PHOTOGRAPHIC INQUIRY AS ARTISTIC EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH: AN INVESTIGATION THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL PROCESSES OF PHOTOBOOK CREATION

By

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ABSTRACT

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This arts-based educational research dissertation is grounded in my emergent practices of photography and understandings about its material medium of photobook through visual reading and small book making. With the four chapters and one separate and accompanying handmade photobook titled *Missing Mountain*, I seek to trace, sort out, articulate, and make sense of my own experiential processes of engaging with photography as a photographer-in-becoming, a very beginning photobook maker, and as a humanities-oriented educational researcher. In the first chapter, I present photographic inquiry as an arts-based methodology by drawing related important literature to conceptualize how photography could be an aesthetic inquiry process in relation to actuality/reality and its specific medium of photobook as another way of affective telling/presentation. In the second chapter, given inspirations from John Dewey's ideas on art and experience and Elliot Eisner's ideas on what and how art teaches, I describe my experiential processes of photo-taking, photobook making, and changing modes of photographic practices in my everyday life over one and a half years as an arts-based educational research. In the third chapter, inspired by Michel Foucault and Lynn Fendler's sense of ethics as work around the self, I examine in four elaborated themes how this whole photographic inquiry project is also process of creating a subject as work of art. My fourth and last chapter is an elaborated and detailed discussion and examination on what and how practices of arriving at my final photobook *Missing Mountain* has taught me in terms of learning to attend instead of to intend, as well as a poetic and esthetic mode of experiencing the surrounding everyday life.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my father, mother, and my grandma(阿婆).

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This has been an aesthetic and inquiry journey I never imagined I would experience along the way when I just set foot in this doctoral program six years ago. I came to this program with a background in rationalist educational theories, and now I finish it with an arts-based educational research engaging with personal emergent photographic practices and aesthetic understandings. Some new aesthetic living and inquiry possibilities seem to open to me because of this challenging yet surprising and delightful journey. At this transitioning point towards an unknown career in the near future, I want to thank important people without whom I could not carry my way through.

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CHAPTER 1 Conceptualizing Photographic Inquiry as Artistic Research

A methodology of photographic inquiry has emerged out of my practicing and becoming a photographer as an educational doctoral student over the past one and a half years. From August 2017 to my current time of writing in Spring 2019, I have been regularly concentrating on practicing photography, experiencing and trying to make sense of how such long-term self-embedded and self-living practices of photography have been influencing my understanding of inquiry and the role of visual arts within it. It could be understood as an inquiry into the everyday aesthetic experiences through the photographic visual approach, which has been simultaneously becoming a pedagogical process of myself. This chapter presents some experiential and conceptual introduction of my journey so far, as a way of introducing photographic inquiry and conceptualization of photographic inquiry as a methodology for artistic educational research.

A Departure from Photovoice Methodology

It should be noted that photography is a big umbrella term potentially signifying a large spectrum of professional and everyday visual practices. For clarity in this research, I refer primarily to documentary photography, which, on its appearance, underscores its function and purpose of adding credible visibility in representing reality in images/photographs (e.g., photojournalism or news photography) and can be regarded as parallel to commercial photography that aims for profit. Later with some introductory readings on documentary traced in its broadest sense, it would become clearer how documentary photography enacted through certain approaches moves towards an intuitive, performative, and self-exploratory fine art genre and is no longer wearing the label of documentary photography specifically.

It is helpful to look at how photography has already been taken up in educational research to help making sense of the photographic approach emerging from my own living practices. One important photography-involved research approach, which I mainly use for purposes of contrast,

has been photovoice, a visual qualitative methodology that emerged in social science research broadly. However, my orientation towards photography is different from photovoice. By briefly articulating what photovoice is and does, I hope to pave the way for introducing my different uptake and framing of photography in my project, which illustrates my aesthetic and artistic orientation.

Graphic and visual data have recently become more widely used in social science research. Adding to conventional qualitative methods mostly conducted and presented in the medium and format of words/texts (e.g., interviews, transcriptions, standard journal paper, etc.), some social science researchers have been exploring the power of photography as a visual medium of representing experiences and communicating research results (e.g., exhibitions). This approach has been called photovoice. Specifically, not used as a general qualitative methodology, photovoice has been clearly defined as a form of participatory action research (Amanda O. Latz, 2017; Wang & Burris, 1997). In photovoice, participants are given cameras to document their community lives, the produced photographs are used as visual records and elicitations for further discussions around local problems, and all the photographs along with narrating texts about them are generated and treated as research data to be further analyzed. And for displaying research results, in addition to conventional journal articles heavily relying on written word format, with a belief in the more intensive touching effects of photographs, researchers and their participants create public photography exhibitions aiming for related stakeholders (e.g., local community members and policy-makers) and broader public audience to achieve critical consciousness raising so as to bring possible social change.

Overall, photovoice methodology on one hand shares an orientation with the influential documentary photography tradition in terms of the explicit critical and reformist orientation of documenting and revealing problems and sufferings (e.g. crimes, wars, famine, pollutions) in human societies. On the other hand, the photography component and its functional framing in photovoice

has mostly been instrumental in terms of adding methodological advantage for investigating, generating, representing, engaging with and displaying participants' voices (in the representational or truth-seeking sense) when compared to the usual word-only medium and format of social science research.

