

Paris-Monad: Origin, Passage, Intermittency. Benjamin and the Metaphysics of Modern Times

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The background thesis of the paper concerns the deep methodological continuity that binds Benjamin's Project on the Parisian Passages to his book on the Trauerspiel. The starting point is offered then by the reprise of the connection between Benjamin's micrology and the theological task of critically reconstituting the whole in its original sense. This connection is consequently developed in a consideration of the "passage" as a nominal substance. On this basis is focused the complementarity in Benjamin's late philosophy between historical materialism and theological nominalism. From the intertwining between urban and linguistic spaces emerges the figure of modern city as a labyrinth. The last move consists in converting the labyrinth in a monad, that is in an intensive space of knowledge and experience of truth.

1. From The Origin of the German Trauerspiel to The Arcades Project: a methodological continuity

We cannot understand Benjamin's late meditation on Modernity, which has in Baudelaire its hero and in the Paris of the nineteenth century its historical emblem, without considering the deep methodological continuity that binds the Project on the Parisian Passages to the book on the Trauerspiel and particularly to its epistemo-critical Introduction. Also in relation to the problem of representing the connection between time and experience in the context of the Modern, the method Benjamin pursues is that of micrology. According to this method, the immersion in the fragmentary nature of the detail is the only way to gain an overview, a synoptic perspective on the whole. In other words, the pathway to totality passes through the dialectic door of its negation, of a critical analysis that shatters its appearance, revealing how illusory the short way of the metaphysical intuition or of the immediately symbolic cognition are. This does not mean, however, to abandon the task of critically reconstituting its sense, namely of restoring dignity to the qualitatively intensive character of the whole. A task that comes out to be necessarily endless, since it feeds on

the detours and on the infinitesimal progressions of a thought that can chase its object only by the means of the long rides of a roundabout way, an “Umweg”.

With this last term, *Umweg*, Benjamin identifies, in the *Einleitung* to the *Trauerspielbuch*, his own method. This identification extends also to Benjamin’s later research and involves even the “constructive principle” of materials’ disposition and the theoretical framework of the Arcades Project. If also the constructive method Benjamin employs in the montage of citations, which constitute the bricks of the *Passagenwerk*, keeps an *Umweg* character, this is one reason more to argue that not even in this case Benjamin’s procedure can do without a micrological breath. Although its object changes, from the text of the baroque drama to the history and prehistory of the Modern, the micrological method is confirmed. As in a game of Russian dolls, the critical synopsis of the Modern and its origin is acquired through the analysis of Baudelaire’s Paris which, in turn, gets caught in the historical-architectural phenomenon of the “passage” and in the tension that it establishes with its name.

2. The “passage” as a nominal substance: the name as a filter

As a result, the very task of representing the Modern, which Benjamin intends to achieve with the work on the Parisian passages, leads to the need of questioning and representing the symbolic dignity of a name, that of the “passage”. To the nominal substance of the baroque “*Trauerspiel*” corresponds, as well, that of the modern “passage”. In the “passage”, in its being understood as a mere name, what is dialectically at work is time:

Being past, being no more, is passionately at work in things. To the historian trusts for his subject matter. He depends on this force, and knows things as they are at the moment of their ceasing to be. Arcades are such monuments of being-no-more. And the energy that works in them is dialectics. The dialectic takes its way through the arcades, ransacking them, revolutionizing them, turns them upside down and inside out, converting them, since they no longer remain what are, from abodes of luxury to <x>. And nothing of them lasts except the name: *Passages*. And: Passage du Panorama <sic>.¹

¹ W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. W. Eiland and K. McLaughlin, Belknap, Cambridge (Mass.) and London 1999, First Sketches, <D°,4>, p. 833.

What the passage has been and has meant as an expressive phenomenon of Paris as the capital of an entire epoch is retained in its nominal residue. The name is what remains. As with every other historical phenomenon, which is undermined by the Hegelian “fury of destruction”, it is valid also for the “passages” their continuing to exist only in the residual form of the name that the memory can retain. It is, however, an active residuality. The name of the passage, already in its resounding, acts as a filter that distills the essence of everything that has been and has found expression in it:

