Historical and Contextual Studies (Contextual Practices)

Research in Context

ADAD5003

We are all makers

We are all thinkers

Contextual Studies

Historical and Contextual Studies

Art History

Theory





We’ve come a long way





Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne de Boulogne (Photos: Adrien Tournachon)

We’ve come a long way





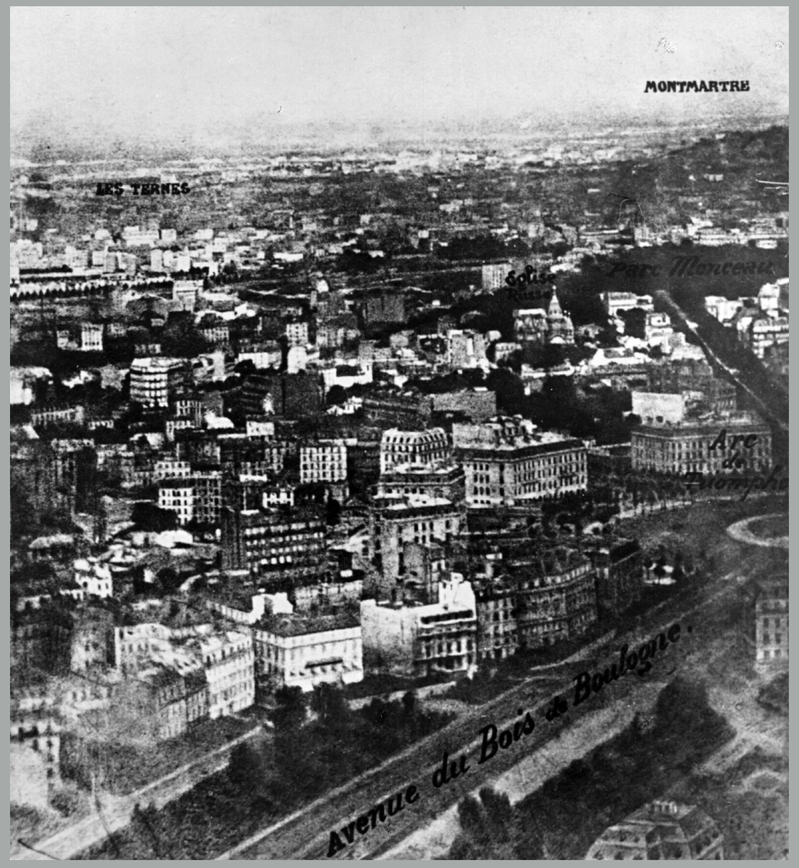


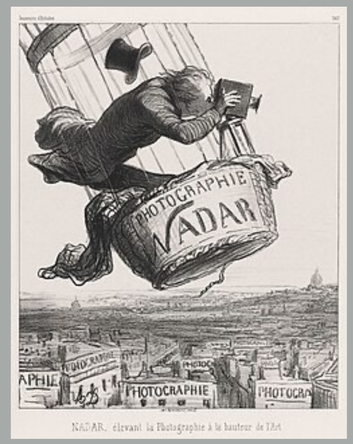




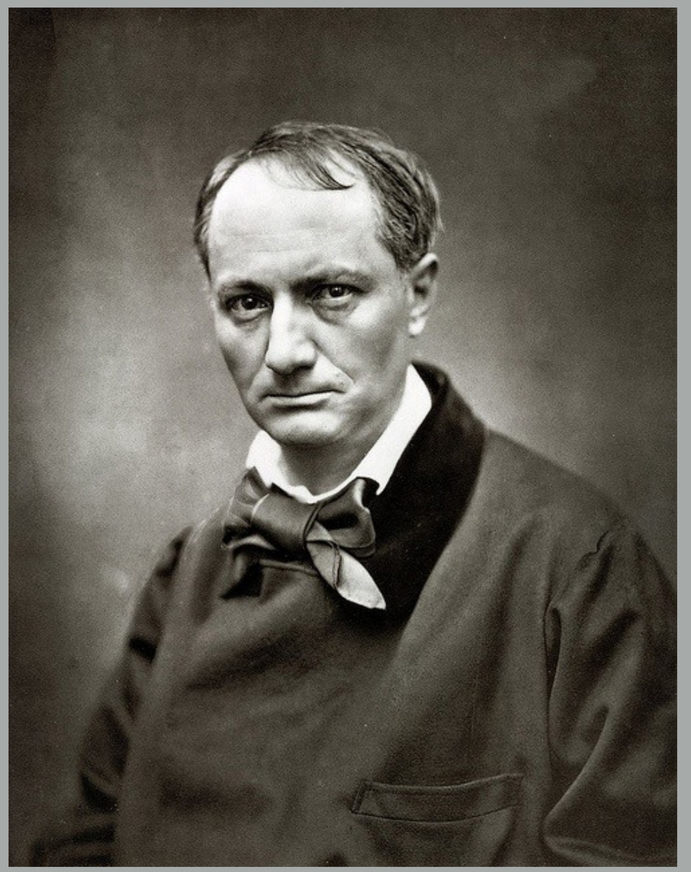
Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne de Boulogne (Photos: Adrien Tournachon)





