

Made/Unmade:
Pound, Benjamin, and Rubble

by

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Abstract

Ezra Pound's *Cantos* and Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* are constructed from fragments. Both texts utilize pieces of the historical record to extract living aura from the past. My thesis examines the structural affinities of these two texts, and seeks to understand the constructive possibilities of ruin. Pound's poetry plays with a variety of verse-structures that incorporate historical pieces and remembrances. Benjamin's *Arcades Project* also deals in historical fragments, and exhibits the belief that "to write history means to *cite* history" (476). The first half of my thesis centers around how Benjamin and Pound make their texts. I am interested in how Pound exemplifies the Medieval spoliator, a figure who incorporates pieces of the classical past into didactic architectural structures and designs. I look at Pound's early cantos, especially the *Malatesta Cantos*, to understand his textual spoliation. I am also interested in how Benjamin exemplifies the collector, a figure who gathers the gists of the past and allows them to play off of each other in search of some greater synthesis. These two figures, the collector and the spoliator, are recurring tropes in my thesis.

The Second World War functions as a historic hinge in my analysis. Because of that world crisis, both the *Cantos* and the *Arcades Project* are "unfinished texts" (in varying degrees). Pound's *Pisan Cantos*, and various sections of the *Arcades Project*, illuminate how destruction and ruin overcome and unmake these two texts. After looking at the consequences of these "unmade" projects, I look at the possibilities of conclusion in Pound and Benjamin. As Pound's poetry moves toward its ragged end, the aptly titled *Drafts & Fragments*, it searches for a way to cohere and make whole the historicizing project of the *Cantos*. The *Arcades Project* often plays with notions of destruction and incompleteness, and understands the constructive possibilities of ruin. Both texts are "unended," and seem to resist unification and conclusion in favor of fragmented-ness. I am largely interested in how both Pound and Benjamin resist our notions of "lateness" and conclusion. To this end, the last two chapters of my thesis examine the consequences of "unmade" texts.

In my work I try to connect the fragmentedness of history to the fragmentedness of the texts. I come to the conclusion that, because the fragment speaks historical "truth" in both Pound and Benjamin, the text out of necessity must end in ruins. This idea leads me through various sections of Pound's *Cantos* that exhibit his evolving relationship to his historical pieces. Ultimately, the analysis attempts to reconcile the reader's need for "ending-ness" in the texts with the realities of historical ruin found throughout Pound's and Benjamin's work. It may be categorized as a structural or "architectural" analysis in that it looks at the mechanics of both Pound's and Benjamin's texts in order to understand how pieces are incorporated into the whole. The analysis serves to marry two thinkers whose work was contemporaneous and remarkably parallel.

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Short Titles

“ARC”: Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1999. Print.

“ILL”: Benjamin, Walter, and Hannah Arendt. *Illuminations*. Ed. Harry Zohn. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968. Print.

“CAN”: Pound, Ezra. *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. New York: New Directions Pub., 1970. Print.

“SEL”: Pound, Ezra, and Richard Sieburth. *New Selected Poems and Translations*. New York, NY: New Directions Pub., 2010. Print.

“COM”: Terrell, Carroll Franklin. *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound*. Orono: National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine at Orono, 1980. Print.

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Figure 3: Nineteenth-Century Paris Arcade pg. 25

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FORWARD

from *The Paper Chase* by Franz Lidz:

The elderly Collyers were well-to-do sons of a prominent Manhattan gynecologist and an opera singer. Homer had been Phi Beta Kappa at Columbia, where he earned his degree in admiralty law. Langley was a pianist who had performed at Carnegie Hall.

The brothers had moved to Harlem in 1909 when they were in their 20's and the neighborhood was a fashionable, and white, suburb of Manhattan. They became more and more reclusive as the neighborhood went shabby on them, booby-trapping their home with midnight street pickings and turning it into a sealed fortress of ephemera, 180 tons of it by the end. Children chucked rocks at their windows and called them "ghosty men."

My father recounted in great detail the rotting decadence of what had been a Victorian showplace. The Collyers had carved a network out of the neck-deep rubble. Within the winding warrens were tattered toys and chipped chandeliers, broken baby carriages and smashed baby grands, crushed violins and cracked mantel clocks, moldering hope chests crammed with monogrammed linen.

Homer went blind in the mid-30's and was crippled by rheumatism in 1940. His brother nursed him, washed him, fed him a hundred oranges a week in a bizarre attempt to cure his blindness and saved newspapers for him to read when he regained his sight. Hundreds of thousands of newspapers.

Langley was buried in an avalanche of rubbish in 1947 when he tripped one of his elaborate booby traps while bringing Homer dinner. Thanks to my father, I knew all the particulars: how Homer had starved to death, how Langley's body had been gnawed by rats, how the police had searched the city for Langley for nearly three weeks while he lay entombed in the debris of his own house. To my 7-year-old ears, the cruel twist was deliciously gruesome: Homer and Langley had been killed by the very bulwarks they had raised to keep the world out of their lives.

INTRODUCTION

I have tried to write Paradise

Do not move
Let the wind speak
that is paradise.

Let the Gods forgive what I
have made
Let those I love try to forgive
what I have made. (CAN 822)

So goes a piece of one of Ezra Pound's final cantos, presented under the tentative title Notes for CXVII et seq. Published in the concluding section of Pound's *Cantos*, *Drafts & Fragments of Cantos CX-CXVII*, the verse suggests fragility, failure, and regret. The lines themselves are subtly reminiscent of Dantean tercets but fail to present the coherency and formal cohesion of the *terza rima*. These eight lines seem, bewilderingly, to undermine the 116 cantos that preceded them; they serve as a redaction, in some sense, of the rest of the *Cantos*. How can we approach a text framed by this undoing and reversal?

Similarly, Walter Benjamin writes in his *Arcades Project* that "it is good to give materialist investigations a truncated ending" (473). This statement seems particularly prophetic, given that the *Arcades Project* is an incomplete collection of Benjamin's working notes towards a future, cohesive study of nineteenth-century Paris. Benjamin's

magnum opus, like Pound's *Cantos*, resists cohesion and conclusion. In addition to their inconclusiveness, both works are quintessentially historical creations, utilizing the pieces of the past in their construction. I will consider in this analysis how the lack of conclusion in both the *Cantos* and the *Arcades Project* is tied in to the works' historicity. As both works near their end, they become unwoven and unmade. Because their construction and destruction mirror one another so closely, it is remarkable that more attempts to bind Pound and Benjamin haven't been made in recent years.

Fundamentally, my analysis centers around how these two men use history as a genesis for creation, and how they find history in ruins and fragments. Because I'm working with two large and multitudinous texts in a limited space, I will focus on particular moments in the *Cantos* and the *Arcades Project* that speak to larger trends in the texts. Working with ideas of historicity and lateness, the second half of my thesis focuses largely on *Convolut N* of the *Arcades Project*, and the *Drafts & Fragments* of the *Cantos*.

Convolut N, titled *On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress*, is a space in Benjamin's project where he focuses in on the larger theoretical currents of his analysis. Because *Convolut N* focuses on theories of historicity and ending-ness, it serves my analysis well. Published in 1969, Pound's *Drafts & Fragments* forms a ragged question mark at the end of his epic. The comparatively limited literature on the *Drafts & Fragments* suggests that few attempts have been made to understand how the poems serve as Pound's last poetic statement, and how they fit into the larger structure of the *Cantos*.¹ *Drafts & Fragments* serves as a sort of commentary on the larger work of the

¹ It is important, I think, to resist the allure of Pound's grandiloquent schemes for understanding his work. Books like the *Guide to Kulchur* published in 1938, the *ABC of*

Cantos, and is marked by a notable lack of coherent late style.

My work in parsing the *Drafts & Fragments* as a final statement in Pound's career relies on merging Walter Benjamin's theory and Pound's poetics. Benjamin, I believe, unlocks the technical potentials of Pound's verse that inform and re-illuminate his final poems. I take as central to the work of Benjamin and Pound the notion of a "fragment" as a unit of textual construction. Hugh Kenner, in his seminal book *The Pound Era*, writes of the cultural renaissance spurred by the archeological efforts of the late nineteenth century.² During this time, the fragment reigned as the primary looking glass into the past. Pieces of papyrus were unearthed, shards of pottery were discovered, and classical structures revealed themselves in broken splinters and pieces. Kenner writes, "fragments compelled a new kind of detailed attention from minds already prepared by Poe and *Symbolisme* to find virtue in brevity, or by Pater to find it in the fleeting glimpse. A phrase of Sappho's, lacking all the rest of the poem, is really no more mysterious than a line of Mallarmé's" (51). Kenner chooses to focus on the possibilities of depth contained in the fragment, not on the absence of context or structural whole.

Reading published in 1934, and *How to Read* published in 1931 suggest that Pound himself can present a coherent, "from the ground up" approach to cultural history and the production of verse. He even seems quite repulsed by the very idea of criticism, writing in the *Guide to Kulchur* that "reading books about shxpeare wd. Never become a favourite pastime with me" writing later that "these suburbanites are hell bent on distracting attention from the text and its meaning" (162). One must, I'm afraid, ignore Pound's prosaic din in order to understand the layers of his verse.

¹

² Kenner presents an interesting analysis of Heinrich Schliemann's discovery of Troy and its excavation in 1871, writing: "'Troy' after Schliemann was no longer a dream, but a place on the map. As his discoveries persisted, more and more Homeric words came to mean something producible, something belonging to the universe of the naturalistic novelist. Each such word is salvage from the vortex of mere lexicography, where of words we learn chiefly what company they keep" (42). The word's reclamation of its physicality furthers the communicative possibilities of both the word and the object. This all ties well into Pound's obsession with the raw "stuff" of history; the bits and pieces of the historical record that ground the "word" in its origins (as we will soon see).

Simultaneous with these archeological advances, language was beginning to reveal itself as intractably embedded in history. The *Oxford English Dictionary* was first published in 1884, and revealed the depth of the isolated textual unit. Kenner wisely points out Pound's own focus on the veracity of the solitary noun or verb. In Pound's own translations, he often relegates syntactic connections to a minor role, focusing instead on the hidden depths of the solitary linguistic fragments. Look, for instance, at his early poem "Papyrus," published in 1916:

Spring.....

Too Long.....

Gongula..... (SEL 44)

In mimicry of Sappho, Pound replicates the splintered language of her fragments. We must not mistake the absence as incompleteness. Travelling casually through etymology, we can trace the first line, seemingly "incomplete," to the Old English *Lent*, or of the Germanic variations of "early," or the Sanskrit "desires eagerly," or the Greek *sperkhesthai* (to hurry). Suddenly the Greek or Sanskrit sense of longing or rushed-ness seems to fulfill a sort of subject rhyme with the second line. Gongula refers to Gongyla of Colophon, one of Sappho's students, tying the poem back in to its precedent. Solitary words unfurl into bottomless depths. Connections are uncovered from time past, the unrelated become kin, and possible variations or multiple meanings promulgate into perpetuity.³ The historic utterance, deprived of context, is never still. Rather, it looks

³ It's interesting to consider Pound's use of the Chinese ideogram as well. While I won't devote much space in this project to teasing out the implications of his relationship to the Chinese character (especially with reference to his work with Fenollosa), it is worth noting. Ming Xie writes in her study of Pound's appropriation of Chinese poetry that "Fenollosa's ideogrammic principle seems to refer the image to the external object, which, through the mediation of the image, acts upon the human mind" (21). This links

constantly behind. As Pound states in his translation of Confucius' *Analects*, "points define a periphery" (5). The solitary words of his *Papyrus* poem reach beyond themselves, searching through history.

