

### **Daniel Weidner: *Mishpat, Zedakah, Gerechtigkeit. Political-Theological Hybridization in Early Reflections of Benjamin and Scholem***

During the years 1916 to 1918, Gershom Scholem continues to reflect on the difference between mishpat and zedakah in the Jewish tradition. Following Samson Raphael Hirsch and others, he presents mishpat as human law and zedakah as divine justice, and speculates on the dialectical or paradoxical relationship between these categories in phenomena such as history, prophecy, and messianism. For the most part, these reflections are not merely esoteric musings, but part of a dialogue with Walter Benjamin, who develops resonant ideas about justice in his early Fragments on Politics and History.

The paper attempts to read these various speculations and fragments by Benjamin and Scholem as part of a dialogue in several ways. It argues that Benjamin's and Scholem's thought in these years is part of a symphilosophical project that calls for a specific hermeneutic and can benefit greatly from Scholem's early diaries. Second, their thought is dialogical in the Bachtian sense: They take up and collide with different ideas and voices from the political tradition, here especially the Greco-Roman tradition of distributive justice on the one hand, and the biblical idea of saving and consoling justice on the other. Third, I will argue that while Scholem at some point tries to distinguish these traditions by separating "Jewish" justice from "Christian" grace, Benjamin deliberately tries to work out the ambivalence in the European tradition of legal thought.

### **Klaus Mladek: *Gerechtigkeit ist die ethische Seite des Kampfes***

Kampf, Rechtfertigung und Zukunft (das „Kommende,“ „Ankündigung“) bilden die drei Schlüsselbegriffe dieses Vortrags. Sie tauchen nicht zufällig in nahezu allen programmatischen Texten und Zeitschriftenprojekten Benjamins auf. „Gerechtigkeit ist die ethische Seite des Kampfes“ heißt es in den „Notizen zu einer Arbeit über die Kategorie der Gerechtigkeit,“ ein ebenso zentraler wie rätselhafter Satz. Er knüpft an Heraklits Fragment „Krieg ist das Gemeinsame und Gerechtigkeit Streit“ an und unterstreicht Benjamins philosophisch-politische Ambitionen. Denn es geht, damals wie heute, um das Gemeinsame, das der Kampf stiftet, um die Frage der Gemeinschaft, die Form und den Status der Streit- und der Kampfschrift, um den Klassenkampf, um Mitstreiter, um die Lebensform der Kritik und um intellektuelle Gemeinschaften, die aus „wechselseitiger Fremdheit“ entstehen. Besonders „Über das Programm der kommenden Philosophie,“ „Karl Kraus,“ „Ankündigung der Zeitschrift: Angelus Novus“ und das „Memorandum zu der Zeitschrift Krisis und Kritik“ stehen im Blickpunkt meines Beitrags.

1. Kampf (als „Streben,“ „Gewährleistung des Existenten,“ „Macht“ oder Klassenkampf) ist vielleicht jene „neue ethische Kategorie,“ welche die Gerechtigkeit begründet, Güter besitzlos macht und die „verwaltete Gewalt“ vernichtet. Kampf wäre dann die Bedingung der Möglichkeit ethischer Gegenstände, also transzendental, ein apriorischer „Urbegriff,“ sogar noch den Kantischen Kategorien vorgelagert. Ab 1934 ist Kampf „Klassenkampf,“ der den Begriff des „gerechten Krieges“ ablöst und nicht parteipolitisch zu denken ist. Wie das Wort *katēgoriē*, das vor Aristoteles die öffentliche Anklage auf der Agora und das gemeinschaftliche Benennen bedeutete, ist Gerechtigkeit Kampf und Kampf um Gerechtigkeit. Die Kategorie des (kritischen) Kampfes hat drei Ausdrucksformen: anklagend, klagend und jubelnd. Zerstörend ist die Gerechtigkeit in diesem dreifachen Sinne.
2. Rechtfertigung, „Rechenschaft“ oder „das Richtige“ beschreibt in diesen Schriften eine bestimmte Treue zum Gegenstand und zur Form der Darstellung. „Reinste Rechtfertigung“ denkt Benjamin zusammen mit der Lehre und der Kategorie. Rechenschaft abzulegen über die Form schafft die Bedingung der Möglichkeit der Kritik als solche. Ihr eignet laut Benjamin eine Haltung, ein Gestus und ein spezifischer Ort; deshalb ist sie körperlich und auf die Bühne verwiesen wie im undramatischen Theater Platons oder Brechts. Die Bühne ist der Streitraum oder die „Kampfform“ der Gerechtigkeit, der Urteilsunterbrechung, welche die Krise der krisis darstellt, und der „Schulung des Urteils“ zugleich. Die Frage, warum immer wieder nichtmenschliche Figuren Benjamins Texte bis hin zu „Über den Begriff der Geschichte“ bevölkern, erklärt sich aus der inhärenten Intensität und

Kraft der Rechtfertigung. Rechenschaft ablegen über die Form der Darstellung liegt Benjamins Form der Sprachgerechtigkeit zugrunde, die auch Theatergerechtigkeit ist

3. Zukunft, insbesondere ihre Gefahren und Bedrohungen, und Verheißung erscheinen bei Benjamin immer wieder im Andenken, aber auch im „gerechten Weltzustand“ selbst. Gerechtigkeit, im Unterschied zum Recht, schafft allererst das Verhältnis von Prophetie zur Erfüllung und des Kampfes zur Kategorie des Existenten. Gleichermaßen stellt die Kategorie der Gerechtigkeit qua Klassenkampf erst die Beziehung des historischen Geschehens auf das Reich der Ethik her.

**Tamara Tagliacozzo: *Messianism and Happiness: A Possible Reference to Kant in Benjamin's Theological-Political Fragment***

On the basis of a quotation from the last part of Walter Benjamin's Theological-Political Fragment (1920-21), we shall hypothesize a similarity between Benjamin and Kant in his Idea of a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent (1784). According to Kant, man, participating in history and in the human race, seeks happiness and the means to obtain it for himself as a member of "free" humanity, and thus seeks to unite external freedom and happiness in institutions of law. In the period 1920-1921, Benjamin was highly critical of the concept of law, including Kant's, which he saw as contradictory to the idea of justice; in contrast, Benjamin held first an anarchist-libertarian, then a revolutionary view. From a dialectical perspective, however, we find in Benjamin and Kant a redemptive pessimism that sees in the "twisted wood" of humanity an ultimate providential and messianic possibility: "The spiritual restitutio in integrum that leads to immortality corresponds to a worldly restitution that leads to an eternity of downfall, and the rhythm of this eternally transient worldly existence, transient in its totality, in its spatial but also in its temporal totality," the eternal succession of generations and their institutions, which is "the rhythm of messianic nature," is happiness. Nature eternalizes itself in this virtual spatial and temporal totality in the history of humanity, moving towards the realization of the idea of law and, spatially, the achievement of global, cosmopolitan politics: "Nature is messianic by reason of its eternal and total caducity" (GS, II, 1, 203-204).

**Everet Smith: *Concerning the Law in Walter Benjamin's Critique of Violence***

Since its publication, much has been said about Walter Benjamin's essay "Towards a Critique of Violence" (see Abbott 2008; Oyarzún 2019; Fenves & Ng 2021). Perhaps because of the seemingly obvious answer, less attention has been paid to the place of the general idea of law in his work - "Critique of Violence" is, after all, critical of the violence inherent in the laws of the state. In the essay "Walter Benjamin - Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," the late Hegel scholar Gillian Rose claims that Benjamin's early essays "develop the neo-Kantian metaphysics which unifies religion and philosophy for which Benjamin called, by bypassing the notion of law" (Rose 1993, 184. Emphasis mine). This is a common assumption in Benjamin's reception; Anna Kornbluh (2019), for example, identifies "Benjaminian materialism" as a "spurning of institutions" such as law, and she is not alone in assuming that Benjamin generally equates the idea of law with violence (see Agamben 2019; Castro 2021).

In response to Rose's charge, I critically address the place of law in Benjamin's thought. I read Benjamin's essay alongside Hegel's "On the Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law" (1803), and examine the resonances between Hegel's criticism of natural law and Benjamin's later criticism of positive law. While Rose argues that Benjamin states that "the only complete response to ... the violence in law would be divine, the law in violence, which is conceivable only as God's anarchy" (Rose 1993, 187. Emphasis mine.), given Benjamin's derisive remarks about anarchists, I argue that we cannot be so quick to assume that Benjamin wants to reject the concept of law altogether. A deeper understanding of Benjamin's thoughts on law can clarify his call for a revolutionary, "divine" violence and its material ramifications.

**Vinsent Nollet: *"The Critique of Violence is the Philosophy of Its History": History, Theology and Politics in Walter Benjamin's Early Historical-Philosophical Writings***

Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" has become a classic work of revolutionary politics, largely because of influential political-theological accounts of its arguments. The main challenge with this understanding of the essay is that Benjamin seems to argue against any reconciliation of politics and theology, particularly in the impossibility of deciding on the occurrence of pure violence beyond the

law. Nevertheless, Benjamin equates the divine with justice. The ambiguity surrounding the relationship between revolutionary violence and justice can be resolved through the clarity of Benjamin's historical-philosophical understanding of violence. It is often overlooked that Benjamin establishes the critique of violence, which is concerned with "the presentation of its relation to law and justice," as "the philosophy of its history". In my paper, I will trace the principles of this philosophy of history and show how the Critique of Violence can be fully realized in a historical-philosophical reading. Between 1919 and 1923, largely overlapping with his work on the "Politics" project, Benjamin developed a clear understanding of such a philosophy of history, which resulted in a metaphysical anarchism directed at the problematic entanglement of myth, fate, and guilt in socio-political reality. I will examine the place of Benjamin's work on politics in the context of these early ideas on the philosophy of history, most notably as expressed in "Fate and Character," "Goethe's Elective Affinities," and the "Theological Political Fragment," as well as a number of unpublished fragments. Understanding the role of the essay on violence in the context of these works is necessary for an orientation in Benjamin's thought on the category of justice and for coming to terms with its "political" finality.

**Rabago Dorbecker: *Bolivar Echevarria's translation of Walter Benjamin. The Baroque modernity of law in Latin America***

Bolivar Echeverría is a lesser known intellectual figure outside of Latin America, largely because the vast majority of his work has not been translated into English. Born in Ecuador, he was active in the German student movement before settling at the Universidad Autónoma de México. In Mexico, he translated many of the well-known works of Walter Benjamin, which have become a reference for critical thinking in Spanish-speaking countries. Such works are: *The Author as Producer*, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, and *Theses on the Philosophy of History*.

Echeverría worked not only as a translator of Benjamin, but also as a theorist of Latin American culture and modernity, especially its relationship to capitalism and whiteness in the region. Through his theories, he introduced the concept of baroque modernity, based largely on Marx and Benjamin, as a uniquely regional way of living in modernity. Although his work remains silent on legal issues, his conception of baroque modernity (following Benjamin's thoughts on tragedy) sheds a different light on the concept of modern law in the region. The region has been portrayed as one of lawlessness and, under the distinct platform of law and development, in constant need of legal transplants and international legal standards to modernize its economy and society. However, the concept of baroque legality and the everyday life and times of Latin American law may paint a radically different picture. Baroque modernity may well be the best tool to turn Latin American legal history against the grain.

**Hannah Franzki: *Foundational Violence and Dialectical Images: Thinking with Walter Benjamin about the Politics of Time in War Crime Trials***

While Benjamin's critique of law has long been on the margins of Benjamin scholarship, over the past thirty years the comments on law in his oeuvre have become central to critical legal studies. Most of this scholarship has been devoted to close readings of Benjamin's often fragmentary remarks on law. Rather than adding to this strand of scholarship, this paper explores what it means to think with Benjamin about contemporary manifestations of law and state authority.

Specifically, the paper engages with the fragment "Capitalism as Religion" (1921), the "Critique of Violence" (1921), and Benjamin's later writings on the philosophy of history, and brings them to bear on a series of ongoing trials investigating the responsibility of economic actors for crimes committed during the last dictatorship (1973-1985). Linking Walter Benjamin's comments on the temporality of guilt in capitalism to his critique of legal violence and the weak promise of historical justice, the paper offers an alternative reading of what is at stake in trials that investigate systematic state crimes (such as crimes against humanity or war crimes). What emerges is a competing politics of time at work in these trials. Against the legal historiography that invokes past injustices in order to authorize the

liberal order of the present, the paper enlists Benjamin for a critical reading of the court documents. Such a reading quotes fragments of the past documented in the trials into the present context in which the trials take place. In doing so, the past acquires a critical force that destabilizes the present legal-political order, exposing not only the violence of the authoritarian state but also that of the capitalist rule of law. The paper concludes with some reflections on what we gain and what we might lose by working with Benjamin on contemporary manifestations of law.

### **Thomas Regehly: *Die Gerechtigkeit und das Rettende***

Die Frage nach der Gerechtigkeit bildet den Hintergrund, der für Benjamin Politik und Literatur verbindet. Der „wahre Politiker“ verschafft sich über die Bedingungen und Möglichkeiten der Gerechtigkeit in der Welt eine illusionslose, metaphysische Klarheit. Dem „wahren Schriftsteller“ steht die Chance „hochpolitischen Stils und Schreibens“ nur dann zur Verfügung, wenn er der Sprache in ihrer höchsten Form Gerechtigkeit widerfahren läßt.

Mit der Einbahnstraße betritt Benjamin das politische Terrain, um der Wahrheit als Gerechtigkeit literarisch und politisch zu dienen. In seinem ersten „politischen“ Buch stehen spekulative, bis heute von der Forschung nicht entschlüsselte Passagen, die seinem Absagebrief an Buber vom 17. Juli 1916 über die politische Wirkung des Schrifttums entsprechen. Das radikale Ziel sollte es sein, so die dahinterstehende Annahme, Hölderlin mit Marx zu verbinden, wie es bereits Thomas Mann gefordert hatte. Das politisch anzugehende *malum physicum* ist von dem sprachphilosophisch, vor allem aber poetisch zu erfassenden *malum metaphysicum* nicht zu trennen. Nur auf diese Weise liesse sich in einer kritischen Zeit „das Außerordentliche, das allein uns noch retten kann“ (Kaiserpanorama I), in den Blick bekommen.

Diese Konstellation erfordert eine Politisierung der Literatur ebenso wie eine Literarisierung der Politik im Zeichen einer sowohl „hoch“- wie „anti-politischen“ Gerechtigkeit.

### **Tom Vandeputte: *Law Under Accusation: Benjamin on Kraus***

The categories of law and justice play a central but still underexplored role in Walter Benjamin's writings on Karl Kraus. In the work of the Viennese polemicist, who was trained as a lawyer, Benjamin recognized the impulse toward a critique of the law that would be concerned "not with its effects, but with its substance. In his two most important early fragments on Kraus, both written in the mid-1920s, Benjamin presents the Viennese writer respectively as an ancient warrior seeking revenge (*Rache*) and as a prosecutor whose "eternal demand" for right (*Recht*) is never satisfied. In this paper, I will reconstruct the critique of law that animates this latter portrait of Kraus as a representative of the legal order for whom "no justice can satisfy his accusation and none of his accusations can satisfy himself". As I will demonstrate, this internal dissatisfaction of the law with itself anticipates Benjamin's later comparison of Kraus in his 1931 essay to a zealot whose last act is to "put the legal order itself under indictment [in Anklagezustand zu versetzen]". This critique is interwoven in the portraits of Kraus with Benjamin's attempt to articulate an idea of justice that is reducible neither to the form of revenge nor to that of law. Even in Kraus's 1926 fragment, the promise of this other justice is sought not in legal judgment but in the realm of language - it appears "between the lines" of legal proceedings that, as Benjamin writes, never cease to "violate the law itself".

