

Visual and Cultural Studies

Spring 2009

Photographs: Descriptive Analysis

In preparation for our next stage of discussion, I asked you to collect four photographs:

1. Found ("vernacular") photograph — snapshot taken by someone you don't know and about which you know nothing. Not digital. The idea is to use this as an example of a "mute object". Obsolescence will also be an issue here.
2. "Personal" photograph — another snapshot (not digital) that has some personal significance but that was taken by someone else. Could be a family photo, portrait, document of a trip with friends, etc.
3. A photo that you've taken of anything you like—digital or analog.
4. "Public" photo -- a photo taken by someone else that is publicly available (museum, media, archives, etc.)—digital or analog.

First Stage: Found and Personal Photographs

To extend our discussion of image, object, perception, and meaning, I'd like you to engage in a bit of pre-theoretical, descriptive analysis of the first two photos.

Many of you have thought and read a lot about photography. Some of you have not. So the point here is, in a sense, to go back to the first stages of your encounter with these photos.

What do you see when you look at the **found** photograph? What was it that caused you to choose this one? Where were you when you found it? How does it differ from your **personal** photograph, both in terms of the material object itself and what you see in these images?

Try to observe as much as you can of the objects, the images, and your experience of each one. Keep in mind that this exercise is a kind of "phenomenology of the photograph" and, therefore, a descriptive process. Soon enough we'll be using theoretical tools to conceptualize and critically examine the experience of looking and interpreting. But, for now, let's bracket our preconceptions in order to trigger a different kind of encounter with the photographic object.

One or two pages should be sufficient. I want you to post your observations to the blog as a **separate post**, not a comment to an existing post. This will make it easier for the rest of us to comment on what you've written. If you can scan and upload your image to the blog post, all the better.

This assignment is part of the **participation** component of the course and will not be given a letter grade. Let me know if you have questions or need more information.

Deadline for Posting: Noon, 16 Feb 09