Francisco Naishtat

The Crisis of Historical Time at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century: An Early Counterpoint Between Benjamin and Heidegger as a Crucial Issue for Thinking Modernity, Globalization and its Historical Space

Abstract: In this article, I intend first to clarify the controversy over the concept of time between the early Heidegger and the young Benjamin, referring to a seminar given by Heinrich Rickert in the summer of 1913 in Freiburg and attended by both young thinkers. Secondly, I intend to indicate further developments of this first constellation through the texts of 1915 and 1916 on time. Finally, after establishing resulting derivations in later fundamental texts of both philosophers, I will conclude by considering their differentiated perspectives on modernity and on the pre-phenomenon of globalization.

I

We may say that it would be bold and adventurous to connect Martin Heidegger with Walter Benjamin, whose thoughts (and lives), in spite of belonging to the same generation of German intellectuals, show such different profiles and with such acute contrasts. The rift is explicitly declared in Walter Benjamin's correspondence, where a considerable number of letters, which range from frank discretion to the harshest criticism, speak of an undeniable distance, expressed throughout the timeframe between his early commentaries on Heidegger in 1916 up to the end of the 1930s.¹ The gap is reinforced by the fact that Heidegger, on

¹ Letter to Gershom Scholem of November 11, 1916, (BR I, p. 344); letter to Gershom Scholem of December 1, 1920, (BR II, p. 108); letter of January 20, 1930, (BR III, p. 503). Lastly, though this does not exhaust a long list of references, we should mention a letter of Benjamin to Scholem of April 25, 1930, where Benjamin tells his friend that "[in association with Brecht] We were planning to annihilate Heidegger (*"Heidegger zu zertrümmern"*) here in the summer in the context of

Francisco Naishtat, Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA) / Centro de Investigaciones Filosóficas (CIF)

his side, never mentions Benjamin— except in his letter of August 10th, 1967, in which he writes to Hannah Arendt about a quotation by Benjamin on Mallarmé, some weeks after attending Arendt's speech in Freiburg on Benjamin (Arendt / Heidegger 1999). Nevertheless, in spite of these strong first impressions favoring an apparent total abyss between both thinkers, it is possible to discover a secret and silent constellation, which is worth exhibiting and exhuming.

Several commentators, whose number has increased in recent years, favor the idea of a deep complementarity between both German philosophers, at least around some polarities, such as the discontinuity of time, ruin, technology, the work of art, tradition and destruction. To begin with, we must mention here Hannah Arendt, who was among the first readers to emphasize the connection of both thinkers.² Ten years later, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben—who attended the *Le Thor Seminar* given by Heidegger in Provence in 1969, and whose philological and philosophical contributions to the studies on Benjamin's work are universally recognized—specifically emphasized the articulations between Benjamin and Heidegger on the issue of the discontinuity of time and some other central topics (Agamben 1978, III.8). During the last three decades, the contingent of scholars and prominent specialists that have paid attention to some aspects of the relations between Benjamin and Heidegger has expanded considerably.³

However, there is one remarkable piece of information that only in the past five years has been attentively noticed (Fenves 2013; Giuliani 2014, pp. 45–164; Eiland / Jennings 2014, pp. 32–75; Lavelle 2013, pp. 373–383). It takes us back to the years 1912–1913. In the summer of 1913, Heidegger and Benjamin attended together, at the Albert Ludwig University in Freiburg im Brisgau, a lecture given by the Neo-Kantian Heinrich Rickert on the idea of 'the perfected/accomplished life' (*vollendete Leben*). If in 1913 Heidegger was already an advanced

a very close-knit critical circle of readers led by Brecht and me" (BR III, p. 522; Benjamin 1994, p. 193).

2 In her introduction to the famous American edition of Benjamin's *Illuminations* (1969), Arendt already pointed to this unapparent connection between Heidegger and Benjamin, using the suggestive figure of the 'pearl diver': "Without realizing it, Benjamin actually had more in common with Heidegger's remarkable sense for living eyes and living bones that had sea-changed into pearls and coral, and as such could be saved and lifted into the present only by doing violence to their context in interpreting them with 'the deadly impact' of new thoughts, than he did with the dialectical subtleties of his Marxist friends" (Arendt 1969, p. 46).

