

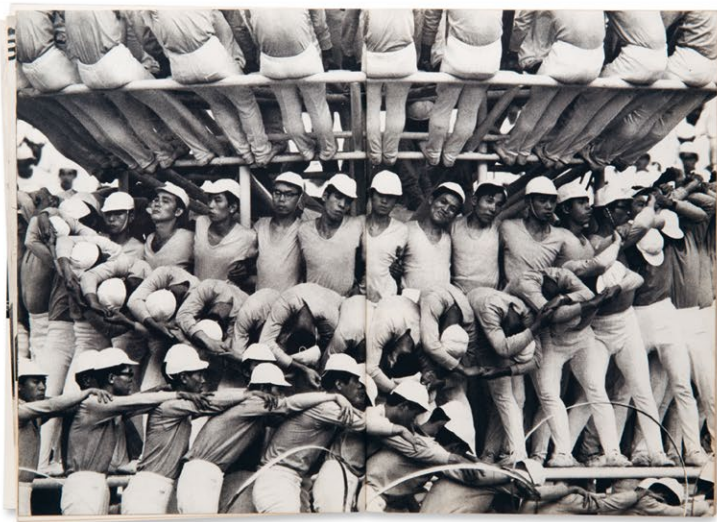
Vartanian, Ivan  
 "Magazine Work"

Aperture.

No. 219 (Summer 2015): 28-35.

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**Is the history of Japanese photography also a history of magazine publishing? A look through the pages of the popular technical and erotically minded magazines of the '60s, '70s, and '80s reveals the most significant photography produced during those decades.**

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# Magazine Work

Ivan Vartanian

Opposite, clockwise  
from top left:  
Cover of *Camera Mainichi*,  
March 1965, photograph  
by Yasuhiro Ishimoto;  
*Camera Mainichi*,  
December 1967, photograph  
by Haruo Tomiyama;  
cover of *Camera Mainichi*,  
August 1968, photograph  
by Akira Sato; *Camera*  
*Mainichi*, January 1966,  
photograph by Yutaka  
Takanashi; cover of  
*Asahi Camera*, March  
1969, photograph by  
Kazumi Kuriigami;  
*Camera Mainichi*, April  
1965, photograph by  
Yoshihiro Tatsuiki

In 1950, in the midst of Japan's postwar economic recovery, the Ricohflex III premiered on the market. The world's first mass-produced twin-lens reflex camera was met with phenomenal sales and catalyzed what would become a prolonged boom market for cameras. Magazines like *Asahi Camera* (1949–present) and *Camera Mainichi* (1954–85) emerged to educate this new demographic of photo-enthusiasts. While the bulk of content consisted of articles on technique, equipment reviews, and pictures submitted by amateur snappers, these magazines also published some of the most important photography of postwar Japan. Editorial stories by Shomei Tomatsu, Kishin Shinoyama, Daido Moriyama, Yutaka Takanashi, and Issei Suda may not have driven sales, but these photographers effectively challenged established ideas about the nature of the medium. Through their work, they argued that photography had the power to provoke thought and possibly exceed written language in its capacity to communicate.

Shoji Yamagishi was the driving force behind *Camera Mainichi*; he edited the publication from 1957 to 1978. Now considered a legendary figure by historians, Yamagishi was also an indefatigable curator, promoter, art director, and printing

This page:  
*Camera Mainichi*,  
January 1966, photographs  
by Yutaka Takanashi

Opposite:  
*Camera Mainichi*,  
November 1968, photograph  
by Kishin Shinoyama

**From the outset *Camera Mainichi* demonstrated a clear affinity for photography that was expressive and artistic.**



director. He is credited with discovering and launching the careers of Nobuyoshi Araki, Masahisa Fukase, Shinoyama, and Moriyama through *Camera Mainichi*. Yamagishi also introduced numerous important photographers from abroad to a Japanese audience, including Diane Arbus, Richard Avedon, and Peter Beard. Likewise, he worked to build an international audience for Japanese photographers by organizing the 1974 exhibition *New Japanese Photography* at New York's Museum of Modern Art with the institution's longtime photography curator John Szarkowski, and through his involvement with the 1979 exhibition *Japan: A Self-Portrait* for the International Center of Photography, New York.

