

Syllabus
Course description

Course title	Project Visual Communication 1a "This Is Not a Photograph!"
Course code	97160
Scientific sector	Module 1: ICAR/13 Module 2: ICAR/17 Module 3: M-FIL/04
Degree	Bachelor in Design and Art (L-4)
Semester	Winter semester 2024/25
Year	2 nd
Credits	19 (Module 1: 8 CP, Module 2: 6 CP, Module 3: 5 CP)
Modular	Yes

Total lecturing hours	180 (Module 1: 90, Module 2: 60, Module 3: 30)
Total hours of self-study and/ or other individual educational activities	295 (Module 1: about 110, Module 2: about 90, Module 3: about 95)
Attendance	not compulsory but recommended
Prerequisites	To have passed the WUP project and all the WUP courses; to have certified the language level proficiency B1 in the course language in years following the first.
Maximum number of students per class	20

Course description

The course belongs to the class "caratterizzante" (module 1 and 2) and "affine integrativa" (module 3) in the major in Design.

Description Module 1 – Visual Communication: DE

This Is Not a Photograph!

Fotografie tritt uns immer in Form konkreter Bilder entgegen, zum Beispiel als Post auf einer Plattform, als Werbefoto auf einer Website, als gedrucktes Nachrichtenfoto, etc. All diese Fotografien, die vermutlich mit einer Kamera entstanden sind, scheinen einen unleugbaren Realitätsbezug zu besitzen, denn offenbar war da eine «*notwendig* reale Sache, die vor dem Objektiv platziert war und ohne die es keine Photographie gäbe» (Roland Barthes).

Der Grad der Ähnlichkeit der fotografischen Darstellung mit der Erscheinung realer Objekte begründet noch immer die Konvention unserer Wahrnehmung von Fotografien und aus Erfahrung tendieren wir dazu, einer fotografischen <Objektivität> und <Wahrheit> zu folgen. Auch wenn wir inzwischen nie wirklich wissen, ob wir noch ein Kamera-Foto oder ein komplett KI-generiertes Bild betrachten – die Präsenz (oder im Falle der KI, die Absenz) eines Objekts vor einer Kamera spielt also die entscheidende Rolle für unsere Bewertung einer Fotografie, beispielsweise als ein glaubhaftes <Dokument> oder als ein <Fake>.

Stellen wir uns nun vor, ein Foto ohne Kamera herzustellen, ein Fotogramm, «die absolute eigenart der fotografie» (László Moholy-Nagy). Hierbei hinterlässt ein auf lichtempfindlichem Material platziertes Objekt eine Spur. Das Ergebnis wird sich zwischen konkreter Nachvollziehbarkeit (bedingt durch die Präsenz eines Objekts) und spekulativer Abstraktion bewegen. Genau diese Dialektik interessiert uns in diesem Projekt: etwas wird vom Realitätsgehalt einer Abbildung <abgezogen> und etwas Neues kommt hinzu.

Abstraktion als Konzept spielt nicht nur zum Beispiel in der Kommunikation oder der Informationstechnik eine grosse Rolle. In der Produktion visueller Konzepte in Design und Kunst ist Abstraktion ein entscheidender Faktor, um Zusammenhänge zu verstehen und Strategien zu entwickeln. Als semiotisch gerüstete Designer*innen und Künstler*innen interessieren uns die Aspekte der Repräsentation. Durch Beschränkung auf die kameralose Fotografie bietet sich die experimentelle Möglichkeit, mit der Konvention der Repräsentation zu spielen und so die Konstruktion von Bedeutung zu hinterfragen.

Im Verlauf des Projekts werden wir unterschiedliche

kameralose Verfahren (Cyanotypie, Fotogramm, Scanner) methodisch erkunden. Die wöchentliche Praxis wird das Spannungsfeld zwischen Identifizierbarkeit und Gegenstandslosigkeit experimentell ausloten.

EN

This Is Not a Photograph!

Photography always confronts us in form of concrete images, for example as a post on a platform, as an advertising photo on a website, as a printed news photo, etc. All these photographs, which were most likely taken with a camera, seem to have an undeniable reference to reality, because there was obviously a «*necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph» (Roland Barthes). The degree of similarity between the photographic representation and the appearance of real objects still establishes the convention of our perception of photographs and from experience we tend to follow a photographic <objectivity> and <truth>. Even if we never really know whether we are still looking at a camera photo or a completely AI-generated image, the presence (or, in the case of AI, the absence) of an object in front of a camera plays a decisive role in our assessment of a photograph, for example as a credible <document> or as a <fake>.

