Walter Benjamin, Politics, and Bodily Collectivity: From *Leib* and *Körper* to Anthropological Materialism

Karolina Jesień

Abstract

This thesis explores Walter Benjamin's concept of bodily collectivity and its evolution in relation to emancipation and social change in the interwar period. It traces this development from his early work on the body understood as *Leib* and *Körper* and through its reformulation within the framework of anthropological materialism from the late 1920s onwards. The focus of this analysis is on the development of these ideas in light of Benjamin's changing approach to revolutionary politics. Contrary to readings that emphasise the melancholic aspect of his philosophy of history, this analysis focuses on Benjamin's unwavering belief in the transformative potential of collective human existence. The thesis argues that Benjamin's reflection on the human body as both a site of historical transformation and a locus for political emancipation reveals his long-standing interest in the emerging planetary scale of human collectivity and the underlying potential for the reorganisation of social relations entailed in it. Ultimately, this study underscores the complexity of Benjamin's vision of bodily collectivity and offers the first monographic treatment of its evolution.

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This thesis is as much a work of my own as it is communal.

Introduction

1. Research scope

This thesis analyses how Walter Benjamin identified the concept of a universal, planetary collective subjectivity as a pivotal notion within the interwar European political landscape. The objective is to demonstrate that, from the turn of the 1920s onwards, Benjamin continued to reflect on the bodily human constitution as a historically changing foundation of collectivity. My main aim is to show Benjamin's reflections on bodily collectivity as an arena in which he develops and negotiates a specific, hopeful and optimistic aspect of his political ideas. Namely, as a field where he addresses the potential for reclaiming the recently emerged scale of collectivity as a vehicle for emancipation.

The guiding question of my analysis will be how and to what end Benjamin repeatedly turns to the idea of bodily collective subjectivity in some of his texts from the early and late 1920s as well as the mid and late 1930s. I argue that, although the figure appears on the margins of his writings, when it does, it operates as a central argument in his own attempts at conceptualising the political organisation of a different future. This is not to say that Benjamin develops a coherent theory of the collective body. In fact, as we will see throughout this dissertation, both Benjamin's terminology, and the very questions which he attempts to address with the figure of bodily collectivity differ from text to text. In order to trace the trajectory of this change, this thesis analyses how Benjamin's use of the figure of bodily-founded collectivity shifts in the different political moments, in which he takes it up.

For reasons to be explained in due course, I will trace the development of the figure of the bodily collectivity in a number of Benjamin's texts: from the turn of the 1920s "Outline of the Psychophysical Problem", through 1929 "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia", the 1936 version of the "Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility" and the late 1930s addition to the *Arcades Project*, "Convolute p", entitled "Anthropological materialism. History of Sects". This approach will enable me to see the figure of the bodily collective and the framework of anthropological materialism, which Benjamin develops around it first in the "Surealism" essay, as a dynamic platform on which Benjamin negotiates his understanding of materialism, politics, and the relationship between different forms of collectivity and emancipation. By attempting to disentangle the different questions that Benjamin tries to address with the figure of a bodily collective, I also aim to

show what underlying thread of continuity can be salvaged from Benjamin's developing ideas on the relationship between different forms of collectivity and the body.

2. Literature review

Over the last decade, anglophone scholars have increasingly highlighted the topicality of Benjamin's reflections on the relationship between the human body and politics in terms of Benjamin's concept of anthropological materialism (Wohlfarth 2011; Khatib 2012; Berdet 2013a; 2013b; Baehrens 2014; Berdet and Ebke 2014; Johannßen 2014; Ibarlucía 2017; Leslie 2018; Moir 2018; Mourenza 2020, 27–86), his long-standing interest in the body and anthropology (Duttlinger, Morgan, and Phelan 2012b; Steiner 2012; Mourenza 2013; Khatib 2014b; Barbisan 2017; Johannßen 2018; Barbisan 2020), and the concepts he develops in connection to it such as innervation (Rutherford 2011; Gess 2012; Ahn 2013; Mourenza 2015; Charles 2018; Lewis 2020). The prevailing approach has been to interpret Benjamin's ideas on the body and collectivity by collating the scattered fragments in his writings together, without differentiating between the disparate moments in the tumultuous period of the Weimar Republic from which they originate. This is partly because Benjamin never really develops his idea of bodily collectivity directly and yet turns to it, with a more or less consistent phrasing, in various moments across two decades. But it also has to do with the politics of the history of Benjamin's reception.

The scholarly focus on Benjamin's concepts of collective body, innervation, and anthropological materialism appeared fairly late in Benjamin Studies, with the first analyses appearing in German in the early 1990s. At the time, Norbert Bolz and Willem van Reijen (1991) suggested that the relative absence of the question of anthropological materialism in Benjamin scholarship owed to the fact that the reception of Benjamin's writings had been strongly influenced by the Frankfurt School. Perhaps an influential factor was, as Bolz and Van Reijen point out, that the first selection of Benjamin's writings was published (in 1955) by Adorno, who himself criticised vehemently the idea of anthropological materialism in a letter from 1936 (Bolz and Van Reijen [1991] 1996, 55). The relatively late blooming of the reception of these ideas in Benjamin's writings needs to be seen in the context of the political undertones in the history of its reception.[1]

[1] The prolific scholarship on Benjamin in the 1960s and the 1970s was triggered by the publication of the first edition of his writings in German under Adorno's editorship in 1955 (Benjamin 1955b; 1955a), and the first

Matthias Uecker summarises well the broader political relevance of the scholarly reception of the interwar period in Anglophone German studies and Benjamin's place in it from the perspective of the mid-1990s. In his 1996 essay "Diagnoses of Crisis: Recent Studies on Intellectuals and the Political Culture of the Weimar Republic". The short period of the Weimar Republic, Uecker notes, has not failed to attract an exceptional level of attention from scholars throughout the 20th century, especially from the 1960s on, when the thinkers of the Frankfurt School and its satellites, including Benjamin, were discovered as a form of diverse Marxism, critical of the orthodox party lines. This surge of searching for positive examples of heterodox Marxism in the Weimar Republic, in Uecker's view, underwent significant changes when "during the 1970s the remaining high hopes of the West German left for radical political change were finally disappointed" (Uecker 1996, 232).[2] During the 1970s, the reception of Weimar critical thinkers, Benjamin among them, turned to the idea of crisis as a way of reinterpreting the Weimar sources discovered in the 1960s away from their initially Marxist reception (1996, 232).

A similar narrative can be found in Esther Leslie's overview of Benjamin reception from 2008. As Leslie notes, Benjamin was first rediscovered in the 1960s and the 1970s by the German and British left, and his political allegiance became, throughout the decades of a changing political landscape, a contested field of interpretative interventions (Leslie 2008). By the end of the 1970s and in the 1980s, Leslie continues, Benjamin's "melancholy was seen to parallel that of a disaffected Left. The more they experienced impotence, the more Benjamin usefully articulated that impotence" (Leslie 2008, 569). The question of the political relevance of those interpretations which highlight Benjamin's melancholic tendencies came back in a new light after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In 1999, Wendy Brown argued that "left melancholy" was Benjamin's "unambivalent epithet for the revolutionary hack who is, finally, attached more to a particular political analysis or ideal – even to the failure of that ideal – than to seizing possibilities for radical change in the present" (Brown 1999, 20). For her, the problem with left melancholy is that we lose sight of what motivates the self-identification of many leftists: a belief in a better future (1999, 22).

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translation of a selection of his texts by Harry Zohn under editorship and with introduction by Hannah Arendt in the 1968 *Illuminations* (Benjamin 1968), followed by the first volumes of the *Gesammelte Schriften* (1972-99) and volume inspired by Arendt's *Illuminations* selection in English called *Reflections* (Benjamin 1978).

[2] See Enzo Traverso (2016) for a more contemporary and thorough account of the role of melancholy in the reception of Frankfurt School and Benjamin in particular. Traverso argues for a reading whereby all progressive worldview is melancholic because it is centred around revolution and utopia. "This melancholia {…} is a constellation of emotions and feelings that envelop a historical transition, the only way the search for new ideas and projects can coexist with the sorrow and mourning for a lost realm of revolutionary experience" (2016, xiv).

This was in line with Irving Wohlfarth's position in the debate his 1992 speech at Benjamin's centenary sparked on Benjamin's *Aktualität*. Speaking three years after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Wohlfarth bemoaned the tendency to read Benjamin against his Marxist inclinations. "With the alleged collapse of socialism – the real, existing collapse, that is, of 'real, existing socialism'", he wrote in a later published version of the speech, "Benjamin's Marxist agenda has yielded to a seemingly irrevocable disenchantment with Marxism itself" (Wohlfarth 1998, 16). Wohlfarth's appeal to Benjamin scholars was also gunned against those readings, which would not heed Benjamin's unwavering optimism towards the possibility of turning the course of history onto revolutionary tracks. Wohlfarth wrote, "does not allow us to claim (as Adorno, among others, was wont to do) that – *the* – revolutionary chance has, regrettably, been missed" (1998, 14).

In this context, it is significant – albeit not causally – that one of the first ones to dedicate a central place in its analysis of Benjamin's writings to anthropological materialism and the corresponding motifs Bolz and van Reijen, who in their 1991 synthetic overview of Benjamin's ideas entitled *Walter Benjamin* underlined Adorno's critical remarks on the idea as the reason for the relative lack of attention to Benjamin's anthropological materialism. In a manner close to what Wohlfarth would argue a year later, Bolz and Van Reijen highlighted the political militancy of Benjamin's idea of anthropological materialism. "Benjamin's theory of knowledge", they wrote giving anthropological materialism a central place in the constellation of Benjamin's thought, "substitutes the bodily collective for abstract materialism" (Bolz and Van Reijen [1991] 1996, 55). In the course of their analysis, Bolz and Van Reijen further suggested that it is Benjamin's "mystique of the collective body" that "carries the whole burden of justifying the revolutionary legitimacy of the proletariat's claim" ([1991] 1996, 56). Yet this reading of Benjamin's reflections on the body focused on the figure of the collective body was not immediately taken up.

In the same year in which Wohlfarth spoke at Benjamin centenary, and one year after the publication of Bolz and Van Reijen's book, Sigrid Weigel published her *Body and Image-Space.* This was the first publication to take up the idea of body- and image-space employed in Benjamin's description of what culminates with the introduction of the notion of anthropological in the 1929 "Surrealism" essay. It also included a vehement polemic with Wohlfarth. Weigel argued against striving to find contemporary relevance of his thought and therefore condemning it to "commemoration" and "historicization" (Weigel [1992] 1996, 2). Weigel's book posits that Benjamin's *Aktualität* can be seen in his idea of "thinking-in-images" ([1992] 1996, viii), which, in her view, is inherently linked to his theory of reading.

Her book offers to develop Benjamin's notion of body- and image-space in the context of his understanding of images as materially rooted in language as linked to the body, and in regard to the psychoanalytically contextualised theory of reading. As such, Weigel's book rarely addresses the collectivity of Benjamin's body, and when it does, this is to do with the collectivity of language rather than with a bodily formation of different forms of collectivity.

Apart from Bolz and Van Reijen's chapter, it is difficult to find a reading of Benjamin's anthropological-materialistic ideas from the turn of the century, which would attempt to address them together as a red thread running through his writings. During the 1990s and 2000s, many anglophone scholars focused on analysing the separate motifs encompassed by the term in Benjamin's work. These analyses rarely mentioned anthropological materialism itself directly, however, they did provide important input on issues such as Benjamin's early understanding of the body (Steiner [2000] 2001), innervation (Buck-Morss 1992; Hansen 1999; 2004), profane illumination (Cohen 1993), image- and body-space (Weigel [1992] 1996; Tsunekawa 2008) and anthropological thought in Benjamin's writings, especially those from the 1920s and before (Honneth 1993; Lethen 1999). The influence of anthropological thought, and especially of philosophical anthropology, on Benjamin's early thought has been described by Axel Honneth and Helmuth Lethen. While Honneth established the link between Benjamin's philosophy of history and his "anthropologically fashioned" concept of experience (Honneth 1993, 119), Lethen underlined the difference in Benjamin's understanding of the body as *Leib* and *Körper* from political anthropology of his time, specifically that of Helmuth Plessner (Lethen 1999, 824). Furthermore, an important thread of scholarship on Benjamin's conception of the body runs through the feminist readings of his thought. These interpretations highlight Benjamin's queer understanding of sexuality, gender relations and point to the figures of the prostitute, the lesbian, and the androgyne as resisting the procreative model of sexuality (Buci-Glucksmann 1984; 1986; [1984] 1994; Geulen 1996; Leslie 1997; Chisholm 2009; Beasley-Murray 2012). Nevertheless, they rarely engage with the relationship between Benjamin's interest in the body and collective subjectivity.

The interest of anglophone scholarship on Benjamin's reflections on the human body, while not traceable to the beginnings of the reception of his writings, has grown for four decades now. However, the question of Benjamin's concept of the collective body and the politics implied in it has only recently started to be tackled directly in a more systematic way. Over the last decade, there has been a surge in publications dedicated explicitly to Benjamin's anthropological materialism as a political proposal in a heterodox relationship to

Marxism within the anglophone scholarship (Berdet 2013a; Baehrens 2014; Mourenza 2013; 2015; Leslie 2018; Moir 2018; Mourenza 2020). The 2012 collection of essays *Walter Benjamins anthropologisches Denken* edited by Carolin Duttlinger, Ben Morgen and Anthony Phelan's accentuated more broadly the long-term presence of Benjamin's anthropological reflections, which he never explicitly developed beyond some of his early unpublished writings from the turn of the 1920s. The editors argue that anthropology "is both more marginal and more central to his work and his method" than other themes such as politics or theology (Duttlinger, Morgan, and Phelan 2012a, 7, my translation). In the introduction, they portray anthropological materialism as an alternative to the materialism of both "Hegelian and Soviet kind" (2012a, 9) and does so in direct discussion with Honneth's Habermasian understanding of the anthropological foundation of Benjamin's writings (Ibidem). The editors propose to see anthropological materialism on two levels. Firstly, as an attempt to gather different historical material for an understanding of the present, in which "the physical, mental, technical and political phenomena are treated as equal parts of a materialist outlook" (2012a, 9). Secondly, as a "revision of classical Marxism and its orientation on the discourse of economy and natural sciences" (2012a, 10). Benjamin's notion of anthropological materialism, however, escapes easy categorisation and, therefore, analysis. In his 2013 editorial essay inaugurating the journal *Anthropology and Materialism. A Journal of Social Research*, Marc Berdet proposes seven different terminological categories through which Benjamin's anthropological materialism can be seen: a) as "a singular tradition", b) as "a polemical term", c) as "a sensibility", d) as "a temporality", e) as "a concept", f) as "an internal concept", g) as "an actuality" (Berdet 2013a). The approach taken in this thesis is complementary to the two mentioned above. Rather than addressing the ambiguity of the notion of anthropological materialism itself, I propose to look not so much at the notion of anthropological materialism directly – which is itself difficult for reasons Berdet so eloquently listed – but at what I consider to be the central problem which appears within and beyond its frames in Benjamin's thought. Namely, the problem of how Benjamin's approach to anthropology through what he makes into the central figure of the body relates to the development of his idea of collective emancipation and its subject. This approach enables me to both draw on the vast body of scholarship available on Benjamin's anthropological materialism and the body, while also distinguishing between various conceptual stages in his approach to these issues.

3. Argument

My main argument is threefold. Firstly, I aim to show that there is an interesting conceptual problem, which Benjamin's references to the figure of bodily collectivity elucidate. While Benjamin rarely addresses the figure of the bodily collective as a direct object of analysis, I argue that his reflections on the historical emergence of the collective subject of human emancipation are an important aspect of the development of his political thought. This thesis aims to show how this theme can be given more precise conceptual consistency. The first goal, therefore, is to show that there is something philosophically systematic about Benjamin's reflections on the relationship between the human body and collective subjectivity. I claim that the overarching horizon of these reflections is Benjamin's idea that, in the aftermath of World War I, a horizon of a new scale of collectivity opened up in Europe and that Benjamin's approach to it changed with the evolution of his relationship to communism. Each of the following chapters shows how, in different political moments of his time, Benjamin comes back to posing the same question: on the possibility of conceiving and organising a collective subject of emancipatory politics based on the common human bodily constitution. The second main argument of this thesis regards the conceptual consistency of Benjamin's notion of bodily collectivity. I argue that each time Benjamin turns to the figure of bodily collectivity, he re-negotiates two primary questions. The first question his reflections on bodily collectivity address is that of the historically changeable relationship between individual and collective subjectivity. The second question is that of the organisation of this relationship into a form of collectivity capable of carrying emancipatory charge. Finally, this thesis addresses the implications of Benjamin's specific applications of bodily collectivity at different points in time. As I aim to show, throughout the Weimar Republic, Benjamin's approach to emancipatory politics and its collective subject through the figure of the human body undergoes an important transformation. As we will see, this approach shifts from Benjamin reflecting on bodily collectivity in terms of humankind, through its relationship with class struggle and the emergence of the collective subject of revolutionary politics, to a problem of the organisation of collectivity through bodily relations themselves in terms of gender relations.

4. Primary sources and the organisation of the thesis

The chapters are organised chronologically. Each of them follows one of the texts which are central for the contemporary interpretations of both Benjamin's notion of anthropological materialism and his philosophical conception of the human body. These are, subsequently, the 1922-23 "Outline of the Psychophysical Problem", where Benjamin develops his dual conception of the body as *Leib* and *Körper*, the 1923-26 final fragment of the *One-Way Street* (1928) "To the Planetarium", the 1929 essay "Surrealism. The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia", and the 1936 version of the famous essay "Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility". The choice of these texts above other as central objects of my analysis in each chapter follows from my engagement with the contemporary literature on Benjamin's anthropological materialism and on the politics of his philosophy of the body. In many of these interpretations, the three texts I mentioned constitute the key body of sources for tracing this often-implicit thread in Benjamin's writings. Furthermore, these texts are central for the main problem I aim to trace: bodily collectivity. In all three texts, Benjamin not only touches on his understanding of the human body (as he does in other anthropological writings from the turn of the 1920s) or uses bodily metaphors, he does in "Moscow Diary", which has been shown with great detail by Gerhard Richter (1995). Instead, he explicitly addresses the figure of bodily collectivity as a form of collective subjectivity and links it to the political realm of emancipation. The fourth chapter takes on a road less taken but follows the chronological organisation of my argument. In it, I analyse Benjamin's choice of sources in the late 1930s addition to the *Arcades Project* – "Convolute p", itself entitled after Benjamin's notion of anthropological materialism. This serves me to provide a systematic overview of the changes and continuities between the questions Benjamin addresses across two decades, when he turns to the notion of bodily collectivity and the framework of anthropological materialism he develops around it in the meantime.

The reader will note that throughout my analysis, some of the notions which have gained much attention in the scholarship listed above are not central to my analysis. I do not, for example, analyse Benjamin's concept of innervation in much detail. This is a conscious decision. While Benjamin's figure of bodily collectivity is crucially linked to the idea of the innervation of this body as the discharges of revolutionary tension (in "Surrealism") or as the goal of attempts at revolution (in the "Work of Art") is an important part of his reflections on bodily collectivity and emancipation, my focus is less on the way in which Benjamin conceived of the revolutionary moment itself (to which he compares innervation) but rather

on the emergence and organisation of the kind of collectivity which can become a revolutionary subject.

5. Chapter summaries

In the first chapter, I show that from 1918 to the mid-1920s the guiding figure in Benjamin's understanding of the relationship between body, collectivity, and emancipatory politics is that of a bodily collective subjectivity of humankind as a specific kind of wholeness. To this end, I turn to the origins of Benjamin's reflections on the body to show how they are, from their inception at the turn of the 1920s, linked to the question of the different forms of collectivity. I analyse in detail two of the earliest texts in which Benjamin developed his ideas on bodily forms of collectivity: the 1922-23 "Outline of the Psychophysical Problem" and the 1923-26 "To the Planetarium" from *One-Way Street* (1928).

Unlike scholars, who highlight the open-ended character of Benjamin's figure of bodily collectivity in opposition to organic wholeness (Friedlander 2012, Barbisan 2017, Jay 2023), I suggest that in these early formulations of the figure of bodily collectivity, Benjamin tries to link it to a specific notion of wholeness, evoked in the concept of a higher plane of individuality (*Individualität*), with which Benjamin characterises both the body of humankind in the "Outline" and the earth in an earlier fragment entitled "Types of History" (1918). What is specific to the emancipatory kind of bodily collective wholeness in Benjamin's thought up until the mid-1920s, I argue, is that its reliance on the notion of humanity means that it not only has a form of individuality but is also a human-and-more kind of totality. In my analysis, I point out that the historical index of this notion is World War I. I argue that Benjamin's response to the failed claim to a planetary scale of human collectivity after the World War is to conceptualise a universal collective subject based on the bodily constitution of human beings, which would be different both from the ahistorical subjectivity of the people (*Volk*) (as per the "Outline") and of the plurality of people engaged in the war effort (as per "To the Planetarium).

In the second chapter, I analyse how Benjamin's approach to the figure of bodily collectivity changes with his introduction of a broader framework – that of anthropological materialism – in the 1929 "Surrealism" essay. With the notion of anthropological materialism, I argue, Benjamin attempts to link his reflections on the relationship between body, collective subjectivity, and emancipation not so much to the proletariat (as he did in "To the

Planetarium") as to the existing communist parties and to the relationship between the question of the organisation of political subject and materialism. I argue that the main problem Benjamin now poses with the figure of a bodily collective, as he inscribes it in the framework of anthropological materialism, is the possibility of conceptualising the constitution of a collectivity rooted in the materiality of the human body as free from the determinism.

In the third chapter, I analyse how Benjamin addresses the question of the different forms of collectivity in the 1936 version of the "Work of Art" essay. In the text, Benjamin turns to the problem of the emergence of the urban masses, their relationship to technologies of reproduction of images and the way fascist and communist politics address this relationship differently. Within the text, invokes the bodily figure of a collective "which has its organs in the new technology" (Benjamin 2006, 3:124n10) in a way which is characteristic for two reasons. Firstly, it brings out its relationship with a utopian aspect of technology. Benjamin describes the potential of the new collective to learn to make the alienating effect of technologies of reproduction on human beings productive for them. Secondly, Benjamin's reiteration of the figure of a bodily collective in terms of humankind as linked to a new, "second" technology offers, I argue, a new way of relating the individual and the collective. In an analysis of Benjamin's notes to the 1936 "Work of Art" essay "A Different Utopian Will" and of the 1935 "Letter from Paris. André Gide and his Adversaries" I suggest that Benjamin's optimistic idea of the "second technology" (2006, 3:107) as a means of emancipation is linked to his negotiations of the utopian potential he saw in the scale of collective organisation in the USSR. Over the course of this chapter, I show that these characteristics also have to do with a new political reality, where faith in party organisation of the revolutionary proletariat became scarce in the face of the 1933 NSDAP *Machteinsetzung* in Germany and Benjamin's sceptical approach to the emergence of the Popular Front politics in France.

In the fourth chapter, I turn to the way in which Benjamin takes up the relationship between body, collectivity and emancipation in the late 1930s. I do so by comparing what I argue is Benjamin's dual conception of the body in the additions to the *Arcades Project* from the second half of the 1930s and the 1938 "Paris or the Second Empire in Baudelaire" essay. I reconstruct Benjamin's conception of the commodified body as it appears in the figure of the prostitute and in Benjamin's remarks on the body as corpse in the *Arcades Project*'s

"Convolute B: Fashion". I then trace the Saint-Simonian idea of the "emancipation of the flesh" and its relations to Benjamin's conception of anthropological materialism in the "Convolute p: Anthropological materialism. History of sects". In my analysis, I focus on the way in which the figure of the androgyne and femininity freed from the reproductive role, which Benjamin uncovers in Saint Simonian and Fourierist sources in the "Convolute p" and the 1938 "Baudelaire" essay relate to his previous understanding of the emancipatory *Leib* as a form of organisation of the collective.

6. A note on translations and terminology

Whenever there is no English translation of Benjamin's text available, I provide my translation of the discussed fragment within the main text of the thesis, followed by the German original for the reader to compare. Much of my analysis relies on notions – such as *Leib, Körper*, or *Menschheit* – which are translated into English in different ways across Benjamin's writings (often within one translation). To make it easier for the reader, I include German terms when this is key to my analysis in square brackets within the translations. However, as a non-native English and German speaker, I do not propose alternative translations of Benjamin's texts in English. In order to point out the nuances of Benjamin's vocabulary in a consistent way which enables the reader to follow the tensions between the original and the translation, all the more extensive quotes from Benjamin's work under scrutiny in this thesis are followed by footnotes with German original as reading aid and for more context. In my analysis, I stick to one chosen translation of all the crucial terms, with one key exception. One of the core arguments I make in this thesis is that the central figure under scrutiny – the bodily collectivity – appears in different and often conceptually dissimilar guises in Benjamin's work. In order to trace these differences and in order to analyse the overarching significance of this motif in Benjamin's writings, I propose the term "bodily collectivity" to denote the many variants of this figure, whether he writes that "the collective" is "bodily" ("das Kollektivum ist leibhaft", Benjamin 1991b, II:310), uses the phrase "the body of humankind" ("Leib der Menschheit", 1991d, VI:80), or writes of the collective which has its organs in technology ("Kollekti[v], das in der zweiten Technik seine Organe hat" Benjamin 2012, 16:151n1). This enables me to trace not only the philological changes in Benjamin's terminology but also the overall trajectory of his ideas on the relationship between the human body and collectivity. However, I also use the term "collective body" to denote those specific variants of Benjamin's figure of bodily collectivity

in which it suggests a specific form of a collective body, such as the body of humankind. Throughout the manuscript, I also repeatedly refer to the notion of emancipatory politics and its organisation. While the phrase itself is vague, it serves as a platform to compare Benjamin's approach to emancipation throughout different political moments and from the lens of his formulations of the relationship between human body and collectivity.

Chapter One: Between Humankind, *Volk*, and the Proletariat. Body and Forms of Collectivity from Benjamin's Early Anthropological Writings to "To the Planetarium"

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyse the evolution of Benjamin's thinking about the relationship between the body and collective subjectivity from his earliest anthropological writings at the turn of the 1920s up until *One Way Street*'s final fragment, "To the Planetarium" (1923-1926). Doing so serves me to open up broader questions concerning the implications of Benjamin's thinking about the body and collective subjectivity for his account of political emancipation. I argue that in between these writings we can identify an important break in how Benjamin conceptualises the relationship between the body and collective subjectivity. Much of the chapter is dedicated to an analysis of Benjamin's early anthropological writings, in which he first develops his understanding of the human body as inherently linked to collectivity. In writings such as the "Outline of the Psychophysical Problem" (1921-22) or the untranslated "Wahrnehmung und Leib" (1918), Benjamin elaborates on a conceptual distinction between *Leib and Körper*, otherwise popularised in phenomenology and *Lebensphilosophie*. I argue that the way he interprets this differentiation points to how both aspects of the human bodily constitution refer us to different forms of collectivity. While *Leib* – the lived body – is historical and transient, *Körper* – the body one has – describes the eternal, substantial aspect of the human body. This conceptual pair, as I show in this chapter, serves Benjamin to develop the idea of humanity as a collective subject of historical emancipation while highlighting the fact that this is not the only given form of collectivity available to human beings.

Benjamin's idea of *Leib* has attracted increasing scholarly attention since the 1990s, especially in regard to how he considers it to expand beyond individuality and the way he links it to technology and images (Weigel [1992] 1996; Bolz and Van Reijen [1991] 1996; Suzuki 2000; Steiner [2000] 2001; Friedlander 2012; Hansen 2012; Khatib 2012; Mourenza 2013; Baehrens 2014; Johannßen 2014; Barbisan 2017; Mourenza 2020; Lewis 2023; Jay

2023). Scholars such as Léa Barbisan and, most recently, Martin Jay have underlined the implications of Benjamin's early *Leib-Körper* framework for his later use of this figure of the collective body in texts such as "To the Planetarium", the 1929 essay "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" or the 1936 version of the "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility" (Barbisan 2017; Jay 2023). I elaborate with particular attention on these latter interpretations in the first part of this chapter. I argue that collapsing Benjamin's formulations of the idea of the collective body from such a long period into one concept, as is the case in the literature I take under scrutiny in this chapter, disregards important terminological and conceptual differences between them. In contrast to this approach, this chapter focuses on a specific moment in the development of Benjamin's thinking: when he addresses the idea of a collective body as, firstly, the body of humankind and, secondly, as a "higher plane of individuality", as he writes in the 1918 "Types of History" (Benjamin 2004, 1:115). By the time Benjamin writes "To the Planetarium", his early formulation of bodily collectivity undergoes a significant change. In "To the Planetarium", Benjamin develops an account of the relationship between the body of humankind and World War I. This shift has important implications for Benjamin's account of the body and collective subjectivity and, therefore, for his account of politics. Because Benjamin points to humankind as a historically new form of collectivity, he is able to address the problem of the form of this collectivity as an object of class struggle.

In order to demonstrate this change in Benjamin's thinking about the relationship between the body and collective subjectivity, this chapter develops in five steps. In the first section, I offer a general overview of Benjamin's *Leib-Körper* framework in the "Outline", underlining the different relationships the two aspects of the human body have towards limit and form. In the second section of this chapter, I provide a more detailed analysis of Jay's, Barbisan's, and Friedlander's readings of the political implications of Benjamin's early thought on the body on the idea of collective subjectivity in terms of its open-endedness, which escapes the idea of wholeness or set form. In these interpretations, as we will see, Benjamin's use of the body as a metaphor for forms of collectivity differs from the totalising and exclusive wholeness they connote with a conservative and nationalistic worldview. While I do not aim to disprove these interpretations, I do want to add some nuance to them. Benjamin's notion of the collective body as *Leib* can certainly be seen as divergent from a nation-based form of collectivity. Yet, as I aim to show, Benjamin initially presents the concept of bodily collectivity as a distinct form of totality. As I discuss in section three, the idea that Benjamin's *Leib* can offer a unique form of collective bodily constitution, distinct

from the idea of a nation, is consistent with the way that the "Outline" associates *Körper* with the collectivity of *Volk*. However, this does not imply that the concept of totality is irrelevant to *Leib*'s form of collectivity. In the "Outline", as I aim to show, Benjamin specifically describes *Leib* as reliant on form (*Gestalt*) and the collectivity corresponding to it – the body of mankind – as a higher plane of individuality. In section four of this chapter, I elaborate on what these two characteristics of *Leib* mean for the collective subject of humankind. I point out a continuity between the way that the "Outline" formulates this idea and an earlier notion of the "earth as a world-historical individual" from a 1918 fragment "Types of History" (Benjamin 2004, 1:115). This serves me to point out that, at the turn of the 1920s, Benjamin's positive idea of a collective totality entails that this totality extends beyond human beings.

In the last section of this chapter, I turn to Benjamin's "To the Planetarium" (written between 1923-26 and published in 1928 as the final fragment of *One-Way Street*). This text is significant in my analysis of Benjamin's developments to the idea of the collective body, as it is the only instance where he refers to the figure of the collective body in a Marxist framework while retaining the idea of this collective body as the body of humankind. I trace the changes in Benjamin's account of this universal subjectivity (the body of humankind) between the "Outline" and "To the Planetarium" in order to establish the influence of Marxist vocabulary, specifically the notion of the proletariat and its underlying idea of class struggle, on Benjamin's idea of the collective body.[3]

1. *Leib* and *Körper* – a politically fruitful distinction?

In his *Immanent Critiques: The Frankfurt School under Pressure* (2023), Martin Jay considers Benjamin's *Leib-Körper* differentiation to be a source of "unexpected political inspiration" (Jay 2023, 164). "What makes reading the Leib/Körper distinction so fruitful", Jay writes, "is the work it does (…) to challenge the vitalist notion of organic wholeness as the normative model of social and political 'health'" (2023, 165). The idea in Benjamin's reflections on the body, which for Jay escapes the organicist notion of totality, is a conception of the "body politic", as he calls it (2023, 184), which would escape any connotations with stable wholeness and, as an effect, avoid being exclusive. For Jay, Benjamin's dual

[3] Because Benjamin's relationship to Marxist sources is still quite limited in *One-Way Street*, I refer to a vague understanding of a Marxist framework throughout this chapter. I go on to specify Benjamin's relation to Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* after 1924 in the next chapter, where this becomes a relevant context for Benjamin's discussion of the figure of the collective body in the 1929 "Surrealism" essay, where he is directly involved in the Surrealists' discussions on the communist organisation of politics.

constitution of the body as simultaneously both *Leib* and *Körper* already attests to its open-ended status. "The oscillation between them", Jay writes of the two modes of corporeality, "prevents humans from ever becoming fully at one with themselves, overcoming all self-alienation to achieve perfect organic unity" (2023, 170).[4] The intentions of Jay's interpretation are clear: he wants to suggest that Benjamin's notion of the body escapes the dangers of projecting a totalising, closed form onto both our understanding of individual subjectivity and of social relations. Jay's reading of Benjamin's conception of the body as disrupting the idea of wholeness and tending towards a fragmentary constitution of subjectivity follows in the footsteps of a body of scholarship which has engaged with Benjamin's early reflections on the body since the early 2010s. In an article from 2017, on which Jay himself heavily relies, "Eccentric Bodies: From Phenomenology to Marxism – Walter Benjamin's Reflections on Embodiment", Léa Barbisan juxtaposes Benjamin's ideas about the body with Edmund Husserl's and Max Scheler's phenomenology[5] and argues that Benjamin's use of this distinction offers an original way of disrupting the idea of a stable construction of the ego. Barbisan suggests that in Benjamin's thought "the body becomes the place where alienness (the object, the world, the outside) penetrates the sphere of the self and deeply disturbs its structure" (Barbisan 2017, 3–4). Barbisan argues that this is where the productive, emancipatory potential of Benjamin's ideas on *Leib* and *Körper* lies: in what she calls "self-alienation" or "alienation from the self" (2017, 10). She highlights how the separation of the idea of a collective "body of mankind" (which relies on the notion of *Leib*) from *Körper* allows Benjamin to conceptualise politics as based on a concept of collectivity "irreconcilable with the organicist model of the individual defined by a precise structure and stable identity" (2017, 10). For Barbisan, then, the crux of Benjamin's political philosophy of the body lies in its capacity to offer an original insight into the relationship between individuality and collectivity. In her view, just as it is later for Jay, this originality boils down to Benjamin's ability to circumvent the organicist connotations inherent in the concept of collectivity based on the body metaphor. Similarly to Barbisan, in his 2012 *Walter Benjamin: A Philosophical Portrait*, Eli Friedlander offers an insight into what makes Benjamin's idea of politics entailed in the "Outline" so fruitful in that it escapes the idea of what he calls

[4] Although in his analysis Jay centers on the figure of *Körper* as the mortal body, this stands in my view in contradiction to the way Benjamin defines *Körper* in the "Outline" as the eternal body linked to God in contrast to the transient and historical *Leib*. Therefore, I stick to comparing my analysis of *Leib* (rather than that of *Körper*) to his reading of the body politics in Benjamin's *Leib-Körper* framework.

[5] For a different historical contextualization of Benjamin's *Leib – Körper* distinction, see Daniel Johannßen, who argues that it can be read in light of what he calls "negative anthropology" of the 1920s (Johannßen 2013; 2014; 2018).

"supraindividual being" (Friedlander 2012, 76). What unites Friedlander, Barbisan, and Jay's readings of Benjamin's concept of the body is the angle from which they praise it. From their perspective, it offers a way of thinking about collectivity that is open-ended and inclusive yet grounded in the bodily constitution of human beings.

The tradition of interpreting Benjamin in opposition to any sense of totality is well established.[6] However, I want to argue that to see Benjamin's writings solely through their fragmentary form and his later reflections on the constellation and the dialectical method makes these readings more prone, in the case of his early anthropological writings, to overlooking an important stake in Benjamin's ideas on the body. Jay's reading is especially helpful in tracing the understandable, yet historically conditioned political stakes behind tending towards what, as I aim to show in this chapter, is an overvalorisation of the fragmented nature of Benjamin's notion of the human body. Jay argues that Benjamin, instead of following *Lebensphilosophie*, "sought to valorize the body in ruins, the fragmented, dismembered body, the body available for allegorization in new combinations" (Jay 2023, 186). However, Jay's reading rids Benjamin's early anthropological thought of how much it is indeed indebted to "the vitalist organicism of Lebensphilosophie", which in Jay's view Benjamin rejects in his "Outline" (2023, 186). It is worth noting in passing that the 1922-23 "Outline" is one of the most salient examples of Ludwig Klages'[7] influence on Benjamin. In a short bibliography at the end of the text, he lists two essays from 1919 and three books from between 1920-1922, all of which were written by Klages. This chapter does not take up the task of comparing Benjamin's writings with Klages, or of establishing the precise points of overlap of his thought with *Lebensphilosophy*. That Benjamin was influenced by *Lebensphilosophie*, especially by Ludwig Klages, has been carefully established by scholars since the 1980s (cf. Fuld 1981; Stauth and Turner 1992; Block 2000; Lebovic 2006).[8] My goal is to revisit the notions of *Leib* and *Körper* in Benjamin's "Outline" through the lens in which the moment of the dissolution of the ego can be seen together with

[6] On Benjamin's primary method of approaching philosophy as fragmentary in regard to his understanding of dialectics and to the notion of constellation, which he employs most famously in the 1938 essay on Eduard Fuchs, see for example Ross 2021, 9–13; Sahraoui and Sauter 2018, ix–xii; Salzani 2009.

[7] For a good overview of Klages' philosophy, see Lebovic 2013, for a translation of an array of his writings, see Bishop 2018.

[8] Furthermore, rather than falling into what Jay would like to see as a philosophy of the body written against *Lebensphilosophie*, Benjamin's "Outline" belongs to the wider phenomenon of ambivalent fascination with the early 20th century philosophy of life among leftist thinkers. Cf. Harrington 1996: "[I]n these years [of the Weimar Republic] even Marxism (of the Hegelian, Western sort) found it possible to dream of a politics grounded in the absolute of 'life' and strove to achieve what a former defender of that dream, Georg Lukács, later ambivalently recalled as a 'left' ethics fused with a 'right' epistemology" (1996, xvi).

the constitutive, positive moment of the emergence of a historically changeable form of collectivity rooted in the body. At its very outset, Benjamin's philosophy of the body does not simply oppose the idea of wholeness but plays on it for the benefit of a differentiated account of politics, in which both a reactionary and an emancipatory potential can be distinguished.

2. The limits to our body as *Leib* and *Körper*

Between 1918 and 1923, Benjamin wrote a series of unpublished fragments touching on a wide range of anthropological subjects stretching from how we perceive ourselves through our body ("Wahrnehmung und Leib", written between 1918-1920, Benjamin 1991a, 6:67) to shame and blushing ("On Shame", written between 1919-20 – for the original text "Über die Scham" see Benjamin 1991, 6:69–71),[9] and the bodily experience of horror (1991d, VI:75–77).[10] In the "Outline", Benjamin discusses the main terminological distinction which organises these early texts: *Leib* and *Körper*, two German terms for the human body. As we learn from the two opening sections of Benjamin's "Outline", he considers both *Leib* (translated by the late Rodney Livingstone as "body") and *Körper* (which he translates as "corporeal substance")[11] as always already in relation to *Geist* (mind/spirit). From the very outset, Benjamin's philosophy of the body circumvents any crude dualism of body and mind or body and soul. Instead, the "Outline" focuses on different tensions, which follow from a dual bodily constitution of human beings as simultaneously *Leib* and *Körper*. Benjamin's differentiation between *Leib* and *Körper* in his early anthropological writings can be organised along two main axes. Firstly, these two aspects of our bodily constitution differ in the way they relate to and are constituted through perception. Secondly, they diverge in terms

[9] A draft, unpublished translation is available online by Jacob Bard-Rosenberg (Bard-Rosenberg 2017).
[10] Two short fragments on horror written by Benjamin are published in *Gesammelte Schriften*: "Über das Grauen I", ca. 1920-22 (Be and "Über das Grauen II", ca. 1920-22 (Benjamin 1991d, VI:77).
[11] Rodney Livingstone writes on his translation choices in the following way: "This essay distinguishes between Leib and Körper, both of which mean 'body,' although there are slight differences in usage. Körper, the more common word, is the opposite of Geist (as in 'mind and body') and denotes human physicality. Leib is the opposite of Seele (as in 'body and soul') and denotes the human body as the repository of the soul; it belongs to a slightly higher register (as in der Leib Christi, 'the body of Christ'). I have translated Körper as 'corporeal substance' here, but I use the more natural word 'body' in Sections IV and VI, where the contrast with Leib is not crucial" (Benjamin 2004, 1:401). There are a number of issues with translating Benjamin's complex ideas on the relationship between *Leib*, *Körper*, and *Geist* into English vocabulary. As we will see throughout this chapter, Benjamin's taxonomy of the body in the "Outline" does not simply reflect the connotations of *Leib* and *Körper* evoked by Livingstone but rather constructs its own constellation of meaning. In order to circumvent Livingstone's complicated translation strategy and to distance myself from the interpretative assumptions it implies, I stick to the German words – *Leib* and *Körper* – throughout this thesis.

of what Friedlander puts in terms of the relational *Leib* and the "nonrelational" *Körper* (Friedlander 2012, 76–77). The first axis is based on the aspects of bodily experience that Benjamin associates with each term. The second axis sets *Leib* and *Körper* apart by relating them to a third term, *Geist*. As Friedlander notes, "[i]f body (Leib) is characterized essentially in relational terms, as a configuration (…) the corporeal is to be understood nonrelationally, that is, as a substance" (2012, 76n15).

Regarding the first axis, Benjamin relates the difference between *Leib* and *Körper* to their disparate relationship to perception in terms of the way we perceive limits of our bodily constitution through them. In an unpublished fragment entitled "Perception and the Body" ("Wahrnehmung und Leib", a part of which was written in 1918 and a part around 1920-1 according to the editors of *Gesammelte Schriften* – see , Benjamin introduces *Leib* as something "eccentric" – as a body seen from the lived perspective of having bodily parts that limit us in our perception and do so most significantly in our perception of ourselves:

> It is very significant that our own body [*Leib*] is inaccessible to us in so many ways: we cannot see our face, our back, our entire head, i.e. the most important part of the body, we cannot lift ourselves up with our own hands, we cannot embrace ourselves, etc. We protrude into the realm of perception, as it were, with our feet, not our heads.[12]

In this early fragment, *Leib* connotes physical and perceptual limitation to our experience of ourselves. However, Benjamin links our inability to perceive and interact with our own body as a whole with the paradoxical recognition of its shape. In the "Outline"'s section "Spirit and Corporeal Substance", Benjamin elaborates on the remarks from "Wahrnehmung und Leib" and points out how *Leib*, because its perception relies on recognising its parts, in fact relies on the recognition of form (*Gestalt*):[13]

> Everything that a human being can distinguish in himself as having his form as a totality, as well as such of his limbs and organs that appear to have a form—all that belongs to his body [*Leib*].

[12] "Sehr bedeutsam ist es, daß uns der eigne [*sic*] Leib in so vieler Beziehung unzugänglich: wir können unser Gesicht, unsern Rücken nicht sehen, unsern ganzen Kopf nicht, also den vornehmsten Teil des Leibes, wir können uns nicht mit den eignen Händen aufheben, können uns nicht umschlingen u.a.m. Wir ragen in die Wahrnehmungswelt gleichsam mit den Füßen hinein, nicht mit dem Haupt" (Benjamin 1991d, VI:67).
[13] For the historical context of the Berlin school of Gestalt psychology and the development of the discourse of wholeness in Germany see Ash 1995; Harrington 1996.

