

Semiotics for Beginners

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Abduction:** This is a term used by Peirce to refer to a form of inference (alongside deduction and induction) by which we treat a signifier as an instance of a rule from a familiar code, and then infer what it signifies by applying that rule.
- **Aberrant decoding:** Eco's term referring to decoding a text by means of a different code from that used to encode it. See also: Codes, Decoding, Encoding and decoding model of communication
- **Absent signifiers:** Signifiers which are absent from a text but which (by contrast) nevertheless influence the meaning of a signifier actually used (which is drawn from the same paradigm set). Two forms of absence have specific labels in English: that which is 'conspicuous by its absence' and that which 'goes without saying'. See also: Deconstruction, Paradigm, Paradigmatic analysis, Signifier
- **Address, modes of:** See Modes of address
- **Addresser and addressee:** Jakobson used these terms to refer to what, in transmission models of communication, are called the 'sender' and the 'receiver' of a message. Other commentators have used them to refer more specifically to constructions of these two roles within the text, so that addresser refers to an authorial persona, whilst addressee refers to an 'ideal reader'. See also: Codes, Encoding and decoding model of communication, Enunciation, Functions of signs, Ideal reader, Transmission models of communication
- **Aesthetic codes:** Codes within the various expressive arts (poetry, drama, painting, sculpture, music, etc.) or expressive and poetic functions which are evoked within any kind of text. These are codes which tend to celebrate connotation and diversity of interpretation in

contrast to logical or scientific codes which seek to suppress these values. See also: Codes, Connotation, Poetic function, Realism, aesthetic, Representational codes

- Aesthetic realism: See Realism, aesthetic
- Affective fallacy: The so-called 'affective fallacy' (identified by literary theorists who regarded meaning as residing within the text) involves relating the meaning of a text to its readers' interpretations - which these theorists saw as a form of relativism. Few contemporary theorists regard this as a 'fallacy' since most accord due importance to the reader's purposes. To regard such purposes as irrelevant to the meaning of a text is to fall victim to the 'literalist fallacy' - a textual determinist stance. See also: Decoding, Interpretative community, Literalism, Meaning, Textual determinism
- 'Always-already given': See Priorism
- Analogical signs: Analogical signs (such as paintings in a gallery or gestures in face-to-face interaction) are signs in a form in which they are perceived as involving graded relationships on a continuum rather than as discrete units (in contrast to digital signs). Note, however, that digital technology can transform analogical signs into digital reproductions which may be perceptually indistinguishable from the 'originals'. See also: Digital signs
- Analogue oppositions (antonyms): Pairs of oppositional signifiers in a paradigm set representing categories with comparative grading on the same implicit dimension and which together define a complete universe of discourse (relevant ontological domain), e.g. good/bad where 'not good' is not necessarily 'bad' and vice versa (Leymore). See also: Binary oppositions, Converse oppositions
- Analysis
- Content: See Content analysis
- Diachronic: See Diachronic analysis
- Ideological: See Ideology
- Paradigmatic: See Paradigmatic analysis
- Poststructuralist: See Deconstruction
- Structuralist: See Structuralism

- Synchronic: See Synchronic analysis
- Syntagmatic: See Syntagmatic analysis
- Anchorage: Roland Barthes introduced the concept of anchorage. Linguistic elements in a text (such as a caption) can serve to 'anchor' (or constrain) the preferred readings of an image (conversely the illustrative use of an image can anchor an ambiguous verbal text). See also: Preferred reading
- Anti-essentialism: See Essentialism
- Anti-realism: See Realism, aesthetic
- Arbitrariness: Saussure emphasized that the relationship between the linguistic signifier and signified is arbitrary: the link between them is not necessary, intrinsic or 'natural'. He was denying extralinguistic influences (external to the linguistic system). Philosophically, the relationship is ontologically arbitrary: initially, it makes no difference what labels we attach to things, but of course signs are not socially or historically arbitrary (after a sign has come into historical existence we cannot arbitrarily change signifiers). Saussure focused on linguistic signs, whilst Peirce dealt more explicitly with signs in any medium, and noted that the relationship between signifiers and their signifieds varies in arbitrariness - from the radical arbitrariness of symbolic signs, via the perceived similarity of signifier to signified in iconic signs, to the minimal arbitrariness of indexical signs. Many semioticians argue that all signs are to some extent arbitrary and conventional (and thus subject to ideological manipulation). See also: Conventionality, Design features of language, Modes of relationship, Motivation and constraint, Primacy of the signifier, Relative autonomy
- Articulation of codes: Articulation refers to structural levels within semiotic codes. Semiotic codes have either single articulation, double articulation or no articulation. A semiotic code which has 'double articulation' (as in the case of verbal language) can be analysed into two abstract structural levels: a higher level called 'the level of first articulation' and a lower level - 'the level of second articulation'. See also: Double articulation, First articulation, Relative autonomy, Second articulation, Single articulation, Unarticulated codes
- Associative relations: This was Saussure's term for what later came to be called paradigmatic relations. The 'formulaic' associations of linguistic signs include synonyms,

antonyms, similar-sounding words and words of similar grammatical function. See also: Paradigm

- Asynchronous communication: Asynchronous communication is communication other than in 'real-time' - feedback is significantly delayed rather than potentially immediate. This feature ties together the presence or absence of the producer(s) of the text and the technical features of the medium. Asynchronous interpersonal communication is primarily through verbal text (e.g. letters, fax, e-mail). Asynchronous mass communication is primarily through verbal text, graphics and/or audio-visual media (e.g. film, television, radio, newspapers, magazines etc.). See also: Communication, Synchronous communication
- Audience determinism: See Social determinism
- Authorial intention: See Intentional fallacy
- Autonomy, relative: See Relative autonomy
- Axes of selection and combination: See Combination, axis of, Selection, axis of
- Bar: 'The bar' is a term used by some theorists to refer to a) the horizontal line in Saussure's model of the sign which acts as a boundary marker between the levels of the signifier and the signified and/or b) the virgule - a punctuation mark (in computer jargon called a 'forward slash') in the form of a slanted line linking and dividing paired terms in binary oppositions (e.g. active/passive). Poststructuralist theorists criticize the clear distinction which the Saussurean bar seems to suggest between the signifier and the signified. Note that in Saussure's model the signified is shown over the signifier but that Jacques Lacan placed the signifier over the signified with the intention of highlighting the primacy of the signifier. Some writers represent binary oppositions using a colon thus: old : new (rather than old/new). See also: Binary oppositions, Deconstruction, Primacy of the signifier, Relative autonomy
- Binarism/dualism: The ontological division of a domain into two discrete categories (dichotomies) or polarities. 'Binarism' is a more loaded term which critics have applied to what they regard as the obsessive dualism of structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss and Jakobson. Hjelmslev argued against binarism. Derridean deconstruction demonstrates the inescapability of binary logic. See also: Binary oppositions, Deconstruction, Ontology
- Binary oppositions (or digital oppositions): Pairs of mutually-exclusive signifiers in a paradigm set representing categories which are logically opposed and which together define a

complete universe of discourse (relevant ontological domain), e.g. alive/not-alive. In such oppositions each term necessarily implies its opposite and there is no middle term. See also: Analogue oppositions, The bar, Binarism, Converse oppositions, Markedness, Cognitive universalism, Valorization

- Biographism: See Reductionism
- Bracketting the referent: See Referent
- Bricolage: Lévi-Strauss's term for the appropriation of pre-existing materials which are ready-to-hand (and in the process contributing to the construction of one's own identity) is widely-used to refer to the intertextual authorial practice of adopting and adapting signs from other texts. See also: Intertextuality
- Broadcast codes: Fiske's term for codes which are shared by members of a mass audience and which are learned informally through experience rather than deliberately or institutionally. In contrast to narrowcast codes, broadcast codes are structurally simpler, employing standard conventions and 'formulas' - so they can generate clichés and stereotypes. They are more repetitive and predictable - 'overcoded' - having what information theorists call a high degree of redundancy. In such codes several elements serve to emphasize and reinforce preferred meanings. Following Bernstein, they are controversially described by some theorists as 'restricted codes'. Broadcast codes are heavily intertextual, although the intertextuality is normally transparent. See also: Codes, Intertextuality, Narrowcast codes, Open and closed texts, Symbolic capital, Textual codes
- Capital, symbolic: See Symbolic capital
- Categories: marked and unmarked: See Markedness
- Chain: See Syntagm
- Channel: A sensory mode utilized by a medium (e.g. visual, auditory, tactile). Available channel(s) are dictated by the technical features of the medium in which a text appears. The sensory bias of the channel limits the codes for which it is suitable. See also: Medium, Non-neutrality of medium, Translatability
- Cinematic codes: See Filmic codes

- Circles or schools, linguistic/semiotic: See Copenhagen school, Moscow school, Paris school, Prague school, Tartu school
- Circuit of communication: Stuart Hall's term for several linked but distinctive 'moments' in processes of mass communication - production, circulation, distribution/consumption and reproduction. See also: Encoding and decoding model of communication, Mass communication
- Classification of signs: See Modes of relationship
- Codes: One of the fundamental concepts in semiotics. Semiotic codes are procedural systems of related conventions for correlating signifiers and signifieds in certain domains. Codes provide a framework within which signs make sense: they are interpretative devices which are used by interpretative communities. They can be broadly divided into social codes, textual codes and interpretative codes. Some codes are fairly explicit; others (dubbed 'hermeneutics' by Guiraud) are much looser. Within a code there may also be 'subcodes': such as stylistic and personal subcodes (or idiolects). See also: Aesthetic codes, Articulation of codes, Broadcast codes, Codification, Dominant code, Filmic codes, Ideological codes, Interpretative codes, Interpretative community, Narrowcast codes, Negotiated code, Oppositional code, Overcoding, Photographic codes, Representational codes, Social codes, Textual codes, Unarticulated codes
- Codes of textual production and interpretation: These are classified here as a type of ideological code. They are codes involved in both 'encoding' and 'decoding' texts - dominant, negotiated or oppositional.
- Codification: A historical social process whereby the conventions of a particular code (e.g. for a genre) become widely established (Guiraud).
- Combination, axis of: A structuralist term for the 'horizontal' axis in the analysis of a textual structure: the plane of the syntagm (Jakobson). See also: Selection, axis of
- Commonsense: 'Commonsense' represents the most widespread cultural and historical values, attitudes and beliefs within a given culture. It is generated by ideological forces operating through codes and myths. Myths serve to ensure that certain familiar assumptions and values are taken-for-granted and unquestioned by most members of the culture, and seem entirely 'natural', 'normal' and self-evident. For instance, in western cultures, a widespread assumption is that of naive realism, which regards reality as independent of the signs which

refer to it. The transmission model of communication reflects commonsensical notions of what communication is. Individualism also presents itself as commonsense in insisting that 'I' am a unique individual with a stable, unified identity and with original ideas and intentions of my own. Queer theorists argue that 'heteronormativity' is the gender regime which maintains the fundamental assumption that heterosexuality is natural, universal and monolithic. Such myths are powerful since they seem to 'go without saying' and appear not to need to be deciphered or demystified. Commonsense does involve incoherences, ambiguities, paradoxes, contradictions and omissions; the role of ideology is to suppress these in the interests of dominant groups. Semiotics seeks to demonstrate that commonsense meanings are not givens, but are shaped by ideological forces. See also: Ideology, Myth, Naturalization, Realism (objectivism), Reality

- Communication: From a semiotic perspective, communication involves encoding and decoding texts according to the conventions of appropriate codes (Jakobson). The centrality of codes to communication is a distinctive semiotic contribution which emphasizes the social nature of communication and the importance of conventions. Whilst most semioticians are concerned with communicative meaning-making, some semioticians also study the attribution of meaning even where no intent to communicate exists or where no human agency was involved in producing what is perceived as a sign. See also: Asynchronous communication, Circuit of communication, Encoding and decoding model of communication, Interpersonal communication, Mass communication, Synchronous communication, Transmission model of communication

- Community, interpretative (or 'discourse community' or 'textual community'): See Interpretative community

- Commutability of the signified: See Unlimited semiosis

- Commutation test: A structuralist analytical technique used in the paradigmatic analysis of a text to determine whether a change on the level of the signifier leads to a change on the level of the signified. To apply this test a particular signifier in a text is selected. Then meaningful alternatives taken from the same paradigm set are considered. The effects of each substitution are assessed in terms of how this might affect the sense made of the sign. See also: Absent signifiers, Markedness, Paradigmatic analysis, Transformation, rules of

- Complex sign. Saussure's term for a sign which contains other signs. A text is usually a complex sign. See also: Simple sign, Text

- Conative function: In Jakobson's model of linguistic communication this is deemed to be one of the key functions of a sign. This function involves the (usually implicit) construction of an addressee ('ideal reader'). See also: Addressee, Functions of a sign
- Condensation: This is a concept introduced by Freud for the psychoanalytical interpretation of dreams: in condensation, several thoughts are condensed into one symbol. See also: Displacement
- Connotation: The socio-cultural and personal associations produced as a reader decodes a text. The term also refers to the relationship between the signifier and its signified. For Barthes, connotation was a second order of signification which uses the denotative sign (signifier and signified) as its signifier and attaches to it an additional signified. In this framework connotation is a sign which derives from the signifier of a denotative sign (so denotation leads to a chain of connotations). See also: Aesthetic codes, Denotation, Orders of signification
- Constitution of the subject: See Subject and Interpellation
- Constraint: See Motivation and constraint
- Constructivism, (social) constructionism: A philosophical (specifically epistemological) stance (with diverse labels) on 'what is real?' Constructivism can be seen as offering an alternative to the binarism involved in polarising the issue into the objectivism of naive realists versus the radical subjectivism of the idealists. In contrast to realists, constructivists argue that 'reality' is not wholly external to and independent of how we conceptualize the world: our sign systems (language and other media) play a major part in 'the social construction of reality'; realities cannot be separated from the sign systems in which they are experienced. Most constructivists argue that even in relation to 'physical reality', realists underestimate the social processes of mediation involved: for instance, perception itself involves codes, and what count as objects, their properties and their relations vary from language to language (see Ontology). According to Heisenberg's 'uncertainty principle' in quantum mechanics, even physical objects can be affected by observational processes. Constructivists differ from extreme subjectivists in insisting that realities are not limitless and unique to (or definable by) the individual; rather, they are the product of social definitions and as such far from equal in status. Realities are contested, and textual representations are thus 'sites of struggle'. Realists often criticize constructivism as extreme relativism - a position from which constructivists frequently distance

themselves. Note that a constructivist stance does not necessarily entail a denial of the existence of physical reality. See also: Conventionalism, Correspondence theory of truth, Epistemology, Idealism, Realism (objectivism), Reality, Relativism, epistemological

- Content analysis: A quantitative form of textual analysis involving the categorization and counting of recurrent elements in the form or content of texts. This method can be used in conjunction with semiotic analysis (semiotic textual analysis being a qualitative methodology).
- Content and form: See Form and content
- Content, plane of: See Plane of content
- Contiguity: In ordinary use, this term refers to something which touches or adjoins something else; some semioticians use it to refer to something which is in some sense part of (or part of the same domain as) something else. Contiguity may be causal, cultural, spatial, temporal, physical, conceptual, formal or structural. For instance, at the level of the signified, metonymy is said to be based on contiguity - in contrast to metaphor (which involves transposition from one domain to another) since metonyms stand for things to which they are regarded as 'belonging' (in some ontological framework): metonymy may thus seem more 'realistic' than metaphor. At the level of the signifier, syntagms, unlike paradigms, are based on formal contiguity (adjacency within the same text). See also: Metonymy
- Conventionalism: This term is used by realists to describe a position which they associate with epistemological relativism and the denial of the existence of any knowable reality outside representational conventions. They associate it with the 'severing' of signs from 'real world' referents and with the notion that reality is a construction of language or a product of theories. They regard 'conventionalists' (or constructivists) as reducing reality to nothing more than signifying practices. They criticize as 'extreme conventionalism' the stance that theories (and the worlds which they construct) are incommensurable. See also: Constructivism, Conventionality, Realism (objectivism), Reality, Relativism, epistemological, Relativism, linguistic, Whorfianism
- Conventionality: A term often used in conjunction with the term arbitrary to refer to the relationship between the signifier and the signified. In the case of a symbolic system such as verbal language this relationship is purely conventional - dependent on social and cultural conventions (rather than in any sense 'natural'). The conventional nature of codes means that

they have to be learned (not necessarily formally). Thus some semioticians speak of learning to 'read' photographs, television or film, for instance. See also: Arbitrariness, Conventionalism, Modes of relationship, Primacy of the signifier, Relative autonomy

- Converse oppositions: Pairs of mutually-exclusive signifiers in a paradigm set representing categories which do not together define a complete universe of discourse (relevant ontological domain), e.g. sun/moon (Leymore). See also: Analogue oppositions, Binary oppositions

- Copenhagen school: This was a structuralist and formalist group of linguists founded by the Danish linguists Louis Hjelmslev (1899-1966) and Viggo Brondal (1887-1953). Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) was associated with this group from 1939-1949. Influenced by Saussure, its most distinctive contribution was a concern with 'glossematics'. Whilst Hjelmslev did accord a privileged status to language, his glossematics included both linguistics and 'non-linguistic languages' - which Hjelmslev claimed could be analysed independently of their material substance. It is a formalist approach in that it considers semiotic systems without regard for their social context. Hjelmslev's theories strongly influenced Algirdas Greimas (1917-1992), and to a lesser extent the French cultural theorist Roland Barthes (1915-1980) and the film theorist Christian Metz (1931-1993). See also: Moscow school, Paris school, Structuralism

- Correspondence theory of truth: Realism depends on a correspondence theory of truth, on comparing propositions with an independent and external reality. For constructivists, reality is a construction of discourse, so all we can compare is one discourse with another. Realists insist that things exist in the external world independently of our modes of apprehending them. See also: Constructivism, Epistemology, Realism (objectivism), Reality, Relativism, epistemological

