The Photographer, the Publisher, and the Photographer’s Book

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1. Introduction

In the collection of essays *Photography a Middle Brow Art* edited by Pierre Bourdieu, he and his collaborators show how ideas of quality in (mainly amateur) photographic practice are constructed by social institutions. Barbara Rosenblum has explored similar areas within professional practice, *(Rosenblum 1978)* showing how ideologies and the culture of justification shift within sectors of the profession. Their studies are primarily concerned with values operating within subcultures and communities. Taking a similar but not identical approach, this essay looks at material forces in the practice and culture of contemporary photographic publishing in this country, considering what function photographic publishing has for those who are part of it. Looking beyond the “major” publishers I concern myself mainly with avenues for new work in the area of “documentary”, partly because I have discussed the activities of Phaidon in a previous essay and partly because practical curiosity about the prospects for publication underlay my interest.

In order to establish the premise about the importance of publishing, I begin by briefly tracing the role of publication in the career of perhaps Britain’s most “successful” contemporary documentary photographer, Martin Parr. I look at key publishers in the commercial and public field who release new work, and briefly discuss the place of publishing within the careers of recently published photographers. I also review the economics and practicalities photographic publishing, and relate publishing to the other key form of dissemination for self-consciously "serious" photography - exhibition.

This study is essentially based on interviews with several respondents. In order to avoid repetitive tedium and endless interruption for the reader, it may be assumed that when specific information about the person under discussion is offered without referencing, it derives from the interviewee. More general observations are my own.
2. Documentary Photography and The Book

“The wall is for paintings; photographs belong in books.” (Henri Cartier-Bresson interviewed in *Le Monde* Sunday 27 April 2003).

Photographic publishing has always occupied a curious position in the economy of images. The dominant medium for public circulation of the photograph has been the mass-media. At the other pole of visibility is the art gallery, with its elaborate apparatus of justification. Somewhere between the image as ubiquitous, functional, usually uncredited and essentially transitive, and the image as esoteric, hieratic object, elaborately underwritten and rendered precious, lies the book of pictures - a consumer object, a bearer of exhortations or warnings, and an invitation to actively “read” photographs.

From Stieglitz's *Camera Work* (1903-1917), through Lissitsky’s ………, Brassai’s *Paris by Night* (date), Brodovitch’s *Ballet* (date) and on via Cartier-Bresson’s *Images de la Souvette* of 1952 and Frank’s *Les Americains* of 1957, up to Sultan’s *Letters from Home* (date) or Goldin’s *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (date), key moments in the construction of canonical ideas around photography have been marked by books. So it should be of little surprise, that when "maverick" photographers wished to stake a claim for an alternative or even "anti" photography, they too resorted to books. Klein's *New York* (1952) or Moriyama's *Bye bye, Photography, Dear* (1972) can be seen as a sort of Samidzat "underground" attempt to contend with the establishment by use of the medium it had made its own.

This is not, of course, to underestimate the influence of photography which appeared in other media - fashion images for example. But the broad truth remains that the publication of photographs in a monograph has traditionally been the means to signal seriousness and weight, and to make a claim for membership of the company of “significant” photographers. This evidently remains true even of fashion and magazine photographers such as Peter Lindbergh, Rankin, Juergen Teller, and Corinne Day.

This essay will concern itself with books by photographers working broadly within the "documentary" tradition. This is an area which I will (admittedly crudely) define as being concerned with neither the promotion of sales (as in fashion) nor the reporting of immediate events (reportage) nor debate around issues in "fine art" (as in much conceptual and staged photography). It is concerned with the world around us, but with underlying trends and patterns rather than contingent, ephemeral or sensational phenomena. At its best it both successfully represents the insight of the photographer and illuminates the raw material “out there”. And as contemporary titles by young photographers like Marcus Bleasdale (*One Hundred Years of Darkness*), Zed Nelson (*Gun Nation*), and Jocelyn Bain Hogg (*The Firm*) show, it is in the area of "documentary" especially, that the book remains the primary vehicle for a photographer's oeuvre. Whereas the "fine art" photographer aims at the gallery and the journalist at the mass media, the "documentarist", while embracing those other outlets when and if possible or appropriate, has traditionally found the particular mode of address, the tonal weight, and the intimacy and gravitas which the book affords - and hence the quality of attention which it asks - a natural platform. Famous examples abound: Riis's *How the Other Half Lives*, Lange and Taylor's *American Exodus*, Agee and Evans' *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Davidson's *East 100th Street*, up to the more recent examples of Goldberg's *Raised By*
Wolves, Delahaye’s Winterreise or Towell's The Mennonites. The extreme partiality of this list will immediately invite awareness of how many other titles, particularly monographs dealing with a single coherent body of work on a single theme, mark out the historic field and contemporary idea of "documentary photography", and how fundamental the book remains as a site of conversation. A brief review of the output of a single “major” photographer will illustrate this point.
Among photographers working in the field of "serious" documentary field in Britain, perhaps the most influential and certainly the most financially successful at the moment, is Martin Parr. Publishing has been central to the shaping and making of Parr's reputation and career. He has had 25 books published for the open market, and has also made six artist's books. From among the former, I will briefly discuss a few books which mark stages in his development from promising young man to pillar of the photographic establishment, and track some of the changes he, his work, his reputation, and photographic "good taste" have undergone in the process.

Parr's degree-show installation was a mock-up of a small suburban room in which "photography" served as a series of ironic encounters, playing with trompe l'oeil (the "view" from the window) and with the culture of representation (the images on the walls). It alerted curators and critics to a singular and important vision, and coincided with an important moment in the shifting concerns of the photographic establishment. This shift was marked by a move away from a belief in the social and political value of the photograph as a critical illumination of the "real", perhaps best represented by the sort of imagery which had made Don McCullin a household name and the Sunday supplements a window on a grimly thrilling world. In place of the dramas offered there, the early Thatcher years (for this was the time of Parr's emergence) coincided with a simultaneous celebration and critique of the domestic, the parochial and the particular. This was part of a wider shift in the critical establishment, led by then fashionable forms of Marxism and feminism, which saw the development of "cultural and media studies" as a newly respectable entry into a field hitherto dominated by "straighter" forms of sociology and political science. This might have reflected not only a healthy scepticism about the "big stories" which had dominated the imagination of the left in the 1960's, but more simply an inward turn coincident with the rise of consumerism and the decline in class consciousness.

Parr's show also demonstrated the love/hate relationship with (British) suburban values which has remained central to his work, even as his style and ostensible subject matter have shifted. In contrast, his first book, *Bad Weather*, looks at first glance like traditional black and white reportage-influenced documentary in the "humanist" tradition. As an homage to a British obsession, and the grim improvisatory stoicism it calls forth in the national character, *Bad Weather* can be seen to concern itself with that peculiar combination of squeamishness, cruelty, comfort-love and grit which is a readily recognisable part of being "British". But when I spoke to him Parr was at pains to stress that "there is nothing humanist about it". The photographic language of the book may be described as "transitional". On the one hand, it retains elements of pictorialism going back to Stieglitz and his treatment of man and the elements (his horse-trams and snowstorms) as actors in an embracing drama of conflict and resilience. On the other, the use of flash introduces a note of aggressive self-referentiality which became a signature not only for Parr but for other practitioners of the 1980's (for example Brian Griffin, with whom Parr was associated). This was a long way from the ethos of the followers Cartier-Bresson who traded on elegant self-effacement and supreme naturalism in which, in the famous declaration, "flash is rape".

3. Politics, Pragmatics and Prestige: the books of Martin Parr
The curious conjunctions of new-left and hard-right which marked the Thatcherite moment, which saw a thousand workshops bloom and Channel Four begin as a platform for yuppy radicalism, lay behind *Bad Weather* in material ways, as well. It was to have been published by Travelling Light, a small independent group among many at that time concerned with revitalising national culture by cutting across the seemingly exhausted perceptions, categories, and institutions which had bound the post-war national accommodation. However Travelling Light went bankrupt, and *Bad Weather* was then published via Zwemmers as a fully-subsidised project with an Arts Council grant. So public subsidy, and the imprimatur of the influential on which it depends, were important platforms for Parr. However "maverick" his style and approach, his was a radicalism readily endorsed by the establishment of the "critical community" of art college lecturers and Arts Council functionaries. But institutional support did not have immediate financial outcomes in terms of the book itself. Parr notes that many photographers believe their first book will land them fame and fortune, but this is almost invariably not so. *Bad Weather* sold in very small numbers, and was later remaindered at 40p. Parr himself bought in as many copies as he could at that price (very much below the cost of production). His self-belief has been rewarded, as these now sell for several hundred pounds.