James Longenbach provides a gloss on the historicity of Pound in his book, *Modernist Poetic of History*. Writing of Eliot and Pound, Longenbach states, "these modern writers were consciously preoccupied with drawing many representations of the past into their work...Pound and Eliot participated in the crisis of historicism that wrenched nearly every discipline of human thought during their lifetimes" (11). For Longenbach, history presents Pound with an inescapable wealth of crisis and vision. A historized poetics isn't an entirely new or revolutionary feature of modern literature, but became ineluctable.

Benjamin helps us understand how the *historicity* of the fragment, explored by Kenner, is tied into the *aura* of the fragment. My emphasis on aura comes from an openly revisionist view of Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. In that essay, Benjamin explores the effects of imitation and reproducibility on the work of art. He writes that the original has an "auratic quality" consisting of "its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determines the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence (ILL 220). Benjamin here is talking about the "cult value" of the work of art, incompatible with the unmanageable duplications of modernity. He is concerned with the sensory dimensions of the original, its particular idiosyncrasies which reveal the subtle etchings of time-passing and time-

up nicely, I think, with Kenner's analysis of the "return to physicality" brought about by projects like the unearthing of Troy. The ideogram is a visual fragment, it seems.

past. I will use Benjamin's concept of aura outside the original boundaries of its definition; while I retain the physicality inherent in Benjamin's definition, I am not particularly interested in modernity's rampant duplication of original works. The auratic object must, I think, contain a physical linkage to its conditions of genesis and production. Perhaps the boundaries of "aura" can be expanded to include the "essence" or "gist" of historical genesis. The etymological origins of the word "aura" reveal a certain fragility in-born in its meaning. Coming from the Latin *aura*, it means "breeze," "wind," or "air," and from the Greek *aura* it means "breath" or "breeze." My use of aura implies a "breath of history" emanating from a thing's origin or genesis.

Benjamin and Pound both utilize textual fragments in search of this "breath of history." Benjamin's attachment to historical aura is necessarily married to his self-perceived role as a historical materialist. Broadly speaking, historical materialism, intuited by Marx, developed by Engels, and proceeding from Hegel, posits a dialectical relationship between the subjects of history, and the movement of history. For now, we might say that this relationship revokes causality in historical motion (i.e. *a* thus *b* thus *c* thus *d...etc*) in favor of a dynamic interplay between positive and negative force resulting in an eventual "synthesis." The engine of this dialectical motion is, necessarily, the "material condition" of life. Engels writes in his *Letters on Historical Materialism* that "according to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life" (760).⁴ What I would like to extract from all this is, again, the centrality of physicality in representing and understanding historical motion. "Real life" for Engels means, quite obviously, real

⁴ For more on this see Marx's *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Historical Materialism is essentially implicit in Marx, but is better observed in the earlier texts.

economic conditions of production. Marx's dialectic (and Benjamin's as well) moves toward the class-consciousness of the proletariat. But for the scope of this project, I will not consider why Benjamin could be considered a "historical materialist," but what this means in terms of his textual production. Benjamin constantly circles around the possibility of "synthesis" in his *Arcades*, and his idea of synthesis is linked to an awakening spurred by physical objects.

Though these terms may seem rather nebulous and elusive, I mean to use Benjamin to ask some rather simple questions with regards to Pound: what does it mean to create a text thoroughly linked to historical physicality? What are the consequences of such a text, not just in terms of "meaning" or "message," but in terms of composition? And, ultimately, how does the historicity of a text effect its ability to close and conclude? *Convolute N* of Benjamin's *Arcades Project* presents us with some illuminating ideas of what this "materiality" means for Benjamin. Benjamin states that "to write history means giving dates their physiognomy" (ARC 476). I am interested in understanding the "physiognomy" of the *Cantos*. I wish to look at the structural body of Pound's "poem containing history" in order to re-read its ending as something other than an "abandonment" of his project. While the terms established above present us with workable outlines for proceeding, it is important to recognize that I view these concepts as kinetic rather than static. The readings of Pound and Benjamin will come to inflect the outlined terms like aura, materialism, fragment, and physiognomy. In some sense, it is only fitting that these two works, when read together, kindle an unconventional diction.

I will show how ruin informs the composition of the *Cantos* and the *Arcades Project*, and eventually overcomes the two texts. History becomes the source of

inspiration and, paradoxically, destruction for Pound and Benjamin. By the end of my analysis, both of the works are largely “abandoned,” left incomplete. I attempt to make meaning out of this incompleteness, and find the two texts to be palimpsests at their end.

Chapter 1: Pound the Spoliator

And we sit here. I have sat here

For forty four thousand years

Pound, Canto XI

We also made ghostly visits, and the stair

That knew us, found us again on the turn of it,

Knocking at empty rooms, seeking for buried beauty

Pound, Canto VII

Beginning with Constantine, the practice of spoliation appears in the historical record of the City of Rome. In early structures like St. Peter's Basilica, the Lateran Church, and the Arch of Constantine, vestiges of classical buildings and art were taken piecemeal and placed within the context of explicitly Christian buildings. An entirely new method of construction was established by interweaving Christian symbolism and design with the triumphant vestiges of Imperial Rome. According to the historian Beat Brenk, these spoliators, these early plunderers of ancient fragments, appeared as cannibals in their behavior, for "when someone removes the hide of a building or tears out its innards, he resembles a cannibal. A cannibal does not devour his enemies mainly because he wants to nourish himself but because he hopes that in so doing he will acquire his destroyed enemy's strength ... consequently, ideology plays a far greater role

with cannibals than aesthetics” (103).⁵ Brenk implies an often didactic or theoretical aim in plundering the ruins of historical structures; appearance and convenience are not the (sole) motivating factors in spoliation.

The historian Robert Coates-Stephens expands on Brenk’s analysis of architectural spoliation. Coates-Stephens writes that the use of spolia “accelerated during the fourth century, to the extent that in Rome by the end of the Empire all construction materials except timber were supplied from ruinous or abandoned older structures” (279). Coates-Stephens goes on to explain how *textual* fragments, pieces of ancient epigrams, also found their way into medieval structures throughout Rome and Europe. Unlike Brenk, Coates-Stephens posits a more haphazard relationship between spolia and construction. He argues toward a view of spoliation as a largely aesthetic and practical endeavor, mentioning that “epitaphs...were reused in vast quantities because they made beautiful, ready-made paving stones” (283). Regardless of how we choose to interpret the act of spoliation, I think it is important to linger for a moment on the image of a city composed from repurposed fragments. In Medieval Rome, one would find traces of the Republic, of the Empire, and of the early Christian Church recombined into contemporary structures. Walking through Medieval Rome, one would be walking through the pieces of the classical past, deprived of their original narrative and context. With this image of the spoliated city in mind, we can turn to Ezra Pound’s *Malatesta Cantos*.

⁵ Brenk implies here that the economic benefits of spoliation (i.e. the cheaper cost of pre-made materials), and the aesthetic benefits of spoliation (how pleasing old pieces may be to the eye), were not really on the minds of people like Malatesta. Rather, spoliating a previously made object put the spoliator in charge of that object’s meaning. As Brenk says of the Arch of Constantine: “the arch...was a monument of political propaganda” (105).

In 1477 Sigismondo Malatesta, the ruler of Rimini from 1429 until 1468, commissioned the rebuilding of the small church of San Francisco in Rimini (often referred to as the “Tempio” or the “Tempio Medio”). Utilizing spoliation as a principle of construction, Sigismundo included a Roman triumphal arch as well as a side fashioned after Flavian Rome in the church’s outer facade (Rainey 9-10). The church contains multiple allusions to the classical past, and the tomb of Malatesta’s third wife, Isotta.

Never entirely finished, the church’s many facades and inscriptions point back to Malatesta as a noble patron and creator.

The Church of San Francisco first appears in Pound’s work in Canto IX.



Figure 1: Malatesta’s Tempio.
From: Modern American
Poetry Page at the University
of Illinois

such as lie, smothered in grass, by San Vitale. (41)

The references to spoliation as a concept should be readily apparent. “Stole” is surrounded by quotation marks because, quite obviously, Pound does not view the integration of classical fragments as theft so much as artistic choice. And later, when he remarks on the “touch of rhetoric,” it is easy to see Brenk’s ideas of ideology over aesthetics at play. Pound was initially fascinated by Malatesta as a figure of early patronage and governance. Malatesta’s method of construction, his spoliation of the pagan combined with the construction of new facades, held Pound’s attention long after his initial visit to the Tempio in 1922.

Pound’s biographer Humphrey Carpenter mentions T.S. Eliot’s observation that the *Malatesta Cantos* “nearly succeed...in extracting the ‘essentially living’ from fifteenth-century Italy” (420). I would argue that Pound succeeds in extracting this living element from the past by utilizing Malatesta’s methods in his own poetry. Throughout the *Cantos*, Pound demands more from his subjects than pure reference or narrative. In the case of Malatesta, it occurs to me that Pound wants to enact the structural decisions of his fifteenth-century predecessor in his own work. Thus, the following anecdote from Rainey should be of no surprise: “only a few months after his release from St. Elizabeths hospital (1958), Ezra Pound informed his daughter that he wished to build a temple. He wished to build it, he said, on the nearby summit of Mount Mut, its white peak surging over the tree covered slope...A few days later they went to a nearby quarry to examine stone for the building. After that the plan was forgotten or abandoned” (27). Pound is not content, it seems, with allowing Malatesta to exist as a purely historical subject; he attempts to consume Malatesta’s story into his own, and to

become a spoliator in his own right. Pound's familiarity with Malatesta's story was, in Rainey's opinion, *the* decisive moment in the formation of the *Cantos*. Rainey writes:

This event marked a catalytic moment. It enabled Pound to discover poetic techniques essential to the formal repertory of *The Cantos*, such as the direct quotation of prose documents ... Equally important, the *Malatesta Cantos* precipitated a radical revision of all the earlier cantos, crystallizing the design of the larger poem, which had until then remained obscure for Pound himself. These events, the outcome of an intense struggle with an enormous body of historical materials, consumed eleven months of his life. (4)

Pound's discovery of Malatesta's repossession of history transformed the structure and vision of Pound's poem. If Pound sought to build a temple, he sought to build it in line with Malatesta's vision.

Pound's construction of the *Cantos* follows, then, from the construction of the Tempio. While Malatesta builds from repurposed marble, Pound builds from repurposed language. Pound's *Malatesta Cantos* speak through fragments, through spoliated parts and stolen voices. In Canto IX, Pound introduces Malatesta's "postbag," signaling a move in the poem towards appropriated historical verses snatched out of documents and cobbled together under the craftsman's eye. The tenor, tone, and subject of these pieces vary considerably. In one fragment from the mail-bag, a correspondent of Malatesta writes, "Sence to-day I am recommanded that I have to tel you my father's opinium that he has shode to Mr. Genare about the valts of the

church...etc..."(CAN 38). In another, his son Malatesta de Malatestis writes to thank his father for the gift of "the bay pony (ronzino baiectino) the which you have sent me, and which appears in my eyes a fine caparison'd charger" (CAN 39). The seeming banality of these pieces is, at first read, quite confounding. Why, in a poem described by Pound as an "epic," a "poem including history," do we find bay horses and instructions concerning church construction (Cookson xviii)? Pound chooses, quite deliberately, to build his epic out of seemingly unmonumental fragments. For Pound, the minutiae has depth. The construction of vaults, and the gift of a bay pony, evoke the fragile aura, the "essentially living," of Malatesta's time.

