

Collective Memory of War and the Redemption of the Individual Experience in Walter Benjamin

Ryohei Kageura

Benjamin defines the story as a medium of the collective experience. Story is an oral communication, and it is not understandable in itself. It becomes understandable only if listener makes it his proper experience. We share a story, but this story's content is our individual experience. Story can include every individual experience. Opposed to the story, information is a modern medium of communication, which is understandable in itself. Incomprehensibility of story is derived from the death of storyteller, because it makes it impossible to know what he means. Death is a condition of the collective memory. But the First World War was not able to create a collective memory. It is because the war is out of the society. The modern society excludes the sight of the dying from itself. It concentrates places to die in a particular place like sanatoria, hospital, or battlefield. Nazism is a movement that aims to reconstitute the collective memory of the First World War. But this memory is nothing but information, consequently it excludes those who do not identify themselves with it. Benjamin's historical materialism consists in the paradoxical work to retrieve individual experiences in order to understand that there are irretrievable individual experiences.

The aim of this article is to clarify Benjamin's thought about collective memory of war and salvation of individual experiences. Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) was an important German-Jewish philosopher of the first half of the twentieth century; he wrote on a wide range of subjects, but his best-known work is perhaps his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* which has been influential in the fields of cultural studies and media theory. Benjamin lived in the period of the First World War, but was not able to survive the Second World War. At the first of the Second

one, he died in Portbou at the Spanish-French border, attempting to escape from the Nazis. So, Benjamin does not know about the concentration camp. This fact makes him differ from the other Jewish thinkers who survived the Second World War, like Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno, etc. Those thinkers problematize the memory and the representation of the Jewish genocide: in *The origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt refers to the problem of the collective memory by the notion “holes of oblivion” (459)¹; In his essay *Cultural criticism and society*, Adorno declares: “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today” (34). They problematize the existence of the unrepresentable, that is, of the individual experience of victim that we cannot reach. In addition, a French philosopher, Jean-François Lyotard, clarifies this problem of the unrepresentable and the inevitability of the fight against revisionism: The existence of the gas chamber at Auschwitz can not be proved, if we follow strictly the presupposition of witness, according to which only the eyewitness can testify the events. If one is a victim of the gas chamber, one cannot testify that it is on account of the gas chamber, because one must be dead. This is an instance of the existence of unrepresentable (Lyotard 16-17). All contemporary thinkers come face to face with such a difficulty of the collective memory of war. Then, Benjaminian thought does not belong to such a context. However, Benjamin has made efforts to elucidate the collective memory of the First World War in his essay *Der Erzähler, The storyteller*. In this way, Benjamin treated the collective memory of a war in the different context from the one of Arendt, Adorno, etc. This article begins with the analysis of *The storyteller*. It will offer us another perspective on the collective memory of war. In this essay Benjamin tries to clarify conditions of a story (in the sense that a storyteller tells stories; *Erzählung*) and impossibility of a story in the modernity, through a reflection on the work of Nikolai Leskov. *Story* is a medium of the collective experience which includes every individual experience. And collective experience is itself structure of the communication of a story. But collective experience loses its medium in the modernity, where *information* is substituted for story. In this way, Benjamin treats the relation between media and collective memory. So, at first, we will read *The storyteller* in order to clarify Benjaminian thoughts of the story, and the relation between individual experience and collective memory of war. Then, we will read his posthumous manuscript “Theses on Philosophy of History”. This difficult text will permit us to understand Benjamin’s thought on salvation of every individual experience in the modernity.

Story is a premodern form of media. Benjamin opposes story to writing. Story can exist only in oral communication: “Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn” (Benjamin, GS2 440). In this way, story is communicated by the voice of its teller. The storyteller is not the writer of a story, but the teller of a story. In the case of writing, the reader is separated from the writer. But, in the case of the story, the teller and the listener share the same realm of storytelling, because story is an experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth. Story presupposes the community which teller and listener are members of. According to Benjamin, the artisan class of the Middle Ages is such a community. In the community of storytelling, the storyteller is the former listener, and the listener is the future storyteller. Storyteller makes his experience listener’s experience. And the listener will become the

¹ And she retries to treat this notion of “hole of oblivion” in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963).

future storyteller who makes his shared experience his listener's one: "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (GS2 443).

