

# SM3721: THEORIES OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND IMAGING

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## Effective Term

Semester A 2022/23

## Part I Course Overview

### Course Title

Theories of Photography and Imaging

### Subject Code

SM - School of Creative Media

### Course Number

3721

### Academic Unit

School of Creative Media (SM)

### College/School

School of Creative Media (SM)

### Course Duration

One Semester

### Credit Units

3

### Level

B1, B2, B3, B4 - Bachelor's Degree

### Medium of Instruction

English

### Medium of Assessment

English

### Prerequisites

SM1013 Introduction to Photography or GE1129 Creative Photography

### Precursors

Nil

### Equivalent Courses

Nil

### Exclusive Courses

Nil

## Part II Course Details

### Abstract

This course highlights the use of theories.

In the spirit of theory as practice, a course on the theories of photography turns around the assumption that art-making is best when the artist is as spontaneous as s/he can be. With a comprehensive list of courses on the practice of photography in place at SCM, this course aims to invite students to think through the many implications of photography and the many possible ways to understand photographic practices. This course aims at encouraging students in photography to become more informed about the choices they make and the reasons they provide for their photo-making activities. For students who do not specialize in photography, this course enables them to be informed, intelligent users, and be able to benefit from the theoretical thinking of photography to better other areas of academic/artistic pursuits.

The first part of the course persuades students to acknowledge the importance and relevance of theory, and that even when we don't mention theory, our photographic activities always already rest on implicit, unspoken assumptions presented as 'common sense'. As Victor Burgin argues, "theory sets out to question the underlying assumptions of common sense in order to replace them."

Even though this is a theory course, students are invited to walk through selected 20<sup>th</sup>-century and 21<sup>st</sup> century thinkers who have contributed to our understanding of photography and photographic practices. While it is still arguable whether photography has a theory of its own, we take the history of photography itself as theory. We will examine theories of image-making, the use of photography in contemporary everyday culture, theories of interpretation and meaning-making, photography within a broader system of picture-making, as well as the social and technological contexts and issues underpinning photography.

The last section of the course will deal with the impact of digitalization on our understanding and practice of photography, and the role of photography in contemporary art and visual culture. Throughout the semester, students will be asked to read assigned texts of digestible size and to complete a final photography project with a thesis statement.

### Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

	CILOs	Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Identify various theoretical perspectives and traditions in the study of photography			x	
2	Defend the value of theory and ways of using theory			x	
3	Evaluate photographs with an enriched vocabulary			x	
4	Assert students' own voices: conceive a critical research-creation project with a defensible position				x
5	Conduct extra research on the subject in relation to one's own experience as a self-reflective process				x

#### A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

#### A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

#### A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

### Teaching and Learning Activities (TLAs)

	TLAs	Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	Lecture	Lectures	1, 2	22
2	Analysis	Case studies	1, 2, 3, 5	11
3	Group work	Group discussion and presentation on assigned readings	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	6
4	Research-creation	Final project: theory-informed research creation	2, 4, 5	Individual
5	Analysis report	Response papers	1, 2, 3, 5	Individual

### Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

	ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks (e.g. Parameter for GenAI use)
1	1 group presentation on an assigned topic	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	20	
2	Short response papers on a particular theoretical concept	1, 5	20	
3	Final project: theory-informed research creation	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	40	
4	In-class participation & discussion	1, 2, 3, 4	20	

### Continuous Assessment (%)

100

### Examination (%)

0

### Assessment Rubrics (AR)

#### Assessment Task

1. Presentation

#### Criterion

This assessment will grade on content and fluency of presentation. Students should show their co-operation to conduct a well-organized presentation with their own argument and evidence from readings and notes. The threshold of 'discovery' lied in a student's self initiatives to conduct additional research and to personalize theories for her/his personal daily experience.

