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Materialities of the Photobook

Materialidades do Livro de Fotografia

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Anna Atkins, *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*, 1843–1853

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Foreword

Materialities of the Photobook

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In the last few decades, we have witnessed a "photobook phenomenon" with the significant rise in the publication, acquisition, circulation, discussion and scholarship around photobooks. Canons and counter-canons have been established, and the photobook has become a recognised form with a set of lineages. New independent and specialized publishers have emerged across the world, along with new audiences of not only collectors and photographers but also occasional and non-professional readers/viewers. Where once the histories of photography were constructed within the frameworks set by conventional art history and museums, the approach was then expanded to become a set of social and cultural histories, before being expanded again to take in material histories. Photography, perhaps more than any other medium has had a plural and unstable relation to materiality: the historical and contemporary condition of the photographic image is marked by its potential to take different and changing material forms, and hence contexts, with no sovereign relation to any of them. Making sense of photography thus means attending to its materiality and its contexts.

While an exhibition demands the consideration of elements such as spatiality, volume, scale, scenography and lighting, among others, the book asks for a different, although sometimes related set of approaches. The specificities of the photobook imply a more or less particular object with its own formal parameters, in which images, text, sequence, design and choice of materials all play a part in the constitution of the work.

Photobooks have slowly started to become objects of study and research for academics and critics. These initial studies are mostly centered on the art and book market (e.g., the work of publishers or the social profile of photobook consumers); the history of photobooks (e.g., its origins, its pivotal moments, and how we arrived at the contemporary boom); or the photobook as a specific case in the wider context of photography studies (e.g., in the 19th issue of Aperture's *The PhotoBook Review*, which aimed at assessing the state of photobook studies in our time, one of the leading questions was "What is the current state of photobook criticism?"). Much is yet to be learned and thought through about the photobook as an object of study, appreciation, and interdisciplinary reading.

For this issue of *Compendium*, we invited authors to look closely at photobooks as complex, unstable and hybridized works, considering their material specificities, the diversity of interpretive and sensorial experiences they offer, and the varied ways in which they engage with the world and find their place within it. We welcomed essays that explored the photobook, contemporary or historical, that looked into the processes that guide its composition, its specific materiality and objecthood, its reception and the reading/viewing experience.

In the opening article, "Photo-Textual Relationships in Early Photobook Making: [Re]Tracing the Roots of Photobook Syntax", José Neves offers a historical account of some early photographically illustrated books. Investigating various works from the nineteenth-century, such as Henry Fox Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature*, or the more travel-oriented *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie : dessins photographiques recueillis pendant les années 1849, 1850 et 1851*, by Maxime du Camp, and *The Arctic Regions: Illustrated with Photographs Taken on an Art*

Expedition to Greenland, by William Bradford, Neves examines the importance of paratextual and paravisual elements — such as maps and descriptions — in the construction of these books. Neves also addresses productive tensions between text and image, looking into how text "perform[s] a paravisual role, enhancing and anchoring the reader's interpretation of the photographic images".

Turning to the first half of the twentieth century, particularly to the Soviet Union in the 1930s, Josie Johnson analyses the book *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* [From Merchant Moscow to Socialist Moscow] in her article "Moscow Out of Time: Varvara Stepanova and the Soviet Photobook in 1932". Considering the photo album as a possible predecessor of the photobook, Johnson raises questions of authorship ("the author is, literally, the Party"), while analysing how the sociopolitical text, the photographs of Alexander Rodchenko and the book design of Varvara Stepanova communicate. Johnson's study draws directly from the avant-garde theorizations of book design by the Russian artist and designer El Lissitzky, foregrounding what can be seen as a conceptualising of the photobook *avant la lettre*.

In "Returning to *Another Black Darkness*: Materiality and Mattering in Photobook Encounters over Time", Briony Anne Carlin takes a phenomenological approach to the study of the photobook. Elaborating on Sakiko Nomura's *Another Black Darkness*, a book notable for its elusive and dark materiality, Carlin argues that "[w]hat appears to be a book-type thing *becomes* a photobook through interaction with a reader, as they gain insight into its image content. In this way, photo-books align with a performance that requires the co-operation of a reading body to be activated and fully realised". Departing from Carlin's own recollections written in 2018, when she encountered Nomura's book for the first time, the article explores the performative and the relational in meaning-making within photobooks.

In "A Turn to Reception: Readers and Reading in the Contemporary Photobook Ecology", Matt Johnston argues in favour of the previously sidelined matter of reading and what it can contribute to a prevailing, production-oriented discourse. Notions such as the absent reader, the supposed inadequacy of verbal language for the discussion of photography, and the necessity of creating new spaces for readers and habits of reading, are all paramount to Johnston's meditation on the contemporary photobook ecology.

Clara Masnatta delves into the work of Japanese photographer Rinko Kawauchi in "Rinko Kawauchi: Imperfect Photographs". Benefiting from Kawauchi's globally recognized expertise in the construction of photobooks, Masnatta explores some of the artist's works by analysing how the concept of "imperfection" is constituent of Kawauchi's poetics at the level of photographs but also at the level of the book itself. Through a careful interplay between individual images and their elaborate sequencing, Masnatta argues, "Kawauchi offers not marvels of exactness but a galaxy of stills following the fluid nature of colours and producing a *metamorphotography* blurring every fixed contour".

In "'A dream, dictating its own course': On Ralph Gibson's Photobook Trilogy, 1970-1974", Anton Lee returns to Ralph Gibson as one of the first photographers that advocated for self-publication, also creating his own publishing house Lustrum

Press. Lee develops a comparative close analysis of Gibson's trilogy — *The Somnambulist* (1970), *Déjà-vu* (1973), and *Days at Sea* (1974) — valuing the relevance of sequencing and demonstrating how the photographer problematises the meaning of his images through their associations and relations on the page. Lee's structural readings are enriched by relating Gibson's books to the literary worlds of Jorge Luis Borges, Marguerite Duras and Alain Robbe-Grillet.

The articles section closes with Henrique Júlio Vieira's "Errâncias: O Acervo Biojuntado de Décio Pignatari", in which Vieira scrutinizes *Errâncias*, a book by Brazilian literary author Dévio Pignatari combining text and image. Starting from the idea of a "bioassembled collection" [arquivo biojuntado], Vieira considers how this "literary book" can be seen as a specific type of "photobook" that borrows from the personal archive, combining photography, time, memory and autobiography, and finally questioning the status of photographs in the narrative that is created from a life.

The book reviews section gathers impressions on two books published in 2022. They are very different titles, published in different geographical and political places (Guimarães, a small city in Portugal, and Tokyo, Japan), aiming at different readerships, and created by two photographers in distinct stages of their careers. Humberto Brito writes about Portuguese photographer Carlos Lobo's *I Would Run this Way Forever (and over again)*, while José Bértolo focuses on *Vortex*, by the Japanese photographer Kikuji Kawada. The reviewers illuminate the fact that despite the numerous differences between these two works, they both contribute, in their own way, to the vigor and diversity of the photobook market today.

The interview section is divided into two parts. It begins with a conversation between José Bértolo, André Príncipe and José Pedro Cortes, the editors behind publishing house Pierre von Kleist, a key Portuguese publisher working with photobooks today. Príncipe and Cortes reflect upon the beginning of the twentieth century, their young years, and the creation of the publishing house. They also discuss the various transformations within the photobook sphere up to the present, while trying to ascertain the importance of PvK as a platform for the dissemination of Portuguese photographers abroad.

The second piece in this section brings together the answers to two questionnaires designed for this special issue. The first was sent to publishers all around the world specialized in photobooks, while the second was directed at photographers who explore the photobook in their own work and experience as artists. These questionnaires aim to map out the contemporary editorial and artistic conditions of "photobook culture" today.

The main objective of this issue of *Compendium* is to foster further discussion around the photobook. Since the field is large and growing, we conclude this introduction in the hope that there will be new approaches to topics such as: case studies on specific books; comparative and interdisciplinary approaches to the photobook; sequence, narrativity and meaning; book design as authorship,

printing, formats, paper; reader-oriented perspectives; digital (im)materialities, zines, and photo-albums.

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Photo-Textual Relationships in Early Photobook Making

[Re]Tracing the Roots of Photobook Syntax

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ABSTRACT:

This paper proposes to analyse the first stages of the relationship between textual matter and photographic images in nineteenth-century photobook practice, investigating how these two elements interacted within several books created during that period of photobook history. The examination aims to demonstrate how those photographic books embody an unexpected duality in which text and photographic images can be divergent or harmonious, questioning established academic perceptions that defined photographs as exclusively secondary in relation to text or categorically central in the construction of photographic books. In its second part, the paper examines how these different intersemiotic relationships did not immediately sustain the type of photo-textual narrative this article attributes to photobookworks, a type of photographic book defined by a complex suprasegmental, multi-layered and relational narrative predominantly based on a multimodal discourse that traverses the entirety of the book.

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RESUMO:

Este artigo propõe analisar a interacção entre matéria textual e imagens fotográficas na prática do livro de fotografia oitocentista, avaliando a forma como estes elementos interagiram em vários livros produzidos durante esse período inicial da história do livro de fotografia. Essa investigação expõe uma dualidade em que a relação entre texto e imagem fotográfica é, em alguns casos, harmoniosa e noutros divergente, uma dicotomia inesperada que coloca em causa percepções académicas instituídas onde a imagem fotográfica é descrita como sendo exclusivamente secundária em relação ao texto ou que, por outro lado, propõe a primazia absoluta das imagens no contexto da construção do livro fotográfico. Na sua segunda parte, o artigo analisa a forma como essas diferentes relações intersemióticas não sustentaram de imediato o tipo de narrativa fototextual que este artigo atribui ao "photobookwork" [livro-obra fotográfico], um tipo de livro de fotografia caracterizado por uma narrativa supra-segmental, estratificada e relacional predominantemente sustentada por um discurso multimodal que percorre a totalidade do livro.

KEYWORDS:

intersemiosis; multimodality; paravisual; paratextual; photobookwork; photo-textual narrative

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

intersemiose; livro-obra fotográfico; multimodalidade; narrativa fototextual; paratextual; paravisual

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I. Introduction

What are the primary buildings blocks of a photobook's narrative? Photographs? Text? A combination of both? Martin Parr and Gerry Badger have argued that the primary message of the special type of photobook canonized in their influential survey "The Photobook: A History", whether combined with text or not, must be carried by the photographs (2004: 6). However, as will hopefully become apparent in the following sections, this characterisation is somewhat rigid and raises significant interrogations about the nature of this intersemiotic affiliation and what constitutes a "photobook". Is it possible to talk of a photobook narrative purely carried by photographs? How do photographic and textual interact in a book? Are they symbiotic or dissonant? Does this relationship affect the construction of narratives? Based on material previously published in modified form in my doctoral thesis (Neves, 2017), this essay will attempt to answer these questions by examining key examples of early photobook practice while simultaneously uncovering a potential starting point of what this article calls photobookworks.

II. Early Photo-Textual Practices

A substantial amount of early photobook production seems to have been defined by a persistent multimodal discourse either through the combination of photographic images and different forms of paratextual (prefaces, introductions, title page, etc.) and paravisual[1] (captions and explicative texts) matter or the association of photographic images and a central literary discourse, for instance, prose and poetry. According to Clare Bustarret:

> The overwhelming majority of published albums[2] have only one photographic print with an average size of 20 x 24 cm per page spread. Apart from the more or less

[1] In this paper, the term "paravisual" describes the semiotic function of captions and explicative texts in relation to photographic images. The designation is a variation of the term "paratext", created by Gérard Genette to define codes and strategies located at the threshold of the text, that is, elements (titles, subtitles, prefaces, notes, forewords, etc.) used by authors to mediate the reader's reception of the book. According to Genette, paratextual elements can also assume "iconic" forms (Genette, 1997: 7). However, the examination of the potential paratextual role of book illustration carried out by Genette is very brief (Genette, 1997: 406). In fact, Genette explains that the omission of such an "immense continent" of paratextual practice is linked to his deficit of "technical and iconological skill" and lack of "historical information" concerning the subject (Genette, 1997: 406). On the other hand, the study of captions, expanded captions or explicative texts, and their inherent affiliation with images is absent from *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Genette, 1997). Although potentially part of Genette's paratextual universe, I consider that the latter elements embody a "paravisual" function that is intrinsically activated by illustration. Therefore, in this paper, I propose a clear distinction between paratexts (introductions, prefaces, dedications, etc.).

[2] Bustarret uses the term "albums photographiques" (photographic albums) to describe all the photographically illustrated titles featured in her essay. Within the scope of this paper, echoing the terminological analysis carried out in my dissertation (Neves, 2017), the ontological ambiguity between nineteen-century "photographic albums" and "photobooks" is resolved by establishing a separation based on the commercial (photobook) and non-commercial (photographic album) nature of these titles. Therefore, the books described by Bustarret, although referred to as "photographic albums", correspond

> ornamented title page, a foreword, and a summary that generally reproduces the printed captions placed below each photographic print (printed elements that may suffice to characterise a photographic publication), these albums may also feature a more or less developed explicative text below each photographic print (a detailed caption or one or two paragraphs of text). The latter elements usually precede a succession of numbered photographic plates, either placed systematically opposite a page of text or interspersed between pages with written text. (2003: 57; my translation)

It should be noted that Bustarret acknowledges the existence of volumes containing no text (2003: 57). Nevertheless, she attributes this absence to production issues that prevented the completion of those publications and not the agency of the bookmaker. Importantly, she also indicates that the nineteenth-century "[photographic] album very seldom adopts a narrative structure that reduces the function of the photos to the status of illustration of a text" (58; my translation). This suggestion inevitably clashes with Roland Barthes's proposition that during a specific historical period, the photographic image was intrinsically parasitic in relation to the linguistic message (1977: 25). Barthes indicates that this conventional model of photographic illustration, in which the photographic image elucidates the text, was eventually reversed, generating a new relationship between photographic image and text. However, the French author does not provide a specific date or period for this key semiotic transformation, nor does he discuss any potential authors or scholarly material examining this shift. When did this reversal take place? Was this semiotic shift immediate or incremental? Did this semiotic shift occur only in photographically illustrated periodicals — the central subject of Barthes's essay — or can it be extended to include photobooks? Regrettably, none of Barthes's subsequent analytical work provides an answer to these questions.

Walter Benjamin's discussion of *New Objectivity* photobooks in his 1934 essay "The Author as Producer" demonstrates that the intersemiotic shift described by Barthes in 1961 was present in 1920s photographic illustration. In the essay, Benjamin draws the reader's attention to captioning and how it can be used to control the polysemic nature of photographic images, a subject he discussed for the first time two years earlier in "A Short History of Photography" (1932). In 1936, Benjamin returned to the same subject in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", this time describing captions within the context of early twentieth-century photographically illustrated periodicals as "signposts" that allowed viewers to apprehend the "hidden political significance of the image" and that simultaneously signalled the end of an apparent "free-floating contemplation of the photographic image" (14). Like Barthes, Benjamin also did not propose an exact historical compartmentalisation. His very brief analysis of text and image affiliation in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) only suggests the existence of a historical period in which captions did not embody an anchoring function. Bearing in mind Barthes and Benjamin's implicit historical compartmentalisations — suggesting a shift in the semiotic relationship between photographic image and text that solely occurred in the twentieth century — would it then be possible to argue that the photographs included in early photobook practice

to what this paper designates as "photobooks". It should also be noted that within the context of this paper, the term "photobook" describes any book containing photographic images.

— in contrast to Parr and Badger's characterisation of nineteenth-century "photobooks" in "The Photobook: A History. Vol. I (2004) — were not the primary carrier of the book's message?

In his comprehensive study of the evolution of illustration, art historian Michel Melot suggests that by the mid-nineteenth century, "text and image no longer had any distinct frontier between them" (1984: 145). As further argued by the latter author in *The Art of Illustration*, pre-photographic illustration in book form had already been able to develop "a system of its own, supported by new reproductive techniques and the demand of a widening readership" (Melot, 1984: 145). In turn, this allowed "the image, the illustration" to be "projected beyond the text" (Melot, 1984: 129). As Jean-Marc Chatelain and Laurent Pinon suggest, this semiotic inversion materialised around the 1530s, partly due to the technical refinement of wood-engraved illustration (2000: 254). Furthermore, Chatelain and Pinon maintain that the duplication of images — using the same wood engraving to illustrate different titles — represents an explicit shift towards the primacy of images in books. As noted by the latter authors:

> These duplications […] attest to the centrality of images in scholarly discourse from the 1530s onwards. There are many examples of fragments of text visibly constructed around an image used previously by other authors, a gesture that shows how images seem to have been at the very heart of those discourses. (2000: 257; my translation)

This semiotic unmooring of wood-engraved images was reinforced in the late sixteenth century by the publication of volumes (anatomy and botany studies) sitting at the intersection between illustrated books and albums of images (Chatelain and Pinon, 2000: 261). Generally accompanied by captions, book illustration was either featured *in-text* or placed in an appendix *hors-text*. According to Chatelain and Pinon, the latter illustration model transformed images into shortcuts and allowed a faster and more open reading process (2000: 265), and, as they observe:

> These collections, in which the reading process is much more open, helped erase the traditional boundaries of the fields of knowledge and propagated wood engraved representations far beyond the usual reading circles of these works. In the scientific field, they were part of a standardisation process of representations gradually imposed by printing. Above all, they enabled the image to free itself from the text and even to escape from the book. (Chatelain and Pinon, 2000: 267-268; my translation)

Therefore, it becomes clear that photography in book form materialised when book illustration was no longer solely defined by the secondary nature of the image in relation to the linguistic message. The latter potentially means that text, particularly paravisual matter, in contrast to Barthes's assertion in "The Photographic Message" (1977: 25), began immediately to be structurally parasitic in relation to the photographic image.

Figure 1. Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, "Plate II — View of the Boulevards at Paris", London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1844-46. (Source: http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/teach/Bande/photography.html / University of Glasgow. Accessed: 11 September 2022).

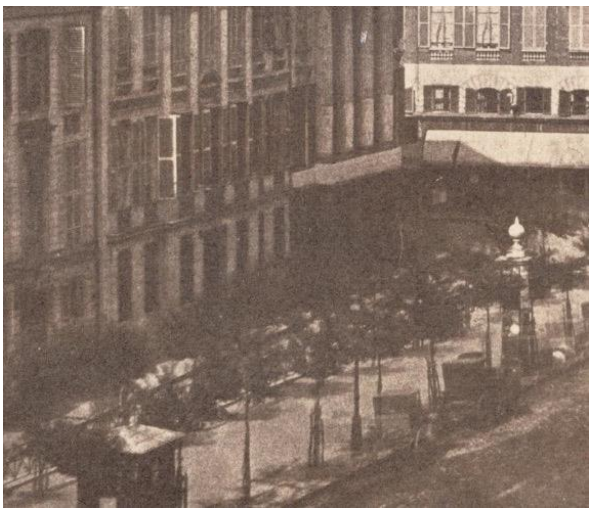


Figure 2. Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, "Plate II – View of the Boulevards at Paris" [Detail], London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1844-46. (Source: http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/teach/Bande/photography.html / University of Glasgow. Accessed: 11 September 2022).

This parasitic process between paravisual elements and photographs can be observed in William Henry Fox Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature* (1844-46). Fox Talbot's use of an explicative text to enhance "Plate II — View of the Boulevards at Paris" (fig. 1) is a clear example of that process. At a certain point in the text, he draws the reader's attention to an open window in a specific building in the image (fig. 2) by describing how "the sun is just quitting the range of buildings adorned with columns: its facade is already in the shade, but a single shutter standing open projects far enough forward to catch a gleam of sunshine" (Talbot, 1844-46). This textual layer guides the reader's interpretation and, to a certain extent, elucidates the photographic image, presenting to the reader what Fox Talbot deems as being crucial in the photographic composition. This intersemiotic strategy — in which an explicative text follows every photographic plate — is reiterated throughout the fascicles that compose *The Pencil of Nature* (1844-46). Taking this example into account, one could argue that, as postulated by Barthes in his discussion of the intersemiotic affiliation between text and photographic image in mid-twentieth century press photography, the recurrent explicative texts in *The Pencil of Nature*

(1844-46) also "realize" the photographic images and load them with "an imagination" that amplifies "a set of connotations already given in the photograph" (1977: 27).

Crucially, this symbiotic and multimodal intersemiotic relationship seems to have been present in most nineteenth-century photobooks. An analysis of the thirty-seven nineteenth-century titles in Parr and Badger's *The Photobook: A History, Vol. I*, for instance, demonstrates this ubiquity. Although Parr and Badger do not always acknowledge the presence of textual matter in their analysis and description of the volumes included in the study, a more detailed examination of those titles reveals that all of them contain some form of printed text, particularly paravisual and paratextual elements. Victor Albert Prout's *The Thames from London to Oxford in Forty Photographs* (1862), featured in "Chapter 3 — Photography as Art. The Pictorial Photobook", for instance, includes two indices listing the titles of all photographs included in the book. Roger Fenton's *Photographs Taken Under the Patronage of Her Majesty the Queen in Crimea* (1856) features a handwritten title page. According to Jeff Rosenheim, George N Barnard's *Photographic Views of the Sherman Campaign* (1866) comprises an introduction by Theodore R. Davis, which seems to be absent in all the existing records of this book (248-49), perhaps explaining Parr and Badger's omission of this textual element. Furthermore, the latter authors also fail to mention the presence of captions in Barnard's volume and Timothy O'Sullivan's *Photographs showing Landscapes, Geological and other Features of Portions of the Western Territory of the United States* (1874-75) and Philip Henry Delamotte's *Photographic Views of the progress of the Crystal Palace, Sydenham* (1855). According to Gernsheim, the latter title also contains "a printed title and contents page" (1984: 21).

Lastly, John Beasley Greene's *Le Nil: Monuments — Paysages. Explorations Photographiques / par J.-B Greene* (1854) contains a letterpress title page crediting its production to "Imprimerie photographique de Blanquart-Evrard, a Lille, 1854", a subsequent title page provides the full title of the book and a final title page contains an expanded title — "Le Nil. Monuments". Interestingly, the photographic plates included in the volume have no captions or explicative texts. Despite the artisanal nature of the handwritten title page included in Fenton's *Photographs Taken Under the Patronage of Her Majesty the Queen in Crimea* (1856), one can safely suggest that nineteenth-century photobooks contain, even if in some instances that presence is somewhat tangential, some form of paravisual matter attached to the photographs. Most early photobooks, as demonstrated above, feature a combination of photographic images and paravisual matter that echoes the intersemiosis established by Fox Talbot in *The Pencil of Nature* (1844-46) described earlier.

Notably, some titles altogether dispensed the presence of a central literary discourse within the body of the book and solely based their discourse on the juxtaposition of photographic images and paravisual and paratexual elements. That occurs in John Beasley Greene's *Le Nil: Monuments — Paysages. Explorations Photographiques / par J.-B Greene* (1854), for instance. The first volume of Maxime Du Camp's *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie* (1852) is another perfect example of this practice. The volume opens with a "prospectus" written by the publishers Gide et J. Baudry praising the advantages of photography in relation to lithography, more

specifically, the former medium's capacity to reproduce monuments with unprecedented fidelity and valuable information concerning the subscription model that sustained the production of the twenty-five fascicles composing Du Camp's *chef-d'oeuvre*. A "List of Figures" detailing the title/caption of each plate follows this introductory text. The subsequent pages present a title page, a dedication, information concerning the printer that produced the book's letterpress sections, and a forty-six-page "texte explicatif" written by Maxime du Camp. This set of introductory paratextual matter is followed by the sixty-seven photographic plates that compose the core of *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie* (1852), a predominantly photographic discourse only interrupted by the insertion of two maps. In contrast to John Beasley Greene's *Le Nil. Monuments — Paysages. Explorations Photographiques* (1854), each photographic image in Du Camp's photobook is accompanied by a layered set of paravisual matter (figs. 3 and 4), including titles describing the region and area where the photograph was taken, a caption describing the subject depicted in the image, and three sub-captions, one crediting "L'Imprimerie Photographique de Blanquart-Evrard, à Lille", another displaying Maxim du Camp and Gide et J. Baudry signatures, and a final caption stating the number of each photographic plate.

Figure 3. Maxime du Camp, *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie : dessins photographiques recueillis pendant les années 1849, 1850 et 1851. T. 1 / accompagnés d'un texte explicatif et précédés d'une introduction par Maxime Du Camp chargé d'une mission archéologique en Orient par le Ministère de l'Instruction publique*, "Plate 107 — Ibsamboul — Colosse Occidental Du Spéos de Phré", Paris: Gide et J. Baudry Editeurs, 1852. (Source: gallica.bnf.fr / https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b86260711 / Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Accessed: 11 September 2022).

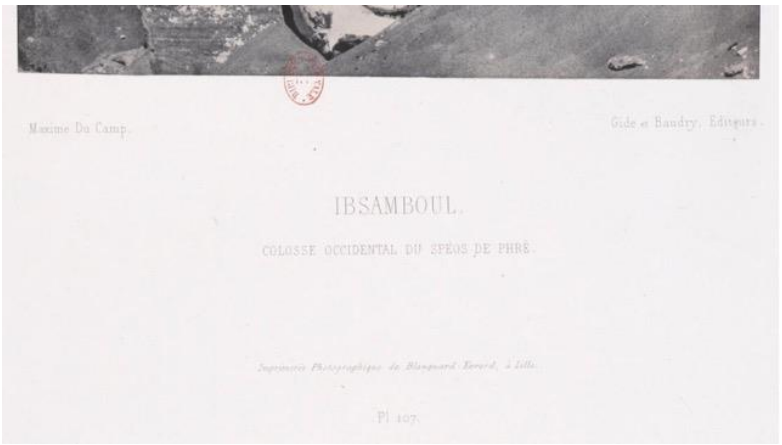


Figure 4. Maxime du Camp, *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie : dessins photographiques recueillis pendant les années 1849, 1850 et 1851. T. 1 / accompagnés d'un texte explicatif et précédés d'une introduction par Maxime Du Camp chargé d'une mission archéologique en Orient par le Ministère de l'Instruction publique*, "Plate 107 — Ibsamboul — Colosse Occidental Du Spéos de Phré" [Detail], Paris: Gide et J. Baudry Editeurs, 1852. (Source: gallica.bnf.fr / https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b86260711 / Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Accessed: 11 September 2022).

Not surprisingly, since much of the key contextual information concerning *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie* (1852) is provided in its first volume, the second tome of Du Camp's photobook features fewer paratextual elements. It opens with a title page, followed by information concerning the company that printed the letterpress elements in the book, a seven-page "texte explicatif" by Du Camp, and a List of Figures followed by a map. The central section containing fifty-nine photographic plates is accompanied by the same paravisual elements present in the first volume of *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie* (1852).

Another key example of nineteenth-century photobook practice predicated on a verbal-visual discourse is Francis Frith's *Egypt and Palestine Photographed and Described by Francis Frith* (1858-60). Extensive explicative texts accompany the photographic plates in this early photographic travel guide. Both volumes of Frith's photobook open with a title page, followed by a "Contents" list featuring the titles of each photographic plate. Interestingly, the first volume of *Egypt and Palestine* … (1858-59) features a two-page introduction in which Frith acknowledges the secondary nature of his explicative texts.

> Scarcely any one ever *does* read the letter-press which accompanies a series of views, any more than one thinks of scrutinizing the "gold sticks" who shuffle, as a matter of course, after a royal pageant. Doubtless I am indebted for this security to the learned dullness of the great men who have hitherto invariably written for illustrated works; not one of whom, as far as I recollect, has been personally acquainted with the scenes which he undertook to describe: I am perfectly content that my own descriptive matter should thus be considered as entirely subordinate to the views. I have neither had time for elaborate investigations on the spot, nor is present space afforded for much topographical or critical detail: upon such points I shall often prefer simply to quote the opinions at which other and more useful investigators have arrived. (Frith 1858-59)

Although much more detailed than captions, Frith's one-page explicative texts, as he acknowledges in his text, still perform a paravisual role, enhancing and anchoring the reader's interpretation of the photographic images that precede them.

On the other hand, and echoing Du Camp's *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie* (1852), the second volume of *Egypt and Palestine Photographed and Described by Francis Frith* (1858-60) does not feature an introductory text. The photographic plates and explicative texts are only preceded by a "Contents" list and a title page.

Taking into account the photographic books examined thus far, one could argue that early photobook production seems to have been predominantly composed upon a permutation of paravisual matter and photographs in which images tend to be at the centre of the photobook's discourse. There are, however, some exceptions. William Bradford's *The Arctic Regions: Illustrated with Photographs Taken on an Art Expedition to Greenland; with Descriptive Narrative from the Artist* (1873), for instance, features a central literary statement accompanied by photographic images. One could argue that in Bradford's photobook, the photographic plates are not essential for the development of the book's central narrative since they appear intermittently throughout the book and are generally used to "illuminate" the textual message. The photographic image shown in figure 5 is described in its caption as an "iceberg which, from its peculiar shape, would be selected to make fast to", and it anchors the passage in the main text concerning the unmoored state of a ship and how "the only resource left" to resolve that situation "was to make fast to an Iceberg" (Bradford, 1873: 10).

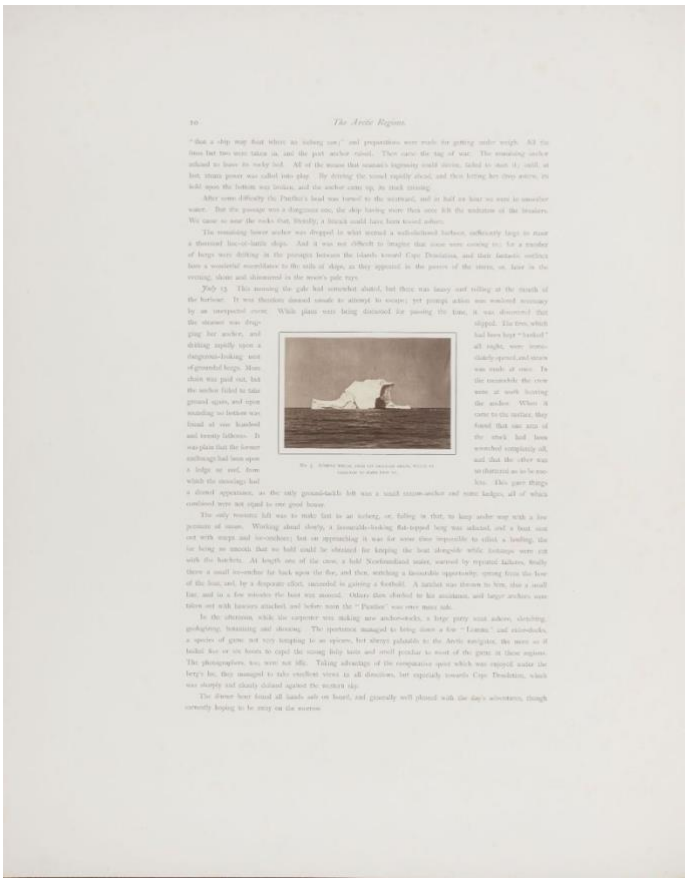


Figure 5. William Bradford, *The Arctic Regions: Illustrated with Photographs Taken on an Art Expedition to Greenland; with Descriptive Narrative from the Artist*, Page Layout, London: Sampson Low, Marston Low, and Searle, 1873. (Source: Digitale Sammlungen der Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:gbv:32-1-10015394393. Accessed: 11 September 2022).

Although photographic images are a significant element in *The Arctic Regions* (1873), Bradford's unfolding textual "descriptive narrative" could be considered the primary track of the book's discourse. Importantly, Bradford's volume reveals a specific photobook production in which images, although part of the book's overall narrative, function as secondary elements within that same discourse.

While the analysis in this article seems to demonstrate a prevalence of titles in which photographs are at the centre of early photobook production, that outcome can potentially be linked to Parr and Badger's limited selection of nineteenth-century material in *The Photobook: A History, Vol. I*. Therefore, a more comprehensive investigation of these different semiotic relationships is perhaps necessary to ascertain which practice was more common during this period. Nevertheless, the existence of these two types of photobook-making strategies seems to invalidate the "historical reversal" of photographic illustration suggested by Barthes (1977: 25). Furthermore, it also indicates that the semiotic and symbiotic relationship between photographic images and textual matter on the page has always been defined by a dual relationship in which text and the image, to quote Barthes, can be a "secondary vibration" or have a predominant role in the construction of a book's narrative (1977: 26).

II. Early Photo-Narratives

It is essential to note that the division described above does not expose the "specific kind of photobook and… particular breed of photobook producer" Badger and Parr uncovered in their general study (2004: 6). Although photographic images in early photobook production were already a central part of the book's discourse, it seems most of those titles did not embody the multi-layered relational photographic narrative my doctoral thesis associates with photobookwork[3] making (Neves, 2017). As discussed above, many early photobooks propose a visual discourse based on large groups of photographic images. Nevertheless, those clusters rarely establish a suprasegmental and reflexive narrative based on the interrelation of those images throughout the book that supersedes a thematic sequence. It could be argued that a photobook built upon a central photographic theme contains an overarching narrative. However, this photo-thematic consistency rarely generated a complex resonance between photographic images based on, as proposed by Robert Massin, a process of opposition and analogy that advanced a narrative (1991: 81).

The presence of a visual theme is not sufficient to create what Sweetman labelled as a photobookwork, a form of photobook predicated on an interpretation process in which the reader creates a narrative pathway based on the affiliation

[3] Alex Sweetman coined this term in his 1985 essay "Photobookworks: The Critical Realist Tradition" published in Joan Lyons' anthology *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook* to describe photographic books constructed upon the interrelationship of the narrative discourse present in the single photographic image and the juxtaposition of different images to generate an indivisible photographic sequence in book form. I have used the term in my research to describe the specific type of photobook examined, for instance, in Parr and Badger's *The Photobook: A History* (2004, 2006, 2014).

between individual photographic images and photographic sequences, which can also be in dialogue with text and other forms of visual expression. Despite Parr and Badger's suggestion that Du Camp's *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie* (1852), for instance, "merits its reputation as the first completely realised photobook" (2004: 23), Du Camp's volume does not embody the relational and suprasegmental visual discourse described above. Despite its ample use of photography, the book suffers from a somewhat limited visual composition, as pointed out in *Égypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie*'s (1852) prospectus. A fact that also seems to have been a matter of concern for Gide et J. Baudry, the book's publishers.

> In order to break the monotony which a series of monuments, temples, palaces, porticoes, bas-reliefs, hypogea, necropolises, pyramids, obelisks, statues, hieroglyphic panels, cartouches, etc., might entail, and to generate a contrast with the persistent architectural elements in the book, we have inserted some landscapes, along with some typical, exotic and interesting sites, in an attempt to mix nature with monuments and link the present to the past for a greater clarity of this work and its sequence. (Baudry and Baudry, Prospectus; my translation)

Du Camp's main goal was to provide an overview of the architectural structures we see throughout the volume and not so much generate a visual narrative, a "monotone" quality that seems to be recurrent in early photobook practice. However, this does not automatically mean that the multi-layered visual discourse of the photobookwork is absent from nineteenth-century photobook-making. Using Emmanuel de Rougé's *Album photographique de la mission remplie en Égypte / par le Vte Emmanuel de Rougé,...accompagné de M. le Vte de Banville et de M. Jacques de Rougé,... 1863-1864*; *photographies exécutées par M. le Vte de Banville ; description des planches par M. le Vte Emmanuel de Rougé* (1865) as an example, Bustarret remarks that several plates (fig. 6) in this volume contain photographic composites that generate "a surprising visual impact, which far exceeds the purpose of a simple epigraphic survey. The structuring of images in sequences succeeds in making the reader's gaze travel" (2003: 59; my translation).

Rougé's diptych shown in figure 6, one of several other photographic pairings featured in *Album photographique de la mission remplie en Égypte* (1865), cannot be considered a photographic sequence in the full sense of the term. As suggested by Bustarret (2003: 60), the pairing could perhaps be better described as a proto-photomontage. There are, however, some concrete examples of photographic juxtapositions in early photobook production that seem to embody a visual syntax based on the interrelation of photographic images. Perhaps the most notorious example is "Plate II — Back of Hand & Wrinkled Apple" (fig. 7), featured in James Nasmyth and James Carpenter's *The Moon: Considered as a Planet, a World, and a Satellite* (1874).

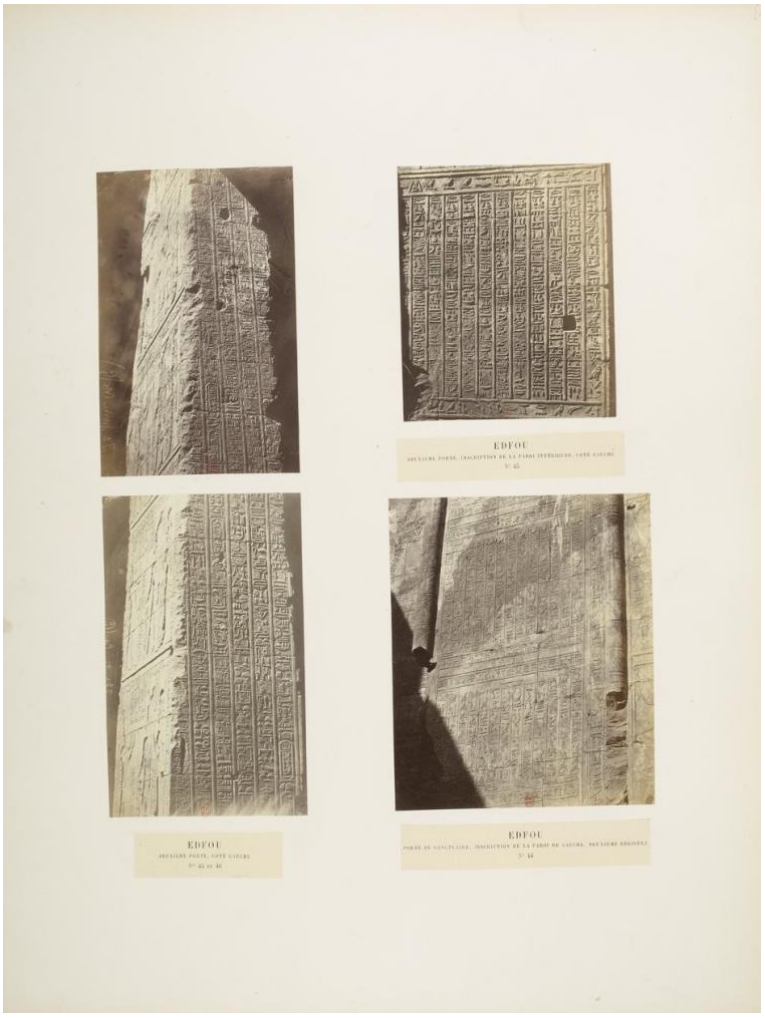


Figure 6. Emmanuel de Rougé, *Album photographique de la mission remplie en Égypte / par le Vte Emmanuel de Rougé,...accompagné de M. le Vte de Banville et de M. Jacques de Rougé,... 1863-1864; photographies exécutées par M. le Vte de Banville ; description des planches par M. le Vte Emmanuel de Rougé*, "Plate F. 26. Edfou. Deuxième porte, côté gauche ; Edfou. Deuxième porte, inscription de la paroi intérieure, côté gauche; Edfou. Porte de sanctuaire, inscriptions de la paroi de gauche, deuxième registre", Paris: L. Samson, 1865. (Source: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b86260941 / Bibliothèque nationale de France. Accessed: 11 September 2022).

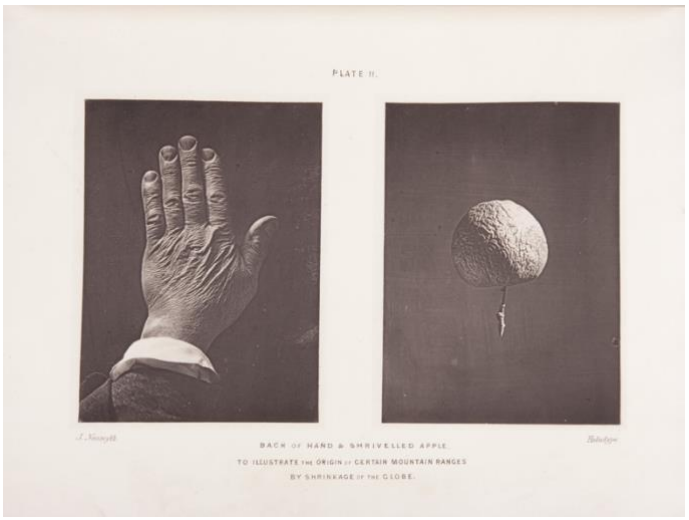


Figure 7. James Nasmyth and James Carpenter, *The Moon: Considered as a Planet, a World, and a Satellite*, "Plate II — Back of Hand & Wrinkled Apple", London: John Murray, 1874.

This sophisticated photographic pairing invites the reader to establish a symbolic association between the wrinkled textures of both photographic subjects and the moon's surface. However, this suggestive pairing is not interconnected with any other photographs in *The Moon: Considered as a Planet* (1874), a lack of reciprocation that prevents Nasmyth and Carpenter's photobook from being considered a photobookwork. Curiously, Parr and Badger included this volume in their "photobook" canon.

Although photobookworks seemed to have been rarely produced during the nineteenth century, it is possible to find examples of this practice. For instance, *The log of the "Wave" / by the O'Bingo* (1871), features what could be described as a multi-layered relational verbal-visual sequence in book form. Comprising a set of 13 albumen prints interspersed throughout the volume's textual matter, this anonymous keepsake proposes a straightforward photo-textual narrative. The book opens with a photographic frontispiece (fig. 8) that portrays three of the men involved in the maritime adventures described in the book.

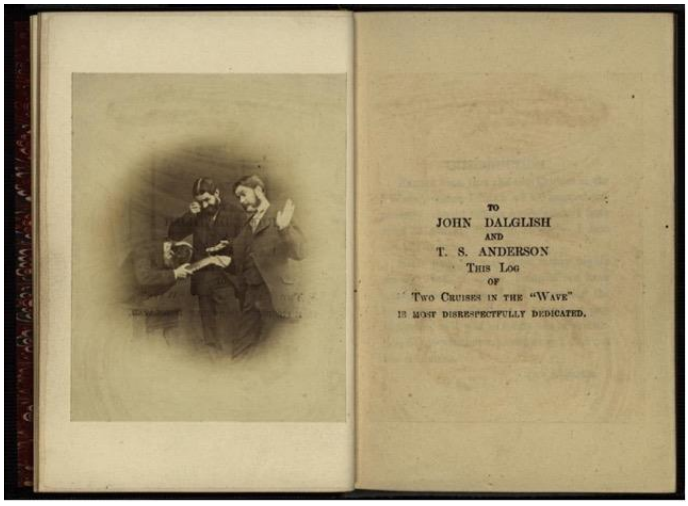
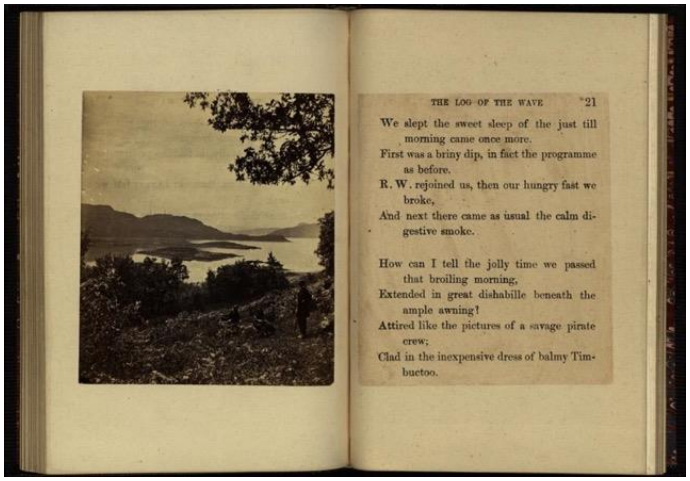


Figure 8. *The log of the "Wave" / by the O'Bingo,* Frontispiece, Glasgow, 1871. (Courtesy of the University of St. Andrews Library. Classmark: Photo DA880.M55L6).

The short opening section of *The log of the "Wave" / by the O'Bingo* (1871), composed of an introduction and four pages of prose that log a preparatory cruise, is illustrated with a single photographic image depicting Gourock Bay in Scotland. On the other hand, the second cruise log consists of a humoristic poem that describes in detail several key moments of this expedition, including the recurrent heavy drinking on board the "Wave" by "R. D. the photographer / the drunken T.S.A. / R.W. proficient in a bacchanalian lay /… repulsive and arrogant J.D. / and a petty Irish Chieftain, whose name it was O'B" (O'Bingo, 1871: 10). The first photographic image in this long poem is a view of the Cloch Lighthouse in Scotland, followed by two photographs of an unidentified waterfall and a seaside view. The first individual portrait in the book, potentially depicting R. D. the photographer, emerges a few pages later, an image followed by three coastal views (fig. 9) that transport the viewer to the natural sites experienced by the characters in the narrative.

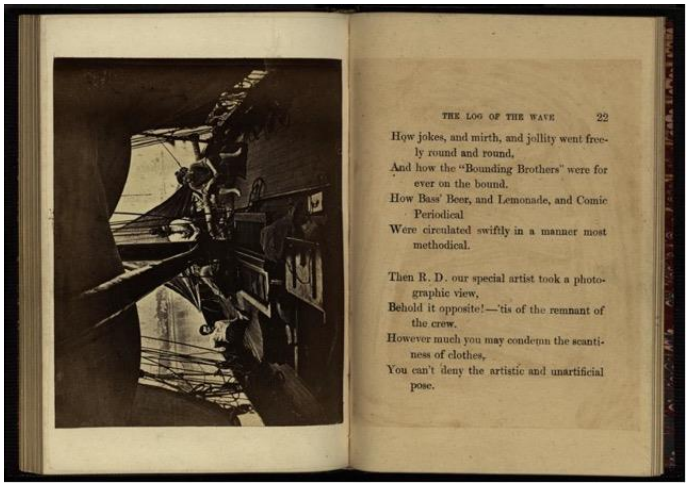

THE LOG OF THE WAVE 21

We slept the sweet sleep of the just till
morning came once more.
First was a briny dip, in fact the programme
as before.
R. W. rejoined us, then our hungry fast we
broke,
And next there came as usual the calm di-
gestive smoke.

How can I tell the jolly time we passed
that broiling morning,
Extended in great dishabille beneath the
ample awning!
Attired like the pictures of a savage pirate
crew;
Clad in the inexpensive dress of balmy Tim-
buctoo.

Figure 9. *The log of the "Wave" / by the O'Bingo*, Page 21, Glasgow, 1871. (Courtesy of The University of St. Andrews Library. Classmark: Photo DA880.M55L6).

The group portrait of "the remnant of the crew", a photograph taken by "R.D. our special artist" (fig. 10), is mentioned in the poem, establishing for the first time a direct connection between the textual and visual matter in the book (O'Bingo, 1871: 22).


THE LOG OF THE WAVE 22

How jokes, and mirth, and jollity went free-
ly round and round,
And how the "Bounding Brothers" were for
ever on the bound.
How Bass' Beer, and Lemonade, and Comic
Periodical
Were circulated swiftly in a manner most
methodical.

Then R. D. our special artist took a photo-
graphic view,
Behold it opposite!—'tis of the remnant of
the crew.
However much you may condemn the scanti-
ness of clothes,
You can't deny the artistic and unartificial
pose.

Figure 10. *The log of the "Wave" / by the O'Bingo*, Page 22, Glasgow, 1871. (Courtesy of The University of St. Andrews Library. Classmark: Photo DA880.M55L6).

A second individual portrait appears on page 23, followed by a photographic image also in dialogue with the text, an "artistic view" (fig. 11) that "represents the evening scene, stand-point the Pier at Row, / Before the night, as it is wont, had filled our eyes with dust" (O'Bingo, 1871: 24).

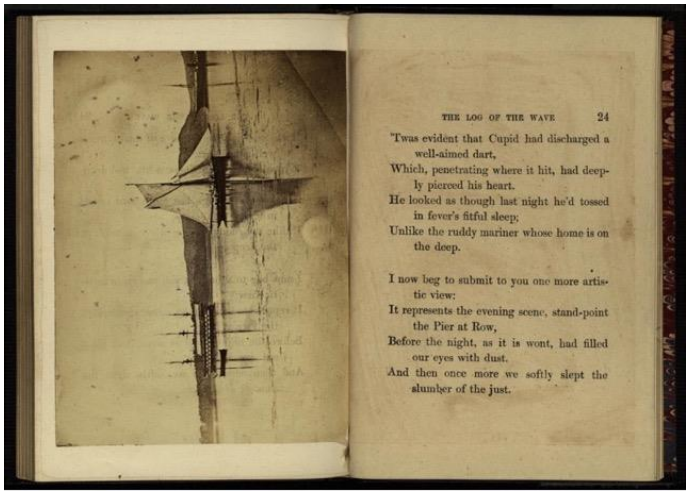


Figure 11. *The log of the "Wave" / by the O'Bingo*, Page 24, Glasgow, 1871. (Courtesy of The University of St. Andrews Library. Classmark: Photo DA880.M55L6).

As seen in Figure 12, the volume closes with a photograph of Albert Bridge in Glasgow. This urban landscape is the visual element that best denotes the presence of a relational visual narrative in *The log of the "Wave" / by the O'Bingo* (1871). The contrasting nature of this image, when compared to the sequence of idyllic landscapes that precede it, establishes a clear closure of the visual narrative presented throughout the book.

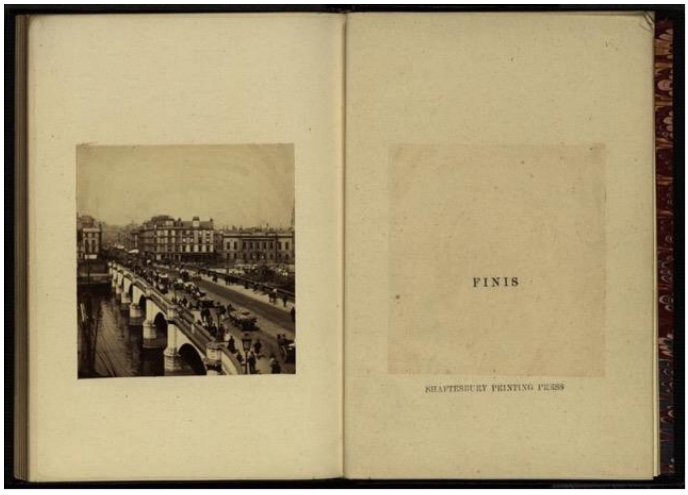


Figure 12. *The log of the "Wave" / by the O'Bingo*, Final page spread. Glasgow, 1871. (Courtesy of The University of St. Andrews Library. Classmark: Photo DA880.M55L6).

It could be argued that *The log of the "Wave" / by the O'Bingo* (1871) proposes a somewhat primary and disjointed visual narrative. Furthermore, in this particular case, it is the interrelation between the main literary text and photographic image that produces the suprasegmental narrative this paper attributes to photobookwork practice. However, as noted earlier, a photobookwork is not defined by the preponderance of the photographic image, whether semiotically or quantitatively, over the textual message. In fact, a photobookwork tends to be multimodal; that is, it usually combines textual matter and photographic images. Therefore, a photobookwork can be characterised either by its use of photographic images as a primary narrative track or through a symbiotic and equal use of photographic images

and text to develop its discourse. What structures the essence of a photobookwork is the multi-layered, suprasegmental and relational affiliation between the elements included in the title.

The log of the "Wave" / by the O'Bingo (1871) embodies the type of visual discourse this essay has associated with photobookwork practice and seems to be one of the earliest manifestations of this type of photobook making. However, it could be argued that this keepsake is an exception rather than the norm. We should not discard the potential existence of titles produced during the same period that express the type of visual narrative and syntax mostly present in twentieth and twenty-first-century photobookworks. Nevertheless, the number of such volumes is most likely negligible and would not alter the analysis proposed in this paper. One could perhaps describe *The log of the "Wave" / by the O'Bingo* (1871) as a proto-photobookwork since, as suggested in my doctoral thesis, it was the use of halftone printing in late nineteenth-century illustrated periodicals that generated a critical shift in photographic visual discourse and literacy (Neves, 2017). The rich visual discourse and syntax developed in the latter form of photographically illustrated printed matter gradually infiltrated photobook practice, particularly after the 1910s, and perhaps inevitably inspired European modernists to explore the book and page as a potential space for the creation of what this paper describes as photobookworks.

III. Conclusion

This essay aimed to expose some of the semiotic dynamics that govern the relationship between photographic images and text in early photobook and photobookwork production. The investigation carried out above has hopefully contributed to a preliminary breakdown concerning the central intersemiotic dynamics that shape the juxtaposition of photographs and textual matter in photobook practice. The findings in this paper suggest that most early photobook-making did not embody the key narrational characteristics currently used to define the special "photobook" canonised and conceptualised in Parr and Badger's (2004) study. Despite the existence of what we could call proto-photobookworks — as demonstrated in my analysis of *The log of the "Wave" / by the O'Bingo* (1871) — the first eight decades of photographic bookmaking seem to represent a primary stage of its history, a period during which photographic illustration in book form established what became its orthodoxy, that is, a practice predominantly shaped by the physical and conceptual boundaries of the page spread. Photobookworks, as proposed in my thesis (Neves, 2017), were only able to fully emerge in the mid to late 1920s when modernist art practitioners instituted a clear division between a traditional form of photographic illustration in book form (photobook) and a more reflexive exploration of the relationship between the book space and the photographic image (photobookwork). Ultimately, this article calls for a new terminological and conceptual classification that separates "photobooks" — an umbrella term that encompasses different types of photographic illustration in book form — from "photobookworks". By instituting this compartmentalisation, the essay offers a recalibration of the somewhat monolithic and nebulous perception of early photobook

history propositioned in general "photobook" scholarship while simultaneously proposing a clearer demarcation of the historical and ontological characteristics that define different forms of photographic illustration in book form produced throughout the history of this practice.

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Moscow Out of Time

Varvara Stepanova and the Soviet Photobook in 1932

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ABSTRACT:

Russian artist Varvara Stepanova (1894-1958) is best known today for her radical contributions to Constructivism and Productivism in the early 1920s. The design work of her later career — especially after the 1934 ratification of Socialist Realism in the Soviet Union — has been less thoroughly examined. One of these overlooked design projects is a 1932 album titled *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* [From Merchant Moscow to Socialist Moscow]. The album consists of a paper folder containing twenty-two loose sheets; each sheet displays an excerpt from a speech on the Socialist reconstruction of Moscow by Communist Party official Lazar Kaganovich (1893-1991) and a set of related photographs.

This essay closely analyzes the album's text, photographs, and design while drawing from the avant-garde theorizations of book design by Russian artist El Lissitzky (1890-1941). By attending to the subtle arrangements of words and images, as well as the album's unique format, we can imagine how Stepanova may have responded to Lissitzky's calls to reinvent the printed book by expanding its spatial, material, and temporal potentials. From this perspective, the album is neither a belated holdover from Constructivism, nor an omen of impending state terror and total aesthetic control, but rather a product of its time: the final year of the first Five-Year Plan (1928-32). The album thus embodies the intense moment of transition when it was created in the artist's own career and in Soviet art and culture more broadly.

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RESUMO:

A artista russa Varvara Stepanova (1894-1958) é hoje mais conhecida pelos seus contributos radicais para o Construtivismo e o Produtivismo no início da década de 1920. O trabalho de *design* da sua carreira posterior — especialmente após a ratificação do Realismo Socialista na União Soviética em 1934 — foi menos minuciosamente examinado. Um destes projectos de *design* negligenciados é um álbum de 1932 intitulado *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi*. O álbum consiste num arquivo de papel contendo vinte e duas folhas soltas; cada folha exibe um excerto de um discurso sobre a reconstrução socialista de Moscovo feito pelo oficial do Partido Comunista Lazar Kaganovich (1893-1991) e um conjunto de fotografias relacionadas.

