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PhotoResearcher

*Form
Follows
Me*

*Photobook
Design and
Authorship*

Guest Editor
Christoph Schaden

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Editorial

It came as a surprise that, when the fourteenth volume of the renowned *Encyclopedia of Photography* was published in the early autumn of 1974, it included two specialist articles devoted to the subject of photography and the book. The first was written by A.E. Marshall, who portrayed the nineteenth century as a heyday of album and book culture in his essay entitled 'Photographically Illustrated Books'.¹ The second

contribution was penned by Nathan Lyons, head of the celebrated Visual Studies Workshops in Rochester, New York. Under the heading of 'Photographic Books', the expert – who was also well-known as a photographer, lecturer, and author – sketched a trenchant overview of the history and development of photographic publications for the following twentieth century [___ figs. 1–5]. His account ended with a surprisingly critical conclusion. Lyons stated that “there are very few truly outstanding photographic books.” He continued: “There are many reasons for this, but a primary cause may be a lack of understanding of the problems of book design and production on the part of the photographer who is designing a photographic book. Similarly, the book designer has responsibilities to the content of photographs as well as to problems of size and shape. It is possible that in the future, because of the increased activity in this area, a much more perspective understanding of the problems of the forms will evolve.”²

In retrospect, it would be possible to identify the striking prognosis that Nathan Lyons made exactly half a century ago as the starting point after which the design factor of the photobook entered into the consciousness of a budding photo-historical research.³ Obviously, a great deal has happened since that time – particularly in

regard to the photobook segment itself. It is well-known that it has experienced a dynamic further development, which appears to be quite spectacular in some areas, and has evolved into one of the most significant and influential innovations in the photo sector since the start of the millennium. A moment of authorship that has shifted the concept of photography from the single print to the book is inseparably linked to the gradual establishment and recognition, which the photobook already started to receive after the Second World War. According to Darius Himes, books now define themselves as an “autonomous art form”⁴ with specific standards of quality, regularities, and discourses. But how is the contribution made by designers evalu-



fig. 1
Willard D. Morgan (ed.),
The Encyclopedia of Photography
– *The Complete Photographer*,
28 × 22 cm, design: Harold Franklin,
vol. 14, New York 1974, cover.

1 ____ In the sense of a perspectival correction, he sees a considerable need for research in this subject area. “Historians writing about development of book-illustration techniques usually pass from the manual art of the etcher and engraver to the various photomechanical reproduction methods, without reference to the era of photographic-print illustrations. But fortunately, there was a period when photographic prints were used as book illustrations.” A. E. Marshall, ‘Photographically Illustrated Books’, in: Willard D. Morgan (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Photography – The Complete Photographer*, vol. 14, New York 1974, 2667.

2 ____ Nathan Lyons, ‘Photographic books’, in: Morgan 1974 (reference 1), 2685.

3 ____ The two contributions mentioned refer concisely to one of the very first scientific texts on the photobook that was also published in 1943 in the periodical *The Complete Photographer*. In it, the author Elizabeth McCausland deals with the problem of form, however, she does not yet consider the function and involvement of the designer. Elizabeth McCausland, ‘Photographic Books’, *The Complete Photographer*, vol. 8, New York 1943, 2783–2794.

4 ____ Darius Himes, ‘Who Cares About Books?’, in: Alex Klein (ed.), *Words Without Pictures*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles 2009, 162.

ated in this connection? To what extent does the substantial book design, which is inevitably a component of each and every book conception and production, play a role in the concept of authorship in photography? From the scientific perspective, it is still possible to identify a gap in keeping with Nathan Lyons' viewpoint. In any case, when considering the photobook, the design aspect of the book in analyses of the work and object has been widely neglected, if not completely overlooked.⁵ This is amazing, seeing that the photobook only receives its distinctive form and appearance when (typo-)graphical and illustrative measures are implemented and transferred into a layout based on image-editing decisions and a developed book concept.⁶ However, looking back, the person responsible for the design of a photobook can often only be identified – if at all! – by a brief mention in the imprint.

