

Fall 2009

SSP100-041
Saisselin Art Building 111
TTH
3:40-5:30

Office Hours:

MW 4:30-5:00
TTh 3:15-3:40
or by appointment

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Library:

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Pixelated: The New Photography**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Pixel by pixel, contemporary photography is reshaping our concept of truth and identity. With the loss of the photographic object, both our idea of representation and the role of the image is shifting. Students will create digital photographs while considering both photographic history and current trends. Through an interdisciplinary lens that includes reading poetry, essays, films and psychological studies on photography, students will consider the social, historical and psychological impact of an image. How does reproduction and the concept of the "original" change our perception of a work? Focusing on both the content and aesthetics in this new chapter of photography, our investigation will take us from the environmental photography of Eugene Smith to Andres Serrano and the study of semiotics, to the effect a self-portrait on Facebook might reveal about one's identity.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Engagement in contemporary photographic practice and a range of activities that include critical readings, writing, speaking, teamwork and individual development you will develop a heightened visual awareness, creativity, and understanding of how art can convey meaning. By the end of this course the committed and hard-working student should demonstrate the ability to:

- comprehend the ramifications of living in a digital and visual world through a meaningful, introductory exposure to digital photography and photographic practice.
- distinguish among and formulate the types of questions asked by the disciplines of studio art, art history, english, history and psychology.
- read critically, and gather and interpret evidence
- analyze and interpret images through practice and exposure to a myriad of photographic images
- think critically, formulate meaningful questions and arguments based on evidence, confront complexity and ambiguity and question their assumptions.
- develop the ability to make connections among diverse disciplines and ideas and distinguish among the evidence and methodologies appropriate to different disciplines through readings grounded in diverse fields and informed by diverse theoretical frameworks
- formulate conclusions based on evidence
- communicate to others visually, orally and in writing.
- make connections among different ideas
- relate the results of the course to educational goals

COURSE REQUIREMENTS + EXPECTATIONS

This is a collaborative process. Be awake, alive, curious. Ask questions, be prepared. Invest strong commitment and involvement. You are not expected to already know the things we learn. You are expected to utilize your talent, intelligence and personal resources to challenge yourself regardless of your level of experience. I will do all I can to create an environment for intellectually stimulating, productive inquiry and will be happy to talk or e-mail with you at any time. Students are expected to participate in all class activities. Some activities may be scheduled on a Saturdays. Please communicate with me if you have any concerns or difficulties related to the course so we can work together to find a solution.

Required Texts + Supplies

Susan Sontag, *On Photography*
Skidmore Guide to Writing

Recommended : Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink*

Epson Enhanced Matte/Luster Paper
Westminister Rag Mat Board (foam core if needed)
Mounting Tissue
Plastic photo sleeves
Flash Drive

Attendance Policy

The course is organized to maximize hands-on experience and will include in-class critiques and demo work sessions. Attendance is required. If you are going to miss a class I will appreciate notification by e-mail, however, that does not excuse your absence. You are responsible for making up all work missed-I will not be able to review what was covered in your absence. Your point total will be affected by your attendance. If you miss more than one class, the percentage of classes attended will apply to the point total.

Use the following chart to tabulate your grade:

1 Classno penalty
2 Classes.....Points x 95%
3 Classes.....Points x 90%
4 Classes or more constitutes an incomplete or failing grade.

You are allowed one "free" absence; additional absences will affect your final grade. If you are a student with a disability, please bring your semester memo of accommodations as soon as you obtain it. If you think you need accommodations but do not yet have them, set up a meeting with the Coordinator for Students with Disabilities in the Office of Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center.

Tardiness/Breaks/Cell Phones

Please be considerate of others in the class and arrive on time. Two lates constitute one absence. Please turn your cell phone off during class. Protect your own privacy by having conversations during break in the hall or outside.

Writing Assignments

There are two types of writing assignments for this course.