Parr moved forward rapidly. In a world where documentary, black and white, and "participant" sensibilities and modes were almost inseparable categories, his next book *The Last Resort* burst like a bouffant of candy-floss laced with strychnine. Here were the working class of the (post-)industrial North, no longer seen in stereotypes of whippet-faced stoicism and grim cheer under adversity - inhabitants of a *Coronation Street* of cosily enduring values. Instead the book showed an economy of mass leisure, dominated by the presence of women - bloated, lobster-like, lolling about in a slather of crisp packets and runny ice-cream; casually brutal, indifferent, seething with inchoate aggression. And visually, instead of being a meditation in moody monochrome, the book was as deliciously vulgar as an American diner. With saturated colours, fill-flash used under bright sunlight, and a preponderance of intrusive low-angles, the pictures expressed a viewpoint not so much "participant" as openly invasive. It came as a thrilling shock at a moment when the miners were being smashed as economic force and cultural icon by a new right under the leadership of a bottle-blonde with a sharp beak: you could take the book from any angle and still come out smiling. But that may show Parr's remarkable prescience, and the importance of the work was by no means foregone. The publication of the book was an act of courage: Parr self-published it with the help of a grant. It established his "brand", caused a sensation in the photographic establishment, and gradually sold out over the next 4 years. Later editions have sold substantially and the book still represents for many the defining image of the brash iconoclasm for which Parr has come to be known, and which has had a huge influence on the aesthetics of photography in the subsequent decades.

Ten years later, with his reputation firmly in place, *Signs of Times* and *From A to B* with a print runs of 10,000, marked an interesting point for Parr's career, in the shift from cult to celebrity (as much as any photographer since perhaps David Bailey has achieved such a thing). They are "the book of the series" of BBC2 series of the same names, produced by Nicholas Barker. Produced in 1992 and 1993, they followed *The Cost of Living*, which had subjected the upper-middle class of late Thatcherism to the same saturated flash-filled interrogation as the proletarians of *The Last Resort*. The TV series were part of a wave of "new documentary" at the time, including work by Molly Dineen, Philippa Lowthorpe and Nick Broomfield, which saw the subject-matter of "cultural studies"
become mainstream, and the anxieties of social mobility became objects of fascination and horror. However, despite being tied in to TV, the books have still not sold out. This is a marker of wider trends in photography publishing, in which the many hundreds of thousands who watch a TV series, dwindle to mere hundreds who will "buy the book".

Nearly a decade further on, *Think of England*, published in 2000 by Phaidon as part of a package put together with Phaidon, marked another stage in the representation of Britishness after books which had seen Parr take his irony abroad. Visually it builds on the intervening work, most notably perhaps *Common Sense* which marked the internationalisation of Parr as a photo "brand" with exhibitions running simultaneously in 40 countries. The style is hyper-saturated, extreme, and far removed from classicism. Many of the images show food, and look like rough snaps or the sort of clumsy close-up one might find in a cheap brochure. These are anchored by occasional wider "master shots" in which surreality is achieved by colour excess and ironic perspectives and juxtapositions. A general sense of disgust has become predominant - perhaps shared by Parr's now growing and established readership- but the images also mesh seamlessly with the work which Parr increasingly undertakes for the colour supplements whose "window" is now the zone of metropolitan consumption, and whose outlook is as abrasively garish as the "self-referentiality" of their advertising.

After two decades of essentially individual and personal books, the Phaidon compendium book *Martin Parr* (2002) edited by Val Williams, is very much a summative exercise in the ratification and exegesis of the career of a "brand" artist. It contains reflections on Parr's childhood and early influences, selections from unpublished work, and a "postscript" section of images of his personal souvenirs and collectors memorabilia. The core is a selection from his many publications, and the interwoven essay treads a cautious line in discussing his evolving style and approach, and lays out the work more or less chronologically. Any subversive tendencies which the work might once have had, are now firmly corralled in the safe and respectable field of "art".

In fact the two Phaidon books were conceived as part of a "package" which would lead up to and support Parr's 2002 retrospective at The Barbican, and corporate interests were very much to the fore. The Barbican show was arranged by John Hall, head of the art gallery there, directly through Magnum, without initial contact with Parr, and in the publishing process, Phaidon were very much in the lead. They decided on the print runs, and only then contracted Parr. In comparison with his early books which had editions of a thousand or less, *Think of England* had a print run of 7,500 copies and *Martin Parr* a run of 10,500. The latter has in fact since been reprinted, as the Barbican show and attendant publicity and press coverage helped the first edition to sell out. Nearly 2000 copies were sold at the show alone.

For someone who has so firmly "arrived", Parr is surprisingly reluctant to discuss his influences or the changes in his approach: his response to the shifts in the two decades since *Bad Weather* is simply that "the world changes, you change, you develop new ideas". And when I asked him about whether he was thinking about his visual language and how it asked people to read pictures, his response was "You are making pictures: hopefully they make some sense - you are putting them in a book in sequence so you can read the sequence. You mustn't ask about my aesthetics - I don't think about it at all, really".

However the distinctiveness and progression in Parr's work show that he is, in fact, a photographer who is deeply aware of the medium and his place within it. He is a renowned collector of photographic books, has initiated the "discovery" of Butlins

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photographers, and is currently working on a book about photographic books with the critic Gerry Badger. Indeed he affirms that the relationship between photographers, curators and critics is vital, and cites the influence of opinion formers such as Ian Jeffrey, Val Williams, and Gerry Badger. Parr's view is that "You can't have writers without photographers or photographers without writers and curators. On the other hand there is a photographic culture which is purely commercial - and this is very different". This may seem a remarkably conservative and academic position to be held by one who has made his name as a "maverick", until one considers that Parr's photography and concerns have only been radical in relation to an orthodoxy of "serious photography" and would pass unnoticed in circles which do not have those pretensions.

Parr does acknowledge that the aesthetics and world-views of the (very much larger) world of camera-made imagery outside of "serious" photography - the world of billboards, advertising, magazines, and newspapers, are important and "all related". However he resists considering what that relationship might be and how culture and taste may be led by one sector or circle of influence, or another. And in considering the opposite pole of photographic practice, how photography's inclusion in the establishment-backed "fine arts" has changed life for a photographer and for photography books, his response is that "There are art books and there are photography books". But he does acknowledge that what is valued changes as "photography" becomes "art" - not merely in terms of the physical demands of images which are to be displayed on the procrustean terms of the gallery, but in overt signs of ideological correctness - for example the requirement to be increasingly self-referential.

As photography enters the gallery the centrality of the book in shifting the sensibilities of the photographic establishment, may be challenged. For example Andreas Gursky has been hugely influential as a photographer, but it is undoubtedly the sheer scale and production values of his work which have made it appropriate as "gallery art", but at the same time limit its impact in book form. But it is clear that the book of photographs (he himself is a renowned collector) is seen by Martin Parr as the pre-eminent vehicle for photographic expression. This is noteworthy considering his own history as an exhibitor (Common Sense was seen simultaneously in huge exhibitions in many countries) and his sensitivity to the place of images in contemporary life. It suggests that far from being a dead or dying medium the book is central to the discourse of photography and the communication of photographic ideas within a community of practitioners.
4. Sharks and Minnows: The world of photographic publishing

For books to have influence, they must be produced and promoted. Among the key figures in photographic publishing at present are Richard Schlagmann, the owner and proprietor who rescued Phaidon from bankruptcy, and Benedikt Taschen who under the imprint of his own name runs an astute mixture of titles, ranging from "art" which crosses over into soft-porn, to thousand-dollar coffee-table tomes of Helmut Newton and Araki. They compete in a market together with Thames and Hudson and Random House. (Mark Holborn who runs the photography department of Random House is a highly regarded and influential editor in the "mainstream" area). Their print runs are usually in tens and in some cases (Phaidon's *Century*) hundreds of thousands. Their clientele is non-specialist and the photography they promote is invariably well-known and rarely contemporary. But it is worth remembering that what gets promoted and published by them, and hence what comes to stand for the public idea of "serious photography", is as much a reflection of their own values and outlooks as the "authentic voice" of photographers, or a reflection of critical opinion. In controlling the means of production, and in entering the defile of the market, a few powerful individuals function in Gramscian terms as "organic intellectuals" and gatekeepers of the current hegemony, while the "artists" they promote and the critics who write about the books they make, are the "traditional intellectuals" whose relation with dominant values may be more ambivalent.

