

Abstracts

Boglárka Daradics and Zalán-György Ilyés: Foreword to the Special Issue on Walter Benjamin – Belated Actuality and an Unprecedented Renaissance

Abstract: The papers in this issue focus on the study and analysis of Walter Benjamin's oeuvre from different aspects. The purpose of the issue was to stimulate the reception of Benjamin in Hungary, to promote (critical) discourse on the texts (which are already available in Hungarian in sufficient numbers). In addition to the studies, the issue also includes reviews and translations, whose apparent (!) eclecticism, we believe, could reveal something of the characteristic of Benjamin's oeuvre, namely its multifaceted and often seemingly exalted nature.

Keywords: Walter Benjamin, belatedness, actuality, letters, reception, criticism

The Belated Relevance of Walter Benjamin's Thought

Gergely Bethlenfalvy: Gleaning – Pieces from Benjamin's Collectanea

Abstract: The following essay approaches its subject, the objects of Walter Benjamin, with the unpretentiousness of an essay rather than the rigour of a treatise. In Benjamin's texts, problems of history, society, writing and reading often seem to unfold in the light of certain small, seemingly insignificant, everyday objects. For Benjamin, these things give him the opportunity to collect and organise his thoughts. Likewise, this essay turns to certain objects when it collects, arranges, presents and comments on fragments of texts (fragments of the texts of Baudelaire, Flaubert, Goncharov, Baudrillard, Butor) to create itself. The focus of the essay is on the philosophical and at the same time practical-creative approach to art outlined in the Benjaminian texts, which helps us to compare the structural features of the work of art (writing, thinking) with the combinatorics of tinkering. In some of Benjamin's writings, things and linguistic elements, symbols (letters, words) seem to be interchangeable

or of the same nature, insofar as their multiplicity opens up to the free play of variations and, in the course of the play, they are arranged into shapes. The essay thus aims to reconstruct this perception by specifically addressing the objects, and to reorder it in a speculative way. However, in some respects it is itself no more than a collection that was created by arranging and inspection of Benjamin's objects – it is also the result of the chance juxtaposition of objects, if its observations happen to be correct.

Keywords: Walter Benjamin, objects, collection-compilation, gleaning, commentary, tinkering, writing

Boglárka Daradics: An Ideological-Historical Analysis of Walter Benjamin's Habilitation Case

Abstract: In my study, I examine the rejected habilitation procedure of Walter Benjamin. My aim is to explore the reasons for this rejection through a study of the exact course of the procedure. In the first part of the paper, I will outline the functioning of the German academic system (concerning the procedure of habilitation) through some historical aspects (institutional history and biographical data), and I will also take stock of Benjamin's life at the time and what a successful habilitation would have meant for him. I will then consider the arguments and explanations that could potentially arise in relation to the unsuccessful habilitation based on the typology I have constructed. I have created this typology to make the explanations clearer and easier to understand, which I believe, in addition to grouping the arguments, can also show how the arguments in question are interlinked. I will then analyse the correspondence surrounding the habilitation procedure and the opponent's critique in the file, written by Hans Cornelius, because of the original archival documents (*Promotionsakte W. Benjamin*). I believe that together they provide a rather complex picture of Benjamin's habilitation procedure. However, the conclusion of my thesis is that this biographical moment should be seen more as an indicator that can actively inform us both about Benjamin's characteristics and thought (covering his entire life and oeuvre) and about the norms and controversies of the German academic system in the 1920s.

Keywords: Walter Benjamin, habilitation, *Trauerspiel*, *Universitätsarchiv Frankfurt*, *Promotionsakte W. Benjamin*

Zalán-György Ilyés: Fighting for the "language of youth". On Walter Benjamin's Philosophy of Language and Community

Abstract: The First World War had a double significance for Walter Benjamin's life and work: besides being seen – as *Experience and Poverty* testifies – as the historical catastrophe of the impossibility of experience, it was also the reason why he lost his most important friend of his youth, Christoph Friedrich Heinle, whom he mourned for the rest of his life. However, we cannot ignore the chronological relationship between these two aspects: *Experience and Poverty* was written fifteen years after the war, and in the *Berlin Chronicle* Benjamin himself recounts the long time it took him to turn to the materialism that dominated the second half of his life's work. This paper will examine the works of his youth and seek to answer the question of how the young Benjamin related to the outbreak of war and Heinle's death. It is important, however, that it does not do so without taking account of the historical dimension of the First World War. Among other things, it attempts to show that Heinle's death

cannot be seen as a personal trauma: the death of Heine, who were – for Benjamin – the embodiment of the idea of youth, is a shattering of this idea and a radical questioning of Benjamin's early idealism. The consequences of death, mourning, lamentation and silence, are not, however, signs of loss of hope or resignation: as constitutive categories of Benjamin's early philosophy of language and community, they are precisely the means of saving hope in an age characterized by the impossibility of hope and redemption.