Let us now imagine producing a photograph without a camera, a photogram, «the unique nature of photography» (László Moholy-Nagy). Here, an object placed on light-sensitive material leaves a trace. The result will range between concrete retraceability (due to the presence of an object) and speculative abstraction. It is precisely these dialectics that interest us in this project: something is <subtracted> from the realistic aspect of an image and something new is added.

Abstraction as a concept not only plays a major role in communication or information technology, for example. In the production of visual concepts in design and art, abstraction is a decisive factor in understanding contexts and developing strategies. As semiotically equipped designers and artists, we are interested in the aspects of representation. By limiting ourselves to cameraless photography, we have the experimental opportunity to play with the conventions of representation and thus question the construction of meaning.

In the course of the project, we will methodically explore different cameraless processes (cyanotype, photogram, scanner). The weekly practice will experimentally explore the tension between identifiability and non-objectivity.

Description Module 2 – Graphic Design

IT

In questo modulo, cercheremo di affrontare il tema pratico della produzione di concetti editoriali che possano contenere il materiale sperimentale raccolto durante il corso. Contemporaneamente, si apprenderanno aspetti del design di base e della tipografia applicata attraverso esercizi pratici. Poiché ci sarà una forte interdipendenza tra il modulo 1 e il modulo 2, la tipografia sarà esplorata anche durante gli esperimenti di laboratorio settimanali — attraverso la distorsione delle forme delle lettere e l'uso di materiali fotosensibili indagheremo l'aspetto dell'astrazione sulla nozione di leggibilità.

EN

In this module, we will attempt to address the practical theme of producing editorial concepts that can contain the experimental material collected during the course. Simultaneously, aspects of basic design and applied typography will be learned through exercises. Since there will be a strong interdependence between module 1 and 2, typography will also be explored within the course of the weekly lab experiments — through the distortion of letterforms and the use of photosensitive materials we will investigate the aspect of abstraction on the notion of readability.

Description Module 3 – Visual Culture

The module overall aim is to nourish the critical thinking of students in the context of design-oriented practices. That reflexive movement will imply the exploration of connections between the proposed topic (photographic material abstraction) and existing references in the humanities (scientific literature, especially the semiotic one).

The framing relationship between *identification* and *abstraction* in the photographic interpretation will be re-articulated in the tension between the so-called *figurative and plastic reading* of images, according to the two logics of iconicity and imprint-indexicality (Peirce). The cultural debate around the photographic medium will be the occasion of deepening the pattern-oriented, diagram readability of abstractions and the type of contents that these kinds of explorations could disclose. Some art and design project implying the use of photography will be discussed and analyzed. The content plane, in search of concepts and their articulation, will be the main goal of the second part of the course: the professional and/or ludic exploration of medium potentials could/should then

find a horizon of sharable meanings, in a proper design process. The course will also offer tools to interrogate student's concept consistency and coherence for their final project, inflecting the general topic.

Specific educational objectives	Knowledge and understanding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - have acquired one's own project methodology in the field of product design. This methodology includes the ability to oversee all phases of design, from the generation of ideas to the realisation of the finished project. Through the integrated teaching of project subjects of practical and theoretical nature, graduates will be able to simultaneously address all these aspects and consider them as synonymous with the development of a project that is successful on a formal, technical, scientific and cultural level.
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Lecturer	Module 1 – Visual Communication: Thomas Mayfried e-mail thomas.mayfried@unibz.it , webpage https://www.unibz.it/en/faculties/design-art/academic-staff/person/37229-thomas-mayfried Module 2 – Graphic Design: Gianluca Seta e-mail gianluca.seta@unibz.it webpage https://www.unibz.it/en/faculties/design-art/academic-staff/person/34470-gianluca-seta Module 3 – Visual Culture Giacomo Festi e-mail giacomo.festi@unibz.it webpage https://www.unibz.it/it/faculties/design-art/academic-staff/person/40076-giacomo-festi
Scientific sector of the lecturer	Module 1 – Thomas Mayfried: n.n. Module 2 – Gianluca Seta: n.n. Module 3 – Giacomo Festi: n.n.
Teaching language	Module 1 – German Module 2 – Italian Module 3 – English
Office hours	Module 1: Tuesday, 14:00–16:00 (during the days of the project) Module 2: Tuesday, 14:00–17:00 (during the days of the project) Module 3: Wed, 9.00 – 11.00 (during the days of the project). In order to avoid overlapping, the exact time of the appointment will be individually arranged by email.