Pound's project as a spoliator goes even further than the example of the mail bag. The *Cantos* are a strange Tower of Babel, and Pound's use of a variety of dead and living languages and idioms reflects his spoliating impulse. Pound writes that, "of Homer two qualities remain untranslated: the magnificent onomatopoeia...secondly, the authentic cadence of speech" (SEL 305). Something oceanic in Homer is lost when the original Greek is forced to conform to the boundaries of another language; something fluid, surging, musical. Instead of relying on the original Greek to retrieve this surging language, Pound begins stitching together various languages and idioms. In Canto VII, Pound introduces "poor old Homer blind, / blind as a bat, / Ear, ear for the sea-surge; / rattle of old men's voices" (24). How does this "ear for the sea-surge" factor into Pound's poetic project? The task of translation becomes for Pound a project of linguistic "spoliation" Pound's method of repurposing past languages is established in Canto I. His retelling of the Odyssean myth begins in mid-motion:

And then went down to the ship,

Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and
 We set up mast and sail on that swart ship,
 Bore sheep aboard her, and our bodies also
 Heavy with weeping, and winds from sternward” (3).

The parallels between Canto I and Pound’s earlier translation of the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Seafarer* have been drawn numerous times before, but it is worth looking closely at what Pound is attempting to do here. Near the beginning of *The Seafarer*, Pound generates these translated lines:

Bitter breast cares have I abided,
 Known on my keel many a keel’s hold,
 And dire sea-surge, and there I oft spent
 Narrow nightwatch nigh the ship’s head. (SEL 24)

Pound, in the first lines of his *Cantos*, recasts the Greek of Homer in an Anglo-Saxon mold, in the process “stealing” the *Seafarer*’s language, and plundering the maritime sensibilities of the original anonymous text. The pacing and cadence of the lines rings harmonious, as do the general themes of wandering pain (the “heavy with weeping” producing a subject rhyme with “bitter breast cares”) and oceanic immensity (“the godly sea” and the “dire sea-surge”).⁶ The inventive linguistic contractions of the seafarer are reproduced in Homeric terms within Canto I, as are the tendencies toward heavy

⁶ For more on Pound’s use of “subject rhyme” see Kenner’s *The Pound Era* where he states: “Pound’s heuristic device is always the subject-rhyme” (423)

alliteration. This synthesis of the Greek myth and the Anglo-Saxon poem is further complicated toward the end of the canto, when Pound writes: “Lie quiet Divus. I mean, that is Andreas Divus, / In officinal Wecheli, 1538, out of Homer” (5) This utterance, inflected with quick and unsure English, shows that Pound is working with the material of Andreas Divus, a renaissance translator of Homer’s Greek into Latin. In the course of two and a half pages of Canto I, we encounter linguistic traces of the 7th/8th Century B.C., the 10th Century, the 16th Century, and 1912-1917. By Pound’s own analysis of Homer, we might believe that all of these elements somehow mingle in the service of an ephemeral “water-quality” in Homer’s original Greek. Kenner writes that, for Pound, the act of translation was more than a subset of poetry; it was the model for the poetic act, bringing “blood to ghosts” (150). Yet, this life-surge in Pound brought about by the resurrection of dead languages and idioms seems never to follow along a direct or intuitive line. Somehow, the Anglo-Saxon verse resurrects Homer, and Divus’ Latin resurrects Homer, and a modern American inflection resurrects Homer. Pound’s revival of the dead is a fragile, tenuous, and multitudinous task.

Pound’s gathering of idioms, voices, and texts determines the structural form of the *Cantos*. Thinking of Medieval Rome abounding in spolia, it is easy to see Pound’s *Cantos* as a city made from the objects and voices of the dead. Because Pound so often refuses to cut his *Cantos* into traditional stanzaic structures, I would suggest that the visual impression of his poetry leaves the reader with an overwhelming stream of his spolia. Pound often thought of his *Cantos* in architectural terms, as his poetry abounds with references to architectural designs and constructed spaces. The Odyssean journey already underway by Canto I leads us on a tour of constructed spaces, often in some state of ruin. Canto III places Pound:

on the Dogana's steps

For the gondolas cost too much, that year

.....

And the buccentoro twenty yards off, howling 'Stretti',

And the lit cross-beams, that year, in the Morosini" (11)

Carroll F. Terrell glosses the poem, adding that this description of a customhouse in Venice was, in an earlier version of the canto, connected to Browning's *Sordello*.

Browning's poem reads: "I muse this on a ruined palace-step/At Venice" (COM 8). It is interesting to see how, even in this early canto, Pound confronts his poetic predecessors through an established architectural space. Later, in Canto V, Pound writes of the Median capital of Ecbatan on the Iranian plateau:

Great bulk, huge mass, thesaurus;

Ecbatan, the clock ticks and fades out

The bride awaiting the god's touch; Ecbatan,

City of patterned streets; again the vision" (17).

Look at how the verse opens with an overwhelming sense of language. The plurality of words, the act of choosing, appear almost crippling to the poet. This then transitions into a "knowable" historic space, Ecbatan, in which the actions of the poem can occur. It is as if the ensuing meditations on light as a generative faculty ("Measureless seas and stars,/Iamblichus' light") and on color ("Weaving with points of gold,/Gold-yellow,

saffron”) are allowed a place in the poem because of Ecbatan’s delineated space.

Pound’s description of Ecbatan as a city “of patterned streets” shows his desire for construction that coheres in form. Later, in the *Pisan Cantos*, we will see this “well patterned” city irrevocably transformed. In Canto LXXIV, Pound writes: “To build the city of Dioce whose terraces are the colour of stars” (445). I will unpack this canto later in the project, but it suffices for now to say that Pound equates the well executed construction of Ecbatan by Dioce (“The first great ruler of the Medes, who built the city of Ecbatana” (COM 362)) with Mussolini’s fascist project. Physical construction is a near-obsession for Pound within the *Cantos* and provides him with a model for his own poetic efforts. It also allows his poetry to claim some physicality as its epistemic boundary: the physical structures, in a sense, grant admittance to the lyric.⁷

Thus far we have the foundation of Pound’s defining architectural idea: he is linked, in spirit of thievery, to the early, post-Constantinian spoliators. Fragments of the past in the *Cantos* function as more than simple allusions: they are the bricks and mortar of his construction. Pound’s poetic “Tempio” is built on the contradiction between forceful making, and fragile, poetic sensibility. Though the *Malatesta Cantos* can often seem rough-hewn and forced, they intend to evoke the aura of Malatesta’s time, the “essentially living” of the Fifteenth Century (as Eliot thought). As Pound writes in his *Guide to Kulchur*: “there is nothing illegitimate or contemptible in wanting to devise, contrive (rather than invent) an efficient tool kit. No man can carry an automobile factory on his back” (70). To contrive rather than to invent. To re-form and

⁷ As Pound finds occasion for verse in these historical structures, Benjamin finds mythology. He writes, in the first sketches of his project, “Architecture as the most important testimony to latent ‘mythology.’ And the most important architecture of the nineteenth century is the arcade” (ARC 834).

take possession of what is already in existence. Later in his “Guide,” Pound mentions Sigismundo’s Tempio:

the Tempio Malatestiano is both an apex and in verbal sense a monumental failure. It is perhaps the apex of what one man has embodied in the last 1000 years of the occident. A cultural ‘high’ is marked...He had little of the best there in Rimini...You get civilization in the seals. I mean it was carried down and out into details. (159)

Little ingenuity is needed to draw a line between Pound, the “toolkit,” and the Tempio. With “little of the best” in Rimini, Malatesta was still able to construct a cultural apex. Though Pound recognizes failure in Malatesta, his prose brims with praise. Malatesta’s toolkit consisted of stolen pieces, as does Pound’s toolkit.

The civilization alive in Pound’s verse (to return to his *Guide to Kulchur*) is often stripped of context, yet in full possession of historic depth and connection. In Canto LXXIV, he writes:

Le Paradis ne’st past artificiel
but spezzato apparently
it exists only in fragments unexpected excellent sausage,
the smell of mint, for example,
Ladro the night cat (458)

Pound wants to construct his “paradiso” not out of the major building materials of

history, but out of small “gists” and radiant details. In his search for the particular and the small, he resembles (as we shall see) Benjamin. Pound’s early forays into Imagism show this desire for the small, radiant detail. In essays like *A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste*, published in *Poetry Magazine* in March 1913, Pound attempts to express the centrality of the image in terms of language and rhythm. In this essay, Pound advises poets not to use “such expressions as ‘dim lands of peace.’ It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete” (1). In the *Cantos*, Pound utilizes the theory of the imagists in search of historical “concreteness”; the image begins to serve historical materiality. Thus, in various early cantos, Pound turns his eye toward image-creation, not in the service of “abstraction,” but in search of historical concreteness. One finds this attitude at work in Pound’s writing on Thebes, the ancient Greek city founded by Cadmus and the Sparti. In Canto XXVII, Cadmus and Thebes serve to suggest some of Pound’s anxieties over poetic construction:

I neither build nor reap.
 That he came with the gold ships, Cadmus,
 That he fought with the wisdom,
 Cadmus, of the gilded prows. Nothing I build
 And I reap
 Nothing; with the thirtieth autumn
 I sleep, I sleep not, I rot
 And I build no wall

Later in at the end of Canto XXVII, Pound writes: “I sailed never with Cadmus,/Lifted

never stone above stone" (132).

One sees here a poetic anxiety concerned centrally with historical materiality. Pound is self-reflexive, pondering on his plunderings. His "building" is always tied to someone else's work. Although Pound is acutely aware elsewhere in the *Cantos* of poetic forbearers (i.e. "Hang it all Robert Browning" in Canto II), his central worry becomes an inability to produce, or to reckon out of the maelstrom of history, a proper "object" or physical "image" from the past. He wishes to "lift stone above stone" and construct a wall. Thus, Cadmus fills a similar role to Malatesta: he serves to illuminate a certain cultural apex of construction. Although Pound constantly reasserts (and redefines) his status as maker in his *Cantos*, the fear of never lifting "stone above stone" illuminates a central feature of the modernist epic. Pound knows as a spoliator that he is working with the constructions of others. John Whittier-Ferguson highlights this recursiveness in his chapter on *Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and the modern epic*, writing, "one of the hallmarks of modernism's epics is that they continually signal their belatedness, their status as 'second-time' productions, and one of their most recognizably modern features is that their authors write while looking over their shoulders at the shelved books, the textual archives that precede them" (212). Although Pound looks for immediate physicality in his fragments, he recognizes and signals his status as a secondary-creator. As Pound assembles his historical materials, he hopes to reinfect, to "make new," what is not his. This explains his tendency to look for historical minutiae, details that do not have a bold stamp of ownership already attached to them. As Pound assembles his stolen fragments, he questions himself as creator.