Este ensaio analisa de perto o texto, as fotografias e o design do álbum a partir das teorizações vanguardistas sobre *design* de livros desenvolvidas pelo artista russo El Lissitzky (1890-1941). Atentando nos arranjos subtis de palavras e imagens, bem como no formato singular do álbum, podemos imaginar como Stepanova pode ter respondido aos apelos de Lissitzky para reinventar o livro impresso, expandindo a sua potência espacial, material e temporal. Visto sob esta perspectiva, o álbum não é nem um remanescente tardio do Construtivismo, nem um presságio dos iminentes terror de estado e controlo estético total, mas sim um produto do seu tempo: o último ano do primeiro Plano Quinquenal (1928-32). O álbum encarna assim um intenso momento de transição tanto na carreira da própria artista quanto na arte e na cultura soviéticas entendidas de forma mais ampla.

KEYWORDS:

constructivism; El Lissitzky; socialist realism; temporality; transition

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

construtivismo; El Lissitzky; realismo socialista; temporalidade; transição

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Among the collections of the Houghton Library of rare books and manuscripts at Harvard University resides a curious object that seems out of place in time.[1] At roughly 7½ by 13½ inches and barely a quarter inch in depth, it is large for a pamphlet and thin for a book. The fading orange ink of the Cyrillic title, *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* [From Merchant Moscow to Socialist Moscow], still springs off the yellowing cover (fig. 1).

Figure 1. Varvara Stepanova (designer), cover for *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* [From Merchant Moscow to Socialist Moscow], 1932, phototype, 7½ x 13½ in. (20 x 34 cm.). Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. © 2022 Estate of Varvara Stepanova / UPRAVIS, Moscow / ARS, NY; author's photo.

The capitalized, sans-serif "Moscow" overlaps with two black-and-white photographs on either side. The photograph at left wraps around the edge of the cover, compelling the viewer to flip to the back; it depicts a densely packed crowd of men in caps and women in headscarves, all facing the same direction, as if waiting for something to begin (fig. 2).

[1] My sincere thanks to Maria Gough and anonymous readers for their comments on earlier versions of this essay.

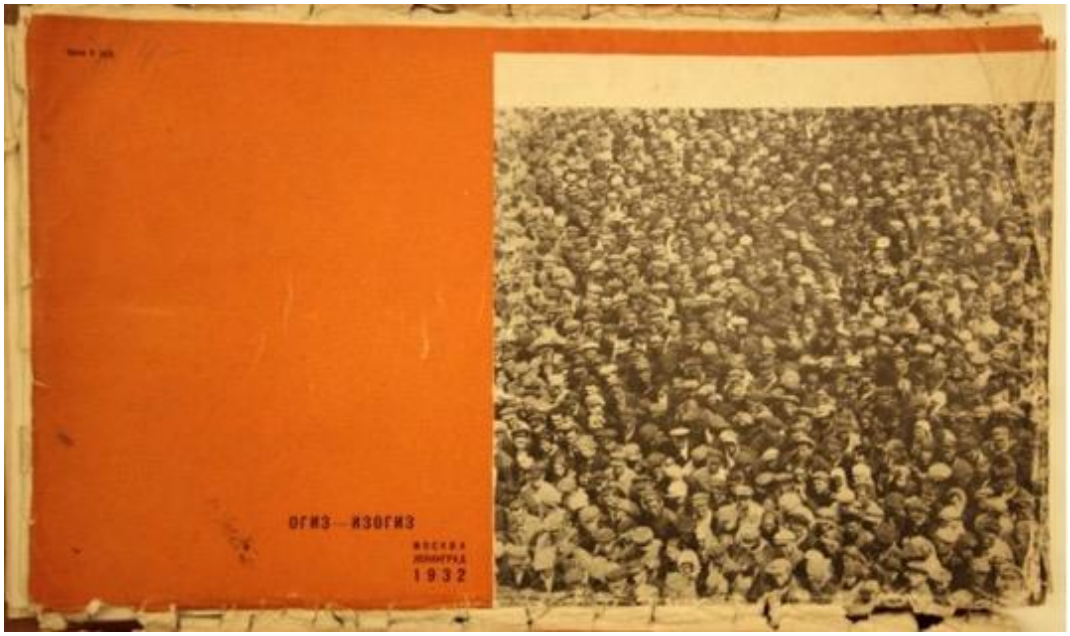

Figure 2. Varvara Stepanova (designer), back cover for *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* [From Merchant Moscow to Socialist Moscow], 1932, phototype, 7½ x 13½ in. (20 x 34 cm.). Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. © 2022 Estate of Varvara Stepanova / UPRAVIS, Moscow / ARS, NY; author's photo.

The photograph at right on the front cover also portrays an urban gathering, but here the crowd gives way to an organized procession of marchers with banners held aloft. The cover thus offers the same message in three different ways (text, photographs, and graphic design): the old, backward-facing Moscow under capitalism is transitioning into the new, socialist Moscow of the future.

The Association of State Book and Magazine Publishers and the Fine Art Publishing House, known by the combined acronym OGIZ-IZOGIZ, printed *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* in 1932, one year after vanguard artist and theorist El Lissitzky (1890–1941) wrote that the cover is "essentially the book's poster, its advertisement" (1987: 62). But to judge this book by its avant-garde cover would be to miss half of its meaning. Upon opening the cover to the title page, the reader discovers a wealth of potentially unexpected information. The text is sourced from a June 15, 1931 speech on the Socialist reconstruction of Moscow by Lazar Kaganovich (1893–1991), a high-ranking Communist Party official and close associate of Joseph Stalin (1878–1953).[2] The artistic designer is Varvara Stepanova (1894–1958), known then as a former contributor to the radically-experimental 1920s Constructivist working groups based in Moscow. The photography credits include Stepanova's husband and fellow Constructivist Alexander Rodchenko (1891–1956), as well as the state-run photo agency Soyuzfoto. In 1932 Moscow, the Avant-Garde comingles with the State.

The reader also learns that this book is not bound; rather, it is a stack of twenty-two loose sheets contained within a paper folder, which I will refer to as an album.[3] Each sheet contains an excerpt from Kaganovich's report and a set of related

[2] For more information on Kaganovich, see Rees, 2017, and Davies, 2003.

[3] The material categorization of this publication has been inconsistent across scholarship and catalogs. Whereas most mentions are bibliographical citations formatted as books, two offer the phrases "album-

photographs contrasting the old Moscow with the new: gas lamps and electricity, tenement houses and communal housing, crowded market stalls and open parks, and so on. The worn and brittle cover requires extremely careful handling, which imparts a sense of preciousness, yet the pages inside have been protected. Their relative sturdiness brings the reader a step closer to the experience of handling this album when it was new: the sheets could be flipped through quickly, shuffled, and stacked back together with ease. For the twenty-first century reader, the tattered material remnants of the exterior and the Stalinist contents of the interior make this album a historical relic. Yet, the freshness of the graphic design, the insistently forward-looking ethos of the text and images, and the reader's direct involvement in handling the loose pages refuse attempts to relegate it to the past.

The album's unstable temporality is but one of the many challenges and questions the reader confronts from the cover/folder alone. Who is the author? Is it Communist Party leader Kaganovich or the artistic designer Stepanova? What about the photographers, editors, and publisher? The city itself? How does one proceed to view a book with no binding? Are the pages in order? Or should the sheets be spread before the reader, face-up, so they can be viewed in their totality? Is the design meant to compel the readers to physically engage with the book more than is typically necessary, forcing them out of bourgeois passivity and fulfilling Lissitzky's call for the book to be "made active"? (1987: 62). Or is the folder merely a simple and inexpensive way to present the contents without binding? Whom was this meant for, and what does it try to accomplish?

Some of the tensions inherent in this album may have been intentional, as everything about it embodies a state of transition. In the following three sections, I will analyze the album's text, photographs, and design, in order to argue that *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* is neither a belated holdover from Constructivism, nor an omen of impending state terror and total aesthetic control, but rather a product of its time: the final year of the first Five-Year Plan (1928-32). This herculean program of industrialization and modernization concluded one year early, only for Stalin to launch the Second Five-Year Plan immediately after (1933-7). In mid-1932, Soviet political rhetoric emphasized monumental accomplishments as well as the immense work remaining to be done. During this moment of sea change, previously open aesthetic debates were drawing to a close and increasingly centralized publishing houses were piloting new formats for commemorative books, Party texts, and propaganda magazines. Socialist Realism was crystalizing ahead of its 1934 designation as the official artistic style of the Soviet Union.

This context shaped the album's deliberately transitory status as an object produced when the radicalism of the early Russian Avant-Garde was brought under control — by publishers, artists, and the state — in anticipation of a looming yet unpredictable future. At the center of this tangled web is Stepanova, an artist grappling with her avant-garde past but continually evolving to fulfill new professional demands and design briefs. In the absence of extant writings by Stepanova on this project, I draw from Lissitzky's contemporaneous and strikingly

folder" and "photo-album." See Lavrentiev and Bowlt, 1988: 126; Rodchenko and Dabrowski, et al., 1998: 310.

radical theories on book design as interpretive aids.[4] Through this analysis, a strange sense of temporality emerges from the album; it demonstrates that in 1932 Moscow, to be "ahead of one's time" was to be "of the moment".

1. Text

In the same 1931 essay mentioned above, Lissitzky wrote, "*The book must be the unified work of the author and the designer*. As long as this is not the case, splendid exteriors will constantly be produced for unimportant contents, and vice-versa" (1987: 62). For *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi,* the text was predetermined, subject only to editorial control through excerpting passages from Kaganovich's June 1931 report. The author is, literally, the Party; Kaganovich narrates in the first-person plural as he describes the Party's plans to transform the socialist capital into a modern metropolis. Slogans and statistics riddle the text — a typical passage included in the album mentions the half-million workers now residing in former bourgeois apartments and new apartment buildings "75-80 percent" occupied by workers. Stepanova likely never met with Kaganovich to discuss the album, but a looser interpretation of Lissitzky's call for "unified work" could still apply in this case, as Lissitzky himself had learned to accept the state as a co-producer of all his work by the start of the 1930s (Johnson, 2015: 232-233). In the political climate of the First Five-Year Plan, Kaganovich's report would certainly qualify as important content — second only to speeches from Stalin and his communist forebears — and deserving of a "splendid" design.

Publications of Party speeches proliferated in the early 1930s, but Stepanova's striking design rises to the level of the distinguished contents, refusing to allow the text to assert priority over the images.[5] Most conspicuously, the title signals that this album is not an exact record of the report like other published versions, but an artistic adaption. Rather than original title "The Socialist Reconstruction of Moscow and Cities of the USSR," Stepanova spreads a pithier phrase across the album cover that previews the dialectical format of the design. The result falls between the traditional, direct transcription model of Party speeches and the "formalist" model of earlier avant-garde book designs.[6] Text and photographs, content and form, here work together.

One additional aspect separates the album from comparable Party publications: a delay between the delivery of the report and printing. Whereas the English translation of Kaganovich's June 15, 1931 report appeared in September, at

[4] Stepanova's own writings, and those of other Soviet women artists, remain under-published in comparison with those of her male contemporaries. The largest collection of texts by Stepanova is published only in Russian. See Stepanova, 1994.

[5] For comparison, see the English translation with a cover by John Heartfield and no other illustrations inside in Kaganovich.

[6] By *formalist* I mean generally concerned with questions of form over content, though precisely this sort of oversimplification fed criticisms of this model in the late 1920s to early 1930s. The best-known example of formalist book design is Lissitzky's 1922 Suprematist "children's book" *Of Two Squares*. Mikhail Karasik and Manfred Heiting (2015: 118) claim that *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* may have been the first of many publications applying avant-garde design to a Party text.

least eleven more months elapsed before the 1932 publication of *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi*.[7] Intentional or not, the delay enabled Stepanova and the editorial team to update readers on Soviet accomplishments since the time of the report and enact the pervasive ethos of progress of the final (fourth) year of the First Five-Year Plan. By combining the text with recent photographs in an innovative album format, the report becomes a living document, continually making new strides into the future and converting a potential liability for printing an outdated text into an asset. In this way, *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* aspires to achieve precisely what Lissitzky called for: an *activation* of the book on multiple levels, beyond just the cover.

2. Photography

In conjunction with the text, photography plays a key role in developing the album's transitional image of Moscow, primarily through the "then versus now" format that was a staple of early twentieth-century photographic publications made around the globe. Soviet examples often contrasted two images in terms of form and content. For instance, in the September 1931 "Moscow" issue of the propaganda magazine *USSR in Construction*, the "old" photographs of horse-drawn carriages are somewhat blurry and printed with a slightly higher contrast, which results in a loss of detail, whereas the "new" photographs of a Constructivist bus garage and an automobile on a paved road are sharply focused and offer more mid-range tones to form a more precise image (fig. 3).

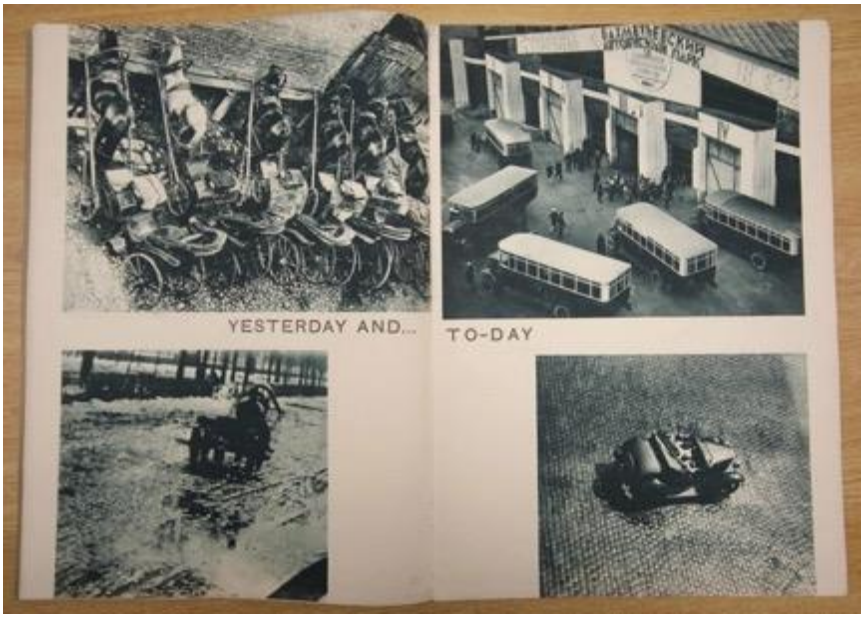

Figure 3. R. Ostrovsky and I. Urazov (designers), "Yesterday and…To-Day," in *USSR in Construction* no. 9 (September 1931), offset lithograph, 16 ¼ x 12 in. (41 x 30 cm.). Five College Library Repository Collection, Amherst, MA. Author's photo.

[7] Images of May Day displays narrow the range for publication from May to December 1932.

Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi employs the comparison method somewhat differently. A contrasting pair appears on all but four of the twenty-two pages, but this liberal use of juxtaposition does not correspond with a heightened visual contrast between the old and the new. Instead, a consistency of tonal range and sharpness characterizes photographs on both sides of the temporal divide, as we see on the album cover (figs. 1 and 2). The pre-revolutionary photographs adhere to a general set of standards for press photography of the era: straightforward views with the subject at the center, maximizing the amount of visual information in the negative.[8] Both old and new photographs are thus treated as historical documents, appealing to photographic "objectivity" and constructing a visual argument for the ongoing transformation of Moscow since the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. Near-identical vantage points in the old and new photographs thus establish a temporal *continuity* between pre- and post-revolutionary Moscow; the original city fabric remains as market squares become public parks and the untapped potential of the medieval city is finally fulfilled as a socialist capital (fig. 4). Instead of invoking the finality of a "then versus now" transformation, this continual process of change suggests *ongoing* progress and improvement, consistent with the logic of the Five-Year Plan immediately leading into a second.

Figure 4. Varvara Stepanova (designer), *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* [From Merchant Moscow to Socialist Moscow], 1932, phototype, 7½ x 13½ in. (20 x 34 cm.). © 2022 Estate of Varvara Stepanova / UPRAVIS, Moscow / ARS, NY; image open access: https://archive.org/details/O.1932.

Yet the newer photographs are not without their own set of unique visual conventions. In order to read these photographs more closely, we must survey the contemporary activities of Rodchenko in particular, one of the few photographers credited on the title page.[9] John E. Bowlt describes the latter's close artistic

[8] The photographs are not credited individually, though we can surmise from the cover page information that these older photographs came from the collections of the Museum of the Revolution, the Communal Museum, Soyuzfoto, and the revolutionary-era photographers V. Savelyev and Kazachinski.

[9] The other two photographers credited in the album are Eleazar Langman (1895–1940) and Boris Ignatovich (1899–1976), two of Rodchenko's close colleagues and occasional rivals from the late 1920s and early 1930s. For more examples of their work and biographical information, see Goodman et al., 2015: 223, 225.

relationship with his life partner Stepanova as a "collective" (Lavrentiev and Bowlt, 1988: 7). In the realm of photography, Rodchenko generally focused on camera work and Stepanova focused on graphic design, often using Rodchenko's images in her compositions. Rodchenko probably supplied the majority of the newer photographs for this album, as Moscow had been his most common photographic subject since the late 1920s (Rodchenko and Stepanova et al., 1991: 37; Tupitsyn, 1998: 13-14).

Rodchenko's career and artistic principles had been evolving constantly since before the 1917 Revolution, but exactly at the time of the album's publication he underwent a particularly intense and involuntary transformation. In the mid 1920s, Rodchenko developed a radical photography practice that embraced the ability of the handheld 35mm camera to shoot from oblique angles and create jarring foreshortenings (fig. 5).

Figure 5. Alexander Rodchenko, Pozharnaia lesnitsa, from the series Dom na Miasnitskoi [Fire Escape, from the series Building on Miasnitskaia Street], 1925; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Accessions Committee Fund: gift of Frances and John Bowes, Evelyn Haas, Mimi and Peter Haas, Pam and Dick Kramlich, and Judy and John Webb; © Estate of Alexander Rodchenko / UPRAVIS, Moscow / ARS, NY; photo: Don Ross.

He believed these photographs embodied modern forms of perception — like the experience of looking up at or down from a multi-story building — and held the potential to promote a revolutionary consciousness (Rodchenko, 1989: 258-9; Dickerman, 1998: 33). These bold theories met with equally vociferous criticism starting in 1928, with bitter arguments aired publicly in the Soviet photography journals.[10] By 1932, Rodchenko had been expelled from the *Oktyabr* photography group he founded the year prior, and his radical imagery was no longer acceptable for display in the Soviet Union. In a confessional biographical essay of 1936, Rodchenko describes this time as a low point in his career (Lavrentiev, 2005: 283-8, 297, 329). He emphasizes his artistic rebirth through photojournalism in 1933, yet the tone of this essay reveals that earlier wounds have barely healed and his

[10] For an example, see Kushner, 1989: 250.

transformation into a "proper" Soviet artist was still incomplete (Lavrentiev, 2005: 298; Tupitsyn, 1998: 16).

The photographs in *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi*, presumably selected by Stepanova from Rodchenko's Moscow negatives, offer a slightly watered-down version of Rodchenko's evolving photography practice at this time. The frontal "belly-button" view he had sought to eradicate appears throughout the album but is not the sole means of representation.[11] Of the forty-three new photographs in the album, twelve are rotated more than ten degrees from the natural horizon line (figs. 6 and 7). These tilts are conspicuous, but they do not drastically transform the image of the subject through foreshortening and fragmentation. I interpret these photographs as neither the politically-motivated radical oblique of Rodchenko's practice in the mid 1920s, nor a total concession to the conservative straight-on view. Instead, they are "slightly skewed," hovering at the limits of acceptable photographic practice in the Soviet Union in 1932.[12]

The role of the skewed image in the album is clearest when compared with a collection of photographs intended for a never-published book on Moscow, also featuring images by Rodchenko and design by Stepanova (Tupitsyn, 1998: 23). Originally scheduled to appear in 1933, this unfinished book would have juxtaposed hand-drawn caricatures of "Old Moscow" with Rodchenko's photographs of "New Moscow" (14).[13] Close variations of over a dozen photographs for the book appear in the album; significantly, many of the images in the book are rotated within their rectangular frames, whereas their counterparts in the album are typically less extreme or fully upright. Judging from the 3:2 aspect ratio of Rodchenko's Leica, the rich detail in the prints, and minor disparities between the images, he appears to have made multiple exposures of each subject from the same general vantage point, sometimes shooting with his handheld camera level to the ground and at other times tilting his camera to angles ranging from negligible to extreme. Exposing multiple negatives offers practical advantages for any photographer, but Rodchenko's motivation was personal as well. As he wrote in 1936 of his work several years prior, "I was photographing sport events. Seems without any tricks…[But] creatively it was unbearable for me to work in Moscow. [Arkady] Shaikhet made the same photos, but slightly worse, different.…They were praised. My mood was down. With malice I began to take pictures at severe angles. I was criticized anyway. I could have left

[11] The "belly-button" view refers to typical cameras like the Kodak Brownie that were held at the abdomen for a rectilinear perspective. Rodchenko saw this practice as completely unimaginative. See Rodchenko, 1989: 256-63, and Dickerman, 1998: 33-4.

[12] Rodchenko uses this phrase in a November 1930 letter to Stepanova to describe Dziga Vertov's 1930 film *Donbass Symphony* (also known as *Enthusiasm*). The meaning here is pejorative; he writes, "The camera work isn't that good, it's… bad, slightly skewed frames", indicating he viewed Vertov's tilting effects as more surface-level visual enhancements than a full embrace of the revolutionary oblique. See Lavrentiev, 2005: 288.

[13] The caricaturists Mikhail Mupriianov, Porfirii Krylov, and Nikolai Sokolov (working together under the name Kukrynsky) were responsible for the drawings. Margarita Tupitsyn suggests the project ended when they started new jobs at *Pravda* (1998: 14-17).

photography and worked in other fields, but it was not possible simply to give up" (Tupitsyn, 1998: 16).[14]

As Rodchenko worked through the challenges posed to his photography practices, Stepanova collected the more conservatively composed images to appear alongside Kaganovich's quotations, perhaps in anticipation of greater scrutiny of the album from government censors. The primary purpose of these tilted photographs seems to be graphic: they increase the visual dynamism of the album by guiding the viewer's eye into deep recessions and bold diagonals. On one sheet, Stepanova arranges three photographs so that the lines of tram rails lead into the curves of a racetrack then into a garden path, perhaps highlighting the seamless integration of transport and leisure in the modern Moscow (fig. 6).

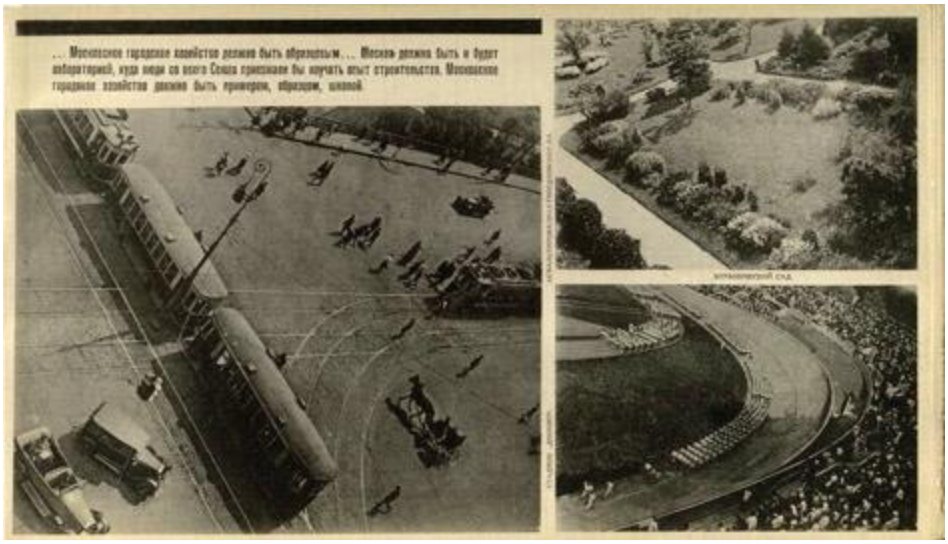

Figure 6. Varvara Stepanova (designer), *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* [From Merchant Moscow to Socialist Moscow], 1932, phototype, 7½ x 13½ in. (20 x 34 cm.). © 2022 Estate of Varvara Stepanova / UPRAVIS, Moscow / ARS, NY; image open access: https://archive.org/details/O.1932.

In several other cases the rotated frame of the "new" photograph contrasts with the upright "old" photograph. The slight skew also helps to emphasize ideologically acceptable content and conceal undesirable blemishes on the socialist Moscow landscape. For instance, a 1930 photograph of a parade in Red Square skillfully aligns the length of the procession, the crowd of spectators, Lenin's tomb, a Kremlin tower, and even some smokestacks in the distance; the iconic, ostentatious façade of St. Basil's Cathedral is just outside the frame (fig. 7).

[14] Arkady Shaikhet (1898–1959) belonged to a rival faction of photographers that championed the legibility of images over formal experimentation, though he and many other prominent Soviet photographers often used gentler oblique angles in their work, to Rodchenko's chagrin.

Figure 7. Varvara Stepanova (designer), *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* [From Merchant Moscow to Socialist Moscow], 1932, phototype, 7½ x 13½ in. (20 x 34 cm.). © 2022 Estate of Varvara Stepanova / UPRAVIS, Moscow / ARS, NY; image open access: https://archive.org/details/O.1932.

Another set of photographs demonstrate the album's commitment to radical aesthetics tempered by the need for accessibility: two aerial photographs of a workers' housing estate (fig. 8).

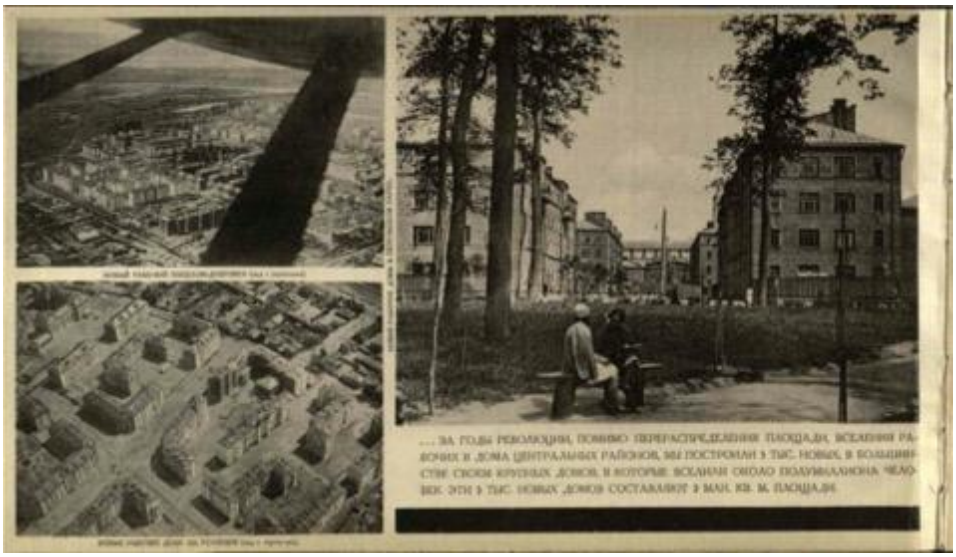

Figure 8. Varvara Stepanova (designer), *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* [From Merchant Moscow to Socialist Moscow], 1932, phototype, 7½ x 13½ in. (20 x 34 cm.). © 2022 Estate of Varvara Stepanova / UPRAVIS, Moscow / ARS, NY; image open access: https://archive.org/details/O.1932.

A variation of upper image appears almost incidentally *within* another photograph on a separate page, depicting the 1932 anniversary displays at Freedom Square (figs. 9 and 10).

Figure 9. Varvara Stepanova (designer), *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* [From Merchant Moscow to Socialist Moscow], 1932, phototype, 7½ x 13½ in. (20 x 34 cm.). © 2022 Estate of Varvara Stepanova / UPRAVIS, Moscow / ARS, NY; image open access: https://archive.org/details/O.1932.

Figure 10. Detail of figure 9.

This diminutive reproduction is actually a photomontage made by German avant-garde artist John Heartfield (1891-1968) during his 1931 visit to Moscow. He used this aerial negative — made by an unknown photographer — to make his widely reproduced photomontage of urban Moscow overlaid with the silhouette of Lenin. Stepanova likely would have seen these reproductions in places like title page of the September 1931 issue of *USSR in Construction* (fig. 11).[15]

[15] Heartfield's photomontage also appeared on the cover of the aforementioned English translation of Kaganovich text. See Gough, 2009: 163-7.

Figure 11. John Hartfield [sic], "[Untitled]," in USSR in Construction no. 9 (September 1931), offset lithograph, 16 ¼ x 12 in. (41 x 30 cm.), Five College Library Repository Collection, Amherst, MA. © The Heartfield Community of Heirs / Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2022; author's photo.

But only a keen observer would notice this detail, which is marginalized and partially obscured at the right edge of the photograph. Heartfield's work is thus downplayed in Stepanova's album in favor of a more direct illustration of Soviet achievements in modernization and collective life, without darkroom manipulation. Seen from an airplane — as the caption generously points out for the unprepared reader — the view itself is modern. This strategy aligns with the views expressed in Stepanova's unpublished 1928 article on Rodchenko's abandonment of photomontage in favor of the "independent recording of reality," which "increases the documentary importance of the photograph" (Lavrentiev and Bowlt, 1988: 178). Here, the contents (new workers' housing) and the means (aerial photography) speak for themselves. According to this view, we might see Moscow itself as the ultimate work of Constructivism that Stepanova and Rodchenko had sought a decade earlier: the city is a construction (as opposed to a composition) of total efficiency, requiring no additional interference from the hand of the artist.[16]

3. Design

Caught somewhere between the robust demands of the state publisher and the embattled avant-garde ideals of Rodchenko is the album designer Stepanova. In this final section I argue that Stepanova masterfully adapted to her circumstances and designed a book that potentially exceeded the terms of its brief. In doing so, I hope to illuminate a neglected period of her career. Though Stepanova is widely acclaimed

[16] For key texts on Constructivism, see Gough, 2005, and Kiaer, 2005. Not long after this album appeared, Rodchenko would again embrace montage as an artistic device, as seen in his infamous design for the December 1933 issue of *USSR in Construction*. See Glebova, 2019.

for her talents in graphic design, most scholarship tends to focus on the earlier stage of her career as a Constructivist, when she worked in a variety of media from painting to poetry to fashion design.[17] In order to examine her career in and beyond 1932, scholars must confront the issue of authorship (disentangling artist input from publisher input, as I attempt to do here), as well as the thornier issue of propaganda production for a brutal political regime.[18]

Stepanova's earlier avant-garde career offered valuable lessons for her later work. During her brief Productivist phrase in 1923–24, she studied textile factory production with the goal of maximizing productivity and achieving "a transparency of formal means" (Kiaer, 2001: 194, 195). She failed to transform the Soviet clothing industry as planned — either because of or in spite of these theoretical underpinnings — but Stepanova likely gained valuable insights into the nature of collaborative design work requiring the input of multiple professionals and production processes. Her rather brash cooption of the factory for avant-garde experimentation became a more equalized working relationship between artist and producer by the 1930s, coinciding with Lissitzky's 1931 presentation at the Moscow Polygraphics Institute when he declared "the author must be a polygraphist" and "the technical editor must be an author" in order to advance the field of book design (Johnson 2015: 174-175).[19] In the intervening years, Stepanova honed her skills in graphic design and book design — as well as diplomacy — accepting hundreds of commissions with Rodchenko.[20] She continued to devise novel solutions to maximize graphic economy in newspapers and magazines, but her ideas were rarely adopted in full, apparently due to bureaucratic and censorship concerns.[21]

We can detect faint echoes of the Productivist principle of efficiency in the design of *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi*. On each page, Stepanova fills nearly the entire sheet, but deliberately leaves a small area blank, as if to balance the demands of maximizing the amount of information on each page and making this graphically legible and compelling. Even more significant is Stepanova's use of preexisting type-setting elements, including the typeface and the lines and rectangles that fill the negative space around the text and photographs.[22] Apparently, Stepanova learned to work within the confines of what was already available from a practical standpoint. *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* is not the Productivist ideal of the everyday object "penetrated and transformed by the processes of production" (Kiaer, 2001: 202). Nor is the relationship between text and image anything like that of the non-objective poetry

[17] This selective focus on the early Russian Avant-Garde reflects a wider trend in Western scholarship on Russian art. A typical example is the biography for Stepanova in Bowlt and Drutt, 2004: 248-9. A recent exception is Glisic, 2021:707-734.

[18] The same concerns have steered scholars away from examining Lissitzky's 1930s work in greater depth. See Nisbet, 2003: 211-13.

[19] See Stepanova's extensive list of demands for the factory administration in Kiaer, 2001: 193.

[20] Over an unspecified three-year period in the 1920s, Lavrentiev tallies 322 commissions, presumably from materials in the family archive (2005: 103-4).

[21] One newspaper was impressed by Stepanova's ideas but declined to make the changes because the editors "didn't want to risk it" (Lavrentiev and Bowlt, 1988: 124, 126).

[22] See some matching design elements in *We Are Building the Five-Year Plan* (1931), *The Self-Financing Steam Engine* (1931), and *The Fight for Peace* (1932), reproduced in Karasik and Heiting, 2015: 110-15, 118, 130-3.

and graphics in Stepanova's earliest book designs of the late 1910s. Overlaps of photographs and black squares are emphatically not the axonometric signifiers of free-floating space and infinity they had been a decade earlier among the Avant-Garde; they simply accommodate more images of varying sizes and perhaps help to conceal aesthetic or ideological flaws in the images.

However, this shift toward rationalization and practicality does not mean Stepanova sacrificed her drive to innovate new solutions to design problems. I suspect that she focused her creative energies in a new direction for *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi*. She may have been inspired by Lissitzky's 1931 call for further experiments on book making by concentrating on its material and spatial possibilities (Lissitzky, 1987: 62). Lissitzky and Stepanova were never intimate friends, but they lived and worked in the same artistic circles throughout their adult lives and would have been closely familiar with the other's work. Much like Stepanova and other avant-garde artists, Lissitzky intended to transform the conditions of perception by transforming the everyday object (Bois and Hubert, 1979: 118-19; Nisbet, 2003: 223). In 1919, he predicted that the book "will give birth to a work not in one copy — not a unique object for the enjoyment of the patron — but in thousands and thousands of identical originals for all: whosoever thirsts, he shall be satisfied" (Lissitzky, 1968: 261). In 1926, Lissitzky pondered the dematerialization of the book through new technologies and imagined a future in which the "automatism of the present day book will be overcome" and "supplanted by sound recordings or talking pictures" that would ease the burden and waste of "cumbersome masses of material" (Lissitzky, 1968: 360-1).

Perhaps Stepanova endeavored to begin this process of reconceptualizing the book with the folder. The album format of loose sheets sets this publication apart from its peers by expanding the spatial, material, and temporal potentials of the printed book. Beyond the tactile engagement with the cover, described at the opening of this essay, the folder format offers a wide range of possibilities for interaction with the interior contents. The twenty-two unbound, unpaginated, single-side sheets can be spread out and displayed all at once in a block, like a gigantic poster, or in a line, like an extended scroll. The excerpts from Kaganovich's report function independently, so any number or combination of pages is possible. Single sheets might be pasted onto a curved post, folded into a letter, or displayed on the wall like a miniature poster in one of the new socialist spaces of the canteen, the communal apartment, or the workers' club.

Rodchenko famously reimagined the latter in his design for the Soviet Pavilion at the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris.[23] Stepanova herself described its key elements in an article for the Soviet journal *Modern Architecture* published the following year. At the heart of the club was the reading area, designed with special attention to visitors' visual, spatial, and tactile experiences as they browsed or picked up a rotating selection of books and magazines (Varst 1926: 36). At every turn, objects were meant to be mobile and modifiable according to current club needs, including a "a movable vitrine for the storage and display of materials, documents, and photographs with a place for

[23] See images and descriptions of the club in Fore and Witkovsky, 2017: 218-28.

headlines and theses, a movable vitrine for posters and slogans, a movable photo exhibition case for displaying current photo materials" and a portable "live newspaper" installation for speeches, equipped with screens for displaying visual aids. Yet the capacity for seemingly infinite modifications sprang from the modern principle of maximum efficiency, particularly through expansion and contraction. "Comrade Rodchenko," she explained, had demonstrated that "a dynamically organized subject achieves larger and larger distribution, proving its vitality and timeliness".

These principles translated directly into Stepanova's album design. If the format could be standardized, each page would fit seamlessly into the corresponding display system at the workers' club. Better still, new sheets could be inserted as old ones became outdated — a flexible method of adaption for a rapidly changing historical moment. For instance, the aspirational image of the illuminated metro map could have been replaced with a photograph of the actual metro interior after the opening of the first line in 1935 (fig. 12).

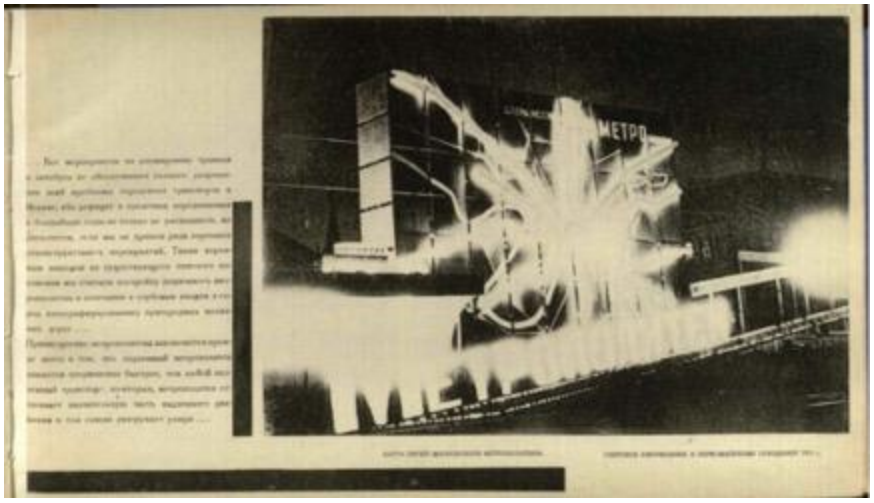

Figure 12. Varvara Stepanova (designer), *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* [From Merchant Moscow to Socialist Moscow], 1932, phototype, 7½ x 13½ in. (20 x 34 cm.). © 2022 Estate of Varvara Stepanova / UPRAVIS, Moscow / ARS, NY; image open access: https://archive.org/details/O.1932.

Or, Party leaders could issue additional directives on the topic of Moscow planning that would require new forms of representation; the album could potentially respond.

Lissitzky suggested as much in 1931 by forecasting the replacement of the book with the card file. He explained, "the poems of the still-living poet are being published. They are printed on cards, and every new poem he writes can easily be added" (Lissitzky, 1987: 62).[24] The need for errata or editions would be eradicated, reducing waste and inconvenience.[25] Patrons could invest in a single folder as a group and purchase individual sheets at low prices, reinventing the avant-garde

[24] In a 1931 speech, Lissitzky used the Russian word *list*, meaning a loose leaf or sheet of paper, to describe the kind of material he envisioned for the ever-expanding file (Johnson, 2015: 3).
[25] More darkly, this flexible format would obviate the violent defacement of photographs of denounced persons in books — a practice that became common during the Great Purge of 1936-1938. See King, 2014.

tradition of cheap and experimental artists' books as a medium for the worker (Lissitzky, 1968: 362). By embracing these potentialities, the album embodies the spirit of the Five-Year Plan: it encourages communal ownership through sharing and promotes continual renewal. Progress and its representation would cycle infinitely into the utopian socialist future.

Of course, this is a generously imaginative reading. There is no direct evidence that any of these possibilities were explored. On the contrary, the condition of the sheets in the Harvard copy indicates that they seldom left the confines of their folder, which seems to have borne the brunt of its traffic and handling over the past eighty-five years. The same is true of a second copy held at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, CA. The interior sheets are in good condition compared with their brittle and faded envelope. Intriguingly, blue pen marks appear on several pages, crossing out the name Kaganovich in most places where it appears and sometimes the name Stalin as well (fig. 13).

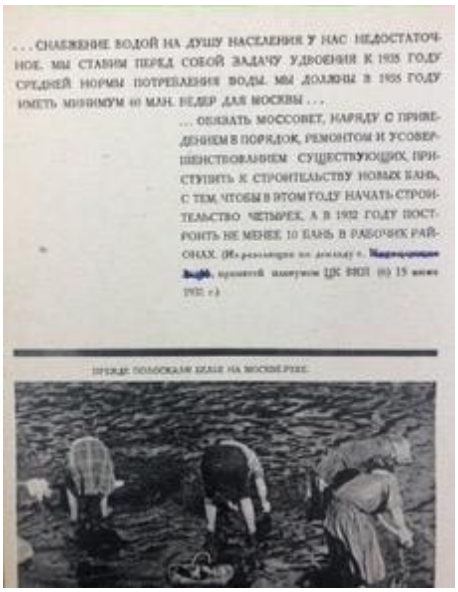

Figure 13. Detail of Varvara Stepanova (designer), *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* [From Merchant Moscow to Socialist Moscow] with marks, 1932, phototype, 7½ x 13½ in. (20 x 34 cm.). Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, CA. © 2022 Estate of Varvara Stepanova / UPRAVIS, Moscow / ARS, NY; author's photo.

Yet this palimpsest offers few clues as to when these marks were made; they were no more likely to appear in the 1930s than they were during the post-Stalinist 1960s or the post-Soviet 1990s.

Considering these later moments of major historical revision, when de-Stalinization and decommunization transformed the face of visual culture in Russia, was the album actually ahead of its time in allowing these modifications (or iconoclasm)? Or was it simply out of sync with the economic realities of 1932, when a publication priced at five rubles was still out of reach for the average worker, even through a communal viewing practice at the workers' club?[26] Is this the poster/book hybrid that Lissitzky describes and Yve-Alain Bois dismisses as a "Trojan horse"? (Bois and Hubert, 1979: 120). Did this ever stand a chance against the poster, the

[26] By comparison, issues of the popular photography journal *Proletarskoe Foto* cost 60 to 75 kopecks in 1932.

newspaper, the cheap illustrated weekly, or the traditional book? Would Stepanova have preferred the usual double-page spread to expand the space for graphic design? Did the publisher capriciously insist on loose sheets in a folder to Stepanova's dismay? Or is there another explanation?

4. Out of Time

Consonant with my reading of this album as deliberately open-ended, more questions remain than answers. Peter Nisbet has argued that the propaganda publication of the mid 1930s intended not to win over new converts, but to demonstrate the "belief and loyalty of the elect, among whom, of course, were the artists themselves" (Nisbet, 2003: 228). Yet Erika Wolf has demonstrated that early issues of the deluxe magazine *USSR in Construction* made (largely unsuccessful) attempts to reach a broad base of international workers and activists in addition to the new Stalinist elite (1999: 53-4, 69).[27] *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* may have been part of this late push to transform mass media that ended, paradoxically, by reaffirming the luxury, "bourgeois," armchair book.

The album's uneasy combination of Party content and forward-thinking design suggest that in 1932 Stepanova's experimentation may have been too late. Put another way, the album's spotlight on progress and change across the Soviet capitol, combined with the potential for material alteration of the contents, destabilized the album and threatened its status as visual testimony of the Party line. Susan Buck-Morss has considered these issues at length in relation to Russian art of the early post-revolutionary years, but her ideas about the fundamental contradictions between the artistic avant garde and the political vanguard — especially regarding their opposing conceptions of time as open to ruptures or locked in a set course — help explain why this album could never fully achieve the "activation" of Lissitzky's theorizations (2000: 42-67). Even if *Ot Moskvy kupecheskoi k Moskve sotsialisticheskoi* successfully embodied Moscow's physical transformations during the Five-Year Plan, the future ultimately remained shrouded in uncertainty. To be "ahead of one's time" at a moment when the Party alone had the power to define the future is a risky endeavor. And yet, by creating this enigmatic album, preserved today in libraries around the world, Stepanova offers a glimpse of an alternate future in a utopian Moscow that — however unlikely — may still come to pass.

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[27] Stepanova and Lissitzky, alongside their respective partners Rodchenko and Lissitzky-Küppers, contributed their design talents to multiple issues (Wolf, 1999: 77).

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Returning to *Another Black Darkness*

Materiality and Mattering in Photobook Encounters over Time

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ABSTRACT:

This article foregrounds a specific, memorable reading of the photobook *Another Black Darkness* by Sakiko Nomura to unravel the different socio-political agencies of objects and environments that configure how we interpret and understand photobooks, as individual creative works, and as a medium in general. It demonstrates a "methodology of encounter" that revisits an autoethnographic response written in 2018 to critique the ways that materiality, place, positionality, coincidence and time configure certain experiential knowledges that are situated in time and place. Repeat readings of the book and the original text uncover deeper analysis of these entangled affects. Photobooks are produced in multiple, and can be found in many different environments, with different rules of engagement, so it is necessary to develop a critical understanding of the medium that can account for this plurality of encounter. Through focusing on performative, relational moments of meaning-making with photobooks, the article links substance with significance, or, "matter and mattering" (Barad), and shows distinct, experiential capabilities of the photobook as an artistic form.

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RESUMO:

Este artigo traz para primeiro plano uma leitura específica e baseada na memória do livro de fotografia *Another Black Darkness*, de Sakiko Nomura, de forma a desvendar as diversas agências sociopolíticas de objectos e ambientes que configuram o modo como interpretamos e compreendemos livros de fotografia enquanto trabalhos criativos individiduais e enquanto *medium*. O artigo demonstra a "metodologia do encontro" que revisita uma resposta autoetnográfica escrita em 2018 para criticar os modos como materialidade, lugar, posicionamento, coincidência e tempo configuram certos conhecimentos experienciais situáveis no tempo e no espaço. Leituras repetidas do livro e do texto original revelam análises mais profundas destas diferentes questões. Os livros de fotografia são produzidos em quantidade, e podem ser encontrados em muitos ambientes distintos, com diferentes regras de compromisso, pelo que é necessário desenvolver uma compreensão crítica do *medium* que tenha em conta esta pluralidade do encontro. Focando-se em momentos performativos e relacionais de produção de sentido com os livros de fotografia, este artigo associa substância e significado, ou "matéria e importância" [matter and mattering] (Barad), e explora capacidades distintas e experienciais do livro de fotografia enquanto forma artística.

KEYWORDS:

autoethnography; library; New Materialism; Sakiko Nomura; ways of knowing

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

autoetnografia; biblioteca; formas de conhecer; Novo Materialismo; Sakiko Nomura

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1. An account of encounter: Fumbling with *Another Black Darkness* in the National Art Library

Here we are again. It caught my eye the first time I saw it. But it was too busy, too fluorescent. The book fair is so very public, I didn't feel I could get to know it properly, the way that I wanted to. So I saved myself for another time, where it's quiet; we won't be interrupted.

The plain black box slips out from its brown cardboard sleeve. The box is smart, its textured title glints at me faintly through inky black on black matte. It winks its glossy eye as I tilt it back and forth and run a light finger over small embossed letters. I open the black box and lift out a black book, darkly titled as before. A woman's face peers out from the shadowy box lining, watching me as I take up the book and turn it over in my hands. Tilt to the back, to the side, appraise its spine, its sides. Then opening, plunging in, delving into its black pages like a sudden switching off a light. My eyes squint and adjust to see the trace of an image. Human, animal forms emerge, natural forms. I lift it until the light catches the sheen of the ink on paper and the shapes become images become impressions and it tells me its secret. I am a voyeur in a darkened room: night time, animal time, where scenes of love and pain in the dimness of black on black alternate with visions of blooming flora, explosive, organic forms.

Stealing through the pages, I know this darkness, the feel of the rumpled linen, the hushed rustle of night-time. I know the touches and breaths. I catch myself sitting beside the window in the bright and decorous National Art Library, where outside children splash and shriek in the courtyard fountain, where inside nobody knows the content of these pages but me, it feels almost indecent, it's ok to put Egon Schiele on the wall for everyone to see what you're looking at, art we can all stand back and appreciate, slapped across the RA, call it daring, risqué, expressive, to some, vulgar. The photobook is performing only for me. Am I shocked? I wasn't before, when I first found this book. But here, now, in these surroundings, perhaps yes, I am a little thrilled by the contrast.

This book asks me about myself. Dares me to see my own experience in its explicit pages. Leaning towards the windowpane to throw light on the darkened erotic images, I am complicit in the act through so actively seeking to see. It is a portrait of senses not scenes, the thickness of seeing in pitch black, where touch is sight. It unfolds its sensual narrative, slowly, through its intimacy, the act of getting close to the surface of the paper, nose between the covers. The glimpses are incoherent and yet recognisable. The book gives me pleasure because its sight is hard-earned; my close attention is gratified with comprehension. As the bodies arch to their climax, so does the floral imagery blossom into familiar metaphors of verdant aromatic awakening.

I close the book and replace book in box, the box in the sleeve. I am struck by the orderliness of the packaging following the abandon between its sheets. I return it to the counter wrapped in its brown paper parcel. "One for the top shelf", I think.

My prudish blush surprises me as the librarian meets my eye. My curator-brain rejoinders, "because it is small, and light in weight and lifts with ease; small things at the top, space efficiency: that's the sensible way to store it". Safely returned to professional practicality.

Weeks later, at home, my own copy nestles pristine in its padded envelope. Fresh from Japan, its sultry pages have yet to give up their darkness inside.

(September 2018)

2. Framing a methodology of encounter

Photobooks today exist as diverse material entities, in equally diverse material realities. They are complex art objects capable of structuring multi-layered seeing and reading experiences. They are also produced in multiple, with each copy going out into the world, to be found in a different place, where it acquires a biography of its own. Each copy facilitates repeat readings — multiple, mutable, personal encounters over time and space. The opening passage to this article narrates one such encounter with *Another Black Darkness* by Sakiko Nomura (2016) in the National Art Library (NAL) at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), London, in 2018. It was written from detailed diaristic notes made during that particular experience of reading the book.

In what follows, I introduce a "methodology of encounter" that critiques the initial creative response to articulate a relationship between the materiality of photobooks, the materiality of the environments in which we find them, and the meanings that emerge, or come to "matter" through these situated encounters, in order to emphasise the importance of personal and contextual meaning-making in the growing arena of photobook discourse. The analysis was constructed from repeated responses to the original text in 2019, 2020 and 2022. Over several years, each time I returned to the text and the photobook (which I had since purchased), new impressions entangled with prior responses, enhancing or complicating my understanding of this photobook, of photobooks in general, and of my self. Following an explanation of the methodology's theoretical foundation, the next section of the article will examine more-than-human agencies of the encounter with *Another Black Darkness* through themes of materiality, place, the reader's identity, coincidence and time. The essay concludes by reflecting on the ways that the iterative methodology of encounter contributes to understandings about how the photobook matters, materially and discursively, as a distinct creative form.

The methodology of encounter was developed through my doctoral research, through a framework of New Materialist theory, phenomenology and feminist praxis. It has emerged non-innocently through my situated, embodied positionality as a woman writing in, what remains for the time being, a male-dominated field. I desired to explore "touchy-feely", affective and multi-sensory aspects of photobook experiences, which veers into languages of subjectivity and emotion that have historically been gendered as feminine and devalued in scholarship. I was frustrated

by publications and definitions that attempted to fix or categorise what a photobook *is,* which I perceived as aligned with the imperialist (also, racist and sexist) epistemological agenda that has prevailed since the Enlightenment era. I sought instead to understand photobooks more through the relational ways they perform — what they *do* — as a more ethical and less hierarchical mode of exploring how materiality and embodiment factor into forming knowledges about photobooks. This invites greater scope for understanding the photobook from a perspective of individual, relational ontologies: it acknowledges photobooks perform differently, whether due to physical properties and artistic capabilities, as identified by Jörg Colberg, or the context of their use and reception.

My methodology to find different ways of learning and knowing has manifested as interwoven voices from multiple writing acts that collapse together temporalities. It is a sustained, deliberate experimentation that has been necessary to my effort to explain the phenomena of co-construction and interrelationships between consumers of art and culture and artefacts themselves, and learning how meaning is co-constituted through these complex relations. Feminist scholars of affect (including Kathleen Stewart, Lauren Berlant, Marisol de la Cadena and Monica Huerta) demonstrate how the personal and political collide through their felt descriptions of ordinary events and images, and how these can be assembled to reveal more about the histories and tensions that surround us.

In this study, these accounts combine with New Materialism's attention to posthuman or "more-than-human" agency to form a political and ethical framework to access the nuances of how material and social worlds interrelate. According to Bennett, agency and affect issue forth in interactions between entities, highlighting the importance of more-than-human situational factors in a temporary "political ecology of things" (Bennett, 2010: xiii). Agency is enacted in performative comings-together of entities, whose physical properties and/or symbolic value mediate knowledges or actions (Bennett, 2010; Law, 2002; Latour, 2005). Photobooks, texts, environments and other non-human entities can have agency that is neither limited to what people think and do with them, nor contained within determinate conceptualisations of what is "human" and what is "object". New Materialist philosophies recognise terms like "person" or "photobook", "subject" and "object", do not denote essential categories, but impermanent, discursive groupings of different kinds of matter that co-constitute meaning through their relation to one another (Barad, 2003: 810). This queering of boundaries aligns with feminist critique through the assertion that things can only be known relationally, through situated, contingent moments of encounter (Barad, 2011).

This discourse has much to offer the interactive medium of the photobook. The interrelated, temporary sense of agency helps us think about how phenomena configure the personal and political meanings we make through encounters with photobooks. To access this experiential detail, I draw on phenomenology, which studies how we experience and interpret being the world. Phenomenology is primarily anthropocentric, which means it has inherent contradictions with the concept of posthumanism, and poses a challenge to my methodology of using a subjective account to examine more-than-human agency. However, I argue these philosophies share the productive view that boundaries between the self and the

material world are imprecise cognitive constructions. How we perceive and make meaning with material things in space and time is something that is continually re-configured, articulated by Karen Barad as the "mattering" that threads throughout this essay (2007: 147-152).

The methodology of encounter uses autoethnographic writing to trace emergent phenomenological knowledges about the more-than-human agency of photobooks and other entities. Criticisms of autoethnography as a method for valorising the self can be offset through a more-than-human perspective, which challenges notions of intentional agency and bounded selfhood. In the short scope of this article, it feels sufficient to acknowledge there are advantages and limitations to this complex theoretical foundation without going into the intricacies of how the concepts are reconciled. Nevertheless, philosophical discourses such as these offer exciting new paradigms for progressing beyond anthropocentric, hierarchical structuring of things, to which the next section will now turn.

3. Critiquing the encounter

3.1 Materiality

"…opening, plunging in, delving into its black pages like a sudden switching off a light… I lift it until the light catches the sheen of the ink on paper and the shapes become images become impressions and it tells me its secret"

Another Black Darkness reimagines imagery from Nomura's earlier book *Black Darkness* (2008). Solarised versions of the photographs are printed in an unusual combination of black ink on black paper, in a limited edition of 600. I had first seen another copy at Offprint book fair in May 2017 ("*it was too busy, too fluorescent. The book fair is so very public*") and been intrigued by its materials: black on black, with a smooth, matte surface that looked as though it would show every smudge and scuff. By eye alone, I could imagine the texture of the object, how it would feel, and the gentle touch that would keep it pristine. Architectural theorist Juhani Pallasmaa has observed that "vision reveals what touch already knows. […] Our eyes stroke distant surfaces […] and the unconscious tactile sensation determines the agreeableness or unpleasantness of the experience" (2005: 42). The materially-complex form of the photobook engages synaesthetic and embodied knowledges before we even reach to pick it up — it inspire an unconscious impulse to reach out.