- Cultural materialism: See Materialism

- Cultural relativism/relativity: Cultural relativism is the view that each culture has its own worldview and that none of these can be regarded as more or less privileged or 'authentic' in its representation of 'reality' than another. Cultural worldviews are historically-situated social constructions. Cultural relativists tend also to be linguistic relativists, arguing that dominant cultural worldviews are reflected in ontologies which are built into the language of that culture. Cultural relativism is a fundamental assumption involved in Whorfianism. Anthropologists and others who study signifying practices within a culture can be seen as cultural relativists insofar

as they seek to understand each culture in its own terms. However, as with epistemological relativism (with which it is closely associated), the label is often used as a criticism, being equated with extreme idealism or nihilism. See also: Constructivism, Conventionalism, Relativism, epistemological, Linguistic relativism, Social determinism, Universalism, cognitive, Whorfianism

- Decoding: The comprehension and interpretation of texts by decoders with reference to relevant codes (Jakobson). Most commentators assume that the reader actively constructs meaning rather than simply 'extracting' it from the text (see Literalism). See also: Aberrant decoding, Affective fallacy, Code, Encoding, Intentional fallacy, Literalism
- Deconstruction: This is a poststructuralist strategy for textual analysis which was developed by Jacques Derrida. Practitioners seek to dismantle the rhetorical structures within a text to demonstrate how key concepts within it depend on their unstated oppositional relation to absent signifiers (this involved building on the structuralist method of paradigmatic analysis). Texts do not 'mean what they say'. Contradictions can be identified within texts in such backgrounded features as footnotes, recurrent concepts or tropes, casual allusions, paradoxical phrases, discontinuities and omissions. Searching for inexplicit oppositions can reveal what is being excluded. That which has been repressed can be used as a key to an oppositional reading of the text. Poststructuralists insist that no hierarchy of meanings can ever be established and no solid underlying structural foundation can ever be located. Derrida aimed to undermine what he called the 'metaphysics of presence' in Western culture - the bias towards what we fondly assume to be 'unmediated' perception and interaction. This bias involves phonocentrism (including that of Saussure) and the myth of the 'transcendent signified'. Other deconstructionists have also exposed culturally-embedded conceptual oppositions in which the initial term is privileged, leaving 'term B' negatively 'marked'. Radical deconstruction is not simply a reversal of the valorization in an opposition but a demonstration of the instability of the opposition (since challenging the valorization alone may be taken to imply that one nevertheless accepts an ontological division along the lines of the opposition in question). Indeed, the most radical deconstruction challenges both the framework of the relevant opposition and binary frameworks in general. Deconstructionists acknowledge that their own texts are open to further deconstruction: there is no definitive reading; all texts contain contradictions, gaps and disjunctions - they undermine themselves. More broadly,

deconstructive cultural criticism involves demonstrating how signifying practices construct, rather than simply represent social reality, and how ideology works to make such practices seem transparent. See also: Absent signifiers, The bar, Denaturalization, Différance, Erasure, writing under, Markedness, Ontology, Oppositions, Paradigmatic analysis, Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, Priorism, Valorization

- Deep structure: See Structuralism
- Denaturalization, defamiliarization: One of the goals of semioticians is denaturalization: revealing the socially coded basis of phenomena which are taken-for-granted as 'natural'. The concept was borrowed from Shklovsky's Formalist notion of defamiliarization, according to which *ostranenie* ('estrangement') was the key function of art - we need to 'make the familiar strange' - to look afresh at things and events which are so familiar that we no longer truly see them. The formalists favoured texts which drew attention to their constructedness and to the processes involved in their construction. As a literary technique, Shklovsky advocated the (surrealistic) practice of placing things in contexts in which they would not normally be found. A feature of many postmodern texts is a parodic use of intertextual references which functions to denaturalize the normally transparent representational conventions of 'realistic' textual codes. The semiotician seeks to denaturalize signs and codes in order to make more explicit the underlying rules for encoding and decoding them, and often also with the intention of revealing the usually invisible operation of ideological forces. See also: Deconstruction, Foregrounding, stylistic, Formalism, Naturalization, Poetic function, Reflexivity, Transparency
- Denotation: The term refers to the relationship between the signifier and its signified. Denotation is routinely treated as the definitional, 'literal', 'obvious' or 'commonsense' meaning of a sign, but semioticians tend to treat it as a signified about which there is a relatively broad consensus. For Barthes, a denotative sign existed within what he called the first order of signification. In this framework connotation is a further sign (or signs) deriving from the signifier of a denotative sign. However, no clear distinction can be made between denotation and connotation. See also: Connotation, Orders of signification
- Design features of language: Charles Hockett defined a number of key design features of human language, including double articulation, productivity (see Semiotic economy), arbitrariness and displacement (language enables us to refer to things even if they are displaced

in space and time). See also: Arbitrariness, Displacement, Double articulation, Semiotic economy

- Determinism
- Audience: See Social determinism
- Linguistic: See Linguistic determinism
- Media: See Technological determinism
- Social: See Social determinism
- Structural: See Structural determinism
- Technological: See Technological determinism
- Textual: See Textual determinism, Literalism and Overdetermination
- Devalorization: See Valorization
- Diachronic analysis: Diachronic analysis studies change in a phenomenon (such as a code) over time (in contrast to synchronic analysis). Saussure saw the development of language in terms of a series of synchronic states. Critics argue that this fails to account for how change occurs. See also: Langue and parole, Synchronic analysis
- Différance: Derrida coined this term to allude simultaneously to 'difference' and 'deferral'. He deliberately ensured that (in French) the distinction from the word for 'difference' was apparent only in writing. Adding to Saussure's notion of meaning being differential (based on differences between signs), the term is intended to remind us that signs also defer the presence of what they signify through endless substitutions of signifiers. Every signified is also a signifier: there is no escape from the sign system. Meaning depends upon absence rather than presence. See also: Deconstruction, Transcendent(al) signified, Unlimited semiosis
- Differential meaning: See Meaning
- Digital signs: Digital signs involve discrete units such as words and numerals, in contrast to analogical signs. Note, however, that digital technology can transform analogical signs into digital reproductions which may be perceptually indistinguishable from the 'originals', and that texts generated in a digital medium can be 'copies without originals' (e.g. a word-processed text). See also: Simulacrum, Tokens and types

- Directness of address: Modes of address differ in their directness. This is reflected in the use of language ('you' may be directly addressed), and in the case of television and photography, in whether or not someone looks directly into the camera lens. See also: Modes of address

- Discourse: The use of the term discourse by theorists generally reflects an emphasis on parole rather than langue. Many contemporary theorists influenced by Michel Foucault treat language not as a monolithic system but as structured into different discourses such as those of science, law, government, medicine, journalism and morality. A discourse is a system of representation consisting of a set of representational codes (including a distinctive interpretative repertoire of concepts, tropes and myths) for constructing and maintaining particular forms of reality within the ontological domain (or topic) defined as relevant to its concerns. Representational codes thus reflect relational principles underlying the symbolic order of the 'discursive field'. According to Foucault, whose primary concern was the analysis of 'discursive formations' in specific historical and socio-cultural contexts, a particular discursive formation maintains its own 'regime of truth'. He adopted a stance of linguistic determinism, arguing that the dominant tropes within the discourse of a particular historical period determine what can be known - constituting the basic episteme of the age. A range of discursive positions is available at any given time, reflecting many determinants (economic, political, sexual etc.). Foucault focused on power relations, noting that within such contexts, the discourses and signifiers of some interpretative communities (e.g. 'law', 'money', 'power') are privileged and dominant whilst others are marginalized. Structuralists deterministically see the subject as the product of the available discourses whilst constructivists allow for the possibility of negotiation or resistance. Poststructuralists deny any meaning (or more provocatively any reality) outside of discourses. See also: Episteme, Interpretative community, Interpretative repertoire, Representation, Representational codes, Signifying practices, Symbolic order

- Discourse community: See Interpretative community

- Discursive formations: See Discourse

- Discursive positioning: See Subject

- Discursive practices: See Signifying practices

- Displacement (Linguistic): This refers to the power of words to refer to things in their absence. Displacement was identified by Hockett as a key 'design feature' of language. It enables signs to be more than simply indexical and facilitates reflective thought and communication using texts which can be detached from their authors. See also: Design features of language
- Displacement (Freud): This is a concept introduced by Freud for the psychoanalytical interpretation of dreams: in displacement unconscious desire is displaced into another symbol. See also: Condensation
- Dominant (or 'hegemonic') code and reading: Within Stuart Hall's framework, this is an ideological code in which the decoder fully shares the text's code and accepts and reproduces the preferred reading (a reading which may not have been the result of any conscious intention on the part of the author(s)) - in such a stance the textual code seems 'natural' and 'transparent'. See also: Preferred reading, Ideological codes, Negotiated code and reading, Oppositional code and reading, Transparency
- Double articulation: A semiotic code which has 'double articulation' (as in the case of verbal language) can be analysed into two abstract structural levels: a higher level called 'the level of first articulation' and a lower level - 'the level of second articulation'. At the level of first articulation the system consists of the smallest meaningful units available (e.g. morphemes or words in a language). These meaningful units are complete signs, each consisting of a signifier and a signified. At the level of second articulation, a semiotic code is divisible into minimal functional units which lack meaning in themselves (e.g. phonemes in speech or graphemes in writing). They are not signs in themselves (the code must have a first level of articulation for these lower units to be combined into meaningful signs). Theoretical linguists have largely abandoned the use of the term articulation in the structural sense, preferring to refer to 'duality of patterning'. See also: Articulation, Design features of language, First articulation, Second articulation, Single articulation
- Dualism: See Binarism
- Duality of patterning: See Double articulation
- Dyadic model of sign: A dyadic model of the sign is based on a division of the sign into two necessary constituent elements. Saussure's model of the sign is a dyadic model (note that

Saussure insisted that such a division was purely analytical). See also: Models of the sign, Triadic model

- Economism: See Reductionism
- Economy, semiotic: See Semiotic economy
- Elaborated codes: See Narrowcast codes
- Élite interpreter: Semioticians who reject the investigation of other people's interpretations privilege what has been called the 'élite interpreter' - though socially-oriented semioticians would insist that the exploration of people's interpretative practices is fundamental to semiotics.
- Empty signifier: An 'empty' or 'floating' signifier is variously defined as a signifier with a vague, highly variable, unspecifiable or non-existent signified. Such signifiers mean different things to different people: they may stand for many or even any signifieds; they may mean whatever their interpreters want them to mean. Those who posit the existence of such signifiers argue that there is a radical disconnection between signifier and signified. For a Saussurean semiotician no signifier can exist without a corresponding signified - to qualify as a sign something must be signified. See also: Signifier, Simulacrum, Transcendent signified
- Encoding: The production of texts by encoders with reference to relevant codes (Jakobson). Encoding involves foregrounding some meanings and backgrounding others. See also: Codes, Decoding, Encoding and decoding model of communication
- Encoding and decoding model of communication: Following Jakobson's model of interpersonal communication which moved beyond the basic transmission model of communication Stuart Hall proposed a model of mass communication which underlined the importance of active interpretation within relevant codes and a social context. See also: Codes, Circuit of communication, Decoding, Encoding, Transmission models of communication
- Enunciation/énonciation: In some contexts, an énoncé is an utterance and énonciation is the act of uttering it. In his model, Saussure chose to ignore the circumstances of enunciation (see Langue and parole). In structural linguistic theory, enunciation refers specifically to the aspect of an utterance which addresses and positions its 'receivers'. In film theory, Benveniste's distinction between 'the speaking subject' and 'the subject of speech' have been treated as analogous to a distinction between production factors (the 'level of enunciation') and narrative

('the level of fiction'). In 'realist' texts the act of enunciation is backgrounded: for instance, Metz argued that (realist) cinematic modes of address mask their own enunciation, implying no addresser or addressee. See also: Addresser and addressee, Functions of signs, Modes of address, Narration or narrative voice, Realism, aesthetic

- Episteme: Foucault uses the term *épistème* to refer to the total set of relations within a particular historical period uniting the discursive practices which generate its epistemologies. See also: Discourse, Interpretative community

- Epistemic community: See Interpretative community

- Epistemology: A branch of philosophy concerned with the theory of knowledge. The term refers to how 'the world' can be known and what can be known about it. Realism, idealism and constructivism are all epistemological stances regarding what is 'real'. Epistemologies embody ontological assumptions. Thomas Kuhn referred to 'epistemic' (epistemological) communities which were characterized by shared texts, interpretations and beliefs. See also: Constructivism, Correspondence theory of truth, Idealism, Ontology, Realism (objectivism), Relativism, epistemological

- Erasure, writing under: Derrida adopted from Heidegger the strategy of writing 'sous rature' which involved printing a word with crossed lines through it, leaving the original word legible, thus: Being. This was intended to indicate that although the term was deeply problematic it was still necessary to use it. It alludes to the issue of linguistic determinism. See also: Deconstruction, Linguistic determinism

- Essentialism: Essentialists argue that certain signifieds are distinct, autonomous entities which have an objective existence and essential properties and which are definable in terms of some kind of absolute, universal and transhistorical 'essence'. These signifieds (such as 'Reality', 'Truth', 'Meaning', 'Facts', 'Mind', 'Consciousness', 'Nature', 'Beauty', 'Justice', 'Freedom') are granted an ontological status in which they exist 'prior to' language. In relation to people, the term refers to the stance that human beings (or a specified category of people, such as 'women') have an inherent, unchanging and distinctive nature which can be 'discovered' (to say this of women or men, for instance, is biological essentialism). The stance known as 'humanism' (which is deeply embedded in Western culture) is essentialist, based on the assumption that the individual has an 'inner self' ('personality', 'attitudes' and 'opinions') which is stable, coherent, consistent, unified and autonomous and which determines our behaviour. Bourgeois

ideology is essentialist in characterizing society in terms of 'free' individuals whose pre-given essences include 'talent', 'efficiency', 'laziness' or 'profligacy'. Anti-essentialists such as relativists and structuralist and poststructuralist semioticians deny that things have essential properties which are independent of our ways of defining and classifying them - they emphasize the contingency of signifieds (social semioticians note in particular the socio-cultural and historical processes involved). For constructivists many signifieds which 'commonsense' regards as having essential properties are socially constructed. 'Nature vs. Nurture' debates reflect essentialist vs. constructionist positions. Essentialism is a form of idealism. Materialism is an anti-essentialist position which counters essentialist abstraction and reification with a focus on the material conditions of lived existence. See also: Constructivism, Idealism, Materialism, Nomenclaturism, Priorism, Realism (objectivism), Reductionism, Reification, Relativism, epistemological, Transcendent(al) signified

- Estrangement: See Denaturalization
- Expression, plane of: See Plane of expression
- Expressive function: In Jakobson's model of linguistic communication this is deemed to be one of the key functions of a sign. This function involves the (usually implicit) construction of an addressee (ideal reader). See also: Addressee, Functions of a sign
- Extracinematic codes: See Filmic codes
- Fallacies (their status as such depends on point of view)
- Affective: See Affective fallacy
- Conventionalism: See Conventionalism
- Dualism: See Binarism
- Intentional: See Intentional fallacy
- Literalism: See Literalism
- Metonymic: See Metonymic fallacy
- Neutrality: See Non-neutrality of medium
- Referential: See Referential fallacy
- Relativism: See Relativism

- Reproductive: See Reproductive fallacy
- Synecdochic: See Metonymic fallacy
- Transparency: See Transparency
- Figurae: See Second articulation
- Filmic codes: Cinematic and televisual codes include: genre; camerawork (shot size, focus, lens movement, camera movement, angle, lens choice, composition); editing (cuts and fades, cutting rate and rhythm); manipulation of time (compression, flashbacks, flashforwards, slow motion); lighting; colour; sound (soundtrack, music); graphics and narrative style. Extracinematic codes are codes used within film which are not unique to the medium, such as language, narrative, gesture and costume. See also: Codes, Grande syntagmatique, Imaginary signifier, Mise-en-scène, Montage
- First articulation: At the (higher) structural level of first articulation a semiotic system consists of the smallest meaningful units available (e.g. morphemes or words in a language). See also: Articulation, Double articulation, Second articulation, Single articulation
- Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness: Within his triadic model of the sign, Peirce referred to the sign as an instance of 'Firstness', its object as an instance of 'Secondness' and the interpretant as an instance of 'Thirdness'. See also: Peircean model of the sign
- Floating signifier: See Empty signifier
- Foregrounding, stylistic: This term, derived from the Gestalt psychologists' distinction between figure and ground [background], was used by the Prague school linguists to refer to a stylistic feature in which signifiers in a text attract attention to themselves rather than simulating transparency in representing their signifieds. This primarily serves a 'poetic' function (being used 'for its own sake') rather than a 'referential' function. See also: Denaturalization, Poetic function, Prague school, Reflexivity, Transparency
- Form and content: A distinction sometimes equated to Saussure's distinction between the signifier (seen as form) and the signified (seen as content). However, the metaphor of form as a 'container' is problematic, tending to support the equation of content with meaning, implying that meaning can be 'extracted' without an active process of interpretation and that form is not in itself meaningful. In 'realistic' codes, content is foregrounded whilst form retreats to transparency. See also: McLuhanism, Translatability