> All limitation that he sensuously perceives in himself belongs, as form, likewise to his body [*Leib*]. [14] (Benjamin 2004, 1:394)

If the body as *Leib* defined through perception is linked to limits and form, it also connotes a sense of totality. Benjamin writes of the way in which *Leib* is the "das ganze seiner Gestalt" – the whole of the human being's form. Within the "Outline" Benjamin contrast this characterisation of *Leib* as the body seen in its limits to our perception, with his depiction of *Körper* as limitless:

> The latter [*Körper*] manifests itself, in contrast, in a twofold polar form: as pain and pleasure. In these two, no form of any sort, and hence no limitation, is perceived. If, therefore, we know about our corporeal substance only—or chiefly—through pleasure or pain, we know of no limitation on it.[15] (2004, 1:394)

We experience our body as *Körper* mainly through sensations which are in themselves limitless and formless. For Benjamin these are the characteristics of pain and pleasure, which can be described qualitatively, by a degree of intensity, but never in terms of form. "[A]t their most intense", Benjamin writes of the states in which we experience limitlessness of our body, they "culminate in intoxication [*Rausch*]" (2004, 1:394). *Körper* is, then, the aspect of our bodily constitution which reaches beyond its shapedness and limited form. On this point, the crux of Benjamin's differentiation between *Leib* and *Körper* in terms of their relationship to form reveals its additional meaning. Paradoxically, even though in Benjamin's framework we experience our *Körper* through pain and pleasure – arguably the most interactive experiences, which presuppose a stimulus – *Körper* is, as Benjamin writes, "the seal of [the human being's] solitariness" (2004, 1:395). In the section dedicated to clarifying the difference between *Leib* and *Körper* by comparing the two directly, Benjamin writes of *Körper*:

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[14] "Alles wovon der Mensch an sich selbst irgend wie [*sic*] Gestaltwahrnehmung hat, das ganze seiner Gestalt sowohl wie die Glieder und Organe sofern sie ihm gestaltet erscheinen, gehört zu seinem Leibe. Alle Begrenzung, die er an sich selbst sinnlich wahrnimmt gehört als Gestalt ebenfalls zu diesem" (Benjamin 1991d, VI:79).

[15] "Dieser [d.h. der Körper] manifestiert (sich) dagegen in eigentümlicher Polarität zwiefach: als Lust und als Schmerz. In diesen beiden wird keinerlei Gestalt, keinerlei Begrenzung wahrgenommen. Wenn wir also um unsern Körper nur oder vornehmlich durch Lust und Schmerz wissen, so wissen wir von keiner Begrenzung desselben" (Benjamin 1991d, VI:79).

> For man, corporeal substance is the seal of his solitariness, and this will not be destroyed - even in death - because this solitariness is nothing but the consciousness of his direct dependence on God.[16] (2004, 1:395)

Benjamin aligns *Körper* with the body that does not dissolve in death, as opposed to the lived body of *Leib*. In his framework, *Leib*, which describes the body as it is lived and therefore the tendency of the body towards dissolution. "Bodily nature [*leibliche Natur*]", Benjamin writes in the subsection comparing *Leib* and *Körper*, "advances towards its dissolution; that of the corporeal substance, however, advances towards its resurrection"[17] (2004, 1:395). *Körper*, on the other hand. relates to the material substance of the body which does not disappear with death. On this point in Benjamin's argument the difference in perception between *Leib* and *Körper* turns into a difference of how they relate to matter as, respectively, changing or eternal. Benjamin's *Leib*, defined by our bodily limits, not only connotes different types of perception but also has a different relation to its material existence than the limitless *Körper*. Because *Leib* has boundaries and *Körper* does not, the former has a form which can undergo historical changes, while the latter cannot.

The difference between *Leib* and *Körper*'s relation to form has to do with the second characteristic axis which Benjamin draws through the "Outline": their relation to the third key term in the essay – *Geist*.[18] Benjamin starts the "Outline" by stating that *Leib* and *Geist* are bound together by an inherent kinship. The two are, he writes, "identical, and distinct simply as ways of seeing" (2004, 1:393). As he continues to explain:

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[16] "Der Körper ist für den Menschen das Siegel seiner Einsamkeit und es wird – auch im Tode – nicht zerbrechen, weil diese Einsamkeit nichts als das Bewußtsein seiner unmittelbaren Abhängigkeit von Gott ist" (1991d, VI:80).

[17] "Die leibliche Natur geht ihrer Auflösung entgegen, die körperliche dagegen ihrer Auferstehung" (1991d, VI:80).

[18] According to a diagram Sami Khatib draws in his essay on Benjamin's anthropological ideas, Benjamin's use of the psychophysical vocabulary combines "diagonally" the traditional connotations of *Leib* with *Seele* (soul) and *Körper* with *Geist* (mind) (Khatib 2012, 161). On the one hand of what he considers to be the "traditional" vocabulary on the psychophysical relations, Khatib portrays the *Leib-Seele*, connoted as "worldly" and "transient" (*weltlich-vergänglich*) (2012, 160). On the other hand, he puts the *Körper-Geist* correlation and links it to the "theological" and "eternal" (*theologisch-ewig*) order (2012, 160). However, a closer look at the "Outline" reveals that Benjamin never uses the word *Seele*. Instead, he discusses three terms: *Leib, Körper*, and *Geist*. As per the order of subheadings the first three fragments of the "Outline" describe relationships between *Geist* and *Leib*, *Geist* and *Körper*, *Leib* and *Körper*, while the remaining three focus on *Körper*.

> At every stage of its existence, the form of the historical is that of mind and body combined. The combined mind and body is the category of its 'now', its momentary manifestation as an ephemeral yet immortal being. (2004, 1:393)

The identification of *Leib* and *Geist*, then, follows from the fact that the two exist together as the "form of the historical" (*Gestalt des Geschichtlichen*). And while the combination of *Leib* and *Geist* is historically specific, *Körper*'s relation to *Geist* is not. *Körper* is linked to *Geist* on a level which Benjamin describes as "existence" (*Dasein*):

> Whereas body and genius can be proper to the real because of its present relation to the historical process (but not to God himself), spirit [*Geist*] and the corporeal substance [*Körper*] to which it belongs are based not on a relation but on existence as such.[19] (2004, 1:394)

The key to what Friedlander calls relationality of *Leib* and nonrelationality of *Körper* lies in their relation to *Geist*. But the effects of this relationship regard the way in which *Leib* and *Körper* relate to temporality and change. *Körper*'s ahistorical existence is non-relational, as Friedlander would have it, because its materiality is of the kind which depends on God and is therefore eternal. Highlighting the temporally unstable reality of *Leib* Benjamin goes as far as to say that it does not simply exist in history (which could connote a certain stability in historical determination of these changes), "but only dwells in it from time to time", as he writes in the following quote:

> Our body [*Leib*], then, is not integrated into the historical process, but only dwells in it from time to time; its modification from one [form] to the next [*von Gestalt zu Gestalt*] is not the function of historical process itself, but merely particular, detached relation [*abgezogenen Bezogenheit*] of a life to it.[20] (2004, 1:393)

This unstable, transient temporality is one of the key differences between *Leib* and *Körper* in Benjamin's framework. In the section entitled "Spirit and Corporeal Substance" [*Geist und Körper*], Benjamin accentuates that from the perspective of *Körper* our body

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[19] "Während Leib und ingenium allem Realen aus seiner Gegenwartsbeziehung zum geschichtlichen Prozeß zukommen kann (nur nicht Gott) ist Körper und der ihm zugehörende Geist nicht auf Beziehung, sondern auf Dasein schlechthin gegründet" (Benjamin 1991d, VI:79).

[20] "Unser Leib ist also nicht ein in den geschichtlichen Prozeß an sich selbst Einbezogenes, sondern nur das jeweilige In-ihm-stehen, seine Modification [*sic*] von Gestalt zu Gestalt ist nicht die Funktion des geschichtlichen Geschehens selbst, sondern der jeweiligen, abgezognen [*sic*] Bezogenheit eines Lebens auf dieses" (Benjamin 1991d, VI:78).

appears as a substance. *Körper*, Benjamin writes, "is not, indeed, the ultimate substratum of our existence, but it is at least a substance in contrast to our body [*Leib*], which is only a function" (2004, 1:394). What follows is that while *Körper* is linked to eternal existence of the substance and God, it is not synonymous with matter. Both *Leib* and *Körper*, Benjamin writes, have "fluctuating boundaries with nature" (2004, 1:395). In its material persistence, *Körper* tends towards resurrection, while the transient *Leib* is linked to decay. "Bodily nature", Benjamin writes on *Leib*, "advances toward its dissolution; that of the corporeal substance [*Körper*], however, advances toward its resurrection" (2004, 1:395). What at first, in Benjamin's presentation of the titular "psychophysical problem", constitutes a difference in perception – the way in which *Leib* and *Körper* relate to the limits of the human body – turns out to be an ontological distinction between a substance of our bodily existence and our body as a function of the historical process.

3. Humankind and *Volk*: two disparate types of collectivity based on the bodily constitution of human beings

One of the key consequences of *Leib* and *Körper*'s different existence in relation to time and substance is that the two have a different relationship to the collective aspect of human existence. While *Leib* extends towards "the body of humankind", *Körper* is "the seal of [the human being's] solitariness" (Benjamin 2004, 1:395). This difference follows directly from Benjamin's conception of the difference between the two aspects of the body in terms of their relationship to limits and form.

Firstly, Benjamin links the fact that *Leib* tends towards its own dissolution not only to the dynamic temporality of life but also to an understanding of the human body as inherently collective. Elaborating on the way in which *Leib* is linked to change and historical process in the section on "Body and Corporeal Substance" [*Leib und Körper*], Benjamin writes:

> The body [*Leib*], the function of the historical present in man [, expands into the body of mankind. (…) In addition to the totality of all its living members, humanity [*Menschheit*] is able partly to draw nature, the nonliving, plant, and animal, into this life of the body of mankind, and thereby into this annihilation and fulfillment. It can do this by virtue of the technology in which

> the unity of its life is formed. Ultimately, everything that subserves humanity's happiness may be counted part of its life, its limbs.[21] (2004, 1:395)

Leib, therefore, not only tends towards the body of humankind but also includes in it much more than the individual human bodies themselves. This goes along the specific dynamic of *Leib*'s historical existence. The fact that the body as *Leib* exists, Benjamin writes, as a "function of the historical present in man" does not simply mean that it exists in time. This is not only because, as I pointed out, in Benjamin's definition *Leib* "dwells in history from time to time" rather than always. The fact that it extends in time changes something in *Leib*: namely, the kind of totality it describes. When *Leib* expands into the "body of [hu]mankind", the totality it describes is not the totality of an individual human being's body, which *Leib*'s perspective recognised in the 1918 "Wahrnehmung und Leib". Rather**,** the expanding *Leib* recognises and engenders a new kind of entity: humankind as a whole. That a certain kind of wholeness is entailed in Benjamin's description of this process, or at least a certain kind of singularity, is clear from the following sentences of the same subsection. Namely, while Benjamin highlights the open-ended character of the *Leib* of humankind, he simultaneously formulates an idea of individuality specific to *Leib*, which can be thought of on a more collective level than that of particular human beings:

> 'Individuality' [*Individualität*] as the principle of the body is on a higher plane than that of single embodied individuals [*Individualitäten*]. Humanity [*Menschheit*] as an individual [*Individualität*] is both the consummation and the annihilation of bodily life [*der Untergang des leiblichen Lebens*]. 'Annihilation' because with it the historical existence, whose function the body is, reaches its end.[22] (2004, 1:395)

Benjamin's notion of "humanity as an individual", which "is both the consummation and the annihilation of bodily life" showcases the specific relationship between wholeness and change in his conception of the human body as *Leib*. Firstly, it points to the inherent

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[21] "Der Leib, die Funktion der geschichtlichen Gegenwart im Menschen, wächst zum Leibe der Menschheit. (…) In dieses Leben des Leibes der Menschheit, und somit in diesen Untergang und in diese Erfüllung vermag die Menschheit(,) außer der Allheit der Lebenden, noch partiell die Natur: (U)nbelebtes, Pflanze und Tier durch die Technik einzubeziehen, in der sich die Einheit ihres Lebens bildet. Zuletzt gehört zu ihrem Leben, ihren Gliedern alles was ihrem Glück dient" (Benjamin 1991d, VI:80).

[22] "Die 'Individualität' als Prinzip des Leibes steht höher als die einzelner leiblicher Individualitäten. Die Menschheit als Individualität ist die Vollendung und zugleich der Untergang des leiblichen Lebens. Untergang: denn mit ihr erreicht dasjenige geschichtliche Leben, dessen Funktion der Leib ist, sein Ende" (Benjamin 1991d, VI:80).

connection between form and history in Benjamin's philosophy of the body. Having a form means to undergo changes, rather than a necessary determination of its clear-cut boundaries. Furthermore, Benjamin insists that the collective form of humankind, to which the body as *Leib* tends, is guided by the principle of "individuality", as he calls it.

As I mentioned in the first section of this chapter, in his interpretation of Benjamin's *Leib- Körper* differentiation Jay argues that Benjamin overcomes the connotations between body politic and organic totality. Indeed, Jay rightly points out the way in which Benjamin's notion of the body "prevents humans from ever becoming fully at one with themselves, overcoming all self-alienation to achieve perfect organic unity" (2023, 170). However, while one of the aspects of Benjamin's framework which prevents this is the dual notion of the body as *Leib* and *Körper* because there is no one figure of the body, as Jay suggests, there is more to it. The very notion of *Leib* as it connotes that which is formed and the sense of wholeness in our body by definition extends beyond itself. In this regard, I argue that the open-endedness of Benjamin's notion of the body has more to do with its collective character of Benjamin's understanding of the body than it does with it going against the language of wholeness and organic unity. Jay's argument has a clear theoretical aim. His reading attempts to valorise *Körper* as a fragile, suffering and mortal body able to overcome the dangers of what he calls "the rhetoric of corporeal wholeness", which – as he points out – has been historically mobilised by fascism (2023, 186). "The image of a healthy, organic, hierarchically organized vital body as the model for a political community like a state" – Jay urges – "should be replaced with one that also includes the mortal body" (2023, 185). For Jay, then, Benjamin's *Leib- Körper* framework offers to describe not only the dangers but also the opportunities of the idea of politics as operating on life and death, because a valorisation of the passive, suffering and mortal body reveals an unexpected universality of human bodily constitution. Jay insists on reading Benjamin's *Körper* as a figure of fragmentary, passive body whose claim to universality preserves the fragility and uniqueness of individuals, in contrast to the body which "connects man to humanity at large and its mundane history, into which it is absorbed without remainder" (2023, 186). However, in the process, Jay collapses an important distinction between the two notions of the body: one which regards the way Benjamin himself relates them to collectivity. For Benjamin, not only *Leib* but also *Körper* participates in the human body's tendency to expand into a broader, collective subject. While *Leib,* however, expands into the body of humankind, the "maximum extension" of *Körper* is "the people" [*Volk*]. In the final argument of the "Outline"'s section "Spirit and Corporeal Substance" Benjamin writes:

> The uniqueness which one may in one sense attribute to it [the person] derives therefore not from itself but from the orbit of its maximum extension. This is how it stands, then, both with its nature and its corporeal substance: they are not limited by their form, but they are nevertheless limited by their maximum extension, the people.[23] (Benjamin 2004, 1:394–95)

The distinction is, therefore, that between two disparate types of how the collective subject can be understood as universal because of the common physical constitution of human beings in their bodies. However, it is not only, as Jay suggests, the difference between *Leib* as the lived body and the "universal human mortality" (Jay 2023, 180) of *Körper* as two foundations of understanding the body politic. Benjamin offers a clear differentiation between the two on the level of the kind of collectivity, to which they extend: humankind and the people. Here, again, a recourse to the *Leib-Körper* differentiation in terms of their relationship to form is helpful. While from the individual subject's perspective *Körper* was characterised by a limitlessness and *Leib* appeared as defined by its limits and form, in the collective optic the roles are reversed. For as much as Benjamin describes *Körper*'s collective "maximum extension" as its limit, the image of *Leib*'s collectivity appears as an open-ended process, with no clear boundaries. The key difference between the kind of collective subject that *Leib* and *Körper* engender is that the former, by tending to its own annihilation – the death of individual human being – refers us to the unitary framework of humankind, with its historical changeability. Yet how can the "body of humankind" both be based on the aspect of our bodies which has to do with limited form and at the same time be limitless in its expansion? In other words, what is the relationship between an open-ended conception of collectivity entailed in *Leib*'s expansion to the idea of wholeness implied in the figure of the higher plane of individuality? In order to answer these questions, I now want to look at the way in which Benjamin operates with the category of form (*Gestalt*) in the "Outline".

3.1. What kind of wholeness? The elasticity of *Gestalt*

We can discern a tension in the way Benjamin juxtaposes *Leib*'s reliance on what Rodney Livingstone translates as "totality" or "form" with its open-ended character (its tendency to

[23] "Sie [die Person] hat daher ihre Einzigkeit, welche man ihr freilich in einem gewissen Sinne beilegen darf, gleichsam nicht von sich selbst, vielmehr aus dem Umkreis ihrer maximalen Ausdehnung her. So steht es zugleich mit ihrer Natur und ihrem Körper: sie sind nicht auf gestaltete Weise begrenzt, aber begrenzt dennoch durch ein Maximum von Ausdeutung (sic), das Volk" (Benjamin 1991d, VI:80).

expand). In its application to *Leib*, the idea of *Gestalt* in the "Outline" appears in the context in which Benjamin describes *Leib* as the aspect of our body which has a form [*Gestalt*] "as a totality" (Benjamin 2004, 1:394). However, as we have seen so far, the totality of *Leib* does not connote any closed borders of the human body. With his specific understanding of *Leib* Benjamin connotes a totality as *Gestalt* – which in his framework signifies a sense of wholeness of the body perceived through the fact that it consists of parts. Furthermore, *Leib* reaches out further than the body of any individual and extends into the body of humankind, which involves non-human elements. When Benjamin writes, that "[i]n addition to the totality of all its limbs and members, humanity is able partly to draw nature, the nonliving, plant, and animal, into this life of the body of humankind" (2004, 1:395), he portrays elements seemingly external to the human body as parts of human life and, therefore, inform the humankind's understanding of its own material unity, that is, its *Gestalt*. This makes the body of humankind into the subject of historical process. Yet, *Leib*'s expansion is only one of the two sides of its historical existence. While it does expand towards humankind, in the process, it is annihilated (2004, 1:395). For Benjamin in the "Outline", then, *Leib* grows into the body of humankind for three interconnected reasons, all of which hinge on its formedness, on it being and recognising *Gestalt*. First, the fact that *Leib* forms with *Geist* a form of the historical means that it is prone to change. Second, because *Leib* "dwells in history", it can shift its shape between the totality of individual body's *Gestalt* and that of humankind. Thirdly, because it recognises the formedness of its own *Gestalt* and the fact that it consists of organs, it can contain more than what is traditionally considered to be parts of the human body.

In order to better understand the concept of wholeness conveyed in Benjamin's portrayal of the body of humankind as "individual", I will now examine his earlier use of a similar figure that also embodies the tension between individuality and collectivity. The "Outline" is not the only text from the turn of the 1920s, in which Benjamin refers to a particular type of individuality that pertains to the unity of human beings rather than to singular individuals. In an earlier unpublished 1918 fragment entitled "Types of History", Benjamin presents a figure of individual collectivity similar to the one found in the later "Outline". Arguing against Johann Gottfried Herder's understanding of natural history,[24] Benjamin writes that the earth is "a *world*-historical individual":

[24] Although it could prove to be an interesting point of comparison both with Benjamin's understanding of natural history in the "Types of History" and with his critique of the notion of *Volk* in the "Outline", a further

> Natural history exists only as cosmogony or as the history of creation. Herder's conception of this is mistaken, regarded from an earthly stand-point, but the earth is, in itself, a *world*-historical individual [*weltgeschichtliches Individuum*] because human beings [*Menschen*] live on it.[25] (Benjamin 2004, 1:115)

Whereas in "Outline" Benjamin presents humankind (*Menschheit*) as an individuality, in "Types of History" he distinguishes the earth as a "world-historical individual" from the plurality of men (*Menschen*).[26] In the last paragraph of the "Types of History", Benjamin revisits the concept of *Menschen*. He emphasises the contrast between the plurality of men and the historical individuum they constitute as life on earth. "Natural history" – he writes – "does not extend to mankind [*Menschen*], any more than does universal history [*Weltgeschichte*]; it knows only the individual [*Individuum*]" (Benjamin 2004, 1:115). The lens of world-history, to which the earth belongs as a "*world*-historical individual", does not capture the plurality of people living on earth – humans (*Menschen)* – but only the individual totality of all of them. World-history retains the category of individuality not because it deals with the affairs of individual people put together but because it deals with the totality of their historical existence on earth. Both in the notion of the earth as a "*world*-historical individual" and in the idea of humankind as an individuality, Benjamin's voice is clear: such a universal subjectivity would result in a different totality than that of all human beings put together. Yet, at the same time, this totality is specifically human. The earth, Benjamin writes, "is, in itself, a *world*-historical individual *because* [emphasis KJ] human beings live on it" (2004, 1:115). And when he posits that the body of humankind can draw on human elements through technology, Benjamin underlines its guiding principle: "everything that subserves humanity's

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engagement with Herder's philosophy would exceed the scope of this thesis. As a preliminary remark, it would have to be said that Benjamin's critique of Herder does not necessarily mean any direct engagement with his thought. Herder does not appear in Benjamin's writings, and he never mentions him in any significant way in his letters, where he often recounts his current reading lists – planned, finished, and in progress – to his correspondents. Since the "Types of History" stem from 1918, Benjamin's understanding of Herder's ideas might be linked to his engagement with the Early Romantics in his doctoral thesis, finished a year later ("The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism", 1919). On the category of natural history in Benjamin's thought see Friedlander 2024.

[25] "Naturgeschichte gibt es nur als Kosmogonie oder als Schöpfungsgeschichte, die Herdersche Konzeption von ihr ist falsch, vom irdischen Standpunkt aus gesehen[,] aber die Erde ist, weil Menschen auf ihr leben [*sic*] schon ein weltgeschichtliches Individuum" (Benjamin 1991d, VI:93).

[26] The difference between the later notion of humankind and the former use of the figure of human beings is lost in Livingstone's translation of the texts, where, in "Types of History" he sometimes translates *Menschen* as "human beings" and sometimes as "mankind" (in the "Outline" *Menschheit* is translated as "mankind" or "humanity"). The translatory choice of "mankind" in the "Types of History" is, in my view, misleading because it evokes the figure of *Menschheit* rather than *Menschen*.

happiness may be counted part of its life, its limbs" (2004, 1:395). However, there is a crucial difference between the figure of humankind's body as an individual in the "Outline" and the earth as a "world-historical individual" from "Types of History". While in both cases Benjamin formulates the figure of the collective subject as having a form similar to that of an individual, the mirror image of a higher plane of individuality between "Types of History" and the "Outline" is distorted. The concept of the body of humanity extending to include all that serves its happiness carries a stronger sense of active progress towards a better future than the idea of the earth as a world-historical individual. Nevertheless, both formulations share a key observation: Benjamin believes that the totality of human beings only becomes a truly universal subject of history when it extends beyond humans. There is a specific historical index to when Benjamin considers human beings to enter a new level of collectivity, which opens up the possibility of thinking about humanity as a whole: this context is World War I. Not only are both the "Types of History" and Benjamin's earliest anthropological writings post-World War I, but also, in a text written a few years after the "Outline" – "To the Planetarium" – Benjamin addresses directly the relationship between humanity as a whole, the Great War, and the cosmic perspective.

4. "To the Planetarium"

4.1. The cosmic perspective and a failed claim to universality in World War I

In the concluding fragment of his first book publication, *One-Way Street* (published in 1928, written between 1923-26) entitled "To the Planetarium" Benjamin approaches the concept of humankind's collective body from a slightly different perspective than in the "Outline", despite using similar phrasing and employing the notions of *Menschheit* and its *Leib*. "To the Planetarium" reflects on the events of World War I. It is in this specific historical context, that Benjamin paints the picture of an emerging new body of humankind, forged in the recent war:

> In the nights of annihilation of the last war, the frame of mankind [*Menschheit*] was shaken by a feeling that resembled the bliss of the epileptic. And the revolts that followed it were the first

attempt of mankind to bring the new body [*den neuen Leib*] under its control.[27] (Benjamin 2004, 1:486)

The fragment shows just how far Benjamin was willing to push his appreciation of technology – which he described as the realm in which *Leib* formed its unity in the "Outline" (Benjamin 2004, 1:395) – even to the point of appreciating the creative powers behind the destruction caused by its military use between 1914-1918. His pacifist response at the beginning of the war was what led him to re-evaluate his close relations with Gustav Wyneken (Leslie 2007, 32). He also suffered personal loss when two of his close friends, protesting the militarisation of Germany, committed suicide.[28] And yet, almost a decade after the Great War had ended, Benjamin portrays it as the dawn of a new body of mankind. The new potentialities which Benjamin saw unleashed in World War I, of course, have little to do with positive valorisation of war itself. It is not the possibility of a different future – a different speculative outcome of the war – but what the war itself enabled on the level of political and technological mobilisation that Benjamin portrays as so unavoidably important. Namely, in the scale of the First World War, he detects a failed attempt at a new sense of universal collectivity. "The world war" – Esther Leslie summarises this key recognition of Benjamin's "To the Planetarium" – "was internationalism twisted into gross distortion" ([2000] 2015, 5). However, as we have seen in the previous sections of this chapter, Benjamin's ambitions in regard to his idea of the collective body of humankind, at least as he first formulated it in the "Outline", are much greater than a sheer internationalist perspective. In his search for a united and all-human subject of history, Benjamin is interested not so much in a global scale but in a cosmic one. And this has to do with his critical evaluation of the war itself.

In a much later text on Paul Scheerbart, whose science-fiction novel *Lesabéndio* Benjamin got from his friend Gerhard Scholem as a wedding gift in 1917 and continued to admire thereafter, Benjamin recalls an article Scheerbart wrote at the outbreak of World War I for the German weekly newspaper *Zeit-Echo*. The article made such an impression on young Benjamin that he refers the gist of its opening lines from memory a quarter century

[27] "In den Vernichtungsnächten des letzten Krieges erschütterte den Gliederbau der Menschheit ein Gefühl, das dem Glück der Epileptiker gleichsah. Und die Revolten, die ihm folgten, waren der erste Versuch, den neuen Leib in ihre Gewalt zu bringen" (Benjamin 1991e, IV:148).
[28] Benjamin recounts Fritz Heinle's suicide in, for example, his "Über Stefan George", written for the *Literarische Welt* in 1928, where he writes of Heinle's death as a milestone in his turn away from George's poetry. For an account of the influence Heinle's suicide had on Benjamin see Felman 2007.

later. “Here is the beginning of the article as it is engraved in my memory” – he writes and goes on to quote Scheerbart[29] – “First of all, I protest against the expression ‘world war’. I am certain that no star, however close, will interfere in the matter in which we are involved. There is every reason to believe that a profound peace continues to hover over the stellar universe” (Benjamin 1991e, IV:630).[30] Benjamin’s take on war in “To the Planetarium” reflects on the same failure of the Great War’s failed pretence to universality of which Scheerbart wrote in 1914. As Benjamin writes, in the Great War an “immense wooing of the cosmos was enacted for the first time on a planetary scale-that is, in the spirit of technology” (Benjamin 2004, 1:486–87). Benjamin compares the 1914-18 war to the ancient form of ecstatic longing for humankind’s unity with the cosmos:

> Nothing distinguishes the ancient from the modern man so much as the former's absorption in a cosmic experience scarcely known to later periods. Its waning is marked by the flowering of astronomy at the beginning of the modern age. (…) The ancients' intercourse with the cosmos had been different: the ecstatic trance [*Rausch*]. (…) It is the dangerous error of modern men to regard this experience as unimportant and avoidable, and to consign it to the individual as the poetic rapture of starry nights. It is not; its hour strikes again and again, and then neither nations nor generations can escape it, as was made terribly clear by the last war, which was an attempt at new and unprecedented commingling with the cosmic powers.[31] (2004, 1:486)

In the “Outline”, the cosmic perspective was present as *Leib*’s outlook on “nature, the non-living, plant, and animal” (2004, 1:395) as parts of its totality actively put together by human beings in their collectivity. This perspective was related to a higher plane of individuality and the human-and-more constitution of its wholeness. In contrast, in “To the Planetarium” the cosmic perspective is framed in historical terms: it has been lost during the

[29] In fact, Scheerbart starts his article quoting a Professor Großleben, whom he – possibly only rhetorically – says he heard speaking on the incongruence of the phrase “world war”. Benjamin’s reference, then, resembles the article even more than he perhaps intended, as it reenacts its rhetorical structure aside from repeating the point Professor Großleben is said to have made (see Scheerbart 1914).
[30] My translation. The original, in French as published in the *Gesammelte Schriften* reads: “En voici le début tel qu’il s’est gravé dans ma mémoire: ‘Et que je proteste d’abord contre l’expression “guerre mondiale”. Je suis certain qu’aucun astre, si proche soit-il, n’ira se mêler de l’affaire où nous sommes impliqués. Tout porte à croire qu'une paix profonde ne cesse de planer sur l’univers stellaire’” (Benjamin 1991e, IV:630).
[31] “Nichts unterscheidet den antiken so vom neueren Menschen, als seine Hingegebenheit an eine kosmische Erfahrung, die der spätere kaum kennt. (…) Antiker Umgang mit dem Kosmos vollzog sich anders: im Rausche. (…) Es ist die drohende Verirrung der Neueren, diese Erfahrung für belanglos, für abwendbar zu halten und sie dem Einzelnen als Schwärmerei in schönen Sternennächten anheimzustellen. Nein, sie wird je und je von neuem fällig, und dann entgehen Völker und Geschlechter ihr so wenig, wie es am letzten Krieg aufs fürchterlichste sich bekundet hat, der ein Versuch zu neuer, nie erhörter Vermählung mit den kosmischen Gewalten war” (Benjamin 1991e, IV:146–47).

development of astronomy. Benjamin writes that the "waning" of the absorption of the ancient man in cosmic experience "is marked by the flowering of astronomy at the beginning of the modern age" (2004, 1:486). Perhaps because of how, in Benjamin's perspective from the *One-Way Street*, cosmos and human beings have been historically disunited, the way Benjamin describes the relationship between humanity and cosmos in the fragment so strongly underlines the desire for unity. His vocabulary is overtly sexual: he calls the relationship between humanity and cosmos "an intercourse" and a "commingling" (Benjamin uses the German word *Vermählung*, translated as "marriage").

In his 1993 *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*, John McCole calls "To the Planetarium" Benjamin's "pivotal, programmatic statement" because of how it joined what he calls Benjamin's earlier "anti-instrumentalist philosophical anthropology" with a Marxist outlook on "social analysis and contemporary political polemics" (McCole 1993, 189). The outcome of this combination is, for McCole, Benjamin's strikingly sober recognition that a "failure to come to terms with technology" effected in war (1993, 189). "The point is easily overlooked" – McCole writes – "given our retrospective knowledge of the war that was indeed to follow" (1993, 189). McCole rightly diagnoses "To the Planetarium"'s focal place in Benjamin's attempts to link his anthropological insights to a Marxist framework. He points out that Benjamin's relentless optimism about technology informed his later cultural criticism in its attention to how technology changes aesthetic forms and remained a guiding force of his analysis in the mid-1930s "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1993, 190). Benjamin's utopian optimism was also, in McCole's view, what distinguished him from the emerging aesthetics of New Objectivity. "At a time when the cultural climate was shifting to sobriety and *Sachlichkeit*" – he writes – "Benjamin's view of technology held fast to the heady optimism of constructivist utopias" (1993, 189). Yet there is more to "To the Planetarium" in how it links his early anthropology with Marxism than its contribution to Benjamin's optimistic approach to technology. As Leslie puts it, "Benjamin's analysis works by establishing a formal contractual relationship that binds technology and the proletariat" (Leslie [2000] 2015, 7). Leslie also points out that the proletariat's relationship with technology is not, in Benjamin's view in "To the Planetarium", a utopian one by default. "The proletariat" – she recounts – "once seemingly thrilled by new technological possibilities for a utopian reformulation of nature, has become a bloody collective object and victim-sacrifice of technology's machinations in war" ([2000] 2015, 7). It is this double-edged account of the potential and the misuse of the new scale on which technology was mobilised in war that "To the Planetarium" offers an insight into the links Benjamin makes in the text

between the collective body of humankind and its potential to be both misused by capitalism and to point out a different organisation of human beings' relationship with nature. In "To the Planetarium", Benjamin notes that technology's potential of uniting separate bodies into a certain kind of wholeness was warped in the war's use of technology because of its capitalist base. "[B]ecause the lust for profit of the ruling class sought satisfaction through it" – Benjamin writes – "technology betrayed man and turned the bridal bed into a bloodbath" (Benjamin 2004, 1:487). The reason for the horrific misappropriation of technology in war, however, is deeper than a simple misuse of technological potential. Benjamin blames a misunderstanding of what technology is altogether and underlines that it does not stand in opposition to nature. Benjamin accuses what he calls the "imperialist" approach to technology, which preaches that technology is a "mastery of nature" instead of what Benjamin proposes is the true character of technology:

> The mastery of nature (so the imperialists teach) is the purpose of all technology. But who would trust a cane wielder who proclaimed the mastery of children by adults to be the purpose of education? Is not education, above all, the indispensable ordering of the relationship between generations and therefore mastery (if we are to use this term) of that relationship and not of children? And likewise technology is the mastery of not nature but of the relation between nature and man.[32] (2004, 1:487)

In his positive account of technology as a relationship with nature rather than mastery over it, Benjamin conveys the spectrum of what contributes to the cosmic perspective. The global perspective of international relations connoted in the "world war" warps the true universality unleashed by technological mobilisation because it does not take into account that this universality is non-anthropocentric. While this idea of a human-and-more universality would seem to repeat what we have seen both in "Types of History" and in the "Outline", Benjamin takes this idea further in "To the Planetarium". Namely, in the latter text Benjamin portrays the relationship of human beings with nature via technology as what shapes the collective form.

[32] "Weil aber die Profitgier der herrschenden Klasse an ihr ihren Willen zu büßen gedachte, hat die Technik die Menschheit verraten und das Brautlager in ein Blutmeer verwandelt. Naturbeherrschung, so lehren die Imperialisten, ist Sinn aller Technik. Wer möchte aber einem Prügelmeister trauen, der Beherrschung der Kinder durch die Erwachsenen für den Sinn der Erziehung erklären würde? Ist nicht Erziehung vor allem die unerläßliche Ordnung des Verhältnisses zwischen den Generationen und also, wenn man von Beherrschung reden will, Beherrschung der Generationsverhältnisse und nicht der Kinder? Und so auch Technik nicht Naturbeherrschung: Beherrschung vom Verhältnis von Natur und Menschheit" (Benjamin 1991e, IV:147).

4.2. The new universal subject of humankind and the failed universality of *Menschenmassen*

In the sexual language with which Benjamin describes the relations between humankind and the cosmos through technology there is also, as Leslie points out, a sense of pregnancy with new life. "The ecstatic encounter of the masses and technology" – Leslie writes – "is described as copulation, an index of both sexual delight and the birth of the new" (Leslie [2000] 2015, 5). But this "new" of which Leslie writes is not a given – what emerges in war is the *possibility* of a different collective subjectivity. The gravity of just how much Benjamin sees the new body of humankind to not only mark a new historical moment, but also a new form of collectivity, is best conveyed in a later paragraph of "To the Planetarium", when Benjamin differentiates between two types of universal human collectivity – men (*Menschen*) and mankind (*Menschheit*):

> Men [*Menschen*] as a species completed their development thousands of years ago; but mankind [*Menschheit*] as a species is just beginning his. In technology, a physis is being organized through which mankind's contact with the cosmos takes a new and different form from that which it had in nations and families. [33] (Benjamin 2004, 1:486)

Thus, the figure of *Menschheit* as a different kind of collective subjectivity from that of *Menschen* reappears in "To the Planetarium". The difference between "Types of History"'s *Menschen* and the "Outline"'s *Menschheit* relies on the difference between the plurality of human beings (*Menschen*) and the totality they constitute with the earth as a body of humankind (*Leib der Menschheit*). In "To the Planetarium", however, the difference between the two is more than that of breadth or scale. Rather, the difference between the plurality of people and humanity is put in historical perspective. While *Menschen* – humans as a species – have already existed for thousands of years in their evolutionary form as *homo sapiens*, *Menschheit* – humanity as the subject of history – is an entirely new entity. Benjamin points out the previous historical forms of collectivity, which humanity succeeds: nations and families. In fact, the English translation is misleading here. Benjamin does not use the word

[33] "Menschen als Spezies stehen zwar seit Jahrzehntausenden am Ende ihrer Entwicklung; Menschheit als Spezies aber steht an deren Anfang. Ihr organisiert in der Technik sich eine Physis, in welcher ihr Kontakt mit dem Kosmos sich neu und anders bildet als in Völkern und Familien" (Benjamin 1991e, IV:147).

Nationen (nations) but *Völker* (peoples) – a broader term which does not necessarily connote the idea of a nation-state but denotes people joined by a common culture, language, and history.[34] The fact that Benjamin mentions peoples and families as the previous historical forms of collectivity reiterates the difference between the plurality of human beings and the history of the kind of supra-individual collectivities they form.

Right after Benjamin states that the "last war" was "an attempt at new and unprecedented commingling with the cosmic powers" (2004, 1:486), Benjamin goes on to list the many layers of the planet mobilised by the war's destructive attempts to commune with the cosmic powers, and lists "human multitudes" among resources used in the process:

> Human multitudes [*Menschenmassen*], gases, electrical forces were hurled into the open country, high-frequency currents coursed through the landscape, new constellations rose in the sky, aerial space and ocean depths thundered with propellers, and everywhere sacrificial shafts were dug in Mother Earth.[35] (2004, 1:486)

Benjamin's description of the Great War depicts the "human multitudes" as one of the many materials used in war, alongside "gases" and "electrical forces" (Ibidem). The emerging image of war is that of total engagement of earth's resources, with the striking recognition that in war human beings (*Menschen*) appear as yet another resource to be deployed: human masses (*Menschenmassen*). As in the "Types of History", the notion of *Menschen* in "To the Planetarium" appears in an inherent relation to earth. However, rather than contributing to earth as an individual subject of history as it did in "Types of History", *Menschen* in "To the Planetarium" appear in a reified form. While in "To the Planetarium"'s description war engages the very same universality of both humans and the environment to the one, which in "Types of History" appears in the form of the earth as a "*world*-historical individual" (Benjamin 2004, 1:115), it does so on a destructive level, and with a very different outcome. Benjamin's juxtaposition of *Menschheit* with *Menschenmassen* highlights the contrast between what appeared as a seedbed of potential new collective subjectivities (the new body of humankind) and what effected from the failure to realise it in this way (*Menschenmassen*). The gist of "To the Planetarium"'s perspective on the relationship between body, collectivity and technology underlines that, in the aftermath of World War I,

[34] For an overview of the etymological history of the word *Volk* in German see Olschansky 2012.
[35] "Menschenmassen, Gase, elektrische Kräfte wurden ins freie Feld geworfen, Hochfrequenzströme durchfuhren die Landschaft, neue Gestirne gingen am Himmel auf, Luftraum und Meerestiefen brausten von Propellern, und allenthalben grub man Opferschächte in die Muttererde" (Benjamin 1991e, IV:147).

the form of the new collective body of humankind might be different from the ones based on nation, or people, or family but it is yet undetermined – there is still a struggle for control over this body. Such a perspective opens up an important question: that is, who is the subject of this struggle?

4.3. Proletarian revolts, or the violent organisation of the humankind's new body

When Benjamin writes that the "revolts that followed" World War I "were the first attempt of mankind to bring the new body under its control", it is not perfectly clear who enacts these attempts. In the German original, the possessive pronoun translated by Jephcott as "its" indeed has the same gender as humankind, but the grammatical structure suggests that it could just as well refer to the "revolts that followed". Benjamin writes, verbatim: "Und die Revolten, die ihm folgten, waren der erste Versuch, den neuen Leib in ihre Gewalt zu bringen" (Benjamin 1991e, IV:148). If we consider that it is not humankind in its new bodily form but rather "the revolts that followed" after World War I that enact the attempt, then the position of the agent bringing the new body of humankind under control would shift from the abstract collective subject of the humankind to the more historically specific revolutionary attempts to enforce a new social order after World War I. We may then posit that there is a significant change in the way Benjamin describes the emergence of the body of humankind "To the Planetarium", compared to the way he does it in the "Outline". Specifically, we may suggest that the tendency of *Leib* to expand towards a body of humankind, which on the grounds of the "Outline" was its given characteristic, in "To the Planetarium" becomes a battlefield itself. In his *Walter Benjamin and the Corpus of Autobiography* (2000) Gerhard Richter follows a similar line of reading "To the Planetarium". He points out that Benjamin describes the organisation of the new body of humankind in the final section of *One-Way Street* not necessarily in terms of control but in terms of violence. Richter notes that when Benjamin writes of what has been translated by Edmund Jephcott as humankind's attempt to "bring the new body under its control" (Benjamin 2004, 1:487), he writes, in the original version, "den Leib in ihre Gewalt zu bringen" (Benjamin 1991e, IV:148). According to Richter, this could also be translated as "to dominate the new body violently" (Richter [2000] 2002, 57). Indeed, as Dennis Johannßen and Dominik Zechner point out, Benjamin's use of the polysemic term *Gewalt* points not only to the most common translation of the term as

violence, but also as force, power or cause.[36] In Richter's view, Benjamin's use of the term *Gewalt* in "To the Planetarium" highlights the difficulties of "historical forces and movements" to reorganise the new body of humankind after the Great War. He writes:

> For to control this new historical body is also, because of its representational vicissitudes, to do violence to it. Any historical appropriation of the body, based on violence, will thus fall prey to a vertiginous "frenzy of destruction" (W 487; 4:148) and decay. For the historical body to survive this violence of appropriation and destruction, it must continually reinvent itself. It must never cease to come into presence, and it must not stop becoming something else. ([2000] 2002, 57)

Richter's reading of Benjamin's figure of the collective body follows a similar path to that of Barbisan, Friedlander, and Jay, which I described in the first section of this chapter. Just as for these scholars, for Richter, too, the key to Benjamin's figure of the collective body is its historically open-ended form. "Something peculiar happens" – he writes – "in the moment in which this historically constituted subjectivity emerges: though it becomes visible as the temporal manifestation of self-presence, it is also exposed to the radical absence, non-linearity, and nonself-identity that are embedded in its very temporality" ([2000] 2002, 56–57). Similarly to what Jay proposes in his *Immanent Critiques*, Richter underlines the open-ended character of the historical changes. "The delimitation of the historical subject's being" – Richter concludes – "is thus also the opening up of its abyss or death: the historical alterity of the subject and its *physis*" ([2000] 2002, 57). In Richter's interpretation, the living (and therefore mortal) quality of the human body entails its morphing resistance to any set form. Richter suggests the subject of the historical body is non-linear – "is also to expose the individual instances of the subject to time" ([2000] 2002, 56). For Richter, the way in which the new body of humankind is described in "To the Planetarium" in opposition to other forms of collectivity, such as the people and family, means that it raises the question of representability. Or, as Richter puts it, "[w]e must question the ways in which a historical body can be represented in the first place" ([2000] 2002, 56). However, in my view, in "To the Planetarium" Benjamin points out something more specific than the general reflection that the capacity to represent the collective subject corporeally is historical and that the

[36] Johannßen and Zechner refer to the Grimm *Wörterbuch* definition of *Gewalt*: "Compare Grimm's definition: 'gl. angelsächsisch geweald, -wald m. n. (power, strength, might, efficacy... empire, rule, dominion, mastery, sway, jurisdiction, government, protection, keeping, a bridle-bit, potestas, facultas, imperium, dictio, arbitrium, jus, cannus)... altnordisch vald n. (macht, gewalt, kraft, ursache)'" (Zechner and Johannssen 2023, 13n13). On translating *Gewalt* in Benjamin's writings in terms closer to the English word 'force', see also Jacques Derrida's discussion of Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" (Derrida 1992).

process of representation is itself violent. My point relates to how Benjamin portrays the relationship between the historically new body of humankind and the proletariat. At the very end of the fragment, when Benjamin underlines the positive role of the proletariat in this process. He writes:

> The power of the proletariat is the measure of its [the new body of humankind's – KJ] convalescence. If it is not gripped to the very marrow by the discipline of this power, no pacifist polemics will save it. Living substance conquers the frenzy of destruction only in the ecstasy of procreation.[37] (Benjamin 2004, 1:487)

Only the "power of the proletariat" can help the new body of humankind to get well. This is what makes "To the Planetarium" stand out against the background of Benjamin's longstanding interest in the human body: it maintains both the holistic and organicist connotations of the collective subject of humankind and the idea of violent, disruptive negotiations on its form as expressed in the class struggle. In "To the Planetarium", Benjamin bases his notion of a collective body on the idea that distinct forms of collectivity, such as the people or family, are historically specific. This is also what differs in this formulation from the one he offers in the "Outline", where *Volk* was linked to the eternal *Körper* as differentiated from the historical *Leib*.[38]

Conclusion

In this chapter, I developed two primary arguments. First, I showed that Benjamin's formulations of the figure of the collective body up until the mid-1920s entailed the collective subject of humankind. Second, I showed an important conceptual discontinuity in Benjamin's thinking about the politics of the body between the "Outline" and "To the Planetarium".

