

PORTRAIT OF A STATE

An Examination of *The Face of Minnesota* by John Szarkowski

by

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ABSTRACT

Portrait of a State: An Examination
of *The Face Of Minnesota* by John Szarkowski

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John Szarkowski was a photographer for nearly two decades before accepting his influential curatorial post at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1962. He published two books of his photographs in the 1950s, *The Idea of Louis Sullivan* (1956), and *The Face of Minnesota* (1958). Szarkowski's second book became a best seller in the months after its publication, but has received little critical attention in recent discussions of his photographic *oeuvre*. An examination of early correspondence, publishing records, and Szarkowski's own writings provides a framework for re-considering the significance of *The Face of Minnesota*, placing it within a period of innovation in the expanding field of photographically-illustrated books. The book is analyzed in terms of its roles as both celebration of the state and platform for the author's personal expression. The book's legacy is considered in terms of its reception since 1958.

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JSM

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INTRODUCTION

John Szarkowski, Director of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art from 1962 to 1991, was a powerful voice in photography in North America through decades of important growth in the field. He is credited with launching the careers of Lee Friedlander, Diane Arbus, Garry Winogrand, William Eggleston, Jacques-Henri Lartigue, and other significant photographers, and producing over one hundred exhibitions and enough books to constitute a small library. Szarkowski was a singular force in shaping the way photographs are regarded, presenting photography as a form of modernist art that deserves a place alongside other works in the museum. "His position," writes Vicki Goldberg, "and his extraordinarily elegant writing, meant that he set the standards and the course of taste for a large audience that had not ventured into the area of photography before."¹

Szarkowski was not without his critics during his tenure at MOMA. He was often accused of adhering to strict formalist principles and a restricted canon of photographers while rejecting external sources of meaning that could inform the understanding of photographs. He was even less interested in making distinctions between photographic categories. When one interviewer asked about his fascination with anonymous and amateur photography, he replied "I am not especially interested in anonymous photography, or pictorialist photography, or avant-garde photography, or in straight, crooked or any other sub-specific category of photography; I am interested in the entire, indivisible, hairy beast—because in the real world, where photographs are made, these subspecies, or races, interbreed shamelessly and continually."² He was accused of having a narrow view, especially when post-modern photo-based art began dominating the New York photography scene in the early 1980s.

While Szarkowski is best known for his curatorial post at MOMA, he was a photographer for nearly two decades before he was called to New York. Born in

1925, he was raised on the shores of Lake Superior in the Wisconsin port town of Ashland.³ As a boy he received a Baby Brownie and a developing kit, and by his early teens was fairly certain he would be a photographer. By the time he finished high school, Szarkowski had produced enough photographs to constitute a portfolio. Immediately after enrolling at the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 1943, he was hired to work in the darkroom of a portrait studio. He worked there while studying art history at the University, which he thought would serve him as a photographer. Szarkowski explained in a 1991 interview, "I decided to major in the history of art, because one could sit in a dark room and look at pictures, and I thought that might be useful...I thought it might be good for somebody that wanted to make well-made pictures to look at other people's well-made pictures. And then of course I got interested in not only the fact that they were well-made, but that they were parts of interesting traditions, and that they had a family life."⁴

After completing his degree at the University of Wisconsin in 1948, Szarkowski left Madison for Minneapolis and found a job as staff photographer of the Walker Art Center. At first he recorded paintings and sculpture, but soon his colleagues discovered his natural writing talent and made him editor of their *Everyday Art Quarterly* magazine. In 1949 his first exhibition was held at the Walker, a group of portraits of notables living in or passing through the Twin Cities. In 1950, while still at the Walker, Szarkowski taught photographic technique and art history courses at the University of Minnesota. He became fascinated with the architect Louis Sullivan (1856-1924) while at the Walker, and when he was ready to move on, he took a job teaching at the University of Buffalo's Albright Art School so that he could be close to Sullivan's Guaranty building.

In the decade that followed, Szarkowski published two books of photographs. His first book, *The Idea of Louis Sullivan* (1956), presents an innovative look at the work of this important American architect, examining his buildings in the context of the people who used them. Szarkowski combined his photographs

with Sullivan's own writings, adding another dimension of insight into the life and ideas of the artist. Two years later Szarkowski employed a similar technique in his second book, *The Face of Minnesota*, published in celebration of the state's centennial year. The book offered an impression of the Midwestern spirit, the character of the people deeply tied to the prairies and wilderness. Although this book was a great commercial success in 1958, it is largely overshadowed in recent discussions by Szarkowski's Louis Sullivan project. A new edition of *The Idea of Louis Sullivan* was published in 2000, inviting critics to reexamine Szarkowski's pioneering work.

Renewed interest in Szarkowski's early photographs is due, in part, to his return to photographing after retirement from the Modern in 1991; exhibitions of his new work have encouraged new discussions and comparisons with the photographs he made in the decades before moving to New York. Some of this new work was published in Szarkowski's third book of photographs, *Mr. Bristol's Barn* (1997),⁵ in which he pairs images of an old structure on his property with excerpts from a diary written by Mr. Blinn, who had owned neighboring land in the mid-19th century. Most significant in recognizing Szarkowski's pre- and post-curatorial life as a photographer has been the recent retrospective exhibition *John Szarkowski: Photographs*, organized by Sandra S. Phillips, Curator of Photography at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The touring exhibition, with its accompanying catalogue, takes a serious look at Szarkowski's work in the Midwest in the 1950s, presenting photographs that were originally included in his first two books. Thirteen images from *The Face of Minnesota* are featured in the catalogue, yet the book as it was initially presented receives little critical attention.

An examination of early correspondence, publishing records, and Szarkowski's own writings provides a framework for re-considering the significance of his second book, *The Face of Minnesota*. The book might be seen first as a popular picture book, produced as part of an effort to "sell Minnesota." It can also be

regarded as a personal reflection of Szarkowski's Midwestern roots and commitment to the region's wilderness areas. A broader assessment places the book within a period of rapid innovation in the 1940s and 1950s, when photographers applied new approaches to combining text and images in a growing field of photographically-illustrated books. A look at the book's reception since its publication in 1958 will further illuminate its meaning and value.

NOTES

¹ Vicki Goldberg, "A Photography Curator Narrows His Focus," *New York Times*, 9 April 1997.

² Mark Durden, "Eyes Wide Open: John Szarkowski," *Art in America* 5 (May 2006): 85.

³ For a detailed chronology, see *John Szarkowski: Photographs* (New York: Bulfinch, 2005), 128-139.

⁴ Mark Haworth-Booth, "John Szarkowski: An Interview," *History of Photography* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 302.

⁵ John Szarkowski, *Mr. Bristol's Barn: With Excerpts from Mr. Blinn's Diary* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1997).

I. JOHN SZARKOWSKI AND THE PHOTOBOOK

During his tenure at the Museum of Modern Art, John Szarkowski became known for his exhibitions featuring neatly framed photographs on clean gallery walls. In the 1950s, however, there were few opportunities outside of New York to view original prints. The public experienced photography through picture magazines and illustrated books, and this was true during Szarkowski's years in Wisconsin. As Sandra Phillips explains, "Through books Szarkowski discovered his predecessors and contemporaries, and this is how he would later choose to conceive and present his own work."¹ He particularly remembers one book that had a significant impact early on his education; while at the University of Wisconsin, a favorite professor suggested Szarkowski buy a copy of *American Photographs* by Walker Evans.² "I was absolutely mystified," Szarkowski later remembered. "All I knew was the pictures were sharp! Where was the art? It took me a long time to figure out what it was about."³

While still a student, Szarkowski purchased a copy of Edward Weston's *Fifty Photographs*,⁴ which he says strongly influenced his work as a maturing photographer. "Edward Weston was probably the first photographer of major stature that I really succumbed to without any qualifications," Szarkowski explains. "His pictures are physically so seductive and so clean and without any kind of confusion or imposture, that it seems to me they're really irresistible to a young photographer. Or they were at least irresistible to me when I was a young photographer. They're just simply a pleasure to look at."⁵ In addition to Weston and Evans, Dorothea Lange and Henri Cartier-Bresson were important to Szarkowski as he developed his own photographic sensibility.

Later, Szarkowski came to admire Wright Morris, due not only to his elegant photographs, but also to the ways that he put his photographs together with his fiction. Szarkowski acquired Morris' 1946 experimental photo novel *The Inhabitants*⁶ during his years in Minneapolis. While there he also studied *Time in New England*,⁷ a book pairing Paul Strand's photographs with historical texts

gathered and edited by Nancy Newhall. Both books were innovative, even radical in their combination of photographs and words. Szarkowski found both of these books to be “rich with ideas about how text and pictures might go together,”⁸ ideas he would later employ in his own books.

These books that were so influential in Szarkowski’s first projects mark a growing interest by photographers and critics in the relationship between text and image in the 1940s and 1950s. Most Americans were familiar with the type of combination found in picture magazines such as *Life* and *Look*, tremendously popular since their introduction in the mid to late 1930s. These magazines extended the use of photographs beyond the simple illustrations found in newspapers. They presented sequences of photographs, carefully edited in an effort to create narratives, convey moods, and construct arguments. Captions and short texts were added to identify the subjects of the photographs and provide further explanation as the story visually unfolded. Control of picture selection and sequencing was in the hands of editors and designers, however, placing the photographer at just one point in the elaborate production process.⁹ Photographers had little influence over the final presentation of their work, and were often dissatisfied with the results.

Picture magazines were also scrutinized for their reliance on images to tell stories. In his 1952 publication *Words & Pictures*, former *Life* magazine editor Wilson Hicks pointed out the inability of photographs to construct a narrative. He wrote that the photograph “still falls short, in varying degrees, of saying all there is to be said about what it represents...it has short-comings, for which only words can compensate.”¹⁰ Szarkowski later echoed this position, insisting that “photography has never been very successful at telling stories. This is not surprising if one considers that isolating single fragments out of the continuity of time – what photographs do – is very close to the opposite of what narrative does.”¹¹ Reflecting on the era of picture magazines in his 1989 history *Photography Until Now*, Szarkowski maintained that “It is difficult to identify a

photo essay from the best days of the experiment in which consistently superior photographs and rigorous writing augment and transform each other, to achieve that new means of expression to which editors, photographers, writers, and art directors paid continual lip service.”¹²

To regain control over their images and explore the potential of the extended photographic essay as a “new means of expression,” some photographers turned to the photographically-illustrated book as a new format. Writing in 1942, art critic Elizabeth McCausland defined the characteristics of a successful photobook; she asserted that a photographic book is “not a picture book, not a treatise nor a burst of splendid rhetoric with illustrations, not a series of beautifully reproduced plates with tabloid captions and tricks of montage, but a book of words and photographs...complementing each other.”¹³ For those photographers looking for alternative ways to join images and text, McCausland’s article provided an annotated list of thirty-one photographic books, each approaching the problem in a slightly different way. McCausland discussed several of these at length in her article, drawing special attention to the Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor collaboration *An American Exodus* (1939),¹⁴ Barbara Morgan’s *Martha Graham* (1941),¹⁵ and Richard Wright’s *12 Million Black Voices* (1941).¹⁶

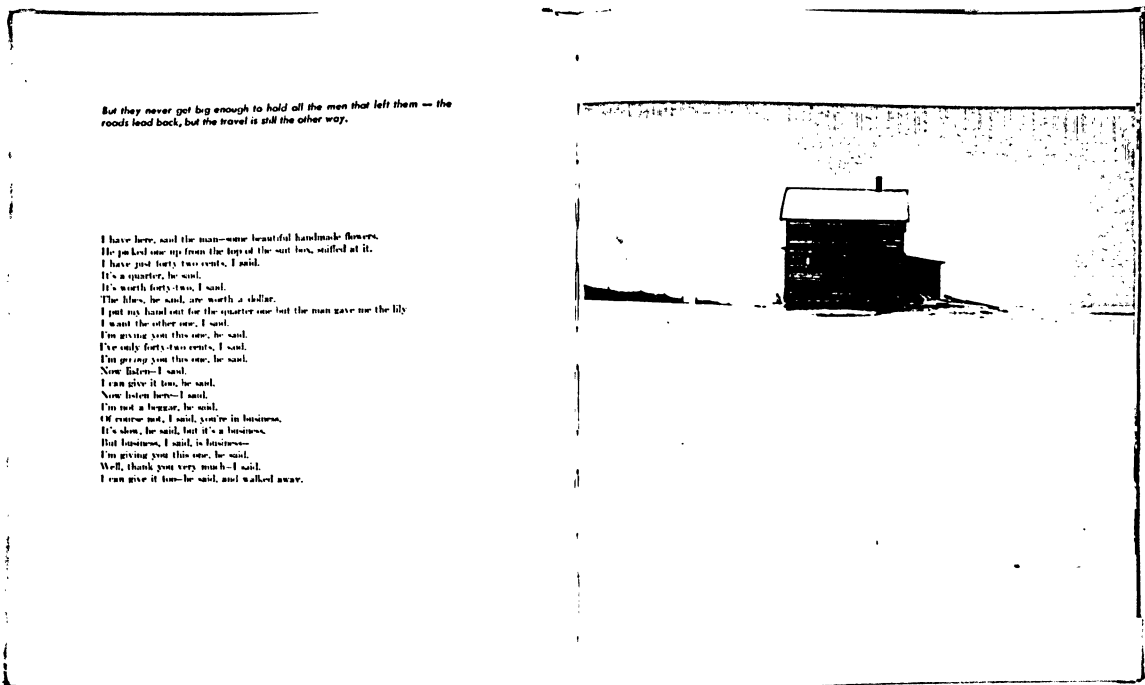
Many of these early photobooks, though innovative in structure, arose from the economic situations and social conflicts of the 1930s. By the 1950s, photobooks had become a site for personal exploration. In his introduction to *The Open Book*, Andrew Roth writes that “For the younger generation of photographers who managed to publish one or more books during the 1950s, the thematic roller-coaster ride of globally operating photojournalism no longer seemed to be the central perspective for their work. They chose their own subjects, concentrated on one city or one neighborhood, observed things from a distance and searched for ways of shaping their work that would reflect their personal experiences. The double-page spread as a visual space and the sequence of

pages inherent in a book served these ambitions.”¹⁷ The dynamic capabilities of the double-page spread became clear to Szarkowski as he considered ways to present his own explorations. Rejecting the image/text combinations found in typical picture magazine layouts, he looked for books that might serve as models for his own projects.

