

The Impact of Photography



Geoff Nunberg

IS103

History of Information

Oct. 31, 2007



The Range of Photography

Applications in private life, state functioning, science, journalism, art...

And by extension, to broadcast, cinema, x-ray, etc.



Agenda

The invention of photography

The photographic "truth"

Manipulating & questioning the photographic truth, then and now

Photography as documentation

Fixing identities

- Documenting the deviant

- The physical classification of deviance

How we read photographs: as particular, real, veridical, "objective"

(What's left out: photography and art)

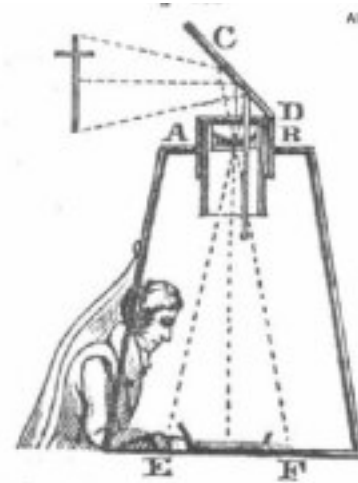
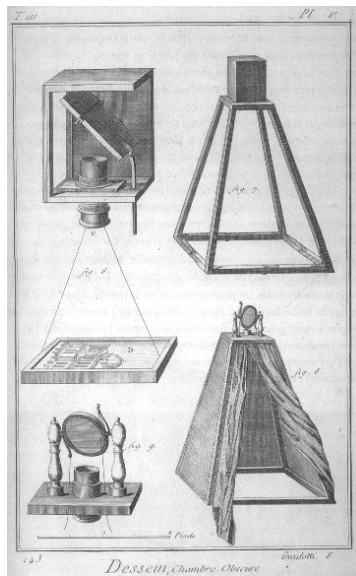
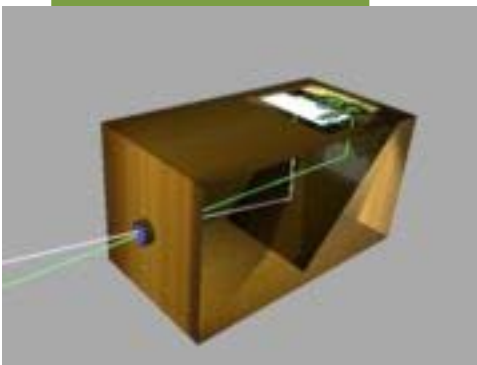


Photography Before Photographs



Ibn al-Hatham
965-1039

The camera obscura: images from nature





Photography Before Photographs



The prettiest Landskip I ever saw was one drawn on the Walls of a dark Room, which stood opposite on one side to a navigable River.... Here you might discover the Waves and Fluctuations of the Water in strong and proper Colours, with a Picture of a Ship entering at one end and sailing by Degrees through the whole Piece. I must confess, the Novelty of such a Sight may be one occasion of its Pleasantness to the Imagination, but certainly the chief reason is its near resemblance to Nature. Joseph Addison, in the *Spectator*, 1712, on the camera obscura at Greenwich



Greenwich Royal
Observatory



G. Canaletto, London
Greenwich Hospital from
the North Bank of the
Thames, 1753



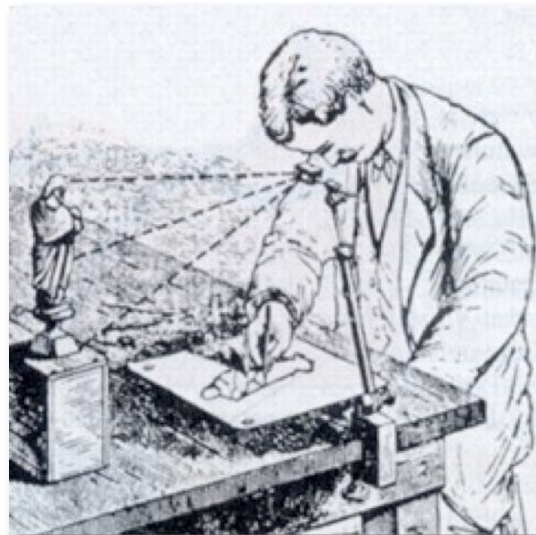
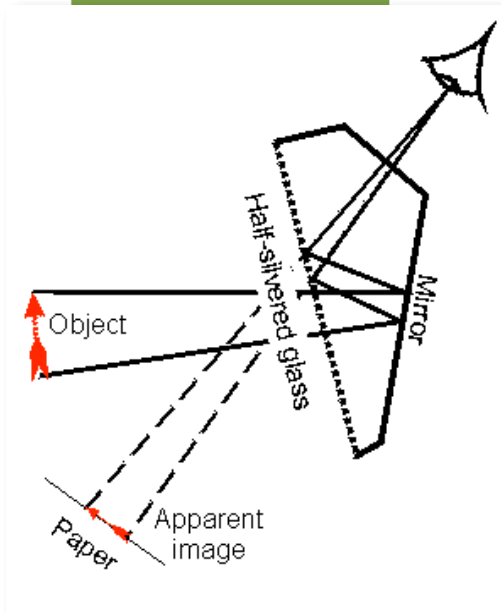
Camera obscura at Cliff House,
Ocean Beach