Chapter 2: Benjamin the Collector

“This work has to develop to the highest degree the art of citing without quotation marks. Its theory is intimately related to that of montage”

Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, [N1,10]

“for a collector--and I mean for a real collector, a collector as he ought to be--ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects”

Benjamin, *Unpacking My Library*

Pound is a spoliator, and Benjamin is a collector. Benjamin, in his essay *Unpacking My Library*, introduces himself as a hoarder of textual pieces and unique copies of books. Benjamin writes, “there is in the life of a collector a dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order. Naturally his [the collector’s] existence is tied to many things as well: to a very mysterious relationship to ownership...to a relationship to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value” (ILL 60). Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* represents thirteen years of collecting textual pieces circling around the Paris arcades, “which he considered the most important architectural form of the nineteenth-century” (ARC IX)



Figure 3: Nineteenth-Century Paris Arcade.
From: “Comma” at UCSB

Benjamin’s vortex of fragments, his working pieces of nineteenth century Paris, look for minor, underserved pieces of the historical record in order to regain the materiality of the past. Benjamin writes in *Convolute H* of his *Arcades*, entitled *The Collector*, that “what is decisive in collecting is that the object is detached from all its original functions in order to enter into the closest conceivable relation to things of the same kind” (205). Benjamin looks to isolate and emphasize the idiosyncrasies of his “building blocks.” As does Pound, Benjamin looks to the “unexpected fragments” for his material. As we saw in the discussion of the historicized fragment in the introduction, Benjamin saw

enormous potential in the single piece. In *Convolute H*, Benjamin expands on this idea:

And for the true collector, every single thing in this system becomes an encyclopedia of all knowledge of the epoch, the landscape, the industry, and the own from which it comes. It is the deepest enchantment of the collector to enclose the particular item within a magic circle, where, as a last shudder runs through it (the shudder of being acquired), it turns to stone. Everything remembered, everything thought, everything conscious becomes socle, frame, pedestal, seal of his possession...Collecting is a form of practical memory, and of all the profane manifestations of 'nearness' it is the most binding...We construct here an alarm clock that rouses the kitsch of the previous century to 'assembly.' (205)

It is not hard to connect Benjamin's sentiment in these lines with Kenner's analysis of the fragment in literary modernism. I am particularly drawn to the way Benjamin describes the collector's item turning to "stone," as if the act of taking possession of a fragment solidified it forever, and made it a monument to history. For Benjamin, the act of collecting fragments is both pragmatic and entirely transcendent. There is an amount of "practical memory" conserved in the historic piece, but there is also the possibility of extracting "assembly" from simple kitsch. Pound writes, "the stone is alive in my hand" in Canto VI (21). In Benjamin's quotation from the *Arcades*, we see a similar vision. Benjamin's fragments become practical "building blocks" in his reconstruction of the Paris arcades, but he can also make them "alive," and allow them to speak of epochs and ages.

Richard Sieburth, in his essay *Benjamin the Scrivener*, writes that Benjamin sought “to reduce the scale of his materials, to miniaturize and abbreviate the archive by a Lilliputian stroke of the pen. Not the sacred Shema Israel on a kernel of wheat, but the profane palimpsest of modernity so compressed, so compacted by the pressures of dialectical insight that it becomes capable of releasing the enormous energies of history that lie bonded within it” (8). Hannah Arendt echoes these sentiments in her introduction to Benjamin’s *Illuminations*, writing that Benjamin’s work consisted “in tearing fragments out of their context and arranging them afresh in such a way that they illustrated one another and were able to prove their *raison d’être* in a free-floating state, as it were. It definitely was a sort of surrealistic montage” (47). Arendt goes on to say how the minor events of history held so much value for Benjamin because of their unpolluted power of evocation. They had not been corrupted by context or narrative. They were details still capable of producing that synthesizing flash, that instantaneous image of the past conflating with the present.

Looking at a brief section of the *Arcades*, we can see Benjamin’s method of montage, and his focus on compressed pieces of history, at work. From *Convolute G: Exhibitions, Advertising, Grandville*:

World exhibition of 1851: 14,837 exhibitors; that of 1855: 80,000. [G9a, 5]

In 1867, the Egyptian exhibit was housed in a building whose design was based on an Egyptian temple. [G9a, 6]

In his novel *The Fortress*, Walpole describes the precautions that were

taken in a lodging-house specially designed to welcome visitors to the world exhibition of 1851. These precautions included continuous police surveillance of the dormitories, the presence of a chaplain, and a regular morning visit by a doctor. [G10, 1] (190-1)

I have plucked these passages out of the *Arcades* in large part because they deal in structural terms. Like Pound, Benjamin seems to be interested in physical structures as arenas of ideas and synthesis.

This selection shows the difference between Pound's spoliation method and Benjamin's collection. Benjamin would not link himself to the architectural ideals of Malatesta. He is not interested in subsuming the ideology of his fragments into larger structures, but seeks to present the fragments on their own terms. Benjamin does not enforce his ownership over his collected pieces as does Pound. While he does organize them by "theme" in his *Convolutes*, they are not fused together and tampered with. Pound often re-inflects his historical pieces with dialect, remolds the fragments into classical verse structures, and implies rather crude didacticisms (e.g. Malatesta can be seen to represent a Poundian economic ideal). Benjamin presents his commentary on the fragments explicitly and separately from the historical pieces. For instance, after the section of *Convolute G* presented above, Benjamin does add a piece of commentary on the fetishization of the commodity (after Marx), but the commentary is arranged so as to allow the original pieces of history to remain autonomous. Benjamin the collector is less interested in conflating ideology with the fragment than is Pound the spoliator. In a very immediate sense, Benjamin asks of us simply to *look* at his fragments. Fredric Jameson writes in his essay *Walter Benjamin, or Nostalgia*, that "in this world of

objects, this intensity of physical presence which constitutes the aura of something can perhaps best be expressed by the image of the look, the intelligence returned” (64). To gaze upon the auratic object means, perhaps, to know history in a synthesizing “flash” as Benjamin would have us believe. Benjamin trusts the gaze of the reader; he presents his fragments bare.

We now have two figures, Benjamin and Pound, who can be seen as fragment arrangers, picking through the debris of history and tradition and building a structure through contrivance rather than through invention. In *Convolute N* of Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*, he writes that the method of his project is “literary montage. I needn’t say anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse—these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them” (460). It is significant that Benjamin, in setting up the ethos of his own architectural practice, makes it clear that he “shall purloin no valuables.” Similarly to Pound’s description of his own project as a “rag-bag,” Benjamin is interested in the under-used, ragged pieces of history. Civilization, for Benjamin as well as for Pound, is seen in the “seams.” Benjamin attempts in his *Arcades Project* to capture a sense of Paris in the Nineteenth Century; in the process, he hopes to unveil the cultural intricacies of that era. It is important to contrast this with Pound, whose scope spans outward from Homer and arrives somewhere in the poet’s present. Benjamin assembles around a more focused point. He has, in some sense, a firm foundation (Nineteenth Century Paris) on which to heap his collected pile of ruins. It is fitting that Pound includes all of human history as open for spoliation. Pound’s wide ambition may explain some of the structural dead-ends of the *Cantos* (i.e. the various epic strands that are not followed after the first thirty cantos).

Although Pound and Benjamin present their purloined fragments in different ways, Pound and Benjamin's attention to their historical pieces and voices ring in striking harmony. In Canto IX, Pound includes construction orders from Malatesta (another fragment from the mail-bag). The orders read:

First: Ten slabs best red, seven by 15, by one third,

Eight ditto, good red, 15 by three by one,

Six of same, 15 by one by one.

Eight columns 15 by three and one third

etc...with carriage, danars 151 (CAN 38)

These tedious construction orders mirror some of Benjamin's tendencies in his analysis of iron construction in Paris; Benjamin tells us, for instance, that "in the beginning, railroad cars look like stagecoaches, autobuses like omnibuses, electric lights like gas chandeliers, and the last like petroleum lamps" in a quotation from Leon Pierre-Quint that comes between a quotation describing the construction of the Hotel du Louvre in 1855 and a quotation describing how the architectural ideal of the nineteenth century was to create buildings that resembled vehicles. The essence of the past is recalled in these stolen voices. They service the fragile breath of history, the aura of a time-past, present in the "railroad cars like stagecoaches," but not, perhaps, in the "valuables" of the historical record.

Marjorie Perloff is the only major critic to have drawn anything like a satisfying connecting line between Pound and Benjamin. In her book, *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century*, she argues that the ethos of Benjamin's *Arcades*

Project and Pound's *Cantos* informed the collagism so rampant in modernity. She defines this ethos as "citationality," writing that "with its dialectic of removal and graft, disjunction and conjunction, its interpenetration of origin and destruction, it is central to twenty-first-century poetics" (Perloff 17). She claims that the use of "archival material, documentary, informational manual, and, most recently, the discourse of the Internet from hypertext to blog to database" prove the centrality of Benjamin's and Pound's architecture to the art of the modern age (Perloff 17). While the *Cantos* play a conspicuously minor role in Perloff's argument, it is important to unpack the word "citation" as the connecting strand between Benjamin and Pound. Is citation truly the best signifier for something like Malatesta's mail-bag in Canto IX? Furthermore, is it reductionist to call Benjamin's *Arcades* a citational project?

Perloff's analysis of Benjamin's technique of composition, and its subsequent manifestation in the avant-garde poetics of the twenty first century, points us wisely in the direction of Benjamin's means but disregards any notion of an end. She summons Benjamin's idea that "to write history means to *cite* history" without teasing out the material implications of the statement (ARC 476). For Benjamin, as for Pound, the implications of this citationality point necessarily to material ends. Perloff's central mistake is thinking that this citationality reflects a tendency in poetics towards "text that can be readily moved from one digital site to another or from print to screen, that can be appropriated, transformed, or hidden by all sorts of means and for all sorts of purposes" (17). In her argument, the avant-garde after Benjamin moves toward dissolution and immateriality; the collagism of Benjamin and Pound foregrounds a larger modern tendency toward "unoriginal" works that express a certain level of genius but hint toward a Barthesian "death of the author." The spirit of the montage, however, lies not in

immateriality (an erasing of origins), but in physicality.

Perloff seems to ignore the auratic potentials of the texts. As we've already seen, words, when viewed through the lens of history, can have a striking physicality and depth. In Pound's search for the language of the "sea-surge," and in Benjamin's listing of names and places around Paris, we see that the "uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of a tradition" (ILL 223). While fragments in the *Cantos* and in the *Arcades Project* are moveable, they are always "embedded" in this sense. Concerning the *Arcades*, Sieburth writes, "names endow the city with the features of a face or text; to write a city is therefore to mime its nomenclature, to engage in onomastic inventory" (8). The depth of the word is tied in to the physicality of the word. Arendt quotes Benjamin as saying, "each truth has its home, its ancestral palace, in language, and this palace was built with the oldest logoi" (ILL 47). Arendt also states that "for Benjamin to quote is to name, and naming rather than speaking, the word rather than the sentence, brings truth to light" (ILL 49). I would draw attention to the primacy of the "word" in Benjamin's theoretical structure and his focus on the "word" as constructed with "the oldest logoi". We can see in his praise of the "word" over the "sentence" the sort of logic that produces a poem like Pound's *Papyrus*, or allows us to read the seemingly incomplete poems of Sappho as complete-in-themselves. These quotations also explain the tendency in both Pound and Benjamin to give over their text to other "creators". Some pages in the *Arcades Project* stand entirely without commentary from Benjamin, as do sections of the *Cantos*.

Pound and Benjamin are making texts (lists and poems), but they are also engaged in recreating physical life. For Pound, this recreation will be a "paradiso terrestre," a city of the past cobbled together from history's refuse. For Benjamin, this

recreation will be 19th Century Paris, collected from records and detritus. And yet, both texts are “a tangle of works unfinished” (CAN 815). How are Benjamin and Pound unmade?

Chapter 3: The Angel of History in Pisa

I don't know how humanity stands it

With a painted paradise at the end of it

Without a painted paradise at the end of it

Pound, Canto LXXIV

After looking at how Pound and Benjamin use the fragments of history to *make* their texts, it is now time to look at how these texts become *unmade*. The fear of a structure that will not hold together, whose fragments will not cohere, is present throughout the *Cantos*, and lingers at the margins of Benjamin's text. Destruction and incompleteness are irrevocable parts of the *Cantos* and the *Arcades Project*.

