

Institutional Intermediality

A Trifecta of Multi-Support Works from the Still Photography Division

L'intermédialité institutionnelle

Tiercé de travaux multisupports du Service de la photographie

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Résumé de l'article

Parmi les organismes qui ont soutenu les photographes après la Seconde Guerre mondiale, le Service de la photographie de l'Office national du film (ONF) du Canada s'est démarqué par son approche intrinsèquement intermédiaire. Fondé à l'origine pour fournir ses services aux ministères du gouvernement fédéral, le Service de la photographie s'est rapidement transformé au cours des années soixante en une institution protéiforme occupant les rôles multiples de banque d'images, de laboratoire photographique, de musée, de maison d'édition, d'agence de presse et d'incubateur de projets multimédias. Les ouvrages publiés sous son égide ont ainsi servi alternativement de catalogues d'expositions, de beaux-livres, d'ouvrages commémoratifs, de cadeaux diplomatiques, de livres d'artistes ou encore de livres photographiques.

Ce texte vise à examiner les ramifications culturelles du type de travail photographique préconisé par le Service de la photographie, de la fin des années soixante au début des années soixante-dix, en posant la question suivante : pourquoi valoriser un médium spécifique, en l'occurrence la photographie, en se fondant sur ses usages intermédiaires ?

J'explore ce paradoxe par le biais d'une étude de cas de trois ouvrages photographiques publiés à un moment charnière du Service de la photographie : Série 4 (1971) de Normand Grégoire (né en 1944), Visions terrestres (1973) de Judith Eglinton (née en 1945) et Un passeport infini (1973) de John Max (1936–2011). Tous trois furent réalisés à une période où le mandat du Service de la photographie se voyait redéfini de façon cruciale, s'éloignant du reflet de la société canadienne pour s'orienter vers le soutien aux artistes contemporains. Chacune de ces œuvres fut également produite simultanément sur différents supports, couvrant tout à la fois le monde du livre, de la revue, du portfolio, de l'exposition, du film et de la projection de diapositives. Ce faisant, elles contribuèrent à décentrer et à dé-hiérarchiser le médium comme le font aussi les écoles d'art et les pratiques amateurs. Les travaux de Grégoire, d'Eglinton et de Max mettent ainsi en lumière un récit de résistance à long terme à la répartition muséale des rôles incombant aux différents supports utilisés, dans le contexte canadien, et soulignent pourquoi les livres photographiques constituent un domaine auquel les érudits du livre devraient contribuer plus activement.

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INSTITUTIONAL INTERMEDIALITY: A TRIFECTA OF MULTI-SUPPORT WORKS FROM THE STILL PHOTOGRAPHY DIVISION

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Abstract

Among the institutions that supported photographers after WWII, the Still Photography Division (SPD) of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) distinguished itself by its inherently intermedial approach. Originally established as a service provider for federal government departments, the Division quickly mutated during the 1960s into a protean institution that simultaneously functioned as image bank, photo laboratory, gallery, publisher, press agency, and multimedia project incubator. The books it published thus functioned alternatively as exhibition catalogues, coffee table books, souvenirs, diplomatic gifts, artists' books, or photobooks.

This paper seeks to understand the cultural ramifications of the kind of photographic work that was championed by the SPD from the late 1960s to the early 1970s by asking the question: Why promote a specific medium, photography, based on its intermedial uses?

I address this paradox through the case study of three co-temporal photographic SPD books: Normand Grégoire's (b. 1944) *Série 4* (1971), Judith Eglington's (b. 1945) *Earth Visions* (1973), and John Max's (1936–

2011) *Open Passport* (1973). All three were produced in a period during which the SPD's mandate was pivotally redefined away from holding a mirror to Canada and towards fostering contemporary artists. Each of these works was also produced simultaneously for multiple supports—together, they span the domains of book, magazine, portfolio, exhibition, movie, and slide show—thus de-centering and de-hierarchizing media in a manner germane to art and media schools, as well as amateur practices. The works of Grégoire, Eglington, and Max thus point at a long-term narrative of resistance to the museal division of labour between media in the Canadian context and show how photobooks constitute a field to which scholars of the book should more actively contribute.

Résumé

Parmi les organismes qui ont soutenu les photographes après la Seconde Guerre mondiale, le Service de la photographie de l'Office national du film (ONF) du Canada s'est démarqué par son approche intrinsèquement intermédiaire. Fondé à l'origine pour fournir ses services aux ministères du gouvernement fédéral, le Service de la photographie s'est rapidement transformé au cours des années soixante en une institution protéiforme occupant les rôles multiples de banque d'images, de laboratoire photographique, de musée, de maison d'édition, d'agence de presse et d'incubateur de projets multimédias. Les ouvrages publiés sous son égide ont ainsi servi alternativement de catalogues d'expositions, de beaux-livres, d'ouvrages commémoratifs, de cadeaux diplomatiques, de livres d'artistes ou encore de livres photographiques.

Ce texte vise à examiner les ramifications culturelles du type de travail photographique préconisé par le Service de la photographie, de la fin des années soixante au début des années soixante-dix, en posant la question suivante : pourquoi valoriser un médium spécifique, en l'occurrence la photographie, en se fondant sur ses usages intermédiaires?

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Introduction

A comprehensive survey of photobooks in Canada is a project that should already be underway but is yet to be done. Interest in this topic is of recent academic coinage, on the heels of a “photobook moment” following the successful global survey by photographer Martin Parr and critic Gerry Badger,¹ which has reinforced the notion of the photobook as an author-driven production.² From the 2010s onward, regional surveys have been

A first version of this article was presented at the workshop “Re-Thinking Photobooks: Media Constellations in Media Constellations,” Philipps-Universität, Marburg, Germany, October 2022.

¹ Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, *The Photobook: A History*, 3 vols. (New York: Phaidon, 2004–14). For a concise chronology, see: Darius Himes, “A Timeline of the PhotoBook Phenomenon, 1999–2021,” *PhotoBook Review*, no. 020 (2021).

² Matt Johnston, *Photobooks &: A Critical Companion to the Contemporary Medium* (Eindhoven: Onomatopée, 2021); Bettina Lockemann, *Thinking the Photobook: A Practical Guide* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2022).

produced, among others, for Japan, Latin America, and the Netherlands,³ but not yet for Canada. Why this omission?

The agency that photographers have over their published output ranges from total control to having their work appropriated without regard to their rights. Focusing on the photographer-author alone leaves unexamined the contribution of design and material production. In photobook surveys, graphic designers are seldom credited, but their role is as fundamental to the production of any illustrated book as that of prepress specialists or printers.⁴ Further complicating the task of studying photobooks, I argue, is their intermedial aspect: their production is a dialogue with a constellation of other media that can include film, illustration, and literature, among others.⁵ Photobooks have been conceived as paper cinema, as graphic novels, and as portfolios – in short, as forms bearing the imprints of other media, and the Canadian context is rich with works that explore these boundaries and problematize a medium-specific history of the photobook in this country and elsewhere.

Is there something inherently Canadian about the intermediality of photographic publication? Extrapolating upon Penny Cousineau-Levine's core thesis in *Faking Death* (2006), one could put it on our contrarian habit to "sabotage much of what is photographic about photography,"⁶ namely its denotative function and canons of aesthetics. Therefore, the Canadian photobook could be construed as a space of resistance against dominant models established elsewhere. Our immediate neighbour to the south certainly inspires a respectable contrarian strain, but, stepping aside from essentialism here, I want instead to understand the intermedial

³ Ryūichi Kaneko et al., *Japanese Photobooks of the 1960s and '70s*, 1st ed. (New York: Aperture, 2009); Horacio Fernández, *The Latin American Photobook* (New York: Aperture, 2011); Frits Gierstberg and Rik Suermondt, *The Dutch Photobook: A Thematic Selection from 1945 Onwards*, 1st Aperture ed. (New York: Aperture, 2012).

⁴ Richard Benson, *The Printed Picture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008); Carole Naggar and Fred Ritchin, *Magnum Photobook: The Catalogue Raisonné* (New York: Phaidon, 2016).

⁵ Michel Hardy-Vallée, "The Photobook as Variant: Exhibiting, Projecting, and Publishing John Max's *Open Passport*," *History of Photography* 43, no. 4 (2019); Michel Hardy-Vallée, "Making photography speak: John Max's *Open Passport* (1973) and photographic narration" (PhD thesis, Concordia University, 2019).

⁶ Penny Cousineau-Levine, *Faking Death: Canadian Art Photography and the Canadian Imagination* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 31.

characteristics of three Canadian photographic books through the history of their making. More specifically, I am interested in the conceptual challenges to the definition of work and author by the publication processes of works produced for multiple supports. Under the title *Série 4*, Normand Grégoire (b. 1944) produced both a portfolio book of photographs (1971) and a short film (1972). Judith Eglington's (b. 1945) *Earth Visions* was designed as an exhibition accompanied by an elaborate, multi-projector slide show, at the same time it was published as a photobook (1973). Finally, John Max's (1936–2011) *Open Passport* was first developed as a site-specific exhibition accompanied by a slide projection (1972), before it was adapted for publication (1973).⁷ All three works were produced with the support of the Still Photography Division (SPD) of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) within a relatively narrow timeframe.⁸ All of them question the primacy of a specific publication support (book, exhibition, projection, motion picture) in defining the photographic work, and all of them raise doubt as to the categorical primacy of the photographer's intention in defining the work. Multi-support works like those of Grégoire, Eglington, and Max not only revive the problem of work and text in a pictorial context, but also raise the additional question of the transmission of spatially and temporally defined contents. They point at a narrative of resistance to the museal division of labour between media, but today, they also evidence how some supports afford better access to these works, leaving to researchers the task of reconstructing missing variants.

After situating the photobook within the history of the book in Canada and the role of the SPD, I embark upon an examination of the work of Normand Grégoire, characterized by a formalist approach to movement and performance. Next, I analyze Judith Eglington's *Earth Visions* as a

⁷ Normand Grégoire, *Série 4* (book and film) (Ottawa: National Film Board, 1971 and 1972); Judith Eglington, *Earth Visions* (Toronto: Martlet Press, 1973); John Max, *Open Passport*, special double issue, *IMPRESSIONS*, nos. 6–7 (1973).

