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All books originate from the collection of Bart Sorgedrager, unless otherwise indicated in the entries.

If there is no mention of the makers in the entries, it could not be traced.

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# FACTORY PHOTOBOOKS

The Self-Representation  
of the Factory in Photographic  
Publications 1890-1987

**FACTORY  
PHOTOBOOKS**

Bart Sorigedraeger (ed.)



# PREFACE

## Martin Parr

In 1999 I visited *Fotografía Pública: Photography in Print 1919 – 1939* curated by Horacio Fernández in the Reina Sofia. The exhibition in Madrid was centred around the published work, in books and magazines from the 1920s and 1930s. It was a terrific show, but the best thing of all was the catalogue. There was something very compelling about seeing the reproduced book and magazine spreads. This got me thinking about how this idea could be applied to other surveys of book publications. These thoughts finally resulted in *The Photobook, A History, Volume I, II and III* (2004, 2006 and 2014), co-edited with Gerry Badger, one of the best photo historians in the country.

We believed that photobooks had not received the status they deserved and that the history of photography did not take full acknowledgement of their important contribution. All histories are fluid as more knowledge and insights are revealed. The history of photography is written by curators and academics and they underestimate the significance of the book, while we photographers understand how important they are to our learning process and to share our work and ideas. Photobooks were and are also particularly important for gaining recognition and for many they paved the way to a thriving career.

We were not the first and only ones to publish about photography books. Back in 2001, Andrew Roth published *The Book of 101 Books* to great acclaim in the USA. Photographers impatiently looked forward to books that highlighted the significance and contribution of the photobook.

Moving on twenty years, there has been a proliferation of books looking at many more aspects of photobook history. Many countries have their own history of photobooks, there are books on photobooks from women. And there

are even books on photobooks with cities like Paris and New York as subjects, the list is endless. And there are festivals around photobooks, led by the pioneering book festival in Kassel.

Another by-product of these surveys, is that books now would make a vital contribution to shows of work by photographers. It would be rare now that a retrospective show would not include vitrines of published books and other ephemera, which add much to our understanding of the photographer. A further role the photobook achieves is to help build their legacies and being included in one of the many surveys gives the work a permanent vindication, that even an exhibition may struggle to achieve.

Just when we thought the photobook world had been well and truly examined, along comes this book, looking at photobooks, done by different companies extolling the virtues of their factories and products. I had only seen a couple of these books before and the bulk of the entries were therefore a revelation. You can see how the books reflected design concepts of their time. Often the photographers were entirely unknown, but a few famous names were also recorded. The quality of these books is very impressive. Their function was to impress their clients and shareholders, and they were not sold on the open market. Often there were no financial restraints from the companies to produce these books. So high class design with very good printing, and novelties like gatefolds are all employed to produce books of the highest calibre.

Here we have a section of the photobook world that has remained hidden and unloved. So, sit back and enjoy the many years of research that Bart Sorgedraeger has invested to produce a new chapter in the history of the photobook.



# INTRODUCTION FACTORY PHOTOBOOKS: UNBOUND CURIOSITIES

Bart Sorgedrager



**Dunlop 188–1920**  
Cover and fold-out page  
(Length 230 cm)

In this overview book, we show how manufacturers and industrialists commissioned photographers to have their factories, workers, and production processes photographed to create an image of quality, innovation, and trust.

In *Films that Work*, a book on corporate films, the American social scientist William Reddy is quoted as saying that, in the course of the 19th century, rises in scale and internationalization led to increasingly impersonal contacts between manufacturers and their customers.<sup>1</sup> With the disappearance of this personal relationship, the safeguarding of quality also came under pressure. Photography, as the medium par excellence resulting from the industrial revolution, became an important weapon in the battle to convince the customer of the quality offered. Further on in this book, in the chapter about the French publisher and printer Draeger, Kim Timby writes that, according to the advertising trade journal *La Publicité* from 1908, it was common in catalogues to include photographs ‘of exterior views of the factory and of interior views of the offices and production areas’. This was particularly important in the food industries, it suggested, because ‘the public doesn’t trust products from a factory that doesn’t allow visits or their illustration in magazines.’ [» 316]

Photobooks, letterheads with smoking chimneys and award medals, photographs, souvenir albums, catalogues, photo albums, postcards, and later also films became vital in winning and retaining the customer. Young people were not forgotten in this advertising strategy: the coffee, tea, and tobacco manufacturer Van Nelle released a jigsaw puzzle with a photograph of its

Rotterdam factory from 1931 [» 369], while the Panter cigar factory introduced children to tobacco and cigar production at a young age with a quartet game [» 392]. Still, not only the customers were important in this PR offensive. The confidence of the investors weighed at least as heavily.