## **Justice in Language and Linguistic Practice**

### **Dennis Johannssen: *Language Justice and the Critique of Linguistic Violence***

“Oppressive language does not represent violence; it is violence.”  
Toni Morrison, *The Bird is in Your Hands*

Walter Benjamin's early writings on language and violence provide the basis for a new approach to the analysis of oppressive language. In this paper, I examine the connections between "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" (1916), "Notes Toward a Work on the Category of Justice" (1916), and "Toward a Critique of Violence" (1921), focusing on the tension between the fact of linguistic

violence-insults, microaggressions, discrimination, microaggressions-and Benjamin's claim that language as "the sphere of 'understanding'" is "completely inaccessible to violence" (Benjamin 2021, 50). A closer look at this tension reveals a distinction in Benjamin's view between, on the one hand, language as a "critical medium" of communication and expression that has been corrupted by property relations and the logic of judgment, and, on the other hand, language as a sphere of justice that allows for a non-instrumental and co-responsive way of sharing experience with others. My exploration of Benjamin's critique of linguistic violence is embedded in broader questions about the contribution of early twentieth-century exile writers to contemporary debates about oppressive language, linguistic profiling, painful language, and the right to self-determination (Butler 1996; Ferber 2019; Kuch and Herrmann 2020; Matsuda et al. 1993). Offering a way to connect subjective forms of linguistic violence, such as traumatic naming and mimetic coercion, to the legal and institutional normalization of oppressive social relations, Benjamin finds its counterpoint in what Werner Hamacher (2018) has called linguistic justice: a different understanding of and comportment toward language that radically interrupts and potentially abolishes its instrumentalization. The violence of language makes an unjust world appear largely nonviolent (or "banal," as Hannah Arendt would say), but language harbors a kind of justice that allows for its own interruption and improvement.

**Nobuyuki Kakigi: *Translation as Action for Justice of Languages: An Inquiry into the Practical Meaning of Walter Benjamin's Theory of Translation***

Since the 1920s, Walter Benjamin's theory of translation has developed a critical reflection on the practice of literary re/production. According to his theoretical thinking, this practice could be an action that corresponds to - to use Hannah Arendt's terminology — the plurality of languages. Revisiting the concept of the "literalness" of translation in "The Task of the Translator," this presentation will suggest the possibility of reading from this essay and some related texts a theory of the action of translating. This action would seek justice as a messianic "state of the world" — as Benjamin defines justice in "Notes on a Work Toward the Category of Justice" — between languages.

Benjamin says that by rendering each word of the original text as a "primary element," the "echo of the original" would sound in the translation. For such a resonance of languages, the translator "breaks through the decayed barrier of his own language. This action, which deconstructs the mythical institute of "language", could be seen as a kind of citation discussed in "Karl Kraus". By suspending the "ambiguities of law," this citation makes each word resound and returns it to its original immediacy, just as literal translation does - in the sense of Gayatri C. Spivak's translation theory — "lovingly." Translation towards "pure", immediate, creative language shows the relationship of languages free from any domination and subordination.

Therefore, the destructive act of literal translation, which develops the "afterlife" of the original, opens up the possibility of justice between different languages. As Benjamin saw in the unrealized journal *Angelus Novus*, this act creates a new literary language. It could also echo repressed memories by interrupting the dominant "history. Examining the afterlife of "The Task of the Translator" in contemporary translation theories, and considering literature based on oral or documentary memory, this presentation will recognize the decolonizing and "weak messianic power" of translation.

**Caroline Sauter: *Translation and Justice: Benjamin and Derrida***

"Doing justice to a text" is a commonplace notion of translation—a notion challenged in Walter Benjamin's seminal "The Task of the Translator" (1923) and Jacques Derrida's "What Is a 'Relevant' Translation?" (1998). Both Benjamin and Derrida argue against the ideas of economy and convertibility in translation (albeit with very different metaphors) and emphasize a view of translation that is neither content nor similarity based. The category of justice is an important leitmotif in Derrida's essay: reading a verse from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* – "When mercy seasons justice" – and defending his translation of Hegel's *Aufhebung* as *relève*, Derrida unfolds a theory of forgiveness [pardon] in translation. While Benjamin does not mention the term "justice" at all in his essay on translation, he speaks of reconciliation three times: For Benjamin, "[translation] points the way to [...] the predestined, hitherto inaccessible realm of reconciliation and fulfillment of languages" (p. 257), and in pure language, languages are "supplemented and reconciled in their way of meaning" (p. 259). My paper will compare

Benjamin's and Derrida's views on translation and justice in light of their understandings of forgiveness and reconciliation, pointing to possible readings of Yom Kippur in their respective works.

**Ludmila Fuks: *Quote without inverted commas. Montage for justice of things***

The importance of montage in Benjamin's late work is well known, both as the core of his practice and of his theory of knowledge, art, and politics. Montage functions as a critical-redemptive epistemology of what it assembles. Composed of quotations, Benjamin insists, it allows the quoted to "attain its right. In turn, as he points out in his *Karl Kraus*, the quotation contains a principle of justice that is intimately linked to his theory of language and name. Breaking the context and temporal space of the quoted and reassembling it in a present space allows things to survive, to be saved from their symbolic death. Working with the inanimate as a creature, as he points out in *Der Erzähler...*, is also in the realm of the just. It is precisely this point that has not been dealt with as extensively in the specialized literature, which tends to approach montage from an artistic or historiographical point of view, or, if at all, from an epistemological point of view in relation to justice. In this study, we propose to interrogate these points in the light of Benjamin's idea of quoting without inverted commas: are inverted commas the rules of use of the thing, its context, the subject behind the object? In this line, it is essential to take up his *Notizen zu einer Arbeit über die Kategorie der Gerechtigkeit* (Notes on a Work on the Category of Justice) and relate them to the reflections on authentic montage. On the one hand, authenticity [Echtheit] refers us to origin [Ursprung] – as a mark on phenomena – the latter idea being so dear to Benjamin's reading of Kraus and the vocation of the just narrator. On the other hand, in these notes Benjamin emphasizes the need to think justice outside the relation of possession of goods. In montage, as in the experience of childhood, objects are neither used nor possessed, but liberated. The exposure of things through montage allows them to raise their own questions and gives them attention, which thus generates a justice of things.

**Elliott J. Niblock: *Buber and Benjamin***

In a 1935 letter to Alfred Cohn, Walter Benjamin recalled his earlier enthusiasm for Franz Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* while marveling at his own longstanding disdain for Martin Buber: "It is not the least remarkable that [Rosenzweig's] friendship with Buber has never been able to damage my unusually deeply rooted aversion to the latter". This paper shows that Benjamin's lifelong aversion to Buber was rooted in an on going disagreement about how to properly do justice to the magic of language; however, this disagreement stemmed more from an initial moment of anger and wounded pride than from philosophically irreconcilable positions. Benjamin's disdain for Buber's use of language began with Buber's editorial in the first issue of *Der Jude* in 1916 and continued through Buber and Rosenzweig's translation of the Hebrew Bible. I argue that Benjamin's letter to Buber of July 1916 — which contained a rough sketch of ideas that would later appear in his essay "On Language as Such and on Human Language" — was at once a clear condemnation of Buber's political writing in *Der Jude*, but also a serious attempt to elicit a response from Buber on the topic of the philosophy of language. This attempt failed, as Buber was angered by the letter and left it unanswered (Scholem confirms that Buber received and read the letter). From this initial disagreement in 1916, I trace a series of misunderstandings that continued throughout Buber's and Benjamin's lives, ultimately arguing that after Buber's turn away from experiential mysticism toward his philosophy of dialogue, Buber and Benjamin actually had far more in common on the themes of instrumentalization and philosophy of language than Benjamin was willing to admit.

**Yu-jin Chang: *Justice is No Myth: An Interpretation of the Antithetical Synonyms in Benjamin's Works***

In his essay on violence, Benjamin shows how the passage to justice is impeded by a certain ambiguity of language. What is imposed as a general rule (as inescapable as that of "fate") in the name of equality, piation\* and, above all, law, is precisely the opposite of justice, namely subjection, guilt and tragic violence (or "misfortune"). Thus law, even in its modern constitutional configuration, is presented by him as the de facto instrument not of justice, as its name suggests, but of unaccountable power, in ancient and permanent conflict with the just state. This early position remains remarkably unchanged throughout Benjamin's work and is taken up again in the late retrospective theses on history, where he posits that what continues to be imposed in the name of progress as a general rule is nothing other than historical

catastrophe. What makes the ambiguity in these cases particularly pernicious, even "demonic," is the profound confusion and deceptive "clarity" through which precisely the opposite of what appears to be named, or even "overnamed," is empowered and enacted in the world. The historical injustice that Benjamin early on ascribes to "mythic violence" is manifestly a bodily, "blood" violence over life and death, but it essentially begins with myth, that is, with a pervasive and persistent problem of language. Benjamin's lifelong commitment to the historical possibility and moment of justice is unmistakable in his sustained critical practices of reading, writing, and translating, always directed against the baleful duplicity of myth wherever it manifests itself. Such anti-mythic interventions leave language neither "demythologized" nor "disambiguated. Such anti-mythic interventions leave language neither "demythologized" nor "disambiguated". Indeed, the assumption that human language, in its irreducible multiplicity and infinite differentiation, can be "clarified" or directly translated into a "pure" and unambiguous word at one with the world, constitutes the original myth itself, in which all others participate - to the extent that all myths instrumentalize (reduce to a mere means) language in this way to achieve their (unjust) ends. Rather, Benjamin's critical approach to almost every subject he addresses is to expose the latent violence embedded in language by positing a synonymous counterword or antonym wherever a mythic ambiguity operates. To name just a few of these antithetical synonyms: Rechtmässigkeit/Gerechtigkeit; Mythic Violence/Divine Violence; Means/Medium; Erlebnis/Erfahrung; Allegory/Symbol; Representation (Darstellung)/Performance (Darbietung); Ziel/Ende; Theocracy/Kingdom of God. As can be seen, mythic violence requires the complete confusion of each pair of related terms. Justice, however, presupposes their antithetical opposition.

**Agata Kobylska: *Den Dingen Gerechtigkeit widerfahren lassen. Benjamins Spätstil in der Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert***

In meinem Beitrag werde ich zeigen, wie Benjamin an der Sprache arbeitet, um den Dingen gerecht zu werden. Im Zentrum werden die „Stücke“ (so der Sprachgebrauch Benjamins) aus der zwischen 1932 und 1938 entstandenen Sammlung *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert* stehen. Diese relativ späten Texte Benjamins handeln von Dingen und Orten, in denen sich via Erinnerung an die Kindheit Erfahrungen abgelagert haben. Um den Dingen gerecht zu werden, entwickelt Benjamin in diesen Texten einen originellen Stil, dessen Ziel ist es, die Dinge nicht subjektiv darzustellen, d.h. nicht als Widerspiegelungen der Seele des schreibenden Ich, sondern möglichst objektiv zu verfahren. ‚Objektiv‘ ist hier nicht als allgemeingültig zu verstehen, sondern den Dingen dazu verhelfen, selber ‚das Wort zu ergreifen‘. Im Gegensatz zu den allgemein anerkannten Stilauffassungen, die davon ausgehen, dass der Stil die Persönlichkeit oder sogar die Seele des Künstlers widerspiegelt, schafft Benjamin einen eigenen Stil, der sich dieser üblichen literaturtheoretischen Kategorisierung entzieht. Er entwickelt eine Sprache, die den Dingen nahe kommt, ihr Wesen einfängt und sie so ‚zum Sprechen erweckt‘. An konkreten Beispielen werde ich stilanalytisch demonstrieren, wie Benjamin ausgebaute Metaphern einsetzt und etwa verstärkt mit Substantiven arbeitet, um den Effekt eines Rückzugs des Subjekts hinter die Dinge zu erreichen. Den hier von ihm erreichten Stil kann man als in Praxis umgesetzte Ideen aus dem frühen Essay *Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen* betrachten: auch die sprachlosen Objekte haben das Recht, ihre Geschichte zu erzählen. Zusammenfassend: die Sprache dient als Mittel, den Dingen gerecht zu werden, denen diese Sprachfähigkeit in der zunehmend durch Erfahrungsschwund dominierten Welt zu Unrecht beraubt wurde. Für den Philosophen ist nämlich die Sprache nicht nur ein Mittel der zwischenmenschlichen Kommunikation, sondern auch ein Mittel der ‚Kommunikation‘ zwischen Ding und Mensch.

**Astrid Seeger: *Sprache an der Schwelle zur Gerechtigkeit – Originaltext zwischen Verfremdung und Entfaltung in Walter Benjamin's Übersetzungspraxis***

Die Anfänge der Überlegungen Walter Benjamins zu Sprache auf der einen und Gerechtigkeit auf der anderen Seite verlaufen in unübersehbaren Parallelen. Bei den Konzepten der paradiesischen Namenssprache sowie der göttlichen Gerechtigkeit handelt es sich um verlorene Ideale, durch den Sündenfall und das menschliche Verlangen nach unmittelbarer Erkenntnis im Urteil verlustig gegangen und für das Streben der richtenden Kategorien der Menschen von da an unerreichbar. Das künstlich geschaffene Recht, die Zerstreung der einen Sprache in viele sind unzulänglich, um den ehemals göttlichen Zustand wieder herzustellen. Und doch ist ihnen das Sehnen danach eingeschrieben. So manifestiert es sich beispielsweise in der Übersetzung, die ein Werk gemäß seiner Natur fordert, um

darin die Sprache an ihre ideale Urform, an einen Zustand göttlicher Gerechtigkeit, zumindest anzunähern. Denn solche Entfaltung ist nur möglich im Rahmen einer Sprachbewegung, in der Begegnung von Original- und Zielsprache in der Übersetzung und ihrer gegenseitigen Ergänzung. Diese Annäherung umzusetzen, ist laut Benjamin die Aufgabe des Übersetzers, wie er sie in seinem gleichnamigen Essay darlegt. Dabei konstituiert sich die Form der Übersetzung als Passage zwischen fremder und eigener Sprache, Sprache bewegt sich in einem Raum zwischen Ziel und Original. Dieser Raum, der sich dabei eröffnet, ist die Schwelle zum verlorenen Ideal von Sprache und Gerechtigkeit, dem sich in der Übersetzung genähert, der aber gleichwohl nie erreicht werden kann. Ziel des Beitrags ist es, diesen Raum der Schwelle, den Benjamin in seiner Übersetzungstheorie auftut, sichtbar zu machen. Die dem Übersetzer-Aufsatz nachgestellten Baudelaire-Übersetzungen verbildlichen, wie sich die Sprache des Übersetzers an dieser Schwelle zur Gerechtigkeit verhält, wie sie sich in der Bewegung verändert und wie sie sich auf die übersetzerische Wiedergabe des Ausgangstextes auswirkt. Schließlich soll gezeigt werden, welche Konsequenzen sich aus der sprachlichen Begegnung für den Ausgangstext ergeben und inwiefern Benjamins Übersetzungspraxis dem Original gerecht wird.