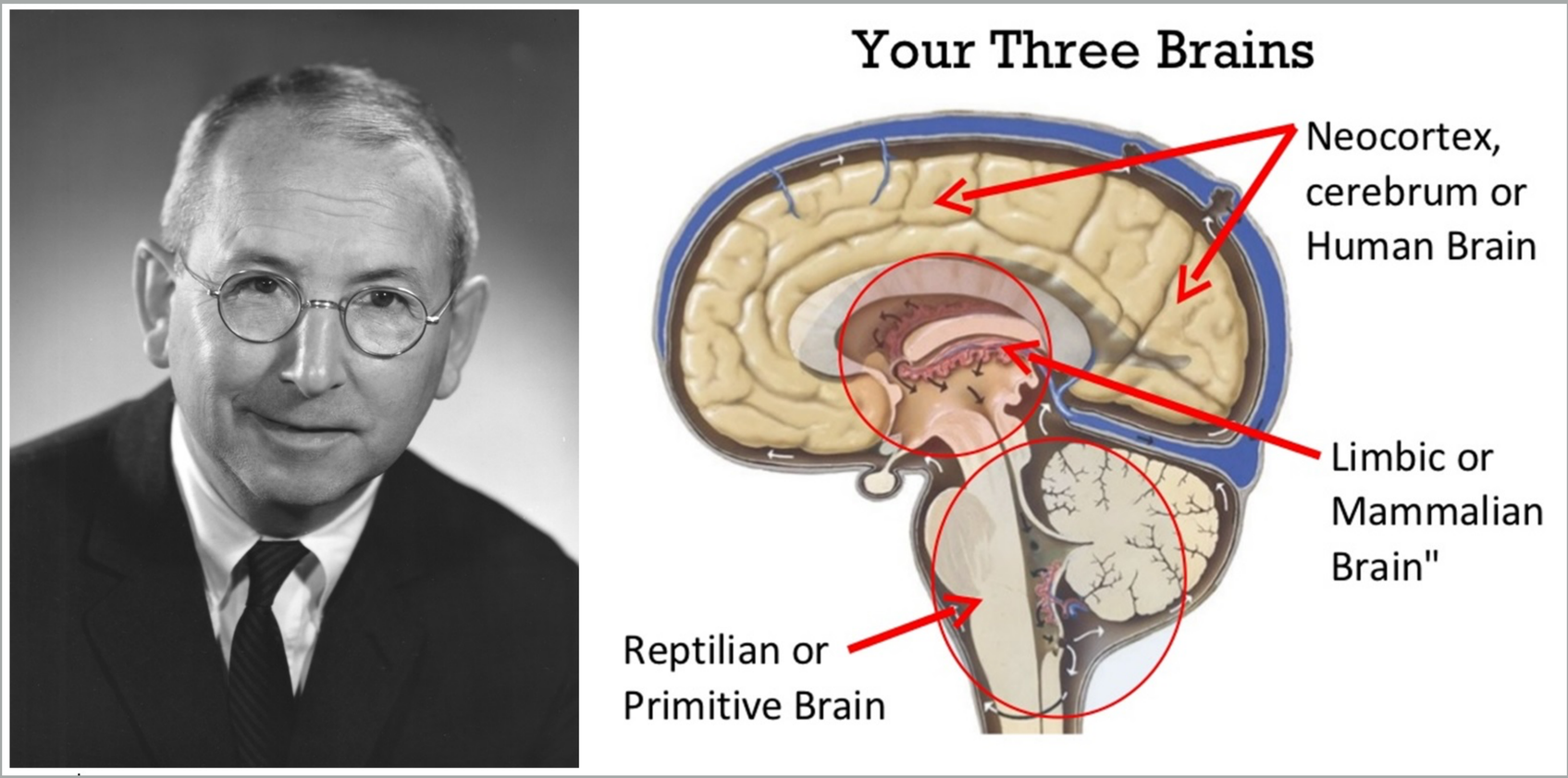


NADAR, élevant la Photographie à la hauteur de l'Art


Charles Baudelaire by Nadar

Nadar (Gaspard-Felix Tournachon)

The levels to which we can analyse artworks is often based on the sophistication of the works, the relationship of those works to the culture in which they exist, and/or the artists intention. In that sense they are similar to Paul D. Maclean's largely discredited Triune Brain Theory. Some pictures are 'reptilian', some are 'Limbic', some 'cerebrum'.



Considering Paul D. Maclean's Triune Brain



Robert Harding: *Sunset - Three Cliffs Bay*



Rankin



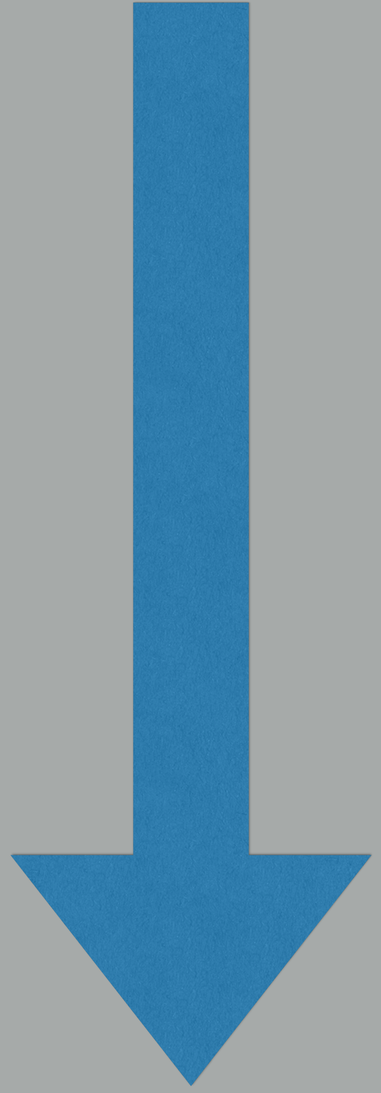
Don McCullin: *Soldier Throwing Grenade*, Tet Offensive, Hue (1968)



Jeff Wall: *Dead Troops Talk* (1992)

“If your pictures are not good enough…





you're not reading enough.”

Tod Papageorge

Science: Optics, Light, The Camera, Chemistry, Digital Technology

History: Social, Art Historical, Illustrative,
Artwork, Commercial, Anthropology,

Methods/Genres: Portrait, Photojournalism, Landscape,
Performative, Constructed, Photo-Therapy, Still-life,
Social Documentary, Fashion, Studio

Movements: Realism/Straight Photography, Modernism, Pictorialism, Documentary, Post-Modernism, Feminism, Virtual/Computerised, New Topographic, New Documentary

Ideas: Indexicality, Truth, Representation, Discourse

A Lecturer Writes…

On the following pages are quotes responding to a request I put out a few years back, asking lecturers of Contextual Studies to list the biggest mistakes/issues they find when marking essays.

Hi Paul,

The biggest issues for me are unsubstantiated statements and subjective commentary - would be great if you could place emphasis on these points.

Feel free to join in and ask questions or add points

1. Poor presentation: The work does not follow the brief.

a) Written work: poor grammar and spelling, weak arguments, wrong referencing, no linking between ideas, and wrong formatting (no cover sheet, no 'originality' clause, etc.)

b) Presentations: Lack of engaging slides, poorly presented slides, spelling mistakes, no logical structure, and my film students have often built up to a clip, this is then shown and they don't discuss it..!

Though, another contributor wrote:

Colloquial uses of language. Exclamation marks should never be used, ever.

2. Lack of insight and analysis. It is often the case that students just describe. They should set up their arguments, back them up with evidence of research (and even counter argue that research), and then take their time to actually analyse what it is they have just shown their audience.

3. Limited arguments. Time and time again, students think that describing passes for good work. Their arguments are often poorly thought out, don't take into account counter arguments, and don't get to the gist of just what it is they are trying to tell us.

4. Lack of enthusiasm. Need I say more?

5. The worst culprit is this: they simply do not read back what they have written. Over the years, I have collected a whole set of written mistakes that students have included in their work. I have placed examples below. They have not been edited, apart from putting them in bullet points. I copied them directly from the students' work.

During every module, I always state to the students that they should take pride and care over their work, and show them some examples where errors have happened. The mistakes are NOT from students with SEN, but rather those students who are too lazy, or rushing, to really go back and check their own work. They are always kept anonymous. When I show my students these examples, they all laugh, yet they still do exactly the same...

‘Freud believed that his brain was like an iceberg.’

(about the film composer, Dimitri Tiomkin)

‘He came from a musical background because his father was a physician’

‘I feel I have developed my weaknesses.’

Another lecturer Writes:

1. Canon Whores: a writer that name checks to too many theorists/theoretical positions without close examination of said theorist/theoretical position. (This only ever works if the writer is discussing a subject relevant to being a canon whore - thetic discourses).

2. Style over substance. A writer who is chasing a certain rhetoric. Always make sure your writing is full of interesting ideas, that the writing is clear and carefully worded.

3. Unimaginative and overly descriptive writing. Endless description with no connection to the context being explored. We all know when a student is searching to hit the word count by buffering it out with a load of descriptive waffle.

4. Substantiation: explain where your ideas come from: your reader should feel illuminated by your words, not frustrated.

5. Writing that goes off-piste. Trace the logic of your thought, from artworks, surrounding theoretical contexts back to your words.

6. Colloquial uses of language. Exclamation marks should never be used, ever.

The List from Student Services:

Structure: students tend to lose track of the importance of structure. the argument does not reach its potential without a defined aim that is supported by a logical constructed architecture.

Research: Academic research and specifically looking for academic journals- tendency to use quite flimsy online resources.

Referencing: There was a recurring issue with accurate referencing. Seems students in previous essays had been allowed to use a variety of styles and mixed messages, in particularly, when image referencing and referencing own work.

Academic skills: Students had issues with approaching writing and structuring their writing and the level of depth required.

Subject
Structure
Accuracy
Substantiation/Evidence
Grammar, Spelling and Syntax
Description rather than insight, analysis, and evaluation
Counter Argument - Thesis, antithesis, synthesis
Reading back/Proofing
Waffle
Irrelevance
Colloquialism
Referencing

While we are on the topic, ensure that are receiving the support you need. If you struggle with writing, get support.

