

Exam

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Anthropology 135: Visual Anthropology: Documentary Photography

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Part 1: Definitions

Naked versus nude

Informally, the words nude and naked are colloquially synonymous, frequently interchanged throughout everyday speech; however, their artistic use perhaps highlights the academic distinction between the two best. John Berger's 1972 book, *The Ways of Seeing*, details two sets of definitions that work together to untangle the matter. Berger juxtaposes his definition of nudity and nakedness with that of the late British art historian and broadcaster Kenneth Clark. Perhaps simplistically, Clark defines nakedness as the state of being without clothes and nudity as transforming the naked body into art (Slyomovics 2023g). In explaining Clark's perspective, Berger writes, "according to him, a nude is not the starting point of a painting, but a way of seeing which the painting achieves" (Berger 1971).

While sympathetic to Clark's artistic definition of nudity, Berger aligns with the more modern tradition, which is fundamentally and inseparably associated with sexuality. Similarly to Clark, Berger defines nakedness as being without clothes; however, he defends this state as remaining, in essence, as oneself, homologous to being without a disguise (Slyomovics 2023g). Where Berger deviates from Clark is in the sense of being nude, writing:

To be nude is to be seen by others yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become nude (the sight of it as an object stimulates the use of it as an object). Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display. (Berger 1971)

A controversial example of the above academic discourse can be found in the photographic collections of Sally Mann. Recognized by *Time Magazine* as "America's Best Photographer" in 2001, Mann has published numerous award-winning collections (Mann 2020). While much of her later career has been filled with accolades, Mann rose to fame under a cloud

of controversy relating to the publication of her collection, *Immediate Family* (1992), first exhibited by Edwynn Houk Gallery in Chicago, which concentrated on the life and antics of her three young children and included a series of nudes (Mann 2020).

One of the 65 black and white pictures in the collection, titled “The Last Time Emmett Modeled Nude” (1987), is of her young son, who was seen wading into a lake in the nude. The picture presents a sense of uncomfortableness for the audience, as Emmett’s expression does not fit a willing participant’s. Mann seems to have taken the picture as her son was either reentering the lake or attempting to emerge back onto shore, identified by the movement of the water’s disturbance and Emmett’s physical posture (Mann 1987). While perhaps more palatable than the collection’s other nude inclusions, this picture still exemplifies the contending controversy and is founded on what the audience defines as nakedness and nudity.

The controversy surrounding Mann’s collection coincided with a politically charged climate, where the public outcry against child pornography was heightened (Slyomovics 2023g). Fundamental to this question is objectification, as aligned with Berger’s definition of nudity, as perceived by the audience. If present, the artistic value of the images comes into question. The academic debate of the naked versus the nude is rooted in a thousand years of artistic expression; however, the inclusion of children within this discourse distracts from the academic, personifies a sense of wickedness, and dilutes the underlying message.



Sally Mann / *The Last Time Emmett Modeled Nude* / 1987

Captions

Captions are texts that range from simple words to essays that accompany images, drawing the audience's attention to something that is not obvious, such as relevance, symbolism, or connotation, and as such, require effort, succinctness, and informativity in their creation (Slyomovics 2023d). Captions work to legitimize, interacting with the visual to provide authority, ultimately working to direct perception.

John Berger details textual authority in his 1972 book, *Ways of Seeing*, describing how each visual medium works alongside text to legitimize artistic justification. Through time

discrimination, Berger outlines the distinct methods of implementing contextual authority upon canvas or film. Whereas a film allows for the careful control of image sequencing, supported indirectly through the reproduced image's authority, paintings provide their elements simultaneously, placing the responsibility of contextual interpretation upon the audience, thus maintaining its own authority (Berger 1971). Berger connects the underlying authority inherent within visual media with their accompanying text, with reverence to the difficulty in defining exactly how they work to change an image's context. Berger writes, "the meaning of an image is changed according to what one sees immediately beside it or what comes immediately after it. Such authority as it retains is distributed over the whole context in which it appears" (Berger 1971).

Susan Sontag continues the conversation of captioning in her 1972 book, *On Photography*, furthering the discussion of how captions represent an image's missing voice. Sontag comments on an audience's expectations and details the anticipated reality that captions authoritatively bestow upon their images. While supporting that words do "speak louder than pictures," she outlines their ubiquity as well, writing, "captions do tend to override the evidence of our eyes, but no caption can permanently restrict or secure a picture's meaning" (Sontag 1973).

Support for the dichotomy of captions can be found in consideration of Steve McCurry's 1985 *National Geographic* photograph, "Afghan Girl." Captioned initially, "Haunted eyes tell of an Afghan refugee's fears," the captivating portrait of an 8-year-old Sharbat Gula popularly exemplifies manipulative captioning, as detailed in a 2019 article by *The Wire*. While many in the West find McCurry's picture heartbreakingly mesmerizing, the circumstances behind the photo represent a vastly different scenario. In subsequent interviews, Gula was described as an

orphan whose parents were killed in Afghanistan during a bombing, a false narrative, as her father was alive in Pakistan, where Gula lived when the picture and subsequent interview were taken (Karnad and Karnad 2019). When asked about her feelings regarding the *National Geographic* picture, Gula admitted to being angry, alluding that any fear felt when the picture was taken had more to do with McCurry's presence than her status as a refugee. *The Wire* writes, "it said her eyes were 'reflecting the fear of war.' This is false [...]. The fear in her eyes is that of a student interrupted at school by a male stranger invading her space, her personal boundaries, her culture, and leaving without even having learned her name" (Karnad and Karnad 2019).

