

Visual Sources/ Visual Culture

Overview

1. Image Commentary Overview
2. Visual Culture Concepts and Examples
3. Photography and Archival Research

1. Image Commentary Overview

Checklist

◆ CONTENT

◆ MEDIUM and
MATERIALS

◆ CONTEXT

◆ PRODUCER(S)

◆ SIGNIFICANCE

◆ AUDIENCE(S) and/or
SETTING

A black and white photograph of Harold Laswell, an older man with glasses, wearing a suit and tie, sitting in a library. He is looking to his right. Behind him are tall bookshelves filled with books. The lighting is soft, coming from the right side.

Laswell's Model of Communication '5Ws'

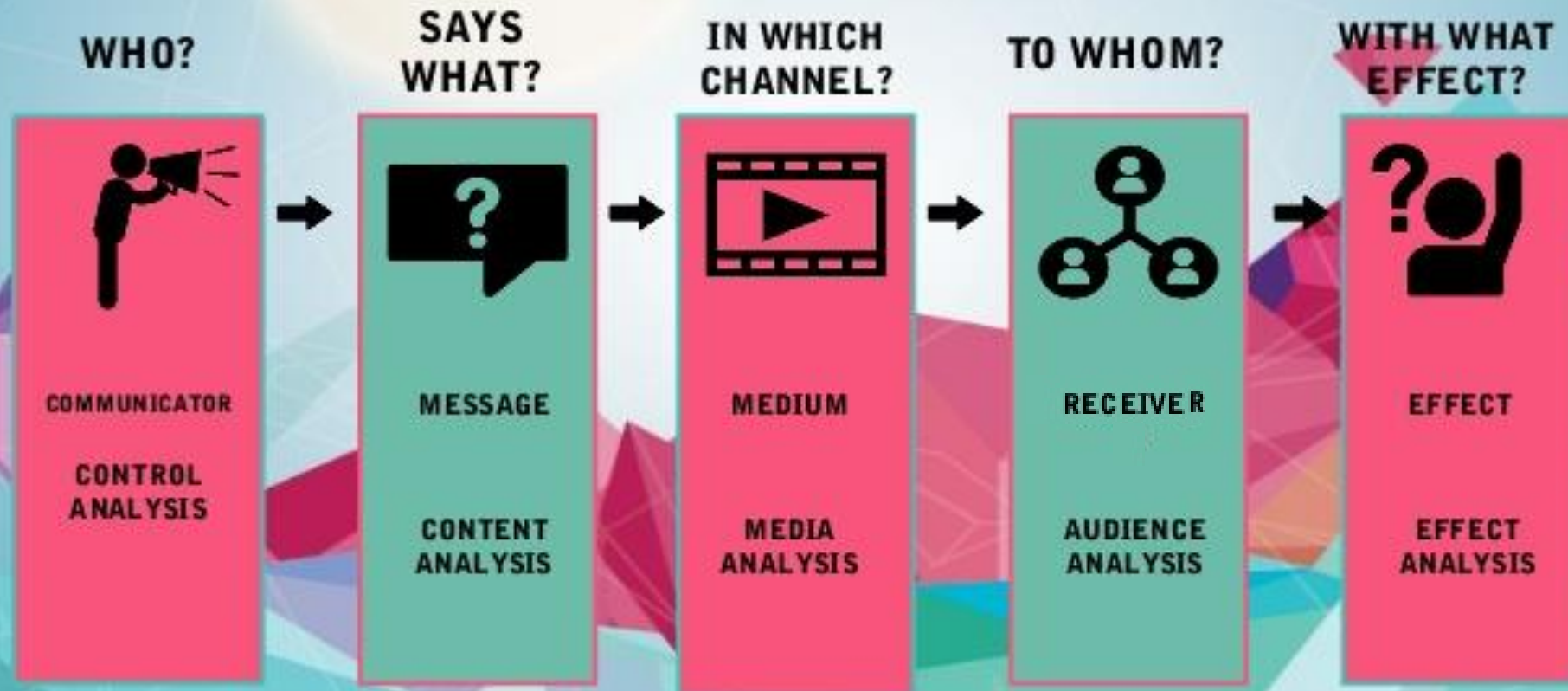
"Who says What to
Whom in Which
Channel with What
Effect".

Harold Laswell (1902–1972)

THEORY HOW DOES IT WORK?

THE LASSWELL FORMULA

"A convenient way to describe an act of communication is to answer the following questions..."





Harold Laswell (1902–1972)

Laswell's Model of Communication '5Ws'

"Who says What to
Whom in Which
Channel with What
Effect".

To which as historians,
we should add **WHEN**
AND WHERE

CHECKLIST

Who says What to Whom in Which Channel with
What Effect, When and Where

- ◊ **WHO** = discussion of the **PRODUCER(S)** of the visual source (if known)
- ◊ **WHAT** = description and explanation of the visual source's **CONTENT**
- ◊ **TO WHOM** = discussion of intended **AUDIENCE** for the visual source and/or the **SETTING** in which it is displayed or consumed
- ◊ **WHICH CHANNEL** = discussion of the **MEDIUM** in which the visual source was produced and the **MATERIALS** used
- ◊ **WHEN and WHERE** = discussion of the historical and geographical **CONTEXT** in which the source was originally made
- ◊ **WHAT EFFECT** = *ANALYSIS* of all of the above and a discussion of the source's overall **SIGNIFICANCE**

MATERIALITIES

- ◆ Study of the matter ('stuff') that things (everything) is made up of
- ◆ Significance of certain types of materials and how they impact upon humans (and vice versa)

Inventor of **Tupperware** Earl Tupper was born on July 28, 1907

THE CONTAINER REVOLUTION



Tupperware is an airtight plastic container for storing food

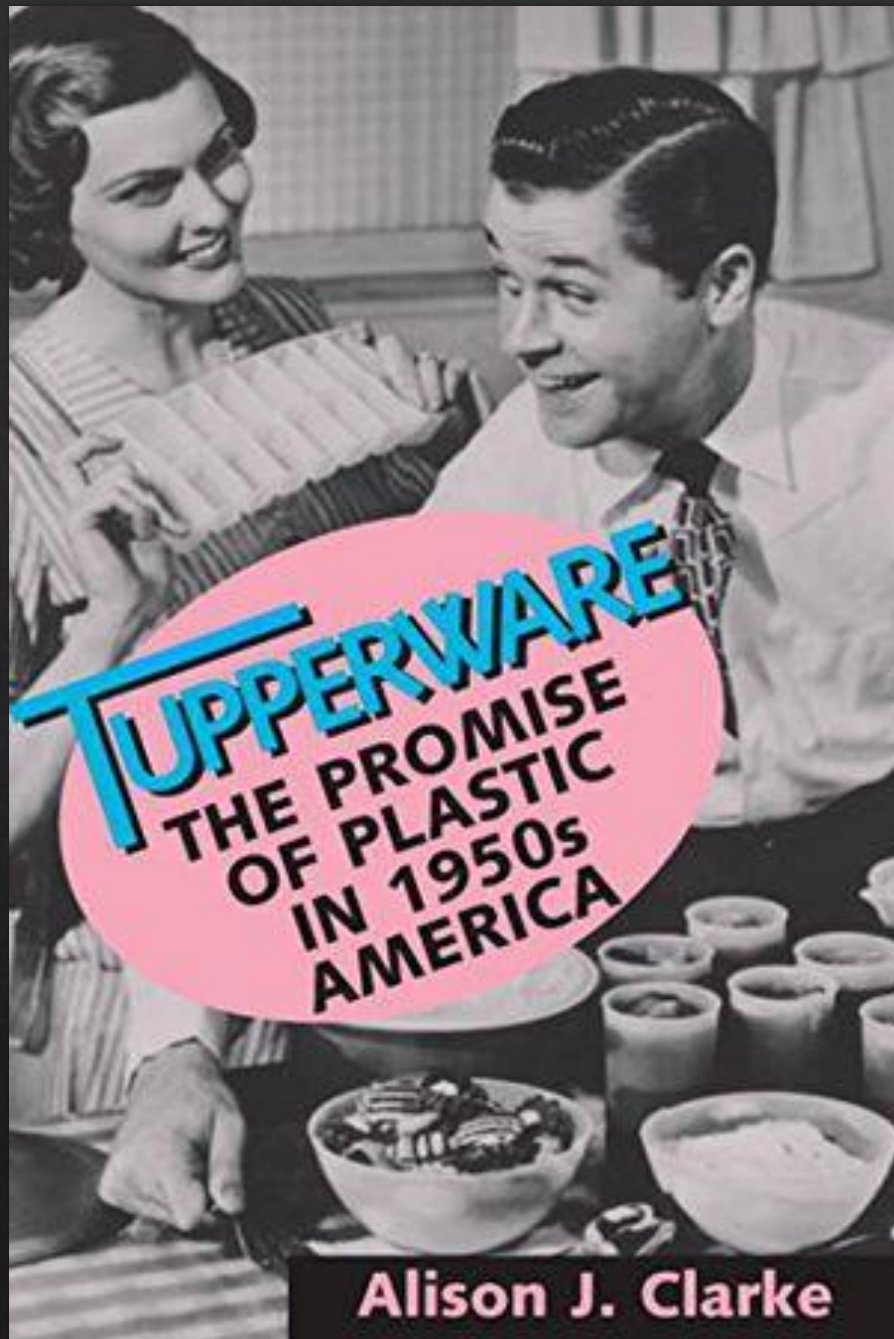
Made using black, inflexible pieces of polyethylene slag, a waste product of the oil refining process

