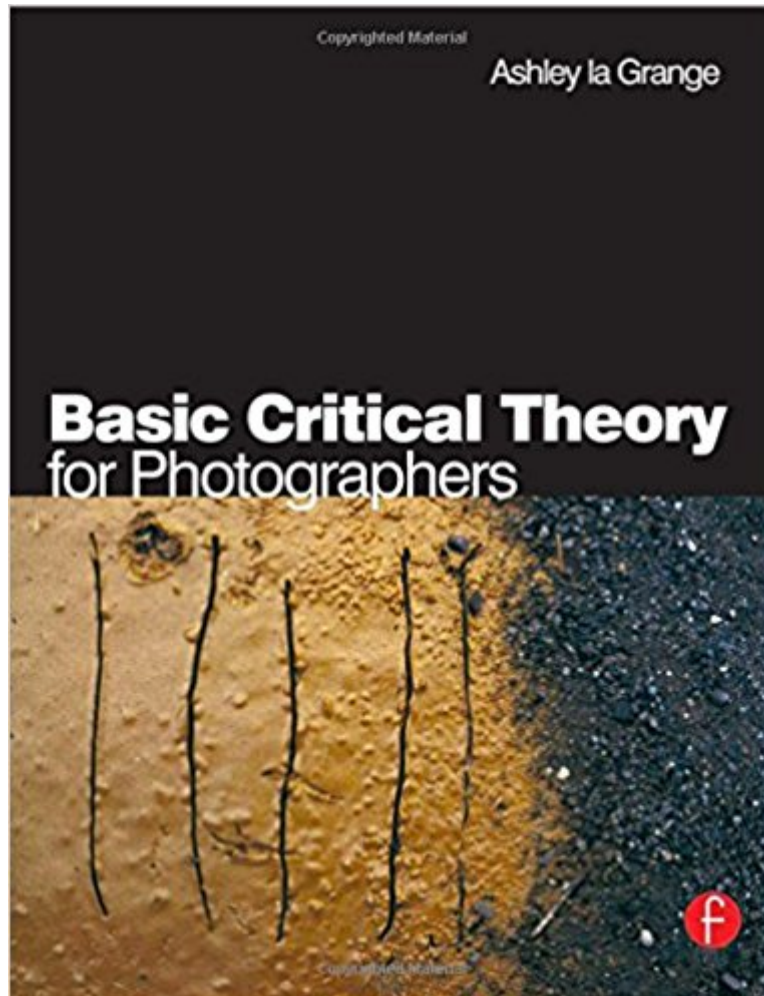




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# Basic Critical Theory For Photographers



## Synopsis

If you want to understand the key debates in photography and learn how to apply the fascinating issues raised by critical theory to your own practical work, this is the book for you! This accessible book cuts through often difficult and intimidating academic language to deliver understandable, stimulating discussion and summaries of the original texts. Key works by great writers such as Sontag and Barthes are explored, along with those from other prominent critics. You are guided through a broad range of issues, including the differences between Eastern and Western art, post-modernism, sexism, the relationship between photography and language and many other crucial debates. The book is illustrated by many classic images by eminent international photographers. Each chapter is followed by stimulating assignments and activities to get you thinking critically and apply theoretical knowledge to your own practical work. A helpful glossary provides quick access to all key terms and a substantial index references key words within the original essays which are not normally indexed. A must-have aid to anyone studying critical theory, this book provides intelligently written, illuminating insights on the 21st century's dominant art form.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Summaries of key texts are followed by thought-provoking questions and practical assignments...the texts are well chosen." - [www.photoarchivenews.com](http://www.photoarchivenews.com) "It's perfect for those who want to understand key debates in photography." - Amateur Photographer "Ashley la Grange has written an excellent book which navigates through the context and meaning of photography. It

covers photography from a range of cultural and historical perspectives as well as guiding the reader through a visual language which many outside the world of academic photography can only guess at...Basic Critical Theory for Photographers is one of those books which should become part of the syllabus of many of the excellent photography courses that are out there." -

www.kickstartnews.com"...a good introduction to theory for photographers looking to expand their understanding of their art form." - Photo Techniques

An essential guide to understanding critical theory in photography

This was a very tough read. The only reason I purchased it, was because it was required for a photography class I was taking. It was difficult to follow and it was almost as if the author was trying to tell you that their way was the correct way. Like most art, it's in the eye of the beholder...but the teaching in this book seemed very aloof and it wasn't my style. Many of the hipsters in the class seemed to agree with statements in the book tho.

I am a recent student in the artistic aspect of photography and needed serious help with the artistic theory. This book helped me get through all the dense books I could not get into.

Great anthology badly edited. Editor seems to apologize for this being an academic book. In retrospect I probably should have gone to the original sources - Berger, Sontag, Barthes et al. If you're new to photo theory then this is probably a useful crib. Disappointing

This book was required for me to have for a college photography class. Had the best deal out of every other place I looked. I ordered the book after my first class and received it within a week and before my next class. Also immediately e-mailed receipts of the purchase to me for my records.

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). He then summarises Szarkowski's *The Photographers Eye* and Shore's *The Nature of Photographs*. Inevitably (and rightly) we get a long précis of Susan Sontag's *On Photography* that draws out many of the problematic ideas and half thoughts from her book. This is followed by Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* which is mainly useful for the idea of 'punctum'. We then get a series of shorter pieces: Martha Rosler's *In, Around and Afterthoughts*, Clive Scott's *The Spoken Image: Photography and Language*, Andy Grundberg's *The Crisis of the Real*, Bertrand Russell on *Appearance and Reality*, Italo Calvino's short story *The Adventures of a Photographer* and some poems by Felix Morrisseau-Leroy and George Szirtes. Also included is Raghubir Singh's *River of Colour* where he argues that western sensibility tied to Judaeo-Christian values allows the creation of black and white photographic practice, whereas in India the values and world view of Hinduism promotes only the exploration of colour; interesting stuff. Finally a short section on Robert Adams, John Baldessari and Peter Goodwin's *Analysis of Particular Photographs*. It's hard to see how anyone can really understand the nature of photography without working through these texts. La Grange's book is therefore fully recommended. Go read.....

This review is merely a nod of approval for those who teach photo theory for undergraduates. The classic texts addressed--or not addressed--in the book have been noted elsewhere. Sure, there are essays that aren't addressed by La Grange, but what you have here is a very helpful tool for class prep--not just as a measuring stick for your interpretation of Sontag, et. al., but as a source for good questions that will help reframe discussions. If there is anything that I like to have when it comes to early AM art history/theory courses, it is a source for (1) a thorough but quick-and-dirty overview, and (2) creative questions for weaseling discussion from under-caffeinated students who've not read...or under-read...the course readings. So in addition to all of the other reasons to pick this up,

consider the "class prep" angle, as well. Request it for your library and then check it out for the year. I have!

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