From the outset *Camera Mainichi* demonstrated a clear affinity for photography that was expressive and artistic: its premier publication featured Robert Capa, another early issue focused on Edward Weston, and contributions from the Magnum agency's global band of documentarians were a mainstay. As editor, Yamagishi enjoyed a certain creative freedom because magazine sales were not tied to the marketability of these features (the camera gear-oriented content appeased advertisers). Amateur photography was an important component and he established a popular column called "Album" (1971–78) that freely mixed the work of both amateur and professional photographers with no discernible hierarchy. Mostly filled with pictures of everyday life, such as street or domestic scenes, the column would provide the editorial bedrock for important stories, such as Shomei Tomatsu's 1975 photo-essay "The Pencil of the Sun," about Okinawa, the southern island home to an American military base, a presence fraught with controversy. (Tomatsu contended that Okinawa was *within* the base; the American presence swallowed up the territory, its culture, and imposed a dominion over the local population.) Tomatsu's personal, fragmentary approach echoed that of the amateur photographers regularly selected for "Album" because he sought to communicate the reality of a given situation or condition not with the analytic or dispassionate eye of a journalist, but rather through an accumulation of incidental truths and small stories. His aesthetic was radical and helped unseat the then dominant rules of photojournalism forged by the field's legends, Ken Domon and Ihei Kimura, who at the time exemplified the world of newspaper photojournalism.

Despite the significant magazine real estate that Yamagishi devoted to documentation of current events, such as the dramatic student upheavals of the late 1960s, he was well aware of the need to diversify in order to satisfy a general readership. The March 1965 issue featured Kishin Shinoyama's story "Fever," a series of psychedelic and playful black-and-white female nudes (very apropos of the mid-'60s) that helped catapult the photographer to notoriety. Yamagishi also published stories that would later turn into important monographs, including Yoshihiro Tatsuki's "*Shitadashi Tenshi*" (Angels with tongues sticking out, 1965), an extended photo-story featuring a single model posing in a near-random variety of scenarios, where each shot showcased a different facet of her persona; Yutaka Takanashi's "*Tokyo-jin*" (Tokyo man, 1966), a series of street snaps of Tokyo and its denizens; Ikko Narahara's "*Seishi Shita Jikan*" (Stopped time, 1965), a wildly expressive project that used wide-angle and fish-eye lenses and a range of in-camera effects to create a fantastical vision of Europe. Throughout these years, Yamagishi maintained a robust stable of star photographers and was able to feed a platform that fostered healthy competition among his contributors.

Alongside *Camera Mainichi*, in bookstores and on newsstands, was its competitor *Asahi Camera*. Whereas Yamagishi's long-term stewardship of *Camera Mainichi* built a dedicated readership, *Asahi Camera*'s editors tended to have short tenures of a year

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or two; some rotated in from other departments and only had a tangential connection with photography. *Asahi* regularly poached photographers from *Mainichi*, including Daido Moriyama, who shot for both magazines from the mid-'60s through the early '70s. But despite Moriyama's dedicated relationship with Yamagishi, editorial differences in the early 1970s precipitated his shift to *Asahi Camera*, where in 1969 Moriyama published a yearlong serialization called "*Akushidento*" (Accident), subtitled "Premeditated or Not," which explored the questions: Does a photographer search for images that he has already envisioned in his mind's eye? Or is the process of taking photographs an exploration of the universe and a means by which to engage something new? The June 1969 installment of the series was subtitled "*Jiko*" (Smash-up) and its subject was a traffic accident, or rather a photograph that appeared on a traffic safety poster that Moriyama rephotographed. This built on an earlier installment in which he photographed a television screen over the course of a week, capturing images of Nixon, in one instance. Rephotographing photographs and images has since been a trope in Moriyama's work.