3 Here I mention, chronologically, only those most relevant to our topic of time: Fabrizio Desideri (Desideri 1983); Howard Caygill (Caygill 1994); Andrew Benjamin (Benjamin, A. 1994); Marc Sagnol (Sagnol 2003); Peter Fenves (Fenves 2011); Hans Ruin (Ruin 2012); Mathias Giuliani (Giuliani 2014); Andrew Benjamin and Dimitris Vardoulakis (Benjamin / Vardoulakis 2015).

student, working under the direction of Rickert,⁴ Benjamin, three years younger than Heidegger, was a newly arrived student in Freiburg. Indeed, in April 1912, the 20-year-old Benjamin, having completed high school at the Kaiser-Friedrich Schule in Berlin-Charlottenburg, began his university studies at the above-mentioned prestigious university in Freiburg (Eiland / Jennings 2014, pp. 12–31; Witte 2012, pp. 17–30). He matriculated at the department of philology in view of literary studies, but early on began attending the university's most renowned philosophical and historiographical seminars, such as those lectured by Heinrich Rickert and Friedrich Meinecke (Eiland / Jennings, 2014, pp. 32–33).⁵ It was above all in that seminar of Rickert on the notion of 'perfected life', together with Rickert's parallel lectures on Bergson (attended by Benjamin and Heidegger), that both young thinkers were introduced to the novel Rickertian categories of *Voll-Endung* and *Un-Vollendung* through Rickert's fresh system of values,⁶ as formulated in *Logos* (a magazine founded by Rickert) in 1912–1913 (Rickert 1911/12; Rickert 1913; Rickert 2007, pp. 133–171; Rickert 2013).

We can resume his central idea of *Voll-Endung*, through what Rickert called "the three stages of our [tendency to] full-completion" (*Voll-Endung*), or "the tendency of every meaningful behavior, oriented to the effective realization of values" (Rickert 2007, p. 140). Firstly, we obtain a dominium of goods that will be designated as the 'uncompleted totality' (*Un-endliche Totalität*), as an incompleteness or absence of actual end, opposed to the full completion (Rickert 2007, p. 141). This is the first plan of Rickert's axiological stages, modeled after the figure of evolution, and corresponding to the masculine dimension of life (Rickert 2013, pp. 375–379). In terms of time, it falls under the future (*Zukunft*),

4 The relation between the young Heidegger and Rickert was already well established, especially since Heidegger's 1915 Habilitation Dissertation titled "On the doctrine of categories and signification in Duns Scotus" (Heidegger 1916), written under the direction of Rickert; furthermore, Heidegger's Conference (*Vortrag*) of 1915 in Freiburg for his *Venia Legendi* finished with an explicit reference to Rickert's notion of *Wertbeziehung*—'value relevance' (Heidegger 1978, p. 433). Finally, the recently published correspondence between Heidegger and Rickert of the period 1912–1933, together with the edition of a number of previously unpublished documents written by Heidegger on different aspects of Rickert's philosophy, also attest to this early relation (Heidegger / Rickert 2002).

5 "I am after all studying philosophy" Benjamin says in letter to Carla Seligson of June 5th, 1913 (Benjamin 1994, p. 29; BR I, p. 108).

6 See also Benjamin's correspondence of that period, mostly addressed to his young friend Herbert Blumenthal, but also to Carla Seligson and to Gustav Wyneken: especially his letters to Blumenthal of Jun 7th 1913 (BR I, pp. 111–112) and Jun 23rd 1913 (BR I, pp. 122–129); to Carla Seligson of September 15th 1913 (BR I, pp. 174–176); and to Gustav Wyneken of Jun 19th 1913 (BR I, pp. 115–119).

