

**AHST 4342-501 (27532)**  
**History of Media and New Media Art**  
**Spring 2018**  
**Dr. Charissa N. Terranova**  
**University of Texas at Dallas**  
**Arts & Humanities**  
**T-Th 1:00-2:15**

**Thursday 01/25/18**

**Discussion**

**Photograph: The Construction of Vision**

**Photograph: The Construction of Vision**

**Evidence of the Truth**

**Constructions of the Truth**

...a photograph can be treated as a narrowly selective transparency...the work that photographers do is no generic exception to the usually shady commerce between art and truth...

Susan Sontag

Are Susan Sontag's ideas from 1977 still relevant?  
Are they correct?

Student question: Given that the majority of photographs are now left in a nonphysical state [i.e. digital], does Sontag's interpretation of photographs still apply to this new breed?



Alfred Stieglitz [1864-1946] by Gertrude Käsebier (1902) photographer, promoter of modernism in US, and impresario



Top: Interior view of the "Little Galleries" at 291. Photo by Gertrude Käsebier.

Bottom Left: Marcel Duchamp, Fountain, 1917

Bottom Right: Poster for Photo Secession Organization 1902-1917



Alfred Stieglitz, Self-Portrait - Cortina, Italy 1890

Student question: How would Sontag think about the selfie?

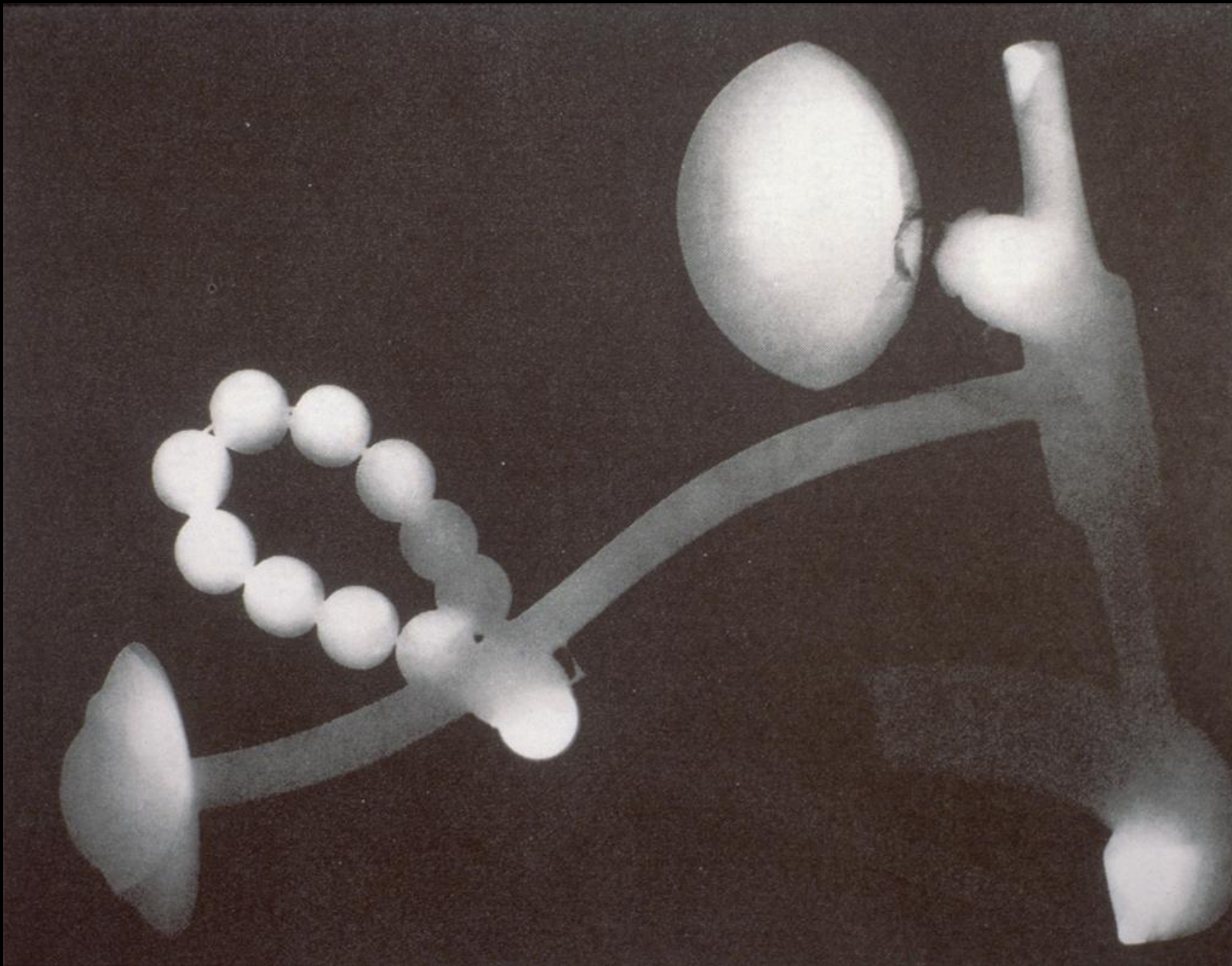
Student writing:

Through the more negative qualities of photography, Sontag argues that the photograph itself is the height of anthropocentric narcissism. With the onset of human-induced rapid extinction [Anthropocene/Sixth Great Extinction], society has turned the camera into a weapon, the goal of the modern photographer becoming the capture and immortalization of his or her subject, as a big game hunter might with a trophy animal.



