

IDSVA SYLLABUS

703.1 Topological Studies I

Seminar III, Part 1: Mexico City Residency

Course Number: 703.1

Course Name: Seminar III, Part 1: Mexico City Residency

Dates: January 9-14, 2023

Format: In residence

Instructor: Simonetta Moro

Credits: 1

Course Description

Seminar III, Part 1, begins with a seven-day January intensive residency in Mexico City, Mexico. This location should be understood not only from the point of view of its own rich history and culture, but also in topological relation with other residency sites, namely Madrid and Marrakech, which opens up considerations of Spanish colonization (not limited to Mexico, but including the rest of the Americas and the Caribbean Basin as well), and the long period of Muslim dominance in Spain (lasting roughly 700 years, from the 8th century to the 15th century), whose decline marks the beginning of the European expansion towards the Americas (1492). Traces of Islamic or Moorish iconographic and decorative motifs brought by the Spanish *conquista* are visible throughout Mexico City alongside vestiges of ancient pre-Columbian civilizations, interspersed with modernist art and architecture and the powerful visual testimonies of the Mexican Muralist movement (Orozco, Siqueiros, Rivera).

As Mexican philosopher Alberto Hernandez-Lemus (Professor of Philosophy at Colorado College, and IDSVA Visiting Faculty 2020) reminds us, the contemporary Mexican civilization is a conglomerate of diverse peoples and languages, made of various cultures and ethnic groups, not limited to the nation presently called “Mexico,” but rather extending to what we should think of as the Mesoamerican region. Not only are Mesoamerican roots and traditions diverse, but since the Conquest, those Mesoamerican roots have cross-pollinated with Spanish traditions, as well as with Latin American, African and European traditions. A *longue durée* perspective of Mexican art would need to recognize the multipolar artistic fabric that it belongs to, including indigenous motifs and perspectives that were “discovered” and incorporated in the nationalist art project after the Mexican Revolution in the 1920s.¹

In the attempt to grasp some of this complexity, our field work will include: the Museo de Antropología, displaying a vast collection of ancient Mesoamerican artifacts and objects; the Museo Tamayo, dedicated to the permanent collection of the modernist artist Rufino Tamayo and to temporary exhibitions of contemporary art; the Museo Casa de Leon Trotsky, the last dwelling of the anti-Stalinist Marxist thinker and political activist; the Museo Frida Kahlo (Casa Azul), the home and studio of the modernist painter; the Museo Anahuacalli, Diego Rivera and

¹ Alberto Hernandez-Lemus, online lecture, December 20, 2019.

Frida Kahlo's Museo and Casa Estudio; the Templo Mayor and Museum, displaying the ruins of the Aztec temple next to the Catholic cathedral built on the original site of the ancient Tenochtitlan; the Palacio Nacional with the frescoes of Diego Rivera on the history of Mexican people; the National Art Museum (MUNAL), which will host the Commencement ceremony, and where the contemporary art exhibition *Bajo la misma falda* (Under the Same Skirt) curated by Mexican writer Carmen Boullosa (IDSVA Honorary Doctorate 2022) and Mexican artist Magali Lara will be the topic of a dedicated site visit. Optional visits to the archeological site of Teotihuacán and contemporary art galleries and museums complete the residency program.

Visiting Faculty include Mexican writers, historians, and editors of the art magazine *Artes de Mexico* Margarita de Orellana and Alberto Ruy-Sanchez, and Apache Chef Nephi Craig, who will deliver this year's Commencement speeches as recipients of IDSVA Honorary Doctorate degrees. Each in their own way, these artist-philosophers will highlight how historical and contemporary indigenous practices consider the objects of their material culture inseparable from their political, devotional, and everyday use.

Learning Objectives

In the course of the seminar, students will:

1. Familiarize themselves with the fundamental concepts of "topological studies" through readings, lectures, and field work;
2. Develop their oral presentation skills through seminar presentations based on their fall coursework, practicing the format, protocols, and basic methods of seminar presentations;
3. Come to terms with the critical language that informs the theory of twentieth-century art as well as the visual history of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries---this latter derived from the images students provide with their seminar presentations.
4. Practice the art of listening and asking *concise, critically informed questions*. This skill is to be developed and practiced through posing questions at the end of student seminar presentations and at the end of faculty lectures.

Course Requirements

In the morning, students will give seminar presentations on fall quasi-Independent Studies (i.e., papers written for the 702 seminar), while practicing their skills as presenters and as listeners.

Readings distributed ahead of the residency should be completed before the start of the residency.

Attendance policy: students are expected to attend *every* class, including the sessions in which they are not presenting. All museum visits and field work are mandatory unless otherwise specified. Attendance to the Commencement ceremony is also required.

Use of Canvas will be limited to posting relevant reading materials and communications relative to the weekly schedule. Students should check their emails daily for notifications.

Individual Advising Meetings

Post-residency, each student will schedule a call or video conference with one of the core faculty for their biannual advising meetings. Students should come prepared to discuss their progress in the previous semester and ideas for possible topics to develop in future papers.

Attendance policy:

Assessment and Grading

Grades will be determined as follows:

- ☐ 60% for the paper presentations (see Rubric for Oral Presentations on Canvas)
- ☐ 20% for participation in seminar discussions
- ☐ 20% for residency field work participation

At the end of the residency, students will be asked to assess the course via an online anonymous **course evaluation**. Please make sure you complete this evaluation; faculty and administrators really value your evaluations and often make important changes to the curriculum based on this feedback.

Required Texts

Most of these texts are excerpts available on Canvas as PDF:

1. *Artes de Mexico*, articles on Sacred Plants (English version).
2. *Artes de Mexico*, articles on Shamanism (Spanish/English versions).
3. De la Cadena, Marisol & Mario Blaser, eds., *A World of Many Worlds*, Duke University Press, 2018. Introduction: “Pluriverse” and Chapter 6: “Humans and Terrans in the Gaia War”.
4. Dussel, Enrique. *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “the Other” and the Myth of Modernity*, trans. Michael D. Barber, Continuum New York, 1995. Chapters 1, 4, 8.
5. Greeley, Robin Adele, ed., *The Logic of Disorder: The Art and Writings of Abraham Cruzvillegas*, Harvard University Press, 2016. Excerpts.
6. Heidegger, Martin. “Why do I stay in the provinces?”
7. Jauregui, Gabriela. “Necropolis: Exhuming the Works of Teresa Margolles”. Article.
8. Maffie, James. *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion*, University Press of Colorado, 2014. Chapter 1.

Recommended Readings (not available as PDF)

1. Le Clezio, J.M.G. *Mexican Dream, or The Interrupted Thought of Amerindian Civilizations*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan, University of Chicago Press, 1993. Chapters 1 and 7.
2. Varo, Remedios. *Letters, Dreams & Other Writings*, trans. Margaret Carson, Wakefield Press, 2018.