

A history of Photography Theory (Academic Year 2023/24)

View Online



100 items

A selective list of photography theory

This is my attempt to capture the most significant photography theory books since the medium's birth in 1839. It is principally books, so some very serious omissions here... I have tried to organise these chronologically, to give some sense of how (broadly speaking) the discourse has evolved over time.

General guides to photography theory (7 items)

Photography theory: a beginner's guide - Telegraph

[Webpage](#) | A small selection of titles selected by Telegraph readers, and summarised by Diane Smyth amongst others. Includes the really big titles - Camera Lucida, On Photography, etc. Key quotations are also presented.

Fifty key writers on photography - Mark Durden, 2013

[Book](#) | Gives a brief summary of writers on photography, covering their major works.

Photography: history and theory - Jae Emerling, 2012

[Book](#) | Discusses key events of photographic history alongside the theoretical discourse that accompanied them. Includes glosses on key texts by Benjamin, Barthes, Sontag, Foucault, and Fluser.

Photography: a critical introduction - 2015

[Book](#)

Fifty key texts in art history - Grant Pooke, Diana Newall, 2012

[Book](#) | Several key texts on photography are included in this handy survey.

Photography theory - James Elkins, c2007

[Book](#) |

Illuminations: women writing on photography from the 1850s to the present - Liz Heron, Val Williams, 1996

[Book](#)

Before photography (1 items)

Plato. The Republic - HeinOnline.org

[Book](#) | Hershberger (2014) suggests this as "an alternative beginning point for

humanity's fascination with cameras" The allegory of the cave is a classic exploration and explanation of the limitations of human perception.

1839 - 1938 (9 items)

The first century

Edgar Allan Poe, "The Daguerreotype," 15 January 1840

[Document](#) | "The instrument itself must undoubtedly be regarded as the most important, and perhaps the most extraordinary triumph of modern science."

Art in Paris 1845-1862: salons and other exhibitions - Charles Baudelaire, Jonathan Mayne, 1981

[Book](#) | "...once [photography] be allowed to impinge on the sphere of the intangible and the imaginary, on anything that has value solely because man adds something to it from his soul, then woe betide us!"

The Pencil of Nature - Talbot, William Henry Fox, 1800-1877

[Book](#)

In Search of Lost Time [volumes 1 to 7] eBook: Marcel Proust, C. K. Scott Moncrieff: Amazon.co.uk: Kindle Store

[Webpage](#) | "Pleasure in this respect is like photography, What we take, in the presence of the beloved object, is merely a negative, which we will develop later, when we are back at home, and we have once again found at our disposal that inner darkroom the entrance to which is barred to us so long as we are with other people."

Naturalistic photography for students of the art : Emerson, P. H. (Peter Henry), 1856-1936

[Webpage](#)

Painting, photography, film - László Moholy-Nagy, 1925

[Book](#)

The past's threshold: essays on photography - Siegfried Kracauer, Conor Joyce, 2014

[Book](#)

A Short History of Photography - W. Benjamin, 1972-03-01

[Article](#) | Republished here in Screen 1972 (Spring)

The art of art history: a critical anthology - Donald Preziosi, 2009

[Book](#) | Read: Benjamin, Walter (1939), The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility [third version], pp. 435-442. "In even the most perfect reproduction, one thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence—and nothing else—that bears the mark of the history to which the work has been subject. This history includes changes to the physical structure of the work over time, together with any changes in ownership."

1939 to 1969 (7 items)

An emerging identity.

Let us now praise famous men - James Agee, Walker Evans, Blake Morrison, 1941

Book | 'the camera seems to me, next to unassisted and weaponless consciousness, the central instrument of our time'

The history of photography: from 1839 to the present - Beaumont Newhall, 1949 (rev 1982)

Book

Henri Cartier-Bresson - the decisive moment - Henri Cartier-Bresson, 2014

Book | Originally published in 1959. "We photographers deal in things that are constantly vanishing, and when they have vanished, there is no contrivance on earth which can bring them back again."

Mythologies - Roland Barthes, 1957

Book

The photographer's eye - John Szarkowski, 1980, c1966

Book

What is cinema? - Bazin,

Andre

, 1918-1958.; Renoir, Jean, 1894-1979.; Truffaut, Franc

ois.; Andrew, Dudley, 1945-; Gray, Hugh, 1900-1981., 1967

Book | The relevant section is 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', which was first published in French in 1945. It appeared in *Qu'est ce que le Cinéma?* in 1958, which was published in English in 1967.