### **Monika Tokarzewska: *Der Humor als 'angewandte Gerechtigkeit'. Humor und Erneuerung des (sprachlichen) Weltbezugs bei Walter Benjamin***

In Benjamins Schriften gibt es erstaunlicherweise eine enge Konnotation zwischen Gerechtigkeit und Humor. Bereits in der frühen kurzen Schrift aus der Zeit des Ersten Weltkriegs lesen wir: „Im Humor läßt man dem Objekt als solchem Gerechtigkeit widerfahren“. Über J. P. Hebels „Schatzkästlein“ heißt es wiederum, „sein Humor [sei] urteilslose Vollstreckung: angewandte Gerechtigkeit“. An diesem auf den ersten Blick für den Durchschnittsleser bzw. -leserin äußerst entfernten Bezug von Humor und Gerechtigkeit hielt Benjamin sein Leben lang mit größter Konsequenz fest. So schreibt er Jahre nach dem frühen Humor-Fragment in einer Rezension zu Alfred Polgar, dass „aller Humor in Gerechtigkeit seinen Ursprung“ hat, und in dem Essay über die Prosawelt Gottfried Kellers nennt er dessen Humor eine „Rechtsordnung“. In Kellers Humor finden wir die Welt „der urteilslosen Vollstreckung, in der Verdikt und Gnade im Gelächter laut wird“. Schaut man von diesen Formulierungen ausgehend nun genauer auf das Werk des wohl berühmtesten Melancholikers der Kulturgeschichte, staunt man, wie oft Benjamin sich gerade für Humor interessierte: er schrieb über humoristische Züge bei Leskow oder insbesondere bei Kafka, über die Satire Karl Kraus', über Komödiencharaktere. In meinem Beitrag werde ich der Frage nachgehen, wie Benjamins Bezeichnung von Humor als ‚angewandter Gerechtigkeit‘ zu deuten ist. Ich gehe davon aus, dass der Humor eine Haltung zur Welt ist, die die Sprache erneuert. Im Humor wird der Modus des Urteilens und der Verurteilung aufgehoben, der sonst den sprachlichen Bezug zwischen Mensch und Welt entstellt und mit Gewalt auflädt. Demgegenüber wird dank dem Humor ein Weltbezug gestiftet, der es ermöglicht, sich der Welt gegenüber zu verhalten, ohne die in ihr bereits überall vorhandene Gewalt fortzusetzen. Am Ende werde ich auf die Thesen Über den Begriff der Geschichte eingehen. Dort interpretiert Benjamin den Humor neben Zuversicht, List und Mut als lebendiges Gut, das „immer von neuem jeden Sieg der Herrschenden in Frage“ stellt.

## **Justice in/of Images and Visual and Performative Arts**

### **Clemens-Carl Härle: *Gerechtigkeit gegenüber der Farbe?***

1. Ist Gerechtigkeit eo ipso Sprachgerechtigkeit? Oder stellt sich das Problem der Gerechtigkeit nicht nur auf der Ebene sprachlicher, sondern auch auf der Ebene sinnlicher Ereignisse? Sind letztere sprachähnlich oder toto caelo von Sprache unterschieden? Die Intervention versucht, diese Fragen, die der Call for Papers zumindest indirekt aufwirft, zu adressieren, und zwar ausgehend von den Fragmenten, Aphorismen, Notizen und dem Dialog Der Regenbogen, die Benjamin zwischen 1915 und dem Beginn der 20er Jahre über das Verhältnis von Farbe und Malerei verfasst hat.
2. Was Farbe genannt wird, ist vieldeutig, umstritten, in vieler Hinsicht rätselhaft. Benjamins Vorgehen zeichnet sich dadurch aus, dass er ihren vielfältigen Erscheinungsformen Rechnung zu tragen sucht und das Wort keinem allgemeinen Begriff unterstellt. Er unterscheidet strikt zwischen der Farbe im Anschauen der Phantasie und ihrer Gestaltung in der Malerei. Die beiden Modi sind unterschieden



und doch zugleich ineinander verfranst. Phantasie ist ein Vermögen sui generis, ihr Ort das Leben des Kindes. Sie ist reiner Ausdruck einer reinen Empfänglichkeit, gibt sich als Freude an der Veränderung der Farbe im beweglichen Übergang von Nuancen, ohne Bezug auf Form, Fläche oder Körper. In der malerischen Farbe hingegen ist ihre Reinheit durch die Beziehung zum Raume verfälscht und durch die Interferenz von Licht und Schatten getrübt. Malerei beruht auf einer Doppelung, ist notwendig und korrelativ beides: Phantasie und Abbild. Denn Phantasie, die als Entstaltung in ihr konstitutiv present ist, ist auf ein Gestaltetes außerhalb ihrer selbst angewiesen.

3. Die Intervention beabsichtigt, Benjamins Bemühung herauszuarbeiten, diesen vielleicht nicht unverträglichen, aber gleichwohl ungleichartigen Ansprüchen an das, was Farbe genannt wird, durch einen Vielzahl von Differenzierungen Rechnung zu tragen, ohne dadurch dem wesentlichen Unterschied der Orte und Formen, in denen Farbe erscheint, sich verwirklicht oder verwirklicht wird, Abbruch zu tun. Könnte dies Farb-Gerechtigkeit genannt werden?

### **Pawel Mościcki: *What Color Is Justice?***

With the concept of justice, Benjamin identifies the figures of indeterminacy; something that is beyond possession, or something that - like the pure means of the utopian "culture of the heart" - is supposed to bring the possibility of interhuman reconciliation without recourse to violence. He seeks justice not as a substance, property, or structure, but as a kind of mediation and medium.

The child's experience of color - echoes of which he also sees in the space of art and the work of the imagination - offers the possibility of interacting with objects that are "not reduced to things, but are constituted by an order consisting of an infinite range of nuances; color is individual, but not as a dead thing fixed in individuality, but as winged, flying from one pattern to another". The culmination of the experience of color understood in this way is the rainbow - the ultimate figure of imagination.

In my presentation, I would like to relate Benjamin's reflections on justice and color to artistic works (including those by Elżbieta Janicka, Alfredo Jaar, Jarosław Kozłowski, Nida Sinnokrot) that explore the possibilities of white, understood both as one of the colors and as a medium for their interrelation. I will be interested in "white rainbows", a kind of "color without properties" or even a strike between colors, a pure means of communication between different kinds of colors. Perhaps it is also a color that, without being a color, defines in a more nuanced way the coloring of justice, promising its sensory experience through political interventions and historical revisions.

### **Katrin Weleda: *Drei Minuten des Leidens. Gedanken und Gesichte eines Geköpften***

Ein außergewöhnliches Beispiel, das den Zeitraum des fort dauernden Bewusstseins, die Leiden des Guillotinierten sowie den eintretenden Tod in einem Kunstwerk erfahrbar macht, stellt das Triptychon *Pensées et visions d'une tête coupée* [1853] von Antoine Wiertz dar. Als Walter Benjamin mit diesem Werk 1929 in Berührung kommt, urteilt er: „Sein Schaffen geht die große Malerei nicht an. Desto mehr aber den Kenner der Kulturkuriosa und der Physiognomien seines Jahrhunderts.“<sup>1</sup> Von großer Bedeutung für die Interpretation des Werkes ist die mittlerweile nahezu unlesbare Inschrift des Triptychons, die unter gleichlautendem Titel in den Katalogen von 1861 in Brüssel und 1870 in Paris posthum publizierten *Œuvres littéraires* enthalten ist. Obwohl Benjamin in seiner Übersetzung die „großartige Einkleidung“ und „kompositorische Kraft“ der „Beschriftung“ hervorhebt,<sup>2</sup> modifiziert er das Ende. Im Hinblick auf das Zusammenspiel von Text, Bild und Praxis von Gerechtigkeit soll im Rahmen der Tagung sowohl die Übertragung dieses Textes von Benjamin beleuchtet werden, als auch der medizinische Diskurs, der dem Werk von Wiertz zu Grunde liegt.

### **Beatriz Sánchez Santidrián: *“Visual justice” in the Artistic Practices of History. Unearthed Libraries and the Recovery of Dissident Memory***

A cross-reading of the Benjamin's model of the historian with the artistic practices of history allows us to examine the epistemological problems posed by alternative models of communication with the past that draw a more just visual representation of history (HERNÁNDEZ NAVARRO, 2012). Since the end of the 20th century, a trend of contemporary "historian" artists can be identified. They adopt a common position towards history that could be interpreted as a crystallization of the historian as defended by Walter Benjamin ("Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian", 1937; "On the Concept of History", 1942;

"The Arcades Project", 1989). It presents history as an open, synchronic time that can be known visually through a material exhibition of history, through a dialectical image that links past and present. In this way, these artists undertake a rewriting of history in search of truth and justice, rescuing small histories that have been forgotten because they challenged authoritarian regimes. Endowed with the political and ethical dimension of Benjamin's philosophy of history, they engage in an exercise of historical memory that resists the politicization and patrimonialization of memory as practiced by the official systems. This paper focuses on La Biblioteca Roja, an interdisciplinary artistic project (exhibition, short film, essay, research) about the excavation of a buried library that endangered the lives of its owners during the Argentine dictatorship of the 1970s (BERTI, HALAC, ALZOGARAY VANELLA, 2017). Books are a testimony of political militancy, and the violence exercised against them is constant in dictatorial regimes. The gesture of exhumation and its resulting visual materialization is an act of both intimate and collective memory that responds to Benjamin's commitment to the past and fulfills the goals of documenting oblivion and redeeming the past. The rescued books are survivors, relics charged with time, history, and memory that ensure visual justice.

**Tomasz Szerszeń: *Read from the Ashes: to Do Justice***

The Second World War is a "destructive moment" of shared Jewish-Polish history. Following Eduardo Cadava's Benjaminian recognition that "history emerges in a moment of disaster," I would like to look at two archaeological moments in which photography becomes a tool of historiosophical inquiry and an attempt to do justice to the lost/disappearing/invisible/powerless. The first concerns the photographic meditations on the "desert" created after the fall of the Uprising and the total destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto – "reading from the ashes" becomes a form of divination, making visible the unclear relationship between past and future. The second moment is related to the interest that the photographer Jerzy Lewczyński (1924-2014) devoted to the destruction of Polish Jews. Beginning in the mid-1950s, Lewczyński photographed Auschwitz and other extermination sites. Then, since the 1970s, he has been working on the archive of the murdered Eisenbach family – the Jews of Sanok. He calls his work "the archaeology of photography. It seems that in this case photography becomes a form of "thinking history", while the photographer becomes a lay historian who tries to read the irregular shape of history from scattered traces. The whole project of Lewczyński's "archaeology of photography" can be seen as a process of searching for a new legibility of history through images. At the same time, it can be seen as an attempt to make history "without distinguishing between great and small events," because "nothing that has ever happened should be considered lost to history" – and thus to work toward a notion of justice.

**Katarzyna Bojarska: *History Behind/Before the Image and the Image of History Behind Us***

In my presentation, I will explore how looking at images of history can become a practice of doing justice to the past and to the victims of past violence. Following Benjamin, I will focus on the conditions of possibility of looking beyond the dominant regimes of visibility, of exercising one's "right to look" (Nicholas Mirzoeff). When is looking backward a form or even a performance of justice, of reclaiming losses or repairing wrongs?

I will work with the figure of the Angel of History, as well as with other figures who look backward, either recording, producing, or imagining the image of the past. My examples will be contemporary female artistic practices, including R.H. Quayman, Marlene Dumas, and Miriam Cahn.

**Daniel Göntzer: *Benjamins Gerechtigkeit des Humors, oder: Die Ungerechtigkeit, dass „die Schmetterlinge im Zoo keinen Käfig haben“***

In meinem Vortrag werde ich Walter Benjamins Konzeption einer „Gerechtigkeit des Humors“ vorstellen und diese anhand einiger Beispiele aus der bildenden und darstellenden Kunst erläutern. Gerechtigkeit ist bei Benjamin eng mit seinen Überlegungen zum subversive Potential von Humor verknüpft. Dieses sieht er insbesondere in jenen künstlerischen Arbeiten umgesetzt, bei denen es zu einer ironischen und kritischen Auseinandersetzung mit dem Verhältnis von Mensch, Natur und Technik kommt. In Benjamins Hörstück Radau um Kasperl entsetzt sich der Orang-Utan über die „Ungerechtigkeit, warum denn die Schmetterlinge im Zoo keinen Käfig haben“ (GS IV, 690). In den

Texten Paul Scheerbarts, den frühen Mickey-Maus-Cartoons und den Filme Chaplins wird die Technik, die Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts die Menschen in Angst und Schrecken versetzte, Benjamin zufolge ironisiert, ohne dabei ihre transformativen Momente zu verneinen. Sowohl bei Charles Fourier, dessen Utopien für Benjamin von „unverjährbarem Recht“ sind (GS V, 431), und den er als Scheerbarts „Zwilling“ bezeichnet (GS II, 632), als auch bei der frühen Mickey Maus, komme es zur „moralische Mobilmachung der Natur“ sowie zum „Aufknacken der Naturteleologie“, welches „nach dem Plan des Humors“ geschehe (GS V, 781). Dieser Liste hinzuzufügen ist der Zeichner und Karikaturist J. J. Grandville, den Benjamin als Vorläufer des Surrealismus und Walt Disneys bestimmt (GS V, 501). In Windrose des Erfolges spricht Benjamin vom „Vorrecht des Komischen, dessen Gerechtigkeit kein Werk des Himmels, sondern das unzähliger Versehen ist, die endlich, infolge eines letzten kleinen Fehlers, doch das genaue Resultat ergeben“ (GS IV, 405). Diese Gerechtigkeit herstellende Fähigkeit des Humors äußert sich am deutlichsten in Benjamins Forderung „die Heiterkeit des Kommunismus dem tierischen Ernst des Faschismus entgegenzusetzen“ (GS I, 1045). Benjamins Gerechtigkeit des Humors beschränkt sich dabei nicht auf die Menschen sowie die gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse, im Humor lasse man darüber hinaus „dem Objekt als solchem Gerechtigkeit widerfahren“ (GS VI, 130). Umgesetzt sieht Benjamin dies in den Montagearbeiten DADAs, in denen die Dinge des Alltags, der Abfall und die Lumpen in neue Konstellationen versetzt werden.

### ***Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesisu: Caricature as Mass Art and Art History as Social Justice***

Discussions of Benjamin's essay Eduard Fuchs: (the) Collector and (the) Historian, 1937, commissioned by Adorno and Horkheimer for the Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung, have focused on the understanding of historical materialism, its relevance to historiography, cultural history, and art history (McRobbie 1994; Steinberg 1996; Leslie 2002; F. Schwartz 2006; M.L. Jackson 2022). The issue that has been marginalized is Benjamin's powerful argument about the power of the peripheral art forms, such as caricature and pornography, that form the core of the Fuchs collection to "ruin the clichés of traditional art history".

This presentation will examine the essay in detail, arguing that it represents one of the most important, yet neglected, contributions to the historiography of modern caricature. Benjamin's "Fuchs Piece" was written in parallel with his formulation of the concept of aura versus reproducibility, as well as with the exploration of modernity in his Arcades project. However, it is the application of dialectical materialism that explodes the 'continuum of history' that informed Benjamin's thesis of the emancipatory power of caricature as a mass art, an art form that expands visibility and literally forces socio-political contextualization, pushing aside formal analysis. This paper examines the "Fuchs piece" in light of Benjamin's other writings on art history (Levin 1988), arguing that it posits both Fuchs's collecting strategies and caricature as tools of political activism, as well as means of triggering a radical transformation of the concerns and methods of the discipline. It also traces Benjamin's prophecy of a materialist art history in the current strand of art history as activism, which has moved away from an engagement with aesthetics toward social justice.

### ***Christian Ferencz-Flatz: The Most Real Gaze into the Heart of Things: Doing Justice to History via Advertisements***

While Benjamin's engagement with advertising in the Arcades Project has received some attention (see Pensky 2006 or Moore 2020), a systematic account of his reflections on advertising is still lacking. In fact, the subject connects several important threads in Benjamin's thought: commodity fetishism, the contemporary urban environment, new forms of language, the transformations of art, etc. In all these respects, Benjamin's attitude toward advertising is productively ambivalent. Combining spectacular sentimentality and blunt sobriety, utopia and everyday life, advertisements provide "the most real (...) gaze into the heart of things" (Benjamin 1996: 476). As such, they are certainly highly complex and sensitive historical materials that Benjamin places in various constellations throughout the Arcades project. In advertising, the "dream consciousness of the collective," as expressed in the fantastic works of Grandville, finds its awakening; at the same time, it is "the ruse by which the dream forces itself upon industry. This presentation will attempt to demonstrate Benjamin's belief in the diverse historical

potential of advertising by drawing on an ongoing artistic research project that the author is currently developing with filmmaker Radu Jude.