By purifying the slag and molding it, he created lightweight, non-breakable containers

Was also used to produce parts for gas masks & Navy signal lamps

The “burping seal” distinguished Tupperware from competitors

Started marketing his products as giveaways with cigarettes



Earl S. Tupper
Tumblers
1954

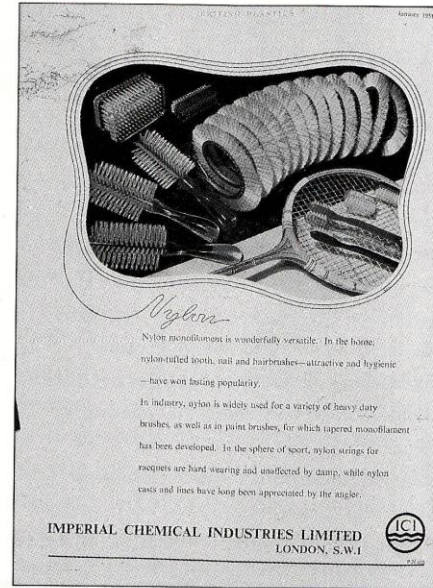
PLASTIC

Roland Barthes

Despite having names of Greek shepherds (Polystyrene, Polyvinyl, Polyethylene), plastic, the products of which have just been gathered in an exhibition, is in essence the stuff of alchemy. At the entrance of the stand, the public waits in a long queue in order to witness the accomplishment of the magical operation par excellence: the transmutation of matter. An ideally-shaped machine, tabulated and oblong (a shape well suited to suggest the secret of an itinerary) effortlessly draws, out of a heap of greenish crystals, shiny and fluted dressing-room tidies. At one end, raw, telluric matter, at the other, the finished, human object; and between these two extremes, nothing; nothing but a transit, hardly watched over by an attendant in a cloth cap, half-god, half-robot.

So, more than a substance, plastic is the very idea of its infinite transformation; as its everyday name indicates, it is ubiquity made visible. And it is this, in fact, which makes it a miraculous substance: a miracle is always a sudden transformation of nature. Plastic remains impregnated throughout with this wonder: it is less a thing than the trace of a movement.

And as the movement here is almost infinite, transforming the original crystals into a multitude of more and more startling objects, plastic is, all told, a spectacle to be deciphered: the very spectacle of its end-products. At the sight of each terminal form (suitcase, brush, car-body, toy, fabric, tube, basin or paper), the mind does not cease



from considering the original matter as an enigma. This is because the quick-change artistry of plastic is absolute: it can become buckets as well as jewels. Hence a perpetual amazement, the reverie of man at the sight of the proliferating forms of matter, and the connections he detects between the singular of the origin and the plural of the effects. And this amazement is a pleasurable one, since the scope of the transformations gives man the measure of his power, and since the very itinerary of plastic gives him the euphoria of prestigious free-wheeling through Nature.

But the price to be paid for this success is that plastic, sublimated as movement, hardly exists as substance. Its reality is a

Roland Barthes Mythologies



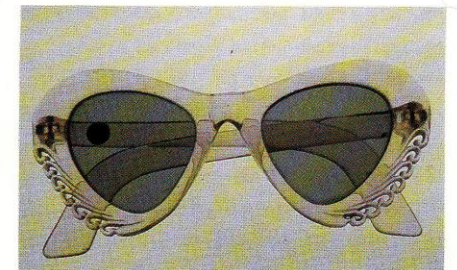
Polythene cups and food containers. Tupperware Plastics Company. USA 1940s-1960s.

Plastic sunglasses. 1950s.

negative one: neither hard nor deep, it must be content with a 'substantial' attribute which is neutral in spite of its utilitarian advantages: *resistance*, a state which merely means an absence of yielding. In the hierarchy of the major poetic substances, it figures as a disgraced material, lost between the effusiveness of rubber and the flat hardness of metal; it embodies none of the genuine produce of the mineral world: foam, fibres, strata. It is a 'shaped' substance: whatever its final state, plastic keeps a flocculent appearance, something opaque, creamy and curdled, something powerless ever to achieve the triumphant smoothness of Nature. But what best reveals it for what it is is the sound it gives, at once hollow and flat; its noise is its undoing, as are its colours, for it seems capable of retaining only the most chemical-looking ones. Of yellow, red and green, it keeps only the aggressive quality, and uses them as mere names, being able to display only concepts of colour.

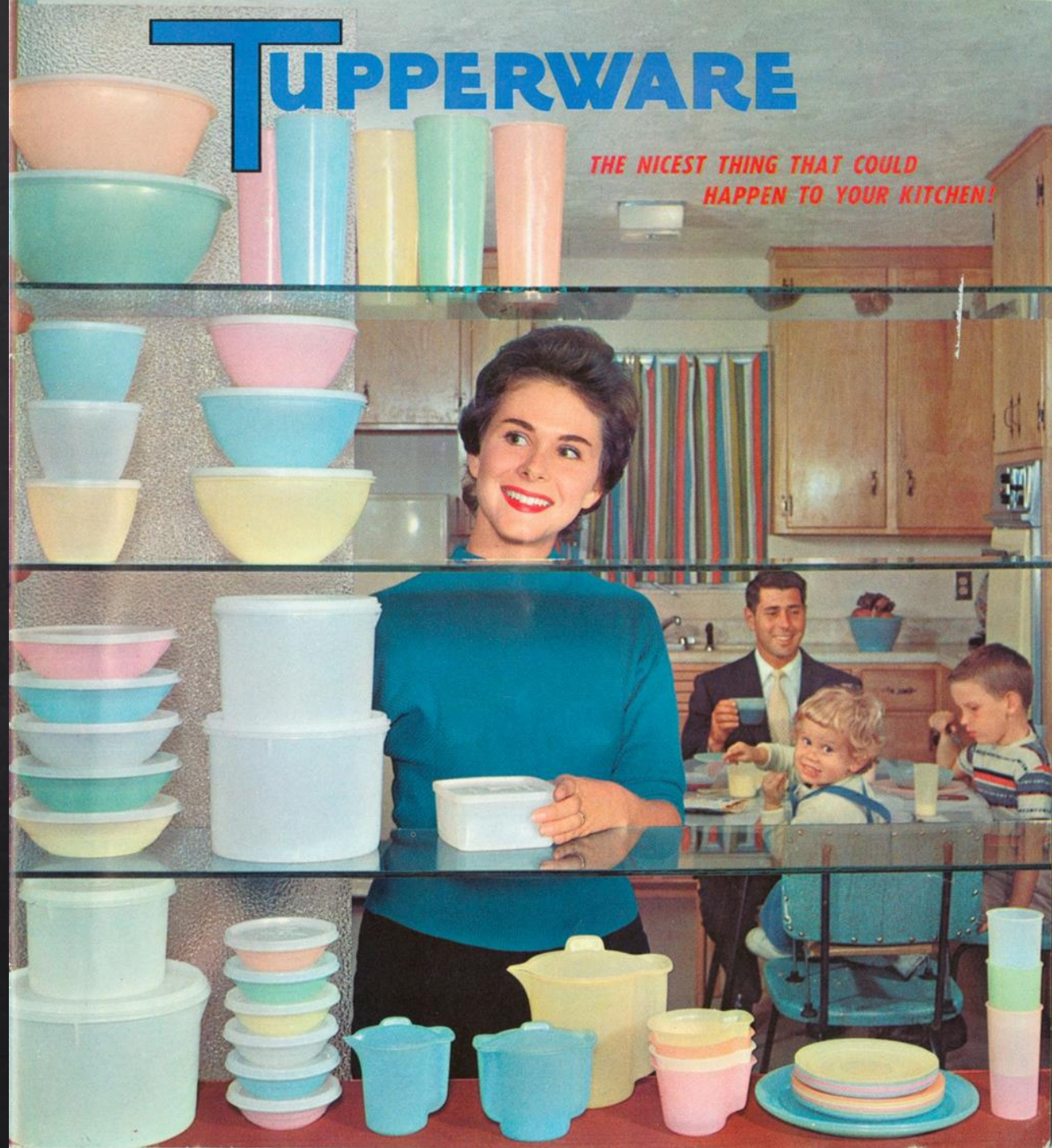
The fashion for plastic highlights an evolution in the myth of 'imitation' materials. It is well known that their use is historically bourgeois in origin (the first vestimentary postiches date back to the rise of capitalism). But until now imitation materials have always indicated pretension, they belonged to the world of appearances, not to that of actual use; they aimed at reproducing cheaply the rarest substances, diamonds, silk, feathers, furs, silver, all the luxurious brilliance of the world. Plastic has climbed down, it is a household material. It is the first magical substance which consents to be prosaic. But it is precisely because this prosaic character is a triumphant reason for its existence: for the first time, artifice aims at something common, not rare. And as an

immediate consequence, the age-old function of nature is modified: it is no longer the Idea, the pure Substance to be regained or imitated: an artificial Matter, more bountiful than all the natural deposits, is about to replace her, and to determine the very invention of forms. A luxurious object is still of this earth, it still recalls, albeit in a precious mode, its mineral or animal origin, the natural theme of which it is but one actualization. Plastic is wholly swallowed up in the fact of being used: ultimately, objects will be invented for the sole pleasure of using them. The hierarchy of substances is abolished: a single one replaces them all: the whole world *can* be plasticized, and even life itself since, we are told, they are beginning to make plastic aortas.



