

## Photography: A Marxist Bibliography<sup>1</sup>

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Photography is a particularly unstable object of study, located somewhere between painting and film, art, science and labour. In addition, Marxist concepts - commodity, class and ideology – have shaped much academic historiography, without the studies produced being consciously Marxist. For instance, how is one to characterise a work as significant as Georges Didi-Huberman's *Images in Spite of All* (2003 in French, 2008 in English) or some of the better social histories of photography, such as Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *AAE Disderi and the Cartes de Visite Portrait Photograph* (1985) or her *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris, 1848-71* (1996)? It would be impossible to outline all of the implications for a Marxist bibliography of the subject and I have limited myself to those authors self-identifying as Marxists, or who did at the time they wrote these studies. No doubt, some of what follows isn't as strict as this suggests.

As overall guides, four books are recommended: two large surveys of the history of photography have appeared, which approached the field by putting aside controversies and beginning from social history: Jean-Claude Lemagny & André Rouillé eds, *Histoire de la photographie* (1982, English 1987); and Michel Frizot, *A New History of Photography* (1998). Both works are Franco-centric and many of the same authors were involved in both projects. The first half of the Lemagny & Rouillé's book is much stronger than the second part. In 2006, I published *Photography: A Very Short Introduction*. Explicit theoretical reference to Marx and the Marxist tradition is less prominent in this book than anything else I've written, but it has the advantage of being accessible and available in five languages). The other book is Peter Smith and Carolyn Lefley, *Rethinking Photography: Histories, Theories and Education* (2016).

### The revolutionary left between world wars.

The history of the Left in photography hasn't received much attention. In Britain during the 1890s, socialist writers began to discuss the divisions between employers and employed and to agitate for unionisation. In 1970 two African Americans set up the 'Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement' to campaign against the sale of the company's products for the hated passbook system in South Africa. It is likely that there have been many such interventions and research is needed to uncover this hidden history.

Marx cited the camera obscura as a metaphor for the 'German ideology' and in *Capital* Vol. 1 he noted that photography was one of the five great new industries of the nineteenth century (the others were: railways, steam navigation, gasworks and telegraphy). The other industries in Marx's list have been extensively discussed by historians, leaving photography somewhat adrift. Marxist discussion of photography really began in the 1920s with three overlapping currents. The first was the debate in the USSR. With the shackling of Proletcult, left-modernists initiated the journal *LEF* (Left Front of the Arts) that ran from 1923 to 1925; this was succeeded in 1927 by *Novy LEF* (*New LEF*). Along with *Sovetskoe foto*, the Left Front of the Arts provided a platform for artists and photographers informed by both Russian Formalist criticism and Marxism to debate photography. Perhaps, the most important of these discussions was Sergei Tretyakov's call for the creation of worker correspondents to supply the radical press, turning readers into writers or photographers. This idea was central to Benjamin's argument in 'The Author as Producer', but it has received the least attention among these discussions, probably because it is less amenable to treatment as 'art'.

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Andrew Hemingway for help with *Kritische Berichte*. The contributions to this reading list by Duncan Forbes and Jorge Ribalta have shaded over into collaboration, rather than mere help. I can't thank Jorge and Duncan enough.

Finally, important essays by, and on, Tretyakov have appeared in the issue of *October* edited by Devin Fore (No.118, 2006). Through 1926 and 1928 Osip Brik and Alexander Rodchenko wrote a number of texts in which they advocated photography against painting. The important Rodchenko debate took place in 1928; the Constructivist-artist, turned photographer Alexander Rodchenko associated bourgeois photography with the belly-button (the medium-format camera held at stomach level) and called for new points of view in photography. Rodchenko argued that a really radical practice in photography meant not merely a change in subject matter, but a transformation in the form of representation. It was no revolution, he claimed, to depict revolutionaries in the mode of Tsarist generals, or women workers looking like the Madonna. In many respects, this was a Marxified version of the pre-war Formalist argument that suggested foregrounding the device would break habitual seeing and revolutionise perception. Others, including Boris Kushner, claimed the revolution consisted in new content and found Rodchenko's argument incomprehensible. Tretyakov, as editor of *Novyy LEF*, made an extraordinary contribution to this debate, insisting that the central category for a Marxist photography was not style (point-of-view) or content, but 'use'. Rodchenko's argument has been central to much subsequent debate, but Tretyakov's intervention remains vitally important. Constructivist inspired Marxists also experimented with photomontage and there are notable essays on the medium by Klucis and Stepanova. In addition, there was a debate on photomontage in Germany and France: Durus (the Hungarian Communist Alfred Kemény) wrote: 'Photomontage, Photogram' (1931) and 'Photomontage as a Weapon in the Class Struggle' (1932). For an exhibition of Heartfield's work in Paris, Louis Aragon penned 'John Heartfield and Revolutionary Beauty' (1935). The texts on painting and photography; the Rodchenko debate; and the photomontage texts are all translated in Christopher Phillips' indispensable edited collection: *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913-1940* (Museum of Metropolitan Art/Aperture, 1989).

