

**Faculty of Arts  
Department of Philosophy  
PHL 8125: Critical Theory  
Fall 2016**

**Philosophy Boardroom, Monday 3:00 – 6:00 pm**

**Instructor:** Dr. Paula Schwebel  
**Office location:** JOR 434  
**Office hours:** Thursday 4:00-5:00 and by appointment  
**Phone:** 416.979.5000, ext. 2251  
**Course web site:** [my.ryerson.ca](http://my.ryerson.ca)  
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**Course Description**<sup>1</sup>

Walter Benjamin speaks of our responsibility to ‘redeem’ the past, and of a ‘weak messianic power’ that binds the present generation to the past. Jacques Derrida writes of being ‘haunted’ by a spectral past. Such accounts of the persistence of the past in the present resonate in the context of societies and individuals that are working through violent and traumatic pasts. We will study a range of theoretical texts by Jean Améry, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin, and Jacques Derrida. We will also look at literature (Ariel Dorfman), and recent work on transitional justice (Berber Bevernage). Class discussions will delve into the nature of historical time, historical truth, memory and forgetting, the work of mourning, and the responsibility to do justice for past suffering.

**Course Material and Readings**

The following books are required reading for this course. They are available at the Ryerson Bookstore:

- Berber Bevernage, [History, Memory, and State Sponsored Violence: Time and Justice](#) (Routledge: New York and London, 2012), also available [online](#)

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**<sup>1</sup>Calendar Description**

**PH8125 Critical Theory:** This seminar focuses on a branch of continental social and political thought known as Critical Theory. Though diverse, Critical Theorists share roots in Western Marxism and a commitment to the critique of ideologies and social practices that perpetuate alienation and oppression. Thinkers studied may include early forerunners, such as Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, members of the Frankfurt School, including Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Fromm, and contemporary figures, such as Habermas and Honneth. [1 Credit]

- Jacques Derrida, Specters of Marx: the State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International (Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Routledge Classics: New York and London, 1994)
- Ariel Dorfman, Death and the Maiden (Penguin: New York, 1991)

The following books are recommended, and will be placed on print reserve at the Ryerson University Library:

- Matthias Fritsch, The Promise of Memory: History and Politics in Marx, Benjamin, and Derrida (SUNY Press: Albany, 2005)
- Michael Löwy, Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History' (Trans. Chris Turner. Verso: London and New York, 2005)

All other required and recommended readings will be made available to you as PDF files on the course website.

**\*You must bring a hardcopy of the text(s) we are currently reading to class.**

### **Teaching Methods**

This class will meet for three hours per week, with a short break mid-class. In weeks where there is no seminar presentation, I will open the class with a short lecture, introducing the week's reading selection and raising some questions for discussion (I will also do this in weeks where there is no presenter). I will supplement these seminar presentations with a short lecture on what I consider to be major themes and important background for the week's reading selection. The rest of the session will be devoted to discussion, based in part on your reading responses (see below), and on working through difficult passages of the readings together.

### **Office Hours and Email Contact**

My office hours are dedicated to meeting with you to discuss your philosophical questions as well as any issues or concerns having to do with this class. I am always happy to talk with you outside of class, so please feel free to drop by my office anytime during these scheduled office hours. If you'd like to talk with me, but my office hours conflict with your schedule, please let me know and we can try to arrange to meet at another time.

I can also be contacted by email at the address given above (please only email me from your ryerson.ca address). I will typically respond to any class-related emails within a 24-hour period, or within 48 hours for emails sent on weekends.

Since many of the questions that you might have about the content of readings, lectures, or assignments can be difficult to answer over email, I would encourage you to come see me in office hours rather than contacting me by email, unless your question is of the sort that can be answered quickly.

## **Assignments and Grade Breakdown**

Assessment of your work in the seminar will involve the following modes of evaluation:

- 1) Five reading responses (on weeks of your choice).....25%
- 2) One seminar presentation.....25%
- 3) Essay outline (due on the final class).....10%
- 4) Final essay (10-12 pp).....40%

All course work will be assigned a letter grade.