Such kind of uptake of photography as a transparent, revealing, and representational medium in social science studies could be understood in words from the educational photovoice scholar Amanda Latz:

> Creating aesthetically pleasing, artful, or precise photographs is not the point of photovoice. The point is to make space for participants to express themselves on their own terms, and what that looks like is up to the participants. This should be made clear. (Amanda O. Latz, 2017, p. 63)

This quotation reinforces the instrumental uptake and conceptualization of photography in critical participatory research while characteristically prioritizing the gesture of participants voicing their own lived experiences through taking, discussing and displaying photographs. The quote presents the distinction between making aesthetic artful photographs and the photovoice photographs. That is because, after all, participants in photovoice projects are not framed to become good photographers for the purpose of producing quality or aesthetically pleasing photographs from a photographic professional standpoint (but this does not mean they are prohibited from doing so, rather, such pursuit might be encouraged in photovoice projects). While I highly admire the power of photovoice research in terms of its unconventional research exhibition format and critical socio-culturally oriented intentionalities, I am curious about other questions that photovoice methodologies do not address: How could photography be conceptualized and enacted in educational research so that it is neither merely instrumental nor merely socially critically oriented

from the very beginning? Is aesthetic and artful photography only of secondary (and even peripheral) value for educational inquiry?

In this chapter, I provide some answers through immersive ongoing practices as a photographer-in-becoming situated in my everyday life of living, working, and studying as an international doctoral student driven by a personal "documentary impulse" (Franklin, 2016). Along with inspirations from critical humanities writings on photography, the flourishing arts field of photobook making and photobook publications, and the field of arts-based educational research (ABER), a methodology of photographic inquiry has emerged, been prompted and tried out in my practices. Photographic inquiry could be understood as a methodology born out of my ongoing journey as a growing photographer and a humanities-oriented educational researcher, one specific mode of being/living and one specific methodological configuration which photographic practices and the affected aesthetic experiences have brought me into. Photographic inquiry has not only produced photographs and writings about photography, photographic inquiry has also educated me as a person, and shaped me into a particular kind of thinker.

How to write out my photographic inquiry methodology when it is not in the very first place conceptualized, planned, and enacted within social science research paradigm such as auto-ethnography in particular? As an artistic and humanities-oriented project, the methodological chapter of Maureen Michael's (2015) dissertation is helpful to me to think through my own methodological conceptualization and process. In her research *Precarious Practices: Artists, Work and Knowing-in-practice*, Michael modelled her articulation of a visually based methodology that she called "integrated imagework," through which she presented her analyses of the material practices of a group of artists she investigated. One big thing I have learned from her methodological writing is to articulate visual medium as a legitimate and creative medium for analysis, which in my own case, is to articulate photographic work—photobook in particular—as a medium for experiential

composition and presentation that is visually-based and materially grounded. While Michael presented her line-tracing image book as presentation of analyses on materiality and knowing-in-practice of her artist-participants, I present my artifact, the photobook *Missing Mountain* as a direct aesthetic art product showcasing one small aesthetic and experiential composition (not conceptual analysis) with photographic language on the material grounds of engaging with my surrounding life environment with camera and photographs. In a sense, I hope my photobook could stand alone as an art piece (i.e. being communicable to an audience without a scholarly context) as well as being a validating illustration of photographic inquiry methodology. Yet I also clearly know that I have just arrived at a beginner's stage of making photographs and photobook through this dissertation project and my art work is most probably at the same beginner stage of refinement as well.

My conceptualization of photographic inquiry includes two major aspects. First, I investigate how photography could be conceptualized and enacted as a form of aesthetic creation and a medium of constitutive "half-language" (Berger & Mohr, 1982) in relation to reality and meaning. It is an aspect revolving around photographic images and their specific material presenting format called photobook. Second, photographic practices have enabled me to experience and understand photography as a form of arts practice, which could be parallel and analogous to other forms of artistic inquiry approaches (e.g., novel, drama, painting, comics, poetry) already explored and conceptualized in educational research for decades (Barone & Eisner, 2006, 2012; Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2013, 2018; Leavy, 2015; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2009).

Photography as Visual and Creative Treatment/Constitution of Actuality

> Some take photographs to express themselves creatively, some to record their view of the world, some to change our perceptions of the world, some simply to pay the mortgage. Photographs can function as historical documents, as political propaganda, as pornography,

as repositories for personal memories, as works of art, as fact, fiction, metaphor, poetry. (Parr & Badger, 2004, p. 6)

As Martin Parr and Gerry Badger say in the quotation, people have been engaging with photography for multiple reasons and the photographic works exemplify multiple qualities, potentialities, and for different practical or aesthetic functions. By drawing on literature from the field of photography, I discuss how the broad and quite inclusive definition of documentary photography as "art of the real" and "a creative treatment of actuality" sets the basis for understanding photographic practices to be a mode of inquiry apart from the mere representational and critical reformist conceptualizations of photographs.

In this chapter, I first discuss how my photographic inquiry explores the basic idea of photography as an alternative interpretive and constitutive aesthetic medium to engage with everyday experiences. Then I move to introduce the difference between single photographs, and a collection of photographs. In my version of photographic inquiry, sequenced photographs serve as the basic unit of meaning making, in contrast with single and separate photographs. The curation of single photos into a collection is an artistic approach analogous to analysis that combines single bits of "data" into meaningful expressions. So, my photographic inquiry takes the shape of a special form of photobook, a flourishing and trendy artist/photographer practice for engaging educationally with new experiential compositions.

