is unlikely that the German Utopian knew the work of his French counterpart. But we can be sure that the image of the planet Mercury teaching the Harmonians their mother tongue would have delighted Paul Scheerbart.

Written, in French, in the late 1930s or 1940; unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime. Gesammelte Schriften, II, 630-632. Translated by Edmund Jephcott.

Notes

1. Paul Scheerbart (1863-1915), German author, produced poetry and prose oriented toward a gently fantastic science fiction. In 1919, Benjamin had written an unpublished review of Scheerbart's novel Lesabendio (1913). Zeit-Echo: Ein Kriegs-Tagebuch der Künstler (Time-Echo: An Artists' War Diary) was published from 1914 to 1917. Two pieces by Scheerbart appeared in the journal. Benjamin's quotation here is actually a very free paraphrase of at least two separate passages from Scheerbart's short story (not an article) "In einem Privatzirkel" (A Private Gathering).

2. Designed by the noted bridge engineer Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel (1832-1923), the Eiffel Tower was built for the International Exposition of 1889. When the exposition concession expired in 1909, the tower escaped demolition only because its value as an antenna for the new radio technology was demonstrated.

3. Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742-1799), German author and experimental psychologist, was a feared satirist in his time. Yet he is best remembered today as the first great German aphorist. More than 1,500 pages of his notes were published posthumously: along with jokes, linguistic paradoxes, puns, metaphors, and excerpts from other writers, they contain thousands of memorable aphorisms. Jean Paul Richter (pen name Jean Paul; 1763-1825) wrote a series of wildly extravagant, humorous novels that, with their blend of fantasy and realism, continue to defy categorization.

4. Charles Fourier (1772-1837), French social theorist and reformer, called for a reorganization of society based on communal agrarian associations known as "phalansteries." He devoted a series of books, written in a bizarre style, to the minute elaboration of his Utopian vision as set in an ideal realm which he called Harmony. The inhabitants of this realm, the Harmonians, would continually change roles within different systems of production.
past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a secret ind

by which it is referred to redemption. Doesn't a breath of the air that n

vaded earlier days caress us as well? In the voices we hear, isn't there a

co

echo of now silent ones? Don't the women we court have sisters they no

longer recognize? If so, then there is a secret agreement between past gener

ations and the present one. Then our coming was expected on earth. Then

like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak

messianic power, a power on which the past has a claim. Such a claim can-

not be settled cheaply. The historical materialist is aware of this.

III

The chronicler who narrates events without distinguishing between major

and minor ones acts in accord with the following truth: nothing that has

ever happened should be regarded as lost to history. Of course only a re-

deemed mankind is granted the fullness of its past—which is to say, only for

a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each

moment it has lived becomes a citation à l'ordre du jour. And that day is

Judgment Day.

IV

Seek for food and clothing first; then

shall the Kingdom of God be granted to you.

—Hegel, 1807

Class struggle, which for a historian schooled in Marx is always in evi-
dence, is a fight for the crude and material things without which no refined

and spiritual things could exist. But these latter things, which are present in

class struggle, are not present as a vision of spoils that fall to the victor.

They are alive in this struggle as confidence, courage, humor, cunning, and

fortitude, and have effects that reach far back into the past. They constantly

call into question every victory, past and present, of the rulers. As flowers

turn toward the sun, what has been strives to turn—by dint of a secret heliotropism—toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history. The his-

torical materialist must be aware of this most inconspicuous of all transfor-
mations.

V

The true image of the past fits by. The past can be seized only as an image

that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again

"The truth will not run away from us": this statement by Gottfried Keller

indicates exactly that point in historicism's image of history where the im-

age is pierced by historical materialism. For it is an irretrievable image of

the past which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize

itself as intended in that image.

VI

Articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it "the way it really was." It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of
danger. Historical materialism wishes to hold fast that image of the past

which unexpectedly appears to the historical subject in a moment of danger.
The danger threatens both the content of the tradition and those who in-

herit it. For both, it is one and the same thing: the danger of becoming a
tool of the ruling classes. Every age must strive anew to wrest tradition

away from the conformism that is working to overpower it. The Messiah

comes not only as the redeemer; he comes as the victor over the Antichrist.
The only historian capable of fanning the spark of hope in the past is the

one who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the en-

emy if he is victorious. And this enemy has never ceased to be victorious.

VII

Consider the darkness and the great cold

In this vale resounding with mystery.

