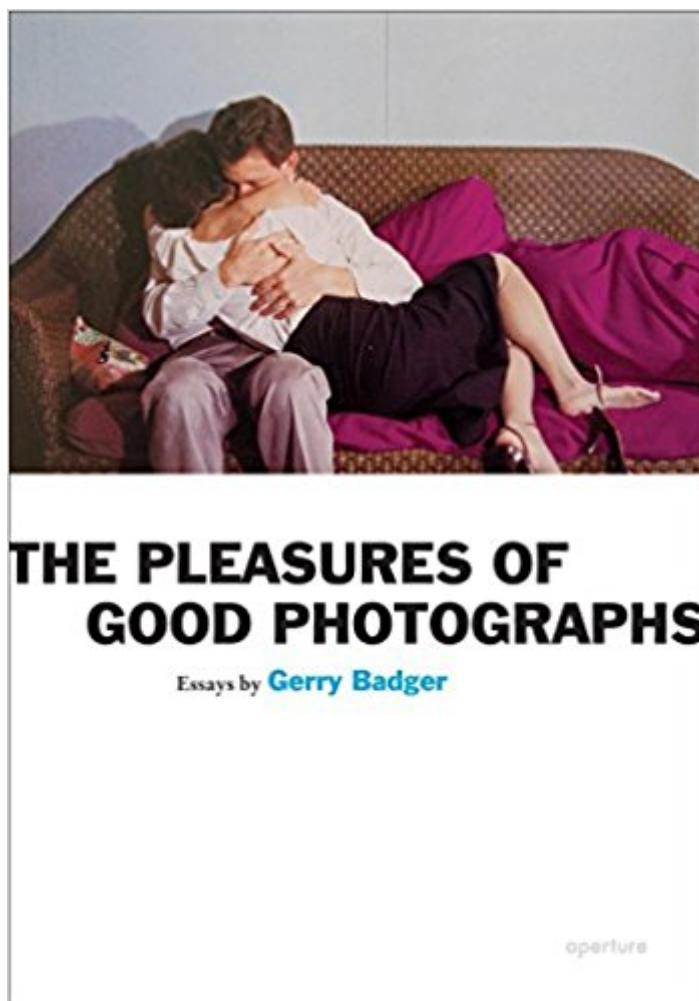


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# The Gerry Badger: Pleasures Of Good Photographs (Aperture Ideas)



## Synopsis

If looking at photographs is a pleasurable activity, it is pleasurable in a complex, transformative, frequently unsettling sense. It is not pleasure unalloyed, for no profound pleasure is pure. Like many truly enriching pleasures, photography has its dark, troubling, even dangerous aspects. Gerry Badger's *The Pleasures of Good Photographs* is an intellectual and aesthetic excursion led by Gerry Badger, one of the field's eminent critics and popular writers and the author of more than a dozen books including both volumes of *The Photobook: A History*. In this new volume of essays, Badger offers insight into some of his favorite images, artists and themes, drawing upon nearly three decades of experience writing and thinking about photography. With deep discernment and a readable blend of scholarly finesse and wit, Badger elucidates works by dozens of photographers, from Dorothea Lange and Eugène Atget to Martin Parr, Luc Delahaye, Susan Lipper and Paul Graham. Among the broader topics discussed are the photobook, where Badger believes photography sings its loudest and most complex song, and Photoshop's role in art-making. An interlude at the heart of the book pairs the author's evocative meditations with nearly a dozen particular images. Alongside some of Badger's classics, *The Pleasures of Good Photographs* showcases primarily new essays, making it an important addition to the canon of photographic writing.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gerry Badger, a photography critic for nearly thirty years, is himself a photographer, as well as an

architect and curator. He has written for dozens of periodicals and his previous books include *The Photobook: A History, Volumes I and II*, coauthored with Martin Parr, and *The Genius of Photography: How Photography Has Changed Our Lives*, a companion volume to the esteemed BBC television series. Badger lives in London.

Clear and concisely written and covering what photography does best.

Very good book. Easy reading.

I'm always amazed that a visual medium like photography sometimes requires a verbal explanation to understand. I suppose that's because image literacy is not innate but learned. "The Pleasures of Good Photographs" contains photography criticism by Gerry Badger, who is a critic, photographer and curator as well as the author of the introductions to many image collections. Although it is organized into separate essays, rather than precisely-linked chapters, the book develops several of Badger's favorite themes, like the difference between subject and subject matter. (The former is what the image shows; the latter what the image is about.) The author starts with old masters like Eugene Atget and Walker Evans and moves on to more recent photographers like Anna Fox and Susan Lipper. Along the way he visits topics like feminist photography and whether photography is an art. He favors the documentary image and the photo book. He writes clearly and avoids most of the mumbo-jumbo of critical theory. Because he covers so much ground in terms of the history of photography and the practitioners, the work will resonate less with readers without an extensive background in that history, particularly since the essays are usually illustrated with a single image, or at most two, except for a short section where Badger explores 16 images having to do with paths and roadways. The author most values documentary content in photographs. Unfortunately the expression of this view, shared by many critics of photography, often seems to be either a lengthy version of "these pictures are really good" or a bit of art history rather than an exploration of the work. I must acknowledge some personal disappointment because the author favors content over form. It may be because I myself am a photographer, but more likely my disappointment arises from my being a disciple of the literary critic Mark Schorer. In his essay "Technique as Discovery", Schorer suggested that it was through technique that what Badger calls subject matter is explicated (and indeed, that without technique there is no content.) Critics examine these techniques in the other arts. Critics of painting talk about the play of light in explicating the content of paintings. Music critics discuss the orchestration of pieces in revealing the subject of the music. Photographers

reveal their vision to us in many ways, other than just pointing their cameras at a subject. Yet most photography critics talk about content without ever discussing how the technique of the photographer reveals the content. I'm not certain how much a reader learns from such criticism, particularly when the images discussed are not available to see. Our appreciation of the work of a photographer could be enhanced so much more by seeing how technique works to transform subject into subject matter. Badger goes so far as to imply that technique gets in the way of good photography and offers in support what he calls "quiet" photographs by image makers like Stephan Shore. Yet I would argue that quiet photography is in itself a technique, designed perhaps to induce the reader to search the image and enjoy the thrill of working to discover the subject matter. I don't mean to suggest the author completely ignores technique. He is especially concerned with the photo book as a work, and has written extensively about the subject. In his essays he suggests that the sequencing of images can enhance the viewer's access to the subject matter. If only he had given examples at which we could look. Ultimately one wonders what the didactic purpose of this book is. Afficionados of what I think of as the London-New York photo axis will certainly appreciate this well-written discussion of a portion of the photographic canon. Most people, who look at, take and enjoy photography as a simple pleasure, will learn that there are other pleasures that await them if they pursue the images and image-makers discussed, but I'm not certain they will be enthusiastic about such a pursuit from what they find here.

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