

PARA ENTENDER  
LA FOTOGRAFÍA  
JOHN BERGER

Edición e introducción de Geoff Dyer



## Para entender la fotografía

*John Berger*

Download now

Read Online 

# Para entender la fotografía

John Berger

## Para entender la fotografía John Berger

John Berger's explorations of the relationships between the individual and society, culture and politics, and experience and expression through the written word, films, photographic collaborations and performances are unmatched in their diversity, ambition and reach. His television series and book "Ways of Seeing" revolutionized the way that art is understood. Now, "Understanding a Photograph" gathers the photography writings of one of the most internationally influential authors of the past 50 years. "Understanding a Photograph" is arranged chronologically, leading the reader on a thought-provoking journey through selected essays from hallmark works such as "About Looking" and "Another Way of Telling," as well as previously uncollected pieces written for exhibitions or catalogues that discuss a wide range of artists--from August Sander to Jitka Hanzlova. This collection of some 25 texts has been carefully selected by novelist and essayist Geoff Dyer, who has also written a critical study of Berger's oeuvre.

John Berger (born 1926) is a novelist, poet, screenwriter and critic. He is the author of numerous works of fiction and nonfiction, including "To the Wedding," "About Looking" and "G.," for which he was awarded the Booker Prize. Among his best-known works are the television series and book, "Ways of Seeing." He has received prestigious awards for his writing, including the Petrarca-Preis and a Golden PEN Award.

## Para entender la fotografía Details

Date : Published June 2nd 2015 by Editorial Gustavo Gili, S.L. (first published November 7th 2013)

ISBN : 8425227925

Author : John Berger

Format : Perfect Paperback

Genre : Nonfiction, Art, Photography, Writing, Essays, Art History

 [Download Para entender la fotografía ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Para entender la fotografía ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Para entender la fotografía John Berger**

## From Reader Review Para entender la fotografía for online ebook

### Kut??n Sancakl? says

John Berger e?li?inde galeri galeri gezmek gibi kitap.. Sadece foto?raf? de?il toplum-birey ili?kisini, kültürel ve siyasi suretleri de anlamak ad?na pek çok pencere aral?yor.

Donald McCullin foto?raflar?yla, sava? foto?raflar?n?n fütursuzca yay?nlanmas?n?n alt?n? dolduruyor. August Sander'in tak?m elbiseliler foto?raf? üzerinden kültürel hegemonyay? aç?kl?yor. Chris Killip arac?l?y?la bireyselli?in kör kay?ts?zl?na dem vuruyor. Paul Strand?n panoramik olandan kaçarak bir ?ehri bir sokakta bulabilmesini, Nick Waplington'un mahrem olan? nas?l alenile?tirebildi?ini, Moyra Peralta'n?n foto?raflar?ndaki insanlar?n nas?l konu?abildi?ini ve foto?raf dilinde de?il insani anlamda yak?n çekimin nas?l yap?labilece?ini anlat?yor. Andre Kertesz'in 'Okumaya Dair' adl? foto?raf serisiyle, okurken hissetti?imiz uçma hissinin nas?l gözle görülebilir k?l?nd??n?, Jitka Hanzlova'n?n orman foto?raflar?nda an?n durmad??n?, adeta canl? olduklar?n? gösteriyor. Hemen Cartier-Bresson'un di?erkâml??n?, hayattan kâm alan gözlerini, an? yakalay??ndaki hüneri hat?rlat?yor.

---

### Eylem says

Bir foto?raf konu?ur mu? Yoksa biz ona bakt??m?zda, gördü?ümüz imajlar?; tarihsel, toplumsal veya ideolojik ba?lamda imgelemimizde, bize an?msatt?klar?, ç?a?r??t?rd?klar? çerçevesinde mi onu yorumlar?z? Foto?raf?n çekildi?i o an'a ait ko?ullar ile bizim bakt??m?z an'da gördü?ümüz ?ey(ler), dünyadaki yer tutuculu?umuza göre say?s?z olas?l?k içeriyor. Bu olas?l?klar foto?raf?n güncel bir imaj?n?n olmas?na, ki?isel geçmi?imize ya da duygular?m?za ait ba?lamlara göre çe?itleniyor . John Berger'e göre say?s?z olas?l?klar, foto?raf?n bizde ç?a?r??t?rd??-an?msatt??na do?ru yönelik onun üzerinde toplan?yorlar. ??te bu küçük toplant? yeri, foto?rafta gördü?ümüz oluyor.

