

AH313 Photography and Modernity

Art and Aesthetics
Module: Media, Practices, Techniques
Spring 2019

Seminar Leader: Geoff Lehman
Course Times: Wednesday, 9:00-10:30 and Friday, 10:45-12:15 (9:00-12:15 for museum visits)

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 16:00-18:00

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

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

Note that there is no reader required for the course. Additional readings will be handed out as photocopies before the class for which they are assigned.

Library and book purchase policies

The college book policy for 2018-2019 is that reserve stocks of books will be lent to students on the basis of need, or (thereafter) on a first come first served basis. Books not yet owned by the college will be purchased only to create a small library reserve collection, and for students receiving more than 70% financial aid. Otherwise, students must purchase all course books.

Requirements

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct.

Attendance

For this class attendance is mandatory, and active participation in discussions will be an essential part of the course. More than two absences (that is, absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course. Readings should be done in advance of the class for which they are assigned. Please refer to the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

Museum Visits

Four of our scheduled classes will be museum, gallery, or site visits. When possible, these will be on Friday, since the longer block of time scheduled for our course on Fridays allows us to make some of these visits during regular class time.

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, 2400-2700 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

From the Student Handbook on the submission of essays:

Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded 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 and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Grade Breakdown

Class participation: 30%

Midterm essay: 30%

Final presentation: 10%

Final essay: 30%

Schedule

I. ONTOLOGY OF A NEW MEDIUM

Wednesday, January 30 **The First Photographers**

Reading:

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

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

Friday, February 1 **Camera obscura**

Reading:

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

Suggested reading:

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

Wednesday, February 6 **Portraiture, I: I/Thou**

Reading:

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

Suggested reading:

David Rosand, "The Portrait, the Courtier, and Death," in *Castiglione: The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture* (edited by Hanning and Rosand)

Friday, February 8 **Portraiture, II: Studium and Punctum**

Reading:

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

Wednesday, February 13 **Photography and Painting: The Pre-Raphaelites**

Visual assignment: group presentations

Reading:

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

Friday, February 15, 9:00-12:15 **Photography and Cinema: Antonioni, *Blow-Up* (film screening)**

Reading:

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

Sunday, February 17 **Visit to me Collectors Room (exhibition: The Moment is Eternity)**

Reading:

Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography" (1927)

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

II. THE SOCIETY OF SPECTACLE

Wednesday, February 20 **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

Friday, February 22 **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

Charles Baudelaire, "The Modern Public and Photography" (in *Classic Essay on Photography*)

Edmond Duranty, *The New Painting*, selections

Wednesday, February 27 **Time, the "Reality Effect," and the Origins of Cinema**

Reading:

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

Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, Chapter 4: "Techniques of the Observer," pp. 102-18,
124-36

Suggested reading:

Vanessa R. Schwartz, "Cinematic Spectatorship before the Apparatus: The Public Taste for Reality
in *Fin-de-Siècle Paris*" (in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. Charney and Schwartz)

Friday, March 1 **Visit to The Museum of Photography
(exhibition: Berlin in the 1918/19 Revolution)**

Reading:

Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography"

Wednesday, March 6 **Eugène Atget**

Visual assignment: group presentation

Reading:

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

Friday, March 8 **Surrealism and the Real, I**

Reading:

Rosalind Krauss, "Photography in the Service of Surrealism"

Suggested reading:

Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography*, Chapter 10: "Straight Photography"

Wednesday, March 13 **Surrealism and the Real, II**

Reading:

Rosalind Krauss, "Corpus Delicti"

Friday, March 15 **Cindy Sherman**

Reading:

Rosalind Krauss, "Cindy Sherman: Untitled," pp. 101-124, 133-142, 154-159 (in *Bachelors*)

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

Suggested reading:

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

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

III. DOCUMENTATION AND EMPATHY

Wednesday, March 20 No class

Friday, March 22 **Goya, *The Disasters of War***

Reading:

David Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, Chapter 1

Wednesday, March 27 **Photographing War**

Reading:

Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Chapters 1, 5, 6, and 9

Friday, March 29 **Documentary Photography: Lange, Evans**

Reading:

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

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

Suggested reading:

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

Wednesday, April 3 **Diane Arbus**

Visual assignment: group presentation

Reading:

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

IV. REPLICATION AND THE SPACE OF THE BODY

Friday, April 5 **Photography in the Age of Digital Reproduction**

Reading:

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

Sunday, April 7 **Visit to contemporary art galleries**

Reading:

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

Wednesday, April 10 **Land Art and Landscape**

Reading:

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

Friday, April 12 **Visit to Naturpark Südgelände**

Photography assignment

Reading:

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

SPRING BREAK (April 15-22)

Wednesday, April 24

Louise Lawler

Reading:

Rosalind Krauss, "Louise Lawler: Souvenir Memories"

Friday, April 26

No class

Wednesday, May 1

No class

FINAL PRESENTATIONS

Friday, May 3

Wednesday, May 8

Friday, May 10, 9:00-12:15 (double session)

Final essay due: 23:59 on Wednesday, May 15