Photobook: an integrative literature review. Narrative, design and publishing

Fotolivros: uma revisão integrativa da literatura. Narrativa, design e publicação

Fotolibro una revisión integradora de la literatura. Narrativa, diseño y publicación

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Resumo

The Photobook is an important support as a product that encompasses a photographer's photographic production in different ways (FERNÁNDEZ, 2011). This article raises the following question: how to understand what a photobook is, after all, what makes a photobook a photobook? The justification is because by better understanding the photobook, the process of creating a photographic book from a transdisciplinary perspective becomes more complete, making an impact on the field in question, on the artistic field and on the publishing market. To address this topic, the article seeks to explain the production of photobooks, that is, their development based on an integrative literature review (TORRACO, 2005). To this end, the objective here is to survey the stages of photobook production covering narrative, image sequencing, design and publication. In this way, the article aims to elucidate that photobooks are a support that allows the development of a photographic project that aims to tell a story based on consistent methodologies with different professionals, which allows us to conclude that the use of photography goes beyond the beauty of the images, becoming the protagonist in narratives immortalized in book format.

Keywords: Photobook. Design. Photographic Book. Photography.

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Abstract

O fotolivro é um importante suporte como produto que engloba a produção fotográfica do fotógrafo de diversas formas (FERNÁNDEZ, 2011). Este artigo levanta a seguinte questão: como entender o que é um fotolivro, afinal, o que faz de um fotolivro um fotolivro? A justificativa é porque ao compreender melhor o fotolivro, o processo de criação de um livro fotográfico numa perspectiva transdisciplinar torna-se mais completo, impactando na área em questão, no campo artístico e no mercado editorial. Para abordar esse tema, o artigo busca explicar a produção dos fotolivros, ou seja, seu desenvolvimento a partir de uma revisão integrativa da literatura (TORRACO, 2005). Para tanto, o objetivo aqui é levantar as etapas da produção do fotolivro abrangendo narrativa, sequenciamento de imagens, design e publicação. Desta forma, o artigo pretende elucidar que os fotolivros são um suporte que permite o desenvolvimento de um projeto fotográfico que visa contar uma história baseada em metodologias consistentes e com diferentes profissionais, o que nos permite concluir que o uso da fotografia vai além da beleza das imagens, tornando-se protagonista em narrativas immortalizadas em formato de livro.

Keywords: Fotolivro. Design. Livro de Fotografia. Fotografia.

Resumen

El fotolibro es un soporte importante como producto que abarca la producción fotográfica de un fotógrafo de diferentes maneras (FERNÁNDEZ, 2011). Este artículo plantea la siguiente pregunta: ¿Cómo entender qué es un fotolibro? ¿Qué hace que un fotolibro sea un fotolibro? La justificación es porque al comprender mejor el fotolibro, el proceso de creación de un libro fotográfico desde una perspectiva transdisciplinaria se vuelve más completo, impactando el campo en cuestión, el campo artístico y el mercado editorial. Para abordar esta cuestión, el artículo busca explicar la producción de fotolibros, es decir, su desarrollo a partir de una revisión integradora de la literatura (TORRACO, 2005). Para ello, el objetivo aquí es estudiar las etapas de la producción de fotolibros que abarcan la narrativa, el diseño y la publicación. De esta manera, el artículo pretende dilucidar que los fotolibros son un soporte que permite desarrollar un proyecto fotográfico que pretende contar una historia basada en metodologías consistentes y diferentes profesionales, lo que permite concluir que el uso de la fotografía va más allá de la belleza de las imágenes, convirtiéndose en protagonista de narraciones immortalizadas en formato libro.

Introduction

How to understand what a photobook is? To answer this question in this article, initially, the simplest way is to compare it with photographic essays. In principle, it is possible to bring the photobook closer to the photo essay because it is also a sequence of photographs that, alone, are not more important than the whole.

