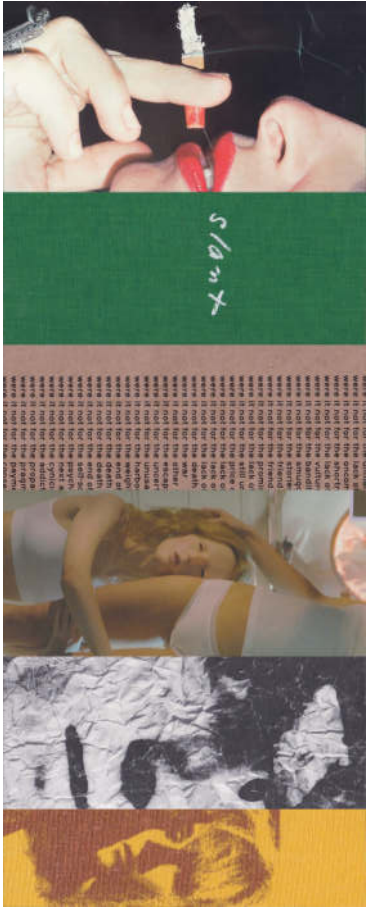


2019: A Short Guide To White People & Their Photography Books

Posted on December 27, 2019 by Brad Feuerhelm



It was the best of years...

Once again it is that time of year where I try to drum up some sort of edit from all of the incredible work the photography book world offers up. This year is difficult as I felt it has been one of the strongest years in recent memory with many titles that are worthy of sincere mention. I run two lists every year, one for our kind friends at photobookstore.co.uk and a much less abbreviated list for American Suburb X. There has been a subsequent list with our friends at Dead Bear Club.

"I find that the lists are very wide this year and if I am completely frank, some of the lists are poor in respect to reasons from which to draw an analysis... There should be a reason the lists are created that offer viewpoints from the contributors as to the reasons for their selections".

There will be some overlap with descriptions on that list here. The list I am offering is in no particular hierarchical order. There are about 10 books vying for my "number 1" attention and I have decided because of this, that I cannot offer a top position here and instead will give a more exhaustive list with some discrepancy towards edition size, re-print status and compilation/multiple author books. Think of this not as an "end of" list, but rather a "that's off" type of list.

Sort that out off date you say?

Before we even start this, I am hereby stating that if your book is physically published and available before Parisphoto and its associated fair's close in November, then you are 100% part of that particular year's offerings. If you come after that with delays, or publish after the floating Mid-November date, then you are conscribed to the following year. There is some uncertainty on the matter and I think we should have a quasi-mandate on it. So as soon as both Polycopies and Offprint shut, we enter a new season. That seems fair to me.

One example of this issue is Mark Mahaney's *Polar Night* (Trespaser) that was delayed and only dropped the end of November. Gidon Mendel's *Freedom or Death* (GOST) is another important book in which the publisher only had example copies on the stand and it dropped properly after the event, so I hereby intend to include those in 2020. These are great books and I expect people to be reminded of that in next year's list. There is also the case that publishing waits or least recognizes no list, but I think going forward that we need to implement this as a strategy as it's all a bit murky otherwise. At the end of things, lists do not sell books, but I think if by sheer volume alone, that many people like to see the lists-they represent some feedback to the artists and publishers, but also illuminate unseen books that people may not have had the chance to examine. I pay attention, though can admit fatigue at times and vehement disagreement, but then maybe if it's a problem to look at book lists, I can go back to the ever-present and glorious news for inspiration...

Now to the particulars of the year in end and some general thoughts and misgivings about the current situation in which we find ourselves that promises not to be insulting, but ultimately will value a wee bit of a rant as well.

Dear Lazy Bastard, Your List Sucks..*

Insert image of the Ralphie "I'm Helping" meme.

I find that the lists are very wide this year and if I am completely frank, some of the lists are poor in respect to reasons from which to draw an analysis. Whereas my list may seem a bit too wide, I would challenge anyone to look up a number of the lists and look at the punitive and small one-liners associated with the lack of explanation of choice. Let's raise the bar next year a bit and instead of shopping name value for contributors with their own agendas, let's perhaps instead get more people with insight involved or we are simply championing platitudes that do not further our engagement with the why's of the matter. There should be a reason the lists are created that offer viewpoints from the contributors as to the reasons for their selections.

Though I do not feel everyone need be overly critical, the complete lack of informed position only leads us down the route of popularity contests and nepotistic laziness. That's a bit of a rant, but I feel it is justified as I care about books and the artists opening my eyes in new ways who spend innumerable hours with their publishers who deserve a bit more than "awesome book, thumbs up, its like nice design, yea". Let's consider how we can fashion some idea of why a book is successful and from there, perhaps we can eventually have the discussion on which titles are not successful. There are no guidelines for this of course and things are subjective, but I would argue that we are now in a position to have spent a decade in which the floodgates have opened and photobooks can now be considered "a thing" and with that, perhaps we can start thinking a little more about why titles are affecting or not.

Further, if you hate "Istmania" perhaps stop reading the lists. Sure, its all a bit silly and unnecessary, but I get the strange sense that when its your turn to have a book out your eyes will be glued to the pages, so let's dispel the nonsense and quiet thy mouth or typing, you big whiny baby.

Here are a few suggestions of where you can buy some of the titles within the list. These are solid shops and they offer interesting titles and are known to be dutiful.

- Lebel Bookshop, Paris
- Bildband Berlin, Berlin Shop and On-line
- Kornick Books, Berlin Shop and On-line
- Dashwood Books, New York Shop and On-line
- Donlon Books, London Shop and On-line
- Photo-eye Books on-line
- Photobookstore.co.uk on-line
- Riot Books, Ghent on-line and Shop
- McCamera, Milan On-Line and Shop
- Café Lehnitz, On-line
- Photo Book Corner, on-line
- Buchhandlung Walther König Books, On-line and multiple locations.
- Perimeter Books, Shop and On-line

I have missed a larger amount of shops, but these are the main shops or on-line stores that I am familiar with. There are more of course. I am not familiar with all of them, nor do I collect books so my outreach is limited.

Further, there are a few bookshops between that I cannot recommend, though they are well known, but they have a history of not paying their artists who send books to them for sale...when exploring publishing next year, we may choose to examine this problematic discourse. For now, I will tpoore around the motto of explicit exclusion.

Become a Friend of the Photographic Arts...at just 9.99 per month...

Within this list, I also want to present one other list within it by our esteemed writer, artist and colleague Eugenie Shinkle (UK) whose view is different than mine and whose estimation on the matter I appreciate. Eugenie and I see things differently, but I am indebted to her minimal vision.

“Further, if you hate “Istmania” perhaps stop reading the lists. Sure, its all a bit silly and unnecessary, but I get the strange sense that when its your turn to have a book out your eyes will be glued to the pages, so let's dispel the nonsense and quiet thy mouth or typing, you big whiny baby”.

Previously, there were two interviews for this piece. My interview with Patrick Maille, a collector in France did not work out. We had completed the list itself and had begun the interview, but for some valid reasons on both sides, we found ourselves arguing and I believe that though this is a beneficial way to discuss things, we could not seem to agree on how we see books. Patrick is also more of a specialist than I am with collecting. I do not collect books. I review books. Patrick is a true collector of photobooks and his insight into titles vastly exceeds my own, so his list compromised of titles that I had not seen, which made it difficult to ascertain their value and further made it exceedingly difficult to have the larger discussion about what constitutes a good book, which became the heart of the second half of our interview. I have a policy not to speak on books that I have not physically seen, so though I can find the titles on Patrick's list for on-line viewing in parts, it was not an ideal method of viewing that I felt entitled me to offer an opinion on the books that I had not seen. I wish Patrick the best in his collecting pursuits and value his contributions to the medium with his joustings/pairings etc.

“It is as though somehow a large bullhorn has descended the skies and has been given to people who have little interest in communicating, but rather idealize using said bullhorn as a volatile weapon, positioning its use as a disrupting and incriminating force or anvil above the heads of those trying to question and understand intent the of divisions”.

I also have a mini-interview with Daniel Campbell Blight who released a book this year entitled *The Image of Whiteness: Contemporary Photography and Racialization* (Self Publish Be Happy) that has caused a bit of a stir. As admitted in the mini-interview itself, I have not read the book. I will freely state that I have some qualms about the way in which the topic of identity politics is being handled presently (as we will see shortly) and it takes me a little longer than usual to get to grips with the many positions that are currently occupying the discourse surrounding the various topics.

On that note, I spend large amounts of time trying to dissect authorship of a political voice or position and although our own writer Sunil Shah has argued on his review of Daniel's book that this can create some problems of sight, I cannot set aside my belief that authorship of a point of a political view, no matter how just the topic, is crucial for me to discover intent and form my opinions on the matters discussed. Part of the reasoning for this position is also that I feel there is little in the way of conversation happening currently about very heated matters with too much outrage and acts of silencing occurring for anyone who disagrees with a position or wishes to speak about it to govern a fruitful re-examination of problematic views previously held and accepted. It is as though somehow a large bullhorn has descended the skies and has been given to people who have little interest in communicating, but rather idealize using said bullhorn as a volatile weapon, positioning its use as a disrupting and incriminating force or anvil above the heads of those trying to question and understand intent the of divisions.

I believe whole-heartedly that if progress is to be made, we should not give into castigating the discussion with name-calling, censored culture or poorly-induced and reductive social media commentary which has little basis in reality and may derive from de-contextualized scenarios. It allows embittered voices to rally good causes towards wrong targets and in doing so actually damages the cause they pretend to speak on. It also leads to a doubling down on both sides in which the escalation of rhetoric can be politically manipulated towards more sinister ends. In Daniel's case this is not how I feel, but we have spoken on how the use of voice in times like this depends on the audience and who is willing to listen. Perhaps a certain pitch is necessary even if the volume is questionable. This sentiment will no doubt find its home amongst those seeking to grip the bullhorn.

Field Notes: Reprints and Compilations...

I will herein declare that most of the books that I am looking at have been made in an edition of 300 or more and that for the most part and in my own lists, I will be avoiding some re-issues. I am particularly forgoing *Family* by Masahisa Fukase as the there are variants of it pre-existing and although it is one of the most important books for me this year, I am not including it on those grounds. I have already sung its praises in review form this year. I am also forgoing the richly printed and exquisite *American Prospects* by Joel Sternfeld (Steidl). Even though there are 16 new images as I do not think it is a new book, per se. That also being said, it is possibly the lushest printing that I have seen of a book to date. Todd Hido's *House Hunting* (Nazraeli) is also not making it to the list despite its importance and neither is the beautiful full edition of *The Park* (Radius) by Kohji Yohiyuki, nor the much needed *Wedding* re-issue (König Books) by Michael Schmidt. I am also going to forgo compilations though I would have put *Land's End* by Dittel books on the list otherwise. I will be reviewing that excellent title in the coming weeks. I have however put the *Camera Austria International* book published by Spector on the list because I believe the CA position is something like that of a monograph-they have been responsible as an entity of offering a conclusive vision for decades and their voice almost reasons like that of an artist or author itself, so I have included it. Feel free to disagree.



I am not including The Ure and Werner Mahler *Kleinsadl* (Hartmann Projects) on the list as the second edition was released this year and the first was last year. Though I have seen that (twice) and oddly *Aporia* by Andrew Waitis on a few lists this year, it does not make sense to me. Wait's site even mentions the colophon, which makes the clear definition of 2018. To my knowledge, Mini Plumb's exceptional *Landfall* (TBW) should also not be on lists this year, though I have seen it also a few times. I did ask a friend of mine why they had included it and

their answer was simply that is it arrived for sale in their country in 2019 to which I had to chuckle. I want to encourage that we have some idea or agreement of publishing dates with releases no matter how amazing both those books are. There is some grey area from November to December 31st, which I have also outlined a bit above. Perhaps we need a definitive structure and perhaps it does not matter.

I am also giving a special golden Willy Wonka pass to *Omaha Sketchbook* by Gregory Halpern as it is a book that only ever existed in a very tiny edition and it has been much expanded on with clear and conscious decisions to re-work the design to define it as a new object. I think it stands to reason by overviewing many of the lists this year that I am not alone in my sentiment or reasons for its inclusion.

Small Things God...

In terms of small editions, I will mention a few titles that stand out as exceptional books of the year, though because of their severe limited status (under 150 exemplars), I feel that giving them exposure is important, but that they should be considered differently as it will be hard for people to see the books and rate them or my feelings on them easily. I have covered or intent to cover 75% of these titles on the site. These are those titles

Mouat Van de Voorde's *Safe*. Self-published

Salvi Danes' *A Les 8 Al Bar Eusebi* (Socarré),

Bruno V. Roels *Flowers for Henriette*. (28 Vignon Street)

Garth McConnell's *The Dream Meadow*. (Sorika Self)

Lia Beta. *In Bloom*. Self-published

These are four to five of the top books that I have seen and two have been covered in depth for American Suburb X in either interview or review form. I want to give them a mention here as I do believe they are all within the top 30 publications of the year and if I were not being coy, I would say that one, if not two or three are actually vying for the top 25% of that. They are small issue and although this seems practical for many reasons for the artists, including economy, I feel that focusing on small runs becomes a bit of a collector's motion, which previously started. I am not. I believe that in as much as that access is denied to the greater public and the ability to spend money does not necessarily facilitate knowledge that one shouldn't govern over base-of-hierarchical lists by having access to small runs that nobody else will see. In short, collecting references some sort of authorship position that I do not believe that I share and again, it has been a point of contention when trying to present a dialogue about inclusion.

Of note, Lia Beta's book *In Bloom* is something small and quite sweet. I have placed it on the "not" list, not because it is perfect or "great", but because it shows sincerity and promises a possibility for future books to be considered as potentially fruitful if edited and covered towards a deeper consideration of form and medium. The images within are striking and although there is a narrative at heart about the idea of an idea in *Lolita*, both cinematic and literary, the images would be just as accessible if left to their own end without the aid of a "story". It is my contention that this book is a strong start for what could shape up into something greater and this is the sort of title that floats across my desk that does not receive wide visibility, but reminds one of the countless people working on their craft that are not part of this list business.

There are four other titles worth mentioning by one publisher-Sun Editions. Aaron McElroy's beautiful return to form with his book *Reds*, Bill Sullivan's beautiful and much anticipated *Self Portraits with Mirrors*, Anthony Tafuro's *Where Ya Going*, and Charles Johnstone's final installment of his television screens project *Red Shoes*-a project that speaks about memory, desire and fascination. I happen to be a fan of Sun Editions. I think they produce slick and interesting titles and that they operate as a strange cooperative is interesting.

One note before we commence is that I have misused a number of great books this year by the look of everyone else's list. The benefit of penning a really long list and dropping it at the end of the year is that I get to disagree with everyone after their efforts have already been put to use.

Continuing, I keep scratching my head as to how I am supposed to see everything let alone give it space on ASX. If you do not see something on this rather exhaustive list, please note that it does not infer that by exclusion, I think the book or author are without merit. I simply have not seen it or spent enough time with it and though I am attempting or make this list longer than usual due to my conviction that it has been an incredible year, I am certainly unable to see or agree with everything. I believe that by providing a longer, more in-depth list that perhaps I am doing a slightly better service than just regurgitating two sentence platitudes about ten books that we all already agree upon. Again, on this point, I will not cover books that I have not physically held in my hands. It is my belief that a book needs to be held in order to be observed and from which to draw critical conclusions. Though I am not overly concerned with binding, paper choices, etc., I would suggest that understanding the flow of a book happens when it is hand-held, not when it is backlit on a screen. I also think printing quality means something, which I cannot see from a screen. I realize not everyone agrees with these sentiments, which is fine. It is by no means meant to be an authoritative position.

