

HIST 585-00P: Special Topics in History:

(cross-listed in ENG 789-05P/CPLT 751-00P/PHIL 789-00P)

Topic: Walter Benjamin & The Arcades

Instructor	Day(s)	Time(s)	Maximum Enrollment
Goodstein	TH	1:00 – 4:00 pm	12

Semester Description:

In recent years, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) has come to be celebrated as a pioneering cultural theorist, catapulting this formerly unknown thinker to posthumous fame and generating a minor industry of translations and secondary literature. This class will center on the unfinished archaeology of the modern, the so-called Arcades Project, that is regarded as Benjamin's principal achievement, attempting to read a text that, while it appears to be a book and is often referred to as though it were a coherent object, in fact consists quite literally of a series of fragments. A palimpsest of theoretical reflection, historical narration, citations, excerpts, intertextual allusions, and metaphysical speculations, Benjamin's *Passagen-werk* is both highly resistant to the reader and extremely open to interpretation and appropriation. At once archive and unfinished magnum opus, it embodies the material traces of a revolutionary method of cultural inquiry even as it attests to Benjamin's tragic failure to bring his dreams to reality. By turning a "work" into a "project," the English title begs the question of the relationship between that failure and Benjamin's distinctive achievement. It is quite possible, however, that the *Passagen-werk* is not simply unfinished but unfinishable. In attempting to discern Benjamin's legacy in the fragmentary openness of this book that is not a book, we will develop a critical perspective on the history of reception that represents this text as a coherent point of reference even as we ask Benjamin can teach us as interdisciplinary scholars, as readers, and as critical participants in modern culture. In the spirit of carrying on his legacy, students will be encouraged to pursue creative projects involving digital media resources.

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"The theater of all my struggles and all my ideas."
Walter Benjamin

Required Textbooks, Articles, and Resources:

1. Benjamin: *The Arcades Project*.
2. Eiland and Jennings: *Walter Benjamin: A Critical*.