

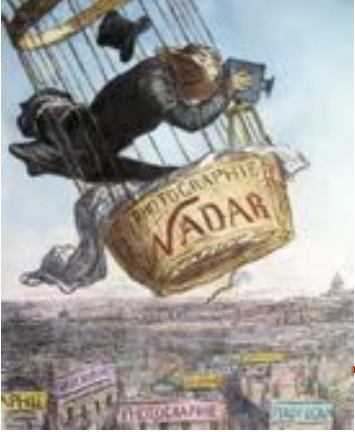


The Photographic Truth

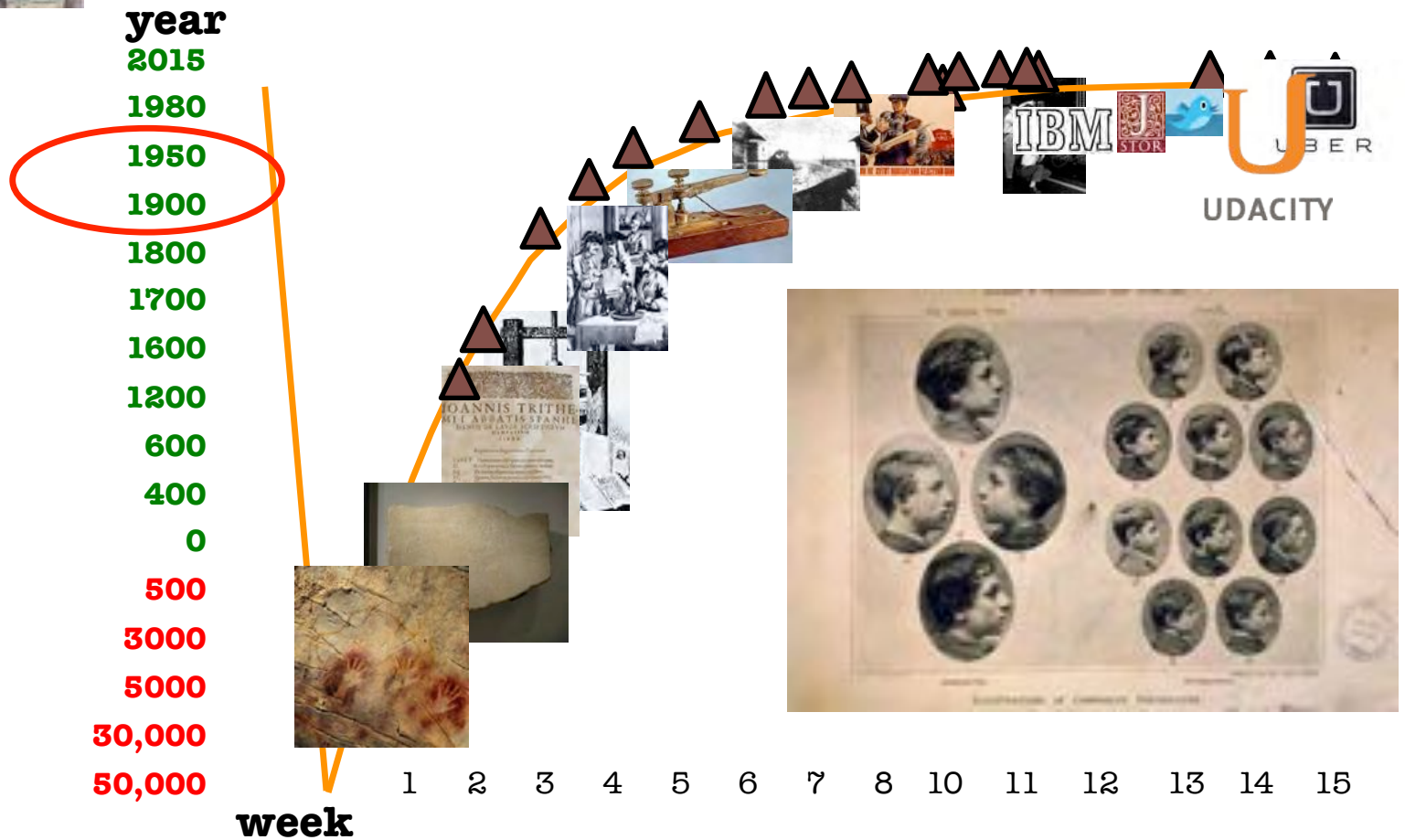


History of Information 103
Geoff Nunberg

March 18, 2014



The Impact of Photography





Agenda, 3/17

Why photograph? The birth of the "information age";
photography and information

Photography as a technology

The photographic "truth"

- Manipulating & questioning the photographic truth, then and now

Photography as documentation

- Fixing identities

- Documenting the deviant

- Representing the other

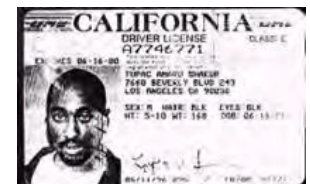
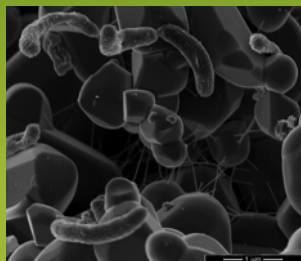
How we read photographs

(What's left out: photography as art, popular form, etc.)



The Range of "Photography"

Things we count as "photography"....





The Range of "Photography"



Things we don't (usually) count as photography

What defines a "technology"? Features of use, distribution, markets etc.





What makes a "technology"?

