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Decolonizing Walter Benjamin In The Age Of Digital Information

He was wrong and we have the receipts

Some contemporary art theory and practice are based on failures of logic and lack of common sense that are so flagrant, so obviously wrong, consisting of Western political propaganda, that we are at a loss to explain why our brightest minds and brilliant scholars do not stand up and speak out. Many of the gravest flaws come from truly talented artists whose thoughts on art were delusional, while others were scammers and charlatans. Walter Benjamin was neither; he belonged to another category, the fervent political acolyte. This essay is based on documented evidence to show that Benjamin, in his world famous essay of cultural analysis, shaped his thoughts to fit the procrustean bed of his political beliefs.

This article offers irrefutable proof that Walter Benjamin's **The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction**¹ was not what we expect of impartial scholarship but was actually a work of Marxist propaganda, that strayed from the truth and then ignored it. The reader is warned that most commentaries on Benjamin affirm the opposite and regard him as a brilliant social critic who accurately predicted how media will affect industrial culture. Garage Publishing and Ad Marginem Press write that "Walter Benjamin (1892 – 1940) was a German philosopher, theoretician of culture, literary critic, writer and translator. He is one of the most influential cultural philosophers of the 20th Century. His essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* remains one of the central texts in understanding the role of art within an industrial society."²

Benjamin is a lyrical writer able to capture our hearts; unfortunately in this essay he sublimates his literary gifts to a political theology. A Marxist reading of history adds to

¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Work Of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 1935,
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>

² *Moscow Diary* by Walter Benjamin, Garage Press
<https://garagemca.org/en/programs/publishing/walter-benjamin-moscow-diary>

our political awareness; history is shaped by economics, conflict, and class struggle, among other variables. A material dialectic is not the sole way to describe the body politic.

In a Marxist economic model, one sets aside self-interest for the common good, giving according to one's ability, receiving according to one's need. This beautiful ideal is why Communism attracted so many converts in the Western world, among those horrified by the abuses of capitalism. However, communists ruined the world for Communism. The strong always had greater needs than the weak. A 1930 photograph of a Moscow street facing the Kremlin shows a filthy heavyset working class woman, in dirty ripped clothing, on her hands and knees laying down bricks to build a road. Behind her there is a limousine with an open door, from which steps out in high heels a wealthy woman wearing a fur coat. She is the wife of a member of the Politburo, the ruling echelon of the Soviet Union. Yet even now in the face of similar socialist inequality, Walter Benjamin's work is certified as an indispensable revolutionary prognosis by experts. That in itself makes it important for us to dig in the dirt.

Francis Naumann is the canonical Duchamp scholar, as Marcel Duchamp's confidant, and biographer. He wrote extensively on Duchamp over decades, so we defer to him writing that Duchamp and Benjamin met on at least one occasion, in a café in Paris a year after Benjamin's essay was published in 1935.³ Yet we would suspect Naumann's assuming it is doubtful the readymade would have been one of the issues they discussed. The links between Benjamin's title and Duchamp's "found object" readymades are so obvious, along with their common disdain for authorship, that they were unlikely to ignore the subject. Francis Naumann's assumptions should not be read with an innocent eye. Naumann accepts Benjamin's essay at face value, calling it "the most penetrating analysis on the way in which society will come to envision the concept of originality in a work of art".⁴ He should know better; by this time history had not been kind to Walter Benjamin, just as Benjamin has been unkind to facts, bending them left and right to fit the procrustean bed of orthodox Marxism.

Who was Walter Benjamin?

Benjamin's literary talent and virtuosity reveal a genius working in a traditional field of writing, even as *Mechanical Reproduction* opens with a 1931 quote by Paul Valéry on industrial technology suggesting we should expect something more radical than standard text. Valéry says new technologies transform culture so much that it may bring about an amazing change in our very notion of art. It came to be that Benjamin's paper presents a materialistic philosophy rejecting spiritual and individual values. He defines art as nothing but a sophisticated form of political propaganda. An opposite reading from psychology and archaeology sees art as an activity driven by instinct, relatively unaffected by any specific technology. The art of our stone age ancestors does not much differ in intent from that of current performance artist Marina Abramović. Technology may

