Editorial Looking at 175 Years of Photohistory

"Since its invention, photography has been the world's ubiquitous picture-making system. [...] Nevertheless, the medium has received little serious study." It is the year 1973 and the person writing this is John Szarkowski (1925–2007), Curator of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York by profession and, therefore, living proof that photography had already become relevant for research. The book in which these sentences can be found is called



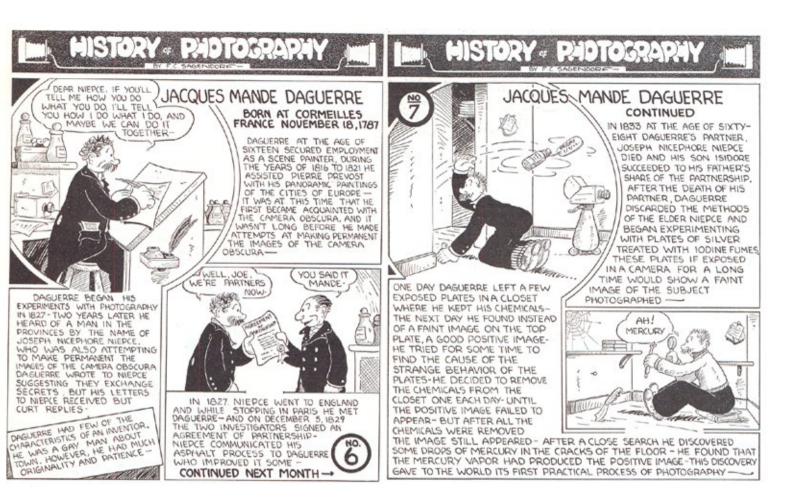
Figure 1 William Shew, Mother and Daughter, Daguerreotype, USA, 1845/1850, figure 1, reproduced in John Szarkowski, *Looking at Photographs*, New York 1973, 14-15.

Looking at Photographs. It contains one hundred photographs from the collection of MoMA that, as is well-known, was the first museum with its own photo department: it was set up in 1940. The spectrum of the photographs, which are shown more or less chronologically with an accompanying text on each double page, ranges from William Shew's daguerreotype of two women (fig. 1) to a landscape by Henry Wessel. Each picture stands alone on the right-hand page so that the reader's eye falls on it first of all when thumbing through the book. All of the information on the picture (photographer, biographical data, title, technique, format and provenance) is placed on the left together with an explanatory text by Szarkowski. The illustrations seem to be embedded in a white frame giving the viewer the impression of being in a museum. At the very beginning, Szarkowski explains that: "This is a picture book." Dealing with individual works and the personalities of individual photographers from this "ubiquitous picture-making system" resulted in a canon and made it easier for the field of art history and museums to deal efficiently with photographs. In keeping with this, Szarkowski organised considerable more solo shows than group exhibitions at MoMA - namely, 48 versus 30.

Looking at Photographs has "100 Pictures from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art" as its subtitle and can also be interpreted as an attempt at creating a canon. By the way, the opening exhibition of the Photo Department of MoMA functioned on the principle of a concentrated selection and, therefore, the formation of a canon – it was called "Sixty Photographs". Looking at Photographs is still considered a "standard work" of photographic literature today. This is not impaired by the book being particularly slanted towards photographers from the USA, with 73 being represented, and showing the work of relatively few women (twelve). It was republished as recently as in 2009.

The 1970s, the decade in which this book saw its first edition, must be regarded as a turning point in photo-historical research. Art historians started probing new subject areas and methods that would later be coined "New Art History" and "Visual Culture". "The new art

