WAYS OF THINKING. SESSION 2 AND 3.

INTRODUCTION TO VISUAL CULTURE. MEDIATION.

Estéfani Bouza: e.bouza-arnoso@uwtsd.ac.uk/ October 2026

RECAP FROM PREVIOUS SESSION

RECAP

-Introductions.

-Housekeeping and classroom environment.

-Assignment brief and criteria.

-What is this module about?

-Schedule.

-Resources: list of artists and books.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO IMPROVE AND WRITE A GOOD ESSAY?

-To improve your writing skills you need to practice, practice and more practice. You can see how your writing improves. Especially if this is your weaker area do not leave it until the end because it won’t work you will only be able to produce something of poor quality.

-Good writing starts with good reading.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO IMPROVE AND WRITE A GOOD ESSAY?

-Being curious and wanting to learn.

-Not knowing is not an ‘issue’ per se, it’s what you do about it.

MODULE LEARNING OUTCOMES

After the completion of this module, you should be able to:

-Identify and discuss the diversity of approaches to understanding elements of **cultural endeavour**.

-Apply a range of **critical theories** to the analysis of any given cultural product.

-Make reference to academic sources by employing appropriate **citation** and **referencing conventions**.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW HOW MEANING IS GENERATED AND WHAT IMAGES ARE TRYING TO SAY?

ROLE AND PLACE OF IMAGES IN OUR EVERYDAY LIFE - EXPLOSION OF IMAGES AND TEXT.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW HOW MEANING IS GENERATED AND WHAT IMAGES ARE TRYING TO SAY?

Because visual and photographic images are pervasive in today's culture. The urgency of thinking about those images not in terms of quantity but rather about their impact in every aspect of our lives.

In this sense images shape the way we think and understand the world around us.

Images function within a set of cultural practices. They have a tendency to accumulate, circulate, and transform through different times, geographies, and institutions. In that way, images have many 'lives'.

Erik Kessels/ *24 Hrs in Photos. 350.000 images, uploaded in a 24 hour period* / 2011/

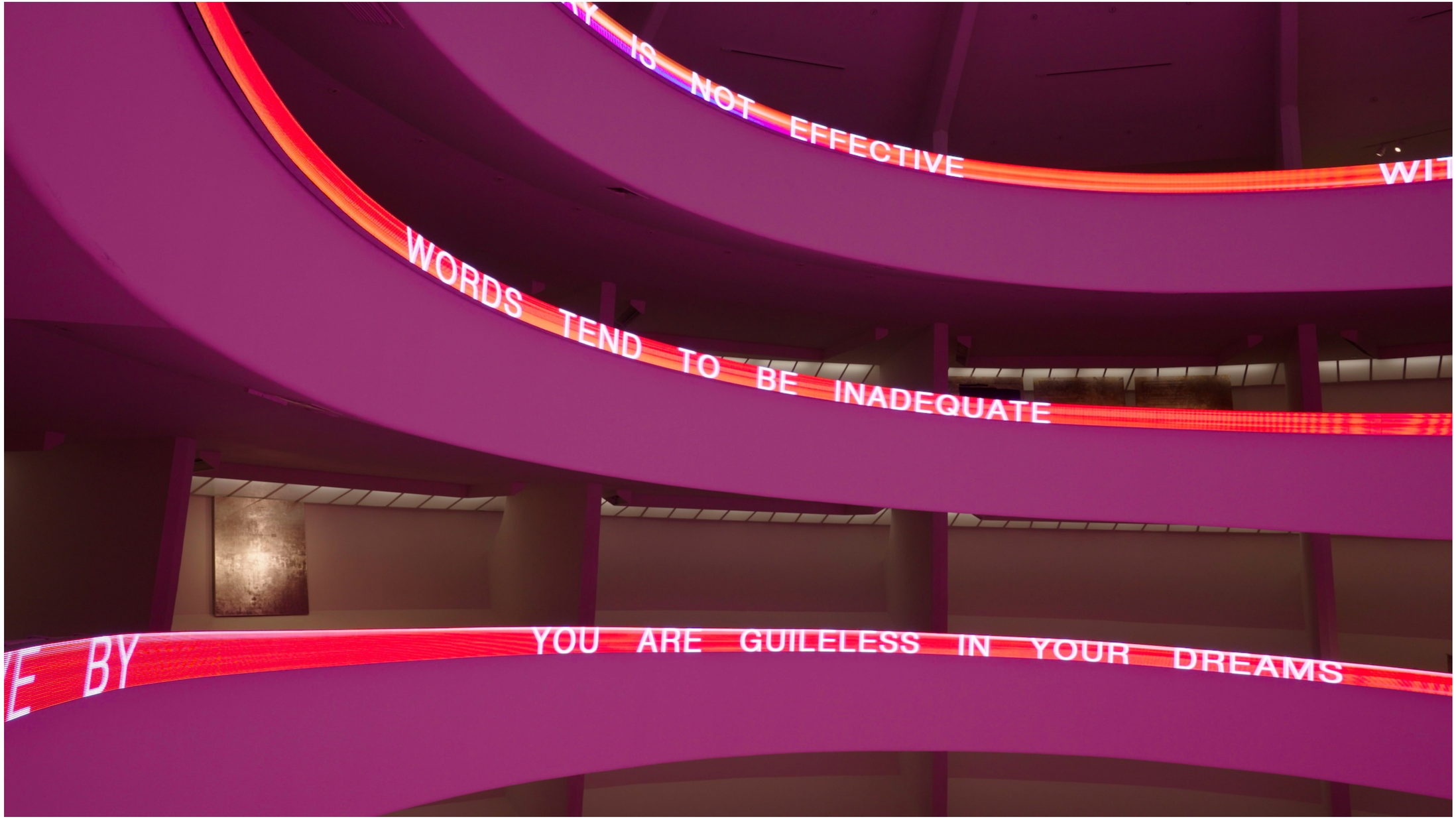




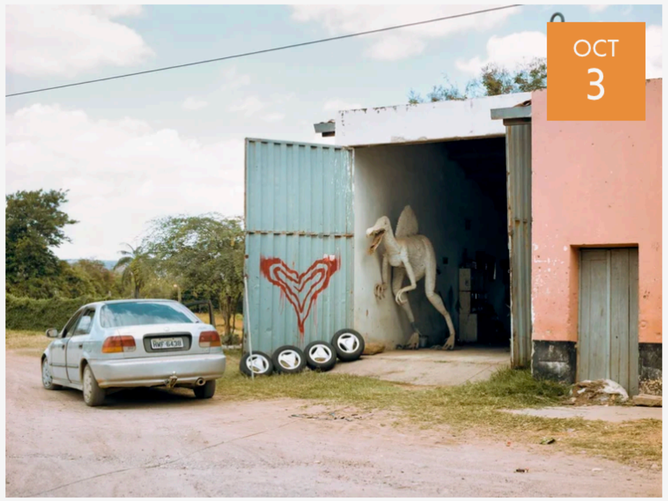
Jenny Holzer/ *Light Line,* May 17 - September 29, Solomon R, Guggenheim Museum, New York/ 2024/



Jenny Holzer/ *Light Line,* May 17 - September 29, Solomon R, Guggenheim Museum, New York/ 2024/



