New York University College of Arts and Sciences  
Core Curriculum  
Spring 2020  
FYSEM-UA 765  
Wednesday 4:55-7:25pm  

First-Year Seminar:  
Instructor: Sara Nadal-Melsió  
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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%)  
Paper abstract, outline, and first draft (this includes a mandatory one-on-one session with instructor) 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 NYU classes.

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.

Texts 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 in reserve you 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)

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 Semprun 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.

Kristin Ross, *May 68th and Its Afterlives* (excerpts)  
Elena Poniatovka, *La noche de Tlatelolco/Massacre in Mexico* (excerpts)  
Samuel Steinberg, *Photopoetics at Tlatelolco: afterimages of Mexico, 1968* (excerpts)

Selections of Spanish poetry from the 60s and 70s in translation.  
80 pages

**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*  
Sara Nadal-Melsió, “A Work-force of images: militancy as historical experience in Joaquim Jordà’s *Numax presenta’*”  
[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
The 15M movement and the Indignados
We will explore the recent social movements and their relation to the democraticx 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 11
The European Project
We will concentrate on how the failure of the European project has affected Spain’s institutional crises.

Pere Portabella, General Report II. Informe General II. El nuevo rapto de Europa (2015) and The Silence Before Bach (excerpts)
Bryan Cameron “Crowd Control: Populism, Public Assembly, Institutional Crises, and Pere Portabella’s Informe general II. El nuevo rapto de Europa”

40 pages

Week 12
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,

Almudena Carracedo and Robet Bahar, El silencio de los otros/The Silence of Others (documentary, 2018)
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 13
Final project presentations and group critiques
In-class writing

Week 14
Final project presentation and group critiques
In-class writing