Seminar on Walter Benjamin  
PHIL 448-01/ PHIL 648-01  
Wed. 3:05-5:45, College Hall 324

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Office hours: Thursday 10-12, or by appointment

Course Description:  
Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) lived in catastrophic times, and wrote about them with precision. He followed the consequences of his thinking, even when this meant abandoning the pretension that thought is adequate to grasp reality without remainder. We will read a selection of Walter Benjamin’s texts (in translation), focusing on his aesthetics and art criticism, his theories of experience, knowledge and language, and his understanding of historical time. Our focus will be on primary sources, but we will occasionally discuss relevant secondary literature, and will consider the work of other thinkers, such as Gershom Scholem and Theodor Adorno, where they directly engage with Benjamin’s ideas.

Readings:  
The primary texts used in this course will be available through the Barnes and Noble Bookstore on campus and can also be purchased online through Amazon.

Primary texts:  
Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings* (in four volumes) [SW 1-4]  
Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* [OT]  
Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* [AP]

German editions:  
If you would like to read the primary texts in German, please let me know, and I can provide you with copies of Benjamin’s *Gesammelte Schriften* as PDF files.

Recommended Readings  
I have included a limited selection of recommended texts for most weeks. These are suggestions for further research, rather than required readings. If you would like further recommendations for readings on a given topic, please ask me.

Evaluation:  
Weekly reading responses (1-2 pages)........................................................................30%  
30 minute Seminar presentation...........................................................................30%  
Final essay (undergrads: 10-15 pages/ Grads: c. 20 pages).................................40%