

KINGSTON UNIVERSITY, SCHOOL OF ART & DESIGN HISTORY

BA (Hons) History of Art, Architecture & Design

Academic Session 2002-2003

Semester A, Level 2

[Course tutor(s)]

CONTEXTUALISING PHOTOGRAPHY

Module Description & Aims

This module explores and considers the development of photography as both a technical and cultural process. The sessions take a thematic approach to the subject so that photography may be considered in its various and multiple contexts. Central to the concern of this module is the role photography has played as an arbiter of truth and reality, and as such, its effects on other areas of artistic and technological production will be considered. This module aims to explain some of the various approaches and understandings of photography, whilst questioning the history which has been constructed around it.

By the end of this module you should:

- Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the historical and theoretical context of photography and precedent and subsequent technologies.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the theoretical approaches to investigating and explaining the technologically produced and reproducible image.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the mass produced images and mass communication.

Week 1 Defining an object of study

This session will consider photography as an object of study. It will question what we actually understand by the photograph as artefact, photography as a process and photography as a medium. We will begin to consider the ways in which photography has been discussed, considered and theorised.

Week 2 Art or Science: a Victorian invention

This session will look at the established histories of photography and begin to consider the various purposes to which it was employed in its formative years. We will question whether, despite much subsequent discussion and theorising, our contemporary understanding of the photograph is that much different from that of the Victorian era. We will also consider the effects photography had on more traditional practices of image making.

Week 3 The camera never lies: documentary photographs as evidence

This session will consider how photography has been used as a source of documentation and evidence. We will consider the ideological uses to which photography has been employed and question its validity as the bearer of truth and lies. Central to this session is the interrogation of how meaning is constructed and read through photography.

Week 4 The vision of modernity

This session will consider the role of photography in the emergent avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century. By contrasting the work of the newly emerging American tradition with the European practices of 'New Objectivity' and 'making strange' which manifested out of a desire to engage and represent modernity within the context of Modernism, we will question how a distinctly artistic mode of photography developed. We will consider work which traverses the usual distinctions and conventions of artistic production in an attempt to ascertain the nature of photographic intervention and contribution, and will ask, is photography art and if so, in what ways does it differ from other forms of artistic expression?

Week 5 Visit

100 Photographs: A collection by Bruce Bernard

Stepping In and Out: Contemporary Documentary Photography

The Canon Photography Gallery at the V&A

V&A. Cromwell Road, South Kensington. London SW7

Week 6 Imaging race

This session will look at the ways that photography has been used to construct and represent issues of race, ethnicity and identity. We will consider contemporary fine art approaches such as those of Zineb Sedira alongside precedent photographic images of early Western anthropologists.

Week 7 Reading Week

Week 8 Picturing people: the portrait in photography

This session will consider the ways that the photograph has been used to represent and portray people in both a formal and an informal sense. We will consider the ways the photographic portraiture interacts with a painterly tradition of portraiture and question to what extent these two traditions negotiate and present an image of reality. Implicit to this discussion of photographic portraiture is the relationship between the photographer and their subject.

Week 9 The 'YBA's': appropriating photographic conventions

This session will consider the role of photography in the work of the YBA's (Young Brit Artists). Looking at the work of artists such as Sam Taylor-Wood, Tracey Emin & Mark Wallinger we will consider how contemporary artists appropriate photographic conventions in order to subvert the fine art tradition.

Week 10 Essay tutorials

Week 11 Imaging gender & sexualities

This session develops the issues and ideas raised by the previous weeks discussion and considers the application of photography to the construction of gendered and sexual identities, and their intersections with ethnicity . Once again we will consider the contribution of photography to the expression of very personal and quite often political work and investigate the reasons for its quite extensive use in such areas.

Week 12 Fashion photography

This session will consider the development of fashion photography as one of the most innovative and fast-moving areas of photography. It will respond to and develop some of the issues raised by recent studies and texts upon fashion photography and imagery, as well as address the use of photography within a commercial context. We will consider the broader aspects of contemporary photographic aesthetics in an attempt to discern whether any style, motif or aesthetic is apparent at the turn of the 21st century. We are surrounded with so very much photographic material it might be suggested that it has become almost invisible to us. This session will attempt to measure the zeitgeist, if such a thing exists.

Assessment requirements:

You are required to answer one of the following questions. Your essay should be approximately 2500 words in length and must include a bibliography of source material. All essays must be typed, double-spaced and illustrated appropriately.