The descriptive narrative surrounding Gula's picture represents the power of captioning and how its deceptively simple presence works to underscore the situational meaning associated with any artistic visual production.



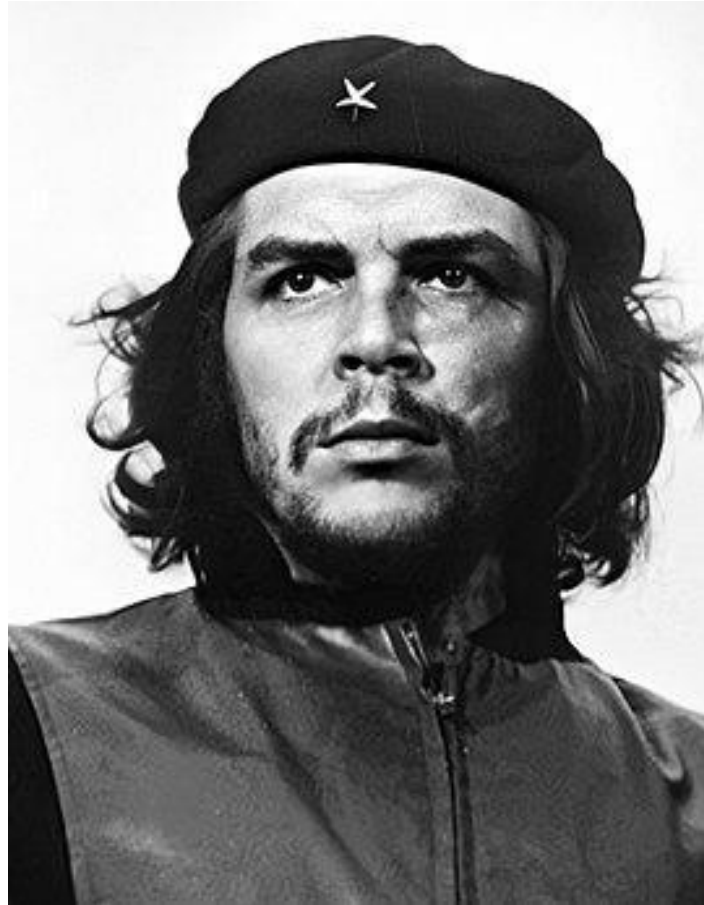
Steve McCurry / *Afghan Girl* / 1984

Icon

According to C. S. Peirce, an icon is representational of “its object by virtue of a character which it would equally possess did the object and the interpreting mind not exist,” alluding to an object’s symbolic representation insofar as its resemblance (i.e., a sign that resembles what it stands for) (dictionary.com 2020 & Slyomovics 2023a). From a religious perspective, iconography cannot be reproduced, is traditionally unique and holy, and represents the divine (Slyomovics 2023a). Habitually representing both a philosophic and religious identity, iconic photography holds true to certain characteristics, including being recognizable to a broad audience, representing a significant event, eliciting a strong emotional resonance, and being regularly reproduced across a wide range of media formats (Hariman and Lucaites 2007).

Characteristic of traditional iconic photography is Che Guevara’s famous 1960 portrait “Guerrillero Heroico” by Alberto Korda (Slyomovics 2023b). The black-and-white close-up image of Che beautifully frames the fierceness of his expression in perpetuity, allowing the image to transcend far beyond its original context. The infamous photograph was taken during the memorial for the hundreds of dock workers and responders killed on the transport *La Coubre*, who, on March 4, 1960, violently exploded in Havana Harbor while offloading its store of munitions bought by the Cuban government (Luis Pardo Lazo 2016). Dubbing the image “Guerrillero Heroico,” Korda describes Che as “a human being who was ‘*encabronado y doliente*’ (pissed off and mourning), with ‘impressive force in his expression, given the anger concentrated in his gaze after so many deaths’” (Luis Pardo Lazo 2016). While perhaps seen today as a symbol of generic counterculture, it is unquestionable that Che’s image represents a personified divinity classically linked with photographic iconography and representational of social activism on a global scale. Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo details the iconographic status

forever fused within Che's eyes, writing, "From Bolivia to the Congo, from Vietnam to South Africa, from the USSR to the USA, Korda's Che became the apostle of anticapitalism and the ultimate *icon* for peaceful social activist everywhere..." (Luis Pardo Lazo 2016).



