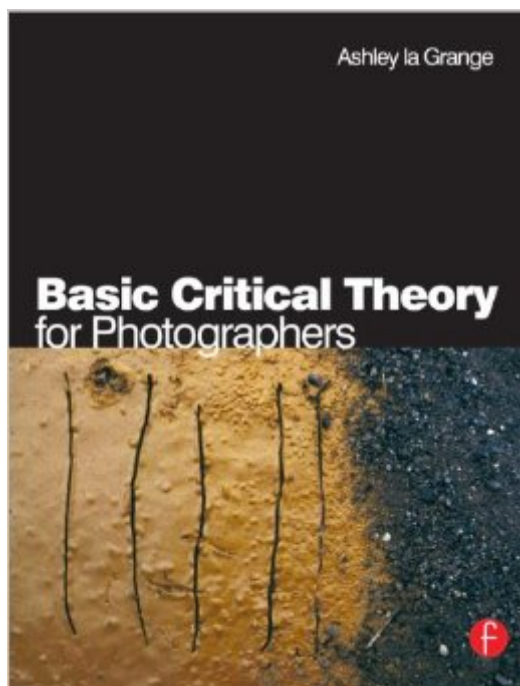


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# Basic Critical Theory For Photographers



## Synopsis

Basic Critical Theory for Photographers generates discussion, thought and practical assignments around key debates in photography. Ashley la Grange avoids the trap of an elitist and purely academic approach to critical theory, taking a dual theoretical and practical approach when considering the issues. Key critical theory texts (such as Sontag's 'On Photography' and Barthes' 'Camera Lucida') are clarified and shortened. La Grange avoids editorilising, letting the arguments develop as the writers had intended; it is the assignments which call into question each writer's approach and promote debate. This is the ideal book if you want to understand key debates in photography and have a ready-made structure within which to discuss and explore these fascinating issues. It is accessible to students, from high school to university level, but will also be of interest to the general reader and to those photographers whose training and work is concerned with the practical aspects of photography. Also includes invaluable glossary of terms and a substantial index that incorporates the classic texts, helping you to navigate your way through these un-indexed works. The book also contains useful information on photo-mechanical processes, explaining how a photograph can appear very differently, and as a result be interpreted in a range of ways, in a variety of books.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a very useful book for anyone who wants to understand what photographs mean; how a particular meaning is constructed by the photographer and how different meanings are interpreted by the viewers. The book is a summary of 'essential texts' on photographic practice and theory. It's not critical theory in the technical academic sense; rather it is a selection of texts that it is critical to understand to gain some insight into the workings of photography. The selection of texts covers basic ideas of how photographs are constructed to semiotics, structuralism, post structuralism and post modernism to literature, poetry and philosophy. The book is targeted to a variety of audiences from high school students, to university students and advanced practitioners. It does help though to have a basic understanding of semiotics to get into some of the more difficult material. A few years ago I completed a Masters degree in photography and many of the core texts from the course are included in this book. It is all well done, the summary of the texts are clear (or as clear as it's possible to be with some of this material). La Grange usefully includes a series of questions after each text that explores the key points and debates from the text. He also suggests photographic exercises that can be undertaken to explore the individual points. The plus side to all this is that he provides a relatively easy route to understanding this material without wading through the original books and articles. The down side is of course that many people will now not read the originals and lose much of the detail of the arguments. The book starts with John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (standard fare for any photo course).

Perhaps even before considering this particular book, one might want to ask whether a study of photographic critical theory and philosophy will actually help a photographer to take better pictures. I would suspect that would depend, at least in part, on the genre that a photographer worked in. Much of the recognized current critical theory points toward a deconstructionist view of photography that attacks the validity of photographs and the use to which society puts them. I suspect the post-modernist photographer might benefit more than a traditional photographer who is primarily concerned with creating a beautiful image. (I know I invite attack for this over-simplification, but an adequate discussion of the utility of critical theory would require another book.) I asked a number of photographers their opinion and received a wide variety of responses. So be warned in advance that not every photographer will benefit from such study. This book makes reference to a number of

books and essays that are seminal works in the modern (or perhaps, post-modern) photography canon. They include John Berger's "Ways of Seeing: Based on the BBC Television Series"; John Szarkowski's "The Photographer's Eye"; and Susan Sontag's "On Photography (Penguin Modern Classics)" as well as a number of important shorter essays.

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