and the privileged models corresponding to this first plan are those of *science and education*, as infinite evolution processes. The second plan of axiological goods defines a dominium that may be characterized as ‘fully completed particularity’ (*Voll-endliche Partikularität*) (Rickert 2007, p. 142). The examples corresponding to this plan are related to the present dimension (*Gegenwart*), and are composed of the figures of *love and art*. Rickert modeled it after the pole of woman, which he fits typically with an achieved life (Rickert 2013, pp. 375–379). Thirdly, the Baden philosopher presents a dominium of goods that is defined by the plan of a totality that at the same time is fully completed (*Voll-endliche Totalität*): “in it, we have the final goal that may be set by an aspiration to the effective realization of values”. This third figure corresponds to the *religious sphere*. Its temporal dimension, says Rickert, is timeless: it is not in the present, nor in the future, but in eternity (*Ewigkeit*) or in the ‘eternal goods’ (*Ewigkeitsgüter*) dimension (Rickert 2013, pp. 379–381). Lastly (although he recognizes it from a strictly formal and combinatory point of view), Rickert considers a fourth plan, namely one of the ‘un-completed particularity’ (*Un-endliche Partikularität*)—but he immediately discards this form: he cannot conceive the possibility of a particularity that is unachieved, in the way that he cannot conceive the idea of the past dimension of time as actual incompleteness (Rickert 2007, p. 142).

The abovementioned seminar on the idea of *Voll-Endung* may have provided a conceptual frame for a first Benjaminian sketch on the idea of time through the polarities of ‘(un)fulfillment’ (*Un-vollendung, unerfüllt*) and ‘messianic completion’ (*Voll-Endung, Erfüllen*). Nevertheless, Benjamin developed his own view, in dissidence with Rickert, specifically through his affirmation of an ‘unachieved and unfulfilled past’, which was not admitted in Rickert’s system of values. Actually, there is a group of Benjamin’s texts of the period 1913–1915, mostly unpublished during his lifetime, in which appears a first outline of both the messianic and the failed secular time. It is worth indicating here that this first version of Benjaminian messianism predates the ulterior connection of Benjamin with the other side of German neo-Kantianism (namely the so called ‘Marburg School’ founded by Hermann Cohen), with which it is customary to associate Benjamin’s main trends of messianism.⁷

To begin with, Benjamin wrote a brief dialogue on love in 1913, titled *Gespräch über die Liebe* and published posthumously for the first time in 1989 (GS VII.1, pp. 15–19), which was clearly influenced by Rickert’s seminar (Giuliani 2014, pp. 85–88). Nevertheless, it is already clear here that love seems not only

⁷ This is valid also for the consideration of the influence of Gershom Scholem, actually not encountered by Benjamin until July 1915 (Scholem 1981, p. 14).

related (as in Rickert) to a plan of particularity (GS VII.1, p. 16), but also to a plan of profane or immanent eternity (GS VII.1, p. 18), which contradicts Rickert, and seems to connect Benjamin with Kierkegaard.⁸ That is to say, love is understood as a particularity, which is clearly distinguished from the figure of universally oriented aspiration, such as a love of humanity. Through the voices of Vincent and Sophia (who undoubtedly incarnate the voices of wisdom in Benjamin's *Gespräch*), in contrast with Agathon (whose positions seem affected by misjudgment), Benjamin says that an abstract universal concept like humanity may mobilize 'aspiration' (*Ziel*), but fails to mobilize desire (*Sehnen*), which is constitutive of love (GS VII.1, p. 16). Love, at the same time, reaches through 'declaration' (*Äußerung*) an eternal 'immanent' plan (GS VII.1, pp. 17–19) that can neither be increased nor weakened, as Sophia says at the end of the *Gespräch* (GS VII.1, p. 18). This particular crossroads between particularity and eternity functions as a messianic comprehension of time that draws Benjamin nearer to Kierkegaard, who connects the idea of eternity (*Evige*) with the notions of Paulinian *Kairos* and of a 'redemptive instant' (*Ojeblik*, in Danish) (Kierkegaard 1935, pp. 87–96).⁹ I mention Kierkegaard here because in 1916, in *Trauerspiel und Tragödie*, Benjamin writes of *erfüllt* and *unerfüllt*, in relation to time: *erfüllen* corresponds in Benjamin to the idea of consummation, which is the sense of the term *Fylde* in Kierkegaard (GS II.1, pp. 133–137; SW I, pp. 55–58). Therefore, in 1916 Benjamin achieved a juxtaposition of the ideas of *Vollendung* from Rickert and of *Fylde* from Kierkegaard. However, at the same time Benjamin admitted a figure that Rickert did not: the unachieved or unconsummated particularity (*unerfüllt*). This figure corresponds in Benjamin to the experience of frustration and failure, which became a fundamental plan in his understanding of baroque time.¹⁰

8 Benjamin's early reading of Kierkegaard is clearly attested through in his correspondence from Freiburg of 1912–1913: in his letter to Carla Seligson of April 30th 1913, he recounts the lecture on Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* (*Entweder-Oder*) (Benjamin 1994, p. 20; BR.I, p. 92); and in his letter to Herbert Blumenthal of July 17th of 1913, Benjamin accounts for the reception of Kierkegaard's *Concept of Anxiety* (*Begriff der Angst*) (Benjamin 1994, p. 44; BR I, p. 148).

