

Bindings, Boundaries and Cuts:
Relating Agency and Ontology in Photobook Encounters

Briony Anne Carlin

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School of Arts and Cultures, Newcastle University

Abstract

The artwork and commodity known as a “photobook” is gaining visibility as an object of creative practice and cultural economy. It has generally been studied within photographic histories. This thesis builds alternative ontologies of the photobook as an experiential, social artefact using a unique methodological assemblage that responds to the object’s hybrid nature.

The enquiry posits that encounters with photobooks are “material-discursive configurations” of matter, materiality, meaning and context, in which the photobook-object is actualised in relation to its surroundings and the reader’s sensations and interpretations. The study foregrounds situated moments of “encounter” between humans and photobooks, which are simultaneously texts, images, actants and phenomena, to question what roles photobooks perform in different circumstances – what they do. The research identifies photobook agencies including: affecting aesthetic art experiences, mediating social and economic relations, and pushing back against established epistemic regimes.

The study of this messy, boundary object employs counter-hegemonic techniques such as autoethnography alongside ethnographic data to uncover relational insight into photobook encounters, analysed through a combined lens of Actor-Network Theory, New Materialism and Phenomenology. The iterative methodology reveals the research process’ own agency, advancing the thesis’ argument that more-than-human entities co-produce diverse knowledges. This original theoretical position produces a multi-faceted analysis of an under-researched artistic medium, form and genre, which is novel for studies of photographic history and culture, as well as interdisciplinary object studies.

Through exploring the complexities of a seemingly quotidian book-shaped thing in wide-ranging personal and institutional encounters, the study fosters a profound, felt awareness of relationalities between humans and non-humans. This alternative approach shows how encounters with art objects present new, pluralistic ways of knowing that disrupt habitual schematic modes of cutting or limiting our experiences of phenomena and things, with meaningful consequences for rethinking our modes of acting, consuming, feeling and being in the world.

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List of Abbreviations

Reference

PS1a, b	Preliminary Study 1: personal notated encounters
PS2a, b, c	Preliminary Study 2: focus groups
PS3	Preliminary Study 3: location observations
MS1i, ii	Main Study 1: ethnographic journals (vol i/ii)
MS2	Main Study 2: interviews

Organisation/theory acronyms

AAT	Art and Architecture Thesaurus
ABC	Artist's Book Collective
ANT	Actor-network-theory
APSC	Artist's Publication Study Collection
CABC	Contemporary Artist's Book Conference
CBA	Center for Book Arts, New York
CCCB	Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona
EE	Errata Editions
GEM	George Eastman Museum
GNE	Gato Negro Ediciones
LCBA	London Centre for Book Arts
LoC	Library of Congress
MoMA	Museum of Modern Art, New York
NAL	National Art Library, London
NYPL	New York Public Library
PDP	V&A Prints, Drawings and Paintings Collection
STS(S)	Science, Technology and Society (Studies)
TPG	The Photographers' Gallery, London
V&A	Victoria and Albert Museum, London
VSW	Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester
WID	V&A Word and Image Department
10x10	10x10 Photobooks

Introduction

There are days when everything I see seems to me charged with meaning: messages it would be difficult for me to communicate with others, define, translate into words, but which for this very reason appear to me decisive.

– Italo Calvino, *If On a Winter's Night a Traveller*

The core investigation of this thesis centres around understanding the affect and agency of things. It is about how we engage with things and how things engage us; how we relate to the material world and what the material world says about relations between people. It is about how we can better know these quotidian engagements and subtle relations. More specifically, it explores these themes through the contemporary photobook, viewing this product of artistic practice as a complex, agential thing.

As we will see, the photobook is a hybridised material culture object. It occupies diverse positions on a spectrum between a familiar book-type product, and the rarefied status of an artwork. The photobook performs diverse roles, as economic product, creative or informative platform, and professional promotional device. Photobooks supply their own interpretive environment to facilitate communicative, affective experiences through visual, verbal and more-than-representational registers.

This research aims to map the variety of activity with and agency of photobooks through interrogating how, where and why people engage with them, framing these engagements as ‘encounters’. The thesis proposes that close attention to the nuanced multiplicity of an encounter with a photobook can lead to rich insights into the broader, versatile, networked world of photobook production, and more general ontological understanding of the medium. The “bindings, boundaries and cuts” of the thesis title could all describe physical acts of making a photobook: they are bound, with edges and ends, at some point separated from larger bodies of matter. Yet these words also express important semantic and epistemic activities relating to how we make and understand knowledges about things, highlighting a crucial link between materiality and discourse and framing the project’s broader relevance for interdisciplinary object studies.

To pursue these themes, the project introduces a novel methodology that interprets ethnographic and autoethnographic data using phenomenology (Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger) and theories of affect (Margaret Wetherell), filtered through a more-than-human, relational perspective influenced by actor-network theory and after (most notably John Law, Karen Barad, Jane Bennett). This complex methodological position forms the thesis' central argument.

This first chapter presents and explains the research question, followed by further elaboration on some of its key issues, before outlining the methodological position and thesis structure in more detail.

0.1 Research question

The research question, “What is the agency of the photobook encounter, and how can this reveal insights into the networked relationality of the photobook genre?”, addresses a meta theme of how we can utilise our experiences with things to understand the agency of objects in material and social worlds. This question raises many smaller ones, such as:

What is a photobook?

What is a photobook encounter?

How can we “know” the encounter?

What is it to have agency in the encounter?

How and what can we learn from the encounter?

These apparently simpler questions address complex themes about our experiences with the material world. As Italo Calvino's fractured protagonist observes in the quote at the start of this introduction, sometimes things seem to vibrate with enigmatic meaning. The harder it is to explain the elusive significances of ordinary phenomena, the more compelling they become. To “know” something as apparently simple as a book relies on interrogating many complex threads of meaning-making in which it is entangled: what it looks like, where one finds it, who uses it, what it *feels* like, what and how it communicates, what it *does*. This project seeks to “know” the photobook in a sense beyond the basic vernacular meaning of the word, conjoining experience, apprehension and epistemology as a more nuanced form of knowing than any written definition. As such, it foregrounds the encounter as an opportunity for this counter-hegemonic “knowing”, as a site of making and accessing different kinds of knowledges.

The photobook encounter is described in the following terms:

- ~ The photobook encounter is individual, embodied and materially specific. Both participant and photobook have agency in the encounter and its interpretation.
- ~ The photobook encounter is socially situated in time and space. It is a product of many interrelated relationships that facilitate the encounter. The photobook and its encounter exist in conjunction with the sites, activities and organisations of which it is structuring, and by which it is structured.
- ~ The encounter is plural. Photobooks exist in editions, with many copies and many interactions occurring in several places at once and over time. One 'photobook' is in fact many, movable, duplicate examples. Photobooks vary significantly in material and conceptual form, adding further versatility to the idea of what a photobook 'is'. These plural interactions are supported by and mediated through social relations.

With this multiplicity in mind, the pursuit of the research question zooms in to the specific, by using photobook examples and accounts of interactions to examine its affect and agency in relation to individual encounters. The research asks, "what agencies are at work in *this* photobook encounter?" to reflect upon how an individual's interpretive experience and the photobook's performance varies in each instance of engagement. It probes and connects localised engagements to reveal relational insights into the photobook and its artworld. This interrogation is influenced by the sensitivity to perceptual experience found in phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1962[1945]; Heidegger, 1978) and affect theory (Wetherell, 2012). The attention to material agency and relationality of the photobook encounter draws on perspectives found in Science, Technology and Society studies (Law and Mol, 2002; Latour, 2005; Barad, 2007) and, more recently, new materialism (Bennett, 2010).

To unearth greater detail and subtlety from these interactions, the thesis experiments with ways of capturing and communicating experience. It complements observation, interviews and ethnographic note-taking with autoethnographic and creative writing. Ethnographic and autoethnographic methods, as well as theories of affect and phenomenology, are traditionally anthropocentric, prioritising human experience. While these approaches offer much to the study of encounters, they presume subjectivity and agency as properties of a bounded, activated self, which prioritises human activity over other kinds of agency. The Enlightenment roots and associated issues of a human-centred approach will be discussed throughout the thesis and best explained by its conclusion. Here it suffices to justify my choice to filter these methods through flows of relationality and a more-than-human position, in analysis and writing. The project

incorporates writing in particular as an additional layer of inquiry and a method of making knowledges about the photobook.

Through this combination of theory and methodology, the project demonstrates a multi-faceted approach to understanding this under-researched artistic medium that is novel not only for studies of photographic history and culture, but also for interdisciplinary object studies. The following section will contextualise the photobook as the subject of study.

0.2 What is a Photobook?

The “photobook” of this research is not the digital-age photo album offered by Snapfish or Photobox, although this invariably tops the search engine results. This shows the “photobook” as an artistic practice is relatively niche within wider visual culture. This study concerns itself with the contemporary photobook as a creative output made by a photographer or photographic artist, sometimes in collaboration with publishers and designers, or independently edited and self-published. They are often intended to perform as artworks, but can act as promotional material, by giving books to people of influence, as a portable exhibition, a manifesto, a commodity and many more roles, as this thesis explores.

The photobook is a productive subject because it is gaining visibility within the field of photographic production. The photobook has evolved quietly for over a century and circulates within a diversifying social landscape. Yet, it remains little known in popular material culture and under-researched in academia. At the start of this research, photobooks seldom featured in specific photo-history discourse or interdisciplinary studies of art and media, although this is changing rapidly. Communities of photobook interest and photobook practice are developing in similar structures to that of photography, zines and print-making, but also literature and design (Neumüller *et al.*, 2017:3). These communities remain relatively small and permeable, enabling this research to relate the affective encounter to its world of production and consumption.

Historically-established photographic outputs, such as fine art prints or journalistic photography, traditionally have more clearly defined boundaries in material form and social function. The contemporary photobook presents opportunities to explore new kinds of object relationship, because it exists in the nexus between a familiarly-shaped form and ambiguous purpose and

destination¹. I assert this tension inspires a different quality of attention and interaction, making it a fertile example for the study of the encounter. The book form is perhaps unnoticed as a technology² given its ubiquity, so aesthetic content is more keenly observed, but the book's materiality is also performative. By materiality, I am referring to the combined material qualities and affects of a thing that bring content, form, and matter into contact (Littau, 2006). In discourses from architecture to archaeology, discourses of materiality explore the physical and tactile agencies of a thing in relation to its situation, reception and use in the world (Ingold, 2011; Lange-Berndt, 2015). Materiality is thus a discussion, of media, material and performativity (Thrift, 2005).

To locate a definition of the photobook, we could look to several official ontologies, as defined by the Art and Architecture Thesaurus (AAT), taxonomized by authors, catalogued by institutions, or prescribed by entry criteria for awards and competitions. Recent texts have sought to define the photobook, including PhD theses, which demonstrates fresh critical curiosity about photobooks has originated from outside of established academia (Parr and Badger, 2004; Shannon, 2010; Neves, 2017; Johnston, 2020).

Parallel to these official ontologies, 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. This thesis is interested in understanding the photobook at the intersections of these official and individual ontologies. At this stage, I will resist a lengthy discussion of photobook history and terminology as could be found elsewhere (Shannon, 2010; Colberg, 2016; Zimmerman, 2016; Neves, 2017). I will instead summarise some commonalities and conflicts among existing conceptions of the photobook to contextualise this thesis.

0.2.1 Why “photobook” is not easy to define

Throughout my reading and listening to talks about photobooks, the most frequent definition comes from the first of three volumes of Martin Parr & Gerry Badger's *The Photobook: A History* (2004; 2006; 2014). The survey anthology is probably the best-known photobook text, stemming from the collection of the widely and commercially popular photographer Martin Parr. If there were ever a “household name” in British photography (aside from shiny celebrity portraitists),

¹ In the sense of André Malraux, see p.201.

² See pp.55-56 for clarification on use of the term ‘technology’.

Parr might be it. Olivier Cablat noted what distinguished Parr and Badger's compendium from earlier anthologies was its association with the "main players in the field" (Neumüller and Tuminas, 2018:2). Parr and Badger's much-quoted definition of the photobook is:

a book — with or without text — where the work's primary message is carried by photographs. It is a book authored by a photographer or by someone editing or sequencing the work of a photographer, or even a number of photographers. It has a specific character, distinct from the photographic print.

(2004:6)

This initially seems straightforward, until the reader realises it offers little clarification. It tells us photobook authors are usually photographers, but can be editors, or multiple photographers, and doesn't mention those who make books with photography but identify otherwise. So it is not defined by who made it. Neither is it defined by what it contains: although "the primary message is carried by photographs", many of Parr and Badger's examples are predominantly text, such as *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* by James Agee and Walker Evans (1941). Evans' 31 images are outnumbered by hundreds of pages of Agee's equally-renowned text. The anthology authors give little attention to the texts in such instances, showing a lack of holistic consideration of the photobook object, or at least confusion as to where a book's primary message lies.

Parr and Badger recommend three further criteria: photobooks should follow a coherent design (whether from the photo-auteur themselves or editorial team); be authored by, or edited from work by a photographer; and have general unifying subject or theme (2004:7). These non-binding suggestions, implied the word *should*, aim to classify the photobook by differentiating it from other photographic volumes, such as albums of vernacular or family photographs.

Elizabeth Shannon (2010:57) has criticised Parr and Badger's broad claims on the basis that elsewhere comments appear contradictory. For example, Badger writes photobooks are works showing "something more ambitious than the commonplace photographically illustrated book has been attempted, or in certain cases, achieved without any self-conscious attempt being made". So, a photobook should be made with artistic intent; unless its artistry is incidental. According to their own definition, Shannon highlights many 19th- and early 20th-century works Parr and Badger included should not be considered photobooks, such as Anna Atkins' impressive *Cyanotypes of British Algae* (1843), which was intended to illustrate and promote her botanical research (2010:57).

This first critique does not aim to malign Parr & Badger's efforts, but to reaffirm a singular "watertight" definition is not viable for fluid and intermingling forms (Shannon 2010:55, c.f. McCausland, 1942). Books containing photographs exist across a spectrum of print production.

As Edwards observes, the purpose of photographic media fluctuates from “use value” to “age value” as enduring texts gain new resonances in different contexts (Edwards and Morton, 2015; Bärnighausen *et al.*, 2020:68). The agencies that enact such shifts in meaning are strands of investigation in this thesis.

Locating the “photobook” through criteria or taxonomies

Parr & Badger’s densely-illustrated survey followed an established template initiated by *Fotografía pública: photography in print, 1919-1939* by Horacio Fernández (1999) and followed by the less geographically and temporally-specific *The Book of 101 Books: Seminal Photographic Books of the Twentieth Century* (2001). These canon-forming publications functioned “as guides for collectors, connoisseurs and curators” (Campany, 2014). The epistemological activity of anthologies such as these will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

Some authors have attempted to characterise the photobook through highlighting attributes of their production or content. In composing his list of ‘101 Books’, Andrew Roth prioritised “content, mise-en-scène, choice of paper stock, reproduction quality, text, typeface, binding, jacket design, scale” as criteria for judging a book’s success (2001:1). Roth’s selection includes Russian photomontage pamphlets, handmade artist books, photo-illustrated ethnographic volumes and mass-produced publications. The diversity of examples surely cannot consistently satisfy each of his criteria, suggesting a less literal, more subjective *feeling* of what a photobook is has guided his 101 selections.

Lesley Martin acknowledges the difficulty in setting criteria to differentiate ‘genres’ of photobooks, instead identifying patterns amongst contemporary photobooks. She perceives three ‘tracks’ of interest: the thematic track, often pursued by photobooks using archival material; the narrative track, which attempts imaginative storytelling; and the production track, which foregrounds innovative, novel or intriguing material properties (Neumüller *et al.*, 2017:11-13). Although Martin identifies three main trends in contemporary photobook production, she acknowledges its usefulness is limited, as many successful photobooks would satisfy multiple categories (*ibid.*:14). Through creating groups within which certain types of photobooks can sit, Martin produced a lexicon to compare and contrast photobook practice, but also created boundaries that assert what the photobook is *not*.

Jörg Colberg’s taxonomy divides photobooks between more elaborate categories by the summative effect of their images, information and production (2016). Colberg uses factors such

as the volume of text, tone, or the position of the photographer (ranging from dispassionate observer to intimate diarist) to distinguish photobooks as catalogues, monographs, or fitting groupings of “journalistic”, “lyrical”, or “narrative-driven” photobooks. Within these latter three headings are sub-categories such as “photojournalistic”, “investigative/research-based”, “encyclopedic”, “lyrical-poetic”, “elliptical” or “linear”, “stream of consciousness”, “photonovel”, “subjective documentary” and “first person narration”.

Colberg emphasizes his interest in how photobooks “operate”, or how they tell a story, over sorting them arbitrarily by geography, date or topic. His justifications and examples for each category are persuasive, but to rationalize photobooks according to this schema, the reader must understand their production context. Nevertheless, the categories express an agency on the part of photobooks: as inanimate things, they can actively “operate” on the reader through their various visual and haptic devices. This suggestion goes some way towards this thesis’ interest in photobook agency.

0.2.2 Intersecting with histories of art and visual books

Photobooks are often discussed in relation to histories of photography, but they are also cultural products that intersect with broader publishing and design practices. Photobooks could not practically exist until photographic and printing technology advanced sufficiently to produce them. In a tangential history of art publishing, long-standing imprints such as Phaidon and Thames and Hudson initially focused on general culture titles, and later specialised in art historical books once reproducing plate illustrations became commercially viable (MS1ii.:5-6). Earlier reproduction methods such as photogravure were costly. The invention of photolithographic printing reduced costs and made densely-illustrated volumes more affordable, meaning photographic publications became more ubiquitous towards the mid-20th century. White (2013) has identified similar intersections between artist’s book production and histories of graphic design.

While contemporary photobooks are entangled with Western publishing histories, their narrative shifts when viewed through cultural and technological developments in other geographies, revealing histories of cultural production to be perspectival and circumstantial. In Japan, photobooks became a prominent photographic medium following World War Two, when the changing political climate towards democratic ideals inspired disapproval of exhibitions of original prints. Prints were more exclusive, belonging to singular owners. Contrary to the Western market, photobooks became the only “worthy” medium for photography, because

“once a photograph was reproduced in any publication it could become co-owned property of the people [...] this was part of the country’s 1950s postwar *zeitgeist*” (Neumüller *et al.*, 2017). The proletarian photograph in book form is an interesting counter-narrative to views that the photobook’s popularity results from giving artists greater autonomy and ownership of their images amid “copy-and-paste” digital culture (C4 Journal, 2021).

Internationally, there has been a perceived surge in photobook publishing since the early 2000s, when digital technologies and print-on-demand services made bookmaking more accessible for artists without access to printing presses and other specialist equipment (Neumüller and Tuminas, 2019:26). The digital revolution has facilitated more democratic means of producing photobooks and enabled opportunities for skill-sharing and networking amongst practitioners, as seen in platforms such as 10x10 Photobooks, which began as an internet community and now also produces books and exhibitions (more in Chapters 4 and 5).

Photobooks and the artist’s book

Photobooks share a kinship with broader artists’ book practices, in their bookish materialities, and their defiance of neat classification. Artists’ books have had similar trouble with definitions. Johanna Drucker has identified, “most attempts to define an artist’s book which I have encountered are hopelessly flawed – they are either too vague (“a book made by an artist”) or too specific (“it can’t be a limited edition”)” when in fact “artists’ books take every possible form, participate in every possible convention of book making” (2004:14). The artist’s book “draws upon a wide spectrum of activities, and yet, duplicates none of them” (*ibid.*). They can range from works of graphic design to sculptural, conceptual pieces, across all art disciplines. Where elsewhere the book object is secondary to its text or content, most artists’ books give primacy to the book form (*ibid.*:xi).

While artist’s book criticism remains a small field compared to general art critique, it is more established than the photobook. Scholarship is rich in North America, led by organisations such as the Center for Book Arts (New York), Printed Matter (New York and Los Angeles), Image Text Ithaca and the Visual Studies Workshop (Rochester). The recently established Book Arts Review (2020), and the 2021 Contemporary Artist’s Book Conference’s theme “The Temperature of Artist’s Book Criticism and Scholarship” indicate renewed interest in critical conversation around artists’ books.

Fortunately for photobooks, texts about artists' books feature many examples using predominantly photographic imagery, such as Keith Smith's *Structure of the visual book* (2003). The photographic content in the example books in Smith's investigation would not exist beyond the book form: artists would make photographs knowing their ultimate outcome would be a book. By placing the tension of series versus sequencing as a central concern, Smith differentiates the photographic "visual book", conceived as an overall "flow", from the photographic monograph, in which "individual pictures are paramount; the book is relegated to warehousing duties" (ibid.:44). Smith's study is led by his experiences as a bookmaker. His insights into sequence and the book's potential to shape visual experience are earned through his embodied practices of artmaking.

The primacy of the book's form as a holistic, experiential object resonates with the opinions of many people involved in this study, who describe the photobook as a photographic project's intended artwork. An ontological difference emerged between photographic works conceived primarily as photobooks and books which are containers for photographs. As monographs generally feature well-established, canonical artists and are made by large publishing houses, these publications exist with distinct economic motivations to the indie activity of visual book production (MS1i:45-47). Interviewees expressed some artist's books can be photobooks, but photobooks are generally distinguished from artist's book practice by larger print runs and less handmade intervention (MS2: Reeves, Watson). There is an occasional view amongst photography practitioners that artists' books are produced by hand or other artisanal craftsmanship, in which the object's materiality becomes more significant as it becomes less mass-produced (MS2: Watson, Bush). However, as seen by Martin's "production" track of photobook trends, these gaps between modes of artmaking are indistinct.

The "Photobookwork"

One connecting thread between artist's book discourse and photobooks is the term "photobookwork", coined by Alex Sweetman (1986). José-Luis Neves' recent thesis concluded this term is a more appropriate descriptor because it distinguishes the specific, crafted, artistic nature of the photobook as "a specific form of multi-layered relational photographic narrative throughout the entire volume", compared with other photographic publications (2017:31). The term "photobookwork" was derived from Ulises Carrión's proposal that artist's books should be named "bookworks" (Lyons, 1985), to foreground the interactive book form as being as integral to conceptual expression as any sculptural, kinetic artwork.

Yet, as with all terminology, the choice of where to use the word “photobookwork” remains subjective and ambiguous. The term is used most frequently by artist’s book scholars to distinguish from artist’s books. For example, Philip Zimmerman (2016) wrote about dividing his library into artist’s books, photobooks, books on photography and photobookworks. Many books whose core message is carried by photographic imagery remained in the artist’s book category, such as Sophie Calle, Christian Boltanski and Ed Ruscha, causing Neves to express frustration at Zimmerman’s “complex and convoluted conceptualization” (2017:248). However, Neves’ form-focussed study misses a crucial point in how these lines are drawn: the artists he took issue with work with photography but are well-established in the general fine art market, whereas others in Zimmerman’s article are more commonly categorized as photographers. To an extent, how a book “type” is classified relates to extraneous factors such as the maker’s position within broader artworld³ economies. Understanding these differences requires a relational, social approach as well as visual and historical analysis.

To further problematise the photobookwork, describing an artistic output with the word ‘work’ connects it with labour as a condition of art-making. This has prevailed since the pre-modern (Renaissance) artworld economy wherein artists worked up the hierarchy of their master’s school or studio. This began to shift following Ruskin and Whistler’s 1877 disagreement on the “work” required of painting (Merrill, 1992). This notion is important in value discourses surrounding photography: where paintings were historically valued on time taken plus technical skill (as per Ruskin), photography was valued less as an instantaneous or mechanical process (Benjamin 1935). Controversial “readymade” art pieces such as Duchamp’s Fountain (1917) again redefined the nature of “work” in art production, founding the assumption that artworks must signify mental labour. Yet, many successful books were produced rapidly, cheaply and ephemerally, without aspirations to the status of *œuvre*. To apply these logics to the photobook asks, wherein lies the work? In the making of photographs, the book’s production, the dissemination of book to audience? It could be all of these. It could also refer to the combined labours of the artist in this and other projects, their training, developing ideas and fundraising to achieve each creation; but this would mean every piece of work actioned by an artist is an “artwork”, when they might value their outputs differently.

The use of the term “work” to signify an art thing is different in nature to the common “product” and therefore requires particular treatment, cognitively, physically and procedurally. The fetishisation of the term “work” is unproductive in relation to the photobook as it

³ Clarification of this term on p.40.

differentiates between ‘book-produced-as-art’ and ‘book-as-saleable-product’: artist and producer must satisfy different aims of creative production and economic consumption, but in many cases, especially when self-publishing, these roles are fulfilled by one person. Ultimately, “photobookwork” implies exclusions in what constitutes a photobook which are not productive to my argument. I choose to take advantage of the ambiguity of “photobook” to traverse the broad community of photobook practitioners and professionals without limiting my inquiry to those who believe their books satisfy particular definitions.

0.2.3 Definition through actions, not words:

Earlier in this discussion, Parr & Badger’s definition asserted the photobook has “a specific character”. They give little indication what this elusive photobook essence looks like, aside from negating or differentiating it from other photographic outputs such as prints. As seen in the discussion of photobook/artist’s book/photobookwork, names can be attributed more through social association than any intrinsic quality in the work.

George Dickie’s institutional theory (1974; 1984; 1997) posits we cannot and should not consider artworks as possessing an essential characteristic of art-ness, but rather things are *made* to be art through systems of institutional acquiescence such as exhibitions and viability on the art market.

A work of art is an artefact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public. [...] A public is a set of persons the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object which is presented to them [...] An artworld system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public”
(Dickie, 1984:80)

If we replace “work of art” with “photobook”, it becomes clear any book with photographs could be reframed as a photobook if its artworld system accepts it. Howard Becker (1982; 2008) has also placed art production within a network of social, material, technical relations and economies, but extends his study of the artworld beyond organizational human agents such as curators to more-than-human factors such as the gallery, security cameras or tickets that facilitate a work of art’s social construction.

Attention to what books *do* invites greater scope for understanding the photobook from a perspective of individual ontologies: it acknowledges photobooks perform differently, whether due to essential physical properties and artistic capabilities, as identified by Colberg (2016), or the context of their use and reception. Bruno Ceschel has said his organisation Self-Publish, Be Happy is interested in “pushing the boundaries of a photobook”, seeing it as “a social practice, or

a physical space, perhaps a sculpture, or a process akin to performance art. We are trying to find out how photobooks can become a tool for change” (Neumüller and Tuminas, 2019:27). Ceschel has reflected that amid this diverse agency, the idea of a singular “photobook world” is naïve: “[i]t is very diverse geographically, and it’s important to move away from Western-centric” notions of production and audience (ibid.:28). This demonstrates joined-up thinking between physical books and the disparate individuals and communities that produce and consume them.

Patrizia di Bello has also situated the photobook within emergent communities of interest and practice, describing the medium as having “an emergent intellectual and cultural moment” (Di Bello *et al.*, 2012:1-3). Efforts to define the photobook would be restrictive and counterproductive in appreciating its cultural impact. Instead, Di Bello invites analysis of the genre’s “prismatic fringes” including magazines, catalogues and biographies. She emphasises the dialogue between the communicative powers of photograph and text, stating that in the photobook, photographs transcend “illustrations or transmitters of evidence” and “claim an active role in generating an independent meaning grounded in the unique ontology of their visual form”, wherein “image and text work within a dialectal relationship” (ibid.:4). Di Bello’s characterization of the photobook as a series of dialectal relationships between visual, textual and tactile elements with complex social relevances expresses it as a material relational object.

Photobooks do not only exist in collectors’ homes and hermetic library stores. They are also made and mediated within sites of commerce and criticism, as will be seen in Chapters 4 and 5. There are now at least 3 or 4 photobook fairs in the UK each year, with many more internationally, some with over 100 exhibitors of alternative print and photography books. People attend book events and buy photobooks in person and online for different motivations; whether they are *photo-affectionati*, or curious, ‘uninitiated’ individuals with an interest in theme or subject matter. Cablat has summarised the

explosion of different publishing practices operates in several realms, such as self-published books, microeditions, or books by smaller publishers experimenting with new ways of conceiving, producing and distributing publications. The digital space has not only strengthened the growing interest in this tradition and polymorphic object, the photobook, it has also assisted several generations of artists with breaking down the limitations of their reach

(Neumüller and Tuminas, 2018:2)

Aside from independent self-publishing, the social landscape of photobook production and consumption encompasses publishers of varying sizes, annual events and awards (Unseen Dummy Award, Mack First Book Award, Aperture Book Award, Kraszna Krausz Award, etc.),

portfolio reviews, book launches private collectors, and libraries such Tate and the National Art Library. The structuring power of these agents will be considered throughout this thesis.

Photobook as an “umbrella” term

As taxonomies impose an artificial illusion of structure, even the word “photobook” suggests a coherent field of practice. It is hard to pinpoint when it became institutionalised as the authoritative term. Following the publication of Parr and Badger’s aforementioned historicisation of the photobook (2004; 2006), in 2006 the term was added to the AAT, the Getty-controlled vocabulary database from which libraries and museums draw their terminology, consolidating its official ontology (Harpring, personal communications 2019). Self-Publish, Be Happy was founded in 2010, implying a growing current of photobook self-publishing prior to this date. From these and other activities, a shift towards more self-conscious photobook-making practices can be discerned during the early 2000s.

Adopting a singular umbrella term for a diverse genre of practice is not a neutral action. Defining the vast variety of books containing photographs with one simple term could homogenise perceptions of photobooks, their aims and agencies. On the recent consolidation of photographic book-making practices under the term ‘photobook’, David Company reasoned that earlier “makers and audiences of photographic books did not require the term to exist... Perhaps photographic bookmaking was so rich and varied precisely because it was not conceptualized as a practice with a unified name” (Company, 2014). This diversity makes the photobook resistant not only to terminology, but also any consistent definition.

Shannon has called the homogenising effect of the term photobook “misleading” because it is applied to “swathes” of published photographic material that is “non-artistic in origin in order to increase the book’s authority and value within the market”. As field actors in positions of influence (such as myself, or a critic or curator) make, define and consolidate categories in this way, adopting a singular term creates symbolic capital, which can produce economic capital when appropriated by others⁴. In short, acts of definition are highly political. As Becker has identified,

artworlds typically devote considerable attention to trying to decide what is and isn't art, what is and isn't their kind of art, and who is and isn't an artist; by observing how an art world makes those distinctions rather than trying to make them ourselves we can understand much of what goes on in that world.

(2008:36).

⁴ Following Bourdieu’s social alchemy of consecration, see Chapters 4 and 5.

Accordingly, in seeking to understand photobook agency, the research must also look beyond the object to survey the structures within which photobooks have capacity to act.

To retain focus in the thesis, this research concentrates on single artist photobooks rather than exhibition catalogues or compendiums, which may have motivations linked to a larger project or cause. This is important for the project's objective to explore knowledge production, because I want to understand how photobooks act as things in themselves, not on behalf of other aims. There will be exceptions to this rule, such as the discussion of sales catalogues in Chapter 5.

This study seeks to highlight the collaborative agency of book, artist, publisher and other actors. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, and given the ambiguities of the medium as discussed above, the photobook shall be **loosely** considered as:

a specific, designed and printed book, principally containing photographic imagery, made in multiple by a photographic artist either independently or in collaboration, as a platform to produce, present and/or disseminate a body of work of photographic origin.

This is a **working parameter** for data collection: although it does, to a degree, function epistemologically in clarifying the types of photobooks of greatest interest to this research, I endeavour to avoid definitive terminology. Furthermore, the thesis generally focusses upon contemporary photobooks, with exceptions. By “contemporary”, I am referring to photobooks produced from 2006 onwards, during this recent, self-identifying era of photobook practice, rather than referring to things produced within the general the paradigm of contemporary art (Whitehead, 2012:xix; 34; 42). I focused on more recent books to draw a flexible parameter around what could realistically be studied; to maximise discussion with current practitioners and authors; and because, as Bruno Latour contends, associations and transactions of agency are most visible whilst being performed (2005:159). Additionally, the economies, motivations and patterns of consumption of collectors of classic photobooks are different to people engaging with contemporary production (Neumüller and Tuminas, 2018). Pre-21st-century photobooks are referenced where they inform ongoing discourse about contemporary political economy and art worlds, alongside where photobook encounters have contributed to personal ontologies.

0.3 What is a Photobook Encounter?

This research foregrounds the encounter as a fertile subject for study because no two photobook experiences are the same. Each encounter with a photobook is specific to time, space, place, and the current state of mind and body of the individual engaging with it. These situated and unique

“moments of embodied interaction” (Wetherell, 2012:7) depend upon material and human conditions as well as the photobook itself. In line with Karin Littau’s theory of reading:

[s]ince a text is ... an embodied material object, this object’s materiality and physical organisation conditions our readings. ... texts bring into contact *content, form and matter* (Littau, 2006:2; original emphasis)

The thesis will argue further that a photobook is a complete, designed, social object and the photobook-text encounter brings time, place and socio-political contextual factors into this transaction.

Goodwin emphasises the layered and relational complexity of the encounter, describing it as an event in which “various ‘small worlds’ are put together in the moment” (c.f. Wetherell, 2013:360). This thesis contends the “small worlds” of photobook encounters are instrumental in making meanings about individual photobooks and the medium in general. The material situation and haptic qualities of the photobook encounter render it highly *affective*, with affect understood in terms of Margaret Wetherell’s definition as “embodied meaning making” (2012:4; Smith *et al.*, 2018). This means an aspect or aspects of the composite experience – whether they be the photobook interaction or another circumstantial factor – stir a response in whomever is experiencing, which could be articulated as physical, emotional or something difficult to translate into words.

The notion of “affect” is explained more clearly through distinguishing it from “emotion”. Brian Massumi argues “affect is central to an understanding of our information- and image-based late-capitalist culture, in which so-called master narratives are perceived to have foundered”, yet it is used as a synonym for emotion because we lack vocabulary to describe it (1995:88). Affect can be considered as a kind of *intensity*, an unspecific, pre-verbal feeling, response or aura, from which *emotion* is subjectively qualified as the conventional, narrativised meaning of that intensity (ibid.). If emotion is the “socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal”, then affect is the intensity of experience before it becomes identified and fixed (ibid.).

Massumi's conceptualisation of affect implies it is autonomous, although it can be managed and encouraged. Jane Bennett (2010) promotes the more-than-human nature of affect in her new materialist notion of a “political ecology of things”. She describes things that have an “impersonal affect” or “material vibrancy” which “is not a spiritual supplement or ‘life force’ added to the matter” but something one and the same as materiality, in all its non-representational, elusive nuance (2010:xiii). While affect cannot exist independently, it issues

forth in all kinds of interactions between people and things, as well as configurations of inanimate things without human intervention, highlighting the importance of human and more-than-human situational factors.

Wetherell links the encounter's intricate detail with its context, saying "[a]ffect can be uncanny and extreme but it can also be ordinary ... [t]hrough this ordinary affect, people engage with the momentous and the global political" (2013:7). The responses evoked in small affective experiences relate to larger societal structures or histories that influence the specificity of that encounter. An encounter with a photobook in a bookshop engages not only with the book and all it individually evokes, but also the book's history of production and dissemination, the history of the bookshop, learned behavioural codes implicit in the bookshop, and potential inclusionary or exclusionary practices towards the bookshop's audience demographic that may have influenced who will participate in the encounter, similar to the heuristic patterns and social backgrounds of visitors to cultural venues, as identified by Pierre Bourdieu (1991).

To study the nuances of embodied interactions requires noticing "situated activities" characteristic of types of encounters (Wetherell, 2012:7). These situated activities are "emergent patterns of practice, recognized by participants, even if they could not explicitly articulate the patterns involved"; they are "oriented variably to contexts, but also often demonstrate repetitive, relatively ordered, recurrent features" (ibid.). To observe how individual encounters vary, the researcher must work cooperatively with her participants and sites of observation to learn about individual responses and regular patterns of practice and behaviour associated with each activity and context. In the example of the bookshop, a regular pattern of practice may involve a visitor's automatic, much-practiced movement of picking up a book. However, within this material engagement, each participant in the encounter could be marked by juggling a handbag or coat, an attempt to browse a book thwarted by its cellophane cover, or social discomfort at being watched by the shop owner. In this way, situated activities are contingent and flexible, "bound up with questions of value and with local moral orders" (ibid.).

As the encounter is a situated activity, it also takes place with a (human) participant, meaning it is socially mediated, which questions who has access to this situation and why, how their perceptions, tastes and social and/or cultural capital have developed, where this moment of interaction fits within the broader field of photobook production. The more-than-representational "small worlds" coming together in situated activities have elsewhere been described as "affective atmospheres", a term that speaks both to physical environment and "sensory and imaginative forms of understanding" that "evade capture" (Sumartojo and Pink,

2018:3). The study of affect in relation to atmospheres concerns “how we constantly encounter and make sense of our surroundings, what we do in them and with whom and how we ascribe value and meaning to this” (ibid.). Studying affective intensities in the encounter surveys a complicated intermingling of physical actors such as architecture, bodies and books, with individual sensory perception, emotional and embodied responses, and collective meaning-making, taking place momentarily and over time. Understanding photobook encounters requires reflecting sociologically upon the individual (Chapter 2), as well as the organisations that mediate specific locations (Chapter 5), whilst attending to potentially intangible experiential factors that can also have profound and varied agencies (Chapter 4). The next section relates affect to discussions of agency.

0.4 Agency in the Encounter

As the influence of context and the individual participant’s contributions vary in each encounter, the photobook too performs simultaneous roles: as designed, material, technical apparatus, an aesthetic conveyer of meaning, and an agent affecting response. The photobook can thus be regarded from a more-than-human perspective as an actor possessing agency. The view that a photobook encounter, as experienced by a human participant, results from interrelated contextual and socio-political factors provides a starting point to study *effective* interactions between non-humans, opening avenues for knowing photobooks in terms of their agencies.

0.4.1 Object agency

The concept of agency initially referred to “people’s differential capacity to act, steered by their structural position, but allowing for the spark of contingency and improvisation”, wherein notions such as “gender, power and class were no longer qualities that one possessed... but emerged out of the constant, dialectical recomposition of social structure in daily practice” (Oyen, 2018). The concept that things can have agency subverts conventional Western 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”, meaning the social and material worlds are not cleanly divided (ibid.).

Anthropocentric approaches from material culture studies regard the agency of things as situational and dialectic: things have agency in relation to how they enable human activities such

as writing, thinking or trading, while producing and using things helps people understand their worldly position (Miller, 2005). The theoretical work originating in Science, Technology and Society Studies (STSS) and broadening into New Materialism argues objects can exert agency *independently* of humans because their physical properties or symbolic value mediates knowledges or actions. Ascribing agency to more-than-human things and entities does not necessarily assign them capacities of intentionality, reflexivity or consciousness: their agency is conceptualized as “an emergent and relational phenomenon and not an essential property” (Oyen, 2018). This will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 1’s explanation of Actor-Network Theory, and elaborated with examples of nonhuman agency of materials and practices throughout.

Discussions of more-than-human agency connect with posthumanism as an ethical and philosophical concern, as articulated by Rosi Braidotti (2013). In *The Posthuman*, Braidotti explores questions regarding how, in a socio-technical culture that has surpassed “humanist” ideals, attributing agency to nonhumans raises ethical questions of inhumane values. For example, using drones in warfare could result in ambiguous accountability for the humans involved in programming and decision-making, because things rather than people specifically enact violence (Karcher, 2014). While this research does not have the same level of ethical concern as issues of this kind, it aligns with Braidotti’s post-humanist view that the subjective or human-centric experience exists only as an outcome of intra-acting more-than-human forces and flows. This repositions the photobook encounter as a relational exchange between different entities, rather than an essentially human experience.

Notions of agency in this project are also inspired by object ethnographies that narrate history through close examination of single objects. These accounts (Dudley, 2010; Turkle, 2011) adopt an object-oriented approach as a useful mode of understanding the world around us, asking how our immediate experiences are embedded in the wider contemporary world. Studies such as *The Mushroom at the End of the World* by Anna Tsing (2015), which charts a map of global capitalism through examining the Japanese matsutake mushroom, have demonstrated how tracing the effects of interactions with a thing, no matter how small, can reveal connected activities of more-than-human agents, enabling a form of social history told of and through objects.

It is not only possible to chart the agency of individual objects, but also to survey the configurations of things that act together to produce certain results. For example, in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Jane Bennett (2010) studies the vibrancy of matter connected in broad, networked occurrences, such as how electricity and rubbish relate to civic infrastructure. The concept of vibrant matter takes on profound and poetic nuance when

considering the arbitrary boundaries between people and inanimate objects. Bennett considers how apparently inanimate stuff like food matter elicits complex and tangled agencies when incorporated amongst the carbon and bacterial masses of our bodies. This atomic consideration is shared by Karen Barad's work *Meeting the Universe Halfway: quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning* (2007), where she mobilises physics in a philosophical discussion of how matter comes to "intra-act" in moments of situated activity, or experience, to be explained in more detail in Chapter 1 and subsequent analyses.

0.4.2 Agency in art discourses

Understanding interactional objects and experiences is an established approach in art discourses. John Dewey (1934) considered experience as integral to an artwork's realisation, Howard Becker's (2008) functional theory of art presents the artwork as a product of complex relationships between many agents and stakeholders as well as the artist, and Alfred Gell's (1998) anthropology of artworks promotes their causal agency in structuring social relations and affecting changes in the beholder's behaviour. Art history scholarship has for some time reflected upon how to better capture, communicate and analyse subjective moments of interaction with artworks, in anthropology and creative writing (Grant *et al.*, 2012). The varied literature on artist's books demonstrates that where photography has not been the priority, it is possible to explore in critical terms the book-ness of the complete and composite art object (Smith, 2003; Drucker, 2004).

There remains room for greater engagement with the subjective experience in photography criticism. In *Camera Lucida* (1981), Roland Barthes describes the "punctum" or point of affect in photographic images as a complex and elusive quality existing in dialogue between the photograph's representational and material qualities and the viewer's subjectivity. Conjuring an imagined viewer raises issues of intersectionality and authenticity, through questioning what kind of subjectivity is anticipated by the text's author or analyst: what is the lived experience of diverse readers who engage with it; do all people identify the same punctum? (Ahmed, 2007; Lee, 2019).

Anthropologists have taken interest in the photo-object's specific affect (Edwards and Hart, 2004; Edwards *et al.*, 2006; Bärnighausen *et al.*, 2020). This discourse is slow to filter into fine art photography discourse, perhaps because art is generally perceived to be affecting in a broader, less personal sense. Seen behind glass or protective window mount, too precious to touch or stroke, a photograph's affect is often perceived as an elusive 'art' quality within the consistent image, more than a reproducible, variable photo-object. The agencies of photographic works in

exhibition circumstances are complicated by co-existing agencies of glass, framing and museum environment, which reduce the opportunity for interaction and mobility. Discussion on this will follow in Chapters 4 and 5.

While some museum displays continue to discuss photobooks exclusively in terms of their image content (MS1i:31-33), elsewhere curatorial practice has also acknowledged an appetite for the object itself. Curators increasingly opt to cut mounts back from the picture edge, to show the photograph's complete material form, meaning the physicality of the object exerts agency upon its mode of conservation, framing and display (Fig.1).



Figure 1 Assorted framing/ mounting/ display emphasising object materiality in V&A Photography Centre (2018). Source: author.

In exhibitions such as *Photobook Phenomenon* (CCCB, 2017) and the inaugural V&A Photography Centre hang (2018), curators paid careful consideration to presentation of photobooks (Neumüller 2017). For conservation reasons, photobooks often appear opened to a static page behind glass. Where resources allow, photobooks might be digitised for visitors to browse pages on a touchscreen (Fig.2). The problems experienced by museums in displaying photobooks are

comparable to other objects that are removed from their original or intended context of engagement, including other kinds of books, but also altarpieces, which must be shown opened or closed instead of being allowed to hinge, furniture that cannot be sat on, musical instruments that cannot be played. The specific display challenges and innovative strategies of exhibitions that mediate encounters with photobooks will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.



Figure 2 Photobook Phenomenon at CCCB. Photobooks pasted over walls, fluttering in political action in the air, glowing from swipeable screens. Source: © CCCB, 2017 La Fotogràfica

Written criticism has frequently neglected the photobook's interactive encounter. Many anthologies and book reviews prioritise discussion of photography or the maker's biography over the book's affect. Survey publications display multiple-page spreads and production details such as binding or printing method to convey a photobook's materiality. This leaves the reader to imagine what holding the book would be like, and depends upon their knowing Swiss binding from Leporello, or what 150 gsm feels like. Naturally there are exceptions, to be discussed in Chapter 2. Company (2014) has suggested photobook scholarship remains sparse because there is little critical framework for image editing, again placing emphasis on the photographic imagery instead of the holistic book. Others have discussed the movement encouraged by some

photobook sequencing cinematic terms, evoking comparisons with montage (Di Bello *et al.*, 2012; PhotoBook Review, 2017).

Nevertheless, the event of interaction remains a persistent absence in many foundational photobook texts (Parr & Badger, 2004; Roth, 2001). These informative, descriptive accounts construct linear surveys of the development of the medium, isolating each book as an artefact of innovation, removed from a sensory encounter. Straight chronologies and bounding taxonomies contribute to consolidating the photobook as a cultural practice with a distinct history, elevating its status and consecrating the photobook artworld according to old-fashioned convention⁵. Yet they neglect to recognise a crucial aspect of all photobooks, which is that they are destined at some point, in some time and place, to be opened and engaged with⁶.

This thesis stands in opposition to these accounts. For hundreds of years humans have recognised book forms' invitation to be opened. The *photobook* is a thing whose form requires interaction to be known, a hermeneutic event which has agency upon the beholder's response and perceptions. The absence of the encounter also persists in sociologically-oriented photobook scholarship. In a recent study interviewing publishers, librarians, printers and agents engaged in producing and disseminating photobooks, Nicolas Östlind (2018) maps relationships in Swedish photobook production, showing it as a connected and collaborative field. However, the study does not reflect upon how these relationships contribute to photobook ontologies because it omits the photobook itself as a crucial actor. The focus on production neglects reception and does not convey a satisfying sense of what it is like to experience a photobook's affect, one of the ultimate outcomes of the network of collaborative photobook production. 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.

Of course, the irony of the absence of the encounter in photobook discussion is it lies beneath all these texts. To be sufficiently motivated to write about a photobook, the photobook genre, or people involved in photobook production, authors must have been *moved* by encounters with these objects. This indicates the absence of the encounter is due to a lack of precedent or method to describe and make use of these experiences in scholarly terms, hence the activity of this thesis.

⁵ For more detailed discussion, see p.39,41,199

⁶ See discussion of Malraux, p.201. Some photobook makers might also agree they desire their works to be destined for museums, to be encased in glass vitrines, but interaction of some kind is still necessary to this pursuit.

0.5 Methodological Approach and Ethics

As the key aim of the thesis is to investigate how something can be *known*, a substantial task of the project concerns developing the method for pursuing this knowledge. John Law says of “messy” subjects that do not clearly align within traditional social sciences, “we’re going to have to teach ourselves to think, to practise, to relate, and to know in new ways ... to know some of the realities of the world using methods unusual to or unknown in social science”; requiring methods that are “broader, looser, more generous” and different to conventional understandings to unravel these subjects’ complexities (2004:2, 4). Following Law, this thesis emphasises the virtue of the methodological process as both theoretical and practical; as a non-neutral means of producing knowledge; and as ongoing, iterative and evolving. Methodology and data are continually informed and reassessed through comparative literature and repeated engagement with people and objects throughout.

The “new way” I will mobilise photobook encounters to reveal insights about photobook agency and networks of production is through combining phenomenology with more-than-human perspectives, beginning with Actor-Network Theory (ANT). Smith, Wetherell and Campbell identify “the phenomenological approach, with its focus on subjectively experienced gradients and bursts of affects, is rich in detail and can be a stimulating starting point” (2018:2) for understanding affective encounters. Phenomenological philosophies attend to the experiential minutiae necessary to explore how perception and interpretation interrelate in photobook encounters. The view that the photobook plays an active and interrelated part in the encounter resonates with the more-than-human approaches to research found in actor-network theory (Latour, Law, Callon), the material semiotics of ANT scholars John Law and Annemarie Mol (2002) and the relational ontology of Karen Barad (2007). There remains little deployment of these approaches in arts research. They can offer valuable insights into photobook agency in the phenomenal encounter and the organisation of photobook worlds, because of their emphasis upon the agency of non-human actors. Further explanation of these theories, their benefits and compatibilities will follow in the next chapter.

0.5.1 Ethical methodology

It is important to acknowledge methodologies are not transparent and singular, but obscure and plural, requiring decisions between multiple, political options. Without any loss of rigour, this study aims to explore and reveal rather than quantitatively prove. Accordingly, how the project

has navigated methodological trials and theoretical dilemmas are part of its contribution to knowledge. The study seeks to link two poles of observation and experience: sitting down with books and people to study close encounters, and a mobile understanding of a social network. I am trying to understand how material, embodied engagement is important in relational studies, by connecting the experiential encounter with any (art) product with macro social relation and construction. These aims concern intangible modes of making knowledges, so the research pursuing them is messy, and grounded in my own understanding. To offset the limiting potential of a strict methodology, this study adopts different voices and modes of interrogating the photobook that are reflective of the different instances of encounter with the photobook, for example, the subjective experience, artist interview and critical review.

The changes in tone throughout the thesis explore a point of epistemological ethics. The variation is directly related to my interpretation and construction of the research, and therefore document authentic development of knowledge and understanding through the act of writing. The chapters additionally resist the conventional academic structure in which the text begins by signalling what conclusions the reader will learn by the end. Law has critiqued academic writings that appear more engaged with their destination than their journey, unlike the novel, which must engage the reader for its duration:

academic writings are means to other ends. The textures along the way, the actual writing, these are subordinate to those ends. [...] poetry and novels wrestle with the materials of language to *make* things, things that are said to be imaginary. [...] The textures along the way cannot be dissociated from whatever is being made, word by word, whereas academic volumes hasten to describe, to refer to, a reality that lies outside them.

(2004:12)

The position of this thesis is that the act of writing is utilising the materials of language to *make* knowledge, therefore I have adopted a counter-hegemonic narrative strategy throughout the research, by withholding certain information and allowing surprises, tangents and diversions that replicate the journey of doing the research.

I justify this position because to attempt to step back and be an ‘objective’ researcher or excise myself from the thesis would be misleading and disingenuous to the nature of the project. As Wall has observed, “norms of objectivity in the social sciences” have been eroded through postmodernist beliefs that research methods are “inextricably tied to the values and subjectivities of the researcher”, because “ethnographers always come with ideas that guide what they choose to describe and how they choose to describe it” (2008:42). According to Law, “methods, their rules, [...] not only describe but also help to produce the reality that they understand” (2004:5). Presenting an argument as a polished, logical text would suggest the research has been

predictable and orderly, which is untrue. Especially in social science studies inspired by actor-network theory, Bruno Latour has argued “writing texts has *everything* to do with method” because one achieves their research goals through constructing a written argument about what they discover:

the text, in our discipline, is [...] the functional equivalent of a laboratory. It’s a place for trials, experiments, and simulations. Depending on what happens in it, there is or there is not an actor and there is or there is not a network being traced. And that depends entirely on the precise ways in which it is written – and every single new topic requires a new way to be handled by a text.

(2005:149)

In Latour’s case, the verbal choice to describe entities as actors is a linguistic act that both reveals and constructs notions of agency.

Therefore, conventions of academic writing present an ethical issue when expectations of refinement in a text obscure biases or assumptions in the research process. This discussion is meaningful in relation to the false binaries and hierarchies that persist in humanities and social sciences research, in which statistical knowledge is perceived as more valuable than experiential knowledge. It is a different, but not inferior kind of knowledge production. The preference for classically “objective” modes of writing is sustained by strict expectations on how research knowledge should be organised and presented. More subjective, experiential ways of knowing are messy: they don’t cohere easily with academic convention and are therefore not taken so seriously. As Law has cautioned, “we need to unmake our desire and expectation for security” in the writing of research (2004:9). This thesis represents the meandering path my research has worn, and is therefore grounded in a particular ethical relation to knowledge-making, which will be clarified by its conclusion.

This note on authenticity of writing-as-knowledge-production is the strongest ethical consideration of this project. All participants are consenting adults (Appendix C) and the research has been undertaken with transparency and accountability to faithfully represent their views. The research has ethical approval from Newcastle University.

0.5.2 Thesis Structure

In contrast to conventional structure, this thesis does not separate research components such as literature, data and analysis. Data gathered through ethnographic and autoethnographic techniques (interviews, diary keeping, observations) is presented and analysed throughout the

thesis alongside theoretical explanation in keeping with the authentic, organic and hermeneutic mode of research. This study frames its use of theory and data as a methodological assemblage, moving between techniques and theories depending on their relevance to the point being discussed. I hope the reader will indulge this fluidity as characteristic to the project's relational methodology. The way this research ethos has been employed, and the theoretical lens through which data has been gathered and analysed will be explained in Chapter 1.

The subsequent chapters each take a theme through which to investigate photobook agency. Chapter 2 advances the study of multi-dimensional encounters with photobook, through unravelling processes of perception and interpretation. It positions visual, haptic and experiential data from recorded encounters in dialogue with theoretical literature to contemplate variables of individual perceptual experience. Chapter 3 discusses in detail the materiality and political resemblances between photobooks and other book technologies, shifting focus to nonhuman agencies specific to photobook materials and form. Chapter 4 steps back from close analysis of the photobook object to consider physical sites and social scenes in which the cultural and economic fields of photobook activity are enacted. It considers how photobooks mediate relations between people in these spaces, and how physical environments frame and produce knowledges about the photobook. Chapter 5 returns to the problematic discussion of definition through profiling the epistemological activity of institutional practices that have subtle, significant influences on how photobooks are conceptualised.

Chapter 6 underscores the photobook's capacity to be repeatedly and diversely read, looked at, held, transported, reprinted, and other interactions. This multiplicity is perhaps the most intrinsic characteristic of the photobook medium, resulting from its very essence of being a book, and yet scholarship often treats the photobook as a singular, conceptual text, and not a complex of movable, tear-able copies. The plurality of engagement across networks of distribution means photobook agencies are mutable and contingent. Here, insights gained from relational ontologies throughout the thesis become apparent and essential to understanding this nebulous artistic product. In the thesis' concluding chapter, I convey some comments, evaluations and challenges for further research based upon the sum of each chapter's findings.

The Appendices contain several texts which serve as autoethnographic "data", referred to in the main body of the thesis. As Latour emphasised the role of text as a laboratory for visualising connections, I have used text as a site of reflective experimentation for understanding the complex theories, artworks and environments with which I work. The full texts are equivalent to

traditional data sets such as interview transcripts, and therefore necessary to the rigour of this study.

0.5.3 Researcher Position

The decision to undertake the research in this holistic manner has arisen from my researcher position. Prior to this doctoral project I worked for several years in the photography sector, first in the commercial art fair Photo London and then as Assistant Curator of Photographs at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A). My professional experience, combined with personal relationships with photographers and photography professionals, has provided unique insights into many areas of photobook production, commerce, criticism and collecting.

Organising the publishers' fair and scheduling book signings during Photo London was my first professional engagement with commercial photobook activities. It inspired an interest in the photobook's economies, and its auxiliary role in the photography industry. For example, I observed book signings as a strategic publicity activity that encourages photobook sales and contributes to their collectible value by connoting greater preciousness to books through contact with the artist's hand. I got to know artists and publishers personally and acquired a fine collection of publisher tote bags, an as-yet unacknowledged cultural currency.⁷

My experience as Assistant Curator at the V&A influenced my interest in the subject of this study, not least because of the breadth of the photographic collections to which I had direct access. In addition to exposure to outstanding works of photography, my role necessitated familiarity with, then contribution to museum procedure for acquiring and classifying new works. This experience augmented my understanding of the epistemological activity of museums: why some things enter a museum collection when others do not; the occasional element of chance and arbitrariness in how things are collected or organised; political relations between different museum departments, staff and patrons.

I was particularly interested by the relation between photobooks, collected by and stored in the National Art Library (NAL), and the photography collection, which was historically housed in

⁷ Tote bags bearing logos of cultural organisations demonstrate ones' participation in the 'artistic' or 'creative' industries; they also advertise the organisation as patrons use bags for everything from photobook purchases to gym kit to groceries. The sturdier your tote bag, the more likely people will re-use it. I've carried a Mack tote bag of thick black cotton with a deep side seam for years – not because they're my favourite publisher, but because it's a useful bag: strong, accommodating in size, subtle.

the library, until it was moved to Prints, Drawings and Paintings (PDP) in the 1970s. Books mostly remained in the library, although albums moved to PDP. Though both were within the Word and Image Department (WID), the split between these section areas has been symbolically and physically epistemic⁸. They exist within different cataloguing databases, public access procedures, and storage systems in separate areas of the building. All photobooks are in the NAL, excepting some photographic albums. Delicate books are in the NAL Special Collections; photobooks would not be accessioned as PDP objects. As a member of PDP staff, I did not have browsing access to NAL special collections, and nor did NAL staff have to PDP collections. In this way, the museum arbitrated a different value system for photographic books in the NAL to other photographic works in PDP.

The museum also revealed insights into its social agency in constructing the photobook genre. Artists would send book gifts to senior curatorial staff, who would pass them to the NAL to review for acquisition. If wanted, they would be accessioned into the NAL library catalogue (whether general or special collections) rather than catalogued as PDP objects. I noticed some artists' CVs vaguely stated work "in the V&A collection", implying they were represented in the print collection when they actually had books in the NAL. This implies the artworld holds prints in greater esteem than books, perhaps due to their higher economic value, and reveals one small way artists, art markets and institutions interact in the social construction of art. Photographers and publishers I met occasionally behaved differently when they learned my position as Assistant Curator, associating the title with gatekeeping authority. When people asked to show or give me a copy of their latest book, I observed photobooks as a currency for photographers, in the same way the affiliative power implied by my job title ('museum', 'collection', 'curator') gave me currency in artworld social situations. From this I began to regard the photobook as an agent of transaction and mobility as well as a complex creative product.

My V&A work also had significant impact upon the study's theoretical approach. Handling a physical collection instilled a profound appreciation for the materiality of photographic works. The media and means by which people engage with photography is a constant curatorial consideration, whether in the gallery or online, as are the requirements of artworks in storage. I became sensitive to how objects push back against human agency, demanding certain treatment or manual behaviour. Hands-on experience in my practical curatorial duties left me unsatisfied with the absence of materiality I perceived in photobook discussion. I knew from experience the complexity that stems from a memorable encounter with a photobook (as this thesis will

⁸ A 2021 restructure moved photographs to a new department of Art, Architecture, Photography and Digital.

illustrate). This convinced me grounded engagements with photobooks deserve equal attention as historiographic accounts and reviews.

The variety of my professional and personal engagements with the photobook has shaped the research method, attempting to convey the photobook's versatility through diverse styles of critical writing, and drawing on museological literature. My interest in theory beyond these professional and social experiences has influenced the thesis' many references from beyond the field of cultural production, including studies of airplanes, coastal walks, hospitals and more. While the subject matter may vary, these texts are useful in demonstrating different ways of knowing things and phenomena.

0.6 Research Value

The thesis contributes to scholarship of the photobook and photography in general through demonstrating an experience-focused analysis that varies and enhances conventional modes of criticism. It contributes to critical photography discourse through studying the worlds in which books circulate and are produced, charting different photobook agencies that contribute to its strengthening identity as a genre of creative practice.

In engaging with institutions that structure photobook discourse, such as the museum, the thesis explores museological issues around the dominance of scopic regimes as a register for apprehension and engagement. The close analysis of a troublesome, category-resisting object such as the photobook reveals the challenges they pose to institutional frameworks, the politics and priorities of the institution and how institutions shapes object relations on a broader scale.

This research ultimately aspires to contribute more widely to understanding the social world in human and more-than-human senses. It shows the variety of information that can emerge through a variable, iterative, personalised methodology, when faced with an esoteric thing such as the photobook. The thesis illustrates what can be learned through nuanced emotional and multi-sensory engagements with the world around us and how these insights can benefit broader, interdisciplinary social science. Incorporating the personal, affective experience into accounts of object interactions could be perceived as gendered (by being feminised as 'emotional'), unacademic or unauthoritative. This thesis presents a study of objects and networks that engages creatively with subjective registers without any loss of rigour. The work invites further research of this kind on other types of object.

This thesis additionally contributes to broader contemporary discourse because it emphasises a greater attention to material encounters, in line with growing interest in our relationship with the material world. Over the last decade, correlating with the proliferation of digital technologies, capitalist globalisation and the abundance of content and choice offered by the modern world, there has been an increasing consumer appetite towards analogue technologies and independent trades, from vinyl records to upcycling to craft beer (Donadini and Porretta, 2017; Bartmanski and Woodward, 2018).

While this material turn could be associated with nostalgia or a reaction to the digital, this thesis contends the appeal of the material results from a desire for greater quality of attention and care in our consumption. While we live more of our lives through digital media and experience more photographic images on devices, the Kindle did not succeed in nullifying the physical novel, and neither does the screen for photography (Neümuller, 2017:3). If nostalgia is involved, it is a nostalgia for ‘simpler times’ when there was less to choose between, and less fear of missing something. Nowadays, carefully-selected products or events are increasingly referred to as ‘curated’, whether they appear in a shop, a blog, a menu, a festival or a playlist⁹ (Bischof *et al.*, 2020; Sebald and Jacob, 2020). This reveals people are increasingly reluctant to engage with the full profusion of the digital world, instead wanting refined selections, and concentrated, cohesive, more greatly affecting experiences. The photobook epitomises this desire, as a meticulously-edited, carefully-produced object-experience, designed with the haptic in mind. Through closely examining this material experience and revealing its connection to a broader social, creative and commercial ecology, this study helps us understand how material experiences become lasting and meaningful to us. The next chapter explains how this study attains such aims.

⁹ The perceived role of the art ‘curator’ has shifted away from its etymological definition of caring for collections (as a curate cares for a parish) and its academic role as researcher and safekeeper of provenance and history, and towards a public-facing exhibition maker. The word has recently been co-opted by a vast range of industries for its desirable connotations of a person of good taste and creativity.

Chapter 1: A Methodology for Knowing, and Knowing Through the Encounter

Then I decided that this disorder and this dilemma, revealed by my desire to write on Photography, corresponded to a discomfort I had always suffered from: the uneasiness of being a subject torn between two languages, one expressive, the other critical.

– Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.8

How might we study what it is to pick up a book, or specifically, a photobook? To hold it, set it down again, smell ink and paper, sense its weight? To confront not only colours and shapes, but visual data, images, signs, to question this object and how it got here, who made it, what it makes of me? What can we know *because* we encounter? These questions invoke personal imagination. They are questions that “necessarily exceed our capacity to know them” (Law 2004:6). These are not therefore questions that can be answered through quantitative surveys or control environments. Neither do they need to be, because the photobook is a technology that acts in most interesting ways when out in the world.

Barthes’ impulse to explore the phenomenon of the photograph highlighted a tension between subjective, affective interpretation and cognitive analysis. This research asserts this supposed subjective-objective binary is rarely so distinct. John Law has written, “while standard methods are extremely good at what they do, they are badly adapted to the study of the ephemeral, the indefinite and the irregular” (2004:4). The reality of researching a “textured” phenomenon such as the photobook must aim to “know the indistinct and the slippery without trying to grasp and hold them tight” (ibid.). This project is concerned with knowing an object through multiple perspectives, contingent upon material and social relations: it seeks to know not by definition but through practice, discourse, use and effect. This more profound knowledge-making resists pre-existing epistemological categories, instead promoting a pluralistic approach which understands a thing to be many things simultaneously.

Being concerned with the project of knowing, this thesis treats “methodology” with caution. This methodological chapter is more a study of method than a “system of methods” to be fixedly applied (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010). As such, this research methodology is less pre-ordained than that of conventionally-structured qualitative Humanities research projects, and would be better described as an intuitive and iterative “method assemblage” (Law 2004:14). This is a mutable, moveable feast of a methodology: it is a splendid splurge on theory that has stayed

with me throughout my data gathering, one that has grown with the research and informed my subsequent perception and reflection.

In practical terms, this chapter profiles the theoretical positions, data-gathering and modes of analysis used to answer the research question: “What is the agency of the photobook in its encounter, and how can this reveal insights into the networked relationality of the photobook genre?”. The two clauses of this question point to two key task areas:

Task area 1 (T1): Understanding the encounter

As outlined in the introduction, the photobook encounter is understood as a situated, relational interaction between a cultural product and a person consuming that output. It is grounded in lived experience and interpretation. The first task area explores *how* to study this initial encounter, to understand the agency of the photobook (and other factors). This necessitates finding meaningful ways to observe and understand instances of material interaction. The theoretical foundation for this task lies in phenomenology philosophies, mostly those of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger.

Task area 2 (T2): Relating the encounter

The second area of activity serves to illustrate *why* it is of value to study the photobook encounter, through demonstrating multi-dimensional modes of analysis that utilise the affective, agential encounter to identify and connect broader networks of photobook production and consumption. This thesis seeks to learn about agencies involved in production, display, political economy and reception of this genre in a networked, non-hierarchical way, led by noticeable aspects of encounters with the medium. This task engages principles from Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as a framework for identifying actors and tracing networks of agency and power in relation to photobook practices. This task additionally draws upon theories of art world social construction such as that of Howard Becker (2008) as a framework to identify agencies within the field of photobook production.

Phenomenology and ANT initially appear as distinct approaches to research: the former is a philosophy of experience and the latter derives from empirical research within Science, Technology and Society Studies (STSS). Nonetheless, there are useful synergies that can be productively employed, such as they both emphasise the value of the material and embodied world in understanding relational phenomena. Recent works have promoted ANT and phenomenology’s shared emphasis on relationality, such as Jane Bennett’s New Materialism in

Vibrant Matter (2010) and in archaeology (Crellin, 2021), and rethinking bodily boundaries (Smith *et al.*, 2016).

The following chapter will profile the value of relational modes of analysis originating in ANT and their developments in more recent scholarship, summarising why this approach suits the study of the photobook. The chapter then explains how phenomenology can enhance these relational ontologies through evaluating key concepts and their relevance. Following this theoretical review I will discuss the limitations and opportunities of these approaches over other comparable theories and methods, justifying how the seemingly different frameworks combine productively in the study. I will detail the multiple practical methods for data collection, explaining how they are informed by the theoretical position. Finally, I will emphasise the significance of this plural, mixed-method model in developing new ways of understanding material relationality.

1.1 ‘Photobook-as-actor’-Network Theory

1.1.1 Origins of ANT

Actor-network theory, or ANT, was developed in the late 1980s by scholars of Science, Technology and Society including Bruno Latour and John Law. This may seem an unusual source for arts research, but photographic and printing processes are also essentially technical, meaning that any photobook creation expresses a relation between human creators, materials and tools.

ANT is a model for visualising the social world as a series of associations between human and non-human actors, which constitute multiple, complex, fluctuating networks of relations. Instead of viewing the ‘social’ and ‘society’ as descriptive terms for structures and categories of people and processes, Latour and his colleagues preferred their etymological meaning of ‘connection’ or ‘association’, using ‘network’ as a conceptual “tool to help describe something, not what is being described”. Alternatively, “ANT is more like the name of a pencil or a brush than the name of a specific shape to be drawn or painted” (Latour, 2005:143). Networks are not fixed constructions of static points, but metaphors that describe flows and distributed agency (Byrne, 2011). For example, nodes in a network surrounding a particular photobook at a particular moment could include everything from the vehicle that delivered the shipment from the printers to its current location, to the original photographic subjects of its images. Not all nodes are relevant actors, depending on what is being studied. The aim of ANT is concerned with tracing different

interactions, transactions and transformations between shifting points of agency in the network. I will explain my interest in the theory through a discussion of a series of its most relevant concepts: networks are unfixed and require localised study, meanwhile agency is more-than-human, non-hierarchical and distinct from notions of power.

Networks are dynamic

Contrary to its name, actor-network theory does not offer a practical method for revealing a network of linkages, because it emphasises multiplicity and possibility rather than structure. Other sociological approaches endeavoured to rationalise people and processes into arbitrary, pre-determined categories, such as groupings by class or employment sector. The social world of ANT has no fixed boundaries, as it is formed by constantly-changing associations of actors.

According to ANT, networks are unstable because discrete actors only assemble in groups for the duration of the actions being performed. These actions are what connect them and sustain the network. It is for this performative definition of grouping that Latour adopts the terms ‘actor’ and the less human ‘actant’ to describe a network’s contributors, although this study will not employ Latour’s exacting terminology (Latour, 2005:37).

Agency is more-than-human

A fundamental principle of ANT is that actors can be human and non-human. An actor could be a whole organisation, or an inanimate or intangible entity such as an object or an ideology. In fact, non-humans are the focus of many ANT studies that reveal interconnected knowledge construction through tracing agency of objects. For example, a petri dish exists essentially as an enacted set of relations between material (glass or plastic), shape (broad, round and shallow), and being sterile at the start of an experiment, thus performing as a boundary object that controls results. The petri dish also has macro agency in its role in the development of vaccines, contributing to vast social change like the “immunisation of France” following Pasteur (Latour, 1986). Latour describes some objects as “immutable mobiles”, with consistent shape and function, yet capacity to move and act in different contexts. One type of object exists as multiple physical entities across long distances, and mediates knowledge through its consistent form, such as a pipette regulates volume through providing measurement. Beyond the laboratory, these tools are mere pieces of plastic, and their signification and their impact on others is altered or nullified. Therefore, objects only take on these existences in particular networks of relations.