⁸ *Earth Visions* was exhibited from 14 February to 20 May 1973 at the NFB Photo Gallery in Ottawa; *Open Passport* was exhibited there from 5 October 1972 to 1 January 1973. Both exhibitions circulated across Canada during the 1970s.

reciprocal intervention between the body and the territory – a hybrid between portrait and landscape. Finally, John Max’s *Open Passport* allows me to explain the intermedial ramifications of an apparently canonical photobook. These three artists produced complex photographic sequences at a time when museums were increasingly adopting the discourse of photography as a modernist, self-contained medium based on the unique image.⁹ They were also part of the first generation of photographers to be supported and promoted by a public art establishment in a country trying to define itself amid the concert of nations. All three were born in Montreal when it was both the metropolis of Canada and the locus of its political tensions. Why the SPD and its executive producer, Lorraine Monk, promoted photography as a performative, multi-support, and intermedial medium can begin to be answered by examining them conjointly.

A Book by Any Other Name

The history of photographic publishing in Canada is typical of the Western world. The first attested photographer living on the territory of British North America, Pierre-Gustave Joly de Lotbinière (1798–1865), published his daguerreotypes as engraved reproductions in Paris, and photographically illustrated books were produced in Upper and Lower Canada before the 1867 Constitution Act.¹⁰ The country was the site of major advancements in the development of halftone reproduction at the end of the nineteenth century,¹¹ and photographers have been publishing

⁹ Classically in John Szarkowski, *The Photographer’s Eye* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966); and in Canada: James Borcoman, *The Photograph as Object, 1843–1969* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1969).

¹⁰ Noël-Marie Paymal Lerebours, *Excursions daguerriennes: Vues et monuments les plus remarquables du globe*, 2 vols. (Paris: Rittner et Goupil; Lerebours; H. Bossange, 1842), vol. 1; James MacPherson Le Moine, *Maple Leaves: Canadian History and Quebec Scenery (Third Series)* (Quebec City: Hunter, Rose, 1865).

¹¹ Ralph Greenhill and Andrew Birrell, *Canadian Photography, 1839–1920* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1979); Michelle Macleod, “Connecting the Dots: The Leggotype and Canadian Nation-Building in Canadian Illustrated News (1869–1883) & l’Opinion publique (1870–1883)” (PhD thesis, Concordia University, 2022).

their images in print to this day. Historians of photography have addressed Canadian publications,¹² but seldom as a coherent corpus. However, some significant photobooks have been republished¹³ and researchers have addressed the specific history of Quebec.¹⁴ Canadian historians of the book, for their part, have paid more limited attention to photographically illustrated publications. Photobooks did not receive specific treatment in the *History of the Book in Canada*¹⁵ (at the time the series was published, the topic had yet to gain academic traction¹⁶) and, compared to the volume of research produced in the field of art history, the study of photographic publications in the field of bibliography remains marginal.¹⁷ However, if the absence today of a survey of Canadian photobooks speaks to the limited amount of research on the topic, it also stems from broader disciplinary and methodological issues with the “photobook” category itself.

Disciplinary cross-pollination between bibliography and art history is necessary when dealing with photographic and other illustrated books. Roger Gaskell has urged descriptive bibliographers to record “the spatial relationship of graphics and verbal text, the internal reference systems in

¹² Cousineau-Levine, *Faking Death*; Martha Langford, “A Short History of Photography, 1900–2000,” in *The Visual Arts in Canada: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Anne Whitelaw, Brian Foss, and Sandra Paikowsky (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Andrea Kunard and Carol Payne, *The Cultural Work of Photography in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011); Sarah Bassnett and Sarah Parsons, *Photography in Canada, 1839–1989: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: Art Canada Institute, 2023).

¹³ Donigan Cumming, *The Stage*, Books on Books (New York: errata editions, 2014). Lorraine Monk, ed., *BC Almanac(h) C-B* (North Vancouver: Presentation House Gallery, 2015).

¹⁴ Serge Allaire, *Le livre photographique @Artex* 1959–2017 (Montreal: Artex, 2017), https://artex.ca/app/uploads/2016/12/bibliography_versionweb_compressed_vf-2.pdf; Alexis Desgagnés, “Le livre photographique au Québec: Intuitions pour une histoire à défricher,” *Ciel variable*, no. 97 (2014); Nicola Pezolet and Eduardo Ralickas, eds., *The Book, Sites of Photographic Knowledge* 3 (Montreal: Artex, 2021).

¹⁵ Fiona A. Black et al., eds., *History of the Book in Canada*, 3 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; Montreal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2004–07).

¹⁶ Patrizia Di Bello, Colette Wilson, and Shamoan Zamir, eds., *The Photobook: From Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012).

¹⁷ Richard Ovenden, *John Thomson (1837–1921): Photographer* (Edinburgh: National Library of Scotland: The Stationery Office, 1997); Loren Lerner, “William Notman’s Portrait Photographs of Girls Reading from the 1860s to 1880s: A Pictorial Analysis Based on Contemporary Writings,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada* 47, no. 1 (2009); Manav Ratti, “The Icon and the Text: American Book History and the Construction of the World’s Largest-Grossing Illustrated Book, Madonna’s Sex (1992),” *Journal of American Studies* 54, no. 1 (2020).

use, [and] the placing and folding of the plates.”¹⁸ He notes that the textual bias of bibliographers has resulted in their neglect of the placement of plates printed on the same pages as the text. G. Thomas Tanselle is a long-time advocate of the study of non-letterpress materials and has recently published a useful and extensive survey of scholarship on the topic.¹⁹ Art historians studying photobooks have inevitably had to repurpose core bibliographical, even philological tools. For example, Sarah Greenough’s *Looking In: Robert Frank’s The Americans* (2009) contains an original kind of variorum collating the cropping of each individual image across all editions of Frank’s seminal photobook.²⁰ Sarah M. Miller’s reconstruction of a lost state of the book *Changing New York*, by Berenice Abbott and Elizabeth McCausland, harks back to one of the most ancient problems in the study of literature – which text best represents the work?²¹ Maintaining the continuing relevance of cultural productions requires interventions upon the definition and transmission of key works, and photobook scholars are only beginning to do what has been done with literature since classical times.

When the history of photography became an academic field in the twentieth century, it was still heavily tinted by art historical assumptions favouring the individual masterpiece over the pictorial sequence.²² Individual photographs from all periods were elevated to the status of tableaux, and some of them were literally ripped from the pages of the books into which they had been tipped to be exhibited in galleries. In the late 1970s, there grew yet another *Laocoön*-like *querelle* between photo-as-tableau and photo-as-book: a kerfuffle between the museum and the

¹⁸ Roger Gaskell, “Printing House and Engraving Shop,” *Book Collector* 53, no. 2 (2004): 233.

¹⁹ G. Thomas Tanselle, “The Description of Non-Letterpress Material in Books,” *Studies in Bibliography* 35 (1982): 1–42; G. Thomas Tanselle, “Notes on Recent Work in Descriptive Bibliography,” *Studies in Bibliography* 60 (2018): 64–69.

²⁰ Sarah Greenough, ed., *Looking In: Robert Frank’s The Americans*, expanded ed. (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art; Göttingen: Steidl, 2009).

²¹ Sarah M. Miller, *Documentary in Dispute: The Original Manuscript of Changing New York by Berenice Abbott and Elizabeth McCausland*, RIC Books (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020). For a critique of its methodology, see my review in *History of Photography* 45, no. 1 (2021): 103–5.

²² Douglas R. Nickel, “History of Photography: The State of Research,” *Art Bulletin* 83, no. 3 (2001).

library as the proper home of photography.²³ There were bitter feelings between those who defined themselves as photographers and those who defined themselves as artists with a camera, following an uneven distribution of riches in both monetary and cultural capital. Parr and Badger's survey is the culmination of this discussion, which was in retrospect more anti-museum than pro-library. They championed the idea of authorship mimicked on literature, making the photographer the author of a reproducible text rather than the maker of a unique artefact, defining the photobook as "a book – with or without text – where the work's primary message is carried by photographs. It is a book authored by a photographer or by someone editing and sequencing the work of a photographer, or even a number of photographers," that we can consider "an extended essay in photographs ... the 'literary novel' amongst photographic books."²⁴ Not only describing a specific practice, Parr and Badger contend that photobooks best represent "the photographer's view of the medium."²⁵ They follow a line of argument according to which we are "more accustomed" to encountering photographs in books,²⁶ a position that Patrizia Di Bello and Shamooun Zamir have summed up (though without endorsing it) as the idea that "the book is the first and proper home of the photographic image from which it moved out to take up residence in the fine art gallery and the modern museum in the early twentieth century."²⁷ Cases such as that of Greenough and Miller tend to favour "texts" that show a greater adequation to authorial intentions when arbitrating between variants, but suffer from a limited knowledge of other

²³ Thomas Dugan, *Photography Between Covers: Interviews with Photo-bookmakers* (Rochester, NY: Light Impressions, 1979); Alan Trachtenberg, "Walker Evans's *Message from the Interior*: A Reading," *October*, no. 11 (1979); Douglas Crimp, "The Museum's Old / The Library's New Subject," *Parachute*, no. 22 (1981); Carol M. Armstrong, *Scenes in a Library: Reading the Photograph in the Book, 1843–1875* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998); André Rouillé, *La photographie: Entre document et art contemporain* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005); Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, "Les deux faces de la photographie dans le livre d'artiste," in *Sur le livre d'artiste: Articles et écrits de circonstances, 1981–2005* (Marseille: Le Mot et le reste, 2006); Di Bello, Wilson, and Zamir, *The Photobook*.

²⁴ Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, *The Photobook: A History*, vol. I (New York: Phaidon, 2004), 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10–11.

²⁶ Armstrong, *Scenes in a Library*, 4.

²⁷ Patrizia Di Bello and Shamooun Zamir, introduction to Di Bello, Wilson, and Zamir, eds., *The Photobook: From Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 1.

approaches to editorial theory.²⁸ Parr and Badger have brought attention to the photobook by way of an essentialist understanding of photographic practice and history, which is reductive to say the least.

