

IWBS CONFERENCE 2023

Politics of Justice: Text, Image, and Practice

27-30 SEPTEMBER
Warsaw, Poland

Organizers:



International Walter Benjamin Society

Partners and sponsors:



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Concept

Ever since his *Notizen zu einer Arbeit über die Kategorie der Gerechtigkeit* of October 1916, the notion of justice was one of the key concepts of Walter Benjamin's thinking. It is central to his paper *On the Critique of Violence*, as well as to the seminal essays on Karl Kraus, Franz Kafka, and Nikolai Lesskov. Explicitly mentioned or merely intimated, it operates at the very core of virtually all Benjamin's intellectual endeavors – from the Goethe essay, translation theory, and *Trauerspielbuch*, to the Arcades Project itself. In fact, set as it is against the recurrent element of myth, justice can be seen as the driving force behind Benjamin's oeuvre, and the work itself may be perceived as an experimental field of various ways of understanding, situating, and practicing justice in the face of crisis.

And it was crisis – the deep moral, ethical, economic, and political crisis of modernity – which Benjamin was trying to bear witness to and adequately express. Beginning with his early diagnoses on the political impact of the new social and cultural movements, Benjamin's writings always sought to name the crisis present in the philosophical, theological, and literary legacies of different European traditions. It was predominantly the crisis of the 1920s and 1930s that created the context for his concepts of poverty, the aura of the work of art, and history and sovereignty. This conceptuality, however, can hardly be thought of without reference to the idea of just intervention: the idea of justice as a proper and, precisely, just response to the crisis of modernity constitutes one of the most original traits of Benjamin's philosophical endeavor.

Today, with each new crisis becoming instantly global and overwhelming, the kind of response Benjamin demanded and sought – a response which would not be merely corrective but truly responsible, engaged, and engaging – seems more necessary than ever since his untimely death. Thus, our conference will be devoted to these central dimensions of Benjamin's work. However, while welcoming all attempts at a systematic analysis of various understandings and reconfigurations of the idea of justice and the notion of crisis, as well as the interlinks between them and his reflections on law, myth, guilt/debt, violence, dialectics, name, image, etc., we also encourage participants both to engage with the possible productive tensions between Benjamin's and other thinkers' explorations of justice and crisis, as well as to inquire into the potential application of Benjamin's intellectual practice within various fields of the humanities and political as well as artistic activity in general. More specifically, we want to explore the three intersecting dimensions in which one can observe the interplay between diagnoses of crisis and ideas of justice: text, image, and practice. In other words, we would like to open up a space for a discussion of various theories side by side with Benjamin's ways of facing crisis and practicing the politics of justice, as well as the modes in which his insights and methods can function outside of the scope of his oeuvre.

Sections

Section 1: Law, Justice, Politics

(chairs: Hannah Franzki & Tom Vandeputte)

The concept of justice is widely acknowledged to play a crucial role in Benjamin's political thought. Before his political writings of the early 1920s, most famously "Toward the Critique of Violence," it already appears in a variety of other texts and fragments which often remained unpublished during his lifetime. Also in his later writings, the term continues to surface in his engagement with political-philosophical problems – for instance in the 1931 essay on Karl Kraus, where Benjamin ties his reflections on justice both to the Jewish tradition and to the critique of right of the young Marx. A constant in Benjamin's work on the category of justice is, indeed, its relation not only to the critique of law and the State, which can already be traced back to his fragments of 1916, but also to the critique of capitalism (most prominently, perhaps, in the fragment on "Capitalism as Religion"). What seems to hold the two together is a theory of fate and its "basic concept": *Schuld*, guilt or debt, with its specific moral, economic and temporal logic.

In this section, we wish to examine the place of the category of justice in the different strands of Benjamin's political thought, including his comments on law. Beyond "Toward Critique of Violence," which has received extensive scholarly attention, we are especially interested in exploring the account of justice in other texts and contexts. We hope to discuss, amongst others, the role of politics and the political in Benjamin's thinking on justice; the political implications of Benjamin's work on judgement and the idea of *Rechtsprechung ohne Urteil*; the place of the category of justice in the different variations of the critique of law; and the relation of justice to the critique of capitalism. Contributions may engage with these (or related) topics in order to shed light on philosophical and/or contemporary political problems.

