

New York University

CORE 700

See It. Read It: Photography and Writing in Latin America

Section 1: 60 5th Avenue, Room 265

[please note that the 2 Friday classes are in room 110 in the same building]

Monday/Wednesday – 11:00 AM-2:00 PM

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Office Hours: By appointment.

From its beginnings, photography has lived in persistent conflict with the nature of its being and those elements that can define it. Its conflict lies between representing truth and serving as a mechanism to produce metaphors. Photography is the most painful reiteration of what we are and what we do not want to be. It is truth constructed with pieces of truth and pieces of lies. It is what anyone wants it to be...With photography, there is always a mystery, a veil that does not allow us to have the clarity we desire.

Jorge Gutiérrez, Director, 1990 a 1994

Museo de Artes Visuales Alejandro Otero, Caracas

In Image and Memory. Photography from Latin America, 1866-1994

Edited by: Wendy Watriss, Lois Parkinson Zamora

Houston: University of Texas Press, 1998

Course Description

What is a photograph? How do we read photographs? How has photography shaped history and fiction, our ideas of the self and of others? The purpose of this course is to analyze the history of photography in its relation with textual productions in XX and XXI century Latin American writers. We will begin by studying how the technology of photography (which arrived in Latin America almost simultaneously with its invention in Europe) contributed to a particular visual construction of Latin America and was incorporated into literary writings from the Caribbean, Central America, and the Southern Cone. The main objective of the course will be to analyze the use of photography in literary and extra-literary texts, from texts that use photography as its discursive axis (but without containing real photographs) to texts that play on the page with photographic reproductions. Topics include: photography and history, photography and archive, photography and madness, photography and the city, photography and memory, and photography and eroticism. We will consider texts and photographs by Roberto Arlt, Leopoldo Lugones, Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, Elena Poniatowska, Mario Bellatin, Juan Villoro, Graciela Iturbide, Sara Facio, Ximena Berecochea, and Paz Errázuriz, among others.

This course will count toward any of the majors and minors offered in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese.

Expressive Culture is intended to introduce you to the study and appreciation of human artistic creation and to foster your ongoing engagement with the arts. Through critical engagement with primary cultural artifacts, it introduces you to formal methods of interpretation and to understanding the importance of expressive creation in particular social and historical contexts. As a part of the College Core Curriculum, it is designed to extend your education beyond the focused studies of your major, preparing you for your future life as a thoughtful individual and active member of society.

Course Objectives:

This course aims to:

- introduce students to modes and methods for the interpretation and appreciation of photography and/literature, including both formal approaches and concern for their combined social and historical contexts.
- expose students to a wide range of creative work in the field of photography.
- critically examine photography as a cultural form and explore how its meaning is constructed by its creators and its intended recipients.
- stimulate students to pursue ongoing engagement with the arts.

Students will:

- learn about the use of photography as a device in Latin American Literature from the early twentieth century to the 21st century.
- learn to analyze photographs specific to the Latin American and Caribbean contexts.
- read about and consider how photography has been used in Latin America and the Caribbean both as a tool of control and construction of an inferior “other” and as a form of resistance.
- develop critical writing skills
- develop research skills

Requirements:

1. Class attendance and participation: Attendance to all sessions is required. If there is a medical reason for which you need to miss class, please email the professor. Participation includes reading all assigned texts and being prepared to participate in class discussion. This class combines lectures with group discussions. (15%)
2. Three short papers (10%, 15%, 25%) (50%)
3. Midterm Exam. (10%)
4. Forum participation-Discussion posts (10%)
5. Final Exam (15%).

Note: You are allowed to bring laptops to class.

Readings: All materials will be available in NYU BrightSpace.

**Please note that all of the assignments (reading and writing)
are due on the date they appear in the syllabus**

Class Schedule

May 22 (Monday) Course introduction: “In the beginning was the word?” See it. Read it. What questions should we ask ourselves in this course?

To do before the class (Read):

Part I- A theoretical Approach to Photography

Theoretical Readings: “Introduction”, *Photography and Writing in Latin America: Double Exposures* (NYU BrightSpace); Walter Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography”; Krakauer, “Photography” (NYU Brightspace)

Part II- Early Latin American Short Stories that use photography or the photographic as a literary device.

Literary Readings: Leopoldo Lugones, “Hipalia,” “An Inexplicable Phenomenon;” Jorge Luis Borges, “The Other Death,” “The Aleph” (*Brightspace*)

Group Work in class:

1. Answer the following questions about the definition and purpose of photography. What is a photograph? How are photographs used today in society? What can photographs do? What can't they do? These answers will be written out in class in the discussion posts.