Working with an extensive archive of Romanian advertisements from the transition period (early 1990s to mid-2000s), they assemble the material through montage into different collections that highlight specific aspects in them: their affective reference to the historical context, their quaint sexual allusions, their obsessive reference to authority, their exaggerated gestures, or their linguistic helplessness. By being creatively set up against each other, these materials – ridiculous and flat initially – acquire depth and display a substantial and nuanced meaning. In this way, the work seeks to reaffirm Benjamin's credo that "there are no periods of decline" by doing full justice to an often discredited segment of the recent past.

### **Rita Velloso: *From Moscow to Berlin: the Urban 'Thought-Images' and the Tasks of Criticism***

Walter Benjamin's concept of criticism moves decisively from immanent criticism to programmatic criticism since his trip to Moscow, when the philosopher placed cities at the center of his reflection on experience. Here I will outline the elements of this critical repositioning in order to examine how Walter Benjamin's concept of critique is transformed and expanded on the basis of his consideration of the city as the object of a specific experience described in the form of a "thought image" (Denkbild). Although it began in Naples, this exercise in observing cities - his attention to the small details and traces of the everyday - undergoes a decisive inflection with Benjamin's Moscow experience and what happens upon the philosopher's return to Berlin in the political context of the Weimar Republic. In his writings during and after the Moscow trip, he developed the principles of a radical new critique. Benjamin's thought-images at that time were a search for an adequate representation of the dynamism of the cityscape, which he tried to discern by immersing himself in its concrete particularities.

"My presentation will be devoid of all theory. In this fashion, I hope to allow the 'creatural' to speak for itself... I want to write a description of Moscow at the present moment in which 'all factuality is already theory' and which would thereby refrain from any deductive abstraction, from any prognostication, and even with certain limits, from any judgment." (Moscow Diary, p.132)

I address the question of how Denkbilder, Benjamin's attempt to capture the character of the 1920s urban environment in which "abstraction is to be avoided at all costs," transformed his critical thinking in general, inflecting on a new theoretical framework and conceptual vocabulary for a materialist critique of culture. Moreover, Benjamin's urban "thought-image" configures an experimental field for his discussion of activism, revolution, and power.

### **Jeremy Rafuse: *Walter Benjamin and the Visual and Performance Arts***

Walter Benjamin's discussion of images is found primarily in two essays: A Brief History of Photography and The Word of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. Each of these essays provides a surreptitious basis for a better understanding of Benjamin's concept of the artwork. However, they are not without controversy, given Benjamin's strong opinions on, for example, photography and cinema.

While Benjamin may be critical of the daguerreotype of photography and the intrusions of reproductive technology, he recognizes the benefits of this technology in the service of science. Moreover, the question of the disappearance of the aura in photography can be revisited on the basis of his later discussion in On Some Motifs in Baudelaire. Here he addresses the issue of the disappearance of the aura in the context of lyric poetry, allowing the reader to revisit his discussion of photography and cinema. The difference between the two earlier essays and Baudelaire shows the overlap and development of Benjamin's thinking. And, one might argue, an epistemic logic that allows for a more judicial perspective to emerge, in this case with regard to the development of the concept of the artwork. Justice takes a critical place in Benjamin's writing, especially given the period in which Benjamin wrote much of his work, between the two great wars.

In the essay "Toward a Critique of Violence," Benjamin examines the concept of violence and confronts the philosophical question of whether or not laws can be conceived beyond judicial intervention. Or, in his essays on Kafka, Benjamin surveys Kafka's most famous works, such as The Castle and The Judgement, describes the depths of The Metamorphosis, and draws parallels with the Talmudic tradition.

In effect, Benjamin's interpretation of Kafka became an elucidation of Kafka's sense of judgment. Or else, in the essay *The Storyteller*, Benjamin discusses the history of storytelling and describes it as an artisanal tool. And that the process of storytelling becomes more meaningful at each moment of its appearance. And that its meaning carries a judicious message, about the world and the context in which the story is told.

And finally, in *The Arcades Project*, the concept of justice appears numerous times. For example, when Benjamin discusses the importance of the dialectical method, he talks about its judicial implications when investigating history. His correspondence with Horkheimer makes reference to justice on many occasions, indicating a very important concept to his thinking.

Today, like in Benjamin's time, there is a heightened risk of fascism in the world. The politicization of the arts, say, the transmission of fascist ideology in social media is at an all-time high. As it happens, these are the kinds of scenarios that Benjamin's philosophy may be of great value to confront and restrict.

In that spirit, as we have seen in Benjamin's writing on Baudelaire, there is an urgency to exhibit experience in its truest form. The pursuit of the aura in *Kunstwerk* is as true today as any other time, as well as its potential disappearance. The visual and performative arts today must assume the same kind of urgency to exist as any other *Kunstwerk*. Indeed, Benjamin's ideas might help to recontextualize the concept of exhibition in the visual and performance arts and offer participants a therapeutic experience.

### **Vladimir Rizow: *Reading Images: Walter Benjamin and Louis Althusser in Conversation***

In his influential essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, Benjamin sets up his analysis by drawing a distinction between commentary and criticism; the former is concerned with the material content of a given work, while the latter seeks to extract the truth content of the work. For Benjamin, this distinction is also expressed in terms of visibility and obscuration – the material content is always readily apparent, while the truth content is hidden. Similar to Benjamin, Louis Althusser argues for a specific kind of reading – symptomatic – that also engages with a given text through its gaps, omissions, and absences. For Althusser, "symptomatic reading" is deeply intertwined with his understanding of history and the presence of other texts within a given work. Taking this position seriously, I seek to bring Benjamin's image of critique into conversation with Althusser's formulation of 'symptomatic reading' as seen in *Reading Capital* and later developed by both Fredric Jameson and Pierre Macherey. The theoretical perspectives that emerge from this dialogue are illustrated in this paper with the photographic works of Eugene Atget and Vivian Maier, both photographers who speak to the obscurity and deception of the ostensible in an image.

## **Bodily and Spatial Practices of Justice**

### **Agata Bielik-Robson: *Nihilism as Material Justice: Benjamin's Theology of Entropy***

In my paper, I will try to demonstrate that there is a consistent project of a political theology in Benjamin's whole oeuvre and that it takes the form of 'nihilism as world politics.' This idea originates in Benjamin's "Theological-Political Fragment," written in response to Ernst Bloch's 1918 edition of *Geist der Utopie* (according to Scholem's dating). It is composed partly of praise and partly of a disguised polemic against Bloch, who gets credited for having proven the impossibility of a utopian theocracy, but also criticized for his investment in the messianic 'principle of hope,' staked on the gradual raising of the material world to the spiritual level. In my analysis of the "Fragment" – which, as I will argue, had a lasting influence on Benjamin's political thinking – I want to point to the theological elaboration of the concept of transience (*Vergängnis*), which may be read as Benjamin's own version of a 'metaphysics of entropy' and the corresponding notion of a hope in reverse. Bloch approaches his 'principle of hope' – soon to become the title of his opus magnum – in a traditional manner of Jewish messianism, filtered through his appropriation of Hegel and Marx, according to which the world has an objective tendency to press towards the redemptive telos when spirit and matter will have found perfect reconciliation. Contrary to this, Benjamin sees the 'messianic intensity' of thinkers like Bloch as a source of misfortune and injustice. Thus, paraphrasing Kafka, if there is hope, it is not for 'us,' if we

imagine ourselves as the messianic agents pressing for the redemptive goal of history. Rather, it is a hope in reverse, realized not in the Blochian progress of the world toward the "humanization of matter" (Bloch, 2009, 232), but in the regressive downward movement of the eternal fall, in which matter resists and counteracts the messianic agency of spirit. Unlike Bloch, then, Benjamin takes the side of matter against spirit, positing a nihilistic world politics as a righteousness of material being permeated by transience and entropy.

### **Antoni Zajac: *Innervated Pessimism and the Infrastructure of Justice***

In my talk, I will focus on the model of emancipatory politics outlined by Walter Benjamin in his essay *Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia* (1929). I will consider how this model relates to Benjamin's concept of justice, which involves an ongoing critique of the fossilized arrangements of modern life.

Benjamin identifies the liberating features of surrealist aesthetics of intoxication. They are associated with a "loosening of the self" that allows for an unexpected and fruitful encounter between the subject and reality. The results of intoxication, Benjamin argues, could be used to create a new, revolutionary mode of political participation that links the individual with the collective and the praxis of the present with a utopian hope for future justice. What brings all these elements together is the animating force of innervation, a psychophysical phenomenon akin to an effect.

Innervation enriches the human sensorium and nourishes the political imagination. It also allows the subject to loosen its ties to existing narratives of freedom, which are often based on conservative moralism and remain too optimistic in their promises. Benjamin thus seeks the "organization of pessimism" and points to distrust as the attitude that constitutes the politics of justice.

In my presentation, I will contrast Benjamin's concepts with the notions of cruel optimism and infrastructure developed by affect theorist Lauren Berlant. Cruel optimism represents an attachment to objects of desire and scenarios of the good life that contribute to the subject's attrition rather than allowing it to flourish. According to Berlant, in order to unlearn these toxic patterns, the subject must develop its own transformative infrastructure: a space for self-loosening, reorganization, and expansion of the life-world. I argue that the organization and innervation of pessimism creates an infrastructure for alternative proxemics of just life.

### **Francisco Naishtat: *Redemption Through Immersion: On the Natural History and Justice in Benjamin's Micrological Theology***

The idea of a natural history, which is crucial in Benjamin's work from the book *Trauerspiele* to the *Arcades Project*, seems to Benjamin scholars to have been largely eclipsed by the notion of transience, which in Benjamin's work is transposed from the context of nature to the context of history. Nevertheless, through a singular dialectic of nature and history, the idea of natural history in Benjamin's texts is not only a reminder of transience and death, but also has a redemptive potential in close connection with the practices of justice, critique, and politics. We can grasp it in Benjamin at various levels: a) prehistory and the disruptive power of fossils and ruins; b) the dissolution of mythology and historicism in the element of origin, archaeology, discontinuity, and spectrality as a configuration of the experience of a non-teleological past; c) otherness and the rupture of the intentional subject both in language (translation, translatability) and in dialectical images as new forms of experience with bodies, the non-human, and nature through a second technique. However, these key connections between natural history and justice, which move the idea of natural history from the inherited determination of mere factuality and fate into the practical realm of critique and politics, are not devoid of a crucial diffusion of theology in Benjamin's thought. Our aim here is to show that the theology at work in the Benjaminian idea of natural history is not precisely an "inversed theology" as in Adorno's interpretation (inasmuch as, as Arendt says, every inversion preserves the same skeleton of the inverted), but a micrological theology, that is, one that works with materiality and things through immersion (Bolz and Van Reijen), revealing, awakening, and reopening a gaze within transient factuality.

### **Burak Üzümkesci: *Bodies at a Standstill: The Political Promise of a Gesture and Its Reproducibility***

While the age of revolutions is over, revolutionary dynamics and tensions are omnipresent today. Following Benjamin's understanding of revolution as the attempt to activate the emergency brake on the train of history, social movements - uprisings, resistances, protests, blockades, etc. - can be seen as moments that embody the instances of standstill and the "things that just go on" are brought to a halt. Through collective action, the streets and squares of the cities become the stage and the bodies of the people become the image space. In Iran, for example, standstill as a political gestural act took place both in the protests of 2017 and in the current feminist revolution. Women taking off their headscarves and standing still in the streets played a crucial role in spreading resistance in waves. Similarly, in the 2013 Gezi uprising, one person's hours-long stand in Taksim Square was taken up and repeated by thousands across the country. How can "standing", which we have seen used as a means in the context of collective actions, become a political gesture that mobilizes people? How do the signals transmitted by the bodies that stand still become recognizable/readable between people who don't know each other? In light of these questions, in this talk I will discuss the concept of standstill as a gestural act that embodies the "applicability of dialectics" that Benjamin writes about especially in his essays on Brecht and epic theater. I will try to explore the political possibilities of these gestures both as a bodily performative act and as images that give impetus to the movement through circulation from hand to hand thanks to their reproducibility.

### **Brendan Moran: "Veil", Justice, and the Body in Benjamin and Luste Boulbina**

With the recent protests in Iran, women's headscarves have come under renewed scrutiny in much of the world. It is as if an appearance - the covered or uncovered head - must uphold societal values. With or without a garment, a semblance is treated as if it were somehow destiny.

In Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, Benjamin rarely uses the word "veil." He more often refers to "Hülle" and "Enthüllung," words that his translators render as "veil" and "unveiling." My paper relates his account of "veil" and "revelation" to Seloua Luste Boulbina's recent reflections on French, Arab, and other debates about "the veil" (*le voile*), especially as worn by some colonized women or their female descendants.

Benjamin discusses "veil" and "unveiling" in the context of beauty. Beautiful appearance and the attraction to it involve a questionable closure. Beautiful appearance, on the other hand, is broken by placing appearance, the "veil," in confrontation with nature, which resists being "unveiled. In the face of this confrontation, it is unjust - and philosophically wrong - to confine anyone to a particular appearance, a particular "veil.

Echoing Frantz Fanon, Luste Boulbina acknowledges that the wearing of headscarves by some Muslim women is often driven by patriarchal imperatives. But the forced unveiling required in certain French public spaces is a continuation of colonial indignity. Under these conditions, wearing the head garment can even become a counter-offensive against this indignity.

Although Luste Boulbina is more sensitive to women's spatial experiences, she and Benjamin converge in suggesting that justice is concerned with the body, including the female body, in its freedom from moralizations about it. Women's bodies are independent of both the "modern" (colonial/postcolonial) fixation on "exposure" and the patriarchal insistence on wearing a particular garment.

### **Michal Pospiszyl: Walter Benjamin in the Shtetl**

The Eastern European town, full of hiding places, back alleys, and winding narrow streets, was the birthplace of the (mainly Jewish) anarchist movement at the turn of the 20th century. Little attention has been paid to the relationship between this urban environment and the radical social movements that emerged within it. Meanwhile, we know from the surviving memoirs of activists of the time that there was a clear awareness of the role that urban chaos played in popular political struggle. As in the Bialystok district of Chanajki or in Krynki, a shtetl where an anarchist republic existed for a few days during the 1905 revolution. The relationship between a particular urban space and the resulting political model has received much attention from Walter Benjamin. Although the most famous passage deals with the impact of Haussmann's redevelopment of Paris on the class struggle being waged in France, my presentation will focus on Benjamin's work on Berlin and Naples. Following his remarks, I will

consider how "chaotic" or "muddy" space, saturated with rituals and meanings, could act as a non-obvious ally of the subjugated classes.