So long as the gas lamps, even the oil lamps were burning in them, the arcades were fairy palaces. But if we want to think of them at the height of their magic, we must call to mind the Passage des Panoramas around 1870 <?>: on one side, there was gaslight; on the other, oil lamps still flickered. The decline sets in with electric lighting. Fundamentally, however, it was no decline but, properly speaking, a reversal. As mutineers, after plotting for days on end, take possession of a fortified site, so the commodity by a lightning stroke seized power over the arcades. Only then came the epoch of commercial firms and figures. The inner radiance of the arcades faded with the blaze of electric lights and withdrew into their names. But their name was now like a filter which let through only the most intimate, the bitter essence of what had been. (This strange capacity for distilling the present, as inmost essence of what has been, is, for true travelers, what gives to the names its exciting and mysterious potency).²

3. The complementary polarity between historical materialism and theological nominalism

As this fragment from the First Sketches of the Passagenwerk attests, the historical materialism of the late Benjamin stays in a relationship of complementary polarity with the theological nominalism of the early writings that finds its most complete metaphysical-systematic formulation in the Introduction to the book on the Trauerspiel. Precisely in the tension between the “passage” as a historical phenomenon, as an allegorical cipher of an epoch that does not want to know its ending (hence the theme of the Modern as Hell’s time), and the “passage” as a mere name, which distills the essence of its history, we can gather this necessary correspondence between historical materialism and nominalism. It would be wrong, however, to intend this affinity as an internalization process that turns the truth of the “passage” into an *Erlebnis*. What the deep relationship between the two

² Ivi, First Sketches, <D°,6>, p. 834.

poles fuels is rather the cognitive dimension of experience. It is only in the context of the latter, in fact, that the name becomes “recognizable” and can unfold its essence³. The sense of this unfolding is both materially historical and speculatively reflective. In the (linguistic) essence of the “passage” what gets known is the true face of the city in which it takes place as an architectural phenomenon. In the consideration of the “passage”, in the analysis of its social life and of the figures that cross it (from the flâneur to the prostitute, from man-sandwich to the ragman, from the worker to the man-mass that forms the crowd), Benjamin gains a lens to peer into the most hidden or neglected folds of Parisian life and, together, a compass to venture in its labyrinthine shape. Thanks to the nominal filter of the “passage”, through the magnifying power of reflection it can turn on, Benjamin understands how the modern metropolis, and Paris in particular, present themselves in the experience of their inhabitants as a topological-linguistic twine, where the maze of streets is also a maze of names:

What was otherwise reserved for only a very few words, a privileged class of words, the city has made possible for all words, or at least a great many: to be elevated to the noble status of name. This revolution in language was carried out by what is most general: the street. - Through its street names, the city is a linguistic cosmos.⁴

4. The intertwining between urban and linguistic spaces: the modern city as a labyrinth. Paris as a Labyrinth.

The experience of the dweller of the modern city is therefore presented as the experience of such inextricable and dense intertwining of reciprocal influences between urban and linguistic spaces. An intertwining where the toponomastic becomes an expression of both the historical memory and the political dialectics that governs it. A weaving that finds in the identity between streets and names its original cell, and in the mythical image of labyrinth the most densely symbolic expression of its way of being and of being experienced. If that of the labyrinth is a key-image that magnetically runs across Benjamin’s entire work (one might just think about its presence in *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, particularly in the chapter “Tiergarten”, which is dense of esoterically metaphysical echoes), it is precisely in the complex of the Passagenwerk

³ Cfr. Ivi, <Q°,24>, p. 868.

⁴ Ivi, The street of Paris, [P3,5], p. 522.

that the image of the labyrinth emerges in all its philosophical significance, especially as an expression of that dialectics of self-alienation, which also implies the «maximum alienation of men from one another»⁵, that constitutes human experience in Modernity, as pervaded and marked by the city-form. For an experience threatened by poverty – modern experience, as Benjamin clarifies definitively in his famous essay of 1933, is primarily “poverty of experience” – , an experience that does not rely on mouth to mouth transmission (the narrative tradition that by transmitting experiences gives them continuity and enriched sense) and must always start all over again from the beginning, the modern metropolis constantly recurs in the mythical form of a labyrinth. A linguistic labyrinth, first of all:

What the big city of modern times has made of the ancient conception of the labyrinth? It has raised it, through the names of streets, into the sphere of language [...].⁶

The city emerges, therefore, as a labyrinth in language, mediated by language: a labyrinth raised to the second power, where the difficulties and aporias of the purely spatial labyrinth are preserved and multiplied. A labyrinth where the venture soon threatens to turn in pure wandering and getting lost. As it is admirably clarified in the opening sentences of the aforementioned *Tiergarten*:

