The aim of this thesis is to produce a reflection describing my experience and my knowledge of the photo-book medium at this present moment. This experience developed around the publication of my book Metsästä (Form the Woods, Kehrer - 2012), and the realization of the book itself forms a major part of this thesis.

The first chapter of this text comments on the approach used to build Metsästä, the structure of its narrative, and the reasons and methods chosen to create the book. Then the thesis describes the context or sphere of the photo-book medium, its actual functioning and gives specific hints through interviews, which bring another tonality to this reflection. The first interview with Lesley Martin (publisher: Aperture Books and editor: Aperture Photobook Review, USA) outlines a broad picture through different themes and approaches the changes and tendencies of photo-book creation. The second interview with Klaus Kehrer (publisher: Kehrer Verlag, DE) is more technical and oriented towards the publishing system and the market of the photo-book. The last interview with Christian Patterson (photographer, USA) approaches the making of the narrative of his book, Redheaded Peckerwood (Mack, 2011), and his opinions and strategies for book making.

The third part of the thesis discusses the narrative constitution from a theoretical point of view, referring to other media. It is a closer look at the definition of narrative, how it works in photography, in a series of images, and in relation to verbal narrative. It examines various notions, including narrativity or tellability, placing them into the perspective of the photo-book medium, and attempting to identify different conditions for a narrative happening.

The last chapter proposes that photo-books can be classified according to a more concrete and analytic perspective, establishing a personal methodology with a classification of different types of narrative in photo-books. It leans towards an attempt to identify different narrative modes, different architectures for photo-books, ranging from classical and traditional modes, to experimental and more complex ones.

Finally, the aim of this text is to provide an interesting source of reflections and information for other students, anyone interested in photo-books, and hopefully future photo-book makers.
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Prologue

the rifle

I don’t know anymore how it all started. Sometimes I suspect that it began much before that I found myself sitting in that plane flying North, hanging in the air above that scattered forest on islands between lakes. There was a man talking to a French girl behind me. At some point he looked through the window, and said in a flat breath: "you know there’s not much of anything apart from woods up here..."

For the last year, my photographic production - and actually my everyday life - has been almost entirely oriented towards the forest, running after stories and people chasing prey into the woods.

I always found those moments, when hanging in between two worlds, very special, and somehow quite violent. Like a spatial and temporal break that happens so quickly, a thousand meters high above the world, while everything remains on the floor of each respective present.

Often, people would ask me why I decided to leave, why go to Finland? Although it’s not so far away, and after all, wasn’t it quite a logical direction?

At that time, I was looking at a new territory and facing the challenge of creating new images from an empty page. In fact, I didn’t know anything about the school which became a new ground for the coming story, nor about the people who helped me to trace it, page after page.
And today, I certainly have forgotten many of the small accidental details that comprised my journey through the Finnish winter for few years, and much further away.

Perhaps it always ends and starts somewhere hanging in the air:

I was listening to some music, a song titled Rifle, a story with people “coming from the woods”, and eventually the desire to face the lack of home.
The premises
movements and encounters

I started to work on Metsästä when I moved to Finland, in fall 2010. Two years later the book came out, published by Kehrer Verlag in September 2012.

Before, I was working on the hunting thematic in Switzerland and France (Chasses -Hunting Games, Ed Infolio, 2010). At the same time, the photography department of Aalto University accepted my application for the Master programme in photography. The first project allowed me to build a personal approach that I continued to develop once in Finland.

After my first significant work Rural Scenes (2008), the hunt came as a natural theme for questioning our perception and relationship with nature and wild life. The hunting community became a precious and inspiring context that I decided to keep exploring once in Finland. At the same time, I really wanted to develop another working direction, different from the discourse I had with Chasses, where it was a matter of being really involved in the heart of the hunt, with a focus on representing the prey and the predator both with admiration and repulsion. But once in Finland, I felt tempted by the possibility of heading to the woods again, to explore a part of the Finnish culture and meet with people outside the student community.

When Metsästä came out, I left to the School of Visual Arts in New York for half a year. This experience was considerably enriching and I spent a lot of time in the well-stocked library and book shops that were available there. When Finland was an amazing context to create and produce, where I ultimately found a very precious working group of friends with the collective Maanantai, which evolves in a great and unsuspected way since 2011.

I think this combination of experiences and relationships together with my initial educative background in Switzerland, the continuation in Finland, the publication work with a German publisher, as well as my passage in the US; all helped me to build and assemble the present reflection, that is nothing more than the combination of those multiple facets.

This morning the postman brought Iris Garden, the last book published by Alec Soth’s Little Brown Mushroom. The book ends with a quote from John Cage:

“My intention in putting the stories together in an unplanned way was to suggest that all things – stories, incidental sounds from the environment, and, by extension, beings – are related. And that this complexity is more evident when it is not over simplified by an idea of relationship in one person’s mind.”

Turning the pages of this nicely scattered book, I smiled thinking of how good
this sentence sumed-up the feeling I have this morning when trying to trace the
beginning of my work. When I take a bigger step back for wider look at various
premises for this work, at its deep foundation, what I realize is the hazardous
dimension of a chain made up of a succession of small incidents coming from an
undetermined starting point. What I see are: pieces of significant moments, uncon-
scious decisions mixed with futile details, intuitions and blind beliefs together
with determining encounters, u-turns and mistakes, silent words and whispered
wishes thrown by chance, or not.

And somewhere in *Iris Garden*, John Cage continues:

“Mr. Romanoff is in the mushroom class. He is a pharmacist and takes
color slides of the fungi we find. (...) Mr. Romanoff said the other day: “Life is the
sum total of all the little things that happen. Mr. Nearing smiled.”

**Framework, conceptualization and inspirations**

Early on, what interested me particularly in Finland was the easiness of the
people to sway between the urban and the natural world - what I perceived
as a sort of inherent attachment to nature, and thus for the forest. I am still not
sure how much it was based essentially on a personal impression related to my
previous implication with the natural world, or part of a more objective feeling.
However *real* or *projected*, this new context was an interesting framework for
observing what I perceive as a larger phenomenon of contemporary a desire for
naturalness, and that feeling was strong enough to ground a story there.

When working on *Metsästä*, I think I literally built an imaginary framework,
whose main pattern would *come from the woods*, and would imply an intrinsic re-
relationship or belonging to a kind of forest environment. It was maybe also a sort
of state of mind, a slight obsession with the woods, or just a way of looking.

However, within that framework, *Metsästä* is built on different levels. One of
them is cultural, and deals essentially with themes related to the Finnish culture,
such as the sauna scenes and related objects. This aspect of the project was a
way to discover and to meet with a new culture and its symbols. But also a way
to depict it with a certain distance, looking at it from the point of view of an
outsider:

One part of my inspiration came directly from popular stories and myths related
to the forest. I became interested in the way some of them were related to very
banal items of our everyday life. *Sampo* for instance, is the brand of a popular
matchbox and is related to a famous and mysterious object in the
*Kalevala* - the national epic of Finland.

On another level, this work deals with a wider questioning of a
the perception of nature, as a symbol of authenticity, freedom,
escape etc. Again partly rooted in the Finnish identity, but also part of an idealized system of urban contemporary representations, where nature and wildlife is admired and consumed, and where the frontier between authentic and fake nature is blurred. Hunting acts as a pretext for interrogating these relationships and representations.

I spent much time comparing with my hunting trips with my everyday life in Helsinki, the people around me and the very banal aspects of my neighbourhood, those common and somehow uninteresting places. Intiäkatu for instance, is probably one of the best example of this category of vernacular scenes. This picture - a winter street view - has nothing spectacular to it, but it belongs to the important images that create a scene, a ground (+ anchorage) for the narrative, a setting where the story can take place.

A story that also has a biographic level, simply recounting my personal journey, my own escape and quest of the unknown. That detachment from the familiar context turned out to include a wide range of inspiring feelings such as lack, incomprehension, impossibility, fascination, admiration and identification (+or non-identification). Today, I perceive these feelings as real constituents of the photographs, as well as concrete cause of thrill (tension or so called suspense) giving rhythm to the narrative of this book.

“A sort of implicit thud of violence is lying underneath”

Metsästä, in fact, is an impossible story to tell with words. It does not follow a main character along the way, who would evolve through different situations; rather it is made of successive encounters with several characters appearing in turns. Each of them, guardians of a narrative inside the narrative.

Finally I believe that Metsästä is foremost the story of a place and the response to personal impressions related to this place, with a desire to catch and to render l’esprit des lieux. A place that certainly cannot be located precisely in the outside world, existing eventually only in between the pages of that book.

2 For instance: Intiäkatu p27, Snow berry bushes p79, Kumpula p57.

3 From Metsästä: in After an elusive world, On settings and atmospheres, Anna-Kaisa Rastenberger

4 The spirit - or sense of place
In the form of a book

I started simultaneously to shoot the first images of Metsästä and to develop the idea of making a book out of that coming work. I imagined the possibility of the book in connection with the Festival Images in Switzerland, where my work was awarded and selected for a coming exhibition. That Festival is taking place in the town where I studied before leaving to Finland, and the prospect of bringing my work back home was a nice motivation. I also knew there would be a context of diffusion for the book with a sort of launching and a possible support from the festival. It was a context of production with a concrete deadline and once again, just a good pretext.

But first, it was a challenge due to the process of book making, which includes several factors - technical and human, from the conceptualizing and image making part, to financing, design conception, the question of the texts and collaboration with authors, work with the publishing team and the context of circulation of the final object.

Beyond this attractive and very complete package of experiences, my interest in book-making was also a simple response to the desire to create a story with images, playing with very different photographic genres, allowing them to co-exist and looking at how they could complete or confront each other between the pages. Photography functions most of the time in series - even when an image has its independent story, but in the book form, probably more then in any other aspect, some pictures make sense only because of the whole, as a response to others. Inside the narrative of the book I discovered how they can be the bridge-images, the ones that allow you to breathe, to rest, to move on, to stop.

About Metsästä, Jörg Colberg published on his blog: “It might not be that coincidental that as the sheer number of photographs made every day is exploding, photo-books are becoming more complex, combining photographs that previously would have been carefully kept apart.”

I actually think that the idea of the book influenced and oriented my way of producing images - and not only my selection and editing of the body of work. It helped me to look for missing parts, chapter after chapter, when I was taking pictures and designing the story.

