



*Routledge Studies in Twentieth-Century Philosophy*

# **REVOLUTION AND HISTORY IN WALTER BENJAMIN**

**A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS**

Alison Ross



ROUTLEDGE



# Revolution and History in Walter Benjamin

“This is an excellent and original book on Benjamin’s idea of revolution. Ross strives to develop a reading that is philosophically informed and as it were willing to follow Benjamin by clarifying his pronouncements rigorously rather than taking them to be merely suggestive.”

—*Eli Friedlander, Tel-Aviv University*

“Alison Ross’ new book is another major contribution to Benjamin scholarship. It shows convincingly that Benjamin’s conceptions of revolution and historical knowledge rely upon an idiosyncratic, theologically-based theory of experience that is not fully consistent in some of its key conceptual features. In turn, as the book illuminates brilliantly, this has major ramifications for contemporary projects in critical social theory.”

—*Jean-Philippe Deranty, Macquarie University*

“Alison Ross provides the first comprehensive account of the concept of revolution in Walter Benjamin’s work. A must-read not only for Benjamin scholars, but for everyone interested in radical collective agency today.”

—*Daniel Loick, Goethe-University Frankfurt*

“Alison Ross’ book brilliantly inquires into Benjamin’s conception of politics and experience and their entanglement. As Ross points out, Benjamin’s understanding of revolutionary experience is based in individual experience, and it raises the problem of how the new concrete collective experience and practice he envisages can emerge.”

—*Massimiliano Tomba, University of California, Santa Cruz*

This book places Benjamin’s writing on revolution in the context of his conception of historical knowledge. The fundamental problem that faces any analysis of Benjamin’s approach to revolution is that he deploys notions that belong to the domain of individual experience. His theory of modernity with

its emphasis on the disintegration of collective experience further aggravates the problem. Benjamin himself understood the problem of revolution to be primarily that of the conceptualisation of collective experience (its possibility and sites) under the conditions of modern bourgeois society. The novelty of his approach to revolution lies in the fact that he directly connects it with historical experience. Benjamin's conception of revolution thus constitutes an integral part of his distinctive theory of historical knowledge, which is also essentially a theory of experience. Through a detailed study of Benjamin's writings on the topics of the child and the dream, and an analysis of his ideas of history, the fulfilled wish, similitude and communist society, this book shows how the conceptual analysis of his corpus can get to the heart of Benjamin's conception of revolutionary experience and distil its difficulties and mechanisms.

**Alison Ross** is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Monash University, Australia. She is the author of *Walter Benjamin's Concept of the Image* (Routledge, 2015) and *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy: Presentation in Kant, Heidegger, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy* (2007). She is also the author of the Oxford Bibliography Online entry on Walter Benjamin.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

# Routledge Studies in Twentieth-Century Philosophy

**Walter Benjamin's Concept of the Image**

*Alison Ross*

**Donald Davidson's Triangulation Argument**

A Philosophical Inquiry

*Robert H. Myers and Claudine Verheggen*

**Heidegger's Shadow**

Kant, Husserl, and the Transcendental Turn

*Chad Engelland*

**Ernst Jünger's Philosophy of Technology**

Heidegger and the Poetics of the Anthropocene

*Vincent Blok*

**Bertrand Russell and the Nature of Propositions**

A History and Defence of the Multiple Relation Theory of Judgement

*Samuel Lebens*

**Benjamin, Adorno, and the Experience of Literature**

*Edited by Corey McCall and Nathan Ross*

**Heidegger on Technology**

*Edited by Aaron James Wendland, Christopher Mervin, and Christos*

*Hadjioannou*

**Revolution and History in Walter Benjamin**

A Conceptual Analysis

*Alison Ross*

For more information about this series, please visit: [www.routledge.com/Routledge-Studies-in-Twentieth-Century-Philosophy/book-series/SE0438](http://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Studies-in-Twentieth-Century-Philosophy/book-series/SE0438)

# Revolution and History in Walter Benjamin

A Conceptual Analysis

Alison Ross

First published 2019  
by Routledge  
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 2019 Taylor & Francis

The right of Alison Ross to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-0-367-07752-5 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-429-02258-6 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon  
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	viii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	ix
Introduction: Revolutionary Experience	1
1 The Child	16
2 The Dream Metaphor	45
3 Meaning and ‘Complete Security of Existence’	75
4 Benjamin’s Theory of Historical Knowledge	96
5 Revolution and Society	118
Conclusion: The Revolutionary Standstill	143
<i>Bibliography</i>	147
<i>Index</i>	151



# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Australian Research Council for sponsoring the research for this book under its Future Fellowship scheme. A number of people generously offered helpful advice and assistance on the fellowship application: Deepa Balakrishnan, Joanne Witheridge, Catherine Ryan, Jamin Chen, Graham Oppy, and Andrew Benjamin. Particular thanks are due to Pauline Nestor for her support and encouragement.

I would like to acknowledge the anonymous reviewers of this manuscript for their insightful comments and helpful suggestions. Andrew Weckermann at Routledge is a very efficient and capable editor and a pleasure to work with.

None of the material in the pages of this book has previously been published. A much earlier version of the general line of argument presented here was published as ‘Walter Benjamin’s Idea of Revolution: The Fulfilled Wish in Historical Perspective,’ in *Humanities Research*, Vol. 4:1, 2017. The argument of this article is superseded by the present work.

Amir Ahmadi read the manuscript and made several useful criticisms, especially on the detail of the argument in the fourth chapter. I would also like to thank Richard Eldridge for his careful comments on the first chapter.

Outside the world of this book, I have been fortunate to have an entertaining group of friends and colleagues in the Philosophy Department at Monash University. I would particularly like to thank Linda Barclay and Jakob Hohwy. Linda suggested a trip away, and, it turned out to be a brilliant idea. Jakob has been a steady friend through thick and thin and a great person to visit at mealtimes. Monima Chadha may not know this, but she is a good person to talk to about the weather. My thanks also to Nancy Viviani, Paul Redding, Lisa Trahair, Lisabeth During, Simon Lumsden, Knox Peden, Nick Heron and Jess Whyte.

Amir brings all the colour into my life. This book is for him; and also for my father, who retains the child’s fresh and vivid perspective on life; and for my brother, who appreciates what this means.

# Abbreviations

- GS:** Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972–1991).
- SB:** Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften Briefe*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno, 2 vols. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978).
- C:** Walter Benjamin, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910–1940*, trans. M. R. Jacobson and E. M. Jacobson, eds. G. Scholem and T. W. Adorno (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- SW:** Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, eds. Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996–2003).
- U:** Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998).
- A:** Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999).