Kitap, Berger'in önceki kitaplar?ndan bölümleri ve herhangi bir kitab?nda yer almam?? metinleri de içeren özel bir edisyon. Beni en çok etkileyen yerlerden biri, Che'nin ölü bedeninin göründü?ü foto?rafta ?sa metaforu üzerinden i?lenen ölümüzlük temas?yd?. Bir di?er çarp?c? buldu?um bölüm, August Sander?n dansa giden üç köylü foto?raf?nda s?n?fsal bask? ve iktidar?n idealle?tirilmesinin te?hirini yapmas?yd?.

---

### Esin says

“Emperyalizmin Sureti” isimli ilk bölümle kitaba ad?m?m? att??mda Che Guevera'n?n öldükten sonra çekilm? bir foto?raf?yla kar??la?t?m. Berger bu foto?raf? Rembrandt?n “Dr. Nicolaes Tulp’un Anatomi Dersi” ve “Mantegna'n?n Ölü ?sa” adl? tablolar?yla kar??la?t?rm??, ölümün foto?raf ve resimde nas?l i?lendi?ini, benze?melerini ve farkl?l?klar?n? aç?klam??t?. Bu noktada anlad?m ki bu kitap benim için bamba?ka bir deneyim olacakt?.

Günümüzde ak?ll? telefonlar sayesinde sosyal medyada her an?m?z?n foto?raf?n? payla?abiliyoruz. Asl?nda o an? foto?rafa indiriyoruz. Peki, foto?raf makinesi olmad??? zamanlar?

Berger diyor ki;

“Foto?raf makinesi icat edilmeden önce foto?raf?n yerini ne tutuyordu? Bu soruya gravür, resim ve ya?l?boya diye yan?t verilmesini bekleriz. Daha ayd?nlat?c? bir yan?t belki ?u olabilir: bellek. Foto?raflar?n d??ar?da, uzamda yap?klar?, önceleri dü?üncede yap?l?yordu.”

Bellek... Foto?raf i?te bu belle?imizdeki görünümlerden al?nt? yapar, resimler ise bu görünümlerin birer çevirisidir diyor yazar.

Berger'e göre foto?raf "bunu görmenin kaydetmeye de?er oldu?una karar verdim." dedikleri asl?nda. Bu cümleden sonra kitab?n içindeki foto?raflara "birilerinin bunu görmenin kaydetmeye de?er buldu?u" hissiyle bakmaya ba?lad??m?zda, o foto?raf bamba?ka bir hal almaya ba?l?yor.

Berger, teknik aç?dan dü?ünülen foto?raf?n kusursuz bir kompozisyon gerektirdi?i dü?üncesine kar?? ç?k???ndan, foto?raf?n sanat olup olmad???na, fotomontajdan ve siyasette kullan?m?ndan, foto?raf?n bizlerde hissettirdiklerine kadar birçok konuyu de?ip, okuyucunun foto?rafa bir ad?m daha atmas?n? sa?l?yor.

Her cümlesinin oturup dü?ünülmeye lay?k oldu?unu dü?ündü?üm büyük adam, ressam, sanat ele?tirmeni, yazar gibi ön birçok s?fata sahip olan bir isim John Berger. Berger okumak, Berger'in alg?s?n?n kap?s?n? t?klat?p, içeriye göz gezdirebilmek gibi. Bir Foto?raf? anlamak, akademik bir bak?? aç?s? de?il edebi ve görsel bir bak?? aç?s?yla foto?raf? irdelemek isteyenler için Berger'in yay?mlanm??, yay?mlanmam?? yaz?lar?ndan olu?an etkileyici bir derleme.

