



**Citation:** M. Montanelli (2018) Walter Benjamin and the Principle of Repetition. *Aisthesis* 11(2): 261-278. doi: 10.13128/Aisthesis-23419

**Copyright:** © 2018 M. Montanelli. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/aisthesis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## Walter Benjamin and the Principle of Repetition

MARINA MONTANELLI

(University of Florence)

marina.montanelli@gmail.com

**Abstract.** The following essay aims to analyze the problem of repetition in the reflection of Walter Benjamin. Showing first of all how this concept, singularly neglected by critics, is the unexpected centre towards which the philosopher's entire reflection converges, thus offering a new reading of his entire production. All the vast domains of Benjamin's speculation are thoroughly rethought starting from this idea, revealing how what is at stake is a more articulated movement of the eternal recurrence of the same, which characterizes mythical temporality. A movement that has to do with the constitution of the human and which indeed exhibits an intimate link between repetition and innovation, repetition and the constructive principle. Another intention of this text is therefore to carry out an in depth analysis of this connection, to question the nature of such a gesture, both repetitive and differential, and its relationship with the recurrence of the ever self-same, therefore with the possible way out of the myth.

**Keywords.** Benjamin, repetition, innovation, eternal recurrence, constructive principle.

---

Throughout his whole theoretical reflection, Walter Benjamin never ceased to focus his attention on the problem of repetition: although treated, for the most part, in the form of fragmentary annotations, illuminating as much as they are short and often hermetic, this issue serves as the backdrop to many of the fundamental ideas developed by Benjamin, innervating them and thus constituting a decisive conceptual nexus. Without ever being thematised in an essay or in a specific work, the concept of repetition runs through all of Benjamin's production, from his early writings to his late works. Yet, in the now vast and critical bibliography available, attempts to analyze this notion are very rare. Many, in fact, have dealt with this problem mostly indirectly and in passing: it is the case of some articles that have tried to establish interesting but also fleeting comparisons with other authors – for example with Kierkegaard (Katz [1998]), with Derrida (Angehrn [2001]) or Einstein (Haxthausen [2004]) –, or works that focus mainly on the question of historical temporality or on modernity (Guglielminetti [1990]; Kaufmann [2002]; in part Fenves [2011]: 103-124). The

text that follows, which sums up the results of a broader research conducted in recent years (Montanelli [2017]), therefore aims primarily to offer a survey – a concise one – of Benjamin's reflection on the topic. In this sense, the analysis will be, in part, also a chronological one. From a thematic point of view the text will be articulated on the basis of three fundamental axes: the first one can be defined as gnoseological and, at the same time, ontological, in that it moves from Benjamin's conceptualization of the notions of repetition and myth, and will allow to analyze the relationship between repetition, language, knowledge and history; the second has an anthropological-aesthetic quality, insofar as it will focus on the link between repetition, perception and construction of the symbolic space; the third will allow to return to the problem of history, in connection with that of political praxis and revolution, and finally to deal with the ethical question concerning happiness and its relationship with the gesture repeating what has been.

The present work, therefore, does not intend to be merely a historical-philological work; on the contrary, the attempt is to analyze the philosophical range of the concept of repetition. The article intends to highlight how repetition constitutes a key idea of Benjamin's thought and how, contrary to what the main critical contributions have claimed, it does not pertain only to the eternal recurrence of the same; indeed the aim is to answer the question concerning the possibility of *another* repetition, exactly the one that shows an intimate connection with the constructive principle, with variation, with what is new.

## 1. THE TWO METAPHYSICAL PRINCIPLES OF REPETITION

In the ferment of Benjamin's university years, when he joined the *Jugendbewegung* and the circle of Gustav Wyneken, in the first texts published in the periodicals of the student movement, we can witness the emergence of the concept of repetition in Benjamin's thought. In fact, the problem of

time, of the relationship between present and past, between tradition, historical repetition and transformative action, captures his attention right from the start.

The crisis of the Wilhelminian values, of the German aristocracy and bourgeoisie, had caused the younger generations to pose questions about change, about the possibility of new social and cultural upheavals. It was in such a climate that Benjamin shared and embraced the idea that the *awakening* from this state of general decadence could come only from a pedagogical renewal, from the revision of all values on the part of youth (see Benjamin [1911a]: 26-32). Renewal and revision – Benjamin states in these first pages – must entail, first and foremost, a radical opposition to the «pious reiteration or regurgitation» of the tradition taught in schools and universities (Benjamin [1913a]: 94). Also, and above all, this opposition must be against the last illusion generated by a certain interpretation of Darwinism, that of historical evolution. Already here Benjamin lays the groundwork for his critique of the concept of progress: behind the idea of a continuous and ineluctable advancement, in fact, he identifies the tired repetition of what has been; behind the ideas of rationality and tolerance typical of enlightened socialism he envisaged the dogmatic rigidity of religion, and the hindrance to revolutionary action in a wait-and-see attitude (Benjamin [1912]: 70, 65).

In this period Nietzsche is the fundamental author with whom Benjamin tries to reflect on the interruption of the gesture which is limited to reiterating what exists: indeed, following the *Second Untimely Meditation*, one must «use the past for life and [...] refeashion what has happened into history» (Nietzsche [1874]: 11). It is not, therefore, so much the movement of a drastic break that constitutes the way out of the circle of repetition, but, on the contrary, a true broadening of the latter, which, however, must be oriented and filtered by the present: youth capable of *critical history* – according to the renowned tripartition of history in monumental, antiquarian and critical (Nietzsche [1874]: 14-22) – *repeats* and *resumes* the events of the past which release a «construc-

tive drive» (Nietzsche [1874]: 38), and serve the transformative action of today. The tired rumination of what has been must be replaced by a *selective oblivion*, «able to forget at the right time as well as to remember at the right time» (Nietzsche [1874]: 10). The «center, where the new comes into being» (Benjamin [1914a]: 168) is thus to be found in the same dynamics of repetition; however, it may be grasped only if youth – or the critical historian – places himself «on the threshold of the moment» (Nietzsche [1874]: 9), if the present becomes actual again, manifesting the «hurry to act» in each and every instant (Benjamin [1913c]: 123). To swim counter current, «against the historical waves» (Nietzsche [1874]: 49) – here one cannot but think of the later «to brush history against the grain» of the seventh thesis (Benjamin [1940a]: 392) – is the primary gesture to interrupt, on the one hand, the litany of «the eternal Yesterday that always was and always returns» (Benjamin [1911b]: 41), and, on the other, to avoid drowning in the waters of progress.

The core of every progressive ideology – the representation of time as a continuous and qualitatively homogeneous line – is indeed shattered. In a well-known passage of *The Life of Students* Benjamin presents his very first elaborations of an idea of an intensive time, qualitatively differentiated, also influenced by messianic suggestions present in these writings. It is the time of the «immanent state of perfection», «in which history appears to be concentrated in a single focal point», the elements of which must be made to emanate from the bosom of «every present» (Benjamin [1915a]: 37). On a subjective level, it is the same temporality that, in *The Metaphysics of Youth* Benjamin identifies in diaristic writing: the suspension of the «calendar time, clock time, and stock-exchange time» typical of a diary, allows to experience temporality in its purest state; written «at intervals», it interrupts the «chain of experiences» and its pauses allow things to be illuminated by «timelessness» (Benjamin [1914b]: 11-12). A diary demands completeness: «It is the unfathomable document of a life never lived, the book of a life in whose time everything that we experienced

inadequately is transformed into experience perfected». It is because «events showed themselves to be undecided» (Benjamin [1914b]: 11, 15) that Benjamin can allude to the *redemptive and immanent state of perfection*.