As I mentioned earlier, when talking about my inspirations there are different chapters spread inside the overall story. The result is that these chapters are not necessary distinguishable, but they structured the work during the development process. I was concretely shooting images trying to fill gaps or in order to balance my discourse, and to orient it. Which I think, is a very different way of working than creating a book afterwards from an existing body of work, where the story is the result of a work of reaction with editing and sequencing. When done the other way it requires rather a work of anticipation, projection and pre-conceptualization.
This gets back to the recurring question of sceptical or worried photographers: is it possible to make a good book with a poor body of work? I heard that question a dozens of time in different lectures on photo-book making. I think that question amounts to asking first what makes a good body of work. The point, talking about narratives in photography books, is rather to be able to see that some types of works have a high narrative power; whereas others do not (- which does not mean that they are less good, or less interesting, or less appealing).

I tend to think that works holding an intrinsic narriveness make more interesting photo-books, simply because the book form suits, supports and encourages naturally the narrative happening. The book as a medium is always a succession of sequenced moments, as well as the definition of story.  

That said - and to get back to the different ways of constructing and thinking a photobook and its narrative, either upstream or downstream - both are interesting attitudes and can end in very good results. But I think it is important to make the following distinction at this stage: on one side, the upstream scenario correspond to Christian Patterson’s Redheaded Peckerwood. Patterson probably did not know with certitude and from the beginning that his work would make a publication, but he intended it that way, and was aware of the high narrative power of his subject.

In the second part of his article about sequencing the photobook in the Aperture Photobook Review, Gerry Badger said: “It helps if you know the story you want to tell, but often the act of making the sequence itself is the act, not of shaping the story but actually generating it.” And thus, he also comments on the risk of resulting in a loose assemblage of photographs because of lack of initial intention. But of course it is not that simple, in some cases - as we shall see later, loosing sense is the actual intention of the narrative (or anti-narrative) construction. 

I think that the second scenario, the down stream approach or a posteriori collation of images which enables one in some case to generate the story, is still the most frequent one and corresponds to a book like Nine Nameless Mountains by Maanantai, where the initial intention of the work was not to function in a book following a story-line, but where a narrative has been nevertheless elaborated within the book object. Or, even better example; the previously mentioned Iris Garden edited by Alec Soth, where all the images shot by William Gedney a while ago were not predestined to be put together -and even less made to be associated with John Cages’s texts. Yet, a new narrative starts there.

To get back briefly to the construction of the narrative in Metsästä, it might be tempting to ask directly: what was actually the story you wanted to tell? Jerome Bruner lists in “The narrative construction of reality” several features of narrative and names one of them: hermeneutic composability. Bruner refers to narrative in the
text, and even though it might sound like an indigestible notion, I found it interesting to keep in mind: “The word hermeneutic implies that there is a text, or a text analogue, through which somebody has been trying to express a meaning and from which somebody is trying to extract a meaning. This in turn, implies that there is a difference between what is expressed in the text and what the text might mean, and furthermore that there is no unique solution to the task of determining the meaning of this expression.” 19

In any case, Metsästä is a story that cannot be read like a tale, and thus that cannot be told like a tale, but I wanted these images to be close to the experience of a dream, to be astride the trip and the dream. A travel into a dream, that would be sometimes very close to the real. Those are notions part of the spirit of that work and they are very strongly related to my perception of what the world Finland meant to me during the time I was making the images. Some dreams are more structured than others, more or less realistic, but often, we don’t really know how we ended up in this or that situation, we don’t really know how it starts, how it transforms, and the characters are not always clearly identifiable, neither the places, things are often mixed up and they change constantly appearances.

As Bruner says again, “narratives are about people acting in a setting”. 10 And I think that another important element of the construction of the narrative in my work is that sort of setting: the woods, where everything takes place. Characters and objects go on stage and leave it in a succession of moments, till the end: the last image has a very important role, and suggests the wake-up of the reader; with a photograph where it seems that the sun is rising in an orange sky beyond the forest.

**Intention and problematic**

My thesis work consists in my experience in making a photo-book and and my knowledge of the photo-book medium at this present moment. Firstly, this experience developed through and around the publication of my book Metsästä, and the realization of the book itself is a big part of my thesis work, as well as it was an important part of my studies.

In the first chapter I commented on the way I built my own work, how this story is structured, why and how I chose the book form. Next, I will talk about the context of the photo-book, (the photo-book sphere, or landscape) its actual functioning and give specific hints through interviews, which, I hope, bring another tonality to this reflection. The first one with Lesley Martin (publisher: Aperture Books and editor: Aperture Photobook Review, USA) outlines a wide picture of different themes, from the changes and tendencies of the photo-book making, to different approaches of publishing and different audiences. The second discussion with Klaus Kehrer (publisher: Kehrer Verlag, DE) is more technical, and oriented on the publishing system.
and the market of the photobook. And the last interview with Christian Patterson (photographer, USA) approaches the making of his book and his strategies of book making.

In the third part, I discuss narrative constitution from a theoretical point of view, referring to other media. There, I take a closer look at the definition of narrative: how it works in photography, in a series of images, and in relation with verbal narratology? I examine some notions, such as narrativity or tellability putting them in the perspective of the photobook medium, and trying to identify different conditions for narrative happening. In this part I have decided to include few thoughts from Lyle Rexer (critic and teacher: School of Visual Arts, NYC), like echoes to my thinking that intersperse my text.

Lastly, I got inspired by some of Gerry Badger’s propositions published in the Aperture Photobook Reviews, and propose to list a selection of photo-books according to a more concrete and analytic angle, establishing a personal methodology, or classification, of different types of narrative in photo-books. Like this, I tempt to identify different narrative modes, different architectures of photo-books, from classical and traditional ways, to experimental and more complexes ones.

I deliberately did not want to focus this text mainly on the analysis of my own photographic production for several reasons: my book contains a discussion that opens my photographic process for anyone willing to know more about the main ideas and themes behind my work. I also wished to look around further, rather than being focussed on my process in detail, and let the viewer project his own vision on my work, following the supposed and desired function of this book; a moment of escape, of intimate wandering. Furthermore, I found interesting to re-place my work in a larger context and to put it in perspective, looking at different photography books and the way they are constructed.

And finally I tried to keep in mind how this paper could be an interesting source of reflexions and ideas for future students, anyone interested in photo-books and hopefully other photo-book makers.
2 On current Photobook context and publishing
Anne Golaz: I would like to start by asking you a few general questions to get to know who you are. For how long have you been working at Aperture?

Lesley Martin: For a long time actually. I started as an intern in 1995. But I went away, then came back, then left again, worked for another small publishing company, and then I came back.

AG: Where are you coming from in terms of background and education? Rather from a photographic background, or from an academic background?

LM: When I went to school, I knew I loved photography and I knew I loved books. But my bachelor is a bachelor of philosophy with a minor in photography. I spent the most of my time with books at the architecture library. My thesis was about Robert Mapplethorpe and how society can fear images, or believe in the power of images.

AG: Thanks, that helps me to create a landscape around you. Within this long period of time at Aperture, how did you see the publishing house evolve?

LM: I feel that I have seen a shift from the past. An example of how it has change is that when I left Aperture in 2000 one of the projects that the director really wanted me to be involved with a re-issue of Kamaitashi by Eikoh Hosoe. There wasn’t really an audience for that kind of specialized book, very expensive and printed in a limited edition. But that model is now a model for so many people to follow. Already other people were doing this type of very specialized limited edition, but it was just not part of our vocabulary as a publisher. And that very specialized, very obsessive audience didn’t really exist yet, either.

AG: That makes me think of what we call experimental publications or artists books and I would like to know what is your position from the Aperture situation, being a quite traditional and well-established publishing house?

LM: Yes. We just celebrated our 60th anniversary. And Aperture was founded by very classic photographers. Edward Weston for instance is the artist we published the most. But in the recent history, I’ve always been interested of how we can push the boundaries of Aperture Books. And we still do work in a way that you might consider very classical, but I think that we can do both. We have done very small artist editions using print on demand for instance. But you have to understand that there are limited editions and also what we call trade books. It’s the trade publishing area that’s really changing so much. (When I say trade publishing I mean sellers like Barnes & Noble, Amazon, etc.) I think on one hand, we are still quite good at reaching a trade audience, people like my dad and my cousins who could be interested in a photography books too. On the other hand, the art-book publishing is also very interesting and changing. And that area is driven by artists.
AG: About this more specialized area, I would like to ask you what you think of the recent success of Mack Books, with books like *Vanilla Partner* (by Torbjorn Rodland, 2012) or *Le Luxe* (by Roe Ethridge, 2011); how do you see that type of quite complex publication with the distance you have? Could it be a sort of fashionable tendency?

LM: I think it reaches an audience of people who are very specialized in photography and photo-books and that audience is growing. It's still very niche, but Mack is somebody who will publish in very small editions, like 1’000 copies so he is not trying to reach the larger trade audience, and he does his own distribution. Which is a huge part of the whole equation, he has a small team and sells to a hundred accounts only. He can sell the whole 1’000 copies, and that’s his success. It’s a very smart model, and I think he also has very good taste; he does have his finger on the pulse of the trends of a certain type of photo-book making.

AG: But has this type of business model, small and specialized, already existed before?

LM: Yes, and no. I think it’s all about the distributions, because it's just how you get your books to the book store. It’s quite complicated, but that trade business model used to be the only model. There used to be a lot of book stores and there was no sales online at all. So you had to have very good distributors, who would know were they could sell which book. And that’s a certain talent that is not really necessary anymore. The internet has become so strong, not only at selling directly to customers but also to promote the books. And before that online network, you had to rely on going to a near by bookstore, to find good things.

AG: Right, that’s about the functioning of the machine somehow, but if we talk about the types of narrative in books like *Vanilla Partner* or *Le Luxe*, it’s also a very special type of narrative construction.

LM: Well, I also think the way of reading photographs has changed. The sophistication of the viewer has grown, and people are more paying attention to how they would read a photo-book. I think before people had a very linear from A to B to C to D way of reading, and now they are more accustomed to complex and disjointed ways of reading. And again, i think it’s because of the internet, or i tunes, to some degree. The comparison with music industry is good in the sense of how we would listen a record, from the begging to the end. And now, one minute of classic rock and one minute of Bach, and people can follow that.

AG: Right, but what do you do with this desire to make sense in assembling photographs? Even Christian Patterson who works with a quite disjunctive type of narrative confessed that he need a certain path.

