

IN BETWEEN

Yuqing Lei
Unit 3 Projection

In Unit 3, I explore what defines a medium's identity —
what allows it to be recognized as what it is.

Projection ¹	<u>Is a medium's identity defined by its content?</u>
Projection ² A	Is a medium's identity shaped by its material structure?
Projection ² B	Is a medium's identity assigned by the system that classifies it?

In Projection¹, I attempted to retain the form of the medium while altering the content it carries.

A book seems to be recognised as a book because it is a rectangular object wrapped in a cover, but is a rectangular object wrapped in a cover a book?*

* The logic was inspired by my Unit 2 project *Equivalent*:

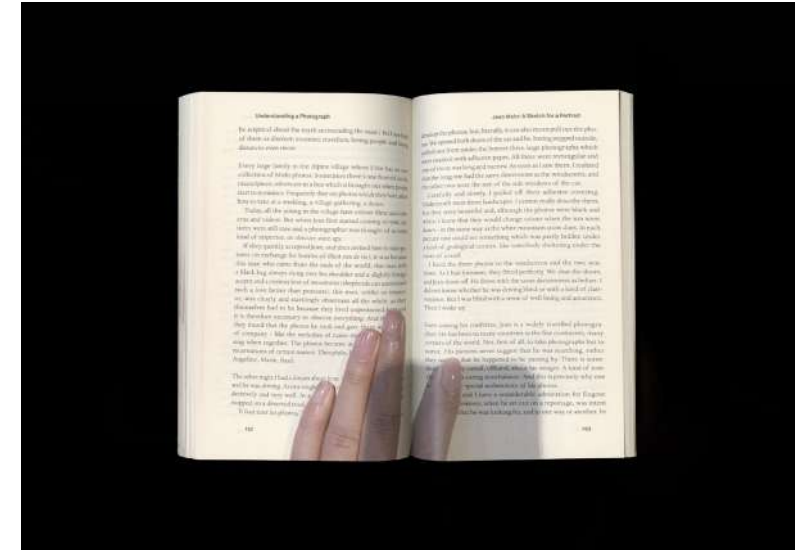


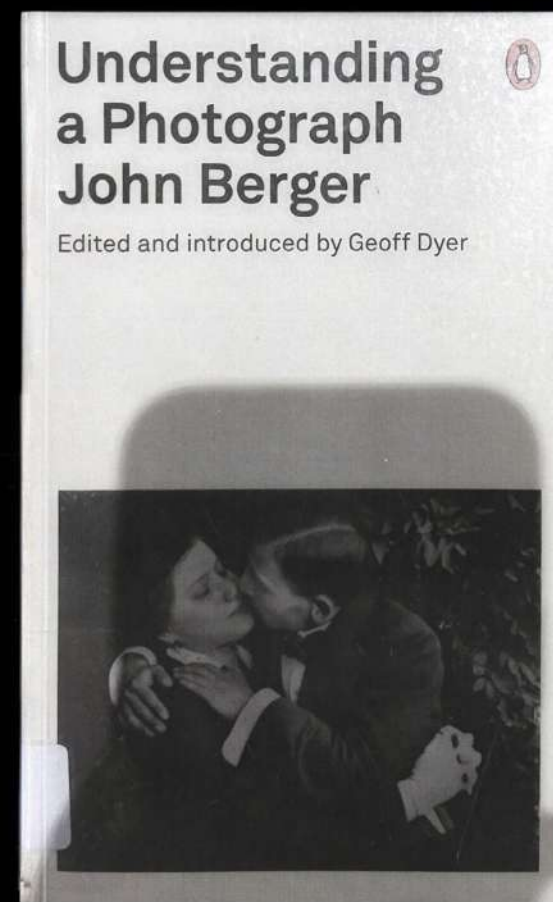
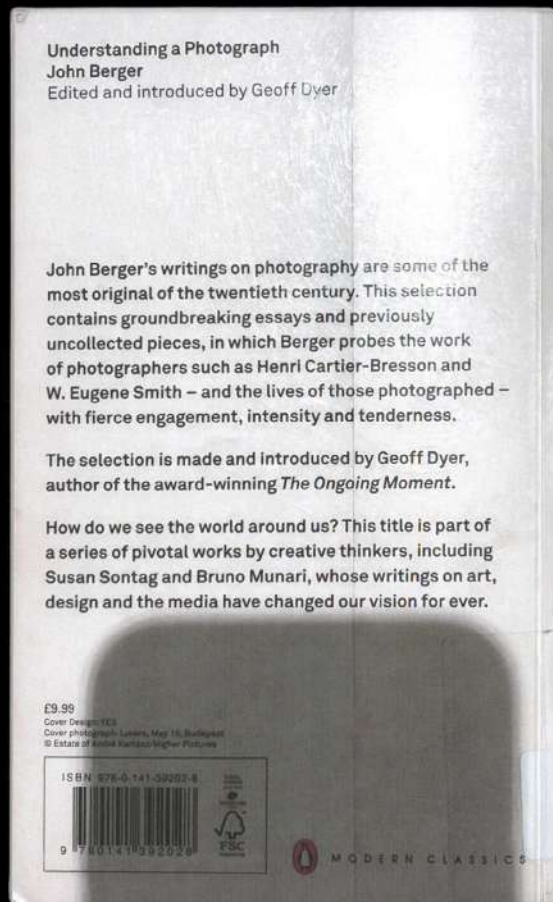
Unit 2 - $\Delta 3$ *Equivalent*