How many technologies?

telegraphy



cast

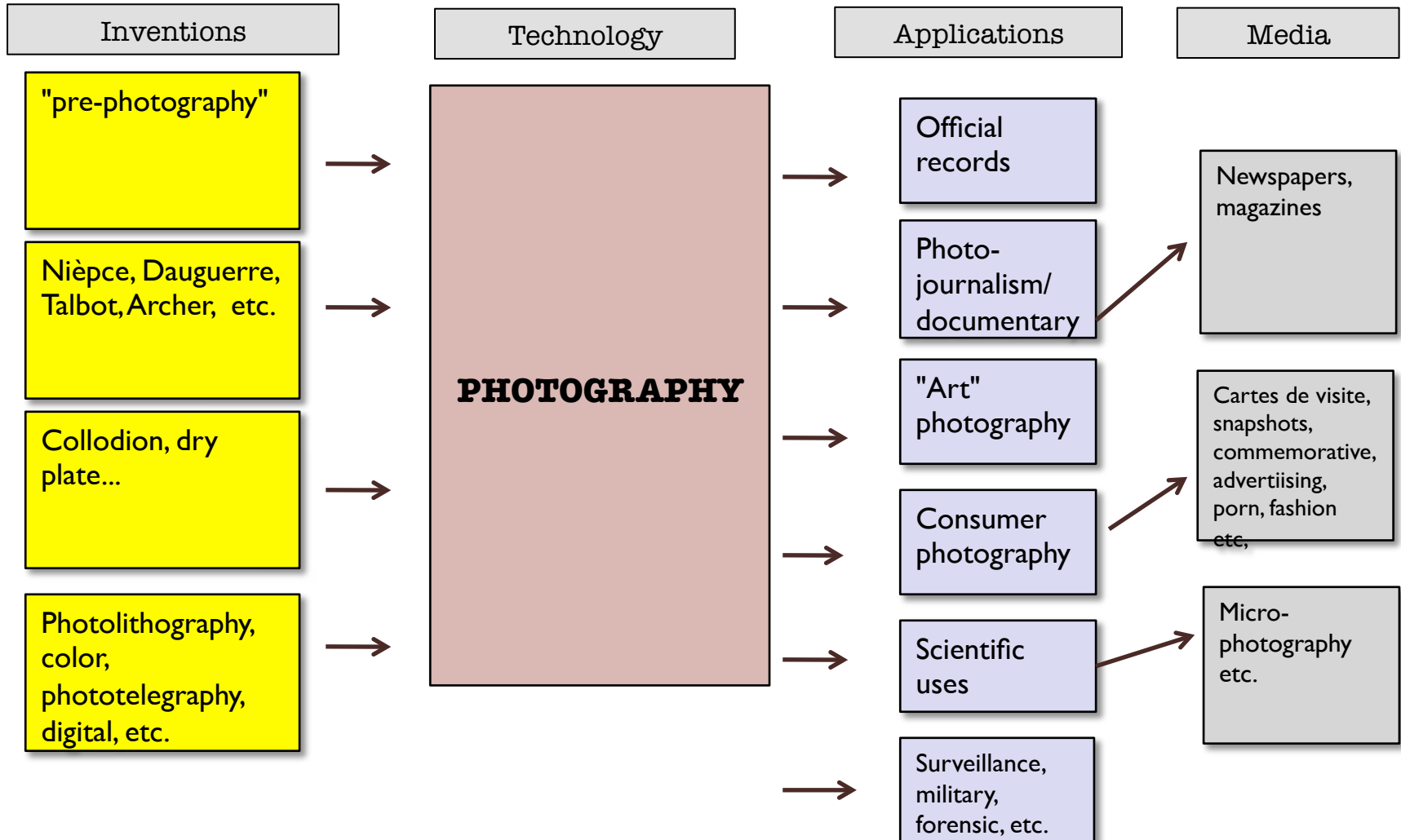


Photography



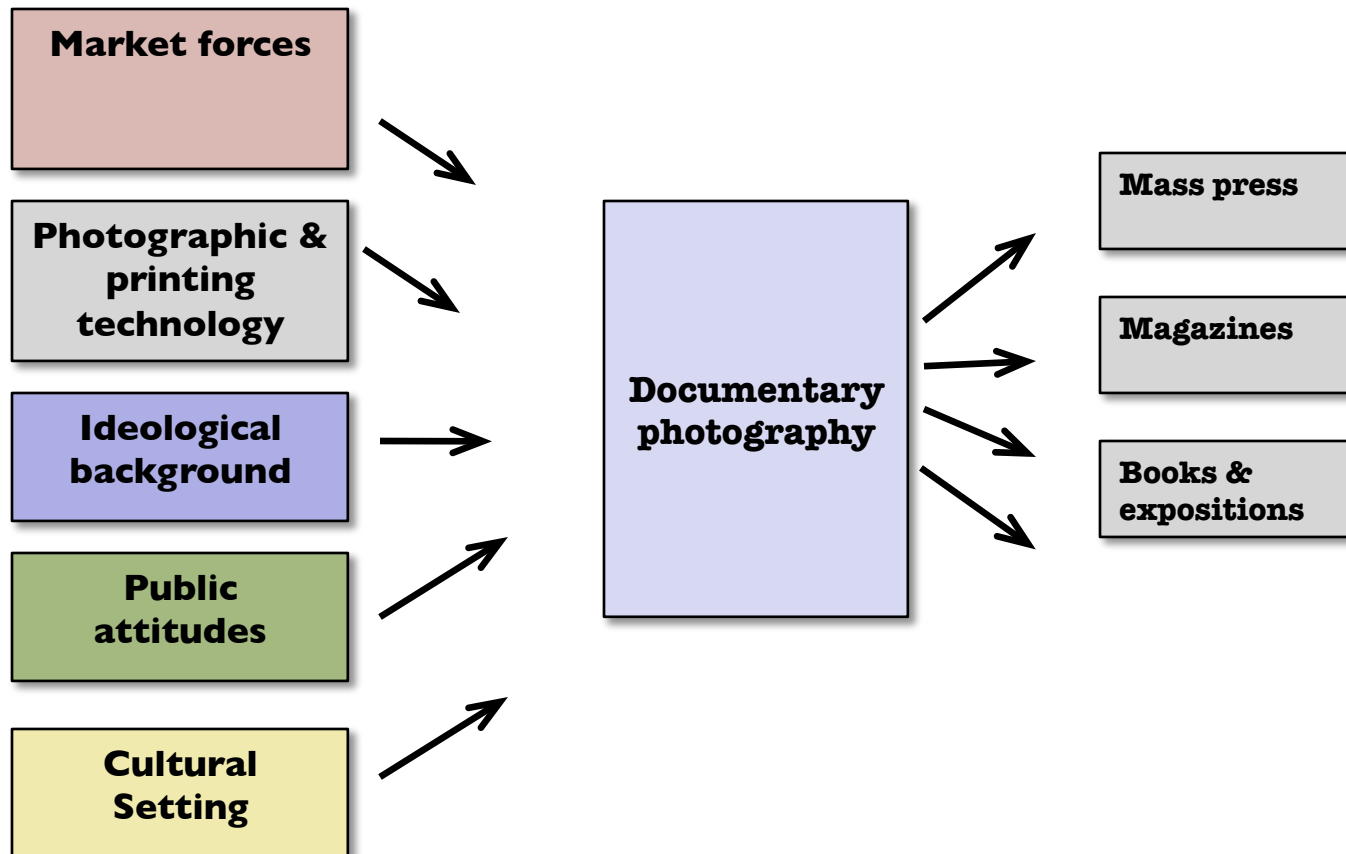


Inventions, Technologies, Applications, Media



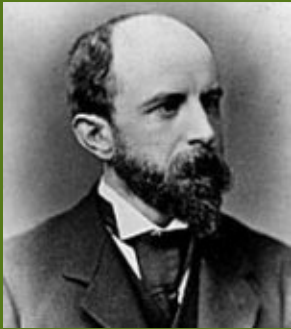


Multiple Influences





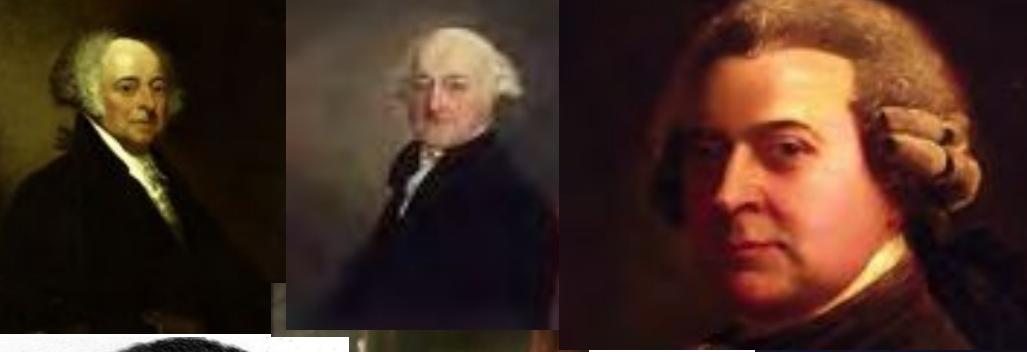
Modern Marvels



Henry Adams
1838-1928

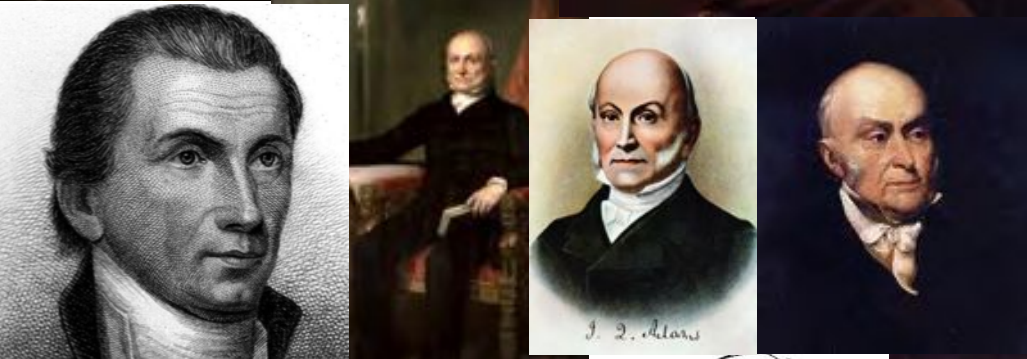
"Only on looking back, fifty years later, at his own figure in 1854, and pondering on the needs of the twentieth century, he wondered whether, on the whole, the boy of 1854 stood nearer to the thought of 1904, or to that of the year 1 ... Before the boy was six years old [i.e., 