9 On the other hand, Kierkegaard elaborates the idea of completion according to the Danish term *Fylde*, which corresponds to the German word *Füllen*. He thus creates the idea of *Tidsfylde*, which in Danish means 'time fullness', and is implied in his notion of instant (*Ojeblikket*). Kierkegaard also notes the antecedents for the notion of instant in I, Corinthians, 15,52, in which Paul writes that 'in the twinkling of an eye' (an instant—*Exaīfnes*), the dead shall be raised (Kierkegaard 1935, pp. 87–115).

10 Actually, in his *Goethe's Elective Affinities* (*Goethes Wahlverwandschaften*), Benjamin not only admits the consecrated love, but also the unconsummated love, which allows him to admit the unachieved particularity (*unerfüllt Partikularität*, or *unvollendete Partikularität*). He

In *Gedanken über Gerhart Hauptmanns Festspiel*, published by Benjamin under the provocative pseudonym ‘Ardor’ in the Magazine *Der Anfang* (Berlin: August, 4th 1913) during his stay in Freiburg (GS II.1, pp. 57–59), Benjamin introduces in the first section of his article the term ‘Illumination’ (*Erleuchtung*), which had a central role in his subsequent work of the 1930s, but referred here to ‘historical meaning’: “solche Erleuchtung als historischen Sinn zu bezeichnen” (GS II.1, p. 57). Benjamin declares that in fact, the meaning (*Sinn*) of Festivity (*Festes*) and of fight (*Kampfes*) is actually the same (GS II.1, p. 60). In the first section there is a programmatic emphasis on the notion of ‘task’ (*Aufgabe*), under a ‘vanguardist’ concept of youth and its historical fight for scholarly reform, and in connection with the precedent article *Experience* (*Erfahrung*), published by Benjamin in *Der Anfang* earlier in 1913 (GS, II.1, pp. 54–56). In the next section, Benjamin introduces his notion of ‘Idea’ (*Idee*) through its historical function as the only principle that can gather the historical as such, preannouncing his article *Trauerspiel und Tragödie* of 1916. The third section of the text, under the suggestive title of *Die Jugend und die Geschichte* (*Youth and History*), underlines not the fight for specific values, but the fight for ‘the possibility of values’ (GS II.1, p. 59). At the end of his article, Benjamin affirms the in-actuality of the present (GS II.1, p. 59), which prefigures the main affirmation of *Trauerspiel und Tragödie* two years later.

“The Life of Students”, an article written by Benjamin in 1914–1915 and published in *Der neue Merkur* in 1915, before being published in the *Gesammelte Schriften* (GS II.1, pp. 75–87), mentioned for the first time in any of his published texts the word ‘messianic’—and it is expressed not in connection with a religious or theological discussion, but in a totally secular and profane tone, confronting the idea of teleological progress:

There is a view of history that puts its faith in the infinite extent of time and thus concerns itself only with the speed, or lack of it, with which people and epochs advance along the path of progress. This corresponds to a certain absence of coherence and rigor in the demands it makes on the present. The following remarks, in contrast, delineate a particular condition in which history appears to be concentrated in a single focal point (*Brennpunkt*),

spent his life obsessed with the problem of failure. As Giuliani observed (2014, p. 52), Benjamin once regarded with some admiration Kant’s Philosophy of History as one that emphasized failure, by separating the meanings of History and causal effectiveness. I believe that the well-known paragraph of the second section of Kant’s *Streit der Fakultäten*, on the French Revolution as a symbol of a moral disposition of humanity beyond its effectiveness in terms of success or failure, is a fundamental example of this issue. For the ‘Elective Affinities’ and the subject of love in Benjamin, I owe to Caroline Sauter some crucial insights (Sauter, Caroline: “Love, Marriage and Experience: Elective Affinities between Benjamin, Kant and Goethe”, unpublished).

