Dissonância
revista de teoria crítica

ISSN: 2594-5025
Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas
Universidade Estadual de Campinas
www.ifch.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/teoriacritica

Título	Walter Benjamin and Douglas Crimp: Theory and Critique of the Photographic Modernity
Autor	Eduardo Maura
Fonte	*Dissonância: Revista de Teoria Crítica*, v. 5, Campinas, 2021
Link	https://www.ifch.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/teoriacritica/workflow/index/4184

Formato de citação sugerido:

MAURA, Eduardo. "Walter Benjamin and Douglas Crimp: Theory and Critique of the Photographic Modernity". *Dissonância: Revista de Teoria Crítica*, v. 5, Campinas, 2021, p. 206-246.

WALTER BENJAMIN AND DOUGLAS CRIMP

Theory and Critique of the Photographic Modernity

Eduardo Maura*

ABSTRACT

This article aims to reconstruct the principal aspects of Walter Benjamin's essay "Little History of Photography" and its North American reception in the 1970s. To do so, I will turn to the work of Douglas Crimp and to the controversies concerning photography and Clement Greenberg's modernist paradigm, paying special attention to the role Benjamin played in them. Furthermore, I will argue that the debates on the photographic and contemporary art theory can benefit from an interconnected reading of Benjamin and Crimp.

KEYWORDS

Photography, Modernity, Postmodernity, Critical Theory

* Assistant Professor of Aesthetics at Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Contact: emauraz@ucm.es. This work was supported by the Contemporary Aesthetics Research Group at Universidad Complutense de Madrid (ESCON/970943). Also, the author would like to thank the Society of Critical Theory Studies (SETC), Marina Hervás, and Robert-Hullot-Kentor.

WALTER BENJAMIN E DOUGLAS CRIMP

Teoria e crítica da modernidade fotográfica

RESUMO

Este artigo almeja reconstruir os principais aspectos do ensaio "Pequena história da fotografia", de Walter Benjamin, e sua recepção norte-americana na década de 1970. Para isso, recorrerei à obra de Douglas Crimp e às controvérsias sobre fotografia e o paradigma modernista de Clement Greenberg, prestando especial atenção ao papel que Benjamin desempenhou neles. Ademais, argumentarei que os debates sobre teoria da arte fotográfica e contemporânea podem se beneficiar de uma leitura interconectada de Benjamin e Crimp.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Fotografia, Modernidade, Pós-modernidade, Teoria Crítica

A memory of reflections becomes an absence of absences

Robert Smithson

Though the secondary literature has become immense, with his essay on photography no exception, I aim to contribute both a reading of Walter Benjamin's "Little History of Photography" (1931) and a hypothesis of how this essay was read in the context of his early North American reception. I propose that the global reception of Benjamin is inseparable from the specific tensions of the New York artistic scene in the 1970s,

which featured diverse actors and voices, and where Benjamin took on a notable role through Douglas Crimp, Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster and Craig Owens, among others. To different degrees, these authors found a vital tool in Benjamin's writing to use in domestic conversations. I refer to 1) the East Coast's struggle for hegemony in art criticism, which is also the battle for an alternative reading of modernity within the art world; 2) the conflict concerning postmodernity as a framework to explain social, cultural, and economic change, that is, the battle against the exhausted institutions of modernism, or, at least, against their depleted aspects; and 3) the fight to recover the theoretical value of contemporary art and to establish the fundamentals for a new relationship between art, theory, and practice or, put another way, between aesthetics and politics.

Some of the traits for which Benjamin has become universally famous emerge in tandem with these debates in the United States. When these characteristics become widespread without paying attention to how they originated and developed, the resulting image may be inconsistent, stripping potential away from both Benjamin as well as the aforementioned context. If we do not closely consider the New York cultural and academic milieu of the six-year period that runs from the Pictures exhibition, curated by Douglas Crimp in autumn 1977, to the publication of the volume *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Foster 1983), it is difficult to understand the current influence of Benjamin.

To reconstruct this connection, I will focus on the connections between the "Little History of Photography" (1931) and the

work of Douglas Crimp. There are two main reasons for this: first, Crimp's generation placed great emphasis on the importance of photography as a new vector for art, as an artistic material, and as a disruptive presence with respect to the authorial tradition of the history of art. Secondly, Crimp was not only a professor and art critic; he was also an editor, activist, and cultural figure. He had a direct impact on artistic practices, both with the Pictures exhibition as well as with his activism during the AIDS crisis. Texts such as "Pictures" (1977-79), "Positive/Negative: A Note on Degas's Photographs" (1978), "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism" (1980), "Appropriating Appropriation" (1982) and "On the Museum's Ruins" (1983) had a notable impact on the academic and artistic community: an entire generation of readers learned to engage in cultural criticism, and also to read Benjamin, in these pages. Obviously, the contemporary reception of Benjamin is not exclusive to Crimp, yet this reception reaches an advanced form in an era in which he is an emerging figure. Apart from his importance as a thinker, all this makes Crimp an excellent road map to get one's bearings in Benjamin's territory.[1]

1 In order to have a comprehensive understanding of the problems posed here, we would have to investigate the cultural and academic interactions during the same period with another essays: "The Author as Producer" (1934), and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935-39). In this regard, almost everything that was said about Benjamin in those years came from three sources, in addition to the previously cited version of the "Little History of Photography": 1) Harry Zohn's translation of the third German version of the artwork essay published in New York with a prologue by Hannah Arendt (Benjamin 1968); 2) the anthology by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen *Film Theory & Criticism*, through which Benjamin found an enormous following in emerging university settings such as Film Studies, and in readers from other fields who understood through him that technological change was not exempt from political repercussions (Braudy and Cohen 1974); and 3) the anthology *Art after*

Benjamin in Context

The "Little History of Photography" was published in three parts in *Die Literarische Welt*. Together with "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936-39), it is the most relevant essay to understand how Benjamin was received in the contemporary cultural field. Four general observations should be made about the essay:

1) The essay had little impact when it came out, perhaps because it was not published in *Bauhaus*, *Das neue Frankfurt*, *Die Form* or in the annual *Das Deutsche Lichtbild*, the leading publications in German photography debates. The essay was also not included in the literature or the books on the centennial of photography in 1939, with Lucia Moholy's publication the best known. As far as we know, the essay only appears in Gisèle Freund's 1936 doctoral thesis, which can be explained by the fact the two knew each other personally (Eiland and Jennings 2014: 573). On the other hand, its contents were known by several people within Benjamin's environment, along with the ideas in the French version of the artwork essay, also from 1936 (Leslie 2015).