LM: I think we always create sense, and we always try to communicate a feeling even if it is a feeling of disruption instead of smooth narrative. And it is the same with current ways of movie making, look at how much more layered they are. This must be related to the fact that the habit of viewing has changed. In the photo-book market this complex way of creating narrative does not have any place on the trade though. Christian Patterson's book sold super well and is built in a really interesting way, but it is still sold to the photo-book community.

AG: Yes, but do people like me or Patterson, actually make books for this photo-book community?
LM: I think it's a very interesting point, and when I teach or talk to people about their work, I always ask them who is their audience, and why they are making this book. It's really important to think about that.

AG: But it can lead to a sort of hypocrisy, no? When thinking of the book as a suppose to be democratic medium to communicate...

LM: That’s not the case anymore though. It’s also an art form. And there are very democratic ways to do it, but not when making super beautiful expensive objects.

AG: My impression is that there is a tendency for limited edition, and also some books that are actually made to be rare. Thinking for instance of Stephen Shore’s Book of Books (Phaidon, 2012).

LM: Yes, it's an edition of 250 copies and 2’500$ each!

AG: Or, if we think of Shimmer of Possibility (SteidlMack, 2007), for instance, it was printed in 1’000 copies, but for what it is, it's also very a limited amount. What do you think about that?

LM: Well, I feel conflicted. That's something we talk about, here in Aperture. I mean it would be fantastic to make the Shimmer of Possibility very widely available for very cheap, but I still think that not enough people would really care in fact. It's too specialized, innovative, it's made just for an art audience. On one hand, I’m happy that the audience is there to be able to support the making of very specialized objects, on the other hand, of course it’s not succeeding in the goals of accessibility.

AG: There are a lot of rare books that belong to the history of photography, they are precious items, and we actually never have them in hands anymore. But when it comes to make an actual book, of course it is a deliberate decision and not only when it’s a print-on-demand book.

LM: Scarcity has become a publishing strategy. Again, this scarcity has also allowed publishers to take risks. It is a strategy that allows publishers to produce special books, because they know, if they make it very limited, that they absolutely won't have the problem of storing many copies of a book in their warehouse 5 years later that they can't sell. But it remains a dilemma for sure.

AG: There has been a large amount of Historical classification of photo-books, the Dutch photo-book, the Swiss photo-book etc, would you say that they are really different identities belonging to different ways of making photo-books? Or some sort of small fires for photo-book making?

LM: Sure, there are sparks, that give rise to some mode of book making or another. I always like to put Diane Arbus Monograph side by side with Daido Moriyama’s Bye Bye Photography, they were made the same year (1971), they are both black and white pictures, about the same size, but they are so radically different. Because of the philosophies that Daido Moriyama was engaged with and the philosophies than Diane Arbus was engaged with. Those publications were happening in almost vacuums at that time, there was some exchange, but not very much compare to now.

AG: I found quite funny this notion of the golden age of the photo-book, I would like to ask you if you really think it's a golden age what is happening now with the photo-book medium?
LM: Well I think it is, in the sense that we have more access, more people involved, talking about it, sharing ideas, getting together to discuss it. But it’s not the golden age in terms of... there’s no more book stores hardly, the publishing systems as a whole are crumbling and it’s harder and harder for publishing companies to support the mechanisms. I think it’s a golden age for self-published and for artist publication.

AG: Right, when I think about my approach of the medium, about my friends, the people that I have around and their relation with the photo-book, I see something that has to do with an attempt to find a response to this overload of internet, and computer activity. A search for a more tangible experience. But on the other hand, there’s a growing interest for ebooks at the same time. Isn’t it a bit contradictory?

LM: It is. When you mention how much time you spend in front of the computer, there’s indeed something very nice and personal to a paper photo-book. You can smell it, it’s always the same object when you go back to it, it’s very stable. But I also think that some day in the next 10 years, 5 or 3 years, somebody will make an amazing ebook or app. I don’t think that it’s there yet, but someone will create something that will not replace the paper book, but will be something else using the special properties that only an app or an ebook can deliver.

AG: As a last question, I would be curious to know what really surprised you recently, what are the few productions that you consider major influences, that might have change your perception of the medium?

LM: Well, at the moment I feel that I am so immersed in this continuous flood of photo-books that I sometimes really feel a certain exhaustion. I think I was recently more struck by meeting people, and spending time with bodies of work in photo-book making. I am working now with Hans Gremmen [11] who is a Dutch designer. Just looking at the types of books he is doing and publishes, really made me appreciate his thinking. And the same with Rob Hornstra and Arnold Van Bruggen [12]. It’s a bit more my job to identify the source of good ideas, maybe even before they happen.

But to answer your question, I actually feel like there wasn’t one most significant thing in this past year for me personally. When last year, I do think that Christian Patterson’s book was really impacting people’s thinking of the photo-book medium.

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The photo-book landscape
and its dynamic

I personally started to take a close look at the photo-book world quite recently, but often I have the impression that it's a very small community, a small photo-book pool of initiated people, certainly changing, growing, becoming more and more specialized and inventive, but still made essentially of artists making books for artists. Thus when an artist makes a book, he/she will certainly think about two things: Why? Meaning why the work would match or get better in a book form, and if the core ideas of the work can be specifically translated in a relevant form by the book medium? (which is not only a matter of efficient design.) And secondly, where, or towards where? Meaning for whom, but also with whom?

I would like to trace quickly the contours of what for me constitutes that photobook sphere just as I perceive it at the moment. I think to have an idea of the main lines of what constitutes the photo-book landscape also helped me to project a book towards it.

Geographically it is quite easy to point different poles as main contributors to the photo book business, as historically it's also in North America, Europe and Japan that the whole medium of photography developed, at the same time as the industrialization of those areas and the development of the printing techniques. In the following analysis I do not refer often to Japanese photo books (with the exception of Rinko Kauwachi's Illuminance), although Japan is a particularly interesting context, where photographers like Araki or Daido Moriyama were extraordinarily prolific authors of photo books. Moriyama produced or re-visited over 80 books between 1968 and 2012. And his conception (or ideology, as Lesley Martin called it) of the photo-book, as something adjustable and evolving, is very interesting. Sometimes the same image appears simultaneously in different publications, making his wok a fluid material, suggesting also that when one book is realized, it does not mean that all the images it contains have found their place for ever.

In a recent presentation at Aperture Gallery, Alec Soth mentioned the photo-book as “a way of making sense out of the current flood of images”. In parallel he made an allusion to Araki’s book production, saying: “He makes his own flood, and instead of fighting it, he takes it all and moves on with it. To me, there’s something very joyous about that and a fantastic spirit.”

In Japanese photo-books, indeed, there is a sort of immediate quality of the images together with a prolific production. This renders a quite opposite feeling of the very fetishized photo-book and the traditional western way to approach it.

Yet, the perception of a geographical identity of the photo-book production tends nevertheless to be irrelevant in the 21st century, where most of the contemporary photo-books are complex crossed collaborations between different people jumping

from one place to another; taking on many influences around the globe, from all kinds of sources.

When I think of what I actually perceive as the producer of the dynamic of the photo-book world, I see of course the photographers and the artists - who are in most cases also the curators of the published work - which it is not the case in exhibitions situation or in most of wall-photography. But, of course, there are other actors, such as publishers, book sellers and critics (those functions are also fluctuating, photographers become their own publishers, when many people have multi-function activities).

Among the people that I met along the way, some of them are recurrent figures and important contributors to the photo-book community; discussing the medium daily, they provide a space for it, they set up photo-book fairs, festivals, competitions etc. They also made me think and directly influenced and inspired my own production. Alec Soth, to who I often refer in this text, is one of them and his LBM books offer for instance a smart, experimental but playful alternative to traditional publishing. Jörg M Colberg, and his Conscientious blog is a very aware, a smart critical source with a constant eye on recent publications. Some places and events are closely involved with the photo-book medium such as OFF-PRINT in Paris, the Kassel Photo-book festival or the recently created Vienna Photo-book Festival.

The Aperture Photobook Review edited by Lesley Martin is another channel dedicated exclusively to photography books. Gerry Badger and Martin Parr are publishing the 3rd monumental volume of The History of the Photobook - even though I tend to doubt sometimes about the relevance of the thematic way they structured it. Whether we agree or not with their selection, the platform they are providing is a great resource. Finally Mack books and its founder Michael Mack are definitely shaping the present era of photo-book makers, but also the proving that there is a demand and an audience for a very refined and specialized market.

Whatever the specific contribution or angle of production is - whether they are established publishers, DIY bookmakers, doing zines and ephemera or self-publishers. I noticed that few questions constantly pop up around the table of the photo-book community. The first one, very basic, consists in the distinction between a photo-book and a book of photographs. Although the distinction is not always so obvious, one refers to the artist-book, as Ron Jude defined it: “a self contained art work”. In other words a body of work conceptualized specifically in a book form, that would not -and could not, express the same idea in any other form. When the book of photographs refers to the still most dominant genre, images published as a form of report, it is closer to a monographic book or a catalogue.

An interesting aspect of the photo-book form, related to the diffusion aspect, concerns the physical versus digital form of the book. At the moment I think paper books and digital books are perceived and used as different and complementary
possibilities to display the same work, when I think they are also very contradictory. In fact, what I have access to - in terms of experience of an artwork, when looking at an ebook, is close to a reproduction type of experience, a digital facsimile (well conceived though, fairly interactive, especially when consulted on i-pad) but finally not so far away from a well presented website, or a nicely designed pdf.

It is indubitably a great way to bring back to the surface and to give a second life to old and rare books, but the access to information is primary what interests the viewer. For instance in the case of a book like the famous Pencil of Nature by William Henri Fox Talbot soon e-published by MAPP, I think it is great to have a beautiful digital version of this work, but finally what makes it interesting is nothing more than the access to an immaterial reproduced version of the original one. In terms of the relevance of the medium, I believe that e-books are not completely persuasive yet. And maybe they won't be, as long as they are seeking for the book properties.

At this stage, one could observe that the photo-book landscape develops simultaneously in 2 directions: towards a bigger accessibility, with wider possibilities of production and diffusion, and at the same time results in a tightening of the medium due to its specialization, something closer to a luxury market, that is very much paper based, whose extremity is extraordinary anti-democratic and entirely supplied by rare books collectors and limited editions.