“A design that compliments what is being dealt with”

The functional orientation of creative premises did not remain untouched by this blank space. As early as in 2004, the photographer John Gossage from the USA articulated a concise concept of quality in the focus of design when he demanded the following for the photobook: “Firstly, it should contain great work. Secondly, it should make that work function as a concise world within the book itself. Thirdly, it should have a design that compliments what is being dealt with. And finally, it should deal with content that sustains an ongoing interest.”⁷ It is not coincidental that the much-quoted opinion integrates design decisions into the holistic concept that characterises photobook publications today; whether it is entirely in the traditional understanding of an individual artist's position in being responsible for the production of a book, or whether – as has increasingly become the case – in the sense of collaborative ventures.⁸ As Michael Hagner writes, the global success of the photobook lies completely on the holistic perspective that knows how to take the medial specificities of the book into account. “In the wake of the digital revolution, new options have opened up both for a medium that was prematurely declared dead and for photography itself, which can attain a sense of focus and density in the book, that, at the mercy of the web, it seems to have lost.”⁹ The contribution the design makes to both the intellectual and sensual concentration that is so specific to the photobook is essential.

From a historical perspective, a number of questions arise when seen against this background. For example, when looking back, how precisely can the creative interventions in the field of tension between the photographic image, text, and book be named? How clearly can the division of tasks, responsibilities, and forms of collaboration between the photographer, publisher, and designer be defined in specific cases? To what extent do they subordinate themselves to a photographic perspective, and in which points do they act freely?

There are follow-up questions that seem to be worth addressing in methodological terms as well. For instance, to what extent does a photo-historical research perspective change when the focus of the analysis is no longer placed primarily on the photographic image, but on aspects of book design? At what interface is a coherent

5 ____ One of the few specialised books that deal explicitly with the design aspect of the photobook is: Jörg Colberg, *Understanding Photobooks. The Form and Content of the Photographic Book*, New York 2017, 129–138.

6 ____ For fundamental information on the book design components, see: Keith A. Smith, *Structure of the Visual Book*, Rochester 1984.

7 ____ John Gossage, cited in: Martin Parr und Gerry Badger (eds.), *The Photobook: A History*, vol. 1, London 2004, 7.

8 ____ On the most recent developments, see: Paul Edwards (ed.), *The Photobook World. Artist's Books and Forgotten Social Objects*, Manchester 2023.

9 ____ Michael Hagner, 'The Photobook, post-digital', in: *Texte zur Kunst*, vol. 99, September 2015, 116–118.



LEON BAY came from the black folk, upon the dusty trail of the South, to capture the hard presence of the day, reality, you really think as he passed and that you know he has no future in the images that you expect, and we are not what we seem.



12 Million Black Voices. This double spread from the Wright-Rosenthal book serves to heighten the mood of Richard Wright's powerful and poetic text.

PHOTOGRAPHIC BOOKS

NATHAN LYONS

Director, Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, N.Y.
Writer, Lecturer, Photographer

[Books, magazines, and other published material which depend on reproduced photographs to tell part or all of the story are now familiar to the reading public. When prepared properly, this material can be extremely effective. Here, a well-known authority provides a thorough discussion of the

historical, esthetic, social, and technical aspects of this use of photography.]

Also see: *Photographically Illustrated Books, Photomechanical Printing Processes.*

IN THE PHOTOGRAPHIC-BOOK FIELD, the travelogue or picture book of distant lands, people, and customs is possibly the type of publication most frequently approached. Before photomechanical processes were made practical, large photographic-publiishing houses printed these photographs and tipped them into bound or portfolio editions. Of primary interest during the 19th

century was subject matter dealing with the architecture and art of antiquity.

One of the most popular forms of photographic books in recent years has been the picture encyclopedia or picture history. These visual chronicles, a testimonial to the photographer as historian, are essentially a product of the 19th and 20th century. Prior to the introduction of photomechanical processes the illustrator supplied drawings for this purpose, but with advanced technology in reproduction processes, the authenticity associated with the photographic medium placed an increasing demand upon the photographer to function as illustrator. Photographic

books of this kind have greatly satisfied a society's historic needs. However, of the hundreds of photographic books published each year only a few make a statement, in the same sense as literary forms, the novel, essay, or poetry.