Keywords: Walter Benjamin, youth, philosophy of language, philosophy of community, hope

Bálint Somlyó: Problems of Origin

Abstract: My paper is an analysis of Walter Benjamin's possibly most important methodological piece of writing, the *Epistemo-Critical Prologue of The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. The aim of the analysis on the one hand is to find out the special, benjaminian meaning and effective origin of certain central terms (representation, idea, origin), and, on the other, to interpret with their help an important late fragment which can illuminate the methodological and thematic coherence of the early and late works of Benjamin. The paper's method is basically close reading, supplemented by reference to some usually neglected sources. Among the results there appeared a completely unforeseen one, namely the possibly cohenian origin of the so important benjaminian term 'detour'!

Keywords: representation, idea, origin, detour

Fanni Tóth: Melencolia I as Denkbild

Abstract: The starting point of this study is the question of why such an extensive amount of literature and attempts at interpretation could have been produced in connection with Albrecht Dürer's enigmatic engraving, *Melencolia I* – a very important work of art for Walter Benjamin. In my own analysis, I take account of this and start from the hypothesis that the variety of interpretations may in itself indicate something about the mode of operation of the picture. To dissect this, the study draws on some recurring elements of the history of interpretation which focus on the compositional principles of the engraving. In addition I briefly review the historical context of the work in the light of contemporary understandings of the image. The main argument of this paper is that the pictorial operation evoked by *Melancholia* is most clearly interpreted in light of Walter Benjamin's Denkbilder. This forms another link between Benjamin's oeuvre and the visual arts, once again showing the diversity of Benjamin's thought. This study compares the (de)structuring elements of the Dürerian concept of the image with the formation of meaning in the Thought-Image (as a form of dialectical image), examining them also through the issues of narrative and dream content, drawing on an essay by Theodor W. Adorno. The proposition of this paper is that the similarity between Benjamin's Thought-Images and the engraving of Dürer lies in the way in which they themselves operate with certain non-rational forms of thought – digressions, detours, fragmentation – and these evoke the same forms of thought in our experience. Thus, the operation of both *Melancholia* and the Thought-Images is based on the *production* of sense rather than on the *opposition* of sense to itself.

Keywords: Denkbild, Walter Benjamin, Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I*, Theodor W. Adorno

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to map the main political and philological trends in the Hungarian reception of Walter Benjamin's works from the beginnings until 1989. This reception history, which is almost entirely confined to the Kádár era, is reconstructed through oral history and relevant primary and secondary literature to illustrate the historical, personal, and professional opportunities and obstacles involved. In doing so, our research has uncovered anomalies in publishing Benjamin, such as the excerpt from *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* that appears in the first translations under a made-up title, the partial publication of the first Hungarian monograph on Benjamin, *Krédó és rezignáció* (*Creed and Resignation*), or the editorial struggle over the afterword to the collection *Angelus Novus*. In critically reconstructing the circumstances described in the interviews, we examined not only the impact of party leadership decisions and power struggles on the publication of Benjamin's works, but also how translations and interpretations were shaped by the personal relationships of those involved. Additionally, we sought to contextualize this reception by exploring contemporary issues in debates among Marxist philosophers, as well as the tensions between the public sphere, as defined by the party-state framework, and the relative autonomy of the institutions responsible for publishing.

Keywords: reception of the works of Walter Benjamin, Kádár era, Marxist philosophy, oral history, historical reconstruction

Tamás Valastyán: Bookmarks – Benjamin and Novalis

Abstract: To this day, the readability of Walter Benjamin's texts is determined by a kind of hybridity, duality or ambivalence. This unconcluded or unresolvable contradiction basically stems from the conflict between the roles of the scholar-philosopher and the elusive writer. In this paper, I try to shed light on some aspects of this conflict from the perspective of Benjamin's view of Novalis. The relationship between the two thinker-writers is best understood in the light of their approach to language, for they both regarded language less as a means of communication than as a medium of creation.

Keywords: criticism, language, paradox, allegory, perspective

The Last Thirteen Letters of Benjamin

Boglárka Daradics: Sounds of hope and desperate letting go – Commentary on the last thirteen letters of Walter Benjamin

Abstract: This essay contextualises the last thirteen letters of Walter Benjamin, in relation to his oeuvre and the historical context. My aim is to provide some reference points for the interpretation of the letters published in this issue, originally written in French and German. These letters were written in a rather specific historical-social context and in a critical period in Benjamin's life. For these very reasons, their documentary value in terms of contemporary history and Benjamin's life story is inestimable: they actively inform us about life in wartime, emigration, internment camps and the continuing insecurity of existence – to mention only the most striking aspects of them. All of this is addressed in Walter Benjamin's letters, and they shed light on the different ways in which intellectuals of the time tried to survive the vicissitudes of war and the different coping strategies they developed. Following the historical contextualisation, I analyse Benjamin's letters through the concepts of correspondence and the letter which both played key role in his life and writing.