This leads me finally to a recurring question concerning the endless tango or rivalry between self publishing and traditional publishing (to be understood as medium or well-established publishers, such as Kehrer Verlag, Hatje Cantz, Steidl, Aperture, Actes Sud, etc). Although I think in reality the answer to this question is first a matter of personal situation and connections, then a question of ideology. Both ways of publishing have obvious advantages and respective difficulties. But I will nevertheless try to give some keys and lighten the basis of the functioning of photo-book publishing, related to my direct experience and based on discussions with my publisher Klaus Kehrer (see the following discussion on publishing, book sales, distribution and production). I realized that I was quite ignorant about what publishing means, and I see a lot of inexperienced photo-book makers, especially students, trying hard to get a good deal with a renowned publisher to make a real book, but with no understanding of what publishing work is actually about, nor what happens first before a book goes on the market.
A discussion with Klaus Kehrer
on publishing, book sales, distribution and production

One day, after my book was published by Kehrer Verlag, I asked Klaus how will he make money - or not - with the sales of my book. He said, "Anne, I work with photographers everyday without needing to understand how they make great photographs". As I insisted, he explained.
The following discussion is extract of email exchanges we had. It is only for who is interested in understanding what publishing means, how the selling and distribution process functions, in other words what you are paying for when you make a book with an established publisher like Kehrer.

Anne: That comment recently caught my attention, “the danger with self-publishing is the vanity to believe that it is enough to create a book to make it exist” could you first explain me how the established publishing channels actually work? Then I wondered how much would you estimate the part of direct sales to individual customers in your total business? Like fairs, festivals or online requests? (I.e. sales channels equivalent to self-publishing ones.)

Klaus: Difficult to say. Let’s approach your question this way: during small festivals like Kassel, I see a highly interested audience - in marketing words: a segment of recipients with a high interest, and the will to buy if the budget is there. The best event like this is Paris Photo, where we do a high quality reach. But compared to the sales through the professional distribution channels it is nothing. I would say less than 10 % of the sales through the wholesalers and stores. And this comparison takes already into account the fact that direct sales have no trade discounts, no reps (representatives) commissions and no distribution fees in between. This comparison counts up the direct sales total not in numbers of books but in net sales in euros (and so even less than 10% of the total number of books sold). Even if we all hate Amazon and the other key accounts (main sellers, wholesalers): a larger publishing house can rarely quit these channels without risking to loose to many sales and income.

If some few self publishers make enough sales they DO the work of a publisher, they have built up well working distribution channels (could be online, direct or whatever) by a huge and successful public relation. Christina De Middel (The Afronauts, self-published, 2012) is probably the most known example. She does that against the background of a journalistic history and a very good network, and she is mentored by people like Martin Parr… Therefore, somebody like Christina does the distribution and the PR (public relation) work of a professional publisher.

AG: In the other case, a book ends in the hands of a customer via the chain of: publisher, diffusion, distributor, and bookshop (-or via Amazon, taking 60% off). Can you clarify a bit the notions and roles of “diffuser”, “distributer” and “representative”? Are those representatives proposing your books on their local market or are they just relayers of orders?

KK: Ok. In France you differ between diffusion and distribution. The diffusion is the organization that organizes the reps (representatives) and the kind of office and concrete representation towards the clients. The reps have more and more the informative function compared to earlier years when they really sold at
each representation visit.
Distribution means the physical distribution, warehousing and sending out the books physically. CBSD (Consortium Books Sales and Distribution) is in this sense our diffusion, they do the catalog for the US and Canada, they organize the reps there and sell to key accounts like Barnes and Noble etc directly. The warehouse organizes the physical aspect of the distribution, this is Perseus in Tennessee for us. Then still in US, we have like 30 reps running. And yes, they propose our books to the local stores and try to sell them to the bookstores. They are the informative source. Our network is quite elaborated in europe and in the US, not satisfying yet in Asia e.g., but I am working on direct reps per country there.

**AG:** How then is the initially fixed retail price (final sale price of the book fixed by the publisher) allocated between the different parts? In other words, how the money of the final sale is shared through the selling process? Could you explain with a concrete example, if a customer buy my book for 39.90€ at Tipi book-shop in Belgium e.g, or any kind of bigger wholesaler, what are the commissions and fees? Out of 39.90, what stays in the bookstore's desk, what for the distributor ← possible representative → and/or diffusion, and finally for the publisher?

**KK:** First you have to take into account that Germany is one of the few countries with a fixed and legally bound book price. No one is permitted to sell cheaper than the fixed price. Amazon.com e.g. is not bound and offers discounts. In Belgium they might offer the book at a higher price than what we have determined, as there is no bound price and some stores add a margin to make a bit more money out of it.

Therefore let's take a German store as an example, as there is the bound price system. 39,90 euros divided by 107 % (7 % VAT here) means a net retail price of 37,29 euros. The wholesaler has a discount of ca 50 %. When he sells to the single store he allows a discount of ca 30 or 35 % to the store, thus keeps about 15 % for storage, handling etc. As we sell most of the books through wholesalers (the book shops avoid the risk of storing and buying books, and it's easier to order within 2 days at the wholesaler when a customer asks for the book), we have to assume an average discount on our books of ca 50 %. The so-called net sale is approximately 50 % of the net retail price, like 18,65 euros in our example.

From this, the publisher pays like 10 to 11 % to the rep (representative) who sold the book. Thus 1.96 euros. Furthermore, we pay the physical distribution percentage the warehouse takes for sending and invoicing the book. Then, there is quite a mentionable amount of other fees like stock charges, handling of packaging, of incoming palets and additional services like this. In total ca 15 to 20 % less, like 3,50 to 3,70 to deduce in our example.

Finally, we have a return of approximatively 13euros net we can count on a book sold 39.90 in the shop. In case we pay a royalty (percentage owned to the author) of lets say 8 % of the net retail price (appr. 3 euros), we have only 10 euros left, or a return for a sold copy of like 26 %. And this has to be diminished by the cost of the book itself, meaning we have to reduce the income by the costs per copy the publisher has invested in. Even at run-off costs a book would at least cost like 5 to 8 euros. (Run-off costs means the price per copy for each further copy you print, not taking into account the starting costs that are the same for a run of 1000 or 2000 copies : prepress costs, like design, test-print and all costs not depending of the printrun. Once the machine runs, the further or additional copies produced are called the run-off costs per copy).
I guess you now also understand why the partner has a lower contribution to the book production to pay if he renounces the royalty: it saves money at the sales and the balance between the expected income and production plus marketing costs is a bit less dramatic.

AG: Right, quite complex but it makes sense. Do you think that other publishers who have different market areas like Aperture or different publishing strategies like Mack, work also on the same principle concerning the artist’s contribution to the book production costs?

KK: Mack’s strategy concerning Amazon is different, they count on sales through major stores only (at the moment 450 direct partnerships with bookstores). But they are much smaller and perhaps can survive like that. We couldn’t and need more sales through all channels. Aperture is having the biggest market, the US market which is always easier taken into account that the books reach Mid-America also.

About the book financing matters, I guess all are working the same way. Mack is supposed to take no money, but he also works in cooperation with institutions or external co-financiers who are supporting the production of the book. I guess there is a mix of financed or co-financed books and self-financed (financed by the publisher) books when the market is big enough. The same Aperture does some books in cooperation with institutions, others self-financed. What we also do depending on the name, brand, reputation etc. Everybody calculates the same way: production costs plus marketing costs versus expected sales. If there is a deficit, the artist or partner has to bring up money.

AG: And finally, would you agree to mention what are the decisive elements that influence your decision when discussing the possibility of a collaboration on a new publication, despite the quality of the photographic work itself?

KK: The market of course. Meaning, is the book to sell all over the world or only in some regions? Are there PR (public relation) relevant events, like major shows. The name and the reputation of the artist, e.g. no problem to finance Saul Leiter, Harry Callahan or Eugene Smith’s books. If these factors are very good, less money is needed. And of course how the book fits in my program, how it is completing the publisher’s profile.
Narrativity and photography

Photography and narrative are bound together. Yet narrative is definitely more related to oral and written media, or in other words, to literary and verbal forms of expression. Whereas photography, after painting, whether it functions alone or in a sequence, is originally a descriptive medium. Linguistic signs, words and phrases cannot be compared to the iconic meaning and the functioning of images, paintings or films. Nevertheless, photography among other technologies - film, TV, radio and the internet - has developed its own story-telling rules and particularities.

In 1966 Roland Barthes begins his Introduction to the structuralist analysis of narratives, stating that “narratives of the world are numberless, they exist in a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances - as if any material was fit to receive humans’ stories. Narrative is carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestured, and the ordered mixture of these substances. It is present in myth, legend and tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, comedy, mime, painting, stained glass-windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation.”

Despite the obvious numerous and growing narrative media, I think worthwhile clarifying here that some images do not follow a narrative logic. Particularly individual photographs often express an aesthetic experience, emphasizing different perceptions, emotions and feelings that are not necessarily connected to any kind of narrative. In Sequencing the photobook part 1 of the Aperture Photobook review, Badger distinguishes literary photographers from visual photographers. Although the distinction would certainly need to be deeply nuanced, I understand the second category as standing away from the narrative functioning, with images belonging to abstract photography, where the referent of the photograph remains unidentifiable and where a relation to painting is often very strong.

In Narration in Various Media, Marie-Laure Ryan, makes the distinction between three kinds of narratives in photography: the monophase work, which is a single frozen moment representing a bigger action: “the greatest narrative challenge because it must compress the entire narrative arc into a single scene.” Polyphase works, or a succession of moments within the same image. And finally works of several images, comprising sequenced photographs of succeeding moments, which are equivalent to the photo-book medium.

In monophase works, suggested by Ryan, a single image, is therefore able to contain its own narrative without resorting to the entire sequence. But couldn’t we just consider that any moment pictured and perceived directly in a photograph suggests inevitably a previous and a following moment? Thus all images - and particularly figurative images, belong to a narrative system because they suggest more than what is simply happening in the frame and refer to a wider temporality than what is the precisely photographed moment.

I would like to make a short parenthesis thinking of very iconic works, that might be...
a priori considered anti-narrative, such as the collection of Taryn Simon’s *Contraband*. The still-life images of *Contraband* occur to own a high narrative power. Nevertheless they are not really what would be considered as a frozen moment part of an action. Each object is presented on a very neutral background, isolated from all context, but still conveying a story. Indeed, it is easy to wonder and tempting to imagine who (why and where?) was the sender of the dead hawk or the collection of Mercedes badges, or what was the intention and the reason for this simple apple which will never reach destination.