Photography Before Photographs



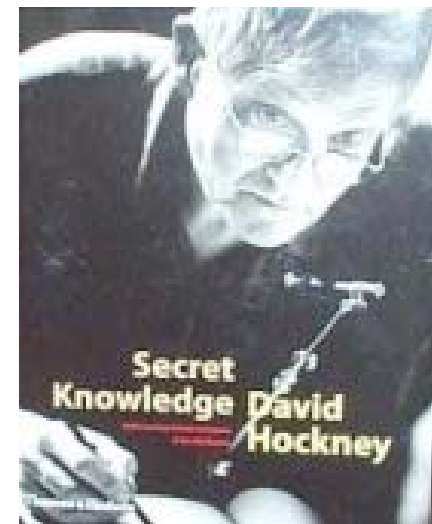
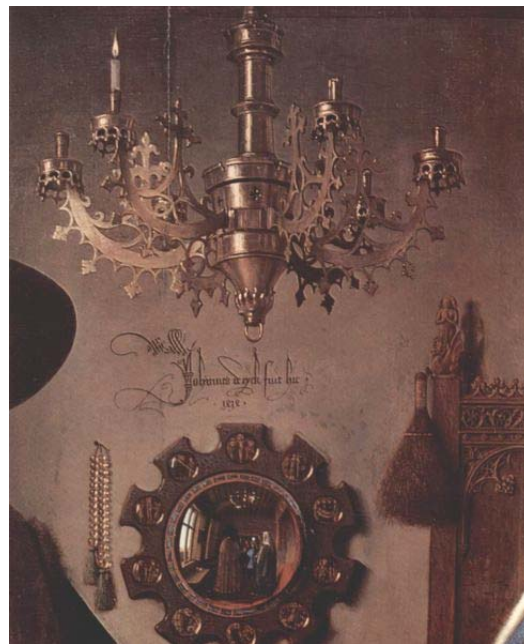
The camera lucida





Photography Before Photographs

Lenses and mirrors -- an old masters' "cheat"?



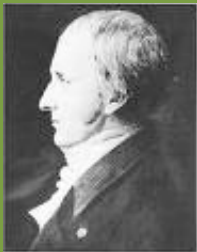
Detail from Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini portrait, 1434



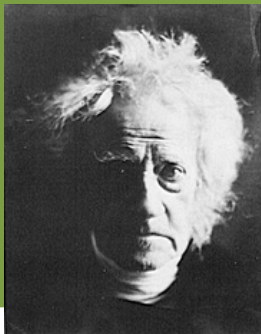
Creating a permanent image



1725: Johann Heinrich Schulze demonstrates that silver compounds are visibly changed by the action of light; makes stencil impressions on glass, but does not try to capture images from nature.



1800: Thomas Wedgewood makes images on leather impregnated with silver nitrate, but is unable to prevent progressive darkening



1819: Sir John Herschel discovers that sodium hyposulfite ("hypo") will dissolve silver halides, can be used to "fix" photographic prints. Later invents the words "negative" and "positive" and "photography"

Sir John Herschel, photographed by Julia Cameron, 1867



The earliest photographs



1826: Nicéphore Niépce makes "heliograph" on plate from window in Gras; requires > 8 hr. exposure.

From 1829, Niépce collaborates with Louis Daguerre, who announces in 1837 a new "chemical and physical process" which "is not merely an instrument which serves to draw Nature; it gives her the ability to reproduce herself."

Daguerreotype permits shorter exposures (but still minutes long); does not permit making multiple images





The earliest photographs



1839: William Henry Fox Talbot invents "photogenic drawing": method of printing on paper, later the calotype, which makes use of latent image, permitting 1-3 min exposures.

Permits multiple prints, less sharp than daguerrotype with "painterly" effects.

1851: Collodion process permits sharp printing on paper



Cuneiform tablet, Ninevah



The earliest photographs

1839: In photograph of rue du Temple, Daguerre inadvertently makes first photograph of a person

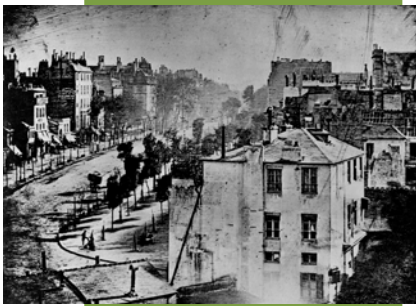




The truth of photographs

1839: In truth, the Daguerreotypic plate is infinitely more accurate in its representation than any painting by human hands. If we examine a work of ordinary art, by means of a powerful microscope, all traces of resemblance to nature will disappear -- but the closest scrutiny of the photographic drawing discloses only a more accurate truth., a more perfect identity of aspect with the thing represented.

E. A. Poe





The truth of photographs



While we give [sunlight] credit only for depicting the merest surface, it actually brings out the secret character with a truth that no painter would ever venture upon, even if he could detect it.

The Daguerrotypist Holgrave, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of Seven Gables*, 1851

What he [the camera] saw was faithfully reported, exact, and without blemish.