#### Excellent (A+, A, A-)

- Rich, informative content, excellent grasp of the material with in-depth and extensive knowledge of the subject matter
- Rigorous organization, coherent structure, and systematic exposition with a strong sense of narrative
- Superior presentation skills: distinct pronunciation, fluent expression and appropriate diction, exact time-management
- Critical analysis with insightful comments opening up new issues, or suggesting the ability to theorize

**Good (B+, B, B-)**

- Adequate content with firm grasp of the material that informs the audience on a subject matter
- Reasonable organization, balanced structure and composition
- Good verbal communication: comprehensible pronunciation, fluent expression and diction, fair time-management

**Fair (C+, C, C-)**

- Adequate content with comprehensive grasp of the material demonstrating basic knowledge of the subject matter
- Fair organization, weak structure and composition
- Fair presentation skills: acceptable pronunciation, expression and diction, fair time-management

**Marginal (D)**

- Weak content, loose grasp of the general ideas with some knowledge of the subject matter
- Poor organization, structure and composition
- Poor presentation skills: marginal pronunciation, expression and diction, poor time-management

**Failure (F)**

- Inadequate content, fail to identify the general ideas with knowledge of the subject matter
- No organization, structure or/and composition
- Poor presentation skills: marginal pronunciation, expression and diction, minimal time-management

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**Assessment Task**

2. Response Paper

**Criterion**

This assessment will grade on rationality, clarity and fluency of argument and comment. The threshold of ‘discovery’ lied in a student’s self initiatives to conduct additional research and to personalize theories for her/his personal daily experience.

**Excellent (A+, A, A-)**

- Rich content, excellent ability to interpret and integrate various resources
- Rigorous organization, coherent structure, systematic composition
- Precision in argument, well defined and reasoned points of view grounded in insightful interpretation of existing literature
- Readiness to respond to peer opinion and other views initiated in class discussion
- Discussion shed light on new dimensions of the issue

**Good (B+, B, B-)**

- Adequate content, sufficient ability to integrate various resources based on demand
- Reasonable organization with balanced structure and composition
- Clear elaboration of ideas that sticks to the point, with clearly differentiated issues, ability to interpret opinions independently
- Sufficient responses to peer comments to sustain a discussion

**Fair (C+, C, C-)**

- Adequate content, fair ability to integrate various resources based on demand
- Fair organization with adequate structure and composition
- Relevant points made to the subject matter in question
- Ability to respond to other statements and engage in class discussion

**Marginal (D)**

- Weak content, limited use of resources
- Poor organization, structure and composition

- Relevant points to the subject matter, marginal ability to interpret opinions
- Ability to respond to other comments in simple terms

**Failure (F)**

- Inadequate content, no/ irrelevant use of resources
  - No organization, structure or/and composition
  - Irrelevant points to the subject matter, no ability to interpret opinions
  - Fail to respond to other comments
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**Assessment Task**

3. Final Paper

**Criterion**

Students should demonstrate ability to utilize primary and secondary sources, build up argument and analysis. The threshold of 'discovery' lied in a student's self initiatives to conduct additional research and to personalize theories for her/his personal daily experience.

**Excellent (A+, A, A-)**

- Excellent grasp of research material, able to explain key concepts, assumptions and debates
- Rigorous organization, coherent structure, distinct thesis, properly argued with strong narrative
- Insightful interpretation of the subject matter with distinct themes and thesis
- Critical analysis with insightful comments opening up new issues, or suggesting the ability to theorize
- Ability to approach a text or a theme using a variety of theories and analytical tools
- Strong bibliography suggesting breadth and depth of coverage and informed insights

**Good (B+, B, B-)**

- Firm grasp of materials, able to explain key concepts and assumptions
- Reasonable organization, balanced structure, adequate content, sufficient ability to integrate various resources based on demand
- Clear ideas which keep to the point, clear-cut subject, ability to interpret opinions independently
- Organized bibliography which can be utilized in accordance with the topic

**Fair (C+, C, C-)**

- Comprehensive grasp of materials, able to explain key concepts
- Fair organization, weak structure, adequate content, fair ability to integrate various resources based on demand
- Relevant points to the subject matter, fair ability to interpret opinions
- Unorganized bibliography which can be utilized in accordance with the topic

**Marginal (D)**

- Loose grasp of materials, cannot explain key concepts
- Poor organization and structure, weak content, limited use of resources
- Relevant points to the subject matter, marginal ability to interpret opinions
- Insufficient and/or unorganized bibliography

**Failure (F)**

- Poor grasp of materials
  - No organization and structure, inadequate content, no/ irrelevant use of resources
  - Irrelevant points to the subject matter, minimal ability to interpret opinions
  - Irrelevant bibliography
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**Assessment Task**

4. In-Class Participation and Discussion

### Criterion

This assessment task reviews students' participation and performance in discussions, debates and peer critique during the tutorial sessions. The evidence of 'negotiation', the sign of discovery, lies in students' pre-class preparation and interpersonal sensitivity to his/her peer members.

