

blend of popular and academic writing, and often seem to deal more with newspapers than with the roles women play in, around, and for them. The section covers a wide—perhaps too wide—range of issues, starting with Gladys Engel Lang's discussions of the "most admired woman" phenomenon and the treatment of women in the press corps. William Domhoff sees women's pages as a "window on the ruling class" in America, with the attendant message that women are perceived merely as adjuncts to their powerful men. Harvey L. Molotch's delightful and chummy article speculates on how newspapers reveal power relationships between men and women, observes press emphasis on bra-burning, and makes understandable (but none the less contemptible) the premise that news is, by definition, male. The section closes with two articles on how journalists should treat women's movement news: Gaye Tuchman sees women's pages as a potential gold mine for spreading crucial information; Cynthia Fuchs Epstein fears that such placement will only continue the ghettoization of women's concerns.

The final section returns to television and its effects. Joyce N. Sprafkin and Robert M. Liebert present a lab test of children's sex-role identifications; contrary to network claims, children prefer to watch (and perhaps "model") characters of their own sex. Larry Gross and Suzanne Jeffries-Fox present some preliminary results of a longitudinal study of adolescents' sex-stereotypes: heavy viewers are somewhat more likely to hold sexist attitudes. Finally, James Benet poses but does not answer the unanswerable question, "Will Media Treatment of Women Improve?"

Thus, the message of television is that "women don't count for much." Magazines say that "women should strive to please others." And newspapers insist that women "aren't real news." Some of these articles cram a lot of data into a few pages (e.g., Molotch, Gerbner), some make a good attempt to deal with institutional processes (Cantor, Ferguson, Tuchman, Epstein), some deal with the more interpersonal implications of media imagery (Ferguson, Molotch). Some present strange theoretical justifications, or confuse content and effect (Scheutz and Sprafkin, and the editors in certain introductory sections).

But, on the whole, the individual chapters in this book are fine, presenting either reasonably tight research or thoughtful and original commentary. The problem is their cumulative effect. Having seen spelled-out the abominable treatment of women in prime time, Saturday morning commercials, and PBS; in high-brow, low-brow, almost liberated, and far-from-liberal women's magazines; and in newspapers' "women's pages" and coverage of movement news, the reader is caught between awe at the consistency of the findings and boredom with the similarity of much of the research.

The book concludes with an annotated bibliography by Helen Franzwa of research articles, public interest reports, and popular articles concerning the

portrayal of women on adult entertainment programs, public affairs, commercials, and children's shows. This impressive compendium points out most clearly what the field is missing: 71 of the papers listed refer to the presentation of women, while only 11 deal with the "impact" of that presentation—and some rather tenuously. Franzwa superbly ends her notes to her bibliography with a challenge to researchers and others (p. 274):

Acknowledge that we now know just about all we need to know about the portrayal of women on television. Let us redirect research and action efforts to the impact of television's image on women and men, girls and boys. \*

Although Gross and Jeffries-Fox eloquently point out the problems such research faces (and almost make one frustrated just for the thinking about it), the challenge is still to be met.

*Image Before My Eyes—A Photographic History of Jewish Life in Poland, 1864–1939.* Lucjan Dobroszycki and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. New York: Schocken Books, 1977. 265 pp. \$25.00 (cloth).

Reviewed by Yeshayahu Nir  
Hebrew University of  
Jerusalem

The scientific and intellectual community has recently displayed renewed interest in photography, in general, and in photography as a primary source in sociocultural research, in particular. This book is a prime illustration of such a trend. The result of a series of extensive and interesting efforts in collection and selection, the book opens with portraits of Polish Jews, taken with early photographic techniques during the 1860s, and concludes with photographs taken from Jewish cinema films made in Poland during the 1930s. Between these two reference points there exists a plethora of material: private photographs taken from family albums, urban and rural landscapes, documentary and press photographs, and postcards and New Year's greeting cards, most of which were taken by Jewish photographers (including a few of the well-known extraordinary photographs of Roman Vishniak).

This is the most comprehensive attempt yet to describe—through photographs—the different aspects of Jewish communal life in Poland during the pre-World War II period. Its voluminous description and usage of the documentary dimension hidden in photographs of a conventional-commercial nature is highly interesting, as is the tendentious selection of photographs employed. In all these aspects, the importance of the book goes far beyond the specific subject of Polish Jewry.



