
Histories of Photography

The College of New Jersey, Spring 2008
Tuesdays 5:00 PM - 07:50 PM
Holman Hall 317
AAH-280-01

Professor João Enxuto

enxuto@tcnj.edu
Office hours:
Tuesdays 11:30 – 12:30 PM or
by appointment.

Course Description

This seminar introduces students to multiple investigations of the history of photography. Emphasis will be given to the diverse cultural uses of photography from its invention to the present day. Such uses include: ethnography; political and social propaganda; documentary photography; amateur photography; studio, advertising and fashion photography; and photography as a medium of artistic expression. Throughout the course, close attention will be paid to the social contexts of photographic production at given historical moments and the relevant questions raised by sociological, economic, aesthetic and intellectual history in European and American society.

The course readings will consist of more or less equal groups of historical documents (artists' and photographers' statements) as well as writings by critics and historians, which reflect the unstable status of the photograph. Class time will be divided among slide lectures, discussions of the readings and student presentations. Students will be expected to take a field trip to museums and galleries.

Course objectives

- Understand significant developments in the medium of photography.
- View and evaluate the photographs of and by individuals who have set precedents in the art and science of photography.
- Discuss photography's significance in the development of modern and contemporary cultures.

Requirements

Class attendance:

Material in this class is cumulative and missing a single class is detrimental. All absences must be explained in writing via e-mail. Lateness is noted when you arrive more than 15 minutes after class has begun or do not return to class after a break - this will count for half an absence. Three absences will result in one letter grade drop.

Class participation: 10%

Students are to be prepared for class discussion.

Quizzes: 10%

Students will be greeted on occasion with quizzes on weekly reading assignments. Quizzes will be hinted to but not announced in advanced.

Exams

Mid-term exam 20%

Final exam 25%

Research paper (6-8 pages) 20%

The research paper must relate a recently viewed exhibition(s) to a required reading(s). Students will be exposed to the work of current and historical artists during organized field trips and highlighted exhibitions. The class will take one field trip to a museum and gallery exhibitions in the New York City area.

Presentation 15 %

A 15-minute visual presentation will investigate a photographer in-depth and contextualize her/his work in critical framework (modernist, postmodern). The presentation will relate to class lectures and discussions, assigned readings, and video screenings. A three-page summary will be handed in on the day of the presentation.

Grading:

- A** work is superior. The work demonstrates a firm understanding of the material, and offers an insightful analysis or reading of that material. The essays and exams are not only cogent, but have a level of sophistication and eloquence. It is generally free of grammatical and typographical errors.
- B** work is good. The work demonstrates an understanding of the material in which the ideas are clearly presented. "B" work is competent, well-organized, yet without the insight, sophistication, and eloquence of an "A" paper. It is generally free of grammatical and typographical errors.
- C** work is adequate. The work demonstrates an understanding of most of the material, but not all of it. It usually lacks clarity of organization and expression of thought. The ideas are stated, but not developed. There are often errors of grammar and/or spelling.
- D** work is inadequate. The work demonstrates the inability to fully understand the ideas presented. It is not well presented, not cogent, and often has errors of grammar and/or spelling.
- F** work indicates failure to understand the ideas at all. This grade usually indicates the inability to analyze material and write coherently about it.

Required Texts:

Robert Hirsch, Seizing the Light: A History of Photography (*primary text*)

Alan Trachtenberg (ed.), Classic Essays on Photography

Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida

Course Readings (CR)

Weekly Schedule:

Week 1 – January 22

What is photography now?

Screening –

- 1) *Decasia*, 2002 (dir. **Bill Morrison**)
 - 2) **Takeshi Murata** *Untitled (Silver)*, 2006
Single channel video
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Week 2 – January 29

The Invention of Photographic Technology: Nicéphore Niépce and Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre

Hirsch, Chapter 1: “Advancing toward Photography: The Birth of Modernity” in Seizing the Light.
John Szarkowski, “The Inventors” in Photography Until Now. (CR)

Week 2 part II

The Invention of the Photographic Image: William Henry Fox Talbot

William Henry Fox Talbot, “A Brief Historical Sketch of the Invention of the Art” in Classic Essays on Photography.

Week 3 – February 5 (Bring Camera Lucida to class)

The Photographic Portrait and the Daguerreotype

Hirsch, Chapter 2: “The Daguerreotype: Image and Object.”
Charles Baudelaire, “The Modern Public and Photography” in Classic Essays on Photography.

Week 3 part II

Paper Photography: The Calotype

Hirsch, Chapter 3: “Calotype Rising: The Arrival of Photography.”
Carol Armstrong, “A Scene in a Library: The First Photographically Illustrated Book” in Scenes in a Library: Reading the Photograph in the Book, 1843-1875.