Officially Peculiar: The Still Photography Division

During the 1960s, federal Canadian institutions became increasingly involved in the field of photography. If clubs, professional associations, studios, magazines, schools, and some regional museums or galleries had long been established hubs of activity,²⁹ by 1970 the field had been altered by government players. The nation's historical collections were now the responsibility of the Public Archives; the National Gallery had launched its collection of photographic art under the aegis of curator James Borcoman; the Canada Council started funding photography projects more systematically in 1967; and the Still Photography Division had transitioned from being the picture agency of the federal government to become an advocate of contemporary work.³⁰ Photographers now had access to resources beyond those of the market and their immediate community, while institutions increasingly encouraged them as creators. In this transitional context, the Still Photography Division simultaneously attempted to organize the field as a whole and to support promising

²⁸ Peter L. Shillingsburg, *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age*, 3rd ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Pietro Beltrami, *À quoi sert une édition critique? Lire les textes de la littérature romane médiévale*, trans. Jean-Pierre Chambon, Yan Greub, and Marjolaine Raguin-Barthelmebs (2010; Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2021); Eddie Breuil, *Méthodes et pratiques de l'édition critique des textes et documents modernes* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019).

²⁹ Michel Hardy-Vallée, "Photographie 57: A Response to *The Family of Man* as the Exhibition of a Medium," *Journal of Canadian Art History / Annales d'histoire de l'art Canadien* 42, nos. 1–2 (2024).

³⁰ Carol Payne, *The Official Picture: The National Film Board of Canada's Still Photography Division and the Image of Canada, 1941–1971* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 45. See also: Andrea Kunard, "Promoting Culture Through Photography in the National Gallery of Canada and the Still Photography Division of the National Film Board of Canada" (PhD thesis, Queen's University, 2004); Andrea Kunard, "The Role of Photography Exhibitions at the National Gallery of Canada (1934–1960)," *Journal of Canadian Art History / Annales d'histoire de l'art canadien* 30, no. 1 (2009): 28–59; Julie-Ann Latulippe, "Le 'tournant artistique' du service de la photographie de l'ONF, 1960–1978: Mutation du statut de la photographie et construction de sa valeur artistique dans le contexte canadien" (MA thesis, Université du Québec à Montréal, 2009).

individuals. This balancing act helps to understand the peculiarity of its photographic book production.

As Carol Payne has shown, the SPD had a significant role in developing a Canadian nationalist idiom. It originated as a division of the Motion Picture Bureau, established in 1923 to promote the image of Canada locally and abroad; then, following the Second World War, it was transferred to the National Film Board. After serving the needs of propaganda, its usefulness was redefined under a new Film Act as the country's official photographic agency and image bank.³¹ The work of staff and freelance photographers depicting all aspects of life in Canada was disseminated across a variety of supports, including magazines, filmstrips, image sales, educational displays, and slide shows. Its main output became the photo story, a prepackaged thematic feature using text and image sold to newspapers and weeklies. When Lorraine Monk took the helm in 1960, she sought to change the image of the Division by introducing new ways of reaching its public such as exhibitions and books, and shedding the stigma of an organization of "civil servants with a camera."³² The NFB had moved its operations – except still photography – from Ottawa to Montreal in 1956, and Monk needed to redress the Division's relevance.

Books and exhibitions resulted from ambitious projects for the 1967 Centennial celebrations. Prestige publications such as *Canada: A Year of the Land* (1967) and *Call Them Canadians* (1968) were meant to reach the general public with feel-good imagery of the country and its people. The *IMAGE* series (ten volumes, 1967–70) showcased, in contrast, the Division's roster of creators through group and individual projects.³³ They can be divided between those that showcased conventional documentary photography and those that were experimental in form and content. The first group comprises the solo work of Lutz Dille, Michael Semak, and Pierre Gaudard as well as three collective volumes, while the second

³¹ National Film Board of Canada, *Canadian Picture Index*, 4 vols. (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1963–67).

³² Payne, *The Official Picture*, 20–45.

³³ For an extensive survey of SPD publications, see: Latulippe, "Le 'tournant artistique,'" 61–90.

contains the solo work of Normand Grégoire and Pierre Vinet as well as two collective volumes, one about dreams and the other by West Coast artists. Each volume in the *IMAGE* series accompanied a travelling exhibition showcasing the Division's innovation in combining media. As Martha Langford notes: "Any one of the *Image* installations would by current tastes be judged too elaborate and distracting from the photographic centre of the show. Exhibition design in the 1960s was unfailingly experimental, employing three-dimensional forms and props to animate the space, leading the viewer through visual and aural environments as though on a conducted tour."³⁴ Printing quality was of paramount importance, and if some early publications employed the gravure process, by switching to less expensive offset lithography the SPD had a direct role in raising the standard of quality for photo reproduction in Canada.³⁵

Lorraine Monk understood the field of photography as a territory to be occupied as broadly as possible. The advantageous position of the SPD led her to overstate its importance as the sole driving force in Canadian photography: "Ten years ago, Canada was a photographic wasteland. Today, a generation of keen-eyed photographers bursting with fiercely personal statements to make about the world they live in, has exploded upon the contemporary scene."³⁶ She could also appear to take credit for inventing the local art photography scene: "We had [in Canada] good commercial and good documentary, but not creative photographers ... [the SPD] had to take the young, potentially creative photographers, give him freedom, let him express himself and find his milieu; and then sponsor him with assignments."³⁷ Unsurprisingly, the SPD under Monk also conflicted with other actors in the field of photography in Canada. Its publicly funded, lavish publications were criticized as unfair competition

³⁴ Martha Langford, ed., *Contemporary Canadian Photography from the Collection of the National Film* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1984), 11.

³⁵ Paul Couvrette, "The National Film Board of Canada, Still Photography Division: A History and Analysis" (honours research project, Carleton University, 1974), 29.

³⁶ Quoted in Kunard, "Promoting Culture Through Photography," 290–91.

³⁷ Janus, "Stimulus to Canadian Photography. Interview: N.F.B.'s Still Photography Division," *Foto Canada* 1, no. 1 (1967): 61.

by the publishing industry, while photographers often voiced the complaint that they needed more than just one way of doing things.³⁸ The Still Photography Division had an evolving interpretation of its mandate over the course of its history. Unlike museums, it was not founded to build a collection of prestige works, but rather to serve the communication needs of the federal government, and then those of the media industry at large. From the start, the SPD was used to work with the photographic image across multiple supports in a project-based process. This encouraged improvisation, but also innovation, and an attention-catching intermedia fluency that supported the work of Normand Grégoire, Judith Eglington, and John Max.

At the Frontier of Cinema: Série 4

A light, cardboard fold-top sleeve containing twenty-seven unbound sheets, *Série 4* (1971) straddles the line between codex and portfolio (figure 1). Square in format, at 33.8 cm ($13 \frac{5}{16}$ ") on each side, it also resembles a slightly large LP record sleeve. Two different papers are used: a cream, uncoated, and lightly textured stock for the three presentation sheets that include the introductory essay by media theorist Gene Youngblood; and a white, coated glossy stock for the fine duotone offset reproductions of Grégoire's photographs, printed at an unspecified resolution (but approximately 200 lines/inch).³⁹ Each photograph is numbered sequentially to 24 on the verso, the number 19 being reproduced on the cover. Although I could not determine the exact size of the print run, it would be reasonable to estimate it in the thousands given the overhead costs of high-quality offset lithography. Such production values were typical of the SPD's publications, which often listed screen resolutions and paper stocks in their colophons. Text

³⁸ Ontario, *Royal Commission on Book Publishing* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1973), 21–22; Naima Aer et al., "Open Forum on Canadian Publications Dealing with Photography," in *Canadian Perspectives: A National Conference on Photography*, ed. Gary Hall, Phil Bergerson, and Bill Morgan (Toronto: Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, 1979), 288.

³⁹ I used a USB microscope with a ruler to measure print resolution.

throughout uses a sans serif font (most likely Univers) that underlines the modernist aesthetic of the publication, designed by Claude Forget. Although Lorraine Monk is credited as editor, no mention is made of the SPD: *Série 4* is identified as a publication of the National Film Board of Canada alone. It was nonetheless considered part of the *IMAGE* series, but, at \$6.95, this final entry sold for twice the price of the previous ones.⁴⁰



Figure 1. Overview of *Série 4*. Author's collection. Courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada.

Youngblood's essay is a gnomic reflection on perception, science, the unconscious, and other casually considered universals, with an inevitable dash of primitivism. The photographs can be easily divorced from the text and appreciated either sequentially or simultaneously in the hands, spread on a table, or pinned onto a wall. *Série 4* is an abstract sequence in the vein of *Minor White*,⁴¹ alternating formal studies of objects with portraits, mostly nudes (figure 2), and some interior scenes. A common thread uniting the images is their geometric rigour and tonal composition: Grégoire favours minimal setups in which his subjects detach themselves from featureless backgrounds. Plastic motifs are tightly

⁴⁰ Advertisement for the *IMAGE* series, *OVO*, no. 7 (1972): 3.

⁴¹ Collected in *The Time Between: The Sequences of Minor White* (San Francisco: Modernbook Editions, 2015).

selected: a crushed tin can and a wet rag are shown with the same flat and dispassionate point of view (figure 3), reminiscent of Walker Evans's 1929 "Stamped Tin Relic"; a studio portrait employs negative space according to the same geometry as another exterior shot; brick tiles recur between images. The sequence achieves a rhythmic quality that suggests choreography – a buildup and release of tension. The mood is ambiguous: a clenched forearm atop the belly of a pregnant woman could signify both protection and aggression (figure 4). Clear meanings are withheld, but the concluding image of a circle points at the idea of the circularity of life and time. Grégoire mines the crisis of modern life and its attendant solitude, strife, and alienation.

