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**As the 2017 editions of Unseen Book Market and Photobook Week Aarhus took place during the same weekend (21–24 September), we have launched a joint discussion about the role of the photobook market today. The project *Market? What Market?* kicked off with a series of three *Book Market Statements* at Unseen website made by guest contributors. The issues raised by the authors in their text entries were continued during the roundtable discussions in Aarhus and Amsterdam. Finally, the texts from the website, the quotes from the roundtable discussions, as well as two additional unique materials have been edited into this booklet.**

1 – Gerry Badger – On Three Markets  
photographer, architect and photography critic, co-wrote with Martin Parr  
*The Photobook: A History, 3 volumes*

2 – Olivier Cablat – On the Role of Digital  
artist and artistic director of Cosmos Arles Books with Sebastian Hau, currently works on a doctorate *Digital and Photobooks*

3 – Sebastian Arthur Hau – On the Community and the Market Space  
founder of the bookshop at Le Bal, director of the photobook markets *Polycopies and Cosmos*

4 – Round Table Discussions: Quotes  
from talks at Photobook Week Aarhus & Unseen Living Room

5 – Carlos Spottorno – On Enlarging the Market  
photographer and film maker, author of *THE PIGS, Wealth Management, La Grieta* etc.

6 – Natalia Baluta – On Potential Audience  
artist, co-founder of Russian Independent SelfPublished collective, and director of client insight Central and Eastern Europe leading market research for Coca-Cola

# 1 – Gerry Badger

The idea of a photobook market is quite complex. They have clearly grown in popularity since the photobook became an object of academic study, but I am unsure exactly how much this recognition has increased. There is a lot of talk about photobooks, and hordes of people look at them at festivals, but I don't know how much of this is translated into sales. There are a lot of books chasing a certain level of spending power in a world where spending power has eroded with time. It seems to me that there are two – possibly three – markets for photographic books.

Firstly, there is the antiquarian market, where high prices are paid for classics in the genre. However, it should be noted that this is very much a 'condition market', which has begun to deflate in recent years. This market is obviously for collectors, whose aims are not just the establishment of pride for owning something most people don't, but who regard the photobook as an asset – something that increases in value, incorporated into a pension plan. I remember one collector of photobook classics saying, "It's nice to look at my shelves and know they're making money".

Some of these criteria spill into the second photobook market: contemporary photobooks. These include books that determine the buzz and debate around contemporary photography. Those who can't afford the classics are able to pick out future classics, and can thereby

make a prospective profit. Of course, many collectors buy them for the love of photobooks and photography, but the feeding frenzy generated by certain books, and the insistence on having signed copies, suggests that the investment impulse is still very much at work.

There is a third market that tends to be overlooked, which is the market for photographic books rather than photobooks. These photographic books include retrospective monographs, exhibition catalogues, historical studies, and so on. If you are interested in photography as opposed to interesting objects, the photographic book market is important. It is also less likely to attract the investor or collector, although as soon as any book goes out of print it demands a premium.

One thing is clear: the number of available photobooks has grown to a point where no one can completely keep up with them. This makes festivals a vital component of the market. I don't know exactly how many books are sold at these events, but festivals are certainly the best place to see the latest photobooks. It is also a place where we get seduced into unwise purchases – those books you look at once and once only, the flaky books about which the wise John Gossage once observed, "are all icing and no cake."

# 2 – Olivier Cablat



The term 'photobook' was never used prior to the year 2000. This is an observation that David Company confronted us with in 2012 in his essay *The 'Photobook': What's in a Name?*

In 2004, Martin Parr and Gerry Badger co-edited the first volume of *The Photobook, A History*, an anthology of books from the 20th century that all represent the emergence of publications containing printed photography in the field of Art History. *The Photobook, A History* was following other attempts of the anthologies of the same kind, for example, Horacio Fernandez's *Fotografía Pública:*

*Photography in Print 1919-1939* or Andrew Roth's *The Book of 101 Books: Seminal Photographic Books of the Twentieth Century*. However it was quite different from the predecessors, in the sense that it was created by main players in the field: photographers, authors of several theoretical and photographic books, and prominent photobook collectors. Traditionally, recorded history is realised by a historian, just as a photobook is supposed to be published by a publisher. But in recent years, the roles attributed to professionals in the realm of photobooks have started to change.

Indicated by the 3 letters D-I-Y, Do It Yourself refers to the possibility of breaking the professional mould, encouraged by online blogs and new digital techniques. A few decades ago, a photobook collection like Martin Parr's was only made possible through years of travelling, sifting through hundreds of libraries and flea markets. Now, with platforms like Ebay that also give a feeling to the collector of being a gold digger finding treasure, products from all over the world are accessible in a few seconds.