The notion that non-humans exert agency underpins this study of photobooks, as it empowers an object with potential for significant cultural influence and agency independent of the humans that make or own it. This study prefers the term “more-than-human” to avoid an arbitrary binary expression. Some have remarked the agency of “immutable” objects is a stabilising force on the dynamic network (Morris, 2003). It could be reasoned that photobooks are immutable mobiles because they mediate a consistent impression of a body of work as it is presented in the book, yet can move through the world and perform extraneous functions. However, the notion of “actantiality” was not intended to emphasise what a non-human actor *does* but rather “what provides actants with their actions, with their subjectivity, with their intentionality, with their morality”, or in other words, what forces motivate agency (Latour, 1999a). Considering the material agency of the photobook in its encounter asks *what* or *who* are the forces motivating the photobook’s affect or reception, and *why*.

Agency is non-hierarchical

ANT rejects the traditional sociological notion that society is structured hierarchically. Latour proposes the social world is a flat, expansive plane, or “landscape”, made of infinite dynamic associations constantly making and re-making new group formations (2005:165). This boundless, plasmic ANT model is well-suited to the grey, often “messy” nature of art (Law, 2004), because it is also an arena in which less easily-defined objects and groups acquire significance depending on context. In this study, ANT offers a novel approach for exploring the social world of the photobook because it resists notions that established hierarchical art world institutions have disproportionate agency, instead “flattening out” practices (Latour, 2005). Latour describes a “symmetric” view of all entities in the network, which does “not make any a priori distinction between human and non-human actors” (Verbeek, 2005), but regards actants equally and non-hierarchically.

Agency versus power

In studying various agential relations within the photobook world, employing ANT in this project is also a study of power: the power of the artwork, of those who activate it and those who benefit. Latour’s objection to the idea of pre-determined social structures is founded on the claim that “society is the consequence of associations and not their cause”. In revising our understanding of the word “social”, we should be critical of adjectives such as ‘political’ or ‘economic’, because they give a similar impression of being stuff that could somehow be measured (2005:238). Economics and politics are manifestations of differentially distributed

power, which is a performative force constructed as a result of many associations. Economics and politics describe the mechanisms for determining and profiting from those associations, and are not forces of power in and of themselves. With regards to photobooks, the economic or symbolic power¹⁰ that some institutions, artists or collectors exercise in the photographic community results from their multitude of connections that amplify their influence.

Local versus global

In ANT, there is no global network containing larger or smaller organisations, but only connected “localities” of actors. This means the social world is only ever as big as the manageable network of local connections that can be surveyed at any point, and durationally limited to those relations coming together in each performed association. A locality is the assemblage of related and interacting actors, which may span different histories and real-world locations, rather than a geographically-focussed network denoting physical proximity. ANT aims to reverse the sociological attitude in which to constantly emphasise a global over a local view is a value choice that undercuts the experiences and (lack of) agency of the marginalised. In this research, the study of agency is localised within the network of connections emerging from specific encounters with photobooks and people.

Latour argues one cannot remain an impartial observer in conducting ANT analysis, because the researcher must have an agenda in mind to discern relevant localities of actors from a wider network of activity. From my prior professional experience, I am sufficiently familiar with communities surrounding photographic production and dissemination to identify different actors. However, while my previous experience gives me greater access to these communities, I do not occupy a clearly defined role as curator, artist or otherwise, with a less visible professional status than those linked to institutions, organisations, or well-known freelance careers. This enables me to move freely between actors with less expectation on the part of those I interact with, and a greater openness to their motivations and views. Although I am connected to people with financial investment in the industry, I am not personally invested in its economic success because, while the photobook is the means through which I am researching ways of knowing, my academic interests transcend this type of cultural output, meaning I can endeavour to remain reflexively critical in my research.

¹⁰ ‘Power’ is a complicated issue that threads through Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Despite Latour and Law's extensive discussion on the aims of ANT, it lacks explicit methodological instruction, leaving researchers to intuit its application from other studies. Alongside use in social and science studies, the notion of material agency and multiplicity inspired a wave of ANT-based studies in museology in the 2010s researching the agency of cultural objects. As Byrne *et al* observe, conceptualising collections according to ANT accommodates the multiplicity of agents within the museum as a social and material assemblage, emphasising "the extent to which almost all social relations are mediated by way of material things, and that all actions are simultaneously material and conceptual, physical and symbolic", meaning actions within the network are co-produced between human and non-human entities.

As each agent is effectively a single node within the network, no hierarchies, natural starting points or priorities are assumed. This in turn provides a variety of routes into studying museum collections. [...] One of the outcomes of approaching social practice in a non-hierarchical manner is that forms of agency [such as material agency] that had not been given a great deal of attention previously are now explicitly recognized.

(Byrne, 2011)

Thus the museum environment is a site of transformation where objects co-create new meanings, both historically and contemporaneously as collections are differently utilised in the museum over time (Morris, 2003). The non-hierarchical perspective of ANT enables us to see "networks in operation at a range of different spatial and chronological scales" (ibid.:11). As such, many museum-based ANT studies could be compared to the Object Biography method first promoted by Igor Kopytoff and Arjun Appadurai (1986). Kopytoff proposes one can ask similar biographical questions about objects as people, such as the key moments in their career, how their status has changed over their lifetime, significant life phases or 'ages', what makes them different from similar types, or how political and social climates impacted their trajectory (Alberti, 2005). Well-documented paper histories or gaps in documentation surrounding museum objects tell us not only about the multiple realities of one thing, but also broader institutional priorities and its place within them. Chapter 6 will reflect further on Object Biography.

1.1.2 Photobook networks, fields and worlds: ANT and art social theory

The principle of networked social relations has been raised elsewhere in cultural theories of art, which offer significant insights to this project's analysis. Accordingly, the following paragraphs give an overview of key authors and themes that cohere with ANT.

Art and Agency

Alfred Gell's thesis in *Art and Agency* (1998) argues "works of art, images, icons, and the like have to be treated, in the context of an anthropological theory, as person-like, that is, the sources of, and targets for, social agency" (1998:92). Gell looks beyond aesthetic to theorise "technologies of enchantment" that create auras of affect in artworks, such as rarity or belonging to a prestigious collection. Gell's discussion of the agency of artworks is of limited interest to this study because he does not permit them equal agency with humans. Moreover, he maintains that larger, stable, pre-existing hierarchies of corporate groups and institutions possess greater dominance in agency.

Fields of Cultural Production

Bourdieu's theory of fields of cultural production (1993) explains the socially-constructed production, circulation and consumption of artistic works through mapping individuals and institutions involved in producing these "cultural products". This includes creative producers or artists, institutions, publishers, galleries, dealers, academics, critics, collectors and other stakeholders involved in promoting creative outputs to the rarefied status of artwork. Bourdieu addresses tensions such as aesthetic value versus "canonicity", or the perception of artworks as valuable because of reputation or endorsement. Bourdieu refers to the systems and actions by which an artistic work gains approval of artistic authorities as activities of "consecration", such as a positive review by an esteemed critic, an acquisition into a museum collection, becoming the subject of an exhibition or monograph. In these activities, individuals and accolades confer cultural capital to a cultural product, thereby distinguishing its artistic and economic value. Bourdieu's terminology makes deliberate comparison to the social structuring of religion. Overall, these activities are expressions of power and transactions of different kinds of capital.

A photobook example of this would be a classic "canonised" work such as *The Americans* by Robert Frank (1959). Putting aside aesthetic discussion of the book's merits, acts of consecration by individuals and institutions can be identified that contribute to the book's canonical status. The artist has become consecrated as a key American photographer through years of inclusion in museum collections and exhibitions and high market prices for original prints. *The Americans* is not the only book of its period to demonstrate affecting imagery and sequencing, but it has been repeatedly mythologised by photographers recounting an "epiphany" of sorts upon first seeing it

(including Jeff Wall, Ed Ruscha, Joel Meyerowitz, Alec Soth; MS1i:28)¹¹. This has elevated its importance in photobook history, along with inclusion in all the foundational anthologies, making it increasingly expensive and rare. Libraries and collections might accordingly place it in special collections, which canonises it as more “special” than other photobooks in the general collection. These are only a few social and economic factors that may lead to a photobook’s consecrated, reverential status.

The Photobook Art World

Howard Becker’s *Art Worlds* (1982; 2008) proposes the art world is a cooperative network performed by those who distribute, appreciate, respond to, and criticise the artwork. More than Bourdieu’s structural analysis, Becker’s theory aligns with the ANT view that networks are co-produced in moments of interaction, translation and agency between actants. The diversity of channels of production of photobooks and their many stakeholders that make the field of photobook production are evocative of Becker’s thesis that:

All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people. Through their cooperation, the artwork we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be. The work always shows signs of that cooperation... producing patterns of activity we can call an art world.

(2008:1)

Becker’s argument goes on to justify the cyclical involvement of many participants contributing to producing and sustaining an artwork: from the artist and their idea; to the people who design the technologies required to execute the idea; those who distribute the artwork to those who appreciate, respond to and criticise the artwork; even down to “support” roles that free other “executants” of the artwork from reproductive work (ibid.:2-4). The individual participation of executants collectively performs what can be perceived as an art world. Becker insists this social system does not follow a set pattern because “any of [these activities] can be performed in a variety of ways with an equal variety of results” (ibid.:6,5), echoing ANT’s rejection of pre-existing social structures.

Becker’s theory allows wider-ranging participation in the art world than previous art theories, such as George Dickie’s Institutional Theory (1974; 1984; 1997). Dickie agrees artefacts do not become works of art through any essential quality but are produced through social means. For example, an artwork is collectively produced because its creator identifies as an artist; it is made with the intention of being presented to a certain public; it follows a trajectory through relevant

¹¹ Curiously again, of the 21 photographers I have come across who cite the paramount significance of this photobook in their practice, 21 were male.

institutions in the creative sector (collectors, galleries, museums, etc.), and gains acquiescence of those in influential positions within those institutions. Dickie's theory is largely human-focused. Becker's theory extends agency to more-than-human factors, if not quite actors. In the realisation of a musical symphony, Becker credits the invention, manufacture and maintenance of the musical instruments, publicity, ticket sales, the workers who clean the concert venue for the audience and orchestra, not to mention rehearsal time and the physical preparation of the auditorium (Becker 2008:2). His "executants" are not always human, and not always existing within the same time or historical contexts – the violin was invented several centuries ago, but this act of ingenuity continues to be implicated in each recital.

This links to ANT because of its transhistorical view of actants and networks from disparate chronologies. It refutes the "great man" theory of key moments in history and cultural production being attributed to a singular creator figure (Barthes, 1977). Dominant narratives about the artist's biography or subject matter can be pluralised with wider research into the multiple agents in each photobook's art world: for example, the extent of the input of the designer is often under-discussed (see p.218). Taking a broader functional view, a lumber labourer from an alternative geographical and temporal reality could have agency in a photobook network by producing pulp for the paper, or the inventor of a particular method of binding many centuries earlier, or the computer that translates image to page through a digital printer. Becker therefore attributes a capacity for agency to technology and things in addition to humans in the performance of an art world.

The photobook typifies Becker's theory at face value as it 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). Whilst photobooks may not align so succinctly with Dickie's art theory as Becker's and Bourdieu's, this may be because they occupy a liminal position between libraries and art collections and have yet to secure as definite an institutional presence as fine art photography.

The specific photobook field of cultural production mostly subsists within the field of photography. In the conventional art world, those with authority to consecrate artworks would include institutional figures with sufficiently accrued cultural and symbolic capital for their endorsements to be accepted without question. In the photobook world, consecrating agents include leading publishers, critics and prominent book collectors, each with additional economic or professional motivations for promoting certain books over others (MS1i:1-5,5-8,35,55-57). This highlights the necessarily political nature of consecration and the perception of expert

knowledge or power. There are other nuances to consecration and accumulating cultural capital, for example, a luxurious re-editioning of a successful photobook could launch an artist towards greater recognition, or the artist could be accused of ‘selling out’, showing cultural capital does not equate to economic success or celebrity.

Who or what occupies positions of power in art world structures, and the agential relations between them is of interest to the analysis and constellation of networks and agents in the thesis’ final chapters. While these social theories of art account for relational activities among people, artworks and institutions, they remain largely anthropocentric and overlook the particularities of the material, affective art experience. Traditional ANT would develop these approaches through a nonhierarchical view of their relations and agency. However, this still would not necessarily capture the experiential, artistic nuance this thesis argues is integral to photobook agency. This task can be better approached through more recent STSS scholarship, to be discussed in the next section.

1.1.3 Limitations of ANT and New Materialist developments

ANT scholars later reflected that the version developed in the 1990s became “too concerned with standardisation, rigidities” which obscured the versatility of its approach (Law and Hassard, 1999; Law and Singleton, 2005). What has come to be regarded as ‘Actor-Network 1990’ was characterised by a complicated lexicon of terms and protocols with which to decipher the roles and activities of components in a network – intermediaries, mediators, mutable and immutable mobiles, actors and actants (ibid.). Law and Singleton reasoned we can learn more about networks and relations through looking at what is “fluid, shape-shifting, name changing”: instead of picturing immutable mobiles that stabilise a network, we should look to objects whose existence is sustained *because* they are conceptually malleable with differential agencies. Photobooks are exactly this: they persist as cultural outputs because they perform different roles, which afford them versatile agencies. They can be appreciated as cultural outputs, but depending on context, they also have agency in social and economic transactions. Combined, this encourages their popularity as a form of artistic practice¹². The material world has multiple realities that are perspectival, flexible and contingent on the dynamic instances of interrelation. The following section will summarise more recent theoretical approaches that share lineage with principles of ANT.

¹² In other words, if photobooks were entirely uninteresting to audiences and markets, there would probably be a lot less of them, and they would have less influence in the broader field photographic of production.

Material semiotics

Law proposed looking at what objects do and mean in various contexts could be understood more broadly as a kind of “material semiotics”. As with ANT, material semiotics is interested in how the social world is mediated through heterogeneous complexes of things, people, ideas, processes, as well as sensations, emotions, histories. Law and his collaborators’ more reflexive approach (1992; 2002; 2005) maps the interconnectedness of ‘things’ and ‘concepts’ through navigating micro- and macroscopic study of things as diverse as aeroplane wings (Law and Mol, 2002) or liver disease (Law and Singleton, 2005). These studies retain the flat attitude in their detailed interrogation that refrains from privileging one actant over another regardless whether one has greater real-world cultural or political resonance. In each study, objects become metaphors for complex relational combinations of heterogeneous agencies, and “following” the networks surrounding each thing reveals the performances of agency within a network.

The material-semiotic strand of ANT is sometimes known as ‘post-ANT’ because it eschews its strict terminological programme for a looser interpretation of ANT’s core values (Law and Hassard, 1999). It derives tools from semiotics as the study of relations between visual and verbal signs, extending this principle to objects and phenomena. Law explains,

it is the argument that terms, objects, entities, are formed in difference between one another ... they don’t have essential attributes but instead achieve their significance in terms of their relations, relations of difference

(Law, 2002:118)

Agency is visualised through expressions of heterogeneity or difference, rather than an essential quality or activity located in a specific body. This paradigm of analysis thinks conceptually about what relations may operate more subtly and less visibly. For example, in a material semiotic case study of the hidden heterogeneities in aircraft design, John Law follows the network stemming from a formalism relating to the aerodynamic engineering of a particular airplane. To produce a design from the formalism, the designers considered several maquettes in the studio but the final shape required testing in the wind tunnel, which depended on and was deferred to a different time and place. The agency of these abstract more-than-human actors in designing the wing can be identified through thinking specifically and imaginatively about what the material realities of making the airplane entailed (see Appendix D). For example, an encounter with a finished photobook depends on agencies of earlier physical rounds of book dummies, test printing, colour matching or technical adjustments.

Law summarises his motivation for his material-semiotic approach, saying “we cannot understand objects unless we also think of them as sets of present dynamics generated in, and generative of, realities that are necessarily absent” (Law and Singleton, 2005). In other words, how we engage with an object in a current state cannot be divorced from the invisible histories and alternate realities to which it is linked. One object can have multiple heterogeneous realities and agencies that can be traced through different prompts of its physical form (Law, 1992). This point is relevant to discussing photobook encounters, because many subtle factors impact experience. These could include physical comfort, time of day, or an unconscious association with the sensual memory produced, perhaps, by a smell or the feel of paper, which can result from technical, social or economic processes. Physical comfort might be influenced by whether the heating is working; a strong sensual memory could be evoked by the decaying acidity of cheaper paper, chosen by a thrifty designer decades earlier. Law addresses this multiplicity by describing messy objects as those that “cannot be narrated smoothly from a single location. [...] Messy objects are interpretatively complex objects;” he says, “they are other to clarity and systematic study, but this does not mean that they are invisible – thinking more creatively and from the perspectives of multiple realities, with methodological humility, can help them to be known” (Law and Singleton, 2005).

Multiplicity

Because objects can perform differently in various contexts, later versions of ANT came to view objects as “multiple”¹³ in themselves. Objects can be disaggregated almost infinitely into smaller component parts: a book could be differentiated between images, words, ideas, paper, printing ink or glue. This use of the word more specifically describes how an object enacts different realities whilst remaining as one consistent form (Mol, 2002). The “multiple realities” of a single photobook could be how it is used, where it has been consumed, what roles it has performed, even how it persists in the memories of its reader. This ontological consideration is a productive lens for the cultural and commercial artefact of the photobook because it is instantiated differently in each moment of interaction, as scenarios and audiences vary. In one situation, the photobook could be a work of art, in another an economic commodity, in another, a coffee table coaster. Post-ANT perspectives extend this ontology through explaining the enactment of these different multiple realities of an object, for different contexts and practices, are related to one another through notions of Otherness. Where an object is a presence, it also implies a set of

¹³ The theoretical understanding of ‘multiple’ explained here is distinct from the sense that photographic works are physically multiple because they are produced in editions. Photobooks are multiple in both senses – multiplying multiplicity – see Chapter 6.

absences¹⁴, such as the processes and technologies in its past or future that are absent presences, which are Other to its physical form (Law, 2002). Agencies that are absent but present in a photobook encounter might include decisions involved in producing the book, how other people have encountered other copies of the same book, or the people and things *in* the photographs, the day the photograph was made, who would exist far beyond the reality of the book as it is experienced in a present encounter, whether temporally, geographically or otherwise.

Marilyn Strathern has argued that in interrogating multiplicity, we tend to interpret data based on linear conceptions of time: what has happened in which distinct circumstance (Law and Mol, 2002). However, this interpretation makes a singularity of multiplicity. Instead, multiplicity can be conceived as a simultaneous phenomenal oscillation of unfixed relations, which overlaps and ranges across limitless, unfixed networks of agencies. Chapter 6 will revisit this mode of understanding the encounter.

Praxiographic ontology

To understand the multiple realities of a given “object” manifest as it is variously being enacted, used, or performed, Annemarie Mol has proposed a “praxiographic” approach to ontology: literally, writing through practices. In her book *The Body Multiple* (Mol, 2002), Mol seeks to know a disease more profoundly than might be supplied by medical definition and diagnosis. She studied the disease from perspectives of patients, relatives, doctors, hospital procedures, equipment, even administration systems, to analyse how the disease “performed” in each scenario. She assembled a composite understanding of the (diseased) body as a networked phenomenon because the meanings it had for various actors revealed different agencies – for the patient, the body is their own body, their existential centre of being, with agency for pain; for the doctor the body might be a less personal object, one of many similar bodies to be examined and treated; for a heartrate monitor, the body is a tangle of nerves and pulses with agency for eliciting certain diagnostic data.

This attempt to know something through the practices of production and use in which it is engaged is useful for a loosely bounded type of object such as the photobook. It would require seeking to understand a photobook through its relations to makers, users, machines,

¹⁴ Law’s use of ‘absence and presence’ is partly influenced by, but distinct from that of Jacques Derrida.

organisations and sites of interaction, rather than identifying essential properties within the object.

Relational ontology

As we begin to visualise the photobook as simultaneously a material thing and a phenomenon constructed through social practices, we move away from viewing objects as hermetic, physical entities. Karen Barad's concept of relational ontologies (2003) identifies that a "thing" is not an independent, self-contained parcel of matter, but a phenomenon of material-discursive *intra-action* between matter, space, time, and meaning-making. The "thing" is suspended in a momentary material configuration of atoms that constitute it and its surrounding physical situation (such as the surfaces or bodies it is in contact with), meshed with a discursive configuration of ideas and process relating to it, past and present. Barad refers to this coming together of relations in a dynamic moment as a "phenomenon", in which the boundaries between entities do not precede the phenomenon, but exist only in the moment of connection (2003:815). This is a similar, more sophisticated articulation of Law's material-semiotic "relations of difference", where things signify through how they interrelate and make meaning with what is going on around them. In an encounter, "photobook" could be said to be made by the atoms of the book and the table it rests on and the light sources that illuminate it, intermingled with a human's social recognition that it is a book (to be elaborated on p.60 of this chapter).

In those performative moments of connection termed "intra-action", Barad describes the process of demarcating one entity from another within a phenomenon as making an *agential cut* (Barad, 2007; Barad, 2014; Warfield, 2016). Though influenced by ANT, Barad differs from its view of networks as assemblages of human and non-human actants, instead viewing phenomena in terms of their materiality and their bodily or embodied experience in the world. Bodies and apparatuses come together in these phenomenal moments of intra-action, so to understand who or what is doing what, material-discursive meanings must be produced about some entities, while others are excluded. The agential cut makes an inherent value judgement about what is surveyed. In "cutting" some things together, others are differentiated, in what Barad calls "cutting together-apart" (2014), making ontologies relational instead of essential.

With this in mind, the ANT researcher must identify their area of focus – in my case, the instance of the photobook encounter and different bodies and material entities it involves – and draw their boundary of where to "cut" the range of the network being studied (Strathern, 1996; Barad, 2003). The notion of the agential cut intuitively suggests what avenues should be researched through

experience, in a more iterative way than the classic Cartesian cut between subject and object. General binaries of human/nonhuman, subject/object, nature/culture are diffused because all that counts for a “thing” is the phenomenal mess of agencies that come together for the duration of the intra-action. This is appropriate for this research because in the embodied, multi-modal photobook interaction, it is difficult to distinguish where entities fall between the subject-object binary. Much of Barad’s work draws on a shared vocabulary with phenomenology and forms a key link in the compatibility of phenomenology and ANT-inspired thought. It will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Additional work on assemblages and flows

To conceptualise the social and political world as performative relations of humans and non-humans is not exclusive to STSS scholars. One notable example is assemblage theory, first developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1980), which proposes the social world has no stable ontology, visualising it as “constellations” of heterogeneous elements, and flows of processes that create and stabilize their historical identity (Delanda, 2006:8). Assemblage theory predates the articulation of actor-network theory. Although it focuses on the “synthesis of the whole not reducible to its parts”, it has similar fundamental opposition to essentialism and fixed structure (ibid.:9). What is termed “assemblage” in English is described in the original French as “*agencement*”. Better translated as “arrangement”, it invokes the verb *agir*, to act. This vocabulary frames the assemblage as something unfixed and active. “Assemblage” calls to mind assemblage art and junk modelling, a jumble of things, coincidentally conjoined discourse and activity. Instead, the term could be understood as an expression of dynamic self-structuring linkages between agencies.

Deleuze styled these de-centred material and cultural assemblages in the form of “rhizomes” – organic webs of agency of self-structuring connection and growth. Tim Ingold’s theory of the “meshwork” (2011) visualises experience as a “rhizomic” mass of interweaved pathways. In the meshwork, connections are “entangled lines of life, growth and movement” (2011:63), making them difficult to separately identify. Ingold’s meshwork also focusses on relational processes of living, animate things. Ingold writes organisms are immersed in an “interplay” of force and action akin to ecosystems of the animal world: things come together for a time, influence each other, then separate again, but it is not possible to reduce them to ANT’s vision of singular points of connection (2011:65,152). While Ingold engages with the inanimate material world he does not attribute agency in equal measures. The meshwork and network differ on ANT’s atemporality: the meshwork depends upon conceptions of lifeflow and therefore time. The symmetrical, non-

hierarchical emphasis on human and non-human agency is central to my research into how photobooks enact social relations, and supports my choice of ANT-inspired theories over more society-focused or life-focused metaphors for relationality found in cultural theory and anthropology.

Whereas Ingold relates the agency of inanimate things through their interactions with organisms, Jane Bennett (2005) asserts even inorganic matter has a “vibrancy” of “impersonal affect”. Bennett’s work links with ANT by visualising things, people and phenomena occurring in ecologies of vital materiality. What Barad does to dissolve distinctions between object and subject through exploring their quantum proximity, Bennett proposes through a philosophical argument attributing vibrancy and vitality to inanimate substances and insentient beings. Bennett prefers the word “thing”, arguing it is less politically charged with human hubris than “object” (ibid.:2). She maps assemblages where human and more-than-human actors never work alone, but in ecological co-operation, situated in space and time moments with a “finite life span”. This co-operative emphasis is comparable to Becker’s model of artworld analysis, in which non-human actors also have agency in the production of art, and will be discussed later in this thesis.

The frameworks for understanding relationality in this section share a close attention to transient, perspectival instances of meaning making between matter and humans. They emphasise different parts of the network or assemblage, some human, some otherwise, and they use different metaphors to visualise these relations. Still, they acknowledge the task of mapping relations and agencies can only be approached from detailed analyses of specific interactions. Phenomenology can enrich relational approaches to knowing the world: by paying close attention to our unfolding encounters with material things, we can get closer to how they are enacted into being and enact agency in their own right. The following section explores and explains phenomenology as it pertains to this discussion.

1.2 Photobooks according to Phenomenology

Phenomenology studies the nature of our intentional experiences of the world, in terms of how they are perceived and felt by individuals. In phenomenology, “intentionality” describes consciousness as a phenomenon that only exists when being directed (or intended) towards something, meaning all conscious experience is relational. Phenomenological analysis enables complex accounts of temporal and spatial awareness, heightened reflection about one’s own experience, and attention to embodied actions and linguistic activities (Smith *et al.*, 2018). It

builds awareness of how we form responses to phenomena, whether through direct attention, or peripheral experience from a wider horizon of the world around us (ibid.). For this reason, phenomenology offers insight into the subtle qualia of situated encounters with photobooks, such as how they conjure different multi-sensory or mnemonic experiences through printed matter, or command social behaviours.

Photobooks suit phenomenological analysis because they are performative artworks, in the sense they require interaction. Dutch critic Ralph Prins compared the photobook to other autonomous, composite art forms such as theatre or film, in which “the photographs lose their own photographic character as things ‘in themselves’ and become parts, translated into printing ink, of **a dramatic event called a book**” (c.f. Parr and Badger 2004:7, [my emphasis]). Prins pinpoints the situated and experiential nature of photobooks, brought to life through materials, technologies and circumstances of engagement. If looking at photobooks is an unfolding and individual experience, phenomenology is a useful tool to understand it.

This study draws primarily upon the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty: specifically, Heidegger’s concepts of the hermeneutic circle and intentional being-in-the-world are enhanced by Merleau-Ponty’s propositions about the embodied nature of perception and knowing. The following sections explain the phenomenological positions of each philosopher and their usefulness to the study.

1.2.1 Being and perceiving in the world

Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein*, of “being-in-the-world” (1978), considers how things appear in the world and their contextual interconnectedness. Things are connected to their present surroundings and people who experience them, and connected to their past, through how they have “come to be”. Such ontological interconnectedness is expressed in the figure of the hermeneutic circle, in which how we experience the world around us and how we understand it are in a constant cycle of influencing our interpretation of each. This accumulative apprehension describes *knowing* as a process of discovery or revealing that is perspectival, like a torch’s beam of light. 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.

Like Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception (1962[1945]) emphasises the situatedness of experience. Heidegger's focus on intentional mental attention is enhanced by Merleau-Ponty's theories about *how* we perceive our worldly experiences, which emphasise the perceptual body's role in this situated encounter. Merleau-Ponty proposes the body mediates being-in-the-world, emphasising how our senses organise experience and "constitute" the physical world (2009). In the *World of Perception* Merleau-Ponty states:

The space of the perceived world is **not the unique space of a disembodied intellect**, but, like physical space, has different regions which are **structured by our expectations** concerning the things which we find in them.

(2009[1948]:23 [my emphasis])

Merleau-Ponty asserts perception in all its modalities is like a series of embodied, pre-cognitive, felt impressions that become progressively clearer, like something in the distance coming into focus as one approaches, but which you might recognise sooner based on prior experience or expectation. As earlier, fuzzier perceptions of the thing are overwritten by the most informed understanding, it is impossible to have autonomy of thought and existence because one's subjectivity is borne from and tied to past, and anticipating the future. Perception thus occurs in the relation between the present embodied experience and the lived, social history. This is comparable to Heidegger's hermeneutic circle, as the experience of apprehension progresses with linear temporality as the perception becomes more informed.

1.2.2 Experience as subjective and embodied

In its pursuit of understanding experience, phenomenology raises many questions about how we interpret what we perceive. Early phenomenologists, including Heidegger's mentor Edmund Husserl, proposed interpreting everyday experiences could reveal latent categories and structures of meaning in how our brains apprehend the world. Heidegger criticised this method because it made assumptions about subjective experience. He argued it is not possible to imagine the underlying structure of universal nor individual, subjective human thought. It expresses a distinct division between the inner, subjective life and the outer world. According to Heidegger, this Cartesian division could be eliminated by visualising experience through the hermeneutic condition of being in the world, because our intentional experience is directed towards and exists in relation to the object of our attention. For example, we don't just absorb the contents of a photobook, we direct our attention to look *at* or read it. Our experience of whether we carry on or how we respond evolves through the duration of this direct relation.

Merleau-Ponty differs from Heidegger's view about intentionality and experience, arguing perception is a spontaneous, pre-cognitive activity occurring without intention or judgement. However, he cautions that perception should not be taken as a bundle of meaningless sensations awaiting interpretation: it is an interpretive act from its first instance, because it forms through the perceiver's subjective place in time and social space, in an internal network of history and association (Romdenh-Romluc, 2011). Merleau-Ponty applies Gestalt psychology to his philosophy of perception by viewing experience and its interpretation as the sum of contributing situational and personal factors. This does not mean he thought all experience reduced to the simplest sum of its parts, but rather, perception of experience can be drawn from a totality of infinite perspectives.

Merleau-Ponty places the individual body as the locus for understanding the experiential world, writing "the thing [perceived] imposes itself not as true for every intellect but as real for every subject who shares my situation" (2009[1948]:94). This builds upon Heidegger's refusal of universal categories of thought, through introducing situational specificity. Merleau-Ponty is saying things are not necessarily real because we can think about them, because we would do this variously in our subjective imaginations. Rather, things appear to a perceiving, intellectual body in time and space. Somebody in a given situation would form perception through identifying an embodied relation between themselves and the thing. The person standing next to them may perceive the situation and thing in a similar manner, because of their similar physical experience. This helps mediate our individual perceptions of the material world as shared and consistent. Thus, intellect and body are not separate cognitive faculties, but rather one synergic, perceiving, interpretive being, distinct from but relating to the perceptions of others. This is relevant to photobooks, being social objects that mediate aesthetic experiences among many people.

Merleau-Ponty's body-led approach to phenomenology is valuable to learning about embodied events of engaging with photobooks and perceptual and sensual responses to their materiality, because books are tactile objects requiring interaction in time and space. Merleau-Ponty compares perceptual knowing through the situated social body to motor skills. For Merleau-Ponty, perception and motor skills are alike because they are embodied and mostly involuntary, like an internalised muscle memory. In the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962[1945]), Merleau-Ponty compares gaining perceptual knowledge with gaining motor skills, or practical knowledge. A skilled typist, for example, develops tacit 'knowledge in the hands', even if they cannot recite which keys belong where on the keyboard (1962[1945]:168). Merleau-Ponty explains manual interaction with a perceived thing involves a "proprioceptive" self-knowledge of one's own situation in space and physical capabilities. Learned knowledges of the properties of things,

strength and proximity, are engaged when performing tasks of looking, touching and doing (Romdenh-Romluc, 2011:82-91). These knowledges are developed through perceptual experience, meaning people understand activities in combination with their surroundings and their motor abilities.

This notion relates to analysing photobook encounters through considering how we learn to handle them. Even basic photobook interactions would require in the reader a proprioceptive awareness of the book's position within their reach, prior experience of book-ish technologies informing them it can be opened, picked up and held (or curiosity to discover this first-hand), the motor ability to perform the task, and awareness of *how* and whether they are allowed to perform the interaction in the current situation. The question of embodied experience is central to discussions of affect: from the first point of perception, there is an interpretive dialogue between body and cognition of its surroundings and actions (in Chapters 2, 3 and 4). Merleau-Ponty's body-led approach suggests the ways perceptual data is apprehended through embodied experience shape interpretation, because they enable the reader to advance through degrees of understanding.

Richard Kearney summarises Merleau-Ponty saying, "it is through our bodies as living centres of intentionality that we choose our world and that our world chooses us" (1986:77 c.f. Pallasmaa, 2005), This relational dynamic echoes the hermeneutic principle, expressing how the viewer's opinion evolves as their experience progresses. Merleau-Ponty examines this dynamic through intentional attention to how subjective experience emerges through visual and motor perception (1996). He summarises thus:

By remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall rediscover our self, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception.

(Merleau-Ponty, 1962[1945])

In other words, through our bodily perceptions, we come to know the objects of our perceived world, but we also come to know ourselves through our relation to them. This assertion once again undermines dualisms of mind and body, subject and object.

1.2.3 Relational meaning-making

According to Heidegger's thesis *Being and Time* (1978), we interpret activities and their meanings by looking to our contextual relations with things in the world (Smith *et al.*, 2018). Heidegger saw artefacts as technologies that mediate the world (this chapter will return to the term 'technology').

Connecting our experiences to our material surroundings and relational apprehension of the world helps us understand what takes place in a photobook encounter, because it positions the encounter as an event both situated in a present, and borne from many past relations and impressions. If our impressions of phenomena are formed by composite perceptual responses to things themselves and the situations where we find ourselves able to interact with them, this shows studying the immediate encounter is intrinsically related to contexts of photobook consumption and production and the hermeneutic lifeworld of the perceiving individual.

Merleau-Ponty's and Heidegger's phenomenologies converge upon the notions that consciousness is embodied (in the world and in relation to its object - *dasein*) and the body is infused with consciousness (having cognition of the world). It reasons that Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty would agree we are never in the world neutrally, that our experiences of the world are often produced by and interpreted through multiple different associations, and knowing emerges from these composite associations. This has been queried by recent affect studies which claim there is some pre-discursive, hence potentially "neutral hit of the world on the body" (Wetherell, 2013:364). Nevertheless, the act of knowing described by phenomenology could itself be viewed as a relational, even networked activity relying on many perceptions, processes and knowledges. Philosopher of technology Peter-Paul Verbeek has reflected on the ways micro material experiences enabled researchers relate phenomena to broader networks and meanings, saying:

The hermeneutical perspective directed attention not only to the role that artefacts play in human perception (macroperception), but also to the way in which these perceptions acquire meaning – which is coshaped by the macroperceptual frameworks in which human beings find themselves.

(2000:172)

This demonstrates the value of a phenomenological consideration of photobook encounters to identify larger structures of meaning-making.

To this end, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty both emphasise close analysis of the process of the "coming-into-being" or "bringing-forth" in relation to knowing, or how the individual's experience progresses and their interpretations of meanings evolve. With regards to photobooks, while a viewer may be predisposed to consider it as they would another kind of book, their overall experience may override the progressive perceptions of their first encounter as their familiarity with the photobook perceptual object increases. Chapter 2 will continue this discussion of perception in greater detail.

1.2.4 Phenomenology as theory and practice

Within the broad discipline of phenomenology, there are numerous philosophers who have more specifically addressed aesthetic experience. Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger both wrote about art and poetry as more authentic means of describing and understanding lived experience, and as forms of political action (Merleau-Ponty, 1964; Heidegger, 2001). Other writers address aesthetic phenomenological experience more explicitly, such as existential phenomenologists Jean-Paul Sartre and Mikel Dufrenne. These works often return to a dissolution of subject and object binaries in the moment of experience, and enquiries into the character and hermeneutic “revealing” of that experience (Dufrenne, 1973), which are ultimately arguments that characterise phenomenology in general. Given the complexity and contrasting views within the field, for this study I will mainly draw from mainstream phenomenological practice, although I will at times make more specific references.

While phenomenology began as philosophical theory, it quickly transitioned into a paradigm for research in practice. Merleau-Ponty drew frequently upon psychiatry and psychology research in forming his thesis of perception. More recently, phenomenologists have developed protocols for investigation. For example, Descriptive Phenomenology endeavours to understand the essence of a phenomena, influenced by Husserl’s belief that phenomena have consistent structures and meanings (Vagle, 2018:55). Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis draws from Heidegger and concerns techniques designed to investigate “experience as we live it, rather than as we conceptualise it” (ibid.). These techniques include modes of reflective writing such as Lived Experience Description, or structured methodologies of storytelling or photo-elicitation, which uses photographs to prompt reflection on comparative experience. Contemporary phenomenology offers analytical strategies for interrogating transcribed or textual data with varying degrees of scrutiny to explore the semantic and emotional phenomenal experience recorded.

Despite these formalised phenomenological strategies, my methodology agrees with Verbeek’s assertion “it is... more in keeping with actual phenomenological practice to treat phenomenology as a philosophical movement whose principal task is to analyse the relation between human beings and their world” (2005). Verbeek advances Merleau-Ponty’s view that “phenomenology can be practiced and identified as a manner or style of thinking... It is a manner of describing, not of explaining” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964 [1945]:viii). This supports my using phenomenology within the methodology to describe varied photobook experiences and identify possible relations between individuals and the material world of photobooks. Moreover, it justifies the requirement

of a secondary mode of analysis, which is offered through combination with ANT-inspired approaches, the opportunities of which will be evaluated in the next section.

1.3 Designing research with Phenomenology and ANT

This chapter has so far suggested some similarities and ways in which ANT and phenomenology could be productively combined. The following sections revisit and clarify these compatibilities and conflicts in relation to the study of photobook agency.

1.3.1 Understanding the Photobook as a Technology

Technology features prominently in phenomenology and actor-network theory as a site of connection between material and social worlds and thus bears relevance to studying the photobook's relationality. The word 'technology' is multi-faceted in contemporary English. Colloquially, it conjures images of computers, smartphones and gadgets. Broader scholarly discussions of 'technology' have varied interpretations, associated with efficiency, effectiveness and control, or instrumentality in achieving human goals. They express some form of 'doing' or 'use'. Ursula Franklin (1990) describes technology as practice to highlight its links to culture as a set of socially accepted practices, values and ways of doing things, thus examining the social and political consequences of technology in the "real world". Considering a photobook as a technology allows us to ask what is it doing, how is it doing it, and who or what is doing what.

In archaeological studies, Marcia Anne Dobres presents technology as relational because people mediate social relationships through producing and using artefacts: "technological practice" is not simply "activities and physical actions of artefact production and use, but the unfolding of sensuous, engaged, mediated, meaningful, and materially grounded experience that makes individuals and collectives comprehend and act in the world as they do" (2000:5). The word 'unfolding' occurs frequently in phenomenological discourse, expressing that experience and our perception of it is a kind of complex knot that unravels as we make hermeneutic sense of it. Dobres' relational view echoes Heidegger's *The Question Concerning Technology* (Heidegger, 1977), which criticises the instrumental view that technologies are merely tools to produce outcomes. Heidegger emphasises "the ongoing and sensual nature of technological practice as a self-centred form of bodily engagement with the material world" (Dobres 2000:81).

Heidegger's conception of technology is closely linked to "being-in-the-world". For Heidegger, technology describes the unfolding process of human existence as it engages with and makes use

of the everyday material world, rather than some alienated, reactive entity” (ibid.:82, c.f. Godson 1994:111). To paraphrase Dobres, according to Heidegger, “be-ing and do-ing” are unfolding, intertwined corporeal experiences linking objects with their “sentient subject-producers” (2000:82-83). She continues,

Through embodied (phenomenal) and mediated experiences with material things, technicians simultaneously produce both material objects and an awareness of themselves as knowing agents (Heidegger 1977). [Heidegger’s] explorations into the “ing” condition of [...] corporeal engagement with the world allows us to reconceptualise technology not as a noun or object, but ... as a verb of human action and interaction (and not simply reaction) that is forever unfolding during the immediacy and contingency of such intersubjective encounters.

(ibid.)

This state of unfolding, contingent action is described in phenomenology as “becoming”. The sensitivity to how people gain experienced-based awareness of their self and the material world frames human-material engagements as dynamic and transformative. Without it, human subjects and technological practices are rendered inert and reified objects. This can be seen in photobook criticism, where lack of acknowledgement of the unfolding material encounter reduces the photobook to static images and information.

Bruno Latour conceptualises technology as acts of “mediation”. This mediation involves several actants jointly performing an action, which can be a translation of meaning or a physical state. For example, a bulky hotel room keyring mediates the goal of not losing keys through translating the guest’s potential action of “forgetting to return the hotel key” into “relief at leaving the cumbersome key at reception” (Verbeek, 2005:156-160, c.f. Latour 1997). Alternatively, a speed bump acts upon the driver by translating a driver’s goal from “slow down so you don’t endanger pedestrians” into “slow down to protect your car’s suspension” (ibid.). Here neither instructional road sign nor the lump of matter itself perform the technical action: the technological agency is the mediation between the driver’s perceiving the speed bump and anticipating its potential effects. Material things become technologies when they are inscribed with actions that mediate human behaviours. Thus, technology in ANT connotes to how materials have potential for technical agency over humans as much as it does humans having agency in the material world. This becomes relevant to the thesis’ interest in how a photobook’s materiality exerts technical agency upon their viewer’s behaviour.

Heidegger and Latour’s views align on how technologies create and sustain meanings and social relations. Further mentions of technology reflect this intersubjective conception of being, doing and things acting upon things. Dobres summarises “technical agents... are responsible for the production, use, and value given to material objects. Equally, agents and consumers...

functionally and symbolically make and remake the world, in large measure, through technical means” (2000:128). The interdependency of recursive relationships between people, products, artefacts, materials, meanings, change and constancy cannot be neatly expressed, recalling Law’s call for alternative frameworks to visualise the messy world. Having presented technology as common ground for the compatibility of phenomenology and ANT, the next section addresses commonalities and conflicts.

1.3.2 Compatibility

In evaluating the compatibility of phenomenology and ANT approaches, we must address others’ claims for their incompatibility. In *We Have Never Been Modern* (Latour, 1993[1991]:57-8) Latour challenged the modernist commitment to hierarchies of knowledge and dichotomies.

Phenomenology had aimed to overcome the subject-object binary through the concept of intentionality, which expresses intentional consciousness as a co-operation between perceiver and perceived. However, Latour argued this concept “transforms a distinction, a separation, a contradiction, into an insurmountable tension between object and subject” (ibid.).

Phenomenology privileges human experience in technical or material encounters, which compromises ANT’s non-hierarchical focus. My approach aims to overcome this conflict by attending to what the photobook is *doing* (i.e. exerting agency) in the phenomenal encounter, as much as how human participants experience it. The discussion on technology demonstrated both phenomenology and ANT regard the material and social world as constituted of co-dependent agencies, so it is reasonable to extend the focus of these agencies to non-humans in the encounter. As Verbeek notes in his thesis of “post-phenomenology”, “creating conceptual space for delegations by nonhumans to humans is highly important, for it makes it possible to observe more in artefacts than only what is delegated to them, or inscribed in them by humans” (2005:170).

Verbeek’s post-phenomenology aims to unite ANT and phenomenology through foregrounding the co-productive role of artefacts in human-object interactions. He compares what ANT terms “translation” with hermeneutic “transformation”. Both refer to how artefacts co-shape action, expressing agential relations between humans and their world. He explains “transformation of perception” as a structure by which:

parts of reality are strengthened, while other aspects are not accessible or become more difficult to access. A similar structure can be discerned in the translation of action: artefacts invite particular actions while discouraging others or even rendering them

impossible. In place of amplification and reduction, then, one might speak of invitation and inhibition.

(2005:171)

To return to the example of the speed bump, it strengthens a perceived reality that speed will enact damage, thus inhibiting faster speeds, inviting drivers to drive more slowly, and transforming the unfolding experience of driving. Verbeek continues,

Via such translations, artefacts mediate the constitution of objectivity and subjectivity just as in the hermeneutic perspective. They make possible particular praxes and in doing so they shape the relations between humans and their world. Because mediated actions make humans encounter the world in a particular way, the mediating artefact helps to determine how both the world (“objectivity”) and those who act in it (“subjectivity”) are present.

(ibid.)

However, the intentional design of technologies in mediating our experience of the world can be an expression of power that predisposes some interactions over others (Benjamin, 2019). These could be tangible technologies, such as walls, gates, first class airport lounges and other architecture of differentiation, or intangible issues such as algorithms leading to intersectional oppression (Noble, 2018) or the “digital divide”, by which some groups of people may be marginalised by a lack of access to data networks and computer technology, impeding participation in digital knowledge-based economies (Brown and Czerniewicz 2010). Photobooks are generally designed for people with conventional ability to manually interact with them, within the social model of dis/ability where people whose manner of interacting with the world is different (often perceived as inferior) to the societal norm (see p.78). This demonstrates subjective, real-time encounters with photobooks are intrinsic to studying photobook relationality, as are more conceptual and political ways in which the material object mediates and maintains social relationships in the wider world.

Another potential theoretical discord between the two approaches is the temporal nature of perception and unfolding experience in phenomenology, versus ANT’s transhistorical view. Studying documents and effects from multiple historical periods simultaneously is important in ANT analysis to avoid privileging or discounting agencies depending on when they happened. However, this does not realistically dispel the acknowledgement that interactions do (or did) occur in real time, in whatever point in history they occur. ANT’s transhistoricity is generally problematic because agencies come together in dynamic moments and are therefore at some point temporally-located. For this reason, this study leans towards the phenomenal intra-activity of Karen Barad, aforementioned and explored further in the next section.

Having thus addressed some prior points of contention, I will outline further ways in which ANT and phenomenology juxtapose productively. ANT involves looking closely and thinking expansively about component parts that make up larger phenomena, and how these larger wholes constitute infinite smaller associations. Phenomenology is concerned with how things are “being and becoming” through their associations with the materially constituted, “time-and-place” “lifeworld” (Vagle, 2018:23). Accordingly, ANT and phenomenology both visualise our experiences of the material world as dynamic exchanges in which agency and perception are cooperative and circumstantial. They are both characterised by an inquisitive, attentive engagement with people and things, tracing, taking notice and “following” cues that are sometimes overlooked in conventional qualitative research, such as Latour’s contemplation of how pipettes mediate knowledge of quantities (1993:46) or Merleau-Ponty’s questioning of what it means to grasp a tennis ball (1962[1945]).

1.3.3 Performativity, agency and intra-activity

One of the strongest arguments in favour of ANT and phenomenology’s theoretical compatibility can be found in Karen Barad’s work on the performative, “agential realist” relational ontology (2007). Barad theorises that:

The world is a dynamic process of intra-activity and materialization in the enactment of determinate causal structures with determinate boundaries, properties, meanings, and patterns of marks on bodies. [...] That is, **it is through specific intra-actions that phenomena come to matter, in both senses of the word.**

(ibid.:140)

The two senses of the word ‘matter’ are the physicality of things and their discursive significance. What things are made of and what they mean are not fixed and essential, but “produced and productive, generated and generative”. This argument relies on Barad’s concept of “intra-action”. Whereas interaction presumes entities exist independently of each other before, during and after coming into contact, Barad argues things become determinate and meaningful as one entity or another through moments of “agential intra-actions” which organise their boundaries and properties. If a book appears motionless sitting on a table, it still pushes down on the table and the table pushes back up. The boundary between book and table is indistinct as long as the two come into contact. This conceptual shift attributes agency to human and non-human entities as they are enacted in relation to each other.

Barad's intra-action is conceptualised in a profoundly material sense. It negotiates between the materiality of the things around us, and the material, metaphysical and discursive ways we experience them through living, subjective bodies. Barad explains, "the primary ontological units are not 'things' but phenomena - dynamic topological reconfiguring/entanglements/relationalities/(re)articulations of the world", meaning the world is constituted through dynamic moments of interrelation (2007:141). She continues,

the primary semantic units are not 'words' but **material-discursive practices** through which (ontic and semantic) boundaries are constituted. This dynamism is agency. **Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world** [...]

(ibid. [my emphasis])

When a book is dropped by a human into a bathtub, or blown into a swimming pool by the wind without human involvement, the book would displace water, water would enter and reconfigure the book's material structure, and the original book is discursively reconfigured into a wet, perhaps ruined book-like mass. For this reason, Barad's agential realist ontology is also a feminist materialist ontology that tries to move beyond the binary of discourse versus materialism¹⁵.

An example to illustrate Barad's theory is the artwork *On Paper: Book Object* (2017) by Duncan Wooldridge (Fig.3). The work is a 3D-printed sculpture of a scan of a book. Where the scanner was not able to identify where the original book-object ended, the scanner bed became incorporated into the digital rendering of the object. Likewise, the 3D printer created supports in the hollow beneath the book's cover to perform its printing function. The material sculpture was digitally produced with minimal human intervention, yet represents an important slippage between material and virtual elements, and actions past and present. The original reproduced book is signified by matter, but so is the intra-action of technologies, softwares and materials, as evidenced by the comingling of surface, support structure and printed contours with the shape of the book form. Conceptually, this work speaks of a threshold between what is real, tangible and touchable and the digital realm. This is heightened when encountering the artwork digitally online. The flat, pixel image elicits my embodied imagination of the sculpture's creamy texture that invites touch and mimics marble, a material associated with fine art traditions. This encounter, too, is a performative intra-action between the viewer and screen, as much as it is materially discursive of past intra-actions of production.

¹⁵ To be expanded in Chapter 2.

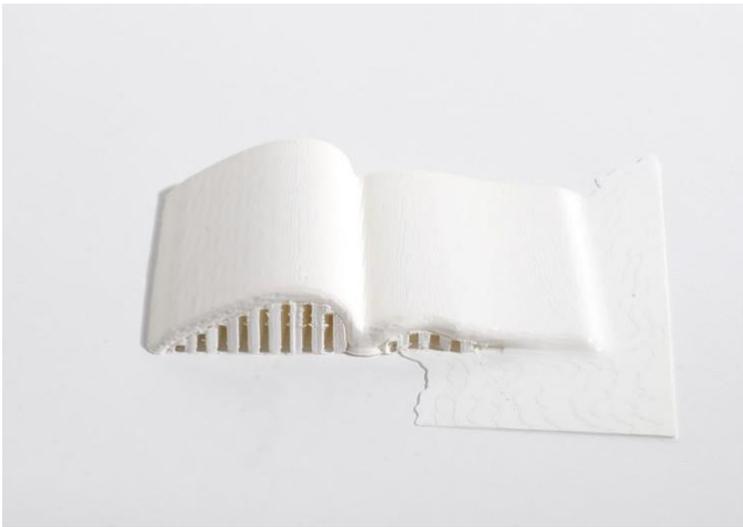


Figure 3 Duncan Wooldridge, On Paper: Book Object, 2017. 3D Print in PLA, from a 3D scan. © Duncan Wooldridge

Though Barad does not explicitly align herself with ANT or phenomenology, her engagement with more-than-human agency shares core presuppositions with ANT. Likewise her emphasis on the performative, subjective moment echoes the phenomenological horizon. Both approaches share a curiosity for the dynamic moment of intra-action, where relations are enacted (ANT) and bodily perceptions formed (phenomenology). This crucial link between performativity and materiality is valuable to studying the praxiographic, epistemological and social relations that configure in the phenomenal photobook encounter.

1.3.4 ANT and phenomenology combined in practice

Though originating in different disciplines, aspects of ANT and phenomenology can be combined effectively because they both reject prescriptive methodological instruction. They are sets of values that inform the researcher's attitude towards their subject of study. Vagle prefers to describe phenomenology as an "approach" because it "signals something concrete *and* something open, malleable, flexible and agile", whereas "method" in conventional methodologies can appear "linear and step-by-step" (2018:52).

Likewise, both Law and Latour assert ANT is more like a framework to assemble information than a theory. Few texts report their specific methodology, for example the influence of ANT principles on Law's research is internalised into his writing without explicit explanation (see 2002; Appendix D). However, we can learn that Law's approach is reflexive and adaptive in the way his studies zoom between micro details of a thing or organisation and macro real-world circumstances or consequences. It can be inferred that his approach to data gathering responds

to what the researcher finds along the way. In addition, relying prescriptively upon evocative visual metaphors such as “networks”, “mobiles”, “fluid objects” and “enactment” can influence how one regards their subjects and consequently the data they produce. The exploratory ontological emphasis of this study likewise avoids this prescriptive terminology, opting for generic terms like “configuration” and “actor”, and interchangeable use of metaphors like “network” and “assemblage”.

Studies from other disciplines using ANT have emphasised the methodological importance of note-taking first seen in Latour’s laboratory ethnography (1986) to capture spontaneous observations that may be lost in retroactive reflection (Yaneva, 2009; Graves-Brown *et al.*, 2013; Knudsen, 2016). It is within what is noticed and noted that one can identify what has agency in an experience or process *as it is being enacted*. Yaneva (2013:12) explains ANT researchers should record spontaneous responses immediately and over a longer period of exposure, as “epistemological techniques of engaging with, and making the present last”. Without this activity, research would merely satisfy the researcher’s pre-conceived expectations formed from existing theory, adding nothing new to knowledge and solidifying popular ideas. This approach is inspired by Latour and Woolgar’s proto-ANT study *Laboratory Life*, in which the two researchers “bracketed” (tried to put aside) existing scientific knowledge and applied ethnographic techniques of observation and note-taking to learn about “the esoteric culture of the scientific laboratory” (1986:275) and its role in constructing scientific “facts”.

Notetaking is equally important in archival research methods adopted for historic subjects, because each discovery of historic exchanges of power or transformations of meaning within historic documents is an identification of agency (Law and Hassard, 1999; Morris, 2003; Byrne, 2011). As my project includes observing real-life encounters and conversations as well as reviewing literature, taking notes throughout relating to all my observations presents itself as a central method, to be explained next.

1.3.5 A Method, Nevertheless

The versatility of the photobook and the contexts of its encounter have inspired a multiplicity of methods for information gathering and analysis in this project. At the start of this chapter, I identified two task areas:

Task area 1 (T1): Understanding the encounter

Task area 2 (T2): Relating the encounter

To respond to these two tasks, I engaged the following data-gathering exercises. The acronym in parenthesis denotes how each unit of research data is referenced throughout the thesis.

Preliminary studies

The early exploratory stages of this research have been highly formative in shaping its direction. Vagle emphasises the importance of the ‘pre-study’ work to designing a phenomenological research project: “spend time with the phenomenon, informally, to get a good sense how it might manifest in the contexts in which you are exploring it” (2018:18). In my personal and professional life prior to my PhD I spent time with photobooks and their producers in various contexts. To expand my understanding of how others related to photobooks, I conducted several informal studies, which presented insights that remain valuable in the thesis.

~ *Preliminary study 1* – photobook surveys (PS1)

In the early stages of my research I spent time questioning my own responses to photobooks. I conducted a close analysis of Chris Killip’s *In Flagrante* (PS1a), in which I considered the book’s materiality, aesthetic and looked for semiotic associations in combinations of text and image and sequencing. I conducted two sessions of reviewing 5-10 photobooks (PS1b), allowing 10 minutes per photobook to record my spontaneous responses, to identify what struck me most about a selection of unfamiliar books. To impose arbitrary selection and to maintain unfamiliarity with the photobooks studied, I requested the curator of photobooks in the NAL, Jennifer Reeves, to make a selection of recent acquisitions.

~ *Preliminary study 2* – focus groups (PS2)

In early December 2017, I conducted three informal focus groups in different locations, inviting participants to look at and discuss a selection of my own photobooks. Two sessions took place in Newcastle University buildings (PS2a & b), the other in a pub near campus (PS2c). I recruited participants for the university sessions through Humanities post-graduate mailing lists. These focus groups were structured and I did not know the participants. For these sessions I produced a schedule of observation to record potential useful actions or discussion topics, and recorded proceedings using a smartphone Dictaphone. The schedule of observation did not ultimately prove suitable as discussion went far beyond the starting framework. The pub focus group was more sociable as I had arranged it through a group of cultural research PhD students; due to the lively ambiance of the pub I recorded using notetaking only.

~ *Preliminary study 3* – observations (PS3)

Between September 2017 and November 2018 I conducted observational studies in public sites of photobook interaction, including the Photographers' Gallery Bookshop, Donlon Books and the National Art Library (all London), Unseen Book Market (Amsterdam) and Paris Photo Aperture Award (Paris). These were informal note-taking exercises of varying durations about photobook interactions I noticed in each venue, for example, for how long individuals interacted with photobooks, whether they purchased them, and whether they interacted with other related texts or persons (e.g. interpretation; shop assistants or publishers manning the book stand). The longest observation was in the Photographers' Gallery Bookshop, from a stationary position for 2.5 hours in the afternoon. I focussed on one individual or group at a time, timing interactions and noting behaviours. I paid particular attention to the physical environments of each space and how this influenced users' movements.

Notetaking is inherently an act of interpretation and value judgement: “noting and writing down some things as ‘significant’, noting but ignoring others as ‘not significant’, and even missing other possibly significant things [...] involve inscriptions of social life and social discourse” and “inevitable processes of selection” reflecting the researcher's interests (Emerson, 1995:7-9). Fieldnotes might focus upon spatial organization, individual interactions and dialogue, personal apparel or behaviour, or chronological accounts of how the researcher experienced an event.

Emerson (1995) instructs the writing of ethnographic fieldnotes should follow a logical strategy of jotting initial impressions, then summarising key events. They caution researchers against making generalized meanings or attributing exogeneous meanings to local phenomena or interactions. I endeavoured to adopt an open positionality in questioning and notetaking. The value of notetaking lies in its use as a “primary means for deeper appreciation of how researchers come to grasp and interpret the actions and concerns of others” in which “the field researcher does not learn about the concerns and meanings of others all at once, but in a constant, continuing process in which she builds new insight and understanding upon prior insights and understandings” (ibid.:13). This project utilises the ethnographic approach to this aim.

The suitability of this mode of study is justified by Vagle's reasoning that “the phenomenon manifests ontologically in particular situations and contexts and that understanding the phenomenon is an act of ongoing interpretation” (2018:16). This translates as a negotiation between present experience and accrued understanding, which has been explored by another phenomenologist, Hans Georg Gadamer, in his concept of the “fusion of horizons”. The fusion of horizons can be explained as a movement away from a static understanding of truth and

meaning to one that is historically rooted, yet malleable over time (2004[1960]). Nevertheless, text or an experience is not completely open to interpretation; it has some inherent truth in its materiality that pushes into each contextual understanding. “History” is not a singular, hermetic, fixed lineage, but comes to signify an awareness of how we got to where we are now.

To maintain sensitivity to more-than-human agency, this “historical” awareness is filtered through a relational position. ANT encourages a flat perspective that disregards grand historical narratives to understand things according to their networked agencies. These approaches can be reconciled because they both describe an understanding of culture and cultural production that is relational, mobile and perspectival. To maintain this flexibility, Vagle advises each “phenomenon calls for how it should be studied – not a prescribed list of sanctioned techniques, processes and tools”, but “any technique, process, or tool” that can justifiably help “explore and illuminate the phenomenon” (ibid.:17). This organic attitude reflects the phenomenological principle of “entelechy”, the process by which things emerge, or ‘come to be’ as they are. This is comparable to ANT notions that agencies become visible in their moments of interaction and differentiation through their affordances and agency.

Main studies

The preliminary studies presented the phenomenon of the photobook *encounter* as a useful platform to explore broader networks in photobook sociology and economy. The focus groups provided insight into the photobook’s affect in individual encounters. Noticing how behaviours and motivations surrounding encounters varied in different circumstances indicated the networked relationality of the photobook genre. From this foundation of dispersed information gathering, I gathered more specialised relational insight for T2 using two core techniques: an ethnographic research diary and interviews.

~ *Main study 1* – research diary (MS1[volume i/ii]:[page number])

Between November 2018 and April 2020 I kept research diaries in a manner inspired by ethnography. I recorded observations about photobooks from conversations, internet research, or coincidentally out in the world. This technique aimed to document diverse events and activities surrounding photobooks, their contents and my responses. During this time, I participated in activities beyond my regular social attendance, such as learning bookbinding. I endeavoured to be omnivorous in recording all things photobook, accumulating a sediment of information from which I have formed my relational analysis. A full schedule of diary entries is detailed in Appendix A.

Note-taking and diary-keeping are information-gathering tools that provide opportunities to practice prolonged openness to where, what, how and why given phenomena unfold (Vagle 2018:94-5). While there is value in writing observations and recollections to aid memory in phenomenology, in ethnographic research they can “contradict the remembered voices of the people from the field. They might also mediate and alter the accuracy of memory as they are continually reread” (Wall 2008:45, c.f. Lederman, 1990 and Sanjek 1990). Emerson, Fretz and Shaw advise “writing field notes as soon and as fully as possible after events have occurred encourages detailed descriptions of the processes of interaction through which members of social settings create and sustain specific, local social realities” (1995:14). While immediacy and sensory detail about events are important to preserve “their idiosyncratic, contingent character in the face of the homogenising tendencies of retrospective recall” (ibid.), it is not always appropriate to make notes in front of other people ‘in the field’, such as during a drinks reception. Therefore, my ethnographic diary contains observations recorded as near to the event as possible, but not always *in situ*.

At intervals, I consolidated my notes through autoethnographic writing about my experiences. According to Sarah Wall, writing an autoethnographic text is more of a “continuation of fieldwork rather than a transparent record of past experiences, leading to the production of a historically, politically, and personally situated representation of human life” (2008:42). This project combines ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches. Autoethnography consciously engages the self in ethnographic enquiry, using autobiographical data to explore cultural analysis. The interrogation of personal, reflective experience is a departure from conventional ethnography, in which “the ethnographer remains a stranger as long as, and to the extent that, she retains commitment to the exogenous project of studying or understanding the lives of others” (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995:36). Autoethnography transcends autobiography by connecting the personal to the cultural through ethnographic explanation (Ellis and Bochner 2000:739, c.f. Chang 2008:46). However, it presumes a bounded self as the centre of interpretation, which presents a potential conflict for this more-than-human study. This is resolved through the project’s relational perspective, achieved through acts of writing that are explained in the thesis’ conclusion.

~ *Main study 2* – interviews **(MS2: [interviewee surname(s)])**

Between April 2019 and January 2020, I conducted recorded interviews with individuals occupying positions of interest relating to photography and photobooks, detailed in Appendix B. The interview participants are considered as “elites” (Dexter, 2006) because they are experienced

professionals in their field. The range of participants was, ultimately, determined by agencies other than my own. I began with a longlist of curators, librarians, collectors, artists, educators, etc. I did not successfully contact all of them, some did not wish to participate, and others did not have availability to meet during the period of data-gathering. Likewise, some interviews were not initially planned and resulted from serendipitous introductions, such as during my research trip to New York in September 2019.

The interview format was unstructured, as favoured by phenomenological researchers for being “dialogic, open and conversational” (Vagle, 2018: 86). Less structured interviews also suited the social dynamic between myself and several participants who were professional acquaintances. Despite the freeform format, when interviewing for phenomenology studies, Vagle advises researchers begin with a clear sense of phenomenon being examined (2018, 87). I asked each interviewee to present or describe to me a photobook that is significant to them. It was important the interviews took place in person so I could share this material encounter. The structured activity aimed to provide participants with a prompt to begin talking about their relation to a *specific* book, to create opportunities to reveal relations with photobooks in general. In reality, many interview participants could not choose a single book, and referenced several examples during the conversation. Regardless of whether the conversations began with a physical photobook, or if they entered the discourse more casually, this prompt provided a “disciplined” starting point to explain my interests to the interviewee, and later functioned in a similar style to photo elicitation (Pauwels and Mannay, 2020).

The approach I designed mirrors the micro-macro approach in ANT of using object-focused dialogues to reveal broader relational patterns. The suitability of my independent plan for interviewing has been confirmed by the success of Neumüller and Tuminas’ (2019) similar method in their market-focused participatory research with photobook publishers at the Unseen Book Market. Neumüller and Tuminas set up a ‘sofa’ for publishers to take a break and bring a book to talk about, indirectly revealing which books were successful at the fair and why, as well as more general attitudes to the photobook market.

Preceding my interviews, I shared an information sheet and interviewees signed a form to record their informed consent to participate. Following the interview, I sent the audio recording to the participant for approval, which was received. Participants were given the option to be anonymised, but they all consented to be identified.

Fieldwork sites

Data-gathering took place during dedicated research trips across a range of sites in the UK, Europe and North America, as well as ongoing ethnographic data collection in sites of organic social engagement with the photobook industry, as detailed in Appendix A. Northern Bridge Doctoral Training Partnership sponsored overseas fieldwork trips to:

- ~ *Photobook Phenomenon* exhibition, CCCB Barcelona, Spain, June 2017
- ~ Paris Photo and Offprint Paris, France, November 2018
- ~ Les Rencontres d'Arles, France, July 2018
- ~ Unseen Amsterdam, Netherlands, September 2019
- ~ New York, September 2019: New York Public Library, Watson Library (Metropolitan Museum of Art), Aperture, various booksellers, New York City, NY; Visual Studies Workshop and George Eastman Museum, Rochester, NY.

1.3.6 Analysis

My principle data analysis followed a classic qualitative model of organizing raw data, coding data, doing thematic analysis, searching for and interpreting meaning, then drawing conclusions (O'Leary 2014). This involved listening back to interviews, rereading journal notes and indexing page numbers and quotes indicating general themes. To analyse text-based data I trialled NVivo coding software, which I found unsatisfactory because it operated as a structuring technology and imposed too rigid a system of categories. As Law observed, “methods, their rules, and even more methods’ practices, not only describe but also help to *produce* the reality that they understand” (2004:5). Using NVivo, I felt I was performing too active a role in constructing the knowledges I *thought* I would find. By falsely ascribing categories to things I knew were overlapping and indistinct, I was creating an artificial impression of order.

Instead, I used hard copy transcripts and analogue methods (colour-coded highlighters and post-it notes) to arrange and draw connections between ideas. Being a primarily kinaesthetic learner, working on paper was most efficient, and suggested my motivation for researching the paper-based technology of photobooks in the first place. It seemed logical that my research on materiality was enacted through concrete materials and technologies. As I cut and grouped quotes together, my knowledge-making was a physical, co-active relation between myself and my data, translated into written form and spatial organisation. Although old-fashioned and time-consuming, this method safeguarded my aim to connect emerging micro insights, rather than

charting the frequency of predetermined terms or opinions. I could respond simultaneously to connections via doodling without losing fleeting thoughts in navigating software. This mode of analysis has been informed by content and narrative analyses and hermeneutics (O'Leary, 2014).

Following a long process of getting to know my data, the remaining analysis was enacted through the trial and error of writing about those emergent connections. The act of writing this thesis has served as the principle means through which the research questions are explored and eventually answered, in as conclusive a manner as can be expected from an ontological study about the agency of inanimate things. This method will become apparent by the close of the thesis.

1.3.7 Subjectivity and creative text

This thesis additionally uses informal and creative writings as a methodological exercise to explore the photobook's encounter and relationality. These build upon techniques from autoethnographic notetaking and lived experience description, such as interrogating my positionality as author, and are cited in **an alternative font**. This mechanism has enabled me to make sense of my own encounters and discuss them in more divergent detail than I could infer from the experiences of others. Sarah Wall justifies reflexive personal experience methods in social research because individuals cannot exist outside their social context, so personal experience offers a foundation for further sociological understanding (2008:47). Amongst Wall's summary of arguments for and against the validity of autoethnographic storytelling-as-research, one potential danger is a failure to connect personal experience with theory (ibid.). The rigor of my autoethnographic content is sustained by my internalisation of the research's theoretical foundation and more-than-human values.

The autoethnographic texts, mainly located in the Appendices, are constructed in more spontaneous modes of writing than the body of the thesis to explore the photobook's multiplicity through varied voices and question dominant ways of knowing. Whilst critical creative writing is unusual in social sciences research, in art history Paul Barolsky (1999) has observed a heritage of fictionalised critical writing, beginning with one of art history's founding texts, Vasari's *Lives* (1550-1568). Vasari qualified the 'genius' of certain artists through profiling their biographies, relying on myth and invention for those living before his time. Catherine Grant explains writing about artworks as "an act of interpretation requiring some level of fictionalisation or projection", wherein the creativity of writing is performative because it "draws attention to the act that is taking place in the writing of a history, both with the physical presence of the writer and the writing itself as an active participant in the creation of a story" (2012:9-11). In recent decades, 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 into their analysis (Fer, 2004), offsetting the hegemony of a singular authoritative voice and blurring practices of criticism and ekphrasis (e.g. Parkinson, in Grant, 2011; Rich 1993).

Where autoethnographic insights appear in the thesis, they are supported by theoretical analysis. The autoethnographic texts thus operate like visual aids, such as illustrations or diagrams. Image-making in academic research, whether it be illustrations in publications, or linked media content hosted online, can be mobilised to subvert singular, authoritative academic narratives (Whitehead 2021). Images are utilised here as methodological components that support the thesis' visual, haptic and spatial claims. Images of artists' publications are only included where they specifically support the argument. I have not included arbitrary cover/page spread images for the sake of illustration. Most referenced photobooks are depicted on artist's websites and online bookstores where a greater selection of images give a more accurate impression of the book; where possible hyperlinks are provided in the List of Photobooks and Artist's Publications.

This chapter has explained the theoretical and methodological foundation for this study, as well as the strategies for data collection. The next five chapters activate this internalised methodology through discussion and analysis of photobook encounters and agency. The following chapter begins with a focus on perceptual, social experience in the individual encounter.

Chapter 2: The “-ing” of Encounter

Perceiving, seeing, sensing, holding, reading, looking, apprehending, understanding, liking, disliking, responding, critiquing, making, having, buying, selling, destroying, forgetting¹⁶.