Not to find one’s way around a city does not mean much. But to lose one’s way in a city, as one loses one’s way in a forest, requires some schooling. Street names must speak to the urban wanderer like the snapping of dry twigs, and little streets in the heart of the city must reflect the times of day, for him, as clearly as a mountain valley. This art I acquired rather late in life; it fulfilled a dream, of which the first traces were labyrinths on the blotting papers in my school notebooks.⁷

The names can not only function as orientation marks, they can also mislead, mostly when they oppose to the wanderer an obstinate muteness. The labyrinthine shape offered by the modern city, and by Paris before any other, discloses soon its chthonic dimension. So the descent into the *Métro* is similar to a descent into hell:

⁵ W. Benjamin, *1931-1934: Selected Writings*, ed. by W. Jennings, H. Eiland, G. Smith, vol. 2, Part 2, Cambridge (Mass.) and London 2005, Part 2, , Franz Kafka, p. 814.

⁶ *The Arcades Project* – First Sketches, <F°, 19>, p. 839.

⁷ W. Benjamin, *1935-1938: Selected Writings*, ed. by H. Eiland and M. W. Jennings, Vol. 3, Belknap, Cambridge (Mass.) and London 2002, *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, p. 352.

Red lights marking the entrance to the underworld of names. Link between name and labyrinth in the Métro.⁸

5. Paris as a labyrinth: the flâneur and the masses. The prostitute.

Only in the unity between its daylight and its submerged side, only in the continuous and reciprocal reference between the overcome world and the netherworld, the modern city unfolds the mythical power of the labyrinth-form, as the image that represents it more than each other. Precisely in relation to it, the question of self-orientation arises as a necessity at the height of an experience of self-estrangement, which is marked by the looping transition between the perception of the real world and dreamlike perception. The extreme poles of this self-alienation that humanity experiences in the city as a labyrinth, and in primis as a labyrinth in language, are given by the flâneur and the masses. The very existence of the first is entirely dedicated to the labyrinth seen as the realization of an ancient human dream⁹. In the labyrinth, as an undecided image in between reality and dream, the flâneur has his residence, without being aware of it. As a mere, aimlessly wandering, oblivious to the deadly threat the labyrinth contains in its center (where the Minotaur awaits the flâneur), the meaning of the typical experience of *flânerie* is that of pure hesitation, the hesitation of someone «who always arrives early enough at his destination»¹⁰. If from a historical point of view this destination is the market, where human consciousness is dominated by commodity fetishism, from the point of view of the experience of the isolated individual it is the death that is mythically signified by the Minotaur. Both aspects, however, come together in the figure of the prostitute:

The first arcanum known to prostitution is thus the mythical aspect of the city as labyrinth. This includes, as one would expect, an image of the Minotaur at its center. That he brings death to the individual is not the essential fact. What

⁸ *The Arcades Project* – First Sketches, <F°, 30>, p. 840.

⁹ Ivi, *The Flâneur*, [M 6°, 4], pp. 429-30.

¹⁰ WB, SW, V. 4, 1938-1940, Central Park, p. 170.

is crucial is the image of the deadly power he embodies. And this, too, for inhabitants of the great cities, is something new.¹¹

The prostitute, as central figure of the modern city and dialectic expression of the commodity-form, involves, however, the other pole of the experience of the labyrinth, that of the masses:

Prostitution opens the possibility of a mythical communion with the mass. The masses came into being at the same time as mass production. Prostitution seems to offer the possibility of enduring a life in which the most immediate objects of our use have turned more and more into mass commodities. In big-city prostitution, the woman herself becomes a mass-produced article.¹²

As a form of self-alienating experience, complementary both to the flâneur and the prostitute, the masses exhibit the dual regime of their existence. On the one hand, they represent a crucial figure of the city-labyrinth, the one that hides the solitary experience of the flâneur like a veil; on the other hand, they impose themselves as an extreme incarnation in which the mythical image of the labyrinth takes concrete form: «Finally, within the labyrinth of the city, the masses are the newest and most inscrutable labyrinth»¹³.

Through the masses, however, «previously unknown chthonic traits are imprinted on the image of the city»¹⁴, and this clarifies that the hesitation, the reluctance to leave the enchantment of the labyrinthine image does not concern the experience of the individual in its isolation, but rather that of a humanity «which does not want to know where its destiny is taking it»¹⁵.