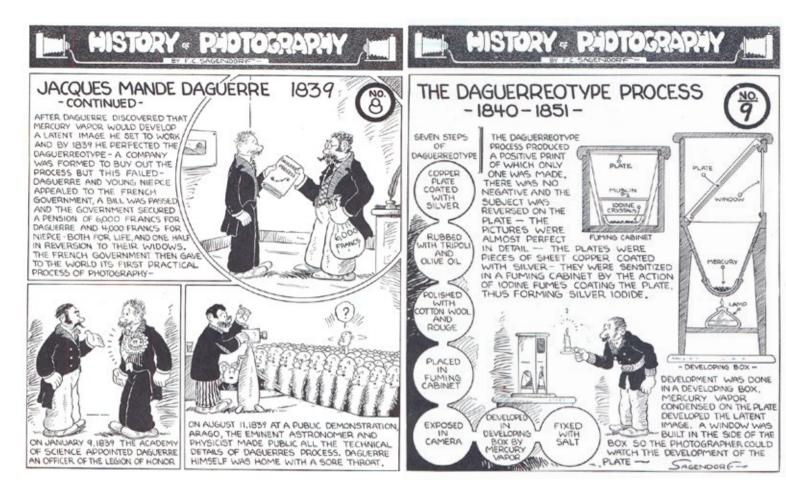
1. John Szarkowski, Looking at Photographs. 100 Pictures from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York: Museum of Modern Art 1973, 9.



Figures 2-5 Forrest Cowles Sagendorf, 'History of Photography', Panels 6 – 9, published in *Popular Photography*, vol. 2, Nr. 7–10, 1938.

historians (...) question the status of art, and the most automatic assumption that art means paintings and sculptures in certain styles. They ask how such objects and not others came to be called 'art' in the first place, and why they alone are worthy of study." Postcolonial studies, Marxist, feministic theories and other areas expanded the previous field of investigation. The *single* grand narrative of art history was replaced by micro-stories – and photography also received increased intention. That meant that research into its history became institutionalized within the frameworks of art and cultural history. Starting in 1977, the History of Photography journal provided a forum for the transmission of knowledge and 1978 was the year in which the European Society for the History of Photography (ESHPh) was founded. The first number of the German-language Fotogeschichte. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Ästhetik der Fotografie appeared in 1981; Gisèle Freund's thesis from 1936 - one of the first, if not the first, dissertations on photo history - was revised, translated and republished under the title of Photographie und bürgerliche Gesellschaft; Heinrich Schwarz planned a new edition of his monograph on D.O. Hill. The "serious study" John Szarkowski still felt to be lacking in 1973 was gathering momentum. And, when we now look at the increasing number of final papers devoted to photographic history in the art history faculties, we see that there is no slowdown in sight. It has become a fact that courses on the history and theory of photography are now included on the curriculum of art history studies at some universities. Photography has established itself as an autonomous medium in science, in the museum and also on the art market. We have no reason to complain. Or, do we?

2. A. L. Rees, Frances Borzello (eds.), $\it The New Art History, London: Camden Press 1986, 4.$



Publication of this number of the PhotoResearcher coincides with the celebration of 175 years of photography. That our title "Looking at 175 Years of Photohistory" pays reverence to Looking at Photography stems from what was quoted at the beginning of this editorial: similar to Szarkowski, we also feel that there is a shortcoming and we are taking a step to compensate for this. However, this supposed deficiency does not have so much to do with research into photographs themselves. That is still taking place; journals dealing with photographic history, grants to study the subject and photo exhibitions are no longer in any way uncommon. No, what one desires today is that more attention be paid to the texts that accompany photographs, the creation of their myths, methods and circulation. It is critical knowledge about photography that is on the agenda. Here, we ask questions about the texts, backgrounds and conditions that shape this knowledge. The meta-level of photographic history is our terrain in this number. Aspects that contribute to differentiating and complementing our image of photographic history are addressed. This is because, even though the 1970s have been described as pivotal years in research on photographic history, the history of the medium actually started to be written while it was still in its infancy. Precisely the inventors and those who made further technical developments took pains to write down their story. Henry Fox Talbot summed this up in 1840: "Now, since the History of Photography will probably be written some day or other, it is desirable that the different phaenomena discovered should be ascribed to their first observers, with as much attention to accuracy as possible." 3 Daguerre also wrote a – nota bene – "Historique (sic!) et description du procédé du

^{3.} Henry Fox Talbot, 'On the coloured rings produced by Iodine on Silver, with remarks on the History of Photography' in: *The London, Edinburgh, and Dublin Philosophical Magazine and Journal of Science*, vol. 22, 1843, 94–97. 94.

