

Glossary

KEY TERMS IN PHOTOGRAPHIC THEORY

aesthetic Pertaining to perception by the senses, and, by extension, to the appreciation or criticism of beauty, or of art. Thus 'aesthetics' references the criteria whereby we judge a work of art. Such criteria primarily include formal conventions (composition, tonal balance, and so on). Aesthetic philosophy is concerned with systems of principles for the appreciation of the beautiful, including the beautiful in art.

analogue A form of representation, such as a painting, a chemical photograph or video tape, in which the image is composed of a continuous variation of tone, light or some other signal. Similarly, a gramophone record is an analogue medium for reproducing sound or music. Analogue representation is based upon an unsegmented code while a digital medium is based upon a segmented one in which information is divided into discrete elements. The hands of a traditional (analogue) clock which continuously sweep its face, in contrast to a digital clock which announces each second in isolation, is a common example of the difference.

art Imagery created principally for exhibition in galleries, museums, or related contexts. In this book we use 'Art', to refer to 'high art' and related gallery and funding systems and institutions.

autographic A generic term applied to all of those processes - drawing and painting being the main ones - in which images are made by the action and coordination of the eye and hand, and without mechanical or electronic intervention. Autographic images are authored wholly by physical and intellectual skill, or as a general field of (artistic) practices.

carnavalesque A concept developed by the Russian theorist Bakhtin to describe the taste for crude laughter, bad taste, excessiveness (particularly of bodily functions) and offensiveness. It celebrates a temporary liberation from recognised rules and hierarchies and is tolerated because, once people have been allowed to let off steam, those norms can be re-established.

code Used here in the **semiotic** sense to refer to the way in which signs are systematically organised to create meaning - the Morse code is one simple example. Cultural codes determine the meanings conveyed by various cultural practices, say, the way people dress or eat their meals; photographic codes control the way meanings are conveyed in a photograph - for example, the details that give a news photograph its sense of authenticity, or a wedding photograph the right sort of dignity. Cultural codes are centrally examined in chapter 5. See **semiotics**

commodity Something which is bought and sold. The most commonly understood forms of commodity are goods which have been manufactured for the marketplace, but within capitalism other things have also been commodified. Natural resources and human labour have also been metamorphosed into commodities.

commodity culture A term increasingly used to describe the culture of industrial capitalism. Within today's culture everything, even the water we drink, has become a product to be bought and sold in the marketplace. Commodity culture also infers the naturalisation of this system to the extent that we cannot imagine another way of living.

construction This refers to the creating or forging of images and artefacts. In photography this particularly draws attention to the deliberate building of an image, rather than its taking from actuality, through **staging, fabrication, montage** and **image-text**. The term also reminds us of Soviet Constructivism, which emphasised the role of Art in the building of a new social order and used industrial elements, putting them together as work. It also draws upon theories of **deconstruction**.

deconstruction A radical poststructuralist theory, centred upon the work of French literary theorist, Jacques Derrida, which investigates the complexity and, ultimately indeterminable, play of meaning in texts. Derrida's focus is literary, but the analysis may be extended to the visual.

discourse The circulation of an idea or set of ideas. Photography is one of the many media - including newspapers, books, conversation, television programmes, and so on - which constitute contemporary discourses. See **ideology**

epistemology A branch of philosophy concerned to establish by what means knowledge is derived. It is concerned with questions such as what it is possible to know and how reliable is knowledge. In the present context, questions can be asked about what kind of knowledge images provide, and how they do it.

fantasies The term 'fantasy' usually refers to stories, daydreams and other fictions. It is sometimes distinguished from 'phantasy', which is a more technical term from

psychoanalysis referring to unconscious processes. This book draws on both meanings, especially when discussing writers and photographers influenced by psychoanalytic thought. See **unconscious**

fetishism The substitution of a part for the whole; or use of a thing to stand in for powerful but repressed forces. In Freudian theory fetishism refers to the displacement and disavowal of sexuality. Fascination or desire are simultaneously denied, and indulged through looking at an object or image which stands in for that which is forbidden. Thus a photographic image of a fragment of a woman's body may stand in for woman as object of sexual desire. See **objectification, psychoanalysis, voyeurism**

formalism The prioritisation of concern with form rather than content. Focus on composition and on the material nature of any specific medium.

gaze This has become a familiar term to describe a particular way of looking at, perceiving and understanding the world. It was brought into currency by writers on cinema, concerned to analyse the response of the audience as voyeurs of the action on the screen. The voyeuristic gaze is used to describe the way in which men often look at women, as well as the way in which Western tourists look at the non-Western world. More recently, discussions have focused on the implications of a 'female gaze'.

hegemony Dominance maintained through the continuous negotiation of consent by those in power in respect of their right to rule. Such consent is underpinned by the possibility of coercion. See **ideology**

heuristic An educational strategy in which students (or researchers) are trained to find things out for themselves.