These are only a few verbs to describe an encounter with a photobook. None of them are sufficient on their own, and none could happen independently. You can't forget without having first seen. You can't apprehend without having read or looked, and perhaps you can't read without looking, nor look without reading. This multitude of perceptual and critical processes can be associated with most objects and ideas: they describe different forms of interaction between a perceiving subject and the thing perceived.

Part of what a photobook 'is' is apprehended through this interaction. The question of what the photobook is – what it does, how it behaves on micro and macro scales – persists throughout this thesis. This chapter explores the most immediate perceptual processes originating in that first moment of encounter, conversing between empirical data, literature, and critical discussion.

2.1 The intra-active moment

One of the most immediate insights from my interviews and observations was that photobooks need engagement of some kind. What appears to be a book-type object only *becomes* a photobook through interaction. The book is a fickle form: despite superficial structural commonalities - spine, a head, a tail, front and back cover - the ontological essence of this book-type thing remains a mystery until it is opened. Books have been subverting readers' expectations for many years: from the material misbehaviour of Laurence Sterne's 18th-century novel *Tristram Shandy* (1759) to mischievous popular culture examples of books hollowed into hiding places¹⁷, books that lever open secret passageways¹⁸, even laptop cases disguised as old books (Fig.4). Until it is opened we cannot be sure what kind of book it is – or whether it is even a book at all.

¹⁶ These words are actions unfolding in a present that immediately becomes past. The present continuous gerund verb form expresses the temporal nature of phenomenological experience.

¹⁷ E.g., a listening device, diamonds and a gun hidden in books in three James Bond films; *The Golden Girls*, Se5Ep6 (1990) featuring a bottle of whiskey hidden in a Bible.

¹⁸ Likewise, e.g., Catherine's gothic fantasy in *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen (1817); a fake bookcase volume opens the vault in *The Addams Family* (1991).



Figure 4 Which is the photobook? Interaction reveals a notebook and a diary also bound in decorative covers; 'Book' laptop case. Source: author; Amazon.co.uk



Across focus groups and interviews, mentions of photobooks were rarely abstract descriptions of images and ideas. They were grounded in accounts of looking, physical demonstrations, temporal recollections of “I thought this, but then I understood that”. The process of a book *becoming* a photobook¹⁹ was visible in focus groups PS2. Participants questioned the specimens’ lack of text and commented they pictured ‘photobook’ as a photography catalogue or album. One participant reflected, “I hadn’t expected the photobook to be something public; I think of it as private” (PS2c). They spoke English as a second language and had understood the portmanteau as a photo album. Their comment demonstrates a hermeneutic progression of interpretation as they drew upon and then redressed their presuppositions.²⁰

In this focus group, the photobook *brought forth* its essence as a visual and narrative technology, distinct from other book forms, through the participants’ handling then reflection, augmented by group discussion. The concept of “photobook” materialised as it was understood through discourse. Rather than a book with photographs, or a book about photography, by the end of the session photobooks had become distinct aesthetic objects for several participants without prior

¹⁹ In the phenomenological sense described in Chapter 1, meaning the emergence of its particular ‘photobook-ness’

²⁰ Interestingly, many photobooks include collections of personal photographs made public, whether found photographs, or belonging to the photographer/their subjects. The medium transforms the image from nostalgic memento to conceptual document through design and reproduction, emphasising tension between different photobooks, the private family album and the published, commercial photobook. See next chapter.

experience. The nature of this interaction demonstrates John Dewey's theory of *Art as Experience*, which explains "aesthetic" as denoting "the consumer's rather than the producer's standpoint", so a photobook's aesthetic effect depends on how it is interpreted through and actualised in the viewer's own psyche (1934:47).

Corina Reynolds, Director of the Centre for Book Arts in Manhattan, NY, emphasised the physicality of aesthetic interaction. When discussing the limitations of exhibiting books, Reynolds explained static books cannot express their artistic agenda: "if you're only exposing one page, there's no way [the viewer is] going to understand the whole context of the work" (MS2). Artist and director of Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, NY Tate Shaw has contrasted this experiential restriction with the metaphor of the "open book" as a symbol of readily accessible information. He cautions this idiom, because the reader may inaccurately believe that from seeing a static page spread, they "can see all there is to know about the books without ever having taken them in hand" (Shaw, 2016:12).

Reynolds and Shaw's accounts recall Heidegger's philosophising on technology, wherein the book's essence is brought forth through interaction. We engage with books in time and space and we come to know them through perceptual, hermeneutic, unfolding experience (as described on pp.49-51). 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. Heidegger describes how a hammer in use becomes an extension of the arm, fusing the user's strength and energy with the hammer's targeted force to perform a conjoined capability. Marshall McLuhan also saw media technologies as extensions of ourselves, through being materially, socially, and integrated with our psychic and nervous systems (McLuhan, 1994). This fusion of subject and object also occurs with the photobook, as the reader extends intentional consciousness towards the thing that becomes joined with their physical activity of looking.

Shaw explores this metaphysical assimilation of bodily action, thought and feeling in his collected essays *Blurred Library* (2016). As the body is activated by the book held in one's hands, the physical object also translates into interior meaning: "a book ... is an extension—prosthesis—of your body and your body is prosthesis to it. [...] the effect is that of a phantom whose presence is felt internally" (Shaw, 2016:46). Book engagement requires whole body co-operation: "the eye moves, the head tilts, the hands and fingers work the pages, the arms and torso shift as the book is handled and manipulated" (ibid.:44, cf. Dworkin, 2013:77). Shaw cites Brian Massumi's view that "a body is its perceivings":

‘Body’ and ‘thing’ and, by extension, ‘body’ and ‘object’ exist only as implicated in each other ... Body and thing are extensions of each other. They are mutual implications: co-thoughts of two-headed perception. That two-headed perception is the world.”

(ibid., 45, cf. Massumi, 2002:95)

In this ‘co-implication’, “[t]here is a feedback loop from materiality to mind. Obviously, artifacts spring from thought, but thought also emerges from interactions with artifacts.” (ibid., 52, cf. N. Katherine Hayles, 2002:75). Shaw’s argument demonstrates the book encounter as physically and conceptually continuous with the body, to a degree that mental and material conception are mutually generative.

This fusion of body and book technology could be called an analogue cyborg, in the sense of Donna Haraway’s *A Cyborg Manifesto* (Haraway, 1985), in which “a cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” and “a condensed image of both imagination and material reality”. Haraway argues the body is not a natural self; rather, the perceiving body is a cyborg of biological faculties, socialised self-awareness and naturalised use of technology. Contemporary examples could range from spectacles to smartphones: things that become extensions of our sensoria as well as our social being. Haraway envisages “a cyborg world [that] might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines”. As technologies increasingly become extensions of ourselves, things come to be as we know them through the co-operation of human and more-than-human entities.

The essence of the photobook is not only realised *through* the encounter, but materialised *in* the event of intra-action, situated in a space-time event with the social body of the viewer. To regard a material co-operation between body and book as a multi-directional intra-action (in the sense of Barad, see p.59) is directly related with Haraway’s feminist thinking in its critique of conventional binaries. The boundary between subject (i.e. viewer) and object (book) in the moment of looking and holding is not as simple as the Cartesian cut of ‘I’ vs ‘other’. As long as the book remains an extension of the body and its subjective attention, this differentiation is a cut that must be produced: it is up to the viewer to discern where the material-discursive effect of the book ends and their own interpretation begins, if such a cut can be made. At an atomic level, both body and book are primarily carbon: in elemental terms there is only a negligible difference between the stuff of my hand and the stuff of the book. The agential cut between subject and object is therefore an *interpreted* differentiation, made by the boundaries of lived experience; they are not essentially differentiated categories. As narrated in the autoethnographic text in Appendix E, in the moment of the photobook encounter, I am not thinking in terms of “I am I, this photobook is object, we are separate”, but rather my attention is absorbed in a channel of joint perceptual

co-operation between myself and the book in my hands. This presents the moment of encounter as performative and intra-active.

If the photobook is not fully realized until it is engaged with and responded to, one might suppose that beyond moments of encounter, photobooks are inert matter awaiting human interaction. Yet, for the duration that a photobook sits immobile on a shelf, it is intra-acting with the surface on which it sits, meanwhile photobooks also change in use, value and significance over time. As Barad says, “[n]ature is neither a passive surface awaiting the mark of culture nor the end product of cultural performances”. She continues,

The belief that nature is mute and immutable and that all prospects for significance and change reside in culture merely reinscribes the nature-culture dualism that feminists have actively contested. Nor, similarly, can a human-nonhuman distinction be hardwired into any theory that claims to take account of matter in the fullness of its historicity. **To presume a given distinction between humans and nonhumans is to cement and recirculate the nature-culture dualism [...],** foreclosing a genealogy of how nature and culture, human and nonhuman, are formed.

(Barad, 2003:827-828)[my emphasis]

The feminist critique of anthropocentrism and binary thought essentially argues that prioritising human over what is ‘other’ devalues that which does not have dominance; it is a modernist prioritization of mind over body, rationality over feeling, clarity over chaos (Haraway, 1985). These artificial divisions have profound significance for issues of social and racial justice, for example, expressing hierarchies of what kinds of bodies are most “human”, where historically Black bodies have historically been thought of as things (Towns, 2018). In studying perceptual photobook encounters, to avoid reinforcing binary assumptions, we should avoid anthropocentric conceptions of agency. It is not possible to isolate human response from the agential role of the photobook itself, just as we should not prioritise an intellectual response over a physical one, or fully distinguish one kind of matter from another.

Barad’s philosophy is an enlightening exercise in questioning how we unthinkingly make agential cuts between atomically similar matter to produce different kinds of things and phenomena. If we were to suspend binary thinking, as a thought experiment, we might not perceive any difference between human and book, or between human and any other thing. Other areas of discourse likewise suggest a fluid or dissolving boundary between where book ends and human begins. In histories of reading, an overindulgence in literature was once believed to cause gout or malaise, while the act of reading is still often described as “losing oneself” in a book (Littau, 2006:4). Alternatively, a voracious reader is a being who consumes books, which resonates with Bennett’s account of food as vibrant matter, in which she writes “in the eating encounter, all bodies are shown to be but temporary congealments of a materiality that is a process of

becoming” (2010:49). While we do not usually physically eat books, Bennett’s discussion of consumption is informed by reflection on how intangible things like music and art are consumed and interiorised (ibid.:46-7).

How we distinguish between one thing and another is, therefore, always contingent and questionable. To make intelligible headway this thesis will maintain an agential cut between human and book as separate entities. Nevertheless, to undertake an analysis of contemporary photobooks as cultural and social products, it is imperative to engage multi-directionally: to study not only what humans think about photobooks, but also what photobooks do to humans and non-humans alike. While this theme will be continually revisited throughout the thesis, this chapter is concerned with perception located in the encounter between human and photobook, with the next sections focusing upon the perceiving person as a social and sensing being.

2.2 The perceiving body

Multiple interviewees’ opinions that photobooks “communicate” confirmed the photobook’s essential interactivity (MS2: Allen, Bush, Wooldridge). Following Haraway’s argument that subjectivity is a constructed social fiction, we turn to scrutinise who or what is the recipient of this communication – the subject, viewer, reader, perceiver, Barad’s intra-actee. This subject is simultaneously a physical body, a perceiving intellect and a social self (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987).

In Chapter 1, Merleau-Ponty’s approach to integrated bodily perception and manual ability illuminated how basic perceptual photobook experiences are mediated by the reader’s proprioceptive knowledge of how to perform the task of picking the photobook up and opening it (p.52). This self-knowledge that you *can* hold a book, see it and read it, is not the same as the experience of reading a photobook. Michel de Certeau describes everyday activities such as reading and speaking as situated, performative acts. Speech, for example, “operates with a linguistic and paralinguistic system, situated in time and place, most often with an interlocutor” (Certeau, 1988:xiii). The competence of knowing a language does not equate with performing it through speech, which involves varied enunciations and emphases. While the reader can likewise possess knowledge of their ability to pick up or look at a book, the acts of reading and interpreting are situated, social performances of this knowing-how. In these acts, “[u]sers make (*bricolent*) innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules” (ibid., original emphasis).

These performative acts are examples of ‘bricolage’, an assembly, a conjoining, of competences and situational factors.

This dialogic, performative account of physical engagement, perception and interpretation becomes pertinent to photobook encounters when considered alongside Barad’s notion of intra-activity because it implicates the individuality of human participants. We may presume other people’s experience of a physical book will be consistent with ours, such as Merleau-Ponty’s explanation of how we find common ground in perception from shared experience of the material world (see p.51). However, each photobook encounter is a set of discursive practices between photobook, body, and surroundings. People of smaller stature may find larger books²¹ cumbersome to look at, making the encounter less pleasurable; meanwhile, if there is a table nearby, the book’s dimension may enact agency by directing the reader to go and sit down. One female interviewee expressed distaste for “unnecessarily large” books as a statement of phallic aggression, as well as physically inconvenient and costly (MS2: Watson), expressing a configuration between materiality, gender politics, psychology, and economy.

Our capacities for manual interaction are limited by each body’s (dis)ability. There are infinite ways bodies perceive and interact with things and it is impossible to experience another person’s perception. Books are generally designed for bodies with conventional physical abilities, so their materiality presumes readers have the ability to turn pages, see and smell. It is important to question how somebody with alternative sensory capabilities might experience a photobook encounter, such as a person without the use of hands. Their perception might be mediated by another person’s page-turning rhythm, introducing interpersonal instruction, or they might find different paper stocks harder or easier to manipulate. Photobooks do not need to reinforce an “able-bodied” social order (Campbell, 2009), as shown by photographer Mihai Barabancea and designer Cristiana Costin’s collaboration *Sarutul* (2016). The photobook combines visual imagery with Braille and tactile transparent varnishing to increase accessibility for people with visual impairments. The book comments on less explicit exclusions of visual arts through presenting lyrical photographs that are only captioned in Braille, meaning a fully-sighted person might find the book less legible than a visually impaired, Braille-reading person (Pullin, 2009).

2.2.1 Embodied perception and the social self

²¹ Dimension is agential in multiple respects; larger books command more space and capital and require special shelving, differentiating modes of storage and epistemological treatment. See Chapters 3 and 5.

The capacity to conceive of one's relation to an object, its estimated weight and dimension, or one's ability to grasp it appears automatic and pre-cognitive. However, it is not innate knowledge. It is embodied knowledge that must be learned: knowing how to open a book arises from prior experience or expectation. Where Merleau-Ponty describes a perceptual dialogue between thing and self, John Berger identifies a similar social transaction. In *Ways of Seeing* Berger writes, "we never look just at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between the thing and ourselves" (Berger, 1977:9) This was seen in the focus group participant who established her view of photobooks against her preconception of what the word 'photobook' might mean. Berger means looking at anything, especially art, is inherently social, as we compare what we are looking at to the experience of our embodied social self. This statement implies "self" as an entity that is distinct from "everything and everyone else". In a similar fashion to the human/book boundary issue, it requires another agential cut between one person's individuality and another to prevent the discussion from becoming entangled in conceptual or existential implications.

Encounters with photobooks are performative intra-actions between the self, the body and the book, therefore how we engage with photobooks is a performance of self and a performed competence of looking or reading. This goes for public interactions at book fairs as much as private encounters. Hannah Watson, director of Trolley Books, confessed she frequently looks at books from back to front to get a "holistic feel", despite understanding authors craft specific sequences, displaying awareness of etiquette as well as personal preference (MS2: Watson). This sentiment was repeated by Wooldridge and Allen, the latter also acknowledged this direction is easier when one picks up the book with their (dominant) right hand. This could be interpreted as a subtle act of subversion against 'intended' practices of consumption, resisting expected modes of engagement and displaying a desire for books to captivate the attention without initiation into the 'correct' mode of looking. It also draws attention to bodily competences that influence encounters but may be taken for granted, such as whether the reader is right-handed, left-handed, or able bodied, as well as cultural background (other languages and cultures that read books right to left).

Reflecting on looking at artist's books, Shaw recalls he had "seldom questioned my reading acts" until he came across the book *Mukelink (Mzlk): The Tours* by Brad Freeman (1997), which contains explicit instructions for how it should be looked at (flat on a table, posture upright) and prompts for looking.

Before encountering Freeman's instructions to the reader and settling in to read *Mzlk* from beginning to end, I probably would have pounced around this visual book and

batted its leaves of paper, in the way one seizes upon magazines while waiting to pay for groceries ... indifferently attempting to consume the entirety of the book through a few sheer glances ... by inserting my own distracted movements, I'm altering the book's meaning.

(2016:132)

Shaw's reflection about the effects of unconscious and self-aware modes of looking shows the act of engaging with a photobook is a hermeneutically-learned and socially-acquired skill that is constitutive of meaning-making and determines how the book is actualised in the encounter. Margaret Wetherell (2012) relates embodied practices to Pierre Bourdieu's notions of habitus, specifically his explanation of how habitus is *embodied* to explore the "affective grip" of bodily practices (2012:110). She writes, "the body cannot help itself rehearsing what Bourdieu describes ... as 'a universe of ready-made feelings and experiences' [1984:474] when prompted by a familiar situation" (2012:106). While actors are free to act otherwise, "our socialised inclinations and available knowledge drive us to do what comes most easily" (ibid.:105).

Bourdieu has explained habitus as "society written into the body" (1990:63). This happens through:

[s]ystems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations, that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.

(Bourdieu, 1990:72),

In other words, habitus consists of dynamic, but long-lasting dispositions and schemes that manifest and influence many things, which are acquired gradually and form a structured and structuring set of principles that order experience and perception. Moreover, societal and historical values are incorporated into the biological individual through lived, embodied, social experience. Wetherell's discussion of habitus argues that "past practice becomes embodied in social actors so they acquire a kind of *sediment* of dispositions, preferences, tastes, natural attitudes, skills and standpoints" (2012:105-106 [my emphasis]). These dispositions "guide future conduct" and predispose interpretations, hardening over time (ibid.). While some aspects of habitus are consciously adopted, such as adapting an accent, others are less quantifiable predispositions or "unthought" categories (Bourdieu 2010 [1984]:70-72). Habits are accrued and absorbed through social education, networks of class and cultural capital, one's likes, dislikes and acquired tastes, and learned, unthought techniques of the body, not unlike learned physical activities such as swimming, which become automatic (Lash, 1994:154).

My conversations with Jennifer Reeves, curator of photobooks at the National Art Library, demonstrated embodied habitus. Reeves possesses such familiarity with books and materials from her learned professional experience that she can predict how books will behave when handled from watching video clips (MS2: Reeves). Photobook sales websites commonly feature product videos of disembodied hands turning pages (MS1i:85). Reeves' ability to make astute observations about whether photobooks will lie flat or mark easily is operationally important for the longevity of a public handling collection and enables her to mitigate risks of buying online. At the same time, the knowledge that NAL books need to withstand handling has likely encouraged Reeves to develop this embodied skill (whether consciously or unconsciously). There is a symbiosis between Reeves' ability to anticipate what will work successfully in the collection, and her lived experience working with idiosyncratic institutional values and activities of this library. Ultimately, Bourdieu writes "what is 'learned by body' is not something that one has, [...] but something that one is" (1990:73). We develop physical behaviours in line with social experiences that later appear automatic and essential through habitual internalisation.

An awareness of one's own habitus is important to understanding one's position and privileges, for example, the reader might not appreciate a photobook's sequencing without familiarity with intended 'front to back' modes of looking. The photobook is a product associated with cultural capital so habitus becomes integral to a discussion of perception and meaning-making in its encounter, as well as how and with what demographic such encounters occur. Deliberate and unconscious performances of taste such as photobook handling demonstrate a hermeneutic process of forming judgement and understanding experience in relation to one's social self and the material world. Habitus also enriches discussions of non-human or more-than-human things, in which an object's materiality and function expresses its dispositions, to be discussed on p.213).



Figure 5 Researcher (R) and her boyfriend have many tastes and shared experiences in common yet still display different responses to the same photobook, pantomimed here for illustrative purposes.

2.3 The synaesthetic subject

As the previous section has shown, perception is mediated through the body, and the body is socialised through experience, meaning perception is an integrated exercise of the social and physical self. The following paragraphs focus on how perception engages multi-sensory, mnemonic and emotional faculties, combined holistically in the sensing body.

Books can be fetishized for their tactility and sensory experience, especially the popular trope of ‘book smell’ (Fig.6) . Smell in general has particular power to evoke “context-dependent”, “episodic memories” of “emotionally meaningful social events” (Gerald *et al.*, 2010:281). It has bodily impact beyond the nose: in *Swann’s Way*, Marcel Proust’s semi-autobiographical protagonist recalled how the smell of a madeleine (a small cake) made “a shudder run through my whole body” transporting him to his grandmother’s kitchen (1922/1960:58). This specific sense memory signifies beyond personal experience: the smell would be familiar to many of Proust’s original Francophone audience and provides an entry point for the imaginative reconstruction of a whole town and way of life.

Sound of Turning Pages of Newspaper - YouTube



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHlvx8XTQgc> ▼

27 Jul 2010 - Uploaded by Leviticus45

This is an audio of me going through the Sunday newspaper—it's gargantuan—the newspaper, that is ...

ASMR Book Page Turning Sound - 40 minute relaxing white noise ...



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnjeLLoYaFs>

1 Jan 2017 - Uploaded by WhiteSounds

40 minute gentle book page turning sound. Good for concentration while working, studying, writing, trying to ...

Page Turn Sounds | Most recent - Soundsnap.com

https://www.soundsnap.com/tags/page_turn ▼

The most popular site for professional sound effects in the world.: page turn sounds.



Figure 6 A Google search returns 81,800,000 results for ‘sound of pages turning’; popular among people identifying with ‘Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response’, a physical sensation induced by certain noises. Heavy books and paperback page-turning sounds appear more often than lighter weight papers such as newsprint. Right: A ‘book smell’ candle

Strlič and Bembibre (2017) have studied the smells of old books, released by volatile and semi-volatile organic compounds as they degrade over time, classifying smells into Historic Book Odour Wheel to aid conservators. Commonly-identified book smells were chocolate, coffee and vanilla, which is chemically similar to lignin, found in wood pulp. Smell has been noted to influence whether somebody purchases a book (Armitstead, 2017). It therefore appears as a result of intra-action between environment, chemistry and time, which can have real-world economic effect upon photobook commerce.

More than other kinds of physical and digital photographic media, the contemporary photobook is designed for touch and tactility. As artist and writer Duncan Wooldridge put it, “I want [a photobook] to affect the way the fingers feel when it touches, as much as the eyes are affected”, going on to include smell as effecting nostalgia (MS2: Wooldridge). Touch, smell and sound have

emotive connotations, internalised through prior experience, such as a feel of luxury or cheapness. Many photobooks combine multiple paper stocks for textural variety, which create different noises and sensations of importance or triviality: imagine the high-pitched crinkling of a flimsy free newspaper, compared to the thicker sound of opening a Sunday broadsheet. In my own encounters, I documented sensations of preciousness handling photobooks of delicate, thin paper (PS2a). Multi-sensory information is exchanged before physical interaction, as revealed by Reeves' haptic appraisal of photobooks from digital videos.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception emphasises close attention to sensory perceptual impressions as they form, before they are eclipsed by a clearer view. This perceptual process is simultaneous and involuntary, as "[s]ensory experience is unstable and alien to natural perception, which we achieve with our whole body at once, and which opens a world of interacting senses" (Merleau-Ponty, 1992:225, cited in Pallasmaa 2005:40). This summarises the photobook encounter, in which visual, linguistic and haptic perception are so closely interwoven it is difficult to extract in what order its characteristics register with sensuous and intellectual faculties. According to Juhani Pallasmaa, this is typical of visual experience, in which there is an "unconscious tactile ingredient in vision": "[t]he eyes want to collaborate with other senses [...] all the senses, including vision, can be regarded as extensions of the sense of touch" (Pallasmaa, 2005:26,42).

Interdisciplinary scholarship has explored the relationship between visual media and the sensory body. Film theorist Laura Marks described cinema as a kind of "haptic visuality" that one touches with the eyes (Marks, 2000:xi; Pallasmaa, 2005:26). Media historian Karin Littau identified engagements with books as "a reaction between two bodies" rather than a comprehension occurring in our heads; she continues that film, as a successor to the novel, "overpowers the senses, and thus stimulates the body before it can stimulate the mind" (Littau, 2006:2,8). Nevertheless, the unpredictable and unquantifiable sensing body has not always had an easy coherence with the constructionist social science arguments hitherto expressed. As Massumi summarises,

earlier phenomenological investigations into the sensing body were largely left behind because they are difficult to reconcile with the new understandings of the structuring capacities of culture [...] it was all about a subject without subjectivism: a subject "constructed" by external mechanisms.

(2002:2)

The socialised, subjectivised being can be returned to its sensations through "affect"; an *intensity* of unqualified feeling prompted by a stimulus, that can be qualified as emotion. Massumi explains, "[i]ntensity is embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the

skin – at the surface of the body, at its interface with things” (ibid., 25). Our bodies, socialised, gendered, othered, are sites of registering affect and intensity, which precede reason and emotion. Wetherell (2012) disagrees, arguing affect cannot precede emotion and discourse because it emerges in situated, recursive patterns. In either case, by the time we attempt to study affective responses they melt, chimeric, into one’s individual habitus of interpretation, language and expression.

The instantaneity of affective, multi-sensory reactions manifested in vivid responses to photobooks in the focus groups. Overall, most participants looking at *Deep Springs* (Contis, 2017) commented on the pleasurable feel of its pages, cover, and smell, calling it a “nice book” because of its tactile print and paper quality. Frost has described the “haptic legibility or manual readability” in terms of “touch, force and dwell”, whether it be forceful visual affect, a sensation of book surfaces that adhere to the skin, or complex subtlety that inspires the reader to linger over it (cf. Shaw, 2016:44). This expresses the temporal nature of exchanging sensory data in reading acts.

Turning their attention to *Vote No. 1* (Duffy, 2015)²², one participant exclaimed, “ugh, I don’t want to smell this one”. The spiral-bound book compiles images of political candidates’ campaign posters, closely cropped to highlight disfiguring additions where portraits have been distorted by screws or cable ties. The book is printed on shiny, laminated paper, like a flyer or tabloid, emulating the ephemeral media it depicts. It suggests greasy politicians and slippery politics. When I asked them to explain their exclamation, the participant attributed it to the images’ “political aesthetic”. Her reaction was an intangible mix of visual perception, texture, sense memory, her political convictions, media coverage, and the contrast with the previous subject matter, which all influenced the encounter and response. Pallasmaa has suggested “touch is the sensory mode that integrates our experience of the world with that of ourselves”: touch acts to verify things are as they appear and bridge between intellectual expectation (formed through prior experience) and present sensation (2005:16). In this example, the affect of the encounter that emerged from the tangle of the participant’s sensory response and her subjectivised self is also consistent with the aims of the book.

²² Note for transparency: Mark Duffy is my partner. He made and published *Vote No. 1* before we met. I included the book in early focus groups using a casual selection of books I already owned for an informal research session. The sessions aimed at piloting a format for observing responses to photobooks, earlier when the project had different aims. I have included this example nevertheless for its productive contribution to discussions of the multi-sensory affect of photobooks; it furthers the academic argument of this thesis and I (/we/Duffy) do not stand to benefit financially from inclusion.

Book designer Sonya Dayakova has described how in “the first moment of contact [holding a photobook] you get an impression; it’s a golden opportunity to say something about the subject matter” (PhotoBook Review, 2018:5). *Vote No.1* makes productive use of this instantaneous connection between physical form and content, illustrated by the participant’s rapid response. Sedgwick has described the experience of texture in particular as an affective phenomenon that is more complex and discursive than a mere sense of touch:

I haven’t perceived a texture until I’ve instantaneously hypothesized whether the object I’m perceiving was sedimented, extruded, laminated, granulated, polished, distressed ... to perceive texture is to know or to hypothesise whether a thing will be easy or hard, safe or dangerous to grasp, to stack or to fold, to shred, to climb on, to stretch, to slide [...]. Texture makes a nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity – to touch is already to reach out, fondle, heft, tap, enfold and always to understand that other people or natural forces have done this already before in the making of the textured object.

(Sedgwick, 2003:16 c.f. Wetherell 2013:358)

Before one has physically touched, texture is known through bodily perceptions, organized by and recursive to prior experience, “yet that organization is inarticulate, felt and intuited rather than systematized, hovering ‘below the level of shape or structure’” (Sedgwick, 2003:16 c.f. Wetherell 2013:359). Scholar of metaphor George Lakoff has said “the common conventionalised aspects of our conceptual systems tend to be structured by what our bodies have in common” (cf. Shaw, 2016:33). This may explain how *Vote No. 1*’s creator could anticipate and engineer consistent tactile responses in participants across the three focus groups. Wooldridge explained it may be more work to make choices beyond standard publishing convention, “but a lot of the ‘work’ is in the detail” (MS2). Here I take ‘work’ to mean the labour of artistic creativity, accommodating more complex production choices, and the work of the photobook in eliciting a strongly affecting response.

The “haptic” becomes a sticky prospect with too much emphasis on one sensory faculty. Where the participant appeared to “smell” the book with her eyes in the previous example, Pallasmaa describes a similar phenomenon between vision and touch: “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). Here he draws upon 18th-century philosopher George Berkeley, who assumed “visual apprehension of materiality, distance and spatial depth would not be possible at all without the cooperation of the haptic memory” (ibid.).

This is how I interpret 'haptic memory':

When I did a workshop making books, I learned how to use an embossing machine. It's a big lump of metal with levers and a heated, weighted doodah that swings forward to impress foil onto your book, card, whatever, in the shape of whatever type you've set in it. There's a slight electrical hum, you have to hold the foil by hand and I was a bit apprehensive about burning myself, but mostly I remember the counterweighted sensation of pull lever, type swings forward, hits foil surface then *slhhhuuffpph* as the mechanism pulls back, peels away from the newly embossed design (MS1i:113). In Vinny and Kasia's book studio in Dublin, prompted by an embossed book, I remembered this sound and now every time I see embossing I have a microsecond of reliving this body-sound sensation that I myself know because one day I personally embossed a notebook with my mum's gilded name. Haptic memory is knowing something felt, even if you only felt it once, even if you've never felt it; it's a sensation that seems so evocative you can recognise it in your mind's eye. I see a thing embossed, I know it by sight, by technique and by body.

The unconscious dependence of the body's perceptual register upon multi-sensory experience was demonstrated when a focus group participant compared a book to a sensation of deafness. The muted tones and lack of clear context in *Deep Springs* left her able to see but not understand what was going on. In this encounter the participant enacted "embodied meaning-making" in identifying a negative opinion through her bodily response of discomfort in the encounter (Wetherell 2012:5). Merleau-Ponty's body-led approach to experiential understanding explains perception is "not a sum of visual, tactile and audible givens: I perceive in a total way with my whole being: I grasp a unique structure of the thing, a unique way of being, which speaks to all my senses at once" (1964:48, cf Pallasmaa 2005:21). For the participant, even though she hadn't experienced deafness, she could imagine the sensation as a kind of haptic memory. The embodied, synesthetic extent of her encounter was demonstrated through her choice of the auditory metaphor to describe visual/tactile experience.

This response can be analysed in relation to common conceptualisations of photographic images as communicative artefacts, an idea seen already in this chapter. Interviewees discussed photobooks that "speak" about issues. Edwards (2005) has written of the "orality" of photographs that "speak" from other times. This communicative capacity is agency, amplified by the indexicality of a material object that was made in a present reality many years past and still holds the same deferred moment aloud for the present-day viewer (Barthes, 1981; Edwards,

2005; Campt, 2017). Photographs and photobooks therefore capture our sensory imaginations in modes beyond the immediate reception of perceptual data.

Another onomatopoeic encounter:

One Sunday morning, sat on my sofa in my dressing gown with a cup of lapsang souchong tea (smoky smell), I was unwrapping a book I had kept new in its brown paper through two house moves without opening. It was a gift I hadn't ever found a moment to devote proper time to. I remembered the jewel-like, glittering gold on pearlescent white embroidered cloth cover, scratchy to touch, and feared once opened I would dirty it. This encounter was all tactility. "As I turn through the pages, the spot varnish makes a *sschloup* sound as it unpeels itself from its neighbour [...] the sound feels like the way my finger drags more slowly across the shiny photographs than the satin white bordering page" (MS1ii:52; Sophie Calle, 2017). Spot varnish is a targeted gloss used here to emulate the materiality of the family photographs reproduced. The sticky noise corresponded so completely to the texture, I knew its feel before I touched it from the look and the sound.

This text conveys an intermingling of sensory perception that cannot be conveniently separated according to the five senses of sight, sound, smell, touch, taste. In the early 20th century Rudolf Steiner (1920) devised a scheme of twelve senses, including senses of ego, thought, warmth, balance, movement, and a sense of "life" (health or energy). Sound is differentiated between speech and hearing and classed with sight and taste as senses with greater cognitive connotations, whilst smell and touch were "lower", less conscious sensory perceptions (ibid.). Sarah Pink (2015) has criticised perceived sensory hierarchies, citing Tim Ingold's view that "vision, hearing and the rest... are not filters in the conversion of external physical stimuli into internal mental representations" and "cannot be differentiated according to the kinds of information they transmit for the simple reason that they are not transmitters" (Pink 2015; Ingold 2011:325). Rather, the synergetic sensory register is "engaged in the same action, and attending to the same world" (Ingold 2011: 323). This emergent, holistic account of sensory perception is aligned with Gestalt psychology, which argues we perceive structures as a whole. Merleau-Ponty likewise advocated the Gestalt approach to sensory perception as a spontaneous and impermanent organization of the sensory field (Toadvine, 2006).

Despite these arguments against separate sensory faculties, it is necessary to single out senses when one or more are excluded from experience. For example, viewing a photobook in a vitrine in an exhibition, bars all senses except sight; even touch must be imagined. At the Centre for

Book Arts, Reynolds laments that sometimes vitrine display is inevitable, making props like zine reproductions can help exhibition visitors make a tactile connection: “at least they’re able to look at the book in a physical form and then hold this thing and make this mental leap between the material aspect of it” (MS2: Reynolds)²³.

Thinking about “the way you can mediate between actual objects and this kind of removed experience” gains importance in relation to neurodiversity and (dis)abilities that equip people with different modes of sensory engagement with the world (ibid.). Reynolds recounted an exhibit involving Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* (1964) at the Cooper Hewitt Museum: for this artwork, audio description would not necessarily help a visually impaired person’s perception, because the description would match real-life Brillo packaging, or they may not have a conception of ‘red’ or ‘blue’ (MS2). The museum made a tactile 3D model with different textures to reproduce colours on the box, alongside narrated description. It is curious to imagine how to assign colours to textures: for example, deciding “smooth is red and blue is fuzzy” might consider the textures of things that colour. This demonstrates the difficulty in transposing or translating²⁴ perception between sensory registers: directly substituting one sense for another seems insufficient without additional sensory or linguistic descriptors.



Figure 7. Andy Warhol, Brillo Box (Soap Pads), 1964. Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on wood. © Museum of Modern Art

The photobook’s status as artefact of primarily visual or synaesthetic experience relates to the ongoing discussion of photobook ontology. Marshall McLuhan has suggested different senses dominate the ways we experience different media: when a technology demands a specific sense, such as listening to music through headphones, this “sense and faculty becomes a closed system” (1994:194). Photobooks seem to demand looking first; many would consider the photobook a visual form of media. Wooldridge remarked that for photographers, the image is primary, while printing, design etc. are auxiliary concerns that *serve* the image. For artists, the paper, printing, binding, presentation are as important as the image, conceptually framing the overall work (MS2: Wooldridge). Valuing a holistic object-specific experience over a purely visual one therefore has ontological bearing on how the maker identifies their self and practice as photographer or artist,

²³ More on the epistemological work of vitrines in Chapter 5.

²⁴ Two words associated with auditory experience: transposing music, translating language

image-maker or maker of objects and ideas. Often it's a combination of these roles, which is where much confusion about the photobook's object status arises. The next chapter continues this discussion of object-ness and making.

2.3.1 The affective absence

Despite the rich variety of multi-sensory data and affective responses elicited in photobook encounters documented in this research, this aspect is often overlooked in the language of photobook critique and appreciation (MS1i:31-33; MS1ii:4, 55, 96). Sarah Allen is Assistant Curator of International Art at Tate and curates Tate Modern's regular photobook displays. Allen regretted "there isn't often a huge amount of room" for details about a photobook's affective or sensory qualities on gallery object labels, reasoning that although "more attention should probably be given to talking about the 'bookishness' for want of a better word", she would also want "to leave a viewer's impression as open as it can be and not [try] to ascribe anything to the artwork" (MS2: Allen) and avoid promoting singular interpretation.

While space may be limited in gallery texts, the choice of what information is included demonstrates a political hierarchy of knowledge that values the artwork's historical or social context, subject matter, or artist biography over its embodied experience. This hierarchy conforms to epistemological conventions established through modernist traditions of positivist art historiography (Panofsky, 1939; Ventrella, 2017:203), as well as occularcentric regimes of 19th- and 20th-century museums, which have conditioned us to "look but don't touch" (Howes, 2005; Classen, 2007).

This lack of affective, sensory description is engaged in intersectional linguistic politics (Ahmed, 2004). Language that expresses subjective or embodied experience has traditionally been feminised through association with emotion (Jagger, 1994; Anderson, 1995; Butler, 2011), whereas objective, passive language is associated with patriarchal authority and a reduced sense of 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, most notably Judith Butler (2006; 2011).

Sensory language in cultural appreciation is additionally racialised through association with sensuous practices of non-Western cultures (Gell, 1998; Gosden and Knowles, 2001) foregrounding modes of perception that are other to the visual hegemony typical to Western culture since the Renaissance (Howes and Classen, 2006). Occularcentrism and objectivism are

typical of an imperialist, modernist, positivist era, so returning to a hitherto subjugated multi-sensory subjectivity and alternative mode of description aligns with post-colonialist critique (Fanon, 1986; Césaire, 2000). In studies of sense and affect in non-Western cultures (Edwards *et al.*, 2006), no separate sense has dominance: pluralised, individualised and uncategorised interpretations are inevitable, meaning a multi-sensory sensibility reflects the openness and multiplicity of post-colonial ethics.

In photobook displays, the 30-60 words per label could be used to “frame” an interpretation in which sensory description is not extraneous, but central to a book’s experience and understanding (Whitehead, 2012). Overall, the concern that subjective interpretation reduces universality and accessibility relies upon assumptions about what information a visitor would want to learn about an artwork. Perhaps telling a reader what they could ‘feel’ could elicit an adverse response, or may prove exclusionary if they do not feel anything.²⁵ Nevertheless, it would somewhat deconstruct or redistribute expectations of what is valuable or interesting in a photobook encounter. Chapter 5 will revisit this theme of how photobooks are constructed and valued through epistemic practices. The next section will continue the discussion of language and interpretation in the photobook encounter through an examination of semiotics and meaning-making.

2.4 The apprehending mind

This chapter has established the photobook encounter affects far more than visual response: it is a manually interactive, multi-sensory, subjective phenomenon with an individual, feeling, social body. How we make meaning from these bodily perceptions is located somewhere in the entanglement of affect and discourse as described by Wetherell (2013). Shaw has summarised it thus:

A book’s material production may encourage you to consider it as a physical object, [...] 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; this is especially true when the images that bind together to form a closure aren’t directly across the gutter from one another in an opening [but spread across several pages]

(2016:102)

²⁵ Oppositional reading can be a political act (Hall 1997). See pp.92-93.

The individual reader forms a “closure”, a material-semiotic relation between the physical photobook-object in their hands and the many visual and verbal signs it contains. The extent to which and the mode in which the perceiver/reader interprets this complex of information is shaped by his or her socialised self, as a hermeneutic “flow” of embodied activity that is “constrained by past practice and the immediate situation and context” (Wetherell, 2013:360). The following section continues to explore how photobook encounters are contextualised through broader sociological considerations such as personal and collective modes of making meaning from visual and textural signs.

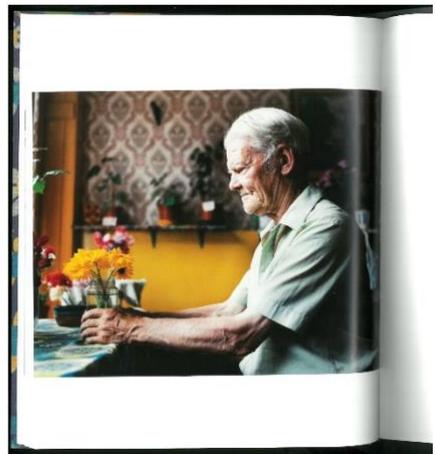
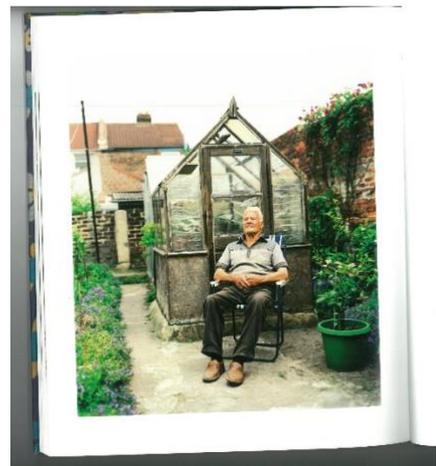
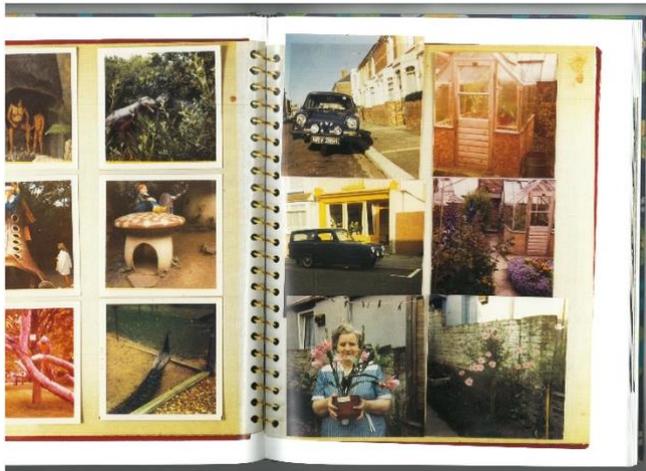
2.4.1 Reading as a social act

The “closure” Shaw described between physical object and internally-perceived text depends on a socially and culturally oriented relation between text and viewer. In one focus group, participants displayed diverse readings of *For Every Minute You Are Angry, You Lose Sixty Seconds of Happiness* by Julian Germain (2005). One participant related the “groovy” cloth cover with pop culture references from her white Western experience such as the swinging sixties and her grandmother’s kitchen décor, leading her to describe the book’s content as melancholy and nostalgic (PS2a). The design affected an aesthetic response entangled with social discourse. The participant and I had similar responses to the material culture signified by the book’s imagery and construction: it made me think of floral patterns on fabrics I purchased from charity shops. This similarity of response is unsurprising considering the participant was of a similar age to me, also a white, British female, with similar interests in vintage clothing.

The fabric and colour tones of the book were signifiers; their signified meaning was an era of British culture. This combined sign was only relevant for myself and one participant. By contrast, a Chinese student in a focus group commented the book was about a “gardener who is always happy, because of the happy flowers”, showing differently nuanced interpretations according to cultural familiarity. As such, signs have no absolute signification outside of a context, rather they gain “value” through relations with other signs in a system (Saussure, 1983:80). This system could be a shared culture, where a sign’s comprehension depends upon a shared cultural literacy.



Figure 8 The patterned cloth cover of *For Every Minute...* against some charity shop purchases; other reference points evoked by the cover that predisposed my engagement with the book before opening it. Below: Assorted page spreads.



The second participant identified the photobook's subject as 'a gardener'; while the short text explains the artist befriended the gentleman through his plants, the book only contains a few photographs of a greenhouse amidst a rich palette of colourful, simple interiors and warmly contemplative portraits (PS2a). The focus group participant had not read the text. Lakoff and Johnson's study of metaphor (2003) proposes human thought seeks consistent and repeating structures, which explains why multiple focus group participants articulated their encounters as "looking for a story" or recurring motifs. The images of flowers and a greenhouse are consistent with the book's elderly subject being of an age group who stereotypically enjoys gardening, showing the participant formed a closure between two sets of images to identify a narrative about a 'gardener'.

This analysis of response is expanded by Stuart Hall's reception theory (1997), which states a text's meaning is determined neither by sender, mode of sending nor the person receiving it, but the co-operation of all three. Where McLuhan has said "the medium is the message", because content is transformed by the technologies that mediate it (1994), Hall's view locates the meaning of a text between its producer, or 'encoder' and its reader, the 'decoder'. This develops on Dewey's theory that aesthetic experience is actualised through the beholder, by engaging more profoundly with how messages are socially coded and decoded. The reader's ability to decode a text may depend upon their proximity to the encoder's imagined audience. For example, *For Every Minute...* transmits meaning coded in the aesthetics and material culture of British 20th-century domestic life, which was successfully decoded by the participant familiar with these signs, but differently received by a person with a different cultural background (PS2a). Hall explains a "lack of fit" can occur between encoding and decoding the message. A 'correct' decoding would depend upon the recipient interpreting the same message as the sender intended, which is more likely if the source and recipient share similar habitus. The Chinese participant formed an oppositional interpretation that some may regard as inaccurate. However, instead of having a 'correct' or 'incorrect' decoding of a text, Mieke Bal has related each subjective interpretation of a text as adding a new "exposure" of meaning onto a narrative "conversation" (1996:7). There is no singular narrative interpretation, even for a reader revisiting the same photobook twice, making these acts of interpretation plural and intra-active.

In the focus groups, books with more sophisticated concepts evoked more ambiguous responses. *Vote No. 1* had a simple punchline achieved through direct and repetitive images and design, and consequently the meaning was understood quickly by all participants, demonstrating an effective encoding/decoding communication strategy. This does not mean they liked the book, showing comprehension does not equate with preference. That other books achieved more varied

interpretations is no discredit: it is not a requisite of 'art' to communicate unambiguously; and varied discussion occurred where there was not comprehension of the photobook's concept.

The audience imagined by the creator during a photobook's development (or indeed, 'consumer' or 'customer') would have familiarity with the photobook genre and economic capital to purchase it. In reality, anyone could be a photobook consumer, given the portability of photobooks and their varied sites of engagement (see Chapter 4). People who access the dominant decoding may not realise they are privileged with a correct reception of meaning that others may miss. I may not have identified the quality of Britishness in the nostalgic tone of *For Every Minute...* if it had not been for the Chinese participant's alternative reading. When artworks are created according to dominant or hegemonic coding, it can become exclusionary to Othered audiences, either because they have different means of decoding, or they consciously challenge or oppose a code they do not feel represents them.

This 'negotiated' or 'oppositional' stance was evident in one reaction to the book *HE: Visual Information About A Human Being* (Vroom, 1969), in a focus group of PhD cultural researchers who knew each other socially (PS2c). The book begins with a full portrait and profile of a man. Each progressive page zooms closer into body parts and facial features. One female participant interpreted the emphasis on the male form as an act of misogyny: she refused alternative interpretation and could not consider other elements without this subjective lens. Here the participant's individual habitus appeared to overpower more open-ended critique that may have figured in group's collective habitus. Her oppositional stance performed her identity as a feminist, and in articulating her response of disapproval she demonstrated cultural capital through her familiarity with academic feminist literature, formed through higher education. The more elaborate the photobook becomes as a communicative technology, interpretations can become more open, but complex strategies of encoding can also inhibit a book's accessibility. The next section will focus on the semantic decoding of these strategies.

2.4.2 Reading images

Beyond individual signs such as patterned bookcloth, photobooks comprise multi-layered strategies of visual communication that shape how meaning is perceived in the encounter (Lyons, 1985:79). Several artists, bookmakers and curators I interviewed advocated the importance of visual literacy. When I spoke to curator Daria Tuminas (MS2), she was preparing a workshop on 'reading photobooks', looking at connections between images to verbalise how and why they construct messages through photography and "whether they are reliable messages, can everyone

make the same connection, do they need to?”. This reflects an element of Hall’s reception theory, in considering that audiences are diverse and interpret texts differently (Hall, 1997).

Tuminas’ workshop would use examples of photobooks to demonstrate strategies in practice and allow students to learn visually, instead of translating visual experience into verbal explanation. Vinny Gregan and Kasia Kaminska from Read that Image (RTI), a photobook design collective that runs workshops in bookmaking, also described using photobook examples to teach a “vocabulary” of photobook-making (MS2: RTI). Kaminska shared hers and Gregan’s experience that “photographers don’t realise how difficult it is to read images ... we trained for four years around reading images, semiotics, etc ... so many people are great image-makers but find it difficult to get their ideas across through photography because they don’t have that [‘semiotic’] background”. Reading images “slows you down, not only taking images at basic representational value”. Kaminska considers “attention spans are so much shorter” so “we’re not reading images, we’re more like glancing ... and teaching that and learning that is becoming more difficult”, implying people give less attention and receive less information in contemporary image consumption.

Semiotics is a study of what signs mean in relation to each other (Barthes, 1972; Saussure, 1983). Even basic signs can be variously interpreted. While photobooks have been called a “visual Esperanto” (Neumüller and Tuminas, 2019:5), Kaminska believes, “photography isn’t really a ‘universal language’. If you say the word ‘car’ everybody will have a different visual reference, but when you look at a photo of a car, that is the [only] car... so photography is quite rigid ... but it’s how you build meaning through sequence, through making careful selections, the way one image comes after the other to direct the viewer”. These selections appear as non-verbal, visual articulations of meaning, but they also depend on accessing signs coded with cultural and historic meaning, so photobooks made by artists around the world, speaking many languages, may differently interpret the visual language constructed, as discovered speaking to international bookmakers at Unseen 2019 (MS1ii:55-57).

The photobook *This Equals That* by Jason Fulford and Tamara Shopsin (2014) addresses a perceived deficit in visual literacy through carefully-constructed juxtapositions designed to teach children associative thinking. Fulford is a well-known artist, designer and editor, involved in several award-winning photobooks.²⁶ The pages progress through pairings of pattern, colour and

²⁶ Gregory Halpern, *ZZYXX* (2016), comes to mind. Published by MACK, won the Aperture Photobook Prize in 2016. *ZZYXX* is an excellent example of the ‘associative thinking’ Fulford is known for. Fulford and Halpern collaborate repeatedly, and Fulford and Aperture appear to be friends too. Connections, readers, everywhere.

shape, then numbers, signs, actions, potentials, facilitating students to “gain a deeper understanding of pictorial vocabulary, and confidence in approaching images from a critical perspective” (Aperture, 2021). It’s a self-conscious didactic tool to encourage careful looking. It may have been aimed at children, but I’ve heard many big kids (/adult professionals) praising Fulford and Shopsin’s editing mastery (MS1i:43; MS1ii:12-16). What struck me most when reading the accompanying downloadable learning guide was how precisely it corresponded with my own associations, noted as I looked at the book, but prior to reading the document (MS1ii:103-107). In the following account, I have highlighted the consistent readings:

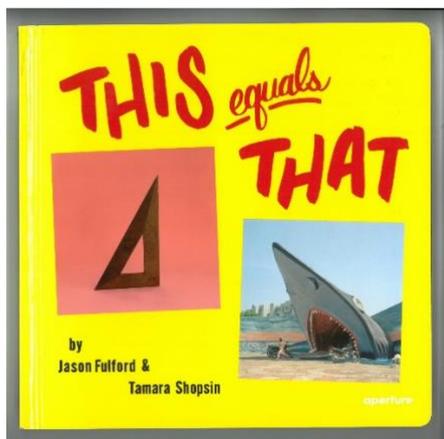


Figure 9 Cover and page spreads from 'This Equals That', including all images pp.96-100

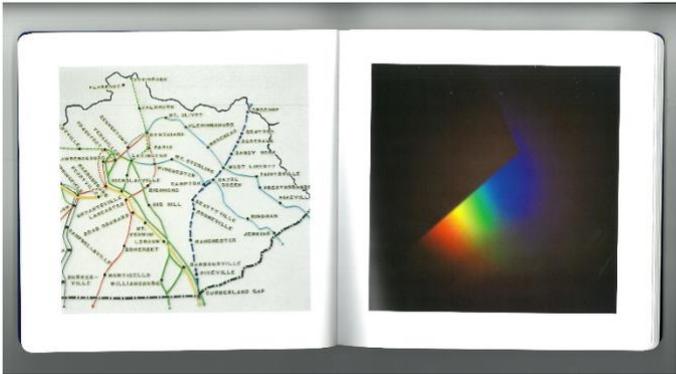


Aperture description: “Pairing of the same oversized fun-house shark’s head and a ubiquitous string of red, white, and blue triangular pennants creates an obvious association through shape and colour, but disassociation through scale”

BC: shark–bunting

red white blue colour and shape, same but different

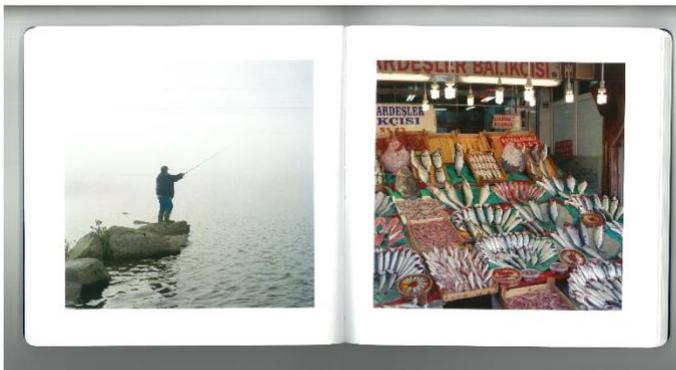
(I called it bunting, the ‘ubiquity’ of red-white-and-blue seems distinctly American despite being the same colours as the Union Flag, these differences are minor; cultural)



“a mysterious image of prismatic light introduces **abstraction** into the conversation”

transit map 2–spectrum rainbow

= **just colour**



“an image of a fisherman followed by that of a fish market departs from pure visual association to suggest **cause and effect**”

fisherman-fish market

process → **product**. Simple

enough. But also he is alone, they are crowded. The fish highlight his aloneness and their futility

The proximity of the intention of these pairings to my own response shows clear semantic associations between image pairings can be consistently made. Although my professional experience has trained my visual literacy and attentiveness to images, it’s not coincidental that the makers of this photobook have succeeded in producing stimulating but clear connections.

Fulford has said of his work,

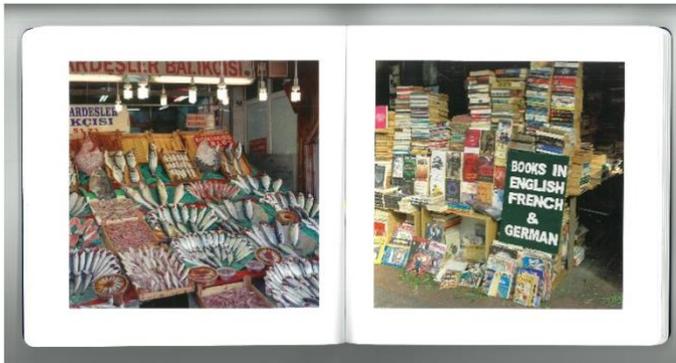
A word is precise, but its meaning can change based on the words around it: think tank; tank top. When a person looks at a photograph you’ve taken, they will always think of themselves, their own life experience. They will relate your photograph to their memories. [...] It’s different for every viewer. My puzzles don’t have definitive solutions. I guess they function more like invitations.

(Schuman, 2018)

Fulford’s reflection on his image-making practice engages directly with the notions of sociality and intra-activity discussed earlier in this chapter. Looking at photographs is not a passive reception of information, but a transaction between text and viewer, multiplied with semantic and subjective possibility when images are placed beside each other. Shaw explains Fulford’s work relies on “non-sequiturs, which translates ‘it does not follow’, and yet images do follow, in sequence, and we make relationships, absurd as they may be” (Shaw, 2016:140). He calls this process “image binding”, which “compels the reader to give the two images a single overriding identity and recognise them as whole” (ibid., 138). The word “bind” echoes the codex form,

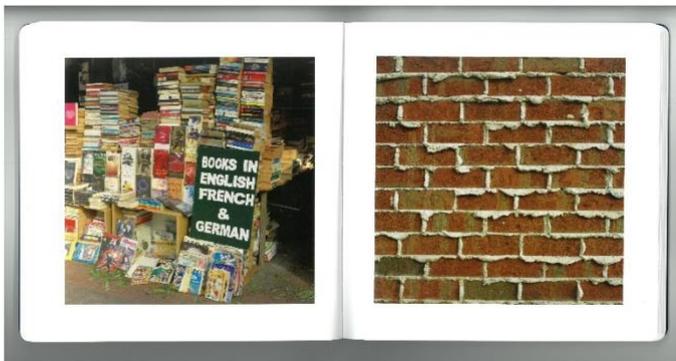
which metaphorically and physically binds together the semantic sum of images and other material elements.

When I tried to articulate how I 'bound' images together, my descriptions became increasingly convoluted:



fish market-bookstall

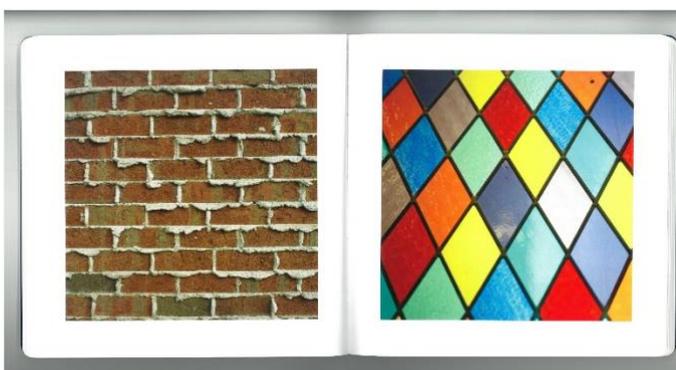
from one leaning crowd to another but the text grabs my eye first out. I think, do fish speak English, French and German?



Books-bricks

writing this I feel the rhyming consonants of the two words more than a consonance between the images, one is towering chaos, one is an orderly tower (or wall) but for those annoying outplurges of mortar, where is the

care in that, not so much as the books, which though chaotic, express care, care of placement, that is the common affect here. There, I have reasoned it out.



bricks-stained glass

the perspective on the wall, dead head on, but the rhomboid harlequin glass is on a slant.

Translucent, fragile, smooth, vivid, these are textures of the window not the wall (pink floyd pops into mind, Dark Side rainbow album art;

repetition, assemblage, bricolage)



stained glass-vase of flowers
 no initially I don't feel these go.
 I can contrive similarities, there is a particularly vibrant yellow that jumps across one page to the next (this is the first time I've been recalled to the nature of pages) but the blue has vanished is it glass window to glass

vase? The vase nearly disappears behind the vibrancy of – ah I believe name of yellow stem is Ranunculus

Shaw explains, “[t]his type of image play is all but impossible to explain verbally, and besides, you don’t want to justify it any more than you want to explain a joke”. This evokes Barthes’ assessment that affect in single photographs derives from “the co-presence of two [or more] discontinuous elements, heterogeneous in that they do not belong to the same world” (1981:23). For Barthes, while the subject matter, or ‘studium’, of a visual narrative may be culturally coded, the ‘punctum’, the piercing point of affect in a photograph, is not comprehended in any rational or deconstructable fashion (Barthes, 1981:53). This may explain how my responses to simple image pairings in *This Equals That* became rambling interior monologue. When materially conjoined in the photobook, placed in material-discursive intra-action with the viewer, the disjuncture of an octopus and a tree was overridden by formal similarity, echoing John Law’s argument that the most interesting research can be located in an examination of “things that don’t fit in, but also do” (Law and Mol, 2002:124).

In addition to insights about reading images, my notation exercise revealed the dynamic activity of looking: “what my eyes were doing and what my brain was thinking, operating mostly in collaboration but not totally synchronised, sometimes the looking did more than the meaning and vice versa”. I continued in my reflection:

I say “what my eyes were doing” because they were not simply optical nerves, receptors of colour, form and pattern, but they were darting around, across, being directed by the shapes before them.

(MS1ii:108)

As an experienced looker-reader of photobooks, this exercise renewed my appetite for slow looking and helped me to tune into my perception and interpretation operating in tandem. It alerted me to the intertextuality of my reading (e.g. comparisons to album art) and the materiality of my reading experience, in recorded instances such as, “oh this sorrowful snail, now he is

gazing wistfully across the gutter, up at the glorious tree, the sun-dappledly wondrous world of nature outside”.



The materiality of *This Equals That* is pleasingly simple. Its thick board front and back covers have the sturdy feel of an alphabet book, and the juxtapositions of images do teach us to read, in a fashion. The book is as friendly as *Noddy and Big Ears*, primary colours like a primary school classroom, cheery fonts and hardwearing materials. It affects a feeling of comfort I can associate with learning to read: I feel the sensation of a much smaller, clammier hand tracing a sticky finger along the page while cuddled with a bedtime story. The reassuring material construction enhances its effectiveness as a learning tool. While this photobook has been designed to stimulate visual reading in photobook encounters, many other contemporary photobooks are created and sequenced with the same deliberateness, making the example a useful starting point for illustrating visual comprehension in the photobook encounter.

Scholarship of children’s wordless picturebooks can inform how we make meanings from photobooks.²⁷ In my exercise with *This Equals That*, I paid conscious attention to my interpretation of pictorial stimuli. This process often appears automatic, as Nichols states,

²⁷ An autobiographical note: I am exceedingly fond of children’s picturebooks. My mother was a reception teacher and my early life was filled with illustrated stories. Having outgrown my infant friends Alfie, Annie Rose and the Avocado Baby, my earliest career aspiration was to *write and illustrate* storybooks. It had to be both. It never occurred to me grownups could indulge in the tandem power of image and text, so as I grew older, picturebooks slipped behind. I relished my newfound ability to read and barely mourned the loss of illustrations. Years later, this abrupt severance of images and words struck me as one of the great deceits of childhood, second only to the transition from pink Calpol to orange, followed by the Truth about Father Christmas. My career choice of curating channelled my early desire to conjoin visual materials and narrative. It’s still easy to *explain* pictures, to make them more wordy than worldly, when they could speak for themselves. Teaching art history taught me images help us learn to read, but verbal literacy dominates the visual.

as we must learn to read an image, we must learn to read the physical world. Once we have developed this skill (which we do very early in life), it is very easy to mistake it for an automatic or unlearned process, just as we may mistake our particular way of reading or seeing, for a natural, ahistorical and noncultural given

(1981:12, cf. Iordanaki and Maine, 2017:16).

Learned and cultured modes of seeing and meaning-making in visual narratives recall Bourdieu's notions about interpretative schemata that are produced by and producing of habitus, as well as Hall's reception theory. Rosenblatt says of children's picturebooks that "each reader brings to the text their own knowledge, thoughts, preoccupations and past experiences; all of them compound this so-called 'mnemonic baggage' and they are necessary for an aesthetic experience" (cf. Iordanaki and Maine, 2017:23), connecting to the sediment of dispositions through which we interpret visual experiences. One advantage of wordless picturebooks, Iordanaki continues, is the ambiguity of images, which engages children as co-authors of the visual story (ibid.). This reiterates my chapter's earlier arguments about the reader's active role in actualizing the artwork (Dewey, 1934) and interpreting/decoding the visual text (Hall, 1997), in line with broader discussions of the active audience in media discourse.

In *The Pleasure of the Text* Barthes (1976) discusses "readerly texts" and "writerly texts". The former occupies an assertive, unequivocal position of a singular message, authored by a singular voice, whereas the latter is a polysemic text that engages the reader's participation in its comprehension. The writerly text relinquishes the author's supremacy in favour of the reader's interpretation. For the most part, photobooks engage an active, inquisitive reader and require initiative to fully grasp their meaning. Therefore, in a photobook encounter, meaning is co-produced between text and reader: "[a] narrative leap is required to see the two [or more] pictures as one entity", creating a mental fiction (Shaw, 2016:138). Shaw continues,

A book is a real thing we ... enact by turning pages. Our own thoughts get infused with new ideas as we page through the book ... Our thinking is not separate from the thing being thought. Image binding in photographic sequences makes a whole that includes the thinking part, too.

(140)

Thus reading a photobook is a gradual experience in which the material book is agential in establishing a thinking relationship with the viewer, through presenting a physical succession of visual narrative elements that can be ordered consecutively or flipped randomly. The physical book introduces pace to the experiential encounter that will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

2.4.3 Image-text intra-actions

When asked to show me a photobook, artist Lewis Bush chose a handmade alphabet book of family photographs and magazine cut outs made by his mother, aimed at encouraging his visual literacy from infancy (MS2). Bush writes about photography and teaches workshops on visual narrative in photobooks. He believes the photograph, while being visually descriptive, “isn’t very good at explaining things ... because it can’t show causal relationships”. Bush made this comment in relation to *War Primer* by Bertold Brecht (1955). Bush explains, “Brecht had an interest in how media work. He saw press photography as propaganda”. *War Primer* juxtaposes images of conflict with short poems “intended to explain what the image doesn’t explain ... a complete redirection of the image towards a different meaning”. Bush cited an iconic photograph of Hitler looking upwards like a visionary, but the accompanying poem frames him as a sleepwalker (MS2). This encounter will be revisited in Chapter 6. Photobooks have a long relationship with text, whether to inform or transform images. Company has observed that captions for photography “are necessary when there is something at stake (in terms of miscomprehension), something needs to be explained” (2008:28). Text can muddy meanings, or infuse poeticism, as seen in the atmospheric plates populating Georges Rodenbach’s symbolist novel *Bruges-la-Morte* (1892), now widely regarded as the first work of ‘photo-poetry’ (more on this later).

Where images and text combine in the photobook, other kinds of reading are engaged as readers negotiate multiple literacies. Reeves tends to focus on pictures to “enjoy the flow” then “go back if I want a reference to what’s going on”, because “if you stop to read the text it stops that rhythm between pictures” (MS2: Reeves). Allen described reading *Margins of Excess* by Max Pinckers (2018) as an experience that requires but also rewards time and attention. She hadn’t brought it to the interview, but gave a vivid description of the experience of reading it, evidencing an affective connection with the book as artwork, and a closeness with its contents gained through repeat readings and curating the book as an exhibition (MS2: Allen). The book combines documentary and constructed photographs with reproductions of genuine newspaper articles and dense original text. Allen recollected it as being “sequenced intuitively” but described “flitting between headlines, sometimes reading deeper”. Allen’s account of her reading recalls how one might read a newspaper, delving into some stories and skimming others, being attracted by certain photographs or headlines. This description of action mirrors the book’s themes of truth and current affairs, where “visually you’re never sure what’s real, [it’s] threading a line between real and illusion”. The construction of the book encourages this comparison, as the text

is printed on thinner, more yellow “newsprinty [sic]” paper which “signals these pages are doing something different” to those with images (MS2).

Allen reflected “it’s not clear what the role of the text is – it’s not there to be fully read”. While “you do have to read a certain amount to understand”, there is also visual impact in the volume of type. Di Bello, Wilson and Zamir (2012) and Chiocchetti (PhotoBook Review, 2019) have applied film theorist Sergei Eisenstein’s (1968) concept of a ‘third something’ to the photobook, respectively focusing upon the composite effect of image sequencing, and the interaction of text and image. Writing predominantly about montage in cinema, Eisenstein claimed two juxtaposed elements produce a third interpretation. For example, sequential film clips can result in a third, imaginary, semantic association beyond each image’s meaning, or a soundtrack or script element that is discordant to the image can create alternative impressions in the phenomenal moment of cinematic viewing. For Chiocchetti, the third something is not what is explicitly depicted or said by either image or text, but a more poetic association as they work together on the page (PhotoBook Review, 2019:4) .

Both Chiocchetti (ibid.) and Allen (MS2) believe combining text and image requires fine balance, in design and as it translates to the viewer’s experience. Allen commented, “everyone’s so self-conscious about how much text they put in photobooks” suggesting an over-expectation of visual literacy or the power of image-making. The anxiety that text might supplant the primacy of the photos echoes Wooldridge’s comment about books as primarily serving photographs, versus books functioning as complete, conceptual, communicative works (MS2: Wooldridge, Reynolds). Artist and lecturer Celine Marchbank spoke to me about a “misjudged” balance of caption and image in some books, or texts that prescribe an interpretation to an image that is unnecessary or inaccurate. She mentioned a book entitled ‘Picturing Death’ that ascribed overly specific, at times insensitive captions telling the reader what emotions they could inspect in the expression of a grieving widow, whereas the photograph elicited a more nuanced empathetic response. She reflected that in her students’ work, there is perhaps a “lack of confidence in their pictures ‘saying enough’” (MS2: Marchbank). Reeves, likewise, suggested text is often “for an audience who hasn’t got used to the concept of looking just at pictures” (MS2: Reeves). When captions are used in this way they diminish the audience’s agency to form their own reading of the visual text, making it more “readerly” than “writerly” (Barthes, 1976).

The idea of text as an informational crutch for those less familiar with wholly visual narratives was evident in focus group PS2c. The PhD students participating had all accrued considerable cultural capital from varied academic research, yet several appeared uncomfortable faced with a

book containing no text whatsoever. One participant leafed through two books rapidly looking for “interpretation”, revealing their background in Museum Studies through their language, a self-inscribed trace of their identity (Derrida, 1997:xvi). They seemed puzzled that the images were the only information supplied about the book’s purpose, perhaps seeking the singularity of interpretation that has dominated museums since the 19th century, echoing this chapter’s discussion of the gendered and colonial overtones of positivist language.

