

The Word in the Road Benjamin Gwalchmai

Editor's preface

Benjamin Gwalchmai's research and premiere-presented findings herein - through the investigation of the workings of "accidental" architecture - seek to bring to the fore the secret language contained within said architectures. Though Walter Benjamin never proposed any method by which this interaction between municipal architecture and the common psychology was affected, Gwalchmai has found it in Benjamin. It is proposed here that this "language" is not as abstract as has been assumed - it may be found written into our very streets, and is affected through the strange pantheistic beliefs of Roadworkers. Further and furthermore, it can be unlocked by conscious effort, through the re-birth of an older form of humanity.

Abstract

Walter Benjamin secretly attempted - but never fully realised - a fusion of Marxism and mysticism. This surreptitious endeavour of Benjamin's - familiar to any adept of auratic studies - can be seen in the faintest of traces, as when he allows himself a somewhat flowery metaphor amidst social-critique. Yet this fusion went further. His work seems to propose that the monoliths of municipal architecture, an architecture which is planned and executed by the innumerable and contradictory forces, nevertheless exhibits and imposes a coherent force upon the bent masses.

Here at the IIAL, we have the institutional freedom to take this fusion further and explore it in a way that Benjamin would have blushed at. Therefore, though not Marxism, the following study wishes to further explore Benjamin's ideas on architecture affecting the passing man and

the thin, fused line between the everyday and the universal, the social and the personal, the municipal and the psychological.

The Word in the Road

London's city planners have long been accused of foul play for planning the city to forward their own purposes. However it is not in the planning of the biggest constructions – far from it. Look now to the street signs at the end of every city street. What do you see? At first perhaps nothing but the sign but look at them again. Then look at two as if they were next to each other – then look at ten. Then a hundred. What similarities sit therein? We'll soon see after a short walk.

Roadworkers, those overlooked fashionistas of our everyday working men and women, are not only sartorially interesting - for their group-wear and rejection of supposed civilised gender divides – but also the definitive and previously-unknown philosophy which infects almost all of their number and cannot help but inform their practice. It is a philosophy which has so far escaped extensive study, yet is vastly important in understanding the effect of architecture upon the common man – where else may be found the cutting-edge of Benjaminian discourse?

Roadworkers the world over understand the inherent beauty in all of their workings. In supplanting individual fashion choices with an evolutionary fashion that builds as they live and gives a tribal declaration of status, such Roadworkers invert all societal judgement. They are thus freed from the control or appropriation of their employers – this is how they're able to live their philosophy. The philosophy itself is too wide to detail wholly here, though for more and an excellent grasp on the subject, I'd recommend the seminal text *The Road(worker)* by Cormac McAnders. A large part of this philosophy is a mixture of cunning and a certain playful irony: see fig. 101 for a prime example of said irony.

Yet there is a deeper element at work here – one as surprising as it is

disturbing.

It rests on the curious religious beliefs of Roadworkers, and the anarchic and ritualised effects these have upon their work.

In between 2005 and 2009, I recorded a series of interviews with any Roadworkers that wished to talk to me – often these men and women wished to remain anonymous for fear of reprimand. I present below a small section from one of these interviews that is perhaps the least revelatory but representative of the whole:

BJNG:How many roads do you think you've made in your time as a roadworker?

Anon: Cudna say datman.

BJNG: Could you elaborate why you can't say?

And on: I mademany – sometimes dey mine, mosttimes dey belong twodee big man upstairs. Den dey all his. Liketa tink I help him dough.

BJNG: Help him how, exactly?

Anon: Dee likkle tings...de curvature, de flourish – dey all add upto dee namin.

BJNG: -

And on: I makem den I plant de namin where noone seein.

BJNG: And do you ever revisit old roads you've made?

And on: I swagger by. Tey mostly miname.

The IIAL now holds, in its voluminous archives, hundreds of similarly fascinating recordings.

Unfortunately, their true significance went unrealised throughout the main era of my research. However, in my recent research we have shed light on at least a portion of their meaning.