---

### **Francisca Pageo says**

Si por algo conocemos a John Berger no es solamente por sus estupendos dibujos, sino también por sus trabajos teóricos en torno a la fotografía y lo creativo. En *Para entender la fotografía*, editado por Gustavo Gili, tenemos una amplia selección de ensayos y textos que giran alrededor de todo aquello relacionado con el mundo fotográfico, sobre el que Berger ha escrito durante estos años. De este modo, el autor nos adentra en el tema con el ánimo de descubrir nuevos fotógrafos y ahondar en sus obras. A través de textos que, sin duda, invitan a buscar sentido a las cosas. Que nos adentran en la fotografía de Sebastiao Salgado, Jean Mohr, Martine Franck, Henri Cartier Bresson, André Kertész, Nick Waplington, Chris Killip, W. Eugene Smith, Markéta Lusacová, Marc Trivier o Paul Strand, así como en la teoría crítica de Susan Sontag, a la que Berger hace unos cuantos guiños; como bien dice su autor en uno de los textos, siempre intenta poner en palabras lo que ve, y aquí, en esta presente edición, hace uso de ello.

La fotografía siempre ha estado íntimamente ligada con lo histórico y lo humano. En *Para entender la fotografía* podemos ver cómo la mirada de cada fotógrafo, aunque Berger anote en cada texto su punto de vista, arroja un poco de luz sobre lo que la fotografía ha aportado a través de todos estos años, tanto en el ámbito social como cultural, personal, documental y antropológico. Cada fotógrafo nos ayuda a ver su manera de fotografiar la vida y cómo el mundo tiene algo que ver con lo que el ser humano va buscando a través de su trayectoria vital. La extroversión/introversión que cada autor tiene con su obra se ve de una forma clara y concisa, haciendo de este libro un aporte lúcido y con gran detalle para lo que entendemos como fotografía y, de algún modo también, el mundo del arte. Aquí la fotografía es la principal compañía de cada autor.

Si algo hay que destacar es la importancia de la luz en todas sus variantes. Tanto desde el punto de vista

técnico como desde el punto de vista poético. Se pone en claro cómo desde la invención de la cámara fotográfica se aportaba una mirada diferente a la conciencia de sí y del punto de vista social, ya que en aquellos momentos la fotografía era considerada un prodigo, pues preservaba el aspecto de las cosas. Conforme fue pasando el tiempo, empezaron a destacar el humanismo y la certeza que podemos hallar en esta técnica, pues en ella siempre encontramos un significado. De este modo, observamos que la fotografía no traduce las apariencias, sino que las cita.

Encontramos que la fotografía también sirve para pensar y hallar soluciones. Así, no solo vemos la fotografía como un instrumento para conocer el mundo de las apariencias, sino también para ahondar en él. Muchas veces tenemos que profundizar en la historia y los acontecimientos sociales para poder entenderla y lograr de este modo un significado en ella. Sin embargo, la fotografía también sirve para crear metáforas, ya que de esta manera podemos encontrarle sentido a las cosas. Toda fotografía nos presenta dos mensajes: un mensaje relativo al suceso fotografiado y otro relativo a la percepción de cada fotógrafo; como decía Joyce: «el verdadero arte necesita del encanto y la exactitud de las imágenes singulares, de las visiones incompletas y sesgadas.» La fotografía es así, un punto de encuentro y de sinergia entre estas dos vertientes en las que se halla.

El ahora de cada vida es único y la fotografía nos ayuda a encontrar y buscar la verdad o mentira tras cada paso que da. Ella es más simple que nuestros recuerdos, pues su paso es limitado. Así, cuando vemos fotos, encontramos siempre fronteras, pero también profundidad, pensamiento o sentimiento. Y ahí está la paradoja y la gran aventura que notamos en ella, lo que Berger nos ayuda a vislumbrar en este estupendo libro: que, aunque su campo es limitado, en ella podemos encontrarlo todo.

---

### **Flora says**

Come for the art theory, stay for the Marxist dialectic

---

### **Melanie Hilliard says**

Need an intellectual fix to help review your next photography show? Then Berger is your man. Expand your mind.

---

### **Philippe says**

After reading *The Shape of a Pocket* and now this, I must conclude that Berger is not for me. There's something in the mix of high-minded moralism and meek aestheticism that profoundly irritates me. It's a closed discourse that doesn't open up to the reader but seems to put him or her constantly at a disadvantage. It seems to be saying that we are never subtle and wounded enough to contradict John Berger. Furthermore, Berger seems to rely on a limited set of tropes to guide his photographic hermeneutics. Constantly he invokes metaphors of the in-between, the marginal, the intangible, the not yet, the liminal. After a while this becomes tiresome and stale. There is, however, in this book one chapter I thoroughly enjoyed: a slice of correspondence with Martine Franck that sparkles with mischief and genuine camaraderie.

