



**LS/CU 330 DRUGS AND VIOLENCE IN LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND ARTS**  
IES Abroad Buenos Aires

**DESCRIPTION:**

Latin American intellectual culture has been famously described as a garrison of sorts, in which intellectuals built a whole worldview while warding off everything that seemed to threaten their authority and prestige. The binary opposition *civilization/barbarism* is probably the most well-known expression of this cultural construction, which had concrete material effects in terms of power structures, cultural hierarchies and social exclusion. Some critics defined this cultural construction as the “lettered city”, an alleged ivory tower, which was from the very start haunted by the forces it, was meant to cast off. However, it wasn’t until the beginning of the XXth century that this ideological construct showed its first serious cracks, allowing critics and historians to speak of a “fall of the lettered city”. In this course we will study two specific forces at work in this epochal collapse. On the one hand, we will explore the occurrences of political and social *violence* that put into question the illusion of intellectual civility that dominated XIXth century literature and the arts. How do literary texts, art pieces and films respond to political and social violence? Can we register the ways in which violence shapes and changes artistic and literary interventions? On the other hand, we will study the way drugs and the narco-machine that makes them available boost the literary and artistic imagination. How have artists and writers portrayed this contemporary condition? Have narco-narratives and drug-related pieces enhanced our ability to understand this phenomenon?

**CREDITS:** 3 credits

**CONTACT HOURS:** 45 hours

**LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION:** English

**PREREQUISITES:** None

**ADDITIONAL COST:** None

**METHOD OF PRESENTATION:**

- Lecture
- Debates
- Student Presentations
- Individual and group analysis

**REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:**

- Course Participation - 10%
- Presentations - 10%
- Midterm Exam - 30%
- Final Paper - 30%
- Reaction Papers - 20%

**Course Participation**

Students have to attend every class and be actively present. This means they should read and watch the scheduled material in advance, ask questions, engage in discussions and share their thoughts with the class.

**Presentations**

Students will be in charge of presenting a weekly topic during the semester. These presentations will be prepared and discussed with the instructor in advance. Presentations will be graded based on their level of engagement. Students will be expected to present the topic of the day (a reading, a film, a work of art) in approximately 15 minutes. The use of images, video and sound clips, charts, maps and additional material is suggested.

**Midterm Exam**



Students will write a take home exam of about 10 pages. Students will have to answer two to three questions on the topics covered in the first six weeks of class. Questions imply a reflection on the discussions held in the course and the use of the concepts and terms learnt in class.

### Final Paper

A guided essay of about 10 pages on the materials covered in class after the midterm. Questions imply a reflection on the discussions held in the course and the use of the concepts and terms learnt in class. Non-cumulative.

### Reaction Papers

Three 2-page papers on the topics discussed in class. The instructor will indicate students when these papers are due and will specify topic and orientation. These papers usually imply a critical comment on the texts or materials analyzed in a given class.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate in oral and written work recognition of the ways in which literature and the arts intervene on an urgent social and political problem
- Evaluate critically the literary and artistic representations of drugs, drug consumption and violence
- Compare and contrast these literary and artistic representation with the way this topic is portrayed in the media
- Become aware of the stereotypes and preconceptions some of the representations in the media may be disseminating
- Analyze concrete texts and artistic pieces and be able to discriminate their specific artistic procedures (narrative techniques, rhetoric devices, positioning of the audience, etc.)

### CONTENT:

Week	Content	Assignments
Week 1	<b>Introduction to the course. Literature and Evil. How do we represent evil? Is violence always a form of evil? What are the dangers of representing violence?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eagleton, Terry. <i>On Evil</i> (Introduction, 1-18)</li><li>• Žizek, Slavoj. <i>Violence</i>. Profile Books, 2009</li></ul>
Week 2	<b>How do we represent systemic violence?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Bus 174</i>. Dir: José Padilha</li><li>• Szifron, Damián. <i>Relatos salvajes</i> (film)</li></ul>
Week 3	<b>Ghosts of the Lettered City. Present day Latin America.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Franco, Jean. <i>Decline and Fall of the Lettered City</i> (Introduction, “Killing them softly” and “cultural revolutions”, pp. 1-20, 21-57, 179-234).</li><li>• Bolaño, Roberto. <i>Distant Star</i> (1996, novel) (chapters 1, 2, 3, pp. 0-46).</li></ul>