## **Explanation of the Evaluations**

**1) Reading Responses:** The purpose of the reading responses is to get into the habit of reading actively, and to have the chance to do some low-stakes writing before the more daunting task of the final essay. These responses are intended to be short (~2 pages). They should not take the form of a summary of the readings, but should rather formulate a question or questions that you have, or offer a tentative interpretation of a passage (or passages) that sparked your reflection, and that you would like to discuss further with the class. You have choice as to which week/ reading(s) you would like to respond to, although please keep in mind that your five responses should address readings other than the one on which you will do your seminar presentation.

Please submit your reading responses to me by email no later than Sunday at noon, so that I can incorporate your questions and comments into the plan for Monday's session.

Responses will be marked on a pass/fail basis, but you will only get credit for a submission where you both submit your response on time and are present in class to discuss your response.

Each response will be worth 5% for a combined total of 25%.

**2) Seminar Presentation:** One of the aims of a graduate seminar is to practice the skills of the academic profession. The seminar presentation is your chance to introduce a topic to the class and to take part in leading the discussion – skills you will be called upon to use, both in professional conferences and in teaching. Seminar presentations should be approximately 20 minutes (the length of an average conference presentation), and should aim to give a preliminary interpretation of the assigned reading(s), and raise some questions/ topics for discussion.

Please schedule a short meeting with me in the week before your presentation. This meeting will allow me to give you some feedback on what you plan to do in your seminar presentation, and it will also give me a sense of which topics you plan to address so that my approach to the material will supplement but not overlap with yours.

A sign-up list will be circulated in the second week of the semester so that you can pick

the week/ topic of your presentation. If more than one person is interested in presenting on a given topic, please speak with me. It is possible to have more than one presentation in a given session, but we will have to work together to make sure there isn't any overlap.

If you are interested in presenting on a reading that is topical for the seminar, but not included on my reading list, you can propose to add a reading (subject to my approval), which you will be responsible for introducing to the group.

If you wish to prepare a handout for your presentation, I can print it for you and make it available to the class if you email it to me in advance.

**3) Final Essay (and Essay Outline):** One of the differences between an undergraduate course and a graduate seminar is that in a graduate seminar you are no longer restricted to responding to questions posed by the professor, but are able to design a topic of your own in response to the course material. This may (but need not) involve linking the course material to your own area of interest, or advancing your own final project in light of the themes and works discussed in the seminar. I will be glad to consult with you and provide guidance about your topic, but you are encouraged to formulate your own essay question. This should be something that you are thinking about throughout the semester, and that your reading responses and seminar presentation can help shape.

Think of your final essay as a chance to engage in depth with one or more of the primary texts in order to elaborate and defend your own interpretation or argument. Although you may consult the relevant secondary literature (please feel free to ask me for guidance about your bibliography), the assignment is not to write a review essay of the secondary literature.

Final essays should be about 10-12 pages in length (the approximate length of a conference paper or a writing sample). The due date for the final essay will be **December 16th**.

All topics should have my prior approval, and to that end, you are required to submit a preliminary outline (email / hardcopy) by the last class.

Note about your final essays: If you would like to revise your essay for submission for a conference, a writing sample for PhD applications, or for eventual publication, please let me know and I will tailor my feedback to help you meet this goal.

### **Schedule of Readings and Evaluations**

The following schedule of readings and evaluations is subject to possible change. Any alteration to the posted readings and dates will be announced ahead of time on the course website and in class.

Note about reading for this course: In addition to the required readings for each week, I

have often included a limited selection of recommended texts. I am aware that this amounts to a lot of weekly reading, and may seem overwhelming. In case you cannot complete all of the readings, *please prioritize the primary texts, and please only read as much as you can manage carefully and thoughtfully*. There is no advantage to completing the assigned readings if you rush through them and do not take the time to try to understand and think about what you have read. You will have the chance to circle back to these readings when writing your final essays.