Another Black Darkness comes in a black box inside a plain brown cardboard slipcase. It is a sexy book — visually and materially. Before reaching the book, the reader navigates a sequence of openings and undressings — sliding out of one outer layer, prising open another. This alluring design and densely black materiality has a transformative artistic effect on Nomura's intimate imagery of nudes, cityscapes and still lifes, mostly flowers. The solarised photographs, printed sparingly in black, leave such little visual information that while I'm still not completely sure whether any of them explicitly depict sexual acts, the black, dark space has a dense erotic charge. In my prose response, the materiality of the book had agency in affecting my embodied response because I had to physically move the book and contort my body

to see pages that, ultimately, denied me complete knowledge of the images. The construction thus invited the response of active physical engagement, fostering a closer sensual link of voyeurism and frustration between the book and myself.

"The photobook is performing only for me"

The majority of photobooks are not simply made to exist: they desire engagement of some kind. The book is a fickle form of object, because superficial structural commonalities — spine, a head, a tail, front and back cover — can smooth over a variety of purposes. What appears to be a book-type thing *becomes* a photobook through interaction with a reader, as they gain insight into its image content. In this way, photobooks align with a performance that requires co-operation of a reading body to be activated and fully realised. This co-operation, in the encounter with *Another Black Darkness,* becomes "complicity" as my exaggerated movements, prompted by the book's materiality, combine with the contents to charge the encounter with voyeuristic affect.

We engage with books in time and space and we come to know them through perceptual, hermeneutic, unfolding experience (Heidegger, 1978; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). To interact with books, often we use our hands and our bodies as much as our eyes: the book becomes incorporated into the perceiving subject. Marshall McLuhan saw media technologies as extensions of ourselves, through being materially, socially, and integrated with our psychic and nervous systems. This blurring of subject and object occurs with the photobook in perception and materiality. A reader extends intentional consciousness towards the thing that becomes joined with their physical activity of looking. At the same time, there is no separate physical sensation that differentiates where one carbon-based body ends and the other begins, as I lean into the table and the book leans into my hands; for that moment, we perform as one lump of looking matter.

And yet, at the same time, the book is not *only* performing with me, for me. The object of *Another Black Darkness* compared to the earlier *Black Darkness* results from new collaboration, at a different point in time. Nomura created both photobooks with designer Satoshi Machiguchi and publisher Akio Nagasawa, so making the later one restages and reperforms social and professional relationships. In this way, *Another Black Darkness* materialises an art world network of practitioners, photographic methods and printing technologies, all with their own histories, with which the reader comes into contact through each encounter (Becker, 2008).

Thinking through a photobook encounter in more-than-human terms repositions it as a temporary, relational exchange between different entities, rather than an essentially human experience. The concept that things can have agency subverts conventional Western anthropocentric ontologies of subject and object by asserting that "people could not be truly social, or even human, without things: objects structure social interactions, and enable many of the activities that make us human, such as writing, thinking, trading, and so on" (Oyen, 2018: 4), meaning the social and material worlds are not cleanly divided, and we form discursive understanding of what it means to be human in opposition to othered, non-human objects. Photobooks offer a useful object to experiment with these posthuman

epistemologies that have meaningful philosophical implications for understanding our place in the contemporary world.

"One for the top shelf…"

When I first approached *Another Black Darkness,* I found nothing remarkable about the brown cardboard slipcase. The materiality had made me participate and labour to look at the nudes and sexual imagery it contained. As I repackaged the book, the combined affect of my reading experience and the cardboard formed an association with relating to other popular culture resonances such as the brown paper wrappings that (before my time) would shield innocent eyes from pornographic magazines in newsagents. Tate Shaw has described material-semiotic association in reading visual books as a "closure":

> complementing language and imagery with materials and printing […] brings a kind of physical veracity to a work. […] If you're reading something, you're identifying, and processing, and forming understanding beyond it, physically. […] Looking at a sequence of images in a book… you form a closure between the images through cognitive binding and memory. (Shaw, 2016: 102)

In this case, materiality, images, recent embodied experience, a mildly cringing sensation I recognised as embarrassment or prudishness, remembered discourse and specific material culture "bound" together to produce the image of the "top shelf".

But, as my "curator-brain" interrupted this association, the book's materiality also had agency in its handling and care, because the physicality of its dimensions would determine the most practical mode of storage. On this first, earlier, book fair encounter, I was struck by *Another Black Darkness*'s unusual objecthood, which I felt restricted from handling because of the busy book fair, and a fear of damaging the pricey product. On the second encounter, in the NAL, I could dive into the imagery, but I also noted a very neat, barely visible pencilled number of the library's shelfmark. The NAL's copy of *Another Black Darkness* is in the special collections — had it been in the general collections, its identifying marks would be more visible. On the third encounter, with a third copy, at home, I noticed the precise folds that hinged the black slip case, and felt still more need to keep the book nestled in bubble wrap now it was my own possession. In this way, although different copies are created virtually identical, save for the silver-inked edition number, they accrue layers of ontological meaning depending on how they are materially used and valued. The combined factors that position one copy as commodity for sale, another as museum object, and a third as a treasured possession have agency in configuring how each photobook called *Another Black Darkness* comes to matter for different readers and organisations.

3.2 Place
"*the bright and decorous National Art Library*"

The material affect of the book in the NAL encounter was heightened by the incongruence of the erotic content and library scenario. In 2019, I wrote:

> Once sat in the mahogany-clad National Art Library, surrounded by fellow readers studying their books and laptops intently and a soundtrack of children's squeals of innocent delight, I had a highly embodied response to my encounter with the book in this particular situation. Despite its grandeur, the NAL is somewhere I feel comfortable now. Though the librarians are keeping a vague eye on you, you're hardly being observed as most people are equally consumed by their own work. Yet, my position, my knowledge of photography and my familiarity with the environment, as well as my being experienced and mature enough not to be shocked or giggle like a teenager, were counteracted by the affect of the book itself as it drew me into its dark colouring and intimate imagery.

This passage draws attention to the access and regulation of affective sites where photobook encounters can happen. Each photobook exists in the real, politicised world, and access to creative objects of this kind is not equal. As Margaret Wetherell has noted, through "ordinary affect, people engage with the momentous and the global political" (2012: 7): situated affective, material experiences relate to larger societal structures or histories. While many sites such as libraries are free, users require sufficient cultural capital to know how to access them, as well as capital in the form of appearance (including race and dis/ability) to feel welcome and able to enter them. Museums and libraries are a productive site for considering composite spatial and social influences of environments because they are consciously planned and organised. Carol Duncan identifies how museums create architectural and biopolitical epistemologies that predispose "civilising" behaviours in visitors through how space is organised and "the visual, rhetorical and monumental characteristics of museum buildings and displays" (cf. Whitehead, 2012: 4).

The NAL is a double-height library, with floor-to-ceiling windows and wood panelling, stiff leather-seated chairs, large chandeliers and a balcony complete with sliding steps like Belle swings around on in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (1991). It's chilly, even in summer, and your footsteps ring out on the wooden floors amidst readers' silent study. These architectural and experiential strategies confer behavioural values, with which visitors comply through self-regulation — such as, feeling "guilty" taking a photo in a gallery knowing photography is not permitted. In the NAL, the rules of engagement with photobooks are made explicit when librarians issue your books. Readers are disciplined to follow these rules by the historic, quiet environment, the desk with library staff, and the sign-in process with the guard at the door (Foucault, 1991).

Carol Duncan has explained how "the ritual character of the museum experience" enacted by physical and social environments alters our mental state as well as behaviour: "[l]ike most ritual space, museum space is carefully marked off and culturally designated as reserved for a special quality of attention — in this case, for contemplation and learning" (1995: 8). According to Duncan, the ritual character fulfils essential activities of art museums by reinforcing the sovereignty of the

institution and its knowledge claims (1995: 7, 9). It contributes to social construction of art through framing objects with quasi-religious connotations, whilst "civilising" the behaviours of visitors by imposing scripted rituals of museum-going. *Another Black Darkness* book demanded my physical participation in ways that visibly contradicted these scripts, making odd and conspicuous shapes by craning my arms and neck. The library's history and architectural style embody outdated moral codes about gender, sex and sexuality that contravened how I was looking, and what I was looking at, creating a dissonance that was felt as self-consciousness.

Against such a backdrop of "civilisation", it is not surprising that looking at pictures of a sexual nature, albeit subtle ones, added a frisson to this encounter. Nomura recounted in an online interview, "Someone once told me that he reads my book in bed, which made me feel very excited. The book then becomes the secret relationship I have with my audience" (Nomura, n.d.). I doubt a private bedroom encounter with *Another Black Darkness* would be as complicated as my public and professional one.

3.3 Positionality and subjectivity

"This book asks me about myself. Dares me to see my own experience in its explicit pages."

The discussion of subjectivity in a posthuman context is a conflicted one that I have questioned at greater length elsewhere (Carlin, 2022: 141-2, 249). It is nevertheless entangled in understanding how photobooks are handled and read by individuals, because we are positioned in living bodies that feel and inhabit the world in different intersecting ways (Crenshaw, 1995; Hills Collins, 2019; Butler, 2011). In this article, I'm not using subjectivity to signify some individual human understanding, but rather an embodied frame of relational understanding that varies from situated interaction to the next. This follows Haraway's view that subjectivity is a fiction constructed relationally through the ways bodies interact with the social and material worlds they are embedded in.

In this encounter, I understand my subjectivity as something arising through material-discursive interaction with the book, as I become aware of how my own response might differentiate from others' in a negotiation between book, body and experience. Not all bodies, for example, have the same physical or visual capabilities as my own body, so some people would experience *Another Black Darkness* differently. I am a white European, able bodied, heterosexual cisgender woman. My positionality is likely to be different to that of the Japanese artist, subjects, designer, publisher and binders involved in the book's production. The book is an English language, left-to-right codex, the materiality of which points to a Euro-centric international market. Acknowledge these cultural contexts of production and reception is pertinent for resisting tropes of orientalism and the exoticisation of cultural others (Said, 2003; Hagiwara, 2010).

In addition to this, I'm a precarious worker on a low salary, which impacts the relative expense of purchasing of a photobook for me versus collectors with greater financial security. I rent my home, and have moved four times in the past four years,

so my capacity to own books is limited by my capacity to store and inevitably relocate them. However, I have worked in museums, and feel confident in accessing books I do not own in the rarefied spaces of art libraries, and I'm probably more likely to spend money on art objects than people without this cultural habitus (Bourdieu). These biographical details influence how I relate to owning photobooks; as Pearce has observed, ownership factors significantly into the value people attribute to objects, and the bonds they develop with them (2010: xv).

Beyond blunt sociological rationale, my subjective response to reading *Another Black Darkness* is complicated by embodied recognition and personal lived experience. The blackened space within the book elicited sense-memories of fumbling and feeling around in darkened spaces, from which the images triggered a sense of self-knowledge of my own sexual experience, that I felt I identified what was represented in the obscured pictures. I relate this to what 18th century philosopher George Berkley called "haptic memory", which describes an unconscious dependence between multi-sensory perception and lived experience. An encounter with a photobook is therefore a manually interactive, multi-sensory, subjective phenomenon with a feeling, social body. How we make meaning from these perceptions is located somewhere in the entanglement of affect and discourse (Wetherell, 2012). My 2019 notes continued:

> It was peculiar to have such personal recollections whilst wearing a work lanyard – separation of personal and professional. I didn't feel embarrassed as such; it's perfectly acceptable to look at art, even erotic art, in the National *Art* Library, and as assistant curator in that institution, looking at a book set aside for me by another curator, I was hardly doing anything illicit.

It becomes apparent that the incongruence between the NAL and a sexy book was also complicated by professional status (I worked as Assistant Curator of Photographs at the V&A until earlier that year). The acknowledgement or performance of sexuality in the workplace have historically been suppressed, which Vicky Schultz has linked to employee behaviours of self-regulation and self-censorship. This is based on historic conceptions of sexuality as irrational and unproductive. The myth that valorises rationality over feeling, is rooted in the same positivist, imperialist and patriarchal paradigms that organised the creation of museums like the V&A.

The discord created by a performance of sexuality and gender in the library reveals much about the patriarchal structures of power that marginalise behaviours coded as feminine, such as overt displays of emotion. This is parallelled in academic scholarship, whereby language that expresses subjective or embodied experience has historically been feminised through association with emotion (Jaggar; Anderson; Butler), whereas objective, passive language is associated with patriarchal authority and reduced individual accountability (Lakoff, 1973; Besnier, 1990). These associations result from socialised and socialising norms and gender scripts that become internalised, inscribed on the body and performed, as theorised by many feminist scholars, notably Judith Butler.

The absence of sensuous practices in Western cultural appreciation and scholarship is further engaged in intersectional linguistic politics (Ahmed, 2004;

Campt, 2017). In studies of sense and affect in non-Western cultures, no separate sense has dominance, unlike the visual hegemony typical to Western culture since the Renaissance. Pluralistic modes of interpretation have been marginalised by the typical occularcentrism and objectivism of European scholarship for centuries, epitomised in the "look but don't touch" regulation of the museum (Gell, 1998; Gosden and Knowles, 2001; Howes, 2005; Classen, 2007; Candlin, 2009). Returning to hitherto subjugated multi-sensory subjectivity and alternative modes of description aligns with post-colonialist critique (Fanon, 1986; Césaire, 2000), therefore engaging profoundly with the sensory, emotional, and subjective experience of a photobook encounter reflects the openness and multiplicity of post-colonial ethics and forms a gesture of resistance to these entrenched knowledge cultures.

3.4 Configuring coincidence
"it's ok to put Egon Schiele on the wall … slapped across the RA"

There was, at the time of writing in 2018, a forthcoming exhibition of Egon Schiele at the Royal Academy being advertised around the South Kensington tube station by the V&A. I likely saw the posters that day because I remember thinking of this artist's sexually-charged portraits as I sat, self-consciously reading in the NAL. There had also been a curious-sounding exhibition around that time comparing Schiele and Francesca Woodman at Tate Liverpool. Perhaps I contrived half a homonym between "RA" and "arse" to convey the complicated, instant affront I felt looking at some works by Schiele, compared to the gradual, sucking in seduction of this book that unfolded hermeneutically the longer I engaged with it. My recollection was that the portrayal of sexuality in this book was voluptuous and sensual, unlike Schiele's spiky, tense, contorted figures; the material construction of *Another Black Darkness* obscures sexual acts and intersperses them amongst floral imagery in a way that replaces objectification with poetic allusion. Bodies are sensed through glimpses of navel here, an eye there, a curve that could be buttock, breast or pillow. The book evokes sensation as much as sex.

Although the reference point of Schiele may have been incidental, it inspired some art historical assemblage on my part. Sakiko Nomura formerly worked as assistant to Nobuyoshi Araki. At the time, I felt the portrayal of sex in Schiele's work was not dissimilar from Araki's: I saw women's bodies distorted through expressive foreshortening, fetishized and bound, passive, bent over or legs apart; their faces gazed out with coyness or detachment, resigned to their objectification. Hiroko Hagiwara (2010) has noted that viewers of Araki's later photographs of women, most often encountered in photobooks, are encouraged towards readings of "sexual excess and sexual desolation", a binary that either way expresses an objectification of female form by a male gaze. Nomura's nudes, men and women, are not seen completely enough to be objectified; too elusive to be firmly fixed in a voyeur's gaze. The soft glimpses felt through the black pages are of lovers so actively absorbed in pleasure that the book does not suggest spectacle but rather a desire to share in their

intimacy. The suggestive bodies in Nomura's work are partially seen, but more fully represented as sensual beings.

I could construct my comparison between this book, Araki and my spontaneous recollection of Schiele into a visual analysis about gaze, women's bodies, or maybe how the artists' biographies influenced their portrayals of sex, perhaps seeking some pseudo-psychoanalytical subtext. There is a latent, tempting critique of the patriarchal narrative of famous (male) photographer influencing the (female) assistant/protégée, and a desire to contradict the "great man" theory of art production that attributes key moments in history and cultural production to a singular, usually powerful, male, creator figure (Barthes, 1977). Instead, writing about the photobook in this alternative way enables me to reflect more profoundly upon my encounter(s), tease out moments where connections were made and inspect them for assumptions and coincidences, down to a mundane meeting with tube advertising.

This kind of enquiry counteracts the positivist impulse in art historical writing to connect artists and their works to a lineage of creators and influences (Panofsky, 1939; Ventrella, 2017: 203). In general, photobook anthologies and criticism have supported this historiography, which can present a causal, deterministic view of the development of a medium, through prioritising the artist's biography, title and representational content of the photobook. This mode of enquiry also embodies the aforementioned European epistemologies since the early Modern era to polish out what is messy in favour of a clear, 'scientific' explanation.

In recent decades, however, art writers authors have critiqued the objectivist paradigm that characterised art history until the postmodern period through reintroducing discourses of affect and personal experience of artworks, offsetting the hegemony of a singular authoritative voice and blurring practices of criticism and ekphrasis (e.g., Fer, 2004; Grant, 2012; Rich, 1993). The non-hierarchical and networked view of discourses such as New Materialism offer additional resistance to these paradigms, because dominant narratives about the artist or subject matter can be pluralised with wider research into the multiple agents in each photobook's art world: for example, the input of the designer is often under-discussed (Berghmans, 2013). I've had many fascinating conversations about the happy accidents and serendipitous meetings that enrich process of making and appreciating photobooks, which expand the ways of knowing this enigmatic medium.

3.5 Time
"*Here we are again"*

Over the years, I have handled *Another Black Darkness* many times as a book-object. I have also encountered it as an idea, a conversation topic, a catalogue record, images on booksellers' websites, and a video with disembodied hands turning its pages. Most frequently, I revisited it through writing about it. Each of these encounters — physical, virtual, imagined, remembered — has an affective texture that is more or less memorable. They have all occurred at some point in time and place.

Another Black Darkness is a photobook that rewards time spent with it: to really "see" it you have to put effort in, with your eyes, mind and body, and dwell with the inky shapes on black paper until they form recognisable shapes. As seen, touching and turning pages accumulates into an evocative multi-sensory experience greater than the sum of its physical parts. Alex Sweetman has described artists' book and photobook genres as a "time-based" medium (1986: 202), because of this unfolding, ephemeral engagement. "Time based" artforms like moving image require time and accumulating perception. To view the photobook as a time-based medium conveys the challenge that every aspect and page cannot be seen simultaneously. If borrowed or viewed in a collection, the reader "might only have the embodied experience of the book once in her lifetime" (Shaw, 2016: 63). In the photobook, or "photobookwork" as Sweetman terms it, "[e]vents occur, stories unfold, things are shown and said; through the progression of the construct, we view the conditions of being in the world, the flow of time as experience" (1986: 187).

There is a hermeneutic condition to looking at photobooks: this phenomenological term expresses how our experience, interpretation and understanding of the world around us constantly inform each other. This accumulative apprehension describes *knowing* as a perspectival process of discovery, like a torch's beam of light (Heidegger, 1978). For some perceptions to be revealed, what is outside the beam is necessarily concealed. With each angled view, the bearer acquires a more complete mental picture of their surroundings. As people interact with photobooks, they see them in sequential "torchlight" moments of encounter, when information on one page informs the interpretation of the next, and the experience of one photobook can inform another.

Even after a physical photobook encounter ends, the perception of that encounter continues to be hermeneutically reformulated in the reader's mind and memory — just as *Another Black Darkness* played on my mind after seeing it at Offprint, leading me to request it in the NAL, and ultimately inspiring this research. Should a reader come into contact with the book again, whether physically or in reference, this may alter their perception of the original encounter, as I have mythologised my own photobooks encounters through autoethnographic reflection. To cite Michel de Certeau, "[t]he readable transforms itself into the memorable;… the viewer reads the landscape of his childhood in the evening news" (1988: xxi). This means that our former life experiences are continually reinterpreted alongside new experiences, and new media we engage with are continually perceived and interpreted according to what we have previously lived and understood.

Repeat readings with the same photobook entangle new experiences with old. Through certain evocative objects, we commune with our past selves, those former, formative moments we have also spent holding them, as well as the histories of others embodied within them, prompting new insights and continued discussion (Turkle, 2011; Auslander, 2017). These encounters do not operate in chronologies of "before" and "after". They happen, and their impressions jostle together: for example, in experiencing *Another Black Darkness* in another present, it is evening and I'm writing by the light of a single desk lamp, noticing how the book behaves differently in this light. I am also connecting with encounters past, as I remember how it looked in bright daylight, next to the window in a university office. Beyond my own

engagements *with* the photobook, I can relate *through* the photobook to those deferred moments of life folded into it by its creator(s), such as the time a woman sat up in a bed, wrapped in a sheet, and arrested the photographer with her gaze, the many walks Nomura took with her camera, or moments of inspiration in darkrooms and meetings. Thus the photobook materialises these oscillations between absence and presence, through its physicality that invites interpretation. Just as hermeneutic perception does not occur in a neat chronology, neither should attempts to understand agency be mapped in linear, causal relationships (Law, 2002; Gadamer, 2004). Time has agency then, not only in aiding understanding each moment of photobook encounter, but assembling them into a greater, remembered and imagined whole, a Platonic idea-photobook that is the archetype to which all virtual encounters refer.

4. How encounters matter for photobook criticism

The type of information sought after by a methodology or constructed through the written communication of research *matters,* in the sense that it indicates a political, representational hierarchy of knowledge that, generally, values an artwork's historical or social context, subject matter, or artist biography over its embodied experience. Embodied ways of knowing such as those demonstrated in this article have been historically devalued and othered for their association with marginalised ways of being. This analysis has shown such insights not only stand on their own as valid critical responses, but can also serve as generative prompts for more conventional art sociological research. Spurred on by the intricacy of my encounter with this book, I could: extend the study through contacting the artist, or compare the affects of *Black Darkness* and *Another Black Darkness;* delve deeper into work by the book's designer Satoshi Machiguchi; or test other books of sensitive or controversial content, sitting in the same spot, with a similar consciousness of public performance; or compare others' subjective responses.

The photobook is "shaped by the cooperation of the photographer with other trades… the collective effort of the photographer, author, editor, designer, printer and publisher" (Neumüller, 2017: 2), but often these other trades and agencies are less valued than that of the artist, and presented as facilitating the artist's singular vision, rather than contributing their own textures and frictions. To imagine this network of co-operation and collaboration need not stop at the obvious creative roles involved in its production. A enquiry into the agency of the photobook rooted in posthuman ethico-onto-epistemology (Barad, 2007) might imagine the agency of a lumber labourer from an alternative geographical and temporal reality who produces pulp for the paper, the inventor of a particular method of binding many centuries earlier, but also the computer that translates image to page through a digital printer – there are infinite social and technical inputs that contribute to shaping the distinct objecthood of each photobook.

The photobook's resistance to singular modes of use, interpretation and definition positions it as a postmodern medium. As Ihab Hassan has noted, the pluralism of postmodern perspectives "proposes a different kind of 'authority'" that

is pragmatic and empirical, and in which "there can be only continual negotiations of reason and interest, mediations of desire, transactions of power" (1986: 515). As each copy of a book can be revisited time and again, its interpretation is grounded in each empirical situation of those plural readings. This means there is a plurality of engagement activated by the reader as well as the author, and through the multiplicity of encounters.

Returning to encounters with *Another Black Darkness* reveals that, parallel to the official ontologies constructed by anthologies and taxonomies that seek to define and historicise the photobook, there exists a plurality of alternative individual, embodied, *felt* ontologies: including, but not limited to, how photobooks are understood by people who make them, how photobooks factor into the livelihoods of makers, what meanings photobooks have for those who buy them. These ontologies are not separate; they are hopelessly entangled in the moments we engage with photobooks as objects in the world. If we do not attune to these subtle aspects of encounter, intellect overwhelms response, and interpretations focus descriptively on "what the book is about" and less on "what the book is". We must not become complacent with the privileged knowledges we have constructed and acquired through experience. Therefore, a combined approach giving attention to the social networks of production and consumption *as well as* the acute, impersonal affect of photobooks in specific encounters is required to understand photobook agency more holistically in terms of both substance and significance.

To be sufficiently motivated to write about a photobook, the photobook genre, or people involved in photobook production, authors must at some point have been *moved* by encounters with these objects. This indicates that an absence of encounters with photobooks in criticism to date is due to a lack of precedent or method to describe and make use of these experiences in scholarly terms. This article has shown the value of mobilising photobook encounters through critical analysis, and demonstrated one example of how to incorporate the personal and the political in making understandings about the agency of photobooks as objects and ideas in contemporary cultural economy.

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A Turn to Reception

Readers and Reading in the Contemporary Photobook Ecology

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ABSTRACT:

At the turn of the millennium, powered by emerging canons, a narrative of discovery and art-historical contextualisation, the photobook became a central object of interest for photographers, scholars and collectors. As a product of this situation a community coalesced, constructing photobook-specific events, platforms and publications that gave space to deep-dive the processes and products of book making. Now, the photobook enters a new moment. As large institutions embrace photography on the page more readily and the frenzy of the photobook phenomenon is tempered, an emerging critical movement seeks to address the sustainability, reception and legacy of the post-millennium medium. This article argues that key to such discussions will be the previously sidelined matter of reading and what it can contribute to a prevailing, production-oriented discourse. By reviewing what literature exists around the subject and its periphery, combining with reflections on the author's own activities and drawing from a number of contemporary photobook initiatives it is posited that there are three substantial challenges that can arrest visibility and comprehension of photobook reading. From the difficulty faced when speaking about books to an absence of space held to accommodate reading and the subdued level of interest in this elusive activity, each theme is outlined and expanded in turn before being located as pivotal in constructing a more inclusive and meaningful future for the photobook.

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RESUMO:

Na viragem do milénio, alimentado por cânones emergentes, por uma narrativa de descoberta e por contextualizações artísticas e históricas, o livro de fotografia obteve um lugar central no interesse de fotógrafos, investigadores e coleccionadores. Como consequência, nasceu uma comunidade que passou a ocupar-se da criação de eventos, plataformas e publicações especificamente relacionados com o livro de fotografia, criando espaço para se aprofundar processos e produtos relacionados com a fabricação de livros. Hoje, o livro de fotografia entra numa nova fase. Enquanto instituições estabelecidas abraçam a fotografia em papel com mais facilidade e o frenesi do fenómeno do livro de fotografia esmorece, um movimento crítico emergente procura endereçar a sustentabilidade, a recepção e a herança do *medium* no pós-milénio. Este artigo argumenta que um aspecto fulcral para estas novas discussões será a questão, antes posta de lado, da leitura, e como esta pode contribuir para o discurso predominante, tradicionalmente orientado para a produção. Examinando a literatura que existe sobre este assunto e assuntos periféricos, associando-a a uma meditação sobre as actividades do próprio autor, e endereçando um conjunto de iniciativas contemporâneas relacionadas com os livros de fotografia, argumenta-se que há três desafios contemporâneos que podem travar a visibilidade e a compreensão da leitura de livros de fotografia. Das dificuldades que se se enfrenta ao falar-se sobre livros, à ausência de um espaço que acomode a leitura, e ao nível ainda moderado de interesse nesta actividade elusiva, cada tópico é delineado e expandido individualmente, antes de ser equacionado como crucial na construção de um futuro mais inclusivo e significativo para o livro de fotografia.

KEYWORDS:

artists' books; audience; photobooks; publishing; reading

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

edição; leitura; livros de artista; livros de fotografia; público

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1. The absent reader

With the foreshortening of time it is natural to view the photobook's "rise to prominence" (Rule, 2015: 15) as a smooth ascent or else a homogenised expansion, but there are significant and definable moments to be recognised in its rapid ascension in the photography and art world. First, the photobook was posited as "an independent artistic medium" (The PhotoBook Museum, 2014: 17) with dedicated study, histories and an "embryonic canon" (Shannon, 2010: 55), before subsequently an ecology was constructed around it — confirming and supporting the photobook-as-art moment and introducing a present to an otherwise predominantly historical period of review and contextualisation. In the first moment, occurring at the shoulders of the new millennium, collectors, dealers, historians and librarians begun to map out a history and territory of photographic interactions with the book. Works like Horacio Fernández's *Fotografia Publica* (1999), Andrew Roth's *The Book of 101 Books: Seminal Photographic Books of the Twentieth Century* (2001) and the first of Martin Parr and Gerry Badger's *The Photobook: A History* series (2004) signified a serious turn of interest to a codex-based account of photography. In the exhibitions and publications of this moment there is a palpable atmosphere of discovery played up, with May Castleberry suggesting "nothing exceeds the enchantment of discovering a forgotten treasure" (2001: 105) and Martin Parr repeating the sentiment in describing the formation of a photobook canon as the "final frontier of the undiscovered" (2004: 4). The narrative of exploration and the urgent art-historical contextualisation of photobooks that took place at this time offered a rich comprehension of photographer's book outputs and simultaneously lent to them a credibility and provenance valued by the art market. Parr and Badger's books were cited for triggering "a collection boom" whereby "reference objects became collector fetishes" (PhotoBook Museum, 2014: 19) and in 2004, Andrew Roth looked back on the short period since his publication debuted, noting a "heightened awareness among bibliophiles of the photographic book as a rare object, a collectible" (Roth, 2004: 9).

Key to the validation of the photobook were the definitions[1] used to describe the characteristics of this newly historicised medium and qualify canon inclusions. Proposals like those from Roth who pitches the photobook as a holistic "work of art" (2001: 1) and Badger and Parr who consider it a representation of the author's unique "artistic vision" (2004: 6-7) contributed to a building of artistic value[2]. In this way, the discourse around the photobook shared many similarities with Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the "sphere of legitimation" whereby a given medium seeks to justify its existence as a true art form (1996: 95). Clément Chéroux, chief curator of photography at MoMA, sees the photobook as having "built a model of legitimation similar to the one photography itself used at the end of the twentieth century" (2021: 4), but the desire for such a move has been present for many more years. Finding its

[1] A topic expanded on by José Luís Neves (2017) and Elizabeth Shannon (2010).

[2] As well as financial value — it can be uncomfortable to witness how influential collectors are in increasing the price of their own stock. As Elizabeth Shannon notes that, "despite often being specialists in the field, collectors 'and dealers 'relationships with the art market potentially compromise and problematise their role as primary authors of the history of the photobook" (2010: 55).

way into numerous definitions and accounts of the photobook are the thoughts of Dutch photographer and designer Ralph Prins who articulated the medium as "an autonomous art form, comparable with a piece of sculpture, a play or a film" in 1969 (qtd. in Suermondt, 1989). Half a century later, Prins' legitimacy claim was fully realised, with Chéroux declaring the photobook's recent elevation to an artistic medium as the "ultimate phase" of "symbolic recognition" (2021: 4).

Having raised the photobook from a subset of arts publishing or curious adjunct to photographic history, a new period develops which is to be characterised by the formation of the contemporary photobook ecology. The heightened profile and status of the photobook piqued interest for collectors, dealers and institutions but significantly, for practitioners too. Photographers realised the opportunities a newly consecrated medium presented, not only as an "astute career move" (Badger and Parr, 2004: 9) but in response to enormous shifts in the presence of networked technologies in life and culture (Johnston, 2021: 30-44). Web 2.0 facilitated two-way content generation as well as knowledge exchange, print-on-demand services that presented low-risk publishing opportunities and e-commerce developments like Paypal enabling simple global payments to individuals. An ideal environment in which an ecology for the photobook rapidly expands in only a handful of years, circa 2008. This year saw the first Fotobook festival Kassel, to be followed by Fotobook Festival Oslo (2009) with other substantial and recurring events popping up around Europe in particular after the new decade; the Unseen photobook market (Amsterdam) in 2012, Vienna Photobook Festival in 2013 and Photobook Week Aarhus in 2014. Only a year on though and there is evidence of a critical turn — a point of separation from the celebration of the photobook towards a questioning of financial security, publishing logistics, purpose and direction. Publisher Michael Mack has frequently raised concerns about the limitations of the "photobook bubble" and its hubris (OstLicht. Galerie für Fotografie) and Bruno Ceschel pointed to the financial instability and saturation of the medium in 2015 (Smyth et al., 2015: 27). Actors like Mack and Ceschel are asking how we learn from the photobook's recent history and take those serious about the possibilities of the medium forward to a more robust future. The photobook:RESET event run by Ceschel's Self Publish, be Happy initiative sought to do just this in 2018 with a pointed call to "rethink where we are and better understand our own limitations, blind spots and scarce resources".

One such blind spot is the recognition and visibility of readers and their readings which, throughout the moments set out above are either absent or showing the narrowest views of encounters with photobooks and approaches to representing them. The collectors and historians who wrote about photobooks in the period of frenzied cataloguing and canonising presented only a small slice of a reading spectrum with a prescribed form (typically 3-800 words) and function (to confirm the significance of a given publication within the remit of the canon). Such accounts do not engage with themes of access, reading environment, book handling, page navigation, assimilation or reader-response; in short, the personal circumstances and effects of reading. Perhaps this is unsurprising given that such subjectivity would lead to questions of bias and influence that are counter to the task of artistic recognition. Even as the authors of location-oriented photobook histories set out with fervour to explore "uncharted territories" (Parr et al., 2011: 7) to maintain a frontier-

like narrative of discovery and appease a growing appetite, attention seldom falls to the readers of the area in question. These readers and their situational reflections on books which engage with the land, people, politics and ideas of a place remain unchartered. Likewise, though the ecology of the photobook began to offer far greater variation and vibrancy of voice than the moment of legitimation, the overwhelming and underpinning atmosphere was one of production and contribution. Rather than reading being championed as a point of extension or fulfilment in the life of the book, it appeared as a byproduct.

It is against this backdrop that I founded The Photobook Club in 2009. Beginning as an online discussion platform the project invited different readers to share personal accounts on 11 canonised works in its first few years of its life. After this, and in an attempt to provide a less prescribed way to engage readers in reflecting on photobooks, the initiative moved to physical meetings with participants encouraged to bring a photobook on a given theme for open discussion. A philosophy of non-hierarchical discourse remained, and ensured that events placed no emphasis on the experiences or training of the individuals round the table, nor the perceived quality or legitimacy of books brought in. In this guise the Photobook Club rapidly expanded to over 50 locations in 34 countries. Though a central philosophy of open discourse and access united the clubs, decisions about events were devolved in order that individual communities could reflect the needs, resources and attendee interests of their respective locations. The project led to a number of other reading-focussed experiments in travelling boxes of books[3], exhibitions and new publications[4] but remained on the periphery: a niche area of an already niche medium. Now, as the possibility for new topics of conversation and an interest in a review of the established discourse builds, reading might have its moment. In an effort to understand why reading is yet to feature prominently in the photobook ecology, what follows is an interrogation of three barriers reading faces if it is to be elevated on a level with making in our contemporary landscape. Beyond giving shape to these difficulties in order that they can be more easily recognised, methods and projects that can work against a tide of production and maker-centrism are brought to the fore with a view to support the realisation of more meaningful publishing approaches to communicating in an alienating world, or fulfilling what Natasha Christia (2020) calls the "potentiality" of the photobook:

> Potentiality is a dual key: not only does it presuppose a horizon, but it also acknowledges the actual possibility of envisioning it. The embrace of potentiality involves a position of awareness, accountability, and perspective that can ground and sustain individual and collective existence amidst our adverse times.

[3] Discussed later in this article.

[4] In 2012, following a month-long look at the work online, and with contributions from a range of readers, I set about producing an ebook and interactive PDF focussed on Ken Schles' rare *Invisible City* (1988) photobook. The publication was called *Invisible City: A digital resource* (Johnston and Schles, 2012) and was made available for free. Within the first six months it had been downloaded more than 2,000 times and was described by writer Taco Hidde Bakker as one of "the most surprising 2012 photobook publications", which he cited as "an excellent example of how… photobooks can be lifted out of the shadows and be studied in a public realm beyond the traditional library" (Bakker, 2012).

2. An inadequacy of language

To begin any discussion on reading the photobook it is important to note how quickly our language presents problems. As Gerry Badger discussed in the inaugural edition of Aperture's *The PhotoBook Review,* we can conceive of encounters with the photobook owing as much to *watching* cinema or *looking* at pictures as to *reading* the book (2011: 3). In adopting the word *reading*, a particular set of assumptions is generated — some of which may resonate clearly whilst others are so removed from individual experiences with the photobook as to appear to be an entirely different activity. The term however does offer a usefully broad scope when seeking to move away from exclusive tendencies and the narrow perspectives of book experiences currently visible. Reading encompasses other terms and modes of encounter[5] (of the book but also the land, social situations, expressions etc.) which accommodates the material, chronological, semiotic and phenomenological aspects of the photobook in a manner that watching and looking fail to achieve. With an intent to open up and strengthen, rather than restrain, new conversations about our photobook encounters, *reading and readers* are thus adopted here.

There have been a number of attempts to offer accounts of reading in literature around the photobook, and its close relation the artists' book, with each offering a piece of a puzzle I have tried to construct in my own "acts of reading" (Johnston, 2021: 145). Tim Daly accentuates the role of touch and haptics as vital to explorations of the artists' book, Doug Spowart put forward his ten steps to reading the photobook, Victoria Cooper has explored montage in the visual book and Bettina Lockemann espoused a phenomenological leaning in which the book "accommodates a quest for immersion" for the sequence in "a perfect way" (2014: 126). All of these proposals and aspect-oriented approaches have their place but herein lies the crux of the matter. The melée of reading permutations which reflect the medium as one of "*Gesamt-kunstwerk* (a synthesis of the arts)" (Kruse and Gaetti, 2021: 15) can make the task seem futile. Then, when we acknowledge that reading the photobook is a frequently changing personal activity that can extend for hours, weeks and years, the issue is only compounded. Shaped by recommendations, reviews or prior knowledge of the makers, reading begins at a distance and stretches out as books are placed on bookshelves or piled on the floor, gradually finding semi-permanent homes and awaiting chance encounters with the spines of neighboured books or a subsequent selection from familiar and new readers. This transference, whereby the book is removed from a context of production in the hands of its makers to those of the reader, is a powerful component in the long-term reading of a work. Photographer Eric van der Weijde describes how the book "gains strength as it gets decontextualised by its viewer, owner, or bookcase in which it stands" (2017: 9), becoming assimilated into the life and thought of its custodian. So, just as Keith Smith articulated with his description of intended and random referrals through

[5] Further discussion of how we describe encounters with the photobook can be found in Briony Carlin's PhD thesis *Bindings, Boundaries and Cuts: Relating Agency and Ontology in Photobook Encounters* (2021) and *Photobooks &* (Johnston, 2021: 133-154). See also the work of Joanna Cresswell and Oliver Whitehead (2015).

image sequence (1994: 105), the same can be said about the life of the book. Did John Gossage intend for my copy of *The Pond* to have been dissected and re-edited by students? Did Virginie Rebetez picture *Out of the Blue* sitting in between Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa's *Dark Mirrors* and Omar Kholeif's *Art in the Age of Anxiety*? Reading is a difficult thing to speak about, but there are noteworthy contributions to discourse that reflect photobook encounters. In these there are clues as to how reading can be translated into a communicable account — a pivotal juncture in the comprehension of book life and impact beyond maker-centric metrics and markers of validity or worth.

In 2021 SOURCE magazine released a video project whereby three photobooks[6] were given to two reading groups "who usually read novels" with the result in each case a lively and critical debate (SOURCE Photographic review, 2021). The conversation moves around between the art of the image and the skill of the photographer to the ability of the book to represent specific moments in history and the feelings imbued from the reading. It is a view and insight of processes and values in engagement from outside the photobook ecology which creates an element of tension when the expert's (SOURCE's own term) reflections are interspersed. Though there is no proclaiming of right or true readings, there are markedly different approaches to the books at play, and with it, knowledge and assumptions about the work. At one point (15:39), David Campany recounts his brother-in-law leafing through Stephen Shore's *Uncommon Places* and commenting on the frequency of MGB cars[7]. Campany states that this is as true a reading as any other but, that his assertion is required presents a reminder that there exists an expectation on photobook encounters. In his account of legitimation, Pierre Bourdieu suggests that readers can no longer be consumers with the right to "judge freely", instead they "feel measured according to objective norms, and forced to adopt a dedicated, ceremonial and ritualised attitude" (1996: 95). This can be seen overtly in Jörg Colberg's introduction to the publication *Understanding Photobooks* in which he suggests that at the culmination of the book, its readers will be able to "engage with [photobooks] in a much more refined way" (2017: 11), as well as in Gerry Badger's reflections on reading in his musical analogy:

> One might take the analogy between a good and a bad symphony conductor. The bad conductor treats the score primarily on a visceral level, treating each passage, a tune or phrase, as an episode in itself. The good conductor is aware of the music's intellectual as well as its visceral qualities. He gets the most out of each passage, of course, but also treats the work as a whole and not just the sum of its parts, pointing out its overarching structure. (2011: 3)

Such a prescribed account of how readers should engage with the book limits the likelihood of readers less familiar with the medium sharing thoughts and generating an expectation on the language and content of reading if it is to be made public. Simple descriptions and say-what-you-see or say-what-you-feel approaches

[6] Robert Frank's *The Americans*, Stephen Shore's *Uncommon Places* and Nan Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*.

[7] Something Shore later confirmed as reflecting his wife's love for the car and thus his predisposition for their inclusion.

which might equip many readers with some confidence in proffering reflection appear inadequate or over-simplified in the face of formalist and structuralist interpretations.

Figure 1. A spread (pp. 5-6) from Markus Schaden and Frederic Lezmi's *Reading New York: A PhotoBookStudy on William Klein's Life is Good & Good for You in New York.*

A record of reading with a very different approach can be seen in *Reading New York. A PhotoBookStudy on William Klein's Life is Good & Good for You in New York* shown at the Photobook Phenomenon event in Barcelona curated by Markus Schaden and Frederic Lezmi. There, an exploded view of the photobook took over a large black wall and brought together design choices, sequencing and the political and social contexts of production and reception. There is an element of formal and focussed study in this presentation of reading but when joined by the small publication of the same name we see a far more playful and subjective reading take place (see fig. 1). As elements of the exhibition are shown, words fill the page at various type sizes that generate a stream-of-reading with its surprises, crescendos and rhythms. The reading shared in this book is *not* refined and most certainly *is* visceral.

In my own research I have worked with a variety of data collection methods to help construct proposals for a language which can scaffold our interactions with the photograph on the printed page. The most illuminating have been those that provide a route to bypass the textual — like graphical elicitation. Graphical elicitation exercises can be met with forensic detail or haphazard fluidity by respondents whilst retaining the opportunity for greater understanding in subsequent response-led conversations which can draw out themes and "stimulate thoughts" (Copeland and Agosta, 2012: 514). Between 2018-19 I conducted 27 postal interviews featuring graphical elicitation as part of a multi-methodological approach to comprehending photobook navigation and experience with responses offering great depth, particularly with follow-up in-person interviews. Building on this work, more recently I undertook an experiment that translated traditional graphical elicitation

to include a material component that was directly layered into a book encounter. Using coloured cards of different shapes and sizes which respondents were able to insert directly into a chosen book, they were offered a way in which to form their own taxonomies and systems of speaking about experience. Such autonomy and flexibility requires additional investment in time on the side of the researcher but can help to de-restrict reader's responses and move away from expectations of what reading should be. SOURCE's recorded events, Schaden and Lezmi's studies and my own experiments show how removing expectations of clear, linear and confined textual reflection can open up a vastly different view of reading. If the reading space of the expert is defined by character limits, copy-stand images and intertextual references, perhaps the space of broader readings are to be reader-defined, messy and interpretive locations of self-definition.

3. A space for the reader

The photobook is frequently discussed as a space, or collection of spaces. Despite being considered "an architectural volume" (Vanthuyne, 2022: 9) or "a self-run artist's space" (Senior, 2015: 10), little is spoken of regarding the room we give for entrants to the photobook. The absence of readers and reading from the contemporary discourse of the photobook is not only a product of limitations and expectations of language but also the struggle to make space in the photobook ecology which thrives on production and celebration as contributions to the apparent health of the medium. Awards and competitions draw in new works on an annual basis with those shortlisted often housed in modest locations on a limited budget, covering tables and shelves with little room in-between. Likewise fairs or festivals with marketplaces feature publisher tables typically stacked high with new (and some old) titles. These instances present a vibrant environment with a wealth of exciting works but they also represent the underlying financial instability of a niche product and the necessity to squeeze revenue from the commodity of physical space. Online, a different challenge for the space of reading is presented. There, while space is not as costly, nor sparse, attention instead is limited. Photobook-specific social media communities are places with a high turnover of content and little conversation or reflection. An environment that is conducive to quick sharing, notices of publications and competition deadlines, though even these have little response (Johnston, 2021: 56-9). In the cluttered rooms of the festival, and the crowded confines of the online community, where is the room for reading?

Aperture's recent launch of a PhotoBook Club[8] has the potential to insert the reader into a prominent space via live events (subsequently shared on Youtube) with a variety of guests discussing particular works but here we find crisp echoes of legitimation tendencies. In June 2022 the Aperture PhotoBook Club focused on Wendy Red Star's *Delegation*, inviting four guests to join Wendy in conversation — the senior editor of Aperture magazine, two art historians and the book's designer. Such a collection is likely to lead to a particular presentation of reading (and indeed

[8] No relation to The Photobook Club, nor Tom Broadbent's Photobook Club Collective.

it does) as an activity for an audience dedicated to the medium to undertake. Aperture did not purport to focus on readers, and the description of the project which invites an audience to "look at and learn from the most compelling photobooks in the field" (Aperture 2022) is a giveaway regarding its intent, but it demonstrates how even in places which could offer some room to a spectrum of encounters with the book, the pull towards the context of production outstrips that of reading and the context of reception.

There are exceptions which seek to provide space to readers and readings outside what is established and may be expected. The well-known 10x10 Photobooks' reading room iterations and the PhotoBook Museum's public exhibition *A World in Transition* for example, but also less familiar initiatives like Offset Projects travelling *pitara*[9] organised by Anshika Varma. For Varma, who recognises the potential of the photobook to make "connections with people", the space created around the works at a public presentation[10] of photobooks is integral to engagement, with "tiny triggers" helping to construct an environment which embraces reading:

> How you organise the space in which you place the book becomes very very important … I make sure that there's always a chair that invites you to sit with each book. It's a small thing, but to know that [you] can sit down and look at the book completely changes engagement. (Varma, 2021)

Rather than invigilators being present, or text being included which prescribes and foreshadows a reading, Varma works with frames containing "small paragraphs to give you a feeling of what the book might be about", encouraging readers to pick up books without leading or revealing its themes or messages. Offset Projects' pitara also gives readers an opportunity to respond to what they have seen with the inclusion of a writing desk and postcards designed so as to "allow the readers a moment after going through the work to sit down in one place and maybe assimilate what they've taken from the book".

A space for reading is a theme I have investigated practically myself. The Photobook Club, in its most basic form, is a space for reading — inviting individuals to sit together with little purpose other than to read. A lack of recording at events helps to facilitate open reflections, as does the role of the organiser to avoid their own projection of experience or knowledge which lessens that of others. Juan Cires (2021) of the prolific Photobook Club Madrid highlights that the absence of authority and lack of teaching at the events was "especially valuable" and one of the elements of the project he cherishes the most. In 2013 I extended the visibility of group reading by posting a box of books round the world to stop at different communities. Together with the books I included a notebook which was soon filled with signatures, stickers and thoughts on the books that could be seen by subsequent readers. A record of collective reading, the notebook and accompanying ephemera that was placed in the

[9] "The library is called the offset 'pitara' — in English it translates to 'trunk'" (Varma, 2021).

[10] There are expectations of locations to complicate the picture here. As Russet Lederman of 10x10 Photobooks noted in relation to the reading room organised at the New York Public Library, such a space is vastly different from "the Museum of modern Art or… somewhere that has art with a capital 'A'" because in those spaces you are engaging with "someone who is already putting on their thinking caps thinking that art is what they're going in to see" (Lederman et al., 2020).

box at each stop is a reminder of reading as a product of our location (as well as so many other factors), and the potential for reading to share a "boundary between private and public states of being" (Shaw, 2016: 146). On return, the books had been handled by upwards of 300 readers, so it was no surprise that there were signs of wear and tear — spines starting to crack and pristine pages smudged or folded. In a maker-centric environment that reveres the photobook as art object, these may be unforgivable occurrences but in the context of reading they are representative of what Matthew Stadler terms a "reading economy" (2018: 118). This economy, which is tied together with his conception of public coalescence, requires the formation of space which is accessible and inviting: "Publics begin in wilful actions, an invitation, an event. A public can arise in any defined space that is open to strangers — a street, a meeting hall, a plaza or bar, a book…" (Stadler, 2018:122) or even a box of them.

Events like my own, those that Varma has been involved in, as well as reading rooms and book shows run by the likes of 10x10 Photobooks and The PhotoBook Museum evidence a role for intermediaries or activators to help realise specific publics for the book. The space they construct online and offline is a place of non-purchase reading which has the potential to shift a discourse from a focus on product and process to that of reading and reception. It is worth considering though, whether book activation is being outsourced to reflect specific skills and knowledge, or because it is deemed less significant than making[11]. Natasha Christia, who herself has curated book-oriented exhibitions (*What's this book?* in 2016 and *Uncensored Books,* 2017), argues for a rethinking of the photobook as "an encounter and an event", thus raising "demands on us and on what we can do with it" (Christia, 2020). Sharing similarities with Stadler, she calls for "situations that re-orchestrate the moment of writing and reading, and allow for more inclusive environments of hospitality, discussion, and knowledge production touching upon all categories of society" that are currently absent from contemporary photobook spaces. To adopt such an approach is possible and proven in small instances, but requires a wilful community to engender a more fundamental shift.

4. An appetite for reading

Following the contentious histories and canons of the photobook as well as the elevation of the medium from container to art object, came a contemporary turn to production. Responding to small gallery closures, the erosion of traditional publishing models and buoyed by new interest around the photograph and page, practitioners set about doing it themselves. The photobook became a popular and primary output for many works which would, only 15 years prior, have been realised through different means. The positioning of the medium as artist-led, whereby all elements of the book project are considered in harmony, not only had an impact on the legitimacy and resulting desire for outputs in this form but also sets expectations for makers to undertake intra-medium interrogations and experimentations.

[11] Engineer and educator Debbie Chachra offers a fascinating insight into the gendered hierarchy of making and not-making in tech culture which offers many connections to the contemporary photobook world.

Numerous photobook workshops, courses and academic curricula encourage makers to be un-compromising in their approach to realising their artistic vision[12] leading to increasingly arcane works and production particularities being so prevalent they are "almost considered a given" (Martin, 2017: 13). The products of this situation are increasingly sophisticated works demanding an equally sophisticated audience "who have the time to commit to learning how to read the photobook" (Martin, 2019).

It must then be asked whether the makers of the photobook, who also comprise the existing audience of the medium (Abril et al., 2015: 28) have an appetite for exploring broader approaches to reading and reflections on the act which are not connected explicitly to conversations of production, product or legitimation? Put differently, are the players of the photobook ecology willing to engage with reading which may challenge the apparent vibrancy of the medium and could disrupt the established traditions and systems that have been put in place over the last two decades? Making space for reading and employing strategies to mitigate difficulties in the language of the activity means giving over space held for making. It means also accepting vulnerabilities of the medium, the slowness of reading and inevitable growing pains as another force enters the discourse. To read the photobook is to make the photobook — folding out what was folded in, expanding what was condensed, constructing a world from the page. Thus to invite reading reflections is to open up a pandora's box of possibilities as diverse as the source material from which they are born. That these outcomes may not adhere to common approaches or expectations places reader and maker alike in a vulnerable position:

> There's always more people out there who will talk about how [the book] was made than why it was made. Maybe that's because people don't want to look stupid. Because they're too scared to put their ideas forward in case everyone laughs at them and what they thought of it. So they talk about how it's made because they can't get that wrong. (Bodman, 2008)

There are several recent attempts to open discourse up to the reading and reception of the photobook and the entangled medium of the artist's book. In 2021 Photoresearcher dedicated an issue to the reception of the photobook. Christoph and Markus Schaden's bold introduction to the subject claimed that "only when photographic reproductions have found resonance in exhibitions and publications, and subsequently been subjected to a discursive discussion, can they become relevant and invested with meaning for the public" (2021: 1-2). They go on to call into question what parameters and aspects of a book under scrutiny have been considered in reviews to-date as well as which "were left out" (2) before calling for a focus on "the reception of photobooks in future research" (5). The articles which follow are not representative of a broad spectrum of readers and readings, instead looking at the social, cultural and political contexts and impacts of reception articulated by experts, but the move away from production-oriented conversation is nonetheless marked. In the field of the artist's book too there is a swell of critical appraisal regarding the role and shape of the review, if not reading more widely. In 'A New Manifesto for Book Art Criticism', a project by Megan N. Liberty, David Solo

[12] A key strategy in the legitimation of the medium outlined in the introduction.

and Corina Reynolds, they detail a number of proposals and actions for the progression of critique which begins to touch on facets of reading and readership, creating space for varied voices and even counter-canons. The manifesto speaks of "demystifying artist books" in order to make them "more accessible to a wider audience", "encouraging dialogue about book art in as many forms and forums as possible" and open discussion about "what book criticism should look like". Even here though, there are pertinent questions about reading that are left out and there remains a hint of medium insecurity resulting in a number of legitimising tendencies as in Megan N. Liberty locating the purpose of the manifesto as "trying to get people to think about books" in the same "way they think about film, performance, and poetry". The manifesto has a bearing on the photobook not only because of the increasingly obfuscated differences between the mediums but their porous borders which see individuals and institutions span the divide and port thematic discussions. As well as his role as founder and contributor to the Center for Book Arts' *Book Art Review*, Solo is a prominent writer, researcher and collector of the photobook. Coinciding with the MoMA forum on photobooks Solo wrote about the role of photobook criticism for Aperture, highlighting that existing coverage of photobooks is typically promotional, descriptive or else mines and repeats publisher's statements. Part of Solo's answer to the problem of criticism is organised around education and insight to address the form and language of "photobooks that would otherwise seem totally opaque" but also recognises the need to include "other voices to discuss [book] choices and their impact on the reading experience".

While appetite for the photobook and its production can be said to be induced by the ecosystem and spaces that teach the photobook as "a powerful medium to show your work in" (Ceschel, 2019), it appears that appetite for the other side of the book's "conversation with a stranger in the future" (Singh, 2021: 16-17) is still somewhat suppressed. Aside from the small number of reading-oriented reflections and interventions that do exist (some of which have been outlined in this article), there is limited evidence of interest in engaging with questions of reading and its comprehension, especially when it relates to a readerships located outside the established photobook-buying (and thus making) audience. The myth of reading may well be such an essential tool for the continued legitimation of the medium that is hard to relinquish. Returning to Bourdieu's spheres of legitimation, the sociologist notes how, when work in question faces a threat of going unnoticed ("because there is no audience capable of recognising it"), the "role of the group which recognises and sanctions the work seems to be essential" (1996: 148). To attempt a demystification of reading may damage the photobook-as-art stasis and erode the protective enclave of the photobook which has been so creatively profitable to its participants. To replace a protective, medium-specific environment with a more open orientation could be seen as pandering to market desires, the antithesis of a medium built on what designer Hans Gremmen describes as works which should be "pure and bold" (Gremmen and Nunziata, 2020: 167). The fear of a "loss of purity" (Costa, 2019: 88) not only relates to individual works and their makers, but to the medium itself. Challenging the history and ecology outlined in the previous pages is, unsurprisingly, an unappealing activity for those involved in the labour of its construction. There are a number of reasons why the contemporary photobook

ecology may be reluctant to engage with a more diverse and in-depth look at reading, but there are benefits to an alteration of focus that may contribute to a robust future for the medium.

