



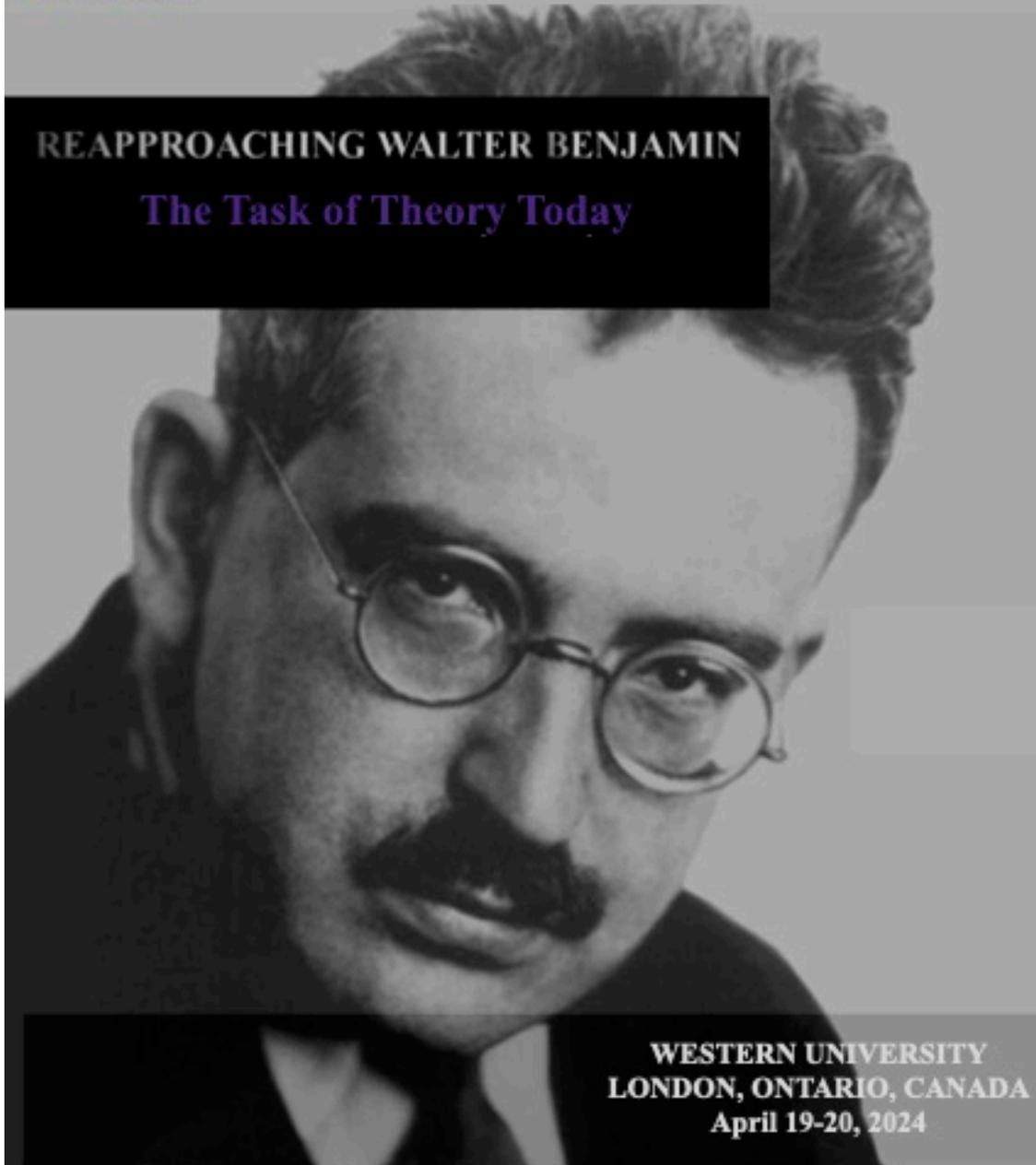
Centre for the
Study of
Theory &
Criticism

Western

THE 10th
ANNUAL
CONFERENCE

REAPPROACHING WALTER BENJAMIN

The Task of Theory Today



**WESTERN UNIVERSITY
LONDON, ONTARIO, CANADA**
April 19-20, 2024



Western

Centre for the Study
of Theory & Criticism

THE TENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

**“REAPPROACHING WALTER BENJAMIN:
THE TASK OF THEORY TODAY”**

**WESTERN UNIVERSITY
LONDON, ONTARIO, CANADA
April 19-20, 2024**

CSTC Conference Committee

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Message from the Director of the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism

Greetings and Welcome everyone to the 10th annual conference, “Reapproaching Walter Benjamin: The Task of Theory Today,” at the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism at Western University. This conference is student-run and highlights the kind of critical theorizing done at the Theory Centre. Conferences are a time of celebration in the sharing of ideas and insights. This conference is also a celebration of the hard work, especially of the conference organizers and all students and faculty at the Theory Centre.

We gather this year to discuss the field of theory today through the lens of the work of Walter Benjamin. In a way, Benjamin is the first to model the full range of critical theory by writing on the following: literature, film, theatre, photography, philosophy, language theory, technology, communications, politics left and right, urbanism, utopianism, the unconscious, collections of things, creaturely life, history, memory, futurity, and redeemed life. Today we might see this range as important in establishing the interdisciplinary impetus in theory. Benjamin found all these domains as fruitful for “thought figures” through which the critical theorist could grasp the truth-content and historical-material content of works, ideas, things, places, or events. In “The Task of the Translator,” Benjamin writes that the translator seeks to renew the work of art’s “life” that is constituted in the work’s originality and historicity. It is certainly the task of theory to think both historically and originally about the full range of critical theory.

This year’s conference at the Theory Centre is our contribution to that great collective task. We look forward to all the presentations and conversations to come. I want to thank again the conference organizers and all the participants and keynote speakers for this wonderful occasion for theorizing.

Joshua Schuster
Director, Centre for Theory and Criticism
and Associate Professor, English

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CSTC CONFERENCE PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

FRIDAY SESSION I: 12:30-1:30 PM

- UC 2110 Politics and Marxism: Perceptibility, Mediation, and Dialectics
UC 2105 Film Phenomenology and the Politics of the Thought-Image

FRIDAY SESSION II: 2:00-3:00 PM

- UC 2110 Allegory, Aura, Image-Sound
UC 2105 Understanding Time and History

OPENING KEYNOTE: 3:30-5:00 PM

- CONRON HALL **Peter Fenves, Northwestern University:**
“Walter Benjamin’s Second Program for the Coming Philosophy”

CSTC RECEPTION 5:00-6:00 PM

- UC 3100

SATURDAY SESSION I: 9:00-10:00 AM

- UC 2110 Benjamin and Psychoanalysis
UC 2105 Law, Violence, Power

SECOND KEYNOTE: 10:15-12:00 PM

- CONRON HALL **Rebecca Comay, University of Toronto:**
“Petrified Unrest / Restless Petrifact” (VIRTUAL)

SATURDAY SESSION II: 1:30-2:30 PM

- UC 2110 Autoethnography and the Politicization of Aesthetics
UC 2105 Art and the Spectacle in Contemporary Consumer Society

SATURDAY SESSION III: 2:45-3:45 PM

- UC 2110 Intersections between Benjamin and Fanon
UC 2105 Applications of ‘Montage’

SATURDAY IV: 4:00-5:30 PM

- UC 2110 Political Cosmogony, Theology, and Eschatology
UC 2105 Revolutionary Forms

Local Arrangement and Logistics Contact

Suhyang Baek (sbaek29@uwo.ca) is our logistics contact. Please contact her regarding hotel accommodations and local travel.

All sessions will take place in University College on campus at Western University located at 1151 Richmond Street, London, Ontario, N6A 3K7, Canada. A map of the campus can be found at https://www.uwo.ca/parking/find/pdf/Parking_September_2021.pdf.

Hotel Accommodations

We were able to negotiate a reduced rate at the Delta Hotels London Armouries in Downtown London. For reservations, please book online at <http://www.marriott.com/YXUD> for a reduced rate starting at \$149 CAD/night. Do so entering Corp/Promo Rate “UO8” under ‘Special Rates’.

Note: Room reservations at the Delta Hotels London Armouries are on a first come, first serve basis. Rooms at the reduced rate are limited and are not guaranteed.