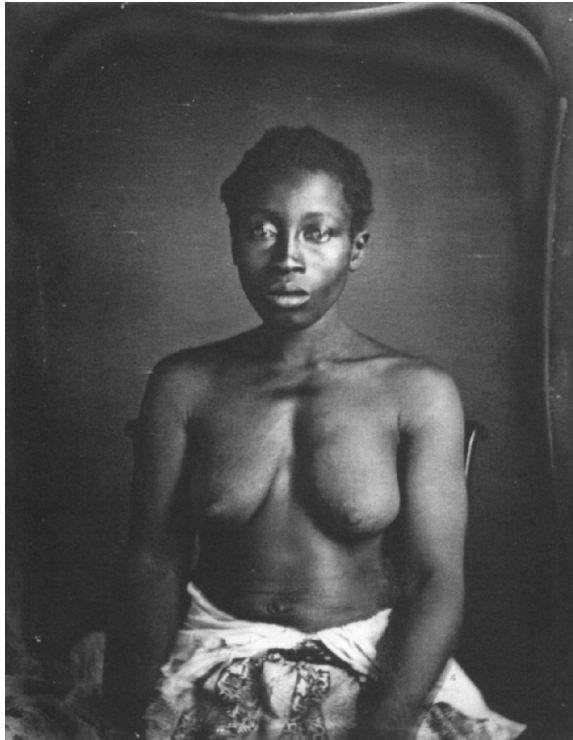
Alberto Korda / *Guerrillero Heroico* / March 5, 1960

Daguerreotype

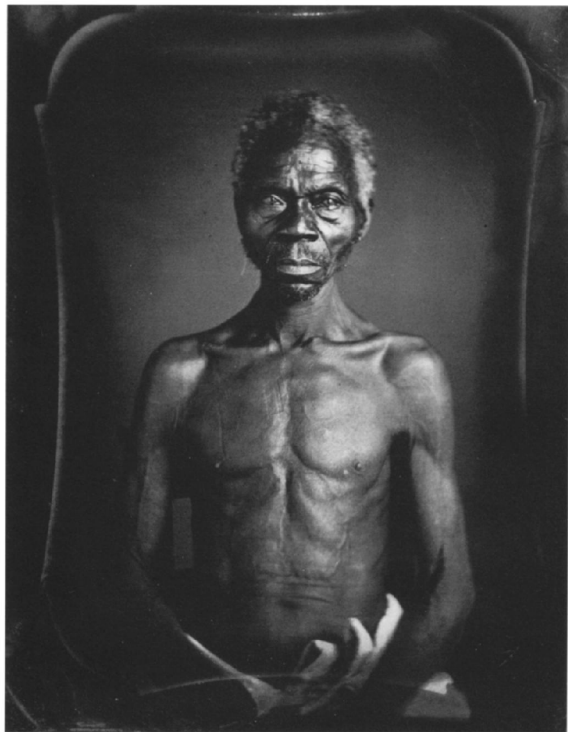
Invented by Louis Daguerre (1787-1851) in 1839, the Daguerreotype was considered one of the first commercially successful photographic methods available, despite its expensive price tag and dangerous production process (Slyomovics 2023c). Popular throughout the 1840s until the late 1850s, it was finally superseded by less expensive and hazardous photographic techniques, such as the calotype (Slyomovics 2023c; Enger 2022). Daguerreotypes consisted of silver-plated copper plates polished to a mirror finish and fumed to deposit a thin light-sensitive

coat, readying them for exposure (Slyomovics 2023c). The exposed plates would then be further processed and developed using mercury vapor, producing a unique image that could be viewed positively and negatively, depending on the angle. The process was slow, requiring extended exposure times, which significantly limited the subject matter commonly found in surviving daguerreotypes today, with older examples primarily focusing on architecture and outdoor spaces and then evolving into portraiture (Slyomovics 2023c).

An example of a surviving daguerreotype is Joseph T. Zealy's (1812-1893) 1850 photographs, "Renty and Delia Taylor" (Slyomovics 2023e). Part of a series of daguerreotype images commissioned by Louis Agassiz (1870-1873), a creationist Harvard professor who practiced scientific racism, or polygenism, described as the promotion of a hierarchical ordering of human races based on the belief that non-whites belong to a separate and inferior race (Merriam-Webster 2023d; Slyomovics 2023e). The images today are at the center of a highly publicized litigation between the descendant family and Harvard University regarding the continued commercial exploitation of victims of slavery (Slyomovics 2023e). This classic example of a daguerreotype, as represented by the image's specific viewing angle and its silver-hued coloration, depicts Renty Taylor and his daughter, Delia, as part of their enslavement to Benjamin Franklin Taylor, a wealthy southern plantation owner, who agreed to participate in Agassiz's investigation (Enger 2022; Garrison 2019; Slyomovics 2023e). These images support an anthropometric standard—designed for scientific measuring and feature portraits of Renty and Delia in vulnerable and exposed states (Slyomovics 2023e).



Joseph T. Zealy / *Delia Taylor* / c. 1850



Joseph T. Zealy / *Renty Taylor* / c. 1850

Part II: Sontag

Question 2

The essence of participation is rooted in active engagement, an interesting consideration given the technological transformation of the past few decades. Before the advent of commercialized photography, an experience could only be documented within the participants' minds. While it is undoubtedly so that memory is a mistrustful companion at the best of times, one's lived experience, earned through the implementation of active engagement, becomes forever woven within an individual's history. An experience becomes embalmed with the essence of deeply personalized, emotional, physical, and psychological empowerment unique to their understanding.