The traditional editorial use of the photograph has rarely enabled the photographer to "make a statement." His primary responsibility has been that of a picture supplier. The role of statement-making in relation to the selection and use of photographs has been primarily an editorial function, chiefly the responsibility of the picture editor. For a number of years the relationship of photographer to picture editor has sparked many controversies in the magazine field. The photographer as reporter has given way, in many instances, to the photographer as journalist. The format of most magazines, however, has rarely permitted the inclusion of an extensive photographic essay. This can be readily understood if one acknowledges the demands and limitations of magazine presentation. It is only natural, therefore, that

the photographer desiring to make a more comprehensive statement is turning to book presentation. Once considered, it is not too difficult to understand that individual photographs can function as nouns, verbs, and adjectives. The ability of one photograph to modify or qualify another photograph can readily be seen in current editorial usage. This juxtaposition (for example, the contrast of wealth and poverty) is used to make a social statement. If we consider the symbolic nature of words, a statement actually standing for an event, the corresponding significance of the photograph as a representation can be understood.

In the hands of a capable photographer, events isolated from the physical world are not selected at random but represent perceptual insights. The photograph is an articulate visual statement, which not only involves recognition of the original event but also reveals the significance of an individual way of seeing. The photographer can

communicate his experience in one of two ways—a literal visual statement on the basis of known and accepted symbols, or a nonliteral visual statement developing along completely different lines and creating both new symbols and new types of correspondence. In a society whose symbols have lost meaning, the active use of photography as a language form could do much to re-establish meanings as well as help to develop new symbols.

This is not too difficult to understand if one considers the use of the photograph during times of national or international conflict. Propaganda during wartime can be most specific when it uses photographs. Joe Rosenthal's "Flag Raising on Iwo Jima" was taken during a period of intense national patriotism. Analytically it could be discussed as functioning on the basis of being photographic representation of known symbols. The essential effort is based on the fact that the visual cues given combine to form a total impression

The traditional placement of a single photograph is illustrated here:



which fortifies the viewer's patriotic involvement. Here the sense of mutual agreement in relation to symbols and their meaning can be readily seen. If the same photograph were shown to the enemy during this conflict, it would evoke a series of completely opposite feelings.

If we consider the symbolic nature of the American flag we may be able to touch upon some of the other variables of photographic communications. The flag itself contains many symbolic references—the stars, the stripes, the colors. Comparing the flag symbol in the "Two Jims" photograph with Robert Frank's use of the American flag in *The Americans* may help to illuminate briefly the effectiveness of this photographic representation of known symbols.

Frank's brilliant essay was formulated during a period which has been characterized as the age of

anxiety. In this very self-conscious atmosphere, Frank photographs the flag in a sense completely different from that of the flag in *Two Jims*. The context in which the flag appears in Frank's book checks the possibilities of the standard associative response. The satirical and sometimes sardonic results attest to the power and effectiveness of this language form. In one sense it must be noted that the meaning normally associated with the flag, but because of the context in which it is seen, these meanings can be effectively modified and entirely new associations established. The flag is also used as a unifying factor by its recurrence throughout the essay.

In the second category (that of nonliteral visual symbols), consideration has to be given to the fact that the photographer, or painter for that matter, becomes involved with the pictographic representation of unknown symbols. It is through

use and in the context of an art tradition that their meanings can be understood. A further discussion of this point can be found in the article, *Landscape Photography*.

The structuring of a continuous statement can be visualized as cinematic. But the experience must be conveyed on a page without the psychological advantages of the darkened theater. The photographs are placed in a prescribed order and the pacing (the relation of the photographs to the pages) helps to create a rhythmic flow. It is therefore evident that the ability to present a photographic statement in book form necessitates a complete understanding of the nature of the statement and its structure prior to approaching the design of the book. There are a number of questions that one should ask before approaching the preliminary layout. Some of these might be considered as follows:

To what extent will the photographic statement be independent

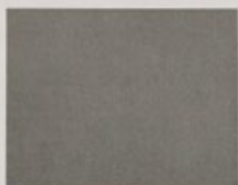


AMERICAN DOCUMENT

DECLARATION "We hold these truths to be self-evident"

"That all men are created equal"

A photograph which runs into the fold or gutter is not considered a bleed. In this instance there would be no loss from trimming of the reproduction. When photographs are used on opposite pages, the combined effect of each page should always be taken into consideration.



of, or depend upon, an editorial (text) statement? Will the photographs illustrate the text, or will the text explain the photographs? Is the statement a social statement? Can it exist purely in visual terms? Is the book to be a collection of single photographs? Or will the placement of photographs relative to one another help to extend, strengthen, or destroy other photographs in the series?