ACTIVITIES - FFOTO CYMRU LAST FRIDAY



3 October 2026 – 31 October 2026 · Ffoto Cymru 2026, Exhibition

Paula Pedrosa: The Living Nature of the Stone-Dead

Elysium, Swansea



3 October 2026 – 31 October 2026 · Ffoto Cymru 2026, Exhibition

Richard Billingham: Public Spaces

GS Artists, Swansea



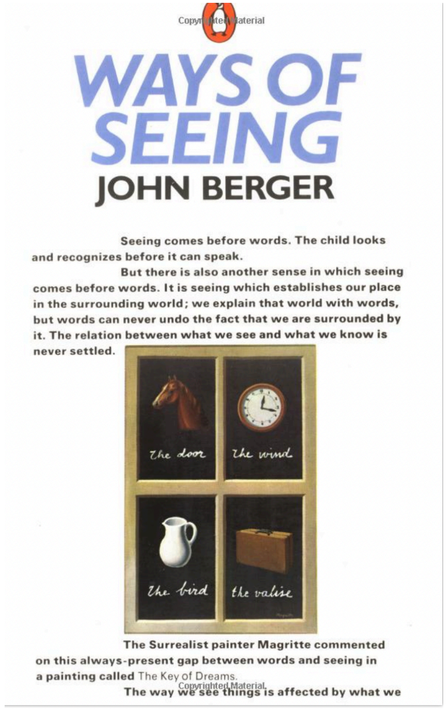
3 October 2026 – 13 December 2026 · Ffoto Cymru 2026, Exhibition

Foto Féminas Mobile Library

Elysium Gallery, Swansea

TASKS





First Edition 1972.

JOHN BERGER. WAYS OF SEEING. EPISODE 1: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

-Does the act of seeing function as an objective truth, or is it a subjective process shaped by our habits, culture, and technology?

-How did the invention of the camera and mechanical reproduction change our perception around art and removed its "silence and stillness"?

-In what ways do digital images and social media today mirror Berger’s critique of oil paintings as a medium to display private property and status?

TASKS

*Read pages 3-17 from *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger. Pdf (please note those pages correspond to the pdf version).
If this is the first time that you are reading this text I would advice to read it twice since we will be discussing excerpts from it in the class. If there are sections of the text that you don't understand or are unclear we can discuss them as well.

JOHN BERGER - Ways of Seeing

“The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled. Each evening we see the sun set. We know that the earth is turning away from it. Yet the knowledge, the explanation, never quite fits the sight. 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 know or what we believe. ” (pp. 7-8)

JOHN BERGER - Ways of Seeing

“Many of these assumptions no longer accord with the world as it is. (The world-as-it-is is more than pure objective fact, it includes consciousness.) Out of true with the present, these assumptions obscure the past. They mystify rtaher than clarify. The past is never there waiting to be discovered, to be recognized for exactly what it is. History always constitutes the relation between a present and its past. Consequently fear of the present leads to mystification of the past. The past is not for living in; it is a well of conclusions from which we draw in order to act. Cultural mystification of the past entails a double loss. Works of art are made unnecessarily remote. And the past offers us fewer conclusions to complete in action. ” (p.11)

NICHOLAS MIRZOEFF

How to See the World

A PELICAN INTRODUCTION



PELICAN
an imprint of
PENGUIN BOOKS

Contents

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION
How to See the World

CHAPTER 1
How to See Yourself

CHAPTER 2
How We Think About Seeing

CHAPTER 3
The World of War

CHAPTER 4
The World on Screen

CHAPTER 5
World Cities, City Worlds

CHAPTER 6
The Changing World

CHAPTER 7
Changing the World

AFTERWORD
Visual Activism

FURTHER READING

NOTES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FOLLOW PENGUIN

WHAT IS VISUAL CULTURE

“Like history, visual culture is both the name of the academic field and that of its object of study. Visual culture involves the things that we see, the mental model we all have of how to see, and what we can do as a result. That is why we call it visual culture: a culture of the visual. A visual culture is not simply the total amount of what has been made to be seen, such as paintings or films. A visual culture is the relation between what is visible and the names that we give to what is seen. It also involves what is invisible or kept out of sight. In short, we don’t simply see what there is to see and call it a visual culture. Rather, we assemble a world-view that is consistent with what we know and have already experienced.”

Excerpt from *How to See the World* by Nicholas Mirzoeff (p.11, 2015).

WHAT IS VISUAL CULTURE

“Rather than try to summarise the immense quantity of visual information available, this book offers a toolkit for thinking about visual culture. Its way of seeing the world centres on the following ideas:

-All media are social media. We use them to depict ourselves to others.
-Seeing is actually a system of sensory feedback from the whole body, not just the eyes.
-Visualizing, by contrast, uses airborne technology to depict the world as a space for war.
-Our bodies are now extensions of data networks, clicking, linking and taking selfies.
-We render what we see and understand on screens that go everywhere with us.
-This understanding is the result of a mixture of seeing and learning not to see.
-Visual culture is something we engage in as an active way to create change, not just a way to see what is happening.”

Excerpt from *How to See the World* by Nicholas Mirzoeff (pp. 13-14, 2015).

WHAT IS VISUAL CULTURE

“Rather than try to summarise the immense quantity of visual information available, this book offers a toolkit for thinking about visual culture. Its way of seeing the world centres on the following ideas:

-All media are social media. We use them to depict ourselves to others.
-Seeing is actually a system of sensory feedback from the whole body, not just the eyes.
-Visualizing, by contrast, uses airborne technology to depict the world as a space for war.
-Our bodies are now extensions of data networks, clicking, linking and taking selfies.
-We render what we see and understand on screens that go everywhere with us.
-This understanding is the result of a mixture of seeing and learning not to see.
-Visual culture is something we engage in as an active way to create change, not just a way to see what is happening.”

Excerpt from *How to See the World* by Nicholas Mirzoeff (p. 22, 2015).



What does it mean to be intelligent? Is it something unique to humans - or do we share it with other beings?

Recent years have seen rapid advances in 'artificial' intelligence, which increasingly appears to be something stranger than we ever imagined. At the same time, we are becoming more aware of the other intelligences which have been with us all along, unrecognized. These other beings are the animals, plants, and natural systems that surround us, and are slowly revealing their complexity and knowledge - just as the new technologies we've built are threatening to cause their extinction, and ours.

In *Ways of Being*, writer and artist James Bridle considers the fascinating, uncanny and multiple ways of existing on earth. What can we learn from these other forms of intelligence and personhood, and how can we change our societies to live more equitably with one another and the non-human world? From Greek oracles to octopuses, forests to satellites, Bridle tells a radical new story about ecology, technology and intelligence. We must, they argue, expand our definition of these terms to build a meaningful and free relationship with the non-human, one based on solidarity and cognitive diversity. We have so much to learn, and many worlds to gain.

RESISTANCE TO ANY REDUCTIVE SYSTEM - RELATED TO CRITICAL THINKING

Projects that are socially, politically and ecologically engaged.

Works that are grounded on research and collaboration with communities.

A space for connection, learning, dialogue and knowledge exchange.



Zanele Muholi, *Phases and Faces,* (2016-ongoing).



Zanele Muholi, *Debora Dlamini, KwaThema Community Hall, Springs, Johannesburg,* (2011).