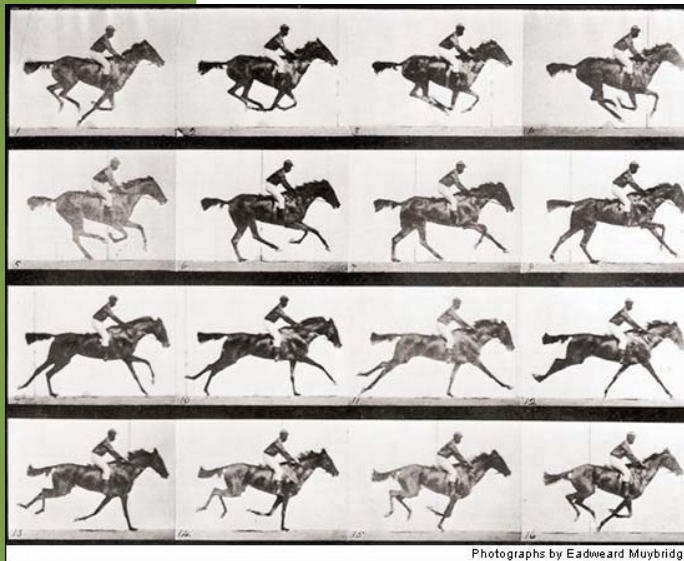
Am. Photographer James F. Ryder in 1902, recalling his first camera from the 1850's

[A photograph] cannot be disputed—it carries with it evidence which God himself gives through the unerring light of the world's greatest luminary. . . . it will tell its own story, and the sun to testify to its truth. . . Cal. Newspaper, 1851



The capture of motion

Art for the purpose of representation does not require to give the eye more than the eye can see, and when Mr. Sturgess gives us a picture of a close finish for the Gold Cup, we do not want Mr. Muybridge to tell us that no horses ever strode in the fashion shown in the picture. It may indeed be fairly contended that the correct position (according to science) is the incorrect position (according to art).
London Daily Globe



Photographs by Eadweard Muybridge

Eadweard Muybridge, Galloping Horse, 1878



Richard Caton Woodville, "Charge of the Light Brigade, 1856 (image reversed)



The photograph as a model for journalistic objectivity



The news as “A daily photograph of the day's events.” (Charles Dana)

The *New York Herald* is now the representative of American manners, of American thought. It is the daily daguerreotype of the heart and soul of the model republic. It delineates with faithfulness the American character in all its rapid changes and ever varying hues. London *Times*, 1848

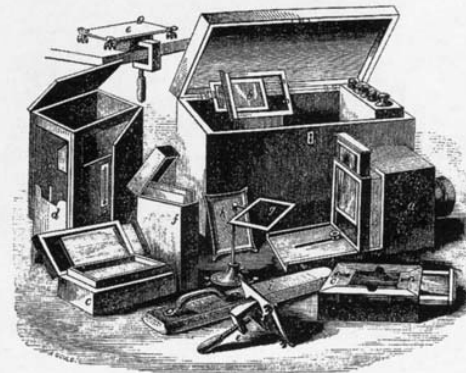


The brief, happy reign of the Daguerreotype

By 1840's, improved lens and increased sensitivity of plates reduce exposure time for portraits. Daguerreotype becomes "the mirror with a memory" (Oliver Wendell Holmes)



- a. Camera obscura
- b. Silver plate
- cc. Iodine and Bromide Boxes
- d. Improved Mercury Cabinet with sliding legs



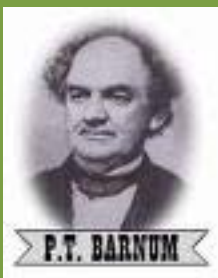
- ee. Plate holders with clamps
- f. Box for Plates
- g. Levelling stand
- h. Flat peculiar dish for washing
- i. Hand-buff



The brief, happy reign of the Daguerreotype



In Daguerrotype, we beat the world.
Horace Greeley

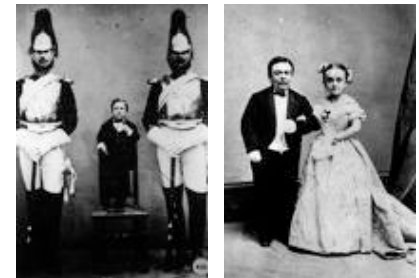
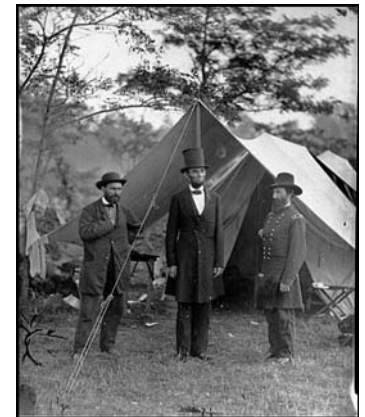


1854: Phineas Barnum stages first modern beauty pageant, using Daguerrotypes for judging

The photograph as a record of personal existence, family continuity
Connection to the “postal age”
The photograph as an instrument of fame



Sarah Bernhardt, by Nadar



"General" Tom Thumb



Second Thoughts



Charles
Baudelaire

During this lamentable period, a new industry arose which contributed not a little to confirm stupidity in its faith and to ruin whatever might remain of the divine in the French mind. The idolatrous mob demanded an ideal worthy of itself and appropriate to its nature. In matters of painting and sculpture, the present-day Credo of the sophisticated, above all in France is this: “I believe that Art is, and cannot be other than, the exact reproduction of Nature. Thus an industry that could give us a result identical to Nature would be the absolute of Art.” A revengeful God has given ear to the prayers of this multitude. Daguerre was his Messiah. ... From that moment our squalid society rushed, Narcissus to a man, to gaze at its trivial image on a scrap of metal.