At the beginning of the essay *Erfahrung und Armut*, that is, *Experience and poverty*, Benjamin presents an Aesop's fable. This fable helps to get a better understanding of the story. It runs as follows: before his death, old man told, in bed, to his children that a treasure was hidden in his vineyard. After his death, they dug, but they did not find anything. When the autumn arrived, his vineyard was the most fruitful in the whole country. Then they understood that their father wanted to leave them the fruit of his experience: the true richness is not to find in the gold, but in the work (GS2 213-214).

This Aesop's fable can be considered as a story of the story, a meta-story, if we consider the old man's last words a story. He, the storyteller, tells his story to his children, to his listeners. But his story is incomprehensible in itself for his children, because they could not find any treasure in his vineyard. His death makes the incomprehensibility of his story absolute for their children, because they cannot ask him anymore what he meant. In this way, the story is not understandable in itself. Its incomprehensibility is its infinity, which its authority comes from. Then the story appears an unreadable doctrine. And it becomes understandable only if the listener makes it his proper experience. The children understand their father's words only when they are joined to their work in the vineyard, that is, to their lived experience. Story is understandable only in the listener's lived experience. Of course, nothing assures identity between what an old man meant and his children's understanding. But, therefore, his last word appears something inexhaustible for his children. Story does not stop to teach something to the listener. Story remains useful and practical for him, because it makes his lived experience so meaningful that he thinks he has to go on with this experience. Thanks to their father's last word, the children can understand that their work deserves something that is said to be a treasure. It seems they hope to work more diligently the next year. Their father's word inspires them to greater efforts in their work. In this way, story contributes to listener's life. Benjamin says: "It [every real story] contains, openly or covertly, something useful. The usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers. [...] After all, counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of an event [*Geschichte*] (which is just unfolding)" (GS2 442). Each storyteller tells a story in his proper experience, but this story's content is the experience of his listener. Such is Benjaminian thought of collective experience. We share a collective experience, but our understanding of this experience is different from each other, because understanding comes only from our individual experience. And collective experience makes individual experiences living and meaningful.

Benjamin opposes the story to a modern form of communication that the press shows us: information. The press aims to explain the things in the world. Then, information "lays claim to prompt verifiability. The prime requirement is that it appears "understandable in and for itself [*an und für sich verständlich*]" (GS2 444). Information does not need individual lived experience anymore, because it is understandable in itself. But it is because of this understandability that the information is finite. Story appears something that is inexhaustible for listeners. Certainly, we can understand a story when

we can join it to our individual proper experience. But this understanding of a story is not an understanding of a story in itself, but an understanding of a story in our lived experience. Plurality of our individual experience permits a plurality of understanding of a story, and a story accepts and does not stop to accept such a plurality, because it is opened to all the present and future individual experiences. This plurality is opposed to the homogeneity of information. “The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time” (GS2 445-446). In this way, differing from the information, the story continues teaching us something for our individual life inexhaustibly. And each individual experience lives a story. In this way, the story can be a collective experience. In reverse, information cannot become an experience, let alone a collective experience, because it is not lived by the individual experience. Information is separated from our living life.

