Rather than following a chronological narrative, this history of 20th century photography will be organized through thematic units that will reflect on the geographic and conceptual borders of artistic photography and its dissolution of the boundaries between art, politics and life. Specifically, we will explore theories and practices of photography by focusing on themes such as power, knowledge and the archive; colonial fantasies; technology; subjectivity and the portrait; patriarchy and the gaze; trauma and memory; fictional document; the afterlife of the image; and pixelated activism, among many others.

Each thematic unit will revolve around photographic works produced in different contexts and periods and with various purposes. Thus, we will study Phrenological and physiognomic photography of the nineteenth century alongside Walid Raad’s pictures about the late-twentieth century Lebanese civil wars for our conversations on the connection between photography and archives. Another example will be Cindy Sherman’s photos and their reflection on male gaze and the objectification of women. Or we will study Trevor Paglen’s telescopic pictures of secret U.S. intelligence locations together with Rabih Mroué’s images on the Arab Spring to discuss the relation between technology, surveillance and democracy.