### **Lukasz Moll: *Walter Benjamin as the Chiffonier of the Common***

What are the merits of bringing Walter Benjamin's writings into the debate about the future of the commons? At first glance, Benjamin does not seem to be the theorist of the commons in a direct way, but many themes in his work bring him closer to the issue, such as his focus on the Paris Commune and the Haussmannization of the French capital understood as the dispossession of the commoners, the transhistorical vision of justice of the oppressed classes, or the plebeian practices of subsistence and habits. In my presentation, I would like to re-read Benjamin as the chiffonier/ragpicker/lumpensammler of the common. The act of collecting the leftovers, composing new constellations from them, and invoking messianic justice - so characteristic of the figure of the chiffonier/ragpicker/lumpensammler in Benjamin's writings - will serve me as a key to identifying three communist threats in his oeuvre: 1) Benjamin as the chiffonier of the common, in the sense of his interest in the reproductive economy of the commoner's gathering and recycling; 2) Benjamin as the chiffonier of the common, in the sense of his own methodological practice as a historical materialist ("historical materialist as ragpicker" - E. Wohlfarth); 3) finally, Benjamin as the chiffonier of the common, with his vision of a transhistorical politics of the oppressed commoners, which reaches for anachronisms, lost causes, old habits, and leftovers of progress in order to constitute the new commons. I believe that including Benjamin in recent debates among theorists of the common allows me to intervene in many crucial dilemmas that commoners face: between progress and the *longue durée* of bottom-up traditions, between the right to work and the right to laziness, or between the tasks of reclaiming the old commons and inventing the new ones.

### **Nélio Conceição: *Presence of Mind and its Practices Between Body and History***

In "Madame Ariane: Second Courtyard on the Left" (One-Way Street), Benjamin writes: "To transform the threatening future into a fulfilled 'now,' the only desirable telepathic miracle, is a work of bodily presence of mind. And in The Arcades Project [N 7, 2] he asserts that "the connection between presence of mind and the 'method' of dialectical materialism remains to be established. I aim to shed light on these passages by focusing on the role that the notion of "presence of mind" plays in Benjamin's thought, deepening lines of interpretation related to other relevant notions such as "attention," "distraction," and "now-time. In this regard, I will consider three simultaneous senses of presence of mind: 1) a form of thought/practice that should be practiced as a way of dealing with the experience of shock, such as that characteristic of urban space; 2) an embodied experience that entails an intense (kairological and redemptive) form of temporality; 3) a relationship between danger and critical gesture that can intertwine individual and collective dimensions. I propose a close reading of the more significant texts dealing with these issues, with a brief detour to encounter Spinoza's Ethics, which in its own terms also posits a relationship between body, presence of mind, and danger. By relating presence of mind to self-divestiture (distraction, "letting go"), Benjamin shows how the political significance of the former goes beyond a simple form of vigilance. Instead, it is part of a bodily rooted intellectual "method" that implies a plastic form of attention. Against this background, Benjamin's politics of justice suggests a double core of meaning and practice: on the one hand, doing justice to oneself, and on the other, doing justice to the present.

### **Judith Kasper: *Benjamins Lumpensammler und Ruth, die Ährenleserin***

In meinem Beitrag geht es um die Allegorisierungen des Lumpensammlers, dieser armen, marginalisierten, elenden Figur, die Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts das Stadtbild von Paris wie kaum eine andere prägte und von Baudelaire in dem Gedicht *Le vin des chiffonniers* prominent poetisch stilisiert wurde.

Benjamin gewinnt aus der Figur des Lumpensammlers und dessen Sammelgeste einen Begriff des Verwendens, der quer zu – gegenwärtig stark unterm Verdacht der kulturellen Appropriation stehenden – Ent- und Aneignungspraktiken steht. Die Sammelgeste des Lumpensammlers, der Begriff des Verwendens, verbunden mit Benjamins Montage-Begriff – diese Reihung wird inzwischen als ein selbstverständlicher Zusammenhang in der Benjamin-Forschung angenommen. Doch lohnt es sich, diese Reihung genauer zu analysieren, die Sprünge und Differenzen, die Auslassungen und



Verschiebungen darin hervorzuheben. Hilfreich, gleichsam als Kontrastfolie, ist es, dem Lumpensammler eine andere arme – weiblich konnotierte – Sammlerfigur gegenüber zu stellen: die Ährenleserin, auch Nachleserin genannt, deren ikonographische Geschichte zum biblischen Mythos von Ruth zurückführt. Ruth ist die Fremde, die Waise, die Witwe, die – ihre Schwiegermutter Naomi nach Betlehem begleitend – beschließt, um zu überleben, auf den Feldern Nachlese zu betreiben: also das was bei der Ernte Liegegebliebene aufzulesen. Die Nachlese ist in vielen Gesellschaften als ein altes Gebrauchsrecht bezeugt. Rechtlich unterbunden und kriminalisiert wurde sie Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts, unterm Eindruck der Absolutsetzung des bürgerlichen Eigentumsbegriffs. Im neuen urbanen Raum taucht der Lumpensammler auf, für Marx eine politisch höchst suspekta Figur, zumal sie sich letztlich a-politisch in den kapitalistischen Verwertungsprozess einspannen lässt, darin – etwa im Bereich der Papierproduktion – die ärmlichste Stufe der Lieferkette ausmacht. Dass ausgerechnet von dieser letztlich korrumpierten Figur für Benjamin eine Figur der Gerechtigkeit abgeleitet wird, bleibt ein produktiver innerer Widerspruch seines Denkens, den der Beitrag entfalten möchte: allerdings nicht nur historisch rekonstruierend, sondern begleitet von der Frage, welche Relevanz sie für die kulturellen und politischen Praktiken der Gegenwart hat, angesichts der Spaltung der Welt in Global North und Global South und im Horizont des Anthropozäns. Der Lumpensammler und die Nachleserin – ein Gespann für die Zukunft?

**Jakub Momro: *Embodiment and Justice: Nominalism and Language Utopia in the Work of Walter Benjamin and Theodor. W. Adorno***

In my lecture, I would like to reconsider the relationship between two concepts of philosophical thinking about language in the context of radical dialectical positions. While the mutual influence of Benjamin and Adorno is obvious on both a biographical and theoretical level, their approach to language is a dense constriction that still seems unclear. Thus, the question of language and justice in the case of both authors seems only apparently obvious. Certainly, they have in common the study of language from the perspective of the utopia of the name, the search in language for its contact with the non-alienated reality, or - as Adorno puts it, reversing Hegel's speculative rule - "reconciliation in difference". Here, however, the paths of the dialectic of justice and name itself are different. Benjamin insisted on analyzing language in its morphological deformations, hence the concept of bodily mimesis, and thus of embodied language as a form of mediation of individuality, as well as a reflection on the political nature of language in its various varieties (from pop culture to the present to an allegorical past). With Adorno, things are a little different. The most important is the reflection on mediation itself, which - as such - combines both the moment of conceptual sublation and the strictly material dimension of language, which reveals the residual or trace dimension of the experience of consciousness. The fundamental difference, then, lies in the two authors' understanding of a possible utopia: Benjamin's thought tends toward an apocalyptic but ambiguous messianism, while Adorno, insisting on the extreme prohibition of images, will seek justice as freedom from the coercion of representation in the dialectical sublimation of language in musical experience and even in sound itself. Thus, one could approach these two different strategies of understanding contingency - probably the very core of Benjamin's and Adorno's philosophies.

**Jakub Gorecki: "Idiosyncrasy as the Highest Critical Organ": Karl Kraus and Bodily Justice**

"Karl Kraus" is a fundamental essay for Benjamin's understanding of the concept of justice. Here, Benjamin developed the strategy of critique as a saving-destructive act of citation, extracting the name from the immanence of journalistic empty phrases. In Benjamin's essay, critique resembles a disease, and Karl Kraus is described as a hypochondriac, someone who tries to recognize and expose the inauthenticity and falseness in his own body, entangled in the mythical order of law. In my paper, I would like to treat the act of critique as a bodily activity and consider how we can understand "idiosyncrasy as the supreme critical organ" while avoiding regression to archaic mimetic behaviors (characteristic of both fascist masses and conformist attitudes). By treating critique as a disease, I would like to consider where the boundary lies between critical illness and destructive illness. I will also question how Kraus's body, infected with critique, becomes an area of unmasking instead of being broken. I will argue that it is because the "demonic" stage is overworked by Kraus in the form of the "Monster". This would mean that any act of critique can only be considered successful under the condition that justice becomes its stake. Thus, justice operates in relation to the body, and critique as a destructive act disrupts the body of the critic in an act of idiosyncrasy. At the same time, as an act of

salvation, critique is an attempt to save at least "a piece of mutilated flesh" as a possibility of materialist, "inhuman" humanism. In my paper, I will focus on "Karl Kraus," but I will also refer to Benjamin's broader theory of mimetic behavior and to psychoanalytic theories of incorporation, which I believe allow for a better understanding of Benjamin's intuitions about Kraus's "theatrical" and "cannibalistic" practices.

**Federica Muré: *Justice as a "Technique of Nearness": A Close Reading of Benjamin's Anecdote-Theory***

As a poignant example of the material capacity to disrupt perceptual relations to the plane of experience, the "anecdote," Benjamin writes in one of the first sketches of *Passagenarbeit*, has the potential to "bring things spatially close to us. Capturing a paradigmatic mode of imagining the world through the grammar of spatial-corporeal displacement, the anecdote illustrates "the true method of making things present," which is "to represent them in our space (not to represent ourselves in their space) [...] We don't displace our being into theirs; they step into our life" (I°, 1; S1a,3 ).

This essay will argue that the aforementioned "method" and the material displacement it guarantees is not only "true" but also "just", insofar as it demands parallels with the state of dispossession that is proper to justice: The space-time configuration that allows things to 'enter our lives' entails a shift of agency from subject to object, and thus points to a practical reconfiguration of perceptual relations to the level for which the mythical body-object hierarchy, or the superior position of the subject in control of the image, is radically overturned.

The argument will be pursued by focusing on the vignette *Mummerehlen* (Berlin Childhood), where, by analogy with the anecdote of a Chinese painter who disappears into the picture, Benjamin writes of a mode of self-dispossession and bodily displacement [*Entstellung*] that acts as a catalyst for imagining new modes of relating to the pictorial plane - and, more broadly, to the world. Finally, the paper will reflect on Benjamin's insights into spatial-corporeal displacement and dispossession and bring them into a contemporary light by tracing revealing parallels with Jean-Luc Nancy's "philosophy of limits" and the complex state of "methexis" that results from the undoing of the body-object, subject-image, hierarchy.

**Karolina Jesień: *The Adventures of Benjamin's Body: On the Politics of Leib and Körper from the "Outline of the Psychophysical Problem" to the Arcades Project***

Nathan Ross has recently noted that, compared to the notion of the body, the body has been understudied in scholarship on Benjamin's conception of the human body, especially in relation to his later writings (Ross 2021, 66). Following Ross, the aim of this paper is to trace the changes in Benjamin's understanding of the human body as body from the "Outline of the Psychophysical Problem" (1923) to the *Arcades Project* (1927-1940).

To do so, I will first focus on Benjamin's early writings. I will draw on Eli Friedlander's framework, in which the fundamental difference between Leib and Körper lies in their relational and non-relational character, respectively (Friedlander 2012). Unlike Friedlander, however, I will argue that denying the relationality of the body overlooks the inherently political significance of the distinction between Leib and Körper. I will suggest that Benjamin sees collective subjectivity not only in Leib, which extends to the collective subject of humanity, but also in the possible dangers of a collective subjectivity based on body: a Volk.

Instead of relationality, I propose to see the Leib-Körper division in terms of their different approaches to the limits of subjectivity and the way in which this is based on an organic-inorganic dialectic. I will then show that this dialectic also informs Benjamin's later understanding of the human body. To this end, I will argue that not only Leib, but also Körper, does not disappear from Benjamin's later writings, and that the latter undergoes a specific transformation visible in the *Arcades Project's* entanglement with fashion. The figure of the body will reappear in a commodified form, as a corpse.

## **Szymon Wróbel: *Walter Benjamin's Attempt at Revision of the Order of Kant's Transcendental Cartography***

The status of Walter Benjamin's work in the Arcades Project continues to provoke intellectual controversy. In a famous letter to Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno, after reading the introduction to the Arcades project, reminded his friend that he was not a "real materialist" but only a "naive empiricist", a "positivist" who believed in the "magic" of "directly given reality". For Adorno, "immediate materialism" is at the intersection of magic and positivism. In my talk, in contrast to Adorno, I will try to treat Benjamin's philosophy as a kind of revision of Kant's transcendentalism. I will suggest that the key question for Benjamin is how to ground and justify the higher concept of experience with the help of Kant's intellectual cartography. Benjamin calls for the inclusion of forms of experience that are excluded by Kant's schematism of reason. It is about pre-animistic experience, the experience of the mad, the sick, the visionary, etc. It's also about the experience of God. Kant's tables of categories of reason will have to be completely revised. With this new concept of experience, a new concept of freedom will also be developed. The new transcendental cartography will make it possible not only to revise the concept of knowledge, but also to deepen the concept of experience and freedom. The main hope of such a project is the belief that with the discovery of a new experience, a "place" would be established where the difference between the realms of nature and freedom would be abolished. Moreover, in this new cartography, error can no longer be explained by error, any more than truth can be explained by common sense. I would like to rethink the possibility of such a project and all its unexpected consequences, also in the ethical and political

## **Andreas Köpfer & Robert Schneider-Reisinger: *Raum- und Körperentwürfe bei Walter Benjamin und Siegfried Kracauer und deren Relevanz für die Critical Disability Studies***

In diesem Vortrag werden zwei Versuche unternommen. Zum einen werden die Begriffe und Dimensionen ‚Körper‘ und ‚Raum‘, die sowohl im Werk von Walter Benjamin wie auch von Siegfried Kracauer eine prominente Rolle spielen, theoretisch beleuchtet und hierbei sowohl Verbindungslinien wie auch Differenzen für die kritische Analyse von Praktiken herausgearbeitet. Es wird dabei mit Benjamins "Aura" (z.B. Benjamin 20171; ergänzend: Wizisla & Opitz 2020) eine materialistische Diskussion von Raum und Behinderung unterstützt – wie sie in der Behindertenpädagogik ja schon länger geführt wird (etwa Jantzen 2004; 2017). Dabei wird versucht, über eine Öffnung des äußeren Raums bzw. seiner Wahrnehmung den inneren zu differenzieren. Aura wird hier als Tätigkeitsbegriff diskutiert und vor allem Aspekte wie "Verfallserscheinung" und instrumentelle Deutungen ("als Übung") kritisch diskutiert und danach gefragt, in wie weit Aura den behinderten (und beschädigten) Körper des Anderen geradezu erfordert. Was bedeutet Benjamins Auralosigkeit des Abbilds für eine materialistische Konzeption von Behinderung als Isolation und was das Moment der Blickerwiderung angesichts der inklusionspädagogischen Auseinandersetzung um Anerkennung? Als weiterer Referenzpunkte dienen die visuell geprägten Raumentwürfe im Werk „Ornament der Masse“ (1963) von Siegfried Kracauer, in dem das Ziel aufscheint, gesellschaftliche Räume in ihrer ‚Exotik des Alltags‘ zu dechiffrieren und hierin eingelagerte Marginalisierungen und Ausgrenzungen offenzulegen (Stumberger 2010). In einem zweiten Schritt werden am Beispielfeld von Bildung bzw. Bildungsorganisationen (und deren inhärenten Frage nach Bildungsgerechtigkeit, vgl. Stojanov 2011) und unter Bezugnahme auf die critical disability studies (Slee et al. 2019) praxeologische Rekonstruktion von be-hinderten Körperentwürfen und deren Raumpositionen in Form von empirischen Schlaglichtern auf die Praxis von Körper und Raum vorgestellt. Im Sinne einer kritisch-rekonstruktiven Analyse werden dabei Überformungen des ‚Autistischen‘ herausgearbeitet (Restayn et al. 2022) und ins Verhältnis gesetzt zu Körper- und Raumverständnisse Benjamin und Kracauer. Dabei werden entlang von Leistungserwartungen zugeschriebene Essentialisierungen und Positionen zu Autismus deutlich, die – materialistisch gewendet und gespiegelt an politischen Regimen der Be-Hinderung – ein Leben ‚in der alltäglichen Ungerechtigkeit‘ deutlich machen.