This is not just a case of having extra support because you may, for example, be dyslexic, but get support if you find the process of writing difficult.

Starting Points - Finding a Subject.

Availability of appropriate research material.

Compendium Texts - to introduce the subject and

find bibliography.

What is Your Passion?

Relate your theme to your practice.

A Reminder . . .

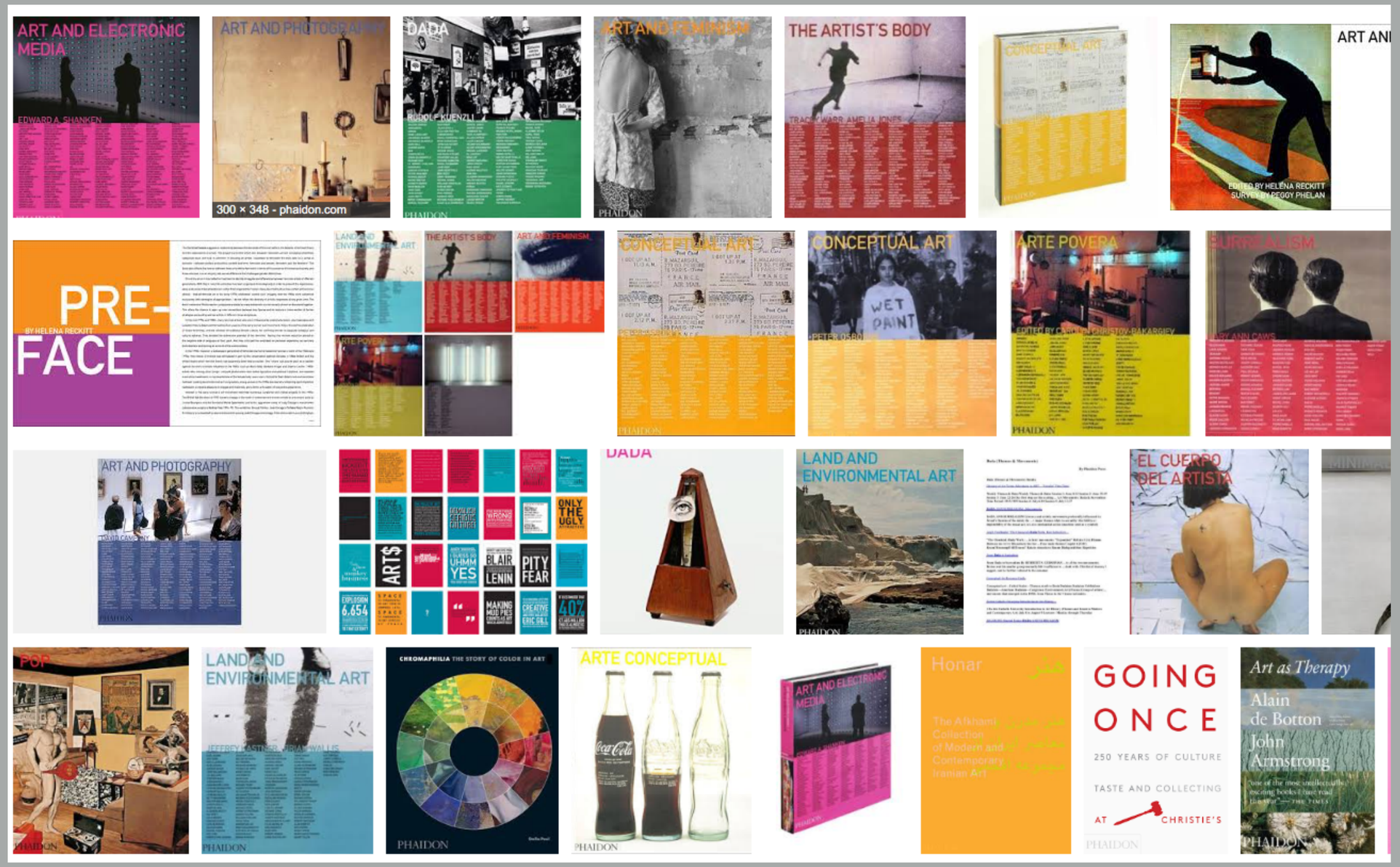
“If your pictures are not good enough you're not reading enough.”