5. A return on reading

The difficult task of wielding language to communicate reading, a lack of space in which to accommodate and witness photobook encounters and a lack of appetite for engagement with the activity in the photobook ecology are all significant factors as to why reading has remained predominantly absent from our burgeoning photobook discourse. There are though initiatives and techniques which combat these challenges or else show ways in which they may be overcome. For reading to become a meaningful contributor to a holistic photobook ecology, these approaches should be adopted now while indications that interest and activity around the photobook is morphing are prevalent. The ceasing of zeitgeist collections that were sold to libraries and archives[13] in order that they can be preserved as a moment in time and Aperture's dedicated journal (*The PhotoBook Review*) becoming subsumed into their regular quarterly magazine are some of the most telling clues as to the way in which medium-specific activity is — like a startup — being smoothed out from its peak and spread into more permanent, traditional spaces. At the same time as Aperture's decision on *The PhotoBook Review*, the Museum of Modern Art ran a Forum event titled 'The PhotoBook Phenomenon: 1999-2021' dedicated to "art form that has achieved a new level of photographic creativity, experimentation, and awareness in the 21st century" (MoMA), a past-tense framing which confirms Clément Chéroux's assertion that the process of legitimation is complete (2021: 4). As many of the examples discussed in this article demonstrate, this doesn't translate to the ceasing of legitimation strategies and discourses but does present the possibility for a tempering of the energies exerted to its cause. If we were to continue the periodisation proposed in "The absent reader", we are thus at the border and beginnings of a third moment yet to be carved out.

At this juncture the makers, those most likely to influence the direction of the next stage in an almost two hundred year history of the photobook, might reasonably ask what reading could bring to the future prosperity of the photobook. So far its benefits may seem abstract. If however it is taken as supplementary to other critical moves — towards expanded audiences, towards environmentally conscious production, towards a more diverse set of players in positions of power in the established ecology — its merits become clearer. A move towards a thorough consideration of readers and reading exposes rifts in literacy that can be met through education (as Solo and the Book Arts Review group propose) or, more radically, in the adjustments of makers outputs which may morph in adoption of alternative visual language styles and physical construction. As Walter Costa posits in thinking about the insular nature of the photobook ecology: "Isn't empathy with readers the

[13] The Indie Photobook Library to Yale's Bienecke library and Self Publish, Be Happy to Maison Européenne de la Photographie.

only possible starting point to getting out of the circle?" (2019: 88). Likewise, by asking what happens with books produced, how they are activated and how the greatest impact of reception can be garnered from each individual codex, the photobook becomes more efficient in its use of various materials and energies (human and otherwise). And finally, to recognise the influence of readers' situations on the readings they undertake can encourage a recalibration of the Western formation and governance of existing representations of reading in the form of reviews, judging notes and catalogue accompaniments. Bruno Ceschel would like to see more thought given to "different experiences and different readings" (Ceschel, 2019) and Tate Shaw similarly suggests that an opening up of the readings we are exposed to can be a symbiotic idea exchange between makers and readers:

> I want more people to tell me what they're seeing when they're reading a book by Ron Jude or by somebody else and I want to know what people are connecting to, because that opens up like a bibliography… it opens up a whole other realm of possibilities. (Shaw, 2018)

Alongside these benefits are tools and platforms which will make the sidelining of reading hard to maintain. Instagram, which has been such a significant platform for makers in publicity is offering a view to the post-sale life of the book in reader's images which connect with maker's handles. This act, which could be skewed in the interest of performative reading and the projection of idealised reading situations, nonetheless shows the book as an object in the world. Designer Alex Lin of Studio Lin speaks of his excited to "literally follow [the photobook] into the hands of the people who have purchased it", seeing the book "in ways and places that you'd never imagine" (Lin and Susuda, 2022). Lin's awareness of what the reader and their choices for the life of their books gives back in knowledge is a tangible account of van der Weijde's decontextualised works and Shaw's sentiment of collaboration.

Away from the volume of production celebration and the vocal positioning of the photobook-as-art narrative, books are extending themselves into reader's worlds and fostering joy, introspection, humour, forgiveness, passion and knowledge exchange. Rather than "automatic validation and recognition" of the photobook, reading recognises that "the real work takes place in a very silent way" (Christia, 2021). Reading confronts the potential inertia of the photobook and its irrelevance to communities beyond those who foster and construct the medium. Clément Chéroux suggests that the photobook sits 40 years behind the artist's book in its "phase of development" (2021: 4) but it is worth asking whether such a trajectory is even desirable. It would mean that in 2035 we would face the same dilemma that Simon Cutts observed with the artist's book in a speech at the Tate gallery's Artist's books conference in 1995, an occurrence that would seem to fail the potentiality of the photobook medium: "If the whole arena is predicated on artists rather than the books themselves, then we will have made it a mirror of the gallery world, rather than benefit from a medium that has no social boundaries, and can precipitate change" (2007: 89).

If instead the photobook set course on a different bearing — one that embraces reading as central rather than peripheral — there is an opportunity to producing a truly exciting moment.

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COMPENDIUM
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Rinko Kawauchi

Imperfect Photographs

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ABSTRACT:

I analyze the oeuvre of contemporary Japanese photographer Rinko Kawauchi through the notion of *imperfection.* An approach that gives precedence to process over product and combines conceptual art with vernacular traditions makes her pictures happily imperfect. Departing from Kawauchi's transmedial concept of the image, often lying between word and image and mainly materialized through photo books, I propose that Kawauchi's photographs are imperfect thanks to her experimentation with technical mistakes, the vernacular subject-matter of everyday snapshots, seriality, sequencing, and format variation, elliptical visibility, the aesthetics of color, and a non-linear temporality. Imperfection emphasizes the materiality of the medium, and positions photography far removed from the referent-centered documentary domain by way of *aisthethic,* rather than semiotic, significance. Imperfection also activates reception as it kindles emotional involvement and participant viewing.

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RESUMO:

Analiso a obra da fotógrafa contemporânea japonesa Rinko Kawauchi partindo da noção de *imperfeição*. Uma abordagem que dá precedência ao processo ao invés de a dar ao produto, e que combina arte conceptual com tradições vernaculares, revela as imagens de Kawauchi como felizmente imperfeitas. Partindo da concepção transmedial que a fotógrafa faz da imagem, localizando-se amiúde entre palavra e imagem e materializada sobretudo através de livros de fotografia, proponho que as fotografias de Kawauchi são imperfeitas devido a elementos como: experimentação em torno de erros técnicos, motivos vernaculares da estética *snapshot*, serialidade, sequencialidade, e variação ao nível dos formatos, visibilidade elíptica, a estética da cor, e temporalidade não-linear. A imperfeição enfatiza a materialidade do *medium* e posiciona a fotografia longe do domínio documental, mais centrado no referente, por via de uma significação *aisthética* ao invés de semiótica. A imperfeição também activa a recepção, promovendo um envolvimento emocional e um olhar participativo.

KEYWORDS:

appresentation; conceptual art; error; materiality; photobook; vernacular photography

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

"appresentation"; arte conceptual; erro; fotografia vernacular; livro de fotografia; materialidade

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The oeuvre of contemporary Japanese photographer Rinko Kawauchi is wrought with imperfection. An approach that favours process over product and combines conceptual art with vernacular traditions makes her pictures happily imperfect. Kawauchi's image universe, an aesthetics that has been aptly called a "poetics of the everyday", is intimate with the world of vernacular, deskilled photography and amateur errors or technical imperfections. Throughout Kawauchi's multifarious experiments in iconicity — encompassing analogue and digital technology, video installation, blogging, slide shows, and, above all, photo books — the notion that a work is an irreversible process ending in a static icon-object fails. Nothing her works offer is perfect, complete, and defined. All is inclusive, expansive, and hypnotically open-ended.

Her oeuvre, in its entirety, is work-in-progress. Kawauchi's project *The River Embraced Me* (2016) materialized her concept of the image in a feat of reverse-engineering that took both the exhibition and book form.[1] Images are transmedial, here spiralling between word and image, but not culminating, for consummation will not describe any work of Kawauchi. Take the title of one of her works from 2013: *4%* evokes the theory that only this tiny percentage of the mass of the universe can be perceived; it acknowledges the impossibility of imagining a perfectly complete picture. Infinity for Kawauchi starts with the endlessness of configuration of the elements at hand in the editing of the image. Thanks to the arrangement in sequences of unexpected variation, photography appears as a never-ending process in which the mode of binding is the mode of loosening.

Kawauchi's photographs are radically without frame. Boundary-less images, regularly bound in books, laid out, juxtaposed in a syntax of continuity (itself a form of imperfection), decidedly against linearity, fixed contours, and stable contexts. For Kawauchi, "[p]hotography is a process of continuous choosing", in which "choosing a photograph from the contact sheet is as important as pressing the shutter release button" (Ishida, 2012: 125). Factor in a grammar just as imperfect as her syntax. These photos speak patois and rhyme without much reason.

Photobooks are Kawauchi's cardinal form of producing her emphatically imperfect photographs. Especially in the case of Japan, the dissemination of photographs in book form is more significant and far-reaching than showing photography in galleries. Looking back at the socio-critical history of photography, its beginnings also appear fuelled by photobooks.[2] "Medium" in the modernist, Greenbergian sense fails to provide an adequate description of photography and its variations, in particular, through Kawauchi's photo pages; that is, "medium" in the sense of a form produced by specific technical means with specific expressive possibilities.

Just as medium-specificity gives way to transmedial photography, photobooks instantiate photography's principle capacity to exist in varying copies and with multiple authors, photographer, printer, designer. Books *qua* photographic apparatus contest an all-too-typical notion of photography and photographs as the

[1] The exhibition was first shown at the Contemporary Art Museum, Kumamoto, from 23 January to 27 March 2016.

[2] I am of course referring to Walter Benjamin's 1931 essay (Benjamin, 1977) and Gisèle Freund's book from 1936 (Freund, 1936).

single and perfect products of an individual photographer. Recall the signature "decisive moment" that defined Henri Cartier-Bresson's masterpieces — the formal peak in which all compositional elements in the photographic frame align for the perfect image — it thrives on such a conception of photography.[3]

Kawauchi's photobooks come in all shapes and sizes. Some books are hybrid in terms of mixed media, like *The Eyes, the Ears* (Kawauchi, 2005b) coupling word with image; others in larger composition terms. *Gift* (Kawauchi, 2014) consists of twin volumes. It takes the syntax of facing pages to facing-books-level in order to display Kawauchi's collaboration with Terri Weifenbach. *Approaching Whiteness* (Kawauchi, 2013b) is an exquisite take on the Japanese scroll. It offers a single-themed variation on contact-sheet images very much at odds with *Sheets* (Kawauchi, 2013c). The latter is a book that adds gatefolds to the contact-sheet mimicry, adequately conveyed by black paper and a lower reproduction quality. As the perspective shifts from ultra-distant to a close-up mosaic through layout variation, it invites us to look again, look closer, and further.

Ametsuchi (2012) deserves special mention because it was the first project that Kawauchi originally shot for an exhibition. The work, consisting of seventeen large-scale photographs and a video, is a site-specific project pivoting on the y*akihata* or controlled burning of farming fields that ritually takes place in Aso, Japan. *Ametsuchi* was given new life when Dutch designer Hans Gremmen did the book version (Kawauchi, 2013a). This beautifully manufactured book gave Gremmen principality on a par with the artist and the editor, Aperture Foundation's book publisher Lesley A. Martin. For Gremmen, "[t]he book itself — the way it is printed and bound — asks questions about the medium of the book, and how people tend to use them" (Sholis, 2013). The book is done in a variation of origami or "Japanese binding". We slide through it; a feeling of continuity arises through the uncut pages (the sides and bottom part of the page are open, only the top is closed). Moreover, the book has a parallel series of negative images on the inside of the pages. We find images — not all, only the pictures of ritual burning and of starry skies — printed in inverted colours, maroon, blue dashes of purple. The design of the book plays out opposites (rough paper on one side, smooth on the other) that seem to translate the meaning of "Heaven and Earth" of *Ametsuchi*; it sets a game of repetition and inversion across images and typography alike (the Rinko Kawauchi name and the title of the book appear at both beginning and end, the image on the endpapers repeats, as does the typography, on the hardcover, with Kawauchi's name printed upside down).

Without exception, Kawauchi's books are reshuffle-ready, typically unpaginated, and singularly adept at non-linear narratives. They unfold a certain continuum of time, rather than present individual moments. Isolating a photograph, in fact, is a rather forceful move for the sake of exemplarity. Kawauchi's minimal unit is the tandem, not the single photograph.

[3] The English translation of the original French publication — Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Images à la sauvette* (1952a) — was chosen by Cartier-Bresson's publisher Simon & Schuster as the title of the 1952 American version, and unintentionally imposed the motto which would define Cartier-Bresson's work. It is present in the epigraph to Henri Cartier-Bresson's introductory text, a quote by Cardinal de Retz: "There is nothing in this world which does not have its decisive moment" (Cartier-Bresson, 1952b).

In addition to chronological priority (Kawauchi produced hand-made photobooks before her publishing debut in 2001, with the three volumes *Utanane, Hanabi*, and *Hanako*), the books have epistemic weight (Kawauchi, 2001a; 2001b; Kawauchi and Takei, 2001). The dominant pairing design has the book layout as matrix, and syncopation for rhyme. While traceable with some insistence, the morphological analogy of pairs is always a bit off, especially compared to the solemn geometry of any New Objectivity series, for example, Renger-Patzsch 's *Die Welt is schön* (Renger-Patzsch, 1928). The effect of her juxtapositions is anything but sobering. "Seeing two images next to each other opens up the imagination and gives birth to something else", declared Kawauchi upon the international release of *Illuminance* in 2011 (Goto, 2011).

The epistemics of colour are key for such dynamics of formation on the fringe of decomposition, pulsing between *Gestaltung* and *Entstaltung*.[4] Colour is unstable — Bauhaus guru Josef Albers warned no normal eye was foolproof against the "colour deception" of the after-image or "simultaneous contrast" phenomenon (cf. Ishida, 2012: 126) — and colour has the potential to produce multi-sensorial episodes through its vibrating boundaries (Albers, 2009: 23). Rather than taking colour as deceptive, Kawauchi relishes in the plurality of perspectives: "I love those ever-changing colours. It can be a metaphor of how the world can transform completely just by looking at it from different angles" (Ishida, 2012: 125).

Consider the vertigo of flowers spiralling in white, mauve, and magenta paired with a seething blue maelstrom, appearing in *Illuminance*. Compare this also to the iconic picture of the man jumping across the puddle where every element in the frame appears perfectly mirrored thanks to his projecting shadow — Cartier-Bresson's "Behind the Gare St Lazare". For a description of Kawauchi's vertiginous ensemble, no characterization could be less appropriate than "the decisive moment" that defines the legendary snapshot, once and for all. Kawauchi offers not marvels of exactness but a galaxy of stills following the fluid nature of colours and producing a *metamorphotography* blurring every fixed contour. The instability of colour harbours the beauty of transfiguration. Perhaps that explains why eggs and hatchlings are a favourite subject of hers, as are butterflies, mutation's winged reminder.

Flipping through the pages of her photobooks "gives birth to something else"; it sets in motion a cinematic, hallucinatory presence. What Kawauchi's imperfect photographs make visible is as important as what is not manifest, yet can, in principle, be perceived. Her work is an invitation not to look at some stationary object but to "watch" photographs unfold as we negotiate their signification, even their referent. Her snapshots contain not a slice of time but a thrust of infinity.

The temporality of photobooks has been consistently appreciated as closer to cinematic time and motion. The advent of digital technology has smoothed the continuity between photo and film. Filming with a digital camera is now standard practice, and has turned quite a few photographers into filmmakers, Kawauchi included. Yet the rapport predates digitalism. Photobooks have a particular temporality: neither the decisive moment of a single photo nor cinema's flow of time.

[4] For Walter Benjamin, colour was the "Medium aller Veränderungen". See Benjamin, 1985a; 1985b.

Slide shows are another photographic form that we will find in Kawauchi, similarly imbued with such "photofilmic" dynamics.[5] Still and still moving, throughout her photobooks, materiality marries cinematic illusion.

Photobooks are objects thick with materiality that call for manipulation. Unlike an image hung or cast, the book grants us private viewing with plenty of opportunities to linger, to stretch time. Duration fosters the occurrence of metamorphic colour phenomena. On the other hand, the book format is perhaps more prescriptive than that of the exhibition.

If transmediality does not detract from materiality, even less does imperfection. On the contrary, the emphatically imperfect photographs of Kawauchi further advance the materiality of the medium. Ultimately, her imperfect photography amounts to a production of presence, of a presence-effect. But this presence does not refer to the privileged relation of copy and original ("there was referent X") that haunts the discourse of the medium. It is a presence felt, evoked, but not shown. Such evoked presence corrodes the fantasy of an external world independent of the perceiving subject, and undermines the idea of photography as a medium that offers evidence or irrevocable proof of existence by that which appears recorded in the recording device; in a word, that eliminates subjectivity. Kawauchi's imperfect photography, an image universe tensed between materiality and illusion, is a world not without humans.

Kawauchi's "poetics of the everyday" has the insignificant as dominant subject matter. With the exception of *Cui Cui* (2005a), her photographs are mostly, uncannily, de-peopled. A bestiary of insects, flowers, children, food, cooked and uncooked, intertwining the urban jungle and the natural world, yield the cosmic in minuscule detail. Her use of a pastel palette and hazy focus blending fore- and background augments the subtlety of the motifs. Delicate fragments form and dissolve into a kaleidoscope of the quotidian. Only in *Ametsuchi* (2012) did Kawauchi drift to an altogether extraordinary planet.

Kawauchi's "everyday existentialism" has been described as a naïve, amateur, offhand, dilettantish, dream-like, elliptical, fractured, speculative, vernacular, de-aestheticized approach.[6] Her photographs are serene yet disquieting, de-peopled yet full of "mistakes". Technical imperfections come forth. Deficient flashlight, a water-splashed lens, magenta-stained images recur — all of them wounds of procedure.

Imperfection must be defined in relation to history — technological and social, that is, cultural — and the set of conventions that shape a repertoire of "error" in order to advance concrete transformations of error's function and definition. With Kawauchi's, at the same time that the photobook format renders her photos present, her aesthetics conjures presence in the age of digital content. Kawauchi's endeavours have been chiefly analogue as well as contemporary to glitch art, that is, an artistic hacking of sorts that exploits methods to make digital images appear pixelated and thematizes colour blotches or interruptions of figures — a practice for obtaining mutant images. Like many digitally generated works through the manipulation of

[5] See Cohen and Streitberger, 2016.
[6] See for example David Chandler's "Weightless Light" (Kawauchi and Chandler, 2011); Lange, 2010; Loh, 2012; Stremme, 2005; Robertson, 2014.

encoding and compression, Kawauchi's experiments show ways to wake up the latent image, part by chance, part under strict aesthetic control, in her medium of choice.

This roughly sketched present landscape speaks to the post-metaphysical "material turn" of media theory, which has informed media studies progressively since the 1980s (Rautzenberg, 2009). The material turn (also, "performance turn" or, alternatively, "aistheticization") can be justifiably read as a cultural reaction to the promotion of radical absence that an iconophobic tradition has promoted, such as the simulation theory put forth by Jean Baudrillard. Palpable is the love for images in recent *aisthetic* theory, as in the image-making practices including blemishes that reveal material processes while also encouraging viewers to interact with images.

Graphic avatars of imperfection are pregnant with time. They are laden with anteriority and futurity. They evince their own having been made and anticipate their own degradation. When Kawauchi does not get rid of the trace that signals the moment of picture-taking, the temporary status of the image gets uncovered at once. Moreover, imperfections arouse a communion of feelings in the viewer's present. David Freedberg would say that we experience an "embodied simulation" that kindles empathy, if we can extrapolate the artist's physical gesture in the modulations of paint and sculpt material to photographic images, and spark the feels-*as-if* (Freedberg and Gallese, 2007).

Errors, rather than the infallible photographer, evoke a presence that touches us. We see a round shoulder occupying the right-hand corner of the dysphoric arena as the bullfighting team drags out the bull. "I don't consider any shot a mistake", Kawauchi tells us (Ishida, 2012: 126). Photography will not, at any given point, be perfect. Perfection promotes distance, reverence, awe. To the extent that we are conscious of the form in a work of art, we become somewhat detached. Aberration, on the contrary, kindles unpostponed emotional involvement. A trembling pulse can move us; an unevenly lit night shot, too. We let down our guard in the face of the magenta-stained image of the waterfalls. Kawauchi's photos embrace the accident, and we embrace them.

Roland Barthes employed similar Brechtian terms to find fault with the "overconstructedness" of horror presented in "Shock Photos", an essay collected in his 1957 *Mythologies*. The gruesome pictures of political realities on display at Orsay Gallery earned Barthes' distancing disapproval because, "the photographer has left us nothing" but "synthetic nourishment" thanks to "the perfect legibility of the scene":

> Now, none of these photographs, all too skillful, touches us. This is because, as we look at them, we are in each case dispossessed of our judgment; someone has shuddered for us, reflected for us, judged for us; the photographer has left us nothing — except a simple right of intellectual acquiescence: we are linked to these images only by a technical interest; overindicated by the artist himself, for us they have no history, we can no longer *invent* our own reception of this synthetic nourishment, already perfectly assimilated by its creator.[7] (Barthes, 1997: 71)

[7] Cf. Barthes, 2005: 98: "Or, aucune de ces photographies, trop habiles, ne nous atteint. C'est qu'en face d'elles, nous sommes chaque fois dépossédés de notre jugement: on a frémi pour nous, on a réfléchi pour nous, on a jugé pour nous; le photographe ne nous a rien laissé — qu'un simple droit d'acquiescement intellectuel: nous ne sommes liés à ces images que par un intérêt technique; chargées de surindication par

Very much in contrast to these fraudulent "shock photos", Kawauchi will leave us plenty to invent upon reception. Her photographs, far from "overindicated", engage with an elliptical visibility that calls for participant viewing. Less sensory detail requires more perceptive completion. Contemplate, for instance, the shattered glass from the *AILA* (2004) series turn magically back into the coffeemaker as our mind's eye intervenes in the reconstruction.[8] The object is evoked, not shown. Non-linearity takes the form of an indirectly constituted object, at once given and withheld.

With such an indirect object, the intensity is cognitive rather than perceptual. Kawauchi lulls us with the art of searching. The instance of reception is decisive for her photography, as if the viewer added the finishing touches to the picture. The viewer must, however, not conceive such finishing as final. Each context grants renewal. The insignificant form returns and recharges in tireless combinations. The elliptical and insignificant quality itself is key for negotiating both signification and referent. Oblique angles, flattened perspective, overflows of striated morphology, and curious little bits magnify with their imprecision the fact that no definition, a specific image even less, could determine Kawauchi's work. Her unsutured images precede and follow as seamlessly as the myriad colours that diamonds cast also in her book's pages. Its title, *Illuminance* (a term referring to the amount of luminous flux per unit area), is perhaps more scientific but less fitting than the "rainbow-like play of lustrous colours" (Ishida, 2012: 126) of *iridescence* when it comes to Kawauchi's work.

Kawauchi's images are gently disorienting. They are at the same time transparent and opaque. Just as syntax is montage in lingo, "appresentation" is the phenomenological equivalent of connotation.[9] The phenomenon of grasping something over and above what is perceived is defined with the name of "appresentation" in Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations* as the co-presenting not actually given yet produced in perception. As appresentation presupposes a core of presentation, it is a co-presence that is in the spatial field, which Markus Rautzenberg cleverly analogized to connotation. Denotation is the first meaning of a thing, what jumps to one's face, and connotation its inseparable decanting, the meaning at the corner of the eye. Just as connotation and denotation are indivisible aspects of a thing's meaning, every perception simultaneously presents and appresents.

Kawauchi is the doyenne of appresentation. Her artfulness is the antipode of overconstructedness; it is charged by the laconic, implicit semantics of connotation. Kawauchi's strategy exploits and strips bare the mechanics of signification or, which

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l'artiste lui-même, elles n'ont pour nous aucune histoire, nous ne pouvons plus inventer notre propre accueil à cette nourriture synthétique, déjà parfaitement assimilé par son créateur".

[8] Excerpts from *AILA* (Kawauchi, 2004), including the image in question, can be found on the artist's website < http://rinkokawauchi.com/en/works/253/> (accessed 20 August 2022).

[9] I am indebted to Markus Rautzenberg for his insights in many writings and his input on an early version of this article presented at "Visual Noise: Wandering Artefacts and Aberrant Images" conference at the ICI Berlin, 17 June 2016, organized by Clara Masnatta, in collaboration with Banu Karaca and James Burton <https://doi.org/10.25620/e160617>. The analogy and reference to appresentation is from Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen* as quoted by Markus Rautzenberg (2014: 351).

is the same, perception. A figure needs a ground, that is, the immediately surrounding space that frames it and enables the very act of perception. Contexts help decode and co-produce meaning. This is the minimalist approach that flourishes along Kawauchi's parallel reframing. For shades of meaning, Kawauchi is an entire sentimental education.

Over and over, Kawauchi calls forth the hidden sides of a thing that we may not sensuously perceive, but of which we are aware. Her photos pulse between the unseen and the visible, with a non-linear beat. They teach us at once: the stuff that images are made of is not visual. It is temporality that enables the non-manifestation of the image (soon-to-be-unfolded) and the tacit presence insisting throughout Kawauchi's work.

Selections from Kawauchi's portfolio get mixed and remixed in a number of projects. While imperfection spins in the shape of impermanence and recurrence, an image's return seems always fresh and the image renewed thanks to the elliptical visibility at play in the photographic sequences of her books. On the whole, it feels that it is through the choreography of many iterations and associations that we get to uncover things, as we see the varying images dancing on the page. One particular example is the variation on the pincushion full of colourful pins that links *Cui Cui* (2005a), Kawauchi's take on the family album, with *Semear* (2007). Originally commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo, *Semear* was to portray the local community of Nikkei immigrants. The pincushion, spotted with hindsight, makes us feel that we are looking at extended family in this later project. Subliminal patterns of such kind (or kin) abound.

In Kawauchi's ceaseless work-in-progress, we never know where the images are going. More often than not, her images do not show where they are coming from. "Every time I make a book, I leave out many elements that indicate a certain location", she clarifies (Ishida, 2012: 125). A camera can be a geodesic instrument, a compass of sorts; Kawauchi's camera is a magnetic machine at times at the threshold of discernibility. Against all photogrammetry, it produces topographies of sensibility by downplaying the charting impulse in the oscillation of the two poles of the medium, *semioisis* and *aisthesis*.

In his book on "Japan", *L'Empire des signes* [The Empire of Signs], Roland Barthes showed that the opacity of signifiers of the system he called "Japan", in other words, a loss in mediatic transparency entailed a gain in *aisthetic* significance. Kawauchi's body of photography with wounds of procedure gives way to materiality with an emphasis on *aisthesis* that is, too, in detriment of the documentary: not "This was X" but rather "Look at this!" Yet the pointing-at is done not with the index but with the little finger. She usually employs a 6x6 medium-format Rolleiflex that gives the child-like perspective: one can typically see the floor in the lower part of the frame. From the perspective of the adult eye, from higher up, this generates a sense of incompleteness, and the mind's eye steps into the breech.

While not really documentary, Kawauchi's style is perhaps in fact diaristic, all snap annotations. If narration is time in textual dress, her work is indeed lyrical, but not elegiac, and never epic. What best describes Kawauchi's art is the interplay of polarities: unhackneyed clichés, all given at once withheld, serene yet disquieting, prosaic poetics, intimate and domestic but also worldly and universal. As her work

oscillates between poles (including, but not limited to *aisthesis* and *semiosis*), we are unable to pin it down. But we come to be certain about the given fragility of a state. Nowhere are these dynamics and the surge of materiality more visible than in her engagement with colour.

The rainbow-likeness describing the shape-shifting iridescence of her work can be misleading. On the one hand, Kawauchi's photography is properly atmospheric. We are at times genuinely immersed in her luminous chromatic expanse. An environmental concept as *Stimmung* — "the relationship we entertain with our environment" for Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2014: xi) — chimes with this photography of enveloping feelings. A subtle presence is imparted in the multi-sensorial chromatics of this damp photography full of dense, evaporating light. Images conjure an estrangement comparable to observing life through the glass of an aquarium. It puts us in a mood, like "the lightest touch that occurs when the material world surrounding us affects the surface of our bodies" that Gumbrecht specified for *Stimmung* (Gumbrecht, 2014: x).

On the other hand, Kawauchi's palette is restricted to aquamarine greens, blues, maroons, and thoroughly white-splashed. The waxy pastel quality of her pictures produces a coated proximity that allows us to penetrate things with our gaze but also keeps us a coat away from them. Her palette, for Kawauchi, is a way of seeing the world as "half awake and half asleep" (Ishida, 2012: 127). But is the world that we see opaque or semi-transparent?

Kawauchi's pictures are bright with opacity. A reference to Goethe's theory of colours is in order. Not only because Goethe's *Farbenlehre*, his colour study, is based on perception and engages whole-heartedly with questions of psychology and sensitivity (to him we owe the confirmation that there is no *Bild* without *Gestaltung*, no picture without consciousness). Above all, we must refer to Goethe because his notion of white is not the absence of colour, but a pure drop of opaque transparency. *To wit*, "[t]he highest turbidity is white, the simplest, brightest, first, opaque occupation of space" ("Die vollendete Trübe ist das Weiße, die gleichgültigste, hellste, erste, undurchsichtige Raumerfüllung" (Goethe, 1989: 67).

A certain thickness is congenital in whiteness. Thickness slows down the reading of the image; it is troubling. Sometimes shades of white can take over, like the picture of the little albino spider against the corrugated plaster. Other times, white hues can bring dulcification to the riot of colour of a carnival scene. Very often, Kawauchi achieves the pastel quality of her pictures by aiming the lens directly at light sources. But there is more to her white expanses than overexposure. Floods of light bring to her images an "occupation of space" in particular through the recurring reflections. Reflections are the contagion of two bodies; they give us a being-in-space. The immediate inscription in space that these reflections offer is purposely turned away from the recognizable. White, again, is for *aisthesis*.

More often than glass, water appears as Kawauchi's chosen reflective medium. Perhaps because, as everyone knows, meditation and water are wedded forever, the aquatic medium percolates effortlessly into Kawauchi's "everyday existentialism". The *Search for the Sun* (2015) series brings aquatic and photographic media nicely

together.[10] In this series, shot in Austria, Kawauchi's cerulean palette goes glacier; her aquamarine turns to ice. The crystal blue of this most controlled palette gives the impression of containing natural history, something to be treasured like the moth fossilized in amber.

Reflections emphasize the fact that the image is an illusion that is embedded in a physical object. This also brings us to the realization that photographing involves physical presences in the world. Incidentally, Kawauchi has expressed her preference for arranging her exhibitions as collaborating with space, for the "wall to look like a large reflection of light" (Ishida, 2012: 127). Augmenting, in this way, the illusion integral to images suggests that the physicality of images is perhaps not best deployed in art shows. It is for sure tangible in the vernacular understanding of photography.

No other work of Kawauchi's is closer to the vernacular tradition than *Cui Cui* (2015), which represents 13 years of day-to-day living picture-taking. *Cui Cui* is a variation on the family album narrative, produced as a slide show and in book form. Because the former is between the banal familial and avant-garde mode of presentation, the projected images combine the vernacular with the conceptual more poignantly. As the slides follow one another against electro-acoustic accompaniment intermixed with chirping (*cui-cui* is an onomatopoeitic French word for the sound of birds), flashing first white and leaving a *turbidus* after-image in our retina, we slowly come to realize that the image carrousel focuses on Kawauchi's own family.

The grandparents are protagonists in this project. The family gets together for dinner, the grandmother cooks in the kitchen, harvests vegetables in the garden, a pregnant woman's belly, scenes of a marriage, the funeral procession, the grandfather reappears, breastfeeding close-up, and so on. Not only do we get here the vernacular photo par excellence — the wedding picture — together with the impression that culinary shots (behold every kidney bean shining back at us like flash-lit eyes) have been part of photodemotics in Japan long before Instagram made food a universal genre. We also come to appreciate photography as a vital part of the domestic architecture; a picture we flipped by can casually appear framed in a room. A photograph is a physical presence in the world. As image-object, it invites physical as well as visual engagement.

Kawauchi's variation on the family album articulates an ecology of images that is in open conversation with how we experience photography as a social and cultural phenomenon. Or, which is the same, photography as snapshots. The simplicity of the composition of snapshots encodes their highly conventional character and reveals that they are artefacts for memory and affect. Snapshots, according to Catherine Zuromskis, are defined by aesthetic simplicity and a certain rhetoric of authenticity; the snapshot's truth is the truth of feelings (Zuromskis, 2013). A snapshot image is typically drained of its meaning the minute it is contemplated outside its personal frame of reference, Zuromskis remarked, for this move neutralizes the affective charge that defines it next to the simplicity of

[10] The *Search for the Sun* series was shot for the exhibition *Rinko Kawauchi Illuminance* (20 March to 15 July 2015 at Kunst Haus Wien, Austria). Cf. the artist's website <http://rinkokawauchi.com/en/works/126/> (accessed 20 August 2021).

composition. The snapshot truth-content gets expanded to all images in Kawauchi's serial framework. The genre's constitutive affective charge is rooted in the physicality of the photograph, itself a memory device.

Perhaps the greatest insight into these vernacular workings is the framed photograph of Kawauchi's grandfather carried high by the mourning procession. We are seeing but the ancient talisman of sacred presence as fetishized gadget, the life-like effigy of a dead man in the age of technical reproducibility. This photo will equally grace his tomb, or hold a place of honour in an homage dinner; it is a portable monument.

Snapshots and *Cui Cui* alike feed on authenticity and affect, yet the latter engages in such rhetoric with a distance. Empathy is mediated through the constructed presentation of a cyclical narrative far removed from linear temporality. The challenge of continuing after we see the grandfather's corpse and funeral is well sustained through the remaining one-third of the photo-narrative. As the old man reappears, we realize these are rebirths, not resuscitations. *Cui Cui* is really a book on the season-like cycle of birth, growth, death, and the rituals that make up life. The naive immediacy with the personal of the amateur dissolves with the universal.

It is true that documenting and constructing go hand in hand in the snapshooting tradition. Yet Kawauchi's emphasis is on the constructing by way of documenting. Amateur photography and Kawauchi's snaps' paths part as they pave their ways. While Kawauchi's *aisthethic* errors were in detriment of the documentary, the frequent technical imperfections in snapshots testify to their documentary concerns irrespective of (in the modernist sense) the aesthetic, against which amateur aberrations stand. Kawauchi's imagination stands in a third place that is neither the deskilled vernacular nor the aesthetics of high modernism. Her work is at odds with the art paradigm that Barthes upheld before the shock photos, in spite of the opportune comparison. As Ariella Azoulay pointed out, behind Barthes's critique stood an idea of art coterminous with the new (Azoullay, 2008:163-64). Barthes was unable to shudder before the shock photos because the artist (really any other one) had done this before him. Barthes' cool leaked over aesthetics in the wider sense, that is, perception, sensation, (not) feeling again a feeling that is not new. Against resolution and for reiteration, Kawauchi's work is, in this respect, as well, a sentimental education.

If snapshots are fundamentally true, their truth got reverse-engineered with a particular project of Kawauchi. Commissioned by the Museum of Contemporary Art of Kumamoto, *The River Embraced Me* (2016) introduced engineering between word and image to re-turn to the community present in vernacular photography. Yet the return was not so manifest. *The River Embraced Me* is an uncannily de-peopled representation of community. Their exposure is done in written words, not fixed in images. Words and the logic of performance compounded the programme of this tellingly conceptual work giving precedence to process over product.

For the project, the community of Kumamoto was called upon to submit their stories and memories of a place in the region, indicating the corresponding location. Thirty-one memory stories were selected, that is, the best-written ones were chosen, and Kawauchi set off to the places indicated in these stories to make photographs in a shooting "comparable to a pilgrimage", as curator Haruko Tomisawa put it

(Kawauchi, 2016). She pressed the shutter release when something, anything really, from a story resonated in her in the place (reportedly, references to weather, the seasons, and time abounded). Kawauchi was a distant medium. In addition, Kawauchi produced a poem, an *exquisite corps* of sorts, by extracting lines from each story. One became the title of the project, "the river embraced me". At the exhibition, Kawauchi's photographs and the extracted texts were shown side by side, under strict aesthetic control. Also on display were the six sample stories that the Museum made as model for the participation call.

Now, nothing of the process that I am describing is visible in the photographs. To grasp that *The River Embraced Me* is a work of process over product one must read the explanatory text that comes as booklet insert or *separata* with the photobook. Distance gets physically inscribed in the book with this caesura. In fact, words and images here appeared coupled and divorced to a varying extent. While the book kept the site-specific character, the exhibition did not, and included a selection of Kawauchi's previous, more scattered projects (*Utatane*, *Illuminance*, and *Ametsuchi*). The exhibited images were likewise sequenced in an order different than in the book variant.

Just as the images in *Cui Cui* were far from being snapshots on their own vernacular terms, the photographs of *The River Embraced Me* were, too. The pictures encompass interpersonal intimacies and communities in an unconventional way; they are "someone's memory place". The stress falls not on the proximal, but the distant. At the centre lies an absence that is at odds with the sacred presence that came to appear in her earlier project. Still, these images are pregnant with emotions, memories, and the words that conveyed them before mutating like butterflies at the photographer's hands. *The River Embraced Me* cultivates the intensity of the indirect object — in the shape of an ekphrasis in reverse.

But the reversal was not straightforward, or, rather, the substance was not stable and then merely evaporated and condensed. The solicited memory text was a script that eventually was performed in "visiting someone's place". The artist retraced movements, thoughts. Her steps' echo in the landscape's architecture of remembrance unleashed the emotions that the memories had recorded. Mimicry and re-enactment mechanics came in play together with involuntary memory in a distorted "madeleine effect". Reverberation triggered Kawauchi's own memories; these partially overlapped the recalled fragments, and so — reportedly, at least in the photographer's inner chamber— appeared the images doubly exposed.

This ambitious search was not for a definite kind of temporality, but for time itself: "Rivers can be a metaphor for time itself, and I want the exhibition to be a place to feel the flow of time", said Kawauchi (Kawauchi, 2016).The convertibility of past memories into the present of re-enactment, and the certain future drift of these photographs in works to come anchored *The River Embraced Me* far away from the documentary and its preterite.

All along the transmutation *The River Embraced Me* capitalizes on the in-between. It is between one's memory and someone else's capturing, between text and image, that is, between media, and between the lines of the text, in the interlinear and the interstitial. The call for room to recall and air to imagine is not new to this project. Now we breathed the air in between the lines of the multivocal poem; we

saw the image and the space between the image and its text on the wall. The potency of Kawauchi's photobooks lies in the flipping, between the pages, and in the fringes of images. *The River Embraced Me* thrives in this gap and makes, once again, imperfection photography's finest fire.

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"A dream, dictating its own course"

On Ralph Gibson's Photobook Trilogy, 1970-1974

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ABSTRACT:

This paper scrutinizes American photographer Ralph Gibson's photobook trilogy published by his own company Lustrum Press: *The Somnambulist* (1970), *Déjà-vu* (1973), and *Days at Sea* (1974). The success of the trilogy verified a sizable market for highly personal photobooks, which would become a defining trend in contemporary art photography. Focusing on the structure of visual signification in each volume, the paper performs for the first time a close analysis of Gibson's sequencing method materialized in the book form. The inner logic of each publication is further elucidated in relation to the major sources of reference in 20th-century art, photography, and literature, such as the fictions of Jorge Luis Borges, the cloud photographs of Alfred Stieglitz, and the *Nouveau Roman* of Marguerite Duras and Alain Robbe-Grillet. The paper argues that sequencing was an epistemological strategy for Gibson to prioritize arbitrary relations between two neighboring pictures, without impairing each photograph's truth claim to the perceptible reality. This was the photographer's tactic to reconcile the purported objectivity of the camera image and the subjective propensity for narrative and imagination in his photobooks. Gibson's avoidance of heavy-handed manipulation and shocking subject matter led his work to the "surrealism of the perception", which can be situated in the tradition of Surrealist photography advocated by André Bazin and Brassaï.

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RESUMO:

Este artigo oferece uma análise da trilogia de livros de fotografia do fotógrafo americano Ralph Gibson, publicada pela sua própria editora Lustrum Press, e composta por *The Somnambulist* (1970), *Déjà-vu* (1973) e *Days at Sea* (1974). O sucesso da trilogia tornou visível um mercado considerável para livros de fotografia altamente pessoais, no que viria a transformar-se uma tendência na fotografia artística contemporânea. Iluminando a estrutura de significação visual de cada volume, este artigo oferece, pela primeira vez, uma análise aproximada do método de sequenciação aplicado por Gibson à forma do livro. A lógica interna de cada publicação é, também, informada por aproximações a referências importantes dos domínios da arte, da fotografia e da literatura do século XX, como, por exemplo, as ficções de Jorge Luis Borges, as fotografias de nuvens de Alfred Stieglitz, e o *Nouveau Roman* de Marguerite Duras e Alain Robbe-Grillet. Este artigo argumenta que a sequenciação de imagens foi uma estratégia epistemológica usada por Gibson para dar prioridade a relações arbitrárias entre duas imagens vizinhas, sem pôr em causa a fidelidade de cada fotografia à verdade do real perceptível. Ao empregar esta táctica, o fotógrafo conciliava, nos seus livros, a objectividade da imagem com uma propensão subjectiva para a narrativa e a imaginação. A recusa da manipulação ostensiva e de assuntos chocantes conduziu o seu trabalho a um "surrealismo da percepção", que é possível situar na tradição da fotografia surrealista preconizada por André Bazin ou Brassaï.

KEYWORDS:

Alfred Stieglitz; Jorge Luis Borges; Lustrum Press; nouveau roman; photobook; Ralph Gibson; surrealism

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

Alfred Stieglitz; Jorge Luis Borges; livro de fotografia; Lustrum Press; nouveau roman; Ralph Gibson; surrealismo

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During the first half of the 1970s, American photographer Ralph Gibson (b. 1939) completed three photobooks — *The Somnambulist* (1970), *Déjà-vu* (1973), and *Days at Sea* (1974) — all of which were published by his own publishing company, Lustrum Press, established in 1970 at 331 West Broadway in New York City. The three books have often been called the "black trilogy," a moniker derived from the black covers and quarto size (approximately 12.0 x 8.5 x 0.3 inches). It was with this trilogy that Gibson embarked on a career-long search for "syntax" proper to the photographic image, which in turn contributed to his meteoric rise to a spokesperson for self-publishing in contemporary American photography (Deschin, 1972: 32).[1] By 1973, Lustrum Press would establish its name as an influential independent publisher of contemporary photobooks.[2] The Lustrum titles were more venturesome than the monographic collections produced by Aperture Foundation, and more subjective and personal than the exhibition catalogs from the Photography Department at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (Parr and Badger, 2004: 215–220; 2006: 12). In 1971, David Vestal wrote: "Lustrum Press is to the conventional photo press what the *Salon des Indépendents* was to the Paris Salon in early-twentieth-century painting" (Vestal, 1971: BR42).

Gibson was one of the American photographers who arranged multiple photographs in sequential order beginning in the late 1960s. These practitioners, including Duane Michals, Stephen Shore, and Nathan Lyons, butted against the idea of singularity that undergirded the fetish of final prints in the art market and museum collections, on the one hand, and the hunt for the "decisive moment" by practitioners, both documentary and artistic, on the other.[3] Expanding the potentials of sequencing explored by their immediate predecessor Minor White, they presented photographs in a structure that allowed "one image to follow another by an order of succession or arrangement which is not apparently thematic or systematic" (Lyons, 2012: 199). The lack of predictable rules in organization distinguished these 1970s photographers from their contemporary artists who utilized photographic series for the systematic aesthetics of Conceptual Art, such as Ed Ruscha, Sol LeWitt, and Douglas Huebler.[4]

The rediscovery of the sequential form proved a boon for narrative impulses in 1970s photography, which undermined the modernist campaign for the specificity of

[1] In linguistics, syntax refers to the order in which words and morphemes are arranged to form larger units of signification, such as phrases and sentences. My use of syntax remains mainly metaphorical in this paper, acknowledging Ralph Gibson's own adaptation of the term in his book *Syntax* (1983) and Gilles Mora's examination of the syntactic structures in Gibson's sequencing in 2017. That said, the legitimacy of this analogy between photography and language awaits a rigorous scrutiny in a future project, along the influences of structuralism and poststructuralism in a much larger arena of art and visual culture from the 1950s to the 1990s. I thank an anonymous reviewer for the insightful comment on this matter.

[2] Immediately after *The Somnambulist,* Lustrum Press published *Tulsa* by Larry Clark, *A Loud Song* by Daniel Seymour, and *Portugal* by Neal Slavin in 1971. The following year, the American edition of Robert Frank's *The Lines of My Hand* was edited by Gibson and released by Lustrum Press.

[3] The idea of the "decisive moment" was originally coined by Henri Cartier-Bresson in his publication *The Decisive Moment* (1952).

[4] The term "sequence" has frequently been used interchangeably with series, set, and suite. Its definition is an important yet complicated matter, which is beside the point of this paper. Consult my first book in preparation, preliminarily titled *New Wave of American Photography: The Rise of Photographic Sequence in the United States and France, 1968–1989*.

photography as a visual medium. According to the influential distinction between poetry and painting by the eighteenth-century art critic Gotthold Lessing, the visual and plastic image is naturally devoid of a temporal dimension, which is reserved exclusively for the chronological and sequential experience of literature (Mitchell, 1986: 95–115). In this respect, a transmedial intent inheres in the act of joining many pictures in a row. Gibson's early sequences conveyed a strong literary appeal, in that they were lengthy — often exceeding forty photographs — and always published as books. In fact, Gibson's sequence work received the first major exposure in October 1970 when the trilingual Swiss magazine *Camera* devoted a special issue to the theme "Photography as a Literary Art". There, the magazine's editor Allan Porter compared Ernst Haas's photographs to poem, Eikoh Hosoe's to novel, Burk Uzzle's to essay, and finally, Gibson's to prose. In his introduction, Porter called attention to the psychological drama that transformed Gibson's sequence into a journey to subconsciousness or fantasy equivalent to Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way* (Porter, 1970: 48).

The literary penchant for fantasy, presciently identified by Porter, is also central to my interpretation of Gibson's trilogy in this paper. This is a characteristic, as I will show, originating from Gibson's interest in such artistic movements as Surrealism, Magical Realism, the *Nouveau Roman*, and the *Nouvelle Vague*. What is overlooked by Porter, however, is the deliberate mechanism of Gibson's sequencing, which enables his photographs to conjure up the experience of the imaginary without ever forcing them to stop being photographs *per se*. In other words, Gibson's photographs remain straight without being doctored, but they, when strung together, offer an experience of the otherworldly, far from shoring up the empirical reality. "Otherworldly" is an apt term to describe Gibson's work in this regard, because his pictures mirror the physical world in a reliable manner, only to parlay their objectivity into suggesting a world other than this one.[5] This separates Gibson from his American contemporaries, including Michals, Leslie Krims, Arthur Tress, and Jerry Uelsmann, whose photographs garnered recognition between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s for evoking dreams, fantasy, and the unconscious. Unlike them, Gibson eschewed the "heavy-handed" distortion of the medium's representational transparency, such as motion blur, multiple exposure, negative sandwiching, and the use of props, make-up, and prosthetics.

It is my argument that, for Gibson, sequencing was an epistemological strategy to prioritize immediate and arbitrary relations between neighboring pictures, without completely forfeiting the axiomatic message of an otherwise standalone photograph, i.e., its status as a truthful record of the perceptible reality. In his sequences, allusive yet consistent impressions suggest fictitious storylines, which come in conflict with, but do not stamp out, the habitual search for a photograph's indexical truth. The seemingly incommensurable modes of looking coexist in Gibson's sequences, thanks to the spatiotemporal continuum unique to the book form. The viewer of a photobook is at once inevitably bound by the succession of pages, and free to examine one page as long and often as needed. The book, following Hubert Damisch, is "a double-entry dispositif" that works "both in diachrony (the

[5] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to the significance of the word.

succession of pages) and in synchrony (their reunion as a single ensemble that can be opened at whatever page)" (Damisch, 2001: 130). This paper aims to clarify such an idiosyncratic inner logic of the photobook through the example of Gibson's trilogy. In the rest of the paper, I will closely analyze the visual and narrative structures of *The Somnambulist*, *Déjà-Vu*, and *Days at Sea*.

The Somnambulist and the Self-referentiality of Borges's Fiction

The Somnambulist was published in December 1970 as the inaugural title of Lustrum Press in an edition of 3,000 softbound copies with glossy black covers (priced at $4.00). The book consisted of forty-eight black and white photographs individually printed on each page without captions or page numbers. *The Somnambulist* does not follow a smooth line of development from cover to cover. Rather, the book establishes a basic unit of visual communication in every double-page spread, which puts forward a face-to-face dialogue between a pair of photographs. Each spread connects with following pages through the leitmotifs of cryptic forms and items, rather than a recurring cast of models or the causality of events. Reviewing *The Somnambulist*, critic A.D. Coleman wrote in 1971: "I'd call it a narrative except that the plot has little to do with the continuity of events and much to do with symbolic evolution and subconscious moods" (1973: 16).

Figure 1. A double-page spread in Ralph Gibson, *The Somnambulist* (1970).

One of the spreads from *The Somnambulist*, for example, puts together two interior shots featuring a same door (fig. 1). On the right page, the door is photographed from a hallway, as it is ajar into a room. A hand is placed in midair near the doorknob, while the rest of the body is hidden in the room. On the left page,

the other photograph portrays the room from inside, showing the same door wide open in the background and a blurred person sitting in a couch near the camera with one hand erected from the armrest. The pairing insinuates the photographer's entry into the room upon invitation from the unknown figure. The imagined movement is choreographed from the right page to the left in harmony with Gibson's discovery that "when you opened a book your eye went to the right-hand page first and then back over to the left" (*Ralph Gibson* 6:25–29). In the meantime, other spreads of *The Somnambulist* operate through the conflicts between juxtaposed photographs in lieu of their synthesis. This is exemplified in a spread, where a vertical photograph of a burning beauty parlor appears to the right of a horizontal portrait of a woman, who turns out to be American photographer Mary Ellen Mark (fig. 2). The fire devours the building with such an intensity that the viewer cannot help but recoil from the picture. The woman, in opposition, puts her fingers against the photographer's hand jutting into the photographic frame and, by extension, advances a tactile experience for the viewer. This spread explores two contradictory vectors of perception: repulsive and attractive. In addition, the pair maintains visual communication with the interior shots analyzed above by playing up the subject of hand, which is the most conspicuous visual trope employed in *The Somnambulist*.

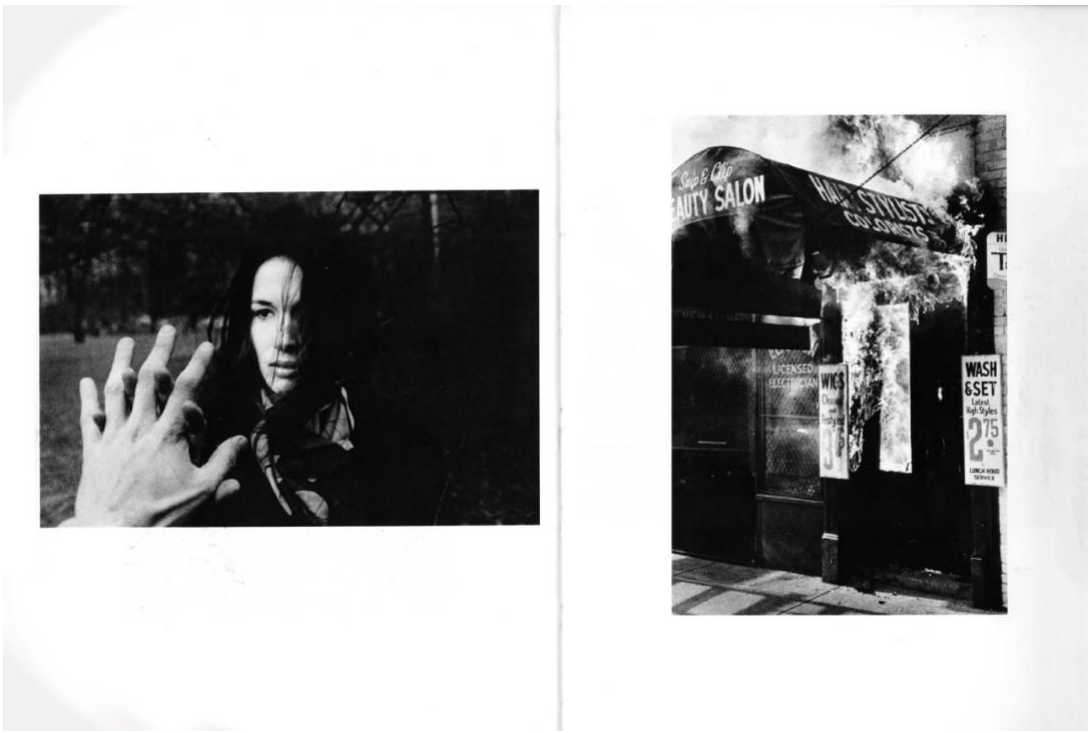


Figure 2. A double-page spread in Ralph Gibson, *The Somnambulist* (1970).

The faltering quality of visual storytelling situates Gibson's photobook somewhere in between the total absence of narrativity in randomly chosen pictures and the tightly woven plots of reportage photo-story standardized by illustrated magazines like *Life* since the 1930s. The denotative information immediately legible in Gibson's photographs does not amount to a close-knit sketch of an event, punctuated with beginning, middle, and end phases. And yet, *The Somnambulist* offers a successive experience of its pages through bookbinding, despite the paucity

of narrational adhesion among the pictures. That said, if one can still classify *The Somnambulist* as a narrative sequence, it is due in the largest measure to a typed letter addressed to the "Gentle Reader" in the second spread:

> A Dream Sequence in which all things are real. Perhaps even more so. While sleeping a dreamer reappears elsewhere on the planet, becoming at least two men. His sleeping dreams provide the substance of that reality while his waking dreams become what he thought was his Life… Called by himself, that other man (The Sleeper) to return to a vaster world of light and greater believability, he accepts without hesitation… Passing from one dimension through another he feels that nothing is left behind, rather always with him in the moment. His life is no more a myth than any other man's… Clarity is all any man seeks, this Somnambulist merely finds his on the Other Side.

The preface lays out Gibson's view of dreams, which he believed to constitute another reality that would manifest itself in a chain of clear perceptions. This is the belief in the "otherworldly," expressed by the photographer in his unpublished journal prior to completing the photobook. There, Gibson recounted a complete abolishment of his identity as a documentary photographer, upon realizing that what was defined as real entirely relied upon one's perspective. In the entry dated September 11, 1968, Gibson wrote that his photographs evolved into a sequence, which continued to "modulate and convolute" like "a dream, dictating its own course" (AG 37:39).