- Form and substance: Hjelmslev introduced the notion that both expression and content have substance and form. In this framework signs have four dimensions: substance of content; form of content; substance of expression; form of expression. See Plane of content, Plane of expression
- Formalism: Russian formalism was a structuralist, anti-realist aesthetic doctrine whose proponents included Victor Shklovsky (see Denaturalization). The Prague school linguists were also structural formalists. Formalism represented a linguistic focus on literary uses of language. As the name suggests, the primary focus of the formalists was on form, structure, technique or medium rather than on content. They saw literary language as language 'made strange' and their model was poetry rather than prose. They were particularly interested in literary 'devices' such as rhyme, rhythm, metre, imagery, syntax and narrative techniques - favouring writing which 'laid bare' its devices. The term 'formalism' is sometimes used critically (especially by realists) to refer to what they regard as an idealist reduction of referential content and of material substance and practices to abstract systems. As also for structuralists, the 'meaning of a text' was immanent - it lay within it: the text itself told you everything you needed to know. The formalists did not relate meaning to authorial intentions. Formalism evolved into structuralism in the late 1920s and 1930s. 'New Criticism' - a formalist school of literary criticism which was not directly related to Russian formalism - flourished in Britain and the USA from the 1930s to the 1950s (see Intentional Fallacy and Affective Fallacy). An explicitly semiotic form of Russian formalism emerged in the 1960s. See also: Copenhagen school, Denaturalization, Form and content, Form and substance, Idealism, Moscow school, Poetic function, Prague school, Structuralism, Tartu school
- Formality of address: Modes of address differ in their formality or social distance. Following Edward T Hall, a distinction is often made between 'intimate', 'personal', 'social' and 'public' (or 'impersonal') modes of address. In camerawork this is reflected in shot sizes - close-ups signifying intimate or personal modes, medium shots a social mode and long shots an impersonal mode. See also: Modes of address
- Formation, discursive: See Discourse
- Foundationalism: See Priorism
- Functionalism: Functionalism in the broadest sense is a perspective on society and culture which emphasizes the interdependent functions of all of the parts in relation to the

whole system. It was established by the sociologists Herbert Spencer and Émile Durkheim and was later adopted by the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski and the sociologists Talcott Parsons and Robert K Merton. It has been criticized for failing to account for conflict and change. In linguistics functionalism is the view that the structure of language is determined by the functions that it serves. Consequently, functionalist linguists focus on the function of linguistic forms. Linguists within this tradition include the Russian formalists (including Propp, Volosinov and Bakhtin), the Prague school linguists (including Jakobson), Louis Hjelmslev, André Martinet, Sapir and Whorf, M A K Halliday and Teun van Dijk. Functionalism has been criticized for neglecting social change and as being ahistorical. It is closely allied with structuralism which has been criticized for being functionalist in its emphasis on internal structures at the expense of social relations. See also: Formalism, Functions of a sign, Prague school, Structuralism

- Functions of signs: In Jakobson's model of linguistic communication the dominance of any one of six factors within an utterance reflects a different linguistic function. referential: oriented towards the context; expressive: oriented towards the addresser; conative: oriented towards the addressee; phatic: oriented towards the contact; metalingual: oriented towards the code; poetic: oriented towards the message. In any given situation one of these factors is 'dominant', and this dominant function influences the general character of the 'message'. See also: Conative function, Expressive function, Functionalism, Metalingual function, Phatic function, Poetic function, Referential function

- Genre: Conventional definitions of genres tend to be based on the notion that they constitute particular conventions of form and content which are shared by the texts which are regarded as belonging to them. However, an individual text within a genre rarely if ever has all of the characteristic features of the genre and texts often exhibit the conventions of more than one genre. Semiotic redefinitions of genre tend to focus on the way in which the formal features of texts within the genre draw on shared codes and function to 'position' readers using particular modes of address. Postmodernist theorists tend to blur distinctions between genres. See also: Codes, Intertextuality, Modes of address

- Givens: See Priorism

- Glossematics: See Copenhagen school

- 'Grammar' of a medium: Some semioticians refer to the 'grammar' of media other than language, in particular in relation to visual media, whilst others have challenged this application

of a linguistic model to media which move beyond the verbal. See also: Language of a medium, Medium, Syntagmatic analysis

- Grammar of the plot: See Narratology
- Graphocentrism: Graphocentrism or scriptism is a typically unconscious interpretative bias in which writing is privileged over speech. Biases in favour of the written or printed word are closely associated with the ranking of sight above sound, the eye above the ear, which has been called 'ocularcentrism'. See also: Channel, Logocentrism, Phonocentrism
- Grande syntagmatique: This was the term by which Metz referred to his elaborate scheme for describing syntagmatic categories for narrative film. See also: Filmic codes, Syntagm
- Hegemonic code: See Dominant code
- Hermeneutics: Hermes was the Greek god who delivered and interpreted messages. The term hermeneutics is often used to refer to the interpretation of texts. Guiraud uses it to refer to a relatively open, loose and often unconscious system of implicit interpretative practices, in contrast to the more formal and explicit character of a code. See also: Code, Interpretative codes
- Historicity: Historical context. Insofar as structuralist semiotics tends to focus on synchronic rather than diachronic analysis, critics have argued that it is ahistorical - that it ignores process and historicity. See also: Diachronic analysis
- Homology: See Isomorphism
- Horizontal axis: See Combination, axis of
- Humanism: See Essentialism
- Hypostasis: See Reification
- Iconic: A mode in which the signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified (recognizably looking, sounding, feeling, tasting or smelling like it) - being similar in possessing some of its qualities (e.g. a portrait, a diagram, a scale-model, onomatopoeia, metaphors, 'realistic' sounds in music, sound effects in radio drama, a dubbed film soundtrack, imitative gestures) (Peirce). See also: Indexical, Isomorphism, Modes of relationship, Symbolic
- 'Ideal readers': This is a term often used to refer to the roles in which readers of a text are 'positioned' as subjects through the use of particular modes of address. For Eco this term is

not intended to suggest a 'perfect' reader who entirely echoes any authorial intention but a 'model reader' whose reading could be justified in terms of the text. Note that not every reader takes on the reader's role which may have been envisaged by the producer(s) of the text. See also: Addresser and addressee, Modes of address, Preferred reading, Subject

- Idealism (subjectivism): A philosophical (specifically epistemological) stance on 'what is real?' in which, in its extreme form, it is argued that reality is purely subjective and is constructed in our use of signs. Constructivists criticize the blindness of idealism to the social dimension. Divorcing texts from their social contexts is sometimes referred to as 'textual idealism'. Left-wing critics in particular object that idealism ignores the material conditions of human existence. Idealism is most strongly opposed by materialists, who associate it with essentialism because a notion of humanity as a pre-given essence is based on 'transcendental consciousness' as the source of meaning. Note that the belief that nothing exists except oneself and one's own mental states is referred to as solipsism. See also: Constructivism, Epistemology, Essentialism, Materialism, Realism (objectivism), Relativism, epistemological

- Ideological codes: One of the types of interpretative codes, notably, the 'isms', such as: individualism, capitalism, liberalism, conservatism, feminism, materialism, consumerism and populism. Also includes codes of textual production and interpretation (dominant, negotiated and oppositional). Note, however, that all codes can be seen as ideological. See also: Code, Dominant codes, Ideology, Negotiated codes, Oppositional codes

- Ideology: There are no ideologically 'neutral' sign systems: signs function to persuade as well as to refer. Modern semiotic theory is often allied with a Marxist approach which stresses the role of ideology. Ideology constructs people as subjects through the operation of codes. According to the theory of textual positioning, understanding the meaning of a text involves taking on an appropriate ideological identity (see 'Ideal readers'). For Althusser, ideology was a system of representation involving 'transparent myths' which functioned to induce in the subject an 'imaginary' relation to the 'real' conditions of existence. For those inclined towards realism ideology involves a 'distortion' of an 'objective' 'reality'. Barthes argues that the orders of signification called denotation and connotation combine to produce ideological myths. Ideological forces seek to naturalize codes - to make dominant cultural and historical values, attitudes and beliefs seem 'natural', 'self-evident' and 'common-sense', although the operation of ideology in signifying practices is typically made to appear transparent. Barthes saw myth as

serving the ideological interests of the bourgeoisie. Semiotic analysis involves ideological analysis and seeks to denaturalize codes. See also: Commonsense, Denaturalization, Ideological codes, Naturalization

- **Idiolect:** A term from sociolinguistics referring to the distinctive ways in which language is used by individuals. In semiotic terms it can refer more broadly to the stylistic and personal subcodes of individuals (see codes). See also: Interpretative community, Sociolect, Symbolic capital
- **Illusionism:** See Realism, aesthetic
- **Imaginary, The:** 'The Imaginary' is Lacan's term for a realm in which the construction of the Self as subject is initiated. Initially the infant has no centre of identity and there are no clear boundaries between itself and the external world. Lacan argues that in 'the mirror phase' (at the age of six- to eighteen-months, before the acquisition of speech), seeing one's mirror image induces a strongly-defined illusion of a coherent and self-governing personal identity. In the realm of images, we find our sense of self reflected back by an Other with whom we identify (who is paradoxically both Self and Other). For Althusserian theorists, the 'imaginary' refers to representations which mask the historical and material conditions of existence (e.g. the heterosexual imaginary naturalizes heterosexuality and conceals its constructedness, making homosexuality a marked category). See also: Imaginary signifier, Subject, Symbolic order
- **Imaginary signifier:** This term was used by Christian Metz to refer to the cinematic signifier. The term is used in more than one sense. The cinematic signifier is 'imaginary' by virtue of an apparent perceptual transparency which suggests the unmediated presence of its absent signified - a feature widely regarded as the key to the power of cinema. Whilst 'imaginary' in the usual sense alludes to the fictional status of what is signified, the term is also related to Lacan's term, 'the Imaginary' - which refers to a phase in the experience of the 'subject' which is dominated by identification - the cinematic signifier is theorized as inducing identifications similar to those of 'the mirror stage'. See also: Filmic codes, Imaginary, The, Signifier, Transparency
- **Immanent meaning:** See Meaning
- **Indexical:** A mode in which the signifier is not purely arbitrary but is directly connected in some way (physically or causally) to the signified - this link can be observed or inferred (e.g.

smoke, weathercock, thermometer, clock, spirit-level, footprint, fingerprint, knock on door, pulse rate, rashes, pain) (Peirce). See also: Iconic, Modes of relationship, Photographic signs, Symbolic

- Intentional fallacy: The intentional fallacy (identified by literary theorists Wimsatt and Beardsley) involves relating the meaning of a text to its author's intentions. Although these theorists regarded meaning as residing within the text, some other theorists not sharing their literalist standpoint have also dismissed the author's intentions in relation to meaning. Privileging the author's intentions is a stance which has several flaws, in particular: it assumes that authors are always aware of their own intentions; it underestimates the debt of the author to other sources (see Intertextuality); and it ignores the importance of readers' purposes (which Wimsatt and Beardsley also dismissed as 'the affective fallacy'). The intentional fallacy implicitly involves a transmission model of communication which privileges the 'sender'. An author's intentions are of no concern to structuralist analysts; signifiers are always derived from an already existing structure over which the individual sign-user has no control. For some semioticians, communication need not be intentional for something to qualify as a sign. See also: Intertextuality, Literalism, Meaning, Preferred reading

- Interpellation (Althusser): Interpellation is Althusser's term to describe a mechanism whereby the human subject is 'constituted' (constructed) by pre-given structures (a structuralist stance). This concept is used by Marxist media theorists to explain the ideological function of mass media texts. According to this view, the subject (viewer, listener, reader) is constituted by the text, and the power of the mass media resides in their ability to 'position' the subject in such a way that their representations are taken to be reflections of everyday reality. Such framings reflect a stance of structural or textual determinism which has been challenged by contemporary social semioticians who tend to emphasize the 'polysemic' and 'multiaccental' nature of texts, together with the diversity of their uses. See also: Structural determinism, Subject, Textual determinism

- Interpersonal communication: In contrast to mass communication ('one-to-many' communication), this term is typically used to refer to 'one-to-one' communication, although this distinction tends to overlook the importance of communication in small groups (neither 'one' nor 'many'). It may be either synchronous or asynchronous. Synchronous interpersonal communication may involve: (a) both speech and non-verbal cues (e.g. direct face-to-face

interaction, videolinks); (b) speech alone (e.g. telephone); or (c) mainly text (e.g. internet chat systems). Asynchronous interpersonal communication tends to be primarily through text (e.g. letters, fax, e-mail). See also: Asynchronous communication, Mass communication, Synchronous communication

- Interpretant: In Peirce's model of the sign, the interpretant is not an interpreter but rather the sense made of the sign. Peirce doesn't feature the interpreter directly in his triad, although he does highlight the interpretative process of semiosis. See also: Peircean model of the sign, Unlimited semiosis
- Interpretative codes: Although many semiotic codes can be seen as interpretative codes, this can be seen as forming one major group of codes, alongside social codes and textual codes. In the current classification, interpretative codes include: perceptual codes and ideological codes. Interpretative codes can be seen as forming a basis for modality judgements, drawing on textual codes/knowledge and social codes/knowledge. There is less agreement among semioticians about the status of interpretative codes as semiotic codes than about the other kinds of codes, partly because they are relatively loose and inexplicit (see hermeneutics). See also: Code, Hermeneutics, Ideological codes, Interpretative community, Interpretative repertoire, Perceptual codes
- Interpretative community: Those who share the same codes are members of the same 'interpretative community' - a term introduced by the literary theorist Stanley Fish to refer to both 'writers' and 'readers' of particular genres of texts (but which can be used more widely to refer to those who share any code). Linguists tend to use the logocentric term, 'discourse community'. Thomas Kuhn used the term 'textual community' to refer to epistemic (or epistemological) communities with shared texts, interpretations and beliefs. Constructivists argue that interpretative communities are involved in the construction and maintenance of reality within the ontological domain which defines their concerns (see Discourse). The conventions within the codes employed by such communities become naturalized amongst its members. Individuals belong simultaneously to several interpretative communities. See also: Code, Discourse, Episteme, Interpretative codes, Interpretative repertoire, Representational codes, Signifying practices, Sociolect, Symbolic capital, Textual codes
- Interpretative repertoire: This term, used by Jonathan Potter, refers to the interpretative codes and textual codes available to those within interpretative communities

which offer them the potential to understand and also - where the code-user has the appropriate symbolic capital - to produce texts which employ these codes. An interpretative repertoire is part of the symbolic capital of members of the relevant interpretative community. The term is sometimes used synonymously with the term discourse. See also: Discourse, Interpretative codes, Interpretative community, Symbolic capital, Textual codes

- Interpreter, élite: See Élite interpreter
- Intertextuality: The semiotic notion of intertextuality introduced by Kristeva is associated primarily with poststructuralist theorists. Intertextuality refers to the various links in form and content which bind a text to other texts. Each text exists in relation to others. Although the debts of a text to other texts are seldom acknowledged, texts owe more to other texts than to their own makers. Texts provide contexts such as genre within which other texts may be created and interpreted. The notion of intertextuality problematizes the idea of a text having boundaries: where does a text begin and end? See also: Bricolage, Genre, Intratextuality, Postmodernism, Reflexivity
- Intratextuality: Whilst the term intertextuality would normally be used to refer to links to other texts, a related kind of link is what might be called 'intratextuality' - involving internal relations within the text. Within a single code (e.g. a photographic code) these would be simply syntagmatic relationships (e.g. the relationship of the image of one person to another within the same photograph). However, a text may involve several codes: a newspaper photograph, for instance, may have a caption (see Anchorage). See also: Anchorage, Intertextuality
- Irony: Irony is a rhetorical trope. It is a kind of double sign in which the 'literal sign' combines with another sign typically to signify the opposite meaning. However, understatement and overstatement can also be ironic. See also: Metaphor, Metonymy, Postmodernism, Reflexivity, Synecdoche, Trope
- Isomorphism: The term is used to refer to correspondences, parallels, or similarities in the properties, patterns or relations of a) two different structures; b) structural elements in two different structures and c) structural elements at different levels within the same structure. Some theorists use the term homology in much the same way. Structuralists seek to identify such patterns and note homologies between structures at all levels within a system because all structural units are generated from the same basic rules of transformation. Narratologists note homologies between semantic structures (e.g. narrative) and syntactic structures (e.g. the

structure of a sentence) in particular texts. Isomorphic relationships are said to exist where certain structural features of a signifier are judged to resemble those of the signified to which it refers. In this sense, iconicity involves isomorphism. Nomenclaturism is closely associated with language-world isomorphism - the belief that the categories of language 'mirror' the structure of the physical world. Lévi-Strauss interpreted certain cultural practices as serving the function of establishing patterned homologies between cultural structures and those perceived to exist within 'nature'. Linguistic relativism involves a rejection of language-language isomorphism. The concept of perceptual codes suggests non-isomorphism between mental representations and sensory data (mind-world). Perceived isomorphism gives 'realistic' representations high modality status. Critics note that at a high level of abstraction any two structural elements could be described as isomorphic. See also: Iconic, Nomenclaturism, Nominal Realism, Structuralism, Transformation, rules of, Transparency

- Language, design features of: See Design features of language
- 'Language' of a medium: Media such as television and film are regarded by some semioticians as being like 'languages' (though this is hotly contested by others). Semioticians commonly refer to films, television and radio programmes, advertising posters and so on as 'texts', and to 'reading' media such as television and photographs. The linguistic model often leads semioticians to a search for units of analysis in audio-visual media which are analogous to those used in linguistics. Others dispute that such basic units can be found in such media. See also: 'Grammar' of medium, Medium
- Langue and parole: These are Saussure's terms. Langue refers to the abstract system of rules and conventions of a signifying system - it is independent of, and pre-exists, individual users. Parole refers to concrete instances of its use. To the Saussurean semiotician, what matters most are the underlying structures and rules of a semiotic system as a whole rather than specific performances or practices which are merely instances of its use. Whilst Saussure did not concern himself with parole, the structure of langue is of course revealed by the study of parole. Applying the notion to semiotic systems in general rather than simply to language, the distinction is one between the semiotic system and its usage in specific texts and practices. For instance, in a semiotic system such as cinema, any specific film can be seen as the parole of the underlying system of cinema 'language' (although note that the eminent film theorist Christian Metz rejected the idea of a cinematic langue). Saussure emphasized the importance of

studying the 'language-state' synchronically - as it exists as a relatively stable system during a certain period - rather than diachronically (studying its evolution). See also: Diachronic analysis, Synchronic analysis

