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The Decisive Network: Producing Henri Cartier-Bresson at Mid-Century

Nadya Bair

Henri Cartier-Bresson's photobook *The Decisive Moment* (1952) popularised the notion that the best photographs are made by the patient and gifted photographer who captures a fleeting moment with just one click of the shutter, creating an image with internal geometry and balance. The book solidified Cartier-Bresson's reputation as an artist working with a camera and it encouraged scholars, curators, and hobbyists to understand photography as the product of trained individual vision and talent. Yet the book's emphasis on personal vision also deflected attention away from the collective efforts and infrastructure necessary to promote Cartier-Bresson's practice as art. By shifting our attention to the decisive network of magazine editors, book publishers, printers, and curators who helped Cartier-Bresson onto a highly orchestrated road to fame at mid-century, this article considers the ways in which collective work is central to the material and social history of photography, and how these realities challenge the decisive moment's paradigm of individual and inspired creation.

Keywords: *Henri Matisse* (1869–1954), *Wilson Hicks* (1897–1970), *Tériade* [Efstratios Eleftheriades] (1897–1983), *Richard L. Simon* (1899–1960), *Beaumont Newhall* (1908–93), *Henri Cartier-Bresson* (1908–2004), *Robert Capa* (1913–54), *Pierre Gassman* (1913–2004), *George T. Bailey*, *the decisive moment*, *photobooks*, *Magnum Photos*, *Life magazine*, *Draeger Frères*

In January 1952, between a business trip to the New York office of the Magnum photography agency and a ski vacation in the Alps, the photographer Robert Capa stopped in Paris, where he wrote a brief letter to the publisher Richard L. Simon, of Simon & Schuster:

I found Henri Cartier-Bresson working with M. Teriade, the editor of *Verve*, on a book project which is not unsimilar to an idea about which at one time, Henri says, you and he had a talk or correspondence. Teriade intends to put out a book of Henri Cartier-Bresson's pictures in the format of the latest issues of *Verve*, in which, besides M. Cartier's pictures, there would be text by a few famous writers and painters and by Cartier himself, about photography. It will be a kind of precious manifesto on photography; the text in French here and in English in another edition.¹

Before signing off, Capa added that it 'would ideally hit the market around Christmas'. The book project was *Images à la Sauvette*, or *The Decisive Moment* as it was titled for its US release, and it would bring together the finest and best-known images that the French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson had made over the past two decades. Divided between Cartier-Bresson's work in the 'Occident'

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1 – Robert Capa to Richard L. Simon, 21 January 1952, Richard L. Simon Papers, 1915–92, Rare Book & Manuscript Library (RBML), Columbia University in the City of New York.

Figure 1. Henri Matisse, cover. In Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*, New York: Simon & Schuster 1952. © 2016 Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society, New York.



and his postwar work in the 'Orient', the images were arranged chronologically, presented without captions and in very large format (some as large as 14 inches × 20 inches), between a jacket cover designed by Henri Matisse (figure 1). It would have made an expensive present for someone already enamoured with Cartier-Bresson's work or interested in photography more generally: upon its release it sold for \$12.50, or approximately \$112 by today's standards.

By the 1950s, Cartier-Bresson already had an international reputation, established with the help of supportive dealers, curators, and photography critics. The Julien Levy Gallery exhibited his work in 1933 and 1935, and he had an acclaimed one-man show at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MOMA) in 1947.² Attentive magazine readers would have known Cartier-Bresson's name as well. Hundreds of his photographs had appeared in illustrated magazines in the USA and Europe, covering such watershed events as the Spanish Civil War and the last days of Mahatma Gandhi's life. *The Decisive Moment* was significant because it contained 126 of the finest photographs made by the respected figure and because it included a lengthy statement on photography by Cartier-Bresson himself – a relatively rare feature for photography books at the time. Beginning with a biographical account of how he began taking and developing pictures, the fourteen-page essay offered Cartier-Bresson's theories and practical considerations on working with a camera. In sections subtitled 'the picture-story', 'technique', and 'the customers', which constituted over half of the introduction, Cartier-Bresson described photography from the perspective of a 'photo-reporter', calling himself an 'artisan' who delivered 'raw material' to the illustrated magazines. He covered captioning, picture layout, and film editing, and acknowledged that magazines and their staff were instrumental to circulating and publicising the photographer's

2 – The 1933 show was a solo exhibition that subsequently travelled to Madrid. In 1935, Cartier-Bresson was part of an exhibit called 'Documentary and Anti-Graphic: Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and Walker Evans'. See *Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Walker Evans Documentary and Anti-Graphic Photographs: A Reconstruction of the 1935 Exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery in New York*, ed. Jeff Rosenheim, Paris: Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson; Göttingen: Steidl 2004.

work. Then, setting aside the system of photojournalism, Cartier-Bresson concluded with a succinct definition of what it meant to make a great photograph: 'To me, photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression'.³

The notion of the decisive moment hinged on the split instant when the attentive photographer saw a geometrically balanced scene and clicked the shutter just in time. The decisive moment could be spontaneous and unexpected, catching the photographer by surprise. It could be the climax of either a long bout of waiting or a rapid succession of shots, but it always combined timing with formal balance. The photographer's artful cessation of the subject in motion was enough to imbue the captured event with significance, whether or not the recorded scene had its own historical import. Cartier-Bresson's rich and lucid sentence began to function as an effective summary of what the decisive moment meant, reproduced time and again even though it was one piece of a longer, multivalent treatise.⁴ Almost immediately, the decisive moment became a powerful mythology for the history of photography. By insisting that great photographs are the result of the photographer's trained instincts, attention to the surroundings, and preoccupation with composition, Cartier-Bresson reconciled the haphazard nature of photography – the uncomfortable reality that even an untrained operator could accidentally make a great photograph – with its claims to art, which implied consistency, effort, and skill. By explaining that the camera functioned as 'an extension of the eye', Cartier-Bresson, like many photographers of his generation, asserted mastery over the camera by integrating it into the realm of physical reflex.⁵

The paradigm of the decisive moment and the book in which it was canonised also cast all of the attention on the individual photographer in his moment of inspiration and action. By contrast, Capa's letter demonstrates that *The Decisive Moment* emerged from a long-term collaborative process that unfolded over the course of many months and which involved not only the photographer, but also publishers and editors on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1947, Capa had enlisted Cartier-Bresson in the creation of the international photographic cooperative called Magnum Photos, with offices in New York and Paris.⁶ Cartier-Bresson was one of the top earners at Magnum in the first years of the operation and his income greatly subsidised the operations of the fledgling cooperative, but he was basically uninvolved in the original set-up.⁷ Capa knew the value of investing in relationships in the world of journalism and publishing. He had a knack for pitching stories to magazine editors and selling Magnum work for high prices, especially to New York City clients, who had far more resources than the periodicals or publishing houses in Paris or London after the war. So it is not surprising that it was Capa who wrote to Simon encouraging the US publication of *The Decisive Moment*, setting the parameters for the contract while also explaining how best to position the book in the US market. But Capa's involvement is again only part of the story.

Producing *The Decisive Moment* involved Cartier-Bresson's critics and supporters in the museum world; magazine editors such as *Life's* Edward K. Thompson and Wilson Hicks; Tériade, the French publisher of *Images à la Sauvette*; Richard L. Simon of Simon & Schuster, the US publisher of *The Decisive Moment*; Pierre Gassman, the darkroom director who developed all of Cartier-Bresson's film; and Draeger Frères, the French firm that printed both the English and French versions of the book. By attending to the often overlooked names and stages of production that went into making and publicising *The Decisive Moment*, this article shifts our attention to the decisive network that shaped how Cartier-Bresson's first photobook was presented to the public, especially in the USA, in the mid-twentieth century.⁸ In so doing, it underscores that

3 – Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*, New York: Simon & Schuster 1952, n.p.

4 – For instance, Michael Kimmelman, 'Cartier-Bresson, Artist Who Used Lens, Dies at 95', *New York Times* (5 August 2004), A1; *The Decision of an Eye* – Henri Cartier-Bresson, Alberto Giacometti, ed. Tobia Bezzola, Zurich: Kunsthau Zürich 2005; Clément Chéroux, 'A Bible for Photographers', in Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*, Göttingen: Steidl 2014, 3–30.

5 – Robin Kelsey, *Photography and the Art of Chance*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2015, 180–213. On the mythology of the 'decisive moment', see also A. D. Coleman, 'Photography: More than a Decisive Moment', *New York Times* (29 March 1970), 113; and Catherine Clark, 'A Decisive Moment, France, 1932', in *Getting the Picture: The Visual Culture of the News*, ed. Jason E. Hill and Vanessa R. Schwartz, New York: Bloomsbury 2015, 55–58.