The work of Zanele Muholi where they use their practice to think about gender and to talk about the continuous fight of the LGTBIQA+ community for their rights.

With this what I am trying to say is that what we are discussing here has an impact in real life and it is not theory for theory's sake.

RESISTANCE TO ANY REDUCTIVE SYSTEM

The context for this module is to work in favour of processes and not positions, of multiple forms of becoming.

How do we do that?

THEORY BEGINS WITH PRACTICE

How is that so?

For example if you know and understand how to read images then you can use that and apply it within your own practices. So you are aware of the codes and how they work in practice. In that sense theory becomes another tool within your work. Treat it the way you will do when you learn a new technique, like medium format analogue photography, or watercolour, casting figures, etc. Then as with any new technique, you investigate a bit more, experiment, and see if it works within your thinking and work. If it does adapt and integrate it.

THEORY BEGINS WITH PRACTICE



Zanele Muholi, *Phases and Faces,* exhibition view at IVAM (2022).

A good example is Zanele Muholi, since they are using the language of photography and traditional portraiture to give voice to their own community and create a series of portraits where the sitters are gazing directly at the viewer. Muholi adopts those conventions to make visible a different narrative, to portrait a community that lacks representation, especially in the context of South Africa where the artist is from. In that sense they are using the classic language of painting and photography and through collaboration with their subjects they create a representation of people who are usually not visible. Therefore they are using the conventions and codes of the medium to tell about their story and that of their community.

THEORY BEGINS WITH PRACTICE

REMEMBER THAT IMAGES have the power of shaping the way we think about ourselves/others and understand the world around us. It is crucial that we know how they work. An example from your everyday life is the way you use your social media and instagram accounts were you do an edited version of your life and post those moments that you want to share. In that way you are shaping and creating a particular context in which you want others to see you. So you are using images to create a version of yourself.

Overall the idea is that you gradually integrate the things that you learn in this module on your own practice and that you apply critical thinking when engaging with a different array of art practices.

MEDIATIONS

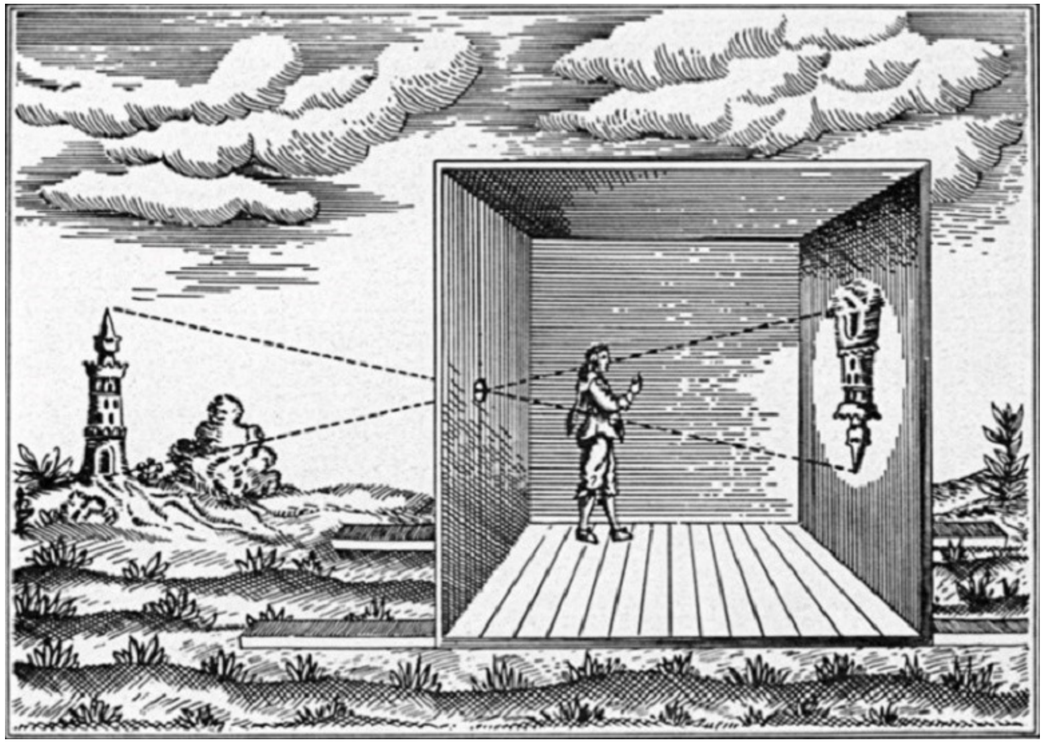


Illustration of a camera obscura, displaying an image upside down on a wall in a dark room.

Any form of representation such as painting, sculpture, drawing or a photograph is not a ‘portion’ of reality but rather a **MEDIATION** of it.

Visual representations are not ‘natural’ but rely on a series of **conventions**.

For example since the Renaissance Western painting used the **convention** of perspective to represent reality. They used the camera obscura as an aid for drawing and painting.

As a matter of fact and as you can see on the illustration on the right hand side, it is quite far from natural.

MEDIATIONS

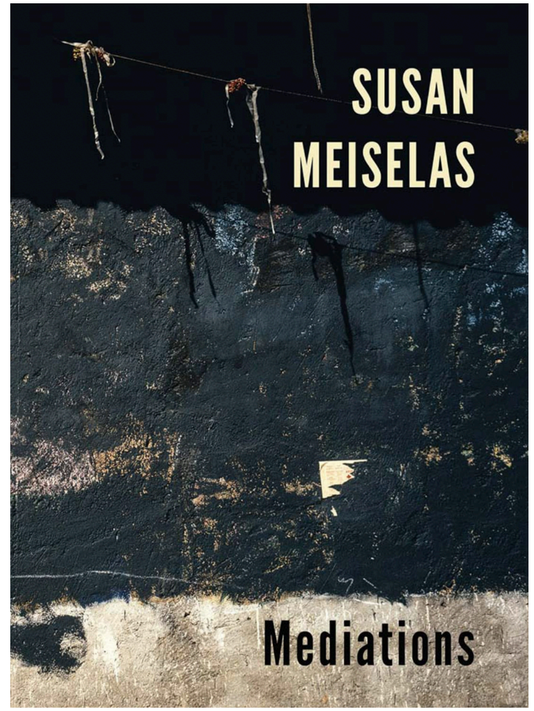
Activity - 10min.

-What does mediation mean? Find a definition.
-What do you think it means that a photograph, a painting, sculpture or drawing are mediations of reality?

MEDIATIONS

What do we mean by MEDIATION? One way of defining mediation is as intervention. How do we mediate and intervene reality?

What we aim is to understand the way in which paintings, photographs and any other visual representations are MEDIATIONS of reality and not a reality in itself. In that sense throughout this module we will see how they are never documents or records but rather interpretations and interventions of reality. This goes against the claims such as photography and truth. But also claims in relation to historical painting and the construction of a history according to the victors.