like those that have traditionally been found in the utopian images of the philosophers (...). The historical task (*geschichtliche Aufgabe*) is to disclose this immanent state of perfection (*immanenten Zustand der Vollkommenheit*) and make it absolute, to make it visible and dominant in the present (...) the task is to grasp its metaphysical structure, as with the messianic domain (*wie das messianische Reich*) or the idea of the French Revolution (*französische Revolutionsidee*). (SW I, pp. 37–38; GS II.1, pp. 75–76)

We can appreciate here how the idea of crisis (*Krisis*) in terms of a ‘mutilated form’ of the present and a ‘deformation of life’ already leads the young Benjamin to a new understanding of time itself through the messianic, something that here evokes ‘the idea of the French Revolution’. In connection with this article, it is relevant to mention here two subsequent texts, both unpublished in Benjamin’s lifetime: *Metaphysik der Jugend* (*The metaphysics of youth*) of 1913–1914 (GS II.1, p. 91–104); and *Dialog über die Religiosität der Gegenwart* (*Dialogue on the religiosity of the present*) of 1912–13 (GS II.1, p. 16–35), which is absent from the English edition of the *Selected Writings* of Benjamin. Both texts accept that modernity has broken up the old religions, but nevertheless consider that the present circumstances do not permit to celebrate it without trouble; indeed, a new religiosity is preconized as capable of confronting positivism and the lack of determined feelings for the youth.

II

Heidegger elaborates the notion of time in his *Vortrag* of 1915, a lecture for his *Venia Legendi* in Freiburg. Initially, we can notice some distance from Rickert’s ideas: Rickert spoke, as we saw above, of the ‘complete’ and ‘incomplete’ in relation to human goals, also understood as ‘particularity’ and ‘totality’; Heidegger, however, clears the notion of ‘time’ implied in the pursuit of goals, and problematizes the notion of historical past, which is implied in historical knowledge. Heidegger’s first step is to separate the time of mechanics and the time of history. Concerning the function of time in mechanics, he asserts that it is the quantitative measurement of movement. On the contrary, the function of time in history, according to Heidegger, is not a measurement, but a fully qualitative notion, which shall be understood through the idea of meaning, since the time of history allows carving out an event as a meaningful historical individuality. When we inscribe an event on a certain date, we are not measuring, but rather placing that event in a unit of meaning in relation to a ‘before’ and an ‘after’. To this comment, Heidegger adds yet another more radical observation through which he shows his particular approach:

The historical object, as historical, is always past: in the strict sense it no longer exists. A temporal divide [*Zeitferne*] separates the historian from the past. The past has its meaning always and only when seen from the present. When viewed from our standpoint, the past not only no longer *is*; it also *was* something other than we and our present-day context of life are. This much has already become clear: time has a completely original meaning in history. Only when this qualitative otherness between past times and the present moment breaks into consciousness does the historical sense awaken. (Heidegger 2011, pp. 68–69; Heidegger 1978, p. 427).

Heidegger extracts from this premise two fundamental conclusions: (i) the past has meaning only in the present; (ii) this past is not for us what it was ‘for itself’ (Heidegger 1978, p. 427). He thus asserts that: (iii) therefore, there is a temporal distance (*Zeitferne*)—even an abyss (*Kluft*)—between the historian and the past, which can only be covered by means of the values (*Werte*) of the present and a resolution of existence mediated by value-relevance (*Wertbeziehung*) in the present; in the same way that Heinrich Rickert had presented since 1902 the selection and knowledge of the historiographical object (Rickert 1986; Heidegger 1978, p. 433).

Thus, Heidegger encounters a temporal abyss between past and present; since 1915 he starts from a radical ontological gap concerning the past. In addition, he wonders how historians mind and fulfill this gap. His answer in 1915, already moving towards the idea of temporalization in *Sein und Zeit* (1927), is that it is through the future—namely by means of our present value-orientation allowing historiographical selection—that it is possible to cover the historical gap between present and past.