TUPPERWARE

THE NICEST THING THAT COULD
HAPPEN TO YOUR KITCHEN!



Semiotics - the science of signs - decoding images (and word)

Ferdinand de Saussure
(1857-1913)

SIGN

Charles Sanders Peirce
(1839-1914)

A successful, understandable form of communication.

SIGNIFIER

Any motion, gesture, image, sound, pattern, or event that conveys meaning and communicates.

SIGNIFIED

The concept that a signifier refers to, the meaning it conveys.

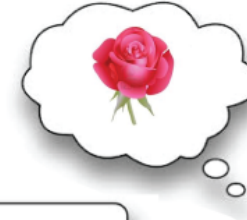


CONNOTATION

The feelings, ideas and cultural meanings which are associated with the word or object. Not the literal meaning.



Rose



DENOTATION

The literal or primary meaning of a word, in contrast to the feelings or ideas that the word suggests.



ICONS

Signs where the signifier resembles the signified.



SYMBOLS

Signs where the relation between signifier and signified is purely conventional and culturally specific.



INDEXES

Signs where the signifier is caused by the signified.



**What is
Visual
Culture?**

What is Visual Culture?

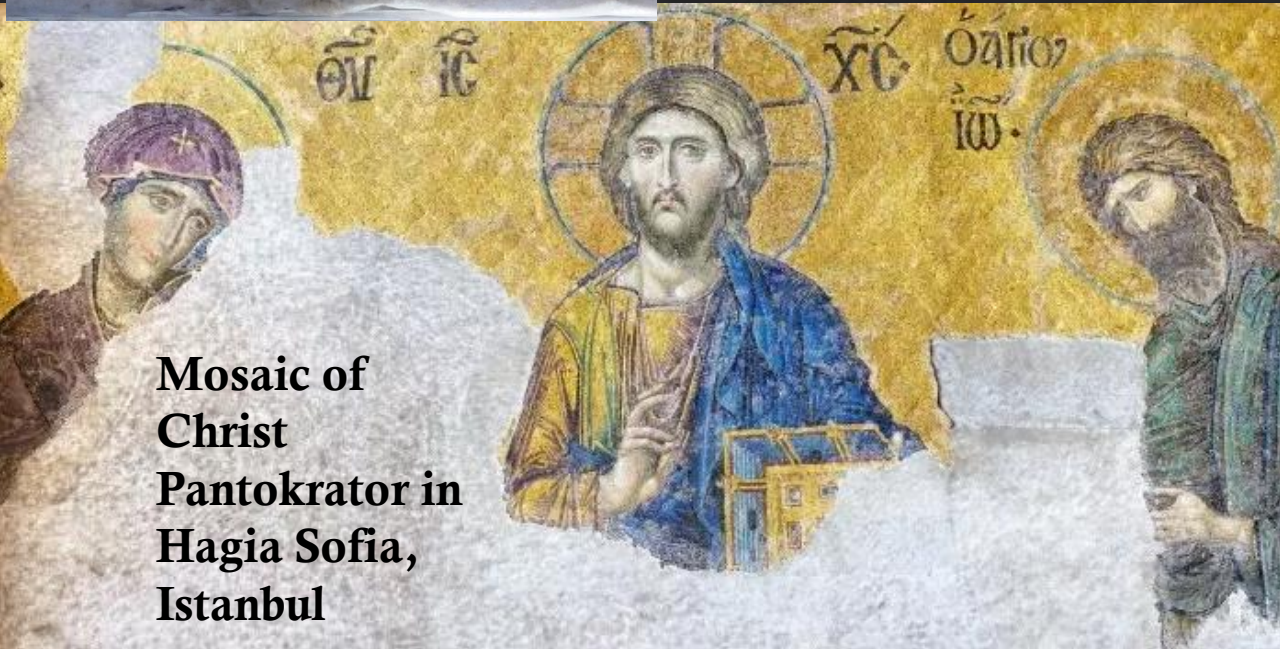
◆◆ Emphasis on sight
and 'visuality'

◆◆ Non-textual

◆◆ Not (just) art history

What are Visual Cultures?

- ◆◆ Emphasis on multiple visual cultures
- ◆◆ Varies according to technological capabilities
- ◆◆ Varies across time, geography and societies



Mosaic of
Christ
Pantokrator in
Hagia Sofia,
Istanbul



Interior of
Sultan
Ahmed
Mosque,
(Blue
Mosque)
Sofia,
Istanbul



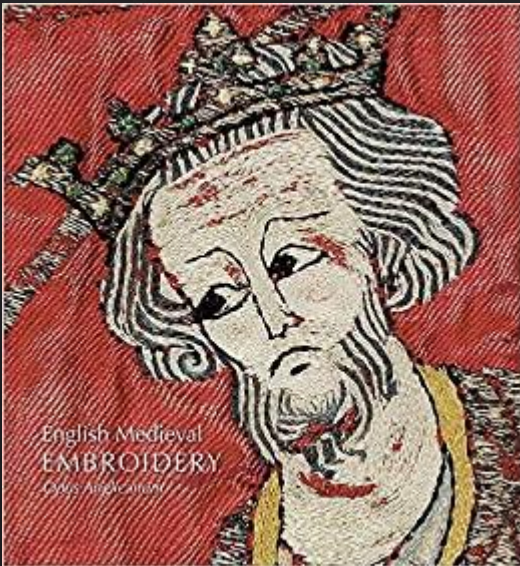


What is/was Medieval Visual Culture?

◊ What are some of the specific features one should bear in mind regarding the following examples – particularly with respect to their medium and materials?

Tapestries and Embroideries

See: V&A Museum Exhibition *Opus Anglicanum: Masterpieces of English Medieval Embroidery*



Reliquaries



RELIQUARY CASKET OF ST THOMAS BECKET,
Ashmolean, Oxford

Memento Mori



See [Worcester Cathedral blog](#)

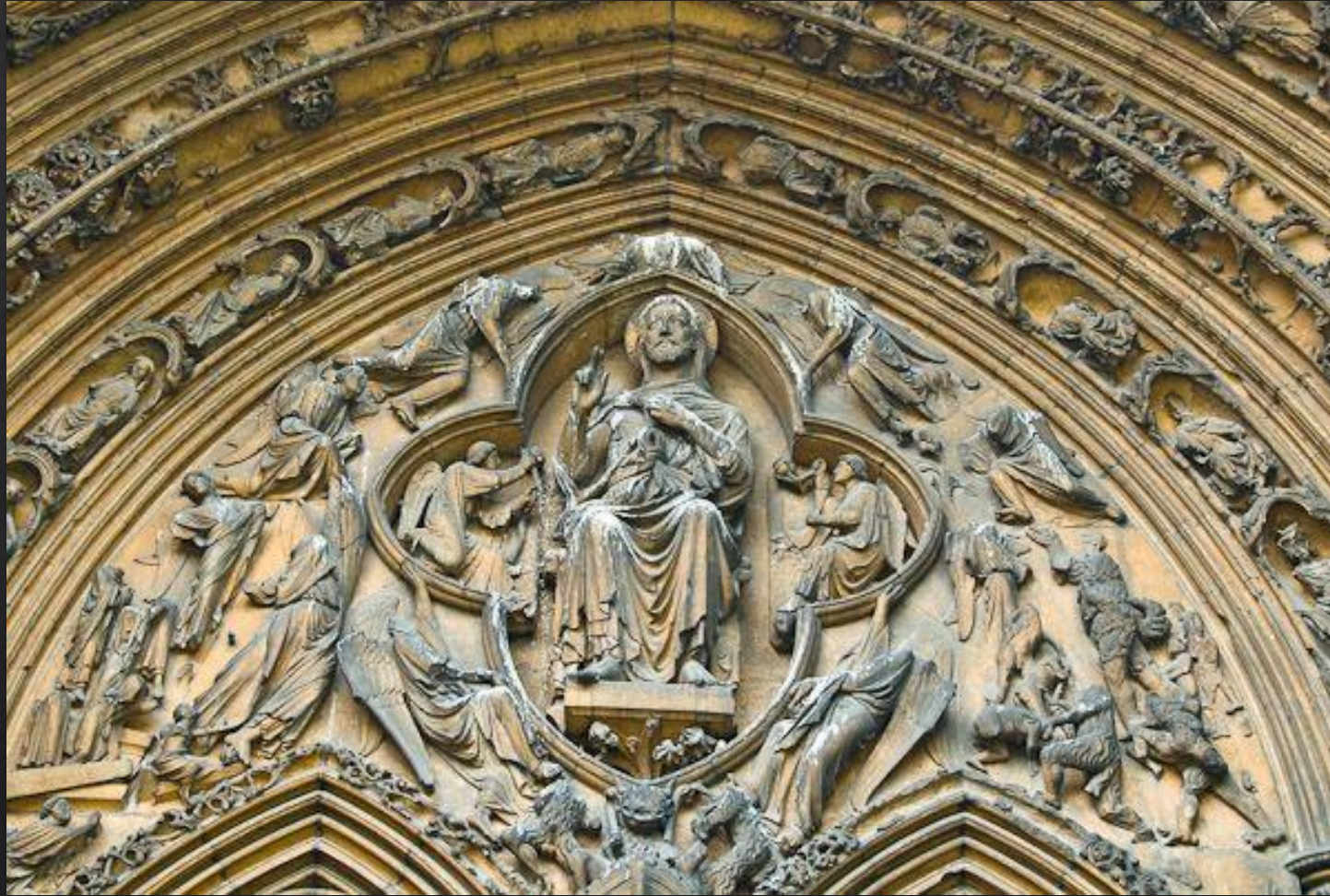
Altarpiece



Carlo Crivelli,
Demidoff Altarpiece,
National Gallery,
London

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/carlo-crivelli-the-demidoff-altarpiece>