Keywords: Walter Benjamin, letter, correspondence, emigration, commentary, last letters

Walter Benjamin: The Symphonies of Escape – The Last Thirteen Letters of Benjamin

Abstract: The following are the thirteen letters written by Walter Benjamin in his lifetime. Most of these letters (eleven) were written in French, but there are two exceptions, written in German. In addition to the commentaries, we have prepared a comprehensive set of notes which we hope will help the reader to make sense of the letters. We believe that the letters, together with the commentaries and notes, provide a complex picture of the last few months of Benjamin's life, which were very decisive. The French letters (1–5. and 8–13. letter) are translations by Laura Klára Lukács and the German letters (6. and 7. letter) by Anna Branczeiz. The notes accompanying the letters are by Boglárka Daradics.

Keywords: Walter Benjamin, letters, emigration, France

Zalán-György Ilyés: On written and unwritten letters. Afterword to the last thirteen letters of Walter Benjamin

Abstract: This epilogue offers some possible approaches to Walter Benjamin's last thirteen letters. The first part tries to reconstruct how Benjamin thought about the reading and publishing of letters and the effectiveness of correspondence. The second part draws on Theodor W. Adorno's famous essay *Benjamin the Letter Writer* to expose some of the distinctive features of Benjamin's attitude as a letter writer that are relevant to the last letters. The third and fourth sections will undertake a more in-depth analysis of the last two letters. In this analysis, I will argue, among other things, that the Hölderlin-inspired notion of sobriety and Benjamin's messianism cast Benjamin's last letter in a very different light: as an expression of courage and hope rather than despair and hopelessness.

Keywords: Walter Benjamin, last letters, correspondence, messianism, sobriety

Aura and Work of Art

Theodor Wiesengrund-Adorno: The Dialectical Theory of the Aura - Adorno's Letter to Walter Benjamin

Abstract: In the following is a very important letter written by Theodor W. Adorno to Benjamin in 1938, which reveals Adorno's comments and criticisms of the essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*. The letter is translated by János Weiss and published in this issue, together with his commentary.

Keywords: Adorno, aura, dialectic, art, autonomous art, mechanical reproduction

János Weiss: Afterword to the 1938 Adorno Letter

Abstract: The following is a commentary on the 1938 Adorno letter in this issue, which contextualises the letter and sheds light on the significance of its statements and remarks.

Keywords: Adorno, aura, dialectic, art, autonomous art, mechanical reproduction

Trends of the (International) Reception of Benjamin?

Axel Honneth: Walter Benjamin as Religious Decisionist

Abstract: Axel Honneth's review (Margarete Kohlenbach, Walter Benjamin. Self-Reference and Religiosity) is a demand for an independent study. Its significance lies in the fact that it reflects on the difficulties and general possibilities of Benjamin research in the context of a remarkable book. Benjamin's oeuvre is very diverse – it can be broken down into periods, but it is very difficult to find a unified intention in the oeuvre. However, the search for such a path is also very attractive for researchers. Kohlenbach tries to trace the early philosophical motifs of religion through the whole oeuvre. Honneth demonstrates the failure of the enterprise with a very nuanced analysis. But he also suggests that no other theme could fulfil the role of fundamental motive – including an interest in Romanticism or Marxism. There is no alternative but to accept the „inherent heterogeneity” of Benjamin's oeuvre.

Keywords: Benjamin research, Marxism, Kohlenbach, philosophy of religion

Interpretation, Reflection, Criticism

András Borbély: Cult and Technology

Abstract: Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproduction* provides insight into the development of the author's political-aesthetic thinking. Of the sixteen texts in the volume, eight have previously appeared in Hungarian; these are presented in revised translations, while the other eight texts are being published in Hungarian for the first time. With its diverse yet interconnected themes, ranging from moral philosophy and pedagogy to art theory and political economy, the volume highlights the contemporary relevance of Benjamin's mode of thought.

Keywords: technological reproduction, political aesthetics, cultic practice

Réka Erőss: The Brightness of Reflection

Abstract: In my current review, I present the book with the title *Chronicle of the Inner World*, translated and edited by Anna Zsellér, containing the autobiographical writings of Walter Benjamin, throughout highlighting the details of its two most significant texts, the *Moscow Diary* and the *Berlin Chronicle*. The former was written in the winter of 1926–27, during Benjamin's one-month visit in soviet Russia, while the latter, containing his recollections of his hometown and the years of his youth, he wrote in 1932 in Ibiza. These writings that simultaneously function as autobiographical texts and cityscapes, are to be considered remarkable mainly because of their authentic critical attitude. In the *Moscow Diary*, this critical attitude stems from the inability to fully commit to the soviet dictatorship of the proletariat, in the *Berlin Chronicle* it is triggered by the repugnance towards the contradictions of the *bourgeois* lifestyle. These texts are characterized by a serene contemplation peculiar to Benjamin's style, that penetrates into the depths of things and phenomena and unravels their hidden, inner essence.