Daguerreotype et du Diorama."4 These and other authors who accompanied the development of photography from its early days by chronicling its history are to be thanked for having established models for describing the history of photography that remained valid until well into the 20th century and continued to influence research into photographic history after its rapids development in the 1970s - whether through a conscious dissociation or through unquestioned tradition.

Special anniversaries have always been taken as an opportunity for looking back over the past. Well-advertised descriptions of photographic history were published in many countries in 1939 to celebrate the centenary of the invention; for example, the works by Beaumont Newhall in the USA, Georges Potonniée in France, Lucia Moholy in Great Britain and Erich Stenger in Germany. In 1989 - 50 years after the first edition - Szarkowski still described Newhall's *Photography 1839–1937* as one of the "standard histories of photography". However, he criticised that it "treats the technical evolution of the medium and the creative achievements of its most talented practitioners as two basically separate issues, which touch and affect each other intermittently and provisionally." Just how right he was in this evaluation is shown in the comic series "The History of Photography" by F.C. Sagendorf, the artist who drew Popeye, that appeared in the Popular Photography magazine in 1938/1939 (figs. 2-5). Here, photo history was depicted as a series of inventions, discoveries and actions. Photographs played absolutely no role. While the inventors and developers of photographic technology were the main focus of attention in the first hundred years, the establishment of the first collections of photographic images led to material becoming accessible that offered new fields of research for historians of photography. Helmut Gernsheim collected and wrote about his collection. Newhall and Szarkowski had the photo collection of MoMA at their disposal. Newhall, therefore, supplemented his technological history with the observation of pictures although - in Szarkowski's opinion - he placed these two aspects of photo history as separate entities alongside each other. Finally, Szarkowski wanted to affirm the autonomy of photographic images on the basis of technique to present them as being equal to, but independent of, painting and graphic arts. Their unique characteristic was the way in which they were created, their realism. From that point of view, Szarkowski fulfilled the demands that Louis Figuier had formulated as early as in 1860: "A l'heure où la photographie est encore, on peut le dire, aux temps voisins de sa naissance, il faut qu'elle s'arrache aux sentiers battus du mercantilisme et du métier; il faut qu'elle s'élève dans une région plus haute, et que, sans prétendre à éclipser la gravure, elle arrive à constituer une formelle parallèle de cette manifestation de l'art."6 Seeing photography as parallel to graphic art is the keyword that had characterised the discourse from the late 19th century until just a few years ago. Quite a few museums established

^{4.} Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daquerre, Historique et description du procédé du 5. John Szarkowski: Photography Until Now, New York: Museum of Modern Art Daguerreotype et du Diorama, Lerebours (ed.), Paris: Susse frères 1839.

^{1989. 8.}

^{6.} Louis Figuier, La photographie au salon de 1859, Paris: Librairie de L. Hachette et Cie. 1860. 3-4.

galleries for graphic art and photography that, while guaranteeing the necessary 50 lux for works on paper, still cemented their special status.

It is symptomatic that Szarkowski even expressed an opinion on the methodology of his predecessor. Since the 150th anniversary of photography in 1989, it has been possible to notice how retrospection has been accompanied by a meta-view. The European Society for the History of Photography invited interested parties to the conference on "The Histories of Photography: Evaluating the first 150 years of the medium's historiography, anticipating the histories to come" in 1989. This self-reflection led to a change in the approach to photographs in museums as can also be shown by taking MoMA as an example: after John Szarkowski had handed over his duties to Peter Galassi in 1991, his successor showed photographs and photo-based works from the painting and sculpture departments, as well as MoMA's library, in his first exhibition More than One Photography (1992). Galassi contradicted the autonomy of artistic photography - as propagated by Szarkowski and which was held against him - through this demonstration of contemporary artists' open treatment of the media of painting, graphic arts and photography. There were works by Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman, John Baldessari, Christian Boltanski and Anselm Kiefer among the exhibits. Photography was now presented in the way it was used by both photographers and artists, radically questioning its special status and particular history. And then, in his lecture John Szarkowski at MoMA 1962-1991: A critical assessment, Quentin Barjac, Curator of Photography at MoMA since 2013, ascertained the current tendencies and missions in the following manner: "We are today addressing an audience which is more interested in and also much more knowledgeable about photography and its history than it was, forty, thirty or even twenty years ago. Thanks to John Szarkowski (...) I feel that today we do not need to do this (separation between the arts, M.H.) any more, that we can turn to different narratives and that we can try to tell the history of photography in a different way." Barjac at MoMA and the Städel Museum in Frankfurt am Main, to name just two current examples, champion the integrative historiography of photography: the matter at hand is no longer photography per se but pictures from all origins. "Today it's probably time I think to go on and to avoid what I would call a fossilisation of the history of photography as an art form. We must try to think a history of art that would at last totally encompass the photographic medium with all its disruptive nature." - Could that be where the coming paradigm for photographic historiography lies? Its prevalence speaks in favour of it. And, that is why it is absolutely essential to take a critical look at the approach to photographs to date in order to reconsider one's own methods and arrive at new judgements.