We must remember that violence is inborn to a system that seeks to "tear out" and "rearrange" the fragments of the past. It is no coincidence that, with reference to spoliation, Brenk uses the language of cannibalism. But (and this becomes so central to what Pound is trying to do in his epic), the act of breaking into fragments is not necessarily done by the arranger. As Arendt states, history itself is often the source of the fragmentation, and has "already relieved him of this task of destruction and he only needed to bend down, as it were, to select his precious fragments from the pile of debris" (ILL 45). The image of the collector, so central to Benjamin's theory, is also applicable to Pound, as is the violence latent in this fragment-collection. Pope Pius II, on seeing the Tempio Malatestiano filled with the pieces of a classical past, remarked that it was "full of pagan Gods and profane things." He was doubtlessly jarred by the fragment-constructed structure, uncomfortable with its reappropriation and central placement of

non-Christian iconography. In addition to the symbolic violence of Malatesta's creation, the *Malatesta Cantos* are full of references to war and physical conflict. While Malatesta makes the Tempio, he is always concurrently making war. A spoliated letter in Canto X reads: "Siggy, darlint, wd. you not stop making war on insensible objects, such as trees and domestic vines, that have no means to hit back...but if you will hire yourself out to commune (Siena) which you ought rather to rule than serve..." (42). Malatesta's artistic project, the cultural apex he reaches in his temple, is also a project of violence. Making art and making war go hand in hand as Malatesta grapples with political disorder and disunity in Fifteenth-Century Italy. Destruction and construction are tied together for Malatesta.

Destruction as a structural theme in the *Cantos* is present from the beginning of the text, manifested in an anxiety over "order" and unity. In Pound's *Hell Cantos*, he visualizes his "inferno" as a place where various elements teem in disharmony. On one level, the *Hell Cantos* give Pound a space to expound on the elements of society that will be targeted throughout the *Cantos* (and in his radio broadcasts): the usurers, the "pandars to authority," the "obstructors of knowledge" and of "distribution." But, on another level, they give Pound a space to excise a certain anxiety over failed construction and fallen structure. Looking at the version of Hell Pound constructs before his *Pisan Cantos*, we find a place of filth and disorder. The urgency, quickness, and vulgarity of his verse illustrate the pain and fear of disorder which is so central to his poetic project:

The slough of unamiable liars,
 bog of stupidities,
 malevolent stupidities, and stupidities,

the soil living pus, full of vermin,
 dead maggots begetting live maggots,
 slum owners,
 usurers squeezing crab-lice, pandars to authority,
 pets-de-loup, sitting on piles of stone books (CAN 153).

Hell becomes a place that “does not cohere.” Knowledge is forgotten (the stone books) and filth begets filth in an unending cycle of aimlessness. The disorder of the *Hell Cantos* is often, as the verse above shows, rather overdone and cartoonish. However, the language of the verse becomes much more urgent in light of some of Pound’s final poetic statements. The *Drafts & Fragments* resound with phrases like “wrecked for an error,” “a tangle of works unfinished,” “I cannot make it cohere” (CAN 815-6). A lack of cohesion forms the basis of Pound’s hell, and is played out tragically in his final verse.

The idea that history itself may be the source of ruin and incoherence is present throughout the *Arcades*. Benjamin embodies Arendt’s claim about history as the source of fragmentation. Destruction, he realizes, has a valuable role in a text that speaks through ruin and detritus. He writes, “it is important for the materialist historian, in the most rigorous way possible, to differentiate the construction of a historical state of affairs from what one customarily calls its ‘reconstruction.’ The ‘reconstruction’ in empathy is one-dimensional. ‘Construction’ presupposes ‘destruction’” (ARC 470). Because Benjamin revokes linear narrative as the primary vessel for historical knowledge, he seeks a different method of construction (his method of collection, as I have already shown). Benjamin, in some sense, *needs* history to appear in ruin in order to apprehend its true illuminating flash. He writes, “an object of history cannot be

targeted at all within the continuous elapse of history” (ARC 475). The elapse of history must be interrupted in order to target the “object of history,” the true fragment. The use of fragments in Pound says something quite similar. Pound’s verse structures consistently rely on the already fragmented, and his work requires ruin. For Pound as for Benjamin, World War Two was a source of this fragmentation. World War Two is the world-historical moment that makes both the *Cantos* and the *Arcades Project* unmade texts.

Returning to the Tempio, Rainey writes that by 1944 “over two hundred bombings had destroyed or rendered uninhabitable 80 percent of the housing in Rimini, and the danger posed by the collapsing buildings had provoked a massive exodus...Each day he [Augusto Campana] registered the results in a diary: which works had been saved, which lost for ever—Roman epigraphs, medieval inscriptions, the extent of damage to various monuments” (209). Consider the Tempio Medio in ruins.



Figure 4: The Tempio in late 1943. From: morenoneri.it

The fragments rekindled by Malatesta's structural effort, the pieces of history compiled into an "apex of culture," become reduced again to rubble. The efforts of Sigismundo and his men who "came with more than an hundred/two wheeled ox carts and departed, for the beautifying/ of the tempio....wheels, plaustra, oxen under night-shield" all undone in the allied bombing (CAN 36) . What can we make of fragments turned to structure turned to fragments again? Pound responds to the leveling of Rimini in Canto LXXII, writing:

Who sold Italy and the Empire
 Rimini burned and Forli destroyed.
 Who will see Gemisto's sepulcher
 The arches down and the walls
 Of the 'divine Ixotta's' resting place
 And its symbolic designs burnt out.
 & I cried out: 'Who are you'
 Againt the fury of the whirlwind.
 'Are you Sigismundo'?
 But the presence did not listen (432-6)

The verse seethes with rage. This Canto begins with an invocation of Genesis. Pound calls God "the great aesthete," and has him painting rocks with lichen "in Japanese manner" (432-3) Turning creation into rubble becomes, for Pound, a travesty of biblical proportions. What's interesting here, however, is not simply the poet's fury over "lost creation," but rather his inability to conjure the presence of Sigismundo into the poem.

The “eternal war between light and mud” obfuscates Pound’s ability to communicate with his creative forbearer. Pound’s historic objects, the medium of his verse, have been destroyed; the voice of Sigismundo is thus muted. If in earlier cantos Malatesta’s structure could serve as an auratic device, the device is lost. This process of “refragmentation,” this destruction of already spoliated pieces, signals a central turn in Pound’s verse. Where before he could create some structure out of ruin, now he faces a pile of debris. The *Pisan Cantos*, faced with this ruin, show that Pound’s spoliation was somehow unsustainable, unmanageable.

While earlier cantos searched for the physical origins of language and the aura of the past, the *Pisan Cantos* are constantly overwhelmed by immediate physicality. In Canto LXXIV Pound writes:

‘I am noman, my name is noman’
 But Wanjina is, shall we say, Ouan Jin
 Or the man with an education
 And whose mouth was removed by his father
 Because he made too many things
 Whereby cluttered the bushman’s baggage (446-7)

Beginning with Odysseus’ sly response to the Cyclops’ question of identity in the *Odyssey*, Pound introduces Wanjina. Wanjina (actually spelled Wondjina) was, as Terrell tells us, “the son of a god” who “created the world by saying the names of things. But W. created so many objects that his father closed his mouth so that he could not speak” (364). Pound purposefully conflates Wanjina with Ouan Jin, a Chinese man of

letters. Pound positions himself as a maker put under punishment for his power to make language physical. To name, for Pound, becomes intractably linked to “objects.” If Pound could overcome the burden of the thesaurus in Canto V, here he is overwhelmed with silence by the weight of its heft. He is surrounded by the refuse of his naming.

The image of Wanjina brings to mind Section IX of Benjamin’s *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. There, Benjamin conjures Klee’s *Angelus Novus*. Benjamin writes:

His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past.

Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed....This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress” (257-8).

One cannot understand this crisis of history without first understanding the chaos it causes the historical materialist who feels the need to still history, to capture it in stasis, and to extract meaning from it. Benjamin writes that the materialist relies on “a constructive principle,” utilizing a mindset that “involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well” (262). The brute facts of history in the modern era, the Tempio reduced to fragments, seem to present a stark antithesis to this “arrest” of time. We

need not make great leaps in creative thinking to see how Pound's task is itself time-arresting, and relies on construction in stasis. History placed into verse and written on the page attempts to achieve a temporal and spatial stasis. When Pound grabs a piece of Malatesta's heritage, or an alliterative sense of Homer's "sea-surge," he stills and actualizes the nebulous past (or at least attempts to). Benjamin's vision of the angel, realized brutally in the allied bombs, tears apart this stillness and sends things into uncontrolled motion. The historical crisis of modernity is realized by Benjamin in his analysis of aura. He writes that fascist war "directs a stream into a bed of trenches; instead of dropping seeds from airplanes, it drops incendiary bombs over cities; and through gas warfare the aura is abolished in new ways" (Benjamin, 242). Both Benjamin and Pound, writing from different sides of the Second World War, saw in the crisis of European destruction a crisis of aura. The fragile essence of history communicated by "fragments" is deadened in the pile of rubble.



**Figure 5: Klee “Angelus Novus”
From: Yale University Modernism Lab**

The effects of this destruction on Pound lead to verse that, for the first time in the *Cantos*, cannot reach into the archives for its materials. Richard Sieburth writes in the introduction to the *Pisan Cantos* that “his detention at Pisa effectively banned him from the space of the library and forced him to draw solely on the textual capital banked in the vast storehouse of his memory” (xxiv). Pound’s poetic signifieds, the fragments of culture found across Italy, had returned to waste, leaving the poet with memory and the present. Recall that Benjamin wrote about history “giving dates their physiognomy.” From Pound’s open air prison cell in the U.S. Army’s Disciplinary Training Center just

north of Pisa, the “physiognomy” of Pound’s earlier cantos, the structures rebuilt from spoliated pieces of the past, must have seemed disfigured and jumbled beyond comprehension.

From the first stanza of Canto LXXIV we are made aware that this moment in history, the moment of Pound’s capture, is something unique and memorable. He brutally recreates the murder of Mussolini and his mistress Clara Petacci, writing:

Thus Ben and la Clara a Milano
by the heels at Milano
That maggots shd
eat the dead bullock...but the twice crucified
where in history will you find it?” (203).

At this point in the *Cantos* there is no need to rely solely on the recovery of lost items from the past; history becomes present and fully realized. That question, “where in history will you find it?” asks us to consider the historical moment of fascism and its violent end as worthy subjects of history. Pound is in a unique position because he was a direct witness to Mussolini’s reign. Where before he had to search for the essence of a past he had not lived through, his proximity to fascism provides him with direct perspective. Following this first verse section of Canto LXXIV, there is a significant space after which Pound takes us into his “present” at the allied internment camp. We must understand, however, that Pound’s present still involves a strange dance of mythos and reality. In the second stanza, after the significant space, Pound places us “under the tent flaps” and then, in beautiful flowing verse writes:

A lizard upheld me
 the wild birds wd not eat the white bread
 from Mt Taishan to the sunset
 From Carrara stone to the tower
 and this day the air was made open
 for Kuanon of all delights,
 Linus, Cletus, Clement” (203).

Here Pound references the “Great Mountain” in China and the construction of the tower of Pisa. Thus, the contents of Pound’s present, situated under a tent, a captive in Italy, are intermingled with Chinese myth and Italian history. A history revealed in ruins is a history Pound can inhabit. Though the building blocks of spolia are mostly absent in the *Pisan Cantos*, the aura of history is fully alive. The *Cantos* become a true epic of history as soon as they are unmade.

