

There is no single history of photography

We are embarking as a class on the challenges of theorizing photography and trying to make sense of it as *artists*,

not reporters
not commercial photographers
not historians
not scientists

How does the “artist” authorship position change our responsibilities and interests in Photography?



Tehching (Sam) Hsieh
“Clock Piece 1980-81

“The first myth to dispel about 'theory' is the idea that we can do without it.

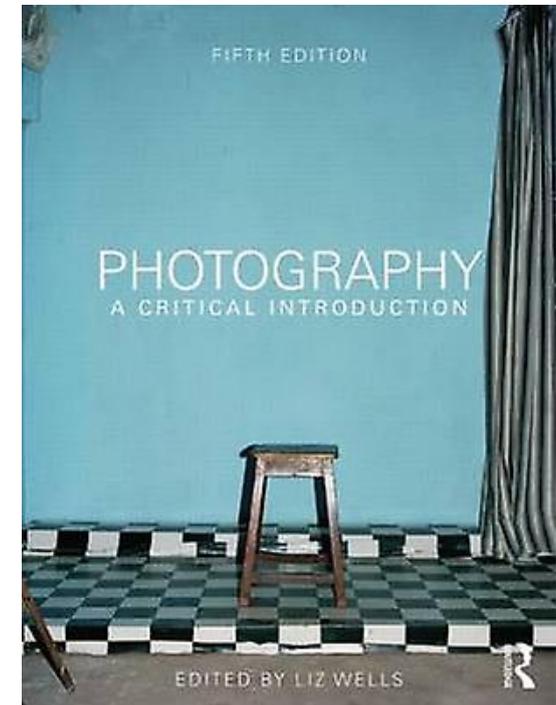
There is no un-theoretical way to see photography.
While some people may think of theory as the work of reading difficult essays by European intellectuals, all practices presuppose a theory.”

David Bate
2009
p25

Here we are offered a nuanced introduction to photography's multiplicit historical development.

Pages 11-28:

1. industrial, mechanical technology,
2. to its use as a tool for “empirical” knowledge production
3. to its fractured presence in globalized capitalism
4. the idea of the “Photographic Image”



Course Textbook available in the course reserves

Wells, Liz.
“Introduction” Photography: A Critical Introduction.
London: Routledge,
2000. Print.