³ Francis Naumann, *Ruminations on Duchamp and Walter Benjamin*, toutfit.com, 999/12/01, Updated: 2019/05/22 <https://www.toutfait.com/afterthought-ruminations-on-duchamp-and-walter-benjamin/>

⁴ "Benjamin's essay is — without doubt — the most penetrating analysis ever attempted to evaluate the effects of photography, film and the newest innovations within the print media — which he indicates are the most recent advancements in the art of mechanical reproduction — on the way in which society will come to envision the concept of originality in a work of art." Francis Naumann, *Ruminations on Duchamp and Walter Benjamin*, toutfit.com

change but creative activity remains an ancient algorithm, an instinctive human behavior born in the dawn of time millions of years ago. Its effect is to expand human consciousness and build the structure of behavior known as culture. But now let us try to understand Benjamin.

Walter Benjamin was no beauty, he was an awkward man. He was impractical, incapable of lighting a fire or opening a window. Hannah Arendt writes of him “*With a precision suggesting a sleepwalker his clumsiness invariably guided him to the very centre of a misfortune*”. For example to escape the bombing of Paris he so feared, he had moved to the outlying districts of the city and unwittingly ended up in a small village that was one of the first to be destroyed. Benjamin had not realized this apparently insignificant place was at the centre of an important rail network, and therefore liable to be targeted.⁵ It is therefore no wonder that he was perhaps incapable of having a relationship and when he tried, it was a disaster.⁶

From Garage Publishing we learn that “In the winter of 1926-27, Benjamin spent two months in Moscow, where he kept a detailed diary that served as the basis for a series of essays about Moscow and Russian culture. His brief visit to Moscow was instigated by his infatuation with Asia Lacis – a Latvian actress and communist whom he had met on the island of Capri at the beginning of the 1920s. Benjamin’s close friend – and the first publisher of the diary – Gershom Scholem, regards the story of this failed romance to be ‘the most personal, fully and mercilessly sincere document telling us about a very important period in the life of Benjamin.’”⁷

For a poetic writer like Walter Benjamin, whose passionate literature we hold in highest esteem, his art in reality was a practice of self-expansion, reaching the highest spiritual development, born of the creative unconscious depths of the individual. The statements in this essay of Benjamin’s, on the other hand, contradict all the science on art, in order to expound the erroneous beliefs of a political theology. And even if the content was convoluted and irrational, the style and form, the art of his literature, carried great powers of conviction built on dedicated belief. It is seen that through immemorial time most art was commissioned by an elite, either for personal status or to create social cohesion. Yet, that does not mean that the patron’s viewpoint defines the philosophy of art. It only does that for a commercial artist but not for the creative philosopher; obviously class struggle does play a role here.

Benjamin’s talent shows best in *Passagenwerk* or *Arcades Project*, an unfinished work written between 1927 and 1940. An enormous collection of writings on the city life of Paris in the 19th century, many scholars consider *Arcades* might have become one of the great texts of 20th-century cultural criticism, but was never completed due to his suicide. This extract is from his notes on Marseilles;

⁵ Giorgio van Straten, ‘In Search of Lost Books’, translated by Erica Segre and Simon Carnell, Pushkin Press 2018.

⁶ *Moscow Diary* by Walter Benjamin, Garage Press
<https://garagemca.org/en/programs/publishing/walter-benjamin-moscow-diary>

⁷ *Moscow Diary* by Walter Benjamin, Garage Press
<https://garagemca.org/en/programs/publishing/walter-benjamin-moscow-diary>

“the yellow-studded maw of a seal with salt water running out between the teeth. When this gullet opens to catch the black and brown proletarian bodies thrown to it by ship’s companies according to their timetables, it exhales a stink of oil, urine, and printer’s ink. This comes from the tartar baking hard on the massive jaws: newspaper kiosks, lavatories, and oyster stalls. The harbour people are a bacillus culture, the porters and whores products of decomposition with a resemblance to human beings. But the palate itself is pink, which is the colour of shame here, of poverty. Hunchbacks wear it, and beggarwomen. And the discoloured women of rue Bouterie are given their only tint by the sole pieces of clothing they wear: pink shifts.”⁸

Benjamin Political

“Our fine arts were developed, their types and uses were established, in times very different from the present, by men whose power of action upon things was insignificant in comparison with ours. But the amazing growth of our techniques, the adaptability and precision they have attained, the ideas and habits they are creating, make it a certainty that profound changes are impending in the ancient craft of the Beautiful. In all the arts there is a physical component which can no longer be considered or treated as it used to be, which cannot remain unaffected by our modern knowledge and power. For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art.”