There are numerous essays, books and exhibition catalogues on Soviet photography. Despite some post-modern flourishes, the best is: Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph, 1924-1937* (Yale University Press, 1996). Tupitsyn has also produced a number of monographs and catalogue texts. Important essays include: Benjamin HD Buchloh, 'From Faktura to Factography' (1984) and Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'The Armed Vision Disarmed: Radical Formalism from Weapon to Style' (1991). Both are reprinted in Richard Bolton's excellent edited collection, *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (1992). For factography see Devin Fore's monographic issue of *October* No.118 (Fall 2006) on Tretyakov and Soviet factography, an indispensable complement to Christopher Phillips' anthology.

The second trend was the workers' film and photo league, formed in the mid-1920s by Willi Münzenberg as part of the Workers International Relief, an organization established in 1921 at the behest of Lenin to collect money to support people suffering from famine in the USSR. These leagues went through various incarnations with the twists and turns of the Comintern, but the basic idea was to establish correspondents for the left press (sometimes these were professionals, but often they were working-class militants). These organisations were never part of the Comintern, but components of the shadow networks of the 'Münzenberg concern'. This 'concern' was a vital component of the large German Communist Culture of the 1920s and a significant feature of its success. Mikhail Kol'tsov was central to some similar projects in the USSR. The resulting images appeared in papers and magazines, exhibitions and books; there were collective production facilities and instruction manuals. In 1931 at its height in Germany the movement claimed 2,400 members in more than one-hundred local groups. Jorge Ribalta's important recent exhibition: *A Hard, Merciless Light* held at the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid in 2011, is an outstanding work of historical recovery. The exhibition showcased the work of groups in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Britain, France, Germany, Holland, Hungary, Spain, the USA and the USSR. Some of these groups were much bigger than others. The British group was pretty weak, those in Germany and the USSR easily the strongest.

There are also significant differences. The Czech texts are highly sophisticated, the US and French ones populist, yet other material still is rudimentary. We lack the research to know, but it is not out of the question that such groups also existed in Latin America and possibly Asia.

Alongside the practical activity, the worker-photography movement also conducted important publications, which hosted Marxist discussions of photography, sometimes these were simply newsletters, but *Sovetskoe foto* and *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* were important publications. Edwin Hoernle, a key figure in the German movement, published his astonishing essay 'The Working Man's Eye' in *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* in 1930. No other museum would take Ribalta's brilliant exhibition, but the accompanying catalogue – *The Worker Photography Movement (1926-1939): Essays and Documents* (in Spanish and English) – includes introductory essays and over sixty translated documents from the period. The book is a vitally important resource. In a recent essay 'The Strand Symptom: A Modernist Disease?' (*Oxford Art Journal*, 2015) Ribalta makes a compelling argument for seeing this international communist trend as a crucial, but over-looked component of modernist culture.

The Popular Front in the US known as the Photo-League probably did as much as the FSA to shape humanist documentary. There is a good recent survey of this work: Klein and Evans eds, *The Radical Camera: New York's Photo-League, 1936-1951* (2013). For a study of French photography under the Popular Front see: Simon Dell, *Image of the Popular Front: The Masses and the Media in Interwar France*, 2006. Again, the photography of the Popular Front shaped the post-war humanism central to Magnum, Cartier-Bresson, Doisneau, Ronis and others.

The third strand is provided by unorthodox German Marxists: Benjamin, Brecht and Kracauer. One comment by Brecht has been extraordinary influential. In 1930 he said: 'Photography is the possibility of a reproduction that masks the context... from the (carefully taken) photograph of a Ford factory no opinion about this factory can be decided'. In the 'Three-Penny Lawsuit' of the same year he offered a more elaborate version of this idea: 'The situation has become so complicated because the simple 'reproduction of reality' says less than ever about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG reveals almost nothing about these institutions. Reality as such has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relations, the factory, for example, no longer discloses those relations. So, there is indeed 'something to construct', something 'artificial', 'invented'. Here there is in fact a need for art.' This material is to be found in the Surkamp, *Bertolt Brecht Werke*, but I've used the English edition by Marc Silberman, *Bertolt Brecht on Film and Radio* (Methuen, 2000). The comment is sometimes known from Benjamin's citation in 'A Small History of Photography'. It is worth observing that Brecht never claimed this perception as his own; he always attributed it to the Marxist Sociologist Fritz Sternberg, who was in many ways his mentor. Siegfried Kracauer's essay 'Photography' was written in 1927. It is available in translation by Thomas Y. Levin (*Critical Inquiry*, 1993) and in the edition of Kracauer's *The Mass Ornament* edited by Levin (Harvard, 1995). Benjamin's three major essays relevant to photography are well known. These are: 'A Small History of Photography' (1931); 'The Author as Producer' (1934) and 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility' (three versions: first version 1935; second version 1936; third version 1939). There are other short pieces of interest, including: 'New Things About Plants' (1928); a review of Gisèle Freund (see below); and the section 'Daguerre and the Dioramas' form 'Paris – The Capital of the Nineteenth Century'. These works are available in multiple editions, but Esther Lesley has recently edited a collection: Walter Benjamin, *On Photography*, Reaktion, 2015, which contains some of his less familiar essays. Commentaries on Benjamin's photo-texts would require a bibliography of their own.