 $7. \ Can be heard at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SlvKGH1gFI.\\$



Figure 6 Gustave Le Gray, Harbour Pier and Lighthouse near Le Havre, 1856-1857. Museum Ludwig Cologne / Rheinisches Bildarchiv.



Figure 7 Charles Scolik, 'Mungo's Leisure Time', Supplement to *Photographische Rundschau* Nr. 7, 1887, n.p. Museum Ludwig Cologne / Rheinisches Bildarchiv.

A more recent example: Erich Stenger was one of the most important collectors of photographica in the German-speaking world at the time of the centennial of photography. Starting in 1906, the chemist from Berlin had assembled an extensive collection of historical photographs, specialised literature on photography and autographs with the aim of, one day, establishing a museum of technology. In a roundabout way, Stenger's collection came into the possession of the Ludwig Museum in Cologne - an art museum - in 1986. There are now several options for how to deal with the Stenger collection. Of course, it is possible to use the works to verify and deepen the knowledge of the history of technology. It is also possible to study the artistic history of photography. But - as in very few other collections - high and low lay



Figure 8 Unkown photographer, Aerial View Brenta Bridge near Susegana, World War I, 1918. Museum Ludwig Cologne / Rheinisches Bildarchiv.

very close to each other: Gustave Le Gray (fig. 6) alongside Charles Skolik's "Mungo's Idle Hours" (fig. 7), aerial photography from the First World War (fig. 8) alongside D.O. Hill. The "disruptive nature" of the "umbrella term" photography comes to full effect in this encyclopaedic collection - together with the other holdings of the Ludwig Museum, it formed a veritable treasure chest of photographic science. The great variety of material made additional photographic and artistic - or better, image-historical - research necessary. "We must try to think of a history of art that would at last totally encompass the photographic medium with all its disruptive nature" was Quentin Barjac's demand. It would be even more helpful to replace the term "art history" with "image science" to get to the heart of photography with all of its uses and modes of operation. And, if we want to achieve this, we must recognise the criteria that have so far been used in the field of photographic history and the shortcomings resulting from them. That is the challenge facing us today, and, what applies to exhibition practice applies equally to writing about photography as it is exercised in magazines such as the one in your hands now: we want to reconsider what has so far been seen as a matter of course, previous ways of dealing with the matter in question, and our view on 175 years of photography.

The essays in this number of the PhotoResearcher are devoted to photography and its historic narration from the beginning to the present day. In his introductory essay, **Wolfgang Kemp** writes about the house as a motif and the photo of it as a sign of possession in the early days of photography, explicitly in the work of Henry Fox Talbot. This subject seems to have become extremely topical once again when Martha Stuart's passion for drone photographs of her house is quoted on the arts pages (fig. 9). "Another thing Stewart is enamored of these days is her drone. 'It has a little camera. You connect it to your iPhone, and you can control it with your iPhone, and it flies all over my farm and takes pictures,' she said. 'It takes wonderful

^{8.} Jennifer Green-Lewis, 'The Invention of Photography in the Victorian World' in Anne M. Leyden (ed.), *A Royal Passion. Queen Victoria and Photography*, exhibition catalogue, Los Angeles 2014, 5.