Concerning the first argument, I highlighted that both the "Outline" and "To the Planetarium" follow a similar understanding of the collective body, in terms of *Leib*, as the body of humankind. I showed that the notion of humankind (*Menschheit*) played an important role both in the "Outline" and in "To the Planetarium". At the same time, I underlined that, in

[37] "Die Macht des Proletariats ist der Gradmesser seiner Gesundung. Ergreift ihn dessen Disziplin nicht bis ins Mark, so wird kein pazifistisches Raisonnement ihn retten. Den Taumel der Vernichtung überwindet Lebendiges nur im Rausche der Zeugung" (Benjamin 1991e, IV:148).

[38] This is not to say that for Benjamin in the "Outline" the *Volk* was seen as an eternal form of collectivity. Rather, what Benjamin's affiliation of *Volk* with the eternal *Körper* shows us is that in his view the notion of *Volk* operated on the idea of eternal human being rather than treating it in its historicity.

both cases, humankind was not the only form of collective subjectivity Benjamin considered in regard to the human body's relation to collectivity. When the idea of humankind appeared in relation to Benjamin's considerations on the body in these two texts, it did so as a notion, which did not simply describe a plurality of men (*Menschen*) but suggested an emergent totality of life on earth. Specifically, in the "Outline", Benjamin introduced the idea of individuality unique to the collective form of *Leib*. This individuality went beyond that of singular individuals and emphasized a kind of wholeness characteristic for the body of humankind.

Concerning the second argument, I showed that Benjamin's idea of a collective body underwent significant changes between his earlier anthropological writings and "To the Planetarium". What changed in Benjamin's portrayal of the body of humankind, relied mostly on his optic on the historicity of humankind's body. While in the "Outline" he focused on the historicity of *Leib* as a part of its ontological characterisation in contradistinction to the eternal existence of *Körper* as a substance, in "To the Planetarium" he described a specific historical moment of negotiating the form of *Leib*'s collectivity. In "To the Planetarium" the body of humankind was shaken in the First World War. The struggle over its form took the form of "revolts". These were, however, not just any revolts – the revolts which, according to Benjamin, had the power to "bring the new body under [mankind's] control" were the ones which were measured by the success of the proletariat in class struggle.

If the difference between "To the Planetarium" and the earlier texts discussed above could not be reduced to chronology (after all, more years separate Benjamin's "Types of History" from his "Outline" than the latter from *One-Way Street*), it could be explicated through changes in Benjamin's theoretical and political contexts. "To the Planetarium" represents Benjamin's much closer alliance with the Marxist idea of politics than any of his earlier texts discussed in this chapter. With the inclusion of a Marxist framework, the idea of a collective body entered into a relationship with the proletariat, which became a marker of the body's recovery after World War I. Yet, as I argued in this chapter, because the figure of the collective body is still linked to the notion of humankind, it retains the vocabulary of wholeness. Still, Benjamin's vocabulary of wholeness was more than organicist – since, from the "Outline" on, *Leib*'s expansion relied on technology. This enabled him to differentiate the proletariat as not simply born out of technological changes to the production process but also an active subject in the process of negotiating the form of the new collective body of humankind. The fact that Benjamin's notion of humankind entailed a cosmic rather than global perspective meant that the collective body of humankind in "To the Planetarium" took

the standpoint of more than a global solidarity of humankind with the proletariat. The survival of the true universality entailed in the figure of humankind depended on the proletariat's success and its existence outside of the limited forms of collectivity, such as peoples and families. For Benjamin in the mid-1920s, the relationship between the figure of the collective body and the proletariat is neither one in which the two would be the same nor one in which the proletariat would constitute a clearly defined part of the collective body of humankind. Rather, the proletariat plays a central role in the organisation of this new form of collectivity. Following the discussion developed in this chapter, we can say that Benjamin's bodily understanding of political subjectivity is mediated by his wider understanding of the different modes in which collective bodies are formed. With the introduction of a Marxist approach to politics in Benjamin's *One-Way Street*, his focus shifts towards how the specifically revolutionary kind of collectivity emerges in political struggle. The different answers to this "how", which Benjamin develops in his later writings, will be the subject of the next two chapters.

Chapter Two: The bodily collective and anthropological materialism in Benjamin's "Surrealism" (1929). In search for a revolutionary *Kollektivum* beyond reconciliations

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyse the way Benjamin formulates the relationship between the human body and collectivity in his 1929 "Surrealism. The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" essay (hereafter "Surrealism"). I argue that the essay is marked by a significant shift in Benjamin's approach to the idea of body collectivity. Differently to his earlier texts, discussed in the previous chapter, in "Surrealism" Benjamin no longer uses the phrase "body of humankind" to describe the collectivity based on *Leib*. Instead, he writes that "the collective is bodily [ist leibhaft]" (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:217, translation modified).[39] My main argument is that this is not merely a linguistic change, but that it comes with a broader reconfiguration of the set of questions Benjamin addresses with the figure of bodily collectivity. This reconfiguration, as we will see in more detail, has to do with Benjamin's more direct – albeit not very thorough – engagement with his idea of the official Marxism of the Soviet Communist Party.

On the linguistic level, "Surrealism" carries two significant transpositions to the way Benjamin formulated the body-collective relationship before. Firstly, the notion of the body does not appear as a noun but only as an adjective – the collective is bodily (*leibhaft*).

[39] Benjamin writes that "Auch das Kollektivum ist leibhaft" (Benjamin 1991b, II:310). The main English translation, by Edmund Jephcott, renders this as "The collective is a body, too" (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:217). Throughout this chapter, I have modified this translation to "The collective is bodily, too" to more accurately reflect the linguistic nuances present in Benjamin's formulation of the concept of bodily collectivity in "Surrealism". As I have already mentioned, one of the arguments I make is that in "Surrealism" Benjamin's focus on the problem of subjectivity shifts from the relationship between body and mind on the one hand and the individual and collective on the other and towards the problem of a non-deterministic emergence of a collective subject from within the relationship between consciousness and material reality. This shift of where Benjamin puts accent on in the relationship between collectivity and human body is reflected, I argue, in the linguistic change of his formulation in "Surrealism" whereby what functions as a noun – and a subject at least in the grammatical sense – is the collective (*Kollektivum*) which has the quality of being bodily rather than the body which is characterized in collective terms, as belonging to the unity of humankind – as it did in the earlier formulation of the body of humankind.

Secondly, instead of the body of humankind, Benjamin writes of the "collective" and its bodily constitution, leaving behind his earlier juxtapositions of different forms of body-based collectivity (be it *Volk* as the maximum extension of *Körper* opposed to the body of humankind (*Leib der Menschheit*) in the "Outline" or the difference between the *Menschheit* with its newly emerged *physis* and *Menschen* in "To the Planetarium"). While I do not wish to suggest that these subtle shifts are in any way a marker of Benjamin's clear-cut severance of his understanding of bodily collectivity from his earlier writings, I argue that they have significant consequences for the way in which we can read the figure of the bodily collective in "Surrealism" as a political subject. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that Benjamin's reflections on bodily collectivity in "Surrealism" are primarily guided by a quest for what he terms a "radical idea of freedom" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:215) in the context of conceptualising how political agency can be organised towards revolutionary social change.

My analysis centres around the final paragraphs of Benjamin's "Surrealism" essay, where he evokes the notion of the bodily collective together with an idea of anthropological materialism, introduced for the first time in the essay. The chapter is structured into three parts. The first part introduces the figure of the bodily *Kollektivum* as it appears, firstly, in Benjamin's essay itself, and secondly, in the secondary literature on the essay. Secondly, it tackles the linguistic specificity of the way Benjamin formulates the figure of bodily collectivity in "Surrealism" as compared to the earlier approaches in the "Outline" and "To the Planetarium".

The second, middle part of this chapter addresses three key contexts in which Benjamin places the figure of the bodily *Kollektivum* in the late 1920s. The first context under consideration is Benjamin's relationship to the history of Marxist debates on materialism and determinism with the mid-19th century and the Second International. In this regard, I demonstrate two important ways in which Benjamin characterises his conception of anthropological materialism. Firstly, I argue that with anthropological materialism Benjamin addresses the problem of a materialistic idea of freedom. I do so by analysing a possible source of Benjamin's identification of the 19th-century scientific materialist Karl Vogt with "metaphysical materialism" in Karl Korsch's 1923 *Marxism and Philosophy*. Secondly, I argue that anthropological materialism should be regarded as Benjamin's attempt to counter his vision of the deterministic materialism, which he considered to be characteristic of orthodox Marxism, as represented by his understanding of Nikolai Bukharin, mediated mainly via Georg Lukács' review of the former's *Historical Materialism* (1921).

The second context which informs my analysis of the bodily collective as a political subject in "Surrealism" are the Surrealists' debates on political organisation and revolution from the second half of the 1920s. The crux of this debate as it affects Benjamin, I argue, is the question if the Surrealists should join the Communist Party on the one hand and, subsequently, if the organisation of revolution should be thought solely on a material level, or if there should also be an organisation of "the spirit". In section five, I demonstrate how Benjamin takes up this debate referring to Pierre Naville's key contributions "Better or Worse" (1927) and "Revolution and the Intellectuals" (1928). I argue that with his adoption of Naville's "organisation of pessimism" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:216), Benjamin takes over more than the phrase itself: he also adopts Naville's preference for a grassroots over a top-down organisation of a revolutionary movement.

Finally, the third context of my analysis are the Frankfurt School discussions on the internal split within the working class in Germany and the failure of leftist party politics to organise it. In section six, I point out that the full scope of Benjamin's engagement with the question of the political organisation of collective movement in terms of "organisation of pessimism" can only be grasped in the context of the contemporary situation of the German proletariat. To this end, I compare Benjamin's figure of the bodily collective with Max Horheimer's 1927 essay "The Impotence of the Working Class".

The third part of this chapter turns to the figure of the bodily *Kollektivum* in "Surrealism" and attempts to construct the underlying idea of politics behind it. Firstly, I establish the context of Benjamin's use of the word *Kollektivum* at the end of the 1920s. To this end, I analyse the way the word *Kollektivum* appears in Benjamin's notes from his Moscow trip and in the "Program for the Proletarian Children's Theater" written a few months before "Surrealism" and heavily influenced by Benjamin's contact with Asja Lacis, whom he had visited in Moscow. Secondly, I point to Benjamin's attention to the Surrealists' anthropological pessimism – their "cult of evil" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:214) – and argue that his rejection of the morally guided idea of politics is tightly linked to his interpretation of Pierre Naville's "organisation of pessimism" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:216) in terms of the organisation of corporeal misery. Finally, the last two sections of this chapter attempt to construct a reading of Benjamin's notion of bodily *Kollektivum* in "Surrealism" as an idea of collectivity which rests on three principles: the organisation of corporeal misery, the idea of collective subject which includes social conflicts rather than projecting ideal(istic) unity, and a radical understanding of freedom as collective liberation.

1. The bodily *Kollektivum* in Benjamin's "Surrealism" – a revolutionary bodily subject

1.1. Introducing the "Surrealism" essay

Benjamin's 1929 "Surrealism" essay reflects the crossroads at which Benjamin found himself after his failure to receive habilitation based on *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama* in 1924. In a letter written a few months later, between May 20th and 25th of 1925, Benjamin writes to Gershom Scholem that if his career as a writer were to fail, he would "probably hasten [his] involvement with Marxist politics and join the party" (Benjamin [1978] 2012, 268). "Surrealism" brings together these two poles of Benjamin's interest in a remarkable way. On the one hand, the essay is an effect of the longstanding critical attention Benjamin paid to the Surrealists' writings. According to Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings, Benjamin's interest in the Surrealists' writings was sparked by an invitation he received back in 1925 from Willy Haas, the main editor of *Die literarische Welt*, to write reports on contemporary French literature (Eiland and Jennings 2014, 236).[40] On the other hand, Benjamin's reflections reach far beyond an analysis of the Surrealists as a literary movement. Instead, as we will see in more detail in this chapter, Benjamin addresses the Surrealists' discussions on their relationship to the French Communist Party. "The German observer" – Benjamin writes in one of the opening paragraphs of the essay, situating himself as a commentator – "has no excuse for taking the movement for the 'artistic,' 'poetic' one it superficially appears" (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:207).[41] In the course of his dense commentary on the Surrealists' changing relationship between aesthetics and politics, Benjamin recounts the political path taken by the Surrealists from what could be called Louis Aragon's early anti-praxis[42] position to the point in which most of the leading Surrealists join the French Communist Party in 1927 and the debates that followed. But the crux of

[40] 1925 is also when Benjamin's "Dream Kitsch: Gloss on Surrealism" – his first text on Surrealism – stems from. It was published in *Die neue Rundschau* in January 1927.

[41] As Ricardo Ibarlucía puts it, Benjamin's 'dialectical' critique of Surrealism» is neither limited to literary or artistic matters, nor to the methodology of the *Passagenarbeit* with respect to Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926), but projects itself on his reflections regarding the political praxis and the philosophy of history" (Ibarlucía 2017, 144).

[42] Benjamin highlights the Surrealists' initial anti-practical worldview by quoting a part of the opening sentence in Aragon's 1924 *A Wave of Dreams* where, according to Benjamin's paraphrase, Aragon states that "the thought of all human activity makes [me] laugh" (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:212).

Benjamin's argument in "Surrealism", as I will argue throughout this chapter, lies beyond his analysis of the Surrealist movement. The "Surrealism"'s analysis of the movement and the philosophical, aesthetic and political consequences Benjamin draws from it fall within a characteristic framing device. Benjamin starts and ends the essay with an aerial view in which he sees the political potential of the Surrealists.

In the opening paragraph of the essay, Benjamin states that the privileged position of the Surrealists in the current political and literary landscape stems from a crisis of "the humanistic concept of freedom" that has befallen the titular "European intelligentsia" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:207). Benjamin elaborates on this idea later in the essay, pointing to the anarchist roots of what he understands by freedom. "Since Bakunin" – he writes – "Europe has lacked a radical concept of freedom. The Surrealists have one" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:215). Throughout "Surrealism", Benjamin will dissect the many layers of what it is that the Surrealists have to offer as a response to this crisis of the idea of freedom in Europe. He elaborates on the political potential of what he calls the experience of intoxication: "To win the energies of intoxication for the revolution – this is the project on which Surrealism focuses in all its books and enterprises" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:215). Despite the potential he finds in the Surrealists' approach to experience – "the true, creative overcoming of religious illumination", he writes, "certainly does not lie in narcotics. It resides in a profane illumination" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:209). Yet Benjamin points out the shortcomings of the Surrealists' response as well. Following closely the debate among Surrealists on their relation to communism, Benjamin voices a difficulty with which they have yet, in his view, to confront themselves. "[A]re they successful" – Benjamin asks of the Surrealists – "in welding this experience of freedom to the revolutionary experience (…) In short, have they bound revolt to revolution?" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:215). The question marks are telling here: for Benjamin, the Surrealists' political potential is not yet decided – but it depends on their ability to connect their efforts in conceptualising radical freedom to revolution. It is in this context, in my view, that we should read the final paragraphs of the essay, where Benjamin highlights – and constructs – what he holds to be the fruitful overlap between Surrealism and communism.

The answer Benjamin formulates to the shortcomings of the Surrealists' radical understanding of freedom, and of their attempts to "win the energies of intoxication for the revolution" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:216) lies in the figure of the bodily collective, which he introduces at the end of the essay. In the final paragraphs, Benjamin takes another step back

from his critical evaluation of the Surrealists and puts them in a broader historical context. Towards the very end of the essay, Benjamin writes:

> For in the end this must be admitted: metaphysical materialism, of the brand of Vogt and Bukharin – as is attested by the experience of the Surrealists, and earlier by that of Hebel, Georg Büchner, Nietzsche, and Rimbaud–cannot lead without rupture to anthropological materialism. There is a residue. The collective is a body, too [das Kollektivum ist leibhaft].[43] ([1999] 2006, 2, I:217)

While Benjamin mentions both the bodily collective and anthropological materialism only once and towards the end of the essay, he attributes these dense final paragraphs with considerable rhetorical power. By incorporating the Surrealists into a broader historical tradition, Benjamin distances himself from those elements in their thought that he thinks are "dubious".[44] Yet, at the same time, he highlights and appropriates those aspects of Surrealism he thinks are fruitful for conceptualising revolutionary social change. In the final sentences of the essay, Benjamin goes on to accentuate that the revolutionary potential he sees in Surrealism, and in the broader tradition of anthropological materialism, has to do with the notion of the bodily understood collective:

> And the physis that is being organized for it in technology can, through all its political and factual reality, be produced only in that image space to which profane illumination initiates us. Only when in technology body and image space [Leib und Bildraum] so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge, has reality transcended itself to

[43] "Denn es hilft nichts, das Eingeständnis ist fällig: Der metaphysische Materialismus Vogtscher und Bucharinscher Observanz läßt sich in den anthropologischen Materialismus, wie die Erfahrung der Sürrealisten und früher eines Hebel, Georg Büchner, Nietzsche, Rimbaud ihn belegt, nicht bruchlos überführen. Es bleibt ein Rest. Auch das Kollektivum ist leibhaft" (Benjamin 1991b, II:309–10).

[44] Benjamin expressed a need to distance himself from the Surrealists from the beginnings of his engagement with their writings. In a letter from July 21, 1925, to Scholem Benjamin writes: "Meanwhile, I have not done a lot and, to the extent that I have devoted any time to literature, I have done so by reading. I have read mainly the latest things from France: on the one hand, the splendid writings of Paul Valery (*Variété*, *Eupalinos*); on the other hand, the dubious books of the surrealists. Confronted by these documents, I must gradually familiarize myself with the technique of criticism" (Benjamin [1978] 2012, 276–77). For an overview of what John McCole calls Benjamin's "immanent critique of Surrealism" and the extent to which his writings were influenced by Surrealism see *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (McCole 1993, 206–20).

> the extent demanded by the *Communist Manifesto*. For the moment, only the Surrealists have understood its present commands.[45] ([1999] 2006, 2, I:217–18)

Benjamin does more than summarise the Surrealists' achievements. Instead, he formulates his own conception of materialism based on a bodily understood collective, whose revolutionary potential relies on the interpenetration of the body and image space. This chapter is dedicated to an investigation of how Benjamin's turn to the figure of the collective body at the end of "Surrealism", and the linguistic specificity this turn takes on, reflect broader changes in his politics.

1.2. Literature Review

The image of a reality, which would "transcend itself to the extent demanded by the *Communist Manifesto*", with which Benjamin ends "Surrealism", prompted many scholars to see this essay as a significant moment in the shaping of his political ideas in relation to Marxism early on in its reception – however, the exact nature of this shift has been interpreted in different ways. Michael Löwy sees in "Surrealism" Benjamin's last explicit attempt to inscribe anarchism in Marxism, suggesting that this was followed by a more explicit allegiance to Marxism (Löwy 1985, 50). Löwy notes that Benjamin himself felt that his anarchist inclinations conflicted with the kind of Marxism he had found in Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* in 1924 (1985, 48). Indeed, in a letter to Scholem from September 16, 1924, when Benjamin expresses his fascination with Lukács' book, he simultaneously states that he "would be surprised if the foundations of my nihilism were not to manifest themselves against communism in an antagonistic confrontation with the concepts and assertions of Hegelian dialectics" (Benjamin [1978] 2012, 248). Benjamin's "Surrealism" explicitly addresses the difficult balance he himself considers is needed between anarchist and communist politics at the turn of the 1930s. This tension is put in terms of a need to combine a radical understanding of freedom with revolutionary political organisation. However, as we will see in a later section of this chapter, the fact that

[45] "Und die Physis, die sich in der Technik ihm organisiert, ist nach ihrer ganzen politischen und sachlichen Wirklichkeit nur in jenem Bildraume zu erzeugen, in welchem die profane Erleuchtung uns heimisch macht. Erst wenn in ihr sich Leib und Bildraum so tief durchdringen, daß alle revolutionäre Spannung leibliche kollektive Innervation, alle leiblichen Innervationen des Kollektivs revolutionäre Entladung werden, hat die Wirklichkeit so sehr sich selbst übertroffen, wie das kommunistische Manifest es fordert" (Benjamin 1991b, II:310).

Benjamin's attempt in "Surrealism" to bring communism and anarchism together in terms of what he calls "anthropological materialism" means that both the question of freedom and of organisation are asked from a different conceptual level. For as much as the questions Benjamin asks – on the relationship between freedom and political organisation – can still be read from within the framework of anarchism versus Marxism, the answer he finds in the "collective body" as the characteristic figure of "anthropological materialism" cannot.

Margaret Cohen's reading of "Surrealism" follows more closely Benjamin's ruminations on materialism as a key to his political position in the essay. Differently to Löwy, Cohen reads "Surrealism" as a break with Benjamin's previous approach to Marxism and a divergence from the Marxist method in favour of a Surrealists-mediated psychoanalytical framework.[46] "Like Breton" – she writes – "Benjamin uses (…) psychoanalytical concepts to break down the Marxist opposition of material to ideal and its hierarchical ranking of economic and political reality over a culture's representations and desires" (Cohen 1993, 129). For Cohen, the defining characteristic of the way in which "Surrealism" marks a threshold in Benjamin's thought is this implied move away from a Marxist understanding of political praxis she finds in his turn to psychoanalysis. In her view, this shift is evidenced by a comparison with Benjamin's "To the Planetarium". "When Benjamin concludes 'Surrealism'", she writes in her 1993 *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution*, "he explicitly underlines the distance his reading of surrealism has taken his notion of praxis from *One-Way Street*" (1993, 193).[47] For Cohen, the difference between these two moments in Benjamin's conceptualisation of political praxis lies in the approach he takes to materialism in the later essay. "[T]he dialectical paradigm ruling *One-Way Street* has broken down in 'Surrealism'" – Cohen concludes (1993, 193). She suggests that this has to do with Benjamin's increasing turn towards a Bretonian notion of "modern materialism" (1993, 195). In Cohen's account, Breton's notion of modern materialism has at its centre a "[d]ismantling [of] the dialectic as it has been rigidified by historical materialism" and uses for this purpose "the psychoanalytical paradigm of the unconscious" (1993, 122–23). The kernel of André Breton's surrealist Marxism, in Cohen's eyes, is that it is "[a]n attack on the very distinction material/ideal" (1993, 122). This is what, in her view, brings

[46] For Löwy's response to Cohen's idea of Benjamin's Gothic Marxism, which she proposes in the 1993 *Profane Illumination*, see Löwy 1996.
[47] Cohen's reading contrasts especially starkly with a reading established by Scholem in his 1975 *Story of a Friendship* (English translation 1981). Reminiscing on the turn of the 1930s as "the beginning of the great essays in [Benjamin's] literary criticism", Gershom Scholem noted that while Bertolt Brecht's influence on some of the works written at the time could already be seen, the "Surrealism" essay was "still largely dominated by an absolutely pre-Marxist line" (Scholem 2001, 135).

Benjamin's thought close to Breton's theoretical project of modern materialism. Yet, although Cohen's framework highlights the relationship between Benjamin's ideas in "Surrealism" and the Surrealists' discussions on materialism, Marxism, and psychoanalysis, it fails to do justice to Benjamin's own discussion with Marxism which his notion of anthropological materialism entails. This pertains to the figure of bodily collectivity in the "Surrealism" essay. Although Cohen proposes to see Benjamin's thought as a form of "gothic Marxism" (1993, 1–17), her *Profane Illumination* presents a reading of this figure through Benjamin's idea of the collective unconscious and in the context of Freudian psychoanalysis (1993, 6). This can be partly attributed to the extent to which the reception of Benjamin's "Surrealism" has been mediated through Benjamin's idea of the "collective unconscious" and "collective awakening" he offers in *Arcades Project*. Because Benjamin himself described the essay as 'an opaque screen placed before the *Arcades* work" in a letter from February 14, 1929, (Benjamin [1978] 2012, 347) many scholars see it as an introduction to his *magnum opus*. In this vein, Susan Buck-Morss' analysis, which introduced it to the English-speaking reader in 1989, (Buck-Morss 1989) discussed in detail the place of Surrealism in the *Arcades Project* and saw in Benjamin's idea of collective awakening as "synonymous with revolutionary class consciousness" (1989, 253). Apart from Cohen's reading, which followed a few years after Buck-Morss' book, this is also the case of Sigrid Weigel's *Body and Image-Space. Re-Reading Walter Benjamin* (1996 [1992]). Weigel's analysis only briefly touches on the notion of the collective, whose innervations, in Benjamin's "Surrealism", "become revolutionary discharge" (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:217). While in her book the word "collective" appears numerous times, it does so mainly as an adjective: in terms of collective memory (cf. Weigel [1992] 1996, 9, 30).[48] Weigel discusses in detail, for example, the relationship between Benjamin's idea of the body- and image-space to the later concept of dialectical image and its relationship to the notion of the collective unconscious, which Benjamin develops in his 1935 "Exposé" to the *Arcades Project* ([1992] 1996, 107–10). In order to look at the figure of the bodily collective beyond its equation with collective consciousness, I want to diverge from a psychoanalytical reading of "Surrealism". Instead, I focus on the way in which Benjamin addresses, with this figure, the question of the relationship between material reality and thought as it pertains to the emergence of a revolutionary collective subjectivity. Whether seen as the beginning or the end of an era in

[48] To an extent this is linked to the fact that while her main terminological apparatus – the "body- and image-space" stems from the "Surrealism" essay, most of her analysis relates to the *Arcades Project*, and to parts written later than the 1929 essay.

his thought, Benjamin's figure of the bodily collective as it appears in "Surrealism" and the broader idea of anthropological materialism, which he introduces in the essay, reflect his idea of politics in a specific historical moment. From this angle, two things stand out in Benjamin's portrayal of the figure of a bodily collective subject in comparison with his earlier texts: his turn away from the notion of humankind and the surprising absence of the figure of the proletariat. If Benjamin differentiated earlier between the organic wholeness of the body of humankind and the proletariat as the mark of its "convalescence", does his turn to the notion of the "collective" mean that the two are conflated? That is, has the figure of bodily collectivity become synonymous with the proletariat?

Let me quickly recapitulate the very way in which Benjamin portrays the figure of bodily collectivity in "Surrealism". There are many similarities between how he formulates the idea of bodily collective subjectivity in "Surrealism" and his earlier phrasing from the "Outline" and "To the Planetarium". Just as in the two previous texts, so too in "Surrealism" Benjamin links the formation of bodily collectivity to technology. Benjamin's phrasing that the "*physis* that is being organised for [the collective which is a body] in technology" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:217) reflects almost word for word his characterisation of how the new body of humankind emerges in technology in "To the Planetarium". There he wrote that "[i]n technology, a physis is being organized through which mankind's contact with the cosmos takes a new and different form from that which it had in nations and families" (2004, 1:487). Similarly, in the "Outline", Benjamin wrote of "humanity (…) able partly to draw nature, the non-living, plant, and animal, into this life of the body of mankind (…) [and] it can do this by virtue of technology in which the unity of its life is formed" (2004, 1:395). What remains constant in these various formulations of the figure of bodily collectivity, is Benjamin's specific understanding of the human body as linked to – and even "organised in" – technology, rather than following the organic-mechanic divide.[49] Nevertheless, there is a couple of linguistic shifts in the way Benjamin formulates the figure of the bodily understood collectivity in the "Surrealism" essay.

Firstly, the body as a noun does not appear at all in the essay– neither as *Leib* nor as *Körper*. Throughout the text, Benjamin writes only of a body-space (*Leibraum*) and the bodily (*leibhaft*) collective – never of the *Leib* itself, as he did in his early anthropological

[49] For a discussion of Benjamin's bodily collective as a figure beyond the distinction of organic versus mechanic see e.g. Leslie 2015, 36.

writings. Still in "To the Planetarium", the relationship between collectivity and the human body was put in terms of a noun – *Leib* – and specified in form as the body of humankind. Instead, what does appear as a noun in "Surrealism" is "the collective" (*Kollektivum*).[50] Earlier, both in the "Outline" and in "To the Planetarium", Benjamin formulated the relationship between body and collectivity in a way which suggested the collectivity of the body had at least a tendency towards a specific shape (in the "Outline") if not a newly established form (in "To the Planetarium"): the body of humankind. In "Surrealism", however, Benjamin writes only of the bodily character of the much more ambiguous figure of the collective.

Secondly, in comparison to the earlier texts, not only does Benjamin shift away from the notion of humankind, but he abandons other figures of collectivity, which served as important points of reference for his earlier considerations on the body of humankind. In the case of the "Outline", Benjamin's reliance on the figure of the "body of humankind" entailed, as we have seen in the previous chapter, a particular form of universal collective subjectivity with links to organic wholeness. In "To the Planetarium", Benjamin introduced an external checkpoint to how this body of humankind was being formed. The "power of the proletariat" was to indicate if the new body of humankind was recovering well after the turbulences in which it was forged in World War I. The latter text also offered a nuanced differentiation between various linguistic registers describing the plurality of human beings (*Menschheit*, *Menschen*, and *Menschenmassen*). Yet in "Surrealism" Benjamin turns to the figure of the collective (*Kollektivum*) as a bodily form of collectivity.

The relationship of the collective political subjectivity to the human body as implied in the "collective[, which] is a body, too" in Benjamin's "Surrealism" has often been taken up in connection to his idea of anthropological materialism. From the outset of its reception in the early 1990s, anthropological materialism has been seen as entangled in the complex history

[50] When Benjamin writes at the end of "Surrealism" that the collective is bodily, he uses the word *Kollektivum*. *Kollektivum* is a linguistic term used to describe a collective noun which in singular form signifies a multiplicity of things or beings (such as "mountain chain" or "the people"). Although, as the Polish translation of "Surrealism" attests, there is a temptation follow this linguistic trope and translate it as the collective noun described above ("rzeczownik zbiorowy" in the Polish translation – see Benjamin 1996, 70), Edmund Jephcott's choice to translate it more bluntly as "the collective" (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:217) is on point. Indeed, in the final fragment of the "Surrealism" Benjamin uses the word *Kollektivum* interchangeably with the word *Kollektiv*, closer to the English noun "collective". Just as he goes on to sketch the relationship between the organisation of the "physis" of what he just characterised as *Kollektivum*, he uses the word *Kollektiv* to determine the subject, whose innervations he links to revolutions. In German original: "Erst wenn in ihr sich Leib und Bildraum so tief durchdringen, daß alle revolutionäre Spannung leibliche kollektive Innervation, alle leiblichen Innervationen des Kollektivs revolutionäre Entladung werden, hat die Wirklichkeit so sehr sich selbst übertroffen, wie das kommunistische Manifest es fordert" (Benjamin 1991b, II:310).

of the reception of Benjamin's politics as mediated by the disparate views on it represented by Gershom Scholem on the one hand and Theodor W. Adorno on the other.[51] In a chapter of their 1992 book entitled "Anthropological Materialism", Bolz and Van Reijen state that the idea of anthropological materialism comprised the "core of Benjamin's theory of knowledge[, which] was not adopted by Critical Theory and therefore has not yet entered clearly enough into the consciousness of 'posterity'" (Bolz and Van Reijen [1991] 1996, 55). Perhaps an influential factor was, as Bolz and Van Reijen point out, that the first selection of Benjamin's writings was published (in 1955) by Adorno, who had previously criticised the idea of anthropological materialism in a letter from 1936 ([1991] 1996, 55). Referring to Benjamin's notes to "Surrealism", Bolz and Van Reijen characterise his idea of anthropological materialism as "defined by a 'double bond': 'to the natural-animalistic and to the political-materialistic'" ([1991] 1996, 56). This dual allegiance of anthropological materialism is what makes up a key contradiction of Benjamin's politics in Bolz and Van Reijen's analysis. It also structures the way in which Bolz and Van Reijen portray the question of collective subjectivity in Benjamin's anthropological-materialist framework. Summarising the meaning of the theoretical ellipse demarcated by the notion of anthropological materialism, they write that "[f]or Benjamin, this mystique of the collective body that is moved to action carries the whole burden of justifying the revolutionary legitimacy of the proletariat's claim" ([1991] 1996, 56).

More recently, Esther Leslie attempted to elaborate on Bolz and Van Reijen's account of Benjamin's notion of bodily collectivity as linked to anthropological materialism and a specific understanding of political subjectivity, including its relationship to his perspective on the proletariat. Similarly to Weigel and Cohen, Leslie reads Benjamin's "Surrealism" in juxtaposition with the *Arcades Project.* Commenting on the image of the bodily collective being organised in technology, she explains that "Benjamin had just completed his first fragmented but extensive study of the Paris arcades, in which he suggests that architectural forms, products of the latest technologies, are part of a reconstruction of the social body" (Leslie [2000] 2015, 23). Leslie's mediation of the collective body's organisation in technology through city architecture escapes, to an extent, the problems of classifying the collective body in the categories of mass-proletariat differentiation – as Bolz and Van Reijen did. Leslie's wide reading of the figure of the collective body is reflected in the carefully

[51] A seminal work, which establishes the Scholem-Adorno divide in Benjamin's work and which inspired much of its later reception is Buck-Morss 1979.

ambiguous way in which she portrays the relationship between it and the proletariat. "Benjamin understands the proletariat" – she writes – "as a collective organ, organizable precisely because of its nature as collective" ([2000] 2015, 23). It is unclear, however, if Leslie's description of the proletariat as a "collective organ" posits that the proletariat *is* the collective body, a part of it, or a variant of a specific shape in which the collective body can form.

Regardless of their stance on the relationship between Benjamin's figure of the collective body and his evaluation of mass movements as irrational, one thing escapes both Leslie's and Bolz and Van Reijen's wide lens: the differences in the functioning and application of Benjamin's idea of bodily collectivity in disparate historical contexts in which it appears across his writings. Since Bolz and Van Reijen, the concept of anthropological materialism has gained increased scholarly attention in the anglophone scholarship, especially in the last decade (Khatib 2012; Mourenza 2013; Khatib 2014b; Leslie 2018; Moir 2018; Johannßen 2018; Charles 2018). Yet, even within the scholarship which tackles Benjamin's idea of the collective body in the "Surrealism" essay explicitly in relation to his simultaneous inception of the concept of anthropological materialism, little attention is paid to how the "Surrealism"'s portrayal of the figure of the collective body is historically specific, and therefore different from Benjamin's earlier (and later) formulations. Bolz and Van Reijen's reading focuses on Benjamin's later formulations on the collective body – most saliently from the 1936 "Work of Art" essay's key footnotes on the collective body and its innervations as revolution (Benjamin 2006, 3:124n10). More contemporaneously, Matthew Charles writes about the "new historical forms of collective experience" (Charles 2018, 27) or of "collective body life" (2018, 35) while Daniel Mourenza introduces a new notion to describe anthropological materialism's key notion: the "collective techno-body" (Mourenza 2013, 29). However, when read from the perspective of the collective subjectivity assumed in these interpretations, the body's collective character is sometimes still linked to the collective subject of humanity (as in the "extended body of humanity" (Charles 2018, 35). What the scholarly interest in anthropological materialism has revealed – the continuity of Benjamin's engagement with the figure of a bodily collectivity – has simultaneously obscured the changes which this figure undergoes in Benjamin's writings.

2. Political organisation and the question of freedom and determinism

2.1. The anti-determinism of anthropological materialism: on the relationship of consciousness to reality and the question of freedom

When Benjamin writes that the "experience of the Surrealists" and a long line of other thinkers point to the fact that "metaphysical materialism, of the brand of Vogt and Bukharin (…) cannot lead without rupture to anthropological materialism", he establishes anthropological materialism as a broader framework with which to read the political productivity of Surrealism. As I aim to show below, at the centre of this framework lies the question of determinism in a materialist approach to political organisation. The two names with which Benjamin differentiates it from what anthropological materialism is not – "Vogt and Bukharin" – place it in the specific context of materialistic thought: the long-standing debate within Marxism on the problem of determinism of the will within a materialistic framework. Benjamin points to two figures representative of what he calls "metaphysical materialism" (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:217), incompatible with the anthropological: the mid-19th century scientific materialist Karl Vogt and the orthodox Soviet Marxist Nikolai Bukharin. While the two figures are distant in both time and place, they are linked by a common element: a deterministic approach to materialism, in which the concept of free will seems redundant, and with which Marxists of the respective times had a quarrel. Vogt famously believed that "thoughts stand in the same relation to the brain as bile to the liver and urine to the kidneys" (Moir 2020, 29).[52] Bukharin, on the other hand, as we will see in a bit more detail below, explicitly stated that "human will" should be considered "determined by certain causes, like everything else in the world", summarising that "we arrived at the conclusion that we must adopt the point of view of determinism" (qtd in Anderson 1995, 112). For Benjamin, as we will see shortly, both these names stand for a deterministic position regarding the relationship between consciousness and material reality.

[52] See Moir 2020, 26–48 for a good overview of the 19th century debates on materialism and their influence on interwar German Marxism – with a focus on Ernst Bloch – particularly through Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and its critique of Ernst Mach.

Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy*, published in 1923, provides a contemporary overview of Marx and Engels' critique of scientific materialism.[53] The context in which Korsch recounts Marx and Engel's disagreement with the kind of scientific materialism represented by Vogt, together with Jacob Moleschott and Ludwig Büchner (Georg Büchner's brother) points to a specific problem associated with these names: that of the "relationship of consciousness to reality"; Korsch writes:

> In the different periods of their revolutionary activity, Marx and Engels speak of the relationship of consciousness to reality at the economic level, or the higher levels of politics and law, or on the highest levels of art, religion and philosophy. (…) their import is very different, depending on whether they are aimed at Hegel's idealist and speculative method or at 'the ordinary method, essentially Wolff's metaphysical method, which has become fashionable once again'. After Feuerbach had dispatched 'speculative concepts', the latter re-emerged in the new natural-scientific materialism of Büchner, Vogt and Moleschott. (Korsch 2009, 90)

According to Korsch, Marx and Engels' critique of scientific materialism should be understood as part of their ongoing examination of the relationship between consciousness and material reality. Korsch argues that their focus shifts depending on the point of reference. When critiquing Hegel's idealism, the focus of their critique is on the "abstract speculative form in which Hegel bequeathed the dialectical method" and their efforts are on making "vigorous counter-statements, such as: all thought is nothing but the 'transformation of perceptions and representations into concepts'" (2009, 91). Korsch notes that the same critical apparatus, when applied to "the undialectical approach which counterposes the (…) perception and comprehension of an immediately given reality *to* this reality" (2009, 91–92) means that even Engels maintained a "dialectical conception of the relationship between consciousness and reality" (2009, 92n75).[54] Notably, Korsch's description of the opposite, "undialectical approach" fits the kind of materialist worldview Marx and Engels, in Korsch's account, saw in the metaphysical method of Büchner, Vogt and Moleschott: one based on

[53] Korsch's book was an attempt at a historical-materialist analysis of the history of Marxism itself published in 1923, which became greatly influential for German interwar Marxism. However, it should be noted that according to the editors of *Gesammelte Schriften* Benjamin read Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy* only in 1930 (Benjamin 1991g, VII:463). Nevertheless, I turn to Korsch's book in an attempt to contextualise Benjamin's critique of scientific materialism as "metaphysical" in the context which brings together the two names he lists – Vogt and Bukharin – much more directly than Breton. I do so also because it could be hypothesised that Benjamin had only finished reading the book in 1930 but came in contact with it earlier on, especially judging by his interest in the classical Marxist positions in the second half of the 1920s.

[54] Even though, according to Korsch, Engels was in contrast to Marx "widely believed [to have] degenerated into a thoroughly naturalistic-materialist view of the world" (Korsch 2009, 90).

"speculative concepts", which Ludwig Feuerbach had already deemed inadequate to a materialistic framework (2009, 90). Thus, the "metaphysical" character of scientific materialism – or materialism "of the kind of Vogt [Vogtscher Observanz]", as Benjamin writes (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:217), boils down to its vulgar-materialistic treatment of consciousness, which attributes actual material existence to speculative concepts.

Benjamin's negative reference to Vogt and Bukharin does more than delineate the boundaries of anthropological materialism as non-metaphysical. With this dual context, Benjamin confirms that the immediate context in which anthropological materialism should be read is through the relationship between consciousness and material reality, specifically in regard to the problem of free will. That freedom is a central category in Benjamin's approach to the dialectical relationship between consciousness and material reality can be further inferred from the fact that he takes Bukharin as the other emblematic figure of "metaphysical materialism". According to Michael Löwy, Benjamin's understanding of what he called Bukharin's "metaphysical materialism" in the "Surrealism" essay was influenced by Georg Lukács' review of Bukharin's *Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology* (1921) (Löwy 1996, 21). In 1925, Lukács published a critique titled "N. Bukharin: Historical Materialism", which presented a stark polemic against Bukharin's methodology.[55] According to Lukács, Bukharin oversimplified some of the key theoretical foundations on which historical materialism rests, while aiming to popularise it (Lukács [1972] 2014, 134). Lukács argues that his opposition is not to the popular form, which has been successfully realised by Franz Mehring and Georgi Plekhanov ([1972] 2014, 134), but to Bukharin's return to the bourgeois form of materialism against which Marx and Engels were writing. The "essential error in Bukharin's conception of historical materialism", Lukács writes, lies in how close it falls to a "natural-scientific materialism" and springs from the fact that Bukharin takes science to be a model for historical materialism ([1972] 2014, 136). What this misapprehends is, in Lukács' words, the fact that "*all economic or 'sociological' phenomena derive from social relations of men to one another*" ([1972] 2014, 136; italics in the original). In short, Lukács concludes, Bukharin's recapitulation of historical materialism fails to recount the Hegelian roots of the

[55] An indirect support for Löwy's interpretation can be found in Benjamin's correspondence. According to a letter to Scholem from December 20, 1931, Benjamin was looking to engage with Bukharin's work on his trip to Riga, during an unannounced visit he paid to Asja Lacis in 1925 – the same year Lukács' review was published. As Benjamin reports to Scholem, he failed to acquire a copy of the "primer on communism" by Bukharin (Benjamin [1978] 2012, 389).

dialectic on the one hand and the humanist strands in Marx's thought, which he inherits from Feuerbach, on the other ([1972] 2014, 136).

It is important to note that an understanding of "Surrealism"'s proposed framework on materialism through the notion of anthropological materialism so understood differs from Cohen's proposition on reading the essay through Breton's category of modern materialism. Cohen takes the idea of "modern materialism" from Breton's 1929 *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, where he reconstructs it, according to Cohen, from Engels' critique of 18th-century mechanical materialism in *Anti-Dühring*. The purpose of Breton's appropriation of the notion, Cohen suggests, is to establish surrealist Marxism as a modern form of materialism in opposition to the "simplistic materialism" of the French Communist Party officials, who repeatedly accused Surrealists of idealism over the second half of the 1920s (Cohen 1993, 120–21). For Cohen, Breton's *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* and his modern materialism are an important point of reference for Benjamin's understanding of 19th-century natural-scientific materialism as "metaphysical" (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:217). However, the history of publication of the two texts – Benjamin's "Surrealism" and Breton's *Second Manifesto* – gives reason enough to presume that it was rather Benjamin who influenced Breton than the other way round, or simply Marx and Engels whom they both had read. Breton's *Second Manifesto* appeared in *La Révolution Surréaliste* on December 15, 1929 – ten months after the publication of Benjamin's "Surrealism". There is more to wrestling Benjamin's anthropological materialism from too close of a link with Breton's modern materialism than chronological inaccuracy.

Focusing on Benjamin's own notion of anthropological materialism agrees with the very kernel of Cohen's argument that in "Surrealism" Benjamin tackles the Marxist framework of base and superstructure.[56] Yet it also avoids recourse to psychoanalysis, which is what leads Cohen away from addressing the bodily character of the collective in Benjamin's "Surrealism". Cohen notes that Benjamin a "somewhat better Marxist than Breton" refrained from equating "material and ideal practices with quite the same vigor" (Cohen 1993, 129). However, the question of the bodily collective disappears from the image of Benjamin's approach to the relationship between base and superstructure. She concludes her comparison between Benjamin and Breton by referring to the materiality of wish image. Benjamin, she

[56] On Cohen's elaborate analysis of Benjamin's surrealist Marxism as addressing the question of base-superstructure relations see Cohen 1993, 57–76.

writes, “remains fascinated by the wish images’ curious materiality” (1993, 129). While I do not aim to resolve the question of Benjamin’s relationship to psychoanalysis,[57] I want to demonstrate that Benjamin’s approach to bodily collective subjectivity centres around the category of freedom and self-determination. With anthropological materialism, Benjamin inscribes the figure of the bodily collective in the problem of the relationship between material reality and consciousness on a level which, compared to his earlier writings, is always-already collective.