The reasoning of Marshall McLuhan seems clear with an example of the Photobook: "each new technology creates an environment, perceived firstly as corrupted and degrading, but then transforms its predecessor into an art form" (from *Understanding media: The extensions of man*). The photobook was a form from the past that has not even been clearly identified. And in a period of less than 15 years, it came into existence and then became a traditional art form.

The 21st century bookmakers can consult blogs, online bookshops, tutorials and forum discussions. They can design their books with software, send a layout by e-mail, understand screen colour

proofing, present it on social networks, and announce and distribute it on their personal website.

All the factors that have contributed to this new wave of self-publishing come from countries all over the world. Traditional codes were broken, reappropriated and re-used in books of all sizes and formats. This explosion of different publishing practices operates in several realms, such as self-published books, microeditions, or books by smaller publishers experimenting with new ways of conceiving, producing and distributing publications. The digital space has not only strengthened the growing interest in this traditional and polymorphic object, the photobook, – it has also assisted several generations of artists with breaking down the limitations of their reach.

I am one of these artists.

When I was ready to publish my first photobook in 2009, I didn't think any editor was ready to invest in an unknown 30 year-old photographer experimenting with documentary and found pictures. But I was also convinced that if I wasn't happy with how things were done, I would just have to invent a way to do it myself.



**“...everybody can now master the whole process of publishing, from design to distribution, with the help of their computer and thanks to technology which contributed to write a new page of Artist Book History.”**

I made my first photobook *Galaxie* (White Press, 2009) using a printing technology called Print On Demand (POD), which allowed my team to digitally print a small quantity of books and repeat the process bit by bit. Each book was more expensive compared to purchasing one in an edition of a few thousand made all at once, but we were able to make the edition possible with a reasonable investment and without the help of any institutions. The photobook then became my preferred art form, and each one of the books I create supports a specific relation with the digital.

*Enter The Pyramid* (RVB Books, 2012) was created using found images from the internet; *Fouilles* (Filigranes, 2013) was made by mixing different kinds of images, such as animated gifs and Google street view captures with my own pictures. *DUCK, A theory of Evolution* (RVB Books, 2014) extended the reading experience into augmented reality 3D content.

As for many artists from my generation, the digital helped me become published, and assisted my experimentation with an art form that was previously reserved for a small number of artists. The software facilitated an understanding of different types of professions, new printing processes permitted the production of a small quantity of books within a reasonable budget, and the Internet gave me the opportunity to access knowledge that would take several lifetimes to research in the analogue world.

As the first artists deliberately using the book as an art form in the 60's, everybody can now master the whole process of publishing, from design to distribution, with the help of their computer and thanks to technology which contributed to write a new page of Artist Book History.

# 3 – Sebastian Arthur Hau

## MARKET

When Olivier Cablat and I set up the first Supermarkt as an offspace at the Rencontres d'Arles in 2009, it was an exhibition of 12 photographers and 5 independent publishers. We certainly didn't imagine it would soon become Cosmos – the primary photobook market in France hosting more than 90 publishers each July since 2014. We also never imagined there would be an emergence of a wave of new book publishers, or a renewed interest in different forms of photography from all over the world.

Over the years we have shifted the focus of the market, from wanting to present publishers that bring the best and most experimental books to actively discussing and promoting diversity and inclusivity. The reason for this shift is rooted in the fact that we have become less interested in our own filters and more interested in unexpected and challenging exchanges.

In the beginning, it was important for us to bring the best books to the Arles Photography Festival, an event that initially had no interest in them. But it evolved into Cosmos – a very dynamic event that includes exhibitions, talks, performances, participatory online projects its own pdf award and a photobook market that is the largest of its kind in Europe.

New questions arise – since most of us are not what was once called a professional in their respective fields, everyone is constantly confronted with challenges resulting from competence, knowledge, sociability issues, things that are constantly discussed among our peers and in the so called photobook community, on social media, and during the festivals and events we attend and organize.

After this year's edition, our partner the Rencontres festival has observed that we

are indeed institutionalizing ourselves, but it certainly doesn't feel that way. Every book on the tables, every book sold or discovered counts for us, and we're still trying to be attentive to every little detail. And it's also true that Cosmos is obviously conceived in the way we idealize photography, without barriers nor separations, as an open space shared, where roles can change and shift, exchanges are non-hierarchical, where the creation of art is privileged, where forms of photography exist next to one another, also able to shift and change when necessary, where form is just a question and a temporary solution. With all of the confusion this entails.

Polycopies, a book market during the Paris Photo week that I have run with Laurent Chardon since 2013, is more privileged. We share the interest in books as collectors and makers, and Polycopies again is kind of a place conceived according to our own ideals (by which I mean that it might also confuse the average visitor with a complex layout that has something of a blown-up bookshop). But for Polycopies, due to the set-up we chose, the boat, the selection of publishers is still the guiding principle.