Tympanum

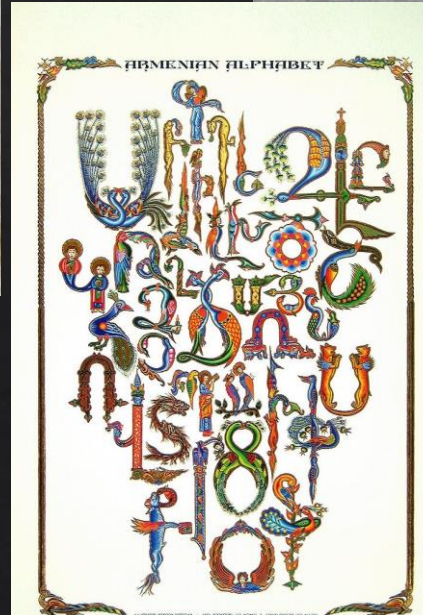
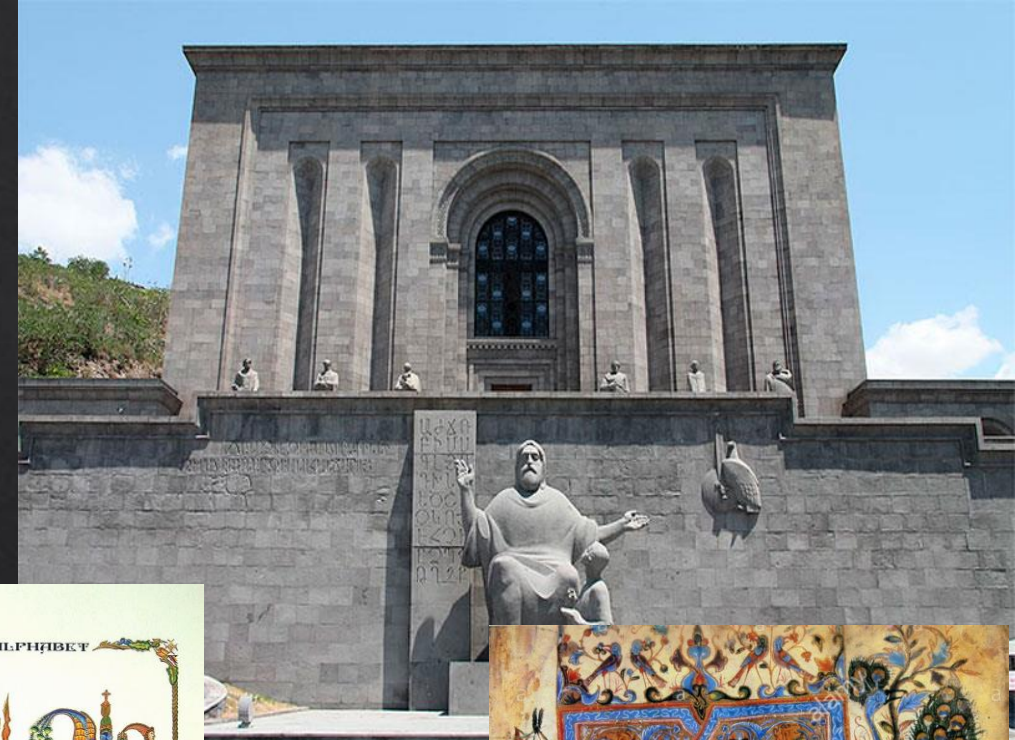


Lincoln Cathedral

Manuscripts and Illustrations



Matenadaran, Yerevan, Armenia



3. Photography and Archival Research

- ◆ How might political and technical issues surrounding archives impact upon our understanding of the past?
- ◆ Does the archival record itself pose *interpretive challenges* for historians?
- ◆ What *limitations* might archives pose for historians?



“Of particular relevance to the research that I set out to do [*on the Red Army Faction aka Baader–Meinhof Gang*] were **the limitations** posed by the archive. While archives were crucial to the completion of this work, **they frequently refused to deliver the materializations that I had previously hoped and imagined they would contain**. This is not to say that the objects for which I was looking did not exist ... Rather, the official state archives did not provide direct access to these objects, even if they were somewhat haunted by them. Disproportionately represented amongst the materials were texts over images and explanations over descriptions. Granted the authority to decide by virtue of presence what constitutes an historical source, the **archive issues both invitations and refusals**.

-Kimberly Mair, ‘In Search of the Archive without an Address,’ *Journal of Historical Sociology* 24:2 (June 2011), pp. 135—136

“ ... Increasingly, I considered the idea that the city itself must have a capacity to archive something of what I was seeking.”

- ◆ What **invitations and refusals** might archives offer researchers?
- ◆ What **obstacles or barriers** might archives pose for historians?
- ◆ How might one respond to or circumnavigate some of these obstacles or barriers?
- ◆ How might we turn an archival *refusal* into an *invitation* for analysis and research?

Warning

This record is about a culturally sensitive object or photograph

Click on the thumbnail below if you wish to see an image of it

Please use it with respect.



HELSBY & CO

(b) ARRANGEMENT.

The re-arrangement of the Zoological Collections in the room which (when the proposed extension of the Museums is completed) will be the commencement of the continuous Gallery destined to contain the Vertebrates, has been now nearly completed. This room is devoted to Man and the Simian Anthropeidea, viz. :—the Chimpanzees, the Gorillas, the Orang-utans, and the Gibbons. The new series of skulls, casts, and photographic enlargements, illustrating the various races of mankind—the Caucasian, the Mongolian, and the Melanesian—has been remarkably popular, and this section will be further extended whenever opportunity offers. Advantage is also taken of opportunities of obtaining photographs direct from life from natives of the various countries who come to the Port of Liverpool. No such collection as this, it is believed, exists in any other Museum. The Anthropoids are represented as yet chiefly by mounted specimens; the comparative preparations of their osteology and internal anatomy are not yet ready for exhibition.

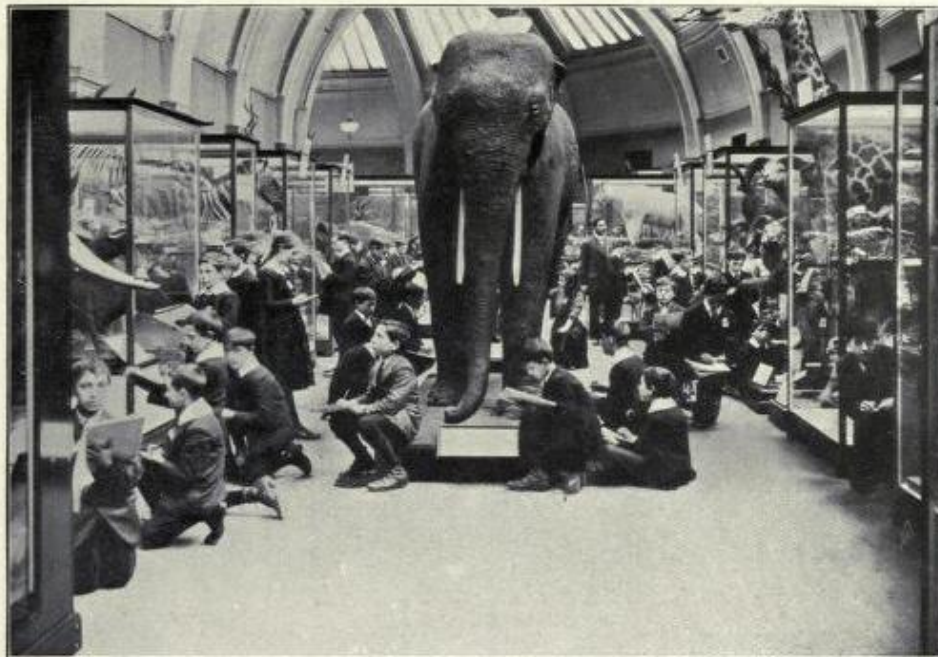
The series of photographic enlargements illustrating the various races of mankind—the Caucasian, the Mongolian and the Melanesian—have been further extended. Anthropologists, who have seen them, have expressed their high appreciation of their value, and requests have been received from several Museums for copies. A series is at present being prepared for the British Museum, and over fifty enlargements have been already sent to that Institution *per* Mr. Richard Lydekker, F.R.S.

