Power of Images

VII_Photographs

Origins and Meaning

- **Camera obscura**, pinhole camera

- **Photography**:

  - Nicéphor Niépce, *View from the Window at Le Gras*, 1826 or 1827

    - 1st surviving camera PH

    - Louis Daguerre (1787-1851

      - 30s daguerrotype

      - 39 publicaly announced

    - Hercules Florence

      - 1832 photograph

Question of Realism

- The PH are systematically collected since the beginning

    - National Photographic Record Association, Britain,1897

- The idea of objectivity:

    - PH are used as evidence of authenticity (ex. newspapers)

    - "camera never lies"

    - "**candid camera**", 1920s

- To what extent the PH can be trusted?

Dagerrotype, 1854

„While photographs may not lie, liars may photograph.“

–Lewis Hine

Dorothea Lange/Margaret Bourke-White
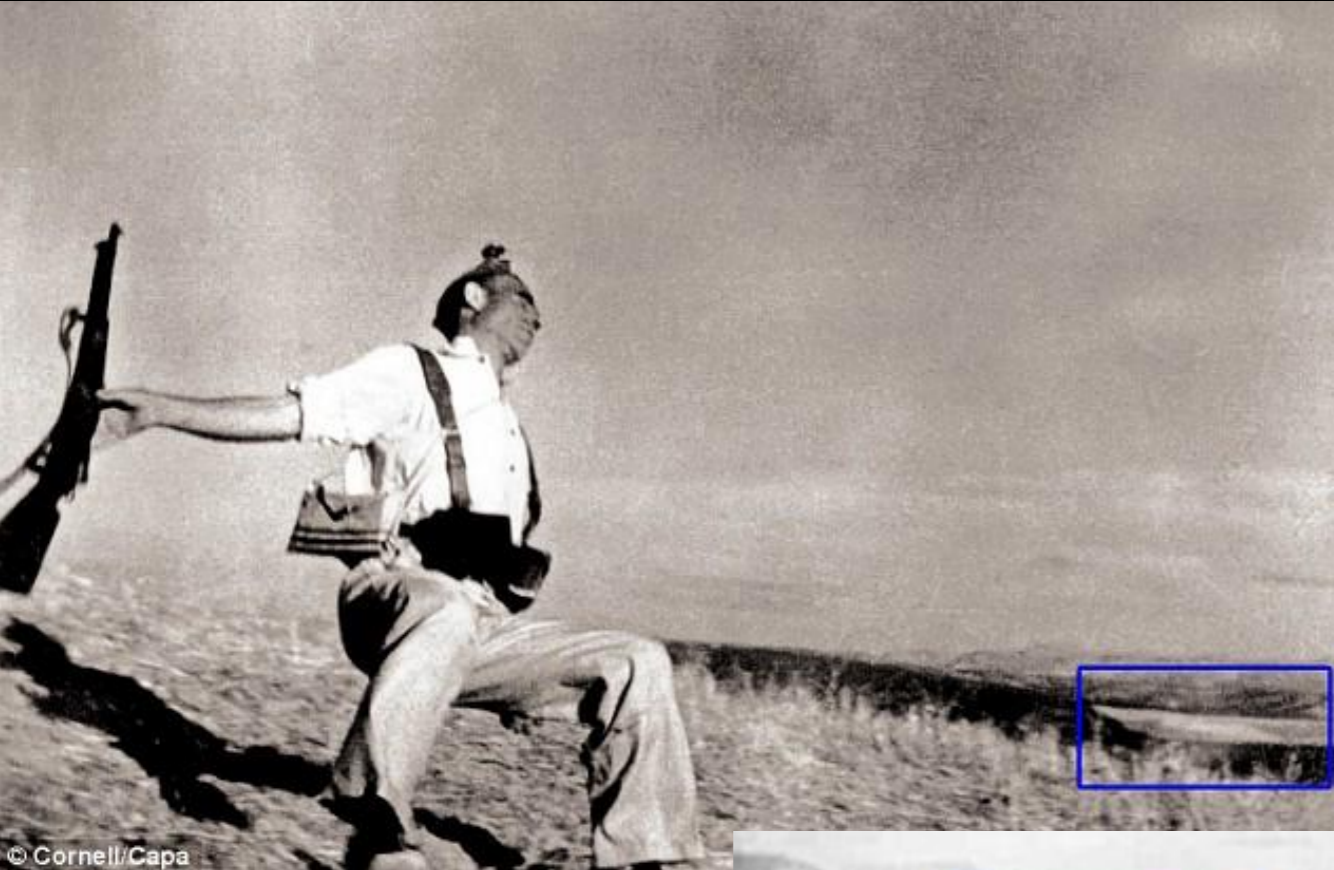
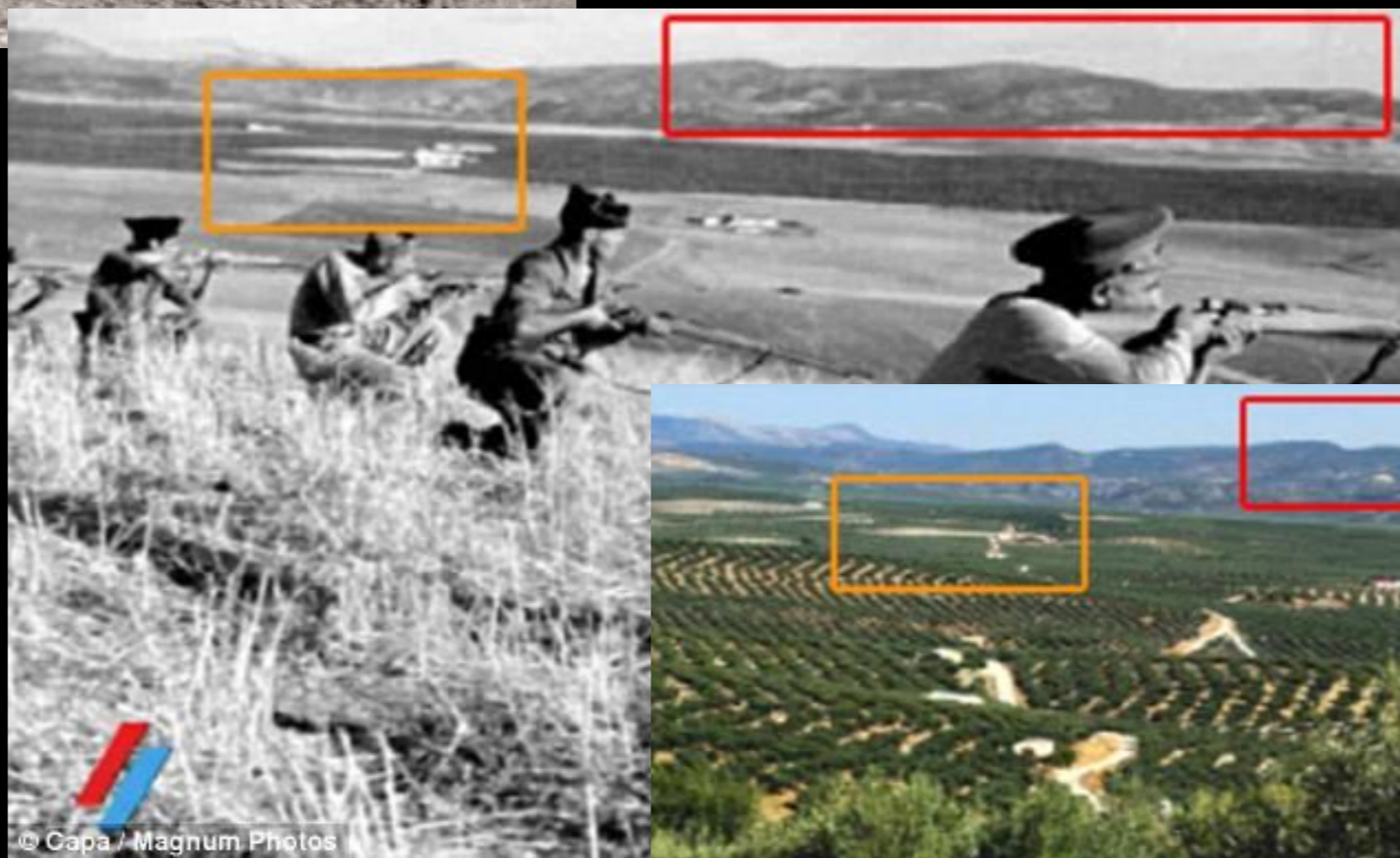# American Civil War (1861-1865)