We are not alone, we have never considered ourselves to be alone, separate from other institutions, but we consider first and foremost the books and works, and we know that collectors and passionate book and photography lovers follow us.

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

We do like a certain nervousness which is in great contrast to the calmness with which you enter your house, open one or two books you're bringing back, settle down into your seat and slowly dive into them and they into you.

## COMMUNITY

I am of the generation in which community plays a prominent role. A sense of belonging is strong for

**“I wholeheartedly buy into the rhetoric of the photobook community, but I can say very little about it. Do we have principles, ideals, or shared interests?”**

us – be it in politics, social media, and social or artistic projects. The post-WWII generations were different – they idealised quitting, running away, and cutting ties. Our generation wants to belong and be a part of something. I wholeheartedly buy into the rhetoric of the photobook community, but I can say very little about it. Do we have principles, ideals, or shared interests?

Because when there is too much talk about book prices and prizes, values going up and down, best-of lists, I lose hope, because everything feels quite empty and commercial. Isn't it true that we share internationalist, inclusive, pacifist, proeuropean, democratic ideas? Does the openmindedness that each book requires, the world-views, complex narratives, stories in all of those books not necessarily require an openminded community ready to exchange ideas and engage in difficult topics at all times? But that is my reductionist mindset, and over the years I've learned to give (a little) more time to things evolving.

I'm adding these questions about community as a second part of this little text because my mind shies away from the more complex economical questions. Each time a reporter asks me, what about the "photobook-bubble", self-publish-boom, "are there too many books?", my mind goes 'blink' and I have to hold back on my emotions. People using words like 'boom' and 'bubble' seem to think within the economics of Silicon Valley, but applying these macro-economical questions to photobooks doesn't work and doesn't provide the tools for an analysis that's necessary.

And yet we do, many of us, search for ways of living with our crafts and arts, as organizers we have to work out new and

better ways for books to find public, and analyzing the market can certainly not be a bad thing. Both Polycopies and Cosmos have always felt the tension between being a place that works for affectionati and people who are interested in discovering, while also showing a slight disregard to a new public that needs a helping hand and to be guided through the amount of books and works presented.

I place too much of my trust in everyone just liking what they like, being interested in what's interesting, talking about what they need to talk about etc. But do I live by these principles? Can I afford to defend them and carry on reproducing them? Is this what is needed today?

#### BOOKS

I remember the director of a big fair once telling me that the cultural program of an event is like the lights on a christmas tree. I remember a gallerist once telling me that photobooks are just vehicles for selling physical prints or works. Countless people have told me that there are already too many books. I'm sure my fellow book dealers, publishers and artists have suffered from this disregard of photobooks, and it has taken me a long time to forge my high-brow booklover's attitude into something more supple and invisible. And yet, here I am, writing those quotes – the books certainly need no one to defend them in times of affluence and peace such as ours, do they? Maybe what we are in fact defending is the possibility of such a community as ours to exist open-minded, ready to exchange in unexpected encounters, meeting the other, finding out about the world, however utopian that might seem. The books are just one part of this, and their business model is a complex and difficult as it has always been.

# 4 – Round Table Discussions: Quotes



#### GETTING IT OUT THERE. PUBLISHING AND DISTRIBUTING THE PHOTOBOOK

PHOTOBOOK WEEK AARHUS,  
THE 22ND OF SEPTEMBER,  
11:00 – 12:00

Irene Attinger (head of library and bookshop of La Maison Européenne de la Photographie)  
Jens Friis (publisher of the magazine Katalog)  
Angel Luis Gonzalez (founder of PhotoIreland Festival and The Library Project)  
Moderated by Moritz Neumüller (curator of Photobook Week Aarhus)

#### SHARING SELLING: THE PHOTOBOOK MARKET TODAY

UNSEEN LIVING ROOM,  
THE 24TH OF SEPTEMBER,  
16:00 – 17:00

Natalia Baluta (founder of Russian Independent Selfpublished)  
Richard Sporleder (founder of Café Lehmitz Photobooks)  
Bas Vroege (director of Paradox, Ydoc)  
Moderated by Raymond Frenken (writer and critic)

## DISTRIBUTION

Bas Vroege:

“What we do with photobooks - we sell them for ourselves, photobook lovers, makers and people involved. We pump 70-80% of sales around within our community. Whether this is a good or bad thing - I don't know. But it's of course a limited outreach, and I am not optimistic about the question of whether we can expand it. A few years ago, when the economy went down and the support for arts in the Netherlands was shrinking, one of the supports that was removed was for books. A few years later, when we got a signal that the minister might think positively, I became a part of the group who lobbied for photobooks at the Ministry of Culture. And I dare to say they had never seen a photobook in their life. I was really happy to bring along a basket with a few important productions, among them the Gerry Badger and Martin Parr's study *The Photobook: A History*, in order to say: “Hey, a fair share of these

books are actually Dutch. In this country, we have a long-standing tradition in both design and publishing photobooks, and it's acknowledged internationally. And now because of the lack of support, the number of titles is going down. If we want to remain relevant on international scale, we have to continue to support these ventures.” But if even the staff of the Ministry of Culture didn't know what photobooks were, I am not optimistic that we could easily expand that market. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't think about changing and making the best of this situation.”

