



## **Picturing Nature: Photography and Theory**

Duke Marine Laboratory  
Summer Session I  
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“One can do gymnastics with perspective.” – Vilém Flusser

### **Course Synopsis**

In this course, students will develop a solid foundation in visual theory and environmental theory, responding through the practice of photography. Part of class will be devoted to discussing readings drawn from visual theory, cultural studies, media studies, and the environmental humanities. Since it will be taught at the Duke Marine Laboratory, the second part of class will involve fieldtrips to local sites (Carson Estuary, shoreline, museum, labs, etc.) where students will respond to course readings through writing and taking photographs. We will engage in weekly peer-review of each other’s photographs and writings, graded on completion and how students see concepts or themes from the week’s readings informing their work. Other assignments will include short writings, two essays, and an online portfolio of the student’s photographs with an accompanying written statement. \*\*Students will be expected to bring a camera of their choice for use in class, which can be their own or one borrowed from Duke.

### **Required Texts**

Liz Wells, ed., *The Photography Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2002)  
William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: Norton, 1995)

## **Assignments**

- (10%) Attendance/Participation
- (10%) Presentation on a photographer's work
- (10%) Blog postings/writing assignments
- (20%) Essay #1 (5 pages)
- (20%) Essay #2 (5 pages)
- (30%) Final portfolio and critical statement

## **Grading Scale**

A = 90-100%, B = 80-89%, C = 70-79%, D = 60-69%, F = < 59%

## **Attendance policy and participation**

The course meets 10 days total, so students earn 10% of their attendance and participation grade per class. Students should come to class prepared and on time; if it is clear that the student has not done the reading or prepared their assignment, they will lose participation points. Students are allowed one free excused absence (includes morning + afternoon). Tardiness of more than 10 minutes will result in half-credit for attendance that morning or afternoon.

## **Presentation on a photographer's work**

Students will choose a photographer to introduce to the class, and give a 15-minute presentation (with images via powerpoint, or another digital means). The presentation should (1) give historical/cultural context of that particular photographer and their work and (2) relate the photographer's work to concepts or themes discussed in class. A list of possible photographers will be circulated on the first day of class.

## **Blog postings/Writing exercises**

Students will post photographs and 1-page writing assignments on the class blog for discussion and peer review. These are low-stakes assignments that will help students reflect on the relationship between readings, broader cultural issues, the DUMML environment, and their own experiences. For full-credit, writing assignments will demonstrate thoughtful engagement with the writing prompt.

## **Critical essays**

Students will write two essays of 5-pages each. The first essay will engage course readings. The second essay will be on a photographer's work (the one they gave a presentation on) and refer to at least two course readings. Each essay will be worth 20% of the student's grade, and the instructor will provide "feed-forward" recommendations.

## **Final portfolio and critical statement**

Students will curate a digital portfolio of their photographs from the course, which they will share on the last day of class, using a service such as Wordpress. This portfolio should feature a selection of approximately 10-15 photographs, taken from any field trip during the course. The student will write a "critical statement" to accompany the photographs, which can be written as one document or divided into sections. The statement should be at least 2,000 words, and discuss how their photographs "picture nature." Students should cite at least four course readings.

## **Academic Integrity**

Students must abide by the Duke University honor code. Please visit:

<http://integrity.duke.edu/ugrad/iindex.html> where you can find detailed descriptions of the code.

Avoiding Plagiarism: <http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism/>

## **Citing Sources**

<http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/>,

<http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism/cite/index.html>

## **Course Schedule**

	<b>Reading Due</b>	<b>Assignments (Field Trips TBA)</b>
<b>Day 1: Intro</b>	<i>The Photography Reader</i> , Ch. 1, 2 <i>Uncommon Ground</i> , p. 23-56	
<b>Day 2: Aura &amp; Reproducibility</b>	<i>The Photography Reader</i> , Ch. 3, 4, 5 <i>Uncommon Ground</i> , p. 69-90	
<b>Day 3: Eye</b>	<i>The Photography Reader</i> , Ch. 8-11 <i>Uncommon Ground</i> , p. 91-113	<b>Essay #1 Due</b>
<b>Day 4: Codes</b>	<i>The Photography Reader</i> , Ch. 12-14 <i>Uncommon Ground</i> , p. 114-131	
<b>Day 5: Fetish</b>	<i>The Photography Reader</i> , Ch. 15-16 <i>Uncommon Ground</i> , p. 132-159	<b>Photographer Presentations</b>
<b>Day 6: Digital</b>	<i>The Photography Reader</i> , Ch. 20-23 <i>Uncommon Ground</i> , p. 409-425	
<b>Day 7: Documentary</b>	<i>The Photography Reader</i> , Ch. 24, 25 <i>Uncommon Ground</i> , p. 298-320	<b>Essay #2 Due</b>
<b>Day 8: Gaze</b>	<i>The Photography Reader</i> , Ch. 30, 33 <i>Uncommon Ground</i> , p. 321-366	
<b>Day 9: Archive</b>	<i>The Photography Reader</i> , Ch. 40-42 <i>Uncommon Ground</i> , p. 447-459	
<b>Day 10: Final</b>	Course wrap-up	<b>Portfolio presentations</b>