- Levels of signification: See Orders of signification
- Linguistic circles or schools: See Copenhagen school, Moscow school, Paris school, Prague school, Tartu school
- Linguistic determinism: According to linguistic determinists our thinking (or 'worldview') is determined by language - by the very use of verbal language and/or by the grammatical structures, semantic distinctions and inbuilt ontologies within a language. A more moderate stance is that thinking may be 'influenced' rather than unavoidably 'determined' by language: it is a two-way process, so that the kind of language we use is also influenced by the way we see the world. Critics who are socially-oriented emphasize the social context of language use rather than purely linguistic considerations; any influence is ascribed not to 'Language' as such (which would be to reify language) but to usage in particular contexts (see *langue* and *parole*) and to particular kinds of discourse (e.g. a sociolect). Both structuralists and poststructuralists give priority to the determining power of the language system: language patterns our experience and the subject is constructed through discourse. See also: Discourse, *Langue* and *parole*, McLuhanism, Poststructuralism, Priorism, Relativism, linguistic, Social determinism, Structural determinism, Structuralism, Technological determinism, Textual determinism, Whorfianism
- Linguistic relativism: See Relativism, linguistic
- Linguistic universalism: See Universalism, linguistic
- Literalism: The fallacy that the meaning of a text is contained within it and is completely determined by it so that all the reader must do is to 'extract' this meaning from the signs within it. This stance ignores the importance of 'going beyond the information given' and limits comprehension to the decoding (in the narrowest sense) of textual properties (without even reference to codes). See also: Affective fallacy, Decoding, Meaning, Textual determinism
- Logocentrism: Derrida used this term to refer to the 'metaphysics of presence' in Western culture - in particular its phonocentrism, and its foundation on a mythical 'transcendent signified'. Logocentrism can also refer to a typically unconscious interpretative bias which privileges linguistic communication over the revealingly named 'non-verbal' forms of

communication and expression, and over un verbalized feelings; logocentrism privileges both the eye and the ear over other sensory modalities such as touch. See also: Channel, Graphocentrism, Phonocentrism, Translatability

- Making the familiar strange: See Denaturalization
- Markedness: The concept of markedness introduced by Jakobson can be applied to the poles of a paradigmatic opposition (e.g. male/female). Paired signifiers (such as male/female) consist of an 'unmarked' form (in this case, the word male) and a 'marked' form (in this case the word female). The 'marked' signifier is distinguished by some special semiotic feature (in this case the addition of an initial fe-). A marked or unmarked status applies not only to signifiers but also to their signifieds. With many of the familiarly paired terms, the two signifieds are valorized - accorded different values. The marked form (typically the second term) is presented as 'different' and is (implicitly) negative. The unmarked form is typically dominant (e.g. statistically within a text or corpus) and therefore seems to be 'neutral', 'normal' and 'natural'. The concept of markedness can be applied more broadly than simply to paradigmatically paired terms. Whether in textual or social practices, the choice of a marked form 'makes a statement'. Where a text deviates from conventional expectations it is 'marked'. Conventional, or 'over-coded' text (which follows a fairly predictable formula) is unmarked whereas unconventional or 'under-coded' text is marked. See also: Absent signifiers, Deconstruction, Ontology, Oppositions, Paradigm, Transcendent signified, Valorization
- Mass communication: In contrast to interpersonal communication ('one-to-one' communication), this term is typically used to refer to 'one-to-many' communication, although this distinction tends to overlook the importance of communication in small groups (neither 'one' nor 'many'). Whilst mass communication may be 'live' or recorded, it is primarily asynchronous - live two-way communication through a mass medium occurs only in such special cases as radio or television 'phone-ins' (which involve interpersonal communication which is then broadcast). Mass communication is conducted through verbal text, graphics and/or audio-visual media (e.g. film, television, radio, newspapers, magazines etc.). See also: Asynchronous communication, Circuit of communication, Communication, Interpersonal communication
- Materialism: Materialism is an anti-idealist and anti-essentialist position which criticizes essentialist abstraction and reification and the formalist reduction of substance to forms and

relations. It is realist in that the world is seen as having a recalcitrant being of its own which resists our intentions. Materialists (sometimes called cultural materialists) emphasize such things as the textual representation of the material conditions of social reality (such as poverty, sickness and exploitation), the socio-cultural and historical contingency of signifying practices, and the specificity and physical properties of media and signs (suppressed in the transparency of dominant codes of aesthetic realism). Texts themselves are part of the world. In a naive realist form, materialism posits a materiality 'prior to' signification and attributes to it causal primacy. Critics often refer to materialism as 'reductive'. Marxist materialism is a version of epistemological realism which emphasizes the 'relations of production'. For Marx, the material conditions of existence determine human consciousness, and not vice versa. See also: Essentialism, Idealism, Materiality of the sign, Realism (objectivism)

- Materiality of the sign: Although signs may be discerned in the material form of words, images, sounds, acts or objects, such things have no intrinsic meaning and become signs only when we invest them with meaning. Signs as such have no material existence: only the sign vehicle has material substance. Whilst nowadays the 'signifier' is commonly interpreted as the material (or physical) form of the sign (something which can be seen, heard, touched, smelt or tasted), this is more materialistic than Saussure's own model. For Saussure, both the signifier and the signified were 'form' rather than substance. However, the material form of the sign can itself be a signifier - the same written text might be interpreted somewhat differently depending on whether it was handwritten or word-processed, and it might even generate different connotations if it were in one typeface rather than another. So too, whether the text was an 'original' or a 'copy' might affect the sense made of the text (see tokens and types) - not everyone would appreciate a photocopied love-letter! The basic material properties of the text may be shaped by constraints and affordances of the medium employed, which may also generate connotations. Some 'reflexive' aesthetic practices foreground their 'textuality' - the signs of their production (the materials and techniques used) - thus reducing the transparency of their style. For instance: 'painterly' painters draw our attention to the form and texture of their brushstrokes and to the qualities of the paint; poetry involves being playful with words; and music (without words) can only offer us sounds rather than propositions or arguments. In texts reflecting such practices, signifiers refer intratextually and intertextually to other signifiers more than to extratextual signifieds. In 'art for art's sake', 'the medium is the message'. However, when our prime purpose is instrumental (i.e. when we use the sign, text or medium

as a means to an end) we are seldom conscious of the materiality of the sign, which retreats to transparency as we foreground the plane of content rather than the plane of expression (or more specifically, rather than the substance of expression). See also: Channel, Materialism, McLuhanism, Medium, Plane of expression, Primacy of the signifier, Reflexivity, Tokens and types, Sign vehicle, Translatability, Transparency

- McLuhanism: Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) was a Canadian literary scholar who enjoyed international cult status as a media guru in the 1960s. 'McLuhanism' is a term sometimes used to refer to his notion that 'the medium is the message', which had at least four apparent meanings: a) that the medium shapes its content (i.e. that the nature of any medium has implications for the kinds of experience which can be best handled with it); b) that using a medium is important in itself (e.g. watching television or reading books are experiences in themselves regardless of explicit content); c) that the 'message' of a medium is the 'impact' it has on society; d) that the 'message' of a medium is its transformation of the perceptual habits of its users. McLuhan was a technological determinist who adopted the 'hard determinist' stance that communication technologies such as television, radio, printing and writing profoundly transformed both society and 'the human psyche'. The technologies (or media) which he discussed reflected his very broad definition of 'media'. This stance (sometimes known more specifically as 'media determinism') can be seen as an application of extreme Whorfianism to the nature of media in general. Just as Whorf argued that different languages shape our perception and thinking differently, McLuhan argued that all media do this. Clearly for McLuhan, the medium was far from neutral. See also: Form and content, Medium, Non-neutrality of medium, Linguistic determinism, Technological determinism, Whorfianism

- Meaning: Saussure's conception of meaning was purely structural, relational and differential - the meaning of signs was seen as lying in their systematic relation to each other. In contrast, referential meaning is the representation of referents in signs and texts. In the transmission model of communication, meaning is equated with content. Similarly, for both formalists and structuralists, 'the meaning of the text' is 'immanent' - that is, it is regarded as lying within the text (socio-historical context, authorial intention and readers' purposes are excluded from consideration). Social semioticians reject this 'literalist' notion - meaning does not reside within a text. They emphasize meaning-making practices and the interpretative importance of codes. Many semioticians would define meaning in terms of the denotative and

connotative associations produced as a reader decodes a text with relation to textual codes. See also: Affective fallacy, Intentional fallacy, Literalism, Preferred reading, Signifying practices, Value

- Media determinism: See McLuhanism and Technological determinism
- Mediation: Semioticians emphasize the mediatedness of experience, reminding us that we are always dealing with signs and codes, not with an unmediated objective reality. We become so used to conventions in 'realistic' texts such as those in audio-visual media that they seem 'natural' - the signifieds seem unmediated and the medium seems 'transparent', as when we interpret television or photography as 'a window on the world'. See also: Constructivism, Idealism, Realism (objectivism), Reality
- Medium: The term 'medium' is used in a variety of ways by different theorists, and may include such broad categories as speech and writing or print and broadcasting or relate to specific technical forms within the media of mass communication (radio, television, newspapers, magazines, books, photographs, films and records) or the media of interpersonal communication (telephone, letter, fax, e-mail, video-conferencing, computer-based chat systems). A medium is typically treated instrumentally as a transparent vehicle of representation by readers of texts composed within it, but the medium used may itself contribute to meaning: a hand-written letter and a word-processed circular could carry the same verbal text but generate different connotations. Signs and codes are always anchored in the material form of a medium - each of which has its own constraints and affordances. A medium may be digital or analogical. Postmodernist theorists tend to blur distinctions between one medium and another. Marshall McLuhan famously declared that 'the medium is the message'. See also: Channel, Form and content, 'Grammar' of medium, Language of a medium, Materiality of sign, McLuhanism, Non-neutrality of medium, Plane of expression, Sign vehicle, Translatability
- Medium and message: See McLuhanism
- Message: This term variously refers either to a text or to the meaning of a text - referents which literalists tend to conflate. See also: Literalism, McLuhanism, Meaning, Text
- 'Message without a code': See Photographic codes

- Metalingual function: In Jakobson's model of linguistic communication this is deemed to be one of the key functions of a sign. This function refers to the codes within which the sign may be interpreted. See also: Code, Functions of a sign
- Metaphysics of presence: See Deconstruction
- Metaphor: Metaphor expresses the unfamiliar (known in literary jargon as the 'tenor') in terms of the familiar (the 'vehicle'). The tenor and the vehicle are normally unrelated: we must make an imaginative leap to recognize the resemblance to which a fresh metaphor alludes. In semiotic terms, a metaphor involves one signified acting as a signifier referring to a rather different signified. Metaphors initially seem unconventional because they apparently disregard 'literal' or denotative resemblance. Metaphor can thus be seen as involving a symbolic as well as an iconic quality. Metaphoric signifiers tend to foreground the signifier rather than the signified. Deconstructionists have sought to demonstrate how dominant metaphors function to privilege unmarked signifieds. See also: Irony, Metonymy, Poetic function, Synecdoche, Trope
- Metonymic (synecdochic) fallacy: This term refers to a tendency for the represented part to be taken as an accurate reflection of the whole of that which it is taken as standing for. It might more accurately be referred to as the synecdochic fallacy. See also: Metonymy, Synecdoche
- Metonymy: A metonym is a figure of speech involving using one signified to stand for another signified which is directly related to it or closely associated with it in some way, notably the substitution of effect for cause. It is sometimes considered to include the functions ascribed by some to synecdoche. Metonymy simulates an indexical mode. Metonymic signifiers foreground their signifieds and background themselves. See also: Contiguity, Irony, Synecdoche, Metaphor, Metonymic fallacy, Trope
- Mimesis: The mimetic purpose in representation involves an attempt to closely imitate or simulate observable features of an external reality as if this is being experienced directly and without mediation. Whilst the notion derives from classical Greece, mimesis came to be the primary goal of a nineteenth century 'realist' movement in art and literature concerned with the 'accurate' observation and representation of the world. See also: Naturalism, Realism, aesthetic, Representation, Transparency
- Mirror phase: See Imaginary, The

- **Mise-en-scène:** Film theorists use this term to refer to the visual composition of individual shots. It includes camera position and angle, setting, costume and lighting, the relation of people and objects and also movement within the compositional frame. Theorists note that it is an extracinematic code since it is not unique to cinema: it was adopted from theatre, where it referred to 'staging'. It is distinguished from montage. See also: Filmic codes, Montage
- **Modality:** Modality refers to the reality status accorded to or claimed by a sign, text or genre. Peirce's classification of signs in terms of the mode of relationship of the sign vehicle to its referent reflects their modality - their apparent transparency in relation to 'reality' (the symbolic mode, for instance, having low modality). In making sense of a text, its interpreters make 'modality judgements' about it. They assess what are variously described as the plausibility, reliability, credibility, truth, accuracy or facticity of texts within a given genre as representations of some recognizable reality. For instance, they assign it to fact or fiction, actuality or acting, live or recorded, and they assess the possibility or plausibility of the events depicted or the claims made in it. In doing so, they draw upon their knowledge of the world (and social codes) and of the medium (and textual codes). Such judgements are made in part with reference to cues within texts which semioticians (following linguists) call 'modality markers', which include features of form and content. See also: Ontology, Reality
- **Modelling systems, primary and secondary:** 'Secondary modelling systems' are described, following Lotman, as semiotic superstructures built upon 'primary modelling systems'. Within this framework, writing is a secondary modelling system and written texts are built upon a primary modelling system which consists of verbal language. Since this stance grants primacy to the spoken form, it has been criticized as phonocentric. Other theorists have extended this notion to 'texts' in other media, seeing them as secondary modelling systems built out of a primary 'language'. Cinematic texts, for instance, have sometimes been seen as built upon a primary modelling system of 'graphic language'. However, whether such a 'language' has basic building blocks and what these might be has been hotly disputed. See also: Language of a medium
- **Models of communication:** See Encoding and decoding model of communication, Transmission model of communication
- **Models of the sign:** See Peircean model, Saussurean model

- **Modernism:** Modernism refers to a movement across the arts in the West which can be traced to the late nineteenth century, was at its height from around 1910 to 1930, and persisted until around the late 1970s. It was characterized most broadly by a rejection of tradition and of art as imitation. It involved considerable cross-fertilization between the arts and between its various forms in different countries. In the visual arts it included Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism and Futurism. In painting modernism typically involved the abandonment of direct representation. In music it was reflected in the abandonment of melody and harmony in favour of atonality. In architecture it is associated with the Bauhaus school; traditional materials and forms were rejected in favour of functional geometrical forms and new materials. In literature, realism in the novel was replaced by fragmentation and stream-of-consciousness and free verse became dominant in poetry. See also: Postmodernism
- **Modes of address:** Implicit and explicit ways in which aspects of the style, structure and/or content of a text function to 'position' readers as subjects ('ideal readers') (e.g. in relation to class, age, gender and ethnicity). Aspects of this include degrees of directness and of formality, narrative point of view and the markedness of one form of address compared with another. See also: Directness of address, Enunciation, Formality of address, Functions of signs, Narration
- **Modes of relationship:** This is Terence Hawkes's term to refer to Peirce's classification of signs in terms of the degree of arbitrariness in the relation of signifier to signified (to use Saussurean rather than Peircean terminology). These are (in order of decreasing arbitrariness) the symbolic, iconic and indexical modes. It is easy to slip into referring to Peirce's three forms as 'types of signs', but they are not necessarily mutually exclusive: a sign can be an icon, a symbol and an index, or any combination. Whether a sign is symbolic, iconic or indexical depends primarily on the way in which the sign is used, so the 'typical' examples which are often chosen to illustrate the various modes can be misleading. The same signifier may be used iconically in one context and symbolically in another. Signs cannot be classified in terms of the three modes without reference to the purposes of their users within particular contexts. See also: Arbitrariness, Conventionality, Relative autonomy
- **'Moments' of communication:** See Circuit of communication
- **Montage:** This cinematic code, taken from the French *monter* ('to assemble'), is used in various ways in film theory. The most general usage refers to editing, to the process of editing

shots into a sequence or to editing sequences into the form of a complete film. It sometimes refers to the use of many short shots to portray action or to a sequence of shots representing a condensed series of events. It is distinguished from *mise-en-scène* and is regarded as specific to the filmic medium. See also: Filmic codes, *Mise-en-scène*, Syntagm