Gisèle Freund provided a uniquely detailed study of the development of photography in nineteenth-century France. Freund, who had studied in Germany with Karl Mannheim, Norbert Elias and TW Adorno, wrote the first PhD on photography, which she defended at the Sorbonne in 1936.

Benjamin was in the audience for her examination. Her thesis was published as *La photographie en France au dix-neuvième siècle: Essai de sociologie et d'esthétique* (1938) and Benjamin reviewed the book that year. (Freund was also a photographer and made some of the most iconic images of Benjamin.) A much revised version of her book appeared as *Photographie et Société* in 1974 and in English in 1980. Freund was wrong about the emergence of photography as a portrait-technology for representing the new middle-class, but once the capitalist market took hold of the invention her account has much on its side.

### **Hiatus (i)**

In the hiatus between the decline of the photo-leagues and the new work of the 1970s, outside the Stalinist bloc, there was little Marxist inspired work on photography. Walter and Naomi Rosenblum, continued to write after the decline of the New York Photo-League, but in McCarthyite America they opted to submerge their politics into championing humanist documentary photographs, focused on ordinary or common humanity. It is probably incorrect to label Susan Sontag's *On Photography* (1977) a Marxist work, but it played an important role in addressing critical ideas. Two quite dissimilar figures produced the most important work of the period: John Berger and Roland Barthes.

The British CP humanist-Marxist critic and novelist, John Berger repeatedly engaged with photography. From the 1960s, Berger published a series of highly perceptive essays on the medium. Fortunately, these have recently been collected by Geoff Dyer in: John Berger, *Understanding a Photograph* (Penguin, 2013). The studies included range from consideration of ill-fitting suits in a picture by August Sander to essays on photomontage, Che Guevara, Shibli and others. Berger also published photo-novels with Jean Mohr: *A Fortunate Man* (1969); *A Seventh Man* (1975); *Another Way of Telling* (1995) and *At The Edge of the World* (1999). There appear to be other works in French and German. For a critique of Berger see: Richard Bolton, 'Wishful Thinking: John Berger's Theory of Photography', *Exposure*, 23:2, 1986. Barthes wrote a number of important essays that combined structuralism with a Marxist modernism (particularly drawn from Brecht). These include: 'Le message photographique' (1961) and 'Rhétorique de l'image' (1964), but see also: 'Photography and Electoral Appeal' and 'The Great Family of Man', both found in *Mythologies*. In the same volume, the long essay 'Myth Today' contains his important reflections on the black soldier saluting the French flag.

### **Photography/Politics in the 1970s**

The renewal of the Marxist Left in the 1970s saw an explosion of publications on photography, in part because of the increased importance of the medium and in part because a new wave of University-trained photographers became politicised. Again Ribalta has done great service with his follow-up exhibition at the Museo Reina Sofia: *Not Yet: On the Reinvention of Documentary and the Critique of Modernism: Essays and Documents, (1972-1991)*, published in 2015. One important task of this generation was the rediscovery of the political avant-garde of the inter-war period. It is difficult to recall now how little was known about Dada or Constructivism. John Willett's narrative account *The New Sobriety: Art and Politics in the Weimar Period, 1917-1933* (1979) was probably as significant as anything else written. German intellectuals produced much important work. Eckhard Siepmann published his book *Montage, John Heartfield* in 1978 (only a fragment has ever been translated). Herbert Molderings, who I believe was in the orbit of the FI, produced studies of German modernist photography: for example, *Beiträge zur Geschichte und Ästhetik der Fotografie*, (1977). The special Issue of *Kritische Berichte*, nos. 2/3 (1977), edited by Molderings and Armin Zweite, contains: Winfried Ranke, "Zur sozialdokumentarischen Fotografie um 1900"; Ulrich Keller, "Die deutsche Portraitfotografie von 1918 bis 1933"; Molderings, "Überlegungen zur Fotografie der Neuen Sachlichkeit und Bauhauses"; Heinrich Dilly, "Sowjetische Fotografie 1918-1932" (a review of

Rosalinde Sartori and Henning Rogge, *Sowjetische Fotografie 1928-1932*, 1975). See also: Molderings, "Argumente für eine konstruierende Fotografie", *Kritische Berichte*, Vol. 9, no.3 (1981). Two key books are: Heinz Willmann's *Geschichte der Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (a history of the AIZ journal) 1975, and the collective monograph on the journal *Der Arbeiter Fotograf*, 1926-1932, Prometh Verlag 1977. Diethart Kerbs was another important Berlin-based Marxist photo-historian. With Walter Uka he edited the anthology *Fotografie und Bildpublizistik in der Weimarer Republik* (2004) as well as various other monographs.