Photography as Interpretive and Creative Treatment of Everyday Life

In *The Documentary Impulse*, taking a passionate and empathetic insider perspective as a photographer himself, Stuart Franklin (2016) provides a comprehensive depiction of the long and fast evolving story of documentary photography. Instead of defining documentary photography per se, Franklin highlights the definition of documentary given by Scottish filmmaker John Grierson as "a creative treatment of actuality" (p. 6). Combining the different historical contexts of photographic

techniques and sociopolitical status quo and along with a wide range of actual influential works by documentary photographers, Franklin stresses the rich, complex and conflicting characteristics of photographic practices under the label of documentary photography, including its complicated relationship to perceived reality. For example, there are respective chapters introducing how documentary photography has become hugely influential medium for recording and communicating the traces of colonial world, for making visible human suffering like war, famine, and civil conflicts out of photographers' impulse to bear witness to human histories and raise critical social consciousness towards reforms. Yet, according to Franklin, in addition to that, there has been the space for some documentary photographers to (re)interpret everyday life and create potential visual poetry from a more personal and subjective position. It is through such varied exemplar demonstrations that Franklin underscores how the rich and complicate practice of documentary photography shows and validates its inherent character of indecisive ambiguities. And it is when the "creative treatment" and "actuality" are put together: "two species of 'fact' exist side by side: one is coolly objective and the other is fraught, diverse and emotive; one figurative, the other abstract; one prosaic, the other poetic; one factual, the other romantic"(Franklin, 2016, p. 6).

How can we further tackle the seemingly alluring effects of documentary photography likewise? Franklin (2016) discusses how photographic rhetoric--like color, lighting, focus, contrast, and framing—can effectively constitute the interpretations of subjects, and much further, its inherent ambiguity as an expressive capacity towards actuality that lends it long lasting alluring power for photographers and viewers. These changing and varied views of photography occur in parallel to other poststructural trends in the social sciences that have challenged objectivity and naïve realism. In Franklin's discussion, documentary photography has become inclusive and diversified when compared with its mere positivistic ties towards social reality out there to be revealed and reported, and an indecisive space of ambiguity in experiential (e.g., visual, psychological, affective,

subjective, viewer-responsive, etc.) meaning-making has been undergoing a complicated evolution in photographers' experimental works. Instead of treating such expressive ambiguity of photographic language as an epistemological/methodological flaw for representational or systematic/standard meaning-making, Franklin comments on how photographers since the last century—most profoundly from surrealist photography in 1950s—have been carving out spaces of photography as a unique artful and poetic visual language: "In fact, for some photographers the language itself, its inherent formalism, became the documentary impulse as much, if not more, than the subject of the photograph" (p. 151).

In *The Pleasures of Good Photographs*, Badger (2010) provides a helpful context within the professional field of photography to put forward photography's special relationship with actuality or the real, where controversies around the artistic status quo of photography in comparison with other traditional visual arts like painting have undergone for decades. He weaves his larger-picture narration around highlighting his argument on photography as a unique medium in treating actuality/reality and in bringing about impactful viewer experiences at many possible levels to the degree that it deserves to be labeled as a distinctive art. What he differentiates in nuance within the controversies is that despite his advocacy for photography as art, he neither follows the way some photography scholars and practitioners treat photography as a mere transparent/objective language medium and thus make it almost merely technically oriented (e.g., development of digital cameras), nor falls into the camp when photography is taken up as a unique medium/language in and of itself regardless of its content (i.e., subject matter, reality, the world) and has thus become self-referential monologue (in a sense of blocking its wide public readership besides its professional/institutional field) heavily loaded with theories (e.g., Badger mentions making photography about photography as self-referential).

Badger provides a nuanced and contextualized argument on photography as a distinctive art in the sense of its special balance between form (photographic treatment) and content (reality/subject matter), which I cannot summarize or paraphrase any better than his own words:

> Photography's relationship with reality, so simple, so profound, yet so damnably slippery, is unique. The pleasures of good photographs derive principally from an encompassing of that relationship within the image. Photography, more than any other art, is the "art of the real." The trade name of one of the new generation of color films, Fuji's Reala, attests to that fact, with perhaps a hint of irony as we enter an age when, courtesy of computer wizardry, we can generate a thoroughly "unreal," yet convincing "reality" at the touch of a button.
>
> But even the unreal makes more of a point by referring to the real. Nonetheless, the good photograph, that is, the "true" photograph (for the photo-hybrid is here to say, and we may need a new nomenclature for it) embodies an understanding of the medium's link with reality, evincing a respect for it on the part of the photographer. This understanding may be an intellectual one, or it may be intuitive, wholly unconscious. (Badger, 2014, p. 16)

In a sense, Badger shares a stance with Franklin on photography as creative treatment of reality. However, it should be noted that by heavily citing and paraphrasing these two-professional photographer-writers, I neither intend nor need to take sides in their articulated controversy on photography's status as art among the range of established art forms (mediums) in a comparison mindset. Rather, I focus on their conceptualizations of documentary photography as broad, elusive, and diversified "as creative treatment [and constitution as I would add] of actuality" (Franklin, 2016, p. 9), and explores in greater depth how it could break away from mere transparent positivistic and subjective interpretivist presumptions about the visually and experientially expressive capacity of photography. Such investigation could better ground an understanding and reframing of photography to be a rich mode of practices that combines visual craftsmanship with serious

educational inquiry (i.e. ways of knowing and expressive presentation). Given Franklin and Badger's broad conceptualizations of documentary photography, reflecting about my own enacted photographic approach through this project, I describe my photographic practices as intuitive and self-exploratory that is closer to a fine art approach, particularly when I try to engage with performative elements of making photographs and to tackle understandings of experience from personal practice-based processes.

