

Benjamin and History
SAIC ARTHI 5814-001 Fall 2009 MC 818 Fridays 1 - 4PM
Instructor: Christopher Cutrone

8/31/09


Course title:






Benjamin and History: The Future of the Subject



Instructor: Chris Cutrone (e-mail: ccutrone@speedsite.com, office hours by appointment)

Course description:

Walter Benjamin's cultural criticism sought to grasp the nature of the dramatic social upheavals and transformations of his time (1892-1940). His work tried to discern emancipatory possibilities in contemporary social developments and the emergence of new cultural forms such as photography and cinema, but it was nonetheless preoccupied by problems of recovering past social and cultural history. His stated goal was to grasp the nature of modern forms of being and consciousness and their transformations of subjectivity and experience. In readings from Benjamin's major essays, this course seeks the critical intention of his cryptic utterances on problems of modern subjectivity in social history, which have provoked musings on presence, temporality, memory, and the sense of history in modern and present-day social and cultural criticism. Other readings include works from among Benjamin's sources in criticism, literature and philosophy such as Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Bergson, Proust, Kafka and Brecht.

Course books: [ required texts / * recommended texts]

-  Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* [NY: Schocken, 1985 - ISBN 0805202412]
-  Benjamin, *Reflections* [NY: Schocken, 1986 - ISBN 080520802X]
- * Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard/Belknap, 2002 - ISBN 0674008022]
- * Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, eds. Marthiel and Jackson Matthews, various trans.
[New Directions Paperback, 1989 - ISBN 0811211177]
- * Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* [Dover, 2004 - ISBN 048643415X / Zone, 1990 - 0942299051]
-  Bertolt Brecht, *Baal* [Arcade Pub., 1998 - ISBN 1559704195]
-  André Breton, *Mad Love* [Univ. Nebraska Press, 1988 - ISBN 0803260725]
- * Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories* [NY: Schocken, 1995 - ISBN 0805210555]
-  Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans.
Peter Preuss [Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1980 - ISBN 0915144948]
- * Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, vol. 1 *Remembrance of Things Past / In Search of Lost Time*,
trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff [Modern Library, 1998 - ISBN 0375751548]

Readings in addition to selections from these books will be available as PDF files or web links [ ] at:
<http://docutek.artic.edu> (password: "benjamin")

Course requirements:

This is an advanced, discussion-based undergraduate and graduate course organized as a seminar that meets once per week. Attendance is mandatory; no unexcused absences are allowed.

This course is **Socratic** in method. Class participation consists of student **attendance** and **discussion**. Students volunteer for **10-15 minute** class **presentations** of the readings to lead discussion of them, consisting of **outlines** of the texts **to be handed out** in class, critical reactions beyond summary overview, and focusing on 2 or 3 passages from the text(s) to discuss in depth. Student presentation outlines will be emailed to me before class for photocopying. I will write my feedback to student presenters after class. All students will be expected to attend every class session and bring one or two written reaction questions for each of the assigned readings. Student reactions to the readings (presentations and reaction questions) will guide the class discussions.

The evaluation of student performance in the course will consist of 3 components:

1. Attendance and class discussion participation: **15%** (~1% per class session)
2. In-class presentations on readings (2 or more per student, depending on enrollment): **60%**
3. Writing assignments: **1** of 3 short papers (4-5 double-spaced pages or ~1,000 words): **25%**

Course schedule:

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Preliminary readings: Summer 2009

Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, vol. 1 *Remembrance of Things Past / In Search of Lost Time* (trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff)
especially "Overture" [or, first part of "Combray"], and "Place-Names: The Name"
Franz Kafka, "Before the Law," and "An Imperial Message" [introductory parables];
"The Metamorphosis," and "Josephine the Singer, or, The Mouse Folk" [longer stories]; and "The Wish to be a Red Indian," "The Next Village," "A Crossbreed (A Sport)," "Cares of a Family Man," "The Truth About Sancho Panza," "First Sorrow,"
and "On Parables" [shorter stories], *The Complete Stories*