Stack dem Brxxx..Stack dem Brxxx

I will also declare here (and name the elephant in the room) that I published a book with MACK this year and many of that company's titles are on my list. Now, before you groan and roll your eyes and scream "conflict of interest" etc. while your vegan brie melts in your mouth, please note that I am too busy counting up these paper bricks to hear you-all that money that I line the walls of my rented Slovakian flat with makes it incredibly difficult to hear you down there with all the photo-plebs. All insulation talk aside, in case you haven't been paying attention, I have reviewed that company's material now for the past six years along with just about every other publishing house and many self-published efforts-which means of course, that I expect to have books made from all of them next year so I that can get my diamond grillwork fired and my McMansion sorted. I do not get paid for these reviews (must keep banging on about it) and although you might find

it somehow a conflict, I would ask you to what end you believe that the reward actually justifies means outside of my obsession and the gold-plated Ferrari and free access to luxury yachting that I am given for my services. Boo all you like, with all this FU money stuffed in my mattress. I will sleep very well tonight.

“Now, before you groan and roll your eyes and scream “conflict of interest” etc. while your vegan brie melts in your mouth, please note that I am too busy counting up these paper bricks up to hear you-all that money that I line the walls of my rented Slovakian flat with makes it incredibly difficult to hear you down there with all the photo-plebes”.

Onward...

In general terms, I like what I see with publishing at present. There seems to be a reduction of bullshit titles which need an IKEA diagrammatic illustration to “read” and the endlessly flippanant and stupid archive projects seem to have slowed a bit as well. There are a few and the ones that I have spotted seem decent. If not decent, at least I don’t need a flashlight or special cape to read them. There have been a few publishing houses that I consider to be moving the game along, I will list them here and again, if I have forgotten a few, that is only human and further just because I did not name all of them, it does not mean they are not doing great work.



R.R.B Books is doing great work for the preservation of British documentary pursuits with a number of necessary projects executed with strong classic design. Their books have a “weight” to them and I very much appreciate the classic format that most of their titles take on.

Stanley/Barker may be within the top 3 publishers at present. It might be a little early for that, but they are certainly on target so long as they keep making exceptional decisions on whom they publish, keep their design quality high, and keep selling out the editions within weeks. I love the Mike Lundgren *Geomancy* book they published and think that taking chances like that pushes their keen sense of vision even further. The Steinmetz *Carnival* book is also incredible to behold as is *COP* by Christopher Anderson.

FW: Books has made a few lateral moves this year mostly by encouraging an already decent program, but paying closer attention to design than ever and also by reaching across the pond to American artists. This has helped them gain an even more profound sensibility. Michael Ashkin and Andres Gonzalez’s books were both standouts.

APL continues to make unusual and interesting choices of who they publish while also helping to foster the early publishing efforts of younger artists, particularly Sjoeren Vanoverbeeghe. As always, I am also enjoying Jurgen Maelfy’s titles.

Radius continues to produce beautiful books and although it doesn’t feature here, that re-issue of *The Park* was a scholarly and interesting pursuit. They also make large books, which is great to behold, but if I have any condemnation on the matter, it is only that European bookshelves must be significantly smaller than American ones.

Hartmann Projects is offering increasingly interesting titles and Spector Books (Both Germany) has continued their excellence and insane rate of quality publications. Spector in particular interests me as they have a wider remit than most publishers and their program is punishing in terms of titles offered.

Loose Joins. As with Stanley Barker and Chose Commune, 2019 marks the fifth anniversary of Loose Joins and though I have hesitated on some of their titles in the past feeling they were slightly over-produced and a bit easy, I cannot ignore that people love some of their books and although they are slightly slower to publish titles, they seem to be consistent in publishing books that retain a high visibility such as Jack Davison's *Photographs* and recently Xiaoping Yuan's *Campaign Child*. Both titles seem to be finding their way even if I do not feel compelled towards them. So, in short, even though I am not an avid reader of their books, I recognize, even if *ostentatiously*, their budding importance.

VOID in Athens have, as I had hoped in last year's list, upped their game sincerely by looking towards a similar, yet refined choice of artists which exemplify challenging work with a dark edge. However, their choices have become more subtle and the design quality though good before, is bordering on becoming great. Their *Hunger Project* and for me on a personal level, books by Savvin, Marzocchi, Ström and Hausthor and Guilmon in particular have been incredibly successful and get under my skin more with a dialogue that surpasses the obvious books by d' Agata etc.

Skinnerbook continues to hold ground and have offered this year a publishing prize the result of which was Peter Watkins' *The Unforgotten*, one of the most moving books in recent times, perhaps only challenged in recent memory by TK Eriksen's *Crackle and Drag*.

“Prices still make publishing accessible, which is great, but one feels there is a slight shift in the number of collectors that buy the material or that the focus has somehow shifted to a more serious nature, preferring solid ideas and work to that of the whimsy of presentations felt in previous years”.

Trepasser has dug in this year with a few great titles. Messrs. Gentempo and Schummat have respectively both opted to not publish something this year, which must have freed up some time to concentrate on a few new projects by other artists. At once bummed they have not put a new book out each, but also elated that they have put Grove and Mahaney (remember Polar Night is 2020) into the world, I can say that it would be amazing to see the publisher tackle 4-6 projects per annum in the following years should time allow. It is one of those strange scenarios where one can speculate that Trepasser exists to help get work out there that they see, but is not and was not meant to be more than that. Perhaps its time to expand.....?

ROMA has also continued its path to success by offering strong titles with an emphasis on never running out of Bartia Suter titles, which I still don't get personally, but they are well-designed and many of my colleagues think I am simply too close to vintage material to see it. Roma continues to be a strong publishing house and it like FW BOOKS and APE continue to make strides in the region.

Arpblein has made a couple of great choices this year with Matteo di Giovanni and Pino Musi. It would be great to see them find a larger footing in things going forward as they seem more than capable to develop their photobook selections on a larger scale.

In general, most publishing houses have reduced the fat, concentrated less on the over-hyped and now cooling photobook market and have produced a number of strong or at least very decent titles. I still sense that perhaps the boom years have slowed down a bit and we are witnessing a return to form within the industry. I cannot give legitimate reasons or site data for my opinion on this-it is simply a feel based off what I have seen and how I hope things to continue. Prices still make publishing accessible, which is great, but one feels there is a slight shift in the number of collectors that buy the material or that the focus has somehow shifted to a more serious nature, preferring solid ideas and work to that of the whimsy of presentations felt in previous years. I did feel the fairs were a bit more quiet in November than usual, but I have not outreached for number data on footfall to either Offprint or Polycopies. I was also not at the fairs every day.

There are also a few other things that I want to tackle regarding my own list that a few of you will have spotted thus far in my choices which I will try to outline below and again may cause some consternation as to my choices.



About Testicles.. What You Need To Know...

I have made a small challenge to a few publishers (a few even with half to a majority of female heads running them) regarding the question of why so many of the lists this year in particular feature many titles by men. Now, before I settle into that, let me be clear that a reasonable argument has been made by a few publishers as to why their rosters are more male-oriented and this will be the focus of a longer inquiry next year on ASX in which we will try to underpin a few of the reasons.

One perspective in short to give a reaser is that the balance or lack thereof has to do with submitted material and the ratios therein being mostly male. I want to note it now as though I tend not to pick up a book by the name of its author, the lists in general this year are testicle-heavy and though I do not want to place blame on the publishers per se, I do want to express that it is hard to conceive of a end of year list in which things are perfectly gender-balanced if there isn't a particular production of titles to work with in equal majority.

In the future, we will try to have that discussion rationally and without cynical or flippanant commentary from our/my side that may be read incorrectly (as I saw earlier this year) as bias. Outrage should no longer occupy our time if not justified and rationally discussed, not should rebutals be issued to improper, callous or otherwise perversely unqualified claims to the contrary of progress. I believe in discussions about important topics. I believe in contrary positions and most importantly, I believe that we should be able to carry out these conversations equally and without *blocking* their progressive intent with cheap theatrics and ridiculous unsubstantiated claims and infigthing that only serve the higher power of authority that benefits from the deaying effects of tribalism you might be surprised who really wants the attention economy to work for their benefit through provocation.

About White Testicles. What We Already Know...

We can also discuss, after (?) we get through the gender equality issues, why so many privileged white people occupy this photobook space and continue discussing issues for other minority groups within a fairly democratic medium and how the entirety of photobook publishing is generally white-ordained and dominated (you would be foolish to argue differently). This is again perhaps best left to White Daniel Campbell Blight and his White Book- *The Image of Whiteness* (Self Publish Be Happy) in which he discusses how all white people see things in the same racist way, especially regarding the medium of photography and asks *us* (Yes, us) to recognize *our* whiteness and in doing so, not to let it get to *our* heads in the wrong way like say, eugenics etc. and that by having this discussion, white people will recognize *our/their* (confused determiners) whiteness and therefore will hopefully and consciously avoid repeating and promoting racist dialogue and action. The discussion is certainly worth the time and effort, which is again, why Sunil reviewed Daniel's book.

For myself, I am still trying to understand where *white* starts and ends for that matter or what white culture is as I personally don't particularly have any affinity for gingerbread latte's, Dockers, people named Darrell, Douglas or Brice, TED talks, or questions like "Sir, where can I like, um, like um, buy a Roomba within like twenty yards". You can find all of that here though...no joke...

(Got me on the Moleskin notebooks, you bastards!!)

Brocademia, Brotopgraphy, Brocolonial Discourses.

If you are still hesitating, you may also read our coverage on Daniel's book recently by Sunil Shah, or his recent Guardian piece and their associated twitter comments or, rather improbably, the book's coverage in Vogue Italia-that ol' chestnut of incorruptible body politic publishing (ahem), "Remember when Vogue was at the forefront of fighting discriminatory action and was a leading proponent of the de-institutionalization of rampant misogyny and racism through fashion coverage and conversation sponsored by corporate clientele"?- Nobody Ever. Cheap shot or necessary shot? You decide. I simply find the *Vogue Italia* politicking slightly, how shall I say it fairly?... hypocritical.

"For myself, I am still trying to understand where *white* starts and ends for that matter or what white culture is as I personally don't particularly have any affinity for gingerbread latte's, Dockers, people named Darrell, Douglas or Brie, TED talks, or questions like "Siri, where can I like, um, like um, buy a Roomba within like twenty yards".

And Again, for the record on that. I have not read Daniel's book, so to throw it here on the year's best despite years of personal friendship and disagreement over positions on the matter, I believe it would be an improper move and dishonest. I'm probably a racist for not reading it yet, like many of you reading this, or perhaps dying this symbolic death is taking longer than I thought without instructions as to how to do so. My concern is not to pick on Daniel, his provocations in my estimation are necessary even if I disagree about their handling.-For the record, I have handled the physical book...with white gloves.

...About halfway through this written diatribe, I made the decision to contact Daniel and simply ask him a few questions about his book and position as it was clearly getting under my skin as I typed. If I am honest, I do find some of the rhetoric around whiteness very difficult to digest, but in fairness to someone who has put their opinions out there and received sheilds of abuse for it, I thought it would be fair to ask him some questions and see what he might throw back...I want to be honest in shaping the form of the discussion from my side here and if I only stutter and believe in cynicism, though it has worked for me personally in the past, I cannot see how I can get anything done by refusing to engage with topics that I may or may not disagree with...and in Daniel's defense, his answers did change the way I look at the situation enough to consider ordering his book and to consider the legitimacy of his position without casting enmity his way. So below you will find some answers from Daniel on the topic. I will lead with this before the list as I think it is worthwhile and if you feel the need to skip forward on your way to getting your privilege polished, please do so.

Two White Men Interviewing about Whiteness. Interview with Daniel Campbell Blight. December, 2019.

BF: Do you think that remaining in an institution as a lecturer that you are not somehow guilty of continuing the tradition of white privilege within the larger discourse that you seek to expand on and would it not be more advantageous or perhaps more congruent for you to consider giving up your own institutional privileges so that perhaps it might open up opportunity for minorities?

DCB: The two priorities of my research, writing and teaching on whiteness are to work against structural racism and to accept personal responsibility for it. This means I am a contradiction. Simply put, I attempt to teach the history of photographic whiteness while accepting that I am part of the problem because I am interpellated white. This is what Stephen Brookfield calls a "pedagogy of self-disclosure" in which whites come to accept that they are racist as an 'unwavering empirical fact'. I am racist not because I undertake acts of physical or verbal violence against people of colour (this is only one definition of racism), but *because* I am white. Whiteness — which is not the same thing as white skin — was invented in the 17th century precisely to oppress and undermine the humanity of people of colour. White skin is genetic and biological, whiteness is social and ideological. In this sense whiteness is nothing but violence. Whiteness says Black and Brown people are less than human. In my view it is impossible to positively identify with that; there is no "good" white identity.

Your question is forthright and powerful in its suggestion that I quit my job. It shows great courage in confronting your white friend and colleague and calls for me to be open and vulnerable to criticism. This is crucially important. Us white people will make mistakes. I am open to the idea that I might be making a mistake now, but this is a risk I must take. You have been a great friend and supporter of my work and that must make it all the more difficult for you to ask these probing questions now. I thank you for that and for your humour.

If I thought that me resigning my job would diminish the existence of structural racism at the University of Brighton then I would surely do it. If I had a guarantee from my superiors that they would employ a woman of colour to teach the cohort of white students on the photography programme about the violence of whiteness then I would stand aside, because the photography programme, like all photography programmes in the UK, is hegemonically white. I don't deserve my job any more than the many excellent scholars of colour who are qualified to teach on photography and whiteness, and I no doubt have my job because of my white privilege. This is a structural and cultural fact, because it is impossible to separate my "academic skills and abilities" from my whiteness. They constitute one another.

So what would happen if I resigned? In the current climate it is unlikely I would be replaced. If my post was advertised, due to UK employment law (which structurally benefits white people), it is statistically likely that another white person would replace me and that particular white person would not be researching, publishing or teaching on whiteness. As a result there would most likely not be an undergraduate elective offered on photography and whiteness at UoB, and there would most likely not be a postgraduate seminar on whiteness offered either. Again, I may be wrong, but the evidence suggests to me that there is good reason for me to continue my anti-racist work in UK Higher Education.

YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE: [Machete Fakes: A Possession of Meats](#)

I have used (albeit unconsciously) my white privilege to arrive in a position of power and now I must pay my debts. I make few friends in doing this, but then again the last thing I need is any more white friends. It was made clear to me at The Photographers' Gallery before I resigned last April that I was "wrong" to do this work, and it was made clear that there is no "professional" or "acceptable" place for this kind of overt anti-whiteness in a public institution. However, at the University of Brighton my colleagues are encouraging and supportive and I thank them deeply for that generosity. This is the right work for me to do in UK HE and I must commit to it wholeheartedly.

BF: I do not think my position or question stems from courage-it stems from my fragility and also my experience. I feel that I want to address hypocrisy, but I also believe that there is probably some validity to your arguments and that without addressing you, it would be unfair of me to have spoken about your book at all, lest I become a hypocrite.

"I do wish to make it personal, because whiteness is both personal and structural. White people should take their whiteness personally and it should worry them deeply. Whiteness exists both within and without us; in the minds of white people and in the world that white people have created in our own image"-DCB.