The circle of influence changes, not only because the economics of the business are inherently fragile, but because of shifts in personal energy and interest. As an example, five years ago the German publisher Steidl, a printer, was not active in the publishing of photography but Michael Hoffman, the editor/publisher at Aperture in New York, was a key influence. However since his death in 2001, Aperture has gone through a phase of resting on its laurels and capitalising on its backlist, and is not publishing new work of significance. On the other hand, Powerhouse (which tellingly identifies itself as "Powerhouse Cultural Entertainment") is increasing in significance, and Nazraeli, a small press based in Tucson, has developed a substantial list of expensive delicacies. Reputation and influence are not proportional to profit, however: Walter Keller at Scalo has recently published an opportunistic "9/11" book as a banker for other things, but in "serious" terms has been deserted by his "star player" Nan Goldin who has gone to Phaidon.

If seigniorial influence seems slightly archaic in a world of corporate capitalism, it may indeed reflect the way that publishing - at least in this specialised area - has not been subject to the forces of focus-group management and conglomerate thinking. Photographic book publishers would not be in the field if money were their only objective - as will be seen, the returns are simply too small and uncertain.

Apart from the "majors" mentioned above, the field of photography publishing in this country is mostly made up of a layer of small enterprises with particular aims and constituencies. Among them are the recently bankrupt Westzone, who published Chris Steele-Perkins *Afghanistan*, Zed Nelson's *Gun Nation*, and Jocelyn Bain Hogg's *The Firm*.
among others, and Booth Clibborn whose serial receivership and reconstruction suggests business practices reminiscent of the German publisher Stemmle.

But the most significant purely British publisher of serious photography is undoubtedly Dewi Lewis. His is a rare example of a small business operating on a commercial basis, but remaining independent of the forces which both enable and constrain larger and more highly capitalised enterprises, and he has been responsible for many of the key publications of the last decade.

Lewis began publishing as administrator of Cornerhouse in Manchester, a regional arts centre funded largely by the arts council, which houses cinemas as well as galleries. During Lewis's tenure there it was a notable publisher of books, but has confined itself to distribution since he left to begin his own company in 1994. Lewis is one of perhaps fewer than a dozen publishers globally who are committed to making and selling books of new photographic work as an end in itself. This may seem an implausibly small number, but contrary to what one might imagine given the prestige and historical importance of photography in the USA, for example, there are few publishers of original work there. A few University presses (Duke, Yale, Texas, Nebraska, Arizona) release one or two books of new work per year, and independent presses cater to a small market, but the American "majors" (Norton, Abrams), like Phaidon and T&H in this country, are invariably re-packagers of material whose value has been critically well-established, or make "picture books" in which the photography is not of intrinsic interest.

There have been major changes in the general terrain of "serious photography", and hence photographic publishing, in this country since Lewis began at Cornerhouse in the mid 1980's. Most significantly, the rise of photography as an accepted "art" medium means that photographers are encouraged to think of the gallery as their primary potential outlet (I will say more about this later), and with a proliferation of would-be photographers and increasing competition for public funding, the role of the curator as gatekeeper and promoter has increased in prominence.

This has been balanced by the decline in the place of photography in commercial media. Although more and more images are being used, they are accorded less value, and there is an ever larger number of photographers chasing work, often at cut-rate prices. Whereas most national newspapers had an office of staff photographers a decade ago, few retain more than one or two now. The same applies to magazines. So the need for photographers to "brand" themselves is pressing, and the lure of an "art" label ever stronger.

These tendencies have had a profound impact on traditional "documentary" photography which was once allied to reportage and is now much closer to the self-referentiality and conceptualism of contemporary "fine art". This has naturally changed the idea of what a photography book is and who might buy it. Lewis observes that 20 years ago publishers took more risks, perhaps paradoxically because the field was smaller and more marginal, but also undoubtedly because the economic environment was more benign - especially for those enjoying state funding. It is increasingly impossible for new photographers to get commercially published, unless they are immediately and evidently sensational in some way.

On the other hand, the re-shaping of society since the Thatcher/Reagan era, has increased private consumer power among those in the upper half of the social hourglass,
which means more books can be sold, provided they cater to the tastes of the metropolitan middle class.

But the market for photography publishing remains tiny. A visitor to an average middle-class home is unlikely to see a single book devoted to photography. Even among photographers, most do not buy books: Dewi Lewis cites Martin Parr and Bruce Gilden as notable exceptions, while Homer Sykes told me he "could not afford" books at more than about £25, let alone the £70-odd cover price of James Nachtwey's *Inferno*.

As a consequence, Lewis's standard print run is 3000 copies. More esoteric titles will have only 2000 copies made, which means break-even at best. In this climate Lewis's approach in understandably cautious. He will look only at full dummies unless the photographer is already known to him. If he feels the work has merit, he then works with the photographer to suggest changes and explore whether a book may be viable. If so, production proper commences.

Production is globalised: for example 30% of print costs can be saved by going to Italy for printing rather than UK, and Lewis uses a printer in Verona. In order for a book to succeed commercially, the publishing costs must not be more than 20% of the cover price. This includes design, print, and other costs of getting the book actually made. The sales price is not a determining factor in this equation, so long as the proportional costs remain the same. This is line with other forms of production, where the manufacturer would work to a retail price of between 5 and 10 times the manufactured cost.

To secure orders, the shops need to be persuaded that the titles will sell. Lewis uses a specialist distribution agency called Turnaround in London, and others in other countries. The distributors have reps who go round to retailers with a package of titles across several areas. However, shops tend not to be interested in the Point of Sale material from which visual media such as photography would most obviously benefit, so an aspect of persuading them to take in stocks of a title is to convince them that there will be media coverage. This is not easy, given that no national newspaper reviews photography books! This is no doubt because the editors of newspaper book pages tend to come from a literary tradition. Meanwhile other "picture books" on cooking, home decorating etc. are often heavily supported by cross-promotion in magazines and associated with television - the BBC is a major publisher in this area.

Although the costs of retailing are high, efficiency arises for the retailer because the norm is to take books on sale or return. Needless to say, this transfers risk to the publisher, who has to take back shopsoiled and unsold copies as a matter of course. The reconfiguration of the bookselling market and concentration of ownership in a few high-profile chains has also enabled retailers to squeeze their suppliers. Waterstones arbitrarily moved discounts to 45% from the previously customary 35%, and if a book is sold as part of a "Christmas promotion", take 65%. Under such conditions, publishers who normally might have been operating at a margin of 15%, would in effect become the bearers of a "loss-leader". Given that this will not necessarily cross over into sales for other titles on their list, it is understandable that photography books are not often handled this way. A recent exception was Martin Parr's *Boring Postcards*, which sold in large numbers from prominent pre-Christmas displays; the amusement value of the pictures and the packaging as a novelty item may account for this.
However all is not entirely gloomy for British photography publishers. With English as an international base language, and the primary content visual, the market is international - much broader than, say, for an Italian publisher. Even with his relatively modest runs, Lewis benefits from this and can in fact only survive through export sales.

If non-fiction retailing with its endemic TV tie-ins shows the importance of cross-promotion, in considering how this would apply to photography one might assume that gallery exposure would be significant. However in practice this is very variable. For example, a show at the Photographers Gallery in London will sell at most 150-200 books through the bookshop there. On the other hand a heavily promoted show at the Barbican may move many more: as mentioned, Martin Parr's recent retrospective "book of the show" sold 1,800 from the Barbican. This disparity may be accounted for by the fact that people go to the Barbican to see a show which has been pre-sold through advertorial, demands an admission fee, and has the status of a "cultural event". Thus the purchase of the catalogue book becomes both a memento and a sign of status. In contrast, the vast number of the 40,000 visitors to the Photographers Gallery annually, simply "drop in" and do not spend more than a few minutes glancing at the show that is up at the time. With the Tate gallery's positioning within a very definite status-aspriant luxury-leisure niche, it will be interesting to see how this summer's pending major exposure of photography affects sales in the gallery bookstall, and possibly beyond.

But while these examples suggest chic self-improvement as an important consumer driver, if there were proof needed that an aura of too much high seriousness militates against the impulse, it is offered by the fact that a dedicated show at a prestigious regional gallery such as the Arnolfini in Bristol or Open Eye in Liverpool, may lead to at most fifteen sales from the centre's bookshop. The effect of media coverage can also be less than commercial: a magazine feature in the colour supplement of a broadsheet will often generate no more than between twenty and fifty sales. Given readerships of half a million plus, this is clear evidence that among the broad middle class, either photography is not seen as being significant (the persistent failure to credit images in the national press suggests this may be so), or the photographic book is not considered an object of desire. This is a key point to which I will return in my conclusions to this essay.

Unsurprisingly, large numbers from the average print run of a photographic title end up with remainder agents. The remainder merchant will probably pay one twentieth of the cover price, resulting in a clear nett. loss for the publisher. At worst, Lewis was recently was offered 40p per copy of a book delivered - with delivery costs of 10p.