Robert Capa

The Falling Soldier, 1936

© Cornell/Capa

© Capa / Magnum Photos

© Magnum Photos

Problem of Context

- **context**

  - the texture: sepia print /black-and-white image

- **identity** of sitters and photographers

Reality Effect

- Roland Barthes, *The Reality effect*, 1968

  - Mimesis

  - T of tripartite sign (sign, signifier and signified)

- *The Phothographic Message*, in: Image, Music, Text

  - „the photographic paradox„

    - Message withour code

    - Reduction
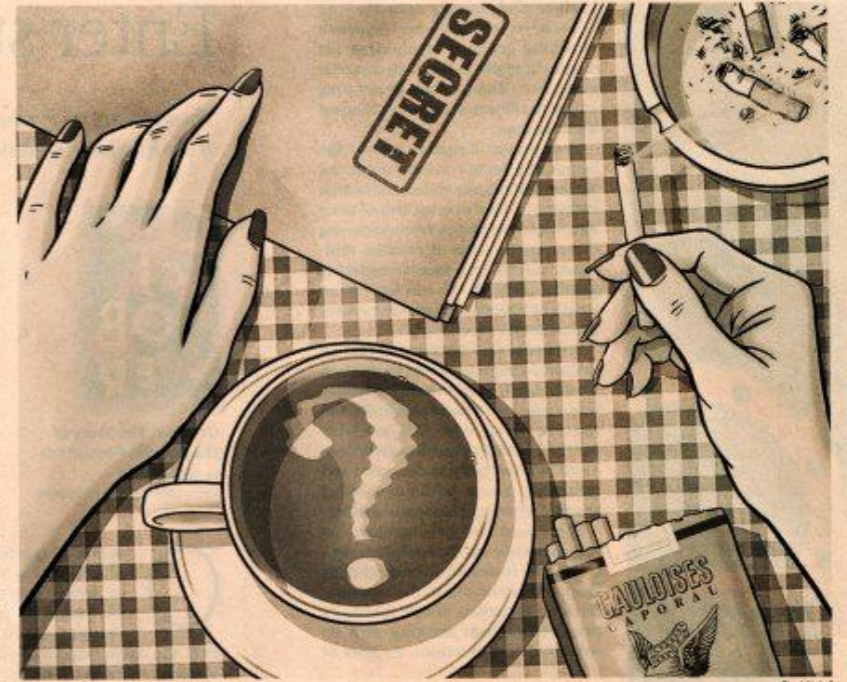
sign

signified

signifier

The premise of Laurent Binet's *The 7th Function of Language* is a stroke of genius. Roland Barthes did not die following an accident in 1980; he was murdered. Jacques Bayard, a superintendent for the intelligence service — sworn enemy of "work-shy lefties" — is immediately put on the case.

Completely clueless ("Episteme, my arse"), Bayard recruits Simon Herzog, a young academic who teaches semiology, to act as his Virgil through the arcane world of Theory. It soon transpires that the great 20th-century linguist Roman Jakobson, famous for defining the six functions of language, had in fact discovered a seventh one. Barthes was in possession of a document revealing its potent secret: how to unleash language's magical powers of persuasion. Such knowledge could turn anyone into the "master of the world", which is why everyone — from Bulgarian spies toting poisoned umbrellas to President Giscard d'Estaing — is after it. The piece of paper has, *bien sûr*, vanished into thin air. In whose hands will it end up?

Binet's bestselling debut, *HHhH*, about the assassination of Nazi security chief Reinhard Heydrich, was awarded the Prix Goncourt du premier roman. His new novel, also inspired by real figures, is a sort of post-structuralist whodunnit casting the semiotician in the role of detective. The first part of the book, set in Paris and featuring a roll call of intellectual luminaries, is pitch-perfect in its evocation of early-1980s French society — and contains hilarious, often polyphonic, set pieces. The scene where novelist Philippe Sollers pontificates about his work-in-progress while his spouse, philosopher Julia Kristeva, has a nauseous existential moment induced by the skin of milk floating atop his café crème, is a bravura performance. The picaresque plot begins to flag, however, when the two protagonists hook up with Umberto Eco in Bologna and at Cornell University, where Jacques Derrida is torn asunder by dogs and Sollers castrated.

In his 1967 essay "The Death of the Author", Barthes contends that language, ceasing to be merely instrumental, "loses its origin" when it enters the fictive realm. A thinly veiled reference to this theory recurs throughout Binet's novel. The reader's quest for the narrator's identity gradually forms a phantom plot that shadows (and even overshadows) the overt whodunnit, sending us on a wild-goose chase. A description of Bayard sitting in a café is interrupted by a parenthetical aside: "Which café? The little details are important for reconstructing the atmosphere, don't you think?" Pleading ignorance, he (or indeed she) enjoins us, à la *Tristram Shandy*, to picture the superintendent wherever we so please.

Here, Binet reprises a theme tackled in *HHhH*, where the author's stand-in frets over the minutiae of historical reconstitution: the colour of the Nazi security chief's Mercedes, for instance. Such "little details" are important in fiction as well as history books: they produce what Barthes called the "reality effect". Highlighting their contingency — why this Latin Quarter café rather than another? — is a ruse by which the narrative voice enhances the reality effect while seemingly undermining it. After all, a fallible storyteller is far more credible than an omniscient one (with the added convenience of allowing Binet to paper over a few gaps in his research).

The strands of the plot are skilfully interwoven through a dual process of fictionalisation of the real and realisation of the fictional. At one stage the narrator observes that it is difficult "to imagine what Julia Kristeva is thinking in 1980", as though this were not the case with any real-life person at any given moment. A similar statement is later made about one of the fictitious protagonists, about whom anything could be imagined: "We have no way of knowing what Simon dreams about because we are not inside his head, are we?"

Or are we? As the plot thickens, Simon feels increasingly "trapped in a novel": "How do you know you are not living inside a work of fiction? How do you know that you're real?" This growing ontological crisis — doubtless stemming from Barthes having read the world like a text — sends us back to the opening sentences: "Life is not a novel. Or at least you would like to believe so".