1844] he had seen four impossibilities made actual—the ocean-steamer, the railway, the electric telegraph, and the Daguerreotype."

--Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* [1905]



John

Picturing the Adamses



John Quincy



Charles
Francis



Henry

Modern Marvels

“... the ocean-steamer, the railway, the electric telegraph, and the **Daguerreotype**.”

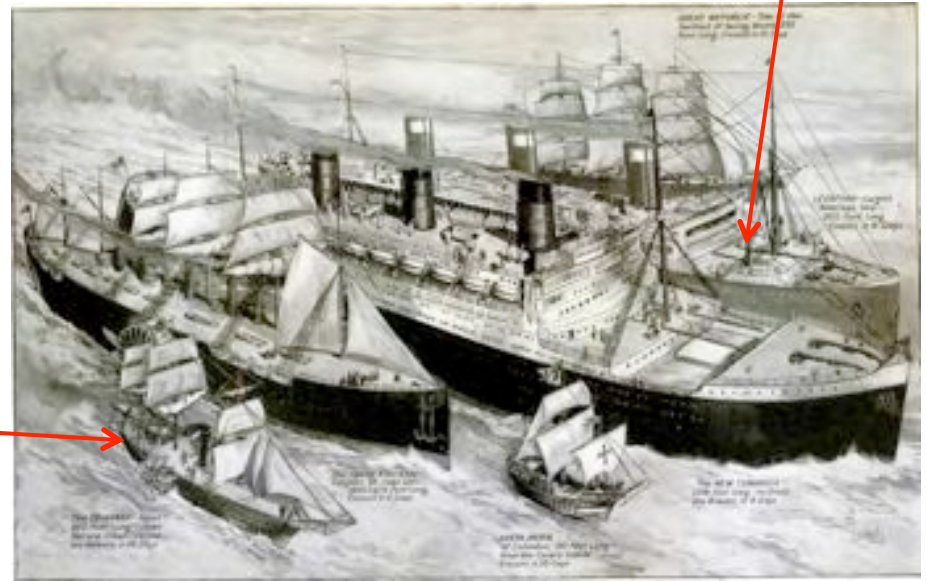


Leviathan 1914
5 days



||

Savannah 1818
26 days





Photography and Information

Photography influences the conception of information:

Directly: Seems to present the world "as it is," independent of human interpretation or intervention.