<p>List of topics covered</p>	<p>Module 1: Visual communication, visual grammar, representation and abstraction in design and art, theory and history of design, strategies in design and art; theory and history of photography, abstraction in photography, cameraless photography, analog and digital photographic processes; abstract cinema.</p> <p>Module 2: Metadesign, Graphic Design, Typography, Print Techniques, Basic Design, Photography and Representation</p> <p>Module 3: The photographic sign in debate: from iconicity to indexicality. Photography in Barthes and Peirce. Studium and punctum. The statute of the photographic image and the mediation of the genre. The invention of the plastic reading: introducing Floch. The semiotic analysis of photography: guided examples. Contemporary debates around CGI images and photographic format.</p>
<p>Teaching format</p>	<p>Module 1: Collective and individual meetings and discussions, lectures, assignments, critique / reviews</p> <p>Module 2: Workshop, lectures, projects, seminars and reviews</p> <p>Module 3: frontal lecture, student presentations of essay and class discussion, guided assignments</p>

Expected learning outcomes	Disciplinary competence
	<p><i>Knowledge and understanding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - have acquired their own project methodology in the field of visual communication, from the phase of planning to the phase of realisation of the project. - have acquired the basic practical and theoretical knowledge necessary to realise a project in the field of visual communication. - have acquired the basic knowledge to be able to turn a critical eye to their own work and to deal with contemporary complexity. - have acquired the basic knowledge necessary for further Master's studies in all components of project culture as well as in theoretical subjects. - have acquired a basic knowledge and understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - design processes for photography - design processes for graphic design - design processes for editorial design - design processes for publishing (print / digital) - design processes for information design - design processes for video and motion graphics - design processes for exhibition design / exhibition graphics - have acquired the ability to communicate and properly argue the reasons for one's choices <p><i>Applying knowledge and understanding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - plan, develop and realise a project in the field of product design. - use the basic knowledge acquired in the technical, scientific and theoretical fields to realise a mature project. - be able to finalize the creation of an accomplished project in the field of product design, thanks to the basic knowledge acquired in the practical and theoretical fields. - recognise the main phenomena of contemporary society, to observe them critically, also from an ethical and social point of view, and to elaborate appropriate solutions at the level of a design proposal/response. - make use of the skills acquired during the course of study in the event of continuing studies in a Master's degree programme in the field of product design and to develop them further.

Transversal competence and soft skills

Making judgements

- Be able to make independent judgements for the purpose of developing their own design skills and in relation to all those decisions that are necessary to bring a project to completion.
- Be able to make independent judgements, both in the critical evaluation of their own work and in their ability to use the right interpretative tools in those design contexts in which they will work and/or continue their studies, also considering ethical and social aspects.

Communication skills

- Present an independently realised project in the field of product design in the form of an installation, orally as well as in writing in a professional manner.
- to professionally communicate and substantiate one's own decisions and justify them from a formal and theoretical point of view.

Learning skills

- have learned a work methodology at a professional level - in the sense of being able to identify, develop and realise solutions to complex problems by applying the knowledge acquired in the practical and theoretical fields - in order to start a professional activity and/or continue their studies with a master's degree programme.
- have developed a creative attitude and learned how to enhance it and develop it according to their own inclinations.
- have acquired basic knowledge in theoretical and practical subjects as well as a study methodology suitable for continuing studies with a master's degree programme.

<p>Assessment</p>	<p>Module 1: Submission, presentation and discussion of the outcomes of the weekly practice and a final project. Students must conceive, develop and produce a project as part of this course. There will be final individual presentations where the students will discuss their projects, explain their conceptual approaches and prove that they have developed critical reflection on the topic and references proposed during the semester. Personal commitment and participation is expected in all phases of the course, to both collective discussions and practical activities.</p> <p>Module 2: presentation and discussion of the own work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - originality - structure - ability of presentation - clarity - autonomy in the design process - team work ability - curiosity to discover news - active participation <p>Module 3: The assessment will be based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the quality of the theoretical insertions in the project, through assignments and the writing of a final paper; - the personal engagement and participation to the different phases of the course.
<p>Assessment language</p>	<p>The same as the teaching language.</p>

Evaluation criteria and criteria for awarding marks

By exam's date, each student must upload on the Microsite of the faculty detailed documentation of the work done during the course. Documentation is an integral part of the exam. The documentation must include visual documentation and an abstract of the project.

Module 1:

- presentation of the individual outcomes of the weekly practice
- for the final work:
- conclusiveness of the design concept
- conclusiveness of the formal aspects of the design work
- quality of the technical execution
- clarity of the presentation

Module 2:

- For the own work: originality, appropriateness, formal, aesthetic quality, technical quality
- For the presentation: clarity, convincingness
- For the process during the whole semester
- quality of team dynamics and individual role in it
- individual development. Active participation and quality of contributions.
- Correct use of the tools and new competences

Module 3:

Students will prepare a final document resuming both the research part, with the suggested integrations and the specific project analysis and interpretation, according to the method proposed during the classes. That document/paper will be uploaded on the devoted Teams channel a few days before the final exam. Part of the final evaluation will also be the intermediate assignments, necessary step to approach the transversal knowledge of the course.

