Cultures of Paramilitarism in Latin America
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Course description.
What is paramilitarism? What is its relation to the political and ideological formation of the modern world? And what is its historical role in forging a basic cultural politics of Latin America? This course pursues these questions, and problematizes possible answers, along three methodological lines. First we will read and discuss a short corpus that will introduce us to some of the conceptual work implied by paramilitarism, namely by focusing on the political-philosophical problems that reside at the center of paramilitary practice: the quadrangular relation between sovereign right, violent force, political space and free-market democracy. Second, we will read a selection of case studies from various disciplines and forms of representation—e.g. journalism, political science, critical theory, film, etc—that deal with aspects of the history and aesthetics of paramilitarism in the Americas. Finally, the students will take charge of the course by introducing the ways in which paramilitary discourse inhabits their own work.

Texts.
See course schedule.

Meetings.
Thursdays, 18h00 – 20h00.

Contact.
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Requirements and expectations.
• Achieving a solid grade in this course (12 and up) should require at least 5 hours of work per week: 2 hours in class; 2 hours reading; 1 hour working on your class project.

• Each student will be required to complete a class project. The nature of this project is to articulate the problem (conceptual, historical, political, aesthetic, etc) of paramilitarism to the student’s own research agenda. This will involve leading the class for at least one hour and composing a subsequent report on that experience. This course is interdisciplinary in both outlook and method, so the precise form of each class project will depend on the student’s own needs, interests, commitment, and creativity.

• With the objective of focusing our work and producing a dialogic ambience, readings will be kept short. They are however essential, and it will be impossible to keep up with the lectures and conversation without them.
**Language.**
The language of instruction is English. However, student production (i.e. presentation, paper(s), even general classroom participation) can be carried out in any language that the instructor can understand (English, Spanish, French, Portuguese). It is expected that the normal classroom language will be bi-lingual, English and Spanish.

**Make-up policy.**
Timely grades can only be guaranteed for work turned in on time. Time-sensitive assignments will not be evaluated if turned in late and will count as a zero in the final grade.

**Classroom rules.**
No screens. No laptops, no tablets, no phones. When relevant, students will bring printed copies of the reading material to class; it is highly recommended that students read the material on paper as well.

**Grading.**
- 40%: Design of the final project (written).
- 60%: Execution of the final project (written and spoken).

**Schedule** (this reading list is a sample subject to modification; final readings will be assigned in class).

**Conceptual work**

1. **Introduction to the course.**

2. **Concept**

3. **Signifier**
   Juan Pablo Dabove “Paramilitarism and Banditry” (2019).

4. **State**
   **Due:** Group topic.

5. **Capital**
Case studies

6. **Land: The case of Colombia**  
   Mariana Rivera and Gustavo Duncan. “Colombian Paramilitaries: From  
   Death Squads to State Competitors” (2019).

7. **Finance: The case of Mexico**  
   *Heli* (2013), a film by Amat Escalante.  
   *Cartel Land* (2015), a film by Matthew Heineman.  
   Gareth Williams, “Decontainment, Stasis and Narco-Accumulation” (2019).  
   **Due:** Group course work.

8. **Police: The case of Brazil (and the United States)**  
   *Tropa de Elite* (2007), a film by José Padilha.  
   *O Som ao Redor* (2012), a film by Kleber Mendonça.  

Class projects

10. TBA

11. TBA

12. TBA