“A knife is recognized as a knife because it can cut an apple, spread butter, or slice a finger. But does a sliced apple, butter on toast, or a bead of blood on a thumb means a knife?”

In the experiment 1, I transformed the content into a form of reproduction that appears identical but is fundamentally different.

I reconstructed John Berger's *Understanding a Photograph* page by page through photography, capturing the visual traces left in the act of reading: the warmth or coolness of the light on paper, the shadow left behind by the turning of the pages, the shading of the fingers...





The original text and images became photographs of the reading process.

Understanding a Photograph

passion to the best of his work done in the decade 1927-33. The latter offers a rare example outside the Soviet Union of an artist committing his imagination to the service of a mass political struggle.

What are the qualities of this work? What conclusions can be drawn from them? First, a general quality.

There is a Heartfield cartoon of Streicher standing beside the inert body of a beaten-up Jew. The caption reads 'German'. Streicher stands in his Nazi uniform, back to the viewer, eyes looking straight ahead, with an expression that denies nor affirms what has happened at his feet. The body of the Jew is metaphorically beneath his notice. On his jacket are traces of dirt or blood. They are scarcely visible to him – in different circumstances they would be obvious. That they do is slightly to soil his tunic.

In Heartfield's political works there

Political Uses of Photo-Montage

on the one hand and the German social democrats on the other was both confused and arbitrary. In 1928, after the fall of the Weimar Republic and under Stalin's pressure, the Comintern decided to categorize all social democrats as 'social fascists' – there is a Heartfield cartoon of 1931 in which he shows an SPD leader with the head of a snarling tiger. As a result of this arbitrary scheme of simplified moral clairvoyance being imposed from Moscow on the German communists, any chance of the German communists winning or collaborating with the nine million SPD voters who were mostly workers and potential anti-Nazis was forfeited. It is probable that with a different strategy the German working class might have prevented the rise of Hitler.

Heartfield accepted the party line, apparently without any misgivings. But among his works there is a clear distinction between those which demystify and those which exhort with simplified moral rhetoric. Those which demystify treat of the rise of Nazism in Germany – a social-historical phenomenon with which Heartfield was tragically and intimately familiar; those which exhort are concerned with global generalizations which he inherited ready-made from elsewhere.

Again, two examples. A cartoon of 1933 shows a minuscule Goebbels standing on a copy of *Mein Kampf*, putting out his hand in a gesture of dismissal. 'Away with these degenerate subhumans,' he says – a quotation from a speech he made at Nuremberg. Towering above him as giants, making his gesture pathetically absurd, is a line of impassive Red Army soldiers with rifles at the ready. The effect of such a cartoon on all but loyal communists could only have been to confirm the Nazi lie that the USSR represented a threat to Germany. In ideological contrasts, as distinct from reality, there is only a paper-thin division between thesis and antithesis; a single reflex can turn black into white.

A poster for the First of May 1937 celebrating the Popular Front in France. An arm holding a red flag and sprigs of cherry blossom;

A book of writing became a book of photographs.

