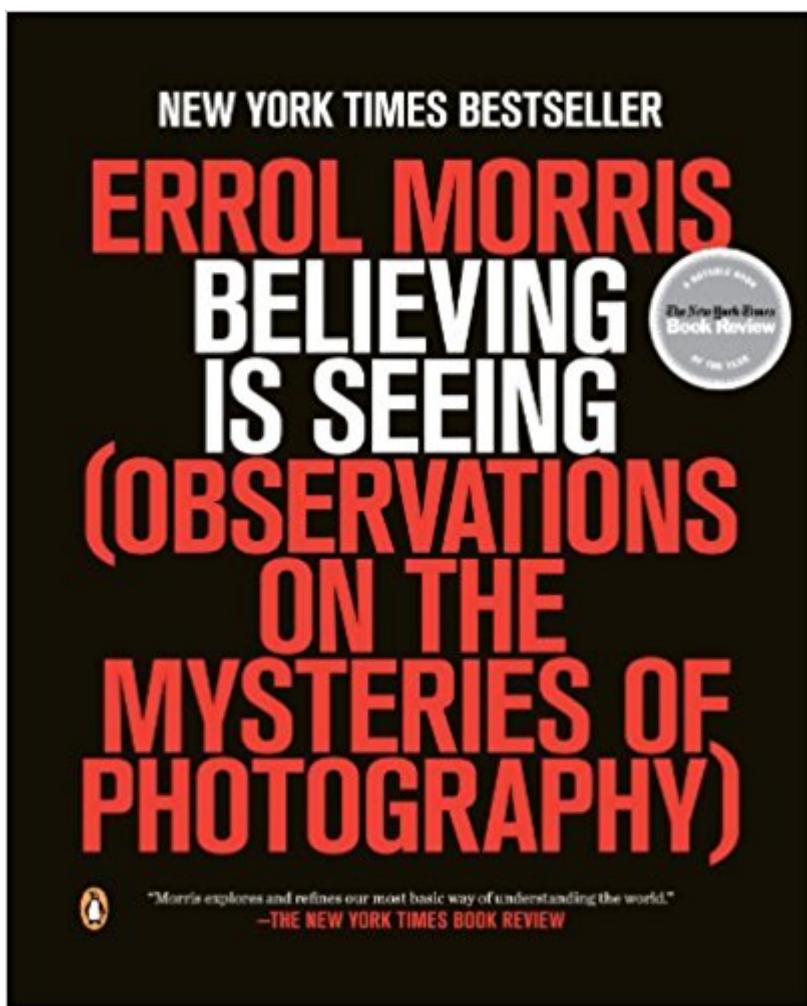


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# Believing Is Seeing: Observations On The Mysteries Of Photography



## **Synopsis**

Academy Awardâ “winning director Errol Morris turns his eye to the nature of truth in photography In his inimitable style, Errol Morris untangles the mysteries behind an eclectic range of documentary photographs. With his keen sense of irony, skepticism, and humor, Morris shows how photographs can obscure as much as they reveal, and how what we see is often determined by our beliefs. Each essay in this book is part detective story, part philosophical meditation, presenting readers with a conundrum, and investigates the relationship between photographs and the real world they supposedly record. Believing Is Seeing is a highly original exploration of photography and perception, from one of Americaâ ™s most provocative observers.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"Morris brings an insatiable and contagious curiosity throughout to the convolutions that arise between art and truth telling." -Publishers Weekly (starred review) "...Morris's book feels less like traditional photography criticism than like the novels of W. G. Sebald, which are similarly obsessed with truth, memory and war. We get odd, absorbing pictures of Mayan ruins, of Picasso and his mistress, of the high heels worn by Morris's tour guide in Crimea: shanks, shoes, a shadow (presumably the photographer's) falling across the once boot-trodden road. Like extra problem sets in a textbook, these photos offer us additional opportunities to practice the art of looking, while simultaneously multiplying the scale of, as Morris's subtitle puts it, 'the mysteries of photography.'" -New York Times Book Review "Believing Is Seeing is an important book: It reminds us, at a time