This preface, however, seems incompatible with the journal entries, due to the former's approximation to the literary genre of fiction furnished with a narrator and a protagonist. Whereas the unpublished note takes the form of diary written by "me," the preface to *The Somnambulist* instates the voice of an omniscient narrator, which is a rhetorical device inscribed in a narrative text by the author. Furthermore, the protagonist prompts a magical understanding of the self irrevocably embroiled with its dreaming double. One of the finest illuminations of such an idea can be found in Jorge Louis Borges's short fiction "The Circular Ruins" (1940), which was also the source of the Latin word "lustrum" incorporated in the name of Gibson's publishing house (AG 1:2:1:25).[6] "The Circular Ruins" tells a story of a "magician" who created a man by dreaming him into existence, only to realize that "he too was a mere appearance, dreamt by another" (Borges, 1962: 61). Toward the end of the story, the magician's "son" began his own dreaming of another man, thereby locking up the narrative in an intergenerational loop. The fable culminates in a vertiginous conflation between the two dimensions where a man is a corporeal being, on the one hand, and a mere image, on the other.

[6] In ancient Rome, lustrum meant a ceremonial purification of the entire Roman people after each census was taken every five years. Salvesen discloses that Gibson took the word "lustrum" from Borges's writings, without specifying the exact source. After an expansive rummage through Borges's complete oeuvre, I have discovered that the Latin word appears only in "The Circular Ruins" in its plural form "lustra" (*lustros* in the original Spanish text).

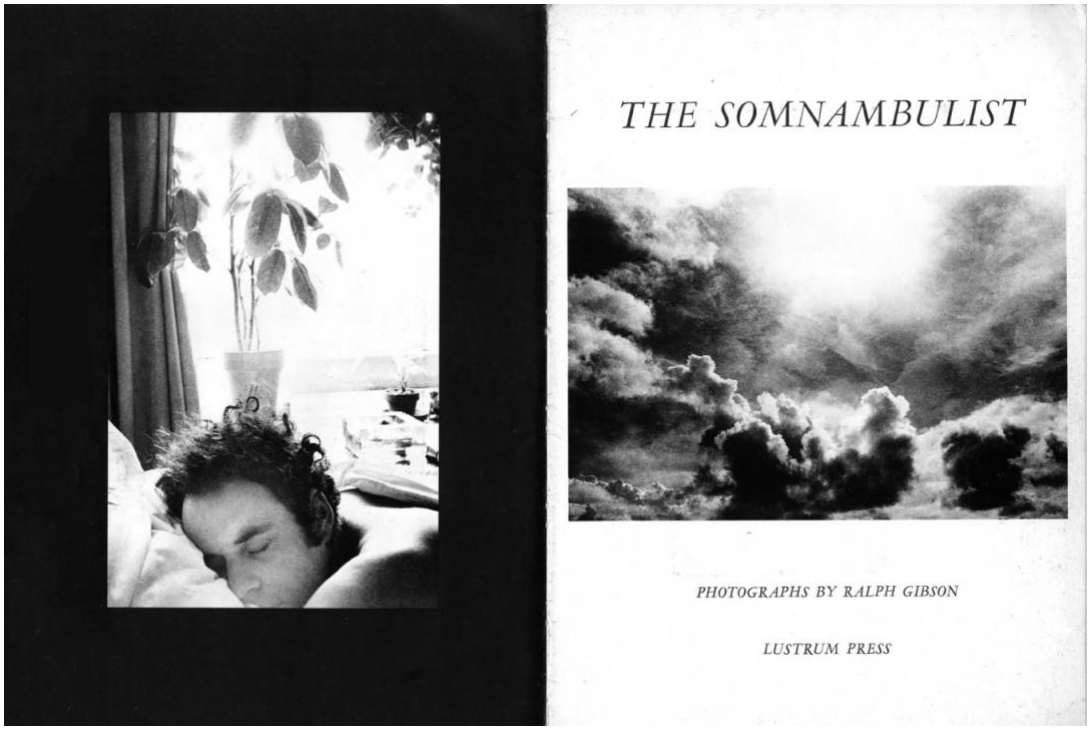


Figure 3. Opening spread of Ralph Gibson, *The Somnambulist* (1970).

Gibson's preface envelops the muddled sequence of *The Somnambulist* in an acute sense of narrational cohesion. In keeping with the story delineated in the preface, the first spread introduces a slumbering protagonist, who will eventually realize his true identity as an illusory being in the last spread. The highly fractured photographic sequence partly analyzed earlier sits in the book's main body, where the protagonist begins sleepwalking across the dream world without an organized itinerary. Interestingly, *The Somnambulist* visualizes all of the above by taking advantage of Gibson's lived identity. First of all, *The Somnambulist* opens with Gibson's somnolent face photographed on the flipside of its front cover (fig. 3). Gibson's unpublished journal entry dated March 2, 1969 attests to the fictional intent of the self-portrait: "I have wanted the front part of my face to be included in the photograph. This would seem to be… the presence of a 'third person' or force… the medium or vector through personality, (a very limiting screen) into deeper areas of Subconscious, dreamlike worlds" (AG 37:39). In Gibson's own words, his face becomes a window to the subliminal depth of an invented character, far from corroborating the photographer's own existence. And then, throughout the main body of *The Somnambulist*, the protagonist's agency is dramatically staged by the anthropomorphized gaze of the camera. Here, Gibson's hands frequently invade the photographic frame and interact with the subjects photographed, just like in the aforementioned picture of Mark. This first-person viewpoint borrowed from Cinema Vérité enables Gibson's photographs to display the fictive eyesight of the somnambulist wandering around the dream world (Gibson, 2006: 23). Finally in the closing photograph of *The Somnambulist*, the sleepwalker witnesses the emergence of a mysterious being, whose hands arise from the dark water and grab the bow of a rowboat (fig. 4). The same photograph is mounted on the front cover of the book (fig.

5), which in turn leads to Gibson's face presented as the protagonist on the flipside. The boat photograph marries the volume's end to its beginning, thereby transforming *The Somnambulist* into a recursive sequence. In that reiterative structure, the protagonist is identified anew as an illusory being born in the dream world.

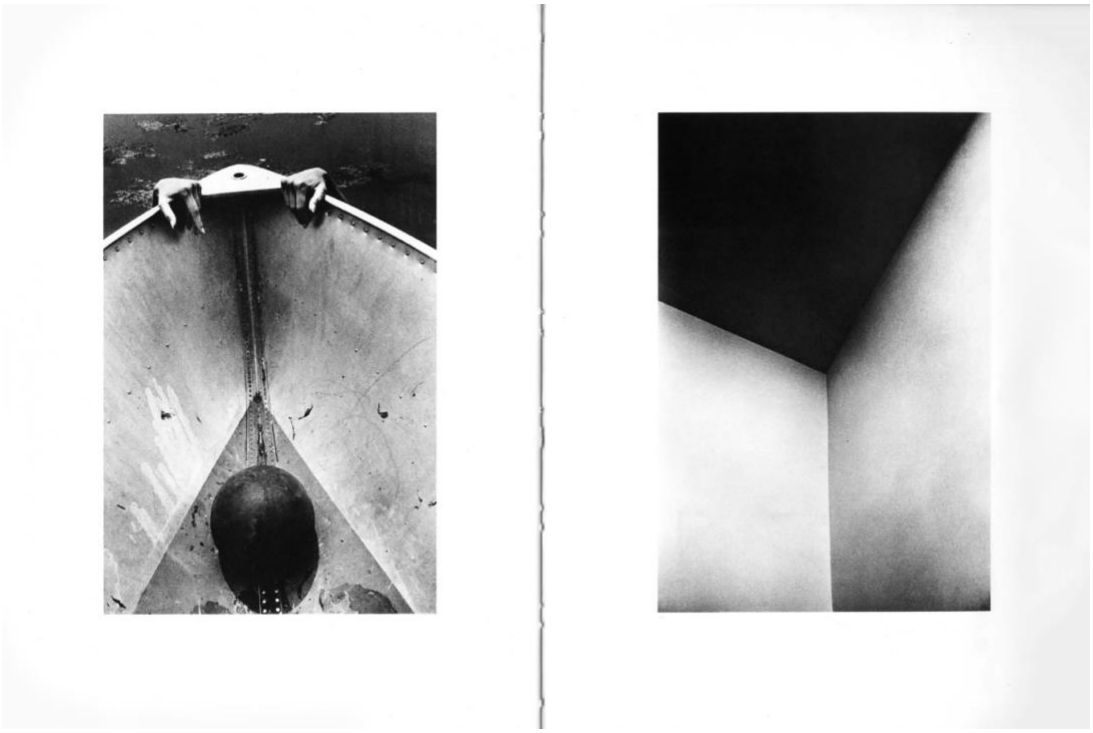
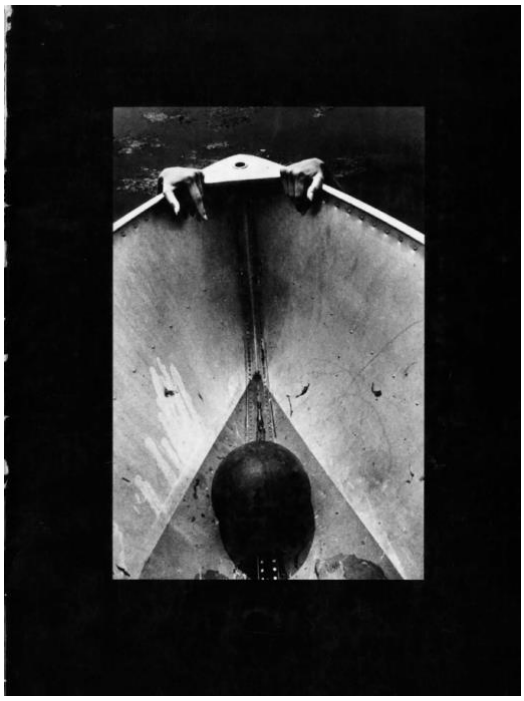


Figure 4. Closing spread of Ralph Gibson, *The Somnambulist* (1970).
Figure 5. Front cover of Ralph Gibson, *The Somnambulist* (1970).



It is paramount to note that the circular organization enfolds *The Somnambulist* in a self-confined phantasmagoria. When viewed repeatedly, the book

coils its narrative sequence inward, referencing its own unfolding: the sleeper walks into the dream world, where he watches the birth of his new self, who then embarks on his own somnambulism and so on. There is no place for the external reality in this labyrinthine involution of *mise en abyme*. Although *The Somnambulist* exploits Gibson's face, his hands, and his eyesight that spawned the photographs, these tokens of his existence do not drag the external world into the photobook's meaning making. Instead, they give life to the sleepwalker inhabiting the photobook, which nestles in its fictional reality so self-sufficiently that it barely turns to the outer world for an endorsement of its narrative. This epitomizes the self-referential architecture prototypical of the Borgesian literature, which can be summed up as a "representation" pushed to the extreme that it becomes coterminous to its "object" in a bid to efface "all remaining traces of reference, or of any externality," according to Frederick Jameson (1984: 197). In like manner, *The Somnambulist* renders the referential reality auxiliary or even superfluous to its interpretation.[7] In 1975, Gibson remarked on the autonomy of *The Somnambulist* that surpasses its creator and his world: "As a work, it seems to have a great deal of its own presence, it lives its own life that way. It doesn't have anything to do with me now, that's what's so amazing about books" (Gibson, 1979: 60).

Déjà-Vu, the "Already Seen," and Visual Analogy

Déjà-Vu, the second volume of Gibson's trilogy, looks almost identical to its predecessor from the outside. Its back cover carries an impish photograph of Gibson wearing a top hat, which reminds of the dreaming magician in Borges's "The Circular Ruins" and, in so doing, moors *Déjà-Vu* to the importance of fictional reality successfully established in *The Somnambulist*. *Déjà-Vu* also emulates, if perfunctorily, the previous volume's circular structure by repeating its title three times at the inception and conclusion of its main body, plus on the front cover. However, the differences between the two books outweigh their affinities. Most prominently, *Déjà-Vu* does not have a lengthy text like Gibson's preface to *The Somnambulist*. Consequently, *Déjà-Vu* also lacks such literary contraptions as a narrator or a protagonist, whose third-person voice or first-person viewpoint were indispensable for the viewer's empathic investment in *The Somnambulist*. *Déjà-Vu* envisions a different mode of cohesion solely based on the visual rapports between photographs at the expense of the somewhat didactic continuity bolstered by written words.

[7] In *The Somnambulist*, a sentence inserted under the publication information explicitly cites Borges's "The Aleph" (1945): "Aleph is a point in space where all points coincide." In "The Aleph," which is exemplary of Borges's self-enclosed writing style, a narrator also named "Borges" describes a small sphere that contains the entire universe, including "the earth and in the earth the Aleph and in the Aleph the earth" (Borges, 1970: 14).

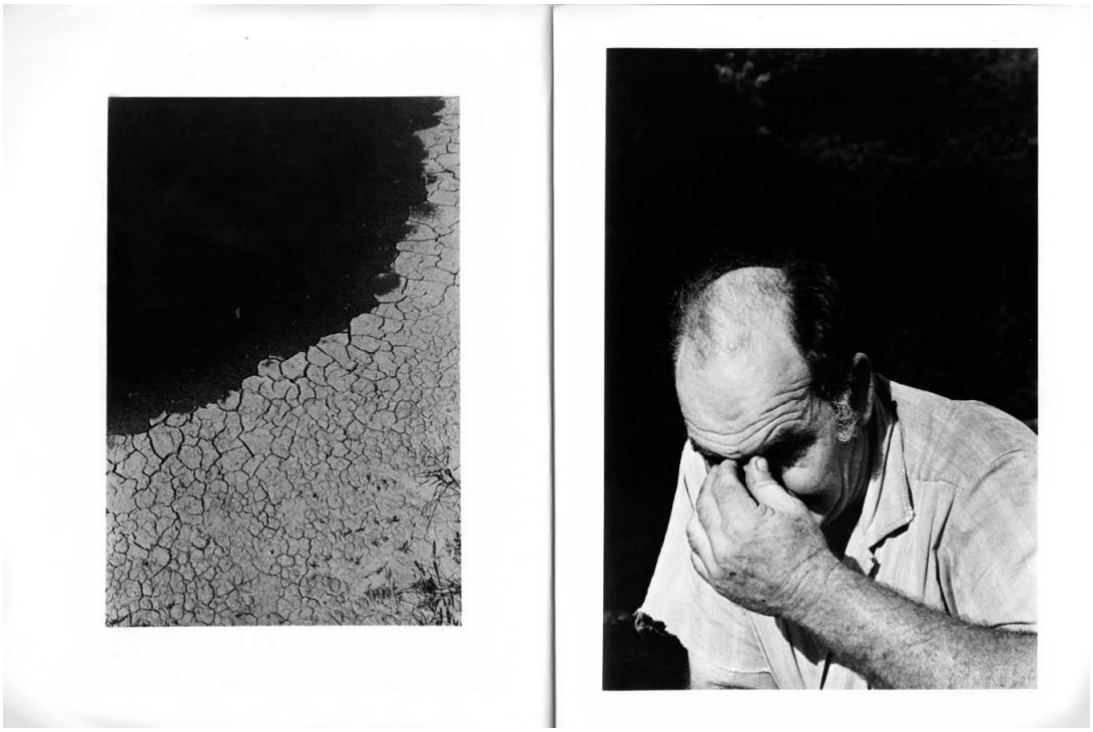


Figure 6. A double-page spread in Ralph Gibson, *Déjà-Vu* (1973).

Déjà-Vu consists of forty-five black and white photographs separately mounted on each page, adhering to the layout previously tested out in *The Somnambulist*. Unlike the preceding volume, however, the size of the photographic image becomes an important variable in *Déjà-Vu*. The difference in scale creates an imbalance of visual potency between two photographs facing each other, so as to set their viewing in order, either from the right page to the left or the other way around. For example, a spread in *Déjà-Vu* carries a photograph of an old man's receding hairline on the right side and the cracked soil surface on the left (fig. 6). The former, bigger than the latter, grabs the beholder's attention first. When the viewer's eyes proceed to the opposite page, the cracking pattern of the ground emanates an elusive sense of resemblance to the dry skin of the man's head. The same phenomenon occurs on every spread of *Déjà-Vu*, whatever direction of viewing. To look at another spread, the left page shows the back of a young girl running away from the camera, while the right page displays a cloud afloat in the sky (fig. 7). The girl's picture preponderates over the cloud photograph in size and meets the viewer's gaze first. Even after the viewer moves onto the opposite page, the shape of the cloud keeps stirring up the girl's tousled hair in his mind. Eventually, if one considers more than one spread of *Déjà-Vu* in succession, there arises a cadenced movement of the gaze that sweeps each photographic diptych to the right or to the left rhythmically. While each spread comes up with different "overtones" as their themes, such as aridity or buoyancy in the aforementioned examples, the zigzag motion of the gaze produces a sense of development running through the entire sequence.

Figure 7. A double-page spread in Ralph Gibson, *Déjà-Vu* (1973).

The pages analyzed above delineate a formula for visual analogy that warrants the title of *Déjà-Vu*, translated to "already seen" in English. The notion of déjà vu clarifies that each photograph of *Déjà-Vu* refers less to the subject matter captured within its frame, than to another picture "already seen" in the book. Moreover, the habitual motion of the eyes gliding from one page to the next makes that inter-photographic déjà vu instantaneous and virtually inescapable. In his review published in 1973, A.D. Coleman commented that every pairing of photographs in *Déjà-Vu* were "inevitable," in that seeing the first image immediately entailed not only the unconscious anticipation for the second image, but also the subsequent inability to separate the second image from the first one (1973: D34). To rephrase, the layout of *Déjà-Vu* combines every two photographs into a single unit of signification, where the second picture's purpose is to refresh the first picture's afterimage in the viewer's mind. If the viewer looks back at the first photograph again, it will now remind him of the second photograph. Here, the visual memory of each photograph becomes the other photograph's ultimate message, that is, its signified. To go back to my previous example, there is no denying that the cloud photograph mentioned above is a visual record of a real cloud observed by the photographer. Nevertheless, the page layout instills a more pressing layer of codification into the photograph, so that it hints at the neighboring picture of the girl glimpsed right before. As such, the photographs of *Déjà-Vu* stand for, or "connote," something other than what they show. On that account, Gibson's interest in the mechanism of déjà vu finds a predecessor in the concept of "equivalents" coined by Alfred Stieglitz for his cloud photographs taken between 1922 and 1934.

Stieglitz considered his cloud pictures equivalent to his inner feelings, his sentiments about friends or places, or his life philosophy (Stieglitz, 1966: 110–112).

For him, the cloud photographs did not concern the external world, since they were not meant to be representations: "The true meaning of the *Equivalents* comes through without any extraneous pictorial factors intervening between those who look at the pictures and the pictures themselves" (qtd. in Norman, 1973: 161). He believed that, by treating the clouds as pure forms, his photographs could achieve the kind of emotive expressiveness formerly sought after by the European Symbolists at the end of the nineteenth century (Greenough, 1984: 24–29). After the World War II, Minor White further developed Stieglitz's understanding of the equivalents into a theory of the photographic experience at large. White contended that any photograph could be an equivalent, when its elementary properties, like forms and shapes, aroused a known feeling that corresponded to emotions, memories, or intellectual speculations the beholder already had in himself. In his formulation, the photograph became a "spontaneous symbol," which produced an *ad hoc* image "to fill the need of the moment" in response to the beholder's state of mind (White, 1966: 169).

The idea of the equivalents seems highly compatible with Gibson's adaptation of the déjà vu experience in his photobook. Both argue for an evocative correspondence between a photograph and a feeling or a mental image provoked by the formal elements, not the referent, of the given photograph. This speaks to Gibson's continued pursuit for the pictures that are received from the world yet nonrepresentational. And the simultaneously transparent and abstract treatment of photography was part and parcel of Stieglitz's experiment with the cloud pictures, which have been dubbed "the first truly abstract photographs" (Enns, 2013: 188). Gibson surely knew about "the theory of equivalence," which he discussed in workshops during the 1970s (AG 37:29 "Fotoworkshop" 1).[8] Having said that, the strategy of sequencing in *Déjà-Vu* does not allow as much leeway to the viewer as Stieglitz's equivalents perhaps could. To elaborate, the visual impression evoked by a photograph in *Déjà-Vu* originates from the other picture in the same spread, not from a life experience the viewer had before opening the book. Hence, an integral experience of *Déjà-Vu* as a sequence hardly exceeds the physical limits of the book. This precept pares down the degree of arbitrariness involved in the interpretation of the photobook. While *Déjà-Vu* encourages the beholder to see beyond what the photographs show on their surface, this invitation to an imaginative looking is only valid within the structure of the photobook prearranged by Gibson. This continues to hold true for the third and final volume of the photographer's trilogy, *Days at Sea*, published by Lustrum Press in 1974.

Days at Sea and the Abstracting Gaze of the *Nouveau Roman*

Although *Days at Sea* appears similar to *The Somnambulist* and *Déjà-Vu* in format, its inner content radically differs from the two. *Days at Sea* has a reduced number of thirty-four black and white photographs, which are homogeneous in size,

[8] Gibson was also familiar with White's approach to photography, which he learned about between 1956 and 1959 at the United States Naval School of Photography in Florida from a chief photographer who had studied under White (AG 19:2 Reel 2007:021).

Gibson, Ralph

DAYS AT SEA

Figure 8. Opening sequence of twelve pages in Ralph Gibson, *Days at Sea* (1974).

unnumbered, and singly mounted on recto pages alone, except for the frontispiece placed to the left of the title page. This marks a departure from Gibson's previous use of photographic juxtaposition as the basic unit of sequencing. In *Days at Sea*, vacant verso pages provide each photograph with an increased sense of independence. Reviewing *Days at Sea* in 1975, Henry Turner underlined the predominant atmosphere of "stasis" emitted by the "autonomous images" (1975: 5). However, the reduced density would engender a new type of transaction between the constituent photographs of *Days at Sea*, far from impairing their sequential association.

Days at Sea starts with a photograph of a ship's dark funnel with a white band around its trunk (fig. 8). That white band resonates with a bright ankle sock exposed between a black shoe and a black pant in the second picture. The black-white-black composition evolves into the alternate lines of black and white on a boat in the third photograph. In the fourth, the pattern is repeated in the striped shirt of a woman, whose hair is spread over someone else's legs. The shape of the legs is mimicked by two baguettes in the fifth photograph and then by a swimmer's lower body on a beach in the sixth. In this way, *Days at Sea* showcases a voyage of forms and shapes slithering along the stream of photographs mostly taken in a waterfront town. Near the end of the book, a photograph shows a white dickey carved into the shape of a triangle by the lapels of a black tuxedo jacket. In the next photograph, that triangle turns into a long feather caressing the naked buttocks of a woman, whose fingernails are painted in dark color. A thumb with the similarly painted nail presses down on an empty notebook page in the last photograph of *Days at Sea*.

The photobook is quite erratic in terms of the subject matter. Even though seascapes and female nudes are frequent throughout the entire volume, the allure of seafaring and eroticism is not undergirded by the sequential association of the photographs. The sparse layout of *Days at Sea* also makes it harder to detect a signifying bond between successive photographs. In *Déjà-Vu*, the way in which a photograph stirs the afterimage of another photograph could be compared to the visible form and the conceptual meaning of a sign, or simply, the signifier and the signified. In *Days at Sea*, by contrast, the negative space wedged between every two photographs makes the viewer leery of paring off pictures. Instead, the thirty-four photographs of *Days at Sea* chip in for the relay of formal elements on equal terms, without one being another's undercurrent. There, geometric shapes, lines, and color blocks suggest an arc of gradual evolvement, running parallel to the raw content of the photobook. *Days at Sea* presents itself as a consistent sequence to that abstracting vision.

Meanwhile, a phrase inserted below the publication information in *Days at Sea* discloses the influence of the French novelist, playwright, and filmmaker Marguerite Duras: "Quel désir impossible".[9] According to Gibson, the phrase ("What an impossible desire") was Duras's response to the American photographer's ambitious plan for the trilogy (Gibson, 1974b: 56). It is little known, however, that the same

[9] Gibson became well acquainted with Duras in the early 1970s and gave her his photobooks (Gibson, 1973b: 96). Later in 1990, Duras wrote the introduction to Gibson's photobook *L'Histoire de France* (Duras, 1991: 1–2).

phrase is also a line from the voice-over in Duras's film *Woman of the Ganges* (*La Femme du Gange*, 1974), which was screened at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1973. The film had a fractured dialogue between two female lovers, who remained off-screen, added on top of a relatively conventional narrative film shot in a seaside resort in Normandy, France. The film initiated Duras's experimental use of the cinematic screen as an "echo chamber", in which the voices reverberated as they were unfastened from the acting bodies and therefore, from representation (Duras, 1976: 49). In *Woman of the Ganges*, the acousmatic voices murmured truncated phrases and abstract words that were related to what was being shown so tangentially as to foster an autonomous dimension of anti-representational experience. As Duras explained, *Woman of the Ganges* was in fact two films: "the film of the image" and "the film of the voices" (Duras, 1973: 103).

Duras's twofold filmmaking allows us to dissect *Days at Sea* into a book of photographic representations, on the one hand, and an undulating flow of formal elements, on the other. And it is with the latter that Gibson's photobook shies away from signification, which was central to the previous installments of his trilogy. The sequential association of fragmented forms in *Days at Sea* is unconcerned with matching the visual content with namable subject matter, similar to the nonsensical mutterings in *Woman of the Ganges*. A white quadrilateral, for example, is too abstract to signify a "sock," although the viewer can see in the given photograph that the block of white is part of a sock. Those forms, in other words, are too myopic in scope to harbor meaningful gestalts. The relation between Duras's cinema and *Days at Sea* has been noticed and further expanded by Max Kozloff, who defined Gibson's work as "a kind of chamber photography," in which fragmented motifs would "harmonize with an almost conversational nonchalance" (1998: 30). Such an indifference to meaningfulness broaches Gibson's more direct affiliation with the distinctively French aesthetics of the *Nouveau Roman*, the founding figures of which included Nathalie Sarraute, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Duras. The *Nouveau Roman*, often tabbed as the "*École du regard*" or "Objective Novel," advocated the non-signifying observation, which would simply describe things without insinuating hidden meanings (Robbe-Grillet, 1965: 9).

Gibson's trilogy circumvented three different kinds of semiotic functions typically performed by the photographic image. This, more to my point, was achieved by Gibson's methods of sequencing that had modified from one volume after another along the discernable line of inquiry. First of all, the photographs of *The Somnambulist* referred less to certain incidents in external reality, than to a fictional reality constructed inside the photobook. Secondly in *Déjà-Vu*, the photographs ceased to stand for what they visualized. Instead, they conjured up the visual memory of the neighboring pictures through formal similarities. Lastly, *Days at Sea* forged a sequential interplay of abstract forms, whose capacity for signification was too limited to indicate the things photographed by their names. It was to catch the "life of forms" transmogrifying throughout the sequence, to borrow the theory of forms professed by Henri Focillon, who wrote: "Whereas an image implies the representation of an object, and a sign signifies an object, form signifies only *itself*" (1992: 34). At this point, Gibson's experiment was heading toward a reticent terrain of visualization, where the photographic image would not call up anything precisely

effable in the viewer's mind. In a way, Gibson's photographs ceased to be pictures *of something*. This move can be assessed as abstraction, only if "abstract" means to photograph the world of appearances vibrating below the threshold of enunciability, or, in Gibson's words, to show "a low frequency hum" emanating from "an image or an object" (AG 19:3 2–3).

The growing antipathy against signification in Gibson's photographs was congruous with the philosophy of the *Nouveau Roman* elucidated by Robbe-Grillet. Gibson was enamored with Robbe-Grillet's novels and his screenplay for the film *Last Year at Marienbad* (*L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, 1961), before making the acquaintance of the French novelist and filmmaker in the early 1970s (Gibson, 1973b: 96). In *For a New Novel* (1963), Robbe-Grillet asserted that the *Nouveau Roman* authors learned from the mechanics of the camera how to restore the reality of objects and gestures, which would plainly be "*there"* before being "*something*" (1965: 21). According to him, one could "see" an empty chair in a film, whereas the same chair would automatically "mean" absence in a traditional novel. As he summarized, the examples of the *Nouveau Roman* often described trivial fragments, which would accomplish nothing but the image of the object devoid of meaningful depth. Robbe-Grillet argued that such an observational technique of writing was essentially photographic, in that the camera's perception suspended the inertial force of "ready-made signification" (1965: 140).

Robbe-Grillet's objection to the hackneyed signification targeted the anthropocentric consciousness, which had projected meaningful order onto the world with itself at the center. That said, Robbe-Grillet separated his attack on the Enlightenment notion of man from a naïve equation of objectivity to utter impersonality. Robbe-Grillet clarified that the new novels still needed a person who observed, who nonetheless failed to synthesize his experiences into a meaningful whole and therefore remained an anonymous voyeur in the world of things (1965: 18). In his novels, the seer's lack of self-assuredness often wrought the most obsessive kind of "imagining close to delirium," so that the objectivity of observation would be fused with "a total subjectivity" (1965: 138). Robbe-Grillet identified this ironic coexistence of objectivity and subjectivity with the very definition of Surrealism by citing André Breton: "Surrealism is the point where insoluble contradictions, such as objective and subjective, true and false, dream and reality, no longer are perceived as being contradictory" (Robbe-Grillet, 1992: 106).

Robbe-Grillet's understanding of Surrealism can be likened to Gibson's "surrealism of the perception", which had emerged on the pages of his trilogy and continued to guide his work after the mid-1970s (Mora, 2017: 18). In 1976, Gibson defined Surrealism as "more of a philosophy than a movement in art," for it had less to do with the way one would "*make* images" than how one would "*perceive* the nature of reality" (qtd. in Goldsmith, 1976: 139). To reiterate, Gibson's Surrealism concerns how the world apprehended in a photograph looks extraordinary to himself and others, rather than how an artist artificially materializes his vision of the otherworldly in the photographic image. Here, Gibson accepts the objectivity of the photographic image on his part as an image-maker, while trying to invoke a subjective way of looking at that image at the viewer's end. The same idea also sits at the heart of Gibson's inclination to the *Nouveau Roman*, which reassured his

conviction that the "only valid question" was "how to perceive reality" (Gibson, 1984: 9). And just like that, Gibson's experiment with sequence has come full circle with the Surrealist understanding of the photographic reality, which was first materialized in *The Somnambulist*.

The Straightness of Photography and the Surrealism of Perception

In this paper, I have demonstrated a close analysis of Gibson's photobook trilogy: *The Somnambulist*, *Déjà-Vu,* and *Days at Sea*. I paid greater attention to the mechanism of visual signification in each publication in relation to major theories of 20th-century art, photography, and literature, developed by such figures as Borges, Stieglitz, White, Duras, and Robbe-Grillet. As it has become clear, at the heart of the trilogy lies an aspiration to loosen the photographic image's indexical ties with the referential reality, so that the photographs can be experienced in the subjective and contemplative ways that intimate dreams, the unconscious, recollections, analogies, and the rhythm of pure forms. By all means, Gibson was not the only image-maker who took such an issue with photography. However, to repeat the point emphasized at the beginning of this paper, it is thanks to his method of sequencing and its inventive application to the book form that Gibson's trilogy has gained an unparalleled importance in the development of art photography and photobook publishing since the 1970s. His sequencing presents a durational arc of narrative — no matter how obscure and open-ended it may be — while respecting the relative autonomy of individual photographs that occupy single pages. Here, in the coexistence of individuality and collectivity of the pictures, the camera image's objectivity reconciles with its inevitable consignment to "the subjectivity of seeing," to borrow Susan Sontag's words (Sontag, 1977: 136).

I will conclude this paper by corroborating the place of Gibson's "surrealism of the perception" in the history of Surrealist thoughts on the photographic medium. The Surrealist purchase on photography has predominantly been associated with the darkroom manipulations, bizarre subject matter, and theatrical trickeries cultivated by the official Surrealists during the 1920s. This view was given the center stage in 1985, when a massive retrospective of Surrealist photography titled *L'Amour fou* was organized by Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. and traveled to the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris the following year. Although the exhibition included a number of unmanipulated photographs showing ordinary subjects, the curators placed greater emphasis on such works as the burned photographs (*brûlages*) by Raoul Ubac, the photograms and solarized prints by Man Ray, the photomontages by Georges Hugnet, and the pictures of deformed mannequins by Hans Bellmer. In so doing, the exhibition canonized a lineage of Surrealist photography hostile to straight photography or the "*photographie-vérité*", as the *Le Monde* critic Patrick Roegiers reviewed (1986: 47). In other words, *L'Amour fou* was conceptually benefitted from a narrow, rather "American" understanding of photography's objectivity, which was nothing but a myth of medium specificity that was debunked most powerfully by the heavily distorted and often grotesque-looking examples (Walker, 2002: 2–3; Zalman,

2015: 150–157). By contrast, for Gibson, what was the most Surrealist about the photographic medium was its straightness and blatant realism.

It is fair to say that Gibson, who looked back to the original Surrealism from a historical vantage point, modernized the Surrealist interest in subjectivity by fusing it with the photographic medium's objective connection to material reality. As Sontag observed in 1977, the realization that photography was "natively surreal" became possible only after the techniques of manipulation and theatricalization adored by the official Surrealists had absorbed into the visual grammars of cultural industry in the 1930s (Sontag, 1977: 51). During the Postwar period, when the original Surrealist movement had already petered out in France, André Bazin noted: "Photography ranks high in the order of surrealist creativity because it produces an image that is a reality of nature, namely, a hallucination that is also a fact" (1967: 16). In 1963, the Hungarian-French photographer Brassaï argued for a "straight Surrealism," which located "Surreality" in banal things, in "the normality of the normal" (qtd. in Sanchez, 2010: 230). Brassaï, who disapproved of manipulations and trickeries, echoed Gibson when he stated that the Surrealism of his photographs was "nothing but the reality made fantastic through vision" (Brassaï, 1980: 14).

The great acclaim that Gibson's photographic work would earn in France after the early 1970s can be understood in this context. From the French perspective, Gibson's emphasis on perception was the latest addition to the continued updates of Surrealism undertaken by Bazin, Brassaï, and Robbe-Grillet. The main impetus for this revision was the critical understanding of photography's straightness, the photographic image's seamless connection to the perceived reality. It is, in other words, the absence of human intentionality in the camera's optical mechanism, which Brassaï christened the "a-human" vision of photography in his study on Marcel Proust (2001: 120). By aligning with this line of revisionist endeavors, on the one hand, Gibson's work offered a modernized alternative to the more conspicuous canons of Surrealist photography that curtailed the medium's truth claim. As French photographer Claude Nori wrote in 1976, Gibson's work was the progenitor of "a new Surrealist photography," which discovered "a specifically photographic originality" by refusing "manipulation and montage" in favor of "the ordinary". On the other hand, Gibson's aversion to the monstrous or the pathological as subject matter was refreshing to French photographers and critics, who were shocked by the bizarre and even violent snapshots by Diane Arbus and Gary Winogrand, shown as part of the exhibition "Photographie nouvelle des États Unis" at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris in 1971. It was owing to the "elegant sophistication" enlivened by Gibson's focus on banal objects and quotidian scenes, that his sequences and photobooks would become a desirable headliner of contemporary American photography throughout the following decades in Europe (Mora, 2008: 30).

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RESUMO:

Este trabalho tem por objetivo analisar o livro *Errâncias*, do escritor brasileiro Décio Pignatari. A incursão no universo da narrativa biográfica e ficcional, com a publicação de *O rosto da memória* (1986), *Panteros* (1992) e *Errâncias* (2000) reiterou e atualizou, simultaneamente, elementos da poética de vanguarda do concretismo e questões teóricas da sua atividade intelectual em Comunicação e Semiótica. Estas obras podem ser situadas no "território fotoliterário", como nomeia o crítico Jean-Pierre Montier (2015). Impresso em formato de álbum fotográfico, *Errâncias* articula as imagens do "acervo biojuntado" pelo escritor (Pignatari 10), com textos que hibridizam o ensaio biográfico e a autobiografia, em que se folheiam, como sugere a "metáfora do álbum" (Reverseau, 2017), as páginas de uma vida e as reflexões sobre amigos, referências intelectuais, paisagens e textos lidos. As questões trabalhadas dialogam com os pressupostos da teoria literária, da psicanálise e dos estudos sobre imagem e arquivo.

ABSTRACT:

This work aims to analyze the book *Errâncias*, by the Brazilian writer Décio Pignatari. The incursion into the universe of biographical and fictional narrative, with the publication of *O rosto da memória* (1986), *Panteros* (1992) and *Errâncias*

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(2000) reiterated and updated, elements of the avant-garde poetics of concretism and theoretical questions of his intellectual activity in Communication and Semiotics. These books can be situated in the "photoliterary territory", as the critic Jean-Pierre Montier (2015) names them. Printed in photographic album format, *Errâncias* articulates the images of the "acervo biojuntado" [bioassembled collection] by the writer (Pignatari 10) with texts that hybridize the biographical essay and the autobiography, in which the pages of a lifetime and reflections on friends, intellectual references, landscapes and texts are leafed through, as suggested by the "metaphor of the album" (Reverseau, 2017). The questions involved here are in dialogue with the assumptions of literary theory, psychoanalysis and studies on image and archive.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

arquivo; autobiografia; Décio Pignatari; fotografia

KEYWORDS:

archive; autobiography; Décio Pignatari; photography

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Considerações iniciais

O livro *Errâncias*, de Décio Pignatari, marcou, em 2000, a continuidade da virada biográfica iniciada pelo escritor quatorze anos antes, com a publicação de *O rosto da memória* (1986) e *Panteros* (1992). A incursão no universo da narrativa biográfica e ficcional reiterou e atualizou, simultaneamente, elementos da poética de vanguarda do concretismo e questões teóricas do seu projeto intelectual. *O rosto da memória* foi o estilhaçamento da linguagem, como a pulverização e a atomização do pensamento na poesia dos predecessores Mallarmé e Apollinaire. Os fragmentos de narrativas curtas que, em alguns casos, não se desfecham, e os diálogos fora do código de coerência e unidade do drama aristotélico trituraram as fronteiras entre os gêneros literários (prosa e drama), as linguagens (literatura, fotografia, cinema e pintura) e os pactos de leitura da ficção e da autobiografia. Como sugere o título, extraído das *Confissões* de Santo Agostinho, essa estrutura não linear dos textos coloca em cena a natureza do trabalho da memória, atualizando, nesse sentido, o pressuposto de *isomorfismo* da poesia concreta brasileira. Se, nos anos 50 e 60, a estrutura do poema deveria corresponder à mensagem poética, desta vez, forma de um texto narrativo, eivado de signos da memória do escritor, não haveria de ser diferente do aspecto não linear e heterogêneo da inscrição dos seus traços no arquivo psíquico.

Depois dessa espécie de *big bang,* a reorganização da matéria se deu através da linguagem do romance *Panteros*, de 1992, menos hermético e cifrado do que o projeto anterior, todavia igualmente desconstrutor em processo semelhante de intermidialidade com imagens fotográficas. As poses de Pignatari em fotografias atribuídas aos seus personagens destacam o teor autoficcional dessas obras, com a produção e o embaralhamento de biografemas do escritor[1], que se dispersa entre cidades e situações da juventude, vividas ou imaginadas. Assim, a criação literária torna-se mais uma das poses do escritor e assinala o caráter teatralizado que podem assumir tanto a escrita e como a imagem fotográfica[2], pois Décio Pignatari empresta o seu corpo, já tornado signo fotográfico, aos seus personagens e, da interação entre signos, embaralham-se as referências pessoais[3].

A assimilação de diferentes linguagens e materialidades, bem como a apropriação de procedimentos da literatura moderna do século XX pela poética do concretismo foram o ponto de partida para a realização de outras disrupções por Décio Pignatari, ao longo da sua trajetória. O projeto intersemiótico da poesia concreta fazia interagir o conteúdo, a imagem acústica e a imagem visual das palavras na construção de poemas *verbivocovisuais*, cujos procedimentos eram

[1] Para Roland Barthes, a fotografia fornece um "infra-saber" sobre o referente e o contexto fotografado, alimentando um saber na ordem do "fetichismo". A partir da imagem fotográfica, Barthes (1984: 51) propõe o "biografema" como "certos traços biográficos que, na vida de um escritor, me encantam tanto quanto certas fotografias".

[2] Walter Benjamin destaca o caráter teatralizado pelo qual surgiram as fotografias de estúdio, onde se dispunham nos ateliês, como um tipo de cenografia, "cortinados e palmeiras, tapeçarias e cavaletes, mescla ambígua de execução e representação" (Benjamin, 1994: 98).

[3] Os ensaios de Evelina Hoisel (2019) abordam a produção de imagens do perfil de "escritores múltiplos", que também são docentes, ensaístas e agitadores da cena cultural, a partir do vocabulário cênico e dos pressupostos da teoria literária e da psicanálise.

provenientes da publicidade, design gráfico, tipografia e da informática[4]. Por sua vez, a ensaística e a atividade docente de Pignatari nas áreas da Comunicação, da Semiótica e da Teoria da Informação, a partir dos anos 60, colocava em xeque a disciplinarização do conhecimento e as concepções beletristas que imperavam nos Departamentos de Letras das universidades brasileiras.

Como se pode observar na vasta produção ensaística já publicada, posicionava-se de modo contrário à compartimentalização do saber e à cultura livresca, mas sem desconsiderar os pontos-altos da criatividade, sobretudo linguística, do cânone ocidental. A maquinaria teórica de Pignatari colocou em rotação os pressupostos dos estudos literários, semióticos e de comunicação, propondo modos de interpretar a literatura e a cultura que destacassem a natureza intersemiótica dos processos de criação e o enriquecimento da crítica literária e dos estudos semióticos através da interdisciplinaridade.

Paralelamente, a sua articulação com universidades, pesquisadores e artistas da Europa e dos Estados Unidos furava as hierarquias de saber e poder historicamente estabelecidas. Era redimensionado o lugar do escritor e do intelectual latino-americano perante os mecanismos de legitimação e circulação do conhecimento. A seguir, pervago nas estratégias das *Errâncias* de Pignatari nos territórios da biografia, da ficção e das práticas de arquivamento.

1. O acervo biojuntado de Décio Pignatari

Na apresentação de *Errâncias*, Décio Pignatari trata, por assim dizer, da natureza errática deste projeto movente no espaço entre a biografia e a autobiografia, a ficção e o ensaio, a palavra e a imagem fotográfica. Talvez não houvesse outra forma possível para esse livro de artista do "escritor múltiplo" (Hoisel, 2019) que foi Décio Pignatari, um intelectual que atravessou diversos territórios semióticos, culturais e disciplinares.

Assim Pignatari apresenta as suas *errâncias*, onde se faz constante o tema da circulação internacional de ideologias e projetos artísticos:

> Quase depoimentos, memórias, reflexões — estudos, enfim, sentido musical; insinuem-se entre o visto, o ouvido e o fotografado, uns tantos surtos impacientes de enxerimento ficcional, de intrusão fabélica — e estarão indiciadas estas errâncias verbo-icônicas, viagens por gentes e lugares conhecidos e desconhecidos. E por tempos desconexos, através de palavras e frases penduradas em irrequietos incidentes de pontuação, em que o sujeito se extravia ou em outros se torna ambíguo. (Pignatari, 2000: 10)

O signo do "quase" assinala a não aderência de *Errâncias* a um gênero textual ou a um sistema de signos, criando uma zona de potência da linguagem nas brechas entre o verbal e o imagético, o ensaio e a autobiografia. Os trinta textos, organizados com o trabalho de pesquisa de Soraya Ferreira Alves, relacionam-se como o arranjo polifônico de vozes do seu repertório de amigos, parceiros intelectuais, referências artísticas e literárias:: "Volpi", "Tarsila", "Curitiba", "Eros e 'o amor de Ionh'", "Paulo

[4] Cf. Campos et al. 2006.

de Jesus", "Noigandres", "Peirce", "João Cabral", "London, London", "Mallarmé", "Jakobson", "Vidraria", "Pound", "Cordeiro", "Franklin Horylka", "Senseaud De Lavaud", "Oswald", "Japão", "Valêncio Xavier", "Nono", "Borges", "Horácio", "Levallois", "Lucca/Ciró", "Delfos", "Duprat", "Rua da Estação", "Fejer", "Erthos", "Cérebro em expansão".

Podemos situar *O rosto da memória, Panteros* e *Errâncias* no "território fotoliterário", como se refere o crítico Jean-Pierre Montier aos projetos que desde o século XIX, "ataram a produção literária à imagem fotográfica, os processos de fabricação específicos que o caracterizam e os valores (semióticos, estéticos etc.) que ele infere" (Montier, 2015: 20). Ao invés de um gênero em particular, constituem um feixe de obras com imagens — tal qual o fotolivro, o livro de artista, a narrativa fotoliterária — ou que não dispõem desse recurso, mas se valem do imaginário técnico da fotografia em sua composição[5].

Os "surtos impacientes de enxerimento ficcional, de intrusão fabélica", insinuada "entre o visto, o ouvido e o fotografado" (Pignatari, 2000: 10), tornam a ficção uma força de arranjo desta obra com múltiplas entradas. O "surto" e a "intrusão" não pertencem ao imperativo da racionalidade e da linearidade do conhecimento, tampouco ao sujeito que se concebe coerente e unitário; do contrário, resultam de pulsões, potências que estão na (des)ordem do inconsciente e na intempestividade de atravessar a escrita, bem como no rompante ou no lapso da memória.

Ainda conforme a apresentação de *Errâncias*, a seleção das imagens fotográficas dos "depósitos de fotofiguras" (Pignatari, 2000: 10) para composição dos textos opera no intervalo entre a razão e o absurdo, o rigor e a aleatoriedade: "Só absurdas razões poderiam explicar estes depósitos de fotofiguras, rigorosa seleção aleatória: poderiam ter sido escolhidas se não se achassem num acervo biojuntado? O estarem ali já é seleção e sentido, em situação de *stand by*; tirá-las dali é compromisso significante [...]" (idem: 10). O que nos interessa explorar com este trecho é a mudança de estatuto da coleção fotográfica, da condição de depósito de fotofiguras a um acervo biojuntado. Este movimento, produzido através da intepretação do conjunto documental, decorre de que as práticas sociais que dão origem aos acervos, bem como os diversos usos e funções atribuídos aos documentos, são formas de produzir sentido sobre a realidade e, mais particularmente, sobre as textualidades que os indivíduos, os grupos sociais e as instituições acumulam e colocam diariamente em circulação.

Talvez seja oportuno destacar que essa distinção entre "depósito" e "acervo" pressupõe um estado de neutralidade dos documentos anterior às interpretações que venham a ser feitas posteriormente. Nessa perspectiva, o arquivo figuraria como reserva edênica, organicamente construída e ainda intocada pelo homem, por outro lado, o usuário ou o gestor do arquivo, um certo Adão, a dar nome para a inexplorada paisagem, ou um Midas, tornando ouro e fetiche tudo o que passa pelas suas mãos. Jacques Derrida chama atenção para que não se considere o arquivo um lugar de

[5] O imaginário da fotografia equivaleria à categoria epistêmica de "fotográfico" (Dubois, 1993: 60) como forma de compreensão visual e não totalizante da realidade em que se destacam os meios técnicos de captura da realidade pela natureza indicial das representações.

"estocagem" ou "conservação" do passado, dissociado dos efeitos de sentido na leitura dos documentos, pois as condições materiais e técnicas do arquivamento determinariam o conteúdo arquivado: "O arquivamento tanto registra quanto produz o evento" (Derrida, 2001: 29).

No mesmo sentido, poderíamos mencionar o ensaio "(Des)construir o arquivo", de Eric Ketelaar, um dos representantes das teorias pós-modernas sobre o arquivo: "Toda vez que um criador, usuário ou arquivista interage com um documento, intervindo, interrogando e interpretando, esse documento é construído de maneira ativa" (Ketelaar, 2018: 197). Em síntese, não seria possível dissociar a forma arquivante e o conteúdo arquivado e, no caso dos arquivos pessoais, esta impossibilidade possivelmente esteja acentuada pelas inúmeras intervenções do titular ao lidar com os seus próprios documentos.

Do ponto de vista da materialidade do livro, *Errâncias* pode ser considerado um álbum fotográfico, impresso em folhas retangulares de papel couché. Todos os trinta textos são diagramados na sequência de três páginas (frente e verso) de cor preta e duas brancas. A primeira apresenta, em tom azul, centralizado, o título; a segunda, a(s) fotografia(s) selecionada(s) do acervo biojuntado, que servem de ponto de partida para o texto escrito, iniciado com letras do mesmo tom de azul do título na terceira página preta e desenvolvido nas duas páginas seguintes, brancas, com fonte preta, em associação com outras imagens. Quando contextualizada nesses aspectos da diagramação, observa-se que a impressão das imagens que engatilham a escrita, ao centro da folha preta, visa a tomar a forma da colagem de fotografias em álbuns e atlas encadernados.[6]

Essas características podem ser relacionadas com o que analisa a ensaísta Anne Reverseau sobre a metáfora do álbum na literatura francesa do século XX. Nos textos poéticos, ficcionais e ensaísticos de Mac Orlan, a autora identifica um "lirismo técnico" que concebe a produção intelectual como um "filme", "tela" ou "álbum de imagens": "Em *Simone de Montmartre*, por exemplo, as imagens mentais são as imagens que folheamos como em um álbum de fotografias"[7]. Reverseau também menciona a crônica *Photographies animées* (Fotografias animadas), de 1921, em que o poeta e dramaturgo Roger Vitrac destacava que o álbum sobre os espaços afetivos da sua juventude, ainda que sem o seu corpo, seria capaz de compor uma cenografia para o "personagem atual que ele é"[8]. Em produções mais recentes, identifica um

[6] Na capa de *Errâncias*, sobre um fundo preto, consta em segundo plano uma fotografia do interior da Itália e, em primeiro plano, de cima para baixo, Ezra Pound, Volpi, Tarsila do Amaral, Jorge Luis Borges, Roman Jakobson, Paulinho de Jesus e Oswald de Andrade. Na contracapa, em segundo plano, sobre as ruínas da Cooperativa de Vidreiros de Osasco, aparecem em primeiro plano, imagens de Tóquio, Valêncio Xavier, Londres, paredes de botequim em Curitiba, Franklyn Horylka, um dorso de mulher desnudo, uma ilustração de Paris e uma foto de dois jovens de costas com boné verde.

[7] Reverseau, 2014: 4, trad. nossa. Reveseau cita estes versos de Mac Orlan: "Ces images, Georges les feuillette chaque nuit / à la même heure. / Il a bien essayé d'apprendre l'anglais / mais ces images quotidiennes le nourrissent comme le pain. / Il vit, au-dessus du bocal, plein de petites lumières / où tourne Simone, en rond, telle un cyprin" (Orlan apud Reverseau 4). Tradução nossa: Essas imagens, Georges as folheia a cada noite / à mesma hora. / Ele bem que tentou aprender inglês / mas essas imagens cotidianas o alimentam como pão. / Ele vive, em cima do frasco, cheio de pequenas luzes / onde fica Simone, rondando, como um peixe ciprino".

[8] "L'album des photographies, où je grandis depuis l'âge de 2 ans auprès du puits, du mur du collège, de Lucienne, du kiosque, d'un pot de fleurs – « Photo Midget » – je l'abandonnerais volontiers à qui cherche

"imaginário fotográfico", cujo "modelo do álbum de imagens fotográficas de uma vida, que nós folheamos, também serve de linha condutora" (Reverseau, 2017: 6) para o entremeio das experiências individuais e coletivas (da família ou da sociedade), citando as autobiografias *Agfa Box: Histoires de chambre noire*, do alemão Günther Grass (2010), e *Les Années*, de Annie Ernaux (2010), ganhadora do Prêmio Nobel de Literatura em 2022.

Por sua vez, o crítico Armando Silva analisa os usos do álbum de família no contexto latino-americano, relacionando-o com a transmissão das identidades de grupo. Dentre as estratégias para esse fim, são mencionadas a conservação das fotografias na materialidade dos álbuns e a repetição discursiva das histórias familiares suscitadas pela visualização das imagens. Em determinadas passagens da sua obra, Silva menciona de maneira intercambiável o suporte material do arquivamento, o álbum, e o conjunto de documentos, o arquivo: "O álbum é arquivo, um dos mais inquietantes da vida privada, e funciona com técnicas que lhe são próprias, idealizadas de modo espontâneo por seus usuários com o passar do tempo" (Silva, 2008: 18). Ora, mais adiante: "Este livro trata de um sujeito — a família; de um objeto que torna possível mostrá-la visualmente – a fotografia; de uma maneira de arquivar essas imagens — o álbum de fotografias" (Silva, 2008: 23).

O que Silva considera por arquivo está mais explicitamente delimitado nesta passagem: "O arquivo é uma maneira de classificar, e será próprio da sua técnica produzir uma ordem aos olhos, posterior ao tempo em que as fotos foram colecionadas" (idem: 24). O emprego da expressão "maneira", conforme a tradução brasileira, talvez seja demasiado amplo para situar o álbum entre os itens de um arquivo pessoal. Contudo, a ambivalência da postura interdisciplinar das suas considerações as coloca entre a perspectiva notadamente discursiva de arquivo, introduzida por Michel Foucault, e a perspectiva material das condições de produção e significação dos conjuntos documentais, como se lê neste trecho: "O arquivo é sempre uma maneira de guardar e hierarquizar que depende de quem o organiza, como é natural, mas também do objeto que será arquivado e da sua tradição" (idem: 41).

A dado ponto, Silva considera equivalentes o objeto do arquivamento e o conjunto documental, tornando sinônimos o que os estudos sobre o tema distinguiriam por "documento" e "arquivo": "O álbum fotográfico é, sem dúvida, arquivo. E o é porque guarda imagens (não apenas fotos) e as classifica de maneira singular, e talvez única. Acerca disso, não há objeção; apenas se trata de uma constatação" (idem: 45). No entanto, outro aspecto que talvez gere objeções é a já conhecida querela sobre o limite classificatório entre o "arquivo" e a "coleção", pois, se forem levados em conta os critérios de restrição temática e da intencionalidade, seriam os álbuns fotográficos arquivos ou coleções?

O que gostaria de destacar nas reflexões de Reverseau e Silva sobre o álbum fotográfico é a relação estabelecida pela materialidade dos documentos iconográficos com a produção das identidades. O significado cultural da materialidade do álbum é potencializado pelo teor memorialístico das imagens fotográficas individuais ou

mon visage ; car si chacune des images n'est en particulier moi-même, du moins toutes composent-elles génériquement le personnage actuel que je suis. […]" (Vitrac apud Reverseau, 2017: 4).

coletivas. E esse veio memorialístico, ao invés de um aspecto imanente ou intrínseco da imagem em si, é deflagrado nos gestos de organização álbum e na interpretação *a posteriori*, o que constitui um circuito de significação onde são interdependentes as práticas de arquivamento (Artières, 1998), a materialidade dos documentos e as leituras produzidas sobre eles.

O fato de estarem "ali", nas residências, bibliotecas, universidades ou fundações, os documentos, os objetos, os livros, ou seja, as várias tipologias de um arquivo físico ou digital, modaliza o tempo passado da incorporação do item ao acervo, que se toca com um tempo presente da enunciação. "Tirá-las dali", nos termos de Pignatari, é trazer para o aqui da leitura das imagens fotográficas em *stand-by* no arquivo, ligadas entre si por um potencial de energia significante da experiência autobiográfica. Sendo assim, organizar (biojuntar) um acervo e narrar a própria vida se tornam operações equivalente de seleção dos elementos que deem sentido à experiência pessoal, como apontam numerosos e meritórios estudos sobre a dimensão autobiográfica das formas de arquivar a própria vida por meio de arquivos e coleções pessoais.[9]

Segundo Boris Kossoy (1998: 45), "os homens colecionam esses inúmeros pedaços congelados do passado em forma de imagens para que possam recordar, a qualquer momento, trechos de suas trajetórias ao longo da vida". Deste modo, a ressemantização do depósito de fotofiguras em um acervo biojuntado é movimentada pelo "compromisso significante" (Pignatari, 2000: 10) de arquivar e desarquivar as imagens fotográficas, o que reverbera na interpretação dos documentos de arquivo e na tradução do signo fotográfico em escrita errática entre a palavra e a imagem. Cito a continuação do ensaio de Kossoy:

> Apreciando essas imagens, "descongelam" momentaneamente seus conteúdos e contam a si mesmos e aos mais próximos suas histórias de vida. Acrescentando, omitindo ou alterando fatos e circunstâncias que advêm de cada foto, o retratado ou retratista têm sempre, na imagem única ou no conjunto das imagens colecionadas, o "start" da lembrança, da recordação, ponto de partida, enfim, da narrativa dos fatos e emoções. (idem: 45).