2) Adorno did not select the photography essay for the first Suhrkamp compilation of Benjamin's writings (1955). It was published in 1963 together with the artwork essay, quickly attaining strong political meaning for the student movement. As it was not widely received in its time, there was no bibliography capable of complementing the reading of the student movement, which considered the essay in terms of political engagement and

Modernism edited by Brian Wallis (1984), also known amongst students as "The Bible" (Elkins and Montgomery 2013: 47).

against the autonomy of art as a bourgeois phenomenon. This generation did not read an essay about photography. Instead, they read a theoretical and practical program, and had no motive to go beyond that. The 1963 version did not even reproduce the photographs that Benjamin spoke of in the text, which speaks volumes both of the type of reading it espoused. The photographers that the essay speaks of were also not well known to the larger public, which did not help the essay to be read in terms of the history and philosophy of photography.

3) The essay was published in the United States in 1972 in the journal *Screen* (translated by S. Mitchell), just before the first issue of the influential journal *New German Critique*, and it kept gaining traction after being published in *Artforum* in 1977 (translated by P. Patton), one year after the founding of *October*.[2] It is important to highlight that Crimp's reading had no desire for a historical reconstruction of Benjamin's legacy; he did not intend to interact with the German debates in the 1930s and 60s, rather his reading had a controversial aim and valuable cultural engagement on its own terms. Contrary to other people thinking about photography around his generation (Nesbit 1992), he exhibited no commitment to engage with the photographs that Benjamin signaled as relevant in his essay either.

4) The 1980s were a period of reconfiguration in the world of photographic thinking. In parallel with what was happening in the New York art world, Benjamin's essay became essential as one of the theoretical landmarks of the criticism of photographic modernity, as well as of new media theories (Kittler 1986), cultu-

2 A fine example of this is Silliman 1978.

ral studies (Birmingham's CCCS), or for those entering a dialogue with Barthes' *La chambre claire* (1980), both in favor (Dubois 1990) and against (Rouillé 2005).

According to Esther Leslie, Benjamin's objective in his texts on photography was "to educate his readers, panoramically, as to the potentials and actualities of the medium" (Leslie 2015: 46-47). This aim links with the educational and experimental work of some of Benjamin's principal references: John Heartfield and Lázsló Moholy-Nagy. Benjamin published his essay on photography in the midst of an avalanche of general interest in photography in Germany and throughout Europe. Moholy-Nagy published *Malerei Fotografie Film* in 1925. *Die Welt ist schön*, a paradigm of the New Objectivity, was published in 1928 by Albert Renger-Patzsch, with clear close-ups and an explicit desire to reproduce objects as faithfully as possible. The great *Film und Foto* (*Fifo*) exhibition that took place in 1929 had an active role in the debate between New Vision and New Objectivity. August Sander published *Antlitz der Zeit*, which Benjamin and all the critics of his time commented upon in depth, while the American photographer Berenice Abbott exhibited her recently acquired collection of works by the French photographer Eugène Atget throughout Europe and America. Surrealists had already claimed Atget a fellow traveler, although he refused to get credit for the pictures they used: "Don't put my name on it. These are simply documents I make", he said (Edwards 1993: 86). The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) opened its doors that same year. It would soon become a pivotal institution to the construction of photographic modernity, a process in which

Atget was to play a paramount role. In 1931, before his involvement with Roosevelt's Farm Security Administration photography project, the young Walker Evans published "The Reappearance of Photography", where he highlighted both Sander and Atget's work.[3]

Starting from *Fifo* and Europe's social evolution in the 1930s, the debate on photography was becoming a debate on realism. The forms of the New Objectivity were no longer considered realistic and transparent, but rather artificial and decorative. They were a substitute for beauty, one that did not take the life in working class neighborhoods into account and which could only speak of objectivity by reducing or excluding social reality. The left-wing press, which had been positively inclined to the recreational use of photography, started to argue that not only was the world not beautiful, but also it could not be that way as long as the oppressors and the oppressed exist.

Also, commenting on the status of photography in North America, Lewis Mumford detailed the project of an objectivity that was capable of including the human element, even its most deplorable sentiments, and was interested more in tackling the topics of our daily life rather than the objects:

> Stieglitz's uniqueness was to embody this *Sachlichkeit* [objectivity] without losing his sense of the underlying human attitudes and emotions. He did not achieve objectivity by displacing humanity but by giving its

3 The *Fifo* had a successful US section, curated by Edward Steichen and Edward Weston, in which Evans was not present. Concerning some of the points in common between Evans and Benjamin, which were undoubtedly inspired by their shared environment and not due to the two being familiar to each other, see Richon 2019.

> peculiar virtues and functions and interests the same place that he gives to steam engines, skyscrapers, or airplanes (Mumford 1931: 234-235, Lugon 2001: 58-62).

Given all this, it can be said that in Benjamin's world photography performed a function of expanding the public sphere and increasing social mediation, capable of permanently broadening its practices and audiences (X-rays, medicine, press, leisure, aerial and architectural photography, among others). This is a world in which photography encompassed both sides of the Atlantic. Photography had become socially important and capable of sparking new debates and viewpoints. In his words, "the lens now looks for interesting juxtapositions" (BGS II/1: 50, LHP: 526).[4] Benjamin's position concerning photography is marked by his proximity to these artistic debates and his contact with notable figures such as Sasha Stone, Germaine Krull and Gisèle Freund. He was familiar with the ongoing photographic conversation. At least partly, this explains his multifaceted understanding of photography: he did not have an essentialist commitment and did not obsess over reproducing the foundational ideas about the new medium, like its supposed ontological realism, or the mechanical-automatic condition of the procedure. He also paid attention to the social and aesthetic meaning of photographic practices, with three very basic proposals:

1) The beginnings of photography were its most fruitful and artistically relevant moment. This first decade can be defined in opposition to the subsequent as it was the one prior to the

4 I have used the following editions of "Little History of Photography": Benjamin 1991 (specified as BGS followed by the volume number), and Benjamin 2005 (specified as LHP).

industrialization of photography, as a skill and a socially relevant activity. Cheap photos already existed, produced as what we would call souvenirs today, though they were more of a fairground attraction than an industry. There was no industrial economy of images. That is why he speaks of a "preindustrial heyday of photography" inseparable from the "crisis of capitalist industry" (BGS II/1: 368, LHP: 507). Photography not only serves to preserve history. The history of photography itself is not disconnected from the social history of its objects, other technologies, and the points where they intersect. This is why photography is an "art of replication, not one of private possession" (Leslie 2015: 29).