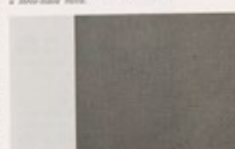
Now a consideration of the physical aspects of the book can begin. The format of the book, its size and shape, are governed by a number of factors. The size of the book should be related to normal viewing distance, a distance of six to 24 inches, and the scale and relation of the photographs should be proportionate. In addition, the proportions of the original photographs should be considered in determining the desired shape of the book. In many instances this could require a 35 mm print require

or suggest a longer and narrower page than do the proportions of 4x5- and 8x10-inch prints. The oversize photographic book often does not present the photographer's work effectively, but relies solely on its opulence or on its shock value. It is a mistake to equate a spectacular layout with the well-designed and meaningful presentation.

The amount of the photograph which is lost in bleeds should be seriously considered. In addition, the economics of page size in relation to standard paper sizes should not be overlooked. It should also be noted that a full-page bleed will be trimmed on three sides and a bleed on a two-page spread will be trimmed on four sides. A minimum of an eighth of an inch has to be allowed for each trimmed side. Thus, in certain situations, the photograph could be reduced 1/8 of an inch. In some instances this could appreciably change the effect of

Above: Martha Graham. This layout, with text imaginatively superimposed on the photograph is an outstanding example of photographic book design.

Below: Contemporary book design has utilized the technique of the bleed rather extensively. The above illustration shows a three-sided bleed.



balance between decisions made in connection with book and design aspects located? Not least when dealing with reception, is it worth investigating design aspects? To what extent, for example, are the design premises of a photobook recognised and taken into account in the critical discourse? What importance and function can they – and should they – fulfil in the photobook segment? This ultimately leads to the radical question of whether, and the extent to which, it is legitimate to grant the designers active in the photobook sector their own concept of work. If this is the case, how is it defined, and how is it distinguished?

Form follows me

This catalogue of questions will be dealt with in this issue of *PhotoResearcher*. In eight case studies, which investigate internationally significant chapters in photobook culture from 1940 to the present day, the function and significance of the design factor in photobooks will be discussed and analysed in their respective historical contexts. In all cases, the focus is on the aspect of authorship. The start is made by **Michael Reitter-Kollmann**, who spotlights, for the first time, the previously unscrutinised book design work of Otto Steinert (1915–1978). The doyen of European post-war photography and co-founder of “subjective photography” unleashed a stupendous creative urge in the period after the Second World War that, initially, still sought its formal references in the tendencies of the prewar period – specifically, in Neues Sehen and Bauhaus photography. Reitter-Kollmann impressively demonstrates that Steinert not only propagated the “absolute image”, but also rigorously integrated the book medium in a holistic approach. This articulates a previously unheard-of authorial aspiration on Steinert’s part to create the photobook as an all-encompassing total work (of art).

In her essay, **Catherine de Smet** sheds light on the children’s book series *Les enfants du Monde* by the French photographer Dominique Darbois (1925–2014) that was created over decades in cooperation with a number of different illustrators but still managed to achieve an unmistakably uniform look. The series, which was published in many languages and editions, delighted generations of children and adults by providing sensitive and nuanced information on global living conditions seen from an emphatically childlike perspective. In this sense, *Les enfants du Monde* is committed to the humanism of the postwar period, which is also reflected in the eye-catching appearance of the book series.

Three contributions are devoted to non-European topics. **Luis Weinstein** investigates the Chilean photobook culture from the 1960s to 1980s and examines the subversive aesthetics formulated by artists such as Alfonso Alcalde (1921–1992), and Eugenio Dittborn (*1943). They took advantage of the means of free montage to develop a highly individual visual signature style of national political protest in book form that still continues to have an impact today.