Although one might be tempted to ascribe these circumstances to a singular blind spot in public awareness, the example of fiction is salutary: Waterstones figures show that of the new novels stocked over the past 6 months, 50% had sold not a single copy throughout the country.

In attempting to broaden his market, Dewi Lewis works with other publishers in Europe - sponsoring the promotional European Publishers' Award for example. However in practice there are surprisingly large cultural differences across Europe - mainly along a North/South divide. For example, Martin Parr's work is not generally well received in Spain and Italy, which are much more firmly rooted in a culture of humanistic photoreportage than is the case further North. There is the added complication that someone well known in one country may be quite unknown in another. This in turn has
the paradoxical effect of creating an impulse in the market to develop international "brand" photographers.

A consequence of these general conditions is that Lewis approaches each project on the basis of a worst possible scenario. While he publishes some work which crosses over into the "non-photographic" market of middle class taste, for example Fay Godwin, this does not prevent him from making more esoteric books in which he believes. An example is Simon Norfolk's *For Most of It I have No Words*, which Lewis believes every school and library should have. But as a visit to any public library will confirm, purchasing of photography titles is tiny, again indicating that the photography book is simply not seen as valuable to "the public" in the way that fiction or the latest DVD is.

Given the conditions described, it is easy to see why new photographers find it difficult to get published. In fact sponsorship is widespread in photography publishing, and much of what appears is not purely "commercial". In Germany, for example, the publisher Hatje Cantz has built a business around titles based on exhibition catalogues, by depending on well-funded municipal galleries to cover the production costs. In a more privatised context, most publishers in the USA require a substantial contribution from the photographer or his/her backers before publishing work. For example, Aperture would expect a sponsorship arrangement or tie-in to a gallery to bring in around $50-60,000 of costs, and Powerhouse looks for $20-25,000 before publishing. This means in fact that the entire production costs are usually covered by the photographer. So the distinction between "commercial", "sponsored" and "self" publishing is hazy. The photographer-publisher Ralph Gibson became internationally famous mainly through promotion under his own imprint, Lustrum Press.

So however industrial it may appear at first glance, what emerges with startling clarity is that publishing - at least as it applies to photography - is a hangover from earlier modes of production, propelled by prophets not profits. Most photography publishing is in fact self-financed - and most books will sell fewer than 100 copies.

Nevertheless, for the photographer Simon Norfolk the book is the primary form of output. He has made his name and identity as a photographer through the publication of two substantial monographs on weighty subjects, both published by Dewi Lewis. The first, *For Most of it I have No Words*, a meditation on genocide in the 20th century, was published in 2001 and the second, *Afghanistan: Chronotopia* appeared in 2002.

Norfolk began as the staff photographer on *Living Marxism* and describes himself as "still a Trot". Jobbing work sustains his practice. *For Most of it I have No Words* was enabled by running two part-time careers - photographing houses for the *Sunday Telegraph* property page, and providing portraits for the arts pages. For these assignments he gets £170 per day plus expenses.

Alongside this thinly buttered bread, Norfolk is also trying to develop corporate and advertising work, which pays £2000 per day, and which covered the cost of his first Afghan trip. He is of course not alone in taking the Saatchi shilling - significant photographers such as Martin Parr and Tom Stoddard make important income from advertising and corporate work. Although an annual report may require as many as 250 portraits in three days, at £1200 per day it remains attractive. These figures illustrate the curious relationship between "commerce" and "art" in photographic practice - for the photographer-as-artist and the curators and critics around him/her, the commercial work
is a means to an end, while for the photographer-as-professional and his/her clients, the "arty" work is a calling card to verify a branded service.

The effect of publication is evidenced in changes in Norfolk's profile and the nature of his commercial work. Before his recent book Afghanistan: Chronotopia, his commercial work was very mixed. But after publication, partly because he was away (he went to America, and talked at shows for exhibitions), the commercial work withered. Instead he found himself winning prize money, including £8000 for the European Photography Prize administered by Dewi Lewis and his fellow publishers on the continent. The prizes amounted to a third of his income - in his words "a bizarre way to make a living". Print sales are beginning to be significant strand for income, while editorial work, which used to occupy 70 to 80 days per year, is down to ten or a dozen. Sustained by sales and exhibition fees, Norfolk finds himself adopting the modus operandi of an artist, editioning prints, and developing a relationship with galleries. He sees this as a way to work more on what he wants, and at the same time to ensure that the value of what he does goes up. The book also led to his being shortlisted for the Citibank prize this year.

But before Afghanistan came For Most of It I have No Words, Norfolk's "genocide book". Norfolk had started his career with strong political views, and after leaving Living Marxism began doing extensive coverage of the political far right, which was going through an ominous resurgence in the late 1980's. As the work developed he became interested in holocaust revisionism. This was the spur to go to Auschwitz to make pictures – where he found himself in a bewildering babel of contending narratives - "Israeli schoolchildren, German neo-Nazis and Polish recruits all on tours, an elderly Hungarian lady crying, Poles viewing the place as site of nationalism, and me an English leftist: I'd never really thought about how history can be made of simultaneous stories". Norfolk made two groups of pictures, 35mm in his "photojournalism" mode and squares in his "landscape" mode. It was the squares which he felt resonated because of their quietness and reticence, the opposite of the insistence of photojournalism. This was a damascene discovery for Norfolk, "like being hit on the head with the flat of a spade" as he puts it, and led to a fundamental shift in his understanding of how photographs "work". His apparently serene landscapes offer a "Brechtian" invitation to viewers to deal with reactions of simultaneous attraction, repulsion, and self-questioning. Norfolk says "People find pictures powerful because they're arguing with them. You don't argue with a picture of a starving kid in Ethiopia - you just think "how dreadful".

The a dialogic relation between images and their “subject” is expressed in the book by text. So an apparently innocuous, even "dull" picture represents the site where 50,000 people were buried in a ditch, while a picture of a pond, which is quite “beautiful” in terms of the iconography of conventional landscape, is identified as being the place where the ash was thrown from the crematorium. Norfolk describes how a month after returning from Auschwitz he found his notes, and discovered they related to a single set of linked themes - "about atrocities, spaces, and the appearance of different spaces through time. It was always going to be a book, and it was going to have a falling curve ... moving back in time". Clearly this coherence and imaginative consistency was a factor behind the readiness with which Dewi Lewis adopted the project for publication, and the smoothness of the publishing process.

The work has also been exhibited widely. In confirmation of the primacy of the experience of "reading", Norfolk feels that in display the material needs to be sequential, and has worked well where that could be the case. The display prints are gorgeous
examples of classic cold-tone craft. This classical idiom is vital to the subtle relations between pleasure and horror which Norfolk hopes to evoke, and which, like the relation of image to text, plays on generic expectations and the conventions embedded in the “reader” of the image. Conscious of the traditions of landscape and the sublime, while making the prints for the project, Norfolk had a print of Caspar David Friedrich’s *The Traveller above the Sea of Clouds* (1818) stuck up in his darkroom. He is acutely aware that visual “meaning” as much as "history" is a matter of social and narrative contention, and cites Richard Misrach as an important influence. He also admires the work of Len Jenshel, Mark Klett, and Stephen Shore.

Curiously, however, despite his articulacy in explaining the rationale for the book, I find the work unsatisfying in book form. It seems to me that the “point” of the project is the cumulative and repeated nature of similar atrocities across space and time. This is slightly lost in the relatively linear form of the book and would be more effective as an immersive encounter in a gallery space. The title of the book (chosen by Norfolk) is awkward and lacking in resonance, and the production design is sober to the point of somnolence. Finally, the subject of the book is well-worn and one wonders what more can be said about it. This raises further questions about photographic books. Do some of them enjoy limited success because, as books, they are simply not very good? Do publishers and photographers pay sufficient attention to the pleasure they may afford as coherent artefacts? With a few historic exceptions (Lissitsky, Brodovitch, Ed van der Elsken, and Sam Haskins spring to mind) most photographers are not designers, and have not thought of their books as a single entity. Consequently many photographic books have a loose and incoherent structure and are little more than catalogues with relatively arbitrary essays, and even those conceived as entities, as was Norfolk’s, may fail to achieve harmony. A book like Larry Towell’s *The Mennonites*, whose design was initiated from within Phaidon, is a rare and delicious exception.
5. Gallery and public publishing

Fortunately for those who work in the more esoteric areas of photographic practice, public arts bodies have give some, albeit variable, support to photography in this country for the past two decades. Commercial galleries have also emerged. Small-scale book publishing is undertaken by both these sectors.

