Teaching Unit Number 8 - Schwartz Gallery

Network in Canadian History and Environment (NiCHE) - Environmental History
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This university-level teaching unit is designed to be easily scaled up or down regarding class time consumed, or difficulty, as appropriate for the individual course context. The material in this unit has a strict focus on Canada (specifically Canadian Photographs as primary sources), though instructors in other locations are encouraged to improvise on their own, using this module as a base, to insert a comparative element and make connections to other places or themes.

Learning goals.

- Introduce the theme of photographs as primary sources
- Familiarize the student with methods by which they can inform and enrich historical narrative in new ways
- Encourage students to connect these concepts with their own experience of the world

This teaching unit is composed of six resources:

- An open source journal article, to be assigned as a reading
- Discussion questions focused on the reading
- A contextual essay, around which instructors can build their own lectures, or share with Teaching Assistants working outside of their area of expertise
- Primary sources, to be deployed as best suits the purposes of the instructor
- A glossary of “Canadian” terms and concepts, to support a non-Canadian, international audience
- A video assignment

Resources:

2) Article Discussion Questions
Q. What is the difference between environment and landscape? How does Schwartz understand photography to reflect and participate in the cultural construction of landscape?
Q. Schwartz offers us two historically disparate sets of photographs, through which she seeks to illustrate methodological approaches of constructing landscape rather than chronological change. Identify some of these approaches and how they intersect with other period narratives such as technological progress, colonial expansion, environmental awareness, etc. Compare and contrast the early images with the later ones.

Q. How does a photograph convey a point of view about the environment? Look to Schwartz’s gallery and consider the photographers' choices in subject matter and presentation (framing, perspective, style, etc.). Why are people included in some images, but not in others? How does their presence or absence, their position, and relative scale within the landscape, shape how we perceive it? What role do titles, or other forms of written accompaniment, play in producing a photograph's meaning?

Q. Schwartz suggests that a photograph's exhibition venue or site of publication frames how it is understood. In other words, it accrues a contextual bias, foregrounding certain features in one situation, and different ones in another. What does Schwartz emphasize by including these images in an environmental history journal? How is the meaning of one image shaped in relation to another? Are there alternative ways to understand these landscapes?

Q. According to Schwartz, the only “fixed and stable” aspect of a photograph is its visual content. What does she mean by this? How does meaning evolve over time?

Q. Consider the staged studio photographs of nature in comparison to photographs of outdoor environments. What differences do you perceive? Are the images of actual outdoor environments more “truthful,” or do they simply appear so because they naturalize the photographer's point of view? Can documentary photographs be “imagined geographies”?

Q. Schwartz argues that when looking at a photograph, we must look beyond the appearance of a neutral set of facts. Instead, she proposes that we consider what the maker sought to convey, how the image was perceived over time, what events preceded and followed the photograph's creation, and what was excluded from the image. Select a random photograph of a landscape and apply Schwartz's proposed method of examination. What kind of information does this mode of enquiry yield? What sorts of resources must you consult to substantiate your suppositions?

3) Contextual Essay
Schwartz’s Gallery piece is a wonderful lesson in method. The less sophisticated researcher might be tempted to treat photographs as illustrations or “surrogates for firsthand seeing.” Often, after devoting considerable time to locating textual primary sources, the researcher will attempt to find illustrations in a rushed manner, for their aesthetic appeal rather than the historical evidence they may convey, almost as an afterthought: visual oases in a desert of text. As Roy and Thompson note, this tendency
is exacerbated by the problem that in any archive, only a small percentage of images are catalogued.¹

Schwartz guides the reader, via a series of figures and paired commentary, through a more nuanced approach. She urges us to be more imaginative about the questions that we pose to photographs and more receptive to the questions that they pose to us. The student will do well to incorporate these subtleties in their own work.

Through a discussion of the reading, the instructor can prepare their students to undertake the video assignment detailed further below. In class, prompt the student to explore the context of the image’s creation, its original intended message to particular audiences, and how this may have shifted when it is consumed by wider populations in space and time.

