

VISUAL AND VERBAL EXPERIENCE IN PHOTO-BOOKWORKS

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An effective way to examine operational modes of photography within the book form is to study visual motifs. In terms of structure, one frequently encounters three primary approaches: Series, Narrative, and Collage. These motifs act as gears that engage the photographs and provide opportunities for (mis)aligning the visual content through the graphic structure of a bookwork. As one observes the ways that photographs operate within a context of graphic motifs that generate meaning, one may also begin to consider how the photographic images engage with one another in terms of verbal experience. The books presented in this verbal/visual essay demonstrate that whether or not a visual work is prompted with verbal language, such as clues found in titles, captions, or ephemera, a photo-bookwork employs various linguistic conventions. Each work situates itself on a trajectory of literal (or non-literal) reading that also acknowledges both its structural and perceptual processes. Within their formal contexts, photographs utilize a multitude of strategies for referencing, representing, and simulating language. These operations can be found within a single image, between two or more images, through the use of parallel narratives, text and image, and many other forms.

A survey of the intersection between visual and verbal experience can be seen to exist on a continuum that spans, horizontally, from photographs with text to photographs with no text, and, vertically, from photographs whose meaning is generated by their representational content, to photographs whose meaning is generated by a subversion of representational content.

Details of the books are shown here with numbers corresponding to brief written descriptions. Works are arranged in clusters that share similar motifs. All of the books utilize photography as a central medium and exist as an artwork in book form, to be distinguished from a catalogue, monograph, or merely a description of an artwork. Some are editioned, some are not, some books are in their second or third (or more) printing and have had a huge commercial success, while others remain undiscovered by all but a specialized audience. Some works here represent an overt evolutionary stage in a work of art following a performance-based piece, and in their use of diverse media and intentional design transcend that of mere documentation. These books achieve not only a representation of an event, but a visual configuration that activates the reader, in a parallel process of discovery and invention.

Other kinds of evolutionary expressions shown here present staging opportunities for the critical understanding of a work and its life in a social context, as with the re-constitutional strategies of the publisher Errata Editions. Taking a first-edition bookwork of great influence and educational importance that is out-of-print, Errata Editions meticulously re-photographs each page and reconstructs a replica, thus making the bookwork once again available.

Finally, over the last few years, photography-based books have enjoyed an increasing interest by the masses. This is perhaps not surprising given the recent technological innovations, such as online print-on-demand services, that make producing a book very easy. It is notable, however, that people should want to make and consume books given the availability of virtually everything on the web. Why do we need objects when their virtual doppelganger is easily consumed online? Possibly, the instant-access and non-physicality of images and information online (much of which has a very short life cycle) not only references its physical counterpart in books, but also stimulates a desire for them.

Works included in the exhibition

1 *Visible World*, Peter Fischli and David Weiss, Walther König, 2001

Journeying through *Visible World*, one moves contiguously from continent to continent by means of a grid-based structure that directs a narrative of form and color. Propelled by a lightness and quickness that overcomes any complex human experience, one goes everywhere in the visible world through proximity and variation.

2 *Album*, Hans Peter Feldman, Walther König, 2009

Comprised of a wide variety of printed media, *Album* demonstrates through its countless subjects: mug shots, bikini-clad stars, cigarette advertisements, animals, etc., the ability of a photographic archive, through the use of grids and collections, to assemble and collate objects and forms, and in their efficaciousness, carry out radical purging and reformations of visual meaning.

3 *Atlas*, Gerhard Richter, D.A.P., 1997

Atlas is an epic collection of images from newspapers, magazines, family photo albums, and painting studies, driven by the indexicality of the photograph, through which Richter pursued his idea that there are “no individual images.” The organizing principles of each sheet: series, grid, and collage allow for a work of “approximations, experiments, and beginnings, over and over again.”

4 *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, Ed Ruscha, Ed Ruscha, 1966

The serial imagery in *Every Building*, in conjunction with its structural accordion form, evokes movement from picture to picture, as one walks (or drives) down the Sunset Strip. These photographs call attention to their indexicality, turning their subjects into specimens that promote a comparison with other (un)like objects.

5 *Evidence*, Mike Mandel and Larry Sultan, D.A.P., 2003

If seriality and proximity are ingredients that promote visual movement by creating likenesses between disparate images, *Evidence* has inverted that formulation. The design of this work—a series of variably sized and proportioned photographs of varying number on each page—utilizes proximity and rhythm to stanch the expediency and formality of viewing images. One stops and lingers on the possibility and relevance of each non sequitur.