A highly dynamic experience is significantly impacted by the space, time, and circumstances surrounding our participation in a particular situation. The fundamental value of lived experience is at the heart of Susan Sontag's position regarding the impact technology (specifically photography) has on our experiences. In her 1973 book, *On Photography*, Sontag describes the influence of photography in a broader experience, writing that its "main effect is to convert the world into a department store or museum-without-walls in which every subject is depreciated into an article of consumption, promoted into an item for aesthetic appreciation" (Sontag 1973). The dissection of experience into photographable moments is at the core of Sontag's discussion. Her commentary on photography is rooted in the experiences of the 1970s; however, her arguments are even more profound today.

As discussed in her book, Sontag outlines the psychological implications of photography, underscoring how it works to fill in the voids in our mental representations of both the past and present (Sontag 1973). Taking a photo of a moment in our lives is often related to its preservation for posterity; however, keeping one's attention for the perfect moment to snap not only distracts

from the now but also works to dissect one's environment into minute momentary fractions, which can either be captured or discarded as unworthy. Sontag writes, "needing to have reality confirmed and experience enhanced by photographs is an aesthetic consumerism to which everyone is now addicted" (1973). Unbeknownst to Sontag, the advent of social media, such as Instagram and Snap Chat, would transform this cautionary tale into the descriptive pinnacle of an entire generation.

Sontag writes, "having an experience becomes identical to taking a photograph of it" (1973). The unquestionable truth of this statement lives within the generations of today's youth. Common phrases, such as "do it for the gram," are popular colloquial references to the cultural and psychological conditions described by Sontag. Consider a contemporary scenario: a person is attending a Beyoncé concert at Madison Square Garden in December 2023. They have front-row balcony seats to the right of the main stage, providing an unobstructed view of the stage (be it from the side) and the hordes of people willing to spend a couple of months' rent to sit front row and center. Just before intermission, Beyoncé surprises the crowd by dramatically introducing Kelly Rowland and Michelle Williams on stage, officially reuniting Destiny's Child for the first time since the 2013 Super Bowl halftime show. What happens next? The crowd unsurprisingly goes wild! A deafening roar erupts from the audience. Every eye in the building is firmly fixed on the stage, with tears streaming down every cheek. Voices are gone from everyone screaming "Survivor" (2001) at the top of their lungs. In essence, the crowd is absorbing every second of this almost once-in-a-lifetime experience. Correct? The reality of this example is that if someone were to look over the balcony, they would see a sea of phones pointed toward the stage. As is the ideology of the present generation, "were you really there if you didn't check in

on Facebook, tag all your friends, take a minimum of 300 photos and 124 blurry videos, post 16 Instagram stories, and share the perfect afterparty cut with your Snap Chat followers”?

Sontag brilliantly underscores the contemporary manifestation of this decades-old issue when she asserts, “cameras miniaturize experience, transforming history into spectacle” (1973). Continuing, Sontag writes, “[...] participating in a public event comes more and more to be equivalent to looking at it in photographed form,” which is, at its core, the fundamental issue associated with the rise of technology—particularly photography (1973). However, despite the pollution of photography and the overall dilution of photographic resonance, Sontag underscores the power of properly considered and constrained photography, especially in documenting the unmanipulated world. Sontag writes, “there is a peculiar heroism abroad in the world since the invention of cameras: the heroism of vision. Photography opened up a new model of freelance activity—allowing each person to display a certain unique, avid sensibility” (1973).

A classic representation of this is Alfred Stieglitz’s 1893 photograph, “Winter, Fifth Avenue,” who waited hours to capture what he described as the “proper moment.” Sontag describes Stieglitz’s moment as when one can see things, especially those commonly seen, in a fresh way (1973). In connection with Sontag’s photographic heroism, Stieglitz’s photo brilliantly captures the freedom of experience, a concept embodied within every pixel of the image. What is a straightforward image of a horse-drawn carriage traveling down the road in Blizzard-like conditions represents freedom for those unable to experience the beauty of its reference (Stieglitz 1894).

Sontag’s heroism also extends to the unabashedly raw realities made possible by the camera’s introduction, as the resonance made possible through the capture of a harrowing experience becomes an unquestionable part of the equation. Sontag references what is today the

most famous picture to survive the 1942 Warsaw Ghetto uprising. The picture, known as “Warsaw Ghetto boy,” was taken sometime during the evacuation of the Warsaw Ghetto between April and May of 1943 and depicted the forced removal of a group of Jews found hidden in a bunker. Most prominent in the photo is a young boy with his arms raised in surrender as a Nazi soldier aims a submachine gun in his general direction (*Warsaw Ghetto Boy* 1943). The picture was found in the effects of SS Major General Juergen Stroop, the commander of German forces that suppressed the uprising. After its discovery, the picture was presented to the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg as evidence, as it can be confirmed that those pictured were later evacuated to Majdanek and Treblinka extermination camps (*Warsaw Ghetto Boy* 1943).

