

T H E

FROM TALBOT TO RUSCHA

PHOTO



AND BEYOND

B O O K

EDITED BY PATRIZIA DI BELLO,
COLETTE WILSON & SHAMOON ZAMIR

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EDITED BY **PATRIZIA DI BELLO, COLETTE WILSON AND SHAMOON ZAMIR**

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Chapter 3

All figures: Edward S. Curtis *The North American Indian*, 20 vols and 20 loose-leaf portfolios (Cambridge, MA: The University Press [Vols 1–5] and Norwood, MA: The Plimpton Press [Vols 6–20], 1907–30), courtesy of the Guildhall Library, City of London. Photographs by Shamooin Zamir.

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Figures 2a, 4 and 5: Emil Otto Hoppé, from *Romantic America* (New York: B. Westermann, 1927).

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Chapter 5

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Figures 2, 3 and 4: Walker Evans, 'Homes of Americans', *Fortune* (May 1946). Photograph by Polly Braden.

Figure 5: Walker Evans, 'Labor Anonymous', *Fortune* (November 1946). Photograph by Polly Braden.

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Figure 1b: Ed Ruscha, 'Mobil, Williams, Arizona' and 'Standard, Williams, Arizona', from *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (Alhambra, CA: The Cunningham Press, 1962), © Ed Ruscha, courtesy the artist and Gagosian Gallery.

Figure 2a: Ed Ruscha, 'Hands Flipping Pages', 1963, © Ed Ruscha, courtesy the artist and Gagosian Gallery.

Figure 2b: Ed Ruscha, 'Standard, Amarillo, Texas', from *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, 1962, © Ed Ruscha, courtesy the artist and Gagosian Gallery.

Figure 3a: Ed Ruscha, *Standard Station, Amarillo, Texas*, 1963, © Ed Ruscha, courtesy the artist and Gagosian Gallery.

Figure 3b: Seven copies of *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* in the exhibition *In Visible Light*, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, 1997. Photograph by Ian Walker.

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Figure 4b: Title page of the copy of *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* in the collection of the Library of the University of Wales, Newport. Photograph by Ian Walker.

Chapter 9

All figures: Search 88, *One Day for Life: Photographs by the People of Britain, Taken on a Single Day* (London: Bantam Press, 1987), © Search 88 Cancer Trust. Photographs by Polly Braden.

Chapter 10

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Figure 3: Original dust jacket of Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfiabel* (Berlin: Eulenspiegel Verlag, 1955), courtesy Das Neue Verlag GmbH, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv, BBA B9.

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Chapter 11

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All figures: Eduardo Gageiro, *Lisboa no Cais da Memória 1957–1974* (Lisbon, 2003), courtesy Eduardo Gageiro. Photographs by Polly Braden.

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INTRODUCTION

Patrizia Di Bello and Shamoon Zamir

Ever since the publication of Henry Fox Talbot's *Pencil of Nature* (1844–46) as a series of six fascicles, the home of the photograph has been the book as much as the gallery wall. It could even be argued that the book is the first and proper home of the photographic image from which it moved out to take up residence in the fine art gallery and the modern museum in the early twentieth century – just as the proper home of vernacular or private photography is the album or scrapbook. Despite this fact, histories of photography have not generally accorded the photobook a place of central importance, if they have paid it any attention at all; accounts have been organized more often around trajectories of technological developments, national histories, genres, iconic images, or the landmark bodies of work by individual photographers as auteurs.¹ Recent years, however, have witnessed a growing interest in the photobook, and this interest among both scholars and collectors is widespread enough to justify speaking of an emergent intellectual and cultural moment which is moving us to new levels of integrated understanding beyond the more scattered studies which have come before.

The ensemble of essays gathered here presents close readings of individual photobooks, from the early days of photography to the present, as well as some analysis of examples at the 'prismatic fringes' of the genre – magazines, catalogues, biographies.² Despite its wide temporal and formal scope, however, and despite its chronological organization, the collection does not attempt a history or a theorizing of genre. Motivated by the emergent scholarly interest in the photobook and in image and text interactions, the contributors are primarily preoccupied with developing ways of reading the photograph in the book. Understanding how meanings are shaped by an image's interactions with another, or its place in a group or sequence, or through its dialectical coexistence with text is the foundation upon which histories as well as aesthetic and cultural conceptualizations of genre must be built up if they are to prove durable, even in their inevitable partiality.