Travel Information

London airport (YXU) is the closest airport to UWO (about twenty-minutes away); Pearson International Airport in Toronto (YYZ) is about two and a half hours by car. To get to Delta Hotel London Armouries you can take a taxi, Uber, BlaBlaCar, VIA Rail, or Bus Service. For those opting for bus service, there are two major low-fare bus companies in Ontario, OnexBus and FlixBus. Ontario Express Bus (OnexBus) travels directly between YYZ and Western’s campus (as well as Downtown London). FlixBus travels between the Union Bus Terminal in Toronto, Downtown London, and Western’s campus (as well as many other Ontario cities).

Local Travel

London has a reliable local bus system that frequently services buses between Downtown London and Western University (**2 & 106**). Through funding graciously provided by the Faculty of the Arts & Humanities the conference committee is able to offer participants a limited amount of bus tickets to offset the costs of local travel, which are included in welcome folders upon registration. For further information on bus routes, find the “local bus routes” information sheet included in the welcome folder.

Publication Notice

The CSTC Conference Committee strongly encourages authors to submit their papers presented at the annual meeting for consideration in the *Chiasma: An International Journal of Theory and Philosophy* Benjamin Special Issue edited by members of the conference committee. To be considered, please submit your paper after the conference via their online submission system at <https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/chiasma/about/submissions> by July 8, 2024. The online system will guide you through the steps to upload your submission. Papers submitted should be no longer than 6000 words inclusive of notes, formatted according to the Chicago Manual of Style, and in MS Word format (no pdfs).

Notes of Appreciation

The conference committee would like to extend a special thank you to Maxwell Hyett for assistance on the call for papers and final flyer and Peter Heft, the Chief Editor of *Chiasma: An International Journal of Theory and Philosophy*, for agreeing to partner with us in making the Special Issue happen.

A big thank you too to our moderators and volunteers and the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism student and faculty for their continuous hard work and dedication to growing our department post-pandemic. The committee would especially like to thank Melanie Caldwell, Joshua Schuster, and Antonio Calcagno for their contributions, wisdom, and guidance.

Lastly, a note of appreciation to our donors: the Society of Graduate Students (SOGS) for the Academic Joint Fund for Support of Graduate Research and Scholarship, Western's Arts & Humanities Faculty, Faculty of Information and Media Studies (FIMS), and Social Sciences for their generous support for the conference.

Land Acknowledgement (authored by James Van Schaik)

Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton Nations and all the treaties that are specific to this area: the Two Row Wampum Belt Treaty of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy/Silver Covenant Chain; the Beaver Hunting Grounds of the Haudenosaunee NANFAN Treaty of 1701; the McKee Treaty of 1790, the London Township Treaty of 1796, the Huron Tract Treaty of 1827, with the Anishinaabeg, and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum of the Anishnaabek and Haudenosaunee.

We acknowledge and recognize the three Indigenous Nations in this land: the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation; Oneida Nation of the Thames; and the Munsee-Delaware Nation who all continue to live as sovereign Nations with individual and unique languages, cultures, and customs.

With this, we respect the longstanding relationships that Indigenous Nations have to this land, as they are the original caretakers. We acknowledge historical and ongoing injustices that Indigenous Peoples endure in Canada such as the residential school system and the "Sixties Scoop", and the ongoing injustice surrounding missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and we accept responsibility as a public institution to contribute toward revealing and correcting miseducation around these issues as well as renewing respectful relationships with Indigenous communities through actionable teaching, research, and community service. We also acknowledge and respect the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the ongoing need to respect and implement its 94 calls to action and the conventions and responsibilities contained within the United Nations Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This Land Acknowledgement is a first step towards reconciliation. It is the work of all citizens to take steps towards decolonizing practices and bringing our awareness into action. We encourage everyone to be informed about the traditional lands, Treaties, history, and cultures of the Indigenous people local to their region.

FRIDAY, APRIL 19th (University College, Western University)

12:00pm Registration Begins

Session I: Panel Title: Politics & Marxism

12:30pm -1:30pm Moderator: Joseph Palmeri

UC 2110 Speaker: Dominic Pizzolitto, University of Toronto, “Benjamin’s
2nd Floor Esoteric Marxism”

Speaker: Mang Su, Temple University, “The Concept of Natural History and the Mediation through the Extremes: On Adorno’s Alleged Critique of Benjamin”

12:30pm -1:30pm **Film Phenomenology and the Politics of the Thought-Image**

UC 2105 Moderator: Yijing Li

2nd Floor Speaker: Daniel Mourenza, Universitat de Barcelona, “The Haptic Quality of Film: Walter Benjamin and Film Phenomenology”

Speaker: Xue Jiang, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, “Between Proximity to the Market and Political Influence of a Left-Wing Outsider: Walter Benjamin’s Feuilletonistic Literary Writings”

Break: Sandwiches / Coffee (UC 3100)

Session II: Allegory, Aura, Image-Sound

2:00pm-3:00pm Moderator: Gigi Wong

UC 2110 Speaker: Hong Liu, Centre for Comparative Literature at University of
2nd Floor Toronto, “Image and Sound: Revisiting Walter Benjamin’s Theory of Allegory in the *Trauerspielbuch*”

Speaker: Yijing Li, Western University, “Re-define Chinese Aesthetic Terminology ‘yi 意’ through the Lens of Walter Benjamin’s Theory”

UC 2105 **Understanding Time and History**

2nd Floor Moderator: Kashifa Arif

Speaker: Jürgen Lipps, University of California, Los Angeles, “The End of All Things (And the Beginning of Nothing!)”

Speaker: Tyla Stevenson, Massey University, “Walter Benjamin for Fashion Studies: Understanding Time through Fashion”

Break

3:30pm-5:00pm
Conron Hall, 3rd Floor

Moderator: Joshua Schuster, Centre for the Study of Theory & Criticism at Western University

“Walter Benjamin’s Second Program for the Coming Philosophy”

Peter Fenves
Northwestern University

CSTC Reception to Follow
 Generously Funded by the SOGS Academic Joint Fund, FIMS, and the Faculty of Social Science
UC 3100
5:00pm-6:00pm

SATURDAY, APRIL 20th (University College, Western University)

8:30am Registration Begins

Session I: Benjamin and Psychoanalysis

9:00am-10:00am Moderator: Tanner Layton
UC 2110 Speaker: Ali Ghasemibarghi, Centre for the Study of Theory & Criticism
 2nd Floor at Western University, “Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Destructive Character’
 Revisited: From Theology to Ethics through a Lacanian Interlude”
 Speaker: Veronika Nayir, York University, “The Burden of the Critic
 and the Task of Resuscitating Carthage”

UC 2105 **Law, Violence, Power**
 2nd Floor Moderator: Jason Stocker
 Speaker: Bogdan Ovcharuk, York University, “Baroque Sovereignty in
 Walter Benjamin’s ‘Natural History’ of Fascism”
 Speaker: Natasha Hay, Toronto Metropolitan University, “Becoming a
 Queer Heir: The Sexual Politics of Sovereign Power and the
 Contemporary Legacy of Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’”

Break: Coffee / Pastries (UC 3100)

10:15am-12pm
Conron Hall, 3rd Floor
 Moderator: John Vanderheide, Centre for the Study of Theory & Criticism at Western University
“Petrified Unrest / Restless Petrifact” (Virtual)
Rebecca Comay
 University of Toronto

Lunch: Sandwiches / Assorted Vegetable / Coffee (UC 3100)

Session II:
1:00pm-2:00pm
UC 2110
2nd Floor

Autoethnography and the Politicization of Aesthetics

Moderator: Nicholas Birmingham

Speaker: Sarah Burgoyne, Concordia University, “‘History is Time in Drag’: Benjamin and the Québécois in Montreal’s Arcades”

Speaker: Jason Stocker, Centre for the Study of Theory & Criticism at Western University, “Ecological Allegory and the Politicization of Aesthetics”

UC 2105
2nd Floor

Art and the Spectacle in Contemporary Consumer Society

Moderator: Mara Gonzalez

Speaker: Ulysse Sizov, Memorial University of Newfoundland, “Reimagining New Potentialities for Art and Revolution in Consumer Society”

Speaker: Fernando Garcia, Centre for the Study of Theory & Criticism at Western University, “The Body-Brand: A New Phantasmagoria?”

