culture presents difficulties that continue to require careful thought. Nevertheless, this is a rewarding collection of essays for students, researchers and educators. To answer the question posed at the beginning, most of the contributions in Consumers and Luxury amplify the models established by the UCLA project through a close analysis of the inter-relationship between the fabrication of consumer goods, the written text, and the construction of consumer desires and identity: the warp and weft of material object and consuming subject. The book points out new directions by demonstrating the potential for collaboration between historians of science and technology and historians of design and the decorative arts. Too promiscuous an exchange across disciplinary boundaries has its problems, but on the whole this book confirms how productive the outcome of a well-directed interdisciplinary project can be.

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Notes

Scenes in a Library: Reading the Photograph in the Book, 1843–1875

The nineteenth century witnessed some of the most important developments in the history of graphic communications and printing, which led to the democratization of images on an unprecedented scale. By the early 1830s, wood engraving had helped to generate the popular illustrated press on an international basis, while at the same time photography had begun to transform the production and consumption of commemorative icons such as portraits and topographical views. Now the world could be both rapidly experienced and measured as a series of evidential images, and, depending on the method of reproduction deployed, the representation of any given entity would by extension be regarded as being either more or less realistic. It is into such a context of reproducibility and phenomenological positivism that Carol Armstrong places the evolution of the photographically illustrated book, and she mostly does so with circumspect authority. Yet there is another agenda addressed throughout her argument which, of necessity, centres on the tension between word and image, and the relationship of parts to the whole. As Armstrong is fully aware, however, such relationships are not always so easy to negotiate, and at the outset she writes that what she found herself dealing with was a 'liminal moment', which entailed 'looking at the ways in which the early photographically illustrated book was not yet what it would become.' Thus the examples of work included here for analysis all predate the photomechanical revolution of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by which time the invention of the half-tone process had allowed photographs to be reproduced successfully and cheaply alongside letterpress in newspapers, illustrated periodicals, and books.

Armstrong has chosen her case studies thoughtfully and systematically, examining an eclectic paradigm of titles and types of photography that range over natural history and botany (Groom-Napier’s The Book of Nature and the Book of Man and Anna Atkins’ Photographs of British Algae), travel and landscape (Francis Frith’s Egypt and Palestine Described), art, architecture and design (Fox Talbot’s The Pencil of Nature), and literature (Julia Margaret Cameron’s Illustrations to Tennyson’s Idylls of the King). In each instance, however, her analysis is concentrated and clearly focused and the prolonged separate chapters are unified to a large extent by her central leitmotif concerning the positivist dimensions and/or underpinnings of nineteenth-century photography between the 1840s and 1870s.

Not surprisingly, as an October publication, this is a ground-breaking if exacting and challenging account, encapsulated in the author’s claim to explore the ‘paradoxical interdependence of subjectivist and objectivist vantage points characteristic of the positivist system of rationally governed empirical observation . . . its tautological system of hypothesis and verification, and its theoretical reduction to the
processes of synchronic comparison ("resemblance") and diachronic sequencing ("succession")—its conjunction to the empirical gaze, and the historical voice of the text. And if this isn’t going to make things complex enough, for good measure she also frames her argument in a series of Barthesian paradoxes. Hence, on the one hand, pæce his Camera Lucida (1980), she insists that it is precisely the ‘antisystematic jouissance’ of the writing she wants to emulate, and the idea that despite or because of its reference to the real world, its constative force, the photograph resists legibility (’I cannot read a photo,’ Barthes contested); while on the other, pæce ‘The Photographic Message’ (1961), she purports to interrogate the ‘historical reversal’ through which ‘the image no longer illustrates the words; it is the words which, structurally, are parasitical on the image’.

Such a strategy is demonstrably in the spirit of post-structuralist analysis, and does indeed ‘make strange’, as she puts it, many of the nineteenth-century photographs we tend to take ‘as read’. None the less, anchored so much in the idea of paradoxes as it is, ironically enough this methodology also leads the author to produce some of the densest readings of the photographs included, while confronting the idea that images may still be parasitical on words, Barthes notwithstanding. This much is evident throughout the book but is expressly borne out in her assessment of Francis Frith’s series of travel photographs.

Frith secured his reputation as a photographer after he founded his photograph-printing firm in Reigate (which Armstrong erroneously locates in Devonshire [sic]) and the publication of a series of works based on his travels between 1856 and 1860 to Egypt, Syria and Palestine. Armstrong illumines the positivist purpose of the published work convincingly and with great aplomb by dealing with the photographer’s acute attention to the details of architecture and costume in the context of Comte’s thesis that the fabric of social life and customs were just as worth exploring as scientific phenomena such as botany (in the case of Atkins) or physiognomy (in the case of Darwin’s Expressions of Emotions in Man and Animals, 1872). In a similar vein she also underscores the way that the Eurocentric Orientalism of Frith’s work and the locations he travelled to can be seen to bolster a form of Quaker positivism, through which photographs could be used alongside text to prove the truth of Christianity. But, in both cases, she is forced to investigate the close correspondence between word and image in his publications and, indeed, the way that photographs either function as illustrations to words or become more resonant when ‘read’ in conjunction with the text. Interestingly, this is nowhere more evident than in her discussion of Frith’s self-portrait in Turkish costume (the first plate in Egypt and Palestine Photographed and Described, 1858–9), which she claims only takes on fuller signification when we read the photographer’s description of it and his references to colour and fabric. Here, the author appears unwittingly to invoke another key idea of Barthes, elaborated in The Fashion System (1967), where he explores the rhetorical tension between words (written clothing) and photographs (image–clothing), insisting that, ‘What language adds to the image is knowledge’.

