

HUMA 889 Winter 2003: Walter Benjamin

Wednesday 18:00-20:00 FB-323 (250 rue Guy)

Instructor: Catherine Russell, Associate Professor, Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema
Cinema Office: FB 315-7 tel: 848-4657; hours: Thursday 14:00-16:00. For appointments call 848-4666.

Humanities office: M 305; 2135 MacKay; tel: 848-2096; Wed, Fri: 14:00-17:00. For appointments call 848-2095.

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Books Ordered at Concordia Bookstore

Required:

- Walter Benjamin. Illuminations. Ed. Hanna Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- Walter Benjamin. Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Ed. Peter Demetz. New York: Schocken, 1986.
- Walter Benjamin. The Arcades Project. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP, 1999.
- Course Pack containing all essays marked with [CP] in the syllabus

Recommended:

- Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings Vol. 2 1927-1934. Trans Rodney Livingstone et. al. Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP, 1999.
- Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings Vol. 3 1925-38. Trans. Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, et. al. Eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP, 2002.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989.

Course Description

Although Walter Benjamin's writing was not fully appreciated in his own time, in recent years scholars and critics from many disciplines have been drawn to his work. An extremely unconventional theorist, Benjamin's writing is poetic and fragmentary, and has spawned many competing interpretations and applications. The focus of this course will be on Benjamin's own writing, a great deal of which has only recently been translated and published in English. Secondary sources will be recommended and

discussed, but we will concentrate on the primary sources.

Benjamin wrote about a plethora of cultural artefacts, including literature, poetry, theatre, architecture, fashion, children's toys, film and photography, in addition to subjects of philosophy and history. He also wrote several substantial autobiographical and diaristic essays reflecting on his travels throughout Europe and his childhood in Berlin. Given the diversity of themes and topics within Benjamin's oeuvre, it seems particularly appropriate to an interdisciplinary graduate programme. Students from every branch of the humanities should be able to find a foothold within his writing. Moreover, one could argue that he practised a certain kind of interdisciplinarity himself, moving constantly between political theory, philosophy, historiography, literary criticism and cultural analysis. Insofar as Benjamin's own methods of theory and criticism are highly unorthodox (and partially responsible for the delay in his scholarly recognition), the course will also provide a context for discussion of the conventions and possibilities of humanities methodologies.

The period in which Benjamin produced his major works, between 1925 and 1940 is highly significant to his notions of modernity, history and culture. Benjamin was essentially a freelance writer in Europe between the two world wars, constantly on the move from Germany through Switzerland, Italy, France and Scandinavia and his theory was intimately related to the political and cultural shifts of the period.

Required Reading

Most of the readings listed below are taken from the three required texts: *Illuminations*, *Reflections*, and *The Arcades Project*. Many essays in the two anthologies *Illuminations* and *Reflections* also appear in the three volumes of *Selected Writings* that have appeared in print since 1996. I have included references only to the original versions of those essays in the syllabus, as the anthologies are far more reasonably priced than the hard cover *Selected Writings*. However, you may want to refer to the new versions, or buy the new volumes yourself (I have ordered a few copies at the bookstore), as they are well annotated, and occasionally retranslated. The only exception is the new translation of the "Work of Art" essay which is in the course pack. Those articles taken from other sources are marked CP, and are included in the course pack available at the Concordia Bookstore. Following the syllabus is a list of books placed on reserve at the Webster Library. Students who prefer to read Benjamin in either French or German are welcome to use versions of the assigned readings, although you may have to look beyond the Concordia library.

Syllabus

1. Jan 8 Introduction

- Peter Demetz, "Introduction" *Reflections* vii-xliii
- Rolf Tiedemann, "Dialectics at a Standstill," *Arcades Project* 929-945.
- Hanna Arendt, "Introduction," *Illuminations* 1-58.
- WB, "A German Institute for Independent Research," *Selected Writings*, Vol. 3, pp. 307-316. [CP]

2. Jan 16 The Arcades

- "Paris, Capital of the 19th Century," (1939 exposé) *Arcades* 14-26
- "Prostitution, Gambling," Convolute O *Arcades* 489-515
- "The Streets of Paris," Convolute P *Arcades* 516-526
- "The Collector" Convolute H *Arcades* 203-211

3. Jan 22 History

- "On the History of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," Convolute N *Arcades* 456-488
- "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations* 253-264

