

# **K10.0649 Writing Seminar II**

## **Image as Argument: Writing About Photography**

**Instructor: Rebecca Wisor**

**Spring 2008**

**Mon/Wed 11-12:15**

**Office:** 715 Broadway, Room 431

**Office Hours:** Wed 10-11am and by appt.

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### **Course Description**

In *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf refers to photographs as “statement[s] of fact addressed to the eye.” Because of their unique claim to realistic representation, photographs are a potent form of polemic at work in our everyday world. In the earlier part of the course, you will read the work of theorists including Roland Barthes, John Berger, and Susan Sontag, who will guide your thinking about how the photograph functions, how photographs can be used to advance argument, the ethical implications surrounding photography, and the kinds of cultural work that photography performs. These issues, which you will explore through class discussion and writing assignments, will form the backdrop for your independent research project.

Independent research, course readings, class discussion, group work, and individual conferences will help you refine the scope of your inquiry and explore your subject in greater depth; class time will be devoted to discussions, presentations, group work, and development of research skills.

### **Required Texts (available at NYU Bookstore)**

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

Susan Sontag, *On Photography* and *Regarding the Pain of Others*

Additional reading materials are available online and on reserve at Bobst Library, Lower Level 2.

### **Classroom Policies and Requirements**

A seminar is only as successful as its members are prepared: students are expected to attend each seminar, arriving on time and having read and prepared all assignments due on that day. Please let me know via email if you are unable to attend class, or if you anticipate having to take an extended absence during the semester. More than three unexcused absences may result in a lowered grade for the course. All assignments should be formatted as Word documents and submitted via email on the dates designated on the schedule below.

### **Grading**

Your grade for the course will be based on three essays (each worth 15% of your final grade), a presentation (worth 10% of your final grade), a research paper (worth 40% of your final grade), and your active participation in seminar discussions and group work

(5% of your final grade). The grade you receive on your research paper will be determined by the overall quality of the finished product and your sustained efforts to develop and revise the paper.

### **Presentations**

Each student is required to deliver one 15-20 minute presentation during the course of the semester on a particular photographer; these presentations frequently will accompany class discussions on visual theory. While each presentation should include brief background information on the photographer, its primary focus should be that of the photographer's work itself; accordingly, you should be prepared to discuss and analyze the content and significance of a series of his or her images in relation to the ideas of the visual theorist/s who have been assigned for that day's class, or in the most recent class. You should prepare a handout for each member of the class that includes photocopies of the images that you will be discussing and questions for further discussion.

### **The Research Paper**

A 10-15 page paper in which you explore the role of photography, or of a particular photographer, in shaping public outlook or policy on a specific war, conflict, or social issue, past or present. The topic should be narrow enough to allow for significant depth in your research and discussion. The specific requirements for this paper will be discussed throughout the semester.

### **Course Schedule**

Wed, Jan 23	Introduction
Mon, Jan 28	<i>Reading a Photograph</i> John Berger, "Understanding a Photograph" (in <i>Selected Essays</i> ) and pages 85-98 of "Appearances" (in <i>Another Way of Telling</i> )
Wed, Jan 30	Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message" (in <i>Image-Music-Text</i> ) <b>Presentation 1</b>
Mon, Feb 4	Barthes, <i>Camera Lucida</i> <b>Presentation 2</b>
Wed, Feb 6	Susan Sontag, "In Plato's Cave," (in <i>On Photography</i> ) <b>Presentation 3</b>
Mon, Feb 11	Sontag, "The Image-World" (in <i>On Photography</i> ) and Berger, "Uses of Photography" (in <i>About Looking</i> ) <b>Presentation 4</b>
Wed, Feb 13	<b>Workshop Essay 1</b>

- Mon, Feb 18      **NO CLASS---President's Day**
- Wed, Feb 20      **Essay 1 due**
- Ethics and Photographic Authenticity*  
Paul Martin Lester, "Picture Manipulations" (in *Photojournalism: An Ethical Approach*, available at <http://commfaculty.fullerton.edu/lester/writings/pjethics.html>) and Hany Farid, "Photo Tampering throughout History" (available at <http://www.cs.dartmouth.edu/farid/research/digitaltampering>)
- Presentation 5**
- Mon, Feb 25      Caroline Brothers, "Casualties and the Nature of Photographic Evidence" (in *War and Photography*)
- Presentation 6**
- Wed, Feb 27      W.J.T. Mitchell, "The Photographic Essay: Four Case Studies" (in *Picture Theory*)
- Presentation 4**  
**Presentation 5**
- Mon, Mar 3      Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*
- Presentation 6**
- Wed, Mar 5      Lester, "Victims of Violence" (in *Photojournalism: An Ethical Approach*, at <http://commfaculty.fullerton.edu/lester/writings/pjethics.html>)
- Presentation 7**
- Mon, Mar 10      **Workshop essay 2**
- Wed, Mar 12      *Embedded Journalism, Media Censorship, and Digital Photography*  
Embedded Journalism: "War Stories" (at [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/jan-june03/embeds\\_04-01.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/jan-june03/embeds_04-01.html)) and "The Media's War" (at [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/jan-june03/embed\\_4-21.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/jan-june03/embed_4-21.html))
- Presentation 8**  
**Presentation 9**
- Mon, Mar 17      **SPRING RECESS: NO CLASS**
- Wed, Mar 19      **SPRING RECESS: NO CLASS**
- Mon, Mar 24      **Essay 2 due.**

Screening of Esteban Uyarra's *War Feels Like War*

Wed, Mar 26

**Research Topic due.**

Lester, "Military Censorship of Photographs" (at <http://commfaculty.fullerton.edu/lester/writings/military.html>), James Rainey, "Unseen Pictures, Untold Stories" (at <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-iraqphoto21may21,0,2732182.story?coll=la-home-headlines>) and Pat Arnow, "From Self-Censorship to Official Censorship" (at [www.fair.org/index.php?page=3095](http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=3095)).

***Presentation 10***

***Presentation 11***

Mon, Mar 31

***Presentation 12***

***Presentation 13***

Wed, Apr 2

Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others" (available via Proquest)

***Presentation 14***

***Presentation 15***

Mon, Apr 7

**Workshop essay 3**

Wed, Apr 9

Research skills.

Mon, Apr 14

**Essay 3 due**

Wed, Apr 16

**Research paper outline and list of sources due**

Mon, Apr 21

**Workshop rough draft 1**

Wed, Apr 23

**Workshop rough draft 2**

Mon, Apr 28

**Workshop rough draft 3**

Wed, Apr 30

**Workshop rough draft 4**

Mon, May 5

**Last class---Research paper due**