The experiment 2 was the destruction of content. I produced* three books with identical covers but radically different interiors:

A book in which every page is a reproduction of the cover image;
 A book whose interior was replaced by a solid block of wood;*
 A book hollowed out into an empty box.
 (continued)



* Production



* Reference



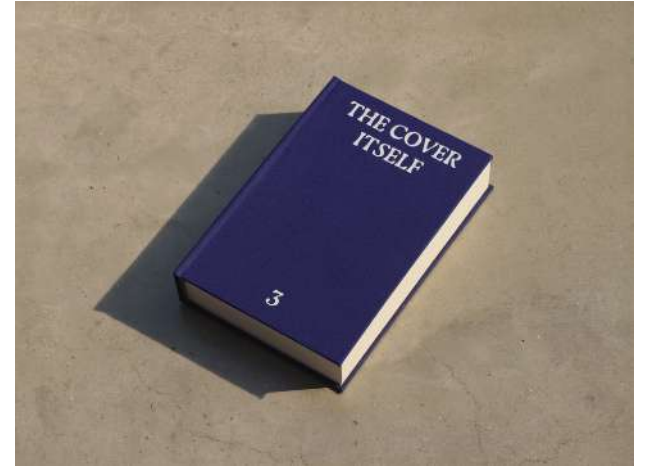
found books



painted books

Roula Partheniou, *Works, Works 1, Twice*

Projection¹ - Content



The Cover Itself 1

The Cover Itself 2

The Cover Itself 3



From 1 to 3, the degree of content disruption increased, while the cover remained unchanged. The inside of the book gradually diverged from the form by which it is typically recognized.

This led me to a new question:
When content is removed from its original position, can the identity of the medium still hold?



Projection ¹	Is a medium's identity defined by its content?
Projection ² A	<u>Is a medium's identity shaped by its material structure?</u>
Projection ² B	Is a medium's identity assigned by the system that classifies it?

In Projection², this question was further expanded into an investigation of the medium's structure.

I returned to the smallest unit of a book—the single sheet of paper—to reconsider the problem. In graphic design, a sheet of paper is typically referred to as a poster.

What happens if I use a stack of posters to carry the content of a single poster?

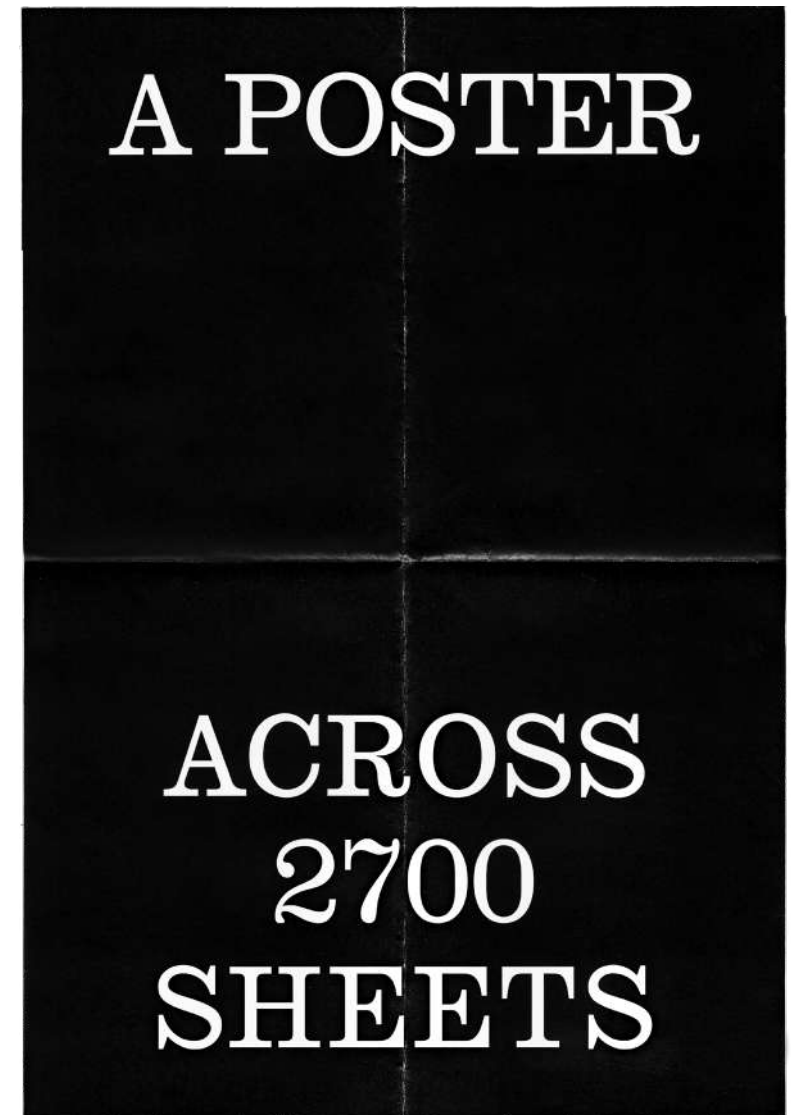
Draft



The result is this: a thick stack of paper is forced to share a single image.