In the 1970's leading photojournalists and documentary photographers working in Wales wanted to create debate around their practices, and began with occasional lectures in the university. This led to a groundswell of interest and the decision to create a space to exhibit. Ffotogallery, established in Cardiff in 1978, is a significant exhibitor and publisher in the public sector. Beginning firmly with a tradition of "straight" documentary, the organisation has reflected the changing notion of photography both internationally and nationally, and the director Chris Coppock, who has run the organisation for the past 14 years, does not acknowledge a distinction between a "photographer" and an "artist who uses photography". But he acknowledges that the blanket of "art" can obscure the intrinsic qualities of photography as a medium, and Ffotogallery is among a very few national spaces which rely entirely on camera-made work.

Ffotogallery is supported by the Arts Council and Cardiff city. Despite its name it does not currently operate as a gallery but is temporarily located in the Chapter Arts Centre, having moved from premises with no disabled access and in poor repair. With a mission to provide a platform and support for independent photographers within Wales, the organisation aims to commission new work two or three times per year from people with Welsh connections, and also to stage perhaps two international shows annually, bringing to Wales the work of photographers from outside the UK. Coppock's criteria for selecting work are complex, and he acknowledges that an influencing factor may be that the photographer has access to a funding package, but a common general criterion is what Coppock describes as a "political" agenda - a concern with how photography can advance debates in and around culture.

In fact in a context where audiences are more or less inured to the ubiquity of images, Coppock defends the gallery as "a very bourgeois concept" which remains of prime cultural and social importance precisely because it offers a contemplative space and invites attention to images on their own terms. But the gallery itself is not just a backdrop. The way images sit in a space is important to the aesthetic experience, and concerns with siting have strongly influenced photographic fashion in the past two decades. For example, there has been a predilection for large-scale colour work, often supported by an overt conceptual glossary, over more traditional "window on the world" monochrome work which does not offer the same sensations in a gallery space.

The audience for a Ffotogallery exhibition is likely to be around two thousand over a period of four to five weeks, and with the difficulty of getting reviews in the national press for exhibitions outside London or one of the major regional centres (e.g. Icon, Modern Art Oxford, or the Arnolfini), may attract very little wider notice. An associated publication can both give a stamp of credibility and enable the work to be taken seriously, and provide (slightly) wider exposure beyond geographical limits. Although
always produced alongside exhibitions, Ffotogallery's publications are usually designed to stand alone, often with text, and to have an integrity which means they can be appreciated as more than a catalogue.

Ffotogallery usually publishes three to four times per year, and not all exhibitions are accompanied by publications. Photographers who bring funding packages are much more likely to be published. Money may come from the Arts Council through project funding, or through organisations. Recent publications have had matching sponsorship in kind from Adshel, local universities, local authorities in Neath and Port Talbot, and the Swansea Institute of Higher Education. This kind of support usually arises because of the nature of the project.

Despite this influence Coppock feels that "only two or three" of all the publications under Ffotogallery's imprint have not contained work which is "good enough" to warrant publication. His favourites among them include John Davies Cross Currents, a classic combination of text & duotone plates, and Koudelka's Reconnaissance Wales, a handmade artist's book at the opposite end of cost from the slim exhibition catalogue. Perhaps not only because of its intrinsic qualities but also because of Koudelka's reputation it has been financially successful, too, with only three hundred copies left unsold at £150 a piece.

Ffotogallery's current normal run is 500. Keeping the run at a size likely to sell out means less storage, and while unit costs may go down with big runs, the actual total costs of course still go up. The costs of publication are very variable, but Coppock is able to make a modest sum go further because he has been in the business a long time, and knows how to exert pressure at the appropriate points in the production chain. This means that Ffotogallery can make a solid publication for £5000. Unit costs at that price are still higher than would be acceptable to a commercial publisher, but for a public body the way of thinking about "success" differs. Indeed every exhibition would be seen as a pure "loss" to a commercial enterprise, and a sense of cultural value and influence is paramount. As far as publication is concerned, Ffotogallery would like to think that there will be some return, but do not aim to "break even". Nevertheless efforts are made to extend distribution - for example books are being sold in Canada through an agreement with a gallery there, and locally, using Chapter's credit card facility if required. But to move to forms of selling which might result in a greater numbers of sales - for example E-commerce - would need much higher turnover to cover the overheads involved.

An example of Ffotogallery’s output is the small monograph Gwendraeth House, by the Welsh photographer Peter Finnemore. The photographs in the book are personal, obscure, and loosely in the genre of Ralph Eugene Meatyard’s staged “surrealism”. I confess I found them unfathomable. This raises the question of how and to whom pictures “speak” – an issue which lies beyond the scope of this essay, but which undoubtedly underlies the issues under discussion. The dominance of “theory” and “conceptualism” in academically oriented practice, and the banality of much “mainstream” imagery make the question of appeal a fraught one. In addressing the question of how and whether photography books affect taste, Coppock avers that none of the Ffotogallery titles marks a watershed in photography publishing. But the message that producing monographs and catalogues sends out has a huge influence in creating reputations. The prospect of publication therefore helps to draw photographers to exhibit. Coppock sees publication as a way of developing the standing not only of the photographer in question but of the organisation as well. This relates the
influence of curators on each other, and their need for credibility within the circles responsible for public funding. This may lead to conformity, but can also be enabling - for example Modern Art Oxford would probably not have mounted the recent David Goldblatt retrospective had it not been shown at Documenta, and before that in Barcelona.

If publishing for Ffotogallery is an extension to the core function of exhibiting, for another small but significant public body, it is fundamental. Photoworks, based in Maidstone in Kent and housed in the Kent institute of Art and Design, is entirely subsidised by the Arts Council, and shares the complex history of public arts organisations since the mid 1970’s. Photoworks takes on a variety of roles as an enabler and promoter of photography in the South East, but publishing and distribution are at its core. It director is David Chandler, formerly head of exhibition at the Photographers’ Gallery.

As a publisher, Photoworks produces titles in runs of about 1000 copies. And yet such is its background and credibility that it can confidently hope to get books noticed within the broader photographic culture. Like Ffotogallery, Photoworks has both an opportunity and responsibility to publish books which would not be commercial. A primary condition is that the work must have regional angle – the artist must be resident in the South East region, or be commissioned to make work there. However when David Chandler took over in 1997, Photoworks had no further criteria for commissioning new work. Chandler tried to develop a more coherent and explicit policy. In the first place, he wanted to get away from the idea of photography as illustration. Another driver was a concern to address a diversity not often recognised in the public image of the region. This also embraced a wish to address the fragmented identity of photography itself. So Photoworks came up with the notion of place. This could be a landscape, or a building, a factory, or a collection located in the catchment area, but in all cases the idea of location became platform for commissioning.

A corollary consideration for Photoworks is whether a project seeking support is significant in an artist’s development. It is this support for the artist which most clearly separates the organisation from commercial publishing, and Photoworks is currently embarking on a new series of "first-time" monographs.

A key audience for Photoworks publications is Higher Education. New releases are made known to universities and colleges with photography courses. In addition Photoworks has a core membership and mailing list of people in the media and cultural fields. The assumption is that if these people use their influence as expected, distribution may reach another layer of audience. As far as distribution is concerned, there is some question whether conventional distributors are in fact useful at the small scale in question: some small organisations employ a person to go round bookshops in London, in effect controlling distribution themselves, while Photoworks distributes through Cornerhouse in Manchester.

As an illustration of the processes and issues involved in Photoworks’ approach to publishing, Nicholas Sinclair's book *Crossing the Water* is a good example. Sinclair had worked on his own for several years to make a series of richly precise but resonant images of a single pond in Sussex. He had then managed to raise some money to contribute to the costs of publication, so Photoworks could take on the project fairly easily. But Chandler would not have taken it if it didn’t accord with his criteria – and as
the intense exploration of a particular place it clearly did so. Equally persuasive was a
sense of integrity in the work. It was in no way concerned with fashion but was concise,
focused, and even obsessive. These were qualities which Chandler regards as admirable,
as was the fact that the project showed an artist working in a way which was not
common for him (Sinclair is primarily a highly regarded portrait photographer with
several books to his credit). Moreover, Chandler felt a responsibility to publish the work
precisely because it was unlikely that others would publish it. And yet the very qualities
which made the work unconcerned with fashion, were the source of its strength: in
contrast to the prevalence of brash postmodern bricolage, the tone of *Crossing the Water*
is one of classicist integrity.

The creative input of Photoworks in such a book is significant. For example, the choice
of writer when planning a book is a creative one, and is based on a broad sense of trust
in what a particular writer may bring to the project. In fact in the case of *Crossing the
Water*, the afterword was written before the main text, and the final organisation with
text by two different writers both before and after images, was the outcome of a debate
about how to use and deal with text in the book.