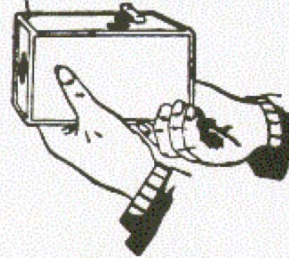
Photos for the millions

1884 George Eastman invents paper roll film;
1888 introduces Kodak camera
1900 introduces Brownie camera for \$1



THE KODAK CAMERA

100
Instantaneous
Pictures!



Anybody can use it.
No knowledge of
photography is
necessary.

The latest and
best outfit for ama-
teurs.

Send for descrip-
tive circulars.

Price \$25.00.

The Eastman Dry Plate & Film Co.
ROCHESTER, N. Y.

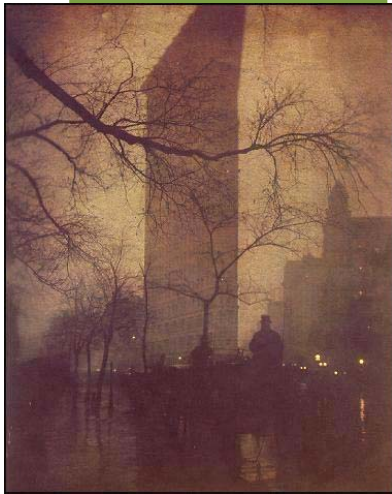
1888



Pictorialism: An Aesthetes' Reaction to Popular Photography?



Robert Demachy, "Behind the Scenes," 1905 Gum print



Steiglitz, The Flatiron Building, 1902



My picture, 'Fifth Avenue, Winter' is the result of a three hours' stand during a fierce snow-storm on February 22nd 1893, awaiting the proper moment. My patience was duly rewarded. Of course, the result contained an element of chance, as I might have stood there for hours without succeeding in getting the desired pictures." Alfred Stieglitz



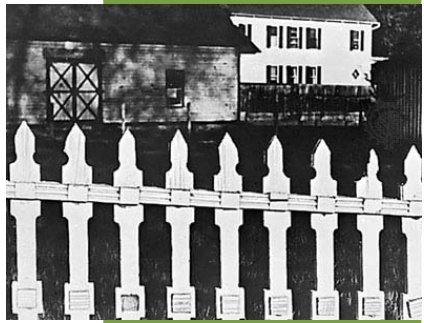
Emil Mayer, "The Hand-Scale," from *Viennese Types*. Bromoil process, 1910



Edward Steichen, Rodin/"The Thinker," 1902



The New Realism/"Straight Photography"



Paul Strand



Edward Weston



Cartier-Bresson



Andre Kertesz

Sometimes it happens that you stall, delay, wait for something to happen. Sometimes you have the feeling that here are all the makings of a picture—except for just one thing that seems to be missing. ... You wait and wait, and then finally you press the button—and you depart with the feeling (though you don't know why) that you've really got something...

If you start cutting or cropping a good photograph, it means death to the geometrically correct interplay of proportions. Besides, it very rarely happens that a photograph which was feebly composed can be saved by reconstruction of its composition under the darkroom's enlarger; the integrity of vision is no longer there. Henri Cartier-Bresson, "The Decisive Moment"



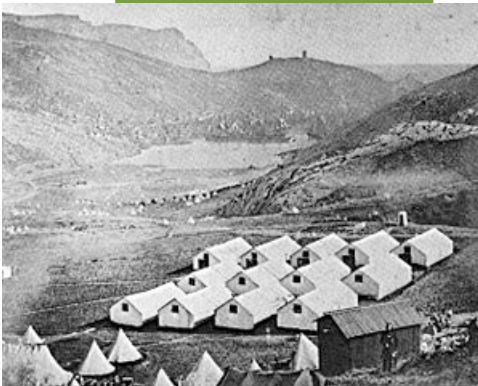
Leica 1, 1924



Manipulating the Photographic Truth

1854-55: Wm. Howard Russell reports for *Times* from Crimea on incompetence of general staff, suffering of troops.

1855: At urging of Prince Albert, Roger Fenton sent to Crimea to take photos to counter Russell's *Times* reports





Crimea: The First "Reported" War

Oct 25, 1854: Light Brigade charges the Russian guns at Balaclava

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
"Forward the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!" he said.
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Forward, the Light Brigade!"
Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Some one had blunder'd.
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die...