## **History, Memory, and Justice**

**Andrzej Gniazdowski: *Phenomenology and Angelology of History: Husserl and Benjamin about "what we call progress"***

The aim of this paper is to compare "materialist" and "idealist" conceptions of history by analyzing the divergences and similarities of Walter Benjamin's and Edmund Husserl's approaches to the idea of historical progress. The starting point of this comparison is the reconstruction of Husserl's concept of the teleology of history and its positivist and neo-Kantian background. While pointing out the theoretical naivety of this concept from the perspective of Benjamin's post-Nietzschean critique of the idea of progress, the author attempts to prove the thesis that the historical facticity of Husserl's idealistic approach to history does not exhaust the critical potential of phenomenology in this regard. He argues that this potential consists in the significance of the phenomenological analysis of internal time consciousness for the critique of the concept of historical time.

**Andrzej Leder: *Who is the Angel gazing at? Some Lacanian Remarks***

Walter Benjamin writes: "There is a painting by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. An angel is depicted there who looks as though he were about to distance himself from something which he is staring at. His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched. The Angel of History must look just so." There is a lot said in this fragment about looking, staring, seeing, gazing...

Framing his argument with Lacanian theory, the author will ask questions in his paper about the gaze of the angel, the subject that this signifier represents, and the other that it stares at with its eyes "wide open". Questions will be raised about the Hegelian spirit of history and the Benjaminian angel. Can we use the Lacanian graph L to elucidate their relationship?

**Anna Wąsowicz: *Between Practical Past and Embodied Art: the Case of Walter Benjamin***

Walter Benjamin, known as an eclectic philosopher, shed light on the "crisis of the arts", which he understood as a "crisis of experience". In this case he observes the approach to the mystery of art. Craft Technology. The difference between art as masterpiece and art as technology is overthinking. Benjamin in his article : *The Work of Art. In the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, the main thesis is as follows: modernism is coming, we are living in the era of critical and artistic and political turns and phenomenological contributions of sensibility. This is not an era for artisans or soldiers, but rather a world of the flaneur. Nevertheless, Benjamin's essay represents the birth of the new age and the new man. Everything seems to be wrought in steel. But that is only the metaphor. As a greedy metaphor, art is a metaphor. Used by Oscar Wilde in his *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. But what exactly does it mean to be an heir of Wilderian literature? When does philosophy meet literature? Who am I? Is it possible to be an artist and an artificer despite the human condition and the constant need to overcome oneself without terrible injuries? I would like to talk about this in my lecture. I hope it will be a comparative, logical and comprehensive discussion.

**Jeon Gyuchan: *Redemption of Justice Through Memory***

The Thesis on the Philosophy of History is, as we all know, a deeply reflexive essay written by Walter Benjamin at the very moment of his ontological crisis and political danger. This text is indeed a short but sharp statement on the problematic of the (im)possibility of histori(ography) in the time of global fascism. Can history stand against the impending injustice of the power that is me? Can philosophy, more specifically the philosophy of history, be a critical means or mode of inquiry that will bring human history back to our time against the barbarian myth? How can we rethink this essay in terms of history, memory and justice?

This paper attempts to reread the text of the thesis through a specific lens of justice. It is doubtful that Benjamin even mentions this word in the entire text. Regardless of the presence of the term, however, Benjamin's text contains several points that touch on issues of historical justice, the politics of antagonism between (counter)history and injustice, the relevance of memory for justice, etc. This paper attempts to configure Benjamin's probable ideas, beliefs, about (historical) justice by articulating his notion of "blast(ing) open the continuum of history."

How can we do justice to the past? What does he mean when Walter Benjamin says that “[t]here is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one? Doesn’t this put on us a sort of ethical burden, role for remembering as a practice of justice to the past injustice, against the unforgettable injustice of the past? He insists that “[o]ur coming was expected on earth”. Is our endowment with “a weak messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim” on our mission to do historical justice delayed, postponed? I, the author, will reflect on this challenging question.

**Johannes Otto Riedner: *Benjamin, Bloch, Kracauer, Scholem***

Both Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno and Gerhard Gershom Scholem recalled much later their first meeting in the garden of the Frankfurt Bürgerhospital in early September 1923, when they visited the ailing Siegfried Kracauer. Benjamin brought Scholem with him, while Adorno was probably already with his friend, who was suffering from a severe stroke.

A discussion quickly ensued, which soon became a heated controversy: Kracauer accused Benjamin of dogmatic messianism, while Benjamin defended himself by calling Kracauer an enemy of philosophy. Adorno, the youngest of the friends, probably did not get involved.

The sharpness of the dispute can be seen in the use of the term “enemy” in Schmitt’s sense of hostility, not just opposition. The previous year, Kracauer had sharply criticized Ernst Bloch’s “Thomas Münzer als Theologe der Revolution” in an article in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* entitled “Prophetentum,” arguing that Bloch was misusing theology for political purposes. The meeting took place at a moment of great danger, as was hyperinflation. But what did Gerhard Scholem, who was on his way to Palestine, say?

And what did Kracauer mean by his accusation? Perhaps he missed in Benjamin the concept of actuality that Bloch had established in his critique of Lucak’s „Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein“. Benjamin would later adopt this concept for his „now of unknowability“.

Just a few months earlier, another meeting, the “Marxistische Arbeitswoche,” had established the first program of what would become the Frankfurt School. The year 1923 has become a focal point of research as an accumulation point of historical fascination.

This essay attempts to explore this controversy in greater depth and to reconstruct the constellation of its arguments concerning the politics of justice and the justice of politics.

**Magdalena Gawin: *Benjamin Against Fascism – A Critical Analysis of Memory***

The aim of this paper is to analyze Benjamin’s remarks on fascism in the context of contemporary fascist and extreme populist movements. Although the “F” word is often considered too stigmatizing to be used in relation to current political struggles, Benjamin’s concept can be used to demonstrate the timeliness of research on fascism. To deepen the argument, I will draw on his reflections on memory. I am interested here in the question of the construction of universality by fascism and what makes this construction so destructive. I will therefore address the problem of the specificity of fascist memory. A certain general assumption of my research is that fascism is a phenomenon that is permanently inscribed in modern societies, which means that the specificity of fascism involves a certain vagueness. This does not mean, however, that it is impossible to identify certain markers of this phenomenon, and it is precisely their presentation that is the presumed effect of my analyses.

**Matthias Roick: *How to do Justice to the Past? Intellectual History, Non-Linear Narratives, and the Quest for Early Modernity***

One of the classic definitions of justice is to give each person his or her due. In my paper I will discuss what this might mean for the practice of early modern history. Perhaps counterintuitively, I am interested in how and to what extent Benjamin’s theses on history, especially Thesis VII on the task of the historical materialist, coincide with trends in early modern intellectual history. As Benjamin turns against a history that “sides with the victor,” scholars in these fields have become suspicious of the “grand narratives” of teleological progress that have long dominated their respective fields and public perceptions, and they have begun to “brush history against the grain,” that is, to treat topics and themes that do not lead directly to the present, from premodern to modern, but rather constitute “Holzwege,” that is, paths that, from a presentist point of view, lead nowhere or are abandoned in the course of time. How can we do justice to

these themes? And how can we do justice to - and justify our interest in - a past that seems to have no connection to the present? How do we reconstruct our memories? Will we be able to use the conceptual tools of the past for a better and more just future?

**Santhia Velasco Kittlaus:** *Where Do We Stand When We Stand Up for Justice? A Comparison of the Historian's Position in Walter Benjamin and Michel-Rolph Trouillot*

Through Benjamin's theses on history, we confront historical events without resorting to the comfort of a positively connoted development that could detach us from the past (Benjamin 2015, 701). To disrupt this illusion of a linear continuum of history, Benjamin approaches historiography not additively but constructively. His historical materialism positions itself in the present as a place where time has come to a standstill. Justice has its place in this now, which, according to Scholem, is not a conceptual limit but a "becoming, a substance" that is related to, even makes possible, messianic time as the eternal present (Scholem, 1999, 359). In this pause in time, Benjamin's concept of the past resembles Michel-Rolph Trouillot's understanding of "pastness [... as] a position" (Trouillot 1995, 15). For both Benjamin and Trouillot, what was is a matter of how the present conceives of it as the past. I read Benjamin's standstill as that "pause in which memory forms" (Pollock, 2009, 40) and makes possible the encounter with traumatic historical legacies. This temporal situatedness corresponds to the critical modality of remembering described by Trouillot as recognizing the silence of those unheard voices in the historical narrative who have suffered injustice. How we deal with these injustices is, for both Benjamin and Trouillot, a question of the justice of the present that needs to be articulated again and again. My comparison situates Benjamin's thought in a more global context and at the same time illuminates those aspects of Benjamin's thought that make an intercultural comparison possible.

**Urszula Zbrzeźniak:** *Philosophy as a Practice of Justice*

Benjamin's concept of history seems to be the common ground of contemporary thought. Yet its significance is quite particular. While many thinkers refer directly to his legacy, others seem to develop this critical concept of history without mentioning Benjamin. The past is not only a privileged area of research, but also the most important philosophical problem. The nature of the past, the status of images of the past appear at the center of philosophical reflection. Moreover, history becomes the source and the stake of ethical reflection. The latter, however, differs profoundly from the ethics developed so far in modern philosophy. The ethical or practical dimension of modern thought assumes a very peculiar form of radical ethical engagement, devoid of any systematicity. In my paper I would like to address the presence of this model of historical inquiry within contemporary philosophy. The question that I find particularly interesting is the relationship between history and the ethical task that arises from it.

**Evelyn Schuler Zea:** *Die Aufgabe der Gerechtigkeit*

Gerechtigkeit war gewiss für Benjamin eine Bemühung nicht nur um die Lebenden, sondern auch um die Toten. Mit verschiedenen Akzentuierungen wird in seinem Werk die Sorge um das vergangene Leiden formuliert. Dabei wird kein erloschenes Geschehen, sondern innere Unruhen der Geschichte beachtet, denn - wie bekannt - werden auch die Toten von ihrem Strom betroffen. Durch Arbeit an Erinnerung und darüber hinaus geht es Benjamin um den Versuch, sich auf die Seite der Toten zu stellen, sie „wecken“ zu können. Wie diese dem historischen Materialisten gestellte Aufgabe durchführbar wäre, ist eventuell im Zusammenhang mit jener anderen Aufgabe zu verstehen, welche der sich hingebende Übersetzer vor sich hat. Verlangen und Gestaltung der Aufgabe scheinen darauf hinzuweisen, dass die in den wegweisenden Notizen zu einer Arbeit über die Kategorie der Gerechtigkeit zentral behandelte Besitzfrage einen transversalen Schlüssel dazu bilden kann. Eine Aufgabe wäre nur erfüllt, wenn der Besitzanspruch aufgegeben wird, d.h., die Auffassung einer Aufgabe würde bereits die anfängliche Gegenbewegung zum „Besitzcharakter“ bilden, und zwar sowohl in Bezug auf das Interesse des Subjekts wie auch auf das Recht der Dinge. Eine späte Gerechtigkeit, welche unvermeidlich und notwendig spät ist in dem Sinn, dass sie sich auf die Toten richtet, wäre dann ebenfalls nur wirksam über eine Auseinandersetzung mit der Besitz- und zudem Eigentumsfrage. Dieser Spannung wird in dem hier vorgeschlagenen Beitrag nachgegangen wie auch ihrer Kreuzungen mit anderen Konstellationen vom Leben mit den Toten aus ethnographischen und literarischen Kontexten.

**Karol Sauerland:** *Die Rolle des Begriffs der Gerechtigkeit für die Beurteilung von antitotalitären Bewegungen*

In dem Artikel „Benjamins Revision der bisherigen materialistischen Geschichtsbetrachtung“, der 1982 im ersten Heft der Neuen Rundschau, erschien, schrieb ich, daß das Danziger Denkmal für die umgekommenen Werftarbeiter, das bereits im Dezember 1980 eingeweiht worden war, wahrscheinlich das „erste in der Geschichte der proletarischen Bewegung“ ist, „das spontan errichtet wurde, um eine Solidarität zwischen den Ermordeten und sich Befreienden zu schaffen“. Ich knüpfte an Benjamins Bemerkungen zur russischen Revolution von 1905 an. Der modernen Geschichtsschreibung ist die Idee der historischen Gerechtigkeit, um die immer wieder gerungen wird, recht fremd. Die polnischen historischen Arbeiten haben im Allgemeinen für die Solidarność-Zeit 1980/81 nur den Begriff des Karnevals im Kopf. Sie lassen sich nicht von den zukunftsweisenden Ideen, die diese Revolution ausstrahlte, und den Erinnerungen an sie leiten. Von den Historikern geht kaum eine Unterstützung für die Bestrebungen aus, die Danziger Werft in das Weltkulturerbe der UNESCO einzuschreiben, was die russische Seite nota bene zu verhindern sucht. 1982 erklärte ich mit Benjamin: Im Eingedenken üben wir Gerechtigkeit, denn die Vergangenheit ist nicht nur Vergangenheit, sondern führt auch „einen heimlichen Index mit, der auf die Erlösung verweist“; wir sind gleichsam „von den gewesenen Geschlechtern auf der Erde erwartet worden“. Es ist, als wäre damit Solidarność gemeint.

### **David Galashvili: *Progress and Catastrophe in the Modern World***

In this presentation, I will contrast the Enlightenment belief in progress with the ninth thesis of the post-Enlightenment and anti-progressive thinker Walter Benjamin's Theses on the Concept of History, in which he sees progress as different from the ideals of the Enlightenment. Benjamin and the thinkers of his time saw in the domination of reason the roots and foundations of Auschwitz and other barbarities. For them, the domestication of nature by reason, its total domination, leads to the instrumentalization of the external world and of the individual himself, and to the subordination of the individual to the projects of reason. This is why Adorno and Horkheimer, in their book *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, declared the Enlightenment totalitarian. This does not mean, however, that these authors were generally opposed to human freedom and progress. They sought to discover and expose the regressive or destructive element of progress and to deconstruct the fiction of progress with which the ideologues of the twentieth century manipulated the masses. As Adorno wrote: "The Enlightenment must understand itself if it is to avoid the total betrayal of the people. The Enlightenment must realize exactly what price humanity has paid for progress.

### **Sarah Ralfs: *Zur Überlieferung der Steine. Benjamins Vision für eine gerechtere Gemeinschaft nach der Hoffnungslosigkeit***

In meinem Beitrag möchte ich Benjamins Vision von Gemeinschaft in den Blick nehmen, die er in den geschichtsphilosophischen Thesen mitführt. Sie kann als letzter Hoffnungsfunken gelesen werden, gegenüber zukünftigen Konstellationen von Gemeinschaft, die aus den Trümmern des Faschismus und des 2. Weltkriegs hervorzugehen imstande wären.

Es wirkt erstaunlich und konsequent zugleich, dass Benjamin dabei seine Hoffnung auf die nicht menschlichen Akteur\*innen setzt, denen er die vielleicht entscheidende Widerstandsfähigkeit zuspricht. Auf das in ihnen gespeicherte Wissen, auf die Konsultation ihrer Zeugenschaft komme es an, so Benjamin, in dem politischen Kampf seiner historischen Materialist\*in gegen die Oppression. In dieser Allianz aus menschlichen und nicht-menschlichen Akteur\*innen und Praktiken visionär Benjamin, so möchte ich argumentieren, Konstellationen einer zukünftigen Gemeinschaft, die es auf den Ruinen des politischen Schlachtfeldes zu errichten gälte. Die Gemeinschaft zwischen der historischen Materialist\*in, ihrer Umwelt und den nicht menschlichen Akteur\*innen ist es nach Benjamin, die den Abgrund, in den sie geblickt hätten, nicht verschwiegen und heroisch verkehrten, sondern diese konstitutive Versehrung und Vernichtung wachhielten, die Geschichte in sich mitführten und aktualisierten, ohne sie unter sich zu begraben und ihr Dunkel zu verleugnen. Gerade an diesem Punkt, so möchte ich in meinem Beitrag zeigen, gibt es eine Verbindung zur Lyrik Brechts, die dessen Kritik an Benjamins Geschichtsauffassung zuwiderläuft.