6. The labyrinth of consciousness: dream time and awakening.

In the light of this implication we can understand how the sense of the experience of the labyrinth, in the mediated form of language and in the historical figures it organizes, directly concerns, at the center of the Arcades Project, that dialectic of consciousness that has in the idea of awakening its

¹¹ W. Benjamin, *1938-1940: Selected Writings*, ed. by H. Eiland and M. W. Jennings, Vol. 4, Belknap, Cambridge (Mass.) and London 2003, Central Park, p. 189.

¹² Ivi, p. 170.

¹³ *The Arcades Project*, The Flâneur, [M 16, 3], p. 446.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ W. Benjamin, *1938-1940: Selected Writings*, cit., *Central Park*, cit., p. 171.

turning point. In awakening Benjamin sees a synthesis between dream consciousness and wake consciousness¹⁶. A decisive role is played here by Benjamin's reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (probably through Kojève) in parallel to the writing of the *Passagenwerk*. The experience, which must emancipate from the mythical power of the labyrinth image by going through it until reaching its center, is ultimately a «Science of the Experience of Consciousness» in the Hegelian sense. Except that Benjamin opposes to the Hegelian dialectic and to the continuum of time that it implies an intimately discontinuous imaginal dialectic. As if Benjamin collapsed into one figure, that of the labyrinth of consciousness still immersed in a dream time (in the *Zeit-Raum* of a *Zeit-Traum*¹⁷, both the two senses of the labyrinth evoked in a famous passage of Leibniz's *Theodicy*: that of freedom (in relation to necessity) and that of continuum (in relation to the indivisibles).

7. The need of converting into a Monad the image of the labyrinth: the monadic structure of the *passage*.

How to orient oneself, by awakening, in the midst of such labyrinth of consciousness that is coextensive to the modern experience of the city? How to dissolve into a historical experience the mythical power of the labyrinth-image? How to convert critically this latter into a dialectic image? My thesis is that in the face of this problem Benjamin, albeit through the resumption of the Hegelian dialectic, made recourse to Leibniz once again, converting into a Monad the image of the labyrinth. In perfect continuity with the *Einleitung* to the *Trauerspielbuch*, also in the *Passagenwerk*, albeit more discreetly, the figure of the truth (and its experience) is that of a Monad. This is evident in passages such as the following:

The true has no windows. Nowhere does the true look out to the universe. And the interest of the panorama is in seeing the true city. "The city in the bottle"—the city indoors. What is found within the windowless house is the true. One such windowless house. is the theater; hence the eternal pleasure it affords.

¹⁶ Cfr. *The Arcades Project*, On the Theory of Knowledge, pp. 462-463.

¹⁷ Cfr. ivi, [K 1, 4], p. 389.

Hence, also, the pleasure taken in those windowless rotundas, the panoramas.¹⁸

The urban and linguistic space in which the conversion of the labyrinth into a Monad takes place, the space in which a mindful consciousness can awaken, is that of the “passage”. Through its profusion of mirrors, the “passage” may entail both, the persistence of illusion (apotheosis of a game of semblances in which consciousness is subdued by the phantasmagoria) and, alternatively, the occasion for reflection and self- reflection: the opportunity, for human consciousness, to rejoin with itself and affirm its own freedom. For a moment, the image of passage, in counterpoint with its name, might become dialectic and give the chance of awakening, by converting itself in the “now of recognizability”. In such “now” the continuum of time stops and, relaxing for a moment, converts into an intensive space of knowledge and experience of truth. According to what Benjamin writes to Adorno in a letter dated December 9, 1938, in the historical object constituted as a monad «the [textual] detail which was frozen in a mythical rigidity comes alive». Therefore, if also the structure of the *Fleurs du mal*¹⁹ is monadological, something similar can be said about the architectural structure of the passage. In its being undecided between street and building, the arcade has removed from its idea the notion of outside. Precisely because of this absence of outward appearance, the arcades can be assimilated to the dream: «arcades are houses or passages having no outside – like the dream»²⁰. At the same time, however, they may turn into a monadic structure, where consciousness may have experience of an intensive infinity, constituted by the differential variation of time and by the integral of an equally intensive space. In the “passage” Benjamin can grasp, this way, the very origin of Modernity and he’s able to do this by the form of the city that Paris signifies with all its fore- and after-history. In light of the passage, in the convergence between its historical character and its intensional nominal existence, the infernal time of modernity, as time of a void progression or an eternal return of the same, can be transformed into

¹⁸ *The Arcades Project* – First Sketches, < F°, 24 >, p. 840.