Week	Content	Assignments
Week 4	Ghost of the Lettered City II. State Terror	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>David Blaustein. <i>Botín de Guerra</i></li> <li>For next class: Fieldwork: Students will have to conduct interviews on the general conditions of slums (villas) in Buenos Aires. At least 5 interviews should be conducted with NGOs working in the slums, host family, local scholars, etc. Students are not expected to visit the slums. This research experience is meant to make students familiar with current social exclusion in Buenos Aires, but also with dominant ideological responses to this dramatic situation. In preparation for the fieldwork, students will be provided with guidelines on methodological and ethical issues relevant to this kind of research.</li> </ul>
Week 5	Social exclusion and its discontents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Elefante Blanco</i> (film)</li> <li>Davis, Mike. <i>Planet of Slums</i> (chapters 1, 2, 6, epilogue)</li> </ul>
Week 6	Paco: an “Extermination Drug”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meloni, Myryam. <i>Fragile</i> (photos)</li> <li>Rafecas, Diego. <i>Paco</i> (2009, film)</li> <li>Taylor, Guy. “Paco: Drug War Blowback in Argentina” (whole article).</li> <li>Visit of a journalist. A journalist devoted to the analysis of the social crisis around the use of paco will visit the class and tell the students about his experiences with drug addicts, his visits to the villas (slums) of Buenos Aires, and his involvement with organizations trying to fight back this recent epidemic.</li> </ul> <p><b>Midterm Questions</b></p> <p><b>Midterm exam due after a week</b></p>
Week 7	Cocaine in the Americas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gootenberg, Paul. “Between Coca and Cocaine: A Century or More of US-Peruvian Paradoxes” (whole article)</li> <li>Taussig, Michael. <i>My cocaine museum</i> (selection)</li> <li>Corben, Billy. <i>Cocaine Cowboys</i> (2006, film).</li> </ul>
Week 8	Before the War on Drugs: Psychedelic Culture  Visit to MAMBA: Paradox at the Centre	

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Week 9	Before the “War on Drugs”: Drugs and Counterculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Castaneda, Jorge. <i>Don Juan’s Teachings</i></li> <li>• Lee, Martin. <i>Smoke Signals</i></li> <li>• McKenna, Terence. <i>True Hallucinations</i></li> </ul>
Week 10	The Narco-Machine and the “War on Drugs”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baum, Dan. <i>Smoke and Mirrors</i> (selection)</li> <li>• Reguillo, Rossana. “The Narco-Machine and the Work of Violence: Notes Toward its Decodification”.</li> <li>• Tercero, Magalí. “Daily Life”.</li> <li>• de Dios Vázquez, Juan. “The Writing Lesson”</li> </ul>
Week 11	Narco-violence in Latin American film and literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meirelles, Fernando. <i>Cidade de Deus</i> (2002, film)</li> <li>• Padilha, José. <i>Tropa de Elite</i> (2007, film)</li> <li>• Vallejo, Fernando. <i>Our Lady of the Assassins</i> (1994, novel, selection).</li> </ul>
Week 12	The Arts confront the Narco-machine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gallo, Ruben. <i>New Tendencies in Mexican Art</i>. Introduction (pp. 1-17); Urbanism (pp. 116-126)</li> <li>• Luna, Violeta. <i>Requiem for a Lost Land</i></li> <li>• Margolles, Teresa. “Agua de Cadáver” y “Vaporización” (pictures of her work with corpses and human remains)</li> <li>• Bustos, Adriana. “Antropología de la mula” (socioartistic piece on the history and sociology of cocaine traffic in Latin America)</li> <li>• <b>For next class:</b> Fieldwork: Legal Drugs in Buenos Aires. Students will conduct a series of interviews and will visit specific sites (coffee houses, pubs, restaurants) to get a sense of the local tolerance to certain drugs and substances. This fieldwork should help students reconstruct the ideological constructions that oppose coffee or alcohol to what locals call “drugs”. The experience is also meant to foster a comparative reflection on the status of legal drugs in Latin America and the US. In preparation for the fieldwork, students will be provided with guidelines on methodological and ethical issues relevant to this kind of research.</li> </ul>