MEDIATIONS

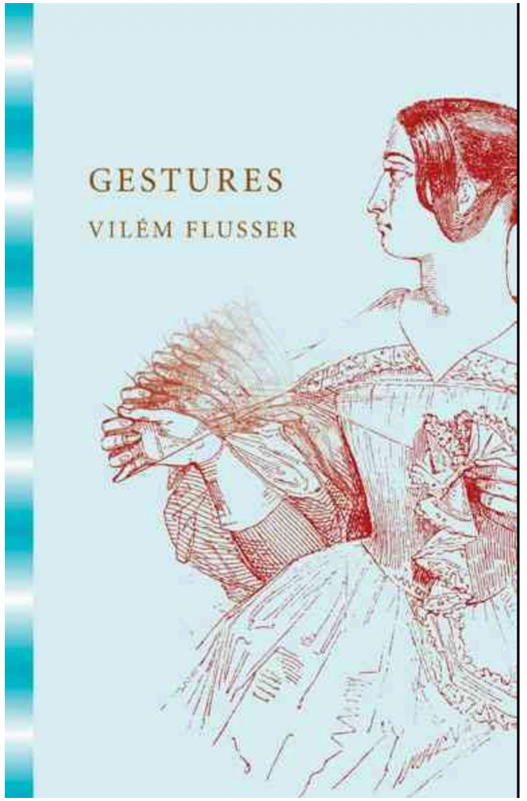
To ‘mediate’ reality we need to collect and register information.

So before anything else there is this ‘gesture’ of collecting that information to then transform it into a photograph, sculpture, drawing and so on.

I call that ‘gesture’ a ‘gathering’.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO GATHER?
HOW ARE WE COLLECTING, REGISTERING, MEDIATING AND TRANSMITTING THAT INFORMATION?

Paintings, drawings, sculptures, photography and the camera are all means to gather visual information.



MEDIATIONS

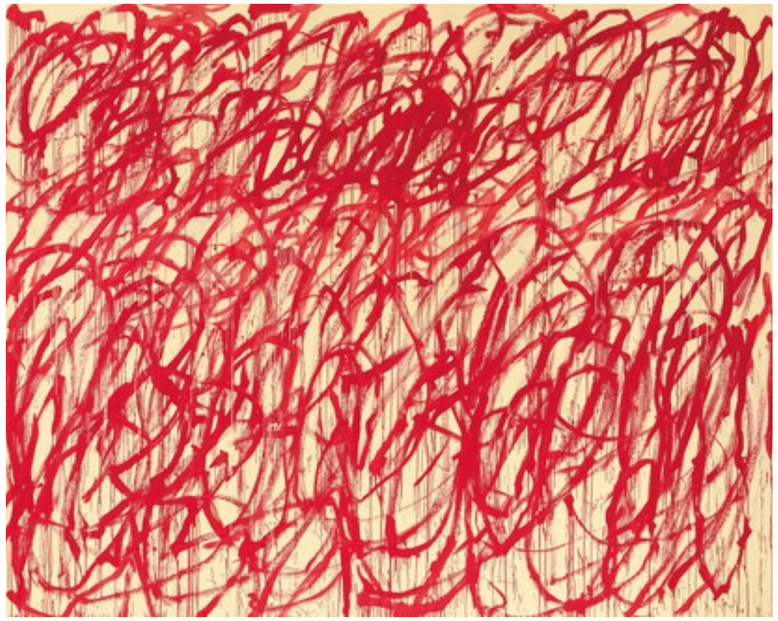
EXAMPLES



Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas,* (1656)



Robert Rauschenberg, *Retroactive,* (1963)



Cy Twombly, *Bacchus,* (2006-2008)

MEDIATIONS

EXAMPLES



Timothy H. O'Sullivan, *Black Cañon Colorado River, from Camp 8,* (1871).



August Sander, *Secretary,* (1931).



Moyra Davey, *Trust Me* (detail)*,* (2011).

ALBRECHT DÜRER



Self-portrait, Study of a Hand and a Pillow (recto), (1493).



Six Studies of Pillows (verso), (1493).

ALBRECHT DÜRER



Studies of Dürer's Left Hand (recto), (1493-1494).



Adam and Eve, (1504).



Praying Hands, (1508).

REMBRANDT VAN RIJN



Rembrandt, *Old Man in Profile,* (1620–69).



Rembrandt, *Two Studies of a Woman Reading,* (1635–1640).

REMBRANDT VAN RIJN



Rembrandt, *Study Sheet with Three Women and a Boy,* (ca. 1638–39).



Rembrandt, *Old Woman with a Baby in her Arms,* (ca. 1643).

WILLIAM BLAKE



William Blake, *The Night of Enitharmon's Joy (formerly called 'Hecate'),* (c.1795).

WILLIAM BLAKE

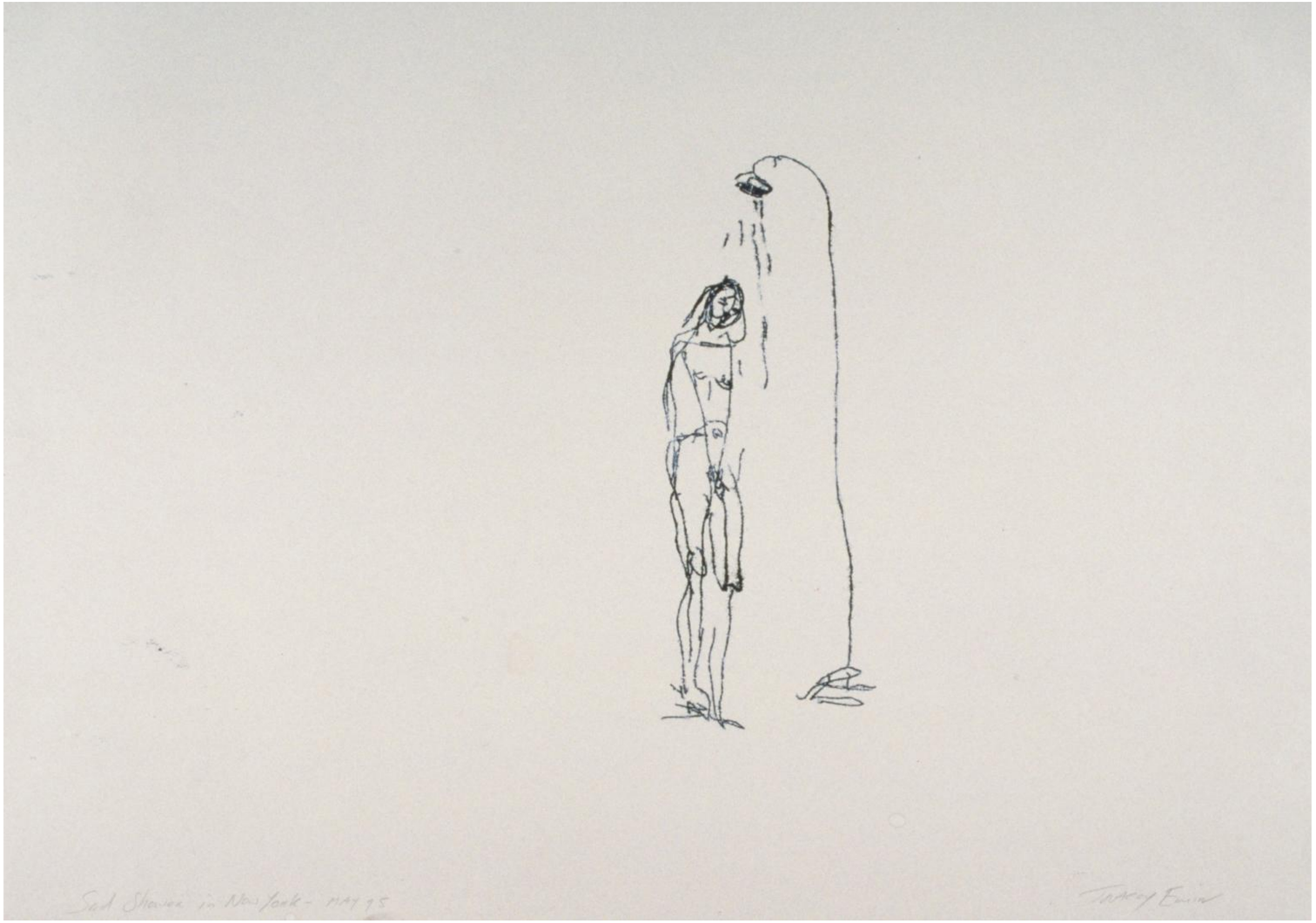


William Blake, *Nebuchadnezzar,* (1795–c.1805).