—Brecht, The Threepenny Opera

Addressing himself to the historian who wishes to relive an era, Fustel de

Coulanges recommends that he blot out everything he knows about the

later course of history. There is no better way of characterizing the method

which historical materialism has broken with. It is a process of empathy. Its

origin is indolence of the heart, that acedia which despairs of appropriating

the genuine historical image as it briefly flashes up. Among medieval theolo-
gians, acedia was regarded as the root cause of sadness. Flaubert, who was

familiar with it, wrote: "Peu de gens devineront combien il a fallu etre triste

pour ressusciter Carthage!"
The nature of this sadness becomes clearer if we ask: With whom does historicism actually sympathize? The answer is inevi-
table: with the victor. And all rulers are the heirs of prior conquerors.

Hence, empathizing with the victor invariably benefits the current rulers.

The historical materialist knows what this means. Whoever has emerged

victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which cur-

rent rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional

Practice, the spoils are carried in the procession. They are called "cultural

treasures," and a historical materialist views them with cautious detach-
ment. For in every case these treasures have a lineage which he cannot con-
template without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of
the great geniuses who created them, but also to the anonymous toil of oth-
ers who lived in the same period. There is no document of culture which is
not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document
is never free of barbarism, so barbarism taints the manner in which it was
transmitted from one hand to another. The historical materialist therefore
dissociates himself from this process of transmission as far as possible. He
regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.

VIII

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in
which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a concep-
tion of history that accords with this insight. Then we will clearly see that it
which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a concep-
tion of history that avoids any complicity with the concept of history to which
those politicians still adhere.

IX

My wing is ready for flight.
I would like to turn back.
If I stayed everliving time,
I'd still have little luck.
—Gerhard Scholem, "Greetings from the Angelus"

There is a picture by Klee called Angelus Novus. It shows an angel who
seems about to move away from something he stares at.12 His eyes are wide,
his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history
must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events ap-
pears before us, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wrecKag
 upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaK
 &
his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history
emerge in fascism. Among these is a conception of nature which differs
from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel
can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the tit
to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows
ward the sky. What we call progress is this storm.

X

The themes which monastic discipline assigned to friars for meditation were
to turn them away from the world and its affairs. The thoughts we are
developing here have a similar aim. At a moment when the politicians in
whom the opponents of fascism had placed their hopes are prostrate, and
 confirm their defeat by betraying their own cause, these observations are in-
tended to extricate the political worldlings from the snares in which the
traitors have entangled them. The assumption here is that those politicians'
stubborn faith in progress, their confidence in their "base in the masses," and,
finally, their servile integration in an uncontrollable apparatus are
three aspects of the same thing. This consideration is meant to suggest that
the high price our customary mode of thought will have to pay for a concep-
tion of history that avoids any complicity with the concept of history to which
those politicians still adhere.

XI

The conformism which has marked the Social Democrats14 from the begin-
ning attaches not only to their political tactics but to their economic views
as well. It is one reason for the eventual breakdown of their party. Nothing
has so corrupted the German working class as the notion that it was mov-
ing with the current. It regarded technological development as the driving
force of the stream with which it thought it was moving. From there it was
but a step to the illusion that the factory work ostensibly furthering techno-
logical progress constituted a political achievement. The old Protestant
work ethic was resurrected among German workers in secularized form.
Smelling a rat, Marx countered "the source of all wealth and all culture."15

—Gerhard Scholem, "Greetings from the Angelus"

The Gotha Program already bears traces of this confusion, defining labor as
"the source of all wealth and all culture."15 Smelling a rat, Marx countered
that "the man who possesses no other property than his labor power" must
of necessity become "the slave of other men who have made themselves
owners." Yet the confusion spread, and soon thereafter Josef Dietzgen pro-
claimed: "The savior of modern times is called work. The . . . perfecting . . .
the labor process constitutes the wealth which can now do what no re-
demder has ever been able to accomplish."16 This vulgar-Marxist concep-
tion of the nature of labor scarcely considers the question of how its prod-
cuts could ever benefit the workers when they are beyond the means of
these workers. It recognizes only the progress in mastering nature, not the
regression of society; it already displays the technocratic features that
 later emerge in fascism. Among these is a conception of nature which differs
from the one advocated by socialist Utopias prior to the Revolu-

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ploration of the proletariat. Compared to this positivistic view, Fourier's fantasies, which have so often been ridiculed, prove surprisingly sound.

