

Lingnan University
Department of Philosophy

Course Title	: Philosophy of Photography
Course Code	: PHI3281
Recommended Study Year	: 2 nd , 3 rd and 4 th Years
No. of Credits/Term	: 3
Mode of Tuition	: Sectional
Class Contact Hours	: 3 hours
Category in Major Programme	: Programme Elective – Aesthetics Profile
Prerequisite(s)	: N/A
Co-requisite(s)	: N/A
Exclusion(s)	: N/A
Exemption Requirement(s)	: N/A

Brief Course Description

This course explores some of the epistemological, aesthetic, and ethical issues raised by photography. Some coverage will be given to relevant background knowledge concerning the history of photographic technologies and their multiple uses. The course will include a practical component related to the making and appreciation of artistic photographs.

Aims

The course aims to:

- provide students with an understanding of philosophical issues pertaining to photography
- present some influential discussions and arguments involved in philosophical reflections on photography
- enable students to reflect on and improve their own uses and understanding of photography

Indicative Content

1. definitions of ‘photography’ and the ontology of photographs
2. photographic depiction and content
3. realism and the evidentiary status of photographs
4. technology and agency in the making of photographs
5. the multiple uses and values of photographs
6. art photography and its genres (landscape, still life, portraiture, etc.)
7. the interpretation and appreciation of artistic photographs
8. photography and the other arts (painting, photography, narrative)
9. the history of philosophical reflection on photography

Teaching Method

Sectional, including lectures, student presentations, discussion, small group assignments, practical photographic assignments, and essay writing.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Identify some of the main topics, theories and approaches in the philosophy of photography
2. Appraise some of the central claims about the nature and diverse values of photographs
3. Evaluate critically the claims about photographs and epistemology
4. Reflect on aspects of the history of philosophical reflections on photography

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

1. Students will discuss the assigned topics and readings. They are expected to be able to reflect deeply and in an informed manner on the issues related to the session's topic (to assess LO 2, 3)
2. Students will write essay assignments. They are expected to be able to integrate what they have learned in class with their own readings. The essay will serve to assess students' understanding of the relevant philosophical debates covered in the course, and their own critical evaluation of them (to assess LO 1, 2, 3, 4)
3. Students will give a presentation and engage critically with the required readings and show that they have understood and thought about the arguments and issues central to those readings (to assess LO 2, 3)
4. Mid-term and final examinations will assess students' engagement with the required readings and other course content with an eye to the realization of course learning outcomes (to assess LO 1, 2, 3, 4)

Assessment

Attendance, in-class participation: 10%

Mid-term examination: 30%

Essay assignment (the instructor will assign 1 short essay): 20%

Final examination: 40%

Required Readings

(selections from the following as well as selected papers from philosophy journals):

Abell, Catharine, and Katerina Bantinaki, eds. (2010) *Philosophical Perspectives on Depiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sontag, Susan (1973) *On Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Walden, Scott, ed. (2008) *Photography and Philosophy: Essays on the Pencil of Nature*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Walton, Kendall L. (2008) *Marvelous Images: On Values and the Arts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Supplementary Readings

La Grange, Ashley, ed. (2005) *Basic Critical Theory for Photographers*. Oxford: Focal Press.

Lenman, Robin, ed. (2005) *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Includes a helpful bibliography and list of relevant websites.

Maynard, Patrick (1997) *The Engine of Visualization: Thinking through Photography*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Sandler, Martin W. (2002) *Photography: An Illustrated History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Savedoff, Barbara E. (2000) *Transforming images: how photography complicates the picture*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Important Notes

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is "the presentation of another person's work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student's own work". Students are required to strictly

follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.

- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students' understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course "Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness" is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>