Week 1: Introduction, the 20th Century as crisis of history 9/4/09

- 📖🔊 *Audio presentations*: Luis De Góngora y Argote (1561-1627), "Fortune Presents Gifts Not According to the Book," and Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), "How Fortunate the Man with None" [poems, music by Dead Can Dance] [photocopy handouts]
- 🕒 *Screenings*: Alain Resnais, dir., *Night and Fog* (1955, 31 min.); and Chris Marker, dir., *La Jetée* (1962, 28 min.) [films on DVD video]
- 📖🔊 *In-class reading*: Benjamin, "Experience" (1913), *Selected Writings* vol. 1: 1913-26 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996-2003], 3-5 [photocopy handout]

I. Destruction of experience, consumption of time
Proust and Benjamin's autobiography

Week 2: Melancholy experience 9/11/09

- 📖🔊 Sigmund Freud, "On Transience" (1915), and "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), *Collected Papers* [NY: Basic Books, 1959], vol. 4: 79-82, and vol. 5: 152-170 [1]
- 📖🔊 Benjamin, "Experience" (1913), and "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy" (1918), *Selected Writings* vol. 1: 3-5, and 100-110
- 📖 Benjamin, "A Berlin Chronicle" (1933), *Reflections*, 3-60 [1]

Week 3: Temporality and memory, the image 9/18/09

- 📖🔊 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (1896-1910), trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer [NY: Humanities Press, 1978 / Dover, 2004:] Introduction: xi-xxi; Ch. 1: 1-35, 43-49, 69-85; Ch. 2: 86-105; Ch. 3: 170-181, 187-200, 231-232; and Ch. 4: 291-298; or: [Zone Books, 1990:] 9-16, 17-41, 45-50, 65-90, 133-140, 145-155, 176-177, 218-223
- 📖🔊 Proust, *Swann's Way*: "Overture," and "Place-Names: The Name"
- 📖 Benjamin, "The Image of Proust" (1929), *Illuminations*, 201-215 [2]

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Week 4: Character of destruction 9/25/09

- 📖🔔 Karl Kraus, selected aphorisms from *Die Fackel* ["The Torch"] (1899-1936)
- 📖 Benjamin, "One-Way Street [selection]" (1928), "Karl Kraus" (1931), and "The Destructive Character" (1931), *Reflections*, 61-94, 239-273, and 301-303
- 📖🔔 Benjamin, "Experience and Poverty" (1934), *Selected Writings* vol. 2: 731-735 [2]
- >>> First paper of 4-5 pages [on experience and memory] due in class Week 4 <<<

II. Destruction of meaning
Kafka and Brecht

Week 5: Kafka 10/2/09

- 📖🔔 Kafka, "Before the Law," and "An Imperial Message" [introductory parables]; and "The Metamorphosis," and "Josephine the Singer, or, The Mouse Folk" [longer stories], *The Complete Stories*
- 📖 Benjamin, "Franz Kafka" (1934), and "Some Reflections on Kafka [from letter to Gershom Scholem of June 12, 1938]" (1938), *Illuminations*, 111-140, and 141-145 [2]

Week 6: Brecht 10/9/09

- 📖 Brecht, *Baal* (1918/26)
- 📖🔔 Eric Bentley, Introduction: "Brecht's First Play" (1963); and Brecht, "The Model for Baal" (1926), *Baal*, trans. Eric Bentley [NY: Grove Press, 1964], 3-14, and 15 [1]
- 📖🔔 Brecht, "Theatre for Learning" (1936?)
- 📖 Benjamin, "What is Epic Theater?" (1939), *Illuminations*, 147-154 [1]

Week 7: Nihilism, language and gesture 10/16/09

- 📖🔔 Kafka, "The Wish to be a Red Indian," "The Next Village," "A Crossbreed (A Sport)," "Cares of a Family Man," "The Truth About Sancho Panza," "First Sorrow," and "On Parables" [shorter stories], *The Complete Stories*
- 📖🔔 Benjamin, "Types of History" (1918), *Selected Writings* vol. 1: 115
- 📖 Benjamin, "On Language as Such and the Language of Man" (1916-17), "Theologico-Political Fragment" (1919/21), and "Fate and Character" (1921), *Reflections*, 314-332, 312-313, and 304-311
- 📖 Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator [introduction to Benjamin's translation of Charles Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*]" (1921-23), *Illuminations*, 69-82 [2]