Alfred Stieglitz, The Steerage, 1907





Man Ray, Rayograph, 1922

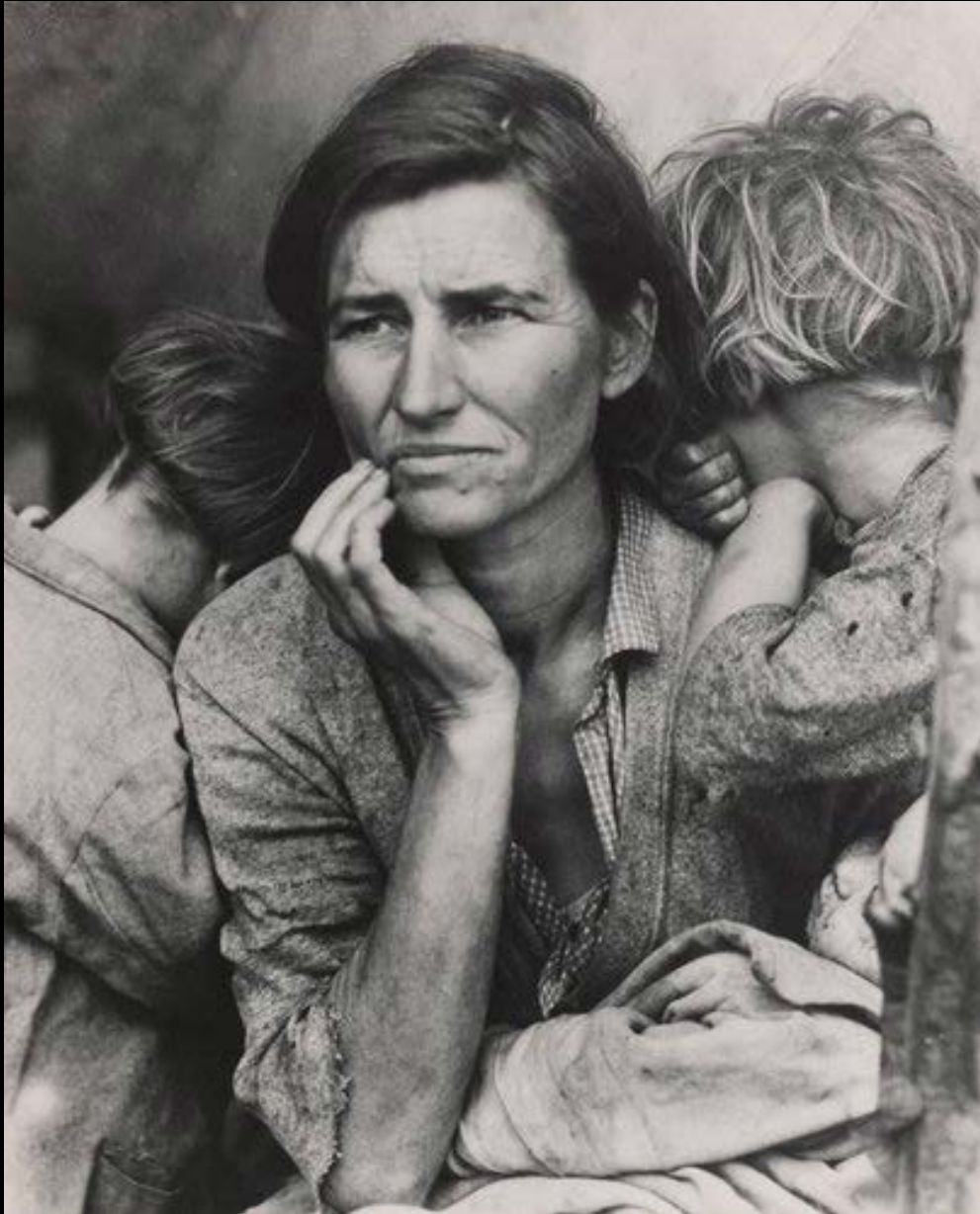
Student question:  
Do photographs, by capturing the world,  
make us more  
human, or do they  
turn us into  
consuming robots?



Walker Evans, Bud Fields and His Family, Hale County, Alabama, 1936



Dorothea Lange, Migrant Mother of 6, Age 32, 1936



I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother, as if drawn by a magnet. I do not remember how I explained my presence or my camera to her, but I do remember she asked me no questions. I made five exposures, working closer and closer from the same direction. I did not ask her name or her history. She told me her age, that she was thirty-two. She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food. There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it.

