

Photographs, Books, and Photographic Books

by CHARLES DESMARAIS, Director, California Museum of Photography

With the recent acquisition by the UCR Library of a major collection of nineteenth-century books on photography—some 767 volumes of great rarity and importance to the study of the medium's history—the University Library has become a major research center in the field. The new additions are from the personal collection of Odette M. Appel-Heyne, a photography historian now living in Germany, whose best-known work is *The Spirit of Fact: The Daguerreotypes of Southworth and Hawes, 1843-1862*, which she co-authored with Robert Sobieszek (Boston, David R. Godine, 1976).

The new special collection in photography—believed to be the largest such library to enter a public collection in more than a decade—supplements and deepens already extensive University

No single, modern invention has had a more pervasive influence on our culture than has photography. In every sphere of our lives, the photograph's value as a carrier of information, and photography's central function as a technological tool, are apparent.

This is no more evident than in the parallel and interdependent careers of the photograph and the book. The relationship between these two triumphs of civilization has existed since at least 1826. That year, Nicephore Niepce achieved his first major success in experiments directed toward a cheap, easy, and accurate lithographic process. In the bargain, he came up with photography.

Since that time, the technological development of printing and book production has advanced as photographic technology has moved forward. Today, virtually all books are printed by the process of photolithography, and most typesetting has its basis, too, in a photographic process. Yet far more radical—if more subtle—relationships have also been created in 150 years of shared history.

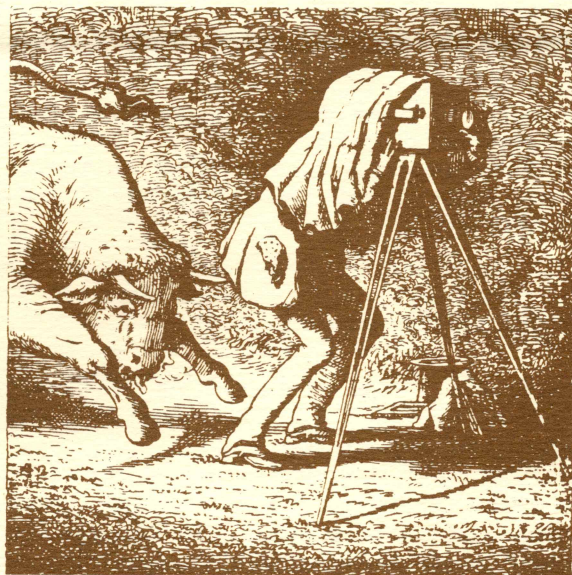
At first, photographs in books were either actual, "tipped-in" photographic prints, or hand-wrought translations in etching, engraving, or lithography. The nineteenth-century search for a type-compatible reproduction process for photographs—a process which would economically allow both photographs and text to be printed simultaneously on the same page, from the same plate—ended in the 1880s with the introduction of the process halftone engraving (the "halftone").

With that innovation came the first universally accessible distribution system for images. Pictures were no longer the scarce product of artists or highly trained artisans. Now these printed images—*photographic* images, with their dependable relationship to objects and events in the day-to-day world—could be quickly and cheaply shared with (or imposed upon) all strata of society.

The full implication of all this was not immediately recognized. Certainly, the widespread introduction of photographs into books, and the birth of the illustrated photographic "view book," was immediate. Such photo-

Library holdings. The UCR Library already possessed a substantial number of reprint and microform editions of primary materials from the last century, along with major twentieth-century books (especially as they relate to the original materials at the California Museum of Photography), and actively maintained collections of current publications.

Because UCR holdings complement, and are complemented by, the famous Albert C. Boni Collection at UCLA (which, though less aggressive in its current growth than the UCR collection, includes some of the rarest incunabula of photographic books), the University of California's collections in photography and its history are now unmatched in the western United States.



Frontispiece to *Bede's Photographic Pleasures*

graphically illustrated books are by far the most common examples of the integration of these two forms. But the effect of combining two such powerful instruments of communication was far greater than a mere summing of parts.

