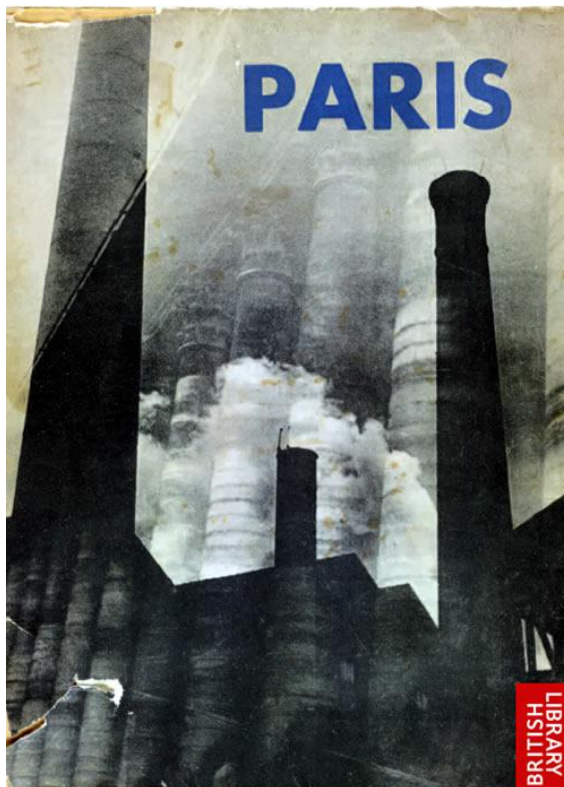
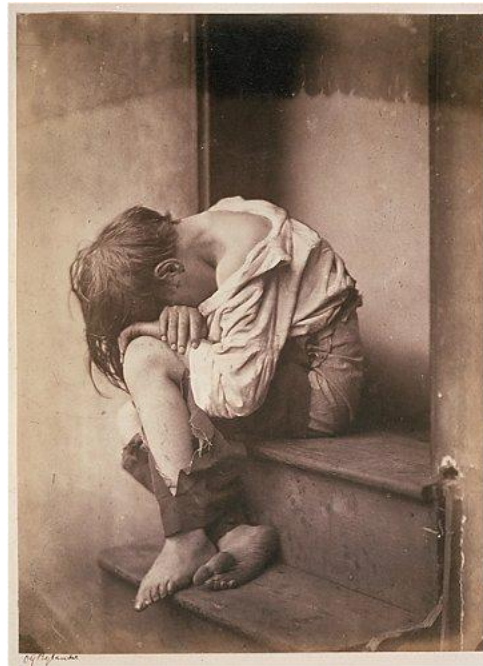


The Photo-book as Artist's Book

Dr Stephen Bury, Head of European and American Collections,
The British Library

ARLIS/Norden Conference, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, June 2009

According to the traditional narrative, 19th century photography imitated the poses of portrait painting or the views of landscape painting. (e.g. Julia Margaret Cameron). Eventually, photography succeeded in becoming autonomous: photographers moved beyond supplying artists with motifs or documentation, and exhibited their work independently and made photo-books. In the latter case, in France in particular, there were pragmatic reasons – copyright depended on publication in books. But the photo-book developed its own aesthetic.



The Lithuanian Moi Ver's *Paris* (Paris, Editions Jean Walter, 1931) has worm's-eye and bird's-eye views, superimposition and montage. The cover has Parisian factory chimneys layered over classical columns – a modernist supplantation or, equally, a conservative fall-back, just as the social anthropologists of the 1920's thought they had to disguise their social anthropological studies of the Western Pacific islanders in terms of Ulysses's Odyssey e.g. Malinowski's study of the Trobriand islanders, *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922). The last

stage in this narrative – if there is ever a last stage – was the re-colonisation of the photo-book format by the artist: the photo-book becomes a subset (a major one) of the artist's book.

