

An Approach to Urban Narrative: Analysis of Temporal Structure of Benjamin's Capital Theory

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ABSTRACT

Why today's urban experience and urban narrative could be traced back to Benjamin? If he is a precocious gambler who passed by a steel and glass building hundreds of years ago, and we are the modern individuals who later live in a complete illusion (phantasmagoria), then what we share with Benjamin is a variant of the same life at a different time. Walter Benjamin's theory of capital constructed a space-time structure, which not only contains the change of perception mode since modern times, but also reveals the psychological immanence of the modern appearance of the city. Benjamin's understanding of the new creation and ruins of the city has an irreplaceable theoretical role in how people read the city and how to construct the urban narrative.

KEYWORDS

Benjamin; City; Flaneur; Arcades; Temporal structure

When facing the urban image of the 19th century, Benjamin interprets and explores it as a huge text. In his urban text *The Arcades Project*, which combines the relics of prehistory civilization with the most novel creations, he completed the work of exploring dialectical images. He explored the possibility that traces of the original history and the new creation of today could converge into a constellation in a pictorial time in the urban terrain. Why today's urban experience and urban narrative could be traced back to Benjamin? If he is a precocious gambler who passed by a steel and glass building hundreds of years ago, and we are the modern individuals who later live in a complete illusion (phantasmagoria), then what we share with Benjamin is a variant of the same life at a different time. As Arendt's metaphorical classic asserts: "What guides this thinking is the conviction that although the living is subject to the ruin of the time, the process of decay is at the same time a process of crystallization, that in the depth of the sea, into which sinks and is dissolved what once was alive, some things 'suffer a sea-change' and survive in new crystallized forms and shapes that remain immune to the elements, as though they waited only for the pearl diver who one day will come down to them and bring them up into the world of the living as 'thought fragments' as something 'rich and strange', and perhaps even as everlasting *Urphänomene*."¹ In this process, a structure of time is gradually constructed that points not to the future but to the past.

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations-Essays and Reflections*, eds. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken, 1969, p51.

1 A construction of spatial form and temporal logic: Arcades in the 19th century

For Benjamin, the city image is not a frame structure that can be developed in detail and layer by layer. When it appears as the overall city image, it is more like the "veil of ISIS", and the department stores, arcades, panoramas, crowds, lounges and so on that constitute its components are all complicated and difficult to capture. Stepping into the urban text of the 19th century, the first thing we will see is the material landscape elements such as arcade buildings, panoramic paintings, photographs, and commodities. In Benjamin's understanding of newly created things, their new state is no different from ruins. Balzac was the first to speak of the ruins of the bourgeoisie, but it is surrealism that makes them visible. The development of productive forces has reduced the aspirations of the last century to rubble before the monuments of those aspirations have fallen."² For Benjamin, on a grand scale, the development of productive forces was like the liberation of science from philosophy in the 16th century, the separation of the creation of architecture from art in the 19th century, and the entry of architecture-and then photography-into the market as a commodity; From the micro point of view, whether it is arcade streets, living room culture, exhibition halls, western scenery, "these are the embers of the dream world."³ In the new time of birth has been stained with decadence color, although these things show a lack of classical atmosphere, Benjamin pointed out that they still show the dialectical relationship between the old and the new.

Among these new creations, the arcade of Paris is the object of Benjamin's great fascination, which means not only a spatial field that is isolated from outdoor weather conditions and changes in light and dark, but also a condensed, ruined and novel temporal existence. The Arcades Project is a compilation of materials collected and written by Benjamin over a period of 13 years on the arcades of Paris, in which he relates the architectural form of the arcades to the most significant and smallest phenomena of the 19th century. In the context of prehistory (Urgeschichte), it is committed to the collection of countless phenomena, traces and fragments, showing a state of "original history" in the 19th century. Benjamin lists a vast number of images of the arcades, including the variety of shops, the bewildering structure, and the fantastic images of the arcades themselves, such as iron pillars, plants, man-made landscapes, and of course the figures of the people who pass through them, prostitutes and gamblers, flaneurs, bohemians, interiors and museums. The study is based on the belief that a typically unsentimental similarity dominates the concept of arcades.⁴

