

Course Outline

V41.0970.002 Topics: Critical Theory: Walter Benjamin Wednesday 0200PM-0445PM

Professor Robert Young

Office Hours: Tuesdays 10.00am—1.00pm
19 University Place, Room 514
212-992-9591
rjy2@nyu.edu

The Life and Works of Walter Benjamin

Walter Benjamin was one of the most creative critical thinkers of the twentieth century: living through the final frenzied years of the Weimar Republic in Berlin, he moved to exile in Paris in 1933 after the Nazis came to power, and finally committed suicide while attempting to escape to America in 1940. His work combines Marxism with Jewish Messianism, philosophy and history with intense autobiography, literature with the material world in which it is produced. In this course, we will be looking primarily at the first two volumes of his Selected Writings (NB in paperback the second volume is split into two, so it makes up three books), which represent his work between the years of 1913 and 1934, the first year of his exile. Among his many varied interests, we will be focusing on his writings on art, the city, film, hashish, literature and story telling, photography, technology, and translation.

Course requirements:

Attendance and participation 20%, Blackboard contributions 20%, Mid-term paper 30%, Final paper 30% (guideline)

The course will be run as a discussion seminar rather than a lecture class: students are expected to participate actively in each class throughout the semester. In addition to completing the assigned reading for class, students in the class will also be expected to present a framing discussion of at least one week's assigned readings. Your notes for this should be posted on Blackboard after the class. Participants should highlight key features, characteristics and themes of the material and present to the class a series of questions about the material that will develop class discussion. Over the course of the semester, all students will be encouraged to contribute comments to the forum on Blackboard: the aim of the work on Blackboard will be to develop an account of the overall dynamics of Benjamin's work.

Written requirement: Class presentation posted on Blackboard, Blackboard discussion, two 8-10 page papers.