

AH284 Photography in Germany, 1871 to the Present

Seminar Leader: Dr. Ying Sze Pek

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Office Hours: Thursdays 11am-1pm (via Zoom) or by appointment

Course Description

This course explores how the history of photography in Germany was intertwined with the country's encounter with modernity. Students will be introduced to canonical episodes and concepts from the history and theory of photography since the time of Germany's unification in 1871. We cover topics such as photography and nationalism, Weimar-era photographic experimentation and the New Vision, photography and memory, photo-conceptualism, East German perspectives, and photography's digital futures.

Our course discusses the work of photographers and artists including Bernd and Hilla Becher, Sibylle Bergemann, Dörte Eißfeldt, Hannah Höch, László Moholy-Nagy, August Sander, and Tobias Zielony. We also engage black diasporic and postmigration perspectives to studying this material, addressing approaches and discourses that are urgent and emerging in the field of German cultural studies. Our investigations of photography and Germany thus account for the country's intersectional histories of colonialism, fascism, socialism, and migration.

Taking advantage of our location in Berlin, the class visits key photography institutions and collections in the city in selected weeks.

For the course assignments, students will write a research paper and will complete a creative "Theory into Form" final assignment.

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.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

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 may 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.

Assessment and Assignments

Each student is responsible for one classroom presentation (on an assigned reading) and two papers. The first paper is a theoretical essay (3000 words) and the second paper (1500 words) is a two-part assignment, “Theory into Form,” that comprises creative and written components; students will give a short presentation on their projects at the last class meeting.

The “Theory into Form” assignment will ask you to translate art historical theory into visual or material form in photography or its associated mediums. Alongside this original artwork, you will submit an accompanying essay. For the assignment, you will be assessed on your interpretation and critical engagement of the ideas discussed in class, rather than your sophistication with honing artistic techniques.

The midterm paper is due on May 29, 11:59pm.

The final “Theory into Form” assignment is due on May 4, 9pm. Students will present their final projects to the class on **May 6**.

Essays must include appropriate academic references and use of citations. Assignment prompts and guidelines with detailed information will be circulated during the semester.

Active participation throughout the semester is expected of all students. You will have the opportunity to discuss the assigned readings, ask questions and develop your own ideas in class. All assigned readings for the week, which comprise only the page ranges indicated in the schedule of readings, must be completed. Please make time to complete around 30 pp. of reading each week, although there are shorter reading assignments on certain weeks. It is imperative that you come for class prepared and ready to participate.

Do give me at least 48h to reply to your emails during the semester.

Note that our course involves two excursions, one in February and the second in April. We meet exceptionally on a Saturday, Feb 28, to visit exhibitions at the Berlinische Galerie. For our class on Apr 15, we meet at C/O Berlin. See the course schedule for further information.

Course materials: There is no textbook for this course. All readings will be made available to students as PDF scans.

Recording policy: You may not record or photograph any part of our class. If there are accommodations that need to be accounted for, please speak with me.

Plagiarism is taken very seriously by the instructor. Your papers must constitute original research work that makes use of standard citation styles and coheres with the College's policies. Likewise, class presentations should represent an independently synthesized analysis of the materials you have read.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late may 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 a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. 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 will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. 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

Final assignment and presentation (1500 words): 40%

Midterm essay (3000 words): 30%

Active participation throughout the semester (including one class presentation): 30%

Course schedule

Week 1 Jan 28 Introduction

Week 2 Feb 4 Photography and Nation c. 1871

Selections from Andrés Mario Zervigón, *Photography and Germany*. Reaktion Books, 2017: 47-49, 58-64, 68-81, 35-43. [The sections “Photography and nation,” “A monarch of unity,” “Technology and vision,” and “National landscapes”; please read in that order.]

Week 3 Feb 11 Modern Vision I: The New Vision and Photomontage

Selection from “1929” in Hal Foster et al., *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Anti-modernism, Postmodernism*, vol. 2, 1945-2010, 3rd ed. Thames and Hudson: 2016: 274-276. [Hereafter: *Art Since 1900*]

Selections from Sabine Kriebel, “Photomontage in the Age of Technological Reproducibility” in Kriebel, *Revolutionary Beauty: The Radical Photomontages of John Heartfield*. University of California Press, 2014: 65-67; 75-85.

László Moholy-Nagy, “Production-Reproduction [1922]”, in Christopher Phillips, ed., *Photography in the Modern Era*. Aperture, 1989: 79-82.

Selection from Pepper Stetler, “László Moholy-Nagy’s *Malerei Photographie Film*” in Stetler, *Stop Reading! Look!: Modern Vision and the Weimar Photographic Book*. University of Michigan Press, 2015: 21-29.

Selection from Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version” in Michael W. Jennings et al, eds., *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008: 37-39 [sections XVI, XVII].

No class on Feb 18; College Art Association Annual Conference 2026 in Chicago.