<p>Required readings</p>	<p>Module 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Roland Barthes, <i>La Chambre claire</i>, Paris, Seuil, 1980; <i>Camera lucida. Reflections on photography</i>, New York, Hill and Wang, 1981; <i>Die helle Kammer. Bemerkungen zur Photographie</i>, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1989 – Bernd Stiegler (Ed.), <i>Texte zur Theorie der Fotografie</i>, Stuttgart, Philipp Reclam jun., 2nd ed. 2017 – László Moholy-Nagy, <i>Malerei, Fotografie, Film</i>, München, Langen, 1927; <i>Pittura, fotografia, film</i>, Torino, Einaudi, 1987; <i>Painting, photography, film</i>, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1987 – Alain Sayag (Ed.), <i>László Moholy-Nagy, Compositions lumineuses 1922–1943. Photogrammes des collections du Musée national d'art moderne – Centre de création industrielle, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, et du Museum Folkwang, Essen; Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou; München, Schirmer/Mosel (German ed.), 1995</i> – Thomas Kellein (Ed.), <i>Abstrakte Fotografie</i>, Ostfildern-Ruit, Hatje Cantz, 2000 – Floris M. Neusüss, Margit Zuckriegl (Eds.), <i>Kamera los. Das Fotogramm, eine künstlerische Position von der Klassik bis zur Gegenwart</i>, Salzburg, Pustet, 2006 – Christian Leborg, <i>Visual Grammar</i>, New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 2006 <p>Module 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Robert Bringhurst, <i>Gli elementi dello stile tipografico</i> – Giovanni Lussu, <i>Farsi un libro. Propedeutica dell'autoproduzione: orientamenti e spunti per un'impresa consapevole</i>, Stampa Alternativa – Bruno Munari, <i>Da Cosa Nasce Cosa</i>, Editori Laterza – Raymond Queneau, <i>Esercizi di Stile</i>, Einaudi <p>Module 3:</p> <p>Specific readings (mostly scientific-semiotic based essays) will be required from week to week according to the necessities of the didactic process.</p>
<p>Supplementary readings</p>	<p>Module 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, <i>Practices of Looking. An Introduction to Visual Culture</i>, New York, Oxford, Oxford University Press, [2001] 2017 – György Kepes, <i>Language of Vision</i>, Chicago, Paul Theobald, 1944; <i>Reissue: New York, Dover Publications, 1995</i> – László Moholy-Nagy, <i>vision in motion</i>, Chicago, Paul Theobald, 1947 – Floris M. Neusüss, <i>Das Fotogramm in der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts</i>, Köln, DuMont, 1990

- Gottfried Jäger (Ed.), Die Kunst der Abstrakten Fotografie. The Art of Abstract Photography, Stuttgart, Arnoldsche Art Publishers, 2002
- Simon Baker, Emmanuelle de l'Ecotais (Eds.), Shape of Light. 100 Years of Photography and Abstract Art, London, Tate Publishing, 2018
- Katharina Steidl, Am Rande der Fotografie. Eine Medialitätsgeschichte des Fotogramms im 19. Jahrhundert, Berlin, Boston, De Gruyter, 2018
- Frac Normandie Rouen (Ed.), Photography to the Test of Abstraction – La photographie à l'épreuve de l'abstraction, Berlin, Hatje Cantz, 2020

Module 2:

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Module 3:

Visual Culture & Semiotics

- Nicolas Mirzoeff, An Introduction to Visual Culture, 3rd edition, London, Routledge, 2023.
- Jean-Marie Floch, Visual Identities, New York, Bloomsbury USA Academic, 2001.

About Photography & Abstraction

- Basso Fossali P., Dondero M.G., Semiotica della fotografia. Investigazioni teoriche e pratiche d'analisi, Rimini, Guaraldi, 2006 (new ed. 2012).
- Floch, J.-M., "The Arms of the Moon Itself: Plastic Description of the Photograph 'Nude No. 53'" by Bill Brandt, American Journal of Semiotics; 15-16, 2000
- Barthes, R., Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography, Hill & Wang Pub, 1982.
- Sonesson, G., "Semiotics of Photography: The State of the Art, in P. P. Trifonas (ed.), International Handbook of Semiotics, 2015.
- Fontanille, J., "Archéologie et anthropologie de la dimension plastique des sémiotiques visuelles. En hommage à Jean-Marie Floch", Estudos Semioticos, 19-2, 2023.