May 24 (Wednesday) Theoretical readings (cont): Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (“Part 1”) Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Read “In Plato’s Cave”; “The Image World”)

To do before the class:

- **Read:** Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (“Part 1”) Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (“In Plato’s Cave”; “The Image World”)
- **Highlight** at least two quotes from each text and be prepared to talk about them, either in small groups or with the entire class. You can either write a question or comment when you highlight, or just put your name in the comment box.

- **Additional Homework for this class:** Look for three different photographs about Latin America or the Caribbean and post them in the discussion post. The photographs can be well known photographs of iconic figures (for example, the photograph of Che Guevara by Korda), photographs of famous events in history, including photographs of recent demonstrations appearing in Latin American, Caribbean or US newspapers, or photographs found in online media like Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. You will be writing about 1 of those photographs for your first paper, so think carefully before you pick! Please place the three photographs, properly labeled with the name of the photographer, the title of the photograph, if any, and the period or year in which they were taken, in the discussion post by Tuesday, 9 pm.

Work in groups:

- In the second part of the class, you will be talking about the 3 photographs that you picked. You will work together to create a caption for these photographs.

Handout distributed for first essay.

Reproductions without reproduction: Short stories on photography without photographs.

May 29: Memorial Day (no classes this day: substitution on Friday, June 2)

May 31 (Wednesday) Written Assignment due/Essay 1: Writing about Photographs (3-4 pages, Times Roman or Times, 12 points, 1 ½ spaces)

To do before the class:

Read: Juan Rulfo, photographs. Readings, Juan Rulfo, “No Dogs Bark,” “Luvina,”; Bioy Casares, *The Invention of Morel* (Novel)

Write: in the Discussion Post: Pick three relevant quotes from Bioy Casares (by relevant I mean dealing with the technology of capturing images) and write them in the discussion post. Be ready to discuss them with your colleagues. You do not need to write an explanation but you should be prepared to write about why you have picked the quotes as exemplary for the text.

In Groups:

- Discussion of quotes from the texts: explain your quotes to the members of your group.

June 2 (Friday): This class will be held in room 110 of the same building

To do before the class:

Read: Julio Cortázar, “Blow-Up,” “Apocalypse in Solentiname”

Write: Choose an exemplary quote from one of the stories (exemplary in terms of the relationship of photography to writing or to perception of history). Write the quote and explain its importance.

Watch: Antonioni, *Blow-Up*.

Website: [Remembering Solentiname-NYU Gallery](#)

Main questions to think about for our class discussion:

1. What relationships between time and space can be seen in the film vis a vis the stories?
2. How is the fantastic genre used in both stories? In what ways does the fantastic help present an ethics of seeing and action? How do the stories differ in the relationships that it establishes with photography as a medium?
3. Pick a scene in the movie to discuss in small groups. This scene can be used either to talk about the use of photography in comparison with the short stories or to converse with one of the theories that we have used in class (Sontag, Barthes, Kracauer...)

June 5 (Monday) Themes: Post-photography, digital photography vs analog photography, archival production, itinerant photography.

Juan Villoro, *Forward Kyoto*, with photographs by Graciela Iturbide.

Additional Required Reading: Junichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*

Videos:

Oscar Muñoz-[Protofotografías \(protophotography\)](#)

Graciela Iturbide-[Moma Interview](#)

[El arte de la fotografía-entrevista a Graciela Iturbide \(in Spanish\)](#)

To do before the class:

Read: (Villoro, Tanizaki)

Highlight: in Villoro’s text, two passages on which you would like to comment. Write a sentence or a couple of words to signal to others why your highlighted text is important. If someone else has already highlighted the text you chose, you can write a comment to their comment.

Watch during class: Videos (Oscar Muñoz, Graciela Iturbide).

In Groups (during class):

- What differences between analog and digital photography are worked out in Villoro's *Forward Kyoto*? How do you think this difference affects the experience of taking photographs? The experience of creation and memory making?

Facing History. Archive, memory, and the making of history.

June 7 (Wednesday)

To do before the class:

Read: Derrida, *Archive Fever* (selections, *Brightspace*); *Our Islands and Their People*, (selections, *Brightspace.*); Jack Delano. *Puerto Rico mío.* (*Brightspace*).

Look at: powerpoint of images for *Our Islands and Their People* and *Puerto Rico Mío*. Pay attention to the captions for the images in *Our Islands and Their People*.

