

Steven Surdiacourt

Changing Covers

The paratextual transformations of René Burri's *Die Deutschen*

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1. From the history of the photobook to the history of a photobook

In the introduction to the first part of their seminal work *The Photobook, A History* Martin Parr and Gerry Badger (2004) describe the object of their historical explorations as follows:

A photobook is a book – with or without text – where the work’s primary message is carried by photographs. It is a book authored by a photograph or by someone editing and sequencing the work of a photographer, or even a number of photographers. It has a specific character, distinct from the photographic print, be it the simple functional work print, or the fine art exhibition print (Parr, Badger 2004, p. 6).

The photobook is then described as an autonomous object in which the photographs lose their status of individual objects and become part of “a concise world within the book itself” (John Gossage, quoted in Parr, Badger 2004, p. 7). In this concise universe the “collective meaning [is] more important than the images’ individual meanings”. Such distinctive factors as the photographic sequence; the choice of an accompanying text; the intricate interaction between individual images or individual texts, between individual images and individual texts, between the accompanying text and the photographic sequence, the overall design; the material properties of the book (“the binding, the jacket, the typography, the paper” (Parr, Badger 2004, p. 7) and the printing); the specific theme etc. contribute to the creation of this collective meaning.

The academic interest for the study of the photobook as a material object is steadily growing, not in the least because this approach offers an alternative view on the history of photography distinct from those academic traditions centered on the aesthetics of the image, on the development of photographic techniques or on



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the socio-political implications of the photographic medium. Even if an in-depth understanding of the photobook demands a keen eye for aesthetic, technical and socio-political issues. In turn this vein of research opens up new paths for the (contextual) exploration of the photographic image. The final consequence of a research orientation focusing on the photobook is the exploration not only of the historical evolution of the photobook but also the micro-history of individual photobooks, shape shifting throughout their subsequent editions. Since a photobook is determined by a complex of different factors – as described above – the change of several (or just one) of the constitutive elements might (and mostly does) alter the “collective meaning” of the book in a significant way or creates, arguably, a new book altogether. A photobook is thus certainly not to be considered an atemporal, immutable essence. The goal of this kind of research into the history of individual

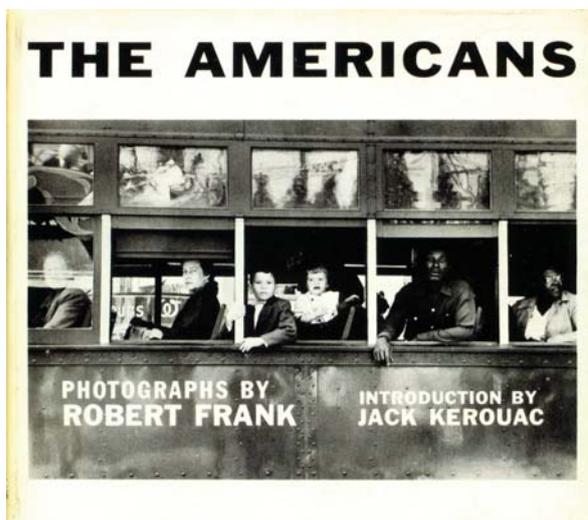


Fig. 1 – Front cover of *The Americans* (1959)

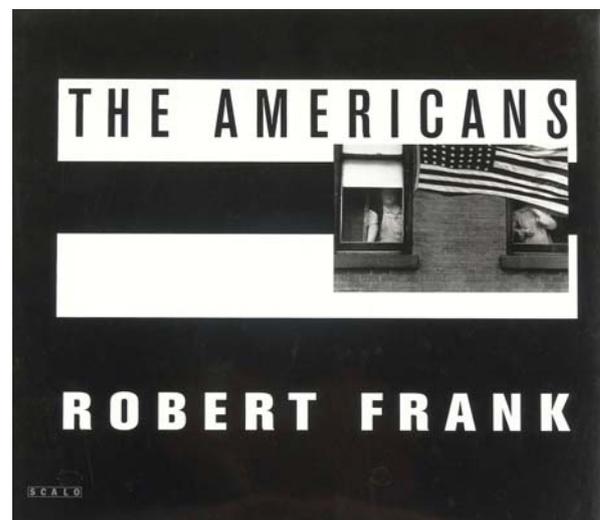


Fig. 2 – Front cover of *The Americans* (1998)