Then Benjamin clarifies a form of communication of the history. He distinguishes the chronicler from the historian. According to him, the historian is the writer of history, and the chronicler is its teller. The historian makes efforts to explain the past and to make it understandable in itself. In this case the history appears information. Separated from the lived experience, the historian’s history cannot be a collective experience. So, historian’s work – effort to make the history comprehensible in itself – does not contribute to creating a collective experience of the history, that is, a collective memory. In reverse, the chronicler is the storyteller. The chronicler tells the history. Chronicler’s history is a story. Then incomprehensibility of the history appears as an inscrutable divine plan of salvation, like negative theology: “The historian is bound to explain in one way or another the happenings with which he deals; under no circumstances can he content himself with displaying them as models of the course of the world. But this is precisely what the chronicler does, especially in his classical representatives, the chroniclers of the Middle Ages, the precursors of the historians of today. By basing their historical tales on a divine plan of salvation – an inscrutable one – they have from the very start lifted the burden of demonstrable explanation [*Erklärung*] from their own shoulders. Its place is taken by interpretation [*Auslegung*], which is not concerned with an accurate concatenation of definite events, but with the way these are embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world” (GS2 451-452). The divine plan of salvation is not understandable in itself for the creature. We can understand it only when it is joined to our lived experience. However, this understanding can be only in our proper experience, because God’s work transcends all human understanding essentially. Each understanding of it is different from each other, but each creature shares a divine plan of salvation. And it makes each individual experience living and meaningful. Such is collective experience of the history, that is, collective memory.

The inscrutable course of the world that the chronicler tells is clearly eschatological, while the storyteller’s story like the Aesop’s fable is apparently natural, that is, profane. Then Benjamin says: “Whether this course is eschatologically determined or is a natural one makes no difference. In the storyteller the chronicler is preserved in changed form, secularized, as it were” (GS2 452). The storyteller is the secularized chronicler. This secularization must be understood as Carl Schmitt’s term. That is, secularization does not mean withdrawal of the religion, but transfer of the

sacredness to the profane field.² So, in spite of his profane outlook, the storyteller has an eschatological orientation. In the storyteller, the story as inscrutable sacredness is joined to the creatures' life. "It [storytelling] sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel" (GS2 447). The story as inscrutable sacredness is joined to creatures' life. But creature is finite being. The story would not be able to maintain his sacredness, if it were joined to the finitude of the creature. The story can derive his sacredness only from its opposition to the finite life of storyteller. It is the death that is the definitive moment of the opposition between the eternity of the story and the finitude of the storyteller. "Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death" (GS2 450). The story must be sunk into the life of the storyteller in order to derive its sacredness from death. The death of the storyteller makes his listeners incapable to understand what he means by the story. Then, thanks to the finitude of the life of storyteller, the story appears an inscrutable course of the world, a divine plan of salvation. In this way, the death of the storyteller is an important element of the collective experience of the secularized history. Death makes it possible that the sacredness appears in the profane field.

The situation where human death is ordinary is war. If the death is a condition of the collective experience, the experience of war must be an exponent of collective experience. Benjamin lived in the period of the First World War. And he notices a fact about it: we have no collective memory of the First World War. Benjamin says: "experience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it is continuing to fall into bottomlessness. Every glance at a newspaper demonstrates that it has reached a new low, that the image, not only of the external world but of the moral world as well, overnight has undergone changes which were never thought possible. With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent – not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? What ten years later was poured out in the flood of war books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body" (GS2 439). The experience of the First World War cannot be a story, that is, the collective experience that goes from mouth to mouth. What this war shows us is that the information expels completely the story from human experience. Why was this experience of a heavy mortality in war not able to become a collective memory?

Then, Benjamin deliberates the relation between our modern society and our

² See Schmitt, Carl, *Politische Theologie*, chapter 3. Carl Schmitt's famous assertion is that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts" (p. 37). It means that the modern political theory consists in the transfer of theological schemas into the political field.