Atget is an interesting transitional case. He is used by Walter Benjamin in his essay on 'The Work of art in the age of mechanical production' (1936). A 1912 photograph of a corset shop on the Boulevard de Strasburg was used as an illustration to a Marcel Noll dream, without a caption or acknowledgment of the photographer in

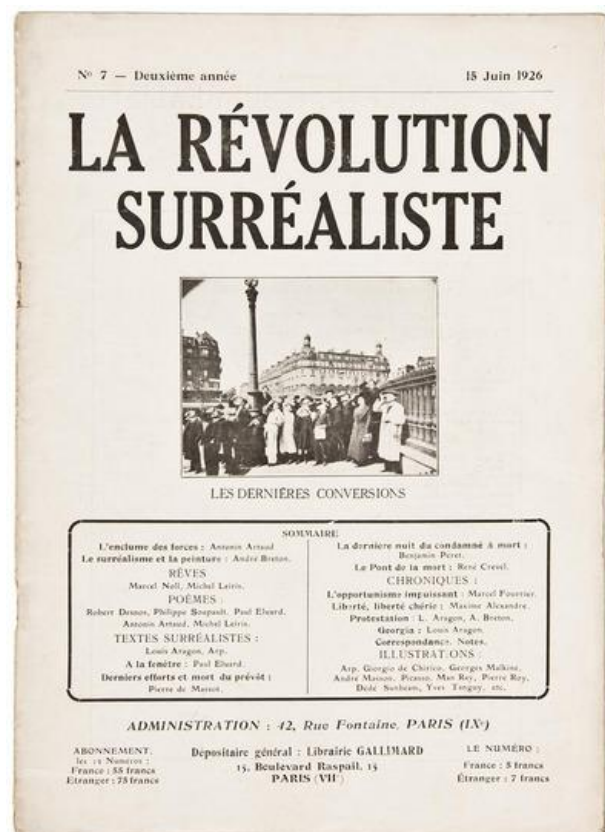
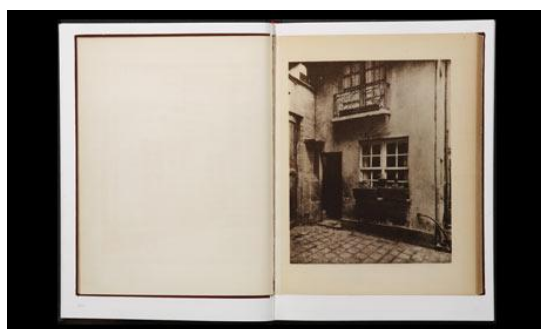


Breton's *La Révolution surréaliste* No 7 (1926) – although it was editorial practice not to credit photographs, unless, of course, they were by Man Ray. The cover of the same issue has an Atget photograph of a group of Parisians gazing at an eclipse of the sun – this is unusual for two reasons: the subject is much less banal than usual for Atget, but it also has a caption, 'Les dernières conversions', provided, not by Atget, but by the anti-clerical editorship.

Atget regarded himself as a journeyman photographer providing photographs to artists, including Man Ray, who claimed Atget had wanted no publicity: "These are simply documents that I make." It was Man Ray's assistant, Berenice Abbott, who bought the bulk of Atget's photographs after

his death on 4th August 1927. Three years later a collection of 96 Atget's photographs, chosen by Berenice Abbott and edited by Henri Jonquières was published in Paris, Leipzig and New York. The photographs are on the recto page with the verso blank. There are captions but these are on a printed fold-out list taped to the inside rear cover.

Benjamin remarked in particular on how "for the first time, captions have become obligatory." But here these captions were probably Abbott's or Jonquières's.



Another photographer associated with surrealism was Brassai. He photographed Picasso's work and studio, introduced by the art critic Maurice Raynal to Tériade, who introduced him in turn to Picasso, but he also contributed credited photographs for Tériade's glossy surrealist review *Minotaure* (1933-). His book *Paris de nuit* (1933, issued 2 December 1932) allowed him to transcend the journalist-photographer/journeyman status and to put photography at the centre of art practice. Brassai, with his Voigtländer Bergheil camera with a 10.5 cm Heliar lens, tripod, and twenty-four plates, photographed Paris by night, sometimes accompanied by Léon-Paul Fargue, the "Pedestrian of Paris" and on occasions by the novelist Henry Miller.