---

## **Paolo Gianoglio says**

Anni, o forse intere ere geologiche sono trascorse da quando non sentivo il bisogno di tenere in mano una matita per leggere. Questo libro eterogeneo, costituito da una scelta di brani scritti tra il '68 e il 2007, che può apparire dispersivo o inconsistente, è un'autentica miniera di emozioni, riflessioni importanti, metafore illuminanti, riletture originali, connessioni azzardate che ti costringe a sottolineare, prendere appunti, aggiungere pensieri. La fotografia e la memoria, la fotografia e il narrare, la fotografia e la nostra percezione del tempo, la fotografia e il nostro bisogno umano di riconoscere ed essere riconosciuti. E ancora tante altre cose, in un lungo discorso fatto di narrazione, filosofia, poesia. A tratti complesso, in altri momenti semplice come una chiacchierata con un amico. Appassionante, sempre.

---

## **Ilker says**

Teknolojinin gel?mesi ile birlikte hemen hemen hepimiz herhangi bir sosyal medya platformu ba?ta olmak üzere gün içerisinde yüzlerce, binlerce foto?rafla kar?? kar??ya kal?yoruz. Bunlar? bir k?sm?na "maruz kal?yoruz" bir k?sm?na ise dikkat ederek göz at?yoruz. Bu kar??la?t???m?z foto?raflardan kayda de?er olanlar? hakk?nda fikir yürütübiliyor veya daha k?sa ifade ile anlayabiliyor muyuz? John Berger bu kitapta i?te bunlar? anlatmaya çal???yor. Elbette "Photography 101" ?eklinde anlatm?yor bunlar?. Bir sergiyi gezerken, elinize bir foto?raf? ald???n?zda gördüklerinizin asl?nda size neler hissettirdi?ini kendi üslubuyla aktar?yor. Kitap, Berger'in muhtelif y?llarda yazd??? makaleleri ve baz? kitaplar?ndan baz? bölümlerinden al?nt?lanmas?ndan olu?uyor. Foto?rafa ve foto?rafç?l??a ilgi duyan ya da bu i?in felsefesini, görsel aç?dan dü?ünce dünyas?n? anlamak isteyenlere önemli bir kaynak niteli?inde. Deklan?öre basman?n foto?raf? olu?turmayaca??, onu yakalarken asl?nda neden o "an"? kaydedili?ini görmenizi sa?layacak nitelikte bir kitap.

---

## **cypt says**

kaip visai žalia foto srityje, iš susan sontag aš išmokau daugiau - mokymosi prasme, bet bergeris yra tiesiog ?tekstinta laim?. be proto gražiai - ir turiningai (kas ne visada sutampa) - rašo apie foto, tiksliau, per jas - apie didesnius dalykus, gyvenim?, transcendencijas. nu tikrai laim?.

---

## **John Fitzgerald says**

The title essay in this collection tells us that this is the key to understanding a photograph:

“A photograph is effective when the chosen moment which it records contains a quantum of truth which is generally applicable, which is as revealing about what is absent from the photograph as about what is present in it.” (p. 26)

In other words, understanding a photograph is an exercise in symbolic logic, with a truth-value as its result. This is a good approach to evaluating an instruction manual, but as a guide to understanding a photograph it

reduces the photograph to the status of expository text (more on that in the last paragraph). Every effective photograph has a message, Berger writes, and the message is:

“The degree to which I [that is, the photographer] believe this is worth looking at can be judged by all that I am willingly not showing because it is contained within it.” (p. 26)

This idea doesn't even work on Berger's terms, since there is no reliable way of determining what was willingly left out, what was left out unwillingly, what was included unwittingly, what was just ignored, and what didn't even come to mind. Berger's examples are opaque as well. For example, he writes that a photograph of a winning racehorse omits the race it has run. So how does that missing race come to be “contained within” the photograph of the horse? The only way I can think of is textually – if, for example, the horse is wearing a garland with the name of the race on it, or if there is a cutline describing the horse as the winner of that race. And how does containing the excluded content of the race, in whatever manner, make the photograph more effective? It adds information, I suppose, but by that standard a photograph that is so overexposed the horse is barely recognizable as a horse is as effective as a technically competent photo.