¹⁹ Cfr. W. Benjamin, *1938-1940: Selected Writings*, cit., Central Park, p. 162.

²⁰ *The Arcades Project* – Dream House, [L 1a, 1], p. 406.

a historically unfinished time that waits for redemption and claims it. First of all, it claims that redemption which may come from knowledge and its ability to capture in detail the cognitive breath of the whole. But how can the monadic structure of the passage and the mindful thought that runs through it become “panorama”, point of view, perspective on the totality? Benjamin’s answer seems to consist in a critical method, which, incorporating micrology in the steps of its proceeding, takes the form of an apokatastasis.

8. The micrological method as an Apokatastasis

In Benjamin’s work, the Origenian idea of Apokatastasis or reintegration of all things appears for the first time in the context of the essay on *The storyteller*. The context of the reference to Origen is the fairy tale character of Leskov’s narrative. Explained here as «the entry of all souls into Paradise», the *Apokatastasis*’ doctrine is interpreted in the context of Leskov’s work as the power of the fairy tale to rescue from the myth and from the principle of eternal repetition that dominates it. In the resumption of the Apokatastasis theme in the *Passagenwerk*, the context is no longer the theological-creatural relationship between narrative and redemption (the fairy tale as an anticipation of the liberation from myth), but it is the critical-methodological context of the «cultural-historical dialectic»²¹. Benjamin introduces his observation as a «modest methodological proposal». However, it would be a mistake not to recognize the slightly ironic sense of «modest». The problem is that of a historical knowledge, which is not limited to the historicist acceptance of the facts, but feeds on a constructive tension with its epistemic object. In short, the problem is to define the relationship between criticism and history, especially on the issue of representing the meaning and form of an epoch by analyzing its phenomena with a micrological method. The process will be, therefore, that of establishing oppositions, screening and re-configuring data and elements by operating selections «according to certain points of view» (*ibid.*).

²¹ Cfr. *The Arcades Project*, [N 1 a, 3], p. 459.

9. The «ad infinitum» of the dialectical negation and the task of the historical apokatastasis

What appears «forward-looking», «lively» and «positive» will be divided, therefore, from what is shown as «abortive, retrograde, and obsolescent». If we would stop here, anyway, Benjamin's proposal could effectively sound «modest». This, we might observe, is nothing more than the standard view of a critical procedure. Benjamin's passage consists, however, in making the boundary between positive and negative intimately mobile. The mobility of the boundary between the positive and the negative of historical knowledge, with its epistemically constructive dimension, implies the assumption of the negation principle as engine of a dialectical movement. By the power of negation, through its original inquietude Benjamin conceives the form of historical time to the second power: as the time of a construction, which finds in the destruction of the continuity appearance its generative moment (the other *facies* of its critical constructiveness). In this regard, Benjamin's move is certainly mindful of Hegel's dialectic and sets the basis for a decisive confrontation with it. Every negation thus acquires value in relation to the profile of the positive that it points out and leads to manifestation. Consequently, the contours of the living and the positive appear from the bottom of the negative. However, in this appearing of historical truth as an epistemic object, there is nothing fixed forever. The separating and discerning power of negation is applied every time again to what had been previously excluded. The point of view changes, but the criteria that inspire the critical-negative movement have not been abandoned. In the gap, a new positive element emerges: «something different from previously signified» (*ibid.*). Without a last line in time and in historical object can be predicted, a last line that would make the division between the positive and the negative something permanent. «And so on, ad infinitum – Benjamin concludes – until the entire past is brought into the present in a historical Apokatastasis» (*ibid.*).