As Sergei Eisenstein noted in his seminal 1939 essay on the principle of montage in film, literature and art, the juxtaposition of two separate elements ‘resembles a creation – rather than a sum of its parts – from the circumstance that in every such juxtaposition the result is qualitatively distinguishable from each component element reviewed separately’. Juxtaposition engenders ‘a “third something”’ which is ‘not fixed or ready-made, but arises – is born’ because it demands that ‘the emotions and mind of the spectator’ or reader not remain passive but become actively engaged in the creative process. Most importantly perhaps, Eisenstein’s exploration of combinatory forms in a variety of arts leads him to an expanded understanding of the meaning of ‘image’ in art. For Eisenstein, montage exists not ‘as something unrelated, but as a given particular representation of the general theme that in equal measure penetrates all the shot pieces’. The discussion here bears on film but applies equally to painting or literature. For Eisenstein:

The juxtaposition of these partial details in a given montage construction calls to life and forces into the light that general quality in which each detail has participated and which binds together all the details into a whole, namely, into the generalized image, wherein the creator, followed by the spectator, experiences the theme.

It is the combination of individual images, visual only or visual and verbal, that constitutes the proper work of art, the creation of a larger and more complete ‘image’, or what Eisenstein calls an ‘image of the theme itself’.³

If there is one thing which unites the essays in this volume, it is the exploration of the experience of the combinatory effect or aspect which Eisenstein refers to as a ‘third something’. Not all the contributions are focused on art in Eisenstein’s sense of the term; some examine works which occupy the boundary between art and social science, or between art and social documentary, and others deal with popular or ‘coffee-table’ work in which the combinatory form may foster a cultural or ideological conservatism. But in every photobook examined, the photograph is the primary vehicle of expression and communication, or it stands in equal, if sometimes conflicted, partnership with the written word. We take much of our intellectual and methodological impetus from Carol Armstrong’s proposal that ‘the irreducibility of the particular example’ requires us to construct and refine practices of reading ‘more than the articulation of a structure of knowledge’.⁴

Armstrong’s analysis of the nineteenth-century British photobook has, perhaps more than any other scholarly work before it, provided an exemplary demonstration through detailed case studies of the importance of

the photobook to histories of photography. *The Open Book: A History of the Photographic Book from 1878 to the Present*, an exhibition at the International Center of Photography in New York (June–September 2005),⁵ picked up where Armstrong’s study left off. While the exhibition recognized the role of the book within the histories of photography and exemplified the increasingly common practice in museums and galleries of displaying photobooks as part of photographic exhibitions (the Canon gallery at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London does so regularly), it also paradoxically brought into focus the potentially unbridgeable division between the gallery and the book, since the display of book covers or a single open page behind glass only made evident the impossibility of engaging with the haptic and visual experience of the book as material object. The only work in English to attempt a broad overview across time and national spaces is Martin Parr and Gerry Badger’s two-volume *The Photobook: A History* (2004 and 2006). No work on the subject could hope to be fully inclusive, and there are obvious omissions and some contentious emphases in Parr and Badger’s account; but it remains the most comprehensive survey of the field available. As Parr acknowledges, even at the start of the twenty-first century ‘there is no scholarly consensus as to exactly what books are out there, and no comprehensive listing of the world’s most important photographic books’. As a consequence, ‘in terms of researching the history of photography, the photobook is the final frontier of the undiscovered’.⁶

If this claim is largely uncontentious, the attempt to define what exactly a photobook is brings us into more difficult and resistant critical terrain. Parr and Badger propose two key criteria as a means of imposing some degree of order on the overwhelming scale and diversity of the materials potentially available for inclusion in a history such as theirs and of making the delimited material manageable for critical investigation. They argue that for a book containing photographs to be considered as a photobook, it must present something more than a mere collection of images; it must demonstrate intention and coherence in design, whether this refers to the agency of the photographer-auteur, of an editor, or possibly even of an editorial team. The photobook has a ‘particular subject – a specific theme’ and what matters most is how the images work together: ‘the sum, by definition, is greater than the part’.⁷