According to Fourier, cooperative labor would increase efficiency to such an extent that four moons would illuminate the sky at night, the polar caps would recede, seawater would no longer taste salty, and beasts of prey would do man's bidding. All this illustrates a kind of labor which, far from exploiting nature, would help her give birth to the creations that now lie dormant in her womb. The sort of nature that (as Dietzgen puts it) "exists gratis," is a complement to the corrupted conception of labor.

XII

We need history, but our need for it differs from that of the jaded idlers in the garden of knowledge.

—Nietzsche, On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life

The subject of historical knowledge is the struggling, oppressed class itself. Marx presents it as the last enslaved class—the avenger that completes the task of liberation in the name of generations of the downtrodden. This conviction, which had a brief resurgence in the Spartacus League, has always been objectionable to Social Democrats. Within three decades they managed to erase the name of Blanqui almost entirely, though at the sound of that name the preceding century had quaked. The Social Democrats preferred to cast the working class in the role of a redeemer of future generations, in this way cutting the sinews of its greatest strength. This indoctrination made the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than by the ideal of liberated grandchildren.

XIII

Every day, our cause becomes clearer and people get smarter.

—Josef Dietzgen, Social Democratic Philosophy

Social Democratic theory and to an even greater extent its practice were shaped by a conception of progress which bore little relation to reality but made dogmatic claims. Progress as pictured in the minds of the Social Democrats was, first of all, progress of humankind itself (and not just advances in human ability and knowledge). Second, it was something boundless (keeping with an infinite perfectibility of humanity). Third, it was considered inevitable—something that automatically pursued a straight or spiral course. Each of these assumptions is controversial and open to criticism. But when the chips are down, criticism must penetrate beyond these assumptions and focus on what they have in common. The concept of historically progress cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time. A critique of the concept of such a progression must underlie any criticism of the concept of progress itself.

XIV

Origin is the goal.

—Karl Kraus, Words in Verse, vol. I

History is the subject of a construction whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled full by now-time [Jetztzeit]. Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with now-time, a past which he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome reincarnate. It cited ancient Rome exactly the way fashion cites a bygone mode of dress. Fashion has a nose for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago; it is the tiger's leap into the past. Such a leap, however, takes place in an arena where the ruling class gives the commands. The same leap in the open air of history is the dialectical leap Marx understood as revolution.

XV

What characterizes revolutionary classes at their moment of action is the awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode. The Great Revolution introduced a new calendar. The initial day of a calendar presents history in time-lapse mode. And basically it is this same day that keeps recurring in the guise of holidays, which are days of remembrance [Tage des Eingedenkens]. Thus, calendars do not measure time the Way clocks do; they are monuments of a historical consciousness of which not the slightest trace has been apparent in Europe, it would seem, for the past hundred years. In the July Revolution an incident occurred in which this consciousness came into its own. On the first evening of fighting, it so happened that the dials on clocktowers were being fired at simultaneously and independently from several locations in Paris. An eyewitness, who may have owed his insight to the rhyme, wrote as follows:

Qui le croirait! on dit, qu’irrites contre l’heure,
De nouveaux Josues, au pied de chaque tour,
Tiraient sur les cadrans pour arrêter le jour.

[Who would believe it! It is said that, incensed at the hour,
Latter-day Joshuas, at the foot of every clocktower,
^ere firing on clock faces to make the day stand still.]
XVI

The historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time takes a stand [einsteht] and has come to a standstill. For this notion defines the very present in which he himself is writing history. Historicism offers the "eternal" image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past. The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called "Once upon a time" in historicism's bordello. He remains in control of his powers enough to blast open the continuum of history.

XVII

Historicism rightly culminates in universal history. It may be that materialist historiography differs in method more clearly from universal history than from any other kind. Universal history has no theoretical armature. Its procedure is additive: it musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time. Materialist historiography, on the other hand, is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the movement of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly comes to a stop in a constellation saturated with tensions, it gives that constellation a shock, by which thinking is crystallized as a monad. The historical materialist approaches a historical object only where it confronts him as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a messianic arrest of happening, or (to put it differently) a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history; thus, he blasts a specific life out of the era, a specific work out of the lifework. As a result of this method, the lifework is both preserved and sublated in the work, the era in the lifework, and the entire course of history in the era. The nourishing fruit of what is historically understood contains time in its interior as a precious but tasteless seed.