2) Photography has an enormous capacity to shine a light on and recover the forgotten, the peripheral, the disperse, which Benjamin, like many contemporaries, associated with the strange beauty of Atget's urban landscapes devoid of human form. Decades later there would be a non-artistic and non-authorial answer behind some of these qualities, namely, that Atget was working for the archives of different Parisian government agencies which therefore explains how he chose to frame his works (Krauss 1990).

3) What photos capture transcends the photographer's intention, the frame, and even the moment the photo was snapped. In 1922, Benjamin translated an article by Tristan Tzara on Man Ray for the magazine *G*. In this article, concerning the automatic condition of photographic process, he claims that "the beauty of the subject does not belong to anyone, as starting now it is a physical-chemical product" (BGS VII/1: 481, Mertins and

Jennings 2010: 142). Chemistry and physics return the object to the sphere of experience, and by not involving a human hand, the photographic image belongs to no one. According to Benjamin, photography, as a new gaze, gives us access to a different reality, only perceptible for a technologically different society, invisible to the human eye and only accessible in a manner mediated by technology and the new social organization of perception. This challenges the artist's autonomy understood in an idealistic fashion, and it is also a proof of the historical contingency of the social fabric of the era:

> The most precise technology can give its products a magical value, such as a painted picture can never again have for us. No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the here and now, with which reality has (so to speak) seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it. For it is another nature which speaks to the camera rather than to the eye: "other" above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious (BGS II/1: 371, LHP: 510).

Photography becomes a key place to detect transitional processes related to the configuration of society, or to nature, in the midst of being transformed by the hands of human industry. Therefore, reading reality does not mean reproducing it, freezing it, or recording it objectively. A photograph can tell the truth and lie to the viewer all at once. In both cases, to show something is a way of connecting with the real and its representations (Carrasco 2016,

Costello 2018).[5] This is why, approaching the end of the text, Benjamin takes on a political position and proposes, in line with the left-wing criticism of his time, that photography understood as a mere replica of reality says less about reality than ever before: "Actual reality has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relations – the factory, say – means that they are no longer explicit. So something must in fact be built up, something artificial, 'posed'" (BGS II/1: 384, LHP: 526).

Those who first had gone through this path of constructing the image, more than taking it, whom Benjamin took note of, came from surrealism and Russian experimental cinema, with their debate between constructive photography and creative-expressive photography (Taylor and Christie 1994). Benjamin condemned any definition of art as an expression of the individual internal self. Yet he also rejected photography as something transparent in and of itself, something that is purely representational. Photography is not capable of capturing human social relationships, and if photographic skill cannot capture social reality, then there are no guarantees that we can experience it objectively. Two paths emerge here: 1) to construct a technique which is capable of reproducing human reality in movement, also the objectified, and not only the products of its activity; that is, to conserve the realist paradigm, but to change the technique

5 These ideas redraft and expand some of the early debates on photography, which are obsessively focused on two pillars: (1) with regard to painting and brush, the self-generated nature of photographs, without human intervention; and (2) the precision of photography and its enormous capacity to conserve human effort. Nearly this entire reflection pivoted on these axes for four decades, from the idea of the founding fathers that photography reproduces nature itself, up to Roland Barthes's claims in *La chambre claire* (1980), which were enormously influential in European and American thought.

(for example, by moving to the cinema, returning to painting, emigrating to other languages); or 2) with the techniques already at hand, to create a political aesthetic in a broad sense, capable of decrypting objectification and working in conditions where reality is always slipping into the functional, that is, in advanced capitalist conditions. This aesthetic is neither ingenuously realist nor insensitive to the permanent transformations of the photographed subject.

Benjamin is having a conversation with those who, like Paul Strand, claim that the greatest unique aspect of photography resides in its "absolute unqualified objectivity" (Trachtenberg 1980: 141-142). Benjamin is also engaging with Kracauer, whose first photographic essay ("Die Photographie", 1927) had an antipositivist standpoint, and who had gradually revolved around what Hansen has called "experiential realism" (Hansen 2011: 37, Kracauer 1977). Through the radical expansion of the image through all the corners of human life, Kracauer believed that the photographic subject had become something more than a style or skill: it was a new manner of seeing the world. His generation, including Benjamin, was greatly impressed by the capacity to show us new worlds within the world through aerial, microscopic, high-speed, and spatial photography, among others. Photography was the most basic vector of a "curious realism" capable of shaking our certainties of the real (Ribalta 2018). This realism is not owned by the State or the photographic industry. It has many edges, levels, and representatives.

Benjamin does not defend the equivalence between photography and objectivity, but he shares Strand and Kracauer's

idea of the capacity of the new technology to produce a *photographic organization of objectivity*, which is perfectly compatible with the need for a new *social organization of perception* posed in his essay on photography. Benjamin learned from Kracauer that photography can serve to train our perception of the real, but he did not accept the distinction that the latter ultimately proposed between the two aims of photography: the experimental-formative and the realist. To a great extent, with this outlook Kracauer ended up defending the proposal that for something to be photographic it had to be realistic. If not, even if the result is beautiful, "it overshadows the photographer's peculiar and truly formative effort to represent significant aspects of physical reality without trying to overwhelm that reality—so that the raw material focused upon is both left intact and made transparent" (Kracauer 1997: 23). Although he appears in these lines as a radical realist, it is certain that he continued defending that the universe, both for documentary and artistic photography as well as for natural sciences, will always be inapproachable as a whole, which infects its representations as a sort of uncertainty or ambiguity: "Photographs evoke a response in which our sense of beauty and our desire for knowledge interpenetrate; and often they seem esthetically attractive because they satisfy that desire" (Kracauer 1951: 113).

With this, Kracauer proposed something that he was unable to resolve. Even if it were true that the referent adheres to the surface of the negative in photography, thereby guaranteeing some kind of lasting material record of continuity between the camera and the photographic object, we would

have to question how reliable this procedure is when the reality that adheres to it is itself deceptive or incomprehensible, as he suggests. In Benjamin's terms, the question was: what do we do with the inability of photography to capture human contexts? What do we do with the essential ambiguity of any human representation? Benjamin's response is not that photography records better than the rest, but rather that it technologically opens up a new social type of description that has become socially hegemonic. He hence put non-documentary and non-artistic photographic uses on the same level: what is at stake is not a new episode in the history of art, science or industry, but rather a new kind of gaze, and that gaze can be learned, expanded or retracted and be put at the service of various social and in fact antagonistic purposes. This aspect of Benjamin's thought is crucial to understanding Crimp's intellectual attitude toward modernism and the photographic object as a disruptive factor.