Durden (2012) writes, "Bazin's concern in OPI is with the nature of photographs, or what in the most fundamental sense they are. There are various approaches to ontological investigations, but Bazin employs the phenomenological method of Jean-Paul Sartre, investigating the nature of photography through careful description of how photographs present themselves to us in experience, including our understanding and attitudes regarding them. At the same time, Bazin draws heavily upon André Malraux's psychological theory of art, not least in his use of Malraux's idea that the history of art reflects an underlying human need to address the effects of time."

Simulations - Jean Baudrillard, 1967

Book

1970s (6 items)

Ways of seeing

Ways of seeing - John Berger, British Broadcasting Corporation, 1972

Book | A key text for the study of visual culture and art history, this text is adapted from Berger's 1972 four-part television series of the same name.

Ways of seeing - John Berger, British Broadcasting Corporation 1972

Audio-visual document | A BAFTA award-winning series with John Berger, which rapidly became regarded as one of the most influential art programmes ever made.

On photography - Susan Sontag, 1977

Book | "To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed."

Five Notes for a Phenomenology of the Photographic Image - Hubert Damisch, 1978

Article

Photography/politics: One: edited by Terry Dennett and Jo Spence - Terry Dennett, Jo Spence, Photography Workshop, 1979

Book

Photography and fascination: essays - Max Kozloff, 1979

Book

1980s (26 items)

The contest of meaning

About looking - John Berger, 1980

Book | A collection of Berger's essays, including four essays on photography. Includes the 1972 essay (from New Society Magazine) 'Photographs of Agony': "What we are shown horrifies us. The next step should be for us to confront our own lack of political freedom. In the political systems as they exist, we have no opportunity of effectively influencing the conduct of wars waged in our name."

Classic essays on photography - Alan Trachtenberg, c1980

Book

Photography and society - Gisèle Freund, 1980

Book

Camera lucida: reflections on photography - Roland Barthes, 1993, 1981

Book

Photography: a concise history - Ian Jeffrey, 1981

Book

The Traffic in Photographs - Allan Sekula, 1981

Article

Thinking photography - Victor Burgin, 1982

Book

The Judgment Seat of Photography - Christopher Phillips, 1982

Article

Towards a philosophy of photography - Vilém Flusser, 1983

Book

Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from the 1850's to th - Val Heron, Liz; Williams, 2021

Book

Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste - Pierre Bourdieu, 1984

Book | Published in English in 1984 before the English translation of Bourdieu's earlier book *Photography; a middle brow art* (1990), 'Distinction' extends the arguments of the earlier text.

From Faktura to Factography - Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 1984

Article

C/Overt Ideology - Esther Parada, 1984-03-01

Article

Photography and Fetish - Christian Metz, 1985

Article

The originality of the avant-garde and other modernist myths - Rosalind E. Krauss, c1985

Book

Winning the Game When the Rules Have Been Changed: Art Photography and Postmodernism - Godeau, Abigail Solomon

Article

Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from the 1850's to th - Val Heron, Liz; Williams, 2021

Book

Photography/politics: Two: edited by Patricia Holland, Jo Spence, Simon Watney - Patricia Holland, Jo Spence, Simon Watney, Photography Workshop, 1986

Book

Putting myself in the picture - Jo Spence, 1986

Book

The Body and the Archive - Allan Sekula, 1986

Article

The burden of representation: essays on photographs and histories - John Tagg, 1988

Book | "Photography as such has no identity. Its status as a technology varies with the power relations which invest it. Its nature as a practice depends on the institutions and agents which define it and set it to work."

The contest of meaning: critical histories of photography - Richard Bolton, c1989

Book | See for example: Rosler, M. (1981) 'In, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography)'. in *The Context of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*. ed. by Bolton. R. Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 303 – 325.

Time pieces: photographs, writing, and memory - Wright Morris, c1989

[Book](#)

Other than itself: writing photography - Anita Phillips, John X. Berger, Olivier Richon, Derbyshire College of Higher Education, c1989

[Book](#)

Technology as symptom and dream - Robert D. Romanyshyn, NetLibrary, Inc, 1989

[Book](#)

Decoys and disruptions: selected writings, 1975-2001 - Martha Rosler, International Center of Photography, 2004

[Book](#)

1990s (12 items)

New histories

Photography: a middle-brow art - Pierre Bourdieu, 1990

[Book](#)

Photography at the dock: essays on photographic history, institutions, and practices - Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Linda Nochlin, c1991

[Book](#)

Cindy Sherman: Burning Down the House - Avgikos, Jan

[Article](#)