Break: Coffee (UC 3100)

Session III:
2:15pm-3:15pm
UC 2110
2nd Floor

Intersections between Benjamin & Fanon

Moderator: Evan Adamou

Speaker: Jeremy Arnott, Concordia University, “Violence and Metaphysics: Benjamin and Fanon”

Speaker: Jiantao Liang, Concordia University, “Redeeming History with Fanon and Benjamin: Theorizing the Decolonization of Time and Possibilities in between the History of Refusal and Messianic Time”

UC 2105
2nd Floor

Applications of ‘Montage’

Moderator: Samir Khondoker

Speaker: Deepro Roy, Centre for the Study of Theory & Criticism at Western University, “The Post-Colonial Montage against the National Allegory: Benjamin, Brecht, and Epic Theater in India”

Speaker: Cory McConnell, York University, “Trauma: Shock-Experience in Hip-Hop”

Break

Session IV:
3:30pm-5:00pm
Conron Hall
3rd Floor

Political Cosmogony, Theology, and Eschatology

Moderator: Lennon Needham

Speaker: Brendan Brown, CSTC at Western University, “Towards a Constellation of an Origin/al Cosmogony”

Speaker: Joseph Palmeri, CSTC at Western University, “Benjamin, Theology, and Messianic Joy: Theorizing Benjamin’s Theology as a Politics of Revolutionary Joy”

Speaker: Lingyu Jing, McMaster University, “From the End of History to the History of the End: Walter Benjamin’s Innovation of Political Eschatology”

UC 2105
2nd Floor

Revolutionary Forms

Moderator: Deepro Roy

Speaker: André Babin, McGill University, “Revolutionary Form: Benjamin, Fourier, and the Necessity of the Cosmic Imagination”

Speaker: Olivier Dorais, Université de Montréal, “Profane Illumination and the Task of Revolutionary Intellectuals: The Use of a Notion from Walter Benjamin to Friedrich Kittler”

5:00pm
Conron Hall
3rd Floor

Closing Remarks

Abstracts and Author Information

KEYNOTES

Peter Fenves, the Joan and Sarepta Harrison Professor of Literature, is Professor of German, Comparative Literary Studies, and Jewish Studies. He is the author of several books including, *Arresting Language: From Leibniz to Benjamin* (Stanford University Press, 2001); *Late Kant: Towards Another Law of the Earth* (Routledge, 2003), which was translated into German in 2010, with a Spanish translation schedule for 2023; *The Messianic Reduction: Walter Benjamin and the Shape of Time* (Stanford University Press, 2010), with a Spanish translation scheduled for 2023; and *Walter Benjamin entre los filósofos* (Palinodia, 2017). Among many other editorial positions, he is also co-editor of two volumes of Walter Benjamin's writings: (with Julia Ng), *Toward the Critique of Violence* (Stanford University Press, 2021) and (with Susan Bernstein and Kevin McLaughlin), *On Goethe* (Stanford University Press, forthcoming). Professor Fenves has written extensively on Walter Benjamin beyond his recent book, including (but not limited to) such titles as: "'A Close Affinity with the Concept of the Dao': Toward Walter Benjamin's Idea of Revolution," *Theoretical Studies in Literature and Art* 40.6 (2020) "Denkicht—Thicket-Thinking with Walter Benjamin around 1917," in *Thinking: A Philosophical History*; "Detour and Dao: Benjamin, with Jullien, contra the Ontology of the Event," *Theory Culture & Society* (2023); "Walter Benjamin, *Altmexiko*, and the Idea of a Different Archeology," in *Archaeology and Its Avatars* (forthcoming); and "Beyond (European) Philosophy: From Leibniz—via Schmalenbach—to Benjamin," *boundary2* (forthcoming).

Rebecca Comay is professor of philosophy and comparative literature, a core member of the Literature and Critical Theory Program (Victoria College), and an associate member of the Germanic Languages and Literatures Department and the Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto. Professor Comay is also professor of philosophy at The European Graduate School, with her primary research and publications on Hegel, Marx(ism), Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Martin Heidegger, Marcel Proust, contemporary art criticism, trauma and memory, psychoanalysis, and political theology. She is currently working on a book on the temporality of deadlines, as well as a project on dramaturgy and dialectic. Among her many publications include articles on Benjamin, such as: "Testament of the Revolution (Walter Benjamin)," *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 50.2 (2017); "Benjamin," in *A Companion to Continental Philosophy* (2017); and "Paradoxes of Lament: Benjamin and Hamlet," in *Lament in Jewish Thought* (2014).

Dominic Pizzolitto, “Benjamin’s Esoteric Marxism”

Adorno once remarked in a letter to Benjamin that, oftentimes, only “initiates” are capable of grasping the theoretical questions latent in his work. But Benjamin is not an obscurantist; the opacity that veils his work is a by-product of his unique mode of presentation. This presentation attempts to unpack Benjamin’s esoteric Marxism by exploring the problem of the *Darstellung* of history in Benjamin’s late work. In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin speaks of the need to “conjoin a heightened graphicness [*Anschaulichkeit*] to the realization of Marxist method.” He also argues that “the expressive character [*Ausdruckscharacter*] of the earliest industrial products, machines, and architecture” affected Marxism in decisive ways. This presentation will argue that Benjamin’s desire to add “graphicness” to Marxism or render history “perceptible” is indicative of a political economy of affect at play in his work. To that end, Benjamin’s recourse to Freudian psychoanalysis—particularly in his Baudelaire essays—will be explored to question how affect might function as a combinatory force capable of constellating historical fragments.

Dominic Pizzolitto is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto. His research interests include Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, German Idealism, modernism, and nineteenth and twentieth century literature. He is currently working on a dissertation about Benjamin’s theory of experience as it relates to “The Arcades Project”.

Mang Su, “The Concept of Natural History and the Mediation through the Extremes: On Adorno’s Alleged Critique of Benjamin”

This essay is yet another attempt to approach Adorno’s infamous (notorious) critique of Benjamin’s thinking as “not dialectical enough.” Instead of arguing that Adorno misunderstands or misrepresents Benjamin, or that Benjamin has an underestimated counter argument against Adorno, like the existing literature tends to do, I proceed instead from Adorno’s own work, especially on the concept of mediation, which he accuses Benjamin of lacking. I will argue that Adorno’s concept of mediation, which draws on both Hegel and Benjamin, is in fact more akin to Benjamin’s dialectical image than to Hegel’s self-mediating spirit. This is the case because without Hegel’s commitment to the system, which alone warrants the mediation in every moment of the dialectic, Adorno’s micrology of mediation falls under the same accusation that he makes against Benjamin. Hence, Adorno’s critique of Benjamin brings about the dilemma of the “micrology” for both Benjamin and Adorno—what they both believe to be the last reservoir of metaphysics. I will conclude that Adorno’s critique of Benjamin should be best understood as an internal alert to the predicament that any micrological-metaphysical speculation will face. In particular, I will examine Benjamin’s and Adorno’s notions of natural history in relation to the notion of redemption, through which their similar but different treatments of materialistic and negative-theological themes are to be made explicit.

Mang Su is a PhD candidate in Philosophy at Temple University. His interests originate in aesthetics, especially on the problematic but seemingly indispensable desire for the transcendent. He is fascinated by critical theory (especially the “first generation Frankfurt School” thinkers such as Adorno and Benjamin), because the emphatic ambivalence of a socially conditioned but socially transcending force of thinking is thematized and developed, along with a

radically imaginative but utterly serious way of thinking about the relation between history, nature, and what could be thought to be beyond. Interdisciplinary by nature, critical theory then leads me to the threads of thoughts from German Idealism, negative theology, to psychoanalysis. He is currently working on his dissertation, which is on the concept of semblance (Schein) in Adorno's late thinking, through the lens of the problematic of metaphysics in German Idealism and Romanticism.

Daniel Mourenza, “The Haptic Quality of Film: Walter Benjamin and Film Phenomenology”

In the Work of Art essay, Benjamin borrowed the concept “*taktisch*” from Alois Riegl to describe the transmission of tactile qualities through optical means. The term has been controversial in Benjamin studies. For example, the editors of the *Gesammelte Schriften* considered the word baffling and used *taktil* instead, whereas Tobias Wilke has defended the polysemy of *taktisch* as both tactile and tactical. I will argue, however, that Benjamin should have used the term *haptisch*. As early as 1902, Riegl discarded the word *taktisch* as ambiguous and argued that from then onwards he would use *haptisch*. Haptics has become a widely used concept in film phenomenology, especially since Laura Marks published *The Skin of Film* (2000), to refer to moving images that appeal not only to sight but also to touch. Although Benjamin is widely cited by these authors, his theory on film's reception in distraction is surprisingly missing from their debates. The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it seeks to reclaim Benjamin's film aesthetics as a film phenomenology *avant-la-lettre*, for it anticipated ideas such as embodied spectatorship and haptic reception. Secondly, it aims to contribute to current debates in film phenomenology about the relationship between spectators and film.