1. *Commentaries* are designed to test your ability to analyze artifacts, images and spaces and understand assigned readings, and to provide a basis for class discussion. A commentary is a short analysis (1-2) typed pages that highlight key points, raises pertinent questions, and makes connections with the larger theme of the course. Commentaries are graded with a check, check minus or check plus; preparation guidelines and evaluative criteria will be provided. You are required to complete seven of the nine commentaries assigned and submit them in class on the dates specified.

2. *Essays*. If photography is becoming the common currency of communication, what can we count on it for and where will it fall short? We will photograph and write about an event or place, and a person. The *Essays* are designed to test your ability to synthesize and expand upon ideas discussed in class and develop your writing. You will be also be asked to develop a final essay on a specified topic or transform a previously completed commentary into an analysis of 3-4 typed pages that incorporates both course material and additional research. Guidelines and evaluation criteria will be provided separately.

Photo Assignments + Portfolio

Each of the required project assignments/exercises will be described in a separate document. Your mounted print is due by the end of class on the date indicated.

All exercises and assignments will be graded. A complete portfolio of your work will be evaluated at the end of the semester. Electronic files (pdfs, swfs, etc.) must be submitted in a folder with your name on it.

Studio Activities

The Communication Design Lab (Saisselin 111B) is reserved for students currently enrolled in Communication Design courses. The lab is open 24 hours a day and on weekends during the semester. During other class sessions you may not use the lab without prior permission. Please note that technical problems do not constitute an excuse for unfinished work. Such issues are part of life when working with computers and you should assume that they will occur. It is your responsibility to schedule your time and your work to allow for technical challenges and still get your work done well and on time.

Critiques

Critiques will be held to review work in progress. This is an important time to gain feedback regarding your work, so participation is mandatory. It is also important to see the work that others are doing in response to the same problem. ALL WORK SHOULD BE PREPARED IN ADVANCE. Attendance and active participation in critiques is considered in determining your grade. Your ability to critique your own work as well as the work of others will be evaluated.

Fourth Credit Hour and Mentoring

Students will complete the fourth credit hour by way of a variety of activities including some scheduled times, evening events and field trips. These activities are intended to draw attention to what it means to be a part of an academic community. Failure to participate in these activities will have a negative impact on a student's grade. Topics may be included in commentaries and discussions:

1. Three or Four Mentoring Workshops (*from the following*)

Session 1 Thursday, 9/17 3:40-5:30 PM Learning as a College Student

~~Session 2 Thursday, 10/1 3:40-5:30 PM Creating Balance~~

Session 3 Thursday, 10/15 3:40-5:30 PM Understanding Conflict

Session 4 Thursday, 10/29 3:40-5:30 PM Privilege in Perspective

Session 5 Thursday, 11/12 3:40-5:30 Values and Leadership

2. Films

Manufactured Landscapes: the photographs of Edward Burtynsky

One Hour Photo, 2002

Vantage Point 2008

3. Lectures and Presentations (*at the Tang or on campus*)

4. Trip to NYC (*October 3, 2009. The Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

Exhibition Project

This component is designed to provide an opportunity to pursue individual interests in addition to the material covered in class, develop skills of research, critical thinking, teamwork and oral presentation and offer a more creative format for learning and assessment than the traditional exam or research paper. Working in teams of two or three, you will be asked to design a small exhibition on a course-related topic of your choice.

Evaluation Criteria

Participation (20%)-during group discussions, demonstrations, presentations and discussion.

Commentaries (20%)

Photo Assignments (20%) ability to understand and apply concepts discussed during studio activities, demonstrate technical skills and develop and produce thoughtful solutions.

Essays (20%)

Exhibition (20%)-all team members receive the same grade.

Submission Policy

All written work must be submitted according to the format, place and time specified on the assignment sheet. With the exception of responses to FYE events, no electronic submissions will be accepted.

Late commentaries will not be accepted. Late essays will be docked one half grade per day. Exceptions will be made only in cases of extreme illness or emergency of which I am promptly informed. If you anticipate a problem submitting your work on time, you are expected to communicate with me as soon as possible so that we can discuss your situation and agree on a reasonable way to handle it.