Then how could photography be conceptualized as a mode of arts-based creative inquiry? I further address the question in the following sections when I move to introduce John Berger's idea on ambiguity (discontinuity) as the inherent characteristic of single photographs regarding meaning-making, his heuristic proposal on how such inherent ambiguity of photograph could be creatively taken up by sequencing or curating groups of photographs to be another way of telling. Further, I introduce how contemporary photographers and photobook authors to carve out a not-fully defined expressive space for aesthetic and experiential sensing, feeling, meaning-making, and knowing. It is with such articulation I attempt to ground an argument for photographic inquiry as artistic educational research.

Curating Groups of Photographs as Another Way of Telling: A John Berger Perspective

I mentioned earlier that Franklin (2016) has discussed in detail how photographers have been employing rhetorical tools (e.g., color, lighting, focus, framing) to interpret subjects and portray emotive messages. Such a depiction of photographic visual rhetoric is generally talking about visual composition on the basic unit of single or separate photographs. While it is undeniably true that there has been quite an amount of great single photographs, what Franklin has explored in *The Documentary Impulse* does not tell much about the rhetorical characteristics and potentiality of sequenced or curated group of photographs—which still differs from direct compiled body of separate photos—for communicating and effecting a message, an idea, or a story. This idea of

photographic narrative through sequenced or curated groups of photographs is directly from John Berger, and it is a significant aspect of conceptualizing photographic inquiry.

In the collaborative photo-text book he created with another photographer Jean Mohr, John Berger provided important writings on "appearances" (of objects and the world) and the experience of seeing them (or quotations of them) through photographs as an ontological issue. Yet such significant issue had been treated violently and explored poorly under a prevalent taken-for-granted positivistic assumption about photographs (i.e. visibility guarantees objective facts) and the experience of seeing appearances has been diminished—under Cartesian dualistic split of subject/object—into "a method of reason that render appearances 'dense and opaque, requiring dissection"'(Berger & Mohr, 1982, p. 115). Against such influential sense-making of photographic visual reading and understanding, in the specific essay *Appearances* included in the book, Berger articulated thesis around an inherent ambiguity of meaning embodied by any photograph due to its nature of being abruptly a discontinuous slice of reality/appearances, which has been frozen with no physical nor continuous connection to its past and future, with no continuity of event that enables any reader/viewer to get meaning quickly and firmly.

Yet why we people could still be moved by strange photograph other than our own—when our experience of being moved immediately implies and validates certain expressiveness of that photograph? Berger thus elicits the statement of worldly appearances being certain special expressive (thus communicative) language, when photographs are regarded as quotations of them accordingly, when the length of quotation itself influences different degrees of expressiveness, which could also be read another way to understand how photograph embodies ambiguity(discontinuity). Proposing to deal with such photographic ambiguity as a condition for perceiving and meaning-making with photography instead of treating and labeling photographs to be merely deceptive and propaganda

medium, Berger seemed to naturally move to the possibility of photographic series and photographic narrative:

> Photographs quote from appearances. The taking-out of the quotation produces a discontinuity, which is reflected in the ambiguity of a photograph's meaning. All photographed events are ambiguous, except to those personal relational relation to event is such that their own lives supply the missing continuity. (Berger & Mohr, 1982, p. 128)

Given such almost ontological feature of photograph's ambiguity/discontinuity, Berger further pushed his thought by speculating how and to what extent such ambiguity could be taken seriously in an enabling way and to be treated as the very (pre)condition of meaning-making, which contrasts with those political and commercial treatments of photographs when they are bounded with texts to direct at very fixed meaning:

> If photographs quote from appearance and if expressiveness is achieved by what we have termed the long quotation, then the possibility suggests itself of composing with numerous quotations, of communicating not with single photographs but with groups or sequences. But how should these sequences be constructed? Can one think in terms of a truly photographic narrative form? (Berger & Mohr, 1982, p. 279)

In other words, each photograph is not destined to be (at least not merely) representational of some aspect or corner of reality. Instead, one photograph could be treated as a word or paragraph within a larger essay or chapter. The words or paragraphs can be detached from the moment of time, space, technique, and some perspectival subjectivity of a photographer with its contained ambiguity. The photograph could thus gain some expressive power of standing on its own, and some power of being receptive and triggering in a certain range of different possible meanings when put in sequential relations (as into an essay) with other photographs (photographic vocabularies).