Berger doesn't even apply his own principles in analyzing photographs. His gushing analysis of Paul Strand's “Photograph of Mr. Bennett, Vermont” doesn't mention what Strand excluded from the photo, for example, and is founded in large part on speculation (that the unpainted clapboard building behind Mr. Bennett is a house, for example). At first glance I took Mr. Bennett to be a farmer standing in front of one of his outbuildings, but of course that is wildly speculative, too, and based on stereotypes of rural life. So how can either Berger or I evaluate what was willingly not shown, when we can't be sure what was willingly shown? I like the photo myself. The more you look at it, the more of a mystery it becomes, and the more you think about that mystery. It is intellectually stimulating rather than an example of effective communication. The extremely fine detail also gives the photo what Stephen Shore has described as an air of hyper-reality, a hyper-reality that helps us apprehend the entire photo immediately, but then the physical characteristics of a photo and the act of viewing are of no interest to Berger – to him the effectiveness of a photo is all about its message, a message that he cannot define objectively.

---

### **Fernando says**

Una buena colección de ensayos sobre la fotografía que adolece de falta de fotografías, pues la mayoría de los textos son muy específicos o "respiran" con las imágenes a las que se refieren. Sin embargo, es una excelente forma de comprender el pensamiento de Berger en torno a la imagen fotográfica, sus usos y su carácter narrativo. Los ensayos más fuertes ya están en otros libros (About Looking, Keeping a Rendezvous) pero tenerlos reunidos ofrece una especie de lección de fotografía desde dos perspectivas: la narrativa y la política. Si hubiera que decidir la palabra clave: compasión.

---

### **Rob Adey says**

Great writing, of course, but as a book a bit bereft without being able to see way more of the photos he's talking about.

---

## **andy says**

Loved reading Berger's essays. In fact, I will go read About Looking from him.

---

## **Kunjila Mascillamani says**

I started reading this book because I was so enamoured by 'Ways of Seeing' by Berger. I think I will read his novel next. It was not as exciting as 'Ways of Seeing' but I realized that John Berger is someone who can shake me with words, by the way he arranges them and the meaning they contain. The book was heavy with words containing ideas which are sometimes so heavy that I almost felt these words struggle with weight of the ideas, trying hard to slither away from the author.

Here are excerpts which I liked and what I thought of them.

In the chapter 'Understanding a Photograph' he tries explaining what a photograph signifies.

'A photograph is a result of the photographer's decision that it is worth recording that this particular event or this particular object has been seen. If everything that existed were continually being photographed, every photograph would become meaningless. A photograph celebrates neither the event itself nor the faculty of sight in itself. A photograph is already a message about the event it records. The urgency of this message is not entirely dependent on the urgency of the event, but neither can it be entirely independent from it. At its simplest, the message, decoded, means: I have decided that seeing this is worth recording.'

It might sound simple perhaps, but if you think about it, you will realize how deep and true this thought is. The statement is true about every single photograph, isn't it?

Berger continues to say,

'This is equally true of every memorable photographs and the most banal snapshots. What distinguishes the one from the other is the degree to which the photograph explains the message, the degree to which the photograph makes the photographer's decision transparent and comprehensible. Thus we come to the little-understood paradox of the photograph. The photograph is an automatic record through the mediation of light of a given event: yet it uses the given event to explain its recording.'

Isn't that totally mind blowing!

Photography is the process of rendering observation self-conscious.'

'A movie director can manipulate time as a painter can manipulate the confluence of the events he depicts. Not so the still photographer. The only decision he can take is as regards the moment he chooses to isolate. Yet this apparent limitation gives the photograph its unique power. What it shows invokes what is not shown. One can look at any photograph to appreciate the truth of this. [The oft repeated line in both films and photographs that 'what is in the frame is also what is outside the frame'] The immediate relation between what is present and what is absent is particular to each photograph: it may be that of ice to sun, of grief to a tragedy, of a smile to a pleasure, of a body to love, of a winning racehorse to the race it has run.' [In a film you don't have to show fire. You only have to show embers. It shows fire without showing it.]