1. Industrial Mechanical Technology

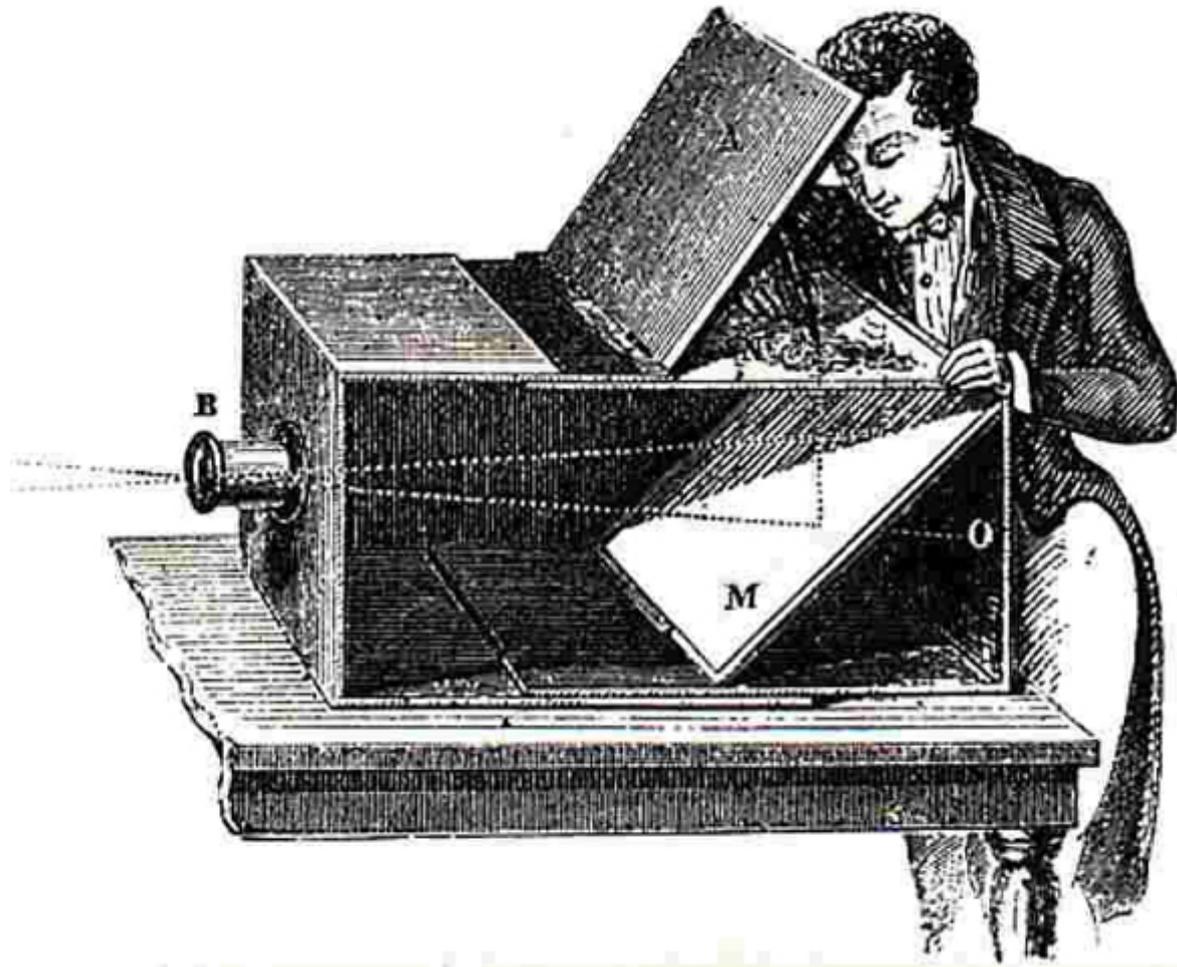
Male user dominated

+

White male user dominated or “documented” cases
In history

We could say there is more white male user
documentation that is
popularly circulated
Than “Othered” kinds of users

But there were non-western, non-white early users



Camera Obscura

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mh42xZQL6-k>

Types of historical chemical-based
photography

Photography as scientific technology

- evidence
 - proof of reality and truth
- machine used by “civilized” people to document and archive reality





Larry Burrows
Life Magazine Photojournalist

2. “Empirical Knowledge”

Anthropology
Photojournalism
Documentary
Archives
Identity Classification
The Penal System
Crime and Punishment etc..
Data
Facts
Evidence
Proof









3. its fractured presence in globalized capitalism



2000



2001- 03



2003



2004



2001



2005



4. the idea of the “Photographic Image.”

A depersonalized world, a world constantly mediated via images and a world that deeply values and commits trust to strong “photographic images.”



ROLAND BARTHES

Camera Lucida
1980



SUSAN SONTAG

On Photography
1977



Kishin Shinoyama

*WE ARE NOT asking **who invented** photography – but thinking about how it has changed and **its origins of use**:*