Other important German publications on the prewar published in the 70s (and 80s) are: Richard Hiepe's *Riese Proletariat und grosse Maschinerie* (1983) and *Arbeiter in der Fotografie* (1974). Hiepe was an organic intellectual of the German photographic Left and he played a significant role in the revival of worker photography in Germany in the 70s. Initially, this project involved the publication of the magazine *Arbeiterfotografie* in Hamburg in 1972. The magazine moved to various other cities and still exists today in Cologne, where there is a small gallery that continues to publish the magazine on an intermittent basis. The most important monograph on the second worker photography movement is the book *Arbeiterfotografie* (Elefanten Press, Berlin, 1978), which includes contributions of Hiepe, Körner and Stüber, as well as historical worker photographers like Erich Rinka. Another relevant monograph from the Berlin circle is *Wem gehört die Welt. Kunst und Gesellschaft in der Weimarer Republik*, (NGBK, 1977) including a chapter on worker photography. More recently in Germany, Rudolf Stumberger wrote *Klassen Bilder*, Vols I and II (2007 and 2010), which provides an updated history of social-documentary photography including material on the worker-photography experiments of the 1920-1930s and 1970s. Pioneering work includes: Berthold Beiler, ***Der Gewalt des Augenblicks: Gedanken zu Ästhetik der Fotografie*** in 1967 and ***Denken über Fotografie*** in 1977. Roland Günter's *Fotografie als Waffe* (1977) was the first monographic history of social-documentary photography.

In Britain, David Eliot staged a series of important exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art (Oxford) on Rodchenko, Mayakovsky, Eisenstein and others, all with catalogues designed by David King. The 1979 London exhibition (and catalogue) *Three Perspectives on Photography*, contains a section on 'Socialist Photography', organised by John Tagg. Bert Hogenkamp (Netherlands), Anne Tucker (USA) and Terry Dennett (UK) did much to recover hidden history of the Workers' Film and Photo Leagues. Some of this work was collected in the important 1979 book *Photography/Politics: One*, which was edited by Terry Dennett, David Evans, Sylvia Gohl & Jo Spence. *Photography Politics: Two* (1987) contains traces of the earlier project, but is much more committed to identity politics. In Britain, Terry Dennett and Jo Spence published a newsletter called *Worker Photographer*, that ran for a few issues and they created an exhibition to tell the story of the movement. Many of the relevant documents are reprinted in Ribalta's *Not Yet*.

Two English-language journals began to be published: *Exposure*, the magazine of the US Society for Photographic Education and *Camerawork*, an initiative that arose from the fusion of Photography Workshop (Dennett and Spence) and Half Moon Gallery. Though the latter alliance fell apart as Dennett and Spence pushed for a more rapid radicalisation. Jessica Evans has published a collection: *The Camerawork Essays: Context and Meaning in Photography* (1997). While this book makes much of this work available, it underplays the base of the magazine in documentary photography. Four Corners Film and Photography Workshop is currently making available on-line the whole of the *Camerawork* archive. The magazine *Block* began publishing Marxist art history from 1979 and includes some contributions on photography, including an important essay on gender in Heartfield by Jo Spence. Slightly later in the 1980s, *Ten.8* magazine carried much of relevance.

In the UK during this period there was a great deal of work in theory and practice. As part of his interest in modern media, Stuart Hall, one of the most important intellectuals working in post-war Britain (he was from Jamaica) wrote several essays on photography. 'The Social Eye of *Picture Post*', (1973) published in *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* No.2, was a searching critique of social-democratic documentary, focused on the magazine *Picture Post*. 'The Determinations of News Photographs', was a Barthesian semiotic account of the news media, which also appeared in the *Working Papers*, no.3, 1973. Hall's 'Reconstruction Work' (*Ten.8*, No 16, 1984) is an excellent re-evaluation of his earlier critique of *Picture Post* in relation to images of West-Indian immigrants arriving in the UK. Victor Burgin had been centrally involved in Conceptual art, but increasingly produced photo-text work, that explored gender and class. Burgin also produced a body of influential writing, including the edited collection *Thinking Photography* (1982). However, Burgin was the most influenced by the *nouveau melange* of Althusser, Lacan and semiotics and he rapidly adopted a postmodernist perspective concerned with desire and representation. The British communist historian and theorist John Tagg combined Althusser with Foucault to explore the role of photography in the modern apparatus of power-knowledge. His highly significant studies are collected in *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (1988). These essays were some of the most influential of the period and set a research agenda. The book contains his important, if problematic essay, on power and photography – an analysis of the use of photography in penal, charity and psychiatric institutions. The text on slum clearance in Leeds offers a detailed case study for these ideas. Also included are essays that are, in effect reviews of Freund and Edelman. Tagg's later work, though it contains important insights, was produced at a distance from his erstwhile Marxism.