We encounter the phrase “imaginative geography of Canada” on page 977. Elsewhere, Schwartz tells us that this refers to the way in which photographs shape our perceptions of place and sustain individual and collective notions of landscape and identity. It is the mechanism by which people come to know the world and situate themselves in space and time. A proper concern with the role of photography in making imaginative geographies, therefore examines the blurred distinction between the real and the imagined.²

4) Primary Sources
Digital images and biographies for photographers represented in Schwartz’s gallery can be found in a variety of places online, and may be used to support a lecture.

William Notman

“Young Canada” can be found in the McCord Museum via the call number I-24434 <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/I-24434>

“Caribou Hunting, The chance shot, Montreal, QC, 1866” can be found in the McCord Museum via the call number –0000.57.6 <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/en/collection/artifacts/–0000.57.6?Lang=1&accessnumber=–0000.57.6>


Additional information about Notman from the McCord Museum is available here

Humphrey Lloyd Hime

“The Prairie, on the Banks of Red River, looking south” is available from LAC via MIKAN number 3243345

Other images by Hime are available from the McCord Museum

William England

“The Railway Suspension Bridge from the 'Maid of the Mist' Dock, Niagara, 1859” can be found here

Alexander Henderson

“Spring Innundation” can be found here

Additional information and images are available from the McCord Museum

John Dillwyn Llewwelyn

“North American Wigwam” is available at Library and Archives Canada as MIKAN number 3241733, or call number PA-164777
William James Topley

“Harriot Georgina, Countess of Dufferin, with members of her family, photographed in a winter studio setting with a toboggan, a sleigh, and snowshoes” can be found at Library and Archives Canada via MIKAN number 3194719
or here
<http://data2.archives.ca/ap/a/a186002-v6.jpg>

Paul-Émil Miot

“Préparation de la morue” is available at Library and Archives Canada via the MIKAN number 3622955

Marlene Creates
Artist webpage: <http://www.marlenecreates.ca/>

“Our Coastline is Natural & Scenic” is available here

Frederick Dally

“THE SIX-TOED PETE CLAIM, WILLIAM’S CREEK” is available here
<http://www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/cgi-bin/text2html/visual/img_txt/dir_75/c_09570.txt?C-09570> and also in Library and Archives Canada under the current title of “Goldmining Asturias Claim, 1867 or 1868” via MIKAN number 3358029

Lorraine Gilbert
Artist webpage: <http://www.lorrainegilbert.com/>
Robert del Tredici
<http://www.bobdeltredici.com/>
<http://www.vaniercollege.qc.ca/main/faculnws/deltredici/>

The texts accompanying these images is accessible via
<http://www.voxphoto.com/cv/deltredici_r.html> or if not working,
cmd=getavanceeB&lng=fr&page=1&pageaff=0&artistes=85&image_fichier=1850149&anneemin=0&anneemax=2010&proceder=0&pratique=0&theme=0&tn_nav=1>

The Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility hosts a number of del Tredici’s images <http://www.ccnr.org/#rdt>

Edward Burtynsky
Artist webpage: <http://www.edwardburtynsky.com/>

5) Glossary
Governor General: The Monarch's representative, performing the ceremonial and constitutional functions of a Head of State. The Governor General of Canada is appointed by the Queen of Canada on the advice of the Canadian Prime Minister. The office has developed with Canada's evolution from colony to nation.

6) Video Assignment—Heritage Minute Videos
This example assignment should be customized by the instructor. Examples of student heritage minute videos (as guided by the below assignment) are available on YouTube here <http://www.youtube.com/user/capubc/videos>. There is a range of abilities represented, and some might be shared with a class as examples of things to avoid in a video (speaking too fast, too much motion, sound problems, failure to include a proper archival citation, etc.)

In the past it was necessary to provide technical instruction to students in digital sound and video editing. These tools have now become ubiquitous. Even when students have not used these tools before, they learn very quickly, particularly when paired with a peer who is more comfortable with the technology.