Almost all of the contributions in the present volume accept a relatively high level of intention or coherence in design in more or less these terms in their readings of individual works. More problematic is Parr and Badger’s definition of the photobook as ‘a book – with or without text – where the work’s primary message is carried by photographs’.⁸ Such an attempt to grant

primacy to the image, and to relegate the text to a supportive or enhancing role, quickly unravels in the face of too many of the examples which Parr and Badger themselves include in their history. Do the 31 photographs by Walker Evans in the original edition of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941) really carry the 'work's primary message' more than the hundreds of pages of brilliant and infuriating text by James Agee? Can we really speak of the 20 volumes and 20 portfolios of Edward S. Curtis's *The North American Indian* (1907–30) as a photobook as Parr and Badger mean it without also acknowledging that it is also probably the largest ethnography ever assembled? And even if we accept that today Dorothea Lange's images are better known than the sociological text which Paul Taylor wrote for their collaboration on *American Exodus* (1939), it would be a mistake to ignore the fact that Lange and Taylor saw the meanings of the work resting squarely and equally 'upon a tripod of photographs, captions, and text'.⁹ Evans and Agee, and Curtis equally did not prioritize the image over the text when speaking of their own work. Photographs and text always interact, even if the text is mostly elsewhere, as in Talbot's *Sun Pictures in Scotland*, or the photographs have been lost, as in Alexander Honory's *The Lost Pictures*, 'the ultimate photobook' at the end of Parr and Badger's survey.¹⁰ In the photobook, then, photographs certainly move beyond the role of illustrations or transmitters of evidence to claim an active role in generating an independent meaning grounded in the unique ontology of their visual form. But at the same time, they do not transcend the texts that accompany them; rather, image and text work within a dialectical relationship.

Most of the contributions to the present volume treat the relationship of image and text as an important concern and this reflects the growing critical interest in image-text interactions which has developed roughly alongside the interest in the forms and history of the photobook.¹¹ But what unites all the contributions here is that each of them examines works in which the photograph is integral and essential, and not merely supplemental, to the work's meanings. Chapters on publications at the fringes of the photobook, such as Walker Evans's pages for *Fortune* magazine, and Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul: Memories of a City*, a lengthy autobiographical text which incorporates a number of small, poor-quality black and white photographs from a variety of sources, bring into focus the way in which attempts to delimit definitions too narrowly may foreclose the possibilities of a new history before it has been written. The fact that a work such as *The North American Indian* is today valued above all for its photogravures than for its ethnographic text may tell us more about the ways in which photographic history and the interests of collectors and dealers have evolved over the

years than about the work itself or the historical and cultural specificity of its meanings. If we come to the photobook only or largely through models of visual analysis derived from earlier forms of photographic history or criticism, or through museum practices and art world economics, then it may be that we will close down the new perspectives and insights which a history of photography seen through the lens of the photobook promises before these have been properly opened up.

Photobooks which combine images and texts tend also to be products of collaborative authorship. Several books considered in this volume are the result of a partnership, which is not to say a relationship of exact equality, between a photographer and a writer. This is so in Carlos Freire's *Alexandrie l'Égyptienne* with accompanying text by Robert Solé, and in *Ein Gespenst verlässt Europa (A Spectre is Leaving Europe)* by the writer Heiner Müller and the photographer Sibylle Bergemann. In Curtis's *The North American Indian* the text was the creation of a team of ethnographers, informants and editors, including the photographer himself. With E.O. Hoppé we have a photographer turned sole author – though as Mick Gidley shows here, the photographer was only one factor in the making of the photobooks he authored. Indeed, an analysis of Hoppé's autobiography shows that 'Hoppé' was a narrative construction as much as an individual, and his photobooks must be seen as codifications, however partial, of specific cultural moments as much as works by him. In other books, such as Bertolt Brecht's *War Primer* or Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul*, the work of the writer is primary: the photographs have been appropriated or borrowed but used against or independently of the intentions of the photographer or photographers who made them. Talbot's *Sun Pictures in Scotland*, our point of departure, offers perhaps the most elusive example of the collaboration between photographer and writer, and between image and text. As Talbot himself explains, all his images are 'scenes connected with the life and writings of Sir Walter Scott'.¹² The relevant texts from the works of Scott do not accompany the images but the assumption of a familiarity on the part of the intended nineteenth-century viewer makes them everywhere present in Talbot's anthology. Scott's embedded presence not only inspires but in a sense legitimates and co-authors *Sun Pictures*.