Jens Friis:

“Whenever I see a good photobook that could be published, I always look the artist in the eye and say, in a dark and frightening voice: “Distribution! Distribution!”

Angel Luis Gonzalez:

“It seems like a good rule of thumb is to make a rule of thirds. A third of the edition goes to the distributor so that

your book goes to the right places, such as Le Bal and other important bookshops; a third for direct sales or crowdfunding; and one third to either give away as a means of publicity, or keep them hoping that prices will rise when the book sells out.”

Jens Friis:

“In the case of my magazine *Katalog*, I am everything in one person, like a Swiss army knife. However, distribution is the hard part. If you get distribution wrong, you will be sitting on a lot of boxes. This is why I keep distribution to myself. So, I am sitting on the boxes myself, but I also see that they become empty. My strategy is to use all available media, online and offline, in order to stay visible. If I am visible, then the magazine is visible. Fifteen years ago, when I became the editor of the magazine, I cancelled all the contracts with the agencies. Agencies are a nightmare. Agencies are the link between the publishers and the libraries. They will go to a publisher and say “We have

got a library here who wants to buy your book. Could we get a percentage if we connect you to them?” I hate middle-men, as they are only there to make money. They are not interested in maintaining the relationships, unless you give them a fat cut - let's say 20-30%. I cannot afford that. I also found out that libraries worldwide are changing their agencies on a regular basis. Obviously, by cancelling these contracts, *Katalog* lost a lot of good clients, but they came back. In the last two years, I have opened up again to the agencies, but I don't give them a cut. So, they probably don't care a lot about *Katalog*, but at least libraries can find me.”

Bas Vroege:

“We found out that there was a recent research study on French publishers of photobooks. They combined their data, and only 25-30% of books today are sold through physical bookstores, and that number is still dropping. And that's the best distribution channel, as books are about touching, smelling – they are

physical objects. So, if we want to keep going, we have to find other ways of distributing them, and the only answer is: online. The only way to survive is to do “business to consumer”, and to sell directly to consumers. But not “business to business” anymore. At the same time, it kills the specialists who remain. Difficult dilemma.”

Angel Luis Gonzalez:

“The bookshop does not make money, the publisher does not make money, the distributor does not make money. So who makes the money?”

Moritz Neumüller:

“Each book demands its own strategy, and many times, this means finding the right mix of approaches to create an impact, e.g. traditional distribution, online sales, and alternative models.”

## PRESALES AND CROWDFUNDING

Angel Luis Gonzalez:

“Artists have not been trained in arts administration or business administration, never mind marketing and sales strategies. If they enter the world of self-publishing, they have to come up with a structure for their invoices, contact hundreds of shops around the world, send books, and if they decide on a consignment model, follow up with each client. This is a really good way of killing creativity. Presales and crowdfunding seem to be a good way to have part of the costs covered beforehand.”

Irène Attinger:

“I understand the importance of crowdfunding. However, audiences can only see images on the Internet, and have no idea how the final product (binding, paper etc.) will really look. I want to see the book. So, I will never participate in a presale or crowdfunding for a book.”

Moritz Neumüller:

“Crowdfunding is not a one-size-fits-all solution. People who participate in crowd-funding often do it to support the cause. They are interested in a subject or want to support an art-ist, and are less interested in the materiality of the book. Presales also show the real interest in a book, and it might help to adjust the edition’s size. In this sense, a presale can help to understand the actual interest of the public in a book (nearly in terms of a market survey) and to pre-finance a part of the costs.”

Angel Luis Gonzalez:

“Crowdfunding also shows if you are prepared to start the process, because it requires a lot of planning. To go through crowdfunding can be an interesting process. We tend to replicate models. People publish in editions of 500 or 1000 because others also do it this way. Sometimes it is better to publish 100 books and sell them all.”

## BOOKSHOPS’ PERSPECTIVE

Irène Attinger:

“There are three standard distribution models. One, where a bookshop buys the books, and cannot return them. Another is where a shop buys a book and get invoiced, but if the title does not get sold, they credit me back the full amount. The third is ‘on commission’. The model that is chosen depends on the situation and, among other factors, on the negotiation power of a shop. In general, there is a trend to go from the commission model to buying books in order to avoid administrative burden.”

Angel Luis Gonzalez:

“The consignment model sounds great: if you don’t sell books, you just give them back, right? However, for someone like us, it means a lot of additional administrative work. It just transfers the problem into the future. So, I am more and more inclined to



buy books, even if I have to invest my own money. These are my books, and if I sell them - good for me. If not - it's my and only my problem. It's also a faster way to support artists."