XVIII

"In relation to the history of all organic life on earth," writes a modern biologist, "the paltry fifty-millennia history of homo sapiens equates to something like two seconds at the close of a twenty-four-hour day. On this scale, the history of civilized mankind would take up one-fifth of the last second of the last hour." Now-time, which, as a model of messianic time, coincides exactly with the figure which the history of mankind describes in the universe.
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13. The reference is to Paul Klee's ink-wash drawing Angelus Novus (1920), which Benjamin owned for a time.

14. The Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany), or SPD, was founded by Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel in 1863, originally as a Marxist revolutionary organization. In the course of the nineteenth century, partly in response to Chancellor Otto von Bismarck's anti-Socialist laws of the 1880s, its policy shifted from revolutionary to social-reformist. Becoming Germany's largest political party after World War I it adopted a moderate reformist policy and participated in the government of the Weimar Republic. The party was banned by the Nazis in 1933.

15. In 1875, the Thuringian town of Gotha was the scene of a congress that united the two large German socialist groups as the Socialist Labor Party. The new party adopted the so-called Gotha Program, drafted by Wilhelm Liebknecht and Ferdinand Lassalle. It was severely criticized by Marx in his "Randglossen zum Programm der deutschen Arbeiterpartei" (written 1875, first published 1891; translated as Critique of the Gotha Program).

16. Josef Dietzgen, Sdmtliche Schriften (Wiesbaden, 1911), vol. 1, p. 175 (Sozialdemokratische Philosophie). Dietzgen (1828-1888) was a self-educated German leatherworker who interpreted Marx for the workers and won fame as the "philosopher of the proletariat," later emigrating to the United States (1884), where he edited socialist newspapers in New York and Chicago. He set out his philosophy of democratic socialism in Das Wesen der menschlichen Kopfarbeit (The Nature of Man's Mental Labor; 1869). He sent the manuscript to Marx, who in turn forwarded it to Engels with the following comment: "My opinion is that J. Dietzgen would do better to condense all his ideas into two printer's sheets and have them published under his own name as a tanner. If he publishes them in the size he is proposing, he will discredit himself with his lack of dialectical development and his way of going round in circles." (Letter to Engels of October 4, 1868.)

12. Charles Fourier (1772-1837), French social theorist and reformer, called for a reorganization of society based on communal agrarian associations which he called "phalansteries." In each community, the members would continually change roles within different systems of production.

19. Nietzsche's Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie fiir das Leben was written in...
1873 and published in 1874 as the second part of his Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen (Unintime Meditations). Benjamin quotes from the opening paragraph of Nietzsche's preface.

19. The Spartacus League was a radical leftist group founded by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg during World War I. In 1918 it became the German Communist party.

20. Louis-Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881), French revolutionary socialist and militant anticlerical, was active in all three major upheavals in nineteenth-century France—the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 and the Paris Commune—and was imprisoned following each series of events. Quotations from Blanqui and Benjamin's commentary on him play a key role in The Arcades Project.


22. Karl Kraus, Worte in Versen, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1919), p. 69, "Der sterbende Mensch" (The Dying Man). Kraus (1874-1936) was an Austrian journalist, critic, playwright, and poet. His Worte in Versen was published in nine volumes from 1916 to 1930. See Benjamin's essay "Karl Kraus" (1931) in Volume 2 of this edition.


24. The July Revolution took place July 27-29, 1830. It toppled the government of Charles X and led to the proclamation of Louis Philippe as "Citizen King" (July Monarchy).

25. See Benjamin, The Arcades Project, Convolute a21a.2.

26. "A unique experience with the past" translates "eine Erfahrung mit der Vergangenheit," die einzig dasteht." The last word chimes with einsteht in the first sentence of this section.

27. "Messianic arrest of happening" translates "messianische Stillstellung des Geschehens." "Oppressed past" translates "unterdrückte Vergangenheit," which also suggests "suppressed past."

28. These last two sections, which appear under the separate headings "A" and "B at the end of an early, untitled draft of the theses on history, were dropped in Benjamin's later drafts of the text. On account of their intrinsic interest, they are printed as a supplement to the text in the Gesammelte Schriften.

29. "The small gateway" translates "Die kleine Pforte," an echo perhaps of Martin Luther's phrase "die enge Pforte" ("the narrow gate"), in his rendering of Matthew 7:13-14 in the New Testament: "Enter by the narrow gate. . . . For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life."