Co-authorship, however, does not pertain only to the combining of image and text. *The Sculptures of Picasso* is Brassai's creation but it exists only to record the 'authorship' of another artist working in a different medium. We can thus come to Brassai's book because we are engaged by his work as a photographer or because we want a record of Picasso's creativity. Authorship can be more diffuse still in other types of photobooks. *One Day for Life* is

a collection of photographs created and submitted by the 'general public' as a form of collective self-representation but the final shape of the book results from decisions made by an editorial team. Walker Evans's magazine work also involves the editorial recycling of vernacular photography. And in exhibition catalogues and gallery publications the process of editorial selection is very often supplemented by co-authored essays and descriptive entries for individual images.

While the movement from Talbot to Ed Ruscha and beyond could be read as signalling an alternative historical project stretching from the Victorian era to the present, this is not our intended scope and ambition. The concern of our collection is more properly with the contrasts, commonalities and dialogues between a variety of practices, forms and thematics which have shaped this trajectory. In this respect, Talbot's *Sun Pictures in Scotland* (1845) and Ruscha's *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1962), read in juxtaposition to each other and through the commentaries of Graham Smith and Ian Walker, do not so much suggest a historical narrative as a set of preoccupations and strategies which have been worked through and explored diversely within this history, and which in turn provide the organizing matrix which underpins the conversations between the essays collected here.

The two works by Talbot and Ruscha would appear at first to have little in common. Talbot's is an exemplary embodiment of a Victorian aestheticism, expensively produced and inviting both haptic and visual indulgence; Ruscha's now landmark photographic contribution to late twentieth-century conceptual art is a small and cheaply produced paperback which blurs the boundary between high art and vernacular forms, and seems to celebrate its own physical fragility and therefore potential disposability. Talbot's images find their inspiration in the life and literary works of Walter Scott, while Ruscha's images of near-identical gasoline stations strung out along the much-mythologized Route 66 are largely unencumbered by textual frames and seem determined in their serial banality to undermine the activity of aesthetic contemplation. However, these differences are best grasped not as polar oppositions which can only be resolved by being separated out along a developmental or progressively organized art historical narrative, but as the terms of a single dialectic which has, in varying forms, determined the shape and direction of this narrative at various moments.

If the differences between *Sun Pictures* and *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* come as no real surprise, what is more striking perhaps are the shared preoccupations and continuities which connect the two works. Both are concerned with the relations between place, history and nationhood. Both explore, whether romantically or ironically, places which have become

weighted with cultural memory and myth – what Pierre Nora has termed ‘lieux de mémoire’ (sites of memory).¹³ In this sense, both carry a sense of something that is passing, even if the sense of melancholy is more ambiguously given in Ruscha. Both are also books of travel, the photobook not merely as a record but also in some way an enactment of journeying, and kinds of autobiography or memoir by indirection. These similarities and continuities, as much as the differences between the two works, help us bring into focus the cultural work undertaken by photobooks from the nineteenth century to the present day.

The subject matter of the photobooks considered and the avenues of investigation pursued in this collection are diverse. There is, then, no single theme – no one ‘image of the theme itself’ in Eisenstein’s words – which governs all the essays. That said, a concern with the relationship of place and memory, and with the photobook as a vehicle for memorializing this relationship is a preoccupation which unites almost all the contributions. In addition to Talbot and Ruscha, this preoccupation is evident in the representations of the city in Colette Wilson’s chapter on *Alexandrie l’Égyptienne* (1998), Paul Castro’s on *Lisboa no Cais da Memória* (2003) and Gabriel Koureas’s on *Istanbul: Memories of a City* (2005). It is there equally, if sometimes indirectly, in the considerations of the collective and individual representations of nation and national history (Anabella Pollen, David Company and David Evans), of national landscape (Liz Wells), of the photographer as international citizen and traveller (Mick Gidley), and of the culturally dispossessed (Shamoon Zamir).

If the essays in this volume share certain cultural concerns, they tend to investigate them by grappling, in one way or another, with the problems of form: for example, the relationship of image and text; the quality of image reproduction; the dialogue between traditional art forms and photography; the appropriation and redeployment of existing imagery; the movement through the photobook as a translation of the experience of the street. Ethical, political and cultural concerns are by no means of secondary concern here but these are approached firstly through an analysis of aesthetic practice rather than through a methodology which privileges the social construction of visual meaning over the aesthetic. Such an approach requires at least some knowledge of the relationship of the forms of the photobook to the general history of the printing and reproduction of photographs in books or magazines.