The rhetoric that you have used, particularly on your twitter feed for me, is somewhat worrisome. You seem to wish to call out everyone on their privileges, whiteness etc. with a vehement and sometimes arguably petulant (I know how to be petulant for the record) second. I often wonder if that sort of rhetoric can be damaging to the cause that you wish to speak on. I have no problems with people being vocal, but at times you seem to wish to make it personal and I can't help but feel some underlying violence in your way of "speaking". Do you think that there is perhaps a different way to engage white audiences to the discussion, which as we know is sadly a largely academic discourse without propelling the sickness of outrage culture towards the masses? I for one tend to turn off quite quickly when I feel someone is making it personal and I tend to retract and double down my previous position. Concepts like whiteness are not easy to distill, nor validate for oneself if one is...white.

DCB: I do wish to make it personal, because whiteness is both personal and structural. White people should take their whiteness personally and it should worry them deeply. Whiteness exists both within and without us, in the minds of white people and in the world that white people have created in our own image. People may of course reach their own conclusions, and I imagine that the majority of white people will disagree with me. It is easier to deny the reality of whiteness than it is to reconstitute ourselves in opposition to it, and as white people love to take the easy option.

I take your question to be a question of tone, voice and style. Across all my writings on whiteness I have adopted various positions, sometimes open and questioning, sometimes persuasive and sometimes polemical. Twitter is most often the latter. In my view the only way to engage with my largely white audience is to voice *parthosé*. This is a philosophical tradition, and as George Yancy suggests, it requires fearless speech. I must speak candidly, forthrightly and I apologise for doing so. I have been lucky to be offered a platform, to publish a book and to also communicate to large audiences via the mainstream press. I do not take this for granted, but there is no time to waste and I am not doing this to make my fellow white people feel good about themselves.

If my petulance, as you put it, offends white people then I ask that they think deeply about why. Are they really offended by my words, or by my affront to their whiteness, my own whiteness? I hear "Why is Daniel doing this, does he not realise he's white?" but is this not just a discourse of white evasion? Have I not already said that not only am I white, but that I am racist too? I wish for other white people to join me. Let's say it together, "We are white and we are a problem." And then let's do something about it. This could be a space in which white people are no longer offended by having our whiteness called out. This space could bring white people closer to freedom, which is what we have always sought, is it not? But perhaps freedom for white people can only be found in the destruction of our whiteness, our white lies, our white affectations. To date we white people have sought freedom at the expense of Black and Brown people. We need to learn to seek freedom at the expense of ourselves, because white people are strong enough and brave enough to do this. We have convinced ourselves that we are the strongest and the bravest and this psychology of conviction has a name: white supremacy.

Furthermore, etymologically petulance is temporary, and the opposite of pride. This sounds right to me. I should not offer white people a permanent form of pride. I offer petulance unapologetically, and I hope temporarily, until all white people come to realise the violent world we have created. There is an underlying violence in my voice because I am white and therefore I am comprised of a form of subjective violence. But behind this violence is an opportunity for love. I believe this wholeheartedly: we white people should desire to love ourselves and love each other, but this must be done apart from our whiteness. I am fighting an internal battle. I am coming to terms with my own racism and my own sexism, and from time to time that will read querulously. On the other side of all this there is hope and there may be pride too, but it will not be "white pride."

BF: Today I received the FOAM Talent issue for which I had written a piece of writing for Simone Sapientza. As I sat down with the issue, I was pretty astounded by all the voices clamouring for attention. The whole of the selection, minus perhaps two pieces, seemed to be speaking about various forms of identity politics. I had trouble distilling what to do with its essence. I could not tell if it was lip service from the judges/organization or if indeed that 98% of younger artists find identity politics at the core of their work-and from there I could not discern how it could play out-it seemed tribal and the clamour unrelenting. I felt as though every individual voice believed in its right to be heard and exhibited, based on their defiance to hetero-normative privileged white cultural constructs, a passion to esteem their individual position, which was abutting many other positions to the effect that it almost felt as if nothing was going to be solved outside of castigating said stereotype of "white Western privilege".

Do you believe that institutions are cynically using identity politics to their advantage or do you believe in the photography world that change is sincere-do we run the risk in which playing to the crowd only if it alleviates a temporary condition and puts spectacle ahead of actual legitimate change? If I were to look at the boards of institutions, museums etc. that are jumping on the bandwagon, do you think I would see a divesting of power to these groups or do you think, and please feel free to engage with the whiteness discussion, that the current climate is acting as a smokescreen and a short-term handout instead of real change? What can institutions do to provoke active and not passive or regressive change for all non-privileged voices?

CDB: I haven't seen this issue of FOAM yet, so I can't respond to that part of your question, but on the issue of identity politics and institutional change I think there is positive work being done. I think young people are interested in identity because it is now obvious, in a way not previously imaginable, that identity is fluid and socially constructed. Binary conceptions of gender are merely two ways of thinking about personhood and there is good reason for young people to want to resist the simplistic male-female paradigms of the past. All power to those photographers who wish to engage this and let's give them the attention they deserve.

On the question of institutional change, I think it's great that the conversation is being had, but it's often the wrong conversation. For example, in my view we should be talking about antiracism and anti-whiteness, not specious moderate notions of diversity and inclusion. I've said this elsewhere, but what happens when the diversity project is complete and there are equal numbers of all identities in workplaces, institutions? Does that mean the job is done? Surely not, as whiteness is a social force that permeates all bodies and institutional spaces. This is why we must think about whiteness in relationship to capitalism and to democracy.

As part of dealing with this problem, I'm interested in what it might mean to fully democratise institutions. What would The Photographers' Gallery look like if decisions about who gets to exhibit were handed over to all the staff instead of the director and a select few curators? Why not empower the membership of The Photographers' Gallery to make decisions about the exhibition program? This is the future. The era of the curator as tastemaker is done. I already hear whispers of "But the membership would vote for tired and boring exhibitors!" to which I respond: Dear curator, how can you be sure you know what a good exhibition is? Do you go to bed at night in full confidence that you alone know what "good photography" is? I think not, or at least, there is little convincing evidence that this is the case. It's time for curators to free themselves from the bind of their own "taste" and "sophistication", which is to say their own hubris and self-importance. I've been there and it's not healthy. At the risk of sounding naïve like politics, art should be for everyone, and if that is the remit of public institutions why aren't they held to democratic standards?

"I'm interested in what it might mean to fully democratise institutions. What would The Photographers' Gallery look like if decisions about who gets to exhibit were handed over to all the staff instead of the director and a select few curators? Why not empower the membership of The Photographers' Gallery to make decisions about the exhibition program? This is the future. The era of the curator as tastemaker is done"-DCB.

BJ: One thing that I have noted in your response was that you believe that "inclusion" and "diversity" should take second stage to anti-whiteness as a way to relieve the issue of privilege and this should be priority number one in dealing with the re-distribution of power. How does that work with other equality-based work regarding sex-, gender equality? Do you believe that if we combat the whiteness issue that other struggles will begin to square their position if positive outcomes begin to take effect or are you suggesting that they should be of secondary consideration after the anti-whiteness campaign prevails?

DCB: I will have to somewhat simplify, as this is a complex question that gets right to the heart of how normative identities, such as "white" and "male" are privileged in a white supremacist world, and as a result, how minority identities are rendered less human by an interlocking set of power structures, including capitalism, whiteness and patriarchy. These are forces that underpin all our lives as we have been interpellated into them: we are tied-up in the ideology of whiteness and of masculinity in different ways and by different means. Our identities are formed through a process of "hauling" in which we are called to become male, or white, to satisfy, strengthen and reproduce social norms. I am white not because I have white skin, but because I have both consciously and unconsciously accepted an invitation on behalf of the capitalist state to become white. For more on this process readers could do worse than to engage Theodore W. Allen's book *The Invention of the White Race*, and Kalpana Seasholtz-Crooks' *Dusting Whiteness*. And of course my simplistic description of "hauling" comes via Althusser's theory of ideology and those philosophers and social scientists that have engaged it since.



It is impossible to think whiteness and capitalism separately. The wealth of capitalist Europe and colonial America was made possible because of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. That slave-trade was legitimised by the invention of whiteness from the middle of the 17th century, and then through scientific racism later, in which it was falsely declared that white people were of superior intelligence to people of colour. So in a sense my whiteness is a product of capitalism: the two ideologies intersect, along with my maleness, to form me as a social being. For me anti-whiteness has to be anti-capitalist, but in order to do away with capitalism we need to attack its various ideological frameworks. I'm interested in whiteness because it is less visible and less often critically discussed than masculinity.

The "diversity" and "equality" project, which is institutional and governmental, seeks to publicly recognise racial and gender inequality and "harden" it. This liberal institutional logic goes something like: there are too many white men in positions of power, so let's positively discriminate until our public institutions and workplaces are more equal. This is a good idea, and should be done quickly, but it is merely the first step in a highly complex process of doing away with oppression properly. Notice the language used in these contexts. We hear the words "sexism" and "racism" but rarely "masculinity" or "whiteness", at least in my experience at public art galleries and university equality programmes. This liberal system presumes that white men should exist at all. I question this entirely, which isn't to say white men should die literally, but it is certainly to declare that we should die a symbolic death, as I discuss with George Yancy in *The Image of Whiteness*. If whiteness was invented to justify the death of people of colour, why should we keep any part of it?

Here things get interesting, as we need to have a discussion about reconstructionism and abolitionism with respect to whiteness. In order to decide whether we re-invent whiteness so that it can become a non-oppressive identity, we need to study its history to see how it came to be and what its various meanings are. Whiteness can be reconstructed as a starting point so that white people can better understand the violence of their own interpellation, but any serious time spent thinking about whiteness results in a realisation that it is effectively a sort of social cancer better abolished. Perhaps equality and diversity programmes are forms of reconstruction? And so it follows, when this liberal project is complete, the next step is the abolition of whiteness, which is in my mind a socialist (anti-capitalist) project.

Thank you for your time!

We Continue..... Why Words and maybe pictures are mumbled...

In reflecting on Daniel's interview I realize that I have become sensitive to these arguments of identity politics over the course of the past two years, probably as there is some truth to significant arguments to my own position as a straight white man. It would be remiss of me not to take note and try and see how improvements can be handled, but if I am honest, it is really hard to wade through the volley of being yelled at by other white and privileged positions. My main contention still, even if I digress my own plight to assume that I am wrong is that the way in which discussions are being meted out with outrage will not solve institutional, cultural or personal inadequacies of power sharing.

In the context of photography books, it makes it harder from this beleaguered position to also consider the legitimacy of new (artistic, non academic-produced) photo-books when words such as "post-colonial", "whiteness" and "patriarchy" are accepted as given buzz words with a distinct lack of backing up the use of such language in text or in projects produced by...guess who...? I can cite here an example of a press release that I have seen recently, which raises this concern...

"Refusing the norm is to choose, as from the vulnerable side as the enthusiastic one, to be incorruptible, faithful to oneself, honest, punk in front of a capitalist system that fathers monstrous children of uniformity and consumerism, all made from the same postcolonial and patriarchal mould."

...These.. bodies are a celebration of the diverse, the unlikely, the ambiguous, the androgynous, the non-obvious and the non-binary".

...Which is about as punk and individual sounding as purchasing a Misfits or Circle Jerks t-shirt off Amazon from your mabook pro (where you likely used in-design to make your for sale book about consumerism and capitalism)– if one knows anything about punk or its aims, the use of contentious pseudo-academic thoughtspeak that is being pandered here, no matter how well you believe it is intentioned is open for rebuttal of every kind and most presciently, those rebuttals would stem from a complete aversion towards all things or suggestions hypocritical or systematic.

My point here is that by flippantly attaching simple buzzwords to projects like this and over-saturating the context with every box-ticked term imaginable to what is probably meant as well-natured intent, we instead run the risk of hypocrisy and a choice of not making much ground on these very important matters within the general discussion, preferring instead to hide behind flavor-of-the-day -isms that defy action and rest on some hallowed space in which nothing is actually transacted. In the photobook world, we have got to accept that we are part of this privileged position and that by making books with such loose qualifications to serious intent, we are close to the point of hypocrisy.

If we want activism, it is my firm belief that sitting on in-design or having an armchair shouting match with someone on social media is not the answer and that it is in effect retrograde as it only secures a faux-sense of guilt relief by pretending that abstracting actual change with pictures is the solution to real-world conversations. Further, screaming up or down the chain, punching as it were, only detracts from change by giving over power structures cause for benefit through our incessant inactivity. If you are subconsciously only trying to buy your fragile ego a little more time before it is spotted and disassembled for the privileged position it occupies, then we are truly and well fucked to make progress legitimate. Making a photobook is not activism. Period. Making art is an elitist pursuit in which the venues that necessitate its use continue to prosper from the same set of decisions that have activated their accumulated privileges. In these spaces, they can afford to think about your ideas and they can more importantly afford to forget or ignore them. Protest does not start at the museum, the laptop or the bookstore, it starts on the streets or ideally the libraries where you probably forgot to donate a copy of your society-changing book.

I will leave you with this before we have the discussion proper about the superfluous construct of the photobook and its importance in 2019. I am sure there will be some confirmation biases at play with some readers, about my own position which will likely be de-contextualized into a mis-intent at best, but it is my priority at the end of this to discuss progress and the limitations which we fail to recognize from our cozy room in the house that White Jesus built us on Avocado Toast Island. I look forward to seeing a celebration of what it could mean to be humane over what it is to be human by continually questioning authorship, position and legitimacy in these critical spheres.

"Making a photobook is not activism. Period. Making art is an elitist pursuit in which the venues that necessitate its use continue to prosper from the same set of decisions that have activated their accumulated privileges. In these spaces, they can afford to think about your ideas and they can more importantly afford to forget or ignore them. Protest does not start at the museum, the laptop or the bookstore, it starts on the streets or ideally the libraries..."

Ok, then here is "a" List with nil a hierarchy implied.....

*Libuše Jarcováková. Evokativ. Published by United. I never thought I would agree with Sean O'Hagan or any of his yearly picks as emphatically as I have with this title. Evokativ is an incredible look at how private images, either by context of art or social realism find their way to the surface after being produced at home under former repressive regimes. In the matter of Evokativ, the photographs made by Libuše Jarcováková incorporate friends, lovers and a gritty diary-formed affair under Czechoslovakian communism during the 80s. Comparisons to Nan Goldin are apt, but I feel there is something more unique at play here and perhaps that this uniqueness is conditioned by the political forces that differed between the East and the West. With Goldin, AIDS and subculture played a massive role, with Jarcováková, sexuality is certainly at play, but there is something more about the condition of making such private images that pushes the book and work towards something more dangerous. I suspect that we will see more books about Eastern Europe/East Germany play a more significant role in the coming years. There seems to be a lot of material to unearth and a number of titles such as Sonia Voss' *The Freedom Within Us: East German Photography 1980-1989* (Walter König) hint at larger negotiations between the production of images, the state and hidden histories in which the body was used as a form of resistance even if privately.*

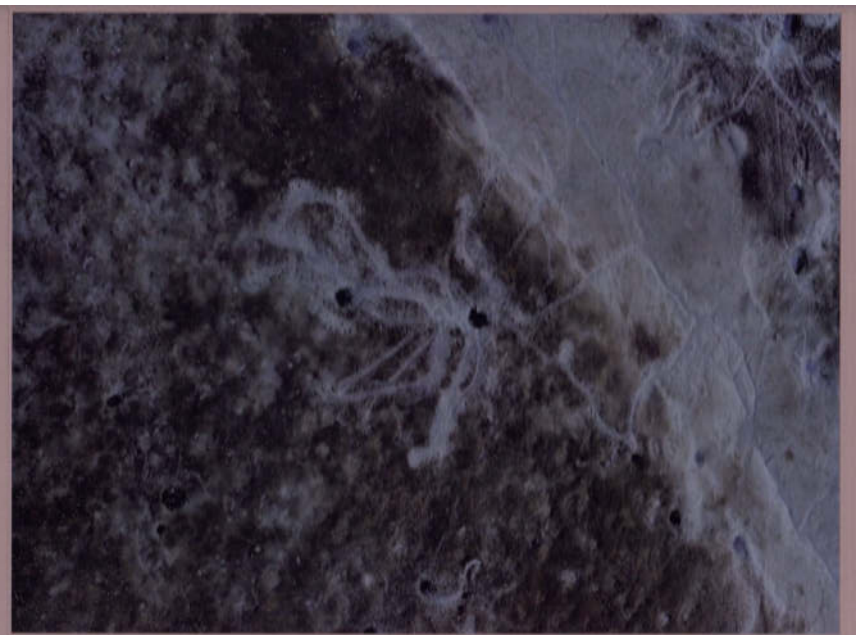
Bruno V Roels. A Few Model Palm Trees (APE). Full declaration-I have written material in the book in the form of an interview with Roels. There are books that I cannot omit their importance on the lists over the years that I have had a hand in helping to create in terms of writing. I get asked regularly to contribute text, help with editing and feedback for potential projects before publishing and will not be able to dismiss their importance simply due to my involvement.