In this sense, when reflecting on the printing support for a photograph, a photographic essay can, for example, have as support: framed photographic paper; fabric screens; projections on walls; digital images, etc. They can also be exhibited in galleries and museums, on websites and social networks, in virtual museums, in digital magazines and printed, and also published as photographic books, catalogs or even photobooks.

There is other support for the printing of photographs, called the Artist's Book. However, this is a broader discussion, which will not be addressed in this time. It is recommended to read the research by Professor Doctor Amir Brito Cadôr to more in-depth (CADÔR, 2016).

Thus, in a photobook and also in a photo essay, the photographer can use the sequence of photographs as an artistic language to narrate the story he or she wants to tell. And the narrative is the most distinguished thing in a photobook.

Having said that, in short, the photobook could be inserted in the context of any type of book, since the content needs to be developed, the design editorial needs to be designed, the layout needs to be carried out, as well as processing of images, printing, publishing, distribution, donations of copies and/or as sales in bookstores. Such processes lead us to think about the question asked by Lyons (2011): after all, who makes the books? He explains that authors write texts, hence the question of authorship. But who makes the book object? For Lyon (2011), the book is made by several professionals and among these is the Designer, who is the one who “builds” the book object, chooses the type of paper, size, layout of the images, such as colors, typography, cover, etc. Graphics printers, and publishers publish the books. The production of a book therefore involves a great deal of network of professionals (LYONS, 2011). Concluding, if the authors write the texts, we can say that photographers are authors who produce photographs and create a narrative they want to tell through the images they make.

And, after all, what makes a photobook considered a photobook? First of all, it is the intention of the author/photographer in telling a story with a visual narrative format.
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The photobook is, for that reason, a narrative told through the photographs of the photographer / author. For this reason, the production of a photobook is similar to the production of other books. However, in the development of a photobook, a partnership between the photographer, the designer and the publisher become, so to speak, the foundation for the success of the work. This is a type of work in which the author/photographer must participate in all graphic decisions, since they influenced the “reading” of the story he wants to narrate through photographs. Furthermore, the sequence of images is almost always thought out in advance by the photographer, as it is sometimes created during the layout of the work.

We can apply the concept of *Imagens Cruzadas* (Images that are organized in a way to convey something) of Etienne Samain (2012). For the author, images have the capacity to generate meanings when they are placed next to each other. It is important to highlight that the sequence of photographs influences the story that will be counted, as well as the order of these images, the position and size that they occupy on the page and the color definition. The beauty of photographs can be enough for the success of a photographic book or a family photo album, also called a photobook. But it may not be enough for the success of a photobook, which is discussed here, as it is necessary to know how to construct the narrative using the language of this medium, therefore, many approximations are made between the theory of movie editing and the sequencing of photographs in photobooks. And, as Samain (2012) explains, a single image already has the power to arouse our thoughts, but when images are placed together, they have the power to change the interpretant – from Semiotics by Peirce (1995).

Di Bello, Wilson and Zamir (2020) explain that the photograph found a home in the book before it won a place on the gallery wall. Nery (2020) point out: shortly after the origin of photography, in the 1840s, the following books were published: Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions by Anna Atkins, 1843 – 1853 (NYPL, 2024) and; Pencil of Nature by Henry Fox Talbot, 1844–46 (MET, 2000 – 20024). Figures 1 and 2 shows these two books.
Figure 1

Cover and some pages from: Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions by Anna Atkins, 1843 – 1853.

Figure 2

Cover and some pages from: Pencil of Nature by Henry Fox Talbot, 1844–46.


Theoretical Framework

2.1 Photobook: Books, Photographs and Narrative

Books are one of the important technologies created by human beings. We can also highlight the technologies that emerged for inserting images into books, such as illumination, woodcuts, lithographs, enlargements and printing of photographs on paper. As Kossoy (2006) explains, photography was even a solution to print images on paper, in other words, print with light.

