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I will never forget one specific meeting of a graduate seminar in Japanese history that I took at in 2004 with the late Dr. Miriam Siverberg, a professor of gender and modern Japan at UCLA. She had posed the following question to us, after discussing Yoshikuni Igarashi's *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970* (Princeton UP, 2000), for our seminar: "What is the *single* most important characteristic of good, solid historical scholarship and writing?" We—a group of enrolled MA and Ph.D. students—racked our brains, voicing our many answers: robust historiographical inquiries; concrete archival evidence; cogent and nuanced textual interpretation of sources; consistent and robust footnotes; comprehensive multilingual bibliographies; and the like. In one fell swoop, Dr. Silverberg respectfully told us that we were all wrong. She then proffered an elusive yet unequivocal answer that has stuck with me for decades: "*Imagination or creativity* is the one key ingredient to good historical writing." Those components, she told us (and as we'd just seen so beautifully modeled in Igarashi's book), stemmed from the very types of intellectual curiosity that necessitate imaginative, innovative, and critically self-reflexive approaches to archives, memory, and the art of historical narration.

It is only in recent years—almost twenty years since that 2004 seminar with Dr. Silverberg, and a decade into my experiences teaching as a full-time university professor—that the gravity and importance of these two words, *imagination* and *creativity*, have truly come to resonate with me in terms of teaching as much as research. Though I certainly did not begin teaching with such insights back in 2012, I now find myself constantly pushing my own pedagogical approaches in order to best harness the students' own interests, passions, creativity, and imaginations in asking them to explore the research questions that are *most meaningful and of interest to them*. Given that I am a historian of colonial Latin America (with a Ph.D. in History) who is teaching in a cultural studies department at NYU, my own primary research interests lie in histories of religion, gender, and sexuality in colonial Latin America (1492-1821). Yet I have long explored different modes of engaging students so as to help shape their own research interests into viable topics for scholarly engagements and writing *for them*. I do this at the undergraduate level in terms of guided research, coursework, and assignments, but also in terms of how closely I work with undergraduate honors students over several years at NYU.

In all of my undergraduate courses at NYU, I aim to center the students' own imagination, creativity, and excitement as the impetuses that strategically guide us from the classroom and into brick-and-mortar archives, special collections libraries, exhibits, galleries, and museums. What I have come to notice in recent years is that I warmly embrace the personal and intellectual challenge of asking students to being open to allowing their own politics, affect, interests, and passions guide them to specific archival sources, and to then guide their interpretative strategies. As an historian of colonial Latin America (with a seeming esoteric research project on sodomy and other criminalized sexualities in colonial New Spain) who regularly teaches students inside and outside of my specific fields of research expertise, I am guided by the teaching philosophy that professors inside the classroom, alongside students, are constantly learning (and unlearning) as part of an ongoing collaborative and symbiotic process. As interlocutors, faculty in the humanities and social sciences are in many ways "advanced students" whose role is to facilitate and engage in open-minded inquisitive dialogue with students at all stages of their academic careers. I aim to train undergraduate and graduate students in analytical skills and in the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological tools necessary to attain their research goals. I aim to do so, however, in a way that places my students and me in the same space—always learning, exploring, and trying new approaches to ask questions and seek answers, acknowledging that research processes are just as important as end results.

To break this down in more concrete terms, I would like explore a handful of research-based examples from recent undergraduate seminars (both First-Year Seminars & 300-level

seminars, taught in Spanish). I often begin my courses on gender and sexuality—thinking, for instance, about my co-taught “Queer Activisms in Latin America”; my FYS “Erotics of Representation: Embodied Memory, Censorship, and the Obscene”; or my Spanish-language “Archivos del cuerpo. Sexualidad, memoria y deseo en las Américas”—by asking students to think, in an open-ended way, about what we might be able to know about lived experiences of sexuality, gender, and desire, in the past. In the early weeks of the semester, as we progress through a diverse body of (both foundational and cutting-edge) theoretical and methodological readings, I present my students with concrete examples of cross-temporal *records*—texts, visual sources, performances, exhibits, moving images, etc.—that speak to constructions of gender, sexuality, and desire both past and present. We analyze digital photos taken of the original (disintegrating) folios of a 1604 sodomy trial from Michoacán, Mexico to think about the charge of “sodomy” among a group of Purépecha-speaking indigenous men in early colonial Mexico. We look at a self-documented and self-archived photographs of transgender or *travesti* anti-trans activism in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century in Argentina or Peru. I ask my students—by opening ourselves up the terrain of epistemological inquiry—why it is that we think we can “know” what we do about the past *through that particular thing*? How do our own filters and forms of intermediation alter the very nature of the record in question, thereby also influencing the relationship between past, present, and future in relation to that very object/text/record?

In recent years, in all of my undergraduate classes, we engage New York City and its vast holdings. I make it a requirement that each of the undergraduate students in my seminar classes must carry out primary research in an actual physical archive or special collections library in and around the greater NYC area. Over the course of each semester, we meet with individual archivists and librarians to help the students think through a range of galleries, archives, and exhibits close to NYU (i.e., the Leslie Lohman Museum Museum’s special collections; the Fales Library Special Collections; the NYPL Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division; Colectivo TRANSgrediendo) in which fascinating materials may be found by the students. What I find both most challenging and rewarding is seeing how, over the course of any given semester, undergraduate students’ anxieties and trepidations about doing primary research on a topic of their choice gives way—once the students’ take on the challenge of researching *the things that they love and have intellectual and personal passions for*—to sheer excitement once they have begun the independent yet guided research process. I see this research exhilaration, for instance, when an undergrad interested in the politics of sexual labor found a box of diverse writings and images by a self-identified “prostitute” at the Lesbian Herstory Archives; when another student wrote a beautiful research project on archived bodies and body parts (through a pair of eighteenth-century dentures with human teeth still in them!) at the New York Academy of Medicine; and when one student’s nagging questions about a strange “monster” at the center of a 16<sup>th</sup>-century colonial map of Peru turned into an honors thesis (advised by me) on the symbolism of the sloth, which was revised and published in *Sloth, A Journal of Human-Animal Studies*, a bi-annual peer-reviewed journal. I always tell my undergraduate students about my own initial fears, anxieties, and doubt about “going into the archives” to conduct research in my early years. Yet, far from being a negative experience, I want them to see how such a sense of initial disorientation in archives, galleries, and special collections libraries can eventually lead to beautiful, surprising, and unexpected finds. I love to see my students’ anxieties about conducting primary, original research give way to sheer passion and excitement—both personal and intellectual—about having found *something* that spoke to them in ways that quite no other object, image, text, or representation has. This is the goal of all of my undergraduate courses: to harness the *imagination* and *creativity* of the undergraduate students, and to use my own imagination and creativity around archives, records, and under-researched histories of the body to do so. In doing so, the past truly and meaningfully *comes alive for students in the present*. Such reactivations of the past, think about their resonance for the present and the future, is now at the heart of all my undergraduate teaching, and it is done by and through texts, archives, libraries, and galleries.