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

# Introduction

## Revolutionary Experience

One of the most continuous preoccupations of Walter Benjamin's writing is to conceptualise the *fulfilling experience*. The thesis of this book is that the notion of fulfilling experience is the touchstone for Benjamin's conception of revolution; it sets his treatment of this topic apart from any other. Self-presence, at once absorbing and reflective (or introspective), characterises this type of experience. The tension between these two poles, which to some extent coincide with the relations of the self to the present and the past, is obvious. The fulfilling experience totally claims the ego, who is nonetheless imbued with a thorough awareness of the moment as fulfilment of a (past) wish. One must assume that absorption in the moment (as in the case of the child at play) and reflection (as in remembrance) do not completely coincide, which would make of the 'fulfilling experience' a contradictory concept. In fact, we see in this dialectic the difficulties involved in Benjamin's theory of modernity: the recovery of the past wish has become the condition of integrating experience and hence the possibility of community.

The idea of fulfilling experience is treated in Benjamin's discussions of the vivid experiences of childhood and, occasionally in some of his early essays, 'youth' and the 'eros of creativity' [SW I, 43]. The scale of the difficulties involved in the idea come to the fore, however, in his treatment of history. In the *Arcades Project* he treats the abolition of the boundary between 'inside' and 'outside,' as this is expressed in the architecture of the nineteenth century arcades. 'More than anywhere else, the street reveals itself in the arcade as the furnished and familiar interior of the masses' [A [d°, 1] 879]. The openness of this architectural form receives a complex treatment. These nineteenth century arcades are 'wish symbols' or 'dream images' of a certain type of social existence whose fulfilment becomes possible uniquely in the twentieth century by way of 'interpretation' of the images and 'extraction' of their truth content. Benjamin collected the material for this project between 1927 until his death in 1940. The extant project, published in its unfinished form, consists in a series of folders that include citations and commentary on material drawn from the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> It contains material on the steel-and-glass construction of the nineteenth century Paris arcades, on marginal social types and experiences, such as the gambler,

## 2 Introduction

flâneur, and prostitute (the ‘trash of history’), and on topics from social history, such as the arrangement of merchandise in department stores and furnishings in domestic interiors. The structure and the construction material of the arcades occasion the experience of being (at) home in public and social spaces, albeit fleetingly, with all the contradictions that this experience brings into play. One aspect of such an experience for Benjamin is, of course, the question of social alienation. He sees in the nineteenth century Paris arcades the distorted image of the emancipatory promise of the new technology. The nineteenth century is the ‘childhood’ and the ‘dreaming’ self of the twentieth century. The *meaning* of the childhood and dream visions awaits the moment of awakening and enlightenment. ‘The dream waits secretly for the awakening; the sleeper surrenders himself to death only provisionally, waits for the second when he will cunningly wrest himself from its clutches. So, too, the dreaming collective, whose children provide the happy occasion for its own awakening’ [A [K1a, 2] 390]. I hope I will have explained this statement of Benjamin’s ‘method’ by the end of this book.

The idea of an experience of public homeliness is set out as a feature of urban life in the city of Naples in the 1925 piece he co-authored with Asja Lacis. They refer glowingly in this essay to the porosity of the boundary between private life and public existence, which they liken to the collective existence in an African kraal. The seeming interpenetration of festive and ordinary days receives particular attention [SW II, 417]. In the same vein, in his essay on surrealism Benjamin comments on the revolutionary ‘virtue’ of living in a glass house and praises the surrealists’ acuity in perceiving the revolutionary potential in the ‘outmoded’ [SW II, 209–10]. These experiences look past prosaic activities and their schedule to an everyday existence that has taken on the colour of a festival. Similarly, they disregard the received hierarchical categorising of things and attempt to bring out the significance of the discarded and the disreputable. Thus illuminated, such phenomena are credited with a unique cognitive capacity. In the *Arcades Project*, the disrepair of the once shining commodities, especially the once new technological objects, provides the perspective from which the historical ‘truth’ of the Paris arcades becomes apparent. This Surrealistic optics of the commodities of the nineteenth century has been connected to Benjamin’s conception of ‘origin’ formulated in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* [*Trauerspiel*]. We will see that this position, maintained by influential commentators, is untenable.

The ‘perceptibility of history’ is the condition of the political usefulness of history, which is its *raison d’être* in Benjamin’s theory of historical knowledge. The question of ‘presentation’ becomes an important methodological consideration of ‘materialist historiography.’ Historical objects’ must be experienceable, the context of meaningful human engagement, rather than a set of indifferent or even alienating facts. History thus conceived can affect ways of being and acting. Benjamin’s notion of ‘nonsensuous similarity’ is pivotal to his experiential theory of the ‘historical object.’ He invokes the

figure of the child who experiences fulfilment in play where anything at all may be rediscovered as a toy, as a unique object of care and pleasure. The idea of wish fulfilment, taken from (remembered) childhood experience, is the keystone of Benjamin's conception of revolutionary experience, transposed from the individual to the collective sphere. In play, the child constantly experiences the world in fresh and vividly absorbing ways.<sup>2</sup> 'The child,' writes Benjamin in the first sketches of the *Arcades*, 'can do what the grownup absolutely cannot: remember the new once again' [A [M<sup>o</sup>, 20] 855]. One may express the idea thus: in the child's experience, the routine is unique and the unique is routine.

## I

The references Benjamin makes to vivid experience do not belong solely or primarily to the register of visual perception, as some commentators have contended.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, one of the constant themes across his corpus is the power of illumination found in language. We will have to explain the monopoly of language on truth which is the epistemological foundation of Benjamin's theory of historical knowledge. The Adamic 'naming language' is the repository of genuine knowledge in Benjamin's early essay on language [SW I, 71]. It is man's 'linguistic communion with God's word' [SW I, 69]; through it man experiences things in their essence. In the essay 'Goethe's Elective Affinities' Benjamin gives language a moral dimension. He accordingly considers two different types of life, the one ambivalent and equivocating, the other decisive and truthful, since illuminated on 'the ground of logos' [SW I, 326–327]. Benjamin contrasts authentic discourse (logos) with the degraded use of language in chatter as well as reticence, which fosters ambiguity and is the sign of being enthralled by mythic powers. His notion of 'revolutionary experience' must be placed in the frame of the fundamental opposition of truth and myth. Revolutionary experience is opposed to 'aesthetic' bourgeois life, which is ruled by conventions and appearances and seduced by sensuous forms. Its exemplar is the child at play that in some respects forms the model for the Surrealistic notion of authentic experience, i.e., the ordinary as radiantly meaningful. We find the opposition of truth and myth in his essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities* too: the resolute 'stride . . . over the stage of choice to decision. Only the decision, not the choice, is inscribed in the book of life. For choice is natural and can even belong to the elements; decision is transcendent' [SW I, 346]. The moral and indeed existential significance of clarity in and through language must be understood against the continuation of the mythic hold over life in bourgeois aestheticism.