4. Jan 29 Baudelaire and Flânerie

- "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," *Illuminations* 155-194
- "The Flâneur," Convolute M *Arcades* 416-455

5. Feb 5 Experience and Cities

- "Marseilles," *Reflections* 131-136
- "Hashish in Marseilles," *Reflections* 137-145
- *Moscow Diary*, Excerpt, pp. 9 – 17 [CP]
- "A Berlin Chronicle," *Reflections* pp. 3-60
- "Naples," *Reflections* 163-173

6. Feb 12 Photography

- “Photography” Convolute Y *Arcades* 671-692
- “Reproduction Technology, Lithography” Convolute i *Arcades* 786-787
- “Little History of Photography,” *Selected Writings Vol. 2* 507-530 [CP]

7. Feb 26 Film

- “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Reproducibility,” *Selected Writings Vol. 3*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn, pp.101-133. [CP]
- “Dream City and Dream House, Dreams of the Future, Anthropological Nihilism, Jung,” Convolute K *Arcades* 388-404
- “On the Present Situation of Russian Film,” *Selected Writing Vol. 2*, 12-14 [CP]
- “Chaplin,” *Selected Writing Vol. 2*, 199-200 [CP]
- “Hitler’s Diminished Masculinity,” *Selected Writings, Vol. 2*, 792-93 [CP]
- “The Formula in Which the Dialectical Structure of Film Finds Expression,” *Selected Writings Vol. 3*, pp. 94-95. [CP]

8. March 3 Adorno and Benjamin

- Letters 32-47 (31 May 1935 to 18 March 1936) *The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940*, 87-134 [CP]
- Letters 110,111 (10 Nov. 1938 to 9 Dec. 1938), *The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940*,280-298 [CP]

9. March 12 Image Culture

- “The Image of Proust,” *Illuminations* 201-216
- “Panorama,” Convolute Q *Arcades* 527-536
- “Mirrors,” Convolute R *Arcades* 537-542
- “Fashion,” Convolute B *Arcades* 62-81
- “Letter from Paris (2) Painting and Photography,” *Selected Writings Vol 3*, pp. 236-248.

10. March 19 Bourgeois Culture

- “One-Way Street” (Selection) *Reflections* 61-94
- “One-Way Street” (Sections missing from *Reflections* version) *Selected Writing Vol 2*, 459-461; 463;477;481[CP]
- “The Interior, the Trace,” Convolute I *Arcades* 212-227

11. March 26 Language

- “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man,” *Reflections* 314-332
- “On the Mimetic Faculty,” *Reflections* 333-336
- “The Storyteller,” *Illuminations* 83-110
- “The Task of the Translator,” *Illuminations* 83-110
- “Translation—For and Against,” *Selected Writings* Vol. 3, pp. 249-252. [CP]

12. April 2 The Avant-garde

- “The Author as Producer,” *Reflections* 220-238
- “What is Epic Theatre?” *Illuminations* 145-154
- “Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death,” *Illuminations* 111-140
- “Surrealism,” *Reflections* 177-192

13. April 9 Allegory

- “Allegory and Trauerspiel,” *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* 159-235 [CP]
- “Modernism,” *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* pp. 67-101 [CP].

Recommended Secondary Sources Included in the Course Pack

- Buck-Morss, Susan. "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered." *October* 62 (Fall 1992).
- _____. "The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering." *New German Critique* 39 (Fall 1986): 99-140.
- Hansen, Miriam. "Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street." *Critical Inquiry* Winter 1999: 306-343.
- _____. "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: 'The Blue Flower' in the Land of Technology." *New German Critique* 40 (Winter 1987): 179-224.
- Schwartz, Vanessa R. "Walter Benjamin for Historians." *American Historical Review* Dec. 2001 1721-1743.
- Habermas, Jürgen. "Consciousness Raising or Redemptive Criticism--The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin." *New German Critique* 17 (Spring 1979): 30-59.

Course Requirements

Oral Presentation 50%

Final Paper 50%

Presentations

Each week one student will present the required reading. This presentation should consist of an interpretive exegesis of the assigned articles. You may want to consult additional primary and secondary sources and you may want to research the sources that Benjamin draws upon and/or the object(s) of his criticism. Parallels and comparisons with other writers, or applications of Benjamin's theory to contemporary or historical cultural formations would also be appropriate. Any visual aids or handouts are welcome but not required; please consult beforehand if any AV equipment is needed. Keep in mind that the class will have read all the assigned articles, so a summary is not sufficient for this presentation. Presentations should be about one hour in length, and will be followed by discussion by the class. You may want to develop a set of discussion topics as part of your presentation; you may want to develop a structure or method of analysis for the assigned material; or you may want to surprise us. (We will allocate the different weekly assignments in the first class in September, and it would help if students arrived with a prioritized list of topics they are interested in presenting.)