-19th century industrial revolution

-middle class demand for portraiture

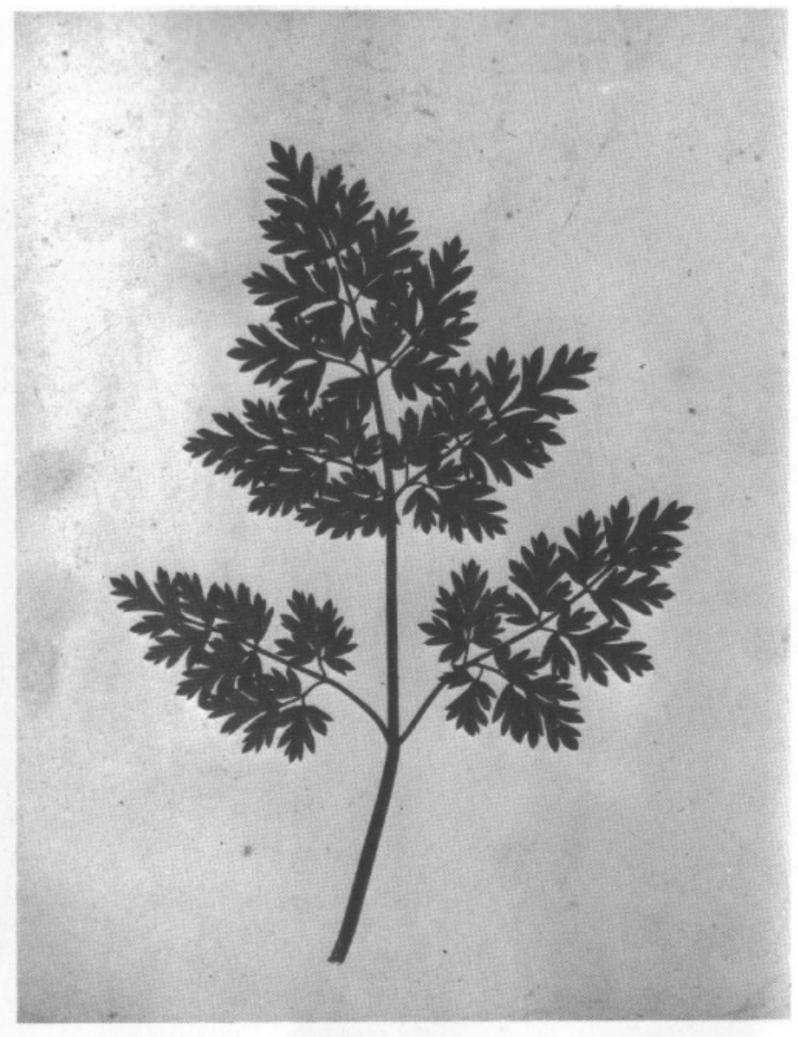
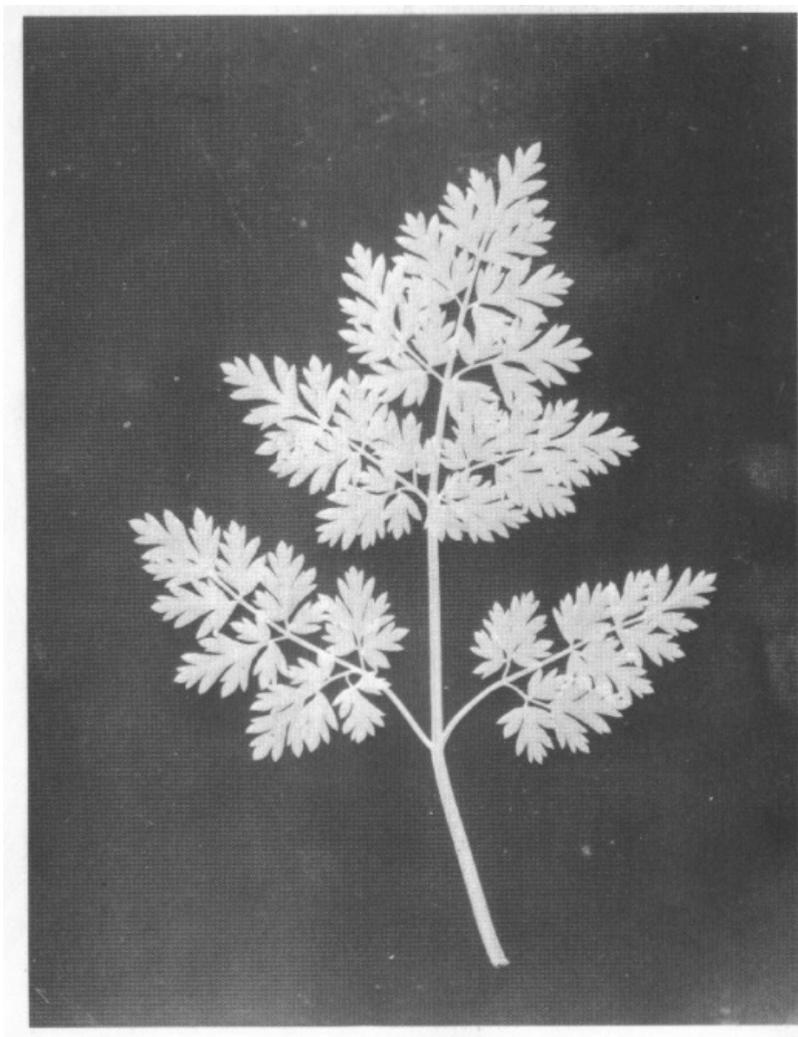
-its efficacy as a documentary device – and “truth teller”