historicisation Used (in chapter 7) to refer to the process by which events or other phenomena are given a place in an historical narrative. Photography may be defined by the position that it occupies in a larger historical schema or an unfolding over time of technologies and practices.

identity A person's identity is their sense of self and the different contexts within which that selfhood is constructed. It can never be given one simple, coherent description. For example, the national identity into which one is born may well clash with the cultural identity of the community in which one chooses to live; or a gay identity, based on sexuality, may clash with a religious identity based on strict rules governing sexual behaviour.

ideology This term is commonly used in two differing but interconnected ways. In this book it is used primarily to refer to a system of bodies of ideas which may be abstract, but which arise from a particular set of class interests. The term is also commonly used to refer to ideas which are illusory, whose purpose is to mask social and economic relations which actually obtain. For instance, the idea that children need their mother at home (which was common in the 1950s) masked the economic relations of patriarchy whereby married women were rendered financially dependent upon their husbands.

index One of three kinds of sign defined by American semiotician, C.S. Peirce. The indexical sign is based in cause and effect, for example, the footprint in wet sand indicates or traces a recent presence. The other two types of sign are the iconic (that which is based in resemblance), and the symbolic, or sign proper (that which is entirely conventional).

indexicality This term refers to a cluster of qualities and ideas about photographs which are associated with their indexical nature (see **index** above); in other words, the manner in which a photograph can be understood to be a chemical trace or imprint, via the

passage of light, of an existing (or once existing) physical object. For example, ideas that photographs are closely related to memory, the past, presence and absence, and death. Or, that they are tangible evidence of a thing's existence. A further meaning is that the 'taking' of a photograph can be thought of as 'pointing' to something in the world. See **semiotics**

mimetic representation Based upon imitation, upon showing rather than telling, a concept central to traditional post-Renaissance art theory. See **representation**

modernism In everyday terms 'modern' is often used to refer to contemporary design, media or forms of social organisation (as in 'the modern family'). But 'modern' also frequently refers to the emphasis upon modernisation from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, and, more particularly, to Modern movements in art and design from the turn of the twentieth century. It is essentially a relative concept (modern by contrast with. . .); its precise usage depends upon particular contexts. In this book we distinguish between three terms: *modernism*, sets of progressive ideas in which the modern is emphasised and welcomed; and *modernity*, social, technological and cultural developments. The term '*Modernism*' is used in chapter 6 to refer to particular emphasis on form and materiality in modern art. Throughout the book a distinction is made between the modern, and the postmodern or contemporary. See **postmodern**

objectification It is often argued that photography objectifies people by turning them into things or objects to be looked at thereby disempowering them. See **voyeurism**

ontological Ontology is a branch of philosophy. It concerns the study of how things exist and the nature of various kinds of existence. It involves the logical investigation of the different ways in which things of different types (physical objects, numbers, abstract concepts, etc.) are thought to exist.

the Other A concept used within **psychoanalysis** and **identity** theory, and within post-colonial theory, to signify ways in which members of dominant groups derive a sense of sense of self-location partly through defining other groups as different or 'Other'. Thus, within patriarchy, the male is taken as the norm, and woman as 'Other'; that is, not male. Similarly, in racist ideologies, whiteness is taken for granted, therefore blackness is seen as Other.

See identity, **psychoanalysis**

phenomenology A philosophical movement founded by Edmund Husserl in the early twentieth century in which the focus is on perception and consciousness, upon what the senses and the mind notice.

polysemic A property of signs is that they can have many meanings, depending on their context and the interests of their readers. Hence the frequent use of captions, or words within the image, to help anchor meaning.

positivism As is implied in the roots of the term itself, positivism stresses that which is definite or positive,

i.e. factually based. Positivism, with its associated emphasis upon logical deduction and empirical research methods, including the social survey, is associated with the Victorian period in Britain, although its roots lie in earlier, eighteenth-century philosophy.

postmodern Literally 'after the modern', the postmodern represents a critique of the limitations of modernism with its emphasis upon progress and, in the case of the arts, upon the materiality of the medium of communication. Philosophically, postmodernism has been defined as marking the collapse of certainty, a loss of faith in explanatory systems, and a sense of dislocation consequent on the global nature of communication systems and the loss of a clear relation between signs and their referents.

poststructuralist At its most simple, this means 'after Structuralism', also implying critical thinking that contests and goes beyond Structuralist theory and method, rejecting the idea that all meaning is fundamentally systematic. In this book it is used to refer to a group of theories which stress the way that the human 'self' and the meaning made of the world is constructed through the languages (including visual languages) which we use. Poststructuralist thinking challenges the idea that there is a fixed and stable human subject who can have certain knowledge. See **identity, structuralism**

private and public spheres We lead our lives within two distinct modes, a 'private' sphere, which is made up of personal and kinship relations and domestic life, and a 'public' sphere, made up of economic relations, work, money-making and politics. The 'private' sphere tends to be controlled by moral and emotional constraints, the 'public' sphere by public laws and regulations. This distinction, although contested by feminist writers, underlies the way the terms 'private' and 'public' are used in this book, especially in chapter 3.