Empathy with the past serves not least to make the past seem present. It is no coincidence that this tendency accords very well with a positivist conception of history (as seen in Eduard Meyer). In the field of history, the projection of the past into the present is analogous to the substitution of homogeneous configurations for changes in the physical world (Körperwelt). The latter process has been identified by Meyerson as the basis of the natural sciences (De Vexplication dans les sciences). The former is the quintessence of the "scientific" character of history, as defined by positivism. It is secured at the cost of completely eradicating every vestige of history's original role as remembrance [Eingedenken]. The false aliveness of the past-made-present, the elimination of every echo of a "lament" from history, marks history's final subjection to the modern concept of science.

In other words, the project of discovering "laws" for the course of historical events is not the only means—and hardly the most subtle—of assimilating historiography to natural science. The notion that the historian's task is to make the past "present" [das Vergangne zu "vergegenwärtigen"] is guilty of the same fraudulence, and is far less transparent.

XVIIa

In the idea of classless society, Marx secularized the idea of messianic time. And that was a good thing. It was only when the Social Democrats elevated its idea to an "ideal" that the trouble began. The ideal was defined in Neo-Kantian doctrine as an "infinite [unendlich] task." And this doctrine was
the school philosophy of the Social Democratic party—from Schmidt and Stadler through Natorp and Vorländer. Once the classless society had been defined as an infinite task, the empty and homogeneous time was transformed into an anteroom, so to speak, in which one could wait for the emergence of the revolutionary situation with more or less equanimity. In reality, there is not a moment that would not carry with it its revolutionary chance—provided only that it is defined in a specific way, namely as the school philosophy of the Social Democratic party—from Schmidt and Stadler through Natorp and Vorländer. For the revolutionary thinker, the peculiar revolutionary chance offered by every historical moment gets its warrant from the political situation. But it is equally grounded, for this thinker, in the right of entry which is means of such entry that political action, however destructive, reveals itself as messianic. (Classless society is not the final goal of historical progress but its frequently miscarried, ultimately [endlich] achieved interruption.)

The historical materialist who investigates the structure of history performs, in his way, a sort of spectrum analysis. Just as a physicist determines the presence of ultraviolet light in the solar spectrum, so the historical materialist determines the presence of a messianic force in history. Whoever wishes to know what the situation of a "redeemed humanity" might actually be, what conditions are required for the development of such a situation, and when this development can be expected to occur, poses questions to which there are no answers. He might just as well seek to know the color of ultraviolet rays.

Marx says that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps it is quite otherwise. Perhaps revolutions are an attempt by the passengers on this train—namely, the human race—to activate the emergency brake.

Three basic concepts can be identified in Marx's work, and its entire theoretical armature can be seen as an attempt to weld these three concepts together. They are the class struggle of the proletariat, the course of historical development (progress), and the classless society. The structure of Marx's basic idea is as follows: Through a series of class struggles, humanity attains to a classless society in the course of historical development. = But classless society is not to be conceived as the endpoint of historical development. From this erroneous conception Marx's epigones have derived (other things) the notion of the "revolutionary situation," which, as we know, has always refused to arrive. = A genuinely messianic face must be restored to the concept of classless society and, to be sure, in the interest of furthering the revolutionary politics of the proletariat itself.

**New Theses B**

History deals with connections and with arbitrarily elaborated causal chains. But since history affords an idea of the fundamental citability of its object, this object must present itself, in its ultimate form, as a moment of humanity. In this moment, time must be brought to a standstill.

The dialectical image is an occurrence of ball lightning⁴ that runs across the whole horizon of the past.

Articulating the past historically means recognizing those elements of the past which come together in the constellation of a single moment. Historical knowledge is possible only within the historical moment. But knowledge within the historical moment is always knowledge of a moment. In drawing itself together in the moment—in the dialectical image—the past becomes part of humanity's involuntary memory.

The dialectical image can be defined as the involuntary memory of redeemed humanity.

The notion of a universal history is bound up with the notion of progress and the notion of culture. In order for all the moments in the history of humanity to be incorporated in the chain of history, they must be reduced to a common denominator—"culture," "enlightenment," "the objective spirit," or whatever one wishes to call it.

**New Theses C**

Only when the course of historical events runs through the historian's hands smoothly, like a thread, can one speak of progress. If, however, it is a frayed bundle unraveling into a thousand strands that hang down like unplaited hair, none of them has a definite place until they are all gathered up and braided into a coiffure.