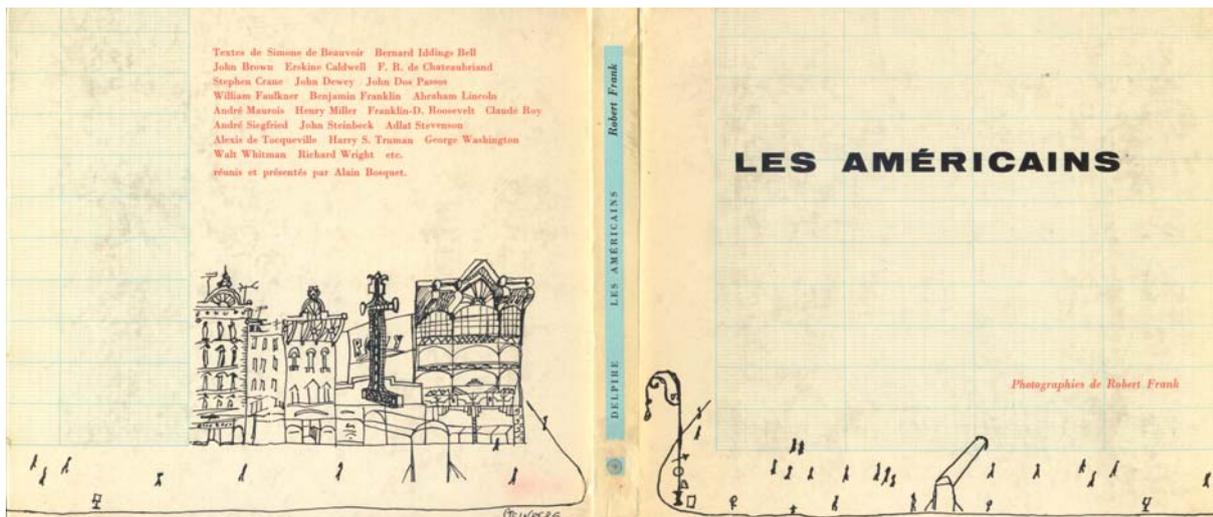


Fig. 3 – Cover of *Les Américains* (1958)

photobooks is definitely not to (re)construct a definitive edition, but rather to investigate the reasons, the contexts and the consequences of their formal transformations (figg. 1, 2).

One of the most striking examples of this kind of editorial transformation in undoubtedly – and the example is not randomly chosen – Robert Frank's widely acclaimed American reportage *The Americans*. The Swiss photographer's book was first published in 1958 as part of Delpire's *Encyclopédie essentielle* under the title *Les Américains* (fig. 3) and republished in 1959 by Grove Press in its now canonical form. Parr and Badger comment on the publication history of *The Americans* as follows: "Robert Frank's masterpiece has become so much of the photobook of legend in its first American edition that it is often forgotten that Delpire's original Paris edition was a different book. Its accompanying texts, gathered by Alain Bosquet, placed it in a socio-documentary context – with a politically antagonistic, even anti-American point-of-view. Only with the Grove Press edition, denuded of text, except for Kerouac's famous introduction [...] did it become ([...] in Kerouac's words) a 'sad poem sucked right out of America' – or out of Frank's despair" (Parr, Badger 2004, p. 247). In the scholarly and artistic reception of *The Americans* up to now the Grove Press edition is considered the "original" edition, the Delpire edition on the other hand is regarded as a (not very influential) proto-version – if it is not totally neglected. Even after *The Americans* was molded into its (more or less) definitive form with the Grove Press edition, the history of the photobook did not come to an end. In the nowadays popular Scalo edition (1998), for example, the famous cover picture of the Grove Press edition (fig. 1) – a photo of a trolley bus in New Orleans thematising racial segregation – was replaced by the opening picture of Frank's photographic sequence – a picture of the spectators of a parade in New Jersey that reveals something of the problematic relation of identity and patriotism (fig. 2), offering the

reader a new looking-glass for the reading of the photobook (fig. 3).

2. Through the looking-glass

As the example of *The Americans* suggests, book covers are significant markers of editorial change. The choice for a new cover design for a new edition hints, as I will argue, at changing relations between the textual and the extra-textual realm.

Since the cover of a book is the most visible and palpable part of the peritext, laid out to hold (for a moment at least) the reader's first inquiring look, its function is *a fortiori* to "present it [the actual text], in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book" (Genette 1987, p. 1). The motif introduced in this exploratory definition is retaken and modulated as Genette asserts that the paratext is "an 'undefined zone' between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward [...] or the outward side." This zone, he adds, is "not only a zone of transition but also of transaction" (Genette 1987, p. 2). A book cover is then a liminal space or an interface that connects a textual and an extratextual reality, inviting readers in – hence Michel Serre's description of the artistic threshold as a door (Serres 1989, p. 90) – and positioning the text in a larger cultural and/or socio-political context. These functions are of course strongly intertwined: the reader's decision to start reading the book is (partly) determined by the presentation of the book's contents on the cover. Considering both its social and its textual function, a book cover could be described as a looking-glass or a reading device as it orients (or re-orient) subjective readings of individual books in specific historical and cultural contexts.