*44th Annual Report of the
Committee of the Free Public
Museums of the City of
Liverpool* (JR Williams &
Co: Liverpool, 1897), p.
13

*46th Annual Report of the
Committee of the Free Public
Library, Museum and
Walker Art Gallery the City
of Liverpool* (JR Williams
& Co: Liverpool, 1899), p.
33

‘Use of the
Museum’
from J.G.
Legge, *The
Thinking
Hand; or,
Practical
Education in
the Elementary
School*

(MacMillan:
London, 1914)



PLEASANT STREET COUNCIL SCHOOL



PLEASANT STREET COUNCIL SCHOOL



PLEASANT STREET COUNCIL SCHOOL



PLEASANT STREET COUNCIL SCHOOL

THE THINKING HAND

OR

PRACTICAL EDUCATION IN THE
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

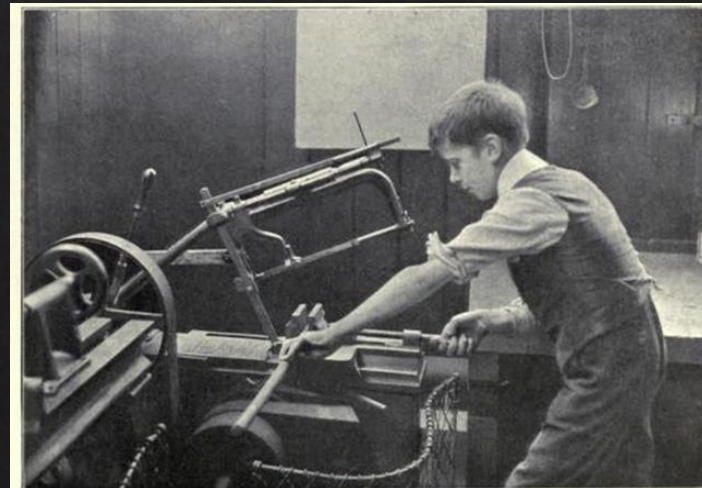


**James Granville Legge, Director of Education
at Liverpool City Council (from 1906 to 1923)**

- Legge insisted photographs showed “more clearly than any words” the utility of the curriculum he introduced to Liverpool schools.
- Photographs left to “speak for themselves” as object lessons – rather like a museum exhibit



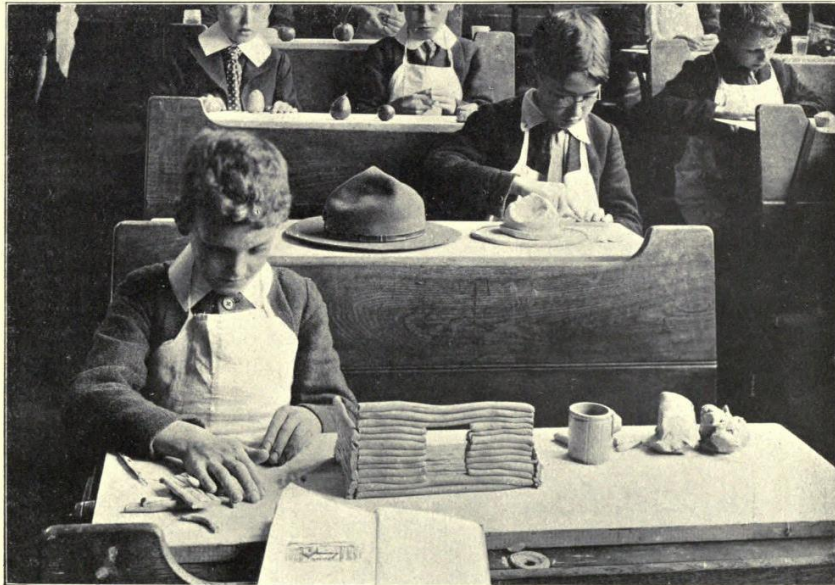
BRAE STREET COUNCIL SCHOOL



BRAE STREET MANUAL INSTRUCTION CENTRE



SEFTON PARK COUNCIL SCHOOL



SEFTON PARK COUNCIL SCHOOL

H



SEFTON PARK COUNCIL SCHOOL



VENICE STREET COUNCIL SCHOOL

School Visits to Liverpool Museum

"Classes group themselves around certain of the cases, from which the public for the time being are excluded by temporary barrier.

"Care is taken not to cover too wide a field, and one or two cases or a group of specimens is selected which illustrates some important facts in Nature. The teacher, or one of the Museum Staff, gives a brief and simple demonstration, in which particular facts are emphasized, and the inter-relation between the specimens pointed out. The children, with note-book in hand, are then left to themselves, with the simple instruction to limit themselves to these particular specimens, and to make drawings and notes of any of them.

"The next day they are called upon to write a short essay, with the help of their drawings and notes, on their visit to the museum."