Fundamentally, in embarking on publication, Photoworks is making a statement of
endorsement. It is an approach pursued in recognition that although monographs are a
very marginal part of the publishing market, they remain a marker of seriousness within
the world in which those books are made. Production, distribution and consumption of
images all follow what may be seen as fashion, or as the evolution of critical position.
But in Chandler’s view, what Photoworks is trying to do is to say that good work does
not always follow those trends.

Nevertheless, Chandler considers engagement with networks to be vital for practitioners,
who self-evidently need not only to know what is going on around them but how to
make themselves visible to those who might enable and underwrite their work.

Part of that network is of course not critical but commercial. While public funding for
photography and photographic exhibition is very minimal in this country, a glance
through the listings pages of the BJP will reveal dozens of small commercial galleries
showing photographs. And although this “market” also flatters to deceive, and provides
little in the way of sustainable income, the commercial sale of prints has an occasional, if
surprising, spinoff in publishing as well.

The foremost commercial gallery involved in publishing is the Zelda Cheatle gallery in
Mount Street, Mayfair. The owner and proprietor Zelda Cheatle spent nine years at the
Photographers’ Gallery, starting the business of print sales there, before opening her own
gallery 15 years ago. She sells to three broad constituencies; corporate art buyers who buy
for large commercial enterprises, private individuals who want prints to hang on their
walls, and collectors.

Corporate buyers invariably look for work in a group or series, by well-established and
“bankable” names. However the work must not intrude on subject matter which might
be construed as treating of religion, sex or politics or anything which might compromise
the strict neutrality of the organisation. For example, an otherwise innocuous print sold
to Citibank in New York was returned because it contained a small Adidas logo as part of
the scene depicted - and the bank holds the accounts of Nike.
Private buyers often buy pictures for their decorative value - a series of landscapes by Tomoko depicting aspects of the British environment associated with World War 2 are being bought by those who simply like the way they depict the British suburban milieu.

Collectors, according to Cheatle, buy according to estimations of the value of prints to them and/or as part of a wider market in collectibles. Despite the high prices now being paid for historic prints, Cheatle will not advise clients on investment and remains wary of the notion of the investment value of photographs. However her core business selling canonical photographers for whose work she has the exclusive agency in this country.

Cheatle began her foray into book publishing with the volume *Inscapes*, a retrospective of the work of John Blakemore, in 1991. The book came about because there was a large number of people who knew Blakemore's work, and had bought his prints, either directly from him or through her as his agent, but who had no access to a book of his work because publishers had not seen the potential for one. The book was printed in a run of 2000 copies to hold down the unit cost, and has gradually, over more than a decade, sold out without having been remaindered.

A similar case was the work of Roger Mayne. Cheatle saw the publication of a monograph, again with a run of 2000 copies, as a way of offering those who bought prints (for which she is the agent) a way of contextualising and as it were underwriting their purchase. The book also helped to raise Mayne's profile and save his reputation from neglect, and in this sense served as a form of indirect promotion for potential print sales.

Another "spinoff" publication is a small book of the work of Manuel Alvarez Bravo - also clearly aimed at buyers of his prints in the first instance. This does not offer those new to his work anything which cannot be seen elsewhere, but the printing and paper are very fine and the small book makes an elegant object. It was printed with a run of 1000 and costs £20. While this is uneconomic for those simply looking for an introduction to his work, it is insignificant in comparison with the £6000 and upwards for which Cheatle sells Bravo's prints.

Another rather less obvious case is Steve Pyke's *Philosophers*, a collection of portraits of famous academics. Despite its manifest strengths and charms, given the small world of professional philosophy this would seem an unlikely publishing venture. The decision to publish arose because Pyke was able to persuade Cheatle that it would be viable. This was in part because he had a deal lined up with the United States to distribute 1000 copies through DAP, and there were plans for a promotional speaking tour involving several notable philosophers, Pyke himself, and sales of the book. It was also thought there might be a ready market at philosophy conferences. Consequently a print run of 4000 was undertaken. However, the promotional tour did not happen, the 1000 copies sent to DAP were never marketed and were dumped, and only about 1000 copies have thus far been bought. However the book still sells a couple of copies per month.

This example, and Cheatle’s experiences more generally, highlight the problems in distributing photography books. Her own distributors are currently under an order of voluntary liquidation, and she has not been paid for the past four years. But mainstream book distributors are accustomed to moving between ten and fifty thousand volumes per month, and they are reluctant to take on the overhead involved in small runs. Meanwhile at the retail end, a major chain such as Waterstones, seeking to avoid holding unsold
stock, buys single volumes at a time. Cheatle understandably describes this as “a huge disservice” to photography publishing.

Cheatle stresses that she is “not a bookseller”, but embraces the book as a way of underwriting photographic prestige, and in considering the shaping of taste and reputation, she suggests that the dominance of the curator may be waning. She characterises the 1990’s as the “era of the curator” in which conceptual framing and critical underwriting were central to the cultural economy of photography, and cites the critical influence of Val Williams as being important in helping to underwrite the growing reputation of Martin Parr. In contrast Cheatle suggests that contemporary photography is becoming more “artist-led”, and she cites the example of Sue Parkhill and five other graduates from the RCA who held a self-initiated two-week exhibition in Islington incorporating a range of live performances.
6. Self-Publishing: Homer Sykes

While "artist-led" exhibitions are plentiful among amateurs and professionals alike, given the economic conditions I have described, a venture into self-publishing may seem at best an act of vanity and at worst sheer folly. In fact the scenario is more complex. Homer Sykes is a long-standing and highly regarded photojournalist and a leading member of the London agency Network. After nearly 30 years in the profession he has recently made two monographs. One, *Shanghai Odyssey*, was published by Dewi Lewis with sponsorship from the financier Gerry Grimstone, who commissioned the project. The other, *On the Road Again*, Sykes self-published: it is this apparently quixotic venture which I will briefly discuss.

The general background for Sykes' moves into book-making is that the market for photojournalism has changed, and in some rather obvious senses has in fact never been so bad. On the one hand there is an over-supply of photographers, with thousands emerging from college each year. On the other the traditional agencies which represented photographers on the basis of personal contact between agency staff and picture editors, are collapsing in the face of globalised and monopolised practices dominated by Corbis and Getty. The imperative for a photographer who does not want to be driven into the indiscriminate pit of terriers feeding the stock libraries for nugatory returns, is to create a personal identity - in other words branding. And publishing may be vital to this. Seen in this light, self-publishing can have a very pragmatic place within the development of personal profile. (One is reminded of Martin Parr's early ventures.)

*On the Road Again*, Sykes' venture into self-publishing, came about through four trips across the United States. The first two happened in 1969 and 1971, when as a break from being a successful magazine photographer he took off with his girlfriend for three weeks each time. Then followed a long interval working as a magazine photographer producing reportage for titles including the *Observer* magazine, the *Sunday Times*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *Now*. (As an indication of how much this world has changed, it is worth noting that the pay was £200 per day twenty years ago - and still is. And in place of reportage with any pretensions to weight, the papers have become dominated by soft-news advertorial designed to complement lifestyle advertising).

In 1999, as Sykes' supply of regular work dwindled, he got a digital darkroom, and began digitising his past work. He showed some of the material from the two American trips to friends and others at Network, who liked the pictures and were enthusiastic about a vision that they did not recognise in the more routine work he was doing at the time. So he decided to follow the same mental trip as he had done a generation earlier, getting on a Greyhound bus and travelling across the continent. Again in 2001, he revisited the process. On the later trips, at the suggestion of his New York agent, he also wrote a journal.

On approaching the better-known publishers with the idea of making this material into a book, Sykes discovered two obstacles. First, he was respected but not famous, and second, they were looking for work that could be tied up with co-editions in other countries - a lengthy and delicate process unlikely to happen around any but the most bankable material. Nevertheless he still assumed he might find a small publisher who would want to do it, and that he, Sykes, would simply take his 6.5-7%.
However he soon discovered that that was not about to happen, and it seemed the project would never be published. At that time he was working on *Shanghai Odyssey*, a substantial monograph of his photographs of the city, and from his intimate experience of the process of making that book, he became convinced that self-publishing could be viable. In calculating costs in relation to potential sales, he decided to print 1,400 copies of *On the Road Again* - in comparison to run of, say, 1,000, this reduced the unit price substantially but did not make the total cost excessive. The total cost of making the book (apart from the shooting and processing of the original photographs) including new prints, dummies, and the services of the designer, came to £11,500 less a grant of £1000 from Leica, who have a small credit in the flyleaf. This meant a unit cost to Sykes of £7.10 per copy.