Entler (2019) really considers it relevant: “to see these two terms book, photography – when they come into play. More than the synthesis, I try to understand the friction that remains from this encounter” (ENTLER, 2019, n.p. Translated by authors). In addition to this statement, the author continues:

Here, I undertake the exercise of seeking some historical meanings of this object, the book, which persist as a symptom in recent experiences with photographic books (and,
consequently, with the collections they constitute). On the other hand, I also think about what photography disrupts this tradition. Such friction is unable to suggest any new definition or theory for photographic books. But it allows, based on the instabilities it generates, to note some powers that manifest themselves in this object (ENTLER, 2019. Translated by authors.).

Fernández (2016) explains that the Photobook is a book with photos, but with images that must have structure, order and coherence, characteristics determined by the photographer's work. In this sense, the direct participation of the photographer is important. However, it is also important that, depending on the photobook being developed, the photographer works together with other specialists, such as the graphic designer and the editor. In this case, it can be said that the photobook is like a film that we see on the pages of a book. And, just as films are not just narratives, since there are poetic, essayistic and informative forms, the photobook can have many contents. However, images are the most important elements, among others, photographs, much more than text. If there is text, it is subordinate to these images.

Photobook is a term that emerged at the beginning of the 21st century to describe certain photographic books that were distinguished from other types of publications that contained photographs in their core, precisely because they proposed a visual narrative. A visual narrative – *Narrativa Visual* – It is proposed (ALVES, 2004) to let the images convey to the reader the story that the author wants to tell without the interference of guiding texts. The text and images must be complementary in this type of work. In this case, the application of the concept of *Imagens Cruzadas* (SAMAIN, 2012) becomes evident. In short, photobooks aim to tell a story. That quality differentiates them, mainly, from other printed materials, such as: magazines, newspapers, exhibition catalogs; published photo essays in magazines or collections; among others. The big question is that some of these distinctions are similar. For example, a catalog exhibition could become a Photobook. An Artist's Book can also become a Photobook and so on. Therefore, it is important to identify that the intention of the author or photographer when produce the Photobook object (normally with the partnership of at least two other professionals: the designer and the editor) is creating a narrative through of the photographs.

Villatoro (2017) explains that the photobook makes it possible to add to the language of photograph another element: the narrative. This narrative does not necessarily needs to be linear, and may even be abstract, fragmented, paradoxical, non-linear, fantastic.
2.2 Publishing: the Places for Photobooks

Having discussed the photobook support, we will now move on to the ‘place’ display of photobooks. For example: where do we find photobooks, Where are they displayed? How do we have access? How do we buy?

The place of the photobook can be purchased from the physical and virtual bookstore; passing through galleries and museums where they are exhibited and consulted as collections, even libraries, specific to photography and art, or common libraries. Photobooks are already produced for sale, but there is a large issue regarding distribution.

Complementing, Edward (2023) states that the meaning of a photobook is collectively produced both inside and outside the art market.

The name Photobook was also accepted due to its use in several publications of collections of Photobooks (Fotolivros), such as: The Latin American Photobook (FERNÁNDEZ, 2011) and The Photobook: A History published in three volumes (BADGER; PARR, 2004 – 2014). Throughout the 2000s, 2010s and 2020s, many collections were published, meetings arose at photography festivals and also academic seminars to discuss and exhibit photobooks. Big ones exhibitions were held, many of them to accompany the launch of the collections. This was the case of the exhibition Fotolivros Latino-americanos (Latin American Photobooks) held at the Instituto Moreira Salles (Moreira Salles Institute) in São Paulo in 2013 (IMS, 2013) and the Fenomen Fotollibre – Fenômeno Fotolivro – (Photobook Phenomenon) in 2017 at CCCB – Centre de Cultura Contemporânia de Barcelona (Center for Contemporary Culture of Barcelona), which jointly launched a series of catalogs aimed at reflect on support as a language (ZUM: REVISTA DE FOTOGRAFIA, 2017).