Section 2: Justice in Language and Linguistic Practice

(chairs: Monika Tokarzewska & Ilit Ferber)

Benjamin's "Notes on a Work toward the Category of Justice" – which come to us only through the medium of Scholem's *Diaries* – were written in conjunction with a long letter he began to write to Scholem that later turned into his "On Language as Such and on Human Language." Though the word "justice" does not explicitly appear in this text, it is nevertheless clear that Benjamin's first attempt to develop a theory of language is deeply imbued with concern for the category to which he turns his attention in the "Notes" Scholem preserved. Moreover, this category – sometimes expressed as such, sometimes recognizable only in reflection – can likewise be seen to traverse perhaps all of his investigations into language and linguistic practices, ranging from his early study of Hölderlin's lyric poetry, through "The Task of the Translator" and the citational practices that characterize the *Arcades Project*, and onto his final notes on "integral prose," which, as he writes, "has burst the fetters of writing and is understood by all human beings (like the language of birds by Sunday's children)."

We welcome proposals that engage with Benjamin's life-long attempt to work through the relation between language and the category of justice, and we encourage a special focus on the different linguistic contexts in which he addresses justice. Just as we welcome proposals

that, departing from Benjamin's work – or its influence – examine how language and justice can again be thought and brought together, so we are eager to receive proposals that challenge the relationship between language and justice, calling to question the very possibility of expressing justice in what is often called “language,” thereby perhaps “reducing” justice to instances of propositional discourse. Finally, we look forward to reading proposals that are responsive to, yet may also stake out a certain critical distance from, what Benjamin calls the “essential multiteity [*Wesensvielfalt*]” of language.

Section 3: Justice in/of Images in Visual and Performative Arts

(chairs: Katarzyna Bojarska & Maria Teresa Costa)

In Walter Benjamin's thought image constitutes both an object of experience and analysis as well as an epistemic tool for building knowledge: both mental (such as “dialectical image”, *Denkbild*, allegory and metaphor) and material images (such as the pictures and photographs that he worked with) are at the center of this enterprise. Furthermore, as loaded with time and history, images are not only the subject of Benjamin's reflections in the fields of aesthetics and the theory of art, but they emerge across his entire oeuvre and are essential for understanding the relationship among the concept of justice and those of memory, testimony, sovereignty and power.

On the other hand, in recent years the fields of visual and performative arts have offered numerous examples of how the questions of justice, care and repair can be addressed, communicated and be more inclusive for all kinds of audiences. The ideas of thinking and acting with images towards more just organization of the world, including environmental justice, have been topical and vital for a while now. Hence we would like to invite reflection on how Benjamin's thought on and engagement with images can contribute to our understanding of practices in the fields of visual and performative arts, as well as activism. Also, on how contemporary practices in these fields allow us to rethink some of Benjamin's ideas as well as those of Aby Warburg, Sergei Eisenstein, Sigmund Freud, Georges Bataille among others.

We are looking forward to contributions from scholars in philosophy, literature, political theory, the history of knowledge, translation studies, environmental studies, visual and performative arts, as well as artists working in different media.

Section 4: Bodily and Spatial Practices of Justice

(chairs: Agata Bielik-Robson & Marta Olesik)

Body was always situated at the center of Benjamin's thinking, from his early take on the psychophysical problem to his analysis of his Berlin childhood and his theory of the reception of art. But so was space, from his reflections on borders in his essay on violence to his writings on city spaces and the Arcades Project itself. Now, it is fascinating to see how these two deeply connected lines of Benjamin's reflection interact with his thinking on justice.

From *Theological-Political Fragment* up to *On the Concept of History*, it is body that suffers and demands justice. Benjamin's politics of justice takes place in the material space filled with bodies: be it his early “nihilism as world politics” which attends to the happiness of the finite life attuned to the rhythm of “transience” or his more mature Marxian approach to the “crude” materiality of *plumpes Denken*. The practices of justice occur thus in the concrete “body- and image-space” (*Leib- und Bildraum*) from which they can never become detached: the Benjaminian messianism remains fixed to the material here and now – to spaces and bodies

administered in very specific ways – never taking flight into the supranatural realms of pure spirituality.