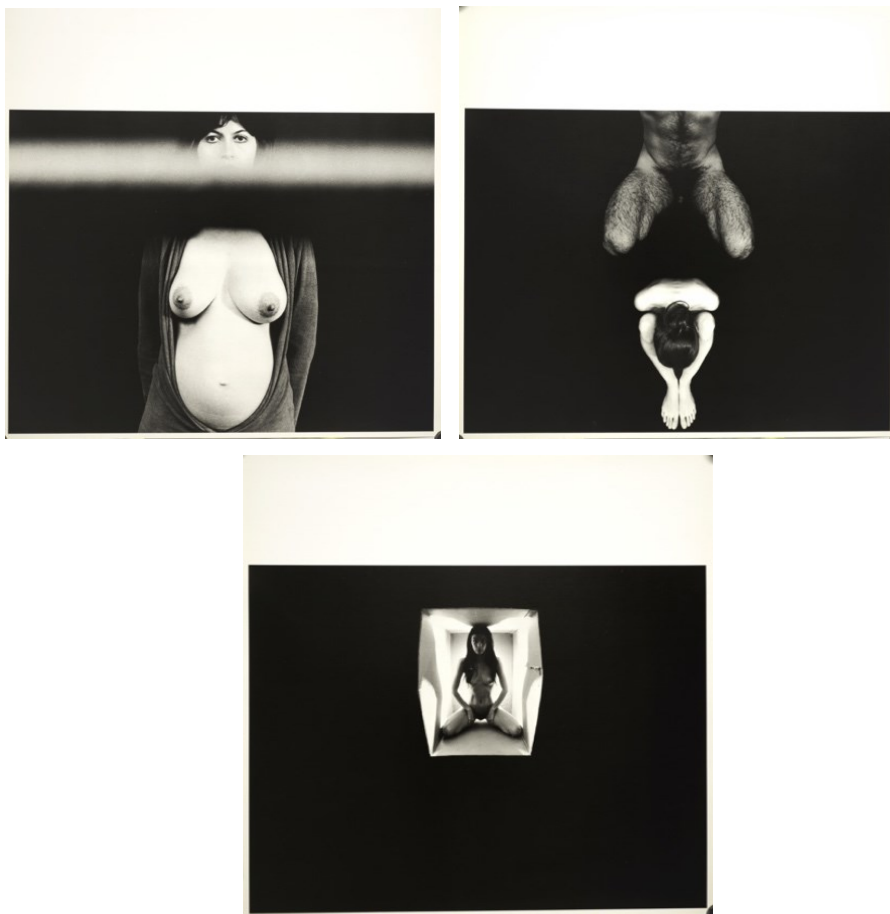


Figure 2. Three nudes from Série 4 (photo nos. 10, 13, and 18). Author's collection. Courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada.



Figure 3. Two object studies from *Série 4* (photo nos. 2 and 7). Author's collection. Courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada.



Figure 4. *Série 4* (photo no. 17). Author's collection. Courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada.

In the movie version of *Série 4*,⁴² this crisis is explained as the confrontation of bodies to machines. Rather than lovingly show each image, one at a time, *Série 4* catapults Grégoire's photos across the frame using a variety of animation techniques perfected at the NFB.⁴³ Nudes are juxtaposed to circuit boards and computer-created figures to the beat of a

⁴² Normand Grégoire, dir., *Série 4* (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1972), 7 min., https://www.nfb.ca/film/serie_4/.

⁴³ Especially Colin Low and Wolf Koenig, dirs., *City of Gold* (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1957), 16 mm, 21 min.

droning soundtrack. The nervous montage combines rotations, multiplications, mirroring, colouring, flashing, and movements in all directions (figure 5). Control alternates with hysteria, grace with violence, and human with machine. *Série 4* uses the medium of still photography in the context of cinema, but also points at its industrial applications by alluding to the computerized future to come: both circuit boards and books are printed through a photolithographic process.

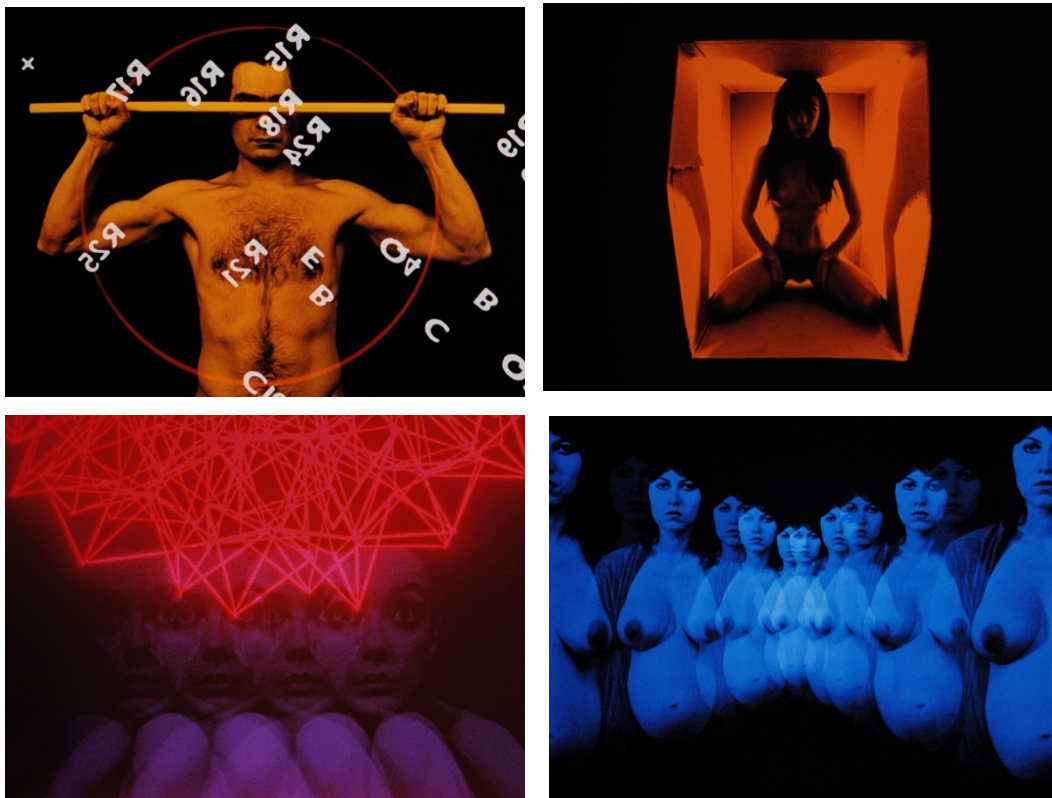


Figure 5. Four stills from the film *Série 4*. © National Film Board of Canada.

Série 4 was produced on the heels of an intensely productive period for Grégoire. Born in Montreal, he studied photomechanical reproduction at the Institut des arts graphiques.⁴⁴ He never worked in printing and

⁴⁴ This career summary is based on a telephone interview with the photographer (9 September 2022) and on Normand Grégoire and Claude Haefely, "Polyptyque 1" (Montreal: Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 1968); Claude Haefely, "Les photos de Normand Grégoire, images d'instant privilégiés," *Vie des arts*, no. 51 (1968): 66–70; Normand Thériault, "Celui qui s'éloigne seul en lui-même," *La Presse*, 26 September 1970; "Au point fixe, photos de Normand Grégoire," *Le nouveau Planète*, September 1969, 103–8; Ian Wilson, "Images of violence...", *Ottawa Citizen*, 21

instead taught himself photography around 1966. He worked freelance and began his artistic practice with minimalist depictions of objects,⁴⁵ then moved to portraiture. In parallel, he produced creative slide shows by recycling the work he did for a Toronto company doing rear-projection slides for televised news. His first major exhibition, *Polyptyque 1* (1968) was a sequence of portraits, precisely cropped and edited to show the anxieties of youth.⁴⁶ Soon after, in 1970, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal offered him a retrospective one-man show, the first of its kind for the newly built museum, which drew the attention of the SPD. Grégoire proposed to them what would become *Polyptyque deux* (1970) and *Série 4*, which he recalls producing simultaneously.⁴⁷

Polyptyque deux was exhibited by the SPD and published as the seventh tome of the *IMAGE* series.⁴⁸ Notwithstanding his professional training, Grégoire did not involve himself with the material production of his books.⁴⁹ Less concerned with spiritual liberation than its previous namesake, *Polyptyque deux* is a strikingly menacing sequence engaging with the plurality of visual culture. Between grainy shots of TV screens, *contre-jours* of masked figures, a man is jumping alone, naked in his living room. Conjoining electronic and biological noise, pitting cybernetics against humanism, the images suggest the atmosphere of a war, a pandemic, or an ecological disaster. Grégoire intended it to evoke the concept of cold (a Montreal snowstorm is another familiar catastrophe). The exhibition of *Polyptyque deux* tested the frontier of cinema, combining still images to a slide show and a soundtrack. The invitation to the opening was signed by Hugo McPherson, film commissioner and chairman of the NFB,

February 1970; "Interview Normand Grégoire," *OVO*, no. 7 (1972): 10–17; Katherine Tweedie, "Photography in Quebec," in *Canadian Perspectives: A National Conference on Photography*, ed. Gary Hall, Phil Bergerson, and Bill Morgan (Toronto: Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, 1979), 109–30.

⁴⁵ Haeffely, "Les photos de Normand Grégoire."

⁴⁶ "Au point fixe, photos de Normand Grégoire."

⁴⁷ Normand Grégoire, interview by Michel Hardy-Vallée, 9 September 2022.

⁴⁸ Normand Grégoire, *Polyptyque deux* (Ottawa: National Film Board of Canada, 1970).

⁴⁹ "Normand Grégoire," interview by Michel Hardy-Vallée, 9 September 2022.

accompanied by a text from Charles Gagnon, then teaching cinema at Loyola College.⁵⁰

Série 4 concluded a cycle begun in 1968.⁵¹ Combining the kind of black-and-white portraiture he refined in *Polyptyque 1* with the fear of reality's walls crushing in on humanity expressed in *Polyptyque deux*, the movie was the primary focus of his attention, whereas the portfolio book was a derived product – a form of merchandising. His initial, Pop Art-adjacent idea for the publication was a calendar using two images for each month (hence the twenty-four images of the resulting portfolio) but also alluding to cinema's most common frame rate.⁵² However, the SPD steered Grégoire along the portfolio route instead, being more practical and better in tune with the Division's artistic turn.⁵³ Concluding his exploration of the multiple image begun with *Polyptyque 1*, *Série 4* softly landed Grégoire back to the single image.

If the *Série 4* movie is the primary version of the work, the portfolio remains a radically different proposition, despite the common origin. Each version of *Série 4* is thus intermedial in distinct ways.⁵⁴ The omission of the electronic diagrams in the portfolio is a major difference, bringing it closer to an elegant collection of pictures rather than a raw indictment of modernity and technology. The movie makes extensive use of colour and limits the range of subjects, whereas the portfolio is strictly monochrome and does not repeat images. Still photographs of comedians Carol Laure, Jacques Thisdale, and Lucile Vernet are posed in ways that evoke dance, which is reinforced by animating them in synchrony with the music. The vibrating montage also alludes to computer art. In contrast, the portfolio

⁵⁰ Invitation flyer for the opening of *Polyptyque deux*, 1970, CMCP fonds, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

⁵¹ Normand Grégoire, *Série 4* artist statement, 1971, CMCP fonds, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

⁵² "Interview Normand Grégoire," 11.