The Critical Activity of Douglas Crimp

Contrary to what Alberti thought, a window doesn't need to open onto a world for it to be a picture in itself

Yve-Alain Bois

Crimp's work occurred at the borders of art criticism, writing, artistic practice and queer culture. His objective was to achieve a critical position which was neither the poetic-subjective position of *Art News* nor the formalist-Greenbergian position of

the journal *Artforum*, which still included, though they were half out the door, Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson, founders of the journal *October* together with Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe and Lucio Pozzi. Crimp was its managing editor for more than a decade.

Clement Greenberg needs no introduction, but it is useful to go over his work in order to grasp how Crimp's generation dealt with it. In addition to his art criticism, Greenberg's writing had a doctrinaire side that manifested through a theory of modernity and progress in art (de Duve 2010: 8). This narrative, along with Alfred H. Barr Jr.'s catalogue for the MoMA exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* (1936), is the most prominent North American contribution to Art history, and its influence is still widely felt (Gordon Kantor 2002). In this regard, it is particularly interesting to approach Greenberg's theory and its aftermath from the perspective of Krauss's early essay "A View on Modernism" (1972). There, she praises certain ideas that the critics of modernism, especially those advocating for Pop Art and Minimalism, had somehow neglected. Firstly, Greenberg's focus on the question of form does not exclude the sentimental and the irrational: both have a place and a time in contemporary art and its history. Rather, the Greenbergian critic seeks to deviate from a personal-subjective approach to art by stressing those aspects that allow him/her to fully appreciate the rational choices made by the artist. Up to that moment, to criticize a work of art had to do with some sort of existential relationship between the critic and the work. On the contrary:

> With modernism [...] it was precisely its methodology that was important to a lot of us who began to write

> about art in the early 1960's. That method demanded lucidity. It demanded that one not talk about anything in a work of art that one could not point to. It involved tying back one's perceptions about art in the present to what one knew about the art of the past. It involved a language that was open to some mode of testing (Krauss 2013: 121).

Secondly, Greenbergian theory relied on the idea of progress. According to Krauss, modernist critics saw history as a series of rooms. Inside each room, the artist explored every available option; he/she tried every combination of the specific ingredients of his/her medium of choice; once this process was completed, a door opened, leading to another room, where he/she started again, and so on. With every new door opening, the previous one was closed and sealed:

> One part of what we were seeing was a kind of history, telescoped and assessed; and the other part was the registration of feelings generated by that historical condition. I never doubted the absoluteness of that history. It was out there, manifest in a whole progression of works of art, an objective fact to be analyzed (Krauss 2013: 122).

That is to say, Greenberg's theory allowed a whole generation to think of art history as a succession of pictorial events. Things happened for a reason, and the reason was only to be fully understood, although Krauss does not put it this way, from the vantage point of New York, the new capital of contemporary art. Much more than a sensibility, modernism was a current or a flow that connected distant things, both in time and space, providing them with a meaning. It acted like a third-person omniscient narrator. In Greenberg's view, the true meaning of the progression in art history was the flatness of the canvas: this

was the *leitmotiv* of the development of painting, and therefore of art as a whole. Western pictorial art progressed as long as it distanced itself from the technique of spatial perspective and its surroundings, such as the chiaroscuro (Greenberg 1986a: 34, de Duve 2010: 24, Krauss 2013: 124).

Krauss thinks that the crisis of this paradigm started when it failed to give meaning to the changes in the way of making and experiencing art. Modernism was a machine that produced meaning, and its influence depended on that ability. Some critics felt that the art that was being made "here and now" objectively challenged the assumptions of Greenbergian modernism: to be a faithful Modernist entailed too many sacrifices. The works of Kenneth Noland and Frank Stella that the Greenberg circle promoted after the decline of the New York abstract expressionists were very hard to reconcile with the flatness-oriented modernism (Ashton 1973, Guilbaut 1990). Those works were about certain experience of color; their power depended on something perceptive, much more than on its formal objective qualities. All of a sudden, the historical necessity behind the modernist narrative looked weaker: it was not an irresistible current but another historical construct (Krauss 2013: 125). Moreover, Greenbergian modernism was almost exclusively a theory of painting. As a way of understanding the history of sculpture, architecture, photography and cinema, it was rather inconsistent: it branded some artists as masters, but it could not justify why others were ruled out, including Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, and others.

As it has been shown, Krauss is both thankful and critical of Greenberg's legacy. Crimp will deepen this ambiguity and

will contribute to the criticism of modernism in ways different and wider than those of Krauss. In the late 1960's/early 1970's, New York was the center of many debates. It was so crowded with conversations that, according to Crimp, one had to be anti-something to be something.

This pattern is behind his obsession with painting and with the debates prompted by Minimalism (Judd 1965). The hypothesis was that, after Minimal sculpture, art as a whole, and painting in particular, had to be anti-illusionist if it was to remain viable (Crimp 2016: 129). As a result, he put a lot of effort in finding traces of the optical and the chromatic in painting: in his view, both operated as distinctive markings of illusionism, so any work of art based on them was to be discarded as anachronistic. In this regard, Greenberg's narrative proposed that the art of illusionist tradition, which had been mostly considered the tradition of true art, had used art to conceal art. It used artistic techniques to achieve an effect of absolute realism, that is, so that the work of art did not appear to be an artifice. On the contrary, modernism uses art to call attention to art, the opposite of concealing it. Modernism takes the limitations inherent to the pictorial medium (for instance, the flatness and the pigment) and turns them into positive elements that must be recognized and radicalized if art is to avoid becoming mere entertainment. In the process of learning the specificity of their medium, painters discovered that there was only flatness/two-dimensionality. Other arts can have the rest, but they cannot have this one characteristic. This is how Greenberg grounds his main hypothesis, according to which "the unique and proper area of competence of

each art coincided with all that was unique to the nature of its medium" (Greenberg 1991: 111). Each artistic field had to erase anything borrowed from other disciplines and all links with other practices. It would thus only be possible to culminate the self-critical process through which "each art would be rendered 'pure', and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence. 'Purity' meant self-definition" (Greenberg 1991: 112).

Crimp was not a hardcore modernist, but his writing, even if he aspired to free from it, somehow depended on Greenberg's formalist-modernist tradition. One of the first and foremost cracks in the relationship between Crimp and the modernist tradition involved how the latter dealt with photography. Krauss, Michelson and others had detected that modernism was unable to account for the moving image. Crimp will make a similar move regarding the photographic activity of his generation.