6 – Unlike traditional photography agencies such as Black Star, PIX, and Rapho-Guillumette, Magnum's photographers were owners rather than employees of the company, and they retained all their negatives and rights to their images. New members were accepted into the cooperative on the basis of their photographic talent, and every photographer contributed a fixed percentage from each picture sale back into the organisation. This arrangement allowed Magnum to hire the staff who helped edit, sell, and archive photographers' work on a daily basis, while also setting up new assignments for its members who were working around the world. For an overview of Magnum's creation, see Fred Ritchin, 'What is Magnum?', in William Manchester et al., *In Our Time: The World as Seen by Magnum Photographers*, New York: The American Federation of Arts in association with W. W. Norton & Co. 1989, 417–44.

7 – Magnum Accountant's Report, 31 July 1949, Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson (FHCB).

8 – For an overview of some of these figures' involvement, see also Chéroux, 'Bible for Photographers'.

despite the central paradigm of the decisive moment, Cartier-Bresson's photography – as a body of work and as a social and material practice – was always the product of a long process rather than the split instant, and that it involved many individuals beyond the photographer.

The Legacy of the Decisive Moment

When Cartier-Bresson died in 2004 at the age of ninety-five, a short remembrance published in this journal noted that the photographer's career – which began with a Surrealist period, then moved into a documentary humanist style, and ended with Cartier-Bresson's embrace of drawing and painting – could be mapped onto a model described by Erwin Panofsky. According to the art historian, exceptional artists who live long lives often achieve three distinctive periods. In the first, the artist works within the tradition that preceded him. Then, he 'establishes his own tradition, which in turn becomes a foundation for the next generation. A mark of the greatest artists is that in their late lives they may reject their own mature styles in favour of old-age styles that are often incomprehensible to their contemporaries'.⁹ Undeniably, Cartier-Bresson was one of the most influential figures in the history of modern photography. His death offered an opportune moment to laud his accomplishments and reflect on the contours of his biography, including his disavowal of the camera, which troubled those who admired his photographs. Although the history of photography has made significant strides in challenging the author function, this lyrical remembrance is also indicative of the tensions inherent to writing about such canonical personas.¹⁰ Cartier-Bresson's individual authorship and mastery continues to garner the rapt attention of scholars and the public alike, and *The Decisive Moment* often stands in for an extension of the author himself.

Indeed no event in Cartier-Bresson's career was more important for his reputation and for subsequent interpretations of his work than the release of *The Decisive Moment*.¹¹ As Martin Parr and Gerry Badger have aptly noted, the photo-book 'gave the world not just a photographer but a photographic concept that could easily be grasped and demonstrated to perfection in the pages of the book'.¹² Countless professional and amateur photographers have claimed that seeing the photographs in *The Decisive Moment* encouraged them to pick up a camera for the first time, or that studying Cartier-Bresson's text transformed their practice in some way.¹³ Although it had a limited print run of ten thousand copies and did not sell exceptionally well, *The Decisive Moment* became one of the most influential photobooks of the century, probably talked about more often than seen.¹⁴ Soon after its release, *The Decisive Moment* also became the title of a large travelling exhibition of the photographer's work and helped to spread his statement on photography to international audiences. The French publisher Robert Delpire designed the first iteration of the exhibit, which opened at the *Pavillon de Marsan* in the Louvre in 1955 and made Cartier-Bresson the first photographer to have his work shown at the venerable fine art institution. In subsequent years, *The Decisive Moment* exhibition travelled to museums in Germany, England, Switzerland, Canada and the USA, which it toured for eighteen months before finally arriving at the IBM Gallery in New York in 1960. There, the exhibit included some of Cartier-Bresson's more recent photographs and was shown in two instalments to an unprecedented number of viewers for the midtown gallery.¹⁵

More recently, high-profile retrospectives organised by the Museum of Modern Art, New York ('Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century', 2012) and the Centre Pompidou, Paris ('Henri Cartier-Bresson: Here and Now', 2014) have kept the photographer's work in the public eye. The accompanying catalogues offer new insights into Cartier-Bresson's career, and Clément Chéroux's text for the Pompidou show in particular acknowledges the limitations of reducing Cartier-Bresson's work to the decisive moment.¹⁶ Yet in these contexts, the focus

9 – Graham Smith, 'Henri Cartier-Bresson 1908–2004', *History of Photography*, 28:4 (Winter 2004), 313.

10 – Analogous revisions of canonical photographers include Douglas Nickel, 'American Photographs Revisited', *American Art*, 6:2 (Spring 1992), 78–97; and Elizabeth Anne McCauley, 'Nadar and the Selling of Bohemia', in *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris, 1848–1871*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1994, 105–48.

11 – Peter Galassi, *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Early Work*, New York: Museum of Modern Art 1987, 47n1.

12 – Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, *The Photo Book: A History, Volume I*, London: Phaidon 2004, 189–90.

13 – For a recent paean to the decisive moment and Cartier-Bresson's influence on contemporary photographers, see Teju Cole, 'Perfect and Unrehearsed', *New York Times Magazine* (11 November 2015), MM22.

14 – The French edition had a print run of three thousand and the remaining seven thousand were printed in English. Chéroux 'Bible for Photographers', 27.

15 – Inge Bondi to Magnum Photographers, 15 May 1959, Archive of John G. Morris (AJGM).

16 – Peter Galassi, 'Old Worlds, Modern Times', in *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Modern Century*, New York: Museum of Modern Art 2010, 10–66; and Clément Chéroux, *Henri Cartier-Bresson: Here and Now*, trans. David H. Wilson and Ruth Sharman, London: Thames & Hudson 2014.

remains on Cartier-Bresson's creativity, his unique vision, and the diverse oeuvre that sprang from it. To the extent that other figures appear in these narratives, they play small supporting roles at best, while certain professionals within the history of photography – especially illustrated magazine editors and staff, with whom Cartier-Bresson worked on a daily basis – are too often cast as the nuisances who imposed their 'tyrannical' or 'capricious collective process' of editing onto the photographer's 'intelligent' and 'culturally sensitive image'.¹⁷ Such interpretations build on decades of modernist criticism in which artistic and commissioned photography were deemed irreconcilable. In 1955, the art critic James Thrall Soby observed: 'Seemingly Cartier-Bresson's poetic imagination, far from being stultified by specific commissions from the publishers of newspapers and magazines, is never hired out to anyone but himself'.¹⁸ The Chief Curator of Photography at MOMA, John Szarkowski, claimed in the 1960s that 'Cartier-Bresson is not a photo-journalist, he is a photo philosopher'.¹⁹ Upon replacing Szarkowski, Peter Galassi formulated similar distinctions by praising the independent and artistic nature of Cartier-Bresson's photography, preserved in spite of editorial demands.

At times keeping alive the notion that art and journalism are mutually exclusive, other times dwelling on Cartier-Bresson's genius, the individual photographer has been privileged, time and again, over his network of supporters. Perhaps this is even contrary to Cartier-Bresson's own wishes. 'I abhor my celebrity', the photographer told Graham Smith, the author of the afore-mentioned tribute, in 1999. But then again, by the end of his life Cartier-Bresson also revised his interpretation of his career, telling another scholar that he had never been a photojournalist and had never made picture stories, but was rather an artist keeping a visual diary with his Leica.²⁰ In what follows, I return to an earlier moment in the history of photography before Cartier-Bresson himself disavowed the facts of his postwar work, inspiring many critics and curators to follow suit. At mid-century, Cartier-Bresson's legacy was still in formation, and it was being shaped by many of the people who helped produce *The Decisive Moment*.

The Press Origins of Cartier-Bresson's Photography

The vast majority of the photographs published in *The Decisive Moment* were not simply single masterpieces resulting from Cartier-Bresson's subjective vision; they were commissioned for and printed as part of longer picture essays in weekly magazines such as *Life*, *Paris-Match*, and *Holiday*. Acknowledging their photo-journalistic origins, however, is not enough to reframe those images as products of the long and collective process of photographic production, in which Cartier-Bresson was one of many people involved. Editors at these publications helped Cartier-Bresson identify what stories and subjects to photograph, and they often selected the images that would appear before a mass audience. In a rarely quoted passage in *The Decisive Moment*, Cartier-Bresson acknowledged that the staff in those institutions were also some of his most important mentors. 'It was only in the process of working for [magazines]', the photographer wrote in his introduction, 'that I eventually learned – bit by bit – how to make reportage with a camera, how to make a picture story'.²¹

Cartier-Bresson's scene from a teahouse in Beijing is one of the many images that resulted from the precise instructions of a magazine editor and which initially appeared in the press (figure 2).²² In November 1948, Cartier-Bresson was working in Burma, where he received a telegram from Magnum's Paris office with an urgent assignment. 'Life magazine asks you to leave by earliest plane [...] for China to do a story quote the last time we saw Peiping unquote asking for extensive coverage black and white for essay type story'.²³ Within weeks, the Communists would take over China – much to the chagrin of US foreign policy and Henry Luce, whose *Life* magazine supported the Nationalist Party led by Chiang Kai-shek. Cartier-

17 – Galassi, 'Old Worlds, Modern Times', 49–51.

18 – James Thrall Soby, 'Two Contemporary Photographers', *Saturday Review* (5 November 1955), 33, quoted in Claude Cookman, 'Henri Cartier-Bresson Reinterprets his Career', *History of Photography*, 32:1 (Spring 2008), 64.