The section invites all the proposals that will focus on the materialist aspects of Benjamin's idea of justice and the role of the spatial-corporeal in his thought, as well as those that bring together these aspects of his thinking and more recent insights from urban studies, body studies, theory of architecture and philosophy of space.

Section 5: History, Memory and Justice

(chairs: Magdalena Gawin & Andrzej Leder)

To what extent is justice a historical concept? Can we imagine a way to think of justice as transcending the historical conditions? Or maybe we could think of it as a fold (*plis*) in the immanence? And if justice has to be an immanent part of history, how is it possible that we dare to judge historical events based on some *a priori* of "just" or "unjust"? Is this miraculous "faculty of judgment", that gives us the audacity to demand justice from history, connected with historical danger? In the sixth thesis on the concept of history Benjamin wrote: "To articulate what past is does not mean to recognize 'how it really was'. It means to take control over a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger". Is "dialectical image" – the "irretrievable picture of the past, which threatens to disappear with every present, which does not recognize itself as meant in it" [the fifth thesis] – possible only in the situation of extreme danger? Are we in such a moment? And, last but not least, how are the different modes of memory defined and analyzed by Benjamin related to his vision of history, on the one hand, and to his understanding of justice, on the other.

Within these sections we welcome papers that attempt to answer these questions in relation to various elements of Benjamin's work as well as those that confront Benjamin's thought on these matters with various historical, social and political phenomena, but also with different ways in which other thinkers dealt with the interrelations between history, memory and justice.

Section 6: Justice and Crisis

(chairs: Christian Ferencz-Flatz & Mikołaj Ratajczak)

It suffices to sift through some of the titles published during the decades following the First World War to realize to what extent this period was indeed experienced as one of acute rupture and crisis: "Krisis des Glaubens, Krisis der Kirche, Krisis der Religion", "Der Untergang des Abendlandes", "Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie", "Die geistige Krisis der Gegenwart", "Die Krisis der europäischen Kultur" etc. Benjamin's work entertains subtle connections to this proliferating literature. His own writings abound in attempts to come to terms with this situation of crisis, from the political crisis of parliamentarism during the Weimar republic to the economical crisis of the German inflation and depression, and from the crisis of art, philosophy, and historical consciousness, to that of contemporary perception and experience in general. The politico-theological reflection on law and justice, which cuts through his entire oeuvre, is deeply connected with these diagnoses in various respects. This is the case most overtly with Benjamin's conception of revolution, but also with his understanding of time and history, his reflections on the contemporary fate of art and its politicization, his ethical musings on attention and destruction etc. The section encourages submissions exploring the various intersections in Benjamin's work between his time-diagnostic reflections of the contemporary crisis and his conception of

justice, also taking into view the relationship to authors like Schmitt, Agamben, Derrida and others.

Section 7: Justice and Visions of Community

(chairs: Alexandra Richter & Sebastian Truskolaski)

Figures of “community” appear in many of Benjamin’s writings, starting with his earliest reflections on the German Student Movement and ending with his self-consciously materialist works from the 1930s – be it as an “ethical community”, outlined in his piece on “Moral Education”, or as a “community of all the dead”, noted in *One-Way-Street*. But what is common in these visions of community? Or, put differently, what constitutes them as a common good?

For all their differences, Benjamin’s figures of community are remarkably consistent in two respects: on the one hand, in their rejection of narrowly conceived forms of “national community”, and, on the other hand, in their attempts to delineate something like a “magical community” that “takes place through similarity”. In each case, these formulations are coined in response to changing historical circumstances, including two World Wars, and in dialogue with a wide variety of interlocutors, from Gustav Wyneken to André Gide. Although Benjamin nowhere systematically elaborates his concept of community, the recurrent use of this word throughout his texts is in keeping with a wider endeavour to think through how alternative modes of sociality might be conceived.

