

Comparative History of Ideas 270 C – Special Topics

Photography: Theoretical Reflections and Ethnographic Applications

Winter 2006 – 5 credits

Instructor: Giorgia Aiello, Ph.D. Candidate in Communication

Meeting times: Mon – Wed, 10:30 a.m. - 12:20 p.m.

Location: Mary Gates Hall 271

Office hours: Wed 4:30 a.m. – 5:20 p.m., Thurs 10:30 a.m. - 11:20 a.m. and by appointment (CHID lounge, Padelford Hall #C101)

Contact info: giorgia@u.washington.edu

Course website: <http://students.washington.edu/giorgia/chid270>

Peer Facilitator: Emily Fischer

Office hours: Fri 10:30 a.m. -11:30 a.m. and by appointment (Mary Gates Hall Commons)

Contact info: efische@u.washington.edu

Course content and objectives

This course explores the role of photography in visual culture and as a means for collaborative research in the humanities and social sciences.

In the first part of the class, we will read classic critical and philosophical investigations about photography as a technology, a medium and a cultural form. Students will learn how to actively engage with theoretical literature about photography through the development of a critical essay.

In the second part of the class, students will use their theoretical knowledge in addition to specific notions about visual ethnography, cross-cultural research methods and digital imaging to create collaborative projects aimed at exploring, documenting and gaining a greater understanding of select aspects of the greater local community.

The assignments for this class are meant to give students the opportunity to develop original academic work in the field of visual studies, which they will then be able to include in their portfolio for job or graduate school applications, expand into a senior or honors thesis, or use as a sample of their undergraduate work for a variety of other purposes. In addition, this course aims to provide students with key tools and skills for the development of collaborative projects involving interviewing, ethnographic research and image-making in their local communities or abroad.

Required texts

Barthes, Roland (1980). *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Sontag, Susan (1977). *On Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Course reader, available at Ave Copy Center, 4141 University Way NE, (206) 633-1837

Evaluation

In this class, a student's final grade will be a combination of:

Participation	20% of final grade
Critical essay (including peer review)	25%
Visual essay	15%
Library research for final project	10%
Presentation of final project	10%
Final project essay	20%

Grades

Students will be evaluated on the 4.0 scale, in accordance with University policy and guidelines. In calculating final grades, great consideration will be given to a student's improvement over the quarter in areas such as the ability to understand and discuss about fundamental theoretical concepts and methodological issues, design and presentation skills, the ability to work both independently and collaboratively and to use available resources (e.g. readings, library, computer lab, instructor's mentoring) for the development of original research work.

Participation

Students can gain participation points for this class by accomplishing a variety of tasks in and even outside class time. This idea of "variety" is based on the assumption that different students have different ways of being engaged, caring and attentive in collaborative learning. In addition, it is important that students maximize on their skills and strengths, while also pushing their boundaries to try out new ways of engaging in discussion and learning with others.

In this class, students will not be graded for participation based on mere attendance. Students' participation is not just a matter of quantity (e.g., how many times they come to class, how many times they speak up in class, or how many times they write posts for the discussion board), but also and above all a matter of quality. This means that students will not be able to obtain a full participation grade just by being physically present in class. On the other hand, this also implies that students who do not attend class regularly will not be able to engage in discussions held in or outside class time.

Participation will be evaluated along five main dimensions:

- Contribution to in-class activities and discussions
- Two non-graded assignments
- Use of peer facilitator's mentoring
- Online discussion board
- Occasional concept reviews

Students are required to complete **two non-graded assignments** (one in the first part of the class, one in the second part of the class). Ideally, students will be able to weave parts of their non-graded assignments directly into their writing both for their critical essay and their final project. These assignments are not graded in the sense that they will not be given a grade on the 4.0 scale

and will exclusively count toward participation. However, each assignment will be given a qualitative evaluation (e.g. 'excellent', 'fair') and comments (e.g. 'your discussion needs more depth', 'great use of Barthes' notion of denotation', etc.). In addition, non-graded assignments will not be accepted when turned in late (which will affect a student's overall participation grade). Each completed assignment will be 500 to 1000 words long (approx. 2-4 pages double spaced).

