

Please cite the Published Version

Davis, Thomas , Hughes, Kathleen, Iancu, Maria and Land, Chris (2025) Deciphering the wreckage: Walter Benjamin's organization in pieces. *Ephemera: theory and politics in organization*. ISSN 2052-1499

Publisher: Ephemera Editorial Collective

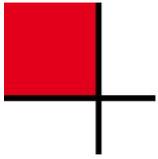
Version: Published Version

Downloaded from: <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/640158/>

Usage rights:  Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0

Enquiries:

If you have questions about this document, contact openresearch@mmu.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in e-space. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our Take Down policy (available from <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/library/using-the-library/policies-and-guidelines>)



Call for papers for an *ephemera* special issue:

Deciphering the wreckage: Walter Benjamin's organization in pieces

Issue editors: Thomas Davis, Kathleen Hughes, Maria Iancu,
and Chris Land

Walter Benjamin produced a remarkable body of work that explored the politics and organization of capitalist modernity. He developed an idiosyncratic interpretation of Marx to investigate the commodification of society in relation to processes of technological change, urban experience, as well as the creation and consumption of art. He wrote on key literary figures such as Marcel Proust, Charles Baudelaire and Franz Kafka, aesthetic and artistic movements such as the Futurists, the Surrealists and utopian socialists, as well as emerging mediums such as photography and film – often interrogating these topics in the context of their social and political potential for affective disruption and societal transformation. Due to economic necessity, Benjamin also regularly undertook commissions for newspaper articles and radio shows on such eclectic topics as the Mississippi flood of 1927, children's toys and the psychology of witch hunts. These sprawling research interests are indicative of an aesthetically informed mode of inquiry that initiated a break with scholarly convention. Benjamin often exuded a playfulness in his experimentation with new ways of interpreting taken-for-granted or often overlooked phenomena, and his work opened up a new space for radical critique and novel forms of literary expression. Yet, his writing was also shot through with the urgency of the times he was living in, with the spectre of rising fascism, messianism, poverty, debt, and violence haunting his texts.

Whilst often enveloped in catastrophe and entropy, Benjamin's writing nonetheless offers important ways of finding new forms of expression by seeking out the extreme and the overlooked, locating in them a radical or redemptive quality: the potential for things to be otherwise. Like the fragments that make up his sprawling study of the Parisian arcades, organizational scholarship drawing on Benjamin's work is, for the most part, suggestively open and diffuse, taking in themes of ruination (De Cock and O'Doherty, 2017), colour (De Cock and Beyes, 2017), pedagogy (Beyes and Steyaert, 2021), as well as informing empirical investigations into festivals (De Molli, Mengis, and van Marrewijk 2020), industrial schools (Kenny, 2013), and the 2008 financial crash (De Cock, Baker, and Volkmann, 2011). Against recent reappraisals of key Frankfurt School scholars such as Theodore Adorno (Cluley and Parker, 2023) – with whom Benjamin maintained a complex relationship throughout much of his life – there has not been a collective engagement with Benjamin's work by organization scholars since De Cock, O'Doherty and Rehn's (2013) inventive special issue in *Management and Organizational History*, published over a decade ago.

With this special issue, we therefore seek to use Benjamin to challenge the organizational canon, building on pioneering work that has applied his ideas and approach to read against the grain of conventional theory and politics in organization (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2019). Benjamin's (2007a) revolutionary political theory of art holds great promise for exploring cultural production in today's particular era of mass consumption, whilst his methodological techniques for exposing illusions of historical continuity as 'destructive momentum' of critique (Benjamin, 2002: 475, *N10a,2*) helps us decipher new material or aesthetic conditions in the catastrophic wreckage of the past and present (Benjamin, 2007b). Through reinterpretation of these more well-known texts, as well as engagements with Benjamin's ideas that are less familiar to researchers of organization, we hope to unsettle our discipline's sense of itself, and its history, and thereby open new ways of interrupting the trajectory of history and pulling the emergency brake (Benjamin, 2006: 402). To discern novel ways to re-encounter the past to imagine and pursue the future differently.

Part of, but outside the Frankfurt School, Benjamin worked most of his life on the margins of institutional academia after his professorial thesis was rejected in 1925. One hundred years later, we encourage reflection on the relationship between Benjamin's material conditions and his intellectual

approach, which emphasises the insights gained through theorizing on the periphery. Further, we welcome submissions that explore how Benjamin's 'organization in pieces' lets us interpret our own positioning (our positioning as individual researchers – and, indeed, the position of *ephemera*) in relation to academic culture a century later.