2.2. The Surrealists’ radical idea of freedom as liberation and their debate on political organisation

In the Surrealists’ heated debate on the political organisation of revolutionary forces, Benjamin finds an answer to the crisis of “the humanistic concept of freedom”, which he announced at the beginning of the essay. However, as we have seen, the answer to this crisis does not refer to individual freedoms such as the right to free speech or freedom of movement, both of which were soon to be under heavy attack under Nazi rule. The crisis of the concept of freedom demands an answer in collective terms. The collective character of the problem of freedom in Benjamin’s take on surrealism is confirmed in the quotations he evokes when writing about their radical notion of freedom. Indeed, the kind of radical idea of freedom Benjamin so enthusiastically finds in the Surrealists is freedom understood in

[57] An example of a nuanced position in this long-standing debate can be found in Beatrice Hanssen, who suggests that Benjamin “effort to make use of psychoanalysis against the right-wing ideologies informing Klages’ work (…) can also be seen as an example of the way Benjamin’s texts function as staging-grounds for struggles between discourses” and calls Benjamin a “tactically astute reader of Freud who weighed the advantages and disadvantages of deploying psychoanalytic ideas and approaches for a larger theoretical agenda’ (Hanssen 2004, 126). However, more recently, Matthew Charles suggested that Benjamin’s indebtedness to Ludwig Klages should be read as a part of his broader anti-Freudian inclinations (Charles 2018), which included his interest in Soviet biomechanics (one could also add psychometrics – a trope recently developed by Carolin Duttlinger – Duttlinger 2022). The latter approach, in my view, offers a more nuanced image of Benjamin’s relationship to the developments in contemporary psychology, which went beyond psychoanalysis itself. It also shows how his interest went towards those theories which aimed to describe masses rather than individuals and acknowledged in particular the bodily aspect of psychology (as in the case of Vsevolod Meyerhold’s biomechanics or psychometrics). The notion of innervation, which often accompanies Benjamin’s mentions of a bodily collective in relation to revolution from “Surrealism” on, has been used as an argument by Miriam Bratu Hansen to read the figure of the collective body psychoanalytically (Hansen 2012). Yet, seen in the broader framework sketched by Charles, this can also be seen as a part of the trend in Benjamin’s thought to gravitate towards an appreciation of the bodily aspect of psychology. As Hansen herself notes, innervation in Freud describes a process (mostly linked to hysteria in his writings) of the re-routing a response to external sensation into a different bodily symptom than the direct one (Freud describes the case of a patient at the dentist’s tapping their leg instead of screaming).

collective terms, as liberation. Benjamin characterises the Surrealists' unique approach to freedom in the following terms:

> They are the first to liquidate the sclerotic liberal-moral-humanistic ideal of freedom, because they are convinced that 'freedom, which on this earth can be bought only with a thousand of the hardest sacrifices, must be enjoyed unrestrictedly in its fullness (…) as long as it lasts'. And this proves to them that 'mankind's struggle for liberation in its simplest revolutionary form (which is nevertheless liberation in every respect), remains the only cause worth serving'.[58] (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:215)

In Benjamin's account, the Surrealists' outlook on freedom is radical in two regards. Firstly, it is radical because they propose that the idea of freedom should be taken to the extreme in practical terms: it should be "enjoyed unrestrictedly in its fullness" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:215). Benjamin quickly goes on to highlight that what makes the Surrealists' approach to freedom so fruitful is the collective rather than individual context in which they view freedom to be central. For, secondly, there is another layer to Surrealists' radical approach to freedom. The consequences drawn from this idea should be radical, too: freedom should be seen as the central revolutionary goal. The stake of the Surrealists' idea of freedom, as Benjamin quotes from Breton, is "[m]ankind's struggle for liberation in its simplest revolutionary form (which is nevertheless liberation in every respect), [and it] remains the only cause worth serving" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:215). The notion of humankind, then, does appear in the "Surrealism" essay within the quotation from Breton but only to be immediately questioned. Right after his characterisation of the Surrealists' radical idea of freedom, Benjamin expresses his doubts as to whether they are able to draw the full consequences from it. He writes:

> But are they successful in welding this experience of freedom to the other revolutionary experience, which we must acknowledge because it has been ours–the constructive, dictatorial side of revolution? In short, have they bound revolt to revolution?[59] ([1999] 2006, 2, I:215)

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[58] "Sie sind die ersten, das liberale moralisch-humanistisch verkalkte Freiheitsideal zu erledigen, weil ihnen feststeht, daß 'die Freiheit, die auf dieser Erde nur mit tausend härtesten Opfern erkauft werden kann, uneingeschränkt, in ihrer Fülle (…) will genossen werden, solange sie dauert'. Und das beweist ihnen, 'daß der Befreiungskampf der Menschheit in seiner schlichtesten revolutionären Gestalt (die doch, und gerade, die Befreiung in jeder Hinsicht ist), die einzige Sache bleibt, der zu dienen sich lohnt'" (Benjamin 1991b, II:306–7).

[59] "Aber gelingt es ihnen, diese Erfahrung von Freiheit mit der anderen revolutionären Erfahrung zu verschweißen, die wir doch anerkennen müssen, weil wir sie hatten: mit dem Konstruktiven, Diktatorischen der Revolution? Kurz - die Revolte an die Revolution zu binden?" (Benjamin 1991b, II:307).

On this point, the decisive point in the Surrealists' "highly exposed position between an anarchistic Fronde and a revolutionary discipline" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:207), of which Benjamin wrote at the beginning of the essay, lies. On the one hand, Benjamin appreciates the anarchist component of the Surrealists' rebellious zeal against bourgeois morality, with which they dedicate themselves to the best kind of radicalism in thinking about freedom. On the other hand, he sees the danger that the Surrealists' subversive radicalism could peter out and never manage to attach itself to any revolutionary social change. Benjamin's words on the "constructive, dictatorial side of revolution", which has been a "revolutionary experience", refer to the success of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, which, under Vladimir Lenin's leadership, followed the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat.[60]

The question of the self-determination of the collective subject of revolution in regard to the relationship between material reality and consciousness arrives in Benjamin's text from a specific political context. As Michael Löwy and Ricardo Ibarlucía have pointed out, Benjamin's attention in the 1929 essay orbits around a specific debate among the Surrealists, which took place in the second half of the 1920s: on the relation of the movement to the Communist Party (Löwy 1996; Ibarlucía 2017). Ever since Breton, Aragon, Paul Eluard, Benjamin Péret and Pierre Unik applied to become members of the French Communist Party in 1927, they were under pressure from the Control Commission to revoke their identification with Surrealism, which was deemed unnecessary, considering their official affiliation to communism (Short 1966, 10–11). What outraged the Party officials in particular was the current title of the Surrealists' journal – *La Révolution Surréaliste*. This resulted in a discussion among Surrealists themselves, whose main question Ibarlucía summarises in the following way: "should the term 'Surrealist' be avoided as the predicate of a social revolution of the Bolshevik kind, or, on the contrary, should it invoke a liberation of the "spirit" beyond all determined historico-political recognition?" (Ibarlucía 2017, 141).

Benjamin aligns his views with the position of one member of the movement in particular: Pierre Naville, who anticipated the problems encountered by the Surrealists as they joined the Communist party a few years before. Throughout "Surrealism" Benjamin refers to Pierre Naville's essay "The Revolution and the Intellectuals" [La Révolution et les

[60] See e.g. García Düttmann 2002, 202.

intellectuels],[61] written between 1925-6 and published in 1928 when Benjamin wrote most of the "Surrealism" essay (Eiland and Jennings 2014, 310). In Löwy's recapitulation, Naville's main argument is that the Surrealists should go beyond "a purely negative, 'metaphysical,' and anarchist standpoint (Löwy 2009, 46). "While celebrating Surrealism as 'the most subversive attitude of the Mind'" – Löwy notes – "Naville criticized its illusions about the spiritual opposition of the Orient and the West; the excessive importance it gave to dream life; and also its hostility to modern technology" (2009, 46). Naville urged the Surrealists to accept party discipline as the path to revolution and to choose communism over anarchism (2009, 46). This way, Surrealists could transition from being, in Naville's words, a "movement of revolt against all contemporary intellectual production" to that of the revolution (in Ibarlucía's translation, see Ibarlucía 2017, 141). In a response to Naville's accusations entitled "Legitimate Defense" [*Légitime Défense*] and published in September 1926, Breton concurred that "[a]ll of us Surrealists (…) want a social revolution that will transfer power from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat, but at the same time we want to pursue our experiments in the life of the Mind without any external controls, including controls by Marxists" (2009, 46).

Although as an effect of the discussions around Naville's text (which took place when Naville was writing it in 1925-6), Breton and a few other leading Surrealists did join the French Communist Party in 1927, the debate on the relations between Surrealism and communism did not end with this (2009, 48). Around the time when his colleagues joined the Party, convinced by his argument, Naville diverged from the main party line and started to support Leon Trotsky's Left Opposition (2009, 48). In his 1927 essay, "Better or Worse" [Mieux et moins bien], he criticised Joseph Stalin's leadership of the Communist Party, which he accused of undue optimism. In opposition to Stalin's politics, Naville tried to incorporate Trotskyism within the Surrealist movement by agitating for revolutionary pessimism – a notion which would become a key inspiration for Benjamin in "Surrealism". As Ibarlucía recounts, in his 1927 essay Naville differentiates between pessimism, contemplation and scepticism. Only the former, in Naville's eyes, is politically fruitful and can be used to bring Surrealism and Marxism closer together (Ibarlucía 2017, 142). In his view pessimism both "'addresses in a general way the virtue of Surrealism, its current reality and perhaps even more its future developments'" and "'is the point of origin of Hegelian

[61] Not only is it one of the few mentions within Benjamin's texts, which he evokes by title, but it also appears in the form of many indirect quotes throughout the essay. For a more detailed analysis of Naville's presence in and influence on Benajamin's text see Ibarlucía 2017.

philosophy (…) [as well as] the source of Marx's revolutionary method'" (qtd in 2017, 142). Pessimism emerges from Naville's reflection as a way of mobilising the psychological and emotional forces for political action. "'We must organize pessimism'", Naville writes, "'or, moreover, given that this is not about responding to a call, we must let it be organized in the direction of the next call'" (qtd in 2017, 143). With the call to the organisation of pessimism, therefore, another appeal comes intertwined: that the mobilisation of passions should follow the kind of political organisation which spontaneously emerges from below rather than being instituted by the PCF.

2.3. Benjamin's take on the Surrealists against German party politics

Benjamin intercepts Naville's call for organizing revolutionary pessimism to his own use while retaining its main political line: against optimism and for a bottom-up understanding of how political movements emerge. Adopting Naville's scepticism towards the idea that the public mood can be organised from above, Benjamin develops a scathing critique of political programmes altogether. To "organize pessimism" – Benjamin states – "means nothing other than to expel moral metaphor from politics and to discover in the space of political action the one hundred percent image space" (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:217). As Ibarlucía puts it, for Benjamin, "organizing pessimism means nothing other than to literalize the 'as if' (Ibarlucía 2017, 144). Benjamin's argument regarding the expulsion of metaphors from politics can be summarised in the following way: the "socialists" — not to be equated with communists — rely on the "stock imagery" of politics, which is like a "bad poem on springtime, filled to bursting with metaphors" (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:216). They base these images on a "society in which all act 'as if they were angels' and everyone has as much 'as if he were rich' and everyone lives 'as if he were free'". But, as Benjamin states, "of angels, wealth, freedom, not a trace – these are mere images" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:217). In other words, the socialists' handling of the images of future change lacks any material substance. In Naville's appeal to pessimism and despair as political forces, Benjamin finds a more direct link between political imagery and material conditions of human existence under capitalism than in the hollow optimism of social democratic political programmes.

With his translation of Naville's idea of the organisation of pessimism into a critique of social-democratic political programmes, Benjamin shifts the geopolitical context of his reflections from France to Germany. In the following section, I will argue that the direct context for the considerations on the current currency of organising pessimism is the problem

of the falling support for the Communist and Social Democratic parties among the German working class. While, as we have seen, Benjamin's "Surrealism" engages in the Surrealist movements' internal disputes and addresses the development of their political position in the second half of the 1920s, the direct geopolitical context of Benjamin's political ideas lies in Germany. Benjamin's reflections on the conditions of revolution and the emergence of a revolutionary social subject appear at a particularly turbulent time in Germany. By 1929, when Benjamin published his essay on Surrealism, Germany was already long-ridden with high unemployment, although it was yet to be struck with the heaviest blow to its economy – the hyperinflation in the fall of the same year. In light of the deepening crisis, which should have, according to Marx's theory of capitalism, drawn its demise ever closer, the wide circle of intellectuals around the Frankfurt School increasingly reflected on the lack of support for the socialist parties among the German working class. It is especially instructive to compare Benjamin's 1929 essay with Max Horkheimer's "The Impotence of the German Working Class", written in 1927.[62]

In this short text, Horkheimer reflects on the stratification of the working class in Germany and attempts to explain why the capitalist crisis has not, as of yet, produced a revolutionary class consciousness among the proletariat. For Horkheimer, the rising incongruence between what he calls the "life and consciousness" of salaried workers and the unemployed has put significant strain on the "solidarity of the proletariat, [because] the community of shared interests shrinks more and more" (Horkheimer 1978, 61). Horkheimer's view is clear: the crises of the capitalist economy in Germany, instead of uniting the dispossessed, drew a ledge between those who could still count on wage labour, even if it was exploitative, and those who were devoid of even that. Horkheimer posits that this meant a turn towards a more individual approach to the experience of the hardships of life under capitalism among those struck by it the hardest. "Today, the term proletariat for a class which experiences the negative side of the present order, the wretchedness, in its own existence" – Horkheimer writes – "applies to its components so unevenly that revolution may easily seem an individual concern" (1978, 61). This is because, as he notes, it has become more and more dangerous for the salaried worker to take up political action in solidarity, which could risk the only thing differentiating them from the unemployed. "The certainty of sinking into the misery of unemployment" – he sums up – "keeps nearly all who still work from obeying

[62] According to Stuart Jeffries . The essay was published in Horkheimer's 1934 collection of essays titled *Dämmerung*.

communist strike calls" (1978, 63). Horkheimer compares the contemporary economic situation of the working class with the pre-war economic reality and notices that the shift in class misery (towards the unemployed) has meant that those "who are most directly interested in revolution lack the capacities for education and organization, the class consciousness and the dependability of those (…) integrated into the capitalist enterprise" (1978, 62). Horkheimer clearly states that there are, in his view, "two revolutionary elements" which are no longer evenly distributed among the proletariat. These are "the direct interest in socialism" and "a clear theoretical consciousness" (1978, 62).

When seen through the lens of Horkheimer's analysis of the internal split within the working class in terms of its interest and needs, Benjamin's notion of a bodily *Kollektivum* seems to ring especially hollow. As a general notion which describes both different types of collectivity and the shape-in-the-making of post-revolutionary society, *Kollektivum* appears to overlook the historical specificity of the situation of the German working class. While *Kollektivum* seems to connote a certain sense of wholeness – even if fleeting and temporarily constructed by spatial togetherness – it fails to address the problems of the German working class, which in Horkheimer's portrayal appears far from a unified political subject. Yet, in my view, there is more to Benjamin's approach to the issue of the political organisation of the collective than meets the eye. This, too, appears especially salient in juxtaposition with Horkheimer's text. While for Horkheimer misery is what disunites the proletariat's solidarity, Benjamin sees in it a political energy worth organising – an idea which echoes in his call for the organisation of pessimism. In his call against the moralistic politics of Social Democracy, Benjamin highlights the lack of material rooting of the ideal world painted in their political programme. As I will argue in the final sections of this chapter, Benjamin's idea of revolutionary politics towards the end of the 1920s builds on the bodily character of the *Kollektivum* as uncoupled from the figure of the universally inclusive body of humankind. Instead, the bodily foundation of emancipatory political subjectivity relates to the political organisation of corporeal misery. The bodily constitution of all human beings is being played politically in terms of conflict rather than unity. Benjamin, I argue in the next section of this chapter, does not equate the collective body with the proletariat, but he also does not understand it simply to be a wider all-encompassing category, which could bring together divided groups such as those of the employed and the unemployed working class.

3. What is a *Kollektivum* and how is it bodily? Benjamin's idea of revolutionary politics as organisation of corporeal pessimism

3.1. Benjamin's *Kollektivum* and the proletariat

Chronologically, the closest text to "Surrealism" in which the word *Kollektivum* appears as well is the 1928 "Program for the Proletarian Children's Theater", written as a theoretical piece for Asja Lacis' work with – the titular – proletarian children's theatre. Elaborating on how a truly proletarian education can, and should, find its place in children's theatre, Benjamin highlights that this education should not take place in seclusion from society, behind the closed doors of a school. Theatre offers the blueprint for an alternative to the classroom because it is inherently open to the outside: it needs an audience. Specifically, Benjamin, writes, "[t]o have a positive effect, proletarian children's theaters (…) need the class as audience" (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:203). In what follows, Benjamin goes into what is a fairly cryptic elaboration of the affinity between children and the proletariat. Nevertheless, as he does so, he elucidates what he means by the word *Kollektivum* perhaps better than anywhere else. He writes:

> Just as only the working class has an infallible intuition for the existence of collectives [*Kollektiva*]. Such collectives may be public meetings, the army, or the factory. But the child, too, is such a collective [*Kollektivum*]. And it is the prerogative of the working class to have a completely fresh eye for the children's collective, whereas the bourgeoisie is unable to perceive it. This collective radiates not just the most powerful energies, but also the most relevant ones.[63] ([1999] 2006, 2, I:203)

There are two things which we can learn from this fragment about Benjamin's use of the word *Kollektivum*. Firstly, the relationship between the *Kollektivum* and the proletariat is one of recognition. The latter, Benjamin writes, has "an infallible intuition for the existence of collectives" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:203). Secondly, Benjamin thinks of the word collective always-already in relation to the plurality of its forms. But perhaps the most instructive for our understanding of the figure of the collective are the examples he gives for the different

[63] "Wie denn andererseits nur die Arbeiterklasse ein unfehlbares Organ für das Dasein der Kollektiva besitzt. Solche Kollektiva sind die/ Volksversammlung, das Heer, die Fabrik. Solch ein Kollektivum ist aber auch das Kind. Und es ist das Vorrecht der Arbeiterklasse für das kindliche Kollektivum, welches der Bourgeoisie nie zu Gesicht kommen kann, das offenste Auge zu haben. Dieses Kollektivum strahlt nicht nur die gewaltigsten Kräfte aus, sondern die aktuellsten" (Benjamin 1991b, II:765–66).

variants of *Kollektiva*. "Such collectives", he writes, "may be public meetings, the army, or the factory" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:203). [64] All of these examples relate to a specific space of corporeal organisation of togetherness. This is not so much about a corporeal form of collective discipline as much as it is about the non-equivalence of these forms of collectivity with the sum of individuals which constitute them. A group of people gathered physically together exists as the given form of collectivity only as long as they are together and act together. It is telling that Benjamin does not mention "the workers" but rather the "factory": the word *Kollektivum* does not describe a social type or sociological group, but a collective *in action*. The workers at a factory work as parts of one production process, soldiers are an army only insofar as they are trained to act according to their place and role in the military hierarchy, and public meetings exist only as long as people are gathered in one place for a common purpose. This confirms, to an extent, Leslie's intuition to read the bodily collective, with the organization of its *physis* in technology as linked to Benjamin's later reflections on urban architecture as "part of the reconstruction of social body" (Leslie 2015, 23). We can see that the bodily collective and the proletariat are not synonymous for Benjamin. As Alison Ross suggests, the common denominator for the different *Kollektiva* listed by Benjamin is a sense of what she calls "spatial togetherness":

> Whether temporary or enduring, this relation is characterised by immediacy and identification, or at least this is what Benjamin values in it. The fundamental role of space in all these instances is clear. Benjamin's notion of the 'collective' is inseparable from spatial togetherness. (A. Ross 2018, 30)

Ross' interpretation of Benjamin's notion of the collective harmonises with the grammatical meaning of the German word *Kollektivum*, which connotes various types of collectivity entailed in the linguistic form of a collective noun (cf. footnote 11 in this chapter). However, as I argue in this chapter, there is more to Benjamin's increased use of the

[64] For an analysis of Benjamin's understanding of the child as a collective see Schestag 2022. Schestag argues that for Benjamin "[e]very child is a proletarian child (…) in that its birth is *pro-*: not back into a family, a clan, or even class, be it the class of workers or proletarians. (…) Each child's birth, instead, takes place *pro-oles* [gr. "before all" – KJ]" (Schestag 2022, 199). As Schestag rightly points out, Benjamin's "ambiguous formulation" that the child is a *Kollektivum* plays on the grammatical ambiguity of the noun *Kollektivum* (2022, 200). The grammatical meaning of the word, mentioned in footnote 10 of this chapter, connotes in Schestag's words "an all-embracing general notion" (2022, 200). This allows, in their view, "to imagine a class of all children; but the child, each single child, allows to be perceived as a – rather loosely connected, almost disintegrating – multitude" (2022, 200). This specific relationship to collectivity which Benjamin attributes to the figure of a child, in Schestag's view, means that "each child [is] a class-like collective (bordering the unforeseeable: classlessness)" (2022, 200).

notion of *Kollektivum* towards the end of the 1920s than a broad framework in which to see different forms of collectivity.

When Benjamin writes about "the collective", the immediate context for this is post-revolutionary Soviet Union. One of the first times Benjamin uses the word *Kollektivum* appears in the notes from his 1926-1927 trip to Moscow. In "Frankreich und Rußland" (1929-30) and "Moscow Diary" (1927), we find Benjamin writing of the *Kollektivum* both as the whole of Russian society and as a specific kind of organised spatial togetherness which will later reappear in the "Program for the Proletarian Children's Theater". Benjamin's portrayal of Russian society as a *Kollektivum* conveys two key observations he makes during his trip to Moscow, both of which have to do with the attempts at a specifically post-revolutionary organisation of society. Firstly, Benjamin uses the word "collective" when he writes of the way children's drawings are displayed on a wall at a children's home where Benjamin visits Daga (Lacis' daughter). This wall for Benjamin resembles a "kind of temple wall to which the children offer their own work as gifts to the collective" (Benjamin 1986, 30). He then goes on to describe the communist symbolism with which, like a temple to Vladimir Lenin, the school is full: "Red is the predominant color in these spots. They are interspersed with Soviet stars and heads of Lenin" (1986, 30). In the image of the children's home altar to Lenin, the collective appears as purely symbolic – a concept taught to children by the state. Yet in Benjamin's description of Russia another notion of the collective is present. He describes the feeling of a historical novelty of the form which the Russian society took on after the revolution mixes with a sense that its shape is still in the making.[65] In the unpublished notes entitled by the editors of *Gesammelte Schriften* as "Frankreich und Russland", Benjamin highlights that the new *Kollektivum* in Soviet Union is driven by contradictions, not least because of the historical abyss which opened between the current historical form of social organisation and the remnants of pre-revolutionary Russia:

> Through his ignorance of earlier Russia the average observer carries a false note into his observations. He does not see that the revolution was an abyss over which no Russian person is

[65] For a convincing reading of Benjamin's sense of the novelty of Russian society as he encountered it in Moscow through see Seits 2018. Irina Seits points out that when Benjamin visited Moscow the city was "a huge construction site, where a number of housing estates ('zhilmassivs'), factory-kitchens, administrative buildings, trade houses, garages and industrial objects were being constructed" (Seits 2018, 576).

> able to look back into the past and how the collective [*Kollektivum*] endeavours to balance the various impulses, forces and counter-forces that emanated from the revolution.[66]

Benjamin's description of the collective's active struggle to strike the delicate balance after the Russian Revolution echoes in the language he employs in the final fragment of the "Surrealism" essay. While in the 1929/30 "Frankreich und Russland", Benjamin writes of the "forces and counter-forces that emanated from the revolution" as "impulses", in the 1929 "Surrealism" he writes of "revolutionary tension [which] becomes bodily collective innervation" synonymised with "the bodily innervations of the collective" in the very same sentence. Let me repeat Benjamin's exact phrasing:

> Only when in technology body and image space so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge, has reality transcended itself to the extent demanded by the *Communist Manifesto*. (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:217–18)

I quote this fragment in full again to point out an aspect of it which comes to the surface in the context of Benjamin's recent observations of the post-revolutionary Russian society. The parallel between "Surrealism"'s final fragment and Benjamin's findings from his trip to Moscow is not surprising. In his *Moscow Diary*, Benjamin repeatedly states that he considers his observations on Moscow and, more generally, of post-revolutionary Russia to be an important point of reference for the political situation of the rest of Europe. As Gerhard Richter puts it, during his stay in Moscow Benjamin "wished to chart a social and cultural map of a city whose changes – since the Revolution, the end of World War I, and the emergence of the contours of a Stalinist regime – he regarded both as emblematic for the future of dialectical materialism and as an intriguing 'other' to Weimar culture" (Richter 1995, 86). Reading the final fragment of "Surrealism" through Benjamin's notes from his trip to Moscow reveals an important aspect of Benjamin's formulation of the bodily collective and its revolutionary innervation in the 1929 essay. Namely, in the way Benjamin portrays

[66] My translation. The original reads: "Durch seine Unkenntnis des früheren Rußland trägt der durchschnittliche Betrachter eine falsche Note in seine Betrachtungen hinein. Er sieht nicht, daß die Revolution ein Abgrund war, über den kein russischer Mensch in das Gewesene zurückzublicken vermag und wie das Kollektivum die verschiedenen Impulse, Kräfte und Gegenkräfte, die von der Revolution ausgingen, einfach ins Gleiche zu bringen, zu balancieren strebt" (Benjamin 1991d, VI:723).

the relationship of bodily collectivity to revolution, the bodily collective's revolutionary innervations do not equal a fulfilled revolutionary social change. They are not, as it were, synonymous with the "reality transcend[ing] itself to the extent demanded by the *Communist Manifesto*" (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:218). Rather, what Benjamin calls the "bodily innervations of the collective" constitute the necessary conditions for the establishment of a new social order. In other words, in 1929 Benjamin seems to believe that the result of the Russian Revolution is still to be decided.[67] It is to this idea of political reality as undetermined to the bone that Benjamin's call for the organisation of pessimism should be read. But what kind of pessimism is at stake and how does this organisation of an affect relate to a bodily understanding of the *Kollektivum*?

3.2. The organisation of pessimism as organisation of corporeal misery

In the "Surrealism" essay Benjamin complicates his views on the relationship between politics and happiness. In the "Outline" and the "Theological-Political Fragment" at the turn of the 1920s, Benjamin still highlighted human happiness as the guiding force of the profane, earthly realm of politics. At the turn of the 1930s, however, he turns to a more nuanced approach to what can ultimately sweep along a collective power of pessimism and desperation. As I aim to show in this section, this shift away from the idea of politics guided by humankind's happiness can be linked to Benjamin's appreciation of the Surrealists' profound anthropological pessimism, which he calls the "cult of evil". Crucially, however, Benjamin adds a corporeal root to Naville's appreciation of the political power of despair.

Before turning to his discussion of the organisation of pessimism, Benjamin points to the key role of what he calls "the cult of evil" in the Surrealists' political development beyond the scandalous anti-bourgeois revolt. His considerations on the anarchist roots of the Surrealist's radical notion of freedom centre around "a justification of evil in which certain motifs of Surrealism are more powerfully expressed than by any of its present spokesmen" (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:214). Benjamin's argument culminates in his comment on Nikolai Stavrogin, the main character in Dostoyevski's *Demons*, who in the novel describes

[67] Seits claims differently, in regard to Benjamin's Moscow notes. She writes "Benjamin found no Revolution in the Russian capital, but only its snatches hanging over the windows: 'You need to know Russia to understand what is going on in Europe' [4, p. 22]. Moscow served as a certain prediction of what might have happened in Europe if she went similar way. Benjamin described Moscow as 'a corporation of the dying' [4, p. 27]. The city was regarded by him as being in a state of transition from life to death, from Revolution to non-Revolution, of being in a state of a failing Revolution" (Seits 2018, 578).

his rule of life in the following words: "that I neither know nor feel good and evil and that I have not only lost any sense of it, but that there is neither good nor evil... and that it is just a prejudice" (Frank and Petrusewicz 2010, 646). Benjamin sees in this Stavrogin-Surrealists line a "cult of evil" characterised by a deeply anti-moral understanding of social relations:

> No one else saw inspiration, as he [Stavrogin – KJ] did, in even the most ignoble actions, and precisely in them. He considered vileness itself as something preformed, both in the course of the world and also in ourselves, to which we are disposed if not called, [just] as the bourgeois idealist sees virtue. (…) That is why all these vices have a pristine vitality in [Dostoevsky's – KJ] work; they are perhaps not 'splendid', but eternally new, 'as on the first day', separated by an infinity from the cliches through which sin is perceived by the philistine.[68] (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:214)

Benjamin's search for amoral politics has a corporeal root, which enables the transgression from the Nietzschean ethical realm of individual freedom beyond good and evil towards questions that drive Benjamin's search for an anthropological materialism. This search explores the relationship between material reality and consciousness/action. This is best seen when we link his reflections on the "cult of evil" in early and proto-Surrealists (such as Dostoyevsky) to the wider framework within which Benjamin wants to place Surrealists: anthropological materialism. For Cat Moir, anthropological materialism is "the perspective Benjamin seeks to revive, within Marxism" by claiming that "through the experience of embodiment, we can identify with the history's chain gang, but the emancipation of the flesh requires us to break the chains" (Moir 2018, 86). In her analysis, Moir highlights what could be seen as the final proof for the anti-moralising character of what Benjamin evokes with the bodily character of the collective: the inclusion of Georg Büchner in the list of anthropological materialists. Büchner's 1836 play "Woyzeck" was based on a real-life murder from 1821, where a wigmaker murdered his cohabitant in a fit of jealousy. Büchner's play touched directly on the relationship between human physiological condition and morality. It portrayed diet as a decisive factor in what a person is capable of

[68] "Keiner hat wie er auch in dem gemeinsten Tun und gerade in ihm die Inspiration gesehen. Er hat noch die Niedertracht als etwas so im Weltlauf, doch auch in uns selber Präformiertes, uns Nahgelegtes, wenn nicht Aufgegebenes erkannt, wie der idealistische Bourgeois die Tugend. (…) Darum sind sie alle bei ihm [Dostojewski – KJ] ganz ursprünglich, vielleicht nicht 'herrlich', aber ewig neu 'wie am ersten Tag', und himmelweit entfernt von den Klischees, unter denen dem Philister die Sünde erscheint" (Benjamin 1991b, II:305).

doing: for a medical experiment, the titular Woyzeck restricts his diet to peas only and, as an effect of malnutrition, starts to experience intense jealousy, which leads him to murder. Benjamin's collective body, as a heritage of the Büchner-inspired materialism, pays tribute to the corporeal immiseration of human beings under capitalism.

Benjamin's words against the moral highness of politics and the "bad poem on springtime" (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:216) of the Social Democrats and their programme take Büchner's notion of the primacy of material needs to morality a step further, into a critique of attempts at organising politics from ideal to material, that is according to an elusive future utopia which would not be rooted in human needs and affairs. The "interpenetration of the body- and image-space" of which Benjamin writes at the end of the essay as the requirement for revolution needs to be seen in contradistinction to the socialists' hollow, moral images of politics.

This is Benjamin's striking response in the "Surrealism" essay to the question of the conditions necessary for the revolution. The primary condition is that which escapes the reality-consciousness divide: human corporeal misery. The element which should be politically organised is the emptiness of the human stomach and the ailments of the human embodied mind under capitalism. This is the bodily-defined materialism to which anthropological materialism pertains. The second condition is the pessimist approach to the corporeal misery of human beings under capitalism and a dissatisfaction with political images which in no way "interpenetrate" with this body-space. However, different to happiness which brought together all creation in the body of humankind in the 1922-23 "Outline", Benjamin's stress on pessimism and misery in "Surrealism" does not imply a universality of the bodily understood collective subject of history. In fact, Benjamin's pessimistic turn in "Surrealism" is connected to his shift away from the sense of wholeness which the notion of humankind conveyed in his earlier formulations of figure of bodily collectivity. In a striking passage on the extent of pessimism, which Benjamin considers an important basis for political organisation, he protests against unification and harmony as a foundation political subjectivity:

> Surrealism has come ever closer to the Communist answer. And that means pessimism all along the line. Absolutely. Mistrust in the fate of literature, mistrust in the fate of freedom, mistrust in the fate of European humanity, but three times mistrust in all reconciliation:

between classes, between nations, between individuals. And unlimited trust only in IG Farben and the peaceful perfecting of the air force.[69] (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:216–17)

The revolutionary bodily collective in "Surrealism", differently than the body of humankind in the "Outline" is far from the kind of subjectivity which brings together the whole of creation. Rather, in "Surrealism", Benjamin underlines the inherent rift in collective subjectivity, which could rise to the challenge of a communist revolution. Pessimism is needed so that political organisation does not fall back on the cosy warmth of bourgeois abstractions such as the idea of humanity or freedom. Benjamin, then, writes not only against Social Democrats' false political imagery. He takes his pessimism a step further. To question the idealistic nature of particular political programmes means also to rebel against the ideal image of a world without conflict, where freedom and humanity figure as given ideological concepts rather than ones that need to be fought for.

Juxtaposed with his shift away from the notion of humankind and towards *Kollektivum*, Benjamin's take on Naville's organisation of pessimism tells us two important things about the concept of political subjectivity hidden behind his use of the figure of a bodily collective. Firstly, because *Kollektivum* exists only in so far as it is corporeally present, it resists idealistic claims to universal human unity. If *Kollektivum* denotes a political subject as it emerges in political action – in opposition to a potential which politicians can see in various social groups such as the unemployed or groups of different social interests and identities – then what we learn from Benjamin's call for a "pessimism all along the line" ([1999] 2006, 2, I:216) is that it does not aim towards a resolution of conflicts but rather puts class struggle at the centre of his idea of collectivity.

Secondly, the anti-moral anthropology underlying Benjamin's scepticism towards "reconciliation" (*Verständigung*) offers more than just pessimism. In fact, Benjamin's turn to the Surrealists' "cult of evil" and to Büchner's amoralistic materialism conveys an insistence

[69] "Der Sürrealismus ist ihrer kommunistischen Beantwortung immer näher gekommen. Und das bedeutet: Pessimismus auf der ganzen Linie. Jawohl und durchaus. Mißtrauen in das Geschick der Literatur, Mißtrauen in das Geschick der Freiheit, Mißtrauen in das Geschick der europäischen Menschheit, vor allem aber Mißtrauen, Mißtrauen und Mißtrauen in alle Verständigung: zwischen den Klassen, zwischen den Völkern, zwischen den Einzelnen. Und unbegrenztes Vertrauen allein in I. G. Farben und die friedliche Vervollkommnung der Luftwaffe" (Benjamin 1991b, II:308). Michael Löwy has repeatedly pointed out the dual irony conveyed in the last sentence of this fragment. The irony in Benjamin's style is complemented for the contemporary reader by the historical irony of how the IG Farben went on to produce Zyklon B during World War II (see for example Löwy [2001] 2016, 10).

that a materialist conception of emancipatory politics should build on (as it did in Büchner's play) an understanding of social problems as human corporeal misery rather than a question of moral education. What differentiates Benjamin from Horkheimer most distinctly is the fact that he chooses to focus on human corporeal misery rather than on a right or wrong form of consciousness. Horkheimer saw in the unemployed a group much more ready to oppose the existing social order (what he called a "direct interest in socialism" (Horkheimer 1978, 62) than those of the working class who were employed. But he also saw in the former a lack of "clear theoretical consciousness" (Horkheimer 1978, 62), which undermined their political power. In Benjamin's call for the political organisation of pessimism, he proposes the organisation of pre-existing social discontent rather than the evaluation of its conscious qualities. He turns to the figure of a bodily collective as a response to the Marxist problem of determinism between material reality and consciousness, emphasising the importance of addressing bodily misery.

If there is a test which Benjamin's intricate figure of the bodily collective fails to pass it is that of its own historical index. Aside from the debate on political organisation in the second half of the 1920s, there is another, less studied political context within the Surrealists' political development, which influences Benjamin's "Surrealism". In his summary of the Surrealists' political development, Benjamin points to the Rif War in Morocco as what "above all (…) accelerated this development [of Surrealists to the left]" (Benjamin [1999] 2006, 2, I:213). When, in 1924, the French Army fought the forces of Berber tribes native to the Rif Mountain region in Morocco, the Surrealists strongly opposed this action as a suppression of an anti-colonial rebellion. It was this political context that provided, as Spiteri writes, "[a]n opportunity to align themselves with the PCF [French Communist Party] in July" 1925 (Spiteri 2016, 112). If there is a potential Benjamin is eager to recover from the Surrealists with his turn to the figure of the bodily collective, it is their anarchist openness to the cause of liberation that would go further than the proletariat. He nevertheless fails to draw the full consequences of the political roots of this idea in the anti-colonial struggle. While it was the Rif War that sparked the Surrealists' interest in the activities of PCF, Naville's call for the Surrealists to join the party was focused on intellectual freedom rather than the freedom of the oppressed. In this regard, Benjamin's "Surrealism" and its idea of the emergence and organisation of a revolutionary collective subject is indebted to the moment from which it stems, but its historical index is personal. It is closer to the issues Benjamin himself was facing at the moment in his life – the prospect of joining the KPD looming over

his shoulder if his literary career were to fail, than to the political issues, which propelled the debates on if the Surrealists should join the PCF or not. Yet, while Benjamin never tackles the question of colonialism in his writings, a specific structure of politics open for conflict and yet somehow maintaining a claim to both grassroots organisation and universality is reflected in his bodily *Kollektivum*. After all, it is in the context of the anti-colonial struggle that the cause of "the liberation of mankind" of which Breton writes, as quoted by Benjamin, loses its idealistic implication of equality and turns into a call for solidarity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that Benjamin's formulation of the bodily constitution of collectivity in "Surrealism" as a bodily *Kollektivum* differs from his earlier idea of the "body of humankind" and that what changes is the range of questions addressed by the figure of bodily collectivity. In contrast to a tendency in existing literature to read Benjamin's idea of anthropological materialism and its central figure of a bodily collective in the "Surrealism" essay through Benjamin's earlier and later texts, I proposed that, in regard to these two ideas, "Surrealism" should be read as Benjamin's historically specific voice on the issue of political organisation. The word *Kollektivum*, I argued, should be read as a historical index of his views on forms of collectivity and the organisation of the socialist revolution after his 1926-1927 visit to Moscow. Rather than assuming that the shape of the new collectivity of the human body engendered through the development of technology was that of humankind, as he did in the "Outline" and "To the Planetarium", in "Surrealism" Benjamin asked about the process in which the new collective body comes into being as a revolutionary subject – and how to conceptualise this both in materialistic terms and without a recourse to determinism. In this regard, Benjamin's figure of bodily collectivity served, in "Surrealism", as a platform on which Benjamin wrestled with the problem of the emergence of an active political collective subject beyond two types of determinism. On the one hand, Benjamin took up Surrealists' debates on the relationship between intellectual avant-garde and political organisation to tackle the problem of a deterministic understanding of revolutionary collective subject. On the other hand, with the notion of anthropological materialism, Benjamin addressed the problem of determinism within a materialistic framework. I pointed out that Benjamin addresses the question of the revolutionary organisation of social collectivity through the problem of determinism in the relationship between material reality and consciousness. In "Surrealism", Benjamin no longer focuses on the relationship between

what Barbisan called the ego and the collective subjectivity, as he did in the 1922-3 "Outline". He also abandons questions about the different types of collectivity which can be based on the bodily constitution of human beings, as he did in both the "Outline" (differentiating between humanity and the people) and in "To the Planetarium" (differentiating between humanity, humans and the people). Instead, he takes as his starting point the question of freedom and self-determination of a collective political subject. What was earlier a question of going beyond the dualism of body and mind/spirit in the dialectical relationship between the individual and collective subject – as the "Outline"' addressed it – has now become an issue of materialism. In "Surrealism", as we have seen, Benjamin attempts to bypass the same duality – of consciousness and materiality – on a level which is always already collective: of how the relationship between consciousness and material reality can engender new collective agents of social change.

This was analysed in three main steps. Firstly, regarding how the fragments on bodily collectivity fit into Benjamin's overall argument in "Surrealism", I showed that in "Surrealism," Benjamin points to the figure of the bodily collective as an answer to what he considers a much-needed alliance between the Surrealists' radical notion of freedom and a Marxist attention to revolutionary social change. In an attempt to address this problem, Benjamin took up Pierre Naville's idea of the organisation of pessimism and incorporated it in his wider anthropological-materialistic framework. What distinguished Benjamin's reconfiguration of the Surrealists' debate – which he did through their internal conflicts and in light of the political situation of the Communist Party in Germany – was precisely that what emerges from his essay was the question of the organisation of revolutionary collective and not the organisation of party politics. The latter had been true for Surrealists, whose main issue was how to organise politically on the level of the production of theory. Even Naville's call for the Surrealists to join the party was focused on intellectual freedom rather than the freedom of the oppressed. The interpretation I proposed of the "organisation of pessimism" as the organisation of corporeal misery was, therefore, a specifically Benjaminian take on Naville's phrase and emerges from the turbulent end of the 1920s.

Secondly, I put the question of political organisation, which Benjamin recounts in his essay, in the context of the contemporary discussion of the situation of the German working class by Max Horkheimer. Analysing Horkheimer's contribution on the internal split within the German working class between the exploited proletariat and the unemployed, I suggested that the Navillean "organisation of pessimism", which Benjamin takes up in his "Surrealism"

essay resonated with the very material problem faced by the KPD (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands) in the late 1920s: on how to organise the misery of the unemployed. Finally, In the course of my analysis, in light of Benjamin's use of the term in the 1927 "Moscow Diary" and in the 1928 "Program for a Proletarian Children Theater", "Surrealism"'s figure of a bodily *Kollektivum* appeared connected to his political valorisation of spatial togetherness.

Thus, in the course of my analysis, I developed two different aspects of what, in my view, characterises Benjamin's approach to the question of collective subjectivity and revolutionary politics towards the end of the 1920s, which might seem contradictory. On the one hand, *Kollektivum* as spatial togetherness was seen as a form of grassroots template of bodily collectivity, which is needed for any revolutionary movement to organise itself. The fact that Benjamin listed examples such as the factory, army, or public meetings for the kind of spatial togetherness he meant suggested that *Kollektivum* denoted an informal gathering of people in one place, joined by no distinct personal characteristics, beliefs or interests. On the other hand, Benjamin's organisation of pessimism was linked to a call to see those who can organise themselves into a revolutionary subject in terms of the universal anthropological basis of all social organisation and needs in hunger, poverty, and hardship. In this regard, a tension arose between an understanding of bodily collectivity as what all people have in common corporeally – bodily needs and desires – and of bodily collectivity as physical togetherness of a group of people within a socially definable situation. This tension between the anthropological basis of bodily collectivity, on the one hand, and the understanding of bodily collectivity as a foundation for the self-organisation of social movement, on the other, will be a guiding question of the next chapter. As my analysis of the 1936 version of Benjamin's "Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility" will show, when he turns to the problem of the formation of different forms of collectivity on the basis of the historical changes to the relationship between human beings and nature, he develops a broader framework of two kinds of technology which mediate this relationship.

Chapter Three: The 1936 "Work of Art" essay's diverse forms of collectivity. On the anthropology behind Benjamin's belief in the emancipatory role of technology in the mid-1930s

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyse the way in which Benjamin addresses the issue of the formation of different forms of collectivity in the "Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility" essay (hereafter "Work of Art"). For reasons which will be discussed in more detail below, I focus on the third version of the "Work of Art", written in 1936. My main argument is that in the mid-1930s Benjamin's use of the figure of bodily collectivity reveals his progressing disillusionment with the utopian potential of the USSR between 1935 and 1936. Overall, I focus on two extensive footnotes to the 1936 version of the "Work of Art" essay, in which Benjamin elaborates his reflections on new forms of collectivity, which emerged with the development of industrial society. The first one is a footnote to thesis VI, in which he turns to the figure of a "new, historically unique collective which has its organs in the new technology" (Benjamin 2006, 3:124n10) and develops a complex relationship between what he calls "first technology" and "second technology". The second footnote comes as an addendum to the twelfth thesis in the essay, which contains a detailed exposition of Benjamin's views on class formation and on the relationship of the petty-bourgeois masses and the proletariat.