Roels' process is pure magic to watch unfold, true alchemy as it were. His seemingly innocent images of "technical" architectural palms, even with the obvious references to Ruscha, belie their true intent to speak about the history of photography, its colonial orientations, its technical, and socio-economic values and its ability to be produced and distributed by the techno-ruling class. Roels' looks at history and uses motifs that recur as ideas of pleasure (gardens or other) and puns repetition and slight variance at the heart of the works which challenges the viewer with questions about how the distribution of said images implies a deeper, more chaotic form of control-oriented interests at its base. What you see with Palms is a segue into taking his normal analogue process into a sphere that is without the implication of nostalgia. What analogue form as we have seen previously, instead focusing on "REAL" palms as rendered for architectural catalogues. In doing so, Roels

Henrik Malmström. *Garbage Systems*. Editorial EJD. A slick and uncanny title. Having been familiar with Malmström's work previously, it is refreshing to see him leave the world of obfuscated desire and head instead into a slightly differentiated use of the thematic of "night" Malmström's new world is that of the universal world of rubbish bins and trophy-pulling there from. Published in an edition of 280 (things are subject to change, rules worth bending), the book follows Malmström and his crack team of trophy-hunters into the gutters of Buenos-Aires, where they look for odd bits of disused technology, painting, clothes and trinkets that once pulled from the debris reveal fascinating contemplations about what value is in both image and object terms. All these items are photographed at night, the objects prop the indexed rubbish bins open and are photographed like a collection in some sort of bizarre and nocturnal museum. It is a weird book in the best way and I salute the progress Malmström has made away from the body in this case.

Alan Huck. *I Walk Toward The Sun Which Is Always Going Down*. MACK. Photography is as much about horizons as it is about physical mobility and point of view. Huck discusses the way in which he walks towards the horizon in his book and in doing so questions the validity of sight, the empty notion of fixity, of meaning of place and of perception based on the medium's relative abilities to surrender to contemplation and perhaps even inner-progress. The book is successful in using text to illustrate photographs, which historically is the inverse of the process by which images are often asked to be the legitimate common denominator of meaning when illustrating text: "Here, I will show you" or, "Where words fail me" are just a few phrases that could be used as indicators for this strange propriety.

This is an important book and I find that the size and general considerations that govern its design, the physical book feels like a novel, is not overdone. The images themselves are of a considerable quality (Guessing he is from the Hartford Program), which all in create a sympathetic book in which positions in photography such as Huck's are geared towards a wider remit than his own work much like Nicholas Mudge's *Lacuna Park*. These positions exemplify the personal viewed through the lens of the medium and attempt to share thoughts, not political conditions and the demands that often result from improper drives or motivation outside of the subjective desire to share communally thoughts on the medium.



Jukka Siikala. *Ecstatic Nausea*. Infinity Land Press. One of my points of disagreeing with Patrick Maille when we conducted our dis-used interview was that I found some of his liking to be "of the existential", which in fairness to his position, he countered with "Is not all photography existential"? It is my feeling that there are a number of edge-lords and edgequeens dominating an improbably "daring" position within the ranks of photography. This condition ranges from the silly and over-used testosterone-driven blurry sexualized images full of grain and distortion to the overuse of bruised knees and period blood in the shower and so forth to create a sense "of the existential" which at this point, I find ludicrously naïve and bordering if not on the unimaginative, certainly on the inconsequential and fake. This is not the case with *Ecstatic Nausea*, which is only one-part photographic, the rest being objects, paintings and installation-based material from the Finnish multi-disciplinary artist Siikala. As with most Finnish artists with a penchant for delving into darker terrain, the work on offer is wholly immersive and operates without holding back on the extremes. It will not be for everyone and the work within raises questions about participation, point of view and its orgasmic and nihilistic tendencies, but it does so from a very active position opposed to a position that caters and crafts its place through weak metaphors, weaker images and complacent idling. Siikala and Infinity Land Press ask us what it means to look and participate in viewing sexualized and violent images. It reflects a wider conspiracy to understand what is at the primal base of viewership and what this position reflects to our normative contemplations of what society mandates for us at large. It is a gross summation of disarticulated desires and dramas that collide and gesture within the viewer developing over time and out of peril to understand what really lies at the heart of our drives. Not for the faint, politically correct or spiritually-bound.

Luce Lebart. *Inventions 1915-1938*. RVB Books. What makes this book most impressive is the way in which the images have been printed on equal footing. Working with vintage material, in this case photographs of inventions that occurred (if not realized or probable, all in) between the two great wars in Europe offers differences of tone and process, so what you get is a sort of kaleidoscope or patchwork of images, color and strengths if they are left to collide without a flattening intervention.

In Luce's book, the images are all printed at the same tone and pitch creating a catalogue not unlike Blossfeldt's *Uniformen der Kunst* (1928) in which typological studies of scientific and natural form, all printed evenly ask us to consider art, photography, science and their ability to be organized in equal range and construct. Lebart's catalogue is studiously produced by RVB books with a straight-forward and no frills production which I emphatically appreciate. The essays included, though I am still working through them are incredibly insightful and very much appreciated. I love the idea of failure and error when it relates to photography and this title points out some amazing disused endeavors of human folly and imagination.

John Lehr. *The Island Position*. MACK. This is probably one of Mack's stronger outings this year among several very strong books. Whereas *Murder, Elf Dahlia* and Seth's *I Know How Furiously Your Heart is Beating*, and Aaron Schuman's *Smart* have done well with visibility, and rightly so, I find that Lehr's book though not without serious considerations of praise, should be held in higher valuation. It is consistent, stark and begs questions about how chronologies of shop front photography from Eugene Atget to Walker Evans consistently envisioned Lehr's take on commerce, capitalism and our habits in the 21st century when it comes to technology and consumption. It is an interesting book full of possibilities for further discussion and carries us through a rich tradition of artists looking at the unobserved or uncomfortable fluctuating desires as reflected by and in shop front windows.

Cristiano Volk. *Sinking Stone*. Witty Kiwi. This is another strangely timely tome produced as we watch the sea levels rise against the stone facades of St. Mark's beautifully chiseled facades. Volk takes on the idea of tourism, travel and alienation in his images of Venice all shot with increasingly claustrophobic and unnatural positions-you see up the noses of people, around their shoulders and through their shipping bags and it creates a parallel universe where we can question the ecology of tourism and photography in interesting ways. There is a heavy indebtiness to modernist use of the camera and the penchant for looking up people or buildings all produced in saturated color and with an emphasis on near and far focal points rendering the frame as somewhat surreal.

Ken Grant. *Benny Profane*. RRB. There is a resurgence if amazing British documentary projects in the works presently. It seems somehow timely that we are examining Britain in the era of its dire flux of status within the European Community Project. *Benny Profane* is on another level-Grant's images are culled from a day at the Bidsdon Moss Trash heap in the late 80s and create a strange dirty fantasy world in which economics, place and the denizens of state all collide to question larger developments on the socio-economic front. Trash is Queen this year.

YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE: [Part 24: "Todd Hicks:How Hunting" \(2013\)](#)

Syben Vanoverbeeghe. *Conference of the Birds*. APE. Stark and illuminating. Vanoverbeeghe returns with his second book with APE. This time, the young artist travelled to a small burnt-out village in Iran. He wanders the brutal white sanded landscape, camera in hand looking for traces of life, of answers and of how to make sense of site-specific images in which nothing can truly be inferred in the process. This is a super strong offering and I believe we will continue to see great things from Belgium's rising star.

John Myers. *Looking at the Overlooked*. RRB Books. Another one of those books in which you are grateful from the distance it took to contextualize the material within in a different way and with different sensibilities. This is the second book of the Myers trilogy with RRB, the first being the *Portraits* book and the final, also released this year is *The End of Industry*.

There was a conscious effort to withdraw portraits from these seemingly banal scenes of quotidian English life, which allowed the publisher and artist to pursue a minimal almost painterly conceptual agenda to the "overlooked". The focus is on corners, concrete with concessions to trace and ephemeral markings written on the landscape of Britain. It is the sort of book that probably would not have been able to be made in the 80s as it would have been seen as quite daring in its emptiness-in short, it would have been seen as a buzz kill as opposed to the triumph of photographic minimalism that we can contextualize it into thirty-plus years down the road. It has challenged every over-complicated project with great effect and has been extremely influential on how I consider photography in the age of representational-discontent. By stripping the individual from the frame, we are left with a body of work that would be hard to offend anyone with, yet still provides an incredible amount of dialogue.

John Meyers. *The End of Industry*. RRB Books. The re-examination of the British documentary tradition is in full swing with titles from Myers, Shirley Baker, Markéta Luskáčová, Tony Ray-Jones and Ken Grant all hitting the shelves recently, among many other great photographers. There seems to be a surge in British publishers looking backwards and looking at photography again, which is refreshing after nearly a decade of silly bullshit masquerading as conceptual practice filling the gap. Perhaps it is because Britain is in a time of flux or perhaps it is simply due to the opening of the Parr foundation. British documentary now has a means by which to be spoken about and the unsung heroines and heroes of yore now have new venues in which to be distributed. Myers allegedly only has about 650 images or so in his archive and more avidly describes his vocation as a painter more than a photographer, so it is an incredibly uplifting to see this third book of incredible work from Myers land with the consistency and brilliance of the previous two.



Andrés González. *American Origami*. FW: Books. There is some contention about this book in the very small critical circle of writers on photography that it is somewhat overelaborate for the content inside, to which I am partial to agree, mostly because I find myself adverse to design novelty and over-complication.

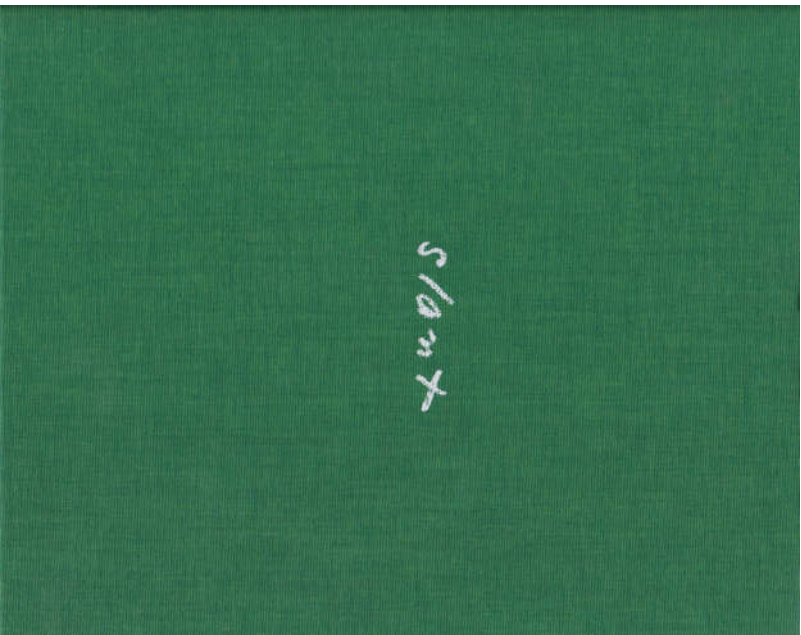
Trying to understand and delineate a photographic response to American school shootings, in photographic form and from a post-event position is a sincerely hard nut to crack. At once, there are the questions of propriety (where do we place ourselves to look it and design it in this way), also propriety (whose tragedy is this), and propensity (what does it say about culture to read or act on school shootings by visual means), but for all the technical issues that could confound the cultural, from the effectiveness or intelligence of the idea, text or photographs to the desire to produce the book at all, we are left with a set a serially haunting challenges which befits the purpose of the subject, book and its matters in a way that pleads for larger investigations, soul searching (what have you) and a discussion that clearly needs continual elaboration.

In first receiving this book, I found it difficult to ascertain a fitting and quick first response. As I stayed with the book and its attempts for a longer period of gestation, I have been left with the conviction, that although imperfect by means of representation, its aim is sincere and though it is a bit over-designed for my liking, that should not distract from larger discussions about the motivations to embark on its making, which seems to stem from an earnest entrenchment in the horrors that it seeks to inquire about.

Dylan Hashor and Paul Gailimoth. *Sleep Creek*. VOID. I have been waiting for this title since I had heard it was in process. The authors have a very particular way of making images that fit my overly gothic sensibility well and I am reminded that though the grandeur of ruins shape Europe, the American side of horror offers equal potency. I can think of few references outside of perhaps Tereza Zelenkova that share this particular affinity in image-making.

There is a deep New England Gothicism involved in *Sleep Creek*, it comments about a certain sense of isolation in which mind, myth and body become intertwined in a frostbitten and cavernous reach. You can imagine a howl and nearly feel your bruising limbs aching, numbing under the biting wind unsure whether the wolves will say their bay until dawn. Mythical, esoteric and demanding, *Sleep Creek* is but one of many darkly fascinating tales I expect from the authors. One of the provisions that I make for this title being on the list is that there is a large quantity of images involved that not only support the effort of "narrative" or the book's atmosphere, but that all the images involved are also incredibly strong and compelling single images.

Major shout out to João at VOID for upping the game on the design in which the woodblock goat gives nod to our man in horns Black Phillip.



Masso Mascaro, *Jardin*. Why-Kiwi. I got this title fairly late in the year when I returned from a few months abroad and having seen it on a number of other lists at the end of the year, I can see why it has been mentioned. In effecting a way in which we might make works of a formal nature and that are roughly stated compositionally-based, I want to suggest that it is equally important for the integrity of the images to remain consistent throughout. The use of their doubling-up, or slight variation is more than acceptable and is one of the foundations of *Jardin*. The consistency of the book is also encouraged by the slightly bleached feel of the monochrome images-this technique produces an effect that suggests a strong summer light in which the images are crafted as though peering at the sun through the canopy. It allows the book to be locked in with these two devices and provides a strong consistency for the overall work.