Daniel Mourenza is an Assistant Professor at Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen/Radboud Institute of Culture & History (RICH) and a Maria Zambrano postdoctoral fellow at the Universitat de Barcelona. He holds a PhD in Cultural Studies (2014) from the University of Leeds, with a thesis on Walter Benjamin's film writings. Mourenza is the author of Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Film (Amsterdam University Press, 2020), co-editor of a special issue of the cultural studies journal parallax and of the volume Contemporary Argentine Women Filmmakers (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023). He is currently working on a project about the role of the senses in women's cinema, in which he tries to reconcile Benjamin's film aesthetics with film phenomenology.

Xue Jiang, “Between Proximity to the Market and Political Influence of a Left-Wing Outsider: Walter Benjamin's Feuilletonistic Literary Writings”

Benjamin not only wrote literary-philosophical proses for newspapers as a creator, but also reflected as a theorist on the development of the newspaper/feuilleton and their relationship to literature. In literary-philosophical creation, Benjamin, on the one hand, tailored his work to the market by adopting “Kleine Form” and an approach that connects with the public, on the other hand, exerts his political influence as a “left-wing outsider” through avant-garde techniques. In terms of theoretical reflection, Benjamin inquired as early as 1928 into “why the art of storytelling is in decline”. In his view, this issue is closely tied to the integration of literature into journalism and the related phenomenon of “literary production being assimilated into commodity production”. The investigation of newspapers and feuilletons is a part of Benjamin's reflection on

modernity, and his expectations for both entail his intentions to rescue modernity from its crisis. By analyzing Benjamin's feuilletonistic literary experiments and his theoretical reflection on newspapers, this article aims to explore whether his strategy in literary creation was caught in a precarious position of being "between two chairs" and assess the applicability of Benjamin's ideas on newspaper in today's media landscape.

JIANG Xue is research assistant at the institute of Foreign Literature, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, where she has been since 2018. She received her Ph.D. in German Literature from Peking University in 2018. Currently she works as a Visiting Scholar at the University of Stuttgart. Her research focuses on the theoretical aspects of modern German literature, with a recent emphasis on Walter Benjamin and Thought-Images of Frankfurt School Writers. She has translated Walter Benjamin's Einbahnstraße and his biography Walter Benjamin into Chinese and published several papers on Walter Benjamin in academic journals in both Germany and China.

Hong Liu, "Image and Sound: Revisiting Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory in the Trauerspielbuch"

In the *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, Benjamin recuperates allegory as a mode of expression that resists hegemonic meaning and the logic of symbolic identity, signaling instead an alternative, fragmented, and heterogeneous relationship to knowledge and history. Scholarship has often thematized the visual nature of the Benjaminian allegory— from the emblem to the *Schriftbild*—an emphasis warranted by the profusion of visual metaphor across Benjamin's oeuvre. However, Benjamin's lengthy discussion on speech sound, onomatopoeia, and the phonetic language of nature has received little attention, and sound is rarely considered in relation to allegory. This paper revisits Benjamin's theory of allegory from the perspective of sonorous mimesis. With reference to Benjamin's early writing on language and the mimetic faculty, I discuss how the structure of allegory is grounded in the unfulfilled linguistic unity between sound and script. Responding to Benjamin's own call for new apperceptions in the "Work of Art" essay and informed by recent approaches to Benjamin from Sound Studies, this paper looks beyond the *seen* to further reconsider the dialectic of sound and silence, utterance, and muteness, in Benjamin's thinking on tragedy, history, and nature.

Hong Liu is a PhD candidate at the center for comparative literature at the university of Toronto. Her dissertation project considers Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory and the entanglement of history and tragic theater, both modern and early modern. She was a member of the Ekphrasis reading group at the university of Toronto and was involved in the organization of the group's 2021 international Workshop: The Scene of Writing the Seen. Her research interests include text-image relationship, allegory and melancholy, sound and memory, phonocentrism and national literature.

Yijing Li, "Re-define Chinese aesthetic terminology "yi意" through the lens of Walter Benjamin's theory"

German philosopher Walter Benjamin came up with an artistic terminology "aura" to explain the originality and unreproducible feature of certain artworks—Only the original artworks contained

aura because of its unique existence in certain time and space (The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, 1935). Using this as an entry point, my presentation will attempt to re-define the aesthetic of “yi意” in Chinese calligraphy through the lens of Walter Benjamin’s theory. Using Wang, Xizhi’s calligraphy work, Orchid Pavilion Preface, as a case study, I will explore how the artist could perceive “aura” in his artworks through numerous imitations of other calligraphy works. I will also discuss the similarity shared between this unique Chinese aesthetic terminology “yi意” and the term “aura” proposed by Walter Benjamin, in terms of its definition as uniqueness and “one and only” in Chinese calligraphy.

Yijing Lin is a first year Ph.D. student in Art and Visual Culture at Western University under her supervisor, Prof. Sarah Bassnett. She obtained her honours bachelor’s degree and master’s degree at University of Toronto. During my undergraduate studies, she fortunately participated in the project of art exhibition curation, Reading Revolution: Art and Literacy during China’s Cultural Revolution under the supervision of Professor Jenny Purtle. During her graduate studies, under the supervision of Professor Deepali Dewan, she has engaged with case studies from the Family Camera Network archive at Royal Ontario Museum (ROM)’s photo collection. Through the case study, she examined the cultural, social, and technological practices that produce family photography and learned to understand its aesthetic and discursive dimensions. Her current research is focused on using family portraits to study the reconstruction of “family time” through generations. Her article Family Portraits: The reconstruction of “Family Time” Through Generations is under the final publication procedure at University of Toronto Art Journal.

Jürgen Lipps, “The End of All Things (And the Beginning of Nothing!)”

Walter Benjamin’s writings on history contain numerous references to the arresting or standing still of time, more specifically, of the historian’s need for a concept of the present that is not a transition, but in which time “takes a stand and has come to a standstill” ([Der] *Begriff einer Gegenwart* [...] *in der die Zeit einsteht und zum Stillstand gekommen ist*). It is incredibly difficult to know what to think of these statements, much less *how* to think them at all. What does it even mean for time to take a stand and come to a standstill? Furthermore, why is such a concept of the present indispensable to the historian? I seek to answer these questions via an engagement with Kant’s late essay *Das Ende aller Dinge* (1794) and a peculiar passage on intelligible intuition from the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788). My claim is that the concept of the present moment that Benjamin takes to be indispensable to the historian can be thought using the Kantian idea of a duration outside of time. I argue that the sought-after advantage of writing history from within a moment outside of time is that historical perception from within such a moment would be unlimited by the form of time, much like Kantian intelligible intuition. As such, it would permit a kind of historical cognition devoid of temporal concepts like progress. I interpret Benjamin’s call for the development of such a conception of the present as an attempt to conceptualize, make possible, and ultimately to instantiate a kind of divine intelligible intuition for the practice of materialist historiography.

Jürgen Lipps is a PhD student in Philosophy at University of California, Los Angeles. He studied Philosophy and Comparative Literature at Rutgers University, receiving his BA in 2021. His current research interests include Kant’s practical philosophy and philosophy of history, early

critical theory, and literary theory. He also has lesser interests in the philosophies of language and mind. His current research is on the emergence, development, and decline of theories of universal history in German philosophy from the 18th century to the early 20th. He is also interested in theories of linguistic change and development on both sides of the analytic/continental gap. In seeking to bridge this gap, he is currently organizing a conference that puts Werner Hamacher's philological works into conversation with recent work in the analytic philosophy of linguistic change.

Tyla Stevenson, "Walter Benjamin for Fashion Studies: Understanding Time Through Fashion"

The concept of fashion is inescapable from time. Fashion can be considered fast or slow, aligned to a strict cycle dedicated to arbitrary seasons and associates what is in fashion with the 'now' and what is out of fashion with the 'past'. Fashion scholars, including myself, turn to Walter Benjamin and his work on the *Arcades Project* and essay *On the Concept of History* to understand fashion and its relationship to time. Benjamin explored the speed in which styles change to appeal to the spirits of the modern times, the way fashions would reference history and repeat and recontextualise previous styles and trends. Although not limited to an association with modernity, fashion for Benjamin, was a phenomenon and model for rethinking temporal articulation in general. Fashion's reiteration of previous styles for Benjamin could be politically revolutionary as it implements the dialectical image as a tool to awaken the collective from a dream state. For my presentation I will explore the way in which Benjamin has been used in Fashion Studies, his relevance today and common critiques of limiting a definition of fashion to a particular conceptualisation of time. I advocate that his works are imperative for a revolutionary study of fashion design and its encompassing system.