1839 Louis Jacques M. N. P. Daguerre – The invention of the daguerrotype: a photograph taken by an early photographic process employing an iodine-sensitized silvered plate and mercury vapor

1841 William Talbot and his patented calotype process: an early photographic process in which negatives were made using paper coated with silver iodide. This method Made multiple copies possible because it used a negative/positive method.

His book “The Pencil Of Nature”







Industrial Revolution and 1800s

“Absolute material accuracy was seen as the hallmark of photography because it was accepted as a truth telling device.”

(15 Liz Wells)

This split art and technology apart. Or rather, pitted them against one another.

19th century photographers responded in 2 ways:

1) acceptance that it was different than art TEAM MACHINE REALITY

2) desire for it as more than mechanical TEAM ART EXPRESSIONISM

TECHNOLOGY

ART

“STRAIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY”

PICTORIAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography became a new kind of knowledge production and was thought of as “a democratic means of representation” and carrier of “facts.” (Wells 18-19)

The authority of photographs to
represent Reality.

“It was there.” + “I was There.”

“Here is The Photograph.”

Think about:

The Scientific
Revolution

The Industrial

Revolution's Elevation of machines as objective
technologies for scientific, quantifiable measurement,

Colonialism,

Capitalism,

Eurocentrism.



“The Original Kodak was fitted with a rotating barrel shutter unique to this model. The shutter was set by pulling up a string on top of the camera and operated by pushing a button on the side of the camera. After taking a photograph, a key on top of the camera was used to wind the film onto the next frame. There is no viewfinder on the camera; instead two V shaped lines on the top of the camera leather are intended to aid aiming the camera at the subject. The barrel shutter proved to be expensive to manufacture and unreliable in operation. The following year the shutter was replaced by a simpler sector shutter in the No 1 Kodak.”

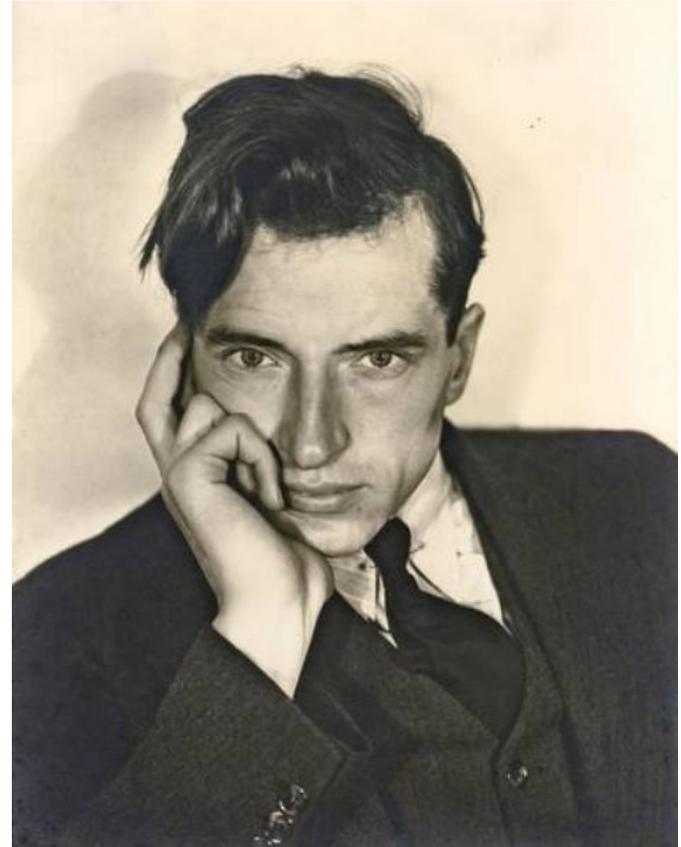
https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_760118