This raises another interesting point about photobook accessibility: it appears people without a specialist interest in photography feel more confident in encounters with book-objects that engage multiple literacies, assuming text conveys meaning with lesser ambiguity. While one might expect image and tactility to convey meaning more universally than words, it requires greater interpretive agency from the reader, and perhaps sometimes people simply prefer being ‘told’. Chiocchetti is a specialist in ‘photo-text books’, in which “photographs and words share equal ontological dignity” in the project’s narrative (Photobook Review, 2019:4). She believes photo-text books offer “the opportunity to expand the audience of the photobook beyond its own bubble”, meaning a specialist audience of image-makers and “textophobic photographers” (ibid.:4) who might still maintain the photobook’s “primary message is carried by photographs” (Parr, 2004).

Another advocate of the genre-within-genre of ‘photo-text photobooks’ is collector David Solo, who described his efforts to facilitate research and arrange exhibitions of photopoetry. The challenge, he said, was the recurring problem of presentation. To appreciate photopoetry works requires spending time interacting with volumes to consider their suggestive interplay of images and texts (MS2: Solo). For Solo, when physical interaction with the book itself is not practicable, instead of page-by-page videos, the essence of a work of photopoetry might translate better as a combined reading and projection. This implies the materiality of the book modulates a pace of encounter akin to live performance, highlighting the phenomenological ‘unfoldingness’ of an encounter with a multi-layered, communicative photobook object, returning to Barad’s notion of performativity.

Where there is text, there is language

This discussion reveals assumptions about different literacies of general versus photo-specialist audiences, underscoring the importance of thinking critically about a photobook’s imagined and actual reader. While pictorial language is culturally informed and international comprehension may vary, text in photobooks limits its encounter further. The dominant language of the

photography industry is English, so international practitioners must choose what language their text appears in, as well as conducting much professional communication in a second language. A strategic translation into English might make your photobook more accessible to international markets, but could alienate the project's aims and most relevant audiences (MS1ii:55-57). I have heard reported an attitude of "if you don't understand it [from the images], that's your problem": while maintaining the "purity" of a project is the artist's prerogative, prioritising visual and textual 'vision' at all costs can make a work impenetrable (ibid.). Multiple-language editions present design challenges and increase production costs (MS2ii:68) The inclusion of text raises political decisions with regards to the work's destination, highlighting an Anglophone advantage in the photobook industry which is counterproductive to postcolonial objectives.

Peripheral text in photobooks, such as the title, the name of the author, or anything extraneous in the colophon also bears influence on a reader's perceptual encounter. The title especially is "metafictive", as Nikolajeva and Scott (2001; c.f. Iordanaki 2017:8) observed in wordless picturebooks. It is, potentially, the ultimate textual signifier in framing the reader's perception and apprehension of meaning, even in the briefest photobook encounter. Bush expressed the usefulness of Gerard Genette's (1997) literary scholarship on "paratext" to his own study of visual narrative (MS2). Paratext refers to elements in a published work that are extraneous to the story, but could influence the overall effect, such as prefaces, cover art, the author's name; in photobooks, this significantly includes materials of construction. In wordless picturebooks, Iordanaki summarises Genette's theory that the title "identifies the work, designates and also illuminates the content and/or the form of the work. Readers who understand the title of a book gain more information about it and feel more prepared to go through it." (2017:8). Something as generic as the title of a book can have political implications. Wooldridge explained the Artists' Book Cooperative (ABC) challenged constraints of the publishing industry such as the requirement for books to have a title and the artist's name on the front or spine, perhaps because of this strong interpretative influence it holds over the book's encounter (MS2).

In summary, this section has shed light on issues concerning visual and verbal literacy as emergent factors in how photobook encounters are perceived. Combinations of materialised image and text can be probed through modes of structural and stylistic analysis, borrowing from semiotics, literary analysis and the visual language of artists' books (Rice, in Lyons, 1985:64-66). These accounts function for an imagined reader and do not sufficiently consider actual reader's social reality. The nuance of intra-activity between image and text in the photobook encounter is modulated by the reader's prior experience and cultural capital, presenting complexes of meaning-making in individual images, juxtapositions and the holistic, textural photobook.

Understanding perceptual readings of visual texts equally requires a sociological sensitivity to the reader alongside analysis of the photobook's formal and communicative qualities. The next section extends the investigation into perception as it unfolds in the real-world, time-based encounter.

2.5 The phenomenal experience

This chapter has so far considered the photobook encounter as occurring between a three-dimensional, tactile object and a perceiving subject. Looping back to the start of this chapter, the encounter is also a four-dimensional perceptual experience unfolding in real time, and if affecting, persists in the reader's future memory.

Occasionally, reviews venture beyond visual description to demonstrate evidence of this unfolding, phenomenal photobook encounter. C4 Journal is an online platform for writing on photobooks, with some tactile reviews that discourse between a book's context, content and the reviewer's subjective experience of looking. Michaela Lahat's review of *Body Maps* by Margaret Lansink, a reflection on ageing and lived experience, takes the reader through Lahat's phenomenal journey of navigating the "folded hidden pieces that generate obstacles in the search of the images" and the contrasting smaller, coloured zine at the centre of the monochrome book that "suggests a conflict in accepting ageing". Lahat's account of her encounter is intermingled with personal reflection on emotions about her own ageing, showing a dialogue between artwork and self. Eugenie Shinkle describes Claudia den Boer's *To Pick up a Stone* as a study of "the way the camera, the image and the book form can act together the capture the full intensity of perceptual experience", which engages the hands and eyes as "the pages rustle and snap as I turn them" (Shinkle, 2021).

Vivid photobook encounters are experienced and remembered. Jeffrey Fraenkel recollected a first encounter with *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph* ("in 1975, in a bookshop in London"), analysing the image "sequence might even seem arbitrary at first, until you realize they've been woven together as deftly as teeth in a zipper" (Photobook Review, 2018:11). The simile displays haptic memory as an evocative comparison to the known feeling of a zip in the act of snugly interlocking, implying engineering and careful design to secure tight fit. To convey the emotional and sensory affect of photobooks, authors can transfer sensations of affect into identifiable placeholders, whether they be textures, objects or emotions, showing substitutive linguistic devices akin to metaphor are useful in interpreting the photobook experience and articulating

response. The following section builds the sense of real-time engagement introduced in these reviews to explore the photobook encounter as a total, hermeneutic experience.

2.5.1 The photobook: a time-based medium

Phillip Zimmerman and Alex Sweetman have respectively described artists' book and photobook genres as a "time-based" medium²⁸ (Sweetman in Lyons, 1985:202; Zimmerman, 2016), because of the unfolding, ephemeral nature of book engagement. "Time based" artforms like moving image require time and accumulating perception. To view the photobook as a time-based medium conveys the problem that you cannot experience every aspect and page 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" (1993:187). When compared to cinema, it could be argued readers have greater agency over the pace of photobook encounters, because they can turn pages in the direction and speed they wish. However, the photobook also exerts agency in the intra-action because it "fixes the rhythm of the encounter more than the exhibition" (as an example of another presentation of photographs); these affordances "limit how you interact, you can flip it backwards but you can't look at page 2 and 80 at the same time" (MS2: Wooldridge, Marchbank).

The question of pacing is important when viewing the photobook as a total work. Jose Luis Neves states for photobooks "the single image is as important as the sequence" (2017:244), reaffirming Sweetman's description that photobookworks focus upon interrelations between "the power of the single photograph and the effect of serial arrangements in book form" (ibid.:187). This view places too great an emphasis on the photographs alone without considering the "third something" that the phenomenal, material experience brings to the book-sequence. Artist Keith Smith expressed an opposing view that "pictures [in books] are like words in a dictionary. It is not the amount of words one uses, but the choice of the words ... and more importantly, not only the order in which you place them, but the total that is revealed by that order", a total that includes use of materials (Photobook Review 2018:14). Smith's notion of books as composite

²⁸ This is distinct from Harold Innis' conception of media that emphasise time (1950). For Innis, time and space describe the relation between materiality of media and their significance to civilisation. While photobook encounters are ephemeral, the durability of the book depends upon material construction (see Chapter 3), which can influence its engagement in institutional hierarchies (Chapter 5).

experience connects back to earlier entangled responses to image and texture, such as focus group reactions to *Vote No. 1*.

In *Structure of the Visual Book*, Smith describes the Western codex as a “compound picture”, which is not literally a single picture, but an implied picture of structure and coherence, like cinema, video and performance: “[n]ot being able to view the book at once is not a detriment, but allows more possibilities than the (literally) single picture, placing the codex in time, space and movement unique to the format” (2003:212). While this contrasts with Neves’ view, Smith’s point is reiterated by other photobook practitioners. Writer and photographer Teju Cole has observed, “not all photographs in a photobook need to be great, and the real artists of the form know how to aerate their stupendous images with less forceful transitional ones” (2020), explaining less impactful images create a vital sense of space in a narrative. Vinny Gregan from RTI echoed this opinion, comparing a ‘coffee table book’ or monograph to a greatest hits record, containing memorable standalone photographs, whereas the photobook is more like a concept album:

It’s about the experience, the ebbs and flows, created as an experience rather than image by image by image. You might open a page and as a single image it’s uninteresting or bad but it’s about the role it plays in building a narrative, light and shade.

(MS2: RTI)

It is interesting to note Neves’ academic argument (every photograph must impress) contrasts with the insight of experienced practitioners, suggesting a disconnect between those who enjoy photobooks from a consumer point of view and those whose appreciation of photobooks is also informed by experiences of making.

Gregan’s description of “light and shade” aligns with Barthes’ theory about the affect of photographs, in which the studium (subject matter) is a necessary layer of sometimes banal informational content through which the punctum activates its piercing effect. Photographs that are too dense with distressing information can desensitise the viewer because there is no singular punctum. *I loved my wife (killing children is good for the economy)* by Dieter de Lathauwer (2017) illustrates this point. I had found the strange occasional portraits in its pages unsettling (PS1b) before I knew the book’s purpose of bringing to light a Nazi programme of euthanizing patients with psychiatric illnesses. The artist describes it as “a dark poetic view on one of the darkest pages in the second world war in Europe” (Lathauwer 2019). The indistinct portraits are disturbing because they loom through a dull tonic of muddy black-and-white Alpine landscapes. When I had discovered the book’s meaning, I made the connection with the clinical pink cardboard sleeve that encloses the book. My strongest mental picture of this encounter is one ghostly, peering face, framed and augmented by the suggestion of materials and images that

surrounded it. As Tina M. Campt (2017) has argued, these phenomenal, specific memories of encounters with photographic media are important sites for understanding the peripheral histories that surround creation and use of visual documents, and imagining their legacies and significances in society at large.

Establishing pace or rhythm in the photobook encounter is elusive. It can come from an accumulative affect that builds through the image sequence alone. For example, in *she dances on Jackson* by Vanessa Winship (2013), Joanna Cresswell described how a melancholic feeling “unfurls, accumulating tension slowly, like a snake unwinding itself” through the steady pace modulated by evenly-sized, successive large-format black-and-white photographs (Photobook Review, 2018:13). Pace, too, could be linked to tension arising from Barthes’ presence of heterogeneous parts, like the small, upsetting images intruding upon landscapes in *I loved my wife...* Pace is often modulated by the organisation of the book, for example in *The Arsenic Eaters* (2018) by Simon Brugner. This book investigates the underground practice of eating arsenic in Styria in Austria, for alleged health benefits. The pseudo-scientific report style, with bright, open landscapes and images of woodland nature gives way to seedier, flash-lit, nocturnal glimpses of bodies, animals, and splashes of fluorescent colour. Alongside the sequencing, as the image size and quantity on each page gradually becomes more crowded, the pace of the book becomes more frenetic, suggesting the effects of ingesting a poisonous mineral. Smith compares the importance of pace to playing the tune of “Happy Birthday” without rhythm, with every note the same volume and length: “pacing, mood, pauses, building to climaxes are just as critical as the meaning within each individual picture. The gaps between the pictures must be composed and many things are left unsaid, composed by the reader’s imagination” (Photobook Review 2018:15).

The comparison of the photobook encounter to other modes of aesthetic experience, such as music and cinema, reveals a new modality of internal meaning-making alongside social practices of looking and imagined sensory cooperation. Shaw describes forgetting oneself when reading fiction: “[y]ou have to unconsciously see through the ink on the page to experience a barely budding awareness outside of what is actually there” (Shaw, 2016:138). The mind’s physical awareness of sitting with a book defers to the imaginative visualisation involved in reading. In discussing screen-based media, Nigel Thrift describes moving image as another affective register that enters the body/mind dialogue (2005:231-253). Thrift explains the perception of movement is a visceral event, because it stimulates bodily sensations; meanwhile the cinema screen is not a “terminus of perception” because we look through it and incorporate its images into our imaginations, inviting a specific mode of attention. Thrift’s description of cinematic perception is

echoed in David Company's discussion of the sequencing of Walker Evans' *American Photographs* (1938), in which he quotes Lincoln Kirstein's essay in the book:

Evans develops what we might call a conceptual palimpsest in which the memory and implications of each new photograph are mentally superimposed on the preceding one, while allowing for the kinds of forward and backward movement denied to cinema's flow.

(Company, 2008:74-5)

Company continues to evoke a time-based account of reading a photobook [Alexey Brodovitch, *Ballet*, 1945] in which the "full-bleed" design is "suggestive of a cinema frame", explaining "the effect is supple and fluid, moving the viewer ceaselessly from one spread to the next" (ibid.). The phenomenal tone of Company's analyses results from his comparison of photography and cinema. Tuminas has also linked the photobook with cinematic, time-based perception, as the history of the moving image traces back to paper productions such as zoetropes and flip-books (PhotoBook Review, 2017).

If the photobook encounter is an unfolding, time-based perceptual experience, then making-meaning also unfolds through the lived phenomenon of reading. Cultural theorist Mieke Bal calls the overall impression of meaning in narrative text the *fabula*, which emerges from related events or images joined within the reader's interpretation or imagination (1985:5). Whilst the story is the ordered presentation of elements the reader follows, the *fabula* is the concept that remains after reading. In this way, the reader/viewer connects aesthetic content in their mind's eye, showing perception in the photobook encounter forms recursively in multiple registers of physical and mental experience, through cooperation between text and reader. This presentation of visual narrative as recursive and unspecified in time and space is expanded through feminist and queer studies of photography and cinema, such as Eliza Steinbock's (2019) principle of "shimmering" cinematic representations of transgender experiences, and Mieke Bleyen's (2014) study of the liminal tensions and discords in photobooks such as *Woman Ajar* by Marcel Mariën (1985).

The phenomenal experience of reading a photobook is relational, because narrative images extend backward, forward, and outward beyond the limits of a text through referencing previous story details, motifs or known traditions (Altman, 2008:212). Photobooks are similar to Krzysztof Pomian's analysis of collections display, in bringing together and making meaning with disparate components that might not sit alongside each other elsewhere (1991). The signification of the whole text is projected onto it through reading, but may be diverted by extraneous factors such as mood or coincidental visual cues. With time, repeat "exposures" and revisiting interpretations in memory can alter and project new meanings into the received narrative (Bal, 1996). This was evident in my autoethnography about *Another Black Darkness* by Sakiko Nomura (2016)

(Appendix F). In the encounter I made an association with paintings by Egon Schiele; later I realised had seen an exhibition advertisement for that artist on the Tube en route to the NAL. This contributes to framing the photobook encounter as a “compound”, intertextual, mobile experience, of which multiple exposures are possible and dependent on the reader’s personal habitus and lived circumstances.

The reader’s agency to form multiple interpretations of a text in the encounter reiterates Barthes’ *The Death of the Author*, in which “the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed... a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination” (Barthes, 1977:148). De Certeau has a similar view on the transformative experience of reading, which makes a text “habitable... a space borrowed for a moment” (1988:xxi). Comparing the reader to a renter who furnishes the text with their acts and memories, over the time it takes to read and internalize a text, the reader transforms it into their own interpretation, which continues to shift according to their own retrospective perception. The phenomenological encounter therefore unfolds as a “conversation” sustained between motifs at various points in the photobook, and other factors such as peripheral visual stimuli, or the reader’s feelings at the point of engagement, and after. This can be compared to the phenomenological concept of “fusion of horizons”: Hans Georg Gadamer (2004[1960]) describes this as one’s specific kind of perspectival view which can be communicated and combined with those views of other people or phenomena to create a more expansive understanding of a subject. This social and relational dimension to how narratives are formed will be revisited in Chapter 6.

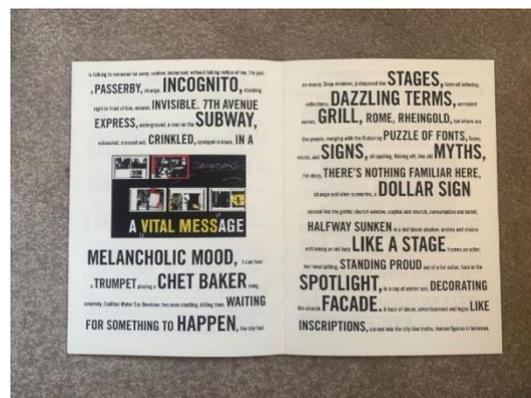
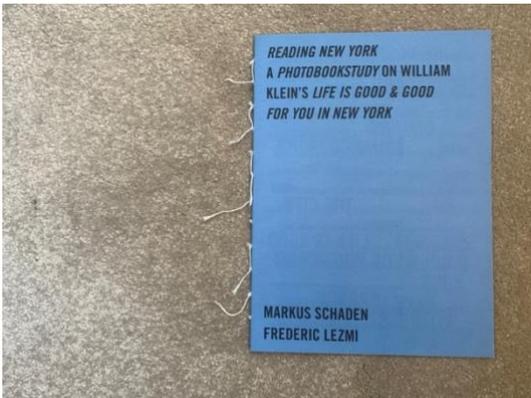
2.5.2 Phenomenologies of ‘photobooking’

To convey experiences of sensations and “mixed modalities” that texts like photobooks can elicit is difficult to articulate (Drucker, 2013). Wetherell has noted, textual representations “paradoxically try to communicate affect beyond representation, and the supposedly unspeakable, in all the pragmatic, convenient, sophisticated and wonderful ways that language makes possible” (2013:358). Nevertheless, in the exhibition and catalogue for *Photobook Phenomenon* (CCCB, 2017; Fig.10), Markus Schaden produced a commentary on reading William Klein’s *Life is Good and Good for you in New York: Trance Witness Revels* (1956) using typography almost onomatopoeically to narrate imagery and dynamic experience. Together with Frederic Lezmi, Schaden he founded The PhotoBookMuseum “to find new people to experience a photobook... and in the end, maybe buy it” (Schaden, in Tuminas and Neumuller 2019:4). The activities of the PhotoBookMuseum vary from installations to a travelling shipping container museum (see Chapter 5), to interpretations of photobooks such as this. The display and catalogue chapter suggest how this

book (and perhaps others) can be *experienced* more than looked at, engaging the comfort that uninitiated photobook viewers draw from verbal interpretation, seen in PS2. This attempt to verbally recreate how it feels to read a book famed for capturing the buzzing atmosphere of Manhattan within its pages is reminiscent of Reynolds' discussion about combining multiple perceptual faculties to "translate" a sensory encounter (MS2).



Figure 10 Life is Good... in Photobook Phenomenon and, next page, in the catalogue. Source: CCCB/author.



Describing the phenomenological encounter

Beyond the field of art criticism, there are many productive examples of capturing lived phenomenological experience as it crowds upon the perceiver. The geographer John Wylie (2005) wrote a narrative study about understanding the geographies of the South West Coast through walking. The most immediate verbs to describe a photobook encounter – ‘reading’, ‘looking’ –

are about as banal as Wylie's 'walking': there is a quotidian simplicity to taking up a book or going for a walk.

Wylie's walk is enlivened by the dramatic landscape he traverses, but this does not account for its total affect. The circumstances of his walk, his increasing lived understanding of the South West coast, physical fatigue and self-doubt had a transformative effect on his perception of his unfolding journey through enveloping woods and suddenly receding shores, meeting flora, fauna and an unconventional half-naked man in a kilt. While some aspects of the narrative could be predicted, such as confronting the sublime and sore feet, the barefoot stranger disrupts the expected coding of the experience of the walk: he does not fit with picturesque surroundings. 'Walking' is an insufficient verb because Wylie is also looking, responding, wayfinding, aching, note-taking, learning, progressing in time, distance, and understanding. Wylie's account is an example of a hermeneutic passage through experience as the author's internal interpretations intersected with the physical, geographical, social, historical, cultural, gendered configurations of the path snaking along the coastal route. Wylie describes this intersection through Deleuze and Guattari's notion that experience 'folds' together (1980). It is ontologically, subtly, different to Barad's intra-action because the former implies heterogeneous elements are always already folded in with each other, but remaining discrete, whereas intra-action is a performative instant where actants are held together for that moment of activity within the bounds of the agential cut. Nevertheless, both express a coming-together of expected and unexpected facets of experience.

Walking, looking, reading, the photobook encounter is no different. The reader is traversing a metaphorical and spatial landscape. The photobook presents "ebbs and flows" just as the path presents hills and slopes. Importantly, the critical photobook reader pays attention not only to what they expect to encounter – images, materials, narrative – but also serendipitous situational factors²⁹ that can equally influence their perception, the 'man in the kilt' in the act of reading. This might be something as small as an itch, a remembered poster on the Tube, or as traumatic as being confined to a boat during a terrorist attack³⁰. When a photobook has been particularly memorable, for whatever reason, it is hard to pinpoint where its encounter ends.

Whitehead and Coffield (2018) have proposed cultural experience can be mediated through a series of "interfaces", broadening the "spatial and temporal" situation of an encounter, in their

²⁹ See Appendix F for an illustrative example.

³⁰ The night of the 2015 terrorist attack in Paris was also the Friday of Paris Photo art fair. Much of the photography world were confined to wherever we were in the city. I was safe in my Airbnb, but some friends were stranded inside the boat on the Seine where Polycopies book fair is held.

case a museum visit, into accounts of multiple, fluctuating, distributed engagements across physical and psychic domains. Whitehead and Coffield's account of interfaces mediating a college group's exhibition engagement questions at what point encounters with cultural products begin, conclude (if indeed they do), what other social or tactile engagements influence them along the way, and how our perceptions of experiences change over time. Whitehead and Coffield identified one interface as the gallery; others included internet and the students' continued mental reflection on the exhibition following the visit. Even after a physical photobook encounter has ended, the perception of that encounter continues to be hermeneutically reformulated in the reader's mind and memory. Should they 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 (Chapter 6; Appendix F). To cite 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, following hermeneutic phenomenology and habitus, our former experiences are continually reinterpreted alongside new experiences, and new media we engage with will be continually perceived and interpreted according to what we have previously lived and understood.

2.6 Conclusion

If you, the reader, were to skim across the subheadings of this chapter, you might form an impression that subjectivity, body, mind and experience have been somewhat disentangled and separately discussed. If nothing else, the discussion here has shown that in the immediate event of an encounter with a photobook, there are multitude recursive ways in which our perceptual faculties are enmeshed with social behaviours, semantic codes and interventions of taste and intellect. The chapter has shown photobook encounters are simultaneously felt, solid and sensory, as well as interiorised impressions. The chapter has mostly treated encounters in the present tense of becoming, unfolding, doing, whilst considering the transient encounter as temporally continuous. As it recedes as a past event, its interpretation is still forming long beyond the initial moment, meaning each single encounter extends elastically across lived time.

This chapter has argued points which may seem elementary ('you should open a book to read it'). Yet by combing through the minutiae of the most common features of how one engages with a photobook we can appreciate the small motions and perceptual adjustments we take for granted. From first encountering a picture book as a child, we hermeneutically learn the physicality and purpose of book-type objects, their actions and openable (or breakable) parts. The same goes for

more sophisticated perceptions: to assess an aesthetic as 'nostalgic' engages other kinds of cultural experience or capital, whilst anticipating the texture of paper from an online image requires embodied knowledge of touching a similar-looking texture (here discussed as haptic memory). 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.

Importantly, this chapter has shown perception is located somewhere between the human and non-human; the intra-action of agential parts. Having surveyed the human perceiver/receiver, the next chapter will turn still closer attention to the agential photobook itself.

Chapter 3: Issues with 'Bookishness'

Think of the books you own. Books that might be spread throughout your house. All the different kinds of books and the purposes they serve. Perhaps they could be:

- ~ Literature
- ~ Reference
- ~ Cookbooks
- ~ Notebooks (full, partially used, blank)
- ~ Diaries (current and past)
- ~ Photo albums (mostly homemade, a couple of new digital ones)
- ~ Instruction manuals
- ~ Magazines
- ~ Travel guides
- ~ Volumes of sheet music
- ~ A Bible or other religious text
- ~ The Argos catalogue (alternative faith text of capitalism)
- ~ Phone book (probably out of date, one of the few book types truly on the verge of obscurity)

To divide between fiction and non-fiction would be hopelessly insufficient. Even a recipe or a geographical guide has an element of illusion. They say, your cake *will* look this seductive, will taste as indulgent as Nigella's knowing smile suggests; the terrain of Northumberland will be *exactly* this... when your icing is wonky and the footpath you followed from the book has collapsed into a landslide. Photo albums rarely document life as it happened; rather they are careful representations of how we'd like to remember it.

In this way, books of all kinds are illusory spaces of deferral. Placeholders of information 'correct at the time of writing', fabricated with the authority associated with print. This chapter asks what is the value of the *book* in photobook? What is *bookishness* and what does it bring to the photobook encounter? The previous chapter explored how juxtapositions of image, text and tactility in photobooks elicited holistic perceptual responses, but perhaps arrangements of photographs in other media could provoke similar associations. This chapter adopts Annemarie Mol's (2002) notion of praxiographic ontology to examine what agencies and economies are specific to the physical book. Mol's concept seeks to understand what something is through

looking at what it *does*, by surveying it in practice through its dynamic relations with other entities. The chapter uses data from interviews and journals to support analyses of photobook agencies connected to their condition of being a book, profiling a wide range of photobooks from interviews and my own encounters that reflect the diversity of this material agency. The chapter begins with a discussion of books, photographs in books and photobooks that reference wider book culture, studying photobooks that engage formally with other book types to probe ‘bookishness’ as an intertextual affect. It then turns to analyse encounters that demonstrate agencies afforded by photobook construction and materials that other photographic media may not support.

3.1 What books ‘do’

When I asked my interviewees to select a photobook for our conversation, they frequently responded along the lines of, “that’s very hard, different books *do* different things” (MS2: Allen, Bush, Solo, Reeves). David Company (2014) quipped you wouldn’t call the variety of books with words in them “wordbooks”, thus “photobook” gives an artificial impression of coherence to an “infinite field” of practice. This is the paradoxical charm for book collectors: books contain ‘stuff’, so appreciation functions on two levels; obsession with the book object, and pursuit of specialist content. At the Grolier Club, a long-standing book society in New York, while members share a fanatical love of books, each person’s niche topic varies widely (MS2: Solo).

When thinking about what books ‘do’ in a New Materialist sense, we could begin with their general purpose, such as those classifiers mentioned above. A diary is a confessional space; photo albums are memorialising and identity-forming; catalogues have an ordering functionality, to categorise content into intellectual or commercial packages. Cookbooks are instructional, but they also operate in aspirational terms, signalling identities through a performance of what food you would *like* to cook – regardless of whether you ever do (Ferguson, 2020:5). Notebooks are for writing in. These information-based activities can and do take place digitally, yet people continue to return to the physicality of the book (Steiner, 2015; Chen *et al.*, 2019).

The continued abundance of physical books suggests their significances beyond giving information, otherwise we would not fill our homes with so much bound paper. Each physical book type asserts its identity as ‘cookbook’ or ‘epic novel’ through modulating configurations of dimension, paper weight, print size, frequency and quality of illustrations, etc. If you have had the luxury to grow up surrounded by books (as I have), you might easily identify book tropes even

without decipherable text; this familiarity expresses material or cultural privilege. The following paragraphs will explore how books generally become objects of meaningful affect and the complexes of power embedded in these objects that are commonplace for many, but not all.

3.1.1 Books that perform

Books perform complex roles in our emotional, social and practical lives. Bush called books “persuasive objects” because their physicality gives their argument intellectual weight (MS2). This relates to concepts of orientational metaphor that ‘understanding is down’: experiential notions of heaviness and solidity are intrinsically linked to our linguistic employment of literal terms such as ‘grasping an idea’ or ‘foundational knowledge’ (Lakoff, 2003). Lakoff argues metaphor depends on “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” generally corresponding something abstract, like understanding or uncertainty, with something physically known, like feet on the ground or a floating feather: ‘that’s up in the air’, ‘the matter is settled’ (ibid.,14). I discovered the power of the physical, material and metaphorical power of knowledge when researching in the London Library. The Victorian cast iron shelving that runs up the building’s core is said to be counterweighted by the historic volume of books. Without the books, the shelves, then the building would collapse; and so too would the institution of the library. Books have tangible physical agency even as they sit taking up space on our bookshelves, or require packing up and unpacking again with each house move.

Writing about materiality, Susan Pearce notes how an object as mundane as a pencil becomes a souvenir through association with a formative experience (Dudley, 2010:xv). A pencil could possess greater material magnetism through being used, even chewed, as a lucky pencil for exams. For humans, objects can acquire greater powers than the sum of their parts through a “strength of feeling” which can be “poured” into “any kind of thing, and at every level of social action” (ibid.). The photobook, through being a material, shelvable thing (as opposed to an exhibition, or a photographic print) makes the artwork’s complex of ideas solidified, own-able, collectible, and a vessel for the owner’s emotional associations.

Books are especially absorbent of the emotional association Pearce describes, because we invest time into them, and in return they aid our personal growth. Keeping and displaying books becomes an activity of identity performance and self-reassurance, as Berger describes how gathering postcards and clippings on pinboards can “match and express the experience of the room’s inhabitant” (1977:30; Fig.11). Berger says in these assemblages of media everything belongs “to the same language and all are more or less equal within it”. Disparate images and

scraps are reconciled in a non-hierarchical manner in their owner's display. The "mood board" social website Pinterest demonstrates a similar contemporary performance (Linder *et al.*, 2014).

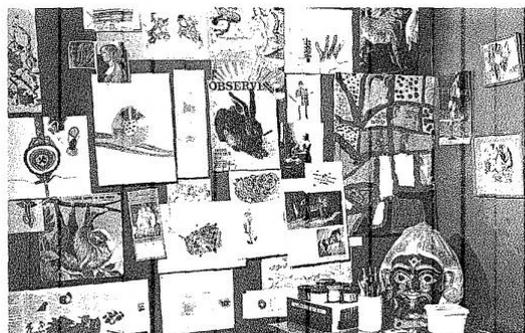


Figure 11 Illustration from *Ways of Seeing* (Berger, 1977:30)

The same identity politics plays out on a bookshelf: among my idiosyncratic, somewhat arbitrary collection, my proprietorial sense that the books are *mine* matters more than how many I have read³¹. The personal selection won't be as individual as I believe it to be – I can't be the only 30-year-old, artsy, middle class British woman who performs this identity through a selection of tattered vintage Penguins, art monographs, complete

Brontë, *Anna Karenina*, Bernadine Evaristo's *Girl Woman Other* and some underused Ottolenghi cookbooks. Similar bookcase stereotyping features in historical house attractions such as the Maihaugen period homes in Norway (Maihaugen, 2020). The '1990s house' bookcase has been curated with a typical selection one might find in a middle-class Norwegian '90s family home. The proximity between bookish materiality and identity politics is signalled in metaphors humans use to understand ourselves, such as "I'm an open book"; "I began a new chapter in my life". The latter phrase suggests how the novel as a cultural form, especially the *Bildungsroman*, has been interiorised as a perceptual lens through which we can structure experiences (Williams, 2020), much as the contents of our bookcases are an external materialisation of these experiences and tastes.

Taken to extreme, the books a person owns represent a consumerist version of what Marilyn Strathern (1991) calls "distributed personhood", representing different facets of our knowledges, relationships, statuses and movements through the world; what we have in common with others, and what combination of parts makes up ourselves. Strathern developed this ethnographic concept whilst studying cultures in which transitions of identity are registered in flows of possessions, gifts, compensation such as dowries, where personhood is distributed between the partibility of wealth items. For Strathern "partible personhood" expresses there is no single identity which encompasses a person all the time. Rather, identity is divided between different roles that material transactions represent, and they become 'different' parts of themselves when attending to each relationship. A collection of books could signify a single person's overlapping roles of student, professional, parent, gardener, sci-fi fan, intersecting cultural identity positions

³¹ Or, mine and my partner's, or some borrowed, some elsewhere at my parents' house: the vision of 'my' books is distributed across cities and time.

(Crenshaw, 1995; Nash, 2008), as well as tokens of experience, memory or sentiment, such as travel or a meaningful gift, and indicating their membership of a particular age group or class (Arcuri and Modesto Veludo-de-Oliveira, 2018). Chapter 6 further explores this plurality and mutability of how books become meaningful.

The book considered thus is transubstantiated cultural capital: whether it has been read or not, a book on a shelf displays cultural engagement through a desire to read or to appear well-read. The example of the weight of knowledge in the London Library, formed at the end of the Enlightenment era by Enlightened Victorian gentlemen, becomes more significant when considering books as symbolic power. Where books have represented free access to and agency of knowledge, ideas and ideologies, they have been feared and destroyed, for example the Nazi book burnings of 1933. The power of books is still visible in the 21st century, when opportunities for reading and storing libraries digitally have highlighted the material and immaterial significances of physical book collections (Arcuri and Veludo-de-Oliveira, 2018). In 2020, during the Coronavirus lockdown, books were foregrounded as an indirect statement of professional validity and political affiliation as talking heads appeared before their well-appointed bookshelves via video chat, as observed and satirised in Twitter feeds such as Room Rater (@ratemyskyperoom) and Bookcase Credibility (Fig.12).



Figure 12 Screenshot from @BCredibility on Twitter, accessed 18:39 19 January 2021

This book-worship can be exclusionary. Aside from the economics of book ownership and storage, differently-abled intellects suit forms of learning other than reading, as hypothesised in educational psychology such as Gardner's theories of multiple intelligences (1983). The book's insistent supremacy in hierarchies of knowledge and authority has power beyond its symbolic status. By preventing slaves from learning to read, illiteracy became a technology of oppression in Western societies (Baldwin, 1985; Du Bois, 1999). Western culture has grown up with book as a structuring technology: it operates with a sense of linear progression, which structures our intake of information in a singular and linear fashion (McLuhan, 1962). This has contributed to Modernist notions that history can be coherently and causally organised, because the book demands information is delivered sequentially. This has broader implications for postcolonial studies because to recognise that knowledge is plural, books must try to disrupt this perception of linearity.

The book object, therefore, preceding any genre distinction, is a thing of significant social and cultural agency. I now turn to consider the agency of the book in transforming the capabilities of the photograph.

3.1.2 Reconceptualising ‘photo’ and ‘book’

To question what a photobook does is to question what the book does to the phenomenon of photography. For most of the 20th century, the original print was the most valued form of photography for its connection to a supposed reality. Popular metaphors to describe the photograph have portrayed it as a window or a mirror, as foregrounded in John Szarkowski’s MoMA exhibition *New Documents*³² (1967); and an “incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened” (Sontag, 1977:4). In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes discusses the photograph as an index or trace of “what has been” (1981). The chemical technology of a photosensitised surface, exposed to light then fixed, captures an imprint not only of light waves, but also of time and other “laminated” layers of meaning.

Anthropologists are also interested in the material photograph’s relation to time, through what its representational content reveals, and as a fragile object bearing marks of use and age. A photograph’s size or setting in a frame or album can be as influential as its image content in inspiring viewers’ responses (Edwards and Hart, 2004). Imagining the “de-lamination” of the layers of meaning in the photographic object has gained traction as a mode of questioning the photograph-object’s resonance as material culture (Edwards *et al.*, 2006).

The physical, chemical fact of the photographic process was previously valued as a link to a deferred past. While the nature of this discussion has changed in the digital age (Wooldridge 2021), there persists a perception of the photograph as referent or evidence (Tagg, 1988; Sontag, 2004; Good and Lowe, 2020). Even in digital images, light data transacts into computational data. The “trace” of lived events is lexically similar to Jacques Derrida’s use of the term (1997). Derrida describes a signifier, like a unit of language, as a trace, or present sign of absence whose signification is established by differentiation through the absence of other signs. This coheres with Barthes’ reading of photography, in which we understand the signified, i.e. a photograph of another time and/or place by identifying it is Other to the here and now.

³² Arbus, Friedlander, Winogrand, by now *haute-canon* in photo-history

If digital photography can hold a similar referential “trace” to analogue originals, other photographic mediations such as images in photobooks can have similar agencies. Philosopher Vilém Flusser (1983) considered photographs as technical images, less defined by their means of production than the circumstances of their inscription and transmission. While a photograph’s materiality can be an integral part of mediating meaning, Flusser reasoned it doesn’t help general understanding of the *phenomenon* of photography. He observed photographs had become less objects, more Platonic image-ideas³³, reproductions flitting between print and televisual media. For Flusser, photographs are not *a priori* reflections or a window on reality, but a surface on which the world is inscribed, chemically/digitally, and socially. These necessary surfaces are not limited to photographic prints, but the entire phenomena of how photography manifests, from the film or sensor inside a camera, to projector screens, to photographs pictured in our mind’s eye. Wooldridge explained much of photography has been concerned with producing the disappearance of the photographer and the photo-object (MS2). Flusser critiques this artifice by seeking to explain the ‘programme’ of not only the image, but the apparatus of producing it, the industry that produced the apparatus, and so on, extrapolating back further. Flusser’s view echoes the assemblage of interests of this research, by articulating photography, its materials, production and consumption are embedded in processes of social and technical construction.

Within this vast photographic phenomenon, photobooks present sequences of surfaces (pages) that sit materially in front of us, but when we encounter them they recede from view as the paper becomes an invisible surface facilitating interaction with the photograph. According to Sontag, the distinction between photograph and photographic reproduction goes unnoticed because the likeness is convincing: originally printed and smooth, a photograph loses less “essential quality” than media such as paintings (1977:4). Many photobooks strive for best print quality possible within budget. Unless they draw attention to their technology of reproduction through unusual image processing or printing, the naked eye would not see the microscopic patterns of dots made by digital printers. The Gestalt glance takes in the photograph as a whole picture: it has the phenomenonal appearance of a photograph despite technically being a reproduction. The page disguises how the photograph arrived there; it asks to be looked *through* to complex, othered realities in a similar manner to Flusser’s photographic surface. This is one factor that has led to artists’ book critics to consider the book as a series of openings, containing a multiplicity of spaces through which the reader navigates (Drucker, 2014; Shaw, 2016).

³³ See Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave”, also p.211.

As well as printed surfaces, photobooks have other constraining edges. Unless unbound, or bound with a removable elastic band (currently trendy), books have finite organisation. The paper has edges, the book has a front and a back, and handling expectations seen in Chapter 1 (p.78). *Top/Top*, by Liam Magee (2015; Fig.13) further subverts patterns of book technologies by presenting two simultaneous orientations. It comes in an envelope sealed with ‘top’ marked at opposite ends on each side, and features a double binding, meaning the reader’s decision to open the book one way or the other will impact the orientation of the book in their first encounter.



Figure 13 A ‘conventional’ book design and a radical one designed to be disruptive. Even the conventional book instructs its own handling.

With greater sophistication, Joan Lyons’ book *Summer Field* (2002) calls attention to finitude of the physical page by refusing to crop images to fit the page size of the print-on-demand format. Scaled to page height but not width, photographs of a summer meadow run freely over the end of one page and around onto the next, taking up all the longitudinal space they require. The edges of digital images meet haphazardly mid-page, drawing attention to the limits of photograph and photobook compared to the flow of nature and experience (MS1ii:45-47). Chloe Dewe Matthews’ *Thames Log* (2020) uses a similar design strategy where the images flow over the ends of the French-folded pages in a similar motion to the forward current of the river through Greater London. The combination of photo and book, therefore, does not have to be as passive as plopping pictures on sequential pages; the photobook can push boundaries of both photo and book. In what follows I show how simple co-operations between image and form can produce highly sophisticated, evocative, and political affect.

3.1.3 Photobooks in proximity to wider book culture

There is an increasing sense in photobook discourse of the “classic” or “conventional” photobook (MS2: Allen, Bush, Wooldridge). Just as we have come to expect a travel guide should

contain at least one map, or an instruction manual should have numbered steps and diagrams, certain characteristics reinforce a photobook “type” (MS2). The “classic” photobook is a model of Western publishing, with heavy paper, restraint in image positioning, often one per page or per opening, with luxe production such as embossed lettering on a hardback cover (e.g. many books by Steidl, Mack, Aperture, Éditions Patrick Frey; MS2: Wooldridge). These books can be beautiful, affective objects: Allen cited Rinko Kawauchi’s *Illuminance* (2011) as one of her favourites in our interview. Yet, Allen chose to discuss *Margins of Excess* by Max Pinckers because of the idiosyncratic interactions of text and design that complicated its encounter (MS2; see p.101). Many conventional photobooks *do* less as books. Their principal functionality is to convey, not to transform, photography. While they also enact material agencies and engage in artworld economies, through operating as a kind of portfolio and more affordable commodity, their images speak louder than their materiality. The book facilitates a pleasant, high quality engagement with the affect and storytelling of the images themselves, as the viewer looks beyond its physicality through into photographic worlds.

However, photobook practices often display critical engagement with the book form. When Aperture editor Lesley Martin identified three taxonomic “tracks” photobooks most often follow (Neumüller *et al.*, 2017), one significant trend was photobooks foregrounding materiality and production. Martin observed, “concomitant to the sophistication and complexity of storytelling that are a hallmark of photobooks today, the material form of the book, too, continues to be pushed into new territories” (*ibid.*:13). She continues, “all the techniques and styles of the past are both on offer and available”, as well as new technologies facilitating complicated bindings or printing effects. Martin describes this material variety in contemporary photobook production as the “Baroque Era of the Photobook”, playfully situating photobooks within their own art historical lineage.

Building on this creative engagement with form and materials in commercially-produced photobooks, some examples have experimented with their “bookness” by reproducing functionalities found in wider book culture. The neologisms bookness and bookishness³⁴ arose interchangeably in interviews, for want of a better term to express what is particular to the photobook’s physical form (MS2: Allen, Solo, Reynolds). To describe what is bookish expresses the same entangled perception of unbounded objectness, experience and interpretation that pervades this thesis. It can be approximated to Heidegger’s *essence*: the essence of being a book,

³⁴ I prefer the suffix *-ish*. It expresses something roughly, roundaboutly known; imprecise, but generally understood. Unless you are an alien who has never seen a book, I think bookish as a word is self-explanatory, meanwhile the *ish* is impossible to put your finger on.

doing what books do, how they perform with the reader in this phenomenological, technological capacity, how they come to mean and matter.

The essence of a diary is simultaneously a private, safe space for confession and reflection³⁵, a physical deposit for busy thoughts and a testament to lived experience. This combination of security and contemporaneity is distilled in those teenage diaries with a plastic lock and key. Numerous photobooks perform a similar instrumental value. Many photographers make images to better understand their passage through the world. The book form supports and sequences this temporal experience, as illustrated in the display *Diaristic Photobooks* at Tate Modern in 2018 (MS1i:31-33). When interviewing the display's curator Sarah Allen, she reasoned many photobooks dealt with personal or emotional content because of the "intimacy" of the book form. A book pulls its viewer/reader between its pages into a private space that resists appreciation *en masse*. For adults, reading is mostly solitary. It is considered impolite to read over somebody's shoulder. It's also physically cumbersome, hence photobooks continually challenge epistemic activities such as exhibitions (see Chapter 5). Allen's view was echoed by other interviewees, such as Lewis Bush, who recognised the book's intimacy compared with public exhibitions (MS2). Books feel familiar and secure: if you are a student making work of a personal nature, who has never had an exhibition, you may feel more comfortable expressing yourself in the confines of 'between the covers' – even this structural description evokes private space.

To read a book is to spend time with it: to choose it before reading, from bookshelf, library or shop; to keep it for a time, carry it in your bag, and as seen in the previous chapter, to uniquely actualise the text through your own individual interpretation. This applies not only to books we consider most personal, such as diaries, or those most open to interpretation, such as novels or poetry. Shelley Turkle writes of the enchantment of everyday possessions in *Evocative Objects*:

We find it familiar to consider objects as useful or aesthetic, as necessities or vain indulgences. We are on less familiar ground when we consider objects as companions to our emotional lives or as provocations to thought. [...] [the] focus is not on the object's instrumental power— how fast the train travels— but on the object as a companion in life experience: how the train connects emotional worlds.

(Turkle, 2011:5)

One photobook that illustrates Turkle's point about how our lives are accompanied and contained by material culture is *A Stranger in my Mother's Kitchen* by Celine Marchbank (pending publication, 2022). This title and Marchbank's first photobook *Tulip: My Mother's Favourite Flower* are accounts of her grieving the loss of her mother. *Tulip*... is a more conventional photobook,

³⁵ As intimated by biographer Alexander Masterman in *A Life Discarded: 148 diaries found in a skip* (2016). Masterman recounts his complicated feelings of intrusion as he gradually got to know the anonymous diarist.

hardbacked, with a sense of stillness permeating the pages. This dignified peace is characteristic of Marchbank's photography: during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown, she photographed a daily still life of flowers from her allotment. The richly coloured, shadowy, compositions like Northern Renaissance paintings are heavily atmospheric with subdued light and lack of movement³⁶. The long exposures are testament to the lived duration of their slow capture, conveying a yearning for the brighter colour and vitality of life outside.

Marchbank's current photobook project redresses *Tulip's* reflective quietude with a portrayal of life fully lived and grief fully lived with, related through the physical and emotional nourishment of food. The artist's mother was a chef: food was central to her professional and personal life, mediating shared social rituals of cooking, eating and merriment. Marchbank photographed meals she cooked from her mother's recipes, memorable dishes with all their complex Proustian sensory evocations (see p.81), combined with her mother's handwritten recipe cards and excerpts from the artist's journals about her experience of grief. The imagery and aesthetic remain still and contemplative, but Marchbank has enlivened the book concept through its multi-textured material design, documenting many existences and experiences simultaneously.

Marchbank and I spoke about *A stranger* ... when it still existed as a playfully tactile book dummy. The reader would be able to slide recipe cards out of little envelopes tucked inside, "you can even cook from it if you want to", Marchbank told me (MS2). You could recreate the smells and stories, making memories of your own. The book therefore has an element of a cookbook's instrumentality, yet it surpasses this function through artistic and reflective complexity. Multiple material gestures inspire this sophisticated performance: at the time, in 2019, Marchbank was considering a softback cover, multiple paper stocks and untrimmed pages to recall a scrapbook stuffed with loose-leaf additions.

A stranger... is the slow product of several years' of loving compilation, and circumstances including the pandemic have delayed its printing. Marchbank doesn't feel a need to rush it. While she produced most of the images and edit for her first book in the months immediately following her mother's passing, *A stranger* ... took years of slow photographing, writing, reflecting and re-editing. We discussed how the experience of making each project might reflect experiences of grief: initially intense and immediate, then a more protracted meditation (MS2). Angela Meah and Peter Jackson (2016) have positioned the domestic kitchen as a ritual site of multi-sensory

³⁶ Basic photography principle: the less light available, the longer the exposure time needed. Sharp focus equates with extreme stillness.

meaning-making and the re-enactment of memory. Kitchens can be intensely personal spaces for encounters with food and objects which mobilise “the sensory, haptic and kinetic dimensions of memory, through a combination of taste-, sound- and smell-scapes and mundane activities which are embedded in the rhythms of everyday life” (ibid.:514). For Marchbank, her home’s kitchen was a site of grief and comfort as she restaged her mother’s cooking. She was not simply re-enacting memory: through cookery, Marchbank re-performed an integral part of her mother’s identity, an essential part of their relationship, and performed her own artistic identity by making something new out of what came before. Combining these acts into a book alongside the recipe cards physically collapses multiple temporalities as images inscribed by the artist’s and her mothers’ hand nestle together. After years of developing the work, perhaps this materiality offers closure for the artist. Marchbank has written, “I am currently working on making this work into a book, perhaps to give it an ending. It’s all been about saying goodbye to grief, and now finally it feels the right time to bid it farewell” (Marchbank, 2021).

Marchbank’s book concept plays subtly with the reader’s familiarity with ephemera of recipes to enhance the affective power of food and memory. While she keenly asserts it is *not* a cookbook, its material proximity engages similar functions and evokes familial ritual. Other photobooks have subverted or exploited commonplace book types to contrast the book’s alleged function with its content. Two examples that co-opt commercial literature to highlight social issues are *La Déroute* [trans. “the detour”], by Nicolas Simarik (2006) and *ImmoRefugee* by Defrost Studio, photographs by Marco Tiberio (2016). The former parodies the French mail order catalogue *La Rédoute*. Co-produced with 600 inhabitants from Empalot, an impoverished area of Toulouse, the “catalogue” features local residents ‘modelling’ their own clothes and possessions around local community sites. It mimics the catalogue’s scale, with 1236 thin paper pages, and its chirpy tone, as participants adopt carefree postures. The project aimed to redress prejudices against the *banlieues*, replacing media tropes of burned out cars with colourful, smiling optimism. Despite this cheery outlook, the project delivers a thinly veiled critique of economic inequality: the capitalist lifestyle encouraged by catalogues and, recently, online shopping is not universally affordable nor sustainable. In approximating the same dimensions as *La Rédoute*, the material sum of the book is a solid testament to the 600 residents who took part. However, the flimsy stock of individual pages is quickly torn and disposable without the support of the larger community.

ImmoRefugee delivers social commentary through a 32-page magazine in the format of an estate agents’ leaflet. Pages upon pages of photographs of dwellings are accompanied by descriptions – how many bedrooms, proximity to places of worship, location in the ‘Sudanese neighbourhood’ or ‘Eritrean area’. These are clearly not homes for sale: they are makeshift shelters assembled

from tents, tarpaulins and branches in the refugee camps in Calais. The absurdity of a real estate publication about the Jungle highlights the paradox of people trapped in the long-term impermanence of these undesirable camps, which are for many an indefinite home. The book's descriptions of dwellings' proximity to facilities suggest the ramshackle area has developed infrastructure. Identifying the settlements within areas of nationality projects an imaginary map of the spatial organisation of this area: the shacks are no longer disconnected images, but related structures in a real geography.

At the centre, the layout shifts and full-bleed photographs of individual shelters fill consecutive double page spreads, confronting the reader with the details of the 'properties' in the publication. Gone are the novelty descriptions positing lean-tos as luxury saloons. The format may employ gimmick, but the large-scale images of the second half reinforce the issue's severity. The mechanism of the estate agent leaflet presents a typology of the desolate conditions in which human beings are trying to live, without overexposing the reader to compassion fatigue (Moeller, 1999). The printed artefact effectively emphasises the point through the transition of pages from spoof to solemn.

The ease with which the photobook overlaps with and critiques other forms of bound media demonstrates its versatility and inseparability from broader book practices. People with an interest in books for their functionality or subject may not discern whether they are most informed or compelled by text, or imagery or both. Therefore, I would argue the photobook's bookness is as strong a force as its photographic content, revealing these factors are inseparable within its encounter.

3.2 Affect and agency of photobook construction

As the photobook form can transform simple content into a complex conceptual statement, it facilitates organisational potentials that would not be possible with other media. This chapter has considered examples of pull-out recipe cards in *A Stranger in my Mother's Kitchen*, which allow potential actions of cooking and eating, and how co-opting other book forms can disrupt readers' expectations. The following section profiles artists' books that resist conventions of book production, before analysing how sophisticated book structures can raise complex issues about the relation between form, meaning, and perception, and intended and unintended effects of materiality.

3.2.1 Book forms that subvert

The power and authority associated with physical books discussed in the first section influence the form's effectiveness in creating a point of view (MS2: Solo). Sometimes the simple physicality of a book being made expresses its artistic argument, subverting the assumed Heideggerian need for engagement. For example, Kenneth Goldsmith's *Day* (2003) engages language as a found object by transcribing every word from the New York Times on 1st September 2000. The text is presented uniformly, highlighting the agency of the newspaper's typesetting, illustrations and materiality through their absence. Wooldridge reflected it isn't necessary to read this book; knowing about its existence makes the conceptual point (MS2: Wooldridge).

Mishka Henner's twelve-volume artist's book *Astronomical* (2011) likewise doesn't need reading to make its point. The collection of book objects depicts the distance of our solar system by transforming the experience of turning pages into a scaled unit of measurement of distance and time. The artwork includes a 9:47 minute video of turning each page. The artist's website reads, "The width of each page is a million km. On page 1 the Sun, on page 6,000 Pluto". The photographs of 'space' are almost completely, profoundly black. The set was produced in an open edition through a print-on-demand service, which charged per page rather than ink usage, so the fabrication also commented on the economies of book production. There were 130 sets produced "before production halted by printer", presumably once they noticed the extravagant quantities of ink consumed (Henner, 2020).

To encounter Henner's twelve volumes of almost entirely black pages might be confounding to a reader, because books generally have intelligible contents. Artist's books have a history of subverting expectations of what a book looks like (Drucker, 2004). One photobook encounter with a conceptually transformative effect occurred at CBA in New York when Reynolds showed me *The Oblivion Seekers* by Stephanie DeMer (2018). At first, it didn't look like a book: its 'pages' consist of 12 archival pigment prints mounted on small sheets of black, shining plexiglass; the 'binding' is a wooden band with grooves to slot pages in and through. Like any other binding, the band brings pages into dialogue as they juxtapose in space. The photographs are suggestive, shadowy portraits of people in nature, inspired by an artist's residency with a focus on mysticism. Positioned in the structure, each page's photograph is mirrored on the upright black plexi as a shadowy reflection looking out of oblivion (probably, the title framed my interpretation). In my encounter, prompted by a social interaction, the materiality of the pages and their image-contents were in a material-discursive relation with each other and the surrounding office space, reflected

in the shiny surface. Personally, it also enacted discursive power by shaping my conceptualisation of what can be considered a book. My exposure to artists' books in New York augmented my reluctance to assign a prescriptive definition to the material book forms I am researching. Physical book construction is therefore a varied and creative opportunity not only for material affect but ontological agency.

This contravention of boundaries of book definitions can be mobilised as a challenge to art and publishing economies. Subverting and experimenting with the book form is a recurring theme in Dayanita Singh's works, where she places books within wooden display "architecture" that can be hung individually or configured into structures (Fig.14). Singh's work has caused debate amongst conservative photobook enthusiasts who believe books should be bound (MS2: Allen). The frames complicate the books' function and status as artworks, contrasting physical security and rigidity with conceptual fluidity. In much of Singh's practice, the book form facilitates her ongoing and recursive exploration of how we engage with images, paper, transformation and chance. Many of Singh's projects refer to or repurpose images from earlier books or exhibitions: photographs from meticulous sequences recirculate in later books in dreamlike combinations, or even loose-leaf editions such as *Box 507* (2019). This wooden box of 30 image cards has a glass front so the owner can choose their 'cover' and place it on wall. One of Singh's 'spontaneous books', the form rejects the bound codex's orderliness and invites play, whilst retaining a physical container for the images, which the blurb instructs must not be separated. While the artist offers little explanation about what motivated the image selection, this remains a loose-leaf book instead of a portfolio because the images do not sit quietly and singularly, but shuffle and interact with one another.

The "Spontaneous Books" such as *Box 507* are motivated by a desire for greater flexibility in how photography can be exhibited and sold. They invite interpretive play from the reader/owner in how they read or display the book-object. *Museum Bhavan* (2017) further provokes manual and mental engagement, casting its reader as "curator" of nine "collections" of photographs contained in accordion-fold books, which they can unfold and position into dialogue with each other. Housed within an outer box, another booklet transcribes a conversation with Singh's long-term collaborator and publisher Gerhard Steidl. As a high-end publisher, Steidl possesses sufficient cultural and economic capital to facilitate production and collectorship of these sophisticated material artefacts.



Figure 14 Assorted works by Dayanita Singh, clockwise: Book 507 (2019); File Room Book Object (Moderna Kunst, Frankfurt, 2016); Museum Bhavan (2017); Museum of Chance installation at MoMA, New York, 2013. Source: artist's website, Steidl.de, MoMA.



3.2.2 Structuring experience and meaning

The structural experiments seen so far have engaged the book form to explore abstracted or ambiguous concepts. Book construction is also a powerful tool for structuring the photobook reader's experience and reception of specific messages. A photobook's physical form can be integral to narrative effect. In his instructional *Zine Binding Guide* zine, Bush identifies strategies for "separating content", such as "multi-section" and "dos-a-dos" zine formats, which suit projects with "two distinct parts which it makes sense to keep physically separate", or the "zine in

a zine” structure which uses two paper sizes in a single section zine to offer experimentation and “surprises” where images can “open up” (Bush, 2019).

More subtle devices also prompt manual behaviours, such as the liftable flaps in *The Restoration Will* by Mayumi Suzuki (2017). The book interprets Suzuki’s trauma at losing her parents and home in the 2011 tsunami in Japan. Amongst the destruction, she located the remains of the family photography studio business, her father’s camera and the family photo album in the mud. The photographs’ fading colours reflected the artist’s sensation of losing memories of her loved ones (Suzuki, 2018). Still, it is the book’s construction that immerses the reader in Suzuki’s experience. On one page, barely noticeable against the texture of rubble, there is flap hiding an image of a camera lens. I almost missed the flap before Jennifer Reeves pointed it out to me (MS2). Finding the camera under this subtle flap performs Suzuki’s personal tale of physical discovery, digging through ruins and painful loss, and unearthing a treasure of sentiment through which she could mourn. More than the reproductions of washed-out family portraits from a ruined album, for me that single flap was this book’s Barthesian *punctum* (MS1i:110).

Whilst reading *The Restoration Will*, I felt how difficult it must have been to produce and share work about such devastating loss. Photo albums are one kind of book many homes would produce and keep regardless of education or literacy (though not cost). It is unsurprising this domestic precedent to the photobook recurs as a common theme in artists’ projects. Lesley Martin mentioned the family archive is a persistent trend in photobook submissions to the Aperture Book Award (MS2), enacting a tension between personal histories and public book consumption. Still, Suzuki’s book is far more than a contemplation of photography’s role in family memories, because of the poignant tale the reader co-enacts as they engage with its sophisticated material construction, something also seen in the next example.

In the fold: statements in construction

These books hold violence

An end folding inwards

Implosion is a sucking in force

Drawing deeper

Nestled in the fold

The creased core is hurt

The fold conceals and protects;

The fold is a passion aggression expression.

Folding to shield, folding to shun.

This short poem, penned in a moment of ekphrastic pretention, describes an encounter with two photobooks (Appendix G). Both share a similar material design strategy, with different symbolic effect. They are constructed using a French fold: each page is doubled over, with a crease along the outer edge, and the loose edges sewn into the binding. In both books, photographs are concealed within the folded pages. *Reconstrucción* by Rosana Simonassi (2016) comments on fatal acts of violence against women as the artist poses herself in a sequence of photographs reconstructed from public domain images of female deaths. A sheet of plain translucent paper folds around each photograph, obscuring its detail. *Illa* by Salva López (2015) reflects on the author's breakup with his girlfriend, with whom he travelled to many islands around the world. Following their split, the artist visited another island, Lanzarote. Black and white photographs of the stark volcanic landscape cover the opaque white pages, whilst enclosed within their folded space on the reverse are colour photographs of his former partner, from happier travels together.

In each book, the folded pages ask a question of the viewer's manual interaction: "how much do you want to see what's on the inside?" It's awkward to tilt the book and try to glance between the stiff crease, and there's a danger that the paper will be dented or torn. Thus, the design enacts a trial of voyeurism. Reeves, who introduced me to these books, told me she had never tried to peek. *Reconstrucción* had a profound effect on me when I first saw it. On my second encounter, Reeves provided *Illa* for comparison, which amplified the affect of the folded pages in both cases. I revisited the V&A months later to see them again, which inspired my amateur poem.

In *Reconstrucción*, the fold functions both to preserve the privacy of the victim and to interrogate the public's (via the reader's) gruesome curiosity about murders, especially of women, by challenging their desire to look inside. By posing her own body in their place, I wondered if the artist experienced an embodied, empathetic proximity to these victims through reconstructing their fate. The maker of *Illa* appears to be excising his heartbreak in a similar mode to a songwriter's ballad about lost love. Perhaps placing the photographs of his ex within the folded pages signified avoiding a sentiment that brought him pain. On the one hand, there is a sense of happier, colourful memory, trapped out of reach within a bleak experience of unfamiliar, monotone landscapes. It could read as a poetic, introspective tale of love and loss. However, to me, "hiding" the images of a woman within the folded pages of book to be published and sold appeared as an uncomfortable aggression when seen alongside *Reconstrucción*. According to online bookshop blurbs, the use of the fold in López's book was conceived of by (also male) designer Eloi Gimeno. Interrogating my response raised questions about consent and patriarchal

oppression that might not have been intended by the artist, but nevertheless rang alarm bells for a feminist interpretation.

By contrast, in *Reconstrucción*, the fold seems fiercely protective of women's bodies and experiences. The source images of violence that had previously circulated freely are restricted, transformed simultaneously into illusion and evidence through Simonassi's forensic restaging. It was published by female-led imprint CHACO, whose projects showcase "Latin American authors who use the image as a space for reflection, to throw uncomfortable and sharp projects into the world" (CHACO 2021). Depending on the reader's interaction, *Reconstrucción* could be accusatory. Even if you looked inside the fold, the sensational appetite for true crime might not be satisfied. The images are removed from their context, leaving the reader to reconstruct the crime in their imagination and potentially implicating them in a mental act of violence that renders them complicit. In both examples, the enclosing fold of paper joined into the binding had simple, powerful and varied agency in my encounters. My responses to both photobooks were influenced and made more vivid through the specific intra-action between the two works.

For Reeves, *Reconstrucción* "gets everything it can out of the form of the book" (MS2). It was one of her favourite recent NAL acquisitions. Beyond the impactful folded pages, its agency is distributed throughout its materiality. I reflected on its slim dimension following my third encounter when looking up bibliographic information:

7 photographs; it's over quickly. I remember sitting there, turning the pages, slowly, and having a strange sensation of unexpected loss – because I expected it to be longer: because photobooks are generally longer, and because the folded mass of paper means the thickness of the book belies its brevity.

This slippage between the volume of pages perceived and number of pages received has a poetic resonance of being cut short, a life, for example. So the sense of loss is amplified, because although they are reconstructions, these images represent lives lost as victims of violence. I wrote the book is "over quickly" – as one might describe a death.

I discovered a material-discursive intra-action between matter and mattering in the book's dimension, resulting from the relation between its number of images and physical construction (Barad, 2007).

This co-productive materiality extends further: the book is packaged with actual dirt sprinkled between its covers, like the various floors upon which some victims might have been found or buried in. Upon opening, this would scatter and stick to you: as Reeves put it, "you yourself become dirty, by handling the book you become complicit", through suggested voyeurism or non-intervention. In my encounter with the NAL copy, the dirt was accentuated because it was

encased within a custom plastic book cover. These transparent CoLibri covers are standard library conservation, but in this case, Reeves ensured some dirt was encapsulated and visible. It's so effective I originally thought the plastic wallet was part of the book, like an evidence bag. The book is kept in an archival card envelope to protect other books from escaping dust. For a private owner, this conservation intervention might not be possible and the dirt would eventually dissipate. This copy of the book has therefore accrued specific aesthetic resonance through interaction with the institution's conservation priorities. In this complex situated encounter, where the dirt deliberately accompanied the book, it subverted the norms of what materials books contain, which was in turn policed and bounded by the conservation practices of the NAL to protect this object and the collections at large.

The overall construction of this photobook as I encountered it manifested a complex of technological, social, hermeneutic, and affective relations that was possible because of the liminal status occupied by photobook objects in the wider world. Building on the previous section's examination of photobooks that subvert epistemic expectations of what book-objects should be, the analysis additionally demonstrated how a photobook's physicality made profound political and affective interventions in this reader's lived encounter. In the examples in this section, the book's physicality is a source of meaning, whether epistemic, conceptual, narrational, which is constantly receding and reentering the viewer's encounter as their mental and manual response is engaged. The following section will continue analysis of the photobook-object's agency in eliciting responses from the reader, through extending Chapter 2's discussion of writerly interpretation to the photobook's physicality, emphasising the economic and political agencies of materiality.

3.3 Affect and agency of materials

3.3.1 Affective associations

As demonstrated by the analysis of *Reconstrucción*, multiple material aspects have affective agency in the encounter. The capabilities of modern technology have expanded the variety of materials and bindings used in editioned books. As the plasticky texture of *Vote No.1*'s laminated pages evoked responses of political sliminess (Duffy 2015; see p.83), or structural devices such as flaps and pull-out pages demand interaction, the materials themselves have subtle agency in eliciting predictable responses and manual behaviours.

These interactive behaviours can be considered through Wolfgang Iser's reader response theory, which identifies stylistic structures in literary texts that parallel our experiences in the world and invite readers to form specific responses as they connect the text with their own experience (1980:34). Where "response-inviting structures" use syntax and language, a photobook's use of materials also directs interpretation. For example, prior experience of tearing tissue paper would instruct the reader that thin paper pages require delicate handling, while readers may also associate it with wrapping something precious (PS1b). Structure links with meaning-making when careful physical handling evokes emotional associations of sensitivity, or with *The Restoration Will*, opening flaps gives a sense of tentative (re)discovery. The physical photobook therefore becomes its own interpretive environment (Whitehead, 2012). Authors can work with the imagined reader's expectations in constructing this response-inviting environment, such as predicting what behaviours a material will encourage. They can also subvert the response completely, such as the surprise of *Reconstrucción's* dirt. According to Iser,

If the text reproduces and confirms familiar norms, the reader may remain relatively passive, whereas he is forced into intensive activity when the common ground is cut away from under him.

(1980: 84-85)

This intense experience of making sense of a sudden unfamiliarity such as an unexpected texture can be affective because, according to Barthes, affect comes from adventure (Barthes, 1981).

Whitehead (2012) has demonstrated how Iser's theory effectively applies to a broader range of cultural products through his analysis of exhibition design, using examples such as a darkened room with spotlighting to create an impression of rarity. The photobook invites responses from the first moment of perception (as seen in Chapter 2). Factors such as dimension are proportionate to a book's spatial relation. If a group of large books are situated together, such as in the London Library where heavy, tall monographs are shelved in separate folio stacks, the photographers' name adorning each spine does not necessarily claim more attention than its neighbour (MS1ii:100). However, in a grouping of differently-sized books, such as in Fig.15, the cumbersome publications of Sebastião Salgado and Josef Koudelka stand out. The books' substantial materiality invites perceptions that these two canonised photographers are superior to the smaller volumes' authors. The person who arranged these books might even have preferred Koudelka because his book is positioned higher up. Through physical dimension, the selection of books manifests a similar hierarchical relation to the photographers' professional status. This reveals it is not only the construction of a single book that invites responses, but the material configurations of books and their situation which have affect (see Chapter 4). The next section expands this analysis through relating materiality with time and duration.



Figure 15 Original image source: *Don't Take Pictures (blog)*. Speech bubble added by me.

3.3.2 Materiality and time

Materials have agency in a broader networked sense when considered in relation to time and economy. Bush and Wooldridge both said materiality can be determined by a book's purpose and longevity, because things are made with an idea of how long they should last (MS2). Wooldridge reasoned an interest in material production is an interest in duration, because it considers how to make something so that it will reward multiple viewings. There's little point making something durable if the reader gets all they can from a text on their first reading.

Choice of materials and content are intuitively linked. Elisabeth Eisenstein suggested there is a logic or "soft determinism" inherent to print culture (c.f. Gitelman, 2014). To make something with cheap materials and simple construction, such as a zine, implies the object holds contemporaneous value because it is not built to last. This ephemeral materiality complements the more straightforward impact usually found in zine content: zines wouldn't usually contain large amounts of text or multi-layered visual narratives that require slow looking, but rather would be reactionary statements or personal expression – "this is what I'm feeling *now*" (MS2: Reynolds). The low-fi zine aesthetic means things take less time to design and produce, cost less, and often have politically subversive content, which connects zine materiality with counter-culture (Nguyen, 2012; Weida, 2013). A more tactile object invites readers to hold it for longer, which may be necessary with a complex narrative structure, but also suggests design, planning and production took longer. In the materiality of print culture, there is therefore an element of determinism in which factors such as subject matter, time (or urgency), accessibility and finance are inextricably linked to what kind of physical book-type object is produced to suit that work.

According to Harold Innis, the materiality of media not only structures how something is made, but also structures different kinds of societies, depending on how they engage with time and space:

Media that emphasize time are those durable in character such as parchment, clay and stone. The heavy materials are suited to the development of architecture and sculpture. Media that emphasize space are apt to be less durable and light in character such as papyrus and paper. The latter are suited to wide areas in administration and trade.

(Innis, 1950:7)

Innis explains how the Romans' conquest of Egypt gave access to supplies of papyrus, which produced a writing surface more cheaply and easily than parchment. This enabled a large administrative empire, because all documents could flow back to a centralised point of power (i.e. Rome). In societies producing media that emphasise time, such as stone tablets, knowledge and decision making must fall within localised sites of power, with more durable, institutional hierarchies.³⁷ The "civilising" power of material media discussed by Innis is similar to the structuring power of architecture and ritual behaviours in museums outlined by Carol Duncan (1995), to be explored in Chapter 5.

On the one hand, the conventional Western (probably hardback) photobook emphasises time, because its paper contents are somewhat protected by its covers. Photobooks gather in localised sites requiring specialised access such as libraries or private collections. In extreme circumstances, such as the London Library example, they transform into an architectural support. They materialise knowledge and make it last in these institutional sites, which perform epistemic practices surrounding the photobook's ontology (see Chapter 5). The photobook also transforms the photograph's relation to time, as Sontag has noted, reproductions of "fragile photographs are guaranteed longevity, if not immortality" (1977:4).