From these reflections contained in his early writings, after the rift between Benjamin and Wyneken, the problem of repetition thus began to be interwoven with a concept that Benjamin never ceased to address: the concept of myth. The mythical dimension appears to Benjamin as a totality of meaning that devours everything, that does not tolerate anything outside of itself, and therefore, as a dimension that is immediately that of destiny: the governing principle of «*ananke*» guides the mythical world, its ineluctable force rests on «the supreme sovereignty of relationship» (Benjamin [1915b]: 22, 34; see also Menninghaus [1986]: 94-97). It is this binding trait that, according to Benjamin, constitutes the violent aspect of the structure of myth: what dominates is the «chain of guilt and atonement», which ties human beings, condemning them to the eternal repetition of the same (Benjamin [1919]: 203). It is not a dead structure, typical only of archaic societies, on the contrary, its remains are visible in the contemporary world: moreover, law is mythical, and in setting its boundaries, it always assigns a destiny, or an infinite circularity triggered by the dispositif of debt of advanced capitalism. In fact, law is both the origin and expression of mythical forces. Mentioning a passage in *The Ethics of Pure Will* by Hermann Cohen, Benjamin describes the legal system as a fatal dispositif to which nothing escapes: the original gesture of law, in fact, is such that «orders themselves seem to cause and bring about [...] infringement» (Benjamin [1921a]: 249). This is where *violence* and, at the same time, *power*<sup>1</sup> rest: the seizure of man inside a de-humanizing vortex. In this sense Benjamin can write that in the domain of law «it is not [...] really man who has a fate» (Benjamin [1919]: 204), «the marked bearer of guilt» is, rather, «mere life» (*bloßes Le-*

<sup>1</sup> As is known, the term *Gewalt* indicates both the sphere of violence and that of authority, of power.

*ben*), that life which, caught in its only natural and non-historical existence, is rendered helpless in the face of this gesture (Benjamin [1921a]: 251, 250). Every juridical institution preserves in itself, in a more or less latent form, this original violence, better, it *repeats* its primordial gesture. So capitalism, in the 1921 fragment, displays the last and perhaps most terrifying sneer of the temporality of destiny: indeed it expels any transcendent element, to incorporate everything, including God, into its own demonic plan of immanence, paced by the monotonous rhythm of guilt and debt (*Schuld*). Unlike the pagan rite, whose circular course still entails interruptions aimed at regenerating the same mythical order, capitalism needs no pauses – there is no need of weekdays, what is left is only gruesome festive days (Benjamin [1921b]: 288-291) –, it is the realization of «only one fate» (Benjamin [1921a]: 242).

Eternal recurrence seems to correspond to the historical time that Benjamin described also in his study on Baroque and its dramas: a temporality in which the Christian conception of history, understood as *historia salutis*, is shattered, in which the historical process itself is devoured by nature, by an unstoppable advance towards decay and catastrophe, cancelled and incorporated into a deterministic closure that eliminates any distinctions of time and renders everything simultaneous (see also Benjamin [1919]: 204), and in which everything repeats itself identical to itself. In fact, a careful examination of the two early texts dating to 1916, on tragedy and on *Trauerspiel*, which contain a first reflection on the concepts then central in Benjamin's habilitation study, reveals a distinction between «two metaphysical principles of repetition»: «the circle» and «the fact of duality» (Benjamin [1916a]: 60). The first is the spherical movement of the mythical system, a cyclic process that regenerates and reconfirms, each time from the beginning, the totality of meaning; a movement masterfully described by Benjamin's friend Florens Christian Rang who wrote about the Babylonian rite of carnival: here the euphoria connected to the festivity, to the act of turning the world upside down, is nothing but a *ritual pause*,

an *interregnum* functional to the restoration of the Cycle and of Order, a momentary appearance of the original chaos, which is then repressed to re-legitimate the establishment of the world-system. In other words, in myth also interruptions are repetitions: of the primordial gesture of creation that transforms chaos into cosmos (see Rang [1927]; see also Eliade [1949]). This is also what is staged by the Attic tragedy in which the death of the hero is both allusion to the suspension of such an order – a titanic revolt against it – and a return to the identical – it is impossible to bear such a break individually –, to a new and more powerful legitimation of the «magic circle» of myth (Benjamin [1916b]: 56; Benjamin [1925]: 100-118). The tragic trait lies precisely in the fact that the hero, despite his act of accusation of the entire *pantheon*, cannot overturn it, and the old mythical statutes are eventually restored. According to a beautiful expression in Lukács's *The Metaphysics of Tragedy*, what is at stake is a «fight for history», destined to fail (Lukács [1911]: 167).

The second metaphysical principle of repetition, *duality*, does not so much concern the circular movement that encompasses everything, but the creatural and «historical life» (Benjamin [1925]: 62), with the endless and ghostly duplication that sets in after the expulsion from paradise, exemplarily represented by *Trauerspiel* (Benjamin [1916b]: 57; Benjamin [1916a]: 60). This repetition is rooted in Benjamin's speculation on language and in his re-reading of the biblical episode of the fall of man. The primary reference is to the essay *On Language as Such and on the Language of Man*, which, it must be noted, is coeval with the two texts on tragedy and *Trauerspiel*. The pure immediacy of the name, shattered by the will to judge what is good and bad – this is the true original sin –, delivers a multiple and ambiguous eruption of signifiers and signs, in Benjamin's work on the Baroque, where the symbol becomes allegory (Benjamin [1916c]: 70-73; Benjamin [1925]: 159-177). It is the origin of judgment, and it is here that repetition emerges as a category of reality, knowledge and time: the breakage of the theological-symbolic unity between sensible and

supersensible, name and essence, makes room for propositional knowledge that shatters the object of knowledge into the chaotic and spectral crowd of its inessential signifiers, of its allegorical schemata, *repeating* them relentlessly (Benjamin [1916b]: 57). According to the image of an «irresistible decay», this is the rhythm of the post-Edenic history and of the Baroque (Benjamin [1925]: 178). «It is this repetition on which the law of mourning play is founded» (Benjamin [1916b]: 57).

The salvation from this eternal return of catastrophe can be reached, then, only exasperating the gesture of this repetition until it is overturned. The translator and the allegorist are the two emblematic figures who perform a similar act of excavation inside language and being, who bring to light the possibility of variation and novelty, starting from a type of replication that is already and always a *technique of combination and construction* (Benjamin [1925]: 178-179; 187-188; Benjamin [1921c]: 253-263). They both open up a gap, a *space of play* (*Spiel-Raum*), in which from the «eccentric embrace of meaning», from the «antinomies of the allegorical» (Benjamin [1925]: 202, 174), from the ruins of the shattered totality, it is possible to see a way out: in the always differing composition of these same fragments, in fact, resides the possibility of building «a new whole» (Benjamin [1925]: 178), grasping, as a fleeting crystallization of repetitive praxis, the eternal in the transient. Both move in the dialectics between uniqueness and repetition (*Einmaligkeit und Wiederholung*) immanent in the origin (*Ursprung*) which Benjamin writes about in the *Epistemo-Critical Prologue* of his *Trauerspielbuch* (Benjamin [1925]: 46). The translator, assuming an «intensive aiming» towards language (Benjamin [1910-1940]: 80), lingers in repetition, until he nears the *Ausdruckslose*, «the expressionless» – remains which cannot be communicated – and is also the origin of every signification, which breaks «the false [...] totality» and reopens the domain of possibility (Benjamin [1922]: 340; see also Benjamin [1921c]: 261; Benjamin [1916c]: 66). He becomes immersed in the domain of the signs of language, dissects its elements to reassemble them and tell them different-

ly, and *eliminates the ineffable* (Benjamin [1910-1940]: 80), taking the absence of reference to its extreme consequences, to the point that the echo of the names resound again, the pure expressive capacity of being, which Benjamin also calls *reine Sprache* (pure language) (Benjamin [1921c]: 256, 259-262; Benjamin [1916c]: 65). Thus the allegorist broadens the repetition by *playing* with the same allegory and with its technical-constructive essence, he subverts the mourning of the recurrence of the same in the playful joy of variation. His is an «*ars inveniendi*» which translates the bewilderment of the «mystical instant» and of the symbol into the profane «‘now’ of contemporary actuality» in which the possible is again «open to all kinds of revision by the interpretative artist» (Benjamin [1925]: 179, 183).