Tyla Stevenson is a PhD candidate pursuing Fashion Studies at The College of Creative Art, Massey University. Her background is in Fashion Design (BDes (Hons)) and Media Studies (MA). Her research interests are in the intersections of fashion studies, new media and critical theory focusing on the developments of virtual fashion in online environments.

Ali Ghasemibarghi, "Walter Benjamin's 'The Destructive Character', Revisited: From Theology to Ethics through a Lacanian Interlude"

In my presentation, I will explore an ethical core embedded within Walter Benjamin's concept of the 'destructive character,' often seen as nihilistic and anti-moral. Benjamin's 'destructive character,' along with other personages like 'the collector' and 'the ragpicker,' exhibit traits that can be seen as virtues, representing a subjectivity attuned to the demands of political struggle within Benjamin's concept of 'Natural history'. However, considering Benjamin's outright rejection of ethical or moral evaluations regarding 'character,' discussing a Benjaminian (virtue) ethics would be inaccurate and illegitimate. The predominance of theological or political sources of normativity in Benjamin's thought minimizes the potential for spotting an ethical core within it. Building on Irving Wohlfarth's authoritative interpretation, which associates this figure's demeanor with liberation from law and guilt/debt and incorporating Lacanian insights on the ethical status of desire in relation to 'the symbolic order' and 'Law,' I aim to reconstruct the ethical aspects of this figure. I will argue that the destructive character, indifferent to 'being

misunderstood' and adopting a 'blithe' demeanor while embracing radical contingency, embodies an ethical moment termed by Lacan as 'traversing the fantasy.' This moment involves recognizing the fundamental inconsistency/inexistence of the big Other, breaking free from the neurotic guilt/debt-generating Law and its obscene jouissance. Moreover, by making a supplementary reference to the personage of 'the collector,' I will demonstrate how the Lacanian notion of 'subjective destitution' can illuminate what Wohlfarth identified as the destructive character's unwavering drive toward self-obliteration.

Ali Ghasemibarghi is a second-year Ph.D. student at Western University's Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism. He studied Persian Language and Literature (BA) and Sociology (MA) at the University of Tehran, Iran. His theoretical interests mainly include Walter Benjamin's thought, with a specific focus on the notion of Natural History (Naturgeschichte), and the Lacanian tradition in Psychoanalytic Theory. His scholarly path includes translating books like Žižek and Theology (by Adam Kotsko) and Psychoanalytic Film Theory and The Rules of The Game (by Todd McGowan) into Persian. In his recent book-length research, published electronically in Persian (2021), titled: The Afterlife of Ashura: The Mournfulness of Ruined Spectacles and the Theology of Silence, he explored the representations of Ashurā, the founding event of Shi'i political theology, within contemporary Persian drama, fiction, cinema, and theological scholarship in post-revolution Iran, in an effort to construct a critical constellation capable of dismantling the unholy marriage between the epic-tragic aura of the Imam with the sacralised figure of the sovereign in the ruling Shi'i political theology. Furthermore, the motif of ruin deeply fascinates him wherever it appears, from its material presence in ruinous cityscapes to its narrative and visual representations in photography, literature, historiography, and cinema. Here at the CSTC, he has enjoyed the opportunity of studying under instructors specialized in Benjamin's thought, and thus continued to be engaged with Benjamin's constellations.

Veronika Nayir, "The Burden of the Critic and the Task of Resuscitating Carthage"

In a footnote to his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* Benjamin offers us a quote from Flaubert: "Few will be able to guess how sad one had to be in order to resuscitate Carthage" (Thesis VII). My presentation explores the curious chronology of this statement – it seems as though sadness is a condition of possibility, rather than an affective response, to the burdensome effort of resuscitation: one "had to be" sad "in order to...". In this presentation, I examine the affective attachments Benjamin identifies in this thesis as belonging to a historicist position and move onto an exploration of the general status of sadness in Benjamin's work, and in his own capacity as a theoretician involved in tasks of redemption and rehabilitation. This will entail an engagement with the resources of psychoanalysis and affect theory – Carthage is but a placeholder for forgotten, blotted out, and buried pasts, pasts we are all interested in. I argue that Benjamin offers us a way of negotiating a theorist's melancholia – that structure of desire fundamentally attached to the past – while maintaining a commitment to hope and possibility. Alongside a reading of Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, which I bring to bear on Benjamin's *Theses*, I consider the tendency toward necrophilia and speculative "returns" that we find existent in the emotional economy of our present moment. I conclude with some of the affective difficulties of my own work as a theorist who works on trauma studies, loss, and the history of the Armenian genocide.

Veronika Nayir is an MA student of Social and Political Thought and a SSHRC fellow. She graduated from the University of Toronto with a degree in philosophy and literature and critical theory. She is interested in and works on post-Holocaust continental thought, philosophies of history and future, time and trauma, hauntology, catastrophe, witnessing, and translation theory. She is especially interested in Hegel, Benjamin, and Derrida. She is interested in philosophical-literary responses to disaster, and is seeking to stage an encounter (i.e. highlight intellectual affinities and borrow theoretical resources) between post-genocide Armenian women's writing and continental philosophy. In March 2024, she will be presenting preliminary work on feminism and speculative thought at the American Comparative Literature Association's Annual Meeting in Montréal.

Bogdan Ovcharuk, “Baroque Sovereignty in Walter Benjamin’s “Natural History” of Fascism”

In his most accomplished work, *Origin of German Trauerspiel*, Walter Benjamin analyses the genre of trauerspiel within the historical conditions that gave rise to it: 17th-century European absolute monarchy. It is within this context that his engagement with Carl Schmitt's legal theory of sovereignty occurs. Benjamin demonstrates how Schmitt's Fascist theory of sovereignty originates from the absolute monarchy's 'Baroque sovereignty.' This paper will focus on Benjamin's history of trauerspiel in the context of the contemporary debate on constituent power. First, I discuss how Benjamin's approach to the trauerspiel, “natural history” (*Naturgeschichte*), provides a perspective on constituent power that historicizes the notion of sovereignty. Subsequently, I explore the second, most difficult aspect of natural history: Benjamin's analysis of the Baroque depiction of nature as fallen - contingent and transitory. In considering the significance of Benjamin's portrayal of this fallen nature, I argue that Baroque sovereignty marks the beginning of a regressive modern political tendency, extending from absolute monarchy through Bonapartism to Schmitt's Fascism. The paper concludes with a critical examination of the theory of 'destituent power,' ascribed to Benjamin by thinkers like Agamben, in relation to the theoretical task of today — the task of confronting neo-Fascism.

Bogdan Ovcharuk is a PhD candidate in Political Science at York University, Canada, where he is pursuing a dual major in Political Theory and International Relations. Concurrently, he is working towards a Diploma in European Studies, broadening his understanding of the sociopolitical and intellectual landscape of the continent. His academic interests encompass Continental political philosophy, international theory, theories of law and ethics, and the aesthetic approaches of the Frankfurt School to social critique. Bogdan's most recent publication appeared in the Journal of International Political Theory. Bogdan's dissertation project involves an application of Gillian Rose's critique of neo-Kantianism to international theory, an endeavor that reflects his commitment to bridging critical philosophical thought with practical issues. In addition to his academic pursuits, Bogdan has professional expertise in the fields of human rights and peacekeeping honed during his tenure as a researcher and media worker amidst the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Natasha Hay, “Becoming A Queer Heir: The Sexual Politics of Sovereign Power and the Contemporary Legacy of Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’”

My presentation will bring together the figure of the child and the critique of legal violence in Benjamin’s corpus to elucidate the contested status of queer and trans subjects in contemporary life. While the reception of Benjamin’s “Critique of Violence” has privileged the paradigm of sovereign decision suspending the law, it has not scrutinized the significant reversals of specific Weimar laws concerning sexuality and gender that express the legislative agenda of populist reaction to a liberal culture. However, Benjamin’s critique of reproductive sexuality from “The Life of Students” to the *Arcades Project* indicates his apprehension of the neuralgic point of sexual politics omitted from current reconstructions of the nexus between sovereign power and bare life. The entangled threads of gender, sexuality, and eros in Benjamin’s corpus also substantially differ from the Foucauldian approach to power, resistance, and discourse that shapes queer theory and Agamben’s influential view of biopolitics. Taking up Dianne Chisholm’s call for a queer return to Benjamin’s corpus, I want to parse out ways that his analyses of the historical violence of legal systems and the creative potentialities of childhood could address the symptomatic targeting of queer youth and align his legacy with an intersectional materialism.