Indirectly: Provides a model or metaphor for "objective" representation of all sorts.





Photography Before Photographs

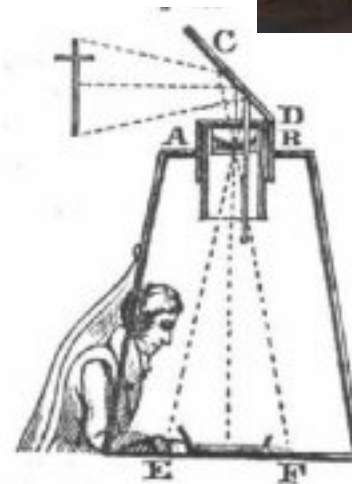
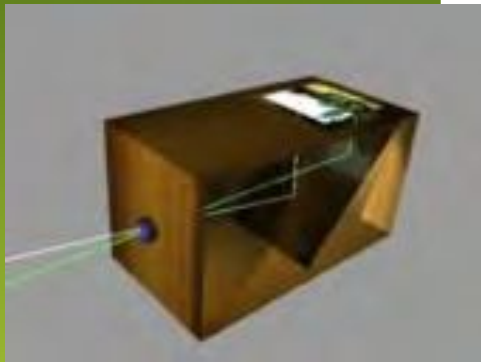


Photography Before Photographs



Ibn al-Hatham
965-1039

The camera obscura: images from nature

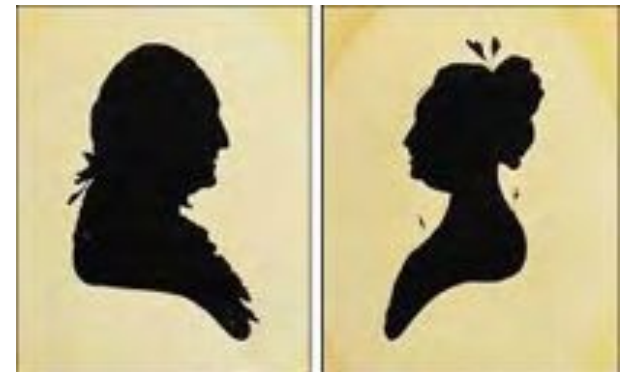
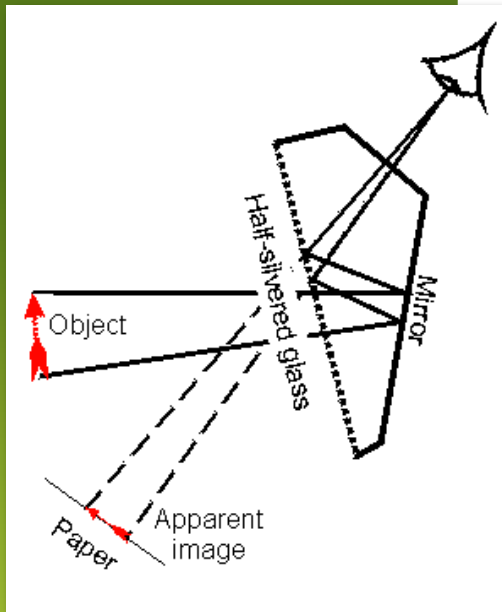




Photography Before Photographs



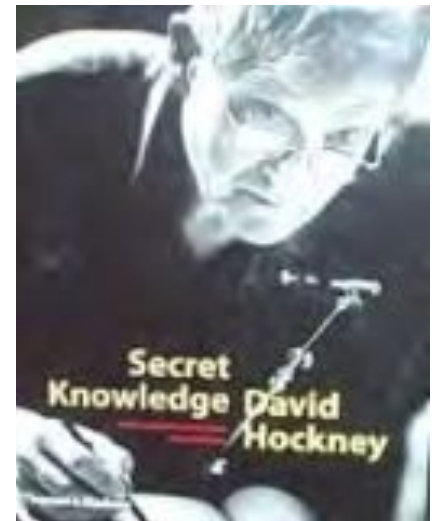
The camera lucida





Photography Before Photographs

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



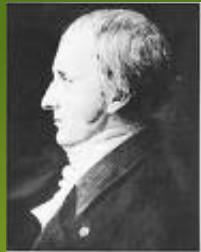
Detail from Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini portrait, 1434



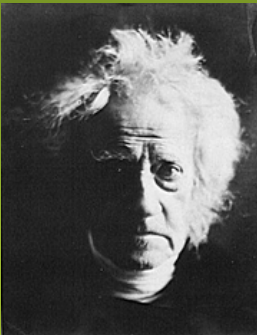
Creating a permanent image: Invention by committee



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 Wedgwood makes images on leather impregnated with silver nitrate, but is unable to prevent progressive darkening... *or was he?*



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



Leaf by Fox Talbot ca. 1830?
Or Wedgwood ca. 1790?



The earliest photographs



1826: Nicéphore Niépce makes "heliograph" on plate from window in Gras

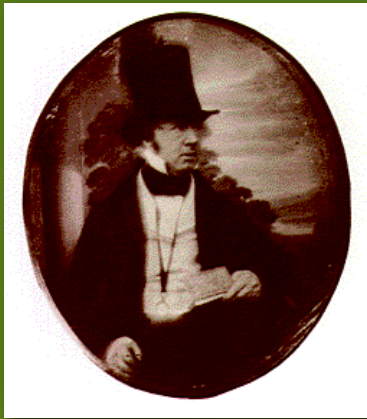
1837: Louis Daguerre announces in 1837 a new "chemical and physical process" which "is not merely an instrument which serves to draw Nature; it gives her the ability to reproduce herself."





The earliest photographs

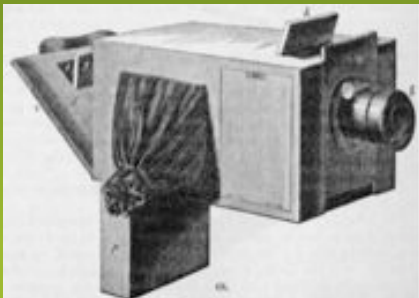
1839: William Henry Fox Talbot invents "photogenic drawing": method of printing on paper, later the calotype, which makes use of latent image, permitting 1-3 min exposures.