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topic:</b>	<b>Assigned Reading:</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Introduction to the course</b>	
Sept. 12th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Introduction to the topic and questions of this course</li> <li>-Getting to know each other</li> <li>-Going over the syllabus</li> </ul>	<p><u>Read:</u> the syllabus for this course.</p> <p><u>Homework for next week:</u> Have a look at the schedule and think about which week/ topic you would like to present on.</p>
<b>2.</b>	<b>The irreversible and the irrevocable: questions of historical time and justice</b>	
Sept. 19 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Questioning the irreversibility of time in light of the persistence of the past</li> <li>-Doing justice for the past: transitional justice and truth and reconciliation commissions; the ‘politics of time’</li> <li>-The philosophy of history of the mothers of the disappeared following the dirty war in Argentina: the ‘living appearance’ of the <i>desaparecidos</i> and the concept of <i>memoria fértil</i></li> </ul>	<p><u>Read:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Berber Bevernage, <u>History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence</u>, ‘Introduction’ (pp. 1-19)</li> <li>2. Bevernage, Chapter 2, plus ‘Preliminary Conclusion’ to Part I (pp. 23-45 and 83-88)</li> </ol> <p><u>Recommended viewing:</u> ‘The Official Story’ (dir. Luis Puenzo, 1985) [Available on youtube: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IY8P0UzpNKE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IY8P0UzpNKE</a>]</p>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Jean Améry and the concept of ‘moral time’</b>	
Sept. 26 <sup>th</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-‘Natural’ time and the ‘disordered’ time of resentment</li> <li>-Resentment and justice: what does Améry mean by ‘moral’ time?</li> </ul>	<p><u>Read:</u> Jean Améry, ‘Resentments’ in <u>At the Mind’s Limits</u>, pp. 62-81.</p> <p><u>Recommended:</u> T. Brudholm, ‘Revisiting Resentments: Jean Améry and the Dark Side of Forgiveness and</p>

	-Resentment and reconciliation: is forgiveness always more moral than resentment?	Reconciliation'
<b>4.</b>	<b>Matthias Fritsch and intergenerational justice</b>	
Oct. 3 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>Guest Speaker:</b> Professor Matthias Fritsch (Concordia) will be visiting our seminar to discuss his current project on intergenerational justice.  He will be visiting our seminar, and has suggested that we read and discuss chapter one of Derrida's <i>Given Time</i> as preparation for his talk.	<u>Read:</u> Derrida, Chapter One of <i>Given Time</i> , "The Time of the King," pp. 6-33.
Tuesday Oct. 4 <sup>th</sup> Philosophy Distinguished Speaker Series	<b>Speaker Series Talk:</b> <b>Professor Matthias Fritsch</b> (Concordia University) will be giving a talk on his current project, title TBA.	Students are invited to attend the dinner with Professor Fritsch following his talk. Please let me know if you plan on attending.
Oct. 10 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Fall Study Break. No Classes Held.</b>	
<b>5.</b>	<b>Ariel Dorfman: what is 'reasonable' in face of the irreparable?</b>	
Oct. 17 <sup>th</sup>	-Questions of torture, resentment and forgiveness; madness and what is reasonable; truth, justice, and the means of seeking them, in Ariel Dorfman's play.	<u>Read:</u> Ariel Dorfman, <u>Death and the Maiden</u> (pp. 3-68, plus Afterword)
<b>6.</b>	<b>Friedrich Nietzsche: memory and forgetting</b>	
Oct. 24 <sup>th</sup>	-Nietzsche's critique of historicism  -The value of forgetting: are there limits to what should be remembered?	<u>Read:</u> Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Use and Abuse of History for Life,' especially §1 to the end of §4.  <u>Recommended:</u> Jeffrey Blustein, 'Memory as a subject of evaluative