Natasha Hay holds a doctorate in Comparative Literature from the University of Toronto. She is currently a Sessional Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy and Music at Toronto Metropolitan University. She is working on a book manuscript, Freedom of Learning: Walter Benjamin and the Contested Legacies of Liberal Education, based on her dissertation. In the tradition of the Frankfurt School’s pathbreaking retrieval of nineteenth-century German thought for political theory, her dissertation reconstructs the young Benjamin’s creative inheritance of Kant’s concept of academic freedom and Nietzsche’s critique of cultural education to shed light on why learning has been structurally devalued in the neoliberal university. Her research on Benjamin has been published in Forces of Education: Walter Benjamin and the Politics of Pedagogy (Bloomsbury Press, 2022) and is forthcoming in New Benjamin Studies (Issue 1.3). Her other research interests include contemporary continental philosophy, queer and feminist theory, and translation studies.

Sarah Burgoyne, “‘History is Time in Drag’: Benjamin and the Québécois on Montreal’s Arcades”

Essentially a mall with covered walkways, Montreal’s Saint-Hubert Plaza, represents a kitschy (or, in Québécois, *québécoise*), 21st-century version of the Arcades Benjamin loved to loiter in. Like the Paris Arcades, it presents in its arrangement of storefronts and objects fruitful juxtapositions and dialectical images to explore and unpack. Dialectical images are a means of penetrating past correlations to “put the truth in present action to the test” (Edinburgh, 2016) and of situating critical thinking in an experiential and materialist framework. According to its website and temporary signage during its 2018-2022 refurbishment project, which read, “ma plaza se transforme” (“my plaza transforms itself”), the Plaza St-Hubert is an evolving and self-actualizing space whose ownership can be reduced to a singular possessive pronoun (“my”). An autoethnographic exploration of the question that this slogan introduces, namely, who are the imagined clients who the shopping strip is “transforming” *for* versus the people who currently and historically claim space there, introduces a Benjaminian disequilibrium to traditional

academic methods of “knowing” and “writing” a place. Both dialectical image and somatic urban practice share a similar logic in treating the process of layering time and space as a politicized, deliberate act of radical history, and tapping the potential of the present moment in order to mobilize a better future.

Sarah Burgoyne is an experimental poet whose practice is based in somatic play and collaboration. She is currently enrolled in Concordia’s Humanities Interdisciplinary PhD program where she is researching the history and complex social articulations of the Saint-Hubert Plaza, a contemporary arcade. An exciting part of this research involves developing an audio walk about this commercial glass-canopied shopping centre which runs from Jean-Talon to Bellechasse, seen by many as merely “a bizarre strip of formal-wear shops touting bargain basement prices on ’80s-style prom and wedding gowns.”

Jason Stocker, “Ecological Allegory and the Politicization of Aesthetics”

This talk explores Benjamin’s distinction between the aestheticization of politics and the politicization of aesthetics, focusing on its implications for relations with nature and ecological crises. Briefly, the aestheticization of politics masks the violence of politics and promotes fascism, while the politicization of aesthetics calls us to exhaustively address such political violence, even where oft neglected, in aesthetics. We will consider this distinction by comparing Benjamin’s conceptions of divine symbols, aesthetic symbols, and allegory, interpreting each through their respective ecological orientations. Divine symbols give way to immediate transcendental relations with nature, while aesthetic symbols offer mediate plastic relations. Both symbols, however, suggest assimilations of nature which mask or fail to account for political violence, and thus risk an aestheticization of politics. Allegory, in contrast, explicitly attunes us to the violent ruptures at play in our current and historical relations with nature. Drawing on Benjamin’s “Critique of Violence,” allegory offers a more nuanced, cautious, and ecological approach to what Benjamin terms divine violence, as it forbids settling means/ends, and thus good conscience, in our relations with nature. In this sense, allegory offers a politicization of aesthetics particularly apt for addressing the violence of ecological crises.

Jason Stocker is a PhD candidate at the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism, Western University. Engaging in a dialogue across deconstruction, post-structuralism, and critical theory, his research explores ways in which philosophies of nature yield normative orientations, and vice versa. His current focus is on the relationship between colonial-capitalism, rivers, and allegory. He completed his MA in philosophy at Concordia University, where his thesis examined the relationship between Derrida’s concept of carnophallogocentrism, Kantian dignity, and movements recognizing the rights of nature.

Ulysse Sizov, “Reimagining New Potentialities for Art and Revolution in Consumer Society”

Revolution as art. The artist and the revolutionary share this in common: they frame the chaos of the world, transcribing into reality their visions of the world (Grosz, 2008). The Van Gogh ‘Sunflower’ activists attempted to realize this commonality by throwing a can of soup at Van Gogh’s *Sunflowers* painting; looking to frame the chaos of a world run amok by capitalism, thus

bringing to light the prescience of global warming and the possibility of a new world. This action (de)territorialized the line between vandalism, art, and revolution (Deleuze, 1987). However, their actions failed— in attempting to break spectacle, they became spectacle. Their message of revolutionary action became absorbed for pointless back-and-forth consumption through the lens of media (Debord, 1983). In light of fulfilling the demands Walter Benjamin once gave art – that in the age of mechanical reproduction of culture all art must necessarily be political (Benjamin, 2005) – we seek to use their failure as a launching platform. Thus, through understanding revolutionary action as art – while avoiding the fascistic aestheticization of politics – the dimensions of art as political action, how revolution becomes spectacle, and what comes of seeing revolution as art we hope to bring hope to art and theory.

Ulysse Sizov is a fifth-year philosophy honours, sociology major, and German cultural studies minor undergraduate student from Memorial University (MUN). They are the head editor for our philosophy department's journal Codgito and have typesetting and layout experience with Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies. They have been the undergraduate philosophy department's president for four years running and have been instrumental for organizing the philosophy department's Public Lecture Series in Philosophy since 2022. They have also been involved with the university's student union and worked both outside of and within the organization to raise student voices. Their studies at MUN have led them to: 20th Century European Philosophy (focused on Deleuze and French Poststructuralism), German Idealism (focused on Schelling), Art and Aesthetics, Political Philosophy, Marx and Marxism, Media and Culture, and the French Situationists. Their research focuses on re-imagining art and its potentiality in a world where art is an onto-commodity. To effectively do so they look to the present and to the tradition, as well as those who the tradition has forgotten or left aside and combine novel thinkers and ideas to address the very real problems of creative expression and its failure today.

Fernando Garcia, “The Body-Brand: A New Phantasmagoria?”

This essay departs from the shift in the music industry's business model and how it has led to a new form of capital accumulation known as “body rentierism”. In this model, musicians transition from selling labor power to renting their bodies as images or brands, with the body becoming a primary source of profit as a body-brand. The essay delves into the legal and economic aspects of this shift, emphasizing the role of copyright and image rights in generating surplus value through the exchange value of intentional scarcity. Moreover, the analysis extends into the broader context of cognitive capitalism, with marketing strategies and legal frameworks playing crucial roles in building what Walter Benjamin called a “phantasmagoria” out of the body-brand. Focusing on capturing attention in a society dominated by spectacle. Following Benjamin's works on “On the Concept of History” and his “Arcades Project” I'll suggest a new phantasmagoria coming out of our new capitalist social relation, and a potential for a critical trope within what I call the cultural phantasmagoria of the body-brand. Positing that a different use or engagement with the cultural product, particularly in an inherent tension of the body-brand, may offer political potential for transforming the phantasmagoric condition of domination.

Fernando Garcia is a first year PhD student at the Centre for the Study of Theory & Criticism at Western University. He is a graduate of the Bachelor's Degree in Psychology and the Master's Degree in Humanities from the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos (Autonomous University of the State of Morelos) and member of the permanent seminar "Entreveramientos: Semiótica, Literatura y música" (Interweavings: Semiotics, Literature and Music) of the Department of Humanities of the Autonomous Metropolitan University. His areas of study revolve around Cultural and Media Studies, Philosophy, and Marxism. His research focuses on how cultural production and consumption (mainly music) within capitalist society generates moments of tension in the Society of "Spectacle". Therefore, how the resolution of these tensions can articulate new subjectivities that strengthen or weaken commodity fetishism. Some of the results of this research have been reflected in conferences such as "Music Scene vs Outsider Music: The Canon and its Possible Profanation" in the Autonomous Metropolitan University, or "Music Industry and Identity Production: Jazztón as a New Subjectivizing Model".