In his enlightening text *Motifs of Extraction: Images on*

Book Covers (2005) Jan Baetens explores the functional differences between covers of fictional works and covers of photographic books. He determines three important distinctions: a difference in form – “the photographic perigraphy favors the images over the textual or verbal elements” – a difference in status – “the perigraphy of the photographic book appears to be less free than that of its counterpart in the sphere of literature” – and finally a difference in function – “the photographic epigraphy [sic] being less concerned with promotion and with controlling the reader than with the function of presentation” (Baetens 2005, p. 86-87). This list of differences is the result of a thorough description of the formal properties of the covers of different photobooks. Jan Baetens notes that on most of the photobook covers – of course there are exceptions – one of the images of the photographic sequence is reproduced. The cover image is selected to – in a kind of synecdochic gesture – stand for the entire series. This practice of extraction, as he names it, distinguishes the cover of a photobook from the visual cover of a work of fiction, governed by the principle of contraction, whereby one of the narrative’s central scenes is visualized by the cover image (Baetens 2005, p. 85). The choice for the extraction of a particular image is determined by three major factors. First of all “the image must be a quotation from the book, and, in addition, it should also be a representative quotation” (Baetens 2005, p. 85), second the image should fit into the overall cover design without being a mere illustration of the meaning of the title and third “the cover images should make clear at the outset that it is not an isolated image but that it belongs to a series” (Baetens 2005, p. 88), meaning that the use of too strong an image on the cover is best avoided.

There is, in my opinion, one small flaw in Baetens’ argumentation. His focus on the “relationship between text and peritext” (Baetens 2005, p. 82), and his ensuing disregard for the reception of the peritext, leads him to understand the practice of extraction as a purely formal strategy, while neglecting its performative function. In his text Baetens argues that the choice for the reproduction of an image on the cover is determined by its representativity for the photographic sequence. I would like to stress conversely that all images are equal constituents of the photographic sequence, that no image is more or less representative for the series that encompasses it prior to its extraction and reproduction on the cover. It is the reduplication of the image and its spatial (from the inside to the outside) and functional transposition (from an image in the sequence to an image standing for and before the sequence) that lends the cover image its “aura” of representativity in the eye of the reader. Only in this perspective the strategy of extraction becomes truly synecdochic, as a not representative part of the whole comes to represent the whole. The notion of representativity on the other hand is still firmly anchored in a logic of contraction. This slight

adjustment in the theory of extraction also sheds a new light on the functions of the cover image. In his text Jan Baetens discerned two main functions: first of all the picture on the cover announces “with as little ambiguity as possible the type of images that will be found inside the volume” (Baetens 2005, p. 85), and second the picture helps to control the reading rhythm (Baetens 2005, p. 89). Given however the potential of any image to represent the photographic image (of course taking into account the other determining factors), the influence of the actual cover image on the reading process should prove to be stronger than expected – although maybe not so strong and precise as the influence of a verbal paratext. The selected cover image, with its formal and thematic specificities offers, as I would like to show, the reader a reading grid, a map for roaming through the photographic sequence.

The cover image is one of the most prominent elements of the photobook’s peritext (and even paratext), but it is certainly not an isolated element. It rather interacts with a whole range of other visual and verbal paratextual elements. The interpretation of Robert Frank’s *The Americans* as a Beat celebration of travel, mainly sparked by Jack Kerouac’s legendary introduction to the book, for example, is reinforced by the depiction of a means of transportation on the cover of the Grove Press edition. A very interesting kind of paratextual interplay is established by the use of two different cover images, one on the front cover and one on the back cover of the photobook. Although both covers are determined by the same principle of extraction, the selected images seem to have a slightly different (but not totally opposite) status. Its reproduction on the very last printable surface of the book does not mean that the reading of the photograph on the back cover is meant to conclude the reading of the photographic sequence. In this sense the back cover image disrupts the concordance of spatial positioning and reading order that characterizes the functioning of the image on the front cover. Both images seem rather to form – in the restricted space of the book cover – a parallel photographic sequence. If the image on the front cover reminds “the reader at the beginning that it takes time to read an image” (Baetens 2005, p. 89) and thus prepares the reader for another reading paradigm, the insertion of a second image might as well warn the reader that every image in a photographic sequence is to be read and understood in relation to the other images. The parallel sequence on the cover is nevertheless distinct from the photographic sequence in the book: whereas the latter is composed of images that equally contribute to the significance of the sequence, the former seems to be structured in a hierarchic manner. More particularly the image on the back cover of the book takes on a secondary role; its main function is to mirror some of the important features of the image on the front cover and to reinforce the reading program it provides.