Berger says that the moment that is chosen for the photograph by the photographer decides the effectiveness of the photograph. The moment, he says should contain a 'quantum of truth'. 'The nature of this quantum of truth, and the ways in which it can be discerned, vary greatly. It may be found in an expression, an action, a

juxtaposition, a visual ambiguity, a configuration. Nor can this truth ever be independent of the spectator.' [Me: In a photograph of someone waving goodbye from a train about to leave, the quantum of truth can be the wave, it tells us about the occasion, the person whom the wave is directed at and many more things. This cannot be independent of the spectator. A spectator might discern these unsaid images according to their orientation and their own personal experience cloud. The wave might signify the lunch the person is soon going to have on the train for someone. It could be about the smoke the person is going to have in the train toilet soon after and the wall writings with explicit content found in every train toilet.

In 'Political Uses of Photo-Montage', he says this about photo montages. These days there are so many of them around. Most politicians have been subjected to these on the internet. Modi, Trump... Berger says that this way of editing photographs, juxtaposing them with other images, etc. has this as the principle behind it.

'The peculiar advantage of photo-montage lies in the fact that everything which has been cut out keeps its familiar photographic appearance. We are still looking at things and only afterward at symbols. But because these things have been shifted, because the natural continuities within which they normally exist have been broken and because they have now been arranged to transmit an unexpected message, we are made conscious of the arbitrariness of their continuous normal message. Their ideological covering or disguise, which fits them so well when they are in their proper place that it becomes indistinguishable from their appearances, is abruptly revealed for what it is. Appearances themselves are showing us how they deceive us.'

[There are plenty of contemporary examples to be found all around us. The example taken by Berger is that of a photo montage in which Hitler is]

'returning the Nazi salute at a mass meeting (which we do not see). Behind him, and much larger than he is, the faceless figure of a man. This man is directly passing a wad of banknotes into Hitler's open hand raised above his head. The message of the cartoon (October 1932) is that Hitler is being supported and financed by the big industrialists. But, more subtly, Hitler's charismatic gesture is being divested of its accepted current meaning.] Later he says, 'Those interested in the future didactic use of photo-montage for social and political comment should, I am sure, experiment further with this ability of the technique to demystify things.'

One of the lines in 'Photographs of Agony':

'...the black blood of black-blood of black-and-white photographs'. On the effect of photographs which depict the painful reality,

Berger writes,

'They bring us up short. The most literal adjective that could be applied is arresting. We are seized by them. (I am aware that there are people who pass them over, but about them there is nothing to say.) As we look at them, the moment of the other's suffering engulfs us. We are filled with either despair or indignation. Despair takes on some of the other's suffering to no purpose. Indignation demands action. We try to emerge from the moment of the photograph back into our lives. As we do, the contrast is such that the resumption of our lives appears to be a hopelessly inadequate response to what we have just seen.'

In 'Paul Strand', he talks about Bresson and the difference between Strand's method and his.

'His [Paul Strand's] method as a photographer is more unusual. One could say that it was the antithesis to Cartier-Bresson's. The photographic moment for Cartier-Bresson is an instant, a fraction of a second, and he

stalks that instant as though it were a wild animal. The photographic moment for Strand is a biographical or historic moment, whose duration is ideally measured not by seconds but by its relation to a lifetime. Strand does not pursue an instant, but encourages a moment to arise as one might encourage a story to be told.

[Somehow I feel that this is also the difference between Bresson and Tarkovsky.]

While analysing Strand's photographs, Berger says that what the photographer does is

'to present himself to his subject in such a way that the subject is willing to say: I am as you see me...I am includes all that has made me so...The I am is given its time in which to reflect on the past and to anticipate its future: the exposure time does no violence to the time of the I am: on the contrary, one has the strange impression that the exposure time is the life time.'

You might be able to get an idea of what he means by taking a look at this photograph by Strand.

I feel that every time you expose this should happen. Imagine a film in which most of the shots are like this. Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing to achieve!

In 'Uses of Photography: for Susan Sontag' he writes his responses to her book *On Photography*.

'What the camera does, however, and what the eye itself can never do, is to fix the appearance of that event. It removes its appearance from the flow of appearances and it preserves it, not perhaps forever but for as long as the film exists. [These days, even more because we are digital.] The essential character of this preservation is not dependent upon the image being static; unedited film rushes preserve in essentially the same way. The camera saves a set of appearances from the otherwise inevitable suppression of further appearances. It holds them unchanging. And before the invention of camera nothing could do this, except, in the mind's eye, the faculty of memory.'