Post: Please choose 2 images from the power points of *Our Islands and Their People*, and two images from *Puerto Rico Mío*. Screenshot them and place them in the forum. Write the caption that the images have and write an alternate caption for each image, thinking critically about what you think the caption should add or subtract from the image. Understanding that the captions are never just descriptive, think of yourself as a newspaper reporter who wants to communicate information with the image.

In Groups:

- Students will talk about their chosen images in the media gallery. Question for the group: how does the archive affect the reading of history and its events? How does the introduction to the books “set the stage” or “frame” the reading that we do in the photographs?

June 12 (Monday)

The Photographer Pablo Allison will talk about migration and we will read his “passport.” The passport is available in Brightspace

TO DO:

1. Think of questions to ask the photographer in advance.
2. IMPORTANT: During the first half of the class on Monday, we are going to be talking about your final projects and begin preparations for it. To that end: you should have already chosen

the topic for your final project by Monday. In the discussion post, you will post: a. Your paper topic (be as specific as possible; if it is an event, what angle do you wish to explore with your photographs and your “exhibit?” b. Upload a photograph of a slide (please refer to the end of this syllabus for details on how to create each slide and for an example. Although you do not need to have all the categories figured out, you will choose for Monday 1 exemplary photograph.

June 14 (Wednesday)

Midterm Exam (Review will be handed out on Monday)/Midterm will be started after the first half of the class.

To do before the class:

Read: *If I don't return, search for me in Putis. Si no vuelvo, búsqüenme en Putis*, Catalog of the Exhibition of Domingo Garibaldi's Photographs (*Brightspace*); *Yuyanapaq*, catalog of the exhibit.

Read: *The Cruel Radiance* (selections)

In groups:

- Compare the structure of both catalogs. How is each catalog structured? How does it combine images and text? What intentions are transmitted through their design? We are reading these catalogs as archives. What effect do they have on our reading of history?

Handout distributed for second essay: information will also be available through Brightspace.

June 19 (Juneteenth): no classes on this Monday, class will be held on Friday, June 23

June 21 (Wednesday): Photographic Interventions-1

To do before class:

Read: Ángeles Donoso. [The Insubordination of Photography](#) , selections [please highlight a portion of the text and place your name by it. You can ask a question or a comment to it]

View: [La ciudad de los fotógrafos-The City of Photographers](#) (NYU Kanopy)

Forum: Find 1 photograph of protest where portraits are used. It can be of Latin America or the US with a Latin American theme. Upload into the media gallery with a short description.

June 23 (Friday): This class will be held in the same classroom. Room C04

Photographic Interventions-2

Written Assignment/Essay 2: Photography as a device in fiction (from 3 ½ to 5 pages)

Part I-

Read: *Circles of Madness*. Marjorie Agosín with Alicia D'Amico and Alicia Sanguinetti;

To do. for class discussion:

1. Choose 2 poems to analyze with their accompanying photographs
2. Look through the photographs and be prepared to speak generally about all of them in addition to the photograph(s) that you choose
3. Please screenshot the poems and the photographs on which you want to comment and upload them into the forum

Part II-*The Official Story*

Watch:

The Official Story (Brightspace-Kanopy)

Think: How is photography used in the film?

June 26 (Monday)

Read:

Theoretical Readings: *Disease and Representation* (selections, in *Brightspace*);

Photo-books-Madness and Literature: Julio Cortázar's *Humanario*; Diamela Eltit, *Soul's Infarct*.

In Groups: Thinking about the photographs and the texts in both *Humanario* and *Soul's Infarct*, be prepared to talk about the following questions: how do the photographers/authors seek to represent madness (or what do we read in their representations)? What are the ethical questions that need to be considered when photographing the subject of madness? Think of specific examples from the readings (both text and image).

June 28 (Wednesday)

Mario Bellatin, *Shiki Nagaoka. A Nose for Fiction*.

Read: Mario Bellatin, *Shiki Nagaoka. A Nose for Fiction*. (short novel)

Write: Forum discussion post-after reading and looking at the images that accompany the text, create the titles that you would use to divide the photographs in categories (boxes). For each category, screenshot at least two images and place them below the specific category where you believe they belong.

Final Exam: The final exam will occur during the second half of the class.

The final essay will be due Monday, July 3 (please see the instructions below for the final paper. These instructions are also available via Brightspace).

Final Paper

The final essay is divided into two parts.