No amplo feixe de produções que integram o espaço biográfico na contemporaneidade, a coleção de fotos dos acervos de família tem figurado como uma instância de produção de sentidos sobre a experiência de vida. As várias formas de acúmulo documental passam a ter lugar de destaque na transmissão das identidades

[9] Destaco os artigos da Revista *Estudos Históricos*, v. 11, n. 21, 1998, editado por Ana Maria Camargo, Célia Costa, Luciana Heymann e Priscila Fraiz, com os trabalhos do Seminário Internacional sobre Arquivos Pessoais, promovido pelo Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação (CPDOC) da FGV e o Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros da USP, e o volume *Arquivos pessoais: reflexões multidisciplinares e experiências de pesquisa*, organizado por Isabel Travancas, Joelle Rouchou e Luciana Heymann (Editora da FGV, 2013). Segundo Philippe Artières (1998), "o arquivamento do eu é uma prática de construção de si mesmo e de resistência", pois a "injunção social" de documentar a própria vida para existir em sociedade suscita "práticas de arquivamento", que constituem, em termos foucaultianos, o exercício do "cuidado de si" pelo sujeito, que realiza através do arquivamento a sua "intenção autobiográfica". Em sentido mais amplo, Yvete Sanchez (1999) analisa as práticas de colecionismo em sentido amplo (não apenas como autoarquivamento). Em exemplos de governantes, aristocratas, artistas plásticos, escritores, bem como em amostras literárias, destaca as condições sociais, materiais e psíquicas do colecionismo: "El celo de colecionar es la tentativa de rodearse de un mundo próprio, em um fervor por la vida privada" (19).

pessoais ou coletivas. Por sua vez, o gesto de retornar aos diversos repositórios onde geralmente estão guardados esses documentos, como caixas, pastas, fichários, latas, gavetas, armários, etc., indica o potencial narrativo que a materialidade das imagens fotográficas enseja, sobretudo quando revisitada pela criação de biografias, autobiografias, ensaios, textos ficcionais, instalações, cenografias ou livros de artista. Estes aspectos, presentes em *Errâncias*, também podem ser pontuados em obras mais recentes, a exemplo de *Menino sem passado: 1936-1948*, de Silviano Santiago, *A vida dos outros e a minha*, de Claudia Cavalcanti, e *Procurem Luisa no Mercado de Arte Popular*, de Maria Dolores Rodriguez, publicadas em 2021.

No capítulo "Fotos" Silviano Santiago tem como ponto de partida a sua fotografia quando bebê, a qual estava aos cuidados de uma irmã em Belo Horizonte, para refletir sobre o corpo e a imagem ausente da mãe precocemente falecida: "De volta ao Rio de Janeiro, guardo o envelope numa pasta em que, de maneira anárquica, reúno muitas e variadas fotos e ainda cartões postais nunca endereçados" (Santiago, 2021: 133). Mais adiante, no mesmo capítulo, destaca o intuito de trazer consigo a fotografia para o Rio de Janeiro como eternização do vivido através da posse do objeto amado, substituto da pessoa amada: "Tenho de roubar. Tenho de ter. Roubo a imagem em preto e branco dos olhos admirativos da mãe e a foto das mãos da irmã mais velha para que o todo permaneça meu para todo o sempre" (idem: 135).

A tradutora e germanista Claudia Cavalcanti, em *A vida dos outros e a minha*, faz do seu "autoensaio" uma reflexão sobre os arquivos do serviço secreto da Alemanha Oriental. Mais de vinte anos depois da formulação das novas políticas de acesso aos documentos de Estado, ela decide solicitar ao governo alemão os documentos produzidos a seu respeito pela Stasi no período em que viveu em Leipzig, nos anos 80. O ensaio acompanha a trajetória do pedido de dossiê de documentos em 2019 até o recebimento em 2021, no tempo da espera entremeado pela pandemia do coronavírus: "Talvez tenha que encarar 30 páginas sobre mim mesma, talvez 300. Talvez ali haja não apenas descrições de encontros e situações, mas fotos e transcrições de áudios" (Cavalcanti, 2021: 45). Durante a espera, há uma curiosa expectativa de ter sido espionada pelo serviço secreto alemão, ao estilo de grandes líderes da intelectualidade antissistema, de modo que a sua trajetória na Alemanha tenha constituído os capítulos da história guardados nos arquivos públicos.

Todavia, esse desejo pelo cruzamento entre as dimensões pública e privada, individual e social da história e dos documentos é, em certa medida, desapontado pelo tamanho do dossiê remessado – integrado por dezoito documentos – e pelo fato de as cartas com a mãe no Brasil não terem sido "suficientemente" interceptadas pela Stasi: "Encontrar referências a apenas algumas delas no dossiê recebido me provoca uma mistura de decepção, alívio e desconfiança, porque não seria possível, com toda correspondência que enviei e recebi (no início, com muita cautela; mais tarde, quase sem atentar para a Stasi), só se fixarem em algumas poucas cartas" (Cavalcanti, 2021: 99-100).

At last, but not the least, gostaria de trazer como exemplo *Procurem Luisa no Mercado de Arte Popular*, da escritora e pesquisadora Maria Dolores Rodriguez, que tem despontado na cena intelectual negra da capital baiana nos últimos anos. A obra é possivelmente uma das amostras mais significativas da hibridização entre o projeto biográfico, a criação literária e as práticas de arquivamento. Em homenagem à sua

mãe, Maria Luisa Rodriguez Rodriguez, a "Espanhola", que foi comerciante de variedades no mercado popular da cidade de Feira de Santana, Rodriguez organiza, em uma pasta-arquivo, poemas e microensaios onde figuram o tema da memória junto com fac-símiles de documentos e fotografias pessoais. De acordo com o texto de apresentação deste livro-objeto, Rodriguez quer "garantir não apenas a preservação de sua memória, mas de aparecer no mundo como um artefato de lembrança afetiva e história, que, assim como todas as memórias e histórias, tem faltas, buracos, distorções e invenções" (Rodriguez, 2021: s.p). Na dedicatória que gentilmente recebi da autora para o meu exemplar, adesivada em um post-it verde sobre o envelope que guarda o classificador, autora também joga com o nível de ficcionalização que há na reorganização das memórias ao apresentar a obra-dossiê como "memórias inventadas". Assim, é possível considerar a ficção não somente como recriação da realidade, mas a linha narrativa que estrutura as identidades narrativas produzimos acerca de nós mesmos ou dos espaços afetivos que nos circundam.

2. Errâncias discursivas entre a ficção, o ensaio e a biografia

O famoso verso do poeta Mallarmé, "um lance de dados jamais abolirá o acaso", reverbera nas reflexões do discípulo, Pignatari, sobre o que há de consciente e de impensado nas práticas de arquivamento que constituem a sua coleção fotográfica e o que surge de intempestivo na interpretação dos documentos seja pelos seus titulares, seja por pesquisadores e críticos, quando é assumida uma ordem fragmentária, dispersiva e não totalizante do saber.

> Sim, pervaga por estas páginas uma quase-intenção de biobalanço, num diagrama de traços em fugidio movimento browniano, colagem autobiográfica de pedaços de biografias alheias, bem ao meu gosto pelas biografias, sobretudo as hipotéticas, como se vêem em John dos Passos e Virginia Woolf, cujos lances repicam entre a descrição, a narrativa e a esvurmação de um sentido. (Pignatari, 2000: 10)

Anteriormente à Psicanálise, poderíamos mencionar as reflexões de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, no século XVIII, sobre o dilema entre a memória e o esquecimento no ato de escrever sobre si mesmo. Em *Confissões*, o propósito de "mostrar aos meus semelhantes um homem em toda a verdade de sua natureza" não deixava de ressalvar que, "se por acaso", empregava "algum floreado sem interesse, não foi senão para preencher alguma lacuna devida à minha falta de memória" (Rousseau, 1948: 13). Anos depois, retomava, em *Os devaneios do caminhante solitário*, o processo de escrita de *Confissões*, afirmando que "essa memória me falhava muitas vezes ou somente me fornecia lembranças imperfeitas e eu preenchia suas lacunas com detalhes que imaginava, como complemento dessas lembranças, mas que nunca lhe eram contrárias" (idem, 2018: 59). Todavia, o embelezamento do esquecido, para Rousseau, obedecia ao limite de uma verossimilhança do acontecimento: "Dizia coisas que acontecera, como me parecia que deviam ter sido, como talvez realmente tivessem sido, nunca o contrário do que lembrava terem sido" (ibidem).

Em seguida, com Sigmund Freud e Jacques Lacan, essa questão tomou novos contornos, a partir da temporalidade mobilizada nos conceitos de *posteridade* e

perlaboração. As lembranças encobridoras de experiências traumáticas colocam em suspensão o pressuposto da transparência da memória, ainda que, na posteridade, seja possível compreendê-las e atravessá-las: "No caso de um tipo especial de vivências muito importantes, que têm lugar nos primórdios da infância e que na época foram vividas sem compreensão, mas depois, *a posteriori*, encontraram compreensão e interpretação, em geral não é possível despertar a lembrança" (Freud, 1996a: 165). O sonho e o ato falho, para os dois analistas, constituem vias de acesso a esse amálgama de forças imperantes no inconsciente. Segundo Lacan, nesta espécie de tropeço da linguagem, está o logro de se ter acesso ao sentido de um acontecimento:

> O próprio do campo psicanalítico é supor, com efeito, que o discurso do sujeito se desenvolve normalmente - isto é Freud - na ordem do erro, do desconhecimento, e mesmo da denegação — não é bem a mentira, é entre o erro e a mentira. [...] Nossos atos falhados são atos que são bem-sucedidos, nossas palavras que tropeçam são palavras que confessam. Eles, elas revelam uma verdade de detrás. No interior do que se chamam associações livres, imagens do sonho, sintomas, manifesta-se uma palavra que traz a verdade. Se a descoberta de Freud tem um sentido é este — a verdade pega o erro pelo cangote, na equivocação. (Lacan, 1986: 302)

Lacan também explicitou que a subjetividade está na ordem da criação, pois, através do *estádio do espelho,* o sujeito "assume uma imagem" de si (1998: 97), o que desnaturaliza a subjetividade como algo já dado e, nos dizeres do analista, "situa a instância do *eu*, desde antes de sua determinação social, em uma linha de ficção" (idem: 98). Tais questões encontraram terreno fértil na literatura do século XX, tanto na proliferação de narrativas autoficcionais e metaficcionais, sobretudo a partir dos anos 70, quanto no reconhecimento do que há de ficcional ao falar ou escrever na primeira pessoa, por exemplo, em autobiografias, diários, livros de memórias. Esse retrospecto permite situar a "intrusão fabélica" que irrompe, segundo Pignatari, nas brechas da memória e do esquecimento, da escrita sobre si e sobre o outro.

Conforme os paratextos de *Errâncias,* das sessenta e quatro imagens*,* trinta e seis são de autoria de Décio Pignatari, que se apresenta nesta obra como "fotopoeta" a capturar "fotomomentos", paisagens, espaços afetivos, parceiros e referências intelectuais. Para além do gesto técnico, existe uma produção de memória no ato fotográfico, que se atualiza nas operações seguintes. Os movimentos de fotografar, arquivar, desarquivar e escrever *a posteriori*[10] sobre as imagens vão adicionando, não necessariamente nesta sequência, camadas de sentido à experiência de vida.

Walter Benjamin encerra o texto *Pequena nota sobre a história da fotografia* retomando as críticas de Antoine Weirtz e Baudelaire à ameaça de morte da arte por essa nova mídia[11], e lança a seguinte indagação sobre o lugar da fotografia na formação do homem contemporâneo: "Já se disse que o 'analfabeto do futuro não será quem não sabe escrever, e sim quem não sabe fotografar'. Mas um fotógrafo que não

[10]Para Freud (1996b), é na posteridade que o sujeito produz sentido sobre os acontecimentos. Cf. "Observações adicionais sobre as neuropsicoses de defesa (1886)" e "A etiologia da histeria (1896)" em *Primeiras publicações psicanalíticas* (1893-1896).

[11] "[...] a sociedade imunda precipitou-se, como um único Narciso, para contemplar sua imagem trivial no metal. Uma loucura, um fanatismo extraordinário apoderou-se de todos esses novos adoradores do sol" (Baudelaire apud Dubois, 1998: 28).

sabe ler as suas próprias imagens não é pior que um analfabeto? Não se tornará a legenda a parte mais essencial da fotografia?" (Benjamin, 1994 [1931]: 107). À parte o tom questionável, aos olhos de hoje, da especulação sobre o que seria pior ou melhor do que um analfabeto, a relação intermidiática entre a palavra e a imagem alcançou um elevado grau de imbricamento na contemporaneidade — ainda mais noventa anos depois das reflexões de Benjamin e a caminho dos duzentos da invenção de Daguerre.

Com *Errâncias,* Décio Pignatari atende ao preceito benjaminiano, realizando uma colagem de pedaços da própria biografia ou de biografias alheias, detonados a partir da interação entre as fotografias de sua autoria ou de parceiros intelectuais com as suas reflexões. Como partículas da matéria realizando um movimento browniano, esses pedaços estão incessantemente colidindo, nas agitações do seu "pensamento experimental, que se move e é movido, ora lenta e espaçadamente, em períodos e lugares onde os jeitos e os estilos se sedimentam e assentam, ora rápida e nervosamente, [...] a ponto de não se perceber estilo nenhum [...]" (Pignatari, 2000: 10).

Retomo aqui também as considerações de Theodor Adorno sobre o ensaio como forma de pensamento que ganha contorno em resposta ao "fracasso do Iluminismo" (Adorno, 2003: 16), do cartesianismo e, posteriormente, do positivismo em produzir um conhecimento totalizante da realidade, buscando a origem, o sentido profundo e a subdivisão dos fenômenos e objetos. Um ensaísta, segundo Adorno, desconfia da não identidade entre as palavras e as coisas e "abandona as suas próprias e orgulhosas esperanças" (25) ao reconhecer o "seu caráter fragmentário, o parcial diante do total" (ibidem). A forma do ensaio, portanto, instala-se nesta mesma zona de quase reflexão escolhida por Décio Pignatari.

No mesmo horizonte das reflexões de Adorno, Eneida Maria de Souza considerou um traço da crítica literária contemporânea a produção de um "saber narrativo", pautado pelas estratégias de hibridização — ou de "errância", para nos valermos da expressão pignatariana — entre a teoria e a ficção: "ao retirar do discurso crítico o invólucro da ciência, distingue-se do mesmo através de sua atitude avessa à demonstração e à especulação, ao se concentrar na permanente construção do objeto de análise e nos pequenos relatos que compõem a narrativa literária e cultural" (Souza, 2004: 56). Converge para esta nova configuração do conhecimento sobre a literatura e a cultura na contemporaneidade o que se processava também nos campos disciplinares da psicanálise e da história, bem como na criação literária. Eneida Souza estabelece uma via de mão dupla entre teoria e ficção, pois o que há de ficcional na teoria da psicanálise, da história e da literatura, não é de menor expressividade em relação ao que há de teórico na ficção, particularmente os traços de metaliteratura em narrativas modernas e contemporâneas.

Acerca destas referências mencionadas anteriormente, é preciso destacar que nelas a "ficção" não está sendo pressuposta como uma "mentira" ou um "desvio" da realidade, mas no sentido apontado por Jacques Rancière em *A partilha do sensível*: "Fingir não é propor engodos, porém elaborar estruturas inteligíveis" (2005: 53). Para destacar a superação do regime representativo da arte e do pensamento ocidental pelo regime estético, Rancière desloca as ficções do campo semântico da "duplicação" para inscrevê-las no campo da "organização", "coordenação entre atos",

"ordenação de signos" (idem: 54-55) ou "rearranjos *materiais* dos signos e das imagens, das relações entre o que se vê e o que se diz, entre o se faz e o que se pode fazer" (idem: 59). A realidade, no regime estético da arte, não está *a priori* da ficção, servindo de modelo à cópia jamais igualada, pois, nesse novo horizonte epistemológico, tornam-se contíguas, ou melhor, indistintas, as estratégias narrativas e descritivas da ficção e as da interpretação da realidade

O questionamento às formas de apreensão da realidade por essas discussões também foi realizado nos estudos sobre a realidade na imagem fotográfica. Segundo Roland Barthes, a fotografia é uma emanação do referente que, contraditoriamente, atesta a existência passada de um real que já não está mais lá, tornada apenas um "Isso foi". Rosalind Krauss e Philippe Dubois, baseando-se na tríade semiótica (ícone, índice e símbolo) de Charles Peirce, tratam dessa referencialidade como um elemento da natureza indicial da fotografia. Ambos a consideram um tipo de signo de relação física com o que foi representado, ou seja, o traço de um real fantasmático[12].

São análises também levantadas por Boris Kossoy sobre a dimensão ficcional da interpretação dos documentos fotográficos pelo historiador ou por familiares no âmbito pessoal, pois implicaria um "processo de criação/construção de realidades" (1998: 45). O ato fotográfico é a "criação *documental* de uma realidade concreta"[13], pois captura essa primeira realidade do acontecimento passado e apresenta ao olhar uma segunda realidade, que não é reprodução ou imitação desta primeira, mas uma representação/interpretação que, um pouco mais ou um pouco menos, não deixa de mostrar o seu aspecto artificioso.

Considerações finais

Por ocasião do *Colóquio Biografia*, realizado em 1995 no Centro de Estudos e Semiótica e Psicanálise da PUC de São Paulo, Décio Pignatari apresentava a ideia de que o terceiro milênio seria o tempo da "biografia multimídia" ou "biomídia", a partir da qual se compõe uma "teia interpretante" com vários signos, para captar as experiências de vidas como "uma aranha à mosca" (Pignatari, 1996: 13): "Da arte ao documento, extraindo fios da mais variada natureza sígnica, o biógrafo arma uma teia interpretante, graças à qual apreende, capta, "lê" a vida de alguém, tal como a aranha à mosca"[14]. Em *Errâncias,* o escritor se deixa capturar pelo próprio método, tecendo para si, entre a palavra e a imagem, uma posição na teia da história.

[12] Dubois (1993: 26) identifica a sequência de três perspectivas sobre a referencialidade na história dos estudos sobre a fotografia: "1) a fotografia como espelho do real (o discurso da mimese)"; "2) a fotografia como transformação do real (o discurso do código e da desconstrução)"; "3) a fotografia como traço de um real (o discurso do índice e da referência".
[13] Idem, destaque do autor.
[14] Idem, p. 13-14.

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COMPENDIUM
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A Conversation with André Príncipe & José Pedro Cortes (Pierre von Kleist), by José Bértolo

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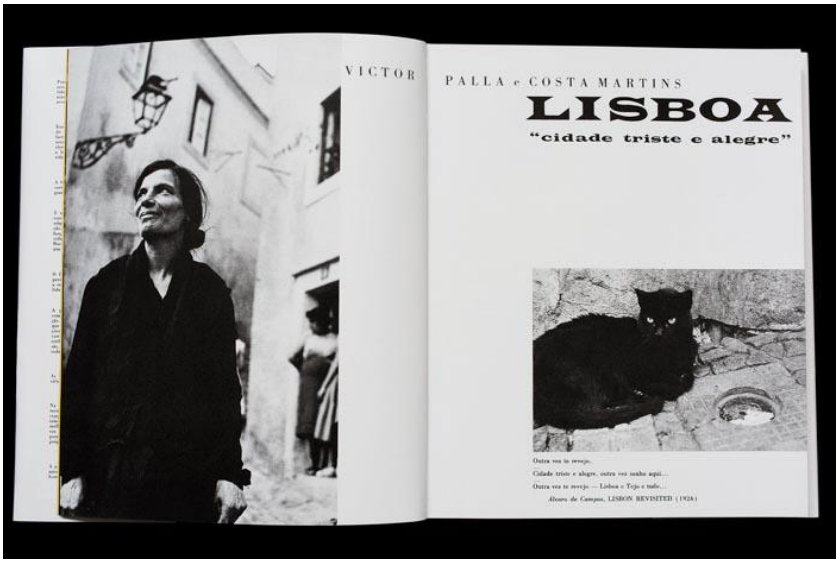
José Bértolo: How did Pierre von Kleist starts as a publishing house?

José Pedro Cortes: The name "Pierre von Kleist" first appeared in 2005, when my book *Silence* was published. Back then, we mainly wanted to have a way of disseminating our work. We had a joint exhibition and André had the experience of publishing a photobook with another publisher. I had been planning my first book, and I wanted to ensure I had a certain amount of control over it. So, because there wasn't really a photography book publisher in Portugal with a strong editorial vision, we set up Pierre von Kleist and published *Silence*. Between 2005 and 2009, we published a few books, and in 2009 came the second decisive moment for PvK: a new edition of the Portuguese classic photobook *Lisboa, Cidade Triste e Alegre*, by Victor Palla and Costa Martins. We spoke with Martin Parr and Gerry Badger about this ambitious editorial project, Badger came to Lisbon on that occasion and ended up writing about the book. In fact, Badger's piece would be the only new addition to the materials of the original edition. The book was published in 2009, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the first edition, and it was a tremendous success.

With Pierre von Kleist, we created a space where we could publish not only our work, but also that of artists we admired. All this according to a specific concept of the book as an object, something that doesn't follow the premises of the catalog or the photography book understood as the corollary of an artistic journey, and often associated with a previous exhibition.



Victor Palla & Costa Martins, *Lisboa, Cidade Triste e Alegre*

JB: How do you see the changes in the publishing world between 2005 and 2022?

JPC: When we attended the first photography fair, Offprint, in 2010, there must have been about 6 publishers and 5 bookstores there…

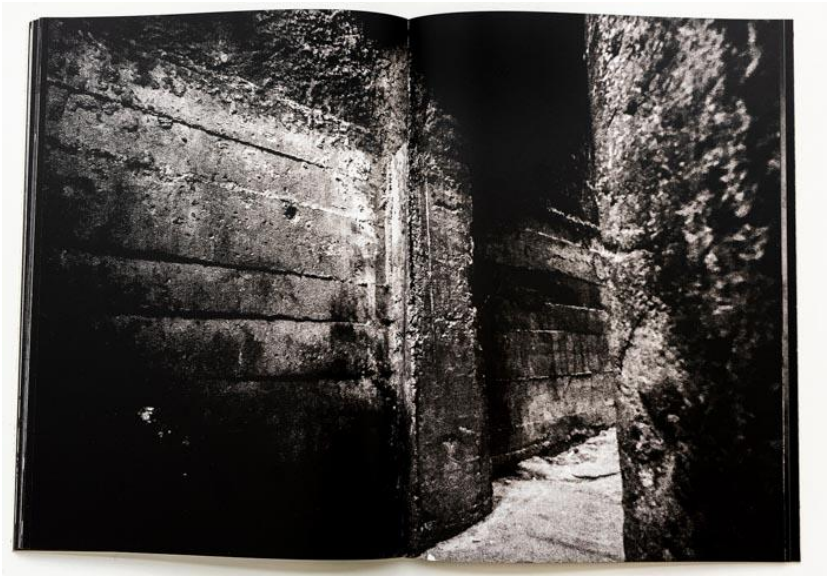
André Príncipe: I would like to add that when we decided to start a publishing house in 2005, we really wanted to make books. We were particularly interested in the book as a medium. That is why it wouldn't make sense for us to open a gallery

or something like that. We wanted to publish our own books, but also the books of others. We wanted to create something new. We grew up together, and as kids we watched a lot of movies and read a lot of different magazines. It was quite rare for us to find photography books in the 80s, but when we did, it was always wonderful. But back then, photography books usually corresponded to established bodies of work. There was a considerable *décalage* between the moment the photographs were taken and the moment the book came out. Our urgency, our youthful desire, coming from magazines, from fanzines, was to publish without the validation of time.

There was this connection to fanzines and this punk "do it yourself" culture. We wanted to take pictures and publish them a year later, without going through museums or galleries. That was the energy. It had to do with having no internet, no digital photography. There was this urgency to cultivate the pure gesture. Nowadays, the gesture is completely different. Our latest books — Engström's, Rui Chafes', Julião Sarmento's — are very far from this. These days, we are back to those slow books, with bodies of work made from 20, 30, 40 years of artistic practice. The internet and the digital technologies are widespread. Today you can take a picture and publish it immediately. This definitely had an impact on what a photobook publisher wants to publish. In face of these changes, we ended up going the opposite way of the beginning of our publishing journey: slow vs. fast.

JB: How would you define? the identity of Pierre von Kleist?

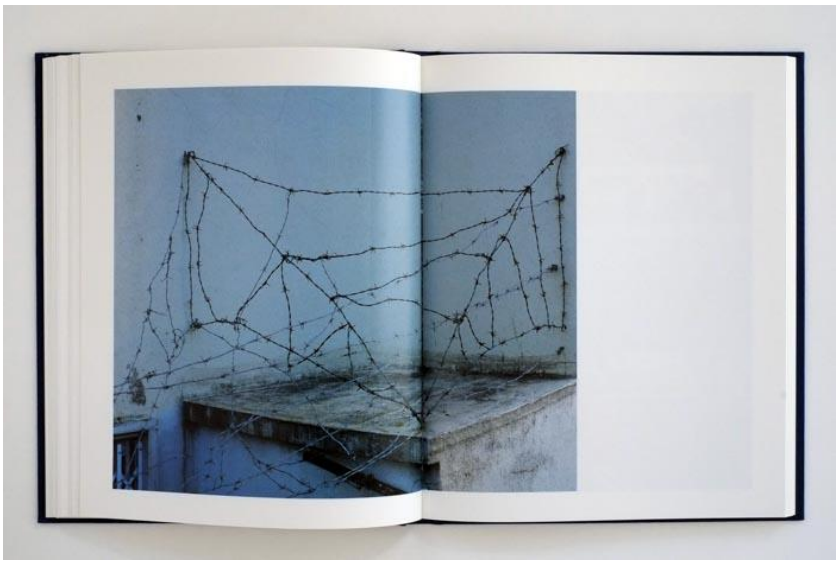
JPC: We have always been interested in works that deal with the contemporary world, that have a strong relationship with the present. This can be seen in the images themselves, as documents, but also in the "mental images" that the books project for us. The identity of PvK is not easy to put into words. It is certainly there, but it is not so easy to explain. There is something intuitive, something organic, in the process of selection and collaboration with the artists.



Pedro Costa & Others, *Vitalina Varela: Caderno de Rodagem*

AP: It is truly hard to explain, but some aspects can be described. For example, the importance of literature and cinema, but also Eisenstein's theories of montage, and the fact that I studied cinema at the university. All this informs the kind of books we do. Pedro Costa, to whom we are very close, always says: "poetry and current affairs". That can be a way to describe what we are interested in.

Then, and not programmatically, we ended up focusing on a "square" made up from me, José Pedro Cortes, António Júlio Duarte, and André Cepeda. This square became the core of PvK. And this happened, again, organically, based on affinities, both personal and work-related. Somehow, the four of us share the desire — a sense of mission — to contribute to the establishment of PvK and Portuguese photography in the world. Later, Pedro Costa joined us, and his ideas have contributed to the spirit of PvK. So, we don't really try to create an identity: it comes naturally.



André Cepeda, *Ballad of Today*

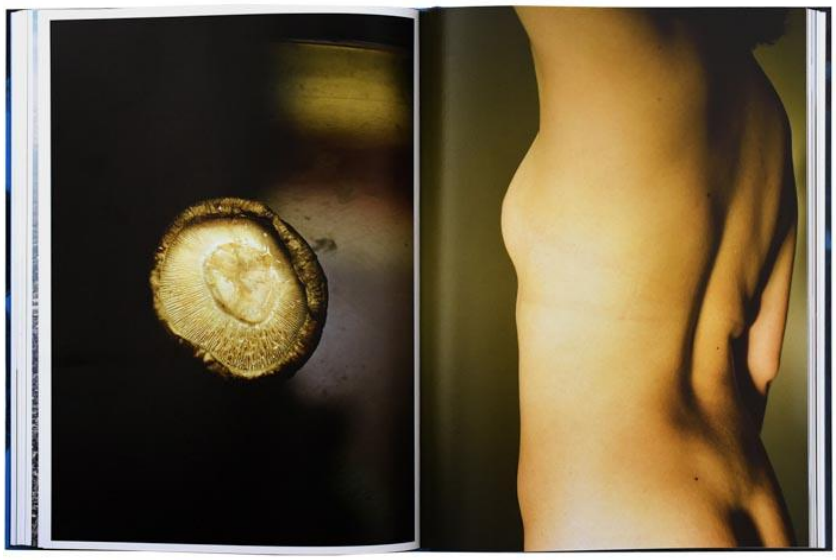
JPC: In a way, our journey has also been marked by a sense of rejection. Maybe we could have positioned ourselves in a more commercially attractive place, we could have accepted more invitations, etc. But it was important to say no, to prevent being contaminated…

But going back to the evolution of the publishing market… When the first Offprint took place in 2010, the founder Yannick Bouillis invited us to be there. He told us that he had this idea of creating a fair dedicated to photography books in Paris... and at the time we kind of laughed at that prospect, because there was no market. It was very small. There was the elitist part of it, with big and important publishers such as Steidl or Aperture. Then, there were books of small print runs, with no commercial ambition, much closer to the idea of the artist's book, combining the artist's thoughts and the industrial mechanics. These alternatives were very few and started to grow from there.

JB: What do you think about the geography of the photobook market?

AP: It's much better than it was ten years ago, when there were almost no alternatives to publishers that came from more powerful countries. But even today this is a story about the rich against the poor. And, in the case of Europe, it is Southern Europe vs. Northern Europe. Ten years ago, there were few publishers coming from the South. We were among the first. Initially it was strange to go to book fairs and think: "where are the Spanish publishers? Where are the Italian? Where are the Greek?"
Traditionally, photobooks come from Central Europe: Switzerland, Germany… Steidl, Verlag, Pierre von Kleist… This name was a way of positioning ourselves: we can pass as *the same*, but underneath we are *different*.

JPC: Publishing photography books is fun and gives people pleasure, but one must not forget that this is mainly an economic activity. When you are in Paris and you attend the book launch of a new artist published by a Dutch publisher, 200 people show up. But when you attend the book launch of a Portuguese artist, three or four friends show up. Portugal still doesn't have a strong presence in the world of photography. There are not enough people, curators, institutions. The money for the books comes out of our own pockets. We almost don't count on state subsidies like it is a usual practice in other countries. As publishers, we feel this geographical difference. We are working against the grain. Even then, we always try to respect our books and create the best possible objects. That is important for us.



José Pedro Cortes, *One's Own Arena*

JB: The books you publish are quality objects sold at quite affordable prices. This seems counterintuitive, given the difficulties of production…

JPC: The truth is that our publishing house doesn't make any money. Financial profit is certainly not the reason why we make books. And we allow this to happen because publishing is not our core business. We are professional photographers. We have the capacity of making books, we invest everything we have in them, but we don't gain any money from them personally. The prices at which we sell them are

levelled down and the calculation is based on the production costs and the costs of circulation. It must be this way, because low prices help us reach more people. And we want our books to have reach. For instance, we had to work hard for António Júlio Duarte — who is an established and respected artist in Portugal — to be well known abroad. Books, and their authors, need all sorts of boosts to circulate.

JB: Besides the "square" you mentioned [Príncipe, Cortes, Duarte, Cepeda] and other Portuguese artists that are close to you, such as Pedro Costa or Rui Chafes, how do other authors, especially foreign, get into your catalog? I remember, for example, JH Engström, Osamu Kanemura, Keiko Nomura...

Keiko Nomura, *Okinawa*

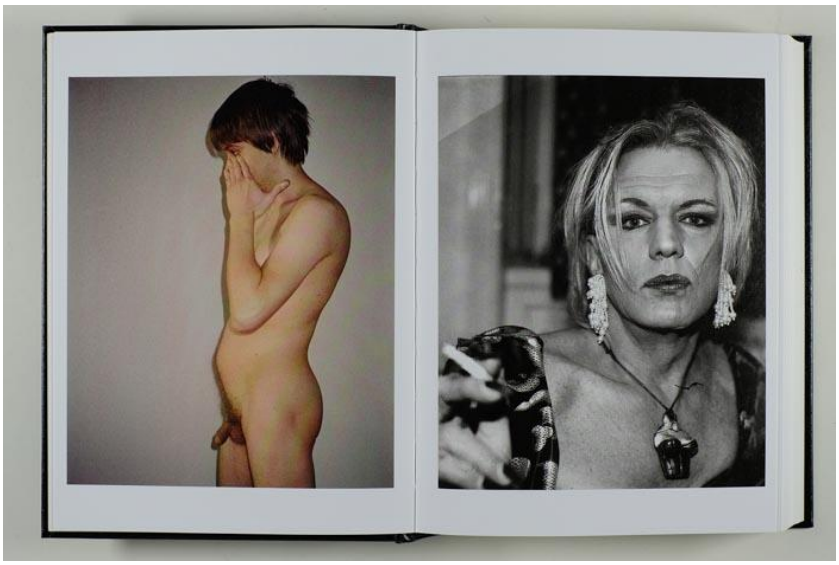
AP: PvK became more Portugal-centered than we had initially imagined because at some point we realized it was necessary to make good books by António Júlio Duarte, by André Cepeda, etc. There were Portuguese photographers who had excellent work but not good books. And we could do these books with and for them.

JB: You started to feel responsible for publishing good quality books by Portuguese photographers…

AP: Yes, it almost became a mission for us. There was good photography in Portugal, but no good photography publishers. That said, we never really stopped being a cosmopolitan publisher with a strong presence abroad, in book fairs, etc.

JPC: We were always abroad and in regular contact with people like Alec Soth, Paul Graham, Paul Kooiker… These are people who know our books well. There was always a dialogue with foreign artists and publishers. But it's true that, due to the context we just described, we gave precedence to doing books by Portuguese artists.

In fact, that is also one of the reasons why we try to keep regular contact with people outside Portugal, so these artists can be well-known and appreciated abroad.



JH Engström, *The Frame*

AP: Still, we are always open to work with foreign artists, as you mentioned. Above all, we strive to maintain a strong and coherent editorial identity. A photographer like Engström makes perfect sense in our catalog. There is a strong affinity between us. Currently, we are working on a book by Bernard Plossu on Portugal and another by Wang Bing on China... These are foreign artists very well-known internationally. But it makes sense for us to publish their work in PvK, and so we will do it, regardless of where they come from.

However, we would also like to contribute to the creation of a new Portuguese generation of photographers. One of the last books we published, *A Zona*, by Diogo Simões, just got a good review in *Les Inrockuptibles*, by Philippe Azoury. Up until now, we were the youngest generation of Portuguese photographers. We have been the "Portuguese young artists", but we are well over 40 now... So that must stop.

JB: How do you see the new Portuguese generation of photographers? In a way, this generation lives under your shadow.

AP: Yes, probably. It is what it is. We also grew under the shadow of Paulo Nozolino, for example. But in the end, I think that Pierre von Kleist is a good artistic parent to have…

JPC: Nowadays, there are many photography schools. I, myself, teach occasionally. And as far as the photobook is concerned, it became part of the photography curricula after the "photobook boom". And this is positive, but we must not forget that a good photobook only exists if there are good photographs in it. It is important for young artists to realize that it is very sexy to have their first book — a kind of visiting card — but the really hard work will be constructing a solid and serious body of work.

Diogo Simões, *A Zona*

AP: I think the new generations are quite different from ours, and it couldn't be otherwise, since the world has changed. We needed the book format to show new work, we needed it for our new work to circulate. There was a certain urgency. At that time, what legitimized the work of a young photographer was not the book, but an exhibition. The first solo exhibition was the big milestone. Today, the first book is often the most desired milestone. And it can be, indeed, the most important. If fifteen years ago the book was punk, now it is academic. In the old days, you studied photography almost without talking about books. Today, as José Pedro said, the book has an important place within the curricula. It has become academic. A certain spontaneity has been lost. Young people today are taking photographs "for their first book", developing a "project" which will be transformed into a book. It all became more conventional, less spontaneous.

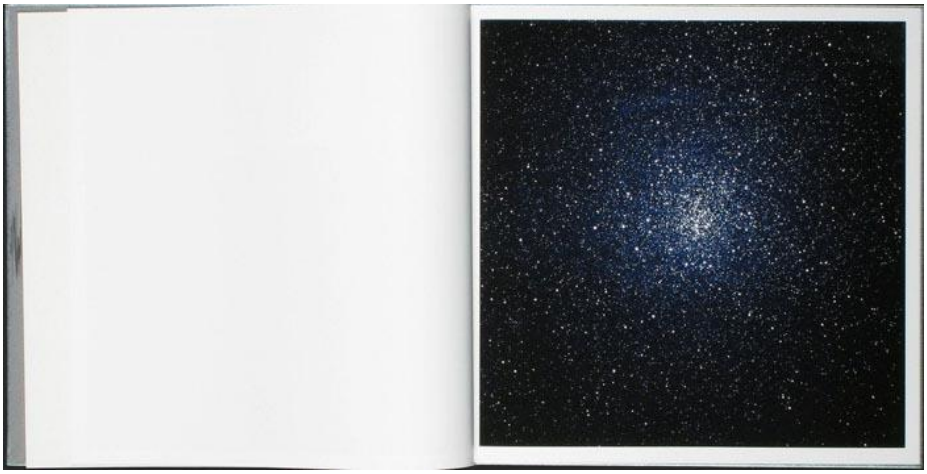
JB: Do you think that the photobook is turning into a fetish object?

AP: Yes. Some spontaneity was lost. The book lost its vital lightness, it has become a heavy thing. The new generation frequently thinks of photobooks in an academic way. Books are no longer an exciting, punk thing.

JB: How do you make decisions regarding the material dimension of the books?

AP: At Pvk, we are self-taught designers. We are mainly interested in the dramaturgical aspect of the books. We construct them according to how we want them to be read. For example, some of my books follow the format of musical scores — I made this decision at some point when I was starting to think about making them. But at the time I didn't really know how to materialize this idea into physical objects. So I started doing research, buying musical scores, etc. And I learned how to make the book as I had previously imagined it, how I wanted it to exist as an object.

When we were working with António Júlio Duarte's in his first book with us, *White Noise*, he told us that his first contact with photography was through the covers of vinyl records. That is the reason why we decided that the format of the book would follow vinyl covers.



António Júlio Duarte, *White Noise*

JB: Coming back to the photobook as perhaps a fetish object… How do you perceive the community that has been built around it? Who buys photobooks? There seems to be a relatively broad community, but a closed community at the same time.

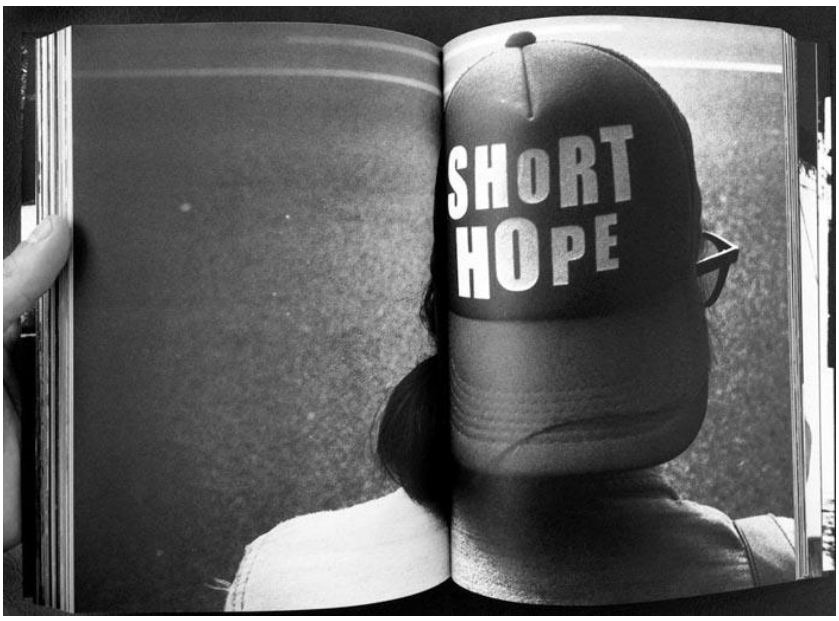
AP: Yes, we talk about that a lot. There is a kind of "ghetto", isn't there? I believe that there is no community these days. The photobook community is over.

JB: In what regards criticism, or reception, for example, there are very few places where photobooks are talked about. Even inside academia there is clearly a gap. In the general press, photobooks are almost absent. This is strange because, in the photography world, everybody is talking about photobooks, but in the outside world it seems that nobody talks about photobooks, or even knows about it.

AP: The community as it existed in the early years failed. We used to compare photobooks with documentaries. Photography should have a public interest. We should get out of the ghetto and become mainstream. Because if the work is about the world, photobooks must communicate with the world. However, that communication with the outside world didn't happen, unfortunately. The ghetto got bigger, it started to accommodate more and more people, but it didn't stop being a ghetto. Our generation wanted to go from photobooks to the world, but the new generations seem to desire the opposite movement. There was an implosion.

JB: Maybe the photobook became so autonomous, so closed in on itself, so institutionalized as an artform, that it ended up losing a certain direct connection with life. This is something that remains very strong in the Japanese photobook, for example, where there is less this idea of a photobook corresponding to a "photographic project", as José Pedro mentioned earlier. In Japan, books seem to be

usually born from a strong relationship with life. Photography is mainly a mediator in this relation. In fact, the film you [André Príncipe] directed with Marco Martins, *Traces of a Diary* (2011), centers on this question.



André Príncipe & Marco Martins, *Tokyo Diaries*

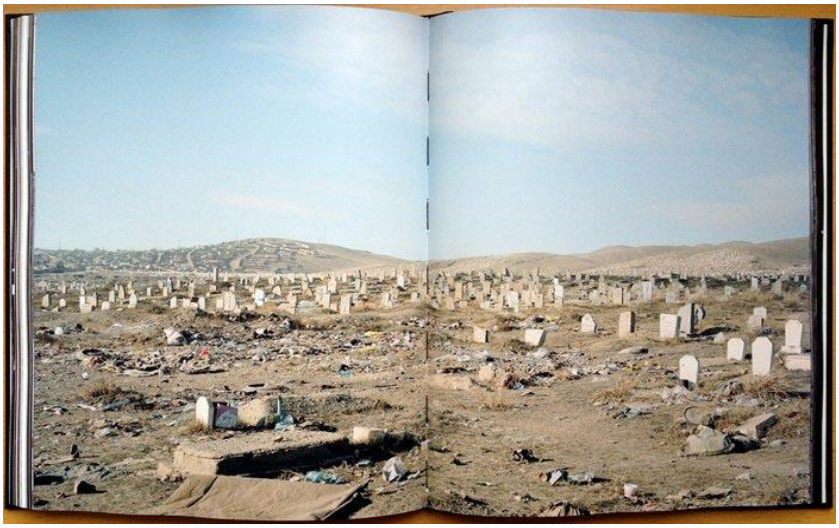
AP: Maybe this is because Japan has a long tradition of this specific practice of photography and the photobook. There hasn't been a "photobook boom" in Japan in recent years like there has been here. There was continuity. In Japan the photobook exists in a more integrated way, perhaps. There is also a huge professionalization, as you know. There are photographers, editors, book designers, but all this division of labor exists in an organic way, without hysteria or fetishization. The relation is somewhat more grounded.

JPC: I believe that in Japan the relationship with art and life is perceived differently. In Japan, the level of abstraction accepted in photography is higher. The audience adheres to that sometimes higher level abstraction. They think about life differently, and therefore the work develops differently. Here, the more a photographer pulls to the side of abstraction and life, and the less they provide context and explanation for the work, the less the audience adheres to it. In the Western world, the more you define the work, the easier it is for it to circulate and communicate. And, well, you need an audience… The less you work on behalf of the audience, the harder it is for them to see and appreciate your work. But this is how the world works. This also happens in cinema, for example: there are the blockbusters, and then there is Pedro Costa… All artists want to reach as many people as possible, but there are artists who only want to reach the people who are available to truly think about their work.

And photobooks must also promote this kind of relation. It's not like the kids' sticker books. Now [December 2022] World Cup 2022 is taking place, and you have the World Cup sticker book. You collect the stickers, and then the World Cup ends and the sticker book loses its value… It shouldn't be like that with books. They must

stamp their mark on people. This is truly important for us as publishers. Maybe some of our books have a hard time circulating, reaching a wider audience, because we resist linearity, easy reading, explanation. But we do it the way we believe we should do it, and that's the important thing.

However, it is true that, for a publisher to survive, the books must circulate. Digital transformations, such as streaming, have helped the more "difficult" cinema to circulate, but that didn't happen in the same way with photography books. You see the pictures on the internet, and that may even make fewer people buy the books, since they see the pictures on the internet and are satisfied with that. They have the pictures, so they don't need the book. It's hard to fight that.



André Príncipe, *Smell of Tiger Precedes Tiger*

AP: I agree. On the other hand — and this, perhaps, is very personal — I feel that these days it is important that we learn to do things without being obsessed with reception and the audience, to do things as if we were alone, without trying to communicate with the audience in a direct or easy way. And this does not mean to have disdain for the audience. On the contrary, it means that the commitment to the medium as an artform must become even stronger. The photobook has become a kind of uninteresting, too "tidy", easy thing, while before, again, it was exciting. As a publisher or as an artist, you felt passion for the book, you wanted to give it to the world, to defend it passionately, to talk about it with other people. Since the market today is kind of saturated, the community has imploded. There is a lot of noise but there seems to be little conversation. We need less noise and more conversation.

COMPENDIUM
Journal of Comparative Studies
Revista de Estudos Comparatistas

A Questionnaire on the Photobook

Publishers

Akio Nagasawa | Atelier EXB | Blow Up Press | Bookshop M | Chose Commune | Éditions Loco | FW:Books | Libro Arte | Roma Publications | STANLEY/BARKER | The Eriskay Connection | Void | XYZ Books | Zen Foto

By
José Bértolo
David Campany

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Publisher: Akio Nagasawa Publishing

Name: Akio Nagasawa

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

Our mission is to preserve artists' important works for future generations. In terms of non-global context, it is to introduce Japanese artists to the world.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

Our publishing house is based in Japan. I think there is no geographical difference in making photobooks. However, in terms of distribution, we have some disadvantages in distributing in Europe and the U.S. due to shipping costs, which is not a big matter.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

Although I believe what is essential in photography is to experience actual prints in person, a photobook is especially important because exhibitions are often temporary and accessible only to a limited audience. It is a medium that allows people to experience an artist's universe wherever they are in the world. A photobook can convey an artist's work to the present generation, but also to those 10, 20, or even 100 years from now.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

I do not know much about who is buying our books. Since our photobooks are kind of high-priced compared to other books, I believe that these are the people who are really consciously committed to the photography culture; they are more than general audiences.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

I do not know the first thing about it since I am not familiar with that field.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

They are very important. An image on the Internet cannot present an essence of a work like it is crucial to appreciate its scale and *matière* for a print. For a photobook, you can experience the world of an artist without seeing an actual photograph, but by touching a physical material that contains other information such as layout design, size, paper, printing quality, bookbinding, weight, etc.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

There is no particular threat. I think digital and photobooks are two separate worlds. Each has its own advantages and audiences.

Publisher: Atelier EXB

Name: Jordan Alves

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

Atelier EXB publishes works that address new forms of photography, contemporary art and science. Founded in 2002 by Xavier Barral, and taken over in 2020 by the five members of the team (Jordan Alves, Nathalie Chapuis, Yseult Chehata, Charlotte Debiolles and Perrine Somma), the publishing house conceives each book with great attention to both content and form. Interrogating the forms of photography, discovering artistic writing, addressing the major issues that permeate our contemporary societies through images: Atelier EXB is at once a space for creation, curiosity and openness to the world. Aesthetic excellence and editorial content, developed in close collaboration with major names in contemporary creation as well as more emerging figures, make up astonishing works in which numerous artists and authors from all over the world come together. To date, the catalogue includes more than 200 critically acclaimed works.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

We are based in Paris, France, but we can see that the market is now global. It is really important for us to publish in French, but we often publish in English and we see that the boundaries are now very thin and almost don't exist anymore. Photobooks are circulating much faster and efficiently, especially with the internet and the social networks.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

Photobooks are still an accomplishment for the artists. I feel like it is an important moment in a career, doing the right book with the right publisher. Books also often complete an exhibition: either by being a part of it, or by continuing the purpose of the artist after it is closed.
Most of all, I feel like in this world of multimedia content, where everything is dematerialized, books appear as a physical necessity, an object that is real and in which you can experiment sensations: touching, smelling, seeing, even hearing!

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

We have a good general idea of our audience but we are still surprised by the diversity of it. Our books were once quite expensive but now with the multiplicity of new publishing houses and the raise of materials, we are as expensive as the others! The situation of the market enlarged our audience and, once again thanks to internet, gathered more people from different landscapes around our publications. We also try to propose events, lectures, book signing or projections to make the link with the authors.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

The place of photobook criticism in the press is still very small, almost non-existing. It is different in the digital world, where it can be faster, cheaper and in a different quantity even if it doesn't mean it is good. There is still this good feeling of having a good critic, but, on the other hand, I still don't know if a good critic helps or not the book to be sold. Sometime social networks or the good work of a bookshop/distributor is enough.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

Of course they do! We try to be as much open to the world as we can, and going abroad to show the books is the best way to defend our message. Every book has a place in our editorial line, saying something of our world in which we recognize ourselves. Spreading the message outside our country is very important, as much as doing it domestically. Book fairs are always a good moment to meet our readers or make new ones. It is essential.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

I don't think so. In terms of selling it is a good complement to the bookshops, a good way to find an information and be redirected to the right publication. About the e-books, I don't see the point of making it. Nothing could ever replace the sensation of the paper under your fingers and the ink to your eyes, and we work hard for that.

Publisher: BLOW UP PRESS

Name: Grzegorz Kosmala

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

From the really beginning we wanted to talk about important topics, to make people think about them, to ask questions more often than giving simply answers to them, especially if there are no answers at all. We don't want to publish books that you go through just one time and then you keep them on your bookshelf and never come back to them. That's why we created a motto, "When the story matters", that we are trying to follow in our publications even if they are artbooks. So, we cover difficult topics, often taken from personal experiences of the authors, that somehow describe the world we live in, describe us, and I hope they contribute to better understanding who we are, what we are doing and what effects this may bring.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

Right now we are based in Warsaw, Poland. I think today's geography of photobooks has some spots where it feels very well. It mainly results from the long traditions of photography and photobooks in those areas. When I look at the map of Europe, they are mostly located in the western part of the continent. Traditionally France, Great Britain but also the Netherlands. These three spots are the leaders followed by Italy, Spain and Switzerland. So, it is Europe. Then, skipping to the map of the world, we have three countries that contribute a lot to the world of photobooks: USA, Japan and China. From our perspective, it is how the world of photobooks looks like.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

They are extremely important as they have become the way we can experience photography today. We realized not everything can be experienced online. Photobooks are here excellent example of this. More and more photographers perceive the photobook as a natural end to their projects. Not a publication in magazine, not a presentation at the gallery or museum. It took a while to realize this but it finally happened. So it is photobooks that drive photography today. In the past, there were festivals and their exhibitions. But it is too ephemeral, too temporal, while photobook stays with you for much longer if not for ever.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Well, we have a group of people collecting all our publications. They are with us from the first printed publications. When we participate in different fairs, we have the same people approaching our table. Luckily, this group increases and each fair results with new customers. Who are they? In most of the cases they are collectors of photobooks, people who like this medium or like photography and the artists we publish. Then we have people who buy books as an inspiration for their projects or materials for their studies. Depending on the market, we also have students of design or photography. I cannot say it has changed over the years. I would rather say it is constant.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

You are right, there are not so many places where people can read about photobooks. And those which exist are under permanent attack by photographers and publishers trying to make them interested in their publications, hoping for a good review. On the other hand, there is an increasing group of reviewers-amateurs promising a review in exchange of a book, building their position that way. But honestly, I don't know how to strengthen this critic. Maybe it should be somehow regulated how to work with reviewers, something like a code of good practices. I'm sure of one thing: we all, publishers and reviewers, need each other a lot.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

Yes, and since the pandemic — extremely important. It is the most important channel of reaching our customers and giving them a chance to experience our books. It is the moment when we can talk to them directly and when we can finally meet, also with our artists.
Of course, depending on the festival, some are better, and some are worse. For us, the best are fairs focusing on photobooks but also on art books. Photography fairs are less interesting as they are focused on galleries, and publishers are always gathered somewhere in the corner of the fair.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

I can hardly imagine a photobook on a Kindle or iPad. It is just a substitute, for me. Even online bookfairs which were so popular during the pandemic couldn't replace offline events which come back after a forced 2-year-long break. It is because people

who buy photobooks are different customers. They are fascinated by this unique connection to photography and paper, which is the best carrier for this medium, almost an irreplaceable one.

Publisher: bookshop M

Name: Satoshi Machiguchi

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

I run *MATCH and Company Co., Ltd.*, a Tokyo-based design studio that edits and book designs photobooks by leading Japanese photographers, does editorial design for magazines, and graphic design for films, plays, and exhibitions.
In 2005, in order to take on the challenge of publishing and distributing our own photobooks, I launched the photobook label *M* and at the same time established the photobook sales company *bookshop M Co., Ltd*.
Since 2008, the company has continued to exhibit at Paris Photo, one of the world's largest photography fairs.
My younger brother, Hikari Machiguchi, also works as a designer, and we work together.
The photobook label *M* publishes mainly the works of Japanese photographers.
Selecting mainly photographers of the same generation as us, but also esteemed predecessors and younger photographers, we continue to pursue the possibilities of the Japanese photobook in a global perspective. This is because we want to fulfill our responsibility to show the work not only of Japanese photographers but also Japan's excellent paper, printing, and bookbinding techniques to the world.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

Tokyo, Japan.
Japanese photobooks have a special history in the world.
While following this history, we are always looking for new ways to express photobooks using new Japanese techniques.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

I recognize that a photograph and a photobook are two very different modes of expression.
As you know, a photobook is more accessible than a photograph, as it begins to walk on its own.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Although our readers are mainly from Japan, we have been expanding our readership to Europe by continuing to exhibit at Paris Photo, one of the world's largest photography fairs since 2008. We are also aware that it is spreading to other Asian countries that are neighbors of Japan.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

Recently, a number of long-established Japanese photography magazines have been forced to discontinue publication in rapid succession. However, in January of this year, a new photography magazine *Sha-shin* was launched, for which I serve as art director. It has attracted more new readers than expected.
While it is important to develop critique through WEB and SNS, I believe it is also important to develop critique through print (substances that can be sensed by the five senses) media. This is because we have received proof that print media will definitely *remain* and we feel that new readers are returning to print media as a *material*. I also think it is important to replace the critique with all kinds of language.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

Of course.
This is because it is possible for people to meet in person and communicate through the medium of photobooks as material.
As an example, at this year's Paris Photo, I proposed a photobook that I planned to publish in Japan to my foreign publisher friends, and it was decided that the photobook would be published not only in Japan but also in other countries around the world.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

I mentioned earlier that photography and photobooks are completely different modes of expression, and, in the same way, I believe that electronic media and paper media are completely different modes of expression.
I believe that it is my job to appeal to readers by taking advantage of the characteristics of both, while carefully considering what can only be done with electronic media and what can only be done with paper.