However, compared to the heavier, more commercially-valuable materiality of framed photographic prints, photobooks are also media that emphasise space. Their pages are dense with information and creative expression, and they move easily through the world when transferred individually. As discussed in Chapter 6, one photobook is distributed between the sum of its physical copies, and its contents disseminated wherever they end up. The space-emphasising qualities of photobooks therefore support a wide-ranging social ecosystem of cultural production and consumption. As commodities to be shared and sold, they play roles of trade (supporting

³⁷ To prevent an overly Eurocentric ontology of book technologies, it is essential to note paper-based inscription has not dominated every culture (e.g., cuneiform, Aboriginal message sticks); in paper-dominant societies, the book has rarely been the default record. East Asian societies preferred scrolls. Even in Western civilisations, binding paper into books was generally an afterthought until the 18th C. Earlier paper manuscripts acquired loose-leaf would be bound in the owner's library style.

individuals and organisations in the publishing and photography industries) and administration (through promoting the careers of photographers) in the broader ‘empire’ of the photography world. In this analogy, the centralised seats of the empire from which these photobooks flow and return might be international book fairs such as Offprint, Polycopies, or Printed Matter.

3.3.3 Materials with political agency

Innis’ time-space model works best in relation to an Anglo/Eurocentric industry, with all roads leading back to the institutional collections and large book fairs in Europe and North America. A photobook encounter with *Ciudad sin nombre* (2018) by Wolfgang Lehrner in my interview with Wooldridge inspired a discussion of non-Western photobook practices. Translated as ‘city without a name’ or ‘nameless city’, the book contains “images and abysmal landscapes on the margins of Mexico City” (Gato Negro Ediciones, 2020). The most noticeable aspect of this monochrome book is its flat, matte texture. The images have a grainy, Xerox-like density from risograph printing, a cross between photocopying and screen printing. “Riso” is currently trendy. Its colours are vivid, with slightly blocky results giving a pleasing, early-digital feel. It is fairly inexpensive; as Wooldridge noted, “certain techniques become popular as a kind of shorthand for what is viable commercially” (MS2).

The use of riso in Lehrner’s book has transformative agency in altering the appearance and affect of imagery. The mattifying texture renders the landscape as inert, distanced and anonymised. Wooldridge and I discussed how “you can’t imagine it any other way”: the print is so absorbing it is hard to picture these images as crisp, perhaps colour photographs. The book aims to render the images indistinct in this way: it “does not designate a specific problem in a particular city, but rather a condition of the megalopolis: indefinable spaces that challenge any possibility of delimiting, defining or limiting them” (Gato Negro Ediciones 2020).

Risograph has greater agency in the context of the publisher’s wholesale use of the technique. Gato Negro Ediciones (GNE) advocates “the liberty of thought” to counteract a “new world where temporary excess and obstruction of knowledge are lived at its height” (GNE 2020). As well as graphic design, photography and illustration, the imprint publishes artistic and political manifestos. Riso facilitates the production of these subversive materials by being “economically-amicable yet unconstrained”; i.e. inexpensive, quick to produce, yet offering broad creative possibility.

In GNE books, risograph is agential in mobilising a set of economic and aesthetic conditions that reduce purchase cost, make information more accessible, art more affordable, and to oppose a “Western aesthetic” (MS2: Wooldridge). This rejection of Western convention (as discussed at the start of this chapter) is a gesture against notions of colonial superiority. Again, the manifesto-like ‘about’ section of GNE’s website asserts:

the books of Gato Negro do not wish to deconstruct reality through ornamental distractions that lately seem to have become an inevitable requisite within the modern history of publishing. Instead, Gato Negro embraces the deliberately-chosen content in its most primal form: straightforward and entire.

(Gato Negro Ediciones 2020).

In rejecting “ornamental distractions”, it appears GNE is rejecting the standard model set by dominant European publishing businesses such as Mack, Steidel, Patrick Frey etc., which combine luxury production with in-house design. According to Wooldridge, Western books have a different aesthetic to the Mexican book, which “feels specific, tied to a place, with distinct materiality that is affordable and achievable”. When I asked what may contribute to a ‘Mexican aesthetic’, we discussed how this could emerge from historical or political reasons, a culture of using what’s to hand, but also in response to immediate circumstances, economies, climate and ecologies within which books are produced.

Alejandro Zambra illustrates culture-specific economies of print media in his essay “In Praise of the Photocopy” (2018). The Chilean writer discusses his tattered library of bootleg ‘books’, photocopied, hole-punched and bound in ring-binders. Despite now owning many of these volumes as print editions, Zambra reflects on the economic and ideological necessity of these photocopies in his youth. The homespun objects now hold curious affect as artefacts of subversion, as well as symbolising obsolete rituals: waiting for the photocopy machine, “impatiently, smoking, on the other side of the copy-shop window”, reading the “warm bundles of paper” (ibid.). Zambra describes how Latin America has a particular relationship with the photocopy because of the prohibitive cost of books:

As citizens of a country where books are ridiculously expensive to buy and libraries are poorly equipped or nonexistent, we got used to reading photocopies, and we even came to find it charming. In exchange for just a few pesos, some giant, tireless machines could bestow on us the literature we so desired.

Unlike in the UK, where there is a history of socially-driven publishing like Pelican and Penguin aimed at a particular print democratisation, in Latin America there was no affordable publishing infrastructure, so the photocopy became the central mode of sharing texts in socially-driven societies. A kind of subculture evolved, as friends traded advice as well as photocopies – Zambra recalled “a classmate who photocopied War and Peace at a rate of thirty pages per week, and a

friend who bought reams of light-blue paper because according to her, the printing came out better” (ibid.).

Although this account appears nostalgic, even essentialising, the affordability and accessibility of printed books remains problematic in Latin America. A Brazilian publisher at a book fair in 2019 described a “paper mafia” in Brazil that makes printing photobooks prohibitively expensive, and a luxury pursuit for photographers with independent finance (MS1ii.:55-56). Zambra claims books are still “scandalously expensive” in Chile. While publishers once campaigned “the photocopy was killing the book”, more recently there has been an “overly elaborate” discussion about digital books, ranging from appeals to romantic images of reading, to the “miracle” of carrying your library in your pocket. Ultimately, the discussion is reducible to economy: “Can we really expect a student to spend twenty thousand pesos on a book? Isn’t it quite reasonable for them to just download it from the Internet?” (Zambra, 2018).

The fact that books remain luxury items is lamentable considering the agency that physical book forms can have over a text. Many manifestos would only fill a few A4 pages as a printout or PDF. However, in the example of Zoe Leonard’s text “I want a president...” (2017), using riso to materialise it as an inexpensive small book gives it aesthetic appeal and durability, which encourages you to keep it and look again. A few sheets of paper are fragile and suggest filing and forgetting. Easily crumpled, they imply having *been* looked at, rather than inviting repeat readings. A PDF is easily lost in the virtual depths of a hard drive or cloud. The solidity of the book has agency in converting the manifesto into something enduring, a sturdier call to arms that has yet to be answered, but which persists.

3.3.4 Materials of identity

From my interviews, I observed the way in which materials constructed a publisher’s brand identity, signalling a system of tastes and values akin to habitus. GNE’s consistent use of riso distils their values and the socio-political reality of their geographical location. Their publishing identity is enhanced through flashes of orange in most publications, bringing together their diverse output through subtle, tactile means rather than explicit logos. Likewise, Trolley Books always use a bright, sunshine yellow headband (the piece of fabric covering the edge of the binding at the top and bottom of the spine). Although *Looking for Alice* by Siân Davey (2015) is one of the Trolley publications she is most proud of, Hannah Watson shared her frustration that the wrong shade of yellow was accidentally used for the headbands. Another brand signifier for Trolley books is the small logo of a trolley at the base of the spine. When the imprint’s founder,

Gigi Giannuzzi, passed away and Watson became director, the books she went on to publish featured the trolley emblem pointing in the other direction, making a subtle, symbolic gesture in the fabric of the books to mark this turning point.

Publishers have made use of the materiality of a series of books to signal certain areas of activity. Dashwood Books try not to be generic in book design, but they produced a series of visual books in “paperback” size and scale (MS1ii:36-37). Where Western publishing convention has generally favoured hardback, this appears to be changing as more designers are opting for softback, seen in *A Stranger in My Mother’s Kitchen*. Watson dislikes softcover for its practical inconvenience – “it can’t stand up, it can’t stack, it’s easy to damage” (MS2), but I heard another publisher proclaim it to be “the future” (MS1i:89). In a small industry faced with costly distribution, every gram saved by lighter softcover formats has financial value. As with Wooldridge’s argument about riso being fashionable, often popular trends are as much encouraged by what is commercially advantageous as by aesthetic effect. In the past photography publishing mimicked the generalised publishing practice of producing a hardback then a softback of the same book, such as the first editions of *In Flagrate* by Chris Killip (1988). This shows photobook publishing has gravitated into its own field of production. Multiple editions and copies will be problematized further in Chapter 6.

A photobook’s materiality therefore makes a significant statement about the economic and political context of its production, as well as furthering the complex narrative-hermeneutic affect of its encounter. Thinking about what books ‘do’ in this way, as initiated at the start of this chapter, leads us to question what agency they enact and *how* they act. In a philosophical sense, if photobooks have agency, they are no longer passive objects. The traditional binary state of not being an object is being a subject, which involves having subjectivity. To reason a photobook as having subjectivity initially seems irrational because they are not sentient beings. Husserl argued the embodied (human) self is a subject of experience and an object in the world (Durt, 2020), implying subjectivity requires self-awareness, of which only humans are capable. This nevertheless expresses a relational dynamic between bodily existence and agency. Understanding subjectivity, or any sense of a bounded self or entity as a product of intra-acting forces and flows opens this discussion to apply to more-than-human entities.

While subjecthood would re-affirm the bounded subject, photobooks can support a kind of relational subjectivity in their materiality, their contents, colophon and additional bibliographic information. They are designed to predispose readers to perform in certain ways in the photobook encounter, eliciting inter-subjective responses. According to Bennett, more-than-human agency manifests as ecologies of impersonal affect, in relations between things and their

place in the world (2010:57). The tenor of that relational, impersonal affect could be described as a more-than-human subjectivity or “vitalism”, expanding Husserl’s relational view of human experience. Photobooks embody the subjectivities of their creator(s), while their physicality and conditions of their encounter accrue and communicate layers of meaning which might also endow them with subjectivity as an effect or product of their intra-actions, as will be seen in greater detail in Chapter 6.

More-than-human subjectivity is gaining urgency as a philosophical question in our increasingly hybridised technological society. It has been explored in greater detail elsewhere, for example Rosi Braidotti’s work *The Posthuman* (2013). The nuance of this profound debate is beyond the remit of this thesis. However, in asserting agency of books in encounter and using active language to describe this agency, as I do throughout the thesis, I am also casting their agential capacity for certain tones of affect as something akin to relational subjectivity. I take up and extend the notion of agency and reactivity of photobook materiality through considering the relational engagement between maker and material in the next section.

3.4 Materialities of making, mattering and meeting

Amongst the makers I spoke with, their affinity with books was often preceded by an affinity with paper. Of all the parts of a book that have agency, paper acts most frequently and variously. It is the conceptual and material support for the book’s ideas, and the common denominator in how photobooks are used, experienced, designed, produced, priced, weighed and shipped, stored, touched, smelled, torn, stained, deteriorated. Even clothbound, board hardback covers are usually made of the same fibrous stuff as paper.

More abstractly, Wooldridge has described the page as a “hypothetical space”: ideas are projected onto and out of it (MS2). Paper is a space where something can be trialled or explained, i.e. “that works on paper”. Although paper is material, it is also symbolic: it provides an in-between site that facilitates more tangible results. Money is a classic example of this (Searle, 1995). The old paper money used to say “I promise to pay the bearer ten pounds”. The ten-pound note is not the same as the value of ten pounds, but it can be used to procure goods at that price. Increasingly, money is not symbolised by paper but digital ones and zeros that translate into a

sum when they flash onto a screen. Paper is thus a flexible substance: in one context, it acts as Latour's immutable mobiles (2005); in another, it is as transient as tomorrow's chip papers³⁸.

Working with paper is understanding its agency, not only conceptually, but in the physicality of touching or folding. When I undertook a bookbinding course at the London Centre for Book Arts, I learned paper acts assertively under certain conditions. For example, the paper's grain, determined by the direction the pulp is rotated through the drum, can make or break your bookbinding project (MS1i:112-113). Folding against the grain (literally)³⁹ is tricky and inconsistent, and gluing against the grain will make your paper buckle. The tutors at LCBA displayed embodied knowledge of paper's qualities and caprices as they demonstrated finding the grain direction by tearing off a small piece and licking it, or letting it sit, folded over itself but not creased, to gauge tensile resistance or a smooth *flop*. Through learning to make books I discovered paper is what holds a hardback book together, not metaphorically speaking, but via the endpapers. I formerly thought endpapers were merely decorative, with glue and stitching doing the work. The endpapers are in fact what makes the book block sit snugly and squarely within its covers. They are sewn or glued to the block, then glued to the case. Too tight and the endpapers tear, too loose the spine will gape, too off-centre and the book will not sit flat. The skill required to case-in a book block looked effortless for the tutors, but my own attempts proved otherwise.

Much like my longhand data management strategy (p.68), many photographers and artists also rely on paper for sequencing their ideas. In his issue of the *PhotoBook Review* dedicated to editing and sequencing, Campany asked practitioners to share images of book works-in-progress. Even amongst highly experienced editors, most resulting images showed looseleaf printouts of photographs laid across floors or tacked to walls (Fig.16). The spatial organisation of a photobook encounter is visible at this development stage: when pictures are spread out and rearranged into different combinations, the whole narrative arc can be visualised at once. This manual sequencing can involve randomly laying out pictures multiple times to see if pairings or themes emerge; grouping pictures by content or subtext; blue-tacking pictures onto loose sheets or into notebooks to mimic turning a page from one image and landing on the next. There is a

³⁸ For readers who may be unfamiliar with the British phrase "today's news is tomorrow's chip papers": fish and chips would be wrapped in old newspaper. My mum recently told me how my great-grandmother would line her plastic shopping basket with newspaper to collect the fried fish every Friday lunchtime. Paper also mediates memories through immaterial means.

³⁹ The frequency of metaphorical paper in everyday idiom shows its essential, ubiquitous presence in Anglophone human society. In fact, this phrase originated in carpentry.

negotiation between this macro view of the content, and the imagined reading experience when the parts are assembled into a material, temporal book (MS1ii:97-98).



Figure 16 'What does editing look like?' centrefold from PhotoBook Review 2018, ed. David Company (skewed in the scanner)

Paper facilitates this shuffling and gesturing by offering a larger spread of visual information than a computer screen would allow, as well as manual engagement with the flow of images. It is lightweight, easily scattered and disorganised by breeze or pets, which sometimes brings serendipitous combinations, but otherwise must be curbed with tape and weights. It is a different paper agency to that of the pages of the published photobook, because this paper is not intended to endure or be made public, but rather to enact play and problem-solving. Like storyboarding a film, it is an exercise of figuring a multi-dimensional experience through a flat, spatial arrangement. Paper enacts agency as a space of deferral, where scattered printouts stand in for the photobook-in-progress.

In bookbinding, makers learn to work with the lively plasticity and rigidity of paper. As a tool in photobook development, the conceptual spaces conjured by bodies of paper have instrumental agency in building concept. Both examples show practitioners working *with* the affordances of paper's materiality. Tim Ingold describes this as a morphogenetic making process, in which form, idea and understanding emerge organically, a kind of *growth*, through the collaboration between maker and material (2011:22). This is contrary to traditional, hylomorphic creative production, a "transposition from image to object" in which practitioners "impose forms internal to the mind upon a material world" that is discrete and external to the body of the maker (ibid.:21). Ingold

writes, “even if the maker has a form in mind, it is not this form that creates the work; it is the engagement with materials”, as in his description of basket-weaving on a beach:

Sometimes [the willow] put up a fight, springing back and striking the weaver in the face. ... then we realised that it was actually this resistance, this friction set up by branches bent forcibly against each other, that held the whole construction together. The form was not imposed on the material from without, but rather was generated in this force field, comprised by the relations between the weaver and the willow.

(ibid.:22-23)

Ingold continues to describe how some baskets acquired an angled shape where their weavers were exposed to stronger winds nearer the shore. The windy environment combined with the tensile strength of the willow and the maker’s physical strength and stamina collectively produced each basket with unique materiality.

This example, as with bookbinding and image sequencing, can be considered as co-production, in which making and meaning arise through intra-action of maker(s), materials and environments, whether these be physical such as paper, or conceptual, such as images. So photobooks are seen as intra-active phenomena throughout their life cycle, through initial creative development and production and later as they act in their encounter with the reader. In discussing the roles of maker and material, Ingold paraphrases Jane Bennett (2010:60):

It is the artisan’s desire to see what the material can *do*, by contrast to the scientist’s desire to know what it *is*, that [...] enables the former to discern a life in the material and thus, ultimately, to ‘collaborate more productively’ with it.

(2011:31)

Ingold frames a dualism between the knowledges gained by artisans and scientists: while the latter seeks an objective, singular ontology, the former thinks processually with materials and therefore gains tacit, embodied understanding. While Ingold maintains a distinction between human maker and active material, he is essentially reasoning that a praxis-oriented approach to understanding how materials behave and how things are made is more fruitful than studying objects as inert, deliberate artefacts of human design. In this study of the photobook, this principle extends beyond the formative stages of photobook production: to collaborate and think *with* photobooks and their agencies at many diverse points of intra-active encounter reveals more about photobooks and people in the process.

3.4.1 Collaboration and connectivity mediated through materials

The material process of making also mediates social relationships. Few artists have the skills or technical facilities to produce all stages of a photobook independently. Even if they design and bind it, they may require a printing service. All photographic artists engage to some degree with

tools and technologies. Photobook production often involves physical and intellectual collaboration between artists, publishers, designers and printers, whilst the epistemic and commercial activities of producing photobooks extend this network to distributors, booksellers, publicists and critics. The social agency of photobook materiality is evident in Thomas Sauvin and Kensuke Koike's collaboration *No More No Less* (2018), a trio of photobooks made by different publishers. The artists sent the same series of Koike's photographs to three publishers with three months to produce a publication ahead of launching it at Polycopies in November 2018. The project displays a conceptual experiment in how different designers and publishers treat a series of images in a controlled duration. It is also a droll statement on the photobook industry as collectors bought all three books as a dispersed trilogy. Through relating creative practices, the three publications connect international geographies of the publishers, printers, and networks of contributors with their production and circulation.

Photobook materiality mediates many other social relations. For example, some publishers may test a working relationship with an artist by producing a smaller publication, which, if successful may lead to greater collaboration (MS1ii:36-37). The measure of this success is not only financial, but whether the collaborators enjoy a positive working relationship in realising the work (ibid.). Depending on the project's scale, photobook production can signal important markers for career progression and offer opportunities to meet with a variety of other practitioners and industry stakeholders (MS2: Martin).

A number of interviewees commented on the popularity of photobook-making workshops whose course leaders have distinct approaches to production and design (MS2: Reeves, Watson, 10x10). This results in many attendees producing photobooks with similar material design, such as an emphasis on varied paper stock or handmade elements. This can be productive when the workshop style suits the project, but there are circumstances where an artist produces a dummy with unnecessarily elaborate construction, which makes them harder for commercial publication (MS2: Watson). This echoes Ingold's emphasis that creative production works best as an organic co-production between maker, materials and other relevant forces.

For some artists, making a book is a punctuation, rather than a finite, conclusive end result. When the art is a personal investigation, the outputs morph through dummies and publications but the real work is located within the artist and the issues they are pursuing (MS1ii:97-98). The supposed finality of printing and selling a photobook can help artists identify areas of improvement (ibid.). This corresponds to Wooldridge's observation on the difference between photobooks made by photographers as carriers of photography, and photobooks made by artists,

who use photography and the book to co-productively explore conceptual aims⁴⁰. The published book is therefore not an end point, but a form that materialises broader conceptual thinking and ongoing, socially-networked collaborations.

The view of the book as a total, finite work, instead of one of flux and limitation, could be related to art historical critique of modernist views of artworks as bounded objects. Art critic Douglas Crimp (1981) has discussed how the canvas physically signifies art only exists within its rigid border and the sites where it can hang, for example, galleries, affluent homes. Performance-based and transient “works in situ” that reject the picture frame also liberate art from becoming the capitalist commodity to which society has become accustomed – classifiable, transportable, saleable (Fisher, 2009). The often inexpensive, plural outputs of photobook projects disrupt the modernist emphasis on original works of art as they unfurl beyond the stoppage of their material forms, before and after their production, circulate as internet images, are discussed in talks, and resonate in readers’ memories.

The photobook’s resistance to singular modes of use, interpretation and definition positions it as a postmodern medium. As Ihab Hassan (1986) 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” (515). As each copy of a book can be revisited time and again, its interpretation is grounded in the empirical situation of each of those plural readings. This means there is a plurality of engagement activated by the reader as well as the author (as seen in Chapter 2), and through the multiplicity of encounters (see Chapter 6).

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the materials and materiality of photobooks across a broad spectrum of engagement. Materials not only direct our appreciation, but in a softly deterministic sense, they inform how a project is conceived. Concept directs form and content, which refines the concept in a recursive, hermeneutic pattern. If the book you are trying to make is one of intimacy, you probably wouldn’t make it very large, which might limit the quantity of images. If you make busy, detailed images, you might conceive a story that would suit a larger book. The process of making

⁴⁰ For clarification, see p.87.

is one that brings people physically together, to shuffle pictures around in a room, travel to printing presses together, and meet again at book launches.

The stuff of bookishness, *knowing* bookishness, is located between the practices of making and reading and selling, and in relation to other, different but also booky things: book memories, book-shaped objects, an abstract understanding of the power books can have. Above all, a crucial characteristic of bookishness is its portability. As books they move from place to place, from studio to printer to shop to armchair to gallery vitrine, our interactions and behaviours with them shift. The ways in which this happens, and their impact on the photobook encounter, will be the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Photobook Site and Scene

Have you ever plucked a book off a shelf on impulse, draped yourself over a chair and melted into browsing its contents? You might, frequently, if you are so lucky to have a home library – with space to store it and resources to grow it. As author of a thesis on photobooks my own collection is embarrassingly small. Photobook purchases, few and far between, have been careful and coveted, but weeks can pass without my taking one down for a look. Maybe this reflects the limited range of titles I have at my domestic disposal.

For some time, photobooks were often called ‘coffee table books’, which characterizes the object in question as a frivolous symbol of cultural status and economic affluence, destined to lounge visibly but idly upon surfaces alongside sofas⁴¹. This term situates the photobook within a specific relation to furniture and function. In doing so, it suggests the mode of looking it invites: not close scrutiny or fervent, greedy page turning, but a languid, passing interest. However, we know contemporary photobooks to be far more versatile, in material construction, in how they perform and the sites where they are found. They can appear in high street bookshops (or even charity shops). They abound in esoteric spaces like photobook awards and museum art libraries. Photobooks are sometimes gallery exhibits, whether placed on a plinth in a starring role, or playing supporting actor to a print display. Several times a year, they congregate at book fairs to jostle for attention in a sea of saleable bibliographic commodities.

This chapter is about the environments where we encounter photobooks, and how their rules, temperatures and textures shape our impressions. The chapter is less concerned with what people do with photobooks in the privacy of their own homes; rather, it explores how public sites of cultural production and consumption contribute to perceptions of the photobook. Certain types of display, rules, behaviours or motives for engagement associated with different environments can shape the extent of our manual interaction with the photobook and how we understand and value it. As individuals we experience space differently according to habitus, our ease or unfamiliarity in situations and how some environments make us feel. The chapter develops this line of enquiry to consider socio-political issues implicit in who has access to different kinds of spaces, and how they might respond to or reproduce their associated behaviours.

⁴¹ The 1990s fashion for coffee table books as glossy status symbols reaches its zenith in Series Five of *Seinfeld*, when Kramer authors one *about* coffee tables that comes with screw in legs and *becomes* a coffee table. It’s a huge success, to Elaine’s chagrin. Heidegger could ask, is Kramer’s book different to those objects it depicts? Even without the legs, it has similar form and function; it can raise one’s coffee off the carpet and reduce its risk of being spilled. It is even derived from the same material. A profoundly silly ontological problem.

The chapter begins with descriptive analysis of sites of interaction, contemplating associated behaviours, audiences and access. It considers engagement in less commercially-oriented sites such as museums. It then explores how people and books perform in apparently sales-oriented book fairs. Finally, it considers audiences and access in relation to “reading rooms” such as those as organised by 10x10 Photobooks, which offer readers a different pace of photobook encounter. The analysis deploys notions of “affective atmosphere” (Sumartojo and Pink, 2018), appraising the political implications of certain situated experiences. The discussion of each site compares data from interviews and autoethnographic insight with broader theoretical scholarship of the politics of place, as discussed across museological literature (Duncan, 1995; Leahy, 2012; Whitehead, 2012), anthropology and human geography (Massey, 1991). It conjoins these ideas with the thesis’ perspectives of relationality and assemblages to argue how the physical and social environment of a photobook encounter inhibits or enriches its encounter.

4.1 Behaviours of looking, touching and moving through space

Containing predominantly visual content does not necessarily make a photobook a rapid read: many require time to contemplate connections between images, form, text or structure. There are limited places it is possible to do this without personally owning the book oneself. While many of these sites such as libraries are free to access, 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.

The typical environments of photobook encounters come with their own sets of conditions that frame the encounter. For example, in a bookshop, things are for sale. This is often signalled materially, through a price tag, or cellophane wrapping that inhibits casual browsing. When looking, you are not only looking for interest’s sake, but questioning, *do I want this, would I buy this?* It might be a hypothetical question, if browsing for leisure or without capital to make a purchase. Nevertheless, the book is offered as a product, which confers an expectation to buy that can be socially awkward. In our interview, Wooldridge reflected that “you can feel a little self-conscious in a bookstore about picking something up, especially if you know the bookseller, you feel should keep looking longer” (MS2). Looking too briefly is an unspoken expression that you find a book uninteresting, meaning encounters with photobooks in bookshops and fairs could be a social minefield: you are seldom simply looking, but also engaged in social performance of taste and etiquette.

This social awareness of behaviour in space is not only specific to site, i.e. shop, but also what kind of shop. I feel more at ease in large bookstores, where I feel less observed, or charity shops, with the informality of their jumbled contents. Yet, more specialised shops offer greater selection. Physical bookstores are businesses under increasing threat from online commerce (Neumüller and Tuminas, 2018:16) and few mainstream bookshops stock photobooks (MS2: 10x10). Those that do generally hold titles by large publishers (e.g., Phaidon, Thames and Husdon), and restrict independent stock due to generic criteria. A large chain bookstore in London was interested in stocking *Vote No. 1* (Duffy, 2015) until learning it was spiralbound, which may dent neighbouring titles on the shelf, displaying a hierarchy of value in which originality is outweighed by convenience and fiscal caution at the risk of stock damage (MS1i:78).

This dilemma “speaks to the physicality of the book, the inventiveness of how one creates the object and defines a book; it puts [the photobook] back into places like Printed Matter” [an artist’s book store and fair in USA] (MS2: 10x10). Shops dedicated to this practice may have more sensitive stock presentation to permit interaction and accommodate materially diverse examples; yet they also attract more specialised audiences (ibid.). With *Vote No.1*, the physical construction was intrinsic to its artistic effect and agential in determining where it would be stocked, sold and discovered. This consideration of photobook sites of encounter reveals an epistemic relation between materiality, access and economy. Bruno Ceschel has noted people who visit specialist bookstores and museum shops, where photobooks are most often found, are probably already part of a cultural “community” (c.f. Neumüller and Tuminas 2019:27). Meanwhile, commercial galleries have been installing bookshops or placing publications in more prominent places, saying “it’s becoming more important for them to be associated with books or to give their artists books” (MS2: Watson). This indicates art publishing in all forms is gaining prominence in physical art spaces and its financial and political economies. However, the effect of this might not necessarily reach wider audiences.

The means by which places encourage modes of photobook interaction, such as whether a customer feels invited or prohibited from touching books in a shop, is constructed through social and spatial factors that impress a site’s agenda upon the visitor. Throughout my ethnographic journals (MS1, 2018-2020), photobooks appeared most often in environments where they were not for sale: museums, displays of awards shortlists, exhibitions, private bookshelves and most of all, libraries. I was initiated into multiple library request procedures, booking appointments and handling procedures. In museum exhibitions, photobooks were almost always behind glass, smeared with handprints of previous visitors who leaned in to look more closely. Where manual

interaction is not possible, the visitor depends on their imagination to experience the book, aided by alternative interpretation such as text, multimedia or contextual artefacts (see Chapter 2; Chapter 5). In photobook displays, dummies and books from awards shortlists were laid out to be handled, screwed into a table at an uncomfortable height, or brutalised with a hole drilled through them and attached by wire, causing me to stoop over the table. In each of these encounters, I absorbed the architecture of the space as much as the photobooks, and sneakily observed the behaviours of anonymous book-lookers around me.

It has been widely acknowledged that people behave differently in different environments. Space and place are concepts constructed within a system of social and economic politics, which can influence our engagements with whatever we encounter within them (Massey, 1991). According to Urry and Lash (1994), space is constituted by physical surroundings and symbolic significance of place associated with its location, with place being a simultaneous meeting of time and space. The influence of place upon its entrants is exerted through explicit means such as instructional signage (“Don’t walk on the grass!”), commonly-held social customs (“libraries are quiet”), and more subtle architectural strategies. Pallasmaa explains this latter idea from a formal perspective by stating “architecture develops existential and lived metaphors through space, structure, matter, gravity and light” (2005:115). Pallasmaa means the architecture of an environment can encourage strong sensations, such as comfort, ease, formality or memory. It may affect how people move around, through the influence of materials and design acting upon the visitor. Environments therefore actively participate in eliciting states of mind and physical behaviours that contextualise photobook encounters and interpretations.

Museums are a productive site for considering composite spatial and social influences of environments because they are consciously planned and organised. Carol Duncan (1995) identifies how museums create architectural and biopolitical epistemologies that predispose behaviours in visitors through “the organisation of space and the visual, rhetorical and monumental characteristics of museum buildings and displays” (Whitehead 2016:4). The museum’s architectural schemes can confer value and reify canons, such as references to names of artists in the fabric of the building⁴²; likewise tacit and imperative devices such as layout discipline visitor behaviour (Duncan, 1995). Helen Rees Leahy (2012) further explores how moving bodies are disciplined within the museum: for example, by following social expectations

⁴² For example: parts of the V&A are decorated with mosaics known as the “Kensington Valhalla”, which depict life-size portraits of “Old Master” artists such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michaelangelo, alongside applied arts figures such as potter Bernard Palissy. Named after the seat of the Norse gods, the figures are consecrated with deific status in their artistic accomplishment.

that prohibit running, the consequent contemplative strolling can cause visitors mental and physical fatigue and limit what kinds of experiences and interactions are available.

These architectural and experiential strategies confer behavioural values, with which visitors comply through self-regulation. If you've ever felt guilty taking a photo in a gallery knowing photography is not permitted, you might agree another factor in this process is an awareness of supervision. In the NAL and NYPL special collections reading areas, the rules of engagement with photobooks are made explicit when librarians issue your books, and supervision ensures these rules are followed. The NAL is a double-height library, with floor-to-ceiling windows, stiff leather-seated chairs, darkwood panelling everywhere, a large chandelier and a balcony running the edge of the room, complete with sliding steps like Belle swings around on in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (1991). It's often chilly, even in summer, and your footsteps ring out on the wooden floors amidst other readers' silent study. The NYPL reading rooms are more numerous, with fewer windows. The materiality of these environments, in summary, is exactly what one might expect a Victorian art library to feel like, if the hiss of gas lamps were swapped out for the whirr of a few computers.

Disciplined by this atmosphere, the visitors I observed in the NAL appeared to sit up straight and turn the pages with delicacy (PS1a; PS3), embodying the rules by which the museum regulates its public (Foucault, 1991[1975])⁴³. Particularly with special collections, the librarian would place the book upon a special cushion or foam block and explain instructions such as, only pencils allowed. Experienced readers perform knowledge and distinction through their familiarity with using blocks, snakes and other supports for best practice handling. This resulting etiquette frames the interaction and how the reader interprets it. The pre-visit access procedure of ordering reading material and planning a visit inspires a heightened quality of attention in the viewer when they finally sit down with their book, showing how the occasion of the institutional visit shapes the reader's intentional perception. The presence of supervision is felt to a greater degree in the Met Watson library, where video cameras are trained on the tables. Before handling anything, readers must wash their hands, watch an instructional video, remove rings and bracelets, tie their hair back, and spit out chewing gum (MS2: White).

These preparation rituals instil in the reader a sense of rarity and responsibility towards what they are about to encounter. Duncan has explored "the ritual character of the museum experience"

⁴³ See Appendix F for more detailed autoethnographic writing about looking at *Another Black Darkness* (Nomura, 2016) in the NAL.

(1995:12). While rituals are often associated with religious ceremony and belief systems, they can be secular, informal events occurring in ordinary life (Douglas, 1970; Duncan, 1995). Physical museum environments often borrow from historic architectural forms associated with religious monuments and ceremonial structures (Duncan 1995:7,9). For the visitor's experience, Duncan has observed, "[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" (ibid.:8). This is achieved through "sequenced spaces and arrangements of objects, its lighting and architectural details" that provide "both stage and script" for the performance of rituals of knowledge (ibid.:12). According to Duncan, the ritual character fulfils multiple essential activities of art museums by reinforcing the sovereignty of the institution and its knowledge claims (ibid.: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. In the case of the Met library, the ritual is scripted not only through the architectural encounter with the museum, but also quite literally through the instructional video and preparation.

In relation to how visitors follow museum rules, Jay Rounds describes behaviours that conform to and reinforce social norms in the museum as "choreographed", implying visitors must be aware of the patterns of movement expected in such spaces (2006:142-3). According to Rounds, a visitor reproduces dominant behavioural practices as they move "with careful formality", striking "a contemplative pose (stylized, a bit more rapt than strictly necessary to focus one's attention fully [...] – but not so much as to appear to be posing)" (2006:142). Rounds evaluates that when visitors politely step around each other, taking care not to block each others' view, "their dance is not merely a courtesy; it is a mutual conspiracy in which each validates the authenticity of the identities being enacted by others" (ibid.:143). In this way, the museum is a controlling space and a performative stage. In museum libraries, this could manifest as a funny walk to soften the sound of your footsteps, or a pantomime-whispered apology for forgetting to silence your phone.

Rounds' account of how visitors demonstrated understanding of expected deportment associated with specific spaces aligns with Stuart Hall's reception theory (1997; see p.92), in which "dominant" or "hegemonic" practices are those with which people are so familiar that they accept and reproduce behaviours unquestioningly. Duncan has observed the socio-political implications of scripted visitor behaviours in the museum, noting "[t]hose who are best prepared to perform its ritual – those who are most able to respond to its various cues – are also those whose identities (e.g. class, sexual, racial, etc.) the museum ritual most fully confirms". This

advances essential discussions of who is scripting museum encounters, in what way and why, challenging unequal relations of power. While much of this discourse relates to audience demographics and accessibility, it is important to note many encounters in libraries have been scripted by procedures developed in response to the requirements and agencies of collections objects.

I observed visitors perform their familiarity with coded behaviours of other sites associated with photobooks around the Aperture Photobook Award display at Paris Photo (2018). Visitors demonstrated “choreographed” behaviours, and concentrated, studious encounters despite the busy surroundings (PS3). Situated in art fair, restricted to ticketed or VIP entry, these initiated visitors performed experience within the photobook genre through practiced behaviours of examining tactile elements, and spending time consulting interpretive texts. This can be contrasted with the Photographers’ Gallery bookstore in London, where visitor motivations for entering this shop appeared less specific, as most visitors entered following an exhibition visit upstairs (signalled by a gallery admission sticker). Many visitors displayed a leisurely demeanour moving through the limited space and plentiful stock. A few of customers selected books and flicked through them with decisive actions, suggesting they knew what they liked and were looking for. While staff are friendly, knowledgeable and happy to talk books, the display furniture maximises stock, with less space for absent-minded perusal, accentuating the site’s sales objective. Interactions were inhibited by conversation or having to juggle looking at a book with holding a handbag or jacket, with no surface to support them, again conveying the message it’s a shop, not a library (PS3).

Reeves was well aware of the effect of library rules and regulations in the encounter, saying, “if you have to wear gloves to not get finger prints on a cover – that affects looking at the book before you’ve even started looking at the book” (MS2: Reeves). This impacts a photobook’s agency in the encounter because “it takes you down one pathway of interacting with it, which [...] if you’re looking at it in your friend’s house you won’t look at it in the same way” (ibid.). Other precautions in the NAL such as the CoLibri cover affixed to the exterior of *Reconstrucción* (2016; see p.134), also materially alter the encounter’s physicality.

While some visitors consistently reproduce behaviours associated with certain spaces, others contest them. Reeves noted that despite giving handling instructions, people will still try and handle books as they like. A ‘one size fits all’ approach to handling rules can limit the reader’s experience of a book. This aligns with my experiences both as study room staff and user. In my encounter with *Trail of Touch* by Naroa Perez (2019). I was aware that, being a delicate special

collections object, I was not supposed to stroke the pages, to hear what sound they would make if I crinkled them; however, this counteracted the tactile purpose of the book. Discussing this with Reeves, she reflected the realities of an institutional handling collection can make buying certain books tricky, because visitors would be limited in handling them. Still, she argued it's better to have a book in a collection with limited access than none at all. Collecting also supports communities of makers, showing handling is not the only consideration in making acquisitions (MS2: Reeves).

The degree to which visitors conform to expected behaviours of place can be linked to their habitus. While aspects of habitus may be culturally shared, such as a regional accent or clothing that aligns with a fashion tribe, this does not homogenise similar subjects: people remain individuals; their habitus a dynamic complex (Hilgers, 2009). The observations in the photo-specialist bookshop elucidate this point: though united by some degree of mutual interest in culture or photography, there were dramatically different manifestations of taste enacted by visitors through fashion or physical appearance. Rees Leahy discusses the art museum as a site for “performative or strategic use of dress”: galleries are public opportunities to demonstrate one’s “ability to dress modishly and appropriate to the activity of cultural appreciation” (2012:117-123), performing a symbolic display of cultural capital through familiarity with aesthetic trends. In the gallery bookshop, I observed visitors displaying fashion choices such as a bold hair style, snazzy trainers, or a futuristic-looking backpack, with multiple visitors wearing black. During the observation these image-conscious people did not necessarily demonstrate comparative levels of interest in the cultural product of the photobook as their carefully-constructed ensembles implied (PS3).

Like art, Bourdieu identifies fashion as an arena of “distinction”, which refers to how the social classes organise and enact their difference through lifestyle and aesthetic choices. Bourdieu’s study was specific to France, but has been extended to other contexts. He explains, “taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make”, wherein the decisions of working class people are generally governed by “principles of conformity and frugality”, whilst the bourgeoisie embodies “principles of autonomy and extravagance” (2010 [1979]:xxix; 383). Bourdieu identifies strategies of distinction such as dress as tools of social pretension and mobility (ibid.:201).

Potentially, the displays of cultural capital seen in TPG Bookshop were performances of either assimilation with or aspiration to a particular socio-cultural group. This may explain the lack of engagement shown by some visitors whose attire indicated a strong aesthetic interest, once again

asserting the importance of the individual, their experiences and motivations for cultural consumption in the photobook encounter.

4.2 “The busy-ness of business”: the photobook fair

This thesis has made many references to art book fairs and photobook fairs, which may be unknown environments to some readers. Often coinciding with international art events, they bring together publishers, booksellers and recent publications from around the world. One would presume their immediate goal is to sell books. However, research by Unseen Book Market and Photo Week Aarhus (Neumüller and Tuminas 2018; 2019) revealed the purpose of book fairs is more nuanced: although vendors hope to at least cover their costs, their participation is motivated by contribution to a “community of practice” (Wenger, 1999). These activities include promoting new projects, meeting potential collaborators and catching up with peers and former colleagues, introducing functions of professional networking and informal socialising to the commercial environment.

The following autoethnographic text illustrates an experience of a photobook fair:

Offprint, London, May 2019.

When I entered the cavernous Turbine Hall, I took myself up onto the passageway that floats above the fair. I looked down on the neat rows of tables, the only orderly figure in the view over piles of books, piles of paper, paper spilling out of boxes, and people. People weaving through the tables, people between the tables in the off-limits spaces between the rows of tables, people standing, people sitting, the hubbub of their chatter rising and resounding with an echo. A rummaging shuffling mass of people and paper. Echoing and impenetrable as I remembered it, if a little less busy than the previous year.

[...]

I start with a slow walk through all the tables. An acclimatisation if you will. People line the aisles and cluster around each publisher’s stall. [...] To look at the books, I have to duck around backs, anticipate who will move away so I can approach a table. So I walk up and down the aisles instead, taking in the peculiar metallic tang of the noise of talking that bounces back at me off the walls. It is simultaneously a hollow noise, and a bodied noise. It emanates sharply from mouths and throats, clatters on hard surfaces, is muffled in cloth and paper, and echoes off unforgiving

architecture. Dialogue is not discernible in the throng of accents, languages, laughter and the tone of the hard sell.

Weaving through the busy-ness of business being done, I am feasting on the overwhelming spread of colour, the typographic picnic without taking any particular books in my hands. Eventually, inevitably, I must dive in and pick some up, squeezing in at a stall when a gap opens. The first few I pick up, fondle absently, feeling without properly focusing my mind on what I'm holding. I'm acclimatising, still. Then I start to look more attentively and make remarks on what is humorous, novelty. Warming up. Finally, the critic in me wakes up and decides, with enthusiasm, that something is derivative, something is dull, but I'm riddled with social anxiety and voice my opinions *mi-voix* (that might be the artist sat there, you never know).

The expectation in the look of the publisher with nobody at their table... I drift over... I drift away. Is it because nothing caught my eye or because her gaze on my looking would have been too intent?

[...]

It is only when I relax into the environment that I start enjoying the books, too. A bit of small talk with one publisher and I find my curiosity stirred by his energetic overview of the looseleaf boxed 'book' he is showing me. It's taken a good half an hour to loosen my tongue and my responses.

I find myself more drawn to conducting a detailed survey of the varying quality of publishers' tote bags than the photobooks. [...] Am I simply oversaturated, already?

I withdraw to my balcony once more. It's above the pop-up bar and I smell beer cans frothing as they open. From here I can survey the kingdom of independent publishing. [...] I look sideways, still in the middle but against the wall, on the right, there are two publishers with standalone tables, quite large. What a primo spot. [...] They must have power, but what kind? This publisher has said to me personally, the perennial complaint, "there's no money in books", but clearly there is some and there are other kinds of currency at play here too. The power to influence. To be recognised as influential in the industry. This is its own kind of power that attracts people to buy and talk about your wares. I have the sensation of clutching my dinner tray in the school canteen, intimidated by the tables of athletic, swishy-ponytailed cliques, only here the popular kids wear black, severe haircuts, nearly all men, besides, this isn't really a memory but more a hologram

of trashy coming-of-age movies I loved around that same teenage time⁴⁴ – if I entered the canteen alone, I bought a takeaway sandwich. And in time enough I wise up to coping strategies for this adult social hierarchy too: I find a pal, we grab a glass of cheap wine and get down to looking at books.

As described, the book fair experience can verge on sensory overload, which, combined with complex social dynamics, can feel overwhelming. Sebastian Arthur Hau, founder of Polycopies and Cosmos fairs (described in Appendix H) has explained the festive ambiance is deliberate:

“a market place dealing with such a complex material as photography books and art books for us is not a calm place concentrating on the transaction only. The music we play, the food and drinks we sell, the discussions, collaborations and presentations are all based on principles of participation (that is – people professionalising themselves – seeking ways to realise projects together) and exchanges of knowledge.”

(Tuminas and Neumüller, 2018:8)

Engendering “a certain nervousness” is an important facet of elevating fairs from sales pitches to forums for community exchange and creative and professional development (ibid.). Hau contrasts the fair environment to the calmness with which one returns home with their purchases, to “settle down into your seat and slowly dive into them and they into you” (ibid.), signalling different modes of photobook encounter in these locations: the fair is a superficial introduction, while the home enables direct and profound intra-action between person and book.

Hau’s model of a photobook fair can be analysed as an “affective atmosphere”. This concept from ethnography visualises certain experiences of “our everyday experiential and conceptual environments” as “dynamic and changing configurations that allow analytical insight”, offering “new ways of thinking about the relationships between people, space, time and events” and “the sensory and affective modes through which we engage” with them (Sumartojo and Pink, 2018:1-3). Atmospheres pervade our immediate sensory and social experience, as well as memories and perceptions of these lived experiences and associated relationships. Atmosphere encompasses more than physical surroundings: it speaks to “sensory and imaginative forms of understanding” of “how we constantly encounter and make sense of our surroundings, what we do in them and with whom and how we ascribe value and meaning to this” (ibid.). Taking a phenomenological view, “the meaningful relation to place is intimately bound up with the embodied nature of perception” (Massey, 2004:8), showing affective atmosphere encompasses the physical environment, the social relations within it, and how these factors are perceived and felt by the subject.

⁴⁴ This phenomenon is what Landsberg has called “prosthetic memory” to theorise the mode in which historical events and mass culture are assimilated as personal experience (2004).

Atmospheres can result spontaneously or organically; they can also be subtly engineered to foster certain values, such as collective feelings of national pride and optimism encouraged by merchandise, slogans and architecture around the 2012 Olympic Games (Closs Stephens, 2016). Atmospheres are thus not neutral: they can be “operationalised” to such ends as enhancing public attunement to something being ‘wrong’, which can encourage self-regulating behaviours through creating an atmosphere of surveillance (Adey et al, 2013, c.f. Sumartojo and Pink, 2018:7). For example, increased numbers of CCTV cameras and visual and audio notices to report suspicious activity on public transport may intend to create an atmosphere of security, but in turn could increase travel anxiety in some users and even encourage racial profiling and discrimination through the use of imagery on cautionary posters and racially-biased algorithm technologies (Noble, 2018). Where attempts are made to “construct” a particular atmosphere, how that environment will be received is contingent upon the assemblage of people and things interacting within it at a given time. Atmospheres are therefore combinations of physical, social and political factors that come together in durational, phenomenal configurations. This brings it into proximity with the intra-active relational ontologies emphasised in this research, in its attempt to visualise networks through moments of material-discursive encounter.

My autoethnographic accounts of visiting Offprint London, as well as those of Offprint Paris, Polycopies (Paris) and Cosmos (Arles), illustrate this entangling of social construction and subjective, experiential coincidence (Appendix H). Parts of the affective atmospheres I describe were compounded by chance extraneous factors. For example, the echoing noise in Offprint London in Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall results from the industrial architecture that predates the building’s use as a cultural venue, and would modulate at different times of day, as exhibitors and visitors alike experience energy or fatigue. While cultural venues such as Tate and the École des Beaux Arts for Offprint Paris are connected to audience networks of potential customers, they are also central metropolitan locations with sufficient undercover space. This is less of a consideration for Cosmos in Arles, France, which used to be in an open-air location, taking advantage of the Provençal summer weather.

Some parts of these events appear as deliberate social construction, such as Hau’s description of carefully-chosen drinks and music that contribute to creating and sustaining the desired atmosphere. As demonstrated in my account, these extra experiential layers can be instrumental in a visitor’s engagement. Speaking of the two fairs he has founded, Polycopies and Cosmos, Hau related a “tension between being a place that works for *affectionati* and people who are interested in discovering, while also showing a slight disregard to a new public that needs [...] to be guided

through the amount of books and works presented” (Tuminas and Neumüller, 2018:9). Modulating the atmosphere to be inclusive enough for visitors who might find the volume of books intimidating can be a fine balance, given many other aspects of the book fair appear to pressurize interactions.

The notion that atmospheres are continuously emergent and reconfigured, according to environmental, social and political factors and the ways they are experienced and valued by those actors who use them, is sympathetic to ANT networks of dynamic relations and Barad’s notion of intra-action. Both intra-action and atmosphere can be described as momentary, dynamic configurations of matter from which meaning is made. Sumartojo and Pink contend that perception of atmosphere is at odds with the “culturally constructed five senses”; it involves an attunement to “affective intensities that course through our bodies, by way of how we feel, what we perceive and sense, what we may remember” (2018:8). If “atmosphere emerges and exists in combinations of people with spaces”, and our perception of atmosphere is not limited to external stimuli, the agential cut of where the body ends and the atmospheric environment begins is less clear. Atmosphere seeps into the sensory experience, making it an intra-active and embodied phenomenon that is also shaped incrementally over time and linked to experiences past and future (ibid.:9).

In this assemblage, some might criticise the illustration of atmosphere as a metaphysical *feeling* that arises out of nebulous configurations of site, scene and social experience, as an unreasonable explanation why atmospheres take hold on collectives. However, while the phenomenon of atmosphere has no “totality” of explanation (Law, 2004), it is possible to produce successful analysis through creatively mapping their physical and social conditions, and seeking to understand different perspectives in novel ways, such as wearing body cameras (Sumartojo and Pink, 2018) or by inviting research participants to lead walks around locations to elicit subtle, experiential insights (Whitehead *et al.*, 2021). The study of atmospheres appears most successful when co-produced with people who inhabit the environments being studied. Instead of painting a magical, overly emotional picture of experience of place, atmosphere therefore affords rigorous, grounded methodologies that engage more fluidly with subjectivities than conventional, objectivist modes of knowledge production.

My own study of affective atmospheres followed this grounded, reflexively analytical approach. My extended autoethnographic writing about book fairs revealed recursive layers of atemporal intra-activity. As I charted my experiences chronologically, I made comparisons to what I had previously seen and felt beyond that situated instant, within the same visit and via expectations

accrued through earlier book fair attendance. The full texts (Appendix H) combine references to external circumstances such as weather – “I sweated in my wet garments” (Offprint, Paris, 2018) – and intertextual associations – the venue that “tickles my taste for Hemingway” (Cosmos, Arles, 2019) – with memories of former social interactions and even past childhood holidays. My interpretation of works I saw was bound up with embodied sensations of physical comfort, such as the “lurching photographer” whose Brexit work, combined with waves from a passing vessel, evoked a pang of nausea that reminded me I was on a boat (Polycopies, Paris, 2019).

Emotional uncertainty also clouded my experience: at Offprint Paris 2018, “I felt foolish”; in London “I don’t say hello to [people] because I believe they won’t remember meeting me” (Offprint, London, 2019), casting a tone of self-doubt over my encounters with photobooks and the responses I formed about them. These various sensations and data were inseparable from my experience of extraneous agential, atmospheric factors. In Cosmos in Arles, an acquaintance showed me a book and I crouched, “deeply absorbed on the dusty cobbled floor until my ankles wobble and thighs tire and the hardness of the floor reannounces itself and I stand up again” (2018). A patch of grass would have allowed me to take a more forgiving posture and look for longer; had I sat down, the cobbles would have dirtied my pastel dress. It wasn’t just that my legs were tired, but the unforgiving stones pushed back and exacerbated my fatigue.

In my interviews, I discovered I am not alone in finding the scale and stimulation of book fairs overwhelming. My research trip to New York fell immediately after the New York Art Book Fair, and interviewees commented on their experiences. Donohue said she was always “shocked” by the sheer volume of books, and while social interactions are positive, the weekend can be tiring (MS2). At CBA, Reynolds reflected “there must be a better way”, describing other book fairs she had attended, including Odds and Ends in Yale University Art Gallery (MS2). Being located in the gallery, this fair is climate controlled, with no food or drinks allowed, so she described the overall atmosphere as calmer with a little more “space” for contemplation, though it was unclear if this meant physical or mental space. My experience of a book fair in similar circumstances was less pleasant: when I helped man an artist’s pitch at BOP Bristol, the location in the Royal Photographic Society gallery meant two days sitting in a windowless room, having to go outside to drink water (MS1ii:59).

Despite mixed sentiments about attending fairs, there is an industry acquiescence that fairs are an essential forum for the photobook community of practice. Founder of collective Russian Independent SelfPublished, Natalia Baluta, has identified:

“the market is not only an opportunity to sell, but an opportunity to have a conversation – to build connections, to get reviews in magazines, and to get in touch with curators. [...] some museums, libraries and institutions come to festivals deliberately searching for publications. And this is our opportunity to get in touch with them.”

(Neumüller and Tuminas, 2018:16)

Baluta’s insight was reiterated by Allen, assistant curator at Tate, who reflected that “there are things that aren’t going to come onto your radar unless you go and have a look around” (MS2). These exchanges are centred around the physical object, as Baluta describes having “real books at our hands” to “tell the story of a project, get some publicity and network” (Neumüller and Tuminas, 2018). This suggests photobooks serve a material function at fairs for initiating shared tactile experience that enables more effective discussion than digital means would allow. The social relation of people in a real-world environment is mediated through the physical objects themselves.

Valuing the photobook fair as a fertile place for meeting people and learning about new projects correlates with Hau’s motivation for staging events with an atmosphere that encourages professionalisation and initiates collaboration. The subtext is while fairs serve an important function in photobook ecology, their purpose is not entirely commercial. Sales statistics back this up: in a round table discussion featured in Neumüller and Tuminas’ “coproductive” research study at Unseen Book Market and Photo Week Aarhus, one bookseller recalled a study on French publishers of photobooks which revealed “only 25-30% of books today are sold through physical bookstores [as opposed to online purchases], and that number is still dropping” (2018:17). The seller lamented this decline because “books are about touching, smelling – they are physical objects” and while online sales seem the most logical answer to distribution, in-person sales are still “the best channel” (ibid.).

In-person sales at book fairs can also be a mixed experience: on multiple occasions I have been encouraged or dissuaded from buying books I found interesting because of how the seller behaved towards me (MS1i:9; MS1ii:60-62). The intersubjective nuances of these social interactions might not reflect in sales figures besides the seller’s own impression of their performance as a salesperson. A more qualifiable factor in commercial success is varying audience appetites for subject matter. Baluta observed in Neumüller and Tuminas’ study that “projects built on archival stories and memory are very interesting for a European audience, and not at all to Americans” whilst books showing Russia during Perestroika that received little interest in Amsterdam were “flying off the table” in New York (2018:16). In the same study, another bookseller, Richard Sporleder, described book fair customers as a particular audience who “want to be convinced about a book and to know what is special about it. And I can do it

only by telling them about it, sharing personal stories ... and showing them what's interesting" (ibid.). Market sales account for approximately 20% of Sporleder's sales, whereas another, larger sales "audience" is "people who have heard about a title, saw it on the Internet, maybe saw that it won an award, and then they can buy it online. 80% of my sales are online" (ibid.).

With this in mind, if in-person sales at book fairs are decreasing and more customers prefer to research purchases online, it raises the question of the sustainability of fairs as a commercial venture, and whether their focus should shift to more inclusive, visitor-oriented experiences targeted at broadening audiences and encouraging discoveries. One artist described to me how he had set up a photobook stall at a flea market in Madrid: sales were low, but it was satisfying for bringing photobooks to a wider audience's attention (MS1ii:56). Others have advised looking to the originally niche graphic novel, which now assumes a significant portion of the mainstream publishing economy (Neumüller and Tuminas, 2018). While the question of audiences will be explored in the next section, an important challenge to widening photobook fair attendance is how greater accessibility might impact its other essential function as ad hoc professional forum for a community of practice.

4.3 Audiences and access

Photobooks are most commonly found in cultural forums with particular demographics: the art bookshop and the fair, like the museum, are classed, gendered and/or racialized (or racializing) spaces, which may cause visitors discomfort, pain, or inhibit some individuals from entering them altogether (Tolia-Kelly, 2016; Neumüller and Tuminas, 2019:27). Opportunity to engage with museum visits is determined by access, in terms of opening hours, dis/ability, and intellectual, cultural, attitudinal or financial barriers that may prevent or inhibit the certain groups' experience (Lang *et al.*, 2006:31). Visitors of varying ethnicities may look differently upon artefacts of colonial history, or visitors with physical dis/abilities may find moving around and seeing exhibits more challenging. Class, too, can be an impediment to cultural engagement, as Bourdieu and Darbel discuss the discomfort experienced by people with lesser formal educational or social capital with regards to museum-going (1991[1969]:53; 93-4). Bourdieu describes an effect of "reverential distancing" exerted upon visitors by venues of "high culture" such as museums, meaning those less familiar with these sites may not wish to engage out of respect or intimidation that places are reserved for elite users (Bourdieu, 1991).

Sandra Harding's (1993) standpoint theory offers a more inclusive approach, suggesting we can gain an objective view of a dominant culture through incorporating the perspectives of those it marginalises. Individuals have different experiences of society, particularly people marginalised by race, gender, sexuality or dis/ability. Standpoint theories assert that by "starting off" research from marginalised perspectives, "beginning in those determinate, objective locations in any social order will generate illuminating critical questions that do not arise in thought that begins from dominant group lives" (Harding, 1993:56). Harding adopts a position of strong objectivity, in which knowledge claims are always socially situated. While other forms of research present objectivity as a dispassionate "god-like" position, the feminist perspective argues it is a "delusion" to think one could erase the "fingerprints" that reveal the process of making knowledge. Donna Haraway similarly calls this the "god trick" (1988). The most viable gesture one can make towards objectivity is to begin from the standpoints of marginalised groups when considering the whole.

Standpoint theory transforms the analysis of cultural events like exhibitions or a photobook fair, because instead of evaluating their success among imagined or intended audiences, it questions the minority experience of these environments. Watson remarked the predominant demographic in photobook events and audiences is white male European, which has impacted on the experiences of herself and other women in the industry (MS2). She recollected female peers asking if she was going to such-and-such fair, and express relief they wouldn't be alone in a crowd of men. Through describing the social interactions she had observed at fairs, Watson highlighted the complex gender politics that affects how relationships are formed, sales are made, and even guided the topics of conversation among a culture of a strange macho-nerd posturing that fixates on details like niche paper stock (MS2).

Considering who may feel marginalised by certain sites also invites discussion of how places enact exclusionary practices. There's a London bookshop I've felt uncomfortable visiting, because all the books are wrapped in plastic. I feel I am not invited to look unless I know I have the capital, desire or confidence to buy one. Walking around Offprint book fairs in London and Paris I tried to imagine negotiating the space in a wheelchair, which is an obvious example among the many visible and invisible, physical and mental conditions that complicate access for diverse audiences. While the aisles may be wide enough in Tate's Turbine Hall, it would be challenging in either venue to approach a table and look at a book because of the throngs of people and the density of stock (MS1i:6). Brophy (2014) suggests cultural venues do not account for the embodied subjectivities of users with non-conformist abilities. Users with dis/abilities might be limited to visiting Offprint at less busy times, but it wouldn't be clear when slack times might

occur without prior experience of attending fairs, or by talking to publishers. (Garcia Carrizosa *et al.*, 2020:37) have identified users with access issues are often “confined to virtually mediated experiences” of cultural events and heritage sites that remove them from other visitors. These challenges presented by book fairs might persuade a person to shop online instead, inhibiting their participation in the community of practice the fair seeks to establish.

Public organisations such as museums and libraries are held to greater accountability where inclusivity is concerned (Lang *et al.*, 2006), therefore they can be important sites for facilitating photobook encounters with wider audiences. Art libraries are usually free to access, but their status as charitable or publicly-funded organisations may have political implications for programming or facilities. Other barriers to access include these sites’ daunting scale. As discussed, libraries such as the NAL, the Tate Library or the NYPL are situated in impressive, labyrinthine edifices. Getting to each building’s art library involves first finding a map, pinpointing where you came in, then navigating imposing halls and galleries. Whilst working at the V&A, whose peculiar layout has an *ad hoc* architectural history, visitors often stopped me asking for directions for the NAL, though less frequently than the nearest loos.

Librarians and curators I spoke with demonstrated concern for making their spaces and resources more accessible and inclusive. For Reeves, this is through diversifying the collections themselves, in terms of artists and subject matter, and giving talks about new acquisitions to groups visiting the study rooms (MS2). Our conversation about the relationship between diversity in audiences and collections was mediated through our mutual encounter with a reprint of *Sweet Flypaper of Life* (DeCarava and Hughes, 1955/2018), which visitors could handle, unlike the original, restricted special collections item. For Reeves, DeCarava and Hughes’ photo-poetic insights into everyday experiences of Black people in Harlem in the 1950s are, to an extent, continued through another book she showed me, Cecil McDonald’s *In the Company of Black* (2018), which attempts to redress “polarised” media representations of Black people in American society through representing a spectrum of “extra-ordinarily ordinary” individuals (Candor Arts, 2020). To me, Reeves’ acquisitions demonstrated an aim to support photo-historical narratives beyond the conventional canon, revealing epistemic relations between audiences, collections and histories to be explored in the next chapter.

Tony White at the Met’s Watson Library explained how the stratification of art libraries in the Metropolitan Museum related to different audience groups. While the Watson Library is a research library for college students and above, the Nolan Library is open to all and doesn’t require a museum pass or library card. 17,000 toddlers visit it each year for ‘story time’ (MS2:

White). Activity maps and family-oriented activities aim at initiating relationships from a young age, acting as socialisation for future museum audiences. The NYPL also has reading rooms of varying degrees of specialisation. For Deirdre Donohue, Assistant Director of the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs, one of the great things about the NYPL is people have more “serendipitous encounters”. Donohue was formerly librarian at the International Center for Photography (ICP). While photobooks had naturally been very popular at the ICP, she had felt she was “in the photo ‘ghetto’” and they were a niche interest in broader collections. When Donohue arrived at the NYPL she was “astonished” at the popularity of photography books requested in the reading rooms.

Donohue believes the NYPL study rooms are some of the most accessible in the USA. The main reading room is a magnificent, vast hall, into which passing visitors (including myself) are drawn by glimpses at the Baroque-style ceiling of clouds and cherubs (MS1ii:26-27). Duncan’s analysis of ritualistic institutional spaces, as well as Margaret Lindauer’s “critical museum visitor” might argue this lavish ceiling promotes this reading room, its activities, and therefore the symbolic, epistemic purpose of the library as valuable endeavours of cultural achievement akin to this era of art historical splendour, whilst the cherubs form a semantic link with religious virtue and place knowledge close to godliness (Duncan, 1995; Lindauer, 2006). Donohue supported the NYPL’s accessibility with an anecdote of somebody who wandered into the NYPL general reading room from visiting the displays (MS2). The visitor requested a book, then was recommended to follow up their interest in the Art and Architecture library, where they were issued a reader card. Later that day, Donohue saw the visitor in the print study room looking at the special collections. As the visitor moved physically between the different spaces, they also moved socially because they accessed greater cultural access, both through obtaining their reader card and progressing intellectually through their discovery of increasingly specialised knowledge.

4.3.1 Reading rooms: the “other” space

The discussion of reading rooms or study rooms has so far considered spaces in libraries where users must order books for librarians to issue. This pre-selection can present a barrier in accessing photobooks, as most library cataloguing systems do not classify photobooks under separate terms, and if the user had no prior knowledge of the photobook genre, they might only stumble upon it through content or keyword searches (MS2: Fox, Reeves, White). From my V&A work and visiting the London Library’s open shelving (MS1ii:99-103), I have experienced how the agency afforded by browsing bookshelves plays a large part in discovering new works and information, which conventional library reading rooms do not allow.

In recent years there has been an increasing number of exhibitions and displays in the format of “reading rooms”, led by non-profit 10x10 Photobooks (abbreviated to 10x10), which aims to broaden photobook appreciation. The reading rooms grew out of informal “salons” or discussion events that inspired founders Russet Lederman and Olga Yatskevich to present a display of Japanese photobooks in the ICP Graduate Gallery in 2012. The display was produced by the photobook community, for the community, as 10x10 invited ten specialists (collectors, publishers, curators) to select ten photobooks and explain their choices (hence the name). The organisation published an anthology featuring the selections (2014), and repeated the exercise with themes of American photobooks (2013), Latin American photobooks (2017) and photobooks by female and non-binary artists (2019). The displays moved into library reading rooms so visitors could sit down at tables and spend more time with the selection of 100 books.

The most recent⁴⁵ 10x10 reading room, *How We See: Photobooks by Women*, was presented in the NYPL (October 2018), with a coinciding public talk, then the library of the Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris (November 2019). Over the three days it was open, Donohue recalled it was busy with “people from all walks of life” (MS2). “Some people went from table to table and looked intently, some breezed through”, with many visitors wandering in from visiting elsewhere in the library, which is “the great thing about this library in general” (ibid.), suggesting the display had wider readership than a photo-specialist venue.

Having visited 10x10 reading rooms (MS1ii:63-64), two factors seem integral to their popularity. Firstly, they offer a more comfortable experience for discovering photobooks. This comes from being able to sit at a table, to spend time looking, relatively unobserved in a large room with other people doing the same as you (MS2: Donohue). Even when busy, it’s also quiet; the volume and variety of books reduces the pressure to perform a response, and the fact the books are not for sale removes commercial expectation (ibid). Donohue has called the reading room the “other” space, where “you can be as long as you like”, interacting more than an exhibition vitrine would allow, with deeper engagement than fairs, where we do in fact “judge books by their covers” (ibid.). She suggested library visits factor in the photobook economy, because “a lot of people who use reading rooms are trying to look at books in advance so they know if they want to buy it ... [they] want to engage with it first”. Beyond the 10x10 reading rooms, “some publishers would want their books in a library because they understood it would drive sales”, describing why they might send books and magazines to libraries for free. “Booksellers and

⁴⁵ At the time of writing (2020).

libraries have always done quite an interesting dance” Donohue continued, booksellers “understand that [the library] is a better way for people to discover things” than bookstores, relating how sites of encounter and the purposes they serve interact within the broader industry (MS2).

Another part of what makes the 10x10 reading rooms conducive to new discoveries is the agency they allow for browsing. With the photobooks laid out on tables rather than closed shelving, readers can see them as objects with individual tactile properties, interacting with the books lying near them, attracting attention. Browsing is a peculiar and informative activity despite requiring little commitment in time and mental energy (Bloch and Richins, 1983). In circumstances like the 10x10 reading room, visitors can browse with confidence that the selection lying before them has been chosen by people with expertise. It’s like visiting a vintage boutique instead of a charity shop: you won’t have to sift through stained polyester and last year’s fast fashion, and while not all garments will appeal to everybody, they all should appeal to somebody.

This is the second factor in 10x10’s popularity: the curatorial element inspires visitors’ trust because the works presented have been subjected to processes of consecration, like artworks acquired by museums or award-winning wines (Bourdieu, 1993). The carefully-made selections are themed, which packages the presentation under a subject area visitors can identify with even if unfamiliar with the photobook genre. The reading rooms are almost double-curated – each selection of books by the ten experts is then subject to a curatorial process of arranging the titles and the flow of interaction around the room. The selections are interpreted – each book comes with a text tucked inside its cover where the selector explains its merits, context, or suggests questions the reader might consider while looking.

Interpretation is most successful when it encourages visitors to access, understand and identify with new content, without being overly prescriptive of meaning (Lindauer 2006:213-214). Barthes has observed texts that are more “writerly” than “readerly” (1976; see p.100,102) allow readers greater agency in forming their own interpretation. This is typical of the balance between agency and structure provided by the reading room atmosphere: the environment is quiet and calm, yet there are many stimulating materials; there is space to move around, and options to sit and dwell; within the layout and the texts there is information to inform visitors’ choices of where to look, there are verbal and visual cues to engage the eye, but the degree to which visitors follow these scripts (as per Duncan 1995), is optional. There are enough choices to elicit active engagement, but not so many to overwhelm.

10x10's reading rooms are partly possible because of the social network of its founders and their individual collections, as some books in the selections are privately owned or loaned. In contrast to complaints from many publishers that photobooks make no money, for 10x10, the profits from their anthology publications fund other areas of activities, such as fostering an online community and organising photobook 'salons'. For this to be a financially viable model, 10x10 economise on production and distribution by printing titles variously in Iceland, Turkey, Barcelona, or wherever is best value, which is often determined by trade relationships among the designers and distributors they partner with. Until the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, the salons took place in varied locations: collectors' homes, galleries, bookshops, studios and other industry spaces. The free salons would be advertised via the 10x10 mailing list and feature varied industry speakers, from artists to printers. They aim at facilitating access to and intellectual discussion around the broader networks of photobook production and distribution (MS2: 10x10).

During global Covid lockdown measures, the 10x10 online community and the salons combined into 'Instasalons', delivered through Instagram Live, and takeovers on the 10x10 Instagram feed by artists and collectors. Like the in-person salons, the Instagram platform has become a crowd-sourced knowledge community, where individuals share items from their personal collections to diversify understandings about photobooks and expand their audience. One benefit of online events is increased accessibility: despite issues of tech poverty, more people across more geographies and time zones can participate. Recent studies into engagements with art objects via Instagram have favoured a "humanising" approach that regards humans' movement "between the digital and non-digital realms of daily life without discrimination or the need to dichotomise these experiences or place it in a hierarchy" (Budge and Burness, 2018:138). Budge and Burness (2018) have observed that despite concerns social media use in museum spaces was having a detrimental effect on public engagement, visitors posting on Instagram prioritised images and content directly featuring museum objects, linking visitor engagement with user agency and authority. This pre-lockdown study demonstrates social media enriched and facilitated closer relationships with cultural objects, for online audiences and those individuals who photographed and posted about them.

Without focussed study, it is not possible to speculate on the degree to which "Instasalons" and other Instagram live photobook events provided enriching encounters with photobooks. What is achievable is a brief analysis of the affective atmosphere of these encounters. For one thing, there is the phenomenological experience of what is perceived within the screen. Split in half for each speaker's video feed, the small device screen renders object "show and tell" difficult, but not impossible. Superimposed onto the remote conversation, viewers experience a stream of social

connections, comments and questions scrolling upwards, the option to “join” the chat and perform your attendance for other members of the community, and occasional interruptions from connection issues.