Part 1 is the construction of an imaginary exhibit of photographs. Your first task is to pick an event in history related to the course (photography in/about Latin America, the Caribbean or Latinx community in the US-from the invention of photography to the present-see examples below) and a topic within that event (for example, the role of women in the Cuban revolution, the role of Latinx and Blacks in LGBTQ+ rights movements during and after Stonewall). You will then perform a research for images, in at least 4 different sources. The sources can be divided into books, google sites, digital or real archives. You need to access at least one library book and/or physical archive (for example: the Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts will be doing an exhibit on dance and exile that will include photographs from their collection. You can choose to talk about how photography reflects on the presence of Latin Americans, Caribbeans or the Latine community in the States and use that exhibit as one of your sources).

An example of methodology of presentation: you may decide to do an exhibit on photography of sex workers in Latin America and the Caribbean. Your first task will be to find different sources that contain photography related to your topic. As you screenshot the images and place them in a folder, make sure that you start a google doc where you write all the necessary information for that photograph (see the example below for the information that you will need). All that information will go into the slide for the photographs that you choose. You are going to need a minimum of 20 images, and those images should be divided into 4 or 5 categories. As you organize your slideshow, you will create a dividing slide for each category. This means that you will have to decide how you are organizing the exhibit, and what your categories will be. Each category should have between 4 or 5 images.

You will create this exhibit in google slides or a similar format. Each photographic slide will contain one photograph. It will also contain a text box with the following information: title of the photograph (or untitled if it doesn't have a title); name of the photographer and the year the photograph was taken; dimensions (if available, for example: 9 3/4 by 7 13/16 inches) and whether it is digital or analog; the provenance of the photograph (the location of your search; if a website please include the weblink).

You can also choose to do your own photography. In this case, you will think of a topic related to the Latin American, Caribbean, and Latinx community in New York (examples: murals in the upper East Side, restaurants in Queens, a performance at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe, etc.). You will need to get my approval for this project.

Example of a slide:



Graciela Iturbide
Mujer Toro, Juchitán, 1985

Black and White
Gelatin Silver Print
11.02 x 7.36

Provenance:
Catalog of the Exhibit at Bienvenu Steinberg
and Partner

Critical Description:

From the threshold, a woman holds a bull's head and shows it to the viewer. The image may relate to the myth of Ariana and the minotaur. We can identify the subject with a victorious Ariana that is showing the minotaur's head as a trophy, thereby speaking about the strength of women in Juchitan. At the same time, the subject's face is hidden; there is a mystery then about the subject's identity and position within society.

Part 2: In addition to presenting the exhibit in part one as a google slide presentation, you will write a 5 page introduction to your exhibit (times new roman 12, at 1 ½ spaces) that will need for you to conduct research on your chosen topic, with a particular focus on how photography has been used to depict the event you have chosen and the topic within that event. You will want to look into JSTOR or ProQuest, as well as Google Scholar, for articles that are specific to your topic. We will have been studying introductions from different photo-essays in Latin America and you should use those skills in the composition of your introduction.

Your introduction needs to show that you

1. Understand the event of which you are speaking.
2. Can show a critical understanding of the photography chosen.
3. Are able to describe how these photographs are exemplary, either because they represent the known understanding of the event or because they present a different perspective that changes the image of the event.
4. Have processed the different theories of the class and can engage with them as you create this critical introduction.

For this section, you can and should quote theory and critical essays. If some of your images come from a photo essay book, you can absolutely use and quote that information in order to produce your introduction.

Some possibilities of historic events:

The Cuban Revolution 1959

Any of the dictatorships in Latin America at the end of the xx century

Nicaraguan War (can be based on DVD *Pictures from a Revolution*, Susan Meiselas, Richard Rogers and Alfred Guzzeti)

Puerto Rican demonstrations against the governor, summer 2019; photography regarding Hurricane María and its aftermath

Chilean demonstrations, fall 2019

The Ni una Menos feminist Movement in Argentina (or any other feminist movement in Latin America)

Muxes in Mexico (Juchitán)

Sex workers in Latin America

Presence of Latin American, Caribbean, Central American or Latines in the Stonewall movement

Representations of the Aid Crisis in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Central America.

Thinking “from the water:” Nadia Huggins has an exhibit at the King Juan Carlos Center that you can use as one of your sources. (Representations of the Islands from the water)

There are several Museum exhibits that can be used for this project as well: Currently, there is an exhibit at MOMA, [Chosen Memories](#), which pertains directly to the topics covered in the course.

or

any other current event where photography plays a key role

Plagiarism and overall academic integrity:

The rules regarding plagiarism and overall academic integrity can be found on the following website

[Rules on plagiarism](#)

Any and all infractions to the code of academic integrity will result in severe penalties.