As the temple to commodity capital, the arcades are presented in this way: "These arcades are a recently invented industrial luxury, glass-roofed, marble-paneled corridors that extend through the building, and the owners unite for the sake of such enterprises."⁵ These corridors are flanked by the most elegant shops that get their light from above, so the arcades are a city, a miniature world in which customers can find everything they need." From a practical point of view, the arcade, with its steel and glass structure as its main components, is a very pleasant interior boulevard, little aware of the weather, almost unaffected by it, and when it opens, it has a myriad of grotesque and whimsical

2 Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Wang Yong, Nanjing: Yilin Publishing House, 2014, p184.

3 Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Wang Yong, Nanjing: Yilin Publishing House, 2014, p184.

4 Zeng Jun points out that Benjamin's dialectical image method is closer to the enlightenment in literary sense than to the criticism in social sense in his article "The Correction of Benjamin's Visual Thought". Dialectic image methodology is more important than dialectics. See Zeng Jun, "The Correction of Benjamin's Visual Thought", *Academic Circles*, 2013, No. 2.

5 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, p875.

objects for the throng to browse. There is no doubt that, as a new way of spatial organization, arcades provide a new spatial experience.

Roland Barthes has pointed out that the Eiffel Tower incorporates the lightness of the wind in an elegant form, and also absorbs the characteristics of plants - straight, connected to the sky - into its architectural form. "The tower's conquest of the wind led to lightness and subtlety that reconnected with many myths about the dreamer and the liberating spirit."⁶ Barthes's expression of a light steel frame already hinted at the possibility of ancient myths being revived, an idea that is most evident in Benjamin's study of the same steel arcades. In addition to seeing the revival of an ancient myth in the architecture of modern creation, Benjamin also keenly smells the death of the arcades. Benjamin mentioned a small contraption that resembled a music box: "Tilly is the cutest fairy of these arcades (more salable and worn-out than the life-size ones): the world-famous Parisian figure that twirls around the music stage with a doll-sized basket in its arms, its strange mouth poked out by a lamb amid the saluting of minor chords."⁷ The horror and intrigue of this little device is also shared by other things in the arcade, and it is hard to hide the darkness and corruption in the artificial splendor. When the electric lights in the arcade go out, this incomparable light suddenly disappears in the arcade, and the faint light of nature cannot penetrate the world of commodities, as if it were extinguished and shut down.

Benjamin, after enumerating the many objects that have become flashy and attractive to the eye, pointed out, "All these are the arcades in our eyes." And none of this is anything. Arcades radiate through imperial Paris like grottoes. ... Here this century is a satisfying reflection of its lost recent past. This is a nursing home for gifted babies."⁸ In Benjamin's eyes, the arcades of Paris rumbled through history with their dreamlike appearance, leaving behind a mere pile of architectural remains and dusty goods for which no buyer could be found, and the Arcades Project sought to describe not the rise of a new architectural form, but a dialectical phenomenon whose origin had been destroyed at the time of its birth. Every age contains in itself its end, and craftily accomplishes it. Benjamin's assertion is not an exaggeration, but a realism. Lidia Banowska has noted that Paris, which underwent mass demolition in the 19th century, looked like a ruin at the time. "In the ruins, one can see the ruins of the old world that is fading into the past. However, one can also see them as the ruins of a nascent modernity built on the ruins, and this view seems equally, if not more, reasonable. Modernity itself can be seen as a ruin - a form infected by death from the day of its birth."⁹ The arcade is the most concentrated place to show the characteristics of this ruin, the ashes, the ruins and the dream, the dream quality of the buried core of death from the beginning.