We must understand, however, that the light of authenticity Pound is able to recover from his present is often a fractured, hysterical light. Pound begins to see luminous visions in minor events around his prison camp, and turns this “minor” space into an arena of epic forces and antagonisms. Here again he shows his affinity for minutiae. A key example of this occurs in his description of “Mr. Edwards,” an American soldier who shared a bit of charity with the captured poet. Pound writes:

and Mr Edwards superb green and brown
 in ward No 4 a jacent benignity,

of the Baluba mask: 'doan you tell no one
 I made you that table
 methenamine eases the urine
 and the greatest is charity" (206).

Firstly, the language of this section is truly striking. Pound makes poetry out of a regional American dialect, thus presenting a far different "subject" of history. Mr. Edwards is upheld as an example of charity, and he is given a voice in the *Cantos* alongside Homer, Virgil, and Malatesta. Simple actions like the making of a table become, for Pound, heightened into historically *necessary* acts. The soldiers around Pound's camp play an important role later in Canto LXXIV. Sitting in filth "with Barabbas and 2 thieves" beside him, Pound writes of "the slaver as seen between decks/ and all the presidents/ Washington Adams Monroe Polk Tyler /plus Carrol (of Carrolton) Crawford" (208). The common soldiers around the camp, Pound notices, share their names with American presidents. American mythos is evoked amongst the incessant madness and pain of the camp (referred to as a "pig sty" in line with the story of Odysseus and his crew being transformed into swine in *The Odyssey*).

Pound becomes truly present in his poetry when he breaks from the spoliating structure of the earlier poems. There is a paradox in this break; Pound becomes the "subject" of history by virtue of a crisis that destroys historical remembrance. The end of Fascism (with the death of Mussolini) represents, in Pound's conception, a loss of historical coherency, a coherency Pound explicitly yearns for. Bush writes, "the Pisan *Cantos* became a poem devoted to shoring up a collective memory not only of the monuments that the Allies had so lamentably defaced but of an Italian culture rooted in

antiquity and revitalized by Mussolini” (7). Pound becomes an increasingly desperate and isolated figure in Canto LXXIV. The physical destruction of the monuments which stood so profoundly at the center of his poetic project (and less profoundly at the center of Mussolini’s fascist project) presented Pound with the ultimate poetic crisis. Pound as restorer was faced with the allies as “destroyers” of the historical lineage which gave his poetry subject and force, and it is precisely this crisis that allows Pound’s present to emerge as such a meaningful poetic space. Towards the middle of Canto LXXIV, Pound writes:

I surrender neither the empire nor the temples
 plural
 nor the constitution nor yet the city of Dioce
 each one in his god’s name
 as by Terracina rose from the sea Zephyr behind her
 and from her manner of walking
 as had Anchises
 till the shrine be again white with marble
 till the stone eyes look again seaward (207).

This is resilient, nostalgic verse. Notice, for instance, its formality compared with the free use of diction and syntax exhibited by the “soldier’s section” of Canto LXXIV. Here, Pound evokes “lost” locations of antiquity: Dioce, the well-ordered city, and Terracina, the birthplace of Venus. He demands restoration of these destroyed, ideal places, asking that the “shrine be again white with marble.” It is at this point of destruction, when

restoration seems so far gone, that Pound creates a more personal poetics.

This desperate calling for restoration is manifested beautifully at the end of Canto LXXIV. Pound writes:

dust to fountain pan otherwise
 Hast 'ou seen the rose in the steel dust
 (or swansdown ever?)
 so light is the urging, so ordered the dark petals of iron
 we who have passed over Lethe" (210).

Restoration becomes distilled into the image of the "rose in the steel dust," referencing the natural pattern that forms when steel is rearranged in a magnetic field. Lethe is the river of forgetfulness in Hades, and we see the tension between remembrance and forgetfulness that Pound is so acutely aware of in his captivity at the allied prison camp. The "rose in the steel dust" becomes increasingly less visible throughout the *Cantos*, and this final invocation of beauty seems to be more of an elegy for things past than a hope for things to come.

So far I have tried to establish the unique significance of Pound's move from a focus on the myth of time-past to his intermingling of time-past and time-present in Canto LXXIV. The catalyst for this move is Pound's desperation upon witnessing the crisis of destruction. That is the tensile burst or springing forward which allows Pound to emerge as himself a subject of history. Despite his attempt to shore up historical "auras" in order to add order and continuity to his historicizing project, it is in this Canto that he recognizes a certain disorder in historical memory. Personal chaos and

ruin allow him to create verse that invokes aura, that “unique existence” of objects in space and time, and fuels some of Pound’s best poetry, including the memorable libretto of Canto LXXXI.

And yet, though beauty abounds in the *Pisan Cantos*, the poet mourns the possibility of coherence, and the poems stand as elegies. In Canto LXXI, Pound writes:

and the clouds over the Pisan meadows,
 are indubitably as fine as any to be seen
 from the peninsula
 [the barbarians] have not destroyed them
 as they have Sigismundo’s Temple
 Divae Ixottae (479).

Although the destruction of the Tempio marks a moment in the *Cantos* when the natural world can abide and shine forth (a fitting topic for another analysis, perhaps), it also marks a moment of irrevocable, irretrievable loss. Pound’s structures return to fragments, and the Angel of History presides over a ruined earth.

Though Pound and Benjamin found themselves at separate ends of the destruction, Second World War deprived Benjamin’s work of completeness, as it deprived him of life. While the Angel of History was always present in Benjamin’s thinking, and destruction was always at the core of his project, the same terror that seized Pound’s poetry aborted Benjamin’s text. Wholeness-through-ruin is the ideal of Benjamin’s work that cannot quite be realized. Ruin, in a sense, trumps structure. As Jameson writes, “Benjamin’s work seems to me to be marked by a painful straining

towards a wholeness or unity of experience which the historical situation threatens to shatter at every turn. A vision of a world of ruins and fragments, an ancient chaos of whatever nature on the point of overwhelming consciousness, these are some of the images that seem to recur” (53). Benjamin, like Pound, theorized history as only accessible through the ruins of time. Unfortunately, the ruin was so relentless that the work could not be finished.

Chapter 4: Abandoning the Epic

Here from the beginning, we have been here
 From the beginning
 - Pound, Canto CXII

Nothing at all of what we are saying here actually existed. None of it has ever lived—as surely as a skeleton has never lived

-Benjamin, *Arcades Project*

We've now seen the central turn in the *Cantos* towards unmaking. Historical ruin overwhelms the *Cantos* and the *Arcades Project* and leaves us with no coherent conclusion to either work. Though the ruins of World War II figured beautifully in Pound's poetry, they altered the possibility that the *Cantos* could ever be a complete verse epic. Towards the end of his life, Pound found the possibility of completing the *Cantos* a daunting and impossible task. The horrors of the Second World War, in tandem with his insular life as a patient at Saint Elizabeths Hospital, had led to self-doubt and self-denial. In an interview with Donald Hall, Pound states, "it is difficult to write a paradiso when all the superficial indications are that you ought to write an apocalypse." Pound's final work, the *Drafts & Fragments*, plays with the horror of incompleteness; these poems push against our expectations for a "late poetics," and give an indication of how Pound's historicized, fragmented *Cantos* should be viewed.

The *Drafts & Fragments of Cantos CX-CXVII* had an ambiguous genesis, a piecemeal publication history, and a less than critically lauded reception. We do not find in these last cantos evidence of an artist creating a deliberate final work. It lacks the

infinite circularity of Joyce's final statement (*Finnegans Wake*) or the religious time-play of Eliot in his last poem (*The Four Quartets*). The year before its official publication by New Directions Press in 1968, Pound wrote to his editor James Laughlin:

Dear Jas,

All right, go ahead.

It reeks with conceit. It needs

punctuation. I want to correct

the proofs.

I can still sign my own

name.

Rather bafflingly, this letter from Rapallo ends with Pound's signature nine times over, ending with two words in Pound's own hand: "conceit remains" (Gordon 287). The Pound confident enough to orchestrate the spoliation of cultural history is gone; in his place is a self whose identity seems to be constantly slipping, whose name must be reasserted nine times over. Pound's sense of a "slipping self" takes us back to Canto I. There, in his opening invocation of Homer's *Odyssey*, he introduces Elpenor "unburied." Elpenor's speech in the first canto reads:

"But thou, O King, I bid remember me, unwept, unburied,

"Heap up mine arms, be tomb by sea-bord, and inscribed:

"*A man of no fortune, and with a name to come.*

"And set my oar up, that I swung mid fellows." (4)

We realize tragically in the *Drafts & Fragments* that Pound is more Elpenor than Odysseus. These final poems show no hope of Ithaca. Pound's poetry, unmade in ruin, leaves him fortuneless and nameless. The inconclusiveness of the final poems constantly show the problems of identity associated with a ruined text.

Contemporary reviews of the "Drafts & Fragments" mirror the poet's own uncertainty in his work. Herbert Leibowitz, writing in the *Hudson Review* in 1969, noted rather ambivalently that "if they do not clarify and round off that strangest and knottiest of long poems—at this date that would be futile to hope—they are not simply the exhuming of literary remains...like some visionary architect still perfecting the grand plan of his life, Pound cannot let go of this petted child...the poems, fragmented as they may be, constitute an act of public contrition" (Erkkila 391). Other contemporary reviews seem to echo the sentiment of uncertainty. L.L. Martz in the *Yale Review* suggested that the poems do not cohere because Pound requires a sympathetic reader who had always been absent in his reception (Erkkila 392). Modern scholarship on these final cantos, sparse in comparison to work on Pound's earlier cantos, struggles with such an incomplete close to the epic. Kenner, mentioning it in passing at the end of his seminal text on Pound, called the *Drafts & Fragments* simply an "abandonment" of the project. Ronald Bush, addressing scholars of the *Drafts and Fragments*, writes that "we might want to entertain the heuristic fiction that there was more than one 'Ezra Pound,' self-constructed or constructed by readers over time, and that different versions of 'Ezra Pound' are associated with variants of a single text" (241). Bush chooses to organize his reading of the *Drafts & Fragments* on thematic grounds, looking at the poems insularly, with biographical information as the ligament of his analysis. No

matter whose gloss we choose to dignify, the reception of the *Drafts & Fragments*, as I see it, falls into two camps united by their recognition of the “inadequacy” of this verse as a conclusion. One camp may wish to see these poems as a dappled vision of contrition, focusing on the poet’s admission of error (i.e. Canto CXVI: “Many errors/a little rightness,/to excuse his hell/and my paradise”). Others see the *Drafts & Fragments* as a final utterance of anachronistic and politically blind dogma (as we see in *Addendum for C*: “The Evil is Usury, *neschek*/the serpent/*neschek* whose name is known, the defiler”).

While it is reasonable to focus on the elements of contrition and division present throughout the *Drafts & Fragments*, I think it is more productive to look at how the final poems play with the ideas of historicity and fragmentation found throughout the *Cantos*. The final cantos present a startling vision of “late style” because they constantly refuse to bind themselves to any one style. The profundity of these poems lies not in their ability to transcend ruin, but in their constant insistence on ruin.

If the earlier cantos were defined by an architectural ethos of “structure from fragment,” and if the Pisan Cantos traced a historical collapse of structure back into fragment, Pound’s situation during the composition of these final cantos demonstrates an entirely different mode. Bush, in his essay on the composition of the *Drafts & Fragments*, writes, “*Drafts & Fragments*, first and foremost, is a poem about Pound’s return after thirteen years of incarceration in St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C., to the European sites of his strongest adult memories. Or rather, it is a poem about his return to what seemed a diminished Europe and a diminished self” (222). We know from biographical sources that Pound’s journey through Italy after his release from St. Elizabeths took him through various spaces he had occupied before and during the

Second World War. He returned to Pisa, for instance, to see his former prison cell. Bush quotes a letter from Pound to Archibald Macleish, demonstrating Pound's shock at returning to Italy: "one thing to have Europe fall on one's head. Another to be set in the ruins of same" (222). It is as though the collage methods of Pound's work had been grotesquely, and literally, turned against him. Instead of picking through the fragments of culture or language, pieces of a collective memory and collective history, Pound becomes confronted with the fragments of personal landscape and personal memory. If Pound begins mid-motion on Odysseus' ship "Heavy with weeping, and winds from sternward/Bore us out onward with bellying canvas" he arrives at the shore of his own collapsed memory (CAN 3).