In his study of the opulent volume *Barakei* by the Japanese photographer Eikoh Hosoe (*1933), **Ivan Vartanian** delves into one of the photographic masterworks of the past century. Four book versions and one magazine version were produced under this title over a period of six decades. Each of these was transformed into an innovative presentation form through the signature (sic!) of the individual design personalities. This is an unprecedented occurrence in the history of photography. According to Hosoe, in this way, his world-famous corpus of images dealing with the legendary writer Yukio Mishima reveals itself as a visual poem that can be repeatedly revitalised and reinterpreted with the help of design elements.



Martha Graham. With an extremely large page size (10 1/2 x 13 1/2 inches), considerable flexibility of layout is possible. This off-center layout is sympathetic to the evocative mood of Emily Dickinson's poem, used in the commentary for this sequence of the dance, "Letter to the World."

the original picture.

The following procedure is suggested only as a guide in approaching the question of photographic-book production. As a first step the photographs are placed in order. (This order, it should be understood, might change later due to alterations made when the photographs are applied to the book form.) A rough layout is then made. This means that after the shape of the book and the requisite number of pages is established, a rough indication is made of the placement of the photograph or combination of photographs on each page. The placement is checked so that it is structurally unified and not repetition. The relation of horizontal to vertical photographs is considered. Now the photographer or designer can reduce his original photographs to the required size. (A scaling method is discussed in Figure 1.) Preliminary blocking in sometimes helps but it is important for the

designer as well as the photographer to see the changes that take place in the photographs when they are reduced in size. Often the photograph will lose its effectiveness, and alternate selection or changes in layout may be required.

The type of reproduction to be used must then be determined. (See *Photomechanical Printing Processes*.) Much could be said about the relative merits of various processes; however, experience with both letterpress and photo-offset indicates that, aside from the question of price, there may be some freedom of choice, tempered by an understanding of what degree of fidelity in reproduction can be achieved by each process.

Possibly the best way to duplicate a photograph is to copy it photographically, but duplicate photographic prints are not practical for commercial publications. Photo-mechanical reproduction is therefore a necessity. To assume that it can

ever duplicate the photograph exactly is a mistake, because the reproduction can only be convincing in its own terms.

Available proofing stages are an important aspect of the process to be used. In offset printing a brown or blue proof print is made from the lithographer's negative, but in general it is very difficult to determine the printing quality of the plate from this proof. Printing quality can only be determined by the press proof, which is costly if integrated before the normal press run. One of the principal advantages of letterpress reproduction is the series of inked proofs generally available, and that alterations to the original plate can be made during production. This is not to say that one cannot obtain the desired results from the offset process; it means that the production supervisor and the pressman must have a satisfactory understanding regarding the desired results. It is preferable, although in many instances difficult, to check the proofing at the press during the make-ready stages. Variations in the ink flow or pressure on the plate can appreciably

affect the quality of the production. The procedure beyond this point is that of any normal printing situation.

As photographers accept the challenge of photographic books as a vehicle of expression, the traditional use of visual material in standard book forms will probably be assessed on a more individual basis. Photographs have generally been used badly in this dimension. There are very few truly outstanding photographic books. There are many reasons for this, but a primary cause may be a lack of understanding of the problems of book design and production on the part of the photographer who is designing a photographic book. Similarly, the book designer has responsibilities to the content of photographs as well as to problems of size and shape.

It is possible that in the future, because of the increased activity in this area, a much more perceptive understanding of the problems of the form will evolve.

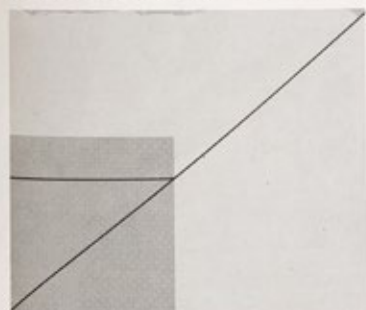
FOR FURTHER READING

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 —The Face of New York, New York, Crown Publishers, Inc., 1954.
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Figure 1. Proportional scaling devices are available but a simple method of determining the proportional reduction of the photograph is illustrated above. The light-gray area indicates the size of the original photograph. The dark-gray area along the horizontal edge indicates the desired width. To determine the height of the photograph, a straight edge is placed from corner to corner. The point at which the diagonal intersects the desired width indicates the proportional height. This technique can be very useful in making the preliminary layout.