Ursula Schulz-Dornburg, *Yerevan 1996/1997*. MACK. I will be honest about this, I was not 100% convinced of seeing the title in the catalogue before it landed physically in my hands that it would weigh on my list. Having found her first book with MACK last year as nothing short of magnificent, I was slightly worried that a much smaller, thinner slice of her travels and documentation may not hold up to *The land in Between* as that was a much larger survey of incredible works, mostly drawn from the Middle East.

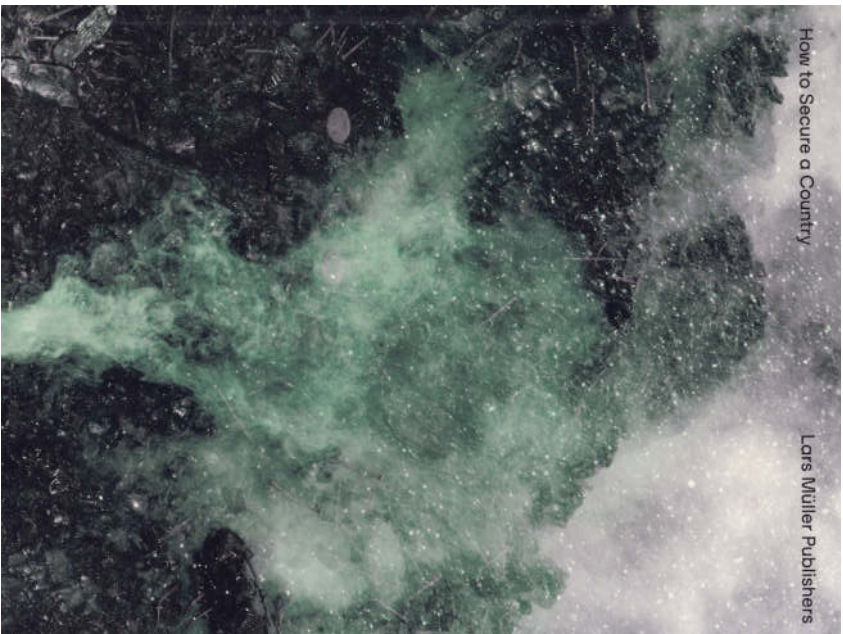
Having now seen *Yerevan 1996/1997*, I can say that although the title is diminutive and unassuming, the images inside are printed small like 4x6 inch drug store prints pasted to an Armenian school book and the design is nothing less than clever, beautiful and at times disorienting to view-The photographs of soviet architecture and the noise of the school book lines and words create a strange optical dialogue that is somewhat of a puzzle or tapestry to read in its busy-ness. The book is or perhaps was lovingly dedicated to her daughter, which is also a nice gesture given the usual lack of people found in her work, in which she seems to prefer the reduction of space to something of a study in architecture or history as objects within frame or on the printed page, not unlike a museum catalogue. Small things, indeed.

Matteo Di Giovanni, *I wish the World Was Even*. Artphilien. Calm, meditative and with a strong nod to American and German photography, Matteo di Giovanni's book is a slow burn about the complicity that photography has towards our aims of self-fulfilment and the therapeutic potential of the medium to turn its qualities in on its author.

Di Giovanni's story is special and coupled with the way in which he presents his story of flow images, creates an obfuscated and hidden meaning within based on a narrative that develops within the text and casts a beautiful shadow over the purpose of the project. The photographs themselves are very strong and I look forward to his next body of work. I will not elaborate on his story, preferring that you read on his experiences that led to the book's creation.

Nicholas Mueller, *Lacuna Park: Essays and Other Adventures in Photography*. Self Publish Be Happy. Nicholas is our gift. He is a brilliant photographer, but even more rare, he is a brilliant photographer that can actually write!! You can't have both-I know this and so do a few other "escameel" writers who make poor images while shuffling decent words. *Lacuna Park* is the severe antidote towards a way of speaking on photography that has become over-academic and fantasy-driven by its political aims and innuendos. In a year where a number of titles have claimed some sort of political audacity, Mueller asks to stop the goddamn world and think through images, to hold them both dear and at arms proverbial length. I don't know why, but I feel if early Jeffrey Eugenides had photographic value, Mueller would have harnessed its enduring potential for our examination. This book is arguably the most universal book written on photography since Sonag or Barchen. This is much needed reading for the cancer of our times.

Garrett Grove, *Errors of Possession*. Tespasser. That damn telephone pole, or lack thereof (cover image) still haunts me since I first saw it. Once you see it, you can't shake it. Its pure beauty and wrong in all the right ways. The rest of the book is also a considerate and beautiful foray into Americana bent on evaluating as we are want to do in the age of Trump our nation, its values and its image. This comes at a time when many artists are looking for answers to our situation and reflecting gravely on possible outcomes, errors or otherwise. Garrett's book adds to the lexicon of our time in thoughtful rumination throughout the land.



Salvatore Viale. *How To Secure a Country*. Lars Müller Publishers. Edited with Lars Willumet (must be noted). This project has taken on different forms as it has progressed, so it is sort of impossible to consider the book as a final object or ending, though it has been a sincerely complimentary medium to that of Salvatore's research and exhibitions. I first came across the project at the JSSP review that I did with Salvatore in 2015. I was taken with the project immediately and could see that Salvatore was making a very serious and intense body of work about borders, which is at the crux of his investigation along with parallel concerns about patriotism, guns, and the evolution of a nation that is home to big banking.

This is one of the most important documentary-oriented books to have been published in the past couple of years along with Lisa Bernard's *The Canary and the Hammer* (MACK). I cannot in one paragraph easily manifest its importance as a long-term project, nor the acuity of imagery. Please get a copy of this book. I feel that it has been one of the more underrated or more likely under-seen titles of the year.

Bertis Conolly. *Sheffield Photographs 1988-1992* Dewi Lewis. I am emphatically encouraged by looking at Conolly's photographs that Britain has the capacity to get through troubled times with some wigour. When I view the photographs of the post-war generation(s) of British documentary photographers, I sense certain courage in adverse situations. In Conolly's work, I see Sheffield, a town that was known for its industrial wasteland landscape photographed at a time in the late 80s and early 90s when it was beginning to transform from the Thatcherite years of rubble and rubbish tips into something new and with some self-respect. Conolly caught the last moments, the twilight of the times and this book caters to the notion that if one or many *are going through hell, one must, as that cigar-smoking, Tommy gun-wielding prime minister once lamented, keep going..*

Mark Power. *Good Morning America Volume II*. GOST. The second volume of Power's massive and sprawling look at America. Ambitious and consistent, Power leads us through the contemporary landscape of America in times of great duress. His adept formalism and his fascination to document as much of America as possible over a decade has resulted in a nuanced and brilliant collection of books. Having had the pleasure of viewing Power's oeuvre this year, I can say with certainty that when complete, the *Good Morning America* works will likely be his opus despite a large back catalogue of incredible works. *Keep going!* indeed.

Cole Barash. *Syza*. DeadBeat Club. Tremulous and haunting, Barash's book combines the tremendous difficulties of documenting birth and a similarly difficult depiction of a Nor'Easter storm (Stella) that occurred at the same time that he and his partner welcomed their child into the world. *Syza* is a study of four intense days of labor and the result is a dialogue about time, environment and the pressures associated with inclement weather and inordinately long labor. The book positively vibrates in sections between the use of interior and exterior images in which veins pop on necks hidden from the raging of storms outside-trapped between or betwixt it seems the two, Barash records the pulse of the extended personal moment.

On a side note, I generally find complicated layers of different sized papers in books to be a bit of chore. It reminds me of the fad to layer images on a wall-you know, start with the wall paper and then add little satellite images on top of it as if that made an installation or distracted from the 2d nature of the photographic image-it's a crutch move that I have spoken about previously, but with Cole's book, I actually find the layering to be sufficient to leverage the tactical use of novelty (not all device of novelty should be read negatively) to give a more in depth discussion about the claustrophobic effect of being in a hotel for four days waiting for your child to be born while you can barely get out for air without being punched in the face by a howling storm. It adds sufficient weight to the design to be considered overly successful and has even pushed my own limits of conservative inclinations of book design to relax a bit.

Camera Austria International. Spector Books. Camera Austria is one of the more important periodicals to be devoted to photography, its aesthetics and its provocations. Spector books have been on a role this year and having this compendium, which enlists correspondence as well as images and historical oversight to discuss the tenure of the magazine, finds a position tenable as to the magazine's legitimate importance. I did say that I would not include compilations, but this sort of goes beyond that notion and becomes a one-off retrospective of a magazine as opposed to one individual artist. If you are interested in photography's histories, you should pick this up. Camera Austria International has a specific way of dealing with text, image and criticism and I think it is fair to include this title in the longer list.

Liz Orton. *Every Body is an Archive*. An interesting look at the body and its diagramming, its programmed medicalized use and its use in technological terms for the gains of politicized means. Orton's book asks prescient questions about the collective body and its uses in the manufacturing of its purpose by industrialized aims. It reminds me of how David Cronenberg in his films often challenges the same body politic, but this results mostly without the overriding necessity of being divided by Freudian sexual obsession. A nice point about this title is that it is broader than simple commentary on Charcot's Hysteria Studies and post-modern gender dissertations.

Carl-Michele Ström. *Montörisen*. VOID. Montörisen is an intensely passionate book about the relatively unobserved position (comparatively between the sexes) of what life is like just before, during and after childbirth. Ström's position is reflected through his obsessive journal entries that he reproduces, then negates, scratches out and limits by cancelling the writings previously penned in his journal, which creates the proposition of the cancelling out of self. This is part of what becoming a father feels like-you wake up one day and everything previously is different, you are somehow again out on your own for a little bit, your direct need diminished by the bond between mother and child and things come into focus about the value you once believe you had. It isn't all bad, but there certainly is a different set of thoughts and circumstances and positions that becoming a father entails and Ström has found an interesting way to communicate this.

Camille Vivier. *Twist*. Art Paper Editions. This is book produced early in the year that really caught my attention and I felt it kind of stood alone as a superior example of where fashion, art and fantasy all met at the crossroads of the female divine. Then Vivier went and released *Sophie*, another incredible book with Art Paper Editions. Her two books are pushing the front of how we view female authorship and gaze and it is with great pleasure that we may watch Vivier condition a mythical world in which women pursue their limits of power devoid of men and our constraints towards what we believe our rights to representation are. If you are a man and struggle with this sort of thing, think of letting go, it is by far more interesting than the constant abuse you will otherwise suffer in the coming years in which the politics of identity reach for the right to castrate and castigate your position. In Vivier's realm, look on at Amazonia and "feels".



Jonathan Levitt. *Echo Mask*. Charcoal Press. As in Haubhor and Gulimoth's *Sleep Greek* (VOID), the horror of the natural world and its audible and delicate soundscapes transform the viewer of Levitt's images into an imaginative and active participant. The photographs become active *pictures* in so much as that collated together, they form a melancholic index drawn from the natural world of New England (mostly) and illustrate a fecund possibility to view them as transformative experiences. Here, amongst the bramble, the sound a gull flapping its wings along the surface of the water blends with the charismatic indolence of deer viscera left dripping from a wispy oak's tired limb-the sound of which, fluid and in an uncomfortable frequency charge the book with a significant set of possibilities

Geert Goiris. *The World Without Us*. ROMA. Goiris is another completely under-estimated voices in photography right now single-handedly making beautiful formal photographs of places, things and people that are all inter-woven into a deeper and more complex potential for the horrors they possibly represent. There is a penchant for an apocalyptic reading of Geert's work that deals largely with human folly and climate-the external world in which we continue to manifest the worst of our species innate ability to give a shit tomorrow if at all. I have a few of Geert's books now and have been incredibly fortunate to spend some time with this soft-spoken peddler of my misery in person. *The World Without us* is important above all for the images and the continued vision that Geert promotes, but also for the writing and interviews at the back of the book, which shed significant light on his practice. Geert in person is humble, even shy, which all belittles the

profound sense of his doubts about humanity and its devices. I strongly encourage readers to look at Geert's work, but also Belgian photography at large, which in my estimation is one of the current strongholds producing great artists.

Aaron Schuman, *Slant*. MACK. Prescient to say the least and another book in which the tension of the text and the images bounce back and forth between the pages playing on stereotype and folly in small town America. Schuman's sweet disposition belies the darker matters at heart within a number of the images, but his pole is to question before condemnation, which is a rare and subtle attribute to have in a day when outrage rules for its own misbegotten sake. Please read Aaron's interview that we published this year for a more in depth re-cap.

Collier Schorr, *Paul's Book*. MACK. What you have to understand first of all with Collier is that she does not have to produce "art books".

She has a lucrative career in fashion and editorial work and aside from that, has a fluid practice, which finds her on both tear sheets and gallery walls without any massive discernible difference between images and their placement. With Paul's book, she returns to a more renegade format of investigation with her model Paul. The work is cut in strange ways and the ephemeral tendencies she displays include film/frame/photoshop markings along with what looks like scrap imagery which in finality becomes an incredible collage of sorts. I am reminded of Larry Clark's *Perfect Childhood*, but more importantly of the distance, or rather continued brilliance between her book *Jens F and Neighbors*. The psychological weight of her portraiture and her queer authorship exceed their qualification to canonize as simple identity-driven politics in image-making. Fiercely strong and timely.

Peter Watkins, *The Unforgetting*. Skinnetbook. It should be said ahead that I find this title deeply affecting on a personal level. I have lived through the death of most of my family. The death of my own mother was extremely traumatic for me. It was under different circumstances than the death of Peter's mother, but the questions become similar. How do we forget to remember the difficult trauma without forgetting the good times we have spent with family. It is to speak about memory, loss and the inevitability that photography plays in dealing with pain, but also lamentable constraints of how memory is attached to the process. Peter won the Skinnetbook award this year for this book and it is one hand intensely personal, on the other extremely universal. The weight of this title cannot be measured easily.



Maja Daniels, *Elf Dahlia*. MACK I tend to find book's that include archival imagery with contemporary images very difficult to reconcile. I find that contemporary artists that pursue this avenue generally fail as their understanding of historical, archival or vernacular function fails greatly when sequenced with their images. Daniel's case is different. She has deftly crafted a tome, which honors the intersection of local custom, the archive of a magician (Tenn Lars Persson) and language (Eldfalian). The examination is coupled with Daniel's own images of the same geography. Eldfalian is a spectacularly esoteric language found in one very small community of Sweden. Its existence has defied logical linguistic analysis for ages and its purging over the last two hundred years has been cause for speculation. The language itself is associated with the folkloric traditions of the region in which pagan witch trials also occurred. The examination of otherness and languages xenophobia and nationalism are implicit and make an unerring parallel to Swedish society today as it wrestles with mass immigration and rightwing defiance towards it. Daniels brilliantly weaves several tethered threads together to examine these potential speaking points brilliantly.

Michael Ashkin, *Were it No For*. FW&Books I don't think I have seen a book so rich in the use of text in a very long time, if ever for me. There is something incorruptibly beautiful in Michael's images of decay and wayward sackcloth and ash forms. I am reminded of a latent New Topographics, but with a bitterness, instead of angry disposition. I guess there is romance in all ruins, but with Ashkin, it feels more like a goodbye and a sigh of relief for it. You know it's a great book when Michael Mack had seen it early, passed on it and then publicly announces that he wishes he could have published it himself were it not for feeling he could not achieve the same end result. This book was a personal game changer. With Ashkin, you can see the formal approach to place in his work, but it has been very convincingly been forced to loosen up, to include foreground contemplations of compositions, to place horizons at the top of the frame, in effect to work between the

placement of framing and the eye's natural way to view a scene or site. This ability is actually much harder to achieve than tight formal images in which composition is dictated by symmetry.