Group work and marks (grade) can be a dangerous combination. The running diary is an insurance policy so that in rare cases when a pair of students is unable to complete a video because of conflict, or disinterest on the part of one student, the other need not be punished unnecessarily.
When pointing students to an archive for choosing photographs to feature, it is crucial that the instructor set boundaries regarding acceptable images for the assignment. Similarly, it is up to the instructor to ensure that copyright laws are respected.

The “Heritage Minute” Video Assignment.
This heritage minute assignment is to be completed in pairs, with both team members doing equal work in all phases of the project. The final product is due for screening in class on [insert date here]. However, please submit your completed video to the course instructor by [earlier date], to upload to YouTube. This assignment is worth X% of your final grade.

Goals.
By completing this assignment you will be able to:

- Perform some basic manipulations using digital sound and video editing software
- Divide a large project into separate tasks and negotiate the distribution of work
- Use multiple sources to craft a short historical narrative

Your ultimate goal is to produce a 60 second “heritage minute” style video on the topic of your choice. Video is perhaps a misleading term. Your video is actually composed of a still photograph and audio overlay. You can pan around your image, or zoom in to focus on particular details, but no moving pictures or animation is required. All of your effort will be devoted to constructing your narrative, recording it, and spicing it up with appropriate sound effects if you feel so moved.

Since this is group work, you will be keeping an individual diary of your group’s successes and identifying things that could have gone better.

Getting Started.
As individuals, select your favorite archival photos from one of the following collections:
Library and Archives Canada <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/lac-bac/search/arch_adv>
McCord Museum <http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/scripts/search_results.php?Lang=1&department=00000&keywords=&object=00801&subject=0&artist=0&period=0&date1=&date2=&order=1>

Meet or correspond with your partner and select the one photograph you want to use and another one as a backup. For copyright purposes, the image must have been taken before 1949. Write to your instructor, with a proper archival reference (not a temporary URL), so she or he can take a look at your image and approve its use. Include some details as to the approach you want to take.

Discuss who your target audience is and what you want to communicate. What should your heritage minute achieve and how? Specify how you will evaluate your success upon completion.
Research.
Partners should seek as many sources as possible to contextualize the photograph. Who took it? When? Where? For what purpose? What does the image show? Perhaps more importantly, what doesn’t it show? Keep a very careful record of your research in your project diary. Use the results of your research to inform the story you want to tell. Draft a script. Read it aloud to check your timing.

Production.
You already have a digital copy of your photo, now you need to make some noise. [Individual instructors will want to include guidance regarding digital voice recorders that may be available for loan via their department or institution].

Next you will need to choose both audio and video editing programs. The specifics are up to you. I use the open source program "Audacity" for my audio editing, and a very old version of iMovie for video. Whatever you use, make sure that they are compatible. [Instructors will also want to point students to video editing resources available to students on your campus].

While the initial audience will be your instructor and peers, we will upload our videos to a class YouTube account. For this reason, all material you use must be original and created by your group. This is to say, you cannot use a commercial recording as a soundtrack, and you cannot splice in copyrighted video from some other source. You can use open source audio content, but it must be credited.

Final Products.
Your 'video': we will begin the first few seconds with a common jpeg advertising this as a class project. Next is your 60 seconds of content, followed by credits (not included in your 60 seconds). [Will probably want to select a hashtag, or key word, to include in all videos, so that disparate students and instructors can view the work of others].

Your diary:
Each individual should keep a private, running diary of your experiences and research, to be handed in with your group’s final product (this should be a document of, at minimum, five pages). The diary should not be written in one sitting at the very end, but rather as appropriate throughout the process! As the project progresses, detail how your team managed the work. What was done by each team member? Did you work effectively as a team? How did you ensure tasks could be done in parallel?

Marking (Grading) Rubric.
There will be a prize for the best Heritage Minute, as voted by your peers. Your instructor will evaluate your group's work based upon:
- Fulfillment of the requirements
- Depth of research
- Clarity, accuracy, and finesse of your narrative
- Innovative use of the medium

Project Diary, including group proposal, research, and account of the process (X%) and Completed Video (Y%), giving a total mark of (Z%) of your final grade.

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American Society for Environmental History (aseh.net)
Forest History Society (foresthistory.org)