Papers

Paper topics may be on any aspect of Benjamin's work, including themes covered in class, or other themes or primary sources. You may choose to focus on secondary sources, interpretations and applications of Benjamin; or you may want to use his ideas in the context of your own areas of research. The term papers may be related to your oral presentation, or they may follow a new path. If the paper is on the same topic as the presentation, it should also represent a further development of the project. In any case, it is a good idea to discuss your paper with me in the early stages. Papers should be approximately 20 pages in length (double spaced, 12pt. font) or 5,000 words. They may be in English or French.

Final papers are due Monday April 21. Please take them to the Cinema Department Office FB 319 and include a self addressed stamped envelope so I can return your paper to you.

Attendance and Participation

Although there is no mark associated with class participation, it is important that everyone keep up with the readings and miss no more than one class during the term. Because 50% of the grade is based on student presentations, please try and help each other out by arriving punctually and contributing to the discussion.

Books on Reserve at Webster Library

3-Hour reserve

- Benjamin, Walter. The Arcades Project. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP, 1999.
- _____. Illuminations. Ed. Hanna Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- _____. Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Ed. Peter Demetz. New York: Schocken, 1986.
- _____. Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism. Trans. Harry Zohn. New Left Books, 1973.
- _____. Moscow Diary. Trans. Richard Sieburth. Gary Smith ed., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986. Also published in October 35.
- _____. The Origins of German Tragic Drama. Trans. John Osborne. London: New Left Books, 1977.
- _____. Selected Writings Vol. 1 1913-1926. Eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP, 1996.
- _____. Selected Writings Vol. 2 1927-1934. Trans Rodney Livingstone et. al. Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP, 1999.
- _____. Selected Writings Vol. 3 1925-38. Trans. Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, et. al. Eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP, 2002.
- _____.and Theodore Adorno. The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940. Ed. Henry Lonitz Trans. Nicholas Walker. Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP, 1999.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989.
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3 Day Reserve

- Eagleton, Terry. Walter Benjamin: or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism. London: New Left Books, 1981.
- Gilloch, Graeme. Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City. Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 1997.
- Pat, Lise, Ed. Benjamin's Blind Spot: Walter Benjamin and the Premature Death of Aura. Topanga CA: Institute of Cultural Inquiry, 2000.
- Richter, Gerhard Ed. Benjamin's Ghosts: Interventions in Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Smith, Gary, Ed. On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1988.
- Smith, Gary, Ed. Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

Steinberg, Michael P. Ed. Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History. Ithaca NY:
Cornell University Press, 1996.

Wolin, Richard. Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption. New York: Columbia
UP, 1982.

Walter Benjamin Bibliography in English

I. Primary Sources

- Aesthetics and Politics: Ernst Bloch, George Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodore Adorno. Translated and Edited by Ronald Taylor. London: New Left Books, 1977.
- Benjamin, Walter. The Arcades Project. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP, 1999.
- _____. "The Author as Producer." Trans. John Heckman. New Left Review 62 (July-August 1970). Also in Art After Modernism.
- _____. "Central Park," New German Critique 34 (Winter 1985).
- _____. Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism. Trans. Harry Zohn. New Left Books, 1973.
- _____. "Doctrine of the Similar." New German Critique 17 (Spring 1979)
- _____. Illuminations. Ed. Hanna Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- _____. Moscow Diary. Trans. Richard Sieburth. Gary Smith ed., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986. Also published in October 35.
- _____. One-Way Street and other Writings. Trans. Edward Jephcott and K. Shorter. London: New Left Books, 1979.
- _____. The Origins of German Tragic Drama. Trans. John Osborne. London: New Left Books, 1977.
- _____. Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Ed. Peter Demetz. New York: Schocken, 1986.
- _____. "Rigorous Study of Art." October 47 (Winter 1988).
- _____. and Theodore Adorno. The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940. Ed. Henry Lonitz Trans. Nicholas Walker. Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP, 1999.
- _____. Selected Writings Vol. 1 1913-1926. Eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP, 1996.
- _____. Selected Writings Vol. 2 1927-1934. Trans Rodney Livingstone et. al. Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP, 1999.
- _____. Selected Writings Vol. 3 1925-38. Trans. Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland, et. al. Eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP, 2002.
- _____. "Theories of German Fascism." Trans. Jerolf Wikoff. New German Critique 17 (Spring 1979)
- _____. Understanding Brecht. trans. Anna Bostock. London: New Left Books, 1973.
- _____. The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem, 1932-1940. Trans. Gary Smith and André Lefevre. New York: Schocken Books, 1989
- _____. The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910-1940. Edited and Annotated by Gershom Scholem and Theodore Adorno. Trans. by Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