Occasionally, I will ask students to write **concept reviews** during the first 10-15 minutes of a class meeting. These will be unannounced quizzes with three to five open-ended questions. Typically, I will ask students to identify and explain key-terms in their own words and/or write definitions of key concepts from readings and lectures. Concept reviews will be returned with comments and corrections, but they will not be given a grade. The goal of these reviews is to give students the opportunity to think reflectively about class material while also assessing their understanding of key-concepts and readings.

In-class **discussion** about readings and other class material will be conducted seminar-style, i.e. as an exchange of questions, explanations and viewpoints about readings and key ideas. Students are also required to continue discussion past class time on the **online discussion board**. In addition, in-class discussion about the readings will be complemented with individual and group 'hands-on' **activities** aimed at giving students the opportunity to learn about visuality and visual culture experientially. Students will be evaluated for the quality of their contribution and their overall commitment to class discussion and activities.

Finally, as part of their participation students will be asked to establish a **mentor/mentee relationship** with the peer facilitator. This mentoring relationship is meant to support students in the process of research design and development. The terms and modalities of this mentorship will be established during the quarter as an individual or group agreement.

Critical essay

The critical essay is a 1,500 – 2,000 words long paper examining the work of a photographer or a photographic 'genre' by means of the theoretical concepts learned in the first part of the class. This essay will be completed by each student individually. However, each student will also work in partnership with another student to complete a 1,000 words long **peer review** about the process leading up to the completion of the critical essay. In order to complete this peer review, students will be required to meet with their partners at least three times before the completion of their respective critical essays to discuss and work through the readings as well as exchange ideas on how to use the concepts found in the readings for their essays. The critical essay will be submitted electronically through Catalyst's e-submit. Further guidelines will be given in class at the beginning of the quarter.

Visual essay

As a mid-term assignment, each student will design and produce a visual essay involving the use of photography and writing to narrate, document and/or map out given topics on a small and auto-ethnographic scale. This assignment is meant to give students a hands-on opportunity to become familiar with visual research by means of relevant annotation, story-telling and analysis techniques. Specific guidelines and topics for this assignment will be given in class.

Final project

The final project is a 6,000 – 8,000 words long collaborative research project about a select aspect of the greater local community. Students will work in groups of four to examine their given topic through a variety of approaches, including archival/library research, visual data collection methods and analysis, interviewing and fieldwork, and theoretical/critical reflections on photography.

During the quarter, each group will also complete a 2,000 words long **library research paper** leading up to the final project. The library research paper is meant to provide students with information/knowledge about their given topic and thus also help them develop research questions for their final project. In addition, each group will be evaluated on the **presentation** of their final project during finals' week, at the end of the quarter class exhibition. Detailed guidelines for the completion and presentation of the final project will be given in class.

Timeline of Assignments	<u>assigned</u>	<u>due</u>
First non-graded assignment	01/04	01/11 in class
Peer review	01/04	01/25 in class
Critical essay	01/04	01/28 e-submit (by 10 p.m.)
Visual essay	01/25	02/13 in class
Second non-graded assignment	02/13	02/22 in class
Library research for final project	02/08	03/01 in class
Presentation of final project	02/15	03/15 class exhibition
Final project	01/18	03/15 class exhibition

>> Please note: in order to be eligible to receive credit for this class all assignments must be completed by the end of the quarter. Incompletes are only granted in extraordinary circumstances.

How to study for this class

In this class students will not be asked to spend their time doing things that are typical of many undergraduate courses in the humanities and social sciences. For example, students' time will not be devoted to memorizing dates, anecdotes or any other academic trivia 'extracted' from readings and lectures. Along the same lines, students will not spend their time studying for exams or multiple choice tests.

Because this class revolves around the development of original research work in the field of visual studies, from the very beginning students should focus on building up specific theoretical knowledge, tools for critical thinking, methodological competencies and design/presentation skills.

In addition to spending approximately four hours a week in class, students should spend their time focusing on activities such as:

1. Reading and making notes about class readings and related key concepts;
2. Thinking about examples, questions, viewpoints and ideas for discussion;
3. Researching and completing both graded and non-graded assignments;
4. Collaborating with their classmates in class, in the computer lab/library and in the field.

