

## **ArtH 400/525: Theories of Photography**

M/W 10:00am-11:20am

Office hours Monday 12:30-2:30pm, or by appointment

Professor Adair Rounthwaite, Office Art 367, [vadair@uw.edu](mailto:vadair@uw.edu)

### **Course description**

This seminar-style class explores the question of why and how photographs are powerful, and how they have shaped our understanding of what it means to be human in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Beyond simply reflecting or representing the world, photographs in these centuries have embodied hopes and fears about what we as humans are becoming in the contemporary moment. Across discussion of both art and documentary photographs—and the complex territory between those categories—we will analyze how photography has participated in constructing us as political and aesthetic subjects, but also how it charts the limits of our ability to see, experience, and understand. Specific themes in the course will include the relationship between photography and nationalism; its ability to speak about trauma; its work in doing and undoing gendered and raced identities; and its relationship to contemporary art in a conceptual lineage.

### **Learning goals**

- To practice close looking at and discussion of photographs in order to gain an understanding of their visual and semantic richness.
- To familiarize students with foundational texts as well as recent scholarship in the theory of photography, and to help them become conversant in this material.
- To analyze the relationship between photography and the various histories and social movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries in which it has played a pivotal role.
- To consider the boundaries and connections between photography as a tool for contemporary art since the mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century, and various non-art and documentary genres of photography from the modern and contemporary periods.
- To give students the opportunity to develop a full-length research paper based on an original topic of their choice.

### **Grade breakdown**

25% - Take-home essay based on readings, due February 11<sup>th</sup> at 8:30am via Canvas (no hard-copy submission)

5% - Initial abstract and bibliography for final research paper, due Friday, February 1<sup>st</sup> at 8:30am via Canvas. To receive a grade for this component you must meet with me (in office hours or at another time) to discuss your initial topic idea before the abstract is due on February 1<sup>st</sup>.

40% - Final research paper, 10-15 pages double-spaced Times New Roman 12-point font for undergraduates and 15-20 pages for graduate students. Due Friday, March 15<sup>th</sup> at noon via Canvas.

15% - Group-based reading presentations and oral responses (see below). This is a collective grade where the whole group receives the same evaluation unless I determine otherwise in conversation with group members.

15% - Individual in-class participation, including bringing the assigned texts to class, arriving punctually, contributing to class discussion of the readings, and attending office hours if necessary. Includes 1% for first-day reading assignment and post to Canvas, due Monday, January 7<sup>th</sup> at 8:30am.

## Weekly reading and presentation schedule

Please note that readings should be completed BY the date they are listed. So for example, come to class on Monday Jan. 7<sup>th</sup> having read the first part of the Barthes, etc.

We will employ a structure to facilitate discussion of the readings based on your work in ten small groups (3-4 people). You must sign up for a group by the end of the first week. Starting on our fourth class, with the Walter Benjamin text, one group will give a 10-minute presentation on the arguments of the reading and pose questions about it to the class. The members of second group will be first to respond to the questions posed and will also supplement the presenting group's discussion with any additional information they think is key to understanding the text. This means that the work of the two groups is very different: presenters must carefully prepare an effective structured presentation in advance, while responders need to gain strong familiarity with the text beforehand, but then be ready to think on their feet to answer questions and bring up additional points. These contributions will then segue into a discussion of the readings with the whole class. A detailed description of each of these tasks and how to prepare for them will be included in the Assignment section on Canvas. For this work your group will receive a collective grade unless I determine otherwise based on feedback about your collaborative process. Note that not all class days involve reading presentations.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>
M 1/7	Introduction: Photography and Feeling, Part 1	Roland Barthes, <i>Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography</i> . Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982, pages 3-60.
W 1/9	Photography and Feeling, Part 2	Barthes, <i>Camera Lucida</i> , pages 63-119.
M 1/14	Photography and Industry, part 1  Visiting speaker: Don Fels	
W 1/16	Photography and Industry, part 2	Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility," in <i>The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media</i> , ed. Michael Jennings et. al., trans. Edmund Jephcott et. al. Cambridge MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, pages 19-42.  <b>Reading presentation group 1, response group 2</b>
M 1/21	<b>MLK Day – No class</b>	
W 1/23	Conditions of Viewing	Noam Elkott, <i>Artificial Darkness: An Obscure History of Modern Art and Media</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016, pages 1-46.  <b>Reading presentation group 3, response group 4</b>