Benjamin is a theorist or student of human experiences, specially the marginal ones. The extreme, he claims, reveals the true meaning of the general. His interest in the child is in the child's experience of the world that is lost to the adult, and with it the possibility of fulfilment. We must keep in

## 4 Introduction

mind that ‘fulfilment’ is an inherently temporal category for Benjamin, just as ‘alienation’ is. In the fulfilling experience one is both absorbed in the moment and recalls the wish that anticipated the moment. This is the reason Benjamin emphasises that the capacity to wish is the *sine qua non* of the fulfilling experience. The child’s experience is paradigmatic for Benjamin. He must have it in the back of his mind when he asserts that the authentic historical knowledge is a category of experience, namely that of a specific past epoch. Revolution is first and foremost the redemption of a (past) wish, which requires both the recognition of the wish and the capacity to realise it. The redemption is also a ‘genuine liberation from an epoch’ [A [h°, 3] 883]. Thus, Benjamin understands revolution primarily as a category of experience. Already in his 1914 essay ‘The Life of Students’ Benjamin had called for an ‘unceasing spiritual revolution’ [SW I, 43]. Admittedly, ‘revolutionary experience’ is not a concept of political theory, and perhaps appears problematic within its conceptual frame. Nonetheless it can illuminate some of the limitations in the more conventional political-theoretical conceptions of revolutionary transformation.

## II

This book does not intend to rehearse a case for Benjamin’s revolutionary *bona fides*. It is not just biographical details such as his friendship with Bertolt Brecht or intimate history with Asja Lacis that can be mentioned in support of his revolutionary sympathies. His works, too, underwrite his reputation as a supporter of the proletarian, ‘revolutionary cause’ in Europe between the wars. We may think of his late theses in ‘On the Concept of History’ or the early ‘Critique of Violence,’ and many others in between.<sup>4</sup> Beyond the narrowly political understanding of the term ‘revolutionary,’ some of his writing such as the *Arcades Project* may also seem to warrant the description on account of the nature of their conception or methodology. Benjamin’s acuity in perceiving the transformations that beset modern experience when it is unmoored from tradition has been noted. His insightfulness about the disappearance of certain institutions and experiences is supplemented by the attention he gives to the promising potentials of new forms of experience (e.g., ‘Experience and Poverty’ in SW III, 731–736). He held, for instance, that mechanically reproducible art forms could replenish the depleted corporeal and communal patterns of modern experience and set them off in a new, ‘revolutionary’ direction. Indeed, the promise of film was revolutionary for Benjamin both in terms of the experience it offered of artistic media, as well as its supposed connection to revolutionary politics [SW III, 117].

Despite the relative popularity of the topics related to revolution in Benjamin scholarship the significance of ‘revolutionary experience’ is not appreciated and understood. This is somewhat surprising, since like other social or political topics Benjamin treats ‘revolution’ as a category of experience.

Perhaps the disparateness of the elements that are amalgamated in his writings on revolution can to some extent explain this oversight.<sup>5</sup> After all, there are in Benjamin's thinking about revolution, in addition to (supposed) Marxist elements, epistemological theses drawn from a theological conception of language, somewhat idiosyncratic methodological suppositions, his 'critique of myth,' messianic notions, as well as reflections on revolutionary figures and situations purported to have general import, and still other elements. In a letter to Scholem, in which he explains his understanding of communism, Benjamin describes it as a deeply personal way of envisioning a society in which his life as a writer is productive and valued [C, 439]. Do these different elements fit together, even as an account of Benjamin's revolutionary motivations and aspirations? And how do we assess the picture of 'revolutionary experience' these anomalous and disparate elements present?

Early in her book *On Revolution*, Arendt outlines the history of the concept of revolution in astrology.<sup>6</sup> The modern political application of the concept is a metaphorical displacement of the Copernican notion of planetary revolution.<sup>7</sup> The displacement fundamentally alters the sense of the astrological conception of revolution. Instead of referring to the ordered, predictable cycle, in its acquired political sense it is the irresistible movement involved in the planetary revolutions that is viewed as important. The astrological sense of irresistible movement is lost in the transition, however, since what is now understood as irresistible is the political claim of the 'multitude' who had hitherto been 'driven by daily needs' and now seek the space and light of the public realm.<sup>8</sup> In the context of the storming of the Bastille in the French Revolution where the political meaning is first consolidated the claim of the 'multitude' is 'irresistible' and 'irrevocable' in the sense that it is 'beyond the power of a king.'<sup>9</sup> 'Nothing could be farther removed from the original astrological meaning of the word "revolution" than the idea of which all revolutionary actors have been possessed and obsessed, namely, that they are agents in a process which spells the definite end of old order and brings about the birth of a new world.'<sup>10</sup> Arendt ties revolution to the 'ancient' struggle between freedom and oppression. And she insists that in its power of inauguration revolution must be distinguished from insurrections and rebellions which fail to establish new political institutions. For Arendt 'the political realm' is 'the only realm where man can be truly free.'<sup>11</sup> This means that for Arendt 'revolution' in its political sense and application is not only a transposed notion but also restricted to the topic of political power.

The pathos of historical consciousness in Benjamin is fundamentally connected with the experience of time. For Arendt, in contrast, it is primarily a tool of historical diagnosis; historical pathos is a consequence of the human capacity to inaugurate, which stimulates the awareness of the (historical) frailty of what exists: just as it begins in time so it will pass away. In the age of modern revolutions this capacity of inauguration is extended to an unprecedented degree. Benjamin conceives of the pathos of the passage



## 6 Introduction

of time as a potential source of revolutionary motivation. We can see the pathos in his abhorrence of common sense and historicist presentations of the past as ‘finished,’ and in his attempt to construct a terminology to talk about the possibility of redeeming past sufferings in a meaningful way.<sup>12</sup> As Habermas remarks, within the Marxist tradition ‘Benjamin was one of the first to emphasise a *further* moment in the concepts of exploitation and progress: besides hunger and oppression, failure; besides prosperity and liberty, happiness.’<sup>13</sup> These ‘further’ moments are not a matter of conceptual amendment in the field of political theory. The extension of the concept of exploitation or progress to the experiences of failure and happiness continue Benjamin’s preoccupation with guilt and anxiety and hence with the possibility of emancipation from them. These terms signal the existential stakes of Benjamin’s perspective, which is altogether distant from Arendt’s essentially political view of the ‘ancient’ contest between ‘freedom’ and ‘oppression’ to which the modern era attaches the pathos of historical consciousness.