Beyond the illuminated device-world, the atmosphere is also modulated by the materiality of the viewers’ physical location: if at home, whether their surroundings are comfortable, perhaps they are watching whilst cooking or have to wear headphones to counteract noise from a child, partner, pet, neighbour, housemate, television. For viewers there is simultaneously a sense of globalised social collectiveness, of being a *part* of something, whilst completely distanced, perhaps totally physically alone (Verity *et al.*, 2020). From my own subjective experience, the flurry of activity on a tiny screen sometimes heightened the monotonous familiarity of my domestic surroundings and left me feeling out-of-sync with both real and virtual dimensions. “Live” events variously collapse and exaggerate material-discursive ontologies because there is a fleeting digital togetherness and simultaneity, but the viewer must use their imagination to compensate for the lack of physical presence.

The various physical and digital sites of encounter facilitated by 10x10 contribute to making knowledges about photobooks: what they are, what they do and what people do with them. They offer informal introductions that could encourage greater familiarity and motivation to engage with more specialised spaces and events. As seen in the previous section, if photobook sales are increasingly taking place online – one of 10x10’s directors remarked he bought 98% of his photobooks on the internet (MS2: 10x10) – then encounters such as those facilitated by reading rooms will become increasingly important not only for outreach and discovery, but for fuelling purchases, like the ‘try before you buy’ interaction detailed by Donohue. In this way, these real and virtual spaces are engaged in significant epistemic activity in constructing the photobook genre, to be analysed in greater detail in the next chapter, as well as inadvertently contributing to the sustainability of its financial and cultural economy.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has considered how different sites can shape photobook encounters. Because they are not unique editions, photobooks can simultaneously circulate in genre-specific spaces and places of commerce, whilst fitting into more conventional artworld spaces such as museums and galleries. What has emerged from this chapter’s enquiry is these environments do not operate in isolation, but assemble as networked sites of encounter, where the limitations of one place can be

offset by the freedoms of another. Each environment is a configuration of scripted and circumstantial atmospheric factors that facilitate different opportunities for audiences: library study rooms offer deep concentration, but present access barriers; shops offer opportunity to make a book your own, at financial cost. The way each user performs the function(s) of each site is dependent on their habitus and goals: for example, while the photobook fair emerged as a site of social networking for some, it could inspire new interest in another, and appear intimidating or chaotic to somebody else. The variety of sites of interaction is necessary for the photobook's spectrum of social, economic and critical activity.

In mapping characteristics of these sites, the chapter has additionally revealed an ecology of activities of photobook construction, whether they are social, physical or intellectual. Sites of photobook encounter are structured around and mediated through the physical object and what is required of it. Where books at fairs are commercial items to be bought and sold, the environment must be designed to accommodate and encourage sales. Photobooks in reading rooms want to be appreciated, so they must have adequate space and furniture to accommodate this. In turn, individual photobooks encountered in these sites are constructed through the way rules and physical environments portray them as precious objects of study, saleable commodities, or another function.

Overall, each of these various environments, including the behaviours it encourages, is instrumental in presenting the photobook in a particular way. What kinds of books appear where and how they are represented is ultimately an epistemic consideration. The next chapter considers how the conditions of certain institutional encounters with photobooks are agential in constructing and confusing perceptions of the photobook genre.

Chapter 5: Epistemic Encounters

The prospect of an “epistemic encounter” sounds rather lofty. “*Join Me for a Rendez-vous with Knowledge*,” she announced with a flourish. But, it is not intended as such. Epistemology is the study of how knowledges are formed. All the encounters detailed in this thesis are forming knowledges *about* photobooks in one way or another – in physical, perceptual engagements and specific interactions contextualised in space and time. If, during one of these encounters, a person forms an opinion that a photobook is, for example, ‘art’, or ‘interesting’, ‘tactile’ or ‘pointless’, that act of personal knowledge-making would also inform their understanding of the word ‘photobook’, as a vaguer, more expansive category of object.

This chapter argues that the situated, social, sensory encounters hitherto discussed are also encounters with larger information-based structures that conceptually shape and produce the idea of what a photobook is. Encounters within institutional contexts are based on cultural actions such as “collecting, classification, conservation and display [which] are in fact ways of theorising the world” (Whitehead, 2009:20). The chapter clarifies and enlivens this argument through four points of interest from interview discussions about institutional collections that reveal instances where photobooks clash with the systems within which they exist. By juxtaposing reflexive analysis with theories of boundary objects (Star and Griesemer, 1989) and social construction (Foucault, 1970), the chapter will unravel how the idea of ‘photobook’ might be produced through collections care, cataloguing, curating, and criticism, evaluating their potential limitations and opportunities.

5.1 First story: about being bound in, and bounded by buckram

one of the things that is still very **jarring and disturbing** to me is the degree to which the general collections ... they tear off the dust jackets, if they're paperbound they **bind them in buckram bindings**, like a general lending library. And although this isn't a lending library it's treated the books as if it was because these were the kind of baseline standards for the whole system of libraries here [in the US] ... what we have been doing on a foregoing basis is retaining the dust jackets and wrapping them in Mylar but it's still against the processing standards of this library for general collections ... **every time I acquire a book that I want to be kept perfectly intact and not barcoded and spine labelled I push it into the photography collection immediately** and then it will be served in this room ... in many cases I am obtaining second copies of books that have had buckram binding ... they don't even put the titles on the sides, all you need is the barcode.

Deirdre Donohue, NYPL (MS2 [my emphasis])

To me, this citation reads like a testament of a brutal regime. A story of poor, abused books, for years stripped of their external individuality, confined to historic protocols that demean their contemporary existence. Rows of spines clad in rough buckram utility outfits, with only a number to identify them; what a bleak and Orwellian picture! Especially while the upper echelons of book society, those special collections, rest resplendently in embossed cloth and colourful jackets. Enter the rescuer of these poor beige books: a bold managing librarian who seeks to liberate, if not those copies, then, more of their kind, covertly disrupting processing standards for new inmates to keep a little more aesthetic vitality. A book does not need to be aged and expensive to be called ‘special’.

For a novel, or a volume of an encyclopaedia, the material fact of its re-binding might have less impact. Donohue finds this treatment especially “jarring” when inflicted upon photobooks and visual texts. We talked about how, if served⁴⁶ a photobook with this treatment, the initial impact might be contrary to the reader’s expectations, visually, texturally and informationally. Instead of title and author is an unintelligible barcode, datafied culture readable only to machines. The historic “processing” practice was established for durability and practicality, long before sensitivity towards a photobook genre, within a wider book culture where intellectual value lies in the object’s content, rather than its exterior.⁴⁷ Yet, when it comes to the photobook, the “work” is the whole, designed object (MS2: Allen, RTI, Watson, Wooldridge), so it is particularly affecting when part of the overall aesthetic programme is disrupted.

5.1.1 Practical treatment, ideological consequence

This arbitrary practice of re-binding provides subtle but profound epistemological insights into how photobooks behave in institutional contexts and beyond. It has informed Donohue’s contemporary cataloguing activity, as she generally places new photobooks directly within the photography collection to avoid this treatment. Over time, this has a conceptual impact on how photobooks are distinguished, categorised and valued, because to be placed within the photography collection earmarks them as “works of photography” first, books second. It has a consequent effect for the reader’s individual encounter, because the books are served within the special collections reading room, with its associated atmospheres and behaviours explored in the

⁴⁶ A verb which frames the photobook like a restaurant meal, another form of transient, corporeal, cultural encounter (see p.80,106).

⁴⁷ Something at odds with practices of book collecting, where the book’s value lies in individual quirks, such as its edition, signature or provenance.

previous chapter. In the NYPL, users require a reader pass to access specialised reading rooms, which although free, adds bureaucracy that could counteract accessibility, and requires readers to physically move to another part of the building.

While in the NYPL the threat of a buckram binding pushes photobooks into one collection or another, in other cases books have agency in how institutions classify them. As with the dirt-covered *Reconstrucción* (Simonassi, 2016; see p.134), a book's materiality dictates its conservation requirements, which could determine whether it is placed (meaning, both catalogued and physically stored) in the general or special collection, regardless of rarity or economic value (MS2: Reeves, White). This ideological distinction has practical impact upon real-world photobook encounters, because while institutional collections can offer visibility and longevity, they come with interactional limitations. Handling tactile but fragile works that conceptualise texture and materiality such as *Trail of Touch* (Perez, 2019) can be restricted: Reeves reflected, "we try to preserve things in the best condition possible which means we sometimes can't use things in the way they're meant to be used", showing best practice can inhibit a photobook's performance and the responses it invites.

The tension between use and preservation⁴⁸ with regards to interactive objects is explored in Helen Graham's study of synthesizers in the collection of the Science Museum. These instruments deteriorate without use, meaning to maintain their authentic sound they need playing, risking damage (2016:15-19). Graham questions what 'object' the museum wishes to collect: the synthesiser's physical object, or the phenomenon of musical sound it produces. The former values the instrument as a work of material and technological design. The latter values an innovative musical tone that sound-tracked 1980s popular culture. The museum prioritises the 'object' of most value through the collections care strategy it adopts. With regards to photobooks, one might think the object would be best preserved through infrequent, tentative handling, but the thing being collected is not only the sum of the pages, binding and cover, but also the affect, ideas and experiences it has yet to elicit in future readers. This pluralises the sense of what is being valued, shifting from ensuring the continuity of physical parts to longevity of ideological access, a tension to be explored in the next section's discussion of materiality and meaning.

⁴⁸ I use 'preservation' instead of conservation here because preservation signifies keeping something in its most intact state, whereas conservation evaluates and facilitates what is 'wise use' of collections (Graham, 2016:18)

5.1.2 Identifying “material-discursive” collections management

Beyond the encounter, the buckram treatment has impacted Donohue’s collecting strategy: while she wouldn’t usually duplicate collection items, she is reacquiring classic photobooks so they can be preserved without this “disturbing” treatment. The word “disturbing” displays a register of affect and care for books that not everyone would share towards inanimate objects. Its etymology has connotations of uncontrollability and disorder, but nowadays it is often used in a moral sense to designate wrongness: “some viewers may find this disturbing”. Such emotive language is contingent on Donohue’s personal and professional interest in books and collections. In the same anthropomorphic tone as I began this story, the use of language questions whether books have a kind of dignity which is compromised by their rebinding, and if so, what discourses and hierarchies of material culture are engaged in producing this perception (see ‘subjectivity’, pp.141-2).

Donohue’s care for photobook materiality is not unusual amongst librarians and curators. In the Tate library, Allen fought⁴⁹ for a similar development: where all books would formerly have a blue Tate library sticker on the front, Allen has argued for new photobooks, from the Martin Parr acquisition onwards, to remain unscathed. The sticker is a material-discursive technology that proprietorially distinguishes books as “Tate books”. To be excluded from this practice within the library collection demonstrates prioritising intactness and aesthetic value over a display of ownership. In Tate’s library, therefore, the *lack* of a blue sticker, or rather, the decision not to apply the sticker to new photobook-like acquisitions makes an agential cut to identify them as belonging to the category of “photobooks”.

This story illuminates how simple actions, such as whether a book is covered in buckram cloth, can determine how that object will be viewed and valued by museum professionals and readers alike. The treatment of objects upon entering the museum, what is or is not done to them, how they are described has been studied by Sam Alberti, who has identified:

The prehistory of the object, its original context, changes radically when it is collected. We might assume that at this point of “discovery,” the collector conferred upon the object a **stable meaning** that endured through its museum career. But for many objects,

⁴⁹ To frame this as a battle may seem extreme, but from my own institutional experiences, I recognise the resistance to slight changes to long-established collection procedure. These details can have subtle but significant effect in signalling what kind of object you are encountering and how you should treat and understand it. Library stickers placed haphazardly over a book’s cover do not invite a response of aesthetic care.

this was but the first in a **convoluted series of meaning and context shifts**. Moreover, the motivations for collecting [and mode of cataloguing] were rarely straightforward.

(Alberti, 2005:562 [my emphasis])

Accordingly, when a photobook is collected by an institution, its original context of production shifts: whatever the reasons for its being made, through acquisition, it transforms into “museum object”, “library book”, or otherwise depending on the collection’s identity. Alberti’s study of natural history specimens shows institutional collections are not inert: things do not enter the accession register then fade from view on a shelf, but are subjected to transportation, conservation or use (*ibid.*). Treatments that nowadays inspire despair, such as applying a buckram cover or sticker, are themselves artefacts of former attitudes expressing a lack of recognition towards the photobook as an aesthetic object. Photobooks may be transferred between collections or attributed other significances, such as Reeves’ activity of identifying valuable or fragile books within the general collection to move into the special collection (MS2).

This symbolic translation shows how books that may have initially been acquired for reference are later regarded with intrinsic value as notable examples of photobook-making or publishing. Where books have resided within collections for several decades, this value shift is conferred upon them from outside by market trends and consecrating structures. The organisational work and agency involved in producing photobooks within the institution is passed between social/discursive and technical/material elements in a manner similar to what organisational studies scholars call “delegation”, inspired by Latour’s ANT conceptualisation of technology (Ribes *et al* 2011; Latour, 1992). Delegation describes how organisational decision-making and structuring is distributed between multiple human and more-than-human actors, such as in this case a photobook’s physical requirements.

Just as the status of photobook collections items transitions from reference material to artwork, beyond the institution, these roles diversify further, as photobooks become capital for book swaps between artists (MS1ii:87,89) or tools of self-promotion (MS1i:64). This elasticity positions the photobook as a “boundary object”. This term describes objects that:

inhabit several intersecting social worlds ... and satisfy the informational requirements of each [...] Boundary objects are objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites. [...] They have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation.

(Star and Griesemer 1989:393)

The term was developed in the context of museum studies in relation to artefacts such as zoological specimens and field notes that are used differently by varying communities. Another

example is the Parthenon marbles: when installed in the British Museum in the 19th century, they held value as objects of antiquarian study and artists' resources, but are now also emblems of debates around national heritage and repatriation. The object remains consistent, but its use and purpose fluctuates depending on the priorities of those who engage with it.

Boundary objects are “weakly structured in common use, and become strongly structured in individualist use” (ibid.), meaning they have broad application as a general term, but more specific meanings in localised instances of engagement. Photobooks in the NYPL general collections would be accessible to a wide range of interests and searches, with varying significance depending on who used them. While these altered copies might have more limited visual experience, the classification and standardised treatment make them accessible for audience groups with general subject matter interests. Their buckram covers could be regarded in this light as a charming idiosyncrasy celebrating each photobook's public service. Photobooks catalogued into the photography collection meanwhile are framed more consistently as photographic objects. To speculate about the habits of NYPL users (based on my NAL experiences), people pre-ordering photobooks from the photography collection would likely already be interested in photography and may expect to find them within this discipline's reading room. This expectation might prepare them for the mild administrative inconvenience of securing a reader's pass, which an acquaintance of mine recalled as a “badge of honour”. This material object confers power because it gives the bearer credential as a literate, culturally-engaged individual, whilst giving access to knowledge, enabling development of other cultural capital and professionalization (Goulding, 2008; Ribes *et al.*, 2013). In this way, the cataloguing and consequent treatment of the photobooks in each collection alters their fluidity as boundary objects through prescribing their intended use, access and classification.

An update on the boundary object in terms of the agential realism offered by Barad (2007) would assert although the object appears to remain consistent between each circumstance of use, it is reconfigured in each 'localised' instance of encounter according to the contextual value of each intra-action. This could be an encounter in a different reading room, with a different binding, or metaphysically through a database. Mol's praxiographic insight (2002) complements Barad's view by suggesting understanding what the photobook 'means' in each context would require studying what it does differently, how and with which actors, such as noting the absence of a blue sticker in the Tate library, which preserves its external appearance as well as conferring value on the book as aesthetic object.

The problem of working with versatile objects in collections is that while it is interesting to talk philosophically, things must be catalogued to be accounted for, and they need to be physically kept and engaged with somewhere. Institutions address this in the most practical, accessible and often cost-effective way possible which, prior to Donohue's intervention, meant treating photobooks like other general volumes. This discussion extends to considerations of how the boundaries of photobooks are negotiated in different circumstances, through material-semiotic signals such as price tags, which frame them as commodities with fixed economic value, or Kickstarter campaigns, which present them as projects-in-progress requiring funding to be realised/materialised. The discussion of how things are catalogued and treated can be elaborated through post-structuralist (Foucault, 1970; 1991) arguments about how things are ordered and "disciplined" into certain categories, whose subtle ideological roots are easily overlooked. This will be the subject of the next story.

5.2 Second story: about the dividing lines that confine objects and construct genres

"it's so sticky because **is it art or technology** ... there is a decision being made here"

Ken Fox, George Eastman Museum Archive and Library (MS2 [my emphasis])

My second anecdotal "epistemic encounter" is inspired by one of many books that resist necessary means of cataloguing. During a conversation at the George Eastman Museum, Fox's cataloguer colleague mentioned entering a book into their database entitled *Grids and Threads* by Bastienne Schmidt (2018). This was the latest example of a regular occurrence of books which do not fit neatly within the grids and threads of the Library of Congress (LoC) classification system used by the museum library.

5.2.1 Systems of classification and categorisation

The LoC database is used internationally, and often the curator/librarian/archivist/cataloguer⁵⁰ will catalogue new acquisitions by attaching them to other records of the same title and edition, preferably created by a library with a specialism in that field (Shaw 2016:157). This assists workload and streamlines information about each title. Users can quickly see locations of copies

⁵⁰ Often somebody with one of these titles will perform all these activities at some point. The titles we give to those who work with photobooks signify how their role is framed: librarian = book, curator = artefact/artwork, cataloguer = describe and document, archivist = record and sort. Each position requires different qualifications, meaning whoever fills each titular role will have undergone discreetly different training that would shape their professional outlook and habitus.

of a given book around the world, which is useful for knowledge-sharing practices such as inter-library loan (MS2: Fox).

The LoC system, like WorldCat (used by the NAL) and other library systems, operates by attributing a code to genre categories, which forms each title's alphanumeric identification. This number structures how titles are organised in the database and the library, melding with the book's material and digital identity. The most populated shelfmarks in the GEM library are 'N', for visual arts, 'PN' for moving image and 'TR' for technology (MS2: Fox). Neither

'photography' nor 'photobook' have specific codes. The act of categorisation is not neutral:

"often carried out in the name of documentation, [it] involves the construction of structures for the organisation and differentiation of types according to identifiable (but variable and arbitrary) co-ordinates", in this case including author, subject matter, date of production, materials, etc. (Whitehead 2009:40).



Figure 17 From *Grids and Threads*, Bastienne Schmidt, 2018.

Within this structure of Ns and TRs, the librarian catalogued *Grids and Threads* as N, visual arts, attaching it to an existing record for the book within this category. The book's linear title resonated with me in a conversation about whether something should be "this or that". Later research informed me that:

Grids and Threads [...] is inspired by Marcel Duchamp's *Three Standard Stoppages* in which three imaginary measuring devices underline the arbitrariness to qualify and quantify something. Part one features bird's-eye photographs of constructed installations [...] The second part consists of mixed media works [...], a punched grid of 8 x 8 inches is divided into one square inch spaces, which draw light and shadow onto the white paper.

(Schmidt, 2020)

The book mobilises the technology of the photograph ambiguously in the two parts. The first part does not consist of photographs and the second does not consist of mixed media works; these are both reproductions of photographic images of the works in question. The first part emphasises the technology of photographing because it describes the camera's instrumentality in fixing the impermanent, 3D constructions into two-dimensional photographic compositions. The fact of the photograph has *added something* to the 'artwork' through capturing the transient installations. However, in the second part, the photograph is a hidden picturing technology. It

does not mention photographic intervention because it is important we see the mixed media works as unmediated drawings on paper. Ontologically, there are at least two kinds of photographs in the book: the first being a creative output, and the second, a document. This shifts where the artist identifies the product of their practice, demonstrating the slipperiness of photographs and printed reproductions because they are simultaneously creative and historic. The very presence of photographs in object collections is complicated by their dual appearance as both collections objects [or artworks] and as modes of documentation (Bärnighausen *et al*, 2020)

The description from the artist's website elaborates on the book's investigation into "arbitrary" and "imaginary measuring devices", citing interest in "a reductive process", "the variations of what happens inside of the squares", and "play with the thought of absolute freedom and absolute constraint". Some questions arose from this:

- ~ **What is a catalogue, if not an imaginary measuring device that arbitrarily qualifies and quantifies something?**
- ~ **What is it to catalogue, if not a reductive process of putting things in boxes (or squares)?**
- ~ **Is cataloguing, for all it appears to confine something to being "this" or "that" for all eternity, an act of absolute constraint?**

These questions opened a line of enquiry about how library systems present a structure of dividing lines, between which books must fall on one side or another. From the contemporary position of social constructionism, deconstructionism, post-structuralism and other postmodern suspicion, it is easy to forget how radical this impulse to categorise and classify must have been in the 18th and 19th century. As the Enlightenment project of sorting the world swept through Western society, it became harder to imagine things without this wonderful, clarifying, oppressive order. Michel Foucault has mobilised the image of the grid to express this tension in *The Order of Things*:

Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself

(1970:xxi)

Order is what has enabled things to "exist", but it also justified hierarchies and distinction, many of which are expressed in rubrics such as the LoC Subject Headings. This ordering and sorting is particularly significant in relation to issues such as race, where systems have been found to centre on white and Western perspectives (Behre, 2020).

Ordering systems require us to make judgements on where things sit within that order. Within a mess of heterogeneous objects, one would identify *Grids and Threads* to be a book, because its “inner law” or, alternatively, essence, form, is a familiar bound thing. In the grid-context of a catalogue of an art library where many varieties of book exist, it slots less easily into one blank space. Its classification must be an act of interpretation or intervention. In this case, *Grids and Threads* fell on the side of ‘art book’, which could mean artist’s book, artist’s monograph, reference book, exhibition catalogue, etc. It might have been called ‘technology’ if its description emphasised the role of the camera in flattening the installations into flat planes to compare with photographs of drawings. Records can be elaborated through adding keywords (MS2: White, Reeves) but an essentialising stamp must be given in where the physical book lives. This ordering activity is “homologous with the choosing of sequences and the imposition of serial or other relations between discrete objects” (Whitehead 2009:30), meaning to place an object within a certain collection or category within that collection is to liken it others in that category, and by differentiation, to Other it from what is not in that category (Derrida, 1997).

5.2.2 Classifying the non-coherent, the multiple and the messy

This ideological coherence or noncoherence between proximal physical books on shelves is significant in the context of the GEM library, where users are permitted to go into the stores to browse the general collection shelving (MS2: Fox). ‘Virtual bookshelves’ now exist for database users to browse titles that neighbour the record they have selected, although as Fig.18 demonstrates, there might be limited relevance between titles. When judging which category a book should sit within, standard training recommends librarians scan the list of contents to appraise the book’s subject, without time to read enough to make a nuanced appraisal (MS2). Photobooks complicate this because they rarely have contents pages or synopses, so its subject may be evaluated as a book about horticulture, on the strength of a few photographs of a greenhouse, when in fact it is a gentle portrait of a pensioner (see pp.90-92).

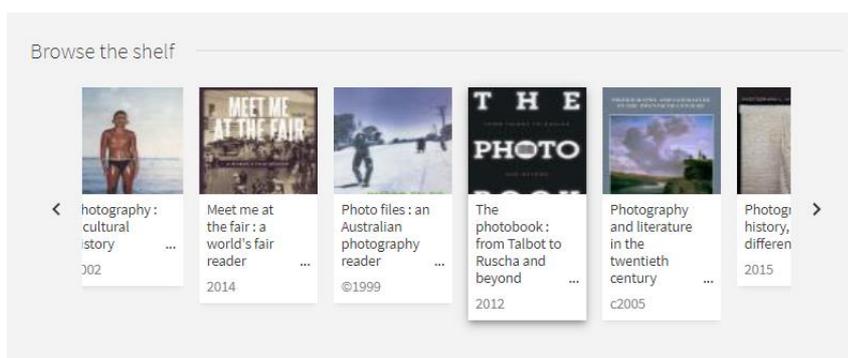


Figure 18 ‘Browse the shelf’ function in the online Newcastle University library search. There are only a handful of texts about photobooks in the library, many of which I have requested during my thesis. Libraries come to represent the research they have supported. (Accessed 8/10/20)

This essentialist act of cataloguing cannot account for the slippage between genre codes and errant object types, as demonstrated by Douglas Crimp's (1993) anecdote about Ed Ruscha's artist's book *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* (1963). Containing, as the title suggests, twenty-six photographs of gas stations, Crimp found a copy "miscatalogued" in a section alongside automobiles and highways:

I remember thinking how funny it was [...] I knew, as the librarians evidently did not, that Ruscha's book was a work of art and therefore belonged in the art division. But now, because of the reconfigurations brought about by postmodernism, [...] Ed Ruscha's books make no sense in relation to the categories of art according to which art books are catalogued in the library [...] The fact that there is nowhere within the present system of classification a place for *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations* is an index of its radicalism with respect to established modes of thought.

(1993:78)

There are two salient points to read from Crimp's experience. The first is it describes a modernist tendency to see through the photograph to what it represents, rather than initially recognising its objectness. This criticism has been made of many media, most aptly in René Magritte's surrealist painting *The Treachery of Images* (1928–1929), which reads, *ceci n'est pas une pipe*: this is not a pipe, because it is a painting of a pipe, a dream of a pipe, an image of a pipe, or many other things apart from a physical, puff-able pipe. It suggests why deferring to subject areas is more convenient than contemplating the complexity of the material world. This was how the modernist project could progress, through purporting to simplify and separate the world, even if this was never really the case (Latour, 1993). Secondly, Crimp's claim that "there is nowhere within the present system of classification a place for *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*" sounds unimaginative 30 years on. I would argue there are *too many* places for the book: as a true boundary object, it has the potential to operate informationally, formally, conceptually, typologically, typographically, etc., depending upon audience and use.

Reading between the lines of Crimp's account shows that, despite his disavowal of genres and the grand narratives they represent, he also benefitted from them. Crimp chanced upon Ruscha's book whilst researching a film about transportation, meaning he located it (if unexpectedly) while looking within that category. Classifications are important tools for users to discover titles by theme or artist's name (MS2: Reeves, White), and as the previous story discussed, could be instrumental in introducing the photobook medium to readers who chance upon requesting one that aligns with their subject interest. On an occupational level, libraries depend on classifiers to function day-to-day, which is generally more urgent than ideological pondering.

Looping back to *Grids and Threads*, classifying a visual text in the manner required by online catalogues can impact its subsequent interpretation. Pigeonholing it as an ‘N’ or ‘TR’ would make a semantic link with ‘art’ or ‘photography’. Shaw has observed:

Searching by language only [...] is problematic when your need and inclination is to gain experience with research requiring visual acumen [...] there is an ontological difference between something found through language and that which is found through visual attention.

(2016:159)

The genre code or category acts similarly to the interpretive frames that gallery displays construct around objects through positioning and presentation (Whitehead 2012), predisposing what the viewer/reader will see in the visual text. Foucault provides an explanation for this:

the fundamental codes of a culture – those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices – establish for every man [...] the empirical orders with which he will be dealing

(Foucault, 1970:xxii)

Photobooks are most easily searched by artist’s name as the most convenient distinguishing factor, perpetuating Modernist notions of singular authorship. Finding new ways to organise and facilitate searching within visual libraries without defaulting to language could permit users to make new relations between texts based on perception, experience, congruence and incongruence (Shaw 2016:162).

It is true that collections need to be organised so their parts can be located. The immense global institutionalisation of classifications by systems like Worldcat and CIDOC results from this need for coordinates to locate and apprehend information. However, it is conceivable those classificatory co-ordinates are arbitrary and could be constructed with alternative social agendas. Crimp suggested a hyper-articulated superabundance of classifications that is infinitely expanding with increasingly radical interpretation, but this could drown a user’s search in irrelevant results. Another is a chaos of multiple classificatory systems with no interoperability and no shared logics. Following a conversation on this theme, a colleague shared with me a passage from Patrick Rothfuss’ fantasy novel *The Name of the Wind* (2007), where rivalries between archivists in a fictional library led to a kind of “holy war” of hiding and reclassifying books:

“How many different systems have there been?” [...]

“It depends on how you count them,” she said softly. “At least nine in the last three hundred years. The worst was about fifty years ago when there were four new Master Archivists within five years of each other. The result was three different factions ..., each using a different cataloguing system, each firmly believing theirs was the best [...] The moral of the story is that things are a mess in here. We effectively ‘lost’ almost two hundred thousand books...”

Most real-world libraries are younger than three hundred years. Still, traces of classificatory revisions can be seen in inconsistent numbering systems that jump from five-digit numbers to alphanumeric sequences, logged in different ledgers and departments, which translate to different digital databases (e.g., NAL/V&A records). In this fictional library, and within my own collections experience⁵¹, if an object is uncatalogued, or not in its database location, it is effectively lost until chance throws it back into somebody's path.

A chaotic library is what Foucault calls a heterotopia, in which things are simultaneously but incompletely described by several different logics, preventing coherent use or comparison of texts. According to Foucault,

Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance ... that less apparent syntax which causes words and things ... to 'hold together'

(Foucault, 1970:xix)

Foucault's concern lies in a lack of consistent grammar by which signifier and significance can be maintained. Yet, the cataloguing chaos in Rothfuss' fiction might appear less disturbing a heterotopia if there were a mode of locating the books independently of a librarian's effort to classify them.

Until now the organisation of libraries has followed language-based rubrics. New technologies might enable alternative approaches to their interaction and organisation. Shaw imagines a library as a repository for discovery: "without a catalog[sic] a library is an ephemeral collection ... a kind of marginalia of moving" (2016:166). Studying how books are positioned, removed, and repositioned by their readers could reveal critical insight. Shaw compares it to a living version of Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924-1929) in which the art historian "recognised the opportunity for showing relationships between art objects from across historical art movements, different time periods and cultures by relating them to one another visually, without words" (Shaw, 2016:168).

The Sitterwerk Kunstbibliothek in Switzerland has offered an experimental solution. The library of 25,000 volumes on art, architecture, design and photography was compiled by collector Daniel Rohner, who constantly re-catalogued and rearranged his collection. When the library was made public, the governing foundation continued Rohner's ambition towards an infinite organisation

⁵¹ The V&A PDP Department would have an annual period for "stocktaking" when the study room closed in the summer, which (unofficially) often involved hunting for "NIPs" (objects marked "not in place")

of the library through labelling the books with Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags instead of pressmarks, so they may be found anywhere within the library's shelving (ibid.:169). Tables sense what books rest upon them, gathering data about what books have been picked by the same user. When they have finished, books can be replaced in any location or configuration, reflecting library users' recent activity, and creating critical connections between physical books. The model revolutionises the notion that books must be confined to categories, and physically manifests a plurality of interpretation and juxtaposition that is well-suited for visual books.

In an account of building an archive of Early Middle English manuscripts, Dorothy Kim (2018) has interrogated the political nature of interfaces through which we navigate archives. Whether they be text based, or resources facilitating "granular" engagement with the materiality of their corpus, Kim argues the ways collections are visualised through archival interfaces are a "mediating apparatus" that "change how our readers/users/subjects will interact and create interpretive iterative acts with their reading, access, and navigation of the digital information". In building an archival interface, Kim's project questioned what historical and political hegemonies may be built into a system that privileges one kind of data over others, for example, literary over sensory, whilst also considering what might be hidden to create a "pleasurable" digital experience. The political possibilities of creating the archive mirrored the multiplicity of readings, user agendas, and Early Middle English manuscripts themselves, in terms of their variable chronologies, functions, subjects and linguistic assemblages (not unlike the boundary status of photobooks), presenting the interface as a space of intra-action (Barad, 2007). Kim's critique that "universal design becomes too close to the ideas of one-size-fits-all in Enlightenment political liberalism" (2018:247) is rooted in her intersectional standpoint. Her argument engages with racial histories through resisting imperial modes of documenting things and people originating from colonial aggressions such as slavery. It also aligns with queer histories in her attempt to transcend binary expressions of information and experience. From this feminist and post-colonial position, Kim contends archiving systems should not strive to accommodate for every possible category or descriptor, because it minimizes the multiplicity of the thing described.

This scepticism of categories was evident when Fox described the activity around classifying books as "sticky" at the start of this anecdote. The adjective simultaneously implies something messy, and something that renders things immobile. John Law has argued "mess" is inherent in social phenomena, but social science has attempted to eliminate all that is "diffuse", "indistinct" and "slippery" (2004:2). Law writes, "simple, clear descriptions don't work if what they are describing is not itself very coherent", and as this thesis argues, photobooks are not a coherent kind of object but shift meaning and matter in different contexts. Shaw's positive heterotopian

picture of a library is one that is in flux, physically and ideologically, characterised by a “paradigm of blur” where books are free to communicate with one another without the constraints of language (2016:168). For libraries, simple descriptors such as genre codes artificially eliminate or disguise this mess. In our interview, Fox reflected, “there is a decision being made here”, and later expanded upon his awareness of how museum work contributes towards the construction of knowledge. If every museum worker dwelt upon the ontological complications of each item they catalogued within their collection, they would indeed become *stuck*. Yet, Fox demonstrated valuable reflexivity regarding the responsibility of curators/librarians/archivists in establishing and maintaining epistemic boundaries. The subjectivities of archival workers is a significant interpretive lens that determines *what* information is discovered. For example, an individual researching an archive with a queer of colour lens might produce alternative insights that disrupt hegemonic narratives and affirm histories of marginalised communities, making a crucial link between archival work and social justice (Zepeda, 2018).

5.2.3 Classification as a tool of institutional politics

For Fox, the decision being made between “is it art or technology” is embedded with the GEM’s institutional history, whose origins lie in the collections of George Eastman, founder of Kodak. Fox described a tension within the museum’s identity between its photographic technology collections, and its repositioning as a centre for the appreciation of art photography in the 1980s. This tension is represented in the library, which has historic holdings about early photographic inventions, while more recent acquisitions focus around GEM’s exhibitions and collecting activity (MS2).

In this context, the distinction between “art” and “technology” becomes loaded, because these categories have ideological origins linked to the museum’s past values. The previous section highlighted Fox’s use of the word “sticky”: this word has also been used by Sara Ahmed to express how ideas and objects accrue affects and meanings. Ahmed explains that things, words and concepts “become sticky, saturated with affects, as sites of personal and social tension” when repeatedly associated with certain contexts (Ahmed, 2007:126). Ahmed’s use of the word initially referred to how commonplace language such as “swamped” and “flooded” adhered to negative, emotive signification in political discourse around asylum seekers in the early 2000s (2004:122). Words such as “photography”, “technology” and “art” that classify GEM’s collections are stuck to tensions between different stakeholders involved in the institution’s history and current operation, through years of repeating these terms in relation to debates over the museum’s mission.

The same can be said for each idiosyncratic organisation and its collection: for example, Tate Modern “isn’t going to start collecting 19th-century material” (MS2: Allen) because its collections are stuck to the word “modern”. Other museum histories likewise impact attitudes towards collections: the V&A’s self-identification as “the world’s leading museum of art and design”⁵² means their photobooks might be used by graphic design students to look up books associated with particular designers. Curators accordingly make efforts to input details of designers and research the balance of creative labour between artist, designer and publisher (MS2: Reeves). Until recently, the Met’s collection of artist’s books and photobooks were acquired and spread across the museum’s libraries to support research of the “main” collections of paintings, prints and photography because the museum’s previous director apparently disliked artist’s books (more on this in the next section).

In addition to the influence of top-level policy, libraries illustrate the history of their use by individuals. At GEM, there is a glut of literature on “trashy” Seventies horror cinema because of its popularity among male students on the film conservation course (MS: Fox). Even the Newcastle University’s Robinson Library bears a tiny mark of my research through titles on photography, photobooks and affect I have requested during my PhD (Fig.18). If a member of university staff publishes a book and uses it on a module programme, the library would buy several copies, meaning the collection grows as a refraction of networked staff research interests, institutional pedagogy, and the market for knowledge and qualifications that means certain subjects are taught in the first place. While it is unsurprising there are abundances and omissions in subject-specific art libraries, this shows even an apparently comprehensive collector like a university library is part of a machine of contingent knowledges.

The aim of this discussion inspired by a book that was *not* easy to fix within a grid of classification has been, much like the first story, to promote sensitivity towards the subtle ideological and practical consequences of small cataloguing decisions. Information systems support binary judgements that the world must be divided into “this *or* that”, when in fact most of the world turns out to be “this and that and that and those and them”. These categories emerge as social constructions, supported by objects in institutional collections that have over time established disciplines of “technology” or “art”. We think of “art” in terms of what we know to be in “art museums”, meaning these categories are sustained by material-discursive

⁵² Now “the world’s leading museum of art, design and performance” since the Theatre Museum merged with the main site in 2007.

relationships between collections and audiences (Whitehead 2012:13; Dickie 1984:80). To highlight and collapse these limiting dichotomies, which mostly we accept without realising, is a gesture towards understanding the relationship between epistemology and ontology. This advances the philosophical dimension of this thesis by opening an imaginative space where other boundaries can also be softened, such as the limit between self and other, body and book, nature and culture, even past, present and future (Graham 2006:7; Barad 2003; see pp.47,60,74-75). Following Derrida's deconstruction of binaries (2004[1972]), if books no longer have to be books *or* artworks *or* commodities, if they do not have to foreground photography *or* overall effect, if we succeed in removing the "either/or" for this one small area of cultural practice, it is a small step towards more pluralistic approaches to how knowledge is made about the world.

5.3 Third story: about documenting practice, and duplicitous artefacts

"If you want to collect literature information on contemporary artists you need their exhibition catalogues, and they're very ephemeral [...] I have been trying to acquire books about artist books, exhibition catalogues about artists' books or exhibition catalogues of artist's books. And I'm also collecting mail order catalogues from dealers who were selling arts books in the 70s and 80s to have a broader understanding of the field."

Tony White, Thomas J. Watson Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art (MS2)

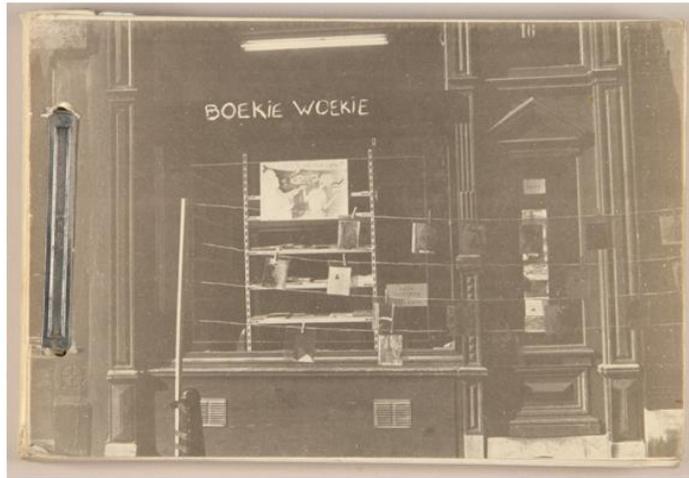
A considerable part of my conversation with Tony White led on from the previous section's discussion about how lines are drawn between certain types of objects, through considering how collections and museum practices could "represent" those types. We circled around "where to draw the line" between different kinds of artist's publications and photobooks. I learned White acquired many artist's books I would regard as photobooks. This thesis does not attempt to distinguish between the two, especially in this chapter that plays devil's advocate to modernist classificatory schema, so for the next few pages I will discuss artists' books on the strength of their significant overlap with photobook practices, as touched on in the Introduction.

5.3.1 Problematising the artists' (catalogue) book

Something White and I agreed upon was catalogues are generally different to artists' books because they serve different aims than pure artistic expression. For me, this resolution soon faltered. As I thought about what vintage catalogues of artists books might look like, it occurred to me that, like artists' books, they are designed, image-led objects made of bound paper. I found images of them on the Met website alongside the artists' books they apparently differ from, and

learned they were often made by the artists whose work they promoted, as in the case of artist-run bookstore Boekie-Woekie (see Fig.19). The catalogues thus act as expressions of their makers' conceptual and aesthetic sensibilities.

What differentiates these book-objects is an awareness of something being “art” or “not art”: its essence as “artwork” or “sales tool”. The latter can be creative, and creative design can be considered art, but it serves different functions and publics to traditional visual arts (Munari, 1971:25-27). Notwithstanding, paper documentation and digital databases do not distinguish between primary book works and supporting literature, such as exhibition catalogues and sales brochures. There is no search function for “show me artists’ books”: books have titles, authors, subject keywords, and relevant results will be listed regardless of whether their maker considered them art.



Forwards? March! (Amsterdam: Boekie Woekie, 1986).

This early dealer catalogue for the bookshop Boekie Woekie in Amsterdam was published in May 1986. The publication date is significant. The shop first opened in January 1986 as a collaborative effort to promote the work of several artists: Jan Voss, Pétur Magnússon, Henriette van Egten, Rúnna Thorkelsdóttir, Saskia de Vriendt, and Kees Visser. Publications by other artists are also listed in the catalogue. Because dealer catalogues are so ephemeral, acquiring them is vital in supporting research related to cool books.

Figure 19, image and caption from [Metmuseum.org](https://www.metmuseum.org) (White 2018)

Furthermore, in the Met Museum’s Thomas J. Watson Library (henceforth referred to as ‘the Watson’), both artists’ books and catalogues of artists’ books are grouped within the Artists Publications Study Collection (APSC), along with “zines, bookworks, artist magazines, pamphlets, artists' files, reference books, dealer catalogues, pricelists, journals...”. Art libraries usually collect artworld ephemera. The Watson collections support scholarship of wider Met collections, where artists’ books also sit within Drawings & Prints and Photographs departments. By combining diverse forms of artists’ publications under one collection title, the APSC acts as a discursive bind that posits materially diverse objects as connected nodes within a network of objects (Morris, 2003). The grouping is non-hierarchical: in the APSC, artists’ books are not portrayed as more important than related ephemera, because their value depends on the priorities of the reader. It transpires the only relevant mode of defining these objects emerges through the act of looking, comparing, researching, reading: the question should not be “what kind of book is this”, in a general sense, but “what kind of book is this for *you*” or “in *this* context”, making an agential cut based on circumstances of engagement.

This assessment shows the ontological value of a library object to be flexible and relational to the circumstances in which it has agency. According to Kim (2018), archives and the environments in which they are mediated are intra-active spaces. This poses a museological opportunity to pluralise ontologies and offer visitors multiple avenues for interpretation, something that has been seen more often in museum displays. Fred Wilson's project *Mining the Museum* (1992) subtly rearranged displays in the Maryland Historical Society, such as placing a set of shackles alongside fine silver pitchers in a vitrine labelled "metalwork". Wilson's interventions critiqued colonial histories and sought to make visible the racial violence integral to Maryland's history. The juxtapositions messed with expectations of museum categories to provoke a specific political agenda of confronting audiences with overlooked racial histories. Wilson's project was successful in changing attitudes about history because it also altered attitudes towards discrete ontological assignments and redistributed the power to promote historical narratives. With a far less immediate political impact, in this research, categories dictated by institutional powers also conduct towards binding representations of what users expect to find within that ontological grouping. For the most part these categories remain unchallenged.

Within the APSC, it isn't *necessary* for the institution to distinguish between the composite parts of zines, bookworks, pamphlets, sales lists. These lines are redrawn and reconfigured by each user's interests. This was demonstrated in White's collecting methods: as well as books that are "interesting or conceptually important or relevant", he sought "books that are similar to other kinds of books within the field so people have a sense of what is a flag book, what is a math book, so people can know what are these are kinds of structures" or printing techniques. For example, while many risograph books can be "terrible", White looks for "exceptional" uses of the technique. So, if searching the APSC for books that make use of riso printing, accordion fold or stab binding, users could find artists' books and catalogues using these techniques for different kinds of publications without needing to firmly delineate between them, because the prevailing attribute joining that configuration of objects would be their common method of production. A catalogue might have a double representational function in this context, by demonstrating a production technique through its own physical construction, alongside representing examples of that technique through its entries.

Writing about the APSC in a blog post, White narrated an anecdote about "cool books", describing "innovative publications published or produced by artists, photographers, designers, curators, and other creatives" (White, 2018). He heard the phrase from a rare books curator who showed zines, photobooks, artists' books etc. during college library tours, and recounted students would return asking to see the "cool books", referring to these less conventional types. White

suggested the term is more convenient for escaping the “inevitable quagmire when it comes to defining these publications”. In this example, the “cool books” are identified through material-discursive relation between the objects themselves, being somehow positively othered from main collections through creative design or materials, and user perception of those materials.

This perception and subsequent designation of artists’ publications as “cool books” could be described as co-productive, in the STS sense of the term, in “exploring interdependence between things and people, ‘matter and meaning’ and the ‘word and world’” (Graham 2016:3, c.f. Barad, 2007:32). Johanna Drucker expressed a desire for artists’ books to be defined through specific, interactional experience, by articulating “the artist’s book has to be understood as a highly mutable form, one which cannot be definitively pinned down by formal characteristics”; a field emerging with “many spontaneous points of origin and originality [...] which belies the linear notion of a history”; and an area needing “description, investigation, and critical attention before its specificity will emerge” (2004:11-15). According to Drucker, potential definitions of “artists’ book” must generate from engagement with artists’ books, as viewers determine “the extent to which a book work makes integral use of the specific features of this form” (ibid.:9). In other words, ontological understanding of artist's book practices emerges through accumulating material-discursive interactions with specific books and broader discourse. Drucker has described a process akin to an assemblage (DeLanda, 2007) or relational ontology (Barad, 2007), wherein a thing can only be known through the sum of the agencies, interactions and ideas in which it is engaged.

5.3.2 From commerce to commemoration

As Drucker has advised, understanding artists’ publications requires attention to the specific capacities of each form. The agencies and interactions of the artists’ books, photobooks and catalogues in the Watson Library’s Artists’ Publications Study Collection differ from those of other copies of the same books elsewhere in private collections, or bins. This again demonstrates Alberti’s theory that objects transform upon entering a collection: through inclusion in the APSC, they are enrolled in a network of research material, people and systems in which their agencies relate to the production of knowledge (Latour and Callon, 1981). This particularly applies to the sales brochures, which no longer work explicitly towards producing economic capital through sales, but become historical records of artists’ book production and commerce. Gitelman has said, “any object can be a thing, but once it is framed as or entered into evidence—once it is mobilized—it becomes a document, an instance proper to that genre” (2014:3). When the catalogues enter the APSC, they are no longer defunct sales literature with interesting visual

content. They are mobilised as documents through which a more cohesive image of a field of cultural production can be constructed.

A catalogue is a materially coherent index of many represented parts. In this case, the parts are more books, presented as saleable commodities. This enables users to research the range of books produced and also their initial sale price, who sold them, and what other books those booksellers sold. This combination of sources could theoretically weave together a bigger picture of networks of social contacts and economies, situating these book works within real-world contexts of sale and use. The collection thus becomes an archive of potential transactions of capital, personal and professional relationships. Sales catalogues would also include information such as production methods, materials and dimensions so even without the original work one can learn what kinds of practices prevailed at a given time. This is more available to artist's books than photobooks because they historically have more established infrastructure of artists and dealers.

White's project of collecting vintage sales catalogues from artists' books dealers is valuable for visualising this community of practice from the '70s and '80s because many books listed aren't in institutional collections, if copies survived at all. White spoke of a "lack of a critical eye" in early artists' book historiography, where people repeatedly paid attention to a small number of well-known artists, such as Ed Ruscha, but neglected to acquire more broadly (MS2). Partly, this was because artists books were physically "difficult to find and get ahold of" in the pre-Internet era. Partly it was due to institutional leadership: the Met's former director Felipe de Montebello allegedly voiced antipathy for the medium and claimed no artists' books would enter the museum under his directorship. These factors resulted in "a large number of artists' books that were produced that weren't collected", leaving them at risk of obscurity save for their inclusion in sales catalogues. The strategy to collect catalogues is an efficient way to survey a broader distribution of activity without examples of the books themselves. The variety of "uncollected" books in such publications also shows the ephemerality of artistic products if they are not preserved through artworld structures of consecration. Decades later, the catalogue's value transfers, essentially, from promoting those things that *will* be sold, to documenting those that *were not*.

5.3.3 Collecting for future histories

Another reason why many artists' books were not collected was "early on, people didn't know what impact they'd have" (MS2: White). In the '70s and '80s, artists' books were primarily associated with counterculture movements (MS1ii:49-50; Weida, 2013). White's comment

indicates a common curatorial preoccupation with collecting what will become “important” in the future. The catch is many things come to have “impact” through institutional legitimization. This questions what motivates curators to collect contemporary works: is it to “predict” what will be of historic importance later on, or to accurately reflect contemporary practice in the hope it will be appreciated in the future? Are these aims one and the same? Susan Pearce has noted, “collecting is intimately bound up with the processes through which material goods acquire (and sometimes lose) value” (Pearce, 1995:352). For social history collections, the museum enacts a “zone of transformation where collections are created and the unregarded detritus of commodity is turned into meaningful culture” (ibid.:396). In a similar sense, those photobooks acquired because they, for example, “pick up the current mood of photobook production” and “support curators’ interests” elsewhere in the museum (MS1i:17) will in future come to matter not only as works in themselves, but as objects that represent what culture was meaningful at the time.

Among the curators I spoke with, their collecting activities generally fell into two areas: contemporary acquisitions and retroactive “gap-filling”. There is a causal relation between these activities because “gap-filling” refers to works that have come to be regarded as significant, but which previous curators failed to acquire contemporaneously, whether due to personal taste, broader institutional collecting priorities, or otherwise. By contrast, contemporary acquisitions help legitimise artists through conferring institutional approval to their work (Dickie 1997), leading them to be regarded as significant in future times. Both practices are expressions of power on the part of who does the choosing and how they respond to issues of race/class/gender/sexuality/dis/ability.

“Gap-filling” in particular refers to the collector’s own image of what is complete or required. Pearce has written that “[c]ollections are essentially a narrative of experience” that “narrate world-views of knowledge and moral understanding” across history (1995:412). As Zepeda has noted (2018), lack of diversity amongst the archival profession has erased and ignored histories of marginalised communities, because people may have overlooked representation of experiences they do not share. Objects associated with regional or social experiences of people who have been marginalised by hegemonic histories and underrepresented by previous collecting activity appear with the benefit of hindsight as “gaps” in institutional narratives. In many cases in art collections, these “gaps” are works that have later entered a canon of creative production, that curators feel should be included in their collection to represent the history of that medium. This contrasts with the alternative mode of collecting activity as “hunting” for rarities and new discoveries to add to the collection (Pearce, 1995:183), because the gaps have already been identified by larger artworld structures.

To an extent these attitudes are a legacy of the 19th-century practice of systematically collecting Old Masters artworks upon which today's art museums were founded (ibid.). Collecting is no longer so systematic: as White said, he is working to build "what we would call a representative collection. Nobody knows what that means, [but] that's fine with me" (MS2). For White, "representative" involves a focus on artists' books in a variety of formats and materials, which could be broadly interpreted. It is hard to quantify how "representative" a collection can be when the thing represented (i.e. history, medium) is indistinct and plural. It is therefore a useful term for collecting policies to give curators flexibility in exercising their interpretation of what should be represented.

Other curators I spoke with also sought to fill the gaps of underrepresented areas, alongside collecting contemporary photobooks. For example, Allen targeted her gap-filling towards discovering works by female or non-binary artists and artists of colour that may have been overlooked amongst the influx of works by predominantly white males from the Martin Parr collection. Fox desired to acquire certain "canonical" early photographic books such as *Bruges la morte* (Rodenbach, 1892) to ensure a copy would be accessible for local researchers. As we have seen, Donohue is seeking to re-acquire certain classic works because the versions existing in the collection are no longer accurate representations of the original work (owing to conservation treatment).

Reeves showed less enthusiasm for retro-active photobook acquisitions: the contemporary consideration of what is historically "important" has to some degree been constructed by the work of other scholars and curators, as well as popular anthologies such as Parr and Badger's (MS2: Reeves). The concept of a "canon" is therefore not a neutral selection: it has been recently been constructed, partially by authors drawing on their personal collections. These individuals, Watson pointed out, have undoubtedly benefitted from the elevated market value of certain titles, as curators rush to "represent" this fledgling photobook canon (MS2: Watson). For Reeves, the retro-creation of a canon that is going on through anthologies and other collections (more on this in the next story) is slightly problematic for the NAL, and its extensive holdings of 20th-century photographic books, because it means the concept of "photobooks-as-objects" has become more crystallised (MS2). As the idea of what is or is not a photobook becomes more distinct, this could unnecessarily or falsely differentiate new acquisitions from pre-existing collections that may have been acquired and catalogued under headings such as artists' books or photography.

It seems to me that to collect backwards on the strength of an external authority would also not make sense for the NAL, because its existing collection was built with different priorities and tastes. It appears especially unnecessary in light of Parr's sale of his photobook collection to the Tate library, where it is now available on request further down the Thames. Reeves prefers collecting new work, in particular from non-Western geographies, non-heteronormative makers, and artists mobilising the book form in response to current social issues, to address gaps in representation contemporaneously. She also endeavours to acquire directly from artists, which supports the community of practice's grassroots. For several years, a dedicated patronage fund allowed her more autonomy and flexibility to "take a chance" on acquisitions (MS2: Reeves).

While this appears to be a meritocratic way of supporting artists' career progression, it also potentially means less "gap filling" will need to be done in future decades. This is because it does not depend on the demographic bias that exists among "mainstream publishers – like Steidl and Mack, who "even last year [2018] they were not putting their money behind a lot of women" (MS2: 10x10[Lederman]). It can make possible acquisitions and therefore histories that genuinely engage with a broader diversity of makers beyond tokenistic representation. This is counterbalances the portion of collecting activities that are directed by other external legitimating structures such as awards shortlists. Many curators referred to such processes as a useful way to discover new work (MS2: Allen), but if different art libraries all acquire from the same limited shortlist selections it could result in a homogenised history of 'contemporary' practice based solely upon the decisions of a small number of juries (in several cases, some individuals sit on multiple juries). This theme of how certain institutional activities are generative of canons and histories will continue in the next story's discussion of critical anthologies and exhibitions.

This story about similarly "sticky" catalogues of artists' books has shown these visual objects to serve many purposes. It has complicated the collapsing of boundaries between object types, showing how one object can be materially and conceptually consistent with several "types" – artist's book, artist's publication, example of production, social and economic document. It has likewise shown how these slippery objects, these "cool books" do not need to have a more precise label and can be interpreted according to multiple material-discursive configurations as articulated by each encounter: once again, to echo Graham (2016), curators must consider what is the "thing" being collected and why they value it, but in this case, and as Alberti (2005) has shown, an artefact's significance does not remain static over time.

In the pre-modern era, words such as "book" and "museum" were used interchangeably, because the early museum (*museion*) was not necessarily a physical place, but a seat of learning. This could

manifest as an academy, a university, an archive, even the assorted effects of a wise person. An early ‘museum’, the *Museo Veronese*, had a physical site, but also existed as a book, or a catalogue, which incorporated items from collections in other cities among its pages. The ‘museum’ embodied in the book transgressed the physical site of the museum, becoming more extensive and plural as it was reproduced and shared between other academies (Royal Academy, 2020). The sales catalogues of artists’ books served a similar purpose of mass communication by making information available across wide geographical areas. The catalogue’s informational value has shifted over time: the reader no longer needs to know how to contact the dealer to make a purchase; they might better appreciate its design and material fabrication now it has become a historical artefact/document. Like the *Museo Veronese*, the catalogue communicates information to a wider variety of people than are able to see the physical books it indexes: originally, this would have been because of geographic and economic barriers; now it may be because items no longer exist, at least not in the same grouping presented in the book, which once sat together in a stock room or under a desk, but has for many years been dispersed.

This concluding point challenges how far it is necessary to determine the limits of something, either in present practice or retrospectively. Whether they are 20th-century catalogues or 18th-century book-museums, these objects come to have multiple significances for each reader, performing as socio-historical documents in one encounter, typologies in another, examples of production and design in a third. Histories have hitherto been written by valuing objects according to their compliance with certain definitions, categories and object types. The next story considers additional challenges and new opportunities for historicising photobooks and book practices beyond collections.

5.4 Fourth story: about asking how do we, and how else can we, make histories?

“when histories aren’t written, and the door is open, there is more room to jump in”
Russet Lederman, 10x10 Photobooks (MS2)

In my conversation with Russet and Michael from 10x10, we talked about histories of photobooks in flux. Through their anthology publications and social events detailed in Chapter 4, 10x10 contributes to historicisation of photobooks past and present. Despite the increasing number of survey publications, the writing of photobook ‘history’ is in its early stages, because people have only been taking the photobook seriously as a practice in its own right for roughly a quarter of its lifetime. When talking with 10x10 about their recent publication, *How We See*:

Photobooks by Women (2019), Lederman drew a comparison to the artists' book movement in the USA. Artists' books were an effective medium for women's co-operatives to make, share and gain attention because they "didn't have a history, quite an open door" (MS2: 10x10). This aligns with White's view that artists books:

provided an opportunity and a venue for women artists to produce works because they weren't able to be shown in galleries in the 1960s. The 1960s are showing male artists predominantly, so artists' books gave an opportunity for [...] persons [...] who were denied opportunities to show their works to create artworks on a multiple level and get it out to a broad audience in a democratic way.

(MS2: White)

The salient point here is that in the '60s, precisely because artists' books were a new, emergent kind of thing people were making, they had no history to define where they would fit within the cultural landscape and who could participate. This lack of history, or novelty, allowed artists' books to be mobilised by society's marginalised members. They did not need gallery spaces, neither did they have pre-existing critical frameworks to which they could be compared. This is still partially the case today when people describe the book as the "democratic multiple", particularly in relation to public art and counterculture (Drucker, 2004; White, 2013; Neumüller and Tuminas, 2018; Speight and Quick, 2020). Discussions at the 2021 Contemporary Artists' Book Conference (New York) maintained this critical framework has yet to solidify. This made me think: when a medium's history starts to be written, how can that door stay open?

Beyond the gatekeeping roles of publishers and editors that influence what photobooks are made in the first place (MS2: Watson), the following section considers the epistemic activities of anthologies and exhibitions in contributing to contemporary photobook histories.

5.4.1 Writing histories

Anthology publications like *The Photobook: A History* can be highly useful, as Lesley Martin pointed out: "that initial surge of publications highlighted the particular role of the photobook in photographic practice" (MS2). A review of a new edition of *The Photobook: A History* (Parr and Badger, 2014), recollected "when the first was published back in 2004, the idea of a canon of photographic books still seemed new and slightly exotic, despite the extraordinarily rich history that was beginning to be pieced together" (Campany 2014). The increasing appetite to produce books about photobooks was distilled in David Solo's 2014 exhibition *Photobibliomania* at the ICP Library, New York.

Photobook anthologies could sit within the same ontological swamp as the Met's artists' book catalogues, being carefully designed and heavy with photographic illustrations. Shannon has observed some anthologies have engaged in similar practices of luxury commodification as photobook special editions, noting Roth's *The Book of 101 Books...* was released in a trade, limited and deluxe leatherbound editions (2010:60). In particular, Parr & Badger's series was criticised for leaving some areas underexplored, but Allen reasoned it provided "something to work against ... to create a counter-history" (MS2: Allen). Parr's own photobook collection formed the foundation for his three-volume survey, which he has since sold the collection to the Tate, which Allen hopes will "ignite a whole new field of research". Shannon has problematised survey anthologies based upon private collections as primary contributors to photobook histories, because the "highly subjective" selections comprise their author's relationship to the art market (2010:55). The taxonomic style of presentation frames them as "buyer's guides – simultaneously satiating and feeding the popular demand for photobooks", and auction catalogues indicated when books for sale had been included in Parr & Badger's selection as a mark of distinction (ibid.).

The trouble with anthologies of any origin that aim to provide a *general* history of photobooks is the weight of inclusion inevitably falls short in one area or another. These publications may have been useful in focusing critical interest upon the photobook, but the histories they propose depend heavily upon reinforcing the existing canon of 20th-century photography. Histories are never general; they are perspectival. From a distance, you might pick out skyscrapers and monuments in a landscape, but you'd fail to see subtle differences in architecture from one neighbourhood to another. Survey publications likewise give an insufficient picture of photobook practice: constantly referencing 'classics' such as *The Americans*⁵³ are all oft-quoted, iconic landmarks in photographic practice, but they are similar kinds of books by already-famous photographers. Repeatedly referencing isolated monuments such as these tells as much about the cultural landscape of photobooks as you could learn about London from identifying Big Ben or the Gherkin on the horizon.

Other kinds of anthologies adopt a more localised approach, such as 10x10's subject-specific collections. By engaging the expertise of multiple contributing authors who are themselves active stakeholders in photobook production, and centring selections around a theme, there is a sense that the histories being written are more fragmented, whilst perhaps more authentic. The monuments are still there, but sitting amongst subtler choices. Most importantly, each suite of

⁵³ Robert Frank's *Americans* has become my touchstone for all things 'canon', which is unfair to the book itself, but I'm repeating the example to reflect how often it arose in conversations throughout the research.

ten photobooks is presented through the voice of that author, maintaining plurality of voices and fracturing the idea of a singular, comprehensive canon. This approach is in line with Harding's standpoint theory (1993), referred to in the previous chapter's discussion of audiences (p.165). This feminist research approach emphasises localised accounts in which the social situation of history and context can be more clearly articulated. By narrowing the focus of research to smaller subject areas, foregrounding marginalised perspectives, the social construction of knowledge claims can be more objectively contextualised, whilst revealing greater detail about histories that lie beyond dominant narratives, such as experiences of overlapping oppressions (Reynolds, 2002). Intersectional standpoints are sensitive to knowledges that are partial and situated in their experiences, rather than absolute or universal, presenting an approach to historiography that is dialogic and unfinished (Yuval-Davis, 2012). With this in mind, the field of photobook criticism can retain 'openness' through specialist focus and by resisting any assumed authority to speak for all experiences and interests.

Histories can also be kept 'open' by not limiting what is considered a 'photobook'. As previously discussed, attempts to define the photobook have encountered resistance (Campany, 2014). Endeavours to delineate the photobook within parameters or taxonomies (Parr & Badger, 2004; Roth, 2001; Colberg, 2016; see pp.7-8) are disciplining the term through a process of enclosure (Foucault, 1991). By repeatedly proposing definitions and suggesting what objects can and can't be called 'photobook', the aggregate of these decisive binary statements establishes a boundary between what a photobook is and is not. Many of these definitions speak in modal verbs: photobooks "should" be this or that. To speak in definite terms about a subjective field of artistic practice would leave arguments vulnerable to contradiction, and shows the thing being described resists total definition. Instead, the grammatical phrasing makes it hard to disagree with the author, because they are not stating an absolute, and implying exceptions exist. The overall effect is a gradual consolidation of what photobooks should preferably look like or do, narrowing the variety that can be discussed under the term.

The notion that photobooks made as 'art' can be critically separated from other photographic books is becoming harder to justify as the subject is given more critical attention. In 10x10's most recent project about historic photobooks by women, Lederman explained, "one of the things we're trying to do [...] is unearth things that weren't under the umbrella of 'photobook' in a classic sense", because our understanding of books as part of visual culture comes from more disparate places (MS2; Chapter 3). There is growing recognition amongst photobook criticism that multiple types of publication can be appreciated under this umbrella. In the exhibition *Photobook Phenomenon* (CCCB, 2017), art director Erik Kessels presented a selection of

photographically-illustrated instruction manuals, meanwhile more recently an acquaintance described a ‘photobook’ produced by a charitable foundation to prepare children with autism for going on an airplane (MS1ii:68). While none of these examples were produced as art, the books’ programmes of information and narrative are mediated by photographs and design.

The mode by which something with alternative instrumentality becomes considered as an object of visual analysis, such as an instruction manual being appreciated as a photobook, is an example of what André Malraux calls “metamorphosis” (1967). Like Dickie (1997), Malraux states it is not the object that makes an artwork, but its transfiguration into sites associated with art production. To display an African mask or an Italian alterpiece in an art gallery, or compare the aesthetic value of photographs of these objects, transforms them into artworks through association with art discourses. Malraux contrasts this with his ambiguous evocation of *le destin*, “destiny”, which I interpret as the inherent trajectories of certain objects towards sites of cultural production and their associated response: artworks produced in the modern era are more often “destined” for museums (1967:109). While many contemporary photobooks are self-consciously produced as “art”, only some are immediately destined for the art museum, depending on the artist’s career trajectory. On the other hand, many foci of historical “photobook” research are subjected to metamorphosis. At a conference about photobooks at the Maison Française in Oxford in 2018, roughly a quarter of papers concerned ‘photobooks’ made outside the remit of art discourses (MS1i:48-61). Parr & Badger’s history included vernacular works that did not fit their own definition, such as Owen Simmons’ *The Book of Bread* (1903) and examples of protest and propaganda literature. Even those who seek to define the photobook in principle cannot hold it to a definition in practice. This issue is not exclusive to photobooks: most kinds of creative practices have proven hard to define, as indeed has the metacategory of “art”.

This unfixed, fluctuating interpretation of the photobook as an artefact of broader visual culture is embodied in the exhibition catalogue for *Photobook Phenomenon* (Neumüller *et al.*, 2017). The catalogue’s construction appears unfinished: within a cardboard sleeve, the different chapter contributions are presented as separate, sewn segments. Even the cardboard container cannot be re-closed once it has been opened. The collection of texts *about* photobooks physically resists enclosure. Likewise, the separate chapters promote different and at times contrasting perspectives on photobook practice, which celebrate the plurality of critical opinion. The catalogue’s materiality brings together disparate voices whilst signalling this is a new history that is in flux, incomplete, and still being written. Unlike the NYPL’s buckram binding, which recasts books within a certain stratum of the museum’s intellectual and physical spaces, the themes and

categories presented in *Photobook Phenomenon* are quite literally and ideologically unbounded, in a liminal state of becoming and undoing.

An attentive reader can identify further ways in which the catalogue materially enacts aspects of photobook making and economy. The sewn but unbound segments illustrate a production stage before they are glued to which consumers may not be privy. The cardboard sleeve tears open via perforation along the ‘spine’, similar to packaging in which books are shipped. This device is a sly nod to those photobooks which must be partially destroyed to be read (e.g. Magee 2015), which can encourage collectors to buy multiple copies. Ken Fox noted this detail, showing me how he had carefully opened GEM’s library copy with a scalpel to remove its contents whilst preserving the packaging’s overall effect (MS2; Fig.20).

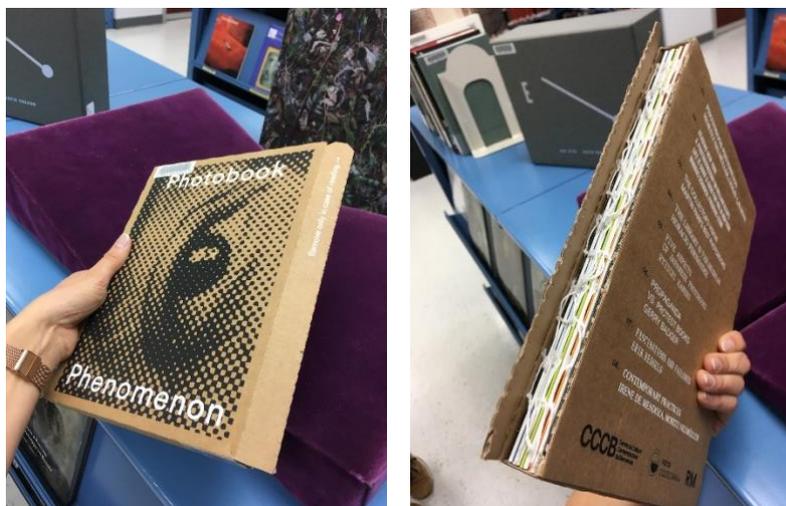


Figure 20 Photobook Phenomenon catalogue opened with a scalpel instead of tearing off the side in GEM library

5.4.2 Exhibiting knowledges

Exhibitions are another site of historicising photobook discourse that can work to keep the emerging discipline “unenclosed”. This chapter has so far focussed on how museum and library practices like collecting and cataloguing construct systems of value and distinction that partially arbitrate how we think about the photobook. But knowledges are co-produced across diverse critical, spatial and social settings, particularly through display. As Graham has summarised, “co-production” can refer to “the political question of how public institutions and their publics might better collaborate” (2016:2). The term also has significance in STS “to argue that ‘the realities of human experience emerge as the joint achievements of scientific, technical, and social enterprise: science and society, in a word, are *co-produced*, each underwriting the other’s existence” (ibid., cf. Jansanoff, 2004). Graham argues museum and gallery displays are sites in which knowledge is co-

produced in both mobilisations of the term because both concern “opening up political potentials by indicating a *variety* of ‘cos’, a plurality of entities interacting in *variable* ways and with variable, and always political, effects” (2016:2, original emphasis).

In previous chapters, exhibitions have appeared as a site in which photobook interaction was often denied, presenting it as a static object, abstracted to a single page spread in a vitrine. Graham has discussed the politics of the glass case in museums as part of wider interlinking of ideas and materiality which are engaged in the production of ‘modern’ types of matter (ibid.:4-7). Glass cases enact a separation between subject and object. They form a material-discursive grouping between the objects *inside* glass case, distinguishing them as thematically coherent through museological interpretation, and other to the viewer-subject through the physical barrier. The glass case indicates the ‘museum-ness’ of the objects on display: though transparent, its solidity enforces a regime of “do not touch”, maintaining the hierarchical relation wherein museums produce knowledge, and visitors look and passively absorb. The physical and ideological enclosure of the glass case creates a temporality where the past is complete and histories are fixed: it is both a hermetic, climate-controlled environment, and a seal separating the visitor’s living, present world from that of the objectified artefact. Even with contemporary photobooks, it is hard to imagine them as mediators of multi-faceted experiences and relationships when closed off in a glass box, meaning that unless the viewer also has sufficient capital to see photobooks in a library or their home, the vitrine has agency as a technology of exclusionary power.