Modernism applies to photography in a partial and problematic fashion. First off, Greenberg (1964) concludes that photography must definitively abandon the pictorialist paradigm. According to this, photography must tell a story if it aims to function as art.[6] The decisive element is in choosing the story and in how to approach it. It is never in the manual artistic activity with the negative or during the process of developing a photo, in the manner of pictorialism, whose defense of blurriness and interpretation, of the alliance between the photographic apparatus and the artist's hand, and of a photography not

6 The best reconstruction of the modernist paradigm in photography is Phillips 1982. Also see Burgin 1986, Ribalta 2018.

servile to imitative purposes, had dominated the international scene during the first decades of the 20th century (Rouillé 2005). According to Greenberg, photography had to embrace its artistic and documentary capabilities, for both were "unique to the nature of its medium":

> Photography is the only art that can still afford to be naturalistic and that, in fact, achieves its maximum effect through naturalism. Unlike painting and poetry, it can put all emphasis on an explicit subject, anecdote, or message; the artist is permitted, in what is still so relatively mechanical and neutral a medium, to identify the "human interest" of his subject as he cannot in any of the other arts without falling into banality (Greenberg 1986b: 61).

In this sense, in his review of an Edward Weston exhibition in 1946, Greenberg presents Walker Evans as the greatest photographer of his time. In his work, it becomes manifest the modernist idea of the "original grasp of the anecdote". Evans is an artist because he lets photography be human and literary (Greenberg 1986b: 63). A decade later, Evans himself will summarize his anti-pictorialist position in a well-known 1971 interview:

> And that's why I say half jokingly that photography's the most difficult of the arts. It does require a certain arrogance to see and to choose. [...] The secret of photography is, the camera takes on the character and the personality of the handler. The mind works on the machine – through it, rather (Evans 2019: 25).

However, the modernist approach to photography does not only assert the specificity of the medium. With John Szarkowski as the director of the Department of Photography at MoMA (1962-1991), without disconnecting from Greenberg, a

new formalism arises which has a more documentary intent. From this point of view, being objective means providing appropriate descriptions, and vice versa, hence the essence of photography. This formalism assumes that the photographic surface is transparent and that reality itself speaks through it. It conceives photographic transparency as the common space from which the different authorial subjectivities emerge. This formalism is comfortable in the snapshot, in the images stolen from everyday life, and it does not think that photography is also a relationship of power (Phillips 1982: 58). It does not understand the concern for the fragility of society as something intrinsically political, but rather as something contemplative and photographic. According to Szarkowski, in the photography of the new social landscapes there is nothing suspicious. Simply, as confident authors with their own style, "[Arbus, Friedlander, and Winogrand] like the real world, in spite of its terrors, as the source of all wonder and fascination and value—no less precious for being irrational" (Szarkowski and Hermanson Meister 2017: 1).

Crimp, on the contrary, poses that photography develops its language through processes of reduplication and appropriation to the extent that, in the resulting visual culture, photographs can be read only as images of photography, not of reality. The realities that only exist for us in photographs must have looked like photographs even before being photographed (Owens 1978). More than reality, in photography one understands the photographic process itself: that is, photography as a process. Thus, images are no longer a product of imagination and reality, but rather their source is an enormous repertoire of

images largely accessible to all. We photograph only that which is already photogenic, that is, that which fits within a certain social pattern of visibility, and we add these images to a growing shared heritage that is reproduced one after another in artistic practice, but also in daily life, as happens in amateur photography or, in our days, the stories and filters on Instagram.

The argument in "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism" is that during the modernist hegemony the relationship between art and photography has been based on repression; on repression not of the photographs as such, as these have been around for a long time and have found their place in museums such as the MoMA, but rather of the fact that photography had challenged the privileged place of art itself. Modernism must dislodge this tension, so that photography always appears either outside the artistic field (as an industrial practice or a hobby) or in the terms of pictorial art. Consequently, the photographic activity of art is a massive return of the repressed. This happens through specifically appropriationist work (Longo, Sherman, Levine, Goldstein) which addresses the questions on reproduction, copies and originals in our visual culture through photographic practice: "the extraordinary presence of their work is effected through absence, through its unbridgeable distance from the original, from even the possibility of an original" (Crimp 1980: 94, Eklund 2009).

For its part, the photographic activity of postmodernity works "in complicity with these modes of photography-as-art, but it does so only in order to subvert them and exceed them" (Crimp 1980: 97-98). Cindy Sherman's photos present the pre-

tense of originality and authenticity as fiction, as a representation of something "always-already-seen". It is not possible to find an original under the layers that constitute her work, as the work itself has displaced it. The representation is somehow freed from the dependence on that which is represented. The method that allows this is appropriation, or confiscation:

> The desire of representation exists only insofar as it never be fulfilled, insofar as the original always be deferred. It is only in the absence of the original that representation may take place. And representation takes place because it is always there in the world as representation (Crimp 1980: 98-99).

Sherman produces herself in each untitled still, but none of them is original and she is not the origin of the image in any of them: all are based on feminine stereotypes and her "self" always appears as a contingency, as if she stopped because she saw something, or something was happening to her outside of the shot (Crimp 1999, Sherman 2003). Even the self is the result of some kind of appropriation. Her photos, in short, do not consist of a recovery of her true self through art (to think of oneself), but rather they consist of showing the self (also the creative self) as an imaginary construction whose repetitive structures prevent the action from achieving closure and through which we understand that representation is the "unavoidable condition of intelligibility of even that which is present" (Crimp 1979: 77). In Sherman's images, the real is not transcribed directly, however photographic they may be. They are not fragments of a real space and time, they are not photographs of herself nor of New York. These are fragments of a specific presentation of the time, such

that they have a "narrative ambience stated but not fulfilled" (Crimp 1979: 80), which therefore remains mysterious. The nature of the fragments is that of the still, not that of the document. Their most basic condition does not match the essence/appearance dichotomy: it no longer tries to unveil the sources of meaning found underneath the surface. On the contrary, it deals with seeking the layers of meaning that appear and disappear in the different strata of representation.

To this critique of the modernist conception of representation, Crimp adds that the formalist standard of purity does not fit with photographic practices. Since their very beginnings, these have appeared precisely in the tension between art and life, between the automatism of the procedure and the capacity to depict human lives. Contrary to Szarkowski, who reads the emerging practices of the 1960s and 1970s as an extension of the modernist concerns, Crimp understands that the process of incorporating photography into the modernist paradigm is a symptom of the end of modernity. This incorporation of photography would have not been possible (or necessary) when the modernist paradigm was at full capacity. This way, the fact that the modernist paradigm had to open itself to photography says more about its crisis than about its generosity:

> For photography to be understood and reorganized in such a way is a complete perversion of modernism, and it can happen only because modernism has indeed become dysfunctional. Postmodernism may be said to be founded in part upon this paradox: that it is photography's revaluation as a modernist medium that signals the end of modernism (Crimp 1989: 9).