⁵³ Paul Couvrette, "National Film Board – Stills Division, Past & Present," in *Canadian Perspectives: A National Conference on Photography*, ed. Gary Hall, Phil Bergerson, and Bill Morgan (Toronto: Ryerson Polytechnical Institute, 1979); Langford, *Contemporary Canadian Photography*; Kunard, "Promoting Culture Through Photography"; Latulippe, "Le 'tournant artistique'"; Payne, *The Official Picture*.

⁵⁴ Michelle Levy and Tom Mole, *The Broadview Introduction to Book History* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2017), 102.

evokes calendars, exhibitions, or coffee-table books. It was also an attempt at going beyond the practice of mimicking an exhibition that is so typical of movies about photographers, a cheap form of intermediality.⁵⁵

Beyond designing specific works, I propose that Grégoire worked across media with a *matière* in the same sense that we understand *la matière de France* or *la matière de Bretagne* in medieval romances: a set of motifs, characters, themes, methods, tropes, and sometimes, but not necessarily, the same images. The common title between the two *Série 4* versions unites them as parts of the same *matière* more than as parts of the same work, while its frontiers bleed into those of his two *Polyptyques*. Although derived from the movie, the portfolio is not an adaptation of it. Nor are photography and cinema the same thing for Grégoire: he would more readily compare photography to video, as individual practices, cinema being for him a collective effort.⁵⁶ The overlapping similarities between his projects suggest that the definition of works was a fluid process attuned to context, like musicians recording multiple versions of songs or recycling old lyrics into new ones.

From the perspective of the SPD, both *Polyptyque deux* and *Série 4* can be read as symptoms of an institution fighting for survival in a rapidly changing context. After a devastating report on the management of information within the Canadian government,⁵⁷ the SPD was divested of its documentary collection and had to concentrate on creative photography, while ending photo story production and image sales.⁵⁸ Dabbling in cinema, namechecking the film commissioner, and not mentioning the SPD were tantamount to a pledge of allegiance to central NFB management. Intermediality was in line with the SPD's habit of interpreting its mandate very broadly⁵⁹ and its capacity for working across multiple supports, but also its support for avant-garde artistic practices.

⁵⁵ "Interview Normand Grégoire," 11.

⁵⁶ Normand Grégoire, interview by Michel Hardy-Vallée, 9 September 2022.

⁵⁷ Canada, *Communiquer: Rapport du Groupe de travail sur l'information gouvernementale*, 2 vols. (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1969).

⁵⁸ Payne, *The Official Picture*, 52.

⁵⁹ Canada, *Communiquer: Rapport du Groupe de travail*, 196.

The growth of post-studio work, conceptual art, and collectives such as Fusion des arts, Intermedia, or the N.E. Thing Co. pushed the art world in the direction of a new economy of mixed media and immersive experiences, one to which photography had contributed since the interwar period⁶⁰ and that was particularly flourishing on the West Coast.

Mediated Connections: Earth Visions

Choreographed nude bodies, screaming figures, and anthropological universals (birth, death, love) are some aspects of Judith Eglington's *Earth Visions* (1973) that are comparable to Grégoire's work. Whereas *Série 4* presents bodies in abstract space, Eglington's work is an embodied, corporeal performance that was created as an exhibition and a slide show for the SPD, and then published as a book by Martlet Press. The photographs were reproduced in offset lithography by Herzig Somerville on thick, semi-matte paper stock at an estimated 200 lines/inch. Each of the 1,715 perfect-bound copies of *Earth Visions* (figure 6) is a comfortable 24.8 x 27.9 cm (9 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 11").⁶¹ Its humanist sans serif typeface (most likely Optima) suggests concessions to traditional book aesthetics. The book begins with an image of death: a bird carcass on a sandy shore. After a few chthonic images of landscape, a human form arises (or awakens) from the sand (figure 7). We are walking into eternity with him, along an unnamed strand. *Earth Visions* emplaces its characters in territories – sand, snow, water – so intensely that a caricature about the exhibition showed the public looking for the photographer buried deep underground (figure 8).⁶² The distinction between landscape and portrait becomes moot. Much attention is given to light sources, blur, and drapery, rendering faces ghostly (figure 9), subsuming the individuality of faces into the landscape,

⁶⁰ Olivier Lugon, "Musées sans murs et document: La spatialisation de la photographie dans les expositions des années 1950," *Revue de l'art* 175, no. 1 (2012): 27–35; Anaïs Feyeux, "La photographie en reconstruction: Les expositions photographiques dans l'Allemagne de l'Ouest après-guerre," *Revue de l'art*, no. 192 (2016): 51–59.

⁶¹ Judith Eglington, letter to Japanese Embassy, 9 November 1972, CMCP fonds, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

⁶² Dave Brown, "Below the Hill," *Ottawa Journal*, 20 March 1973, 22.

and maintaining a constant sense of motion. Models wear Noh theatre masks to destabilize the realism of the scenes (figure 10).⁶³ The sequence is interrupted at regular intervals by poems in Yiddish, English, and French. The regular grid, generally one image per page with broad margins, is occasionally broken by full bleed images and groups of images. Eglington shot everything in 35 mm black and white, with models, within the span of a year.⁶⁴ The sequence is unified like drama and pulses like cinema. Reading it yields effects of surprise, such as the transition from a beach to a snowy landscape (figure 11), and the irregular breaks recall the rhapsodic effects of free verse. A self-portrait of Eglington, face covered in snow recalling the white Noh masks, breaks the fourth wall. If *Série 4* is a struggle toward meaning, *Earth Visions* is a struggle toward connection – with the land, other people, a spiritual entity, or oneself – that is echoed by the multilingual text and the many images of touch.⁶⁵ Yet, today we are unfortunately disconnected from the artist's vision, since the book is only one component of this elaborate work.



Figure 6. Cover of *Earth Visions*. Author's collection. Courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada

⁶³ Eglington, letter to Japanese Embassy.

⁶⁴ Judith Eglington, interview by Michel Hardy-Vallée, 7 June 2021.

⁶⁵ Like Eglington's contribution to the *BC Almanac(h)* C-B, "I Am A Living Creature," and Grégoire's *Polyptyque deux*, *Earth Visions* is officially titled in multiple languages, thus extending the SPD's habit of systematically translating the title of each of its projects between French and English.

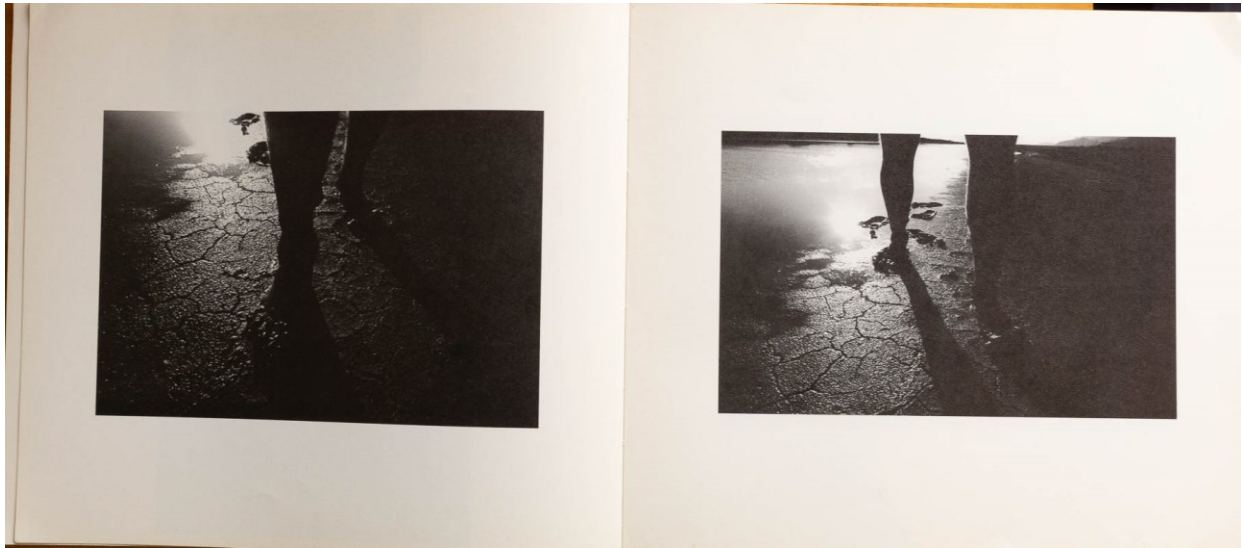


Figure 7. Two-page spread from Earth Visions depicting a character arising from the ground. Author's collection. Courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada.



Figure 8. Caricature from the Ottawa Journal, 20 March 1973, p. 22.

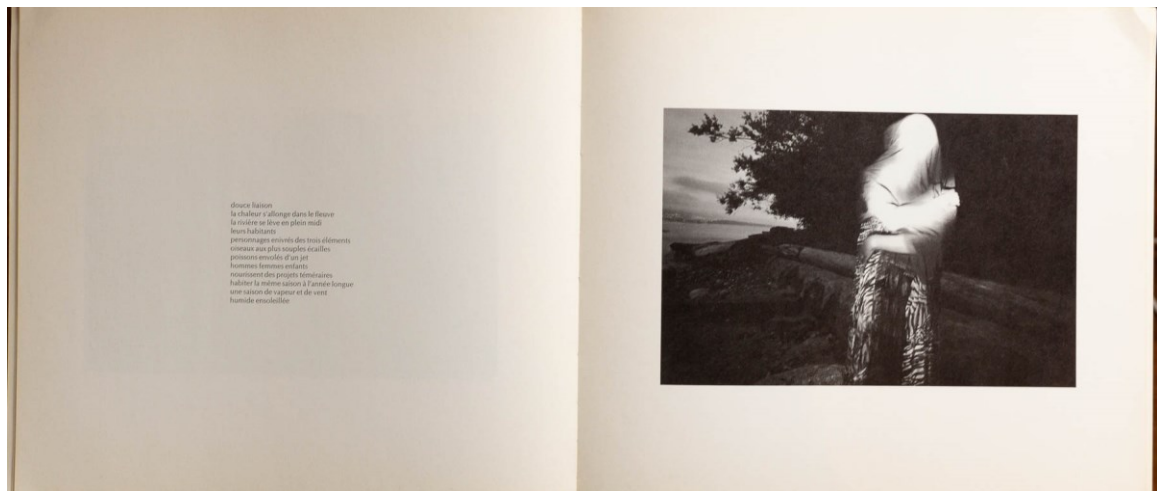


Figure 9. Two-page spread from Earth Visions: poem in French and draped figure. Author's collection. Courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada.



