

AH313 PHOTOGRAPHY AND MODERNITY

Art and Aesthetics, Fall 2021

Module: Media, Practices, Techniques / Aesthetics and Art Theory

Course Times: Tuesday, 15:45-17:15 and Thursday, 15:45-17:15

Seminar Leader: Geoff Lehman

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Office Hours: Fridays, 13:00-15:00

Course Description

Invented in the early nineteenth century, the new medium of photography has since then occupied a crucial place within visual culture. This course considers photography in terms of the conditions and concerns specific to its medium, as well as in its relationship to painting, to the origins of cinema, to key aspects of modernism and postmodernism, and to broader categories of experience (affective, social, scientific, oneiric). Major topics for the course include: photography's theoretical and technical origins in Renaissance perspective and the *camera obscura*; memory, presence, and affective response, with a particular focus on portraiture; the "reality effect," documentation, and social criticism; originality and replication in relation both to avant-garde practices and to mass culture. Special attention will be given to the early history of photography and to photography within the broader context of modernism. The course will also involve a sustained dialogue between photography and painting (Renaissance portraiture, Goya, the Pre-Raphaelites, Impressionism, Surrealism). Recent developments in digital photographic practice, especially in relation to online replication and dissemination, will be a topic towards the end of the term. We will be guided throughout by close reading of individual works by photographers such as Daguerre, Talbot, Nadar, Cameron, Atget, Man Ray, Lange, Arbus, Sherman, and Lawler, among others. Visits to galleries, museums, and installation sites to experience works of art firsthand are an integral part of the course.

Course Books

Required

Course Reader

Classic Essays on Photography, edited by Alan Trachtenberg, ISBN-13: 978-0918172082

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, ISBN-13: 978-0099225416

Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, ISBN-13: 978-0312420093

Suggested

Rosalind Krauss, *Bachelors*, ISBN: 978-0262611657

Requirements

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FALL 2021: Some students may need to begin the semester remotely due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, all students and instructors must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Instructors should make efforts to offer alternatives to in-person attendance where needed, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

Museum Visits

Four of our scheduled classes will be museum or site visits. Since it is not possible to go to a museum during our scheduled class time, museum classes will normally be on Sundays and each museum class will replace a regular Tuesday or Thursday class, usually from the preceding or following week.

Assessment

Participation

Students should arrive to each class on time and prepared. Being prepared means

- (1) having completed the assigned reading (in the specific editions indicated above),
- (2) bringing to class a non-electronic copy of the assigned reading, and
- (3) being ready to initiate and to contribute to discussion.

Engagement in class discussion should be regular as well as productive; quantity alone will not favorably affect the participation grade.

Writing Assignments

There will be two principal assignments over the course of the term: a midterm essay, 2000-2300 words in length, and a final presentation accompanied by an essay, 3000-3500 words in length, due at the end of the term.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Class participation: 30%

Midterm essay: 30%

Final presentation: 10%

Final essay: 30%

Schedule

INTRODUCTION: ONTOLOGY OF A NEW MEDIUM

Tuesday, August 31

The First Photographers: Louis Daguerre, William Henry Fox

Talbot

Reading:

Louis Daguerre, "Daguerrotype" (in *Classic Essays on Photography*)

William Henry Fox Talbot, "A Brief Historical Sketch of the Invention of the Art" (in *Classic Essays on Photography*)

Thursday, September 2

Camera obscura: Le Secq, Girault de Prangey, Du Camp, Salzmann

Reading:

François Arago, "Report to the Academies of Arts and Sciences" (in *Classic Essays on Photography*)

Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, Section I

Suggested reading: Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, Chapter 2: "The Camera Obscura and Its Subject"

I. PORTRAITURE

Tuesday, September 7

I / Thou: Nadar, Hill and Adamson

Reading:

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Chapters 1-16

Suggested reading: Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography*, Chapter 5: "Portraits for the Millions"; David Rosand, "The Portrait, the Courtier, and Death," in *Castiglione: The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture* (edited by Hanning and Rosand)

Thursday, September 9

Photography and Painting: Julia Margaret Cameron

Visual assignment: group presentation

Reading:

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Chapters 17-36

Suggested reading: Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography*, Chapter 6: "Art Photography" and Chapter 9: "Pictorial Photography"

Tuesday, September 14

Studium and Punktum: Sally Mann, Carrie Mae Weems

Reading:

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Chapters 37-48

Thursday, September 16

Counter-Portraiture: Francesca Woodman

Reading:

Paul Valéry, "The Centenary of Photography" (in *Classic Essays on Photography*)

Hubert Damisch, "Five Notes for a Phenomenology of the Photographic Image" (in *Classic Essays on Photography*)

John Berger, "Understanding a Photograph" (in *Classic Essays on Photography*)

Suggested reading: Rosalind Krauss, *Bachelors*, "Francesca Woodman: Problem Sets"