Benjamin, in his letter to Gershom Scholem of November 11, 1916, commenting on Heidegger’s *Vortrag*, points out (without mentioning or quoting), that the Conference “documents precisely how this subject should *not* be treated” (BR I, p. 344; Benjamin 1994, p. 82 [emphasis in original]). This brings us back to Benjamin’s *Trauerspiel und Tragödie* (1916), unpublished during his lifetime. Although setting the issue of historical time as his focal point, Benjamin nevertheless refers to the consideration of death in Tragedy and death in *Trauerspiel* (‘mourning play’). These forms therefore lead to two dramatic genres, in which the aforementioned notions of *Un-Vollendung* and *Voll-Endung* fulfill a central function.

Here, Benjamin recognizes that “to obtain a deeper understanding of the tragic, we should perhaps look not just at art but also at history” (SW I, p. 55). Indeed, this could also be interpreted the other way around: to obtain a deeper understanding of historical time, we should perhaps look not just at historiography but also at the tragic. In fact, Benjamin recognizes that the trajectories of tragedy and of historical time intersect—something that is grounded in the ac-

tions of heroes (SW I, p. 55). But here follows a consideration that will completely take another turn: observing that “Historical time is infinite (*unendlich*) in every direction (*in jeder Richtung*) and unfulfilled (*unerfüllt*) at every moment (*in jedem Augenblick*)” (SW I, p. 55; GS II.1 p. 134), Benjamin radically distinguishes two sorts of time-fulfillment—namely individual heroic time, and messianic historical fulfillment. Only the latter could properly lead to historical time. Therefore, despite the above affirmation concerning the tragic genre, no individual fulfillment of time could by itself determine historical meaning, which instead could only be constituted through messianic fulfillment. This is why Benjamin says here that:

This feature naturally changes the meaning of fulfillment completely, and it is this that distinguishes tragic time from messianic time. Tragic time is related to the latter in the same way that an individually fulfilled time (relates to a divinely fulfilled one. (Benjamin 2015, p. 134)

So we have here two forms of time—the tragic and the messianic—that for Benjamin fit with two forms of fulfillment: the individual and the divine respectively. It seems as if the tragic, restricted to the individual plan of the hero, could neither achieve nor fulfill the historic, whose fulfillment relates to the messianic.

Benjamin complicates this first sketch with the introduction, in the second part of his text, of a third form—the mourning play, or *Trauerspiel*—as a transitional device: “the mourning play is in every respect a hybrid form” (SW I, p. 57). The specification of this form is obtained through the contrast between two figures of death, the ‘tragic’ and the *Trauerspiel*’s ‘figure of death’. While the former is governed by the law of fate and corresponds to the individual fulfillment of time by the hero’s death (SW I, p. 56), the latter is governed by the law of repetition, where death is only the spectral transition to a form of continuity mediated by a mirror image, defined by Benjamin with Aristotle’s ‘Metabasis of life’ (*Eis allo genos*)—transformation into another type or sort (SW I, pp. 56–57). This defines *Trauerspiel*’s ‘death’ as a non-conclusive death. It means that *Trauerspiel* corresponds to a form of expansion and dissemination (SW I, p. 57) that is typical not only of baroque time, but of modern time, as one which lacks meaning and conclusiveness, and as a time of desolation and dissolution (Caygill 1994; Sagnol 2003). It is as if the messianic, from then on, remained for Benjamin a joker card, used since his earliest phases until the latest context of his *Thesis on history* (1940), in order to counterbalance, through a plan of immanence, the complete vanishing of meaningful individual heroes, as well as the lack of future-oriented subjectivity.

III

Heidegger did not publish anything between 1916 and 1927. In the latter year's *Sein und Zeit* (*Time and Being*), the second section is dedicated to the temporalization of *Dasein*, and here he reformulates his approach to historical time, further distancing himself from the epistemological context of his work of 1915. In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger distinguishes the past as 'ontic', meaning a time that would simply be a 'succession of nows' (*Jetztfolge*), from a past that Heidegger calls 'ontological', meaning one kept in the present of oneself, in the process of having-been, as a past that is being for a self that temporalizes himself, into the projection that Heidegger called *Ekstasis*—being at the same time its own past and anticipating its future, but in a way that being projected (*Entwurf*) is the possibility of gathering its own time. Here, Heidegger takes from Wilhelm Dilthey the expression 'connection of a life', (*Zusammenhang des Leben*) for this continuance of the past in the present under the possibility of projection.