The dialectical image of the arcade, in addition to being a general manifestation, is also displayed everywhere on the various hidden things in the arcade. Most of the objects in the arcade are commoditized objects, but the discussion here is more about the appearance and content of the arcade than about the antiquated and ruined substance of the commodities under the new shell from the perspective of commodity fetishism. In the barbershop window, people can see the women wearing curly hair. The soft and fluctuating waves indicate that the hairstyle is petrified. What Benjamin sees in this graceful curly hair is the fragility that is destined to be petrified and fixed

6 Roland Barthes, *Eiffel Tower*, trans. Li Youzheng, Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2007, p. 31. Roland Barthes.

7 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, p876.

8 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, p874.

9 Lidia Banowska, Paris in Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project – on the Threshold of Modernity, in *Approaches to Walter Benjamin's The Arcades Project*, Paweł Stachura, Piotr Śniedziwski, Krzysztof Trybuś eds. Frankfurt: Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften Frankfurt am Main, 2017, p92.

in the petrified state. And fashion is a dialogue with death, a bit snatched from the hands of death but lost the novelty of new ideas. Likewise, there are countless mirrors in the arcades. "Paris is a city of mirrors."¹⁰ It has become almost a fatalistic curse that people are so eager to find their image in the mirrors that are everywhere, not just physical ones, but veiled ones in the eyes of passers-by. The objective image that people thought was available was but a fragment of image in a mirage, and this endless movement of reflection and refraction began a trick with its Satanic intentions, and the state that once lived among each other was gone forever, and now the people of Paris live in an endless circle of mirrorlike reflection images. "It flickers, it is always just this one, just nothingness, and there is never anything out of it that produces another."¹¹ The space of self-transformation is like this in the embrace of nothingness." Benjamin points out the ambiguity of the mirror world and its Satanic countenance. Nothing new is produced, everything that man encounters in this boring process of multiplication is like the work of an assembly line, only the homogeneous, the same thing is produced.

Among the strange objects of the arcades was the image of the light, which, outside, also demonstrated its brute power over the night. This light was originally a gas street lamp, and in the heyday of the Second Empire, the gas lamp was being replaced by electric lamp. Benjamin, in "The Loiter," writes of Stevenson's lament over the passing of the lamp, "he was particularly amused by the rhythm with which the lamplman crossed the street, lighting the lamps one by one."¹² The lighting of the lamp one by one represents a survival rhythm associated with the classical era, and when the lamp is suddenly lit at the same time in a highly efficient form, it also makes the melodious and slow rhythm disappear in the wilderness of life. The street lamp itself is a kind of erasing of the starry sky in big cities. People's survival changes from relying on the changes of the sky to abandoning this ancient original light, and the process of lighting it one by one from the lamp man to suddenly lighting it up means the loss of a sense of time connected with the universe, replacing it with a boundless rhythm of urban survival with no end and no beginning. The simultaneous beginning and passing of the moment are the new manifestations of this metropolis in appearance and in nature.

As a result, the time structure of urban survival experience is developed. The mandatory lights that start and go out at the same time imply a kind of planning and management of time. Almost every subject living in the city has to adjust their work and rest and life habits according to this established rhythm. Thus, the arcade is both the opening of a dream world, turning the past into a spatial display as a trace, and a temporal representation of the synchronized work and rest of modernity. In a 1934 letter to Adorno, Benjamin wrote, "The Arcade project will indeed revolve around Jetztzeit-my present, and all the present that makes it possible." It will show Anachronismus in a more positive sense. In a more positive sense, because this anachronism is not refining the past, but bringing forward the future of humanity."¹³ The arcade's present is to turn on the lights and the gates day after day to welcome the crowds, and to restore the silence day after day to wait for the next cycle. In this sense, the urban time structure of the 19th century not only appears as a return to the past in appearance, but also represents the core of the urban time structure of the future.

It can be said that there are at least two kinds of construction of time structures in the arcade.

10 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, p878.

11 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, p879.

12 Walter Benjamin, *Paris, the Capital of the 19th Century*, trans. Liu Beicheng, Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2013, p. 118.

13 Adorno, Benjamin. *The Dialectics of Friendship: The Correspondence between Adorno and Benjamin: 1928-1940*. Trans. Liu Nannan. Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2022, p. 43.