Crimp presaged a new logic in which the photographic becomes a vector and material of art, finally freed from modernist repression. However, Crimp is also aware that modernism was regenerating in the 1980s. In spite of being in crisis, it was still operative where it had remained hegemonic. This process can be detected in the work of Szarkowski's successor at the MoMA, Peter Galassi (1981). With him, the modernist position evolves through three ideas:

1) Photography is to be conjugated in singular, as if it were born as a single piece, not as a plural set of practices and discourses.

2) Photography is the direct and legitimate heir of the western pictorial tradition.

3) Photography has its own pictorial syntax: it begins with the landscape painting at the end of the 18th century, but something decisive occurs with it: the image is no longer composed or drawn, it is taken. The way in which this pictorial tradition takes form in the photographic medium is that the originality passes from the hand of the artist to the medium itself.

Indeed, Crimp thinks that the fulfillment of modernism does not actually take place at MoMA, but with the New York Public Library's decision to reorganize its enormous collection of photographs, which until then were stored in disperse sections, ordered by topics or even disordered, with an authorial approach. Until the 1980s there were only *photographs* of an infinite number of things, places, people, situations, etc. With this authorial recomposition, Crimp understands that the NYPL has

become a place of true discovery: "for if photography was invented in 1839, it was only discovered in the 1960s and 1970s – photography, that is, as an essence, photography itself" (Crimp 1989: 7). For the NYPL, poverty and inequality get renamed as Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine, just as the American Civil War becomes Alexander Gardner and Timothy O'Sullivan. Crimp opposes this authorial view of photography: the practice of photography, no matter how much we seek to invest it with essential artistry and authorship, always ends up leaving the institutions of art behind. Photography enables anyone to produce images, to challenge the logic of creativity and identification as privilege, and this cross-cutting nature is too obvious not to cause discomfort in the institutions of art. Photography is too multiple, too unmanageable: "[it] will always participate in non-art practices, will always threaten the insularity of art's discourse" (Crimp 1993: 134).

In the end, his position oscillates between photography as a practice stripped of its old functional habits, as an artistic material, and as a vector of tension between modernism and postmodernism. In this conversation, Benjamin appears more as an open intermediary than a precursor.

Benjamin in New York

It has been said that a great deal of the intellectual and artistic activity of the 1960's and 1970's was part of a "revolt against modernism" (Burgin 1986, Osborne 1989, Lippard 1997). Notwithstanding the role that Benjamin played in this rebellion, the aim of this article has been, and will remain so in this last sec-

tion, to comprehend the connection between Benjamin and Crimp's position towards modernism, and to fully understand the collateral effects that this connection had upon Benjamin's reception. Broadly speaking, it can be said that Crimp's work on photography retrieves and reorients two Benjaminian problems: the question of originality and the aura, on one side, and the role of technology in the social organization of experience, on the other.

Firstly, Crimp uses the idea of the auratic in terms of the critique of representation: does the copy retain the being-there of the original or not? Is the copy a way of being-there? When photography is included in the museum, what does that say about its here and now? More than following his traces, Crimp provides Benjamin's ideas with a renewed focus and purpose. In fact, Benjamin had not searched for a theory of the original and its copies, but for a theory of experience in an age of social, economic, technological and cultural change.

Benjamin offered different versions of the aura: the most quoted one has to do with "the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be", as it appears in the photography essay (Benjamin 2005: 518), but he also characterized the auratic as something that wakes up when someone looks at it, and as a strange substance surrounding certain objects or people in a picture (Hansen 2011). The three of them share one aspect: the auratic is a way objects and persons connect with each other; it is a mode of relationship. The aura can be understood as a relational structure that includes the visual; that is to say, as a *medium* of perception, not the property of an object or person: there are no auratic things; there are auratic relations. If

we read Benjamin's idea this way, then the auratic is a useful category in order to reconsider the problem of the photographic representation and the museum. What makes Crimp interesting in relation to Benjamin is not whether his interpretation is accurate or not, but the fact that his work opens an unexpected road: Benjamin's terms can be used to think the photographic as the paradigmatic mode of representation of a contemporary self that, in fact, does not exist outside its several representations, or at least does not exist autonomously, like in Sherman's film stills. Insofar as it appears, the original, whether it is a subject or an object, is already the outcome of a process of representation.

According to Crimp, the concept of aura is a historical category, not an ontological one. It does not pertain to manual work *per se*, as neither is its destruction the direct result of mechanical work. The auratic portrait photographs prior to the boom of commercial photography that Benjamin speaks of in his essay are the example. In these photos the aura comes from the subject that is represented, not from the artist's hand or style. Photographic skill, contrary to pictorial logic where the artist's hand represents the subject on the material, allows a greater amount of reality, and therefore also subject, to be integrated in the work. Yet it does so in a way that questions traditional subjectivity, both in the romantic version which imposes itself brilliantly on brute objectivity, as well as in its sentimental aspect, which flees from the ugliness of the real seeking the purity of the isolated individual. This links with Adorno (2002), for whom more subject does not equal more art: the psychological subject does not match the artistic or aesthetic subject.

In Crimp's view, North American museums in the 1970s wanted to recover the authenticity of art as something transcendent, and therefore they "elevated" the photographer to the rank of classic creator whose expressive self is the origin of the work: photography as art is subjected to the classic criteria and the machinery of the museum and art history. In this regard, Crimp (1980: 97) speaks of a process of "subjectivization of photography" through which photography becomes the standard bearer of subjectivity and authenticity. The entire history of photography starts to be read from this point of view, from the more recent photography-as-art to the first images of the founding fathers, passing through magazines such as *Life* and *Camera Work* and the bourgeois *carte de visite* which, as we know, tormented Benjamin's childhood (Haustein 2012).

With this, Crimp is also taking up a classical point of Critical Theory: the call for more subjectivity as the magical solution to the problems of society. According to Benjamin, in times of social and cultural crisis there are always going to be demands for more expressiveness, authenticity, and artisticity. Benjamin's findings suggest that these are false solutions to the problem. More expressivity does not entail more freedom, as the German culture itself experienced after the Great War. Following the defeat, Germany was flooded with theories and manifestos claiming for a reinvention of the great German personality, and for the glorification of the creative mind. Benjamin regards these ideas as regressive, for instance as he found them in the circle around Stefan George (Hansen 2011: 47). This national-aestheticist-individualist regression dovetails with the fascist purpose of

substantiating politics in the destructive power of technology and the aestheticization of war. Benjamin wrote his essays on photography and the artwork in a state of emergency: he wanted to intervene in a current that he felt was leading to disaster, not to the victory of Western democracies (Hansen 2011: 85).