The glass case is only one method of display. Curators I interviewed have developed exciting exhibition strategies for photobooks. At Belfast Exposed in 2019, Sarah Allen curated an exhibition around Pinckers’ *Margins of Excess* which foregrounded readable copies of the photobook on a table in the centre of the room. This emphasised “the book is the work”, rather than a “vehicle or conduit of images” (MS2: Allen). To animate the photobook within a larger public space, Allen placed images and excerpts from the texts around the walls of the gallery, following book’s sequencing. The curation highlighted details from the book and created a spectacle through which to engage viewers. By placing the book in a central position, in multiple so several people could look at once, the display aimed to draw visitors from casual engagement with the project’s subject matter towards closer attention to the book as ultimate artwork.

Tuminas also designed the exhibition *Under Cover* (Contemporary Art Museum Erarta, St. Petersburg, 2013-2014) with impressive visual impact, where visitors would “enter through a forest of books” suspended from the ceiling attached to coloured Perspex boards. The

photobooks were presented in thematic groups, colour coded by cyan, magenta and yellow plastic supports, a nod to CMYK printing and digital production. She recounted the visual experience of the exhibition was so popular there were people taking wedding photos amidst the installation; but at the same time, people did sit with the books and spend time in the exhibition. For Tuminas, exhibitions of photobooks should enliven and expand the experience people have with books; she calls table displays of books in awards' shortlists and festivals simply "presentations". These displays do not develop a curatorial argument, nor propose new knowledges about the photobook, beyond what can be learned independently by looking at the selections. Spectacular installations can attract a wider audience's attention, encourage people to sit and spend longer amounts of time engaging with the books themselves and inspire participation with photobook economies.



Figure 21 Undercover installation views, Contemporary Art Museum Erarta, St. Petersburg, 29 November 2013 to 13 January 2014. Source: dariatuminas.com



These two exhibitions constructed narratives about photobooks as a primary output of photography and a diverse field of practice. Knowledges made about the photobook can go

further beyond appreciation of the finished text. Schaden and Lezmi (2018) have argued that discourse and displays around the photobook should regard it not only as a finished book, but the culmination of many process of production and collaboration:

If I go to a book exhibition, I'd like to learn more about the story of the book's production. ...when you're in a natural history museum, you don't only want to see the dinosaur, you also want to know what its skeleton looks like, what its diet was [...] what determines an actual work, print or publication, is shifting [...] how the production of a publication is archived needs to become more valued. ... we need an institution that can take care of the background, the making of the story, dummies, scripts, files, designers' documentation, because that's what constitutes the lives of photographers who express themselves in books.

(Neumuller and Tuminas, 2019:8)

Although the last phrase of this quote emphasises the biography of the photographer as artist and author, Schaden's attitude portrays the photobook as a collaborative result. In the exhibition "Reading a Photobook", Gallery of Printing, St Petersburg, 2014, Tuminas curated photobooks alongside correspondence and design insights. These contextual documents could be enhanced by broader documentation encompassing interrelated connections across the field of photobooks, like how the Met's practice of collecting catalogues captures a past field of cultural production. This contextual approach to historicising photobooks could be taken up contemporaneously. Physical catalogues are not as common nowadays, since sales have mostly moved online (see previous chapter), so a present-day equivalent for capturing bookmaking practices and economies could include book fair exhibitor maps, or archives of sales websites.

Schaden and Lezmi have argued in favour of bringing photobooks out of institutional spaces to explore what dialogues they introduce in the public sphere. In 2018-2020 they created an installation based around the photobook *Unter Krabnenbäumen: Bilder aus einer Straße* by Karl Heinz Hargesheimer (known as "Chargesheimer"), 1958, around the street in Cologne where the photographs were made. They said of the project:

Our goal is to ask how a photobook, in this case a famous one, can be used as a resource for making something new ... how it could contribute to the discussion around using city streets as a public exhibition space ... how can we activate a photobook that has an established place in art history, and see what it can do today for my Turkish butcher rather than specialised collections ... Such a project will not work if it simply intrudes into the public space.

(Neumuller and Tuminas 2019:7)

By introducing the photobook into the public site and initiating interactions with inhabitants, Schaden and Lezmi are making opportunities for people to co-produce meaning. Graham writes, "museums can be read as producing demarcations between objects and people and working on the assumption that the world can be known, represented and displayed" (2016:6). These politics

of containment operate differently beyond the confines of the institution. Schaden and Lezmi have facilitated other public engagements with photobooks such as the travelling PhotoBookMuseum, which presents selections of photobooks inside in shipping containers, temporarily located in city squares and streets.

There is an assumed position that photobooks, amongst many material culture objects, have interesting and enriching potential, therefore it is positive to encourage publics towards their enjoyment and appreciation. It is pertinent to remember all acts of public display desire to persuade the visitor towards a point of view, which might be loaded with value judgements. This could be as benign as “photobooks are interesting because...”. Nevertheless, exhibitions have occasionally been co-opted into propagandist exercises so in being critical of display, we should not neglect to question who is making and funding the display, why, and how it contributes to the political economy of photobooks.

Both of these activities express a concern with altering perceptions of the photobook towards a networked practice rather than a singular output, which recognises the wider field of photobook production beyond “great man” narratives of historical achievement, particularly that of the genius artist (Barthes, 1977). It also indicates a similar paradigm shift away from the ‘subject/object’ division that Graham argues is enacted by the glass case. In her analysis of the Science Museum’s synthesisers, Graham concludes the “thing” being collected and communicated to audiences is not the (deteriorating) physical object of the synthesiser, but the phenomena of playing, performing, and the community of skilled, enthusiastic volunteers who contribute towards its maintenance. In another example, Graham discusses a display in which the “thing” exhibited is the invention of photography, but the display is materially mediated through William Henry Fox Talbot’s cameras (2016, pp 9-11). The historicisation of photography’s invention is contingent upon a network of experimental photographs, chemicals of salt and silver, exposure times and human desire and ingenuity, which are congealed within the cameras as the sole artefacts suitable and stable enough for display. More generally, Graham elaborates, “objects in the gallery are sedimented practices and, through their collection and display, they are drawn into new phenomena *of exhibition* in the gallery” (ibid). Graham explains that “what matter *is* has been made up through its intra-actions, ‘sedimented historicalities of the practices through which it is produced as part of its ongoing becoming’” (2016:12, c.f. Barad, 2007:180).

The photobook too, is not only the ‘thing’ of a book in a glass case. It is produced as a configuration of many copies, and each photobook represents many congealed practices, people and agencies, correspondence, dummies, trial and error, meetings, test prints, experienced as a

phenomenon in space and time, in a gallery or elsewhere. When display foregrounds phenomena as the unit of reality, it “draws attention to the way in which any attempt to know something becomes part of the process of producing and being produced” (Graham, 2016:9). Schaden and Lezmi’s call to archive the manifold practices that *produce* a photobook would enable curators to make a greater share of these networks visible. It could also enable important epistemological plurality around the ‘thing’ being produced through a photobook display, by leaving the reader to interpret whether the focus is production, the sediment of agencies and relations, the life of one individual book or the sum of a title’s copies and editions (Hall *et al.*, 2004). The next chapter will expand upon this plurality as it relates to photobooks produced and consumed in multiple, diversely distributed copies, with individual biographies but existing as part of a whole.

5.5 Conclusion

The chapter has shown the tangle one can arrive at by attempting to stick to clear categories, as well as the benefits of opening up histories living in flux as they are written. Each section has revealed how the notion of ‘photobook’ is performed in each institutional encounter. In each story, the photobook’s material reality is agential in pushing back against epistemological regimes, directing its physical or intellectual treatment.

The first story recounted an anecdote about institutional conservation practices, relating material treatment with discursive practices of categorizing and valuing collections. The second story problematized the systems of classification within libraries that superficially simplify how materially and conceptually complex collections are used and located. These classifications are not neutral rubrics, but connected to institutional histories and deep-rooted epistemological binaries and hierarchies. In the third story, this categorisation became further complicated through a study of how definitions of photobooks, and most objects in general, can be perspectival and performative, enacted through the instances in which those objects are collected, used and studied.

The sum of these arguments shows that museums, as an emblem of modernity, have been engaged in a project of narrowing practices and language that were previously elastic, as a legacy of the Enlightenment’s pursuit of generically fixing in place and finitely distinguishing the world. It may make us uncomfortable when something can be legitimately described in many ways, but covering this ambiguity with convenient categories is artifice. It doesn’t stop the ambiguous thing from being complicated, it only subjects it to subtle modernist epistemic aggression. The final

story has explored activities of criticism and display which, although engaged in producing knowledges about the photobook, could promote its unfixedness of being many things at once to many people.

Reverting back to pre-modern epistemologies in which words are used less finitely and critically offers an elasticity that is helpful to discussing the material, conceptual and economic agencies of photobooks across diverse institutions. The need for this plurality and openness will be elaborated in the following chapter, which will demonstrate how we are never only talking about 'one' photobook: even books produced by the same artist with the same title can have diverse lives and capabilities.

Chapter 6: Photobook Plurality and Potentiality

There is one photobook to which I keep returning throughout this research: *In Flagrante*, by Chris Killip. It is a portrait of people and places around the North East of England over a period of de-industrialisation. The photographs were made during the late 70s and 80s during the decline of heavy industry, the employment, economy and community it had sustained, and the social deprivation that followed. First published in 1988, I hesitate to reference the date, because it wasn't a single edition of *In Flagrante* that captured my interest, but a constellation of copies, facsimiles and reprints I encountered over several years, all stemming from the same photographic work, bearing the same name.

This thesis is, ostensibly, a study of contemporary photobook practices, but appreciation and discussion of historic works is a living part of current discourse, especially when these works are reprinted as they find new audiences. Whilst looking at my colleague's copy of the recent re-edition, *In Flagrante Two* (2015), I disagreed with her about the decision to scale the images so they no longer fell across the gutter (fell "in the gutter", with all its idiomatic resonance). For me, it lost some of its charm as a *book*, I remember saying: it made it only about the pictures. Perhaps this was the intention. It resulted in the pages being larger; the overall book was also larger and heavier. Everything about it felt *off*, the pages too thick, the blacks too black. It had become an Art Book that insisted upon itself. My colleague preferred the new design's simplicity. The gravity. How we came to our distinct conclusions could only be through complex tangles of multi-sensory perception, personal taste, and experience.

I remember this interaction vividly: it was in the office of the V&A under the fluorescent lights that grew harsher as the evenings drew in. We were both staying late to work on research after our daily duties as assistant curators. This was the same setting of my first encounter with *In Flagrante* (1988), the first edition, curatorial office copy, several years before as an intern. I didn't have an academic interest in it then; more of a local reverence to hold a first edition of the book so strongly connected to the place I had made my home, whose images I had known since undergrad Art History lectures. It was faded on the spine, but bright white on the front, from sitting tightly on the busy shelves of other artists' monographs and reference texts. But I only took note of this detail several years later.

For the past few years now, each time I've picked up a copy of *In Flagrante* by Chris Killip, I've made notes. I've picked up a few copies: mostly my own copy, a softback first edition, with a

faded back cover, sun printed in negative by a smaller book or a book end that sat next to it long before I came to own it. The National Art Library (NAL) version, the same inside, but hardback. The re-edition, the source of disagreement, mostly the same pictures but a completely different book with its peculiar wrap of luxury. The Errata Editions facsimile (2009), which reproduces each page spread of the first edition as a complete object, initially a more accessible way of studying the original prior to its 2016 reprint. Aside from material differences, the circumstances of encounter were different; I was different. Not all my notes were about *In Flagrante*, sometimes they lapsed into journaling, but these are nevertheless responses elicited by the work.

This chapter explores the ways in which the photobook, produced in multiple, is plural: not only because it exists in many copies, but because these copies facilitate multiple, mutable, personal encounters over time and space. It will discuss how translations and re-editions complicate the notion of a title as a singular identifier, because different copies of the same title may elicit different interpretations. Each edition or re-edition can be connected to complexes of socio-economic conditions that determine the new print run's production. As its method, the chapter will juxtapose my autoethnographic chronicling of *In Flagrante* encounters with two other recently re-edited and re-interpreted 20th-century photobooks. *Love on the Left Bank* (1956a,b; 1962;2010;2013) by Ed van der Elsken inspires a conversation about plurality based on translation and interpretation. *War Primer* (1955;1998) by Bertolt Brecht advances this multiplicity through questions of authorship in re-editions. The chapter draws upon methods of object biography and actor-network theory to reconcile the notion of singular titles with multiple, distributed, pluralised photobook encounters.

6.1 What's in a title?

6.1.1 In Flagrante ad infinitum

One single photobook copy, over its “lifetime”, can have multiple owners and be used many times. It might sit on several bookshelves and be read in many different chairs by different windows. It might even become less “photobook” and more “appropriately-sized lump of matter” that props up a device for a video call. One photobook alone is enacted in plural. Photobook makers know this and hope their book will be one to which readers return, time

again, taking something different from the experience each time.⁵⁴ One photobook publication, produced as a single edition, multiplies this plurality of encounter by the number of that edition – 200, 500, 1000. If a photobook is reprinted, it adds another multiplier. If the photobook publication is re-edited, perhaps in hardcover, softcover, or years later with an updated essay, this multiplies and stretches the encounters associated with one signifying title even further.

A title is a useful vehicle for streamlining discussion of a given work of book art, but without checking the colophon, it neglects the diversity and specificity that can exist between editions. When Killip recently passed away, I noticed several Instagram tributes citing *In Flagrante* among the most important British photobooks. But which *book* were they talking about? I suspect they're talking about an idea of *In Flagrante*, mingled with their personal experiences of specific material-discursive configurations of engaging with 'In Flagrante' titled book(s), physically, virtually, imaginatively in memory. Perhaps it's not even a book they have in their heads, but a series of images, or a vague conception of a body of work about hardship set in some idea called "The North" (Kirk, 2000). *In Flagrante* is not some perfect, singular Platonic ideal-copy⁵⁵. Instead, it is the sum of these engagements, memories and mythologising, as well as different physical editions, and the economies of publishing that result in re-editions, and institutional activities such as exhibitions that sustain and grow criticism and increase its economic viability. And, essentially folded into *In Flagrante*, are the conditions of the work itself, those images of brutal honesty and wonder, the people with families and dreams who lived only a mile or two from where I am writing this now (perhaps they still do).

While the final section of this chapter will contemplate some of these deferred, heterogeneous parts that together create a phenomenon of *In Flagrante*, here I wish to consider what the diversity of physical copies I have engaged with reveals in terms of object biography. Coined by Igor Kopytoff, doing the "biography of a thing" would involve "asking questions similar to those one asks about people", including where it comes from, what it has done and how its impact changes with age, and what happens when it reaches the end of its usefulness" (Appadurai *et al.*, 1986:66-67). For example, a car could not only reveal a history of drivers, mechanics and repairs, but also

⁵⁴ Some books are indeed engineered with this play and discovery in mind, such as *Xian* by Thomas Sauvin (2016), a "book" whose pages are layers of intricately folded pockets containing reproductions of found images, in which it would be difficult to find the same photographs in the same order twice.

⁵⁵ Ancient Greek philosopher Plato believed all things existed as pure ideals in our innate understanding before they imperfectly materialised in real-world experience. For example, we recognise a real horse, regardless of colour, size or if it only has one eye, because we have divine understanding of a horse ideal. Aristotle counter-argued we understand what a horse is through accrued exposure to many horses, so we learn their common features more memorably than how individuals differ. Photobook criticism often treats its object as ideal – an assumption that the book exists as a universal, identical, multiple thing (as per Plato) – instead of engaging with the realities of specific experience that contribute to more general understanding (per Aristotle).

cultural data relating to trends and technologies in the automobile industry when it was manufactured, and how it has performed or failed in years since (ibid.). Kopytoff emphasises the individual nature of biographies of things as particular to each object: a well-maintained car would relate different narratives of care for people associated with it than another car of the same make and model dismantled for rusty parts. Object biography is likewise partial: by focusing on different details of a thing's "life", different biographies can be revealed. These details are not limited to what understandings can be made from the real object in time and space: they can be tangible or intangible forms of information, brought forth through understanding the object as it is experienced in consciousness (Trace, 2016).

For photobooks, the idea of a biography has precedent within the publishing industry, wherein editors use the phrase "life of title" to discuss the development, release, sales and reprinting of a book (MS2: Martin). The phrase expresses the longevity, mobility and mutability of each title and has connotations for measuring a project's market success. However, an object biography could look beyond one publisher's interaction to the network of redevelopments and re-editions. The development of photobooks is highly individual to each title. The publication *Trolleyology* (2013) recounts unique stories of how books by publisher Trolley came into being, featuring drunken meetings, mishaps on printing presses, stories of serendipity, sincerity and passion. It is a tribute to Trolley's founder Gigi Giannuzzi, compiled by Hannah Watson in her first act as director. The stories told by artists and collaborators illuminate how each publication faces many crossroads and chance encounters without which the resulting photobook could have turned out differently.

Where possible, studying book dummies also reveals a liminal point at which a photobook could have potentially been something else. It is easy to describe events occurring in the development of a photobook as "before" and those following its publication as "after", but the concept of object biography posits this progression as a continuous motion. Howard Becker's theory of art production relies upon the principle that process is ongoing: "nothing happens at once, everything occurs in steps ... what we take as an end state to be explained is only a place we have chosen to stop our work, not something given in nature" (2008:xii). A finished book is therefore only a punctuation in an artist's process (because it may not be the end to a project), a materialised relationship between artist and publisher, and an event in the biography of the book object itself, whose agency continues into future interactions. As we have seen, the 1988 publication of *In Flagante* was not the culmination of a project, but an early punctuating event in an expansive network of interactions and agencies extending into a future re-edition, and beyond to present day, to these moments in which I am writing and you are reading about it.

In other forms of art-making, the processual nature of artworks is connected to their total materiality, such as the conservation of a painting – the painting is singular, and whilst restoration might seek to capture an original “ideal unity” (Brandi *et al.*, 1963), from Becker’s view, that unity could never be obtained because the painting has always existed in flux of production and degradation. In the case of photobooks, object biography affords sensitivity to the particularities of a specific copy as well as a generic title. At the point of publication, the processual life of the photobook is dispersed between and multiplied by each individual copy. Researching a biography of my personal copy of *In Flagrante* would reveal some general production information shared by many other copies, such as when it was published or where it was printed, or how it had evolved from earlier book dummies. However, it would also reveal a very particular, personal history: while I can’t know who owned it before me (there are no names written inside the cover, nor tell-tale ex-library stamps, no little card insert documenting previous lenders), I know one of its former owners kept it on a bookshelf beside a smaller book, or perhaps held by a book end. The trace of this previous existence has been indelibly imprinted upon the book’s materiality because the back cover has faded around the outline of this phantom obstacle – an accidental camera-less photograph of the book’s former life.

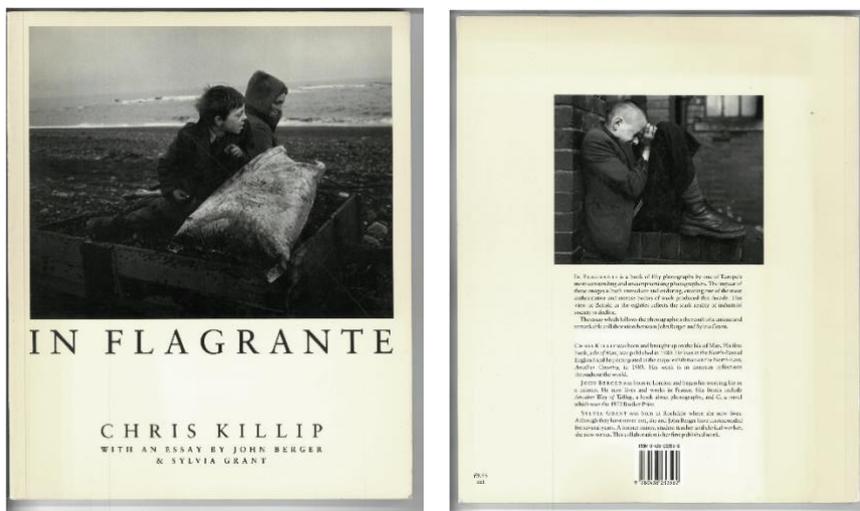


Figure 22 The ‘photogram’ cover indexing the book’s former life. Ironically, embarrassingly for someone trained as a curator, in the past year I absent-mindedly left this book out where the sun has evened the discolouration to a darker, more uniform yellow – showing matter is ever in flux.

Via Instagram, I’ve seen other copies, apparently of the same edition as mine, with similar discolouration. This implies a common susceptibility to light damage in the materials used across the whole edition, as well as general habits that people would keep this book on an everyday bookcase and not protected in a darkened room. It also reveals a trace of something that is entirely unique to my own copy: no other copy will be discoloured quite like mine. The materiality of a book can be considered a kind of habitus: as Bourdieu said, society and history

are “written on the body, which forms the sediment of dispositions known as habitus in social beings (1990:63). Bourdieu probably meant both our personal histories and cultural competencies manifest in the way we use and present our physical selves, as much as through other expressions of self, like fashion or mode of speech, but this notion could extend to more-than-human artefacts. The book thus embodies a small corner of publishing culture in the 1980s, as well as showing scars of its more recent personal history, including those bodies who have left smudged fingerprints (human) or tan lines (non-human, book neighbours). All bodies in this sense constantly write and are written upon, one could say, intra-actively.

This reintroduces the discussion of whether photobooks have subjectivity from Chapter Three, in which subjectivity was expressed as a relation between one’s status of being an object in the world, and subjective experience of that embodied objectness. The photobook’s experience in the world is one of writing (through having agency) and being written on (the agencies of other entities). It accrues subtle evidence of this experience, in its materiality and in the impressions it leaves on others – readers, tables, other books. This tangle of accrued intra-actions could be described as biography, or as habitus, or subjectivity; essentially, all these terms express a relation between bodies in the world. A photobook has a relational, social experience in the world, regardless of whether it has sentience to comprehend it.

Jane Bennett (2010) has taken this anthropomorphic attitude further. She summarises the cultural theorists’ study of the social lives of objects (Appadurai, *et al.*, 1986) as being concerned with “the *historicity* of objects, about the way the form and meaning of things change as they age and detach from a social whole or become embedded in new relations with new things” (Bennett, 2010:56-7 [original emphasis]). Yet, these meanings and relations are construed with an anthropocentric focus. Bennett’s thesis about the vitality of inanimate things argues the material world “quivers” with vibrancies of its own, independently of their use by humans. It is not only human interaction that enlivens things, but that materiality itself is a kind of liveliness that occurs when things come into contact with each other (ibid.:57). She explains, “[i]n this strange, *vital* materialism, there is no point of pure stillness” (ibid. [original emphasis]). Things are “heterogeneous materials whose rate of speed and pace of change are *slow* compared to the duration and velocity of the human bodies participating in and perceiving them” (ibid.:58; cf. Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 2014) but nevertheless, they are not inert but rather in a state of slow movement.

Like Becker’s idea of process, Bennett has identified nothing really *stops*, whether it be social relations or finite physical matter. This is evidenced by my *In Flagrante*’s faded cover: sunlight

reacts, paper yellows, plastic degrades. This rate of change, however small, is an agency of its own resulting from time, environment and elemental breakdown, the interrelation of which produces an “impersonal affect” that leads me to imagine the circumstances of the books’ previous lived encounters: who else read it, where, what did they think? Bennett contests that “[a]s noun or adjective *material* denotes some stable or rock-bottom reality ... [h]istorical materialism also relies on the trope of fixity” (2010:58). Yet, materials themselves are in a state of slow flux, and this dynamism has agency in how they elicit responses from humans. It also has economic effect, when one considers collectors often regard pristine, unmarked copies as more desirable, and therefore worth a higher financial value (Wilding, 2016).

I meanwhile prefer the books with a patina of use, an individual marking, or a production quirk⁵⁶. In my interview with Hannah Watson (MS2), in describing accidents in book production, she showed me copies of Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin’s book *Scarti* (2013) that were initially bound with the book blocks back to front within the cover. *Scarti* (‘scraps’ in Italian) describes the pages used to clean the printing drums in the production process. Printers often use scrap from previous book projects, resulting in twice-printed, completely coincidental image combinations that are usually thrown away. This book sequences *scarti* pages from the printing of one of their previous books. I was entertained by the fact that the assembly mistake happened in the production of a book engaging so explicitly with the serendipity of publishing, and yet it was undesirable because it didn’t match the rest of the print run and had to be redone. Watson kept some of the “rejects” anyway. When I expressed my admiration for the project, she offered me a standard copy but I took home one of the back-to-front ones. In an ironic market hypocrisy, the accidental copy would have little economic value as a non-recognised by-product of the production process. For me, it encapsulated the principle of the work and was more interesting than the official, commercially-relevant edition.

There are other significant variations between copies and editions of *In Flagrate*, as suggested at the start of this chapter. The first edition is accompanied by a short statement by Killip and a written dialogue between critic John Berger and Sylvia Grant, a writer from the North East with whom Berger corresponded. These texts were not included in *In Flagrate Two*. The Errata Editions included an essay by Gerry Badger. While many photobook readers may not pay much heed to the verbal content, for me, Killip’s initial ambiguous foreword was an important interpretive frame:

⁵⁶ Hence my sympathy for the buckram-bound NYPL books.

“The **objective** history of England doesn’t amount to much if you don’t believe in it, and I don’t, and I don’t believe that anyone in these photographs does either as they face the reality of de-industrialisation in a system which regards their lives as disposable. To the people in these photographs I am superfluous, my life does not depend on their **struggle**, only my **hopes**. This is a **subjective** book about my time in England. I take what isn’t mine and I covet other peoples’ lives [...]”

(Killip, 1988, [my emphasis])

This statement told me the book refutes the authority of its *being* a book; it knows it is subjective, and “objective” histories do not exist in the sense that all histories are authored. Or rather, it is the book, and the artist, intra-actively: the author arrived at this refuting and knowing through making the book, and the book refutes and knows its condition because it is inscribed into its materiality. This intra-active expression specifies a socio-economic context of “de-industrial” England. It acknowledges the photographer’s debt to those he photographs, who have so little, as well as his own latent potential the book may help him achieve. To offer a linguistic analysis, it emphasises the humanity of the people photographed, through a series of contrasts that create a sense of polarity with the systemic actants that invalidate them. The final section of this chapter will explain how my personal readings of *In Flagrante* extend the ontological preoccupations of this thesis. The next section will address another example in which differences in language can disrupt a title’s coherence between subtly different parts.

6.1.2 An unreliable love story in Saint Germain des Prés

Photobooks often rely upon lexical clues to give shape and context to the narratives they present: even without longer texts, the title alone can give an interpretive frame for the photographic work. As discussed in Chapter 2, wherever there is text, there is language, which requires translating in order to be read by a wider audience (see pp.103-104). When *Love on the Left Bank* by Ed van der Elsen was first published in 1956, it appeared in Dutch titled *Een liefdesgeschiedenis in Saint Germain des Prés*, translating directly as “A love story in Saint-Germain des Prés”, later published in German following the same translation (1962). The English title is shorter, more alliterative and therefore more memorable⁵⁷. Whereas Saint-Germain-des-Près is a geographic location in Paris on the southern bank of the Seine, the substitution of “Left Bank” in the English title more accurately reflects the spatial and cultural subject of the book, which is not simply the sights and people in the Saint-Germain area, but specifically those associated with a certain class and lifestyle, a particular social grouping concentrated within this locale. The Left Bank, or *rive gauche*, became associated with a class of bohemian bourgeoisie thanks to the many

⁵⁷ There is evidence of alliteration as an effective mnemonic device (Boers 2014).

artists and writers frequenting the cafés, galleries, bookshops and universities in Saint-Germain and the Latin Quarter. “Left Bank” also refers to a specific era in history, beginning with the Parisian avant-garde in the early 20th century and lasting for several decades. The area is still mythologised as a creative hub but thanks to ongoing gentrification this perception has long been at odds with high prices and crowds of tourists that are typical to the area (MS1ii:65).

As discussed in Chapter 2, *Love on the Left Bank* (hereafter *LOTLB*) is a photobook that uses multiple frames of the same scene and close-up crops to create a narrative effect akin to a cinematic storyboard. The book chronicles a fictional, unrequited love story between its male protagonist Manuel and a woman named Ann. The photographic storytelling is aided by short captions throughout, which are crucial to interpreting one ‘plot point’ where images are presented as a ‘flashback’. The overall story is also recounted as a continuous short text at the end of the book. As well as its innovative design by Juriaan Schrofer, as illuminated by a recent study by Tamara Berghmans (2013), text plays a central role in weaving together the images of café scenes and unrelated strangers into coherent fiction.

Yet, across the different language editions, there are subtle variations in the texts, altering the story. Unlike the differences in the title, these variations are not limited to how accurately the choice of language conveys cultural nuance, but the plot apparently changes to suit the tastes of English-speaking or Dutch-speaking audiences. According to Jennifer Reeves, the short story in the English first edition ended with a lovelorn Manuel leaving Paris, having been rejected by Ann, who laughs at him with her female friend Geri. The European language editions conclude with Ann rejecting Manuel for a romantic relationship with Geri, and informing him he may have a venereal disease (MS2).

I haven’t been able to compare a full edition history of different language editions, because art libraries seldom collect the same book in multiple languages (to be discussed). It remains to speculate why one version would have been preferred over the other for publication among international readerships. Perhaps the diversion in the conclusions would reflect moralistic values of Anglophone society at the time, compared to supposedly more sexually permissive Dutch-speaking society. In international photography discourse, it is very possible that two people could have a conversation about *LOTLB*, regarding it as the same title, the same book and the same story, when in fact they have read different language editions and have interpreted the endings differently. The 2010 English language re-edition adopts the original ending, implying at some point the translations have been co-ordinated as societies at large have become more inclusive.

The ambiguities between language editions become a point of intrigue considering the previous chapter's discussion about the epistemic structuring of photobooks through library catalogues. Both the NAL and the GEM library would generally acquire English-language books, excepting cases where a book has strong relevance to the collection but no available English translation (MS2: Reeves, Fox). It would follow that foreign-language libraries would have a similar policy, so it would be unusual to find multiple language editions of the same title in one collection. The cataloguing systems for each library are set up to accommodate bibliographic information specifically about the books in their collection, so there is no appropriate field to compare information about other editions (MS2: Reeves). This results in a sense that the book by Ed van der Elsken known in English as *Love on the Left Bank* is actually a publication multiplied between several different translations, as well as editions from the 1950s and '60s and 2010s. It might be known collectively in photography discourse as a book that ends with the protagonist being jilted, but the specifics of the narrative and thus the idea of the book might vary depending upon which copy and in which language you consult. This heterogeneity cannot be adequately captured and communicated by library systems because of their localised focus on those specific copies in their care.

There has also been further transformation of meaning in the textual framing around *LOTLB*'s 2010 re-edition. Marketing texts for the reprint across various booksellers (Dewi Lewis, Waterstones, Amazon 2021) include an identical strapline about the woman who modelled for the character "Ann", an artist and dancer named Vali Myers. The text cites Myers' artistic contribution to the project, as model, muse and portraitist. This recent acknowledgement of Myers' (a woman's) creative contributions is undoubtedly due to increasing interest in feminist retellings of histories (e.g., Edwards and Harris, 2017). This reveals the transitioning cultural life of the book over time, as the marketing text reinterpreted the book for contemporary cultural values of greater gender equality. However, there is still little to no mention of the integral work of the designer Schrofer. Neglecting to credit Schrofer implies that, within art discourse, there remains a tendency to valorise the persona of the artist as creator more highly than designer as, say, facilitator, maintaining a modernist hierarchy of creative practice.

LOTLB became a focal point for this discussion of the plurality of the photobook genre when a colleague who does not work directly in photography mentioned she heard about van der Elsken's book in a documentary about French New Wave. Encounters with photobooks can be deferred beyond even a direct interaction with the book itself, when these cultural products have acquired intertextual relevance in broader discourse. Personally, I feel I know *LOTLB* through a familiarity with reading about it and seeing images of it, but I've actually only looked at the book

once, a couple of years ago. The way we apprehend texts and identify with them is shaped by so much more than simply the matter of the book itself, but also the ripple effect of what the book has meant and done for different people over time.

This realisation has been often investigated by scholars of literary media, who have explained each book is in fact two books: one as a material, technical apparatus to hold and read, the other as an ideational, transcendent, culturally mobile artefact of textual signification (Littau, 2006:2). These dual interpretations are not separate objects, but different realities of the same thing, that are *enacted into being* in different sets of circumstances. It is not a question of one text being fragmented into two parts, because to “fragment” suggests “regret about a whole that has been exploded”; neither is it fractured nor segmented because that implies a breakage or a loss of unity (Mol, 2002:78). Annemarie Mol expresses this idea of performative, partitive, multiple objectness by citing Marilyn Strathern’s example of a scholar who is:

simultaneously a feminist and an anthropologist. Being one shapes and informs the other while they are also different identities ... not two different persons or one person divided into two. But they are partially connected, **more than one, and less than many**”

(ibid., cf. Strathern, 1991:35) [my emphasis].

For Mol’s praxiographic ontology, the whole “truth” of an object cannot be known. Instead, we can study the way an object’s different realities are enacted, through complex sets of relations, in which scale and significance shift. In her work on disease, Mol uses the example of an artery, which is “not necessarily smaller than the patient operated on”, because in the duration of an operation, the artery is a more vivid and important reality than the patient; at that moment, the surgeon does not recall the patient as a person with whom they may have exchanged jokes (ibid.:149). Neither does the patient contain the artery as one entity encompassed within another. These two realities, and more, coexist alongside each other with shifting prominence, as different performances of the same body. Mol’s argument is that we can use the same words, for example the name of a disease, and simultaneously be talking about different things, different realities known in different circumstances. “Atherosclerosis” can mean a diagnosis or a treatment for a doctor, whilst signifying an experience and an identity for a patient. “*Love on the Left Bank*” is the name of an object that could likewise mean something entirely different for a Dutch speaker conversing in English, to an English speaker who does not speak Dutch, depending on the realities they have experienced as enacted by a book of that title.

Books, too, perform variously as material technologies with textures and smells, as a series of ideas and images, or as a title people can use as shorthand for an amalgamation of many different book-bodies. Karen Barad’s relational ontology builds on Mol’s idea of realities that are enacted or performed through siting this performance as a material-discursive phenomenon of what she

terms “spacetimematter”. The meaning-making and social relations of the photobook are performed through how it is configured in discourse, through people’s discussions and imaginations, as well as grounded in the matter of multiple physical copies of *LOTLB* existing and slowly degrading around the world, and the materiality of the single copy engaged in a photobook encounter. With such expansive connotations, in discussing the photobook *LOTLB*, an agential cut must be made in which the reader chooses to place their focus. We can’t always be talking about the unknowable, distributed existence of all editions and languages and copies of *LOTLB* at once; so we defer to talking about the phenomenon of reading the physical book we have before us as a synecdoche of the larger ideational text, another material instance of “more than one, less than many” in which not only are there different editions, but also potential alternate endings, multiple texts within one title. This is how so many book reviews lean towards abstract discussion of ‘the book’ rather than ‘*this* book’ (including some analyses in this thesis).

If and when I next encounter a copy of *LOTLB*, perhaps I will oscillate between the material experience of the book in my hands, and my imaginative recall of a network of other language editions to which it is related, which might tell a slightly different story. The next section will consider the relationship between economics and interpretation that is implicated in these multiple editions and copies and versions, the different realities they may enact, and the sets of relations through which these phenomena are performed.

6.2 Remake, remodel, re-edition

6.2.1 The same, but different: contemporary reprints

“The photobook world is funny”, said Hannah Watson in our interview, “because it’s got so much prestige but the numbers are tiny” (MS2). Compared to mainstream publishing, where the Thames and Hudsons and the Phaidons want to sell 50,000 copies, in photobooks, 500 is considered a lot. “My favourite thing is when people go, ‘my book sold out’, but you only made ten!”, Watson quipped as she talked numbers with fresh candidness. “The biggest number of books we’ve ever sold is 8,000, *Gentlemen of Bacongo*, and we sold the rights to a Japanese publisher and they sold 20,000 copies in six months”. While these figures may be small compared to the broader market, *Gentlemen of Bacongo* (2009) by Daniele Tamagni is a success story. For contemporary photobooks, to sell out an edition or to do a second print run are hallmarks of “success”, although these victories can be illusions of a complex of market tricks. Even the small photobook economy is subject to suppression and stockpiling when book dealers buy large

numbers of a publication on the day of its release to withhold until the rest of the edition has sold out (MS1i:85; MS2: Marchbank).

The very practice of producing books as a limited edition can be regarded as an affectation. According to artist Lewis Bush, photography is “cornered” by its relationship to the art market and the adherence to conventions originating outside photography and fine art. Bush explained, “editioning originates with the birth of printing and the recognition that the nature of printing means there is a physical limit to the amount of prints you can produce before your [woodblock] became unintelligible ... it’s amazing that photography, essentially a modern medium, is caught up in practices that originated in the middle ages” (MS2). Photography is in theory an economically efficient media, but the art market sees this as a handicap, and efforts are made to restrict its reproducibility through limiting numbers of prints that can be made to elevate rarity and price, creating an artificial scarcity. The consequences of a specific materiality, i.e. the woodblock that wears out, are transmuted into contemporary economic practices. When Bush, who doesn’t edition his photographic prints, asks other photographers about why they edition their work, many can’t answer his questions about the history of the practice, although he respects those who admit “it’s about money” (MS2).

Arguably, with book production, like other print media, there is a limit to how many it is practical and cost-effective to produce at once. Considerations for the size of a print run include budget, predicted demand and warehousing costs, as Watson told me accessing her storage unit involves climbing over piles of old stock “like a Crystal Maze ‘Book Zone’” (MS2). Still, with digital printing and consistent production there is little reason to demarcate between first and second edition unless it has been somehow updated. Nevertheless, “people are finding very arbitrary ways to limit the number of books they make” by retrospectively adding an action to make it more rare or more handmade, such as the addition of a sticker or a post card (MS2: Bush). Books are generally more valuable when signed, forging an indexical link to its author, promoting artistic singularity over the photobook’s co-produced reality. Smaller edition sizes have also become more interesting to collectors, according to Watson, who suggested people would not “like that a book has got thousands of copies ... I don’t mind, it doesn’t interest me if there’s only 100 of a certain book but ... you get certain kinds of collectors” (MS2: Watson). This comment is revealing: people who purchase photobooks are generally spoken of as “collectors”, which suggests intent and creates an air of prestige about buying them compared to, for example, novels, or posters, which might be associated with different kinds of material and use value.

The first hard and softback editions of *In Flagante* in 1988 and *In Flagante Two* 30 years later have in a way bookended this transformation in contemporary perceptions of photography, then photobooks, as more serious, collectible works of fine art. The main auction houses have prominent photography sales, in some cases several times a year. Part of this legitimation has occurred through widespread participation in practices such as editioning, which escalate value through controlled market supply. This is exactly supported by Becker's institutional theory (1982;2008), which defines art through the collective activities and conventions that produce it, rather than some essential quality in the products themselves (or, artworks). Especially in digital photography, editioning is one of these collective activities in which everybody cooperates: it is not necessary in production terms, but the practice and its associated art production continue to function because people subscribe to it as the dominant mode of presenting work for sale.

Becker explains, “[w]orks of art ... are not the products of individual makers, “artists” who possess a rare and special gift. They are, rather, joint products of all the people who cooperate via an art world’s characteristic conventions to bring works like that into existence” (2008:35). To this I would add a new materialist slant by arguing these characteristic conventions in and of themselves are agential factors in producing something as “art”. When a photobook is marked as one of a limited edition, it materially conforms to a convention shared by print works and fine art photographs, aligning more closely as an art object than a product of the publishing industry. While people cooperate in applying and accepting these practices, the very practice of numbering itself is an actant. For example, where many photographers now write the edition number by hand in each book, what would happen if an artist numbered every book as 1/100? Would it disturb the photobook’s legitimacy as an artwork, or would it be taken as a conceptual statement?

Through a recent movement on Instagram, print artists offered to send small artworks free of charge to people who made a charitable donation, numbering them “1/many” (Fig.23). The artist’s handwriting that numbers the artwork as one of an open edition maintains an emphasis on the object’s necessary condition of being *made*, part of a larger expenditure of creative energy and manual effort, which despite low financial cost, asserts its artistic value. This expression is made on the part of the individual maker, and the collective “one of many” artists participating in the initiative. Similar subversive gestures have been made in photobook production by print-on-demand initiatives such as described in Chapter 3 (p.104,128).

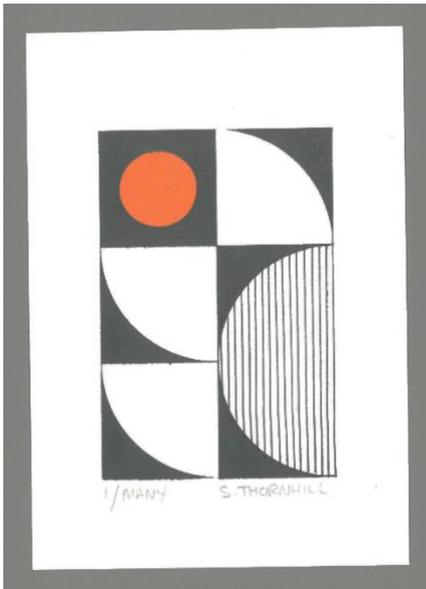


Figure 23 "1/Many" print by Sean Thornhill, 2020

While the various editions of *In Flagrate* are not hand-numbered, studying the pattern of production and reproduction tells another story of art world acquiescence. First of all, preceding any print edition, were the dummies: most valuable of all, as unique and auratic objects that bear the trace of the artist's hand (Benjamin, 1935) and have been crucial technologies in realising the subsequent book(s). As Bergman's study of van der Elsken's mock-ups revealed insights about the artist's working process in *Love on the Left Bank*, dummies materialise a liminal space between the creative act of art-making and the polished product. Then came the 1988 publication, produced in hardback and softback as was customary at the time. Nowadays, the cover type would more often follow the design concept, as books are conceived as a total object (MS2: Marchbank). However, being printed in both reveals photobook production as operating more in sync with collective conventions of publishing than art (Becker, 2008:36).

The Errata Editions (EE) *Books on Books* publication of *In Flagrate* from 2009 came at a point when photobook criticism was finding its stride, following several survey anthologies in the mid-2000s (Roth, 2001; Parr & Badger, 2004). The series at large shows a desire to foreground serious study of the the specific photobook object through faithfully reproducing their covers, front and end matter and page spreads in their entirety, edges and all.



Figure 24 Screenshot from Errata Editions website [date accessed 20/11/20]

Books on Books “are not reprints nor facsimiles but comprehensive studies of rare books”, selecting “original master bookworks” to reproduce faithfully page by page, alongside contextual essays about the book’s historical significance and stories of production (Errata Editions, 2020). EE are a not-for-profit “dedicated to making rare and out-of-print photography books accessible to students and photobook enthusiasts”. In theory, this democratises artworks through mechanical reproduction, whilst adding distance from the original “auratic” copy through this technical mediation (Benjamin, 1935). By presenting the featured books within their own standardised book design, *Books on Books* have aimed to produce a cohesive, scholarly series, unlike facsimile reprints which “tend to quickly go out-of-print and become valuable and expensive collector's items themselves”. Ironically, the EE book is now out of print and likewise expensive. The inclusion of *In Flagrante* in the series posits the work’s enduring appeal two decades after its publication, as well as conferring “master” status to the work, an artworld activity which Bourdieu might call a lesser act of consecration (1986; 1993).

Given my attachment to *In Flagrante*, I would like to think it would have had longevity regardless, but it is pertinent to speculate whether the book would still be widely recognised if Killip had not continued working in photography, producing work, mentoring students, and maintaining networks of relationships with writers and curators. As it happens, Killip’s revision of the book as *In Flagrante Two* with the publisher Steidl is, in the photobook field, another mark of consecration (Bourdieu 1986). Throughout my research I encountered comments with varying levels of sincerity and sarcasm along the lines that making a book with Steidl means “you’ve made it”: Steidl books are luxurious, beautifully designed, the so-called apex of Western photobook publishing (MS1:43, 55; MS2: Watson, Wooldridge).

While clearing out a former office, I found a pamphlet entitled *How to Make a Book with Steidl* (2007), which had been intended for collaborating artists. It portrayed the process as a kind of ritualistic retreat in ‘Steidville’, where ideas are brainstormed, meals are provided, and everyone goes to bed early in the next-door ‘Halftone Hotel’. Gerhard Steidl comes across as an idiosyncratic character, with a lab coat pocketful of pencils and alchemic aptitude for book production. The mythical religiosity surrounding Steidl production elevates their photobooks (the products) to greater institutional art status (Dickie 1984; Bourdieu, 1986). The physicality of *In Flagrante Two* confirms its consecration. At the start of this chapter, I surmised the newer book “insists upon itself”, assigning subjectivity to the book’s materiality (see pp.141-142,176). In a new materialist sense, the larger, more luxurious materiality had transformative agency over the work as I knew it, to the extent that the book appeared self-conscious of its accrued cultural capital (although this is entangled with the desires of the producers to frame it so).

The description of the re-edition on Killip’s website demonstrates this more refined and reified attitude to the project: *In Flagrante Two* is “a radically updated presentation, showing a single image on the right side of each double-page spread ... strident in its belief in the primacy of the photograph ... in an unadorned narrative sequence devoid of text”. The artwork, the artist and the market have matured to a point where the book no longer needs the legitimising association with a critic, unlike many previous photobooks initially marketed with credentials of their literary contributors⁵⁸ (MS1i:59). Killip himself, anecdotally generous with his time, has become legitimatised through decades of work as an artist and educator, lecturing at the prestigious Harvard University (1991-2017), compounded by museum recognition in solo exhibitions and collections (V&A, MoMA, J. Paul Getty Museum, but a few). Surely this is what many artists desire: to progress to a point where their work is allowed to speak for itself, for people to give enough time and confidence to looking at their work in order to interpret without a framing, verbal support⁵⁹.

Nevertheless, in this recent large-scale book, the finish and the very newness of it seem at odds with the images, more than thirty years old, when compared with the original contemporaneous publication. My first edition, with all its traces, presents itself as an artefact of its time, aging along with its subjects, aging in my possession just as I am aging, and my relationship with the book has been maturing. In the new edition, this proximity is deferred on all counts: the images

⁵⁸ E.g., *Banlieue de Paris* by Robert Doisneau was marketed with popular author Blaise Cendrars’ name in prominent place, despite Cendrars’ small contribution to Doisneau’s 130 pictures.

⁵⁹ In the sense of “interpretative frame” (Whitehead, 2012)

speak for themselves, but they seem less intimately connected with their multitude meanings. The following section examines not simply re-editioning, but reinventing a book to redirect its message towards updated political issues.

6.2.2 Reinterpretation as a political statement: a genealogy of War Primer

The economy of photobook production extends from self-published works produced on a shoestring to high end publications by international publishers such as Steidl, Taschen and Aperture; from projects maintaining established industry conventions, to those that aim to challenge or subvert. What remains consistent is these objects all take the form of a photographic “book”⁶⁰. As such, the medium evidently possesses a flexibility that allows its use by early career artists, for reasons both cheap and ideological, whilst still being a desired output for “canonical” works (*In Flagrate Tuo* included). This political elasticity becomes most apparent in cases where a book has been reinvented by different artists.

Photography has always been a referential medium, with one of its earliest applications being to document and reproduce artworks (Haworth-Booth, 1997). In the early artistic photography of the 19th century, the Pictorialists sought to approximate painterly effects through manipulating the processing and printing of negatives, to produce composite tableaux akin to contemporaneous Neo-classicist and Pre-Raphaelite painting. These efforts were in part intended to legitimise photography as an “independent art” through demonstrating its proximity to conventional fine arts like painting and sculpture.

Fast forward a century and photography has evolved to be distinctly self-referential. Innovations have become tropes: the “decisive moment” of street photography; the “typologies” first of Talbot, then Bernd and Hilla Becher; the portrait studio as a motif for performances of identity and nationhood⁶¹. Projects are revised to offer updated social commentary, such as Ian Walker’s survey of recent riffs on *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (Ruscha, 1963), in which other artists adapted the form to comment on issues including urbanisation (Di Bello *et al.*, 2012; Taylor, 2013). There is a balance between demonstrating reflexivity towards media history, and a contrivance to display assimilation with photography’s codes and conventions (MS1ii:108-109), which is in many ways a criticism that applies to the referentiality of general contemporary art post-Duchamp.

⁶⁰ As discussed, I withhold finite definition on what constitutes a book.

⁶¹Such as: Queen Victoria’s *cartes-de-visite*; James van der Zee (New York, 1920s); Seydou Keita (Mali, 1950s); the passport studio of Dennis Dineen (Ireland, 1960s); Shadi Ghadirian (2000s); etc.

However, this reflexivity can be mobilised for powerful critique, demonstrated by Bertolt Brecht's *War Primer* (1955;1998). By juxtaposing well-known press images, mostly from the Second World War, with four-line poems, it recontextualises them to provoke the reader to think more carefully about the ambiguities and limitations of photographs. Immediately there is at least a double meaning to be read: one can look at *War Primer's* images alone, or engage with Brecht's alternative poetic framing. Brecht mostly clipped pictures from magazines like *Life*, which have since become iconic conflict images, adding another intriguing heterogeneity. "Anyone who knows the history of photojournalism and looks through it would probably recognise a lot of the images" (MS2: Bush), lending extra dissonance to Brecht's reinterpretation.

What makes *War Primer* a fascinating case study in this discussion of plurality and politics is how this message of redirection has been multifariously re-enacted in recent years. Since its publication in 1955, and its English translation in 1998, other artists have produced "sequels" (MS2: Bush), neatly illustrated as family tree (Fig.25). The first of these "updates" was by Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, who recontextualised *War Primer* for the war on terror. Broomberg & Chanarin produced a literal pastiche by collaging new images into existing copies of the book and screenprinting new text that "redirected Brecht's redirection" (MS2: Bush). It amplifies the instruction to be critical of mass media, by adhering more layers of ambiguity to the information contained in the book.

Because of the manual production, Broomberg & Chanarin's version was a high-end artist's book with matching price tag, published by Mack (whose founder learned the ropes with Steidl). As successful artists, they enlisted the manual labour of unpaid and uncredited student interns to stick thousands of pictures into 100 copies (MS1ii:13; MS2: Bush). This is consistent with auteur theories of cultural production, in which emphasis on the "vision" of a centralised, author figure⁶² obscures the artistic division of labour among an assemblage of skilled practitioners (Grant 2008). While Brecht and Broomberg & Chanarin present themselves as politically left-leaning, both works depended upon uncredited labour. This lack of acknowledgement feeds into "great man" theories of history as critiqued by Barthes (1977). For Brecht, although his socialist writings concerned who is credited and who is not, it's "ironically resonant that Brecht himself ... took work from people who worked with him and passed it off as his own" (MS2: Bush).

⁶² E.g., in film theory, director as "auteur" e.g. François Truffaut

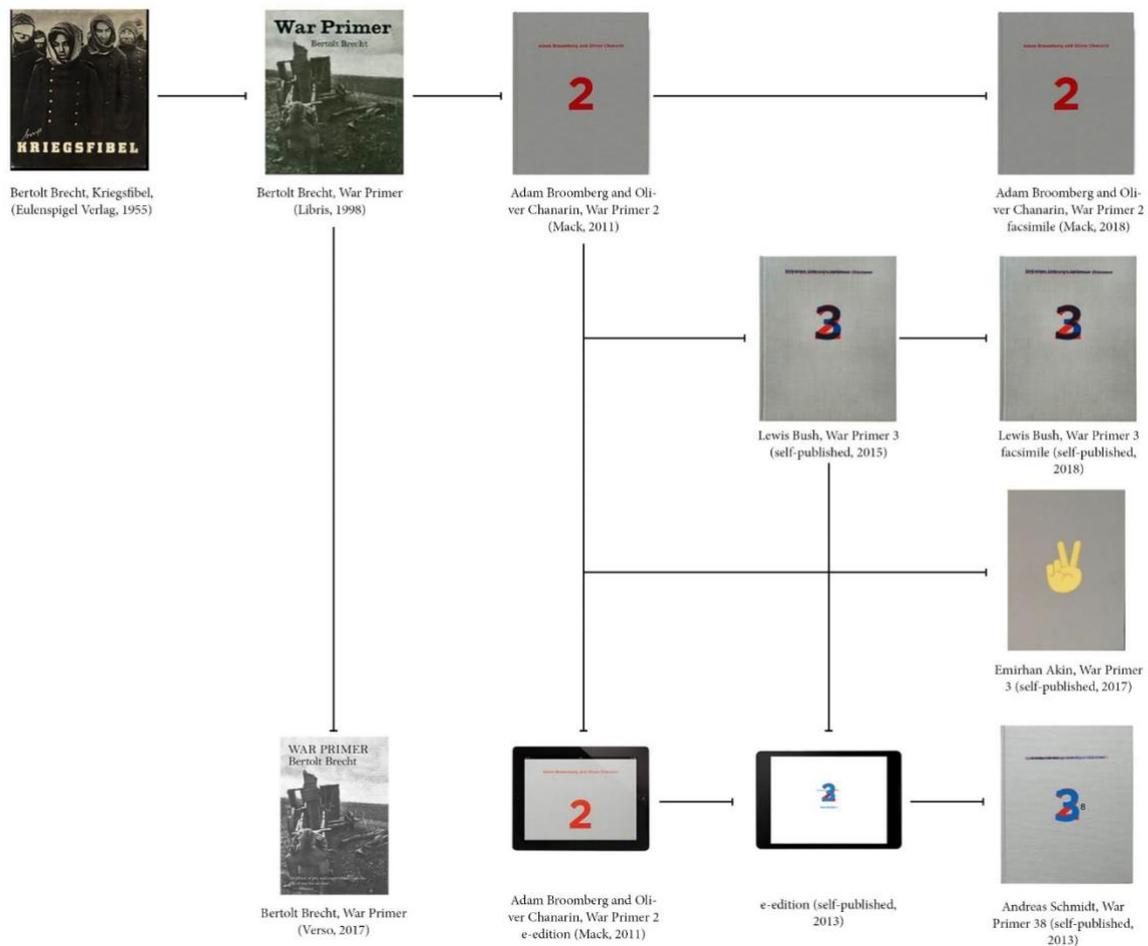


Figure 25 “War Primer Family Tree” © Lewis Bush

According to Lewis Bush, Broomberg & Chanarin fulfilled Brecht’s legacy “a bit too accurately”. Although Bush admired both projects, he felt this invalidated the integrity of the book’s critique, so he responded by making a third version, which somebody colloquially called “work primer”, because of its subject of economic violence. Bush’s version digitally layered new images alongside the original texts to divert the meaning of the words towards a war of labour; a fight for making a wage to survive. Instead of invisible networks of uncredited interns and exclusive collector clients that supported Broomberg & Chanarin’s version, Bush produced his quickly, initially made it available cheaply and electronically, and later self-published⁶³ a physical book.

Bush was not the only artist to play theme and variation; as the genealogy shows, Emirhan Akin and Andreas Schmidt also produced iterations, and Bush and Broomberg & Chanarin later re-edited their own (the latter as a commercially-produced book retailing at a fraction of the

⁶³ There is perhaps an avenue to consider self-publishing as a neoliberalisation of cultural production. But not within the scope of this thesis – this is beyond the “cut”.

cost). Bush made his version somewhat in jest, thinking “people would laugh at it for 10 minutes so it’s funny that six years later people are still asking about it”. It clearly struck a chord that has continued to reverberate more loudly: the persistent precarity of arts labour was clear in the wave of redundancies from arts organisations during the Coronavirus pandemic of 2020, whilst an ill-timed government campaign⁶⁴ – appearing to encourage creatives in “non-viable jobs” to retrain for cyber careers – demonstrates an institutional lack of value in the creative industries. The work’s surprise longevity also caused Bush to reflect “you can’t anticipate how books will be seen and you can’t predict how changes in circumstance will affect how they’re seen and received” (MS2), connecting a photobook’s success with a network of social and economic factors that continues to shift long after its publication, connecting back to object biographies. Even with large publishing houses, a title’s success can be unpredictable, as Lesley Martin explained about a slow start with a Luigi Ghirri book that only picked up with a later surge of renewed interest in the photographer (MS2).

Each reinvention of *War Primer* adds another node onto a network of influence and audience. The assemblage illustrates the breadth of production, from independent artists to those collaborators made visible (publishers, previous authors) and those parts of the network that remain hidden from view. Just as we are made to question our interpretation of images, we are also led to question the political economy in which photobooks are made. A persistent concern in Bush’s writing and artwork is making visible abuses of power, whether personal, professional or on a level of global politics. Particularly when exploitation occurs within his own industry, “it’s really important as artists or photographers or whatever we call ourselves ... to stand up and say, this is at best hypocritical, and at worst, just wrong”.

Crucially, the political agency of these assorted books is enacted through their coherence and difference. Each book makes its point through how and why it varies from another known entity. In Brecht’s original work, the book’s agency arose through redirecting the familiar press photographs through language. The books of Broomberg & Chanarin and then Bush subsequently established their argument through noticeable developments and divergences: the same, but different. The fact that Bush finds people are still asking about his book means it gave a material focus to the issues of economic inequality that outraged him in the first place. A spoken complaint or online article may not have such impact: as with Gato Negro’s publication of *I want a President...* by Zoe Leonard discussed on p.140, making a tangible product gives an argument physical substance.

⁶⁴ “Fatima’s next job...” ad from the Cyber First/HM Government initiative used a photograph of a ballerina.

Jane Bennett has questioned the degree to which matter itself is agential in political circumstances by comparing political systems to ecosystems. Citing Darwin's research on worms, in an ecosystem, "small agencies" ...in "the right confederation with other physical and physiological bodies, can make big things happen" (2010:94). The worms are an insentient actant facilitating a larger natural ecosystem, in the same way that elsewhere Bennett activates rubbish on the streets or electricity as viable, vibrant actants in the political functioning of society. I'm not trying to quantify what "big things" these sequels of *War Primer* have enacted, only to echo Bennett's enquiry in asking, "what is the difference between an ecosystem and a political system? What is the difference between an actant and a political actor?" (ibid.). Do the books themselves here have less or more agency than those unpaid interns pasting them together?

Each artist worked in confederation with networks of other images, workers, and most importantly, the books themselves, as well as their predecessor(s) as a locus for these disparate agencies. In Bourdieusian terms, Broomberg and Chanarin used uncredited labour to conserve economic capital whilst benefiting from the symbolic capital of a publicly left-leaning sensibility. In materialist terms, rethinking relations between things and people creates potential for ethical insights and actions (Bennett, 2010). Material actors are not always taken seriously, but neither is the agency of interns. Foregrounding the materiality of the multiple Broomberg & Chanarin *War Primer* books, and the distributed assemblage of "sequels" they spawned, also brings into focus the contrasting realities of producing these disparate books and the ethical issues they raise about often-exploitative socio-economic structures of artistic production.

The *War Primer* photobooks therefore are the matter through which creative and political statements are linked and enacted. They are multiple foci in a decentred tangle of different activities, some of which are visible. Others (for example, Broomberg & Chanarin's relationship with their gallery representation; Bush's social media activity; Brecht's scissors that clipped those original press photographs from magazines) have probably also been nodes in the network at some tangential point or other, but remain non-coherent, heterogeneous, seemingly forgettable, essential worms in the ecosystem (Bennett 2010:94; Law and Mol, 2002:126-133). Worms have even been invoked as a metaphorical origin of the universe: Menocchio claimed in his 16th-century cosmology, "and out of that bulk a mass formed – just as cheese is made out of milk – and worms appeared in it, and these were the angels" (Ginzburg, 1976). So, it is through minute study of the metaphorical worms that we can come closer to ontologies of relational phenomena.

We are used to thinking of photobooks as neat expressions of “*Title*, by Author (date)”. This is an extreme simplification of, in this case, the unseen, uneven division of labour of interns, designers, photographers, photographic subjects, collaborators, friends, mums, stationery. When we begin to consider photobooks and their relations as plural and potential in this way, it disrupts the “pragmatic simplicity” through which we have come to consider the divisions between words such as material, social and political, before and after, opening up spaces of “absence or alterity” in which to explore “the Otherness of materials that don’t fit in but also do” (Law and Mol, 2002:124). The next and final section expands upon an expression of heterogeneity through a complex of actants that are identified and interpreted over multiple encounters.

6.3 “The book is a fiction about metaphor”

The title for this section quotes the final sentence of Killip’s foreword to the first edition in *In Flagrante*. The statement contradicts tropes of “truth”, “authenticity” and “rawness” generally associated with 20th century social documentary photography, through owning the book in itself is an interpretive story, captured through one person’s lived encounters with the world, presented once more for somebody else’s, the reader’s, interpretation. Each “photobook”, as a network of copies and human and nonhuman agencies, is further pluralised through many individual acts of interpretation.

In this final section I will describe two instances of encounter with my own copy of *In Flagrante* to further probe the idea of plurality and potentiality of photobooks and their multiple lives, economies and encounters as expressions of heterogeneity. The prospect of heterogeneity is important for thinking about relations between diverse actors, because it expresses an oscillation between disparate parts, some easily mapped, others that are less visible, but nevertheless have agency in a network (Law 2006). These elusive agencies can be unravelled with archival research, oral histories, speculation and a little imagination, as actor-network-theory scholarship demonstrates. They can also be visited or mapped through reflexively interrogating the “what ifs” and “what weres” of the encounter, by questioning the absent presences of my own modulating, interpreted experiences.

6.3.1 Interpretation, situated off the ground

My accounts of past encounters emphasise different aspects of the book: for example, in February 2017⁶⁵, I was preoccupied with the depth of the blacks and the tonality of the images, and mused how little I knew about commercial book printing: does it use ink, is it an especially black kind of ink, is it more watery or more viscous than the black ink used in, say, the Sotheby's catalogue? In early March 2017, I pored over the images, writing quasi-stream-of-consciousness about what I looked at, what it made me think of and how it made me feel. Later that month, I made photographs of page spreads, first picking out those I found most affecting, then later systematically snapping each opening. It is these photos that focus this discussion. They show the book, of course, (the copy I own and can look at when I like, so I'm not sure why I photographed it) but they also show the context of my encounter. The book sits on a familiar, dark orangey-brown, mid-century parquet identical to the one I remember in my primary school hall, the tiles of which little fingers wrought loose during assemblies sat on the floor. The earlier images show the surface of an equally familiar table that came with the rented flat, but the angles were dreadful so I laid the book open on the floor, with the cyborg shadow of my hands-holding-smartphone drawing my body into the encounter.



Figure 26 A man bites his fingernails, sat on a wall on a page sitting on parquet, overshadowed by the phantom of my smartphone. (30 March 2017)

To look at this photograph is to identify a lighter shape, with a darker shape within it and over it, and a pattern of brown around the edge. To see it as a book on a floor involves a process of interpretation that relies on identifying the light shape as the outline of this kind of object. As explored in Chapter 2, our understandings of the world come through interpreting our perceptions of configurations of sensory data against something concrete, a background, a place

⁶⁵ Recorded in a personal diary before initiating MS1.

of depth. Marilyn Strathern (2002) has related this interpretive process of making sense of things to the “figure-ground” organisation of perception which emerged through Gestalt theories. The word “interpretation” in this thesis has cropped up in reference to museological strategies, as well as in reference to the phenomenological hermeneutic principle that we perceive the world as we register free-floating sensory data, identify it according to experience and learn to understand subsequent perceptions and the sum of our experiences through accumulative interpretive schema. This discussion engages the more general latter sense. By identifying “figure” as something differentiated from “ground”, Strathern positions it within “the modernist tradition as an act of singularity [...] one that makes singular the subject of interpretation, and hence gives rise to an oscillation of view(point)s” (ibid.:90).

In this example, I can focus on the book as a figure against a literal ground, as a singular interpretation of this photograph. I can also look past my shadow and ignore the periphery of the photograph, and look directly through it to the book and the image it contains. The image of the man is another (human) figure against the (book)ground. I can look at my shadow as it hovers and stops on the page, and I know it is *my* shadow because I corroborate my interpretation with my memory of taking the picture. It is a digital photograph on my screen and if I zoomed in further (spy thriller command: “enhance!”) I could look at nothing but pixels. It is hard to look at all of these things at once, but it doesn’t mean they aren’t all there, swimming in my phenomenological field of vision. I have to single out *what* is being interpreted. This is always happening when we analyse artworks, or anything, except we filter out the periphery, making a choice and a perceptual loss, which I have only recovered now by looking at these photographs of my encounter years later. Strathern clarifies:

Interpretation implies taking something - an event or location or artifact or whatever - and specifying its singular qualities. It is the **resultant singularity** of the entity that encourages the **divergence in comprehension**. For the entity in question is being made apparent both in its particulars and as inevitably summoning a context of a kind, a whole field of possible (further) particulars and understandings.

(pp.89-91, [my emphasis])

Happily for my argument, she exemplifies this through a photograph:

Think of all the coordinates through which one might address one's interpretation of a photograph, for instance, from its chemical composition to its aesthetic impact. Yet [...] to consider the particular quality of the photographic reproduction is to sidestep the subject matter; to focus specifically on the way a face is angled within the frame is to slide past the effect of the smile. The singularity of the selection reveals it as a choice among many.

(ibid.)

This kind of perspectival interpretation is also, I would argue, engaged in the study of heterogeneity of any kind. Strathern’s use of the word “oscillation” echoes Law’s expression of heterogeneity as an “oscillation between absence and presence” implicitly connected to more and less visible actants (Law, 2002:122). When attempting to uncover such complexity, “what we see depends on what we choose to magnify and where we look” (Strathern, 2002:118). While Strathern aligns the perspectival nature of interpretation with modernist impulses to simplify, she acknowledges this as “a choice among many”.

As seen in Chapter 5’s discussion of classification, singularity is a tool that artificially smooths over a multiplicity of possible ways of forming knowledges. Through these photographs, by looking around and away from the book they depict, I can uncover another kind of plurality, through the way this particular encounter congeals with a specificity of place. The ground merges with the figure as an artefact that represents a moment in time and place, where *In Flagrante* meets the floor of my Stratford kitchen in March 2017. Despite my arguments in Chapter 4, for the sake of this discussion, space and time are not tangible, orderly realms in which encounters can be situated. This encounter is less a fixed point in Euclidean space and linear time; less “my kitchen, Aldworth Road, Stratford, UK, The World”, but a more abstract sense of how I relate to my former experience. Just as I formerly interpreted my encounter with *In Flagrante*, now I interpret the book as a figure against a background of parquet tiles in a photograph, as well as a background of personal history of that moment in my life looking at it in my old East London flat.

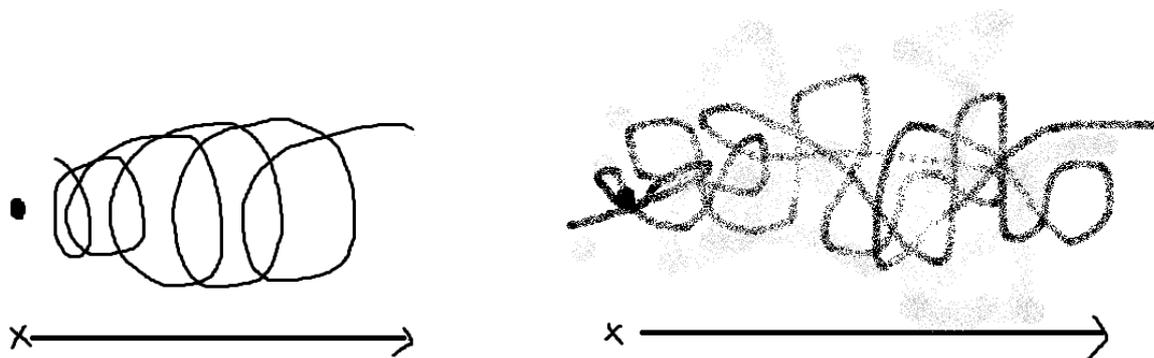


Figure 27 Extremely crude impression of hermeneutic interpretation as occurring in linear model (left) and as a relational, recursive model (right), in which perception is a cloud that recurses unevenly and imprecisely, with interference, and in which the black line of interpretation is only one of multiple possible perspectives. X is first encounter with thing perceived and chronological (modern) time progresses L-R. (See Ingold’s (2016) visualisation of experience and relations through diagrams of lines).

Strathern's argument supports this plurality: she asserts *modernities* are the expression of "efforts to overcome the heterogeneity of specific moments, through summoning a grand temporal narrative." Simplification, therefore, does not only occur in the words we use to describe things, but the way we conceptualise their chronology. Strathern continues, "[l]inear time is a way (not the only one) to distribute powers and agency; it orders multiple particulars." Linear time conceptualises perceptual experience as a coherent, accumulative process of hermeneutic interpretation. The codex, in its formation of subsequent pages turning, conceptualises linear time. "Diversity, difference and plurality might appear outside that ordering process," Strathern reasons, "yet it is because different worlds are seen to be carved ultimately out of the same universal realities (naturalistic time and space) that they are amenable to ordering." (2002:91). This admission is key to visualising the pluralistic mode in which the world is experienced and enacted, and specifically photobooks are experienced and enacted, because it enables us to picture recursive agencies relating across multiple temporalities, without fixed endings or beginnings, like Becker's processual theory of art production (2008:xii). If I think about it, I can order this encounter as coming "after the V&A office, February 2017" and "before sitting cross-legged on my bed, October 2020" as points in the same linear timeline, but these are not separate realities that occurred in chronological isolation, rather a tangle of recursive possibilities, spiralling along in a general forward trend, but subject to disturbance and confusion (see Fig.27).