Publisher: Chose Commune

Name: Cécile Poimboeuf-Koizumi (co-founder / director)

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

At Chose Commune, we aim at producing books that *don't exist*.
By this, I mean that most of the books, if not all of them, are book projects before being anything else. We never work with ready-made dummies and don't really accept any submissions. I always say that I am happy to receive an invitation to see some work, whether it's a gallery/museum show or a school's graduate show, or even anything that would be underground is most welcome. People tend to think that when I say "I don't accept submissions", it means that I'm not interested in discovering new work. It's actually quite the opposite. But I just don't like my eye to be directed.
If I had to present the editorial line — something I never really feel comfortable with as what comes out of Chose Commune is basically mostly what I like, personally —, I would say that I am particularly interested in making visible unpublished works by famous or unknown artists. I want people to be surprised each time we publish a book, because they've heard of the name but they didn't suspect he/she was also making such work, or be blown-away because they had no idea the photographer even existed. I hope my contribution lies there especially. In the discovery. One might notice that there are a lot of Japanese photographers published by our imprint. Being half-Japanese and having an extensive knowledge of the language, culture and photography from this part of the world certainly guides my choices. But I feel we are more generally very much interested in the international scene. We are a French publishing house but we don't publish that many French photographers. The photography scene is very strong in France but there are already many publishers doing a wonderful job representing France, so when Chose Commune came to life, I thought I would use my strength (Japanese/French background + an overseas upbringing) to offer something a bit different.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

Chose Commune is based in Marseille, France.
I am not sure geography is such a big deal in today's global world.
People may travel less or rightfully so, but books can and should travel.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

To me, photobooks are everything. I feel very close to the way photobooks ruled the culture of photography in Japan, much more than exhibitions. I feel that in the West, exhibitions bring approval and books are often considered catalogues of the said-show. I aim at making books that are the exact opposite. Not long ago, someone asked, talking about one of our releases, if the book was the show's catalogue. I replied that the show was conceived and imagined from the book, not the other way round. And it was true, as the book was a project long before the exhibition was even planned.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

We have a strong network of faithful collectors and buyers. Those I know, and meet regularly at book fairs. But I like to think that I don't know most of the people buying our books, through bookshops for example. Nothing would be more sad than selling your books to the same people every time. I don't make books for photobook collectors. I make books that can bring a little something to anyone, especially those who never even thought a photobook was a thing.
Talking exclusively about the photobook world, which is not what interests me most, as you may have understood, yes, I think it has changed slightly. Let's say that there has been a self-publishinig/small presses's boom around 2013/2014, there was a crazy energy back then. Of course, new publishers flourish every year, but it feels different.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

It is totally lacking. Most magazines write about photobooks (well, let's say art book, broadly speaking) only once a year, at Christmas. To think that photobooks are considered like coffee table books that one would only buy for Christmas is pretty much depressing. Of course, there is a specialized press that works differently but I wish that national newspapers and more mainstream magazines would also want to write about it. I've been looking at a way to change things for the past 10 years… Please let me know if you find the magic trick.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

Yes, book fairs are an important moment both socially and financially. To be honest, it can be a bit disappointing financially speaking, but it's just so good to meet the people who make what you do worth it.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

I don't think so. A screen just cannot replace printed matter, especially images.

Publisher: Éditions Loco

Name: Eric Cez

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

Since their creation in 2008, Loco editions have developed several axes in the field of photography. We are attached to author photography, ranging from an exploration and plastic research, to more documentary works, set up through the photographic image of the narrations.
For each book, we want to find the most accurate form and editorial approach in relation to the singularity of a photographic work.
We want to give visibility to a demanding photographic creation in France and abroad.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

Our publishing house is based in Paris and our books are distributed worldwide with greater importance in Europe.
The photobook now enjoys an incredible aura and the circulation of books is mainly through international trade shows and fairs.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

The book has always been, by its reproducible nature, intrinsically linked to photography. A book is often more important to a photographer than an exhibition. It makes it possible to develop a work and to perpetuate a plastic, documentary or aesthetic position in a united whole. Reproduction techniques now make it possible to restore all the qualities of a photographic print. The book is the most faithful ambassador of a photographic work.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Buying a photography book is still an insider act. Buyers are still collectors, passionate about photography.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

We suffer from a lack of serious criticism around the photobook. It is true that the place devoted in the press to the book in general tends to be reduced, giving even less space to the criticism of a photo book. The space is now moving a little more in the blogs and websites of photobook enthusiasts. But a whole critical field remains to be invented.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

They are certainly important to make the books more visible to the public.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

I don't think digital is a problem for the photobook. On the contrary, the book develops an increasingly rich research on materiality, a reflection on the object, the choice of a format, a paper and a binding which gives all its singularity and originality to a book. The book is assimilated more and more to a luxury craftsmanship which contributes to its aura.

Publisher: Fw:Books

Name: Hans Gremmen

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

We see the choice of an artist to make a book as a choice to make a new work. Making a book is a collaborative act in which design, editing, and production are all merged into one organic process. This way of working is very much rooted in the Dutch tradition of collaborations between photographers, designers, and printers; which can be traced back to the experimental reproductions of Piet Zwart, and to the collaborations between Emmy Andriessen, Cas Oorthuis with designer Dick Elffers, and Ed van der Elskens' books made with Jurriaan Schrofer. And later, in the nineties, the books made by Mevis and van Deursen for photographers Aglaia Konrad, Geert van Kesteren and many others.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

This year I was part of the jury of the *Best Books from all over the World* competition, and I see that the books that are made are more and more starting to look alike. Which makes sense, because the education also is no longer limited to borders of countries. If I look at the Netherlands, where we are based, I see many important Dutch designers, like Karel Martens, Mevis & van Deursen, Irma Boom, Joost Grootens, all teaching at international schools, such as Rietveld, Yale, Ecal, etc. The input at art schools is therefore no longer limited to a specific country.
Also the students at art schools are becoming more and more diverse, and bring in their worlds into education, as well. This creates a great and energetic field that I also experience when I'm visiting international book fairs, such as the New York Art Book Fair or Tokyo Art Book Fair. It is great to see that design and books bind so many people. Yet, there is a danger to this globalisation, too: if we mix all these perspectives and flavours too much, we end up eating the same boring soup.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

Photobooks and photography have a unique connection. Within photography there is no such thing as "an original": every photograph is a reproduction of a negative, a slide, or a digital file. To print a c-print and frame it, and put it on the walls of the MoMA takes as many steps of reproduction as to print that same photograph on a page in a book. This means both prints are equal. Realizing this made me

fundamentally change my view on what a photobook is, and how it shapes photography.
A book has also another important quality: it can easily travel. Most of the photography i saw in my life was in printed form: through books and magazines. Also a book stays forever, and is always open, and on, without needing a plug, internet or opening hours.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Our network is growing in an organic way. This is very much connected to the people we work with. Every new photographer, and writer, we work with expands our network. Also, many books are distributed through our partner Idea Books. They find shops for us, and show them our books. We could have a more active say in this part, but I like to stay a bit away from that. Being too much aware of your audiences can be distracting, and — in the worst case — it can dictate the outcome of the books. I think that a large part of our audience is expecting a book which is made without compromise, in edit, content and design. Sometimes this means a book is uncomfortable or difficult to read. But a good book is a bit uncomfortable and takes an effort to read. We expect the readers to engage with the book.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photo-books? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

I try to focus on my job (designing and publishing), and i hope writers and critiques are doing their job: to create a steady bubble in which there is reflection on this important medium.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

These fairs are a very important way to connect to colleagues, buyers, shops, curators, libraries. Interestingly, during the Covid pandemic, there were hardly any fairs. And we were afraid we would loose this connection to these groups, and — mostly — we were very worried that many shops could disappear. But the opposite happened: many new (small) shops opened their doors, and found their way to our books. Our distributor noticed that the percentage of books sold to Amazon shrank, and the "real" bookshops sales grew significantly. For me these sales, through bookshops, are the most important: I truly enjoy the idea that many people with love for books benefit from our work: the people working in bookshops, with all their knowledge and passion, the shops themselves, the distributors, and people they work with. They all benefit. From this perspective I struggle sometimes with the idea that

every book sold on (for instance) the New York Art Book Fair from my table is a book less sold at a nice NYC bookshop.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

The opposite is true: internet helps independent people to show their work and ideas.

Publisher: Libro Arte

Name: Yoshihiro Ikka

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

I would like to introduce young Japanese photographers to the world. I hope that as many Japanese photographers as possible will be active in the world. For that reason, I still want to make a photobook and present it to the world.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

Libro Arte is based in Japan. I have been exhibiting at French book fairs for the past 10 years, so, outside Japan, I often think mainly about France.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

I believe that photobooks are important in photography culture.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

I think that general people and people who like photobooks are buying them. I don't think it will change now or in the future.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

I didn't give it much thought.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

I think it's pretty important.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

I don't feel threatened by digital photobooks. I think of it as something completely different.

Publisher: Roma Publications, Amsterdam

Name: Roger Willems, director

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

Roma Publications aims to be a platform to initiate, design, produce and distribute artists' books, photobooks, and other contemporary art and design related publications. Every publication is the result of a close collaboration between an artist and an (editorial) designer, which is often me, but not all of the time. The goal is to stay close to the intentions of the artist, to handle this with care, and avoid institutional interferences when necessary.
We don't have any strategy or opinion about our place in a global context. It's fine to work in a margin as long as we find the opportunities and receive enough positive response to carry on.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

We are based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and distribute worldwide through Idea Books, also located in Amsterdam.
Photobooks can travel well, but still reach only few. I think, also if you try your best, it's not realistic to expect photobooks to be a very democratic medium. We are loyal to independent book shops all around the world because we think they still play a role in local communities. But on the other hand we deliberately make books that spring out of our limited and subjective context. We accept and enjoy the fact that we often drop completely out of place publications on the other side of the world. It's up to the individual to recognise it or not, to inspire, or to ignore it.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

Photobooks are great tools. But to be honest, I try to stay a bit out of the culture of photography. The world of photobooks feels very narrow to me.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Based on my experience at fairs I can say that books that are somehow interesting for graphic designers and bought mostly by young designers, and art or design students. Photobooks are merely bought by senior photographers and collectors.

Over the last years I noticed that a large part of the design students have an Asian background.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

I don't know. Probably criticism regarding photobooks will always stay within the photobooks-circle.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

Yes, they do. It is a moment to come out of the studio and meet your audience. Last week we attended Printed Matter's Art Book Fair in New York, and it was great to experience this huge interest in independent publishing. It's really amazing and gives us a lot of energy.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

No, I don't see it that way. A book has different qualities.

Publisher: Skinnerboox

Name: Milo Montelli

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house?

Basically, I just want to have fun. At least this was my goal at the very beginning (2014).
I have another job totally far from the arts and I wanted publishing to be my space of freedom.
At a certain point I felt obliged to fit some business rules/strategies but I mostly like to see publishing as a way of expressing myself. I'm still looking for a balance between my personal taste, motivation, money, human relationship and publishing as a learning experience.

2. Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

Really hard to answer. Can I say I don't know? My aim is to give a voice to young artists as well as to most established ones.
I can do it with my tools and experience. I'm quite alone in this but I like to know new people, artists, designers, curators. If some of the books I made can give some new emotion, new impulse to people, so this is my contribution.

3. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

Skinnerboox is a very small reality, based in a small place in the country in the middle of Italy. The place is called Jesi. Publishing gave me the opportunity to travel a lot to several places in the world. I saw a lot of realities similar to mine, as well as most structured companies. Regarding the audience, I think the most interested people at the moment are from Asia. At least people I met, but also bookshops, are often very curious and have a very enthusiastic approach.

4. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

I think it's one of the most important vehicles to share the culture of photography. It allows artists to share their work even without institutional support (which in Italy is zero). Photobooks give them the opportunity to go deeper into their work, it's a space of freedom but also a learning opportunity. The problem is that doing/buying

books is very expensive. And I think this is the biggest barrier in order to make it a real global/democratic experience.

5. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Yes. As I already stated, in the last 2 years I experienced a lot of growing interest from Asian countries. Also, most important, most of them are very young people.

6. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

There is no real criticism. There's no real debate on photobooks, with some few exceptions. Also, if you see the biggest book prizes are made (jurors, winners...) by friends of friends, typical of the art world (and not only, maybe). Sometimes you can decide if to be in or not. And not always quality is a prerequisite. So I think education is always the answer. But also this kind of education is very expensive. So I fear it will be quite hard to be out of this niche.

7. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

Definitely. Since we say that we are all in love with the materiality of books, fairs are the best moment to share your work. To allow people to touch and smell it.
Personally, at the moment, fairs' participation are among the few moments I particularly enjoy this experience.

8. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

I prefer to say that photobooks could be a threat to the digital world.

Publisher: STANLEY/BARKER

Name: Rachel & Gregory Barker

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

We publish the books that we ourselves want to own, and more than that, the ones that stay on your coffee table, rather than sinking into the oblivion of the shelf.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

We are based in England but we work with photographers from all around the world. Where we are is irrelevant to the books we produce, we find photographers who's work we love and we distribute the books worldwide.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

Books give everyone the opportunity to enjoy photography and they can have the power to change and shape the culture of photography — if they are good. We are also interested in the world outside photography and getting our books into people's lives who wouldn't ordinarily know about the photographers we work with.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Our collectors are located all around the world and are passionate and enthusiastic about our books. We have noticed our reach is much wider and grows each year, with people ordering books from near and far.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

There is no criticism. We would welcome honest criticism and comment.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

We attend Paris Photo, it's a good opportunity to meet our collectors, stockists and people in the photography industry.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

No. The digital experience killed the photography magazine, but books have a different nexus. For us, the book is the work itself, not a depiction of it.

Publisher: The Eriskay Connection

Names: Rob van Hoesel, Carel Fransen, Evelien Seegers & Jan van Helden

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

The Eriskay Connection is a Dutch studio for book design and an independent publisher. With a small team, we focus on contemporary storytelling at the intersection of photography, research and writing. In close collaboration with photographers, authors and artists from all around the world, we make photobooks as autonomous bodies of work that offer us new and necessary insights into the world around us.
The key for us is to convey the essence of the work through high quality editing, design and production. Our editions are mainly offset printed and bound in the Netherlands, and we strive to work with local producers and sustainable materials as much as possible.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

We are based in the city of Breda in the Netherlands, and our publications are distributed all over the world. Even though contemporary art is focused a lot on the Western world, we have been surprised and hopeful about the vast diversity of places where photobooks are being made (and bought). It is still a very Western practice and market, but there seems to be a shift in focus, which hopefully will continue.

3. How important are photo books in shaping the culture of photography?

Photobooks could be seen as a dedicated niche within the world of photography. But it is tough to determine how photobooks influence the culture of photography. For photographers there is some overlap, as there are a considerable amount of photographers represented by galleries who have also published photo books. For the audiences, however, there is a more clear division. People who buy photographic prints are often different from those who buy photobooks.
As an object, photobooks can be a physical document of an artistic or documentary project. But it can also be a piece of art on itself, something you'd call an artist's book. "Artists' books are books or book-like objects over the final appearance of which an artist has had a high degree of control; where the book is intended as a work of art in itself" (Stephen Bury, *Artists' Books: The Book as a Work of Art*, 1995). Most of what we publish falls in this latter category, and these are the kind of books we like to make most. Because for those books we need to work closely with an artist, not

only for the edit and sequence of their photographs, but also to see how we can tell a story in book form that goes beyond the simple representation of their work.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

The fact that most of our publications are in English, and often multilingual, makes it possible for us to have a far-reaching audience. We have a reasonably good feeling about who is buying our books, especially on fairs and on our web shop, and our audience is quite diverse. We feel this has not necessarily changed over the years, except for the fact that our reach has increased, of course.
Still, we operate in a niche market, also shown by the edition sizes we, and other publishers, generally work with. But what's interesting is that every book has a chance of reaching a specific audience outside of the photobook niche, based on the subject matter. But as these potential audiences change for every book, it is quite a challenge to keep finding ways to find out about, and reach out to them.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photo books? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

In general, it seems to us that the field of criticism for art in traditional media is coming short. There seems to be a lessening interest and room for niche subjects in a market that tries hard to compete with the fast moving online world. While being reviewed in magazines and newspapers undoubtedly helps out, we think that we mainly benefit from repeating visibility. If someone has read a review of one of our books, then sees it on social media, and finally on our table at a book fair, then they will likely already know what it's about. So whether it is an article on a blog, a post on social media, or a review in a newspaper, everything counts. But it's an ever-changing world, so we also need to listen to and learn from the new kids on the block.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

Book fairs are very important for our publishing house, so the last two years of lockdowns were very strange. Generally, we try to visit many fairs: a nice variation of smaller ones that do not require extensive travelling, but also bigger ones such as Polycopies in Paris, and the art book fairs in New York, Tokyo and Shanghai.
One of the most important and fun parts of book fairs for us is that we can directly connect to our audience. You can see how visitors react at your table, what they might pick up, and how they leaf through a book. And of course the possibility to actually have a conversation about the work.

We also try to invite the photographers we work with to join us at a fair, for example for a book signing or a talk. It is also very nice to see the people we work with to meet each other. As they all have book making as a shared experience, there is a lot to learn and to talk about.
Book fairs are also a place where you can see what other publishing houses are producing. We exchange experiences and share thoughts and drinks. Every publisher has their own creativity and strength. For that reason we don't really see each other as competitors, but more like colleagues.
Last but not least, it is a place where we meet new artists. Sometimes book fairs organise portfolio reviews, with students for example, but we also meet many artists who simply go to fairs to show their work and look for a publishing house that might suit them. Many of the books we published originate from a conversation at a book fair.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photo books?

That is a difficult question. The digital world is such a boundless and uncontrollable sphere of everything that yes, nowadays, it influences most of our daily lives. But its unlimited inventiveness is also exciting and give many new opportunities. New ways to find an audience, for example, or for artists to present themselves and their work. But those opportunities are mostly centered around the way to present photobooks and reach out to new artists and audiences. While it might have been a direct threat to the industry ten years ago, we think photobooks have since proved themselves unreplaceable by digital alternatives. So we will simply keep doing what we love to do, which is making well produced physical books with talented artists.

Publisher: Void

Name: João Linneu & Myrto Steirou

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

Void is very invested in publishing books that wouldn't easily find another publishing house. As an example, we published *5 Dollars for 3 Minutes* by Cammie Toloui — a book that the artist had been trying to publish since the 90s.
We are very keen on publishing debut books of artists. Half of our titles are the first monograph of a photographer. As much as this is commercially challenging, there's great energy (and responsibility) when working on an artist's first publication. Treating artists fairly is something we prioritize. Void is self-funded, and our business model is drawn in a fashion that values the artists we collaborate with, and at the same time, grants us creative freedom and independence.
All our books, including the most colorful ones, have a dark twist to them. And this is a niche within a niche that we try to populate and take good care of. In our practice, we avoid templates and formulas. Every time we feel we are starting to repeat ourselves, we change routes. Not fearing to experiment and fail, we keep our slightly-not-that-commercial practice with enthusiasm and the same — or even more — passion than when we started. Looking forward to being relevant, fair and inspiring to the people we collaborate with, and to the audience.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

Void is a Greek company. With its stock and brick-and-mortar store in Athens. Though, its members are divided between Iceland and Greece. Geography is an extremely important factor in the editorial universe.
The country you are based in will impact the likelihood of getting grants and funding. There's no public grant for art publishing in Greece, to say. When — in northern Europe — you can find a multitude of support for artists and publishers. This has a direct impact on the regional representation within the editorial universe. It also has a big influence on the deal between publishing houses with artists and readers. Publishers can offer more to artists when they can rely on external sources.
As you can also offer much better product prices when you have to invest just a fraction of the production costs.
Open a book directly in the colophon of a Dutch publishing house. You will find more logos than in a Formula 1 car. This book will be sold at least 30% cheaper than a book by a self-funded publisher. This will also impact the selling of the book, the distribution, the edition run, and, therefore, the representation of such publishers and their artists.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

We are way too involved and too passionate to have a clear and objective opinion. We are motivated by the belief that books are an important part of the photographic fauna. And that if photography is deeply related to "memory" as a concept, the book is perhaps the best suit for such a concept.
On the other hand, the book became the fuel for speculative photographic practices. The need to make a book is "shaping the culture of photography" in a negative way. Many photographers need to make a book before needing to make a photograph. And the book starts before questioning if their project is suited for that format. Many times it is not. And inevitably populates the photography ecosystem with half-baked projects that saw the light of day too soon.

4. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

Our experience is that specialized photography book criticism spans from people wanting free books to Collector Daily (collectordaily.com). The latter do a very serious job. To start from, they purchase the books they review, so there are no influential dynamics of "favor-retribution". They also do an interesting self-evaluation at the end of the year of how many reviews by gender, geography, etc. And, no less important, their review brings in-depth thoughts and interesting perspectives.
But maybe because of the niche nature, criticisms tend to always picture positive aspects. Speaking from a publisher's shoes, we would be scared if there were way too many Simon Cowells out there. The financial sustainability of a book lies on a lifeline, and if negative reviews pop up more often than not, it would be even more challenging to be a publisher.
Now, wearing off the publisher's shoe, it is at times boring to know every article you read will surely praise the critiqued book/exhibition/project. I remember reading "SHIT and Empty Infantilism" (an article by Brad Feurhelm on Erik Kessels' book *Shit* by RVB Books) and was mesmerized that, finally, something non-praising was out there. And at the same time had the chills of feeling bad for the publisher who will have to deal with that in a small market.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

Fairs and festivals are good sales opportunities, being responsible for 12% of our revenue (yes… we have this number). But more than the sales figure, fairs allow a good connection with the audience. You have a good barometer of what you did right

and wrong. Just observing someone reading your book tells a lot about our hits and misses.
Also, relevant to the geography and representation issue: the more relevant fairs tend to be in Central and Northern Europe. The recent increase in oil and transport is making it more and more difficult for peripheral publishers to attend fairs and festivals in a financially profitable way. Portugal has an interesting grant for Portuguese publishers to travel to book fairs abroad. But there are not many of those out there.

6. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

Probably no longer. The harm it could cause was already done. E-books hit the literature market, shrinking brick-and-mortar stores. This drove bookstores to run with less physical space, and art books, for their bigger dimensions, were the first to be kicked out of the stores.
Another aspect: we already learned how to appreciate photography in the digital world. We understand the unique nature of each realm. We won't look for an in-depth intimate relationship with photography on Instagram. As we can't ease the craving for reactive news in magazine or book form.
This is to say we might have reached an equilibrium moment, where books on photography have their niche. With specialized physical and online bookstores, specialized media, fairs, festivals, awards, producers and customers.
Perhaps the imminent threat to photography books comes from economics (paper supply crisis, inflation hitting ways of production, increasingly expensive shipping fees) and ecology.

Publisher: XYZ Books

Name: Tiago Casanova & Pedro Guimarães

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

We have tried to position ourselves as an open and collaborative hub for photography and photography books, being XYZ Books much more than just a publishing house. Inside our premises we are currently hosting five interdisciplinary and nonprofit projects: an exhibition space, a bookshop with a focus on photography, a publishing house, a printing lab, and shared studios for permanent and temporary residents.
We envision our project in two perspectives: what we take out and what we bring in. Our two main missions are on one hand to create the means to internationalize local and Portuguese authors, and on the other hand create the means to bring in new, external and international knowledge to share it with our community. We do so by participating very actively in international photobook fairs, photography festivals and by creating partnerships with other international institutions, and by organizing workshops, exhibitions, presentations and also a very unique format of Residencies entirely dedicated to the photobook making, which we started in 2017.

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

We are based in Lisbon, Portugal.
One of our greatest passions about photobooks is the fact that these can also be seen as portable and long-lasting exhibitions. There is not a specific place or a closing date to be seen. In this sense we have noticed the worldwide proliferation of the photobook, being in fact a global phenomenon, where you can see publishers and self-published authors based in all imaginable places of earth, a reality entirely allied with the fast growing of digital systems of communication and production.
The same can be said about the audience, and people in general who have interest in buying and owning photography books, since we have online sales for any country you can imagine.
On the other hand, although photobooks are a global phenomenon, we cannot say that we have accomplished a geographical equity of the photobook making. By being a physical object, and usually requiring very expensive machinery and materials, it is a fact that not every country and even not every continent have the means to produce and distribute high quality photography books. We have recently realized that even developed countries such as New Zealand have a tremendous difficulty to produce photography books due to the tremendous logistical problems they face in terms of machinery and materials, and ultimately on very high costs. There are probably 4 main hubs of photobook making/distribution: Europe; Japan, North

America and South America, but due to import/export logistics and high costs, even within these big hubs it is very difficult for artists and publishers to internationalize themselves outside those borders. Even for XYZ Books, which is located in Europe, it is difficult to be able to internationalize ourselves due to high costs on traveling and shipping, to be present on the main international events, which usually take place in Central Europe.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

There is somehow a fetish within the artist and photography community to be able to create their own book, especially their first book. The photobook as a way to showcase a body of work is more and more reaching the same status as exhibitions. This means on one hand that photobooks have allowed the democratization of the photography production (up to a certain point), allowing artists to self-publish without the need of a curatorial process or even a commercial purpose. On the other hand, this also means that authors, especially the younger ones, are more and more impatient about publishing their first work. This results in an excessive production of photobooks, with the creation and massive production of titles that add very less to the already overwhelming universe of images.
Nevertheless, photobooks are still somehow a way to be critical and analytical within the abundance of images that we are daily confronted with, especially with digital and social media platforms and advertisements. As professional creators of images, photographers who pass through the process of editing a book are often confronted with the task to narrow down and be more and more precise on their image selection in order to communicate a specific idea, concept or project. In a digital world, this is one of the greatest challenges we are now facing, on how to create meaning to an image in an already overwhelming world of images. In order to shape the culture of photography to a wider audience (ultimately the entire world population is an audience of photography, and the vast majority is an image creator too) you need to first shape within the professionals working in the field.
Photobooks have been playing an important role in shaping the culture of photography on two different ends, from the photographers who have published themselves a book, to other photographers, artists and consumers who see and consume photography books, since this has been revealed to be a more democratic, atemporal and borderless way of showcasing photography.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Our main audience are other artists and photographers, other editors and publishers, and a few collectors. Maybe a few bigger publishers were able to reach a wider audience outside this spectrum, but we believe that the great majority of small independent publishers are still in a very narrow niche. Some titles, due to their thematic, might reach a new external audience, but again, that's just another niche.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

Art critics, and especially photobook critics, lack structural and financial support for their activity. Newspapers and specialized magazines and platforms struggle for means of survival, especially with the new digital formats. Most contributors work on a nonprofit base, meaning that the quality of contribution has decreased over the years, even in established magazines. Most of the more interesting examples of criticism have been created by fellow experienced photographers and educators who have created their own platforms of communication, who depend entirely on financial contributions by readers, and most of the time they also depend on book donations by publishers and artists.
The only possible way to strengthen the field of art and photography criticism is to create structural and state sponsorship, so that authors who want to specialize themselves in the field can count on grants and financial support for their activity, the same way many artists and curators can also count with financial support for creation and dissemination of artworks.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

International Photography and book fairs are the main concentration point of people working in photobook making, from photographers and publishers, but also booksellers, printers, designers, curators, journalists and much more. Considering that, these are the moments we are able to more closely showcase our work to our piers, create the so valuable network to promote the books and artists that we publish, but also find new works to be published.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

The past 10-15 years have taught us that the digital world is far from being a threat to photobooks. The more digital the world is, the more physical photobooks we see being produced and the more publishers we see pumping out. The digital world has in fact created a platform to ease the sharing of knowledge, especially to curious photographers searching for ways to self-publish their first books, and also it has eased the production processes, where many authors and publishers see their photobooks being printed and produced at a physical distance in other cities, countries and even continents. Also, the digital world has paved the way to many publishers, authors and even bookshops based in remote locations.
The current biggest threat to photobooks lies in the extreme increase of production costs, including the costs of paper. Photobooks are becoming more and more

expensive to produce, while our audience (other artists, photographers and publishers) also have less and less financial means to buy expensive books.
We are afraid that the photobook world will have a massive reshape in the very near future.

Publisher: Zen Foto Gallery

Name: Mark Pearson

1. How would you describe the editorial project and mission of your publishing house? Where do you place it in the global context and what do you expect to be your contribution?

The mission of our publishing efforts was never made explicit. It began in a very small way as a series of thin monographs to form a record of exhibitions that we held in Zen Foto Gallery from 2009 onwards. The purpose was to leave a record of the exhibitions which would otherwise have been forgotten and which would be helpful for the artists in the promotion of their work more widely. The exhibition can be analogous to the live performance of a symphony which is experienced only by the audience present and disappears when the resonance of the music fades, whereas the photobook might be closer to the printed sheet music and the reproduced recording.
As the years passed, we recognized that these simple monographs could be "improved" with better printing quality and "better" design, in order to leave a better more permanent record. Yet the pace of our exhibitions was relatively rapid, and we had to be self-financing, so we had to make the books with rather tight budgets.
We do not see the mission in a global context or as a project, beyond leaving a record in the form of a book of a series of photographs that often might otherwise not exist, and which will help the artists and reach widely to the people around the world who appreciate them.
The books are arguably little more than a statement that "we were here".

2. In what country is your publishing house located? How do you see the geography of the photobook in today's global world?

We run out of Zen Foto Gallery in Roppongi in Tokyo, Japan. It is interesting to see the contrasting styles in different places around the world, in different houses, which is one of the advantages of events such as Polycopies, in Paris, that bring publishers together from around the world.

3. How important are photobooks in shaping the culture of photography?

I do not feel qualified to answer this question. I simply hope that people will appreciate the photographs and the books. I have been blessed to be involved with Japanese and Chinese photography in the past two decades, and this has tremendously enriched my own life. I am told by some people that they like the books and I feel glad that I have been able to play a part in the greater appreciation of

Japan and China in the world of photography, which makes me some kind of ambassador.
Although I do not profess a higher purpose than a small contribution to the cultural life of Japan and its wider appreciation, it seems to me that photobooks are important in shaping the culture of photography in several ways. Firstly, most people associate books with the written word, and photograph books are inherently unusual. The content is often interesting, and permit a view of a subject that cannot otherwise be experienced, they are accessible and relatively affordable in comparison with original prints. They also provide a very different sensory experience in comparison with social media.
Finally, it is clear that one book or one artist or one country's style often influences others, and the incorporation of these lineages of influence contributes to the dynamic development of the medium.
The medium is also relatively organic and independent. Being far below and largely independent of legacy corporate media, whilst often influenced by such conventional views, the photobook can yet be an opportunity for subversive expression, to the benefit of society.

4. Do you have a good sense of who is buying your books? Has it changed over the years?

Likely the majority of people in the world have no interest in photography books. The medium is a mystery to them. I don't think it is possible to characterize the kind of people who buy our books. However, there are a very small number of people across the world in all countries who do. Obviously, they are photography fans of various kinds, often people who are also practitioners themselves, whether professional or not. Most people who buy the books seem to have a true passion for the art form, but I cannot explain why they formed this passion in the first place. Nor do I have a clear sense of whether the trend has changed.

5. What do you think of the criticism in magazines, journals, and the digital world regarding photobooks? It seems that this field of criticism is still lacking. What can be done to strengthen it?

I do not read many critical appreciations of photobooks, so I am not very qualified to comment. Occasionally I do encounter comments and reviews and am impressed by the thoughtfulness and analysis contained therein. I enjoy reading some books that are appreciations of various genres, such as those on "The Japanese Photobook" by Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, and so on. I am naturally very happy to read favourable appreciations of our own books.
However, I think there is a fair amount of critical comment out there, albeit rather diffuse and often obscure, so I do not sense that there is a lack of criticism in the field.

6. Do international photography and book fairs play an important role in your work?

They are good events for us to reach people who enjoy the books, so the answer has to be yes. The problem is that it is expensive to participate in fairs — apart from the participation fee (which is sometimes quite reasonable for book fairs but often very expensive for photo fairs), the shipping cost for the books, travel and hotel cost and salaries are high and make it an unprofitable activity.

7. Is the digital world a threat to photobooks?

Digital is likely complementary to photobooks rather than a replacement. The sensory experience is entirely different. One is a transitory experience that will surely disappear in time, the other is an enduring record of the artistic work.
Of course, the physical book is limited by physical constraints, while the digital version can do things that are impossible in book form.
One might argue finally that, in extremis, viewing a digital version of a photobook is inherently unhealthy in several ways, whereas the viewing of a real book seems to me to be entirely benign to physical health.

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A Questionnaire on the Photobook

Artists

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Aaron Schuman

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career?

For me, the photobook is the primary format through which I engage with photography today. Photographs themselves are paradoxical in the sense that they are incredibly detailed and rich with information — both in terms of their content, and in terms of the aesthetic choices made by the photographer — yet they also remain remarkably ambiguous when left to their own devices; context more than anything is what imbibes them with meaning, purpose, depth, clarity and the potential to communicate beyond the limitations of the frame. As a younger photographer and viewer, I often used to fetishize the single photograph, obsessing over individual images, what they meant, and how they were made. But I came to realize that what is truly rewarding is to engage with photographs in relation to the constellations of images and information that we surround and support them with, which infuses them with layers of meaning, feeling and complexity that might otherwise go undiscovered. Eventually, I came to understand that a photobook is not simply a collection or catalogue of individual images, but is a singular work of art in its own right, which at its best is carefully designed and curated to communicate holistically, with each element within it speaking to and resonating amongst all the others, and collectively serving a greater purpose. The photobook offers the photographer so much potential in terms of being able to create, control and convey the underlying complexities and contexts within which their pictures are intended to be seen, understood and read — as well as the opportunity to use image, text, design, materiality, and the physicality of the book itself to weave together an elaborate tapestry of ideas, experiences and information — creating something that exponentially more interesting and engaging (for both photographer and reader), and so much more meaningful and enriching than the sum of its parts. Furthermore, a book has a "reader" rather than an "audience" — reading is generally an individualized act, and the book format alone innately encourages an incredibly direct, unique and intimate relationship to form between its author and each reader. Don't get me wrong — I love a beautifully presented photographic print or a cleverly curated exhibition as much as the next person — but I do feel that the photobook is the ultimate format for photographic expression, in terms of allowing photography to serve as a genuine "medium" through which we can best communicate ourselves and connect with others at the deepest and most important levels.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

When I first started to consider publishing my own photobooks, I was already very aware of the importance of editing, sequencing, sizing and layout, having spent a lot

of time studying these intricacies with the books of others. But it wasn't really until I sat down with publishers and their respective designers to discuss the production of my books that I became entirely aware of potential and vast range of possibilities offered by their materiality, and the subtle importance of our physical experience of a book. Obviously, from having spent many years printing my own photographs — both in the darkroom and digitally — I understood that, visually, the type of paper used plays a vital role in how an image is read and received; matte versus glossy, warm versus cool, textured versus smooth, high-contrast versus low-contrast, dense tones versus flat tones, and so on. But when Michael Mack first walked me through some of the books he'd published, discussing in detail the feel of various papers on the fingertips, and how the texture and weight of a paper determined the reader's encounter and understanding of the work in terms of a tactile experience — i.e. how easily the pages turned, how stiff or flexible they were in the turning (partially revealing the next page or not to varying degrees), how they either lay flat or slightly curved in relation to the spine, how they subconsciously recalled or intuitively referenced the feel and associations we have of all of the different types of papers we've come across in our lifetime (from telephone books, to paperback novels, to magazines, to photographic prints), and so on — it completely blew my mind. In both the books I've published with MACK so far, we've incorporated two paper-stocks in order to create a subtle physical sensation or shift in the reader's physical experience while turning the pages. In *Slant* (2019), a body of work that incorporated both black-and-white photographs made in what might be called a traditionally "straight" documentary style and clippings from a local newspaper, we used a somewhat traditional-feeling paper for the photographs (with a slight varnish on the images themselves, to give them a bit of a fibre-based-print kind of depth and sheen), and a much thinner, recycled, more pulpy-feeling paper for the clippings, to refer back to their newspaper origins. In *Sonata* (2022), which conceptually and structurally is inspired by the classical sonata form within music, the book contains three "movements" — an exposition, a development, and a recapitulation; the first and third movements, which share some motifs and themes amongst them, contain color photographs which are printed on a rather smooth, photographic-print-feeling type of paper (which is deeply saturated and has a slight sheen), whereas the second movement is entirely a sequence of dizzying black-and-white pictures made in Italian olive groves, and is printed on a matte paper that has a slightly rougher, more "natural" feel. In both cases, the idea is that the reader not only sees subtle transition taking place within the book, but literally feels it as well. And that's not to mention all of the other design elements that are utilized in order to quietly support the work or guide the reader's experience — from the cover design and material, to the endpapers, to the binding, to the structure and pliability of the case, to the design and curvature of the spine, and even to the headband and so on. Of course, once you become aware of all of these possibilities, it is very tempting to want to take advantage of all of the bells and whistles on offer; it's easy to overdo it in the sense that the design can overwhelm the content or intentions of the work itself, and take center-stage, pushing the photographs and materials that are at the heart of it to the background, and into a supporting role. But so far, I've been lucky enough to work with designers who have understood (and insisted) that all of these choices

need to be considered in service of the body of work, and through extended conversations between us every decision is carefully justified in relation to its intentions, and how we can utilize design and materiality to further strengthen, support and communicate these to the reader, both physically and conceptually.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

I tend to both photograph and research in quite an intuitive manner, gathering lots of seemingly random images, materials, ephemera, bits of information and so on that I inherently find interesting, in the knowledge that some of it will eventually gain further relevance within the context of a book or project, and quite a high proportion of it will probably be culled, or saved for future use. Once I sense that a particular theme, idea, pattern or obsession is beginning to surface or form within this amorphous collection of material — and once I feel this starting to pull me in a more distinct direction; personally, emotionally, intellectually or otherwise — that's when I start to consider ways in which I might focus my attention, and approach the photographing, editing and sequencing process with a bit more rigor and intention. I begin to try to more clearly identify and refine the underlying themes that I'm exploring, and when it comes to thinking about the eventual book, I start to consider ways in which I might devise an overarching conceptual or symbolic structure that will help me sort the photographs and materials, and build meaningful relationships between them for both myself and the reader. Often, when I'm developing this structure, I look for inspiration from outside of the photobook tradition, alongside spending a lot of time with many of my favorite photobooks trying to unpick how they are so successful on a structural level. For example, my first book, *FOLK* (2016), evolved from an exhibition that I'd had two years earlier at an ethnographic museum, so its editing, sequencing and design drew a lot from the curatorial process of that show — thinking of each double-page-spread as portion of wall on which images and objects hung and developed a physical relationship to one another; and thinking of the overall book as a spatial experience for the reader, akin to wandering from wall to wall and room to room, whilst mentally building an intricate network of connections between them. This book also drew inspiration from the ways in which various ethnographic catalogues and publications incorporate photographic materials and visualize objects and artefacts. In *Slant* (2019) — which was made in and around the town of Amherst, Massachusetts; the hometown of the poet Emily Dickinson — the layout, sequence and structure of the book drew inspiration from slant-rhyme, a poetic devise used frequently by Dickinson herself, as well as from the local newspaper, the *Amherst Bulletin*, where I found the clippings that were included in the book, as well as from classic photobooks, such as *Time In New England* (1950) by Paul Strand and Nancy Newhall, and *Wisconsin Death Trip* (1973) by Michael Lesy, which both interweave photographs and appropriate texts together in fascinating and incredibly effective ways. And as I mentioned previously, *Sonata* (2022) structurally and sequentially draws its inspiration from the classical

musical form of the sonata, with three interrelated movements coming together to form a singular composition and holistic sensorial experience for the reader, as well as from a wide range of photobooks, including Christian Marclay's *Things I've Heard* (2013), Lee Friedlander's *Apples and Olives* (2005), Matthew Connors's *Fire in Cairo* (2015), and many more. Again, in all three of my books, the intention is for these underlying conceptual foundations or symbolic structures to subtly support and enrich the reader's experience and understanding of the work itself in book form, rather than overwhelm it – so they may go entirely unnoticed at first glance. But my hope is that, even if it's on a subconscious level, they will help to bring further meaning, purpose, depth, context, clarity and complexity to the projects as a whole, and allow the diverse and somewhat ambiguous individual component parts to coalesce into singular and consolidated work of art, which is both captivating and rewarding in its totality.

Alec Soth

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

Something I love about photography is that it can be distributed so many ways. I often make the analogy to music. In the digital era, photographs can be "streamed" for free or seen "live" in exhibitions. I think of the book at being analogous to the vinyl album. While not as democratic as the web, it is still somewhat affordable and broadly distributed. Having come of age in a pre-digital era in smaller city without very many photo exhibitions, the photobook was my primary source. As a consequence, it is almost always the first form of distribution I think of for my work.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

The way I tend to remember photobooks in my library is by touch. I make an emotional connection to the weight of the book and the tactile quality of the cover. I pay a lot of attention to this in my own work. I also experiment. I've made large and small books using everything from newsprint to the finest papers.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

I find it difficult to explain editing as so much of it is intuitive. But I generally have a few consistent practices. When I start a project, I decide on a rough number of pictures to include in the book. I think of this as being analogous to the length of a film. Most filmmakers, I assume, know before shooting if they are going to make a thirty minute episode, a ninety minute feature film or a four hour epic. After taking significantly more images than the number I choose, I begin editing. I make small thumbnail prints so that I can see them all at once. I then begin something that looks like a game of solitaire. After I develop a rough sequence, I make larger prints and a dummy so than I can experience the feeling of flipping the page. This process then gets translated into an InDesign file so that I can make faster changes. It's only until late in the process that I discuss the sequence with my publisher.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

I'm exceedingly lucky to work with a publisher who respects my vision but also gives clear, thoughtful feedback and has a good eye for design. The quality of the collaboration is quite rare, so I have little desire to work with other publishers.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

While these fairs play an important role in the culture and economics of the photobook, due to where I live and my schedule, I tend to engage with them infrequently.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

There are far too many to name. The reason I have a large library is so that I can continually find new sources of inspiration. This inspiration can come from obvious elements like the photographs and sequences but can also come from nuanced design details.

Amak Mahmoodian

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

In light of what is happening globally, and the atmosphere that encircles us with personal, social and political issues, photobooks for me are evidence and testimonies for those yet to come.
For some of my projects, the photobook is a wonderful transition from single images to the whole narrative. The book is an in-between space, into which the readers are transported, where my narrative and their's blend together.
Books and sketchbooks are in the centre of my practice. In sketchbooks I invent a character who is caring, dealing, living, suffering, researching and looking for the answer. I find the answer in the active process of responding through my sketchbooks, rather than in the outcome. My books are strongly connected to my sketchbooks and the process of making them.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

I choose the materials that highlight the importance of the story that the reader holds in their hands as a book. For instance, *Shenasnameh* is a small book exactly the same size as an Iranian Shenasnameh (birth certificate), covered with the fabric Iranian women are forced to wear for their ID photographs. It is the same fabric Iranians have been burning in the streets of Iran in the last 64 days, in the protests against the morality police, injustice and oppression.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to pro- duce through editing in your works?

At the beginning my approach to the process of sequencing is deeply intuitive. My recent book *Zanjir* is structured as a circular narrative referencing the idea of time (the eternal return) positioning both Taj and I at each side of the book to collide in the middle where the myth (Shahnameh) and death are represented with red tattoos. This is also where past and present meet to create a new narrative. The historical images and my images are never on the same spread, almost as they were running after each other. Taj's excerpts always appear in the recto pages in italics and my text in the verso pages with a standard font visualising this back-and-forth dialogue.

In the sequence and edit of *Zanjir* we used archetypal symbols such as: heaven (associated with power), earth (associated with fertility, or the nurse of all living things), blood (related to life, dignity of inheritance, death), and light (symbolising mental and spiritual qualities). As well as metaphors created with the combination of images and text. The design used a variety of sizes and positions for the photographs creating a certain flow and hierarchy helping us to translate the idea of "distance" to the reading experience. For example, using full bleed images for a more immersive experience to smaller ones placed in the corner of the page to objectify others. The book tries to blend the different timelines into one (historical and contemporary), blurring the lines of what conforms to the past and the present but acknowledging their provenance.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

For last two books, *Shenasnameh* co-published by RRB Photobooks and IC Visual lab in 2016 and *Zanjir* published by RRB Photobooks in 2019, I decided to work with the publisher who knew the work and importantly my relationship with my work and subjects, which is the core of my practice. This helped me to analyse and identify the narrative structure and sequence in response to the issues I intend to identify through the project.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

Personally, at the beginning of my journey I found them scary. But, through the time and conversations I had with friends and artists who I am inspired by, I learned to attend the book fairs that are relevant to my practice. Book fairs and Photobook festivals are meadows of resources, inspirations and sometimes feedback. This helps me not only in learning about other artists but also in understanding my own practice.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

I have several inspirations and they change as I change. In my opinion each photobook has something to offer, like a view, you take and carry within what suits you and who you are.
My personal canon is not a photobook, it is a book (in seven parts) with no images yet evocatively visual, *In Search of the Lost Time*, by Marcel Proust.

António Júlio Duarte

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

The photobook format has been increasingly important in my work. My working process is very much about finding balance between how single images work and how they generate different meanings as sequences, and the book format is perfect for that. My first books were closely tied to exhibitions, so the pictures in them were selected more with the exhibition in mind than the book. They are more catalogues. *White Noise* is the first work I edited as a book from scratch. That was 2011. Since then, photobook became my elected way of expression. Books and exhibitions pose different challenges. I like them both. In an exhibition I deal with the relation between an architectural space and photographs as tridimensional objects. In a book, the images appear in succession, there is a stronger sense of time. These are different ways of thinking and experiencing.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

I do have a strong intuition of the general aspects of the book I am working on from the beginning, like the size or the format. As the editing work progresses, these aspects become more detailed and more technical. Final decisions about paper and materials are made together with the publisher, the graphic designer, and the printing technicians.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

My approach is more intuitive than conceptual or symbolic. I take reality as it is and work from there. Photographs are visual, but I think of them much in musical terms: single photographs as songs and books as music albums. The way they relate to each other has to do with the idea of rhythm and harmony, and they produce meaning in a poetic sense, by setting tones and suggesting moods.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

I've been working mainly with one publisher — Pierre von Kleist — since *White Noise*. We did five books together in the last eleven years. We have a relationship based on trust and that's essential for me. I edit in close collaboration with them and give them access to all my images. They are there from the beginning.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

I think photography and book fairs are helpful for promoting my work and for seeing new works, but personally I prefer to enjoy books and shows quietly.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

Too many to enumerate here. Christer Strömholm's *Poste Restante*, Gaylord Herron's *Vagabond* and Brassai's *Paris de nuit* still haunt me. With few exceptions I like books that look like books — pages between covers — rather than *art objects*. I prefer a badly designed book with good photographs than a very sleek one with poor content.

Brad Feuerhelm

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

I do not consider the photobook a format. I consider it a medium and it is the primary medium in which I desire to work. I do not see my own practice as being relevant outside of the medium of the photobook anymore. It is a medium at its infancy and the field for its interpretation is only being considered now in my opinion. I do not show my work in any other manner, nor do I intend to. If given the chance, the exhibition of my work will be in a form dedicated to the photobook. I would not deviate my images and their assembly in an exhibition from that of the photobook medium. In short, I would be interested in the expansion of the photobook into new forms of exhibitions, but categorically refuse the work to be disassociated from the original form.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

I have a clear idea of the format of the medium that I am personally drawn to which is not experimental and borders on the conservative photobook form. I am not interested in anything that deviates from that. I see my work as being "read" in a form that rewards a reader of images with significant subtle planting of images within the book to encourage deeper ruminations through symbolic usages of images in their flow throughout. Size may vary as may paper stock, but the form is classic in nature for me.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

All forms of sequencing and editing/culling of images are dependent on the ideas behind the conceptual framework of the photobook. There are many ways to sequence a book, some of which I am currently identifying by quasi-mathematical choices as well as architectural undergirding. There is no one single solution, but there are effective strategies one can enlist to "read" the photobook in a certain way. It is important to think about the various iterations of form that can help enable these tactics for sequencing and editing. From there, the designer becomes a key element. Types of meaning are somewhat arbitrary as the notion of such is pitted between the leverage between intention and interpretation of concept. This is to

suggest that what I may want from my work could be vastly different than how the viewer "reads" it, and I can play with that in many ways, so meaning, as with absolutes, is nothing more than a game of possibility between artist and audience.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

I have worked with a decent amount, including notable ones such as MACK, Self Publish Be Happy, Witty Books, VOID, Chaco, and the Archive of Modern Conflict. It seems that many publishers are opting to work with an artist once or twice depending on sales, or the artist's visibility. MACK seems to do both. They have single books such as mine that they cater too, but also repeatedly put out books by their better selling artists such as Paul Graham, Alec Soth, Alessandra Sanguinetti, etc. Though I would like to have one prolific publisher who can cater to the number of books that I wish to publish, it has been rewarding to work with new ones as I continue through my work. Ultimately, this, along with my reviewing and writing on photobooks has given me enough insight to consider my own aims with publishing. As per the second part of your question, different publishers demand different things with designers. Some like MACK have an in-house designer, while others allow you to bring your own designer, and some allow both. There are other publishers that demand they edit, sequence, and design your books. They may be open to suggestion, but in the end, they want brand control when publishing your work. This is a difficult position unless you are extremely flexible with your work. I can do both, but prefer to not let a publisher touch my sequencing.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

Not at all, but that may change in the future. I enjoy Offprint in Paris when I go to Paris, otherwise, they are not terribly important to me. If I am not publishing, or if I do not have something new out, I do not see the point in them personally. I would also say that I am in a rather unique position in that I am highly networked through all my various activities. I wear many hats and that allows me to connect with a large audience, but also with critics, etc. on a firsthand basis. In short, I do not need the fairs. Again, this is a fairly unique position. My privilege of my hard work and visibility coupled with a strange ability to work social media platforms means that I have reach.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

I continue to be inspired weekly by photobooks. As a reviewer and a passionate lover of the medium built over a couple of decades, I can fully say that I love what I do and

I love seeing people make books. Hardly a week goes by where I don't find something amazing for me. This week it was Alessandra Sanguinetti's *Some Say Ice*, Saskia Groneberg's *Büropflanze*, and Lucile Boiron's *Mise en pieces* are inspiring me currently.
What is not to love? I think people who struggle with the ceaseless torrent of photobook, the end of year lists, and so on, are better served elsewhere. I do not have a personal canon, but I seem to lean into Northern European and German photobooks quite heavily with Laurenz Berges's *4100 Duisburg*, Keld Helmer-Petersen's *122 Color Photographs*, Manfred Willman's *Das Land* and Volker Heinze's *Ahnung* being four photobooks which I would not part with easily. That said, I would easily say that I have owned thousands of photobooks over the course of the last 25 years of my interest.

Daido Moriyama

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

A photobook is an essential medium for me. I believe that photobooks are the best way to distribute my images all around the world rather than exhibition prints in galleries or museums.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

It is definitely important, but I leave everything up to publishing houses. I prefer not to decide by myself.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

I do not edit by myself.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

Except for exhibition catalogs and international publications, I generally make photobooks only with publishers whom I trust. A photo book is a collaborative creation between an editor and a designer, so I just hand them my photographs which become a foundation. The reason that I do not participate is because I would not be able to produce anything better than my own thing if I make my own thing. By leaving everything up to editors and designers, I hope to discover new myself and new perspectives, which I did not even know.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

I am happy for any opportunity if a large audience could see my photographs.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

William Klein's *New York* and Weegee's *Naked City*.

Gerry Johansson

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

It has over the years grown to become very important. I have a background as designer for a publishing company that goes back to 1970. My first little catalogue, 36 pages, was published in 1980. That was a catalogue for a local exhibition. Nowadays it is usually the other way around, a bigger book accompanied by a small exhibition. For me the book and the exhibition with the silver gelatin print is equally important. Just different types of objects.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

Most of my books have a very simple and basic design. The designer Henrik Nygren in Stockholm formulated in 1998 when we worked with the book Amerika. It has a small and very economical format 24 x 17 cm with small pictures, 9,2 x 9 cm. The book was self-published so it was important to keep costs down. I needed a lot of pages to get the right flow of images and the book has 224 pages and is printed on a cheap book paper. The book had a cardboard cover which looked nice but that unfortunately meant that the book didn't open up very well. For the next book *Sverige*, 2005, we changed the cover to a light brown linen hardcover with tipped in images on cover and back cover. The design was used for the next four books and variations of the design has been used for most of my books.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

When I planned my first little catalogue I spent a lot of time trying to get the 33 pictures in a logical order. When I some years later looked at the edit just couldn't understand what I had tried to achieve.
In my later books, from *Amerika* (1998) onwards, the edit is much simpler, just based on a very simple idea. You might say conceptual, but I don't like the word and I'm certainly not a conceptual photographer. I don't want to create stories with my pictures and I don't want pictures to talk to each other. Each picture is a new story and that was the reason for just putting the pictures in alphabetical order starting with *Altheimer* and ending with *Zell*. The idea is so simple and obvious that the readers quite soon understand the editing principle. This principal is used for at

least half of my books. A few are edited in geographical order, or in time order. In one book, *Ulan Bator* (2009), the pictures are in the same order as they were photographed. In some later books there might be sub orders like small chapters within the alphabetical order. You can see it in *American Winter* (2018), *Esker*, (2021) and *Spanish Summer* (2022). Some of my books have quite a number of pages, usually around 320 pages and circa 200 photographs. What I hope to achieve with that is that the reader gets a bit exhausted and must put the book away and have a pause. It just becomes a bit too much.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

I think that over the years I have tried most combinations of publishing. I have been a publisher, a self-publisher, a self-publisher in cooperation with a gallery or another publishing company and I have had my work published by other publishers. All combinations have worked fine. Sometimes I have approached publishers and sometimes they have contacted me. Since I'm a person who likes to do everything myself, and I hate to argue for my work, I would say that self-publishing is great if you can afford it. It's a lot of work, but it is very rewarding if you manage to sell your books. Patience is important and when they are sold out you miss them terribly. The *Amerika* book took 12 years to sell out.
I'm educated as a graphic designer myself, but I have only designed a couple of my own books. I have been lucky to work with two designers, Henrik Nygren and Greger Ulf Nilsson, who believe that you can only improve a design by removing stuff.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

I rarely go to book fairs, but I go to Paris Photo every year. There is just not time for fairs. I'll much rather work on new books or be in the darkroom.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

Books by Atget, Paul Strand, Walker Evans, Lee Friedlander, Winogrand, Robert Adams, Eggleston, Chris Killip, Michael Schmidt, and Guido Guidi are always wonderful to read. But if I must single out one book it would be *Beauty in Photography: Essays in Defense of Traditional Values* by Robert Adams.

25th of Oct 2022

Guido Guidi

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?
2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

I suppose the simplest way to show our photographic work, or rather our prints, is to give them to the viewer, perhaps to a friend, in the same box that contained them while they were still virgin. However, we must be careful of the sequence that the friendly viewer, usually not very diligent, will surely mess up.
But don't worry — this little earthquake can lead to beneficial afterthoughts.
The Book is definitely the best way to display one's work to a wide, more or less demanding audience who will not be able to change the sequence except by skipping a few pages or flipping backwards. The shrewd photographer will have foreseen all this.
The book format I prefer is 30x30cm. or 24x30cm., horizontal or vertical, as the case may be, and I always use the same coated paper.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

For a book, the sequence is fundamental. I concede that my approach is mainly intuitive-visual, the interest in photographs being dialectical. I do not look for meaning but for significance.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

Wonderful — I prefer to work with one single publisher.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

I am a bit wary.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

Several books. I would make too long a list. I will just mention *Un Paese* by Paul Strand.
To be in my canon, a book should usually feature these:
a. quality of the photographs.
b. quality of the printing.
c. simplicity and clarity of editing.
d. design should not prevail.