The Case of the Disappearing Cannonballs

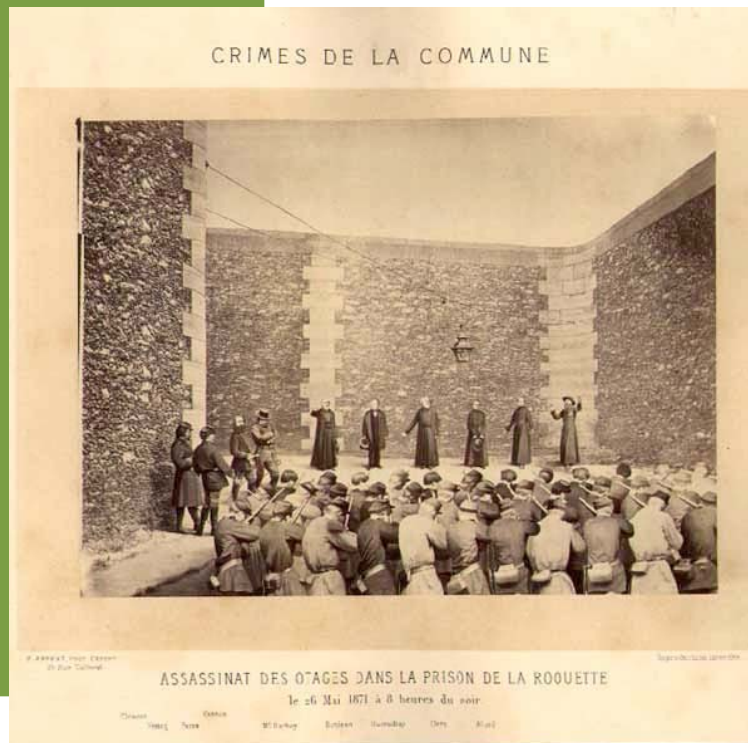


“The Valley of Death,” photographs by James Fenton, April 4, 1855



Doctoring the Truth

1871: Paris Commune: Photographs of executions by communards are doctored to change identity of victims.





In Search of Ghosts



Arthur
Conan Doyle



“Spirit photograph” taken by
the paranormal hoaxer
William Hope in 1922



Modern alterations: A shifting standard?



I discover my photographic death.
Do I exist?
I am a little black,
I am a little white,
I am a little shit,
On Fidel's vest.
Carlos Franqui



Modern alterations: A shifting standard?

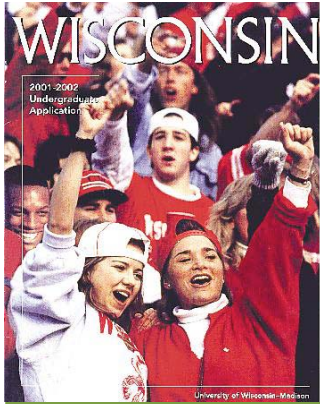


Photo of Beirut following Israeli raid, 8/5/6, as published by Reuters and as originally taken



Modern alterations: A shifting standard?



Fonda Speaks To Vietnam Veterans At Anti-War Rally



Actress And Anti-War Activist Jane Fonda Speaks to a crowd of Vietnam Veterans as Activist and former Vietnam Vet John Kerry (LEFT) listens and prepares to speak next concerning the war in Vietnam (AP Photo)



Kent State, 1970





Fixing Identities

Communards, Paris 1871



Figure 1. Anonymous, Barricades, boulevard de Puybelle (rue des Pyrénées), 20th arrondissement, March 1871.



Fixing Identities

Communards, Paris 1871



Figure 1. Anonymous, Barricades, boulevard de Paris, 1871. Musée de la Ville de Paris.