## 2. ANTHROPOLOGY OF REPETITION

From these premises the question arises concerning the relationship between repetition and construction of experience, that is, of symbolic space. Here I will move from that series of writings dedicated to childhood that Benjamin worked on in the second half of the 1920s (so before *Berlin Childhood around 1900*), texts that are generally treated as minor composition by critics (and by Benjamin himself), because they are considered inferior to the rest of Benjamin's production, but that, on the contrary, have a philosophical depth of their own. In them it is indeed possible to grasp the echo of the new «Marxist dialectical anthropology», yet to be founded (Benjamin [1929a]: 275).

In the more general *impulse to play* (Benjamin [1928a]: 28), Benjamin envisages something that is decisive for the comprehension of man in his entirety: what is being experimented, in the first gestures of play, is what he calls «basic rhythms» of vital formations, «a transition to a more precise definition» of things (Benjamin [1928b]: 120, 118). What emerges in the foreground is a constructiveness intrinsic to childhood play: children, in fact, while playing, are constructing the world, and in this sense they are attracted by detritus

generated by buildings, gardening, housework, tailoring, by waste products, by things that are being visibly worked on (Benjamin [1926]: 449). Here too, we are dealing with the action of combining, with an original *technical* element, a praxis that, in the continuous destruction and re-composition of objects, alone, can create a «vibrant relationship» with them (Benjamin [1930]: 123). In other words, this gesture is about the foundation of the objectual world and of subjectivity. And «the great law» that regulates and guides this gesture is «the law of repetition» (*das Gesetz der Wiederholung*) (Benjamin [1928b]: 120). If, on the one hand, Freud understood how powerful this law is, so much that he spoke of what is *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, on the other hand, he also saw the *repetition compulsion* as a direct expression of the *death drive*, of the essentially «conservative» nature of living beings (Freud [1921]: 45)<sup>2</sup>. For Benjamin, on the contrary, the ludic repetition of children has to do with what makes a life possible: with the construction of experience, and with all those habits that form the necessary condition for any kind of orientation of an existence (Benjamin [1928b]: 120). The rhythm of a child's play is not set by the eternal recurrence of rite, rather it follows a beat that, in each of its repetitions, creates discontinuity, *clinamen*<sup>3</sup>.

Rite and play are not two clearly distinct areas, on the contrary, there is a tension between them, which originates from a deep affinity: these phenomena are both constitutive of what is properly human, they have to do with man's need for orientation and protection, with the institution of what we call world; and yet they are gestures that provide antithetical answers to this same need. Benjamin's starting point is this original tension: after all, «the oldest toys [...] are in a certain sense imposed on [...] [a child] as cult implements that became toys only afterward» (Benjamin [1928b]:

118). In short, just as play always exhibits a residue of rite, in rites a ludic aspect is always present. Play, however, although deriving from the ritual sphere, takes leave of it, breaking away from the tradition that legitimates and gives meaning to the ritual practice. What ceases to exist, according to the fundamental pages of Émile Benveniste (1947), is the element of myth, the discursive order that founds and justifies rite. Toys, in this sense, are concrete crystallizations of this *profanatory* event. By deactivating old uses, children are constructing something new; destroying the original context from which they extrapolate objects – the constituted order of myth –, they return them to the sphere of *use*, of experimentation and innovation<sup>4</sup>.

It is precisely in infantile constructiveness that the aesthetic-anthropological origin of the montage principle must be found, and of the second technique that Benjamin spoke of in the essay on the *Work of Art*: indeed it reveals the *intermediate space* which invalidates all simplistic dichotomies between nature and history, nature and technique and gives life to the symbolic function. Paraphrasing Jean Piaget, playful repetition does not simply repeat «part of the adaptive behaviours», but it goes «beyond the limits of adaptation», applying «schemas already established for a non-ludic end» to objects that are always new and are not necessarily connected to the constraints of the external environment. It is therefore a repetition that, *breaking away from rituality*, produces continuous *variations* (Piaget [1945]: 89, 95). A repetition that maintains an intimate relationship with *mimesis*, if by this we mean not the simple identification-with or emulation-of the world of adults, but something, once again, that is essentially creative. The child, by incorporating things, and not by empathizing with them, both constructs and individuates them. Things are, through him or herself, always assembled, taken apart, destroyed, reassembled and thus fixed and known in their many facets. This is something that differs greatly from creativity (*ex nihilo*, the work of a genius), under-

<sup>2</sup> For a more in-depth reflection on Freud and Benjamin see Werner (2015) and also Montanelli (2017): 70-78.

<sup>3</sup> Here I will limit myself to underline the strong resonance with the words of Deleuze with regard to the relationship between repetition and habit (Deleuze [1968]: 73-75).

<sup>4</sup> On the concept of profanation see also Agamben (2005).

stood as an activity carried out by an autonomous and sovereign subject (Benjamin [1933a]: 720-721; Benjamin [1929b]: 229): not only because in a child a clear distinction between the self and the world has yet to be formed, but because it is precisely through the mimetic and repetitive play that children construct both their own subjectivity and the external world (Benjamin [1926]: 449-450); furthermore, it is because Benjamin reflected of this gesture as something that is always profoundly underlain by relations, by a collective and social dimension, unlike what is claimed by the *fictio* of abstract individualism (Benjamin [1929a]: 273). Playful repetition is therefore the source of symbolic activity, the condition of possibility not only of experience and of the rules shaping it, but of innovation *tout court*. Donald Winnicott described this process as a «potential space» inside which «transitional phenomena» are inscribed: a toy is the «first use [...] of a symbol», and «the first not-me possession», the first not-me experience (Winnicott [1971]: 54-56, 130). This space, opened up by play, does not cease to operate, also later, especially in imaginative experience (artistic and cultural experience), because play is the original area from which man can oppose the «infinite variability» of symbolic creation to the «stereotypy» of biological or environmental phenomena (Winnicott [1971]: 132). Thus, the ludic «doing the same thing over and over again» (*das Noch einmal*) is a «doing anew» (*ein-Immer-wieder-tun*) that expresses the innovative drive of human animals (Benjamin [1928b]: 120), a *doing* for which each repetition has a paradigmatic value. From an ontogenetic point of view, therefore, in children we see the work of the principle of montage which, at a historical and phylogenetic level, became visible with technical reproducibility. The prevalence of the pole of play in aesthetic experience – however historically determined –, as opposed to the cultural pole of semblance, in this sense has to do with what is a real anthropological trait.