The basic conception in myth is the world as punishment—punishment which actually engenders those to whom punishment is due. Eternal recurrence is the punishment of being held back in school, projected onto the cosmic sphere: humanity has to copy out its text in endless repetitions. (Eluard, *Repetitions*.)

The eternity of punishment in hell may have sheared off the most terrible torments from the ancient idea of eternal recurrence. It substitutes an eternity of torment for the eternity of a cycle.

Thinking the idea of eternal recurrence once more in the nineteenth cen-
tory, Nietzsche becomes the figure on whom mythic doom is now carried out. For the essence of mythic happenings is recurrence. (Sismondi, Danaides.)

**New Theses H**

The dissolution into pragmatic history ought not to benefit cultural history. Moreover, the pragmatic conception of history does not founder on the demands made by "strict science" in the name of the law of causality. It founders on a shift in historical perspective. An age that is no longer able to transfigure its positions of power in an original way loses its understanding of the transfigurations which benefited such positions in the past.

The history-writing subject is, properly, that part of humanity whose solidarity embraces all the oppressed. It is the part which can take the greatest theoretical risks because, in practical terms, it has the least to lose.

Universal histories are not inevitably reactionary. But a universal history without a structural [konstruktiv] principle is reactionary. The structural principle of universal history allows it to be represented in partial histories. It is, in other words, a monadological principle. It exists within salvation history.

The idea of prose coincides with the messianic idea of universal history. (Leskov)

**New Theses K**

"For to organize pessimism means ... to discover in the space of political action ... image space. This image space, however, can no longer be measured out by contemplation. ... . The long-sought image space ... the world of universal and integral actuality" (Surrealism). Redemption is the times of progress.

The messianic world is the world of universal and integral actuality. Only in the messianic realm does a universal history exist. Not as written history, but as festively enacted history. This festival is purified of all celebration. This image space, however, can no longer be measured out by contemplation.

The idea of prose coincides with the messianic idea of universal history. Compare the passage in "The Storyteller": the types of artistic prose as the spectrum of historical types.

The multiplicity of "histories" is closely related, if not identical, to the multiplicity of languages. Universal history in the present-day sense is no more a kind of Esperanto. (It expresses the hope of the human race more effectively than the name of that universal language.)

**The Now of Recognizability**

the saying that the historian is a prophet facing backward can be understood in two ways. Traditionally it has meant that the historian, transplanting himself into a remote past, prophesies what was regarded as the future at that time but meanwhile has become the past. This view corresponds exactly to the historical theory of empathy, which Fustel de Coulanges encapsulated in the following advice: "Si vous voulez revivre une époque, oubliez que vous savez ce qui s'est passé après elle." —But the saying can also be understood to mean something quite different: the historian turns his back on his own time, and his seer's gaze is kindled by the peaks of earlier generations as they sink further and further into the past. Indeed, the historian's own time is far more distinctly present to this visionary gaze than it is to the contemporaries who "keep step with it." The concept of a present which represents the intentional subject matter of a prophecy is defined by Turgot—not without reason—as an essentially and fundamentally political concept. "Before we have learned to deal with things in a given position," says Turgot, "it has already changed several times. Thus, we always find out too late about what has happened. And therefore it can be said that politics is obliged to foresee the present." It is precisely this concept of the present which underlies the actuality of genuine historiography (N8a,3; N12a,1). Someone who pokes about in the past as if rummaging in a storeroom of examples and analogies still has no inkling of how much in a given moment depends on its being made present [ihre Vergegenwärtigung].

**The Dialectical Image**

If one looks upon history as a text, then one can say of it what a recent author has said of literary texts—namely, that the past has left in them images comparable to those registered by a light-sensitive plate. "The future alone possesses developers strong enough to reveal the image in all its details. Many pages in Marivaux or Rousseau contain a mysterious meaning which the first readers of these texts could not fully have deciphered." (Monglond.) The historical method is a philological method based on the book of life. "Read what was never written," runs a line in Hofmannsthal. The reader one should think of here is the true historian.