19 – John Szarkowski, wall label for *Cartier-Bresson: Recent Photographs* (25 June–2 September 1968), original in photographic department, Museum of Modern Art, New York, quoted in Cookman, 'Henri Cartier-Bresson Reinterprets', 64.

20 – Cookman, 'Henri Cartier-Bresson Reinterprets', 59–73. See also Yves Bourde, 'Un Entretien avec Henri Cartier-Bresson', *Le Monde* (5 September 1974), 13.

21 – Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*, 1952.

22 – Under the Nationalists, present-day Beijing was called Peiping. *Life* used 'Peiping' in print and in its correspondence with Cartier-Bresson circa 1949. Following the Communist revolution, the city was reinstated as the capital of China and its name was changed to Peking. 'Peking' is the name that appears in the captions to *The Decisive Moment*.

23 – Telegram from Magnum Paris to Cartier-Bresson, 25 November 1948, FHCB.



Figure 2. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Peking*, 1949. In Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*, New York: Simon & Schuster 1952, n.p. © Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos.

Bresson's directions came from *Life* managing editor Ed Thompson and they reflected the control *Life* wished to have over the story angle and content. But they also offered Cartier-Bresson a helpful roadmap of where to go and how to make choices about what to photograph on this sudden and unexpected journey. The telegram proceeded:

[...] want to show human angle of city also of china's finest scholars merchants opera lovers bankers bird fanciers [...] you should look into little side streets visit shop keepers [...] go to tea houses get faces of quiet old men whose hands are clasped around covered cups of jasmine tea.²⁴

24 – Ibid.

The photograph that was first published in *Life* on 3 January 1949 and later received a double-page spread in *The Decisive Moment* adhered to these parameters superbly. Cartier-Bresson preserved the quiet air and sense of peeping in that *Life* had requested, capturing in intense detail the facial features and expressions of old men and bird fanciers. In the magazine, the image occupied two-thirds of page 14 and bled across the gutter, inviting closer looking by virtue of its larger scale. In conjunction with the snapshots of other men – young boxers and newspaper peddlers, older medicine men and bird merchants – it anchored a visual narrative about Peiping's traditional way of life, which *Life* insisted the Communist revolution would soon destroy. Each photograph in the spread had specific qualities that enabled a magazine editor to create an effective layout. Cartier-Bresson consciously focused on people rather than places; alternated between individual and group portraits; and used some images to suggest movement while capturing stillness in others. This variety of photographs is what allowed editors to devote an entire page spread to the tranquillity of the city under the subtitle 'City Finds Serenity in Birds

and Boxing'. Revealing only some of the production details, the magazine explained to readers that 'as complete isolation drew near, LIFE asked the famous French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson to fly from Burma to Peiping for a last look at a city which is known the world over for its gracious way of life'.²⁵ The editors helped to mystify Cartier-Bresson's process by leaving their own role out of the story, and they went so far as to draw a parallel between the temperament of the 'famous French photographer's' and Peiping's 'gracious way of life'. In actuality, *Life's* telegram to Cartier-Bresson had listed over a dozen types of people, scenarios, and moods to capture and the photographer succeeded in fulfilling almost all of the magazine's requests. The correlation between Cartier-Bresson's photograph and *Life's* instructions is therefore no mere coincidence, but neither does it detract from Cartier-Bresson's accomplishments. If anything, such connections help expand our appreciation for the work of the photojournalist who not only seeks out beautiful and dramatic moments, but who is tasked with the incredibly difficult work of translating editorial priorities into images.

Reproduced in the book, the Beijing photograph became about form (faces, shadows, lines) and the humanity of Cartier-Bresson's subjects rather than the precise content or narrative (bird fanciers, an impending revolution).²⁶ A reader who wanted to know more about this or any other photograph would have to turn to one of two caption lists printed at the centre and the end of the book – a step that would disrupt the immersive looking and 'calm delectation of a sumptuous feast for the eyes' that the layouts otherwise encouraged.²⁷ Yet it was a magazine editor who asked Cartier-Bresson to arrive in that place and search out that kind of scene, empowering the photographer to take pictures that worked effectively as news and that included precise formal details and juxtapositions (clasped hands, quiet faces). In this journey from telegram to magazine and then photobook spread, one has a glimpse of what Cartier-Bresson might have meant when he wrote in 1952 that working for magazines taught him how to make reportage with a camera.

A decade later, the photographer still identified as a journalist but he also began to overstate his autonomy when explaining that his images were not, as some thought, the result of pure luck. 'People often say that I have been in the right place at the right time. What they really mean is that I follow the newspapers in order to get a sense of what is happening in the world'.²⁸ It is true that Cartier-Bresson chose to work in Asia between 1947 and 1950, but the specific stories he covered were often based on requests by magazine editors who were working within their own geopolitical constraints. When *Life* sent Cartier-Bresson to China, for instance, they did so because he was already close by, and because earlier that year he produced better and more photographs of Gandhi's funeral than the magazine's own staff photographer, Margaret Bourke-White.²⁹ But on the eve of the Communist revolution, *Life* editors also understood that a French photographer would have better luck gaining access to the Communists than American photographers, especially since the USA had publicly supported the Nationalists.³⁰ Such magazine assignments allowed Cartier-Bresson to create a vast body of work from which individual images could be chosen for longer contemplation in book and exhibition contexts. Recognising this fact, Cartier-Bresson asked his US publisher Richard Simon to provide multiple copies of *The Decisive Moment* to editors at *Life*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Holiday*, and *Look*, calling these the people to whom he was indebted, while also acknowledging that they could help with the publicity of his new book.³¹

Defining Cartier-Bresson's Practice

Just as the images selected for *The Decisive Moment* were rarely products of sudden, individual inspiration, neither was Cartier-Bresson's entry into the world

25 – 'A Last Look at Peiping', *Life*, 26:1 (3 January 1949), 13.

26 – Claude Cookman has also observed that the photographer's books served to 'decontextualize many of his photographs, lifting them above particular events and transforming them into timeless statements' even though they 'began their existence as news [and] refuse to be generalized'. See Claude Cookman, 'Margaret Bourke-White and Henri Cartier-Bresson: Gandhi's Funeral', *History of Photography*, 22:2 (Summer 1998), 206.

27 – The compilation of the caption list also involved Magnum staff members. Chéroux, 'Bible for Photographers', 7; and Galassi, 'Old Worlds, Modern Times', 31.

28 – Dorothy Norman, 'Stieglitz and Cartier-Bresson', *Saturday Review* (22 September 1962), 54.

29 – For an excellent account of this incident, see Cookman, 'Margaret Bourke-White and Henri Cartier-Bresson', 199–209.

30 – I am grateful to Catherine E. Clark for this observation.

31 – Cartier-Bresson to Richard L. Simon, 4 September 1952, RMBL.

32 – Stuart Alexander finds another important precedent for *The Decisive Moment* in Beaumont Newhall's idea to write a book called 'Fleeting Image, which will deal entirely with what [Henri Cartier-Bresson] so aptly calls slices of 1/100 of a second' and to illustrate it with many of Cartier-Bresson's photographs. The curator wrote of this idea to Cartier-Bresson on 29 October 1949, but by the time Cartier-Bresson began on the project Newhall was no longer involved. Stuart Alexander, 'The Decisive Moment', in *The Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Photography*, ed. Lynne Warren, vol. 1, New York: Routledge 2006, 374–75.

33 – James Thrall Soby, 'The Art of Poetic Accident: The Photographs of Cartier-Bresson and Helen Levitt', *Minicam*, 6 (March 1943), 31.

34 – Lincoln Kirstein, *The Photographs of Henri Cartier-Bresson*, New York: Museum of Modern Art 1947, 8.

35 – Beaumont Newhall, 'Cartier-Bresson's Photographic Technique', in Kirstein, *Photographs of Henri Cartier-Bresson*, 12.

36 – Cartier-Bresson thanked Hicks for allowing him to write down, for the first time, 'something on this subject, which is important to me'. Cartier-Bresson to Hicks, 12 May 1951, FHCB.

37 – Precedents to Hicks's work included Daniel Mich and Edwin Eberman, *The Technique of the Picture Story*, New York: McGraw & Hill 1945. Mich was the picture editor and Eberman the art director at *Look* magazine.

