

Course description (topics)

Title of the course: History and Philosophy of Photography / Photography in Theory				
Tutors of the course, contact details: Gábor Pfisztner, pfisztner.gabor@g.mome.hu , +36 20 2280667				
Code: M-FT-202	Related curriculum (programme/level): Photography MA	Recommended semester within the curriculum: 2	Credit: 5	Number of class hours: 20 (48) Student working hours: 102
Related codes:	Type: seminar/lecture/class work	Can it be an elective course: -	In case of elective what are the specific prerequisites: -	
Course connections (prerequisites, parallelism): History of Photography				
Aim and principles of the course: The aim of this course is to scrutinise and discuss recent theories on photography as an art form, or photography in art (respectively). We try to conceptualise photography as an art form, or, maybe rather, in art. We will also inquire into different approaches towards photography as a 'medium' and as a 'tool' to convey a message about it or with it. To better understand the differences, we will examine some contemporary art works with different aims and approaches. Through this process, students need to reflect on their existing concepts and their own artistic practice, but they also can learn how to be critical of others' concepts and different theories. It is essential that the students learn how to express their thoughts in writing when studying such theories.				
Learning outcomes (professional and general competences to be developed): Knowledge: They understand the importance of analytical, critical, and historical thinking. Their knowledge is characterised by a broad spectrum of knowledge and a high level of literacy. Ability: Based on the experience gained during their studies, they are able to analyse, process, and manage basic knowledge, and to express their own opinions and critical approach within their own field of art (photography). They have the ability to collect and interpret relevant data for the development of their creative concept. Attitude: They think critically, looking for correlations of contexts. They strive to be informed. They persist with their found themes, understanding the role of time in becoming independent artists and authors. Autonomy and responsibility: They research and develop their professional skills independently. Committed to learning and understanding the historical achievements of photography.				
Topics and themes to be covered in the course: At the beginning of the course we raise the question whether artists need to study theory and to discuss it. The objective of this initial debate is to conceptualise the difference between to concepts: 'Photography as art' and 'Photography in art'. Through this approach, we raise the problem of a medium and the problem of 'medium' in 21st century art production and we also try to answer the question why it is worth to do so. At the initial stage, we students will be given a short summary of the theory of Peter Osborne and Diarmuid Costello only to see their points and				

know their arguments. For both intellectuals, theory is essential to conceptualise and understand the possible methods that are involved when using photography and working with photographs.

After this introduction, we will discuss two different possible approaches to photography as a means. In today art world, artist, among other possibilities, use art to reflect on art and artistic strategies, and, therefore, the work will have a process character. Other artist, however, use photography to reflect on social and political issues that concern contemporary society in different regions of the world. Socially engaged art activity's aim is to create a discursive space that makes another kind of approach possible to those issues if the aesthetic realm is provided.

Art as a tool to promote social and political change has a long history also in the history of art theory. We will discuss Walter Benjamin's concept of the author as an important actor to influence historical processes, and analyse the work of some of his contemporaries as well as a later artist couple, the Bechers. However, there can be other methods and approaches than that, which is discussed by Benjamin. A more recent example is the theory of Nicolas Bourriaud, 'relational aesthetics', and some other techniques that rely on photography as a tool to document and to reveal. Since this approach aims to provoke and create a discursive space to discuss several issues, we can say, it has to rely on the public sphere as it was introduced by Jürgen Habermas. To fully exhaust this concept, we also look to the theory of Niklas Luhmann who considers art as an opportunity and a model to provide a foundation for and to form society.

Specificities of process organisation / organisation of learning:

Course structure, nature of the individual sessions and their timing (in case of several teachers' involvement, please indicate the distribution of their teaching input:

Thursdays 13:40-15:00

23th February: Gábor Pfsztner – Introduction: Do artists need theory? Why do we discuss theory and theoretical issues regarding photography? (a 'round table' discussion)

2nd March: Gábor Pfsztner – The 'purpose' of art – diachronic and synchronic approach a) art on art and artistic production or b) art as socially engaged activity on social issues

9th March: Gábor Pfsztner – To a): introduction and close analysis of the work of Dezső Szabó and Gábor Ósz (double class), a hermeneutical approach

16th March: Gábor Pfsztner – To a): revisiting the works of Szabó and Ósz with regard to some concepts of Heidegger and Gadamer for understanding and interpreting works of art

23th March: Gábor Pfsztner – To b): Benjamin and the artist as 'operator' and as 'producer'

30th March: Gábor Pfsztner - To b): based on Benjamin's concept, and with an excursus with Klaus Honneff, analysing the work of August Sander, John Heartfield, the Bechers (double class)

6th April: Gábor Pfsztner – To b): Nicolas Bourriaud and the concept of 'relational aesthetics' and the possibility of documentary in art

13rd April: Gábor Pfsztner – To b): Examples by Pettendi and Technica Schweiz, Graafland

20th April: Gábor Pfsztner – To b): Luhmann's theory of society exemplified through art (the medium of society), see also Habermas's theory of the Public Sphere

27th April: Gábor Pfsztner – Filling in the frames, the role of photography in art – postconceptual art, how previously mentioned examples support the concept of

Osborne (or rather they don't?), and concept of Costello (and McIver-Lopes) an argument for an 'artistic photography' exemplified on the work of James Welling and/or Joachim Schmeisser

04th June: Final deadline to submit the essay

Students' tasks and responsibilities:

in class activity, completing the readings, active participation in discussions in class
Learning environment: (e.g. classroom, studio, off-site, online, in-company placement, etc.)
classroom discussion

Assessment:

Based on the essay and on the activity in class

Requirements to be met:

To qualify for a grade, students need to take part in class, complete the readings for designated classes, and to write a 1500 to 2000-word essay

Method of assessment:

discussions in class, essay writing

Assessment criteria (what is taken into consideration in the assessment):

Structure of the essay, relevance of the argumentation, critical approach, use of literature, appropriate use of references,

How is the mark calculated:

85-100%: excellent

60-84%: good

40-59%: medium

20-39%: sufficient

0-19%: insufficient

Class work (30%)

Activity (30%)

Quality of the essay (40%)

Required Literature:

Costello, Diarmuid: *On Photography, A Philosophical Inquiry*, Routledge (2018)

Gadamer, Hans-Georg: *Truth and Method*, Second, Revised Edition, Continuum (2004), selected parts

Heidegger, Martin: *The Origin of the Work of Art*, In: *Off the Beaten Track*, Cambridge University Press (2002), selected parts

Luhmann, Niklas: *Art as a Social System*, Stanford University Press (2000), selected parts

Osborne, Peter: *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, Verso (2013), selected parts

Bourriaud, Nicolas: *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presse Du Reel (1998), selected parts

Stallabrass, Julian (ed): *Documentary* (Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art) MIT Press (2013), selected chapters

Recommended Literature:

Dumbadze, Alexander and Suzanne Hudson: *Contemporary Art 1989 to the Present*, Wiley-Blackwell (2013), selected parts

Habermas, Jürgen: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, The MIT Press (1991)

Osborne, Peter: The postconceptual condition: Or, the cultural logic of high capitalism today, *Radical Philosophy* 184, Mar/Apr (2014)

Recognition of knowledge acquired elsewhere/previously/validation principle:

- No exemption from attending and completing the course will be granted,
- Exemptions from the acquisition of certain competences and the completion of certain tasks may be granted,
- some tasks may be replaced by other activities,
- full exemption may be granted

Out-of-class consultation times and location:

Based on individual appointment