**Image, time and narrative diachronicity**

“A narrative is an account of events occurring over time. It is irreducibly durative.”18 When a photograph is defined by a very specific moment and contained in a precise time gap. It actually really lacks temporal duration. However, it is very obvious to make similarities between the definition of story and what is concretely happening in a photographic sequence. But that succession of events also suggests a transformation and thus a more or less direct relation of causality between the images of the sequence. Where in photography and pictorial narratives - if that relation of causality exists or is suggested by the author - it can never be direct and always results from the viewer’s interpretation. Marie-Laure Ryan explains that important difference between the functioning of pictorial narratives and verbal narratives: “With its combination of dynamic unfolding and visuality, film maybe as efficient as words at representing a succession of events such as - the king died and then the queen died - but only words can say - the king died and then the queen died of grief - because only language is able to make relation of causality explicit.” Ryan continues, “In a film (and even more in a static image), causal relations between events must be left to the spectator’s interpretation.”19

As will develop later; this part left to the spectator; this role, responsibility or power is also part of the pictorial narrative potential and its strength.

**Memory and truth**

Another issue in this question of the narrative closeness of photography, concerns its relationship with reality. Photography still has a foothold in the attempt of grasping a *true knowledge* of the world. I am not going to discuss here the objectiveness of the photographic medium, but photography happens to be still dealing quite intensely -despite the digital development and the loss of the real referent - with reality matters.

So then, that principle of reality favours the tellability of an image and is part of the constituents of the narrative substance of photography. Tellability (racontabilité) as

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the potential (and I would even say - the desire - tempting to narrate and to listen to or look at) of being narrated, the possible disposition of an object, an image or a group of images to be recounted.\textsuperscript{20}

Possible truth, real-like experience, or verisimilitude is then par of what Jerome Bruner calls a narrative necessity: “Narrative constructions can only achieve verisimilitude. Narratives, then, are version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and narrative necessity rather than by empirical verification”.\textsuperscript{21} “There seems indeed to be some sense in which narrative, rather than referring to reality, may in fact create or constitute it, as when fiction creates a new world of its own.”\textsuperscript{22} At this point, the story become the truth. Isn’t it also the power of photographs, to become sometimes more real than the real?

Stories, as photographs are also very strong links to memory. “We tell stories to construct, maintain and repair our reality”\textsuperscript{23}, claims Mary O’Neil, as well as we attempt to trace or re-trace our memories by recounting them. O’Neil suggests story-telling as a fundamental aspect of being: “The great power of stories, the endurance of the form and the compulsion to tell them suggest that telling stories is not merely an entertainment, and optional extra which we can choose to engage with or not, but a fundamental aspect of being.”\textsuperscript{23} She insists then on the experience ensuing from the recounted story. Stories come from somewhere, whether they are fictional or not, they are part of our life experiences, our knowledge and observation of the world. They are our life trials. Stories, memories and by extension, photographs, have the potential and the power to “offer a different form of truth, be it poetic, metaphorical, psychological, theoretical or critical”.\textsuperscript{23}

Interpretive activity and imagination

Time duration, verisimilitude and memory are not the only features of narrativity - in relation with photography. I think that imagination has a big role to play in the formation of the photographic narrative.

In literature, imagination is definitely an essential part of the reader’s projection into the story although verbal discourse is more explicit than visual language. Whereas in films, imagination and self-projection is part of the narrative process too, I would not say that the viewer’s imagination is the most solicited aspect to experience a movie. Narrative in cinema could be another entire thesis subject, but the comparison is
worth mentioning and I think film narrative follows a system, a construction - complex, varied and very own, that creates a strong and uninterruptible story-flow (even if the film is very fragmented with temporal breaks, and complicate layers: when you look at the movie, you follow a precisely determined narrative chain and you cannot escape it).

**LR:** What is a photo-book, then if not a series of collected disjunctions and gaps? Time must be broken or unsealed in order to be recombined in narrative. Film constantly breaks and reseals the instant, and we barely notice this, we are always anticipating what comes next - this is the tyranny of time enforced. We are not allowed, except selectively, to experience the ruptures.

When looking at photographs, the reader / viewer is entirely part of the construction process of the narrative, first through the activation of his own imaginary. As mentioned earlier, the relation of causality and the transformation of state necessary for the narrative to happen, depends in photography particularly on the viewer activity to interpret - and I would even say invent, relations between images.

When thinking of the narrative in a photo-book we can therefore identify three spots for narrativity, one takes place inside each individual images. Another one, beyond all the images, beyond each individual parts, on a further level where all the elements meet within the sequence of the work, in the whole story. (If there is such a thing. Because it might be possible, in some photo-books, that the whole story is sometimes not identifiable, or simply non-existent).

In Vladimir Propp’s terms, “the parts of a narrative serve as functions of the narrative structure as a whole!” 24. But in a photo-book each of these parts contains more than a word or a sentence, each image is already a story and the book do not necessary have to reach the level of the overall story to have a meaning and interest for its audience. In Bruner’s terms: “For a story can only be realized when its parts and whole can, as it were, be made to live together”. 25

I think that in a photo-book, there is a constant movement of mind between the experience of the individual photograph, and the experience of the whole work. Of course, along the sequence, some images are more independent than others, stronger, different, they can sometime step out because of the layout, become almost extern, but they always exist according to the rest of the sequence.

And so the third spot for narrativity would be located somewhere between the pages of the book and the viewer’s mind, probably in his eyes. The reader will automatically, and even unconsciously create a relation between the single open spread that he is watching, and the whole book that he is holding in hands. This is what will be his/her own narrative contribution.

In a photo-book, furthermore, it is easy and common to not follow the conventional way to read from left to right -from the beginning to the end, and it is natural to skip to the next page or to flip through it. Thus the book -and the narrative,
is constructed according to more unpredictable rules, with a space for a random experience of the story that cannot be planned by its author. Again with an essential space, a mission for the viewer by his/her interpretive activity.

**LR:** Also, the experience of “reading” images is not and cannot be consistent: we ourselves inhabit different temporalities as we look, that is, we move at different speeds, hurrying “forward” (wherever that is, a convention as you say), stopping to think, to be vacant or to let memories fill our mind, or to become aware of sensations that we can’t name. Isn’t this the whole point of looking at photographs? These rhythms cannot be planned or managed by the book or photographer, only complicated perhaps.

**Tellability**

Before broaching a selection of different types of narrative in photo-books in the next chapter, I would like to take a closer look to the notion of *tellability*, understood less as the mechanism of the narrative, than as the narrative interest, what constitutes its efficiency or relevance – rather than what makes it work.

First let’s go back to the definition of story itself: “a chronological succession of facts related to a specific subject” 26. In French, a useful distinction exists more clearly between the story (l’histoire) and the discourse or narrative (le récit).

I think those distinctions might help to understand my approach and the classification I am proposing in the next chapter.

On one side, the story is also the whole mentioned earlier, the subject matter; the theme, what is actually told/ shown/ expressed. (Yet, at this point, it is interesting to step out and to specify that a succession of moment is not necessary enough to produce a narrative. In written texts, manuals or receipts are examples of a succession of chronological moments without story telling.) But what interests me is the narrative discourse (le récit). So there is a story, a chronological succession of facts, and that story exists via a specific discourse, it creates a plot, transmitted by a channel, a system, a teller-medium. This discourse is “the arbitrary and specific organization (sequence), of the events composing a story”. 26

In other words and according to what interest me here, this narrative-discourse also corresponds to the book form, its architecture, its structure, rather than to what is thematically addressed inside, or what is directly represented although the content indubitably influences the form.

In literature and cinema, the narrative, or story-line, is punctuated and generated by a breach -or complication. The tellability of the story is therefore founded by the admitted relevance or importance of the complication, creating a rupture in the regularity. It is obvious that photographs reaching a certain level of complication, in the sense of strange, intriguing, surprising images, are stimulating the narrative process - and the viewer’s imagination. Images with multiple meanings, are like stories with possible virtual developments, they become interesting.
Tellability, says Raphaël Baroni, “is dependent on the nature of specific incidents judged by story-tellers to be significant or surprising and worthy of being reported in specific context, thus conferring a point on the story.” This judgement of the significance and the importance of an event is of course very subjective and related to a specific situation, context, and cultural conventions too. Baroni continues, “however, tellability may also relay on discourse features, i.e. on the way in which a sequence of incidents is rendered in a narrative.” In the case of a tale recounted, those features might be for instance related to the narrator's charisma and capability to captivate and convince his audience, to embody his story by expressing emotions and feelings. Following the notion of discourse as the form of expression for a story, this affirmation would also suggest that tellability depends on the relevance of the photo-book as an object, including its layout and design qualities.

**Narrative structure and leitmotiv**

Most photo-books function in a rhythm and a succession of more or less dissonant images, and surprises play an important role in the flow of the narrative. O'Neil comments: “The story in fact offers the possibility of multiple time-frames and distortions as well of multiple voices and perspective. The listener's trust in the telling of a story is that there will be a dénouement, where motivations will be made clear, and secrets revealed.” When I look at the photo-books I have around myself at the moment, I think that in some cases it is also possible to identify an image or several images functioning as outcome of the story. In *Redheaded Peckerwood* for instance, some reproductions of documents and letters are providing the information needed to close the story. The place where they are inserted in the sequence is also carefully thought, in order to not divulged some information too early. In some cases the text, introduction, prologue, or a booklet added to the book relay the image in the function of “revealing the secrets of the work”. Though this does not always mean a total and eventually complete understanding of the story. Here, I would like to quote Jerome Bruner once again: “Narrative, he says, is designed to contain uncanniness rather than to resolve it.”

In many current publications, the narrative is like a succession of breaches, not leading to any kind of dénouement. Yet, in these cases (see later: Fractured-narrative and Anti-narrative) the story (with its setting, characters and succession of happenings), the narrative experience of the work, still seems to exist.

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To end this chapter it is interesting to note that the rhythm of the sequence in a photo-book is sometimes helpfully compared to the leitmotiv in music, or narrative program. “Narrative lives from a succession of events that brings transformations to the state of the story world, while music lives from a succession of sounds that creates melody and harmony through transformations in pitch, rhythm, and loudness.”

It is the leading motive, or main theme, that gives a structure to the piece, creates its variations, changes and oscillations. It is also possible to keep the audience on track by rendering repetitions and creating perceptible recurring patterns. Again, some following examples of complex, scattered or very varied sequences in photo-books, still follow the track of a perceptible leitmotiv.