Figure 10. Two-page spread from Earth Visions: poem in Yiddish and model with Nob mask. Author's collection. Courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada.

Lorraine Monk was initially dismissive of the West Coast, asserting in 1967: “We would be lucky to find a couple of photographers on the West Coast ... Ron Solomon, our Photo Editor, has just returned from a trip through Canada’s West, looking for photographic talent.” Asked if

Solomon found any talent, she replied, “I am afraid not.”⁶⁶ By 1970, however, she needed to address the long-due demands to feature British Columbia photographers, and she reached out to artist Jack Dale.⁶⁷ Alongside Michael de Courcy, with whom he had collaborated in the Intermedia collective, Dale connected the SPD to the West Coast scene, where Eglington was then based. Photo editor Ron Solomon invited her to contribute to the *IMAGE* book project⁶⁸ that followed Grégoire’s *Polyptyque deux*: a box set of small booklets printed on newsprint and made exclusively by BC artists. The *BC Almanac(h) C-B* (1970) was inspired by conceptual art and counterculture, minimalism, and the critique of mass media. Reversing the trend for SPD publications thus far, it was virtually ignored in Eastern Canada but received favourable coverage in BC. Unlike other SPD projects, it was produced on a single support. Pages from the booklets were plastered on the walls of the SPD Photo Gallery in lieu of an exhibition, thus acknowledging the absence of originals, and the importance of print and book for the medium. Eglington contributed “I Am A Living Creature,” a proto-*Earth Visions* sequence about the liberated body in the landscape. The *BC Almanac(h) C-B* remains the only SPD publication to have been reprinted to date,⁶⁹ the ideas that subtend it having been vindicated in the long run, despite its initially modest reception.

After years of working with painting, Eglington was attempting to relearn how to see, and *Earth Visions* can be understood as trying to get in touch with the world rather than merely depicting it. By the time she began shooting in 1972, she had relocated to Ottawa and started working for the SPD.⁷⁰ Having the same institution as patron and employer may have exposed her to appearances of favouritism:

⁶⁶ Janus, “Stimulus to Canadian Photography,” 62.

⁶⁷ See: <https://www.michaeldecourcy.com/BC-ALMANAC/>.

⁶⁸ Judith Eglington, interview by Michel Hardy-Vallée, 7 June 2021.

⁶⁹ Monk, *BC Almanac(h) C-B*.

⁷⁰ Lorraine Monk, memorandum to Judith Eglington, 10 January 1973, CMCP fonds, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Those who hoped for “stars” (or even, as in the Monk/Eglington case, tried to create stars) were to be sadly disappointed ... The Division, with its wide-ranging interests was simply incapable, from the point of view of staff and funding, to promote Canadians abroad with any great success. [Yousuf] Karsh and [Roloff] Beny, who had done excellent jobs of promoting themselves, were all the world knew of Canadian photography.⁷¹

The idea that Lorraine Monk attempted to “make” Judith Eglington into a star is a surprising statement compared to her much better-documented attempts at turning John Max into one.⁷² As with the caricature, there is a sexist dimension to this critique of an emerging photographer who also happened to be a woman. Nonetheless, the book was generally well received in the press. However, reviewing the exhibition of *Earth Visions* for *Afterimage*, Penny Cousineau expressed annoyance at the repetition of successive images.⁷³ Eglington remarked instead that the prints were meant as a kind of storyboard,⁷⁴ and her greater concern appears to have been the slide show.

Out of the 150 prints in the exhibition, she chose two portraits and “exploded” them into a hundred slides.⁷⁵ Ten Kodak Carousel slide projectors, coupled in pairs to five dissolve controls timed by a punch-card electronic programmer, projected the slides on three screens through coloured gels, accompanied by a soundtrack, on tape, of Eglington’s voice and pulse. Her intent with this immersive, layered projection was to induce in the audience a deep, multidimensional feeling of empathy with the person depicted, but also to produce something technically resilient

⁷¹ Couvrette, “National Film Board – Stills Division,” 275–76.

⁷² Lily Koltun, interview with Lorraine Monk, 1981, Documentary Art and Photography Sound Collection, National Archives of Canada fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa. *John Max: A Portrait*, dir. Michel Lamothe (Montreal: Les Films du 3 Mars, 2010), digital video, 94 min.

⁷³ Penny Cousineau, “Sensual Estrangement,” *Afterimage* 1, no. 10 (1974): 17. She would reconsider the implicit biases of her critique in *Faking Death*.

⁷⁴ Judith Eglington, interview by Michel Hardy-Vallée, 7 June 2021.

⁷⁵ Bergin, “Judith Eglington: Knows Where She’s Going.”

should a projector become jammed.⁷⁶ The book mattered a lot to Eglington – she, too, was arguing in 1973 that people were more exposed to photos in print rather than through cinema – but ultimately she was concerned with the still image across all its manifestations.⁷⁷ Eglington’s subsequent career included both cinema and stills, in particular the Polaroid, but she would not return so intimately to the codex.

The 1970s, like the 2010s, count as another “photobook moment.” In the United States, photographers such as Ralph Gibson were venturing into independent publishing, art schools like the Visual Studies Workshop were encouraging creators to engage with the book, and printers were experimenting with advanced offset techniques.⁷⁸ In Canada, the federal government’s austerity budget of 1970 dramatically shrunk arts funding instead. After the conclusion of the *IMAGE* series, the SPD ceased publication for a while, partnering with commercial publishers for *Earth Visions*, *Open Passport*, and their celebration of the US Bicentennial, *Between Friends* (1976).⁷⁹ These public-private partnerships mitigated costs and charges of unfair competition. The SPD thus benefitted from new distribution and diffusion networks, and kept government intervention at bay by following the “arm’s length” principle of cultural policy. Nevertheless, the SPD managed to go over budget with *Earth Visions*.⁸⁰

Like the now technologically inaccessible multimedia works produced during the 1990s as CD-ROMs or proprietary hypertext,⁸¹ audiovisual works of the 1970s were made with great enthusiasm for a democratic technology that quickly got left by the wayside.⁸² Contents produced during the era of slide projection have been abandoned more

⁷⁶ Maureen Cumbers, letter to William Kirby, 11 September 1974, CMCP fonds, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Judith Eglington, interview by Michel Hardy-Vallée, 7 June 2021.

⁷⁷ Bergin, “Judith Eglington: Knows Where She’s Going.”

⁷⁸ Dugan, *Photography Between Covers*.

⁷⁹ Karla McManus, “Romance *Between Friends*: Revisiting the National Film Board of Canada’s Photobook of the Canada-United States Border Line,” in *The Book, Sites of Photographic Knowledge* 3 (Montreal: Artexte, 2021).

⁸⁰ Monk, memorandum to Judith Eglington.

⁸¹ See the case of Chris Marker’s CD-ROM *Immemory*:
<https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/7188-the-deaths-and-rebirths-of-chris-marker-s-cd-rom-immemory>.

⁸² See: <https://resources.culturalheritage.org/emg-review/volume-4-2015-2016/oconnor/>.

often than they have been remastered or translated for new platforms. From the *Earth Visions* book and from extant prints, it is impossible to imagine the slide show beyond what is said in the reviews. Insofar as Eglington's punch cards have not been preserved in the SPD archives, we cannot reconstruct its text.

From the perspective of the institution, *Earth Visions* was another take on the problem of relevance that tilted the balance toward a more practical, less experimental packaging of artworks. Although the slide show embodied the core of Eglington's artistic vision, it was not as portable as the exhibition or the book. Rather than try to reproduce dissolve effects or spend money on colour printing, Eglington designed her book according to familiar layout practices. *Earth Visions* is a modular kind of intermedia work, in which each support dialogues with the others, creating an integrated experience in the audience, but also subject to being broken down into parts. The book proved to be the part more resilient to the sands of time; yet, reading it today, we have only an incomplete connection to the work.

Circling Back: Open Passport

The 1973 photobook *Open Passport*, by John Max, has gained the status of a landmark work in Canada.⁸³ It was favourably reviewed by critic A. D. Coleman in the *New York Times* and was literally enshrined by photographer Serge Clément in an artist's book.⁸⁴ Max has been the subject of two documentaries⁸⁵ as well as my own doctoral research, and I have been writing about *Open Passport* for a while now.⁸⁶ To summarize

⁸³ Wim Melis and Machiel Botman, eds., *Noorderlicht: Wonderland* (Groningen: Stichting Aurora Borealis, 1999); Cousineau-Levine, *Faking Death*; Desgagnés, "Le livre photographique au Québec."

⁸⁴ Serge Clément, *Hommage: John Max, Open Passport* (Montreal: Serge Clément, 2005). Each portfolio box combined a copy of *Open Passport* with a copy of a self-printed book by Clément.

⁸⁵ *John Max: A Portrait*, dir. Michel Lamothe (Montreal: Les Films du 3 Mars, 2010), digital video, 94 min.; Dennis Mohr and Amelia Does, *John Max: Open Book* (unreleased), 2004–05.

⁸⁶ Hardy-Vallée, "Making photography speak"; Hardy-Vallée, "The Photobook as Variant"; Michel Hardy-Vallée, "Thinking Onto the Box: The Photographer's Archive as Instrument," *Annales de Historia del Arte* 32 (2022): 351–72; Michel Hardy-Vallée, "From Tableau to Sequence: Introducing

Max's career, suffice it to say that he represented Lorraine Monk's highest hope for the SPD establishing a new major Canadian photographer, on the level of Yousuf Karsh or Roloff Beny.⁸⁷ Published in late 1973 as a special double issue (nos. 6 and 7) of the Toronto art photography magazine *IMPRESSIONS*,⁸⁸ *Open Passport* followed Max's eponymous solo exhibition, which had opened at the Photo Gallery in October 1972. *Open Passport* is a slim, perfect-bound, US letter-size (27.9 x 21.6 cm or 11" x 8.5") book printed by Herzig Somerville in 250 lines/inch duotone offset lithography on glossy coated paper. The print quality was at the highest end of what was then available, and the book was intended to be the best possible adaptation of the exhibition.