One begins to wonder if Simon has not done a Proust: stepped out of the story at the end in order to write it with the benefit of hindsight. This would partly account for the choice of an anonymous present-day narrator piecing together past events. It could also explain some of the anachronisms — goths, yuppies, purple Dr Martens, crack cocaine — which may have been planted by the author as signs of an unreliable memory. The retrospective view provides a rich seam of dramatic irony as the characters' forecasts prove invariably wrong. This is obviously its main *raison d'être*, but the time gap also signals a more fundamental distance, as though the ideas of Barthes or Foucault could only be integrated at the level of subject matter, no longer seriously engaged with. Or perhaps the narrative voice is language itself and Simon's paranoia a manifestation of the novel's growing self-consciousness. This particular enigma remains unresolved, which is as it should be if literature is understood as the invention of a voice "to which we cannot assign a specific origin".

Although highly entertaining at times, *The 7th Function of Language* fails to live up to its title. Everything, including the most obvious allusions (like the ubiquitous Citroën DS that Barthes compared to a Gothic cathedral) is spelt out. After all, what is the point of a *roman à clef* if the author provides us with all the keys?

Andrew Gallix teaches at the Sorbonne and edits 3:AM Magazine.

The reality effect

A roll call of 1980s intelligentsia features in an artful French whodunnit about the search for a missing philosophical document. By *Andrew Gallix*

The 7th Function of Language
by Laurent Binet
translated by Sam Taylor
Harvill Secker £16.99, 400 pages

„…Photographs are never evidence of history:
they are themselves the historical."

John Tagg

Photographs as Historical Evidence

1. evidence for aspects of social reality
2. PH are less R than it seems and distorts the social R
3. process of distortions is itself evidence of phenomena: mentalities, ideologies and identities
   - E.g. Edwardian photography
4. variety of intentions (author — patron — client)

Photography and History

- **Social history**, GB 1960s, (Rafael Samuel)

    - Victorian Photography

    - previous generateions "**visually illiterate**"

    - O.G. Rejlander, *Homeless* (from the series „Street urchins", 1865-1892)

- /**Gilberto Freyre**

  - H as a painter, whou paint the H in „an attempt to surprise the life in movement"

- **Robert Levine**, *Images of History: 19th and Early 20th Century Latin American Photographs as Documents*, Durham, NC, 1989
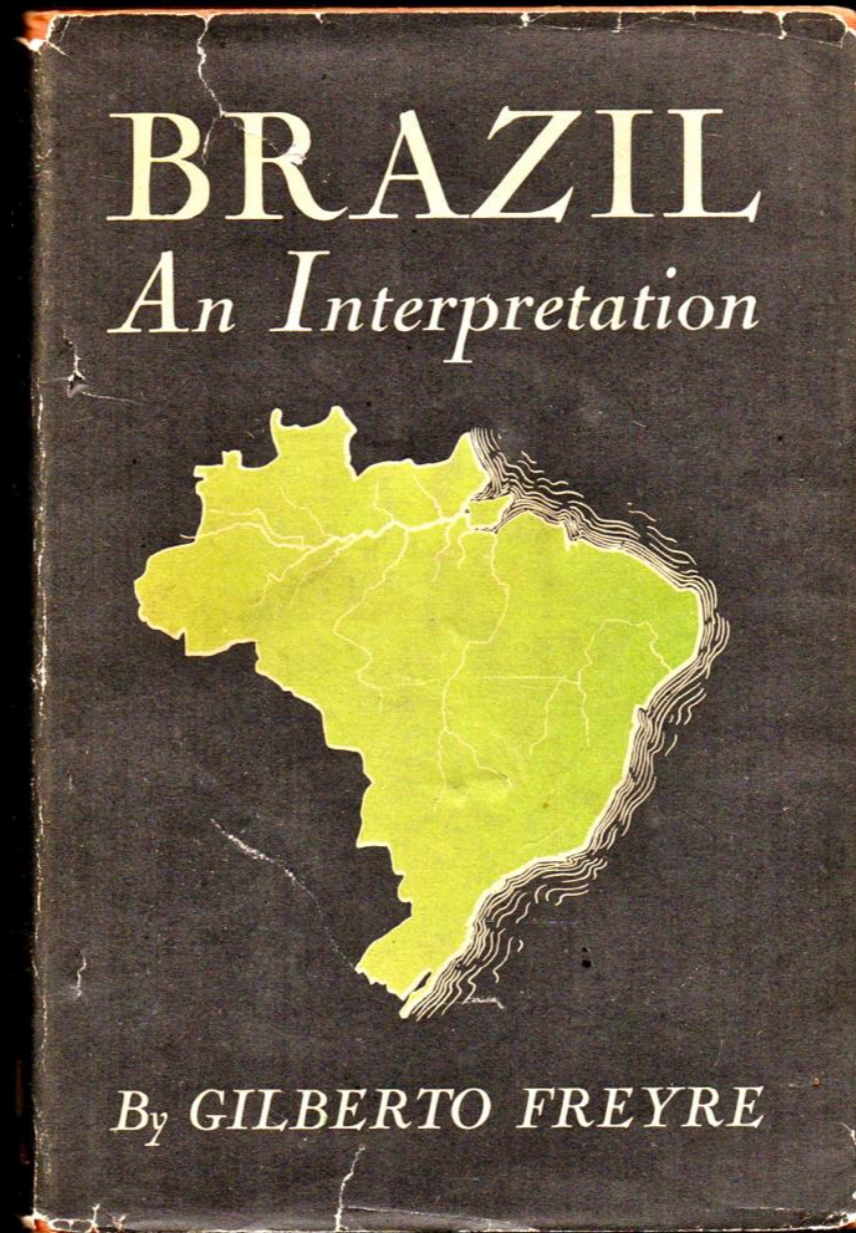
Documentary Photography

- 1930 in the USA
- **Roy Stryker**, Historical Divisin, Farm Security Administration
- **Dorothea Lange**
- **Lewis Hine**
  - *Power House Mechanic Working on Steam Pump*, 1920
- **Jacob Riis**
  - *Bandit´s Roost*, 1914