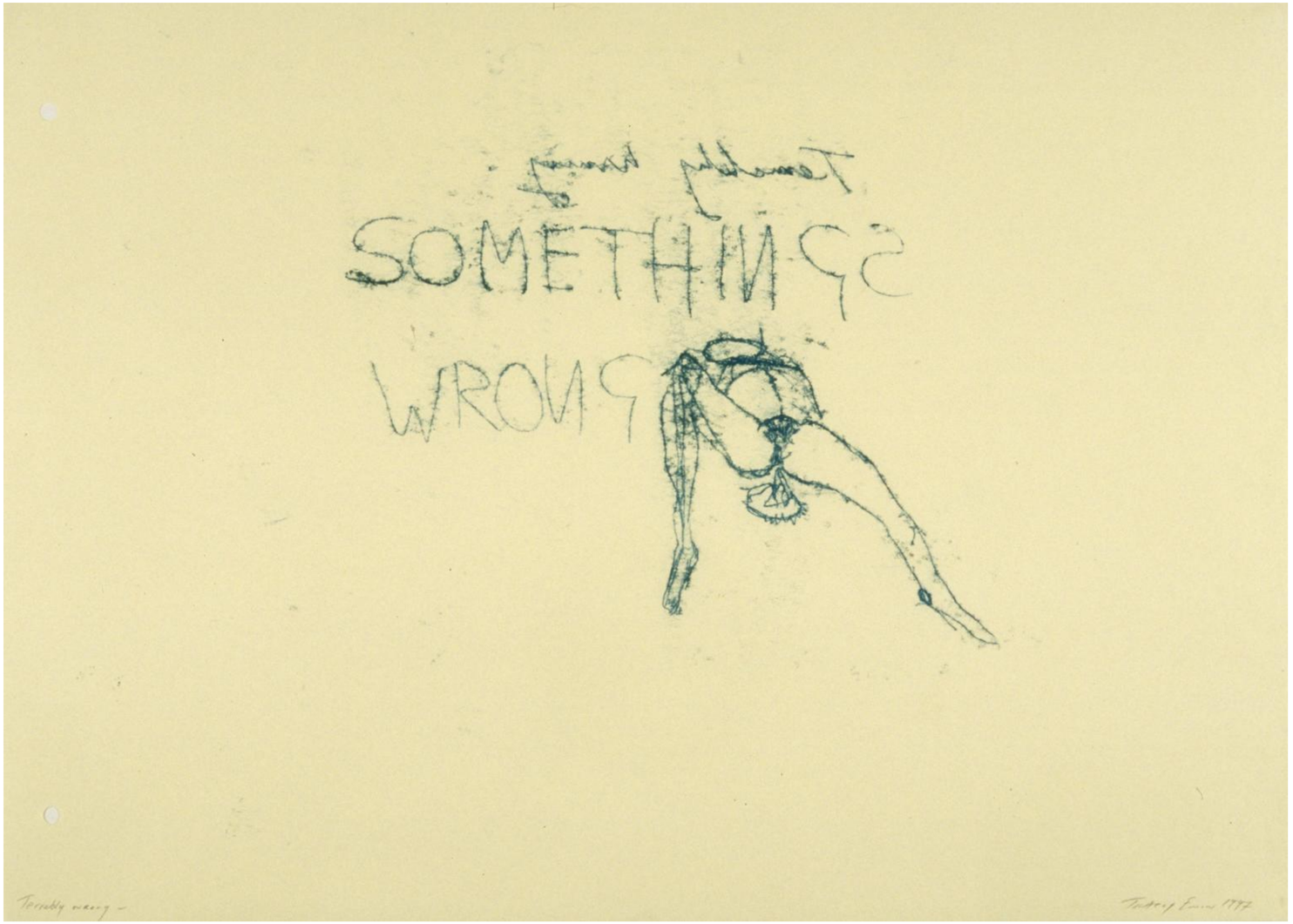
William Blake, *The Ghost of a Flea,* (c.1819–20).

TRACEY EMIN



Tracey Emin, *Sad Shower in New York,* (1995).

TRACEY EMIN



Tracey Emin, *Terribly Wrong,* (1997).

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE



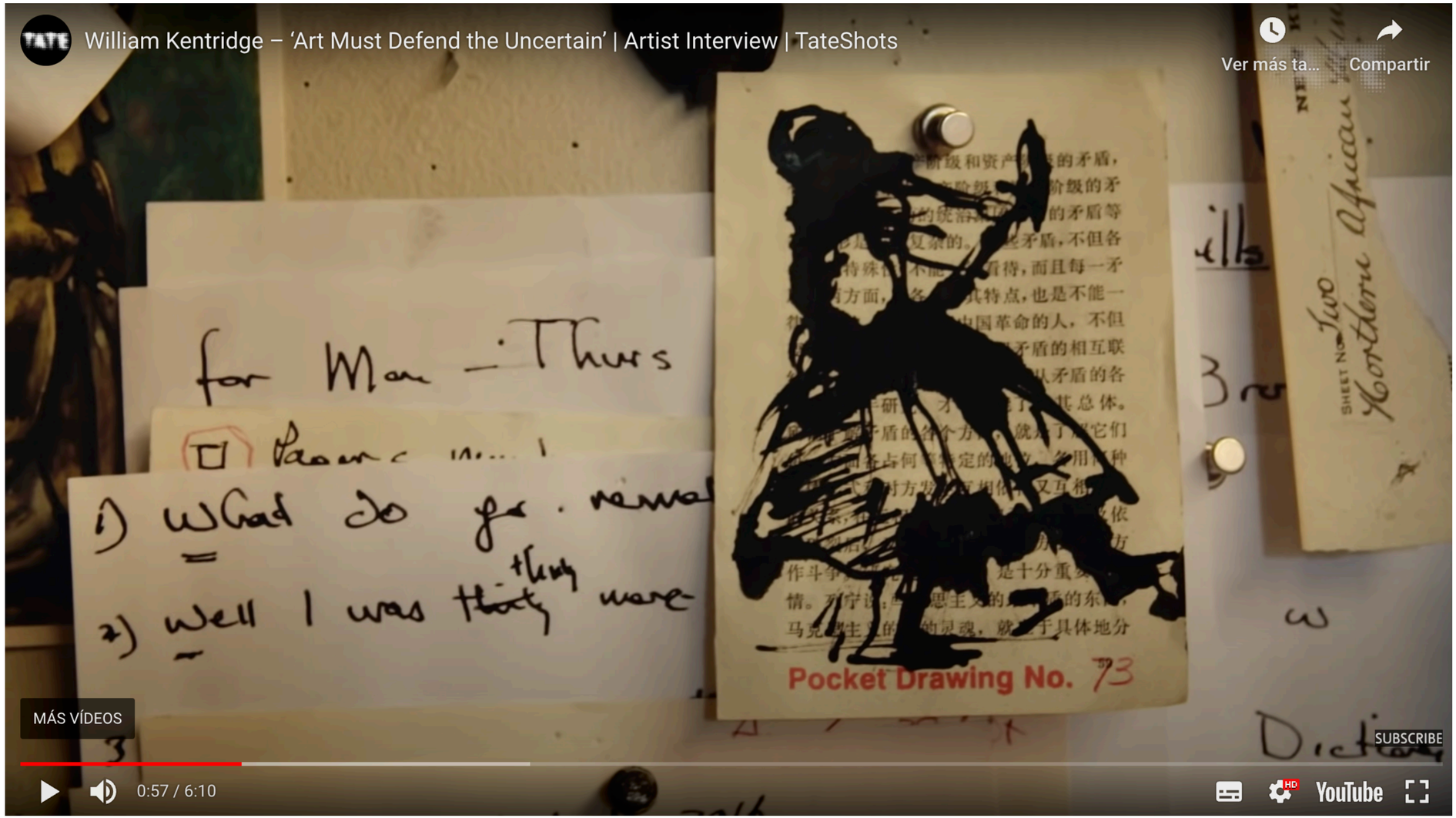
William Kentridge, *Arc/Procession: Develop, Catch Up, Even Surpass,* (1990).

