First-Year Seminar:

Instructor: Sara Nadal-Melsió

Office hours: Mondays 12 pm to 2 pm; Wednesdays; 2pm to 4 pm and by appointment. Virtual office hours only by appointment.

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**Democracy, Avant-garde, and Counterculture in Contemporary Spain**

The social and political imaginaries of Francoist Spain (1939-1975) created a singular instance of temporal dislocation in the avant-garde of the 1960s and 70s, the countercultures of the 70s, and in the social fabric of political militancy against the regime. This course proposes an examination of those political, historical, and aesthetic conjunctures and their effect on the subjectivities of a generation that felt ‘infinitely foreign’ in the Spain of the time. By redefining the meanings of work, sexuality, and everyday life through the introduction of desiring subjects into a scene of discipline and obedience, artists, poets, filmmakers, activist, and militants often paid homage to the democratic legacies of the Second Republic in the 1930s and to the avant-gardism of its cultural milieu. Similarly, the more recent *indignados* movement that occupied Spain’s public squares and demanded more radical democratic practices recalled, in turn, the countercultural practices of the 70s. We will study these cross-generational alliances in an effort to understand the complicities of aesthetics and politics in the often short-lived experimental communities of contemporary Spain.

**Grade Breakdown**

- Active class participation (10%)
- Group discussions and presentations (15%)
- Response papers (20%)
- Individual presentations (15%) (this includes content and delivery)
- Midterm paper (this includes a mandatory one-on-one session with instructor, a draft and a final version) 25%
- Final Paper (30%)

**Description of Assignments Attendance and Participation:**

Students are expected to attend to and participate actively in all classes. Unexcused absences and/or minimal engagement in class discussions will affect participation grade (3 unexcused absences will lower your grade by 10%).
Discussion Questions: each week one student will act as a discussion leader and will bring 3 questions to be explored in conjunction with the assigned readings for the week and send them to the instructor the night before for revision.

Response papers: each week students will write a 400-word response to that week’s reading assignment. Responses are due by midnight the day before class and should be submitted through NYUclasses.

Midterm paper (5 pages): instructor will provide a prompt and the exercise will include in-class writing, editing tutorial, and final submission.

Group discussion and presentations: instructor will divide the class into smaller ‘reading clubs’ by the third week of the semester. Each group will be responsible for reading and presenting on a text of their choosing (previous consultation with the instructor) that develops some of the topics covered in class. (15 to 20 min)

Individual presentation: each student will be expected to present a summary of an article discussing one of the texts studied in class. (You should familiarize yourself with JSTOR). The article may be used as initial research and exercise for final paper. 10-minute class presentations will be scheduled throughout the semester. Students will also present an abstract of their research paper to the class.

Final paper (12 pages): students will meet with the instructor to discuss an original idea for a research paper related to the topics discussed in the seminar. The project will be broken down in stages: abstract, outline, draft, and final version. Projects will be presented to the class for peer-review.

The Moses Center for Students with Disabilities Academic accommodations are available for students with physical or learning disabilities. For more information, you can contact the Moses Center on the 2nd floor of 726 Broadway, via phone at 212-998-4980, or online (www.nyu.edu/csd). Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

An important note on academic integrity:
Academic honesty means that the work you submit - in whatever form - is original. Students are expected - often required - to build their work on that of other people, just as professional researchers and writers do. Giving credit to someone whose work has helped you is expected; in fact, not to give such credit is a crime. Plagiarism is the severest form of academic fraud. Plagiarism is theft. Obviously, bringing answers into an examination or copying all or part of a paper straight from a book, the Internet, or a fellow student is a violation of this principle. But there are other forms of cheating or plagiarizing which are just as serious, for example:

- presenting an oral report drawn without attribution from other sources (oral or written);
- writing a paragraph which, despite being in different words, expresses someone else's idea without a reference to the source of the idea;
• submitting essentially the same paper in two different courses (unless both instructors have given their permission in advance);
• giving or receiving help on a take-home examination or quiz unless expressly permitted by the instructor (as in collaborative projects)
• presenting as your own a phrase, sentence, or passage from another writer's work without using quotation marks;
• presenting as your own facts, ideas, or written text gathered or downloaded from the Internet;
• submitting another student's work with your name on it;
• purchasing a paper or "research" from a term paper mill;
• "collaborating" between two or more students who then submit the same paper under their individual names.

