Photography Landscape and Place:
The Visual Anthropology of Utah
HON 3820 - ML 2008 - Wednesdays 6-8pm
Note: includes intensive workshop at Rio Mesa during Fall Break October 12-16

Trudi Smith and Monty Paret

Course Description
In this class we will explore the terrain of photographic practices in Utah. We will tease apart our assumptions about photography and land use by looking at photographic archives, artist practices that engage photography, and contemporary surveillance projects. Grounded in interdisciplinary forms of inquiry, this class draws social science, art theory and art practice into a setting to explore and build a visual literacy for the 21st century. This investigation will be guided by a mix of readings, lecture and class discussion, fieldtrips, fieldwork, and through hands-on exploration of images and image-making. Through written assignments and through workshopping the photographs we make, students will be expected to engage with and interpret the course readings and lectures and apply the concepts to their own practice of photography.

We will apply our inquiry to two field sites: the Great Salt Lake region and the University’s Rio Mesa Field Station in southeastern Utah. In these field sites we will experiment and test practices of vision and practices of photography. A central component of the course will be a week-long field school at the Rio Mesa Field Station, which will become a site for deep investigation of and conversations about photography, practices of vision as a way to produce critical visual literacy.

Students will gain experience in the practice of photography and will be able to apply their knowledge of photography to their own practice of taking pictures. This class will also provide students with an introduction to researching historical visual archival collections. Students will engage these collections in their own practice in the local community and will develop a greater understanding of the history and construction of (photography in) Utah.
Photography Landscape and Place:  
The Visual Anthropology of Utah

PART I (Sept – Sept) Monty  
Introducing Land, Land Use and Representation

Students are introduced to key concepts of land, landscape and land use from varied perspectives of cultural studies, geography, art history and anthropology, with special focus on the Great Salt Lake region, land art in Utah and the Center for Land Use Interpretation in Wendover, UT

PART II (Sept – mid Oct) Trudi  
Photography, Landscape and the Photographic Archive:

Includes a five-day intensive workshop Oct 12-16 at the U's Rio Mesa field station over Fall Break.

Students learn about photographic representation, the photographic archive and the process of re-photography as an analytical and interpretive method. Working off of photographic archives available in Marriot Library and other local sources, students will embark on their own photographic project of re-photography. This is a fieldwork-based project that draws art and anthropological inquiry together to better understand the conditions under which photographs and archive happen. Students will conduct archival research at the University of Utah archives to analyze the history of photography of Great Salt Lake. We will ask, what is the shape of this collection? What is included as photography and what is missing?

Repeat photography

The goal of participation in the Rio Mesa field component is twofold: First, students will workshop their repeat photography projects as works-in-progress. Second, as a way to build on our inquiry into representations of place students will participate in a quest to install an artwork in various locations at the field station. The artwork, Portable Camera Obscura, is a walk-in, room-sized camera. The tent structure is a lightproof environment that projects an image of the outside view onto the back wall and sides of the inside of the tent with a simple lens. The tent provides a site to loiter and have conversations about place and photography. Using the PCO as a site of inquiry and as a hub for fieldwork practices, we will reflect on what we have learned about photographic representation.

PART III (Oct – Dec) Monty  
Re-photography, presentations and final research projects

Students will complete their rephotography projects and research, present their work and complete their final research projects (photographic and written portions). Class meetings will be held roughly every other week.

Project Description:
For final projects students will rearch a historical photograph of the Great Salt Lake area or other part of Utah from the archival collections of Marriott Library. You will try to re-create the photograph. This might be achieved by relocating preciesely the historical vantage point and rotating a photograph, or by attempting to reenact a scene, or by recreating a portrait of someone. You will also produce a portfolio of photographs that relate to this effort and the course themes, as well as an accompanying written essay that draws on your course experience to critically analyze an aspect of photographic representation and land use in Utah.