Documenting the Deviant

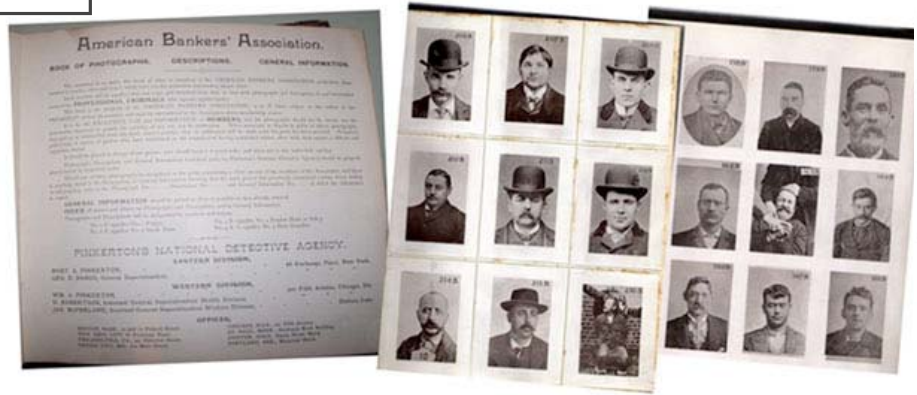


Wanted posters for Lincoln assassins, Butch Cassidy

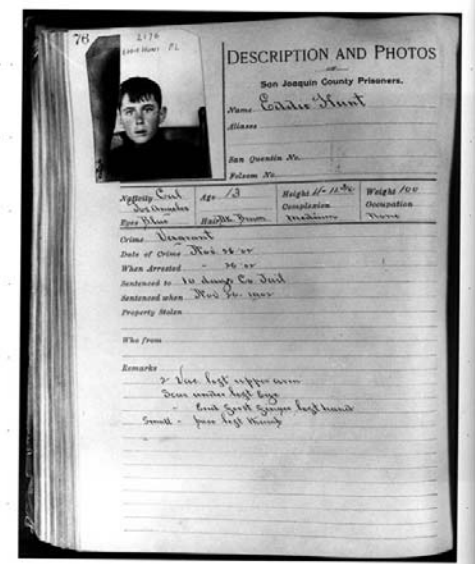


No 21
Bethlam
Mr Barton

Inmate of Bethlam Royal Hospital for the Criminally Lunatic, 1870s



"Bank book" prepared for bank clients by Pinkerton Detective Agency, ca. 1875



Entry for 13-year-old "vagrant," San Joaquin County Jail, ca. 1900



The Sordid Details



Arthur Fellig
("WeeGee"),
1930s

Public obsession with crime-scene photos



Murder scenes, Paris, 1890s



Police display body of Baby-Face Nelson, 1934



The Documentation of Death

Kent State, 1970



Eddie Adams: South Vietnam police chief executing Viet Cong captain, Feb 1, 1968



Robert Capa, The Falling Soldier, Spain, 1936



Documenting the Other



Photos of Downieville CA Chinese Prepared by Justice of the Peace, ca. 1890



Photographs of Modoc Indians made by gov't following 1874 war.

Photography as an instrument of social control



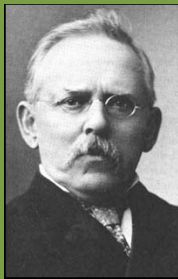
Auschwitz documentary photo

One of a set of images prepared for Harvard naturalist Louis Agassiz to support thesis that human races were different species.

Truth before all. The more pity I felt at the sight of this degraded and degenerate race, the more impossible it becomes for me to repress the feeling that they are not of the same blood as we are. 1846



Documenting the other, 2



Jacob Riis:
*How the Other
Half Lives*

Photography and the awakening of social conscience



AN ALL-NIGHT TWO-CENT RESTAURANT IN "THE BEND."

Lithograph prepared
from Riis photo



Documenting the Other

Lewis Hine, Carolina Cotton Mill, 1909



The golf links lie so near the mill
That almost every day
The laboring children can look out
And see the men at play.

– Sarah Norecliffe Cleghorn, 1916



"Some boys and girls were so small they had to climb up on to the spinning frame to mend broken threads and to put back the empty bobbins. Bibb Mill No. 1. Macon, Ga."



Documenting the Other



Walker Evans



Image from
"Let Us Now
Praise
Famous
Men"

Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange, Farm Security Administration, mid-1930s



Evans

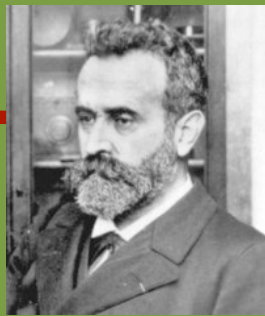


Lange, photos of Dust Bowl and Japanese relocation in WWII





Classifying Deviance



Alphonse Bertillon

1882: Bertillon presents system of criminal identification, anthropometry (later called Bertillonage)



"LOOK AT HIS EARS!"
An example of Bertillon's sectional photography, which is the basis of the *portraits parlés*.
[See pp. 104-105.]

"Unchangeable in form from birth, this organ [the ear] is the immutable legacy of heredity and intrauterine life."



The Renown of Bertillon



"I came to you, Mr. Holmes, because I recognized that I am myself an unpractical man and because I am suddenly confronted with a most serious and extraordinary problem. Recognizing, as I do, that you are the second highest expert in Europe -----"

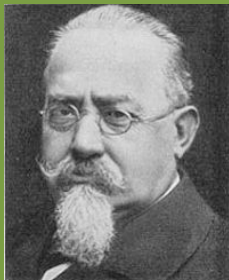
"Indeed, sir! May I inquire who has the honour to be the first?" asked Holmes with some asperity.

"To the man of precisely scientific mind the work of Monsieur Bertillon must always appeal strongly."

"The Hound of the Baskervilles"



The "Criminal Type"



Cesare Lombroso

Lombroso: Hereditary criminals are identified by large jaws, handle-shaped ears, shifty eyes, etc.

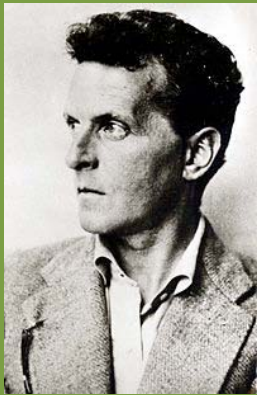


The criminal is "an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals."

"Revolutionaries and political criminals
-- the semi-insane and morally insane"



The arbitrariness of photographic "truth"



We regard the photograph, the picture on our wall, as the object itself (the man, landscape, and so on) depicted there.

This need not have been so, We could easily imagine people who did not have this relation to such pictures. Who, for example, would be repelled by photographs, because a face without color and even perhaps a face in reduced proportions struck them as inhuman.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*,
IIxi



Photography in Science

Scientific Atlases: The tension between the typical and the characteristic



From Bernhard Albinus' *Table of the Skeleton and Muscles of the Human Body*, 1749

As skeletons differ from one another, not only as to the age, sex, stature and perfection of the bones, but likewise in the marks of strength, beauty and make of the whole; I made choice of one that might discover signs of both strength and agility; the whole of it elegant... Yet however it was not altogether so perfect, but something occurred in it less compleat than one could wish. As therefore painters, when they draw a handsome face, if there happens to be any blemish in it mend it in the picture, thereby to render the likeness the more beautiful; so those things which were less perfect, were mended in the figure, and were done in such a manner as to exhibit more perfect patterns..."
Albinus