Prepress was carried out by Shin Sugino, who was just starting his career as a professional photographer and offset specialist. He helped raise the profile of *IMPRESSIONS* from a student-run underground publication to that of a mainstream player in arts publishing.⁸⁹ Prior to the special issue, *IMPRESSIONS* had lower production values and variable quality: the use of heavy, glossy paper, high-resolution screens, and the duotone process was exceptional for the magazine. The magazine had already produced two monographs as portfolios,⁹⁰ but *Open Passport* made a convincing case for switching to a photographic book format for subsequent projects, also sponsored by the SPD.⁹¹ Max would discuss layout with Sugino, giving direct input on the final disposition, which reflected his evolving ideas for the work. These exchanges were anything but smooth: Sugino took a pragmatic, bottom-line position whereas Max was very picky, always looking for a better way to lay out photographs.

Comics Theory within Art History to Study the Photobook," in *Seeing Comics through Art History: Alternative Approaches to the Form*, ed. Maggie Gray and Ian Horton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022); Michel Hardy-Vallée, "John Max: Le fil conducteur de la photographie," *Ciel variable*, no. 122 (2023): 46–53.

⁸⁷ Koltun, interview with Lorraine Monk.

⁸⁸ Max, *Open Passport* special double issue.

⁸⁹ Aer et al., "Open Forum on Canadian Publications," 286. It continues today as *C Magazine*.

⁹⁰ Judy Gouin, *Monograph 1* (Toronto: IMPRESSIONS, 1972); Jacqueline Boughner, *Boughner* (monograph) (Toronto: IMPRESSIONS, 1974).

⁹¹ Michael Semak, "Monograph," special double issue, *IMPRESSIONS*, nos. 11–12 (1974); Pamela Harris, *Another Way of Being: Photographs of Spence Bay N.W.T.* (Toronto: IMPRESSIONS, 1976).

Tensions were eventually resolved by a common desire to see the images in print.⁹² After layout was decided, each photograph was reproduced according to output size with the use of halftone screens on horizontal process cameras. Printing technicians at Herzig Somerville used a set of 8 "x 10" prints for the purpose of reproduction, not the larger 16" x 20" exhibition prints.⁹³ Individual negatives were combined in pasteup to produce the printing plates, and the proofs were reviewed by both Max and Sugino. Although he was not knowledgeable about printing, Max made useful remarks, deciding what to sacrifice and what to emphasize when adjusting the contrast.⁹⁴ Copies were first distributed in the United States by Light Impressions, while the Canadian distribution lagged for another two years.⁹⁵ *IMPRESSIONS* subscribers received the special double issue at no additional cost.⁹⁶

The cover of *Open Passport* suggests the agency of John Max across the whole chain of graphic production (figure 12). The white text on a black background, in stately Modern No. 20 typeface, is further repeated on the inside title page, black text on white background. Together, they suggest the negative-positive process fundamental to both photography and offset printing. The "open passport" of the title is a metaphor, meant to suggest a passport to go anywhere but also a pun on "open ticket," suggesting that the return date is left undetermined. *Open Passport* is a poetical narrative, the tale of a family of artists torn apart by the arrival of a child and the dilemma between creative work and parental obligations.⁹⁷ Rather than mimic the temporality of the motion picture by decomposing

⁹² Shin Sugino, interview by Michel Hardy-Vallée, 14 December 2017.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Shin Sugino, email to author, 28 June 2018.

⁹⁵ Isaac Applebaum, quoted in Aer et al., "Open Forum on Canadian Publications," 287.

⁹⁶ Advertisement for the *Open Passport* special double issue in *IMPRESSIONS*, no. 5 (August 1973). In 1973, *IMPRESSIONS* subscriptions cost \$8.00 and individual issues \$2.00. In the United States, individual issues cost \$2.50 (the two currencies were near parity then). In retail stores, however, the special double issue sold for \$7.95.

⁹⁷ For instance, the story of the Suzanne Meloche/Marcel Barbeau family analyzed in *Les enfants de Refus global*, dir. Manon Barbeau (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1998), 74 min.; and fictionalized in Anaïs Barbeau-Lavalette, *La femme qui fuit* (Montreal: Éditions Marchand de feuilles, 2015).

movement in successive frames, like Eglington in *Earth Visions*, Max groups photos thematically and symbolically to evoke a specific mood. Using a variety of grids, the sequencing is not between individual images but between groups of them, thus creating effects of simultaneity and narration. To show the happiness of the couple in its early days, he combines images that suggest love and caring, either between subjects or between the subject and the person behind the camera (figure 13). To signify the breaking down of the couple and their entourage's reaction, a first group combines falling gestures with tense or distant expressions. The next group suggests the opprobrious gazes of others: illustrator Vittorio Fiorucci points his finger at the camera, while Max's then girlfriend Andrea Paradis looks coldly at the lens, her image repeated twice (figure 14). Max builds his narration with means comparable to those of comics and photo stories⁹⁸ – for example, representing the arrival of the child as a literal fall across the page of a photograph of his wife, Janet Peace. She is then mirrored around a portrait of Andrew Owen, son of film director Don Owen, thus evoking the whirlwind of child rearing (figure 15). The grid layout allows for the creation of interlaced narrative structures and formal correspondences, like melody and harmony in music.



⁹⁸ Hardy-Vallée, “From Tableau to Sequence.”

Figure 12. Front cover and title page of Open Passport. © The Estate of John Max, courtesy Stephen Bulger Gallery.



Figure 13. Two-page spread from Open Passport: couples. © The Estate of John Max, courtesy Stephen Bulger Gallery.





Figure 14. *Successive two-page spreads from Open Passport: rupture.* © The Estate of John Max, courtesy Stephen Bulger Gallery.



Figure 15. *Two-page spread from Open Passport: child rearing.* © The Estate of John Max, courtesy Stephen Bulger Gallery.

Open Passport was John Max's third solo exhibition, a narrative work based on the specific space of the Photo Gallery in Ottawa (figure 16).⁹⁹ The narrative thrust was presented on the gallery's four perimeter walls, while images standing outside the storyline were mounted upon pillars in the centre space. The exhibition can be subdivided into five different, successive zones that include both narrative and non-narrative images, and this logic was respected when the exhibition travelled to Montreal. Max called his book a "recasting" of the exhibition, melting his work into a new bibliographic mold: "I would feel the book would have to be recast. I do not want a record. The book must be an experience in itself, just as the exhibition is."¹⁰⁰ The recasting from wall to page also resulted in some variant readings of specific passages: for instance, a group of three photographs is reproduced across a double-page spread as a group of four, the centre image duplicated to ensure a balanced layout. *Open Passport* should be considered as a single work with two authored variant texts – exhibition and book – since the slide show was primarily the work of Judith Eglington.



Figure 16. John Max and designer John Honeyman examining a maquette of the Photo Gallery during the preparation of *Open Passport*, 1972. Fonds John Max en dépôt (P18), Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal. © The Estate of John Max, courtesy Stephen Bulger Gall.

⁹⁹ Hardy-Vallée, "The Photobook as Variant," 411–13.

¹⁰⁰ Nathan Lyons, transcript of interview with John Max (unedited), 29 October 1972, Visual Studies Workshop Archives, 14.

Max's exhibition was initially scheduled to open after *Earth Visions*, but because Eglington was still shooting in the fall of 1972, the schedule was adjusted to show him first. He was, in any case, a few years late by this point, Monk having pitched the idea of a solo exhibition to Max around 1968.¹⁰¹ Upon arriving in Ottawa just before the opening, Max dropped all his materials on Eglington's desk. The two had already been back in touch in recent years, and he had included a portrait of her in *Open Passport*. In an interview, she recalled that their first encounter was around 1959, after Max had seen Springford's photos of her. Born John Porchawka in Montreal to a family of working-class immigrants from Galicia (near Lviv in present-day Ukraine), he gained his art education at the School of Art and Design at the same time as Eglington. Although Max did not attend the ÉBAM, he hung closely to that scene. A voracious reader and a serious networker, he did as much as he could to stay abreast of the field. Max was cultivating friendship with artists, photographing them offhandedly for public and private circulation. Given a tight deadline, a stack of 35 mm positives made from Max's prints, and full creative control, Eglington programmed on punch cards a three-projector setup that "anybody with half a brain" could set up and run, she recalled amusingly.¹⁰² More than one copy of each image was used, and the projection lasted around twenty minutes. The soundtrack was built with the help of a local radio station's sound library. After the daily broadcast ended, around midnight on the eve of the opening, she spent the night intuitively picking up soundscapes – she recalls using opera, ocean sounds, and Tibetan chants – to accompany the images, and mixing them with very long crossfades. The slide show was a success with audiences, and some visitors' comments stress how it helped them understand the exhibition. Despite requests, it was only shown again at the Montreal opening and in Toronto for a conference at A Space, both in 1973. There

¹⁰¹ Nathan Lyons, transcript of interview with John Max, 15; Judith Eglington, interview by Michel Hardy-Vallée, 7 June 2021.

¹⁰² Judith Eglington, interview by Michel Hardy-Vallée.

are some conflicting mentions as to whether it may have been shown on community television, and Max clearly intended at some point to turn it into a film.¹⁰³

Max spent comparatively more energy on producing the *Open Passport* photobook and exhibition than on the slide show, but not for lack of interest in the medium. He had produced, with the help of his Loyola students, his own lightshow, *Killflesh*, in underground and countercultural venues, and he was a key player in the Montreal concert scene,¹⁰⁴ projecting behind Janis Joplin during her 4 November 1969 concert.¹⁰⁵ The *Open Passport* slide show was clearly a derived work and deserves to be understood, at least, as a Max-Eglington collaboration, if not entirely as Eglington's own. It does not have the same authorship, but its authority should not be dismissed either: it helped audiences understand Max's work and there remains the yet unverified possibility that he could have imported some of its ideas into his book.