The Role of Peer Mentor and Professor

The peer mentor is able to provide you with good advice on many aspects of college life. The peer mentor's role is to support your adjustment to college by helping you get acquainted with the community and negotiate academic, social, and personal opportunities and challenges. As professor and advisor, my role is to support your academic development by helping you gain as much as possible from this course, develop skills essential to your success in college explore and help you prepare a course for future work at the college. I am responsible for delivering the course content, grading, advising and addressing any major academic or personal problems that may compromise your academic work and sense of well-being. Please take full advantage of the resources provided.

Timeline

Week 1 Introduction and Outline of Course

A short overview of photography, its technical advancements and corresponding influence on our culture and history through a review of a series of important photographers and movements. We will look at and question a series of images that may challenge and help shape our definition of contemporary photography.

Images/Presentation: A Short Overview of Course

Looking at Photographs

Readings: John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (London: Penguin, 1972) pp. 7-33.

John Berger, "Understanding A Photograph," *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. by Alan Trachtenberg, (New Haven, Conn.: Leete's Island Books, 1980) pp. 291-294.

Plato, "The Simile of the Cave," *Liberal Studies 1: Human Dilemmas*, ed. Liberal Studies 1 Faculty, (Copley Custom Publishing Group, 2003), pp. 21-29.

Susan Sontag, "In Platos Cave," *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977)

Commentary: Our Lincoln

Photography Assignment #1: Light

Week 2 Photography: Technical Considerations

An overview of the technical aspects of digital photography.

Reading: Paul Martin Lester, "The Media Through Which We See," *Visual Communication: Images with Messages*, (California: Wadsworth/Thomson, 2003), pp. 108-115.

Critiquing Guidelines

Demos and Exercises in Lab

Photography Assignment #1: Light (the digital process)

Session 1 Thursday, 9/17 3:40-5:30PM Learning as a College Student

Week 3 Photography and Aesthetics

A look at the aesthetic considerations of the media and discuss the vocabulary of technical terms needed to discuss images.

Images/Presentation: Aesthetics, Beauty and Content

Reading: Edward Weston, "Seeing Photographically," *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. by Alan Trachtenberg, (New Haven, Conn.: Leete's Island Books, 1980) pp. 169-175.

Annie Lamont, "Polaroids," *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, (New York: Pantheon, 1994) pp. 39-43

Malcolm Gladwell, "The Statue That Didn't Look Right," *Blink*, (New York: Back Bay Books, 2007)

Writing Assignment: Commentary

Critique #1 Light

Week 4 Vantage Point | Viewpoint

The role of viewpoint, access and perspective. We will look at artists who have a unique perspective. What were the developments or conditions that helped to create that vision?

Images: Viewpoints: Photographers with Unique Perspectives

Reading: John Szarkowski, "The Photographer's Eye," and Stephen Shore, "The Nature of Photographs," *Basic Critical Theory for Photographers*, ed. by Ashley la Grange, (London: Focal Press, 2005) pp. 15-26.

Malcolm Gladwell, "The Theory of Thin Slices: How a Little Bit of Knowledge Goes a Long Way," *Blink*, (New York: Back Bay Books, 2007) pp. 18-47.

Susan Sontag, "America, Seen Through Photographs, Darkly," *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977) pp 25-43.

Writing Assignment: Commentary

Photography Assignment #2-Event

Week 5 Documentation

The role of photography in politics and social construction.

Images: The Pros and Cons of Documentary Photography

Reading: Martha Rosler, In, Around and Afterthoughts (on Documentary Photography), *The Photography Reader*, (London: Routledge, 2003) pp. 261-274.

Susan Sontag, "Melancholy Objects," *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977) pp 45-74.