Cuneiform tablet,
Ninevah



Frederick Scott Archer



Collodion Process



Metric





The brief, happy reign of the Daguerreotype



By 1840's Daguerreotype becomes "the mirror with a memory" (Oliver Wendell Holmes)





The brief, happy reign of the Daguerreotype



In a mobile and transient society concerned with preserving stable images of personal identity, a photographic likeness... held a powerful appeal.... Daguerreotype portraits quickly became a staple item of postal exchange.... The unique daguerreotype image was both a bodily relic and an intimate epistle in its own right. David Henkin, *The Postal Age*

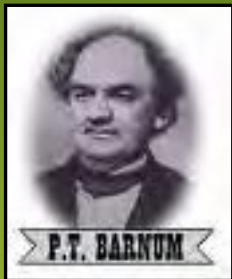




Photographic Fame



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



Sarah Bernhardt, by Nadar



"General" Tom Thumb



Second Thoughts



Charles
Baudelaire, by
Nadar

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... 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.



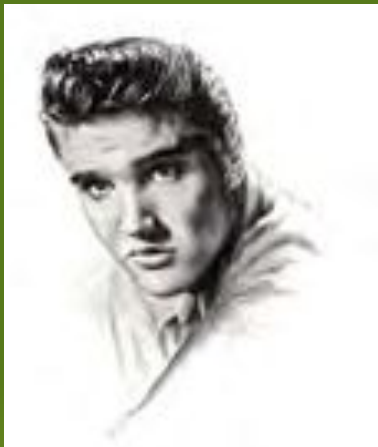
The photographic truth



The photographic truth

Iconic and indexical signs

Why do photographs seem more truthful than other kinds of pictures? One of the most intuitive explanations... is that the photograph... has a direct relationship to the thing it represents. This relationship has been called “indexical”... a sign that has a causal connection to the thing it represents, such as smoke to a fire.... Mia Fineman, *Faking It*





The arbitrariness of photographic "truth"



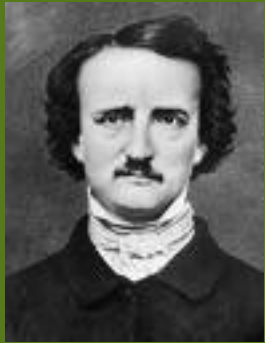
We regard the photograph, the picture on our wall, as the object itself (the man, landscape, and so on) depicted there.

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*, II



The truth of photographs



"[It] is not merely an instrument which serves to draw Nature; it gives her the ability to reproduce herself." Louis Daguerre. 1837

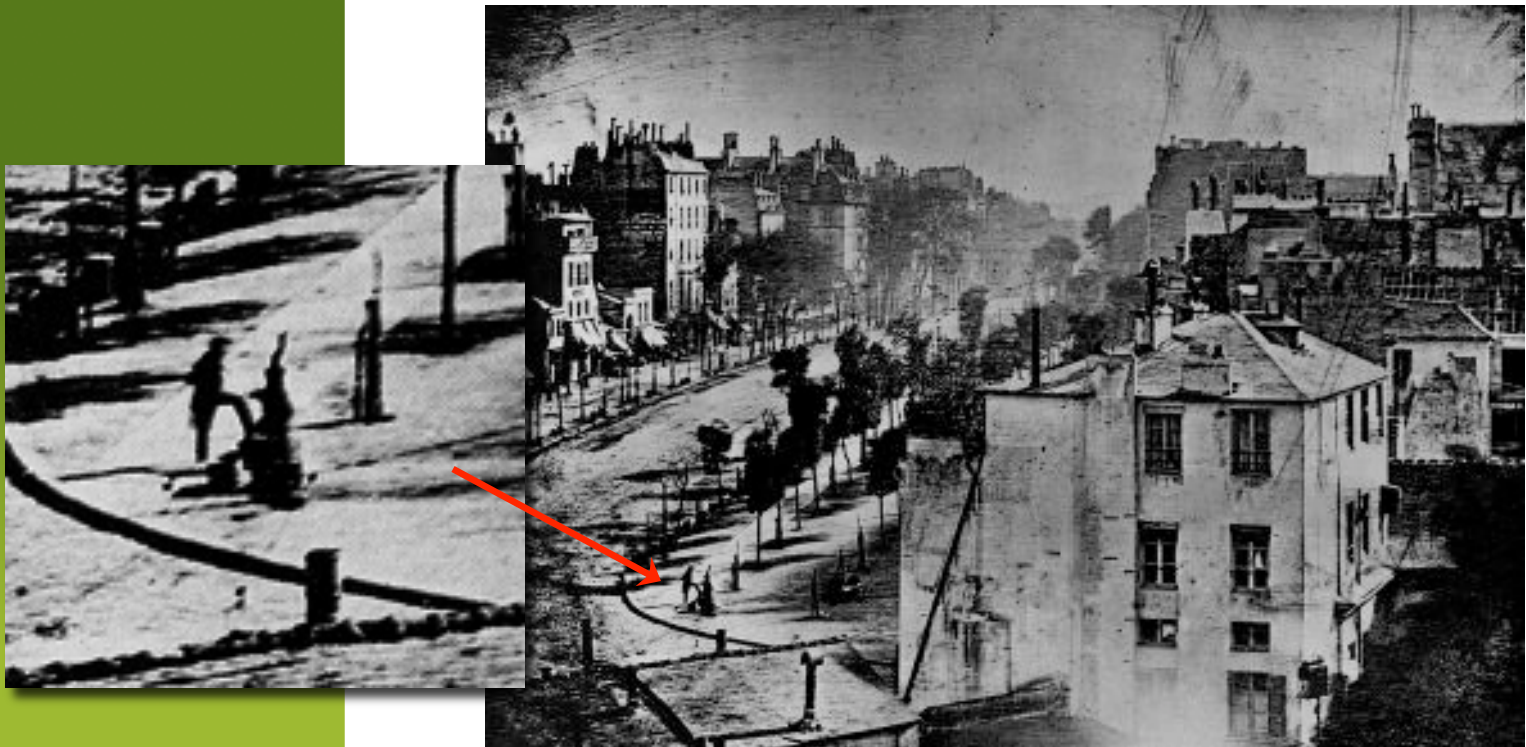
In truth, the Daguerreotyped plate is infinitely more accurate in its representation than any painting by human hands. If we examine a work of ordinary art, by means of a powerful microscope, all traces of resemblance to nature will disappear -- but the closest scrutiny of the photographic drawing discloses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

E. A. Poe, 1839



The photographic truth

1838: Daguerre, photograph of rue du Temple,





The truth of photographs

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. . .

