



Seminar

MICHAEL SAPPOL

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*Anatomy's Photography:
Objectivity, Showmanship and the Reinvention
of the Anatomical Image, 1860 - 1950*

Tuesday, 7 March, 11:15 a.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala
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S W E D I S H
C O L L E G I U M
for ADVANCED STUDY

ABOUT MICHAEL SAPPOL

Michael Sappol was born in Queens, New York. A longtime resident of New York City and Washington, DC, he has recently relocated to Stockholm. For many years, he was a historian, exhibition curator and scholar-in-residence at the History of Medicine Division of the U.S. National Library of Medicine. He has also been a Fellow at the American Antiquarian Society, the Clark Art Institute, and the College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

Sappol's scholarly work focuses on the history of anatomy, death, and the visual culture and performance of medicine in film, illustration, and exhibition. He is the author of *A Traffic of Dead Bodies: Anatomy and Embodied Social Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (2002) and *Dream Anatomy* (2006), editor of *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Age of Empire* (2012) and *Hidden Treasure* (2012), and curator of the Medical Movies: Historical Films from the Collection of the U.S. National Library of Medicine website. His latest work, *Body Modern: Fritz Kahn, Scientific Illustration and the Homuncular Subject*, was published by the University of Minnesota Press in early 2017.

At SCAS, Sappol is working on a new project: 'Anatomy's Photography: Objectivity, Showmanship & the Reinvention of the Anatomical Image, 1850–1920'.

ABSTRACT

Anatomy was slow to embrace photography. After Nikolaus Rüdinger published his pioneering photographic study of the peripheral nerves in 1861, it took decades for anatomists to follow suit. Over the next century they took thousands of photographs — and took liberties. They cut, posed and lit their cadavers in peculiar ways to accommodate the camera — and then “improved” the images with ink, color, overlays and captions. The artist's pen and brush were as evident as the anatomist's saw and scalpel. The resultant illustrations were impressive, eccentric, provocative.

The photograph had rhetorical advantages, persuaded viewers that it fixed a view of how a specimen would appear without any mediation. That was useful in mounting a critique of anatomical illustration as overly aestheticized and old-fashioned, lacking in scientific objectivity. But the anatomical photograph was still subject to aesthetic impulses and the specificity of its details troubled many viewers. Photography never came to dominate anatomical representation.

This talk shows off the varieties of photographic anatomical experience with the aim of exploring the epistemological virtues, rhetorical power, technical difficulties, scientific agendas, aesthetics and ethics of photographic gross anatomy, as were then debated and as we debate them now. While scholars have long studied surgical photography, clinical photography, photomicrography, radiography, medical movies, racial anatomy, etc., the use of photography in gross anatomy has been neglected. The goal of this talk, and my larger project, is to begin to remedy that, to make the beautiful, grotesque, evocative images of anatomy's photography visible to scholars and the public — because they are part of our common history, as unique and valuable as any UNESCO heritage site.