when it is remarkably easy to manipulate images and we are daily inundated with more and more of them, to ask: 'What, after all, are we looking at?" -Wall Street Journal "[A]n elegantly conceived and ingeniously constructed work of cultural psycho-anthropology wrapped around a warning about the dangers of drawing inferences about the motives of photographers based on the split-second snapshots of life that they present to us. It's also a cautionary lesson for navigating a world in which, more and more, we fashion our notions of truth from the flickering apparitions dancing before our eyes." -Los Angeles Times "Delightfully conversational..." -Boston Globe "...simultaneously bewildering and thrilling, like finding a fathomless secret world hidden behind the seeming simplicity of everyday life." -Salon "Morris' assiduous and profound inquiry into the relationship between reality and photography is eye-opening, mind-expanding, and essential in this age of ubiquitous digital images." -Booklist (starred review) "Students of photography-and fans of CSI-will find this a provocative, memorable book..." -Kirkus Reviews --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Errol Morris is the author of the New York Times bestseller *A Wilderness of Error* and the Academy Awardâ "winning director of *The Fog of War*, among other films, including *Standard Operating Procedure*; *Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control*; and *The Thin Blue Line*. He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Though it was published earlier, this is the best book I read in 2014. It has flaws - the last third isn't nearly as good as the first two thirds - but Morris' discussion of the authenticity of the famous Crimean War picture, the scope of his intellectual engagement, his detective work, the careful approach he took to his subject is absolutely breathtaking. Consider this a seven star review minus two stars for the last section. Highly recommended.

This is an interesting read for anyone who enjoys altering photos and the science behind it. It reads a lot like a text book so it's not terribly engaging but it is definitely interesting.

This is not a book for a typical or amateur photographer. This is a book for people who care very seriously about photography. This is the kind of book for people who keeps thinking about what photography really is, the importance of photography, the influence of photography, the history of photography, the mass media manipulation using photography. In other words, don't buy this book if you don't care about photography's theory. And if you do, don't miss it!

While most photographers, myself included, just take what we do for granted, Errol Morris points out the manipulative nature of all photographs. Artists do much the same thing. The very act of "selecting" what to capture in an image and what to leave out is an act of selective vision that we use to inform or impress our viewers. But, since we are not all taking images to be used in a court room in a legal case, or to document a war, that is fine. His observations will make you think more deeply about what you photograph, but certainly won't change my methods or intent.

This is a well-written work of serious intent. I expect a lot of readers might find it a slog, but the main message is an important one, especially today when we are flooded with images that purport to speak for themselves. My only complaint is that in the analysis of the famous Fenton photographs of the canon balls, the issue of which came first might have been resolved with a little experiment throwing say ball bearings randomly over a scaled-down landscape. The arrangement of canon balls on the raised road surface looks decidedly unlikely. Still, a worthwhile analysis and a good read for anyone interested in documentary photography.

fascinating deep dive into how we know what we think we know. Very geeky/obsessive, but it grows on you.

As a photographer, I appreciated Errol Morris' book on several levels. He examines several case studies, specific photographs since the advent of photography which have in some way affected the perception of history; his choices in themselves are intriguing. Morris' style of writing manages to read as both academic and personal, and he takes advantage of all the research options available, both human and otherwise. His central point, that an image can be manipulated by both the artist and the viewing public to become something more, makes you question all of modern media.

This is almost a philosophy book, really. Morris carefully helps the reader distinguish between: the photograph, that which is depicted by the photograph, that which is not depicted in the photograph, the text surrounding the photograph, the inferences we make from the photograph, and the inferences we make from the text. These are important things to sort out, and to distinguish. He makes, repeatedly and clearly, with forceful arguments as to the importance of the point, this point: We imbue a photograph with too much truth, because it looks real. Skepticism is vital here, since our instincts point in the wrong direction. In this modern era, we mostly know about digital alterations, but we tend too much to forget the many many other ways that a photograph can

mislead us. It's a good book, and one completely worth owning and reading, if you're at all interested in EITHER photography OR media. One quibble: In the section on Walker Evans and the missing alarm clock, Curtis is simply wrong. Agee does mention the alarm clock, or to be precise the sound of an alarm clock, and suggests (in that fabulously loopy and ambiguous Agee way) that the clock is set 2 hours fast. It's right there at the end of "The house is left alone" in the chapter "The Gudger House". That Curtis would claim that Agee does not mention the clock suggests that Curtis couldn't be bothered to read the book, but only to dip into the inventory sections. That Morris would repeat the claim suggests, unfortunately, that he couldn't be bothered to read it closely either, although it's clear that he's read large pieces of it. It's a tough book to read, I'll grant you, but I am astonished that a man who would fly to Crimea to check the background for one image would fail this check on another image. Agee's reference to the clock does not immediately resolve any questions about what it's doing in Evans' photo, at least under my reading, but the fact that his reference goes unmentioned (indeed, denied) is disturbing to me, and makes me worry about the scholarship all around, a little. It probably provides a little more evidence that the clock is Gudger's. That quibble aside, let me end on a positive note: Morris did some great work here, and has written a really wonderful, accessible, book on an important topic.

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