Angel Luis Gonzalez:

"Sometimes we receive books that cost us more to send them back. If they don't sell, then we just keep them. For example, we used to get *FOAM Magazine* directly from them, but when they started to be distributed by Idea Books, the conditions got so bad that we had to stop. With these new conditions, it would actually cost me money to sell a copy of *FOAM Magazine* in Dublin. The distribution chain becomes a big monster sometimes. The bookshop does not make money, the publisher does not make money, the distributor does not make money. So who makes the money? The printer?"

**AUDIENCE**

Richard Sporleder:

"I see that people are still interested in photobooks, but I often hear: "Nothing has changed since my last visit to another photobook fair." My personal experience is that people come back to older books - the titles from the last 10 years. That also changes my position as a seller, and I am trying to find balance between new and older titles."

Natalia Baluta:

"Part of our collective is at the NY Art Book Fair right now. We have almost the same line up of tables here as we do in NY, and we exchange our observations on how different audienc-es react on the same photobooks. We noticed that some books are very well accepted here, and they get no attention in NY. Projects that are built on archival stories and memory are very interest-ing for an European audience, and not at all to Americans. One of the books we present is

by Igor Mukhin, a famous Russian photographer, and it was the opposite situation. We had little interest towards it in Amsterdam – we heard that it is too classic. And in NY, it is just flying off the table, as it shows Russia during Perestroika times – something that people didn't have a chance to see."

Richard Sporleder:

"One type of audience I find at markets. These are people who want to be con-vinced about a book and to know what is special about it. And I can do it only by telling them about it, sharing personal stories from a photographer, and showing them what's interesting in the form development so that it fits content. The other group is people who have heard about a title, saw it in the Internet, maybe saw that it won an award, and then they can buy it online. 80% of my sales are online. And 20% I sell on markets, and this percent goes down more and more."

**PHYSICAL SPACE OF A PHOTOBOK MARKET**

Natalia Baluta:

"The market is not only an opportunity to sell, but an opportunity to have a conversa-tion – to build connections, to get reviews in magazines, and to get in touch with curators. In case we just send emails from somewhere and nobody has seen the physical books, it's next to impossible to reach people. With real books at our hands, we can tell the story of a project, get some publicity and network. This networking really helps to push books forward. That's why we prefer to sell books ourselves and not partner with bookshops. A festival is also an opportunity to meet with an institution. It's hard to come to a museum and start selling something as a visitor. However, some museums, libraries, and institutions come to festivals deliberately searching for publications. And this is our opportunity to get in touch with them."

## IMPACT OF A PHOTOBOOK

Bas Vroege:

“Sometimes it’s very hard to tell if a book is a best or worst seller. For us, the most important thing that we often ask as we deal with socially driven issues is: what is the impact of your production? Did it contribute to the additional understanding of this issue? Or did it evoke and contribute to the social change? These questions are the hardest you get from funds when evaluating a project. We also make films. And sometimes we have productions that reach 500,000 people. And still it’s hard to say whether reaching 500,000 with a movie has as much impact as a book with a press run of 500. The impact often goes way beyond the exact number of print-run.”

Bas Vroege:

“Many subjects are no longer carried by the press, and we as news consumers think that we have heard enough of them. The media fatigue

is something that we all suffer from. We have learned that we can bring attention back by reintroducing a story in a special book, and then people will invite you to news shows that are prime time on TV. Maybe the debate will not be about the book, but it’s going to be about the subject. That is immeasurable. The cultural products of the book, however small in its circulation, have enormous importance for re-introducing the subject matter to a large audience.”

# 5 – Carlos Spottorno



Spanish documentary photographer Carlos Spottorno has worked on the project *La Grieta (The Crack)* together with reporter Guillermo Abril since 2013. In 2016, they published a book of the work with the same title. The book is their field journal as they follow the border from Africa to the Arctic with the aim of identifying the causes and consequences of Europe’s identity crisis and the European Union’s external borders. Spottorno’s goal is to deliver the results of their investigation to a general audience, and thus went through the quest of publishing the book with a graphic novel publisher Astiberri. So far,

the book has been published in France, Germany and Italy with a total amount of 22500 copies.

## PHOTOBOOK MARKET VS GRAPHIC NOVEL MARKET

The photobook market is extremely weak compared to the market of graphic novels. Although, in the graphic novel universe they also complain when they compare their world to non-illustrated literature. The whole chain in the photobook market is dysfunctional: mainstream distributors take a very large share of sales, so there isn’t much left for authors, publishers and book sellers.