Memory in *Drafts & Fragments* is memory of a corpus. These poems take Pound away from his vast storehouse of cultural history, and give him the space to look through his own career and assess what he has made, and the moral valence of what he has made. Peter Stoicheff understands this tendency in the *Drafts & Fragments* well. In his book *The Hall of Mirrors*, he examines the self-reflexivity of Pound's final work, writing that the composition of the final poems "led him to a difficult reinterpretation of the poetic and political ideologies at its core and to withdraw gradually, through the writing, from some of its more strident and inflexible foundations" (75). As readers, we are ready to embrace this image of Pound "withdrawing gradually." Frequent retreats into the language of forgiveness and redemption serve as portals back into Pound's poetry for the reader of his work conditioned by his politics and economics to disbelieve his sincerity and aim. This language of retreat punctuates the *Drafts & Fragments* and stands out by its nakedness; rarely when speaking of redemption does Pound employ his

methods of citation and allusion⁸. In Canto CV, Pound writes, “that love be the cause of hate,/something is twisted” (800). In *Canto CXIII*, he writes, “Error of chaos. Justification is from kindness of heart/and from her hands floweth mercy” (808). In “Notes for CXVII et seq.,” Pound presents himself in a barren, uncharted space. The poet cries out:

M’amour, m’amour
 what do I love and
 where are you?
 That I lost my center
 fighting the world.
 The dreams clash
 and are shattered--
 and that I tried to make a paradiso
 terrestre. (822)

⁸ It’s interesting to consider how, as Pound nears the end of his life and his work, the enactment of judgment appears entirely different than it did in earlier *Cantos* like the *Hell Cantos*. We might recall the comic ferocity of Pound’s vision of Inferno; in those *Cantos* Pound chooses to subject the judged to the “last cess pool of the universe” where jewels are plunged in mud, the condemned howl, and the soil is a “decrepitude” (62). The fragility and near-tenderness of forgiveness and lamentation in the *Drafts & Fragments* suggest multitudes. As Pound becomes the center of his own critical eye his language becomes more adult, more refined. Sin is figured as an uncenteredness and becomes less a problem of direct ill-will but of tangled intentions. Pound will not place himself in the childish carnival of waste and fury that he imagines in the *Hell Cantos*. This, to me, says a lot about ideas of personality and impersonality. As the poet becomes a figure of error he retreats from his prior conceptions of judgment. Hell does not appear as a concept in the *Drafts & Fragments*, and is curiously avoided as Pound’s mortality closes in around him.

This section of the *Drafts & Fragments* embodies all of the reader's expectations of a broken Ezra Pound. This verse is housed in an incomplete canto, merely the working notes toward some final completion. Pound here is outside of history; rather than relying on historical fragments to speak his meaning, he cries out as a lost, confused self. Though he addresses the subject off-scene as "M'amour," he questions even what he loves. His life's work, his *paradiso terrestre*, is now only a failed attempt at coherence. He lies, with his work, shattered. Stoicheff explicates the rawness of these final poems well when he writes, "the reassessment of *The Cantos* that the volume's composition generates leads to a painful and incomplete exposure of the self. Together they create an inescapable contraction of the poem that assists in its close" (150). This new "exposure of the self" may lead us down the path of seeing the *Drafts & Fragments* as an entirely new model for Pound's poetics. The image of the exposed Pound, stripped of all hopes of completing his *paradiso terrestre*, calls to mind later Yeats, who found renewed poetic vigor in sparseness and decay. Here, as a point of comparison, is Yeats' *A Coat*:

I made my song a coat
 Covered with embroideries
 Out of old mythologies
 From heel to throat;
 But the fools caught it,
 Wore it in the world's eyes
 As though they'd wrought it.
 Song, let them take it,
 For there's more enterprise

In walking naked. (127)

As Pound moves away from spoliated structures in the *Drafts & Fragments*, he mirrors Yeats' casting aside of Irish mythology as a motivating genesis for poetry. Exposed and "naked," Yeats manages to renew his poetics and cast aside imitators and exploiters. In Pound's exposed and personal admittances of guilt and uncenteredness, we might see a similar move. By looking at Pound's nakedness in the *Drafts & Fragments*, we see a deeper tragedy exposed. By the time Yeats' published "A Coat," he still had 23 years left of a deepening poetic career; his casting aside of "old mythologies" could be played with and utilized extensively. Pound's exposed poetics are only hints toward a new vision of the *Cantos*. Pound gives us a glimpse of stark and deeply personal poetry as he makes his disappearance off of the poetic stage. His most direct cantos are presented to the reader in the act of farewell. Pound is clearly thinking of Yeats as he nears the end of his own life. Yeats appears in Canto CXIV: "William murmuring: 'Sligo in heaven' when the mist came/to Tigullio. And that the truth is in kindness" (813). Yeats becomes, for Pound, a model of closure that he himself, with a twisted confusion of hate and love, cannot mimic. We might also remember that Yeats' end was directed and orchestrated within his verse. *Under Ben Bulbin* has Yeats directing us to his grave, and provides an epitaph instructing us to "Cast a cold eye/On life, on death./ Horseman, pass by!" (325). Pound places Yeats in a celestial Sligo. In his *Drafts & Fragments*, Pound leaves himself unburied and uneulogized. Pound's own grave in San Michele cemetery carries only his name; no piece of his *Cantos* adorns his burial site.

While focusing on the conciliatory and apologetic elements of the *Drafts & Fragments* satisfies many of our desires as readers of Pound's poetry (as they seem to

is faint (801)

Notice first Pound's allusion to Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Pound edits Eliot's verse to include "time's wreckage," implying, it seems, the historical fragments which compose his own *Cantos*. Again, we see Pound channeling his contemporaries in order to find a fitting way to conclude his own epic. When Pound references Mr Rock, the claims to wreckage "shored against ruin" becomes a sort of mockery. Mr Rock, Terrell tells us, refers to Dr. Joseph Rock. Dr. Rock was a researcher out of Harvard who worked with the Na-Khi over a period of 20 years. Terrell writes: "in the spring of 1943 he tried to ship over 700 manuscripts, all his 20 years' work ready for the printer, back to the States. The ship was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine and his work went with it to the bottom of the Arabian Sea...Dr. Rock returned after WWII to start the work over again" (COM 716-17). In my discussion of the *Pisan Cantos*, I mentioned how those poems radically subvert Pound's attempts to spoliage; they envision structures made of fragments (the medieval grandeur of the Tempio Medio) reduced to fragments again. Instead of insulating and protecting the poet (as they do, perhaps, for Eliot at the end of *The Waste Land*), Pound's fragments function in tandem with Mr. Rock's. The Second World War, the defining and hinge-moment of Pound's *Cantos*, altered the possibility that fragment-constructed structures could remain whole or stable. As we consider the work of Malatesta in ruins, so we might consider the work of Dr. Rock and of Ezra Pound returned to ruins. The light in the dark forest at the end of this canto becomes faint; the *Drafts & Fragments* do not shore against ruin, but are ruin realized.

Mr. Rock is only one model of lateness and incompleteness in the *Drafts & Fragments*. Considering the inclusion of Eliot and Yeats (among others) in the poems,

the *Drafts & Fragments* are simply a rehearsal of various possibilities of conclusion. The poems show Ezra Pound searching for a way to end his epic, for a way to make his verse cohere. Often this searching takes a dark turn, as is evident in the first canto of the *Drafts & Fragments*, Canto CX. Pound opens his final collection with a reference to the Na-khi ceremonies meant to redeem the spirits of those who committed suicide (COM 714). Pound reenacts the ceremony in verse, writing, “The nine fates and the seven, / and the black tree was born dumb” (797). The black tree, Terrell informs us, is the hanging tree of a young girl who chose death over forced marriage. This sinister first image in the *Drafts & Fragments* enacts the unease that continues throughout the verse.

Elsewhere in the poems, Pound seems to fade away into the company of other creators. As we’ve already seen with Yeats and Eliot, Pound chooses to populate these last cantos with friends and other artists, many of whom could craft a satisfying “late work” or final statement. In Canto CXIII, Pound writes, “Yet to walk with Mozart, Agassiz, and Linnaeus / ‘neath overhanging air under sun-beat” (806). Pound places a high premium on those who “make,” as is evident at the end of the *Pisan Cantos’* Libretto (“But to have done instead of not doing / this is not vanity” (541)). Pound can still, perhaps, envision a paradiso where the makers of art and culture have an eternal home, even if he realizes the impossibility of that vision. Even Mr. Rock, whose fragments were sunk, is given high esteem in Canto CXIII when Pound writes, “Rock’s world that he saved us for memory / a thin trace in high air” (806). Even here, in the disconcerting ruins of Pound’s art, some redemption is possible. Pound reminds himself, “God’s eye art’ ou, do not surrender perception” (810). Though Pound’s perception is scattered in these final cantos, it is not quite relinquished.

The notion that a “late style” can be defined by a lack of coherent style is not

entirely unique to Pound⁹. Edward Said, in his last book *On Late Style*, sets out to look at final artistic endeavors. Said asks a question that reverberates across the final texts of Benjamin and Pound: “But what of artistic lateness not as harmony and resolution but as intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction?” (7). As readers, we have various biases and preconceptions regarding final works. We demand wholeness and conclusion in art because, perhaps, they are so absent from our history and from our lives. Said finds unresolved contradiction in the late work of Beethoven, writing:

Beethoven’s late works remain unreconciled...they do not fit any scheme, and they cannot be reconciled or resolved, since their irresolution and unsynthesized fragmentariness are constitutive, neither ornamental nor symbolic of something else. Beethoven’s late compositions are in fact about ‘lost totality,’ and are therefore catastrophic. (12-13)

Fragmentariness is as constitutive to the *Cantos* as it is to Beethoven’s late works.

Fragmentariness is both the subject and the ever-present structural conceit of the verse. As we’ve already established, Pound’s structural tendencies tend toward the building of verse structures through pieces of the historical record. We can see how the same tendency becomes realized in the *Drafts & Fragments* as Pound draws from his own verse. History is no longer the storehouse for Pound’s materials; Pound’s own corpus becomes open for spoliation.

⁹ Pound’s act of withdrawing from his corpus is not a unique event in English Literature. Recall that Chaucer, who Pound preferred to Shakespeare, ended his work by writing: “Mercy on me and foryeve me my giltes...the whiche I revoke in my retracciouns.” English literature is born with a revocation.