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 —Roger Fenton, *Photographer of the Crimean War*, London, Sackler & Warburg, 1954.
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 LEWIS, NATHAN, CHAPPELL, WALTER AND LARROT, SYL, *Under the*

Men at Work. This modest book by the late Lewis Hunt was published in 1932. Good design is shown, with text reduced to a minimum and type matter well integrated with the pictures.

DERRICK MEN



Men at Work. This modest book by the late Lewis Hunt was published in 1932. Good design is shown, with text reduced to a minimum and type matter well integrated with the pictures.

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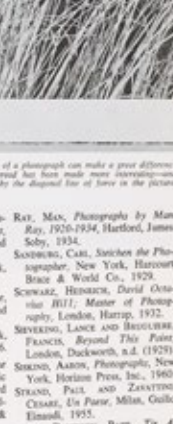
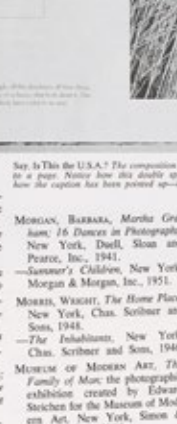
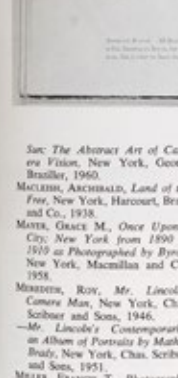
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See This the U.S.A.?



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Men at Work. This modest book by the late Lewis Hunt was published in 1932. Good design is shown, with text reduced to a minimum and type matter well integrated with the pictures.

Chiara Seidl discovers one of the great unknowns in photobook design in the person of Carl G. Laanes (1935–2016). In the 1970s and 1980s, Laanes was responsible for the design of a number of catalogues for the Museum of Modern Art in New York. These include such legendary publications as *William Eggleston's Guide* (1976), and *Winogrand. Figments of the Real World* (1988) that were created in collaboration with John Szarkowski. In her biographical essay, Seidl details how confidently and charmingly Laanes was able to employ his creative energies at the renowned museum to put his own stamp on – not only – its book publications.

The three concluding articles deal with recent developments in the photobook sector, in which the function of design and the designer have experienced fundamentally new – and sometimes controversial – changes. **Christoph Schaden** uses the debate surrounding the photobook *Das Auge des Krieges. Ukraine 1941/42*, which was published in 2020 and brings together historical photographs taken by the Wehrmacht soldier Dieter Keller (1909–1985) during the Second World War, to demonstrate just how lastingly a disturbing visual aesthetic can irritate the authorities of criticism. It was only at a later stage that the design came under scrutiny in the discourse on the book. The text reveals the extent to which the aesthetic premises of the book, devised by Ana Druga and Thomas Gust from Buchkunst Berlin, were able to set references and launch an ambivalent effect of the motifs.

Finally, **Taco Hidde Bakker** discusses the Dutch designer Hans Gremmen (*1976) in his brief text. His approach to design, as exemplified by the two-volume publication *Edges of the Experiment*, could be described as an act of emancipation. Gremmen operates as editor and text author, researcher and publisher, in equal measure, making it possible for him to act extremely freely with the visual material to create a highly complex study through the interplay of all these elements. In it, all parameters are subjugated to the designer's authorial will. This self-confident, unrestricted appropriation is an exemplary expression of the unique features that characterise the Dutch photobook design of the present day.

The Indian photographer **Dayanita Singh** (*1963) honours us with the final words. In conversation with **Markus Schaden**, the renowned artist, who – like no other – has expanded the agitational space of the photobook, explains her affinity for books, and her biographical development. She also comments on her training periods that ultimately led from applied design studies to free art. In contrast to Gremmen, Singh insists that, today, professional photographers should, once again, focus more on the design factor to ensure their authorship of the photobook. Her dictum shows that the struggle for creative premises is by no means over.

Christoph Schaden
Vienna, October 2024