

Impact case study (REF3)

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| Institution: Ulster University | | |
| Unit of Assessment: Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory (32) | | |
| Title of case study: The Photobook: Transforming social, cultural and educational engagement with photography | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013 - 2019 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): | Role(s) (e.g. job title): | Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: |
| Martin Parr Ken Grant | Professor of Photography Lecturer in Photography | 2013 - present 2013 - present |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - 2020 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N | | |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Photobook research has been an integral part of Ulster University's artistic research since the mid-2000s. Parr has galvanised Ulster's research environment around a thriving academic culture on photobook practice, as a Visiting Professor (2008 - 2013) before his only Cat A contract in HEI, with Ulster (2013). He has defined and expanded the understanding, appreciation and momentum of the photobook and its centrality in photographic culture.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Impact on understanding, learning and participation: Significantly expanding the canon of knowledge within photography curricula and the industry internationally, influencing students and practitioners through historical scholarship, exhibitions or symposia. 12. Impact on creativity, culture, and society: The significant growth of cultural knowledge, through the Tate's acquisition of 12,000 photobooks (2017) of Parr's photobook collection, positioning Tate as a world leading institution in the representation of Photobooks and recognising the value of this genre in cultural life, providing new research resources. 13. Impact on creativity, culture, and society: With the establishment of the Martin Parr Foundation (MPF), providing dedicated activities, events and opportunities for photobook practice and practitioners across the UK and Ireland. 14. Impacts on commerce and the economy: As a catalyst for, contributing to, and leading on cultural regeneration initiatives, engaging communities, and increasing tourism, generating GBP5,000,000 in the Wirral, and providing sustained cultural initiatives in the Sandwell district of the West Midlands, leading to improved societal wellbeing. | | |
| <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The photobook is considered by Parr as the 'supreme platform', to disseminate their work to mass audiences. Ulster's thriving photobook academic culture continues to gain international recognition. Seawright's <i>Volunteer</i> (2014) listed as a Photo-eye best book of 2014, Gallagher's <i>The Second Shift</i> (2019) recognised by <i>The Guardian</i> as among the best photobooks of 2019 and similarly Grant's <i>Benny Profane</i> (2019) in the respected American Suburb X resource. In Parr (<i>Photobook: A History, Volume II</i>, 2006) he identified the important historical reference points of both Seawright and Wylie's research. This case study focuses on the recent influential work of Parr and Grant. Parr's research has expanded the photobook's importance internationally. <i>The Photobook: A History, Vol. III</i> (R1, 2014) significantly builds on earlier volumes to broaden Parr's historical enquiry and provide an assessment of the emergence of a global photobook culture and market. Parr's lifelong enquiry has consolidated since joining Ulster both as a seminal academic text (R1) and research database (R5). These influence new directions in a now thriving photobook culture and market. R1 is recognised as "a renaissance in photobook practice" and such contributions are formally recognised internationally (A1, A2). It proposes themes that collate propaganda books, diaristic work, self-published works and industrial commissioned photobooks.</p> | | |

In so doing, it plots a shift from the photobook as a transparent vehicle for information to a more experimental form through which to explore materiality and visual narrative. This research became a catalyst and template for several geographically specific studies. *The Chinese Photobook* (R2, 2015), a collaboration between Aperture Books (USA), Chinese photo-historians and institutions, further enriched the field with dissemination through several exhibitions (2015 - 2016) in Europe, the USA and China, to great acclaim. *The Chinese Photobook* uncovered an entirely new history: an essential addition to the key geographical photobook studies. Parr and Grant have been convenors and presenters at international symposia around the photobook, including Photobook Bristol (2014, 2016) and Kassel Fotobook festival (2015). In Belfast (2016), the emerging history of the Irish photobook (R6) was foregrounded in a conference that brought international focus to the photobook in Ireland. New research, conducted by Seawright, with Parr as advisor while Visiting Professor (2008 - 2013) and PhD Researcher Dr. Jose Neves (2012-2017), saw the acquisition of over 200 titles to Ulster's unique Irish Photobook Collection, housed in Ulster's new library as a special collection for research. This compliments the MPF collection of 274 books relating to Ireland and Irish photographers/artists with associated catalogues and zines.