Jo Spence was the most militant of this group of intellectuals and she was involved in multiple initiatives intended to develop a Marxist-Feminist politics of photography. Much of her work was involved in radical pedagogy and workshop practice and has often been miscast in terms of 'art'. Her publications include: *Photography/Politics: One* and *Photography/Politics: Two*; *Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political, Personal and Photographic Autobiography* (1986) and *Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression* (1995). These are important resources for anyone interested in class, capitalism and gender. Again, there was an excellent retrospective exhibition of her work curated by Ribalta with an accompanying catalogue: *Jo Spence Beyond the Perfect Image: Photography, Subjectivity, Antagonism* (MACBA, in Spanish and English, 2006). Siona Wilson's *Art Labour, Sex Politics* (2015) is admirable, but I find her reading of the 1970s too inflected by the later debates of the 1980s and 1990s. I recently wrote a series of blogs for Fotomuseum Wetherthur, which offer a guide to the politics of British radical photography in the 1970s: "[The Fire Last Time: Documentary and Politics in 1970s Britain](https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/explore/still-searching/series/31235)": <https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/explore/still-searching/series/31235> the fire last time documentary and politics in 19

In the 1970s a group of Marxist photographers and theorists coalesced at the University of California, San Diego. Sometimes called the San Diego school, the group included Allan Sekula, Martha Rosler, Phil Steinmetz, Fred Lonidier and others. Sekula and Rosler wrote as well as making artworks. Rosler's 'In, Around and Afterthoughts on Documentary' (included in her book *3 Works*) was one of the first and most significant criticisms of humanist documentary. Rosler pointed out that FSA photographers had made careers from photographing the poor, but the depicted subjects got nothing from the seeming exchange. This essay insisted on an ethics of representation that addressed the unequal relationship between photographer and subject. It, and other essays, are collected in *Positions in the Life World* (1999) and *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001* (2004). In some ways, Rosler's performance/video work: *Vital Statistics of a Citizen Simply Obtained* (1977) was the earliest attempt to think about photography, state institutions and the control of the body, with the emphasis on the domination of women.

She has said that, at the time, she had not read Foucault, and the resources for the work were Marcuse and Lefebvre. Her interview with Buchloh in *Positions in the Life World* is excellent. I wrote a short book on one work by Rosler: *Martha Rosler, The Bowerly in two inadequate descriptive systems* (2012). This study examines Rosler's work, but also looks at the intellectual and political context for the San Diego school and other Marxist modernists of the period.

Allan Sekula wrote a cluster of important critical and historical studies between 1974 and 1986. Most are collected in: *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo-Works 1973-1983* (1984). These include his 'The Invention of Photographic Meaning, which looks at the semantic instability of photography as images switch between affect and objectivity: 'Steichen at War' – a study of aerial reconnaissance pictures from WWI that were fetishized and exhibited as precious commodities because the commander of the unit was Edward Steichen. 'The Traffic in Photographs' is a wide-ranging meditation on photography in exhibition, which employs a homology with money. 'Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)' is in many ways a manifesto for the San Diego group and showcases their work. It is a powerful and militant critique of formalism and a pioneering statement of biopolitics. Many of these studies are collected in a French edition of his writing: *Écrits sur la photographie* (2103). Two major essays are not included in these collections. One is the long-essay 'Photography Between Labour and Capital', which focuses on mining to trace the 'emerging picture language of industrial capitalism' (in Benjamin HD Buchloh ed., *Leslie Shedden, Mining Photographs and Other Pictures*, 1983). This study ranges from the illustrations in De Agricola via the plates of the *Encyclopédie*, Nadar's pictures in the Parisian Catacombs through to time and motion studies. While some of the research is now dated, the combination of Marx, Lukács, Sohn-Rethel and Braverman, makes it an extraordinary performance. The introduction offers a fascinating account of the role of the archive as a 'clearing house of meaning' and has sometimes been published as a free-standing text. His other essay 'The Body and the Archive', published in *October* in 1986 was his final, and probably most influential, historical study before he chose to concentrate on photography and filmmaking. This highly influential essay, like the work of Tagg, draws on Foucault, to account for archives of power-knowledge. However, the research is more extensive, the cases more differentiated and Sekula was explicit that the camera would not substitute for actual carceral institutions. He also ended with an example of resistance, refusing the totalising machine of power that Foucault's work of this period seemed to encourage. Sekula's subsequent prominence as an artist and premature death in 2013 have led to a number of studies of his work. I'll return to some of them, but his interviews contain more insight and powerful critique than some entire bodies of work. WJT Mitchell's *Iconology: Image Text and Ideology* (1986) is a thoughtful reflection on representation and ideology with a good discussion of Marxism and photography. The artist Jeff Wall also wrote important accounts of photography and gave very insightful interview. For a selection see: *Jeff Wall* (Phaidon, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2006). I edited a special issue of *Oxford Art Journal* on Wall in 2007. Wall subsequently discovered 'Art'.

We need serious research on the Latin American and Japanese debates. A good source for Latin American discussions are the catalogues of the 'Latin American exhibitions' and colloquia organized in Mexico in 1978 and 1981, these are titled: "Hecho en Latinoamerica No.1 (1978) and No.2 (1981). These are ideologically diverse, but the second in particular includes a section on photography as instrument for struggle, with contributions by Rosler, Gunther and others. In Mexico there was also circle around the Mexican Council of Photography, including some serious Marxists such as Raquel Tibol and the photographer Nacho Lopez. The exercises in reading photographs in Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979) are worth their weight in gold. Unquestionably, there has been a lot more work throughout the continent. An indication of this is to be found in Cecilia Fajardo-Hill & Andrea Giunta eds, *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985* (2017). We know that there was

a significant radical photo-culture in Japan, but little of the work has been translated. Franz Pritchard is about to publish an edited volume of Takuma Nakahira's essays in English. Other Japanese Marxist-inflected writing from the period is more explicitly intermedial (concerned with eizo, or the image). Okwui Enwezor gives a good sense of photography in South Africa in *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life* (2012). Also of use is Darren Newbury, *Defiant Imaged. Photography and Apartheid South Africa* (2009). However, these references just go to show little we know of what was happening outside of Europe and the USA.