Researchers and scholars devoted themselves to studying the photographically illustrated books (LOC, 2018) since the incorporation of photographs pasted on the pages of books from the 1840s. In this way, the term Photobook also refers to books from the “past”, let’s say, prior to the 21st century and which contained the same “qualities or definitions” that, according to scholars, characterized a photobook. Therefore, from the adoption of the term Fotolivro – Photobook and all events and discussions about it, it was natural that photographers, designers and editors wanted to publish photobooks and participate in events. Explaining in a way elementary: photographs are produced by a photographer, the book object it is designed by a designer and published by an publisher. We still have here are several professionals who may be involved, mainly in the which refers to graphic production, in
addition to marketing, distribution and discussion around authorship. The author may be the photographer, who counts the story. Or the story can be built in partnership by professionals involved, designer and publisher. The author can be the photographer or it can be a joint authorship.

In any case, fairs, independent publications, calls for photobook dummies whose prize could be the publication and the distribution of the winning photobook. Just type in the internet search the term Photobook Dummies or Photobook Dummy Award and the list that appears is endless. And the most interesting thing is that it was a worldwide phenomenon and that it entered also the academic world and scholars from universities, museums, libraries and various types of institutions. Quoting Horacio Fernández, “the library is now the museum” (2017).

To name some libraries in Brazil where photobooks and photographic books can be found: Artist's Book Collection (COLEÇÃO LIVRO DE ARTISTA, 2017) in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil; The Moreira Salles Institute of Photography Library in São Paulo, Brazil (BIBLIOTECA DE FOTOGRAFIA DO INSTITUTO MOREIRA SALLES, 2024); in between others. Also added is the important Digital Book Database of Photography (BASE DE DADOS DE LIVROS DE FOTOGRAFIA, 2000 – 2024).

2.3 Photobooks Examples: Aeroporto and Doorway to Brasilia

Starting, therefore, from the thought of photography, design and narrative, two photobooks will be shown. They are cited by Horacio Fernández in the collection Fotolivros Latino-americanos (2011), which are available for consultation in the Coleção Livro de Artista. First, Aeroporto (Airport), by Claudia Jaguaribe (2002), and also Doorway to Brasilia, by Aloisio Magalhães and Eugene Feldman (1959). And were also analyzed by Nery (2020). Due to the importance of the two publications, it is possible find a lot of information available about both works, if interest in delving further into the matter arises.

Aeroporto, by Claudia Jaguaribe, was published in 2002. According to Fernández (2011, p. 206), the Aeroporto project included an exhibition and a catalogue. However, “Claudia managed to break the routine of the world of art and make the book an authorial work, at the same level of demand as exhibition” (FERNÁNDEZ, 2011, p. 206). Still according to the author, the design of this work is signed by Rodrigo Cerviño Lopez.

Figure 3 depicts the book Aeroporto. The photographs of the book (Figure 3) show the
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sequence of images forming a visual narrative. It is also possible to see the chosen design.

**Figure 3**


Doorway to Brasilia, by Aloisio Magalhães and Eugene Feldman, was published in 1959 and both the photographs and the design are credited to the two professionals. According to Fernández (2011, p. 81), the possibilities language of graphic arts used in the exquisite printing of the photobook make it an example of “rich textures, tonalities and transparencies of the photographs, their monumental scale, the care of exaggerated contrasts or the impression of focus, the elegance of the New font Gothic, bold, printed in gray; finally, all the graphic fanfare of a book as extraordinary as its theme” (FERNÁNDEZ, 2011, p. 81).

NERY (2020, p. 176-188), addresses all the richness expressed by the book, and carried out a analysis of the work that included several aspects, such as technique; parts of the photobook; descriptive analysis; content analysis; analysis of graphic design; object; material and layout.

