

**“The Books: A Conversation”  
Stephen Shore and Jeff L. Rosenheim**

**The Metropolitan Museum of Art, August 2006**

JR: Stephen, what got you started on the books?

SS: I saw one. I kind of noticed in passing as part of the iPhoto program that there was this option where you could have a book made and I never really gave it any thought. And then someone showed me one that they had made out of snapshots and I was excited by it. Immediately I saw its potential for artists' books.

JR: So the means of production enticed you, the simplicity of the means of production.

SS: Yes.

JR: The efficiency of it.

SS: I think what enticed me was the idea that I could easily produce a small book. I think as an added element I love the process of it: I like the ease of it; I like the idea; I like the accessibility of it; I like that it's something that really is open to anyone and is not very expensive. I find I take pleasure in the casualness of it, in a way, that I can order a book on a Saturday night and on Monday morning FedEx sends it out to me, and there are no people involved. It's this very modern process.

JR: It reminds me of what happened in the 1960s when artists discovered that the photocopier, the Xerox, was this immediate means of production and anyone could work the machine as if it were a print shop, a lithography studio. I think there is something about that freedom in your book work. The 50 or so books that you've made have all different strategies, the same different types of narrative strategies that you might use when you are making the pictures themselves. Sometimes there is an obvious pictorial narrative; sometimes you are following a time-based pathway, and making pictures accordingly. Regardless, there seem to be certain subjects that you find particularly rewarding to follow in the small book. I'm particularly interested in this book of pictures made of American Airlines flight #105 [AA105]. It was made in February 2004, and you follow your trajectory by the shadow of the plane that you're in. Had you thought about doing that before you actually made the pictures? Is that something you had actually seen?

SS: I had seen it in the past, but I hadn't thought about it for the book. I started photographing from a window seat that didn't have a wing or an engine in the line of view and I was just photographing, I guess, the Long Island or Connecticut coastline as I was coming in. Actually, I probably started earlier. I started over Newfoundland, and when I saw the shadow of the plane first appear, then the idea came to me to do it.

JR: Had you thought of making photographs out of airline windows before you began the book project in the spring of 2003?

SS: Almost never; there's one that's actually in the Metropolitan Museum's collection, a diptych of a landscape from the ground and one from the air. It's a black-and-white picture from the 1971 show. That one was shot out of a plane window, the top one. Otherwise, no.

JR: Do you think that given this new medium, the small book—the self-generated “print on demand” book—that new photographic possibilities are emerging for artists?

SS: For me the answer is yes. I think it's that the book stimulates my imagination. Obviously for all the past years I have sat on planes there was nothing stopping me from doing that with a medium-format camera, but there is something about when I am thinking about making the books, and I see this with students, that it stimulates my imagination in a particular way. I had a discussion with a student the other day, someone I had dealt with here in graduate school, and I know that when she goes out on her own, camera on her shoulder, to take pictures, she comes back with nothing particularly interesting. When she has a specific project, her imagination is set off and she does fabulous work.

JR: So the idea of the small book can be a catalyst for the work itself.

SS: Yes.

JR: Nonetheless, you've had a long and successful career that was started way before there was this more efficient tool available to you—before the opportunity to produce the small book. It's not as if you didn't have ideas to work out.

SS: Correct.

JR: Or a means to explore the ideas, or a darkroom? Isn't the traditional darkroom a type of printing facility like the iPhoto book? Don't artists working in other media envy photographers because at the end of a good day they can produce an entire exhibition? A photographer can work in the morning, process in the afternoon, print in the evening, and the very next day mount a show.

SS: Yes. For example, this book from June 9, 2006 [6-9-06] has more than 40 pictures in it.

JR: Its cover features a *New York Times* newspaper banner headline.

SS: And so yes, you can photograph for a day and have a 50-plate book by dinnertime.

JR: At some point or another might this activity not interfere with your long-term projects? Are you worried about this?

SS: I don't even think about it that way. The books are my long-term project.

JR: A long-term project?

SS: My current long-term project.

JR: Clearly your essential project is to be an artist.... The pictures in the June 9, 2006 book are quotidian details of everyday life: your backyard, looking at your own work, examining what's for sale in the grocery store. And naturally, the pictures follow some sort of sequence. What rules do you follow when you make the books? Do you put the pictures that you made first in that day before the pictures that you made last?