II. Selected Secondary Sources

- The Actuality of Walter Benjamin New Formations No. 20 (Summer 1993)
Critical Inquiry Vol. 25, No. 2 (Winter 1999) Angelus Novus: Perspectives on Walter Benjamin
- Adorno, Theodore W. "A Portrait of Walter Benjamin." Prisms. Trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981.
- Allen, Richard. "The Aesthetic Experience of Modernity: Adorno, Benjamin and Contemporary Film Theory." New German Critique 40 (Winter 1987): 225-240.
- Brodersen, Momme. Walter Benjamin: A Biography. Trans. Malcolm R. Green and Ingrida Ligiers. Ed. Martina Dervis. London: Verso, 1996.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. "The City as Dreamworld and Catastrophe." October 73 Summer 1995.
- _____. "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork essay Reconsidered." October 62 (Fall 1992).
- _____. The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989.
- _____. "The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering." New German Critique 39 (Fall 1986): 99-140.
- _____. "Benjamin's Passagen-Werk: Redeeming Mass Culture for the Revolution." New German Critique 29 (1983): 211-240.
- _____. The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodore W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute. New York: Free Press, 1977.
- Chow, Rey. "Film as Ethnography; or, Translation between Cultures in the Postcolonial World." In Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography and Contemporary Chinese Cinema. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- Cohen, Margaret. Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris Surrealist Revolution. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Cowan, Bainard. "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory," New German Critique 22 (Winter 1981): 110-122.
- De Man, Paul. "Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator.'" In The Resistance to Theory. Minneapolis: the University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Eagleton, Terry. Walter Benjamin: or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism. London: New Left Books, 1981.
- Gilloch, Graeme. Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City. Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 1997.
- Habermas, Jürgen. "Consciousness Raising or Redemptive Criticism--The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin." New German Critique 17 (Spring 1979): 30-59.
- Hansen, Miriam. "Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street." Critical Inquiry Winter 1999: 306-343.
- _____. "Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: 'The Blue Flower' in the Land of Technology." New German Critique 40 (Winter 1987): 179-224.
- Hanssen, Beatrice. Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

- Jameson, Fredric. Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1971.
- Jennings, Michael W. Dialectical Images: Walter Benjamin's Theory of Literary Criticism. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.
- Menninghaus, Winfried. "Walter Benjamin's Theory of Myth." Trans. Gary Smith. in On Benjamin. Ed. Gary Smith. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988: 292-328.
- Naigle, Rainer. Theatre, Theory, Speculation: Walter Benjamin and the Scenes of Modernity. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- Parini, Jay. Benjamin's Crossing: A Novel. New York: Henry Holt, 1997.
- Pat, Lise, Ed. Benjamin's Blind Spot: Walter Benjamin and the Premature Death of Aura. Topanga CA: Institute of Cultural Inquiry, 2000.
- Richter, Gerhard. Walter Benjamin and the Corpus of Autobiography. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000.
- Richter, Gerhard Ed. Benjamin's Ghosts: Interventions in Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Rosen, Charles. "The Ruins of Walter Benjamin." On Walter Benjamin. Ed. Gary Smith: 129-175.
- Scholem, Gershom. Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1981.
- Schwartz, Vanessa R. "Walter Benjamin for Historians." American Historical Review Dec. 2001 1721-1743.
- Smith, Gary, Ed. On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1988.
- Smith, Gary, Ed. Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Steinberg, Michael P. Ed. Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1996.
- Wolin, Richard. Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.
- _____. "From Messianism to Materialism: The Later Aesthetics of Walter Benjamin." New German Critique 22 (Winter 1981).
- Weigel, Sigrid. Body-and-Image: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin. London: Routledge, 1996.

In addition to print sources, many resources can be found on the internet. One of the best sites to start with is the Walter Benjamin Research Syndicate:
<http://www.wbenjamin.org/walterbenjamin.html>