Contemporary Photography
Proposal for a 200-level course without student prerequisites.

Andrés Mario Zervigón
Department of Art History
60 College Ave
zervigon@rci.rutgers.edu

Course Description:
Not long ago I asked Anthony Aziz why he and his partner Sammy Cucher had abandoned their famous photography practice for—of all things—carpet design. His answer was simple: “Everything in photography has already been done.” The advent of digital technologies, he clarified, may have extended photography’s life, but the medium’s contemporary art practice is dead. Could Aziz be right? Over the last three decades photography managed to become a fully recognized art form. For better or worse it entered galleries, museums, libraries and private collections as a highly valuable object. Fundamental to this advent has been the expectation that a successful photograph bears a snappy idea or the personal expression and creativity of its maker. The medium, therefore, seems to have entered the realm of fine arts on the same basis as painting, sculpture and drawing. What, then, has this seemingly traditional aesthetic transformation done to contemporary photography? Could Anthony Aziz be correct in asserting that photo as art has become exhausted in the process? If so, does photography’s significance now lie in the exploding realms of internet sharing, journalism, and everyday vernacular usages?

This course will explore a broad range of contemporary photographs from around the world and ask what typifies the medium’s aesthetic practice and everyday popularity. Can inventive new trends be identified or is photography forever replaying its history in new technical clothing? What does it mean to create, interpret, collect, catalogue, exhibit, and publish photographic images in the last twenty years? What questions can we ask about contemporary photography as an art, science, technology, social practice, communications medium, and cultural discourse?

With these questions in mind, we will pay particular attention to the impact of digital technologies on the medium. How has Photoshop, for example, changed our expectations about a photograph’s relationship to the reality it generally purports to represent? Has the radical democratization of photography through cell phone cameras and Facebook contributed to new aesthetic and cultural trends such as so-called viral photography? Among other things, we will explore our personal use of photographs to seek answers for such questions.

Learning Goals:
By the end of this course all students should be able to:
1.) with an informed point of view, describe the current state of photography as art and as a medium of information,
2.) identify significant works of contemporary art photography,
3.) understand some of the significant aesthetic, cultural, political, and economic trends that contribute to the subject matter and form of contemporary photography as both an object and a practice.

Requirements and Grading:
- Attendance at all lectures and participation in all discussions: 10%
- Mid-term examination: 25%
- One two-page paper juxtaposing two contemporary photographs of your choice (to be approved by me) at a local New Jersey or New York art gallery or museum: 10%
- One five-page paper focusing on one of those two photographs using at least three published sources for your research. These sources can include reviews, newspaper reports, scholarly articles, and book chapters. The final draft will be submitted in class: 25%
- Final examination: 30%

All readings and powerpoint presentations will be posted on Sakai.

Week 1
Introduction: The rise of contemporary photography from the new document in the 1960s to conceptual practices in the 1970s.
Countries covered: US, Switzerland.

Week 2
The “Pictures Generation” and the culture wars: photography from 1975-1989.
Countries covered: US, UK.

Week 3
The photography of intimacy and “photo therapy,” & the advent of digital imaging: photography from the 1980s into the 1990s.
Countries covered: US, UK, Germany, Netherlands, France.

**Week 4**

**Vernacular Photographies**


**Week 5**

**The new large format photography.**

Countries covered: Canada, Germany, US, Netherlands, Finland, Japan, South Africa

  - Midterm Exam

**Week 6**

**The “documentary turn.”**

Countries covered: US, UK, South Africa, Nigeria, Netherlands, Finland, Russia, Japan, Australia

- Sarah Pickering and Anne-Celine Jaeger, “Interview: They are Documentary of Staged Events,” *Foam Magazine* 16, 134.

**Week 7**

**Photojournalism and Viral New Photography.**
Week 8
The invented document, staged photographs, and fantastic illusion.
Countries covered: Netherlands, Korea, US, Japan, Germany, Australia, Vietnam, Russia, Latvia
- Michael Fried, “Without a Trace” [on Thomas Demand], Artforum (March 2005), pp. 199-203, 252.
- Tracy Moffatt, laudanum (Ostfilden, Germany: Cantz, 1999), selections.

Week 9
The new narrative photography and the cinematic photo.
Countries covered: US, Canada, Iran, Argentina, UK, Germany, Netherlands, France, Israel, Lebanon

Week 10
Digital photography in extremis.
Countries covered: US, UK, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, Finland, Sweden, Italy, Spain, South Africa
- Peter Plagens, “Photoids. The New Real,” Art in America (February 2009), 67-72.

Week 11
Abstract photography.
Countries covered: US, UK, Japan, Germany, Nigeria
Week 12
Self-Construction and the new street photography after the algorithm.
Countries covered: Japan, South Africa, Mozambique, Nigeria, Central African Republic, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mali, Senegal, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Indonesia, Australia, Papua New Guinea
  - Second paper due in class

Week 13
Photojournalism in the new century and viral photography.
Countries covered: US, UK, Iraq, Afghanistan, Brazil, Republic of Congo, South Africa
- Mary Panzer, “Picturing the Iraq War Veterans,” Aperture (Summer 2008)

Week 14
The photographic future.
Countries covered: US, Spain, UK, Japan, Germany

Final Exam