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE



William Kentridge, *I am not me, the horse is not mine,* (2008).

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE



William Kentridge, *Art Must Defend the Uncertain,* (2018).

GATHERING - DEFINITION

What do we mean by gathering?

Following the dictionary definition, gather means:
1 to assemble or cause to assemble;
2 to collect or be collected gradually; muster’.

Sinclair, J.M. (ed.), (2000) *Collins English Dictionary.* Glasgow: HarperCollins.

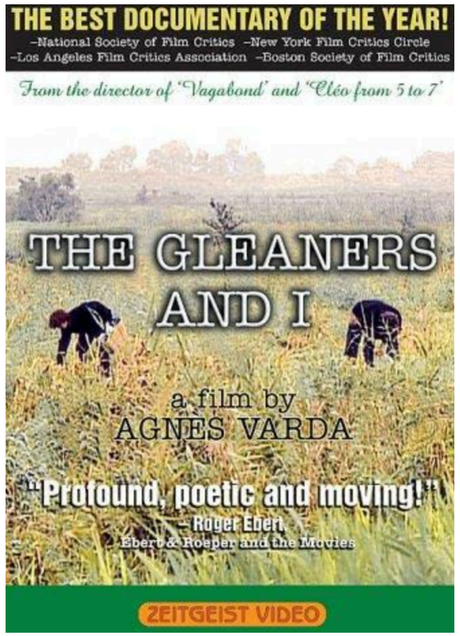
GATHERING - DEFINITION

A more detailed explanation of the verb ‘to gather’ is to **take up** and **pick up** from the ground, to **bring together** and **place together**, **collecting**. But not collecting in the sense of an endless accumulation, but **collecting** that which you want to **preserve**.

So gathering is **picking something up** with the intention of **preserving** it.
Do you see the connection between gathering and painting, photography?
In that sense you photograph, paint, or draw that which you consider is worth preserving.

AS A RESULT GATHERING AND PRESERVATION ARE JOINED TOGETHER.

GATHERING - DEFINITION



Agnes Varda, *The Gleaners and I,* (2000).



François Milet, *The Gleaners,* (1857).

GATHERING - DEFINITION

Similarly, we could say that photography, painting, drawing or any means of visual representation are comparable to gathering. For example, the artist Zoe Leonard acknowledges:

> ‘There is an aspect of photography that is like hunting and gathering. […] I go out into the world and find things, images or situations that strike a chord in me. Like any good hunter or gatherer, I am grateful that those things are there.’

Leonard, Z. and Blume, A. (1997) 'Zoe Leonard interviewed by Anna Blume', in Rhomberg, K. (ed.), *Secession: Zoe Leonard* [Exh. Cat.], Vienna: Wiener Secession, p. 9.

In that sense Zoe Leonard is ‘picking up’ visual information with the camera.
As a result every photograph is to a certain extent a way of collecting a ‘fragment’ of reality.

GATHERING - DEFINITION

To gather in general can mean about anything. So we are going to see how it works in practice with a case study. For that I am going to use the work *Analogue* (1998-2009) by the artist Zoe Leonard (Liberty, New York, US, 1961).

ACTIVITY

Activity - 5min.

-

-Can you **identify** an image/artwork, other than the examples provided, that uses **mediation** and **gathering**?

-Would you **apply** the concept of **mediation** and **gathering** within your own practice?

ZOE LEONARD - GATHERING IN ANALOGUE



Zoe Leonard, *Analogue,* (1998-2009)*,* exhibition view, MNCARS, Madrid.

EUGÈNE ATGET - CHIFFONIER (RAGPICKER)



Eugène Atget, *Chiffonier (Ragpicker),* (1899-1901).

ZOE LEONARD - GATHERING IN ANALOGUE



Zoe Leonard, *Analogue, chapter 1,* (1998-2009).

Leonard began to work on *Analogue* at the end of the 1990s after a two-year retreat period in Alaska. Upon her return she realised that the Lower East Side of Manhattan, where her studio was based since 1977 and which for her constituted her immediate urban landscape, was then under an accelerated process of gentrification.As a result, local business – grocery shops and restaurants among others, where gradually disappearing whilst being replaced by global brands as well as restaurants and independent stores targeted at an affluent new population that was moving in to that area of New York at the time.