Petra Collins. *Miert vagye, ha lehezt en is!*. Baron. The world of Petra Collins deftly subverts any given assumption about fantasy, photography, the female gaze and the political apparatus adjusted to an orientation of photography. Collins' world is an abstraction, a foray into the inconceivable peppered with a dynamic use of 80's 90s plastic cultural designs such as VHS movie covers, romance novels, DVD gift on girl pornography cases and perhaps even exercise and cooking manual designs-a crock pot of *Goonies* and *Lethal Weapon* sensationalism. The use of prosthetics, meta-creature allure and the obfuscation of post-wave aesthetic are crafted into something of an aberration between perverse nostalgia, fashion and art. I like to think of Collins' work as striding the awkward planks of a sequined and *My Little Pony*-themed pirate ship helmed by Leonor Fini, Louis Wain, and perhaps not unsuspiciously Pierre Molinier.

Petra Collins. *OMG! I'm being killed*. Super Labo. Even stranger than her book with Baron is this slim Super Labo book in which all manner of inconvenient mash-ups occur in a female nymph world where creatures and desires overlap into complete absurd chaos. Collins has taken her natural interest in the female form and disoriented, bent and made perverse all the elements, which feature in her previous work. It has become a carnival in which each passenger of each ride screams wildly, arms flailing for their own amusement before bathing in the blood of the cotton-candied innocents. I can't fawn enough. Whatever is happening with fashion right now is way more interesting than half of the garbage "art" photobooks I see being rendered by over-fascidious and boring image-makers trying to command my look to feliate their "intelligence". I'll say it again, "please take your dick outta my face when making your pretentious glocentric books".

John Gossage. *Should Nature Change*. Steidl. Gossage has yet to let me down on a title. His gift of sequence, the raw and deliberate attention to detail, design and consistency make every one of his books a trophy. He is possibly the single-most important photographer alive and working today for me. His ability to speak in a photographic dialogue that seems so effortless and yet considered at the same time makes his eye and books an impassioned consumption for many people

Estelle Hanania. *IT'S ALIVE! A travers l'œuvre de Gisèle Vienne*. Shelter Press. This is possibly one of the richest documentations of one artist's career from another. Hanania documents the fragments and partial rituals from Vienne's choreography and transforms those partial images into something the reminds one of the Hans Belmer or Morton Bartlett had they been able to consider a career in horror films directing classics such as *Puppet Master*, *Basket Case* or *Troll*. There is also a faint whiff of Jordan Wolfson at play when we view the single images of Vienne's "actors" interspersed with awkward and sooty still lives of coffins, masks, and crushed beer cans, the details of which Hanania completes the conversation with. All in as a book it shows Hanania's distinctive interest in mythological types that we have seen in her previous work such as *Glacial Jubile* (*Also Shelter*).

I would also note here that I have a profound admiration for the folks at Shelter Press for having more than one interest and belonging to a larger group of amazing artists based in Paris-Stephen O'Malley, Dennis Cooper, Felicia Atkinson, Peter Rehberg, Michael Salerno, and Bartolomé Sansón are just part of the larger group of networked individuals at the forefront of contemporary arts, music and literature in Paris along with Gisèle Vienne and Estelle Hanania. It is thoroughly gratifying to see such talent working with each other and to not be necessarily defined by their mediums. This book was delayed a bit, so I may also put in again next year as the time line was a bit hazy, and so if you see it again, consider a reminder.

Guillaume Simoneau. *Murder*. MACK. From beginning to end, the sequence of this book is possibly one of the strongest I have seen to date. Simoneau's use of archival imagery along with its own images made in Japan paying homage to the master Masahis Fukase has created an exemplary shine-an order and a magnitude often unseen. I have written extensively on Simoneau's excellence this year and rather thanully it here in short, I suggest you get the book and read the reviews in full.

Alfonso Moral. *Zero*. ANTI-Books. An unbelievably intelligent book of contact sheets that the artist made while visiting Syria, Beirut and Libya. The book itself reads like a ring binder of negatives in which the supporting contact sheets reveal ghostly traces of war and destruction, absence and presence which dialogue with the physicality of the object asking the viewer to contemplate the 1 to 1 ration of negative to contact sheet and the implicit behaviour of audience relation to it. Many are blank having been under exposed and many are over-exposed leading to the ghosting of figures and ruins within. This reminds one at times of Broomberg & Chaarín's *The Day Nobody Died* in which the photographic paper stock itself and its ephemeral traits ask us to consider what it is to "change" physical photographic materials by including their presence of their processing by material means at the site or scene of trauma or event. It is an astounding body of work and dedicated to the late Hannes Wandler of Peperoni Books. I am not sure of the edition size and the site does not clarify this, so I will hope that it is available for those interested.

Jerome Ming. *Oobaken*. Mack. First Book Award. This is an incredible first book award selection this year. Ming's strange world of domesticity is conflated with the local environment and forays into sculptural presentations, which elicit a sense of interiorized states externalized in an environment akin to a home in Gaston Bachelardian sense of psychological expression. That was a weird mouthful, but let's suggest instead that Ming's genius is his ability to create a home from inside his head with success dependent on its objective interests in a failing orientation of its material value-errr....



Jack Latham *Parliament of Owls*. Latham has a lengthy career ahead of him if he desires. After speaking with him in November, I was bowled over by his work and particularly his in-depth ability to express his positions on it with sensitivity and humility-rare these days. *Parliament of Owls* is about conspiracy, America, patriotism, the new British documentary tradition and the author's deep immersion in the subjects he finds relevant. I think of his research process as sitting in front of Youtube, nodding off for a sleep only to wake up in the mid-collision of two overlapping documentaries in which a deep dark yearning for solving a case or problem overlaps with a video about rogue governmental psychops brainwashing brochures read by Marshall Melihan or perhaps Hunter S. Thompson. He also re-released *Sugar Paper Theories* this year, which if you have not gotten a chance to examine, I strongly suggest you grab it. Where *Parliament* has images of a more striking, perhaps haunting beauty, the edit of *SP7* brings the reader face to face with darker uncertainties. Latham is heavily involved with his subject for the latter. Wait for the podcast....

Laura Rodari. *The Gray Line*. Akina-Stark, brooding and incipit in its ability to disseminate representational form. Rodari's much-anticipated new book leans and sags and commits to the treason of interpersonal potential. It wants little discussion and it favours solitude as a means in which it thrives. The images within are a testament to the nature of photography's sincere ability to be revered as a solitary environment.

Jules Spinatsch. *Semiautomatic Photography*. Spector Books. This is a long-term project for Spinatsch, which has lasted from 2003 until present. The works by Spinatsch involve using semiautomatic cameras in a mode of surveillance that questions the medium's fragmentation in a digital age, but also how power structures can be reversed by what is photographed, disassembled and re-purposed. Spinatsch's is a world where high heels and gold rings cut from 2176 frames becomes a conduit for larger questions about how we access places of privilege and power-the larger implications to be asked are where automatism of the apparatus will take us from driverless google cars to nano-drones with optical capability. Spector books are absolutely killing it this year.

Girault de Prangey. *Monumental Journey*. The MET. There were a few great historical books this year worth checking out. As a collector of 19th and early 20th Century photography, I find that returning to looking at vintage material offers an impassioned solace for me when I get a little bored with the realm of contemporary matters. History acts as a catalyst of irreplaceable fantasy based on its commitment to remaining unlivied by the absolutes of its condition and that does not exclude its current associations with wrongdoing or improper behaviours. I believe that history lives, but that it lives on its own and without intervention (for now) by people living currently. Though it can be read as a construct, the operative function of history is create an idea of progress, growth, but also romanticism and lament. With de Prangey's daguerreotypes of the Greater Middle East and part of Europe, it is easy to see how images function to purport the fantasy of history. Of course we cannot ignore who made the images and what ideas they perpetuate, but as an ungovernable slice of time, I find catalogues and work like this rich in possibility-it transports me elsewhere-an escapism fraught with problems and associated tensions. I remember when theses came up for sale at auction and I also remember when the Russian material was found in a box at a provincial English auction snapped up by Ken Jacobson, an American dealer living in England. The tension of that purchase and seeing the de Prangey images surface still gives me shivers to think of how much still exists buried in the historical canon, but also how much is lost and how comparatively, we still have so much to learn about the medium. Thanks to Charles Johnstone, I was able to receive a copy of this catalogue to further my own fascinations.

Stephen Gill. *The Pillar*. Nobody Books. Gill proceeds with his investigation of the flora and fauna of his home in Sweden. Where Night Procession left off with its brooding and mercurial surveillance of nighttime fauna, The Pill plants a literal stake in the earth to watch it pass by from one steadfast position and poet. Seasons change, the orb spins and we are presented with many gifts all duly and beautiful. On many lists this year and rightly so-Gill continues to up the game with his inherent fascination and ability to be playful and productive. The books he makes are some of the most beautiful objects to hold.

Terri Weichenbach. *Des oiseaux*. Editions Xavier Baral. Terri is one of the most under-appreciated artists working in photography. That is not to suggest that she is not appreciated, but completely under-valued. Her books are strange studies of the familiar that border on surreal. Everything has a place and the way in which she places the camera along with the focal length almost distorts their natural world appearance. I keep thinking of Conan Doyle debunking the *Cottageley Fairies* when I look at the work or as I mentioned to her in November, like I am going to zoom in and find those ants in the ear of *Blue Velvet*.

Antonio Julio Duarte. *Against the Day*. Pierre Von Kleist. Duarte is something of a black magician of the esoteric type. His book *Against the Day* occupies a space in which images of ritual and custom crossover to inform greater possibilities about human interaction and environments. Talismans keep surfacing which echo uncomfortable histories about art, race and are conversely interspersed with how Duarte views habitable architecture, homes, places of work or play (music). A series of African sculptures pop up and are conflated against what appears to be both European and American spaces, both interior and exterior. If I were to guess, there is something uncomfortable at its roots- Have you been to Lagos, Portugal? There is a specific history to that town which informs the new world and its images and I cannot help but feel that there is something at play with Duarte's use of sculpture and the claustrophobic photographs of interior and exterior space- to further this, I will also note that he is also using the "color" black in his work often- something I am also interested in to speak on variations of significance when it comes to the use of color photography and its potential to be read through polychrome ventures. Duarte is an incredibly gifted photographer like his associates at Pierre von Kleist- that they operate under their own mantle and publish difficult and subtle material is but just one excuse to dwell a little longer and look a little harder with them.

YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE: [ASSTY/Gehard Seidl: "How To Make A Book With Seidl" \(2011\)](#)

Lisa Barnard. *The Canary and the Hammer*. MACK. Lisa makes me feel small almost incompetent with making photographs. Her work is vast and deep. It is like an inverse volcano where one can feel the possibility of its potential as an ocean of lava. All platitudes and crude metaphors aside, her research and ability to corner a political, economic and cultural symbol such as gold at its most wide is honourable. I still flip through the book and its images, which are spread over continents and think...how is this possible to produce in only a few years.



Pino Musi. *Border Soundscapes*. Arphilin. Every once in awhile, I stumble across someone that I do not know on social media who has phenomenal work. It doesn't mean they are unknown by any means, just that they are new to me. Pino Musi is such a person. It has happened a few times that I think "F/CK this F%&R", every day an incredible image that makes me think I have been blind. The images are so well crafted and considered that I find it almost brutal that I have to look at them. They defy the current drives in photography and inhabit their own world and their precision of execution is nearly insurmountable. Now it stands to reason this sort of technicality is not the only qualification for great images or books, but when it is coupled with another idea such as music, notation and composition the framework becomes rigorous and consuming.

Christopher Anderson. *COP*. Stanley/Barker. Incredible. I still don't know how to place this title even though I have spoken to Christopher recently about the work and his past two titles in general, both with Stanley/Barker. *COP* defies categorization. It is oddly punk rock and oddly in praise of the individual police featured within. It begs questions about how we view authority and yet, it asks us to forgo pre-judgment and it does so in a way that can only occur in NYC. Anderson's gift is his ability to hint at story, narrative etc. through a presentation of claustrophobic and challenging portraits. His use of color is cinematic as is the implications of what lies beyond the stillness of the frame. The urbanity and tight cropping of the subjects presents an anachronistic possibility. I cannot tell when I am. The production

again is on point and S/B have shown they will continue to support artists, a stable if you will of a caliber that can deliver with each title. If you have Approximate Joy, you would be remiss to leave COP out of the collection.

Peter Chadwick and Ben Weaver: *The Town of Tomorrow 50 Years of Thamesmead*. Here Press. This is not a monograph per se, but is a much needed archival examination of the conceptual framework around Thamesmead, which is currently being destroyed as I type this. If you are familiar with Stanley Kubrick's *Clockwork Orange*, the importance of the Thamesmead estate in popular culture cannot be understated. Architecturally speaking, it offers a slight conundrum in that it is known as a stalwart of post-war brutalist thinking in which the notion of utopian systems had not yet been vanquished and yet, practically-speaking the architectural solidity of the estate itself has been in question for decades, which poses the reasons for its current state of dismantling. The book that Chadwick and Weaver have put together is full of images and general conversations about the site and looks at its inception and current state though contemporary images paired with historical ones. Cultural and socio-economic factors are also implied and the book's overall production merits it a place on the list, not only as Here Press generally delivers solid photobooks, but because it provided a nice crossover tome in which archive, architecture and photography with purpose co-exist and challenge social and cultural memory as well as the aims of post-war Britain. Having visited the site in the rain and on acid (yes) in September, I can fully say that the spectacle has not dissolved completely and I believe that the haunological residue of its myth will continue in popular culture. Mark Fisher, if ever a playground was built for you to watch it submerge into the sands of time, this was it.

Mark Steinmetz, *Carnival* Stanley/Barker-I have to admit, against all probability, I love Steinmetz and his ability to force my photographic self to remain interested in humans. I generally feel lost looking at portraits of people I do not know and try with all continued possibility to hide from their glare, persona, or existence. I live in a fantasy when I look at photography. It exists at points without empathy. It is rather that I try my hand and eye at a non-connectedness. I want to limit relationships. I want to avoid and then I am countered with a new Steinmetz publication and I find myself pulling myself back together, organizing my human-ness and I glare back endearingly, wishing to speak, to commune, to orient myself back into proximity with others. Only Steinmetz has this affect on me. Carnival in technical terms is also possibly Stanley/Barker's largest book to date. It is already sold out, but I suspect that you will see it again. Steinmetz work should never be limited and I am reminded with it, that neither should I.

Hannah Darabi, *Engelshab Street, A Revolution Through Photobooks 1979-1983*. Spector, co-published with Le Bal. This is an incredible study of Iranian photobooks produced at a time in the country's history that was under tumultuous change. Darabi, a talented artist and researcher worked painstakingly to locate and contextualize these items. Where most photobook anthologies function as an uncomfortable ode to nationalism, Darabi's book functions obliquely as a politicized inquiry in which by display and selection alone, she begs larger questions about contemporary Iran.

Tin Carpenter, *Christmas Day, Bucks Pond Road*. The Ice Plant. I missed out on *Local Objects* when it dropped and managed to great it down at Micamera in Milan. Where that book felt open, free and like a gentle study or meditation on the rural, along comes "Bucky" and subverts and opens up how we look at one specific place and a specific time by an author whose passionate and longing investigation along the bramble and asphalt gives the viewer the greatest gift, that of space to contemplate its possibility without hefty intervention.