SS: In this particular book, yes. In a number of others, no. This one was a visual diary of the day.

JR: Did you feel obliged to follow the order in which the pictures were made?

SS: In this particular book they are in exact chronological order, but that's not true of say the August 31st book [8-31-05], or the October 29th book [10-29-05], the flooding in New Orleans, or the indictment of Scooter Libby. These books do not follow any predetermined order.

JR: Let's discuss the New Orleans flooding book. Was this the first of the time capsules that you completed?

SS: Yes.

JR: As you know, the subject interests me personally. Obviously it's timely as we are about to celebrate the anniversary of Katrina's arrival and the subsequent flooding of New Orleans. What's interesting to me is your use of the piece of news to set the tone, the mood perhaps, for the pictures that follow. It looks like you were in New York City as you begin the day, but maybe you are in the city the whole day.

SS: I actually started the day upstate New York, then took a train to the City. That was my plan for the day, anyway. I didn't really change my plan for the pictures, but the pictures are not in chronological order. Some pictures are in the City and some are made Upstate.

JR: But they are all from the same day.

SS: They are all from the same day, and I knew I was going to do this kind of book before the event happened. I had decided months in advance that the next time there would be a banner headline in the *New York Times* I would do one of these time-capsule books and I was simply waiting for the day to happen.

JR: Why do you call it a time capsule?

SS: I think I'm interested in the culture of that day, and sometimes it means the actual cultural experience I'm encountering. There's one book where I happened to be in New York, the day after Mayor Bloomberg was reelected [11-9-05]. I had some business in Chelsea and was going to galleries that day, and so the whole book was the art being exhibited that day. As I mentioned in the little piece I wrote for this issue of *Witness*, I'm interested in what else in life there is on a day that is put into context by a news event. I didn't really know there were going to be so many banner headlines in the past year.

JR: I like the time-capsule idea. You seem to use the *New York Times* as one way to determine when to begin a new book. It's kind of a random decision because you can't control what the editors, the headline editors of the *Times* are deciding. The banner headline is just one way of determining what we should pay attention to, but it is a sign that one notable institution in our culture seems to be asking us to pay attention to something. Of course all photographs record time in interesting ways, yet the odd thing about photography is that although it is so tied to its moment, it's very hard to make a photograph that records visual evidence of an actual day, or a year for that matter. I mean, what could you photograph that safely documents an actual date other than the front page of a newspaper? And even then, all you could be certain about is that the picture couldn't have been made before that date. It could have been made on that day, shortly afterwards or decades later.

Years ago when I was a cataloguer at the Museum of the City of New York, I saw the work of an artist who had been photographing for 25 or 30 years. The way this fellow operated was that he began every day photographing the front page of one of the New York City newspapers, and then he would complete the roll of film, about 36 pictures. After which he would go on with his day. The stories and pictures on the front page set the tone. He made one series of pictures and was done

with art that day. This kind of time capsule is fascinating to me in part because each roll of film is a perfect history, fully dated internally, without an additional caption or a title....

About titles: in general, the pictures in your new books are not titled. A few provide basic captions. What is your strategy for titles for the new work?

SS: In most of my past work, I've chosen very clinical titles with the location, the street, the city, and the date. For the books, though, I've actually thought of titles. Sometimes it's as simple as a date, but I'm thinking of them as a title in a way that's a little more embellished than the way I've used titles in the past.

JR: Is that because they are in a book?

SS: That's a good question. I don't know. I felt like it needed it. I don't feel that the pictures need specific titles because they are all, with very few exceptions, made in a single day and are identified so on the title page of the book. If it's not in the actual title of the book, on the title page there will be the place and date and so it serves that function of identifying it. But I'm not going further. For example there's a book that's done in Paris and its title is simply a date. On the title page it says "Paris," but then I don't identify the location of each picture. I use that in a way to play with it. So I am going back and forth between posters and architectural detail or a city scene, a close-up of a painting, and use that ambiguity of not titling it.