Paul Valéry, *Pièces sur L’Art*, 1931
Le Conquete de l’ubiquite
Introduction to Benjamin’s essay.

Walter Benjamin has been praised as an early Marshall McLuhan, a social scientist able to discern the cultural effects of media in shaping society. Ironically, where we thought *The Work Of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* was research similar to today's academic scholarship, it is in fact Marxist propaganda. As an intellectual communist Benjamin was versed in the classical Marxist writings of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, their contemporaries, and then Kautsky, Plekhanov, Lenin, Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg. The irony is that Marxism was built on the writings of these individuals, while Marxist tenets repudiate the agency or even the existence of such individuals. Marx denied such agency according to his theory of history consisting of economic determinism, in which we lack ‘free will’, as each individual is but the tool of economic forces.⁹



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On reading Benjamin’s text we find a political message that twists truth to fit policy. History reminds us that communists saw truth and accuracy as useful when convenient, to be ignored otherwise; we cannot read Benjamin innocently when the work has such

⁸ Walter Benjamin, *Neue schweizer Rundschau*, April 1929. *Gesammelte Schriften*, IV, 359-364.

⁹ Translated by Edmund Jephcott. It has been collected in English in his *Selected Writings II* (Belknap Press 1999).

⁹ Peter G. Stillman, *The Myth of Marx’s Economic Determinism*, 2005
<https://www.marxists.org/subject/marxmyths/peter-stillman/article.htm>

strong commitments. Benjamin is obviously writing agitprop without concern for accuracy. As we see after a moment of reflection, he shares flawed assumptions, fact and fiction twisted to fit theory; the reductions, contradictions, and leaps of faith are obvious.

A decisive deconstruction

The purpose of deconstruction is to locate hidden flaws, ambiguities, and paradoxes of which the author is probably unaware. Derrida's method of deconstruction was to look past the irony and ambiguity to the layer that genuinely threatens to collapse that system, so we will follow that model here.

In "Mechanical Reproduction", Benjamin writes "*The art of the proletariat after its assumption of power... or the art of a classless society... brush aside a number of outmoded concepts, such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery*". Benjamin's core argument is "*that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art*", aura referring to the spiritual and emotional force of a work of art. These supposedly vanished when a work of art is reproduced.

Johhanes Guttenberg begs to disagree; books are made by mechanical reproduction yet printed words and images retain their power of seduction through multiple reproductions over centuries. Munch's *The Scream* is known primarily from mechanical reproduction since few have seen the original, yet the image remains haunting, just as haunting as any Raven perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door. Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."¹⁰

Benjamin insists all we can expect of art is bare facts, an accurate rendition of reality, since art originally meant skill in copying the material world. The essence of art is supposedly pictorial reproduction. This assumes we all see alike. Were this true, we would not praise those who see the world in a grain of sand, when a majority of us only notice the sand. In fact art consists of hinting there's more to know than the obvious. We feel this in the aura of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's words; "In Xanadu did Kubla Khan, a stately pleasure dome decree, where Alph the sacred river ran, through caverns measureless to man, down to a sunless sea." We can also call on William Blake's "Tyger Tyger, burning bright, in the forests of the night: What immortal hand or eye, dare frame thy fearful symmetry?". Such poetry reveals spiritual and emotional values that Marxists insist are only a bourgeois delusion. The material dialectic says the only meaningful reality consists of the solid material facts the working classes know through their oppression by the capitalist. Facts that becomes obvious when mechanical reproduction stamps out bourgeois decadence.