Bernard Edelman's *La droit saisi par la photographie* (1973) is in a category of its own. Edelman was an Althusserian legal theorist and his study examined the way that the odd category of photography disturbed the copyright-law in nineteenth-century France, revealing its unstated basis in a bourgeois conception of the human subject. It was translated into English as *Ownership of the Image* (1979). Edelman's cult book, which managed amazingly to combine Althusser and Pashukanis (!), has had a significant impact beyond photography studies. However, like so many of his generation, he moved rapidly to the right.

Two Marxist historians wrote important studies on photographic history during the 1980s. One time LCR activist, André Rouillé produced several books of note: *L'Empire de la Photographie 1839-1870* (1982), is a study of photography and capitalism in nineteenth-century France. *Le Corps et son Image: Photographies Du Dix-Neuvième Siècle* (1986) is a catalogue of images from the Bibliotheque Nationale, which looks at the body in French photography: Rouillé considers images of the labouring body; police and medical imagery; and photographs of the slaughtered Communards. He also edited a collection of documents: *La Photographie en France. Textes & Controverses: Une Anthologie 1816-1871* (1989). Thereafter, he became editor of the journal *La Recherche Photographique* (1986-1997), which contains some original work, but was increasingly preoccupied with contemporary 'creative' photography. The other figure of note is the American art-historian Molly Nesbit who produced a series of astonishing studies on Eugène Atget. Her curated exhibition *Intérieurs Parisien* at the Musée Carnavelet (1982, with an excellent catalogue) looked at Atget's studies of Parisian apartment interiors as an analysis of class structure. Her important essays include: 'The Use of History' (*Art in America*, 1986) and 'In the absence of the parisienne' (*Sexuality and Space*, 1992). In 1991 Nesbit published *Atget's Seven Albums* (1992). This study reveals Atget to have been a revolutionary syndicalist opposed to WWI, who created a series of unpublished albums that examined working-class modernity. The book also provides the best account of the nature of a photo--document; the photographic commodity, authorship and many other things. To my mind, it is the most important single historical work on photography. In 1992, I reviewed it for the *Oxford Art Journal*. One other essay by Nesbit should be noted, this is 'What was an Author?'" (*Yale French Studies*, 1987), which is an exceptional Marxist response to the famous essays by Barthes and Foucault on authorship. Examining changes in Intellectual Property law, Nesbit argues the law decided the character of authorship as a defence of property, and in the process, it transformed the cultural field, dissolving the distinctions between high and low culture.

### **Hiatus (ii)**

The work of Nesbit and Rouillé represented a high-point before another hiatus. During the 1980s and 1990s many Marxists working in and on photography, like many in other fields, opted for varieties of postmodern thinking. At this time, professing Marxist commitments was a self-marginalising position. During this period, a few writers fought a rear-guard position. I wrote a critique of the prevailing mood: 'Snapshooters of History: Passages on the Postmodern Argument' (*Ten.8*, 1989, with various re-editions including a Portuguese version), which, for all its youthful crudity, now seems prescient as an early realisation of the importance of globalisation. More substantively, I published 'The Machine's Dialogue' (*Oxford Art Journal*, 1990), which elaborated a Bakhtinian-Marxist response to those who saw in photography a total machine of power. The



argument treats the photographed subject as capable of ‘answering back’ or shaping a dialogic image. Versions of this claim are now fashionable, but rerouted through Agamben and Arendt. The prolific critic John Roberts drew on philosophical theories of realism (particularly, the work of Roy Bhaskar) to elaborate a Marxist-realist research programme for photography. See: *The Art of Interruption* (1998). Two exhibition catalogues by Roberts are also worth consulting, these are: *Renegotiations: Class, Modernity and Photography* (1993) and *The Impossible Document: Photography and Conceptual Art in Britain 1966-1976* (1997). In a little known essay, James Huginin offered a good critique of postmodern assumptions in ‘The Map is not the Territory’ (*Exposure*, 22:1, 1984). Another largely unknown essay from the same journal is: Linda Andre, ‘Dialectical Criticism and Photography’, *Exposure*, 22:4, 1984. Jessica’s Evan’s essay ‘Victor Burgin’s Polysemic Dreamcoat’ offers an account on one individual trajectory (in Roberts, *Art Has no History*, 1994). It is reasonable to note that at the time none of this work, with the possible exception of Roberts’ book, had much impact.