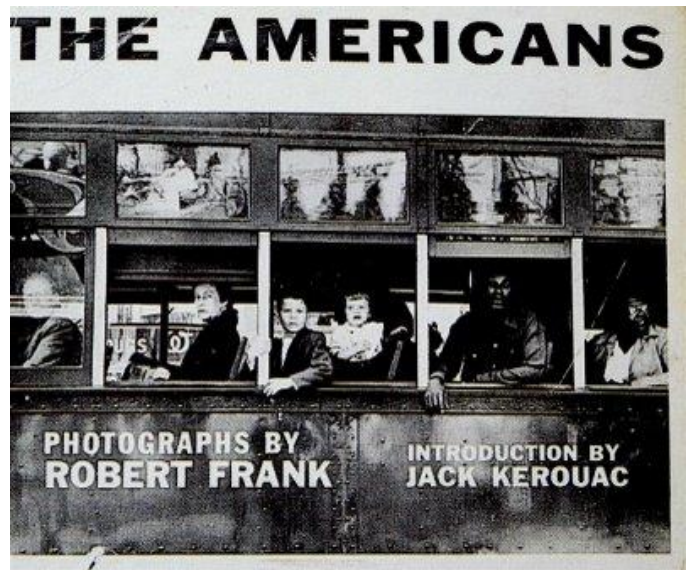
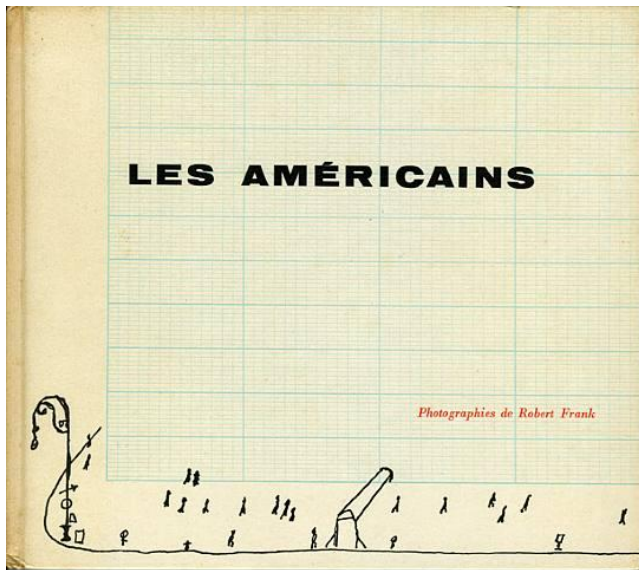


Paris de nuit is characterized by rich gravure printing of photographs that bleed over the edge of the page: plate/page numbers lie in white on the photograph. The metallic spiral binding was a relatively recent invention (1924), and this allowed images to abut closely. The cover, inside cover, inside back cover and back cover are photographs downwards in the direction (as if at one's feet) of the dark, wet, shiny cobbles. Because of the spiral binding the book can be opened to expose front and back covers together to reveal the same image reversed to make a converging street.

The majority of the images are portrait in format and there is a separate list of the captions. The work was influential – Hermann Larsen's *Kobenhavn ved nat* (1935) and Bill Brandt's *A Night in London* (1938) were effectively Danish and English homages – Brandt's publisher was Charles Peignot of Brassai's publisher, Editions Arts et Métiers Graphiques: but Brandt did move the captions (in English and French) into a white space at the bottom of the photograph, whilst Larsen used more of the 'landscape' format.