Michael Light, *Lake Lahontan Lake Bonneville*. Radius Books. Michael Light is a something of an adventurer. His books often employ a technical means in which he finds his position ascendant and of the heavens looking down or in his archival works such as 100 suns or Full Moon, the opposite-questioning the heavens from the small position of life on earth. In recent years, Light has been making work from the air, imploring questions of what geological time looks like from above by analyzing in this case the salt flats of Lake Bonneville and Lake Lahontan where the Burning Man festival takes place. Light interested in surface and how humans leave evidence along the Western expanse uses the site and the way in which humans drive across it to create new forms. One is reminded of Brassai's *Graffiti* and more aptly Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp's co-authored *Dust Breeding*. The resulting images as one can suspect hold an air of awe- a fleeting beauty captured from above.

Mike Slack, *Walking in Place 2*. The Ice Plant, Co-published with Perimeter. This is my first year with Mike Slack and oddly enough I feel a bit of kinship with him for publishing a book on Berlin during the year of the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. I believe Michael Ashkin's *Horizon* to be one of the few other books along with mine on the subject- that all three were published by Americans also makes it oddly compelling. This is my first analysis of Mike's books, which came to me in November this year. I think of what he does and perhaps Ashkin and myself as a strange wave of street-oriented image-making. Slack's photographic world is incredibly peculiar focusing on fragment, de-contextualization and the rhythm of color and line. Though it sounds nearly pity to re-iterate in this way, his way of seeing the under-observed serves a purpose to elucidate our contemporary condition that is at once stylized and very much needed.

Michael Lundgren, *Geomancy*. Stanley/Barker. If H. P. Lovecraft had thought about photography and lived long enough, he may have come up with something like Michael Lundgren's Geomancy- oddly comic and terrestrial in familiar terms, the landscapes that Lundgren presents are abstracted, unusual, and kind of creepy, which is associated mana for some of us. There are implications of ecological boundaries crossed without even relying on the tired crutch of "anthropocene" and the psychological, if not horrific potential that Lundgren unlocks begs questions towards human nature and our interpretation and resulting desire to enslave our environment thus putting our terrible specimen directly on the celestial map for all the worst of reasons. Sparse, challenging, beautiful and another killer from Greg and Rachel.

Chris Shaw, *The Hunter Gets Captured By the Game*. Zen Foto Gallery. Chris is a one-man machine exploring the lines in which diary and project become intertwined. Hunter is ostensibly a book about Thailand and its lady boys, but its much deeper than that- it acts a catalyst for how we see the theatre of photography playing out and how the subject and author enforce and re-distribute boundaries to the beneficial transaction of both parties. There is play involved, a certain and accepted performance lingers within frame and is driven by Shaw's indelible eye and position for how he reads the political terrain of making images like this as you can see by reading his words on the matter from his site. The book is lavish and another beautiful Zen Foto Gallery title in which no expense has been spared to make a beautiful object from a great image-maker. I would also suggest that though Shaw is known for his images- his use of text is also masterful and worth further acclaim

Daisuke Yakota, *Sadogashima*. Self-Published. Finally, we see a quiet return from the once ever-present Yakota who has been laying low the past couple of years after a tremendous surge in production. In essence, Yakota could have taken a multiple decade break and his work would still have the weight of something spectacular. Though I am happy to see the production slow down a bit as it was getting a bit over-bearing

and had sincere risks of losing steam, Yakota returns with a few gems of recent, but *Sadogashima* stands out as an atypical, well-executed and slightly nuanced book for Yakota. There is repetition and there are the somewhat familiar landscapes that bleed into darkness, but also around this work is a strange narrative of place that is present in Yakota's personal work, but never really capitalized on, the artist preferring abstractions, process-driven experiments or intensely personal imagery of girlfriends etc to hold the viewers and his own attention. With Sadogashima, Yakota is asking us to consider the idea of remote place. Sado as it is called is known historically to be an island of exile in which dissidents and criminals were sent. It also happens to house a fortitious gold mine, making both the reference to history and Daisuke's work pertinent: his images range from azure to golden peaks from the setting sun. He also undertook the journey quietly and during his own bout of self-exile from the world of photography. Quiet, ruminating and sensuous, this is one of Yakota's finer works and it operates without the largesse of over-processing.

Erik van der Weijde. *Bollenveld*. ROMA. This slim volume presents a typical foray by van der Weijde into architecture, memory and lost utopias though this time, the artist has focused on the Dutch modernist utopian architecture of Dries Krefkamp instead of the German or American. Fetishises that van der Weijde is usually attracted to. *Bollenveld* presents a different kind of nostalgia and it stands to reason that Erik's interest stems from returning to the Netherlands after some years abroad: it feels like a bit of yearning and trepidation played out in the architecture that mirrors the utopian fervour in which *Bollenveld* itself represents. I favour Erik's work heavily and still believe his voice, though always present in the land of photography is seriously under-estimated. This is also a nice companion piece the Here Presses book on Thamesmead.

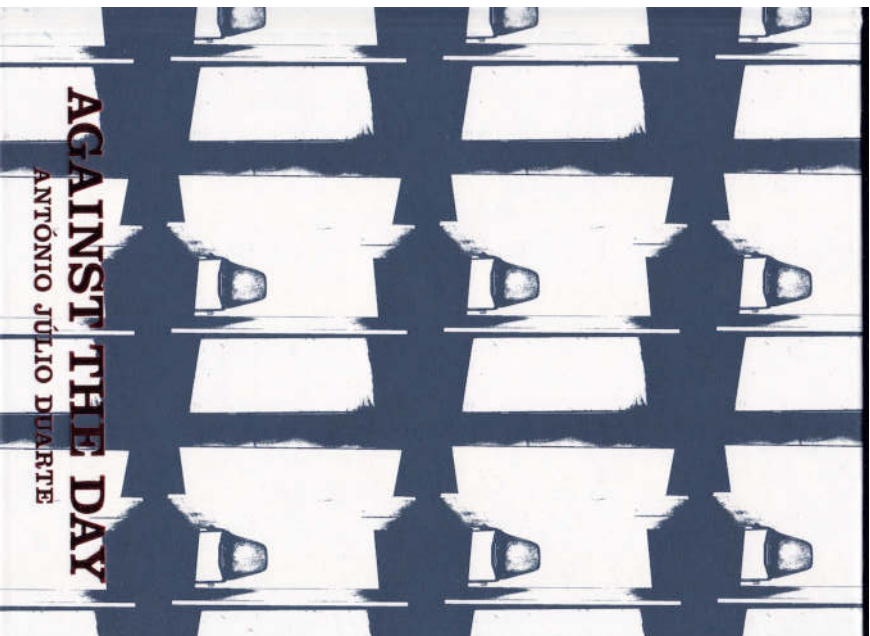
Jurgen Maellyr. *Furs*. Art Paper Editions. Where lips left off last, we find Maellyr continuing his dissection of how glamour functions from nostalgia. Jurgen dissects, as he did last year with lips the accoutrements and emblematic adornments of desire. In *Furs*, he concentrates again on the form of his subject, but this time reduces the frame to the specifics of fur. He bounces light off the surface of the pages that he is looking at before taking the photograph of the printed page, creating somewhat reminiscent of Dirk Baekman a game or folly in which photography's inability to represent are called into question within copy culture and potential variants of representation.

Paul Rousteau. *Arcadies*. Editions La Pommiere. I came across Rousteau's painterly work this year and was favorably impressed with his former book for L'union's Fashion Eye series where he made an exemplary body of work about Geneva. *Arcadies* picks up the nouveau pictorialisme brush and considers topical methods and subjects within the tradition of art-still lifes, nudes, and flower studies. Rousteau reminds one of Sheila Metzner or perhaps more pertinently Sarah Moon's later decades of work. It feels as though he has been experimenting with something similar to the Frescon process, but I am more convinced that instead Rousteau is playing with printing on water color paper and then perhaps blazes the print with water to create a beautiful distortion at the edges of the print. It is a playful way in which to distort the image and asks the viewer to think about how these common tropes of art such as the topics listed above. The result is a gorgeous selection of images for the sake of images.

Reiner Riedler. *Sweat Reflektor*. It's hard to explain what this title actually sums up. Though it is not photography, it has all the hallmarks of explaining certain qualities of the ephemeral in photography, its ability to be seen as a spiritual and transcendent form and its ability to be read as being somehow about the body. The act of Riedler is quite curious. In taking a sweating subject, pulse raised and perspiration present, Riedler transferred their image, or their image in perception to a sensitized material to create life sized negatives which he then photographed again, crystallizing the salt and sweat into something of a photograph. Though we are missing light as an active ingredient to the portraits, what we have instead is a ritualized alchemical act in which Riedler's process reminds one of the Turin Shroud and a photograph simultaneously: the work therein takes towards a spiritual quantity asking the viewer to "believe" these images to activate them into photographs which in an act of superposition remedies larger questions about the framework of truth and its relation to the body politic of subject matter. It's a very strange body of work and pushes the envelope of the medium. Do not miss out on this title.

Shirley Baker. Lou Stoppard (ed.) *MACK*. This is another in a much-needed examination of British photography from the 20th Century. This is my introduction to Baker's images and although by all accounts the book is a bit sprawling in terms of content, it provides a beautifully produced and needed catalogue of Baker's documentary images of Britain. I suspect that there are several bodies of work within that, if accompanied by more images could function as books in their own right. This is an overview and an introduction for many. I can only hope for more specific bodies of work to unfold as is with the case of Ursula Schulz-Dornberg.

Marco Marzocchi. *Oyster*. VOID. Personal histories are often complex and hard to illustrate if not by relative atmosphere and probability. Marzocchi's personal history with his family, notably his parents play out in *Oyster* in a compressed excavation of personal ties to his history situating a morose flow of photographs that lament a certain absence. His parents were troubled and Marzocchi bore the brunt of that condition. Within troubled families, there is a worry by the offspring that whether related to alcohol, drugs, violence, or other forms of abuse, there may be a compelling argument for the children of these nightmares to continue their patterns. In Marzocchi's case, he seems to find solace in naming the condition or at least the ineluctable aspects of it through making images about his emotions, doubts and his own relationships. All is not lost in his case however as there is also at its heart an aversion to the cyclical (ouroboros) nature of these issues and Marzocchi through distilling his concerns into images, also fights back their appeals towards disintegration. It is a strong book and of a type that necessitates its completion of terms before the artist can move forward. Books are important for this reason: they can offer a sense of completion, a way of ending chapters that no other medium can rally offer. It can still be referred to and denied by its physical observation in equal amounts.



And now from a different perspective with different needs and different reasons

Eugenie Shinkle is our beloved contributing writer. She has a sickness in collecting books that most of us here reading this share, though she finds way cooler material in London charity shops, which she lovingly obliges us with on her Instagram account, which you should follow.

Though I find that we have severely different tastes in some areas, we both share a common fascination with minimal photographs or photographs of minimal order. I will admit that a few factors have changed my position on what I look at it regards to photography and though I have personal referents thereof, I will also freely admit that some of the material that Eugenie has pointed me towards in the past, I found nothing shy of boring only to re-discover it a short time later to have my eyes blown.

ES: I haven't had the chance to see everything that's out there, so if you're wondering why I haven't included certain books it's probably because I didn't get a good enough look at them. I also saw quite a few great photographic projects this year that were subsequently turned into not-so-great books – and some pretty mediocre images packaged into very desirable objects. The ones on the list below have it all – excellent photography, solid ideas, and perfectly-judged design. In no particular order

Gregory Halpern: *Omnia Sketchbook*. MACK A tender and songlike exploration of a troubled trinity: identity, place, and masculinity. The loose imperfection of Halpern's images and the scrapbook-style design suggest that any answers we might reach for are as wavering and ephemeral as the questions he raises. One photograph lingers on a cliché, the next one blows it apart, gently. There's no such thing as a perfect edit but this comes close.

Diane Dufour; Bernard Marcade: *Sigmar Polke's Photographic Infamies*. Le Bal. I've loved Polke's painting forever but didn't know much about his photographic practice, and I had no idea that someone so thoroughly abusive and disrespectful of the medium of photography could produce such compelling images. As a photographer, Polke was a 'master of the poetry of almost nothing,' as curator Bice Curiger writes. This is the catalogue to an exhibition of Polke's photographs and photocopies at Le Bal in Paris, and it captures perfectly the bubbling entropy of the work.

Sohrab Hura: *The Coast*. Ugly Dog. This is an unusual one for me. I'm attracted to its message and its design whilst being simultaneously repelled by the images. I actually really dislike the superaturated, hard flash style of photography and the often grotesque subject matter, but I think it's an important book dealing with an important subject – the normalisation of violence in India – and love the way it never allows you to forget what you're looking at.

Michael Ashkin: *Were it Not For*. FWBooks A Ginsbergian howl for the new millennium. I'd compare Ashkin's photographic style to that of Lewis Baltz were it not for Ashkin's less cynical misdeeds, and the way he's able to smash through the imperatives of the photographic frame in a way that Baltz never managed. Pastoral, dystopic, and driven by the same kind of carefully measured anger that courses through Robert Adams' *The New West*.

David O'Mara: *If you can piss ...*. Self-Published. Provoke-er sensibility meets profoundly mundane subject matter, and the result is what I imagine Renaissance painting might have looked like if cameras had existed back then. Deceptively simple images by a photographer who

trained as a painter (and it shows). O'Mara's own essay on the social stratification imposed upon him by manual labour is a smart and sensitive accompaniment to the work.

Michael Lundgren: *Geomancy*. Stanley/Barker. The velvety unreality of Lundgren's landscapes makes me wonder whether we've been encountering the world around us through all the wrong sensory portals. He uses the camera to reach towards something that begins with the surface appearance of things, but that stretches a long way beyond, towards what I imagine Walt Whitman must have been thinking about when he wrote of the 'vast similitude [that] interlocks all ... All spheres, grown, ungrown, small, large; suns, moons, planets ... All distances of place however wide, all distances of time and all inanimate forms ...'. Sorry for sounding like a new-age weirdo but this book moved me profoundly.

Ezio D'Agostino: *NEOS*. Skinnerbook. Full disclosure: I like space, I like machines, I like silver ink on black paper, and I like clever books about complex topics. NEOS – an acronym for 'near earth objects' – draws all of these together in one lush volume. As Luxembourg's mining and steel industries fall into decline, the government is exploring ways to extract resources from asteroids. D'Agostino's nearly abstract photographs evoke a new kind of post-terrestrial sublime – the development of a vast economic, technological and political infrastructure to sustain the exploitation of off-world assets.

Batia Suter: *Hexamiles*. ROMA. Suter's combinatory logic has always fascinated me, but she's taken it to the next level with this book, pulling apart and subverting the structure of the images themselves. Hexamiles uses overlays, collage, and abstraction to turn the visual platitude of landscape into something eccentric and intriguing. Pro tip: don't try and read the images in their 'correct' orientation.

Jack Davison: *Photographs*. Loose Joins! I wish I'd taken every single picture in this book. I'm not going to offer deep critical insights into his work because I don't think that's what it calls for. He's just a fucking great photographer. The classic, understated design stands back and lets the images sing.

George Georgiou: *Americans Parade*. Self-Published! The parade is a quintessentially American anachronism. Georgiou has turned his camera on the crowds that gather to watch these events, and found in them a nuanced and equivocal form of political expression. The undercurrents of inequality and disenfranchisement are there, of course, but there's also a sense that America is still held together, however tenuously, by a sense of community and shared ideals. History painting with a camera.



The Interview beckons...