As Agamben comments (1978), Heidegger's originality is to propose historical time from the assumption of the temporalization of *Dasein*, and this latter through the figures of resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) and instant (*Ekstasis*), as attached to the same being of *Dasein*. Then, the figures of *Zeitigung* and *Entschlossenheit* are linked to the care (*Sorge*) and authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) of the figure of being-towards-death (*Sein zum Tode*), which is the keystone to the projectivity of *Dasein*. We exist towards death, and that allows us to live our past as being from birth to death within the structure of finitude. Death is not an event: it is a phenomenon that must be understood existentially (SuZ, p. 251). The issue of death lies at the center of temporalization, and therefore, of Heideggerian historicity—something that Adorno noticed in his famous *The Jargon of Authenticity*. Being-towards-death is inherent to the *Geworfenheit*, of our being thrown and our finitude as facticity. The authentic choices of *Dasein* projected in a singular destiny (*Schicksal*) are interwoven in order to form the fate (*Geschick*) of a people (*Volk*). The coincident interweaving of fates finds its locus in the generation (*Generation*). Some scholars agree nevertheless that there is a vagueness and incompleteness in the term 'generation' as used by Heidegger (Barash 2003, pp. 170–173).

But here we ask ourselves: isn't there an abyss when we go from the level of individual identity to something like a collective identity, precisely in relation to matters such as past, future, and even the idea of death? Actually, the collective level seems to generate an ontological asymmetry in relation to the existential dimension of death. There is a tale by Kafka (included in the stories that compose *The Great Wall of China*) that Benjamin selected during his radio shows

on the Czech writer, in which a messenger is summoned to the Chinese emperor's deathbed. The prominent court men around the emperor open his way and the emperor tells him a secret in his ear—words that no one else hears—and asks him to transmit those very same words to someone else, who awaits the message on the other side of the empire. After saying these words, the emperor dies. The Chinese messenger's dread is proportional to the immensity of his urgent task, since just to leave the capital of the empire he must go through countless human barriers composed of the subjects of the crown, cramming to be with the emperor during his last breath. The difficulty multiplies as the messenger tries to open his way, and he rapidly realizes that he will never be able to personally deliver the message to the recipient.

Concerning this story, we could also think about the problem that has often been disregarded by hermeneutic tradition, which is no longer the problem of interpretation, but the problem of the mere material transmission of the message. The problem concerning the break of the transmission may be presented focusing on the subject of survival (as opposite to death at the level of personal existence) and on the matter of collective identity, considered as a way of understanding tradition—not as derived from personal experience in the form of a present that takes over the past, but as inherent to a union of experiences that are heterogeneous, yet at the same time articulated or scattered in a mesh of experiences in time that relate not so much to the survival of oneself, but to the translation of different languages, the survival of different strata of time, or of different disposals and ruins from the past.

This is the way in which Benjamin pursued his research during the years after that initial period: trying to think a decentralized notion of experience based on transmission rather than on self-consciousness; on languages and translation rather than on authenticity and selfhood; and on materials and ruins under danger, rather than on meaning and the meaningful horizon of the world. Heidegger, after the *Kehre* (U-Turn) of 1935, nevertheless approached a linguistic turn and a spatiality-turn, in such a way that space and language intertwined with our common world, making it possible to reformulate the task of philosophy—perhaps in a way that bridges this last period of Heidegger's thinking with Benjamin's own thinking on modernity and the global world.

Abbreviated References

- GS Benjamin, Walter (1989): *Gesammelte Schriften*. 7 volumes, 14 books. Tiedemann, Rolf / Schweppenhäuser, Hermann (Eds.), Frankfurt a. M.: Surkamp. [Abbreviated titles are followed by a roman number from I to VII to note the volume, then an Arabic number when a volume contains more than one book.]
- BR Benjamin, Walter (1995): *Gesammelte Briefe 1910–1940*. 6 volumes. Göde, Christoph / Lonitz, Henri (Eds.), Frankfurt a. M.
- SW Benjamin, Walter (1996): *Selected Writings 1913–1940*. 4 volumes. Bullock, Marcus / Jennings, Michael W. (Eds.) Cambridge (MA): The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- SuZ Heidegger, Martin (1927): *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.

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