The typical *Asahi Camera* layout was packed with content both visual and textual. Editors often relied heavily on texts to fill in all the white space on a page, and photographers were sometimes expected to contribute; some developed extensive writing practices alongside their photography. Magazines allowed for a commingling of text and visual elements, and exploration of the relationships between them. Takuma Nakahira and Kishin Shinoyama's *Ketto Shashin Ron* (Duel on photography, 1977), featuring images by both photographers

and essays by Nakahira, was serialized in *Asahi Camera*. But, ironically, these kinds of heady engagements were often outweighed by titillating photography (models in swimsuits, demure nude silhouettes, and an obvious penchant for Western-looking models) that most readers were hoping to see and emulate. That's what kept magazines selling, not the minuscule blocks of text musing on critical discourse set over a blurry image.

By the late 1970s, the camera-magazine market was saturated and media companies began to feel the pinch. Balancing the relationship between the techie and amateur pages left little space for serious photography that was more than mildly titillating. Therein developed the space in the market for magazines that focused exclusively on photographs, not on cameras and gear. Of this new (and very limited) breed of publication *Shashin Jidai* (Photography era, 1981–87), edited by Akira Suei, its singular visionary, was the most successful. The publication's subtitle was "Super Photo Magazine" and at its peak 350,000 copies were printed and sold each month. The magazine dispensed with all technical content and because it sold so well it did not rely on advertising revenue, a luxury afforded because *Shashin Jidai* was essentially a soft-core porn magazine augmented with a smorgasbord of other content—a mix of Ripley's *Believe It or Not*, vintage nudes, and very edgy, au courant art reporting by the avant-garde artist Genpei Akasegawa. This exceedingly uneven editorial style kept readers guessing, but also entertained. At times the magazine was so campy and in such poor taste that the chances of selling any advertising to camera manufacturers would have been unlikely. Despite the ample prurient content,

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This page:  
*Asahi Camera*,  
January 1976, photograph  
by Masahisa Fukase

Opposite,  
clockwise from top left:  
Cover of *Asahi Camera*,  
June 1969, photograph  
by Kazumi Kuriigami;  
*Asahi Camera*, January  
1969, photographs  
by Daido Moriyama;  
cover of *Asahi Camera*,  
December 1969,  
photograph by  
Kazumi Kuriigami;  
*Asahi Camera*,  
October 1969, photograph  
by Kishin Shinoyama;  
cover of *Asahi Camera*,  
January 1976, photograph  
by Shin Yanagisawa;  
*Asahi Camera*, June 1969,  
photograph by Daido  
Moriyama

**The legacy of these magazines  
is visible in the history of  
Japanese photography books.**

it was surprisingly also a locus for serious photography by Araki; Moriyama, who would produce regular columns; Keizo Kitajima, who often made his travels the subject of his works; Shomei Tomatsu; Issei Suda; and Seiji Kurata. From the outset the magazine ran three columns by Araki, who already had an established following: "*Keshiki*" (Landscape), "*Shoujo Furendo*" (Young girlfriend), and "*Shashin Seikatsu*" (Photography lifestyle). As expected, his images often featured seminude girls posing in mildly erotic and provocative ways; in other cases the photography was plainly gratuitous. (Some of the "young girlfriend" images would likely be labeled child pornography today.) The magazine was shut down by the police in 1987 for obscenity (for depicting images of female genitalia visible in sex acts). "We were constantly pushing the envelope with what we could show. After years of dealing with the police, I knew the borderline of acceptability. We were regularly experimenting with ways to obscure genitals or reproduce potentially risky images much smaller on the page," Suei explained to me in preparation for this article. Suei's role as editor meant he was not only on location with Araki on his photo-shoots but sometimes participated in shoots that blurred the lines between photo-session and orgy.