38 – Hicks to Cartier-Bresson, 13 April 1951, FHCB.

of book publishing and photography treatise writing an independent path.³² The text he composed for his 1952 introduction incorporated the interpretations, mythologies, and sometimes the very formulations that some of the most important critics of photography had already used to describe Cartier-Bresson's work in the previous decades. In 1943, James Thrall Soby wrote of Cartier-Bresson: 'he walks the street with no ideas about what to photograph except within broad limits [...] [and relies on his] sensitivity [and] intuitive vision to recognize the split second when a photograph should be made'.³³ In the catalogue accompanying Cartier-Bresson's MOMA exhibit in 1947, Lincoln Kirstein similarly explained what made this artist and his practice unique:

the decisive part of Cartier-Bresson's particular process takes place not in the mechanism in his hand but in the vision of his head; in that right eye which (he says) looks out onto the exterior world, and that left eye which looks inside to his personal world. The vision fuses on what he sees, where and when, and how he feels about it.³⁴

Beaumont Newhall, the first curator of photography at MOMA who, with his wife Nancy, began organising Cartier-Bresson's one-man show, added the most succinct description of the photographer's technique: 'At the split second when the lighting, the form, and the expression are one, he releases the shutter. The precise composition of the final print is determined at this peak of emotional intensity'.³⁵ Like the network of supporters behind him, who reinforced a specific interpretation of his work for over a decade, Cartier-Bresson crafted a statement that focused on him as the independent artist, working from his personal intuitive vision and sense for plastic rhythms. But the photographer may not have articulated that statement, nor proceeded with *The Decisive Moment*, had it not also been for the prompting of Wilson Hicks, the newly retired picture editor of *Life* whom Cartier-Bresson credited with being the first person to inspire him to write something 'of importance' on the subject of photography.³⁶

In early 1951, Hicks was working on the manuscript of *Words and Pictures*, which would become one of the most important textbooks on photojournalism in the USA.³⁷ He wrote to Cartier-Bresson asking to publish two images and a statement by the photographer. Hicks wanted to show the contrast between Cartier-Bresson's early, Surrealist-inspired work – which the editor called 'the world of your own (the artist's)' – and his later work for the press – 'the big-world-outside'. 'Don't you think' that this contrast 'would be of great interest to younger photographers', Hicks asked?³⁸ The illustrated press had been undergoing rapid professionalisation since the end of World War II, marked by increased publishing of manuals and the creation of workshops and training programmes across the USA. This included the Missouri Photo Workshop, which Clifton Edom created in 1949 with the help of Roy Stryker, formerly the head of the Farm Security Administration's photographic unit, and Hicks himself would found the University of Miami Conference on Visual Communication in 1957. Hicks hoped to address mostly young and amateur photographers looking to break into the business. He wanted Cartier-Bresson's words to affirm that, unlike art photography, press photography was an engaged, socially concerned practice that was grounded in the real world and could even be a form of activism. The images that Hicks ultimately published in his book were meant to affirm such a contrast (figure 3). The editor selected Cartier-Bresson's 1932 image of a bicyclist in Hyères, France to demonstrate how the photographer managed to unite the curving lines of the staircase, railing, street gutter, and human figure to make a lasting composition out of the 'limited sphere of his personal experience'. Below, Hicks reproduced Cartier-Bresson's 1949 image of a frantic queue outside a bank in Shanghai, made on assignment for and initially published in *Life*. The picture was meant to demonstrate the same photographer's ability to be engrossed in 'the world of human crises' and to capture the panic that people experienced as they tried to buy gold on the eve of the Communist takeover.



The photographer may operate in a quiet, non-journalistic world of his own, within the relatively limited sphere of his personal experience, or he may operate in the world of human crises, large and small, which produce news (see page 97). The brilliant French photographer, Henri Cartier-

Bresson, took the picture above at Hyères, France, in 1932. In dramatic contrast below is his frieze of Chinese seeking to exchange paper money for gold at a government bank in Shanghai early in 1949, when the Communists were pressing victories which were to cause the Nationalists' fall.



Figure 3. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Hyères, France*, 1932; and *Shanghai*, 1948. In Wilson Hicks, *Words and Pictures*, New York: Harper & Brothers 1952, 78. © Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos.

But what Cartier-Bresson felt would be of interest to young photographers is the lack of distinction between an art world and press world for photography, and that all good pictures, regardless of where they were destined to be published and exhibited, depend on similar inspiration and skill. The visual organisation found in a photograph, Cartier-Bresson wrote in response to Hicks, 'must come from an INTUITIVE [sic] feeling for the plastic rhythms, which is the backbone of the arts', and he went on to write the almost exact definition of the decisive moment that would subsequently appear in the introduction to his photobook: 'In conclusion, to me photography is a recognition in a fraction of a second simultaneously of the signification of an event as well as the recognition from a chosen position of a precise formal organisation which brings to life the given event'.³⁹ Hicks printed the letter verbatim even though it was actually a more democratic claim than what Hicks wanted, since Cartier-Bresson tried to dismiss the hierarchy between art and press photography.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Cartier-Bresson's own focus on the individual and instantaneous snapping of the shutter, coupled with the fact that the images in his book were singular shots pulled out of the photographic essays in which they first appeared, deflected attention away from the very idea he tried to communicate to Hicks. Ironically, his definition would lead pivotal figures to elevate both Cartier-Bresson and his theory of photography above the daily practice of photojournalism, even though his definition of the decisive moment appeared in two contexts in 1952: the photographer's own book as well as Hicks's textbook on press photography. The English photography historian Helmut Gernsheim was one of many who wrote to Cartier-Bresson praising his credo: 'Your insistence on form and plastic organisation, so evident in your pictures, explains the vast difference between your work and that of the average press and magazine photographer'.⁴¹ The statement implied that press photography was more formulaic than Cartier-Bresson's work, and that the photographer's emphasis on composition set his oeuvre above the inherent features of journalism, including its preoccupation with narrative and information. In so doing, Gernsheim's comment foreshadowed the modernist discourse that would soon surround Cartier-Bresson's photography, displacing it from its press origins.

Livre d'Artiste

Positioning *The Decisive Moment* as an artistic manifesto rested on more than Cartier-Bresson's formulation or the selective interpretations of his supporters. It included the pivotal involvement of the publisher Tériade, who, with his assistant and collaborator Marguerite Lang, selected the photographs and prepared the layout of the book.⁴² Born Efstratios Eleftheriades in Greece, Tériade came to Paris to study law but found that he was more interested in art and publishing than legal affairs (figure 4). He became an art critic and was involved in producing the art journals *Cahiers d'Art* and *Minotaure* before launching *Verve* in 1937. Initially backed by David Smart, the American publisher of *Esquire* and *Coronet* who desired to create 'the most beautiful magazine on earth', *Verve* was a lavishly produced publication organised according to Tériade's expansive interests and friendships with artists and photographers, including Cartier-Bresson, whom he met in the mid-1930s.⁴³ Tériade prioritised content as much as the printing quality in *Verve*, filling the journal with brilliantly coloured, skilfully reproduced photogravures and experimenting with typography. In *Verve*, different media were put into conversation with each other: reproductions of paintings, collages, photographs, and sculptures by artists such as Pablo Picasso, Alberto Giacometti, and Georges Braque were printed side by side, surrounded by clean white borders with minimal captions. Tériade commissioned artists to write texts explaining their work for the journal, printing these statements verbatim and often in the very handwriting of the artist. This became a signature of his publishing approach in *Verve* as well as many of the *livres d'artistes* that he produced after World War II.⁴⁴

What eventually became *Images à la Sauvette* was at first supposed to consist of images by Cartier-Bresson as well as statements by multiple 'famous writers and painters', solicited by Tériade, about photography. In the course of the book's

39 – Cartier-Bresson to Hicks, 12 May 1951, FHCB.

40 – Wilson Hicks, *Words and Pictures*, New York: Harper & Brothers 1952, 97–98.

41 – Gernsheim saw an earlier version of the text at the Contemporary Arts Society in London, where it accompanied an exhibition of Cartier-Bresson's photographs. Helmut Gernsheim to Cartier-Bresson, 3 March 1952, Helmut and Alison Gernsheim Papers, Harry Ransom Center (HRC), The University of Texas at Austin.

42 – Lange also worked with Cartier-Bresson on composing his text. Chéroux, 'Bible for Photographers', 6.

43 – Michel Anthonioz, *Verve: The Ultimate Review of Art and Literature (1937–1960)*, New York: Harry N. Abrams 1987, 25.

44 – On Tériade's publishing efforts, see Rebecca Rabinow, 'The Legacy of la Rue Férou: Livres d'artiste created for Tériade by Rouault, Bonnard, Matisse, Léger, Le Corbusier, Chagall, Giacometti and Miró', PhD thesis, New York University 1995; and Chara Kolokytha, 'The Art Press and Visual Culture in Paris during the Great Depression: Cahiers d'art, Minotaure, and Verve', *Visual Resources*, 29:3 (September 2013), 184–215.