- **Moscow school:** The Moscow Linguistics Circle was co-founded in 1915 by the Russian linguists Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) and Pjotr Bogatyrev (1893-1971). Together with the Petrograd Society for the Study of Poetic Language (*Opoyaz*) - which included Victor Shklovsky (1893-1984), Yuri Tynyanov (1894-1943) and Boris Eikhenbaum (1886-1959) - the Moscow school was the origin of Russian Formalism (a term initially used perjoratively by critics). When Formalist criticism was suppressed in the early 1930s by the Russian government, Jakobson emigrated to Czechoslovakia and became part of the Prague Linguistic Circle. See also: Formalism, Prague school
- **Moscow-Tartu school:** See Tartu school
- **Motivation and constraint:** The term 'motivation' (used by Saussure) is sometimes contrasted with 'constraint' in describing the extent to which the signified determines the signifier. The more a signifier is constrained by the signified, the more 'motivated' the sign is: iconic signs are highly motivated; symbolic signs are unmotivated. The less motivated the sign, the more learning of an agreed code is required. See also: Arbitrariness
- **Multiaccentuality of the sign:** this term is used to refer to the diversity of the use and interpretation of texts by different audiences (Volosinov).
- **Myth:** Barthes argues that the orders of signification called denotation and connotation combine to produce ideology in the form of myth - which has been described as a third order of signification. Popular usage of the term 'myth' suggests that it refers to beliefs which are demonstrably false, but the semiotic use of the term does not necessarily suggest this. Semioticians in the Saussurean tradition treat the relationship between nature and culture as relatively arbitrary; myths operate through codes and serve the ideological function of naturalization. See also: Ideology, Orders of signification
- **Narration or narrative voice:** Narration is the act and process of producing a narrative. Modes of address differ in their narrative point-of-view. Written narratives may employ third-person omniscient narration ('telling') or first-person 'subjective' narration ('showing'). In

television and film, camera treatment is called 'subjective' when the camera shows us events as if from a particular participant's visual point of view (encouraging viewers to identify with that person's way of seeing events or even to feel like an eye-witness to the events themselves). In academic writing, third person narrative has traditionally been regarded as more 'objective' and 'transparent' than first-person narrative; critics note that this style obscures authorial agency - 'facts' and events appear to 'speak for themselves'. See also: Enunciation, Modes of address, Polyvocality, Textual codes, Univocality

- Narrative: A narrative is a representation of a 'chain' of events. In the orderly Aristotelian narrative form, causation and goals turn story (chronological events) into plot: events at the beginning cause those in the middle, and events in the middle cause those at the end. See also: Narration, Narratology, Syntagm, Syntagmatic analysis

- Narratology: Narratology (or narrative theory) is a major interdisciplinary field in its own right, and is not necessarily framed within a semiotic perspective. Semiotic narratology is concerned with narrative in any mode - literary or non-literary, fictional or non-fictional, verbal or visual - but tends to focus on minimal narrative units and the 'grammar of the plot'. See also: Syntagmatic analysis

- Narrowcast codes: In contrast to broadcast codes, narrowcast codes are aimed at a limited audience, structurally more complex, less repetitive and tend to be more subtle, original and unpredictable. Following Bernstein, they are controversially described by some theorists as 'elaborated codes'. See also: Broadcast codes, Code, Symbolic capital

- Naturalism: In some contexts naturalism is regarded as a reductionist form of realism which offers detailed but superficial representations of the appearance of things (verisimilitude), in contrast to a mode which reflects a deeper, more profound understanding of their 'essential' nature (less specific and more 'typical'). However, another use of the term (originating in the late nineteenth century) refers to a focus on psychological or 'inner' reality. 'Photo-realism' or 'photographic naturalism' is the dominant contemporary form of visual naturalism for which modality judgements tend to be based on standards derived from 35mm colour photography. See also: Mimesis, Realism, aesthetic

- Naturalization: Codes which have been naturalized are those which are so widely distributed in a culture and which are learned at such an early age that they appear not to be constructed but to be 'naturally' given. Myths serve the ideological function of naturalization -

making the cultural seem 'natural', 'normal', 'self-evident' 'common-sense', and thus 'taken-for-granted'. Denotation can be seen as no more of a 'natural' meaning than connotation but rather as a part of a process of naturalization. See also: Commonsense, Denaturalization, Ideology, Valorization

- Negotiated code and reading: Within Stuart Hall's framework, this is an ideological code in which the reader partly shares the text's code and broadly accepts the preferred reading, but sometimes resists and modifies it in a way which reflects their own social position, experiences and interests (local and personal conditions may be seen as exceptions to the general rule) - this position involves contradictions. See also: Dominant code and reading, Ideological codes, Oppositional code and reading

- Nomenclaturism: According to this naive realist philosophical position, language is simply a nomenclature - words are simply names for pre-existing things (for some, this may include imaginary things and concepts as well as physical objects). It is a reductionist stance: reducing language to the purely referential function of naming things. See also: Essentialism, Isomorphism, Meaning, Nominal realism, Realism (objectivism), Referent, Referential fallacy, Reification

- Nominal realism: Jean Piaget uses this term to refer to the way in which young children sometimes appear to have difficulty in separating the labels which we give to things from the things themselves, as if such signifiers were an essential part of their referents. Even with adults, certain signifiers are regarded by some as far from 'arbitrary', acquiring almost magical power - as in relation to 'graphic' swearing and issues of prejudice - highlighting the point that signifiers are not socially arbitrary. As Korzybski declared, 'the word is not the thing' (the signifier is not the referent), a reminder which is particularly apposite with reference to visual rather than linguistic signs. See also: Essentialism, Isomorphism, Nomenclaturism, Realism (objectivism), Referent, Reification

- Non-neutrality of the medium: Marshall McLuhan's notion that 'the medium is the message' can be seen as a semiotic concern: to a semiotician the medium is not 'neutral'. Each medium has its own technical constraints, affordances and cultural connotations. The signified itself may be altered by a change of the medium used for the sign vehicle. See also: Channel, Graphocentrism, Logocentrism, Materiality of the sign, McLuhanism, Technological determinism, Translatability, Transparency

- Object: Term used in Peirce's triadic model of the sign to describe the referent of the sign - what the sign 'stands for'. Note that unlike Saussure's abstract signified, the referent is an object in the world. This need not exclude the reference of signs to abstract concepts and fictional entities as well as to physical objects, but Peirce's model allocates a place for an physical reality which Saussure's model did not feature (though Peirce was not a naive realist, and argued that all experience is mediated by signs). See also: Peircean model of the sign
- Objectivism: See Realism (objectivism)
- Ocularcentrism: See Graphocentrism
- Ontological arbitrariness: See Arbitrariness
- Ontology: This philosophical term (from metaphysics) refers to assertions or assumptions about the nature of reality: about what 'the real world' is like and what exists in it. It concerns what Foucault called 'the order of things' - a system of dividing up reality into discrete entities and substances. There are often hierarchical relations within an ontology: certain entities may be assigned prior existence, higher modality or some other privileged status. Ontologies are necessarily defined in words, which in itself transparently assigns a privileged status to words. Furthermore, naive theorists tend to assume that an order of things in the world can be adequately represented in words. Ontologies are tied to epistemological frameworks. The term ontological status is sometimes used to refer to the relationships between signifieds. Semantic oppositions such as between physical and mental or between form and content are ontological distinctions. The principle of ontological parsimony or economy (also known as 'Ockham's razor') is that the entities posited by a formal ontology should be limited in number to those which are essential for an adequate explanation. Advancing the theory of ontological relativity, Whorfian theorists argue that different languages carve up the world differently and have different in-built ontologies, so that some concepts may not be translatable. Realists deny ontological validity to things which they do not regard as part of the external, objective world. For realists, there is an ontological bond between the signifier and the signified in media which are both indexical and iconic (such as photography, film and television) which are thus seen as capable of directly reflecting 'things as they are'. See also: Binary oppositions, Deconstruction, Epistemology, Markedness, Modality, Priorism, Reification, Relativism, linguistic

- Open and closed texts: Eco describes as 'closed' those texts which show a strong tendency to encourage a particular interpretation - in contrast to more 'open' texts. He argues that mass media texts tend to be 'closed texts', and because they are broadcast to heterogeneous audiences diverse decodings of such texts are unavoidable. See also: Broadcast codes, Polysemy
- Oppositional code and reading: Within Stuart Hall's framework, this is an ideological code in which the reader, whose social situation places them in a directly oppositional relation to the dominant code, understands the preferred reading but does not share the text's code and rejects this reading, bringing to bear an alternative ideological code. See also: Dominant code and reading, Ideological codes, Negotiated code and reading, Oppositional code and reading
- Oppositions, semantic: See Analogue oppositions, Binary oppositions and Converse oppositions
- Order of things: See Ontology
- Order, symbolic: See Discourse
- Orders of signification: Barthes adopted from Hjelmslev the notion that there are different orders of signification (levels of meaning) in semiotic systems. The first order of signification is that of denotation: at this level there is a sign consisting of a signifier and a signified. Connotation is a second-order of signification which uses the denotative sign (signifier and signified) as its signifier and attaches to it an additional signified. Barthes argues that the orders of signification called denotation and connotation combine to produce ideology in the form of myth -which has been described as a third order of signification. Differences between the three orders of signification are not clear-cut. See also: Connotation, Denotation, Myth
- Overcoding: 'Overcoding' refers to structurally simple, conventional and repetitive texts having what information theorists call a high degree of redundancy. These are alleged to be features of broadcast codes. Under-coding is a feature of texts using less conventional narrowcast codes. Overcoding may lead to an 'overdetermined' reading of the texts which employ broadcast codes - to a stronger preferred reading. See also: Broadcast codes, Overdetermination, Preferred reading, Redundancy, Textual determinism

- **Overdetermination:** A phenomenon is said to be overdetermined when it can be attributed to multiple determining factors. Overdetermined readings of texts are those in which the preferred reading is very clear from the use of overcoded broadcast codes and the familiarity of the representational practices involved. See also: Overcoding, Textual determinism
- **Paradigmatic analysis:** Paradigmatic analysis is a structuralist technique which seeks to identify the various paradigms which underlie the 'surface structure' of a text. This aspect of structural analysis involves a consideration of the positive or negative connotations of each signifier (revealed through the use of one signifier rather than another), and the existence of 'underlying' thematic paradigms (e.g. binary oppositions such as public/private). See also: Commutation test, Paradigm, Selection, axis of, Syntagmatic analysis
- **Paradigm:** A paradigm is a set of associated signifiers which are all members of some defining category, but in which each signifier is significantly different. In natural language there are grammatical paradigms such as verbs or nouns. In a given context, one member of the paradigm set is structurally replaceable with another. The use of one signifier (e.g. a particular word or a garment) rather than another from the same paradigm set (e.g. adjectives or hats) shapes the preferred meaning of a text. Paradigmatic relations are the oppositions and contrasts between the signifiers that belong to the same paradigm set from which those used in the text were drawn. See also: Associative relations, Paradigmatic analysis, Selection, axis of, Syntagm
- **Paris school:** This is a school of structuralist semiotic thinking established by Algirdas Greimas (1917-1992), a Lithuanian by origin. Strongly influenced by Louis Hjelmslev (1899-1966), it seeks to identify basic structures of signification. Greimas focused primarily on the semantic analysis of textual structures but the Paris School has expanded its rigorous (critics say arid) structural analysis to cultural phenomena such as gestural language, legal discourse and social science. It is formalist in treating semiotic systems as autonomous rather than exploring the importance of social context. See also Copenhagen school, Formalism, Structuralism
- **Parole:** See Langue
- **Peircean model of the sign:** Peirce's model of the sign had three elements - the representamen, an interpretant and an object. It is thus a triadic model. See also: Saussurean model

- Parsimony, ontological: See Ontology
- Perceptual codes: These is classified here as a type of interpretative code. Some semioticians regard sensory perception as a code. Various arguments are encountered, in particular: a) that interpretation cannot be separated from perception; b) that human perceptual apparatus differs from that of other organisms and so presumably different species inhabit different perceptual realities; and/or c) that even within the human species, that there are socio-cultural, sub-cultural and environmental differences in perception. Perceptual codes must thus be learnt. As a semiotic code, perception involves representation. Unlike most codes, the notion of a perceptual code does not assume intentional communication (there need be no 'sender'). See also: Code
- Phatic function of signs: In Jakobson's model of linguistic communication this is deemed to be one of the key functions of a sign. This function refers to its construction of a relationship between addresser and addressee. See also: Addresser and addressee, Functions of a sign
- Phenomenal reality: See Reality
- Phonocentrism: Phonocentrism is a typically unconscious interpretative bias which privileges speech over writing (and consequently) the oral-aural over the visual). See also: Channel, Graphocentrism, Logocentrism
- Photographic codes: On one occasion, Barthes asserted that a photograph is 'a message without a code'. However, even though photographs are indexical (as well as iconic) photography involves a translation from three dimensions into two, as well as many variable representational practices. Consequently, some semioticians refer to 'reading photographs'. Photographic codes include genre, camerawork (lens choice, focus, aperture, exposure, camera position), composition (framing, distance, angle, lighting), film (quality, type, colour), developing (exposure, treatments) and printing (paper, size, cropping). See also: Codes, Naturalism, Photographic signs, Representational codes
- Photographic naturalism: See Naturalism
- Photographic signs: Unedited photographic and filmic images are indexical rather than simply iconic - though you could call them 'iconic indexes (or indices)'. A photographic image is an index of the effect of light on photographic emulsion. The indexical character of photographs encourages interpreters to treat them as 'objective' and transparent records of 'reality'. In this

medium there is less of an obvious gap between the signifier and its signified than with non-photographic media. We need to remind ourselves that a photograph does not simply record and reproduce an event, but is only one of an infinite number of possible representations. Representational practices are always involved in selection, composition, lighting, focusing, exposure, processing and so on. Photographs are 'made' rather than 'taken'. Digital photography leaves no trace of any editing, so that a digital photograph may lose its indexical status whilst retaining a compelling illusion of indexicality. Note that in a photograph the syntagms are spatial (or conceptual) relationships rather than sequential ones. See also: Indexical signs, Photographic codes

- Photo-realism: See Naturalism
- Plane of content: For Hjelmslev and Barthes, the signifieds on the plane of content were: substance of content (which included 'human content', textual world, subject matter and genre) and form of content (which included semantic structure and thematic structure - including narrative). See also: Plane of expression
- Plane of expression: For Hjelmslev and Barthes, the signifiers on the plane of expression were: substance of expression (which included physical materials of the medium - e.g. images and sounds) and form of expression (which included formal syntactic structure, technique and style). See also: Materiality of the sign, Plane of content
- Plane of the paradigm: See Selection, axis of
- Plane of the syntagm: See Combination, axis of
- Poetic or aesthetic function: In Jakobson's model of linguistic communication the dominance of any one of six factors within an utterance reflects a different linguistic function. In utterances where the poetic function is dominant (e.g. in literary texts), the language tends to be more 'opaque' than conventional prose in emphasizing the signifier and medium (and their materiality), or the form, style or code at least as much as any signified, content, 'message' or referential meaning. Such texts foreground the act and form of expression and undermine any sense of a 'natural' or 'transparent' connection between a signifier and a referent. In this sense, where the poetic function dominates, the text is self-referential: form is content and 'the medium [of language] is the message'. Some later adaptations of Jakobson's model refer to the poetic function as the formal function. The poetic function is generally more metaphorical than

metonymic, more connotative than denotative. See also: Aesthetic codes, Conative function, Encoding and decoding model, Expressive function, Foregrounding, Functions of a sign, Metalingual function, Phatic function, Referential function, Reflexivity, Transparency

- Polysemy: Those who reject textual determinism (such as poststructuralists) emphasize the 'polysemic' nature of texts - their plurality of meanings.
- Polyvocality: In contrast to univocality, this is the use of multiple voices as a narrative mode within a text, typically in order to encourage diverse readings rather than to promote a preferred reading. See also: Narration, Univocality
- Positioning of the subject: See Subject
- Postmodernism: This slippery term, which ostensibly refers to an era succeeding modernism, is philosophically allied with poststructuralism, deconstruction, radical scepticism and relativism - with which it shares an anti-foundationalist stance. Ironically postmodernism could almost be defined in terms of resisting definition. Postmodernism does not constitute a unified 'theory' (though many postmodernist theorists grant no access to any reality outside signification). Nor is there a 'postmodernist' aesthetic 'movement'; postmodernism is highly fragmented and eclectic. However, characteristic features of postmodern texts and practices are the use of irony and a highly reflexive intertextuality - blurring the boundaries of texts, genres and media and drawing attention to the text's constructedness and processes of construction. Postmodernism differs from modernism in embracing popular culture and 'bad taste'. The postmodernist trend is sometimes dated from Jean-François Lyotard's book, *The Postmodern Condition*, first published in 1979, which characterized postmodernist theory in terms of 'incredulity towards metanarratives'. See also: Deconstruction, Intertextuality, Modernism, Poststructuralism, Reflexivity,
- Poststructuralism: Whilst poststructuralism is often interpreted simply as 'anti-structuralism', it is worth noting that the label refers to a school of thought which developed after, out of, and in relation to structuralism. Poststructuralism built on and adapted structuralist notions in addition to problematising many of them. For instance, whilst Saussure argued for the arbitrariness of the relationship between the signifier and the signified and the primacy of the signifier, many poststructuralists have taken this notion further, asserting the total disconnection of the signifier and the signified (see Empty signifier). (they tend to be idealists, granting no access to any reality outside signification). Both schools of thought are

built on the assumption that we are the subjects of language rather than being simply instrumental 'users' of it, and poststructuralist thinkers have developed further the notion of 'the constitution of the subject', challenging essentialist romantic individualism (the notion that we are autonomous and creative agents with stable, unified 'personalities' and 'original' ideas). Poststructuralist semiotics is post-Saussurean semiotics; it involves a rejection of Saussure's hopes for semiotics as a systematic 'science' which could reveal some stable, underlying master-system - any such system would always involve exclusions and contradictions. For poststructuralists there are no fundamental 'deep structures' underlying forms in an external world. Whilst some semioticians have retained a structuralist concern with the analysis of formal systems, poststructuralist semioticians insist that no such analysis can ever be exhaustive or final. Many poststructuralist semioticians are involved in deconstruction, emphasizing the instability of the relationship between the signifier and the signified and the way in which the dominant ideology seeks to promote the illusion of a transcendental signified. Some poststructuralist semioticians are social semioticians who are concerned with 'signifying practices' in specific social contexts. Such semioticians have extended Saussure's emphasis on meaning as relational to include not only relationships within a self-contained linguistic system, but also the interpretative importance of such broader contexts of language use. Poststructuralist theorists include Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Kristeva and the later Barthes. Poststructuralism is closely allied with postmodernism and the terms are sometimes used interchangeably. See also: The bar, Deconstruction, Intertextuality, Postmodernism, Primacy of the signifier, Semiotics, Transcendental signified, Structuralism