10. To save the phenomena: making justice to «the indestructibility of the highest life in all things»

With the latter observation, the purely methodological tonality of Benjamin's considerations is abandoned. The discourse on method here alludes directly to the question of the criterion, from which it moves and to which it applies, letting us see its theological and metaphysical assumption. The past that as a whole is brought into the present coincides logically with the figure of the Parousia, where the end generates the beginning. The premise of the entire work on the Parisian passages, in fact, consists in the reprise of Plato's program to save the phenomena. To the Jewish Platonism of names outlined in the Foreword to the book on the *Trauerspiel*, corresponds, in the Arcades Project, a Platonism from below – from the dark background of the historical material – with the task of making justice to every phenomenon, even to the most disjointed and marginal. This task can also be expressed in affirming, «against the prognosticators of decline», «the indestructibility of the highest life in all things»²². This, in the assumption that even in the most overlooked detail or fragment vibrates, albeit in a latent form, an indestructible life that illuminates the whole, in the same sense that there are no periods of decline. This is namely the idea of truth as Apokatastasis that the Arcades Project intends to support:

The pathos of this work: there are no periods of decline. Attempt to see the nineteenth century just as positively as I tried to see the seventeenth, in the work on *Trauerspiel*. No belief in periods of decline. By the same token, every city is beautiful to me (from outside its borders), just as all talk of particular languages having greater or lesser value is to me unacceptable.²³

11. Time differential, dialectical image, Monad, Jetzt-Zeit

Coherently with this idea of truth in its relationship with the whole as an epistemic-messianic task, Benjamin, in the *Passagenwerk*, takes up the theory of the monad, developing it, however, in close connection with the theory of the dialectical image. By criticizing Hegel's dialectics, Benjamin introduces the «time differential [Zeitdifferential]» in the form of images. The image's «temporal momentum [Zeitmoment]» is what both the principle of variation and the critical leverage of

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ Ivi, *Theory of Knowledge*, [N 1,6], p. 458.

negation rely on. As interwoven with time, the image is in its own right a «dialectical image». The image's actuality culminates in the «Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit» that for Benjamin represents the canon of the messianic truth: a truth that can irremediably escape and fall into oblivion, if not caught promptly. «Salvation of the past means to hold the Zeit in Jetzt, causing the Jetzt-Zeit». The act of stopping time, the messianic gesture of grasping its inner discontinuity, derives consequently from the attempt of catching its differential origin (its consisting of the quasi-nothing of the image). However, it is possible to aim at restoring the figures (the integral) of its fulfillment, only converting time, caught in the differential character of the images, in the integral of space. This complex dialectic is represented and realized by the figure of the passages intended as Monad. In relation to them Paris itself becomes a Monad.

It is a world of strict discontinuity [...] always again new [...] not something old that remains, or something past that recurs, but one and the same crossed by countless intermittences [das von zahllosen Intermittenzen gekreuzte Eine und Selbe].²⁴

12. Intermittency as metaphysics of Modern

Although the context of this observation is that of the relationship between «the optics of the myriorama and the time of the Modern», its meaning has a dialectical value. While it regards hell, the time of the condemnation to endless repetition, it involves the Messianic world too. The first is only the sinister parody of the second: its inverted image. For this reason, the fragment ends with the reference to «the chapter on origin in the book on Baroque». According to the intermittence's principle, which constitutes the critical heart of the passage, «every look in space meets with a new constellation» (*ibid.*). To grasp the modern, the time that distinguishes itself through the complementarity between infinite progress and eternal return, means, thus, to understand it «as the new in the context of what has always already been there»²⁵.

The gesture of recognizing the uniqueness of a constellation in the space of the identical is as much «theological» as «political»²⁶. In this gesture, time and space lose their abstract separateness. Internal and external inter-

²⁴ Ivi, First Sketches, < G°, 19>, p. 843.

²⁵ Ivi, Painting, Jugendstil, Painting, [S1,4], p. 544.

²⁶ Ivi, [S1, 3], p. 543.

permeate in the space-time of a monadic configuration that, with the words of the *Preface* to the book on the *Trauerspiel*, constitutes an «objective interpretation of the phenomena» that includes the viewer's gaze. This configuration, where the time continuum as «eternal passage» is converted in the space of a monadic totality, however, is conceivable only in the dialectic that extinguishes the absolute appearance of the image in the truth of the name.

13. The true image of Modern: the origin as “passage”

In this dialectic, the image of Modern, of actual times, as hell is led back to recognize its origin, and therefore its truth, in the space-time of passage. To identify the *Ursprung*, the origin, as passage means to conceive as a single act the Messianic stop of time in the political actuality of redemption and the task of the *restitutio in integrum* as a restoration of the principle. The possibility to think the unity between these two moments transforms into a deep theological insight what may look like «a tired and withered truth» namely, «that the world is always the same (that all events could have taken place in the same space)»²⁷. The intuition concerns the fact that the arrest of the Messianic time, the crisis of its continuum coincides, according to Origen's doctrine of the Apokatastasis, with the generation of its principle, to which the image of the end resembles.