ZOE LEONARD - GATHERING IN ANALOGUE

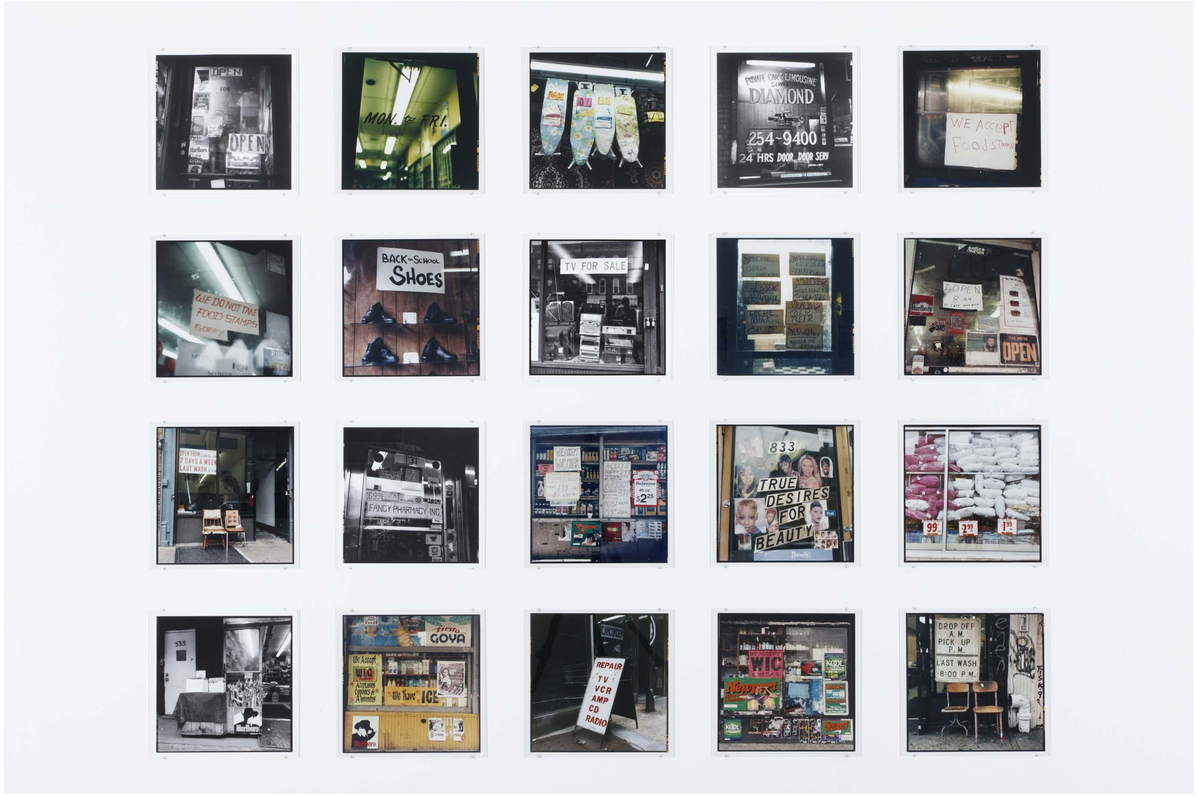


Zoe Leonard, *Analogue, chapter 2,* (1998-2009).

The space as she knew it was vanishing little by little. This gradual disappearance prompted Leonard to start walking through the streets in order to take notes for herself with a camera to remember what was there. She writes: ‘I began to realize I would miss all this. So I started taking pictures. I wanted a record’.

During that time she bought a second-hand Rolleiflex camera from the 1940s, what she calls a ‘leftover from the mechanical age’. She noticed that what she was doing was something bigger than purely note-taking.

ZOE LEONARD - GATHERING IN ANALOGUE



Zoe Leonard, *Analogue, chapter 3,* (1998-2009).

HOW IS ZOE LEONARD GATHERING IN *ANALOGUE*

She is gathering visual information with an old camera. Looking at something in the present with an old technology.

Why is it important that is an old camera?
You have a clue already in the title of the work *Analogue*. What Zoe Leonard is doing is looking at something which is disappearing, her neighbourhood, with a technology that is also disappearing, analogue photography.

In this sense the content of what she is photographing and the way she is photographing are the same. In that way she is emphasising this idea that particular ‘world’ is disappearing.

ZOE LEONARD - GATHERING IN ANALOGUE



Zoe Leonard, *Analogue, chapter 4,* (1998-2009).

ZOE LEONARD - GATHERING IN ANALOGUE



Zoe Leonard, *Analogue, chapter 5,* (1998-2009).

ZOE LEONARD - GATHERING IN ANALOGUE



Zoe Leonard, *Analogue, chapter 6,* (1998-2009).

ZOE LEONARD - GATHERING IN ANALOGUE



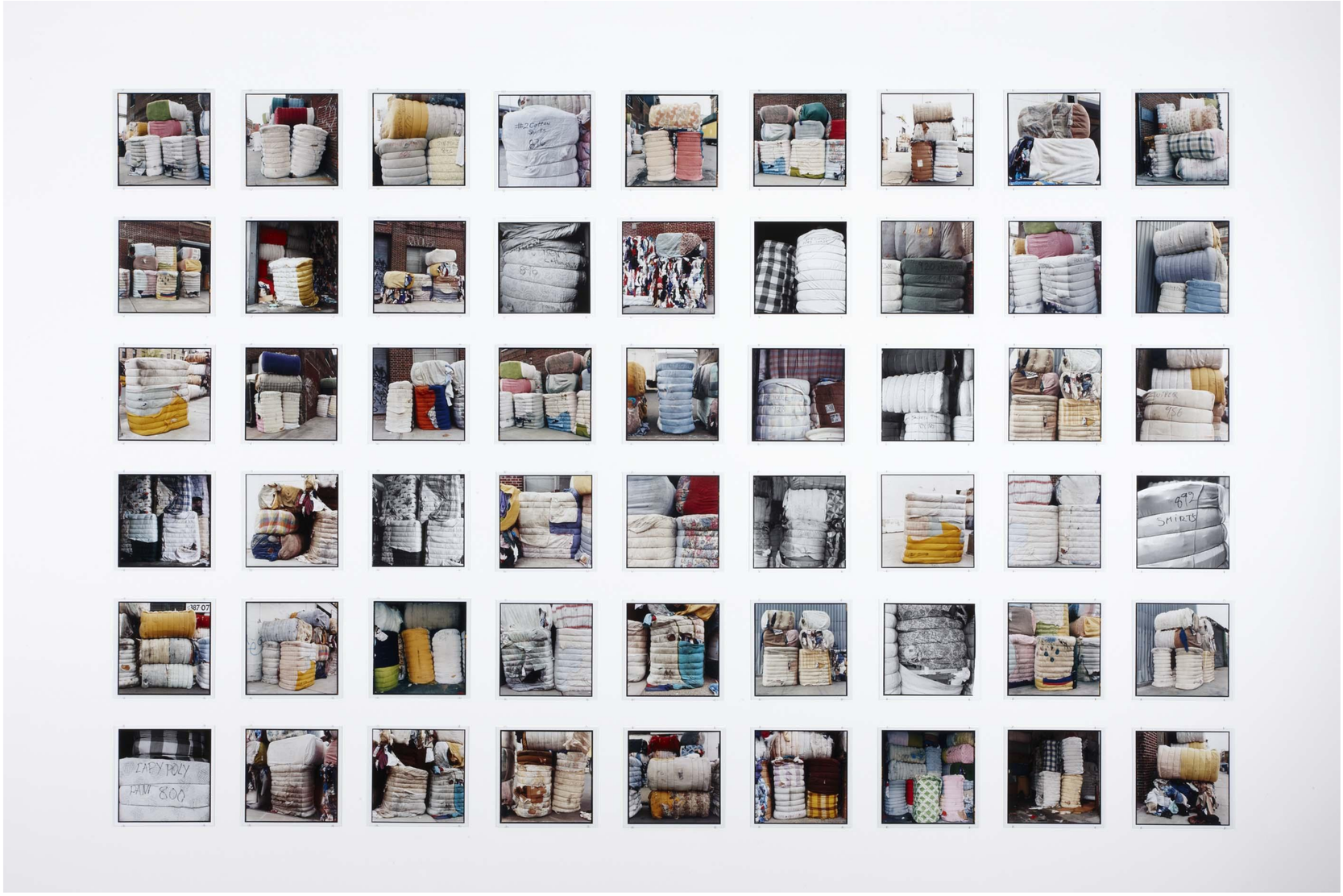
Zoe Leonard, *Analogue, chapter 7,* (1998-2009).