death. His central thesis is that our society consists in the exclusion of the sight of the dying from itself. Benjamin says: “in the course of the nineteenth century bourgeois society has, by means of hygienic and social, private and public institutions, realized a secondary effect which may have been its subconscious main purpose: to make it possible for people to avoid the sight of the dying. Dying was once a public process in the life of the individual and a most exemplary one (think of the medieval pictures in which the deathbed has turned into a throne toward which the people press through the wide-open doors of the death house)” (GS2 449). In the same way, in the Aesop’s fable, the children press toward their father in the deathbed. So, the story can exist only if death is a public process in the life of the individual. When death, or the finitude of the human, was pushed out of the perceptual world of the living, the story lost its eternity. “The idea of eternity has ever had its strongest source in death. If this idea declines, so we reason, the face of death must have changed. It turns out that this change is identical with the one that has diminished the communicability of experience to the same extent as the art of storytelling has declined” (GS2 449). In this way, the story cannot exist anymore in the society that excludes the sight of the dying. We do not see others’ death in the modern social life. However, it does not mean that humans obtain eternal life, but that the place to die is out of the society in the modernity. “Today people live in rooms that have never been touched by death, dry dwellers [*Trockenwohner*] of eternity, and when their end approaches they are stowed away in sanatoria or hospitals by their heirs” (GS2 449). In this way, the society concentrates places to die in a particular place like sanatoria or hospital. This concentration of the dying in a particular place allows the society to eliminate the human death from itself. From this point of view, we understand that the war is not opposed to the society that wants to avoid the sight of the dying. War is an exceptional state, which suspends the social order. So, it is by definition out of the society. Therefore, the death in war is out of the society, like the death in sanatoria or hospital. Certainly, the war leads to a heavy mortality, but the death in war is concentrated to the battlefield out of the society. The dying in war, sanatoria or hospital cannot be a storyteller, because he does not have his listener. His listeners live only in the society, while he is dying out of society. Therefore, we do not share any collective experience in the modernity.

However, collective experience is a divine plan of salvation. The storyteller’s salvation can be attained by his listener who memorizes his story. Memory is a condition of salvation of the storyteller, and his listener who is the future storyteller. “The cardinal point for the unaffected listener is to assure himself of the possibility of reproducing the story. Memory is the epic faculty of all others. Only by virtue of a comprehensive memory can epic writing absorb the course of events on the one hand and, with the passing of these, make its peace with the power of death on the other” (GS2 453). The storyteller obtains an eternal life in the memory of his listener. Memory permits the storyteller to overcome his finitude. His individual experience is saved in his listener’s one. His individual experience is memorized by his listener’s one, and the later is memorized by the individual experience of the listener of the next generation. “*Memory* creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation” (GS2 453). Thanks to the memory, the deepest shock of every individual experience, death, does not constitute any obstacle to a collective experience. The chain of memory creates the collective memory, the community of memory where every individual

experience is saved. If the modernity makes the collective memory impossible, any individual experience cannot be saved.

Benjamin examines the salvation of every individual experience in the modernity. He does not insist on the resuscitation of the collective experience. He insists on the fact that our thinking must be based on an awareness of the incommunicability of each individual experience. And in his posthumous manuscript *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, he calls his position “historical materialism”. Historical materialism aims to save every individual experience without collective memory. Then, Benjamin considers that the modern human has a retrospective desire for collective experience and that this desire makes the movement of Nazism alive. In this way, he defines his fight against Nazism as fight over collective experience or memory.

In reality, there is a historical view that is cited as an important factor in Nazi Party’s rise to power. It is the stab-in-the-back legend (*Dolchstoßlegende*). The stab-in-the-back legend refers to a German popular myth in the period after the First World War until the end of the Second World War. It attributes Germany’s defeat in the First World War to a number of domestic factors. The theory proclaims that Germany was not defeated by its enemy, but by betrayal of part of the German. German communists stabbed the German Army in the back, while the soldiers were fighting for the country. They made their death meaningless. The Nazi Party grew its original political base largely from those who were sympathetic to this interpretation of Germany’s then-recent history, especially from First World War veterans. Then, it seems that the *Horst-Wessel-Lied* (“Horst Wessel Song”) was symbolic in Nazi Movement. The *Horst-Wessel-Lied* was the anthem of the Nazi Party; also part of Nazi Germany’s national anthem. The lyrics of the song were composed by Horst Wessel, a local commander of the SA who was assassinated by a Communist activist and whom Joseph Goebbels, main propagandist in Nazi Germany, made the leading martyr of the Nazi Movement. The lyrics of the *Horst-Wessel-Lied* are as follows: “The flag high! The ranks tightly closed! SA marches with a calm, firm pace. Comrades whom Red Front and Reaction shot dead march in spirit within our ranks.” (“*Die Fahne hoch! Die Reihen fest geschlossen! S. A. marschieren mit ruhig festem Schritt. Kameraden, die Rotfront und Reaktion erschossen, marschieren im Geist in unseren Reihen mit.*”) The “Red Front” is surely a reference to the *Rotfrontkämpferbund*, a paramilitary organization associated with the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). But it seems difficult to understand what “Reaction” means. However, those who were sympathetic to the stab-in-the-back legend must have understood it as the Reaction against German soldiers in First World War. If we understand “Reaction” in this way, Nazi Movement appears the movement that aims to recreate the meaning of the death of German soldiers which communists made meaningless. The spirits of the dead of the First World War march with SA. Then, Nazi Movement is understood as a movement that aims to reconstitute the collective memory of the First World War. The *Horst-Wessel-Lied* says that the dead soldiers are the storytellers of this fight for the country. So, the *Horst-Wessel-Lied* can be understood as a meta-story of the collective experience of the First World War.

