

isms

UNDERSTANDING PHOTOGRAPHY

EMMA LEWIS

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Photography is structured by technological innovation, artistic movements, its cultural role as a documentarian and storyteller, and its function in commercial contexts, all of which act as categories for the practice of different photographers. This book is an accessible guide to these classifications.

Since its invention in the early 19th century, photography has proved itself to be a restless medium – far more so than any other. From the foundational inventions of these early years (like William Henry Fox Talbot's method for producing prints from negatives, or Eadweard Muybridge's technique for recording motion) to the game-changing innovations of the 20th and 21st centuries (such as the launch of colour film, and digital and front-facing cameras), chemistry and technology are constantly transforming the very nature of photography – and therefore our relationship with it.

Throughout this evolution, photography has been ascribed arguably its most important, and certainly its most contested, role – as a witness to current events. It has also been relied upon to communicate political ideas, and shaped by groups of photographers with firm ideas about what their medium is or should be used for. And, just like painting, drawing or sculpture, it has been integral to some of the major movements in modern art.

The structure of the book reflects how all of these different facets have overlapped or diverged over the course of time. While there are movements, such as Surrealism, which can be pinpointed to a specific place or moment, there are also themes like Still Life that span history and geographies. These themes are explored here from the key period when they were first introduced, especially productive or influential. Other

approaches that have gone through very different iterations, such as conflict photography, appear in two or three different places throughout the book to illustrate the ways in which they have shifted in accordance with culture, industry and technology. Some chapter titles are names coined by the photographers involved, some simply describe the approach, and others – Industrialism, Subjectivism, Satirism, Düsseldorf Deadpan and Fictional Narrativism – have been coined for this book to pithily sum up a style or approach.

It is important to point out that the photographers included in each chapter are necessarily representative but, like photography itself, their practices are fluid and not defined solely by the category in which they appear here. This publication is, therefore, not an exhaustive summary, but an essential guide, offering the key information necessary to understand and enjoy the medium that permeates almost every aspect of our lives.

THE FOUR TYPES OF ISM

1 MOMENTS

e.g. The First Photograph; Motionism

MM

These chapters signpost the key events that have shaped photography's history. This includes technological developments. It also includes the types of photography that are understood here through the specific cultural and historical moment in which they existed; for example, Mexican Modernism. Key exhibitions, like 'The Family of Man', are also featured under this header to reflect how a particular assembly of photographers captured the *zeitgeist*.

2 THEMES

e.g. The Studio Portrait; Still Life

TH

These chapters focus on photography that is understood primarily – though not exclusively – through the subject matter that it depicts. Some, like *Survey*, have fulfilled a specific purpose at a particular time; others, like *The Nude*, are ongoing subjects within fine-art photography. The photographers in these chapters are rarely associated solely with only one genre, however; many are also associated with different artistic movements, and they work in a variety of styles.

3 MOVEMENTS

e.g. Dadaism; New Formalism

MV

These chapters encompass groups of artists who either coined a term themselves to label their practice or had the word suggested (at the time or retrospectively) by a critic; they are the 'isms' from which this book takes its name. Some are specific to photography, others are part of broader artistic movements. Often they have a manifesto or essay in which the artists' shared goals and processes are clarified. A number of the artists labelled with a particular ism by critics might have rejected the term themselves, but it has remained in common use as a description of their work.

4 APPROACHES

e.g. Photojournalism; Diarism

AP

This is the most common type of ism in the book. Like themes, approaches necessarily do not belong to specific places or moments in time. They are broadly classified according to their treatment of a particular subject matter, as well as, or instead of, the subject matter itself. Each chapter under this header falls under one of the broader categories of reportage, documentary, commercial or conceptual photography.

TH Symbols are used to distinguish between the four different types of 'ism' outlined in this introduction: key moments **MM**; themes **TH**; movements **MM**; and approaches **AP**. Some chapters, or 'isms', could arguably be understood by more than one of these, but this book has used the most relevant header.

INTRODUCTION Each chapter opens with a brief summary to explain the key features of the moment, theme, movement or approach.