II. THE SOCIETY OF SPECTACLE

Tuesday, September 21

Photography and *Modernité*, I

Reading:

Charles Baudelaire, *Petits poèmes en prose* (English edition: *Paris Spleen*), Dedication, I, IV, V, VI, X, XII, XIII, XXV, and XXVI

Shelley Rice, *Parisian Views*, Chapter 2: "Parisian Views," pp. 31-45 and 57-82

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, selections

Thursday, September 23

Photography and *Modernité*, II

Visual assignment: group presentation

Reading:

Charles Baudelaire, *Petits poèmes en prose* (English edition: *Paris Spleen*), XXXV, XL, XLI, XLVII, L, Epilogue

Edmond Duranty, *The New Painting*, selections

Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century"

Suggested reading: Charles Baudelaire, "The Modern Public and Photography" (in *Classic Essays on Photography*)

Tuesday, September 28

Time, the Phantasmagoria, and the Origins of Cinema

Visual assignment (film):

La jetée (Chris Marker, 1962)

Reading:

Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, Chapter 3: "1888: Illuminations of Disenchantment," pp. 247-280

Thursday, September 30

No class

Tuesday, October 5

Eugène Atget

Reading:

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, selections

Molly Nesbit, *Atget's Seven Albums*, "Dust" (pp. 196-213) and "The Third City" (pp. 132-51)

Thursday, October 7

Surrealism and the Real: Man Ray, Maurice Tabard, Lee Miller

Visual assignment: group presentation

Reading:

Rosalind Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism"

Suggested reading:

Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography*, Chapter 10: "Straight Photography" and Chapter 11: "The Quest for Form"

Sunday, October 10, 14:00

Visit to C/O Berlin (exhibition: Lee Friedlander Retrospective)

Reading:

Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography" (in *Classic Essays on Photography*)

Tuesday, October 12

Cindy Sherman, I

Reading:

Rosalind Krauss, "Cindy Sherman: Untitled," pp. 101-133 (in *Bachelors*)

Suggested reading: Laura Mulvey, "Cosmetics and Abjection: Cindy Sherman 1977-87" (in *Cindy Sherman [October Files]*)

Thursday, October 14

Cindy Sherman, II

Reading:

Rosalind Krauss, "Cindy Sherman: Untitled," pp. 133-159 (in *Bachelors*)

Norman Bryson, "House of Wax" (in *Cindy Sherman [October Files]*)

Midterm essay due: 23:59 on Sunday, October 17

FALL BREAK (October 18-24)

III. DOCUMENTATION AND EMPATHY

Tuesday, October 26

Goya, *The Disasters of War*

Visual assignment:

Francisco Goya y Lucientes, *The Disasters of War*, series of 80 etching with aquatint prints, c. 1810-20, published posthumously in 1863

Reading:

Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Chapter 1 and Chapter 5, pp. 66-72

Thursday, October 28

Photographing War

Visual assignment: group presentation

Reading:

Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Chapter 5, pp. 72-84 and Chapter 6

Tuesday, November 2

Documenting the Great Depression: Lange, Evans

Reading:

Lewis Hine, "Social Photography" (in *Classic Essays on Photography*)

Bernice Abbott, "Photography at the Crossroads" (in *Classic Essays on Photography*)

Walker Evans, "The Reappearance of Photography" (in *Classic Essays on Photography*)

Suggested reading: Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography*, Chapter 13: "Documentary Photography"

Thursday, November 4

No class

Sunday, November 7, 14:00

Visit to The Deutsches Historisches Museum (exhibition: Progress as a

Promise: Industrial Photography in Divided Germany)

Reading:

Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, "In Plato's Cave"

Tuesday, November 9

Diane Arbus

Visual assignment: group presentation

Reading:

Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, "America, Seen through Photographs, Darkly"

Thursday, November 11 No class

Thursday, November 11, 19:30 Film Screening: *Blowup* (Antonioni, 1966)

Suggested reading: Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, "Melancholy Objects"

IV. REPLICATION AND THE SPACE OF THE BODY

Sunday, November 14, 14:00 Visit to Naturpark Südgelände

Photography assignment

Reading:

Yve-Alain Bois, "A Picturesque Stroll Around Clara-Clara," pp. 76-91

Tuesday, November 16 No class

Thursday, November 18 Land Art and Landscape

Visual assignment: group presentation

Reading:

Yve-Alain Bois, "A Picturesque Stroll Around Clara-Clara," pp. 59-76

Tuesday, November 23 Photography in the Age of Digital Reproduction

Reading:

Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

Thursday, November 25 Louise Lawler

Reading:

Rosalind Krauss, *Bachelors*, "Louise Lawler: Souvenir Memories"

Sunday, November 28, 14:00 Visit to the Hamburger Bahnhof

Reading:

Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, "The Image-World"

Tuesday, November 30 No class

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

Thursday, December 2

Tuesday, December 7

Thursday, December 9

Final essay due: 23:59 on Thursday, December 16