The *Drafts & Fragments* contain work dating from 1941 to 1966. *Addendum for C* predates Pound's capture and imprisonment in Pisa, and presents an odd antithesis to the cantos of retribution and forgiveness that stand alongside it elsewhere in the collection. In the poem, Pound returns to the comic and hyperbolic language of judgment we find in the *Hell Cantos*, writing again of the "Evil" called "Usury." He goes on to write: "here is the core of evil, the burning hell without let-up,/The canker corrupting all things, Fafnir the worm,/Syphilis of the State, of all kingdoms,/Wart of the common-weal,/Wenn-maker, corrupter of all things" (818). That Pound chose to reopen the economic discourse around usury so attached in the minds of his readers to fascism and anti-semitism seems astounding. The inclusion of earlier fragments like the *Addendum for C* is partially explained by the complicated publication history of the *Drafts & Fragments* glossed earlier in this analysis. Stoicheff suggests that the publication history proves that "Pound may never have felt comfortable with the intentions of closure that a published last volume for *The Cantos* might imply. The poems of *Drafts & Fragments* cannot, therefore, be read outside the context of their textual production, a history that is intrinsic to the volume's gestures of incompleteness and self-interrogation (including the multiple identities, poetic and personal, which 'self-' fitfully merges here) (73). Stoicheff rightly recognizes that the structure of the poems, as well as their publication history, imply a sense of incompleteness outside of purely thematic concerns. The poems resist closure constantly, and present an odd challenge to the reader seeking conclusion in the *Cantos*.

Recall Arendt's image of Benjamin picking up "his precious fragments from the pile of debris" (ILL 36). This image ties in to Benjamin's analysis of Klee, and provides a model for Pound at the end of his career. As the *Pisan Cantos* left Pound's physical

world in ruin, the *Drafts & Fragments* leave Pound picking through the fragments of a self and a career. The poems end with a spoliated piece that powerfully evokes Malatesta's mail-bag in the *Malatesta Cantos*. The final poem in the *Cantos* is a short, ten-line dedication to Pound's lover, Olga Rudge. It is appropriately titled *Fragment (1966)*. It reads:

That her acts
 Olga's acts
 of beauty
 be remembered.

Her name was Courage
 & is written Olga

These lines are for the
 ultimate CANTO
 whatever I may write
 in the interim (824)

Carpenter explains that Pound sent New Directions the final fragment of the *Cantos* in 1966, though it was not included in the collected work until the 1972 edition.

Concerning the late addition, he writes, "the disarray of the poem's conclusion, the uncertainty about how Ezra meant to finish, seems in itself a proper ending" (Carpenter 895). The loose strands and fragmentariness of these late cantos cannot be resolved.

Pound, left in personal “fragments,” could not fulfil his structural visions. Ruin overcame him.

The fate of the *Arcades Project* involves an even higher degree of incompleteness than Pound’s *Cantos*. The facts surrounding Benjamin’s suicide and his incomplete set of notes for a future magnum opus are well known and oft-repeated. A rather romantic account of Walter Benjamin in his final days is included in the Harvard Press edition of the *Arcades Project*. Lisa Fittko, a travelling companion of Benjamin’s as he set out to find safe haven in Spain during WWII, remembers him dragging a large manuscript over the mountains between France and Spain, recalling that “under no circumstances would he part with his ballast, that black bag; [they] would have to drag the monster across the mountains” (ARC 950). Benjamin stopped collecting his fragments, and with his death the idea of a coherent study of 19th Century Paris died too. The ending of the *Cantos* and of the *Arcades Project* calls into question the role of the reader in a text of historical fragmentation; how is the reader called on to “finish” or orchestrate the ending of the text?

Chapter 5: Palimpsest

“To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past--which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments”

“As flowers turn toward the sun, by dint of a secret heliotropism the past strives to turn toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history”

Benjamin, from *Theses on the Philosophy of History*

The fact that both Pound and Benjamin leave us with ruin cannot be transcended or altered. Incompletion is both the burden and the virtue of the *Cantos* and the *Arcades Project*. After traversing the odd structures of these texts, working through their making and unmaking, one would hope to find some final message or meaning in their incompletion. The final inconclusiveness of the texts works as an inclusive motion, inviting readers to finish what is unfinished, and to make what is unmade. As I look at these ruinous, halted texts, I think of palimpsests. Both the *Cantos* and the *Arcades Project* become palimpsests as they are abandoned and left in fragments. A palimpsest is “parchment from which earlier writing has been removed to clear it for new writing.” The word comes from the Greek *palimpsestos*, or “scraped again.” I would like to focus on the perpetuity of the word, the sense in which it denotes continuity and persistence. To conclude my analysis, I will focus on one poem from the *Drafts & Fragments*, and a few fragments from the *Arcades Project*, all of which further the idea of the texts as palimpsests.

Canto CXVI is representative of the entire *Drafts & Fragments*. The poem takes pieces of Pound’s earlier work, references to various other locations in the *Cantos*, and

cobbles them together; the work of spoliation evident in the earlier cantos still informs this late text. The canto begins:

Came Neptunus
 his mind leaping
 like dolphins,
 These concepts the human mind has attained.
 To makes Cosmos--
 To achieve the possible--
 Muss., wrecked for an error,
 But the record
 the palimpsest--
 a little light
 in great darkness--
 cuniculi-- (815)

The first three lines take us back to Canto CX, in which Pound references the mosaic of Madonna in the basilica of Torcello. The Roman god of water is connected back to human creation, to the mosaic. The conflation of the divine and the human continues in lines five and six where “to make Cosmos” merges with “to achieve the possible.” The presence of Mussolini, significantly indicated by only the first four letters of his name, shatters the sense of complete creation felt earlier in the poem, and lies “wrecked for an error.” The fact that his name is indicated by its first four letters suggests a trepidation on Pound’s part; a similar tactic was used for figures condemned

to the *Hell Cantos*. The fact that Pound thinks of his own work as “wreckage” suggests a historical tie to Mussolini that cannot be broken. The ruin of World War Two is dramatically present in these final cantos. The next two lines, however, introduce the “palimpsest” and begin to invite the reader into the wreckage and ruin. The word *cuniculi*, meaning a labyrinthine, underground passage, is a good stand in for Pound’s work, and in the next image of the “unprepared young burdened with records” we see Pound’s readers.

Canto CXVI constantly searches for a “center,” for some kernel of truth to redeem the act of literature. Pound writes, “*litterae nihil sanantes*” (literature which heals nothing). The act of writing becomes simultaneously futile and redemptive in this canto as Pound searches out for someone to continue the palimpsest. Canto CXVI gives us the emotional heart of the *Drafts & Fragments*:

Justinian’s

A tangle of works unfinished.

I have brought the great ball of crystal ;

who can lift it?

Can you enter the great acorn of light?

But the beauty is not the madness

Tho’ my errors and wrecks lie about me.

And I am not a demigod,

I cannot make it cohere.

If love be not in the house there is nothing.

The voice of famine unheard.

How came beauty against this blackness,
Twice beauty under the elms-- (815-16)

The reference to Justinian takes us back to Canto XCIV. Pound admired Justinian because he established the most impressive law book of the late-Roman world. Justinian's work occupied fifty volumes, and included a "basic manual for beginners which would give an outline of the law in clear and simple words" (COM 575). Pound sympathizes with this accumulation of text and code and most likely saw his "ABC" books as kin to Justinian's basic manual. And yet Pound knows that Justinian's work, perhaps by virtue of its size and heft, is only a "tangle of works unfinished." The idea of an epic, of a coherent record of human history, becomes impossible. When Pound calls his *Cantos* a "great ball of crystal," and a "great acorn of light," he refers to neo-platonic light philosophy. However, the idea of transparency seems so inappropriate to Pound's laborious, fragmented work. The idea of participation makes these lines resonate. Pound invites his readers to "lift" and "enter" his work. He strips himself bare, places himself amidst his fragments (a man at the foot of the angel), and asks, "how came beauty against this blackness." If beauty is in the *Cantos*, it is a confused and tortuous beauty for Pound this late in his life. Though Canto CXVI looks constantly for light, it passes the task of creation over to the reader.

At the end of the canto, Pound asks clearly, "And as to who will copy this palimpsest?" (817). Pound cannot make light "flow thru" the fragments of his text. Although he looks for "a little light, like a rushlight / to lead back to splendour," he is left in a limbo between coherence and complete disunity. The entirely off-the-cuff statement, "i.e. it coheres all right," shows this precarious limbo. Asking "who will copy

this palimpsest” says a lot about Pound’s late work, and his *Cantos* as a whole. A palimpsest serves as a good model for his earlier work. The stream of spolia present in the early cantos functions as a sort of hazy palimpsest in which the texts of the past fuse together dimly and connect with the present text. Pound leave his text to be “scraped again.” He is left with ruins and fragments, that is true. But his *Cantos* show the *possibility* inherent in the fragment, the possibility of construction and beauty. As Pound hands off his fragments, he hands off the depth and potential of his fragments as well. The last word of the New Directions edition of the *Cantos* is “interim.” We fill that interim.

Benjamin writes, “the historian is the herald who invites the dead to the table” (481). His *Arcades Project* invited the dead, but Benjamin was unable to make a final, coherent piece out of their presence. I mentioned earlier that Benjamin’s greatest aim in collecting his fragments was to have his readers simply “look” at the ruins he has assembled. For Benjamin, the synthesizing gaze sees history “only in lightning flashes. The text is the long roll of thunder that follows” (ARC 456). In this sense, Benjamin’s text invites our participation, and our role as meaning-makers. Though the fragments are not in final form, and are abandoned, the possibility of this “lightning flash” persists.

In some sense, Benjamin’s project always pushed against the possibility of completeness. While the first cantos suggest several strands of epic-tradition that could be followed to a complete end, any such such suggestion is always absent in the *Arcades*. Benjamin writes, “historical materialism must renounce the epic element in history...it also explodes the homogeneity of the epoch, interspersing it with ruins--that is, with the present” (474). The presence of a “present moment” in Benjamin always suggests new ways of looking at his fragments. The object of the past is determined by the present,

that much is clear throughout *Convolute N*. The fact that the fragments of the *Arcades Project* are not in final form weighed on Benjamin toward the end of his life. Sieburth writes that Benjamin worried “that his project may amount to nothing more than a series of prologmena and parilipomena--prefaces or addenda to a missing book” (15). Sieburth goes on to write, “ever in progress, ever in preparation (or ruin), Benjamin’s Arcade contains its eventual completion within itself as a faint principle of hope; but like the flaneur, gambler, or wandering Jew, his fate is, above all, to wait” (16).

And so, the task of waiting is passed on from Benjamin to his reader. It is fair to call Benjamin’s text a palimpsest too because of this sense of perpetual wait and perpetual ruin. As the “pile of debris...grows skyward” before the Angel of History, so the *Arcades* contain the potential of more and more fragments, an ever expanding image of ruin. Although the *Arcades* lie unfinished, I truly believe that had Benjamin lived thirty more years, the text would have remained unconcluded. The march into future present moments, the so-called “progress” of mankind, provides no dearth of material. The significant thing about Benjamin’s theorization of the collector is that he never provides the collector with a finished collection. Benjamin calls collecting “a primary phenomenon of study,” and this study goes on perpetually. The text is a palimpsest because it contains the possibility of further fragments and of always more study. Without Benjamin’s hand to collect more material, the *Arcades* ends. But the project of collection is a continuous scrawling, and forms a continuous text.

And so, if we ask finality of Benjamin, we must also ask finality of history. We can hope only for a moment of stillness, a flash in his text when the past becomes re-illuminated, fused to the present waking moment. I cannot say that I’ve experienced such a moment in the *Arcades Project*, although I have been overwhelmed by the

enormity of his materials, the destruction of a continuous narrative, and the transcendence of seemingly trifling details. Benjamin positions his ideal reader as someone in the state between sleep and first awakening. He asks, “is awakening perhaps the synthesis of dream consciousness (as thesis) and waking consciousness (as antithesis?)” (463). The immeasurable heft of history, of epochs that lie silently behind us, is our sleep. As we read the *Cantos* and the *Arcades Project*, we occasionally see the ruins of the past re-illuminated. We grasp, for a moment, that silent, oppressive bulk of time. The texts are the strange dreams we have in the pre-dawn hour.

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