3. Die Deutschen

To verify some of the previous theoretical considerations I would like to retrace the publication genealogy of René Burri's reportage of post-war Germany by focussing mainly on the changing covers of the different editions. *Die Deutschen* was first published in 1962 in Zürich by Fretz & Wasmuth and republished shortly thereafter (1963) as *Les Allemands* in Robert Delpire's *Encyclopédie essentielle*. New editions by Schirmer/Mosel appeared in 1986 and 1999. A book with such a complex editorial history as *Die Deutschen* deserves a double reading: a first reading, indispensable for the historiography of photography, that tries to discern the overall – circulating, not localized – significance of the photographic project and a second reading which describes the social life of the project through its different (re)editions. In the context of this essay the first reading will take on the form of a concise introduction into René Burri's early work.

3.1. A significant inconsistency

The comparison with Robert Frank's masterpiece *The Americans* is a recurrent theme in the reception of *Die Deutschen*. Although the critical reflex to compare both photographic projects was certainly strengthened by a number of biographical and editorial coincidences, it was triggered by more formal concerns. Parr and Badger note: "Burri's pictures are sharp and incisive, occupying an interesting middle ground between the controlled framing of the classic photojournalistic mode and the casual looseness of Frank" (Parr, Badger 2004, p. 218). Instead of using this finding as an opening for a reading of Burri's photographic work in itself, the authors cling to the comparison with *The Americans*, stating: "If Frank had not raised the bar to impossible heights, Burri's book would be more widely regarded as one of the best photobooks of the 1960s". Burri's book, the authors conclude is "a much underrated book, but one nevertheless firmly back in the more classic genre of European photojournalism" (Parr, Badger 2004, p. 190).

It makes more sense to consider *Die Deutschen* as an answer to some of the problems generated by *The Americans*, rather than as a failed attempt to create a German counterpart to Robert Frank's photobook. Writing that that Burri's photographic sequence lacks "Frank's intensely personal vision" (Parr, Badger 2004, p. 218), Parr and Badger might have meant that Burri's photographic sequence is not as consistent as Frank's. This inconsistency, I would like to argue, is at the same time the most striking and most significant feature of Burri's project. As Parr and Badger point out the photographic sequence of *Die Deutschen* is formally characterized by the juxtaposition of images in the classic documentary vein and images determined by Frank's paradigm of subjective testimony. The confrontation of two photographic models surely has a critical function, as it shows

both paradigms as systems of (coded) conventions. An explanation for this strategy of confrontation is provided by the poetics of Hans Magnus Enzensberger, whose (early) texts (prose and poetry) accompany the photographic sequence in most of the editions. Enzensberger's work in the fifties and the sixties was devoted to defy the "dichotomous view of the lyrics genre as either *poésie pure* or *poésie engagée*" (Melin 2003, p. 36) or to close the gap between "*Elfenbeinturm und Agitprop*" [the ivory tower and agitation-propaganda] (quoted in Zimmermann 1977, p. 44), as he described it himself. Seen in this light the inconsistency of Burri's photographic sequence, can be understood as an attempt to reconcile a highly self-conscious – but strictly subjective – imagery with a (potentially manipulative) visual language coded for objectivity. Burri thus seems to have understood and incorporated Frank's visual paradigm, but also to have seen its dangers, more particularly its impossibility to overcome a strictly personal viewpoint. There is nevertheless one major difference between the projects of Enzensberger and Burri: whereas the plasticity of poetical language allows the fusion of ethics and aesthetics in one single text, the photographic medium resists this kind of reconciliation and forces the photographer to keep on confronting images of both paradigms, without hope of ever reaching a "middle ground".

On the content level the Burri's photographic sequence engages in a dialogue with a French documentary tradition, that of humanist photography. This particular documentary vein, which originated during the 1930s, became the dominant visual language in postwar France. It played an important role in the reconciliation and reunification of the French nation after the atrocities of World War II and the difficulties of decolonization, by representing France as one strong community (cf. Hamilton 1997). Burri must have felt that this specific photographic language, with its accent on optimism and solidarity, was not particularly suited for the depiction of a literally dived country. By portraying of all kinds of relational, geographical, historical, social and spatial ruptures, he puts into perspective the values conveyed by the humanist paradigm and adapts the representational system to the German situation. It would be untrue on the other hand to claim that Burri replaces the humanist grammar of unification with a generalized grammar of division, while addressing more or less the same topics. Burri's imagery is far more capricious, as it confronts images of unity with image of separation, creating an atmosphere of uncertainty, rather than one of radical division.