Very much the centrepiece of Armstrong’s discussion is William Henry Fox Talbot’s The Pencil of Nature (1844–6), which is not only a book that deals with the genesis of photography per se but also the first to be illustrated with Talbot’s own photographic invention, the calotype. Indeed, one of the plates from the book has been used to furnish the title of the current work. To my mind, this chapter, dealing with the implications of both photographic reproducibility and non-reproducibility and the hermeneutic effects of juxtaposing photographs with text, is also the most successful in arguing through the paradoxical status of the photographically illustrated book before the 1880s. As Armstrong argues, the letterpress of The Pencil of Nature, as well as Owen Jones’ tessellated Gothic Revival title page for it, were easier and more consistent to print than the photographs, whereas the calotypes had to be tipped-in as plates and, notwithstanding the fact that they were reproducible photographs, each set of plates was prone to a certain amount of variability. Thus the photographically illustrated book was still very much an individuated art object at this stage of its development, and as such remained the province of the well-to-do, in contrast to those works which contained wood-engraved pictures. In this chapter we also get detailed and persuasive readings of a series of photographs from the work and their bearing on the passing of time, which is assessed with regard to both the form and content of the images. Accordingly, on the one hand, the author assesses the experimental nature of the calotype process and Talbot’s preoccupation...
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with the temporality of light and shade, and on the other, the way that many of the photographs included in *The Pencil of Nature* function as inventories of objects and places which may no longer exist or, if they do, have mutated through use and age. But, as she reminds us, it is in this sense that the calotypes themselves are likewise ephemeral objects, printed on paper, and prone to rapid transformation or destruction.

Less successful, I feel, are the respective chapters that deal with the work of two female photographers—Anna Atkins and Julia Margaret Cameron. In her treatment of Atkins, the author sheds much light on her position as a female practitioner, both in terms of her interest in photography and botany and her place in positivist discourse. But Atkins’ cyanotyped studies of algae between 1843 and 1854, although sufficiently pleasing to the eye, also led her, as Armstrong attests, into a ‘photographic and scientific cul-de-sac’ for eleven years. With repeated viewing, therefore, the work begins to pall, while the torpid prose style that begins to creep into Armstrong’s analysis at this point doesn’t help to lift the material either.

Armstrong is also right to emphasize the feminist connotations of Cameron’s *Illustrations to Tennyson’s Idylls of the King* (1875) and the way the photographer foregrounds the female subjects—Guinevere, Vivien, Enid and Elaine—of his narrative. Perhaps more curious, however, is her decision to frame Cameron’s images in a positivist context. In so far as she argues that the work of both Cameron and Tennyson tended to blend spiritual themes with materialist detail, this interpretation seems to work. But overall, I am not entirely convinced by her contention that Cameron’s use of real people in the illustrations was designed ‘to prove the phenomenal reality of their fictional referents as well’. A more cogent way of approaching such correspondences, as Mike Weaver has done in his exemplary study of Cameron’s work in 1984, is to argue their typological symbolism and the idea that an earlier prototype can prefigure or stand in for a later one. Armstrong hints at this when she states that the Arthurian legend can be seen to allegorize the moral state of Victorian England, but she does not also consider how Elaine’s morbid self-sequestration in the tower, for example, could have symbolized for readers of Tennyson during the 1870s the parallel retreat of Queen Victoria from public life after Prince Albert’s death. At the same time, her criticism of Cameron’s textual selectivity, the way that she tended to underline only a few of Tennyson’s stanzas and isolate them for illustration, seems to overlook the idea that an idyll is more precisely an allusive pictured moment in time rather than an all-encompassing narrative view or tableau. In this respect, Weaver once again appears to approach Cameron’s idealism with more sensitivity, as he does the simulacral aspects of her photographs and the formal correspondences between them and the illustrations of earlier editions such as *The Moxon Tennyson* of 1857. For Weaver this is exemplified in the deployment of the parabolic curve, a pictorial device that seems to unite two discrete moments in time, which we find in Daniel Maclise’s illustration ‘Morte d’Arthur’ in *The Moxon Tennyson* and later in Cameron’s photograph ‘The Parting of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere’. Armstrong, meanwhile, looks through the telescope in the opposite direction, envisaging the narrative sequencing of Cameron’s work, her fantasy, and her technical use of soft focus as precursors to the visual and emotional effects of moving pictures.

One wonders if this striving to say something interesting about certain of Cameron’s images is a result of the author having lived with the material over too long a period—she traces her initial interest in photographically illustrated books back to the 1970s—and the fact that other writers such as Weaver beat her to it. Yet it would be wrong to put things as baldly as this. As both a photographer and a writer herself, Armstrong has a clearly stated ideological investment in and intellectual purchase on the material under discussion. Moreover, much of the photography that her book encompasses is also notoriously difficult to reframe or bring alive, and that she largely succeeds in doing so is a commendable feat. Overall, then, while this may be an uneven study to read, it scarcely strays from the author’s express methodology to explore both the immanent tension between text and image in the photographically illustrated book and its relationship to various aspects of positivist philosophy. As such, it is undoubtedly a welcome addition to the history and theory of nineteenth-century photography.

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Scenes in a Library: Reading the Photograph in the Book, 1843-1875 is a 1998 book by Carol Armstrong. It is a study of photographically illustrated books from the mid 19th century. It has been reviewed by The Library Quarterly, Victorian Studies, caa.reviews, and The Art Bulletin, Library holdings of Scenes in a Library.