[Isn't that just amazing? We humans actually love memory so much that we invented a means of preserving it. Better than memory perhaps.]

'The faculty of memory led men [by now you must have realized that Berger uses 'men' to mean people, like most of the world still do.] everywhere to ask whether, just as they themselves could preserve certain events from oblivion, there might not be other eyes noting and recording otherwise unwitnessed events. Such eyes they then accredited to their ancestors, to spirits, to gods or to their single deity. What was seen by this supernatural eye of men, but not this higher justice from which nothing or little could be hidden.'

'The spectacle creates an eternal present of immediate expectation: memory ceases to be necessary or desirable. With the loss of memory the continuities of meaning and judgement are also lost to us.

[If you forget your past you might not be able to judge who is your oppressor. You could think that it is your mother who is not letting you wear certain clothes but that is because your memory does not retain the great grandfather(s) who maintained that women were raped because of their clothes]

The camera relieves us of the burden of memory. It surveys us like God, and it surveys for us. [It is not possible for anyone to forget Hitler.] Yet no god has been so cynical, for the camera records in order to forget.'

[After clicking a picture, there is a sigh of relief that it will not be forgotten anymore. Like how you feel reassured after you hit 'save' in a document or a video you are editing. However, this God as theorised by Sontag and Berger is different from my interpretation, mainly because Berger always saw photography through the lens of capitalism and class. I have not read *On Photography*.]

Berger agrees with Sontag that this cynical god who records in order to forget is the god of monopoly of capitalism. He quotes Sontag

‘A capitalist society requires a culture based on images. It needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to stimulate buying and anaesthetize the injuries of class, race, and sex.’

[I understood this part and agree with it too. The advertising industry flooded with images, photographs, manipulated and not is the biggest example. Berger believes that photographs being arrested moments will not suffice. The way capitalism is operating, it definitely will not. True. So he says.]

‘Photographs are relics of the past, traces of what has happened. If the living take that past upon themselves, if the past becomes an integral part of the process of people making their own history, then all photographs would reacquire a living context, they would continue to exist in time, instead of being arrested moments.’[So when capitalism gives you the glossy picture of Coca-Cola, beads of icy water shining on the glass, humankind, if it remembers the past, will remember Plachimada.]

Now comes the way in which this can be achieved, which I think every photographer should keep in mind while at work.

‘For the photographer this means thinking of her- or himself not so much as a reporter to the rest of the world, but, rather, as a recorder for those involved in the events photographed. The distinction is crucial.’

‘What makes photographs like this so tragic and extraordinary is that, looking at them, one is convinced that they were not taken to please generals, to boost the morale of a civilian public, to glorify heroic soldiers, or to shock the world press: they were images addressed to those suffering what they depict. And given this integrity towards and with their subject matter, such photographs later become a memorial, to the twenty million Russians killed in the war, for those who mourn them. The unifying horror of a total people’s war made such an attitude on the part of the war photographers (and even the censors) a natural one. Photographers, however, can work with a similar attitude in less extreme circumstances.’

[The photograph cited is ‘Grief’ by Dmitri Baltermants, 1942.]

In ‘Appearances’, he says,

‘What makes photography a strange invention – with unforeseeable consequences – is that its primary raw materials are light and time.’

Berger also puts into words, some basic things that a photograph does, even when we are not aware of it, most of the time.

‘Between the moment recorded and the present moment of looking at the photograph, there is an abyss. We are so used to photography that we no longer consciously register the second of these twin messages – except in special circumstances: when, for example, the person photographed was familiar to us and is now far away or dead. In such circumstances the photograph is more traumatic than most memories or mementos because it seems to confirm, prophetically, the later discontinuity created by the absence or death.’

He goes on to explain the role of the photographer thus:

‘The professional photographer tries, when taking a photograph, to choose an instant which will persuade the public viewer to lend it an appropriate past and future. The photographer’s intelligence or his empathy with the subject defines for him what is appropriate. Yet unlike the storyteller or painter or actor, the photographer

only makes, in any one photograph, a single constitutive choice: the choice of the instant to be photographed. The photograph, compared with other means of communication, is therefore weak in intentionality.'

[It is implied that other choices like framing, lighting etc. come after the choice of the instant to be photographed.]