It appears that, in the worship of the deity alluded to in the above passage, generations of Roadworkers have been encoding meaning into our Fair Lady's streets. Occasionally, this hidden language is contained

within the plan of the streets themselves. Sometimes, though, it may surface again in the very names very playfully given to these same streets.

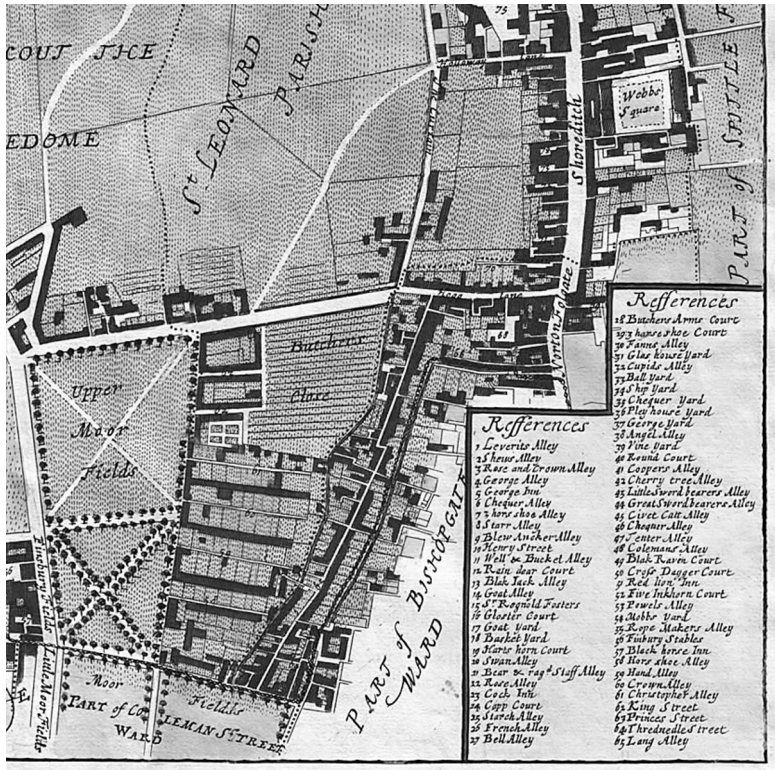


Fig. 11011011 - Shoreditch, London.
(image © Sara Douglass Enterprises).

Thus, we can see in fig. 11011011 the attention to detail even the mapmaker has taken. Within fig. 11011011's 'References' we can see this process at work. Further, see fig. 10111010001 for our most recent,

yet unfinished, investigation into the connected naming of the streets. You'll see that many of the street names were intended to be combined by walkers walking with a sharp enough eye: numbers 9, 10 & 11; numbers 12, 13 & 14; numbers 30 & 31; number 33 seems to be a usage of the Godhead to hint toward a future great writer who would write about the atmosphere that could develop if notice is not taken of the beauty of the streets and the importance of naming; numbers 35 & 36; and, finally, numbers 58 & 59. The work continues.



Fig. 10111010001 - Benjaminian analysis of street names

Much as The Dandy is known to migrate South East, so too have our studies. In order to come to these conclusions, students and I have walked these very figured streets connecting the dots, bumps and playful rises. The correlation is irrefutable. It is written in the make-up of The Word in the roadworks, the streets and the very labelled clothes adorning street-regulars. What has become clear is that, in some way, this language appears intended to exhaust the names of God. It is as if, in creating a network of inestimably varied street-plans and street-names, and through walking them in all possible orders, some transcendental language is being spoken. A language in which everything stands for god, and god stands for everything. In this, we are presented with – perhaps – the most ancient form of worship.

Pantheism

It is the attention-to-detail previously mentioned alongside teh (sic) apt naming of roads and the style of roadworkers which leads us to an understanding of Pantheism in the roads of London.

Before I continue, a brief definition.

