

Theory 9421: The Benjamin Constellation
Course Syllabus
Winter 2023

1: Course Information

Course Name and Number: Theory 9421G, The Benjamin Constellation

Location: StvH 3165

Day and Time: Mondays 10:00-1:00

2: Instructor Information

Name: Dr. John Vanderheide

Email: Jvande29@uwo.ca

Appointments: email for zoom chats, or drop in hours Thursdays 9:30-11:30 HUC A203 (Huron)

3: Course Description:

This course studies the constellated relations between nature and history, aesthetics and politics that Walter Benjamin charted across his philosophical and critical career (1915-1940) and the ways in which contemporary theorists and critics have been reading that constellation for knowledge of their own present.

4: Course Materials:

PDFs provided for all the readings, but students are also encouraged to acquire their own print copies of *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* and *The Arcades Project*.

5: Methods of Evaluation:

Attendance and Participation (Ongoing, 2%/wk): 15%

Seminar Presentation (Due weeks 5-13; 30 minutes in length): 30%

Short response (Due: Feb 10, 2023; 750 words+): 15%

Research Project (Due Apr 17, 2023, 20-25 double-spaced pages): 40%

6: Statement on Academic Offences (*scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf*).

7: List of Weekly Readings (pdfs provided)

Week 1 (Jan 9):

Benjamin readings: "Aphorisms on Imagination and Color" (1914-15)

Constellated readings: Peter Fenves, *The Messianic Reduction* (selection) (2010)

Week 2: (Jan 16)

Benjamin readings: "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" (1916)

Constellated readings: Peter Fenves, *The Messianic Reduction* (selection) 2010

Week 3: (Jan 23)

Benjamin readings: "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy" (1918)

Constellated readings: Annika Thiem, "Benjamin's Messianic Metaphysics of Transience" (2015)

Week 4: (Jan 30)

Benjamin readings: "Fate and Character" (1921), "Capitalism as Religion" (1921), "Theological Political Fragment" (1921), "Toward a Critique of Violence" (1921)

Constellated readings: Judith Butler, "One Time Traverses Another" (2015)

Werner Hamacher, "Guilt History" (2002)

Byung-Chul Han, *Topology of Violence* (selection) (2011)

Week 5: (Feb 6)

Benjamin readings: "Epistemo-Critical Foreword," *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* (1928)

Constellated readings: Beatrice Hanssen, "Philosophy at Its Origin: Walter Benjamin's Prologue to the Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels" (1995)

Week 6: (Feb 13)

Benjamin readings: "Trauerspiel and Tragedy," "Allegory and Trauerspiel," *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* (1928)

Constellated readings: Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (selection) (2015)

Reading week

Week 7: (Feb 27)

Benjamin readings: "This Space for Rent," "To the Planetarium," *One Way Street* (1928)

Constellated readings: Adrienne Rich, "Planetarium" (1971)

Week 8: (Mar 6)

Benjamin readings: "Surrealism" (1929), "Chaplin in Retrospect" (1929), "Franz Kafka" (1934)

Constellated readings: Michael North, *Machine-Age Comedy* (selection) (2008)

Week 9: (Mar 13)

Benjamin readings: "Doctrine of the Similar" (1933), "The Mimetic Faculty" (1933), "Problems in the Sociology of Language: An Overview" (1935), "The Knowledge That the First Material on Which the Mimetic Faculty Tested Itself" (1936)

Constellated readings: Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity* (selection) (1993)

Week 10: (Mar 20)

Benjamin readings: "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (second version) (1936)

Constellated readings: Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick* (selection) (2020)

Week 11: (Mar 27)

Benjamin readings: Konvolut A, B, F, *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940)

Constellated readings: Philipp Ekardt, *Benjamin on Fashion* (selection) (2020)

Week 12: (Apr 3)

Benjamin readings: Konvolut M, N, O, *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940)

Constellated readings: Robyn Marasco, "It's All about the Benjamins" (2018)
David Ferris, "The Shortness of History" (2005)

Week 13: (Apr 10)

Benjamin readings: "On the Concept of History" (1939)

Constellated readings: Paul Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus* (selection) (2019)