One is that the past becomes a spatial trace waiting for the presence of the present eye, and “once and now converged into a constellation representation in a flash”¹⁴, and the arcade inherently contains recognizable images jointly determined by the present and the concurrent images. Second, the arcades themselves operate according to a temporal discipline of modernity that starts and stops at the same time, which displays secular time into space. In other words, in this spatial representation of the image it outlines a rhythm similar to clockwork time, which is an epic characteristic of modern life; It reveals the obsolescence of the creative landscape that represents progress, how the novelty of modern creation has become, or is waiting to become, a lifeless legacy.

In Benjamin’s eyes, arcades would become a kind of self-image that the past can leave in the form of buildings, or it will contain some possibility for future historians and developers to excavate and reveal the image engraved by it, and it has the potential to depict the outline of the future, and this possibility lies in the construction of the time structure of arcade street.¹⁵ As Benjamin wrote to Adorno, “There is a maxim of Gracian: ‘Explore all things and let time come to you.’”¹⁶ The return of past time condensed in the arcade is like the time that Benjamin himself waited, hesitated, and circled before the arcade project.

2 Preservation of the classical structure of time and space: Urban flaneurs and Modernist heroes

In addition to the material image, the crowd is the most important part of the metropolitan image community, and it also appears as the main body of the fantasy in the sense of Benjamin. The general crowd is like a veil, “under which the familiar city beckons to the wanderer like a fantasy, sometimes transformed into a landscape, sometimes transformed into a house.”¹⁷ The combination of people and buildings is a strange sight in a metropolis, and nowhere is the combination more intense than in a department store. Why the crowd has the function of a veil, we can refer to Benjamin’s discovery in Edgar Allan Poe’s detective novels, the crowd in a big city has a feature of existence that erases orientation, and because of this, the crowd becomes a kind of cover, where detectives and criminals can find ways to hide themselves without being easily found. If there is a general division of Benjamin’s crowds, there are the masses, the loungers, and the “hero” characters like Baudelaire.

While explaining the image of “loiter”, we should note that Bohemians are different from loiter. Those who belonged to the Bohemians could include a division of social roles ranging from writers to professional conspirators, and although they lived a precarious and turbulent life, full of agitation and resistance, they tended to have a social identity other than that of Bohemians, and were neither social castaways nor proletarians. Marx also noted the furious (la rogne) character of the Bohemians,

14 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, p463.

15 In his article “Wanderer in the Stars of Time: On the Concept of Time in Benjamin's Modernity Thought”, Hu Sang pointed out that the arcade brings together the ancient and the present, the new and the ruins, where a form of time in modern society is taking shape, and the core of this time is not only the display of the allegorical spirit of the Baroque mourning drama, but also the last moment of the halo decline. It is also a kind of occurrence where the historical dimension and the memory dimension come together. See Hu Sang, “Wanderer in the Constellation of Time: On the Concept of Time in Benjamin's Modernity Thought,” *International Comparative Literature*, 2019, No. 2.

16 Adorno, Benjamin. *The Dialectics of Friendship: The Correspondence between Adorno and Benjamin: 1928-1940*. Trans. Liu Nannan. Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2022, p. 105.

17 Walter Benjamin, *Paris, the Capital of the 19th Century*. Trans. Liu Beicheng. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2013, p. 20.

who he considered as professional conspirators were revolutionary alchemists, and the use of alchemy to play with revolutionary ideas was illusory and therefore pedantic and narrow. Benjamin noticed the conspirator in Baudelaire, but at the same time he preferred to focus on the poet's unfathomable allegorist. Baudelaire once praised the heroism of the loungeur and referred to this slightly deterministic style as the last flash of decadence, just as Benjamin pointed out that the mournful drama held the beautiful image of the last day at the level of ruins, "The prodigal style is a sunset, like a sinking star, magnificent, without heat, full of melancholy."¹⁸ The loiter is an image that Benjamin borrowed from Baudelaire's works, and Jerzy Kałużny has pointed out that "Baudelaire's works often appear as a lonely artistic passer-by, a seasoned aesthete who walks the crowded streets and corridors of Paris."¹⁹ He maintains an ironic distance from reality, but finds joy and excitement in observing it." The origins of the loiter are deeply in common with Baudelaire.

