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**Comparative Literature 236/ German 236**

**Photography and Truth - From ‘The Pencil of Nature’ to the Smartphone – ‘Brothels without Walls’**

Course description

This will be a course in both philosophy (in particular, the branch of philosophy known as aesthetics or epistemology) and media history (in particular, the history of the theory of photography). We will be concerned with a variety of interrelated and overlapping theoretical questions that arise in connection with the present, i.e. digital photography. Our guiding questions will be: What is a photograph today, and how has it changed in the transition from the analogue world to digital networks?

The first cameras with built-in “CCD” chips came on the market in the early 1990s, “active pixel” cameras-on-chips have been built into mobile computers (so-called smartphones) since the middle of the first decade of the new millennium. It is already clear that both rapidly growing developments have changed photography fundamentally. Nevertheless, their impacts are not yet fully describable in social and aesthetic terms. To name just one aspect, a ‘picture boom’ has emerged (since smartphones are mainly used for shooting photographs and uploading them) which entails a daily input of 250 million pictures on Facebook alone. Our course will look at these fundamental medial changes not only in their superficial social effects, but rather reflect on their impacts in the light of the history of photography from the early beginnings onward. We will explore, among others, the following questions:

- Has there ever been “truth” and “ontology” in photography? Do images create or improve “identity“? Have “selfies” always existed? How does the “camera view” change? What is the “fetishism” of an image? Are digital pictures dubious or dubitative? How has the function of control and surveillance of pictures changed? Photography and journalism - is their mutual relationship coming to an end? Is there still a difference between “professional” and “amateur” photography? What makes one photograph more realistic than another? Are photographs inherently more realistic than paintings? Does the very idea of a ‘realistic’ representation rest on a philosophical confusion?