-- Dorothea Lange

Dorothea Lange, Migrant Mother of 6, Age 32, 1936



Different versions of Migrant Mother (Florence Owens Thompson) by Dorothea Lange

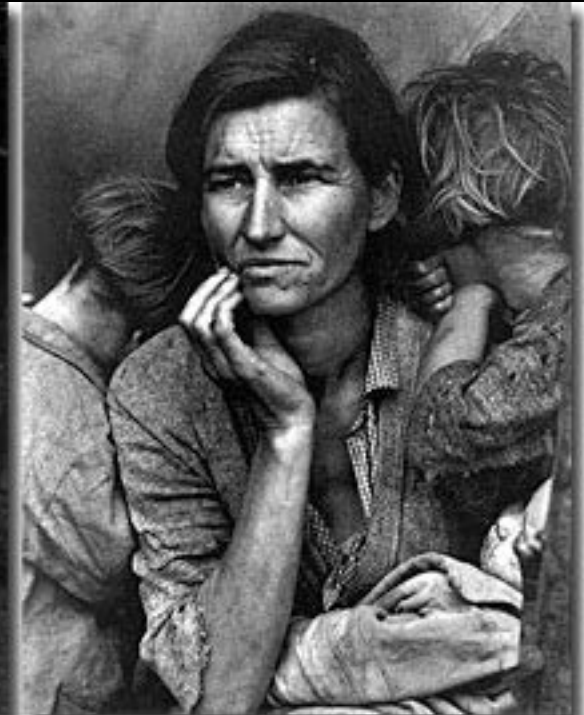
The immensely gifted members of the Farm Security Administration photographic project of the late 1930s (among them Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Ben Shahn, Russell Lee) would take dozens of frontal pictures of one of their sharecropper subjects until satisfied that they had gotten just the right look on film – the precise expression on the subject's face that supported their own notions about poverty, light, dignity, texture, exploitation and geometry.

Susan Sontag

Different versions of Migrant Mother by Dorothea Lange



Florence Thompson and her daughters Norma Rydlewski (in front), Katherine McIntosh, and Ruby Sprague, at Norma's house, Modesto, CA, June 1979, by Bill Ganzel. [To hear Florence's story, click here.](#)



Migrant Mother [Florence Thompson with her daughters], Nipomo, CA, March 1936, by Dorothea Lange.

# POSTMODERN APPROPRIATION



Walker Evans, Bud Fields and His Family, Hale County, Alabama, 1936

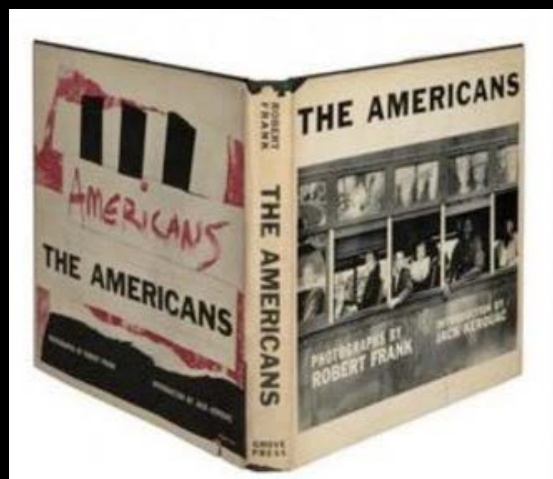
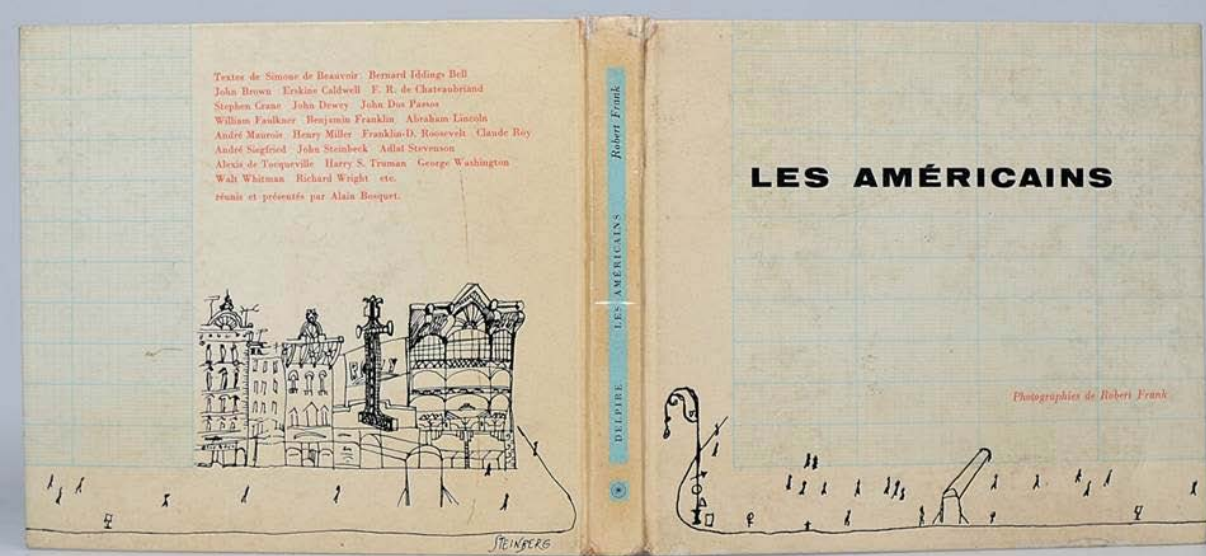
Walker Evans and James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941)



Sherrie Levine after Walker Evans, Metro Pictures Gallery, NY, 1981



Student question: Has photography done more to further our understanding of the world around us, or has it skewed our perception of reality?