One of the most successful books in Szarkowski’s opinion was Wright Morris’ *The Inhabitants*, published in 1946. Morris, who considered himself first a writer, thought he might photograph the kinds of highly detailed images he attempted to describe in words. He made trips across the country in 1938 and 1940, capturing images of vacant structures that bore the imprint of their occupants, or “inhabitants,” now long gone.¹⁸ He combined his photographs of empty houses, farm buildings and churches with short pieces of fictional prose, resulting in what he called “photo-texts.” An early version of *The Inhabitants* was published in *New Directions of Prose and Poetry* in 1940, offering a preview of Morris’s unconventional format. Most of the photographs appearing in his 1946 publication were made on another cross-country trip in 1942, financed by a Guggenheim Fellowship.¹⁹ While his subject matter was reminiscent of the social documentary studies of the previous decade, he did not look upon the artifacts he recorded as remnants of tragedy or evidence of economic disaster. As Alan Trachtenberg has recently written, “Elegy is far from Morris’s purpose, which is closer to a sacramental embrace of objects ‘salvaged,’ as he often said, from the ravages of time.”²⁰

In *The Inhabitants*, Morris does not employ an overt structure; there is no table of contents or delineated sections. After opening the book with quotations from Thoreau and Rilke, Morris launches into a consistent pattern of double-page spreads that feature text on the left, single pictures on the right. More often than not, these pairs have no obvious correlation. As Trachtenberg notes in his analysis of the book, “there is no single overarching story, no single controlling voice; coherence comes by accretion, a cumulative process.”²¹ One medium

does not describe the other in Morris' book, and indeed the combinations of words and pictures are often unexpected. "Two separate mediums are employed for two distinct views," Morris explains. "Only when refocused in the mind's eye will the third view result."²² For Morris, the result of this combination was greater than the sum of its parts. In fact, "the unexpected resonance and play between apparent contraries, and unrelated impressions, was precisely what delighted the imagination."²³

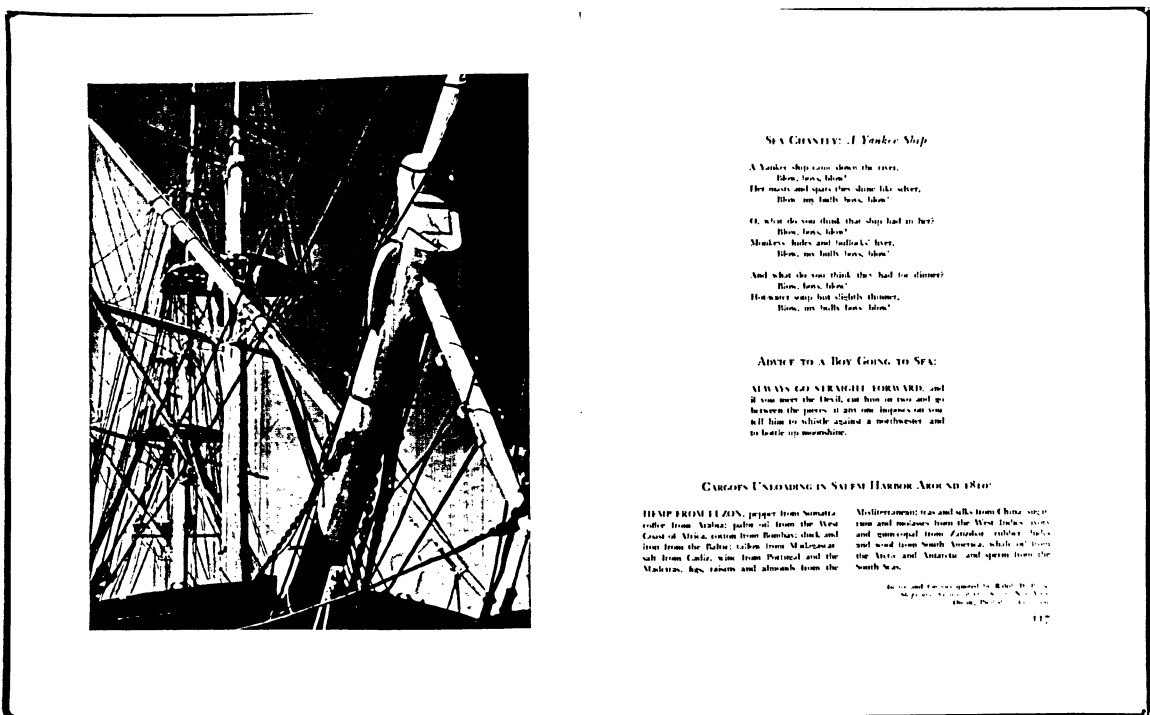


1. Pages from *The Inhabitants*, by Wright Morris

To the pictures and text in *The Inhabitants*, Morris adds a third voice, which he refers to as the "soundtrack." Printed in bold type above Morris' texts, the track stretches in segments throughout the book, announcing major themes along the way. Trachtenberg likens this third level of discourse to "a kind of authorial voiceover,"²⁴ while Szarkowski calls it a "running chorus" which "has the interesting effect of providing a seemingly impersonal, historical framework and a plot of sorts, against which the fragmentary and impressionistic fictions and photographs can test their possible meanings."²⁵ For Szarkowski, the book "demonstrated that it was possible to use photographs and text together in ways

that had not been used together before – in ways that really demonstrated how impoverished the picture magazines were in terms of the way that they addressed that issue.”²⁶

Another successful model for Szarkowski was *Time in New England*, a collaboration between Paul Strand and Nancy Newhall. Shortly after Strand's retrospective exhibition at MOMA in 1945, he told Newhall of his desire to make something more of his New England photographs, perhaps present them in a book. He was concerned about the text, however, and wondered who would write it. In her preface to the book, Newhall remembered her instant reaction: “Why, the New Englanders themselves, of course. Thoreau and Emily Dickenson and Melville and Hawthorne – who better?”²⁷ With this new idea in mind, Newhall and Strand set out to characterize the New England spirit in words and photographs.



2. Pages 116-7 from *Time In New England*, by Paul Strand and Nancy Newhall

Five years later *Time in New England* appeared, featuring Strand's photographs carefully placed together with the historic documents compiled by Newhall. The book was conceived as a partnership between words and photographs; like Morris, the authors insisted that one medium would neither illustrate nor describe the other. In her foreword to the book, Newhall defines the purpose of the project as creating "a portrait more dynamic than either medium could present alone."²⁸ Jefferson Hunter notes in his study of word and picture interaction that Strand and Newhall were "wary of pitfalls" in combining the two media. This is evident in correspondence between them during the project; in their letters, they agree that "words should not dominate pictures, pictures should not dominate words, words and pictures should not be juxtaposed too literally or too aptly."²⁹

Thematically, *Time in New England* is an investigation of the region's distinctive culture, deeply tied to the land and sea of the Atlantic coast, that developed over three centuries. To present this idea of culture, Newhall and Strand had to marry a great deal of text with their selection of photographs. The book is structured around four "chronological movements," as Newhall writes in her foreword, each with several sub-themes presented as chapters. The images and texts included in these chapters are listed side-by-side in the table of contents, reinforcing the intended equality of the visual and verbal media. The overarching structure is maintained quite clearly throughout the book, as numbered chapters and bold titles guide the reader. Across double-page spreads, letters, poems, and journals are combined with Strand's photographs of New England coastal towns and their residents.

Szarkowski's understanding of *The Inhabitants* and *Time in New England* significantly contributed to his first book, *The Idea of Louis Sullivan*, which in turn became the most immediate model for his Minnesota project.³⁰ Szarkowski became fascinated with the writings and architecture of Louis Sullivan while at the Walker Art Center, and when it was time to move on in 1951 he took a job teaching at the University of Buffalo's Albright Art School. His position in Buffalo

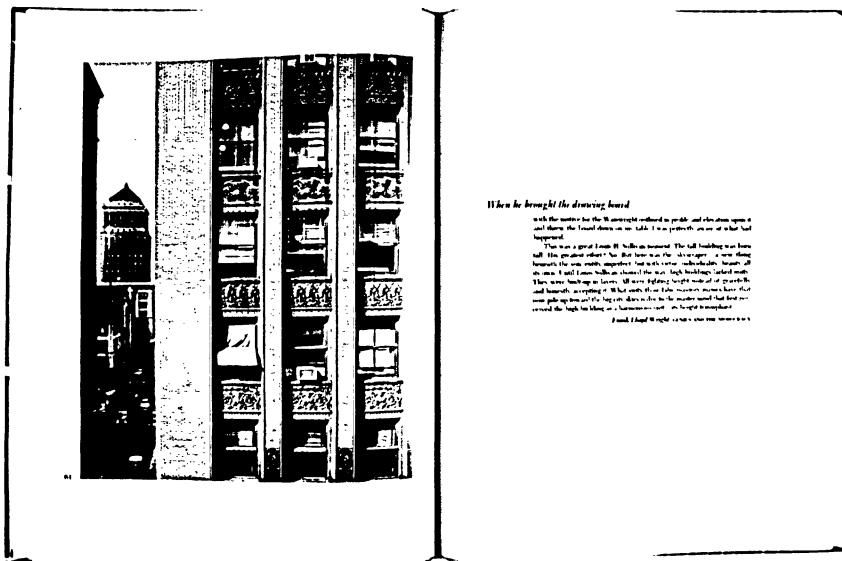
allowed him to spend time photographing Louis Sullivan's Guaranty (later Prudential) Building. He later wrote of this experience, "As I began to work I found, to my own surprise, that I was seeing this building not with the decorous disinterest with which a photographer is supposed to approach a work of formal architecture, but as a real building, which people had worked in and maimed and ignored and perhaps loved, and which I felt was deeply important. I found myself concerned not only with the art-facts but with its life-facts."³¹ With these photographs as a starting point, he conceived of a book in which photographs of Louis Sullivan's architecture would be integrated with text to create a new form of criticism. Buffalo's close proximity to Rochester allowed Szarkowski to develop a relationship with Beaumont Newhall and Minor White at George Eastman House; Szarkowski exhibited his photographs there in 1952, and both Newhall and White provided critiques of his early photographs of Sullivan's buildings.³²

Szarkowski left Buffalo in 1953 to pursue his idea in Chicago, where many of Sullivan's buildings still stood. He received a Guggenheim fellowship to pursue the Louis Sullivan project in 1954, bolstered by recommendations from Edward Steichen, Beaumont Newhall and Frank Lloyd Wright.³³ Building upon the examples set by *The Inhabitants* and *Time in New England*, Szarkowski envisioned a book that would combine photographs of Sullivan's buildings with texts both written especially for the book and drawn from historical sources. He presented his photographs on double-page spreads across from writings by Sullivan and his contemporaries and an extended interview with a small town banker who had commissioned him. Szarkowski contributed a biography of Sullivan, illustrated with historical photographs made when Sullivan's buildings were newly constructed.

After his "Photographer's Foreword," Szarkowski introduces the subject of his book with a prologue consisting of excerpts from interviews with Mr. and Mrs. J.R. Wheeler, a couple in Columbus, Wisconsin who commissioned Sullivan to build their Farmers and Merchants Union Bank. With a few exceptions, these

excerpts are presented across from photographs of the bank, examined from various viewpoints as it is situated in the small town. Szarkowski follows this prologue with a “Profile of Louis Sullivan,” recounting the rise and fall of the “Master.” The biography begins with a full-page portrait of the architect, reproduced from an earlier source, opposite Szarkowski’s text. The pages that follow consist mainly of text, in which small historical photographs are occasionally embedded.

The main section of *The Idea of Louis Sullivan* is divided into seven chapters; the first five chapters are developed around a single building and are organized chronologically by the dates of the buildings’ construction. The sixth chapter



3. Pages 64-5 from *The Idea of Louis Sullivan*

describes three structures linked by their association with “higher culture,” while the final chapter describes two buildings constructed late in Sullivan’s career. Each of the seven chapters in *The Idea of Louis*

Sullivan begins with a single page of text, marked by a chapter number and title and placed opposite a blank page. The spreads that follow feature at least one photograph, facing either text or another photograph. Photographs are framed on the page by a white border which surrounds the image, without captions or text. These spreads combine to form sequences of images and text, building an impression of the life and use of each structure. Captions are used at the

beginning of the sequence, placed opposite the first photograph, indicating the name of the building on the “opposite and following pages.”