The multiplicity of histories resembles the multiplicity of languages. Universal history in the present-day sense can never be more than a kind of Esperanto. The idea of universal history is a messianic idea. The messianic world is the world of universal and integral actuality. Only the messianic realm does a universal history exist. Not as written history, but as festively enacted history. This festival is purified of all celebration.
There are no festive songs. Its language is liberated prose—prose which h
burst the fetters of script [Schrift] and is understood by all people (as its language of birds is understood by Sunday's children).—The idea of the concept of redemption is conceived of as the spectrum of universal historical types [the passage in "IX: Storyteller"]).—The third bastion of historicism is dedicated to the memory of the anonymous.—The second fortified position of historicism is the strongest and the most difficult to overrun. It pres-
tifies itself as "empathy with the victor." The rulers at any time are the heirs to the culture. For in every case these trea-
tures as much as by their current relationships to one another the notion that the history of humanity is composed of peoples is a mere refuge of int-
tellectual laziness. (The idea of a universal history stands and falls with the idea of a universal language. As long as the latter had a basis—whether in theology, as in the Middle Ages, or in logic, as more recently in Leibniz—universal history was not wholly inconceivable. By contrast, universal his-
tory as practiced since the nineteenth century can never have been more than a kind of Esperanto.)—The second fortified position of historicism is evident in the idea that history is something which can be narrated. In a ma-
terialist investigation, the epic moment will always be blown apart in the pro-
cess of construction. The liquidation of the epic moment must be ac-
cepted, as Marx did when he wrote Capital. He realized that the history of capital could be constructed only within the broad, steel framework of a theory. In Marx's theoretical sketch of labor under the dominion of capital, humanity's interests are better looked after than in the monumental, long-
winded, and basically lackadaisical works of historicism. It is more difficult to honor the memory of the anonymous than it is to honor the memory of the famous, the celebrated, not excluding poets and thinkers. The historical construction is dedicated to the memory of the anonymous.—The third bast-
ton of historicism is the strongest and the most difficult to overrun. It pres-
ets itself as "empathy with the victor." The rulers at any time are the heirs of all those who have history, have been victorious throughout history, and currently benefit those currently ruling. The historical material-
ist respects this fact. He also realizes that this state of affairs is well-
founded. Whoever has emerged victorious in the thousand struggles tra-
versing history up to the present day has his share in the triumphs of those now ruling over those now ruled. The historical materialist can take only a highly critical view of the inventory of spoils displayed by the victors before the vanquished. This inventory is called culture. For in every case these trea-
sures have a lineage which the historical materialist cannot contemptu-
without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great geniuses who created them, but also to the anonymous toil of others who lived in the same period. There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. The historical materialist keeps his dis-
tance from all of this. He has to brush history against the grain—even if he needs a barge pole to do it.

Categories for developing the concept of historical time.
The concept of historical time forms an antithesis to the idea of a tempo-
ral continuum.
The eternal lamp is an image of genuine historical existence. It cites what has been—the flame that once was kindled—in perpetuum, giving it ever new sustenance.
The existence of the classless society cannot be thought at the same time
that the struggle for it is thought. But the concept of the present, in its bind-
ing sense for the historian, is necessarily defined by these two temporal or-
ders. Without some sort of assay of the classless society, there is only a his-
torical accumulation of the past. To this extent, every concept of the present participates in the concept of Judgment Day.
The saying from an apocryphal gospel—"Where I meet someone, there
will I judge him"—casts a peculiar light on the idea of Last Judgment. It recalls Kafka's note: "The Last Judgment is a kind of summary justice." But it adds to this something else: the Day of Judgment, according to this saying, would not be distinguishable from other days. At any rate, this gos-
pel saying furnishes the canon for the concept of the present which the his-
torian makes his own. Every moment is a moment of judgment concerning certain moments that preceded it.

Excerpts from the Fuchs essay.
The passage on Jochmann's visionary gaze should be worked into the basic
structure of the Arcades.
The seer's gaze is kindled by the rapidly receding past. That is to say, the
prophet has turned away from the future: he perceives the contours of the
future in the fading light of the past as it sinks before him into the night of
times. This prophetic relation to the future necessarily informs the attitude
of the historian as Marx describes it, an attitude determined by actual social
circumstances.
Should criticism and prophecy be the categories that come together in the
"redemption" of the past?
How should critique of the past (for example, in Jochmann) be joined to
redemption of the past?
To grasp the eternity of historical events is really to appreciate the eternity
of their transience.
3. The Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany) was created by the Polish ophthalmologist Ludwig Zamenhof (born Lazar Markевич; 1859-1917), who, under the pseudonym Dr. Esperanto (“one who hopes”), published an expository textbook in Russian in 1887, after years of experiment. His Fundamento de Esperanto (Basis of Esperanto; 1905) established the principles of the language's structure and formation. Esperanto is characterized by a simple grammar (its rules have no exceptions) and by logical word-formation, using prefixes and suffixes to build on a small number of roots. Its vocabulary is formed from the most commonly used words of the western European languages: the name “Esperanto,” for example, recalls such words as esperanza, speranza, and espoir.


