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Der Topos der Vergänglichkeit in Walter Benjamins "Denkbildern"

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Abstract (English)

In numerous academic works, texts by Walter Benjamin, including *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama* (1928), *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935) and *Goethe's Elective Affinities* (1924, 1925) are intensively discussed. This Master's thesis concentrates on a collection of Walter Benjamin's texts that are not often discussed: the *Denkbilder* (Thought Figures), in particular those in the collection *Kurze Schatten I* (Short Shadows I) and *Kurze Schatten II* (Short Shadows II), written between 1929 and 1933. In these *Denkbilder*, Walter Benjamin elaborates his theories on allegory, mourning, anachrony and pure language developed in other texts in the form of short, sometimes very short texts. In a nutshell, it could be said, that Walter Benjamin treats the topos of vanitas in the form of its various aspects in these *Denkbilder*. The analysis of a selection of them shows the way in which the tradition of vanitas in Walter Benjamin's concepts of anachrony, allegory and the longing for the pure language is reflected. The term vanitas is usually used to refer to symbols of transience; however, as a demonstration of the unsuccessfulness of a reproduction and the inaccessibility of what is reproduced, it also has media-critical aspects that are directed against the vanity of what is held or represented. These very aspects of vanitas are shown on the basis of Walter Benjamin's selected *Denkbilder*. The central categories, anachrony, allegory, vanitas and pure language, are traced in Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama* (1928), *Thesis on the Philosophy of History* (1940) and *The Task of the Translator* (1923), as well as in relevant research literature, in order to show that the four topoi mentioned can be detected in the *Denkbilder*. Furthermore, it is shown that the "in-between", the *Dazwischen*, can be traced in all contexts, in Walter Benjamin's life, in his theoretical writings as well as in his *Denkbilder*.