### **Ulrich Mathias Gerr: *Last der Geschichte – Entstellung und Gerechtigkeit im Kontext des ‘Bucklicht Männlein’***

Der Begriff der Gerechtigkeit wird von Benjamin in einem Spannungsverhältnis von historischem Materialismus und Messianismus in der bildhaften Darstellung des ‘Bucklicht Männlein’ konkretisiert.

Der Buckel ist das dialektische Bild der 'Entstellung' in einer historischen Situation, in der die Menschen durch die Ansammlung materiellen Reichtums, die „ungeheure Warensammlung“ (Marx) der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft, nicht etwa befreit werden, sondern diesen ihnen als „Last auf dem Rücken“ aufliegt. Der Buckel wird zur körperlichen Folge dieser Last, das negativ andere des materiellen Reichtums, ein „Mal“ der „namenlosen Fron“ der Arbeiter (GSII, S. 476).

Gerechtigkeit ist der Prozess der Befreiung von dieser Situation. Den Buckligen, als Personifikation des historischen Leids, zum nicht Buckligen zu machen, ist eine der zentralen Aufgaben des Messias und Hoffnung auf eine Welt, der „die Last vom Rücken genommen“ (GSII, S.438) wäre.

Ist Gerechtigkeit dadurch nur jenseitige Erlösung? Im Erzähleraufsatz wird deutlich, dass der Gerechte eine Gestalt ist, die - sehr wörtlich - „aufrecht“ geht, die also jenseits des Buckels des historischen Leids agiert und in Richtung einer Befreiung zu wirken verspricht. Diese Befreiung obliegt der Figur des Erzählers, weil er gegen das Vergessen agiert, also reflexiv erinnert: „Der Erzähler ist die Gestalt, in welcher sich der Gerechte selbst begegnet.“ (GSII, S.465).

Benjamin beschreibt historische Gestalten wie das 'Bucklicht Männlein' und den 'Erzähler, die die Gerechtigkeit auf eine von zwei Weisen zu realisieren versprechen: sie wird optimistisch nicht erst an einen nachgeschichtlichen Punkt verlegt, oder initiiert pessimistisch zumindest einen 'Aufschub' der Katastrophe im Sinne der Erzählung der Scheherazade.

Der Vortrag entfaltet dies und diskutiert, ob Benjamin durch die Darstellung des aporetischen Verhältnis zwischen Messianismus und Geschichte auf eine historisch situierte Aufklärung zielt: indem die Entstellung als unerträglich dargestellt wird, wird ihre Bedingung destruiert und damit als zu verändernde bloßgestellt.

### **Manuela Sampaio de Mattos: Testimonial Clinics in Brazil – a Benjaminian reading**

The Testimonial Clinics was a project launched in Brazil in 2012 by the Brazilian Amnesty Commission, to oversee reparations for the violence perpetrated by agents of the state during the last period of Brazilian civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985). For five years, the Clinics stood out as a pioneering initiative, even among the other proposals for reparations put forward by an Amnesty Commission that was highly preoccupied with questions of social memory and historical truth. It was the first official attempt by the state to integrate into its history the psychological marks left by the repressive violations committed during the dictatorship, at both the individual and collective levels. The dispositives created during the project culminated in an intense work of memory through testimonies, thus collectively confronting social and individual trauma. Beyond the discussion of whether the clinics were reparative in the sense of justice and in Benjamin's sense, it was clear that bringing up memories of our recent violent past disturbed the political status quo and influenced reactionary far-right movements that have led Brazil in recent years to a scenario very similar to that of the dictatorship. As Benjamin notes, the danger of not dealing with the images of the past that pass by is that humanity becomes a tool of the ruling classes. However, it is not only the question of class struggle that is at stake when we acknowledge the decolonial implications of reading Benjamin's oeuvre in the present - the issues of racism and colonialism function as dominant expressions of power and danger. An experience such as the Testimonial Clinics, despite its evanescent character, offers a remarkable methodology for dealing with flashing images of the past. To approach this historical experience, this presentation analysis draws on Benjamin's notions of collective unconsciousness, memory, reparation, justice, and the state of exception.

## **Justice and Crisis**

### **Filip Brzeźniak: “Enslaved Forebears” or “the Emancipated Heirs” – Walter Benjamin’s Politics of Inheritance and (In)transmissibility as Crisis**

Revolutionary politics and philosophy seem to have always dealt with the question of inheritance in different ways. This is particularly evident in all the changes that have taken place in modern societies and politics. The examples range from the specific measures of abolition of the right of inheritance (Bakunin), to the more general issues of inherited language and circumstances for revolutionary



movements (Marx in "18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte"), to the promises of the oppressed to inherit the land and ruins left by the bourgeois class (Durutti). While Walter Benjamin referred directly to some of these questions (Adorno, Arendt, Derrida, Richter), I believe that many other parts of his writings are in fact indirectly based on specific conceptions of inheritance, understood as possible responses to crises that are seen as groundless (in)transmissibility (Agamben). This interpretive lens should allow us to look differently at the questions of justice and law, revolution, the succession of sovereignty, or the various melancholic (dis)positions we find in his thought.

### **Anna Migliorini: *A Leap and an Are between Krise (und Kritik) and the Real State of Exception***

Already in 1923's material concerning Einbahnstraße, Benjamin writes, starting from his Gedanken zu einer Analyse des Zustands von Mitteleuropa, about hyperinflation and wide-spread misery, in other words on the German economic crisis. Such a crisis soon becomes, in Benjamin's eyes and in the eyes of several other intellectuals, a generalized crisis that reaches other different fields, such as art, politics, experience, and existence itself. In addition to the common notions of an intellectual crisis and a crisis of freedom of speech, which even lead to the so-called "Innere Emigration," the confirmation of such a generalized crisis also emerges around 1930 from the material of Benjamin's and Brecht's (and others') project for the journal "Krise und Kritik". If in this context the task is to reveal and cause the crisis - as Brecht's "welcoming of the crisis" declares - the textual confrontation with a much better known passage from the VIII thesis Über den Begriff der Geschichte identifies the task of 1940 as the one that would cause the "real state of exception," a place for justice.

The purpose of this paper is first to highlight the elements that can be used to distinguish crisis from exception. Then to describe the personal, historical, and political context in which Benjamin's reflections on the subject appear. After that, we will compare the texts of 1930 and 1940 in order to define what, if any, continuity can be found in the idea of crisis and exception as tasks, their relation to law and justice, with regard to the changes of the decade, starting from the historico-political one, moving from a state of crisis to a state of exception, through the changes that primarily concern the transition from the Weimar Republic to the Third Reich, the development and dangers of technology, as well as the limits of conformism.

### **Mikołaj Ratajczak: *Doing the Crisis Justice: Benjamin's Conceptual Politics in Theorizing Crisis***

The crisis is one of the central theoretical problems of Walter Benjamin's writings; it may even be the problem of what we might call Benjamin's political philosophy. It was the multifaceted approach to the question of crisis that made Benjamin's thinking on crisis unique; from the economic crisis presented in One-Way Street, to the crisis of experience in his writings on poverty, to the crisis of modernity presented in the constellations in Das Passagen-Werk. However, the very term "crisis" was not one of Benjamin's technical concepts; one might even hypothesize that Benjamin deliberately tried to avoid writing about crisis as such, or about crisis as a philosophical category. This hypothesis seems even more plausible when one places his writings in the context of other authors writing in the 1920s and 1930s on topics that interested Benjamin, including the philosophy of art, the politics of culture, and modernization, who focused on the category of crisis as a key concept to describe the situation in post-World War I Europe. In my presentation, I would like to sketch out this Benjaminian "conceptual politics" of finding terms and notions to express, represent, and analyze crisis as the proper form of modern experience and modern politics. My aim is to reconstruct the constellation of concepts that Benjamin used to formulate the problem of the crisis of experience in modern conditions, and to reconstruct the way in which Benjamin used these concepts to break out of the conservative paradigm of diagnosing cultural and political crises that prevailed in the interwar period.

### **Caroline Adler: *"...ehemals gesicherte Begriffe von Gerechtigkeit". "Drei Bücher [des Heute]" und die Krisis der europäischen Intelligenz***

Der vorgeschlagene Beitrag widmet sich Benjamins Überlegungen zu einem gerechten Schreiben und seinem Verhältnis zur Krise der europäischen Intelligenz. Im Zentrum steht Walter Benjamins 1928 erschienene Besprechung „Drei Bücher [des Heute]“. In dieser kurzen Sammelrezension entwirft Benjamin die Umriss eines gerechten Schreibens, das „den Menschen nicht wichtig nimmt, sondern die Sachen“, und damit weniger Handlungs- oder Gesinnungsanweisung, als vielmehr Entwurf einer „geglückten Verfassung der Welt“ ist. Darüber hinaus charakterisiert Benjamin in der

Auseinandersetzung mit den drei Autoren Schklowski, Polgar und Benda „Abbilder des heutigen Europa“, von dessen Kultur „nicht viel mehr heut abzusehen oder wirklich ist als ihre namenlose Gefährdung.“ Innerhalb dieser Krise Europas und ihrer Intellektuellen sieht Benjamin in den drei Büchern drei Perspektiven auf ‚europäische Dinge‘, die mehr Darstellung ihres Verhältnisses zur Politik sind, als begriffliche Rede von ihnen. Mein Beitrag möchte zentrale Momente einer Idee von Gerechtigkeit aus Benjamins Kritik herausarbeiten: Gerechtigkeit erscheint in der Buchbesprechung einerseits als Gesinnung und Parole einer überkommenen Intelligenz; andererseits als Form einer Repräsentationskritik, deren „beherrschtere, gemäßere Formen“ ein gerechtes Schreiben jenseits von Protektionismus erprobt. Deutlich werden soll, dass Benjamins Konzept der Gerechtigkeit – mehr Idee als Begriff – keine ‚gesicherte‘ Formel ist, sondern vielmehr als „ewiger“ humanistischer Wert gerade in der Diskussion um die zentralen Werte der europäischen Intelligenz problematisiert wird. Mein Beitrag soll dabei auch zeigen, dass Benjamins Auseinandersetzung mit ‚Gerechtigkeit‘ nicht systematisch, sondern praxisbezogen – als Antwort auf die rechtsextreme und nationalsozialistische Politisierung der europäischen Intelligenz – in der vergleichsweise ‚kleinen Form‘ der Buchkritik Anwendung findet.

### **Brian Britt: *Crisis, Critique, and the Righteous Storyteller***

The impact of Karl Barth's "The Epistle to the Romans" (1918) reached far beyond theologians to a wide intellectual audience, including Walter Benjamin. While scholars continue to debate the extent of Benjamin's engagement with the Swiss theologian, "theology of crisis" describes a cultural context of which Benjamin was certainly aware. Beginning with an account of how Benjamin's writings intersect with the concerns of Barth's theology of crisis, this paper articulates a conception of "crisis" common to both thinkers. Far from lamenting contemporary political culture, Barth and Benjamin share an idea of crisis that, as its Greek root suggests, points to points of radical distinction and the practice of discerning them. For both thinkers, contemporary political programs and legal institutions offered no meaningful way out of the perils of the times, but both cultivated critical practices designed to identify righteous lives.

It is no coincidence, then, that Benjamin's friendship with Barth's student Fritz Lieb centered on their shared political and literary convictions. Benjamin's correspondence with Lieb, and his publication of "The Storyteller" in Lieb's journal *Orient und Occident*, represent, I argue, critical practices consistent with Barth's theology of crisis. Legal and political institutions could not achieve justice, but cultural practices such as storytelling could provide a form of self-recognition for the "righteous man" (*der Gerechte*). The elusive, almost forgotten art of the storyteller, which Benjamin himself practiced in his radio plays, taps into the very forces of life and death. The practice of storytelling responds to Barth's theology of crisis and belongs to the critique of fascism about which Benjamin wrote to Lieb in 1937.

### **Julia Dybczyńska: *The Myth of the Atom***

Just as, for Benjamin, the decomposition of the world becomes a condition for its salvation, contemporary nuclear energy can be seen as a source of both destruction and security. It is precisely on the basis of this ambiguity that this work is an interpretation, in the spirit of Benjamin, of the qualitative research carried out in France, in the Ardèche region, during the period 2022-24, on people who work for or live near nuclear power plants. On the basis of interviews and participant observation, the author attempts to characterize the processes of subjectivation provoked by nuclear infrastructure. She considers the various factors that shape the subjectivity of those who interact with the plant on a daily basis. These include, in particular, technocratic and paramilitary management, the partial protection of workers by professional secrecy, the invisible and irreversible threat of radiation, and the material dimension of the hermetic infrastructure and the organization of its space. The author then explores the relationship between these conditions and the politicization of her interviewees. Furthermore, her interviews raise questions of political autonomy and alienation, and problematize visions of the future and perceptions of time, particularly relevant to the problem of radioactive waste. In the vein of Timothy Mitchell, the author also reflects on the potential opportunities for political emancipation or systemic sabotage that nuclear infrastructure can offer. Her sociological research aims to capture the representations and interpretive frameworks that enable her interviewees to explore, understand, and normalize the power plant-dominated environment. In this paper, however, it becomes a pretext to

address Benjamin's concept of myth, as well as to consider Foucault's theses on governmentality, Rancière's theory of the distribution of the sensible, and Latour's concept of political ecology.

## **Justice and Visions of Community**

### **Carolyn Duttlinger: *Beyond Individual Authorship: Benjamin's Journalism as Intervention and Engagement***

Benjamin's essays of the Weimar years and beyond are acutely aware of the role of communities as agents of change on the road to a just society, as essays such as "The Author as Producer" and "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility" illustrate. What is often overlooked is the formative role played by his journalistic writing of the period, which is centrally concerned with notions of collective experience on both a conceptual and a practical, strategic level. Benjamin's journalism remains a curiously overlooked part of his work, even though it reached by far the largest and most diverse audience during his lifetime. As a journalist, he does not work in isolation, but is part of a network of people that includes contributors, editors, and the many others involved in the production of each newspaper and magazine. This collective effort is visible on the page, where different voices and genres coexist, often in tension. Weimar journalism reflects and shapes an increasingly polyvocal, but also increasingly divided, society. In my paper, I focus on several exhibition reviews that Benjamin wrote for *Die Literarische Welt* and the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. I assess how these texts describe the communities (however transient) that emerge from these particular spaces and their potential to act as agents of justice and change. In writing these reviews, Benjamin, in turn, drew on his own networks of family, friends, and colleagues who were practically involved in the projects he was reviewing. These and other pieces of journalism thus incorporate the thoughts and actions of others, which in turn inspire them. As I conclude, Benjamin's journalistic writing challenges the very notion of individual authorship; it, in turn, requires a fundamentally different analytical approach to grasp the underlying interpersonal networks and their productive and sometimes radical potential.

