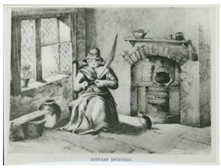
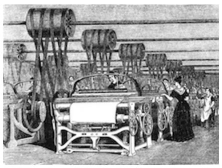
# Economic Relations

## The Industrial Revolution: From Home to Factory


Distaff Spinning

The essential change which the Industrial Revolution brought was not in machines but in method. The Industrial Revolution was only incidentally a change in industrial techniques; it was more profoundly a change in industrial organization, [namely, the transfer of] many of these industries from the home into the factory. Within two generations, roughly between 1760 and 1820, the customary way of running industry changed. Before 1760, it was standard to take the work to villagers in their own homes. By 1820, it was standard to bring everyone into a factory and have them work there.

[For instance, consider] the making of woolen cloth. Characteristically, this was carried out in many steps. Sheep were reared and then shorn; the wool was cleaned and combed. It was then spun into thread, and the thread went to the individual weaver, who had a weaving frame in his own home and wove the cloth on it. In principle, the weaver was a private manufacturer; that is, in principle he bought the thread, he owned his frame, and he sold the cloth himself.


Power Loom

This detailed procedure suffered from two drawbacks. First, not all parts of it were equally mechanized. The weaver's frame was an effective machine, but the spinning wheel was not. Anyone could spin who had the minimum sense of touch needed to draw an even thread and, as this needs little skill, spinning was therefore only a minor occupation of women — as the word 'distaff' still reminds us. A weaver at work could keep many hands spinning. [...] Second, there was little money in spinning, with its low productivity, and those who could gave it up whenever possible, in order to do the necessary work of house and farm. It was a seasonal occupation, which was dropped at seed and harvest time, and was therefore a bottleneck at the mercy of its occasional workers.

Another handicap in the organization of the woolen industry was economic. In principle, the weaver was his own master: he bought the thread, he owned the frame, and he sold the finished cloth himself. But he had little to fall back on if times were bad, and he got into debt. He had to borrow, that is to say he had to ask for credit, from the man from whom he bought either the raw wool or the spun thread. The only security he could offer for the loan was his weaving frame. In practice, therefore, even in the seventeenth century many weavers were in effect merely workmen for the wool merchant to whom their frames were mortgaged.

The wool merchant commonly had his headquarters in a small town around which the weavers' villages clustered. The weavers would come into town on a given day, often a Friday, and sell their pieces of woolen cloth. With the money, the weaver would buy fresh wool; but if times were bad and there was a surplus of cloth, he would have to ask the merchant to keep the cloth and would have to get wool on credit against it. In this way, the ownership of the wool, the weaving frame, and the finished cloth tended all to fall to the one merchant. Thus, in a practical sense, the weaver became a workman for wages — the uncertain wages made up of the difference between what he got for his cloth and what he paid for his wool.

This relationship became common in many industries: the woolen industry of Yorkshire, the cotton industry of Lancashire, nail and needle making around Birmingham, the making of gloves and stockings and hats, and many others. It became convenient for the merchant to send his agents into the working homes, to take the raw material there and to bring back the finished goods. He now had an investment in these homes, and needed to keep a sharp eye both on the tools and on the materials there. [...]

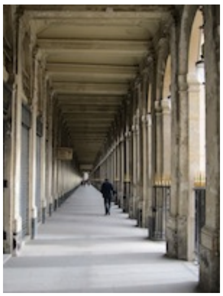
The early factories were organized in a number of different ways. In some the worker still brought his own tools — he did this in the Sheffield steel industry down to the present century — just as a skilled fitter brings his own tools today. Whatever the detailed organization, however, the factories turned out to have several advantages. They gave the owner control of the materials and the working hours. They enabled him to

Vaucanson's Automatic Loom (1748)
[Musée des Arts et Métiers, Paris]

rationalize operations which needed several steps or several men. They made it possible to use new machines which could be worked by unskilled women and even children under supervision. And they allowed these machines to be grouped around a central source of power.

— From: Jacob Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish, *The Western Intellectual Tradition: From Leonardo to Hegel* (1960), pp. 308-10.

