

**The Lively Arts
Fall Semester 2009
Topic Guide**

Topic #3

September 23, 2009

Photography

Stephen Petegorsky

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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 the photographer has selected, and how the photographer or editor has translated the photograph's subject.

When we speak, we are using verbal language to put our thoughts or feelings into a form that 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.

Important topics to consider (during tonight's lecture and on OWL):

- Creative composition
- The denotation and connotation of a photograph
- Differences between camera vision and human vision and their implications

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?
- What is the difference between the denotation and the connotation in a photograph?
- Do you believe that pictures are true or objective? Why – why not?
- In what ways can a camera be misleading?
- How do photographs influence our understanding of the world?

Reminders:

- Calendar Correction: The Orquestra de São Paulo concert begins at **7 pm**
- Arts Genealogy is due in sections the week of September 28
- Required Event: The Minox and the Big Shot: Andy Warhol's Photography (1973-86) opens today
- Reception tonight 5-8 pm, University Gallery
- Quiz #2 in lecture, September 30