Expectations

In this class, students are expected:

1. to always come to class on time or to inform the instructor of any reasons why they might not be able to come on time or attend;
2. to always come prepared to class, by having completed readings prior to each class meeting;
3. to turn in their assignments on time and in accordance with the instructor's guidelines;
4. to check in with the peer facilitator regularly about their progress, challenges and overall experience in the class;
5. to conduct original research work that is both creative and theoretically/methodologically sound;
6. to attend class regularly and contribute to the ongoing discussion, by offering personal insights and listening to others' viewpoints about class material;
7. to demonstrate, at all times, academic integrity and respect for others.

As a student, you are expected to challenge yourself beyond your skill level. In this class, you will be asked to work both independently and collaboratively, be a creative and critical thinker, mentor your peers and contribute to collective knowledge building through your understanding of class material.

As the instructor for this course, students can expect:

1. that I will always be on time or inform students of any unexpected emergencies in a timely fashion;
2. that I will come to each class meeting prepared and willing to engage with students' ideas and questions;
3. that I will help students develop critical thinking skills and research competencies in the field of visual studies;
4. that I will read and return students' assignments with comments in a timely manner;
5. that I will be available to mentor students on their academic and creative projects in and outside class;
6. that I will value each student's viewpoints, offer constructive criticism and, ultimately, treat everyone fairly and respectfully;
7. that I will always bring my expertise, curiosity and passion for the subject into the classroom.

As members of the same learning community, we will all participate in collaborative learning by creating and maintaining a respectful, safe and fun environment for the exchange of viewpoints, information and creative ideas.

Plagiarism

Everyone in this class is expected to produce original work and cite the work of others. Not only print sources, but also information and resources found on the web must be properly cited. Presenting someone else's work or ideas as your own will be treated very seriously. This may result in loss of credit, suspension or expulsion from the University. The purpose of this class is to help students become critical and independent thinkers. Original thoughts and ideas will be highly valued, and students are expected to treat the work of others similarly.

Students' special needs

If you have a disability and need special accommodations for note taking or any other aspect of your coursework, please let me know and/or contact Disabled Student Services, 448 Schmitz, Box 355839, (206) 543-8924, uwdss@u.washington.edu.

If you are an athlete on a UW winter sports team, please provide me with documentation as to your travel schedule throughout the quarter and work closely with me throughout the quarter to ensure your success in this course.

>> Please note: students are highly encouraged to contact me and/or the peer facilitator early in the quarter about any issues that might affect their participation and achievement in this class.

Email Guidelines

Students are welcome to use email to contact me and ask me brief questions. I will normally answer within the next 24 hours or so. Students who have lengthy or complex questions (i.e. that would take me longer than five minutes to answer via email) should meet with me or the peer facilitator in person.

At all times, students are encouraged to contact me and visit me in my office to share ideas, questions, concerns and insights about the class as well as broader issues relating to visual culture and communication.

Weekly Course and Reading Schedule

INTRODUCTION

Week 1: Approaching the visual (Jan. 3 - 6)

- W 01/04** >> field-trip to the Henry Art Gallery for the exhibit "Sign Language"
>> first non-graded assignment assigned
>> peer review and critical essay assigned

Readings

Calvino, Italo (1965). "The spiral". In *Cosmicomics*. San Diego: Harvest/HBJ.

Calvino, Italo (1970). "The adventure of a photographer". In *Difficult Loves*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

PART 1

Week 2: Photography, technology and culture (Jan. 9 – 13)

- M 01/09**
- W 01/11** >> first non-graded assignment due in class

Readings

Barthes, Roland (1980). First part of *Camera Lucida*.

Sontag, Susan (1977). Chapters 1 & 2 of *On Photography*.

Week 3: The photograph as record, copy and representation (Jan. 16 - 20)

- M 01/16** >> no class (holiday, Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebration)
- W 01/18** >> final project assigned

Readings

Barthes, Roland (1980). Second part of *Camera Lucida*.

Sontag, Susan (1977). Chapters 3 & 4 of *On Photography*.