1. Considering particular examples discuss how photography is presented as art. What are the implications of the photographic medium on the artistic message?
2. Using the work of Roland Barthes discuss his explanation of 1st order and 2nd order meaning by applying it to photographs. Barthes' essays 'The Rhetoric of the Image' and 'The Photographic Message' are particularly useful and provide a good starting point.
3. Considering the work of two or more photographers, discuss the representation of the body with reference to gender, race or sexual identity.

4. Giving examples, discuss the use of documentary photography. In what ways does it present a 'reality'? You may wish to consider the *Stepping In and Out: Contemporary Documentary Photography* exhibition at the V&A Canon Photography Gallery.

Bibliography

This bibliography is intended to provide an overview of some of the writing about photography and photographic practice. The periodicals listed are both general and specific and may be used to obtain more up-to-date, contemporary material. The literature on photography is getting increasingly vast and subsequently this bibliography does not contain monographs on particular practitioners, but chooses instead to select books which provide overviews of the subject and some of the issues we will be discussing. It is expected that students develop their own bibliographies according to their research interests.

Periodicals

Afterimage

Aperture

Art Forum

British Journal of Photography

Camerawork

Creative Camera

Critical Enquiry

Exposure

History of Photography

Image

Journal of Design History

October

The Photographer

The Photographic Collector

The Photographic Journal

Screen

Screen Education

Studies in Visual Communication

TEN.8

Word and Image

Working Papers in Cultural Studies

General Books

D. Ades, *Photomontage*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1986

Aperture, *British Photography: Towards a Bigger Picture*, London: Aperture, 1988

D. Bailey & K. Mercer. *Mirage: Enigmas of race, difference and desire*. London: ICA and inIVA, 1995

Barbican Art Gallery, *Art or Nature: 20th Century French Photography*, London, 1988

R. Barthes, 'The Photographic Message' (1961), in S. Sontag (ed.). *A Barthes Reader*

R. Barthes, *Mythologies*, (1957), London: Fontana, 1972

R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, London: Fontana, 1982

R. Bolton, *The Contest of Meaning: critical histories of photography*, Massachusetts: MIT University Press, 1991

V. Burgin (ed.), *Thinking Photography*, London: Macmillan, 1982

Camerawork No12, Special issue on Portraiture

G. Clarke, *The Photograph*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, History of Art, 1997

G. Doy, *Black Visual Culture*, I.B. Tauris, 2000

S. Graham-Brown, *Images of Women: The Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East, 1980-1950*, London: Quartet Books, 1988

J. Green, *American Photography: A Critical History*, New York: H. N. Abrams, 1984

G. Freund, *Photography and Society*, London: Gordon and Fraser, 1974

E. Jussim & E. Lindquist-Cook, *Landscape As Photograph*, Yale: Yale University Press, 1985

S. Kent & J. Morreau, *Women's Images of Men*, (1981), London: Pandora Press, 1990

R. Krauss & J. Livingstone, *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism*, London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1986

F. Lloyd (ed.), *Contemporary Arab Women's Art: Dialogues of the Present*, London: Women's Art Library & I. B. Tauris, 1999

F. Lloyd (ed.), *Displacement and Difference: Contemporary Arab Culture in the Diaspora*, London: Saffron Books, 2000

D. Mellor (ed.), *Germany: The New Photography 1927-33*, London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978

B. Newhall (ed.), *Photography: Essays and Images*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1981

C. Phillips, *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Writings 1913 -40*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Aperture, 1989

Photography Workshop, *Photography/Politics One*, London, 1979

Photography Workshop, *Photography/Politics Two*, London, 1987

A. Scharf, *Art and Photography*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975

A. Scharf, 'Modernism, Photography, Art' in *History of Photography*, Vol. 13, No.1 Jan/Mar, 1989

A. Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions and Practices*, 1991

S. Sontag, *On Photography*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984

J. Tagg, 'The Currency of the Photograph', in *Screen Education*, 28 Autumn 1978 pp 45-67

J. Tagg, *The Burden of Representation, Essays on Photographies and Histories*, London: Macmillan, 1988

Ten 8, 'Men in Camera' special issue

Ten 8, 'Black Experiences' special issue, vol. 2, 1992

Ten 8, 'Independence Days' special issue on race

M. Weaver, *The Art of Photography 1839-1989*, Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1989

L. Wells (ed.), *Photography - A Critical Introduction*, London: Routledge, 1997