Therefore, publishers and authors take care of distribution, which is a huge energy consumer, and is inefficient in small scales. A lot stands on enthusiasm and the desire to be published at all costs. I have been there too – spending lots of money to see your book come to life. I can't say it wasn't worth it; I learned a lot not just about bookmaking, but about the market dynamics too. But it took me just one strike to understand the importance of having all components of the equation right.

As an author, if I want people to like and buy my book, I can't ignore the audience part of the equation. It is naive to believe we can publish extremely personal and illegible stories and hope that suddenly, by some miracle, the audience will understand and love them to the point

of spending disproportionate sums of money to buy them. The photobook market is so small that we almost know all potential buyers by name, and that is clearly not sustainable. In the graphic novel market, there are phenomena like these too, but a medium sized or a big publisher will not publish a book if they don't see a potential in sales beyond the usual hardcore buyers. They won't get it published unless there's enough money to get everyone paid. With publishers focusing more on sales, it will be more difficult to be published. On the other hand, whatever will be published will have better chances to reach an audience. Content, timing, production costs, distribution plan and promotion strategy are other very basic concepts too often ignored by authors.

### LA GRIETA- APPROACHING PHOTOBOOK MARKET PROBLEMS

I think I managed to solve a couple of problems. First, I found a way to tell a complex story, full of data and nuances, in a way that makes linear narrative possible. I believe people like to be told complex stories in a simple way. Anyone can read and understand most graphic novels. You don't need any particular training or knowledge. Communication between the author and the reader happens almost instinctively. This is why graphic novels are popular and sold to a much larger audience than photobooks. The latter are very often too difficult to decode, therefore difficult to sell. By adopting an existing language, I also adopted its distribution dynamics. I included our story into a delivering stream that reaches general bookshops in many more locations than photobooks. You can find a comic book shop in many

small towns in Europe, while photobooks are only sold in few very specialized bookshops and online.

An issue I still haven't figured out is how to make this book (or any book) more readable online than in a printed form. Interactivity is too demanding, and too many layers of information prove to be less effective than a simple linear story. But that's a new, different story.

### CAN PHOTOGRAPHY USE FORMATS OF OTHER 'GENRE' BOOKS?

I believe there is room to make author's cookbooks, science books, gardening, children's books, and so on. Isn't it striking that all science books look very much the same? Wouldn't it be cool to make a tourist guide that doesn't look like any other? I am 100% open to any kind of genre, just as I am open to all content. I have been focused in economy and

**“As an author, if I want people to like and buy my book, I can't ignore the audience part of the equation.”**

politics for a long time, but I can't say I won't approach other topics.

We photographers have been taught that photobooks have very narrow boundaries. The proportion of photobooks almost unreadable by outsiders of the photobook universe is a flashing indicator of what is accepted to be the main road to follow. Photobooks are often oriented towards the art world, as a door-opener for art galleries. They are made using the logics of scarcity and exclusivity, essentially borrowed from the art gallery system. I am more interested in photobooks made for everyone, embracing the logics of abundance and wide reach. I believe the natural goal and responsibility of a book is to be read by as many people as possible.