KEY PHOTOGRAPHERS Up to five key photographers are listed in each chapter. The list could often be extended, but exploring their work would give you a comprehensive understanding of style, approach or moment in time discussed.

KEY WORDS These are words taken from the main definition text that relate closely to the 'ism' and are often repeatedly used in explanations of the affiliated photographers' work.

MAIN DEFINITION This describes the key ideas, methods and photographers' practices in more depth. It gives a brief overview of the historical, cultural and technological context that relates to the moment, theme, movement or approach being explained, including key exhibitions, publications, and innovations in photographic products and processes.

Conflict & Surveillance

TH

Conflict & Surveillance

The rise of surveillance and the changed nature of conflict have prompted new photographic application. Often creating their images by hijacking the technologies they are investigating, photographers reveal what hidden systems look like and how they permeate our lives.

EDMUND CLARK (1962-), **RAPHAEL DALLAPORTA** (1980-), **MISHKA HENNER** (1976-), **TREVOR PAGLEN** (1974-), **DONOVAN WYLLIE** (1971-)

data; counter-terrorism; intelligence gathering; investigation; satellite

Post 9/11, the mechanisms behind conflict and counter-terrorism activity, and concerns about how surveillance technologies are an accepted part of life, have become a major subject in

photography. Some photographic series concentrate on hidden sites. Edmund Clark, for instance, has documented camp complexes, naval bases and detainees' homes in Guantanamo Bay, and terrorist control centres to which he was granted access. Others reveal what is in plain sight, but taken for granted, as in Donovan Wyllie's photographs of military watchtowers in England, Ireland and the Arctic, which illustrate how structures of national defence imprint themselves upon the landscape. Both employ the deapjan style associated with the New Topographics photographers.

Trevor Paglen seeks to represent the facets of mass surveillance and data collection that do not have an obvious or tangible form. In 2014, he located and photographed the buildings that housed

the top-five US intelligence agencies, and made his images freely available online. The buildings may look like any other civic institutions, but by bringing the images into the public domain he seeks to create what he has called a 'visual and cultural vocabulary' around surveillance, making it seem less of an abstract concept.

Collaboration – with scientists, human rights activists or journalists, among others – is a major characteristic of this genre. So too is investigation. Paradoxically, many photographers make use of the very surveillance technology on which they are commenting in order to create their work. Paglen has used commercial satellite technology to track classified US drones, while Mishka Henner has used Google Street View to help locate the overt and covert sites that are the focus of his series, *Fifty-One US Military Outposts* (2014).

These technologies can yield beautiful results. In Henner's *Dutch Landscapes* (2011) he captures the colourful shapes that the Dutch government use to censor sites on Google's satellite imagery, while Paglen's images from space possess an abstract quality sometimes referred to as an 'astronomical sublime'. For Raphael Dallaporta, surveillance technology offered a means of making alternative representations of a country at war: in *Ruins* (2011) he used a pacifist drone to create striking aerial studies of landscapes in Afghanistan that represent important archaeological sites.

EDMUND CLARK
Camp One: Exercise Cage from Guantanamo: if the Light Goes Out, 2009
Herald and Museum, London

Shot straight-on, and devoid of people or action, Clark's image concentrates attention on the structure of one of the planes that detainees must spend countless hours of their time. The mesh ceiling that takes up a third of the horizontal plane emphasises that this is a place of oppression.



TREVOR PAGLEN
STS-1 and Two Unidentified Spacecraft over Carson City (Space Tracking and Surveillance System, USA-253), 2010. From The Other Night Sky 2007-11

Installation: American Art Museum, Washington DC
Paglen used data produced by amateur satellite observers to map secret American satellites and space debris on the earth's orbit, which he then shot using telescopes and digital and large-format cameras.

OTHER WORKS

RAPHAEL DALLAPORTA
Ruins, Season 1, from *Ruins*, 2011
Museum Neoplastic Venice, Chateau de Latour, France

MISHKA HENNER
Dutch Landscapes, *Concealed*, *Diometric*, from *Dutch Landscapes*, 2011
Centre Pompidou, Paris

DONOVAN WYLLIE
OP-1a Forward Operating Base, *Masum Ghaz*, *Kandahar Province, Afghanistan*, 2010, printed 2015, from *Outposts*, 2010
National Gallery of Canada



S Survey, War Reportage, New Topographics, Post-Internet

T The Nude; Still Life; Postwar Colour; Advertising & Fashion; New Formalism

KEY WORKS

Each chapter is illustrated with one or two works by Key Photographers. These are selected from publicly accessible art collections. Individual photographs are very often made as part of a larger body of work, which might exist as a series of prints, be published as a photobook, or both. This information is noted in the caption that accompanies the image.