## Shopping as a Way of Life: The Commodification of Everything


Palais-Royale

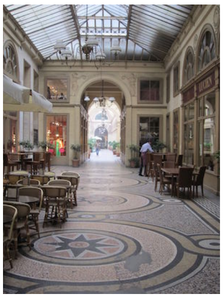
What is an arcade? In its classic sense, the term denotes a pedestrian passage or gallery, open at both ends and roofed in glass and iron, typically linking two parallel streets and consisting of two facing rows of shops and other commercial establishments — restaurants, cafés, hairdressers, etc. "Arcade" is the English name: in French the arcades are known as 'passages', and in German as 'Passagen'. The modern arcade was invented in Paris, and, while the concept was imitated in other cities — there are particularly fine mid-nineteenth century examples in Brussels — the Parisian arcades remain the type of the phenomenon. Benjamin quotes a passage from the *Illustrated Guide to Paris*, a German publication of 1852, which sums up the arcades' essence:

> These arcades, a recent invention of industrial luxury, are glass-roofed, marble-panelled corridor extending through whole blocks of buildings, whose owners have joined together for such enterprises. Lining both sides of the corridors, which get their light from above, are the most elegant shops, so that the arcade is a city, a world in miniature, in which customers will find everything they need.

The construction that is generally accepted as the first example of the Paris arcade proper was the Passage des Panoramas, opened in 1800 when Napoleon Bonaparte was First Consul, and still in existence. There had been earlier partial precursors in Paris. The "Galeries de Bois" or Wooden Galleries inside the Palais-Royal — the former Royal Palace and residence of the Orléans branch of the royal family — offered, from 1790 until their demolition in 1828, a traffic free space where a multitude of traders served thronging crowds under a wooden roof, and which, in literature, is the subject of a celebrated description in *Illusions perdues* (Lost Illusions), Balzac's classic fictional exposé of Parisian society published in 1843. However, the Passage des Panoramas was certainly the first of the purpose-built glass-roofed arcades, and, therefore, of the arcades proper. This arcade, situated just off the Rue Vivienne near the Bourse or Stock Exchange, to this day contains a multitude of small shops and restaurants, and culminates in the back entrance to the Théâtre des Variétés. Most of its successors were constructed between 1800 and 1830, i.e., through the Napoleonic period and under the post-1815 Bourbon monarchy, as restored after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo; a further handful saw the light during the "bourgeois monarchy" of Louis-Philippe and the Second Empire under Napoleon III, the last being built in 1860. All these arcades — in their heyday they numbered between twenty and thirty — were located within a relatively small area of the city, on the right bank of the Seine. In the process that gave rise to them, landowners — aristocrats, bankers or large-scale traders — bent on speculation bought up and demolished old or empty properties, thus creating substantial vacant lots between streets, on which the arcades were constructed. In many cases the empty properties had earlier been private residences, but certain sites had been occupied by former convents, dissolved at the Revolution. The latter connection allows the arcades to appear as a product and manifestation of secularisation from one angle, but from another as a locus for the displacement of one religion by a second one: to compulsory Christianity there succeeds the worship of the commodity.

The evocative list of their names includes the Passage Jouffroy, the Passage Verdeau, the Galerie Vivienne, the Galerie Colbert, the Galerie Véro-Dodat and the Passage Choiseul (the last named, which is considered the best-preserved, is the home of the comic-opera theatre known as the Théâtre des Bouffes). The great majority, including all the above-named, still exist and are still used for their original purpose, the most significant exception being the Passage de l'Opéra, pulled down in 1925. Running between and parallel to the visible world of the streets, and in some cases virtually abutting on one another, the arcades offered the Parisians of the nineteenth century an alternative universe of consumption, in which they

Galerie Vivienne


Galerie Vivienne

could walk free from the deafening noise of horse-drawn carriages and the discomforts of rain, snow or mud outside. As one commentator, Amédée Kermel, put it in 1831, the arcades were "a shelter from showers, a refuge from winter wind or summer dust, a comfortable and seductive space to wander through," and also "a route that is always dry and even, and a sure means of reducing the distance one has to walk." The presence from the early days of theatres, in more than one arcade, is no accidental detail, for the arcades themselves created a new form of spectacle. Idling, window-shopping and observing became an art, summed up in the French verb *'flâner'*, meaning to stroll, which, with its derivatives *'flâneur'* (stroller) and *'flânerie'* (the activity of strolling), became inextricably bound up with this special form of urban space. The arcade was a paradise for — again in Kermel's words — the race of "determined *flâneurs*, sheltered from the caprices of the weather under an all-protecting vault." In our own time, the arcades are, while not the most obvious of Paris' tourist attractions and, indeed, frequented more by Parisians than by outsiders, a subject of discreet attention to the more discerning of international visitors to the French capital, who may window-shop and browse to their heart's content among the milliners, jewellers, stamp-dealers, vendors of antique dolls, second-hand bookshops and traditional bistros, thanks to which the nineteenth-century structures have preserved (or re-created) their highly particular character. As in the past, organised diversion is not lacking: the Passage Jouffroy even houses the Musée Grevin, the city's wax-works museum.

From Christopher Rollason, "The Passageways of Paris: Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*," pt. 2 (2002). Online: www.wbenjamin.org/walterbenjamin