Arendt retains the idea of irresistible movement from the astrological definition of revolution albeit giving it a new reference, as we saw. Benjamin, on the other hand, defines revolution precisely in opposition to it, not only in the sense of a cessation of a seemingly irresistible ‘progress’ but also as redemption of the past [SW IV, 402]. In an important sense Benjamin’s notion of remembrance is pitched against the irreversibility of time [A [K1, 3] 389]. For Arendt, the struggle for freedom against tyranny and oppression is the motor of history; whereas what is important for Benjamin is to escape from forces of totalisation, under which we must reckon historical determinism of any sort. His comments on Blanqui’s prison notes published as *Eternity by the Stars* is revealing in this respect [A [D5, 7-D 9, 1] 111–6]. Blanqui, a failed, imprisoned revolutionary and a hero of the Paris commune assimilates history to cosmology, or rather to the modern equivalent of astrology. In Benjamin’s thinking, the ‘irresistible movement’ of history, borrowed from astrology, sooner or later leads to the closure of eternal return and hence the fatalistic schematisation of human life. Benjamin counters the borrowed term and its surreptitious totalisation with the quasi-mystical notions of ‘time to come’ and ‘caesura,’ the transcendent moment, understood first and foremost as the point of escape or the destructive breach that would undo immanent totalisations, be it history or nature. One cannot overemphasise the significance of this optics in Benjamin. It underlies all his writing. The idiom is, of course, entirely foreign to Arendt’s pragmatic perspective.<sup>14</sup> For Benjamin revolution is the exit from ‘history,’ the destruction of ‘history’ from outside. Likewise, historical knowledge has nothing to do with historical laws or stages. In respect to the issues at the centre of conventional political theory, Benjamin is an outsider. His conception of revolution is no less ‘practical’ for that, however. In his historiography ‘politics attains primacy over history’ [A [h°, 2] 883]. The experience in the ‘dialectical image’ of the meaning of a past epoch is not a literary transposition of moral idealism. Revolution as Benjamin understood it is a

concrete experience. *His* question was how to conceive of it as also a collective experience—and *not* how to turn it into a collective action.

Marxist tradition is no more helpful in providing a canon to measure Benjamin's writing on revolution than Arendt's cold war attempt to defend the grandeur of the American revolution through the vocabulary of 'freedom' resisting 'tyranny.' Benjamin was critical of the Marxist conception of 'the revolutionary situation.' His objections range from the Marxist theory of history to its specific conception of class struggle.<sup>15</sup> The main points of similarity between Benjamin and Marx include the Hegelian idea that (transcendent) truth manifests itself in history.<sup>16</sup> However, he rejects the 'Marxist' epistemology of history. 'Resolute refusal of the concept of "timeless truth" is in order: Nevertheless, truth is not—as Marxism would have it—a merely contingent function of knowing' [A [N3, 2] 463].

Benjamin's various statements on methodology battle the ghost of arbitrariness. The notion of intention-less truth, which supports the idea of a transcendent perspective, is one of his earliest weapons in this fight [U, 36]. He also supposes, as we saw, that the 'extreme cases' of the nineteenth century can supply general insights into history; taking one's measure from the borderline cases is a secure way to establish the 'truth' of historical knowledge.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, he contests the premise that objects contain meaning that could be 'divined' by an interpreter. His early writing develops a critical account of the idea that meaning is embodied in things and perceptible as such in them. In 'Goethe's Elective Affinities' he identifies the obsessive, quasi-hermeneutic relation to phenomena as the basis of the bourgeois, fateful life and contrasts it with the solid ground of the 'logos.' Words alone can communicate ascertainable meaning. The *Arcades Project* does not comprise things but words or 'citations,' which he nonetheless calls 'images.' Benjamin's conception of (historical) meaning needs to be carefully differentiated from the idea of hermeneutic intuition. Without the transcendent power of language, human life will be ruled by fear and anxiety, which are the consequence of the mythicised nature and hermeneutics of sensuous forms. The conceptual background of revolutionary experience in Benjamin's early work is not only the notion of fulfilling experience but also that of 'tradition' understood as collective experience. In a sense, revolutionary experience inherits from both, which, as I mentioned, are in some respects at odds with each other. As we will see, Benjamin tries to develop a number of concepts to reconcile them.

The theory of the experience-ability of historical meaning is the core of Benjamin's conception of revolutionary experience. Such meaning is emphatic in the sense that it is existentially gripping and motivating. He addresses it in different contexts as the experience that cuts through forces of totalisation. Benjamin's messianism must be connected to this theme. It has the quality of 'freshness' in perception that he ascribes to the child's experience. It differs from the perception of the child which is absorbed in the present moment, however. A shift in perception changes the meaning

## 8 *Introduction*

of the past, a theme Benjamin takes from Jewish messianic tradition. The noted Chicago scholar J. Z. Smith contrasts locative and utopian religions. The first adheres to the idea that order is divinely created and must be preserved; the second maintains that the current cosmic arrangement is corrupt and must be transformed or abandoned.<sup>18</sup> In his 1932 essay 'In the Sun' Benjamin recounts the story of the Hasidim regarding the world to come. This apocryphal source recounts that in the kingdom to come everything will be as it is now, only a little different [SW II, 665]. Whatever one makes of this story, its significance for Benjamin seems clear and sharply stands out against Smith's two types of religions. The 'little difference' is wholly a matter of perception, a matter of experience. It confirms for us the fundamental place of the concept of experience in Benjamin's thinking about revolution.

### III

Benjamin's aspiration to find a way to conceive of revolutionary experience as collective experience fails. The failure is a structural feature of the conception, whose constituents are all drawn from individual experience. How 'experience' can be conceived at the collective level is one of the abiding problems of Benjamin's writing. His attempts to grapple with it are no less fascinating for the fact that they founder. The attempts in the literary and Marxist scholarship to pad out a 'collective-to-come' or a revolutionary project located in the 'future' are at odds, I will show, with every important aspect of Benjamin's thinking. In critical accounts, such as Jacques Rancière's, Benjamin is criticised for placing revolutionary motivation in the past and locating the revolution out of reach. In sympathetic accounts, such as Michael Löwy's and Alexander Gelley's, Benjamin is a thinker of the revolutionary 'future.'<sup>19</sup> The position must overlook both Benjamin's messianic understanding of revolution and his theory of historical knowledge. The clear implication for contemporary readers is that in Benjamin's view the revolutionary opportunity as he conceived it has now passed. The revolutionary experience is an experience of absorption, akin to the Surrealist intoxication or what Benjamin calls 'profane illumination'; and it is so because for Benjamin revolution is a type of experience—or it is nothing. There is no theory of 'revolution' in Benjamin's writing, strictly speaking, but only an account of revolutionary experience.

This book examines in detail the five main themes that Benjamin uses to describe this revolutionary experience; these are (childhood) fulfilment, the dream, meaning, history, and the collective. I consider under the topic of history the vexed issue of the convergence of Benjamin's messianic theory of history with his notion of the materialist knowledge of the historical object. This convergence seems to be the way he tries to resolve the problem of revolutionary motivation. The final chapter treats, as a counterpoint, the difficult issue of Benjamin's conception of communist society, which can only be reconstructed from his scattered references to the 'collective' and the

‘classless society’ [SW II, 207–221; III, 305–306; IV, 401–411]. The theme of the collective is treated in Chapter 5 in relation to Michael Löwy’s influential interpretation of Benjamin’s Bachofen essay, but this theme is also examined through other frames of reference in each of the previous four chapters.