Week 4: Photography and research (Jan. 23 – 27)

- M 01/23** >> guest speaker: installation artist Iole Alessandrini
- W 01/25** >> computer lab: FTP and Photoshop fundamentals
>> peer review due in class
>> visual essay assigned

Readings

Sontag, Susan (1977). Chapters 5 & 6 of *On Photography*.

Saturday, January 28: Critical essay due by 10 p.m. (via e-submit)

PART 2

Week 5: Ethics (Jan. 30 – Feb. 3)

- M 01/30** >> guest speaker: Prof. Phillip Thurtle
- W 02/01** >> computer lab: basic HTML and Dreamweaver

Readings

- Madison, D. Soyini (2005). "Ethics". Chapter 4 of *Critical Ethnography: Methods, Ethics and Performance*. London: Sage.
- Madison, D. Soyini (2005). "Methods and application: three case studies in ethical dilemmas". Chapter 6 of *Critical Ethnography: Methods, Ethics and Performance*. London: Sage.
- Pink, Sarah (2001). "Planning and practicing visual methods: appropriate uses and ethical issues". Chapter two of *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*. London: Sage.
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Week 6: Using images and library resources for social research (Feb. 6 – 10)

- M 02/06**
- W 02/08** >> library research workshop
>> library research for final project assigned

Readings

- Ball, Michael S. & Smith, Gregory W.H. (1992). "The use of photographs in a discipline of words". Chapter one of *Analyzing Visual Data*. London: Sage.
- Collier, Malcolm (2001). "Approaches to analysis in visual anthropology". In *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, eds., T. van Leeuwen, and C. Jewitt. London: Sage.
- Grasseni, Cristina (2004). "Video and ethnographic knowledge: skilled vision in the practice of breeding". In *Working Images: Visual Research and Representation in Ethnography*, eds., S. Pink, L. Kürti, and A. I. Alfonso. London: Routledge.
- Schwartzberg, Susan (2005). "The personal archive as a historical record". In *Visual Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, April 2005. New York: Routledge, pp. 70-82.
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Week 7: Interviewing and cross-cultural research methods (Feb. 13 – 17)

- M 02/13** >> presentation of visual essays due
>> second non-graded assignment assigned
- W 02/15** >> computer lab: guest speaker: web designer Paul Ford
>> presentation of final project assigned

Readings

- Geertz, Clifford (1983). "From the native's point of view: on the nature of anthropological understanding". In *Local knowledge: Further essays in interpretive anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.

Slim, H. & Thompson, P. (1995). "Ways of Listening". In *Listening For Change: Oral Testimony and Community Development*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, pp. 61-94.

Aiello, Giorgia (2000). "The *Grand Illusion* and popular culture 1967 – 2000: an oral history of one of Seattle's first independent movie theaters". Unpublished paper.

Week 8: Analyzing photographs as ethnographic data (Feb. 20 – 24)

M 02/20 >> no class (holiday, President's Day)

W 02/22 >> computer lab: photo galleries and FTP continued
>> second non-graded assignment due

Readings

Aiello, Giorgia, and Gendelman, Irina (2003). "Seattle's Pike Place Market (de)constructed: an analysis of tourist narratives about a public space". Paper presented in the Visual Studies Division of the International Communication Association Convention.

Barthes, Roland (1961/1977). "The photographic message". In *Image, Music, Text*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Barthes, Roland (1964/1977). "Rhetoric of the image". In *Image, Music, Text*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Week 9: Creativity, innovation and presentation (Feb. 27 – March 3)

M 02/27

W 03/01 >> computer lab: work on final projects
>> library research for final project due

Readings

Browse the urbanarchives.org website (pay particular attention to the 'Projects' section)

Pink, Sarah (2004). "Conversing anthropologically: hypermedia as anthropological text". In *Working Images: Visual Research and Representation in Ethnography*, eds., S. Pink, L. Kürti, and A. I. Alfonso. London: Routledge.

CONCLUSION

Week 10: Theory revisited (March 6 – 10)

M 03/06

W 03/08

Readings

Sontag, Susan (1977). Chapter 7 of *On Photography*.
Review Barthes and Sontag as their ideas apply to your final projects

Wednesday, March 15: exhibition and final project due
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