To be sure, Benjamin’s concept of community occasions a reflection on the interplay of language, politics, and history in terms of what is common. However, given the conventional association of “community” with what is *proper* to a given group, i.e. with what belongs to it as *property* (language, territory, ethnicity), the question thus arises, as to how “community” might “transcend” this “possessive character”, if – as Benjamin notes – “there is no system of possession, regardless of its type, that leads to justice”. This question, for its part, is underpinned by Benjamin’s well-known distinction between “justice” and “law”, whereby the latter might be seen as violently sustaining unjust property relations that perpetuate the narrow notions of community that Benjamin rejects. Put differently, then, we might ask: what, if anything, is the relationship of community to justice in Benjamin’s writing, and what do his visions of community entail?

Program

27 SEPTEMBER / IFiS PAN

10:00	Social Activity: Facing the catastrophe of the past: a walk along the traces of the Warsaw Ghetto
	room: The Mirror Hall
2:00	Welcome: Andrzej Rychard, Director of the IFiS PAN; Adam Lipszyc, Head of the Scientific Council of IFiS PAN, Marcin Jacoby, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities in Warsaw, SWPS University; Agnieszka Pantuchowicz, Vice-Director of the Institute of Humanities, SWPS University
2:30	Keynote Lecture: Sigrid Weigel, <i>Benjamin's Discussion of Law and Justice between Athens and Jerusalem</i>
4:00	Break
4:15	Keynote Lecture: Susan Buck-Morss, <i>Doing Justice to the Past</i>
6:00	Reception

28 SEPTEMBER / SWPS UNIVERSITY

	room N308	room N309	room N318	room N312	room N311
	Bodily and Spatial Practices of Justice	History, Memory and Justice	Justice and Visions of Community	Justice in/of Images and Visual Arts	Justice in Language and Linguistic Practice
	Agata Bielik-Robson <i>Nihilism as Material Justice: Benjamin's Theology of Entropy</i>	Andrzej Gniazdowski <i>Phenomenology and Angelology of History: Husserl and Benjamin about "what we call progress"</i>	Carolyn Duttlinger <i>Beyond Individual Authorship: Benjamin's Journalism as Intervention and Engagement</i>	Clemens-Carl Härle <i>Gerechtigkeit gegenüber der Farbe?</i>	Dennis Johannssen <i>Language Justice and the Critique of Linguistic Violence</i>
9:00	Antoni Zajac <i>Innervated Pessimism and the Infrastructure of Justice</i>	Andrzej Leder <i>Who is the Angel gazing at? Some Lacanian Remarks</i>	Jaime Cuenca <i>An Adress with Three Audiences, and with None</i>	Paweł Mościcki <i>What Color Is Justice?</i>	Noboyuki Kakigi <i>Translation as Action for Justice of Languages: An Inquiry into the Practical Meaning of Walter Benjamin's Theory of Translation</i>
	Francisco Naishtat <i>Redemption Through Immersion: On the Natural History and Justice in Benjamin's Micrological Theology</i>	Anna Wąsowicz <i>Between Practical Past and Embodied Art: the Case of Walter Benjamin</i>	Yu-jin Chang <i>Zensur – zwischen Kontrolle und Unterdrückung: Walter Benjamins Deutung eines Machtinstruments</i>	Katrin Weleda <i>Drei Minuten des Leidens. Gedanken und Gesichte eines Geköpften</i>	Caroline Sauter <i>Translation and Justice: Benjamin and Derrida</i>
10:30	Break				