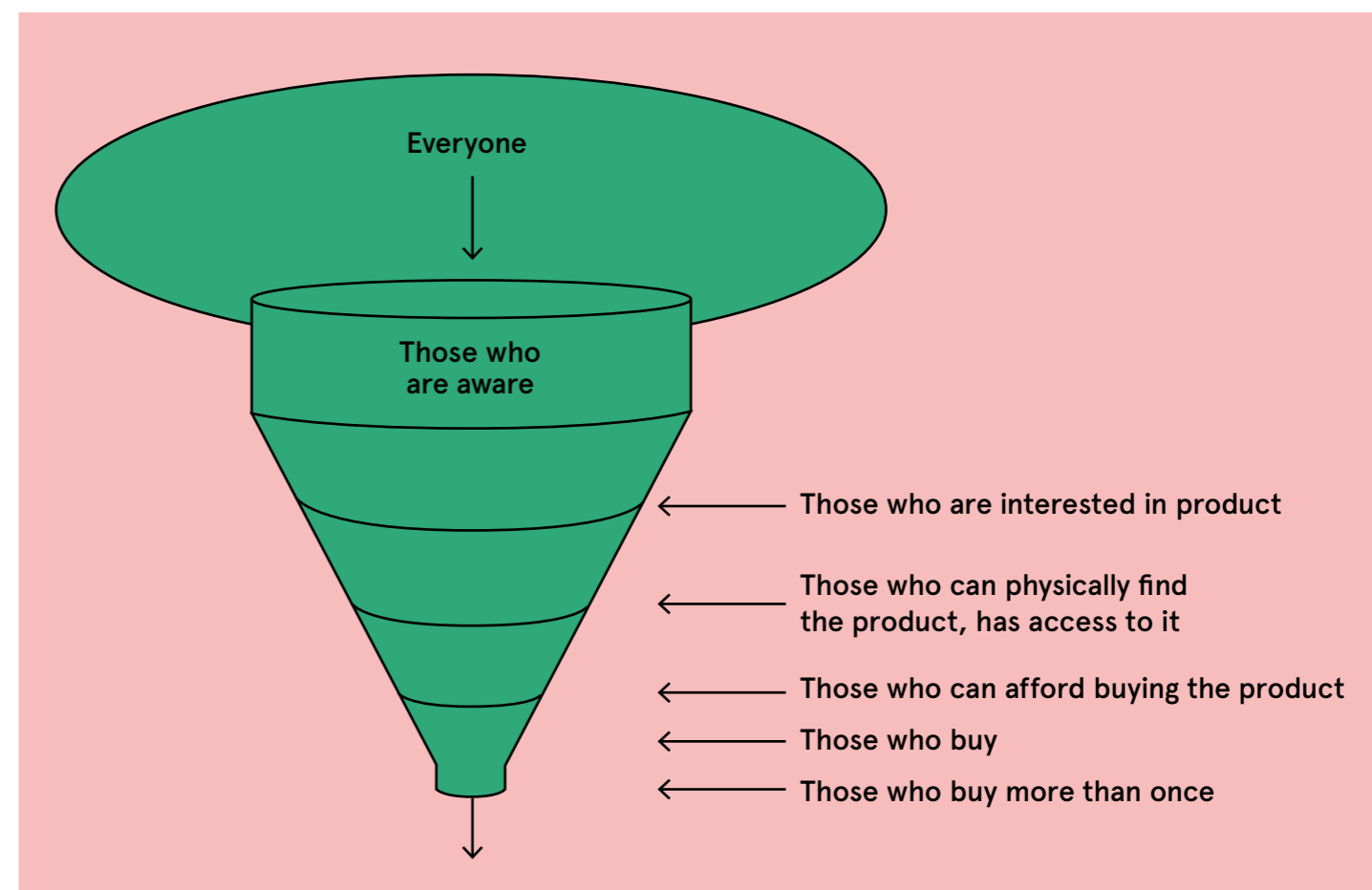
**ON PHOTOBOOK MARKET DISCUSSIONS** I have been asked to talk about the photobook market in different forums. During Les Rencontres de la Photographie in Arles 2017, I participated in panels like Nonante Neuf, directed by Lars Willumeit, The Eyes Talks, directed by Vincent Marcihalcy and Le Boudoir 2.0, by Annakarin Quinto. I shared a stage with Patrick Frey, Yumi Goto, Virginie Rebetez, Rémi Coignet, Gabriela Cendoya-Bergareche, Claude Lemaire and Pierre Bessard.

The experience of the discussion was twofold. On one hand, there was an attempt to discuss and understand how the photobook market is kept alive. On the other hand, there was also a certain resistant reaction towards ideas of the popularization of photobooks that I was promoting. Perhaps that's because I tend to present my ideas in a provocative way, or perhaps it is because it's easy to transform my view into a call for "mainstreamization", which is not the

case. There's a fear of becoming too popular which could lead to a lowering of the bar in order to make more commercial books. But I think we are so incredibly far away from photobooks being a popular medium that the danger is simply nonexistent. Within the discussions, I was mentioning that I would like to see my books in airports and train stations bookshops. The first reaction was always negative – these bookshops are full of garbage. It should be reminded that classics and literature Nobel prizes are being sold there too.

We often regard 'popular' art products to be less intellectual or of a lower kind than the 'exclusive' ones, but history is full of examples of artworks both popular and intellectually rich. Think of García Marquez's *100 Years of Solitude*, Picasso's *Gernika*, Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* and of course, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

# 6 – Natalia Baluta



There are so many aspects for consideration when thinking about the market in general, and the photobook market in particular. I would like to focus on a specific concern shared by many authors and publishers recently: is the photobook market saturated? Are we only making photobooks mainly for ourselves, a small circle of people involved in photography and bookmaking?

To answer this I will use an approach I have been using so many times for fast-moving-consumer-goods and luxury lifestyle products, trying to find the

way to maximize sales for multinational corporations. The model is usually called 'consumption pyramid' or 'purchase funnel', or something similar. Essentially, it illustrates why not everyone in society is buying any given product, and what its limitations are.

Let us imagine 'everyone' in Europe, meaning about 822,710,000 people. But how many of them would realistically buy a photobook? 'Funnel' helps to structure our thinking and build a flow of facts for consideration, and can even do some calculations.

**“...the number of buyers we can count on in Europe is impressive: 631,019.”**

The first level of the funnel will already reduce the number of people, and this limitation is quite obvious: awareness. To buy something, one should be aware of the product. Without knowing about product existence, it is rather impossible to start considering it for purchase. That is why companies spend billions on different types of advertising: to build awareness of their brands and products. The biggest brands in the world, well established ones, selling for billions of dollars yearly, enjoy nearly 100% awareness. Think of Coca-Cola for instance: mostly everyone globally would know what it is, and this is a result of their substantial investment and deliberate activities throughout many years.