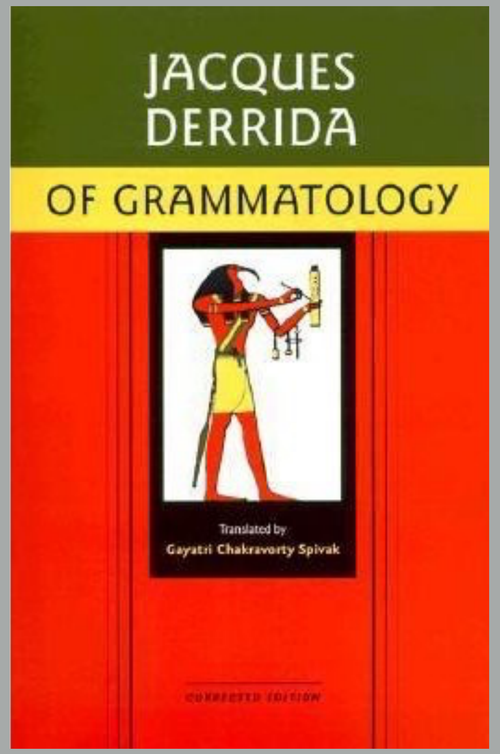
Documents of Contemporary Art

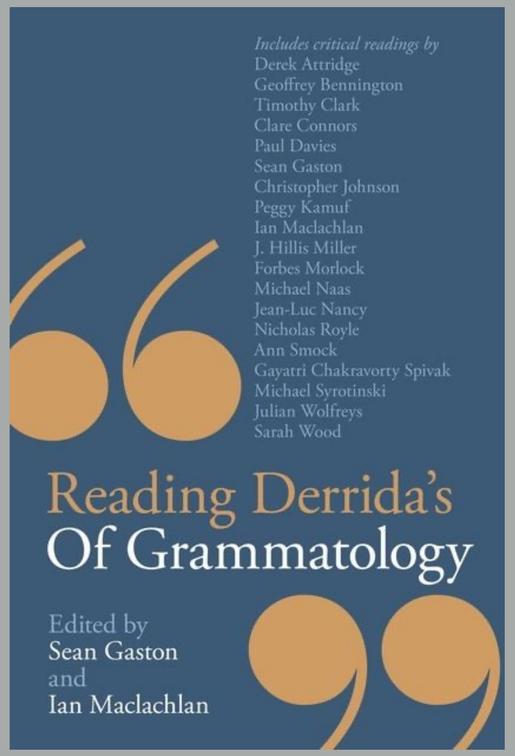


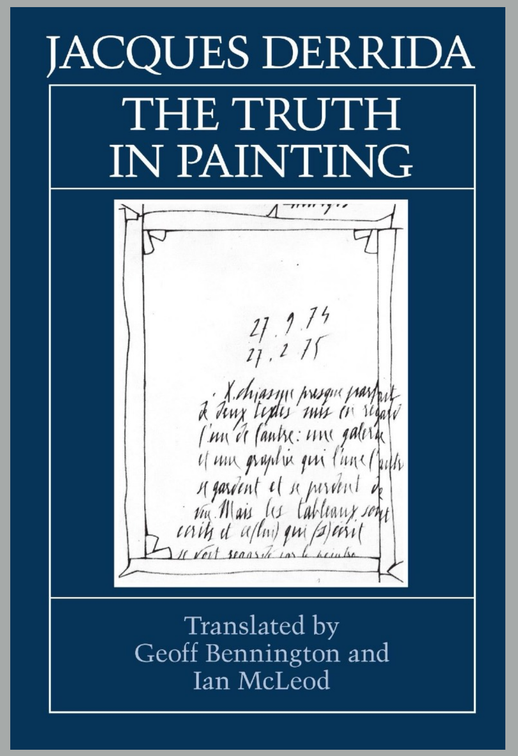
Routledge *Reader* Series

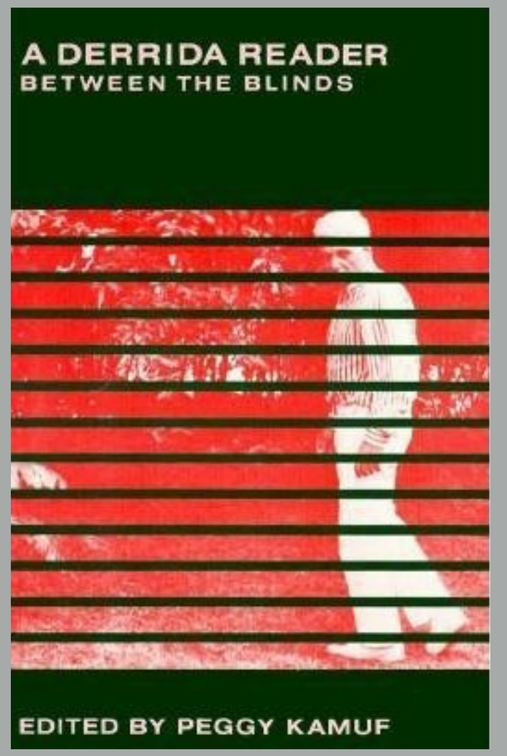


Phaidon's *Themes and Movements*

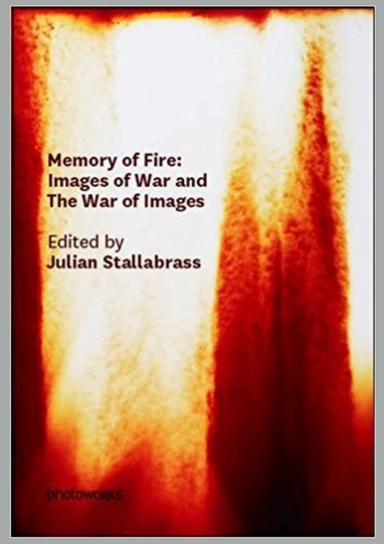

JACQUES
DERRIDA
OF GRAMMATOLOGY
Translated by
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak
CORRECTED EDITION

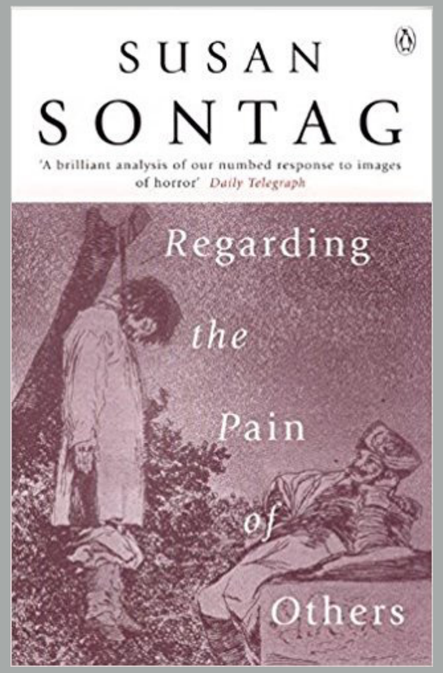

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Geoffrey Bennington
Timothy Clark
Clare Connors
Paul Davies
Sean Gaston
Christopher Johnson
Peggy Kamuf
Ian Maclachlan
J. Hillis Miller
Forbes Morlock
Michael Naas
Jean-Luc Nancy
Nicholas Royle
Ann Smock
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak
Michael Syrotinski
Julian Wolfreys
Sarah Wood
Reading Derrida's
Of Grammatology
Edited by
Sean Gaston
and
Ian Maclachlan

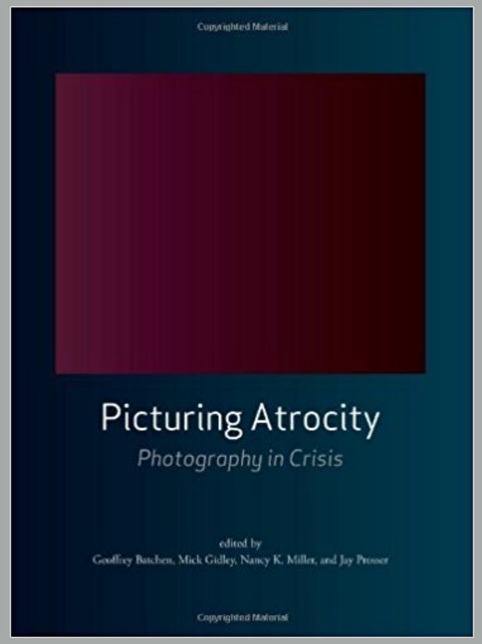

JACQUES DERRIDA
THE TRUTH
IN PAINTING
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Ian McLeod