The way Berger has framed relationships between and among separate photographs is helpful illustrative language other contemporary photographers are still using to navigate through their different photographic narrative creations. I reviewed a photobook class note I took about when relationships among images were elaborated: 1) photo sequence is a work regarding a series of photos put together in such a particular order to give meaning to the whole; 2) the attraction of photographic imagery ambiguity in one way manifests in such a fact that, when the same photo is placed aside with (or before/after) different ones, the details of this photo are made explicit in different ways or orientations. That is, photographs can change meaning in different contexts; 3) the photobook course teacher Lara Shipley has mentioned many times that image viewers crave for patterns and connections when they flip from one photo/page to the next photo/page.

Another helpful articulation of image relationship comes from the experienced photographer and photobook maker Ian Teh's interview:

> Ben Smith: What about photographic grammar? That's another thing I heard you talk about. Can you explain more what you mean by that, how you think about that?
>
> Ian Teh: One of the things I do with whatever I do is that I tried to make comparisons to other disciplines, and I tried to find similarities in other disciplines, be writing, music, etc. And it's, it's almost, what I'm really interested in when I look at other accomplished artists is their process. And what I'm struck by is how similar that process is. It doesn't really matter what form it takes. But that journey, there are so many similarities along the way, that it's informative how it gives you a sense whether you are doing the right thing or not. So, when I talked about, let's say photographic grammar, I think I mean in a sense of like photographic language. One of the reasons why I brought that up is perhaps the idea of comparing photography to language, the sense that in language, you have quite strict rules as to how you order a sentence, you know, grammatically. And how you choose the structure

> of that sentence, you can go from something that's really quite direct and simple to something that's rather poetic. When I refer to photographic grammar is that the nice thing about photography is that it's more fluid. There are no real rules because rules are created by the maker partially. There may be general rules in the sense that everyone has similar reference points within the context of photography, and so they know when they look at certain, you know, if you look at an image that's maybe not shot in a diagonal, you know that's certain language points all recognize within the context of photography. But I think the beauty of photography is that the structures aren't naturally fixed, so there's more room for you to kind of create your own language with that, to play with that. (Smith, 2015)

Upon what photographer Teh articulated as photographic grammar, I loosely define and use a similar expression termed visual grammar, to describe the constructed characteristics of a concrete photobook around its main images. Those constructed characteristics may be rules or patterns for placing separate photographs in relationship to one another on paper pages to effect different feelings and thoughts.

As one important answer to Berger's questions about a form specific for photographic narrative that would also be able to showcase the construction of such visual narrative, I now move to an introduction of the photobook medium,[1] a form Berger himself seemed not to focus on very much in his critical writings about photography. Still there might be people wondering why it needs to be the photobook as the particular medium for constructing and presenting curated photographs? Why not think about the presentational form of a photography exhibition? I mainly have two considerations, the same reasons among many explaining why this format of photographic work has

[1] I could not clearly remember when I arrived at the realm of photobooks in 2017. One anecdote is that after I practiced daily iPhone photo-taking for a few months and had experienced and pondered the idea of visual writing in terms of framing and editing each single photograph, I logically thought of the possibility of visual writing on another level that would treat separate photographs as basic compositional vocabularies. This anecdotal thought guided me to the library to search for possible books that met my logical thinking.

also become popular and used by more and more photographers. That is because making and self-publishing a photobook is cheaper and easier to access for a photographer artist to showcase and circulate his/her projects in a longer lifespan compared to exhibitions (Colberg, 2017). Given my own goal of creating a photographic work during the dissertation, a form of photobook seems to be manageable and still challenging enough in terms of exercising handcrafts and aesthetic judgements for composition. In the future, I hope to have the opportunity to organize an exhibition as well.

The Medium of Photobook

To elaborate my current understanding of this particular material form and expressive medium of photobook, I first present what Martin Parr and Gerry Badger has defined and argued for photobook as specific art medium through their introductory text for the influential three-volume monographs *The Photobook: A History* (2004; 2006; 2014). In this huge series, they have sorted out historical records of photobooks made since the time when camera was first invented and published across several geographic continents in terms the varied rich functions, themes, concepts, material and aesthetic designs they have showcased and embodied. I then move to present two different genres of visual photobook compositions in terms of their experiential and aesthetic focuses I have come to terms with based on my own exposure to photobook reading. By briefly summarizing my close reading of two specific published photobooks in each genre, I hope to offer concrete examples of how I understand visual grammar for making photobooks, a compositional term I use for describing details of my own enacted methods in the following chapter. Such an articulation of visual grammar is part of how I have come to grasp and am still learning to grasp another way of telling, specifically and further conceptualized as a wide range of expressive possibilities for photographic narratives presented in different photobook designs.

The medium of photobook, as its name directly informs, is basically "a book—with or without text—where the work's primary message is carried by photographs" (Parr & Badger, 2004,

p. 6). Martin Parr and Gerry Badger argue this medium of photographic work has been an important yet largely ignored historical tradition of photographic work creations and publications that has primarily been presenting a wide range of rich documentary, literary, material, and expressive experimentations by artists around the world since the time of camera invention (Parr and Badger, 2004). Yet, what makes photobooks an expressive medium, and what are some existing ideas talking about the qualities of good photobooks? By citing Ralph Prins, Parr and Badger underscores the basic functional pattern of the photobook medium as how all visual movements and events are curated and placed to bring about a more complete or holistic experiential and aesthetic understanding:

> A photobook is an autonomous art form, comparable with a piece of sculpture, a play or a film. The photographs lose their own photographic character as things 'in themselves' and become parts, translated into printing ink, of a dramatic event called a book. (Ralph Prins, cited by Parr & Badger, 2004, p. 7)

Badger also outlines four basic aspects of photobook design useful for making and evaluating qualities of a photobook:

> First of all, it should have good photos in it. Secondly, those photos should be about something, they should be telling a story. Thirdly, then, bookmaking elements like good design, good typography, relationship of pictures on the page, they all come to it into it as well. And fourthly, all those elements should come together so this book is kind of a world of its own. (Phaidon, 2014)

Adding to a brief understanding of visual grammar, I have had careful experiences of reading two genres of photobooks with an emphasis on understanding and dissecting their visual grammars. I describe them below as examples of how varied and different a photobook design could bring

about. I acknowledge that my following characterization of the two photobook genres may turn out to be very limiting given the larger context of photobook visual reading.