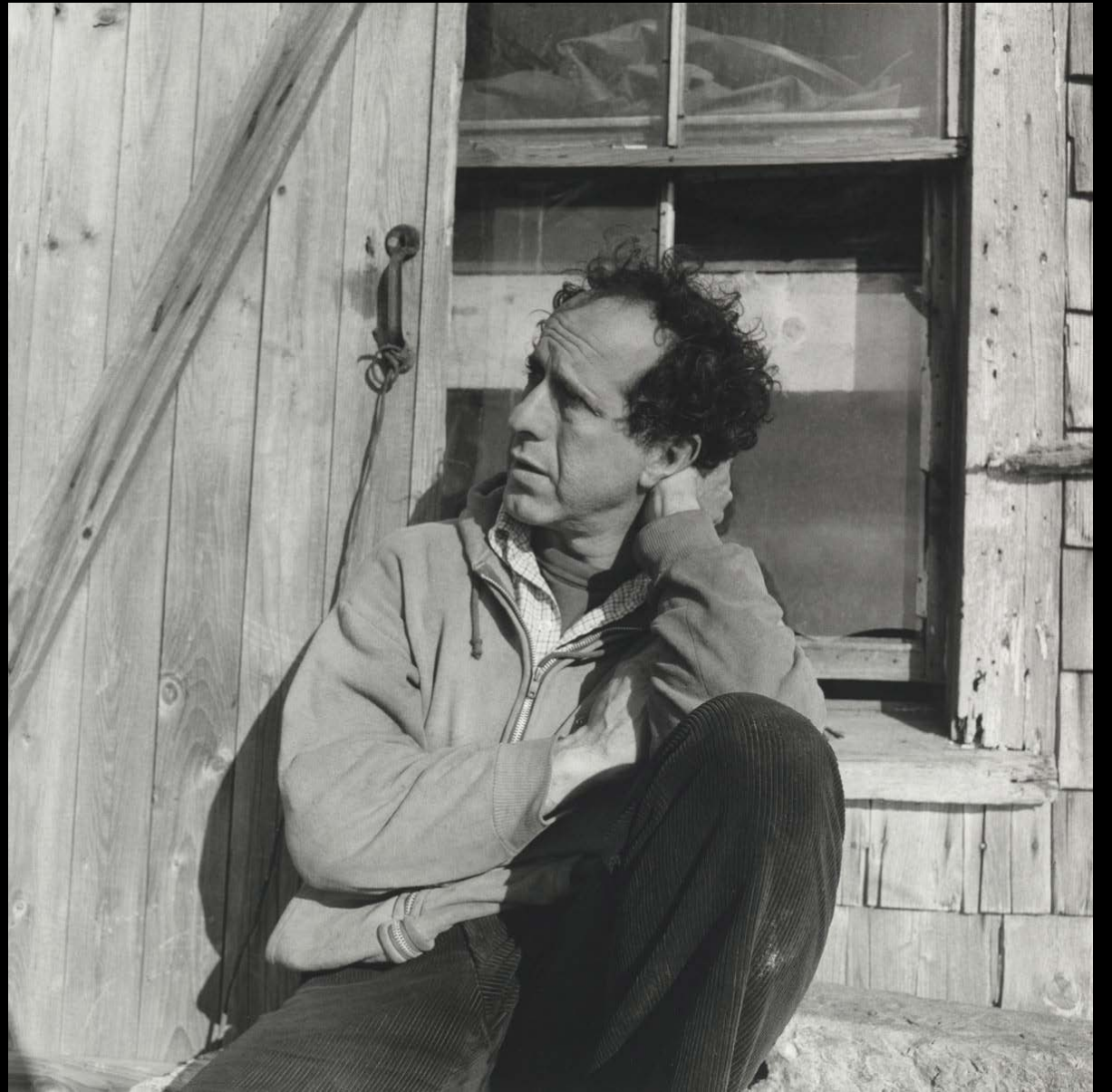


"Frank set out with his Guggenheim Grant to do something new and unconstrained by commercial diktats" and made "a now classic photography book in the iconoclastic spirit of the Beats." -- Sean O'Hagan

Above: Robert Frank, Santa Fe, 1955  
 Above Left: Les Américains, by Robert Frank, published by Robert Delpire, Paris, 1958 (1st Edition)  
 Below Left: The Americans by Robert Frank, published Grove Press, 1959 (1<sup>st</sup> Edition IN ENGLISH)



Walker Evans, *Interior View of Robert Frank's House*, Nova Scotia, 1969-71



Walker Evans, *Robert Frank*, Nova Scotia, 1969-71



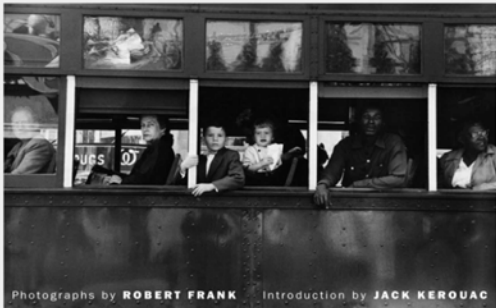
Robert Frank, Butte, Montana, 1955  
Frank took 28,000 shots. Only 83 of those were finally selected by him for publication in *The Americans*.



Robert Frank, U.S. 285, New Mexico, 1955



## THE AMERICANS



Photographs by **ROBERT FRANK** Introduction by **JACK KEROUAC**

STEIDL

Above: Robert Frank, Ranch Market, Hollywood, 1955-56  
Left Above: Robert Frank, Rodeo Cowboy, Madison Square  
Gardens, 1955-56



Robert Frank, Florida, 1958



Parade - Hoboken, New Jersey, 1955

Student/Professor question:  
Does photography  
democratize information or  
dumb down and homogenize  
information?