Week	Content	Assignments
Week 13	Legal Drugs in Latin America History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ortíz, Fernando. <i>Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar</i> (pp. 3-96; 283-309)</li> <li>Weinberg, Bennett Allan y Bonnie K. Bealer, <i>The World of Caffeine. The Science and Culture of the World's Most Popular Drug</i>. New York: Routledge, 2001.</li> </ul>
Week 14	Final considerations. What happens to art and literature when they welcome drugs and violence? Thinking on Drugs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Benjamin, Walter. "Hashish in Marseille"</li> <li>Derrida, Jacques. "The Rhetoric of Drugs"</li> <li>Ronell, Avital. <i>Crack Wars</i> ("Hits")</li> </ul> <p>Final questions</p>
Week 15	Final Paper Due	

#### COURSE-RELATED TRIPS:

- MAMBA: Paradox at the Centre

#### REQUIRED READINGS:

- Arana, Ana. "How Street Gangs Took Central America". In *Foreign Affairs*, May/ June 2005, pp. 98-99.
- Bataille, Georges *Literature and Evil*. London: Marion Boyars, 2006.
- Baum, Dan. *Smoke and Mirrors. The War on Drugs and the Politics of Failure*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1997.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Hashish in Marseille", in Benjamin, Walter. *Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books, 1978.
- Bolaño, Roberto. *Distant Star*. New York: New Directions, 2004.
- Davis, Mike. *Planet of Slums*. London: Verso, 2006.
- de Dios Vázquez, Juan. "The Writing Lesson". In *E-misférica* 8.2 #Narcomachine
- Derrida, Jacques. "The Rhetoric of Drugs". In *differences*. 5. 1 (1993)
- Eagleton, Terry. *On Evil*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.
- Echeverría, Esteban. "The Slaughterhouse", in Nouzeilles, Gabriela and Graciela Montaldo, *The Argentina Reader: history, culture, politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Fernández Retamar, Roberto. "Caliban". In *Caliban and other essays*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Franco, Jean. *Decline and Fall of the Lettered City*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Gallo, Ruben. *New Tendencies in Mexican Art*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Gootenberg, Paul. "Between Coca and Cocaine: A Century or More of US-Peruvian Paradoxes". In *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 83:1, February 2003, pp. 119-150.
- Lee, Martin. *Smoke Signals*. New York: Scribner, 2012.
- Luna, Violeta. *Requiem for a Lost Land*. In *E-misférica* 8.2 #Narcomachine.
- McKenna, Terence. *True Hallucinations*. New York: Harper Collins, 1994.
- Ortíz, Fernando. *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.
- Rama, Ángel. *The Lettered City*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.
- Reguillo, Rossana. "The Narco-Machine and the Work of Violence: Notes Toward its Decodification". In *E-misférica* 8.2 #Narcomachine
- Ronell, Avital. *Crack Wars*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992.
- Sarmiento, Domingo. *Facundo*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Taussig, Michael. *My cocaine museum*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Taylor, Guy. "Paco: Drug War Blowback in Argentina". In *NACLA Report on the Americas*. Vol. 41. Nbr. 3, May 2008.

- Tercero, Magalí. "Daily Life". In *E-misférica* 8.2. #Narcomachine
- Vallejo, Fernando. *Our Lady of the Assassins*. London: Serpent's Tail, 2001.
- Weinberg, Bennett Allan y Bonnie K. Bealer, *The World of Caffeine. The Science and Culture of the World's Most Popular Drug*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Žizek, Slavoj. *Violence*. London: Profile Books, 2009