from the perspective of memory, photography appears as a jumble that consists partly of garbage.

Siegfried Kracauer¹

Ultimately, Photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is pensive, when it thinks.

Roland Barthes²

Course Description

The Photographic Image applies concepts and practices from visual ethnography to the study of memory, place, and everyday life. The course aims at developing counter-intuitive and subversive approaches to common practices of looking and techniques of representation. Whereas photographs are often taken to be archival technologies, we will invert this idea and explore how images can be transient and ephemeral by focusing on sites of encounter and orders of engagement.

This course is organized as a split theory/hands-on exploration of the image and image-making. At all points in the course students are drawn into the use of image-making as an interpretive and critical engagement with course readings. We will begin with techniques of visual inquiry established by visual anthropologists, documentarians, and artists working on the margins of documentary traditions. This course will work primarily with still images. Students will be expected to have at their disposal a camera (digital or analogue).


Grades & Assignments

Class participation = 10%
Photo studies (2 small photo projects) = 20%
Scrapbook minor (2 scrapbook entries w/metacommentary) = 30%
Scrapbook major (final project; self-directed; written and visual components) = 40%

Required Texts


*As we work through the semester I may assign additional articles for you to read. There won’t be a lot of them but I’ll give you enough time to read them and will be clear if they are supplemental or required reading.

Learning Goals

I have provided some learning goals here but they are all with caveats. In general though, there are a number of critical things that I think you should learn in this course. As the title suggests the idea and practice of photography are central. This is not a photography course that you would take in a Fine Arts program. But we will be using our cameras. This will be a form of practice-based learning. As we study photography and photographic uses we will be using our own photographs and cameras to extend our inquiry.

We will develop a flexible and extensible skill set that will allow us to read photographic theory and history, look at and think about photographs as a form of visual culture, and most importantly think about the ways that photographs are apprehended by people in the everyday.

• Learn some history of photography
• Learn some photo-theory
• Learn some approaches or techniques for using photography as tool for research and analysis
• Learn about a variety of culturally specific uses of photography and photographs.
Note:

All information in this syllabus is subject to change. Students will be given reasonable and explicit notice for all changes to the syllabus.