Lewis Hine's Social Photography

Police Photography

- 1800

- 1850s, New York Police, Rogue's Gallery

- Mug shot
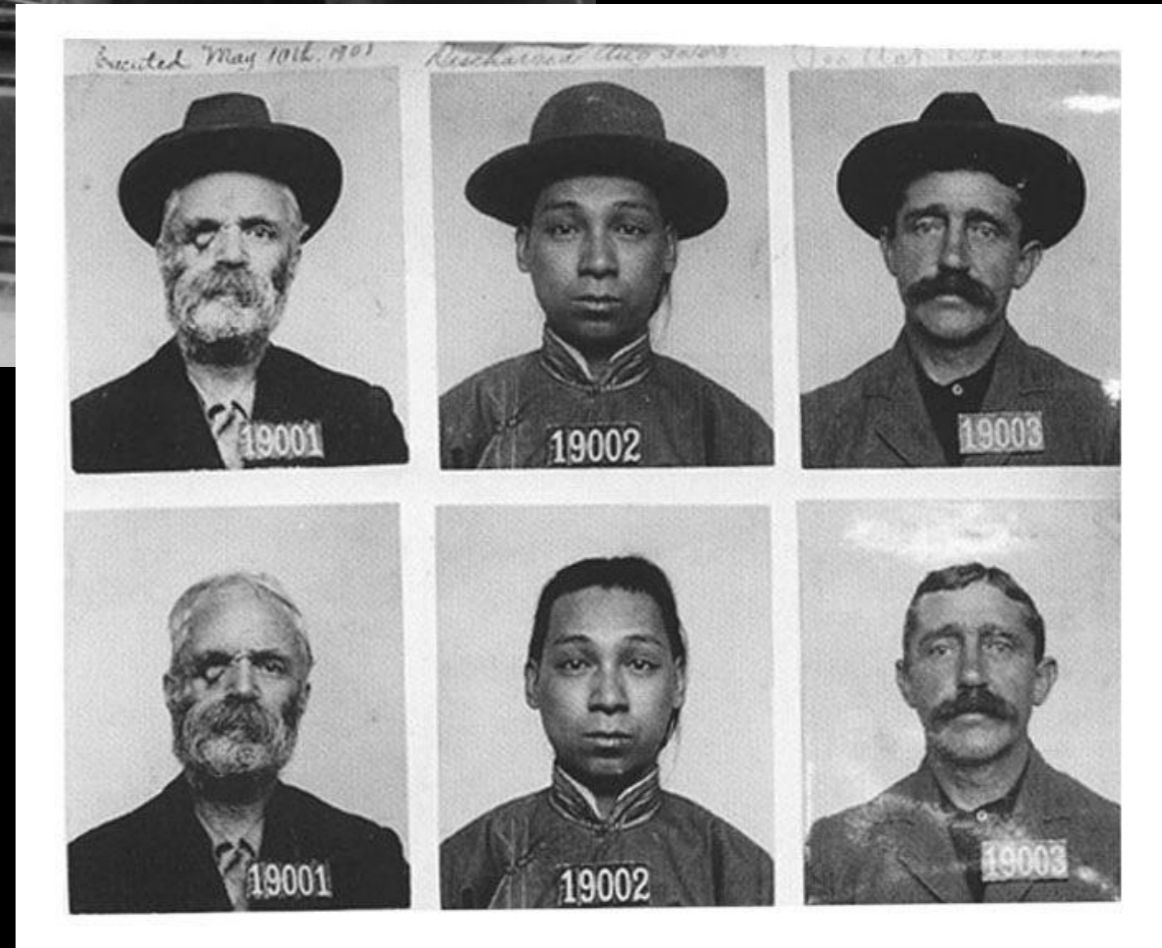
- Agust Sander, The
  Mirror of the Germans
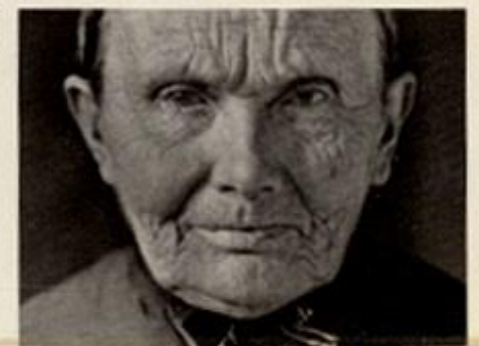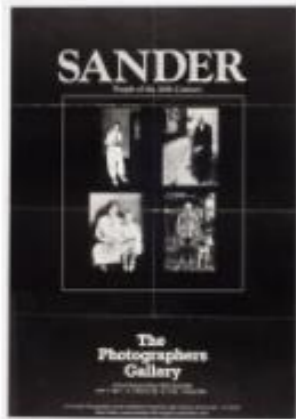 (*Deutschenspiegel*)

August
Sander

Deutschenspiegel

Menschen
des 20.
Jahrhunderts
Einleitung
von
H. Lützeler

AUGUST SANDER

[Exhibition poster for Sander: People of th...

AUGUST SANDER

The painter Otto Dix and his wife

AUGUST SANDER

The painter Otto Freundlich

AUGUST SANDER

The painter Heinrich Hoerle

https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/constituents/august-sander?all/all/all/all/0

War Photography

- **Crimean War** (1853-6)
  - Roger Fenton
- **American Civil War**
  - Mathew Brady, Alexander Gardner
  - Timothy O´Sullivan, George N. Barnard
    - Timothy O´Sullivan, *A Harvest of Death*, Gettysburg
    - http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/cwp/
- Shift from **heroic** to **factual** (anti-heroic) style/same battery of problems for historians

Negative by T. H. O'SULLIVAN.   Entered according to act of Congress, in the year 1865, by A. Gardner, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Columbia.   Positive by A. GARDNER, 511 7th St., Washington.

Heroic style of Military art

Diego de Velázquez, *The Surrender of Breda*, 1634-1635. oil on canvas
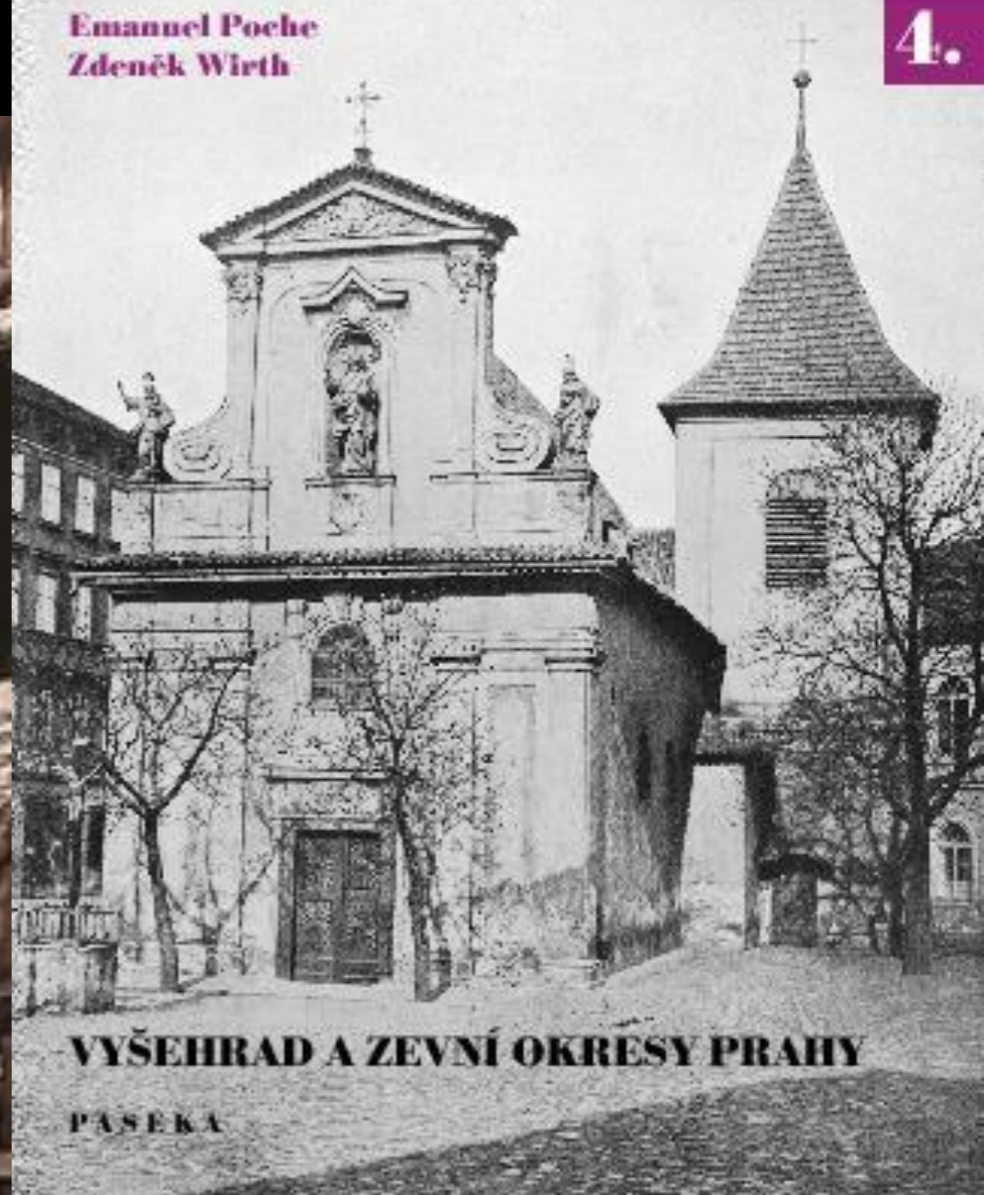
Nick Ut, *The Terror of War*, 1972