Texts for the courses will be uploaded to the course site by instructor. Links to stream films online will also be provided (except for Numax presenta which will be put in reserve and that you will need to watch in the library)

Week 1
Introduction to the course

Week 2
The Attraction and Fear of Modernity
Segundo de Chomón, Hotel Eléctrico
Leigh Mercer, “Fear at the Hands of Technology: The Proto-Surrealism of the Films of Segundo de Chomón”
Tom Gunning “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-garde”

60 pages

Week 2
The Paranoid/Critical Revolution
Luís Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, Un Chien Andalou, 1929
Bill Nichols “Documentary Film and the Modernist Avantgarde”
Salvador Dalí, The Collected Writings (selections)

65 pages

Week 3
The Avant-garde, Pedagogy, and Architecture
Jordana Meldenson, Documenting Spain (selections)
Luís Buñuel, Las Hurdes/Land Without Bread 1932
The 1938 Spanish Pavillion
70 pages

**Week 4**
The Spanish Civil War as a Culture War
Instructor will bring visual materials to class.

100 pages (small format, it is actually closer to 70 pages)

**Week 5**
Documentary and Propaganda
Joris Ivens, *The Spanish Earth*, 1937 (film)
Adrian Shubert “Between Documentary and Propaganda: Teaching The Spanish Earth” (pdf)
Sebastian Balfour “Spain from 1931 to the Present” (pdf)

This week we will also visit the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive, held at NYU’s Bobst library.

50 pages

**Week 6**
Aesthetics of Resistance
We will explore the political resonances of a commitment to avant-garde practices.

Alain Resnais, *La guerre est finie*
Kafatou, Sarah. ‘Jorge Semprun:” La Vie Continue”
Colin Davis, “Testimony/Literature/Fiction: Jorge Semprun” in *Traces of War: Interpreting Ethics and Trauma in Twentieth-Century French Writing.*
[Please begin reading the Semprún memoir for the next week]

90 pages

**Week 7**
Memoirs of Militancy
We will read about clandestine operations and the fictionalized worlds that sustained them.

Jorge Semprún, *Communism in Spain in the Franco era: the autobiography of Federico Sanchez*

90 pages

**Week 8**
The Distant Echoes of May 68
Even though May 68 did not spark a revolution in Francoist Spain its echoes were felt throughout the poetry of the 60s and 70s.
Week 9
Militant and Political Cinema
Clandestine and militant cinema were important tools for the fight against late Francoism and as a site for the exploration of radical democratic practices.

Joaquim Jordà, Numax presenta (Film, available at Avery Fisher)

Recommended reading: Trevor Stark “Cinema in the Hands of the People”: Chris Marker, the Medvedkin Group and the Potential of Militant Film

Jacques Rancière “Politics in Film” from The Intervals of Cinema, London/New York, Verso, 2015, pp. 103-127; from Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art


[We will also watch excerpts of Pere Portabella’s General Report for a Public Screening/Informe General para una presentación pública (1976)]

65 pages

Week 10
IN-CLASS Writing
MIDTERM
You will be given a prompt and will write a first draft of a 5-page paper in class. Your will get comments that same week during a mandatory tutorial with the instructor and will have a week complete a final draft.

Week 11
The 15M movement and the Indignados
We will explore the recent social movements and their relation to the democratic memory of the second republic, as well as the militancy and counterculture of the 70s.

Kostis Kornetis, “Is there a future in this past? Analyzing the 15M intricate relation to the Transition”
Germán Labrador Méndez ,“The cannibal wave: the cultural logic of Spain's temporality of crisis (revolution, biopolitics, hunger and memory)”

60 pages

**Week 12**  
**The European Project**  
We will concentrate on how the failure of the European project has affected Spain’s institutional crises.


Bryan Cameron “Crowd Control: Populism, Public Assembly, Institutional Crises, and Pere Portabella’s *Informe general II. El nuevo rapto de Europa*”

40 pages

**Week 13**  
**Memory as Activism**  
We will discuss the grass roots activism that has developed in the last 15 years to demand the exhumation of victims of the Francoist regime.


Zoe De Kerangat, “Beyond Local Memories: Exhumations of Francoism’s Victims as Counter-Discourse during the Spanish Transition to Democracy.” *The Twentieth Century in European Memory: Transcultural Mediation and Reception*

60 pages

**Week 14**  
Final project presentations and group critiques