Figure 4. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The publisher Tériade in his villa, Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, France, 1953*. © Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos.

production, Cartier-Bresson's work, rather than photographic medium more generally, became the principal subject.⁴⁵ Tériade and then Simon, who became involved in the project in early 1952, encouraged Cartier-Bresson to articulate his unique approach to photography in the style of *Verve* and to publish an artist statement to accompany his pictures. With help from Marguerite Lang and occasional suggestions from Tériade and Simon, Cartier-Bresson finalised the text for his book between January and March of that year, at which point Magnum's Paris bureau chief Margot Shore began translating it from French into English.⁴⁶

In a natural continuation of the bridging of painterly and photographic arts that was central to the publisher's own efforts in *Verve*, Tériade also enlisted Henri Matisse to design a book jacket for *Images à la Sauvette*. By 1952, Tériade had already published dozens of *livres d'artistes*, including the first book of Matisse's cut-outs, titled *Jazz*, in 1947. The artist's designs had also appeared on the cover of *Verve* beginning with the journal's inaugural issue, for which Matisse combined calligraphy with a drawing and three cut-outs of richly saturated blocks of colour (figure 5). Tériade asked Matisse for a cover for *Images à la Sauvette* during a particularly busy and productive period for the aging artist, who had recently been commissioned to create a stained-glass window for the Time Life Company, and who was beginning to work on his first *Blue Nude*, which became one of his most arduous and labour-intensive projects in 'drawing with scissors'.⁴⁷ Obliging Tériade's request, Matisse arranged a number of shapes with which he was already working at the time into a whimsical landscape consisting of shrubs, the sun, mountains, and a small pool of water, represented by a blue diamond (figure 1). Under the composition, Matisse wrote the title and author in his own hand, again an extension of *Verve* practices as well as the artist's own experiments in calligraphy, which he incorporated into many of the books he designed after World War

45 – Capa to Simon, 21 January 1952, RBML.

46 – Chéroux, 'Bible for Photographers', 5; and Simon to Cartier-Bresson, 5 March 1952, RBML.

47 – Jodi Hauptman, 'Bodies and Waves', in *Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art 2014, 193–94.

Figure 5. Henri Matisse, cover of *Verve*, December 1937. © 2016 Succession H. Matisse/Artists Rights Society, New York.



48 – John Bidwell, *Graphic Passion: Matisse and the Book Arts*, Philadelphia: Penn State Press and the Morgan Library 2015, 43–48.

49 – Cartier-Bresson to Simon, 1 June 1952, RBML; and Magnum to Simon, 'Expenses on preparing the book "The Decisive Moment"', 14 May 1952, RBML.

50 – Simon to Sol of Draeger Frères, 25 July 1952, RBML.

51 – ARL to Simon, 31 July 1952, RBML. Based on the context of Simon's files, 'ARL' is one of the publicity staff at Simon & Schuster, although his precise identity is unclear. ARL communicated with Simon via short, inter-office memos that included his initials only.

II.⁴⁸ The network waited to see the book jacket for a few months, and on 1 June 1952 Cartier-Bresson finally updated Simon: 'Matisse has finished the cover and Teriade is bringing it back in 3 days. Matisse has written from his own hand the title in French and in English'.⁴⁹

Yet when Richard Simon saw the composition, he was alarmed. He wrote immediately to the book's printer at the Parisian firm Draeger Frères, eschewing any niceties: 'Dear Mr. Sol, I wonder if there is time to change the jacket of the *Decisive Moment*'.⁵⁰ Simon was concerned that Matisse's cover made the volume look like 'a book of paintings and design', and he asked whether the jacket could be changed completely to feature a large photograph – any photograph – by Cartier-Bresson instead. But Simon & Schuster's own publicity man disagreed, and encouraged Simon to stop panicking. 'For what it's worth, Monroe Wheeler [the director of exhibitions and publications at MOMA] felt it was a big mistake not to use the Matisse jacket on the Cartier-Bresson book. [Wheeler] thinks that Matisse's name and the unusualness of the presentation will sell a lot of books'.⁵¹

Matisse's cover may have fit in well from MOMA's perspective, but it also made sense within the context of Cartier-Bresson's photographs. Halfway through *The Decisive Moment*, Tériade, Lang, and Cartier-Bresson included a number of portraits of the famous American and French artists and intellectuals that Cartier-Bresson made between the 1930s and 1950s: William Faulkner, Saul Steinberg, and Truman Capote, whom Cartier-Bresson photographed in 1947 while travelling through the USA on an assignment from *Harper's Bazaar* (figure 6), as well as Christian Bérard, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Pierre Bonnard, photographed in France (figure 7). Two photographs of Matisse himself interrupted the series, and were printed basically in the centre of the book (figure 8). The image on the left was from 1944, showing Matisse at work while waiting out the Second World War and occupation of France in Vence. The photograph

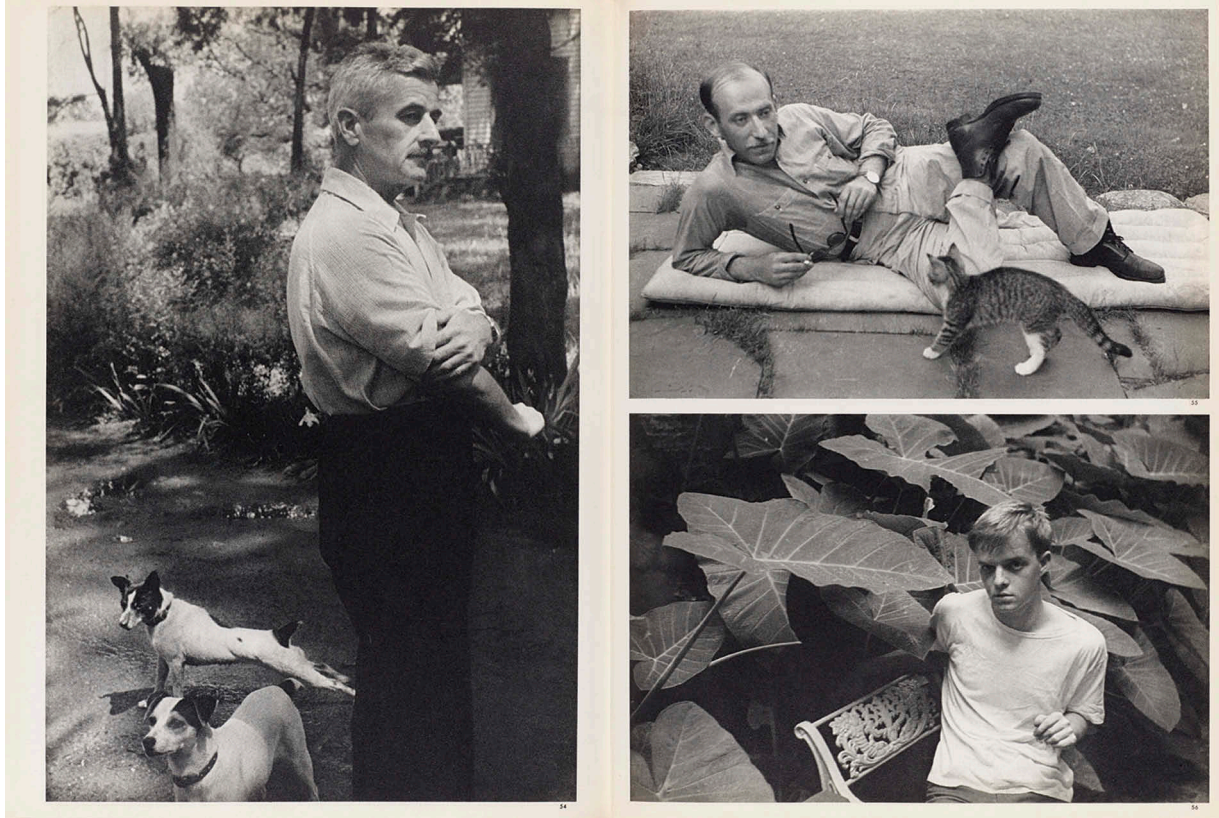


Figure 6. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *William Faulkner in the garden of his home, Oxford, Mississippi*, 1947; *Saul Steinberg, Vermont*, 1947; and *Truman Capote in New Orleans*, 1947. In *The Decisive Moment*, New York: Simon & Schuster 1952, n.p. © Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos.



Figure 7. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Christian Bérard in the First Hotel, Boulevard Garibaldi, Paris*, 1932; and *Jean-Paul Sartre on the Pont des Arts, Paris*, 1946. In *The Decisive Moment*, New York: Simon & Schuster 1952, n.p. © Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos.



Figure 8. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Matisse in Vence*, France, 1944; and *Matisse in St.-Jean-Cap-Ferrat*, 1952. In *The Decisive Moment*, New York: Simon & Schuster 1952, n.p. © Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos.

52 – Bidwell, *Graphic Passion*, 148. In *The Decisive Moment*, the photograph was erroneously dated to 1952.

53 – Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*, 1952, n.p.

54 – ‘The present jacket appeals to art lovers who I think will, after all, start the publicity and talk about your book’. Simon to Cartier-Bresson, 1 August 1952, RBML.

55 – ARL to Simon, 31 July 1952, RBML.

56 – Like *The Decisive Moment*, Barr’s volume on Matisse was also priced at \$12.50. Bidwell, *Graphic Passion*, 213–14; and Nicholas Cullinan, ‘An Agreeable Distraction: The Early Reception of Matisse’s Cut-Outs’, in *Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs*, 27–29.