Baudelaire's uncertain way of life may make the reader wonder whether the poet is often Mired in the misery of such a life with no escape, wearing a torn shirt under his jacket in order to escape his landlord's multiple accommodation, and he says in his letters that he is quite capable of coping with this life, but what is most noteworthy is his bold assertion. Baudelaire celebrates passion and fortitude, and he is looking for the hero of modern life and a heroic temperament to live it. In the Salon of 1845, he noted that the tone of dress during the July Dynasty had changed to black and gray, "The painter, the real painter, more than anyone else, will be able to take the epic character of modern everyday life and be able to use line and color to teach us how great and poetic these men in black patent shoes and ties were."²⁰ Instead of individual tailoring, the mass production of numerous dark garments in a uniform production method means that the body is no longer used to express individuality, and the undifferentiated individual will be different from the close relationship between body and action in the classical period. This approach of obscuring everything is not just a stripping of the halo of the classical period in Baudelaire's eyes, but also a new kind of beauty.

Baudelaire went on to say in *The Hero of Modern Life*, "Does not this garment, which has so many times been sacrificed, possess a native beauty and charm?" Is it not a garment necessary for our age of suffering, when eternal mourning is carried on our black and thin shoulders?"²¹ This garment, no different from the one worn at a funeral, is a necessary shell for living modern life. The black dress and the tuxedo show the epic character of modern life, the poetic act of finding ironic pleasure under pressure, the smell of equality in the hopeless rut, it is Baudelaire's creative discovery to define the inconsolable attire and the monotony of black as a kind of poetry and equality, a sense of eternal mourning. Kejun Xia, when combing through the different "present" situations of the "present", once stated a "present mourning", "this present situation, no matter how full and fashionable, will disappear immediately, just as Baudelaire said that modernity is a long funeral ceremony."²² This inevitable temporary and transition, Baudelaire, with a modernist hero practice, flipped the paradox between classical and modern, and regarded it as the epic

18 Baudelaire, *Selected Essays on Baudelaire's Aesthetics*. Trans. Guo Hongan. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1987, pp. 501-502.

19 Jerzy Kałużny, In the Labyrinth of Benjamin's Arcades Project: The Flâneur, the Collector, and the Gambler as Readers of the Nineteenth Century, *Approaches to Walter Benjamin's The Arcades Project*, eds. Paweł Stachura, Piotr Śniedziwski, Krzysztof Trybuś. Frankfurt: Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften Frankfurt am Main, 2017, p.66.

20 Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Wang Yong, Nanjing: Yilin Publishing House, 2014, p. 149.

21 Baudelaire: *Selected Essays on Baudelaire's Aesthetics*, trans. Guo Hongan, Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1987, p. 301.

22 Xia Kejun. *The Theology of Uselessness: Benjamin, Heidegger and Derrida*. Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2022, p. 349.

characteristics of the modern subject.

Benjamin sees Baudelaire, the poet who diagnoses modern life, as a developer: "Let us compare time to a photographer - earthly time to a photographer who captures the essence of things." No one can read these negatives, and no one can infer the true nature of things as they are from the negatives of things recorded in time."²³ Only Baudelaire could read these negatives, only he had the power to extract from the negatives of the essence a premonition of the true picture of the essence. This is a typical image of Baudelaire's way of looking at the world.

The loiter has both an irrepressible and a feeling of helplessness and a sign of time. The loungers are not destitute in their rags; their sense of despair and hope are two sides of the same coin. In "The Return of the Flanerie," Benjamin states that the wanderer (i.e., the wanderer) is a creation of Paris, and that Paris is the Promised Land of the wanderer. In the eyes of the wanderer, "the great memoirs, the shudders of historiography - these are all rubbish to the wanderer, and they are happy to leave them to the tourists." He would trade all his knowledge of the abode of the artist, the birthplace, the palace of the prince, for the smell of a weathered threshold, or the touch of a tile -- anything an old dog could carry away."²⁴ The wanderer has a keen nose for the narrative of traditional historicism, for which he is not worth a mention, and he searches like a detective for the subtle signs by which modernity announces its existence.