Robert Frank, Florida, 1958

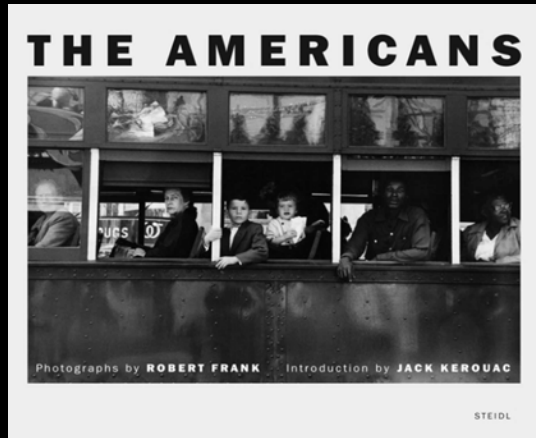
Student response: Technological advances over time took the photograph from the laps of the elite and placed it in the hands of the everyday working class, quickly transforming a status symbol into something ubiquitous. With the advent of photography came somewhat of an elevation of societies. Communities of people once closed off to the world suddenly view other cultures, far off lands, and art in the comfort of their homes. One could say photography served to close the gap between high and low culture.



Parade - Hoboken, New Jersey, 1955

What then is the goal of art? To democratize relations? To elevate the life of mind? To bring moral uplift? Are democratizing forces and moral uplift mutually exclusive?





Above: Robert Frank, Contact Sheet for "Elevator Girl," from The Americans, 1955-56

Left: Robert Frank, Elevator Girl, 1955-56



Robert Frank, Trolley, New Orleans, 1955, from *The Americans*

Robert Frank,  
Charleston South  
Carolina, 1955-56

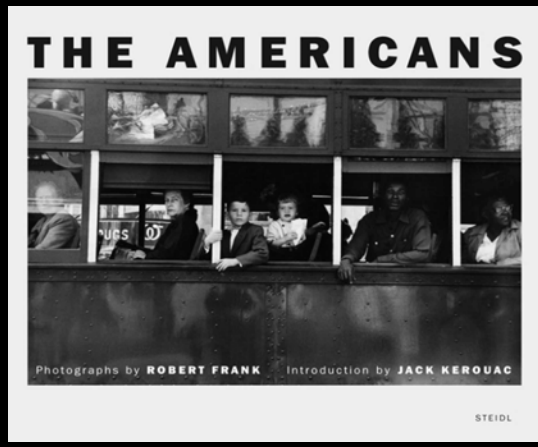


## THE AMERICANS



Photographs by **ROBERT FRANK** Introduction by **JACK KEROUAC**

STEIDL



Robert Frank, New York City, 1955

...images transfix. Images anesthetize.

Susan Sontag

Student question:

How can the general populace be so desensitized due to the saturation of images of destruction and corruption in the media, yet have a simultaneous addiction and impulsive reaction to mundane falsified images specifically on social media?

Professor's related question:

Are the mechanisms of social media only image-oriented?



William Eggleston, Los Alamos, 1966-74

Student question:

Why do we feel  
the need to hide  
behind cameras?



William Eggleston, Los Alamos, 1966-74



Student writing:

Humans have an instinctive need to shield themselves from unpleasant thoughts (which images can bring aplenty), and as such tend to avoid visualizing tragedies and cruelties if they can avoid them.