Nonetheless, throughout this period there were some good studies of American documentary, some more Marxist than others, but all solid work: Pete Daniel et al, *Official Images: New Deal Photography*, 1987; Maren Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America*, 1989; James Guimond, *American Photography and the American Dream*, 1991; Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must be Represented: The Politics of Documentary*, Verso 1994; and Anthony W Lee, *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco*, 2001. Monika Faber has written a series of studies of early twentieth-century photography in Vienna and Prague. There has been much too little research on aspects of commercial photography and the popular press. In this regard, Sally Stein work is indispensable, see: ‘The Graphic Ordering of Desire: The Modernization of a Middle-Class Women’s Magazine, 1914-1939’ (in Bolton, 1992). Terry Smith’s *Making the Modern: Industry, Art and Design in America* (1992) contains important chapters on photography, Fordism and advertising.

### **A new cycle begins**

The insurgency against capitalist globalisation and neo-liberalism has thrown up a plethora of younger theorists focussing on all aspects of capitalism in art history, or more broadly, image-studies. These critics have largely attended to contemporary art, rather than produced historical studies. In photography, the work of Allan Sekula has played a significant role. *Fish Story* (1995) – a book in images and essays – is one of the major artworks of the period of globalisation. See also: *Constantin Meunier: A Dialogue with Allan Sekula*, (edited by Hilde Van Gelder, 2005) and *Critical Realism in Contemporary Art: Around Allan Sekula's Photography* (Jan Baetens & Hilde Van Gelder eds, 2006). Sekula’s *Dismal Science* (1999) contains an excellent interview with Debra Risberg. A selection of his recent work is to be found in: Sekula, *Performance Under Working Conditions* (2011); including an interview with Buchloh. See also: Pascal Beausse, ‘Allan Sekula réalisme critique. Interview/The Critical Realism of Allan Sekula. Interview,’ *Art Press*, 240 (1998). Examples of writing on Sekula include: Zanny Begg, ‘Recasting Subjectivity: Globalisation in the Photography of Andreas Gursky and Allan Sekula’ (*Third Text*, 19:6 2005); Steve Edwards, ‘Commons and Crowds: Figuring Photography from Above and Below’ (*Third Text*, 23:4, 2009; Portuguese edition 2017); Stephanie Schwartz, with Terri Weissman & Larne Abse Gogarty *Waiting for Tear Gas 1999-2000 by Allan Sekula*: [www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/in-focus/waiting-for-tear-gas-allan-sekula](http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/in-focus/waiting-for-tear-gas-allan-sekula); Steve Edwards, ‘Allan Sekula: *Fish Story*’ (*Kunst und Politik Jahrbuch der Guernica-Gesellschaft*, 2017).

Sekula’s last project appeared as: Hilda Van Gelder ed, *Ship of Fools/The Docker’s Museum* (2015), issued in English, French and Portuguese editions. All the studies in this book are of interest including a wonderful memoir by his partner Sally Stein; three contributions are explicitly Marxist – by Gail Day, Alberto Toscano and myself. The work on the present is, of course, wider than the focus on Sekula. For instance, Julian Stallabrass has written a good account of Salgado: ‘Sebastião Salgado & Fine Art Photojournalism’ (*New Left Review*, 1/223, 1997). Also of interest is his essay: ‘What’s in a Face? Blankness in Contemporary Art Photography’ (*October*, 2007). See also his edited

collection: *Documentary*, 2003. Antigoni Memou has written a book on *Photography and Social Movements* (2015). Toscano and Kinkle's *Cartographies of the Absolute* (2014) contains much of interest on image-mapping for contemporary capitalism.

Blake Stimson has written an excellent study of photography and the transformation of subjectivity at the middle of the twentieth century: *The Pivot of the World: Photography & Its Nation* (2006). It is useful to read this alongside Sarah E. James's study: *Common Ground: German Photographic Cultures Across the Iron Curtain* (2013). In 2006, I published *The Making of English Photography, Allegories*, a book on nineteenth-century photography, capitalism and ideology in the mode of Nesbit and Rouillé. Gen Doy wrote a series of books on Black visual culture, women and representation and other topics. Of particular relevance is her: *Claude Cabun: A Sensual Politics of Photography* (2007). See also Doy's much earlier essay on photography in the Commune, which is published in *Photography/Politics: One*. Stephanie Schwartz has recently edited a special issue of the *Oxford Art Journal* (Vol.38, No.1, 2015) on American modernist photography, which gives an excellent overview of the state of current research. It contains admirable Marxist studies by: Stimson, Ribalta, Barnaby Haran, Jason E Hill, Andrew Hemingway, and Schwartz herself.

Ribalta has edited an important collection (in English and Spanish) on photographic exhibitions: *Public Photographic Spaces. Propaganda Exhibitions from Pressa to the Family of Man, 1928-1955* (MACBA, 2008). Though, some of its assessments are questionable, Christopher Phillips essay 'The Judgement Seat of Photography' (in Bolton, 1992) is essential reading for the photo-exhibition complex. On this theme, see also the work of Jordana Mendelson, particularly: *Documenting Spain Artists, Exhibition Culture, and the Modern Nation, 1929-1939* (2007). Sekula ('The Traffic in Photographs' and Barthes, 'The Great Family of Man') are important studies of photography in the museum.

