

*The Photography Reader* is a comprehensive collection of twentieth-century writings on photography – its production, its uses and effects. Encompassing essays by photographers including Edward Weston and László Moholy-Nagy, and key thinkers from Walter Benjamin to Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag, the Reader traces the development of ideas about photography, exploring issues such as identity, consumption, the gaze, and digital technology. Each themed section features an editor's introduction setting ideas and debates in their historical and theoretical context.

Sections include:

- Reflections on Photography
- Photographic Seeing
- Codes and Rhetoric
- Photography and the Postmodern
- Photo-digital
- Documentary and Photojournalism
- The Photographic Gaze
- Image and Identity
- Institutions and Contexts

Includes essays by: Jan Avgikos, David A. Bailey, Roland Barthes, Geoffrey Batchen, David Bate, Karin E. Becker, Walter Benjamin, John Berger, Ossip Brik, Victor Burgin, Jane Collins, Douglas Crimp, Hubert Damisch, Edmundo Desnoes, Umberto Eco, Steve Edwards, Andy Grundberg, Stuart Hall, Lisa Henderson, bell hooks, Angela Kelly, Sarah Kember, Annette Kuhn, Lucy R. Lippard, Martin Lister, Catherine Lutz, Roberta McGrath, Lev Manovich, Rosy Martin, Christian Metz, W. J. T. Mitchell, László Moholy-Nagy, Wright Morris, Marjorie Perloff, Martha Rosler, Allan Sekula, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Susan Sontag, Jo Spence, John Szarkowski, John Tagg, Liz Wells, Edward Weston, Peter Wollen.

**Liz Wells** teaches Media Arts in the School of Arts and Humanities, University of Plymouth. She is the editor of *Viewfindings: Women Photographers, Landscape and Environment* (1994) and *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (second edition, Routledge 2000), and co-editor of *Shifting Horizons: Women's Landscape Photography Now* (2000).

#### Photography

Cover image: 'Amishi 1993' by Dawoud Bey. Reproduced by kind permission of Dawoud Bey and Autograph ABP.

Design: Nick Shah

ISBN 0-415-24661-X



9 780415 246613



Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group

11 New Fetter Lane London EC4P 4EE  
29 West 35th Street New York NY 10001  
www.routledge.com  
Printed in Great Britain

the photography reader

liz wells, editor

Routledge

the photography reader

liz wells, editor

James  
Men

an overwhelming and oppressive world. A world that manifests itself fundamentally through the image is only a few steps from totalitarian manipulation. Images, the visual power of present-day capitalism, like the ritual constructions of ancient Egypt, are refined ways of inhibiting and crushing man. I have lived more than twenty years with these anxieties. I am convinced of the effectiveness of shared, collective work, and of the decisive importance of dialogue among people. I have learned much more by conversing, in animated exchanges and collective discussions, than in eyeing and reading the barrage of information that imposes on us a docile passivity. That is the lure of pseudo-reality.

The photographs in magazines and books, or blown-up on posters and billboards, have the limited power of a watchword, of visual phraseology. We do not commit ourselves by giving our word, we do not assume a real and considered position within the group. The image only incites us, it does not commit us. It customarily manipulates us. For better or for worse. The visual image has a limited value within a social and cultural system.

The Greek habit of dialogue continues to be a liberating principle; and when this dialogue becomes universal among men and bases itself on work, on coherent action – only then will the image be able to play a humanizing role.

The prestige of the visual image is out of all proportion. Photographs are ideas, memories, feelings, thought – and thought devotes itself only to death, to what is mechanical in life, to regularities or distortions. Life is first action, then words, and a photograph in death. It is an instantaneous truth that has already ceased to exist.

Photography has taught us not to twist ourselves around a discourse that should always be an open dialogue. It is what we have been, and not necessarily what we will be. We are ignorant of the future.

There are one, two, three paths . . .

## PART SEVEN

### The photographic gaze



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #21*, 1978. Courtesy the artist and Metro Pictures, New York.

### Introduction

Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves.'