- Practices, representational: See Representational codes
- Practices, signifying: See Signifying practices
- Pragmatics: Morris divided semiotics into three branches: syntactics, semantics and pragmatics. Pragmatics refers to the study of the ways in which signs are used and interpreted. The interpretation of signs by their users can also be seen as levels corresponding to these three branches - the pragmatic level being the interpretation of a sign in terms of relevance, agreement etc. See also: Semantics, Semiotics, Syntactics
- Prague school: This influential structuralist and functionalist group of linguists/semioticians was established in 1926 in Prague by Czech and Russian linguists, although the term 'Prague school' was not used until 1932. Principal members of this group

included: Vilem Mathesius (1882-1946), Bohuslav Havránek (1893-1978), Jan Mukarovsky (1891-1975), Nikolai Trubetzkoy (1890-1938) and Roman Jakobson (1896-1982). It was functionalist in analysing semiotic systems in relation to social functions such as communication rather than treating them purely as autonomous forms (in contrast to Saussure and Hjelmslev). Whilst they are known for their identification of the 'distinctive features' of language, these theorists also explored culture and aesthetics. With the emergence of Nazism, some, including Jakobson, emigrated to the USA. See also: Moscow school, Structuralism

- Preferred reading: This is a term which Stuart Hall originally used in relation to television news and current affairs programmes but which is often applied to other kinds of text. Readers of a text are guided towards a preferred reading and away from 'aberrant decoding' through the use of codes. A preferred reading is not necessarily the result of any conscious intention on the part of the producer(s) of a text. The term is often used as if it refers to a meaning which is in some way 'built into' the form and/or content of the text - a notion which is in uneasy accord with a textual determinism which Hall rejected. Hall himself seemed to assume that (in relation to television news and current affairs programmes) such meanings were invariably encoded in the dominant code, but such a stance tends to reify the medium and to downplay conflicting tendencies within texts. Nor is it clear how we may establish what any such preferred meaning in a text might be. Does it constitute the most common reading by members of the audience? Even if it proves to be so, can it be said to reside 'within' the text? In the context of the polysemic nature of relatively open-ended texts, the notion of a preferred reading may be too limiting. The extent to which there may be a preferred reading is related in part to how open or closed the text is judged to be. See also: Dominant code, Ideal readers, Ideology, Intentional fallacy, Meaning, Overcoding, Overdetermination, Textual determinism, Univocality
- Presence, metaphysics of: See Deconstruction
- Primacy of the signifier: The argument that 'reality' or 'the world' is at least partly created by the language (and other media) we use insists on the primacy of the signifier - suggesting that the signified is shaped by the signifier rather than vice versa. Some theorists stress the materiality of the signifier. Others note that the same signifier can have different signifieds for different people or for the same person at different times. Lévi-Strauss emphasized the primacy of the signifier, initially as a strategy for structural analysis. Poststructuralist theorists such as Lacan, Barthes, Derrida, Foucault have developed this notion

into a metaphysical presupposition of the priority of the signifier, but its roots can be found in Saussure and structuralism. See also: Arbitrariness, Constructivism, Conventionality, Idealism, Linguistic determinism, Materiality of the sign, Poststructuralism, Priorism, Relative autonomy

- Priorism/foundationalism: Priorist or foundationalist theories grant ontological priority to certain 'foundational' entities which are regarded as 'givens' or first principles. Various theorists assign causal priority to God, material reality, perception, 'human nature', language, society, ideology, technology and so on, raising the problem of how we are to explain these entities and their origins. 'Commonsense' suggests that reality exists 'prior to' and 'outside' signification. In a naive realist form, materialism posits a materiality prior to signification and attributes to it causal primacy. Essentialism grants an ontological status prior to and independent of language to certain key signifieds (which Derrida refers to as transcendental signifieds). Althusser declared that ideology was 'always-already given' (toujours-déjà-donné). Structuralism involved an attack on foundationalism, emphasizing that 'reality' is a construct and that there is no way in which we can stand outside language. However, both structuralists and poststructuralists thus give priority and determining power to language - which pre-exists all individuals. This is sometimes expressed as the primacy of the signifier. Social determinists reject the causal priority given to language by linguistic determinists and to technology by technological determinists. Derrida dismissed as 'metaphysical' any conceptual hierarchy which is founded on an sacrosanct first principle and his deconstructive strategy was directed against such priorism. Some theorists would argue that whilst we may become more conscious of priorism it may nevertheless be as inescapable as 'which came first - the chicken or the egg?' See also: Deconstruction, Essentialism, Linguistic determinism, Ontology, Primacy of the signifier, Realism (objectivism), Reductionism, Relativism, epistemological, Structural determinism

- Psychologism: See Reductionism

- Readers and writers, reading and writing texts: Whilst these terms appear to be graphocentric and logocentric, they are often used in semiotics to refer broadly to 'texts' and their users, regardless of medium. Writers and readers are sometimes referred to as encoders and decoders; a few commentators also use the terms makers and users in this broad sense (to avoid privileging a particular medium). Some semioticians refer to 'reading' (making sense of) visual media such as photographs, television and film: this is intended to emphasize the

involvement of codes which are learned (largely by informal but regular exposure to the medium). See also: Text

- Reading, dominant, negotiated and oppositional: See Dominant code, Negotiated code, Oppositional code
- Real, the (Lacan): For Lacan, 'the Real' is a primal realm where there is no absence, loss or lack. Here, the infant has no centre of identity and experiences no clear boundaries between itself and the external world. See also: Imaginary, The, Subject, Symbolic order
- Realism, aesthetic: The usage of this term varies mainly in relation to the various aesthetic movements, theoretical frameworks and media with which it is associated - so there are many different 'realisms', though a common realist goal is 'to show things as they really are' (a meaningless notion to a constructivist). In everyday usage 'realistic' representations are those which are interpreted as being in some sense 'true to life'. Realism tends to be defined in opposition to other terms (especially romanticism, idealization, artifice, abstraction) and in turn gives rise to the negatively defined notion of 'anti-realism'. Realist art seeks to represent a world which is assumed to exist before, and independently of, the act of representation. Whilst a function of aesthetic realism (especially in visual media such as photography, film and television) is that the signifier comes to seem identical with the signified (the signified is foregrounded at the expense of the signifier), 'realistic' texts even in such media involve representational codes which are historically and culturally variable. Realism seeks to naturalize itself. Readers learn realist codes at an early age - in the case of audio-visual media, through repeated exposure to an enjoyable personal learning process but without ever being taught to do so (in contrast to the learning of purely symbolic codes such as that of written language). Familiarity (from endless repetition) leads experienced viewers of photographic and audio-visual media to take realist representational codes in these media for granted so that these codes retreat to transparency, leaving the illusion of the text as a 'message without a code'. Realism involves an instrumental view of the medium as a neutral means of representing reality. Realist representational practices tend to mask the processes involved in producing texts, as if they were slices of life 'untouched by human hand'. Aesthetic realism leaves a compelling sense that 'the camera never lies', that television is a 'window on the world' and so on. Psychological realism refers to the coherence and plausibility of characters and their motivations within narratives. Critics of some forms of realism refer to it as 'illusionism'. Anti-

realist aesthetics involves the principle that 'progressive' texts should reflexively foreground their own construction, their own processes of signification. See also: Aesthetic codes, Mimesis, Naturalism, Realism (objectivism), Reality, Representational codes

- Realism, nominal: See Nominal realism
- Realism (objectivism): A philosophical (specifically epistemological) stance on 'what is real?' For those drawn towards philosophical realism, an objective and knowable reality exists indisputably 'outside' us and independently of our means of apprehending it - there are well-defined objects in the world which have inherent properties and fixed relations to each other at any instant. Realists usually acknowledge that 'social reality' is more subjective than 'physical reality' (which is seen as objective). They argue that truth (in the form of facts) can be generated by testing beliefs or theories against external reality, which involves physical constraints on the idealism of reality being purely a mental construction. Naive realists assume the possibility of 'direct perception' of the world whilst their critics argue that our experience of the world is unavoidably 'mediated'. Some realists accept that our perception of reality may be 'distorted' by the media which we use to apprehend it but deny that such media play any part in 'constructing' reality. Realism involves an assumption that the accurate description of reality is possible. It is reflected in the routine assumptions of 'commonsense' (even in the everyday practices of constructivists!). Marxist materialism is a version of epistemological realism. Realists tend to criticize constructivist stances as extreme conventionalism or relativism. See also: Commonsense, Constructivism, Conventionalism, Correspondence theory of truth, Epistemology, Essentialism, Idealism, Materialism, Nominal realism, Priorism, Realism, aesthetic, Relativism, epistemological
- Reality/realities: Whilst 'commonsense' suggests that reality exists prior to, and outside signification, according to constructivists (who refer to 'the construction of reality'), 'reality has authors' and what we experience as reality is a set of codes which represent the world; realities are made, not given or 'discovered'. 'Reality' is constructed in representations. Some semioticians, following Barthes, refer to reality as an 'effect' of the sign. Many pluralize the term or bracket it with quotation marks to emphasize their rejection of the 'realist' notion of a single, objective, knowable, external reality. Social semioticians acknowledge that not all realities are equal, and are interested in texts as 'sites of struggle' in which realities are contested. They are also interested in institutional practices of reality maintenance.

Phenomenal reality refers to the psychologically subjective 'lived experience' of individuals ('how things seem to me' - which is typically assumed to be universally shared and equivalent to 'the ways things are'). See also: Commonsense, Constructivism, Conventionalism, Idealism, Mediation, Realism (objectivism), Representation

- 'Receiver' and 'sender': See Sender and receiver
- Reductionism/reductivism: Reductionism involves the reduction of explanatory factors involved in some phenomenon to a single primary function or cause. For instance, nomenclaturism reduces language to the purely referential function of naming things; technological determinism reduces social change to a single cause; transmission models of communication reduce meaning to 'content'. Algirdas employed 'semiotic reduction' as a technique, reducing multiple 'functions' of narrative to three types of syntagms. However, 'reductionism' is typically a negative label. Realists criticize what they see as the reduction of reality by 'conventionalists' to nothing more than signifying practices. Materialists criticize formalism as an idealist reduction of referential content and material substance to abstract systems. But materialists are also accused by their critics of being reductionist. Disciplinary perspectives are often attacked as reductionist: sociologists tend to criticize psychologism (reduction to individual psychology) whilst psychologists tend to criticize sociologism (social determinism). Some other 'isms' which have been criticized as reductionist include economism (economic determinism) and biographism (reduction of textual meaning to authorial biography). See also: Essentialism, Priorism
- Redundancy: Broadcast codes have what information theorists call a high degree of redundancy - texts using such codes are structurally simple and repetitive ('overcoded'). See also: Broadcast codes, Open and closed texts
- Referent: What the sign 'stands for'. In Peirce's triadic model of the sign this is called the object. In Saussure's dyadic model of the sign a referent in the world is not explicitly featured - only the signified - a concept which may or may not refer to an object in the world. This is sometimes referred to as 'bracketing the referent'. Note that referents can include ideas, events and material objects. Anti-realist theorists such as Foucault reject the concreteness of referents, regarding them as products of language. See also: Essentialism, Nomenclaturism, Realism (objectivism), Referential fallacy, Representation

- Referential fallacy or illusion: This term has been used to refer to the assumption that a) it is a necessary condition of a sign that the signifier has a referent (in particular, a material object in the world) or b) that the meaning of a sign lies purely in its referent. Such assumptions are flawed because many signifiers do not have referents (e.g. a connective such as 'and' in language). The existence of a sign is no guarantee of the existence in the world of a corresponding referent. The reference in texts is primarily - poststructuralists say that it can only be - to other texts (see Intertextuality) rather than to 'the world' (see 'Reality'). The fallacy is reflected in judgements that the (referential) Peircean model of the sign is superior to the (non-referential) Saussurean model. Reducing language to a purely referential function is called nomenclaturism - a stance associated with naive realism. See also: Nomenclaturism, Realism (objectivism), Referent, Referential function
- Referential function: In Jakobson's model of linguistic communication this is deemed to be one of the key functions of a sign. This function of a sign refers to content. See also: Functions of a sign, Nomenclaturism, Referential fallacy
- Reflexivity: Some 'reflexive' aesthetic practices foreground their 'textuality' - the signs of their production (the materials and techniques used) - thus reducing the transparency of their style. Texts in which the poetic function is dominant foreground the act and form of expression and undermine any sense of a 'natural' or 'transparent' connection between a signifier and a referent. Anti-realist aesthetics involves the principle that 'progressive' texts should reflexively foreground their own construction, their own processes of signification. Postmodernism often involves a highly reflexive intertextuality. See also: Denaturalization, Foregrounding, Materiality of the sign, Poetic function, Postmodernism
- Reification: To reify (or 'hypostasize') is to 'thingify': treating a relatively abstract signified as if it were a single, bounded, undifferentiated, fixed and unchanging thing, the essential nature of which could be taken for granted (see Essentialism). It is a representational practice which functions to establish the self-evident 'reality' of the concept in question, treating it as if it has the ontological status of a specific physical thing in an objective material world. Reification suppresses the human intervention involved in the defining process as if the signifier were neutral and had been an integral part of a pre-existing thing in the world (see Nominal realism and Nomenclaturism). Reification makes no allowance for the cultural and ideological frameworks which produced the signifier. Just because we have a word for

something such as the 'self' or the 'mind' does not make it a 'real' entity, and yet the widespread and routine use of a signifier can appear to validate the existence of the signified as a taken-for-granted thing in itself. Perception itself may unavoidably involve reification. Technological determinists are often criticized for reifying 'Technology' in general or a particular medium such as 'Television' or 'The Computer'. Reification is a difficult charge to avoid, since any use of linguistic categorization (including words such as 'society' or 'culture') could be attacked as reification. Whilst reification is a strong criticism for realists, to those whose stance acknowledges the role of language and other media in constructing realities (constructivists and idealists), reification seems less meaningful as a criticism, since things are to some extent what we make with words. However, even constructivists sometimes treat concepts as if they were 'things in the world'. See also: Essentialism, Nomenclaturism, Nominal realism, Transcendent(al) signified

- Relational meaning: See Meaning
- Relations, syntagmatic and paradigmatic: See Paradigmatic relations, Syntagmatic relations
- Relationship, modes of: See Modes of relationship
- Relative autonomy: This is a term adopted from Althusserian Marxism, where it refers to the relative independence of the 'superstructure' of society (including ideology) from the economic (or techno-economic) 'base' (in contrast to the orthodox marxist stance that the latter determines the former - a stance similar to that of technological determinism). In the context of semiotics, Saussure's model of the sign assumes the relative autonomy of language in relation to 'reality' (it does not directly feature a 'real world' referent); there is no essential bond between words and things. In a semiotic system with double articulation the levels of the signifier and of the signified are relatively autonomous. The signifier and the signified in a sign are autonomous to the extent that their relationship is arbitrary (commentators also speak of 'relative arbitrariness' or 'relative conventionality'). See also: Arbitrariness, Articulation, The bar, Constructivism, Conventionality, Idealism, Modes of relationship, Nomenclaturism, Primacy of the signifier
- Relativism/relativity, cultural: See Cultural relativism

- Relativism, epistemological: The term 'relativism' is frequently either a term of abuse used by critics of constructivism (notably realists, for whom it may refer to any epistemological stance other than realism) or by constructivists themselves referring to a position whereby 'anything goes' with which they do not want to be associated. Critics associate relativism with an extreme idealism or nihilism denying the existence of a real material world - which it does not necessarily entail. Since few theorists choose to label themselves relativists it is difficult to define the term adequately. One characterization is as the stance that there are numerous alternative versions of reality which can only be assessed in relation to each other and not in relation to any 'absolute', fixed and universal truth, reality, meaning, knowledge or certainty. Such categories are contingent - temporary, provisional and dependent on context and circumstances. Any defence of absolutes tends to be denounced as 'metaphysics'. There can be no 'value-free' facts. Relativism is in tune with the emphasis in Saussurean structuralism on the relative position of signs within a signifying system rather than on 'things'. Relativism is an anti-essentialist position. The semiotic stance which problematizes 'reality' and emphasizes mediation and representational convention in the form of codes is criticized as relativism (or extreme conventionalism) by those veering towards realism. Such critics often object to what they see as a sidelining of referential concerns which are foundational in realist discourse - such as truth, facts, accuracy, objectivity, bias and distortion. Even in relation to the interpretation of a text, the stance that meaning depends on how readers interpret it rather than residing 'within' the text has been criticized by literalists as relativism (see Affective fallacy). Critics sometimes note that relativists cannot logically make any general statements even about relativism. See also: Constructivism, Conventionalism, Cultural relativism, Epistemology, Essentialism, Idealism, Priorism, Realism, Reality, Relativism, linguistic, Representation, Universalism, cognitive, Whorfianism

- Relativism/relativity, linguistic: Linguistic relativism is the view that every language is a unique system of relations and, more radically, that the phonological, grammatical and semantic distinctions in different languages are completely arbitrary. Thus, on the semantic level, reality is divided up into arbitrary categories by every language and different languages have different in-built ontologies. Concepts may not be translatable. Linguistic relativism emphasizes the contingency of signifieds. It is closely associated with epistemological relativism and is a fundamental assumption involved in Whorfianism. An opposing viewpoint is that of linguistic universalism. Both linguistic relativism and linguistic universalism are compatible with

Structuralism. See also: Cultural relativism, Relativism, epistemological, Translatability, Universalism, linguistic, Whorfianism