6 *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar*, Taryn Simon, Steidl, 2007

The range of non sequiturs in *American Index* harken back to the infinite possibilities found in *Atlas* or *Album*. Here the relevance of the image (with descriptive text) is pegged to the dynamism of each viewer's imagination. Through a single photographic image shown on each page, access is given to something as real as you want it to be—an index of the possible.

7 *Memories of a Dog*, Daido Moriyama, Nazraeli Press, 2004

As his eponym demonstrates, Moriyama's subjects are formal studies of interiority, i.e. maps of memories. In fact, his memories appear to be very much alive and living in the present, prone to revision with every new visual experience. On each page, a single image appears as a confrontation holding forth as icon and portal.

8 *Riding First Class on the Titanic*, Nathan Lyons, MIT Press, 2000

By inducing synergy through the parallel use of text within an image, and an image sequence structure (two photographs per opening), Lyons presents the viewer with an opportunity to make associations between discrete units of visual information that samples a dialogue form. To a viewer activated in this way, one's experience of places, things and events in time becomes a form of reading and re-reading.

9 *Ozone Alert*, John Wood, Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1996

Elegiac in form, tone, and rhythm, the viewer is presented with a singular sequence of landscape images from post-accident Three-Mile Island overlaid with the names of indigenous birds. The structural relationship of image and text signifies a surrogate identity of creatures whose lives in absentia continue to bear witness to a traumatic act.

10 *The Newport Museum Postcard Museum*, Madeline Djerejian, Self-Published, 2008

Navigating through a museum, one finds objects, images, and artifacts that are presented to the viewer in conjunction with display information that directs and illuminates the viewer's experience. In *Newport Museum*, Djerejian focuses on the more subjective encounters of these viewing opportunities, whose impressions—

postcard-sized photographic interpretations of her navigations through the collections—create a relief in relation to the institution's presentation strategies.

11 *Mine Fields*, Bill Burke, Nexus Press, 1995

For Burke, creating a palimpsest of photographic image and text becomes an examination of parallel experiences. Collages of portraits, documents, ephemera, and hand-written messages create visual relationships that tell the story of Burke's failing marriage within the backdrop of Pol Pot's atrocities during the 1970s in Cambodia.

12 *Jens F.*, Collier Schorr, Steidl/Mack, 2005

With each viewing, meanings derived from the collaged photographic images find revision in proximity to hand-written notes of description and narration. In *Jens F.*, Schorr finds a doppelganger to Andrew Wyeth's *Helga*, a poetic vehicle of desire, latency, and power.

13 *A New History of Photography*, Ken Schles, Schaden White Press, 2008

The subtitle, "The World Outside and the Pictures in our Heads," foreshadows the pages that follow with a presence and visual pacing that likens photographs to mental images. Structured like Beaumont Newhall's *History of Photography*, *New History* is composed of pages that privilege the autonomy of the image (2–8 per spread), but, in the end, veers far from Newhall's hierarchies and conclusions to explore, instead, the intertextuality of creative influence.

14 *Fast/Days*, Morten Andersen, Centro Portugues de Fotografia, 2007

Lush, full-bleed, black-and-white images made in New York and Tokyo compose fragmentary objects and moments. In *Fast/Days*, a narrative of memories is recounted by a profile, a shadow, or a dark city street—in every case, an apparition brought to light through a noir-existence disembodied from its past.

15 *First, Jay Comes*, Takashi Homma, Match and Co., 2009

The depiction of blood on snow in the forest through color photographs and paintings evinces a parallel existence of image and object—we see with more than just our eyes. The page-by-page progression establishes a dialogue between the media that heightens our experience as we become aware of the importance of our own viewing associations in completing the work.

16 *Toshi-e (Towards the City)*, Yutaka Takanashi, Errata Editions, 2009

The physical distance one senses between the photographer and his subjects, coupled with the design of the work—single images lining the bottom half of pages with adjacent gray boxes—lends itself to a narrative leading towards something, in this case, at least figuratively, a city. Furthermore, the trope of the city underscores the aggressive territory-marking activities of an individual shaping and transforming one's identity.

17 *U-NI-Ty*, Michael Schmidt, Scalo Verlag, 1996

Through the use of constellations of images that vary in size and content, *U-NI-Ty* explores the possibilities of the subjective in the face of German history and ideology. Photographs form mental images that indexically reference individual experience and stimulate collective memory.

18 *Berlin in the Time of the Wall*, John Gossage, Loose Strife Editions, 2004 Exploring the visibility of empty spaces surrounding the Berlin Wall, Gossage designed his work as an environment—each spread containing a different arrangement of photographs and staging strategies—one that represents a place that is fecund with the stories that determine its geographical phenomena.