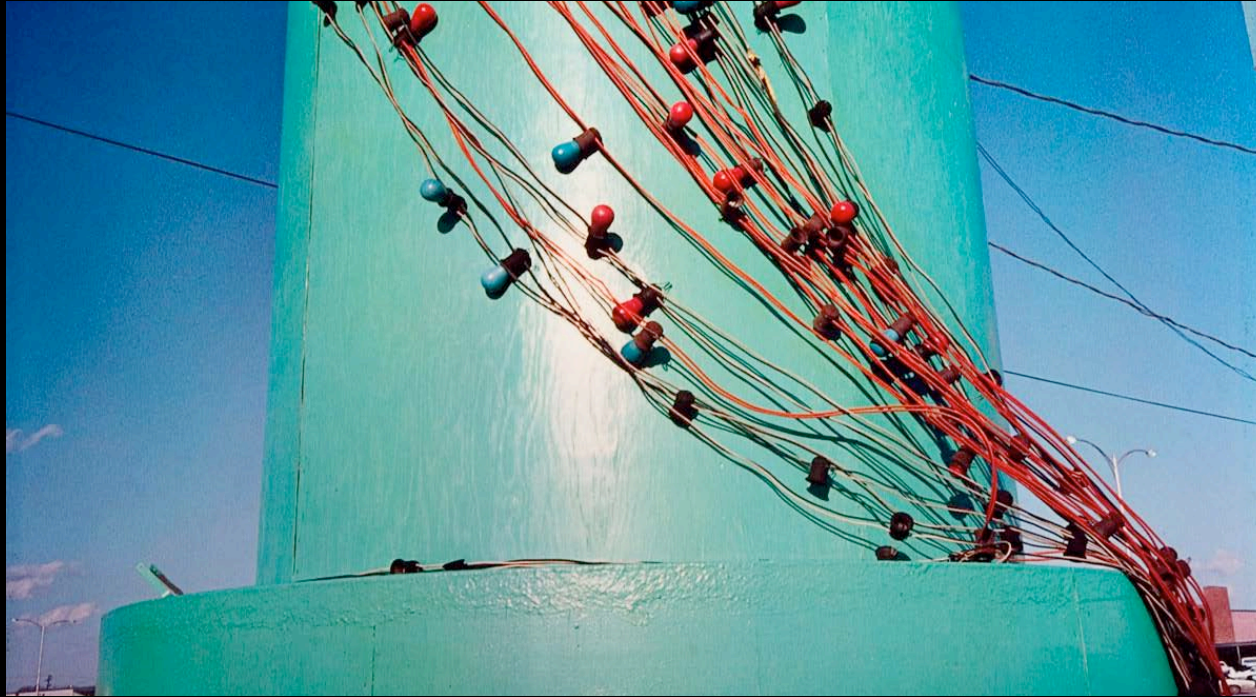
William Eggleston, Los Alamos, 1966-74



William Eggleston, Red Ceiling, Greenwood, Mississippi, 1973  
SATURATED COLOR

Student question:

Why are still images [sometimes] more powerful than a video?

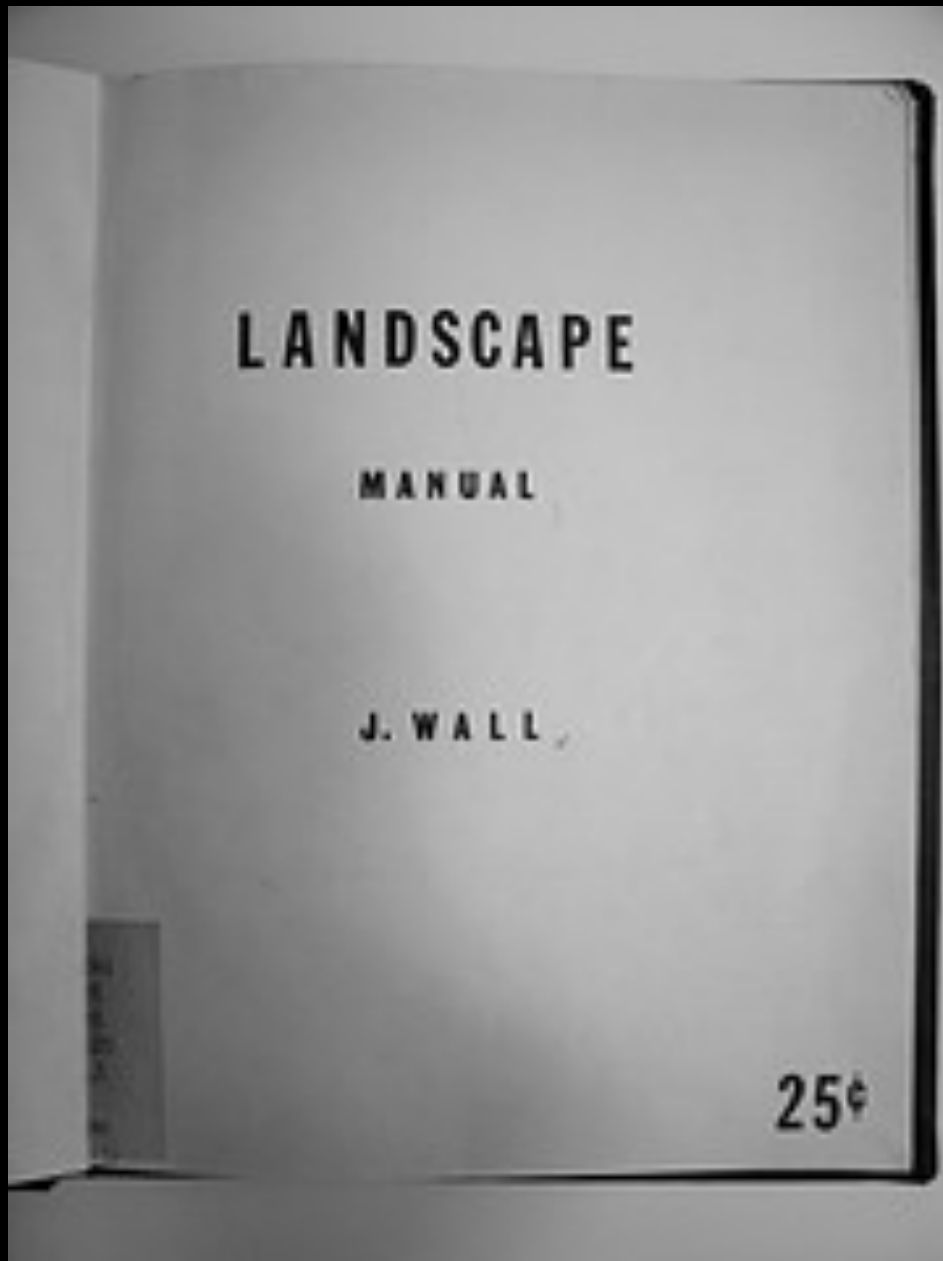


William Eggleston, *Untitled (Lights)*, c. 1971

Dye transfer dyes are much closer to 'ideal' than other photographic dyes. The colors are purer.