	room N308	room N309	room N318	room N312	room N311
	Bodily and Spatial Practices of Justice	History, Memory and Justice	Justice and Visions of Community	Justice in/of Images and Visual Arts	Justice in Language and Linguistic Practice
	Burak Üzümkesci <i>Bodies at a Standstill: The Political Promise of a Gesture and Its Reproducibility</i>	Jeon Gyuchan <i>Redemption of Justice Through Memory</i>	Markus Hennig <i>Die Gemeinschaft zwischen Mythos und Gerechtigkeit</i>	Beatriz Sánchez Santidrián <i>“Visual justice” in the Artistic Practices of History. Unearthed Libraries and the Recovery of Dissident Memory</i>	Ludmila Fuks <i>Quote without inverted commas. Montage for justice of things</i>
10:45	Brendan Moran <i>“Veil”, Justice, and the Body in Benjamin and Luste Boulbina</i>	Johannes Otto Riedner <i>Benjamin, Bloch, Kracauer, Scholem</i>	Thomas Lindenberg <i>Ästhetische Erziehung zur Bildung einer gerechten Gemeinschaft</i>	Tomasz Szerszeń <i>Read from the Ashes: to Do Justice</i>	Elliott J. Niblock <i>Vergegnung: The Mis-Meeting Between Martin Buber and Walter Benjamin</i>
	Michał Pospiszyl <i>Walter Benjamin in the Shtetl</i>	Magdalena Gawin <i>Benjamin Against Fascism – A Critical Analysis of Memory</i>	Sophia Buck <i>Walter Benjamin’s ‘Outsiders’: Against ‘Optische Täuschungen’ of National communities and their literary histories</i>	Katarzyna Bojarska <i>History Behind/ Before the Image and the Image of History Behind Us</i>	Yu-jin Chang <i>Justice is No Myth: An Interpretation of the Antithetical Synonyms in Benjamin’s Works</i>
12:15	Lunch				
	Łukasz Moll <i>Walter Benjamin as the Chiffonier of the Common</i>	Matthias Roick <i>How to do Justice to the Past? Intellectual History, Non-Linear Narratives, and the Quest for Early Modernity</i>	Ori Rotlevy <i>Educative Violence and Just Communities?</i>	Daniel Gönitzer <i>Benjamins Gerechtigkeit des Humors, oder: Die Ungerechtigkeit, dass „die Schmetterlinge im Zoo keinen Käfig haben“</i>	Agata Kobylska <i>Den Dingen Gerechtigkeit widerfahren lassen. Benjamins Spätstil in der Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert</i>
1:15	Nélio Conceição <i>Presence of Mind and its Practices Between Body and History</i>	Santhia Velasco Kittlaus <i>Where Do We Stand When We Stand Up for Justice? A Comparison of the Historian’s Position in Walter Benjamin and Michel-Rolph Trouillot</i>	Ewa Majewska <i>Procedures of Justice – Towards Historical Dimensions of Weak Solidarity</i>	Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesisu <i>Caricature as Mass Art and Art History as Social Justice</i>	Astrid Seeger <i>Sprache an der Schwelle zur Gerechtigkeit – Originaltext zwischen Verfremdung und Entfaltung in Walter Benjamin’s Übersetzungspraxis</i>
	Judith Kasper <i>Benjamins Lumpensammler und Ruth, die Ährenleserin</i>	Urszula Zbrzeźniak <i>Philosophy as a Practice of Justice</i>	Turkuaz Benlioglu <i>Towards an Improperly Human Community? Walter Benjamin on Solitude and Community</i>	Christian Ferencz-Flatz <i>The Most Real Gaze into the Heart of Things: Doing Justice to History via Advertisements</i>	Monika Tokarzewska <i>Der Humor als ‘angewandte Gerechtigkeit’. Humor und Erneuerung des (sprachlichen) Weltbezugs bei Walter Benjamin</i>
5:00	Social Activity: Warsaw City Museum: The Opening of the Exhibition 'This Is Not My Story' and the Special Panel on the Exhibition (Katarzyna Bojarska, Wiktoria Biezuńska, Marta Rakoczy, Zofia Rojek)				