The organisation of each chapter draws on writings from different periods of Benjamin’s corpus and engages with some of the significant scholarly debates over the interpretation of specific points. I have come to the view, as I mentioned, that there is no *concept* of revolution in Benjamin, and if we look at his corpus this statement is neither surprising nor questionable. Rather, what we have and can analyse in conceptual form is the idea of revolutionary experience, for which we can draw on his entire writing. In an important sense, Benjamin only ever wrote on a single topic: experience. The literature on Benjamin, which is extraordinary in its volume and spread, lacks an analytical and comprehensive treatment of the topic of revolution. The studies which do treat this topic focus primarily on the late work, which they supplement with questionable readings of ‘Critique of Violence’ and the ‘Life of Students’ from the early writing. In my view, this foreshortening distorts their interpretations. The scholarship is wont to gloss over (potentially) problematic points in Benjamin’s writing; and there is a general tendency to avoid engaging with other scholars on disputed points of interpretation. One consequence of the echo-chamber effect in Benjamin studies is that despite his currency as a major reference in various fields, concept-critical engagement with Benjamin’s thinking is rare, and the discussion of his work is often hardly more than an ‘application’ of his terminology.<sup>20</sup> One particular problem that I argue exercised Benjamin’s mind is the idea of a collective experience, which is clearly important for the topic of revolution and which is difficult to formulate on the basis of Benjamin’s conception of experience as this is developed in his early writing. I do not think that Benjamin scholarship has duly appreciated the importance of this problem, partly because it has not been placed in the right frame.

In the first chapter I examine the different contexts in which Benjamin describes revolution as a type of vivid experience, akin in its freshness and engaged nature to that of a child at play. The conception is in some important respects the model for Benjamin’s idea of revolutionary experience; the notion of absorbing experience figures as something of a measure in the other contexts (e.g., the Surrealist intoxication) he uses to explore the idea. With the aim of exploring the distinct and multiple resonances attached to this idea, I connect the mnemonic experience of childhood fulfilment with those contexts in which Benjamin treats the feeling of collective belonging as a kind of auratic experience in his signature works on Baudelaire and Goethe.

In the second and third chapters, I consider the conceptual constraints under which Benjamin poses the relation between individual experience and collective experience. To this end, these two chapters critically examine

Benjamin's conception of revolution as awakening from dreaming, and they situate it in relation to notions such as 'involuntary memory' and 'distracted reception.' Benjamin uses these notions to describe 'collective experience,' for example, in his analysis of the experience of watching a 'progressive' film. In the second chapter, I focus particularly on the implications of Benjamin's reversal of the usual allocation of the dream to the individual sphere and the waking experience to the shared world, and critically assess some of the scholarship on Benjamin's conception of the dream (Jacques Rancière and Eli Friedlander) in relation to this reversal. In the third chapter, as a way of illuminating the peculiarities of Benjamin's conception of the formation of existential meaning, I compare his work with the approach to the topic of meaning in Niklas Luhmann.

In the fourth chapter, I take a close look at the threads that compose Benjamin's theory of historical knowledge. Theology is present in this theory not only as a frame but also in the way the relation with the past, which is to say the 'historical object,' is conceptualised. The all-important notion of redemption connects this theory with other themes in his writing, particularly 'dream' and 'wish fulfilment.' I will show that despite Benjamin's amalgamation, followed by his commentators, his 'dialectical image' cannot have a 'monadological structure,' as this notion is understood in his book on the German baroque mourning-play. In the *Arcades* and 'On the Concept of History,' Benjamin outlines a theory of historical knowledge that is fundamentally political. The practical (revolutionary) nature of historical knowledge is incompatible with the ideas of 'origin' and 'redemption' outlined in the Epistemo-Critical Prologue to the *Ursprung*.

For Benjamin, as we will see, what is past is not only knowable but indeed experienceable, under certain conditions—which are in fact the same thing: genuine historical knowledge belongs to the sphere of experience. Benjamin does not place *the* revolution in an unspecified future (Gelley), as a purist ideal (Rancière) or (inevitable) goal, but in the twentieth century, *to the extent that it is conceivable*. Such is Benjamin's theory of the revolution, as concrete as one could possibly demand. That history falsified his theory is another matter. Revolution, Arendt maintains, is an idea.<sup>21</sup> That may well be; nonetheless, it must become a meaningful lived experience to exist. For Benjamin, revolution is both transcendent (with respect to history) and a concrete collective experience. This, again, brings us back to the question of the revolutionary experience and that of the mechanisms and contexts by which individual experience (*Erlebnis*) may be plausibly thought to be shared.

The final chapter focuses on the tensions between the concepts of 'community' and 'experience' in their implications. Given the content and valence of each concept, what are we to make of the picture of the 'classless society' that Benjamin's writing sketches? I examine the notion of revolution in Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence' and argue that it is imagined within the literary schema of the struggle (or quest). Benjamin's understanding of the

‘collective’ is a topic that has not been given serious analytical attention. I discuss it in relation to the debate on the distinction between community and society in late nineteenth and early twentieth century German philosophy. The positions in this debate, as presented in Helmuth Plessner’s classic study *The Limits of Community*, may not map exactly onto the topography of Benjamin’s concepts, but insofar as Plessner’s analysis too is focused on experience, it provides an illuminating contrast for understanding Benjamin’s notion of the collective.

## Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Trans., Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999). Cited in parentheses in the text as A, followed by the convolute reference and page.
2. The position is outlined in a number of different contexts. One of the most important is Benjamin’s writing on the mimetic faculty and similitude from the 1930s. In these short pieces he outlines the notion of nonsensuous similarity. The word ‘nonsensuous’ draws attention to the fact that ‘similarity’ is not determined by perceptual ‘evidence’ of ‘similarity’ as such, but rather that it consists in a ‘gift for producing’ and ‘recognizing’ cosmic similarities. Childhood play, he argues, is the ‘school’ of similitude. Benjamin, SW II, 720. I discuss these essays in detail in chapter 3.
3. Cf. Howard Caygill’s, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London, UK: Routledge, 1998), where the thesis of visual experience is used to interpret the entire oeuvre. Caygill specifically demotes the significance of language in Benjamin’s thinking in order to defend this interpretation. The position yields some interesting commentary especially regarding Benjamin’s relationship to Kant on the topic of experience. It is ultimately untenable, however, in the way it excludes language, arguably the most resonant frame for the entirety of Benjamin’s thought, as a pertinent topic for understanding the corpus. Amongst others, the position quite deliberately obviates the need for any analysis of the context of the messianic overtones in Benjamin’s theory of naming language. See Caygill on language, xiii; messianism, 149–153; and visual experience, 79–96.
4. More detailed discussion of these issues can be found in Esther Leslie and Michael Löwy. See Leslie’s, *Walter Benjamin* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2007), and Löwy’s, *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe, a Study in Elective Affinity*, Trans., Hope Heaney (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), esp. 95–127. Lacis persisted with the project of introducing Benjamin and Brecht despite the initial misgivings of the two parties. On Benjamin’s friendship with Brecht see Erdmut Wizisla’s, *Benjamin and Brecht: The Story of a Friendship*, Trans., Christine Shuttleworth (London, UK: Verso, 2016). The choice of subtitle is a reference to Gershom Scholem’s, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship* (New York, NY: New York Review of Books, 2003).
5. There are a few scattered essays and one slender book that deal specifically with the topic: Susan Buck-Morss, ‘Walter Benjamin: Revolutionary Writer I’ and ‘Walter Benjamin: Revolutionary Writer II,’ *New Left Review*, No. 128 (July–August, 1981), 50–75 and No. 129 (September–October, 1981), 77–95; Ned Lukacher, ‘Walter Benjamin’s Chthonian Revolution,’ *Boundary 2*, Vol. 11, No. 1–2, *Engagements: Postmodernism, Marxism, Politics* (Autumn, 1982–Winter, 1983), 41–57; and Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin’s ‘On the Concept of History,’* Trans., Chris Turner (London, UK: Verso, 2005). Löwy’s book was originally published in French in 2001, and the other

