

# Seeing is not believing: Visual literacy in the age of AI

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Module 1: Photograph as Material Culture

# Photograph as Material Culture

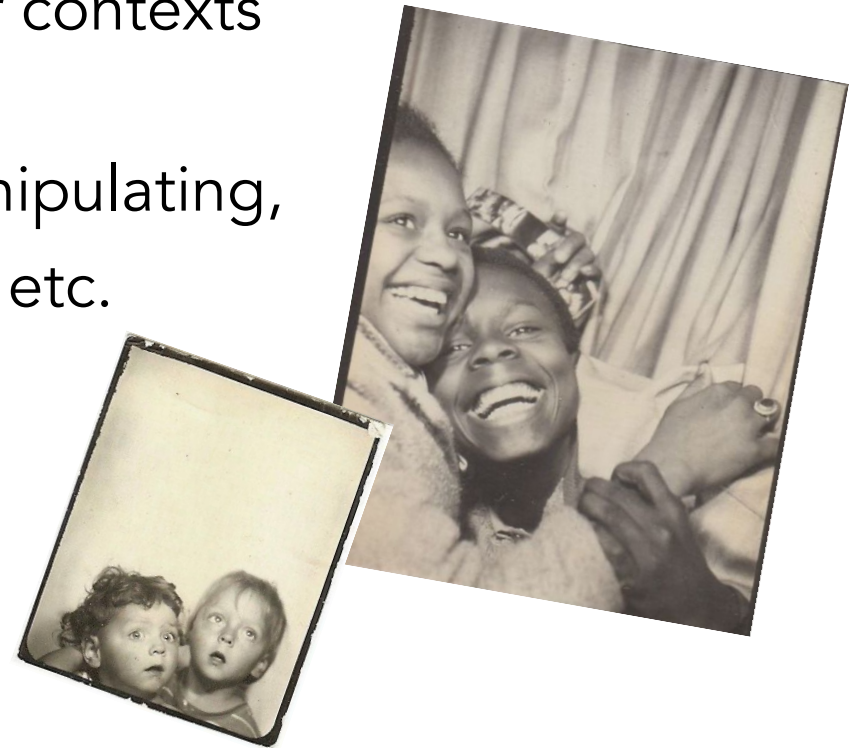


# The social life of things

- According to A. Appadurai (1986), objects are important artifacts that construct our social lives with value recognized through their provenance
- Identity of an object not fixed or found in form alone
- The essence of a thing may be in what it has become *not* what it was made to be
- Cultural biographies of things ask:
  - Where does it come from and who made it?
  - What has been its career so far and what do people see as an ideal career for such a thing?
  - What are the recognized ages in the life of such a thing and what are the cultural markers for it?
  - How does it change with age and what happens when it has reached the end of its usefulness?

# Thinking materially about photographs

- Traditionally 3D objects – with a physical presence in the world
- Photos examined beyond the image content
- As images & objects in time/space/particular contexts (socio-cultural, historical, political, economic, legal)
- Involves the processes of making, using, manipulating, distributing, consuming, discarding, recycling, etc.



# Materiality of photos

- Physical attributes influence how we interact with photos (B&W, colour, in an album, on the fridge, framed on the wall, in a wallet)
- Grounded in a world which is physical – senses other than vision involved
- How do we interact with photos now? What form do they take? Has the intangible nature of photos changed our interaction?
  
- Photos as active signifiers of meaning
- Traces of former material lives clinging to them
- Shift in categories: from commodity to *inalienable* object expressing intangible meanings (Edwards & Hart, 2004, pp. 1-15)

# Materiality of photos



Trailer for *Finding Vivian Maier*: <https://youtu.be/2o2nBhQ67Zc>

# Inalienable Wealth

- According to A. Weiner (1985) some objects/interests/stories like body décor, land rights or myths may be exchanged without ever losing their identity to the lineage which originally owed them
- Can be applied to representational images to help maneuver through the difficulties of considering issues of authenticity and historicity in the visual record as well as rights such as consent, privacy, and ownership
- What happens to the idea of *inalienable* when the object lacks physical/material form?
- Can it be manipulated without the consent of the person being photographed or the photographer?

# Inalienable Wealth



Take a look at this project: <https://re-entanglements.net/faces-voices/>



# Resources:

- <https://www.pinterest.ca/itsagablething/moments-in-time/>
- Appadurai, A. (Ed.). (1986). *The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge University Press.
- Edwards, E. & Hart J. (2004). Introduction: Photographs as objects. In E. Edwards & J. Hart (Eds.), *Photographs object histories: On the materiality of images* (pp 1-15). Routledge.
- Weiner, A. B. (1985). Inalienable Wealth. *American Ethnologist*, 12(2), 210–227.
- Trailer for *Finding Vivian Maier*: <https://youtu.be/2o2nBhQ67Zc>
- <https://re-entanglements.net/faces-voices/>