Urban Photography

ZMIZELÁ PRAHA

Emanuel Poche
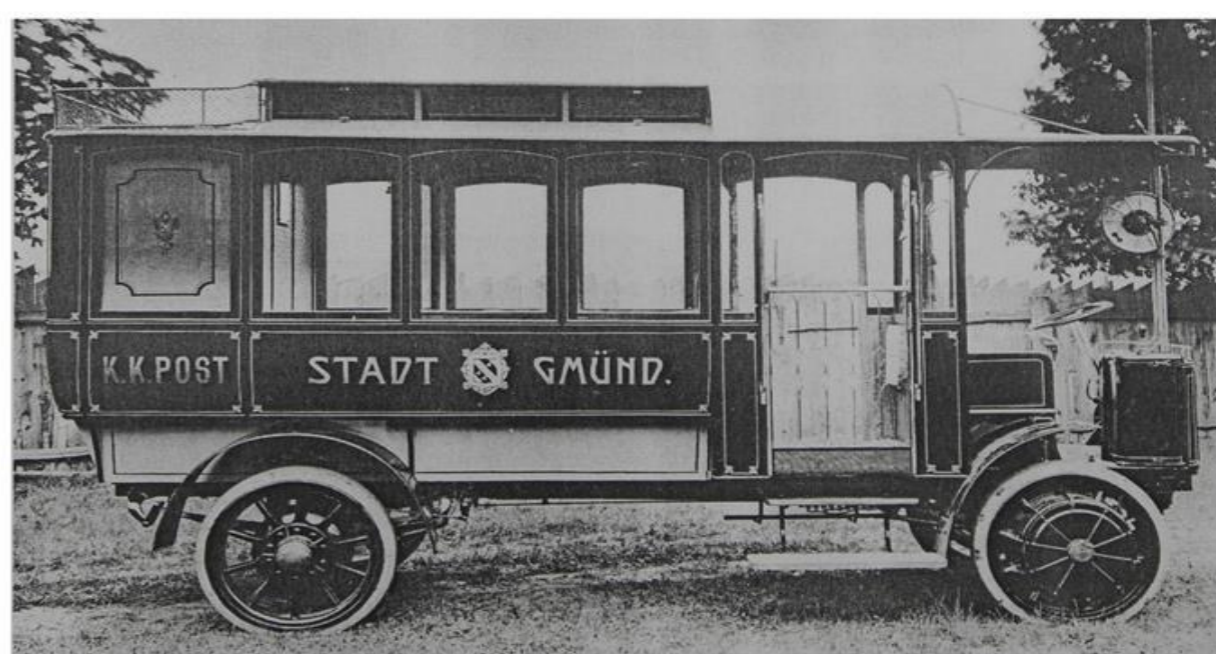Zdeněk Wirth

4.

VYŠEHRAD A ZEVNÍ OKRESY PRAHY

PASEKA

nadhledový pohled na budovu nádraží

historická podoba trolejbusu (O-bus)

pohled na alej 20. léta 20.století


pohled na alej 10. léta 20.století

pohled na alej 30.léta 20.století

pohled na alej 10. léta 40. léta 20.století

Aerial Photography

- Use of aerial photographs as a source of I
  - I that are not apparent from other sources (vegetation marks, soil marks, eartworks)
    - Wymondham Abbey, Nortfolk
    - West Dereham Abbey
  - Monastic economy (sites of granges/deficiency of documents)
   - Monknash Grange

MONASTIC SITES

FROM THE AIR

David Knowles &
J. K. St Joseph

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
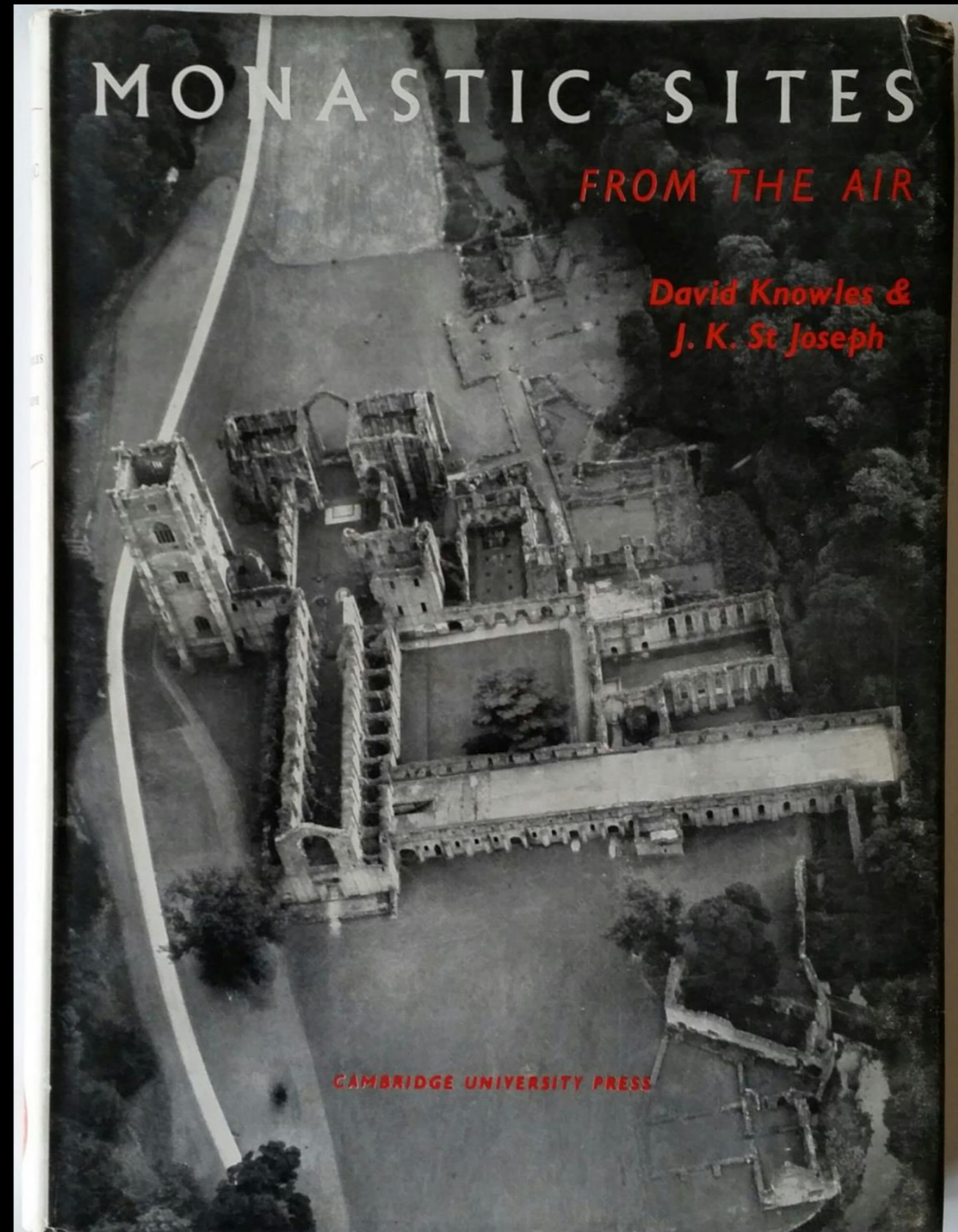
Photography of Rural Life