essays come from the spurt of English language Benjamin scholarship in the early-mid '1980s, now well over three decades old. Each of these treatments focuses specifically on Benjamin's late work on history. Löwy's book consists in a close reading of Benjamin's Theses 'On the Concept of History.' In other writing he makes the connection between these theses and certain 'key' essays. He lists in this regard the 1914 essay 'The Life of Students' and the essay from the mid 1930s titled 'Johann Jakob Bachofen.' I discuss Löwy's selection of the relevant texts from Benjamin's writing and the specifics of his position, which is the most comprehensive existing treatment of the topic, in the fifth chapter. One may concur with Löwy's statement in *Fire Alarm* that Benjamin's Theses 'On the Concept of History' 'is perhaps the most important revolutionary document since Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach,"' 4, but differ with his account of what the term revolution means for Benjamin. Löwy makes a version of this claim in a few places, including *Redemption and Utopia*, 126, where Benjamin's Theses are described as 'one of the most radical, innovative and visionary documents of revolutionary thought since Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach."' On the theme of revolution, we can also mention the more literary angle taken in Margaret Cohen's, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1995). I concur with Cohen's general position on the significance of surrealism for Benjamin. But, for various reasons, which this study will elucidate, I think that the literary approach is too piecemeal to capture all the elements involved in Benjamin's idea of revolution. Neither, I will show, is the focus on the late work on history one finds in Löwy sufficient for a comprehensive angle on the topic.

6. See also Reinhart Koselleck, 'Historical Criteria of the Modern Concept of Revolution,' *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Trans., Keith Tribe (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), 43–57.
7. [Cf. A [K1, 2] 388]. It is well known that the term 'revolution' has astrological origins. In the description it provided of the orbital path of a planet around another, the term had the connotations of irrepressible and irreversible movement which would later be attached to its political meaning. Marx, for instance, called revolutions 'the locomotive of all history'; his theory of history also emphasised the impersonal factors, such as the tension between forces and relations of production, involved in the generation of revolutionary events. (Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France: 1848–1850* [London, UK: International Publishers, 1972], 120. See Arendt's discussion, *On Revolution*, 255). In Copernicus's *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*, which established the importance of the term in the natural sciences, the word revolution conveys the 'regular, lawfully revolving motion of the stars' (Arendt, *On Revolution*, 42). Violence and novelty, which are the core elements of political revolution, are foreign to this celestial context. The scientific idea of revolution as a 'recurring, cyclical movement' did have a metaphorical application in politics. However, in such application 'it could only signify' in Hannah Arendt's words, 'that the few known forms of government revolve among the mortals in eternal recurrence and with the same irresistible force which makes the stars follow their preordained paths in the skies' (Arendt, *On Revolution*, 42). According to Arendt, the word is used as a political term for the first time in the seventeenth century to describe not the revolution that broke out in England, but the restoration of the monarchy after the overthrow of Cromwell's Rump parliament in 1660. The word was also deployed later in the seventeenth century in 1688 when the Stuarts were expelled and monarchical power was transferred from them to the Protestant William and Mary. Hence the early history of the metaphorical application of the word 'revolution' to politics described the inevitable restoration of forms of power and traditions of political order, not their wholesale replacement with something 'new.'



In the early stages of the American and French Revolutions the people involved thought themselves to be engaged in restoring an old order that had been disturbed by the ‘abuses of colonial government’ or the ‘despotism of absolute monarchy’ (Arendt, *On Revolution*, 44). When, in the course of events, these actors became aware that restoration was an impossibility the word ‘revolution’ had already acquired its new meaning’ (Arendt, *On Revolution*, 45). Along with it came other adjustments to our political vocabulary. Crucially, the use of ‘conservatism’ to signal ‘a political creed and ideology owes its existence to a reaction to the French Revolution and is meaningful only for the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ (Arendt, *On Revolution*, 44). Similarly, the association of revolution in the natural sciences with ‘irresistibility’ is retained in the acquired political meaning of the term. It was during the French Revolution that the word was used to emphasise an irresistible movement and it did so ‘without [bearing] any connotation’ that this movement was ‘a backward revolving’ one (Arendt, *On Revolution*, 47). When the king was told that the Bastille had fallen on 14 July 1789 he exclaimed that a revolt had occurred, but the duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt corrected him, stating that it was a ‘revolution.’ Liancourt, on Arendt’s description, saw that the claim made by the ‘multitude’ who had hitherto been ‘driven by daily needs’ for the space and light of the public realm was ‘irrevocable and beyond the power of a king’ (Arendt, *On Revolution*, 48). ‘The notion of an irresistible movement, which the nineteenth century soon was to conceptualize into the idea of historical necessity, echoes from beginning to end through the pages of the French Revolution. Suddenly an entirely new vocabulary is introduced into political language’ (Arendt, *On Revolution*, 48). Arendt’s account of the inaugural use of the word ‘revolution’ in the court to the king contrasts with Raymond Geuss’s comment that the story is too neat: among other reasons to be suspicious of it is the ‘preternatural prescience’ it attributes to the courtier. After all, the ‘age of revolutions’ characterised the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, not just in terms of ‘the radical transformation of the political and socio-economic structures of various European societies’ but also in terms of the way ‘people acquired certain general ideas about the possibilities of large scale social change and the human ability to unleash and perhaps control it.’ Raymond Geuss, ‘Dialectics and the Revolutionary Impulse,’ *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, Ed., Fred Rush (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 103–138, 103. Geuss ascribes the prescience of all this in the courtier’s comment, but the inference is not a valid one. All we need to see in this story is the feasibility of the meaning that is retrospectively read into his comment. It is no more than a convenient and dramatic way to mark the semantic shift in the term; it doesn’t pretend to rule out other sites where the shift is enunciated and registered and discussed. As Arendt notes, the ‘very usage’ of this ‘relatively old term which only slowly acquired its new meaning . . . indicates most clearly the lack of expectation and inclination on the side of the actors, who were no more prepared for anything unprecedented than were the contemporary spectators’ (Arendt, *On Revolution*, 41). ‘The notion of an irresistible movement’ really acquires its new meaning as ‘historical necessity’ in ‘the pages’ devoted to the French Revolution (Arendt, *On Revolution*, 48).

8. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 48.

9. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 48. On her definition of revolution, the status of this moment as revolutionary is only able to be determined with hindsight. For Arendt, a revolution is distinguished from a revolt or an insurrection because its ‘irresistible’ movement not only destroys prevailing order but also inaugurates in its wake new political institutions. The vocabulary specifically marks the limitations of institutional reform; revolutionary agents seek to install something new rather than preserve and perfect existing (cosmological) order.



## 14 Introduction

10. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 42.
11. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 114.
12. Walter Benjamin, A [N11, 4] 476 and A [N8, 1] 471.
13. Jürgen Habermas, 'Walter Benjamin: Consciousness Raising or Rescuing Critique?' *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Reflections*, Ed., G. Smith (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), 90–128, 121.
14. See Arendt's description of the conditions of the nineteenth century 'professional revolutionists,' such as Blanqui, who, despite their incarceration, spent their lives 'in study and thought, in theory and debate, whose sole object was revolution,' *On Revolution*, 259.
15. Naturally, it may be objected that there are diverse 'Marxist' conceptions of the revolutionary situation. This is not Benjamin's concern; his focus is the disconnect between the conception(s) and history. He characterises the 'entire theoretical armature' of Marxism as the attempt to weld together three things: the concept of the class struggle, the notion of historical development or progress, and the ideal of the classless society: 'From this erroneous conception,' he writes, 'Marx's epigones have derived . . . the notion of the "revolutionary situation," which, as we know, has always refused to arrive' [SW IV, 402–403].
16. Eric Hobsbawm derides Hegel's writing as 'tautological' and claims that Marx redeems Hegel's circular thinking in focusing his analysis on material progress in history. See Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction,' *Karl Marx, Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, Trans., Jack Cohen (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1965), 16.
17. Cf. Benjamin, U, 160.
18. J. Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 121.
19. See Jacques Rancière, 'The Archaeo-Modern Turn', *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*. Ed., Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 24–41; Alexander Gelley, *Benjamin's Passages: Dreaming, Awakening* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2014); and Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History'*, Trans., Chris Turner (London, UK: Verso, 2005).
20. For instance, it is very rare to see in Benjamin scholarship detailed discussion of the scholarship in the field, especially of the contesting scholarship from different disciplinary approaches. It is almost as if each piece of scholarship seeks out a direct connection with Benjamin's writing, unmediated by the milieu of interests or scholarly fashion that no doubt frames, even unawares, the connection the author makes to these 'hallowed' texts. The silence expresses the wish that the alternative position, by definition invalid, would somehow evaporate. Thus, much scholarship is addressed to the converted. This can make the claims involved in such writing seem untested for readers interested in the debate that belongs alongside the exercise of exegesis. Some recent approaches from German studies and comparative literature (Gelley, Fenves, Hamacher), for instance, do not seem to register the implications of those approaches influenced loosely by Marx (Leslie, Buck-Morss, Löwy) or philosophical approaches (Friedlander). I have discussed Fenves and Hamacher elsewhere (see, Alison Ross, 'The Distinction Between Mythic and Divine Violence: Walter Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" from the Perspective of "Goethe's Elective Affinities"', *New German Critique*, Vol. 41, No. 1, (2014), 93–120). Gelley's recent treatment of *The Arcades Project* strangely makes no mention of Eli Friedlander's related monograph on the topic (Gelley, *Passages*). Gelley is one of the very few Benjamin scholars to refer to Rancière's reading of the dream; however, he misconstrues

his position. I discuss Rancière's and Gelley's interpretation of Benjamin's use of the dream as the conversion point from individual to collective experience in detail in chapter 2. I also discuss Friedlander's position on the dream and the wish in chapter 2. Eli Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin: A Philosophical Portrait* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). From the Benjamin scholarship my main focus, however, will be on some of the details of Löwy's interpretation of Benjamin, which are the most relevant for our topic. I mention and discuss the detail of Löwy's interpretation throughout but focus primarily on his reading of Benjamin's Bachofen essay in chapter 5 on the idea of communist society.

21. The 'idea' of 'which all revolutionary actors have been possessed and obsessed. . . [is] that they are agents in a process which spells the definite end of the old order and brings about the birth of a new world' (Arendt, *On Revolution*, 42).

## References

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Ed. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press. 1999.
- Aristotle. *Poetics: The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Volume Two. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1984.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Eds. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhuser. 7 Volumes. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag. 1974/1989. (Abbreviation: GS).
- Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften Briefe*. Eds. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno. 2 Volumes. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag. 1978. (Abbreviation: SB).
- Benjamin, Walter. *Selected Writings*. Eds. Michael W. Jennings et. al. 4 Volumes. Cambridge, MA and London, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 1996/2003. (Abbreviation: SW).
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press. 1999. (Abbreviation: A).
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Trans. John Osborne. London, UK and New York, NY: Verso. 2009. (Abbreviation: U).
- Bloch, Maurice. *Marxism and Anthropology: The History of a Relationship*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press. 1983.
- Blumenberg, Hans. *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 1985.
- Blumenberg, Hans. *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 2010.
- Blumenberg, Hans. *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman: A Protohistory of Theory*. London, UK: Bloomsbury. 2015.
- Bredenkamp, Horst. *From Walter Benjamin to Carl Schmitt, via Thomas Hobbes*. Trans. Melissa Thorson Hause and Jackson Bond. *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1999. 247-266.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. *Walter Benjamin: Revolutionary Writer I*. *New Left Review*, No. 128. July/August, 1981a. 507-5.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. *Walter Benjamin: Revolutionary Writer II*. *New Left Review*, No. 129. September/October, 1981b. 77-95.
- Brger, Peter. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Trans. Michael Shaw. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. 1984.
- Caygill, Howard. *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*. London, UK and New York, NY: Routledge. 1998.
- Cohen, Margaret. *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press. 1995.
- 148 Eiland, Howard and Jennings, Michael. *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*. Cambridge, MA and London, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 2014.
- Eldridge, Richard. *Images of History: Kant, Benjamin, Freedom and the Human Subject*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. 2016.
- Elster, Jon. *Ulysses Unbound: Studies in Rationality, Precommitment, and Constraints*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 2000.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1904*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1985.
- Friedlander, Eli. *Walter Benjamin: A Philosophical Portrait*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2011.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. New York, NY: Continuum. 2004.
- Gelley, Alexander. *Benjamin's Passages: Dreaming, Awakening*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press. 2014.
- Geuss, Raymond. *Dialectics and the Revolutionary Impulse. The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*. Ed. Fred Rush. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 2004. 103-138.
- Goethe, J.W.V. *Elective Affinities*. Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books. 1971.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *Walter Benjamin: Consciousness Raising or Rescuing Critique? On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Reflections*. Ed. Gary Smith. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 1991. 90-128.
- Hanssen, Miriam Bratu. *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. 2012.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. *Introduction. Karl Marx, Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*. Trans. Jack Cohen. New York, NY: International Publishers. 1965.

Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848*. New York, NY: Vintage Books. 1996a.

Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875*. New York, NY: Vintage Books. 1996b.

Honneth, Axel. *A Communicative Disclosure of the Past: On the Relation Between Anthropology and Philosophy of History in Walter Benjamin*. *The Actuality of Walter Benjamin*. Eds. Laura Marcus and Lynda Nead . Special Issue: *New Formations* No. 20. Summer 1993. London, UK: Lawrence and Wishart. 8394.

Jouvenel, Bertrand de . *The Pure Theory of Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 1963.

Jung, C.G. *The Basic Writings of C. G. Jung*. Ed. Violet Staub de Laszlo . New York, NY: Modern Library. 1959.

Koselleck, Reinhart. *Historia Magistra Vitae: The Dissolution of the Topos into the Perspective of a Modernized Historical Process, Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Trans. Keith Tribe . Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 1985. 2138.

Koselleck, Reinhart. *Historical Criteria of the Modern Concept of Revolution. Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. Trans. Keith Tribe . New York, NY: Columbia University Press. 2004. 4357.

Leslie, Esther. *Walter Benjamin*. London, UK: Reaktion Books. 2007.

Leslie, Esther. *Colonial and Communist Pedagogy*. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, No. 1. 2016. 18.

Lindner, Burkhardt. *The Passagen-Werk, the Berliner Kindheit, and the Archaeology of the Recent Past*. Trans. Carol B. Ludtke . *New German Critique*, No. 39. Autumn, 1986. 2546.

Lwy, Michael . *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe, a Study in Elective Affinity*. Trans. Hope Heaney . Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 1988.

Lwy, Michael . *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamins On the Concept of History*. Trans. Chris Turner . London, UK: Verso. 2005.

Luhmann, Niklas. *Essays on Self Reference*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press. 1990.

Luhmann, Niklas. *Social Systems*. Trans. J. Bednarz Jr. and D. Baecker . Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 1995.

Lukacher, Ned. *Walter Benjamins Chthonian Revolution*. *Boundary 2*, Vol. 11, No. 1/2. Engagements: Postmodernism, Marxism, Politics, Autumn, 1982/Winter, 1983. 4157.

Mrkus, Gyrgy . *Marxism and Anthropology: The Concept of Human Essence in the Philosophy of Marx*. Trans. E. De Laczay and G. Mrkus . The Netherlands: Van Gorcum Assen. 1978.

Marquard, Odo. *In Defense of the Accidental*. Oxford, UK: Odon. 1991.

Marx, Karl. *The Class Struggles in France: 1848-1850*. London, UK: International Publishers. 1972.

Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Volume 1. Trans. Ben Fowkes . Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books. 1976.

Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Trans. Ed. Martin Milligan . New York, NY: Dover. 2007.

Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. *Early Writings*. London, UK: Penguin Books. 1992. 279401.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice . *Signs*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. 1964.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice . *Phenomenology of Perception*. London, UK: Routledge. 1989.

Missac, Pierre. *Walter Benjamins Passages*. Trans. Shierry Weber Nicholzen . Cambridge, MA and London, UK: The MIT Press. 1995.

Moss, Stéphane . *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*. Trans. Barbara Harshav . Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press. 2009.

Osborne, Peter and Charles, Matthew . *Walter Benjamin*. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta . Fall, 2015 Edition. URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/benjamin/>>.

Plessner, Helmuth. *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism*. Trans. Andrew Wallace . New York, NY: Humanity Books. 1999.

Proust, Marcel. *Against Saint-Beuve and Other Essays*. London, UK: Penguin Books. 1988.

Rancire, Jacques . *The Archaeomodern Turn. Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*. Ed. Michael P. Steinberg . Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 1996. 2441.

Richter, Gerhard. *A Matter of Distance: Benjamins One-Way Street through The Arcades*. *Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project*. Ed. Beatrice Hanssen . London, UK: Continuum. 2006. 132157.

Ross, Alison. The Distinction between Mythic and Divine Violence: Walter Benjamins Critique of Violence from the Perspective of Goethes Elective Affinities. *New German Critique*, Vol. 41, No. 1. 2014. 93120.

Ross, Alison. *Walter Benjamins Concept of the Image*. New York, NY: Routledge. 2015.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques . *Les Rveries du promeneur solitaire. uvres completes. Tome I: Les Confessions*Autres textes autobiographiques. Paris: d. Pliade. 1959.

150 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques . *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. DAlembert on the Theatre*. Trans. Allan Bloom . Glencoe, IL: The Free Press. 1960.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques . *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. Trans. Charles E. Butterworth . Indianapolis: Hackett. 1992.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques . *Of the Social Contract. The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*. Ed. Victor Gourevitch . Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 1997. 39153.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques . *Emile*. New York, NY: Dover. 2013.

Salzani, Carlo. *Experience and Play: Walter Benjamin and the Pre-Lapsarian Child*. *Walter Benjamin and the Architecture of Modernity*. Eds. Andrew Benjamin and Charles Rice . Melbourne, VIC: Re-Press. 2009. 175201.

Schmitt, Carl. *Political Theology*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 1985.

Scholem, Gershom. *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*. New York, NY: New York Review of Books. 2003.

Smith, J. Z. *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. 1990.

Starobinski, Jean. *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer . Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. 1988 [Paris, 1971].

Tiedemann, Rolf. *Dialectics at a Standstill: Approaches to the Passagen-Werk*. Trans. Gary Smith and Andr Lefevere . *Walter Benjamin , The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin . Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press. 1999. 929945.

Tnnies, Ferdinand . *Community and Civil Society*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 2001.

Vatter, Miguel. *The Republic of the Living: Biopolitics and the Critique of Civil Society*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press. 2014.

Weigel, Sigrid. *Walter Benjamin: Images, the Creaturely, and the Holy*. Trans. Chadwick Truscott Smith . Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 2013.

Witte, Bernd. *Paris-Berlin-Paris: Personal, Literary, and Social Experience in Walter Benjamins Late Works*. Trans. Susan B. Winnett . *New German Critique*, No. 39. Autumn, 1986. 4960.

Wizisla, Erdmut. *Benjamin and Brecht: The Story of a Friendship*. Trans. Christine Shuttleworth . London, UK: Verso. 2016.