Rhododendron argentum, Joseph Hooker, 1849

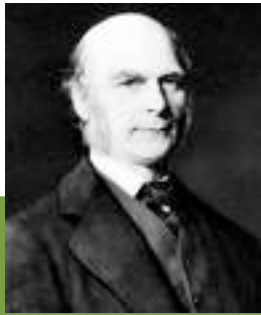


Photography in Science

The virtues of the typical

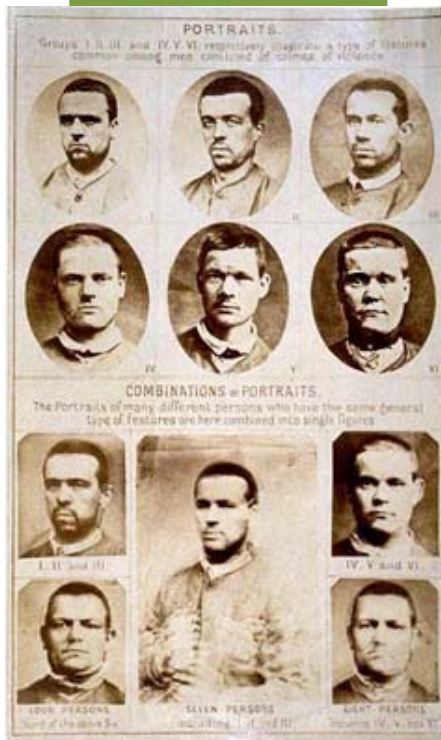
...an anatomical archetype [*Typus*] will be suggested here, a general picture containing the forms of all animals as potential, one which will guide us to an orderly description of each animal. . . . The mere idea of an archetype in general implies that no particular animal can be used as our point of comparison; the particular can never serve as a pattern [*Muster*] for the whole.' Goethe

But rendering the typical leaves too much discretion to "subjective" judgment...



Francis Galton

Composite Types



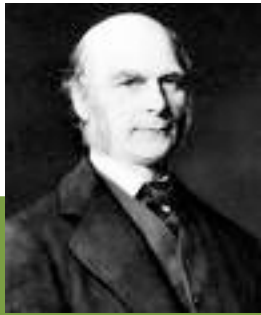
Composite:
Violent
Criminals

1870's: Darwin's cousin Francis Galton makes composite photographs, part as aid to criminology, part as effort to apply Darwinism to human differences. Coins *eugenics*, "nature vs nurture," "regression to the mean," notion of statistical correlation, pioneers questionnaires and surveys. With Wm. Herschel, tries to put study of fingerprints on a scientific basis.

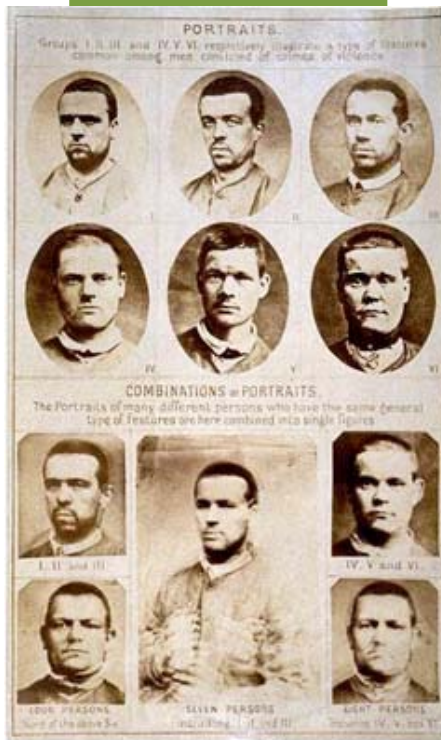


Composite: Jews

Composite Types & "Objectivity"



Francis Galton



Composite:
Violent
Criminals

"... the imaginative power even of the highest artists is far from precise, and is so apt to be biased by special cases that may have struck their fancies, that no two artists agree in any of their typical forms. The merit of the photographic composite is its mechanical precision, being subject to no errors beyond those incidental to all photographic productions." Francis Galton



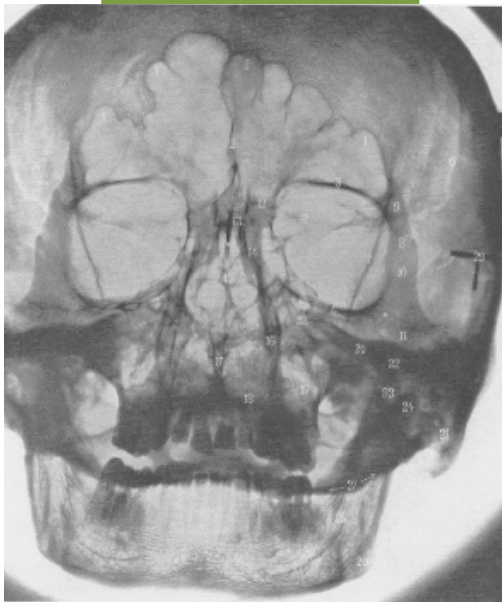
Composite Jews



Photographic exhibits: The debate over interpretation

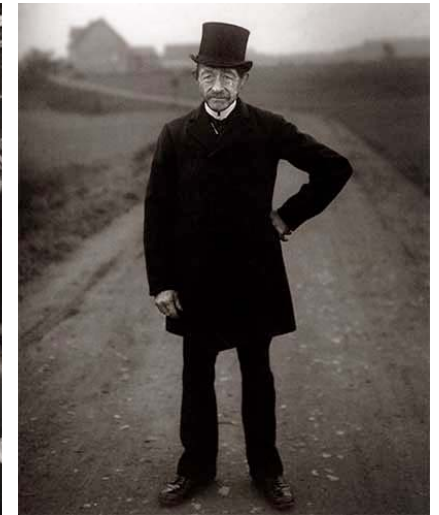
The limits of X-rays to display micro-anatomy, the temptation to "clarify" images:

