

**BERGSON ON TIME**

Thursday 3:35 – 6:25 PM (Leacock 927)

Professor A. Al-Saji

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Office hours: 6:30 PM – 7:30 PM (and by appt)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Henri Bergson's (1859-1941) philosophy can be read as a sustained effort to think time for itself, a philosophy in and of time. *Matter and Memory* (1896) is exemplary in this regard, for it is a book that situates perception, embodiment, materiality and subjectivity in relation to a theory of memory. The purpose of this course will be to read closely Bergson's main text, *Matter and Memory*. We will seek to make precise Bergson's concepts of duration, perception, memory, matter and difference.

At the same time, Bergson is a philosopher who has deeply (and sometimes invisibly) influenced twentieth-century Continental philosophy. His philosophy of time has been seen as a precursor to some post-structuralist philosophies of difference (Gilles Deleuze), to new materialism and materialist feminism (Elizabeth Grosz), and more ambivalently to French phenomenology (Maurice Merleau-Ponty's later philosophy). In the last four weeks of the course, we will trace the reception and appropriation of Bergson's thought by later thinkers, in particular Gilles Deleuze. In this part of the course, students will be asked to present on selected readings or propose readings of their own, focusing on thinkers who have explicitly appropriated Bergson.

There may be two film screenings during the course (mandatory), in connection with the readings from Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema 2*. (To be determined, e.g. *Last Year at Marienbad*; *Je t'aime, Je t'aime*.) On screening days, seminar time will be 3.5 hours: two hours to discuss the texts of that day, and the remaining 1.5 hours for the screening at the end of class.

***Prerequisite: PHIL 474/475 or written permission of the instructor.***

***Seminars are open only to graduate students and final year Philosophy Majors, Honours and Joint Honours students, except by written permission of the Department.***

**TEXTS**

At Paragraphe Bookstore:

1. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. Paul and W. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991)
2. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson and R. Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

In the course folder in Leacock 908:

- Henri Bergson, "The Possible and the Real" from *The Creative Mind*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1992), pp. 91-106.

- Henri Bergson, On the “cinematographic illusion” from *Creative Evolution*, trans. A. Mitchell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998), pp. 298-308.
- Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1988): Chapters 1 and 3.
- Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986): Preface and Chapters 1 through 4 (some optional).

You are encouraged to read the French texts, if you are able to do so (in particular Bergson’s texts):

- Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1939)
- Henri Bergson, “Le possible et le réel.” *La pensée et le mouvant* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1928), pp. 99-116.
- Henri Bergson, *L’évolution créatrice* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1941), pp. 298-309.
- Gilles Deleuze, *Le bergsonisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966)
- Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 1, L’image-mouvement* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1983)
- Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 2, L’image-temps* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985)

### ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES

The grade will depend on the following: a major term paper, 55%; a presentation given during the last four weeks of class (for which you may be required to work collaboratively or singly), 25%; and consistent and engaged participation in the class as well as regular attendance, 20%.

- (1) The **TERM PAPER**, worth **55%** of your grade, should be approximately **12 pages** in length (for undergraduates), **17-20 pages** in length (for graduate students). Formatting should be: Times New Roman 12 font, double spaced. *The topic of this paper is to be designed by you, in consultation with the instructors.* It is recommended that you begin work on this paper early, since you may need to consult some secondary sources for the purpose. ***Due date to be announced.***
- (2) The **PRESENTATION** is worth **25%** (single presentation or joint presentation with two students, depending on class size).

In the last four weeks of the course, once we have completed reading *Matter and Memory*, we will turn to reading more recent thinkers who have appropriated, criticized or been explicitly influenced by Bergson, focusing in particular on Gilles Deleuze. Students will be asked to present either (i) on one of the texts listed in the schedule (texts from Bergson or Deleuze); (ii) on a text from a list of sources compiled by the professor; or (iii) to do their own research and suggest a text (to be approved by the professor). In all cases, the text must demonstrably take up Bergson (preferably *Matter and Memory*) and be considered a significant philosophical work in its own right. The aim in each case is to familiarize ourselves with the more recent revival of Bergson’s thought in philosophical circles, a revival that began with Deleuze’s reading of Bergson. **Presentations should be about 25 minutes in length (40-45 minutes if joint) with 30 minutes for discussion afterwards.** All presenters are expected to meet with the professor on the Thursday the week before presenting with an outline of their presentation.

- (3) Since this is a discussion-based seminar, **ATTENDANCE** and **PARTICIPATION** are crucial to your role in the seminar. Together they are worth **20%** of your grade. (See guidelines below.)

**Expectations with respect to Participation and Attendance**

This course is a **discussion-based seminar**. Although the professor will lecture earlier on in the course in order to introduce important concepts, where clarifications are needed, and to direct you to the philosophical significance and connections of the texts, **the helpfulness and success of discussion depends on the collective participation of all students**.

Students are **expected** to play an active and respectful role in the seminar each week. You should complete all assigned readings before coming to class and be prepared to participate *thoughtfully and actively* in class discussion. This means reading *closely* the texts assigned for each week. It also means engaging seriously with the questions, interventions, and presentations of your fellow students and the professor. Oral participation should be thoughtful, respectful of others, and constructively critical, as well as on-going.

Since this is a graduate-level seminar, you are expected to **attend** all sessions of the seminar, unless you have a valid medical reason (one unexcused absence is allowed).

*McGILL UNIVERSITY VALUES ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. THEREFORE ALL STUDENTS MUST UNDERSTAND THE MEANING AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHEATING, PLAGIARISM AND OTHER ACADEMIC OFFENCES UNDER THE CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).*

*In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.*

*In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.*

*Instructor generated course materials are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor.*

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**SCHEDULE OF READINGS**

January 9 Introduction.

**Bergson's *Matter and Memory***

January 16 "Introduction" and chapter one (pp. 9–48) [*Matière et mémoire*, pp. 1-47]

23 Class cancelled. [Make-up class?]

30 Continue chapter one (pp. 48–76) [*Matière et mémoire*, pp. 47-80]

February 6 Chapter two (pp. 77–107) [*Matière et mémoire*, pp. 81-117]

13 Continue chapter two (pp. 99–131) [*Matière et mémoire*, pp.117-146]

20 Chapter three (pp. 133–177) [*Matière et mémoire*, pp. 147-198]

27 Finish chapter three.  
Begin Chapter four (pp. 179–205) [*Matière et mémoire*, pp. 199-230]

March 3-7 is reading week

March 13 Continue chapter four (pp. 205–223). [*Matière et mémoire*, pp. 230-251]  
And "Summary and Conclusion."

**Bergsonisms: Deleuze and Cinema** [Option 1 was chosen]

March 20 Bergson, "The Possible and the Real"  
Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, chapters 1 and 3.

27 Bergson on the "cinematographic illusion," *Creative Evolution*, pp. 298-308.  
Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, chapters 1 and 4. [Optional: Chapter 2]  
SCREENING: *Je t'aime, je t'aime* (Alain Resnais, 1968, 94 min)

April 3 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, chapters 3 (§ 1-2) and 4 (§ 1-2).  
[Background: chapter 2, § 3]  
SCREENING: *Last Year at Marienbad* (Alain Resnais and Robbe-Grillet, 1961, 94 min)

10 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, chapter 5.

**Last week: TERM PAPERS DUE**