The Poetic and Literary Photobook Genre

For the poetic and literary genre of photobooks, the purpose seems to focus on bringing art to life. For example, the analogous literary point of view about photographic book has been discussed by several contemporary photographers who have been making and publishing photographic books. For example, during an interview, Magnum photographer Alec Soth commented: "Anyone can take a great picture, but to construct this thing in which the pictures speak to each other is not easy" (Soth, Dyer, & Center, 2010, p. 141). I also hear about similar and echoing ideas from two other photographers: Ian Teh (2015) once shared how he treated his photo sequencing in constructing a photobook as making important judgements about how much or how little visual/emotive message to present or to hide in arranging photo to photo so as to attract and sustain readers' interest, curiosity, and to infect a sensible narrative (Smith 2015). Gregory Halpern (2016) also mentioned in an interview how he has been intrigued by and transitioned to the photographic/visual unexhausted literary space in creating a photobook after his initial photojournalist project (Weitzman, 2016). And I have been deeply impressed by Halpern's idea of creating a photobook in such a literary way that the final work itself opens up freer space for reader interpretation. This is explicitly articulated by Michael Ashkin from the position as a visual author as well: "At what point does the connection between them [photographs] become too didactic or too nonsensical? This really is a question of poetics" (Fulford & Halpern, 2014, p. 109).

Visual grammar of a photobook example: *Ametsuchi* (Kawauchi, 2013). *Ametsuchi* is the photobook created by the renowned Japanese photographer Rinko Kawauchi, whose works inspire me a lot. I presented this close-reading during the photobook course before, which turned out to be

very informing. Such close reading and talking around visual grammar of this photobook has helped me to better think through the kind of visual grammar I want to try out in my own photobook.

- A close reading of her visual grammar according to my first-hand experience with the material book itself:
    - Start from certain actual material location/event, then transform it into the metaphorical, imaginative and mystical (through some repetitive visual threads/motifs placed in different ways throughout the book)
    - Photos indicating the burning location from different angles, distances, in different seasons, with different impacting intensities
    - The more religious scenes: temple atmosphere, scenes seem to be around Walls of Jerusalem
    - The mystical alive red lines in dark backgrounds (skies), a thread of photos that are relevantly abstract. Notice Kawauchi's balancing arrangement between abstract photos and very concrete photos.
    - Great photo sequencing that tightly draws reader interest and attention to experience varied affective intensities: burning/growing, loud/quiet, longing/fulfilling, intensively impacting/Peacefully impacting.
    - A visually vivid and changing tempo done through arrangements of big photos on paper, small photos, no-margin cross-page photos.

The Sociocultural Oriented Inquiry Photobook Genre

I encountered this photobook genre until very recently. It has caught up my attention since this Chinese photographer-artist Xinhao Cheng finished projects with strong anthropological inquiry questions and extensive field works, yet his inquiry products are mostly visually based (e.g.

photographs, videos). His published photobook of this genre makes me wonder to what extent, a photobook could be tried out as a creative form of academic writing and presentation.

Visual grammar of a photobook example: *Time from Different Sources: Images from Ciman Village*[2] (Cheng, 2017), by an emerging Chinese young artist. My attempt of a close-reading about its visual grammar:

- The book includes four explicit chapters (the photographer calls them "movements") and a coding illustration of the four movements in the end to present his "polyphonic narrative" as the conceptual approach enacted in the selecting, sequencing, and arrangement of photographs in exploring times of a local village during modernization.
- The book design feels like a huge complicated layered notebook of an anthropologist.
- For all the photographs inside the book, it seems the only texts are brief title descriptions of each photograph or arranged mini photographic threads.
- The book opens with a brief statement of issue in concern and a Foucauldian approach for empirical inquiry.

The Issue of Subjectivity

In this section, I address one potential and necessary challenge inherent in my individually based photographic and empirical educational processes by framing and answering the question: how could a photography project in and throughout individually situated living experiences be

[2] I have not got a chance to read the actual printed version of this photobook yet, since it is not available through any of our library or inter-library loan services yet. But I have got a close glimpse of the book through two primary resources. One resource is a page-flipping video of the entire photobook provided by a British art book store online: https://vimeo.com/221744790. I could tell some parts of the book structure and page design with certain engagement for knowing by watching (and pausing) this video to see some details. Another resource is from the artist own website, where he has posted all the interior image and text content: http://chengxinhao.me/1/-time-from-different-sources/.

accountable beyond self-indulgence or mere subjective, romanticized and sentimental educational expression?