The polarities underlying the *Kunstwerkaufratz* – the version offered by the new critical edition as third (Benjamin [1935-1936]) –, include

what could be defined as the synchronic or horizontal polarity between semblance (*Schein*) and play (*Spiel*) (see Lindner [2011]: 247-249; Desideri [2012]: XXXIV): that is, the tension immanent in every artwork, which constitutes and founds the very concept of artwork – its structure – also when the latter ceases to exist, because it is inscribed in the «the primal phenomenon of all artistic activity», that is *mimesis* (Benjamin [1936]: 127). The hypothesis being put forward here is that this polarity provides the keystone not only to understand all other polarities, but also to grasp Benjamin's «materialistic theory of art» (Benjamin [1910-1940]: 509). Furthermore, also here, if we keep in mind the conceptual range of the playful element elaborated by Benjamin, the role of repetition is decisive, inasmuch as technical reproducibility calls into question, precisely with its large-scale type of seriality, also a kind of differential and ludic repetition, differential because it is ludic – this is indeed the meaning of the *Spiel-räume*, of the «new fields of action» or, we might say, *spaces for play*, at the center of the essay (Benjamin [1936]: 118, 124, 127; see also Hansen [2004]; Lindner [2011]: 248-249).

As is well known, the definition of aura is intertwined with what Benjamin calls the cultural basis of art, therefore with the sacred and magical dimension, with the tradition that all religious or profane rituals establish and continue to transmit over time. The *hic et nunc* of an artwork, its «uniqueness», originates within this horizon (Benjamin [1936]: 105-106). The work of art in which the pole of semblance is dominant, is, in other words, a ritual device, part of the multiplicity of practices which, in addition to founding a community, with its patterns of behaviour, its institutions and its symbolic systems, also guarantee their continuity over time. Ritual, in fact, is also what allows to continue to articulate tradition in the present. The cultural foundation of art thus displays a paradoxical character: if on the one hand the auratic artwork is described as a work possessing traits of uniqueness, of unrepeatability, a «once and for all» character (Benjamin [1936]: 107) – *das Ein für allemal* –, having not yet entered the mecha-

nism of serial reproduction, on the other hand it is inserted in the cyclical, repetitive temporality of ritual. Benjamin speaks of a «unique apparition of a distance» (Benjamin [1936]: 104-105), which remains, and re-appears again, always with the function of re-legitimizing this circularity. In other words, it remains inextricably linked to mythical time, which freezes the same temporality within the cycle of the repetition of the identical.

This figuration establishes a specific relationship with nature; in the third draft of the essay on the work of art, Benjamin defines it with the synthetic concept of «first technology». A characteristic of the latter is that it aims to achieve «mastery over nature»: in societies in which «technology existed only in fusion with ritual» (Benjamin [1936]: 107), its primary purpose is to tame natural forces, as these are perceived – to quote Ernesto De Martino (1948) – as a threat to one's «presence». In short, the first technology operates by performing acts of exorcism of nature.

With the advent of technical reproducibility, «for the first time in world history» the work of art becomes emancipated «from its parasitic subservience to ritual» (Benjamin [1936]: 106). The link between the actuality of what is reproduced and tradition is broken from the inside: artworks, exposed to an «ubiquitous and non-linear actualization», are no longer characterized by the *hic et nunc* of their origin (Desideri [2013]: 39). It is a «symptomatic» process, its «significance extends far beyond the realm of art». What is radically upset is in fact tradition in its complexity, because of this tear in the process of transmission that causes the onset of the «crisis» of humanity. On the other hand, this tear also alludes to the possibility of an interruption, with ritual, of mythical temporality, and opens up the possibility of a «renewal of humanity» (Benjamin [1936]: 104). It is simultaneously the appearance of decline and of *chance*, because the shift of the perceptual paradigm involves all of the fundamental relationships of man with nature, with technique, with history. What is at stake is the phenomenon that Benjamin also termed «poverty of experience» (Benjamin [1933b]: 732).

Therefore, from a diachronic point of view, when what is reproduced is released from tradition, the exhibition value predominates over cult value, so much that the function of artworks is distorted, and in parallel, on the synchronic plane, what occurs is an equally intense displacement of the barycenter towards the pole of play, away from the pole of semblance (Benjamin [1936]: 106-107, 127-128). A shift that leads to a «qualitative transformation» not only of the relationship between man, nature and technique, but of man himself as well as of nature: it is an anthropological passage, because what corresponds to a «second technology» (Benjamin [1936]: 107) is itself a «second nature» (*eine zweite Natur*) (Benjamin [1935-1936]: 63), and «the traditional [...] image of man» is replaced by the barbaric and new image of «the naked man of the contemporary world», who is poor of experience (Benjamin [1933b]: 733). What characterizes this second technique is not an attempt to dominate, but «an interplay» – *harmonien, passionnée*, following the Fourierian inspiration – «between nature and humanity». Moreover, for the first time we witness *human beings distancing themselves from nature* (Benjamin [1936]: 107, 124-125; Benjamin [1935-1936]: 173-174), where nature is understood as the nature of ritual, a danger to be tamed and domesticated, thought in dichotomic terms with respect to history, to technical artefacts. The «nature [...] of the second degree» that emerges with technical reproducibility, the result of the montage principle, well exemplified by the film editing process, is located on the threshold between natural and artificial, at the point of continuous passage from one to the other (Benjamin [1936]: 115).

We now understand the intrinsic political nature of Benjamin's reflection on childhood: in childhood ludic activity, the *profanatory* gesture is already contained, able to tear objects from their traditional and auratic context, in order to return them to the sphere of *use* and experimentation, where repetition and variation, destruction and re-composition, following orders that differ each time, are the creation of something that is always new. Children are the first actors of mon-



tage, their play is already «the inexhaustible reservoir of all the experimenting procedures» of the second technique (Benjamin [1936]: 127). *Das Einmal ist keinmal*, is an expression belonging to children's play as much as it belongs to the second technique; *das Ein für allemal* characterizes the cultural foundation of art and the first technique, and thus the value of eternity and uniqueness prove to be empty (Benjamin [1935-1936]: 108): it is an auratic crystallization of a *compulsion to repeat* which actually re-institutes, each time, the identical. It is the same repetition that regulates the *phantasmagoria of commodities*: the modes of production of advanced capitalism exhibit, in an exemplary manner, the mystification of the relationship between always-identical and uniqueness, where behind the compulsive overproduction of *nouveauté* lies the mythic compulsion to repeat the same (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 11). It is a compensatory action, as well as a mystification: when the aura ceases to be, this same aura, with all its cultural and magical value, is transferred into commodities. The same can be said of experience: the destruction of the latter is concealed by a convulsive *simulation* of experiential shocks, in order to exorcise the poverty that characterizes modern man (Benjamin [1933b]: 732). What is hidden behind the eternal novelty and the presumed rebirth of auratic experiences is the always-identical, but also forms of reaction, and one in particular, the «aestheticizing of politics» is, among these, a privileged instrument (Benjamin [1936]: 121). In other words, mature capitalism employs the second technique following the canons of the first: the problem it poses is not how to formulate *proposals to improve nature*<sup>5</sup>, but how to establish relations founded on dominion.

The fact that a historical shift has led to the emergence of the pole of play, however, does not mean that the conditions of liberation are already given. Technical reproduction does open up the *space for play*, the condition of possibility of a

uniqueness with no aura, but it is precisely in this space that the most bitter conflict with capitalism takes place. In the age of poverty of experience, in which man goes back to being a child without habits, «a newborn babe» who shouts «in the dirty diapers of the present» (Benjamin [1933b]: 733), groping in the construction of new customs, capitalism captures and enhances precisely this human capacity to re-acustom oneself every time from the beginning, to construct the new making do with little, and turns childhood into something *chronic* in order to extract value from what is a true anthropological trait (see Virno [2015]: 91-93). It is no coincidence that in analyzing the transformations of perception, Benjamin insists on the question of habit, highlighting the tension between continuous perceptual shocks and the ability to get used to something all over again, which characterizes, in an essential way, all forms of contemporary experience: «*the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at historical turning points [...] are mastered gradually [...] through habit*». And in the historical epoch of technical reproducibility we have seen that «even the distracted person can form habits»; it is «a covert measure of the extent to which it has become possible to perform new tasks of apperception» (Benjamin [1936]: 120). Perhaps it is precisely here that the powerfully prognostic quality of Benjamin's materialistic analysis emerges: in the comprehension of the intimate link between the playful repetition and the large-scale serialization of contemporary production; in the identification of the fundamental reconfiguration of capitalist exploitation in the tension between the absence of solid habits and the human capacity to re-acquire them; in an epoch in which capitalism has elevated childhood to the predominant form of life and has succeeded in extracting value also from poverty of experience. It is starting from here, perhaps, that the question of «politicizing art» must be rethought today, that of the *renewal of humanity* stemming from its own *crisis*. Once again, what must be rethought is art's foundation in that «different practice» with respect to ritual, which is, precisely, «politics» (Benjamin [1936]: 122, 106).