11. Esperanto is the most important of the international constructed languages. It was created by the Polish ophthalmologist Ladislaus Zamenhof (born Lazar Markевич; 1859-1917), who, under the pseudonym Dr. Esperanto (“one who hopes”), published an expository textbook in Russian in 1887, after years of experiment. His Fundamento de Esperanto (Basis of Esperanto; 1905) established the principles of the language’s structure and formation. Esperanto is characterized by a simple grammar (its rules have no exceptions) and by logical word-formation, using prefixes and suffixes to build on a small number of roots. Its vocabulary is formed from the most commonly used words of the western European languages: the name “Esperanto,” for example, recalls such words as esperanza, speranza, and espoir.

12. “Der Historiker ist ein rückwärts gekehrter Prophet.” This is fragment 80 of Friedrich Schlegel’s Athenäum-Fragmente (Athenaeum Fragments; 1798).

13. “If you want to relive an epoch, forget that you know what happened after it.” Turgot (1727-1781) was a French statesman and economist who was appointed comptroller general of France by Louis XVI in 1774. His fiscal and political reforms met with opposition from high-ranking circles and led to his downfall. He was appointed comptroller general of France by Louis XVI in 1774. His fiscal and political reforms met with opposition from high-ranking circles and led to his downfall.
dismissal two years later. Among his works are *Lettres sur la tolérance* (Lettres sur la Tolerance; 1753-1754) and *Reflexions sur la formation et la distribution des richesses* (Reflections on the Formation and Distribution of Wealth; 1766).


16. André Monglond, *Le Preromantisme francais*, vol. 1, *Le Héros preromantique* (Grenoble, 1930), p. xii. The translation here reflects Benjamin's German translation of the French original. See *The Arcades Project*, Convolute N15a,1. Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux (1688-1763) was a French playwright, essayist, and novelist whose light comedies won great popularity in the mid-eighteenth century. His best-known works include plays such as *Le Jeu de Vamour et du hasard* (The Game of Love and Chance; 1730) and *Le Legs* (The Bequest; 1736), and the novel *Le Peasant parvenu* (The Peasant Upstart; 1736). He was elected to the Académie Franchise in 1742.

17. Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874-1929), Austrian poet and dramatist, is best known in the English-speaking world for his collaborations with the composer Richard Strauss, including his librettos for the operas *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Ariadne auf Naxos*. The quotation is from his play *Der Tod und der Tod* (Death and the Fool; 1894).

18. In German folk tradition, children born on Sunday, particularly under a new moon, are likely to possess special powers, such as the ability to see spirits, speak with the dead, or have their wishes fulfilled. The term *Sonntagskind* ("Sunday's child") is also used figuratively to refer to someone who is "born under a lucky star," who has an easy time with things that are difficult for others, or for whom each day is imbued with the spirit of Sunday.


20. In Exodus 27:20, in the Hebrew Bible, God tells Moses on Mount Sinai to maintain a lamp at all times in the sanctuary: "And you shall command the people of Israel to bring to you pure beaten olive oil for the light, that a lamp may be set up to burn continuously." The lamp was to burn continuously as a sign of God's presence.

21. Possibly a reference to a passage in paragraph 5 of the *Revelation of Paul*, part of the New Testament Apocrypha: "My long-suffering bears with them, that they may turn to me; but if not, they shall come to me, and I will judge them."

22. Benjamin refers to number 40 in an untitled sequence of numbered reflections that Kafka composed ca. 1917-1918: "Nur unser Zeitbegriff lässt uns das Jüngste Gericht so nennen, eigentlich ist es ein Standrecht" ("It is only our concept of time that makes us call the Last Judgment by this name. Actually it is a kind of summary justice"). *Standrecht* literally suggests "standing imperative." See Franz Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1992), p. 122. In English, *Dearest Father: Stories and Other Writings*, trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (New York: Schocken, 1954), p. 94. Born in Prague of Jewish parentage, Kafka (1883-1924) is best known for his short stories, such as "Die Verwandlung" (The Metamorphosis; 1915) and "I"