The poster image*, originally occupying the front of a single sheet, now slips to the edge. Since each page measures only 0.184mm thick, what could once be carried by one poster must now be reconstructed by 2,700 sheets, collectively rebuilding the original A4 surface.

* The Final Poster Design



In other words,
it's a poster.
It just takes 1631 sheets
to carry a single image.

Self-Referential

The medium is the site of
meaning.

On the Medium 1

The medium is no longer
merely a vehicle,
but a site of meaning.

On the Medium 2

The copy takes the place of
the original,
but not its weight.

Mechanical Reproduction

A sheet of A4 paper is
described as “a sheet of
A4,” not as $297 \times 210 \times$
0.10 mm.

Front–back,
how we describe a surface.

Front–back–side,
how we describe a 3D
object.

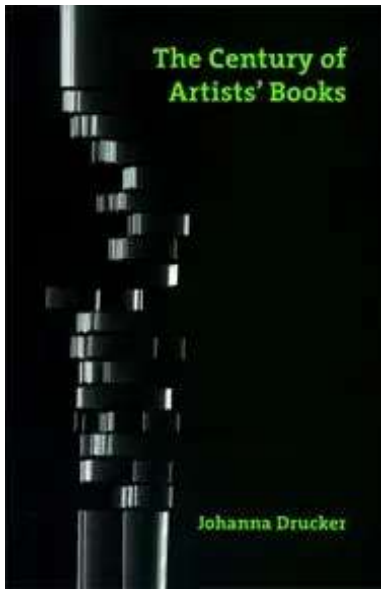
A ream of paper is labeled
“500 sheets,” not $297 \times$
 210×500 mm.

The medium is
not neutral.

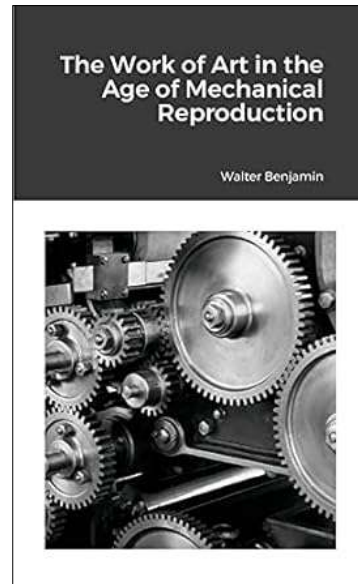
The medium is
the message.

The original is not
what is seen,
but what resists being
copied.

Poster Content Iterations



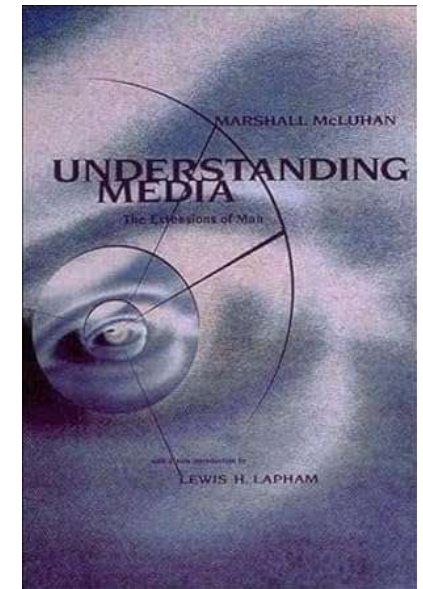
Johanna Drucker,
The Century of Artists' Books