Moriyama mentioned to me that *Shashin Jidai* was the only publication for which he did any work in the 1980s; many of his most famous images were first shot for the magazine. After proclaiming his famous farewell from photography in the early 1970s with his book *Shashin yo Sayonara* (Farewell photography, 1972) and taking an extended hiatus from photography, Suei coaxed him back into shooting. Moriyama produced two columns for the magazine: "*Hikari to Kage*" (Light and shadow),

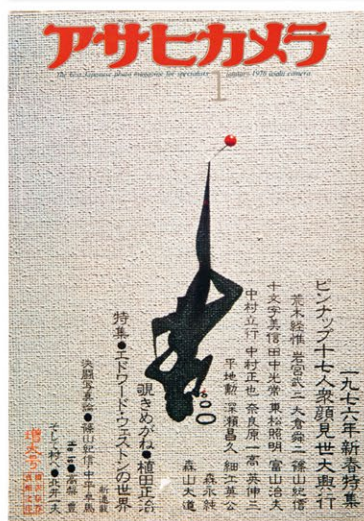


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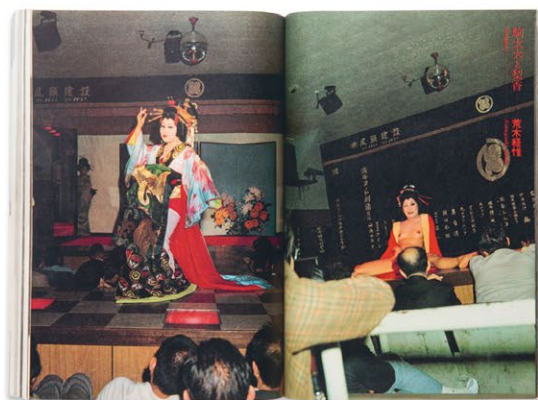
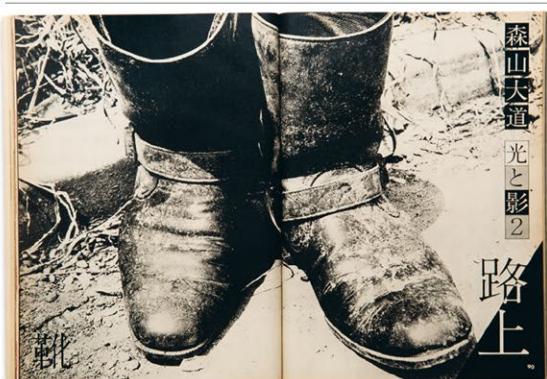


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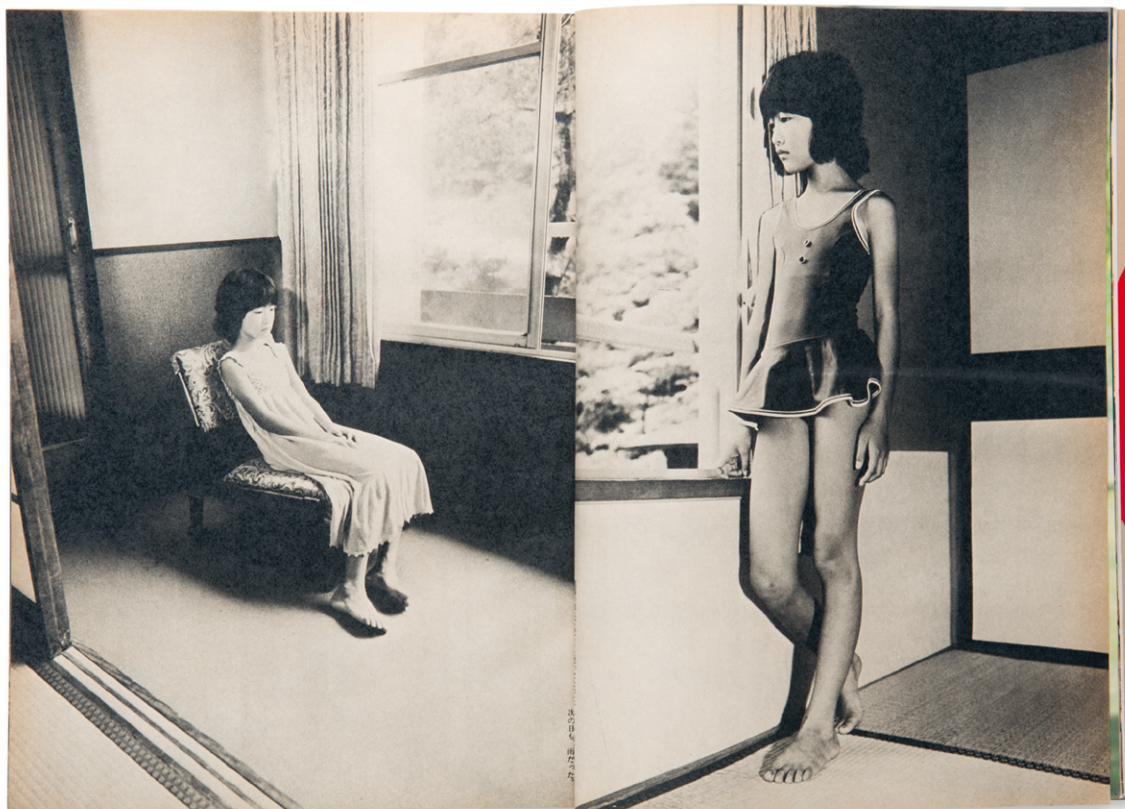