OTHER WORKS

This is a supplementary list of works that also relate to the chapter subject. As with the Key Works, the larger body of work – series or photobook – is noted in addition to the name of the individual photograph, if relevant (though the collection will not necessarily have all of the photographs in that series). Photographs are also by their nature reproducible, which means that the same photograph might be held in several different collections. Those listed in this book have been selected based on various factors, including which have the largest holdings of works by that photographer overall, or have the most instructive online resources on that work.



SEE ALSO

This is a list of other chapters in the book that relate to the 'ism' under discussion and perhaps share a working process, stylistic tendency or concept.



DON'T SEE

These 'isms' feature a key idea or process that contradicts that under discussion. Their conceptual approach or precepts might be antithetical, or aesthetically they might be very different.

Other resources included in this book

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHERS

All of the photographers included in this book are indexed alphabetically at the back. The 'ism', or 'isms', with which they are associated in the book are noted, as well as their birth and death dates.

GLOSSARY OF USEFUL TERMS

Terms mentioned in the book that are not commonly understood are listed in a glossary at the back, including brief explanations of some of the main photographic processes discussed.

LIST OF COLLECTIONS

A list of the major museums, galleries and other collections mentioned in the Key Works and Other Works sections of each chapter, organised by country. Many of these list their collections online, with images and other resources for further exploration and research.

CHRONOLOGY OF ISMS


This is a timeline of all of the different 'isms' explained in the book, from the very first permanent photograph in 1826 to the burgeoning movements of New Formalism and Post-Internet photography. The start and endpoints of 'isms' can often be debated: even movements that declared an official ending often had a legacy beyond this, while approaches like photojournalism began in different places at different times. The timeline here marks the widely accepted moment when an 'ism' was established and when it declined. For thematic categories that have no set endpoint, such as The Nude, the timeline marks the core period on which the chapter focuses.




Dictyota dichotoma
in the young state, &
in fruit.


I

THE
INVENTION OF
PHOTOGRAPHY
AND THE
RECORDING OF
THE WORLD
1826–1910s

 Photography is the result of three processes announced in the 1820s and 1830s that made it possible to record, fix and reproduce an image. The first in-camera photograph was a unique, permanent image made with a camera obscura.

 ANNA ATKINS (1799–1871); LOUIS-JACQUES-MANDÉ DAGUERRE (1787–1851); HUMPHRY DAVY (1778–1829); JOSEPH NICÉPHORE NIÉPCE (1765–1833); WILLIAM HENRY FOX TALBOT (1800–77); THOMAS WEDGWOOD (1777–1805)

 camera obscura; heliography; photogenic drawing; positive; unique

 First steps towards the photographic image were made by Thomas Wedgwood and Humphry Davy, who in 1802 published accounts of their experiments with recording light. The findings that launched photography came later, beginning with the work of inventor Joseph Nicéphore Niépce.

Interested in lithography, Niépce sought a technique to supplement his professed lack of skill as an engraver. In 1816 he experimented with placing sensitised paper into the back of a camera obscura, an optical device that projects images. He found that where light hit the paper it would darken, creating a negative impression. But the results were only temporary: the paper turned completely black in daylight.

Six years later, Niépce discovered that putting a solution of bitumen and Judea, a mineral spirit, onto the paper would permanently fix the image. The spirit hardened on contact with the light, and was commonly used in lithography. He called this invention heliography, meaning ‘light drawing’, after *helios*, the Greek word for sun. His reproduction made by placing an

engraving of Pope Pius VII in direct contact with sensitised paper is considered to be the first made from a photographic process.