(Berger 1972: 47)

**D**EBATES ABOUT 'THE GAZE' in photography date emerged from general feminist theoretical perceptions and debates of the 1970s/1980s. Discussing classic Hollywood narrative cinema Laura Mulvey drew upon psychoanalysis to argue that images of women on screen are constructed for the gratification of the male spectator. Freud's discussion of voyeurism is premised on his proposition that scopophilia, that is, the desire to look, is a primary human instinct. In patriarchal cultures the male I/eye is central within discourse and woman is 'other'; in psychoanalytic terms she is complexly construed as simultaneously the object of desire and a source of fears and insecurities. Mulvey noted that this objectification of women is reinforced cinematically both through the use of the camera to frame her image, and through the audience being drawn into identification with the point of view or 'look' of male characters within the fictional narrative (Mulvey 1975). It is this formulation that Victor Burgin acknowledges and draws upon in his discussion of 'the look' in photography (see Part 3, p. 130 ff.); he later suggests that the effect of the 'still' of the photograph, the permission for the eye to roam within the frame, and the apparent artlessness or naturalism of the image – by contrast with, for instance, an oil painting – also need taking into account (Burgin 1990). Thus, in considering what is sometimes termed 'the phallic gaze of the camera' in relation to the still image, we need to consider both specific characteristics of photographs and broader cultural attitudes.

Debates not only raised questions of gender. Discourses inter-sect. For instance, articulated with gendered relations of looking are discourses of age and ethnicity whereby the idealised female image is, almost without exception, young, slim, light-skinned. In photography, discussion focused on female representation, in particular, feminist critics argued that 'the nude' is a masquerade, a genre in art which essentially acts as an excuse for contemplating nakedness, however abstractly or pleasingly pictured. The female nude was thus reconceptualised as a patriarchal fetish, whilst the homo-eroticism of male nudity in European classical art was also acknowledged. In the first essay here, Roberta McGrath analyses the work of Edward Weston, drawing upon his own daybooks, as well as upon feminist interrogations of the ambiguity of woman as sign within patriarchal discourses.

Since the initial discussions of relations of power and powerlessness of the surveyor and the surveyed in terms of gender there has been concern to develop debates more complexly. As Anne Williams commented:

Relations of looking, whether socially or in visual representations, are governed by convention which unsurprisingly are structured according to the norms of masculinity and femininity – man the active subject of

the look, the looker, woman its passive object. A number of questions occur. How does the woman look? Is she forced to share the way of seeing of the man, or might there be a specifically female gaze? Can the man too be the object of the gaze? Can such a clear distinction be made between male and female, masculine and feminine?

(Williams 1987: 6)

Such debates have been extensively explored, including, for example, interrogating the male nude in photography (Cooper 1990; Pultz 1995); lively discussion of the work of Robert Mapplethorpe; lesbian looking and the performative (Boffin/Fraser 1991; Bright 1999). Debates were also explored through practice, for instance, in Cindy Sherman's work, which has been discussed as postmodern art and in terms of image and identity. In the essay reproduced here, Avgikos argues that Sherman's practice is also founded in feminist perceptions. Both Weston and Sherman are generally encountered in the context of the art gallery or art publications. The critical discussions have broader implications as questions of patriarchy, desire and voyeurism are equally relevant to analysis of commercial imagery including advertising, fashion, erotica and the pornographic.

Extending from debates about the gaze in terms of gender and sexuality, representation and desire have been interrogations of ways in which, historically and now the 'colonial gaze' implicates and reinforces privilege. Critiques of colonial attitudes not only brought into question the positivist pretensions of traditional anthropology, but also articulated issues of exoticism and otherness (Green 1984; Graham-Brown 1988). Post-colonial theory also encompasses critical practices in which ethnic, regional and cultural difference were differently pictured, re-positioning otherness. Here interrogations take into account subjective positions and perspectives on the part of the photographer or critic as well as questioning issues of representation. For instance, in the third essay included here, taking a single photograph of a family group of Native Americans in Canada as a starting point, Lippard dissects layers of past and present relations and assumptions, always noting her own reactions as viewer of the image.

Indeed, photographs can be conceptualised and productively examined as points of inter-section of multiplicities of gazes. Such an approach relates textual decodings to broader historical and cultural questions. In the final essay in this section, Lutz and Collins analyse examples from *National Geographic*, taking into account a regime of visibility whereby definitions of otherness mirror and contribute, often problematically, to conceptions of self (both in terms of individual subjectivity and in terms of nationhood).

### References and selected further reading

- Berger, J. (1972) *Ways of Seeing*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.  
 Bhabha, H. (1983) 'The Other Question: Homi K. Bhabha Reconsiders the Stereotype and Colonial discourse', *Screen* 24/6, pp. 18–36.