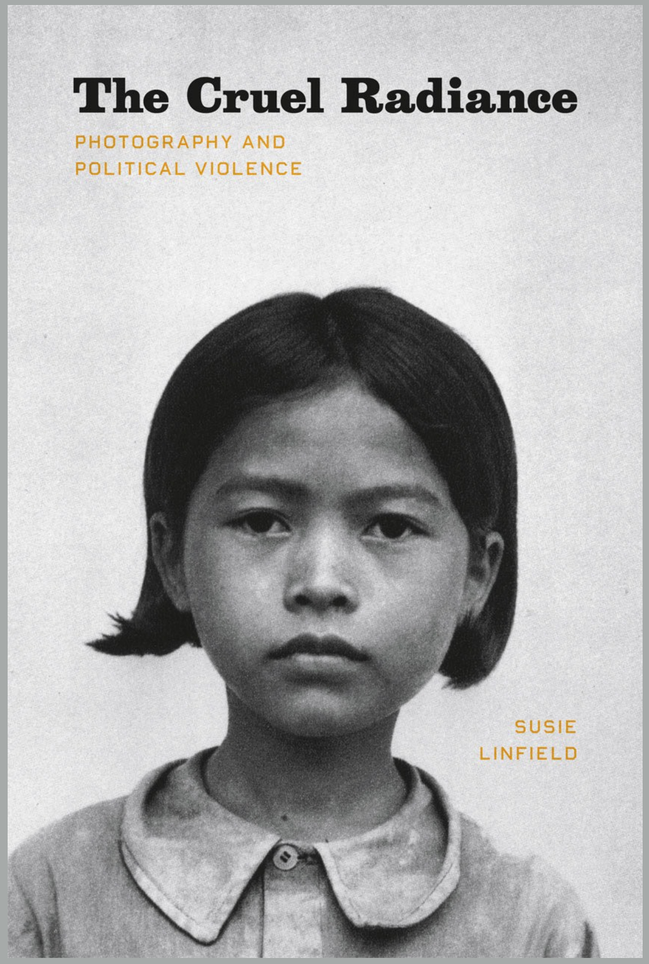

A DERRIDA READER
BETWEEN THE BLINDS
EDITED BY PEGGY KAMUF

Photography and Conflict

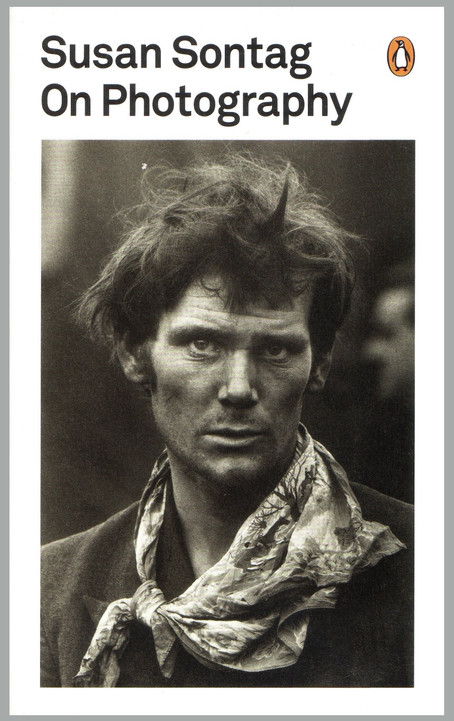


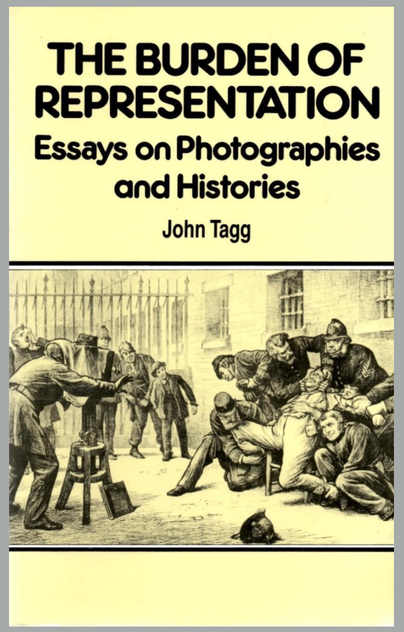


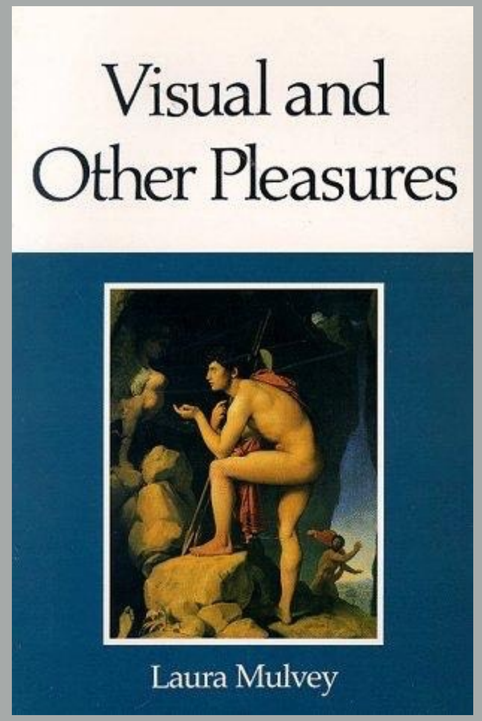


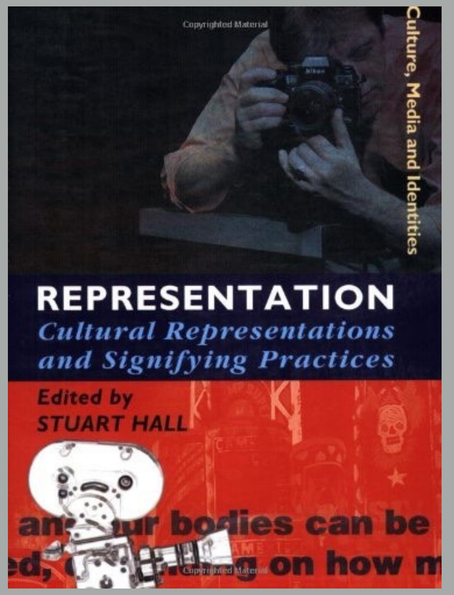


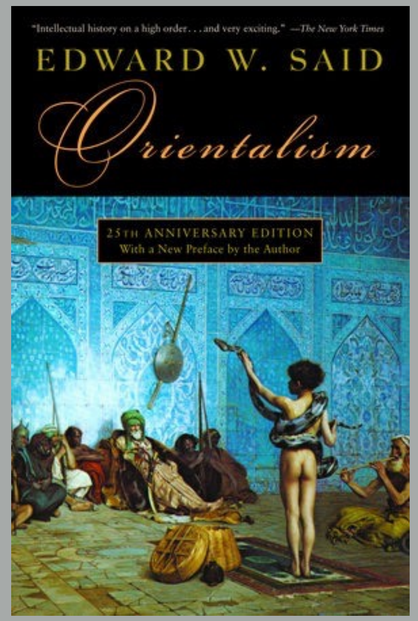
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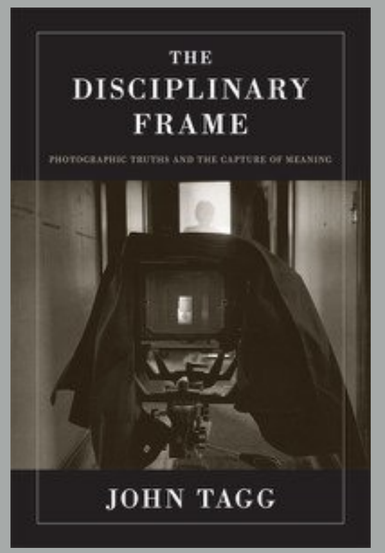