Erika's Wolf's innovative studies of Stalinist propaganda are worthy of attention, see: *Koretsky: The Soviet Photo Poster: 1930-1984* (2012) and *Aleksandr Zhitomirsky: Photomontage as a Weapon of World War II and the Cold War* (2016); See also, her contributions to Ribalta's *The Worker Photography Movement*. Antonelle Russo, *Storia Culturale fotografia. Dal Neorealismo al Postmoderno* (2011) is an acclaimed national history. See also her: *Eye for the City: Italian Photography and the Image of the Contemporary City*, 2003. Works by Margarida Medeiros include: *Fotografia e Narcisismo - O Auto-retrato Contemporâneo* (2000); *Fotografia e Verdade - Uma História de Fantasmas* (2010) and Margarida Medeiros e Emília Tavares, *Tesouros da Fotografia Portuguesa do séc. XIX*. (Lisboa, Museu do Chiado, 2015). Zahid R Chaudhary's *Afterimage of Empire: Photography in Nineteenth-Century India* (2012) is the study of photography and British colonialism that is most engaged with Marxism. For those who read German, Michael Ponstingl's work on Vienna is worth consulting, see: *Wien im Bild. Fotobildbände des 20. Jahrhunderts* (2008) and *Die Explosion der Bilderwelt. Die Photographische Gesellschaft in Wien 1861-1945* (2011). Influenced by the October school, two major studies of Heartfield have recently appeared, see: Andres Mario Zervigón, *John Heartfield and the Agitated Vision* (2012) and Sabine Tania Kriebel, *Revolutionary Beauty* (2014). Also of interest is Zervigón's recent study of German photo-nationalism, *Germany and Photography* (2017). In Buenos Aires the *Ojos Crueles* magazine circle takes a sociological approach.

There has recently been much discussion of ethics and witnessing in photography. For Marxist contributions, see: John Roberts, *Photography and Its Violations* (2014). This is a theoretically sophisticated and often brilliant, reflection on photography, realism, time and violence. Julian Stallabrass's Brighton Photography Biennial of 2013, was an important exhibition and is accompanied by a good catalogue: *Memory of Fire: Images of War and the War of Images*. Also concerned with recent wars in the Middle East and capitalism's image culture are: Otto Karl Werkmeister, *Der Medusa Effekt* (2001) and Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Abu Ghraib Effect* (2012; also in Spanish).

In photography, exhibitions can be as important as books. The curator, Duncan Forbes, has put together some compelling recent photo exhibitions, these including a show on the Austrian communist photographer, exile and Comintern agent, Edith Tudor-Hart (2013); an exhibition looking at the historical legacy of photography and the manifesto-form, *Manifeste: Eine andere Geschichte der Fotografie* (2014); and collaboratively *Provoke: Between Protest and Performance - Photography in Japan 1960/1975*, which includes an initial study of the important Japanese protest book movement. All have excellent accompanying catalogues. Matthew Witkovsky and Devin Fore's recent exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago, *Revoliutsiia! Demonstratsiia!: Soviet Art Put to the Test* (2017) provides a compelling account of the image culture of the early years of the Russian Revolution. Kirstin Lloyd curated a number of significant smaller exhibitions at Stills Gallery in Edinburgh.

For digital cultures, see: Martin Lister, *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture* (1995; 2nd edition 2013) and *New Media: A Critical Introduction* (2003 and 2nd edition 2009); Sean Cubitt, *Digital Aesthetics* (2009); *The Practice of Light: A Genealogy of Visual technologies From Print to Pixels* (2014); *Finite Media: Environmental Implications of Digital Technologies* (2017) and with Daniel Palmer, *Digital Light* (2015). Sometimes the works of Lister and Cubitt drift towards postmodern culturalist conceptions, but these works are always intelligent. Of relevance is Christian Fuchs, *Digital Labour and Karl Marx* (2015) - though, Dave Beech presented a detailed critique at HM in 2017. Jonathon Beller, a student of Fredric Jameson, has just published: *The Message is Murder: Substrates of Computational Capital* (2017). John Roberts' *The Art of Interruption* contains a double response to digital techno-utopians/techno-dystopians.

While this work is far from hegemonising current debate – Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory and 'New Materialism' along with anthropology inflected by these ideas seem to be the shaping the mainstream approach – there is no sign of current Marxist work abating. Stimson and Hemingway are working on a study of Paul Strand; Schwartz's research on Walker Evans is on-going; Forbes is in the process of curating exhibitions on photography, empire and decolonization. With Gail Day, I will soon be publishing a long essay on Sekula, time and uneven and combined capitalism in a Historical Materialism volume and I'm writing a book on early photography, property and bourgeois subjectivity. Sarah Tuck is doing excellent work on 'drone vision' and Lloyd is researching a book on documents in contemporary art. Roberts is a one-person publishing machine. In France, *Association de Recherche Sur L'Image Photographique* (ARIP) (<https://arip.hypotheses.org>) hosts important events, including a 2017 symposium on 'photography and capitalism'. As a note for your diary, any exhibition by Ribalta is an event worth travelling to see.