psychoanalysis The therapeutic method established by Sigmund Freud, which involves seeking access to traumatic experiences held in the unconscious mind. See **repression, unconscious**

representation This refers to ways in which individuals, groups or ideas are depicted. Although this seems obvious, the use of the term usually signals acknowledgement that images are never 'innocent', but always have their own history, cultural contexts and specificity, and therefore carry **ideological** implications.

repression Unpleasant or unwelcome thoughts, emotions, sensations are 'repressed' when they are forced into the **unconscious**. The phrase 'the return of the repressed' means that such emotions surface into the conscious world in different form. See **psychoanalysis, unconscious**

reproduction The production by machine of many identical copies. The process of mass production when applied, through photography, print technology,

and electronic recording to the copying of visual images or music. As this process has become increasingly sophisticated, the reproduction of original works of art has reached a stage where the reproduction is, for almost all intents and purposes, as good as the original. Where it does not, and cannot, replace the original autographic work is in bearing the traces and marks of its maker. Such originals have been spoken of as having an 'aura' (Benjamin) due to our sense of their being unique and of having a history. There are, broadly, two schools of thought about the impact of reproduction on original images. One deplores the 'cheapening' of unique originals through reproduction; the other celebrates the process as a way of democratising visual and aural culture. Whatever the case, photography is a technology which has reproducibility built in. A negative is produced precisely to be able to make infinite numbers of prints, each, in principle, being identical. The phenomenon of the 'artist' photographer's proof, or 'original' print, is therefore an ironic twist and an example of the political economy triumphing over technological determinations. Digital technology now renders distinctions between 'original' and 'reproduction' irrelevant.

scopophilia The human drive to look or observe; in Freudian theory the fundamental instinct leading to **voyeurism**. See **fetishism**. **Voyeurism**, **semiology** see **semiotics**

semiotics The science of signs, first proposed in 1916 by linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, but developed in particular in the work of Roland Barthes (France) and C.S. Peirce (USA). Semiotics - also referred to as semiology - is premised upon the contention that all human communication is founded in an assemblage of signs - verbal, aural and visual - which is essentially systematic. Such sign systems are viewed as largely or entirely - conventional; that is, consequent not upon 'natural' relations between words or images and that to which they refer, but upon arbitrary relations established through cultural convention. The sign proper has two aspects, signifier and signified. The signifier is the material manifestation, the word, or pictorial elements. The signified is the associated mental concept; that is, conventionally associated with the specific signifier. While separable for analytic purposes, in practice the signifier and the signified always go together. See **code**

social and economic history History may be written in many ways. Economic history deals with changes in work patterns and the ways in which human societies have sustained themselves. Social history deals with the organisation of societies - marriage, education, child-rearing and the like. A history of photography is normally seen as part of art history or, more broadly, of cultural history. In chapter 3 it is suggested that we can understand personal photography better if we consider it within a social and economic context. Chapter 5 takes the social and the economic as the primary context for understanding commercial uses of photography.

straight photography Emphasis upon direct documentary typical of the Modern period in American photography. E.g see the work of **Walker Evans**

structuralism Twentieth-century theoretical movement within which stress is laid upon analysis of objects, cultural artefacts and communication processes, in terms of systems of relations rather than as entities in themselves.

technological determinism This refers to the proposition that technological invention alone determines new cultural formations. The notion has been criticised primarily on the grounds that new technologies arise from research enterprises driven largely by economic imperatives and perceived social or political needs. Technological developments may be seen as an effect of cultural desires as well as a major influence within cultural change.

teleology Arguments and explanations in which the nature of something is explained by the purpose or 'end' which it appears to have. In this view photography, and then cinema, may be understood as being caused by a human desire to achieve ever more comprehensive illusions of reality and are seen as striving towards a future achievement.

unconscious In psychoanalysis, that which is repressed from the individual's conscious awareness yet gives rise to impulses which influence our behaviour. Freud insisted that human action always derives from mental processes of which we cannot be aware. See **repression, psychoanalysis**

voyeurism Sexual stimulation obtained through looking. In photography voyeurism refers to the image as spectacle used for the gratification of the (hitherto construed as male, heterosexual) spectator. See **fetishism, objectification, psychoanalysis**

For a comprehensive definition and discussion of technical terms in photography see: Baldwin, G. (1991) **Looking at Photographs: A Guide to Technical Terms**, California: The Paul Getty Museum and London: British Museum Press.

For fuller discussion of various contributions to twentieth-century debates, including Barthes, Benjamin, Foucault and Freud see: Lechte, John (1994) **Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers**, London: Routledge.