Original Kodak camera
1888

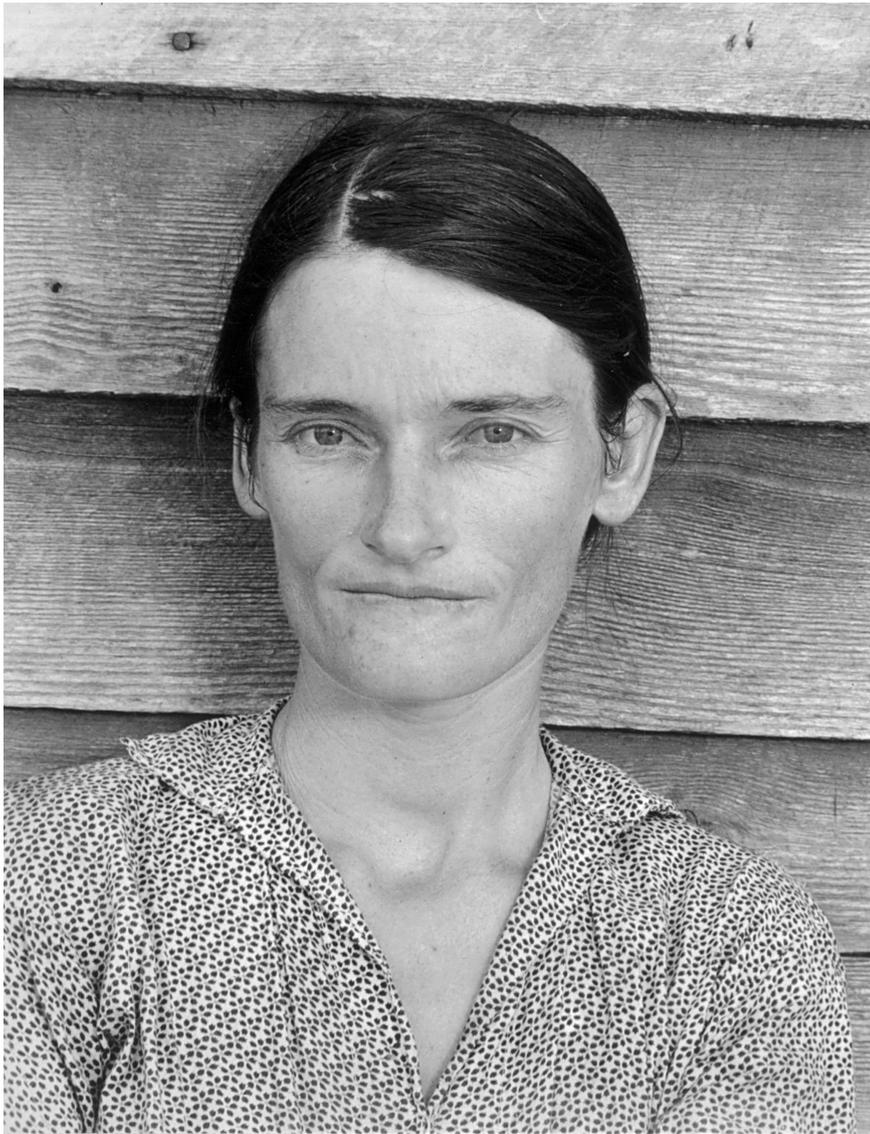
Moving towards Modernism:

“European modernism – its contempt for aesthetic forms of the past + celebration of the machine – endorsed photography's claim to be most important form of representation” Walker Evans (22)



MODERNISM

“Modernism refers to a global movement in society and culture that from the early decades of the twentieth century sought a new alignment with the experience and values of modern industrial life.” tate.org



(L) “Evans's photo of then 27-year-old Allie Mae Burroughs, photographed in 1936, has become a symbol of the American Great Depression”

Walker Evans was an American photographer and photojournalist best known for his work for the Farm Security Administration 1935 documenting the effects of the Great Depression.