Sullivan’s buildings are presented from a variety of perspectives; some photographs situate the structures in their urban environment, while others move in closer to examine Sullivan’s trademark ornamentation. The buildings’ exteriors are sometimes dark, revealing layers of soot and years of decay. Striking interiors of the once grand Chicago Auditorium show empty seats and peeling paint. Rather than making efforts to exclude people from his architectural studies, Szarkowski used pedestrians, workers, taxis, and even sidewalk showmen to present the “life-facts” he found so important to Sullivan’s work. Texts culled from Sullivan’s autobiography and *Kindergarten Chats* further illuminate the philosophy behind his design, and the writings of Frank Lloyd Wright, who had served as Sullivan’s shop foreman, add insight into the inspiration behind his triumphs.

Writing about the book in his “Photographer’s Foreword,” Szarkowski explained that “The effort has not been to compile an exhaustive documentation of Sullivan’s buildings, but rather to re-enliven, by means of photography, the fundamental concepts which were born in his work. In the selection of the accompanying text, the attempt has been less to explain or evaluate than to capture the mind and the spirit of the man and the time and the place.”³⁴ This approach would be employed for Szarkowski’s second book project, which began even before his first book was released.

NOTES

- ¹ Sandra Phillips, "Szarkowski the Photographer" in *John Szarkowski: Photographs* (New York: Bulfinch, 2005), 143.
- ² Walker Evans, *American Photographs* (New York: MOMA, 1938).
- ³ Richard B. Woodward, "Picture Prefect," *ARTnews* 87 (March 1988): 169.
- ⁴ Edward Weston, *Fifty Photographs* (New York: Duell Sloan & Pearce, 1947).
- ⁵ Transcript to the film *John Szarkowski: A (Double) Life in Photography* by Richard Woodward.
- ⁶ Wright Morris, *The Inhabitants* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1946).
- ⁷ Paul Strand and Nancy Newhall, *Time in New England* (New York: Oxford UP, 1950).
- ⁸ John Szarkowski, letter to author, 2 July 2006.
- ⁹ For a detailed examination of this process at *Life* magazine, see Maitland Edey's introduction to *Photographic Essays from Life* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1978).
- ¹⁰ Wilson Hicks, *Words & Pictures: An Introduction to Photojournalism*, rev.ed. (1952; repr., New York: Arno, 1973), 17.
- ¹¹ John Szarkowski, *Looking at Photographs* (New York: MOMA, 1973), 154.
- ¹² John Szarkowski, *Photography Until Now* (New York: MOMA, 1989), 228.
- ¹³ Elizabeth McCausland, "Photographic Books," *The Complete Photographer* 8, no. 42 (November 20, 1942): 2785.
- ¹⁴ Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor, *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1939).
- ¹⁵ Barbara Morgan, *Martha Graham: Sixteen Dances in Photographs* (New York: Duell Sloan & Pearce, 1941).
- ¹⁶ Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States* (New York: Viking, 1941).
- ¹⁷ Andrew Roth, ed., *The Open Book: A History of the Photographic Book from 1878 to the Present* (Göteborg, Sweden: Hasselblad Center, 2004), 21.
- ¹⁸ Jefferson Hunter, *Image and Word: The Interaction of Twentieth-Century Photographs and Texts* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987), 56.
- ¹⁹ Sandra Phillips, "Words & Pictures," in Wright Morris: *Origin of a Species* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 28.
- ²⁰ Alan Trachtenberg, *Distinctly American: The Photography of Wright Morris* (London: Merrell, 2002), 10.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 24.
- ²² Quoted in *Ibid.*, 23.
- ²³ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 23.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.
- ²⁵ John Szarkowski, "Wright Morris the Photographer," in *Wright Morris: Origin of a Species* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 19.
- ²⁶ Transcript to the film *John Szarkowski: A (Double) Life in Photography* by Richard Woodward.
- ²⁷ Paul Strand and Nancy Newhall, *Time in New England* (New York: Oxford, 1950), v.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, vi.
- ²⁹ Quoted in Jefferson Hunter, *Image and Word: The Interaction of Twentieth-Century Photographs and Texts* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987), 42.
- ³⁰ John Szarkowski, letter to author, 2 July 2006.
- ³¹ Photographer's foreword to *The Idea of Louis Sullivan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956).
- ³² Beaumont Newhall and Minor White, "Critique: John Szarkowski," Menschel Library Information Files, George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film.
- ³³ For an amusing account of Szarkowski's first meeting with Frank Lloyd Wright, see "Preface to the New Edition," *The Idea of Louis Sullivan* (Boston: Bulfinch, 2000), viii-ix.
- ³⁴ Photographer's foreword to *The Idea of Louis Sullivan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956).

II. HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

In 1955 Szarkowski's *Idea of Louis Sullivan* was fully realized, but it proved difficult to secure a publisher. He finally found a receptive ear in Helen Clapesattle, Director of the University of Minnesota Press, who enthusiastically agreed to publish his book. As the *Idea of Louis Sullivan* neared completion, Clapesattle took Szarkowski out for dinner at Harry's, a favorite Minneapolis restaurant. To his "astonishment," just as they were celebrating the success of one project, she proposed that he take on another. "Out of nowhere," Szarkowski recalls, "she said 'Would you like to do a picture book on the State of Minnesota, to come out as part of the Centennial Celebration in 1958?'"¹ While the idea for the book was still in its early stages, he says, "any photographer who did not have a big nut to crack would have jumped at that chance."

Plans for a Minnesota picture book had been brewing in the mind of Clapesattle for at least two years. The idea grew from repeated requests from booksellers across the state, who reported "great demand for a book of pictures of Minnesota, a book that tourists can buy as a souvenir and that Minnesotans can send as a gift to friends elsewhere in this country and abroad."² In a memo she wrote "to file" in August of 1953, she listed suggestions for pictures that might be incorporated into the book. Her ideas included photographs of wild rice gathering, open pit mines, and the Mayo Clinic.³ She thought the book might be titled something like *The Face of Minnesota*.

In January of 1955, a few months before she met Szarkowski, Clapesattle drafted a proposal for her Minnesota picture book that could be used to approach potential funders. She proposed obtaining the pictures through a highly publicized statewide competition, allowing both amateur and professional photographers to submit entries. She felt this would provide a good representation of all parts of the state, as well as creating widespread interest in the book in advance of its publication. Furthermore, she proposed that the

winning photographs be presented to the public in a traveling exhibition, and that the photographs be reproduced in Minnesota engagement calendars.

To achieve complete coverage of the state and all of its activities, Clapesattle suggested the use of categories for the competition, with prizes awarded in each category. She identified the following ten categories as essential:

1. The countryside, in fall, winter, spring, and summer
2. Cities and city life
3. Towns and villages – Life on Minnesota's "Main Street"
4. Agriculture and farm life
5. Industries (e.g. mining, flour milling, Spam, etc.)
6. Business and professions (e.g. clinics, stores, office buildings, etc.)
7. Cultural activities and institutions (e.g. colleges, Minneapolis symphony, art museums, etc.)
8. People and nationalities
9. Festivals and recreation (e.g. skating, fishing, Aquatennial, etc.)
10. Scenic features and famous spots (e.g. Minnehaha Falls, North Shore, birthplace of Sinclair Lewis, etc.)⁴

The competition Clapesattle proposed would allow submissions in both color and black-and-white. She felt this would avoid excluding amateurs who worked primarily in color. She noted, however, that printing a book made entirely of color photographs would be prohibitively expensive. Because the goal was to produce a book for wide circulation, prices should be kept low. Local booksellers advised her that a book of this type would likely sell for no more than \$5.00, but a price closer to \$3.00 would be ideal. "On all accounts," she writes, "we believe a division between the two to be best, in whatever proportion the funds permit."

In her proposal, Clapesattle envisioned the final product as a book of 175 pages, 7 x 10 inches in format, with 142 pages of black-and-white photographs "reproduced by good quality offset" and 24 color photographs reproduced by a four-color lithography process.⁵ Integrating the color images into the book would be complicated and expensive. To keep costs low, she suggested printing separate color inserts that could be wrapped around the black and white forms. She admitted that this treatment of the color reproductions would leave their

placement largely to chance. She argued, however, that if the sequence of the book required that the color reproductions appear on specific pages, they would have to be tipped in, a laborious and costly process.

Clapesattle outlined her plans for the book during dinner with Szarkowski at Harry's that night in late 1955, and a flurry of letters between the two were exchanged during the first few months of 1956. In a letter of January 30, Szarkowski writes, "A month ago I was determined that when and if I finally got this Louis Sullivan monkey off my back, I would spend the first thirty days of freedom staring at a blank white wall. One eye at a time. Now I have gotten so excited about this *Face of Minnesota* business that even the idea of sitting in the Mexican sun is losing its charm...What a valuable and beautiful thing would come out of this project! Yes, I'm positive."

By February 14, Szarkowski had put his ideas for the project in writing. He writes to Clapesattle, "It seems to me the ground on which this project is defensible is this: the finished book will be valuable to its subject – Minnesota – for the same reasons that it will be a book of independent creative merit. The 'art' of this book must not be considered as a decorative extra, but as the means by which the book will communicate. Otherwise, the typically inane collection of scenic views and other photographic euphemisms would serve as well." Szarkowski makes it clear from the start that his book would not be another pedestrian tourist manual.

Attached to Szarkowski's letter was a full-page statement outlining the project as he saw it (*Appendix A*). He writes, "The aim of this project is a consistent and integral visual report on the State of Minnesota today: its people, their culture, and their land. In addition to this specific function, it is believed that the project will demonstrate and develop new potentials of the extended photographic essay, as a critical and creative medium." The text, he explains, "is considered an inherent part of the total problem. This text will in its greater part take the form of long captions, sometimes written specifically to pertain to the facing

photographs, and sometimes excerpted from the rich body of documentary sources both historical and contemporary..." Clapesattle's plans had mentioned text only peripherally, but Szarkowski evidently sensed an opportunity for innovation.

Szarkowski continues his outline, formulating his "project scope." He writes, "The scope of the project's concern will be broad. All major aspects of the State's social, cultural and economic life will be recorded, against the background of her physical environment. In terms of the purely circumstantial 'record' photograph, such scope would imply the necessity of literally thousands of pictures.

Therefore the photographic problem is not merely to describe, but to discover and enliven those aspects of the subject that together best suggest and symbolize the whole." Szarkowski estimated eighteen months for the project: 32 weeks for photographing, the remainder for photographic processing, research and writing, and final compilation and editing. He provided a cost estimate for Clapesattle, totaling \$12,698.22 for labor and supplies.

As Szarkowski was refining his concept for the book, Clapesattle was searching for the financial sponsorship that would allow the project to officially proceed. She liked much of what Szarkowski had written in his project statement, but was worried that the potential sponsors she had in mind would balk at funding an artistic work. She writes to Szarkowski, explaining that she would adopt much of what he had written for use in grant applications, but proposed that they "play down the artistic element in the photography and play up the importance of securing a pictorial record of Minnesota for publication in the state centennial year."⁶

In a grant application to the Hill Family Foundation,⁷ Clapesattle itemizes the same ten subject areas to be "covered" in the book that she had first drafted in her preliminary proposal of 1955. The rest of her proposal is radically different however, as the competition idea has been abandoned in favor of the work of a

single photographer. "As you will recognize," she writes, "to achieve this sort of coverage in the stated number of pictures will call for selective and interpretive ability of a rather high order. Up until now we have not been able to find a competent photographer who had time and interest enough for the job and also the ability for interpretive selection, plus writing skill enough to provide the accompanying text and captions. Recently, however, the Press has been working with a young photographer from Ashland, Wisconsin...He writes well, he takes good pictures, he can put text and picture together in such a way that they really communicate both fact and idea, and he has demonstrated his ability to bring a task to completion."⁸

Despite Clapesattle's efforts, the Hill Family Foundation declined the opportunity to fund the Minnesota picture book project. Foundation members suggested that the book might be better suited to commercial sponsorship, and recommended approaching the State Commissioner of Business Development. Clapesattle proceeded to solicit support from local business leaders, and even asked that the University make the grant as its contribution to the Centennial. After several rejections, the chances of financing the book looked bleak.

Across the river in St. Paul, the Minnesota Statehood Centennial Commission had just been created by the Minnesota Legislature. Members of the Commission's Executive Committee, meeting in March of 1956, exchanged ideas for the year-long celebration. The comments of member Senator Harry L. Wahlstrand characterize the ambitious attitude of the Commission's members: "We want Minnesotans to be brought to their attention as never before. We want every man, woman and child to become conscious of Minnesota and what it stands for, what it means."⁹ Indeed, the slogan for the Centennial Commission became "Sell Minnesota to Minnesotans – And to the Rest of the Nation." Helen Clapesattle knew that the Commission would be looking for ways to put Minnesota on display, and she seized the opportunity.