Week 4 – February 12

The Commercial Image

Hirsch, Chapter 4: “Pictures on Glass: The Wet-Plate Process.”
Rosalind Krauss, “Tracing Nadar.” *October*, Vol. 5 (CR)
Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph,” in Classic Essays on Photography.

Week 4 - part II

Pictures of War

Hirsch, Chapter 5, “Prevailing Events / Picturing Calamity”
Alan Trachtenberg, “Illustrious Americans”, “Albums of War” in: Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans (CR)

Week 5 – February 19

Art and Nature

Hirsch, Chapter 6, “A New Medium of Communication: Art or Industry?”

Henry Peach Robinson, “Idealism, Realism, Expression” in Classic Essays in Photography.

Brian Wallis “Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz’s Slave Daguerreotypes” (CR)

Week 5 – part II

Urbanism and the New Landscapes

Hirsch, Chapter 7, “Standardizing the Practice: A Transparent Truth”.

Rosalind Krauss, “Photography and Discursive Spaces” (CR).

Peter Galassi, “Before Photography” in Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography. (CR)

Week 6 – February 26

New Visions

Hirsch, Chapter 8, “New Ways of Visualizing Time and Space: The Inadequacy of Human Vision”.

Screening – *Edwaerd Muybridge: Zoopraxographer* (dir. **Thom Andersen**), (1975)

Week 6 part II

Chronophotography in the 1880’s: Etienne Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge

Marta Braun, Picturing Time: The Work of Etienne Jules Marey (1830-1904) (CR)

Week 7 – March 4

Mid-Term Exam

(try to) Read Camera Lucida over Mid-term break.

Week 8 – March 18

Pictorialism in America: Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Steichen

Hirsch, Chapter 9, “Suggesting the Subject: The Evolution of Pictorialism”.

Alfred Stieglitz, “Pictorial Photography,” in Classic Essays in Photography.

Screening – Alfred Stieglitz from *American Masters*

Week 8 part II

The Rise of Modernism: Weimar Germany

Hirsch, Chapter 10, “Modernism: Industrial Beauty”.

Siegfried Kracauer “Photography” in Classic Essays in Photography.

Week 9 – 3/25 and 3/30

Field Trip to ICP and Chelsea Galleries

Finish Camera Lucida before field trip.

Week 10 – April 1 *Field Trip Response Paper Due*

Surrealism and Photography

Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, "Photography" in Classic Essays in Photography.

Patricia Johnston, "The Modern Look in Advertising Photography and Product Design," (CR)

Week 10 part II

The New Objectivity

Hirsch, Chapter 11, "The New Culture of Light"

Benjamin Buchloh, "From Faktura to Photography" in Contest of Meaning. (CR)

Week 11 – April 8 *Presentations*

The American Documentary Tradition: Jacob Riis to Lewis Hine

Hirsch, Chapter 12, "Social Documents: An American Urge: Social Uplift".

Lewis Hine, "Social Photography," in Classic Essays on Photography.

Week 11 part II

The American Documentary Tradition: Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange

Maren Stange, "From Sensation to Science: Documentary Photography at the Turn of the Century" in: Symbols of Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America. (CR)

Week 12 – April 15 *Presentations*

War Reportage, Halftones, and the Snapshot

Hirsch, Chapter 13, "Nabbing Time: Anticipating the Moment".

Henri Cartier-Bresson, "The Decisive Moment".

Week 12 part II

Hirsch, Chapter 14, "Photography and the Halftone: Pictures and Printers Ink".

Susan Sontag, excerpts from Regarding the Pain of Others.

Richard Bolton, "In the American East: Richard Avedon Incorporated," in Contest of Meaning. (CR)

Week 13 – April 22 *Presentations*

Post-war Photography

Hirsch, Chapter 15 & 16, "The Atomic Age" and "New Frontiers: Expanding Boundries".

Susan Sontag, "American Seen Through Photographs, Darkly," On Photography.

Roland Barthes, "The Great Family of Man" Mythologies.

Jack Kerouac, Introduction to "The Americans" (1958).

Week 13 Part II

Hirsch, Chapter 17, "Changing Realities: Alternative Visions".

John Berger, "Understanding a Photograph," in Classic Essays on Photography.

Week 14 – April 29 *Research Paper due*

Conceptualism and Postmodernism

Hirsch, Chapter 18, "Thinking About Photography".

Douglas Crimp, "The Museum's Old / The Library's New Subject" in Contest of Meaning. (CR)

Vik Muniz & Thomas Demand "A Notion of Space" in Blind Spot vol.8 (CR)

Week 14 part II

Photography and New Media

Lev Manovich, "The Myth of the Digital" in The Language of New Media (CR)

William J Mitchell, "Intention and Artifice" in The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era. (CR)

William J Mitchell, "Vital Signs/Cloning Terror" in What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images. (CR)

Final Exam