The question of distribution seemed both crucial and vexed. Sykes saw three distributors, and they all liked the book. But he realised that on a small run he would be unlikely to recoup his costs, because after the distributor had taken perhaps 30% of the cover price, in addition to the retailers' 30-40%, he would end up with as little as 30% - pushing the cover price into the high £20's and making substantial sales even less likely. So he decided to distribute the book himself. This meant he would get 60 to 70% of the cover price, and could price the book at the psychological £20 point. At the time I spoke to him in January he was averaging a gross return of £13.20 per copy, through wholesalers as well as direct. He had by then, seven months after the book's launch, sold 420 copies and needed to sell 750 to break even. He had borrowed money from the bank for the project on a two-year loan, so had that time as a "window", before having to absorb any losses.

Sykes self-publicised *On the Road Again* by preparing a press release, and telephoning reviewers and magazines and newspapers. He sent out thirty review copies, and as a consequence fifteen papers and magazines covered the book in pieces of varying weight and size. The ones among them which Sykes' singled out for mention were illustrated feature articles in *The Independent*, *Design Week*, the RPS magazine and *Black and White* magazine.

But Sykes knew that the appeal of the book would be esoteric, so he targeted only a handful of retailers to whom to try and sell copies. These were the Photographers' Gallery, Zwemmers, Shipleys, and Waterstones. It is worth noting that the first three of these are within a few hundred yards of each other. This suggests that the core clientele for photography books are very much part of a tiny metropolitan circle. By dint of re-supplying these outlets, and sales at the launch party, 102 copies sold in the first week. By the time I spoke to Sykes in December sales were running at 17 per week.

This scenario confirms that the economics of self-publishing are predictably precarious. But the venture may have other benefits. For Sykes there have been several spin-offs. He was approached to give several lectures over the year, including a series of three at the NMPFTV. Sykes has sold as many as twenty copies of the book at an illustrated lecture. This suggests that there is indeed a wider latent market for photography books, but that it needs to be cultivated and educated. There are profound philosophical questions here about taste and the contract of mutual recognition between buyers and makers, the relation between makers, critics and curators, the way "value" is accorded to an image, and the "market" is an instrument of cultural persuasion. But more basic is the will of
book makers to publicise and distribute their output. The two public organisations to whom I spoke seemed particularly languid in this regard.

But there are other intangible benefits to the project. Not least is the satisfaction of being able to disseminate personal work to a potentially appreciative audience. Self-publishing meant that Sykes could take the authorial, subjective, process to its logical conclusion. The idea was to make the book an exploration of going and seeing. Sykes says that what he wanted after 30 years was "not to know where I was going, or what I was going to see. If something was "happening" in a town where I was - say Dallas - I would avoid that. I didn't want in any way to fall back into the trap of what I'd always done, which was to go and make pictures that worked for the magazines. I just wanted to go and come up with things."

Perhaps only the total assumption of risk and responsibility, which self-publishing requires, makes such an approach possible.
7. Observations and (in)conclusions

This study has looked at the practicalities, motives, and context for photography publishing in this country. A clear thread has been the importance of books in establishing the reputation of photographers and in shifting ideas about photography. Also evident is the precariousness of the enterprise from a commercial point of view, and its dependence on personal resources or public patronage. These latter factors make photography publishing an inescapably middle class activity, dependent if not on "independent means" then at least on the individual resources to gather and collate a "significant" body of work. Not least among these resources is simply time.

The amateur is seldom able to devote the concentrated effort needed to develop a body of publishable work. Whether this is what accounts for the dominance of resolutely anti-intellectual pictorialist practice revolving around camera clubs and competitions is difficult to say, but one can at least say that it offers immediate rewards of esteem and comradeship, whereas to embark on a publishable project of "serious" photography is a much more demanding undertaking with far less immediate prospects of gratification. The size of the camera market (several million annually in this country) and club membership (several tens of thousands), compared with the tiny sales of any photography books more demanding than the "how to" titles associated with amateur aesthetics, suggests that the sort of book I have been discussing either simply does not reach the notice, or excite the interest, of the average amateur photographer.

In this essay I have not addressed is the experience of photography books from the point of view of the buyer. But seen thus, it seems remarkable and even astonishing that the process of publishing should be so fraught and precarious. After all for the price of a return bus ticket to another city, or a very basic meal for two in a restaurant, one may buy objects which are made with great care and personal flair, and which will bring enduring pleasure. The book of photographs may be dipped into, browsed, pored over, shared with others, and enjoyed in way simply not possible with a work of fiction. And while a book reproducing painting or drawing never equates to the experience of the original, the reproduced photograph may very closely approximate the fine print. This is of course one of the great limitations of photography against which the current gallery fashion for megalithic display contends - the photograph is a rather ordinary, even plebeian artefact, easily reproduced and relying not on sheer physical presence but on subtler semiotic complexities. The reproduced photograph (unlike, say, the daguerreotype) is not a precious object. On the face of it, this makes the photograph and the book intuitive partners, even as the "artistic print" so beloved of the camera club is invariably valued in proportion to how it shows evidence of counter-intuitive technical strain and an ability to "break free" of the bounds of the instant mechanical image.

The book is no more socially "neutral" than the gallery: personal (think of the "ex libris" plate in the cover and the way it is "consumed" by being held in the lap) durable, useful, pleasurable, practical, portable, and affordable – it is the essential middle-class commodity, a signifier of citizenship, one might say, and of membership of a collective. Undoubtedly these qualities account for the power and influence to which I alluded in the introduction.
So why are photography books sold in such tiny quantities? Clearly the policies of the bookselling trade are one reason. The following report appeared recently in Photo District News:

**Arena Editions Calls It Quits**

The tight economy has claimed another casualty, this time resulting in the closure of fine art photography book publisher Arena Editions. After six years and 55 books from the likes of Adam Fuss, Robert Stivers, Garry Winogrand and Richard Misrach, founder James Crump has decided to call it quits.

"I feel confident that we gave it our best shot and tried to set a very high standard," Crump says. "For most intents and purposes, we represented artists in a very good way, and a few titles will have quite a long life."

At press time Crump had not yet declared bankruptcy, but he was in liquidation, owing a seven-figure debt mostly to vendors who helped produce the books.

David Fahey of the Fahey Klein gallery in Los Angeles worked with Crump and Arena Editions on several projects. Fahey says that many of Arena's titles will likely become collector's items due to their high quality and scarcity.

"They have a stellar reputation and name and have produced fine high-quality books that are eclectic and dynamic," Fahey says. "It's very disappointing."

For the most part Arena tried to release as many commercially viable books as challenging titles. Crump says he often looked for artists who either already had a strong cult following or who had popular interest but had not previously released a high-profile book. Still, Arena was hampered by several factors, not the least of which was the consolidation of power between two major retail chains.

In recent years, Barnes & Noble and Borders have installed inventory management software that tracks how many copies each title is selling. This means that books have a much shorter lifespan on the shelves, which Crump estimates is now down to six weeks from 18 previously. If a book doesn't start selling in that time, the chains ship the returns back to the publisher, often with wear-and-tear that further decreases their value.

"The big chains have input on jacket design, dictate pricing, control the market, and sell real estate [in stores]. There's no risk for the big retail chain," Crump says. "That imbalance is a fundamental issue that has to be addressed, but I don't think publishers are willing to band together to have some power commensurate with the chains. To bring them together, that's a monumental task and I don't see it coming together in the near future."

Arena's biggest sellers were books by Peter Beard, Bruce Weber and Richard Misrach, which sold between 5,000 and 7,000 copies each. Last year's Garry Winogrand book sold out of its 5,000 copies and will not be reprinted. One of publisher's biggest disappointments was a book by Sara Moon, (sic) which sold only around 3,000 of its 10,000 print run. Crump was expecting a much greater demand based on the fact that Moon had never had a serious book published before.

Though Fahey admits that the economy hasn't yet regained its legs, he still thinks there's room for other photo book publishers to shake things up.

"I think now is a great time for someone to step in, because the competition out there is very cautious and lots of companies have closed down," Fahey says. "Now is a good time to attack it if you're a publishing company." ([Photo District News](www.photodistrictnews.com) 24 April 03)

If further proof were needed, this makes clear how volatile photography publishing is, and indicates the incompatibility of a small proprietor-led "industry" devoted to esoteric and enduring "quality" appeal, with a marketplace driven by the logic of planned obsolescence.