Keywords: autobiography, journal, Walter Benjamin, Moscow, Berlin

Zoltán Lengyel: Vaterland, Muttersprache

Abstract: Walter Benjamin: A chronicle of the inner world. An important volume, *Autobiographical Writings*, was published in 2020, selected and translated by Anna Zsellér. In this review, I discuss the place of these writings in life and work, and their relation to the fundamental questions of Benjaminian philosophy.

Keywords: Walter Benjamin, Anna Zsellér, memory, cognition, epistemo-critique

Csillag Tarnai: Taking a Walk on the Map of the City of the „Self” – A Brief Note on Walter Benjamin's Autobiographical Writings

Abstract: In 2020, Kijarat Publishing House published a carefully crafted selection of Walter Benjamin's autobiographical writings from important periods of the writer's life, entitled *The Chronicle of the Inner World*. The collection of literary texts, in the outstanding Hungarian

translation of Anna Zsellér, compiled writings of different genres which are centred around two cities, Moscow and Berlin. *Moscow* is about the two months that Benjamin spent in the Soviet capital in the winter of 1926–1927, while the diary and letters, which are integral to the genesis of the series of essays on everyday life in the Soviet Union, outline in intricate details the personal challenges raging behind the rather matter-of-fact theoretical text. Benjamin wrote *The Berlin Chronicle* in Ibiza in 1932, a memoir of his homeland inspired in part by a personal crisis: the growing rise of fascism forced the writer to leave Germany. The prose gave way to a version in verse, which is also included in the selection, along with two short autobiographies written by Benjamin himself in 1928 and 1940.

Benjamin's autobiographical writings are fascinating attempts, from both a literary and a social theoretical point of view, to define the place of writer, bourgeois and intellectual in the structure of contemporaneous societies in constant political transformation. Anna Zsellér accurately points out that Benjamin's interest in writing about Moscow is driven by the critical question of "whether and if so, how the materialist dialectic can be used with both scientific and aesthetic rigor" (Zsellér [Benjamin] 2020: 213), while in the texts on Berlin, the author reveals that he seeks to discover how the experience of the metropolis "strikes the native of the bourgeois class" (Benjamin, quoted by Zsellér [Benjamin] 2020: 218). Benjamin's literary activity was thus fundamentally characterised by his desire to depict and understand differences between social classes, but his writings also reflect on the primarily bourgeois traditions that determine the literary character of autobiographical and reminiscence-driven texts. The tension between art and society is thus one of the main dilemmas in the selected texts, not only in the choice of subject matter, but also in the creation process of their particular literary character.

Keywords: urban writing, autobiography, bourgeoisie, reminiscence, cultural studies

Tóth Hanna: Crossing Borders – Review of Walter Benjamin's Hasis in Marseille

Abstract: In 2023 Walter Benjamin's latest selection of writings, titled *Hasis in Marseille* was published. The book has seen the daylight thanks to the publisher Kijarat and Anna Zsellér, who has worked both as a translator and editor of the book. This volume is another testimony to the diversity of Walter Benjamin's writings, which makes us wonder whether there is something other than the figure of the author, that links the various essays to each other. And even if at first glance this connection is not so obvious, I think it can be revealed if we pay close attention to the individual texts. Similarly, to Benjamin's creative work method, to justify my position, I must make digressions to get to the more cardinal questions of the review. In my writing, I will try to discuss questions such as why we should read Benjamin in Hungarian, and what we can call the task of a translator. And although I cannot provide a definitive answer to these dilemmas, asking the questions can provide us a fertile ground. In this review, therefore, I would like to justify my proposition that the book should be viewed as a large montage of fragments, as an archive of viewpoints, which thus makes each text completely self-contained along the lines of interpenetrability and interconnectedness.

Keywords: Benjamin, translation, interstitiality, montage, viewpoint

Abstract: In my review I try to give the potential reader a sense of the significance of Giorgio Agamben's work *Studiolo*, published in 2021. In my interpretation, this book is of great importance for both the reader and Agamben, because it deals with elderliness and the fruit which comes by reflecting onto it: the confrontation with the creative process. The object of my review takes on a special importance if the author's *studiolo* is recognised as an intimate space of thought and creation; this sphere being an area into which the reader can only gain insight on rare occasions. In my opinion in the current book Agamben tries to unveil himself with the help of the artworks and the arising thoughts which emerge from these. He wants to grasp that specific fountain or source, which made possible his philosophy.

Keywords: Agamben, elderliness, nakedness, self-reflection, art

