**Assignment 1: Photograph as Material Culture**

Use *Photograph as Material Culture* lecture notes to guide you through this examination of the social life of an object – a photograph. The goal of this exercise is to describe a physical photograph and consider how its content, form, location, function, and cultural significance interact.

Choose a photograph that you feel comfortable sharing with me. *The significance of this photo should not only be situated in its content*: the person/people portrayed, a place dear to you/your family, an important moment frozen in time such as graduation, a wedding, or a birthday.

*The significance of the photo should also be clear from its form, where and how it is displayed in your home and the functions it serves*. Is it framed and displayed in a collection of photos in the family room? Is it in your room stuck to the wall with masking tape? Perhaps it made its way onto the fridge many years ago with every intention of being moved to a more permanent location and just stayed there? Or is it in a family album or a box of photos which come out on special occasions? The scenarios I have just described are not exhaustive; they are simply to provide you with ideas of the kinds of photos I have in mind.

**Instructions:**

**1.** Describe the content of the photo. You may be very specific here if you wish in describing the people, the place, the event. It is up to you how much information you provide. A caption and a time frame of when the photo was taken is the minimum required.

**2.** Describe the photo as a physical object. Consider its size, colour, thickness, signs of use, and how it is displayed – the materials used. Has it been restored or altered from its original state? How did you come into possession of this object?

**3.** Describe the physical location of the photo. Where is the photo located in your home and what other objects surround it? What is the relationship of your chosen photo to other things it shares the same environment with? Is its location temporary or permanent? Has it ever been moved? If so, where, and why?

**4.** Describe the function of the photo. What purpose does it serve? Is its purpose universal or is it personal depending on the relationship to the individual(s)/place(s)/event(s) portrayed?

Is the content, form, function, or location of the photo contentious? In other words, have your family members ever not agreed about what it portrays or its significance; or the form it presently takes?

**5.** Image the photograph you chose to discuss and paste it into the document below your write up. Please make sure that the image you take is of good quality – the resolution and size must allow for comfortable viewing. It is best to photograph it during daylight hours without too many artificial light sources illuminating it.

**6.** You have just constructed a cultural biography of a photo. Reflect on this exercise. Has it changed how you might look at this or other photos? Would you consider this object as an example of *inalienable wealth*? If yes, why? If not, why?