Walter Benjamin,
*The Work of Art in the Age
of Mechanical Reproduction*



Marshall McLuhan,
The Medium is the Massage

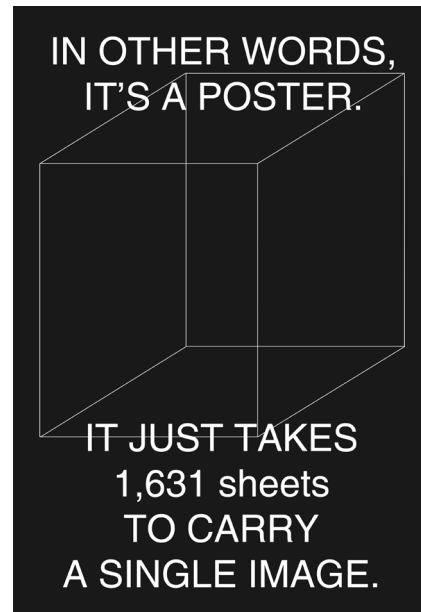
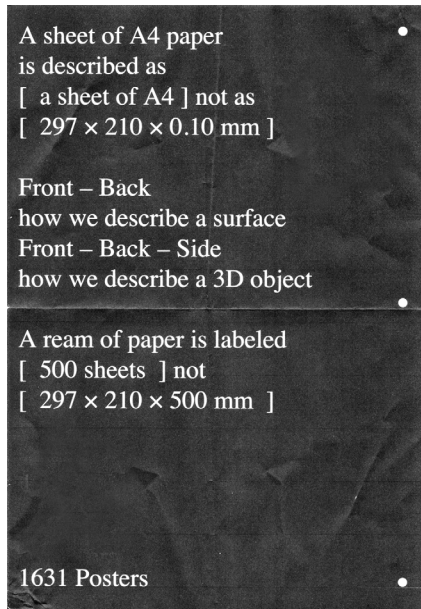


Marshall McLuhan,
Understanding Media

References



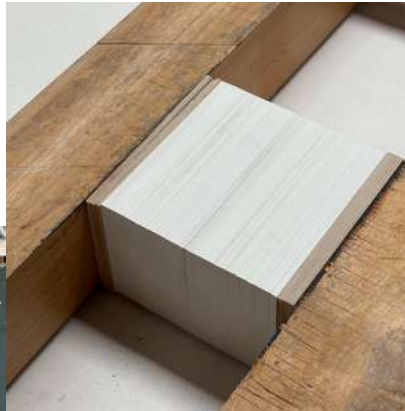
For Print Test ▼



Final Version ▼



Poster Design Iterations



Screen Printing Test

Fixing



Transporting



Printing



Final Printing

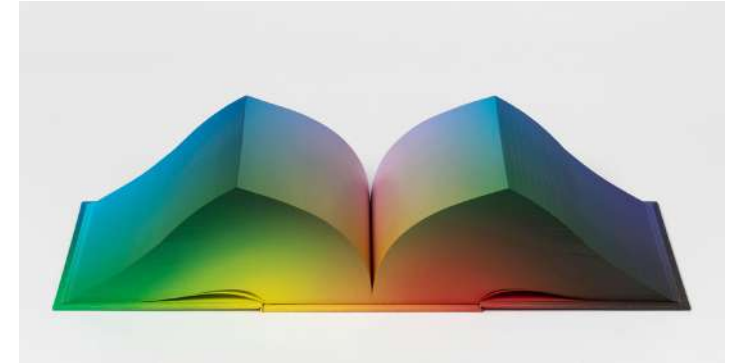


(I would remove the white part at the bottom,
which is the result of a measurement error)

Through the dismantling of its physical basis, the poster image no longer resides on the surface of the sheet, but becomes something that slides around the entire “body”, a ghost drifting along the structure’s edges*.

On the other hand, paper, originally a neutral carrier of content, is transformed by structure into an active participant in image-making. It shifts from being a transparent channel into becoming a formative force, an agent that defines the image itself.

* Reference



Tauba Auerbach, *RGB Colorspace Atlas*



Michael Mandiberg, *Print Wikipedia*

Projection ¹	Is a medium's identity defined by its content?
Projection ² A	Is a medium's identity shaped by its material structure?
Projection ² B	<u>Is a medium's identity assigned by the system that classifies it?</u>

I then placed the question in a more systemic context:

Is a medium's identity determined by classification systems rather than content or form?

What happens if the content of a book is transferred to a poster? In this experiment, I preserved a key marker of book-ness: the ISBN. A number belonging to the publishing system was placed onto an object typically recognized as a poster. (This is a real, valid new ISBN)

Poster Design



This revealed how circulation systems can override material logic.

In graphic design, a book is often identified by its content and format—a bound stack of printed pages, with a cover and numbered sequence. But within the publishing system, it is the presence of the ISBN that makes a thing count as a book.

In this case, the poster—deprived of binding, pagination, or narrative—nonetheless acquired the institutional identity of a book.

New Questions

Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· If a poster no longer resides on the surface of a single sheet, but drifts along the edges of a stack, is it still a poster?
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· Is the physical structure the basis of a medium's identity?
System	<ul style="list-style-type: none">· How do we understand what a graphic medium is? Is a poster with an ISBN still a poster, or is it a very thin book?· If a publication requires no content, no pages, no words, but can exist through a number alone, how do we distinguish what is a book, and what is not?

References

Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*
Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things, The Archaeology of Knowledge*

Enjoy!



(` • ω • ´) >”