In a letter to Szarkowski in June of 1956, Clapesattle reported a meeting with Thomas Swain, the newly-appointed executive director of the Minnesota Statehood Centennial Commission, and Virginia Huck, his assistant. Clapesattle relayed the Commission members' reaction to her proposal: "They took readily to the idea and by the end of the two hours' discussion were tremendously enthusiastic." Perhaps Swain and Huck were so receptive because the proposal supported an idea previously suggested by members of the Commission. The concept of a Minnesota picture book had, in fact, been discussed by the Commission in its early brainstorming sessions. In April of that year the Commission's Education Committee had proposed the publication of "a picture history of Minnesota" and a "picture story of Minnesota today."¹⁰

After that initial proposal, Swain invited Clapesattle to attend the next regular Commission meeting in order to formally pitch the project. Clapesattle made her presentation on July 13, 1956. She told the Commission that the Press was willing to cover printing and publicity costs, but was unable to finance the photographer's services. The members of the Commission were receptive, but not completely without reservation. Many were concerned about how the organizations involved would function together; some members of the Commission argued that if they were to finance the book, they should also have ultimate control over its content, including selection of the photographs. The members approved the request, but only if they retained editing privileges "in the event some picture or pictures are selected by Mr. Szarkowski to represent Minnesota today that in the opinion of the Centennial Commission would be controversial or objectionable, and if included would place the Commission in an indefensible position."¹¹

A week after presenting the proposal to the Centennial Commission, Clapesattle sent word to Szarkowski. "The news isn't too good, in my opinion," she wrote. "The State Centennial Commission voted to underwrite our project in the amount of your estimate, but the strings attached are even worse than I expected..." She

listed the Commission's conditions, which included a historical section at the beginning of the book and periodic consultation with members of the Commission. The final selection of the photographs would be approved by the Commission, and the "bill of particulars" given to Szarkowski reviewed by its members. Clapesattle described Swain's astonishment after hearing that the Press did not plan to give the photographer a "bill of particulars." She wrote, "I tried to explain to Mr. Swain that if we were to sit here and draw up a list of the specific subjects and pictures to be included, we might as well then go to the newspaper morgues and the files of commercial photographers and pick out the pictures ourselves, slap some captions on them, and get out the book without all this time and expense."¹²

Szarkowski's reply was bold: "I am afraid that the conditions as stated would make it quite impossible for me to undertake the project. The book that you and I have envisioned – a lively and integrated visual report on Minnesota and its people – is a profoundly different matter than a casual collection of photographic views with captions. The problem in doing such a book would be to discover and dramatize those aspects of the subject which, in their interrelationships, would best suggest and symbolize the whole...I believe that you would agree that this is not a problem that can be properly handled by committee procedure, regardless of the training and competence of the individuals involved...On the other hand, I certainly understand and respect the Commission's ideas...The suggestions of any Commission member would of course be respected and welcomed."¹³ Szarkowski agreed to review suggested subject-areas compiled by the Commission, as long as it did not constitute a restrictive or binding list.

Szarkowski knew that sending this letter, which Clapesattle intended to share with the Commission, was a risk. "I really wanted to do the job, and was afraid that they would call my bluff, but they didn't," he recalls. "On the other hand, it should be understood that I was a native of that part of the world, and loved it, and the Commission did not really have to worry about me doing an exposé on

their state. As far as I was concerned it was a great place, with great people in it.”¹⁴ The Press and the Commission eventually agreed upon joint editing rights, but as Swain told his colleagues, “this does not mean that the Commission can prescribe what Mr. Szarkowski must do or the pictures he must take. The University Press contends that Mr. Szarkowski is an artist and that the book to be effective must represent his creative ability... The Commission’s editorial prerogative will be to largely insure against Mr. Szarkowski’s crusading some sociological problem and to assure rejection rights on some highly improbable but possible controversial picture.”¹⁵

Szarkowski’s final contract of December 7, 1956 (*Appendix B*), reads “The Author will prepare and present for publication...an integrated group of pictures...with appropriate accompanying captions and text. In this he is to be left free to do a creative job and will not be required to accept dictation or revision in matters of content which in his opinion would violate his integrity or damage his reputation as an artist and a writer.”¹⁶ “In the end,” Szarkowski recalls, “I had complete freedom—no script, outline, editing, or approval.”¹⁷

Even before the contract was finalized, Szarkowski set out to photograph the state. In the “Technical Note” Szarkowski includes at the end of *The Face of Minnesota*, he describes the type of photographs he aspired to make and earlier photographers he considered as models for his portrait of the state. “I want to make pictures possessing the qualities of poise, clarity of purpose, and natural beauty, as these qualities were achieved in the work of the good wet-plate photographers,” he wrote. “The compelling clarity of this early work is generally assumed to be a technical attribute, but I do not think that this is so. Mere sharpness will never produce clarity... The work of men like Brady and Jackson and O’Sullivan possessed clarity because the photographers knew what they wanted – they had to know; the technique was far too unwieldy to allow shooting by whim... To learn to photograph purposefully – to be less like a sponge and

more like a snare – will be very difficult today, when the photographer has almost no technical limitations to help him.”

Aided by a letter from Thomas Swain, Szarkowski was granted entrance to government buildings, industrial sites, classrooms, and houses of worship. “Dear Minnesotan,” Swain wrote, “Please accord Mr. Szarkowski every opportunity and means at your disposal to enable him to accomplish his mission.”¹⁸ “I never had more fun working,” Szarkowski said in a recent lecture. “[D]riving my old Chevy around the state...without a script and without an editor. On the other hand I was simultaneously living in terror at the prospect of making enough good pictures, and devising some sort of structural continuity that would make it a book and not simply a bound portfolio, and writing a text that would help disguise the deficiencies in the solutions of the first two problems – all in eighteen months.”¹⁹ Szarkowski’s freedom and responsibility were compounded when Helen Clapesattle soon left the Press to be married in Chicago.

At their meeting on April 5, 1957, Commission members learned that John Szarkowski had already taken over 2,000 photographs in preparation for the forthcoming book.²⁰ After almost a year of photographing around the state, Szarkowski sent a progress report to Helen “Scotty” MacDonald, Sales and Business Manager at the Press. “I have been printing for the last three weeks,” he wrote, “the first printing that I have done on the book, except for proofing --- and I am getting some GREAT stuff!”²¹ At his request, University Press Sales and Promotion Manager Janet Salisbury sent a list of books that he might find useful “in shaping up the text in the Minnesota picture book.”²² The list of 18 books provided information about the University, Minnesota business and industry, the arts, politics, and religion in the state.²³

Szarkowski presented his finished layout for *The Face of Minnesota* at a meeting of the Centennial Commission on October 17, 1957.²⁴ He reported that the total number of pictures had been increased by about fifty from the original proposal,

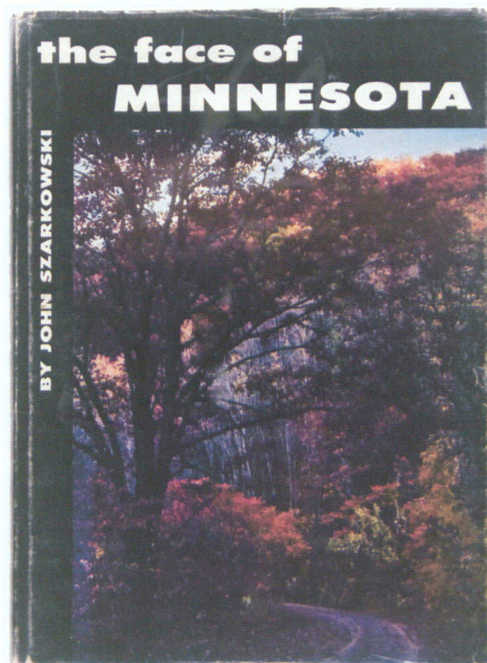
with the finished book containing 179 black and white photographs and twenty-four in color. The Commission wasted no time in promoting the book; shortly after that meeting, members chose Szarkowski's *Farm near St. Paul* for use on a Christmas card that was sent out by executive officers of the state and members of the Commission.²⁵

By mid-December, 1957, the book was nearly finished, and needed to be approved by all parties before it could proceed to printing. Galley proofs of the text were sent to Peter Popovich, Executive Chairman of the Commission, who had argued that the Commission should have final control over the images and text selected for the book. After reading the text, Popovich, who was a Minnesota State Representative, was particularly concerned about Szarkowski's discussion of Minnesota politics on page 182.²⁶ He felt that "some of the negative aspects of politics in Minnesota should be eliminated." Popovich challenged Szarkowski on several statements throughout the book; in some cases minor adjustments were made to the text to reflect these concerns, but most were defended by citing the specific sources of the information.

As the deadline approached, Szarkowski worked closely with Marcia Strout to edit the text and with Jane McCarthy on layout design and typography. The twenty-four color images were printed on six separate sheets with four images on each sheet, which were wrapped around sections containing the text and 179 black-and-white photographs. The finished book, totaling 304 pages, measured just under 7.5 x 10.5 inches. *Cut Foot Sioux Forest, Itasca County* was selected for the cloth cover and reproduced on the front and back boards, while *Fall Color, Winona County*, an image that does not appear inside the book, was reproduced on the front of the dust jacket. The difference between the two covers hints at the complex message of the book; the dust jacket, with its brilliant colors and inviting path, attracts an audience familiar with the picture story. Beneath the dust jacket is a darker image made deep in the wilderness, signifying Szarkowski's subtle intentions for his portrait of the state.



4. The cloth cover of *The Face of Minnesota*, featuring a reproduction of Cut Foot Sioux Forest, Itasca County



5. The dust jacket of *The Face of Minnesota*, with a reproduction of Fall Color, Winona County

NOTES

- ¹ John Szarkowski, letter to author, 2 July 2006.
- ² Helen Clapesattle, "Preliminary Draft from the University Press of a Possible Plan for a Book of Pictures of Minnesota," 10 January 1955, *Face of Minnesota Sales Files*, University of Minnesota Press (hereafter cited as Press Files).
- ³ Helen Clapesattle to File, 3 August 1953, Press Files.
- ⁴ Helen Clapesattle, "Preliminary Draft from the University Press of a Possible Plan for a Book of Pictures of Minnesota," 10 January 1955, Press Files.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Helen Clapesattle to John Szarkowski, 27 February 1956, Press Files.
- ⁷ Now the Northwest Area Foundation
- ⁸ Letter written by Helen Clapesattle, sent from the office of Malcolm M. Willey, VP of Academic Administration, University of Minnesota, to A. A. Heckman, Louis W. and Maud Hill Family Foundation, 22 March 1956, Press Files.
- ⁹ Minutes of Meeting of Minnesota Statehood Centennial Commission Executive Committee, 2 March 1956, Minnesota Statehood Centennial Commission, Agency History Record, Minnesota Historical Society, State Archive (hereafter cited as Minutes, Centennial Commission).
- ¹⁰ Minutes, Centennial Commission, 13 April 1956.
- ¹¹ Minutes, Centennial Commission, 13 July 1956.
- ¹² Helen Clapesattle to John Szarkowski, 20 July 1956, Press Files.
- ¹³ John Szarkowski to Helen Clapesattle, 22 July 1956, Press Files.
- ¹⁴ John Szarkowski, letter to author, 2 July 2006.
- ¹⁵ Memorandum by Thomas Swain, 13 August 1956, Centennial Commission.
- ¹⁶ Memorandum of Agreement, 3 December 1967, Centennial Commission.
- ¹⁷ John Szarkowski, letter to author, 2 July 2006.
- ¹⁸ Thomas Swain to Minnesotans, 6 September 1956, Centennial Commission.
- ¹⁹ John Szarkowski, "Being a Photographer" (lecture, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, February 8, 2006).
- ²⁰ Minutes, Centennial Commission, 5 April 1957.
- ²¹ John Szarkowski to Helen "Scotty" MacDonald, 6 July 1957, Press Files.
- ²² Janet Salisbury to John Szarkowski, 16 April 1957, Press Files.
- ²³ The list of books included the following: Theodore C. Blegen, *The Land Lies Open*; Solon J. Buck, ed., *William Watts Folwell: Autobiography and Letters of a Pioneer of Culture*; Helen Clapesattle, *The Doctors Mayo*; T. A. Erickson, *My Sixty Years with Rural Youth*; Guy Stanton Ford, *On and Off the Campus*; Albert I. Gordon, *Jews in Transition*; James Gray, *Business without Boundary: The Story of General Mills*; James Gray, *The University of Minnesota, 1851-1951*; Winifred Helmes, *John A. Johnson, The Peoples' Governor*; Sister Helen Angela Hurley, *On Good Ground: The Story of the Sisters of St. Joseph in St. Paul*; Agnes M. Larson, *The White Pine Industry in Minnesota*; Maud Hart Lovelace, *Early Candlelight*; George Mayer, *The Political Career of Floyd B. Olson*; Alma Scott, *Wanda Gag: The Story of an Artist*; John K. Sherman, *Music and Maestros: The Story of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra*; Alice L. Sickels, *Around the World in St. Paul*; George M. Stephenson, *John Lind of Minnesota*; John T. Flanagan, ed., *Snelling's Tales of the Northwest*.
- ²⁴ Minutes, Centennial Commission, 17 October 1957.
- ²⁵ *Farm near St. Paul* is reproduced on page 93 of *The Face of Minnesota*.
- ²⁶ Peter S. Popovich to Virginia Huck, 27 December 1957, Centennial Commission.