Week 4 Feb 25 Modern Vision II: The Photobook, Physiognomy, and Dangerous Moments

Selections from Daniel H. Magilow, “Photographic Physiognomies,” and “The Snapshot and the Moment of Decision,” in Magilow, *The Photography of Crisis: The Photo Essays of Weimar Germany*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012: 92-108, 119-133.

Reference (review briefly) selections from Walter Benjamin, *A Little History of Photography*, in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, 1927-1934: 519-523; 526-528.

Feb 28 Class excursion to Berlinische Galerie, Alte Jakobstraße 124-128, 10969 Berlin (10.30am–1.30pm).

We visit the exhibition *Raoul Hausman: Vision. Provocation. Dada.* and review the gallery display on Hannah Höch. Specific instructions on the excursion to follow.

Review the reading assignments by Walter Benjamin from Weeks 3 and 4.

A short manifesto and a short essay (5 pp.) by Raoul Hausmann: “Synthetic Cinema of Painting”; “Photomontage”

Kristin Makholm, "Strange Beauty: Hannah Höch and the Photomontage." *MoMA* 24 (Winter/Spring 1997): 19-23.

Week 5 Mar 4 Black German Family Photographs under National Socialism

Selection from Geoff Eley, "Nazism, Everydayness, and Spectacle: The Mass Form in Metropolitan Modernity," in Julia Adeney Thomas and Geoff Eley, eds., *Visualizing Fascism: The Twentieth-Century Rise of the Global Right*. Duke University Press: 69-73.

Selection from Tina Campt, "Family Matters: Sight, Sense, Touch," in Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe*. Duke University Press, 2012: 35-60.

Week 6 Mar 11 Photography and Memory after the War

Selection from Andrés Mario Zervigón, *Photography and Germany*. Reaktion Books, 2017: 157-162 ["Photography and memory"].

Selection from Sarah E. James, "Cold War Primers," in James, *Common Ground: German Photographic Cultures across the Iron Curtain*. Yale University Press, 2013: 15-32.

Browse the photobook Bertolt Brecht, *War Primer [Kriegsfibel]*.

Week 7 Mar 18 Photo-Conceptualism, Seriality, Time

Selection from "1968a" in *Art Since 1900*: 597-601.

Selection from "1967a" in *Art Since 1900*: 581-582.

James Lingwood, "The Weight of Time [2002]" in Brian Dillon, ed. *Ruins (Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art)*. MIT Press, 2011: 109-118.

Week 8 Mar 25 East German Perspectives

Selections from Sarah E. James, "Evelyn Richter's 'Exact Seeing,'" in James, *Common Ground: German Photographic Cultures across the Iron Curtain*. Yale University Press, 2013: 103-120; 124-137.

Selections from Sonia Voss et al., *The Freedom within Us: East German Photography 1980-89*. Koenig Books, 2019: 6-7; 94-96; review photographs on 97-105. [This covers a selection from Sonia Voss' introductory essay and the section on Sibylle Bergemann.]

Midterm essay due on May 29, 11:59pm

No class on Apr 1; spring break.

Week 9 Apr 8 The New New Vision

Selection from "1968a" in *Art Since 1900*: 601-602.

Alex Alberro, "The Big Picture: The Art of Andreas Gursky," in *Artforum* 39:5 (January 2001): 105-114.

Selection from Okwui Enwezor, "The Conditions of Spectrality and Spectatorship in Thomas Ruff's Photographs," in Enwezor et al., *Thomas Ruff: Works 1979-2011*. Schirmer/Mosel, 2012: 9-14. [The sections "Scale..."; "Depiction and Picturing..."]

Week 10 Apr 15 Class excursion to C/O Berlin Hardenbergstraße 22-24, 10623 Berlin (3-c.5.15pm).

We visit *Dörte Eißfeldt: Archipelago* and engage the curator Boaz Levin in a discussion about the exhibition. Short reading assignments (10-15pp.) will be circulated closer to the class meeting. Specific instructions on the excursion to follow.

Week 11 Apr 22 Images of a Postmigrant Nation

Selection from Peter Chametzky, "Introduction: Who Can Represent Germany?" in Chametzky, *Turks, Jews, and Other Germans in Contemporary Art*. MIT Press, 2021: 1-18.

Selections from Elâ Kaçel and Barbara Engelbach, "In Situ: Photographs and Memory Images of Labor Migration," in Kaçel and Engelbach, eds., *Vor Ort: Fotogeschichten zur Migration*. Walther und Franz König, 2021: 13-17; 25-32; review photographs by Fikret Üçgüler and Asimina Paradissa.

Week 12 Apr 29 Digital and Environment Futures; consultations on final assignments
Daniel Muzyczuk, "Obscure Correlations," in Marta Herford, ed., *Tobias Zielony: Wolfen*. Spector, 2023: 177-185.

We will have a shorter class meeting this week, where we consider Tobias Zielony's multimedia photographic work *Wolfen*. In the latter half of this session, students can sign up for a short consultation with the instructor to discuss their work-in-progress for the final assignment.

Final "Theory into Form" assignment due on Monday, May 4, 9pm

Week 13 May 6 Presentation of "Theory into Form" projects; course wrap-up.