	room N308	room N309	room N312	room N311
	Bodily and Spatial Practices of Justice	History, Memory and Justice	Law, Justice and Politics	Justice in/of Images and Visual Arts
10:00	Jakub Momro <i>Embodiment and Justice: Nominalism and Language Utopia in the Work of Walter Benjamin and Theodor. W. Adorno</i>	Evelyn Schuler Zea <i>Die Aufgabe der Gerechtigkeit</i>	Tom Vandeputte <i>Justice at Point Zero: Benjamin's Early Critique of Law</i>	Rita Velloso <i>From Moscow to Berlin: the Urban 'Thought-Images' and the Tasks of Criticism</i>
	Jakub Gorecki <i>"Idiosyncrasy as the Highest Critical Organ": Karl Kraus and Bodily Justice</i>	Karol Sauerland <i>Die Rolle des Begriffs der Gerechtigkeit für die Beurteilung von antitotalitären Bewegungen</i>	Klaus Mladek <i>Gerechtigkeit ist die ethische Seite des Kampfes</i>	Jeremy Rafuse <i>Walter Benjamin and the Visual and Performance Arts</i>
	Federica Muré <i>Justice as a "Technique of Nearness": A Close Reading of Benjamin's Anecdote-Theory</i>	David Galashvili <i>Progress and Catastrophe in the Modern World</i>	Tamara Tagliacozzo <i>Messianism and Happiness: A Possible Reference to Kant in Benjamin's Theological-Political Fragment</i>	Vladimir Rizow <i>Reading Images: Walter Benjamin and Louis Althusser in Conversation</i>
11:30	Break			
	room N308	room N309	room N312	room N311
	Bodily and Spatial Practices of Justice	History, Memory and Justice	Law, Justice and Politics	Justice and Crisis
11:45	Karolina Jesień <i>The Adventures of Benjamin's Body: On the Politics of Leib and Körper from the "Outline of the Psychophysical Problem" to the Arcades Project</i>	Sarah Ralfs <i>Zur Überlieferung der Steine. Benjamins Vision für eine gerechtere Gemeinschaft nach der Hoffnungslosigkeit</i>	Everet Smith <i>Concerning the Law in Walter Benjamin's Critique of Violence</i>	Filip Brzeźniak <i>"Enslaved Forebears" or "the Emancipated Heirs" – Walter Benjamin's Politics of Inheritance and (In)transmissibility as Crisis</i>
	Szymon Wróbel <i>Walter Benjamin's Attempt at Revision of the Order of Kant's Transcendental Cartography</i>	Ulrich Mathias Gerr <i>Last der Geschichte – Entstellung und Gerechtigkeit im Kontext des 'Bucklicht Männlein'</i>	Vinsent Nollet <i>"The Critique of Violence is the Philosophy of Its History": History, Theology and Politics in Walter Benjamin's Early Historical-Philosophical Writings</i>	Anna Migliorini <i>A Leap and a Bow between Krise (und Kritik) and the Real State of Exception</i>
	Andreas Köpfer & Robert Schneider-Reisinger <i>Raum- und Körperentwürfe bei Walter Benjamin und Siegfried Kracauer und deren Relevanz für die Critical Disability Studies</i>	Manuela Sampaio de Mattos <i>Testimonial Clinics in Brazil – a Benjaminian reading</i>		Mikołaj Ratajczak <i>Doing the Crisis Justice: Benjamin's Conceptual Politics in Theorizing Crisis</i>
1:15	Lunch			

	room N312	room N311
	Law, Justice and Politics	Justice and Crisis
	Hannah Franzki <i>Foundational Violence and Dialectical Images: Thinking with Walter Benjamin about the Politics of Time in War Crime Trials</i>	Caroline Adler <i>"...ehemals gesicherte Begriffe von Gerechtigkeit". "Drei Bücher [des Heute]" und die Krisis der europäischen Intelligenz</i>
2:15	Thomas Regehly <i>Die Gerechtigkeit und das Rettende</i>	Brian Britt <i>Crisis, Critique, and the Rightous Storyteller</i>
		Julia Dybczyńska <i>The Myth of the Atom</i>
3:45	Break	
4:00	General Meeting of the International Walter Benjamin Society (room S205)	

30 SEPTEMBER / SWPS UNIVERSITY

10:00	Social Activity: Kibbutz Grochów – guided walk
	room S305
11:30	Keynote Lecture: Eli Friedlander, <i>Language, Just Language</i>
1:00	Break
1:15	Special Panel: <i>Violence, Law and Justice: discussing the practices of justice in contemporary Poland</i>
2:45	Closing Remarks and Farewell

Organizing committee

Katarzyna Bojarska	SWPS University
Adam Lipszyc	IFiS PAN
Marta Olesik	ISP PAN
Mikołaj Ratajczak	IFiS PAN
Mateusz Skrzeczkowski	SWPS University

Conference locations



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