Photography becoming contested
and increasingly theorized in
Modernism as it was being used
as a “modernizing authority”



Indian School Group

© 1901 G. W. B. & Co.

- The evolution of the penal system and its “streamlining” into state and economic systems (Surveillance, Evidence, Classification)
- Photos as Information that can disseminate “master narratives” aka cultural values and beliefs considered righteous and intellectually superior by dominant structures of power



POLICE DEPARTMENT
CITY OF NEW YORK



P

EXPIRES MARCH 31, 1934

MATTHEW MC MANUS

(NAME OF DRIVER)

**DRIVER'S
NUMBER 64683**

**NOTICE TO PASSENGERS—Keep a record of
the above name and number on this card.**

**JAMES S. BOLAN,
POLICE COMMISSIONER.**

U. P. 29-D

PEOPLE START TO NOTICE HOW
THE WORLD AND SELF KNOWLEDGE
IS BEING
SHAPED BY IMAGES



Germany's cash note hyperinflation 1923

WALTER BENJAMIN

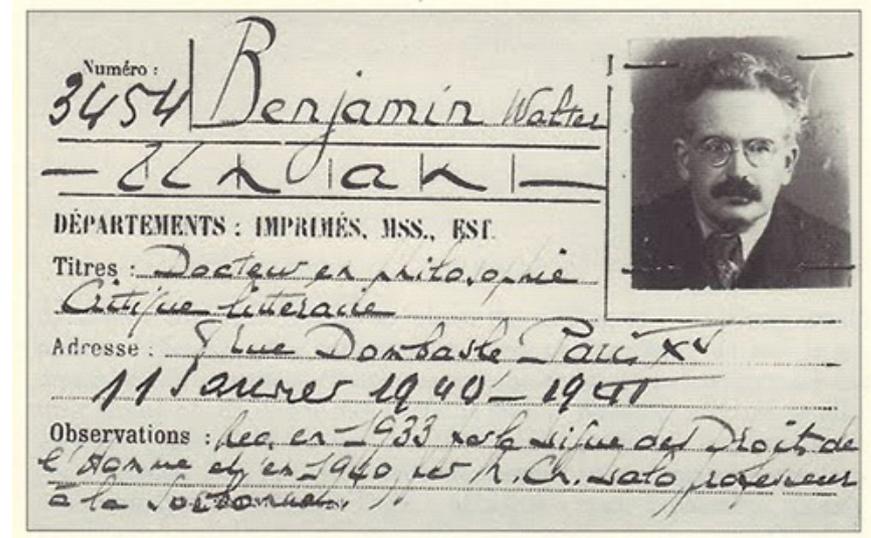
JULY 15 1892 – SEPTEMBER 26 1940

GERMAN JEWISH PHILOSOPHER

INFLUENCES: JAQUES DERRIDA,
HANNAH ARREDT

“A SHORT HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY” 1931

“THE WORK OF ART IN THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION” 1936



HE IS ALL “ART IS POLITICAL”

“...a photography which is able to relate a tin of canned food to the universe, yet cannot grasp a single one of the human connections in which that tin exists; a photography which even in its most dreamlike compositions is more concerned with eventual saleability than with understanding... the true facts of this photographic creativity is the advertisement... - Walter Benjamin - "A Short History of Photography"

[cited in: "Photography/Politics: One", Photography Workshop, London 1979, p. 57]

“The illiterate of the future will not be the man who cannot read the alphabet, but the one who cannot take a photograph.”