LR: No wonder so many current narratives in photo and in writing lack a sense of conclusion, or being unresolved. Interestingly, Redheaded Peckerwood is resolved in a sense before we open the book because we know how the story (the original story) ended. It’s a bit like a Greek tragedy, in that the suspense lies elsewhere, in a sort of identification with the characters and objects of the story.
A discussion with Christian Patterson

Christian Patterson is an American Brooklyn based photographer; his work Redheaded Peckerwood was published by Mack in 2011. During the past year it has been impressively acclaimed and cited as one of the most influent photo-book of the recent production. I met him in his atelier in December 2012 to discuss the process of making Redheaded Peckerwood and his current situation.

Anne Golaz: You mentioned the Redheaded Peckerwood story was a 5 years process, right? Could you tell me the story of those 5 years, what happened, what were the key moments?

Christian Patterson: I became interested in the story behind the work in late 2004 or 2005. I’ve seen the movie based on the same story and I loved it so much that I wanted to know more about it. When I discovered the movie was based on a true story it became even more interesting.

AG: The trigger of this work was then the movie of Terrence Malik, Badlands31?

CP: Yes, and from there I started to make some research. The movie takes some creative liberty, it doesn’t retell directly, truthfully, what happened as Redheaded Peckerwood does. I deliberately made it as a mysterious and vague story, because it’s important to have a certain amount of unknown elements and empty spaces that can become part of a personal interpretation along the way. But my intention with Redheaded Peckerwood was also fairly straightforward; the story itself has a chronology, a timeline following a series of events. It involves an important element of travel: these 2 kids travel through a landscape from point A to point B. It was essentially a roadmap that I could follow. But I was also going to be revisiting their story 50 years after the fact, and there weren’t so many concrete things left out there. So I found myself coming up short, feeling that there wasn’t really enough material to be captured or to be documented. That’s why before I finish my 1st trip I started to look at other materials, archives and other documents that could also tell the story, just to keep the project moving forward. Then I started to see if these other objects and documents could bring the power and the visceral part of the story closer to the surface.

AG: So beyond your own research you had quite many key-people involved?

CP: A few, yeah I would meet with them and they would share their personal link with Starkweather32 or with what happened. Or they would share some of their collection and personal belongings. I don’t know a lot about your work and the story behind it, but I have the feeling that our process and our ways of working are very similar.

AG: Sure there are similarities, but let’s keep the comparison aside for now. You answered about the image making part of the 5 year process, but what about the book making? Am curious to know how it evolved, when did you start to think of this story for a book?

31 “Badlands”, written and directed by Terrence Malick, 1973

32 “19 year old Charles Starkweather and 14 year old Caril Ann Fugate murdered ten people, including Fugate’s family, during a three day killing spree across Nebraska to the point of their capture in Douglas, Wyoming”: From publisher’s comment on Redheaded Peckerwood.
CP: As far as the book is concerned, I realize very early on that it would make a good story for a publication. It got some little stories within the main story, it’s highly narrative and incorporates some heavy universal themes. Teenage angst, love and confusion, longings, escapes and violence, romance...

AG: The book process itself went quite quickly after you got all the material and the final editing?

CP: Yeah finally after 5 years I felt I’ve done all what I could, or all what I wanted, and began to put a book together during a month of residency in upstate NY. That was in May of 2010. My goal was to produce the book dummy. When I had the maquette finished I would share it with a few friends and fellow artists. One person in particular advised me to show it to Micheal Mack, so we met up in august 2010 and the book came out in November. So it took a little bit over a year.

AG: You designed the book by yourself, right? Were you personally very involved on its formal conception? Don’t you have the impression that finally who ever would have published it, that book would have been fairly the same?

CP: No, not necessarily, because I met and spoke with different publishers and each of them is an individual. Different people want to bring a varying amount of themselves in the project, their vision for the book or their own framework for the realization of the book can be very different. Everyone would have brought some influences and interventions to the book making. I don’t know if you had one, but of course it also helps to have a fairly strong and well-realized vision for the book before hand. Michael Mack more than anyone, was interested in making the book that I wanted to make. Before him, making the commitment to publish it, I had the impression that he must be very personally involved in the shaping of these different books. So I was very excited because I thought this is going to help me to take the book to another level. I am not saying that they weren’t little things that happened and did this, but I thought I am going to be able to ask him some questions, to get his input on some details. Actually more often then not, when I did ask him a question, he would either not answer, or not answer directly. That was kind of frustrating for me because I felt I was hitting a wall. But it also forced me to make the decisions by myself. I gradually came to understand that what he wants the most is to help artists to realize their book and their vision. I’m very glad that it worked out that way in the long run.

AG: I would like to get back on the design of the book and more particularly on the booklet. Do you actually have a background related to graphic design?

CP: No, I don’t. I think I simply developed an eye for things over time. I cannot say from where it comes from. Some aspects of the book were important to me, I wanted it be be stark, sparse and simple. The sequencing and the layout of the images is not necessary simple, but what surounds the images, is very simple. It’s really quite plain. I didn’t want any page numbers for example, because I just consider them to be distractive.

About the booklet, I always feel conflicted about the inclusion of text in photo-books. The booklet is a good solution that I’ve seen in other books before, to incorporate essays.

AG: Lately yes, but before that was not so usual? We definitely see quite a lot of those inserts today. I nevertheless found that quite daring in your case.
CP: Really?

AG: Yes, not meaning that it’s totally revolutionary, but somehow it made me smile. Because these texts are quite serious, they are not light anecdotes, but the way it is designed and inserted, with this “flying” detached place, gives to the text another status.

CP: Yes, and the first time people open the book this often falls to the floor actually! As I said, I often have mixed feelings with the inclusion of text in photo-books. I rarely read these texts myself, and I have to be extremely interested in the work and really want to know more in order to make some research and readings. So this was just a way of having the text, but also not having the text. And the booklet relates very well to the nature of the work, in a way the essays become like another insert. Everything about this book is meant to incorporate a certain amount of confusion, sort of blurry the line between the old and the new and the fact and the fiction. So these academic interpretations of the work are not meant to be taken anymore seriously than anything else.

AG: Yes, I appreciated it because it is not such an easy position when you ask professionals to work for you and eventually what you do is a booklet that can be lost on the way. It’s quite brave I think.

CP: Thank you, it makes me think of another word that would apply to this. Readheaded Peckerwood is a very serious subject, a tragic story, but at the same time there are little touches here and there in the book that are irreverent. For instance this piece that says: “Let’s get together and let bitterness pass, I’ll hug your elephant and you kiss my ass”. It is a straight reference to the American system, the elephant is a symbol of the Republican party and the ass for the donkey is a symbol of the democratic party. Or “shit from Shinola”, comes from an old American phrase that basically means you’re extremely stupid, that you cannot make the difference between two things that are obviously so different. And then the book closes with “Let’s all go out and get a steak” which is meant to be this light, funny touch at the end. I think that connects with what you were saying about the booklet, just not taking things so seriously.

AG: I would like to talk about your work in the perspective of different photographic narratives. Regarding the linear traditional ways versus more complex ways to build a narrative, how do you relate to a kind of family of works, like Roe Ethridge’s Le Luxe?33

CP: I admire and appreciate it greatly. But i think it’s such a dangerous way to construct a book narrative that it’s not dangerous anymore. With Le Luxe, Roe has traced a territory in such a way that he can do whatever he wants. Once you go that far, you have basically blown the door open and no one can challenge you anymore.

AG: Would you say you still need a certain narrative path?

CP: Yeah, I think I need a bit of a path, or a concept to grab onto it. That’s why the next thing I have in mind has also a story to it, although I am not sure exactly how much that story will come out...
AG: You mentioned you worked with Eggleston and thus were quite influenced by him. Nowadays, do you still have some masters, or examples of books that have been your main influences, significant inspirations or works that you really admire?

CP: There's so many. But thinking of the next project, I am looking at a lot of books that are not necessarily focused on photography but incorporate documents and objects. I am really interested in surrounding my photographs with some other materials. Right now I’m more interested in concept and process as a source of influence than I am in photography. Look at Richard Prince for example, I really like when he photographs his own process, when he shows you a painting in progress or a view of the corner of his studio. In *Redheaded Peckerwood* I used that strategy too, when the viewer is able to look through the photographer's eye, when you know that the photographer is present, that the camera is there.

AG: One last point, the book went on press for the 3rd time in approximately one year right? I would like to hear you about what is the post *Redheaded Peckerwood* period? Do you have a certain nostalgia or are you rather done with this story that still keeps you so busy?

CP: I would say it’s more the latter case. No one really tells that if you’re fortunate to achieve any major success with a work, it can keep you busy - almost too busy, for a very long time. Yes I would like to be able to dive more actively into the next work.

AG: So what are your next goals and dreams?

CP: I just want to continue making work. The idea that am working on right now is a completely different subject matter but I think has a similar approach, similar strategies that I developed with *Redheaded Peckerwood*.

AG: You want to continue following the same direction?

CP: I don’t want say too much about my next work, but it could be potentially exciting to treat a story -or the source, as an archive when in fact it’s not really an archive. It may present something as fact when it’s completely fictional. I don’t know, am still figuring all that right now. But there is definitely opportunities to deal with the same kind of method in a completely different way.

I think for me it’s important not only to continue making work and to evolve as an artist but also to make transitions and sideways from one body of work to another. I see one thing leading to another anyway.
In the last chapter, I propose to sketch out 6 different types of narrative systems. Once again, this classification is not following a thematic logic and this selection depends on narrative-discourse relevance, the elements constituting the book, the way it is sequenced, the variation of frames, or the style and genre of images or documents cohabiting along the pages. I did not want to insist either on very technical details, such as material choices of paper, very graphic elements, cover or design related. I based my exploration on the narrative impression. In other words, the nature and the sensation of the flow of the book, its narrative pulse.

I think it is an interesting way to understand the evolution of photo-book making, because the thematics somehow remains unchanged, when the way we look at them is constantly evolving. After all, Alec Soth’s Sleeping by the Mississippi published in 2004, or even Patterson’s Redheaded Peckerwood published in 2011, might be telling similar things than Robert Frank’s The Americans, released for the first time in 1958.

Naturally, this proposition is still motivated by my own interests, and my personal tastes. It is also influenced by my own path, and the people I met on the way. There are tones of good photo-books that I will never see, but I am quite trustful to think that they would match with one or the other of the proposed categories.