I anticipate naming and criticism of such from two threads of intellectual discourses. On one hand, in the world of documentary photography, as illustrated by Franklin (2016), the genre of surrealism photography, one that has attended to the everyday, has received criticism from Walter Benjamin with a Marxist orientation:

> Benjamin was more critical on the subject. Taking a Marxist position, he linked Surrealism to solipsism and political quietism, disengaged from the struggles of socialism: 'the reader, the thinker, the loiterer, the flaneur, are types of illuminati, just as much as the opium eater, the dreamer, the ecstatic. And more profane. Not to mention that most terrible drug-ourselves-which we take in the solitude.' The unfettered space/time capsule free from the demands of customary adulthood - a form of extended childhood, living in an eternal present (no past, no future)-offered a growing band of early street photographers the freedom they carved, especially those without pressing financial burdens. (Franklin, 2016, p. 155)

Similar to Benjamin's Marxist critique of surrealism of street photographers, critiques are made by educational scholars and artistic researchers (see for one most recent example: Springgay & Truman, 2018) on the single walker and the corresponding metaphoric and methodological figure *flaneur* as a socioeconomically privileged, gendered, and individualistic (egoistic and narcissistic) subject. Confronted with such potential critiques towards certain orientation of documentary photography (e.g., nor objectivist representational or socially and critically conscious-raising) and a mode of an individualized photographic inquiry process, I respond by attempting to discuss the embedded taken-for-granted assumptions of subjectivity and subject-object relationship in both critiques, and how I approach the subjectivity issue of my own project with a more (critical) materialist philosophy orientation primarily informed by John Dewey and Michel Foucault.

Both critiques seem to assume a fixed subject with fixed subjectivity that could not be changed but only revealed through a mere process of monologue-like expression. This assumption of subjectivity almost feels like either putting the ready-made and pre-formed subject gradually or altogether into the expressive container of photography. This fixed assumption of subjectivity also prioritizes the exploration or revealing of some hidden subjectivity as the primary purpose of enacting photographic inquiry project and making photographic art work. As a direct contrast, on one hand, my lived experiences with this current photographic inquiry project explicitly refuse to presume or fit into a fixed or static concept of subject and its limiting dichotomous relationship to objects. This is made possible by adopting John Dewey's philosophy of experience that focuses on how the subject is in interactional flow with objects (or the surrounding world) through doing/acting and undergoing/perceiving. Upon this basic conceptualization of experience, art in almost any form, including photography, is understood to emphasize the material and qualitative aspects of such interactions and communications between subject and object along with its particular attention to forms and expressiveness of objects and art works. Within this ontological orientation of Deweyan pragmatism, one helpful differentiation between an egoistic subjectivity and an experiential subjectivity is well and clearly articulated by art educator and artistic researcher Stephen Levine (2013). Levine made such a differentiation along with the relationality between subjectivity and art-making, when he tackled the issue of improvisation in art performance and art making. Pointing out the problems with focusing on intentionality of expression, Levine concisely and insightful termed it as the difference between expressive author/artist versus artwork that is expressive:

> The main problem in improvisation is that the performers can get in their own way – their subjectivity becomes the content of the work. This is also a challenge in art-based research. The exclusive identification of art as self-expression is a misunderstanding that has haunted

> the field of expressive arts, which uses creativity and art-making in helping relationships, since its inception – the very word 'expressive' misleading students and practitioners into thinking that to make art, one need only express one's own feelings. Sincerity becomes the criterion of excellence, and criticism is impossible.
>
> Indeed, we understand who we are through what we do and what we make. Poiesis implies that we shape ourselves by shaping the world. We do not express a pre-existing and substantial self but form the self continuously through our poietic acts, a process that James Hillman calls 'Soul-making'.
>
> Actually, we should say that the work is expressive, not the self; the artwork has qualities that affect us. It is not the person that touches us in the work of art but the expressive qualities that the work embodies. (Levine, 2013, p. 122)

I greatly appreciate Levine's remarks on the problematic subjectivist mode of art-making and practicing arts-based inquiry, a mode of art making and knowing I may easily fall into without explicit thoughts and reflections on ontological assumptions about experience and subject-object relationship. Yet on another equally important note, I should say that, in my enacted photographic practices, I did not explicitly read such a Deweyan philosophy of experience and art to constantly guide and monitor my mode(s) of experiencing; rather, the very materiality of photographic practices I have been engaging with has taught me and informed me such enriched lessons. I further elaborate my conceptual and educative reflections around issues of what effects of subjectivity are made through photographic practices in the following chapters.

On the other hand, in addition to framing my photographic inquiry process from a Deweyan philosophy of experience and subject-object relationality, in the chapter on creating a subject as work of art, I turn to the very enacted site (e.g., sensing, feeling, perceiving, thinking) of subjectivity itself with a Foucauldian critical ethical lens of subject (Fendler, 2010; Foucault, 1997). Using a

Foucauldian ethical lens, the mode of sensing, feeling, thinking, and experiencing made available in my experiences through photographic inquiry is examined with reference to my old habitual way to work around the self in practice of knowing and writing. Details of such examinations and articulations are presented in the latter chapter tackling creating of a subject as work of art, which echoes the idea of "soul-making" from Levine's above quote as well.