Then, the seventh thesis of Benjamin’s *Theses on the Philosophy of History* can be read as a parody of the *Horst-Wessel-Lied*: “Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried

along in the procession. They are called cultural treasures, and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. For without exception the cultural treasures he surveys have an origin that he cannot contemplate without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another. A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from it as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain” (GS1 696-697). Cultural treasures that are carried along in Nazi procession are spirits of the soldiers of the First World War. Then Benjamin thinks that Nazi collective experience consists of the sacrifice of “those who are lying prostrate” and “the anonymous toil of their contemporaries”. The Nazi collective memory is a document of barbarism which excludes those who are not sympathetic to it. This barbarism comes from the informational nature of this collective experience: Nazi collective experience is not a story, but information, which is understandable in itself. If we can be sympathetic to Nazi collective experience, it is because it is comprehensible in itself. We cannot be sympathetic to the story that is incomprehensible in itself. When the story constitutes the community of memory, it is not based on a process of empathy. Incomprehensibility of the story permits the story’s content to be every individual experience. So, the community of the story does not demand the homogeneity of each individual experience. But Nazi collective experience is based on a process of empathy. Benjamin thinks that empathy is a main object against which his historical materialism must fight: “To historians who wish to relive an era, Fustel de Coulanges recommends that they blot out everything they know about the later course of history. There is no better way of characterizing the method with which historical materialism has broken. It is a process of empathy whose origin is the indolence of the heart, *acedia*, which despairs of grasping and holding the genuine historical image as it flares up briefly” (GS1 696). What is the presupposition to be able to blot out everything historians know about the later course of history? It is that historic object that historians wish to relive is understandable in itself. Empathy is based on the understandability of the memory. If our individual experience can be joined to the understandable story, it is because we can notice the similarity between our individual story and this story. It is a process of empathy. And empathy consists in the homogeneity of individual experiences and in the exclusion of the individual experience that does not correspond to the story. The modern collective memory does not save all individual experience insofar as all the stories in the modernity are nothing but information. So, Benjamin explores the redemption of all individual experience without story.

How can we search after the salvation of individual experiences in the different way from Nazism? Each individual experience is different. The story works as the point of indifference that reunifies every incommensurable proper experience. In the modernity, we do not have such a point of indifference anymore. Then, all we have is our present individual experience. So, if the community of memory can be reconstructed, this reconstruction must start by our present individual experience. In the modernity, the community of memory is not based on story as point of indifference, but on individual experience. Historic materialism is constructivism, and history is constructed by the