1 of 5-panel daguerreotype
panorama of San Francisco,
1851





The photograph as a model for journalistic objectivity



“The *Sun* ... will endeavour to present its daily photograph of the whole world’s doings in the most luminous and lively manner.” 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. *London Times*, 1848



The Photographic Document: War Photography



Crimea: The First “Reported” War



Oct 25, 1854: Charge of the Light
Brigade (Richard Caton Woodville, Jr.)

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred....
...Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die...
Alfred Tennyson

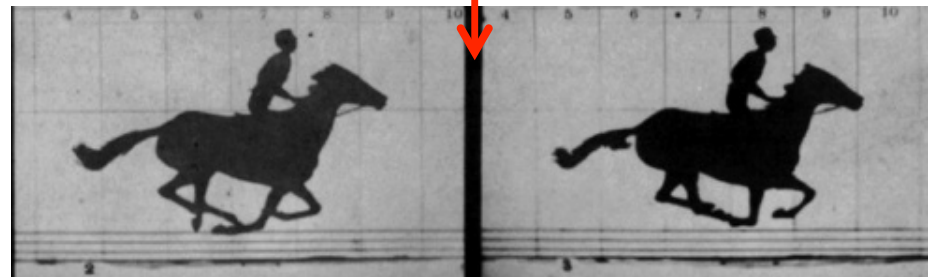




Aside: capturing gaits



Oct 25, 1854: Charge of the Light
Brigade (Richard Caton Woodville, Jr.)



Eadweard Muybridge 1878



Crimea: The First Photographed War



Roger Fenton

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

1855: Roger Fenton sent to Crimea to take photos to counter Russell's *Times* reports



Wm. Russell





Photographing the Civil War



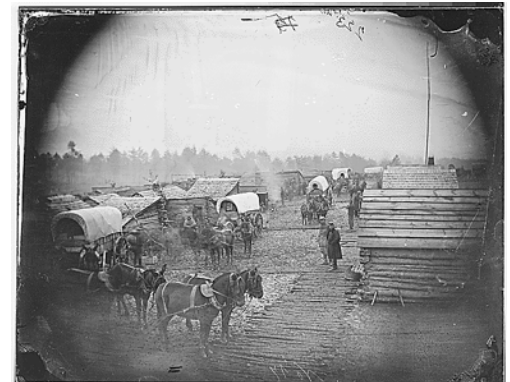
Matthew Brady



Wounded Union Soldiers,
Fredrickburg, VA



Union batteries at Fredrickburg, VA





Photographing Battle



Earliest known battle photo, Sédan, 1870



What newspaper readers saw



Photographs as Symbols



Robert Capa 1936



Joe Rosenthal, 1945



Photographs as Symbols



Yvgeny Khaldei 1945





The Vietnam Narrative



Eddie Adams 1968



Nick Ut 1972





Manipulating Photographic "Truth"



Manipulating Photographic Truth



“[Alexander] Garner’s dead sharpshooter, his long rifle gleaming by his side, is not imagined. This man lived; this is the spot where he fell; this is how he looked in death... The camera records what is focussed upon the ground glass. If we had been there, we would have seen it so.... We have been shown again and again that this is pure illusion. Subjects can be misrepresented, distorted, faked... but this knowledge cannot shake our implicit faith in the truth of a photographic record.”
Beaumont Newhall



Manipulating Photographic Truth

"We have been shown again and again that this is pure illusion. Subjects can be misrepresented, distorted, faked... but this knowledge cannot shake our implicit faith in the truth of a photographic record."





The Case of the (Dis?)appearing Cannonballs



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



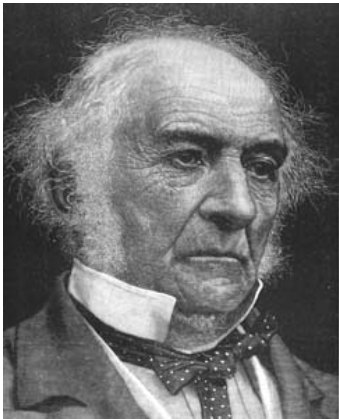
Doctoring the Truth

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





Doctoring the Truth



W. Gladstone



Figure 18.1 Prime Minister Gladstone shown standing outside a London pub. Combination print photograph reproduced by Messrs. Boning and Small by making two exposures. (From Jelf 1894, 520).



Rewriting history



Mao Zedong and Bo Gu (l.), 1936



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



Rewriting history

Fonda Speaks To Vietnam Veterans At Anti-War Rally

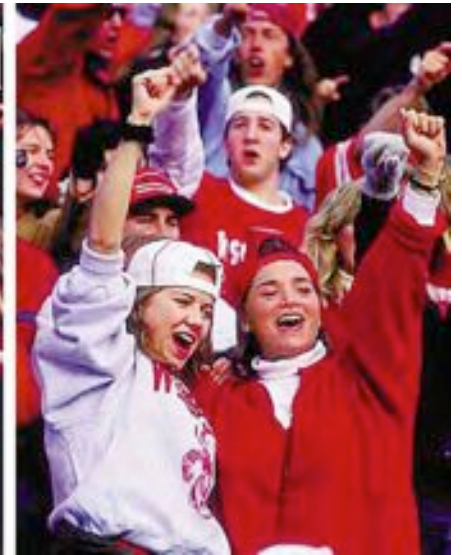
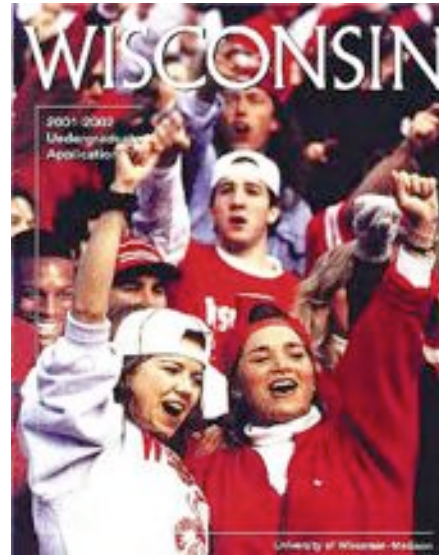