This problem leads to the aforementioned second Benjaminian question: the role of technology in the social organization of experience. Crimp's generation approached this issue from the point of view of the debate between modernity and postmodernity. As a response to this generational concern, Krauss, Crimp, Owens, and Foster conceived of the contemporary work of art as mediated by the intersections between technologies and formats and as based on photography, even where the primary or explicit uses of photography were not in play (Ed Ruscha, Walter DeMaria, Dennis Oppenheim).

In this regard, Krauss indicates that the working conditions are no longer dictated by a particular medium, and that the different positions within the artistic field allow for access and relationship between positions based on different mediums. The artist, therefore, can occupy all the possible positions and do it with any medium. Likewise, she establishes an influential connection between the disconnection with the singularity of the medium and the technological possibilities, which she understands as a critique of the traditional values of art (spontaneity, originality, subjectivity, expressiveness, self-expression) with the new practices that it had been facing since the mid-1960s (Krauss 1985: 146). Crimp agreed with this idea because he rejected the idea that photography was either a reflection of subjecti-

vity, or a direct window to reality. The desire to overcome this paradigm was inseparable from a strong expansion of the field of artistic practices and technologies associated with art. Since they operated in a different context and had different antagonisms in mind, Crimp's generation could only read Benjamin from the enthusiasm for technological change, precisely because they were reading very different strains than those that Benjamin posed in the 1930s. It can be argued that Benjamin was trying to say that his deepest worry was the destructive, failed reception of technology, for both political and cultural reasons, not the cult value of the auratic work of art in itself. The emergency theory he was looking for could not be only aesthetic, or regarding art history: it also had to be political.

Most likely, the success of Benjamin's late writing lies in this capacity to integrate different cultural positions and to propose crosscutting debates. Benjamin's photography essay is not relevant because it is groundbreaking, rather than because it provides a good seismographic report. On the one hand, Benjamin bases his argument on the constructivism of Moholy-Nagy and the *Neues Sehen*, which appears as a necessity to reconstruct a non-reactionary viewing machine, able to produce new visibilities and not allow the possible footholds from which to construct a new social organization of perception to be stripped away from it (Molderings 2008). On the other hand, his text approximates the positions of John Heartfield and Kurt Tucholsky, despite not mentioning their joint work *Deustchland, Deutschland überalles* (1929), where Tucholsky emphasizes one of the ideas that Benjamin would make famous: the contempo-

rary image must be an end in itself, it must not let itself be aestheticized. The way to prevent this possible gentrification is to organize a forcefield between images and words, allowing for a dialectic relationship between photography and captions, between the image and the text. This must be capable of producing individual effects (in the viewer's gaze), but also of opening public spaces of discussion and surprise (through the press).

In addition to these two issues, we have to add the capacity of the first surrealist photomontages to cause surprise in everyday life, a sensation that can also be felt in Benjamin's autobiographic writings. These texts were replete with specters which undoubtedly made him empathize with Atget's photos, who would later be claimed as a precursor of surrealism, but also recognized by art criticism and by photographers such as Kerstéz, Krull and Stone. This is in agreement with the technical, perspective and constructive developments of the time, that is, with the research into the new *physis* that photographic and cinematographic technique was creating in humankind. Given this polysemic forcefield, it should come as no surprise that Benjamin's essay was as invigorating as it was in the North American 1960s and '70s. Here we can draw some conclusions, according to which Crimp and Benjamin's respective works become more productive the more they are intermixed:

1) Where German students saw a loaded gun against the aesthetic device of capital, Crimp learns that it is not about fitting photography within the history of art, but rather about detecting what photography does to artistic practice and to its

most elemental premises, and about navigating the destabilizing and liberating effects this has.

2) Where Benjamin could be seen as a moderately informed critic who does not want to be portrayed in any of the disputed positions, like Molderings (2014) argues, Crimp observes in him the theoretical foundations to use photography to rethink the relationship of dependence between art, photography and museums and, by extension, the possibility of a different subjectivization of art and of a new relationship between artistic practices and the present.

3) Where a defense of communist positions could be read in favor of the use of photo captions as a tool to emphasize the political impact of images, Crimp intuits that, by following the praxis of the construction/montage of image-word compounds, Benjamin already conceived photography as exceeding the representation of its objects. By extension, we can also find in his work the seed of the independence of representation *vis-à-vis* that which is represented, against the grain of the later modernist paradigm of straight photography (Szarkowski 1978). The photo caption, more than causing an effect on the viewer or reaffirming the transparent, direct, informative relationship between signifier and signified, opens the image to all the possibilities of the surrounding world. When Crimp (1977: 5) refers to the possibility, incarnated in Joan Jonas, of a "representation

freed from the tyranny of the represented", he is thinking of this aspect of the "Little History of Photography".[7]

Given all this, it is easy to understand the excitement that reading the "Little History of Photography" must have provoked in someone who, like Crimp, had reconsidered the new social and aesthetic uses of the everyday repertoire of images, which were more diverse and accessible than ever. We can see traces of Benjamin in these debates: his jovially open-minded and optimistic image is the result of the debates on photographic modernity, and between traditional modernism and the new generation of critics. But there are numerous combined layers of reading in this intersection between Crimp's generation and a series of texts which had been hardly studied in German at the time, let alone in English. Only from this focus, by following his traces in the United States, but also accounting for the textual and geocultural decentralization of his work, can we think of Benjamin's place in the history of critical theory and the discussions prompted by his work. With the appropriate nuances, Benjamin's account of the photographic forcefield of his time continued to be productive for Crimp's generation. It was so in a way that casted a shadow so long that it still affects us. These pages have tried to draw the attention of our generation to those questions and conversations. Not only for they are still operating and remain as exciting as they were in the early 1970's, but

7 We can find a similar tension in the series *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978-1979) by David Wojnarowicz, where Rimbaud's mask questions both the documentary representation of the urban landscape as well as the romantic subjectivity of the doomed poet (Breslin and Kiehl 2018). Francesca Woodman's masked portraits were made around the same time (Tellgren 2016).

because we need to think about them in our own terms. That, also, is something to learn from both Benjamin and Crimp.

Received on 06/10/2020
Published on 11/05/2021

References

ADORNO, T. W. *Aesthetic Theory*. Trans. R. Hullot-Kentor. London/New York: Continuum, 2002 [1970].

ASHTON, D. *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning*. New York: Viking Press, 1973.

BENJAMIN, W. *Illuminations*. Trans. H. Zohn. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968.

—. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1991.

—. *Selected Writings. Volume 2, Part 2: 1931-1934*. Ed. M. W. Jennings, H. Eiland, G. Smith. Trans. R. Livingstone. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005.