It was with Robert Frank's *The Americans* (New York, Grove Press, 1959) that the photo-book became available to artists for use. There is a crucial difference between the earlier French edition with its plethora of texts edited by Alain Bosquet



and the American edition which has lost these and replaced them with a short introduction by Jack Kerouac (whom Frank had met on the sidewalk outside a party in New York)

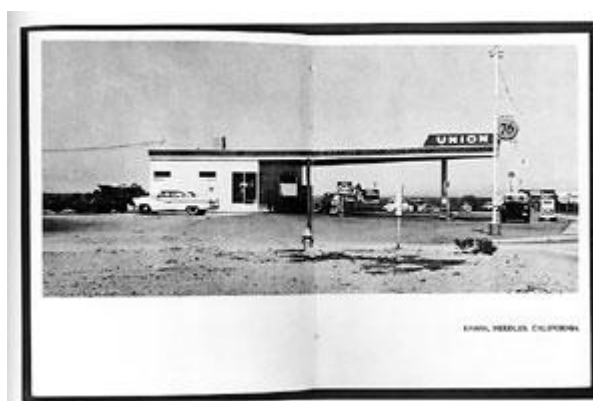
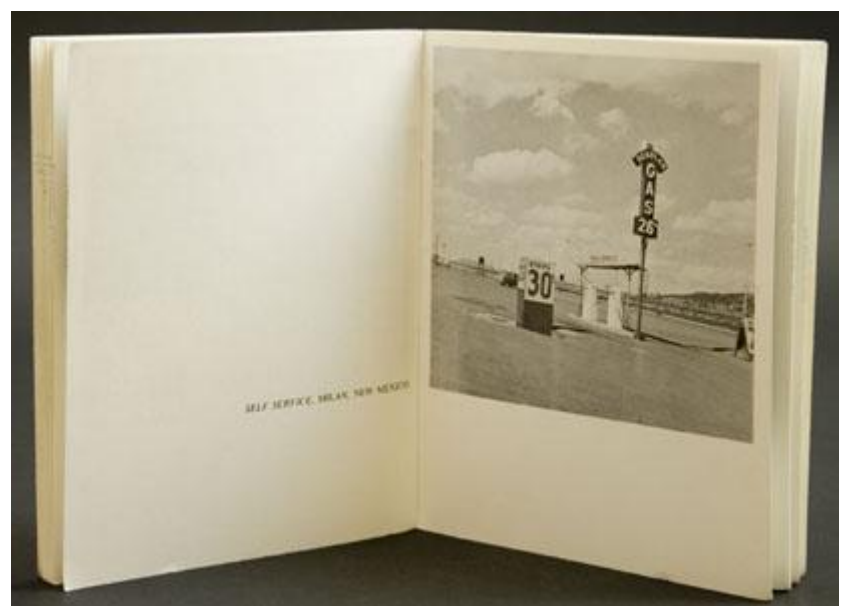
Here we have the image on the right (recto) page with a caption on the opposite side below white space. The caption can be read before or after the image (or not at all):