19 *Fait*, Sophie Ristelhueber, Errata Editions, 2009

In addition to revealing its stories through environmental spaces, a place might also present objects that are the result of human actions. This is the case in *Fait* where, page after page, one experiences these objects as marks in the Earth. Here, photographic images of the deep lines, craters, and fissures form a textual aftermath on the Kuwaiti landscape after the first Gulf war with Iraq. Taken from many vantage points, one often has a bird's eye view of the ground that presents the viewer with a rebus-type narrative of past events.

20 *Chizu (The Map)*, Kikuji Kawada, Nazraeli Press, 2005

Comprised of a contiguous series of abstract full-bleed photographic images of marks and visual ephemera on the walls of the Atomic Dome in Hiroshima, *Chizu* is a mapping of the subjective experiences that are at once personal

and collective, rooted in a specific place holding great symbolic value. From its many interspersed gatefolds, one experiences a profound point of departure from the linearity of a map into a multivalent environmental immersion.

21 *Journey Without Title*, Balazs Czeizl, Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1995

How do we distinguish between images that represent our memories from images that we see everyday? In *Journey Without Title* we are confronted by a series of object-images, autonomous in their sequencing within the bookwork, illuminating an experience of near-misses that disorient as they progress, while giving promise to a future of comprehension through familiarity.

22 *Sunbird*, Jason Fulford, J & L Books, 2000

If meaning derived from experience resides, at least partly, in the retention of images in one's conscious or unconscious mind, then the vast collections of images within and among us present associative opportunities for poetic scrutiny. In *Sunbird*, ready-made images from this inner-collection are posed in groups of two to four on each opening, situated both vertically and horizontally alongside unrelated fictional quips, creating vast parallel narratives.

23 *Landmasses and Railways*, Bertrand Fleuret, J & L Books, 2009

The mechanical reproduction of black-and-white Xeroxed pages provides the staging area for a purely subjective visual travelogue into a city. Each page, a single full-bleed image, is presented as a component of one of several levels of immersion into *Landmasses and Railways* that reads like pure fiction.

24 *A Shimmer of Possibility*, Paul Graham, Steidl/Mack, 2009

A Shimmer of Possibility is a structural examination of the unfolding of individual experience. Enacting multiple series of photographs, ranging from one to ten images, whose subject matter probes American iconography of the dispossessed, one is confronted with the proposition that the discrete intervals of our lives—like the sequencing of film stills—present significant opportunities for [dis]engagement in the world.

25 *Fields*, Michal Rovner, Steidl, 2005

In a digital era, the relationship of code to image takes on a particular gestural relevance. Here, we are confronted with mutating image-aggregations based on scientific archetypes, i.e., Petri dishes, DNA strands, Rosetta Stones, whose compositions are built with micro-photographs of individual men standing, walking, and dancing. This work inverts the idea that we consume images.

26 *The Solitude of Ravens*, Masahisa Fukase, Bedford Arts, 1991

With the raven, Fukase traces an emotional totemic arc that phasically considers his kinship through death, loneliness, and fruitless wandering. The full-page black-and-white images of ravens perching together at night—eyes glowing towards the camera; in flight; being hunted by cats; or pictured against the backdrop of snow—have a strong graphic quality that conjures calligraphic writing. As such, this work reads as a pictographic record of sorrow.

27 *Still Water*, Roni Horn, SITE Santa Fe, 2000

Full-bleed photographs of the surface of water poetically illustrate Horn's notion of water: it is a dependent form and its shape is determined by what is in proximity to it (thus, in *Still Water*, it flows from opening to opening between two covers in the codex form); it acts as a solvent for many things and hence accommodates many presences (numbered literary/historical references appear below the images on each page evincing multiple contexts); and it remains constant everywhere in the world, physically and ontologically, through its simultaneous existence as thing and image.

28 *A Record of Past Walks in Existing Landscapes*, Hamish Fulton, Publié pour le Centre d'Art de Kerguelennec et la Galerie Laage Salomon, 1988

In its mixing of photographic image and text, and photographic image as text, *Walking Through* is as much a meditation on the human imagination in the landscape as it is a document of Fulton's walking through the landscape. Motifs such as repeated boulders blocking pathways and open roads suggest Sisyphean attempts to traverse and intervene in nature's processes.

29 *Weavings, Performance #2 (Portland, Oregon)*, Corin Hewitt, J and L Books, 2009

Weavings is the manifestation of a complex matrix of performance, object, image, history, and personal story. More than a mere document of an event, diverse media including Polaroids, photographic prints, and drawings of various sizes juxtapose one another as they signify a process-based experience.