Hoda Afshar

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

I have always appreciated the creative possibilities that the photobook offers. But it wasn't until I started making films in 2018 and exploring more seriously other ways of working with images than I was used to, that I became more interested in presenting my work in this format. Making video works taught me a lot about the role of time and movement in storytelling, for example; and photobooks similarly allow one to play with narrative sequences and to create a sense of passage and movement. Previously I had mostly thought about these things in the context of exhibiting my work.
I don't see photobook as a medium suited for every project because it's always the nature of the subject that determines the format and aesthetic that I choose. For instance, I knew early on with *Speak the Wind* that I was shooting it for a photobook.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

The material dimension of photobooks is fundamental, as it is this that distinguishes the medium from other modes of presenting images; and just like the compositional aspect of photographs, it can be manipulated in different ways to communicate different ideas and stories. This became a central element of *Speak the Wind* — using the photobook itself to convey the story I was telling — but I had no clear ideas in advance about how I would approach this. In general, I do not approach making a new work with such preconceptions; I like to treat each project as a journey, and let such decisions resolve themselves after spending time with the work and letting it speak to me.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

I would say that my approach involves all of the above. Broadly, I am interested in exploring stories through photography, so when I am editing a work I am always looking for connections between images that might serve to structure the narrative. But as for my approach: it all depends on the idea and the story; and as I was saying earlier, I tend to let such decisions resolve themselves.

If anything, I would say that my approach is most inspired by poetry (perhaps since this was the first art form that I encountered), in that I tend to choose and sequence images as though they are words that form lines whose meaning might be read on multiple levels simultaneously.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

In fact I have only worked with one publisher to date — MACK — so needless to say I have been fortunate in this respect. Our relationship was trusting and cooperative from the beginning, and I can say it probably would have been impossible to make *Speak the Wind* without the input of the whole creative team there. I had pretty big ideas about the project from the start, and MACK made it happen.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

While photography and book fairs are integral to the survival of the industry, I must confess I do not engage with them much as an avenue for sharing my work. Again I am fortunate to have a publisher like MACK behind me. I would instead say that I love the community aspect — they are a place where kindred souls meet, and I have had a wonderful time meeting old and new friends at fairs and festivals, discovering new and surprising artists and works and so on.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

I wish I could say that I have a personal canon, but the photobook world is so vast, and the works that have inspired me are so many and so diverse, that I would struggle to come up with a comprehensive list. Also, my primary engagement with photobooks has been as a photography teacher; and that has made me appreciate a wider range of works than those that have immediately influenced me. I would say instead that the photographers and photobooks that have touched me most deeply seem to share a similar "quiet" approach to their subject matter. I am thinking, for example, *Halfstory Halflife* by Raymond Meeks, *Museum Bhavan* by Dayanita Singh, *Tranquility* by Heikki Kaski, *On Abortion* by Laia Abril, Sam Contis's *Deep Springs*, *Lunario* by Guido Guidi and *Life is Elsewhere* by Sohrab Hura.

Jason Fulford

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

In general, it seems that individual images are ambiguous. The meaning comes when the picture interacts with other things: a reader, another picture, words, the way it's presented, the moment in history when it's seen, or myriad other things. I've learned to love this quality and to play with the ambiguity of the image. I love to make books because you can create relationships between pictures/page/text, that point the reader toward certain meanings. You can fix those relationships on the page, and they will remain, as long as the book survives. So, the book is a way of preserving those intentional arrangements.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

For me, content dictates form. So, images and ideas come first, and then the materials are chosen to best hold the content.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

I try to avoid obvious connections. Sometimes, with an easy connection, the initial effect is powerful, but then satisfaction diminishes over subsequent readings. I'll use chance in the editing process, to present myself with options that I wouldn't have preconceived. The goal is to create relationships that will keep giving over time. Ideally there will be multiple layers of meaning — easier ones on top, then more complex the deeper you go.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

I've worked with several publishers — The Ice Plant, The Soon Institute, Aperture, Phaidon, MACK — and have good relationships with them all. Each offers something unique, in terms of audience, sensibility, and support.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

I go to a few book fairs every year. Mostly it's social — a chance to reconnect with other photographers and publishers, to meet people who are reading the books, and to compare notes with everyone. You get to see books in person that you've only seen on your phone. You exchange advice and ideas about practical things like printers, paper, ink, distribution.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

A few, off the top of my head:

Girls, Some Boys and Other Cookies by Ute Behrend
Jens F. by Collier Schorr
Wisconsin Death Trip by Michael Lesy
American Pictures by Jacob Holdt
272 Pages by Hans Peter Feldmann
Spare Bedroom by Roe Ethridge

Jo Ractliffe

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

Probably my first "photobook" was in 1998. It was a postcard-sized, ring-bound, limited-edition book of 28 photographs of the N1 national road, taken at one hundred-kilometre intervals, from Johannesburg to Cape Town and back again.[1] But I'm trying to think back to when I first heard, or registered, the term "photobook" — certainly not back then in 1998, perhaps not even when I started working on the Angola books ten years later.[2] By then I had made a number of exhibition catalogues, fold-out leaflets that also served as forms of documentation for exhibitions — and also the odd artist's book. I thought of photography books as "proper" books, ones with hard covers; I hadn't considered the idea of a photobook constituting its own distinct genre.

South Africa in the years leading to my adulthood was a place of isolation, surveillance and control; television had finally arrived in 1976, but stringent censorship laws carefully monitored what we could see and hear. Art, photography, music and literature also suffered under extensive restrictions and many photographers and/or their work were banned outright — the most prominent example being Ernest Cole's *House of Bondage* (1967). When I started photographing, there were virtually no books on photography beyond "coffee-table" books *National Geographic* style, hobbyist periodicals and "how to" manuals. I had scant knowledge of the work of other photographers, local and international — one exception being Sam Haskins' *Cowboy Kate & Other Stories* (1964), which had been in our house when I was young and I rather dismissively viewed it as little more than a pin-up book. By 1983 I owned an anthology titled *World Photography*, edited by Bryn Campbell, that my father had brought back from an overseas trip in 1982, a copy of Robert Frank's *The Americans* (1959) and the obligatory *On Photography* (1977) by Susan Sontag.

The 1970s and 1980s saw a surge of political activity and mass mobilisation triggered by the 1976 Soweto uprising, and with it a generation of local artists and photographers whose work reflected the urgency of the times and was primarily directed towards exposing the workings of the apartheid state and mobilising political change. And while a strong activist publishing culture had emerged by the

[1] Driving to Cape Town on the N1 national road in January 1996, I made an inventory of the road every hundred kilometres — a homage of sorts to John Baldessari's *The Backs of All the Trucks Passed While Driving from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara, Calif., Sunday 20 Jan. 63*, 1963. On the return journey, I came across three donkeys lying in a gully alongside the road. They had been shot. Back on the road afterwards, I missed the next 100-kilometre mark. Sometime later I talked about the incident with writer Mike Nicol, and asked if he would consider writing something. The book opens with his story, a fictional reconstruction of the shooting followed by the road images and a close-up of the ground at the site.

[2] *Terreno Ocupado*. Johannesburg: Warren Siebrits, 2008; *As Terras do Fim do Mundo*. Cape Town: Stevenson, 2010; *The Borderlands*. Barcelona / Mexico City: RM, 2015.

1980s[3], for many, making an individual photography book was out of mind and out of reach.[4] But my attentions were turned more towards challenging what I saw then as the limitations of social documentary — manifest via explorations into photomontage, lithography and screen-printing, artists' books, utilising plastic cameras, video and, in particular, installation — taking the photograph off the wall[5] and later, into the public space[6]. All of which share with photobooks, questions of how photographic modes translate across different spatial registers — how the exhibition space approximates the space of the page; or a sequence of images photographed in real time is evoked through binding methods, for example.
Covid and the extended periods of lockdown inadvertently provided an opportunity to rethink some of these earlier explorations and to realise a sequence of photographs across various formats, two of which were books. *Being There* (2021) comprised a sequence of 51 "core" photographs presented as framed prints on the wall, within other sequences in a short film[7], as a photobook and a handprinted, handbound "soundbook", into which sound from the film was embedded into the binding and construction of the book itself.

2. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

My editing process and the way I put narrative or sequence together has much to do with the influence of corresponding interests that intersect my photography, such as writing, literature and film, music, and also an early background in printmaking. But underpinning much of my work is an understanding of the photograph as inherently fragmentary, always part of a larger whole. I'm interested in the way the fragment functions in photographic terms and as an element in the construction — or disruption — of narrative. The notion of the fragment runs through my work from the beginning: it's in the photo-montages of the *Nadir* series (1986-8), the home-movie like "stills" of *reShooting Diana* (1990-5), the multiple-exposure filmstrips of *Johannesburg Inner City works* (2000-04). Even the diptych and triptych sequences

[3] Ravan Press, established in 1972, one of the larger anti-apartheid publishing houses, was also the publisher of *Staffrider*, a significant journal of the 1970s and 80s, which published the work of photographers, graphic artists, young writers and community-based organisations alongside well-known writers. *Staffrider* also mounted an annual photography exhibition during the 1980s.
[4] For instance Santu Mofokeng's *Black Photo Album / Look at Me* was made in 1997 but only published as a photobook in 2013.
[5] *Reshooting Diana* (1995) constituted an installation of fifty photographs suspended from the gallery ceiling. On the adjacent wall, *A Sunny Day* comprised five postcard racks, the postcards made up of cut-up duplicates of the photographs on show. Viewers were invited to take a postcard away with them — a souvenir, and literally a piece of the exhibition.
[6] *End of Time* (1999) is the exhibition that grew out of *N1: every hundred kilometres* and was presented in the remote Karoo town of Nieu-Bethesda. Three billboards were erected along the national road near turn-offs to the town so passing travellers would encounter the image of a donkey looking out from that landscape. Two works were installed in the gallery: a life-size portrait of the dead donkey and the 28 photographs of the road.
[7] *Something this way comes* (2021) was made in collaboration with filmmaker Catherine Meyburgh and composer Philip Miller.

in the Angola series are mostly configured afterwards, some utilising frames from different rolls of film.

And it extends from my photographic seeing through to the way images and sequences are put together. I guess this is where everything else enters the picture; by that I mean how listening to Tom Waits and reading Kerouac as a teenager led me to William Burroughs and his notion of "cut-ups", for example. And how that brought me to read T. S. Eliot anew, because Burroughs viewed *The Wastel Land* as the greatest cut-up poem ever. Looking at photomontage led me to Eisenstein's theories around montage, ideas around juxtaposition and the crash or collision of fragments, which later connected with John Baldessari and his work with film stills, and it all comes together in ideas around the fragment. I've been working in this manner pretty much since the 1980s. It's not something I'm overly self-conscious about — mostly it's quite a playful process and one that values indeterminacy rather than closed meanings.

My editing process usually begins while I'm still working. Proof prints are pinned up in my studio, in groups according to "in", "maybe" and "out"; these groups are not fixed, and as new images enter the equation, existing pictures may change designation or fall out altogether. When I begin making a sequence, I think of syntax and rhythm and when things need to draw breath. This could translate visually in any number of ways such as formal repetition — a shape or line, or tonal density, or emptiness, for example. I might interrupt the rhythm of a sequence with a jarring juxtaposition or introduce something fugitive to destabilise an apparently coherent sequence. At this stage, I'm not overly focussed on content, what's depicted in an image; I'm more interested in the kinds of relationships that run through or repeat across pictures and what happens in the spaces between. Earlier today, I found an exhibition statement from the mid-1990s, which talks about an interest in "what we don't expect from photographs; what they leave out, their silence… what happens in these furtive spaces of betweenness". It still holds in many ways.

In the past, I've sometimes worked in formats where the individual image is put to work in service of the larger body or photographic essay. On occasion I've discarded an image — even one I felt had merit — because it could not find its place in the narrative or sequence. A few years ago, while convalescing from an injury, I spent some time going through my negative files and looked again at some of those pictures. Alongside some new work, these former discards developed into the exhibition and photobook, *Signs of Life* (2019). There my editing strategy was very different. I approached those images as if they were found pictures, not my own, which allowed me to project freely onto them and put them into configurations and associations I might not have otherwise. It was quite invigorating to see the dynamics that emerged from this random assemblage of disparate images.

3. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

Generally, I think it's important that there's a good cohesive sense of a team between the photographer, the designer and the editor/co-ordinator. And following on from that, a good connection with the printer. Working from South Africa with printers in other countries can be cumbersome — especially if there are issues with language. There have been a few anxious moments regarding print quality in two books but in the end, things worked out. Overall, I've been fortunate; I have enjoyed good working relationships with people I hold in high regard. Each time I complete a book, a new question arises, something that provokes a challenge for the next.
With three exceptions, all of my books have been either self-published or produced in collaboration with Stevenson, the gallery that represents my work. There I work with Sophie Perryer who co-ordinates and edits Stevenson's publications and Gabrielle Guy who designs most of their books. It's a relationship I value and I think it works really well and has many advantages, the most immediate being the knowledge, skill and expertise they bring to each project, not to mention a working condition of collegiality and respect, which makes for a joyous experience. To date we have worked on five books, including *As Terras do Fim Do Mundo* (2010), *Being There* (2022) — and *Photographs: 1980s – now* (2020), which was published by Steidl. *The Borderlands* (2015) was published by RM. Working with Ramón Reverté was both exciting and enriching — if not a little unnerving at first. He was startling in his clarity of vision and challenged all my preconceptions about the ways books should look and function. It's a book that taught me much and I hold that experience very dear.

4. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

I attended the Kassel Fotobook Festival in 2011. *As Terras do Fim do Mundo* had been shortlisted and I was invited to present the work in the talks programme. I remember listening to a talk on Latin American Photobooks by Ramón Reverté. It's hard to explain; I recall little of what he said beyond a bit about image, text and design all being inextricably linked elements, but I had one of those epiphanous moments as something happened between the words being spoken and the images being shown on the screen. I cannot say much more than that except I came out of that talk changed.
Those few days in Kassel were significant; there's a certain intensity that comes when a group of people with very particular shared interest comes together for a short period — and with a host of activities crammed into the programme as well! Conversations after talks, during lunch on the grass, at dinner and late at night in the hotel bar were invigorating and some have since developed into enriching collegial friendships. I felt I had found a home of sorts in that world. Paris Photo feels similar although it has been some years since I was last there and I feel the absence of that quite keenly.

5. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

I have a somewhat measly awareness of contemporary photobooks, mostly due to the fact that international photobooks simply don't make it to South Africa so either you have to travel to them, or get them shipped here, which is a risky business. I haven't travelled much in the past seven years, so I either look at websites — a woefully insufficient method — or the libraries of fellow photographers.

I don't have a personal canon, although my attention is directed primarily towards the books of photographers whose work I admire — or books that either share an interest with something I am working on at a given time, or alternately, exhibit various qualities that I find powerful or evocative and/or useful for my own thinking. But above all, the question that most compels me is that of the textual photobook — for want of a better term. I think I'm only just beginning to grasp what that means for me and, more importantly, beginning to find ways of working where such expression might be appropriate — which is seldom when you're working in a documentary mode and are obligated to provide context. So it's about the "right" kind of text and setting up the conditions for image and text to interact — or not — on equal terms, and how this is supported by the design of the book.

I've made a list that includes a number of seminal books, which may seem like overused examples of the photobook. But even 10, 30, 50 years later, they continue to reveal something new to provoke, engage, challenge and move me — and I marvel at the photographs.

Robert Frank, *The Americans* (1959)
Danny Lyon, *Conversations with the Dead* (1971)
David Goldblatt, *Some Afrikaners Photographed* (1975)
Josef Koudelka, *Gypsies* (1975)
Richard Avedon, *In the American West* (1985)
Chris Killip, *In Flagrante* (1988)
Manuel Alvarez Bravo, *Revelaciones* (1990)[8]
Larry Sultan, *Pictures from Home* (1992)
Jillian Edelstein, Truth & Lies (2001)
Dana Lixenberg, *The Last Days of Shishmaref* (2008)
Daniel Blaufuks, *Terezin* (2010)
Léonie Hampton, In the Shadow of Things (2011)
Christian Patterson, Redheaded Peckerwood (2012)
Diana Mater, *Evidence* (2014)
Graciela Iturbide, *Des Oiseaux* (2019)

[8] I have since acquired other books and more comprehensive exhibition catalogues of his earlier works such as that from MOMA in 1997, but this book was my first of his work.

Lieko Shiga

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

I think that the process of closing the book and making it personal is completely different from the exhibition. Also, I think that books are a rare thing that can reach far from the place where the author lives, in a form different from the Internet.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

Everything changes depending on the work each time.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

Photographs are expressed on static paper, so I would like to ask what kind of imagination the viewer has between the photographs, and how to connect the "between" that is normally invisible. I take great care when editing.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

Both are very important.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

To "open" a work is to say, "I think it is very important because it will give the artist an unexpected response. In order to look at the world in a more diverse way, I would like to see many exhibitions and presentations of my work". I think that they have a deep influence on each other.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

Many!!!!

Manuela Marques

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

A great importance. The book makes it possible to create new rules of appreciation and appearance of images, it is an original space, where crossings and links are woven. The place of the book is also that of the combination of different skills. It is a singular format that interacts with a specific production environment.
The place of the photobook has changed enormously throughout my career. Although I was always surrounded by photography books, I didn't feel the need to work on this.
Of course, from the beginning, when the means of production allowed, the catalogues accompanied my exhibitions. But the creation of a book, which frees itself from the exhibition context becomes a space that keeps track of the evolution of a work while being a singular object, a new place of intervention.
The links that are woven between the different modes of representation of photographic work (exhibitions, interventions by photography) must find in the book a certain accuracy of coexistence and dialogue. Even if the book can be an autonomous element, it also accompanies and prolongs the artist's work with extensions that enrich and question it.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

No clear ideas, but sometimes desires that are sometimes vague and which little by little take shape. It also happens, as with my last book*, Echoes of Nature*, that the ideas are clearer, at least in the final intention. The different choices that are made for it to become a book (format, type of paper, cover, etc.) have emerged as it is developed.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

The relationship I have with the editing and sequencing of the book is of several orders: first intuitive of course, I trust in intuition, but also, at another stage of the process, more conceptual.
I try to ensure that the book, although it is a new space for intervention, is also a place where choices are made. The sequence of images must, page after page, lead

our vision and our mind towards an understanding and/or a questioning of what we see.
So, this is a very important phase for me. But I would say that it corresponds to an essential moment in my work: that of setting up an exhibition.
The two spaces are different, but they get my attention. I think what's also very important is the idea of rhythm. Finding the rhythm of the book is like finding the rhythm of an exhibition.
The Japanese notion of "ma" has been a key for me to understand certain things.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

I live with a photography book publisher and we have many discussions about it.
Working with a publisher is a precious moment in the creation of a book, it can be a nice cooperation, you must find the publishing house in which a good quality dialogue is established. But, depending on the project, it may be interesting to collaborate with different types of publishers, depending on their editorial approaches.
I believe that the artist is always the designer of something, he is then led to work with publishers and graphic designers.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

Not really. This is more important when it accompanies an exhibition.
Otherwise, the places that are specifically devoted to art books (bookstores, museums, art centers, etc.) are very favorable to the visibility of the book.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

I am not really inspired by photography books. I often find inspiration in books that are not necessarily in the artistic field.
Recently I have looked a lot at Giuseppe Penone's books and often come back to *Tarefas Infinitas: Quando a Arte e o Livro se Ilimitam*.
But so many others are also important…

Mårten Lange

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

The photobook is central to my practice. It has been from the start, even before I considered what I'm doing to be a career. Making photographs and assembling them in books is my primary work, and exhibitions are like translations of that work into a space.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

Books are intimate objects and their shape, size and tactile properties are very important. I usually have a general idea of what I want to use, but I prefer working with a book designer who specializes in photobooks.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

My editing process is quite intuitive. I find connections between images and try to show these connections to the reader by using juxtaposition, repetition and sequencing. The sheer amount of images is also important. My recent work has been composed of quite large collections of photos. I'm always trying to create an "image world" that the reader can stay in, and my books need to be a certain length to achieve that effect.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

I started out with self-publishing but since then I've worked with many different publishers. Some of these collaborations have been great, others less so. The best publishers are the ones with a holistic view of the process, who understand that everything from editing to designing to marketing needs to be in sync.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

Not really. I mostly go there to meet my friends, and maybe buy books that are recommended to me. These fairs are usually pretty hectic, so it's hard to browse for books there. Bookshops are better for that.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

I'll skip this question.

Martin Parr

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

It is still the best way of communicating. Nothing can touch it.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

I try and ensure that the design and physicality of the book echo the theme. This doesn't always happen, but I do try.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

Editing is pretty straightforward. I take the best images and ones with a strong narrative relevant to the book, and dump the rest.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

I work with many publishers and have a hunch who is the right person for each project.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

It is always good to bring books to new audiences, so the likes of Paris Photo are very good at finding these.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

There are so many, the 650 books that Gerry Badger and I put in our 3 volumes [*The Photobook: A History*, Volumes I, II and III] are a great starting point.

Pacifico Silano

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

I've always enjoyed the photobook as an act of finality. It's a way of closing a chapter metaphorically and physically on a project. At least that's how I have always viewed it. The photobook is a more democratic way for my art to exist where anyone can purchase it. I was thrilled to be able to reinterpret my large scale photo installations into this hand held, collapsible art object that a viewer could either page through or expand into a sculptural, photo object. This new way of iterating my work was incredibly inspiring and has influenced my most recent works in the physical shape that they take.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

I work a lot with ideas of revealing and concealing in my art. The accordion book format really lends itself beautifully to those themes. I knew that I wanted to take the idea of a monograph and toss it out to create something unique and special. The book became this brand new way of seeing these images very familiar to me. It reminded me just how fluid a photograph can become and how they're hard to pin down. This slipperiness was something I knew I wanted to replicate in the form and materiality. The size of the book when collapsed on itself looks unassuming and closely resembles the size of the original magazine pages I appropriate. So all of those ideas were in my head when starting out on this project.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

It started off intuitive and quickly became about relationships between signifiers in the work. It was a very collaborative experience with Sarah Piegay Espenon and Lewis Chaplin, my book publishers. I know the photos in my archive so well that having an outside perspective was really wonderful. There was an exchange back and forth where we would make suggestions till we got the sequence just right. In the end it created this fever dream of images bleeding into one another. I wanted a feeling more than anything and I think we really encompassed that.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

I have done two books in my life as an artist. One was early on with a small publisher called Silent Face where I designed the entire book from scratch called "Tear Sheets". It was a great way to play with the images I had at the time and helped prepare me for all of the work on "I Wish I Never Saw The Sunshine" with Loose Joints. Both were really informative experiences. I was just so blown away by the success of my 2nd book. It moved me that people connected with the ideas behind the work, were enjoying living with it and that it sold out. I know that this was all possible due to the collaborative relationship with Sarah & Lewis. I think they are the best photo book publishers out there and it was such an honor to work with them.
I am in the very early stages of talks about what my next book will be. They will be who publishes it when the time comes. They have a deep understanding of my work and I trust them fully.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

Anytime my work can go out into the world and reach a wider audience I am very grateful. I've done many international fairs and I think it is important because my work is very much about America but needs to be able to translate overseas. So it challenges me to think about ways the work can be entered.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

I absolutely loved Mark McKnights *Heaven is a Prison*. The book comes wrapped in one of his gorgeous black and white photographs of the sky. The only way you can get to the work is through tearing the sky to open the book. It's this beautiful gesture and metaphor for his photographs like a petit mort.
As far as canon goes it has to be Nan Goldin's *Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. It was the first photobook I picked up that completely changed my view on what a photograph could do. I actually paid my rent a week late because I was such a poor art student that I decided I couldn't live without owning it. I've had the same copy since I'm 18 years old.

Paul Graham

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

Woah, a triple decker question! ok:
Très important — it's how I first saw serious photography, and that's probably true for most people. It's still where I first head to at Paris Photo — the books in the main fair / Polycopies / Offprint — it's so alive and energising! You want to see where it's happening — go look at the books.
Books are, of course, a very different experience to the gallery wall. It is the artist and their viewer in a dance. That might be a subtle waltz, or an intimate tango, a wild rock 'n roll ride, but it is just you and the artist, together.
Galleries — well, they are inter-related of course, and although you don't have the same intimacy as the book, you do have scale, you have presence, you ask for physical engagement — for the viewer to come into a space and move around. It is also possible to make a living from the gallery, but sadly not from photobooks.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

Listen to your work — it will tell you what it would like to be! *A Shimmer of Possibility* told me it needed each brief moment in time, each sequence, to be given its own dignity and space — hence the 12 hardback volumes. *Does Yellow Run Forever?* wanted to be smaller, intimate, diary-like with a soft fabric cover. My first three books were horizontal/landscape format, but the next three were all vertical/portrait format. You have to hear your work, let it speak to you, not impose your ego on it.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

It starts intuitive of course — has to. Then your mind begins to catch up and see threads run through what you've done, and will put some order on them. But you must be light, and respect what the subconscious gifted you — the work has its own meanings, I try not to impose. The more you do that, the more you tether things to a single reading, a single interpretation — and that is a sad thing. Let it sing!

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

I've been with Michael Mack since the beginning of him starting MACK, so that's my home, and I don't see anything to be gained by playing hop-scotch with publishers. Maybe other people do, and — well — whatever works for you.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

I was at New York Art Book Fair the other weekend, and on the ground floor the big galleries had their stands — Gagosian, Marian Goodman, Zwirner, Pace, etc. And, well, I have to be polite here, but they just aren't "on the same page" — they are engaged with publishing doorstop catalogues of their major artists. That's not at all what art-books can be — to find that, you had to go up to the indy & artists' floors. It's ok, it is necessary to have a 500-page catalogue on this or that major painter, but… the energy and creativity was all upstairs, with the small independent publishers.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

Too many to mention. No personal "canon", just love the egalitarian nature, love the ability to discover young/new artists, love the intimacy, love the creativity, love the surprise, love the freedom, love the energy.

Rinko Kawauchi

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

Making a photo book helps me to organize my thoughts.
Then I can move on to the next one.
By making a photo book, I have some ideas in order, which makes it easier for me to create the exhibition space.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

I don't have a clear vision for the materials of the book, but I have a vague idea of what I want to create, which I discuss with my trusted book designer and an editor.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

By creating a sequence, I can communicate my ideas to the viewer.
By intuitively selecting and connecting photos, I aim to reveal symbolism and generate a variety of emotions.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

Editors and designers who have worked with me many times are easy to work with because we have a trusting relationship.
It is also good for newcomers to work with me because they can take on new challenges.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

I think it is important to be internationally active.
It is a pleasure to share my work with a wider audience.

Personally, I try to stay oriented to work with publishers and galleries in many countries, not just only Japanese publishers and galleries.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

My first interesting experiences with photography books were with Sally Mann's *Immediate Family*, Terri Weifenbach's photobooks, and the work of Sarah Moon.
I don't know why, but at the time I was attracted to women photographers.
I also try to get a copy of Stephen Gill's and Viviane Sassen's book every time a new one comes out.

Sakiko Nomura

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

A photobook is very important. It is also essential in terms of finding out what I am doing. The more I make photobooks, the more I realize their significance. I think that there is a difference in recognizing what you see when you appreciate photographs in an exhibition space with the size of photographs, spacing between them, and the flow of time, and that through photobooks within your personal space, time, and place.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

I believe that each photo has a suitable paper and size. It is a lot of fun going on in the process.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

Intuitive, visual, conceptual, and symbolic… everything is crucial, but it first begins with intuition. In making a photobook, I start off with several photographs, then cut them down by going back and forth in different approaches and getting lost in the process.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

I prefer to work with both publishers including a close one and a new one. I make photobooks with publishers and book designers together, which is necessary and important.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?
Hmm… I don't have any idea about a specific role.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

Numerous photobooks have inspired me, but I do not have a personal canon. I get more influenced by what is going on in front of my eyes than by photobooks.

Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

It has always been a primary means of engaging with the thought and work of other artists. I learned art photography through books of art photography, and continue to find them a rich and compelling form. I don't think of it in relation to other forms of exhibition/publication at all.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

I work with really good bookmakers and try to be a good collaborator. All the material dimensions of a book come from those discussions and from immersion in one another's work and thought.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

I have literally no hard and fast rules other than kill your darlings. I'm not ever aiming to produce singular meanings in books — just a set of conditions in which various interrelated ones might emerge distinctively for differing readers of the work.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

I hope that my collaborative relationships are life-long partnerships and conversations.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

Yes, I look at work from artists based all over the world constantly. Book fairs are important for the business of the photobook, but also for the web of social

relationships between practitioners of the form. That latter part has always been the part I'm really interested in.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

Too many to cite.

Terri Weifenbach

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

In the 70's when I was earning a bachelor's degree, my first thoughts were influenced by painting which I was practicing at the time. I saw photography, like painting, as single representations. This singularity of painting affected me, and it was important to me that each photographic image I made could stand alone even when part of a group. There were photobooks at this time that foreshadowed and informed the way we think of photobooks now, as objects and works in themselves, (Ed Ruscha's *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations,* Walker Evans's *American Photographs*, and, of course, Robert Frank's *The Americans* as examples). However, I was looking for books in order to see as much as I could in the world of photography, not at that point for the book as object. Monographs and catalogs were dominant. The history of the photobook was not in most photographers' consciousness, yet. It wasn't until 1995 or so that making a book of my own even occurred to me.

Everything in my world was still analog, my first book too, the sequencing and design were cut and paste. By this time there was plenty of exploration with the book, but galleries were the main force for making a career. The speed at which my book, when printed, found its way in the world through the publisher's connections and word of mouth stunned me. In between the covers of the book were my sequenced images, defining a world I had experienced, dressed in a suit, and left open for a viewer to find their way through. It quickly became the primary way for me to present work to the listening world. Now the book as object was more ubiquitous and the possibilities of discovery evident. I have however always questioned the tendency the covers of the photobook have of closing in or keeping out what came before and what follows. My observation is the perceived end and beginning that a book defines, has led photographic artists to work in projects — to fill the pages — which is fairly unique in the arts. This is a backward tendency, to make work to put in a book, rather than to decide where the covers of a book belong in a career. The question then is, what is the description of the career of a photographic artist? Is it like Roni Horn, Gerhard Richter or Cecily Brown who center their works on a single but open, in all directions, inquiry? Or can we have many different unrelated inquiries, by the same artist? Do we have the same answer to these questions through all art media, photos, performance, paintings, multimedia, etc.?

Looking at a book is an intimate act for me. It can be less or more, but almost always more, intimate than viewing an exhibition. There is a disconnect, meaning when I am working on a book, I'm not thinking about how to exhibit and vice versa. The difference can maybe be described by the decisions for my first book, *In Your Dreams*, 1997. My prints for exhibition were printed on glossy paper for the best saturation and a bit of "super reality", beyond reality, feel. In the book we (it is always a collaboration with the publisher) weighed the options. A glossy paper seemed

horrendous. We settled on a matte paper, a type of gardapat with a slight pink tone. Then we used a glossy varnish over the image only, separating it from the paper. More tactile so allowing more intimacy than a coated, reflective paper would have. Exhibitions are active and three dimensional. The viewer will perceive the work at different sizes as they approach or walk away. Sequence can be attempted but there is no security in the direction a viewer might choose to walk and engage with the works. The work should be calling from all points in each space and experienced differently from a variety of distances.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

My desire for my books is that every material decision cater to the images. This is always a push-pull in relation to other's ideas (designers, publishers), limits of the medium (printing, costs) and, these days, availability of materials. Because materials are so different in different parts of the world (gardapat was unavailable in Hong Kong) I usually wait rather than decide to allow choices. I have general ideas for book size, paper type, but I am specific with image sequence and placement. Designers and publishers know these materials far better than I, so communication and openness are important to arrive at choices in line with both my ideas and production.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

I learned that my approach is more intuitive by attempting to teach sequencing and editing. It's tough to teach intuitive response. But intuitive thought includes the visual, conceptual and symbolic. This is in my head already subconsciously (lines of a poem, something someone said once, the power of red) and takes part in the decision. It changes too. There are times a conscious decision must be made to solve a problem. But sometimes not; the last thing I did one night before sleeping was to try and solve the final sequence of a book. I looked at all the possible images and nothing seemed right, so I went to bed. In the morning, between sleeping and waking, I sort of dreamt a sequence. I was awake enough to remember it and jumped up and laid it out. It became the final sequence of the book.
I don't try to produce meaning. This is an inquiry of necessity.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

Cooperation of all involved in the making of a book is vitally important. I have ideas about how I wish for a book to look, and I lean on the expertise of the publisher who knows the limits, and designers who know the materials. It is important that both understand the work and their sensitivity to it is there throughout. I've been quite lucky to find publishers that allow my sequence and structural design to be final and have not found fault with it. I've never been any good with type, fonts, text and leave this entirely to the designers.
At my beginnings and well into my career I worked with one publisher. As the photobook world expanded exponentially, I started experimenting, pushing the boundaries, and I worked with a few small publishers. This was also during the period when film was disappearing, and digital technology had not yet resolved continuous tones, so the book became more important to me as making prints was problematic. Staying with one publisher only might be a good idea for some, but my experience is that my range of ideas don't fit with one publishing house. Probably the worst thing for a publishing house to demand is the singular loyalty of an artist. I guess to make a point, I'd ask, is it possible to have one person fill all your needs in your life? We need friends, partners, business associates, etc.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

Book fairs definitely play a relevant role as a couple of the smaller publishers I've made books with have had no other distribution. And even if they do, the sheer numbers of people that come to these fairs to look for books has a great impact. The interaction, the meeting of other photographers and publishers, the parties… they bring our community together. There are people who gather at fairs I'd not see otherwise. It's a pleasure to reconnect, dream up plans and enjoy each other's company.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

I like to look outside my medium for inspiration. I'm inspired by paintings — Vuillard, Bonnard, Odilon Redon, Cecily Brown — poets, and nature. To look at photobooks for inspiration about photobooks winds one tightly inward into an ever-contracting whirl. To experience life, looking outward, rewards us with infinite choices and inspiration. That said I'm totally addicted to looking at photobooks for the experience of discovering the photographs inside.

Wouter Van de Voorde

1. How important is the photobook for you, personally, as a format? Has this importance changed over time throughout your career? How do you connect the photobook with other ways of presenting and showcasing your work?

The photobook is an essential part of my practice. Compared to showing work on the walls of a gallery, making books feels like a more wholesome process; I am not left with an empty feeling at the end of the ride; exhibiting often makes me feel like that. In the context of my practice, the photobook format feels like a protective blanket. There is an element of comfort in having a body of work contained in a book.
When I was putting together my first self-published monograph, *SAFE*, in 2019, I dreamt about a collection of silver prints being stored inside a safe cut out in volcanic rocks near a coastline. This image became a metaphor for how I see the photobook in the context of my practice.
I place a lot of value in preserving my work in the form of a book. It feels like putting little gems inside a time capsule or a treasure chest for safekeeping.

2. How do you respond to the material dimension of photobooks in your work? Do you usually have a clear idea of the materials you want to use, the paper, size, etc.?

I would lie if I said I have progressive ideas about dimensions and materials. I am always happy to be guided by the publishers with whom I collaborate. The primary papers I know are darkroom or fine-art print related. The book *Death is not here*, which I recently published with Void, measures exactly 8x10 inches; this is in correlation with the size of paper I usually print in the darkroom. Most of the images in the book are straight scans of silver prints, including the white border around the printed images. I like this consistency. The prints featured in *Death is not here* are covered in fixer stains, dust spots etc. With a background in painting and printmaking, I have embraced imperfections that sneak into the darkroom printing process; I like that the book accurately represents this process.

3. What is your approach to the process of sequencing and editing? Is it more intuitive, more visual, more conceptual, more symbolic? What types of meaning do you try to produce through editing in your works?

In my practice, I usually work on singular images. I often make images that can carry themselves without needing much context in the form of other images. I rarely ever do projects or shoot to a specific brief. When working with a publisher, designer and editor, I am conscious that these people, being in the creative industry, also have a voice that needs to be heard. I am happy to be led in the sequencing and editing in

recent and ongoing projects. The images I produce are already so intrinsically my babies, so I am happy to let go of a tight grip on the edit and the sequence without losing my voice.
In terms of meaning, it is all elementary and human; I am a 40-something cis male, married with two kids. I often think about my own mortality and my place in the world. A crucial part of my story is that 15 years ago, I moved from my home country of Belgium to Australia. This foundation is always the underlying story of a lot of my work. Throughout the years, I have developed a personal mythology rich with various symbols, often hermetic to the viewer's interpretation. I feel strongly about not imposing or indicating imposed meanings onto my work.

4. What is your relationship with publishers? Do you find it preferable to stick with one you know well, or to work with different publishers? How important is the cooperation of publishers and/or book designers?

I am happy to work with different publishers and designers, as I mentioned in my answer to question 3. Each publisher and designer brings another perspective to the table. In my practice, the element of play and experimentation is crucial. Consequently, there is room for different approaches in terms of photobooks. For example, I will now start work on a publication revolving around images I made of my son, which will require an entirely different approach than my recent Void publication. This book will have much more in common with a traditional family. The new book will emerge through lengthy discussions and considerations with this publisher; just like the variations in my practice, the books I produce will reflect this complexity in form and subject.

5. Do international photography and book fairs play a relevant role in your work? How do you relate to that personally?

I have no experience with fairs to this date.

6. What photobooks have inspired you? Do you have a personal canon?

A good friend in my city (Canberra, Australia) is an avid collector of photobooks. Over the years, he has shown me many outstanding works, many of which I forgot the title of. So, unfortunately, I don't have a personal canon or specific books that inspired me. I am incredibly stubborn in following my own path in my work and the books I produce. I don't go out of my way to deeply study books produced by others as I am afraid I'll see something so unique that it would stop me from ever picking up a camera again. Despite my recent publication with Void, a well-established publisher, I feel like an outsider to the game, and to some extent, I would like to hold that position.

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Carlos Lobo. *I Would Run This Way Forever (and over again)*. Lebop Books, 2022.

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I would run this way forever (and over again): o que diz este título? Pode querer dizer que o fotógrafo *não vai* continuar a fazer certa coisa, ou que não vai continuar a fazê-la *assim*. (Que desperdício seria.) Pode também expressar a vontade do fotógrafo de continuar a fazer essa mesma coisa dessa mesma maneira, infinita e repetidamente. Visto que nada o impede, porquê "*would*"? Sugere isso que um artista *não pode* continuar a fazer sempre a mesma coisa? (Porque não?) Ou está Carlos Lobo a tocar um nervo da arte: a forma como se muda de direcção consoante o favor do vento? Pode ainda significar, sem ironia, que mudar é, por vezes, para um artista, o preço de se ser verdadeiro consigo mesmo. "Eu *faria* isto desta maneira para o resto da vida," etc., "mas tenho de mudar." O condicional sugere uma descontinuidade que faz temer o tom quase elegíaco de algumas destas imagens.

Há grandes fotógrafos para os quais a fotografia é um momento singular das suas vidas. Há grandes fotógrafos que se perdem quando encontram o seu rumo. Há aqueles que não sobrevivem ao silêncio crítico e aqueles que não sobrevivem ao êxito. Há grandes fotógrafos simplesmente abandonados pelos deuses: é como se cegassem. Podem respirar de alívio aqueles que acompanham o trajecto de Carlos Lobo (um dos nossos grandes fotógrafos). A mudança para que este livro aponta não sugere nenhuma daquelas coisas e vai quatro passos à frente na direcção inversa. Quanto mais idade tem, menos velho se torna.

A ida ao arquivo é contemporânea da ida ao parque, e estão mutuamente relacionadas. Amigos, família, estranhos de passagem, súbitas fisionomias, gestos, reflexos, desenhos, cartazes, superfícies, fachadas, natureza viva, natureza morta, tudo concorre num mesmo plano: o constante processo da visão à procura de si mesma na contingência. (Tudo pode ser levado nesse processo, como se depreende de um dos retratos, no qual, acima da mulher que cativa o olhar, se lê a expressão "*take away*".) Lobo mostra aqui uma desinibição lírica e uma liberdade de processos diante das quais uma série de mitos da fotografia *séria* nos dão vontade de sorrir. O equilíbrio de meios, numa fotografia que busca a sua própria viabilidade material, recusando-se a ser um desporto de luxo, recusando-se a paralisar; a mistura de processos, em que diferentes géneros de trabalho se conjugam hábil e despreconceituosamente na aproximação a uma ideia de si mesmo enquanto fotógrafo; o à vontade com o qual as imagens são truncadas, ampliadas, reconfiguradas, arrancadas de outras imagens, suas e de terceiros, fotógrafos e não fotógrafos; a experimentação e o artifício que não pedem autorização para existir — que não se arvoram em explicações difíceis e nobres causas — que não esperam por explicações para acontecer; — tudo isto conhece aqui a naturalidade e a latitude de uma compreensão prática da história fotográfica.

Referi-me de passagem à busca de Carlos Lobo (nas qualidades de autor e editor deste livro) por uma viabilidade material de certo tipo. Esse ponto merece um breve desenvolvimento. Neste e nos seus últimos livros, em especial, os que têm aparecido sob a chancela Lebop Books, estamos perante tentativas de encontrar uma solução, ou um compromisso equilibrado, para um problema genuíno. A saber, o da relação ingrata entre a fotografia e o dinheiro: se quisermos, o problema da plausibilidade de um trajecto fotográfico *verdadeiramente independente*. (Isto é: a condição de cuja existência não pode ser o patrocínio.)

Este problema é de particular interesse para o género de fotógrafo cujo meio principal é o fotolivro. No contexto descrito por vários como o da banalização e superabundância do fotolivro, em que virtudes propriamente fotográficas (se é que existe tal coisa) tendem a perder o lugar para a ilustração de ideias respeitáveis, para a arte da *bullshit*, para o virtuosismo editorial e para o *design*, está ainda por resolver a questão do custo de produção de um objecto-livro que as pessoas queiram *ter*. Como fazer um fotolivro bom que não seja ao mesmo tempo um objecto de luxo? Como fazê-lo sem correr risco de falência num nicho desigual e cheio de seduções? Já para não falar na frequente incoerência entre o luxo da forma e a precariedade do conteúdo. Vem à memória a frase de Frank: "Cheap, quick and dirty, that's how I like it!" — ainda que este livro (que reúne imagens feitas ao longo de mais de uma década) seja tudo menos isso.

I Would Run This Way Forever… é um livro político no modo como busca uma continuidade entre a razoabilidade material e a elegância moral da fotografia, se podemos dizê-lo assim. É um livro não excessivo em cada escolha, um livro contido e confiante, que defende uma certa ideia de fotografia mas também uma certa ideia de fotolivro, em constante referência não exactamente aos seus heróis, mas à sua autonomia. A crença na fotografia enquanto forma virtuosa de relação com o real é aqui coerente com uma crença no fotolivro enquanto meio de honrar esse encontro; e a importância da autonomia dessa relação e deste meio é uma das suas grandes forças.

A haver um tom elegíaco, não é o de um fotógrafo a despedir-se dos seus demónios mas o de um constantemente evocativo dos seus heróis, num mundo que os considera cada vez menos heróicos, cada vez menos evocáveis. Como pode alguém justificar perante si próprio continuar a fazer a mesma coisa da mesma maneira para sempre, *run this way forever*, em face de todas as evidências em contrário? Como pode alguém deixar de o fazer?

É quando nos damos conta da parte mais importante do título: *this way*. O que quer dizer "deste modo", "assim"? Vê-se nestas imagens um apelo pela vida como ela é, como ela é *aqui* e *agora*, onde quer que isso seja: uma esperança na fotografia enquanto modo de inscrever esse apelo. A figura humana nunca teve na obra de Carlos Lobo a prioridade que assume neste conjunto, em que mesmo as paredes são retratos. Ela surge aqui representada em várias posições de um longo espectro, que vai da sugestão projectiva em superfícies inanimadas, à escultura, à evocação pictórica da mais complexa à mais ingénua, à absorção sem teatralidade (as imagens de pessoas perdidas na sua interioridade), ao retrato puramente frontal e não absortivo (em que a interioridade é reconstituída por via de um confronto intersubjectivo), ou por fim à prostração fisionómica que só se encontra na esfera doméstica. Esses rostos infantis que se deixam ver como se diante deles não houvesse uma câmara são um tropo da origem da fotografia, ou da situação humana liberta da consciência da objectiva, ou da possibilidade heróica de se fazer retratos sem precedentes históricos.

Esta multiplicidade de gestos tem uma função ostensiva. As fotografias deste conjunto reiteram cada uma delas o gesto que o título descreve. Todas elas apontam não só para uma fatia de tempo e espaço como para a sua própria exemplaridade. Apontam para si mesmas enquanto exemplo de um modo de ver. Todas elas dizem: *é*

assim; aliás: *pode ser assim*. Ante a possível extinção da fotografia, ironicamente, na era da sua máxima proliferação, é muito digno de nota todos os retratos frontais serem retratos de adolescentes. É a pulsão de encontrar nas gerações vindouras uma esperança na viabilidade da fotografia assim entendida, e uma auto-intimação. A de jamais trairmos promessas que fizemos a nós mesmos naquela idade; a de jamais nos deixarmos morrer.

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Kikuji Kawada. *Vortex*. Akaaka, 2022.

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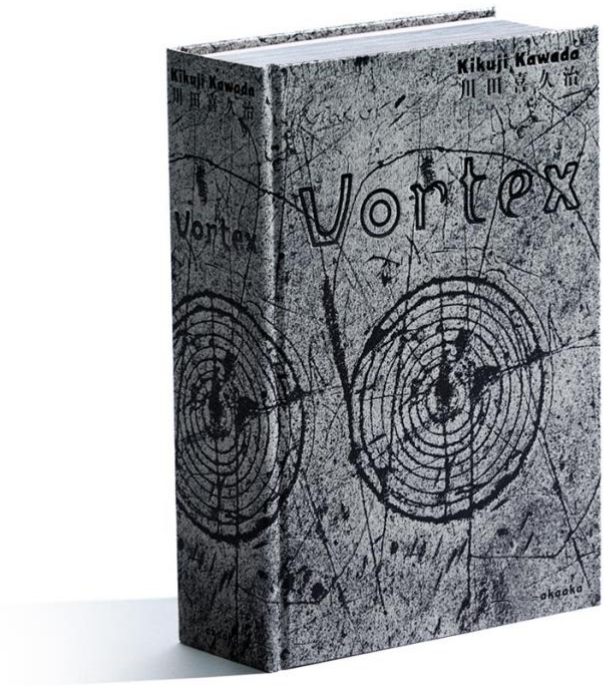

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It would not be entirely fair to say that Kikuji Kawada has lived his entire life under the shadow of his first, groundbreaking work, *Chizu* (*The Map*, 1965). In fact, Kawada continued presenting new work, as well as publishing photobooks, regularly up to these days. We must recognize, however, that Kawada's work after the 60s was invariably haunted by *Chizu*. This is understandable insofar as the 1965 book is celebrated as one of the most important photography works of the twentieth century. But when a photographer presents us with a new work such as *Vortex*, we should try to see it for what it is, instead of looking at it solely through the lens of the artist's historical path and evolution.

Vortex is the latest photobook by acclaimed Japanese photographer Kikuji Kawada. It was published in July 2022 by Akaaka, one of the most important publishers currently coming from Japan. Kawada is a longstanding member of the pantheon of Japanese photography, along with Daido Moriyama, Masahisa Fukase, Nobuyoshi Araki, Shomei Tomatsu, Takuma Nakahira, among others, but his name and his work have not been as familiar to Western audiences as those of the others for decades. It was only in the last few years that he became well-known in the West, namely, after the publication of the beautifully delicate *The Last Cosmology* in 2015, and the maquette edition of *Chizu* in 2021, both by MACK.

Vortex reached the West in limited numbers, as commonly happens with photobooks published by Asian publishing houses, but that didn't stop it from becoming a minor sales success, quickly being sold out in many specialized bookstores. This may be due to a certain cult status that Kawada achieved in the last few years, which can be explained, on the one hand, by his name being associated with MACK, and, on the other hand, by the photographer's presence on the Internet. Having been born in 1933 and being 89 years old at the time of this writing (he is turning 90 in January 1st, 2023), Kawada must be one of the oldest, if not the oldest, renowned photographers with a very active presence on Instagram. Commenting on Kawada's relentless activity on the Internet, Yoshiaki Kay notes that "Kawada's photographs on Instagram are far from serene. They are unsettling not just in their imagery, but also in Kawada's frequent act of posting them — one cannot help but sense some uncontrollable impulse of the photographer" (Kai, 2002: 527). *Vortex* is born from this persistent activity online, gathering — albeit not exclusively — photographs that were first posted on the photographer's Instagram account.

Kawada uses Instagram like this photo sharing social network was first meant to be used: a way of sharing slices of life in the characteristic stillness of photographs. In a way, one can say that Instagram still works more as a book than as a gallery. As a "reader", you leaf through the images as you leaf through the pages of a book. But Instagram also offers the photographer an immediacy that s/he would not find in a book or in a gallery. That is why the temporality of the photographs posted on Instagram is more directly related to the flow of life than in any other medium. From the few photographers that took advantage of this, Kawada has certainly been one of the most interestingly prolific.

Kawada's Japanese origin may not be totally unimportant to this discussion. Japanese photography is historically intertwined with life and experience, as the works of the abovementioned artists testify. In the documentary film *Traces of a Diary* (2010), directors André Príncipe and Marco Martins travelled to Japan to

interview a group of photographers, in order to ascertain the strong relation between Japanese photography and the diaristic mode. In the last segment of the film, Araki claims enthusiastically: "Photo is diary; diary is life!". In "Remote Past a Memoir: 1951-1966", a text of 2016, Kawada also writes *apropos* of a set of photos he had shot long ago, in the 50s and 60s. Meditating on the interplay between life, time, memory, and photography as a mediating technology, he states:

> …The lens itself is indeed a machine for glimpsing into the past and future. Both the telescope and the microscope serve to imaginatively compound our vision. From negative to positive, it induces the beginnings of memory to shift from the glooms of chemistry towards a new illusion. It had also attempted to transform that which was lost in pressing the shutter, into radiant life. The images that remain as profound memories are alluring bodies that move faintly and ever so slightly. All of the past becomes a needle that penetrates the future, engraving its body, bringing a flower to blossom vividly like that of a tattoo. (Kawada, 2016)

Despite the current tendency to consider Kawada a quasi-formalist, or at least a conceptual artist, I prefer to look at *Vortex* as the work of a diarist, the same way I look at his Instagram account as a photo-diary. In a short piece entitled "The Map and The Chronicle", Rei Masuda also discussed these same propositions within the work of Kawada, albeit through the concepts of the "map" — which was obviously fundamental in *Chizu*, but is also crucial in *Vortex* — and the "chronicle":

> A chronicle is in effect a continuous record of events written in order of their occurrence, and serves to explain the process by which one arrived at the present. If a map's intention is to confirm one's current position in the midst of the flow of time that extends from the past. (Masuda, 2016)

I would argue that *Vortex* responds to a particular kind of photo-diary, a mix between "map" and "chronicle" where both space and time are disorganized, non-referential. This disorganization takes place because the change of medium from Instagram to book also changes the sequencing of the images and, consequently, the reader's experience. For instance, contrary to posts on the Internet, there are no dates on the book. Also, the book does not include the compelling hashtags that accompany the photos on Instagram and sometimes help the reader place themselves geographically. Nevertheless, leafing through the pages of *Vortex* throws us into that same "vortex" we are thrown into when sliding through the images on the photographer's Instagram account. Strong lines and colours, abstract shapes, strange perspectives, weird textures, and so on, morph into each other while *reading* the book, finally producing what Alex Prior aptly described as a "visual cacophony" (Prior, 2022), but also an oneiric and alternative — purely photographic — reality.

The work Kawada has produced in the last few years is as diaristic as Moriyama's (who is also in his 80s, and famous for having embraced quite early digital photography), in the way that it communicates an existence in the world that cannot be entirely disconnected from a photo camera. As Gerry Badger states in *Traces of a Diary*, diaristic Japanese Photography become about "not so much recording the world, but recording one's experience of the world". Publications such as *Vortex* or Moriyama's ongoing *Record* series are truly the works of "camera-men",

such as the modernist avant-gardes of the last century (think of Dziga Vertov or Jonas Mekas) conceptualised when thinking about how to close the gap between the artist and the camera while recording his/her own life.

In *The Last Cosmology*, Kawada states: "I want to spy the depths of a multihued heart that is like a Karman vortex" (qt. in Vermare, 2022: 532). And in one of the three essays that accompany *Vortex*, Pauline Vermare clarifies that: "The phenomenon of a Karman vortex is defined by American meteorologist Tom Niziol as 'a linear chain of spiralling whirlwinds, that are spectacular is satellite imagery'" (Vermare, 2022: 533). This chain of spiraling whirlwinds, both "stunningly beautiful and deeply haunting" (ibidem) is the perfect metaphor for the snapshot-like, expressive images that constitute this fairly "subjective" work (again, Badger's words).

This is a fairly thick book, with a textured hardcover in black and gray (with an abstract pattern reminiscent of *Chizu*), 216 × 154 mm in size, 533 pages, displaying around 250 photographs and containing three short essays in Japanese and English. However, what strikes us when picking up the book is its relative lightness. This is due to the type of paper used in the publication, a textured matte that, in the best Japanese fashion, seems to be simultaneously sturdy and delicate. Most photographs are in horizontal format, with only a few quite imaginative spreads showing two vertical images. And the images always fill the pages in their entirety, leaving no white margins. One would say it provides a truly immersive experience.

The sense of lightness that I referred to comes from the materiality of the book but also from the images themselves. This happens because the images here shown are heavily digital — not high-definition, but mostly of old digital technology. There is visible noise in almost all the photographs, especially since they are clearly manipulated by Kawada in post processing. Colours are frequently non-natural, heavily saturated, and in the best-case scenario just a little bit off, the contrast is clearly overdone, and you will not be looking at the "details" in the photos, because there is almost no detail to be analysed and marveled at. You would not expect to find some of these images in a serious photobook by a serious photographer. These photographs may make you think that, possibly, the photographer has gone a bit too far in the editing process. However, that is also part of the freshness and the bravery of *Vortex*. Kawada is sure of himself as a photographer. He has nothing to lose. And he is — whether deliberately or not — freely exploring and extending the possibilities of photography within the contemporary image-filled world.

The photographs that constitute *Vortex* are ostensively flat and two-dimensional, almost transparent — images which were, up to a certain point, created on a screen with some image editing software, and that are, in a way, also meant to be seen on a screen. But the interesting aspect of all this is that they work even better on the book than on the screen of our phones or laptops. To me, this paradox lies at the heart of *Vortex* and elevates it to the status of a great photobook — certainly one of the best published in 2022. Almost all the images inside it point to the virtual, to the diaphanous, to the elusive; yet, in the end, we hold this object in our hands, touching it with the tips of our fingers, feeling its weight in our hands.

And a great part of the fascination it exerts on us comes from these intrinsic aesthetic and material characteristics.

As Akiyoshi Taniguchi mentions in his short final piece, "[a] discussion of Kawada's work naturally becomes part of a discussion of the essential theory of photography. To see Kawada's works is to touch something more real than reality, something truly genuine" (Taniguchi, 2022: 540-41). Flirting with bad taste, kitsch, and the limits of what is considered "serious photography", and putting it into such a well-crafted book, Kawada invites to think both on what contemporary photography is and is not — and why it is not what it could also be. Finally, he makes us reflect on what a photobook can do for photography in a world where making images and sharing them with others is increasingly ridden with virtuality.

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