57 – Simon to Margot Shore of Magnum-Paris, 24 June 1952, RBML.

on the right – showing an older Matisse contemplating a vase by Picasso – was made in June 1951, at Tériade’s villa in Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, which the artist visited frequently from his home in Nice.⁵² In his introduction, Cartier-Bresson explained that portraits taken by the same photographer often have a ‘certain identity’ because ‘the photographer is searching for the identity of his sitter, and also trying to fulfill an expression of himself.’⁵³ In *The Decisive Moment*, the series of portraits as well as the choice for the cover asked readers to understand Cartier-Bresson through this purposeful association with an artistic and cultural milieu on both sides of the Atlantic.

So despite his initial bout of cold feet, Simon changed his mind and within a few days became very excited about the potential of the Matisse cover to elevate Cartier-Bresson to the status of an artist working with a camera and therefore encourage ‘art-lovers’ to buy the book and publicise it through word of mouth.⁵⁴ Largely because of the Matisse cover, Wheeler agreed to make a large display of the book at the MOMA gift store.⁵⁵ It must have helped that MOMA had recently taken down a large Matisse retrospective curated by Alfred Barr, and that Barr’s 1951 monograph, *Matisse: His Art and His Public* (which featured a composition of black and blue cut-outs on the cover) was probably still for sale at MOMA in mid-1952.⁵⁶ Simon even proposed that Matisse should provide:

a statement on what a great artist Henri is. To help wring this out of Matisse, I suggest it begin something as follows: I do not know whether any painter has ever felt that photography is an art. As for myself, I had never thought so until I was privileged to see the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson which is so beautifully reproduced in this volume.⁵⁷

Cartier-Bresson refused to even raise the issue with Matisse, explaining that Matisse ‘doesn’t like to write and his writing isn’t up to his painting, and I can’t ask him to say it with flowers!’ Nevertheless, Simon adapted that language for

many of the promotional articles that he planted in the US media in time for the book's release – in *Life*, *Time*, and *Harper's Bazaar*, as well as multiple US camera magazines including *Popular Photography*, *US Camera*, and *Photography*.⁵⁸ Simon used the same language in conversations with publicist colleagues. When Lewis Gannett of the *New York Herald Tribune* asked Simon for a 'handle' on the book, Simon, who was in the hospital recovering from surgery, did not hesitate to respond:

The only handle that occurs to me from Room 1134, Harkness Pavilion, is that the Artist, at least Henri Matisse, regards Cartier-Bresson as a great artist and volunteered to design the jacket for his book. Me, I know nothing about what is art and what is not art, but, as a photographer, I believe that Cartier-Bresson raises our craft to a new high level.⁵⁹

Simon, who had co-founded Simon & Schuster in 1924, was an avid amateur photographer who was knowledgeable about the medium and who even authored his own photography manual in 1937.⁶⁰ Simon had also long admired Cartier-Bresson's photography, but when it came to promoting *The Decisive Moment* he relied as heavily on the symbolism of Matisse's involvement as he did on praising the mastery of the photographer.⁶¹ In other promotional statements, Simon drew attention to Tériade's stamp of approval. As Simon explained, Tériade had already published books by 'such artists as Picasso, Matisse, Braque, and other great painters. He believes Cartier-Bresson is on a par with these masters'.⁶² Both of these tropes entered the popular press. When the *New York Times* printed Walker Evans's review of *The Decisive Moment* alongside photographs of Sartre and Matisse, the newspaper included a caption that also summed up Simon's publicity efforts (figure 9): 'Matisse ... 1952 ... looking at two vases by Picasso'.⁶³ Such associations, as well as the selective sampling of the photographers' non-journalistic images for publicity articles, helped Cartier-Bresson to be promoted as a great artist himself. Finally at peace with the cover, Simon strategically positioned *The Decisive Moment* to appeal to an audience that might be sceptical about buying a book of photographs but that would be swayed by Matisse's stamp of approval, the involvement of a great French art book publisher, and the frequent inclusion of the word 'artist'. It worked. Within a week of the book's release, Beaumont Newhall reported to his friend Helmut Gernsheim in London: 'Henri Cartier-Bresson's new book, published last Thursday, is the talk of the art world'.⁶⁴ These publicity tactics are an important reminder that the labels the book generated at mid-century were as crucial for selling a product on the market as they were for accurately categorising the intrinsic nature of Cartier-Bresson's photographic practice.

Appealing to the Amateur Photographer Market

Fearing that Cartier-Bresson's book may not sell particularly well, the decisive network in late 1952 became increasingly concerned with making the book appeal to as many buyers as possible. Capa and Simon agreed that most of Cartier-Bresson's anticipated but meagre profits should go towards increasing publicity.⁶⁵ Although Capa had originally pitched the book as a 'precious manifesto' on photography, he, like Simon and Cartier-Bresson, soon started to worry about the book's non-museum-going publics. They agreed to also promote the book as a 'bible for photographers' (again Capa's phrasing), aimed at amateurs and those professionally employed for magazines and newspapers.⁶⁶ As Simon explained to Cartier-Bresson, 'even the amateur with very small means manages always to save money to buy expensive equipment or gadgets that he thinks will help him to make better pictures [...] this book [will] sell only if it [is] presented as a new kind of "how to"'.⁶⁷ To ensure that it was a 'new kind of how to' book, Simon asked Cartier-Bresson to include a text on the mechanics of his picture making beyond

58 – Simon to George Wright, 3 October 1952, RBML. *Paris Match* also covered the book and within a matter of days, Magnum's agents in Europe began requesting copies of the book in order to run articles in local magazines. Cartier-Bresson to Simon, 6 October 1952, RBML.

59 – Simon to Lewis Gannett of the *New York Herald Tribune*, 15 October 1952, RBML.

60 – Simon to the New York Camera Club, 9 December 1946, RBML. In addition to authoring *Miniature Photography: From One Amateur to Another* (1937), Simon published a number of photography books before *The Decisive Moment*, including Philippe Halsman's *The Frenchman*, New York: Simon & Schuster 1949 and Stefan Lorant's *FDR: A Pictorial Biography*, New York: Simon & Schuster 1950.

61 – Simon to Joan Dye of Time, Inc., 27 October 1952, RBML.

62 – Simon to 'Fellow Photographer', 1 July 1952, RBML.

63 – Walker Evans, 'Cartier-Bresson, a True Man of the Eye', *New York Times* (19 October 1952), 7.

64 – Cartier-Bresson to Simon, 16 July 1952, RBML; and Newhall to Gernsheim, 19 October 1952, HRC.

65 – Simon & Schuster initially broke even and then lost profit when it ordered a second reprinting, all while hoping that Cartier-Bresson's subsequent photobooks, including *The People of Moscow* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1955) and *The Europeans* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1955), would rekindle interest in the photographer's earlier work and thereby sell the remaining copies of *The Decisive Moment*. Simon to Cartier-Bresson, 20 April 1955, RBML.

66 – Capa to Simon, 6 October 1952, RBML. Capa also suggested promoting the book in *Infinity*, the magazine published by the American Society of Magazine Photographers, whose members Capa thought would 'all' buy the book if they could order it directly and at a discounted price from Simon & Schuster.

67 – Cartier-Bresson to Simon, 17 September 1952, RBML.

The Spirit And the Art

THE ENDURING ART OF JAPAN.
By Langdon Warner. 113 pp. text.
92 illustrations. Cambridge: Har-
vard University Press. \$6.50.

By HAROLD G. HENDERSON

FOR many years Langdon Warner has been the outstanding Occidental student of Japanese sculpture, painting and folk-art in all their varied forms. The word "student" is used advisedly, because it expresses Mr. Warner's attitude better than "expert," "scholar," or "authority"—designations to which Mr. Warner is entitled, but to which he himself objects.

Coming just after the great pioneers like Fenollosa, who necessarily saw Japanese art from the outside as something new and strange, Mr. Warner was perhaps the first non-Japanese able to study from the inside, and so to comprehend what these beautiful objects meant to Japanese themselves. Complete understanding is, of course, almost if not quite impossible for any foreigner, but Mr. Warner has come closer to it than anyone else. He has done it by living in Japan, speaking the language fluently, and being for years in intimate contact not only with the inanimate objects of his study in their own natural settings, but also with living people, scholars and amateurs, priests, poets, artists, artisans and quite ordinary people, too. From all of them he has learned.

Mr. Warner's earlier writings ("Sculpture of the Suiko Period," "The Craft of the Japanese Sculptor," etc.) treated various particular aspects of the art of Japan. Here he has given us a general view, a sort of background against which any aspect may be placed and seen with greater clarity.

IN his preface Mr. Warner says: "Study of the fine arts illuminates the history of a race with a peculiarly significant glow, and history in its turn provides the light by which art can be viewed. Perhaps, even with so few photographs and such a brief text as a small book allows, one may contrive to suggest a binocular vision of the past." Mr. Warner does so contrive, although the book has only slightly over 100 pages of text, and slightly under 100 illustrations. There is, of course, no attempt to fit into these limits the details of a pageant lasting thirteen centuries, but rather the evocation of the spirit that made the pageant.