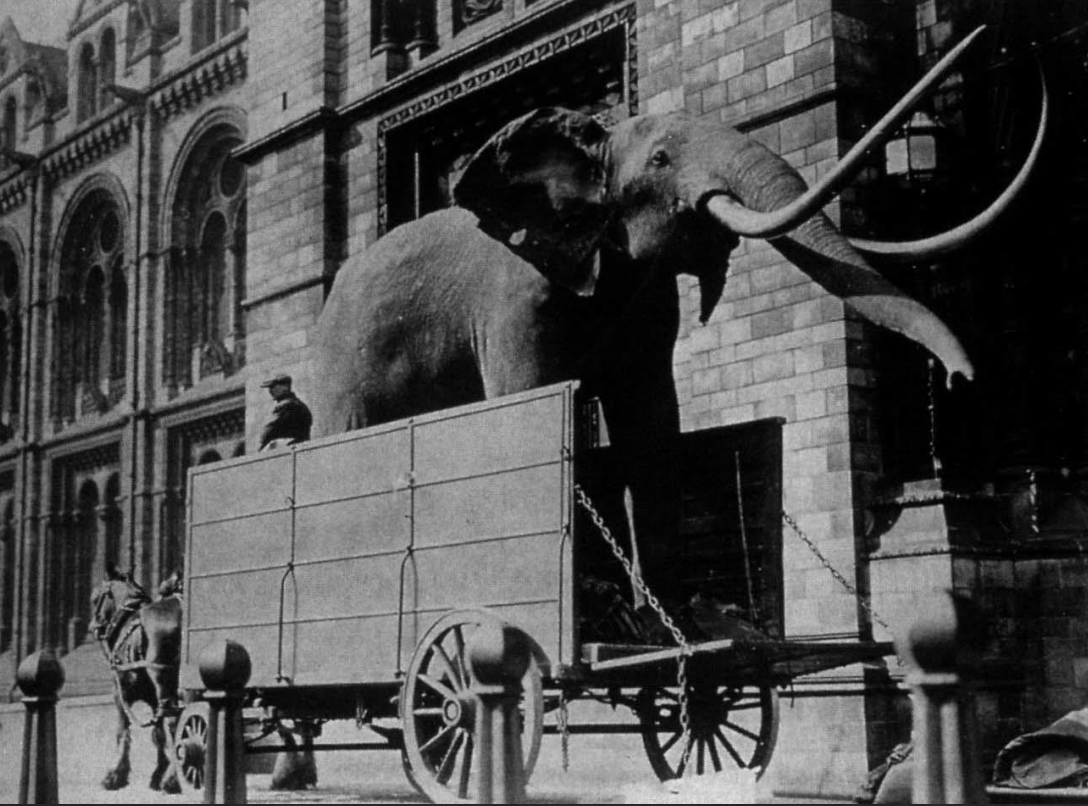
- Liverpool Museum annual report 1902



PLEASANT STREET COUNCIL SCHOOL



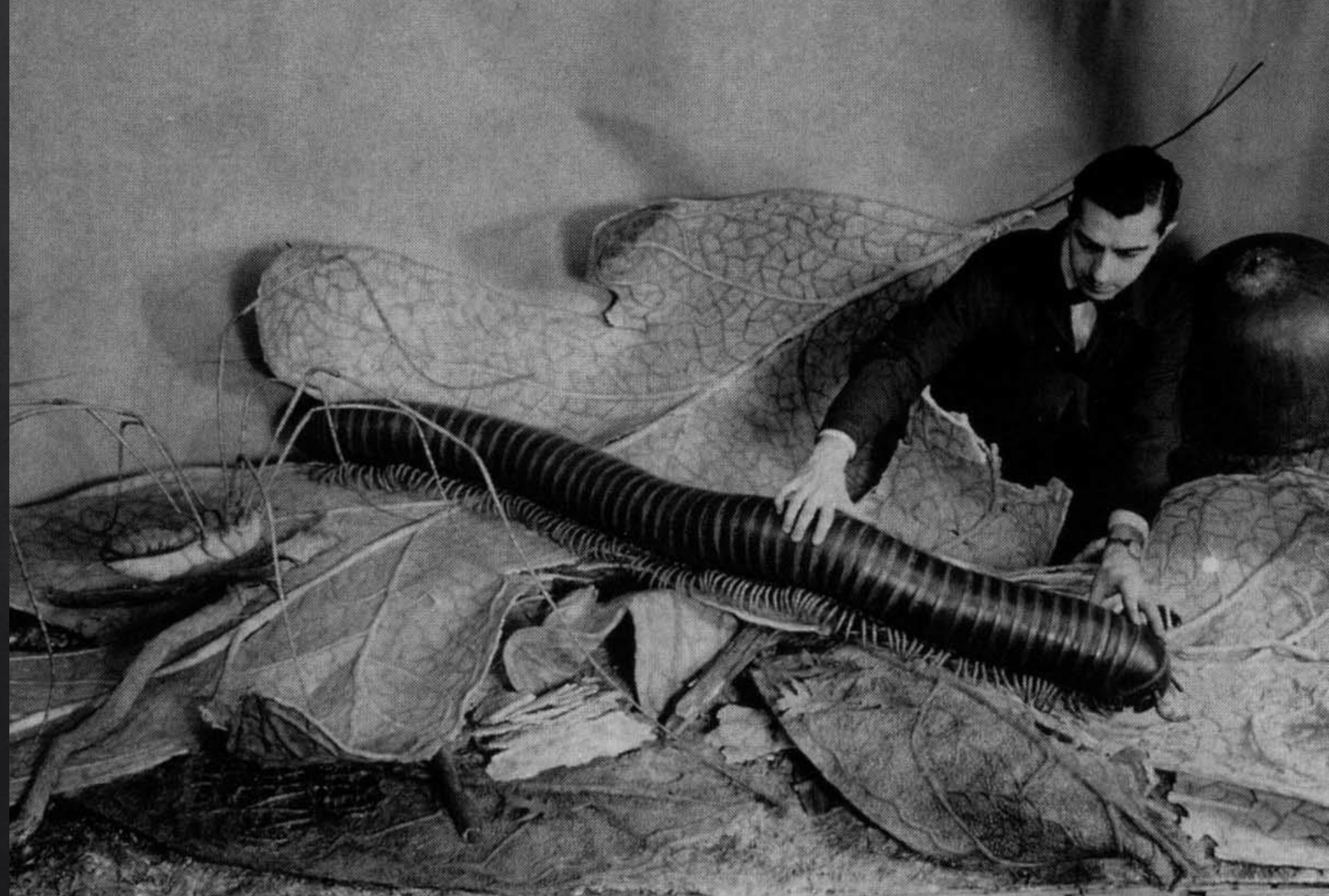
PLEASANT STREET COUNCIL SCHOOL



- photographs of museums can “*exceed* both their routine documentary function and their complex realism,”
- disclosing “an implicit social commentary on the instructional life of the museum,” making the “effortful artifice behind the museum’s public illusions” apparent in a “vaudeville of bizarre scales and incongruous juxtapositions”

Georgina Born, ‘Public Museums, Museum Photography, and the Limits of Reflexivity: An Essay on the Exhibition *Camera Obscured*: Photographic Documentation and the Public Museum,’ *Journal of Material Culture* 3:2 (1998), pp. 223–254. To see examples of Vid Ingelevics’s work, visit his website: <http://www.web.net/artifact/CameraObsc.A.htm>





Page from Georges Bataille, ed., *Documents*, No. 6, 1930;
René Magritte, *One Night Museum* (1927)



EN HAUT, À GAUCHE : ÎLE DE TORRES STRAITS, CRANE DÉCORÉ EMPLOYÉ POUR LA DIVINATION (CES CRANES PASSENT POUR EXPRIMER LEUR ORACLE PAR LE BRUIT DES DENTS QUI CLAQUENT).

Photo A. C. Hobbs, extrait de Customs of the world.

EN HAUT, À DROITE : CRANES TROPHÉES DAYAK (FERMÉ À L'AIDE D'UNE PLANCHETTE, LE CRANE NOIR EST EMPLOYÉ COMME RÉCIPENT POUR DES MÉDICAMENTS).

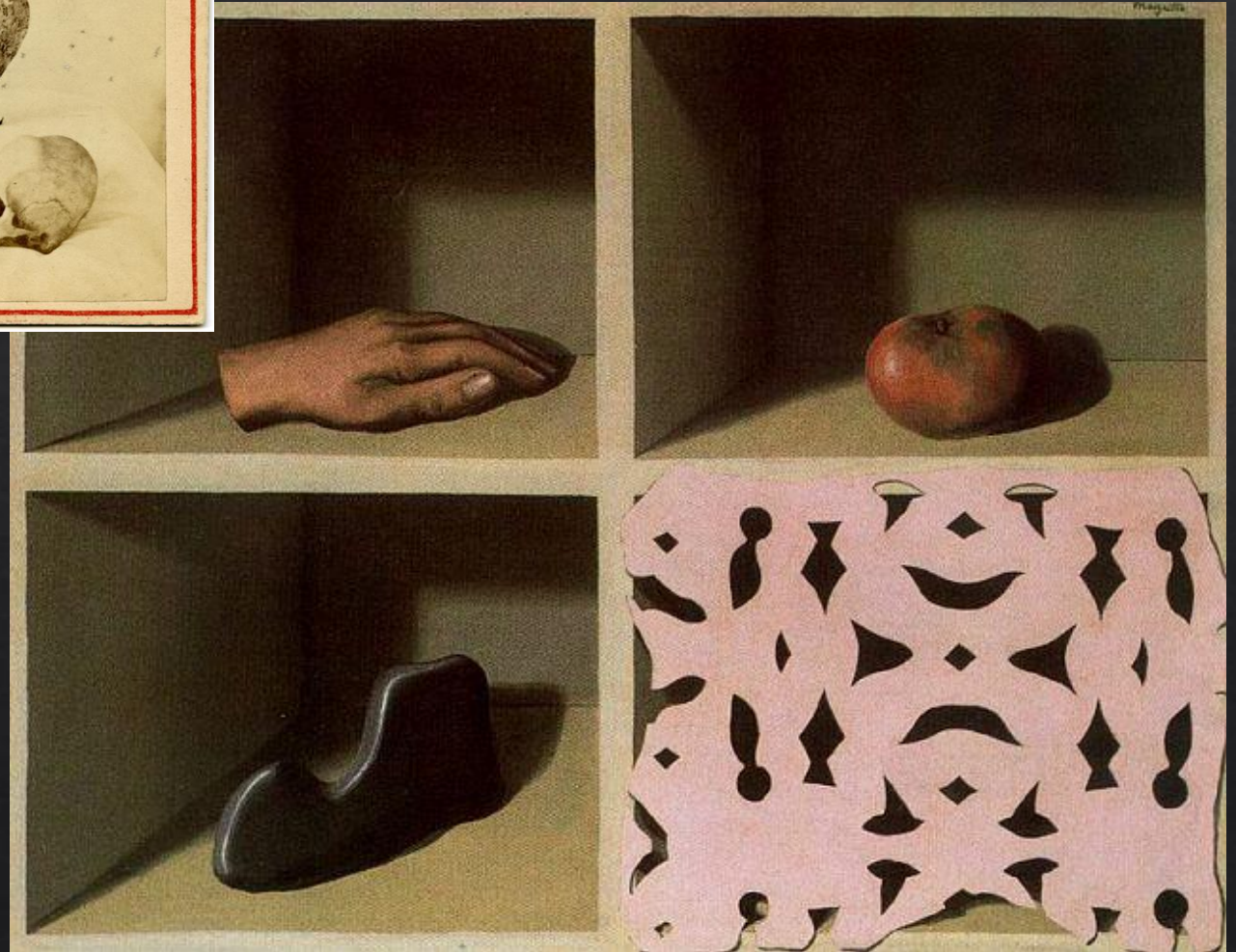
Photo R. von Kautzsch.

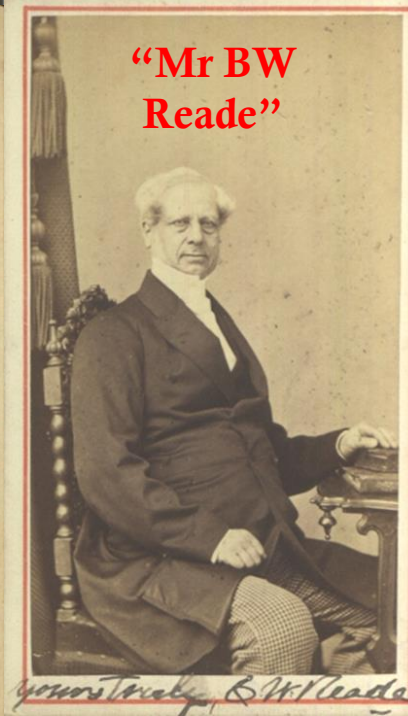
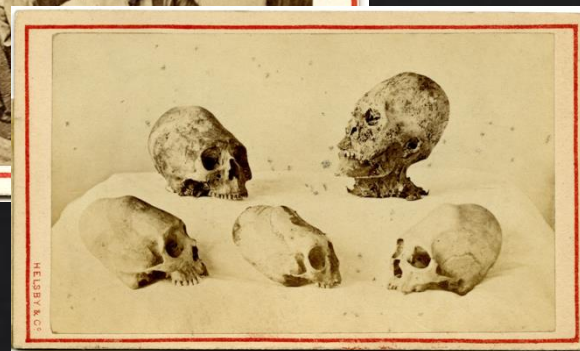
AU CENTRE : NOUVELLE-GUINÉE, CRANE RECOUVERT DE TERRE GLAISE MODELÉE, AUX YEUX FAITS DE COQUILLAGES.