<sup>5</sup> It is indeed a *perfective mimesis* (*vollendende Mimesis*), which operates with play and with the second technique (Benjamin [1935-1936]: 155).

### 3. THE NOW OF REPEATABILITY

We have thus reached the problem concerning the relationship between advanced capitalism and repetition; or, better, between the *origin* of the former and the idea of history as an eternal recurrence of the identical which presents itself again in the nineteenth century. As is known, the *passages* – the «world in miniature» of this century, «temples of commodity capital» – represent the *Urphänomen* through which Benjamin tries to grasp this connection. The pace set by industrial work transforms the historical course into «a mass produced article», which repeats itself continuously as something always new and always the same (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 31, 37, 462, 340). Fashion embodies the *exemplum* of a similar temporality: its being «eternally up-to-date» betrays, in the frenzy of its changes, the face of the eternal same. It is a time that «does not recognize death», and that, unlike the cycle of myth, proceeds by eliminating every break. The journey through the *passages* is «a ghost walk», at the end of which no palingenesis takes place. *Passage*: the name is a parody of itself, it generates an experience that is the opposite of that of the rite of passage (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 541, 66, 409, 494); not only are there no metamorphosis here, but man is returned, once the thresholds of birth and death have also been erased, «into the intrauterine world» (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 415; see also Desideri [2002]: 112-113).

This is how the thought of the eternal recurrence rises again, and what is more, it becomes the «sky», against which «the people of the nineteenth century see the stars»: Louise-Auguste Blanqui and Friedrich Nietzsche stand out against the backdrop of this sky, and of Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*. The vision of the cosmos as a «site of lingering catastrophes», which Blanqui describes in *L'éternité par les astres*, is, Benjamin writes, «a complement of the society to which [...] [he], in his old age, was forced to concede victory». The same idea according to which the universe consists of a finite number of simple elements, therefore of an equally finite number of *combinations-*

*types*, condemned to repeat themselves infinitely, is based on the «data from the mechanistic natural science of bourgeois society» (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 111-112; see also Blanqui [1872]). In short, *this* idea of repetition that Blanqui tries to assert at a cosmological level, prior to a historical one, though it demystifies the ideology of progress, remains circumscribed to the categorical perimeter of modernity; in other words, because it is historically determined, it proves to be the other side of faith in progress. The same can be said for Nietzsche, whose idea of eternal recurrence «appeared at a time when the bourgeoisie no longer dared count on the impending development of the system of production which they had set going», that is, as an unconscious and compensatory response to the frenzy of mature capitalism (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 119, 117). *Amor fati* and the *willing* of the Nietzschean eternal recurrence, as the «most extreme form of nihilism and its overcoming», treat the archaic circular vision of becoming as «a philosophic yardstick by which to measure the experience of time and of the temporal», and thus point to the overcoming of time itself, to the dissolution of its frenzy (Löwith [1935]: 156, 136). One must mention also Kierkegaard in this regard, although he appears less frequently in the preparatory notes for the *Passages*: he is more closely linked to the concept of bourgeois *intérieur*, which, however, is also inscribed in the overall framework of the phantasmagorias of repetition that take root in this epoch, as a superstructural counterpoint to the process of reification of social life. Benjamin quotes Adorno, according to whom inwardness – which the Danish thinker opposed to the misery generated by the capitalist world – is «the historical prison of a primordial humanity», in which things are not only estranged from their essence, but also subjected to the sphere of appearance, condemned to the order of the ever-selfsame (Benjamin [1933c]: 704; see also Adorno [1933]). In the contrast between nostalgia for a lost *authenticity* and the imposition of the law of commodities, the Kierkegaardian characters – Constantius in *Repetition* is exemplary – display an *allegori-*

*cal rigidity* that forces them to repeat themselves infinitely. The repetitive gesture of Constantius/Kierkegaard thus represents a titanic attempt to return to an *authentic* dimension; and this, however, is only possible by entering the religious sphere (see Kierkegaard [1843]). It is an act that once again confirms, according to Benjamin, the fact that Kierkegaard's reflection – the latecomer of German idealism – is still underlain by a mythical quality (Benjamin [1933c]; see also Benjamin [1927-1940]: 218-220, 548).

But we would like here to try to radicalise Benjamin's intuition, going beyond the immediate connection between the frantic and serial rhythms of industrial work and the idea that the historical course is an endless recurrence of the same. It is in commodity, as an elementary unit of the capitalist process of value extraction, that Benjamin identifies the material matrix of the historical temporality of the modern era. A matrix that must be viewed in terms of an expressive relationship/correspondence and not in terms of a causal-deterministic relationship (see Benjamin [1927-1940]: 460). The becoming-myth of capital must be sought, following Lukács, in the process by which commodity becomes «the universal category of society», «the dominant form» of «every expression of life», so much that it becomes «second nature», in the most disturbing sense of the expression (Lukács [1923]: 86, 84). In my opinion, it is necessary to take a further step back, and proceed from a quote of Marx present in the *Passagenarbeit* (the same quote will also appear in the *Theses*), the importance of which is stressed by Benjamin. The passage concerns the creative dimension of work – the very concept of «creative (*des Schöpferischen*)» –, at the beginning of the *The Critique of the Gotha Program*, where Marx states that «Labor is the source (*die Quelle*) of all wealth and all culture» (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 658). Here we can identify a reference to the founding act of capital: according to Marx, what makes the creation of value possible is, well before commodity, «labour as subjectivity», the worker as a *living subject*, as «living labour» (Marx [1867]:

217; Marx [1857-1858]: 272). Once the source of value is captured – what Marx also calls primitive accumulation (see Marx [1867]: 784-848) –, capital becomes foundational, a totality incorporating everything, a mythical system that transfigures the historically determined quality of one's own modes and relations of production turning them into a law of nature. But in order for this transfiguration to take root, *the origin must be reiterated*: such a process of naturalization of social relations is in fact possible only starting from the continuous concealment of the creative source of value (see Dussel [1990]: 334-384). In Benjamin's words, this is the «bad infinity in the movement of capital» (Benjamin [1939]: 1177).

On the other hand, at a subjective and conscience level, the idea of eternal recurrence affirms itself again, as mentioned above, as an effect of the destruction of experience in the sense of *Erfahrung*. Factory work and metropolitan phantasmagoria fragment the nineteenth-century man, overwhelm him with an unlimited amount of perceptual shocks, which, disconnected from each other, are repeated without pause. The eternal recurrence thus resurfaces also as compensation for the «atrophy of experience»: deriving «its luster from the fact that it [...] [is] no longer possible, in all circumstances, to expect a recurrence of conditions across any interval of time shorter than that provided by eternity» (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 804, 340).