Adam Liptak, "Images the Law and War," *The New York Times* (May 16, 2009)

Writing Assignment#1: Event/Viewpoint

Critique #2 Event

Photography Assignment #3: Place

Week 6 Truth: Appropriation, Alteration and Editing

Images: Altered Visions

Reading: Sherrie Levine, "Statement," *Art in theory, 1900-1990*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (Massachusetts:Blackwell, 2003), pp. 1038-1039.

Fred Ritchin, "Photojournalism in the Age of Computers," *Essays on Contemporary Photography: The Critical Image*, ed. by Carol Squires, (Seattle: Bay Press), pp. 28-37.

Barbara Kruger, "'Taking' Pictures," *Art in theory, 1900-1990*, ed. by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 1041-1042

Errol Morris, "Believing is Seeing," *New York Times*, 2008.

Writing Assignment: Commentary

Critique #3 Place

Session 3 Thursday, 10/15 3:40-5:30PM Understanding Conflict

Week 7 Identity + The Portrait

What does an image tell us about a specific person? What does an image tell us about ourselves? The photographic image and identity in creating image.

Images: Portraits

Reading: Annie Lamont, "Character," *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, (New York: Pantheon, 1994) pp. 44-53.

Northrop Frye, "The Motive for Metaphor," *Liberal Studies 1: Human Dilemmas*, ed. Liberal Studies 1 Faculty, (Copley Custom Publishing Group, 2003), pp. 49-56.

Susan Sontag, "The Image World," *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977) pp. 135-147.

Cindy Sherman, "Untitled Statement," *Theories and Documents in Contemporary Art*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), ed. by Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, pp 791-794.

Writing Assignment #2: Portrait/Character

Photography Assignment #4: Image: A Portrait

Week 8 Memory and Evidence

Differences between word and image descriptors-recognition and retention.
The role of photography in history and recollection.

Reading: Italo Calvino, *The Adventures of a Photographer, Difficult Loves*, (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), pp. 220-235.

Billy Collins, "Class Picture, 1954," *The Trouble with Poetry*, (New York: Random House, 2005), pp. 72.

Malcolm Gladwell, "Paul Van Riper's Big Victory: Creating Structure for Spontaneity," *Blink*, (New York: Back Bay Books, 2007) pp. 99-146. (Jonathan Schooler, Verbal Overshadowing)

Alex Williams, "I Was There. Just Ask Photoshop," *New York Times*, 2008.

Critique #4: Portrait

Writing Assignment: Commentary

Session 4 Thursday, 10/29 3:40-5:30PM Privilege in Perspective

Week 9 The Original and the Reproduction

Does where we view a photograph play a role in our perception of it?

What determines an "original" in a digital environment? Why is the original important?

Images: Zapruder

Reading: Rosalind Krauss, *Photography's Discursive Spaces, The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. by Richard Bolton, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989) pp. 296-301.

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, (Schocken, 1969).

Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, "Real Virtuality," *Global | Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imagery*, ed. by Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake, (Duke University Press, 1996) pp. 109-112.

Writing Assignment: Commentary

Week 10 Icons and Semiotics

The iconic image. Images that remain and endure.

Images: Icons +Symbolism

Reading: Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author"

Susan Sontag, "Heroism of Vision," *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977) pp 75-100.

Vicki Goldberg, "Icons," *The Power of Photography*(New York: Abbeville Press, 1991) pp.

Writing Assignment: Commentary

Photography Assignment #5: The Self Portrait

Session 5 Thursday, 11/12 3:40-5:30 Values and Leadership

Week11 The Violent Image: *Images that provoke*

Access and the effect of violent images. How are images used to influence and persuade, what are the side effects? Ethics and publishing violent images.

Images: The Violent Image

Reading: Sue Sorensen, "Against Photography: Susan Sontag and the Violent Image," *AfterImage*, May-June 2004

Susan Sontag, "The Image World," *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977) pp. 147-158.

John Berger, "Photographs of Agony," *About Looking* (New York: Vintage books, 1992)

Chris Burdin, "Untitled Statement," *Theories and Documents in Contemporary Art*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), ed. by Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, pp. 768-773.