III. **THE FACE OF MINNESOTA: AN ANALYSIS**

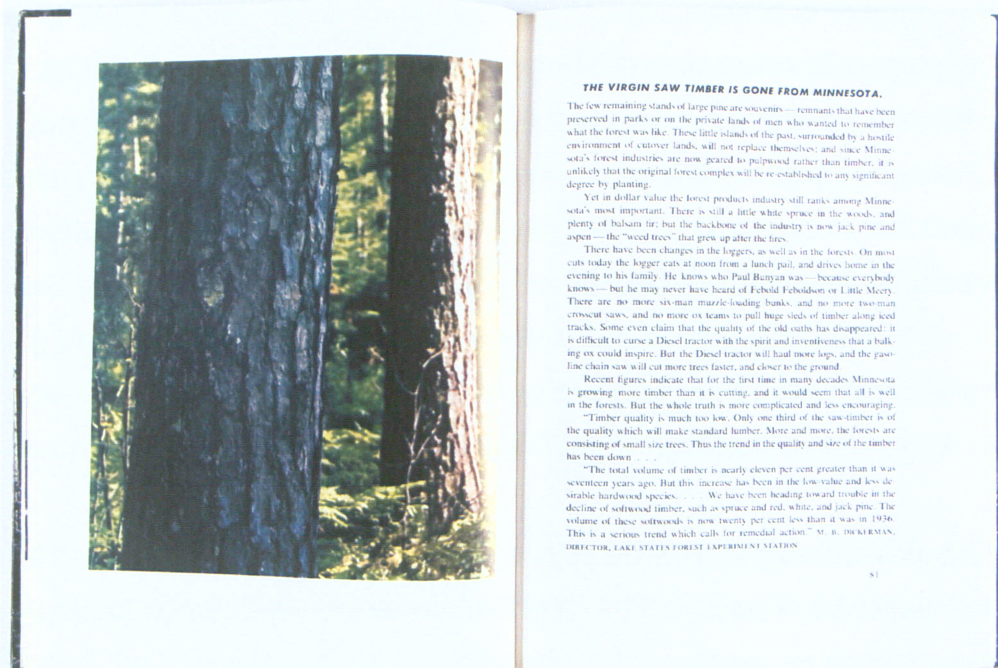
On May 5, 1958, 10,000 copies of *The Face of Minnesota* were on bookstands throughout the state, just in time for Statehood Week.¹ Szarkowski presents his impression of the state through a complex combination of pictures and text. After an introductory prologue, Szarkowski organizes the book into four historical sections, each with several sub-themes. The first section, "The Nature of the Place" (23), provides an introduction to the land and the early explorers, drawing attention to the importance of Minnesota's system of waterways that drew fur trappers into the region. "Foothold" (73), the second section, addresses the history of logging in the state, a practice that gradually made way for farming. The settlers brought a variety of traditions to the area, and Szarkowski describes this "melting pot." Section three, "The Beginnings of a Group" (163), presents the development of the towns and cities of the state, and the establishment of its government, education, and arts. In the last historical section, "The Techniques of Survival" (233), Szarkowski contemplates the future of the state, as agricultural traditions make way for industrial modernization.

The four sections begin with extended essays researched and written by Szarkowski, while the individual texts which articulate the sub-themes draw from literature, government reports, and interviews. These texts are carefully integrated with over 200 black-and-white and color photographs, presenting an impression of Minnesota and its unique character. In the preface Szarkowski writes, "I have tried to show the land and its people and their work, in such a way that the whole would fit together to give a lively and an honest sense of what the place is really like."

At a very basic level, *The Face of Minnesota* derives its structure from Newhall and Strand's *Time in New England*. Both books are organized into four "chronological movements," as Newhall called them, and both deal with the themes of landscape and culture within each larger section. In *Time in New England*, these themes are separated into chapters, each consisting of its own

sequence of texts and images. While the chapters in the New England book are clearly numbered and titled, the structure of *The Face of Minnesota* is less immediately obvious to the casual reader. To signal the beginning of each of Szarkowski's four historical essays, the left side of the spread is left blank while the right side introduces the section with its title and first paragraphs of text. This visual technique of separation had been used to introduce new sections in *The Idea of Louis Sullivan*, but in that book the new sections are also marked by chapter numbers. Szarkowski uses text rather than imagery to introduce new sections, acknowledging that these historical essays are intended to provide a context for his photographs.

In addition to the use of the blank page to signify a division, Szarkowski uses variations in typography as a tool to indicate structure. His major sections are marked with large titles printed in Baskerville Italic, the typeface also used for the titles of his "Preface" and "Technical Note." At the conclusion of his essays, he introduces related topics that flow from the preceding history lessons. The first sentence of these sub-sections is set in Futura Bold Oblique, letting readers know once again that an organizational shift is taking place. In her examination of text and image combinations, Nancy Newhall notes that this use of typography is a technique prevalent in picture magazines. She writes that extended captions usually begin with "a colorful phrase in boldface type...In a photo-story, it acts as a bridge between text and photograph."² Indeed, these bold lines of text serve not only as structural cues but also as thematic hooks, drawing readers in with pronouncements such as, for example, "THE VIRGIN SAW TIMBER IS GONE FROM MINNESOTA" on page 81. Elizabeth McCausland had recommended such "display [type]faces," asserting that if photographic books were to be as widely accessible as picture magazines, which she thought they should, "type must be bigger and bolder and easier to read to keep up with instantaneous communication provided by photographs."³



6. The Face of Minnesota, pages 80-1, first pages of the logging subsection in "Foothold"

While the sub-sections that fall into Szarkowski's four major sections lack overt structural markers, closer examination reveals that each theme is closely linked to the historical essay it follows. In the second section, "Foothold" (73-79), for example, Szarkowski writes about the early explorers who logged and later farmed the land. He moves to a discussion of the early settlers, and the traditions brought by waves of immigration. From the notion of diversity Szarkowski moves to building traditions, discussing specific types of houses and architecture. He closes his essay by commenting on man's contradictory attitudes toward the wilderness. Text dominates these historical sections; in three of the four sections, photographs appear sparsely, often reduced in size and placed on the same page with text. Only in these essays do photographs and text share space on a single page.

As soon as Szarkowski brings his extended history to a close, he begins to systematically address each of the topics he outlines in the essay. In "Foothold," he begins with a lengthy discussion of logging, presenting a full ten pages of

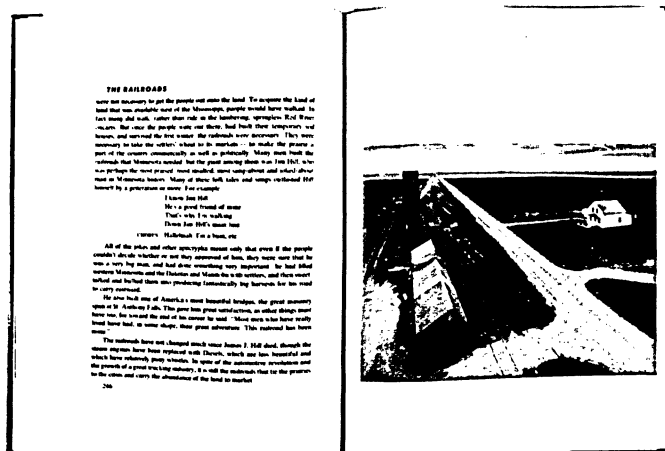
images and text which, in combination, describe this extensive industry and its impact on the state (80-89). If text dominated the discussion of logging in Szarkowski's essay, he gives photographs their full due in the sub-section. Eight of the ten pages contain a single image, presented without text or caption. Szarkowski moves next to farming, as expected, and again gives this theme his full visual treatment (90-101). Following his outline, he discusses Minnesota as "melting pot," rich with traditions brought from far-away lands (102-125). These traditions are manifest in the homes the people built, and Szarkowski takes readers on a verbal and visual tour of architecture across the state (126-137).

Each of the four major sections of *The Face of Minnesota* proceeds in this way, drawing direct correlations between the themes introduced in Szarkowski's essays and the topics treated in the following sub-sections. In some cases the topics are developed in a slightly different order, but each topic is considered fully. After all of the outlined topics have been covered, the four major sections take slightly unexpected turns, where additional themes are addressed. To the "Foothold" section examined above, Szarkowski adds a pair of portraits (138-39), one of a railroad worker and one of a "girl" at a county fair, not clearly connected with the previous architecture section. He follows the portraits with a sequence of images and text addressing the foundations of religion in the state (140-145). Next he moves to a lengthy section describing the state's climate and the broad range of outdoor activities enjoyed by its residents (146-161). Thematically, this section could be loosely tied to Szarkowski's discussion of the pioneers' ambivalence toward the wilderness, but the connection is not as strong as with the other themes he develops. In many cases, these additional themes build on the historical topics to present information about Minnesota and the lives of Minnesotans now. While the early explorers may not have been concerned with county fairs, ice skating, or medical technology, no impression of present-day Minnesota would be adequate without their inclusion.

Even without relying on the outlining function of his historical essays, observable shifts in subject matter allowed Szarkowski to structure his book without obvious markers. It is easy for the reader to see, for example, that the section dealing with sports has ended on page 215 when the subject turns abruptly to the fine arts on the pages that follow. Perhaps the reader does not need more concrete signals, as might be necessary to distinguish between sequences of Louis Sullivan's buildings. This type of structure, in which themes move quickly from one to the next without interruption, encourages the cumulative reading that Szarkowski champions.

Without the conventions of numbered chapters and running headers, there are no recognizable points of entry or exit for the reader. One might imagine that Szarkowski left these devices out deliberately after reflecting on how people approached his first book. "The trouble with picture books," Szarkowski said in a 1958 interview, "is that people tend to start reading them from back to front. My book doesn't make much sense this way. But I think that if any one goes through it from start to finish, reading the text and looking at the pictures as they appear, he will find that it fits together."⁴

The building blocks of Szarkowski's structure are photographs and texts, carefully sequenced in double-page spreads. The photographs provide views of

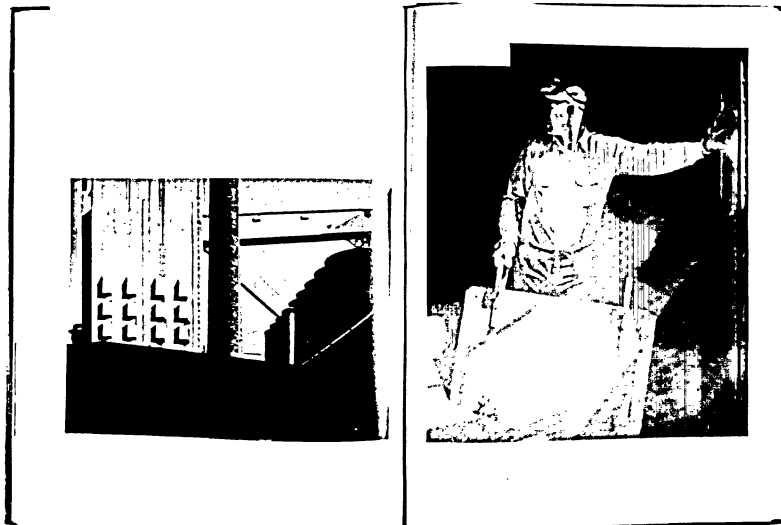


7. The Face of Minnesota, pages 246-7

the Minnesota land and water, its farming and industry, and its people and their activities. In her catalogue essay, Sandra Phillips sympathetically writes, "The pictures are gentle, certainly Midwestern, and adhere to the plain beauty of things, referring, almost personally, to the community

from which they come.”⁵ In 1958, one reviewer sensed a connection with the documentary photography of the 1930s, commenting that Szarkowski’s “stark Minnesota portraits...capture the frontier feeling still present in much of the North Star state.”⁶

Outside of his extended historical essays, Szarkowski’s presentation of photographs is similar to that of Strand’s photographs in *Time in New England*. In the latter, they are placed one-per-page, framed by thick white margins, and free of captions (which appear separately in a list at the end of the book). The images are never cropped; the format of the original negative is maintained. This presentation gives integrity and impact to each individual image. Szarkowski breaks with *Time in New England* in his placement of images on the page, however. Strand’s photographs are positioned in the same place on each page,



8. The Face of Minnesota, pages 240-1

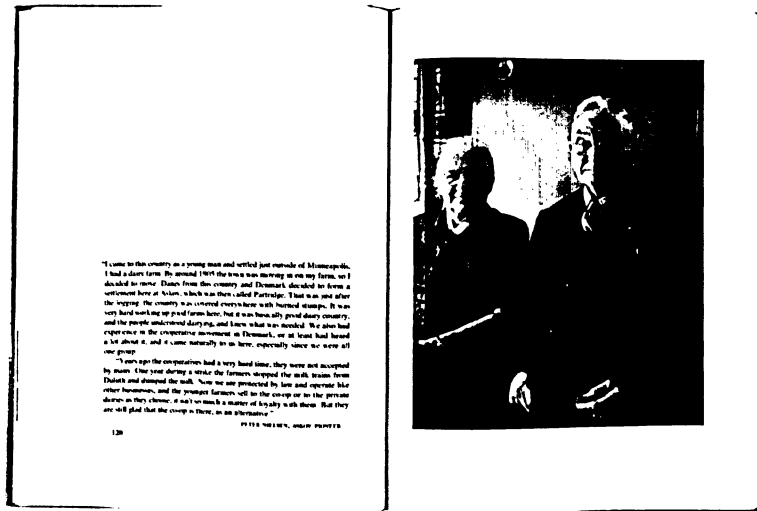
creating a formal impression of each image as a self-contained work of art. In Szarkowski’s book the placement is varied and lively; photographs appear close to the top, middle, and bottom of the page, and are occasionally allowed to bleed off the

page on one or two edges. He uses this technique with pictures of wilderness or large crowds, giving the impression that the scene extends far beyond the edge of the page. In only four cases (18-19, 46-47, 94-95, 248-49), Szarkowski allows a single image to spread across two pages; these are detailed horizontal landscapes that would have been lost on one of the book’s small pages.