Presentation of the material as "history" does generate a number of problems and seems forced at times. This tendency is seen both in the book's heading, in the lead chapter, "The History of Jewish Photography in Poland," and mainly through the book's editing, the actual visual discourse. A precise examination will show that this presentation and the promise included in the book's heading are fulfilled only to a partial extent.

One of the most obvious discrepancies is the inadequate coverage of the 19th century. The book includes only some 20 photographs from the 19th century (out of a total of 330 photographs in the book), most of which lack dates on which they were taken.

Another 30 photographs only were taken during the first two decades of the present century, some of which do not specifically pertain to Jews. Over 80 percent of the photographed material was taken between the two world wars, and, in the majority of cases, was not arranged chronologically. Many of the photographs lack both dates and more general documentation despite the authors' pronounced view on their importance. Even the degree of exactitude itself is not extensive. Consequently, for example, a photographer by the name of Michael Greim—was he a Jew?—is mentioned in the first chapter as having photographed pictures of Jewish life in Eastern Poland in 1860. On the preceding page, an explanatory note accompanying three of his pictures notes that they were taken between 1860 and 1880.

The chapter "Jewish Photography" gives no data concerning the relative part played by Jews in the development of photography as a profession in Poland. Despite a detailed description of the Jewish illustrated press, there is no data on the relation and proportion of photographs on Jewish and general subjects which were published there. There are also no data or analysis presented about the Jewish traditional prohibition of use of pictures, an attitude which in certain locales or among certain Orthodox circles, it can be assumed, existed and possibly was gradually relaxed. Furthermore, the specific essence of "Jewish photography" is never defined.

Motifs and characteristic patterns undoubtedly constitute a reservoir of symbols representative of the society which used them. Detailed documentation and even detailed analysis are needed with such material. And in this respect the book falls like a rediscovered but unexplored treasure into the hands of researchers. The greetings, postcards, and personal family and organizational material constitute one of the most interesting and refreshing points offered by the book, and should be regarded as a social document. In a most interesting fashion, it is precisely the conventional-commercial character of the photograph which becomes a guarantee of credibility and representativeness. Such photography emphasizes

the artificial posture of the photographed person or group, often revealed through the crude skills of an uninspired craftsman. It seems that the declared artificial nature of conventional photography frees it from the deviations which can taint documentary photography and harm its representative character. In this light, conventional photography possesses elements of naivete and even documentary purity which can assist in formulating an ethnographic picture of a given community through its usage.

It is unclear, however, whether such a conclusion was intended by the authors or whether the manner in which they presented the photographs is only part of the book's prevalent ideological trend. The growth of the Jewish bourgeoisie in Poland, and the integration of Jews within the diverse political and economic Polish framework, are greatly emphasized by the book's authors, as are the achievements of Jewish organizations. The usually prevalent subjects of Jewish suffering and poverty, the subjects of anti-Semitism—both public and state—and even the approaching Holocaust, are significantly relegated to the background. For example, two pictures which describe the beginnings of the Nazi invasion into Poland in the autumn of 1939, are not placed at the book's conclusion but rather, with great restraint, at the end of the middle chapter. The book's conclusion leaves the reader with an unmistakable impression of Jewish achievements during the period under question. This presentation constitutes a certain turnabout in the self-image of contemporary Jewry and its perception of Jewish past.

Indeed, the attempt on the whole to avoid obsolete clichés should be noted. Such an editorial decision contains much more than appears on the surface. Emphasis rests with Polish Jewish society's social, economic, and cultural achievements, reached against a background of the old homeland. Wide acceptance of this new emphasis can be found in other recent cultural works as well, such as an unusual museum that was opened recently at Tel Aviv University and is devoted to Jewish Diaspora existence. Here, too, the achievements—not the sufferings—of Diaspora Jewry are emphasized.

This possibly indicates that not only Polish and other Jews who migrated to the United States but also those who reached Israel feel a need to alter their retrospective self-image. A second exhibition, on the subject of Jewish life in Morocco, presented by the Israel Museum in Jerusalem in 1973 revealed a similar trend. In addition, many of the Moroccan immigrants who attended the exhibition requested that more photographs be added to show the life of the affluent classes in Casablanca at the expense of material documenting the rural background of the community.

