



GEMEINSCHAFT | COMMUNITY

IN WALTER BENJAMIN'S PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF VERONA

3-4 JUNE 2022

'You are imperilled by the longing for community,
even if it means the apocalyptic community of
revolution'

Gershom Scholem, Letter to Benjamin, May 1931

Organisation: Stefano Marchesoni (Paris), Nassima Sahraoui (Frankfurt),
Sebastian Truskolaski (Manchester/Berlin), Tom Vandeputte (Amsterdam/Cambridge)
Co-Organisation: Nicolò Pietro Cangini (Verona), Caterina Diotto (Verona)

In collaboration with Centro di Ricerca ORFEO (Dipartimento di Scienze umane, Università di Verona), Professor Markus Ophaelders (Verona), Philosophical Colloquium / Frankfurt Benjamin Lectures (Thomas Regehly), and the Walter Benjamin Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

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AKADEMIE DER KÜNSTE



UNIVERSITÀ
di VERONA

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The concept of 'community' (*Gemeinschaft*) runs like a thread through many of Benjamin's writings: from his earliest reflections on the German Student Movement, including his 1911 essay on 'The Free School Community', to his ill-fated *Habilitation* on the *Origin of the Mourning Play* (1925); and from his early language-philosophical tract 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man' (1916) to his later, more pointedly materialist city portrait, 'Moscow' (1927). For Benjamin, the term entails not only a critique of 'national community' (*Volks-gemeinschaft*), but equally an effort to delineate a form of 'ethical community' (*sittliche Gemeinschaft*) and a 'community of language' (*Sprach-gemeinschaft*). In each case, these figures of community are articulated in response to shifting historical circumstances, including two World Wars, and through an engagement with a wide range of interlocutors – Friedrich Hölderlin and Gustav Landauer, among them. Although Benjamin never systematically expounds the concept of community *per se*, his frequent use of the word is consistent with his wider effort to recast the sense in which alternative forms of sociality might be conceived – be it in terms of 'The Storyteller's 'community of listeners' or in terms of the city as 'the first *communio*', as noted in *The Arcades Project*. In other words, there is a sense in which Benjamin's concept of community, alongside its cognate terms, marks a nodal point: an opportunity to rethink the interplay of language, history, and politics in the register of what is *common*.

This two-day workshop will take the concept of 'community' as it appears in a selection of texts, including (but not limited to) the ones noted above, as a starting point for a broader exploration of the 'actuality' of Benjamin's thought – its *Aktualität*. As in previous years, the workshop will be organised around close readings of short, selected text passages in which these matters will be traced over the course of Benjamin's earlier writings, as well as his later thought, probing the currency of his reflections for the present moment. In short: we intend to focus on the question what Benjamin's concept of community means for us today – and how we might understand its continuing or renewed currency.

For this workshop we will be joined by HOWARD CAYGILL (Kingston University London).

Since the event revolves around intensive reading sessions, some prior knowledge of Benjamin's philosophical writings is strongly encouraged. Bilingual, German-English copies of the texts will be made available. To facilitate the discussion, the number of participants for this workshop is limited.

If you are interested in participating, please send a message and a brief biographical note to the organisers before **1 May, 2022**.

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