- Relativism/relativity, ontological: See Ontology
- Representamen: The representamen is one of the three elements of Peirce's model of the sign and it refers to the form which the sign takes (not necessarily material). When it refers to a non-material form it is comparable to Saussure's signifier; whereas when it refers to material form it is what some commentators refer to as the sign vehicle. See also: Peircean model of the sign, Signifier
- Representation: In general usage, this term refers to the depiction of something in any medium in the form of a text. However, as standard dictionaries remind us, a representation is something which stands for or in place of something else - which is of course what semioticians call a sign. Semiotics foregrounds and problematizes the process of representation. It is a widespread semiotic stance that reality is always represented - what we treat as 'direct' experience is 'mediated' by perceptual codes - perception involves mental representation. Representation always involves 'the construction of reality'. All texts, however 'realistic' they may seem to be (as in audio-visual media), are constructed representations rather than simply transparent 'reflections', recordings, transcriptions or reproductions of a pre-existing reality. Except in the case of digitally-sourced reproductions, texts are constructed from different materials from that which they represent, and representations cannot be replicas. Whether through 'direct' perception or mediated texts, what we experience as realities always involve codes. Representations which become familiar through constant re-use come to feel 'natural' and unmediated, and can even shape what we accept as reality (at least within a genre). In our daily behaviour we routinely act on the basis that some representations of reality are more reliable than others - we make modality judgements about them. Representations require interpretation. Realities are contested, and textual representations are thus 'sites of struggle'. Representation is unavoidably selective, foregrounding some things and backgrounding others. Every representation is motivated and historically contingent. Realists focus on the 'correspondence' of representations to 'objective' reality (in terms of 'truth', 'accuracy' and 'distortion'), whereas constructivists focus on whose realities are being represented and whose are being denied. Structuralist semioticians often explore how subjects are positioned within systems of representation. Both structuralist and poststructuralist theories lead to 'reality' and

'truth' being regarded as the products of particular systems of representation. Social semioticians focus on how representations are produced and interpreted. Some postmodern theorists avoid the term 'representation' completely because the epistemological assumptions of realism seem embedded in it. See also: Mimesis, Realism, aesthetic, Reality, Referent, Relativism, epistemological, Representational codes

- Representational codes: These are textual codes which represent reality. Those which are perceived as 'realistic' (especially in film and television) are routinely experienced as if they were recordings or direct reproductions of reality rather than as representations in the form of codes. See also: Aesthetic codes, Discourse, Reality, Realism, aesthetic, Representation, Textual codes

- Reproductive fallacy: André Bazin refers to this fallacy as being that the only kind of representation which can show things 'as they really are' is one which is (or appears to be) exactly like that which it represents in every respect. Since texts are almost invariably constructed out of different materials from that which they represent, exact replicas are impossible. For Bazin, aesthetic realism depended on a broader 'truth to reality'. See also: Reality, Realism, aesthetic, Representation

- Restricted codes: See Broadcast codes

- Rules of transformation: See Transformation, rules of

- Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: See Whorfianism

- Saussurean model of the sign: In Saussure's model, the sign consisted of two elements: a signifier and a signified (though he insisted that these were inseparable other than for analytical purposes). This dyadic model makes no direct reference to a referent in the world, and can be seen as supporting the notion that language does not 'reflect' reality but rather constructs it. It has been criticized as an idealist model. Saussure stressed that signs only made sense in terms of their relationships to other signs within the same signifying system (see Value). See also: Peircean model, Sign

- Schools or circles, linguistic/semiotic: See Copenhagen school, Moscow school, Paris school, Prague school, Tartu school

- Scriptism: See Graphocentrism

- Second articulation: At the (lower) structural level of second articulation, a semiotic code is divisible into minimal functional units which lack meaning in themselves (e.g. phonemes in speech or graphemes in writing). These lower units are nonsignifying sign elements - purely differential structural units (called *figurae* by Hjelmslev). They are recurrent features in the code. See also: Articulation, Double articulation, First articulation, Single articulation
- Secondness: See Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness
- Selection, axis of: A structuralist term for the 'vertical' axis in the analysis of a textual structure: the plane of the paradigm (Jakobson). See also: Combination, axis of
- Self-referentiality: See Poetic function
- Semantics: Morris divided semiotics into three branches: syntactics, semantics and pragmatics. Semantics refers to the study of the meaning of signs (the relationship of signs to what they stand for). The interpretation of signs by their users can also be seen as levels corresponding to these three branches - the semantic level being the comprehension of the preferred reading of the sign. See also: Pragmatics, Semiotics, Syntactics
- Semiology: Saussure's term *sémiologie* dates from a manuscript of 1894. 'Semiology' is sometimes used to refer to the study of signs by those within the Saussurean tradition (e.g. Barthes, Lévi-Strauss, Kristeva and Baudrillard), whilst 'semiotics' sometimes refers to those working within the Peircean tradition (e.g. Morris, Richards, Ogden and Sebeok). Sometimes 'semiology' refers to work concerned primarily with textual analysis whilst 'semiotics' refers to more philosophically-oriented work. Saussure's semiotics embraced only intentional communication - specifically human communication using conventionalized, artificial sign systems. Nowadays the term 'semiotics' is widely used as an umbrella term to include 'semiology' and (to use Peirce's term) 'semiotic'. See also: Semiotics
- Semiosis: This term was used by Peirce to refer to the process of 'meaning-making'. See also: Signification, Signifying practices, Unlimited semiosis
- Semiosis, unlimited: See Unlimited semiosis
- Semiosphere: The Russian cultural semiotician Yuri Lotman coined this term to refer to 'the whole semiotic space of the culture in question' - it can be thought of as a semiotic ecology in which different languages and media interact.

- Semiotic economy: The infinite use of finite elements is a feature which in relation to media in general has been referred to as 'semiotic economy'. The structural feature of double articulation within a semiotic system allows an infinite number of meaningful combinations to be generated using a small number of low-level units. This key 'design feature' is held to be the basis of the productivity and creative economy of verbal language. The English language has only about 40 or 50 elements of 'second articulation' (phonemes) but these can generate hundreds of thousands of language signs. See also: Design features of language, Double articulation
- Semiotic schools or circles: See Copenhagen school, Moscow school, Paris school, Prague school, Tartu school
- Semiotic square: Greimas introduced the semiotic square as a means of mapping the logical conjunctions and disjunctions relating key semantic features in a text. If we begin by drawing a horizontal line linking two familiarly paired terms such as 'beautiful' and 'ugly', we turn this into a semiotic square by making this the upper line of a square in which the two other logical possibilities - 'not ugly' and 'not beautiful' occupy the lower corners. The semiotic square reminds us that this is not simply a binary opposition because something which is not beautiful is not necessarily ugly and that something which is not ugly is not necessarily beautiful. Occupying a position within such as framework invests a sign with meanings. The semiotic square can be used to highlight 'hidden' underlying themes in a text or practice.
- Semiotic triangle: Peirce's triad is a semiotic triangle; other semiotic triangles can also be found. The most common alternative changes only the unfamiliar Peircean terms, and consists of the sign vehicle, the sense and the referent. See also: Peircean model
- Semiotics, definition of: Loosely defined as 'the study of signs' or 'the theory of signs', what Saussure called 'semiology' was: 'a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life'. Saussure's use of the term *sémiologie* dates from 1894 and Peirce's first use of the term semiotic was in 1897. Semiotics has not become widely institutionalized as a formal academic discipline and it is not really a science. It is not purely a method of textual analysis, but involves both the theory and analysis of signs and signifying practices. Beyond the most basic definition, there is considerable variation amongst leading semioticians as to what semiotics involves, although a distinctive concern is with how things signify, and with representational practices and systems (in the form of codes). In the 1970s, semioticians began to shift away from purely

structuralist (Saussurean) semiotics concerned with the structural analysis of formal semiotic systems towards a 'poststructuralist' 'social semiotics' - focusing on 'signifying practices' in specific social contexts. See also: Poststructuralism, Pragmatics, Semantics, Semiology, Sign, Social semiotics, Structuralism, Syntactics

- 'Sender' and 'receiver': Within transmission models of communication, these terms are used to refer to the participants in acts of communication (communication being presented as a linear process of 'sending' 'messages' to a 'receiver'). Semioticians usually regard such models as reductionist (reducing meaning to 'content'); the main semiotic objection is usually that transmission models do not feature the semiotic concept of a code, but related objections refer to the model's neglect of the potential significance of purposes, relationships, situations and the medium. See also Addresser and addressee, Intentional fallacy, Transmission model of communication
- Sense: In some semiotic triangles, this refers to the sense made of the sign (what Peirce called the interpretant). See also: Interpretant, Semiotic triangles
- Sign: A sign is a meaningful unit which is interpreted as 'standing for' something other than itself. Signs are found in the physical form of words, images, sounds, acts or objects (this physical form is sometimes known as the sign vehicle). Signs have no intrinsic meaning and become signs only when sign-users invest them with meaning with reference to a recognized code. Semiotics is the study of signs. See also: Analogical signs, Complex sign, Digital signs, Functions of signs, Modes of relationship, Models of the sign, Photographic signs, Signification, Simple sign
- Sign vehicle: A term sometimes used to refer to the physical or material form of the sign (e.g. words, images, sounds, acts or objects). For some commentators this means the same as the signifier (which for Saussure himself did not refer to material form). The Peircean equivalent is the representamen: the form which the sign takes, but even for Peirce this was not necessarily a material form. Note that the specific material form used (e.g. a word written in one typeface rather than another) may generate connotations of its own. See also: Materiality of the sign, Medium, Plane of expression, Representamen, Signifier, Tokens and types
- Signification: In Saussurean semiotics, the term signification refers to the relationship between the signifier and the signified. It is also variously used to refer to:

- the defining function of signs (i.e. that they signify, or 'stand for' something other than themselves);
- the process of signifying (semiosis);
- signs as part of an overall semiotic system;
- what is signified (meaning);
- the reference of language to reality;
- a representation.
- See also: Modes of relationship, Orders of signification, Semiosis, Value
- Signified (signifié): For Saussure, the signified was one of the two parts of the sign (which was indivisible except for analytical purposes). Saussure's signified is the mental concept represented by the signifier (and is not a material thing). This does not exclude the reference of signs to physical objects in the world as well as to abstract concepts and fictional entities, but the signified is not itself a referent in the world (in contrast to Peirce's object). It is common for subsequent interpreters to equate the signified with 'content' (matching the form of the signifier in the familiar dualism of 'form and content'). See also: Modes of relationship, Referent, Saussurean model of the sign, Signifier, Transcendent(al) signified
- Signified, transcendent: See Transcendent signified
- Signifier (signifiant): For Saussure, this was one of the two parts of the sign (which was indivisible except for analytical purposes). In the Saussurean tradition, the signifier is the form which a sign takes. For Saussure himself, in relation to linguistic signs, this meant a non-material form of the spoken word - 'a sound-image' ('the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression it makes on our senses'). Subsequent semioticians have treated it as the material (or physical) form of the sign - something which can be seen, heard, felt, smelt or tasted (also called the sign vehicle). See also: Absent signifiers, Empty or floating signifier, Imaginary signifier, Modes of relationship, Primacy of signifier, Representamen, Saussurean model of the sign, Sign vehicle, Signified
- Signifier, imaginary: See Imaginary signifier
- Signifying practices: These are the meaning-making behaviours in which people engage (including the production and reading of texts) following particular conventions or rules of

construction and interpretation. Social semioticians focus on signifying practices in specific socio-cultural contexts - on parole rather than langue, and tend towards diachronic rather than synchronic analysis - in contrast to structuralist semioticians who focus on the formal structure of sign systems. Realists criticize what they see as the reduction of reality by 'conventionalists' to nothing more than signifying practices. See also: Representational codes, Interpretative community, Social semiotics

- Simple sign: A sign which does not contain any other signs, in contrast to a complex sign. See also: Complex sign, Sign

- Simulacrum: This was Baudrillard's term (borrowed from Plato); 'simulacra' are 'copies without originals' - the main form in which we encounter texts in postmodern culture. More broadly, he used the term to refer to a representation which bears no relation to any reality. See also: Digital signs, Empty signifier, Tokens and types

- Single articulation, codes with: Semiotic codes have either single articulation, double articulation or no articulation. Codes with single articulation have either first articulation or second articulation only. Codes with first articulation only consist of signs - meaningful elements which are systematically related to each other - but there is no second articulation to structure these signs into minimal, non-meaningful elements. Where the smallest recurrent structural unit in a code is meaningful, the code has first articulation only. The system of related traffic signs (with red borders, triangular or circular shapes, and standardized, stylized images) is a code with first articulation only. Other semiotic codes lacking double articulation have second articulation only. These consist of signs which have specific meanings which are not derived from their elements. They are divisible only into figurae (minimal functional units). The most powerful code with second articulation only is binary code: this has only 2 minimal functional units, 0 and 1, but these units can be combined to generate numbers, letters and other signs. See also: Articulation, Double articulation, First articulation, Second articulation, Unarticulated codes

- Sites of struggle: See Constructivism, Reality, Representation, Social semiotics

- Social codes: Whilst all semiotic codes are in a broad sense social codes, social codes can also be seen as forming a major sub-group of codes, alongside textual codes and interpretative codes. Social codes in this narrower sense concern our tacit knowledge of the social world and

include unwritten codes such as bodily codes, commodity codes and behavioural codes. See also: Code

- Social construction: See Constructivism
- Social determinism: Social determinism is a stance which asserts the primacy of social and political factors rather than the autonomous influence of the medium (whether this is language or a technology). Social determinists reject the causal priority given to language by linguistic determinists and to technology by technological determinists. Those who emphasize social determination focus on such issues as the circumstances of production, modes of use, values, purposes, skill, style, choice, control and access rather than on the structure of the text or code or the technical features of the medium. An extreme social determinist position relating to the decoding of texts (sometimes called, more specifically, audience determinism) would reduce individual decodings to a direct consequence of social class position. A more moderate stance would stress that access to different codes is influenced by social position. Structuralist semiotics tends to be allied with textual determinism and to ignore social determination. See also: Linguistic determinism, Technological determinism, Textual determinism
- Social semiotics: Whilst some semioticians have retained a structuralist concern with formal systems (mainly focusing on detailed studies of narrative, film and television editing and so on), many have become more concerned with social semiotics. A key concern of social semioticians is with 'signifying practices' in specific socio-cultural contexts. Social semioticians acknowledge that not all realities are equal, and are interested in 'sites of struggle' in which realities are contested. The roots of social semiotics can be traced to the early theorists. Saussure himself wrote of semiotics as 'a science that studies the life of signs within society'. Signs do not exist without interpreters, and semiotic codes are of course social conventions. See also: Semiotics, Social determinism
- Sociolect: A term from sociolinguistics referring to the distinctive ways in which language is used by members of a particular social group. In semiotic terms can refer more broadly to subcodes shared by members of such groups (see codes). See also: Idiolect, Interpretative community, Symbolic capital
- Sociologism: See Reductionism

- Solipsism: See Idealism
- Square, semiotic: See Semiotic square
- Structural determinism: This is the stance that the pre-given structure of some signifying system - such as language or any kind of textual system - determines the subjectivity (or at least behaviour) of individuals who are subjected to it. Louis Althusser was a structural determinist in this sense (see Interpellation). See also: Interpellation, Linguistic determinism, Priorism, Social determinism, Structuralism, Technological determinism, Textual determinism
- Structural meaning: See Meaning
- Structuralism: Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of modern linguistics, was a pioneer of structuralist thinking - his was the linguistic model which inspired the European structuralists. Other key structuralists include Nikolai Trubetzkoy, Roman Jakobson, Louis Hjelmslev and Algirdas Greimas in linguistics, Claude Lévi-Strauss in anthropology, Louis Althusser in political science, Roland Barthes in literary criticism and Jacques Lacan in psychoanalysis (although the theories of Barthes and Lacan evolved into poststructuralist ones). Michel Foucault, a historian of ideas, is often seen as a structuralist, although he rejected this label; his ideas are also closely allied with poststructuralism. Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* was published in 1916; although the words 'structure' and 'structuralism' are not mentioned, it is the source of much of the terminology of structuralism. Formalism was a key tributary leading to structuralism in the late 1920s and 1930s. The birth of European structuralism is usually associated with a conference of the Prague school linguists in The Hague in 1928. The first English translation of Saussure's *Course* was published in 1959, and structuralism flourished in academic circles in the 1960s and 1970s (though it continued to be influential in the 1980s). The primary concern of the Structuralists is with systems or structures rather than with referential meaning or the specificities of usage (see *Langue and parole*). Structuralists regard each language as a relational system or structure and give priority to the determining power of the language system (a principle shared by poststructuralists). They seek to describe the overall organization of sign systems as 'languages' - as with Lévi-Strauss and myth, kinship rules and totemism, Lacan and the unconscious and Barthes and Greimas and the 'grammar' of narrative. The primary emphasis is on the whole system - which is seen as 'more than the sum of its parts'. Structuralists engage in a systematic search for 'deep structures' underlying the surface features of phenomena (such as language, society, thought and

behaviour). Their textual analysis is synchronic, seeking to delineate the codes and rules which underlie the production of texts by comparing those perceived as belonging to the same system (e.g. a genre) and identifying invariant constituent units. The analysis of specific texts seeks to break down larger, more abstract units into 'minimal significant units' by means of the commutation test, then groups these units by membership of paradigms and identifies the syntagmatic relations which link the units. The search for underlying semantic oppositions is characteristic of structuralist textual analysis. Contemporary social semiotics has moved beyond structuralist analysis of the internal relations of parts within a self-contained system. See also: Combination, axis of, Commutation test, Copenhagen school, Formalism, Functionalism, Langue and parole, Paradigmatic analysis, Paris school, Poststructuralism, Prague school, Selection, axis of, Semiotics, Structural determinism, Synchronic analysis, Syntagmatic analysis, Tartu school, Transformation, rules of