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III. Aesthetics of destruction
Baudelaire

Week 8: Baudelaire (1) 10/23/09

- ☞ Charles Baudelaire, selections from the Salon of 1846: “To the Bourgeoisie,” and “The Heroism of Modern Life,” *Art in Theory 1815-1900*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood with Jason Gaiger [Blackwell, 1998], 300-304
- ☞ Baudelaire, “3 Drafts of a Preface,” “To the Reader,” “Giantess,” “The Sun,” “Comes the Charming Evening,” “Parisian Dream,” “Abel and Cain,” “Litany to Satan,” “The Voyage,” “A Madrigal of Sorrow,” and “What a Pair of Eyes Can Promise,” *Flowers of Evil: a selection*, various trans., eds. Marthiel and Jackson Matthews [NY: New Directions, 1955], xi-xvii, 2-5, 20-21, 76-79, 96-99, 102-107, 124-145, 156-159, and 160-161 -also- [web resource]
- ☞ Baudelaire, “To Arsene Houssaye,” I. “The Stranger,” II. “The Old Woman’s Despair,” III. “Artist’s Confiteor,” XLIX. “Beat Up the Poor,” “Epilogue,” and “Beauty,” *Paris Spleen* (1855-67, pub. 1869), trans. Louise Varèse [New York: New Directions, 1947], ix-x, 1-3, 101-103, 108, and 118
- ☞ Benjamin, “The Paris of the 2nd Empire in Baudelaire” (1938) *Sel. Writings* v. 4: 3-94 [2]
>>> Second paper of 4-5 pages [on art and meaning] due in class Week 8 <<<

Week 9: Baudelaire (2) 10/30/09

- ☞ Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” (1940), *Illuminations*, 155-200 [2]

Week 10: Baudelaire (3) 11/6/09

- ☞ Benjamin, “Central Park” (1939), *Selected Writings* vol. 4: 161-199 -also- *New German Critique* 34 (Winter, 1985), 32-58 [2]

IV. Sur-realism

Week 11: Objects 11/13/09

- ☞ Baudelaire, “The Rag-Pickers’ Wine,” “Beauty,” and “To a Passer-By” [poems]
- ☞ Benjamin, “On the Mimetic Faculty” (1933), *Reflections*, 333-336
- ☞ Breton, *Mad Love* (1937) [2]

Week 12: Subjectivity 11/20/09

- ☞ Benjamin, “Marseilles” (1929), “Hashish in Marseilles” (1932), and “Surrealism” (1929), *Reflections*, 131-136, 137-145, and 177-192
- ☞ Benjamin, Convolute K: “Dream City and Dream House, Dreams of the Future, Anthropological Nihilism, Jung,” *The Arcades Project*, 388-404 (983-985n) [2]

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Week 13: [Thanksgiving break: please read ahead for week 14]

11/27/09

V. Repressed of history

Week 14: Life in history

12/4/09

- 📖🔍 Baudelaire, from *Fusées* ["Rockets"] (1867)
- 📖🔍 Brecht, "To Posterity" [poem]
- 📖 Benjamin, "Conversations with Brecht," *Reflections*, 203-219
- 📖 Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* [2]
- 📖 Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century [*Arcades Project* exposé of 1935]," *Reflections*, 146-162
- 📖🔍 Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno, exchange on "Paris" Exposé of 1935, *Selected Writings* vol. 3: 50-67
- 📖🔍 Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century [revised exposé of 1939]," *The Arcades Project*, 14-26 (957-958n)
- 📖🔍 Benjamin, *Convolute D: "Boredom, Eternal Return," The Arcades Project*, 101-119 (961-963n) [2]

Week 15: [Critique Week, possible extra class session: please read ahead for week 16] 12/11/09

Week 16: Time of the now

12/18/09

- 📖🔍 Benjamin, *Convolute N: "On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress," The Arcades Project*, 456-488 (988-991n)
- 📖 Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940), *Illuminations*, 253-264
- 📖🔍 Benjamin, *Paralipomena to "On the Concept of History"* (1940), *Selected Writings* vol. 4: 401-411 [2]

>>> Third paper of 4-5 pages [on appropriation of history] due in class Week 16 <<<