JR: The individual pictures are untethered. It's interesting, however, that you did a book, *Heavy Metal Alphabet*, that is actually quite a charming version, or anti-version, of what we were just discussing.

SS: I'm glad you like that; I like it too.

JR: I like it a lot. The book is basically an index of some of the heavy metal band names that one might find in any given music store. The cover is the only photograph in the book and the book seems to offer a reading of the lexicon of music, of a certain class of music, and I like the idea that you are willing to deal with the concept that this is literature. It does upset or inject a new way of looking at everything in this series of books. I also appreciate that you did two books on special trees in Africa. One is *The Marula Tree*, in which you used a different method: you actually provide little titles, which are really not titles. They're captions, information to help you understand what the tree is used for, how it is a symbolic part of the landscape of South Africa, and what purpose it has within the community.

SS: And there is also on the title page a paragraph of text with the botanical name of the tree and a descriptive paragraph about the tree.

JR: I actually find that the freedom with which you are working on the books really useful and extremely effective.

SS: I want to say something about those two books which is not literally apparent from the books themselves. With *The Marula Tree* everything in the book is absolutely accurate; the picture of elephants under the Marula tree is a picture of elephants under a Marula tree, eating Marula fruit that has fallen to the ground. Apparently, the fruit is mildly intoxicating.

JR: To elephants?

SS: To elephants, and when made into a liqueur, to humans, too. The other book, *The Firewood Tree*, is entirely fiction. There is no firewood tree. Every picture in the book is of a different tree or detail of a different tree.

JR: That was not apparent to me.

SS: It's not apparent. There's no way to know unless you are a botanical expert on South African trees. One book is actually accurate and one is actually fictitious.

JR: Curiously, I was drawn to the one that was accurate, although I didn't actually choose it because I thought it was more accurate. But now knowing it is more accurate doesn't make it better or worse to me.

SS: It isn't "more accurate"; it's accurate and the other one's entirely fictitious, but I'm interested in that. I'm glad you brought that one up because when you talk about *Heavy Metal Alphabet* I'm thinking of how...

JR: How accurate is *Heavy Metal Alphabet*?

SS: Oh, as far as I know it's accurate.

JR: You didn't add any names?

SS: I was not adding any names. There was no need to add names.

JR: But you could have added other names, and eliminated some.

SS: There may have been some I was unaware of, but I went to record stores, I did research on the web, I came up with as many names of heavy metal bands as I could find.

JR: I like that book.

SS: When you spoke about it in terms of seeing the other books in a different light, one of the things that made me think of *The Firewood Tree* is how easily we believe things we see in print.

JR: Absolutely.

SS: Somebody encountering *The Firewood Tree* book would have no reason not to believe it, and would probably have it lodged in their mind as one little bit of South African arboreal knowledge.

JR: The fact is, no one is going to know what you just explained.

SS: Correct.

JR: Until we explain it here.

SS: That's true.

JR: So maybe you should consider not explaining it, because then I think it's over.... When you are making pictures for a book, or potentially for a book, is this the only medium you would imagine the photographs might exist in. I don't mean the reuse of early photographs.

SS: I understand. I wouldn't say it's the only medium I imagine them in, but it's the only medium I am thinking about when I'm making them. And some of them, a lot of them, are made with very small digital cameras from which I couldn't really make a print larger than the reproduction in the book.

JR: Right, but not all prints for individual distribution need to be made larger than the reproduction in the book.

SS: Correct. I certainly have shown prints this size, and smaller.

JR: Let's look at some other books. In a few you take a specific subject—for example, roadside grave markers—and make that the organizing principle. I like the one, *Window Rock, Arizona*, a classic subject for photographers. Walker Evans, of course, made a similar series of photographs in Alabama, of the graves of cotton sharecroppers and farmers. And many, many other artists have photographed grave markers.

SS: Christenberry, for example.

JR: Even the angle point of view you have used is pretty similar to Evans's; the forms are roughly the same size, and they're unified the graphic structure and the subject content. The title *Window Rock, Arizona* presumably refers to the place.

SS: Yes.