Figure 28 The photographer's shadow caught at the moment of photographing, x2. Two moments, frozen and collapsed. Multiple subjects making multiple objects. (30 March 2017)

For example, Fig.28, from that same 2017 encounter, where multiple temporalities collide. Initially, there are two instances of photographing: mine and Killip's, shown through our shadows. For me this moment was suspended in a chain of page turning and camera angling.

Killip's timeline in relation to the woman he photographs is also made clear when the woman reappears in the book in a picture he evidently took shortly after, still on the same kerb but slumped sideways. Small transactions like these within *In Flagrante* are what pack its punch (or, punctum): time goes forward, but life moves in a different, sideways motion, if it moves at all. In his essay at the end of the book, Berger describes its subjects with the words "extemporary", "out of time": he could either mean they have run out of time, or they are *outside* of time. As a reader, whenever I read the book, I am mobile: I can turn its pages backwards and forward, set it down and walk away. The book, however, is bound by its material fixity to act at a greatly reduced speed: it is not inert, as the first section of this chapter shows (Bennett, 2010), but to many readers it may as well be.

Earlier in this chapter, I established the continuity of object biographies as processual, in which "before" and "after" rely on arbitrary punctuations rather than total events. In much the same sense, encounters do not operate in chronologies of "before" and "after". They happen, and their impressions jostle together: in experiencing an encounter in the present, I am also connecting with encounters past. Beyond my own engagements *with* the photobook, I can also relate *through* the photobook to those deferred moments of life folded into it by its creator, such as the time the man sat on the wall and bit his nail, or at least two times Killip photographed the lady on the kerb. 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 (Gadamer, 1960; see p.64-65), neither should attempts to understand agency be mapped in linear, causal relationships. The next section provides a final contemplation on the photobook's phenomenal capacity to connecting worlds through such complexity.

6.3.2 Interpreting (my)self into the network

By this point, I hope I have illustrated the image of the "network" not as a system of clearly articulated connections, but something diffuse and dynamic, weaving unreliably across multiple temporalities and subjectivities. If not, this is the intention of the last encounter I shall describe in this thesis.

The most recent occasion (at the time of writing) when I opened *In Flagrante* and my notebook, I was sat cross-legged in the middle of the bed. It was early evening but the lights were on and the curtains drawn against the ever-earlier autumn dusk. It was during this encounter that I scrawled, over many pages, the notes that formed the basis for this chapter, as I looked at and through the book to previous encounters, collapsed within the familiar prized possession. After all, through

certain evocative objects, we commune with our past selves, those former, formative moments we have also spent holding them (Turkle, 2011), as well as the histories of others embodied within them, prompting new insights and continued discussion (Auslander, 2017). The experiences, emotions and environments I remembered folded around me at each interaction may have been unrelated to the book itself, but they integrated into each of our encounters. As I looked at photographs of the familiar terraces of houses and Tyneside flats like the one I live in now, I had a distinct feeling of history: my own history, as I so clearly saw it at that moment, punctuated by *In Flagrante* encounters; and the history of this place to which I feel so attached.

I do not believe I am alone in my strong associations with *In Flagrante*. In the weeks after Killip passed away somebody on Instagram remembered a photograph from the series in an exhibition because of how intently a young woman was sketching from it. Someone else described how an exhibition of his work moved her mother to open up about her childhood in the North East, a spontaneous photo-elicitation exercise inspired through the incisiveness of his images. Another story that captured my imagination came from photographer Julian Germain, who photographed an album belonging to John ‘Cookie’ and Glynnis Cooke (Fig.29). The couple were among those Killip got to know in a seacoal camp⁶⁶ and whose photograph he included *In Flagrante* (original & *Two*) and *Seacoal* (2011). The album shows prints of well-known photographs by Killip of Cookie and his relatives, pasted alongside Polaroids of babies in bathtubs, appearing in another kind of photo book replete with an altogether homelier affect.

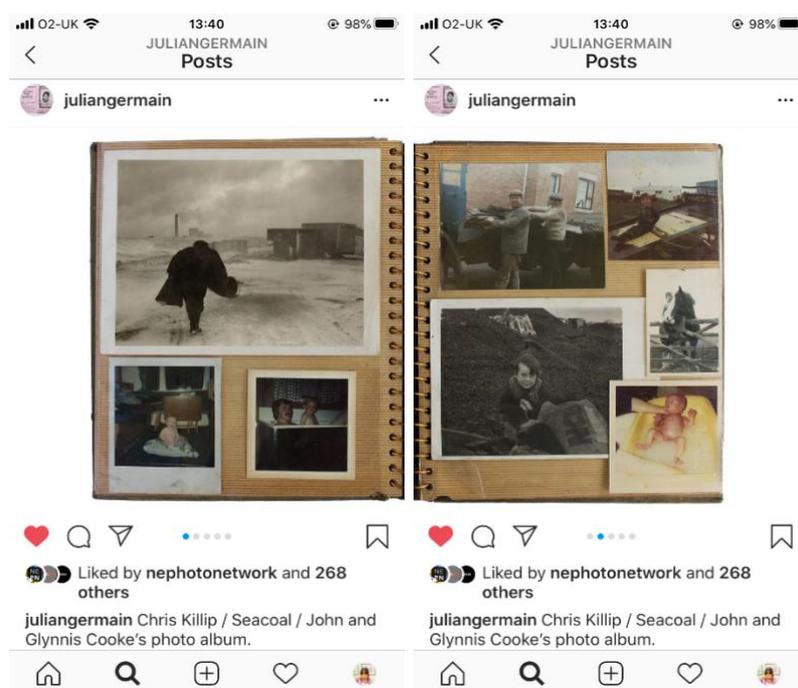


Figure 29 Screenshots, Instagram post by Julian Germain, 19 October 2020 [accessed 20 October 2020]

⁶⁶ “Seacoalers” were people who reclaimed and sold coal that washed up along the shoreline. They sometimes lived in small communities of caravans directly on the beach.

Through my own autoethnography I have come to recognise these idiosyncratic encounters have agency in mediating a sense of self, in which the photobook acts to co-produce autobiography. It is a physical object through which I can commune with previous versions of myself. I regard this as a kind of intersubjective relation between my present and past selves that is performed with book as actant and prompt. The book opens a channel through which I can consider the experiences of myself and others in relation to it. This feeling was never so apparent as in this most recent reading, when I discovered another photobook encounter, described by Sylvia Grant within the final pages of text. My notes read:

The Grant/Berger essay ends with Grant describing an encounter with a photobook of photos of the North with her mother in WH Smiths. In the busy atmosphere of the shop, the book moves her mother to tears.

A memorable first evocative encounter.

There all along in the book I have held for a long time and I've never seen it until now. Hidden.

An encounter within my encounter – what I've unknowingly been trying to say?

When I read Grant's own recollection, I felt closer to that moment of her experience, than the one I was currently, physically inhabiting, sitting on the bed. It felt meaningful that I had never read that bit of the text until that precise phenomenal moment. Photographs and descriptions of looking at photographs have a peculiar sense of transportation or displacement for this reason – the “channel” I described being one of intra-action, a material-discursive loop between my body-brain and the worlds conjured by the sensory data I am holding before me (see p.74; Appendix E; Barad, 2007). Looping back once more, bringing these notes into this chapter is a recursive move back to trace yet another self, lost in time, but made memorable in the moment of encounter. This encapsulates the theoretical action I have been working towards, to respect my own implication and intra-action in these encounters and not to cut, sever, screen or artificially detach myself from the research on the conventions of what might be “proper” to scholarship.

6.4 Conclusion

When dealing with objects produced in multiple, and which have multiple uses and resonances, the question of what we can learn about them is inherently perspectival, like Strathern's discussion of interpretation, and Barad's notion of the agential cut. This multiplicity, complexity and non-coherence is disguised in discourse by reducing photobooks to a combination of basic

signifiers such as author, title and date of publishing. In this formula, it is possible to conduct profound analyses based on artist biographies, issues of subject matter, production context and aesthetics whilst occluding the vast heterogeneity of social, political, economic, affective, intra-active realities configured within the materiality of each book-object.

The plurality of copies of each photobook, with their associated biographies and vibrancies, elicit such a variety of agencies and interpretations that it is hard to hold this complexity in view. To 'see' something requires a figure on which to focus, whether through the split lens viewfinder of a camera, through an instinctive, corneal function, or in the Modernist paradigm in which sight is equated with knowledge and clarity of understanding. And so this chapter ends in a metaphorical confusion, in which understanding something as complex and plural seems more like the messy reality of the world we live in, or a Magic Eye picture. We trust there is a form in all that repetitive, recursive, squiggling, wormy colour happening across the surface, but it is elusive, and it needs squinting, and looking at from different angles, over time, putting it down, coming back to it, and perhaps we might eventually perceive its greater substance.

Chapter 7: A Closing Chapter

That which is complicated comes in simple packages [...] that can be used to make sense.

John Law, 2002:120

The lesson I draw from my experience is ... that we are never through, but occasionally stop to tell our colleagues what we have learned.

Howard Becker, 2008:xxi

I am reluctant to write ‘conclusion’ because my thesis does not make the kind of hermetic knowledge claims usually associated with such a title. If an established academic with decades of scholarship under his belt such as Becker can acknowledge “we are never through”, it seems still more absurd that a PhD thesis could offer a definitive conclusion on what is likely to be work in progress for some time yet. At the time of writing, neat lexical choices like “conclusion” feel at odds with the messy, relational philosophies I have come to espouse⁶⁷. Accordingly, here I offer some summaries, evaluations of lessons learned, and challenges to my future researching self and interested readers.

When I began this research, I superficially set out to investigate the actor-network of the photobook. What I now understand I wanted was to explore the ways in which our experiences of and with these perplexing cultural products could reveal other kinds of knowledges. ANT is a generous theory in terms of thinking about relations between humans and things, but in my own photobook encounters and those I facilitated with focus groups, it didn’t permit enough room to explore the affective agencies of things. I proceeded to read widely and play freely with theory and method, meanwhile I continued to get to know the photobook more subtly and profoundly through social and professional experiences I had initially considered outside the parameters of thesis research. My aim to map the variety of activity with and agency of photobooks through interrogating how, where and why people engage with them has been achieved in an informative, yet irregular manner, in keeping with the messy nature of the material and social entanglements I discovered.

In the spirit of new materialism, I could argue the research itself has had agency in its own making. At the start I didn’t have a clear idea where it would go, but it has arrived somewhere.

⁶⁷ I toyed with the more phenomenal-sounding “finale”, as a concluding event/sequence to be experienced and interpreted, but decided it was too *jazzhands*...

That somewhere is a realisation that I have achieved a bonus research objective, which was finding a way to describe these messy knowledges. This emerged as a dynamic, idiosyncratic method that has clustered together new materialism, phenomenology, actor-network theory and relational ontology, combined through a prism of autoethnography. The original research questions were about understanding encounters and identifying agencies, but the latter part has become much more significant in terms of not only knowing these phenomena but describing and communicating them. This question has been explored in real time through the act of writing. In the sections that follow, I first consider what knowledges have been made about the photobook during the course of this research, then I will reflect on my personal relation to knowledge-making and what opportunities I foresee for further research.

7.1 To answer the question asked

At the start of this thesis, I asked a research question “What is the agency of the photobook encounter, and how can this reveal insights into the networked relationality of the photobook genre?” as a mode of articulating a broad interest in what our experiences with things tells us about the agency of objects. Simply formulating this question raised many more questions, seemingly simple at first, but sticky with words, affects and ontologies. To initially ask ‘what is a photobook’ evolved into ‘what is a photobook, when, where and for whom’; in effect, what does a photobook do? These kinds of questions can only be answered in relation to specific situations, configurations of people, stuff and ideas. For example, a photobook in a library for a visitor is different to a photobook in a library for a librarian which is different to another copy of the same photobook in a book fair. The knowledges that appeared to me most reliable and valid during this research are those that are grounded in experience, whether lived, observed or remembered.

The chapters of this thesis have been gradually advancing this argument that photobook knowledges are relational, experiential and reflective. This thesis’ research started with issues of methodology, in Chapter 1, asking “how to know” (in many ways this is also where the thesis ends). Next, my first analytical chapter, numbered 2, looked not to ‘the thing in itself’, but began with ‘the thing perceived’, using phenomenology to access and theorise subtle facets of photobook experience, on the phenomenological premise that perception precedes understanding. In Chapter 3, I mobilised the attention to experiential detail learned from my phenomenological study of encounters to imagine the affordances of photobooks as material objects. The photobooks I examined demonstrated material affects and opportunities that

operated consistently across different geographies and scenarios, displaying certain agencies enacted by the book-object itself – Latourian “immutable mobiles” (2005:223).

In Chapter 4 I moved from what was essential about specific photobooks to look at what agencies effervesced around many photobooks as they moved through their photobook-network, by exploring the environmental frameworks in which photobooks took on different roles. These socially-constructed environments facilitated different capabilities for the photobook to act as economic or cultural capital. At the book fair, the photobook became a commodity not only through the physical layout of the space, designed for commerce, but by the atmospheric configuration of sellers, buyers, price labels, bank notes, smartphone chip and pin machines, sales pitches, heat, seasickness, tote bags, music. Chapter 5 advanced this constructionist argument to consider the epistemic arenas that produce the photobook through less material and more ideological means, and how the photobook’s material agency resists epistemological schematisation. In the last chapter, I explored the publication of a photobook as merely a punctuation in multitude converging and diverging processes: each book has a life after its production and purchase, just as artists continue to revisit and reformulate published work. The individual encounters with individual copies throughout their object lives are complex in making meaning across temporalities and interpretations, returning the thesis to where it started with a (now more nuanced) analysis of phenomenological perception.

From this meandering enquiry, the photobook has emerged, in fact, as a highly *mutable* mobile, which is enacted through fleeting performances in one material-discursive arrangement after another. What is finished, or what is incomplete, where the line is that marks ‘before’ and ‘after’: these are simply a few more of the binaries I have questioned throughout this thesis. These provocations have been important in relation to the original research question to seek new ways of understanding photobooks because they have shown all and any understandings to be contingent and relational. Instead of binaries – subject/object; book/body; photobook/not a photobook – what has emerged is a sense that all these relations exist through configurations or assemblages. Neither does it matter too severely which exact word one uses, as long as it evokes a sense of a dynamic coming-together and relating of disparate parts.

I’ve spent the past three years telling people “I’m not interested in defining the photobook”, but I now realise this whole quest of *knowing* through the encounter is an alternative exercise in ontology. If ‘photobook’ were the seemingly simple package described by John Law, to know it has involved undoing this package, unpeeling an outer layer to reveal something that is in fact unbounded, an indefinite number of unspecified parts that doesn’t appear to ever have fit into

such a tiny thing as a word. Although I still have no desire to fix the photobook's boundaries by putting into words exactly what it *is* or *does*, I am still learning infinite things it *can be* and *can do*, feeling around its blurry edges through experience, conversation and trial and error.

In response to my question, I can say that the agency of the photobook encounter is situational, particular, variable, durational, historic, and as many other adjectives as there are circumstances in which the photobook manifests. It affects viewers diversely, depending on the place, the photobook and the person and it co-constitutes its own meaning. Most of all, it does not simply reveal insights into the networked relationality of the photobook genre: rather, the photobook encounter is in itself an expression, a materialisation of this relationality. For each photobook encounter, we can ask, how did this photobook get here, how did I get here, what is the photobook doing, what am I understanding, and this in itself is how insights into the photobook actor-network can be uncovered.

7.2 Looking beyond the photobook

This thesis has also contributed to its broader research interest in exploring how we can utilise our experiences with things to understand the agency of objects in material and social worlds. This is not a question that can be answered, but rather an opportunity to trial different ways of making knowledge through reflecting on such experiences. Some of my methods have been conventional and practical, such as interviewing; others have been manual and embodied; all have been reflective.

As I draw this current research project to a close, punctuating the knowledge-making until it finds another forum for continuation, I can identify two significant developments throughout the chapters of this thesis, which I believe contribute to this inquiry about method. The first of these points is the role the photobook plays in each chapter's formation of knowledge (with the chapters being written in the order in which they appear).

- ~ 1: A Methodology ... = how to build understandings *about* photobooks and *with* photobooks
- ~ 2: Perceiving the Photobook = what is happening *between* person and photobook
- ~ 3: Issues with Bookishness = what is being done *by* the physical object
- ~ 4: Photobook Site and Scene = what is happening *around* the photobook

- ~ 5: Epistemic Encounters = looking *through* books to see how they are institutionally co-constructed
- ~ 6: Photobook Plurality = thinking imaginatively *with* photobooks, people, photobook encounters to learn *about* ourselves and others

These italicised prepositions express a different relation in how the photobook itself helped me to develop different understandings. This relation became increasingly complex, showing deepening nuance in both the heterogeneous agencies of photobooks, and my approach to understanding them. It also became somewhat circular, as the final chapter puts into place and builds upon the kinds of modes of knowledge-making hypothesised in the first. This demonstrates my point that the research, too, has come to have its own agency: because I did not initially prescribe the way in which I would study photobooks, the examples I encountered throughout the duration have informed and directed how I constructed my arguments.

The second point of evolution throughout the thesis is a shift in the tone of writing. This manifests in an increasing ease with my own voice as narrator of the project, and the diversifying ways photobooks have entered the analysis. In the earlier chapters, I was more deliberate in how I formulated my points around photobook examples, interview quotes or focus group data and selected theoretical arguments to explain and expand. The tone is noticeably more formal. As the chapters progressed, I became more fluent in both my data and my use of theory, the style(s) of writing became more closely aligned and the arguments unfolded more naturally as my academic persona and personal voice became synthesised through the accumulation of new knowledge. This progression in writing style from laboured construction to organic growth demonstrates a hermeneutic and heuristic process of internalising my approach to *knowing*.

Conventional scholarship would expect stylistic discrepancies to be edited out to present a polished, seamless text. On the contrary, my decision to leave some parts of the thesis in their original form, at times less refined and more spontaneous, elsewhere stuck in clunky verbiage, is important to the ethical integrity of the project in showing how I have grappled with information in my pursuit of knowledge. I described it to my supervisors as “a bit like the ‘show your working out’ part of a maths problem”. Some of the connections I have made have resulted specifically from the process of writing and conjoining disparate theories and data. The thesis therefore demonstrates a method within a method. The research method, or mode(s) of finding out and interpreting information about photobooks, has been enacted first in real time, and then re-performed through a narrative method, or mode(s) of knowledge making in my thesis:

1. Research method: mode(s) of finding out and interpreting information about photobooks analysing data from interviews, various studies of the 'encounter' through analytical framework of combined theoretical perspectives of ANT, relational ontology, assemblage theory, new materialism; autoethnography is the prism through which these other frameworks can be used, combined, overlapped, evaluated
2. Narrative method: mode(s) of knowledge making in thesis
Reflecting on the mode of articulating, structuring, inscribing and presenting these knowledges in a manner that is authentic to the nature of their production (i.e. experiential, heuristic, messy)

My construction of the thesis in general is therefore a significant part of the research. My effort to find different ways of learning and knowing has manifested as interwoven voices. It is a sustained, deliberate experimentation that has been necessary to my individual 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.

What does it mean to meander?

The formation of a meander:

As the river erodes laterally, to the right side then the left side, it forms large bends, and then horseshoe-like loops called meanders.

The formation of meanders is due to both deposition and erosion and meanders gradually migrate downstream.

(BBC Bitesize, 2021)

I have occasionally described my research project as having worn its own meandering path. This poetic cliché of a strolling, lackadaisical mode of experiencing the world is employed here in its most literal sense. The flow of a research assemblage with agency of its own has pushed me to think laterally. Ideas have accrued like deposits of sediment, whilst other notions have been challenged and repositioned, with the whole lot gradually migrating further downstream, not in a linear fashion, but an eddying, muddying swirl. Meanders seem peaceful because they occur in the middle stages of the river, where it appears more mature; but in fact they are a fast-flowing flurry of activity in their continual destructive construction.

My research has meandered because not everything I have done was planned or intentional, has been subject to external forces, but has produced results. It has often been serendipitous and it

has been, obviously, human (if not human-centred). For example, early on I chose not to pursue my initial intention for single case studies and instead to allow photobooks to manifest circumstantially in encounters throughout the research. I experienced a high level of indecision in choosing which photobooks to study, which on reflection made me embrace more organic involvement that demonstrates the flow of books within my network. Both research and writing process have been littered with coincidence: why did I decide to use this quote, or refer to this book, and not that one? Many of my most productive references emerged from the knowledge of my interviewees. In order to benefit from these fertile coincidences, I have needed to be an intuitive researcher that responds creatively to whatever data I encountered. To identify these moments as coincidences, I need to be still more conscious of the people, things and circumstances that have facilitated my forming certain understandings. This reflexive consciousness is what enables relational insight.

As a kind of meta-evaluation of my own thesis, reading back over the final chapter has given a sense of having arrived, after much recursive wandering, at a destination I have been seeking. I haven't ever exactly known what this destination would be, and I still cannot precisely specify its name and landscape (or river mouth), but I can describe it. It is a form of research and analysis that incorporates the pluralistic space I know photobooks to inhabit. It is a way of presenting knowledges in a manner that is appropriate and particular to this assemblage of subject matter, theoretical influences and researcher habitus. My supervisor Tina Sikka helped me articulate what I have been doing as:

Looking at what happens in an encounter between a cultural output and a person consuming that output and what goes on in terms of meaning-making, constructing meaning, constructing political economies, producing knowledge and understanding with those artefacts. Then, what's the best way to describe it? Through autoethnography and different bits of methodology that hinge around relational ontology and new materialism I've put together a way to think about it that can be replicated with other cultural artefacts.⁶⁸

If I wanted to, I could name this method. I might wish to do this because, in the economy of academia, coining a phrase gives an impression of a self-conscious, self-contained mode of working that others can adopt. To name what I have done might provide intellectual capital that could boost my future research career. However, to give a name to the diffuse mode of getting to know photobooks I have enacted over the past four years would not only be disingenuous, but

⁶⁸ This articulation is taken from meeting notes and would feel insincere to pass it off as my own. But, it's not exactly a quote. Another reflective snippet that doesn't completely sit within the 'academic' narration.

it would contradict the spirit of the project, which resists categories and fixed terminology. When I call something a ‘photobook’, I am making a cut, distinguishing it as a distinct thing. I am othering it from other kinds of book objects, placing a veneer of coherence over an assemblage of many messy materials and ideas (Law, 2004) and giving it the status of Latour’s black box, in which complexity is hidden (1999b:304).

Nevertheless, this is my concluding chapter, where I distil the meaning of what I have accomplished, and so I will summarise it thus: this thesis displays an effort to explore configurations of things (specifically photobook-like things), people and agencies, which has been influenced by more-than-human relational theories, and has drawn significantly upon autoethnography as a sentient site of analysis. This thesis has sought to de-centre the human within that assemblage, so the theoretical combination initially sounds a little uneasy. If autoethnography is a method for imagining society through the individual (human) researcher’s experiences, then one might expect the society being discussed to be primarily structured by human relations. This project has attempted to visualise a society that is co-produced by plural things and agencies, which has required a kind of autoethnography that is “un-anthropocentric”.

Autoethnography presumes a kind of bounded self. But in fact, these boundaries are not distinct: the photobooks I have looked at have entered my psyche, their dust particles have perhaps entered my body, just as my skin cells might have adhered to their edges. In doing autoethnography, I am not producing information that desires to be autobiographical. I cannot excise myself from the research, because my self has become an essential site of forming the knowledge of the research, yet at the same time I have no desire to reify myself as a subject distinct from others. Instead, I position my work here as a kind of de-centred autoethnography: I am a part of the research assemblage, rather than its creator or orchestrator. I am one necessary centre of observation, but I am not the only centre, and not all the other possible centres are people; some are photobooks, some are intra-actions between people and books. I have been able to come to know parts of the assemblage specifically because I am implicated in the assemblage. I do not value my insights or experiences more than those of other human or non-human parts of the assemblage: merely, they are my own data, and I can use them productively. Accordingly, I have used my own reflections, and my interpretation of the words of others, as a mode of accessing and understanding the greater network. My ‘self’ in research is mobilised as a tool for developing modes of material-discursive analysis.

This is the core, then: using myself as a site of analytical self-reflection to piece together some of the greater assemblage, of which I am one small and transient part. I am by no means the first to

have this realisation of the essentialness of my positionality as a researcher, whilst also acknowledging the triviality of my own actions considering the scale of the greater network of things and agencies in my area of research. Autoethnography has arisen from scholarship of identity politics such as feminist theory, from which the work of posthuman scholars such as Karen Barad and Rosi Braidotti has also grown. It is therefore possible to see a trajectory in which using the self as a site of experience and knowledge can transcend a 'self-centred' position to a more open view of more-than-human identities and agencies, and this transition is made possible through a great degree of reflection and acknowledging the larger assemblage.

Part of my difficulty in doing the research has resulted from reading around lots of theories with similar ideas about how people, things and phenomena assemble together, but which give different weight to parts of that assemblage. Just as autoethnography prioritises the experience of the human, new materialism emphasises the impersonal affect of things, ANT emphasises non-human agency, phenomenology emphasises those beings with perceptual faculties, theories of affect emphasise how people register the non-representational, relational ontology emphasises the transient points of connection within the assemblage. While it may not ever be possible to view the assemblage from a position of total neutrality, in each case, by turning one's attention to one component, it makes it hard to remember what else is going on in a vibrant social world, and how else the thing we are looking at might be understood. In every assemblage, or network, the weighting will be different, and it will be in flux as circumstances, actions and attitudes change, specifically because any mode of knowing the assemblage is perspectival.

What I hope this thesis demonstrates is a way to connect these parts: it is possible to productively shift the focus between various theoretical focal points and subjectivities. It also demonstrates why I can't name the theoretical 'smush' I have enacted (as I have become fond of calling it). I wouldn't want the selection of words to give undue weight to the 'auto' over the 'thing', the 'graphy' instead of the 'ology', just as I wouldn't want to overemphasise the 'me', the 'they', or the 'thing'. Neither can I propose hermetic conclusions to some of the questions the research has raised. Instead, I have summarised what I believe is the value of my exploratory attempts.

To offer a gesture to the kinds of statements about 'transferability' and 'replicability' that are conventionally found at this point in a PhD thesis, and which I feel pressure to acknowledge at this point in my academic career, there exist many avenues for further research going forward. There is opportunity for greater ontological investigation into the relation between terminology, materiality and making, particularly in organisational systems such as catalogues. Seeking what agencies and relations exist also questions what, and why, others might be absent. This study has

not given sufficient enquiry to issues such as the socio-economic privilege or lack of diversity prevalent among the predominantly white, male, European, human actors in the relational assemblages of photobook production. I could perform a similar methodology to enquire into the economic opportunities and felt experiences of people in less dominant groups who do, or do not, make photobooks because of factors such as availability of resources or opportunity. Where my research has mainly addressed national libraries and practitioners working in capital cities, I could restage my photobook research in smaller, more localised contexts, such as inquiring what photobooks/artists' books do and why for creative networks in the North East, to build a more detailed picture of how these objects operate in less centralised geographies and institutions. However, the outcomes of re-enacting this methodology in new contexts would necessarily be different because this mode of inquiry is so entangled with its object/subject. I could redirect my personalised mode of experiencing, interviewing and knowing to another kind of cultural artefact, by asking questions such as, what other kinds of affective encounter take place between people and creative products, or what is the agency of a painting hanging on the wall of an art museum, or a CD, or the pantomime at the Theatre Royal. "Wishy Washy" floats into my head, which is what this conclusion is becoming. Above all, I will continue seeking new ways to explore my commitment to revaluing historically devalued forms of knowledges and knowledge-making that this thesis has embraced.

So, to close this chapter, what I have learned most is to assert the validity of my subjective experience in putting things together and making knowledges about the world. Subjectivity is not a subtext, but rather the integral, intra-active frame of relational understanding. If all we can know is our own perceptual experiences, then I will endeavour to pay close attention to what I experience, to broaden the scope of what and who comes into my field of perception, to look sideways and beyond, to talk around, to think with and through, as I have done with photobooks and as I look forward to continuing with other exciting kinds of slippery thing. I will let a previous, more lucid version of myself that made this note in my notebook have the final word:

**Here are some different ways of knowing things. (Via one kind of thing-photobook.)
It's not total, there are infinitely more, but here are some ideas and insights I've come up with. A small gesture to point out existing parameters and open up our outlook towards possible ways of conceptualising the world.**

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Appendix A: Index of journal entries (MS1)

Journal vol.	Page	Date	Topic
I	1-10	09/11/2018	Paris Photo 2018
I	11	22/11/2018	Today on Instagram
I	12	30/11/2018	Lunch with Brandei Estes
I	13,14	30/11/2018	Dinner with David Solo
I	14-21	13/12/2018	Meeting with Jennifer Reeves, NAL
I	22,23	13/12/2018	Lunch with Simon Fleury, tea with Martin Barnes, both V&A
I	24	14/12/2018	Mark Duffy, 'Brexit is Your Fault'
I	26,27	19/12/2018	TJ Boulting/Trolley Books Christmas Party
I	28	20/12/2018	Photographers who cite <i>The Americans</i> by Robert Frank as an 'epiphany' or similar
I	29	05/01/2019	Northern Bridge writing retreat
I	30	19/01/2019	Chester Beatty Library, Dublin
I	31,32,33	26/01/2019	<i>Diaristic Photobooks</i> display Tate Modern
I	34	30/01/2019	Sid Motion Gallery finissage
I	34,35,36	31/01/2019	Photofusion 'long table' discussion on competitions and support
I	37,38,39,40	05/03/2019	Susan Meiselas talk, Courtauld Institute
I	41,42	06/03/2019	Book encounter - 'you can call him another man' Maria Kapajeva
I	43	07/03/2019	Opening of Deutsche Boerse Prize 2019
I	44,45	08/03/2019	Coffee with Maria Kapajeva to talk about 'you can call him another man'
I	45,46,47	09/03/2019	Visit to Lewis Bush home and studio (with Mark, collaborator)
I	47	10/03/2019	Mark's issues with 'Brexit' project for FORMAT
I	48-62	14/03/2019	Maison Francaise Oxford: Photobook conference
I	62-69	17/03/2019	FORMAT Festival Derby inc book fair; Kassel Book Dummy Award
I	69,70	21/03/2019	Reflecting on freelance translating - surrealist photobooks of the 1920s
I	70	26/03/2019	Lewis B photo workshops - narrative and storytelling
I	71	07/04/2019	TPG course: 'building a story: curating images for books and essays'
I	72	10/04/2019	Searching Tate library catalogue online
I	73	12/04/2019	Social meeting with Jessie Bond
I	74,75	14/04/2019	Martin Parr 'Only Human' at NPG
I	76,77,78	17/04/2019	Recent reflections
I	79	25/04/2019	Loose Joints book launch/1 day exhibition
I	80	26/04/2019	Dinner with Karen McQuaid, curator TPG
I	81,82	01/05/2019	PV Eamonn Doyle at Michael Hoppen
I	83	02/05/2019	PV 'Moving the Image' Camberwell and Deutsche Boerse prizegiving

I	84,85	17/05/2019	Photo London 2019
I	86,87,88	18/05/2019	Peckham 24, other events
I	89,90,91	19/05/2019	Offprint London 2019
I	92	29/05/2019	LCC Degree show
I	93	11/06/2019	Talk @ Centre for Visual Arts and Culture, Durham uni
I	94	13/06/2019	Nan Goldin - Ballad of Sexual Dependency at Tate
I	95,96	15/06/2019	Interview with Lewis Bush
I	97-101	17/06/2019	Studio visit with Esther Teichmann
I	102-105	18/06/2019	Interview with Daria Tuminas
I	105-111	18/06/2019	Interview with Jennifer Reeves
I	111-117	24/06/2019	London Centre for Book Arts bookmaking summer school
I	118-122	03/07/2019	Les Rencontres d'Arles 2019
II	1,2,3,4	06/07/2019	Les Rencontres d'Arles 2019
II	5	13/07/2019	Photo Ireland
II	5,6,7,8	18/07/2019	History of Art Books talk at Sothebys
II	8,9	10/08/2019	Women in Photography trip to Hastings
II	9,10	12/08/2019	Reading Trolleyology
II	11	13/08/2019	Hannah Watson interview
II	12,13,14,15,16	30/07/2019	Irene Gonzalez, Sothebys
II	17,18,19,20,21	02/08/2019	Duncan Wooldridge interview
II	22	12/09/2019	Read that Image interview at their studio in Dublin
II	23,24,25	19/09/2019	10x10 interview at Unseen
II	26,27,28,29	23/09/2019	Deirdre Donohue, NYPL
II	29,30,31,32,33	24/09/2019	Corina Reynolds interview, Center for Book Arts
II	34	24/09/2019	Interview with Lesley Martin, Aperture offices
II	35	24/09/2019	Richard Grosbard collection visit
II	36,37	25/09/2019	David Strettell Dashwood Books
II	38,39	25/09/2019	Tony White interview
II	40,41	25/09/2019	Datz Press talk, NYPL
II	42,43,44	26/09/2019	Meeting with Tate Shaw
II	45,46,47	26/09/2019	Meeting with Joan Lyons
II	48,49	27/09/2019	Ken Fox interview
II	50,51	30/09/2019	Talking with Dan G about exhibition, liminal spaces of redrafting in curating/bookmaking
II	51,52,53,54	05/10/2019	Reading Sophie Calle for the first time
II	55	06/10/2019	'Today on Instagram' BJP advert for 'new exhibitions and photobooks' showing similar appetite for the two; yet text still 'what they were about'
II	55,56,57	06/10/2019	Reflecting on AMS/NY fieldwork
II	57,58	17/10/2019	Book fairs this weekend; seeing Astrid and reflecting on how we have moved through photo sector in a few short years
II	59,60,61,62	20/10/2019	BOP Bristol
II	63,64,65	06/11/2019	Paris Photo 2019

II	65,66	13/11/2019	TPG Patrons book club; literature, my first love
II	67	14/11/2019	Esther Teichman's 'portfolio' launch - special edition with bits and pieces
II	68	02/12/2019	Meeting with Moritz and Daria RE market project v3; language of production, English as dominant, non-English speakers must make extra decisions; books with photos 'becoming' photobooks latterly
II	69,70	10/12/2019	Picture books and wordless picture books
II	71,72	14/01/2020	alternative photography criticism
II	73	21/01/2020	Sarah Allen interview
II	74,75,76,77	21/01/2020	The Rothko Room at Tate Modern - aesthetic and emotional experience, practices of looking, visitor observation
II	77,78	24/01/2020	Radiolab episode on 'things' - Berkley experiment about placing a higher financial worth on things we own than things we do not yet possess; our ownership imbues a thing with some kind of essence so it becomes more valuable/meaningful
II	78	30/01/2020	Celine Marchbank interview
II	79,80	n/d	Art licks launch, reading the PhotoBook Review (Campany, Chiochetti), reading Drucker and Zimmerman on artist's books (isn't it funny how you have things for ages but don't read them until just the right moment) reading J-L thesis and relating to convos about artist's book in NY
II	81	30/01/2020	Celine cont (missed pages)
II	82-89	31/01/2020	NAL, reading <i>Illa</i> and <i>Reconstrucción</i>
II	90-96	06/02/2020	Martin Parr in Tate Britain library
II	97	24/02/2020	TPG Bookclub, reconnecting with Martin Steininger, Ivan Klima - 'visual' literature, rhythm of book weaves through different images, recouring back to the same progressing themes much like a photobook
II	97,98	26/02/2020	Reflecting on making - 1 year on since Mark and I were designing collage book 'Brexit is Your Fault'
II	99-103	02/03/2020	The London Library - thinking, reading, writing in diverse spaces; finding books in the idiosyncratic stacks
II	103-108		This Equals That encounter
II	108-109		Photobook Breakfast by Anastasia Samoylova
II	110		Photobooks and the covid crisis lockdown

Appendix B: Interviewee Affiliations (MS2)

Name(s)	Position/Affiliation
Sarah Allen	Assistant Curator, International Art at Tate.
Lewis Bush	Photographer.
Deirdre Donohue	Assistant Director, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs, New York Public Library.
Vinny Gregan and Kasia Kaminska	Artists and founders of Read that Image (RTI), a design studio and photobook making workshop.
Ken Fox	Head of Library and Archives, George Eastman Museum.
Russet Lederman and Michael Lang	Russet is Co-Founder of 10x10 Photobooks. Michael is Co-Director of 10x10 Photobooks.
Lesley Martin	Creative Director, Aperture Foundation.
Celine Marchbank	Artist. Celine is also a lecturer in Photography at Falmouth University and London College of Communication (UAL).
Jennifer Reeves	Librarian, National Art Library. Jen is in charge of photobooks in the NAL.
Corina Reynolds	Executive Director, Center for Book Arts, New York.
David Solo	Collector, independent writer and researcher, and patron focused on artist and photo books and related art.
Daria Tuminas	Curator, writer and educator; formerly head of Unseen Book Market and Unseen Dummy Award at Unseen Amsterdam.
Hannah Watson	Director, Trolley Books and T.J. Boulting.
Tony White	University Librarian at OCAD University in Toronto. At the time of interview, Tony was the Florence and Herbert Irving Associate Chief Librarian of the Watson Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Duncan Wooldridge	Artist, writer, curator and course director for BA (Hons) Fine Art Photography at Camberwell College of Art.

Appendix C: Example Consent Form

Relating encounters with the contemporary photobook (working title)

PhD Researcher: Briony Anne Carlin

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

1.	I have read and understood the information about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	Select only one of the following:	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I do not want my name and position used in this project • Please use an alternative name and position for me (write name here) <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> 	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would like my name and position used and understand that what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised. 	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participant (sign and print name): _____

Participant position: _____

Researcher (sign and print name): _____

DATE: _____

Appendix D: Thinking photobooks via aerodynamics (auto-ethnographic engagement with theory; John Law)

This text is a 'praxiographic' illustration – 'showing-method-through-practice' – that profiles in more detail a single ANT study by John Law, which has been foundational to my own study of the photobook. Law's micro-interrogation of a 1950s aircraft wing's design (2002) employs ANT to aid the study of heterogeneity as an expression of complexity, something that is 'not pure or clean or homogeneous but carries what is different within'. Law's ANT approach is embedded within his writing, serving as a useful example of how ANT principles become naturalised into the researcher's treatment of actors and actants. The study of the aircraft wing is a vehicle for exploring and demonstrating different complexities of heterogeneity surrounding an object and its network of connections. It uses detailed analyses of several historic texts to theorise the related factors and connections contributing to the wing's design, including the brochure describing the wing's aerodynamic functioning and government white papers as well as documents outlining the requirements of military aircraft.

The focus of Law's enquiry is a formalism found in the brochure that aims to reduce the object of the wing and its operation to a mathematical expression. Each algebraic symbol of the formalism signifies an element of the wing's design. Law considers each element individually, neatly revealing diverse chains of connections that are implicated in each factor and articulates what is lost or gained through its simplistic reduction to a semiotic expression. In this way, he reflects on the complexities of what is present and absent in the wing and the formalism of its design. Heterogeneity, as Law argues, lies in the oscillation between absence and presence (Law 2002:12): understanding how something can be many things at once depends upon thinking divergently about what is and isn't obvious in a phenomenon.

Law frames these 'heterogeneities' as a series of expressions. The first, 'heterogeneity/simplicity' reflects upon how a complicated assemblage of variable meanings and actions (the wing shape, air flow and angle of attack when in flight) are simplified into the brief phrase *lift slope* in the formalism. *Lift slope* is accepted at face value because it is not possible to recall the many complex variables that the term signifies at all times of its discussion, recanting Latour's instruction of 'localising the global' in focusing upon areas of relations instead of a trying to perceive the 'meta' picture, enabling a closer analysis of a particular site than would be possible in an overarching survey (Latour 2005). For the purpose of this study, we could equate *lift slope* to *images*: if printed reproductions of photographs are an essential component of a photobook, they are also a surface signifier of a more complex relationship between distribution of ink and

colour and the form and gradation of the images being reproduced, as well as what is being represented.

The remainder of the expressions of heterogeneity evoke notions such as materiality, otherness, noncoherence and time as factors in the processes of designing, testing and piloting the aircraft, all of which are much more sophisticated than the formalism can convey. For example, the discussion of the term *gust response* expresses the aircraft's technical capabilities but fails to consider the material consequences of its efficiency in the real-world experience of the pilot's sweat, nausea and discomfort. This also factors into an expression of the craft's technical performance because it affects the aircrew's embodied capacity to concentrate on piloting the plane. 'Otherness' is a necessary antithesis that things are designed against, or to counteract. Law demonstrates through evidence from government papers that the shape of the wing has been designed to function most effectively at high speeds and at a low level, because enemy missiles from Russian military are most proficient at targeting higher altitude aircraft, meanwhile the decision about the number of engines was compromised between cost of production and cost of lethality. This is a good example of the 'flat' ANT approach, because it presents military policy, the value it places upon pilot safety and the yet more Othered concept of fear and the cultural resonance of the Cold War all to be equilateral absent presences in the wing design. Comparative 'others' that are implicated in the photobook could be extraneous financial circumstances that influenced the choice of printer made by the book's producer, if the publication of a similar book forced its producer to change its image format to retain greater originality, or developments in the pigments in inks that could be brought together under the terms such as 'budget', 'print schedule' or 'available materials'.

Law continues to a final, equally abstracted conception of heterogeneity of deferral, which theorises the design of the wing is subject to deferral in its dependence upon something other than the present circumstances of the design process. For example, the wing's designers considered several different options for its shape when designing the wing in the studio. The final shape was decided upon the condition that it would satisfy testing in the wind tunnel, which took place in a different time and place. The wing design therefore involves differences that are deferred, of relations that are still to come and have still to be made (Derrida 1976). These differences involve a displacement of time: an oscillatory distribution between the present/now and the absent/future. Within the printed images of a photobook exists a deferral to several rounds of test printing, colour matching and technical adjustments to the printing equipment. More prominently, as mentioned, the printed image also contains a deferral to the content of the photograph: the things, people or places it indexes would exist far beyond the reality of the

book as it is experienced in the present, whether temporally, geographically or otherwise, but in the experience of the images, new associations will be made in the mind of the reader.

When considering the photobook through the lens of Law's project, an example of an absent presence in the printed image of a photobook could be the smell of the ink with which it is printed: it may have a pleasant or unpleasant smell, which could result from the quality of the ink, the paper, or a combination of both. The smell produced by the ink could evoke the experience of a glossy magazine, or an old book, which extend the experience of reading the book to worlds beyond its present experience but are still a constitutive factor of the encounter.

Having outlined the complexities inherent in the wing's design, Law reflects on the design process itself. The English Electric brochure of the wing summarises the design process as one of "obtaining the best combination of a large number of variables each one of which reacts on many of the others." Law criticises this "best combination of variables", which in fact trades off cost against lethality, or an optimum combination of weapons from a government statement, because of its concern to deal in different kinds of 'technical and social' materials, centring, handling and managing them with a 'characteristic modernist lack of concern with things in themselves.' By simplifying and bringing together materials in this privileged way, this modernist view of the design process excludes the complexities of heterogeneity, chance and decision-making, as well as obscuring important political subjectivities.

Law's study argues a contrary view, that the stability and form of artefacts must be seen in a more nuanced way:

Instead, we need to hold on to the idea that the agent – the "actor" of the "actor-network" is an agent, a centre, a planner, a designer, only to the extent that matters are also decentered, unplanned, undesigned.

(2002, p. xx)

The ANT perspective that views everything as connected and acting upon every other thing allows Law to divergently connect immeasurable factors such as political fear, the physical sensations of pilots and a dependence upon future activities such as wind tunnel testing, but crucially there is no particular rationale governing these networks; rather they are self-maintaining systems. His study is effective because it excavates connections beyond the predictable networks of professional relations or intellectual influence. Finally, Law establishes the design process as a heterogeneous one, with no centre, that relies upon tension and oscillation between what is present on the one hand and what is absent but also present on the other. He reasons that heterogeneity is only recognised from a place of homogeneity – of limitations, management and control. This can be interpreted to say that even though ANT avoids

engagement with perceived societal structures, it is impractical to actively ignore structures that exist, (such as 'governments have military agendas') as these are the frameworks within which a more creative, critical line of enquiry is formed. The lesson for my project here, and the novelty of applying ANT to my chosen field, is that to learn more profoundly about photobook experiences, production practices and economy, I should look beyond existing conventional frameworks and take a more inquisitive view that does not privilege institutional prestige over less renowned actants.

Law's reduction of engineering technology to abstract concepts such as trial and error, fear and corporeal sensation demonstrates how many kinds of agency can be traced from a seemingly sterile, inanimate starting point provides a structured perspective through which to consider more broadly the networks implicated in the photobook art object. When relating to an art object, it offers a system through which to excavate further layers of people, things and events that are implicated in the superficial engagement with the thing itself. I responded to this study both in terms of its intellectual inquiry, but also because of the visual way in which Law unfolds his argument through the metaphor of the formalism.

Much of this analysis, rooted in ANT, sheds light on the design process of the wing through imagining the phenomenal experience of testing and piloting the aircraft. Law begins with what is documented about the wing, including its key characteristics and circumstantial necessities of its engineering process. The forensic detail and divergent questioning of Law's material-semiotic ANT could combine very effectively with phenomenological sensibilities: his analysis could be enhanced with a greater phenomenological inquiry into what it is like to pilot an aircraft or work within aerodynamics at the time of the Cold War, through interviewing others about their lived experiences, or the researcher attending a lesson on aerodynamic engineering. Therefore, by applying them both to my pursuit of knowledge production about the photobook, my thesis will demonstrate the benefits of integrating these two disparate approaches.

My phenomenological enquiry of photobook encounters parallels Law's use of the formalism as a platform from which to explore different pathways along the network. In a mode similar to Barad's 'agential cut', Law isolates different elements of the formalism and uses them to direct his questioning of what is and is not implicated in that element. Interrogating the material encounters of myself and others with photobooks will lead me to identify and theorise how different agencies are connecting and constructing a view of photobook production, use and affect.

Appendix E: Holding, headache ... a phenomenology of book-looking (auto-ethnographic engagement with theory; Karen Barad)

23rd October 2020

I'm sitting in an office chair at a desk in an office in the Armstrong building, holding my hands in front of my face. I'm trying not to think about how red and squiggly my palms look in the warm central-heated room. I'm staring straight at my hands, or the space just in front of my hands, which are tilted slightly away from me, sides of palms touching, with my arms folded in close to my body. It occurs to me that anybody glancing through the window might think I'm mad. I'm reading an invisible book.

Not invisible, because it's not see-through material. Not imaginary either, because I'm not imagining any *specific* book. Rather, I'm trying to picture the act of book-looking.

Without a physical book to distract me, I'm trying to take in all the extraneous stimuli that are impacting my proto-encounter.

I keep lowering my hands to the keyboard to type, then reassume the position.

My posture is actually a little unbalanced, my legs are crossed, I uncross them.

The light is falling unevenly across my hands from the window to my left, the ridges of my fingers and the palm of my left hand in shadow. There is a hum of the radiator, and a niggling self-consciousness of being observed in this daft exercise. Even in a single occupancy office, I've got performance anxiety about looking like I'm 'working'.

As soon as I pick up a book, all of these things are still there (apart from, I feel a bit less daft to have a physical object in my hands). The book has added to them: my body has slightly relaxed because my arms are no longer waving in the air, but are counterweighted by the mass of the book pressing into them. My fingers feel first the soft, imitation calfskin cover of my notebook, then the brittle, plastic texture of a library book cover, which crackles as I open the spine. I'm not even looking *at* the books at this point. I'm looking at the phenomenon of the *holding* of a book.

There's something I've been feeling lately, about books and bodies, which I think has partly come out of the constraint of lockdown. When I hold a book, or I even think about holding a book, I think not of new spaces, imaginative and literal, opening up with each page. Instead, I think **hunch**. Not the word hunch, but an embodied feeling akin to a hunched, bunched up posture, everything drawn in and confined within the intimate space of holder and held. It's more that I think of a book, and I *feel* an expression of this spatial relation.

I think about the boundary between book and body in this relation. I have picked up a book, I wanted a photobook but I don't have one here so I've opened any old one to a page with a

picture. As I hold the book and look at the picture, a photograph of a cabinet containing a kind of doll, two dolls, 'poppet' I read, *museum of witchcraft*. I am looking at the picture and I am not thinking how, I am a person and this is a book, or this is a picture in a book. I am not thinking about where the carbon-based stuff of my skin ends and the carbon-based stuff of the laminated paper-based book cover begins. What I am, and what the book is, is a closed channel of perceptual interaction. The book is sending me verbal and visual data. The environment is sending me other kinds of sensory data. Energy is being exerted by me, holding the book, and by the light source above me, so that I may see the visual data, and by the radiator beside me, giving heat and a low *huuurrrhhhhruh* hollow noise. All is situated and related in a flow of happening and exchange. In this moment, I am not other to the book, the picture, the information, the chair that is supporting me: it is not a question of 'I' because I'm not thinking 'I'. 'I' is also poppet is also *huuurrrhh* is also brightness is also holding. For a split second, this is the configuration of stuff and energy and matter and meaning that exists. For a second after, when I close the book and lay it on the desk (eyes notice: where, paper everywhere, place on top, messy look) and then the minute that follows, different configurations are taking place as I articulate this momentary relation by writing by typing into a keyboard where buttons index letters which correspond to a system of signification known as language.

Looking back over the past few lines where I described something I had just done, but had finished doing, in the present tense, the thinking part of 'I' thinks the word *artifice*. *Auto-ethnography*, *authenticity*. A quote from an article pops into my head. A dull ache arrives and announces itself from behind, inside my front right temple.

Appendix F: Fumbling in Another Black Darkness (auto-ethnographic text about photobook encounters)

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 girl's face peers out from the shadowy box lining, watching 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. Exhibition exhibitionism, versus the book as personal peephole. Does sex in art have to shock? Am I shocked? Not exactly, 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. Verging on pornographic, but far from sordid, it unfolds its sexual 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 severity and orderliness of the packaging following the abandon between its sheets. I return it to the counter wrapped in its brown paper parcel, amused by the eyebrows that would raise. *'One for the top shelf'*, I think. My prudish blush surprises me as the librarian meets my eye. *'Because it is small, and light of weight and lifts with ease; small things at the top, space efficiency: that is the sensible way of ordering things'*, my curator-brain rejoinders.

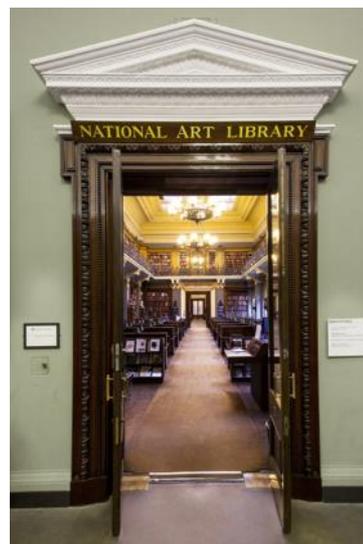
Weeks later, at home, my own copy nestles pristine in its padded envelope. Fresh from Japan, its sultry pages have yet to give up their darkness inside.

(September 2018)

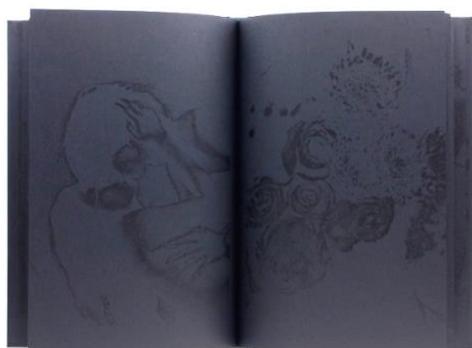


Reflecting on experience

The preceding passage describes an encounter with a photobook I had requested to view in the National Art Library (NAL), written from detailed diaristic notes of everything that came into my head as I experienced the book. I had first seen it at Offprint book fair the previous May (“it was too busy, too fluorescent. The book fair is so very public”) and been intrigued by its materials: black ink on black paper. It is by female Japanese photographer Sakiko Nomura, whose work is typified by intimate, sensual photographs of flowers, interiors and nudes. The content of this book is no departure from her usual subjects, however it is entirely different in materiality. In fact, *Another Black Darkness* (2016), published by Akio Nagasawa, is a reimagining of an earlier book, *Black Darkness* (2008). What distinguishes it from Nomura’s earlier work is that the photographs have been solarised before printing in the unusual combination of black on black. Specifically, it is the material production that caught my attention.



However, 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. 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. Despite its grandeur, the NAL is somewhere I feel comfortable now (but it wasn’t always – now I feel secure in my habitus as ‘arts professional’). 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 book asks me about myself ... leaning towards the windowpane to throw light on the darkened erotic images, I am complicit in the act”

The materiality of the book was agential in affecting my embodied response because it provoked my physical participation, altering my normal posture in order to see the erotic images. The construction thus invited the response of active physical engagement, fostering a closer sensual link between the book and myself. Meanwhile, in a manner similar to photo-elicitation, 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 could identify and relate to what the book was representing despite its sparing depiction. The book did not make me feel aroused; my discomfort was more that it seemed peculiar to have such personal recollections whilst wearing a work lanyard. Even more peculiar when the book demanded that I make such odd and conspicuous shapes craning my arms and neck to look at what I was looking at. It made me break with social convention and the coded behaviours of sitting up straight and still in the Library, and this made me yet more self-conscious of my own body in the encounter.

“it’s ok to put Egon Schiele on the wall ... slapped across the RA”

There was, at the time of writing, a forthcoming exhibition of Egon Schiele at the Royal Academy that was being advertised in the South Kensington tube station and connecting underpass. I would have undoubtedly seen the posters while travelling to work that day because I remember thinking of this artist reputed for his sexually-charged



Nobuyoshi Araki, *Mythology*, 2001.
Source: Sansiao Gallery

illustration as I sat, self-conscious, looking at the book in the NAL. I contrived half a homonym between “RA” and “arse” because I wanted to convey the affront I felt looking at some works by Schiele, compared to the gradual, sucking in seduction of this book that unfolded hermeneutically with my experience the longer I engaged with it. My recollection was, in fact, that the portrayal of sexuality in this book was more intimate and sensual than Schiele’s explosive and scratchy figures; obscuring the sexual act



Egon Schiele, *Seated Female Nude, Elbows Resting on Right Knee*, 1914. Source: The Albertina Museum, Vienna

through its printing, and sequencing it amongst floral imagery replaced objectification with poetic allusion.

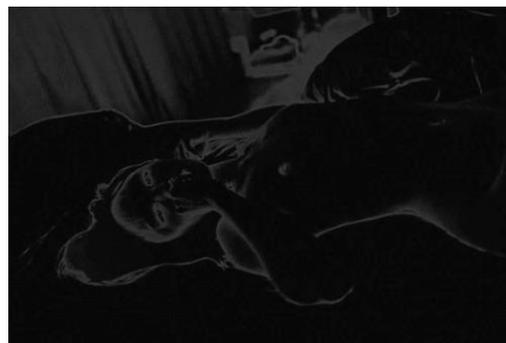
Nomura worked for many years as assistant to Nobuyoshi Araki, famed for his erotic photographs. The portrayal of sex in the works of Araki and Schiele are not too dissimilar: women's bodies are distorted through expressive foreshortening, they are fetishized and bound, passive, bending over or spreading their legs, faces that gaze out of the image with coyness or boredom, resigned to their objectification. Nomura's nudes, more frequently men, are actively absorbed in their own pleasure, yet while her gaze may be that of the voyeur, her camera does not suggest a spectacle but rather a desire to share in their intimacy. Nomura's books share Araki's tendency to intersperse nudes with botanical subjects, interiors and quiet images of quotidian street life, but her treatment of these subjects is distinct. Araki shoots streetscapes as empty, slightly seedy alleyways, still lifes are lusty fruit, with targeted, unflinching sharp focus and high contrast. Nomura's book works sequence nudes alongside softer nocturnal city views, flowers and occasionally, innocently, portraits of children, photographed with a sensitive and lyrical aesthetic that suggests the close, quiet moments in life.



Sakiko Nomura, *Nude / A Room / Flowers*, 2012

The comparison between this book, Araki and my spontaneous mental recollection of the works of Schiele could be written up to be quite a scholarly and considered comparative visual analysis about gaze and the female figure, the traumas of the biographies of the two male artists that influenced their portrayals of sex, perhaps seeking some pseudo-psychoanalytical subtext. Writing about the book in this alternative way enabled me to reflect more profoundly upon my encounter and tease out the moments these connections were made and inspect them for the coincidences they contain. I could otherwise have attributed these thoughts to the dominant narrative of male 'master' photographer influencing the (female) assistant/protégée, compounded by what was really a coincidence with tube advertising.

Spurred on by the intricacy of my encounter with this book, I could go further in my research: contacting the artist and comparing the affects of *Black Darkness* and *Another Black Darkness* perhaps; I could delve deeper into the work of the book's designer Satoshi Machiguchi, or show it to others and compare their responses. Or I could test out other books of sensitive



or controversial content, sitting in the same spot, with the same consciousness of public performance; but perhaps I would become desensitised to my task. I read Nomura recounting 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”⁶⁹. I doubt a private bedroom encounter with *Another Black Darkness* would be quite as complicated as my public and professional one.

(August 2019)

⁶⁹ <https://www.thekitab.in/photobook-Interviews/Sakiko-Nomura-Book-is-the-secret-relationship-I-have-with-my-audience/> date of access 12 August 2019.

Appendix G: *Threefold*, poems about interiority (auto-ethnographic text about photobook encounters)

Hidden Islam haiku

Hiding a secret
Denial dulls the surface
Oppressed, vivid within.

Reconstruction/Illa

These books hold violence
An end folding inwards
Implosion is a sucking in force

Drawing in deeper
Nestled in the fold
The creased core is hurt

The fold conceals and protects;
The fold is a passion aggression expression.
Folding to shield, folding to shun.

The Restoration Will

It came from a destruction
Handing muddy mourning through the threshold
Seeing the present through the past
Uncovering grief
An unearthing of sad treasure
Little opening is hope.

Appendix H: Photobook fair diaries (auto-ethnographic text about photobook encounters)

Offprint, Paris, November 2018.

Inside, it was very warm. My feet were wet and my legs steamed damply with the rain and the rainwater that slid off my umbrella. I looked about for the entrance and was disgruntled by the sign announcing a 4€ entrance fee. And for what, this one small room? It was not anything like what I had in mind.

After a few minutes of skirting around this small room, barely two dozen desks, I felt foolish as I pushed through into an actually quite enormous and lavishly ornate central hall. The *École des Beaux Arts* lived up to its name then – and what a throng! How to even get in! Four, no five aisles with tables either side, people everywhere, music blaring from somewhere but all that reached me was a tinny whine and a bass beat. We pushed on in and roamed a couple of aisles before I recognised anything that interested me; it seemed *Offprint Paris* had a substantial appetite for indie French language critical theory.

We stopped at a table and I looked at a book about bees. I liked it. My companion muttered to me that he could never consider buying a book from an ‘emerging artist’ wearing a Rolex. We pushed on. I failed to engage. Bodies, so many bodies, pushing through the throng, and by the time we reached a table we often realised there was nothing for us there, and had to make a similarly pushy retreat to reach the next. We continued on like this for half an hour. We saw acquaintances across the room, we could not reach them. It was too busy. I sweated in my wet garments. We soon went back out in the rain. We would return the in a couple of days, earlier in the day, for a much more successful visit including two purchases.

Offprint, London, May 2019.

When I entered the cavernous Turbine Hall I took myself as usual up onto the passageway that floats above the fair. I looked down on the neat rows of tables, the only orderly figure in the view over piles of books, piles of paper, paper spilling out of boxes, and people. People weaving through the tables, people between the tables in the off-limits spaces between the rows of tables, people standing, people sitting, the hubbub of their chatter rising and

resounding with an echo. A rummaging shuffling mass of people and paper. Echoing and impenetrable as I remembered it, if a little less busy than the previous year.

The time is creeping on, it's late Saturday afternoon and the exhibitors have been here since 11. I pick out individual tables from my bird's eye view and I can see the bare spaces of black tablecloth on some of them. Things perhaps have been selling and selling fast, or there hasn't been time to replenish stock. I decide it's as good a time as ever to head in.

A t-shirted helper hands me a large piece of folded light blue card. High gsm in a millennial colour, they have splashed out on a substantial, if slightly impractically sized map this year. I stop before the start of the rows of tables, jostled by a family exiting and a couple pushing in past me. I look up at the scenes of conversation and transaction going on before me and take a look again at my map. It's not a map though, it's a programme advertising other LUMA events and exhibitions taking place in France over the summer. The exhibitor map is a flimsy sheet of A4 paper inside the fold. It's not much help anyway, tiny text under fluorescent lighting is hard to read and it's not as if I'm looking for something or someone specific.

I start with a slow walk through all the tables. An acclimatisation if you will. People line the aisles and cluster around each publisher's stall. It's easy to move along the middle but the middle is not why we're here. To look at the books, I have to duck around backs, anticipate who will move away so I can approach a table. So I walk up and down the aisles instead, taking in the peculiar metallic tang of the noise of talking that bounces back at me off the walls. It is simultaneously a hollow noise, and a bodied noise. It emanates sharply from mouths and throats, clatters off plastic and metal, is muffled in cloth and paper, and echoes off unforgiving architecture. Dialogue is not discernible in the throng of accents, languages, laughter and the tone of the hard sell.

Weaving through the busy-ness of business being done, I am feasting on the overwhelming spread of colour, the typographic picnic without taking any particular books in my hands. Eventually, inevitably, I must dive in and pick some up, squeezing in at a stall when a gap opens. The first few I pick up, fondle absently, feeling without properly focusing my mind on what I'm holding. I'm acclimatising, still. Then I start to look more attentively and make remarks on what is humorous, novelty. Warming up. Finally, the critic in me wakes up and decides, with enthusiasm, that something is derivative, something is dull, but I'm riddled with social anxiety and voice my opinions *mi-voix*, that might be the artist sat there, you never know.

The expectation in the look of the publisher with nobody at her table... I drift over... I drift away. Is it because nothing caught my eye or because her gaze on my looking would have been too intent? The publishers are under economic pressure to break even. I am under my own emotional pressure to 'perform' at researching. I see so many people I have met once or more. Of course I don't say hello to because I believe they won't remember meeting me. Social anxiety rockets through the roof.

It is only when I relax into the environment that I start enjoying the books, too. A bit of small talk with one publisher and I suddenly find my curiosity stirred by his energetic overview of the looseleaf boxed 'book' he is showing me. It's taken a good half an hour to loosen my tongue and my responses.

Nevertheless I find myself more drawn to conducting a detailed survey of the varying quality of publishers' tote bags than the photobooks. Am I shirking a professional agenda, or is this a valid observation? Am I simply oversaturated, already?

I withdraw to my balcony once more. It's above the pop up bar and I smell beer cans frothing as they open. From here I can survey the kingdom of alternative publishing. In the centre there is a seating area of millennial pastel foam wedges. The kind we would use for propping up pictures in the museum store. But apparently these fleshy flecked colours are all the rage and the seating area actually looks more like a soft play centre for hipsters. (I can't take Offprint's aesthetic seriously – what the hell is that that flyer design that looks like a cover for R.L. Stein's *Goosebumps*?) I look sideways, still in the middle but against the wall, on the right, there are two publishers with standalone tables, quite large, of their own construction. What a primo spot. They have many friends. They must have power, but what kind? I know this publisher has said to me personally, the perennial complaint of "there's no money in books", but clearly there is some and there are other kinds of currency at play here too. The power to influence. To be recognised as influential in the industry. This is its own kind of power that attracts people to buy and talk about your wares. I have the sensation of clutching my dinner tray in the school canteen, intimidated by the tables of athletic, swishy-haired popular cliques, only here the popular kids wear black, severe haircuts, nearly all men, besides, this isn't really a memory but more a hologram of trashy coming-of-age movies I loved around that same teenage time – if I ever entered the canteen alone, I bought a takeaway sandwich. And in time enough I wise up to coping strategies for this adult social hierarchy too: I find a pal, we grab a glass of cheap wine and get down to looking at books.

Cosmos, Arles, July 2019.

It's totally by chance that we are here. I didn't even know Cosmos was at Arles this year. It was in that funny concrete courtyard place last year, where the exhibitors sweltered and slouched beneath the scant shade of the narrow verandas. That venue this year has a clinical canopy type construction and is called Temple. There's no music and no buzz. We'll go back there later.

Ten minutes ago we were sat on the edge of the fountain in Place de la Republique, not sure where to head next. I fussed over the blackberry ice cream stain on my strawberry ice cream coloured dress. Two artist acquaintances strolled by and we waved them over, they were headed here, oh we didn't even know there was a Cosmos this year?

So I was not mentally prepared to dive into books just now. I'm feeling pretty dopey from a hot afternoon of tearing around the many exhibitions of Arles. And this place is also hot (there isn't anywhere that isn't hot) but it's pretty charming, apparently it's the Toreadors' clubhouse – or whatever bullfighters are called in France. Sort of underground, 70s, quite kitsch. It tickles my taste for Hemingway. Exceedingly stuffy though. I chat briefly to a friend. I can't look at any tables – too many damp backs and bare shoulders glistening in the heat. I can't even string a multi-clausal sentence together. Multi-clausal is not the word that pops into my head at the time – this is the fallacy of recollection.

By the hum of a completely ineffectual and ancient electric fan, I notice a display of richly embellished postcards. Bullfighters! Their embroidered jerkins are picked out in gold and green thread, just like the naff postcards of flamenco dancers I cherished from childhood holidays. They have Spanish names, not local. It turns out they have been brought by the adjacent stall holder, who planned his products sympathetically to the venue. My French brain is failing me but he tells me they're all vintage, they were mostly mass-produced souvenirs, the bullfighters were bigger celebs than footballers of today! Exquisite! *Merveilleux!* They're my favourite thing I've seen today, I think guiltily, betraying all the photography that is supposed to be my passion profession. He's got some cool books too though – I am particularly entertained by a Dolly Parton colouring book. Want to look at more books. But momentary excitement has receded, concentration reduces again to monosyllables. Hot, so hot, need to get some air. Out. Sunlight. No shade.

Here it's less about the books – I hardly want to sweat all over them. I crouch against the wall and describe my research to another artist. He shows me his latest. It opens out into a million pockets. I play with the flaps and openings and become deeply absorbed on the dusty cobbled floor until my ankles wobble and thighs tire and the hardness of the floor reannounces itself and I stand up again.

Polycopies, Paris, November 2019.

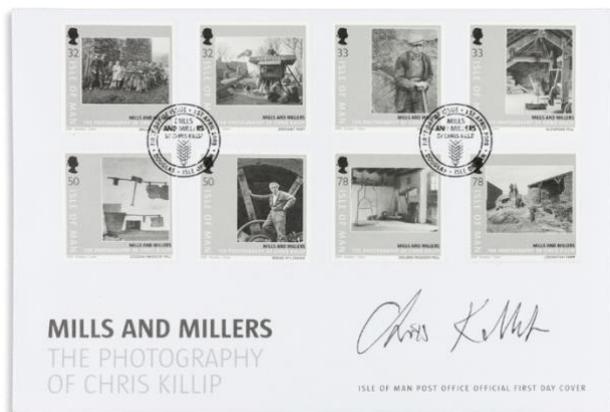
Despite carrying a cumbersome shopping bag (not mine, Mark's, but I have less of a problem toting a trendy boutique bag than him) I enjoyed looking downstairs. If I ignored the sewagey smell I could almost forget I was on a boat. I looked at nice books, had a chuckle at a publisher's ironic merchandise ('There's no money in books... so buy a tote'), had a chat. Up here though, on the upper level, I'm hating it. The two of us have been cornered by a tall and intense Scottish photographer. He's heard about my partner's work on Brexit. He's leaning over us, into us, showing us photographs of *his* work on Brexit. I have no interest in it, I don't think it's very good, I didn't ask to see it (this is what we came to Paris to get away from!) but still he swipes, thrusting the phone in our face.

Another large river tour cruises along the Seine and once again I am reminded I am on a boat. The upper, top storey level of a boat, we pitch from side to side up here with more drama than the splash of the waterline against the porthole downstairs. I'm not great on boats. I don't know how the publishers can stand to be up here – I guess they must have their sea legs. My tolerance is plummeting, I am tired. I'm feeling increasingly claustrophobic in the face of more mediocre Brexit bandwagon images, the lurching photographer and swaying deck. I politely make my excuses and escape to dry land.

Appendix I: A post-script to Chapter Six, in memoriam. (auto-ethnographic text about photobook encounters)

At the time of my latest *In Flagrante* encounter, which turned out to be just before he died, I wrote a list entitled “Things I would like to ask Chris Killip now, if only I didn’t think he’d be sick to the teeth of being asked about it”. Reading others’ warm recollections of his generosity, I realise I should have contacted him years ago, much earlier on in this project. He wasn’t inaccessible, I could easily have got in touch. Vainly, I feel disappointed I never communicated to him quite how complex a response his books have inspired in me, how I have observed responses of others, and how I’ve often wondered what he’d make of all my theorising.

I expressed a concern to a friend that my writing about *In Flagrante* would appear to co-opt the book’s powerful and humane storytelling for my own intellectual argument. Having worked with him a decade ago, she told me that Killip was not only a supremely kind man, but that he too had an interest in how images disseminate and transform. In 2009 he produced a series of stamps with his native Isle of Man postal service through which his photographs would circulate widely, providing they were dropped in a Manx post box. I was, naturally, delighted by this prospect of pushing encounters with photographs deeper into a system so reliant on organisation, and on which material communication itself is reliant.



Chris Killip, Mills and Millers 8x Stamp Collection (Sent from the Isle of Man), offset lithography, 2009. Source: Martin Parr Foundation [date accessed 27/11/20]

I pictured little black and white faces whizzing through franking machines and I wondered if one could buy them in the little folded-card format we still call a ‘book’.

I find something new every time I think, talk and write about his work. It is a tremendous, ongoing gift.