Another more obvious reason for the slow take-up of serious photography books may be that until fairly recently the quality of reproduction simply did not make possible the sensual delights now available at affordable prices. I have tentatively suggested, too, that many books are poorly imagined and do not cohere as design objects.
A third reason may be that conditioned by the ubiquity of the paperback, readers no longer think of the book as an object in its own right, but merely as a disposable conduit to the thoughts it contains. Indeed the photography book is in some important ways not really like other books - or at least not those generally produced since the age of the illuminated manuscript. This relates to the matter of cost. The average book of photographs is several times the cost of a paperback novel. It must be bought to be savoured and kept, not consumed and discarded. A price of perhaps 40 or 50 pounds no doubt seems excessive to those accustomed to thinking of a “book” as something for under ten. This takes no account of the actual production values and costs involved – my own sense is often one of amazement that the superb artefacts which books of photography often are, can be produced so cheaply. That the cost factor is perhaps the single major obstacle, however, is borne out by the success of Robert Delpire’s *Photopoche* series, whose issue on Cartier Bresson, for example, has sold 300,000 copies (Delpire interview in *Paris Photo*, April 2003). With their uniform format and “little black book” design, these sell directly into the early Penguin mindset, and have the same slightly puritanical aura as the original crop of Allen Lane’s zealous brainchildren with their orange and buff paper covers.

But for the most part, the book of photographs is not a "text" like a novel, offering transitive access to a conceptual realm which lies "behind" its sign-surface. It is a design object in itself – a narrative construct as much like a film as anything else, but often (usually) working without linear narrative. In books, perhaps its closest cousins are coffee-table books which are designed as decorative objects, and the "slim volume" of verse. These offer sensual pleasures of contemplation, meditation, sharp delight, and in the case of the verse compilation demand to be actively read to be enjoyed. The "story" or "information" will not sweep the reader along, nor offer keys to self-improvement. Rather the photography book demands a certain effort and willingness to engage in the pleasures of form. And this in turn demands training. Steeped as we are in a history of aesthetic and archetypal imagery it is difficult sometimes to imagine just how much our appreciation is a product of acculturation. But if one looks at the sort of image admired by "serious" photographers, whether is be the abstraction of a Dolores Marat or the bravura composition of a Gilles Peress, one needs to remember that these would be considered "failures" in the camera club, and so the elements of risk and excitement they convey are very much bound up with an awareness of contemporary aesthetics and discourses within photography.

In fact one may be so bold as to suggest that the primary audience for the photographic monograph is other photographers, critics, and curators. The photographic book is a statement of position within a community, as far from the mass-media magazine as a paper in an academic journal. It is doubtful, for example, whether Wolfgang Tillmans would have been considered for the Turner prize had not Benedikt and Angelika Taschen published a book of his work in 1998, which Tillmans himself laid out. Nor might Juergen Teller have broken from the ranks of fashion hacks into "art" and the contention for the Citibank prize had he not also been published by Taschen in 1996. The same effect of publication in book form in raising their profiles might apply to other recent Citibank contenders, Roger Ballen and Simon Norfolk.

So another significant limitation on the sale of the sort of photography books I have been discussing may be the narrowness of the social group to which they appeal. An absolutely key issue here is the status of the visual image in society at large. Ever since George Eastman said “you press the button, we do the rest” we have been in a culture
where photographs are seen for the most part entirely transitively – i.e. it is the “subject” of the picture of which people are aware rather than the nature of the image or the sensibility which informs it. This remains so even after the movements of modernity in painting and their demand that we learn to look in a more conscious and active way. In order for these fundamentals to change what is needed is the cultivation of a sense that "photography matters" and that photography books are potential sources of pleasure and “value” at prices that remain lower than an opera or football ticket. But the way forward remains consumerist and this may dictate the sort of work that succeeds.

Standing at the gateway to this, is the question of what I might call the "erotics" of the book. This seems to me fundamental because it is a key to why people spend money on anything beyond the requirements to sustain biological life. To narrow the field to those areas contiguous to the book of photographs: the work of fiction promises an erotics of "transport" (not for nothing are the early novels often picaresque) in which narrative bears one away from the mundane and into a heightened zone, while the gallery is a sensorium - a site of jouissance or aesthetic bliss (when it is not merely stroking vanity by offering anhedonic pseudo-philosophising). So what does the book of photographs offer?

I will not here rehearse or contend with the many well-known theorisations of photography. Suffice it to say that the photograph, and the photography book refer to the world outside themselves and require a particular kind of interest and engagement both in that world and in the manner in which it may be represented. Cartier Bresson famously said he was not interested in photography, but only in "life, life, life", but even as it invites engagement with that world the photograph distances and stylises, "de-naturating" its subject-matter and turning it into an icon. I would argue that these are complex processes, and of limited appeal to the person who looks at pictures in the way men look at page three of the Sun, purely as transitive signifiers. The pleasure to be got from a Cartier-Bresson picture is after all essentially "philosophical" - we do not care particularly about the specifics of how and where the picture was made but about what it "says". And this "saying" is closer to poetry or music than to prose. It requires a cultivated eye. And the more one knows about how difficult it is to capture the ineffable, and how easy banality, the more precious it becomes.

I use the word "precious" deliberately for its double-edged meaning. A thread running through this essay has been the relation between publishing and exhibition - between the book as the essentially demotic artefact (think of schoolbooks or the popular press of the 19th century) and the gallery as a contemporary shrine. And like the book of "serious" poems the book of "serious" photography is clearly, I would suggest, hieratic in function - its appeal directed mainly at fellow-practitioners and its promise one of mysteries. In that respect it, too, like the gallery in Chris Coppock's description, perhaps even more so in fact, is a "particularly bourgeois" object. It is after all a piece or personal property, a commodity without any function or value other than the pleasure of possession, and the imaginative "richness" to which it gives access, and which may be revisited like a personal treasure.

I make these observations because a discussion of the nature of photography publishing without a consideration of its wider social and political resonance would be a philistine exercise, oblivious to the forces which animate the process of making and buying photography books. In this regard, the interesting fact is that while serious photography and publishing are undoubtedly "bourgeois" activities, they are adhered to by a rather
particular sector of the middle class; every publisher, gallery curator and photographer mentioned in this essay, would consider themselves "left-leaning" if not "radical". The radical and campaigning tradition in the 20th Century is more or less inseparable from photography (and many anxieties about photography address the legitimacy of this marriage). For although the production and pleasurable consumption of a book of photographs may be beyond the means of the masses (at least globally if not in this country where almost every household contains a camera) it is within the reach of a sector of the middle class which nevertheless remains "oppositional". Unlike Opera which exists on huge state and private subsidy and is available only to the very wealthy, or Cinema which can be produced only by those of vast wealth or massive corporate support, and must be experienced by masses to be viable, photography can practised by individuals and enjoyed and hence sustained by relatively small groups. So it is unsurprising that it is in keeping alive that most old-fashioned of libertarian entities, the "enlightened citizen" that a certain kind of engaged photography, from Stieglitz to Walker Evans to Simon Norfolk, most clearly distinguishes itself. To those who believe that the representation of the "real world" matters deeply, and who value what Doisneau called "vision" and others "insight" or even more traditionally "wisdom", the book of documentary photographs may be of enormous vitality and importance in contributing to a passionate and joyous engagement with life.
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The Photographer’s Eye, by John Szarkowski, was one of two books Ansel Adams suggested I read before attending his workshop in Yosemite Valley, many years ago when I was a young and inexperienced photographer. The book is a classic. Published in 1966 and based on a 1964 “landmark” exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art, it is filled with black and white images photographed over the span of nearly a century and a quarter by both recognized masters and unknown photographers. Many of you are probably asking who is John Szarkowski and why this book? Become the professional photographer you were meant to be. Competition in the photography industry has never been fiercer. But in this empowering guide, acclaimed photographer and speaker Dane Sanders reveals that the key to success is to stop worrying about what everyone else is doing and start focusing on your most powerful resource: you. Discover how to: Â· Use your unique skills and talents to carve out a niche all your own.Â· â€”Scott Bourne, publisher and host of Photofocus.com “As much about finding out who you are as it is about how to become a truly great photographer. Highly recommended!” â€”Amit Gupta, founder of Photojojo.com. â€œThis book is worth its weight in gold.â€”Gary Fong, photographer, author, and creator of the Lightsphere. The ULTIMATE list of photography books as chosen by over 600 professional and amateur photographers. Discover the books that help and inspire photographers.Â For 2019, I wanted to dig deeper on the vast topic of photography books by asking over 600 top photographers the same two questions: What books have helped you improve your photography and what books have helped you grow your photography business. Each photographer kindly provided more than one book for each category, and I soon noticed that the same book names kept cropping up, hence the creation of this post. Check out my top pick! How to Create Stunning Digital PhotographyBest all-round photography book in 2019.