Considering the examples above, Sontag discussed the purpose of photographic resonance, writing, “protected middle-class inhabitants of the more affluent corners of the world—those regions where most photographs are taken and consumed—learn about the world’s horrors mainly through the camera: photographs can and do distress” (1973). Unfortunately, photographs also desensitize the realities of humanity’s darkest possibilities; as Sontag asserts, “[...] the aestheticizing tendency of photography is such that the medium which conveys distress ends by neutralizing it” (1973). The camera captures yet minimizes the essence of lived experience, and when descriptively utilized, it manipulates the darkest realities of the human condition into a palatable modality for widespread consumer consumption.



Alfred Stieglitz / *Winter, Fifth Avenue* / 1894



Unknown / *Warsaw Ghetto boy* / 1943

Part III: Essays

Question 6

Anthropometry is variably defined depending on the source and circumstances of its connotation. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines anthropometry as “the systematic collection and correlation of measurements of the human body” (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019). In a different consideration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define anthropometry as “the science that defines physical measures of a person’s size, form, and functional capacities” (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health 2022). Both these descriptions consider a modern perspective considering anthropometric data, painting a benign picture of a concept that hides a sinister past. It is impossible to consider anthropometric data without reflecting on its racist and ethnocentric roots, ideologies that evolved from an ancient

practice into a tool of oppression and segregation during Europe's nineteenth-century colonial aspirations.

The origins of anthropometry are rooted in the ancient world. With a passion for symmetry, the ancient Romans, Greeks, and Egyptians collected anthropometric measurements for cultural purposes, incorporating their findings within their artistic renderings to display the human form's beauty and power (Editors 2017). During the Renaissance, artists refined the practice by applying anthropometric measurements to artistic works displaying the human body (Editors 2017). Perhaps the most famous example of historical anthropometry is Leonardo da Vinci's infamous sketch, "The Vitruvian Man," best described by Kenneth D. Keele in his 1983 book, *Leonardo da Vinci's Elements of the Science of Man*, who wrote:

Leonardo's famous drawings of the Vitruvian proportions of a man's body first standing inscribed in a square and then with feet and arms outspread inscribed in a circle provides an excellent early example of the way in which his studies of proportion fuse artistic and scientific objectives. (Keele 1983)

Stanford University also describes da Vinci's famous drawing as the perfect example of his keen interest in proportions, presenting it as the cornerstone of his attempts to connect man with nature (Stanford University n.d.).

The weaponization of anthropometry can be traced to Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914), credited as the father of anthropometric-based classification (Editors 2017). As the son of a physician, Bertillon started his career in the Paris police criminal records department, where he introduced a new classification system based on the body measurements of incoming criminals, recognizing that the existing system frequently failed to connect the aliases of criminals with their records, allowing them to avoid deportation or harsher sentences for repeat crimes (Editors

2017). Bertillon obtained the measurements of the criminal's height, breadth, foot size, length and width of the head, length of the middle finger, and length of the left forearm, in addition to other morphological and distinguishing characteristics (Editors 2017). Bertillon's anthropometric-based system would become popular among many police departments, with the system, now dubbed "Bertillonage," spreading rapidly throughout the world (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019).

Simultaneously to Bertillon, Louis Agassiz (1807-1873), a Harvard professor and an avid creationist who believed that the world was fixed precisely as God had intended, implemented anthropometric standards into his research on racial differences (Slyomovics 2023e). The University of California, Berkeley described the considerable scientific debate surrounding the origins of humans and human races and comments on Agassiz's place in the broader discussion, writing:

Unlike Darwin and others, who thought that humans all belonged to one species and that their populations had differentiated through time as they spread geographically and adapted to new environments, Agassiz could not accept that all groups of humans belonged to the same species, and he argued vehemently for the inferiority of non-white human groups. (Stanford University n.d.)

Described as being physically revulsed by human equality, Agassiz commissioned a photographic study of enslaved people in 1850, documenting the morphological and distinguishing characteristics in support of his theories (Slyomovics 2023e).

Anthropometry was promoted as a scientific method with protocols that each study was mandated to implement. The subjects were photographed naked from the front and in profile, with women being required to place their arms so as not to interfere with the contours of the