A few years later Benjamin may have changed his views about much contained in this essay, according to one of his last works, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", which seemingly doubts Karl Marx's claims to scientific objectivity. This time Benjamin appears to reject the past as a continuum of progress and suggests historical materialism is

¹⁰ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Raven*.
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48860/the-raven>

a quasi-religious fraud. But that comes later. Mechanical Reproduction is based on dialectic materialism, denying creativity in favor of a data-driven art degraded to propaganda. Since then science has shown that beauty and its complex differentiations are crucial for mental health, instead of being a disposable bourgeois deca-dance. And what a dance it is! Paul Dirac says that when he finds beauty in his equations he knows he's on the right path to progress, and Einstein agreed. Other scientists may disagree, but none of them ever won a Nobel Prize.

As an aside, Montreal's Sealan Twerdy suggests Benjamin's essay should be titled "Technological Reproductability" instead of "Mechanical Reproduction"¹¹, following the canonical translation of Benjamin scholars like Michael Jennings. While the context is accurate, the pronunciation is uncomfortably awkward, ensuring Jennings's contribution will never stick, especially when "Technical Reproduction" is perfectly adequate. Benjamin wrote about film and photography, which uses chemical reproduction as well as mechanical, so Technical Reproduction would be the best choice, had the words Mechanical Reproduction not been set in stone so long ago.

Passions of a unique individual

Moscow doesn't believe in tears, nor in the individual with their feelings and private thoughts; supposedly the strength of socialism lies in the masses. A major premise of Benjamin's essay therefore denies value to individual artists. The aura of the work of art is further described in chapter 4 of Mechanical Reproduction as the mythical bourgeois value of the uniqueness of an 'authentic' work of art" which mechanical reproduction destroys. Photography is given as an example. "*The status of a work of art will no longer depend on a parasitic ritual of authorship. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense*".

This "parasitic ritual of authorship" means that no individual is better than another according to egalitarian socialism. But now we remember that history has not been kind to Benjamin. In 1985, one hundred and fifty years after Benjamin wrote that, an authentic Ansel Adams print sold for \$722,000 because of the limited edition printed by a major artist. The uniqueness of the image comes from it being printed by Ansel Adams, from his own negative. The number of prints was restricted to a limited edition from a negative theoretically capable of unlimited reproduction, although it will never achieve that potential. Benjamin should have known better; limited edition prints sold for a premium even during the Renaissance. Original photographs by Ansel Adams are defined as photographs he printed from the negatives that he shot and developed. We also need to know that Ansel Adams along with Fred Archer developed the Zone System in photography, and Adams was probably one of the best technical and aesthetic printers of the 20th century. Art was always about the personal touch; a cement garden gnome is sculpture but it is not the art of sculpture.

¹¹ Joseph Henry, "All Awareness Becomes Base": Jens Hoffmann's Reduction of The Arcades Project, MOMUS
<http://momus.ca/awareness-becomes-base-jens-hoffmanns-reduction-arcades-project/>

The camera's mechanical parts standardize photography, but there's still plenty of room for the artist's choices. There's the visual grammar of frame composition, color, tone, brightness, and angle of view. Although Benjamin mentions printing and lithography, he discounts the aesthetic factors beyond functionality that added to a product's value; aesthetics were bourgeois, so of no interest to him. Yet it is that blind spot which foretells his eventual misfortune.



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A criterion of verifiability

“The criterion we use to test the genuineness of apparent statements is the criterion of verifiability”, so Oxford’s A.J. Ayers writes in a study of language, truth, and logic. *“We say that a sentence is factually significant to any given person if, and only if, they know how to verify the proposition it purports to express”*¹² Georgy Pyatakov, who was twice expelled from the Party and eventually shot, wrote that a true Bolshevik is *“ready to believe [not just assert] that black was white and white was black, if the Party required it,”* In Orwell’s book 1984, O’Brien proclaims this very doctrine - two plus two is really five if the Party says it is - which Orwell calls “collective solipsism.”¹³ No one considered how self-interest and greed makes corruption inevitable, when members follow the party line.

Paul Valéry’s preface contains the seeds of it’s own demise as he writes of Marx’s critique having prognostic value, which didn’t turn out like that. Marx described capitalism exploiting the proletariat with increasing intensity, eventually forcing a global working class revolution where they would cast off their chains, take over the means of production, and abolish capitalism itself. This is what Nikita Khrushchev meant in 1960, when he took off his shoe at the United Nations and pounded it on the table yelling “We will bury you!” during a speech by Harold MacMillan, The Russian words мы придем на твои похороны! actually translate as “we will attend your funeral”. That didn’t work out as Marx expected. By the time Khrushchev finished pounding the table, or more precisely

¹² A.J. Ayers, *Language, Truth and Logic*, p48, Pelican Books.

