

Prof. Willy Thayer, Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias Y Educación, Chile  
Prof. Paul North, Yale  
Spring 2018  
Graduate/Undergraduate course

[Multi-title course in Humanities, Film and Media, Spanish]

## Walter Benjamin and Critical Theory in Latin America

### Course Description

This seminar studies transformations of European critical theory in a Latin American context. Taking one exemplary European critical theorist, Walter Benjamin, and one exemplary Latin American intellectual, cultural, and political milieu, Chile, it surveys the conjunctures among them. Critical theory names a cluster of intellectual methods and goals in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Germany, which sees philosophy as too theoretical and Marxism as too untheoretical, and tries to fix the one with the other and visa versa. Later in the century, critical theory travels outward, occupying other discourses, becoming occupied by other histories, contributing to political occupations in systems not foreseen in the original movement. We trace two Benjaminian motifs—violence and its relation to the image and critique—as these motifs migrate out of texts by Benjamin into artworks, films, and theoretical texts by Spanish-language thinkers and makers, against the singular backdrop of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Chilean political history. What interest us are the readings and misreadings, correspondences and responses, citations and fantastical reconstructions, turn-arounds and cul-de-sacs of a reception and repurposing of critical theory.

The course will be taught in English, with texts available in both Spanish and English. Some texts will be available in English translation for the very first time.

This seminar is partially funded by a Mellon Foundation program on Critical Theory in the Global South.

### Reading Schedule

#### Week 1

Walter Benjamin: “Toward a Critique of Violence” (1921)  
Pablo Oyarzun, Carlos Pérez López, y Federico Rodríguez (editores):  
*Letal e incruenta. Walter Benjamin y la crítica de la violencia (2017)*;

#### Week 2

Benjamin: “Toward a Critique of Violence”  
Pablo Oyarzun, Carlos Pérez López, y Federico Rodríguez (editores): *Letal e incruenta. Walter Benjamin y la crítica de la violencia (2017)*;

#### Week 3

Benjamin, “Theses on the Concept of History” (1940)  
Pablo Oyarzun: “Cuatro señas sobre experiencia historia y facticidad” (1993)

#### Week 5

Benjamin Walter, “The Destructive Character” (1919); “Fate and Character” (1919)  
Federico Galende, *Fragmentos del Libro: Walter Benjamin y La Destrucción (2009)*

Week 6

Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" (1921); "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" (1916)

Elizabeth Collingwood-Selby. *Walter Benjamin, La lengua del exilio* (1997)

Pablo Oyarzun, *Sobre el concepto benjaminiano de traducción* (1990)

**Complementos**

Lotty Rosenfeld, *instalación visual: Residuos americanos*,

Nelly Richard: *Ropa usada*

Week 7

Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility" (1936)

Elizabeth Collingwood-Selby : *El filo fotográfico de la historia* (2009)(fragmentos)

Thayer: *Aura serial: la imagen en la era del valor exhibitivo* (2006)

**Complementario**

Carlos Pérez Villalobos: *Narración, experiencia, escritura* (2009)

Week 8.

Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility" (1936)

R. Kay. *Del espacio de acá* (1980)

Enrique Lihn; *Arte disidente en Chile: Eugenio Dittborn, por el ojo del rodillo.* (1979)

Week 9

Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Like, On the Mimetic Faculty" (1933)

Eugenio Dittborn: *Pinturas aeropostales: exposición visual de la obra*

*Fugitiva* (2005); *Correcaminos VII* (hay versión en inglés)

*By By love* (1996)

**Complementario**

Willy Thayer: *E. Dittborn, No man's land paintings* (2012)

Week 10

Walter Benjamin: "The Storyteller" (1936)

Nikolai Leskov: Selected stories

Raúl Ruiz: Poética del cine 3; cap. 5. *Folklore* (2013)

Films: *La recta provincia* (2006); *Litoral* (2008)

Week 11

Benjamin, "Paris of the Second Empire" (1938); *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire* (1940)

Nelly Richard: *Residuos y metáforas* (1998)

Week 12

Ivelich y Galaz: *Chile arte actual* (1988)

Gerardo Mosquera, *Copiar el edén; Arte reciente en Chile*, (2006)

Week 13

Tomás Sebastián Peters Núñez; *Cartografía de una puesta en escena* 2011

Galende, *Filtraciones* 1, 2, 3

Tomás Moulian, *Chile actual, anatomía de un mito* (1997)

**Texts**

All class texts will be available as PDF on Canvas, in both the original language and in English translation.

## **Assignments**

Undergraduates are expected to attend every class session and all the screenings. There will be one midterm paper (4-6 pages) and one final project that can take the form of a paper (10-12 pages) or another piece of work to be discussed individually with the instructors. In addition, students are required to post one short comment, including one question, on the week's film or readings. The comment (no longer than 300 words) should be posted on the class forum each week by Sunday night at midnight before the Monday seminar session. Graduate students will write one seminar paper.

## **Grading**

Attendance and Participation	20%
Midterm Paper	20%
Forum Posts	20%
Final Project	40%

## **Academic Honesty**

Any work you submit in this class is understood by you and by the instructor to be your own original work and no one else's. You may want to include in your text some words or ideas written by others, but you may do so only with the proper attribution. This means that you openly and obviously mark the words or ideas of others as taken from their work, whether they be another's exact words or a paraphrase of their text or a key idea taken from them. It also means that you fully identify the original source in the proper place in your paper, in parentheses or footnotes, and if necessary in a bibliography as well. Submitting another's work as your own without proper attribution carries serious consequences. For details please see Yale College's statement on academic honesty at <http://yalecollege.yale.edu/new-students/class-2019/academic-information/intro-undergrad-education/academic-honesty>.