### **Jaime Cuenca: *An Address with Three Audiences, and with None***

"The Author as Producer" has come down to us in a typed manuscript with a subheading indicating that it was delivered as a speech at the Institute for the Study of Fascism (INFA) in Paris on April 27, 1934. While it is highly plausible that the speech never took place, Walter Benjamin was convinced that it would. As will be shown, the text was decisively shaped by what Benjamin expected of the participants in the INFA. But they were not the only recipients of the text. Benjamin dictated "The Author as Producer" with the clear intention of having it published in the journal *Die Sammlung*, whose staff and readers were mostly German exiles. The mix of expectations about its recipients becomes even more complex when one realizes that the text is deeply indebted to the project of an earlier lecture that Benjamin had unsuccessfully planned to give in French in April 1934. Thus, by shedding some light on the three different audiences Benjamin had in mind during the writing process of "The Author as Producer," this paper will attempt to gain a better understanding of the textual layers and the structure of ideas of the final text.

### **Sabine Schiller-Lerg: *Zensur – zwischen Kontrolle und Unterdrückung: Walter Benjamins Deutung eines Machtinstruments***

Schriftsteller, Autoren, Kritiker verstanden sich als Gemeinschaft, wenn es darum ging, sich gegen Übergriffe der Rundfunkkontrollgremien zu positionieren, die sie kategorisch als Zensur bezeichneten. Ernst Schoen als Programmverantwortlicher des Frankfurter Rundfunks, fühlte sich ihnen vor allem politisch verpflichtet. 1930 versuchte er für einen großen rundfunkkritischen Artikel, der neben vielen anderen Punkten auch die Zensur anprangern sollte, den Freund Walter Benjamin zu gewinnen, der sich darauf einließ. Den Punkt Zensur allerdings wollte er nicht behandeln, obwohl Schoen ihn an den „Chorgeist“ dem „eigenen Stand“ gegenüber gemahnte, ihm einige Beispiele für Zensur lieferte und betonte, wie wichtig dieser Punkt sei. Warum weigerte sich Benjamin dennoch die Zensur in den kritischen Kanon aufzunehmen? Wollte er mit einer Form von Selbstzensur seine eigenen Veröffentlichungsmöglichkeiten in Zeitung und Rundfunk nicht gefährden? Er selbst hatte Erfahrungen

mit der Zensur unter den Bedingungen des Ersten Weltkriegs gemacht und erst später - ab 1933 - mit ihrer härtesten Form, dem endgültigen Veröffentlichungsverbots. Dazwischen erlebte er auf seiner Reise nach Moskau alltägliche parteipolitische Zensurmaßnahmen gegen alle Medien.

Für den Rundfunk in der Weimarer Republik wurde von Anbeginn eine Struktur geschaffen, mit der durch politische und kulturelle Überwachungsausschüsse Eingriffe in die Programmgestaltung möglich waren. Das interne Kontrollsystem diente der Aufrechterhaltung staatlicher Interessen und sollte vor „Missbrauch“ schützen. Damit wurde ein Machtinstrument installiert, das sich das Recht nahm, die inhaltliche Ausrichtung des neuen Mediums zu bestimmen. Allerdings war diese strukturelle Zensur in ihren Entscheidungsprozessen schwer zu durchschauen.

In welchem Kontext thematisiert Benjamin Zensur? Erscheint sie ihm als ein Instrument der Unterdrückung, mit dem das Recht auf freie Meinungsäußerung gebrochen wird oder duldet er gar Kontrolle innerhalb einer politischen Gemeinschaft als nachvollziehbare Stabilisierungsmaßnahme? Wann und wie bezieht er eine klare Gegenposition und wo fügt er sich in bestehende Strukturen? Wie ist die Benjamin'sche Deutung von Zensur?

### **Markus Hennig: *Die Gemeinschaft zwischen Mythos und Gerechtigkeit***

In seiner 1921 veröffentlichten Kritik der Gewalt unterscheidet Walter Benjamin bekanntlich zwischen Recht und Gerechtigkeit, um sich vor allem einer Kritik der mythischen Rechtsformen zu widmen. Die darin aufscheinende Möglichkeit einer Entsetzung des Rechts wurde bisweilen als Hinweis auf eine nicht-legale Gemeinschaft gedeutet. In diesem Sinne wäre die Gemeinschaft das, was Gerechtigkeit verspricht, weil sie soziale Beziehungen nicht mittels des abstrakten Rechts erfasst, sondern den Anderen in ihren je eigenen Ansprüchen gerecht wird.

Insbesondere in seinen jugendlichen Schriften rückt Benjamin die Gemeinschaft ins Zentrum seines Denkens. Allerdings ist es jene aus der Jugendbewegung stammende Begeisterung für die Gemeinschaft, welche verdächtigt wird, den Weg zur faschistischen Volksgemeinschaft geebnet zu haben. Die Aufhebung des Rechts ist darin keine Befreiung, sondern die Fortsetzung der mythischen Gewalt. Im Bezug auf die Gemeinschaft verbergen sich damit zwei konträre Möglichkeiten: entweder wird in ihr eine dem Anderen gerecht werdenden Beziehung vermutet oder in ihr liegt die Fortsetzung der mythischen Herrschaft ohne jegliche rechtliche Regelung.

Der Beitrag möchte dieser Ambivalenz in Benjamins frühem Werk nachgehen. Dafür will er zuerst im Kontrast zu Gustav Wyneken aufzeigen, dass Benjamins Vorstellung von Gemeinschaft sich bereits während seiner Zeit in der Jugendbewegung von autoritären Konzepten unterschied. Anders als Wyneken versteht Benjamin die Gemeinschaft nicht als homogenen Zusammenhang, sondern als „Freundschaft der fremden Freunde“ ermöglicht sie die Verschiedenartigkeit ihrer Mitglieder. Allerdings betont er in seiner Zeit in der Jugendbewegung noch die Bedeutung der Idee als verbindende Kraft. Wie der Beitrag deshalb im nächsten Schritt in Auseinandersetzung mit Benjamins Essay zu Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften zeigt, unterzieht Benjamin die Idee als verbindende Kraft selbst der Kritik. Dieser dem Mythos verfallende Verbindung stellt Benjamin im Essay die Perspektive einer auf Erfahrung begründeten Entscheidung füreinander entgegen. Diese Perspektive will der Beitrag als Ethik einer Gemeinschaft präsentieren, in der die Mitglieder sich nichts vom Anderen erhoffen, sondern alles für ihn hoffen. Erst in dieser nicht-instrumentellen Gemeinschaft erscheint die Hoffnung auf Gerechtigkeit.

### **Thomas Lindenberg: *Ästhetische Erziehung zur Bildung einer gerechten Gemeinschaft***

Bereits in seinen studentischen Aufsätzen äußert Benjamin Überlegungen zur Empfindung von Ungerechtigkeit, dem Begehren nach kollektiver Veränderung und der Bildung einer befreiten Gemeinschaft. Diese sind verbunden nicht bloß mit Ästhetik, sondern genauer: mit dem Anliegen einer ästhetischen Erziehung. Explizit wird ein solches Anliegen im Programm eines proletarischen Kindertheaters. In diesem Text liegt die Betonung auf der revolutionären Kraft von freiem Spiel und Wahrnehmung sowie auf dem Kollektiv, nämlich dem des Publikums, der Arbeiterklasse, der Kinder. Neben weiteren Überlegungen zu Spiel, Kinderbüchern und Kindheit, sind Gedanken zur ästhetischen Erziehung auch in Benjamins medien- und kulturpolitischen Aufsätzen, den literarischen Kritiken und den Texten zu Brecht und seinem epischen Theater zu finden. Darin zeigt sich, dass für Benjamin

ästhetische Erziehung im Hinblick auf gesellschaftliche Veränderung nicht nur Kinder zu adressieren hat. Damit meint Benjamin aber nicht eine Infantilisierung, Bevormundung oder Indoktrinierung „der Massen“. Diese erkennt er als Attribute der bürgerlichen Pädagogik und Intelligenz, von der eine revolutionäre und gerechte sich zu unterscheiden hat. Im Gegenteil scheint Benjamins ästhetische Erziehung eine derartige epistemologische wie ethische Veränderung zu bezwecken, welche im Gramscischen Sinne das Verhältnis zwischen Intellektuellen und Subalternen (sowie zwischen Kunstwerk und Publikum, Kapital und Proletariat, Erziehung und Kind ) auf den Kopf stellt und im Sinne einer erlösten Gemeinschaft überwindet.

Der Vortrag zeigt den Zusammenhang von ästhetischer Erziehung und Gerechtigkeit in Benjamins Schriften auf und hebt jene Aspekte hervor, die die Arbeit einer solchen ästhetischen Erziehung an der Vorstellung und Bildung einer gerechten Gemeinschaft ausmachen: Anerkennung von historischer und gesellschaftlicher Ungleichheit; Hinterfragung der eigenen gesellschaftlichen Stellung; Kritik der undialektischen Beschwörung von Gemeinschaft; Brauchbarkeit im Hinblick auf kollektive Veränderung. Des Weiteren werden Parallelen zu den Überlegungen anderer Denker:innen zur ästhetischen Erziehung und Gerechtigkeit gezogen, insbesondere zu Gayatri Chakravorty Spivaks Projekt einer ästhetischen Erziehung als „training of the imagination for epistemological performance“.

**Sophia Buck: *Walter Benjamin's 'Outsiders': Against 'Optische Täuschungen' of National communities and their literary histories***

While Benjamin does indeed invoke the concept of community in a positive way on various occasions, he also decisively challenges certain connotations, especially instances of "Volksgemeinschaft" in his journalistic writings. In "Kaiserpanorama" from Einbahnstraße (1928), for example, he exposes the notion of "Völkergemeinschaften Mitteleuropas" as a xenophobic chronotopos resulting from a specifically German crisis and thus as an unjust "optische Täuschung," "Trugbild" or "Luftspiegelung". On the contrary, for Benjamin the topos points to "Gemeinschaftskräfte" at work on German soil itself. What they generally perpetuate are "isolierte Standpunkte" (WuN 8, 24f) that lack a counter-perspective from outside or abroad. In turn, this paper seeks to explore not one of Benjamin's alternative visions of community, but an alternative framework for reflecting on or countering such modes of phantasmagorical essentialization.

When Benjamin observes seemingly national intelligentsias or literary scenes in the second half of his discussion of the 1920s, he tends to avoid the framework of national communities. Instead, he remarkably often mentions "outsiders" to communities, scenes, circles, groups, or collectives in the USSR, France, or the Weimar Republic. For example, he introduces his German readers to notable "outsiders" in his survey report "Neue Dichtung in Russland" (1927), which aims to question the traditional practices of a "wissenschaftliche Literaturgeschichte" (WuN 14.1, 146) - a genre or site for institutionalizing the imaginary possessions of a national community. For Benrubi's survey Philosophische Strömungen der Gegenwart in Frankreich (1928), he highlights the „markanten Outsider, von denen wir mit viel Interesse erfahren, in welcher Gesellschaft sie vor Jahren einmal ausmarschierten“ (WuN 13.1, 156). He also comments on Siegfried Krakauer's publications and the epistemic and methodological merits of his "konsequentes Außenseitertum" (WuN 13.1, 238). And finally, he deals with Andre Gidé's outsider position or "Ausnahmefall" and yet the most "representative Erscheinung" (WuN 14.1, 176) for France.

What characterizes these outsider positions is structurally different from the mode of isolation or the "optische Täuschung eines isolierten Standpunktes". It points to the function and possibility of (self-)reflection or a heightened reflexivity, and thus allows us to reflect on the extent to which Benjamin was conceptually experimenting here with moments of epistemic justice against xenophobic figurations of community.

**Ori Rotlevy: *Educative Violence and Just Communities?***

The connection between community and justice is somewhat implicit in Benjamin. In "Towards a Critique of Violence," he criticizes revolutionary attempts to constitute a community that will bring justice to the earth. Justice, for him, disrupts the order of law, or (as his earlier notes suggest) the order of property. Benjamin does not offer an alternative image of a just community. But can we learn something about the connection between the two concepts from the images of community implied in his

"Critique"? Rather than focusing on revolutionary communities, my talk will examine two other examples: a theological and a pedagogical one.

Benjamin's famous example of divine violence - Korah's horde - implies a unique image of community: the annihilation of boundaries and laws is the annihilation of privilege. As Benjamin points out, Korah's horde were Levites, privileged people. Divine violence thus gathers a community in which the status of privilege is never fixed and can never justify the determination of the community and its leader.

But how might this inform our own world? The second example suggests that "educative violence," "the manifestation [of divine violence] in contemporary life," offers a similar constitution of community without fixed social status. Benjamin's provocative concept of violence draws on "The Life of Students" and his correspondence with Scholem. The violence of education concerns the undoing of the fixed status of teacher and student and the destabilization of the subject. It resists the relations of dependence that maintain the possession and acquisition of knowledge. It makes possible a community based on immersion in a shared medium in which individuals transform themselves and the medium. These kinds of communities, which undo the orders of possession and the fixed hierarchical status that laws maintain, are not necessarily just, but at least they do not undermine the possibility of justice.

### **Ewa Majewska: *Procedures of Justice – Towards Historical Dimensions of Weak Solidarity***

In his recent piece "Sprawiedliwość" (Justice), Michał Zadara poses several pertinent questions about the work of trauma, transcending its historical actuality and penetrating the "now" of the community. His main focus is on "Polish 1968," which took place in March, not May, and led to the forced migration of some 25,000 Polish Jews. Yes, only thirteen years after the end of the Second World War. My own work consists of reconstructing the inconsistent and scattered archives of the "Hiacynt" actions carried out by the Polish police at the end of the 1980s with the aim of infiltrating, monitoring and controlling the gay community ("male homosexuals", as the documents say) and its international contacts. In the early stages of my research, I noticed the relief and gratitude of the gay men I interviewed in the course of my reconstructive work, and I realized that perhaps a version of "weak messianism" was taking place in this process, in which the oppressed group appreciated and supported the meticulous efforts to reconstruct the otherwise dispersed memory of the "Hiacynt" events. The procedures of justice can take different forms, and in the course of this project (Public against their will) the work that the state should have done many years ago is carried out beyond its apparatus. While institutions leave the entire community, not just sexual minorities, in a confusing and intimidating state of trauma by not investigating their own actions, intergenerational solidarity, linking past, present and future generations, as Walter Benjamin suggested in *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, can perhaps contribute to justice being done beyond punitive regimes. In my presentation, I will discuss research activism as a procedure of communal justice organized by the principles of solidarity of the weak, following Benjamin's *Theses*... but also the work of James Scott, Vaclav Havel, Sara Ahmed and Jack Halberstam.

### **Turkuaz Benlioglu: *Towards an Improperly Human Community? Walter Benjamin on Solitude and Community***

In a correspondence from the early 1910s, we find the outlines of a theory that Walter Benjamin never fully developed: a theory of community. As he reflects on the concept of community, Benjamin is repeatedly drawn to its relationship to the question of solitude or loneliness, and argues that while a "true" community necessitates "destroy[ing] solitude, eliminat[ing] it", "the conditions for solitude among people" nevertheless "have yet to be created." He thus rejects one kind of solitude while embracing another, and begins to rethink the meaning of community dialectically with specific reference to a kind of solitude whose "conditions" have yet to be realized. In this sense, Benjamin's theory of community — if there is one — is inseparable from a theory of solitude, and a closer examination of this semi-visible thread running through his writings reveals that Benjamin understands community to be based on an irreducible yet "common," "unelevated" solitude that describes the condition not only of the singular human being, but also of every creature. In this paper, I will explore the idea of what I will call an "improperly human community" that we glimpse in a number of Benjamin's writings on politics, melancholia, and creatureliness. The paper will show that Benjamin's idiosyncratic approach to the question of community and that of solitude speaks to some contemporary debates in the environmental

humanities about the relations between humans and nonhumans and the question of responsibility in the literal sense of "ability to respond" in the context of ecological catastrophe.