In the first section of this chapter, I explain the relationship between the problem of forms of collectivity and the "Work of Art"'s overall argument. To this end, I introduce the essay and point out that aside from Benjamin's reflections on revolutionary versus fascist aesthetics and the effects of the development of technologies of reproducibility on the artwork's aura, the "Work of Art" essay tackles the emergence of the masses and its political dangers and potential. My starting point is Miriam Bratu Hansen's influential critique of what she portrays as Benjamin's multifaceted concept of the masses in the "Work of Art" essay. I follow up on two of the critical remarks she makes about the theoretical usefulness of what she considers to be Benjamin's conceptions of the masses in the essay. Firstly, I take up her

point that both footnotes present an "abstract" and a-sociological account of the masses, as opposed to Siegfried Kracauer's approach in *The Salaried Masses* (*Die Angestellten*). Complementing her reading with Benjamin's own review of Kracauer's book first and with Andrea Cavalletti's reading of the footnote on class formation second, I point out the advantages to how Benjamin's understanding of collectivity in the early to mid-1930s goes purposefully against a sociological analysis of the masses. Secondly, I elaborate on Hansen's critique of Benjamin's positive account of technology as a means of emancipation. While I acknowledge the limits of Benjamin's faith in the emancipatory potential of cinema, I point to a broader understanding of technology in the "Work of Art" essay. Read in this broader context, the positive potential Benjamin aims to recover from the alienating effect of film has to do with the emergence of a new scale of collectivity rather than with the cinema audience *per se*.

In the third part of this chapter, I elaborate my analysis on Benjamin's reflections on the relationship between the masses and the proletariat as he develops it in the long footnote to the "Work of Art"'s twelfth thesis. Focusing on his idea of solidarity, I point out the importance of reading the footnote in the context of the politics of the Popular Front in the mid-1930s. Following Cavalletti, I investigate the consequences of Benjamin's dynamic conception of solidarity as an action which dissolves the classless form of collectivity of the petty-bourgeois mass for his understanding of the process of formation of different forms of collectivity.

Finally, in the fourth part, I argue that to dismiss Benjamin's positive account of technology is to overlook a complex relationship between his dual understanding of anthropology as, on the one hand, a framework which takes as its starting point the human beings as individuals and, on the other hand, the one which centres on their collective interconnectedness. I argue that this dual conception of anthropology is entailed in his differentiation between first and second technology. the last section of this chapter, I argue that Benjamin's notes to the footnote on revolutions as innervations of the collective ("A Different Utopian Will", 1935-6) enable us to read the two types of technology as a part of Benjamin's new take on anthropology. Reading Benjamin's "A Different Utopian Will" against his first "Letter from Paris" (1936), on André Gide, I suggest that Benjamin's differentiation between first and second technology as he links them to two former text, should be read in the context of his changing approach to the USSR.

1. The “Work of Art” essay and the masses

1.1. The 1936 version of the “Work of Art” essay and its political footnotes

Although the "Work of Art" essay is one of the few texts within Benjamin’s published *oeuvre* that appeared in both French and German during his lifetime, in a way, he never finished his work on it. Benjamin first mentions the new project in a letter to Gretel Adorno from October 9, 1935 (as per the account of the editors of *Werke und Nachlaß. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (hereafter *KGA*), but the last notes on it stem from as late as 1940 (Benjamin 2012, 16:320–21). The text itself has been preserved in five different versions. According to the editors of the *KGA* the first version of the essay, which was published for the first time in this edition of the essay, was composed around September 1935. Benjamin himself claimed that the idea for the essay itself was inspired by Benjamin's work on the exposé to the *Arcades Project*: its aim was, in Benjamin's words from a letter to Horkheimer from October 10, 1935, “to give the questions raised by art theory a truly contemporary form: and indeed from the inside, avoiding any unmediated reference to politics” (Benjamin [1978] 2012, 509). Yet even though Benjamin’s outspoken intentions for the essay were to confine it to the subject of art theory, both the contents of its theses and the history of its publication are heavily marked by politics. The most recent edition of the “Work of Art” essay in *Werke und Nachlaß. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* introduces for the first time Benjamin’s first sketch of the essay, which precedes the rewritten typoscript with reorganised structure – a copy published in the *Gesammelte Schriften* as the first version. According to the *KGA* numeration, the 1936 German version under scrutiny in this chapter is considered to be the third version.[70] This version served as a basis for the first publication of the essay in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* as a French translation by Pierre Klossowski. While its structure and the order of the theses do not differ substantially from the previous version, it is complemented by a completely new, extensive apparatus of footnotes. Some of the most political passages in the essay, which appear in this version of the essay, disappear from the 1939 version of the essay – the so-called fifth, following the French translation. As the editors of the *KGA* argue, “[i]t is not clear whether these omissions were a direct result of Brecht's objections or whether they were made with the publication in *Das Wort* in mind” (Benjamin 2012, 16:357, my translation).

[70] This is the same version, which in the *Gesammelte Schriften* and the *Selected Writings* appears as the second version of the essay (cf. Benjamin 1991g, VII:350–84; 2006, 3:101–33).

This chapter deals with the third version of the essay for two reasons. Firstly, this version is what could be called the first comprehensive version of the essay as it was the first one which Benjamin prepared for publication (as the basis for the French translation). Secondly, on this point – in an extensive footnote to thesis six, missing both from the previous versions and the 1939 reworked fifth version – Benjamin engages in most detail with the ideas, which he links to the figure of a bodily collective. Finally, regardless of the fact that Benjamin discards the most political passages in the third version from the so-called fifth version of the essay – or perhaps even more so because of it – the 1936 version offers an insight into a crucial moment in the development of Benjamin's politics. Equipped with the apparatus of footnotes, the third version of the essay delves into Benjamin's ideas of an emancipatory reappropriation of the new media and the mass forms of collectivity it coproduces. Furthermore, even if the most politically optimistic footnotes were erased from the later version of the essay, their appearance in the 1936 version should, in my view, be read as a historically significant moment in the development of Benjamin's politics rather than discarded because he later changed them. As we will see, the 1936 version enables us to see Benjamin's reaction not only to the rise of fascism in Germany but also to the emergence of the politics of the Popular Front.

1.2. Benjamin's diverse concepts of the masses in the "Work of Art" essay

In all except the first version of the "Work of Art", Benjamin starts with a parallel between the essay's aim and Marx's critique of the capitalist mode of production.[71] In an attempt to sketch a continuity between his work on the revolutionary potential revealed by technologies of film production and Marx's endeavours, Benjamin takes up Marx's differentiation between base and superstructure. Arguing that there is a historical delay in the development of the superstructure in comparison to the economic conditions of production, Benjamin writes that "it has taken more than half a century for the change in the conditions of production to be manifested in all areas of culture" (Benjamin 2006, 3:101). He suggests that film and the overall conditions of production of culture have only now – in the mid-1930s – caught up with the changes taking place in social relations of production since the Industrial Revolution. The effects of these changes to the superstructure are, in Benjamin's view, expressed in what

[71] It is unclear which text by Marx – if any in particular – Benjamin had in mind. While the editors of *Selected Writings* suggest that Benjamin refers to Marx's *Capital* (Benjamin 2006, 3:122), Howard Caygill and Miriam Hansen point to the affinity between Benjamin's formulation and Marx's 1859 *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* (Caygill 1998, 98; Hansen 2012, 89).

he calls the "destruction of aura" of the work of art. Benjamin defines aura as a "uniqueness of the work of art" and a "strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be" (2006, 3:104–5). However, while the main subject of the "Work of Art" essay focuses on the technological changes to human beings' relationship with nature and the effects of these changes on the artwork, the essay's main protagonists are the masses. "The masses" – Benjamin writes in thesis XVIII of the essay's 1936 version – "are a matrix from which all customary behavior toward works of art is today emerging newborn" (2006, 3:119). For Benjamin, the destruction of the aura itself is linked to the rise of mass society. "[T]he social basis of the aura's present decay" – he writes in thesis IV in the "Work of Art" – "rests on (…) the increasing emergence of the masses and the growing intensity of their movements" (2006, 3:105). In the "Work of Art", the relationship between new technologies of reproduction, art, and the masses describes an important political crossroads at which Benjamin finds European society in the mid-1930s.[72] "The technological reproducibility of the artwork changes the relation of the masses to art" – Benjamin writes in thesis XV (2006, 3:116). The privileged position in Benjamin's argument is given to cinema and film. "[N]owhere more than in the cinema", Benjamin continues, "are the reactions of individuals, which together make up the massive reaction of the audience, determined by the imminent concentration of reactions into a mass" (2006, 3:116). As Stefan Jonsson points out, there is a surprising discrepancy between the extent to which Benjamin's writings engage with the idea of the masses on the one hand, and the relative absence of thorough scholarly analysis of this trope in his thought on the other (Jonsson 2013, 191). Among others, Miriam Bratu Hansen, Susan Buck-Morss and most recently Andrea Cavalletti have touched on the multifaceted nature of Benjamin's notion of the masses and its central – and often dubious, as we will see shortly – place both in his studies of the actuality of the 19th century for post-World War I Europe and the development of his political ideas in the 1930s.

One of the most influential readings of the "Work of Art" essay, especially in relationship to Benjamin's concept of the masses, has been Hansen's work, whose contributions since the 1990s greatly contributed to the development of the scholarly interpretations of Benjamin's concept of technology, mass media, and politics involved in the

[72] On Benjamin's interpretation of fascism in terms of aestheticisation in the "Work of Art" essay see: Koepnick 1999; Buck-Morss 1992. On the roots of Benjamin's reflections on fascist politics in terms of aestheticisation in Benjamin's earlier review essay "Theories of German Fascism: On the Collection of Essays *War and Warrior*, Edited by Ernst Jünger" (1930), see Hillach 1979; Jay 1992. For a concise contextualisation of Benjamin's approach to fascism in the context of the Frankfurt School and in juxtaposition to the theories of fascism developed during and after World War II see Tucker 1999.

relationship between the two. In her 1994 article "America, Paris, the Alps: Kracauer (and Benjamin) on Cinema and Modernity", Hansen proposes that, in his writings from the mid to late 1930s, Benjamin develops three parallel figures of the masses (Hansen 1994, 25–28). While two of these figures are linked to Benjamin's work on the *Arcades Project* in the late 1930s and to the Baudelaire essay, Hansen traces the third one – and the one she evaluates most critically – directly to the 1936 "Work of Art" essay.[73] In *Cinema and Experience*, she writes that "Benjamin's concept of the masses, especially in the artwork essay remains a philosophical if not aesthetic abstraction, a subjective correlative of changes in the organization of perception in modernity" (Hansen 2012, 95; cf. 1994, 29). Arguing against Hansen, Jonsson claims that Benjamin's concept of the masses is nuanced and historically concrete. "[T]he proletariat" – he writes in a discursive footnote discussing Hansen's approach – "is an elusive and abstract category in Benjamin's work, a category with a barely *stipulated* agency, whereas 'the masses' is a fully concrete notion worked through in all its aspects and appearances" (Jonsson 2013, 290n62).

In his 2013 *Crowds and Democracy*, Jonsson summarises how the historical emergence of the masses permeates Benjamin's thought throughout the *Arcades Project* on many levels: from mass commodity production and its coproduced mass customer, through the urban crowd and the production of an anonymous individual, to the masses as the non-class of petty bourgeoisie. He suggests that although Benjamin never addressed his understanding of the notion of the masses in any one text, Benjamin's mid- to late-1930s texts teem with the trope "to such an extent that it is safe to say that this is one of their main concerns" (2013, 191).[74] "Benjamin's theory of modernity" – Jonsson claims – "hinges on careful distinctions between 'crowd,' 'mass,' 'proletariat,' 'petty bourgeoisie,' and 'people'" (2013, 191).[75] In Jonsson's account, the specificity of Benjamin's approach to the masses relies on two aspects which are, in his view, consistent with what "Marxists called the petty bourgeoisie" (2013, 195). Firstly, the masses appear in Benjamin's work as "a social effect caused by the city's

[73] The first figure of the masses identified by Hansen is associated with the image of the prostitute as a commodity, a concept prevalent in Benjamin's Arcades Project. It represents, according to Hansen, the "masses as the social counterpart of mass production" (Hansen 1994, 26). Hansen suggests that this theme in Benjamin's work originates from Lukács' theory of reification (1994, 21). According to her interpretation, Benjamin assumes "a parallel between the industrial standardization of cultural goods and the conduct and identity of the mass audience that consumes them" (1994, 20). The second figure of the masses, linked by Hansen to commodity production, embodies the idea of the dreaming collective.

[74] Jonsson points to a wide array of Benjamin's texts from mid-1930s on, from the 1934 "The Author as Producer", through the "Work of Art" essay, to his late works such "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" (1938), "Central Park" (1939), and even his last piece, "On the Concept of History" (1940).

[75] Admittedly, Jonsson adds, Benjamin's use of these notions is characterised by a "conceptual obscurity" because he uses them in both their colloquial and their theoretical meaning interchangeably (Jonsson 2013, 191).

accelerating circulation of commodities" (2013, 195). Secondly, Benjamin portrays the masses not only as an effect of the capitalist mass commodity production but also, in Jonsson's words, as "a collective whose members fulfil their dreams of social harmony and existential wholeness through the historically new activity of consuming mass-produced stories and images" (2013, 195). This is what, in Jonsson's view, makes Benjamin stand out against the background of the more developed theories of mass society and its psychological constitution of his contemporaries such as Siegfried Kracauer or Sigmund Freud (2013, 194). The mass does not appear in Benjamin's work as either a sociological category (as it did for Kracauer, to Hansen's approval) nor as a psychological term (as it did for Freud, as Jonsson points out). Instead, Jonsson argues, Benjamin "defined the mass by identifying its material condition of possibility, which he located at the economic level" (2013, 195). Jonsson rightly points out Benjamin's insistence on the notion of the masses as linked to the capitalist development of the relations of production and the attention he pays to the possibility of emergence of new forms of collectivity in different historical moments, specifically in relation to the development of technology. We have seen this already in Benjamin's reflections in the early to mid-1920s on the attempt at planetary scale of collectivity warped in World War I (as recapitulated in Chapter One). Yet the "Work of Art" essay returns to the question of the relationship between technology and new scales of collectivity from a new perspective, whereby Benjamin focuses on technologies of reproducibility. Despite the correct, in my view, direction of Jonsson's critique of Hansen's argument that Benjamin's notion of the masses is a-sociological, his interpretation conflates various moments in Benjamin's work. In doing so, Jonsson loses the part of Hansen's critical perspective, which addressed Benjamin's specific political ideas on the relationship between the masses and technology in the "Work of Art" essay.

Jonsson turns to the 1936 version of the "Work of Art" essay and its footnote on the relationship between the masses and the proletariat in order to show what he considers to be a broader trajectory of Benjamin's approach to the masses. In his view, Benjamin's analysis "moves from the crowd (…), to the mass (…), and onward to the proletariat" (2013, 203). This trajectory, for Jonsson, reflects "the progression of the gradual awakening of the collective" (2013, 203) which becomes the central figure of the *Arcades Project* in the first exposé written in 1935. The footnote to thesis XII, which prompts Jonsson to extrapolate this three-step analysis onto Benjamin's work more broadly reflects, for him, Benjamin's judgment of "the historical drama: whereas fascism obtained the ideal community according to the conventional prescriptions of mass-psychological doctrine (…), socialism would

achieve *its* ideal community through human liberation and political self-representation of the collective (2013, 202). This, in my view, is the crux of Benjamin's reflections on the relationship between the masses and the proletariat in the 1936 "Work of Art" essay's political footnotes. While Benjamin is certainly interested in the relationship between the crowd, the mass, and the proletariat, his focus is on *how* to conceptualise the transition between these different forms of collectivity. He asks this question both in terms of historical research of the relationship between them and, as we will see in this chapter, on the level of how we can find an emancipatory potential of this new mass collectivity.

Hansen's critique relates exactly to this moment of Benjamin's text. Hansen offers more than a critique of Benjamin's inadequate understanding of the social reality he lived in. Rather, she points out an ambiguity in Benjamin's political ideas in the mid-1930s. The two accounts of masses that constitute this ambiguity for her are, firstly, the dreaming collective and, secondly, what she sees as the "most problematic, troping of the mass in (…) the notion of a 'collective innervation of technology'" (Hansen 1994, 26–27). Indeed, while as I have pointed out, the masses are the "Work of Art"'s starting point and play a key role in Benjamin's analysis, he differentiates more than one form of collectivity in the essay. Hansen does acknowledge this. She distinguishes in the essay two politically disparate ideas of the masses, which she juxtaposes with each other as the promising and the disappointing political propositions on the masses in Benjamin's "Work of Art" essay. These follow along the lines established by Benjamin's two important footnotes to the 1936 version of the "Work of Art" essay.

In the footnote to thesis six, Benjamin evokes a figure similar to the one that appeared, with slight terminological shifts, in his earlier writings as the bodily collective. The footnote serves as a commentary on the revolutionary potential of film's role in accelerating the adaptation of humanity to what Benjamin calls "second technology" (Benjamin 2006, 3:107). Benjamin proposes here that "[t]he aim of revolutions is to accelerate this adaptation" and that they be viewed as "efforts at innervation on the part of the new, historically unique collective which has its organs in the new technology" (2006, 3:124n10). The central, familiar image, which appears in the footnote, is that of the collective whose organs are organised in technology, and whose innervations are equated with revolutions. Benjamin returns here to linking this figure of a collective with the notion of humanity:

> Revolutions are innervations of the collective – or, more precisely, efforts at innervation on the part of the new, historically unique collective which has its organs in the new technology. This

> second technology is a system in which the mastering of elementary social forces is a precondition for playing [*das Spiel*] with natural forces. Just as a child who has learned to grasp stretches out its hand for the moon as it would for a ball, so humanity [*Menschheit*], in its efforts at innervation, sets its sights as much on currently utopian goals as on goals within reach.[76] (2006, 3:124n10)

Echoing his formulations from "To the Planetarium" and the "Surrealism" essay, Benjamin turns to the idea of revolutions as "innervations of the collective" (2006, 3:124n10) and elaborates on the relationship between revolutions and "the collective, which has its organs in technology" (2006, 3:124n10). Hansen considers the footnote on the innervations of the collective as revolutions to be the less fruitful notion of the masses in Benjamin. "The problem is not with the concept of innervation as such" – she writes – but with "the attempt to hitch the proletariat to the cart of this process [of the technological interpenetration of 'body and image space'] and make the cinema a rehearsal ground for polytechnical education" (Hansen 2012, 27). In Hansen's view, Benjamin's reflections on the masses "oscillate between a turn-of-the-century pessimistic view of the mass or crowd, as distinct from the proletariat, and his attempt (famously in the artwork essay) to reclaim a progressive concept of the masses – in the plural – as revolutionary productive force by way of a structural affinity with technological reproduction, in particular film" (2012, 86). It is this positive evaluation of technologies of reproduction, and especially film, that Hansen rightly points out as long-expired and based on a misplaced optimism. In the footnote to thesis VI, Benjamin argues that "the more the collective makes the second technology its own, the more keenly individuals belonging to the collective feel how little they have received of what was due them under the dominion of the first technology" (Benjamin 2006, 3:124n10). Benjamin puts this overcoming of the first by second technology in terms of the "liquidation" of first technology (2006, 3:124n10) and this, together with the opening line of the footnote referring to acceleration, has whereby Benjamin's positive account of technology in the "Work of Art" essay has been described as "liquidationist" (Bolz and Van Reijen [1991] 1996, 60), criticised

[76] "Es ist das Ziel der[/]Revolution[en,] diese Anpassung zu beschleunigen. Revolutionen sind Innervationen des Kollektivs: genauer Innervationsversuche des neuen, geschichtlich erstmaligen Kollektivs, das in der zweiten Technik sein[e] Organ[e] hat. Diese zweite Technik ist ein System, in[\]welchem die Bewältigung der gesellschaftlichen Element(~~xx~~)arkräfte die Voraussetzung für das Spiel mit den natürlichen darstellt. Wie nun ein Kind, wenn es greifen lernt, die Hand so gut nach dem Mond ausstreckt wie nach einem Ball, so fasst die Menschheit in ihren Innervationsversuchen neben den greifbaren solche Ziele ins Auge, welche vorerst utopisch sind" (Benjamin 2012, 16:109n1).

as “left-Fordist” (Foster 2004, 109) and, much more recently, applauded as a proto-post-humanist approach (Mourenza 2013; 2015; 2020, 195–234; Khatib 2014a).

Hansen herself clearly states her weariness towards going too far with Benjamin’s liquidationist overtones in the “Work of Art” essay. “I put into question the liquidationist tenor of the essay” – she writes in the introduction to *Cinema and Experience* – “and, by implication, the facile reproduction of this tenor in the essay’s standard reception—along with the politically progressive purchase derived from it” (Hansen 2012, 107). In the following part of this chapter, I complement Hansen’s critique of Benjamin’s understanding of the masses by elaborating on his broad understanding of technology. Hansen herself points out that “the artwork essay is [not] ‘about’ film as an empirical phenomenon (…) [but r]ather, it is concerned with the structural role Benjamin ascribes to film as a hinge between the fate of art under the conditions of industrial capitalism and the contemporary political crisis, which pivots on the organization of the masses” (2012, 85). Yet, as I aim to show in this chapter, in the 1936 “Work of Art” Benjamin applies but does not limit his analysis of the relationship between technology and mass forms of collectivity to the cinema or even art.

2. The emancipatory potential of technologies of mass reproduction and film

2.1. Benjamin’s a-sociological concept of the masses

At the centre of Hansen’s critique of the figure of the masses in Benjamin’s writings as abstract and theoretically hollow lies his equation of the masses of workers with a cinema audience.[77] In a 1994 essay on Benjamin and Kracauer, Hansen writes of the discrepancy between Benjamin’s account of the cinema audience and its actual sociological stratification at the beginning of the cinema’s mass popularity:

> Benjamin's concept of the masses as the subject of cinema passes over the actual and unprecedented mixture of classes – and genders and generations – that had been observed in

[77] Hansen’s insistence on this is linked to the fact that, as she notes, Benjamin replaces the word “mass” in the 1939 version of the “Work of Art” essay with “the more neutral term ‘audience’ [*Publikum*],’ which he now qualifies (…) as ‘the consumers who constitute the market’” (Hansen 2012, 96). Hansen points out that one of the key differences between the two versions of the essay lies in how Benjamin portrays the relationship between the cinema audience (2012, 96).

> cinema audiences early on (notably by sociologist Emilie Altenloh in her 1914 study). (Hansen 1994, 28)

Hansen contrasts Benjamin's view of the masses with Kracauer's more careful, sociological observations of the German interwar society. She points out that Kracauer's 1929 collection of essays *The Salaried Masses* "self-consciously 'constructs' the reality of the white-collar workers through theorizing observation – quotations, conversations on location, his own situation as an employee" (1994, 29). For Benjamin, on the other hand, "the masses that structurally correspond to the cinema coincide not with the actual working class (whether blue-collar or white-collar) but with the proletariat as a category of Marxist philosophy, a category of negation directed against existing conditions in their totality" (1994, 29). What Hansen suggests is Benjamin's abstract and a-sociological understanding of the category of the proletariat follows from a complex understanding of the position from which an intellectual can attempt to conceptualise the working class – or rather, of its limits. In his 1930 review "'An outsider attracts attention' – on *The Salaried Masses* by S. Kracauer", Benjamin praises Kracauer's insight for what could be seen as the same reasons for which Hansen does. Namely, Benjamin applauds Kracauer's portrayal of the salaried workers precisely because it does not follow along the lines of orthodox Marxism. "[I]t is not as an orthodox Marxist, still less as a practical agitator", Benjamin writes, "that he [Kracauer] dialectically penetrates the existence of employees, but because to penetrate dialectically means: to expose" (Benjamin 1998, 109–10). In Benjamin's view, Kracauer, although not a Marxist by identification, thinks in a Marxist way insofar as the "primary task of Marxism", in Benjamin's words, is "the production of a proper consciousness - and precisely first among the lower classes, who have everything to expect from it" (1998, 110). What impresses Benjamin the most is that Kracauer approaches a class which, in Benjamin's view, is the most "alienated from the concrete reality of its everyday existence" (1998, 110) by analysing the products of its false consciousness. He writes of Kracauer's method in the following way:

> The products of false consciousness are like picture-puzzles, in which the main thing just barely peeps forth from clouds, leaves and shadows. And the author has descended to the

> advertisements in employee newspapers, in order to detect the main things that appear puzzlingly embedded in the phantasmagoria of glamour and youth, culture and personality.[78] (1998, 112)

In this regard, Benjamin's reading of Kracauer agrees with Hansen's evaluation not only in that he considers Kracauer's analysis insightful but also in that they both see the method of his inquiry best for its subject. However, Benjamin is interested in the broader problem addressed by Kracauer's book than his portrayal of the salaried class. In his review, Benjamin takes up the issue of the relationship of the writer to the social object of his analysis. For Benjamin, Kracauer succeeds in attaining all a writer can hope for not simply because he manages to paint an adequate portrait of a social group under the scrutiny of his analysis. Rather, Kracauer's greatest accomplishment is that he overcomes his bourgeois education by politicising his own class. In Benjamin's view, Kracauer's *The Salaried Masses* is characterised by "a constructive theoretical training that is addressed neither to the snob nor to the worker – but that is instead capable of producing something real and demonstrable: namely, the politicization of its own class" (1998, 113). Benjamin calls this success an "indirect effect" and opposes it to the "direct effectiveness [which] can emerge only from praxis" (1998, 113). In my view, it is instructive to read the "Work of Art"'s reflections on the emancipatory potential of technologies of mass reproduction and of film in the context of Benjamin's review of *The Salaried Masses*. This means reading Benjamin's positive figure of the masses in the 1936 "Work of Art" essay in the context of his recognition of the limited effect on the consciousness of the masses from the position of the intellectual and the privileged place of praxis in having a direct effect on class consciousness. In the "Work of Art" essay, Benjamin's insistence on the emancipatory potential of the masses recognising themselves in the movie and as an audience is complemented by a call for appreciating popular culture and for the democratisation of its production. What appeals to Benjamin the most is the potential he sees in film for the masses to take over the production of their own image. Yet we can also learn a different lesson than the one Benjamin chose to draw from the moment in which he saw this potential. I argue that the gist of Benjamin's belief in the emancipatory potential of film and of the cinema audience lies in his attempt to think the possibility of emancipation from within alienated social relations. In other words, Benjamin's

[78] "Die Erzeugnisse des falschen Bewußtseins gleichen Vexierbildern, in denen die Hauptsache aus Wolken, Laub und Schatten nur eben hervorlugt. Und der Verfasser ist bis in die Inserate der Angestelltenzeitungen herabgestiegen, um jene Hauptsachen ausfindig zu machen, die in den Phantasmagorien von Glanz und Jugend, Bildung und Persönlichkeit vexierhaft eingebettet erscheinen" (Benjamin 1991f, III:223–24).

faith in the cinema is only a part of his broader understanding of the potential of re-appropriating technology created under capitalism for the collective purpose of reorganising social relations.

2.2. Making alienation productive

Benjamin expands on the emancipatory potential he finds in cinema's relation to the masses especially clearly in thesis X. In Benjamin's account, the masses of the workers going to the cinema experience a different relationship of the actor to the apparatus, in which, contrary to their daily experience, the actor manages to retain their humanity in the face of the technological apparatus.

> In the evening these same masses fill the cinemas, to witness the film actor taking revenge on their behalf not only by asserting his humanity [*Menschlichkeit*] (or what appears to them as such) against the apparatus, but by placing that apparatus in the service of his triumph.[79] (Benjamin 2006, 3:111)

Comparing the performance of a film actor with the performance of a worker, Benjamin points to the different roles which, in these two cases, technology plays in mediating bodily action. Benjamin highlights that performance in film is always a "test performance" (2006, 3:111). "An action performed in the film studio therefore differs from the corresponding real action the way the competitive throwing of a discus in a sports arena would differ from the throwing of the same discus from the same spot in the same direction in order to kill someone" (2006, 3:111). Benjamin sees in the fact that the cinema relies on exhibiting test performance with no recourse to "real action" not an artificial kernel of cinema but a crooked mirror image of the situation of the working class. Just as the actor performs in front of an apparatus in what is always a test performance, workers in a factory perform their labour in a way which is constantly being compared to a standardised performance measured by various tests.[80] The "work process, especially since it has been standardized by the assembly line", Benjamin writes, "generates countless mechanized tests (…) [which] are performed unawares, and those who fail are excluded from the work process" (2006, 3:111). Film, in

[79] "Abends füllen dieselben Massen die Kinos, um zu erleben, wie der Filmdarsteller für sie Revanche nimmt, indem seine Menschlichkeit (oder was ihnen so erscheint) nicht nur der Apparatur gegenüber" (Benjamin 2012, 16:116).
[80] On Benjamin's relation to the developing field of psychometrics see Duttlinger 2022.

Benjamin's eyes, offers a different relationship between test performance, the apparatus, and what Benjamin calls an individual's "humanity" (*Menschlichkeit*).

The figure of alienation of human beings reappears at the end of the essay, this time as the "self-alienation" of humankind (2006, 3:122). In the last sentences of the 1936 version of the "Work of Art" essay, Benjamin writes about humankind as once "an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods", which has become an object of contemplation for itself. Benjamin points out that the technological changes to the production of images, which the "Work of Art" essay addresses, have led to humankind's "self-alienation" to "the point where it can experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure" (2006, 3:111). He writes:

> Humankind [*Menschheit*], which once, in Homer, was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, has now become one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached the point where it can experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure. Such is the aestheticizing of politics, as practiced by fascism. Communism replies by politicizing art.[81] (2006, 3:122).

The "Work of Art"'s final image of humanity's self-alienation leading to aesthetic pleasure from its own destruction comes as a commentary on what Benjamin considers to be an emblematically fascist form of aesthetics. Commenting on Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's futurist manifesto and its laudation of the beauty of warfare, Benjamin states that fascism expects "from war, as Marinetti admits, the artistic gratification of a sense perception altered by technology" (2006, 3:122). He highlights that imperialist warfare stems from the capitalist abuse of the technological development of the forces of production, whose potential could not be realised by means which would serve (Benjamin mentions "deploying power stations across land" and "promoting air traffic"). He writes:

> [I]f the natural use of productive forces is impeded by the property system, then the increase in technological means, in speed, in sources of energy will press toward an unnatural use. This is found in war, and the destruction caused by war furnishes proof that society was not mature

[81] "Die Menschheit, die einst bei Homer ein Schauobjekt für die olympischen Götter war, ist es nun für sich selbst geworden. Ihre Selbstentfremdung hat jenen Grad erreicht, der sie ihre eigene Vernichtung als ästhetischen Genuß ersten Ranges erleben läßt. So steht es um die Ästhetisierung der Politik, welche der Faschismus betreibt. Der Kommunismus antwortet ihm mit der Politisierung der Kunst" (Benjamin 2012, 16:141).

> enough to make technology its organ, that technology was not sufficiently developed to master the elemental forces of society.[82] (2006, 3:121)

Over the course of thesis XIX Benjamin explains that fascism's glorification of war stems from a common denominator between the two. In his account, the reactionary function of war is that it mobilises technological development and its unrealised social potential thwarted by capitalist crises. Benjamin writes of "unemployment and the lack of markets" as the driving forces of the "discrepancy between the enormous means of production and their inadequate use in the process of production" (2006, 3:121). Similarly, fascism mobilises the masses without addressing the exploitative capitalist social relations, which lie at the roots of their political demands. "Fascism", Benjamin writes, "attempts to organize the newly proletarianized masses while leaving intact the property relations which they strive to abolish" (2006, 3:120–21).

Hansen suggests that in order to propose the radical political polarity between fascism and communism, Benjamin sacrifices his otherwise distinctively ambiguous style, where "meanings oscillate depending on the particular constellations in which they are deployed" (Hansen 2012, 92).[83] The victim of this sacrifice is, in her view, Benjamin's concept of the masses. Hansen sees in the epilogue a "leap of faith" between Benjamin's "argument about sensory-perceptual alienation" and the one on "communist cultural politics" (2012, 91) – in her view, it mismatches the rest of the text. For her, the alternative proposed is abstract: a "rhetorical escalation of alternatives—either liquidation of the cultural heritage or (self-liquidation of the human species" (2012, 91). Hansen would see Benjamin turn his gaze less towards the masses and more towards the framework of humankind:

> [I]n the epilogue the subject of this sentence is 'humankind' rather than the masses, let alone a particular class. But Benjamin's attempt to situate the aporias of contemporary politics within a more global, anthropological-materialist perspective—that is, to frame the problem of the masses within a politics of the species – is precisely what makes the essay point beyond its tactical

[82] "Wird die natürliche Verwertung der ~~Produktionskräfte~~ Produktivkräfte durch die Eigentumsordnung hintangehalten, so drängt die Steigerung der technischen Behelfe, der Tempi, der Kraftquellen nach einer unnatürlichen. Sie findet sie im Kriege, der mit seinen Zerstörungen den Beweis dafür antritt, dass die Gesellschaft nicht reif genug war, sich die Technik zu ihrem Organ zu machen, dass die Technik nicht ausgebildet genug war, die gesellschaftlichen Elementarkräfte zu bewältigen" (Benjamin 2012, 16:140–41).
[83] Hansen finds the origin of what she calls Benjamin's "conceptual polarization" in the 1933 "Experience and Poverty"'s "positive concept of barbarism" and calls it "programmatic" (Hansen 2012, 92). "It has to be understood" – she writes – "as a radical response to a near-hopeless polarization of political reality" (2012, 92).

> dichotomies toward the possibility of imagining another – different as well as other – history. (2012, 99)

What Hansen seems to overlook is Benjamin's insistence on reading the emergence of mass society in close connection to the very possibility of thinking collectivity in the universal terms of humankind. Benjamin concludes the fragment on humankind, to which Hansen refers as the more productive framework than that of the masses, by stating the historical specificity of the current position in which we find this category. It is not simply a "politics of the species" whose history is of a different kind than that of the masses and collectives. The possibility of thinking in terms of global politics is a new historical phenomenon, which has so far been made productive by fascism, war and capitalism. Benjamin writes that humankind's self-alienation "has reached the point where it can experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure. Such is the aestheticizing of politics, as practiced by fascism. Communism replies by politicizing art" (Benjamin 2006, 3:122).

What Hansen considers to be a crude polarisation between fascism's and communism's understanding of the masses and their relationship to the decay of the aura is, in my view, a reflection on the different forms of collectivity of a new, hitherto unknown scale. In this optic, Benjamin's 1936 "Work of Art" approaches the question of how the politics of what he calls the "newly proletarianized masses" (2006, 3:120–21) should be understood, if it is to avoid its fascist variant, just as he did in some of his previous attempts at reflecting on the historically new forms of collectivity he saw to emerge in modernity. Benjamin's account of the masses as a social matrix rather than a sociological category enables him to simultaneously conceive of the capitalist and fascist abuse of this new form of collectivity and of the emancipatory potential it brings: a new scale of thinking collectivity. The self-alienation of humankind needs to be made productive, just as the self-alienation of the human being has been made so in film. Differently than in the 1923 "Outline to the Psychophysical Problem", Benjamin addresses the difference between an emancipatory collectivity and a reactionary one not based on the way in which they relate the universal bodily constitution as its basis (with *Volk* corresponding to the solitary and eternal constitution of *Körper* and the body of humankind to the extensive, collective and historical nature of *Leib*). Rather, in the "Work of Art", the figure of humankind relates to the mechanism of human beings producing their own image in technology and the historical changes to the affective relationship with this image once it is able to represent the idea of wholeness. In other words, with humanity

becoming an object of self-observation, as Benjamin writes in the last thesis of the essay, it develops a relationship to itself as an object of its own activity, including the destructive kind. As a response to this new pleasure in self-destruction which humankind takes in fascism, Benjamin's attention turns to the problem of the relationship between the masses as the political subject mobilised by fascist politics and the proletariat, whose mobilisation could prove to be a communist solution to this problem.

3. Masses and the proletariat

3.1. Benjamin's conception of the relationship between the proletariat and the masses

In a footnote to thesis XII, Benjamin portrays a complex taxonomy of the relations between the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie as a dynamic effect of class struggle. He attempts to address the emergence of classed forms of collectivity, elaborating on what he considers to be the differentiating factor of the "proletarian mass" as he calls it, and the class-conscious proletariat, which appears as a mass "only from the outside" and "in the minds of its oppressors" (Benjamin 2006, 3:129n24). In Benjamin's account, the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie are structured differently by the emergence of class struggle:

> It should be noted in passing that proletarian class consciousness, which is the most enlightened form of class consciousness, fundamentally transforms the structure of the proletarian masses. The class-conscious proletariat forms a compact mass only from the outside, in the minds of its oppressors. At the moment when it takes up its struggle for liberation, this apparently compact mass has actually already begun to loosen. It ceases to be governed by mere reactions; it makes the transition to action.[84] (2006, 3:129n24)

The footnote stretches over a page and covers one of the most densely packed accounts of Benjamin's theory of politics in his writings, which Adorno calls "amongst the most profound and most powerful statements of political theory I have encountered since I read [Lenin's] *State and Revolution*", in an otherwise critical letter on the 1936 version of the

[84] "Das proletarische Klassenbewusstsein, welches das erhellteste ist, verändert, nebenbei gesagt, die Struktur der proletarischen Masse grundlegend. Das klassenbewusste Proletariat bildet eine kompakte Masse nur von aussen (sic), in der Vorstellung seiner Unterdrücker. In dem Augenblick, da es seinen Befreiungskampf aufnimmt, hat seine scheinbar kompakte Masse sich in Wahrheit schon aufgelockert. Sie hört auf, unter der Herrschaft blosser (sic) Reaktionen zu stehen; sie geht zur Aktion über" (Benjamin 2012, 16:123).

"Work of Art" essay (Adorno and Benjamin 1999, 132–33).[85] Over the course of the footnote, Benjamin contrasts "the mass as an impenetrable, compact entity, which Le Bon and others have made the subject of their 'mass psychology'" (2006, 3:129n24) with the class-conscious proletariat, whose struggle for liberation propels the loosening of the masses' structure. Benjamin discusses his understanding of the emergence of the proletariat as a specific form of political subject, which dissolves the compact appearance of the masses as uniform and classless. This is written in response to the dangers of fascist abuse of the revolutionary potential offered by film, as a footnote to the thesis dedicated to this problem. The footnote is where, according to Hansen, Benjamin's "more productive" account of the masses can be seen. In it, Benjamin "offers the most detailed discussion anywhere in his work on the question of the masses, particularly in relation to class and violence" (Hansen 2012, 121). Nevertheless, despite the existence of this "more productive" notion of the masses, Hansen's evaluation of the 1936 "Work of Art" essay remains the same. Commenting on the footnote in question, Hansen concludes that Benjamin's overall view of the masses lacks historical accuracy. In effect, for Hansen, Benjamin holds a reductionist and patronising image of the masses:

> Whether rejected in LeBonian terms or embraced as the self-sublating empirical prototype of the proletariat, the masses are attributed a degree of homogeneity that not only misses their complex reality, but also ultimately leaves the intellectual in a position outside, at best surrendering himself to their existence as powerful, though still unconscious Other. (Hansen 1994, 29)

Yet Hansen's account of Benjamin's argument seems to overlook the important distinction, which Benjamin makes between the "proletarian masses" and a class-conscious form of the proletariat as a political subject. As a sociological category describing a group of workers employed in a specific way, the proletariat might be akin to the masses as a historically observable emergence of a new scale of urban collectivity. But Benjamin's footnote focuses on a different understanding of the proletariat's relationship with the masses. For Benjamin, the point of interest is when the proletariat gains class consciousness as a political subject and when, as a result, this very process changes social relations.

It is from the perspective closest to Benjamin's reflections in the footnote to thesis XII that the most astute counterpoint to Hansen's critique can be found. Andrea Cavalletti's 2019

[85] Because of its length, I do not quote the footnote in full but rather split it into most important thematic sections, analysed in relevant fragments of the chapter.

Class provides a detailed examination of the footnote on the relationship between the proletariat and the petty-bourgeois masses from the 1936 version of the essay and offers a reading of a selected history of crowd theory through the lens of Benjamin's note. In contrast to Hansen, Cavalletti argues that the anti-sociological understanding of class and of the masses is what makes Benjamin's insight in the footnote to thesis XII most fruitful. As Alberto Toscano notes in the afterword to *Class*, for Cavalletti the power of Benjamin's footnote on the proletariat and the masses lies in "unsettling [of] the customary distinction between theories of class (consciousness) and theories of (pathological) crowd" (Toscano 2019, 157). It is the idea of the masses as a matrix for urban forms of collectivity that enables Benjamin to propose, in Cavalletti's view, an "idea of a society without crowds" (Cavalletti [2009] 2019, 142).

Indeed, Benjamin's a-sociological treatment of the category of the masses offers the most fruitful aspect of his references to class formation. The focus in the footnote to thesis XII is not on what differentiates the proletariat from the petty bourgeoisie but on the relationship between the two as it changes when the proletariat gains class consciousness. In other words, instead of attempting to find and describe the proletariat in a snapshot of a sociological or cultural analysis, as in Kracauer's analysis of the salaried workers, Benjamin focuses on the dynamic effects of the class struggle. It is class struggle, that increasingly polarises the disparate densities of these two forms of collectivity. In this regard, just as Hansen argued, Benjamin's understanding of both the masses and the proletariat is historically inconcrete. Indeed, Benjamin's figures of both the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie escape sociological categorisation in terms of class formation linked to a specific form of employment, exploitation, or living conditions.[86] This is because Benjamin's purpose is different. He does not aim to ask who represents the contemporary proletariat or what political allegiance the different classes have and how to shape them. Instead, Benjamin's footnote to thesis XII tackles a concrete political problem. Namely, the problem of what it is that propels a class to gain class consciousness on the one hand, and what effects this process has on the structure of the collectivity of the petty-bourgeois masses. The answer to what governs this dynamic lies, for Benjamin, in what he calls "solidarity":

> The loosening of the proletarian masses is the work of solidarity. In the solidarity of the

[86] For an example of a contemporary discussion on defining class through either exploitation or living conditions in the context of two historical traditions of class analysis stemming from Karm Marx and Emil Durkheim see Wright 2000 and Sorenson 2000.

> proletarian class struggle, the dead, undialectical opposition between individual and mass is abolished; for the comrade, it does not exist. Decisive as the masses are for the revolutionary leader, therefore, his great achievement lies not in drawing the masses after him, but in constantly incorporating himself into the masses, in order to be, for them, always one among hundreds of thousands.[87] (Benjamin, 2006, 129n24)

Solidarity, then, is the very process of the proletariat gaining its class consciousness – it is what loosens "the proletarian masses" (2006, 129n24). In other words, in solidarity the seemingly compact form of the proletariat, which resembles the petty-bourgeois masses, dissolves. In solidarity, however, dissolves more than the proletariat's mass-like appearance. As Benjamin writes, the very "undialectical opposition between individual and mass is abolished" (2006, 129n24). In Benjamin's view, then, solidarity is not something which exists between an individual and the collective struggle, or an alliance of a group of people with a cause of another. In other words, Benjamin's notion of solidarity goes directly against the politics of inter-class alliance. In what follows, I propose to look at Benjamin's understanding of solidarity from the perspective of the historical context in which Benjamin conceives them: the rise of fascism to power in Germany in 1933 and the introduction of a new policy of the Comintern, the Popular Front.

3.2. The Popular Front and the politics of mass support

While the categories of the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie might not be backed up by any sociological observations or theories in the "Work of Art" essay and its 1936 footnotes, this does not mean that Benjamin's reflections on the relationship between them are not marked by a historical index of their own. According to Susan Buck-Morss, 1934 was a critical year for the development of Benjamin's political stance towards the problem of mass support for fascism and the response to this on the left.[88] Benjamin was staying in Paris

[87] "Die Auflockerung der proletarischen Massen ist das Werk der Solidarität. In der Solidarität des proletarischen Klassenkampfs ist der tote, undialektische Gegensatz zwischen Individuum und Masse abgeschafft; er besteht nicht für den Genossen. So entscheidend daher die Masse für den revolutionären Führer auch ist, so besteht dessen grösste Leistung nicht darin, die Massen nach sich zu ziehen, sondern immer wieder in die Massen sich einbeziehen zu lassen, um immer wieder einer von Hunderttausenden für sie zu sein" (Benjamin 2012, 16:123n1).