Walter Benjamin

“Photography transformed subject into object, and even, one might say, into a Museum object.” (Roland Barthes 1981)





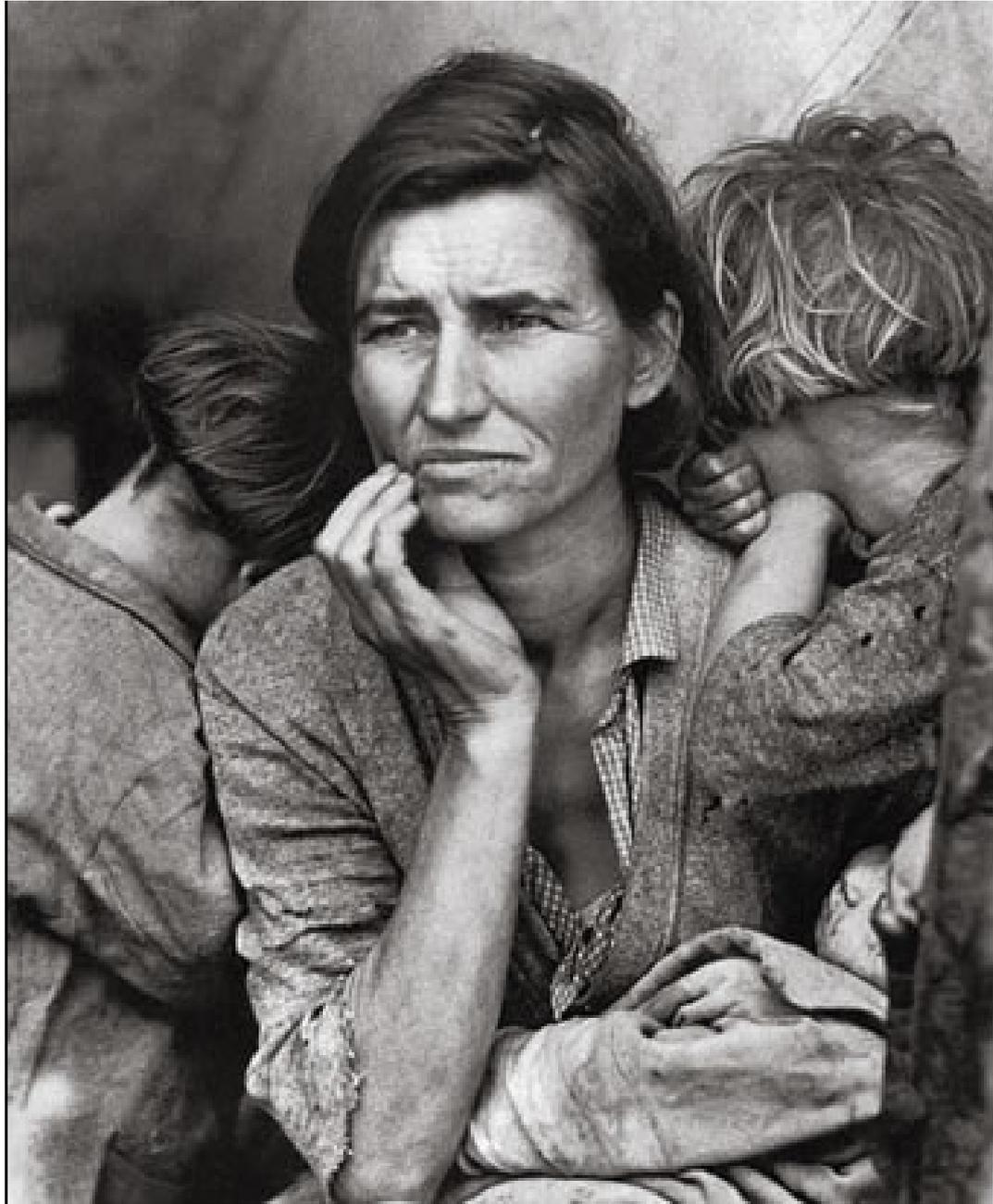
631 Une Almée

J. Geiser, phot.-Alger.



394 Jeune fille du Sud-Algérien

J. Geiser, phot.-Alger.



Migrant Mother Dorothea Lange 1935

POST MODERNISM



Photography's *failure of singularity*
undermined the
aesthetic rules that validated Originality.