JR: It's an extremely effective book, in part because of the palette; there's something about the digital camera and the way light is recorded. It's not the finest or best medium to record the subject perhaps, but in the size that it is in the book, it is nearly perfect. The book is very satisfying and one doesn't feel like anything is missing visually, although *Window Rock, Arizona* is all about the visual pleasure of the grave markers. I don't think it has that much meaning beyond it. On the other hand, you took a collection of postcards which I assume are in your own collection....

SS: Yes.

JR: ...and the reproductions look like the images were just scanned on a flatbed scanner. What's that about?

SS: Well, I have a large postcard collection and it is my intention over a period of time to do a number of books divided by content.

JR: Do you classify them and organize them into subject categories?

SS: In my mind I do.

JR: And is this one *Civic Architecture*?

SS: Yes, but in the box they are stored in they are not. But when I've shown them—some were exhibited in 1971 in the show "All the Meat You Can Eat"—I organize them in grids by subject matter and this would be one of the categories.

JR: In this book you used the left-hand page, which, at least as far as I can tell, is a rarity for you. It's usually a blank left in these books.

SS: In this book I used the left-hand page for the back of the postcard on the right-hand page, the previous right-hand page.

JR: Yes, so you have to turn the page to see the verso.

SS: Yes.

JR: Which means that when you look at them as a panorama, you are really comparing visually two different postcards.

SS: Yes. One technical note: about perhaps a year or two ago Apple added a feature of being able to print on the left hand page. It wasn't available before. Perhaps a year into the book project things changed, but for the first books I could only print on the right hand page, simply because that's all that was available to me.

JR: That was the medium.

SS: Yes. For example, in the one you referred to, *Window Rock, Arizona*, I'm beginning to print on the left-hand page; this was shortly after that feature became available. I'll still do many books with the left page blank because that just makes sense for that particular book. But there are occasions where I'll use the left-hand page.

JR: Back to the postcard series: What do you like about the postcards?

SS: Well, I learned a lot from them, looking at everyday architecture. It was a different way of using color photography than the way promoted in the photography magazines of the time, and it was one of the influences on me when I was first thinking of working in color.

JR: Where did you find your postcards?

SS: Traveling.

JR: So, collecting postcards and making photographs were concurrent activities?

SS: Yes, although I started collecting postcards first. Before I started taking the photographic trips (and the first really photographic trip, which produced "American Surfaces" was in 1972) I had, since 1969, been going every summer to Amarillo, Texas, and at first I wasn't driving. I didn't know how to drive, and so I was a passenger, or I flew there, but I would drive around with friends from Amarillo throughout the Southwest and along the way I would collect postcards and that's where I got the ones that were included in my exhibition, "All the Meat You Can Eat," which was shown the year before I did my first photographic trip. So I'd been collecting the postcards before that. Also in 1971, the same year as "All the Meat You Can Eat", I did my own series of postcards, postcards of Amarillo, and that obviously grew out of my interest in postcards.

JR: This doesn't suggest that you were aware or unaware of On Kawara, and the date paintings, or related works by other conceptual or minimalist artists. It was really about the picture. It wasn't about the idea that there was an art, that one could make art out of it, that it would influence your art, influence your own picture-making.

SS: Yes. But I was also fascinated with them as objects; that's why the first color work I made were the postcards, my own postcards. The same year I did a series of snapshots – I was interested in these vernacular forms – in the snapshot, in the postcard.

JR: And the original prints from “American Surfaces” are printed in a format that is consistent with or about the same size as a postcard.

SS: Well, that was not as much about the postcard as about snapshots. That was the standard snapshot size.

JR: The postcard is usually 3 \_ x 5 \_ inches, of course, so your “American Surfaces” prints were similar in size simply because that’s the size that Kodak made prints when you sent your film to be processed. Are you going to continue make books in the postcard series?

SS: Yes.

JR: It’s a good thing.... My next Walker Evans project will be a book and an exhibition drawn from his postcard collection, which he began as a kid in the Midwest, traveling with his parents to visit relatives. When his sister and his parents would go into small towns and shop, Evans would look for the postcard of the new store or the new bank or the elementary school and...

SS: I’ve always thought I was influenced by Walker Evans; it turns out I was influenced by his postcards.