Over the last decade, research themes have expanded to consider the photobook as a tool for cultural enrichment. Parr's leadership, with sustained engagement while at Ulster from 2013 - 2019 benefited the West Midlands (R3), with the photobook now contributing to significant impact and cultural legacy. In Bristol, institutions worked with Parr to foreground the printed form as a key driver to engagement. Parr contributed to a project in New Brighton, in which Grant used photobooks that had taken the region as its context. Alongside Grant, Parr, Tom Wood and curator Tracy Marshall, the work of regional photographers consolidated an exhibition and events programme that explored the relationship between the photographers, the photobooks, those depicted, and their legacy and interpretation amongst the regional community (R4). In 2017, Parr's Foundation opened in Bristol, dedicated primarily to British and Irish photography but acquiring increasing numbers of worldwide photobooks, including duplicate copies of many acquired by the Tate. The photobook has already become a noted research resource, with unique photobook dummies, maquettes and rare editions, including seminal works, made accessible by an evolving dedicated digital research database (R5). Under the direction of Parr, the Foundation team worked with software developers to devise the database's architecture and navigation system to enable the grouping of visual artefacts in complex search associations which will facilitate researchers accessing materials. Since this system implementation (2017), they have iterated their archival process to populate this unique interconnected research database (R5). Both collections have consolidated Parr's research around the photobook. Working closely with his Ulster colleagues, the Foundation affirms the depth of research achieved and the continued activities towards its meaningful dissemination. 152 photobooks and book dummies in the collection are by Ulster staff including Doherty (4), Gallagher (1), Grant (8) Morris-Cafiero (1), Parr (115), Seawright (9) and Wylie (14).

3. References to the research Outputs can be provided by Ulster University on request.

- R1. Parr, M. & Badger, B. (2014) *The Photobook: A History, Vol. III*. London: Phaidon Press. **(Multi-component output: 1 Authored book, 5 invited public talks (2014 and 2020))**
- R2. Parr, M., Zheng, G., Lum, R.D., Lundgren, R., Tung S.H., Badger B., & Lundgren, W. (2015) *The Chinese Photobook: From the 1900s to the Present*. New York: Aperture **(Multi-component output: 1 Authored book, 4 Exhibitions)**
- R3. Parr, M. (2014). *Black Country Stories*, Dewi Lewis Publishing
- R4. Grant, K., Wood, T., Parr, M., & Marshall, T. (Curator) (2018) *New Brighton Revisited*. Exhibition, Northern Narratives. Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool, UK. **Award A1**
- R5. Parr, M., Smith, J., Little, L., Blease, I., Hyams, J. & Davies, C. (2017) *Martin Parr Foundation Collection Database, Data set/Database*, Martin Parr Foundation Library
- R6. Grant, K. (2016). *Photography, Ireland and the Photobook*, Belfast, United Kingdom

Awards

- A1. Grant, K. (2019) Ambassador of Wirral Award (for significant contribution to the culture of the Wirral region), Wirral Borough Council
- A2. Parr, M. (2017) Sony World Photography Awards, Outstanding Contribution to Photography

A3. Parr, M. (2016) Royal Academy Bronze Acorn Award presented for his Contribution to the Arts, Nominated by Grayson Perry

4. Details of the impact

I1: Impacts on understanding, learning and participation.

Photographic bookmaking is now embedded in photography curricula, sitting within many undergraduate and postgraduate courses as an integral practice for in photography education. In this respect Parr's *The Photobook: A History* (R1) has influenced a **"progression and both cultural and commercial tendencies that have led to the Photobook now sitting at the heart of Photography today"** (C1). Along with the Chinese Photobook (R2), this research has compelled changes in curricula internationally (C1). For example: the University of Hartford's (USA) Photography MFA study programme now foregrounds a photobook module in its schedule; Photo Pedagogy national educational network (PhotoPedagogy, 2018) profiles Parr specifically in its photobook section (post 16 lesson plan); whilst across Europe the integration of research into the production and potential of the photobook is embedded in undergraduate courses. A Professor of Photography at UCA (Farnham, UK) describes this research as **"unparalleled reference points for Photography students and researchers alike"** (C1), outlining the impact on the Photobook History series on study at her own institution and those she collaborates with internationally. In Tate Talks (2016) featured in PhotoPedagogy (2018), the Tate Director outlines the transformative impact of photobooks for the sector **"we see them in festivals, we see them popping up in art fairs, we have even photobook fairs, we have photobook symposia, we have also collectors specialised in photobooks"** crediting Parr and Badger specifically and later referring to Parr as **"incredibly instrumental to raise, to bring to our attention what the photobook can do"** for the museum sector, describing photobooks as **"a very important and new way to engage many different audiences"** (C2). Examples of how Parr and Grant have continued to lead such photobook expansions reaching diverse audiences, through international symposia, such as *Photobook Bristol* (2014) and *Micamera Milan* (2020) have enabled them to propel wider engagement with the medium. The emerging history of the Irish photobook was foregrounded at a symposium in Belfast (2016) and unlocked a funded PhD scholarship at Ulster (GBP70,000) which supported a doctoral student to successfully progress research into the topic.