[88] As I recount below, in Buck-Morss' interpretation the emergence of the Popular Front in France is *the* direct political context in which to read the "Work of Art" essay's reflections on mass movements and leftist politics. Yet, although Buck-Morss' 1989 *The Dialectics of Seeing* virtually introduced the English-speaking academia to Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and has been vastly influential on Benjamin scholarship ever since, there has been

in a hotel on the Boulevard Saint-Germain between October 26, 1933, and March 24 when, in February 1934, the streets of Paris witnessed a wave of protests. Mostly organised by the far-right leagues, these demonstrations – the so-called *six février* – aroused fear of a fascist putsch among government officials. It was this fear – the grounds for which have been widely disputed in historiography – that led to the unification of the French left on a national level in a campaign against fascism.[89] As Buck-Morss efficiently summarises for the purpose of inscribing Benjamin's reflections on the masses in this historical context, the Popular Front "claimed national unity could override class differences. It argued that recovery of the capitalist economy would benefit workers by providing jobs, commodities, and the wages to buy them. It passed laws for worker benefits rather than worker ownership" (Buck-Morss 1989, 321). Pointing to Benjamin's critical research on Saint-Simon's thought in the mid-1930s, Buck-Morss highlights that he "was uncovering just how familiar this political formula of national unity, patriotism, and consumerism was in history, and how it inevitably resulted in the betrayal of the working class" (1989, 322).[90] At the time, as Cavalletti points out, the idea of an inter-class political alliance between the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie against fascism embodied in the politics of the Popular Front often stemmed from a specific diagnosis of the mass support for fascism as relying on the petty bourgeoisie, which preceded the German elections in 1933.[91] Cavalletti's reading highlights Benjamin's

little research following up on this observation. For an earlier account of the relationship between Benjamin's work – mainly his 1940 "On the Concept of History" – and the Popular Front see Kambas, Loeffler, and Daniel 1986.

[89] For a detailed overview of the development of the Popular Front in France see Jackson 1988.

[90] On Saint-Simonianism as the "ur-form", as she calls it, of the Popular Front, Buck-Morss elaborates as follows: "In a reaction that paralleled that of Blum's Popular Front during the Paris strikes of June 1936, The Saint-Simonian newspaper Le Globe opposed the worker uprising in Lyons in 1831, fearing that 'a raise in wages might place the industry there in jeopardy'. The Saint-Simonian solution to workers' problems involved the intervention of the state in terms of social legislation and a certain level of planned economy. Capitalism was relied upon to deliver technological innovation, as well as consumer goods that improved the quality of life of the working class. In short, Saint-Simonianism prefigured state capitalism in its leftist (Popular Front and New Deal) as well as rightist (national-socialist) forms" (Buck-Morss 1989, 322).

[91] Cavalletti points to Theodor Geiger's *Panic in the Middle Classes* from 1930 as the possible inspiration for Benjamin's idea that the petty bourgeoisie is not a class but as Toscano translates it a "simple grouping" (*Bevölkerungsblock*) and an effect of the struggle between two antagonistic classes, as well as the idea that the petty-bourgeois panic was to be seen as the political basis of the political success of Nazism (Cavalletti [2009] 2019, 33). The idea of fascism as a mass movement with a popular basis in petty bourgeoisie was taken up in some of the most famous early leftist attempts at theorising fascism. Wilhelm Reich in his 1933 *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* is perhaps the most well-known example contemporary to Benjamin, although there is little evidence that Benjamin read it. An earlier example is Leon Trotsky's letter to a comrade from November 15, 1931, a fragment of which was published in a 1932 issue of the journal *Militant* and later as "Fascism—what is it?" in a 1944 edition of Trotsky's pamphlets.

insistence on communist politics as irreconcilable with the politics of mass support.[92] Here, the crux of Benjamin's alternative to this tactic lies in a specific understanding of solidarity, which has little to do with convincing different "social groupings", as Alberto Toscano calls it in an "Afterward" to Cavalletti's book (Toscano 2019, 33), to come together in support of one cause. He writes of Benjamin's idea of solidarity in the following way:

> [I]t is not about persuading anybody, especially not the instinctual mass, ready for anything, no longer persuadable due to its excess of credulity. It is a matter of avoiding its formation. Today, confronted with new pogroms and state racisms, the 'winning over' cannot be undertaken in any other way—only through true solidarity, which upends the compact mass, transforming it into a revolutionary class, that is to say, from crowd simply into class. (Cavalletti [2009] 2019, 143)

Cavalletti interprets the loosening "work of solidarity", of which Benjamin writes in the footnote to thesis XII, in terms of paradoxical emancipation. This emancipation comes, in Cavalletti's view, in the form of "estrangement" of the individual from the circumstances that bind them to descriptive social categories ([2009] 2019, 149). The paradox is that in the process of emancipation, both the individual and the sociological categories delineating social groups disappear. What Cavalletti calls "biopolitical ties" – of race and nation ([2009] 2019, 148) – is dissolved in the work of solidarity. This is because, in Cavalletti's reading of Benjamin, "class is not reducible (…) [to] the real divisions that structure the social" ([2009] 2019, 148). Cavalletti's reading offers an alternative perspective on Benjamin's concept of class as something other than one form of sociologically determinable and describable form of a social grouping. In his analysis, Cavalletti posits that Benjamin presents an alternative conceptualisation of class as a form of structural emancipation from determination by belonging to a specific social group. Within such an understanding of class, he argues, solidarity – as *the* action which brings out class consciousness – has the ability to engender change not only in the areas directly related to class but also in the broader context of social divisions. This potentiality is built around the central figure of the freely determined human being – one which, according to Cavalletti, is able to behave in a way that has never been

[92] The broader framework Cavalletti develops around his interpretation of Benjamin's notion of class is especially well portrayed in his 2020 "Masses, class and the power of suggestion", where he develops a contemporary reading of Gabriel Tarde's theory of the masses and its governing idea of prestige, which "in Tarde's time (…) defined the leader's force of attraction, and thus produced effects of mass suggestion" (Cavalletti 2020, 41). Cavalletti puts Tarde in the context of the history of the theory of mass psychology from Gustave Le Bon's 1895 *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* through Sigmund Freud's 1921 *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* to Elias Canetti's 1960 *Crowds and Power*. He suggests that crowd psychology revolves around the concept of "prestigious attraction" (2020, 43).

seen before. “No longer riveted to their situation but enduringly estranged”, he writes, “beings remain always determinable, capable of unprecedented behaviours, that is to say of all possible connection” ([2009] 2019, 148–49). In Cavalletti’s reading, because Benjamin’s conception of class offers an idea of solidarity as an “anti-psychological act that dissolves the crowd” ([2009] 2019, 143), a new kind of non-determined individual behaviour becomes conceivable. In this regard, for Cavalletti, Benjamin’s step outside of sociological categories is the greatest power of his portrayal of the relationship between the masses and class formation. For Cavalletti, this is so because Benjamin’s idea of solidarity frees the individual and their behaviour from social determination. In Cavalletti’s fruitful account, Benjamin’s approach to class is a work of dissolving categories of social classification such as race, gender and other kinds of social groups based on common characteristics. However, in my view, this does not need to entail that we need not seek the emancipation of the individual in what constitutes Benjamin’s understanding of formations of collectivity. If Cavalletti is right to point out that Benjamin’s idea of solidarity works by dissolving the “biopolitical ties” which bind individuals into a compact mass ([2009] 2019, 148), there is also a constructive side to this process. As we have seen, in Benjamin’s optic, the act of the proletariat gaining class consciousness changes the structure of its collectivity. As an effect, the proletariat loses its apparent resemblance to a homogenous anonymous mass, which instead appears to be a matter of class perspective. However, this does not mean that Benjamin’s notion of class and the work of solidarity offer an account of emancipation, which would focus on the question of determination or lack thereof of the behaviour of individuals, as Cavalletti seems to suggest. In the following part, I argue that while Benjamin indeed thinks of new forms of collectivity in terms of new relationships between collective organisation and individuals, he does so differently than what Cavalletti suggests. Reading earlier notes on the footnote to thesis VI, I show that the differentiation between first and second technologies offered by Benjamin links to a broader differentiation between two kinds of anthropology, of which one centres around the individual and the other around the collective.

4. What kind of anthropology? Utopias of the individual and of the collective

4.1. Two kinds of technology

Benjamin elaborates on the relationship between the emergence of a new scale of collectivity and the development of technology especially clearly in thesis VI of the 1936 "Work of Art" essay and its footnote on the bodily collective. The link itself is not a new trope in Benjamin's thought: the idea that a new scale of collectivity is linked to certain developments in technology was already present in Benjamin's earliest experiments with the figure of bodily collectivity at the turn of the 1920s. As I argued in Chapter One, Benjamin's formulations of the figure from that period are marked by his reflections on the failed claims to the planetary universality of the body of humankind following World War I. In the "Work of Art" essay, this potential of engaging technology on a collective scale hitherto unseen is no longer linked to World War I but to the utopian potential of the USSR. As we will see in this section, the 1936 version of the "Work of Art" essay and the notes Benjamin wrote in preparation provide good insight into Benjamin's struggle with his growing disillusionment over the revolutionary potential of the Soviet Union on the one hand and his attempts to recognise the importance of not losing sight of this lost potential on the other.

In the footnote to thesis VI, Benjamin expands on the distinction between what he calls the "second technology" (*zweite Technik*) and the "first technology" (*erste Technik*). As he explains in the thesis itself, the new, second kind of technology aims "at an interplay between nature and humanity", in contrast to the "first technology", which "sought to master nature" (Benjamin 2006, 3:107). Benjamin locates the key role of art and, in particular, of film in the pedagogical function of accommodating the new technology. "The primary social function of art today", he writes, "is to rehearse that interplay" between nature and humanity, opened up by second technology (2006, 3:107). Film, Benjamin claims, can teach human beings the necessary "apperceptions and reactions needed to deal with a vast apparatus whose role in their lives is expanding almost daily" (2006, 3:108). It is in this context – of the process of accommodating the new kind of technology and its distinct form of mediation between human beings and nature – that Benjamin returns to the figure of bodily collectivity organised in technology. In the footnote, he comments on the idea that film can help human beings adapt to the new ways in which technology has permeated their lives, introduced in the thesis, and turns to the broader consequences of his attribution of emancipatory, pedagogical

potential to technology. He writes of an inherent link between this process of adaptation to the new kind of technological mediation between human beings and humanity on the one hand and revolutions on the other:

> The aim of revolutions is to accelerate this adaptation. Revolutions are innervations of the collective – or, more precisely, efforts at innervation on the part of the new, historically unique collective which has its organs in the new technology.[93] (2006, 3:124n10)

While in other parts of the "Work of Art" essay film stands at the centre of Benjamin's attention, here the focus is more on a broader notion of technology and the way in which the appropriation of its new form is the goal of revolutions. Benjamin's use of the word "innervation" to describe this adaptation, as he calls it, has attracted much scholarly attention. In her critical evaluation of the revolutionary potential of technology from, Hansen diminishes the role of innervation in Benjamin's theoretical framework. She highlights the fact that Benjamin abandons the notion in the final version of his "Work of Art" essay and that this cannot be attributed solely to Adorno's influence on the corrections made (Hansen 2012, 341). Instead, according to Hansen, this final expulsion of innervation should be read as a conscious theoretical gesture. In her view, Benjamin appears as a theoretician disenchanted by the dangerous masses, or by "the increasing threatening otherness of actual mass publics", as Hansen calls it (Hansen 2012, 342). Hansen's critique of innervation has to do with her critique of Benjamin's idea of bodily collectivity in the 1936 version of the "Work of Art", which I recapitulated in the first section of this chapter. In Hansen's view, Benjamin's notion of innervation represents a "liquidationist agenda" of this version of the essay. In contrast, in his 2018 article "Secret Signals from Another World", Matthew Charles argues against the psychoanalytical reading of innervation followed by Hansen and for interpreting it as a viable account of revolution, alternative to that of the "pulling the brakes of history" from Benjamin's 1940 notes to "On the Concept of History" (Charles 2018, 1). Charles' reading of the emancipatory potential of innervation centres around the notion of what he calls, after Benjamin's notes to the "Work of Art" essay's 1936 version (Benjamin 1991b, 7.1:665) a "different utopian will", whose guiding image is, in his interpretation, that of a learning child and its signals (Charles 2018, 30). The notion of innervation undoubtedly

[93] "Es ist das Ziel der[/]Revolution[en,] diese Anpassung zu beschleunigen. Revolutionen sind Innervationen des Kollektivs: genauer Innervationsversuche des neuen, geschichtlich erstmaligen Kollektivs, das in der zweiten Technik sein[e] Organ[e] hat" (Benjamin 2012, 16:109).

touches on an important aspect of Benjamin's politics of bodily collectivity, especially in regard to its relationship to technology. If I choose not to elaborate on it, then, it is because I want to address Benjamin's approach to technology in the "Work of Art" essay from a different perspective. Thesis VI and its footnote as they open the broader question of the transition between previous forms of technological mediation between human beings and nature and the new technologies of reproduction. They also point to the crucial overlap between the different forms of technological mediation with nature and new forms of collectivity. As I argue in the remaining part of this chapter, the way in which Benjamin portrays his distinction between first and second technology in his notes to the 1936 "Work of Art" suggests that he did not think of the two in terms of a technological progression, as Hansen's "liquidationist" reading suggests. In what follows I aim to show that the crux of Benjamin's political considerations behind the distinction lies in the prioritisation this enables him to propose in relation to the different levels of the organisation of social relations.

4.2. Utopias of the first and the second nature. Hedonism of Fourier and Sade, and the socio-technological utopia of the USSR

In his notes to the 1936 "Work of Art's" essay written in December 1935 (published under the tentative title "A Different Utopian Will" in the English edition of *Selected Writings, 1935-1938*), Benjamin portrays the broader conceptual framework behind his idea of two technologies presented in thesis VI and its footnote. Specifically, "A Different Utopian Will" sheds on Benjamin's conception of revolution by contextualising the relationship of both the first and the second technologies to revolutions with an outlook on the different kinds of utopian will which can be voiced in Reiterating what was to make it to the 1936 version of the "Work of Art" essay as its footnote on revolutions as innervations of the collective, Benjamin explains that insofar as revolutions are "attempts to dominate the second nature" rather than the first, they relate to the "mastery of elemental social forces [that] has become a *prerequisite* for a higher technical mastery of elemental natural forces" (2006, 3: 135). The liquidation of first into second technology in revolution takes a form of appropriation of the new, inorganic nature as the first nature of revolution. This is in line with the footnote to thesis VI, where Benjamin writes of the second technology as "a system in which the mastering of elementary social forces is a precondition for playing with natural forces" (2006, 3:124n10). Benjamin goes on to paint a powerful image of humankind reaching for

revolutionary goals like a child reaches for the moon when it mistakes it for a ball: as if it was real and within its reach:

> Just as a child who has learned to grasp stretches out its hand for the moon as it would for a ball, so humanity, in its efforts at innervation, sets its sights as much on currently utopian goals as on goals within reach. (Benjamin 2006, 3:124n10).[94]

For Benjamin, the crux of revolutionary action (as the previous part of this chapter showed, Benjamin equates revolutions attempts at innervation of the new body of humankind) is that it sets its sight "as much on currently utopian goals as on goals within reach" (2006, 3:124n10). The footnote itself focuses on the process of adapting this second technology through child-like playful disposition it opens towards nature. Second technology, Benjamin writes, "aims at liberating human beings from drudgery, the individual suddenly sees his scope for play, his field of action [*Spielraum*], immeasurably expanded" (2006, 3:124n10). For Benjamin, the emancipatory effect of this playful potential of technology is directly related to an anthropological tension between collection of individual subjects and a collective subject. The playful subject, which reaches towards goals far and near is a collective one: humankind (*Menschheit*). But its very emergence changes something in the way in which individual subjects can relate to their desires. "For the more the collective makes the second technology its own", Benjamin writes, "the more keenly individuals belonging to the collective feel how little they have received of what was due them under the dominion of the first technology" (2006, 3:124n10). In other words, the more the new scale of collectivity appropriates the tools that bind it together, the more the individuals can see that a different social order is possible. The notes from December 1935 provide an insight into a more detailed insight into that tension which Benjamin introduces in the image of a child reaching for the moon as if it were a ball: that between the "currently utopian goals" and those "within reach" (2006, 3: 135, repeated in 2006, 3:124n10). In a draft version of what would become the footnote on revolutions as innervations of the collective the 1936 "Work of Art" essay, Benjamin follows the image of a child at play with a statement that "a twofold utopian will asserts itself in revolutions" (2006, 3: 135). This dual utopian framework has to do with a tension Benjamin locates in how revolutions operate on both the

[94] "Wie nun ein Kind, wenn es greifen lernt, die Hand so gut nach dem Mond ausstreckt wie nach einem Ball, so faßt [auch] die Menschheit in ihren Innervationsversuchen, ~~welche die Revolutionen sind~~, neben den greifbaren solche Ziele ins Auge, die [welche] vorerst utopisch sind" (Benjamin 2012, 16:151).

collective level of reaching towards social-technological utopias and their relationship to the utopias of individual happiness. To this end, Benjamin introduces a distinction between utopias of the "first nature" and those of the "second nature".[95] He then defines the problems linked to the latter as "the social and technological ones", while those attributed to first nature are described as problems of "love and death" (Benjamin 2006, 3:134):

> The problems of the second nature, the social and technological ones, must be very close to resolution before those of the first–love and death–can be distinguished even in outline.[96] (2006, 3:134)

What follows in Benjamin's reflections on the problems of the first and second nature shows that the "social and technological" problems are simultaneously problems of a different level of the organisation of social relations. Elaborating on the difference between the two utopias, Benjamin gives two examples. On the one hand, he mentions Charles Fourier and Marquis de Sade as thinkers who focus on the utopia of the first nature, while on the other hand, he refers to the example of the USSR as a prioritisation of the utopia of the second nature. Commenting on the necessity to address the problems of the second kind of utopia before those of the first, Benjamin writes:

> To be sure, some of the most far-sighted minds of the bourgeois revolution refused to acknowledge this. Sade and Fourier envision the direct realization of hedonistic life. By contrast, this aspect of utopia is a second-order priority in Russia.[97] (2006, 3:134)

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[95] In Leslie's view, Benjamin "uses the term 'second nature' similarly [to Lukács], in order to counter the assumption that the cosmos is simply natural and static, non-social, non-historical. 'Second nature', in contrast, is technological, artificial, cultural, but, through use, it becomes part of the new nature, part of the given" (Leslie [2000] 2015, 91). Duy Lap Nguyen, in contrast, argues that Benjamin's approach to second nature differs from Lukács. In his reading, mediated through Adorno, Lukács' second nature is the realm of alienation and this alienation can be "overcome through allegory, which deciphers the human significance in 'rotted interiorities' [a quotation from Adorno's *Minima Moralia*] that have been petrified in this second nature" (Nguyen 2022, 102). Benjamin, on the contrary, sees allegory not as a "reified meaning, but a petrified landscape that is devoid of human significance, a thesis which Lukács will characterize as an uncritical affirmation of commodity fetishism itself" (2022, 102). Leslie's and Nguyen's disparate readings of Benjamin's relationship to Lukács' concept stem from the disparate sources on which they base their interpretation – the "Work of Art" essay in Leslie's case and the "Origin of the German Trauerspiel" in Nguyen's – and are, in this regard, a reflection of Benjamin's changing approach to fetishism.

[96] "Die Probleme der zweiten Natur, die gesellschaftlichen und technischen, müssen ihrer Lösung sehr nahe sein, ehe die der ersten - Liebe und Tod - ihre Umrisse ahnen lassen" (Benjamin 1991g, VII:665–66).

[97] "Freilich wollten das einige gerade unter den weitestblikkenden [*sic*] Geistern der bürgerlichen Revolution nicht wahrhaben. Sade und Fourier fassen die unmittelbare Verwirklichung des menschlichen Freudenlebens ins Auge. Demgegenüber sieht man in Rußland diese Seite der Utopie zurücktreten" (Benjamin 1991g, VII:666).

That Benjamin evokes Fourier and Sade as examples of utopian thinkers who failed to see the need for prioritising the utopia of the second nature over the first tells us something about Benjamin's understanding of the anthropological difference behind the two types of utopias. Insofar as Benjamin calls the principle linking Fourier's and Sade's utopias "the direct realization of hedonistic life" (Benjamin 2006, 3:134), both can be seen as utopias, in which social organisation is directly linked to the individual experience of pleasure. After all, Fourier's *phalansteries* were centred around the organisation of labour according to human passions, whose different distribution among human beings meant that the division of labour could follow along individual differences. In this regard, Fourier's utopia was structured around a specific anthropology, whose starting point was the possibility of typifying the differences between individual human beings both productively and according to the principle of pleasure. In a fragment added to the *Arcades Project*'s convolute on Fourier between June 1935 and December 1937, Benjamin comments on the connection he sees between Fourier and Sade.[98] "The kinship between Fourier and Sade", he writes, "resides in the constructive moment that is proper to all sadism" (2002, 638). As he elaborates on the common element shared by the two thinkers, Benjamin explains:

> The sadist, in his experiments, could chance on a partner who longs for just those punishments and humiliations which his tormentor inflicts. All at once, he could be standing in the midst of one of those harmonies sought after by the Fourierist utopia.[99] (2002, 639)

In Benjamin's comparison of Fourier and Sade, both figures stand for a kind of utopia organised around the (best in the case of Fourier and fullest in Sade's) fulfilment of an individual's desires and inclinations.[100] In other words, these are utopias which oppose an understanding of politics based on moral ideas of how to better human beings. However, the notes to the 1936 version of the "Work of Art" essay offer a more complicated outlook on the anthropological base of emancipatory politics from the 1929 "Surrealism", where the

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[98] According to the editors of *Selected Writings,* Benjamin wrote the notes entitled "A Different Utopian Will" between late December 1935 and the beginning of February 1936 (Benjamin 2006, 3:135). Since the fragment in "Convolute W" quoted above stems from the second phase of Benjamin's work on the *Arcades Project* (December 1935-July 1937) and is the only fragment directly comparing Sade and Fourier, it is possible to assume that Benjamin wrote it at a similar time when he did "A Different Utopian Will".

[99] "Der Sadist könnte bei seinen Versuchen auf einen Partner stoßen, der genau diejenigen Demütigungen und Schmerzen ersehnt, die sein Peiniger ihm auferlegt. Mit einem Schlage stünde er mitten in einer der Harmonien, denen die Utopie Fouriers nachgeht" (Benjamin 1991c, V:786).

[100] For more on Benjamin's approach to Sade and Fourier see: Klossowski [1969] 2014; Hollington 1994; Miller 2022, 169–94.

"organisation of pessimism" and the "cult of evil" were central to what Benjamin proposed. In "A Different Utopian Will", he criticises Fourier and Sade for failing to acknowledge the need to think social utopias not only on the level of individual happiness and fulfilment but also on the level of organising hopes and dreams that are collective in their nature. As a response to this shortcoming, Benjamin proposes that the second kind of utopian thinking takes place on a different scale of planning collective existence. This other utopianism, for Benjamin, is linked to communism: the second kind of utopia, in his account, has been given priority in the USSR. He gives a practical account of what he means by this. Instead of focusing on hedonistic political goals, in Russia:

> the planning of collective existence is being combined with technical planning on a comprehensive, planetary scale. (It is no accident that forays into the Arctic and the stratosphere were among the first great acts of the pacified Soviet Union).[101] (Benjamin 2006, 3:134)

"A Different Utopian Will" reveals an important link between Benjamin's considerations on the revolutionary shift between first and second technology and thinking collective emancipation on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other. In the example of the Soviet Union's scale of collective, technological planning that Benjamin sees an affinity with his conception of the second technology as a form of relationship between human beings and nature that takes it to a new level, guided by play rather than dominion and by a new scale of collectivity. Yet how are we to read Benjamin's remarks that the aspect of utopia, which he links to the "direct realisation of hedonistic life" is "a second-order priority" (2006, 3:134) in the Soviet Union considering their direct historical index? It is surprising that, writing in 1935, Benjamin presents such an optimistic account of the USSR's collective technological endeavours, with the Soviet famine of 1930-33 having just ravaged the major grain-producing parts of the USSR and the news of Gulag labour camps spreading over Europe. Perhaps Benjamin himself thought it to be an unfortunate formulation. The reflections formulated in "A Different Utopian Will" never made it to the 1936 version of the "Work of Art" essay in this form and the corresponding fragments which did – thesis VI and the accompanying footnote – omit the conception of two utopias entirely. It is possible to

[101] "Demgegenüber sieht man in Rußland diese Seite der Utopie zurücktreten. Dafür verbindet die Planung des Kollektivdaseins sich mit einer technischen Planung in umfassendem planetarischen Maßstab[)]. (Nicht zufällig gehören Streifzüge in die Arktis und in die Stratosphäre zu den ersten Großtaten der befriedeten Sowjetunion)" (Benjamin 1991g, VII:666).

interpret this omission as an implicit criticism of the political developments in the USSR. However, even within "A Different Utopian Will", there is grounds enough for a favourable interpretation of Benjamin's recourse to Soviet Union beyond its historical developments in the 1930s. The reading I propose along these lines is that, for Benjamin, the USSR is an example of an important type of a historically specific utopian project which attempts to harness the emerging new scale of human collectivity rather than its realisation. It is symptomatic that when he places the Soviet Union in the vanguard of revolutionary utopian will in "A Different Utopian Will", Benjamin does not refer to any key economic ideas or infrastructural changes – neither those introduced in the Soviet Union in the 1930s such as the collectivisation of agriculture, nor any of the earlier attempts at reorganising property relations. Instead, he mentions the early Soviet "forays into the Arctic and the stratosphere" and comments that it "is no accident" that these "were among the first great acts of the pacified Soviet Union" (Benjamin 2006, 3:134). From today's perspective of the accelerating and palpable climate change, such a techno-optimistic idea of endless expansion and exploration feels ill-advised. But Benjamin clearly sees the destructive potential in the technological utopia of reaching for the stars, too. At the end of the fragment of "A Different Utopian Will" devoted to the difference between the two utopias, he explains how his dual framework works against the fascist ideology of "blood and soil". He writes:

> If, in this context, one thinks of the slogan "blood and soil," fascism can be seen as trying to block at *one* stroke the way to *both* utopias. "Blood" runs counter to the utopia of the first nature, which strives to make its medicine a playground for all microbes. "Soil" goes against the utopia of the second nature, which for fascism is realized only by the type of man who ascends into the stratosphere in order to drop bombs.[102] (2006, 3:134)

First introduced in Oswald Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes* in 1923, the figure of a national community bound together by eternal links of blood and soil was made into a flagship phrase of National Socialism with the publication of widely popular *New Nobility from Blood and Soil* in 1930 by Richard Walther Darré, the Reich Minister for Food and Agriculture. Playing on the crooked resemblance of the fascist concept of eternal links of a

[102] "Gewährt man in diesem Zusammenhang der Parole 'Blut und Boden' ein Ohr, so steht mit *einem* Schlag der Faschismus da, wie er *beiden* Utopien den Weg zuverlegen sucht. 'Blut' – das geht wider die Utopie der ersten Natur, die seine Medizin allen Mikroben zum Tummelplatz geben will. 'Boden' – das geht wider die Utopie der zweiten Natur, deren Realisierung ein Vorrecht desjenigen Typus von Mensch sein soll, der in die Stratosphäre aufsteigt, um Bomben von dort herabzuwerfen" (Benjamin 1991g, VII:666).

nation to land on the one hand and the planetary figure of humankind as a collectivity of people living on earth on the other, Benjamin contrasts the relationship between the "technical planning on a comprehensive, planetary scale" (Benjamin 2006, 3: 135) he finds in early Soviet explorations of the stratosphere with the kind of technological planning on a national and international level propelled by war and destruction. In my view, the key difference between the destructive and what could be called the utopian approach to technology which Benjamin sketches here has to do with the scale of collectivity at stake. If technological development which has collective goals at heart can and has been a harbinger of destruction, this depends on the form of collectivity it aims to serve. The "type of man who ascends into the stratosphere in order to drop bombs" does not do so because of their personal need to drop bombs but because of a collective interest – national, religious, or otherwise – they aim to carry out. It is no coincidence that Benjamin's considerations on the two utopias so easily transform into a reflection on technology and its relationship to forms of collectivity. There is an overlap between Benjamin's conception of the utopia of the second nature – the "technological, social utopia", as he describes it in the first fragment of "A Different Utopian Will" – and his notion of second technology as he develops it throughout the 1936 version of the "Work of Art" essay. When Benjamin describes the utopias of the second nature as "those relating to society and technology" this is so in direct affinity with the definition of second technology which he characterizes as the one "asserts its claims vis-á-vis society" (2006, 3:124n10) in the footnote to "Work of Art"'s thesis VI.

If Benjamin's critique of the fascist concept of a land-bound community is clear, the way in which his dual framework of utopian will counters the part of the fascist slogan which entails a community linked by blood is less so. This has to do with Benjamin's dialectical understanding of the potential implications of the transition from first to second technology in terms of the emancipatory claims that emerge during this process. If in "A Different Utopian Will" Benjamin claims that the utopias of the first nature have to do with anthropological affairs such as love and death, the footnote to thesis VI states that these are questions which "had been buried by the first technology" (2006, 3:124n10). Nevertheless, even though there is a clear ontological distinction between the two, Benjamin's concepts of the utopias of the first nature and that of the first technology are linked in a crucial way. In the 1936 "Work of Art"'s thesis VI, Benjamin uses the phrase "questions affecting the individual–questions of love and death" to describe the claim of the "individual liberated by the liquidation of the first technology" (2006, 3:124n10). Compare this to the fragment from "A Different Utopian Will", where Benjamin writes that "[t]he problems of the second nature, the social and

technological ones, must be very close to resolution before those of the first-love and death-can be distinguished even in outline" (Benjamin 2006, 3: 135).

The question, then, is what is liquidated in the appropriation of the second technology by humankind. The answer, in my view, can be found in the kind of utopias of the first nature which Benjamin considers to be dialectically emancipated in the process. Benjamin describes the utopias of the first nature as utopias of "organic nature" and states that they relate "primarily [to] the bodily organism of individual human beings" (2006, 3: 135). It is in relation to this bodily understanding of the first nature that Benjamin's conception that the goal of revolutions is to accelerate the "liquidation of the first technology" in how, for Benjamin, it effects in the emergence of the new body of humankind (2006, 3: 135). Understood in their relationship to human bodily constitution, love and death, are both processes which exceed a hygienic understanding of bodily integrity. Be it by exchanging bodily fluids or dissolving the earthly body, these "utopias of the first nature" strive "to make [their] medicine playground for all microbes" (2006, 3: 134). In contrast, the fascist idea of blood as what binds people together in family and nation images bodily collectivity as guided by purity and sameness. In this regard, the key difference between Benjamin's framework of the two utopias and the fascist idea of the "blood and soil" lies not only in how the two utopias play on the bodily and kinship differently, but also in the temporal relationship between the two.

In a gesture which takes the differentiation between the two kinds of technologies out of a progressive framework which could be read from the "first" versus "second" nomenclature, Benjamin complicates the temporal relationship between the two utopias to which these technologies are linked. While the utopias of the second nature appear as a consequence of a certain tendency in human development, Benjamin does not evaluate them as in any way more developed. The key phrase lies in how Benjamin describes the kind of development within which utopias based on the second nature appear. Benjamin writes:

> The more widely the development of humanity ramifies [Je weiter die Entwicklung der Menschheit ausgreift], the more openly [offenkundiger] utopias based on the first nature (and

especially the human body [Leib]) will give place to those relating to society and technology.[103] (2006, 3:134)

If the introduction of utopias "relating to society and technology" into the social imagery is linked to technological development, this is not because the teleological progress of technology generates this change. Instead, utopias of the second nature emerge from what Benjamin puts in terms of a widening of humankind's development. In other words, utopias of the second nature are a consequence of the broadening of the anthropological framework of humankind. It is important to read Benjamin's description of this process as the ramification of "the development of humankind" in relation to his early writings on the body from the early 1920s. In a reiteration of some of his ideas developed in his early philosophy of the body as *Leib*, Benjamin restates the dynamic of self-dissolution which he linked to *Leib*'s tendency to extend towards the body of humankind in the 1922-23 "Outline". The key affinity to this conception of the historical development of the material human collectivity and "A Different Utopian Will" lies in the way in which Benjamin describes the transition between utopias of the first and those of the second nature. Utopias of the second nature, "those relating to society and technology", he writes, will only be able to arrive fully when utopias of the first nature "will give place" to them. Since utopias of the first nature are those based on the human body as *Leib*, utopias of the second nature can only arrive with the dissolution of *Leib* into the body of humankind. The point I make here regards more than an abstract conceptual similarity. In my view, Benjamin's "A Different Utopian Will" offers an account of two kinds of utopias as related to two disparate forms of anthropology: one centred around the individual, the other around the collective. The utopias based on the first nature (Benjamin writes of the human body as its medium) relate to individual desires and needs. The ones based on the second nature relate to a collective organisation of social relations. While love and death – the problems which Benjamin links to the first nature – can be seen as universal, they are problems which relate to each and every human being as individuals. Yet this does not mean that Benjamin ever resolves the tension between the two anthropologies in an image of a historical ascension of an individual body of humankind, as he did in the 1922-23 "Outline". Elaborating on how the appropriation of the second technology by the humankind can be liberating for individuals in the footnote to thesis VI,

[103] "Je weiter die Entwicklung der Menschheit ausgreift, desto offenkundiger werden die die erste Natur (und zumal den menschlichen Leib) betreffenden Utopien zugunsten der die Gesellschaft und die Technik angehenden zurücktreten" (Benjamin 1991g, VII:665).

Benjamin shows especially clearly how the non-progressive relationship between first and second technology translates into a complex dialectic of individual and collective emancipation:

> it is the individual liberated by the liquidation of the first technology who stakes his claim. No sooner has the second technology secured its initial revolutionary gains than vital questions affecting the individual-questions of love and death which had been buried by the first technology-once again press for solutions.[104] (Benjamin 2006, 3:124n10)

For Benjamin, the primacy of utopias of the second nature – of the social and technological kind – is the primacy in relation to the order of action rather than priority of its aims. As the next section of this chapter will elaborate, to read Benjamin's positive account of technology in the "Work of Art" essay solely through his distinction between first and second technology and without recourse to his idea of two utopias would mean to overlook the core of his politics at the time. Although on the grounds of the relationship between the 1936 footnote to thesis VI and the notes published posthumously as "A Different Utopian Will" it could be tempting to argue that Benjamin corrected his faith in the utopian potential of the USSR by the time he constructed the 1936 version of the "Work of Art" essay, the following part of this chapter will show that he maintained a complicated understanding of revolution as planetary reorganisation of collective life. With questions about the relationship between individual happiness and collective emancipation at their centre, Benjamin's reflections on bodily collective politics and revolution turn, time and again, to the problem of the anthropological basis on which to envision and enact utopias.

4.3. Gide and the apology of neediness

Just as he did at the end of the 1920s in the "Surrealism" essay, in the mid-1930s Benjamin turns his gaze to the potential of thinking the organisation of politics around poverty. In another essay from the time, whose subject closely follows Benjamin's focus on the question of fascist aesthetics in the "Work of Art", we can find an objection to a politics based on the utopia of abundance. While working on the third version of the "Work of Art" essay,

[104] "Es ist, mit andern Worten der durch die Liquidation der ersten Technik emanzipierte Einzelmensch, welcher seine Forderungen anmeldet. Die zweite Technik hat nicht sobald ihre frühesten Errungenschaften gesichert, als die durch die erste verschütteten Lebensfragen des Individuums: Liebe und Tod von neuem auf Lösung drängen" (Benjamin 2012, 16:151-2).

Benjamin wrote, on commission by Brecht, an essay entitled "Letter from Paris. André Gide and his Adversaries" (hereafter "Letter from Paris"). The essay was published in November 1936 in *Das Wort* – an organ of the Popular Front based in Moscow, of which Brecht was the main editor.[105] In the essay, Benjamin juxtaposed Gide's writings with an emblematic, in his view, example of fascist aesthetics in France: Thierry Maulnier's work. Maulnier was a popular right-wing French literary critic. Together with Jean-Pierre Maxence and Robert Francis he authored a manifesto dedicated to the far-right protesters killed during the events of the 1934 *six février*, which aimed to provide a theoretical framework for the far-right corporatist movements (Rubenstein 1990, 125). While most of Benjamin's essay is dedicated to an exposition and critique of Maulnier's thought, Benjamin's analysis of Gide focuses on one aspect of his writings in particular: what he calls an "apology of neediness" (*Apologie der Bedürftigkeit*).

> Gide found the most diverse forms for the apology of neediness. They all basically coincide with the unfolding of that neediness [*Bedürftigkeit*] which the young Marx (the author of 'The Holy Family') saw as the task of society to make visible in an undisguised way; they all appear to Gide as varieties of the need that man has for man.[106] (Benjamin 1991f, III:484, my translation)

Benjamin takes the phrase "apology of neediness" from the newly published volume of Gide's diaries where, as Benjamin notes, "several notes (…) reveal a more hidden but not less important continuity in Gide's development" – a continuity even comparable with his lifelong engagement with making "the cause of the individual his own; a matter which he recognized as having its appointed advocate today in communism" (1991f, III:483).[107] In Benjamin's account, the thread of an apology of neediness has found its expression in the latest work by Gide, the 1935 *Les Nouvelles Nourritures Terrestres* (translated as *Later*

[105] The publication of this text had far-reaching consequences for Benjamin's life. According to Chryssoula Kambas, it was one of the likely reasons why he was unable to publish the "Work of Art" essay in *Das Wort* in spite of Brecht's fervent support. As Kambas notes, the letter was published shortly before the titular André Gide published his *Retour de l'URRS* which turned the Communist officials against him and rendered him a public enemy of the Popular Front (Kambas 1983, 172-73n50). It also led to Benjamin's expatriation in May 1939 shortly after the Gestapo read Benjamin's text (Eiland and Jennings 2014, 474, 626).
[106] "Gide hat für die Apologie der Bedürftigkeit die verschiedensten Formen gefunden. Sie alle fallen im Grunde mit der Entfaltung jener Bedürftigkeit zusammen, die unverstellt sichtbar zu machen dem jungen Marx (dem Verfasser der »Heiligen Familie«) als die Aufgabe der Gesellschaft erschienen ist; sie alle erscheinen Gide als Spielarten des Bedürfnisses, das der Mensch nach dem Menschen hat" (Benjamin 1991f, III:484).
[107] Benjamin is probably referring here to Gide's address at the First International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture in June 1935 in Paris, which he and Brecht attended with a great deal of scepticism, but where Gide's presence made an impression on Benjamin (cf. letter to Alfred Cohen from July 18, 1935 – Benjamin [1978] 2012, 493). There Gide's opening speech called for a "Communist individualism" as a response to Socialist Realism (cf. Shattuck 2000, 147).

Fruits of the Earth). As an example, he quotes a passage, where Gide addresses the issue of happiness, private possession, and communism. He writes, and Benjamin quotes a fragment of this (in what seems to be his own translation in German, here quoted from the English translation of Gide's work):

> I feel an aversion to every possession that is exclusive; my happiness is made of giving, and I shall not be left with much in hand for death to rob me of. The most I shall be deprived of are those many natural riches which cannot be appropriated and which are common to all. Of those I have taken my fill. As for the rest, I prefer the ordinary of a roadside inn to the best served table, the public gardens to the finest park enclosed by walls, and the book I am not afraid to take out with me on a walk to the rarest edition. And if I had to be alone to look at a picture, the finer it was the more my pleasure would be outweighed by my sadness. My happiness is to increase other people's. To be happy myself I need the happiness of all. (Gide [1935] 2014, 198)

Gide's words come as a comment on a paradoxical conflict of values he sees in communism's relationship to happiness: the problem of collectivisation of private property. On the one hand, he expresses his devotion to the idea of communism from which, he writes, even "[a]ll the arguments of my reason will not hold me back" ([1935] 2014, 198). On the other hand, the rational arguments he mentions regard the idea that "all happiness seems to me hateful which is obtained only at the expense of others and by possession of which others are deprived" ([1935] 2014, 198). "What seems to me mistaken" – he writes – "is to demand that a man who has possessions shall distribute them" and the expectation that he would "willingly resign the possessions to which his whole soul is attached" ([1935] 2014, 198). The fragment which Benjamin quotes comes as a surprising twist to Gide's argument. While he considers the collectivisation of private property to be unjust, he points to how this is so only under the alienated social relations in capitalism, in which the individual's happiness is attached to objects rather than other human beings. The striking picture of what happiness means for Gide as happiness "made of giving" is a notion of individual well-being inherently intertwined with that of others. This is the gist of Benjamin's summary of Gide's position quoted above, as finding "diverse forms for the apology of neediness", all of which "appear to Gide as varieties of the need that man has for man" (Benjamin 1991f, III:484). The key to understanding the anthropology behind what Benjamin calls Gide's "apology of neediness" is that the "need that man has for man" is not simply linked to necessity – the need of every individual for social relations to survive – but to happiness. Gide's concept of happiness, which he elucidates with many examples in the long quote above, is that it is highest when it

is sharable. This is not to say that the stakes in Gide's apology of neediness are reduceable to the human need to share their emotions and experiences with others. Rather, Gide suggests a notion of happiness, which is determined by the state of the collective: "To be happy myself I need the happiness of all" (Gide [1935] 2014, 198).

In the context of his 1936 reading of Gide, Benjamin's framework of two utopias described in "A Different Utopian Will" appears much more complex than it initially seemed. The key lies in the relationship between Benjamin's differentiation between first and second technology to the framework of the utopias of first and second nature. The first technology is linked to the questions of "love and death" (Benjamin 2006, 3:134) and therefore to the horizon of the universal human being rather than the collective horizon of humankind. The questions of love and death are, after all, questions which befall each and every human being. But with the notion of second technology, Benjamin introduces a different horizon of universality: of questions which relate to all human beings together rather than to each and every one. This, I argue, is not in itself a solely ontological or terminological difference. With the differentiation between the first and second technologies as two different horizons of utopian thinking, Benjamin makes a historically specific point on the kind of horizon that should guide emancipatory politics of his time. Namely, I argue, Benjamin points out that positing structural changes to social relations – such as a reorganisation of relations of production or property rights – do not foreclose addressing the more affective and individual needs and desires. On the contrary, in order to address the basic human striving for happiness and well-being, Benjamin suggests in the notes to the footnote on the collective of humankind, we first need to tackle social organisation on a collective level. Individual well-being rests on the collective struggle, but it is not dissolved in it.

Benjamin's prioritisation of the second order of utopia over the first re-enters the same problem he addressed in the "Surrealism" essay: that of the relationship between morality, human needs and revolutionary politics.[108] Yet there is a key difference in how Benjamin approaches it. In 1929 the working opposition was that between the spontaneous organisation of pessimism and an anti-moral understanding of how politics should address human needs

[108] Indeed, the Surrealists themselves considered Sade to be a precursor of their movement. In the 1924 first *Manifesto of Surrealism*, André Breton wrote of Sade as a "Surrealist in sadism" (Breton 1972, 26). In the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1929), he praised Sade for the "impeccable integrity of Sade's life and thought" as well as his "desire for moral and social independence" (1972, 186). Benjamin could have been reminded of Sade's precursory role for surrealism at the Congress of Writers in June 1935, where Breton called for reading Rimbaud outside of the political key of his relationship to the Paris Commune and went on to list Sade as an example of a work "full of sap" which should be guarded "against al falsifications from the right or from the left" (1972, 240).

and desires on the one hand and party organisation on the other. In contrast, in the 1936 version of the "Work of Art" essay, the organisation of a revolutionary subject defined in terms of a bodily collective has no links to party politics. Instead, Benjamin opposes the utopia of social organisation focused on individual freedom and happiness to the utopia of social organisation which centres around a different, collective subject: humankind. The theoretical separation of two technologies is followed, as I showed, by an implied separation of an anthropology based on the figure of a universal but individual human being on the one hand and an anthropology pertaining to the collective aspect of human interconnectedness. This serves Benjamin in two regards. Firstly, it enables him to posit the idea of the development of humankind in non-progressive terms. That is, it enables him to highlight the link between new scales of collectivity and technological development and, at the same time, to refrain from evaluating this development as progress. Secondly, the juxtaposition of two technologies as simultaneous rather than following in subsequent order serves to highlight the need for political prioritisation of one over the other, without deeming any of them less pressing or important. In other words, what Benjamin's differentiation between two technologies manages to do is to separate individual needs and desires from the question of political organisation while maintaining that the latter is needed exactly for the purpose of addressing the former. In this way, Benjamin prioritises social organisation on the level of collective over individual affairs without deeming the needs and desires of individuals to be an unworthy political goal – just a goal which can be addressed in the second order.

Conclusion

In the previous chapters, I established Benjamin's interest in the relationship between different forms of collectivity and the universal bodily constitution of human beings at the turn of the 1920s and at the turn of the 1930s. This chapter turned to the way he approached this subject in the 1936 version of the "Work of Art" essay. I showed that, differently than in "Surrealism", Benjamin's use of the figure of bodily collectivity in the 1936 essay linked it to the figure of humankind. This time, however, what the figure of humankind revealed was not so much a form of totality consisting of humans, nature, and technology mediating between the two, as it had been in the "Outline" and in "To the Planetarium". Instead, Benjamin's footnote to thesis VI of the "Work of Art" essay elaborated on the bodily collective as humankind in relationship to first and second technology. As a result, the figure of the bodily collective and its relationship to other forms of collectivity discussed in the previous chapters,

like the proletariat and humankind, addressed the questions of revolutionary subjectivity and its organisation with important shifts in comparison to the way Benjamin's earlier texts approached them. Over the course of this chapter, I identified two primary planes, on which this took place.