The ‘plates’ in Fox Talbot’s *Sun Pictures* were produced with the first negative-positive photographic system, which allowed the photographer to produce from each negative a potentially infinite number of prints on-paper

that could be bound or hand-tipped in the pages of books and albums. As Armstrong argues, Talbot's photography was developed for the book, and books are intrinsic to the medium of photography. The new medium of photography was, then, always intended to become the content of an older one, the book.

The textual minimalism of *Sun Pictures* might now seem a pioneering example of the use of photographs to construct rather than illustrate a narrative. However, this image-led mode of book production was not a novelty introduced by photography. Many illustrated books and publications in the early nineteenth century began as collections of images rather than as texts in search of illustrations. These images were produced by engravers, who enjoyed a higher cultural and financial status than the 'letterpress' printers who produced text using moveable type. It was only towards the end of the process of making the plates that poems or other short texts were sourced or commissioned, often at short notice and paid by the line, to 'illustrate' the images.¹⁴ What photography introduced was the possibility of bypassing the work of skilled artists, draughtsmen and engravers, enabling one process to produce and reproduce images ready for binding between pages of text.

It was only later in the nineteenth century, with the development of wood-engravings that could be printed at the same time and on the same page as text, that the relationship between image and text reversed into the one we assume today when we speak of 'illustration': optional images commissioned to embellish and somehow 'match' a pre-existing text, to which they have a conceptually subservient relation. But this privileging of text over image, of the image being required to match a text identified as the primary moment of ideation and creativity, was not always followed. Images remained primary in commercially produced albums and 'gift', 'picture' or 'drawing-room' books, precursors of today's coffee-table books. Hand-tipped plates – engravings, lithographs or photographs – continued to be used as a sign of high production values and cultural prestige in more expensive publications. Photographs added market value as a 'novelty', but also acquired a new authority as images invested with a documentary or evidentiary power by their indexicality,¹⁵ especially in books with a claim to scientific or experiential veracity such as the international geographical series *Orbis Terrarum*, discussed in Gidley's chapter on Hoppé. The development of the half-tone system at the end of the century finally permitted photographs to be reproduced photomechanically (in continuous tone and without being manually turned into an engraving) at the same time and on the same page as text, via the same printing method. This fostered a closer relationship between photographs and texts, as they now interacted on the same footing and could nestle together on the same page,

rather than being separated by the gulf, cultural as well as technical, of plate and letterpress. It also made it easier to have more than one image printed on the same page, for the verso and the recto of two pages to be combined into a 'double-page spread' of text and images, or for a photograph to 'bleed' across the gutter.

If the half-tone process helped to consolidate the conventions of mass-marketed illustrated books and magazines still familiar today, it also enabled more creative and exploratory work with the photographic image itself, as demonstrated by the experimentation of avant-garde artists in Europe and Russia in the 1920s and 1930s. Montage as a new organizing principle by which images could convey a narrative and carry meaning spread rapidly from the avant-garde to the wider field of 'modern' design and advertising, whether for commercial products or political propaganda.¹⁶

Photographs invaded the page not only of books, but also of magazines and newspapers, where some of the more interesting experimentation on the layout and sequencing of photographs took place, as discussed in David Company's chapter on Walker Evans. In his *War Primer*, by contrast, Brecht extracts press photographs from their original mass media contexts and combines them with short poetic texts into 'photoepigrams', thus subverting the meaning of the original photograph to produce his own critique of fascism and war, a practice of appropriation examined by David Evans.

Walter Benjamin argued that text can be mobilized to rescue photographs from 'modish commerce' and give them a revolutionary political role to play.¹⁷ If this describes Brecht's strategies, a similar impetus could arguably be said to have motivated conceptual artists such as Ruscha in their embrace of plain, factual photographs and inexpensively produced books as an alternative to an art system geared towards the production of fetishized, expensive, one-off objects traded like any other commodity. As Lucy Lippard notes, the fetishized art object 'dematerialized' into performance, happenings and conceptual events, only to rematerialize in the form of photographs,¹⁸ often disseminated through low-production-values photocopies and cheaply printed booklets.¹⁹ Ultimately, however, 'modish commerce' wins: *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* is now a highly collectable item, having gone through a complex material and conceptual journey here explored by Ian Walker.

Thanks to the developments in printing technology, almost all the photobooks examined in this collection are, or were at the time of their original publication, inexpensive items. Talbot, of course, worked before the cost of printing had been reduced by the half-tone process. Curtis, on the other hand, working during the first three decades of the twentieth century, specifically chose photogravure, the most expensive mode of photographic