- Struggle, sites of: See Constructivism, Reality, Representation, Social semiotics
- Stylistic foregrounding: See Foregrounding, stylistic
- Subject: In theories of subjectivity a distinction is made between 'the subject' and 'the individual'. Whilst the individual is an actual person, the subject is a set of roles constructed by dominant cultural and ideological values (e.g. in terms of class, age, gender and ethnicity). The structuralist notion of the 'positioning of the subject' refers to the 'constitution' (construction) of the subject by the text. According to this theory of textual (or discursive) positioning, the reader is obliged to adopt a 'subject-position' which already exists within the structure and codes of the text. Subjects are thus constructed as 'ideal readers' through the use of codes. For the linguist Benveniste the subject has no existence outside specific discursive moments - the subject is constantly reconstructed through discourse. For some theorists, the power of the mass media resides in their ability to position the subject in such a way that media representations are taken to be reflections of everyday reality. The notion of the positioning of the subject assumes that a text has only one meaning - that which was intended by its makers - whereas contemporary theorists contend that there may be several alternative (even contradictory) subject-positions from which a text may make sense, and these are not necessarily built into the text itself (or intended). Poststructuralist theorists critique the concept of the unified subject. Suture is a term used by film theorists to refer to filmic processes (particularly shot relationships) which shape the subjectivity of their viewers whilst invisibly

'stitching together' cinematic signifiers to foreground the narrative. See also: Addresser and addressee, Ideal reader, Imaginary, The, Interpellation, Modes of address, Preferred reading, Structural determinism, Symbolic order, Textual determinism

- Subjectivism: See Idealism
- Subjectivity, theories of: See Subject
- Substance, form and: See Form and substance
- Suture: See Subject
- Symbolic: A mode in which the signifier does not resemble the signified but which is arbitrary or purely conventional - so that the relationship must be learnt (e.g. the word 'stop', a red traffic light, a national flag, a number) (Peirce). See also: Arbitrariness, Iconic, Indexical, Modes of relationship
- Symbolic capital: Pierre Bourdieu outlined various inter-related kinds of 'capital' - economic, cultural, social and symbolic. 'Symbolic capital' refers to the communicative repertoire of an individual or group, which is related in part to educational background. In semiotic terms, symbolic capital reflects differential access to, and deployment of, particular codes. See also: Broadcast codes, Interpretative codes, Interpretative community, Interpretative repertoire, Narrowcast codes
- Symbolic order: 'The Symbolic' is Lacan's term for the phase when the child gains mastery within the public realm of verbal language - when a degree of individuality and autonomy is surrendered to the constraints of linguistic conventions and the Self becomes a more fluid and ambiguous relational signifier rather than a relatively fixed entity. Structuralists focus on the Symbolic order rather than the Imaginary, seeing language as determining subjectivity. See also: Imaginary, The, Subject, Discourse
- Synchronic analysis: Synchronic analysis studies a phenomenon (such as a code) as if it were frozen at one moment in time. Structuralist semiotics focuses on synchronic rather than diachronic analysis and is criticized for ignoring historicity. See also: Langue and parole, Structuralism
- Synchronous communication: Synchronous communication is communication in which participants can communicate 'in real time' - without significant delays. This feature ties together the presence or absence of the producer(s) of the text and the technical features of

the medium. Synchronous communication is invariably interpersonal communication. See also: Asynchronous communication, Interpersonal communication

- Synecdoche: A figure of speech involving the substitution of part for whole, genus for species or vice versa. Some theorists do not distinguish it from metonymy. See also: Irony, Metaphor, Metonymic fallacy, Metonymy, Trope
- Syntactics: Morris divided semiotics into three branches: syntactics (or syntax), semantics, and pragmatics. Syntactics refers to the study of the structural relations between signs. The interpretation of signs by their users can also be seen as levels corresponding to these three branches - the syntactic level being the recognition of the sign (in relation to other signs). Such recognition depends on the reader's access to an appropriate repertoire of codes (see Symbolic capital). See also: Pragmatics, Semantics, Semiotics
- Syntagm: A syntagm is an orderly combination of interacting signifiers which forms a meaningful whole (sometimes called a 'chain'). In language, a sentence, for instance, is a syntagm of words. Syntagmatic relations are the various ways in which constituent units within the same text may be structurally related to each other. A signifier enters into syntagmatic relations with other signifiers of the same structural level within the same text. Syntagmatic relationships exist both between signifiers and between signifieds. Relationships between signifiers can be either sequential (e.g. in film and television narrative sequences), or spatial (e.g. montage in posters and photographs). Relationships between signifieds are conceptual relationships (such as argument). Syntagms are created by the linking of signifiers from paradigm sets which are chosen on the basis of whether they are conventionally regarded as appropriate or may be required by some syntactic rule system (e.g. grammar). See also: Combination, axis of, Grande syntagmatique, Paradigmatic analysis, Syntactics, Syntagmatic analysis
- Syntagmatic analysis: Syntagmatic analysis is a structuralist technique which seeks to establish the 'surface structure' of a text and the relationships between its parts. The study of syntagmatic relations reveals the rules or conventions underlying the production and interpretation of texts. See also: Combination, axis of, Paradigmatic analysis, Syntagm
- Tartu school: What is sometimes called the 'Moscow-Tartu school of semiotics' was founded in the 1960s by Yuri Lotman (1922-1993), who worked in Tartu University, Estonia. Lotman worked within the tradition of formalist structuralist semiotics but broadened his

semiotic enterprise by establishing 'cultural semiotics', his goal being to develop a unified semiotic theory of culture. See also: Formalism, Structuralism

- Technological or media determinism: The term 'technological determinism' was coined by Thorstein Veblen. Nowadays, it is used to refer to the common assumption that new technologies are the primary cause of: major social and historical changes at the macrosocial level of social structure and processes; and/or subtle but profound social and psychological influences at the microsocial level of the regular use of particular kinds of tools. Whatever the specific technological 'revolution' may be, technological determinists present it as a dramatic and 'inevitable' driving force, the 'impact' of which will 'lead to' deep and 'far-reaching' 'effects' or 'consequences'. Technology is presented as autonomous. Technological determinism is often associated with a belief in the 'neutrality' of technology, but is sometimes linked with the notion of the non-neutrality of technology in the form of the stance that we cannot merely 'use' technology without also, to some extent, being 'used by' it. Very broad claims about the 'impact' of technology (such as those of McLuhan) are open to the criticism of reification. Where technological determinism focuses on communications media in particular (as with McLuhan) it is sometimes referred to as 'media determinism'. A moderate version of technological determinism is that our regular use of particular tools or media may have subtle influences on us, but that it is the social context of use which is crucial. See also: Linguistic determinism, McLuhanism, Non-neutrality of medium, Social determinism, Whorfianism

- Televisual codes: See Filmic codes

- Tenor: See Metaphor

- Text: Most broadly, this term is used to refer to anything which can be 'read' for meaning; to some theorists, 'the world' is 'social text'. Although the term appears to privilege written texts (it seems graphocentric and logocentric), to most semioticians a 'text' is a system of signs (in the form of words, images, sounds and/or gestures). It is constructed and interpreted with reference to the conventions associated with a genre and in a particular medium of communication. The term is often used to refer to recorded (e.g. written) texts which are independent of their users (used in this sense the term excludes unrecorded speech). A text is the product of a process of representation and 'positions' both its makers and its readers (see Subject). Typically, readers tend to focus mainly on what is represented in a text

rather than on the processes of representation involved (which usually seem to be transparent). See also: Complex sign, Representation, Textual codes

- Textual codes: Whilst many semiotic codes are treated by some semioticians as 'textual' codes (reading 'the world' through the metaphor of a 'text'), this can be seen as forming one major group of codes, alongside social codes and interpretative codes. In the current classification, textual codes relate to our knowledge of texts, genres and media, and include: scientific and aesthetic codes, genre, rhetorical and stylistic codes and mass media codes. See also: Aesthetic codes, Broadcast codes, Directness of address, Formality of address, Filmic codes, Modes of address, Narrowcast codes, Photographic codes, Representational codes, Narration, Text

- Textual community: See Interpretative community

- Textual determinism: This is a stance that the form and content of a text determines how it is decoded. Critics of this stance argue that decoders may bring to the text codes of their own which may not match those used by the encoder(s), and which may shape their decoding of it. See also: Aberrant decoding, Affective fallacy, Literalism, Overcoding, Overdetermination, Polysemy, Preferred reading, Social determinism

- Textual idealism: See Idealism

- Textuality: See Materiality of the sign

- Thirdness: See Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness

- Tokens and types: Peirce made a distinction between tokens and types. In relation to words in a text, a count of the tokens would be a count of the total number of words used (regardless of type), whilst a count of the types would be a count of the different words used (ignoring any repetition). The type-token distinction in relation to signs is important in social semiotic terms not as an absolute property of the sign vehicle but only insofar as it matters on any given occasion (for particular purposes) to those involved in using the sign. The medium used may determine whether a text is a type which is its own sole token (unique original) or simply one token amongst many of its type ('a copy without an original'). See also: Digital signs, Simulacrum

- Transcendent(al) signified: Derrida argued that dominant ideological discourse relies on the metaphysical illusion of a transcendental signified - an ultimate referent at the heart of a

signifying system which is portrayed as 'absolute and irreducible', stable, timeless and transparent - as if it were independent of and prior to that system. All other signifieds within that signifying system are subordinate to this dominant central signified which is the final meaning to which they point. Derrida noted that this privileged signified is subject to historical change, so that Neo-Platonism focused on 'the Monad', Christianity focused on God, Romanticism focused on consciousness and so on. Without such a foundational term to provide closure for meaning, every signified functions as a signifier in an endless play of signification. See also: Deconstruction, Différance, Discourse, Empty signifier, Essentialism, Markedness, Poststructuralism, Reification

- Transformation, rules of: Analogously to Chomsky's notion of 'transformational grammar', European structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss argued that new structural patterns within a culture are generated from existing ones through formal 'rules of transformation' based on systematic similarities, equivalences or parallels, or alternatively, symmetrical inversions. The patterns on different levels of a structure (e.g. within a myth) or in different structures (e.g. in different myths) are seen as logical transformations of each other. Rules of transformation enable the analyst to reduce a complex structure to some more basic constituent units. Lévi-Strauss claimed that the structure of relations underlying the practices of one particular culture is a transformation of other possible structures belonging to a universal set. Structures can be transformed by a systematic change in structural relationships. By applying transformation rules the analyst could reconstruct a whole structure from a fragment and later stages from earlier ones. See also: Commutation test, Isomorphism, Structuralism

- Translatability: Linguistic universalists argue that we can say whatever we want to say in any language, and that whatever we say in one language can always be translated into another. For linguistic relativists translation between one language and another is at the very least, problematic, and sometimes impossible. Some commentators also apply this to the 'translation' of un verbalized thought into language. Even within a single language, some relativists suggest that any reformulation of words has implications for meaning, however subtle: it is impossible to say exactly the same thing in different words; reformulating something transforms the ways in which meanings may be made with it, and in this sense, form and content are inseparable and the use of the medium contributes to shaping the meaning. In the context of the written word, the 'untranslatability' claim is generally regarded as strongest in the expressive arts and

weakest in the case of formal scientific papers. Within the literary domain, 'untranslatability' was favoured by Romantic literary theorists, for whom the connotative meanings of words were crucial. The formalist New Criticism in literary theory also condemned 'the heresy of paraphrase'. Translatability is an issue concerning the relation between semiotics and linguistics: the issue being whether texts in 'non-verbal' systems can be translated into verbal language or vice versa (where logocentric theorists argue that non-verbal texts can generally be translated into language but that linguistic texts can seldom be translated into non-verbal forms). Benveniste argued that the 'first principle' of semiotic systems is that they are not 'synonymous': we cannot say 'the same thing' in systems based on different units: we cannot directly translate from one medium or code to another without transforming meaning. See also: Channel, Language of a medium, Logocentrism, Medium, Non-neutrality of medium, Universalism, linguistic, Relativism, linguistic, Whorfianism

- Transmission model of communication: Everyday references to communication are based on a 'transmission' model in which a 'sender' 'transmits' a 'message' to a 'receiver' - a formula which reduces meaning to 'content' (delivered like a parcel) and which tends to support the intentional fallacy. This is also the basis of Shannon and Weaver's well-known model of communication, which makes no allowance for the importance of social context. Semioticians, by contrast, emphasize the importance of codes. See also: Communication, Encoding and decoding model of communication, Intentional fallacy, Sender and receiver

- Transparency: We become so used to familiar conventions in our everyday use of various media that the codes involved often seem 'transparent' and the medium itself seems neutral. The medium is characterized by instrumentalist thinking as purely a means to an end when the text is regarded as a 'reflection', a 'representation' or an 'expression'. The status of the text as text - its 'textuality' and materiality - is minimized. Commonsense tells us that the signified is unmediated and the signifier is 'transparent' and purely denotative, as when we interpret television or photography as 'a window on the world'. The importance accorded to transparency varies in relation to genre and function: as the formalists noted, poetic language tends to be more 'opaque' than conventional prose. In 'realistic' texts, the authorial goal is for the medium, codes and signs to be discounted by readers as transparent and for the makers of the text to retreat to invisibility. Unmarked terms and forms - such as the dominant code - draw no attention to their invisibly privileged status. Semioticians have sought to demonstrate that

the apparent transparency of even the most 'realistic' signifier, text, genre or medium is illusory, since representational codes are always involved. Anti-realist texts do not seek to be transparent but are reflexive. See also: Foregrounding, stylistic, Imaginary signifier, Mediation, Mimesis, Naturalization, Non-neutrality of medium, Realism, aesthetic, Reflexivity, Representation, Materiality of the sign

- Triadic model of sign: A triadic model of the sign is based on a division of the sign into three necessary constituent elements. Peirce's model of the sign is a triadic model. See also: Dyadic model, Semiotic triangle
- Triangle, semiotic: See Semiotic triangle
- Trope: Tropes are rhetorical 'figures of speech' such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. Poststructuralist theorists such as Derrida, Lacan and Foucault have accorded considerable importance to tropes. See also: Irony, Metaphor, Metonymy, Synecdoche,
- Types and tokens: See Tokens and types
- Unarticulated codes: Codes without articulation consist of a series of signs bearing no direct relation to each other. These signs are not divisible into recurrent compositional elements. The folkloristic 'language of flowers' is a code without articulation, since each type of flower is an independent sign which bears no relation to the other signs in the code. Unarticulated codes, which have no recurrent features, are 'uneconomical'. See also: Articulation of codes
- Universalism, cognitive: Structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss argues that there is a universal mental structure based on certain fundamental binary oppositions. This structure is transformed into universal structural patterns in human culture through universal linguistic categories. See also: Cultural relativism, Universalism, linguistic
- Universalism, linguistic: This term refers to the view that, whilst languages vary in their surface structure, every language is based on the same underlying universal structure or laws. In contrast to linguistic relativists, universalists argue that we can say whatever we want to say in any language, and that whatever we say in one language can always be translated into another. Both linguistic universalism and linguistic relativism are compatible with Structuralism. See also: Cultural relativism, Relativism, linguistic, Translatability, Whorfianism

- **Univocality:** In contrast to polyvocality, this is the use of a single voice as a narrative mode within a text. Univocal texts offer a preferred reading of what they represent. By obscuring agency, this mode of narration, in association with third-person narrative, tends to be associated with the apparently 'unauthored' transparency of realism. See also: Narration, Polyvocality
- **Unlimited semiosis:** Whilst Saussure established the general principle that signs always relate to other signs, within his model the relationship between signifier and signified was stable and predictable. Umberto Eco coined the term 'unlimited semiosis' to refer to the way in which, for Peirce (via the 'interpretant'), for Barthes (via connotation), for Derrida (via 'free play') and for Lacan (via 'the sliding signified'), the signified is endlessly commutable - functioning in its turn as a signifier for a further signified. See also: Différance, Interpretant, Transcendent(al) signified
- **Unmarked categories:** See Markedness
- **Untranslatability:** See Translatability
- **Valorization:** Loosely, the term refers to the attribution of value, but it is also used more specifically to refer to its attribution to members of binary semantic oppositions, where one signifier and its signified is unmarked (and positively valorized) whilst the other is marked (and negatively valorized). Valorization is part of a process of naturalization whilst devalorization (or revalorization) is part of an attempt to deconstruct the ideological assumptions built into the oppositional framework (a process of denaturalization). See also: Binary oppositions, Deconstruction, Markedness, Naturalization, Ontology
- **Value:** For Saussure language was a relational system of 'values'. He distinguished the value of a sign from its signification or referential meaning. A sign does not have an 'absolute' value in itself - its value is dependent on its relations with other signs within the signifying system as a whole. Words in different languages can have equivalent referential meanings but different values since they belong to different networks of associations. There is some similarity here to the distinction between denotation ('literal' meaning) and connotation (associations). See also: Meaning, Saussurean model of the sign, Signification, Structuralism
- **Vehicle in metaphor:** See Metaphor
- **Vehicle, sign:** See Sign vehicle

- Vertical axis: See Selection, axis of
- Virgule: See The bar
- Whorfianism: In its most extreme version 'the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis' can be described as relating two associated principles: linguistic determinism and linguistic relativism. Applying these two principles, the Whorfian thesis is that people who speak different languages perceive and think about the world quite differently, their worldviews being shaped or determined by the language of the culture (a notion rejected by social determinists). Critics note that we cannot make inferences about differences in worldview solely on the basis of differences in linguistic structure. Whilst few linguists would accept the Whorfian hypothesis in its 'strong', extreme or deterministic form, many now accept a 'weak', more moderate, or limited Whorfianism, namely that the ways in which we see the world may be influenced by the kind of language we use. See also: Conventionalism, Cultural relativism, Linguistic determinism, McLuhanism, Non-neutrality of the medium, Ontology, Relativism, epistemological, Relativism, linguistic, Social determinism, Technological determinism, Translatability, Universalism, cognitive, Universalism, linguistic
- Writing 'under erasure': See Erasure, writing under