Adam Liptak, "Images, the Law and War," *The New York Times* (May 16, 2009).

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/17/weekinreview/17liptak.html?fta=y>

Critique#5: The Self Portrait

Writing Assignment: Commentary

Week 12 Archiving and the Commodification of the Image(the role of stock photography)

Reading: Terence Smith, "Frozen in Time," *PBS*, 2004

Linton Weeks, "Bill Gates Buys Photo Trove; Microsoft Chief Acquires Famed Bettman Archive," *The Washington Post*, 1995

Cathy Robbins, "Collecting Indians," *voice of sandiego.org*

Assignment: Searching for images and articles on the web and evaluating resources.

Visit Library and the Tang Collection Room

Commentary: Environment and Image (Museum and Reproduction)

Week13 On Both Sides of the Lens: Privacy and the "Tethered Self"

In what ways does the photographic equipment and supporting structure, necessary to communicate with images, influence our physical, and social behavior?

Reading: Sherry Turkle, "Always-on/Always-on-you: The Tethered Self." *In Handbook of Mobile Communication Studies*, ed. by James E. Katz, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).

Malcolm Gladwell, "Listening with Your Eyes," *Blink*, (New York: Back Bay Books, 2007)

Writing Assignment: Final Essay:Past/Present + Exhibition

Week14 Final Project and Presentations

Portfolio of Writing Assignments and Photographs

Critique and Discussion

Final Presentations/Exhibit

Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria for Commentaries

Process. The purpose of this assignment is to convey your active engagement with and understanding of the assigned readings. Your commentary should consider the following points—*keep this sheet beside you as you write to make sure you address everything!*

Argument. What are the author's most important points? Explain them *in your own words*, as clearly and specifically as possible. *Avoid summarizing the entire text.* Focus on the ideas you consider most interesting and significant.

Relevance. How does this text contribute to your understanding of contemporary photography – technically, aesthetically, in consideration of content or context? How does the author's argument and use of evidence resemble or differ from the work of other authors we have read? *Make at least one specific connection or comparison* with a text, object, image, or issue we have discussed, or something from a paper or presentation you have completed for class.

Provocation. What does the text leave you thinking about? Are there things that the author might have considered that would have strengthened or complicated the argument? How might the text inspire further study? Formulate *at least one substantive critical comment* about the text, in the form of a question, reservation, or elaboration, that goes beyond the author's argument and shows that you are thinking seriously.

Length. 1-2 typed pages. Content is more important than length.

Format. You may use any format that helps you to communicate your grasp of the material. Feel free to experiment! Possibilities include a series of short paragraphs, a detailed outline, or a list of bullet points. It might be helpful to organize your analysis using the three analytical categories listed above. You do NOT need to write a formal essay with complete, connected sentences. *Avoid using extensive quotations*—your own words demonstrate understanding much more effectively.

Submission. Commentaries are due in class on the dates specified on the syllabus. *You must submit 7 of the 9 commentaries assigned.* If you complete fewer than 7, the missing ones will be counted as zeroes when I average the grades. If you complete more than 7, I will average only your 7 highest grades. If you have prepared a commentary but are unable to attend class for a legitimate reason, I will accept the commentary via e-mail **ONLY** if it is sent **BEFORE** the beginning of the class period. *Late commentaries will not be accepted.*

Evaluation. Each commentary will be graded as follows. To expedite prompt turnaround I will provide minimal written comments, but I would be happy to discuss your work at any time. Commentary grades will constitute 20% of your final grade for the course.

Check plus = A/A-. Exceptionally thorough, well organized, and articulate; demonstrates original, incisive thought and a sound understanding of the material.

Check = B+/B. Generally observant and well organized; demonstrates good effort and an acceptable understanding of the material.

Check minus = B-/C+. Difficulties with organization and articulation of key points; suggests cursory reading and/or a poor understanding of the material.