Dye transfer printing resembles the mechanical printing process that magazines use to make color pictures. A color printing press uses four separate printing plates, one each for the three primaries (magenta, yellow, cyan) and one for black. Each plate is engraved with a halftone image for one of the colors, which is coated with a thin layer of oil-based ink. The four plates then transfer their ink to the surface of a sheet of blank white paper to make the color pictures. The final picture is not 'created' chemically in the paper; it is assembled on its surface from four separate screened color images. Dye transfer uses three continuous-tone sheet film plates called matrices. The matrices are soaked in water-based cyan, magenta and yellow dyes. The matrices are rinsed clean of excess dye and squeegeed against a sheet of gelatin-coated paper, much like regular photographic paper but without the silver compounds. The gelatin absorbs the dye from the matrix. The result is a continuous-tone dye image on paper.

<http://ctein.com/dyetrans.htm>



Jeff Wall, Landscape Manual, 1969

**Photoconceptualism**



Marcel Duchamp, Fountain, 1917



Bruce Nauman, Self Portrait as a Fountain, 1966-70



Jeff Wall, The Storyteller, 1986



Jeff Wall, Tattoos and Shadows, 2000



Jeff Wall, Tattoos and Shadows, 2000



Jeff Wall, The Storyteller, 1986



Manet, Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe/Luncheon on the Grass, 1863



# LANDSCAPE

MANUAL

J. WALL

25¢

Jeff Wall, Landscape Manual, 1969

ny sight of the two of them together, he drifting his dreary city chemical pictures across dusty spikes of coarse grass, she admiring the plants and keeping an eye out for squirrels, rabbits etc.---both of them, their hands at their sides, have never really been "without" beauty at all. Making a journey aboard ship in the future all the photographs have been taken, now scattered along a dirt road marvellous dust settling on the chemical hard surfaces a natural bond---as natural as real light falling on # the real sensitive silver emulsion on the celluloid strip or the eye.

EVERY EVENING AT [REDACTED] LIGHTNING

Here sitting at the desk---typewriter, camera, light-meter, tape [REDACTED] recorder---open window to my [REDACTED] immediate right---this afternoon October 7 1969 Tuesday 3:37 p.m.---unravelling the images and sequences of the past into the small dusty road---deep green clustering shrubby small trees coarse spiky blades of grass---<sup>the</sup> small gently undulating dirty road



Notes: rows of windows ---  
[REDACTED]

leading at once to the water and down from the camp. Approaching across yellow and dry meadow not shimmering in the clear white summer sunshine---instead placed not flat not rolling---

instead simply larger than the possibility of peripheral vision might be able to encounter---these meadows a facility for rendering back the unusable words into real seeing---where have we the words for these meadows---approaching the small dusty road the most overpowering sense-impression is the smell of the heated dry grass, acres of dry [REDACTED] grass (boredom, sunshine [REDACTED] [REDACTED]---itself intensifying a weather (i.e.---landscape)-oriented disappointment---[REDACTED] looking down at dry shoes not very energetically stepping across coarse very dry flatt-



rows of apartment windows

(mute camera)

car windows as facility

(re-structured viewing system necessitating continuous orientation to [REDACTED] "continuum" of sensation)

ened grasses of the meadows stretching---without any effort involved---beyond constantly-moving frames established by the eyes.)---I am recalling these fields scorched and daylight as a factor in the question of their identity as a facility, or as simple-material for post-dated analogue 15 years later real experience. That it is, when is not involved, but nevertheless remains a constant---this real time is flexible.

Nothing appears irregular or out of place (but then, "out of place" doesn't seem "workable" at all) in other words, things can be accepted immediately, without reaction and reflection—but not without the living memory of those photographs, which are not even yours. In the ~~memory~~ of your conditioned consciousness—conditioned in level after level—one can penetrate farther and further: the photo-cards continue to fall into place; the photos continue to line themselves up in one single, apparently immutable order.



immutable apartment

Shifting through the reams of photographs, you are co-ordinating a structure which threatens to reveal itself as mostly empty space. ~~looking~~ (looking through the photographs in the sensory)

We agree that manipulation of structure does bring us deepened & sharpened understanding of the world ?? (Art?)—do we not?? Structural manipulation (this can of course

be image, word structure, etc.) breaks down more necessarily exclusive relationships between things and offers an "infinity" of new (i. e.—ageless) possibilities, revealing that the "importance" and "meaning" of these connections is ~~in the final of~~ connection/separation or of relationship itself.



area---ageless possibilities

Word, image, or "formal" structures can be seen as schemata of less particular (and so less simple & fully articulate) relationships: in language, the structure of the words should follow as closely as possible the structure of that which is occurring or existing outside the word universe, or outside a person's skin. In a world where this does not often occur, pathological problems of stunning simplicity are created. (Art) manipulation creates endless combinations; the relationships which are the "result" of this manipulation do not necessarily carry more or less "meaning" or "importance" than do the "original" set of relationships (i. e. the original organization of activity or ordering of "physical" members). What is revealed is the infinity of ways in which the facets of the world—themselves continually changing—can be related. They also show us that one arrangement does not necessarily take precedence over another.

RIDES OUT IN PIECES

Nothing appears irregular or out of place (but then, "out of place" doesn't seem "workable" at all) in other words, things can be accepted immediately, without reaction and reflection—but not without the living memory of those photographs, which are not even yours. In the            of your conditioned consciousness—conditioned in level after level—one can penetrate farther and further: the photo-cards continue to fall into place; the photos continue to line themselves up in one single, apparently immutable order.