I2: Impacts on creativity, culture, and society: Tate Collection.

Parr's interest in developing new knowledge around lesser recognised photobook culture led to a study exclusively dedicated to Chinese photographic books. In collaboration with several western and Chinese scholars, Parr edited the survey *The Chinese Photobook: from the 1900s to the present* (R2). The investigation served as the basis for exhibitions containing materials from Parr's extensive collection of Chinese photobooks, which was presented in France, China, USA and the UK. The exhibition, with an accompanying publication, has facilitated an increased understanding of Chinese photobook culture and its preservation internationally. These contributions **"significantly expand the influence and acknowledgement of tendencies that most people involved in photography would have been previously unaware of"** (C1). R1 and R2 positioned Parr's research intentions as reported in the Financial Times (2014): **"Eventually I want it to go into a public collection, to be looked after and be used as a research tool. That's the whole point really. There is no particularly good photographic book collection in the public domain in the UK"**. The acquisition of 12,000 photobooks from the MPF Collection in 2017, now developed as a database (R5) into the Tate's collection allowed the institution to inaugurate and enhance an interpretation of practice based on photographically illustrated books. The move also confirmed the gallery as **"an institutional world leader in the representation of photobooks"** (C3, C4). The acquisition of Parr's collection by the Tate was the catalyst for new exhibitions and interpretive strategies at the institution. Exhibitions including *50 years, 50 Books* at Rencontres D'Arles (France) in 2019 brought the research to international audiences, and elements from the collection are now on permanent display and regularly integrated into major new exhibitions to offer new contexts and stimuli. A Tate curator recognises the research as **"...a contribution to the development and historicization of the photobook as a medium that cannot be overstated"** (C4). They go on to state **"The foundational importance of this acquisition was reflected in the level of support the proposal drew across many committees at Tate including Tate"**

Americas Foundation, Tate Members, and...” six other named geographic acquisition committees (C4). The Trustee Director of the Art Fund stated **“It’s a major acquisition which we think will help underpin Tate’s growing status as a centre for the study and enjoyment of world photography”** (C5). A Tate Curator has acknowledged the geographical diversity of the collection and how it enabled Tate to exhibit for the first time several non-Western photographic practices in its galleries, including work developed by Iranian, Japanese, Latin American and African American photographers (C4). The Tate’s Director goes on to say **“we will be able to preserve this invaluable resource for generations to come and use it to tell new stories about photography, art history and photography’s role in recording the culture and politics of its time.”** (C5). Publicly available through Tate’s Reading Room in London, the collection has already travelled to other countries, becoming the basis of an important exhibition to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Rencontres d’Arles photographic festival in France (2019) (C6) contributing to the festival’s multidisciplinary vision of photography and showing both Parr’s influence and the importance of the photobook worldwide among international audiences. Much of the collections are duplicated in the MPF Database (R4).

I3: Impact on creativity, culture, and society: Martin Parr Foundation.

The acquisition of Parr’s photobook collection by the Tate helped advance the establishment of the Martin Parr Foundation in Bristol in 2017, which includes a gallery, temperature-controlled storage, a library and a studio/office (C7). It authors new exhibitions with a focus on British and Irish Photography with a membership base of approximately 400 members, generating approximately **GBP45,000** annually (C7) and has **generated employment for 4 full time and 3 part time staff**. It has supported emerging practitioners hosting free lecture platforms for them (C7) and through bursaries (most recently to support photographers of ethnic minorities) which curator and bursary panel member Bindi Vora (Autograph) acknowledged were awarded to artists responding to the importance of community (C7). The Foundation hosts forums for practitioners, not least towards the promotion of women in photography. It also initiates collaborations and public research events (C7). Symposia have foregrounded the photobook while providing new research on key aspects of modern British and Irish photography and photobook publishing since the 1970s. With an extensive collection of photobooks within a new database (R4), the Foundation has hosted exhibitions, a photobook festival (2019) and other public events built around both internationally recognised practitioners and collaborative and community-based initiatives. The Foundation continues to host international speakers who each cite the photobook as central to their practice and convenes public talks dedicated to key moments in photobook production, including the 1970s (Bristol, 2017) and 1980s (Bristol, 2019). These new insights include interviews with Parr, under the title ‘Sofa Sessions’ (14 to date) and are recorded and both available for viewing at the Foundation as part of the growing research database and distributed internationally through publicly accessible streaming platforms. The Foundation provide 5 exhibitions annually, with a total of 13 to date (C7). The Martin Parr Foundation collection, described by a Professor of Photography as a **“repository for an internationally leading collection of Photobooks”** (C1), its events and symposia are described as **“a valuable environment for the research and wider understanding of the role the Photobook in the culture of Photography... which have up until now been disparate, uncollected and difficult to access.”** (C1). As it continues to grow, the collection can now be accessed by international practitioners via a bespoke digital database (R5).