Jiantao Liang, "Redeeming History with Fanon and Benjamin: Theorizing the Decolonization of Time and Possibilities In Between the History of Refusal and Messianic Time"

In this presentation, through examining Frantz Fanon and Walter Benjamin's notions of history and the past, I argue that they orient the task of theorists towards decolonizing temporal possibilities. In *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Fanon declares that one must "rework (*reprendre*) the whole past of the world", which is followed by an expression of identifying himself with all the oppressed who refuse subjugation. He diagnoses 'affective ankylosis,' or the White's inability to liquidate the colonial past and the 'affective tetanisation' of the colonized as the result of the temporal violence that they experience, which results in what Alia Al-Saji calls the 'dismembered possibility' of the colonized. Colonial temporality and 'progress' are dialectically violent and regressive. Fanon attempts to locate one of the possible remedies to the colonial pathologies of temporality in rearranging what I would call the 'historical scenes of refusal.' For Benjamin, historical materialists' task is also to 'brush history against the grain' beyond the linear progress of the victors. The unfulfilled happiness in the past possibilities, particularly in the oppressed, can be constructive through their realization in the '*Jetztzeit*'. They both orient us to theorize re-experiencing the past and its possibilities in an a-teleological way.

Jiantao Liang is a master's student in the Department of Philosophy at Concordia University. He did his undergraduate studies in philosophy at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. He is interested in the critical philosophy of race, decolonization, critical phenomenology, and social and political philosophy. His recent presentation includes "Feminist Liberation and Cultural Racism, Saba Mahmood and Frantz Fanon on the Feminist Subject and the Phenomenon of the Veil." He is working on topics related to decolonizing temporality, the reformulation of ecological justice and climate change with the notion of environmental racism, and on a project about the existential ethics of the facticity of race as well as Levinas's phenomenology and ethics.

Jeremy Arnott, “Violence and Metaphysics: Benjamin and Fanon”

This paper will explore the philosophical valences of the concept of violence in Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and Frantz Fanon (1925-1961). For both thinkers, violence serves as both a political and metaphysical tool, and, as such, can be employed as a prism to reflect upon the relationship between both domains. Taking up Benjamin’s “On the Critique of Violence” (1921), in conjunction with “The Destructive Character” (1931), I will chart the polyphonic role played by violence in Benjamin’s oeuvre. Primarily, I will consider the violence at the heart of political sovereignty, which Benjamin outlines in “Critique of Violence.” Further, I will consider Benjamin’s violent interpretation of the avant-garde, which he describes as “making room” through the destruction of the cultic “aura.” Benjamin’s considerations will be supplemented by Fanon’s “On Violence,” from *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), bringing Benjamin into conversation with de-colonial theory. For Fanon, violence is inherent in the “colonial situation,” and is equally necessary for any identity formation (following Hegel), along with resistance to the colonial situation. This constellation of thinkers allows one to pose broader questions regarding the (potentially violent) relationship between theology and politics. Both theorists allow for an interrogation of political theology, highlighting the forceful basis of the law, along with the violent of any state formation. Further, one can consider metaphysical questions relating to violence, considering the potentially violent nature of judgment.

Jeremy Arnott holds a PhD in Theory & Criticism from Western University. He is an interdisciplinary researcher and instructor who specialises in critical theory and continental philosophy. My current research is focused on speculative approaches the Frankfurt School (in particular Benjamin and Adorno). He is also interested in discourses of ecology and philosophies of nature. He currently teaches at both Concordia University and Western University.

Deepro Roy, “The Post-Colonial Montage against the National Allegory: Benjamin, Brecht, and Epic Theatre in India”

Brecht’s “Third World” reception and legacy raises vital questions at the heart of post-colonial theory. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s theoretical attitudes, for instance, by her own admission, are shaped by an early familiarity with the Indian People’s Theatre Association (or IPTA), a Brecht-inspired cultural wing of the Indian communist movement. Benjamin’s reflections on Brecht help account for the energies and events defining Indian post-colonial theatre. The colonial moment and its aftermath demanded a theatre that may be considered Brechtian in two respects: it was, firstly, an activist, didactic, popular theatre, and secondly, against what Benjamin calls the “sublime but barren massif of [Western, Tragic] classicism.” The form was sought in the pre-modern past. For Fredric Jameson, Brecht’s “method” overcomes a tension between, on the one hand, a modernism of shocks and exciting scientific praxis, and, on the other, a pre-modern didacticism, a sage-like embrace of a pre-capitalist temporality. A more stubborn tension appears between two competing uses of “the Folk” in Indian post-colonial theatre. Left cultural movements (IPTA, Badal Sircar’s “Third Theatre”) recovered folk idioms for didactic efficiency. An equally decolonial “theatre of the roots” (K.N. Panicker, Girish Karnad, etc) pursued something authentically Indic. Benjamin, with his Messianic theory of temporality, explains Brecht’s *use of the past*. Benjamin’s recovery of Baroque allegory and

modern montage (that Brecht perfects) deepens our sense of how the Brechtian Indian cultural Left differed from the allegorical “theatre of roots.” I revisit, finally, the post-colonial outcry over Jameson’s controversial declaration that Third World cultural production takes the form of “national allegories.” I argue, using Benjamin, that allegorical readings do apply to *one* current of post-colonial modernism. There is, however, another revolutionary Brechtian-Benjaminian current that subverts the national.

Deepro Roy is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Theory and Criticism, University of Western Ontario. He works on Modernism, Futurism, Speed, and Excess as experienced from the Global South.

Cory McConnell, “Trauma: Shock Experience in Hip-Hop”

In this paper, I take up Benjamin’s discussion of ‘shock-experience’ as a traumatic structuring of modern experience in dialogue with hip-hop as it engages in critical testimony about political violence. By working through this resonance of Benjamin’s thought with hip-hop, I argue hip-hop might be considered a contemporary move in the same direction as Benjamin’s analysis of montage as a contemporary medium apt for capturing shock-experience in the former’s use of the scratch to articulate inarticulable trauma. Against attempts to recuperate testimony by the state testimony in hip hop is always already a critique of traumatic political violence. Critical testimony relies on what Benjamin calls our ‘*weak, messianic power*’ to redeem the past by transmitting a ‘tradition of the oppressed’ through the use of sampling and lyrical content to layer meaning onto histories of oppression and resistance which remain alive to us now. Through such citational practices rappers are able not simply to argue that anti-black violence is genocidal but rather to consider its genocidal character to be self-evident thus circumventing the how the history of the victors precludes such by relegating anti-black violence to a past mistake away from which the nation has moved on together.

Cory McConnell began their post-secondary education studying the Great Books at the University of King’s College, Halifax in the Foundation Year Program. They built on their undergraduate study of philosophy and contemporary studies by completing a Master of Arts in Philosophy at Toronto Metropolitan University. After completing their MA, they began a PhD in Social and Political Thought at York with the intention of continuing their research on political theology and hip-hop as forming a uniquely apt constellation for working through the continually renewed relevance of Walter Benjamin’s thought in dialogue with the Black radical tradition and political theology (especially Jewish and Christian messianism). From the standpoint of their interdisciplinary background in continental philosophy, psychoanalysis, political theory, and religious thought, they confront questions at the intersection of art, politics, and religion paying special attention to the political uses and abuses of history, memory and trauma as their evocation undermines and/or reinforces state sovereignty with a focus on how hip-hop develops what Benjamin calls the “tradition of the oppressed”.

Brendan Brown, “Towards a Constellation of an Origin/al Cosmogony”

This presentation thinks the ‘cosmological’ across three figures: Walter Benjamin, Georges Bataille, and Sylvia Wynter. Rarely, if at all, is Benjamin’s work brought into conversation with Wynter and little is theorized about Benjamin’s relationship to Bataille. As such, this presentation seeks to find a common ground between these three thinkers on their respective theorization of the role of ‘cosmogony’. I take the cosmological to be important not only for theorizing this hereto for unthought constellation, but also for thinking through the category of agency in relation to being and praxis, and, more importantly, the praxis of being human. Cosmogony names a relic of human capacity which sought to divine the role of praxis for each of these thinkers. Reading Benjamin’s “To the Planetarium”, Bataille’s *Accursed Share* and *The Limits of the Useful*, and Wynter’s triptych on humanism “The Ceremony Must Be Found”, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being...”, and “The Ceremony Found”, I will show how cosmogony is a crucial cipher for understanding the limits of praxis and agency in the context of anarchy. I will conclude by arguing that anarchy for each is predicated upon a re-interpretation and unleashing of cosmogony as ushering in a new way of *being* human.