Finally, I deliberately chose to exclude books that fulfill mainly the function of catalogue or monographs, although many of them are great works, they are simply not interesting enough from a narrative point of view.

I would like to say a short word about the history of photo-books, since most of the publication I will mention are quite recent, I think it is important to have a brief notion of the evolution of the photo-book medium, from the first creations in the 19th century.

In the begging, photo-books were merely assembled photographic prints (black and white calotypes bound together) for instance in the case of The Pencil of Nature, by William Henry Fox Talbot (1844) (which is considered as the first photography book, sold to 274 customers). Such books were following a quite rigorous documentary, illustrative, and denotative function. They were inventories, herbariums, collection of illustrations. But they were also endowed with a great materiality. The original photo-book function was therefore to create a space to collect images rather than to tell a story with images. Fine travel books, expedition albums, were fulfilling the same expectation. Photography was at that time a way to discover and make inventory of the world, so were photo-books.

I think that this early form of photo-book as travelogue is interesting to notice because the notion of trip has developed into a model for narrative recurrent in the entire photo-book production till today. Of course each movement and tendency in the history of photogra-

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35 See later: Linear narrative.
phy influenced the photo-book production. In this way, Russian Avant-garde introduced fascinating photomontage elements and craft in the mass media of publication. In the 1920s, formal importance and the influence of Constructivism and the Neue Sachlichkeit, conferred a particular attention to the design of the photo-book and by extension to its status of object. Other tendencies, such as Surrealism found in the book form a fertile ground for experimentation. Facile by Man Ray and Paul Eluard (1935), a blending of solarized pictures of nude and poems, is certainly one of the most famous and beautiful example.

Linear narrative
a predominant model


American Photographs: Walker Evans, Text: Lincoln Kirstein, Museum of Modern Art, NY - 1938


Sleeping by the Mississippi: Alec Soth, Text by Anne Wilkes Tucker and Patricia Hampl. Steidl - 2004

I remember Alec Soth starting a speech on photo-books like this, ‘when I think about photo-books, I think Robert Frank’. That might be the way anyone would start a speech about photo-book. The Americans is indeed an unavoidable reference, always mentioned when it comes to the history of photo-books, at least in the Western culture. Today this book embodies a narrative that some of us compared to a sort of cinematic experience. (Although I am still not completely convinced about the comparison with cinematic narrative), such a way to sequence a book of photograph was for a long time, and is still, a predominant layout. Till the 5 last years, when more elective forms of narrative spread and became usual.

There is a feeling of a constant flow in The Americans, with a succession of images of the same nature that might remind the movie story-line. Although, when I look at this book, and most of the linear narrative type of books, I have rather an impression to be sitting in a train, passing through the world. As if the images would be an open window frame. Always the same frame, always at the same place, and the outside world would be passing through, recounting its story with characters succeeding each-other, like encounters along the way. It is the trip par excellence.
The Americans:
Robert Frank, Robert Delpire, Paris,
Intro: Alain Bosquet – 1958
(Intro: Jack Kerouac - 1959)
To me, a key element for describing the linear narrative is the feeling of a constant flow, a stable, linear and continuous sense of direction. The reading and the story tone seems to be following an imaginary horizon line. I could also compare it to a promenade where the viewer does not get lost. It is the result of the scrolling of similar type of photographs, with a repetitive format, a fixed layout and a constant positioning of images on the page (often with a photograph on the right page of the book, along with a corresponding caption on the left side).

*American Photographs*, by Walker Evans (1938) is another very classical reference: “a landmark publication that established the potential of the photographer’s book as an indivisible work of art”.{ref{AmericanPhotographs}} Although from a distance of 75 years, this book looks very much like a monographic type of publication, where the narrative space is rather located into individual images.

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I found *Flagrants Délits*, by Henri Cartier-Bresson (1968) an interesting case because the book is almost structured as a novel, of 5 chapters, taking place in different places (Paris, Berlin, Mexico, etc). In addition, inside this sort of world tour, the layout includes small sequences or grid of images, creating short embedded stories inside the main story line of the book.

*Flagrants Délits*, starts with an introduction text, but it is a personal statement by Cartier Bresson, handwritten, on his perception of the photographer’s responsibility in 1968. (He comments on mass media influences and our duty “to not let ourselves separate from what is the world and the human being”.)
À travers l'utilisation intense de la image, grâce aux moyens de communication de masse conférés aux photographes des responsabilités toujours sensibles, il est nécessaire qu'il existe une relation entre les impératifs économiques de notre société de consommation et les origines de ceux qui tissent le temps. Celui qui affecte tous et nous devons plus que jamais veiller à ne pas nous laisser apprivoiser par ce qui est le monde et l’humain. —

Henri Cartier-Bresson
22 février 1968
When I looked at Soth’s *Sleeping by the Mississippi*, it struck me how this book - although it is quite recent and certainly a pillar in the photo-book world - follows an extremely linear narrative logic, and a very classical construction. I think that *Sleeping by the Mississippi* is a perfect example of a very solid type of narrative structure as well as the expression of a leading model for book-making, that really blew up in the following years (by people like Alec Soth himself).

The book structure is amusingly as classical as classical can be; it starts with a title, an introduction text, continue through a body of work displaying images on the right hand side with captions on the left and ends on an essay, a biography of the photographer and his quite detailed acknowledgements. For me, it shows a pure example of the traditional ingredients of the photo-book composition. (This said, when I worked on my book in 2012, all those elements were not necessarily included, but nevertheless discussed with the publisher.)

The story of *Sleeping by the Mississippi* follow the track of the Mississippi river. It does not only develop along the spatial line traced by the river, but also follows a temporal linearity. Indeed, the book starts upstream in Minnesota in winter time, and ends down stream in Louisiana in summer time.

That type of linear structure, either following the passing of time or the unfolding of a spatial trajectory on a map is part of the regular narrative tool to keep the viewer following a certain direction, whether this sense of direction is directly identifiable or not.
Fractured narrative
from trail narrative to dreamlike narrative

Lick Creek Line: Ron Jude, Booklet essay by Nicholas Muehler; Mack - 2012
Casa de Campo: Antonio M. Xoubanova, text by Luis Lopez Navarro, Mack - 2013
Illuminance: Rinko Kawauchi, text by David Chandler; Aperture / Kehrer - 2011

In fall of 2011, Christian Patterson published the first edition of Redheaded Peckerwood, the book became a reference inspiring the photo-book makers of all over the world. Soon it also created a rupture in the perception of photo-book making and maybe little liberation, although there has always been artists experimenting and doing stunning art pieces with the book form. Patterson’s book is not so revolutionary, but one has to admit that it opened, or significantly contributed to open, a certain path towards a more eclectic form of narrative.

Redheaded Peckerwood assembles images of very different nature: still-life, night shots, road trip, documents, archive images, etc, yet in a consistent whole, and bound together in a strong story. Despite the complex and fractured body of work with a variety of genres, formats, and small inserts in the book, the photographs roll out a very narrative sequence. The book’s story line follows the escape of the protagonists across Nebraska to the point of their arrest in Wyoming. It follows a precise trajectory, although it was intentionally broken and re-built by the photographer in order to create a confusing narrative that would not be illustrating literally the run away of the protagonists Charles Starkweather and Caril Ann Fugate. Patterson’s book is a good example of fragmented narrative that comprises a deep narrativity because it refers to an original existing story, and develops as a photographic plot.
Examples like *Casa de Campo* or *Lick Creek Line*, are not completely eclectic, they both contain quite homogeneous images, but within an elaborate and subtile rhythm. In both books the narrative follows a path, or a trapper in the forest of Idaho (*Leek Creek Line*), a walker in the park near Madrid (*Casa de Campo*). The viewer walks directly in the footsteps of the narrator - the photographer; nevertheless the tension remains along the “promenade”, and the story rhythm is changing constantly, sometimes it jumps, speeds up, slows down, hesitates, stops.
The *leitmotiv*, mentioned earlier\(^{37}\) is nicely perceptible in Xoubanova’s book. From the first opening sequence of 5 spreads, the path is there, between dry weeds and pine needles. From that first section of images the author suggests that the story takes place along the beaten path - of Casa de Campo. Then we can meet and experience all kind of people, strange happenings or insignificant details, but the trail always reapers.

\(^{37}\) See chapter: Narrative structure and leitmotiv
I like to say that *Illuminance* is like a firework, an outpouring of images. It's narrative experience is fluid and evasive, despite a sequence of images meeting always within the same format and frame. The narrative does not follow any character; it is nevertheless a story, in the world of Kawauchi, perhaps in her mind, an exploration of texture and sensations too, like a whirl of life - *about* life and what governs it. Sometimes images repeat them-self, or complete each-other in almost similar diptych on a spread, bringing some semblance of structure in the hazardous flow of images. The sensation is close to the experience of a dream, half awake, half unconscious, stirring.

At the end of *Illuminance*, David Chandler comments on his daughter and him looking at the book together by chance, “we seemed to be, for the first time in many years replaying the reading of a bed-time story, that almost forgotten daily ritual and imaginative journey that had always felt like some kind of preparation for the life ahead, an introduction to its joy and perils.”
Anti-narrative
or counter-narrative

Last year, at the Aperture symposium on Latin-American photo-book, I remember one of the guest lecturers claimed that “a photo-book aims at putting images together in order to create sense.” Yet, I thought at that time, some of them seem to look for non-sense.

In this category I would like to propose two examples of books whose sense is — on my opinion, non-sense. There is a narrative structure, but also a deliberate wish to not be leading to any story. Or rather to lead to a confusional experience which eventually could be the story. Or as the publisher says about Le Luxe, “Ethridge’s consistent undermining of his own certainties.” The composition of a book like Le Luxe is indeed quite extreme in terms of undermined certainties. It is extraordinarily eclectic, mixing personal images, with newspaper cuts or screen shots, creating a chaos very well thought and organized around a backdrop that seem to be derived from a commission work of architecture on a building in downtown Manhattan. The role of such a narrative is maybe first to question the way images coexist in the book form, pushing the limit of the photo-book story telling so far, just to see what happens to the story.
Vanilla Partner is certainly a bit more homogenous body of work than Le Luxe, when looking at the style of the work. The sequence is very good and the relation between the images and is based on a careful play of image associations. Although the story - strictly speaking, remains hard to grasp, the main themes are quite evident: body materiality, recurrent sexual representations, awkwardness with odd images slightly uncomfortable but aesthetically very impelling.