Pantheism; [stolen from Stanford - he doesn't use it much]:

Pantheism is a metaphysical and religious position. Broadly defined it is the view that "God is everything and everything is God ... the world is either identical with God or in some way a self-expression of his nature" (Owen 1971: 74). Similarly, it is the view that everything that exists constitutes a "unity" and this all-inclusive unity is in some sense divine (MacIntyre 1967: 34). A slightly more specific definition is given by Owen (1971: 65) who says "'Pantheism' ... signifies the belief that every existing entity is, only one Being; and that all other forms of reality are either modes (or appearances) of it or identical with it."

Even with these definitions there is dispute as to just how pantheism is to be understood and who is and is not a pantheist. Aside from Spinoza, other possible pantheists include some of the Presocratics; Plato; Lao Tzu; Plotinus; Schelling; Hegel; Bruno, Eriugena and Tillich. Possible pantheists among literary figures include Emerson, Walt Whitman, D.H. Lawrence, and Robinson Jeffers. Beethoven (Crabbe 1982) and Martha Graham (Kisselgoff 1987) have also been thought to be pantheistic in some of their work — if not pantheists. For those wishing to start their research in Pantheism, begin with John Toland who coined the term in 1705 and carry on reading through Albert Einstein up to contemporaries like Stephen Hawking. Though that summation may seem unreal, it is true — look it up.

What is important here is this — the language encoded within these streets, a language which contains the names of an infinite number of gods and exhibits a unity comparable to that of God-head, must be deciphered. What, then, is the praxis for this translation? The IIAL propose Dandyism.

The Dandy

Dandy [from the common Dan-Day] is often conflagurated with a “sartorialist” or a swanning of sartorialists - this is a fallacy. The Dandy is much, much more. In modern parlance such an individual is considered an eccentric 'East-End Pot-Toss' [Jack Ack-Knee, Foppish Kynte. (London:Barley Press, 2006) p. 8], possibly sporting what has become known as an 'Hack-en-ney moustache'.

I myself have only ever seen two such dandies before they died in my arms on a reconnaissance trip I undertook for the IIAL. It was only in 2008 BCE that I dared venture into the Eastern-wild, where specimens were known to frequent. The surrounds had already greyed before I met them. The shop signs had all faded from purple to bruised but detritus still held sway over the street – some small natives were seen to be smothered by it but there was nothing I could do for them, nor for the Dandies I went on to observe. To expand any further upon their deaths would be to do them a disservice. I failed them there and this study is made in their honour. At the time, I thought them a rare sighting. In recent years, however, it appears that many simply migrated south-east (see fig. 1100000 for the usage of subtle blue feathering, so common to The Dandy). If the arcade-rich histories of Venice and Milano are to be trusted, it appears that the renaissance form of The Dandy liked warmer climbs and so often desires new, more vibrant influence. What arcade could prove more worthy of exploration then, than the overcrowded, infernal streets of Greenwich?

However, it must be stressed that the term “The Dandy” was originally used in distinction to “The Fop”: The Dandy and The Fop represented attention-to-detail and pretentiousness, respectively. Due to his flamboyance, The Dandy also came to represent the man-in-the-crowd dialectic inherent in the figure of Baudelaire's “The Flaneur”: sporting turtles on leads, debating the very life of the street as 'a botanist of the sidewalk'. Having been, myself, a once prominent figure in this pre-eminent field, in my recent research I have observed the slow practice of re-intertwining the original etymological understanding of Baudelaire's Flaneur into this secret language of the streets, this grand-

scheme-architecture of London, this municipal pantheism.

It is the Dandy's 'swagger' that is so important to our appreciation of understanding the history and future-history of *The Word in the Road*. Dandyism requires an attention to the roads and streets we walk and especially those that Dandies 'swagger' – it is this attention-time spent that allows for road names to become numerated, combined, understood. It is only through this Dandification that such words are elevated, and thus elevated they become a part of the higher fabric of understanding and our growth toward understanding Pantheism and therefore God-like status.

We must take note of the words we trace and the words traced on us when we walk through this fair city. Let us begin to see how we work with the names that hover above and in us each day.

This appreciation is the trope of the dandy, and we may elevate the street words – and understand the playful beauty that names them – through following it and then through this, we make the world into god and ourselves into that same goddandy.