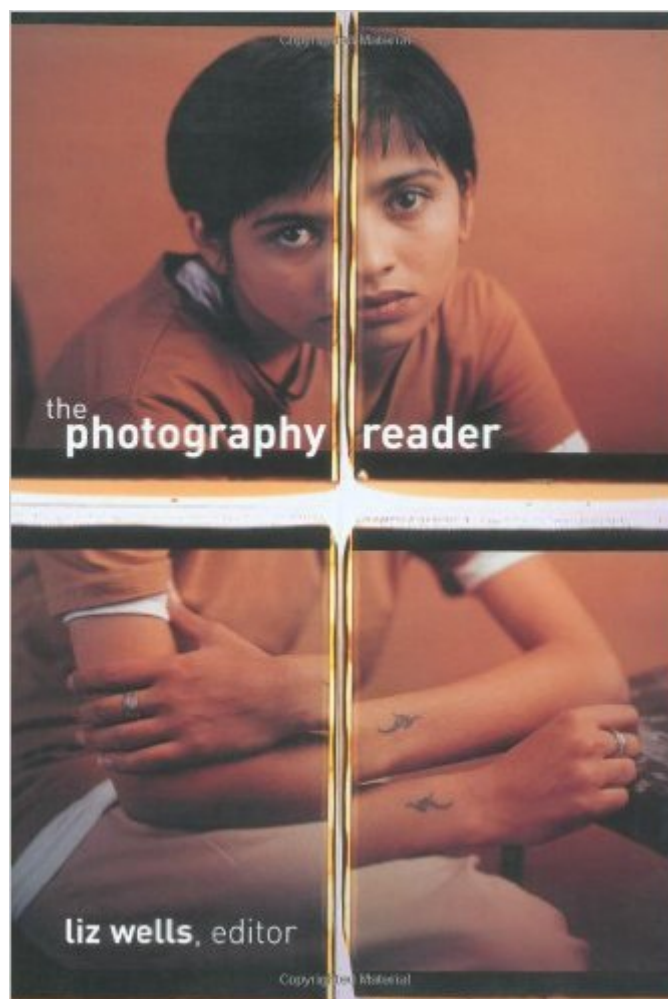


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The Photography Reader



Synopsis

The Photography Reader is a comprehensive introduction to theories of photography; its production; and its uses and effects. Including articles by photographers from Edward Weston to Jo Spence, as well as key thinkers like Roland Barthes, Victor Burgin and Susan Sontag, the essays trace the development of ideas about photography. Each themed section features an editor's introduction setting ideas and debates in their historical and theoretical context. Sections include: Reflections on Photography; Photographic Seeing; Coding and Rhetoric; Photography and the Postmodern; Photo-digital; Documentary and Photojournalism; The Photographic Gaze; Image and Identity; Institutions and Contexts.

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Customer Reviews

As the editor Liz Wells remarks in her introduction, this book is concerned with histories of ideas about photography. Even though Wells herself falls into the trap of referring to the materials in this book as photography criticism, this is a book of readings in critical theory of photography, and as such is concerned more with history, sociology, semiotics, aesthetics, and epistemology. All of the works in the book were created after 1930 and include the writings of many of the great public intellectuals, like Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag and Umberto Eco. After a general introduction by Wells, the book is divided into several parts, each of which deals with a particular aspect of photographic critical theory. Again Wells sets the scene and then a number of voices are heard from, either offering original theory, or analyzing a theory, or finding fault with a theory. For example,

the general section offers selections from Barthes, Sontag and Walter Benjamin as well as articles by authors who clarify the thoughts of these writers. Thus W.J.T. Mitchell's article on Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" made explicit for me the basic conflict between Benjamin's respect for the aura of the original work of art and his optimism about the ability of mechanical reproduction to make art available to the public. The book covers a number of subjects in critical theory, such as photography and postmodernism, where several authors explain what the postmodern is in photography (I hasten to add "in photography" since the nature of postmodern seems to vary amongst the arts), and for me at least, explained what elements distinguished postmodernism from what I perceive to be the main stream of art photography. There is even a section on digital photography, which spent a great deal of print on an old question, how real is photography? There is nothing about photographic technique here. In fact one question that is regularly on my mind when I read photographic critical theory is "how much use can this work be to the photographer?" Some photographers will find the discussion of the nature of images interesting, but I was hard pressed to understand how all of the broad theory will help in making a single image that better expresses the photographer's vision of his work. (Interestingly, photographic critical theory may have diverged in this respect from literary critical theory where knowledge of some of the theory might help an author write a more effective work.) Moreover, except to the extent that photographic critical theory has identified certain broad philosophical trends in images, I'm not certain that all of this theory will help a single viewer to come to grips with a single photograph. Many of the concepts in this book are hard to grasp and I expect that many of the selections will require several readings to understand. However, as I've said elsewhere, reading the originals of the articles that Wells has assembled is probably the best way to come to terms with the deep roots that photography has sunk into modern culture.

This book includes seminal essays that all photography students should read such as those from Rosler, Sontag and Barthes to name a few. It also includes others that discuss the role of the photographer in the Post Modernist, digital artworld. Together the essays create a discussion about why we photograph the things around us and what happens to the meaning of the image when seen by others. I recommend this anthology with 4 rather than 5 stars only because some of the essays are not complete and the book began to fall apart before I finished it. Many of the full version of the essays are available in the Context of Meaning, another highly recommended photo-theory anthology. If available buy this in hard cover. It is a great introduction for college-aged students to the various writings on photography.

I had to purchase this for a photography history class and the layout of this book is odd. There are many "writers" in that many photographers contributed to this reader from other publications. This meant the tone/voice of the book would vary greatly from chapter to chapter. Like another reviewer said, it is a text on photography concepts, theory and critiques and not a "how to" text. This is more of a "why?" and "what is the message?" text. To me, it is very choppy despite the introductions/forwards. Maybe it is because some of the sections needed translation? Also, some of the chapters were extremely dry and filled with obscure words such as "filiation, deictic, tautological, eidolon, heautoscopy, anamnesis", which were all taken from a few pages in the first chapter. It reads like that self-important guy at a party that uses big words to make themselves sound important but no one else can understand.

Very informational. Got it for college course-History of Photography-as required reading. We focused on particular photographers' writings, as this book is rich in content from them. I learned a lot about the history of photography that I had never known. Good and inspirational reading. It is an older edition, but most of the writings were done years ago, so it all good.

My advanced photo teacher had us purchase this book for class. It is NOT an instruction/technique guide of any kind. Instead, it is more of a collection of short-essays written by photographers, and lovers of the art. It is very philosophical, and a few of my classmates dislike this, however I find it to be very interesting.

I realize this text is called a "reader" but for a reader on photography I would have liked more illustrations of the concepts.

The book is fine but the essays within it are mediocre in some cases, it covers items of current import, but there seems to be a bit of liberal one-sidedness to it.

This is a great source to understand some of the basis in defining photography and its concepts, very recommendable for students of still image arts.

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