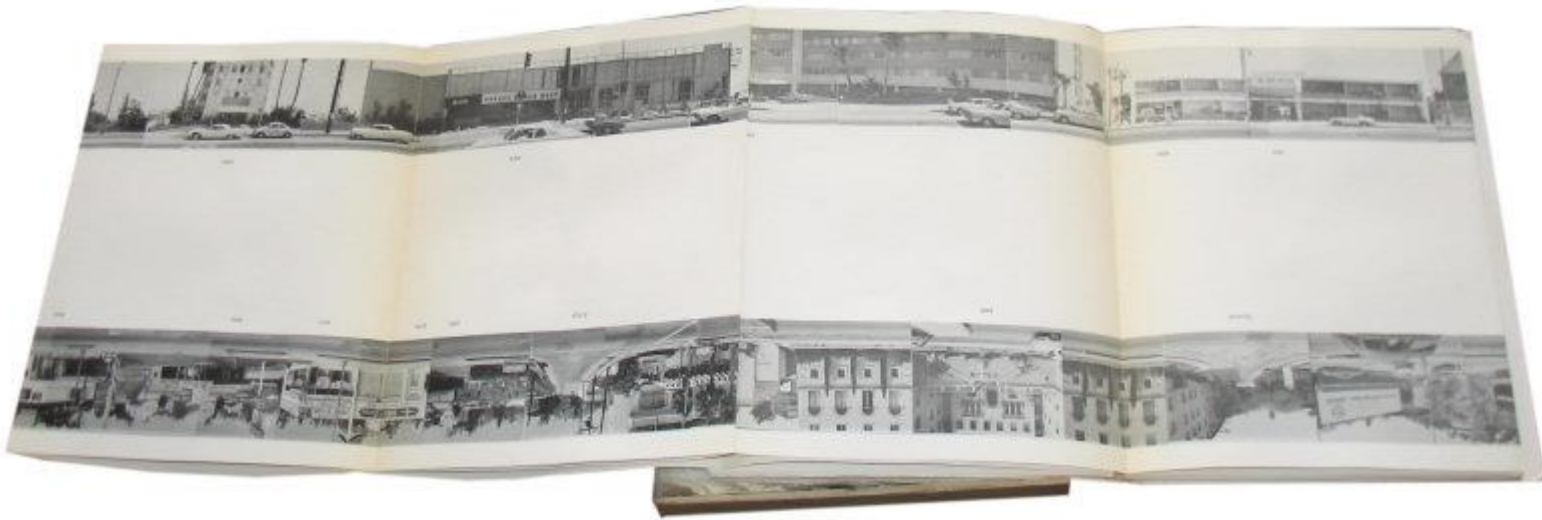
The journey/s that this book documents took place in 1955-6, when Frank travelled across America on a Guggenheim fellowship. The low-lighting and cropping put this photography beyond the composed and glossy images of Ansel Adams etc. : we have moved from staged photography to the exploitation of the portable camera. The tools are available for the artist to pick up. This image could well have inspired the artist Ed Ruscha.



Ruscha's *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*, 1962 was published by Ruscha's own Heavy Industries Publications in 1963. The first printing was in an edition of 400 numbered copies – the only one (at least so far) published by Ruscha in the tradition of the limited edition. The second was of 500 copies and the third, 3,000 as Ruscha aspired to the availability of the book in the garage store perhaps attached to one of these photographed.



In 1966 Ruscha published a leperlelo of photomontages of every building on both sides of the Sunset Strip.



The amateur photographer, Todd Webb (1905-2000) had done a similar project, photographing from a step-ladder, for a New York real estate agent on 6th Avenue between 43rd and 44th Streets, New York, in 1948. But the motivations for Ruscha were very different.