M 1/28	Photography as Discipline	<p>John Tagg, <i>The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning</i>. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, pages 66-102.</p> <p>Tina Campt, <i>Listening to Images</i>. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2017, pages 49-67, ebook on the UW Library website.</p> <p><b>Reading presentation group 5, response group 6</b></p>
W 1/30	Photography and the Production of Difference, part 1	<p>Tanya Sheehan, <i>Study in Black and White: Photography, Race, Humor</i>. University Park: Penn State University Press, 2018, pages 1-12 and 74-101.</p> <p><b>Reading presentation group 7, response group 8</b></p>
M 2/4	<b>Cancelled due to snow</b>	
W 2/6	Photography and the Production of Difference, part 2	<p>Susan Sontag, "America, Seen Through Photographs, Darkly," in <i>On Photography</i>. New York: Picador, 1977, pages 27-48.</p> <p>Lisa Baird, "Susan Sontag and Diane Arbus: The Siamese Twins of Photographic Art," <i>Women's Studies</i> 37 (2008): 971-986.</p> <p>Kristin Lindgren, "Looking at Difference: Laura Swanson's <i>Anti-Self-Portraits</i>, Diane Arbus's Portraits, and the Viewer's Gaze," <i>Journal of Literary &amp; Cultural Disability Studies</i> 9 3 (2015): 277-294.</p> <p><b>Reading presentation group 2, response group 1</b></p>
	<b>Cancellation due to snow</b>	<b>Take-home essay due 8:30am via Canvas</b>
W 2/13	<b>Prof. Rounthwaite away at CAA conference – No class</b>	Research day for final paper
M 2/18	<b>Presidents' Day – No class</b>	
W 2/20	Photography in American Art of the 1980s and '90s, part 1	<p>Douglas Crimp, "Pictures." <i>October</i> 8 (Spring 1979): 75-88.</p> <p>Hal Foster, <i>The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the end of the Century</i>. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996, pages 127-168.</p> <p><b>Reading presentation group 4, response group 3</b></p>

M 2/25	Photography in American Art of the 1980s and '90s, part 2	Huey Copeland, <i>Bound to Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013, pages 65-105.  <b>Reading presentation group 6, response group 5</b>
W 2/27	Photography, Nationhood, and Modernism, part 1	Roberto Tejada, <i>National Camera: Photography and Mexico's Image Environment</i> . Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, pages 1-94.  <b>Reading presentation group 8, response group 7</b>
M 3/4	Photography, Nationhood, and Modernism, part 2	Anna Pegler-Gordon, <i>In Sight of America: Photography and the Development of U.S. Immigration Policy</i> . Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009, pages 1-66 and 174-191.  <b>OPTIONAL Reading presentation group 1, response group 2</b>
W 3/6	Photography as Witness, part 1	Sharon Sliwinski, <i>Human Rights in Camera</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011, pages 1-33 and 111-138.  OPTIONAL: Martha Rosler, "In, around and Afterthoughts (on Documentary Photography)." In <i>The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography</i> , edited by Richard Bolton, 302-40. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990 [1981].  <b>OPTIONAL Reading presentation group 3, response group 4</b>
M 3/11	Photography as Witness, part 2	Ariella Azoulay, <i>The Civil Contract of Photography</i> . New York: Zone Books, 2008, pages 9-30, 85-135.  <b>OPTIONAL Reading presentation group 5, response group 6</b>
W 3/13	Photography as Witness, part 3	Hervé Guibert, <i>Ghost Image</i> , trans. Robert Bononna. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, pages 9-76.  <b>OPTIONAL Reading presentation group 7, response group 8</b>
		<b>Final research paper due via Canvas at 12:00 noon on Friday, March 15<sup>th</sup></b>

## **Readings**

Some readings will be available as PDFs under the Files section on Canvas. Others are available as ebooks on the UW Library website.

## **Late policy**

I will deduct 5% of your assignment grade for every day, including weekends, that the paper and final group project are late. If a paper is due at 8:30am on Monday, this means that a submission at 4pm that same day is counted as one day late, and a submission the following day is two days late, etc. A group reading presentation or response that is not ready for the day it was assigned cannot be rescheduled and will receive a 0.

## **Technology policy**

Your computer or tablet will be an important tool for your work for the class. Please silence your cell phones. Off-topic use of cell phones, or distracting yourself, other students and me through extracurricular internet use on your laptop, will lead to a reduced participation grade.

## **Accommodation**

I look forward to working with students who may need learning accommodations (for the official School of Art policy, see below). If you have a letter from Disability Resources for Students, or concerning travel for varsity sports, please give it to me within one week of the start of class (i.e. by Thursday, October 11<sup>th</sup>). I encourage students not registered with DRS but who regularly experience challenges excelling in class to investigate DRS services.