From the earliest announcements of the process, *books about photography*—its technical workings and its history—have also abounded. The newly formed special collection in photography at the University Library is particularly rich in this area. It includes, for example, a copy of one of the earliest editions of the first manual of photography. Of great interest, too, are the numerous bound volumes of popular periodicals containing early references to, and announcements of, the daguerreotype process.

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But in almost a hundred years of photography—and fifty years of type-compatible photographic reproduction—true *photographic books* which were more than mere albums or photographically decorated texts were practically non-existent.

The photograph and the book each have a unique syntax. Considered independently of content, each is a structure for communication with its own semiotic rules: each is a “language” of a sort.

By virtue of its historical development, the photograph has become a trusted metaphor for reality and truth. Over the last fifty years we have come to view photography as a system of notation and observation—a reporter’s notebook, occupying a place somewhere on the continuum between information and interpretation, but always related to real events. If a photograph can be manipulated, the manipulation is, nonetheless, of something which is (or was) real.

The book is sequential, progressive, linear. It is permanently arranged. As the photograph has become a symbol of the real and true, the book has been made our emblem of the logical.

When photographs began to be used in books, a new form was engendered (though it was not recognized as

such until much later). Characterized by portability and multiplicity—essential qualities of both forms as they had come to be developed—the photographic book required no particular “exhibit” environment. Nor did it even necessarily require an understanding of verbal language; words, when used, tended to extend rather than limit meaning.

Late in the 1920s and throughout the 1930s, the photographic book saw its first real flowering. These books were related to experiments in film being carried on at about the same time—experiments both with technical/formal aspects of the medium, such as montage, and with the structure of the film narrative. Similar attempts to define essential characteristics in *all* media were the mark of the Modernist enterprise, and the development of the photographic book was a part of that overall effort. Whether self-consciously “experimental,” or simply conscious of the extraordinary power of the form, photographic books of the period are still among the most original and exciting.

The recent history of the photographic book is often marked by self-reflection, autobiographical narrative, brash appropriation, and even cynicism. The form continues, in other words, to be very much a part of its time.

Some Major Books in the University Library Collection

Photographically Illustrated Books

Cartier-Bresson, Henri. *The Decisive Moment*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1952. A “photographically illustrated book” in that it is basically a collection of disparate photographs, this book nonetheless had enormous impact on the way photographers worked, and their pictures looked, for at least a decade. Its secondary, “ripple” effect is still being felt.

Graff, Werner. *Es kommt der neue Fotograf!* Berlin, Verlag Hermann Reckendorf, 1929.

Lange, Dorothea and Paul Schuster Taylor. *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion*. New York, Reynal & Hitchcock, 1939.

Newhall, Nancy and Ansel Adams. *This Is the American Earth*. San Francisco, The Sierra Club, [1960]. First and most important example of the Sierra Club book series, which helped stir the new environmental awareness of the past twenty years.

Riis, Jacob. *How the Other Half Lives; Studies among the Tenelements of New York*. New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1890. Riis is often thought of as the father of photojournalism. *How the Other Half Lives* was his most influential book.

Smith, Michael A. *Landscapes, 1975-1979: Photographs*. Revere, PA, Lodima Press, 1981. A recent example of lush, extravagant book making in photography.

Books about Photography

Adams, Ansel E. *Making a Photograph: An Introduction to Photography*. London, The Studio Limited; New York, The Studio Publications, 1935.

The Art Union: Monthly Journal of the Fine Arts and the Arts, Decorative and Ornamental. London. Vol. 8, 1846. Contains two important articles, including “The Talbotype—Sun Pictures,” giving details of the first negative/positive photographic process (invented by William Henry Fox Talbot) and illustrated with a fine example of a Fox Talbot Talbotype (calotype), the facade of a building.

Bede, Cuthbert [Edward Bradley]. *Photographic Pleasures Popularly Portrayed with Pen and Pencil*. London, T. McLean, 1855 (the plates). London, John Camden Hotten, 1859 (the text). First edition (?), containing 70 cartoons relating to photography. Many of Bede’s insights into the nature of photography still hold true today.

Brewster, David. *The Stereoscope, its History, Theory and Construction*... London, John Murray, 1865. First edition of a major work, which led to the stereographic industry of the nineteenth century. Particularly relevant to the California Museum of Photography’s famous Keystone-Mast Collection.