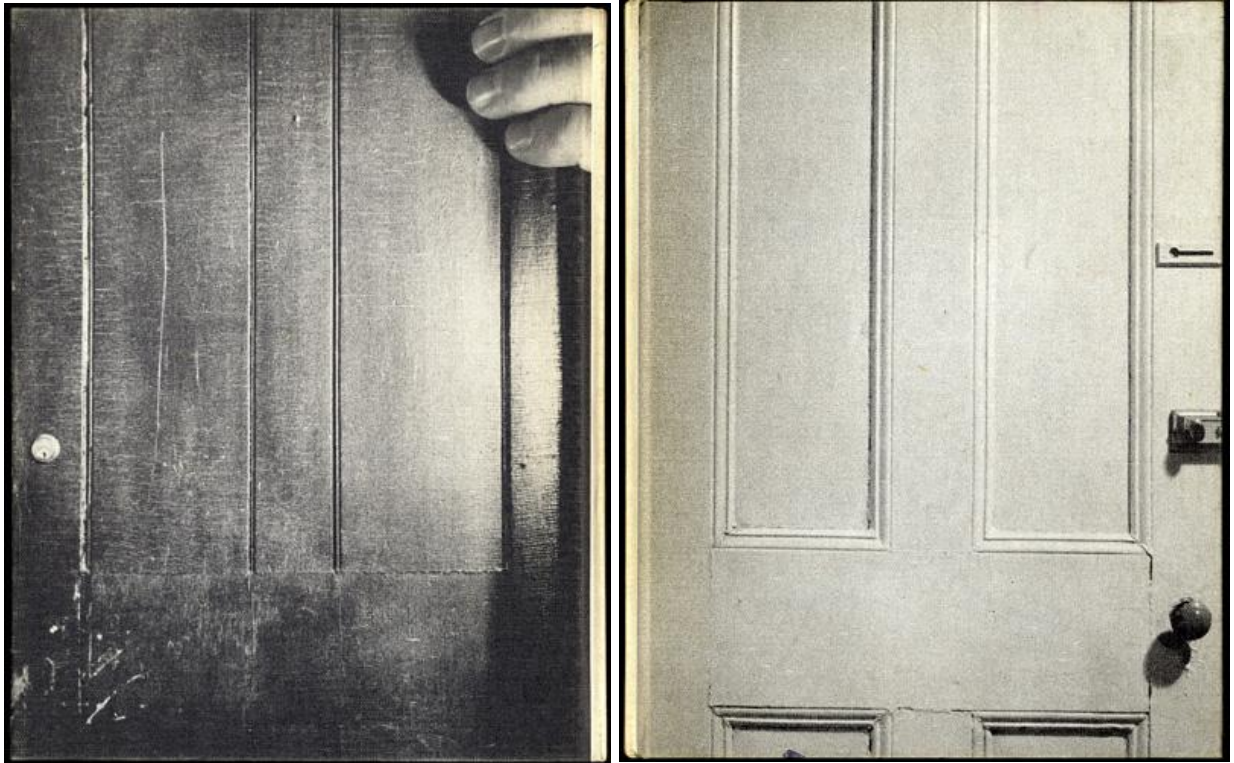
Lucy Lippard's book/bibliography *Six Years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972* (New York, 1973) described a "deemphasis on material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness)." So-called land artists such as Richard Long or Hamish Fulton, performance artists such as Gilbert & George etc. and conceptual artists found in the artist's books a form of documentation of the ephemeral and temporal and (sometimes) commercial return. Eventually their works would perhaps inevitably, inexorably, re-enter the gallery system and become art commodities.

Other artists known primarily for their work in painting, sculpture, film or installation have also resorted to the artist's book, and to the photo-book in particular when it has suited a project or was the most appropriate means of expression.

Anslem Kiefer, known for his mixed media history paintings and sculpture, made two photo-books, *Die Donauquelle* (1978) and *Hoffmann von Fallersleben auf Helgoland* (1980), quite different to his more famous huge lead books which require several assistants to turn the pages. They document performances – probably private studio events. The militarism which used the lyrics of "Deutschland über alles", written in 1841 on Helgoland, then a British possession, would be reduced (*ad absurdum*) to a melting bath-tub of ice with a gradually revealed model battleship. The theme would inspire a later painting (1983-6)

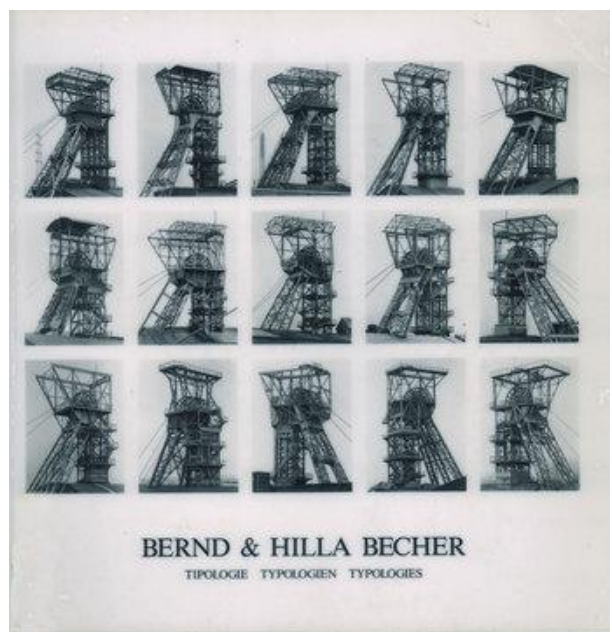
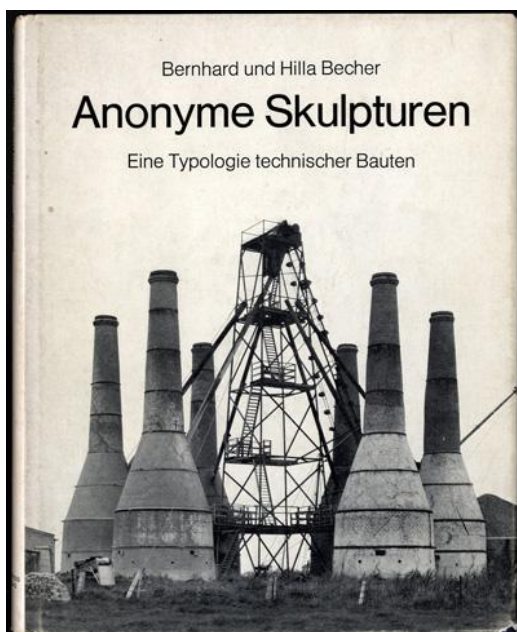