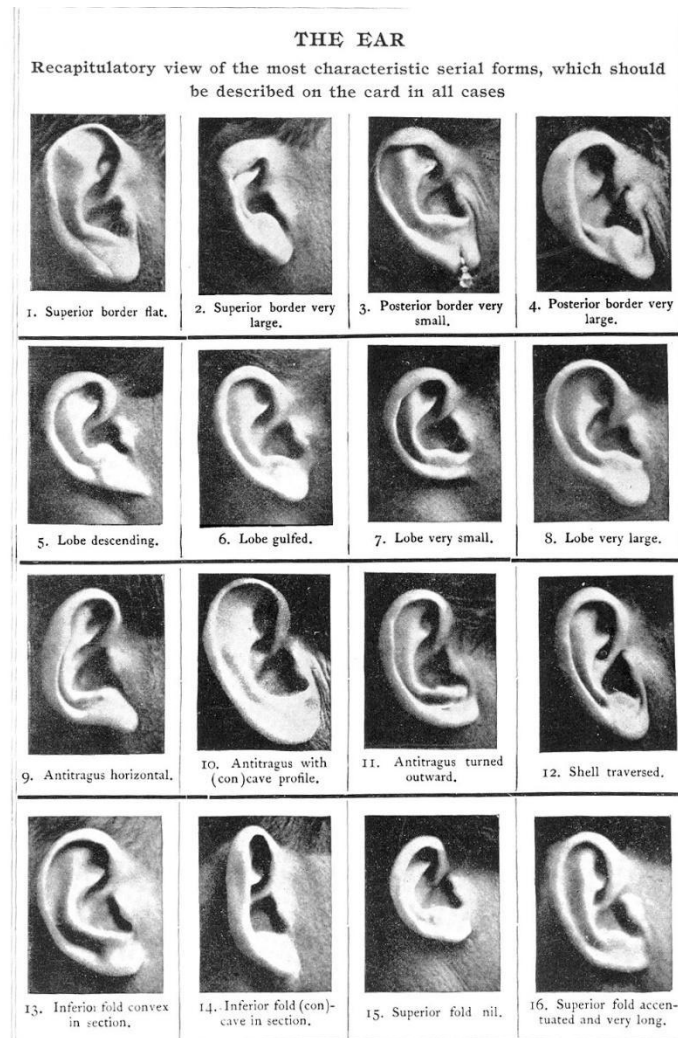
breasts. The background would include visible markers, used as a measuring guide, establishing a pose that would quickly become the hallmark of anthropometric photography (Slyomovics 2023e).

In 1885, Bertillon published his anthropometric classification guide in his book, *“Identification Anthropometrique: Instructions Signaletiques,”* which translates to Anthropometric Identification: Signage Instructions. In the book, Bertillon publishes various charts describing potential criminals’ physical characteristics, including “The Ear,” which serves as a classic example of anthropometric photography (Bertillon 1885). The chart contains a series of black and white photographs of variously shaped ears, including brief physical descriptions under each displayed example (Slyomovics 2023h). In addition to descriptions such as “superior border flat” and “lobe very small,” Bertillon included directions that instructed arresting officers to document the perceived differences in ear shape in each criminal’s file, writing, “recapitulatory view of the most characteristic serial forms, which should be described on the card in all cases” (Bertillon 1885; Slyomovics 2023h).

The work of Alphonso Bertillon and Louis Agassiz launched a scientific process that infected the anthropological field for over a century, eventually being utilized as a tool of oppression for the colonial powers. While seemingly based on insubstantial science, anthropometric standards continue to be used in various fields today, including in anthropology, where paleoanthropologists work to uncover the secrets of human origins and evolution through the study of fossilized human remains (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019).

Anthropometry is also used in the prevention of occupational injury, where “anthropometric measurements are used to study the interaction of workers with tasks, tools, machines, vehicles, and personal protective equipment—especially to determine the degree of protection against

dangerous exposures, whether chronic or acute” (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health 2022). However shaky its history, anthropometry is now well fixed within the anthropological tool kit, a scientific process that continues to evolve with modern times.



Alphonse Bertillon / *The Ear* / c. 1885

Question 9

Prior to the invention of photography, a painted, sculpted, or drawn portrait was the only form of artistic representation capable of recording the appearance of another person. Portraiture as an artistic modality can be traced back some 5,000 years to ancient Egypt, where iconography and portraiture intermixed in an artistic style that lasted centuries. Centuries later, with the fall of

the Ptolemaic Kingdom following Octavian's (later known as the Roman Emperor Augustus) decisive victory over the combined fleets of Mark Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, Egypt officially became part of the Roman Empire. The end of the Hellenistic period and the rise of Roman Egypt called for an artistic revolution that slowly merged the two ancient styles into a unique period lasting throughout the first to third centuries AD. During this period, mummy portraits—the first proper examples of ancient painted portraiture—were incorporated into the Roman Egyptian burial custom (Cartwright 2020). These paintings consisted of wooden panels with a lifelike representation of the dead painted in portrait style that was then secured in either linen wrappings or cartonnage (thin layers of linen mixed with plaster) and placed over the face of the underlying mummy (Cartwright 2020).

The continuation of European history saw the decline in portrait-style art, finally seeing a reemergence during the late-Middle Ages. As a feature in medieval Christian art, wealthy donors were frequently artistically portrayed within the altarpieces or wall paintings they commissioned (Sorabella 2007). However, the rise of portraiture in the western tradition can be traced from the fifteenth century onward, a period dominated by the Renaissance masters who developed the modern aesthetic commonly associated with the style today ("Portrait" 2023; Sorabella 2007). Today, portraits are defined as either "a painting, drawing, or photograph of a person that usually only includes the person's head and shoulders" (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019). However, the style is more than just a simple visual representation of an individual; it has historically been used to highlight the power, importance, virtue, beauty, wealth, taste, intellectualism, and other qualities associated with the sitter ("Portrait" 2023). As is the case with portraiture's historical evolution, contemporary portraiture represents far more than a visual representation of an individual, as can be seen among its many modern iterations.