3.2. Les Allemands

The Delpire edition (for a discussion of Delpire's editorial practice see Boulaire & Renonciat 2010) of René Burri's work is exceptional in a double sense: the edition takes on a particular position in the editorial genealogy

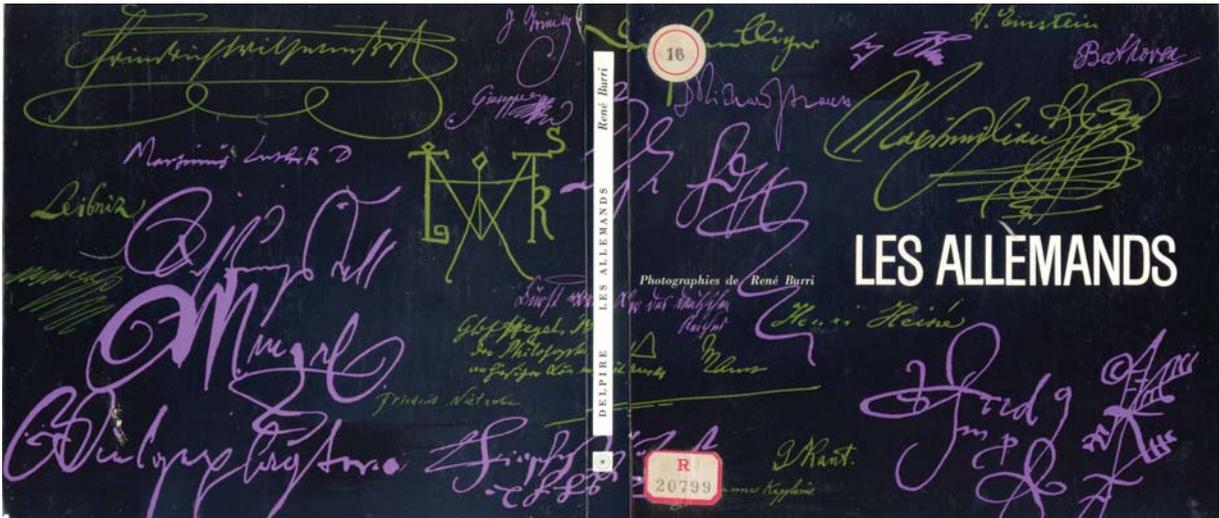


Fig. 4 – Cover of *Les Allemands* (1963)

of *Die Deutschen* but also in the project of the *Encyclopédie essentielle*. The books in this series “are not art books”, as the description of *Essentiellement* – as the series is now called – on Delpire’s website stresses, but are rather to be seen as “loose explorations of a specific theme presented by the editor”. These books appeal to a threefold reading, as the description continues, that is a first reading of the images – the imagery is described as “unconventional and miscellaneous”, combining pictures from different times, genres and styles; a second reading of the captions, revealing the significance of the images and a third reading of the text, which offers “an in-depth study of the chosen topic”. The description clearly emphasizes the pivotal role of the editor in the modeling process. The books in the *Encyclopédie essentielle* thus seem to belong to the “genre of photobook [...] made by someone who is not even a photographer”; in this genre “the author’s task is not one of creating the photographs, but of selection and ordering” (Parr, Badger 2004, p. 8). *Les Arabes* (1959), for example, is a perfect realization of the above described editorial program: the book contains an essay from the hand of Jacques Berque, professor of the social history of Islam at the Collège de France between 1956 and 1981, and is illustrated with a patchwork of images of manuscripts, archeological findings etc. and contemporary documentary photographs by, among others, Burri, Cartier-Bresson and Riboud. Notwithstanding their (deceivingly) similar titles *Les Allemands* and *Les Américains* are structured in a quite distinct (and even opposite) manner, combining a pre-conceived photographic sequence by a single photographer and a patchwork of quotes from different authors selected by Jean Baudrillard in Burri’s book and by Alain Bosquet in Frank’s (fig. 4). Despite these formal distinctions, the pages of both *Les Américains* and *Les Allemands* are imbued with the same pedagogical zeal as the other books in the *Encyclopédie essentielle*. The texts in both books strive to outline the contours of a, respectively, American and German na-

tional identity. Baudrillard opens his introduction to *Les Allemands* with a dismissal of the idea of a German “soul”, writing: “let us no longer speak in terms of a “soul”, let us no longer lock up the Germans in this irrational complex” (Burri 1963, p. 8 (my translation)). Then the text takes another turn: Baudrillard concludes that the Germany has not found an appropriate answer to the questions raised by World War II and that the Germans are still holding on to the idea of a German soul: “Will it [Germany] finally lose its “soul” and find a style, a luck line, a new society?” (Burri 1963, p. 12 (my translation)). The introductory text is followed by a collage of quotes trying to discern this German soul. Most of them are from authors whose thinking is clearly affected by a Romantic nationalism: Goethe, Hölderlin, Heine, Mme de Staël... and even Hitler and Goebbels. *Les Allemands* (and so is *Les Américains*) is thus in line with the program set out in the epigraph of *Les Arabes* – an excerpt from Goethe’s *Faust II* – which suggests that the book is a search for the hidden soul of the Arabs. It goes without saying that the focus on the description of a national identity is not only a function of the editorial program, but also of the French attempts to reposition the country in the changed world after the second World War.

