

Vézelay, 23 August 1945

My dear friend,

I had been very sorry to miss you in Paris where I went while you were on vacation.

Can I ask one thing of you?

In the papers I had left at the library there were two manuscripts, one in Russian, Kojève's, in a large hard-bound cloth dossier, the other in German, Walter Benjamin's, in two packets the size of this letter, as far as I remember.

Somebody is now reclaiming Benjamin's manuscripts, which are supposed to be used for a posthumous printing of his work. Perhaps they are in my armoire? In that case I will send you the key by post.

Excuse me for boring you with this story.

*I am finished now with *Méthode de méditation*, which I have talked to you about and which will soon be published.*

Give my regards to your wife.

*Most sincerely yours,
Georges Bataille*

Mme Genet had a portion of W. Benjamin's papers. I am writing her at the same time as you.

We can only begin to understand the significance of this letter from Georges Bataille to Jean Bruno of 1945. It speaks of two bodies of writing, those of the two most important philosophers of the terrible twentieth century. One is Alexandre Kojève (1902–1968), the Russian-born philosopher whose Marxist readings of Hegel were delivered as highly influential lectures at the Collège de Sociologie, an institution founded in Paris by Georges Bataille, Roger Caillois, and Michel Leiris in 1937. Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), who attended Kojève’s lectures as a silent auditor and who became acquainted with Bataille as he did research for *Das Passagen-Werk* (*The Arcades Project*) in the reading room of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, is the other. Benjamin and Kojève’s manuscripts were left with Bataille for safekeeping during the war.

As the letter alludes, Benjamin’s papers were abandoned in haste and were hidden so well that Bataille no longer knew their exact location. We are not certain whether Benjamin’s manuscript was a section of his *Arcades* project, or his essay “On the Concept of History,” or both, or if there were other manuscripts that were lost during the war. We know for sure, though, that Bataille’s letter represents the highly uncertain fate of Benjamin’s writings after he lost his life fleeing World War II, and, more broadly, the perilous ground on which philosophical thinking found itself after this catastrophe.

–Jeffrey Stuker