We are therefore able to understand why Baudelaire can allude to the interruption of this phantasmagorical repetition: because, like the allegorist, the *brooder*, insinuates himself between the equivocality of the signifiers, between the *theological whims of the commodities*, reviews them playfully to show their historical index. He broadens the infernal repetition once more to overturn it in a constructive reiteration (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 328, 368-369). Neither the heroic Nietzschean composure, nor the resignation of Blanqui, nor the nostalgia of Kierkegaard, but the new to be wrested from the ever-selfsame constitutes the «deepest intention» of his poetry, of his life (Benjamin [1938-1939]: 175; Benjamin [1927-1940]: 318).

Unlike Adorno, who understands the dialectic between the archaic and the modern as an interminable movement, Benjamin thinks of this relationship starting from the disintegration of myth, from the image of the redeemed world or, in profane terms, of revolution. This disruption coincides with the dissolution of the phantasmagoria of the «repetition in history». «To dissipate the semblance of eternal sameness», this is the task of dialectical experience (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 473); see also Harroootunian [1996]). Freed from the shackles of the ideology of progress, historical materialism, in fact, placing itself near the economic and therefore historically determined matrix of social phenomena, shatters the semblance of eternity of these same phenomena. Benjamin, however, takes one step further – thus the originality of his reflection: using the «historical index» of images as the zero point for their knowledge means not only to assume that «they belong to a particular time», but also and above all, that «they attain to legibility (*Lesbarkeit*) only at a particular time», regardless of the *intentio* of the knowing subject. This is the heart of the concept of *dialektisches Bild* (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 462-463). The materialist historian must therefore be able to grasp, in the *now of their recognizability*, before they flee, the critical constellations that emerge from the vortex of historical substance, from the dialectic movement of repetition and uniqueness of the *Ursprung*. Because these are indeed *unrepeatable combinations*. Once the heroic-individualistic traits have been eliminated, the youthful and Nietzschean suggestions resurface here: the historian capable of grasping such a moment is in fact the one that is guided by the filter of the present, by the *principle of actualization*. The present is the dynamite with which to blow up the semblance both of historical repetition and of progress, of the linearity and homogeneity of the temporal course (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 460, 474). Thus, in the difference of each new combination with the present, the past no longer appears as something which has been once and for all, indeed it is reopened: at the moment – historically determined – in which it becomes legible again, entering a critical constellation with the pre-

sent, the horizon of its outcomes opens up again, becoming once again a battlefield. What Benjamin sheds a light on is the broadening of the repetitive gesture, the virtuous combination of repetition, destruction and construction: the emergence of the dialectical image necessarily implies a «destructive momentum» that blasts the «historical continuity» to the point it is demolished, although, conversely, new configurations between past and present can arise only if what has been is retraced and, therefore, repeated (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 462, 475) .

This repetition is intimately constructive; again, it has to do with the «principle of montage» and with use. Behind the figure of the materialist historian we can still see that of the child, or of the *citationist*: who *uses, cites* elements of historical substance, who is attracted by rags, by the refuse of history; he extrapolates these from their original context, he takes them apart and destroys them to reassemble them according to orders that have never seen before (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 458, 460-461).

The *now of recognizability* thus coincides with a *now of repeatability*: the dialectical image, or – it is the same thing – the revolutionary *chance* correspond to a crystallization within the already repetitive activity of recollection of the past. What is reiterated and actualized is a certain fragment of the past that has never been, that demands to be accomplished. History is therefore *not a completed work*, but something that asks to be reopened, re-exposed to the sphere of possibility (Benjamin [1937]: 267). The object of historical knowledge presents itself as a monad, as an absolutely singular concretion in which virtually all the occurrence of a given fact is contained, its «fore-history» as well as its «after-history» (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 475). This virtuality coexists alongside what has been and what is, it does not cease to be actualized until all its possibilities are fulfilled, «until the entire past is brought into the present in a historical apocatastasis»<sup>6</sup>, until it is «citable» (*zitierbar*) in every part (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 459;

<sup>6</sup> On the concept of apocatastasis in Benjamin see Desideri (2016).

Benjamin [1940a]: 390). It is the same *form* of language, of languages, that are, in their essence, translatable, and that require to be translated. The suffix *-barkeit* – of *Erkennbarkeit*, *Lesbarkeit*, *Zitierbarkeit*, *Übersetzbarkeit*, and also of *Reproduzierbarkeit* – names exactly this form: the past (just like language or artworks), regardless of whether it is empirically known, read, cited, *requires this a priori*, it requires this to be still possible, it requires its own repetition and remembrance, release and redemption (see Benjamin [1921c]: 254; Benjamin [1916c]: 60-70)<sup>7</sup>. To *eliminate the ineffable*, to *accomplish the uncompleted*, are the two faces of the same messianic-revolutionary gesture.

It thus becomes clear why the theological category of remembrance is not exclusively contemplative, but is intimately linked to redemption, and why this link has a profane correspondence in the connection between historiography and politics (Benjamin [1940b]: 110-111). It is no coincidence that Benjamin uses the term *Eingedenken*: unlike *An-denken* (souvenir) that catalogues the past «as dead effects» (Benjamin [1938-1939]: 183), the *Eingedenken* slips into the (*ein*) threads of history, to break, to reassemble – to *profanate* – their fabric, to re-assemble it according to new combinations, *useful* for present action. A usefulness to be understood in its literal sense: because it is the result of an unprecedented *use* of the past and, simultaneously, of the *use* of current revolutionary praxis. Thus «the small gateway» from which the Messiah can enter at any time, or through which the revolutionary situation is unleashed, is where one must grasp the possibility that still lives within the past (Benjamin [1940a]: 397). It is the opening that has a very particular spatial and temporal nature, the revolutionary opportunity in fact emerges in the interferences, inside «time differentials», produced each time by this repetition of what has been. Also here the model of intensive time, of the messianic dimension, plays a decisive role: it gathers «the entire history of mankind» in a «single focal point», comprising it «in a tremen-

dous abbreviation» (Benjamin [1915a]: 37; Benjamin [1940a]: 396). What emerges here is a sort of *double movement of repetition*: if on the one hand it appears as *remembrance*, which retraces a single event, on the other hand, in the arrest of time brought on by the critical constellation, repetition takes place in a contracted form, as an integral recapitulation of history, in the form of a *living mirror*, allowing for a certain perspective angle, of the history of the whole universe. The *Jetztzeit*, the present understood as actuality, is therefore not an infinite transition; on the contrary, it is a «breath» in which, for an instant, «becoming» is entirely withheld – the moment, intimately fleeting, in which the features of eternity appear in a flash only to disappear (Benjamin [1940a]: 396; see also Desideri [1995]: 160).

In conclusion, I would like to attempt to demonstrate that also the ethical nuance of Benjamin's thought is intimately linked to the concept of repetition. Where by ethics, in line with Aristotle, we mean the search for the highest good that is happiness. In the hermetic text titled *Agésilas Santander*, Benjamin clearly states that the angel – *objectum meditationis* of these pages – «wants happiness – that is to say, the conflict in which the rapture of the unique, the new, the yet unborn is combined with that bliss of experiencing something once more, of possessing once again, of having lived» (Benjamin [1933d]: 715). Here I will not dwell on the exegesis of this figure – a personal or Talmudic angel, a messenger, the emblem that conceals the anagram of Benjamin's name? (see Scholem [1972]; Agamben [1982]; Montanelli [2017]: 137-145) – what matters is the identification of happiness in the contrast between radical novelty of what has not yet been lived and the repetition of what has been (see also Benjamin [1938-1939]: 184). Benjamin then adds: «he has nothing new to hope for on any road other than the road home». The new stems from the recovery of what has been, and what is at stake here is the temporal form, capable of reopening the past, of remembrance. The angel drags the man away with him «to the future along which he came» (Benjamin [1933d]: 715). It is therefore not a coinci-

<sup>7</sup> On the *-barkeiten* in Benjamin see Weber (2008).

dence between future and return of the past, destination and provenance. Unlike what Scholem (1972) claimed, Benjamin here is not thinking of a cyclical conception of the historical process: the «future» is the future of what is «yet unborn», the movement of what returns implies differences, intensive variations. The origin is indeed the goal, as is said in the line by Karl Kraus that Benjamin uses as epigraph to the XIV thesis (Benjamin [1940a]: 395), however, to move towards it means opening it up to the possibility of new configurations: to retrace the already experienced means to fulfil what has not yet taken place inside it, *to repeat the unrepeatable*. Happiness is therefore a profane category – also in Benjamin's early *Theological-Political Fragment*, however still strongly nihilistic –, it interrogates the time of the shattered mystical instant, of the allegorical eruption of *eternal transience* (Benjamin [1920-1923]: 305-306; Benjamin [1927-1940]: 348). Wanting the downfall of all things is the gesture that can break the eternal recurrence of the same, because it repeats historical events once more to virtually actualize the totality of their possibilities.

