# The 'If a Picture Paints a Thousand Words' Assignment

**Introduction**

An introduction on the history of and contemporary photography and the basics of semiotics.

Deals with analyzing and looking at 'photography' and finding the 'thousand words' to describe a photo and borrowing its composition and color scheme for typographical exercises.

**Educational Aims**

1. Developing ways of looking, giving an understanding of the basics of semiotics, doing research on 'when/why' these images have been made, awareness of good composition in photography, a deeper understanding in 'the history of photography and the contemporary photography practice'.
2. Enhancing writing skills, learning to describe images, from being very precise to being very personal in interpretation based on analyzing principles.
3. The publication form is used to understand the order of giving information, from cover to content pages, to analyzing studies (composition/color/atmosphere), to articles and 'end conclusion'.
4. Typography skills

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### April

**Week 01**
- **Monday, 04.02.12**
  - Introduction / On Photography
  - Researching photographers visit to Arts Library
- **Wednesday, 04.04.12**
  - Choice of photographers

**Week 02**
- **Monday, 04.09.12**
  - Intro on Semiotics
- **Wednesday, 04.11.12**
  - Typographic research
  - First text assignment

**Week 03**
- **Monday, 04.16.12**
  - Ways of looking/seeing
- **Wednesday, 04.18.12**
  - Typographic research
  - Second text assignment

### May

**Week 05**
- **Monday, 05.07.12**
  - Typographic research / InDesign exercises
  - Essays
- **Wednesday, 05.09.12**
  - Essays

**Week 06**
- **Monday, 05.14.12**
  - Critique
- **Wednesday, 05.16.12**
  - Typographic research
  - First photography assignment

**Week 07**
- **Monday, 05.21.12**
  - Designing publication
  - InDesign exercises
- **Wednesday, 05.23.12**
  - Designing publication

**Week 08**
- **Monday, 05.28.12**
  - Critique / InDesign exercises
  - Essays
- **Wednesday, 05.30.12**
  - Critique / InDesign exercises

### June

**Week 10**
- **Monday, 06.04.12**
  - Final critique
  - InDesign exercises
- **Wednesday, 06.06.12**
  - Final critique
  - InDesign exercises

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INTRODUCTION:

2 slide shows are presented, the first one covering the history of photography showing most of the work of photographers mentioned in SUSAN SONTAG'S ON PHOTOGRAPHY. Emphasizing on the 'confusion' of this invention and the constant battle between capturing reality and the pictorial aspect, photo journalism or art, and anything in between.

The second one shows a selection of photographers we can find in museums nowadays, besides the huge leap, it shows that the same discussion is still existing, connections are made between generations of photographers, the broadness of the landscape of contemporary photography is shown.

A third slide show will emphasize ways of looking and 'recognition', what does this photograph remind us of, is the composition 'borrowed', is it 'familiar', in what context of other images do we see this particular image.

[shown is a small scene out of JIM JARMUSH' movie MYSTERY TRAIN (1989) where an image of Elvis is put next to several other images.]

The students are asked to select duo's of images (one from the Sontag series next to one contemporary) of their interest, in the presentation we look at an overall preference in genre, we discuss the possibility of research.

a. CHOICE OF IMAGES + MATCHING TYPEFACES

One set of photographs is chosen, by describing the atmosphere of the photographs in characteristics - fitting typefaces are found to fit the photographs based on those characteristics. Important to acknowledge is: when are the photographs made (date), the 'events' of importance, what is the genre, what is the subject matter, etc.

needed: A GOOD QUALITY SCAN of the images chosen. Presentation on tabloid sized paper!

b. COMPOSITION + COLOR - several INFO GRAPHICS

Through info graphics the student needs to give information on the COMPOSITION of the photographs (find a method - source: Tufte's info graphics, etc.) information on 'angles', background, foreground, horizon, light fall etc. should be discussed. The student gives an insight on color use, not only showing the separate colors, but identifying them, categorizing them, and attaching them to the subject matter of the photographs.

Presentation on tabloid sized paper

c. THE VISUAL CONTEXT / COMPARISON

Find several images that come to mind when looking at your photograph, almost as if you wanna recreate a visual context, those images could be related in form, in content, in atmosphere, in subject matter etc.

b. LIST OF NOUNS (denotation) + and DESCRIPTIVE SENTENCES (connotation)

The student sums up every object he/she sees on the photographs, aim is to be as complete as possible, what is visible on the images (these 'facts' in semiotics are called SIGNS!) The second exercise is a more descriptive way of describing, mostly combined to things we feel and how we interpret given 'signs', things based on opinions and values. Start with descriptions and 'actions' of the chosen NOUNS. In the end you will have 2 layers of information. List of nouns + descriptive sentences.

Treat them as such: [shown is a small scene out of JACQUELYN MOONROSES' movie PROOF (1991) where a blind photographer needs his photographs to be described to him]

d. THE ESSAYS

Based on the knowledge that you have gained on the photographers, their work and the particular photographs you are asked to write two essays. Think about how you would describe this image to a blind person. Describe the experience of looking at this image in words, think about all the other things that go through your mind when looking at this photograph. This could also be a lot of good questions that will go through your mind when looking at it.

(attempts are being made to find someone from the English department to help you with it, in the form of a lecture with writing exercises).

e. THE PUBLICATION

Compile all your exercises and information in a publication. Think about the order of the information, cover, content pages, intro/editorial pages, info graphics, articles, etc.

If you have done it right, with the publication itself you have designed an identity environment for your photograph, specifics on binding, format, and other parameters, will be discussed!

grading: You are graded on your amount of research, the ability to transform your research into clear and visually attractive designs, your writing skills, your analyzing skills and the ability to compile all that in a publication that feels logical as a design environment for your specific photograph.

R.B. you need to be present, show interest, be active and present in group discussions and visit lectures, exhibitions and anything else you need in order to gain knowledge.

advice: find a working method from beginning to start - design your 'sketchbook', use a tabloid format document in Design with specific borders. Keep using the same 1 typefaces, make use of headings in the 'right' typography, present on tabloids that will work as a series. Most importantly... HAVE FUN WITH IT ahah!!

ADvised LITERATURE and SOURCE BOOKS:

----- ON PHOTOGRAPHY - Susan Sontag 1973 picador isbn 0-312-42009-9

THE PHOTOGRAPHy READER - edited by Liz Wells 2003 routledge isbn 0-415-24660-1

anything by John Berger, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin

ENVISIONING INFORMATION by Edward TUFTE

STOP STEALING SHEEP and find out how type works by Erik Spiekerman

ELEMENTS OF TYPOGRAPHY by Robert BRINGHURST