Firstly, I analysed the way in which Benjamin's reflections on the emergence of the masses affected his take on the relationship between forms of collectivity and the historical development of human sensibility. In contrast to the "Surrealism" essay, Benjamin's attention in the "Work of Art" focused on the formation and forms of mass political subjects with only a negative recourse to party politics (the organisation of masses by fascists). As we have seen in Chapter Two, in "Surrealism" Benjamin had looked to strike a balance between spontaneous organisation of mass movement on the one hand and party discipline on the other. In turn, the "Work of Art" essay's reliance on an understanding of bodily collectivity in terms of humankind meant that the collectivity connoted by the bodily collective with "organs in the new technology" (Benjamin 2006, 3:124n10) was not synonymous with the proletariat. With the footnote to thesis XII, Benjamin elaborated on his hitherto undeveloped ideas on the relationship between class formation and active struggle in parallel to the figure of bodily collective.

Secondly, the "Work of Art" essay brought the question of technology to the foreground of Benjamin's reflections on the historicity of human sensibility and its relationship to different forms of collectivity. As I argued towards the end of the chapter, the new differentiation in Benjamin's thinking – between first and second technology – was linked to a new idea of dual anthropology. In the final sections of this chapter, I showed the complex relationship between the individual and the collective behind Benjamin's differentiation of the first and second technology. In doing so, I challenged Hansen's idea that his positive approach to technology in the "Work of Art" boils down to a structural affinity he finds between a progressive form of the masses and technological reproduction (Hansen 2012, 86).

Chapter Four: Bodily Collectivity and Female Emancipation. On Reorganisation of Gender Relations and the Universal Subjectivity of Humankind in "Convolute p"

Introduction

This chapter analyses Benjamin's approach to the relationship between the human body, collectivity, and emancipation towards the end of the 1930s through the perspective of a new branch of sources he includes in his conception of the tradition of anthropological materialism. Focusing on the sources gathered in the *Arcades Project* "Convolute p" entitled "Anthropological Materialism. History of Sects", I show how Benjamin aligns his idea of anthropological materialism with Claire Démar's specific position on the abolition of marriage and biological motherhood. I argue that, by giving Démar the primary voice over the Saint Simonian pope Barthelemy Prosper Enfantin, Benjamin takes an implicit stance in the internal debate among the Saint Simonians on the nature of female emancipation. The main argument of this chapter is that through his research into the Saint Simonian debates on marriage and female emancipation, and the divine androgyne, Benjamin addresses the figure of bodily collectivity from a new perspective, that of gender relations.

The point of departure for my analysis is the existing research, which points out that the figure of the human body, explored by Benjamin in connection to his work on the Baudelaire in the second half of the 1930s, is distinctly gendered. In the first part, I present the key sources for my analysis and argue that it is through this gendered body that we should analyse Benjamin's late understanding of anthropological materialism.

The second part of this chapter follows the secondary literature on the subject to point out two key figures of the female body in Benjamin's writings at the time: the sex worker and the androgynous lesbian heroine in Baudelaire. In the case of the sex worker, the relationship between the human body and collectivity can be said to follow along the axis of sociological allegory: the sex worker stands for all the workers in that she represents the commodification of the labouring body. The lesbian heroine could be, and often is, seen in similar terms – as a metonymical figure symbolising the changing position of women on the labour market and in

the family structure. However, the figure of the androgyne, as we will see in the later parts of this chapter, is itself a figure of bodily collectivity, based on the unity of a couple rather than a non-gendered individual.

The second part of this chapter shows how, in "Convolute p", Benjamin sketches out the bodily character of collectivity in terms of the links between gendered division of labour, binary understanding of sexes, social change and property relations. I first develop an analysis of Démar's specific position within the Saint Simonian movement and point out what Benjamin's alignment of anthropological materialism with her voice, in this case, means for the direction in which he develops this concept. Secondly, I inspect the way in which the figure of the divine androgyne appears in "Convolute p". I point out that Benjamin's commentary on the sources he presents, as well as the choice of those sources, suggest that there is a specific aspect of the concept of the androgyne, which drew his attention to the figure.

In the third part of this chapter, I turn to an analysis of gender relations in Claire Démar's radical critique of patriarchal structures on the one hand and the Saint-Simonian figure of the divine androgyne as it appears in "Convolute p" on the other. Unlike her contemporaries, Démar advocated for free love and sexual autonomy, envisioning a society where women's roles were no longer confined by biological determinism. Furthermore, I analyse how Benjamin's portrayal of the divine androgyne highlights it as a figure of bodily collectivity. I point out that Benjamin's understanding of anthropological materialist bodily collectivity as he finds it in these sources should be read within the tension which arises from his juxtaposition of Démar's critique of marriage with the androgyne as a universal human family. Finally, the last section of the chapter and the conclusion bring together the emerged image of bodily collectivity and the problems which Benjamin addresses with it in the "Convolute p" and compare this with Benjamin's previous formulations of this figure, as analysed in the previous chapters of this thesis.

1. Benjamin's approach to bodily collectivity in the late 1930s and the lens of gender

1.1. Anthropological materialism and the female body

From December 1937 to 1939, Benjamin worked on a book on Charles Baudelaire – a project commissioned to him by the Institute for Social Research as a part of his ongoing stipend

funding his life in Paris (Eiland and Jennings 2014, 532–33). The 1938 text "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" emerged from Benjamin's work on the chapter of the *Arcades Project* on Baudelaire. One of its aims was to resolve the doubts Adorno and Horkheimer had towards the project after having read the first exposé that Benjamin wrote in 1935. On August 2, 1935, in what is called the *Hornberger Brief*, Adorno expressed a stark critique of the exposé, arguing in particular against Benjamin's conception of the collective consciousness. He argued that, as it stood in the part of the 1935 exposé to the *Arcades Project* focusing on Baudelaire, the notion of dialectical image transposed "as 'dream' into consciousness" meant that the idea had "forfeited that objective liberating power that could legitimize it materialistically" because "[t]he fetish character of the commodity is not a fact of consciousness but it is dialectical in the preeminent sense of producing consciousness" (Benjamin [1978] 2012, 495). According to Adorno, in positing that collective consciousness produced dialectical images as its content rather than that commodity fetishism produced collective consciousness, Benjamin came too close to the reactionary theories of Ludwig Klages and Carl Gustav Jung ([1978] 2012, 497).[109] Three years later, Benjamin sent "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" to Horkheimer in a letter from September 1938, as the middle section of what he called "the Baudelaire book" ([1978] 2012, 573) – an elaboration of his ideas from the 1935 exposé. "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" (1938, hereafter Baudelaire essay) was supposed to provide "the requisite data" and function as an "antithesis" to the theory which Benjamin planned to develop in a part of the Baudelaire book entitled "The Commodity as Poetic Object" ([1978] 2012, 573–74). What is left of Benjamin's work on Baudelaire focuses on the changes to the Paris crowd in the second half of the 19th century and the new figures it engendered such as the flâneur. In what can be read as an attempt to shield himself from further critique, Benjamin highlights that the middle section offers only "a prerequisite of Marxist interpretation but does not on its own fulfil its conception" ([1978] 2012, 574). These precautionary disclaimers, however, were not enough to alleviate doubts Adorno and Horkheimer would continue to express towards Benjamin's methodology in his work on Baudelaire. In response to the 1938 essay Adorno delivered one of the heaviest critiques of Benjamin's methodology. In a letter from November 10, 1938, Adorno criticises Benjamin's insufficiently dialectical materialism as an

[109] For a thorough summary of the discussions between Benjamin and Adorno and Horkheimer around the 1935 exposé and the Baudelaire essay, see Montanelli 2020.

"anthropological materialism" (Adorno and Benjamin 1999, 283). Commenting on the Baudelaire essay in 1938 Adorno writes:

> This sort of immediate–and I would almost say again 'anthropological'–materialism harbours a profoundly romantic element, and the more abruptly and crudely you confront the Baudelairean world of forms with the harsh necessities of life, the more clearly I detect it. (1999, 283)

Adorno's critique is that the material Benjamin gathers in his Baudelaire text fails to be mediated "through the *total social process*" (1999, 283). The "harsh necessities of life" with which Benjamin attempts (in Adorno's view inadequately) to confront Baudelaire's poetry, hint at the very same aspect of the text which Benjamin called the "requisite data" (Benjamin [1978] 2012, 573). Adorno delivers his decisive blow when he writes that he considers Benjamin's methodology "unfortunate" and describes it in terms of giving to "conspicuous individual characteristics from the realm of the superstructure a 'materialistic' twist by relating them to corresponding characteristics of the substructure in an unmediated and even causal manner" (Adorno and Benjamin 1999, 581–82). As Sami Khatib notes, this critique of what Adorno calls Benjamin's anthropological materialism stems from his broader disagreement with Benjamin's approach to commodity fetishism: Adorno considers it idealistic because it assumes the material existence of phantasmagoria (Khatib 2012, 164–66). It is unclear, however, how to relate Benjamin's own conception of anthropological materialism to Adorno's critique. For Khatib, it should be read in relationship to Benjamin's notion of collective consciousness. In Khatib's reading, Benjamin's notion of collective consciousness follows a similar gesture to the one offered by his conception of profane illumination in the "Surrealism" essay (2012, 165). Khatib's comparison of "Surrealism" with Benjamin's later conception of collective consciousness suggests the idea that insofar as the former pointed to the political potential of intoxication and its desubjectivisating effects on the individual ego. Consequently, for Khatib, the experiences which destabilise the individual ego such as *Rausch* or dream and open up the potential of collective subjectivity, become the common thread tying earlier writings with Benjamin's conception of anthropological materialism together. However, there is an important shift in Benjamin's framework of anthropological materialism between the 1929 "Surrealism essay" and the late 1938 essay on Baudelaire.

As we have seen in Chapter Two, Benjamin's notion of anthropological materialism, introduced in the 1929 "Surrealism" essay, denoted a tradition of thought which aimed to counter the moralistic and idealistic politics of social democratic parties, building on a tradition which stretches from 19th century body-oriented thinkers and writers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Georg Büchner to the Surrealists. In the late 1930s, as we will see in this chapter, Benjamin adds a new branch to this tradition: the Saint-Simonian debates on the idea of the "emancipation of the flesh" and the broader romantic socialist conception of the divine androgyne. While Benjamin never actually mentions anthropological materialism in the Baudelaire essay, he hints at the idea when he cites the Saint Simonian radical feminist Claire Démar and identifies the Saint-Simonian discussions on the "emancipation of the flesh" and the figure of the androgyne as key sources for Baudelaire's lesbian heroine (Benjamin [2003] 2006, 4:56). The fact that Benjamin counts Démar as an important representative of anthropological materialism, however, cannot be deduced from the Baudelaire essay alone. Only in the *Arcades Project*'s "Convolute p", as we will see in detail in this chapter, does Benjamin use the notion of anthropological materialism to describe the new range of sources, with particular attention given to Démar's voice. Therefore, it is improbable that Adorno could have meant Benjamin's own conception of anthropological materialism at the time he wrote his letter in 1938. Consequently, it is misleading to attempt to understand Benjamin's idea of anthropological materialism from the perspective of Adorno's critique. As I show in this chapter, the differentiation between Benjamin's approach to anthropological materialism in the late 1930s and his previous formulations of the question of bodily collectivity is more than philological. Benjamin's understanding of the human body as both thoroughly collective and a field on which negotiations of the form of this collectivity take place turns towards a more concrete and differentiated understanding of the body itself as gendered. As we will see, this in turn means that Benjamin starts to consider the human body to be a field of struggle for a different organisation of social relations in regard to relations of reproduction. In this light, I argue, Benjamin's idea of anthropological materialism towards the end of the 1930s should be read less in relationship to Benjamin's notion of the collective consciousness, as Khatib would have it, and more through the new contexts in which Benjamin addresses the human body as a point of mediation between individuality and collectivity. This is not to say that the lens of commodity fetishism and Benjamin's approach to its analysis are not to be taken into consideration when reading the new aspects which Benjamin includes in the framework of anthropological materialism in "Convolute p". The body as a subject matter in Benjamin's work towards the end of the

1930s is closely related to the emergence of mass commodity production. It is also distinctly gendered. Within and around his work on the "Baudelaire book", Benjamin develops two prominent figures of the human body: the commodified body of the female sex worker and the androgynous body of Baudelaire's lesbian heroine. In Benjamin's optic, these two figures highlight shifts in the role of the female body under 19th-century Parisian commodity capitalism. Each of them offers unique insight not only into the new social roles and relations engendered by women entering the urban workforce but also into the new paths for countering the alienating effects of capitalism. Of the two, however, it is the body of the sex worker that bears closer connection with commodity fetishism.

2. Literature review

2.1. Commodity fetishism and the sex worker

Throughout "Convolute J", assembled in preparation for the 1938 Baudelaire essay, the figure of the sex worker is evoked as an allegory of modernity. Benjamin shows Baudelaire's sex worker as a synthesis of form and content of the commodity. "The commodity form", he writes, "emerges in Baudelaire as the social content of the allegorical form of perception. Form and content are united in the prostitute, as in their synthesis" (Benjamin 2002, 335). As Susan Buck-Morss writes in her early interpretation of Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, the sex worker is the "most significant female image in the *Passagen-Werk*", and an "allegory for the transformation of objects, the world of things" (Buck-Morss 1986; for a critique of her reading see Chisholm 2009, 247). Yet Benjamin's body of the sex worker is, in accordance with the wider ramifications of his interest in the human body, more than a reflection of commodity fetishism's dehumanising and atomising effects on people. It also represents the drastic changes which the composition of French society underwent over the course of the 19th century due to rapid urbanization. In other words, it is inherently linked to the emergence of new, mass forms of collectivity, which he observes in his time and for whose origins he searches in 19th-century Paris. Benjamin writes of the sex worker as linked to the development of a crowded urban environment in the following way:

> Only the mass of inhabitants permits prostitution to spread over large parts of the city. And only the mass enables the sexual object to become intoxicated with the hundred stimuli which that object produces.[110] (Benjamin [2003] 2006, 4:33)

The figure of the sex worker as an allegory of modernity is, therefore, closely linked to Benjamin's reflections on the emergence of urban mass society. It is Benjamin's interest in the effects of industrialisation on the emergence of new bodily social relations that engenders the second important figure of the female body in his thought, too. From his research into 19th-century Paris, Benjamin picks up interest not only in the figure of the sex worker but also in that of the androgynous lesbian in Baudelaire's writings. Benjamin discusses Baudelaire's figure of the lesbian heroine directly in relation to his inquiry into how modernity and urbanisation change social relations in their gendered form. What fascinates him is the way in which modernity, as seen through Baudelaire's eyes, blurs the hitherto clear boundaries between the social functions of man and woman and their respective gender expressions. Benjamin quotes, for example, Baudelaire's reflections on Gustav Flaubert's Madame Bovary, who in Baudelaire's view, "[in her optimal vigor and her most ambitious goals, as well as in her deepest dreams (…) has remained a man. (…) this strange androgyne has been given all the seductive power of a masculine spirit in an enchanting woman's body" (Benjamin [2003] 2006, 4:57). But Benjamin's interest in the emergence of the figure of the androgyne in 19th-century French romanticism[111] goes further than what he uncovers in Baudelaire. What, in his view, remains unexplored in Baudelaire's outlook on all that is non-procreative in sexuality (Benjamin evokes Baudelaire's aversion towards pregnancy) are the links between the 19th-century phenomenon of the androgyne and the developments in the capitalist relations of production.[112] Benjamin attempts to complement his use of Baudelaire as a mirror of the effects of rapid urbanisation in 19th-century France on social relations with his own ideas on how to link them to the changes in production. He offers to explain the figure of androgyny and Baudelaire's consideration of the lesbian as the heroine of modernity

[110] "Erst die Masse der Einwohner erlaubt der Prostitution diese Streuung über weite Teile der Stadt. Und erst die Masse macht es dem Sexualobjekt möglich, sich an den hundert Reizwirkungen zu berauschen, die es zugleich ausübt" (Benjamin 1991a, I:559).
[111] On the importance of the androgyne for romanticism see e.g. Busst 2016.
[112] Benjamin points out that Baudelaire's attention toward the figure of the lesbian was no more than that – that is, a fascination with an ideal figure, which never expanded towards real life. "He found room for her within the image of modernity" – Benjamin writes of Baudelaire's attitude towards the lesbian in the section of "The Paris of the Second Empire" on modernity – "but did not recognize her in reality" (Benjamin [2003] 2006, 4:58). A paragraph later Benjamin remarks the hypocrisy in Baudelaire's attitude towards real-life lesbians in his social circles, when he writes that "[w]hat he could not forgive George Sand was, perhaps, that she desecrated the image of the lesbian through her affair with Musset" ([2003] 2006, 4:58).

as what he calls the "masculinization of woman" ([2003] 2006, 4:58) through changes in the gendered division of labour. "During the nineteenth century", he writes, "women were for the first time used in large numbers in the production process outside the home" ([2003] 2006, 4:58). Benjamin argues that it was because of women's increasing employment in factories that the "masculine traits were bound to appear in these women eventually" ([2003] 2006, 4:58). Benjamin's characterisation of the 19th-century figure of the lesbian in terms of a masculinised woman seems necessarily crude today,[113] but it also falls within the broader problem of his approach to social phenomena, criticised by Adorno and Horkheimer. Specifically, Benjamin's portrayal of the relationship between gender expression and relations of production falls into the trap of vulgar materialism, of which Adorno accused his Baudelaire essay. Adorno's critique of Benjamin's methodology as a crude juxtaposition of social phenomena "corresponding characteristics of the substructure in an unmediated and even causal manner" (Adorno and Benjamin 1999, 582) can certainly be applied to Benjamin's characterisation of lesbian women as masculinised and his explanation of the emergence of a masculinised woman through changes in workforce composition. He goes on to suggest that with what he calls "higher forms of production, as well as the political struggle per se" – an account of inclusion of women into both intellectual labour and functions of the civic society – came "masculine characteristics of a more refined nature" (Benjamin [2003] 2006, 4:58). However, Benjamin's portrayal of the lesbian heroine's sociological background needs to be seen in the context of what he considered to be its original form: the Saint-Simonian figure of the androgyne. The gesture worth retaining from Benjamin's approach to Baudelaire's lesbian is that it offers a way of looking at gender and sex as parts of a negotiated field of social relations in which the relations of production and reproduction overlap. I argue that this outlook is present much more intricately in Benjamin's approach to the androgyne in "Convolute p". The broader context of the Saint-Simonian discussions shows a new scope of data and problems regarding the anthropological problems

[113] As does his approach to sex work. His equation of the sex worker and the commodity form has raised some well-founded critique from the perspective of the kind of emancipation it suggests. For Rey Chow, Benjamin's interest in the prostitute is not in her subjectivity or physicality, but in her role as a commodified figure. This focus on the inanimate and commodified character of the sex worker's body, in Chow's view, reflects a broader theme in Benjamin's work: the decline of the aura in the modern capitalist world, where human qualities are increasingly commodified and objectified (Chow 1989, 86). However, this is also what, for Chow, makes Benjamin's figure of the sex worker reflect a broader blind spot in his reading of the 19th century that could be summed up in terms of the male gaze. Chow highlights that Benjamin sees politics of loitering or straying as gender blind. While subversive, these are mainly male practices – women experience public and private spheres differently, she argues (1989, 83). "Benjamin's fascination with Baudelaire", she writes, focuses on the effects of man being looked at rather than man looking - it is a fascination, that is, with a world transformed into an inanimate object" (1989, 80).

of the relationship between individuality and collectivity, which had interested Benjamin since the turn of the 1920s. First, however, let me turn to what a focus on the androgyne rather than the figure of the sex worker means for an analysis of Benjamin's approach to the relationship between the human body and emancipation in the late 1930s.

2.2. The sex worker and the androgyne as figures of emancipation?

Several feminist readings have juxtaposed Benjamin's figure of the commodified body of the sex worker with his account of a non-productive, non-heterosexual, often androgynous image of the body (Buci-Glucksmann 1984; 1986; [1984] 1994; Geulen 1996; Leslie 1997; 2006; Chisholm 2009; Beasley-Murray 2012). For Christine Buci-Glucksmann, the common denominator between the two is that they represent a specific form of protest against the division between the private and the public sphere. "The lesbian", she writes, "is the sister of the prostitute, in that she protests against the dominant interiority of the family scene, the reduction of love to family and pregnancy" (Buci-Glucksmann [1984] 1994, 106). In her 1984 book *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity* and the corresponding 1986 essay, she traces what in the latter she calls the "symbolic redistribution of relations between feminine and masculine" in 19th century France, both in Benjamin's and in Baudelaire's work ([1984] 1994, 86). In Buci-Glucksmann's framework, both the sex worker's and the lesbian's appearance in the 19th century are an effect of the blurring of the private and public spheres and the new visibility attributed to women in the city. The difference between the two lies in their relationship to this effect of modernity. While the sex worker is an "allegory of modernity", the lesbian and the androgyne are "a heroic protest against this modernity" ([1984] 1994, 104).[114] In Buci-Glucksmann's interpretation, this protest is reflected in the decentralisation of the Enlightenment figure of the universal human being. She compares the Saint-Simonian figure of the divine androgyne to Freud's idea of bisexuality, according to which every human psyche comprised of both female and male components in different proportions. Bisexuality, she writes, "is the matrix of 'anthropological materialism', which breaks with the anaemic humanisms of universal man (*Allmensch*)" ([1984] 1994, 94). Yet

[114] Buci-Glucksmann follows here Benjamin's "Central Park", where he writes that "The paradigm of the lesbian woman represents the protest of 'modernity' against technological development" (Benjamin [2003] 2006, 4:170). Sigrid Weigel has rightly taken an issue with Buci-Glucksmann's framework, arguing that Benjamin "did not propose a theory of femaleness, as Christine Buci-Glucksmann would have us believe" (Weigel [1992] 1996, 64). "Of more importance, from today's perspective than his images of the feminine", she writes, "is his textual practice, the way in which he works with these images, transforms them into dialectical or thought-images" ([1992] 1996, 64).

Benjamin's approach to androgyny, as I later show in this chapter, not only highlights the inherent differentiability of human being undermining the idea of the "universal man", as Buci-Glucksmann calls it, but also connotes the figure of bodily collectivity. It therefore cannot be summed up with the Freudian framework of bisexuality.[115] I argue that the androgyne that Benjamin takes up from Simon Ganneau and Louis-Jean Baptiste de Tourreil should be read as a part of his approach to the Saint Simonian debates on female emancipation, marriage and sexual freedom. Only in this context can we grasp the full scope of how what in Buci-Glucksmann appears as the anthropological utopia of bisexuality fits into Benjamin's wider framework of anthropological materialism and how it shifts the questions posed within it.

In my view, the kaleidoscopic negotiations of gender and sexual relations in modernity and its emancipatory potential which Benjamin finds in the figures of the sex worker, the lesbian heroine, and the androgyne pose a further, broader question: of the different types of relationship between individual and collective emancipation as it can be mediated by the human body. This question has been taken up by Esther Leslie, who highlights that the common trope between the sex worker and the lesbian heroine is that they point to the emancipatory potential within the commodified urban modernity of 19th-century Paris (Leslie 2006, 104). Leslie links the positive side effect Benjamin aims to find in the commodification of the sex worker's body with the figure of the "masculinised" lesbian heroine. By exposing the brutal realities of capitalism, these figures highlight the potential for revolutionary change. "The political twist of Benjamin's argument", she writes, highlighting that the broader function of Benjamin's method of rescuing "ruins and rubble", titular to her

[115] A critique of Buci-Glucksmann's Freudian reading of the androgyne in Benjamin can be found in Dianne Chisholm's 2009 paper. Chisholm also finds that Benjamin's figure of the androgyne resembles Freud's later conception of bisexuality but, contrary to Buci-Glucksmann, her assessment of the affinity between the two is thoroughly negative. "Benjamin, like Freud", she writes, "confuses gender and sexuality; he, for instance, discusses lesbianism and the masculinization of female factory workers in the same breath" (Chisholm 2009, 24). Furthermore, Chisholm highlights how Benjamin's approach to androgyny is different from the Freudian concept of bisexuality. The main difference, she suggests, lies in Benjamin's historical approach as opposed to Freud's psychological outlook. While Freud's bisexuality describes the construction of individual psyche as a combination of feminine and masculine elements, Benjamin takes his idea of androgyny from 19th century sources and cultural motifs. "Less an en-gendering of the individual psyche", she writes, "Benjamin's 'lesbian' is more of a multi-faceted emblazon of perverse femininity in the wake of woman's entry into the industrial work force and her emancipation from motherhood, as well as her re-fashioning in apparel of greater physical and social mobility" (2009, 24). Both Chisholm and Buci-Glucksmann highlight that for the latter the figure of androgyny as well as the lesbian stand for a range of changes to the social visibility and mobility of women. Yet, while they appreciate the notion of the social construction of gender in Benjamin's thought, both Buci-Glucksmann's and Chisholm's readings of Benjamin's figure of the lesbian and the androgyne fail to acknowledge an important, in my view, aspect of the relationship between Saint Simonian androgyne and collectivity that goes beyond the social determination of gender expression which Benjamin grasps in the figure of the lesbian.

article, “is to load the ruination or the negativity of the commodity-woman with a politically positive charge” (2006, 106). She elaborates on how this reappropriation of the commodification of the female body for emancipatory purposes can be understood:

> Becoming ungendered or thinglike [*sic*] are processes connected to their admission into exchange. It is exchange that makes possible a certain equality, the strange equality of all who stand before the labour market. (2006, 109)

In other words, in Leslie’s view the fruitful political potential of both the figure of the sex worker and of the androgynous woman-worker lies in the paradoxical effect that capitalist relations of production have on both the workers and the commodities: equalisation. The logic behind Leslie’s interpretation of Benjamin is that of rescuing an emancipatory potential from within the capitalist social relations. In a similar vein, Dianne Chisholm argues that Benjamin offers an emancipatory idea of the sex worker as the figure, who “is not just a mass victim of mass marketing” (Chisholm 2009, 30). Benjamin’s sex worker, she writes, “figures the liberation of all women, and all sex and sexuality, from the traditional confines of marriage-at a cost: (…) [w]ith sexual mobility comes sexual marketability” (2009, 30). But Leslie’s argument goes further than Chisholm’s. For her, the sex worker does not stand for the general cause of female emancipation only but also for the emancipation of all the workers. The question, then, is if women can and should stand for a universal category of those exploited and oppressed under patriarchal capitalism or if they should rather represent the historically and socially concrete oppression that is specific to women. I argue that an important aspect of Benjamin’s response to this question can be found in his reading of the Saint Simonian feminist debates on female emancipation, which he explores in “Convolute p” together with the figure of the androgyne.

3. Saint Simonian discussions on marriage and the androgyne – a new branch of anthropological materialism

3.3. From gender difference to social reproduction

In Benjamin’s writings from the late 1930s, the figure of the bodily collective, as it appeared in “Surrealism” or even in the “Work of Art” essay where it was more implicitly present, is difficult to find. Yet the horizon of bodily collectivity is still distinctly present in “Convolute

p", which Benjamin titles "Anthropological Materialism. History of Sects". It is in this convolute that we find Benjamin's sources for what he considers to be the "original version" (Benjamin [2003] 2006, 4:56) of Baudelaire's lesbian heroine. In the course of the convolute, Benjamin traces the doctrines of French utopian socialists who developed the thoughts of Charles Fourier and Saint Simon. His focal point, however, is the different ways in which Saint Simonians, Fourierists, Evadamists and Fusionists attempted to question the patriarchal organisation of the gender difference. Benjamin's kaleidoscopic eye turns with particular attention to two key areas: the concept of the divine androgyne and the Saint Simonian discussions on the abolition of marriage and the mother figure. This convolute, and specifically these two key aspects which Benjamin's collage of sources raises there, will serve as an insight into his approach to the conceptual framework of anthropological materialism in the late 1930s. Benjamin evokes the idea of anthropological materialism twice in the *Arcades Project*'s late entries (December 1937-1940). Both times he does so, it is in relation not so much to the idea of the collective consciousness but to a new thread of the anthropological materialist tradition of thought he finds in the Saint Simonian discussions on emancipation.[116] One of the instances in which Benjamin refers to what he considers to be a new addition (in order of his research, not chronologically) to the tradition of anthropological materialism. In the *Arcades Project*'s "Convolute U" on Saint-Simon, Benjamin identifies Ludwig Feuerbach, Georg Büchner, and Barthelemy Prosper Enfantin as parts of the anthropological-materialist tradition and points out that the thread uniting these otherwise diverse figures finds one of its expressions in Enfantin's idea of the "emancipation of the flesh":

> The "emancipation of the flesh", in Enfantin, should be compared to the theses of Feuerbach and the insights of Georg Büchner. The anthropological materialism is comprised within the dialectical.[117] (Benjamin 2002, 591)

[116] Apart from a fragment written simultaneously with the "Surrealism" essay in "Convolute a" (Benjamin 2002, 698), Benjamin's entries in the *Arcades Project,* which evoke the notion of anthropological materialism, appear in his mostly late additions to convolutes on Charles Fourier, on Henri de Saint Simon, and in "Convolute p". The range of historical figures evoked in the name of anthropological materialism across the *Arcades Project* stretches across French and German sources from the early 19th century (pre-1848).

[117] "Die 'Emanzipation des Fleisches' bei Enfantin ist mit den Thesen Feuerbachs und den Einsichten Georg Büchners zu vergleichen. Der dialektische Materialismus schließt den anthropologischen ein" (Benjamin 1991c, V:731).

Enfantin was a leader and the pope of the Saint-Simonian movement in the 1820s and 1830s. His ideas revolved around establishing a new religion based on love. As Claire Goldberg Moses and Leslie Wahl Rabine note, in his teachings Enfantin argued for the necessity of sexual liberation for the equality of the sexes (Moses and Rabine 1999, 6). He advocated for the participation of women in the Saint-Simonian movement's hierarchy, whereby each structure of the new Church would be directed by both a male and a female (1999, 28).[118] This "politics and theology of 'difference'", as Moses and Rabine call it, was based on a belief that both women and men were direct descendants of God and denounced the idea of Eve being born from Adam's rib (1999, 29). Most importantly, however, under Enfantin's guidance the Saint-Simonians denounced the Christian separation between body and soul, spirit and matter (1999, 34). Their critique of this separation was to be the bedrock of the later discussions on marriage and the form which the emancipation of women from the chains of morality should take. As Susan Grogan notes, it was the influence of Fourier on Enfantin that led to the development of his idea of the "rehabilitation of the matter" into that of the "rehabilitation of the flesh" (1992, 108). As a result, he began to link the former idea, which stemmed from the Saint Simonian belief in spirit and matter to both be God's manifestations, "with sexuality, and with the sanctification of woman's sexual role" (1992, 108). This call for the "rehabilitation of the flesh" was aimed against the post-Revolutionary ideology, which relied strongly on the opposition of reason and sentiment and identified women with the latter (Moses and Rabine 1999, 87). Even though Benjamin never mentions the phrase "rehabilitation of the flesh" in "Convolute p: Anthropological Materialism. History of Sects", the idea of reevaluating the status of bodily affairs and women serves as the overarching framework for the problems taken up in this strand of the *Arcades Project*. As an opening motto to the collection of quotes and short excerpts by Benjamin, he quotes a short dialogue from the 1822 drama *Herzog Theodor von Gothland* written by Christian Dietrich Grabbe. In the dialogue between Gustav – a young adult son of the titular duke – and his father's main adversary, Berdoa, Gustav comments on the looks of a girl named Milchen, sent by Berdoa to demoralise his love for another, absent, woman. "Your bottom is… divine!", Gustav exclaims, having already given in to Milchen's sensual charm earlier in the drama. Berdoa responds with a comment that Gustav fails to hear: "And immortal as well, I

[118] On how the idea of equal leadership between sexes within the Saint Simonian church did not work out in practice see Forget 2001.

hope" (Benjamin 2002, 807). Even without recourse to the drama's plot,[119] Benjamin's insertion of the dialogue as a motto to "Convolute p" plays on the idea of the divine character of the body and its vulgar sexuality at stake in Enfantin's "rehabilitation of the flesh".

Yet in "Convolute p" Benjamin steers clear of Enfantin, instead directing his attention to those Saint Simonians who criticised his ideas of the new moral law from within the movement. Instead, the primacy in both the "Convolute p" and in the respective fragment of the "Second Empire in Baudelaire" is given to Démar over Enfantin.[120] This is not a simple substitution of one Saint-Simonian voice by another. In the section on modernity in his 1938 "Second Empire in Baudelaire", Benjamin takes up Démar as an example of an alternative – and better – outlook on the figure of the mother to the one represented by Enfantin. "Her text", he writes of *Ma loi d'avenir*,[121] "is likewise concerned with mother, but in a sense substantially different from those who set out from France to seek 'the Mother' in the Orient" ([2003] 2006, 4:56). Benjamin is conscious that Démar is not an obvious choice. "Over the grandiloquent fantasies of Enfantin", he writes, "Claire Démar has been forgotten. Yet the manifesto she left behind is closer to the essence of Saint-Simonian theory – the hypostatization of industry as the force that moves the world – than is Enfantin's mother-myth" ([2003] 2006, 4:56). Benjamin's decision to choose Démar over Enfantin indicates two significant characteristics of what he considers to be politically fruitful in the Saint Simonian discussions on female emancipation. Firstly, by selecting a female rather than one of the male Saint-Simonian voices from the debates on the "emancipation of the flesh", Benjamin aligns his own anthropological materialism with the pragmatist side of Saint-Simonian feminism. As Evelyn Forget (2001) notes, the approach of Saint Simonian women to the question of female emancipation was markedly different to that of their male counterparts. The Saint-Simonian men developed a "difference-based feminism", as Forget calls it, whereby women were considered inherently different from men (Forget 2001, 80). They, most notably Enfantin, posited that "individual self-interest" should be subordinated to the "greater needs

[119] For a good overview of the drama's plot, publication history, and main literary motifs in English see Katy Heady, *Literature and Censorship*, chapter 1, dedicated to Grabbe's *Herzog Theodor von Gothland*.
[120] The central place of Démar in Benjamin's research on the Saint Simonians is affirmed not only by the many quotations from her *Ma loi d'avenir* in "Convolute p" but also by the fact that only her name makes it to Benjamin's 1938 "Second Empire in Baudelaire", where he writes that "[s]o far as its anthropological content is concerned, the Saint-Simonian utopia is more comprehensible in the ideas of Claire Démar" than in the concept of a temple by Duveyrier he describes earlier in the paragraph, which was to represent the androgynous ideal of the human being on architectonic plane (cf. [2003] 2006, 4:56).
[121] Most of Démar's quotes in the convolute come from the 1831 *Ma loi d'avenir*, her most well-known work, in which she discusses issues of gender equality and how a society governed by this principle would look like. The text itself is a response to Barthélemy-Prosper Enfantin's "new moral law" – a conception he started to develop in 1829, influenced by the work of Charles Fourier, who sent him copies of his texts in May of that year.

of society" (2001, 81). Forget links Enfantin's ideas on the "new moral law" and what she calls his "theoretical feminism" to a broader shift in Saint Simonian doctrine Enfantin and his followers promoted (2001, 84). The practical projects focused on reform (especially regarding marriage and introducing divorce) were pushed aside "as Enfantin and his closest disciples shifted the focus of concern to the new society, the utopia, that would emerge from these policies" (2001, 85). In contrast, according to Forget, the Saint Simonian women continued to push for a rights-oriented idea of feminism. The divergence between what Forget calls male "theoreticians" of Saint-Simonian feminism and female "pragmatists" reached a point of rupture soon after 1831, when Enfantin announced that women were no longer permitted to occupy official positions within the Saint-Simonian hierarchy until the female messiah was found (2001, 87–89).

Secondly, the fact that Benjamin prefers Démar's and not Enfantin's approach to the figure of the mother has broader consequences for the way in which we can read the contents of his idea of anthropological materialism in the late 1930s. Just as he did in his 1929 "Surrealism" essay, here too Benjamin evokes the notion of anthropological materialism as a counterexample to an idealistic idea of the politics of emancipation. In "Surrealism", this was in contrast to the idealistic politics of Social Democracy, with their slogans of a better future which rung hollow in the face of the bodily experience of poverty of the exploited workers. Now, however, Benjamin turns the tradition of anthropological materialism against the hollow idea of the emancipation of women in particular and of gender relations of reproduction more generally. Benjamin picks up Démar's ideas from Firmin Maillard's *La Legénde de la femme émancipée*: a highly critical account of the French 19th-century feminist movements, aimed to demonstrate the moral indecency of their proposals. Benjamin offers a critical assessment of Maillard's derogatory account of Démar:

> What sordidness once again, at the end of the century, in the representation of physiological affairs! Characteristic of this is a description of impotence in Maillard's book on the history of women's emancipation, which in its overall handling of the matter lays bare, in drastic fashion, the reaction of the established bourgeoisie to anthropological materialism. In connection with the presentation of Claire Démar's doctrine, one finds that 'she... speaks of the deceptions that can result from that strange and enormous sacrifice, at the risk of which, under a torrid Italian sky, more than one young man tries his luck at becoming a famous

> chanteur.' Firmin Maillard, *La Légende de la femme émancipée* (Paris), p. 98.[122] (Benjamin 2002, 809)

The fragment from Maillard, which Benjamin quotes, regards Démar's arguments opposing those voices within the Saint-Simonian movement, which wanted to reform the institution of marriage rather than dissolving it. In her *Ma loi d'avenir* Démar argues that the compatibility of a couple should pass through the test of premarital sex. In this passage, which Benjamin deems to be "key" and which he attaches to the convolute right after the quote from Maillard, Démar writes that "[t]he union of the sexes in the future will have to be the result of…deeply meditated sympathies" and would have to pass through "*the TEST of MATTER by MATTER*, the ASSAY of FLESH by FLESH!!!" (2002, 809). "Often enough", she continues her argument against premarital celibacy, "on the very threshold of the bedroom, a devouring flame has come to be extinguished. (…) More than one person… who will read these lines has entered, at night, into the bed of Hymen, *palpitating with desires and emotions*, only to awaken in the morning *cold and icy*" (qtd in 2002, 809–10). As Benjamin himself notes in fragment p3,1, "[s]everal passages from Claire Démar's *Ma loi d'avenir* may be cited by way of characterizing her relation to James de Laurence" (2002, 811). Within the Saint-Simonian movement, Laurence, or Lawrence as his name is sometimes spelled, was one of the first to argue against reforming and for the abolition of marriage. As Grogan recounts, "Lawrence had argued that the discovery of paternity constituted the 'Fall' from the original state of grace, in which only the paternity of God was recognised" (Grogan 1992, 114). His key argument against the patriarchal organisation of gender relations and marriage was that only the mother's claim to parenthood could ever be without doubt. In his view, Grogan delineates Laurence's reasoning, "since marriage stemmed from the recognition of human paternity, a matrilineal system would enable it to be eradicated, thus ending the proprietary rights of men over women and children" (1992, 114). As Grogan recounts, Démar was a lone figure of Saint Simonian feminism, whose demands for radical sexual freedom for women "were rejected by virtually all the other members of the Saint-Simonian group" (1992, 120). In response to Suzanne Voilquin, who argued for changing the permanence of

[122] "Welche Mesquinerie hat um das Jahrhundertende sich von neuem in der Darstellung physiologischer Tatbestände festgesetzt! Bezeichnend hierfür ist eine Beschreibung der Impotenz aus Maillards Buch über die Geschichte der Frauenemanzipation, das in seiner Gesamthaltung die Reaktion der gefestigten Bourgeoisie auf den anthropologischen Materialismus drastisch belegt. Im Zusammenhang der Darstellung von Claire Demar's [*sic*] Lehre heißt es da: 'Elle... parlera des déceptions qui peuvent résulter de l'étrange et énorme sacrifice au péril duquel, sous le ciel brûlant de l'Italie, plus d'un jeune enfant court la chance de devenir un chanteur célèbre'. Firmin Maillard: La légende de la femme émancipée Paris p 98" (Benjamin 1991c, V:973).

Christian marriage but against the idea of free love, Démar imagined women as independent from men and their union as a prolonged trial of their compatibility (1992, 118–19). Démar's unique position within the Saint-Simonian movement sheds important light on the specific variants of the 19th century French utopian socialism, which he considers to be a part of the tradition of anthropological materialism.

Démar took a unique position on feminist liberation within the Saint-Simonian movement. Differently to other Saint-Simonian women criticising Enfantin's patriarchal views, she supported his core idea of the "rehabilitation of the flesh", or women's sexual liberation. As Moses notes, most "Saint-Simonian women (…) were little interested in 'the rehabilitation of the flesh'. Their concern was to achieve autonomy" (Moses 1982, 264). Démar, however, was interested in both. Similarly to other female Saint Simonians, such as Suzanne Voilquin, she disagreed with Enfantin's abstract notion of female emancipation (Grogan 1992, 119–20). Yet while, as Grogan notes, other female figures "had already recognised that sexual freedom was necessarily liberating" and "viewed their sexual relationships with men as an aspect of their nurturing and supportive function", Démar argued for radical freedom for women in both their sexuality and in their social function, detached from care (1992, 123). But Démar takes the arguments against patriarchy a step further than the focus on the gender-defining institution of the family. Her arguments against the mother as a figure of gender emancipation go in the direction of a reorganisation of gender relations as a social project.

One of the most powerful fragments, which Benjamin quotes from Démar's manifesto in "Convolute p", counters the Saint Simonian figure of the mother as a figure of female emancipation. "You want to emancipate the *woman*?" – Démar asks in the final fragments of her *Ma loi d'avenir* and urges a solution – "Well, then, take the newborn child from the breast of the *blood-mother* and give it into the arms of the *social mother*, a *nurse* employed by the state, and the child will be better raised" (qtd in 2002, 810). In one move, Démar substantialises both the bodily aspect of motherhood and its role in social reproduction. In her account, motherhood understood in biological terms – "the *blood-mother*" – appears just as much a question of the historically specific organisation of the social relations as an institution of a "social mother" would be if they were to be organised differently. The "tyranny of the natural and the burden of the biological", as Esther Leslie describes the object of critique in Démar's pamphlet (Leslie 1997, 79), is the tyranny of the biological conditioning of woman's social position. It appears as a shortcoming, but also the substance, of the social order. The biological language appears as a negative point of

reference for Démar's political proposal, but in it she recognises a broader organisation of social relations. "I venture to raise my voice", she writes, "against the law of blood, the law of generation!" (qtd in Benjamin 2002, 810). Démar's fiery renouncement of *not only* the biological understanding of parenthood but of the blood relations in general and the social order based on them means suggests the need to reorganise the social relations of reproduction along different lines than those of family.

A thorough analysis of Démar's position shows a different approach to the figure of a woman freed from the moral and reproductive determinants of femininity than Benjamin's crudely materialistic account of the lesbian heroine. This is not to say that the two are in any way critically incompatible. Benjamin himself points out that the "original version" of lesbian heroine in Baudelaire is Démar's critique of the figure of the mother (Benjamin [2003] 2006, 4:56). Reading "utopia of bisexuality" through the Saint Simonians' discussions on the emancipation of the flesh rather than the figure of lesbian heroine in Baudelaire reveals it contains more than a protest against the separation of the public and the private sphere, as Buci-Glucksmann would have it (Buci-Glucksmann [1984] 1994, 94). The "symbolic redistribution of relations between feminine and masculine", in Buci-Glucksmann's words ([1984] 1994, 86), which Benjamin observes in the 19th-century sources he researches for his Baudelaire book, shows a utopian potential different from the emancipation of individual women from gender roles (as in the figure of the lesbian heroine) or reproductive function of sex (as in the figure of the sex worker). It is the potential to look at women's social role in terms of the reorganisation of social relations of reproduction along different lines than those of the family. With his choice of Démar's voice in the Saint Simonian debates on the "emancipation of the flesh" as a part of anthropological materialism, Benjamin again addresses the problem of historically changing human anthropology and its relationship to emancipation, this time in regard to gender roles and the organisation of social relations of reproduction. In the process, a new approach to the relationship between anthropological idea of wholeness and the historically malleable forms of collectivity opens up within Benjamin's reflection. In the following section, I argue that Benjamin finds a new blueprint for reimagining society as a whole in Ganneau's and Tourreil's figure of the divine androgyne. When juxtaposed with Démar's critique of the family as a unit of emancipation, Benjamin's recourse to the Saint Simonian figure of the androgyne as a symbol of united, difference-based collectivity will show a set of tensions between body, collective subjectivity and emancipation characteristic for Benjamin's anthropological materialism.