Actress And Anti-War Activist Jane Fonda Speaks To A Crowd Of Vietnam Veterans As Activist And Former Vietnam Vet John Kerry (Left) Watches And Prepares To Speak Next Concerning The War In Vietnam (AP Photo)





Modern alterations: A shifting standard?





Modern alterations: A shifting standard?





Modern alterations: A shifting standard?





Modern alterations: Aesthetic choices?



Pulitzer Prize winning photo by John
Filo, Kent State, 1970



Are we more sophisticated about photographs now?

Digital photography and Photoshop have taught us to think about photographic images in a different way—as potentially manipulated images with a strong but always mediated resemblance to the things they depict. Mia Fineman



Photography as Documentation



Fixing Identities

Communards, Paris 1871



Gustave Courbet





Fixing Identities

Communards, Paris 1871

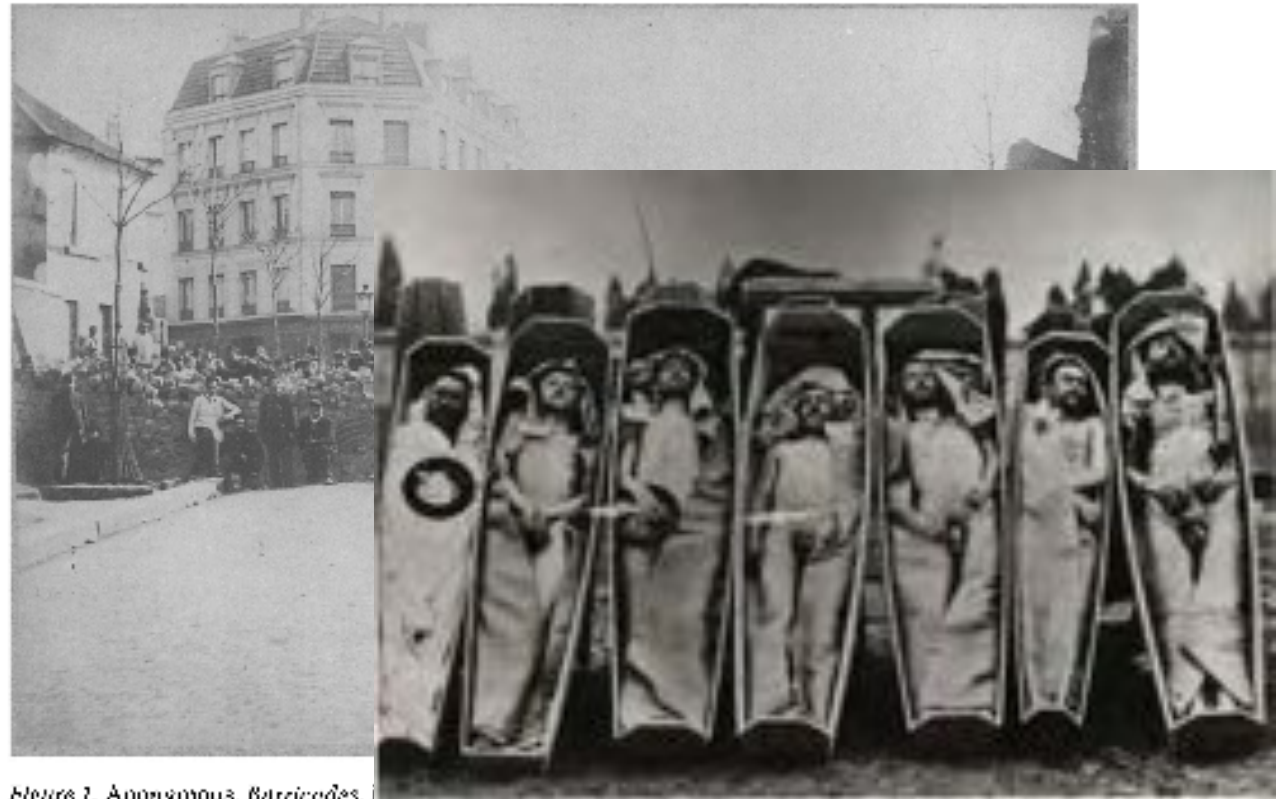


Figure 1. Anonymous, *Barricades*, 1871. The photograph shows the bodies of seven Communards in coffins, standing upright on a street in Paris. The bodies are arranged in a row, and the faces of the deceased are visible. The background shows a Parisian street with buildings and a crowd of people.



Documenting the Deviant

Creating the mug shot



Figure 2. "The Inspector's Model" from Thomas Byrnes, *Professional Criminals of America* (New York: Cassell, 1886), between 52 and 53.

Documenting the Deviant



Wanted posters for Lincoln assassins,
Butch Cassidy



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



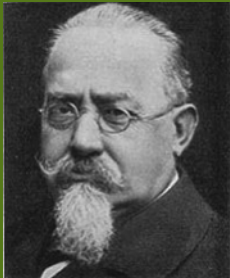
"Bank book" prepared for bank
clients by Pinkerton Detective
Agency, ca. 1875



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



Classifying Deviance: 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"



Classifying Deviance

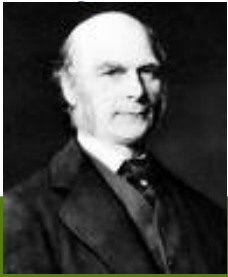


Alphonse Bertillon

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



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



Francis Galton

Eugenics and Photography

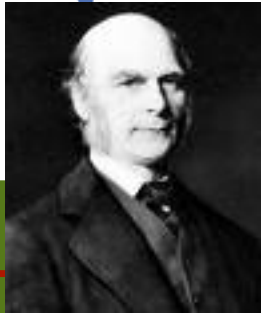
1870's: Darwin's cousin Francis Galton makes composite photographs, part as aid to criminology, part as effort to apply Darwinism to human differences.