Because Max produced his works like an editor picking from an image bank (his own) rather than producing a new corpus of images for each project, there is a considerably intertextual character to his production. The general narrative arc of *Open Passport* can first be seen in a five-picture sequence he exhibited at the fifth edition of the Biennale de Paris in 1967; a 1969 photo and poetry essay in the Loyola College student magazine *Gamut* already picked some key images; and, at the Centaur Gallery's inaugural exhibition in 1972, he showed images he selected for *Open Passport*, juxtaposed in the same manner he would later do in Ottawa (for instance, by hanging Eglington's image beside Leonard Cohen's). *Open Passport* also contains outtakes from his second solo exhibition, *Le soleil brilla toute la nuit* (1970), combined with images taken for the

¹⁰³ John Max, curriculum vitae, 1973, Fonds John Max en dépôt, P18, Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal.

¹⁰⁴ Georges-Hébert Germain, "Les grands spectacles," *SPEC, le magazine de spectacles de La Presse* 1, no. 49 (1970): 10; Alain Simard, *Je rêvais d'un festival* (Montreal: Les Éditions La Presse, 2024), 124.

¹⁰⁵ Yves Leclerc, "Janis Joplin hurle, se déchaîne, et reste 'cool,'" *La Presse*, 5 November 1969; "Une soirée 'Voir Pellan' au Musée d'art contemporain," *Le Devoir*, 28 April 1969; Germain, "Les grands spectacles."

documentary still-in-motion movie *...to be INDIAN* (1971).¹⁰⁶ I have resisted the temptation to trace an exact genetic schema of Max's oeuvre, but many diagrams pepper my research notes that indicate long trajectories of individual images through his work.

Whereas Grégoire and Eglington reused themes and motifs for new images, Max primarily reused his pictures, a task that was complicated by the SPD's copyright practices. Exhibitions were initially printed by Division staff using negatives acquired from the photographers, which gave them full copyright control. The *IMAGE* series would have been a natural home for *Open Passport*: Max contributed greatly to these projects, in addition to featuring prominently in the book *Call Them Canadians/Ces visages qui sont un pays*, but he could not generate sales from his SPD negatives. Although acquisitions of negatives were gradually on the way out by the early 1970s,¹⁰⁷ it is possible that Max wished to avoid ceding any of the rights for *Open Passport*. As was the case for *Earth Visions*, publishing Max's book within an alternative structure helped to offset costs and reflected the rapport between the SPD and the photographer on the ultimate direction and ownership of the project.

Open Passport is a photographic book meant to be appreciated on its own, one that would correspond most closely to the modernist ideal defended by Parr and Badger. What we could call its textual history, however, shows that it builds upon the uses of photography across other supports, as was then common at the SPD, to articulate its narrative statements. Its intermedial characteristics consist mainly in reusing certain devices applicable to cinema, slide shows, and music, but they were a major response to the institutional practices of the SPD. By showing the transfiguration of a photographic archive into a work of art, besting the Division's own efforts at creating exhibitions out of their image bank, *Open Passport* shows how even the most canonical photobooks must be

¹⁰⁶ John Max, "This preparation contains no scheduled poison," *Gamut*, March 1969, 28–36; *...to be INDIAN*, dir. Jesse [Hideo] Nishihata (Toronto: CBC, 1971), 16 mm, 54 min. As mentioned above, Clément's *Hommage: John Max*, *Open Passport* recycles some of Max's tropes, but so does Sylvain P. [Henri] Cousineau, *Mona Nima* (Almonte, ON: Powys Press, 1977).

¹⁰⁷ Kunard, "Promoting Culture Through Photography," 280.

explained by considering a constellation of media, rather than the notion of the autonomous medium.

Concordant Discourses

Intermediality was an emergent attribute of the Still Photography Division, a consequence of its complex history and the need to seize opportunities in an unstable context. In turn, it gave the SPD an edge on artistic discourses, at least with respect to photography. While the National Gallery was primarily collecting international masters from past eras, the SPD produced innovative Canadian work, albeit in a sometimes unplanned manner that nonetheless demonstrated the lateral-thinking abilities of its staff. It is worth considering to what extent this kind of history is the paradigm rather than the exception. Publishing a photographic book, especially one driven by an author-like vision, entails struggles and negotiations, and the works of Normand Grégoire, Judith Eglington, and John Max all evidence a struggle for authenticity. *Série 4* is concerned about dehumanizing technologies and the resulting lack of meaning in life; *Earth Visions* interrogates the modalities whereby we connect with the world around us; and in *Open Passport*, divorce deconstructs the human family in search of a new kind of transcendence.

All three works tread the spiritual and humanistic dimensions of art in a manner that can be understood as a subjective turn in reaction to the implosion of the magazine market,¹⁰⁸ but I propose instead to see them within the longer tradition of art as a spiritual endeavour, an integrated experience of the whole person. As Yvan Lamonde has shown, the culture of twentieth-century Quebec was invested deeply in positioning the spiritual person above atomizing liberal conceptions of the individual.¹⁰⁹ Art as a spiritual endeavour is a premise shared across the spectrum of political opinion, including overtly anticlerical artists such as those who signed the *Refus Global* manifesto (1948). At the SPD, Norman Hallendy

¹⁰⁸ Langford, "A Short History of Photography, 1900–2000," 285.

¹⁰⁹ Yvan Lamonde, *La modernité au Québec*, vol. 2 (Montréal: Fides, 2016), 21–22.

was instrumental in producing exhibitions like *Dreams* (1966) and *Seeds of the Spacefields* (1969), poetic and fictional reinterpretations of the photographic image.¹¹⁰ The influx of images at the same moment from assignments by photographers across the country also changed the texture and tone of the SPD's image bank. Instead of showcasing a few "civil servants with a camera," the Division was now acquiring a rich variety of points of view. Capitalizing on the aesthetic power of the photograph was also a fact at other institutions, but it helped the Division to interpret its mandate to interpret Canada to Canadians by fostering the photographic community upon which it depended. Intermedial, multi-support photographic work was not only useful in extending the reach of the Division (exhibitions stimulating interest for books, books showcasing movies off screen, and so on), but it also reflected an agnostic stance with regard to artistic medium in line with Canada's official discourse of multiculturalism as peaceful cohabitation.

In a Cold War context, the Division was searching for ways of expressing a message of national unity through photography as a silent language, a site where cultural tensions could be resolved.¹¹¹ The individual trajectories of photographers like Grégoire show how apparently opposed artistic trends (e.g., Pop Art and Minor White's spiritually inflected abstract images) can be resolved in a given artistic practice: through a *bricolage* recombining voraciously consumed ideas and techniques. For an institution that had spent most of its energies visually defining Canada for Expo 67, harmony was a political statement, and supporting the spiritual world of the arts above the messy politics of the nation was expediently useful. Discussions between art and politics were the province of documentary photographers, who had a stake in defining reality: Grégoire recalled endless, bitter discussions between photographers on the relationship of documentary work to Quebec nationalism.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Langford, *Contemporary Canadian Photography*, 12; Payne, *The Official Picture*, 47–48.

¹¹¹ Martha Langford, "Calm, Cool, and Collected: Canadian Multiculturalism (Domestic Globalism) through a Cold War Lens," *Visual Studies* 30, no. 2 (2015): 166.

¹¹² Normand Grégoire, interview by Michel Hardy-Vallée, 9 September 2022.

In the 1980s, the market for slide shows dropped dramatically after the arrival of video, but so did the market for competing ideas of the nation following the negative answer to the 1980 referendum, stopping the Quebec independence movement in its tracks. A former student of Grégoire's recalled how photography was then being taught in schools as a self-contained medium, independent of the moving or projected image that had defined the start of his teacher's career.¹¹³ Meanwhile, many of the engaged documentary photographers of the 1970s, such as Michel Campeau, transitioned to the personal themes they had sidestepped during the previous decade, now addressing memory, alienation, or love and loss in mixed-media works.¹¹⁴ The centre of gravity of intermediality had shifted away from the institutions and the collectives to the individuals. When Montreal became a multimedia capital again in the 1990s, attracting investments in computer games and new media, another referendum on Quebec independence was shaking the national consensus.

Political analysis does not exhaust the meanings of *Série 4*, *Earth Visions*, or *Open Passport*. The slide show for *Open Passport* may be tabulated in the ledger of multiculturalism, which could explain Max's lack of interest. It is also worth remembering as a collaboration in which Judith Eglington saved his back. Even as pawns in a war game, these works exist as manifestations of culture that teeter on the edge of durability. Like the other cases examined here, the *Série 4* portfolio has never been reprinted, which makes the digital scanning and restoration of the movie version even more remarkable. All these works are now defined by their preserved states, in decreasing order of ease of access: digital movie, book, exhibition prints. Their significance resides in the possibility of their belonging to a new public, which is conditional to their preservation and complicated by the fluctuating importance of intermedial work on multiple supports. To preserve and transmit these photobooks, one must also preserve the constellation that accompanies them.

¹¹³ Lucien Lisabelle, interview by Michel Hardy-Vallée, 12 August 2022.

¹¹⁴ Epitomized in Michel Campeau, *Les tremblements du cœur* (Montreal: Les Éditions Saint-Martin, 1988).

Photobooks occupy an anomalous disciplinary position as they are currently studied chiefly outside disciplines directly concerned with books. Despite claims to being a kind of pictorial text, photobooks have not followed comics and graphic novels into literature departments. This may be for historical reasons, but can also be explained by the limited success in academia of conceptual frameworks such as semiotics or semiology that purport to unify the study of text and image. Photobooks are pictorial books requiring scholars untrained in bibliographic or editorial theory to repurpose tools developed outside of their art-historical turf. This interdisciplinary knot can be further compounded by the intermedial aspect of photobooks such as those produced by the SPD. To republish them in scholarly critical editions would entail the development of new and original methodological tools that are simultaneously indebted to bibliography, literary and textual criticism, art history, and media and film studies. A comprehensive survey of photobooks in Canada, should such a project ever be undertaken, would be a very productive test case for a methodological framework that is both interdisciplinary and intermedial, and could provide rich new insights derived from the protean pervasiveness of photography. Photosensitive silver halides in a gelatin emulsion have functioned simultaneously as a printmaking medium, as the substrate of slides and motion pictures, and as the underlying technology enabling the printing of books and magazines containing texts and images. Only the pixel has proved a more flexible media technology, and its own pervasiveness has done much to push aside that of photosensitive imaging materials. Photobooks conjoin key aspects of book history with new problems; as such, art historians are actively in need of new colleagues to work with them in investigating the transmission of the image on the page.

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