It is in the second thesis of *On the concept of history* that Benjamin goes back to the correspondence between (profane) happiness and (theological) redemption. Happiness, which must orient the revolutionary practice of historical materialism, is directed to what has been: it is the movement capable of transforming the past conditional – of everything that one would have wanted to be or do, but that has not been, or has not done – into the *futur antérieur*, into the time which reopens what has been, exposing it once again to modification, letting possibility retroact on reality. Each generation is then *expected* – and not just *thrown* – on earth, because it has the *power*, albeit *weak*, to reactualize what has been, in order to allow what has not been fulfilled, in it, to finally take place (Benjamin [1940a]: 389-390; see also Lindner [2002]).

Happiness thus coincides with the memory of the future – *futur antérieur* is exactly this –, it is the taking place of what did not take place in the past. The past wrongs are not disregarded, on

the contrary, there is an «increasing concentration (integration) of reality, such that everything past (in its time) can acquire a higher grade of actuality than it had in the moment of its existing» (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 392; see also Benjamin [1927-1940]: 471).

As in the world of Kafka, the figures for which perhaps «there is hope» are those «mist-bound creatures, beings in an unfinished state» – assistants, fools, messengers, students, children – who, precisely because they are *unfinished* or *helpless*, retain the power of possibility (Benjamin [1934]: 798-799). They are figures of memory, of *attentiveness*, which act as a counterpoint to the ones distorted by the weight of oblivion (Benjamin [1934]: 806-812). The crazy, the helpers, the students «don't get tired»; children never want to go to sleep, because «while they are asleep, something might happen that concerns them»: these figures watch over the possible that in every instant could re-open and repeat itself. For them «the great rules of asceticism operate», the ancient warning that orders: «Don't forget the best!» (Benjamin [1934]: 813). This «best» is the possible itself. And it is in this gesture, able to «remember the new once again» (Benjamin [1927-1940]: 855) that happiness, revolution and redemption can come together.

## REFERENCES

### *Benjamin's Writings*

- Benjamin, W., 1910-1940: *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin. 1910-1940*, transl. by M.R. Jacobson and E.M. Jacobson, ed. and annotated by G. Scholem and T.W. Adorno, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994.
- Benjamin, W., 1911a: *Sleeping Beauty*, in *Early Writings. 1910-1917*, transl. by H. Eiland and Others, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2011, pp. 26-32.
- Benjamin, W., 1911b: *The Free School Community*, in *Early Writings. 1910-1917*, transl. by H. Eiland and Others, The Belknap Press of

- Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2011, pp. 39-45.
- Benjamin, W., 1912: *Dialogue on the Religiosity of the Present*, in *Early Writings. 1910-1917*, transl. by H. Eiland and Others, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2011, pp. 62-84.
- Benjamin, W., 1913a: *Teaching and Valuation*, in *Early Writings. 1910-1917*, transl. by H. Eiland and Others, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2011, pp. 90-100.
- Benjamin, W., 1913b: *Thoughts on Gerhart Hauptmann's Festival Play*, in *Early Writings. 1910-1917*, transl. by H. Eiland and Others, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2011, pp. 120-125.
- Benjamin, W., 1914a: *The Religious Position of the New Youth*, in *Early Writings. 1910-1917*, transl. by H. Eiland and Others, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2011, pp. 168-170.
- Benjamin, W., 1914b: *The Metaphysics of Youth*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. by M. Bullock and M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 1996, pp. 6-17.
- Benjamin, W., 1915a: *The Life of Students*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. by M. Bullock and M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 1996, pp. 37-47.
- Benjamin, W., 1915b: *Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. by M. Bullock and M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 1996, pp. 18-36.
- Benjamin, W., 1916a: *The Role of Language in Trauerspiel and Tragedy*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. by M. Bullock and M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 1996, pp. 59-61.
- Benjamin, W., 1916b: *Trauerspiel and Tragedy*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. by M. Bullock and M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 1996, pp. 55-58.
- Benjamin, W., 1916c: *On Language as Such and on the Language of Man*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. by M. Bullock and M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 1996, pp. 62-74.
- Benjamin, W., 1919: *Fate and Character*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. by M. Bullock and M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 1996, pp. 201-206.
- Benjamin, W., 1920-1923: *Theological-Political Fragment*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 3: 1935-1938*, ed. by H. Eiland and M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2006, pp. 305-306.
- Benjamin, W., 1921a: *Critique of Violence*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. by M. Bullock and M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 1996, pp. 236-252.
- Benjamin, W., 1921b: *Capitalism as Religion*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. by M. Bullock and M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 1996, pp. 288-291.
- Benjamin, W., 1921c: *The Task of the Translator*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. by M. Bullock and M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 1996, pp. 253-263.
- Benjamin, W., 1922: *Goethe's Elective Affinities*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. by M. Bullock and M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 1996, pp. 297-360.
- Benjamin, W., 1925: *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, transl. by J. Osborne, Verso, London-New York, 2003.
- Benjamin, W., 1926: *One-Way Street*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. by M. Bul-

- lock and M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 1996, pp. 444-488.
- Benjamin, W., 1927-1940: *The Arcades Project*, transl. by H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 1999.
- Benjamin, W., 1928a: *Old Toys*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 2, Part 1: 1927-1930*, ed. by M. W. Jennings, H. Eiland, G. Smith, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2005, pp. 98-102.
- Benjamin, W., 1928b: *Toys and Play*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 2, Part 1: 1927-1930*, ed. by M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, G. Smith, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2005, pp. 117-121.
- Benjamin, W., 1929a: *A Communist Pedagogy*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 2, Part 1: 1927-1930*, ed. by M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, G. Smith, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2005, pp. 273-275.
- Benjamin, W., 1929b: *Hartlaub. «Der Genius im Kinde. Ein Versuch über die zeichnerische Anlage des Kindes (2. stark umgearbeitete und erweiterte Auflage)»*, in *Werke und Nachlaß. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Volume 13, Part 1, ed. by H.v. Kaulen, Suhrkamp, Berlin, 2011, pp. 228-229.
- Benjamin, W., 1930: *Russian Toys*, in *Moscow Diary*, transl. by R. Sieburth, ed. by G. Smith, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 1986, pp. 123-124.
- Benjamin, W., 1933a: *On the Mimetic Faculty*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 2, Part 2: 1931-1934*, ed. by M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, G. Smith, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2005, pp. 720-722.
- Benjamin, W., 1933b: *Experience and Poverty*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 2, Part 2: 1931-1934*, ed. by M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, G. Smith, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2005, pp. 731-736.
- Benjamin, W., 1933c: *Kierkegaard*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 2, Part 2: 1931-1934*, ed. by M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, G. Smith, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2005, pp. 703-705.
- Benjamin, W., 1933d: *Agesilaus Santander (Second Version)*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 2, Part 2: 1931-1934*, ed. by M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, G. Smith, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2005, pp. 714-716.
- Benjamin, W., 1934: *Franz Kafka. On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 2, Part 2: 1931-1934*, ed. by M. W. Jennings, H. Eiland, G. Smith, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2005, pp. 794-818.
- Benjamin, W., 1935-1936: *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, in *Werke und Nachlaß. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Volume 16, ed. by B. Lindner, Suhrkamp, Berlin, 2013.
- Benjamin, W., 1936: *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 3: 1935-1938*, ed. by H. Eiland and M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2006, pp. 101-133.
- Benjamin, W., 1937: *Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 3: 1935-1938*, ed. by H. Eiland and M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2006, pp. 260-302.
- Benjamin, W., 1938-1939: *Central Park*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 4: 1938-1940*, ed. by H. Eiland and M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2006, pp. 161-199.
- Benjamin, W., 1939: *Aus einer Niederschrift*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Volume 1, Part 3, ed. by H. Schweppenhäuser and R. Tiedemann, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M., 1974, pp. 1175-1181.