In 1826 or 1827, Niépce created the world’s first in-camera photograph by placing a pewter plate coated with the bitumen preparation inside a camera obscura. After leaving the camera in a window for at least eight hours, he rinsed the plate with a lavender oil solution to reveal a direct positive (and therefore unique) permanent image of the outdoor scene. Niépce’s partnership with expert in the camera obscura Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, from 1829, contributed to the first commercially viable photographic process. He died in 1833 before it was fully refined, though, and it was announced to the world in 1839 as the daguerreotype.

News of Daguerreotypy spurred William Henry Fox Talbot to announce the findings of his own experiments. His hopes to fix the image projected by a camera obscura led to the 1833 discovery of what he called the ‘photogenic drawing’ (a photogram): an image made without a camera by placing objects directly onto paper coated with a light-sensitive silver chloride solution that darkens on exposure to sunlight. John Hershel’s 1842 invention of the cyanotype followed the same basic principle, but he used a solution that turned bright Prussian blue upon exposure. Botanist Anna Atkins was the first to realise the potential of this for recording plant specimens; her volume *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions* was published serially between 1843 and 1853. By that point, Talbot had already announced his next discovery, the calotype – the first negative-positive process.



† JOSEPH NICÉPHORE NIÉPCE

View from the Window at Le Gras
(*Point de vue du Gras*), c 1826–27

Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin

This is the earliest surviving photograph made in a camera. Despite the blurriness of the pewter plate, it is just possible to see the rooftops of the outbuildings of Niépce's family estate in Le Gras, France. After decades in obscurity, it was eventually located by photo-historians Alison and Helmut Gernsheim in 1952.

ANNA ATKINS (see p10)

Dictyota dichotoma in the Young State and in Fruit,
from *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*, 1843–53

J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Atkins had experimented with various methods before trying the cyanotype process. Because this could enable multiple prints, she was able to make more than a dozen copies of her volume on British algae, considered to be the first book illustrated with photographs.

OTHER WORKS

ANNA ATKINS

Ceylon, British Ferns, from Cyanotypes of British and Foreign Ferns, c 1853

J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

ANONYMOUS

Shark Egg Case, c 1840–45

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

JOHN HERSCHEL

Still in my Teens, 1838

Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin

WILLIAM HENRY FOX TALBOT

Leaves on a Stem, c 1838


Victoria and Albert Museum, London




Daguerreotypy;
Negative-Positivism



Motionism; Early Street; Futurism;
Photojournalism; Conceptualism

 A daguerreotype is a unique, highly detailed, positive image on a silvered copper plate, made by a chemical and technical process perfected by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre. It was the first commercially successful means of producing photographs and the main process in use throughout the 1840s and early 1850s.

 ANTOINE CLAUDET (1797–1867); ROBERT CORNELIUS (1809–93); LOUIS-JACQUES-MANDÉ DAGUERRE (1787–1851); JOSEPH NICÉPHORE NIÉPCE (1765–1833); JOHN ADAMS WHIPPLE (1822–91)

 commercial; detail; fragile; portrait; unique

 In 1829, artist and theatre set designer Louis Daguerre and inventor Joseph Nicéphore Niépce formed a working partnership to bring together Niépce's pioneering methods of recording light and fixing a permanent image, known as 'heliography', with Daguerre's expertise with the camera obscura that he developed as inventor of the diorama – an illusionary three-dimensional stage device. Following Niépce's death in 1833, Daguerre continued alone, arriving four years later at a successful method of making a permanent recording. One of his most important findings was the 'latent image': exposing



← ANTOINE CLAUDET
Portrait of Girl in a Blue Dress, c 1854

J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Claudet hired portrait miniature painters to add jewel-like tones and decorative backdrops to his photographs. Here, the tones complement the young sitter's features, while sensitive application means that colour does not obscure the plate's lustre.

→ LOUIS-JACQUES-MANDÉ DAGUERRE (*overleaf*)

Boulevard du Temple, 1838
Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich

The daguerreotype's ability to reproduce fine detail is evident here in the texture of the cobbled streets and in the crisp lines of rooftops and edges of buildings. This plate took more than 10 minutes to expose: too long to register the traffic and bustling crowds, though the blurry figure of a shoe-shiner can just be made out.