As in *The Idea of Louis Sullivan* and *Time in New England*, the photographs in *The Face of Minnesota* are paired with texts drawn from a variety of sources. As in those models, Szarkowski stays close to his subject by drawing on earlier writings and contemporary interviews from distinctly Midwestern voices. Minnesota historians William Watts Folwell and Theodore Blegen inform Szarkowski's historical essays, while reports from government offices add authority and realism to Szarkowski's charming prose. Interviews with farmers, foresters, conservationists, and residents act to personalize the photographs, while poems and folk songs enrich Szarkowski's characterization of Minnesota culture. Szarkowski departs from his earlier models as he uses his own voice to moderate the texts he has gathered. While the historical texts in the earlier two books stand alone, the texts in *The Face of Minnesota* are framed by Szarkowski's commentary.

As a means for combining his texts and images, Szarkowski employs the double-page spread format throughout his book. Outside of the four historical essays, at least one photograph is always part of each spread; unlike the layout of *Time in New England*, there are never two facing pages composed solely of text.⁷ Thematic sequences are invariably introduced by a page of text facing a photograph, followed by one or more spreads consisting of facing photographs or texts and photographs.

Spreads which combine photos with text function in a variety of ways. At times the text serves as information, or situates the photograph in a historical context. This occurs early on, as Szarkowski pairs images of a Coast Guard boat with early predictions of the networks that could be formed by the great lakes and connecting waterways (30-31). At times the connection is direct, as in the case of the interview and portrait of Peter Nielsen placed side by side (120-121), but that is not to say that the text simply serves as a description of the photograph. By reading the text accompanying *Virgin Pine, Basswood Lake* (85-86), it becomes clear that these pages are about logging and the value of the forest, not



9. The Face of Minnesota, pages 120-1

the beauty of fresh snow in the forest or winter recreation. The beauty of the woods, however, combines with the text to act as a powerful argument for responsible land use.

These individual spreads are situated in more extended sequences. Szarkowski approaches the theme of education, for example, with one page of text and five photographs (186-191). The text appears on the first page of the sequence, quoting from a lengthy report by the Governor's Committee on Higher Education. Through the text, the reader learns that Minnesota's system of education ranks higher than average in the United States, but new challenges in a changing society will require greater financial support from the state's citizens. This text is paired with a portrait of a hopeful young child, adding to the sense of urgency implicit in the text. The following spread presents two scenes of university learning, one group in a seminar paired with a young physics professor at the blackboard. Through this sequence the reader is reminded of the quality of education in the state, emphasized first in the preceding text. Turning once more, this quality is confirmed by two scenes of commencement, graduates' heads bowed in prayer on the left, aged professor on the right. This sequence of text and images develops a sense of pride and dignity in education, which is presented as a worthy investment.

In other sequences, Szarkowski's message is more subtle. In his section that addresses the Native American population of northern Minnesota (44-51), Szarkowski begins with a page of text entitled "The People" paired with an image of two commercial fishermen on the Red Lake Indian Reservation, working with traditional methods. The nature of their hard work is underscored by Szarkowski's text, which explains that "The People who first learned to use the lakes and rivers, who named the waters, and traced their paths for the Europeans—these have not prospered from the changes they helped bring about." To further illuminate this point, Szarkowski draws from an interview with an "old Minnesota Indian" who remembers the freedom and peace of his youth, now gone. Turning the page, Szarkowski dramatically presents the historical reality of the Native Americans' demise; in a single image stretched over two pages, Szarkowski presents the formidable stockade that provided protection for European fur traders who learned from the Indians and later took over their land.



10. *The Face of Minnesota*, pages 44-5 and 46-7

Szarkowski returns, on the next spread, to the words of the Native Americans. In an interview, a young woman patiently explains the type of misunderstandings she sometimes has with misguided tourists. This text is paired with an image of a pleasant young boy with his father, seated quietly before the camera. The building respect and affection for the Native American ends on an disquieting note, when on the last spread in the sequence Szarkowski pairs an image of the

young boy, turned away from the camera in the disheveled yard of his house, with a woman awkwardly posing next to a cigar store Indian.

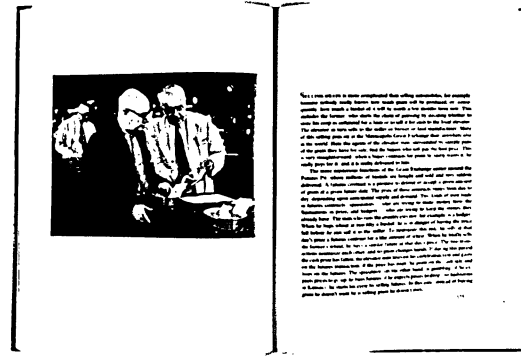
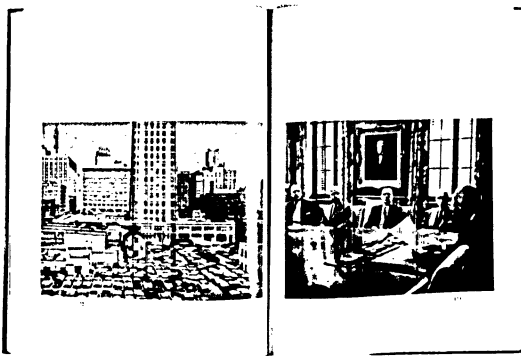
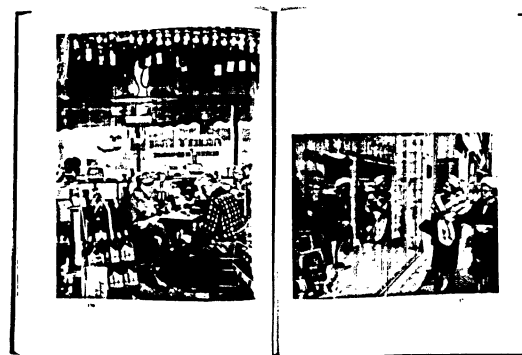
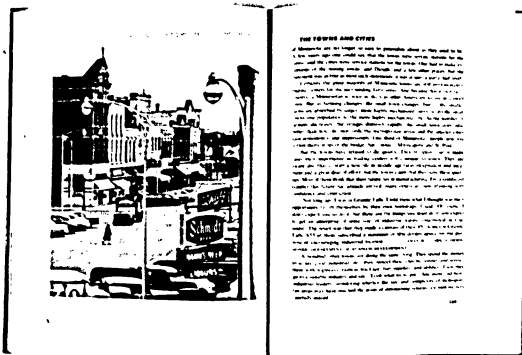
Szarkowski follows a very similar pattern in his presentation of logging practices in the state (80-89). This time he begins with a color image made deep in the forest, a study of the bark of a Norway pine. After situating readers in the calm woods, Szarkowski announces the bad news: "The virgin saw timber is gone from Minnesota. The few remaining stands of large pine are souvenirs—remnants that have been preserved in parks or on the private lands of men who wanted to remember what the forest was like." Quoting the Director of the Lake States Forest Experiment Station, Szarkowski informs the reader that "this is a serious trend which calls for remedial action." Turning the page, the reader is again confronted with the disparity between tradition and "progress." Szarkowski pairs a picture of a single logger on the left, his horse waiting to haul away the few trees he has selected, with another displaying massive stacks of trees, stripped of their branches and ready for the pulp mill. This pairing contrasts traditional, sustainable land use with commercial excess.

After presenting the overwhelming view of so many felled trees, Szarkowski moves with the next spread to the idea of conservation. "Today *everyone* agrees," he writes, "in theory if not always in practice, that the forests are a resource to be harvested on a sustained-yield basis rather than mined. Conservation—the wisest use of available resources—is an ideal universally praised." Facing this text, he returns to an image of the forest as calm, welcoming place worth saving. To reinforce the urgency of his argument, the next double-page spread presents two images, side by side, of men in a small boat guiding hundreds of logs as they float down a river. Szarkowski knows that not everyone is convinced that this type of practice is destructive, and as in the Native American sequence described above, he ends with an unsettling assessment of the current situation. On the next spread, two images are juxtaposed to show a group of old men idly resting on a bench on a small town

main street on the left, as logs are pushed through steaming machines that will shred them into pulp on the facing page.

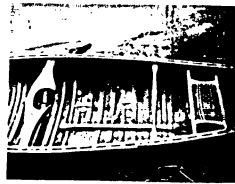
Another sequence of images and text comments on the changing role of the state's towns, as trade becomes more centralized in the Twin Cities (168-177). "The Towns and Cities" opens with a picture of a typical main street in a small town, lined with its drugstore, hardware store, and café. Szarkowski places text across from this image, explaining that these towns have been forced to change from trade centers for farming communities to industrial centers, keeping the town alive through manufacturing plants. The big cities are now the trade centers for the state, and readers get a clear sense of the differences between town and city life. In the pair of images in the next spread, two men in dusty work boots play checkers between customers at the general store, while ladies in fancy hats and fur stoles admire a beaded dress in the window of an upscale department store in downtown Minneapolis.

As the reader turns the page, the city of Minneapolis with its skyscrapers and parking lots presents a view distinct from the small town main street in this section's opening spread. Opposite the wide city view, men in suits sit around a highly polished conference table, conducting business inside one of the imposing buildings. On the next spread, readers are brought into the Minneapolis Grain Exchange, where agents for grain elevator operators find buyers for their stored crops. Szarkowski explains how this system operates in his lively text, his description acting to ground the opposite photo in a particular place and time. Once again Szarkowski leaves his sequence unresolved. In the last spread, an elderly farmer in worn coveralls rests on his bags of grain in front of the local elevator, while opposite, suited traders stand around conducting the mysterious functions of the "Futures Pit" at the Minneapolis Grain Exchange. This juxtaposition, while describing the beginning and end points of grain trading in the state, also creates a sense of nostalgia for the old and wariness of the new.



11. The Face of Minnesota, "The Towns and Cities" sequence, pages 168-77

Through these combinations and sequences of images and texts throughout his book, Szarkowski builds an impression of natural beauty and unique character of Minnesota while subtly drawing attention to its challenges, past and present. This sense is noted by Sandra Phillips, who writes that “the pictures and text articulate an awareness of limits—a change from nature taken for granted to a contemporary understanding of wise land use and conservation—and an acknowledgement of social pressures on rural life.”⁸ Nowhere in the book are these limits more clearly articulated than in Szarkowski’s epilogue, nearly lost without any official marker (284-99). After a section highlighting innovations in technology and manufacturing, the mood abruptly changes as readers turn the page to find a traditional handcrafted canoe resting on the shore of a peaceful lake. This is the second time readers see this image; it appears as the first image in the first of Szarkowski’s four historical essays on page 24. The image and its facing blank page offer the reader a moment to pause and consider the accumulation of images and voices in the preceding pages.



12. *The Face of Minnesota*, pages 284-5

As readers turn the page, they are jolted by the image of heavy machines rolling over desiccated land, smoke filling the air. A state official, quoted in Szarkowski’s text on the facing page, warns against the mishandling of natural resources. The next spread enhances this message even further, as Szarkowski describes the increasing economic power of manufacturing in the state, resulting in the loss of farm land to industry. In a dramatic pairing, Szarkowski illuminates his text with his placement of a pastoral farm scene which now includes a refinery looming in the background. This is surely his notice of things to come,

reinforced in the next three spreads, each with the combination of expert testimony and images of pristine beauty.

Near the end of the sequence, Szarkowski's friend and mentor Ernest C. Oberholtzer appears, seated on the weathered rock shore of a northern Minnesota lake. The portrait of Oberholtzer, a hero of the conservation movement surrounding the border lakes of the state, is placed across from written pleas for mankind to reestablish its nurturing, reciprocal relationship with the land. In a telling concluding statement, Szarkowski ends the sequence with the image of Southdale Shopping Center, the nation's first fully enclosed indoor mall. Szarkowski's final text demands that readers challenge the status quo and question the function of their state: "Is a state like a house, built to shelter its people? or is it like a plant which should in time drop its seeds and die? or is it like a machine, which, once built, should *do* something?"

NOTES

¹ 15,000 copies were printed in 1958, but only 10,000 were bound at that time. Janet Salisbury to Bruce H. Nicoll, Director of the University of Nebraska Press, 21 February 1962, Press Files. This letter is Salisbury's response to Nicoll's request for information about the financing and sales of *The Face of Minnesota*; Nicoll was considering a similar project on the state of Nebraska.

² Nancy Newhall, "The Caption: The Mutual Relation of Words/Photographs," *Aperture* 1, no. 1 (1952): 18.

³ Elizabeth McCausland, "Photographic Books," *The Complete Photographer* 8, no. 43 (20 November 1942): 2788.

⁴ Robert J. R. Johnson, review of *The Face of Minnesota*, by John Szarkowski, *Sunday Pictorial Magazine*, St. Paul Pioneer Press, 11 May 1958, 7-8.

⁵ Sandra Phillips, "Szarkowski the Photographer" in *John Szarkowski: Photographs*, by John Szarkowski (New York: Bulfinch, 2005), 143.

⁶ Donald H. Dooley, review of *The Face of Minnesota*, by John Szarkowski, *Milwaukee Journal*, 4 May 1958.

⁷ One double-page spread consisting only of text occurs as part of Szarkowski's last extended historical essay, pages 236-7.