The advent of photography quickly allowed for the evolution of portrait photography into the contemporary analog to the great Renaissance masterpieces. The modern tradition far outpaces the physical; instead, it has successfully transformed the medium into a practice that captures both the physical and metaphysical characteristics of an individual through the effective manipulation of lighting, backdrops, and poses, ultimately creating a product that can be artistic, clinical, or even scientific (“What Is Portrait Photography?” 2023). According to the Museum of Modern Art, the primary characteristics of a portrait in the western tradition include considerations of costume, gesture, expression, pose, and background (Museum of Modern Art n.d.). Conventionally, the physical elements mandated by portraiture include considerations of perspective, including a three-quarter profile with a straightforward gaze, no smiling, and a date where possible (Slyomovics 2023i).

The modern portrait photograph is an established staple today, a practice commonly implemented across many institutions, including in schools, places of employment, governments, universities, and more. The contemporary usage of portrait photography serves as a means of state control through identification cards (“The History of Passport Photography” 2023; Slyomovics 2023i). The first issuance of a photographic identification card was during the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, where professional photographer William Notman introduced an identification system for the event that required visitors and employees to obtain a so-called “photographic ticket” (“The History of Passport Photography” 2023). However, the concept of photo identification would not become popular until approximately 35 years later, when in 1915, the first passports that included photographs were introduced. During the height of the First World War, the United States Secretary of State ordered the introduction of passport

photos after a German spy, Carl Lody, successfully obtained a US passport under an assumed alias (“The History of Passport Photography” 2023).

The chaos that plagued Europe following the conclusion of World War I forced the standardization of these government-mandated pictures, which slowly became more and more regulated throughout the 1920s, culminating in a published standardization guide by the League of Nations in 1926 (“The History of Passport Photography” 2023). During this time, many of the traditional characteristics common throughout the Renaissance would become incorporated into contemporary identification photos. This process evolved into many of the rules in place today, such as no hats, glasses, or distracting articles of clothing or accessories, a neutral facial expression (no smiling or frowning), bright, plain backgrounds, a straight posture with no glares or shadows visible within the picture (U.S. Department of State n.d.; Slyomovics 2023i).

A classic visual example of the required standards of a passport photo can be found online, with many being presented in chart form, displaying both versions of pictures that would and would not be approved by the issuing authority. One example includes a 12-photo series that includes three photos each of four individuals, each presenting one example of an approved photograph and two that highlight many common mistakes that frequently result in rejected applications (Foto Centre Plus, n.d.; Slyomovics 2023i). While the state-mandated passport photograph is undoubtedly one prominent example of contemporary portrait usage, it is not the only example available.

Following the theme of state-mandated portrait photography are the mug shots. Police departments in the United States began taking pictures of the people they arrested in the 1850s (Gershon 2021). These black and white prints were “hung [...] in rogues’ galleries to entertain the public and instruct people on watching out for shady characters” (Gershon 2021). Sometimes

these photographs were included in criminological books; for example, the 1886 volume of *Professional Criminals of America*, published by Thomas Byrnes, the Chief detective of the New York Police Department, included 204 photographs of “rogues,” mainly consisting of shoplifters and pickpockets ((Gershon 2021). However, it was Alphonse Bertillon who developed the standardized mug shot commonly utilized by police departments across the globe (Bertillon 1885). Bertillon mandated a standardized protocol of two tight shots of a subject’s head and upper body, one picture in profile and the other straight-on (Bertillon 1885; Gershon 2021).

A classic example of a famous mug shot representing the traditional conventions of portraiture and the established methods set forth by Bertillon is that of former New York City Police Officer Justin Volpe, who was sentenced to 30 years in federal prison after pleading guilty in what is today remembered as one of the most shocking cases of police brutality and torture (ACLU 1999; Cooper 1997). The then 25-year-old officer ultimately admitted to beating and sodomizing Haitian immigrant Abner Louima in a Brooklyn station bathroom (ACLU 1999). The highly recognizable picture (commonly displayed in both black and white and in color) presents Volpe in a close-up face forward pose; he is unsmiling, looking towards the camera, and depicted from the shoulder up without any distracting features on or around him (*Justin Volpe* 1999; Slyomovics 2023i).

Another frequently utilized method of including portraiture within the state structure is to transform them into tools of politicization. The portrait of government officials has become an everyday staple across all levels of government involvement, a practice that dates back to before the founding of the United States. While many famous examples of the political execution of portraiture currently exist, one that stands out as significant was *Time Life’s* 1961 portrait of President John F. Kennedy, titled the same, by renowned photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt

(Eisenstaedt 1961). The color photograph depicts President Kennedy in a dark suit sitting at this desk at a slight angle away from the camera; his hands are posed upon some files with his gaze directly focused upon the camera as if to indicate the picture was taken impromptu as he worked (Eisenstaedt 1961; Slyomovics 2023i).

Regardless of the modality, portraiture is a complex visual medium that firmly established itself within western cultural ideology. The style has become a prominent visual representation for many government institutions as a means of asserting social control. Portraiture is a posed process, commonly outside of the organic observational conventions found among anthropological work; however, it is without question that the style is firmly set, providing a fascinating study on the visual aesthetics of a culture and how those foundational preferences evolve into social and cultural standards.



U.S. Department of State / *Passport Photo* / n.d.