BI: Your list has a few things on it which we agree upon completely and I think generally we have some amount of crossover with some titles. Your own background in making for lack of my own imagination, these serene, sometimes flat and serial pieces whether they are close up of textures or barren landscapes are of an order I believe in which our paths cross somehow more recently with archival projects. You have mentioned to me in passing recently that your way of seeing things has changed a bit over the past couple of years and I guess I can completely relate, though I suspect that we are looking a bit askance at things. How do you feel that your vision of things, particularly books has changed? Is it due to settling down and re-working a new home and adding bookshelves? Is it because of teaching or is it just a general shift? You have also been rather prodigious in the writing department lately.

ES: I've been collecting books for a while but it ramped up when I moved into a larger space. The nature of the collection has changed over the years but at the moment it includes a mix of contemporary photobooks and a lot of vintage stuff – photography books, engineering manuals, technical drawing manuals, electrical encyclopaedias, books on design and typography, along with really random things that I bought because I loved the photos in them, or I loved the paper, or the design, or the smell, or the cover ... It's hard to pin down exactly what drives the shifts in my collecting habits – recently, it's had a lot to do with the increasingly close relationship between photography and design, and the way that this is articulated in/as the printed page. So, I've been studying design in a kind of disorganised way for a few years now, inspired initially by an impulse buy of about 70 issues of the Architectural Review from the 1960s. I was really attracted by the design in the advertisements – simple, clean, and very powerful. I see a lot of the techniques there – the focus on technical imagery, the layering, the use of halftone screens and other textural effects – reflected in contemporary photobooks.

Yeah, the writing ... I've been trying to move away from it but people keep asking me to do these really interesting projects. I've just finished a piece on videogames, another one on photography and topology via the work of Gabriele Basilico, and I've got a couple of cool things in process. I trained initially as a civil engineer and although that training has always shaped the way I think, it's also started to intervene powerfully in the kind of projects I get involved with and the kind of photographic work I make.

“So, I've been studying design in a kind of disorganised way for a few years now, inspired initially by an impulse buy of about 70 issues of the Architectural Review from the 1960s. I was really attracted by the design in the advertisements – simple, clean, and very powerful. I see a lot of the techniques there – the focus on technical imagery, the layering, the use of halftone screens and other textural effects – reflected in contemporary photobooks.”

BF: You wear many hats and I want to ask you a particular question. Perhaps it's a bit of speculation, but I tend to feel that we of the many hats have a particular hat that we wear better than most. In my case, though I may be completely wrong, I find that the hat I feel best wearing is my photograph making hat, though I suspect people think my collecting hat is probably the most fashionable on me and yes, I am quite convinced that my writing hat is a bit weird and uncle-y, like some sort of mustard encrusted Bavarian feathered beer hat somewhat recognizable, but not necessarily the better for it. With many artists, I feel that one hat has to suffer more closer time. You pursue writing, you pursue educating, you pursue making your own work-do you feel that you do one of these better than the other? Do you think it is reasonable logic that I am projecting? I see so many talented writers that make really poor images and vice-versa? What are the qualifications for doing all at one level?

ES: I really have the way that people get pigeonholed into being/doing one thing or another. The idea that we have to be 'specialists' in one craft and 'hobbyists' in anything else is dumb and narrow-minded. You write, you take pictures, you collect, you're good at all of these things, and together they constitute a rich and unique practice (I'd describe your writing hat as a space helmet wrapped in barbed wire and filled with tiny octopi and lots of floating microplastic, hrrm). So while your observation is certainly reasonable, I have a big problem with the logic that drives it. Some people prefer to operate as specialists in one field, which is fine. Others take a more ecumenical approach to images and image-making. In my case, I actually believe that I'm a much better photographer than I am a writer, but for a number of reasons the photography hat has been hidden in the back of the closet for quite a long time.

I don't know that there are any particular qualifications for doing more than one thing – I think it's down to temperament as much as anything else, and a willingness to acknowledge that the questions you're trying to answer can't be solved just with language, or just with a camera. We all think in different ways, so you develop a skill set that works for you. I started working across disciplines in the second year of my photography degree, and I see some of my own students starting this journey too, which is really gratifying. As far as the teaching is concerned, it's part of the ensemble for me. I find it really energising and inspiring to help students work out what their questions are and how to go about answering them. Most of my students think I'm a fucking weirdo but if that's the hat that I have to wear in order to push them to do their best work, then I'm okay with it.

BF: Haaaaaaa- I feel your response has an air of the defensive, which was not my drive, though I do appreciate the space helmet metaphor. My inking on those grounds was that frankly that I can name here, but will not, a few of our colleagues that excel at writing and institutional work within the grounds of medium, but fuck me if they don't make really poor images and books.

It feels to me as though there is a division often between what part of the venture we excel at. For example, I know that I certainly do not excel at writing. I do feel however that I have a fairly deep knowledge of historical images based on collecting etc. In any event, I was positioning that sentiment more about what it feels like from your position and my inclination remains though it was not to cast any sort of shade on you.

Forward, you are also an avid book hound. We were at Conor Donlon's (London) place in September and bumped into David Solo. I remember David was buying a particular book, perhaps it had to do with type art or something. I remember looking over David's shoulder before you could see it and instantly knowing it was a Eugenic title. Perhaps you can remind us of that as I do believe that you did not make it out of the shop with the same bank account total that day. Do you have a long history of being interested in books and if so, has photography factored largely into that or has it been more something of the last 10 years when projects really picked up? I tend to think of myself as something of a bore when it comes to the kind of book that I like. I prefer un-obtrusive, linear projects without too many bells and whistles. Though I think that his images are great-I ran from a book like *Ex-Nihilo* by Daniel Shea and OK_R.M. and sense that this sort of thing is straight up your street. How do you think of your tastes and what kind of book really grabs your attention?

ES: The book at Donlon was *Signs Fiction*, a survey of work by Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt – she's a German artist who worked in concrete poetry, typewriter art and mail art from around the 1960s to the 90s. I did indeed buy it. Donlon is very bad for my bank account ... So books, yeah. Both of my parents were and are very avid readers so I grew up surrounded by books. For many years I ate philosophy and critical theory texts for breakfast, like I was trying to get my head around every possible way of thinking about photography and images and life and the world more generally. I didn't understand everything I read, by a long stretch! Most of that collection was sold on, apart from a few shelves of classics that I go back to again and again: Michel Foucault, Brian Massumi, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Kaja Silverman, Fredric Jameson, etc. etc. etc.

... The photography book collection has been coming together slowly alongside that for about 20 years, but as I noted earlier, it's really ramped up lately, partly because I've got more space, and also because the direction that my interests take is in constant transformation. I stopped reading theory completely for about two years and focused almost exclusively on the visual: photography, typography and design. Of course there is work I have loved forever and will always love – I studied with Mark Ruwedel as an undergrad and I hold him personally responsible for my unshakeable obsession with minimal landscape photography. New Topographics is pretty much the foundation of my visual aesthetic, though I've written a few pieces in the last few years critiquing the way that work has been inserted into recent photographic history as some kind of unique 'starting point'.

My taste is also deeply shaped by my lifelong obsession with machines and built structures more generally, and by my training as an engineer. I've never been all that interested in portraiture or humanist documentary but show me a photograph of a pitched or a reinforced concrete roof structure and I go mad. So yeah, *Ex Nihilo* sits pretty much perfectly within that constellation of interests – I love Daniel's work anyway, but that collaboration looks particularly lush. Thank god I haven't seen it in the flesh yet, because I know that the moment I set eyes on it I'm going to want to buy it. The other project I've seen recently that really got my attention was 67-P, by Claudio Pigo and Magdalena Wysocka. They used imagery harvested from the European Space Agency's archive of the Rosetta mission to create a moving, other-worldly narrative of space exploration. From my perspective, everything about this book is perfect: the beautiful, understated design, the careful choice of paper, the textural, almost tactile use of imagery, the choice of font, even the size of the physical object itself.

"I studied with Mark Ruwedel as an undergrad and I hold him personally responsible for my unshakeable obsession with minimal landscape photography. New Topographics is pretty much the foundation of my visual aesthetic, though I've written a few pieces in the last few years critiquing the way that work has been inserted into recent photographic history as some kind of unique 'starting point'".

BF: I love Daniel's images for sure and I think he is going to be very important to the future contributions to the medium, but god damn if I am going to "play" with his or anyone else's books. My kid is getting into building blocks and legos- I'm sorted.

When will you make a book? Do you have several projects to think on? You seem to get locked into unusual collaborations.....

ES: Ha – good question! I got my archive out of storage recently and rediscovered hundreds of negs that haven't even been proofed. The focus has always been on landscape, built structures, and geology, so... I don't know, I guess there's a book or two in there somewhere, but it's a monstrous editing project, not helped by the fact that approaching publishers fills me with tremendous anxiety ... so all of that is mostly in my head at the moment, trying to work out whether this un-published work needs to be turned into books or something else.

I've also got a collaboration on the go at the moment that may well end up in printed form much sooner – someone I met randomly on Instagram who turned out to have an amazing, wide-ranging intellect and taste very similar to my own, but different enough to shape something completely new together.

Thank you!

In conclusion, it has been a great year for publishing with many thoughtful and provoking titles topping many lists out there. As mentioned previously, I would not have thought this was going to be a great year for books feeling a small lag last year in the number of exemplary titles being fairly modest. So I have no idea how 2020 will pan out at this point, but it is with some clarity that I hope our discussions about important issues, books and changes in the world will be rewarded with calm and thoughtful participation in the name of progress.

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Ursula Schulz-Dornburg: Yerevan 1996/1997

January 16, 2020

"Armenia and its role in the central Caucasus make its geography of special geo-political reference given its access point, along with Azerbaijan and Georgia to both the...



Mike Osborne: Deep State, Journalist, Spy, Conspiracy Theorist

January 14, 2020

"The path of paranoia leads us to a pizza parlor, armed to the teeth and utterly convinced of the righteousness of the mission. At the other end of the...



Hauثور & Guilmoth: Sleep Creek, Gauze-Eyed Gothic

January 11, 2020

"Taken in the weight of a heavy yet foot dragging across the floor boards above unmoved by concern for the splinter in the attic above, the same attic, two...



Mark Mahaney: Polar Night

January 06, 2020

"The disappearance of identifiable items that we consider part of the terrain from fire hydrants to road signs seem obliterated and much diminished under this soft, yet threatening sun or ...



Sohrab Hura: A Carnival of Violence and then a Volta

December 16, 2019

"I felt ambivalent about what was unfolding but in the end, the psychic energy and latent subtext, predicted by a short story involving a headless woman, a bird and ...



Robert Adams Interviewed – Thomas Weski, John Szarkowski, Shooting 450 Rolls of Film in Denver

November 30, 2019

@ Robert Adams "I shot about 450 rolls of film, all up and down the Front Range mostly in the Denver area, though, and the work from that...



Gaechter & Clahsen: Fünf Finger Föhn Frisur

November 29, 2019

"Traces from French photography in West Africa, Madagascar and also the Middle East, such as studies by Tizende Pinaus focused on hair as a way of defining difference." ...



Beyond the Pandemonium of Nowness: Guido Guidi's in Sardegna

November 14, 2019

"The photographs in Volume 1 of his Sardegna are extraordinary. It's as though Guidi was trying to wrap his wide-angle lens around everything at once: people, cars, buildings, gestures...



Whiteness as a Position

November 11, 2019

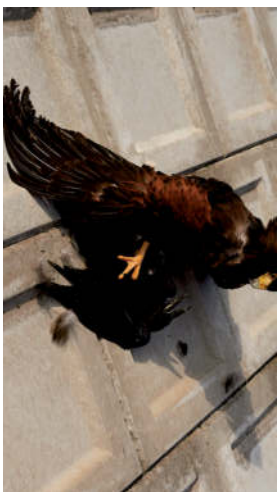
"Whiteness is a position that anyone can possess regardless of their colour"



Federico Clavarino Interview: Hereafter, Escaping Nihilism

November 06, 2019

Editor's Note: This interview was conducted over the period of months. Federico and I would ping pong ideas back and forth, being a very arduous, Clavarino had already...



Guillaume Simoneau: Murder as Legacy

November 27, 2019

"Guillaume Simoneau is a true carnival, but his book Murder (MURDER) is an ode to Pinaus' legendary status and particularly his book Karyn Bayou. Murder is a deconstruction..."



A head raised to the heavens and a foot in the mud: David O'Meara's If you can piss ...

December 08, 2019

"It was in the ambience of my situation between being a builder and an artist that I realized the reality of the class structure in British society and ...



Bryan Schutmaat: The Goddamn Interview

October 29, 2019

"In very broad terms, it seems that the work made in the West during the 20th century portrays a prolonged event – a disaster, you could say – that...



Martin Stöbich: Beirut / Tokyo 東京 and one picture of Mt. Fuji / Happy in the U.A.E.

October 19, 2019

"The way a photographer "sees" and commits to an image is through experience. Those experiences have very little to do with the camera and are built up over years...



Michael Lundgren: Geomancy Terraforming The Hermetic Tradition

October 10, 2019

"Man has understood his place in the cosmos of things by de liberating over his mortality. In fear, we build a language before we build a language from love...



Guy Tillim: Things Come Together

September 14, 2019

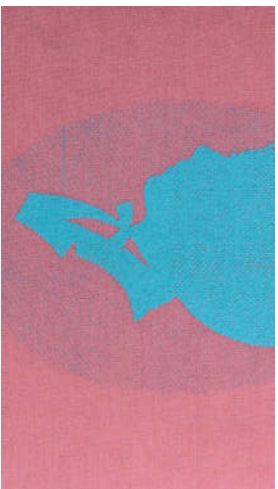
"This literary position that implies the view that African colonization created only victims incapable of looking after themselves, impinges against their oppressors and incompetent without..."



Salvi Danes: A Cinematic Investigation of a Photographic Panopticon

October 27, 2019

"With them, the moment, the ever-sharp moments included in its subordination (non-news, non-documentary) force inquiry as to the politics of its production and in doing so enable the viewer..."



Carl Mikael Ström's Montöristen The Birth of Redeemable Language

October 18, 2019

"Self-putting self-comment and a postcard for observation oscillating between peaks and troughs of life's chaos and losses or what my friend Jeffery Shwartz once described as "Swedish gain syndrome"..."



Masahisa Fukase: Family Enshrined

October 01, 2019

"Times change, we enshrine ourselves to different locations and yet with nostalgia nothing more has lost. It can be found again. We can consider the death of an..."



Mark Power: Good Morning, America Volume II

September 11, 2019

"From there it is all taken up and pumped up. From the position in front of its double, it's the small of Baltimore's bearing how more wires and antiseptic..."



Dennis Stock: Once Upon A Time in California

October 25, 2019

"Photographs make up the vast majority of how we consider the narrative of California in the late 60's and early 70's, and Dennis Stock's California Trip exemplifies the condition..."



Alec Soth – Photographer (2019)

October 12, 2019

"The Minnesota-based, internationally-respected photographer Alec Soth recently released his ninth book, entitled I Know How Futurously Your Heart Is Beating. But in the summer of 2017, less than two..."



Berris Conolly: The Sheffield Photographs That I Hear in My Head

September 29, 2019

"We propose that what 'X' is to 'Y' is how 'Z' was accomplished. We lack the details of a true overnight and our compunction to rely on discourse..."



Walter Keller: Berurf: Verleger. A Tribute

September 09, 2019

"So, when we consider respect in the medium, we can limit our discussion by looking at who is contributing to our world and who is not. Publishers and..."