- Alan Trechtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, 1989

    - *„A photographer has no need to persuade a viewer to adopt his or her point of view, because the reader has no choice; in the picture we see the world from the angle of the camera's partial vision, from the position it had at the moment of the release of the shutter.“*

    - Photo - „view of society" (opinion)

    - E.g. Photographers of rural poor in the USA in the years of Depression
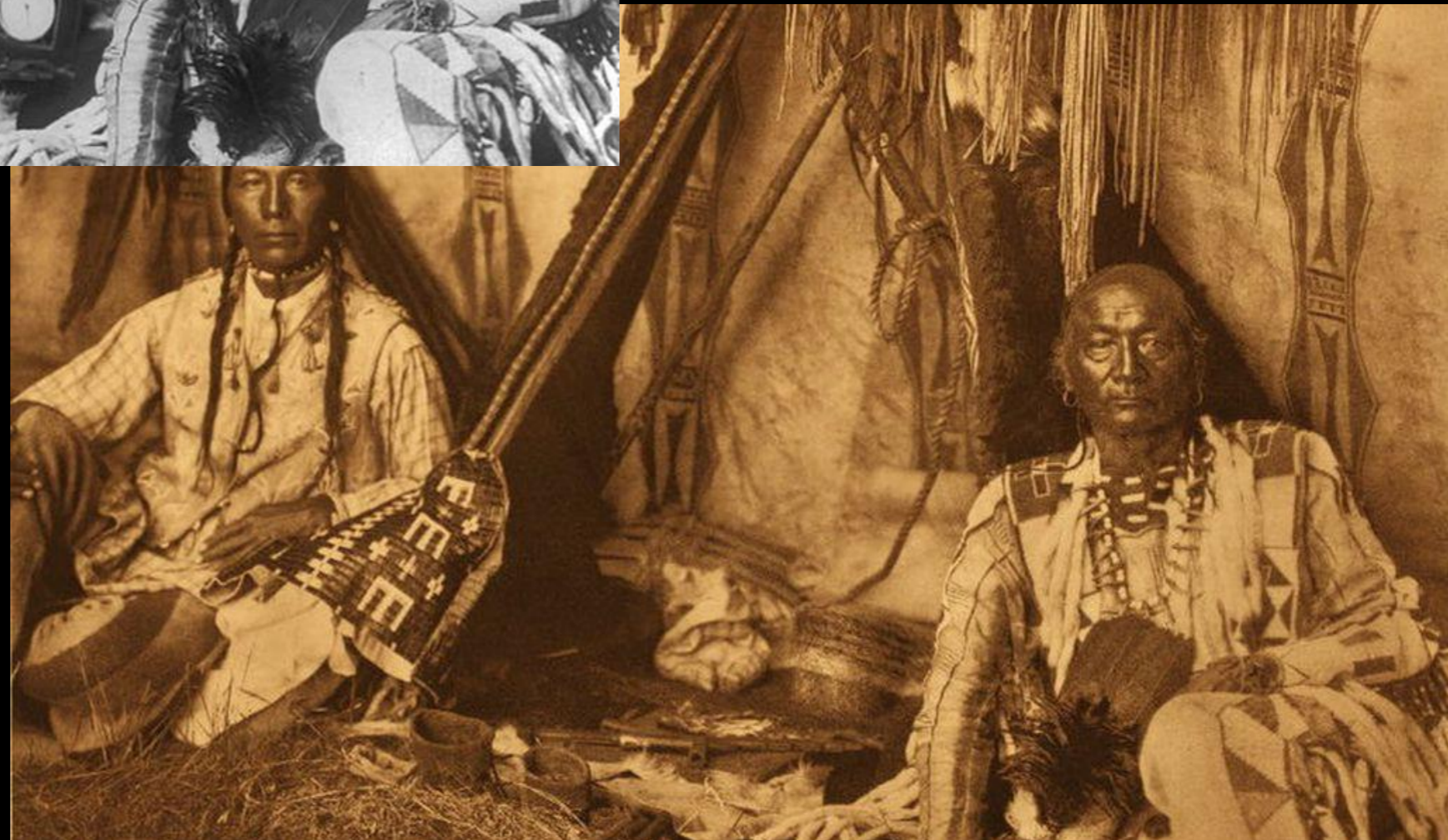

READING AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHS

Images as History
Mathew Brady to Walker Evans
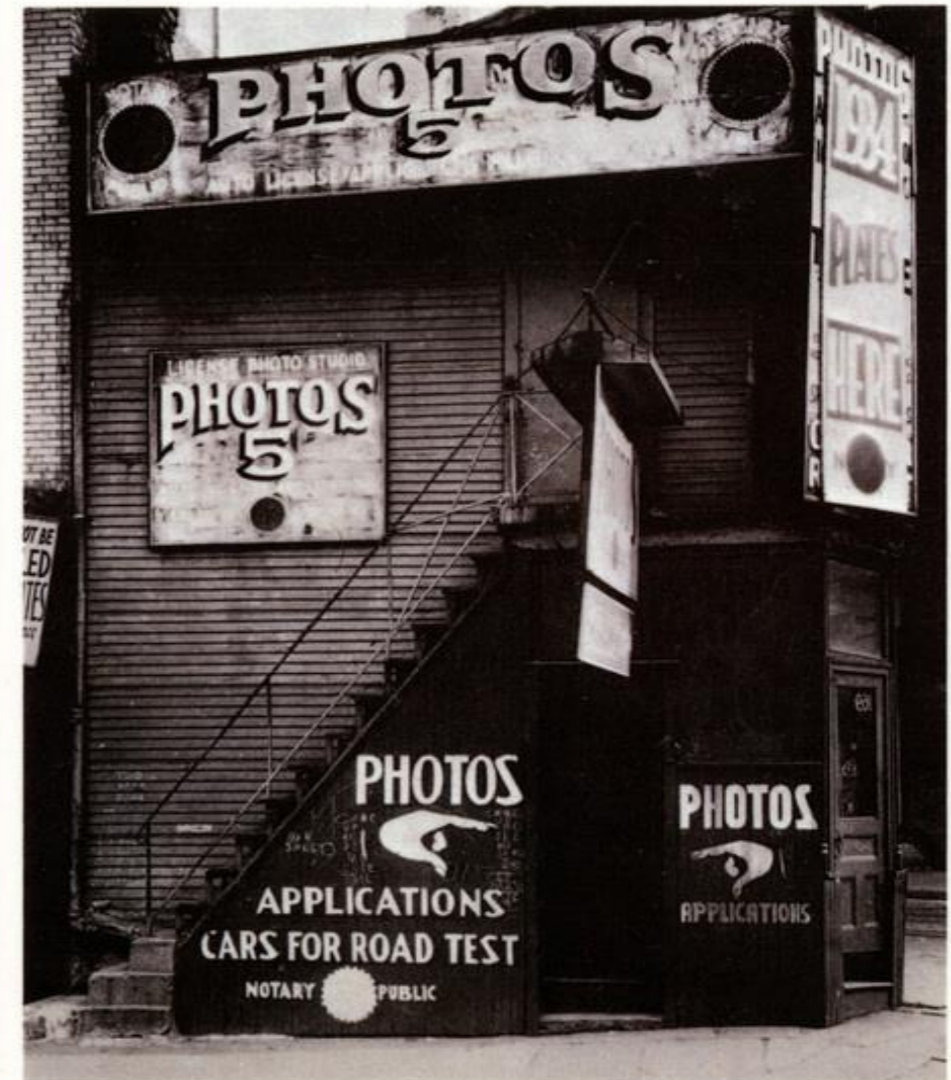
ALAN TRACHTENBERG

