

Syllabus: Fall 2010

Photography 305 - Magic Box Revolutions: a social history of photography from 1839 to the present

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The course will present a social history of photography in its broad sweep.

Among all the technological achievements in recorded history only a handful have reached across society to touch almost every aspect of human endeavor. This handful includes writing and number systems, the mass produced book, the dynamo, digital computers, and photography. Photography is not a single invention, but an evolution and merging of technical ideas that by 1839 made what we know as photography possible, and its effects were immediate and far-reaching in scope. It was revolutionary in every sense, altering our social and cultural landscapes in profound and lasting ways. Many of the little revolutions it set in motion have yet to achieve their final form, since they are continuing at a pace and are continuing to alter our lives, including how we record both our personal and collective memories, how we communicate with one another, how we express ourselves artistically, and most particularly how we see and understand the world of the infinitely small and infinitely large. This course will attempt to come to grips with some of the more important implications for our on-going human project.

#### Course Outline:

Part 1: the technologies: light and optics, chemistry, digital recording.

Part 2: frozen moments, memory making, and virtual travel

Part 3: journalists, artists, and other troublemakers

Part 4: truth and fiction in photography; you've been "PhotoShopped"

Part 5: photography and science, including why there are no photos yet that are anyway helpful to some religions.

Part 6: memory in motion; motion pictures, computers, and algorithms.

Term project: Select two of the following (one of them must be completed by the 6<sup>th</sup> week of class, the other by the 12<sup>th</sup> week of class):

- Write a 5-page paper with illustrations on the evolution of the camera from camera obscura to digital camera, highlighting at least five of the most important technical (mechanical, chemical, scientific) innovations.
- Prepare a ten-minute talk with PowerPoint slides on topic of your choice that illuminates the role of photography in reporting news events or documenting the human condition. To be presented in class.
- Prepare a ten-minute talk with PowerPoint slides on a photographer or art photography movement that captures your interest. To be presented to the class.
- Write a five-page paper on an aspect of photography or a particular photograph(or group of photographs) that has profoundly changed how we look at the world around us or understand our place in the cosmos.
- Photography in the digital age and Photoshop: write a 5-page paper discussing truth and fiction in photography, and how our perceptions of what is true and what isn't have changed. Does it matter? If so, how and why does it matter? Ethics do matter, so where do we draw the line between what is possible and what is ethical? Who makes that distinction?

There will be two exams, a midterm and a final. These will be mostly multiple-choice exams with perhaps a fill-in-the-blank question here and there.

Attendance: Because there is no textbook for this course it is imperative that you attend the lectures. For this reason attendance will be part of your grade, about 10 percent. I will not call roll, however. There will be a sign-in sheet on the table for every class meeting. Be sure you sign in upon arrival to class. These will be collected and attendance recorded. You can miss only two class meetings for any reason without penalty. If you miss either the midterm or final there will be no make up exams unless you have made prior arrangements.

Grading: Grades will be based on total point accumulation for the term. The two exams will comprise about 45 percent of the grade. The term projects will comprise another 45 percent of the grade. Attendance makes up the remaining 10 percent.

Note: I may from time to time offer opportunities for extra credit.

Web Site [www.exhumanitas.com](http://www.exhumanitas.com)

I have established a website that provides information about the courses I teach and other information. Importantly, a copy of this syllabus is available online there in PDF format.

Administrative dates:

First day of classes: Monday, August 30, 2010

Last day to add & drop: September 3 (in person), September 5 (online), 2010

Labor Day: September 6, 2010

Last day for grade option changes: November 4, 2010

Last day to withdraw: November 4, 2010

Thanksgiving holiday: November 25 - 26, 2010

Last day of classes: December 12, 2010

Final Exams Begin: December 13, 2010

Photography Department Closes: 12:00 noon, Friday, December 17, 2010