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high-contrast still lifes, and “Tokyo,” street scenes shot from the hip. Among the magazine’s standard sleazy fare and questionable content—such as a “Heil Hitler” photo-montage series by Tsuchida Kimura that showed Hitler holidaying in Tokyo, taking in the sights, and visiting a strip show—were Moriヤマ’s elegant black-and-white abstractions that presented their own form of eroticism through the contours of a bicycle or the grainy texture of a wall. After the magazine closed, Suei went on to create an even more successful publication called *Pachipuro*, dedicated to pachinko (an upright pinball game that is essentially a gambling machine), but for many photographers navigating a dearth of publishing platforms, the disappearance of *Shashin Jidai* would be felt acutely.

Today, the legacy of the golden eras of these magazines is perhaps most visible in the history of Japanese photography books. Many of Daido Moriヤマ’s projects that began with magazine work—*Nippon Gekijo* (Japanese theater), *Shashin yo Sayonara*, and *Hunter*—were published as books that are now regarded as masterpieces. Indeed, the history of Japanese photography is a history of magazine features, serializations, and influential editors. The same editors from the magazine world produced many of the classic photobooks of the ’50s, ’60s, and ’70s; through sounding the response of their readerships (the serious readers and influencers with whom magazine staff had a rapport, that is), editors could intuit what work had enough traction to warrant a stand-alone publication. Photography books are now indispensable to understanding photography from Japan. But recognizing this lineage of print publications adds another layer to the story of the dynamic photography culture that kicked off in the postwar years and thrived for decades.

This page:  
*Shashin Jidai*,  
November 1981,  
photographs by  
Nobuyoshi Araki

Opposite, clockwise  
from top left:  
*Shashin Jidai*,  
November 1981,  
photograph by  
Daido Moriヤマ;  
*Shashin Jidai*, November  
1981, photographs  
by Kazuo Ishikura;  
*Shashin Jidai*, September  
1982, photographs  
by Keizo Kitajima;  
*Shashin Jidai*, September  
1982, photograph  
by Nobuyoshi Araki;  
*Asahi Camera*, January  
1976, photographs  
by Nobuyoshi Araki;  
*Shashin Jidai*, September  
1982, photograph by  
Keizo Kitajima;  
*Asahi Camera*, March  
1976, photographs  
by Daido Moriヤマ;  
*Shashin Jidai*, March 1983,  
photograph by Daido  
Moriヤマ

Under the imprint Goliga, Ivan Vartanian has collaborated on and produced many editions, books, and exhibitions with Japanese photographers. He is the coauthor (with Ryuichi Kaneko) of *Japanese Photobooks of the 1960s & ’70s* (*Aperture*, 2009) and the author of *Setting Sun: Writings by Japanese Photographers* (*Aperture*, 2005).