At the heart of this insight there is, therefore, the truth that «*Ursprung ist das Ziel*» (origin is the goal), but specifying that this applies to every moment because the truth depends on it. Indeed, it is the «*Jetzt der Erkenntbarkeit*» that articulates the dialectical method as a concrete and precise intersection between the differential time of image and the space in which the image takes place and comes into existence. As Benjamin states in a methodological fragment, the «higher concretion» of the *Jetztsein* (of the now-being), in which the dialectical method does justice to a historical situation, is exactly that of a waking consciousness: «*Wachseins!* (Waking being!)»²⁸. On the other hand, this now-being is nothing less than the

²⁷ Ivi, [S1, 5], p. 546.

²⁸ Ivi, Dream City and Dream House, [K2, 3], p. 391.

«*Jetztzeit*», the actuality of the world that is understood in the tension or in the endless task of unifying revelation and redemption, origin and goal. This task can also result in an endless process of integration, where «everything past (in its time) can acquire a higher grade of actuality»²⁹.

14. Monadic integration. The *Jetztzeit* as Intermittence: Apokatastasis pantōn (Benjamin & Leibniz)

The highest concretion is thus conceived in the perspective of a monadic integration that culminates in the figure of the ontological and epistemic *Jetztzeit* joining the curve of the infinite time approximation (the principle of infinitesimal variation) and the permanence of identity: the being one and the same space as *integrum*: the integral of the whole. This figure of the *integrum*, the integral of the space, is conceivable, however, only at the apex of the *Jetztsein* of the *Jetztzeit*. This confers to the whole the vital dimension of an intensive existence. The now-being of the *Jetztzeit* – as Benjamin says – counts as something «*stoßweises und intermittierendes*»: of «pulsing and intermittent». The *Jetztzeit* as intermittence in being one and the same space in which all events happen and take place: all this says something significant about the dialectic between incompleteness and revelation which is inherent to the origin. In connection with this dialectic intermittence of the origin, »; the redeemed world, the word of an integral actuality where the past had become «citable in all its moments», involves the idea of Apokatastasis as a critical task in the form of an «infinitely intensive process». It requires it both logically and theologically. Therefore, Benjamin, perhaps without knowing it, but coherently with his historical monadology, is to re-think the same problem thought by Leibniz in the fragment titled *Apokatástasis pantōn*³⁰. While, however, Leibniz thinks the apokatastasis of all things in the light of the *lex continui* and, thus, of the infinite variation in the sense of a continuous progression, Benjamin conceives the same idea in the light of a radical discontinuity. To Leibniz's evolutionary apocalypse, where the link between continuum and continuation excludes the

²⁹ Ivi, p. 392.

³⁰ Written in 1715, but published only in 1921 by M. Ettliger in *Leibniz als Geschichtsphilosoph*.

interruption of an eschatological end of all things, Benjamin seems to oppose the ratio of the interval between catastrophe and messianic redemption. An eschatological solution prone to divide time from eternity is absent in Benjamin's thought as well, but this happens for a different reason than in Leibniz. Indeed, Benjamin shifts the catastrophe of time in every «now». To Leibniz's *lex continui* Benjamin opposes thus the rule of a radical discontinuity. The opposition, however, is less radical than it may appear at first glance. The sense of discontinuum, if caught in the dialectics that brings the pure differences of time to the space of their total figure (the realm of truth), is that of intermittence: the origin as intermittence, as Monad-fragment in which the truth is exploded and to which it always reassembles. Even the worst of all possible worlds can tip over into the space of an infinite approximation, in the shape of a re-deemed world. Neither for Leibniz nor for Benjamin evil can, therefore, be thought of as another principle. This would be the case, if space could be dissolved in the time of consciousness, of an «absolute spirituality», separated from the world and from others. At least for Benjamin, all this depends on the fact that he does not allow this image to persist in itself. The «radical destruction of the world of images» consists in their dialectical reversal. In this reversal, absolute evil dissolves like appearance: it reveals what it is, «just and only allegory»³¹ and so is abandoned «the supposed infinity of despair»³². Conclusively, it is only in the intermittent dialectics between the origin and the apokatastasis that even the metaphysical experience of the Modern can still recognize, remembering the “passages”, a weak spark of hope.

³¹ W. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. J. Osborne, New Left Books, London 1977, p. 208.

³² Ivi, p. 207.