Benjamin's ideas also invite creative engagements with his methodological innovations: creating new meaning in constellations, allegory, dialectical images and lightning flashes of insight; working with montages of material and cultural ephemera; and attending to the fragmentary or marginal figures in society, such as his image of the metropolitan *flaneur*. This special issue will curate a collection of organizational works developing these ideas and methodologies, opening up a new space for academic experimentation from which to view a novel Benjaminian constellation of critical and alternative theory and politics in organization.

We welcome any papers engaging with the work of Benjamin, but some indicative topics might include:

- Constellation and montage as method of research and writing differently
- The deployment of neglected Benjamin concepts like messianism, phantasmagoria, allegory and hallucination as critical, disruptive forces in management and organization studies
- Re-theorizing the forces of violence and power in organization
- Benjamin's idiosyncratic interpretation of Marx and use of dialectics
- The relations between technology, reproduction, art and ritual in the age of AI generated imagery
- Benjamin as theorist of organizational space, movement and architecture to analyse the arcades and flaneur's of the post-digital 21st century
- The use of images, colour and a dialectical of seeing the kaleidoscopic organization
- Questioning narratives of progress through historical excavation of objects and artefacts: the phantasmagoria of today's fetish objects, material and immaterial
- Interrogating the limits of redemption and messianism in critical theory and politics of organization

- Benjamin's precarious and de-institutionalised position without academia as a critical resource for thinking thought, research and higher education today

This should not, of course, be considered as a comprehensive or restrictive list and we would welcome all submissions that engage with aspects of Benjamin's thought for the creative rethinking of organization.

Deadline and further information

The deadline for submissions is **16 January 2026**. All contributions should be submitted to the issue editors: Thomas Davis, Kathleen Hughes, Maria Iancu and Chris Land (walterbenjaminephemera@gmail.com).

ephemera encourages contributions in a variety of formats, including articles, notes, reviews, interviews and other media. Submissions will undergo a double-blind review process. Please follow *ephemera's* submission guidelines, which are available at www.ephemerajournal.org/how-submit. Please do not hesitate to contact the issue editors with any queries you may have, or to propose a note or review contribution.

references

- Benjamin, W. (2002) *The arcades project*, trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin. London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University.
- Benjamin, W. (2006) 'On the concept of history', in H. Eiland and M. Jennings (eds.) *Selected writings: Volume 4*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Benjamin, W. (2007a) 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. H. Zohn. New York: Schocken Books.
- Benjamin, W. (2007b) 'On some motifs in Baudelaire', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. H. Zohn. New York: Schocken Books.
- Beyes, T. and C. Steyaert (2021) 'Unsettling bodies of knowledge: Walking as a pedagogy of affect', *Management Learning*, 52(2): 224-242.
- Cluley, R. and M. Parker (2023) 'Critical theory in use: Organizing the Frankfurt School', *Human Relations*, 76(11): 1689-1713.
- De Cock, C., D. O'Doherty and A. Rehn (2013) 'Specters, ruins and chimeras: *Management & Organizational History's* encounter with Benjamin', *Management & Organizational History*, 8(1): 1-9.

- De Cock, C., M. Baker and C. Volkmann (2011) 'Financial phantasmagoria: Corporate image-work in times of crisis', *Organization*, 18(2): 153-172.
- De Cock, C. and T. Beyes (2017) 'Adorno's grey, Taussig's blue: Colour, organization, and critical affect', *Organization*, 24(1): 59-78.
- De Cock, C and D. O'Doherty (2017) 'Ruin and organizational studies', *Organization Studies*, 38(1): 129-150.
- De Molli, F., J. Mengis and A. van Marrewijk (2020) 'The aestheticization of hybrid space: The atmosphere of the Locarno Film Festival', *Organization Studies*, 41(11): 1491-1512.
- Kenny, K. (2013) 'Affective disruption: Walter Benjamin and the "history" of Ireland's industrial schools', *Management & Organizational History*, 8(1): 10-22.
- Kociatkiewicz, J. and M. Kostera (2019) 'Textual *flânerie*: Writing management with Walter Benjamin', *ephemera: theory and politics in organization*, 19(1): 163-178.