	-Nietzsche's discussion of the Monumental, Antiquarian and Critical methods of history	inquiry' (E-book available through the library)
<b>7.</b>	<b>Walter Benjamin (I): the 'redemption' of the past</b>	
Oct. 31st	-Benjamin's theses as a critique of Marx  -The 'redemption' of the past, and the 'weak messianic power' that links the present generation to the past	<u>Read:</u> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on History' Theses 1-IX  <u>Recommended:</u> 1) Michael Lowy, <u>Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History'</u> , pp. 17-68  2) Matthias Fritsch, <u>The Promise of Memory</u> , Introduction and chapter 1, 'Benjamin's Reading of Marx'
<b>8.</b>	<b>Walter Benjamin (II): exploding the continuum of history</b>	
Nov. 7th	-Revolutionary time and the real state of emergency  -Against the conception of 'homogeneous, empty, time'; fulfilled ' <i>now-time</i> '  -Benjamin's constructive method; the monad	<u>Read:</u> 1) Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on History' Theses X-end (including 'Paralipomena to 'On the Concept of History')  <u>Recommended:</u> Michael Lowy, pp. 68-106
<b>9.</b>	<b>Thinking about history in psychoanalytic terms: the work of mourning, and intergenerational haunting</b>	
Nov. 14 <sup>th</sup>	-History, the work of mourning, and the relationship to the dead  -The distinction between mourning and melancholia; the 'work' of mourning  -Intergenerational haunting; the return of the repressed	<u>Read:</u> 1) Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia'  2) Nicholas Abraham, 'Notes on the Phantom: A Compliment to Freud's Metapsychology' and 'The Phantom of Hamlet or the Sixth Act, <i>preceded by the Intermission of 'Truth''</i>  <u>Recommended:</u> Bevernage, chapter 8,

		'History and the Work of Mourning' (pp. 147-167)
Tuesday Nov. 15 <sup>th</sup> Philosophy Distinguished Speaker Series	<b>Speaker Series Talk: Professor Rebecca Comay</b> (University of Toronto) will be giving a talk titled 'Revolutionary Inheritance' on Benjamin's 'Theses on History'	*There will be a chance to meet with Professor Comay on the Tuesday before her talk. Students are also invited to attend the dinner following Comay's talk. Please let me know if you plan on attending.
Nov. 21 <sup>st</sup>	-Introduction to Derrida's project in <u>Specters of Marx</u> : responding to the ghosts of Marxism  -'The time is out of joint': haunting and the disjuncture of the present  -The question of justice (which is not the same as the law), and our responsibility to those who are no longer, and those who are not yet born	<u>Read</u> : 1) Derrida, <u>Specters of Marx</u> , 'Exordium' (xvi – xx) and 'Injunctions of Marx' [purchased text] (specific pages tbd.)  <u>Recommended</u> : 1) Bevernage, chapter 7, 'Jacques Derrida and the Deconstruction of Time' [PDF online]  2) Matthias Fritsch, <u>The Promise of Memory</u> , chapter 2, 'Derrida's Reading of Marx'  <u>Recommended background</u> : 1) Marx, <u>Communist Manifesto</u> (esp. the opening reference to the 'Specter of communism') 2) Shakespeare, <u>Hamlet</u> (esp. Act 1, scene 1)
<b>11.</b>	<b>Derrida (II)</b>	
Nov. 28 <sup>th</sup>	-The evangelization of the free market, and the crises of late capitalism  -The promise of the messianic spirit, and the undeconstructable idea of justice	<u>Read</u> : Derrida, 'Conjuring –Marxism' and 'Wears and Tears (Tableau of an ageless world)'  <u>Recommended background</u> : 1) Francis Fukayama, <u>The End of History</u>
<b>12.</b>	<b>Derrida (III)</b>	
Dec. 5 <sup>th</sup>	-Marx's ghosts and his struggle against the spectral  -Revolutionary inheritance and	<u>Read</u> : Derrida, chapter 4, 'In the Name of the Revolution, the Double Barricade'

	<p>the repetition of history</p> <p>-Marx's attempt to separate the good from the bad 'ghosts,' the revolutionary spirit from its specter</p> <p style="text-align: center;">***</p> <p>-Conclusion of the course</p> <p>-Instructor evaluations (please bring pencils to today's class!)</p>	<p><u>Recommended background:</u> Marx, 'The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' esp. §1</p> <p><b>Essay outline due.</b></p>
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**Final essays** will be due on Friday, Dec. 16<sup>th</sup>

Note that due to my own deadline for submitting grades to the University, I cannot offer extensions. If you anticipate having difficulty meeting this deadline, please speak to me in advance of the due date.