Obviously the confrontation of a text trying to define a German “soul” and a photographic sequence problematizing the very concept of national identity, threatens to undermine the pedagogical project of the *Encyclopédie essentielle*. The main function of the cover of *Les Allemands*, I would argue, is to prevent this potential conflict by emphasizing the centrality of the text. All the volumes of the *Encyclopédie essentielle* have original, mostly colorful graphic – rather than photographic – covers. The choice not to put a photograph on the cover of a photobook is always marked, but in the case of *Les Allemands* it is even more peculiar. Whereas Saul Steinberg’s drawing on the cover of *Les Américains* directly refers to Frank’s photographs – it opposes Frank’s



Fig. 5 – Front and back cover of *Die Deutschen* (1962)

subjective visual language (the vivid drawing) to the documentary codes of objectivity (the blue grid pattern that reminds one of millimeter graph paper) – the signatures of the included authors fill the whole cover in *Les Allemands* and render almost invisible the name of the photographer. The cover design thus presents *Les Allemands* as a textbook (or a book of quotes) rather than as a photobook, reducing the editorial program of a threefold reading to a reading of the text and a reading of the pictures anchored by the text.

3.3. From experiment to document

The rare reader who would open *Die Deutschen* (1962) to a random page without looking at the cover – an almost impossible undertaking, to be honest – and without carefully scrutinizing the text, would be tempted to consider it as “just” the German original of the above described French “translation”. Parr and Badger’s entry on the subject, for example, seems to be structured to a large degree by this confusion (Parr, Badger 2004, p. 218). A more thorough reading however reveals that both books, apart from some structural (and quite superficial) similarities: the same photographs on the even pages and a patchwork of quotations on the odd ones, could not be more different. Whereas the textual collage in *Les Allemands* is vigorously framed by Baudrillard’s introduction and by its subdivision in thematic chapters, the collection of quotes in *Die Deutschen* (1962) is organized so as to activate its polyphonic potential. Or put otherwise: the quotes in *Les Allemands* are structured by a logic of culmination, whereas the text in *Die Deutschen* (1962) is characterized by a strategy of dissemination. This strategy is reinforced by the choice, by Hans Bender in this case, for quotations by contemporary German writers (Böll, Brecht, Enzensberger, Richter etc.), which mainly problematize or even question the existence of a German identity in a post-war context. These literary quotes are further played out against

on whole array of encyclopedic en journalistic material. The text in *Die Deutschen* (1962) thus emphasizes the contradictions and inconsequences of on ongoing debate on what it means to be German. It reflects both the theme and the form – the confrontation of different visual/verbal languages – of Burri’s photographic sequence (fig. 5).

The picture on the cover of *Die Deutschen* (1962), is a very convincing example of how an untypical image can be used to (re)present the photographic sequence. For the chosen image is the only image in the photographic sequence that is clearly (and openly) a montage – probably the most severe infringement of the documentary codes of objectivity. In his foreword to *René Burri: Photographs*, Hans-Michael Koetzle recounts following anecdote about this particular cover image:

When Burri presented to Cartier-Bresson the German first edition of his book *Die Deutschen (The Germans)*, he had an ulterior motive. The cover was a compound image Burri had created by combining two sequential negatives, unconventionally cropped to appear as one. Cartier-Bresson looked at it upside-down to examine the structure of the composition and declared it to be good. The fact that Burri’s breach of rules went unnoticed was a triumph for the young photographer (Koetzle 2004, p. 21).

It is barely believable that Cartier-Bresson could have overseen the compound nature of the photograph: the woman on the left hand side and the man on the right hand side have definitely been photographed from a different angle and from a different distance. Both “scenes” are separated by a black band, dividing the picture vertically. In this photograph the German division becomes a division of the representational surface. Finally a part of the same advertisement sign, reading *[Ele]ktrotechnik*, is visible in both parts of the image. It would not be surprising if the inclusion of the sign – only the last part of it is actually readable was meant as



Fig. 6 – Front and back cover of *Die Deutschen* (1986)

an ironic reference to the structure of the representation itself.

