

Annotated Bibliography

Thesis title: Memory and possession: How does photography mediate our understanding of the past?

Belk, R.W. (1988) "Possessions and the Extended Self," *The Journal of consumer research*, 15(2), pp. 139–168. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1086/209154>.

Belk's article *Possessions and the Extended Self* explores the relationships that people attach to their possessions and how our possessions can inform our sense of self and identity. Backed up by a range of psychological research and philosophical writing, Belk argues that our sense of self does not reside solely in ourselves but is in fact extended into objects in our surroundings which we have through various means attached significant meaning to. The article was written for a consumer research journal, which may make its application to an arts thesis difficult. That being said, his main points are extremely pertinent to my area of research. My previous essay from last semester and my photographic practice explored the topic of hoarding, where an extreme imbalance occurs regarding the value of one's possessions. This research led me on to my current topic of how photography can mediate memory and possession. This article will help me to highlight the significance of photographs and tangible possessions at the beginning of the essay and later will support my analysis of Miyako Ishiuchi's project *Mother's*.

Barthes, R. (1993). *Camera Lucida: Reflections on photography*. Vintage Books.

Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* is a phenomenological exploration into the nature of photography. The book examines a wide range of photographs, some of them very personal, such as an image of his deceased mother. Others cover topics from war to snapshots of the everyday. A key point in the book which is often quoted by writers on photography since, is the "punctum" and "studium." The "studium" refers to the general interest we might experience when viewing a photograph, whereas the "punctum" is something in an image which "pricks" the viewer, or becomes immediately poignant to them. One limitation of *Camera Lucida* is that it is written from a very personal and subjective standpoint, which can make it difficult to use when analysing different photographers' work objectively. A further limitation is that the book is now nearly fifty years old, and much more has been written about the topics he touches on since. This means that when referencing *Camera Lucida* in my thesis, I will have to point out why his words remain relevant in the present day. As well as the punctum, one chapter I will be referencing is "He Who Is Photographed," where he discusses the innate response to pose when a camera is pointing at you. This, I will apply to my section on family albums and private photographs.

Sartre, J. P. (2003). *Being and Nothingness: an essay on phenomenological ontology*. Routledge.

Being and Nothingness is considered to be the primary book on existentialist philosophy. In it, Sartre covers a wide range of topics relating to the human condition and our perception of the world around us. Because of its large scope, the book has been a challenging resource

to use. After reading through some of the chapters I thought might be relevant to my argument, I found “Doing and Having.” In this chapter doing and having are identified as two main states of being, both of which Sartre relates to possession. Having is self explanatory- however, doing is linked to possession through the idea that to do something you exert some form of manifestation on your external environment. Many of the ideas in this chapter of the book also informed R.W. Belk’s research on the extended self, which means that I can make comparisons between the two in my thesis. *Being and Nothingness* can be applied to all areas of my research, however it will be most important in the last section of my thesis, which looks at a documentary photography project on a disappearing cultural tradition. Here I argue that the act of photographing it acknowledges its disappearance as a possible future and therefore encourages a shift in the way in which the tradition is possessed. Firstly possessed through engagement with the landscape (supported by Sartre) and then to being possessed as a memory.

Sontag, S. (2002). *On Photography*. Penguin.

On Photography is a critical work on the theory of photography and photographs. The book is a collection of six essays with a seventh section comprised of quotations. Compared to Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida*, Sontag’s book is written from a far less personal perspective, drawing from attitudes in western (particularly American) society from different periods up until the 1970s (current decade at time of writing). This makes *On Photography* a good choice for backing up arguments regarding photography in wider societal contexts. The essay which is most relevant to my research is “In Plato’s Cave,” which among other great observations, contains her most well known quote regarding the act of photographing as a form of appropriation. From this I can infer that in photographing something we exert possession over the subject in a metaphorical sense. I aim to link this back to Sartre, who says in *Being and Nothingness* many years prior that even the act of seeing is a form of appropriation, or in his own words: “To see it is already to possess it, in itself it is already apprehended by sight as a symbol of my being.” (p. 602). Sontag’s idea of appropriation will inform much of my thesis because in dealing with the subject of possession I am not always discussing it in the physical sense.

Langford, M. (2007). *Scissors, Paper, Stone: Expressions of Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art*. McGill-Queen’s University Press.

Martha Langford’s book on the subjects of memory and photography is structured in a very unique fashion. Comprised of three sections, it draws on the game of rock, paper scissors (or as I assume Americans call it scissors, paper, stone) as a metaphor. A wide range of topics under the memory bracket are discussed and organised based on their strengths and limitations into the three sections, so rock beats scissors but is beaten by paper and so on. The section “Memory and Imagination” will be most important for my work, where I will use it to back up a section discussing the personal memories and experiences that come into play when a viewer engages with a new photograph. This section proceeds a passage on personal photographs, or ones in which the viewer has a direct memory of the scene photographed.