I4: Impacts on commerce and the economy.

Parr has led sustained collaborations with several organisations in the UK who have worked for the cultural enhancement of their regions. In 2014, he produced a photobook and newspaper to disseminate a 4-year community-based project documenting the social and cultural life in the borough of Sandwell, addressing the industrial decline of the area and the recent revitalisation of the region brought by immigrant groups. Working in collaboration with *MultiStory*, the photobook *Black Country Stories* (R5) became the central cultural artefact of the project along with a single-issue magazine (750 copies) titled *Black Country Women* (2014). Parr was a key exhibitor and consultant for Blast, a festival led by MultiStory that was **awarded GBP417,000 Arts Council and Sandwell Council support (2017)**. The publications **boosted the public accessibility, with approximately 147,000 visitors** (C8). This led to the creation of permanent local and cultural

portable archives that document and preserve the culture, history and social diversity of those communities. Parr has continued to develop these cultural artefacts as research outcomes. In 2016, he was commissioned by the Hepworth Museum, Wakefield, producing 1,000 copies of a photo-based newspaper as a tool to enhance the public reach of a research project about rhubarb production in the region. These publications, in contrast to the finite nature of exhibitions, remain as portable cultural archives that preserve the outcome of research in accessible and inclusive ways, of note attracting **“non-art going audiences” (C8)**. Collectively the research and activities have **“had positive impact on commerce, increased cultural investment and the economy in the region” (C8)**. New Brighton Revisited (R3) re-examined seminal photobooks by Wood, Parr and Grant to create an exhibition that engaged the community with published representations of their past, visited by approximately **10,000 people** in the summer of 2018. In partnership with Wirral Council, it was a key event in its Year of Culture initiative that, across its year of activities, **generated more than GBP5,000,000 for the local economy (C10)**. Grant’s leading contributions to the Wirral region were recognised as significant (A3), and the exhibition noted photobooks made in the region by Parr and others as a starting point (C9). The exhibition, supported by the Arts Council and Wirral Borough of Culture, engaged the local community with what visitors called **“a great social history of a seaside resort” (C10)** produced by Parr, Wood and Grant as both a stimulus to cultural engagement and a primer to a series of public events important to those in the region. This connected with the community across a wide age group, with **“94% of visitors rated their overall satisfaction with the exhibition as ‘good’ or ‘very good’, which demonstrated to Wirral Council the positive contribution that the exhibition made both to the local area and to the New Brighton visitor experience”**. Visitors commented that **“the exhibition ‘brought back memories, the smell of the place, the felling of the rough surface under my feet over the pool” (C10)**. Parr and the Foundation continue to contribute to key initiatives that extend knowledge and expand access to the medium. As a founding partner in a new photography festival in Bristol, both Parr and the Foundation were key in securing **GBP90,000 of Arts Council funding in 2019**, in ongoing city-wide exhibitions and events through 2021. A symposium on ‘inclusivity and diversity’ which the Parr Foundation will host alongside a Photobook Fair is the latest in a series of collaborations that most recently saw Parr collaborate with the Arnolfini / St. Paul’s Carnival (2019) and commercial sponsors (Wex and Epson) to make and freely distribute photography-based newspapers and hold an exhibition that attracted 15,000 visitors.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1. Professor of Photography UCA testimonial corroborates this impact further.
- C2. Transcript from the Tate Talks (2016) featured in Lesson 16 of Photopedagogy.com
- C3. Tate Trustees report affirms the importance of the acquisition of the Parr collection. [‘Tate Annual Report 2017/2018’](#) London: Tate Galleries, 2018.
- C4. Tate Assistant Curator’s testimonial outlining the significance of the collection and its value to the public and research community.
- C5. British Journal of Photography interview with the Tate Director, outlining the importance of Parr’s photobook research.
- C6. Arles, Les Rencontres d’. 50 Years, 50 Books – Masterworks from the Library of Martin Parr’. Rencontres Arles, 2019.
- C7. Report of the Trustees and the unaudited Financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2019 for the Martin Parr Foundation
- C8. Director of Multistory testimonial outlining qualitative and quantitative data evidencing the regional impact to society, economically and culturally.
- C9. British Journal of Photography interview (12 July 2018) about ‘New Brighton Revisited’.
- C10. The Testimonial from Director of Culture, Wirral Borough Council, corroborates the significant impact to society, the cultural reach and the economic benefits unlocked as a result of this research.