

MATTER | MATERIE IN WALTER BENJAMIN'S PHILOSOPHY

ERNST BLOCH CENTRE FOR GERMAN THOUGHT
SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON.
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Die heilige Familie, on the subject of Bacon's materialism: "Matter, surrounded by a sensuous poetic glamor, seems to attract man's whole entity with winning smiles." (Arcades Project, N 5a, 4)

One of the most striking features of Benjamin's thinking is his extreme attention to material details, which, although they constitute the main texture of our everyday experience, are mostly overlooked. Thanks to this particular awareness, his ideas always develop "in bodily contact with the materials", as Adorno pointed out, thereby subverting the metaphysical dualism between form and matter. One might even argue that the topic of *matter* (not only *Materie* but also *Stoff* or *Stofflichkeit*) could be seen as a thread that runs through his entire oeuvre. Already in his early reflections on language, Benjamin refers to a "communication of matter in magic communion" ("*Mitteilung der Materie in magischer Gemeinschaft*") that demands to be translated into names by humankind. Always true to this ethical demand of listening carefully to the "unspoken nameless language of things", Benjamin's writings unfold a myriad of ways in which expression can be lent to matter in language, including: the fragment as "the noblest material of Baroque creation", the empathy (*Einfühlung*) with material objects that characterises the attitude of the collector, the passionate philosophical interest in toys, the pivotal role of iron and glass in the *Arcades Project*, the child's obsessive concern with an endless variety of materials, and Baudelaire's morbid disposition of empathising with inorganic matter. Moreover, matter is not only an object to which Benjamin's thinking seems to be inextricably bound; it also plays a decisive role on a methodological level. Identifying himself with the Parisian ragpicker of the 19th century, Benjamin, during his stay in Paris, spent most of his time at the Bibliothèque Nationale where he collected an enormous amount of heterogeneous philological materials. It is on this basis that the dialectical image of Paris as the capital of the 19th century began to materialise, ultimately leading to Benjamin's idiosyncratic reading of historical materialism and his engagement with the question of matter in the history of philosophy and politics.

This two-day workshop aims at re-reading Benjamin's writings by following these various material traces.

For this workshop we will be joined by PROFESSOR CAROLIN DUTTLINGER (OXFORD).

Since the event revolves around close reading sessions, some prior knowledge of Benjamin's 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 would like to participate, please send a message and a brief biographical note to the organisers before **31 March, 2023**.

Organisation: Stefano Marchesoni (Paris), Nassima Sabraoui (Frankfurt), Sebastian Truskolaski (Manchester)

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In collaboration with the Walter Benjamin Archiv, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, the Frankfurt Benjamin Lectures (Thomas Regebby), and the Ernst Bloch Centre for German Thought, School of Advanced Study, University of London.