Composite:
Violent
Criminals



Composite: Jews



Francis Galton

Composite Types & "Objectivity"

"... the imaginative power even of the highest artists is far from precise, and... 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:
Violent
Criminals



Composite Jews



Eugenics and Photography



Francis Galton

"My general object has been to take note of the varied hereditary faculties of different men, and of the great differences in families and races, to learn how far history may have shown the practicability of supplanting the human stock by better strains, and to consider whether it might not be our duty to do so by such efforts as may be reasonable, thus exerting ourselves to further the ends of evolution more rapidly and with less distress than if events were left to their own course."



Documenting the Other



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



Image prepared for Louis Agassiz

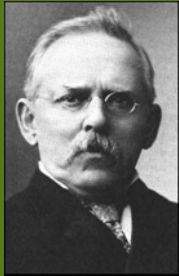
*Truth before all. The more pity I felt at the sight of this
degraded and degenerate race, the more impossible it
becomes for me to repress the feeling that they are not of the
same blood as we are. 1846*



Auschwitz documentary
photo



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



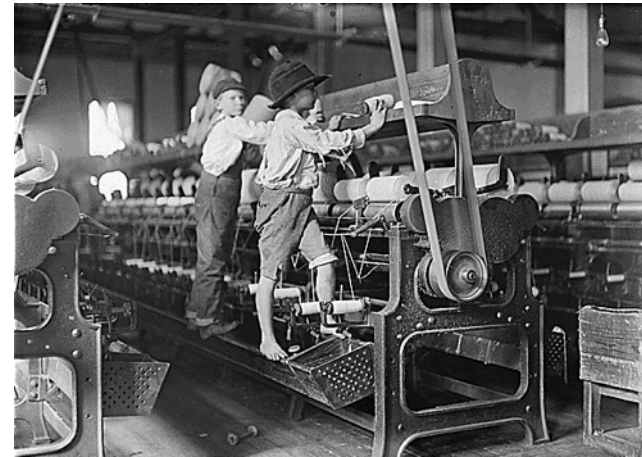
Documenting the Other

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 Norcliffe Cleghorn, 1916



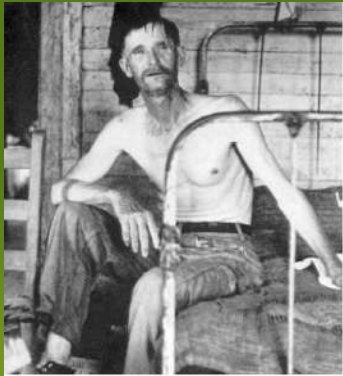
"Some boys and girls were so small they had to climb up on to the spinning frame to mend broken threads and to put back the empty bobbins. Bibb Mill No. 1. Macon, Ga."



Documenting the Other



Walker Evans



"Let Us Now
Praise Famous
Men"

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



Lange, photos of Dust Bowl and Japanese relocation in
WWII



Photography in Science



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... 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 argenteum, 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

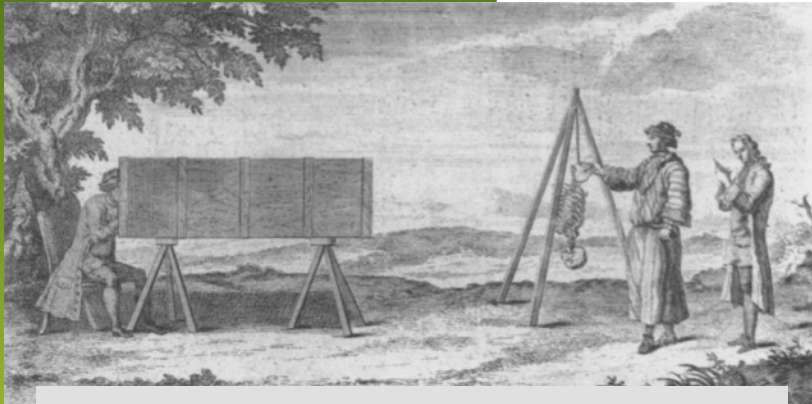
But rendering the typical leaves too much discretion to "subjective" judgment...



Photography in Science

Portraying the particular:

We have no Lionardo [sic] de Vinci, Calcar, Fialetti, or Berrettini, but the modern draughtsman makes up in comprehension of the needs of science all that he lacks in artistic genius... we are able to employ new processes that reproduce the drawings of the original object *without error of interpretation*, and others that give us very useful effects of colour at small expense. Wm Anderson, 1885



Cheselden preparing an anatomical atlas, 1733



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



Astronomical photography



I immediately recognized ...that the corona was less in extent near the extremities of the sun's axis, and largest in the line of the equator. I have reason to think that this picture gives nearly all of the corona which can with certainty be considered as belonging to the sun.
Jos. Winlock, 1869



Total eclipse 1869
(Shelbyville TN)



The Specificity of the Photograph



The Specificity of the Photograph



Photographs by August Sander,
"Man in the Twentieth Century" 1929



Photographing Types



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



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



Reading for Tuesday, March 31

Czitrom, Daniel J. 1982. "The Ethereal Hearth: American Radio from Wireless through Broadcasting, 1892-1940." in *Media and the American Mind*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. Pp. 60-88.

Read: Entire chapter [219-233 in course reader]



Assignment for Tuesday, March 31

Czitrom writes on p. 88: Less than fifty years after the first wireless explorations, radio broadcasting stood at the very center of American society, an integral part of economic, political, and cultural processes. Radio succeeded not in filling the utopian visions first aroused by wireless technology but in appropriating those urges for commercial interests....

Three-quarters of a century later, would you say that this characterization still holds of broadcasting — including both radio and television? What are some specific similarities and differences between the content of modern broadcasting and that described by Czitrom for the 1930's and 1940's? On the whole which are more striking — the similarities or the differences?