Daguerre, L. J. M. *Historique at Description des procédés du Daguerreotype et du Diorama*... Paris, Lerebours & Susse Frères, 1839. The daguerreotype was the first commercially viable photographic process. Though not the first issue of the first edition (which was published by Susse Frères alone), this is a very early example of the inventor’s own manual for the process. It was published in the first year of photography’s practical history.

Emerson, Peter Henry. *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art*. London, Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1889. A presentation copy from the author (with Emerson’s inscription in ink on the title page) of one of the most influential books in the art history of the medium.

Lietze, Ernst. *Modern Heliographic Processes: A Manual of Instruction in the Art of Reproducing Drawings, Engravings, Manuscripts, etc.* New York, D. Van Nostrand Company, 1888. Particularly interesting as it contains 12 tipped-in original specimens of early processes, including a direct cyanotype, 2 uranium prints, a red prussiate of potash print, etc.; also 32 woodcut illustrations in the text.

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Photographic Books

Niepce de Saint-Victor, C.F. Abel. *Recherches Photographiques. Photographie sur Verre. Héliochromie. etc.* Paris, Alexis Gaudin et Frère, 1855. The first book to deal with color photography, as it covers Niepce de Saint-Victor's early experiments in that area.

Robinson, Henry Peach. *Pictorial Effect in Photography...* London, Piper and Carter/Marion & Co., 1869. This first edition is the most important of Robinson's numerous publications; among the three original prints tipped-in is one of Robinson's famous composite prints.

Szarkowski, John. *The Photographer's Eye.* New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1966. Perhaps the most clearly articulated theory of photography.

Becher, Bernhard and Hilla. *Anonyme Skulpturen: A Typology of Technical Constructions.* New York, Wittenborn and Co., 1970.

Blossfeldt, Karl. *Urformen der Kunst.* Berlin, Verlag Ernst Wasmuth, 1928.

Brassai. *Paris de Nuit.* Paris, Arts et Métiers, 1933.

Clark, Larry. *Tulsa.* New York, Lustrum Press, 1971.

Evans, Walker. *American Photographs.* New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1938. Along with Frank's *The Americans* and Friedlander's *American Monument*, one of the three essential photographic books relating to our contemporary culture.

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Frank, Robert. *The Americans*. New York, Grove Press, 1959; rev. ed. Grossman Publishers, 1969. (Originally published as *Les Américains*. Paris, Delpire, 1958.)

Friedlander, Lee. *The American Monument*. New York, Eakins Press Foundation, 1976.

Klein, William. *Life is Good and Good for You in New York*. London, Photography Magazine, 1956. In design, photographic form, and content a shocking book, even after almost thirty years.

Lyons, Nathan. *Notations in Passing*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1974.

Mendelsohn, Erich. *Amerika: Bilderbuch eines Architekten*. Berlin, Rudolf Mosse Buchverlag, 1926. Beaumont Newhall reports that Alexander Rodchenko reviewed this book, saying "It's a book that's so hard to understand, sometimes you must put it over your head to be able to see the pictures." A very significant book, not only for the "abstract" photographs which so impressed Rodchenko, but also for the sophisticated sequencing.

Owens, Bill. *Suburbia*. San Francisco, Straight Arrow Books, 1973.

Renger-Patzsch, Albert. *Die Welt Ist Schön*. Munich: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1928. The California Museum of Photography holds the most important Renger-Patzsch collection in the U.S. This book showed the value of clear observation of simple form.

Ruscha, Edward. *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles*. Privately published, 1967. The photographs are by Art Alanis.

Snow, Michael. *Cover to Cover*. Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, [1975].

Strand, Paul. *Time in New England*. Text selected and edited by Nancy Newhall. New York, Oxford University Press, 1950. 2nd ed. Millerton, NY, Aperture, [1980]. A true collaboration between photographer and editor, as is made clear in Beaumont Newhall's informative Afterword to the second edition (pp. 253-254). The Aperture edition was completely re-designed, "to present a clearer and more vibrant interplay of word and image," but even the dated layout of the 1950 edition makes clear the book's radical innovation.