

**The Lively Arts
Fall Semester 2007
Topic Guide**

Topic #1

September 5, 2007

Photography

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Photography has become deceptively simple. In the early years of the medium's existence, creating a photographic image was elaborate and time-consuming. More recent technical developments allow us to use cameras that focus and calculate correct exposures automatically, and then produce prints instantaneously. Unfortunately, the great ease with which photographs can now be made has allowed us to take many aspects of photography for granted, and has let us lose sight of what a photograph really is.

A photograph is a selection and a translation: a selection of a part of the world in which we exist (three-dimensionally and with continuous passing of time), and a translation of that selection into a two-dimensional, suspended fragment. In order to understand photography, we have to consider — each time we look at a photograph — what is being selected, and how it is being translated.

When we speak, we are using verbal language to put our thoughts or feelings into a form, which allows communication. A language is thus a vehicle or means of translation. Photography is also a language. To be able to utilize or appreciate the medium of photography, or to better comprehend its possibilities and limitations, we need to examine it, learn about it, and practice it as we would any other language.

To begin, consider these questions:

- What are the elements of language?
- What equivalents exist in a visual language to those of a verbal or written one?
- For what different purposes is language used?
- What role does photography play in your life?
- What are the different contexts in which you see photographs?
- How do these different contexts affect our understanding of the images?
- In what ways do human vision and camera vision differ?
- Do you believe that pictures are true or objective? Why – why not?
- How do photographs influence our understanding of the world?

REMINDERS:

- **The Arts Genealogy Project is due on September 19, 2007**
- **The first five OWL assignments are available. Please refer to your syllabus for login instructions. These are due at 5:00 p.m. on October 10, 2007.**
- **An extra credit opportunity is coming up on September 23rd, 2007 at 2:00 p.m. Ask your teacher for more information.**