- Boffin, T. and Fraser, J. (1991) *Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs*. London: Pandora Press.
- Bright, D. (1998) *The Passionate Camera*. London: Routledge.
- Burgin, V. (1990) 'Perverse Space' in (1996) *In/Different Spaces*. Berkeley and LA: University of California Press.  
On 'the look' and theorising the photograph as a semiotic space.
- Chalfen, R. (1980) 'Tourist Photography', *Afterimage* 8, Summer, pp. 26–9.
- Cooper, E. (1990) *Fully Exposed: the Male Nude in Photography*. London: Routledge.
- Graham-Brown, S. (1988) *Images of Women: the Portrayal of Women in Photography of the Middle East 1860–1950*. London: Quartet Books.
- Green, D. (1984) 'Classified Subjects', *Ten.8* No.14, pp. 30–7.  
On anthropology and the ethnic other.
- Hall, S. (1997) 'The Spectacle of the "Other"' in S. Hall (ed.) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage and The Open University.  
On ethnic and sexual difference as represented in popular visual culture; includes examples from a range of historical archives.
- Mercer, K. (1994) 'Reading Racial Fetishism: The Photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe' in *Welcome to the Jungle*. London: Routledge.
- Mulvey, L. (1975) 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* 16/3 Autumn.  
Widely reprinted including in her (1989) *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London: Macmillan.
- Pultz, J. (1995) *Photography and the Body*. London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Urry, J. (1990) *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. London: Sage.  
Includes a definitional discussion of the term, 'colonial gaze', in relation to imperial histories and ethnic otherness.
- Williams, A. (1987) 'Re-viewing the Look: Photography and the Female Gaze', *Ten.8* No. 25, pp. 4–11.

### Bibliography of essays in Part Seven

- Avdikos, J. (1983) 'Cindy Sherman: Burning Down the House', *Artforum*, Jan. 1993.  
Reprinted in Liz Heron and Val Williams (eds) *Illuminations*. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Lippard, L. R. (1992) 'Doubletake: The Diary of a Relationship with an Image' in Lippard (ed.) *Partial Recall: Photographs of Native North Americans*. NY: New Press.  
Reprinted in Steven Yates (ed.) (1995) *Poetics of Space: A Critical Photographic Anthology*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Lutz, C. and Collins, J. (1991) 'The Photograph as an Intersection of Gazes: The Example of *National Geographic*' in Lucien Taylor (ed.) (1994) *Visualizing Theory: Selected Essays from V.A.R 1990–1994*. London and NY: Routledge.
- McGrath, R. (1987) 'Re-reading Edward Weston' in *Ten.8*, No. 27.

## Roberta McGrath

### RE-READING EDWARD WESTON

#### Feminism, photography and psychoanalysis

EDWARD WESTON IS, PERHAPS, UNUSUAL in that unlike many other photographers his work has been dominated by his own writing. In his diaries (published as *The Day Books* in 1961 and 1966<sup>1</sup>) he records his life through his photography, his sons, his appetite for women and health foods, and his dreams.

Despite this body of knowledge, his photographic work is most commonly accounted for in terms borrowed from modernist art criticism. Emphasis is placed firmly on formal qualities; a purifying of the visual vocabulary; and truth to the (photographic) medium. From such received and well-worn criticism we learn how Weston emerges from the murky depths of nineteenth-century pictorialism into the blinding light of twentieth-century modernism. The trajectory traced is that of a star. To quote Buckland and Beaton, Weston was 'a man ahead of his time',<sup>2</sup> who then arose from obscurity to fame via New York.

As the dominant ideological ruse of twentieth-century art criticism, modernism has functioned not only to suppress any concern for the wider social matrix of which all cultural production is part, but has also hidden issues of class and race and – crucially – those of gender.

For beneath all the fancy talk of the universal genderlessness of art, as women we know that such truths are meant for *men only*. Such knowledge is kept suppressed. How else could the illusion be preserved that the real meanings of art are universal, beyond the interests of any one class or sex?<sup>3</sup>

It is clear that a feminist art criticism cannot afford to have any truck with modernist discourse. Lucy Lippard has described the feminist contribution to modernism as precisely a *lack* of contribution.

It is therefore not accidental that in the title of this essay I place feminism before photography and psychoanalysis. The task which faces feminist practice is double-edged. On the one hand we must work to de-construct male paradigms, and on the other to construct female perspectives. Both are necessary if we are to change those traditions which have silenced and marginalised us.