## **Anti-discrimination**

As your instructor I am committed to making our classroom a space without discrimination, where each one of you feels comfortable expressing yourself, and equally, is willing to listen to your peers express themselves. If discrimination does arise, I invite you to discuss it with me and we can make a plan for how to rectify it. Being committed to anti-discrimination doesn't mean that you need to be nervous about saying the "wrong" thing. Rather, it's a commitment to process, in which all of us agree to remain generous and self-reflexive, and to help each other out in the collective work of establishing a positive group dynamic. See below for the School of Art's official Equal Opportunity policy.

## **University of Washington School of Art Policies and Procedures**

### **Information for Students**

#### Equal Opportunity

The School of Art reaffirms its policy of equal opportunity regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, disability, or status as a disabled veteran or Vietnam-era veteran in accordance with UW policy and applicable federal and state statutes and regulations.

#### Disability Accommodation

- If you would like to request academic accommodations due to a disability, please contact Disabled Student Services, 448 Schmitz, (206) 543-8924 (V/TTY) or [uwdss@u.washington.edu](mailto:uwdss@u.washington.edu).

- If you have a letter from Disabled Student Services indicating you have a disability that requires academic accommodation, please present the letter to me so we can discuss the accommodations you might need for the class.

#### Participation Policy

- Absences from class prevent participation and may negatively affect grades.
- If you miss class due to illness or emergencies immediately notify your instructor and insure that all missed assignments and exams are completed.

#### Plagiarism

- Plagiarism is defined as using in your own work the creations, ideas, words, inventions, or work of someone else without formally acknowledging them through the use of quotation marks, footnotes, bibliography, or other reference.
- Please check with your instructor if you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism.
- Instances of plagiarism will be referred to the Vice Provost/Special Asst to the President for Student Relations and may lead to disciplinary action.

#### Incomplete Grades an incomplete is given only when you:

- Have been in attendance and done satisfactory work through the eighth week of the quarter.
- Have furnished satisfactory proof to the instructor that the work cannot be completed because of illness or other circumstances beyond your control.

#### Concerns about a course, an instructor, or a teaching assistant

- Talk with the instructor in charge of the class as soon as possible.
- If you are not comfortable talking with the instructor or are not satisfied with the response that you receive, you may contact the Director of Advising and Student Services, Judith Clark, Art 104, 206-543-0646
- If you are not satisfied with the response that you receive you may contact the Chair of the School of Art, Christopher Ozubko, 102 Art.

#### Examination Schedule

- Students are required to take exams as scheduled.
- Exceptions are granted in cases of documented emergencies and must be approved by instructor.

#### Grade Appeal Procedure If you are concerned that the grade you received for a class is incorrect:

- Contact the instructor who issued the grade and discuss the matter with her/him.
- If not resolved to your satisfaction make an appointment with the Director of Academic Advising and Student Services, Judith Clark, 104 Art, 543-0646.
- If necessary submit a written appeal to the Director of the School of Art who will take the matter under advisement and call a faculty committee to review the student's course work and make a final determination concerning the grade dispute.

#### Materials Fees

- All art and art history classes have materials fees that are billed on your tuition statement. Information is available in 104 Art.
- If you drop a class in the first five days of the quarter, the fee is automatically removed from the quarterly billing.
- If you drop after the first five days (and before using any class materials) you must petition for a refund. Studio Art Fee Refund Petitions are available in 102 Art.
- The School of Art cannot process any petitions received after noon on the last day of the quarter.

#### Building Use Policy

- For current Art Building hours, see the website of the School of Art.
- Students wishing to work in the building after hours can obtain a key and building pass in 102 Art.

- For the safety of our students, the campus police frequently monitor the facility. Individuals found without a pass may be asked to leave the building.
- All students working after hours in the studios and classrooms must maintain quiet, refrain from tampering with the work of others, and follow all regulations established by the faculty for each classroom/studio.
- Students who are not enrolled in classes for the quarter may not use the facilities, classrooms or studios in the School of Art.
- All students taking studio classes are expected to follow faculty direction in terms of keeping classrooms clean, safe, and workable for themselves and others.

#### Copy Write Policy

The SoA regularly displays works of art that students create in class, images of student works, and images of students participating in SoA activities. We do this to promote our students, their work and the School, and the ways we display student works and related images vary widely. Use of such images is traditional among all art schools and we assume that by participating in UW SoA classes and activities students have no objection. However, if you do have concerns about these image uses, please contact Academic Advising and Student Services (206-543-0646 or [uaskart@u.washington.edu](mailto:uaskart@u.washington.edu)).