⁸ Sandra Phillips, "Szarkowski the Photographer" in *John Szarkowski: Photographs*, by John Szarkowski (New York: Bulfinch, 2005), 148.

IV. RECEPTION AND LEGACY

Even before *The Face of Minnesota* was officially released on May 5, 1958, Szarkowski and the staff of the Press began energetically promoting the book. Szarkowski was interviewed on several radio programs in early May, including “Audrey Booth’s Book Chats” on KUOM, broadcast from the University of Minnesota. He appeared on a local television program, signed books at “autograph parties” hosted by bookstores, and spoke to groups at libraries. Posters and advertising circulars were distributed to bookstores across the state, featuring a reproduction of one of Szarkowski’s *Rainy Lake* photographs. To coincide with the book’s publication, the Walker Art Center organized an exhibition of Szarkowski’s photographs, featuring a selection of forty-nine black and white prints.”¹



13. Rainy Lake, from page 4 of *The Face of Minnesota*.
Selected for promotional posters and circulars in 1958

In the following months, *The Face of Minnesota* received recognition that extended far beyond the state. The book was discussed by Dave Garroway on NBC's "Today" show, a particular source of pride for the Press's publicity department.² The Centennial Commission presented copies of the book to visiting dignitaries, with a special bookplate signed by the Governor. Copies were sent to 135 United States Information Service posts in countries around the world, where they were used to "tell the story of America abroad."³ Most reviews of *The Face of Minnesota* were brief, but nearly all were overwhelmingly positive. One reviewer wrote, "...this beautifully done book is enough to make any ex-Minnesotan homesick for two weeks, at least."⁴ By May 11 it was on the list of books "Minneapolis is Reading," and was noted in the *New York Times Book Review*, under "Other Books of the Week." The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* dedicated several pages to the book in a special issue of its *Sunday Pictorial Magazine*, reproducing eight of the book's images.⁵

In what was perhaps the most thorough examination of *The Face of Minnesota* published that year, Minor White wrote a review in *Aperture*, at that time the leading journal dedicated to fine art photography. White, whom Szarkowski had met years earlier at George Eastman House, calls the images "lyrical and informative" with the "underlying current of love [that is] characteristic of the writing and photography of John Szarkowski...Mr. Szarkowski is a documentarian belonging to the humanitarian school – neither photojournalist nor sociologist." White holds *The Face of Minnesota* up as proof of his "contention that the local photographer, given equal talent, can do a more penetrating job of showing facts, fancy and especially essence of place and event than the world jockeying photojournalist...To show how a place lives is much slower, never obvious."⁶

Nearly a month after *The Face of Minnesota* was published, Szarkowski received a letter from John ("Jack") Ervin, the new Director of the University of Minnesota Press. "Adjust your glasses carefully and then have a look at the best seller lists

in the *New York Times Book Review* on June 1 and June 8", he wrote.⁷ *The Face of Minnesota* had indeed captured a coveted spot on the list, where it spent eight weeks that summer.⁸ In July, Janet Salisbury wrote to the *New York Times Book Review* to ask how the list was calculated: "We are as baffled as we are pleased by the fact that our book *The Face of Minnesota* by John Szarkowski has been on the *New York Times* non-fiction best seller list for five weeks. Total sales through July 1 have been 4,691 copies, a figure that is relatively high for a university press book but which we would never have expected would place the book on a national best seller list."⁹

By the end of Minnesota's summer tourist season of 1958, *The Face of Minnesota* had proved itself a commercial success. In September, Szarkowski wrote to Janet Salisbury at the Press. "It begins to look, I take it, that reprinting of *Face of Minnesota* is pretty likely, sooner or later." He expressed his dissatisfaction with the way the color images had been reproduced in the first edition, and requested that "the most serious consideration" be given to having new color separations made if any reprinting were done. He explained that because of the constraints on time and money that were present before the first printing, he "made no issue of the color reproduction, even though some of it was pretty painful."¹⁰ He later suggested throwing out the color plates completely.¹¹

When stock of *The Face of Minnesota* ran dangerously low in 1963, the staff of the Press returned to the idea of a reprint. It is clear from Szarkowski's correspondence with the Press that he was still refining his approach to the problem of joining images with text. By this time Szarkowski had moved on to his post as Director of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, but still had some reservations about reprinting the Minnesota book in its original form. Writing to Marcia Strout, editor at the University of Minnesota Press, he recommended a careful and thorough revision, editing down sections of the text and moving the captions so that they appeared on the page with the images. "In the cold light of history," he wrote, "I have decided the universal opinion of the

populace was right on this: the book will have more coherence and continuity if people know what they are looking at.”¹²

The color plates could not be removed, Strout reminded Szarkowski, because the contract with the Centennial Commission required their inclusion. Plus, she explained, people had come to expect color imagery in books of this kind.¹³ She and the rest of the staff at the Press thought the book was “a very good book indeed just as it stands” and resisted the idea of any revision. “We think that the sequences make sense, and...a third of the readers, dreary as the fact is to contemplate, never read the text.” As for the captions, the members of the Press agreed that “the pictures are intended primarily to create impressions, to stimulate the imagination of the viewer, not primarily to inform him... though he can glance into the back if he wants to find out what he’s looking at.”¹⁴ By early 1964, the Press proceeded with a reprint of 4,000 copies, with only two minor errors corrected.¹⁵

Stock of the second printing of *The Face of Minnesota* was nearly depleted by the end of 1968, and Jack Ervin decided it was time to let the book go out of print.¹⁶ The Press continued to get requests for a third printing, and revisited the idea periodically. Members of the Press considered a reprint once again in 1978, but concluded that the time was simply not right. In a memo to John Ervin, University of Minnesota Press Assistant Director “Chip” Wood, writes, “I have looked at the book again and reviewed the files. The result is that I am persuaded we should not attempt to reprint now.” He elaborates, explaining that there would be a smaller market for a vintage book. “I think another serious problem may be the age of the book – it’s too young to be a classic, and yet there is a very dated aspect to many of the photos depicting the human society. The book would be more interesting a generation from now, I suspect.”¹⁷

While *The Face of Minnesota* has remained out of print since the late 1960s, Szarkowski’s Minnesota photographs have indeed been the subject of renewed

interest. In 2005, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art organized *John Szarkowski: Photographs*, a retrospective exhibition featuring photographs made before and after Szarkowski's years as Director of Photography at MOMA. Several of the images that appear in *The Face of Minnesota* are included in the exhibition and accompanying catalogue. In this new context, the images lose their function as symbols of the particular place and time they were made to represent. Instead, they serve to reflect upon the life of the most powerful American voice in photography in recent decades. In the catalogue, Szarkowski stays true to his practice of pairing pictures with historical texts. Rather than borrowing from Minnesota's writers and historians, however, this time the texts are made up of personal letters he wrote and received while working on the project. The images are no longer about Minnesota—they are about John Szarkowski.

Since the exhibition, reviewers have tried to place Szarkowski's early work alongside others working in post-war America. One writes, "Looking at *Children*,



14. *The Face of Minnesota*, pages 136-7. *Children, Bloomington is on the left; Richfield on the right.*

Bloomington, Minnesota (1957), one can't help but think of William Eggleston's suburban street scenes."¹⁸ Another reviewer compares the same image to Helen Levitt's photographs of New York in the 1940s."¹⁹ Despite Szarkowski's obvious objections, some critics associate *The Face*

of Minnesota with the picture magazines that were so popular at the time of its publication. Richard Woodward writes, "[*The Face of Minnesota*] became a best-seller, probably because it resembled a *Life* magazine portrait of America."²⁰

Joel Eisinger later wrote that the book was “done in a style resembling the *National Geographic*.”²¹ This characterization made it into the 2006 edition of the *Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Photography*.²² Szarkowski insists that at the time he avoided these magazines as models; as for combining images with text, he feels that those who were producing the picture magazines “did not understand the problem at all.”²³

The Minnesota State Centennial Commission and the University of Minnesota Press ordered a celebratory picture book of the state when they hired Szarkowski, and many remember *The Face of Minnesota* fondly as just that. Modern insight might extend the book’s meaning to include Szarkowski’s attitudes toward the wilderness. Even before his Louis Sullivan project, Szarkowski looked for ways to save the great north woods of the Midwest. In 1955, he appealed to the Quetico Foundation, which was setting up funds for Canadian artists working in the area just across the border from Minnesota’s Superior National Forest. Hoping to participate in the project, Szarkowski writes, “I believe that the most successful conservationists have been artists.” He goes on to describe how William Henry Jackson’s photographs of the Yellowstone area convinced Congress that it should be set aside as a national park. “As you have probably guessed,” adds Szarkowski, “I would like to be the W. H. Jackson of the Quetico-Superior Forest.”²⁴

His relationship with the Quetico Foundation did not move forward and soon he was busy with his Louis Sullivan and Minnesota projects, but in 1958 he returned the idea of photographing the Quetico-Superior Forest. He continued to seek funding that would allow him to work on the project full time. Szarkowski received a second Guggenheim award in 1961 based on his proposal for a book concerning wilderness values and the history of the region.²⁵ By this time Ansel Adams and Nancy Newhall had produced *This is the American Earth*²⁶, written, according to Beaumont Newhall, “as a warning, as a challenge, as a hope, to the

American people that this land could be saved from the utter destruction threatened by carelessness and by misunderstanding of the land.”²⁷

Szarkowski did not finish his project; he was called out of the woods to take on his important post at MOMA. His ideas about the role of art in wilderness preservation began to change over the next few years, and his belief in the social function of photographs began to fade. Vicki Goldberg interviewed Szarkowski shortly after his retirement from the Modern, and they spoke about his early projects. She writes, “In 1960, when he canoed into Canada, Mr. Szarkowski hoped to save a wilderness by photographing it, but the idea of social usefulness lost its luster for documentarians over the next few years. Now, he said, ‘if you want to save something from exploitation, don’t photograph it.’”²⁸

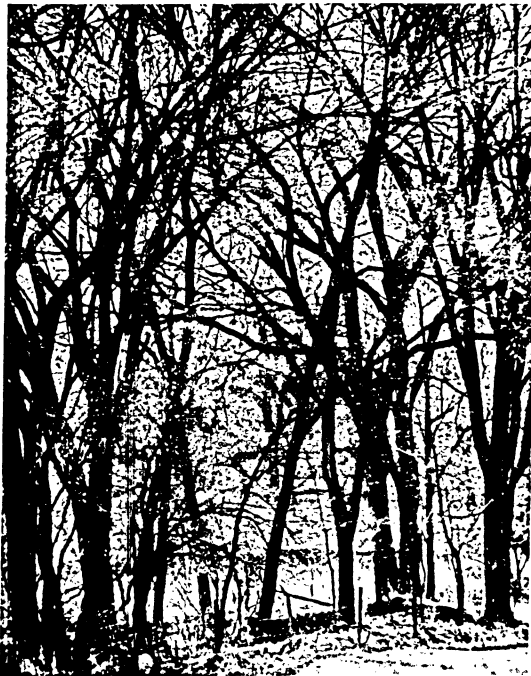
Szarkowski maintains this point of view in the introduction to his 1981 *American Landscapes* exhibition at MOMA, where he writes, “We have been half persuaded by Thoreau and by the evidence of our own brutal use of the land that the earth is beautiful except where man lives, or has passed through; and we have therefore set aside preserves where nature, other than man, might survive, and which men may visit in reasonable numbers and with adequate supervision, for their education and edification. This is an imaginative and admirable idea, and would perhaps be nobler still if we locked the gates to these preserves and denied ourselves entrance, so that we could imagine better what transpires there. We could then turn our attention to the rest of the earth, the part in which we live, which is not yet devoid of life and beauty, and which we might still rescue as a place worth celebrating.”²⁹

In 1958 Szarkowski still hoped that his Minnesota photographs might encourage responsible land use. In the artist biography he completed for the Press, he writes, “As a native of the Northern lake country, I have a deep love for the wilderness activities which northern Minnesota affords in such bounty.”³⁰ This love is revealed in his photographs and writings throughout the book, but both

pictures and words acknowledge the inevitable human encroachment into the wilderness. A wire fence marks the limits of his *Hardwood forest* (15), and boulders left by the glaciers now stand watch over farmland, cleared for planting (17).

In the years soon after *The Face of Minnesota* was published, only one review stands out in its recognition of the book's underlying environmental theme.

Writing for *Infinity* in 1962, Ralph Hattersley examined *The Face of Minnesota* in



15. Hardwood forest, from page 15 of
The Face of Minnesota

an attempt to find out what Szarkowski might bring to his new position at MOMA. In his review, he finds that the book "leaves the reader with the feeling of having experienced particular people and places as well as the state and its history in large perspective. Somehow, having read the book, I know Minnesota; I like and admire its people." He notes that Szarkowski takes a "strong stand for conservation, saying that if the Minnesotans wish to continue reaping the bounties of the land they must take care of it. While showing what steps are being taken he is also asking for more."³¹ These

comments most perceptively illustrate both the obvious and more subtle meanings of *The Face of Minnesota*.