JR: That seems right. Evans also carefully grouped his cards into categories. The typological process with which he organized his cards mimics or follows much of the same things that he’s interested in. And while working at *Fortune* magazine from 1945 to 1965, he published three portfolios drawn from his own postcard collection. When Yale University invited him in 1964 to lecture on his work—the school was actually looking to hire him as a professor—Evans didn’t lecture on his own photographs. He showed his postcard collection.

SS: Another thing about the postcard book. It’s part of a number of series that I have set up that have to do with, in a way, found images that I have or found information. In a way, *Heavy Metal Alphabet* is found information.

JR: Absolutely.

SS: So, too, *Civic Architecture* and *Times Square #2* which is taken from a web cam.

JR: What you see is live activity in Times Square from a fixed vantage point.

SS: Except the web cam is not continuous. It refreshes itself every 15 seconds; it does a still image every 15 seconds, and so my editing is my editing of the still images. I can just click save when I see one I like.

JR: Not that the world revolves around Walker Evans, but he did like to stand on a street corner, in Bridgeport or Chicago or Detroit, and photograph what would happen before him. The camera doesn’t move and simply records the changing events on the street. It’s not a hidden camera because Evans is standing there, but because he’s there for such a long time, not moving, the eye disappears and with it the influence of the artist on the scene vanishes as well.

SS: In the other book, *Times Square #1*, that’s exactly what I’m doing. I’m standing at a street corner and I’m looking at the same view.

JR: Tell me about *White Garden*.



SS: I'm glad you mentioned that book because it is very different from all the others. It's like a piece of sculpture, or a record of sculpture. My son Nick had spray painted something in the backyard and had missed what he was painting and sprayed part of a spruce tree. It was sort of hanging there. As I walked back to the hen house, I would walk past this spruce tree...

JR: And the landscape had changed.

SS: Yes.

JR: The normal landscape had changed.

SS: Exactly, and I found it fascinating. I just saw it for a couple of days, and then thought I was interested in continuing this. And there was the idea for *White Garden*, and in fact this spring I shot (I haven't put it together yet) *White Garden #2* which takes place in the most famous white garden, the White Garden of Sissinghurst. It will be a very traditional garden photograph book of the famous White Garden at Sissinghurst. Anyway, I like to garden and had been aware of this idea of the White Garden.

JR: I think it's a very effective book.

SS: So I did this book where all the pictures, all except one, there's a Queen Anne's Lace in here that's a white flower – that wasn't sprayed, but all the others are sprayed white. The cover is a gardening tool basket, with clippers and gloves and trowels and a can of white enamel spray paint. It's the can I used to spray the flowers.

JR: Several of the books function by you looking at one of your older photographs and either working toward or away from it. The one made in Galveston [1111] you explore as if it were a garden. You focus on the salient details or elements that the eye would not pick out or separate.

SS: Actually that one is absolutely mechanical. I divided the original photograph divided it into sixteen rectangles and printed them in order, left to right, top to bottom. But, I'm not approaching an earlier picture of mine with an idea in mind. I'm looking at that picture, and thinking about what's appropriate to that picture.

JR: I don't know of too many other artists that have ever used their own work in this way, as another subject to explore with the camera. I'm sure the digital world didn't give you this license, but in a certain sense the small book does encourage this type of exploration. I think the Galveston book, *1111*, which is just the address of the house, and *Jigsaw Puzzle*, which in a certain sense works in the opposite direction, suggests that there are even many more ways to reinvestigate your own archive of photographs. Isn't *Mount Shasta* yet another version of the same kind of process?

SS: In *Mount Shasta* I am starting in close on the painting of Mount Shasta on the billboard, except that I am not being coy about it because the cover of the book...

JR: ...tells the whole story.

SS: Exactly, so it's not like you are going to be surprised that it pulls back and it turns out that it's not just a painting, but it's a painting on a billboard. You know it to begin with. And then there's the fourth reworking of an earlier picture, *Merced River*, which is just different croppings within the scene. So each of these books uses a different strategy.

JR: Another one of the books that I got a kick out of is the one called *Merrick and Traction*. The cover picture is a map of sorts—a simple map—that is used to locate the pictures that are in the book. I assume that the photographs were made somewhere around Merrick and Traction, or within walking distance.

SS: In fact, right at the intersection.