A *Base de Dados de Livros de Fotografia* (2000 – 2024) provides a review of the work and a video of the pages being passed. It is a resource widely used and publicized to make photobooks available digitally – https://livrosdefotografia.org/publicacao/459/doorway-to-brasilia.
Figure 4 shows some pages from the book Doorway to Brasilia.

**Figure 4**


**Methodology**

The integrative review determines current knowledge on a specific topic, as it is carried out with the aim of identifying, analyzing and synthesizing results of independent studies on the same subject. In this way, it contributes to a critical review and a synthesis of representative literature on the chosen topic (TORRACO, 2005), in this case the Photobook, in an integrated way and in a way that new landmarks and perspectives on the topic are generated.

Botelho et al., (2011) emphasizes that the integrative review must follow a clear and well-defined methodology. This methodology highlights that the beginning of the review includes identifying the research topic and selecting the research question, thus, the problem to be researched and the strategy to be used must be indicated, aiming to establish the question to be analyzed in the studies. Therefore, the phase of identifying scientific productions.

TORRACO, 2005 explains that a integrative literature review article should begin with a topic in need of review and a broad conception of what is known about the topic and potential
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areas where new knowledge may be needed. The organization of the article begins with a coherent conceptual structuring of the topic. It is not necessary to follow a chronological order when choosing authors, but rather a conceptual order. It is necessary to create an organization of the works cited based on the chosen theme and the questions to be answered. Therefore, the organization of the review starts with a coherent conceptual structuring of the topic by the author, then it is important to write how the literature was identified, analyzed, synthesized, and reported (TORRACO, 2005).

Following the guidelines of Toraco (2005), the literature selection strategy that was included in this study will first be described.

Firstly, it was important to define where photobooks can be found (mostly in Brazil), whether a face-to-face search or even a digital search via the Internet is necessary. To this end, the keyword bibliotecas de fotolivros no brasil (photobook libraries in Brazil) was used. Were found The Moreira Salles Institute of Photography Library in São Paulo, Brazil (BIBLIOTECA DE FOTOGRAFIA DO INSTITUTO MOREIRA SALLES, 2024) and; Digital Book Database of Photography (BASE DE DADOS DE LIVROS DE FOTOGRAFIA, 2000 – 2024). Also, for this search, the keywords biblioteca de livros de fotografia (photography book library) and biblioteca de livros de artista (artist book library) were used and this search leads to the Artist's Book Collection (COLEÇÃO LIVRO DE ARTISTA, 2017) in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil. At this stage, international collections were also selected.

The included authors were selected based on their relevance to the thematic field and from the search of the following keywords: fotolivros brasileiros história (Brazilian photobooks history); fotolivros latino-americanos história (latin american photobooks history); fotolivros história (photobooks history); fotolivros historia e montagem (photobook history and editing) and sequenciação de imagens em fotolivros (photobook sequencing). These words were used directly in Google search and also on the Google Scholar platform.

The inclusion criteria for the 2 photobooks analyzed were: 1- the photobooks should belong to at least one of the selected libraries, in this case Base de Dados de Livros de Fotografia and Coleção Livro de Artista. 2- Having been analyzed by selected authors, in this case Fernández (2011) and Nery (2020).

The stages of the literature review were carried out following the path of construction of the photobook according to the history of its field: ideation; photography; design and
Final Considerations

In this study, through an integrative review of the scientific literature, the characteristics of the photobook were analyzed in order to help better understand this support, mapping the areas that the research covers and the opportunities for future studies.

The photobook uses visual narrative and the sequence of photographs to create a story told through photographic images. Its production requires several professionals to work together, mainly the photographer, the designer and the publisher.

The place for the photobook can be bookstores, fairs, festivals, exhibitions, libraries and museums.

In this way, understanding what makes a photobook a photobook raises interesting discussions about the possibilities of creating a photographic book from a transdisciplinary perspective, making an impact on the field in question, on the artistic field and on the publishing market.

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