Photo R. von Kautzsch.

EN BAS : OSSUAIRE À HALLSTATT (AUTRICHE).

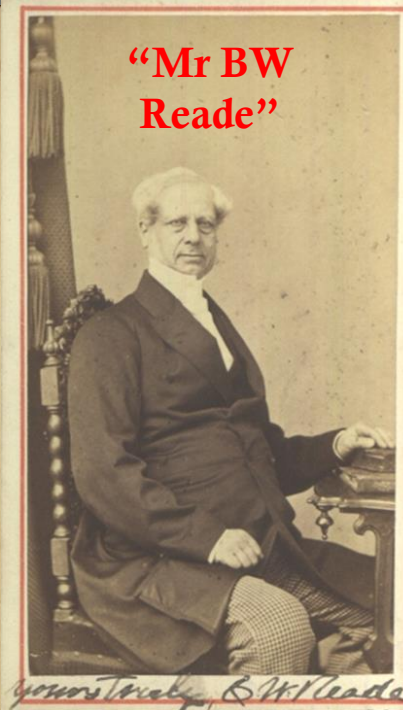
Photo Zittel, Wiener

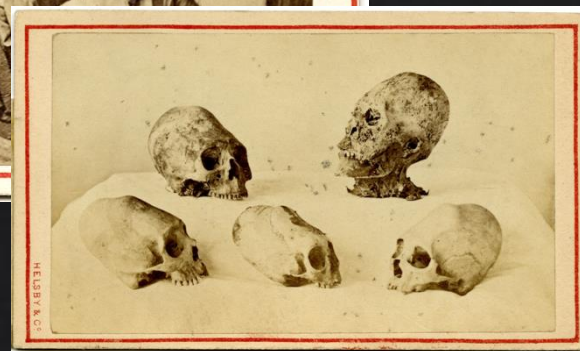


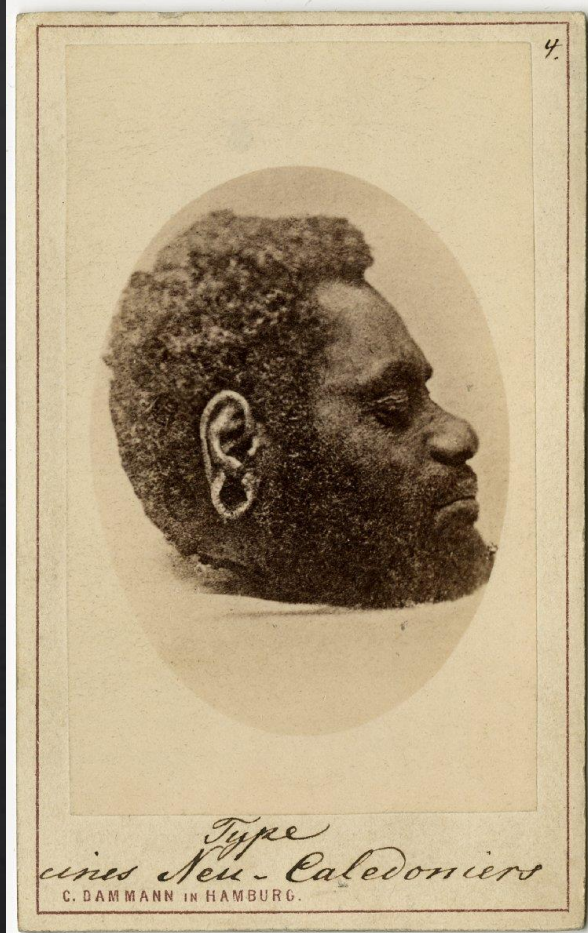




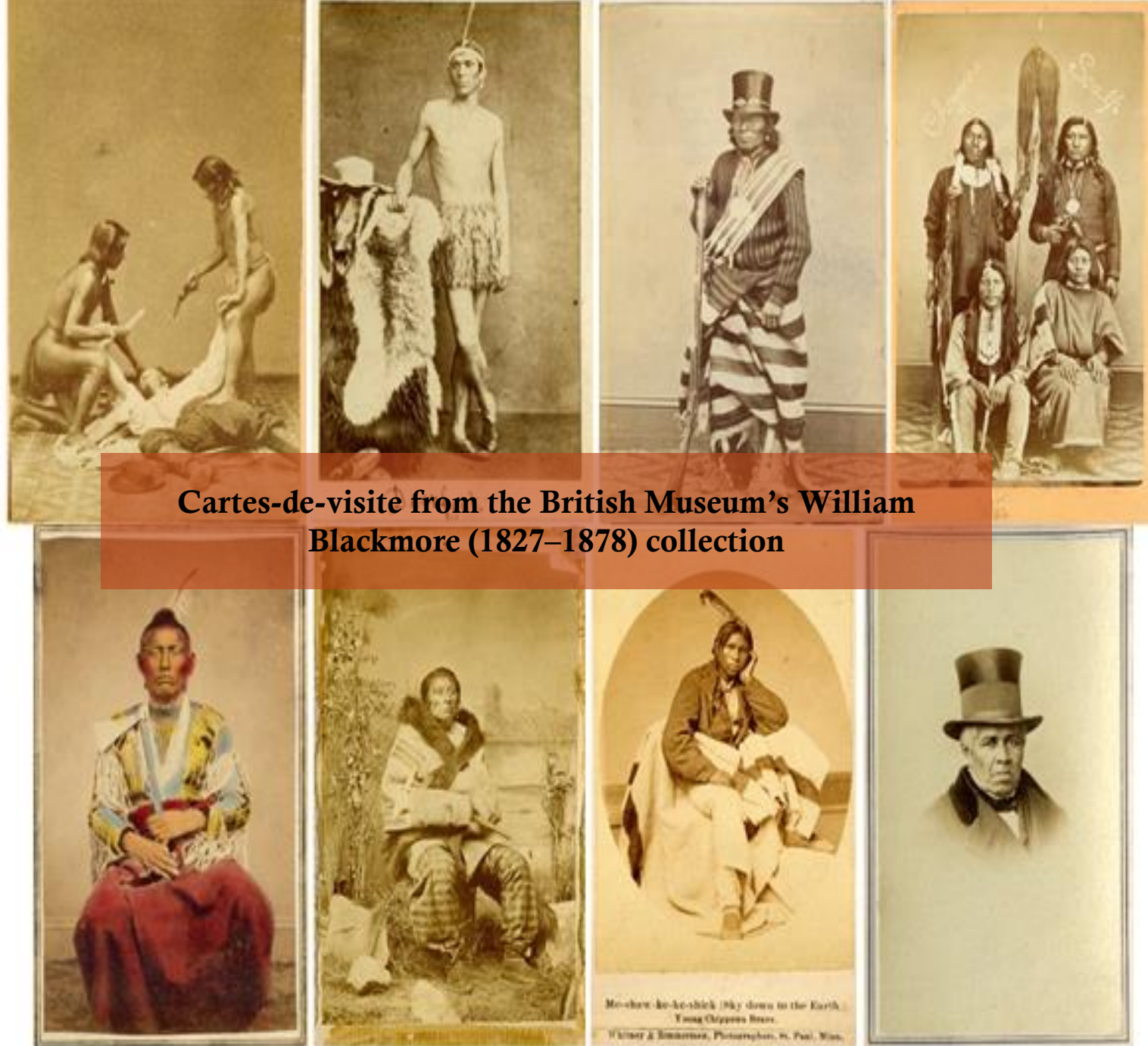
JA Picton, the 14th Earl of Derby and William Rathbone V. Pictures taken for the opening of Liverpool Museum in October 1860







“Photograph (black and white); carte-de-visite; a Kanak man's severed (?) head in profile; New Caledonia,” British Museum curators notes



Photographs by John Thomson (1837-1921)



*Illustrations of China and Its
People (1873–1874)*

*Street Life in London
(1877–1878)*

*Royal Collection (1881,
1882)*

Liverpool Record Office Archives: Liverpool City Mission Slides



Liverpool Record Office Archives



Liverpool
City
Mission
slides



Liverpool
Seamen's
Orphanage
(top);
Mersey
Mission to
Seamen
(bottom)