The particularity of the image is stressed by the position and typographical features of the title, which runs parallel to its top side. The title's most significant feature is the lack of inter-word space between the definite article (*Die*) and the noun (*Deutschen*), foregrounding the title's material characteristics as, for example, the alliteration and the spatial disposition of the letters. This disposition mirrors, in turn, the one fourth three fourths structure of the photograph, associating a national, a pictorial and a grammatical division with each other. Ironically the missing inter-word space strengthens, rather than solves, the separation between article and noun. And in this typography the problem of a German postwar identity seems to be articulated, as the title oscillates between a definite (unifying) and an indefinite (polyphonic) plural. After all, the best way to transcribe the cover's formal organization in a single formula would be: (*Die*) *Deutschen*.

The formal play of the front cover is continued on the back cover, where the vertical division of the photograph is echoed by the (vertical) parallelism of the *Siegessäule* and some chimneys in the background. Although the photograph could be seen as an ironic reference to the spectacular industrial growth of the BRD – the German defeat turned out to be an industrial victory – and to a certain feeling of disenchantment of the world – *Viktoria*, symbol of heroic victory, confronted with the principles of an economic reality; it is especially its formal virtuosity that strikes the reader. In fact the whole cover design aims at presenting *Die Deutschen* (1962) as an experiment involved in a critical dialogue with the documentary paradigm rather than as a document in its own right. On the cover of *Die Deutschen* (1962) the problem of a German identity becomes a primarily formal problem.

With the second edition of *Die Deutschen* (1986) the

presentation of Burri's photographic work undergoes a number of significant changes: the photographic sequence has been rearranged, some of the pictures in the sequence have been replaced, the book opens with some six texts – three prose excerpts from *Deutschland*, *Deutschland unter Anderem* and three poems of Hans Magnus Enzensberger, the odd pages are left blank except for the caption accompanying the photographs on the even pages and the book has been published in a larger (more prestigious) format. The lay-out of the cover (fig. 6) with large photographs on the front and the back, broad white margins and a simple typography reflects this overall sober book design. Compared to the first German edition the choice of the cover image for this edition seems to be less bold: whereas the photograph on the cover of *Die Deutschen* (1962) bears the traces of a formal manipulation and thus highlights the materiality of the image, the cover image of the 1986 edition – which could be broadly situated in the paradigm of Frank's subjective documentary – “merely” foregrounds the subjectivity of the presented perspective. By including in the picture frame an object that blocks the view – in this case the parked cars on the left hand side – the fact that someone is looking, is thematized, as Robert Frank has amply demonstrated. A similar obstruction is present in the photograph on the back cover in the form of a wall fragment. The selected images in this particular case are certainly not the strongest or the most telling photographs of the book: the cover image confronts the modernity of shiny cars with the nostalgia of a bar (?), bearing the sign “Golden Angel” and the photograph on the back cover echoes the religious motif of the angel on the front cover, while showing the ruins of a church (?).

More significant is the addition of a subtitle – *Photographien 1957-1964* – and a reference to the included texts – *Mit zeitgenössischen Texten von Hans Magnus Enzensberger* – on the cover. Both expressions introduce

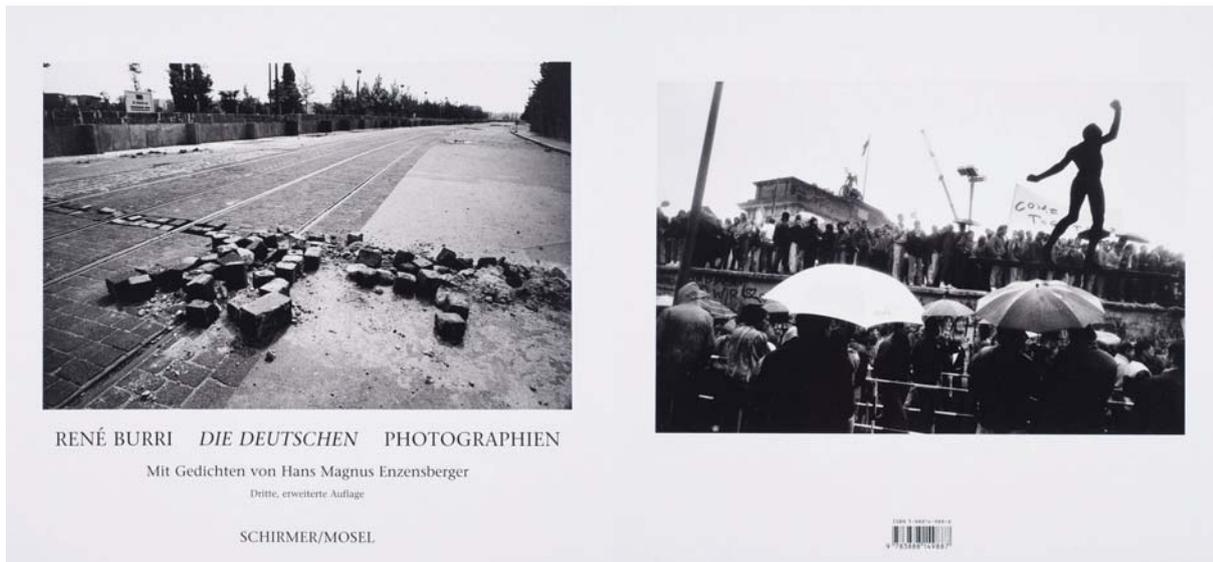


Fig. 7 – Front and back cover of *Die Deutschen* (1997)