Now let us take a minute to think about photobook awareness, considering not only photographers and publishers, and our families and best friends, who are aware thanks to our passion. Think about all people. What seems to be a fair number to you: 10%, 5%, 1%, 0.5%? Unfortunately, I do not have hard numbers and a worldwide consumer research about photobooks, which is actually worth doing. But the truth is obvious even without numbers. Most of the people have absolutely no idea what photobooks are about, and no idea about photobooks as a category! This is the key explanation for why the photobook market could suffer from saturation.

But, in fact, this is not very unique. Some businesses do face a situation where they need to build awareness about an entire new product category. This was the case for most of the products we use in our daily life: computers, smartphones, digital cameras, cars, dishwashing machines, baby diapers, hair conditioners and even the Internet itself. One hundred years ago, most people had no idea about all of these things.

The reasonable argument would be to say that all of these new products appeared in order to serve a certain purpose – they do a ‘job’ for us, helping us cope with some of our daily tasks. People are interested in these new products – they need them. This brings us to a second level of the funnel: interest in or relevance of the product. The number of people interested in a product is usually less than the number of those who are aware of it. Taking a simple example again: many people are aware about the existence of shampoos, but some people would not need shampoos, for instance if they do not have hair.

There is something tricky about the relationship between awareness and interest – it is a chicken and the egg problem. Does interest appear after awareness about anything new, or does potential interest help with establishing awareness? With most of commodity products it is simple: people do have a physical need that products would help addressing. But what about photobooks? They are not a commodity, they are an experience – they are a new communication medium and pieces of art. It is helpful to look at computers as an analogy from the past, as they can also be described as communication and experience devices, and some of them are even close to art. When

personal computers were first appearing, there was no established need in them among a broad audience. There was no unmanageable daily routine. Our needs and daily tasks, which we now do with the help of computers were ‘invented’ later than the computers themselves.

The next level of the funnel is physical availability of the product for purchase. In the past, it could be a serious limitation. The absence of product in point of sales was making purchase impossible. This is less important these days, as internet and e-commerce made most of the things easy to find and easy to get with online payments and worldwide deliveries. And the photobook market seems to be leveraging this opportunity the fullest extent.

The last level of the funnel is affordability: how reasonable is the price of the product for potential buyers? Can they buy it out of pocket, or do they need to plan and make some savings for the purchase? It might be surprising that this appears so late in the model. But indeed, price becomes a barrier only if a person is aware of something, has an interest to buy it, and has an opportunity to do so. At this point, if the price is wrong, it could prevent the purchase. But before this point, that price is not even considered. Sellers may often exaggerate the importance of pricing issues. The good check here is giving a product away for free. Many companies waste money sampling away their products for free without thorough analysis of the preceding issues, while people never try or use those free products because they do not need these products, or do not know the benefits, or do not know how to use them.

This is an easy experiment: try giving away some photobooks on the streets for

free. Most people would not take them. Why would they bother taking something rather bulky and heavy, something that would occupy some space at their home, even if it is for free?

For me, this is the most important question we should be asking ourselves with regards to the photobooks market, and the entire purpose of “funnel” exercise is to identify this important question. Some companies discover the issues with distribution, or affordability, or inferiority of the product by comparing it to competition. For us in the photobook market, the key seems to be understanding why people would need photobooks, and there might be more than one answer. Once we figure this out, we can start building some communication strategies to boost awareness. Availability and affordability of the photobooks do not seem to be a bottleneck, as there are plenty of opportunities to deal with those issues.

We may not understand the purpose of the photobooks existence enough yet. Did Guttenberg have a clear idea about all the consequences and needs to meet while inventing printing press?

Out of 822,710,000 people in Europe, I would say that 1% are aware of photobooks. This is just a fair guess, leading to 8,227,100 potential buyers. In terms of interest, I believe photobooks are exciting – in my social circle many people are getting involved with photobooks once I introduce them to the subject. So, I will make another optimistic assumption that at least half of those who are aware would be interested in photobooks, leaving us with 4,113,550 potential buyers in Europe. I also assume that photobooks can be purchased online, and only the accessibility of the

Internet is limiting availability. According to Internet World Stat, 76.7% of people in Europe have Internet access, meaning there might be 3,155,093 potential buyers in Europe. Another assumption about affordability suggests, based on practical experience and given different price ranges for the photobooks and zines, some items should be affordable for at least 1 out of 5 people. So, the number of buyers we can count on in Europe is impressive: 631,019.

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**Platforms:**  
**Photobook Week Aarhus**  
**Unseen Book Market**  
**Unseen Living Room**



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