Brendan Brown is a PhD student at the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism at the University of Western Ontario. They primarily are engaged in and write on the relationship between metaphysics and anarchy with influences from the Black Radical Tradition. Their current work stresses the influence of Jacques Derrida on Sylvia Wynter as she investigates the racial fault lines of Western metaphysics.

Joseph Palmeri, “Benjamin, Theology, and Messianic Joy: Theorizing Benjamin’s Theology as a Politics of Revolutionary Joy”

Walter Benjamin is clear about his belief of the Messianic. He begins the *Theologico-Political Fragment* saying, “Only the Messiah himself consummates all history, in the sense that he alone redeems, completes, creates its relation to the Messianic.” In this short fragment, and with this short sentence, Benjamin cuts against the grain of history, even against the grain of traditional historical materialism. Adorno and Horkheimer, for their part, spend the better part of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* arguing that Man has not yet overcome myth, and that the optimistic affirmation of culture presents nothing but the psycho-political victory of fascism after World War Two. Though Benjamin is also critical of the telos-trap within capitalism and the ideology of progress, even within this fragmentary work, he nevertheless unsettles the reservations articulated by Adorno and Horkheimer on three fronts: 1) Benjamin favors what he calls ‘transient totality’ as opposed to nonidentical consistency; 2) This transient totality requires an affirmation, indeed even one that believes in immortality, that is not only resilient but optimistic in the face of profanity; 3) Benjamin, in favor of a materialism which is also divine, rolls the dice with the hand of the Messiah. He conveys an optimism which goes undetected for those reading him as a purely anarchic figure who makes metaphoric use of theological language. On the contrary, Benjamin’s theology is one of Messianic joy, a joy only found in transient totality, where ruptures are also glimpses of immortality, and where even profanity is violently divine and imminently paradisiacal.

Joseph Palmeri is a PhD student in Theory & Criticism at Western University. He holds a Master's degree in Cultural Studies and Critical Theory from McMaster University, and an undergraduate degree in English and Cultural Studies. His most recent presentation at the LABRC conference on Shakespeare was based on a previous, undergraduate publication titled: Multiplicity and Macbeth. Currently, he is building upon the work done in his masters, which seeks to locate intersections between theory and theology.

Lingyu Jing, “From the end of history to the history of the end: Walter Benjamin’s innovation of political eschatology”

The paper situates Walter Benjamin in the tradition of political theology and views his philosophy of history as an innovation of political eschatology. In the 1920s, Marxist-Leninists created a teleological worldview that treated the communist party as the vanguard of progress towards the end of history to justify revolutionary violence and the founding of the Soviet Union. I will argue that from Benjamin’s perspective, the traditional Marxist view of history is a secularized Christian eschatology, which does not bring history to the end time but only perpetuates mythical violence and political idolatry. I treat his Jewish Mysticism as an innovation of political eschatology that creates a new historical consciousness of revelation, redemption, and revolution. First, I draw on *Theologico-political Fragment* to discuss the dialectical relationship between the political and the theological and show why theology should not be used to justify political power as in the case of the Soviet Union. Second, I connect *Critique of Violence* and *Theses on Philosophy of History* to interpret divine violence as the temporal and corporal manifestation of the Messiah and how his Judaic theology reorganizes eschatology as a history of ruptures to reveal the timing of revolution and the rule of the divine.

Lingyu Jing is a second-year PhD student in political science at McMaster University. He holds a MA degree in political science with Cultural, Social and Political Thought specialization (CSPT) from the University of Victoria. He also holds an MA degree in political from the University of York and a management bachelor's degree from Dalian Maritime University. He specializes in political theory and international relations with an interdisciplinary perspective of religious studies. His research interest covers state sovereignty, international law, critical security studies, Judeo-Christian political theology, monotheism, apocalypticism and eschatology, sacrifice and the political meaning of blood, the aesthetics of horror, the political thought of Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, and Giorgio Agamben. His doctoral project explores the mystical construction of state personhood from the perspective of sacrificial rituals and theological discourses. It examines the creation of the state's body politic from the mimesis of Christ's mystical body and political transubstantiation of the flesh of martyrs.

André Babyn, “Revolutionary Form: Benjamin, Fourier, and the Necessity of the Cosmic Imagination”

With his invocation of anti-lions, tails covered in eyes, and oceans turned to lemonade, Charles Fourier’s radical visions of planetary harmony are certainly startling. More curious still is why Walter Benjamin makes such central use of Fourier in the *Arcades Project*. Benjamin dedicates—in addition to a full convolute and various other references throughout—a section to Fourier in each of the 1935 and 1939 prefatory exposés, making explicit a connection between

the revolutionary potential of Fourier's project with the arcades as symbol of both the city in miniature and the technological progress that made them possible: "The phalanstery becomes a city of arcades" (AP 5). But in giving Fourier such a central role in his project, Benjamin does not make a point of separating out Fourier's rational project from his bizarre fantasies, as so many of even Fourier's most sympathetic critics tend to do (Pearson 2005). Benjamin realizes that Fourier's fantasies are crucial to understanding the consumerist and capitalist dream that overtakes Paris, and the entire Western world, in the nineteenth century. Even more importantly, their cosmic influence will help Benjamin discover "the constellation of awakening" that is the stated goal of the *Arcades Project*.

André Babyn holds a PhD in English Literature from the University of Toronto and currently teaches at McGill University. His dissertation focuses on the intersection between love, lack, religious mysticism, medieval literature, and translation in the work of Marguerite Porete. His short stories and poetry have been published in Poetry, Maisonneuve, Grain, and The Fanzine, and his first novel, Evie of the Deepthorn, was called "a powerful and promising debut" by Quill and Quire.

Olivier Dorais, "Profane illumination and the task of revolutionary intellectuals: The use of a notion from Walter Benjamin to Friedrich Kittler"

The pivotal importance of the 1929 essay on Surrealism in Benjamin's work cannot be overstated. Against the backdrop of a critical discussion of the Surrealists' political evolution as a symptom of the crisis of the European intelligentsia, Benjamin outlines the tasks of revolutionary intellectuals from a perspective he calls anthropological materialism. At the same time as it takes up certain key elements of his theory of literary criticism, this perspective provides a materialist and political basis for his own theoretical practice of the 1930s, particularly in *Kunstwerk-Aufsatz* and *Passagenwerk*. – Through the presentation of the notion of profane illumination, reconstructed from the complex conceptual constellation that gives it meaning (*Bildraum*, *Leibraum*, anthropological materialism, the dialectic of intoxication, the bodily collective innervation), I would like to highlight Benjamin's contribution to the question of the task of revolutionary intellectuals and what this task imposes on the very form of theory as immanent critique, aiming to produce a transformative experience, and its relationship to cultural heritage. – From there, I'd like to conclude by contrasting the theoretical and political ambition that Benjamin placed in the notion of profane illumination with the slight but symptomatic reworking of it, in a different historical context, by media theorist Friedrich Kittler in his book *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1986). By highlighting what remains and what is lost, I intend to question the actuality of the perspective of anthropological materialism for contemporary theoretical tasks.

Olivier Dorais is currently a doctoral student in philosophy at the Université de Montréal, working on a thesis co-supervised by Iain Macdonald (Université de Montréal) and Emmanuel Alloa (Université de Fribourg, Switzerland) on Walter Benjamin's aesthetics and media philosophy from a critical anthropological perspective. Their research focuses more generally on critical theory, aesthetics, philosophy of culture and media theory. More specifically, they are interested in the reciprocal contribution of critical theory (especially in the Marxian tradition) and aesthetics. They are the author of a monograph on the form of philosophy in Benjamin: Un

regard sobre. Révélation et histoire chez Walter Benjamin, *published in 2023 by the Presses de l'Université de Montréal.* – They completed their undergraduate and master's degrees in philosophy and German studies at the Université de Montréal and the Centre canadien d'études allemandes et européennes (CCÉAE). Finally, from 2020 to 2023, they were a member of the Montreal-based artists' collective la lumière collective, where they became familiar with contemporary experimental film practice.