a time dimension: the dates in the subtitle function as a time frame for the photographic sequence, presenting the images as depictions of a definite and a past period of time. The characterization of Enzensberger's texts as "contemporaneous" fits into the same logic. This strategy of a positioning in time is also perceivable on another paratextual level, that of the captions: whereas the short captions of *Die Deutschen* (1962) situate the pictures in a merely geographical sense – geography is, of course, an important factor in the German question – most of the captions of *Die Deutschen* (1986) include a time indication. The experiment of the edition of 1962 situated in a kind of continuous present is thus transformed into an historical document: "The eighty-eight photographs in this book [...] are, however, more than merely masterpieces of photojournalism. It would be more appropriate to speak of them in terms of historiography" (Burri 1986 blurb (my translation)). The main reason for this transformation is doubtlessly a changing historical context: in 1961, one year before the publication of the first edition, the national division had materialized in the form of the Berlin Wall. With the construction of the Wall the nature of the German question had changed from a representational to a sociopolitical problem, explaining the repositioning of the photobook as a document rather than as an experiment. The 1986 edition is furthermore an expression of a nostalgic longing for a time when the geographical (and mental) division of the country did not yet seem definitive. This feeling of nostalgia is clearly discernible in the last sentence of the blurb, characterizing the book as "the last attempt to see and describe Germany as a whole" (Burri 1986 blurb (my translation)) (fig. 7). Only three years after the publication of *Die Deutschen* (1986) the Berlin Wall was demolished. In 1990, the year of the German reunification, the 1986 edition of *Die Deutschen* was republished with a new subtitle read-

ing: *Photographien aus einem geteiltem Land* (Burri 1990). This apparently superficial change aimed to present the photographic work not as the expression of nostalgia towards a period before the "definitive" division of the country, but as a document of that past division. The tone of the blurb of the 1997 edition is even more optimistic as it describes Burri's book as "as the successful attempt to see and to describe Germany as a whole during the forty years of division" (Burri 1997 blurb (my translation)). On the cover of this final edition of *Die Deutschen* (1997) the Berlin Wall plays a central role, as it is depicted both on the front and on the back of the book. The picture on the front cover, a more traditional documentary photograph, shows the Berlin Wall and a crack in the street. In the light of the period indication in the subtitle on the title page (1957-1997), this photograph seems to be a comment on the period after the demolition of the wall, suggesting that the political and geographical division of the country has left its traces in the form of a mental division, that could (and would) prove to be more difficult to overcome. The picture on the back cover depicts the people on both sides of the wall "coming together", as the banner reads. On the Brandenburger Tor the driver of the quadriga answers the gesture of victory of the statue on this side of the Wall, a reassuring symmetry. *Die Deutschen* (1997) is not only a document of the German division and reunification, oriented towards the future rather than towards the past, it is also an overview of Burri's photographic involvement with Germany between 1957 and 1997 or even of Burri's photographic evolution as such, since "*Die Deutschen* is Burri's most substantial project and also the one that has occupied him for the longest time" (Koetzle 2004, p. 23). The inclusion of an introduction about Burri's photographic career by Michael Koetzle confirms this reading. But the double scope of this edition is best

marked by the positioning of the time indication on the title page and not on the cover: the subtitle on the cover, reading simply *Photographien*, conveys the idea that the book provides an overview of Burri's photographic career, whereas the time indication on the title page reconnects the photographic sequence to the flow of historical events that have transformed Germany.

4. Conclusion

In this (doubtlessly overambitious) essay I have tried to retrace the publication history of René Burri's *Die Deutschen*, with special attention for the changing covers of the book. The cover of a photobook is always, as del Lungo (2009, pp. 101-102) notes, a public element. This also means that the cover is not only determined by the content it has to "present", but also by other (editorial, historical, artistic) factors. While the cover positions a book in a particular socio-political or cultural context it also influences the collective meaning of the book, by suggesting to the reader a particular reading mode – that he/she can of course choose to ignore. Or as del Lungo formulates it: "the paratext is less an object than an effect" (del Lungo 2009, p. 101). The study of the paratextual transformations of a particular book during its publication history might consequently reveal something of the functioning of that book in changing historical contexts, while raising questions about the centrality of the paratext.

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