With his book, Torbjorn Rodland seems to go after the same challenges than Roe Ethridge, the same desire to disturb, to create a quite pleasant feeling of confusion, to lose the viewer in his own experience, tracing question marks rather than suggesting answers.
Vanilla Partner is like an intriguing friend. *Almost* a friend, that you still don’t know after months if it’s a good or bad friend. So you dance on a thin line, amused, captivated, trustful and ready for a fall.

- Anne Golaz
Diaristic narrative
or autobiographic narrative

This is the category that leaves me the most uncertain, because the diary-like
dimension of those works tends to be also related to their specific themes.
Nevertheless, I think it is right to identify a type of story-telling in photo-books that
is driven by an autobiographic or diary-entry approach. Those narratives function
with the specificity of involving the narrator (author; photographer) directly as a
character of the story - which does not mean that he/she is directly represented on
the photographs. In *Tulsa*, by Larry Clark (1971) - that I will not illustrate here - the
photographer is not visible in the images, but he is so closely involved and part of the
life of his “subject”, that he becomes consequently part of the image. I think that this
relation of proximity between the photographer and his subject somehow favors
the viewer to enter into the story, because of a strong feeling of authenticity due
to the personal involvement of the author. In *Raised by Wolf*, Jim Goldberg does not
retell directly his own story either, but he is personally very involved with the kids he
photographs. The photographic material is mixed with reported dialogues, Pola-
roids, letters and directly handwritten comments of the kids on their experiences or
visions of life.


*In the Shadow of things*: Léonie Hampton, texts by L. Hampton (dialogues), Contrasto Books – 2011

From the perspective of the discourse, diary-entry narratives tend to include elements of intimate life, such as family photos, drawings, reproduction of letters or personal handwritten notes. Aesthetically these inputs give an intimate and truthful tone to the story. And if there is - or would be, a voice to the narrative it would certainly use the form “I” to narrate it.

La Ferme du Garet, is the first photo-book that I remember having really engaged with, when I was not even thinking of what a photo-book could be. This book looks actually like a brochure and has none of the precious properties of the actual photo-book trend. Depardon combined old photographs of the farm where he grew up, with more recent clichés of the same place, retelling like this the story of this site, his family destiny, and his own process to become a photographer:

Of course, I identified myself easily to this work, simply because of my personal story. But I think it is an interesting example, published in 1995, when the tendency was not yet so common to make books combining archive images, family album pictures, contact sheets, together with very fine photographs and personal notes. The book format is also quite small and intimate (ca 18x24cm) and really functions as an object in itself. The text written by Depardon himself in a very modest and quiet style, comments sometimes directly on the photos, and bring to the viewer pieces of the family life, expressing the author’s attachment to this farm.

(I like particularly the cover, made from the original collages that Depardon had pinned up to his first laboratory door, at the Garet farm).
Experimental narrative
the materiality of the book

There is a nice space in the market of photo-books - especially via self publishing, for experimental types of books. I think this goes together with the actual fetishism of the photo-book, and its objecthood. The importance of its physical form, together with the consistence of the conceptual realization and the design properties. Some books make a distinctly better use of the material possibilities of the medium than others.

The first following example is my favourite one, Broken Manual by Alec Soth is on my mind well expressing the possible completeness of a photo-book. Just the title says already a lot about the book form. It actually looks more like a broken manual than a photo-book. To me, the outstanding and experimental aspect of this book is the great match between the form of the book and its content, but also a subtle contrast between a soft used and cheap cover and the high quality of the images printed inside the book. The sequence of the images is also built on the difference of nature of the images (black&white, small color images with glossy partial varnish, large full spread images in foldouts etc).

The text relates 16 steps, how to escape the world on the model of a guide book (Lester B. Morrison’s broken manual, who is (perhaps) an imaginary character, an extension of the author and his publishing business Little Brown Mushroom). Broken Manual is a playful hide-and-seek game, as well as a smart comment on (American) contemporary society.

Broken Manual: Alec Soth, Steidl - 2010
A head with wings: Anouk Kruithof, Little Brown Mushroom - 2012
Nine Nameless Mountains: Maanantai, texts by Maanantai, Kehrer – 2013
Broken Manual:
Alec Soth, Steidl - 2010
A Head With Wings combines fold images and text in a complex and well realized design, the narrative follows a single character in a surrealist world of collages and paper folds.

If an acid trip could be distilled into a book form, it would look like this - From Aperture Photobook Review, vol 2, fall 2012
With *Nine Nameless Mountains*, we worked with Maanantai on the concept of a common authorship, where the story generated by 8 photographers is presented and mixed in one single work. The result is a rich combination of images (analogical and digital, video stills, drawing, reproductions found object and pieces of paper; etc) like an absurd travel diary and a reflection on the artist function - and by extension a poetical metaphor for life. Some image have been interpreted or realized by several people together; the book is thus the result of 16 eyes authorship, and was literally sequenced collectively.

I perceive it as a challenging and experimental type of narrative, and a quite daring project. Especially for a book that is not a self-published, since it does not even mention any author's name, and follow with integrity the work's concept beyond the traditional ways of photo-book making.
Nine Nameless Mountains:
Maanantai, texts by Maanantai, Kehrer
2013
The last example I would like to show in the experimental narrative chapter, is *Iris Garden* which combines images of the photographer William Gedney with texts by the author-composer John Cage. The book is actually edited and the story was conceptualized by Alec Soth, and published by Little Brown Mushroom.

There is a strange thing happening in this book, (it is actually a combination of flap images and foldouts together in an unbound package) as if there was a distance between all the elements that compose it (texts and images), and nevertheless they seem to be very well connected by something that is hard to tell (and probably generated by the editor’s intention). There is man just standing in the street, while his aunt is doing her laundry commenting on her husband, while someone is strangely walking on someone’s back somewhere else far away, while the train always stops at the same place, at the same time. Furthermore the narrative of *Iris Garden* is changeable and relative to the number of possibilities that the unbound collection of images provide. Nevertheless, inside the whole story, there is a precise sequence of photographs representing Cage himself, during a mushroom hunt, and back home with the mushroom basket. This sequence provide a main track and a chronological backdrop for the whole story.

All that renders a nice sense of elusiveness, but also a quite odd perception of the intangible connection between a random individual and the rest of the world. As if everything that is pictured and written in this book could have happened right while the main character is doing his mushroom walk, as if he was thinking out-loud walking with his basket, when his thoughts and the rest of the world simultaneously go on.

My resulting impression is that Alec Soth built *Iris Garden* accomplishing the visual narrative challenge of Cages’ intentions “in putting the stories together in an unplanned way (...) to suggest that all things -stories, incidental sounds from the environment, and, by extension, beings -are related…”

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Iris Garden:
edited by Alec Soth, photographs:
William Gedney, texts: John Cage, Little
Brown Mushroom – 2013
What I intend in the term *meta* narrative, is a narrative aiming essentially at expressing narrativity and its functioning. It is not exactly the case of *A Shimmer of Possibility* by Paul Graham, but these books (12 altogether) were for me one of the strongest experience of narrative in the photo-book medium. I perceive this work -especially in the book form, as a real embodiment of the act of looking. It is more about the perception of the sensation of the world, in a very photographic thinking, than a representation of what really happens in the world.

In *A Shimmer of Possibility* there is a particular rendering of the experience of time and space, or rather the encounter of both. It reminds movie-editing, cross-cutting or *montage alterné* (a juxtaposition of shots from different places, but suggesting the temporal continuity of the sequence -suggesting that both actions happen simultaneously).

The books actually propose 4 different types of story-line experimentation: The *one picture narrative* (one book is actually made of 8 pages and one single image only\(^{38}\)), the *one world narrative*, combining 1 type of several images (1 type of scene, a sequence of images belonging to the same place), the *2 worlds narrative*: 2 types of scenes alternating simultaneously (images from 2 different places suggesting that both depicted actions happen separately but at the same time) and the *multiple world narrative*, a succession of several types of scenes belonging to different places, entangled in one final story-line.

I perceive *Shimmer of Possibility* as the most subtle, rigorous and rousing work of story-telling in photo-books.
A Shimmer of Possibility:
Paul Graham, SteidlMack - 2007
I saw Myriam’s work *La Montagne Dorée* for the first time a year ago, before she graduated from the school of photography in Vevey. I found her approach of the narrative construction -or rather the deconstruction of the narrative, very interesting. She literally dissects the story of *La Montagne Dorée*, by creating distinctive categories of narrative elements, as many suggestions accompanying the script of a movie or a theatre play. The story is written at the begging of the book, but visually decomposed into possible props (stones, wood, divers), casting of characters (the goat, the citizens: bailiff, shepherds, the extras), costumes (of the devil, of the shepherds, etc) and sets (background sceneries).

What Myrima Ziehli proposes is definitely a comment on the narrativity itself. Her work is a back-to-front approach of the narrative construction, she starts from the whole story and continues going back before the sequencing action, to display the narrative individual parts and possibilities. Eventually, she also articulates the difference and relations between the main story and its multitude of possible narratives. She also suggests that the viewer, and his imagination, is an important part of the story-making process.
Photo-books have a long tradition of story-telling, which unfolds through thousands of pages and flat or floating images. This tradition differs from place to place around the world, from one editor to another around a table, from one mind to another in the eye’s beholding. Yet the photo-book has an inherent, narrative character, even if we can’t quite say what it is at any moment. Some books meet the challenge of completeness; they reach a subtle balance between form and content. But it’s not always that way, and who would want it to be? A narrative can be innovative, engaging or mind blowing without being all that striking in its physical form as a book. To gauge the true impact, the place to concentrate is perhaps on the viewer: what role, what space is made for the viewer/reader to imagine and take control of the narrative? That is maybe how to judge the true character of any book.

Eventually, I wrote this text like someone looking at herself in the mirror. It took a bit more time though. But I wanted it to be like this, like a straight gaze into the mirror: Just a reflection, of what I think I know, of where I am now, where my interests lie, where I spent my days, my money, my attention, during the last few years. And who knows where all those things will go now? Hopefully, and in all probability, into other photo-books.

Robert McLiam Wilson began one of my favourite novels by writing that “all stories are love stories”. To this a friend of mine answered: “Photo-books are about love because they are based on the eye’s desire.” Maybe. I don’t know. But what is certain is that every book and every picture-fold forever closes up a story, whether it is a chapter of life or the wink of an eye.
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