JR: Your books are often pointers to things you find of interest, to a way of working with the camera, a kind of arrow to a location like Merrick and Traction. Photography seems to do that—to focus with intensity on a particular subject. I like the idea that the map works the same way as the front page of the *New York Times*. It places the work within a structure but doesn't proscribe what you will find inside.

SS: Right. When I first started, the cover of my first book was drawn from one of the pictures in the book, and that's the only one as far as I recall where I did that. Then I started thinking about just how the cover image sets up the experience of the book. In some cases it's simply a similar picture, but different. In others, for example *Window Rock, Arizona*, the cover could have been one of the pictures in the book, but it isn't. But, in most it functions as either a kind of establishing shot or a counterpoint to the content.

JR: You describe the small book of 10 or so pictures as a single work. I like that idea. Even so, I find that many of the books are rather complex, for example *Merrick and Traction*. Having just looked at it, it would be hard for me to describe anything but the basic narrative structure. I wouldn't be able to describe an individual picture. The books are dense like haiku is dense. Everything counts, and where everything counts it's hard to actually describe (especially when there is a variety of subjects shown) what the work is about. I believe it is difficult for most people to hold simultaneously more than two pictures in their mind.

SS: *Merrick and Traction* includes a dozen or so pictures. One might not be able to recall a specific picture, but I think that what can happen is you hold in your mind the relationships. With the small book it's possible to hold the whole group together as a related group of a dozen pictures. In a book of 150 pictures you get lost in the details. First of all, a large book may not even ask for you to think about why one picture follows another. That is just something that a good photographer or editor may do to help clarify and keep the work looking fresh, carefully structured. If you want to you can think about why that decision was made, one image following the other. It's a different experience here in these books where the relationship is much more fundamental. For example in *American Airlines 105* it is very clear what I'm doing and the shadow gets bigger as I get closer to the ground and that defines a very linear relationship between pictures. Others are much vaguer.

JR: I wonder what the small form means when you're editing it. I understand what the reader gets, but what does the picture-maker achieve from reducing the process to such a small number of images?

SS: Well, I get to think about the relationships and make that an active part of the work. Part of the thrust of my new work is about the sequencing, it's different. And because of the nature of the small book—even if I picked nine pictures at random—I'm convinced someone opening the book will start thinking about why that selection was made and why one picture follows the other, which they may not do if there were 100 pictures in the book. I think the form almost asks for that. One other component of it is that when I'm working I am thinking about this matter. This is not simply happening in the editing process. I'm thinking about the book as I'm shooting it, as a book. I'm thinking about what can I use as a cover picture, and then I see this map (*Merrick and Traction*) and I think this is the cover picture. Sometimes the idea for the book comes to me as

I'm shooting; for example I described *AA 105* where I'm making aerial landscapes, and then it coalesces into this.

JR: So in some sense the short form allows you to find your subject. The freedom of working on a small scale offers a kind of clarity on what the subject actually is. Is that a misreading?

SS: I guess what I'm saying is that the form of a small book adds one element, an inevitable element to the subject, which is the relationship of the pictures to each other and that is almost inescapable. A simple example is the diptych and why there are very few uninteresting diptychs.

JR: Very few interesting or uninteresting?

SS: Uninteresting. There may be few great ones, but you can take two ordinary pictures and put them side by side as a diptych and....

JR: ...improve them both

SS: Yes, maybe that's what I'm doing, trying to improve my work.

JR: Yes, but very few of the books actually ask you to make a comparison on the same page. You've avoided that.

SS: Oh yes, but that's not what it's about.

JR: Except that in the Africa books you compare the view down the path of the road to what is seen along the path [*Bushveld Walk #1*, *Bushveld Walk #2*, *Bushveld Walk #3*].

SS: Yes.

JR: These books describe a kind of journey. Along the way there are the sights along the path—various detours, picture opportunities. The Africa books are interesting, but to me less successful because I can't really see enough of the detail. I can read the picture when it's the road itself, but I can't really read the picture when it's the bush, or a tree study. The images are too dense and I can't separate the forms. I'm mildly disappointed as I can't really understand what you are seeing. Perhaps the images are simply not large enough on the page. I think they would work fine....

SS: ...on left and right, on facing pages?