Figure 9 Martha Stewart, Aerial View of her House, 2013/14. © Martha Stewart.

aerial photographs.'... Have the neighbors called the authorities, reporting a U.F.O.? 'No, I don't have any neighbors,' she said, laughing." **R. Derek Wood** investigates the reasons for Daguerre not sending a photo to Queen Victoria as he had done to so many other rulers in Europe. Especially when seen in the context of the exhibition on Queen Victoria, who was enthusiastic about photography and whose earliest known photograph is a daguerreotype, as recently shown in the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, *A Royal Passion: Queen Victoria and Photography* (February 4–June 8, 2014), Wood's investigation provides an illuminating commentary on the politicisation of photography in the early days.

Stephan Koja writes about early photography as the subject of an exhibition in the Belvedere in Vienna in 1928. The curator of the exhibition, Heinrich Schwarz, was one of the first art historians to devote himself to the history of photography. His intentions behind the exhibition, which were groundbreaking in photographic historiography, are revealed by Koja. Schwarz, who lived in the USA from 1940 after having to flee from Europe, also had a determinative influence on Szarkowski. At the same time, Koja presents an early text from the archives of the Austrian Gallery, Belvedere that has so far remained unpublished: the manuscript of a radio presentation given by Heinrich Schwarz on the occasion of the exhibition in 1928. In his essay, **Christoph Schaden** draws attention to a falsification and gap within the history of photography: the case of Levi L. Hill, which was also a trans-Atlantic affair. The American churchman and later photographer advertised the production of coloured daguerreotypes.

9. Martha Stewart, cited after Henry Alford, 'Martha Stewart Explains Her Drone', in: *The New Yorker*, July 23, 2014.

Blanquart-Evrard recalls: "Pendant que cette comédie [Levi L. Hill, M.H.] se jouait sur l'autre hemisphere, les journaux de New-York avaient éveillé notre attention, et tous, en Europe, nous pensions, sur des assurances aussi formelles, que le problem de l'obtention des couleurs naturelles était résolu." After the opinion that the problem had not been solved became widespread, Hill disappeared from the collective memory of the history of colour photography – especially in Europe and, as now become clear, that unjustly. **Rolf H. Krauss** investigates the fine line between retouching and the artistic treatment of photographs and shows how the specialised literature of the 19th century dealt with image manipulation or the removal of faults – depending on one's point of view – to demonstrate how the choice of words can be deceptive.

Lena Fritsch asks the author Naomi Rosenblum about the question of global photo history and the place of women in it. As the author of A World History of Photography (1984) and A History of Women Photographers (1994), Rosenblum is responsible for two works that have been republished many times until today and filled gaps in the histories of photography published beforehand. Claude W. Sui outlines the significance of Alison Gernsheim as a photo historian alongside her husband Helmut Gernsheim. Although they usually appeared as a team and wrote books together, Helmut Gernsheim received most of the recognition. The laudation given when the German Cultural Prize for Photography was awarded by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Photographie (German Society for Photography) in 1959 noted that: "In the field of photography, Helmut Gernsheim is an internationally renowned, unique personality. Together with his wife - and on his own initiative and with his own money - he developed the world's most important photographic collection after the Second World War." It is time to question this double rhetoric - naming both, but celebrating him alone. Christiane E. Fricke describes the development of photography on the art market, from the time it made its first inroads in the 1970s - not least, through the efforts of the collectors Alison and Helmut Gernsheim, Erich Stenger and like John Szarkowski. And finally Rolf Sachsse investigates the phenomenon of the broad distribution of photographers' autobiographies; a private photographic historiography. The sheer number of them suggests that an independent genre has come into existence and appears like the modern version of Henry Fox Talbot's approach: "...since the History of Photography will probably be written some day or other, it is desirable that the different phaenomena discovered should be ascribed to their first observers...". Let's take a close look.

Miriam Halwani, Ulla Fischer-Westhauser, Uwe Schögl Vienna, October 2014

^{10.} Louis-Desiré Blanquart-Evrard, *Les couleurs en photographie. Causerie*, 11. Laudation, manuscript. Archiv der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Photographie. Lille: Société des sciences, de l'agriculture et des arts de Lille 1871, 4.