NOTES

- ¹ Photographs reproduced on the following pages of *The Face of Minnesota* were part of the Walker exhibition, in the order they appear on the checklist: 122, 263, 49, 51, 241, 265, 293, 38, 260, 15, 143, 107, 242, 193, 58, 137, 160, 131, 53, 69, 274, 262, 92, 259, 118, 141, 247, 119, 176, 93, 91, 181, 287, 125, 88, 171, 250, 17, 261, 102, 82, 45, 54, 46, 139, 31, 234, 100, 42. The exhibition was removed in late July and offered as a traveling exhibition to regional institutions. During the next year and a half, the photographs appeared at St. Mary's College in Winona, MN, Wartburg College in Waverly, IA, the Wustum Museum in Racine, WI, Worthington High School, Worthington, MN, and the J.B. Speed Art Museum in Louisville, KY. The total rental fee was \$18.00, which covered insurance, transportation, crating and handling charges. *The Face of Minnesota* Sales Files, University of Minnesota Press.
- ² John Ervin to John Szarkowski, 17 July 1958, Press Files.
- ³ Minutes, Centennial Commission, 25 September 1958.
- ⁴ John Virden, review of *The Face of Minnesota*, *Army Times*, 28 April 1958.
- ⁵ Robert J. R. Johnson, review of *The Face of Minnesota*, *Sunday Pictorial Magazine*, *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, May 11, 1958, 7-9.
- ⁶ Minor White, review of *The Face of Minnesota*, *Aperture* 6, no. 2: 94.
- ⁷ John Szarkowski to John Ervin, 4 June 1958, Press Files.
- ⁸ June 1 (#16); June 8 (#15); June 15 (#14); July 6 (#15); July 13 (#13); July 20 (#14); July 27 (#14); August 31 (#16).
- ⁹ Janet Salisbury to Nona Balakian, 11 July 1958, Press Files.
- ¹⁰ John Szarkowski to Janet Salisbury, 9 September 1958, Press Files.
- ¹¹ John Szarkowski to Marcia Strout, 23 August 1963, Press Files.
- ¹² John Szarkowski to Marcia Strout, 29 November 1963, Press Files.
- ¹³ Marcia Strout to John Szarkowski, 30 August 1963, Press Files.
- ¹⁴ Marcia Strout to John Szarkowski, 3 December 3 1963, Press Files.
- ¹⁵ The caption for the image on p. 104 was corrected to read "Cemetery, Sibley County." The tenth line of the T. S. Eliot text was changed to *By worshippers of the machine...* (the omitted).
- ¹⁶ John Ervin to Low-in-Stock File, 30 October 1968. Press Files.
- ¹⁷ Chip Wood to John Ervin, 16 August 1978, Press Files.
- ¹⁸ Nola Tully, review of *John Szarkowski: Photographs*, by John Szarkowski, *The New Criterion* 24, no. 8 (April 2006): 45.
- ¹⁹ Roberta Smith, review of *John Szarkowski: Photographs* by John Szarkowski, *New York Times*, 3 February 2006.
- ²⁰ Richard B. Woodward, "Picture Prefect," *ARTnews* 87 (March 1988): 170.
- ²¹ Joel Eisinger, *Trace and Transformation: American Criticism of Photography in the Modernist Period* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 211.
- ²² Lynn Warren, ed. *Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Photography* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1524.
- ²³ John Szarkowski, letter to author, 2 July 2006.
- ²⁴ John Szarkowski to Harold C. Walker, 18 June 1955, Ernest C. Oberholtzer Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.
- ²⁵ *John Szarkowski: Photographs* (New York: Bulfinch, 2005), 133.
- ²⁶ Ansel Adams and Nancy Newhall, *This is the American Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1960).
- ²⁷ Beaumont Newhall, *Photography and the Book* (Boston: Boston Public Library, 1983), 50.
- ²⁸ Vicki Goldberg, "A Photography Curator Narrows His Focus," *New York Times*, 9 April 1997.
- ²⁹ John Szarkowski, *American Landscapes* (New York: MOMA, 1981), 14.
- ³⁰ John Szarkowski, "Personal Background," 16 October 1956, Press Files.
- ³¹ Ralph Hattersley, "Szarkowski in Minnesota," review of *The Face of Minnesota*, *Infinity* (September 1962): 10.

CONCLUSION

Reflecting upon *The Face of Minnesota* nearly fifty years after completing the project, Szarkowski writes about its lasting virtues. "I think the best thing about the book is its parts—both pictures and text—but I think the book as a whole is quite successful, considering the complexity of the subject," Szarkowski explains. "Doubtless the cities got comparative short shrift, by any statistical measurement, but I do think that the book gives a sense of the whole place, with all its variety, and that it does so with an affection and sympathy that were altogether genuine."¹ Members of Minnesota's current photography scene hold the same affection for Szarkowski's book, and there has been much speculation about a reprint of *The Face of Minnesota* as the state's sesquicentennial approaches in 2008.

If *The Face of Minnesota* were reprinted, it would be examined in terms of fifty years of Szarkowski's influence in the field, fifty years of change in the state of Minnesota, and fifty years of photographically-illustrated books. Ultimately, it will be viewed as the product of the 1950s, a period tied to the documentary tradition of preceding decades, but ready to follow the growing artistic impulse. This balance is fittingly characterized by Martin Parr and Gerry Badger in their recent study of the photographically-illustrated book. "The photobook has an important role within the history of photography," they write. "It resides at a vital interstice between the art and the mass medium, between the journeyman and the artist, between the aesthetic and the contextual."² *The Face of Minnesota* exemplifies this important role of the photobook.

NOTES

¹ John Szarkowski, letter to author, 2 July 2006.

² Martin Parr and Gerry Badger. *The Photobook: A History*, Vol. I (London: Phaidon, 2004), 11.

APPENDIX A: Attachment to letter from John Szarkowski to Helen Clapesattle, February 14, 1956.

THE FACE OF MINNESOTA: A Photographic Document

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|---------------------------|---|
| definition and purpose | <p>The aim of this project is a consistent and integral visual report on The State of Minnesota today: its people, their culture, and their land. In addition to this specific function, it is believed that the project will demonstrate and develop new potentials of the extended photographic essay, as a critical and creative medium.</p> |
| publication and other use | <p>As their first and primary use, these photographs will furnish the material for a photographic book of the State today, to be published in connection with Minnesota's centennial celebration, in 1958. The photographs selected for this book (156 monochrome and 52 color) will be reprinted in the four successive years as engagement calendars, one quarter of the book being used for each calendar issue.</p> <p>In addition, these photographs, after publication, along with those photographs which were produced by the project but not chosen for publication, will be made available for use by educational and historical groups in the state.¹</p> |
| text | <p>Since the completed work will make its statement as a book, the creation of an appropriate text is considered an inherent part of the total problem. This text will in its greater part take the form of long captions, sometimes written specifically to pertain to the facing photographs, and sometimes excerpted from the rich body of documentary sources, both historical and contemporary, which will best compliment or reinforce the message of the photograph.</p> |
| project scope | <p>The scope of the project's concern will be broad. All major aspects of the State's social, cultural and economic life will be recorded, against the background of her physical environment. In terms of the purely circumstantial "record" photograph, such scope would imply the necessity of literally thousands of pictures. Therefore the photographic problem is not merely to describe, but to discover and enliven those aspects of the subject that together best suggest and symbolize the whole.</p> |
| schedule and completion | <p>The total period devoted to this project will be eighteen months, from March 1956 to September 1957. This schedule will allow approximately thirty-two weeks for photographing, in the field. The remainder of the time will be devoted to preliminary and final photographic processing, to the research required for pictures and text, and to the final compilation and editing of the book.</p> |

¹ There is no indication in the Press or Centennial Commission files that Szarkowski's photographs were used for engagement calendars or any further use by "educational and historical groups."

APPENDIX B: *The Face of Minnesota* contract agreement. Approved and signed by The Minnesota Statehood Centennial Commission, The Regents of the University of Minnesota, and The Author, December 7, 1956.

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

This Agreement, made this 30th day of November, 1956, by and among the Minnesota State Centennial Commission, representing and acting for the Legislature of the State of Minnesota (hereinafter referred to as the Commission); the Regents of the University of Minnesota acting through the University of Minnesota Press (hereinafter referred to as the University); and John Szarkowski, photographer and writer of *Ashland Wisconsin* and *St. Paul, Minnesota* (hereinafter referred to as the Author), witnesseth that,

Whereas the University, joining with the Commission, wishes to have prepared for publication in book form in 1958, as part of the celebration of Minnesota's statehood centennial in that year, a photographic survey of the state with appropriate accompanying text; and

Whereas the Author is competent and willing to undertake the preparation of both pictures and text for such a survey; and

Whereas the Commission, in fulfillment of the purposes for which it was established, wishes to encourage the preparation and dissemination of such materials among the people of Minnesota and interested persons elsewhere, during the centennial year and thereafter –

It is therefore agreed by and among the University, the Author, and the Commission that:

1. The University will engage the Author to prepare both pictures and text for this book portrait of Minnesota. It will pay him a stipend of \$450 per month from August 15, 1956, the date on which the Author, by verbal agreement and in accordance with verbal instructions from the University and the Commission, began work on the project, until he has completed it, which date is not to be later than December 31, 1957. The University will also reimburse the Author for all his expenditures on the purchase of materials and in travel for the project. But the University's payments to the Author, for both stipend and expenses are not to exceed a total of \$12,700, in accordance with the attached estimate submitted by the Author. The initial payment by the University to the Author shall include payment of stipend and reimbursement of expenses retroactive to August 15, 1956.

2. The Commission will reimburse the University for its payments to the Author at such times as the University renders bills therefore to the Commission, provided only that such bills are not presented more often than once a month and that the total amount for which the Commission is liable is not to exceed \$12,700.

3. The Author will prepare and present for publication, not later than December 31, 1957, an integrated group of pictures, totaling more than 40 in color and 130 in black-and-white, with appropriate accompanying captions and text. In this he is to be left free to do a creative job and will not be required to accept dictation or revision in matters of content which in his opinion would violate his integrity or damage his reputation as an artist and a writer. He will, however, consult the Commission as well as the University for advice on the general categories and the broad subjects to be covered; he will include some treatment of the state's history, preferably in an historical prologue. Final review and decision on content will be made in joint consultation with the University and the Commission. If this final consultation, due to neglect or inattention by the Commission, delays completion and production of the book, neither the Author nor the University is to be held responsible for failure to meet the publication date specified in Item 4 of this agreement.

4. The University will publish the book and have it available for sale in Minnesota bookstores by May 1, 1958, but the University is not to be held liable for failure to meet this date if such failure results from an Act of God or other conditions and circumstances over which it could have no control. Publication will be in such format and design as the University decides are practicable and suitable, after careful consideration of the purposes of the book and with due regard to the wishes of the Commission and the Author. The University will offer the book for sale at a list price of not more than \$5.00.

5. The University will acknowledge the sponsorship of the Commission by publishing the book under a statement on the dedication page as follows: On May 11, 1858, Minnesota became the 32nd state to enter the union of the United States of America. This book is published in cooperation with the Minnesota Statehood Centennial Commission in commemoration of this important historic event. It will further, if the Commission so requests, include in the Acknowledgments or at some equally suitable place in the fore pages of the book, an unobtrusive acknowledgment of indebtedness for financial aid to the individual, agency, or institution that the Commission agrees to pay the University in Item 2 of this Agreement. In this connection the Commission will give careful consideration to the fact that commercial sponsorship thus acknowledged in any conspicuous or advertising way may easily defeat the purposes of publishing the book by rendering it unsaleable.

6. Title to all pictures taken by the Author on this project will belong to the University. But in recognition of the Author's stake as a photographer in the proper printing of his pictures, the Author is to retain possession of all the negatives, supplying prints of his own making as necessary to fulfill the purposes of the project and the terms of this Agreement. On completion of the book, the Author will make available to the Commission proof prints of all photographs not used in the book. From these proofs the Commission may select pictures for their own use. From these negatives the Author will supply one 8 x 10 glossy print and copy negative, which the Commission will use according to their wishes. Copy negative and print will be made available at cost, not to exceed \$2.00. All color transparencies not included in the book will be made available to the Commission and the University in copy transparency form by the Author and the Author may request and shall receive payment for them at standard rates. The Commission may obtain photographic copies of pictures published in the book by permission of the University. No additional use is to be made of the pictures published in the book except by permission of the University. The Author will be free to arrange for exhibiting of the pictures as he wishes and can, subject only to securing permission from the University on those published in the book. The Author will be free to arrange for publication of the pictures as he wishes and can, after September 1, 1958, subject only to securing permission from the University on those published in the book.

7. The Author will cooperate with the Commission and the University, as far as possible without jeopardizing satisfactory completion of the project on time, in publicizing his activities on the project. The Commission will recognize and acknowledge the joint sponsorship of the project by the University in all its publicizing of the project and the University will do the same. Publicizing and promotion of the book will be arranged by joint consultation between the University and the Commission, to avoid duplications of effort and conflict in plans and arrangements.

8. The Author will establish and maintain residence in Minnesota for the duration of the project.

9. The Commission will be entitled to buy from the University up to 500 copies of the published book, for the Commission's own use but not for resale, at the unit cost of production per copy plus actual handling charges incurred by the University. This same purchase privilege, subject to the same restriction as to number, up to 500 copies of the book, may by negotiation with the University Press be extended to the secondary sponsor acknowledgment of whose aid is provided in Item 5 of this Agreement.

10. The University will grant to the Author the customary author's privilege of six free copies of the book and the right to purchase additional copies, for his own use but not for resale, at the author's discount of 40% from list price. In view of the payments provided for in this Agreement, the University will pay the Author no royalties on the first 10,000 copies of the book sold. On all copies sold thereafter the University will pay the Author a royalty of 10% net proceeds.

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