¹³ Gary Saul Morson, The house is on fire! On the hidden horrors of Soviet life. The new Criterion. 22016.
<https://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/The-house-is-on-fire--8466>

by the end of the Industrial Revolution, workers had formed unions that eventually raised wages and created a thriving middle class out of the impoverished proletariat. Union pension funds were invested on the stock market, allowing workers to become owners of the means of production. The evils of capitalism persisted, but somewhat reduced.

We return to Benjamin's predictions of how workers after the global revolution would do away with art's decadence. Marcel Duchamp himself had said in that 1968 BBC interview that art was discredited, so we should get rid of it like some had done with religion.¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, who believed art was useful as propaganda, put it differently:

The art of the proletariat after its assumption of power... or the art of a classless society... brush aside a number of outmoded concepts, such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery.

Today we know that eternal value and mystery are not things we want to do without. Even an artist's shit now sell for nearly a million dollars. In May 1961, while he was living in Milan, Piero Manzoni produced ninety cans of artist's shit titled Merde d'Artiste. Each can was numbered on the lid, from 001 to 090 and sold for \$37.U.S. The can in the Tate Gallery's collection was number 004. The cans sell today for upwards of \$120,000, while Artsy has a listing of \$989,000. Ninety cans of Merde d'Artiste is industrial reproduction with a vengeance, although urban myth says the cans contain plaster of Paris.

As for discarding the concept of genius, documentation attests to child prodigies such as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and the label genius includes exceptional adults with unmatched achievements who win Nobel Prizes. In the meantime the spiritual values of mystery give life meaning, a psychological feature that cannot be underrated. Dr. Callaway of Baylor University emphasizes the centrality of art to the human experience by referring to our species not as homo sapiens, but instead as "homo aestheticus." Our experience of beauty is central to the way we understand our reality physically, psychologically, and spiritually. "

What we are measuring is primarily...what I would call the psychosocial religious¹⁵ effects of the art experience."¹⁶ When psychology speaks of art therapy, the opposite is also true; rejecting aesthetics and spiritual values degrades mental health, lowers morale as well as weakens the immune system, bleeds one's motivation, degrades character, and likely played a large role in Benjamin's suicide.

Through chapters 5 onward, Benjamin writes about film, which to him represents the final form of art that overrides all other images by being the most realistic.

for contemporary man the representation of reality by the film is incomparably more significant than that of the painter since it offers... a reality which is free of all

¹⁴ Joan Bakewell in conversation with Marcel Duchamp, Late Night Line-Up, BBC ARTS, 1968.
<https://youtu.be/Zo3qoyVk0GU>

¹⁵ Comparing Marx's "religion is the opiate of the masses" to Dadaist Picabia's "art is the opiate of idiots"

¹⁶ Kutter Callaway, Measuring the Spiritual Dimension of Art, Baylor University
<https://templetonreligiontrust.org/explore/measuring-the-spiritual-dimension-of-art/>

That is a description of Social Realism but today we expect more from art than the obvious. Other corrections raise their heads; there is no such thing as freedom from personal bias. Sarah Lewis at the Harvard Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, found that even at the most basic level of film, digital sensors, and camera lighting, the parameters are optimized for racial bias according to the skin color of the person in front of the lens.¹⁷ The composition and the timing are also subject to cultural bias; for example in a culture with a high degree of respect for the elderly, the lens may linger on them longer than otherwise. Some cultural biases are unconscious; in the early days of Soviet Russia, the respect for literacy was so strong that if a political film was unsuccessful, the writer might be shot while the director and actors were not held accountable.

When art is solely propaganda, large groups need to harmonize their understanding of the content of a film. “Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art. The reactionary attitude toward a Picasso painting changes into the progressive reaction toward a Chaplin movie.” At that time, Chaplin films were seen as a champion of “the little man”. Ironically, in his private life, Charlie Chaplin, who was a talented actor, was described by fellow actor Marlon Brando¹⁸ and by his own son¹⁹ as an unbearable narcissist, whom Marlon Brando threatened to kick off a film set for repeated cruelty towards Chaplin’s own son. Rather the opposite of the selfless Bolshevik.