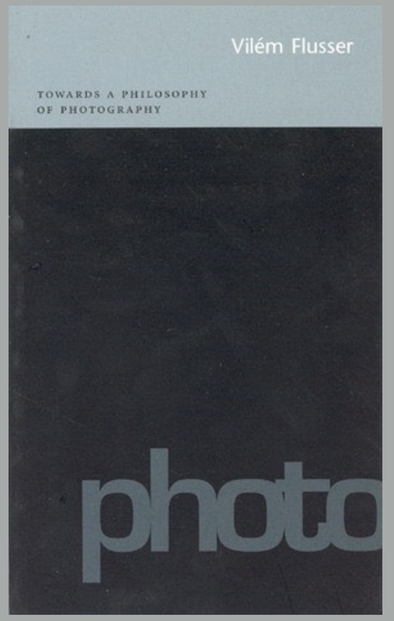


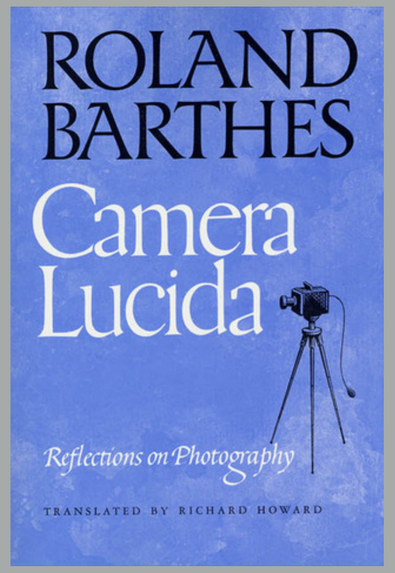


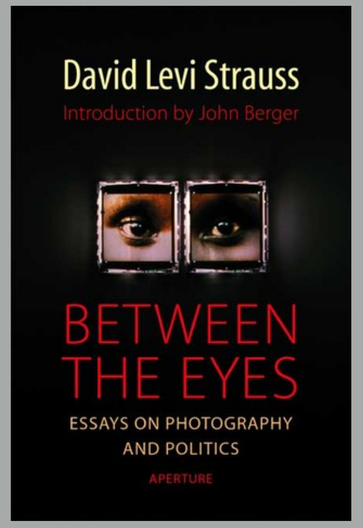


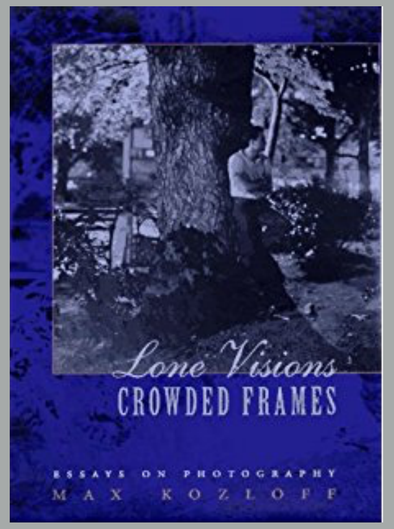


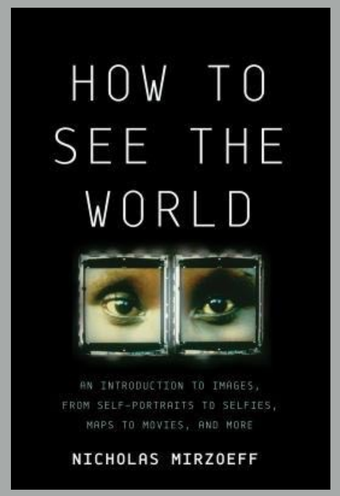
Personal Visions

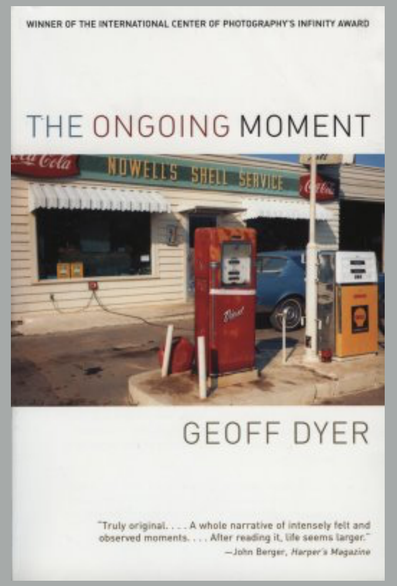


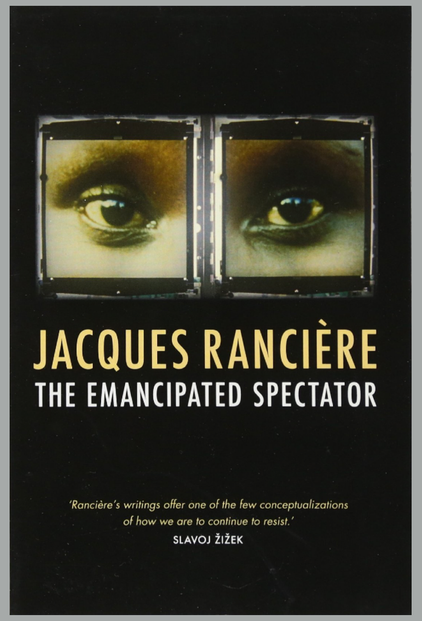




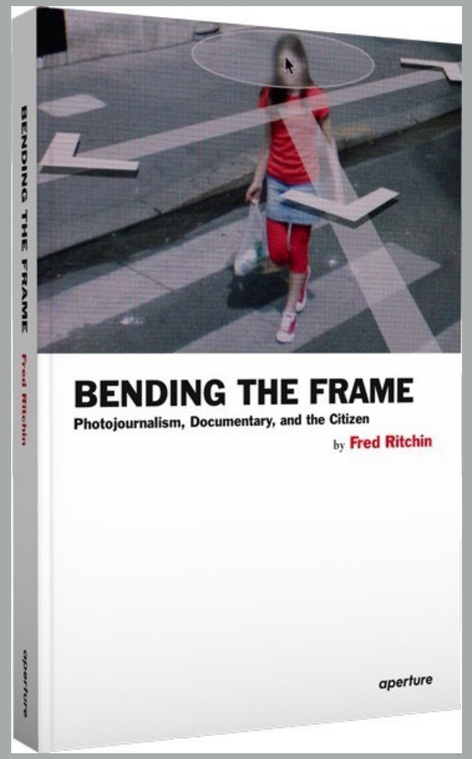


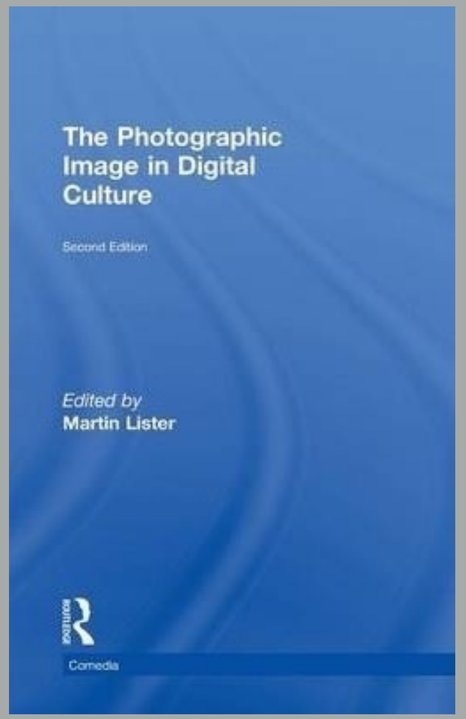


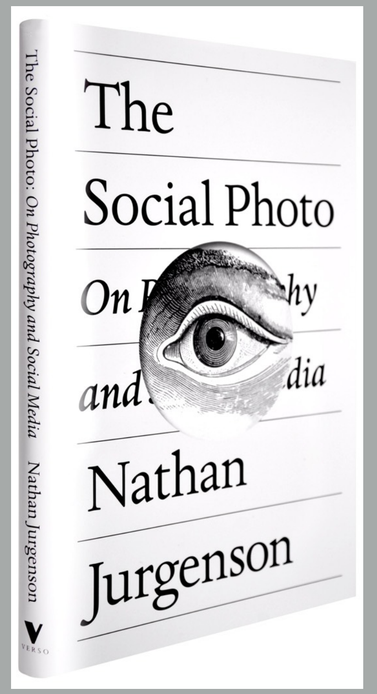


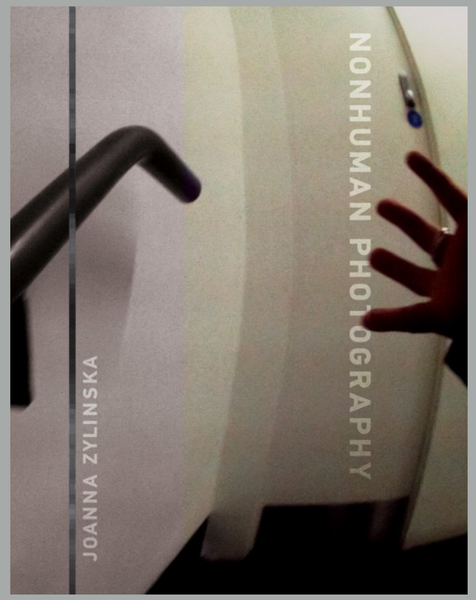


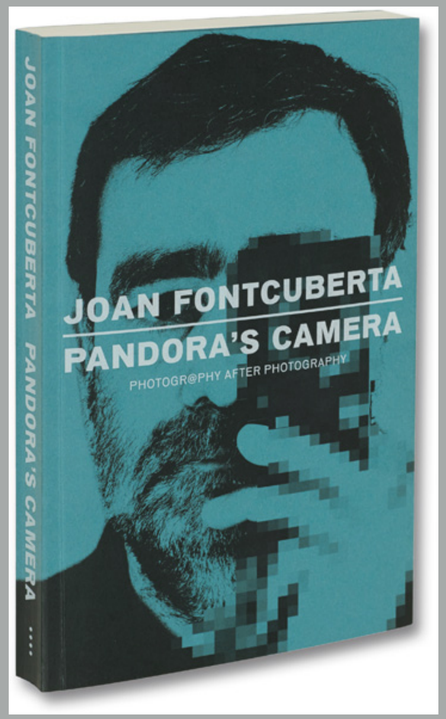
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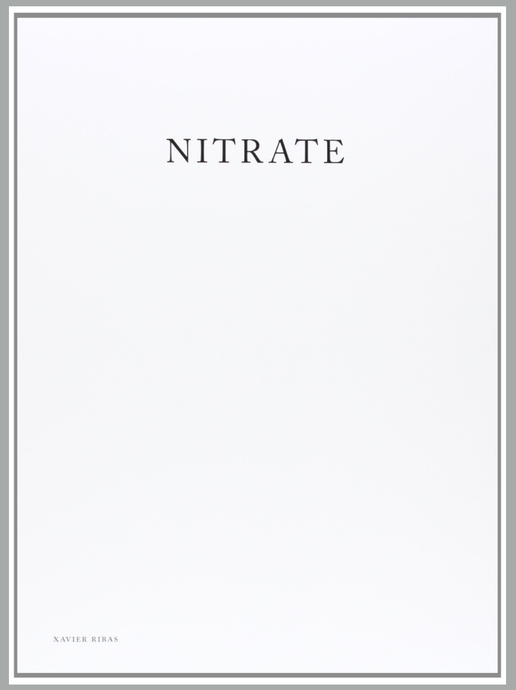


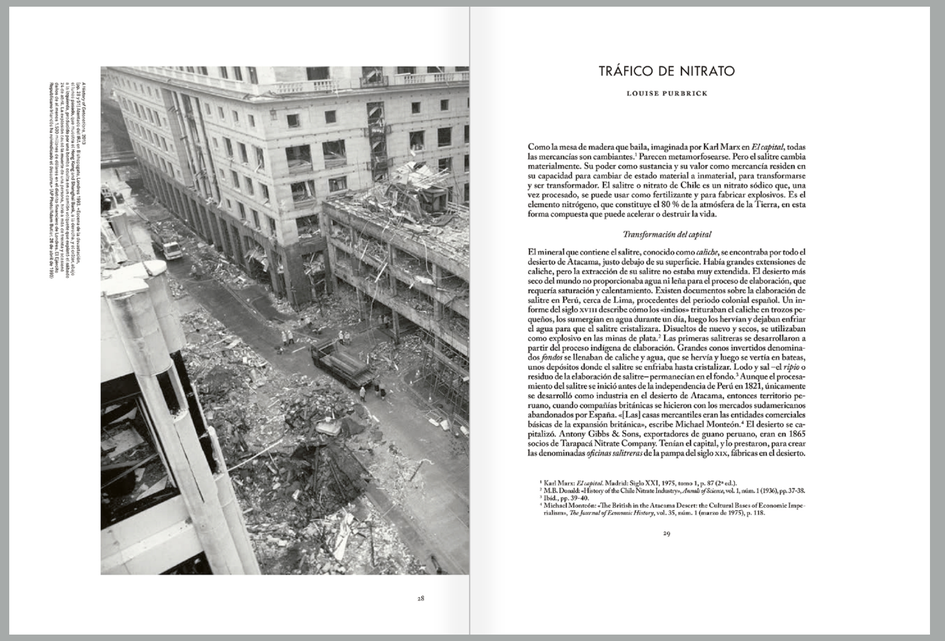












Monograph Texts

This excerpt is from a first-class essay. Read it across the next 2 pages including the bibliography after.

How does our modern visual language stall and prevent true virtue and desire?

Synopsis

This essay will discuss how modern photography has been a key component in the propagation of our consumerist values. It has mainly achieved this by visually stating how one can be changed via consumption. The main theorists to be discussed will be Edward Bernays and John Berger. Further discussion will be in relation to the theories of Jean Baudrillard and Guy Debord.

The first chapter will discuss the foundations of the modern publicity image, and its main criticisms as stated by John Berger. The second chapter will discuss the psychoanalytical basis of such imagery via Lacan’s mirror stage, and also Baudrillard's theory of objects value beyond their practical use. The third chapter will discuss the need to return to 'being' over 'appearing', as contemplated by Debord, and also the concept of détournement.

The conclusion put forward as a result of this discussion will be that society must begin to realise how our visual language is a mere fallacy, and we must instead look away in order to pursue true virtue and desires, key to our well-being and happiness. The time frame of the discussion will be post Second World War, as this was the point at which Bernays ideas gained influence, and now in our current Western societies.

A core tenant of Bernays' approach was also a sense of control and manipulation. The division of the modern publicity image was in order to control and guide the masses towards a certain collective goal, that of consumerism. Bernays refers to a Walter Lipmann phrase in his own writing, 'The manufacture of consent is a necessity throughout the public sphere' (Bernays, 1928, p.13). The rational of those behind such construction was not based on want, but rather necessity. They felt it had become a necessary imperative to cajole the masses via consumerism to avoid the downfall of society. Those who insisted upon such a system, 'a benign elite of rational manipulators', feared the realisation of true freedom within the minds of the majority (Bernays p.16). Even more so they feared the freedom of actual human desire, a virtue encouraged by the writings of Nietzsche. Nietzsche encourages individuals to instead take control of their own happiness, and not be swayed by majority thought (Armstrong 2013).

Note that although all necessary information is present, the formatting under the Harvard Referencing System has changed.