Every self-respecting company has published a photobook on the occasion of an anniversary, celebration, or change of directors. These are books that reflect pride and optimism. They serve a commercial purpose in the widest sense of the word. Factory photobooks are usually promotional gifts and are not for sale in regular bookstores, as they were published by the companies themselves. For example, on the occasion of the centenary of the Gutehoffnungshütte in Oberhausen in 1910, an anniversary book was published in an edition of 5000; 200 of these were leather-bound copies that were presented to the Kaiser and other dignitaries. The remaining copies were distributed to the 140 German ambassadors abroad, heads of police, domestic and foreign railway directors, banks, newspapers and magazines, universities, jubilarians, shareholders, office workers, but also to parishes and members of workers’ associations and the coal union.<sup>2</sup>

There have been a great many of these publications. The most interesting ones show that much effort was made to engage an external team of good photographers, designers, and copywriters. They often involved professionals and artists who, from their professional point of view, took a natural distance from their subject.

This genre is usually referred to as company photobooks: books commissioned by a company. Within these pages, we focus on a specific sub-

genre of company photobooks, namely photobooks devoted to factories and their employees. For this reason, it is perhaps more appropriate to speak of *factory photobooks*.

Factory photobooks have never been widely discussed in the history of photography (just as corporate films have not been popularly included in the history of film). A possible explanation is that many photography historians were trained in the 1970s and 1980s; the years in which universities paid little attention to commerce, advertising, and industry. Or, as Mattie Boom, photography curator at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, has put it: ‘In those days, we considered advertising and commerce to be dirty.’ She immediately added that she now sees this as a major omission.

An additional problem is that factory photobooks often do not mention the name of the photographer, which makes it difficult to give them a place in photographic history. In my own search for unknown books, I learned much more from dealers and collectors than from historians.

Just like an ordinary photobook, a good factory photobook can be recognized by the fact that the photographs are leading and of good quality. Moreover, the whole is more than the sum of its parts – and by the separate parts I mean the photography, the graphic design, the book’s technical implementation, and the text. In retrospect, you could say that factory photobooks not only reflect the spirit of the times and closely follow the latest industrial developments but also show developments in photography, graphic design, and printing. Pictorialism, the influences of the Bauhaus, New Objectivity – these can all be found in the factory photobooks, as well as influences by pioneers like

Piet Zwart, Aleksandr Rodchenko, El Lissitzky, Max Burchartz, and László Moholy-Nagy. Photomontage was frequently used from the late 1920s onwards, and the humanist approach can be found in many factory photobooks published after World War II.

What typifies the factory photobook? Most factory photobooks have a portrait orientation. The cover usually includes typographical design but rarely shows photographs. The books often have a linear storyline, starting with portraits of the founders and directors, followed by the history of the company, sometimes illustrated with historical documents, graphs, and old images. They continue with a photographic section: the buildings, the employees, and the production process – from raw material to final product. Interestingly, distinguished companies had their factories depicted not only by photographers, but also by painters. For example, the jubilee books of the German firms Krupp, Lanz, Bayer, BASF, Mannesmann, and Henschel contain impressions by the German industrial painter Otto Bollhagen (1861–1924). These were paintings of monumental factory buildings or of the extensive factory grounds, visualized from a bird’s-eye view.

The factory photographed from the air is also a familiar image in many factory photobooks. The Royal Dutch KLM, founded in 1919, started an aerial photography department in as early as 1921. In its annual report of 1922, the airline reflects on this new enterprise with great satisfaction: ‘Many factories, shipyards, and other industrial enterprises have had an aerial photograph taken of their premises, as this is an excellent means of providing a clear, visual overview of them.’ Without exception, all the companies to whom