- Benjamin, W., 1940a: *On the Concept of History*, in *Selected Writings. Volume 4: 1938-1940*, ed. by H. Eiland and M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2006, pp. 389-400.
- Benjamin, W., 1940b: *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, in *Werke und Nachlaß. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Volume 19, ed. by G. Raulet, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M., 2010.
- Other Authors:*
- Adorno, T.W., 1933: *Kierkegaard. Construction of the Aesthetic*, transl. and ed. by R. Hullot-Kentor, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989.
- Agamben, G., 1982: *Walter Benjamin and the Demonic. Happiness and Historical Redemption*, in *Potentialities. Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. and transl. by D. Heller-Roazen, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1991, pp. 138-157.
- Agamben, G., 2005: *Profanations*, transl. by J. Fort, The MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.), 2015.
- Angehrn, E., 2001: *Die Unabgeschlossenheit des Vergangenen: Erinnerung, Wiederholung und Neubeginn bei Walter Benjamin und Jacques Derrida*, "RISS. Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse" 51 (2), pp. 43-62.
- Benveniste, E., 1947: *Le Jeu comme Structure*, "Deucalion" 2, pp. 161-167.
- Blanqui, L.A., 1872: *Eternity by the Stars. An Astronomical Hypothesis*, transl. by F. Chou-raqui, Contra Mundum Press, New York, 2013.
- De Martino, E., 1948: *The World of Magic*, transl. by P.S. White, Pyramid Communications, New York, 1972.
- Deleuze, G., 1968: *Difference and Repetition*, transl. by P. Patton, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994.
- Desideri, F., 1995: *Ad vocem Jetztzeit*, in *La porta della giustizia. Saggi su Walter Benjamin*, Pendragon, Bologna, pp. 153-166.
- Desideri, F., 2002: *Il fantasma dell'opera. Benjamin, Adorno e le aporie dell'arte contemporanea*, Il Melangolo, Genova.
- Desideri, F., 2012: *I Modern Times di Benjamin*, in Benjamin, W., *L'opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica. Tre versioni (1936-39)*, ed. by F. Desideri, transl. by M. Baldi, Donzelli, Roma, pp. VII-XLV.
- Desideri, F., 2013: *Aura ex machina*, "Rivista di estetica" 52 (1), pp. 33-52.
- Desideri, F., 2016: *Intermittency: the differential of time and the integral of space. The intensive spatiality of the Monad, the Apokatastasis and the Messianic World in Benjamin's latest thinking*, "Aisthesis" 9 (1), pp. 177-187.
- Dussel, E., 1990: *El ultimo Marx y la filosofía de la liberación*, Siglo XXI, México D.F.
- Eliade, M., 1949: *The Myth of the Eternal Return. Cosmos and History*, transl. by W. Trask, Princeton of University Press, Princeton, 2005.
- Fenves, P., 2011: *The Messianic Reduction. Walter Benjamin and the Shape of Time*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Freud, S., 1921: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ed. by E. Jones, The International Psycho-Analytical Press, London-Vienna, 1922.
- Guglielminetti, E., 1990: *Walter Benjamin. Tempo, ripetizione, equivocità*, Mursia, Milano.
- Hansen, M.B., 2004: *Room-for-Play: Benjamin's Gamble with Cinema*, "October" 109, pp. 3-45.
- Harroonian, H.D., 1996: *The Benjamin Effect: Modernism, Repetition, and the Path to Different Cultural Imaginaries*, in Steinberg, M.P. (ed.), *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, Cornell University Press, New York, pp. 62-87.
- Haxthausen, C.W., 2004: *Reproduction/Repetition: Walter Benjamin/Carl Einstein*, "October" 107, pp. 47-74.
- Katz, M., 1998: *Rendezvous in Berlin: Benjamin and Kierkegaard on the Architecture of Repetition*, "The German Quarterly" 71, pp. 1-13.
- Kaufmann, S., 2002: *Mit Walter Benjamin im "Théâtre Moderne" oder: Die unheimliche Moderne. Szenen der Wiederholung*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg.
- Kierkegaard, S., 1843: *Repetition*, in *Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs*, transl. by M.G. Piety, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, pp. 1-82.

- Lindner, B., 2002: *Zeit und Glück. Phantasmagorien des Spielraums*, in Geyer-Ryan, H., Koopman, P., Yntema, K. (eds.), *Benjamin Studies/Studien 1. Perception and Experience in Modernity*, Rodopi B. V., Amsterdam-New York, pp. 127-144.
- Lindner, B., 2011: «Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit», in Lindner, B. (ed.), *Benjamin-Handbuch. Lebenswerk-Wirkung*, J.B. Metzler, Stuttgart, pp. 229-251.
- Löwith, K., 1935: *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, transl. by J. Harvey Lomax, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, 1997.
- Lukács, G., 1911: *The Metaphysics of Tragedy*, in *Soul and Form*, transl. by A. Bostock, The MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.), 1974, pp. 152-174.
- Lukács, G., 1923: *History and Class Consciousness*, transl. by R. Livingstone, The MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.), 1971.
- Marx, K., 1857-1858: *Grundrisse. Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, transl. by M. Nicolaus, Penguin, London, 1993.
- Marx, K., 1867: *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*, transl. by S. Moore and E. Aveling, ed. by F. Engels, The Modern Library, New York, 1906.
- Menninghaus, W., 1986: *Schwellenkunde. Walter Benjamins Passage des Mythos*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M.
- Montanelli, M., 2017: *Il principio ripetizione. Studio su Walter Benjamin*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine.
- Nietzsche, F., 1874: *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, transl. by P. Preuss, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis-Cambridge, 1980.
- Piaget, J., 1945: *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*, transl. by C. Gattegno and F.M. Hodgson, Routledge, London, 1999.
- Rang, F.C., 1927: *Historische Psychologie des Karnevals*, Brinkmann & Bose, Berlin, 1984.
- Scholem, G., 1972: *Walter Benjamin and his Angel*, in Smith, G. (ed.), *On Walter Benjamin. Critical Essays and Recollections*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.), 1991, pp. 51-89.
- Virno, P., 2015: *L'idea di mondo. Intelletto pubblico e uso della vita*, Quodlibet, Macerata.
- Weber, S., 2008: *Benjamin's -abilities*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.).
- Werner, N., 2015: *Archäologie des Erinnerns. Sigmund Freud in Walter Benjamins Berliner Kindheit*, Wallstein, Göttingen.
- Winnicott, D., 1971: *Playing and Reality*, Routledge, London-New York, 2005.