*region*



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area—ageless possibilities

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ECON - O - WASH  
14 TH AND HIGHLAND  
NATIONAL CITY CALIF.



LOOKING EAST ON 4TH AND C  
CHULA VISTA, CALIF.



Robert Frank, U.S. 285, New Mexico 1956

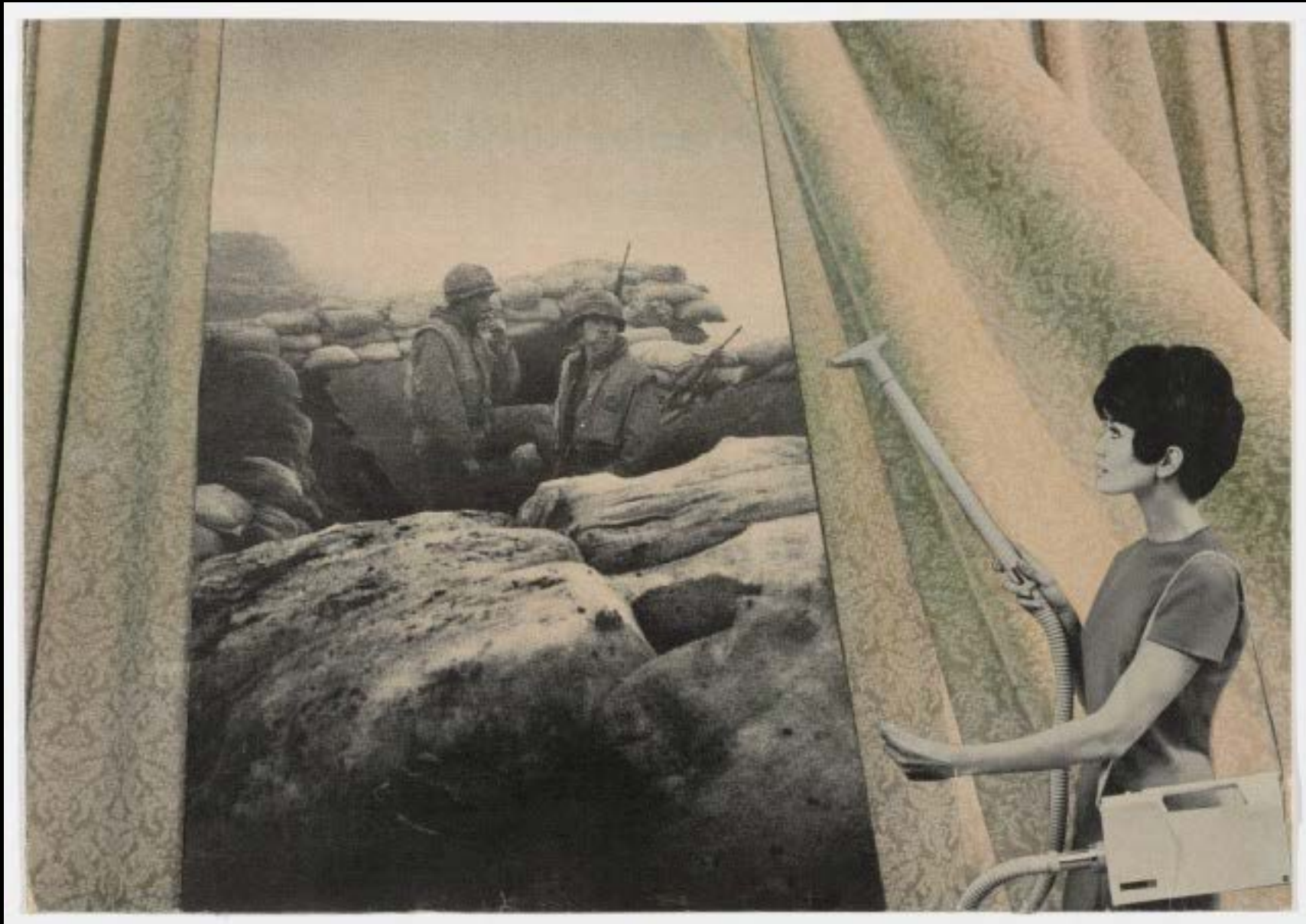


ECON - O - WASH  
14 TH AND HIGHLAND  
NATIONAL CITY CALIF.

John Baldessari, Econ-O-Wash, 14th and  
Highland, National City Calif, 1964-66



Martha Rosler, Rights of Passage, 1995-97



Martha Rosler, *Cleaning the Drapes*, from the series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home*, 1967–72, Cut-and-pasted printed paper on board.

An event known through photographs certainly becomes more real than it would have been if one had never seen the photographs – think of the Vietnam War. But after repeated exposure to images it also becomes less real.

-- Susan Sontag





Student question:

Susan Sontag employs a deeply cynical view about the effect of photography's increasing popularity.

Are most of the negatives of photography a result of its novelty, and the general public's lack of understanding of the dangers of an "image-obsessed" society? If so, will the deterrents Sontag described eventually be remedied as humans become more familiar with photography as a medium?

Martha, Rosler, Bringing the War Home:  
House Beautiful, 1970-71



Martha Rosler, Rights of Passage, 1995-97