BRAUDY, L., COHEN, M. (eds.) *Film Theory & Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.

BRESLIN, D., KIEHL, D. (eds.) *David Wojnarowicz: History Keeps Me Awake at Night*. New York: Whitney Museum/ Yale University Press, 2018.

BURGIN, V. *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity*. London: Macmillan, 1986.

CARRASCO, N. "Arte y fotografía en Walter Benjamin. Raíces de una vieja controversia". *Fedro. Revista de Estética y Teoría de las Artes* 16, p. 156-175, 2016.

COSTELLO, D. *On Photography: A Philosophical Inquiry*. New York: Routledge, 2018.

CRIMP, D. *Pictures, an exhibition of the work of Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, Philip Smith*. New York: Artists Space, 1977: https://issuu.com/artistsspace/docs/77_pictures_catalogue

—. "Pictures". *October* 8, p. 75-88, 1979.

—. "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism". *October* 15, p. 91-101, 1980.

—. "The Museum's Old/The Library's New Subject". In: R. Bolton (ed.) *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989, p. 3-13.

—. *On the Museum's Ruins*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993.

—. "Cindy Sherman Day and Night". In: *1000 caras, 0 caras, 1 rostro/1000 faces, 0 faces, 1 face: Cindy Sherman, Thomas Ruff, Frank Montero.* Madrid: Fundación Telefónica/La Fábrica, 1999, p. 17-33.

—. *Before Pictures*. Chicago: Dancing Foxes/The University of Chicago Press, 2016.

DE DUVE, T. *Clement Greenberg between the Lines*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010.

DUBOIS, P. *L' Acte Photographique et autres essais*. Paris: Nathan, 1990.

EDWARDS, S. "A Walk on the Wild Side: Atget's Modernism". *The Oxford Art Journal* 16 (3), p. 86-90, 1993.

EILAND, H., JENNINGS, M. W. *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014.

EKLUND, D. *The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009.

ELKINS, J., MONTGOMERY, H. (eds.) *Beyond the Aesthetic and the Anti-Aesthetic*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013.

EVANS, W. *The Interview with Leslie George Katz*. New York: Eakins Press, 2019.

FOSTER, H. (ed.) *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1983.

GALASSI, P. *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1981.

GUILBAUT, S. *De cómo Nueva York robó la idea de arte moderno*. Trans. M. R. López González. Barcelona: Mondadori, 1990.

GORDON KANTOR, S. *Alfred H. Barr, Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002.

GREENBERG, C. *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1961.

—. "Four Photographers". *The New York Review of Books,* January 23, 1964: https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1964/01/23/four-photographers/

—. "Towards a New Laocoon". In: J. O'Brian (ed.) *Perceptions and Judgments: The Collected Essays and Criticism, volume 1 (1939-1944)*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986a, p. 23-38 [1940].

—. "The Camera's Glass Eye: Review of and Exhibition of Edward Weston". In: J. O'Brian (ed.) *Arrogant Purpose: The Collected Essays and Criticism, volume 2 (1945-1949)*. 1986b, p. 60-63 [1946].

—. "Modernist Painting". In: S. Everett (ed.) *Art Theory and Criticism*. London: McFarland & Co, 1991, p. 110-118 [1961].

HANSEN, M. B. *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

HAUSTEIN, K. *Regarding Lost Time: Photography, Identity, and Affect in Proust, Benjamin, and Barthes*. London/New York: Routledge/Legenda, 2012.

JUDD, D. "Specific Objects". *Arts Yearbook* 8, p. 181-189, 1965.

KITTLER, F. *Grammophon Film Typewriter*. Berlin: Brickmann & Bose, 1986.

KRACAUER, S. "The Photographic Approach". *Magazine of Art* 44 (3), p. 107-113, 1951.

—. *Das Ornament der Masse*. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1977 [1927].

—. *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997 [1960].

KRAUSS, R. *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985.

—. *Le Photographique. Pour une Théorie des Ecárts*. Trans. M. Bloch, A. Hindry, J. Kempf. Paris: Macula, 1990.

—. *Perpetual Inventory*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013.

LESLIE, E. "Benjamin and the Birth of Photography". In: *Walter Benjamin: On Photography*. London: Reaktion Books, 2015, p. 7-51.

LIPPARD, L. *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1997 [1973].

LUGON, O. *El estilo documental*. De August Sander a Walker Evans, 1920-1945. Trans. A. Fernández Lera. Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2001.

MERTINS, D., JENNINGS, M. W. (eds.) *G: An Avant-Garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design, and Film (1923-1926)*. Trans. S. Lindberg, M. I. Christian. London/Los Angeles: Tate Publishing/Getty Research Institute, 2010.

MOLDERINGS, H. *Die Moderne der Fotografie: Aufsätze und Essays*. Hamburg: Philo Fine Arts, 2008.

—. "Photographic History in the Spirit of Constructivism: Reflections on Walter Benjamin's 'Little History of Photography'". *Art in Translation* 6 (3): p. 317-344, 2014.

MUMFORD, L. *The Brown Decades: A Study of the Arts in America, 1865-1895*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1931.

NESBIT, M. *Atget's Seven Albums*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

OSBORNE, P. "Aesthetic Autonomy and the Crisis of Theory: Greenberg, Adorno, and the Problem of Postmodernism in the Visual Arts". *New Formations* 9, p. 31-50, 1989.

OWENS, C. "Photography 'en abyme'". *October* 5, p. 73-88, 1978.

PHILLIPS, C. "The Judgement Seat of Photography". *October* 22, p. 27-63, 1982.

RIBALTA, J. *El espacio público de la fotografía. Ensayos y entrevistas*. Barcelona: Arcadia, 2018.

RICHON, O. *Walker Evans: Kitchen Corner*. London: Afterall Books, 2019.

ROUILLÉ, A. *La Photographie: Entre document et art contemporain*. Paris: Gallimard, 2005.

SHERMAN, C. *The Complete Untitled Film Stills*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2003.

SILLIMAN, R. "Benjamin Obscura". *Renegade* 1, p. 35-70, 1978.

SZARKOWSKI, J. *Mirrors and Windows: American Photography since 1960*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1978.

—. HERMANSON MEISTER, S. (eds.) *Arbus, Friedlander, Winogrand: New Documents, 1967*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2017.

TAYLOR, R., Christie, I. (eds.) *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896-1939*. London: Routledge, 1994.

TELLGREN, A. (ed.) *Francesca Woodman: On Being an Angel*. Cologne: Walther König, 2016.

TRACHTENBERG, A. (ed.) *Classic Essays on Photography*. New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980.

WALLIS, B. (ed.) *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*. New York: The New Museum of Art, 1984.