NYPD / *Justin Volpe* / 1999

Alfred Eisenstaedt / *Pres. John F. Kennedy* / 1961

Question 10

National Geographic Magazine was first published in October 1888 as part of the National Geographic Society's push to fund an official scientific journal (Slyomovics 2023f). From these roots, the organization has evolved into an entertainment powerhouse, reaching approximately 60 million monthly readers worldwide alongside its other divisions like the National Geographic Channel, NationalGeographic.com, and a social welfare mechanism that impacts the lives of over 30 million people worldwide (Smithsonian National Postal Museum 2023). Described by the Smithsonian National Postal Museum as having "redefined itself as a committed outlet for world-class photojournalism, documenting the wonders of the planet and tackling serious issues around environmental and human rights," the magazine prides itself on adhering to a set of principles that every photographic entry must abide (Smithsonian National Postal Museum 2023). These include *fairness*, *veracity*, *social positivity*, *beauty* (aesthetically pleasing), and *instructiveness*, principles designed to uphold the respectability and authority of the magazine throughout its sometimes-shaky publication history (Smithsonian National Postal Museum 2023; Slyomovics 2023f).

While principled in theory, *National Geographic Magazine* has sometimes struggled to justify its strict adherence to a somewhat ambiguous set of standards that, at times, has produced questionable content. Regardless of its history, the magazine's editorial practices are accredited with over a century of academic, scientific, and entertainment-based contributions, which continue to influence how the world is seen. *National Geographic* has enabled the launch of mass journalism, supported the emergence of distinct academic disciplines, such as anthropology, and is credited with awakening a sense of international tourism and political awareness within the American public (Slyomovics 2023f). Additionally, the National Geographic Foundation's

continued funding of research around the globe is a significant and sustained contribution to the academic world (Smithsonian National Postal Museum 2023; Slyomovics 2023f).

As the rubric for accepting researcher photographs, the principles described by *National Geographic* stand as a testament to their visual doctrine, ensuring the creation of a standardized model as evident throughout their hundreds of publications. Further consideration serves as evidence of their influence on research dynamics, exemplifying how they drive the undercurrents of photographic fieldwork. Some of *National Geographic's* principles are unquestionably unproblematic; however, others work to dissuade rather than empower, ultimately undermining the authenticity of their publications and limiting the scope of photojournalism. These limitations can cause researchers and photojournalists to focus their lens upon a small fraction of the realities of the surrounding world, diluting the importance of some of the most crucial topics of our time, some of which may, politically, socially, or culturally, represent topics deemed too controversial by *National Geographic*.

Consider fairness, defined as marked impartiality, honesty, and the absence of self-interest, prejudice, or favoritism (Merriam-Webster 2023b). In practice, fairness is unproblematic, ensuring natural objectivity during photograph capture and selection. Veracity is also seemingly unproblematic, defined as a devotion to the truth; it underscores a sense of consistent reliability among the photographs ultimately published by *National Geographic* (Merriam-Webster 2023d). *National Geographic* also mandates beauty as a fundamental photographic principle, defined by *Merriam-Webster* as “the quality or aggregate of qualities in a person or thing that gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit” (Merriam-Webster 2023a). Another principle is positivity, defined within these circumstances as “indicating, relating to, or characterized by affirmation, addition, inclusion, or presence rather

than negation, withholding, or absence” (Merriam-Webster 2023c). Together, these and other principles work to direct *National Geographic’s* ethical standards, a process that trickles down from the board room to the editorial room, to the funds made available by the foundation, and ultimately, into the field, where it works to direct the ambitions and aspirations of researchers and photojournalists around the world.

Of the hundreds and thousands of photographs published by *National Geographic*, many provide an interesting basis for discussing their principles’ impact on photography as a whole; however, many others provide an unproblematic glimpse into the fascinating world around us. One example is Justin Hofman’s 2017 photograph, “Sewage surfer,” which proved to be an instant viral sensation, earning Hofman the prestigious Wildlife Photographer of the Year Award in 2017 from London’s National History Museum (Osterloff 2017). The close-up color photo of a seahorse holding onto a Q-Tip is instantly recognizable, providing a poignant example of the disastrous conditions of the world’s oceans.

“Sewage Surfer” is a zoomed-in photograph of a tiny green seahorse freely floating in the currents with its tail wrapped around a Q-Tip. Many of the photo’s elements work together to produce a striking image, including the muted yellow-green coloration of the seahorse, the pink and white of the Q-Tip, and the surrounding blue-green ocean environment. First published on Instagram in September 2017, Hofman’s description underscores many of the picture’s characteristics that correspond with *National Geographic’s* principles of photography. Hofman writes, “what started as an opportunity to photograph a cute seahorse turned into one of frustration and sadness, as the incoming tide brought with it countless pieces of trash and sewage” (Hofman 2017).

The striking juxtaposition between nature's seahorse and environment against industrialization's Q-Tip provides a stark reminder of humanity's carelessness regarding nature. Hofman's lens captured a sense of veracity and a haunting beauty within his picture, unabashedly prompting the audience to reflect upon their actions and question their future practices, a tactic very much in line with *National Geographic's* global message.



Justin Hofman / *Sewage Surfer* / 2017

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