The image of the wanderer in "The Wanderer Returns" is even given the task of preserving the ancient sex in itself. The article "The Rambler Returns" is Benjamin's review of his good friend Franz Hessel's book *Spazieren in Berlin (On Foot in Berlin)*, originally published in *Die Welt Literature* in October 1929. Benjamin points to the remnants of the original early vestiges of Hessel's book that have not yet been swept away by modernity: "In *plebs deorum*, in which Hessel reveals to the reader the caryatids, atlases, Pomona, and the naked figure of Cupid, his favorites are those once dominant figures who have decapitated into penates - humble domestic gods on dusty landing, In the nameless alcoves of the hall, they once served as the patron saints who presided over the ceremony whenever someone crossed a wooden or metaphorical threshold."²⁵ The gods of the universe have fallen to the status of the patron saint of the family, and Hessel's visit to these ruins is like a farewell to the wanderer, a farewell to the gods, a farewell to antiquity. At the end of the passage, Benjamin briefly depicts the awakened look of the wanderer with a few images: "Paris," said someone many years ago, "is the narrow lattice balcony in front of thousands of Windows; A red tin cigar in front of a thousand tobacco; A zinc counter in a small bar; The janitor's cat." In much the same way, the "wanderer" recites lists like a child and sticks to what he knows to be true like an old man.²⁶ In the pursuit of eternal experience and fleeting experience, there are countless wandering philosophers and dreamers.

As de Certeau points out in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the proper term for the city, although it has largely become a form of power or superstition, also offers a certain possibility: "To put the rich silence into the cellar, the story without words into the barn... Through their ability to go around building cellars and barns, local legends have an outlet, a place to go out and come back, and a

23 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 1, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, Gary Smith, et al. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004, p361.

24 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 2, edited by Michael Jennings, Howard Eiland, Gary Smith, et al. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2005, p.262.

25 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 2, edited by Michael Jennings, Howard Eiland, Gary Smith, et al. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2005, p266.

26 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 2, edited by Michael Jennings, Howard Eiland, Gary Smith, et al. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2005, p268.

habitable space.”²⁷ Thus, the symbols of the city are both produced in the space--the dense lattice balconies, the patron saint of the family yard, the countless cigars--are both produced and produced in the space where Paris is located, and are also anchored in the memory of a position that is always absent, pointing to the outline of the past and the future. And connecting it into a symbolic whole relies on the wanderers’ physical actions in the urban space and memory space to awaken those stories as waiting.

3 The embodiment of urban experience and time: Flaneurs in urban narratives

In “A Review of Hessel’s *Heimliches Berlin*”, Benjamin describes how Hessel, as a wanderer, pierces the ruins of the city to a different time scale than life in the metropolis. Hessel devoted himself to the study of mythology, Homer’s epics, and translation, “between the walls of ancient great cities, between the ruins of the last century, how these books are reminiscent of classical antiquity.”²⁸ More than anyone else, Hessel feels the threshold that separates situations, hours, minutes, and words from one another. This is the “revival” of cultural relics imprinted on the flaneurs. As Silvia Agathinski observes in *The Ferryman of Time*: “Things of the past are like an ancient coin or an obsolete language, no longer in use... For the test of time is always concerned with those irreversible movements in the world we share with others.”²⁹ The past, as an ancient dimension, can still be preserved between cities and gradually become something with age, which may be trapped in the past and never return, or it may be preserved and become a measure of people’s experience of their own aging. In the seemingly unproductive wanderer, Benjamin identifies a restoration of the classical structure of time and space that is hidden in the wanderer’s gaze.