Stereotypes of Others

- Edward S. Curtis
- https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/pictures

- "*Here is depicted a group of Sioux warriors as they appeared in the days of intertribal warfare, carefully making their way down a hillside in the vicinity of the enemy's camp. Many hold in their hands, instead of weapons, mere sticks adorned with eagle-feathers or scalps—the so-called coup sticks—desiring to win honor by striking a harmless blow therewith as well as to inflict injury with arrow and bullet.*"

- Edward S. Curtis, *North American Indian*, 1907

Political Photography

- E.g. series of photos of USA presidential candidates

- „image management„

 - E.g. Leni Riefenstahl, *The Triumph of the Will*, 1935
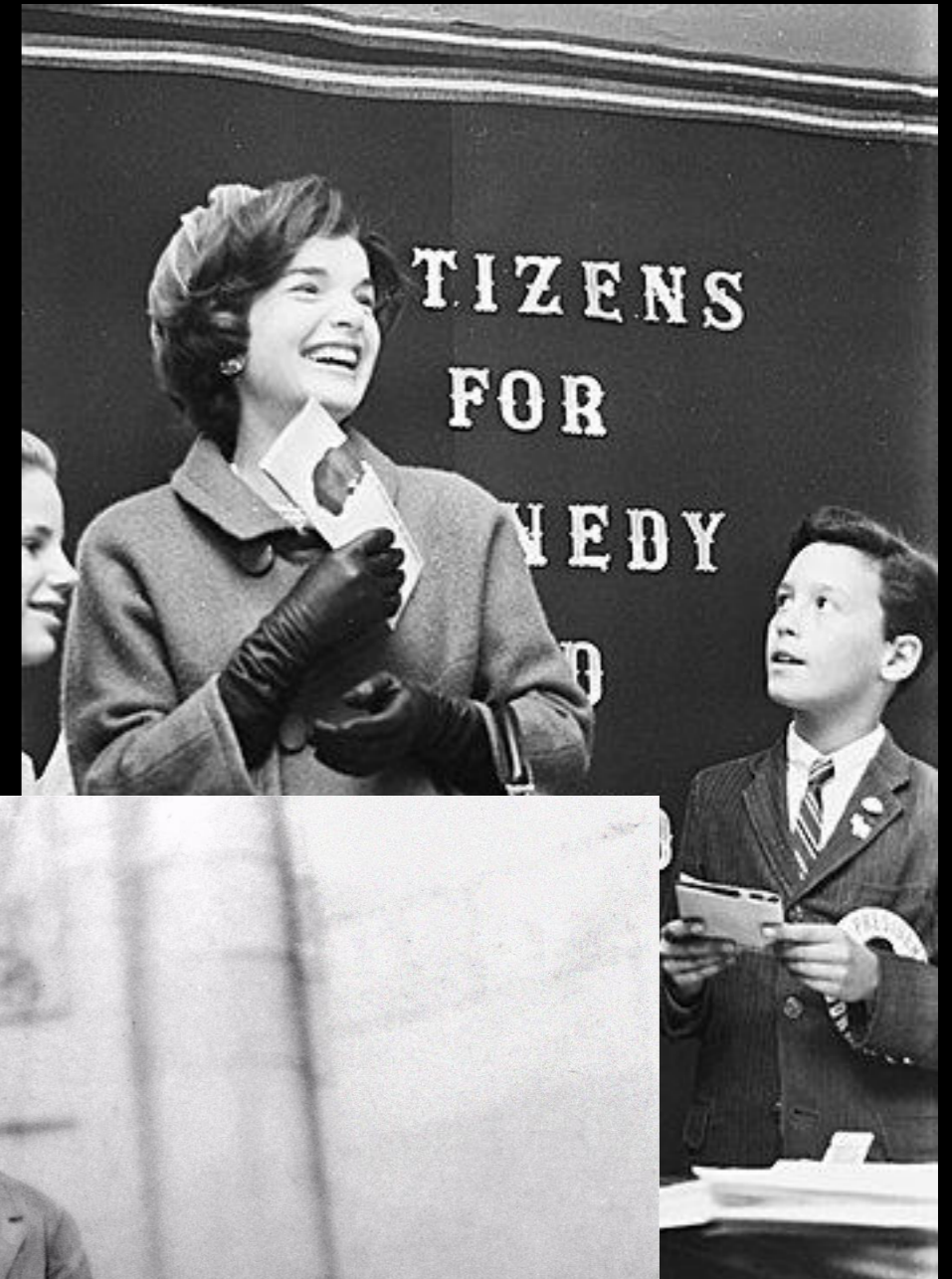
„self-censorship"

„walkabouts":
battle/campaign buses,
chartered aircraft, speeches
from soap boxes, tanks and
lorries, pressing the flesh and
kissing babies

Visual Narratives

- **Problem of reading** (VN):

  - dynamic movement, sequence/static scene

  - **Condensation/Reduction** (arrivals/departures, placing sth in/taking sth out)

  - narrative conventions or discourse (story told from left to right, stereotyped representations)