Michael Snow, known primarily for his films, used the book format and the photo-book format for his *Cover to cover* (Nova Scotia College of Art & Design Press, 1975). The book has 360 pages, which equal 360 photographs and 360 degrees: “the other side of the page is the other side of what is being photographed”.



This is an inspired use of the book format, exploiting the recto/verso building block of the book, and the metaphor of the book cover as an opening, a door.

The book format also helps typological exploration. The persistence of images after a page is turned, helps generate a paradigmatic image of the subject matter. The Bechers have done this with water towers, blast furnaces – what they have called “anonymous sculpture”. They also exploit the grid format.



Sol LeWitt, conceptual artist, also deployed grids, photographs and the artist's book. Such a work as *Five cubes on twenty-five squares* (1978) has six black-and-white photographs per page of variations of five cubes on a grid of 25 squares. He later applied the grid to his *Autobiography* (New York: Multiples, 1980) where he documents photographically his apartment room by room, its books, records, tapes, kitchen utensils etc.



Maurizio Nannucci's *Sixty natural greens* (1977) likewise uses a grid of 6 colour photographs per page of the leperello:



His *Stored images* (1992) has colour photographs of various artists' books collections and archives: this book probably now resides in them all.

Found objects have been used by Christian Boltanski and by Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska. The latter's *Lost property* (London: Chance Publications, 1996) involved the photographing of all the lost items handed into the London Transport Lost Property Office, Baker Street, in one day (there are 184,000 pieces per annum) – prosthetic limbs, teddy bears, replica guns. By juxtaposition, metonymy, narratives are inexorably generated: who consoled the small child who had lost his toy rabbit?



The next step is perhaps the deployment of found photographs themselves. Susan Hiller's *Rough Sea* (1976) uses seaside postcards of, yes, rough seas. The interesting effect though is the turn of the page, which acts as a sort of interval between the crashing waves.

(L: Folkestone R: Palace Pier, Brighton)



Hiller has translated this project into the digital age with her recent, tête-bêche, *Auras/Levitations* (2008) where, for *Auras*, inspired by Duchamp's 'Portrait of Dr Dumouchel' (1910) she has researched auras on the Web e.g. and presented 35 images found there.

Levitations, an homage to Yves Klein's famous leap, does the same, sourcing images of levitation from the Web.



I'd like to end with one of my favourite artist's book, photo-book and it just happens to be the Ringier Annual Report for 2002. Ringier is a magazine publisher (I was thinking of this at the Bonnier visit last night). They invited the artist, Aleksandra Mir, to do an artist's project. She has created a montage of continuity photographs from 'Hello' style photos of the rich and famous. The idea is to get from Annette Ringier on the cover back to (her father) Hans Ringier, also on the cover, by group and paired photographs – some of the transitioning however needs to be done by snowmen and animals. The report is available in hardcopy or as a pdf on the Ringier and Mir's own website.

http://www.aleksandramir.info/zips/pdfs/JB_2002_e.pdf