For Benjamin, the image of the city as a general image of the city is more like the “veil of ISIS”, and its components are complicated and difficult to capture. Specifically, in crowds and loungers, the illusion of space that he is infatuated with is a kind of narcotic similar to the time that gamblers are infatuated with, a state of exhilarating fear caused by encountering the unpredictable. As Benjamin believed, “dangerous charm is the root of all great passions.” Without cliffs, there is no perfect happiness. The mix of fear and joy is intoxicating.”³⁰ Here he is indulging in a round and round, while preserving the color of the halo of viewing in this interval. In the crowd, the crowd is like gravity to the limited uniqueness of the main body firmly adsorbed, the characteristics of the crowd is not as Engels said that desperate and cold, full of cold threat, Benjamin glimpsed the inevitable complicity of people and people in the interaction of people and people. It is in this sense that our understanding of “A Woman Passing by Arm” can be cut from the crowd that does not appear, which is the support and background of this whole thrilling process. It is precisely because of the presence of the crowd that the moment when love begins and ends is tormented and humiliated, and the throbbing has been suppressed before the formal start. This is the second function of the crowd in addition to erasing orientation, as a veil at the same time, the crowd is also an inescapable separator, the desire to suspended and detached. In its ephemeral creation, the city

27 De Certo, Michel. *The Practice of Daily Life 1. The Art of Practice*. Trans. Fang Linlin and Huang Chunliu. Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2009, 184.

28 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings 2*, edited by Michael Jennings, Howard Eiland, Gary Smith Boston: Harvard University Press, 2005, p267.

29 Silvia Agathinski, *The Ferryman of Time*, trans. Wu Yunfeng, Beijing: Citic Press, 2003, p. 54.

30 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, p498.

shows the operating logic of modernity: the world is dominated by its own illusions - "modernity,"³¹ in Baudelaire's parlance. The chapters of Baudelaire, Blanqui and others are the last words of a world dominated by illusions, and they, like Benjamin, are mediators lost between the old and the new.

In general, the city as a huge text attracts the hero of modern life, who tries to find in the ruins of the reality, the shape of the monument that has been accomplished with love and admiration by worshippers over the centuries. This monument may no longer be a physical monument like the obelisk of the Place de la Concorde, but a glory that no oracle can match. According to Benjamin, "Experience, whether in collective coexistence or in individual life, is in fact tradition. It is not so much the product of facts anchored firmly in the depths of memory as the accumulation of material, often neglected, in the depths of memory."³² For the wanderer and the hero of modernism, the traditional experience, the classical structure of time and space, is a monument without physical substance, and the wanderer preserves and restores a classical structure of time and space with his body.

Are we the flâneurs of Baudelaire and Benjamin's texts? This relies on today's realistic context and action response to answer, and the theoretical interpretation of this question, on the one hand, Benjamin's time and space structure of the 19th century city as a classic thing fixed, on the other hand, also calls for urban narrative in 21st century to express the relationship between urban illusion and modern individuals.

4 Conclusion

When people in modern society faced the world of illusion, the illusion is almost equal to reality, and the pure logic of confrontation is faced with the inevitable failure. When Benjamin perceived the world of illusion in a literary way, he perceived the social temperature that has changed in it, and when he wants to retain something, he does not build a fortress with conceptual weapons, but finds historical imagery and classical temperament in the complex phenomena. For example, the halo retention he discovered in Daguerre photography, one does not need to go back to the time of painting to be nostalgic, but to be nostalgic briefly in this photographic technique. At the same time, in modern or posthuman societies, the world of illusion expands into different kinds of deception, the manipulation of power discourse, the amplification of local experience, the disregard for local conflicts, where the perception of novelty and historical legacy still constitutes a kind of guiding existence, when the perception of what the ancients did not perceive becomes extremely important. It is also in this dimension that Benjamin's ambiguous attitude of embracing and resisting modern cities and his theoretical construction are worth looking back to the 19th century.

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31 Walter Benjamin, *Paris, the Capital of the 19th Century*, trans. Liu Beicheng, Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2013, p59.

32 Terry Eagleton. *Walter Benjamin, Or, Towards Revolutionary Criticism*. Trans. Guo Guoliang and Lu Hanzhen. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2015, pp. 102-103.

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