A possible criticism is that the method chosen does not allow full or even equal discussion of all the art-forms. Prints, for example, are given only a few lines. But, on second thought, the criticism seems unjustified. Such a book as this is of necessity intensely per-

(Continued on Page 50)

Assistant Professor of Japanese at Columbia, Mr. Henderson is author of several books on Japanese life and art.



"Matisse...1952...looking at two vases by Picasso."



"Jean-Paul Sartre on the Pont des Arts, Paris, 1946."
[For news of Sartre, see p. 40 of this issue.]



"Allee du Prado, Marseille, 1932. I was walking behind this man, and for some reason he stopped and turned."

Photographs by Henri Cartier-Bresson for "The Decisive Moment."

Cartier-Bresson, a True Man of the Eye

THE DECISIVE MOMENT. Photography by Henri Cartier-Bresson. Introduction by Henri Cartier-Bresson; technical note by Richard L. Simon. 126 plates. New York: Simon & Schuster, in collaboration with Editions Verve of Paris. \$12.50.

By WALKER EVANS

IN the Nineteen-Thirties Henri Cartier-Bresson, an extremely intelligent young French photographer-at-large, was discovered and discovered by this and that local esthete of influence. He was relatively unharmed by the experience.

The esthetes were right. Cartier-Bresson was and is a true man of the eye. More, he was one of the few innovators in photography. The words of this title, "The Decisive Moment," point out that innovation. What Cartier-Bresson has is a more or less dependable ability to snap a picture just

when, say, a city neighborhood roughneck becomes the universal dark character planted in the perfect setting for his type; just when a child takes off into an ecstatic state of being as he skips beside a wall that is covered with an unearthly design of some lunar-like patina. This picture field was not Cartier-Bresson's exclusive discovery. But his un-muddled assumptions about it when he found it, and his continuity of performance in it, were important.

In another realm, picture reporting, Cartier-Bresson seems to answer the magazine editor's dream of sending out a photographer who, even though hampered by originality, will bring in

the definitive summation of a topical event. See the famous snapshot, in his George V Coronation series, of the waiting English crowd; this is assuredly the most staggering piece of camera humor-cum-characterization ever published.

CAMERA portraiture of celebrities is the riskiest of fields: people are so ready to look at the famous that the artist is tempted into mere photographic name-dropping. Cartier-Bresson can stumble over this too: his picture of Saul Steinberg, though mildly witty, seems nothing much. But look at his Bérard, look at his Matisse and at his Sartre in this book: "Bébé" Bérard awash in his hotel bedding, underwriting the occasion with uproarious, mock-narcissistic collaboration, the

whole thing a lesson in how to give odor full and high to a photograph; Matisse at his easel in Vence, on the French Riviera; a facing portrait of the same artist, admiring the work of Picasso—and showing that admiration with a gesture that no one but a Frenchman could duplicate; Sartre in conversation, out somewhere in the soft Paris air—perhaps the best of the portraits. I happen to think that if you must photograph personalities, this neo-news-paper style is the way to do it.

This book, manufactured in France, is a stunning production. The plates are hellogravure of breath-taking quality. Cartier-Bresson's fourteen-page preface essay has something rather peculiar about it, for writing of this kind: it is quite devoid of rubbish and ego.

Mr. Evans is a photographer and writer now on the staff of *Fortune*.

Figure 9. Walker Evans. 'Cartier-Bresson, a True Man of the Eye', *New York Times* (19 October 1952), 7. © Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos.

his philosophy of the decisive moment. When the photographer showed no interest in writing about films or lenses, Simon – himself an avid photographer and tinkerer who admitted to being ‘over-fascinated with technique’ – took it upon himself to reach the amateur market.⁶⁸ Based on interviews with Cartier-Bresson and the printer Pierre Gassman, Simon wrote a brief but detailed technical report to photographers explaining the equipment and processes involved in making the photographs for *The Decisive Moment*, and it served as a kind of appendix to the English-language version of the book.

The report dwelt especially on the work of Gassman’s Pictorial Service, which opened in 1947 and which processed all of the film for Cartier-Bresson in Paris. Simon explained that Cartier-Bresson never developed film himself. Whenever he returned from a trip or assignment, Gassman would develop a few rolls of film under inspection and examine them on the reel together with the photographer. The photographer would explain what it was like to be there – the conditions of light and movement and any other aspects of the trip that affected the details in his images. Gassman was central to the decisive network because in the process of developing Cartier-Bresson’s film he became the primary interpreter of his images and enabled Cartier-Bresson to devote himself to what he was most passionate about: the actual process of taking photographs.⁶⁹ Cartier-Bresson occasionally checked in with his publishers and printers about *The Decisive Moment* as it was being made, but the photographer was mostly on the road making new pictures in 1952, and so it was Gassman who oversaw the production of the book on a day-to-day basis, checking each round of printing, and even correcting Simon’s technical report.

In a 1995 interview, Cartier-Bresson confessed: ‘I’m known as a photographer but what excites me is taking the photographic shot; the rest I couldn’t care less about. I was in the Orient for three years [between 1947 and 1950] and I didn’t see a contact sheet. Every so often I’d have something published. I’d take a look’.⁷⁰ The conditions in which Cartier-Bresson worked – on the move, in remote locations without proper facilities to print and edit images – often prevented him from identifying the decisive moments in his rolls of film. Editors at *Life* were the first to select which photographs of the Chinese Revolution or the assassination of Gandhi should be published, and their reappearance in *The Decisive Moment* demonstrates that the photographer agreed with their editorial decisions.⁷¹ Moreover, Cartier-Bresson’s statement reveals that the medium-specificity of photography was not its ability to stop subjects and time and arrange them into a perfect composition, but that it encouraged overproduction. The photographer may have warned in *The Decisive Moment* that ‘it’s essential to avoid shooting like a machine-gunner and [burden] yourself with useless recordings’, but his contact sheets reveal that split-instant epiphanies leading to such icons as the 1932 puddle jumper at Gare Saint Lazare were the exceptions rather than the rule.⁷² Like most photographers, Cartier-Bresson made multiple shots of the same scene without recognising the decisive moment, hoping instead that either he or a trusted colleague would find it in the film editing process. For this reason he was also very protective about who could edit his film and make final selections for publication. Once chastising Magnum’s Paris bureau chief for showing *Paris-Match* editors his unprocessed work, Cartier-Bresson explained ‘Contact sheets are passionate – a personal monologue, but full of unfinished thoughts’.⁷³ Gassman and others needed to step in to make sense of the unfinished and extensive material that Cartier-Bresson produced, first by editing and then by printing in the darkroom. As one member of Gassman’s Pictorial Service explained, prints could vary so greatly based on the quality of the paper used, or the time and temperature applied, that ‘the taste of the darkroom man is not only very important – it is decisive’.⁷⁴

Pierre Gassman was also the technical expert in the decisive network with whom amateur photographers could identify. On the one hand, there was a clear technological determinism embedded in Cartier-Bresson’s theory of the decisive moment because it required that the photographer be on the move and have a

68 – Simon to Cartier-Bresson, 11 February 1952, RBML.

69 – Philippe Arbaizar, ‘The Public Eye: Shows and Exhibitions’, in *Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Man, the Image, and the World – A Retrospective*, London: Thames & Hudson 2003, 359–67; and Cartier-Bresson, notes from an interview by Simon, undated, RBML.

70 – Michel Nuridsany, ‘The Moment that Counts: An Interview with Henri Cartier-Bresson’, *New York Review of Books*, 42:4 (2 March 1995), 17.

71 – Like other Magnum photographers, Cartier-Bresson praised *Life*’s darkroom editor Peggy Sargeant for her ability to read contact sheets and make selections. Cornell Capa to Magnum, 8 September 1955, AJGM; and Cartier-Bresson to Michel Chevalier, Cornell Capa and John G. Morris, AJGM.

72 – Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*, 1952.

73 – Cartier-Bresson to Chevalier, 11 February 1958, AJGM.

74 – Pierre Gassman, notes from an interview by Simon, 6 May 1952, RBML.

75 – James Thrall Soby also made this connection in his 1943 assessment of Cartier-Bresson's photography. See Soby, 'Art of Poetic Accident'.

76 – Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present* (1937), New York: The Museum of Modern Art 1982, 225.

77 – Ira H. Latour, 'Ansel Adams, The Zone System and the California School of Fine Arts', *History of Photography*, 22:2 (Summer 1998), 147–54.

78 – Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*, 1952. On photographic pedagogy in the USA, see Jason Francisco, 'Teaching Photography as Art', *American Art*, 21:3 (Fall 2007), 19–24.