#### Excellent (A+, A, A-)

- Active in-class participation, positive listening, strong ability to stimulate class discussion and comment on other points
- In-depth pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Interpret others' views with an open mind and ready to negotiate
- Readiness to share personal insight via analysis and synthesis with informed views
- Constructively critical, thus facilitating the discovery of new issues

#### Good (B+, B, B-)

- Active in-class participation, positive listening, ability to initiate class discussion and comment on other points
- Adequate pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Interpret opinions effectively

#### Fair (C+, C, C-)

- Attentive in in-class participation, listening with comprehension, but only infrequently contributing
- Adequate pre-class preparation but little familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Fair ability in interpreting opinions

#### Marginal (D)

- Unmotivated to participate in class discussion or comment on other people's views
- Little pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Poor ability in interpreting opinions

#### Failure (F)

- Unwilling to participate in class discussion and comment on other points, even when requested by the teacher
- No pre-class preparation and familiarity with peer reports and other materials
- Minimal ability in interpreting opinions

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### Additional Information for AR

All A+/A/A- grade assignment should comply with the highest performance of Discovery-oriented learning.

## Part III Other Information

### Keyword Syllabus

What is photography? - automatic record of a reality, expression of an individual, photograph as "a record of a reality refracted through a sensibility" (Burgin)

What is photography theory and why we need it

Complementary theories to photography: photography and cognitive psychology, perception theories, the social dimension of photography, feminism and photography / photography and realism / semiology / intertextuality

Roland Barthes: Camera Lucida, archives of the dead / Walter Benjamin: the Optical Unconscious / Susan Sontag: photography within the humanities / W.J. T. Mitchell: beyond the visual /

Lev Manovich: the paradox of digital photography

Photographic practices / the uses of the photograph / performative photography / photography for archiving / what is documentary photography / History of photography as theory: before chemical-base photography / words and pictures / photo archives and Eugene Atget

### Reading List

**Compulsory Readings**

Title	
1	Victor Burgin, 1984: "Something About Photography Theory" (A review by Victor Burgin), Screen no. 25(1), January/February, 61-66. (The essay is a transcript of Burgin's speech given on September 30, 1983 at the School of Communication of Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, Toronto, as part of a public talk series to discuss the introduction of courses in the theory of photography into its syllabus. The panel had three other speakers: Hollis Frampton, Allan Sekula, and Joel Snyder.)
2	Clément Chéroux, Andreas Fischer, Pierre Apraxine, Denis Canguilhem, and Sophie Schmit, 2005: <i>The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult</i> . Yale University Press, New Haven and London.
3	James Elkins, 2008: "Photography," in <i>Six Stories from the End of Representation</i> ; Stanford University Press, Stanford; 51-86.
4	Olivier Lézoray and Leo Grady (eds), 2012: <i>Image Processing and Analysis with Graphs: Theory and Practice (Digital Imaging and Computer Vision)</i> ; CRC.
5	_____ (ed.), 2007: <i>Photography Theory</i> . Routledge, New York and London.
6	W.J.T. Mitchell, 2006: <i>What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images</i> . University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
7	Mary Price, 1994: <i>The Photograph: A Strange, Confined Space</i> . Stanford University Press, Stanford.
8	Susan Sontag, 2001: <i>On Photography</i> ; Picador.
9	_____, 2001: <i>Against Interpretation: and other Essays</i> . Picador.
10	Jo Spence, 1995: <i>Cultural Sniping</i> . Routledge, London and New York
11	_____, 1988: <i>Putting Myself in the Picture</i> ; Real Comet Pr.
12	_____ and Patricia Holland; Simon Wantey (ed.), 1987: <i>Photography/Politics: Two (Photography Workshop) volume 2</i> ; Methuen.
13	Liz Wells (ed.), 2002: <i>The Photography Reader</i> . Routledge, New York and London.

**Additional Readings**

Title	
1	Martin Lister, ed., 2013. <i>The Photographic Image in Visual Culture 2nd Edition</i> . London: Routledge
2	Ingrid Hoelzl & Remi Marie, 2015. <i>Softimage: Towards a New Theory of the Digital Image</i> . Bristol/Chicago: Intellect