**Missed Classes and/or Evaluations:**

Students are required to inform their instructors of any situation which arises during the semester, which may have an adverse effect upon their academic performance, and must request any considerations and accommodations according to the relevant policies and well in advance. Failure to do so will jeopardize any academic appeals.

- *Medical certificates* – If a student misses the deadline for submitting an assignment, or the date of an exam or other evaluation component because of illness, he or she must submit a Ryerson Student Medical Certificate AND an Academic Consideration form within 3 working days of the missed date. Both documents are available at [www.ryerson.ca/senate/forms/medical.pdf](http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/forms/medical.pdf). **If you are a full-time or part-time degree student, then you submit your forms to your own program department or school. If you are a certificate or non-certificate student, then you submit your forms to the staff at the front desk of the Chang School.**
- *Religious observance* – If a student needs accommodation because of religious observance, he or she must submit a Request for Accommodation of Student Religious, Aboriginal and Spiritual Observance AND an Academic Consideration form within the first 2 weeks of the class or, for a final examination, within 2 weeks of the posting of the examination schedule. If the required absence occurs within the first 2 weeks of classes, or the dates are not known well in advance as they are linked to other conditions, these forms should be submitted with as much lead time as possible in advance of the required absence. Both documents are available at <http://www.ryerson.ca/senate/forms/reobservforminstr.pdf>. **If you are a full-time or part-time degree student, then you submit the forms to**

**your own program department or school. If you are a certificate or non-certificate student, then you submit the forms to the staff at the front desk of the Chang School.**

- *Students who need academic accommodation support* should register with the [Academic Accommodation Support office](#) (formerly called the Access Centre). Before the first graded work is due, registered students should inform their instructors through an “Accommodation Form for Professors” that they are registered with Academic Accommodation Support and what accommodations are required.

**Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:** Students must respect and protect all intellectual property (ideas), both their own and the intellectual property of other people. Plagiarism is an extremely serious academic offence. If you have any questions about plagiarism, you must seek clarification before submitting an assignment. Ignorance is not an acceptable defence for any form of plagiarism.

Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the following practices:

- Copying from another person’s work without using accurate quotation marks and citations (footnotes or in-text references)
- Substantially paraphrasing another person’s words and/or ideas (i.e., changing the original author’s words slightly and interspersing them with a few of your own words), without appropriate referencing
- Failing to incorporate complete and accurate footnotes or in-text references in your written assignments, including exact page numbers
- Submitting work in this course that has also been submitted in another course (at Ryerson University or elsewhere)
- Submitting a test and/or other assignment produced partially or entirely by another person and claiming it as your own work.

If plagiarism is suspected in one of your assignments, you will be invited to attend a Facilitated Discussion with the instructor and Ryerson’s Academic Integrity Officer. If the instructor determines that plagiarism has occurred, your assignment will receive a grade of ‘0’. Further penalties may also be imposed, including an ‘F’ in the course and/or suspension from the University. **Keep all your notes and drafts to assist in authenticating your work.** The instructor also reserves the right to conduct an oral examination on the contents of any submitted assignment, test or exam, and/or to request an electronic copy of any submitted work.

For more detailed information on these issues, please refer to the full online text for the [Academic Integrity policy](#) and to the [Academic Integrity website](#).

### **Important Resources Available at Ryerson**

- **The Library** provides research workshops and individual assistance. Inquire at the Reference Desk on the second floor of the library, or go to [www.ryerson.ca/library/info/workshops.html](http://www.ryerson.ca/library/info/workshops.html)

- **Student Learning Support** offers group-based and individual help with writing, math, study skills and transition support, and other issues.