He then goes on to explain the ambiguity of a photograph. Taking the example of a photograph titled, 'A group of Nazi troops and students gather seized papers and books to burn in the Opernplatz, Berlin, May 10, 1933', he explains how the photograph would be ambiguous if not for the title. Even with the title, one needs to know history to fully understand the photograph. Then he poses this heavy question.

'...it might be that the photographic ambiguity, if recognized and accepted as such, could offer to photography a unique means of expression. Could this ambiguity suggest another way of telling?'

[Sexy.]

There is an aspect of photography that Berger pointed out that I liked very much. Unlike other forms of art, like painting, photography does not differentiate between the objects it is capturing at a given point of time.

'...The time which exists within a drawing is not uniform. The artist gives more time to what she or he considers important. A face is likely to contain more time than the sky above it. Time in a drawing accrues according to human value. In a photograph time is uniform: every part of the image has been subjected to a chemical process of uniform duration. In the process of revelation all parts were equal.'

[The only way this is changed is when the frame is lit up by the artist. But even then, usually, lighting up is a process by which the photographer tries to make the work visible to the medium. Earlier it was celluloid. Now the lighting up is done for digital. Exposure is and can, only be uniform. Except for rolling shutters which existed during Berger's time too, there is no change in this. Even with all the technological advancement since.]

Now comes another important aspect which becomes clear when photographs are compared to painting. Photography does not have a language. It quotes from appearances. Renaissance paintings had a language. It varies from other forms of painting during other periods in history. But photograph is produced instantaneously and there is no use of language. Berger puts it like this

'Photographs do not translate from experiences. They quote from them.'

This is the reason why photographs are considered to be authentic. Interesting thing noted by Berger is that, tampered photographs are in fact, a proof of this. It requires elaborate tampering to create a lie out of a photograph. A photograph as it is, cannot lie. Given this situation, he explains how then, photographs are 'massively used to deceive and misinform.'

'We are surrounded by photographic images which constitute a global system of misinformation: the system known as publicity, proliferating consumerist lies. The role of photography in this system is revealing. The lie is constructed before the camera. A "tableau" of objects and figures is assembled. This "tableau" uses a language of symbols (often inherited, as I have pointed out elsewhere, from the iconography of oil painting), [Read 'Ways of Seeing' by Berger for this 'elsewhere'] an implied narrative and, frequently, some kind of performance by models with a sexual content. This "tableau" is then photographed. It is photographed [and not drawn] precisely because the camera can bestow authenticity upon any set of appearances, however false. The camera does not lie even when it is used to quote a lie. And so, this makes the lie appear more truthful.'

In 'Stories' is this line.

‘The term flashback is an admission of the inexorable impatience of the film to move forward.’

How true!

Another perfect analogy from Berger:

‘No story is like a wheeled vehicle whose contact with the road is continuous. Stories walk, like animals or men. And their steps are not only between narrated events but between each sentence, sometimes each word. Every step is a stride over something not said.’

In ‘W. Eugene Smith: Notes to help Kirk Morris Make a Documentary Film’, is something that can be attempted while making films.

‘...He sought a truth, which, by its nature, was not evident. It was waiting to be revealed by him and him alone. He wanted his images to convert so that the spectator might see beyond the lies, the vanity, the illusions of everyday life...’

Interesting observation

‘...the image of a Pieta – of the man-Christ dead in his mother’s lap. An image of tenderness and bereavement. The figure of the victim, suffering or dead, is, by its nature, horizontal. The figure of the healer or the mourner is vertical...’

‘Walking Back Home: Chris Killip: In Flagrante (with Sylvia Grant)’ has this beautiful quote from Killip. ‘I saw an elderly man with a Tesco carrier and a walking stick. I was on the escalator going down and the one going up was, as usual, broken. If there’s a certainty in life, it’s that the escalator going up is broken and your shopping bag’s full. He was walking up the endless stairs and mildly struggling. Only struggling mildly. If he had been more obviously disabled or had been a mother struggling with shopping and a pram, he would have rightly inspired sympathy. He was just a little, tired, unknown man struggling mildly. He was just an old man who had maybe paid his taxes, fought for his country.

The rest of the readings can be seen here <http://kunjilacinema.blogspot.in/2017...>

---