PHOTOGRAPHY IN POSTMODERNISM

- Authorship, uniqueness of art object and nature of self-expression become unstable and challenged
- Mass reproducibility and proliferation of photographs
- Images saturated into all aspects of waking life, commerce and communication.

IMAGE CULTURE

(post modernism and beyond)



*IS YOUR WORK
DUMB AND SEXY ENOUGH?*



A more self-conscious era

Images become intrinsic, almost
unconsciously ever-present

Their “truth telling” becomes subject
to context-based critique, nuance,
overt and covert manipulations

To photograph is in some ways to appropriate the object being photographed.

It is a power/knowledge relationship.

- Sontag



Moises Saman. Zawiyah. 2011



Baby Girls Gotta Mustang Dana Claxton





Family Portrait Dana Claxton



Moises Saman - *LIBYA Tripoli. 2011*

Kit Lo

Kit Lo argues that, “no signifier is truly arbitrary and though the meanings of colour are not permanently fixed, they contain, and are in fact formed through the layering of contested, ideological histories of content”

(Kit Lo, “The Propaganda
of Pantone...”)

APPROPRIATION

CULTURAL
SUBCULTURAL
AESTHETIC



“**Aesthetics** can be understood as the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics **as a form of experience**.”



Opening of essay “The Propaganda of Pantone...”

Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.”

— Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*

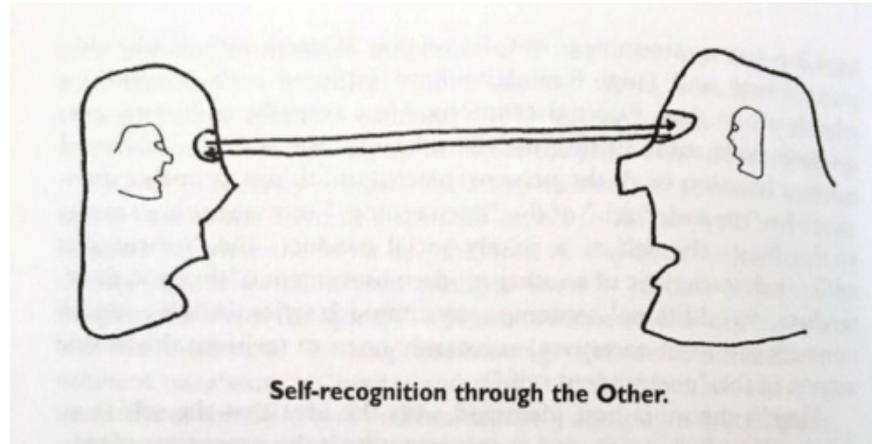
EL MAS SEXY
milímetros de cuero y
rosa 5.373 €, badero
rosa con pedrería
239 €, y collar plateado
hecho a todo de
terro (208 €), solo
Roberto Cavalli,
y demás creólos.
En Este Número,



Solomon-Godeau

THE DEMANDS OF
THE REAL!

THE
NECESSARY
ACCOUNTABILITY!



THE PROBLEMS
OF THE PHOTOGRAPH
AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF TRUTH!

INSIDER OR OUTSIDER,
AUTHENTIC REPRESENTATION OF OTHER
OR
PRESENTATION OF SELFHOOD?

“While photographic representation retains its evidentiary or juridical status for purposes of individual identification, police procedure, the courtroom, and the racetrack, the truth status of photography has not fared well in the epoch of postmodernity.” (*Inside/Out* 58)

1. Why do we care about ideas of identity and knowledge production in relation to photography Specifically?
2. As artists who are image based, why will it be fundamentally important to have vocabulary and understanding around the history of images?