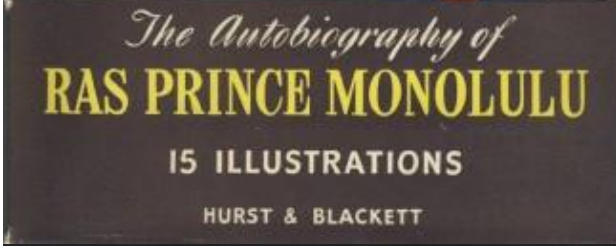
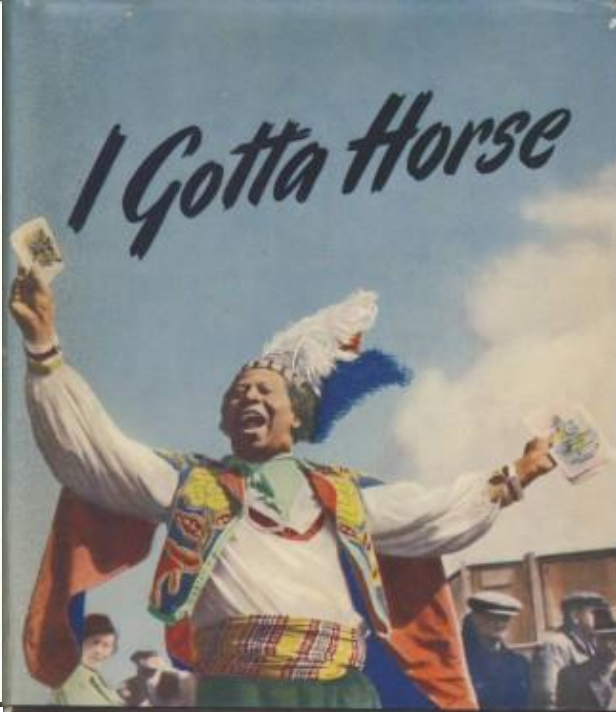




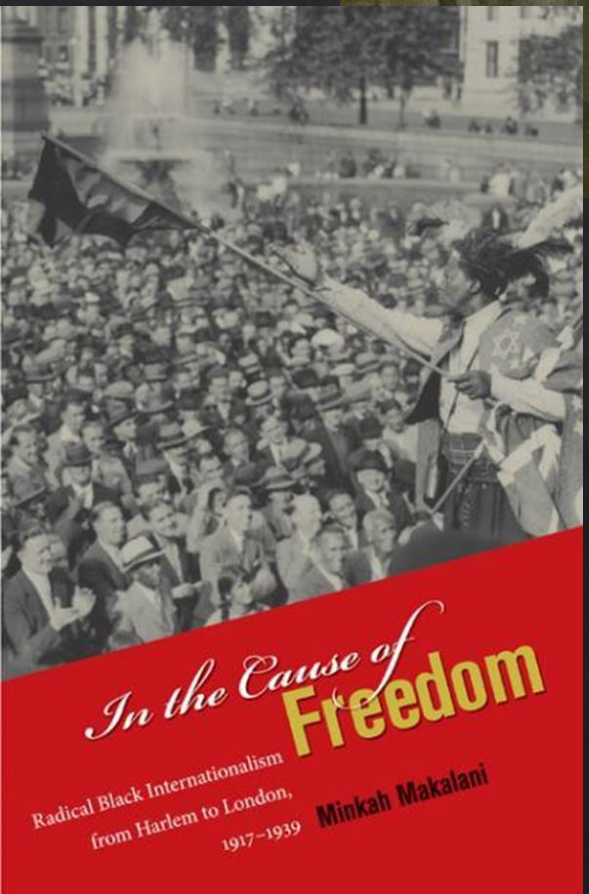
'Man in
exotic dress,'
'Preaching at
a race
meeting'
(Liverpool
City Mission)



'Boys from
the Liverpool
Wesleyan
Mission Boys
Home'



'Man in
exotic dress'



John Ojijatekha
Brant-Sero
(British Museum
collection)

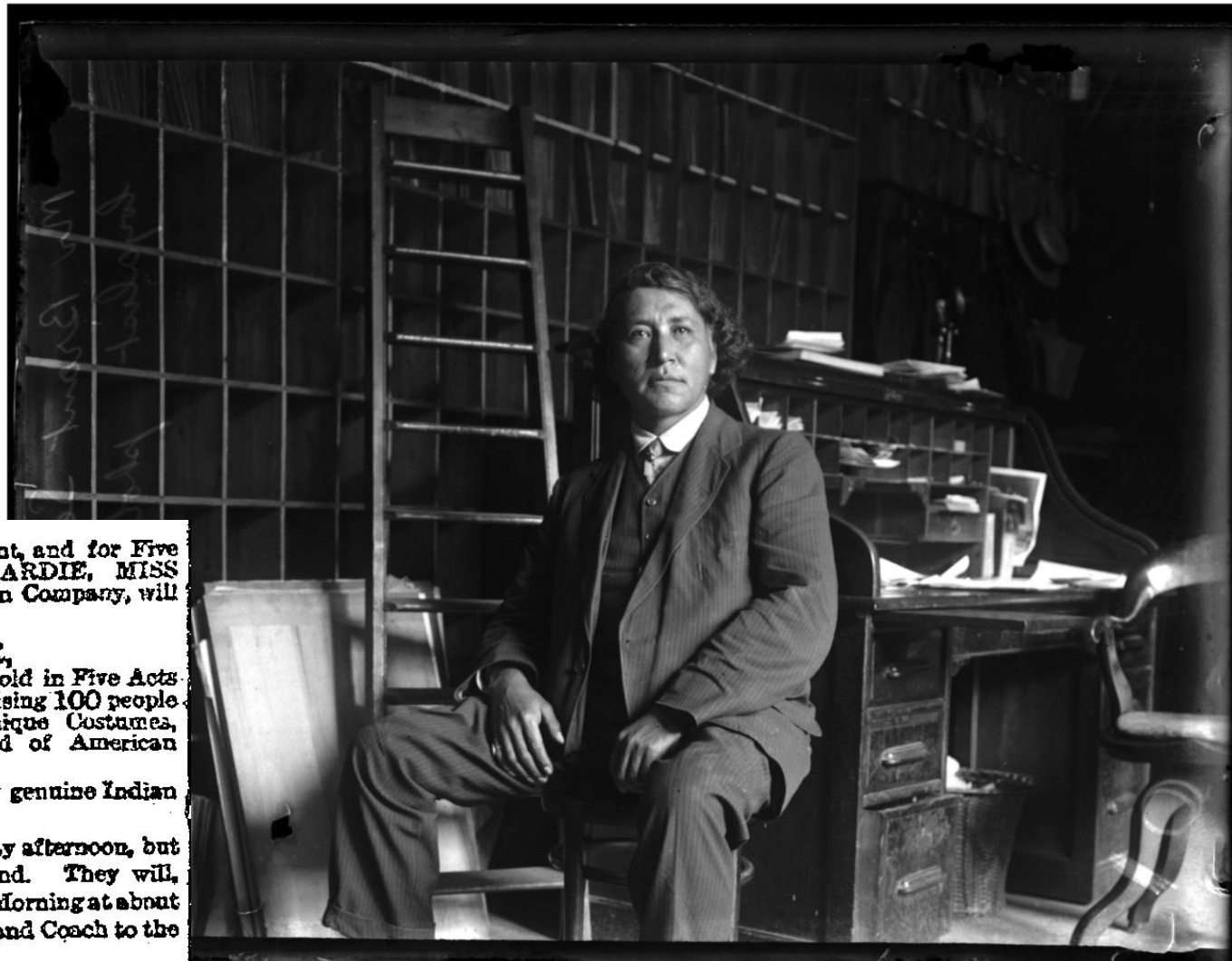


FREE LECTURES.

DELIVERED IN THE PICTON LECTURE HALL, JANUARY TO MARCH, 1902.

BRANT-SERO, JOHN OJIJATEKHA, Canadian Mohawk Indian. "Canada and the Indians," with musical and lantern illustrations.

50th Annual Report of the Committee of the Free Public Library, Museum and Walker Art Gallery the City of Liverpool (C Tinling & Co: Liverpool, 1903), p. 13



Commencing Easter Monday, 30th instant, and for Five Nights thereafter, MR. JAMES M. HARDIE, MISS SARA B. VON LEER, and their American Company, will present the Military Melodrama.

ON THE FRONTIER,

A faithful picture of rugged Western Life, told in Five Acts of Comedy, Pathos, Songs and Dances, utilising 100 people in its production. Special Scenery, Unique Costumes, Cannon Drawn by Horses, and a Band of American Indians in the realistic GHOST DANCE.

Watch for the Noonday Parade of the only genuine Indian Brass Band in the World.

The Company arrived at the Bar yesterday afternoon, but owing to the severe gale were unable to land. They will, however, land at the Stage This (Thursday) Morning at about Ten o'clock, and be conveyed in a Four-in-hand Coach to the Shakespeare Theatre.

A Collection of Indian Trophies and Relics will be on view in the windows of O'Keefe's Furnishing Depot, London-road, belonging to Hardie and Von Leer.

Liverpool Mercury, March 26 1891, p. 1

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THE ATTACK ON CULTURE. The gutted City Museum, a victim of Nazi Vandalism.

THIS WAS ONCE THEIR HOME