ZOE LEONARD - GATHERING IN ANALOGUE



Zoe Leonard, *Analogue, chapter 8,* (1998-2009).

ZOE LEONARD - GATHERING IN ANALOGUE



Zoe Leonard, *Analogue, chapter 11,* (1998-2009).

ZOE LEONARD - GATHERING IN ANALOGUE



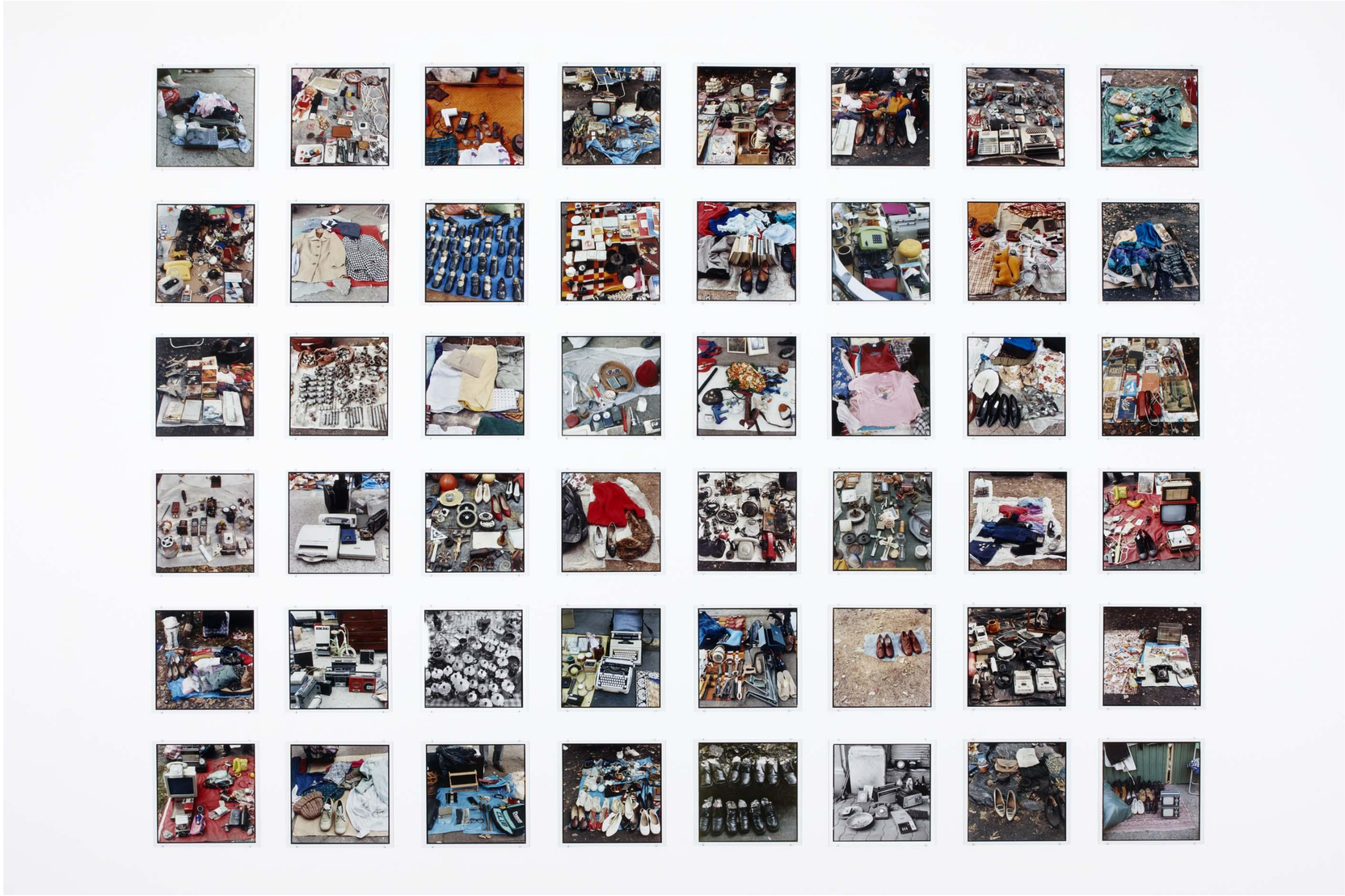
Zoe Leonard, *Analogue, chapter 13,* (1998-2009).

ZOE LEONARD - GATHERING IN ANALOGUE



Zoe Leonard, *Analogue, chapter 21,* (1998-2009).

ZOE LEONARD - GATHERING IN ANALOGUE



Zoe Leonard, *Analogue, chapter 25,* (1998-2009).

ZOE LEONARD - VISUAL REFERENCES



Figure 2.8: Eugène Atget, *Costumier, 2 Rue de la Corderie* (1911)



Figure 2.10: Berenice Abbot, *Pawn Shop, 48 Third Avenue, Manhattan* (1937)

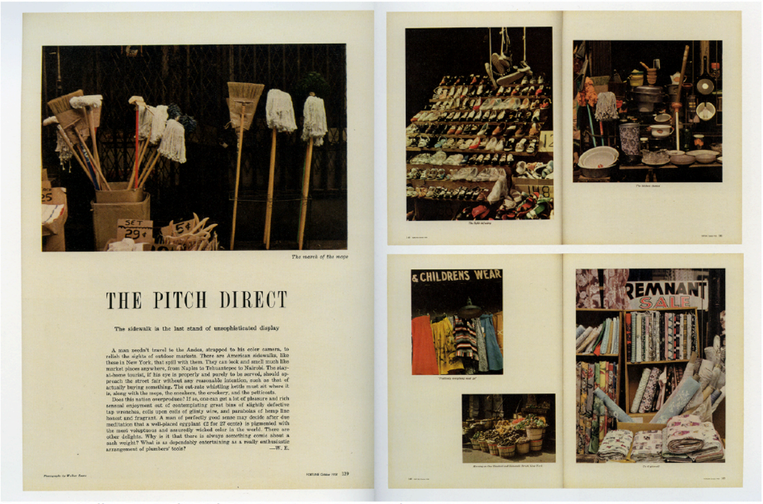


Figure 2.11: Walker Evans, *The Pitch Direct* (1958), Fortune (October 1958)



Figure 2.12: Zoe Leonard, *Analogue* (1998-2009), chapter 19, MNCARS, Madrid

ACTIVITY

Activity - 10min.

-Write down one thing that you have learned today and share that idea and discuss it with your group.
-Would you apply some of these ideas on your own practice?

SUMMARY

Some of the ideas that we discussed today are:

-Visual representations as ‘mediations’ of reality but not reality itself.
-Definition of gathering.
-Case study - Zoe Leonard and how she gathers in *Analogue*.
Throughout this module and this year you will begin to construct your own visual language and identify those artists that you find interesting and perhaps incorporate them in your own practices.

THANK YOU

Estéfani Bouza: e.bouza-arnoso@uwtsd.ac.uk/ October 2026