Only time will tell whether this turnabout reflects the economic rehabilitation of Jewish society after the



Holocaust and after years of upheaval in Israel or whether it is a process of deeper character. In the current wave of similar books, expositions, and films using old photographs, changing interpretations of a nation's or a minority's past as generated by members of those nations, can be singularly noted. It is worthwhile to ascertain whether such changing perceptions as shown in *Image Before My Eyes* are indicative of a general tendency in societies throughout the world.

*On Photography*. Susan Sontag. New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1977. 207 pp. \$3.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Derral Cheatwood  
University of Baltimore

The first question to ask is: "Why review this book in *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication*?" There are three answers, each of which considers the relationship of *On Photography* not only to photography in general but to visual social study in particular. First, for better or worse, it has become a major work in photographic criticism and a best seller. As such, it is of tangential concern to our field, but we should be aware of what it has to say and of its strengths and weaknesses.

Second, others are going to read it because of its popularity, and many of these people are important to our profession. Over the next few years we will encounter students who have based some of their attitudes on this book, students who have read it and accepted it as a legitimate statement on photography. Also, we may reasonably expect that our colleagues in anthropology and sociology who are not directly involved in visual methods will, if they read anything on photography at all, be more likely to read this than any other single work. Others who are not in our area but who directly influence the future of the field may also read and be influenced by Sontag's arguments, and we will have to contend with directors, deans, presidents, and funding agency personnel who have secured the bulk of their misinformation from *On Photography*.

Third, Sontag makes two fundamental mistakes, both of which could have been avoided had she acquired any sociological or anthropological sophistication; these are not simple content errors, but essential misunderstandings of the nature of photography and its relation to social action. Sociologically, she fails totally to understand that the act of photographing is in its fullest sense a social act. Next, she never clearly states what the phenomenon is that she is investigating; she defines neither its limits nor the culture from which she is approaching it. The result is an unstated, presumably unrecognized, ethnocentrism of the worst sort.

Let me begin by saying that Sontag is a fascinating writer. I must note, however, that I considered and rejected the adjectives lucid, clear, and concise. In ways the book is an intellectual *Chariot of the Gods*: one must read it simply to know what the hell everyone else is talking about. William H. Gass of *The New York Times* called it a "brief but brilliant work on photography" and "a book on photography that shall surely stand near the beginning of all our thoughts on the subject." And in the *Washington Post* William McPherson called it "a tour de force of the critical imagination . . ."

Other critics, however, pointed out what is wrong with the book beyond those aspects relevant to visual social science. Maren Stange in the *New Boston Review* offers the most cogent, intelligent, and honest review of the book available and notes that "Sontag's actual topics are difficult to discern, so her arguments are hard to follow. Although her essays often seem to refer to traditional disciplines, especially history and aesthetics, they do not have a clear design or outline. Their structure is not the result of disciplined thinking." In *Afterimage* Michael Lesy pointed out a number of errors of fact that exist in the work and some of the apparent contradictions. The book abounds with these. To cite but one, Sontag states on page 33 that "[Diane] Arbus's photographs undercut politics just as decisively, by suggesting a world in which everybody is an alien, hopelessly isolated, immobilized in mechanical, crippled identities and relationships." Yet she has written on the previous page that "Arbus's work does not invite viewers to identify with the pariahs and miserable-looking people she photographed. *Humanity is not 'one.'*" Even if some rationalizing can reconcile these statements, they certainly are not made in the "crystalline style" McPherson finds.

The book should not be read as an introduction to photography or as an aid to understanding the use of photography in any sense. It is a fascinating account of one person's reaction to an exposure to photography, and if it had been clearly set forth as such, *On Photography* would be worthwhile within the field. However, it has been taken as an authoritative discussion of "photography," and the dangers that follow from this assumption are worthy of concern and evaluation within the disciplines of visual anthropology and visual sociology.

### Photography as a Something

It rapidly becomes apparent that Sontag fails to understand photography as a complex activity. It is her simplistic vision, in fact, that creates most of the problems within the book. She seems to posit some vague, unspecified, unnamed "professional photography" as the essential matter and act of photogra-