present: "History is the object of a construction whose place is formed not in homogenous and empty time, but in that which is fulfilled by the present [*Jetztzeit*]" (GS1 701). Construction of history must not be based on the point of indifference, but on the present. And the idea of construction denies the idea of organic unity of every individual experience. The present retrieves past individual experiences. In this way, the past becomes comprehensible in the present. But the retrieved past is not the past as such anymore, because it is transformed into the present. Then, historical materialism does not aim to dominate the past arbitrarily, but to seek an irretrievable picture of the past through this construction of history. Historical materialism must save those we cannot recognize: "Are we not touched by the same breath of air which was among that which came before? Is there not an echo of those who have been silenced in the voices to which we lend our ears today? Have not the women, who we court, sisters who they do not recognize anymore? If so, then there is a secret agreement between the generations of the past and that of our own. For we have been expected upon this earth. For it has been given us to know, just like every generation before us, a *weak* messianic power, on which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply. Historical materialists are aware of that" (GS1 693-694). Historical materialists must be aware of the claim of the irretrievable past. So, the work of historical materialism is to face the irretrievable element of the past on the attempt to retrieve the past. Benjamin expresses the picture of the past that this paradoxical work describes as follows: "The true picture of the past *whizzes* by. Only as a picture, which flashes its final farewell in the moment of its recognizability, is the past to be held fast" (GS1 695). The instant that the present makes the past recognizable, an insoluble picture of the past appears and disappears in the same time. An irretrievable picture of the past appears as the individual picture that threatens to disappear because of the present, which resolves the past into it. In other words, the work of historical materialism is to face the finitude of the present, because the existence of the irretrievable picture of the past denies the totality of the present. To face its finitude permits the present to encounter the past that is out of it, that is, the totality of history. "The materialist writing of history for its part is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the movement of thoughts but also their arrest [*Stillstellung*]. Where thinking suddenly halts in a constellation overflowing with tensions, there it yields a shock to the same, through which it crystallizes as a monad. The historical materialist approaches a historical object solely and alone where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he cognizes the sign of a messianic arrest of events, or put differently, a revolutionary chance in the struggle for the suppressed past" (GS1 702-703). The suppressed past is saved when the present encounters it in the negative way. And this salvation of the past does not consist in reconstruction of the organic unity between past and present, but in recognition of the existence of the past which is not recognizable anymore. If every individual experience can be saved, it is only when we are aware that there are irretrievable individual experiences. And this awareness comes only from impossibility of achievement of our work to retrieve every past and present individual experience. Such is an only possible form of collective memory in the modernity.

Then, we can clarify differences between Benjamin, who did not survive the Second World War, and Adorno, who survived it. As we have seen it before, Adorno insists that "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today." Then, Benjamin

seems to respond as follows: *To write poetry after the First World War is, certainly, barbaric. But this leads to the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today.* While Adorno forbids us to make experience of Auschwitz presentable, Benjamin thinks that we have to make efforts to make the event presentable in order to understand why there are unrepresentable individual experiences. How can we think of this difference of two ways of thinking? Does the unprecedented disaster of Auschwitz urge Benjamin to change his thought on the redemption of every individual experience? We cannot respond to these questions within the framework of this article. But it is sure that Benjaminian historical materialism aims to resist this disaster. What makes the salvation of every individual experience is not Nazi story, which is nothing but information, but the paradoxical work to retrieve individual experiences in order to understand that there are irretrievable individual experiences. Benjamin's fight against Nazism is to recapture the salvation of individual experiences from Nazism. And it is only through this fight that we can be connected with irretrievable experiences. We end this article by citing a famous passage from Benjamin's *Goethe's Elective Affinities*: "It is only for hopeless people that hope is given to us" (GS1 201).

Ryohei Kageura is a doctoral student at the University of Strasbourg II in France. The title of his doctoral thesis is *Walter Benjamin et la secularization*.

Works Cited

- Benjamin, Walter, *Gesammelte Schriften Band I*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991
Benjamin, Walter, *Gesammelte Schriften Band II*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991
Arendt, Hannah, *The origins of Totalitarianism*, San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt, 1994
Adorno, Theodor W., "Cultural criticism and society", *Prisms*, tr. Samuel and Shierry Weber, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983
Lyotard, Jean-François, *Le Différend*, Paris: Minuit, 1983
Schmitt, Carl, *Politische Theologie*, München und Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1922