"I have vigorously avoided artistic aids; in those few cases where, because of the uneven covering of the emulsion [*Deckung*] on the negative, a few visible contours had to be added afterwards, I have explicitly so indicated." Rudolph Grashey, 1905





Photographing Types



Photographs by August Sander



Photographing Types

Photographic kitsch



BUY WAR BONDS

From Norman Rockwell's "Four Freedoms" paintings, 1941



Photos of Concepts



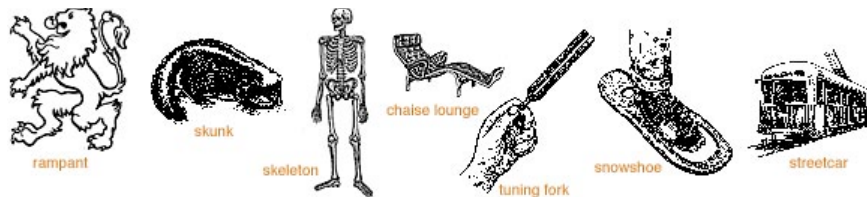
Sandy Skoglund, "Shelter," "Clothing," "Food"



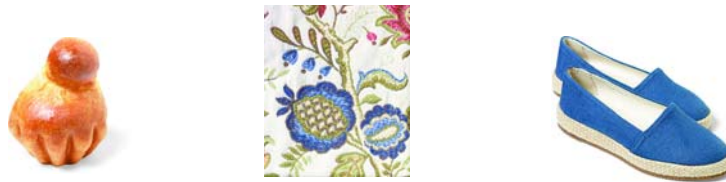
Photos of Concepts

Can a photo illustrate a concept?

"Photographs are necessarily of unidealized individual things, whether zebras, geese, or medieval churches [whereas] drawings may represent a composite distillation." Sydney Landau



Merriam Webster illustrations for *rampant*, *skunk*, *skeleton*, etc.



American Heritage illustrations for *brioche*, *brocade*, *espadrille*.



Fictionalizing Photos

Cf Victorian uses of photographs in illustrations,
"Any dodge, trick and conjuration of any kind is open to the
photographer's use.... It is his imperative duty to avoid the mean,
the base and the ugly, and to aim to elevate his subject.... and to
correct the unpicturesque...." Henry Peach Robinson



Julia Cameron,
Lancelot and Guinevere,
1875



Henry Peach Robinson, Fading Away, 1858



Fictionalizing Photos



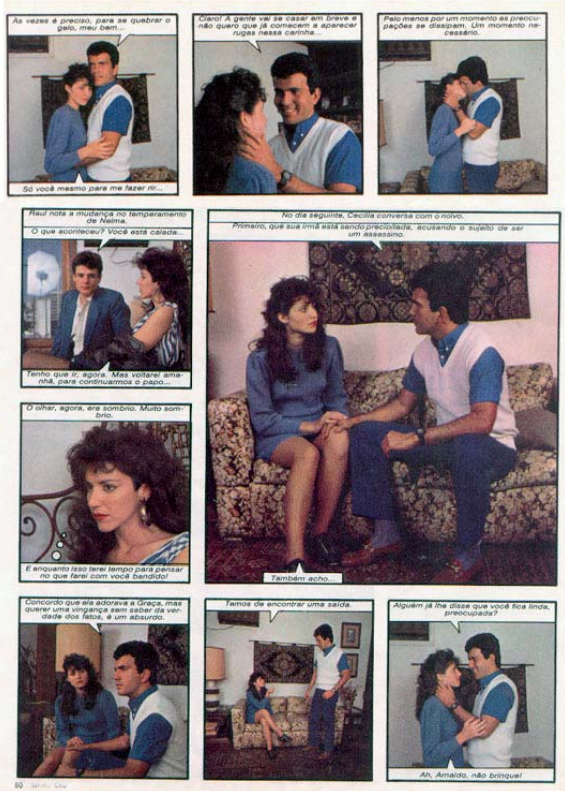
Henry Peach Robinson
The Lady of Shalott



Illustration to Henry James'
The Golden Bowl, 1904



Modern Photographic Fictions



fotonovelas



Tina Barney



Sam Taylor-Wood



Paul Outerbridge, The Coffee Drinkers, 1939



Modern Photographic Fictions



Yinka Shonibare, from "Diary of a Victorian Dandy"



Cindy Sherman



The Particularity of Photos

Cf Victorian uses of photographs in illustrations, tableaux



Oscar Rejlander, "The Two Ways of Life," 1858



Revisiting Allegory



Joel Peter Witkin, Las Meninas



Revisiting Allegory



Eleanor Antin, *The Triumph of Pan*, 2004