Viewing a painting is a personal affair; therefore with a painting “there was no way for the masses to organize and control themselves in their reception”. For communists the mass’ reaction is to be controlled; the party leadership informing the masses on what they need to learn. A film better lends itself to indoctrination because it is seen by large groups at the same time in a state of collectible consciousness. Benjamin mentions Duhamel’s reaction; “*I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images.*”²⁰

Nazis and Fascists

Benjamin’s epilogue looks at the rise of the Nazi party, where graphic iconography and powerful visual symbols like the swastika were used to unite the masses into a political movements.

The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life. The violation of the masses, whom Fascism, with its Führer cult, forces to their knees, has its counterpart in the violation of an apparatus which is pressed into the production of ritual values. All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war. War and war only can set a goal for mass movements on the largest scale while respecting the traditional property system. This is the political formula for the situation. The technological formula may be stated as follows: Only war makes it possible to mobilize all of today’s technical resources while maintaining the property system...

¹⁷ Sarah Lewis, The racial bias built into photography, Harvard Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, 2019
<https://www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/event/2019-vision-and-justice-convening>

¹⁸ Marlon Brando, The Contender, , the story of Marlon Brando,
<https://www.amazon.ca/Contender-Story-Marlon-Brando/dp/0062427644>

¹⁹ Michael Chaplin, I Couldn’t Smoke the Grass On My Father’s Lawn,
<https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/9323656>

²⁰ Georges Duhamel, Scènes de la vie future, Paris, Mercure de France, 1930, p. 52
http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Scènes_de_la_vie_future

Then Benjamin quotes the fascist sociopath artist Marinetti's manifesto on the Ethiopian colonial war as proof of the horrors of aesthetics, but this was likely a bridge too far in accusing capitalism of Fascist goals.

"War is beautiful because it establishes man's dominion over the subjugated machinery by means of gas masks, terrifying megaphones, flame throwers, and small tanks. War is beautiful because it enriches a flowering meadow with the fiery orchids of machine guns..."

Benjamin concludes his essay by writing "*This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art.*" "*The work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function, later may be recognized as incidental.*" If the artistic function is incidental then the work is no longer art, it's illustration and propaganda. By the end of his paper Benjamin's argument reveals the contradictions at its core.

John Berger's "Ways of Seeing" is a great lesson in basic deconstruction, but he acknowledges a strong debt to Benjamin. Which also means that Berger's views are questionable when influenced by Marxism wherever they lean on Benjamin's writing. For example, the fallacy that oil painting exists to mirror the wealth of the rich, and now that photography does it better, painting is dead.

Death of Walter Benjamin

In Mechanical Reproduction we find beliefs that seem incredible without a Marxist indoctrination. Hungarian writer Arthur Koestler was a longtime communist who left the party disillusioned. In 'The God That Failed' and 'The Invisible Writing', Koestler described the logical contradictions and *sacrificium intellectus* that communist writers suffered.²¹ The resulting emotional damage may well explain Benjamin's catastrophic failure of morale, which can happen to genuine socialists when they are left alone for too long. This failure of morale probably led to his subsequent suicide in a moment of crisis.

Arthur Koestler wrote in "The Invisible Writing" of Benjamin's death in Spain during the 1940s. "*Just before we left, I ran into an old friend, the German writer Walter Benjamin. He was making preparations for his own escape to England. He has thirty tablets of a morphia-compound, which he intended to swallow if caught: he said they were enough to kill a horse, and gave me half the tablets, just in case. The day after the final refusal of my visa, I learned that Walter Benjamin, having managed to cross the Pyrenees, had been arrested on the Spanish side, and threatened with being sent back to France. The next morning the Spanish gendarmes had changed their mind, but by that time Benjamin had swallowed his remaining half of the pills and was dead.*"²²

²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacrifice_of_the_intellect

²² Arthur Koestler, p421, The Invisible Writing, Hamish, Hamilton & Collins