Art on my mind: visual politics - Bell Hooks, c1995

[Book](#)

| "I want to rescue and preserve this image of our father, not let it be forgotten. It allows me to understand him, provides a way for me to know him that makes it possible to love him again, despite all the other images, the ones that stand in the way of love" (from 'In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life')

Welcome to the jungle: new positions in Black cultural studies - Kobena Mercer, 1994

[Book](#)

Pleasures taken: performances of sexuality and loss in Victorian photographs - Carol Mavor, 1995

[Book](#)

What is a photograph? - Margaret Iversen, 2013

[Article](#)

The mass ornament: Weimar essays - Siegfried Kracauer, Thomas Y. Levin, 1995

[Book](#)

Illuminations: women writing on photography from the 1850s to the present - Liz Heron, Val Williams, 1996

[Book](#)

Photogenics - Geoffrey Batchen

[Article](#)

Burning with desire: the conception of photography - Geoffrey Batchen, c.1997, 1999

Book

Proust in the power of photography - Richard Howard, Brassai, 1997

Book

The new millennium (16 items)

Each wild idea: writing, photography, history - Geoffrey Batchen, c2001

Book

The emigrants - Winfried Georg Sebald, 2002

Book

Regarding the pain of others - Susan Sontag, 2003

Book

| "Making suffering loom larger, by globalising it, may spur people to feel they ought to 'care' more. It also invites them to feel that the sufferings and misfortunes are too vast, too irrevocable, too epic to be much changed by any local political intervention."

Photographs objects histories: on the materiality of images - Elizabeth Edwards, Janice Hart, 2004

Book

The photography reader - Liz Wells, 2003

Book

Between the eyes: essays on photography and politics - David Levi Strauss, John Berger, c2003

Book

Memories of a Dog - Daido Moriyama, January 2004

Book

| Sadly not part of the library collection, this is a classic of photographic literature with text and photographs by Moriyama. You will have to do with the documentary "Daido Moriyama stray dog of Tokyo" which is in the DVD collection or any of Moriyama's photobooks - especially 'Farewell photography'.

The ongoing moment - Geoff Dyer, 2005

Book

| "Photographers sometimes take pictures of each other; occasionally they take photographs – or versions – of each other's work. Consciously or not they are constantly in dialogue with their contemporaries and predecessors."

Philosophy of photography - Henri Van Lier, Jan Baetens, Aarnoud Rommens, cop. 2007

Book

The future of the image - Jacques Rancière, 2007

Book

What's in a Face? Blankness and Significance in Contemporary Art Photography - Julian Stallabrass, 2007

Article

Why photography matters as art as never before - Michael Fried, 2008

Book

The civil contract of photography - Ariella Azoulay, Relä Mazali, Ruvik Danieli, 2008

Book

After photography - Fred Ritchin, c2009

Book | "The multitudes of photographers now intensely staring not at the surrounding world, nor at their loved ones being wed or graduating, but at their camera backs or cellphones searching for an image on the small screens, or summoning the past as an archival image on these same screens, is symptomatic of the image's primacy over the existence it is supposed to depict."

The paradox of photography - Pierre Taminiaux, 2009

Book

Photography after Conceptual Art: Edited by Diarmuid Costello and Margaret Iversen: Art History: Vol 32, No 5

Journal

2010s- (15 items)

To be continued...

Photography theory in historical perspective - Hilde van Gelder, Helen Westgeest, 2011

Book

Land matters: landscape photography, culture and identity - Liz Wells, 2011

Book

The wretched of the screen - Hito Steyerl, c2012

Book

Ethics and images of pain - Asbjørn Grønstad, Henrik Gustafsson, 2012

Book

Bending the frame: photojournalism, documentary, and the citizen - Fred Ritchin, 2013

Book

Uncertain histories: accumulation, inaccessibility, and doubt in contemporary photography - Kate Palmer Albers, 2015

Book

Bad new days: art, criticism, emergency - Hal Foster, 2015

Book

Mass photography: collective histories of everyday life - Annebella Pollen, 2016

Book

Why art photography? - Lucy Soutter, 2018

Book

Decolonising the camera: photography in racial time - Mark Sealy, 2019

Book

The photography cultures reader: representation, agency and identity - 2019

Book

Contemporary photography and theory: concepts and debates - Sally Miller, 2020

Book

Repetition, reproduction, and circulation - 2021

Book

Analogy, attunement, and attention - 2021

Book

How photography became contemporary art: inside an artistic revolution from pop to the digital age - Andy Grundberg, 2021

Book