3.2. The androgyne as a figure of bodily collectivity

The third passage from the "Convolute p" points to a particular understanding of the holy trinity as a unity of all genders, whereby God is a harmony of female, male, and androgynous elements in Simon Ganneau's thought, whom Benjamin introduces through Jules Bertaut's 1935 article "Le 'Mapah'".[123] Ganneau was self-proclaimed pope of the Evadamist sect, whose "main contribution to radical theology", as Susan Grogan notes, "was a concept of Divine androgyny" (Grogan 1992, 166). As the quote from Bertaut provided by Benjamin tells us, "the title of Mapah", is a name "formed from the first syllables of the words 'mama' and 'papa'" (qtd in Benjamin 2002, 808). Bertaut explains that Ganneau took on the name "Le Mapah" as a symbol of new, non-binary identity, which combines the words *mama* and *papa* to signify the dissolution of gender forms through the unity of paternal and maternal figures. Already in the figure of the Mapah we find the focus on gender as a domain of collectivity. Firstly, the Mapah relates gender to the figure of the unified human family pointing to the collective horizon of the figure of the androgyne. The very name with which Ganneau described his version of Saint-Simonism – Evadamism – was founded on a gesture of blending the clear-cut distinction between two sexes into one figure. Evadamism, as Ganneau wrote in his manifesto from 1838, symbolised a merge between Eve and Adam – the original parents of humankind (Busst 2016, 32). Secondly, the figures of individual gender identities of man and woman are purely symbolic, with no reference to existing individual men and women. As Naomi Andrews suggests, this is characteristic of the whole genre of sources she calls early 19th-century "romantic socialists" (2003, 439).[124] Pointing to Ganneau among other writers of the time, she argues that their use of the figure of the androgyne should be read as "a metaphorical response to the emerging – though, arguably, not yet hegemonic – masculine individual of liberalism" (2003, 438) and a means of symbolising "a remade humanity" (2003, 457). Andrews finds that the specific construction

[123] A later addition to the convolute, composed after December 1937, links the trope of the androgyne to Benjamin's research on Baudelaire. Benjamin's comment on this affinity reveals how the specific lens of the convolute focuses on women's emancipation. "The heroic ideal in Baudelaire is androgynous", he writes and notes that despite this Baudelaire expressed his deep disgust with Saint-Simonian and Fourierist ideas of womanhood. The androgynous ideal in Baudelaire, he writes, "does not prevent [Baudelaire] from writing: 'We have known the philanthropist woman author, the systematic priestess of love, the poetess of the future, Fourierist or Saint-Simonian; and our eyes… have never succeeded in becoming accustomed to all this studied ugliness'" (Baudelaire, *L'Art romantique* qtd in Benjamin 2002, 816).

[124] As she explains in a different text, Andrews uses the term "romantic socialists" instead of "utopian socialists" to underline that "even the most 'utopian" and 'universal' thinkers of the nineteenth century, the pre-Marxian romantic socialists, participated in the project of biological differentiation and contributed to constructing a logic of difference that had long-reaching consequences, in both imperial and humanitarian terms" (Andrews 2011, 475–76).

of the androgyne in romantic socialists' thought as a unity of sexes which retains gender difference served as a blueprint for reimagining society as a whole:

> The union of opposites embodied by the androgyne was suitable not just to represent the union of man and woman, but equally to represent the union of the various opposing forces in the world in which these thinkers lived. (…) Whether bridging class barriers, the distance between producer and consumer, or even the gulf between the West and the East, romantic socialists sought the reworking of society on grounds of love and cooperation. (2003, 441)

That the key characteristic of the figure of the androgyne as it interests Benjamin in the romantic socialist sources lies in its symbolisation of reorganised humanity can be supported by the second set of quotations on the androgyne he provides in "Convolute p". Benjamin returns to the figure of the androgyne in the later, final fragments of the convolute, where he presents Fusionism, a late 19th-century "sectarian development" preached by Tourreil.[125] In reference to a 1902 book on the fusionist religion, Benjamin points out that Tourreil's idea of an androgynous God named "Map" and of the Fourierist idea of "the Trinity as a Mother-Father to which Sister-Brother or Androgyne is joined" was linked to a broader metaphysics of a "universal substance" (Benjamin 2002, 816). The working of this substance, as the quotations Benjamin provides from the text on Fusionism tell us, was said to be guided by the processes of its emanation, absorption and assimilation (2002, 816). What interests Benjamin in Fusionist metaphysics is the consequences this has for Tourreil's arguments against the social divisions between rich and poor. In a passage he takes from Tourreil's aphorism "Pauvres, riches", Benjamin finds an idea akin to that of emancipation based on a planetary perspective on humanity as a whole, to which he was drawn at the turn of the 1920s. Tourreil's text is addressed rich men and talks about their relationship to the poor. It offers an argument in which the division between two groups of people is unattainable from the perspective of the planet as a whole. Benjamin quotes:

> Moreover, if you refuse to elevate them [the poor] to your level and scorn to involve yourselves with them, why then do you breathe the same air, inhabit the same atmosphere? In order not to breathe in and assimilate their emanation…, it will be necessary for you to leave this world. To breathe a different air and live in a different atmosphere. (qtd in Benjamin 2002, 816)

[125] Benjamin repeats a typo in Tourreil's surname after Alexandre Erdan's *La France mystique* and writes "Toureil". On Erdan's reception of Tourreil and his over-emphasis of the latter's actual influence during his lifetime see Andrews 2003, 453.

Benjamin's outlook on Tourreil's divine androgyne, more so than the one he finds in Ganneau, projects a planetary perspective. It suggests more than that all humans are equal. The image of indivisibility of the air with which both the poor and the rich breathe reflects the perspective in which the principle of equality is inherently linked to humans living together on earth and sharing the same resources. Because it is the air – and not, for example, territory or material riches – that the rich and the poor all breath as one, the focus of Tourreil's image gravitates towards an account of equality founded on the unity of life on earth rather than on the equal distribution of goods. Benjamin's attention towards Tourreil's idea of universal substance and its consequences for the latter's approach to social inequalities is reflected again in fragment p6, 2, where he comments on Fusionism. "*Fusionisme*", writes Benjamin towards the end of the convolute, "aims not at a syncretism but at the fusion of human beings with one another and with God" (2002, 817). It is this overlap between an idea of a collective subjectivity of all human beings and an image of overcoming not only gender difference but all kinds of social stratification that is so fascinating in Benjamin's approach to the figure of the androgyne. In this regard, the Saint Simonian divine androgyne echoes Benjamin's search for a universal human subject of history, which has guided his reflections on the body as *Leib* from the early 1920s. As we have seen in Chapter One of this thesis, Benjamin first developed his conception of the human body as tending towards the collective form of humankind in the 1922-23 "Outline of the Psychophysical Problem". Benjamin's attention to the way in which for Saint Simonians and other utopian socialist sects the androgyne stood for a figure of human family reflects his ongoing interest in figures of collectivity which would encompass all of humanity. However, there is a crucial difference in collective subjectivity rooted in the human body as it emerges from the Saint-Simonian sources he chooses in "Convolute p". In his 1922-23 "Outline of the Psychophysical Problem" and in the earlier "Types of History", Benjamin linked the lived body of humankind, or earth as human beings live on it in the case of the latter text, to a notion of a form of collectivity guided by the principle of individuality. The Saint-Simonian androgyne, in contrast, symbolises the unity of two sexes and highlights a specific kind of wholeness which does not rely on the figure of individuality but of a couple. This difference-based kind of unity, which Benjamin finds in the divine androgyne, does not, however, come without its problems.

As Andrews points out, the androgyne in the romantic socialist texts from the 1830s and 1840s was closely connected to their discussions of marriage. In Ganneau's figure of the

Mapah, Andrews points out, the androgyne symbolised the divine marriage between Mary-Eve and Christ-Adam and stood for the image of salvation. For Ganneau, in Andrew's words, "[A]ndrogyny is posited as alternative 'scaffolding of humanity, a potential route toward unity and harmony in society'" (Andrews 2003, 448), in contrast to the "isolated and vulnerable individual that is the cornerstone of the social and economic system Ganneau is rejecting" (2003, 449). Similarly, in Tourreil's fusionism, "the basic unity of humanity is the *couple collectif*, or Evadam, echoing the Saint-Simonian idea of the couple as the basis of humanity" (2003, 454). Yet, although retaining difference at its basis, this idea of an all-human universality has significant weaknesses. For one, the underlying gesture of sublation of gender difference in Tourreil's androgyne is closely linked to a heteronormative family structure. In another of her texts on the romantic socialists' approach to the universal subject of emancipation, Andrews notes the political shortcomings of the human family metaphor permeating their writings as linked to hierarchical gender relations implied in it. She points out that the Saint Simonians' imaging of humanity as a family meant that the hierarchical structure of its heteronormative bourgeois blueprint was projected onto the real political ideas of solidarity with the oppressed. "Romantic socialists", she writes, "conceptualized humanity as a family, laterally and hierarchically bound by ties of obligation and affection" (Andrews 2018, 20). Andrews suggests that projecting family hierarchy on the oppressed often meant their infantilisation. Furthermore, the metaphor was prone to failure as soon as religious and racial differences were at stake. She writes:

> To the extent that other races and cultures could be folded into that family—as, for example, the infantilized and Christian slave populations of their imaginings—their empathic circle was flexible and inclusive. Algerians, however, refused— both through their adherence to Islam and their ongoing resistance to colonial conquest—to join that family. (Andrews 2018, 20)

Andrews' critical overview of the Saint Simonian figure of the human family points to a broader problem in thinking about the subject of emancipatory struggle in universal terms of humanity. As long as the assumed unity of the universal collective subject is based on the bodily constitution of human beings, the existing hierarchical structures in the relations of reproduction need to be thematised as well. In other words, if the subject of emancipation is to be linked to humanity as a whole, this cannot forgo a critique of the historically existing family relations. In my view, this is where, in Benjamin's overview of the Saint Simonian, Fourierist, and Fusionist sources in "Convolute p", the key role of Démar enters the scene.

4. Between Démar's family abolitionism and the divine androgyne as a human family

Démar's particular position in the Saint-Simonian debates escapes the problems of which Andrews accuses the Saint-Simonian idea of emancipation, while preserving its claims to a universal level of collectivity on two levels. First of all, because Démar opposes marriage altogether, she is far from preserving the hierarchical family structure in how she imagines female emancipation. This does not, however, lead her to neglect the broader horizon of the universal claim implied in the idea of a bettering social relations. In fact, as we have seen in this chapter, her critique of family-based considerations of female emancipation causes her to highlight the broader, collective nature of social relations of reproduction as the platform on which the struggle to reorganise them should take place. Yet there is also a second level on which Démar's position escapes an issue which her Saint-Simonian colleagues faced in their conceptualisation of universal emancipation. In Margaret Cohen's view, Démar's ideas represent a fruitful inversion of the slippage of gender and class widespread among Saint-Simonians. As Cohen notes in her 1991 essay "'The Most Suffering Class': Gender, Class, and Consciousness in Pre-Marxist France", the Saint-Simonians saw a set of common characteristics in the oppression experienced by women and by the proletariat. As Cohen recounts, for Saint-Simonians "[b]oth workers and women lacked education, were deprived of property, and lacked a public voice" (Cohen 1991, 26). However, Cohen argues that the effects of this equation of women with the proletariat were politically unfruitful. "The Saint-Simonians' seemingly feminist discourse", she writes, "served their efforts to render ideologically innocuous a discursively unstable and potentially dangerous social group" (1991, 24). Démar's gesture is, in Cohen's view, opposed exactly to that employed in the prevalent figure of the feminised proletariat: she proletarianizes the woman. Cohen's argument refers to Démar's conception of *femmes prolétaires*. With this notion, Cohen argues, "Démar fuses gender and class discourse to maintain that women's experience does and should extend beyond the domestic realm" (1991, 42), but she also, "draws attention to the fact that (…) the realm of domestic relations is itself the site of a power struggle" (1991, 43). The gesture of what Cohen calls Démar's "proletarianized FEMME" (1991, 41) echoes in both her critique of the biological figure of the mother and in her stance on marriage insofar as both cases are a call for taking the abstract figure of woman out of its social and

biological role. Critiquing both the woman as mother and as wife, Démar points to the reality of women's life beyond their domestic roles as well as to the pivotal role of questioning them in the struggle for emancipation.

Démar's approach to women through the lens of both production and reproduction responds to the question of the relationship between gender and class in the bodily understanding of revolutionary emancipation, which occupies Benjamin in the late 1930s. While the sex worker, as Leslie and Chisholm argue, serves him as the figure of the commodified body of the worker, Démar's outlook on female emancipation as worker emancipation offers a different lens on what a reorganisation of social relations both on the level of production and reproduction would entail. If Benjamin's figure of the sex worker could be interpreted to stand for both all women, as it does for Chisholm, and for all the workers, as it does for Leslie, Démar's optic sheds new light on the issue. The Démarian origins of what interests Benjamin in the androgenic figure of Baudelaire's lesbian heroine point to the incompatibility of any one social group to represent either another or the universal collectivity of the oppressed. Because Démar's is an optic on the abolition of family structure and the biological determination of social and gender roles, her proletarianized woman calls for the reorganisation of relations of both production and reproduction. On a broader plane of Benjamin's long-standing ruminations on the historical malleability of anthropological forms of collectivity, Démar's position towards female emancipation reopens the question of addressing the formation of social categories rather than changing definitions and roles of those groups adjacent to specific categories such as women (as wives, mothers, etc). Only when the social relations which produce women's roles as biological and pre-determined are addressed, can we talk about female emancipation. In this regard, the "Convolute p" and the corresponding fragments of what is left of Benjamin's 1938 Baudelaire book can be seen to both restate and expand the question he had been posing with the figure of bodily collectivity as a realm of struggle over the historical emergence of new forms of collectivity and its organisation. In broadest terms, they return to the same issue of the relationship between body, collectivity, and emancipation. But the new way in which they restate it lies not only in the inclusion of body as gendered and therefore differentiated. Benjamin also implicitly returns to the relationship between class and forms of collectivity from the point of view of the transition from family to humankind as the basic unit of anthropological collectivity. What is exceptional is that Benjamin consciously takes out the guiding voice of his considerations on the issue from within a strand of thought inspired by

Saint Simon, whom he otherwise criticises for an overly optimistic account of utopian re-organisation of social relations.

In this regard, it is instructive to compare Benjamin's reflections on and choice of the sources in "Convolute p" to the "Convolute U", where Benjamin repeatedly affirms his strongly critical evaluation of Saint-Simon. "All social antinomies", he writes of the Saint Simonian industrial utopia, "dissolve in the fairyland which *le progrès* projects for the near future" (Benjamin 2002, 578). In his critical evaluation of Saint-Simon, Benjamin touches not only on his belief in progress but also on their specific understanding of who should count as the subject of socialist emancipation behind it. As he notes in an earlier addition to the convolute U, what separates Saint-Simon and Marx is the way in which they divide society into those who are themselves exploited and those who exploit others. In Benjamin's view, Saint-Simon "fixes the number of exploited as high as possible, reckoning among them even the entrepreneur because he pays interest to the creditors" (2002, 578). In contrast, Marx "includes all those who in any way exploit another–even though they themselves may be victims of exploitation–among the bourgeoisie" (2002, 578). Benjamin displays a conscious weariness towards Saint-Simon's idea of exploitation that could prove *too* universal. This brings us back to one of the key political contexts which moved Benjamin's thought on the emancipatory politics of the oppressed in the second half of the 1930s. As Susan Buck-Morss notes, "[w]hen Benjamin commented critically on the Saint-Simonian faith in technological progress, whereby class conflict was denied and wished away, he was indirectly attacking the prevailing politics of his own time" (Buck-Morss 1989, 322). For Buck-Morss, the "prevailing politics of his own time" which Benjamin criticised in the second half of the 1930s was the Popular Front and, as she puts it, "just how familiar this political formula of national unity, patriotism, and consumerism was in history, and how it inevitably resulted in the betrayal of the working class" (1989, 322). To illustrate the link between the political imaginary represented by the Popular Front and the ideas of Saint Simonians, Buck-Morss points to the Pavilion of Solidarity at the 1937 World Exhibition. In her view, "[i]ts political message expressed the Popular Front line of national solidarity *with* labor, rather than the international solidarity *of* labor, and evoked nineteenth century tradition not to challenge the present but to justify it" (1989, 324). The passage she quotes from the brochure of the Pavilion of Solidarity recalls Saint Simon and Fourier as "introducers of conceptions of social cooperation" and asserts this new kind of solidarity rests on the idea of human never being isolated but rather constituting associates of "[t]he association of all like beings" (1989, 324). Benjamin's detailed examination of those strands of Saint Simonian, Fourierist, and Fusionist

thought that emphasise the political value of emancipatory politics beyond the smooth ideas of wholesome unity of humankind where each individual constitutes an equal part, falls under the same intuition he had in in "Surrealism" essay and in "Work of Art".

Both Démar's critique of an essentialist figure of woman and Tourreil's androgyne offer a way out of the problem encountered by the Saint-Simonian idea of the abstract feminine as the figure of all-human emancipation. They point to the relationship between the distribution of gender difference and family structure as it pertains to reproducing both gender and economic inequalities. Démar's *Ma loi d'avenir* defended, as we have seen, the rights of women to free love in terms of detaching the social role of a woman from the family structure. In this, she opposed other Saint-Simonians who argued for the emancipation of women within their role as wives and mothers. Benjamin's fascination with the figure of the romantic socialist androgyne had also, as we have seen, less to do with the family structure they represented and more to do with the blurring of social differences in the planetary perspective of humans living on one earth. Yet, in my view, the most productive aspect of Benjamin's presentation of the Saint Simonian and Fusionist sources in "Convolute p" lies in the tension between the planetary perspective of humankind and the idea that any emancipatory politics needs to avoid sublating differences between people. For Benjamin, the subject of emancipation can neither be a universal individual human being (an "*Allmensch*" as Buci-Glucksmann would have it), nor can it be a universal collective of humankind – even one based on an assumed unity of differences between people. What needs to be emancipated, Benjamin's choice and positioning of Démar's views teaches us, is the way in which social relations structure the existing collective and individual subjects.

Conclusion

As I showed in the first section of this chapter, the question underlying the scholarly discussions on Benjamin's figure of the sex worker was if a figure engendered by capitalist social relations – in this case, and for Benjamin, the sex worker as an allegory of commodity fetishism – could become a figure of more universal emancipation. In Leslie's view, it was the equalising quality of commodity fetishism – in which everything and everyone could be compared by the omnipotent standards of exchange value – that made it indeed possible to find such emancipatory potential in both the figure of the sex worker and of the lesbian heroine. A recapitulation of Benjamin's understanding of the origins of the latter figure, however, points to a different image of the relationship between at least the second figure of

the female body under 19th-century capitalism. The lesbian heroine's sources were found in Claire Démar's calls to free women from both moral and reproductive chains. I showed that Démar's position in the debate was unique not only because of the radical sexual freedom she posited for women but also because of how her arguments contrasted with the broader Saint Simonian framework of the nuclear family as a basic unit and a blueprint for universal human association.

In the previous chapters, I pointed out how Benjamin's use of the notion of *Leib* and the linked figure of bodily collectivity consistently implied an emancipatory organisation of social relations on a collective level. This idea was connected to technology, and, in the "Work of Art" essay, Benjamin took the idea of the utopian potential of technology and of reappropriating its alienating effects for the sake of the masses. If we go beyond the hitherto dominant focus on Benjamin's treatment of the gendered human body through the figure of the sex worker, Benjamin's play on the Saint Simonian and Fusionist approach to female emancipation in "Convolute p" offer an account of bodily collective emancipation which no longer relies on the idea of a positive use of technological alienation of human beings.

Furthermore, Benjamin's reflections on the androgyne and Démar's critique of marriage play on the key idea I developed from his 1936 "Work of Art" essay in the previous chapter. The two utopias of two different natures in "A Different Utopian Will", I argued, could be read in terms of a commentary on the relationship between a grand-scale utopia of the all-encompassing reorganisation of social relations on the one hand and a utopia responding to the need of personal fulfilment of human needs. In "Convolute p", the question of personal relations between people, as well as their individual needs such as sexual desire, appeared as the central question of the organisation of bodily collective relations.

What is striking in "Convolute p" is that it reveals a form of thinking about the human body as organised by social relations, not so much through technology or by it having to do with a historically new form of collectivity – humankind – which has already emerged, as it did in "Work of Art" essay and in "To the Planetarium". Rather, in his presentation of the divine androgyne, Benjamin finds a figure of the human body as the very material shaping social relations on which social change must be enacted and imagined.

Conclusion

Benjamin is often read as a melancholic, a philosopher of the contemporary and a historian of the 19th century capable of discovering unrealised alternative paths in catastrophes past, present, and future. The melancholic aura of Benjamin – a writer who considered himself to be born "under the sign of Saturn" (Sontag 1981, 111) – is reinforced both by his personal history and by the political developments in the Weimar Republic, a period in which he wrote most of his texts. Depressive in character and forever struggling to stay financially afloat, an outsider and the ugly duckling of academia, and with no luck in love – so the story of the "ill-fated Benjamin" goes – Benjamin never ceased the call to watch out for those key moments in which the course of history could be derailed into a different scenario, even in the face of the rise of fascism to power across Europe. The point of departure of this story is commonly placed where Benjamin's life ends. In 1940, fleeing from Paris occupied by the German army, Benjamin arrives at the French-Spanish border, where, afraid that he might be captured by Franco's army, he commits suicide, overdosing on morphine. Whether it was indeed a suicide or not – which is itself contested – Benjamin's tragic end captures many motifs which occupied him throughout his life and permeated his writings. It binds together his theoretical and practical fascination with intoxication and its disrupting effects on the ego, his active engagement with countering fascist literature and theory and his affinity with Marxism, which directed the officials' eyes to him. Finally, it paints as the background of Benjamin's life story the looming horizon of what we now see as a culmination of the rise of fascism in 1930s Germany: World War II. Yet this story is also, in a way, an anti-Benjaminian kind of narrative. If the one thing learned from Benjamin by generations of critical and cultural theorists is that history should not be told from the perspective of victors – at least if history is to teach us something new. In that case, telling a story about Benjamin's theories from the perspective of his end seems to be misplaced. In contrast, to follow a Benjaminian understanding of history while approaching his own writings would mean, in my view, to look for those potentialities he himself saw as emancipatory in his times and which, from our perspective today, seem rather detached from the historical events that followed. One such thread in Benjamin's writings, I argued in this thesis, is his long-standing rumination on the idea of a universal, planetary form of human collectivity, rooted in the bodily constitution of human beings.

As this thesis showcased, across the period of the Weimar Republic Benjamin repeatedly reflected on the fact that, as far as it is inherently connected to the collectivity of human existence, our bodily constitution changes historically with the development of new technological mediations of our perception and social relations. My main argument has been that Benjamin's recurrent interest in the figure of bodily collectivity marks a horizon of his broader interest in the historical emergence of different forms of collectivity. In Benjamin's writings from from the early 1920 up until the late 1930s, the figure of bodily collectivity consistently returned as a battleground on which the struggle for an emancipatory form of human collectivity is fought. While the importance of his recurrent reflections on the figure of a bodily collective, the broader framework of anthropological materialism, and the surrounding ideas such as innervation or body- and image space have been increasingly pointed out in scholarship since the 1990s, there has been little analysis of how these ideas changed in Benjamin's thought. In contrast, this thesis treated Benjamin's thought as a testimony of a combative time for thinking left theory, probing figure of bodily collectivity from different perspectives in different historical moments. The starting and central point of my analysis was the figure of the *collective* body and the forms of collectivity entailed in it. Because of this, my focus stood in conscious contrast to the readings, which highlighted the complex relationship between matter and mind found in Benjamin's writings from a psychoanalytical perspective. To focus on the psychoanalytic roots of concepts such as innervation meant, as I argued in Chapter Three, to follows a model of individual subjectivity behind Freud's psychophysiology. Differently, by reaching beyond Benjamin's engagement with psychoanalysis, I aimed to showcase the scope and extent of what his understanding of the collective body means for his search for a collective subject of political emancipation. Yet the contrast in which my reading stands to the more psychoanalysis-inspired interpretations does not stem from any key disagreement. There is much to be gained from acknowledging the depth of Benjamin's interest in psychoanalysis and its influence on him in regard to his reflections on bodily collectivity. This includes a well-developed account of how Benjamin's philosophy of experience focused on the ways in which individual ego could be seen in disintegration, such as through intoxication or dream (Khatib 2012), as well as the discussions of bodily collectivity in terms of cultural phenomena he engages with such as collective memory (Weigel [1992] 1996). Rarely, however, have Benjamin's reflections on the bodily formation of collective subjectivities been discussed. In this light, my aim was to uncover Benjamin's materialism of the body from a perspective of collective rather than individual understanding of subjectivity as it develops from his early anthropological thought

to the late 1930s. It needs to be noted that Benjamin continues to refer to ideas of mind such as genius, class consciousness and collective consciousness throughout his writings concerned with bodily collectivity. The decision not to discuss these ideas directly was, to an extent, a consequence of the focus of this thesis. But it also stemmed from an understanding of the body-mind relationship following from how Benjamin developed it in his early writings. In Benjamin's early anthropology there was no mind pure and simple and certainly no such thing in opposition to the body because mind (*Geist*) was always already in relationship to body. In the case of "genius", which combined *Leib* with *Geist*, this relationship of embodiment was inherently linked to the historical character of *Leib*. In this regard, to focus on the historicity of *Leib* and its collective form, to my understanding, does not mean to discard a part of the body-mind amalgam but to follow a specific aspect of Benjamin's conception of the body which pertains to collectivity.

1. Two poles of the politics of Benjamin's figure of the bodily collective

With these intuitions in mind, my analysis indicated that throughout the Weimar Republic Benjamin held onto the belief that a new scale of collectivity, which had opened up at the dusk of World War I, had the potential to facilitate emancipation and solidarity and enable a reorganisation of social relations. One of the key findings of this thesis was that Benjamin held his optimism even in the face of the rising threat and reality of fascist politics and his progressing disillusionment with the ability of the USSR to represent a viable alternative. On the contrary, Benjamin consistently returned to the figure of bodily collectivity in face of otherwise grave political disappointments. From World War I and the failed attempts at German Revolution in 1919, through his reflections on shortcomings of social democracy and the relationship between party politics and revolutionary movement, his disillusionment with the revolutionary potential of the USSR, and his research into the socialist utopian movements as a response to what he considered to be a failure of the politics of the Popular Front – the figure of bodily collectivity served as a platform of Benjamin's search for an alternative to failed attempts at creating a form of universalist politics of emancipation.

Yet it was not Benjamin's answers to these complex problems but the set of questions which Benjamin formulated in his considerations on the relationship between body and collectivity that made reconstructing his thought particularly interesting. Starting off with an

attempt at countering an individualist and conservative outlooks on the body-mind problem, Benjamin soon encountered issues which reached much further than the question of what form and how the body could be considered an emancipatory and inclusive figure of collectivity. From the inception of Benjamin's philosophy of the body, the question of body's collectivity was inscribed in broader questions on the relationship of anthropology and history. For almost two decades stretching from the turn of the 1920s to the second half of the 1930s, Benjamin consistently addressed the human body as an inherently collective matter, whose historically changing form and extent conditioned new scales of social organisation and new forms of collective subjectivity. In the 1922-23 "Outline", Benjamin distinguished between the *Leib*, or the historically transient body as it tends to collectivity, and the *Körper*, or body in its unchanging, fundamental form. In both "To the Planetarium" and later in the "Work of Art", Benjamin highlighted that there is an additional plane of the development of the human body beyond the evolutionary process. This other, historical process pertained to the way in which human beings organise themselves and the material reality around them through technology. While humanity as a species had finished its development a long time ago, Benjamin stated in "To the Planetarium", the history of humankind had only just begun. This thesis showcased Benjamin's account of the collective body as standing in contrast to two political poles of conceptualising the anthropological shape of human collectivity. On the one hand, it opposed the "fascist" forms of collectivity rooted in the collective forms linked to blood and land such as patriarchal family and the people (*Volk*). On the other hand, it countered the liberal concept of universal humanity based on an abstract idea of universally equal individual.

The first pole was held by Benjamin's consistent inscriptions of bodily collectivity in an actively antinationalist anthropology. To be fair, Benjamin mentions the context for his reflections in the fascist idea of "blood and soil" as what binds people together on into an eternal community only once: in the 1935 notes to the "Work of Art" essay's footnote on revolutions as innervations of the collective body Benjamin. Nevertheless, the idea of countering right-wing ideas was at the core of Benjamin's endeavours to develop his own philosophy of the body from the start. Not only did Benjamin's first and most text extensive on the subject – "Outline of the Psychophysical Problem" – enter a direct polemic with the conservative writer Ludwig Klages' *Lebensphilosophie*, but it was also conceived in the very same year when Oswald Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes* saw public light. Whereas Spengler, and later Richard Walther Darré in 1930, wrote of the interconnectedness of eternal

land and eternal blood, Benjamin saw the human body as the ultimate proof of how, rather than reproducing one eternal form, human collectivity was historically malleable and tended to expand beyond biological ties. In this specific optic, family appeared as a form of collectivity which both organised bodily relations and was organised by them. As such, it became a recurring point of reference for Benjamin's reflections on bodily collectivity: from "To the Planetarium", through "Surrealism", to the final reflections on anthropological materialism in "Convolute p", family could be seen as one of the forms of collectivity in relation to which Benjamin developed his understanding of new potential collective forms.

There was, however, an important shift in Benjamin's approach to the relationship between universal form of bodily collectivity in the figure of humankind and the institution of the family between his writings from the first half of the 1920s and his turn to the notion of anthropological materialism towards the end of the 1930s. What in "To the Planetarium" was considered to be a different and, to an extent, backwards form of collectivity to that of humankind – family – turned into a crucial aspect of addressing the potential and limitations of humankind as a horizon of emancipation. With the turn to Claire Démar's family abolitionist ideas on how to conceptualise the organisation of emancipatory social relations and their subject, Benjamin returned to the problem of the mediation of different forms of collectivity through the social institution of the family. Rather than considering it a historically preceding form of social organisation of collectivity to that of the humankind, however, Benjamin found in the Saint Simonian sources a complex tension between imagining emancipation from family structure and the respective organisation of gender relations on the one hand and a universal claim of this emancipation on the other. Benjamin's final reflections on gender relations and the emancipation of women under capitalism point out the dangers of addressing emancipation in both too general terms (universal human family) and too particular, case-oriented (mother figure). As Chapter Four argued, Benjamin's handling of the Saint-Simonian debates on female emancipation teaches us that the figure of an individual can never successfully convey an image of collective emancipation, because our material interconnectedness cannot be addressed from the perspective of a particular group. Instead, we have to think emancipation in regard to how collective rather than individual subjectivities are formed.

This brings me to the second pole of the political stakes in the trials and tribulations of Benjamin's figure of bodily collectivity. For as much as there is a clear line of a cosmopolitan claim in Benjamin's fluctuating reliance on the figure of the humankind, his

reflections on the collective nature of the human bodily constitution do not take its links to this universal notion of humankind lightly. From the very outset of his considerations on the historical nature of human collectivity and its tendency to expand towards broader forms, humankind was a horizon of ultimate universality whose form was never considered to be realised. While Benjamin repeatedly emphasised that a novel form of emancipation was contingent upon the emergence of a historically new body of humankind, he also warned that this potential could easily be lost. As I showed in Chapter One, Benjamin's differentiation of *Leib* from *Körper* in the "Outline" served as a basis for his recognition that many different forms of collectivity could be conceptualised as having a bodily basis. Nevertheless, not all of these forms of collectivity reflected the emancipatory potential Benjamin saw in the emerging new scale of collectivity. While *Körper* was associated with *Volk*, the unchanging bodily subject of the people, *Leib* represented the foundation of the tendency of human beings to extend to the collective subject of humankind. Benjamin expanded on the notion in "To the Planetarium", where he situated the *Volk* alongside another form of collectivity: family. The ultimate horizon of emancipation was linked to the figure of the humankind as an individual collective subject living on earth. However, I argued that Benjamin's distinction between different forms of bodily collectivity, alongside with the historical character of *Leib*, meant that the human body was a field on which a struggle over the historically changing form of collectivity could take place.

An important shift in Benjamin's conceptualisation of the relationship between bodily collectivity and the universal figure of humankind could be noted when Benjamin introduced notion of anthropological materialism in the 1929 "Surrealism" essay. Rather than assuming that the looming shape of the new collectivity of the human body engendered in technology was that of humankind, as he did in the "Outline" and "To the Planetarium", in "Surrealism" Benjamin asked about the political process of organisation of this new collective body into a revolutionary subject. From the 1929 "Surrealism" on, the stake of Benjamin's idea of an anthropological materialism was to approach political and social emergence of emancipatory forms of collectivity, which would evade the dangers of projecting their shape in a deterministic, top-down way. The political stakes of Benjamin's search for a grassroots concept of the coming together of collective political agents and towards conceptualising a collective subject towards reimagining the organisation of bodily social relations meant that his figure of bodily collectivity underwent significant changes over the two decades. These changes, I argued, had to do with Benjamin's changing evaluation of the political potential of the USSR. In effect, Benjamin shifted between different ideas of what could make a

materialistically understood collective subject emancipatory. In the "Work of Art", the concept of the collective body was employed to examine the potential for maintaining the prospect of a comprehensive reorganisation of social relations, particularly in light of the prevailing scepticism regarding the USSR as a model for such a transformation. In his own response to the show trials and in the ambivalent portrayal of the USSR evident in André Gide's 1935 *Les Nouvelles Nourritures Terrestres*, Benjamin found an incentive to readdress the problem of the relationship between the grand scale organisation of collective life and the needs and desires of individual human beings. Crucially, this was still within the framework which opposed the liberal concept of an abstract individual as the building block of collectivity. Chapter Three argued that Benjamin's theoretical framework concerning the concept of utopias of the first and second nature offered a distinctive approach to the relationship between desires of individuals on the one hand and collective utopias on the other. Namely, it offered a view in which the utopia of universal human needs was to be realised (the utopia of abundance and happiness), it first needed to address the horizon of human collective interconnectedness, that is: a utopia of grand scale reorganisation of relations of production and social relations.

The fourth chapter of this thesis tackled the specific moment in Benjamin's reflections on the human body and collective subjectivity when, at the end of the 1930s, he turned away from the problem of the emergence of revolutionary collective subjectivity and its organisation, which occupied him in both the 1929 "Surrealism" and, to an extent, in the 1936 "Work of Art" essays. This was characterised by a new understanding and focus on the issue of the organisation of bodily collectivity. The figures of femininity he took up – that of the sex worker and the androgyne – were closely linked to the technological changes to the production process in the 19th century. However, Benjamin's focus was on the way in which these figures, particularly the androgyne, organised gender and sexual – in other word, bodily – relations. In contrast to the earlier formulations of the figure of bodily collectivity, Benjamin's research into the Saint Simonian discussions on female emancipation addressed the organisation of bodily collectivity in terms of the organisation of relations of reproduction. His particular focus was on what it would mean for the figure of an all-human subject of emancipation rooted in the bodily constitution of human beings if it were to take two things into consideration simultaneously. On the one hand, a differential function of the body (the fact that it differentiates people and not only unites them) and, on the other hand, the idea of emancipation as a detachment of human beings and their bodily relations from the

way in which they are inscribed in the currently governing relations of production (and therefore reproduction) under capitalism.

2. Anthropological materialism and class

The key finding of this thesis was that Benjamin's anthropological materialism offers a way to conceptualise forms of collectivity such as family, nation, and humankind as emerging in relation to the historically changing ramifications of human anthropology. This recognition has significant consequences for the way in which we can see Benjamin's anthropological materialism in relation to historical materialism. Benjamin makes the defining differentiation between his conception of anthropological materialism and other forms of materialism in the 1929 "Surrealism" essay, where he opposes it to mechanical forms of scientific materialism. Because of this, scholars have rightly seen the concept itself as an attempt at conceptualising an anti-deterministic form of materialism (be it of "Hegelian or Soviet kind", as Duttlinger, Morgan and Phelan put it – Duttlinger, Morgan, and Phelan 2012a, 7). Yet there is another important way in which Benjamin's anthropological materialism complements historical materialism, which goes beyond how the former could be seen to give the latter a "humanist" angle.

The lens of Benjamin's figure of bodily collectivity revealed that he retained a perspective on class in his reflections on the changes to the anthropological basis of human collectivity from the very beginnings of his involvement with Marxist theory. Indeed, as this thesis showed, between the mid-1920s and the mid-1930s Benjamin addressed the question of the relationship between bodily collectivity and the proletariat more than once. This was clear as early as in the conception he proposes in "To the Planetarium", where it was the power of the proletariat that indicated if the new scale of collectivity of the humankind could be rehabilitated after the destruction of World War I. If Benjamin put the figure of bodily collectivity in check with the standing of the proletariat early on – therefore differentiating between class and anthropological forms of collectivity – his reflections on the relationship between the organisation of emancipatory politics, bodily collectivity, and class were constantly reworked throughout the two decades.

In face of the raging economic crisis in Germany at the turn of the 1930s, Benjamin's reflections on bodily collectivity in the "Surrealism" essay highlighted the role it had for the direction he proposed for revolutionary politics – the organisation of corporeal pessimism. It brought together the bodily nature of collectivity with the question of the organisation of

revolutionary politics by highlighting the central role for the latter of a grassroots, spatial organisation of people according to their materially unfulfilled needs. My analysis in Chapter Two indicated that Benjamin's terminological turn away from both the notion of the proletariat and that of the humankind suggests an endeavour to formulate an alternative, non-determinist account of how to conceptualise the emergence of an emancipatory political subject. And second, that this attempt can be seen as a response to the theoretical shortcomings on the left (exemplified by Horkheimer) to come to terms with the inability of existing party structures to mobilise the proletariat despite the raging crisis of the costs of living. Benjamin could be seen to further develop this intuition into a broader disagreement with sociological treatment of class in the mid-1930s. As he sketched his own formulation of a theory of class is in the 1936 version of the "Work of Art" essay, Benjamin located class on a different plane of analysis from other forms of social groupings. As the analysis in Chapter Three indicated, Benjamin's specific conception of solidarity as a dissolution of masses into classes rather was a form of disagreement with Popular Front politics of recruiting mass politics for an interclass anti-fascist alliance. The classed perspective on a conflicted understanding of the anthropological collectivity of human beings faded, to an extent, from the late 1930s reflections on the collective subject of female emancipation. Nevertheless, as Chapter Four aimed to show, a perspective on the relationship between historically changing and changeable anthropological constitution of human collectivity and class does not disappear completely. The specific voice of Claire Démar, which Benjamin chooses from the Saint Simonian discussions on female emancipation, offers an account of it oriented on the division of reproductive labour rather than that of individual sexual freedom present in other parts of the debate.

3. Limitations and prospects

It would be difficult to summarise Benjamin's reflections on bodily collectivity with one clear image. Not only is there no one correct form of bodily collectivity in Benjamin's thought, but also to judge it from today's perspective would necessarily mean to risk ahistoric conclusions. We can, however, speak of the limits and the functionality of the framework he probed throughout the two decades, and of the aspects of his reflections which strikes the contemporary reader with particular topicality.

If there is one test which Benjamin's quest to reclaim the global scale of collectivity for the cause of emancipation fails time and again, it is the one so crucial for the thinking

emancipation on a global scale today: the test of challenging a Western- and Eurocentric perspective. The sources that Benjamin counts as parts of his idea of anthropological materialism, while on the heterodox side of what was considered to be canonical at his time, remain exclusively white and European. This is not just an anachronical note on the incompatibility of Benjamin's sources with current critical standards. As suggested in Chapter Two, Benjamin's own sources could have urged him to include the question of colonialism in his reflections on bodily collective subjectivity and its claims to universal emancipation. While his body-centred anthropology does escape – from its very outset at the turn of the 1920s – the dangers of connecting a bodily understood collectivity to an ethnically differentiated group, there is a tangible lack of consideration, on Benjamin's part, of the questions of anticolonial liberation on the corner of the French sources with which he chooses to engage. This is not only the case of his *en passant* mention of the key event which sparked the Surrealists' debate on if they should join the PCF (the anticolonial Riff War). The colonial context had been present in French politics long before the Surrealists. Another, earlier discussions on which Benjamin draws later on in his reflections on bodily collectivity – the Saint Simonian debates on female emancipation – have recently been put in the broader context of their approach to colonial liberation. Incidentally, it is in his approach to these sources that the most fruitful aspect of Benjamin's approach to bodily collectivity for thinking the relationship between universal emancipation and colonialism lies. If, as Naomi Andrews shows, the Saint Simonians' joint treatment of women and slaves as subjects of their universal conception of human emancipation meant that both groups were considered to be weak (Andrews 2013, 2018), Benjamin's careful choice of voices from within the movement pointed to a way out of this problem. Specifically, Benjamin's framing of Démar within the tradition of anthropological materialism pointed out that if bodily human constitution was to become a building block of an idea of universal emancipation, this had to have to do with the key role of the organisation of relations of reproduction rather than with a singular social group as a figure of emancipation (be it women or slaves).

One thing which can be learned from Benjamin's attempts analysed in this thesis, is the intuition behind his problematisation of the historical malleability of human bodily collectivity. Namely, that the cosmopolitan ideas of universal global emancipation need to be checked against the particularity of the human body not so much as a refuge of individuality but as the material basis of the historical forms of our collectivity. As the four chapters of this thesis have shown, Benjamin reapproached this problem from different directions with

different results at various moments in time. There is something to be learned about the intuition behind these attempts from each of them. Firstly, Benjamin's early considerations on bodily collectivity urge us to acknowledge that there is an emancipatory power to be harnessed in a focus on collectivity as a form of wholeness, as long as the latter is conceptualised as historically malleable. Secondly, his reflections at the turn of the 1930s call for recognising that the gravitas of this historical malleability does not lie in any future collective but converges on the present. To follow Benjamin's intuition in "Surrealism" would mean to heed the fact that the organisation of a collective life should not refer to moral standards and idealistic visions of a better humanity but address the corporeal misery of the poor and the oppressed today. Thirdly, Benjamin's reflections on the two types of utopias in the mid-1930s point to an 1intuition that the concrete needs and dreams of today's individuals can only be addressed from the perspective of the organisation of the *whole* collective life. In other words, a general change to social relations is needed first to address the postulates of individual happiness but this does not mean that the latter are to be resolved in it. Finally, a lesson to be learned from Benjamin's late reflections on the relationship between the bodily aspect of human collectivity and gender relations points out the dangers of positing both an individual figure and an abstract unity of differences at the pedestal of universal emancipation.

It is in these observations that, in my view, lies the key to the theoretical potential and contemporaneity of Benjamin's anthropological materialism. Two current contexts are of particular importance for why issues raised in this thesis can feel topical today. Firstly, Benjamin's interwar reflections on forms collectivity offer us a positive conception of collective political subjectivity in the face of circumstances painfully familiar to the contemporary reader: of the fast-rising social inequalities, accelerated by inflation and the cost-of-living crisis, and of the international growth of the popularity of far-right parties. In this regard, Benjamin's figure of bodily collectivity strikes the contemporary reader with a relentless optimism in holding a theoretical space for thinking emancipation on universal anthropological level in times when political organisation was much more successful in mobilising through figures based on anthropological difference such as those of nation and heteronormative family. with a crucially unresolved tension between conflictuous and cosmopolitan understanding of collective emancipation. What remains of value today from the trials and tribulations of Benjamin's figure of bodily collectivity over the two decades is his attempt to frame the tensions between group classifications such as nations or other forms of social groups based on identity on the one hand and emancipatory forms of collectivity on

the other, as both emerge from the historically new, planetary frame of the humankind. This comes with a unique idea of a conflict-driven and porous but universally emancipatory politics of revolutionary change. In it, emancipation comes not from reinstating individual freedom as the boundary of collective goals but from the inherent collectivity and interconnectedness of human beings, as they live together on earth, breathe the same air, and are deeply interconnected by technology and social organisation. This brings me to the second point on the contemporaneity of Benjamin's conception of bodily collectivity. In times of great political mobilisation around the planetary problems of the climate crisis and of the burning questions of how to address collective responsibility and action, Benjamin's considerations on the need to organise politically the cosmic perspective on human existence as collective echoes with particular strength. Benjamin's point that the figure of humankind is both a historical phenomenon and a political battlefield is something on which we reflect still today, as we observe and shape our understanding of global ecopolitics. In this regard, and as a guiding intuition for further research, there is much to be learned from Benjamin's theoretical gesture of holding space for both the broadening of emancipatory agency and for a conflictuous anthropology, sensitive to class struggle and wary of reconciliations.

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