JR: Certainly much better than two images on one page. Anyway, the permission that you've given yourself as an artist to work small is great considering that you've also been simultaneously printing your early pictures larger than ever. New technology has allowed you to make big prints from your 8x10 inch negatives and have them be unbelievably refined and eloquent. In some weird way the same technology has also allowed you to work small. And I think this doesn't create a tension, but rather supports an interesting dialogue. In my opinion your books are one of the best uses for digital camera work. As I see it, artists have not done well with this new way of making pictures, and I think you have.

SS: I was talking to a woman, an important fashion stylist, and she was discussing this very issue. She told me that many photographers with whom she works switched from film to digital and there is now a kind of profligacy in their shooting. And these are very talented photographers. There may be something in the knowledge that it's immaterial, that it's free. All it is is disk space. That may lead to less discrimination and I don't think it has to.

JR: Ironically, at least for now, digital seems to be an impediment to artists, but a great boon to amateurs. The books are a direction for you and I think you are wise to have taken the lead in this field. From my perspective on the matter, digital media is not that different from any other media, but it will take time for artists to figure out what to do with these new tools. Anyway, the books are very effective, and a rich vein in which to work.

SS: But they are the opposite of what I have done for years, which is 8 x 10 inch color work, which is the opposite of profligacy. I find looking back on the 8x10 work very interesting. I worked with a kind of discipline because it costs so much to take a picture with a view camera. With a digital picture, once you have a camera, it's free and if you don't like it you can just erase it. 8 x 10 inch color was \$20 a shot in those days, more now, for film processing and contact prints. And as an artist one doesn't want to limit oneself and only take pictures you know will be good. There would be no growth. Nonetheless, there has to be some restraint unless you have unlimited money, and the restraint for me was I didn't take two pictures of anything. I would take pictures that I had no idea whether they would be good or not, but I wouldn't take two of them. And so unless something really changed, there were very few times when I would have exposed a second sheet. Over the years it kind of forced a discipline on me where I found I was put into a position where I had to decide what it is I really want.

JR: So what would the discipline in this new medium be?

SS: This may be a carryover, but now when I use medium format equipment or digital, I still take only one picture. I photograph the same way. So I resisted the profligacy because of my years working with an 8 x 10 inch camera.

JR: Does this mean that you're not making pictures with other formats or does this mean that you are using this new work as a kind of ladder to another way of working with other formats of photography?

SS: I'm doing very little with other formats. When I mentioned using medium-format cameras it's often doing editorial work, and I'm not trying to do one shot of everything. It's just that I look at my contact sheets...

JR: Well, that's what happens.

SS: And I realize that the picture editors are used to seeing five contact sheets of one building.

JR: It seems clear that you are not going out and buying a chip to put on the back of a Hasselblad or a digital camera, a 4 x 5 inch digital camera. You seem content to use the sort of hand-held, amateur version of this gear.

SS: Yes, and it's also true of the form of the books that I'm accepting certain restraints, certain limitations of form. Right after I started playing with the books, I figured out how I could lay them out any way I want—which is to place the picture on a canvas and Photoshop and send the canvas as a full page bleed to Apple. I could do complex layouts, and then after I figured that out, I thought why should I bother, why not accept that this is the way the book looks?

JR: Thus there are very few verticals; it's a horizontal book...

SS: Yes, when there was only one printed page to a spread I just accepted this was the form that I was going to work in, one picture to a spread on the right-hand page.

JR: Well it's working.

SS: I guess it goes back to the limitations of the camera, too. That unless you go to the \$30,000 digital back you really can't make a picture much larger than 11 x 14 inches or 16 x 20 inches that really looks good, and I find even very few 16 x 20s look good from digital. This is more of its natural form.

JR: So what are these books?

SS: I see them as works of art.

JR: Works of art meant to be presented in all the same environments as other works of art?

SS: I think that raises a marketing issue that might now need confronting, but yes, that was my idea.

JR: I guess you've always made artist books whether they are journals or limited editions or handmade books.

SS: A big aesthetic event for me was when I first saw Ed Ruscha's books in the late 1960s. They really opened my eyes to new ways of using of photography. I love the books and I have a set of them and still look at them.