    - *Esisner´s contract with the reader,* in Will Esiner, Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative, 1996
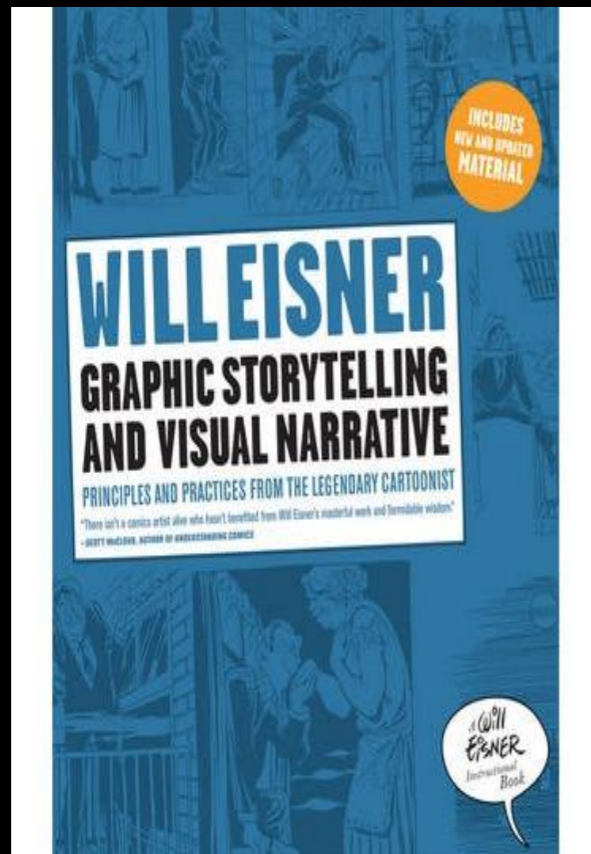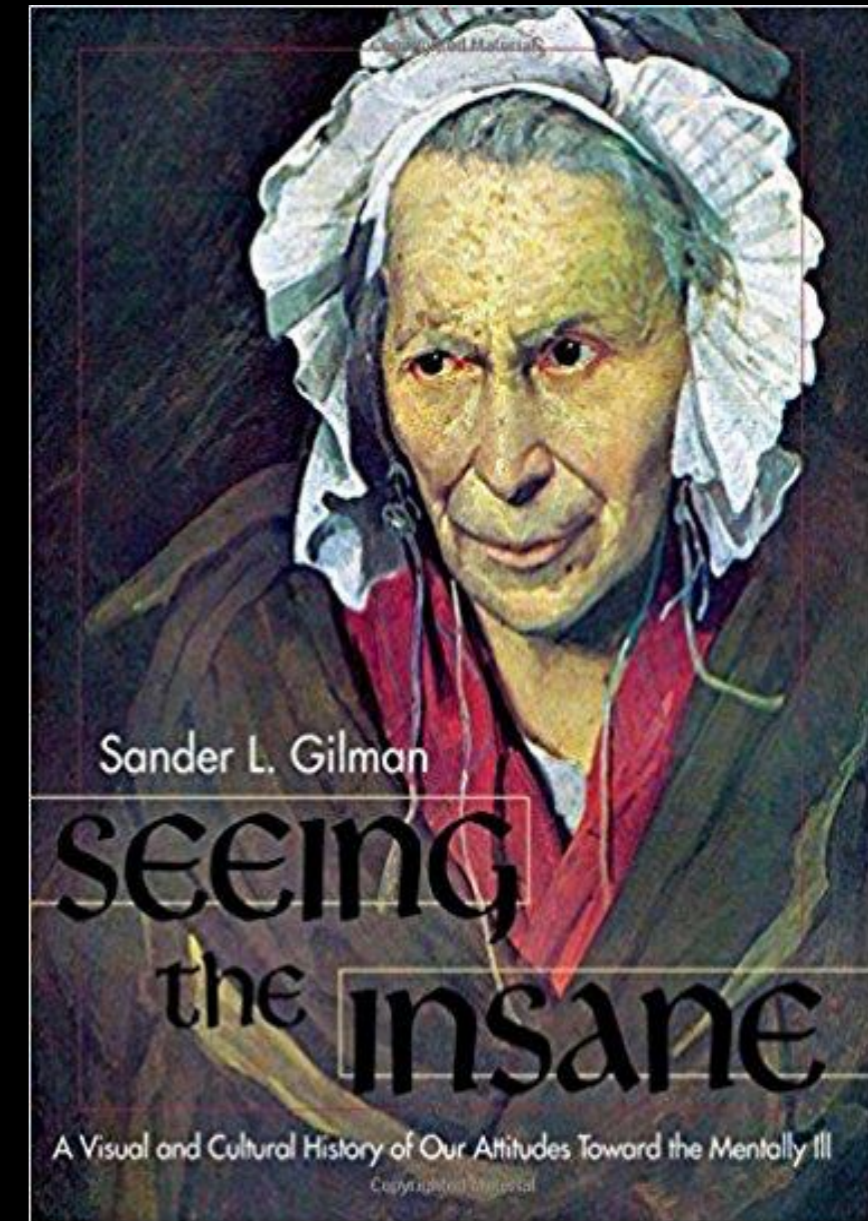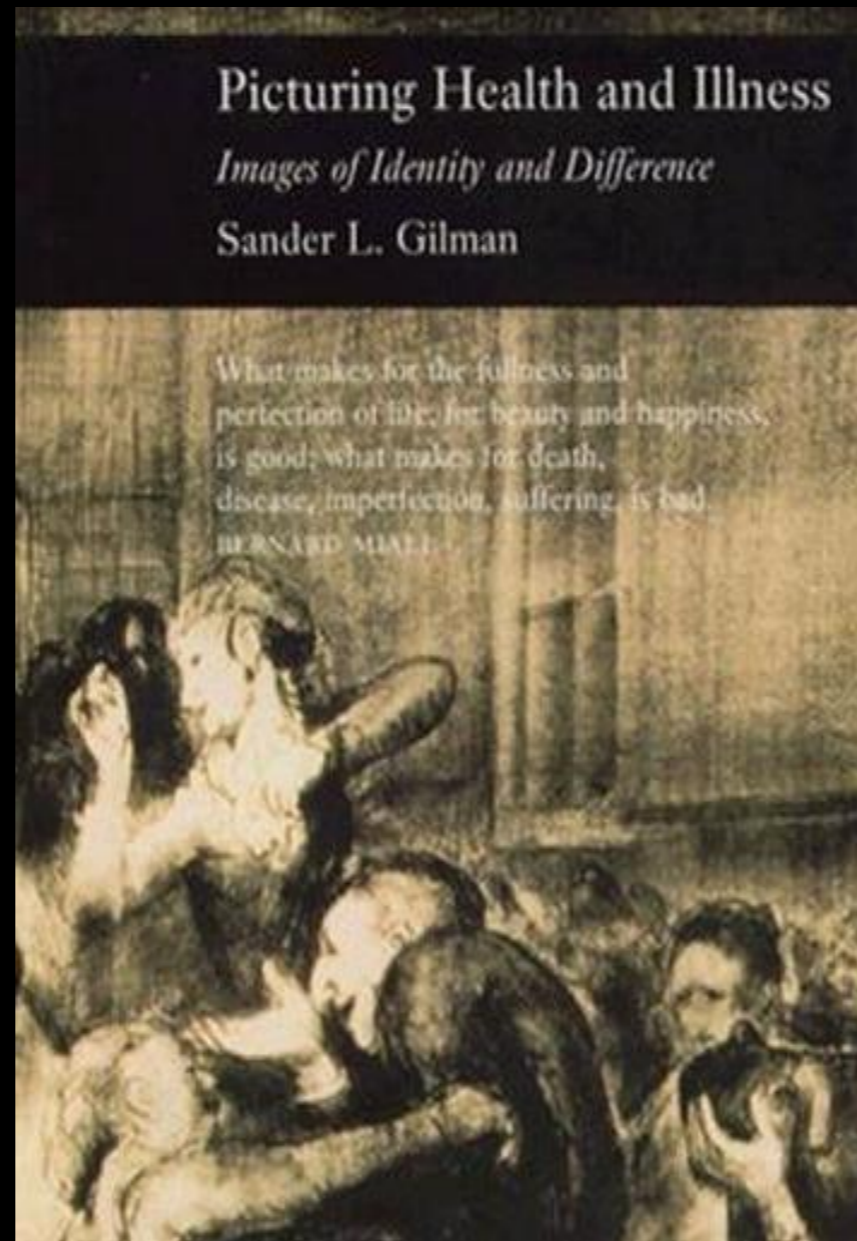
- Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales,* 1960

  - **formulae**: small-scale schemata, 'stock' figure

    - sleeping Mexican

  - **themes**: large-scale schemata, 'stock' scenes (battles, councils, meetings, departures, banquets, processions and dreams)

À MARAT.
DAVID.

Etnographic Gaze

- "**Images of difference**", Sander Gilman

- Scientific gaze

- Deshumanization (reduction of individual people to types)

Picturing Health and Illness
Images of Identity and Difference
Sander L. Gilman

What makes for the fullness and perfection of life, for beauty and happiness, is good; what makes for death, disease, imperfection, suffering, is bad.
BERNARD MIALL

Sander L. Gilman
SEEING the insane
A Visual and Cultural History of Our Attitudes Toward the Mentally Ill

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