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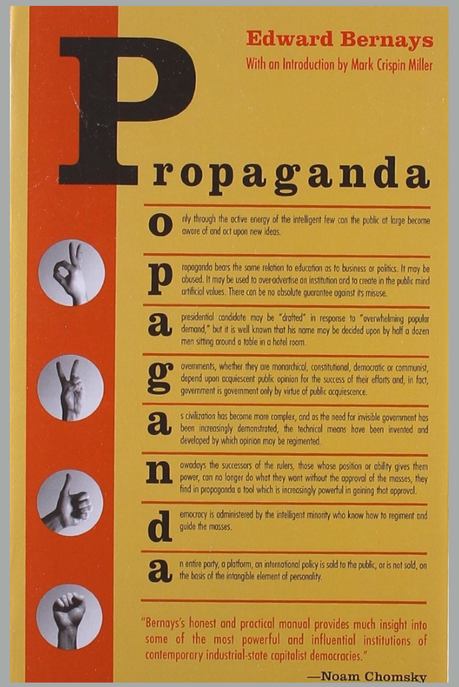
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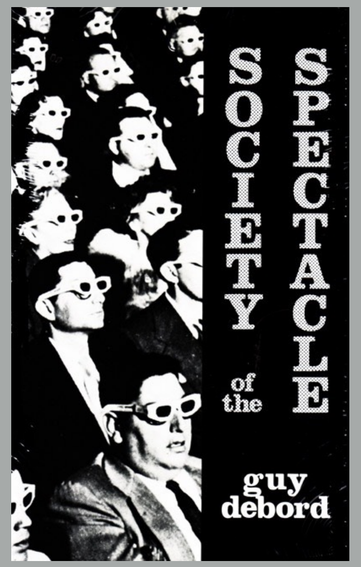
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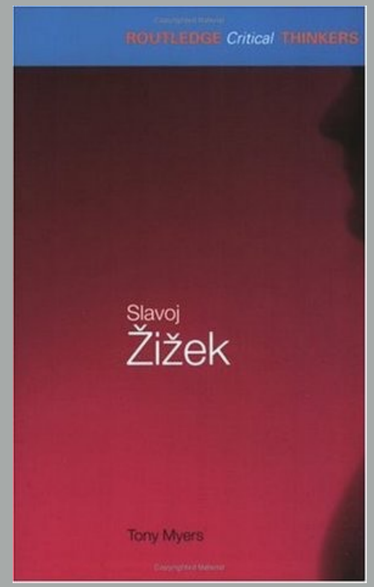
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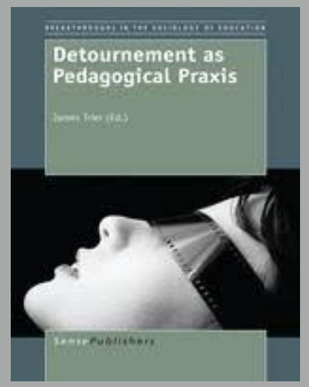
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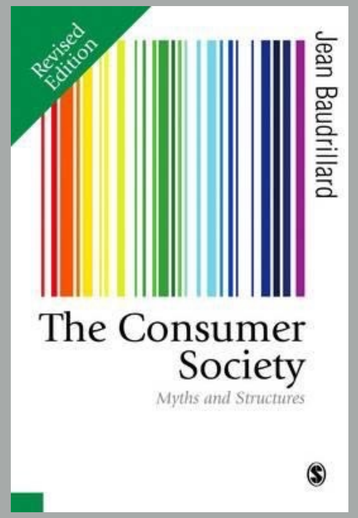

Edward Bernays
With an Introduction by Mark Crispin Miller
Propaganda
"Bernays's honest and practical manual provides much insight into some of the most powerful and influential institutions of contemporary industrial-state capitalist democracies."
—Noam Chomsky

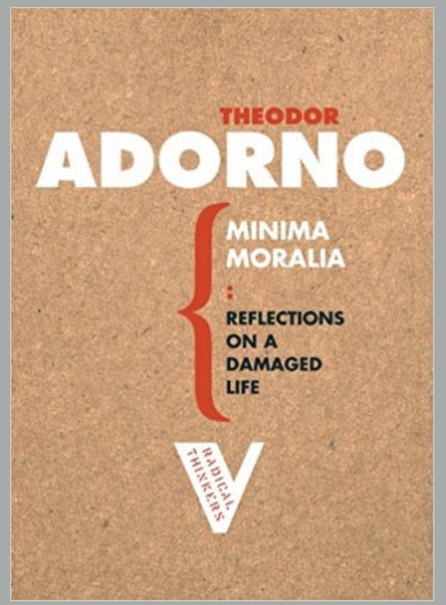

Ways of Seeing
John Berger
Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak.
But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.
the door
the wind
the bird
the valise
The Surrealist painter Magritte commented on this always-present gap between words and seeing in a painting called The Key of Dreams.
The way we see things is affected by what we


SPECTACLE
SOCIETY
of the
guy debord


ROUTLEDGE Critical THINKERS
Slavoj
Žižek
Tony Myers


Detournement as Pedagogical Praxis
Sense Publishers


Revised Edition
Jean Baudrillard
The Consumer Society
Myths and Structures


THEODOR
ADORNO
MINIMA MORALIA
:
REFLECTIONS ON A DAMAGED LIFE
RADICAL THINKERS

Keywords

Publicity Image
Consumerism
Psychoanalysis
Mirror Stage
Frankfurt School
Simulacrum
Détournement

Thinkers

Edward Bernays
John Berger
Guy Debord
Jean Baudrillard
Jacques Lacan
Theodor Adorno

Artworks

The Modern Publicity Image (Various)
Tom Deacon’s work (Détournement)

Paul Duerinckx - Research in Context (ADAD5003) LENS-BASED IMAGE MAKING research strand. Semester 1

The Research in Context module (ADAD5003) is designed to help students to explore interests, artists, designers and themes within or associated with their practice, as a preparation for an ongoing engagement with the contextualisation of their work.

Bear in mind that in order to contain your argument within the format of a 2,500-word essay and avoid superficial coverage, you should be highly selective in your choice of examples and concentrate on **critical analysis**.

Choose ONE essay question from the following:

Question 1:

Using at least 3 examples, consider how image makers have utilised digital technology to explore at least one of the following: Conflict, the Environment, Identity, the Surveillance State, the Technological World?

Question 2:

“It is useless and tedious to represent what exists, because nothing that exists satisfies me…. I prefer the monsters of my fantasy to what is positively trivial.”

Baudelaire, *Salon Review (*1859)

Is Baudelaire’s position defensible in light of the case lens-based art-forms make to ‘represent what exists’? Or, from a contemporary perspective, do the ‘monsters of fantasy’ still allow artists to engage with ‘what exists’ creatively?

Question 3:

“Yosemite Valley had, during his [Ansel Adams] decades of photographing it as wilderness, a golf course, a luxury hotel, several camp sites, stores, a school, churches, and even a beauty parlour. Adams cropped it out in the name of Beauty, of formalism, of composition, but all his heirs learned to leave it out too and thus was nature photography created. And what he cropped-out, his fellow Americans learned not to see, leaving the American landscape as a chequerboard of scenic wonders and blank spots.”

Rebecca Solnit, *Landscape and Amnesia*, in Creative Camera (Aug/Sept. 1998). p. 35

Using both historical and contemporary examples, discuss the attempts made by contemporary photographic artists (such as the ‘New Topographics’) to photograph the ‘blank spots’ of the landscape?

Question 4:

“In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation.”

Guy Debord, *The Society of The Spectacle*

Guy Debord contends that the ‘reality’ of our perceived negotiations with the mediated world has been replaced by ‘The Spectacle’ – image has replaced substance. To what extent do you believe this to be true and how have visual artists used the lens-based medium to comment on and critique this reality?

Question 5:

From the **Lens-Based Image Making** research strand lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2,500-word essay. Critically assess primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

Word Count 2,500

Essay hand-in: December 10, 2026, by 17.00, on Moodle

Seminar Task for Thursday October 8

Task:

You will each bring in/submit an image of your choosing: photograph, painting, sculpture, film still, diagram, building etc., combine it with a quote by the artist that provides insight about their work, and an additional quote from another source - theorist, writer, reviewer etc. - that contextualises this further.

Consider some of the sources we have discussed.

Choose an artwork or artist that you are drawn to, either because of a relationship to your own practice or because you are otherwise fascinated.

Print out and bring to the session. Please also send a digital version - instructions to follow.

An example follows, using one of my favourite photographers, Garry Winogrand.



Garry Winogrand



“There is nothing as mysterious as a fact clearly described. I like to think of photographing as a two way act of respect. Respect for the medium, by letting it do what it does best, describe. And respect for the subject, by describing it as it is. A photograph must be responsible to both.” – Garry Winogrand



“In fact, by so forcibly and openhandedly counterfeiting the world, these pictures suggested that there was not only no clear relationship between a photograph and what it was a photograph of, but also - and more important - that the world might exist for the photographer in precisely the way it existed for any artist: as a sourcebook of possibility, a storehouse of material.”

Tod Papageorge (Papageorge, 2011, p. 84)

Papageorge, Tod (2011) *Core Curriculum.* Aperture

Thank You