79 – Simon to the Photographic Society of America, 18 June 1952, RBML.

light, hand-held 35 mm camera to capture fleeting moments.⁷⁵ For this reason, Beaumont Newhall's classic *History of Photography* included Cartier-Bresson in a chapter on 'instant vision', in which Newhall explained that Cartier-Bresson's ability to 'seize the split second' is facilitated by the small camera, which 'he can bring [...] into action almost at once, as "an extension of the eye"'.⁷⁶ But as a technique, the decisive moment also went against what was perceived as an amateur love of gadgetry and chasing of the perfect negative. 'To slip a filter over the lens, or to hold an electric exposure meter up to the subject would interfere in his timing', Simon wrote of Cartier-Bresson in his technical report, 'and he'll take no chances'. Any imperfections in his negatives could be remedied by Gassman, who had mastered the technique of making prints, while Cartier-Bresson had a philosophy that was expressed through his photographs. The decisive network therefore created a delicate balance around the figure of Cartier-Bresson, whose skills – the ability to combine 'sense' and 'intuition', for instance – were intangible and almost impossible to teach.

This marketing of Cartier-Bresson as a photographer with a philosophy rather than a technique set him apart from one of his great contemporaries, Ansel Adams. A close friend of Beaumont and Nancy Newhall who had also exhibited his photographs at MOMA, Adams made prints that were a feat of the technical methods that he treated as law, and which he codified into the Zone System around 1939–40. Adams's technique relied on the stationary viewfinder camera and offered a scientific and mathematical formula for 'visualising' the final print prior to the exposure of the film, thereby giving the photographer maximum control over the tonalities in his photograph.⁷⁷ Amateurs loved it because it was teachable and seemingly foolproof, as long as one had the right equipment, sufficient time, and a favourable landscape. No such point of access was available in *The Decisive Moment*, where Cartier-Bresson even scoffed at contemporary photographers' obsession with technique and 'craving for the sharpness of images' – a subtle but potent dismissal of Adams and the documentary realism that was being taught in many photographic educational programmes at the time.⁷⁸ When read through Simon's technical report addressing camera fans, Cartier-Bresson's images themselves take on a different meaning. A spread from *The Decisive Moment* becomes not about arresting a fleeting moment but about capturing, in grey scale, elements of nature that usually elude the Leica photographer, including morning mist and snow (figure 10).

A Symbol of French Craftsmanship

Finally, there is yet another way that the decisive network aimed to market Cartier-Bresson and his book. For an audience knowledgeable about reproduction technologies, each page of *The Decisive Moment* was also a feat of the French printing industry. Despite the rich history of American photobooks from the 1930s, Simon claimed that he had never been satisfied with how photographs were reproduced in the USA – using the letterpress halftone, which had a rougher appearance and lower resolution than the actual photographic print. When Simon publicised *The Decisive Moment* to book vendors across the country, therefore, he promoted Cartier-Bresson's talents in the same breath as he delighted in the superb work done by 'the finest printer in the world, Draeger Frères of Paris'.⁷⁹ Founded in 1886, Draeger Frères had an established reputation for its innovative production of advertising materials and for its brilliant reproductions of illuminated manuscripts and other works of art, for which it used colour heliogravure. Tériade worked regularly with Draeger Frères to print the art reproductions in *Verve* and the artist books he produced, and it was because of Tériade's involvement that the Parisian firm printed *The Decisive Moment*. Draeger Frères used the heliogravure process to transfer Cartier-Bresson's negatives onto metal cylinders from which the book plates were printed. The fine printing cells of the cylinders allowed for ink of varying thickness to be deposited based on the tone of the original photographs printed by Gassman. The richness of blacks could be preserved in



Figure 10. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Peking*, 1949; and *Near Blois, France*, 1946. In Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1952, n.p. © Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum Photos.

the reproduction, as could the range of greys, and the very large photographs were printed on a high-quality matted paper that did not dull the tonalities. The resulting quality was closer to the professionally made photographic prints that were slowly being made available at museum exhibitions and galleries, and therefore made *The Decisive Moment* into a collectible item.⁸⁰

The quality of the book also triggered a fair amount of trans-Atlantic envy. In the 1950s, printers and advertisers in the USA readily called Draeger Frères ‘the world’s finest printer’, capable of achieving prints with hairline accuracy and for turning promotional material – like a catalogue of Lancôme perfume, reproduced as part of a feature on Draeger Frères in a US trade magazine the year *The Decisive Moment* was released – into an artistic portfolio (figure 11).⁸¹ The author of the trade article acknowledged that cultural differences had contributed to the difference in printing techniques: printers in the USA, needing to meet the demands of their hurried customers, had mastered high-speed printing production and had a profound knowledge of mechanised machine skills, whereas French printers had the leisure to work slowly and develop the ‘aesthetic side of the graphic arts’. Upon receiving his advance copy of Cartier-Bresson’s book, George T. Bailey, who headed the Photogravure and Color Company in New York, commended Simon on Draeger Frères’s craftsmanship and congratulated Simon & Schuster for having the ‘privilege’ of being the US publishers of such an exquisite book of prints. He concluded: ‘Perhaps one day you could dream up a similar project for an American photographer on which we might collaborate with you to demonstrate what an American printer can really do. In monochrome I am confident that we could do and do do [sic] comparable work’.⁸² Without considering the collaborative role of

80 – Rabinow, ‘Legacy of la Rue Férou’, 14–20.

81 – Ray Seaver, ‘An Exhibit of Work of Draeger Frères, Paris, Sometimes Called World’s Finest Printers’, *Direct Advertising – A Catalog of Mill Brand Papers*, Paper Makers Advertising Association, Boston, 38:2 (1952), 9–12. The article is filed in Richard Simon’s research and correspondence files relating to *The Decisive Moment*.

82 – George T. Bailey to Simon, 5 November 1952, RBML. Ansel Adams, who used the halftone letterpress to produce his photobooks in the 1930s and 1940s, became interested in photogravure when he saw the work of another European printer, La Guilde du Livre in Lausanne, Switzerland. See Anne Hammond, ‘Ansel Adams and George Waters: Photographer and Printer’, *History of Photography*, 32:1 (Spring 2008), 54.



PLATE II, DRAEGER FRERES PRINTING

These are all Draeger color gravure pieces. As Ray Seaver writes, the exquisite French color printing is the product of top craftsmanship. The retouching, the hairline accuracy of register, and the striking simplicity of design are all superior to what we are doing today in the U.S.A.

Figure 11. 'An Exhibit of Work of Draeger Frères, Paris, Sometimes Called World's Finest Printers', *Direct Advertising – A Catalog of Mill Brand Papers*, 38:2 (1952), 10. Richard L. Simon Papers, 1915–92, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

the printer in making the book, one might not see quite so clearly how *The Decisive Moment* also registered as a symbol of French craftsmanship. With Bailey's suggestion, we see the book being read both as a manifesto of a uniquely French way of photographing the world and printing a book; to compete would require pairing an American printer with an American photographer, presenting a counterpart in temperament as well as production value. The exchange also demonstrates that the book's appeal hinged on more than the photographs or Cartier-Bresson's philosophy. Reviews in *US Camera Magazine* and the *New York Times Book Review* in 1952 insisted that *The Decisive Moment* was 'one of the most beautiful photographic books ever produced' and 'a stunning production. The plates are heliogravure of breath-taking quality'.⁸³

Conclusion

While the legacy of Henri Cartier-Bresson and the decisive moment persist, key members of the photographer's network – including editors, publishers, and dark-room developers – have mostly been forgotten. Such omissions suggest that histories of photography continue to value individual makers and iconic photographs over the collaborative efforts that have been central to photography's development as a technology and as a social and material practice. The production history of *The Decisive Moment* attests not only to the importance of the decisive network, but also the *longue durée* of Cartier-Bresson's photographic process, which began long before the clicking of the shutter and which was followed by many stages of postproduction, often without the photographer's involvement. How do we continue to come to terms with the history of this medium as more than a history of important names, of memorable pictures and lasting treatises? How can we tell new histories of photography that account for the surplus of forgotten photographs, made with the help of countless, nameless individuals? If we take the time to dig a little, we may find that they are not so nameless after all. Not long before he died, Cartier-Bresson published a book of previously unseen photographs from his travels through 1940s America. Sometimes, uncovering the decisive network means turning just one more page to find the photographer's own words of indebtedness:

I should like to record in black and white my appreciation of the help provided by the following individuals and magazines, all of them instrumental in one way or another in aiding the creative process of taking the photographs which are reproduced in this book. My thanks go to: Pierre Beres, John Malcolm Brinnin, Truman Capote, Norma Copley, Martine Franck, Alfred Kazin, Lincoln Kirstein, Sergio Larrain, Kate Lewin, Inge Morath, Dorothy Norman, Alan Porter, Pat Strathern, and Helen Wright; also to Life, Harper's Bazaar, Paris Match, Holiday and Vogue. Finally, I wish to thank Ideodis Creation and Magnum Photos.⁸⁴

Cartier-Bresson's dedication urges us to start looking up these names ourselves, and to start uncovering the decisive networks without which decisive moments would never have been possible.

83 – Book reviews, reprinted on the cover jacket of Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*, 1952. More recently, the print historian Richard Benson noted 'Cartier-Bresson's pictures may or may not be great art but the printing is among the very best ever done'. Richard Benson, *The Printed Picture*, New York: Museum of Modern Art 2008, 236.

84 – Henri Cartier-Bresson, *America in Passing*, Boston: Bullfinch 1991.