CHAPTER 2 My Methodological Experience with Photographic Inquiry as Arts-Based Educational Research

In this chapter, I articulate why and how my enacted photographic practicing process could be considered as a form of arts-based educational research. My practices include a range of photography-based activities along with printed and handmade visual products.

For illustrating my rationale of positioning my photographic inquiry methodology as arts-based educational research, I discuss how my experiential process and practice-based realizations of photographic making art fit or resonate with important benchmarks made by important arts-based educational researchers such as Elliot Eisner and Stephanie Springgay. In the last part of the chapter, I lay out details of my enacted visual and material methods of photographic practices, and articulate how they were carried out with attention and reflection on specific photographic, aesthetic, and material inquiries on putting parts (photos) into a whole (a photobook) with an effort to represent, present, and effect in potential audience (including myself) some experiential qualities.

Photographic Inquiry as Aesthetic, Practice-base and Educative Living Inquiry

This section considers photographic practices in relation to a/r/tography and what can engagement with arts teach.

Photographic Inquiry as Practice-Based Living Inquiry

> A basic principle of practice-based research is that not only is practice embedded in the research process, but research questions arise from the process of practice, the answers to which are directed toward enlightening and enhancing practice. (Candy & Edmonds, 2017)
>
> In a/r/tography, visual, written, and performative processes are enacted as a living practice of art making, researching, and teaching…… They are not merely activities added to one's life but also the processes by which one's life is lived…… In a/r/tography, this living inquiry is an aesthetic encounter, where the process of meaning making and being are

inextricably connected to awareness and understanding of art. (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 902)

I relate my enacted photographic inquiry methodology to a/r/tography, an arts-based educational research orientation that concerns how different modes of living come together in an inquirer or scholar's life (see, e.g., Springgay et al., 2005, 2009), and how it is primarily a practice-based inquiry process, which attends to emergent inquiry questions and concerns (Candy & Edmonds, 2017).

As the term a/r/tography generally signifies, it has been conceptualized as an inclusive and generative arts-based research paradigm that underscores how modes of being (and becoming) **a**rtist, **r**esearcher, and **t**eacher could be lived through together in one's journey of living, experiencing, and meaning-making (knowing). Resonating in my own individual case, incorporating cameras, walking in local landscapes, and making photographic work since September 2017 has reshaped my way of living in substantial and significant manner: what could it mean for being, experiencing, and sense-making as a photographer/researcher when I spend substantial time wandering, observing, appreciating, and making photographs in the surrounding landscape, and what mode of teaching I have experienced and tested out towards myself along this journey? This and the following chapters address such questions in greater details. By aligning my methodological experience with practice-based a/r/tography, I gain certain discursive space to put emergent new experienced and experiencing roles of photographer, inquirer and teacher altogether instead of having to treat them in mechanical and isolated ways if wearing a different methodological hat centering on either researcher or teacher. As this methodology underscores, it attends to "the *in-between* where meanings reside in the simultaneous use of language, images, materials, situations, space and time" (Irwin & Springgay, 2009, p. xix). My unexpected dissertation journey revolving around photography so far does resonate a lot with such description of living in multiple and closely

related roles which often permeate with each other as well. Incorporating cameras and photographic practices in life as a way of living and meaning-making, such photographic and visually-laden practice itself has become an important part of my everyday life: it has been the most intensive and stretched-out aesthetic experiential learning journey I have been living through so far. Photographic visual archives and occasional written notes have been generated along the process. Artifacts have been selected and edited into several visual products for the purpose of trying out my own visual narrative work. I even tried out a little bit with bodily performances in front of camera for self-portraits that are needed for my final photobook composition. And the process of composing and creating photobook has brought me new conceptual and art issue to further explore (a few specific examples are noted in later chapters).

Photographic Art That Teaches

This section is inspired by the seven educative aspects of arts enunciated by Elliot Eisner (2002). Looking through what I have come to experience and understand through exercising and making photographic works, I have matched my own resonating and validating examples with each aspect of Eisner's ideas. I summarize below Eisner's idea of each aspect that art could teach, and then provide my own experience as an illustrative example of Eisner's aspect. Most of my experiential examples are only briefly summarized in this section, and they are elaborated in greater detail in the chapter on educative reflection of photographic practices and the chapter on creating a subject as a work of art.

1. Attention to relationships. According to Eisner, one thing art teaches is sensibility and craft of paying attention to our relationships with materials to achieve aesthetic and expressive product as a whole: "composing, the putting together of elements, can be resolved in the arts only by paying attention not to literal matters, not to matters of reference or to logic, but to qualitative matters"(Eisner, 2002, p. 75). Two of my own experiential cases resonate with this statement. First,

the introduced understanding about curated group of photographs (i.e., sequenced photographs) as another way of telling from the prior methodology chapter closely illustrates how photographic art can teach attention to two different kinds of relationships: relationships among images, and relationships among photographer/author concept and printed material qualities in composing a final photobook. Second, in the educative reflection chapter, I discuss the challenge of shifting from intention to attention. I learned to pay attention to qualitative matter of photographs for purposes of creating sensible photobook instead of trying to figure out the photographer's intention or logic of sequencing. I experienced the shift of learning "to attend instead of to intend" while navigating through my own photographic practices.

2. Flexible purposing. Eisner recognizes the uncertain and non-linear aspect of experience made possible and taken in great significance by engaging with artistic process: "Flexible purposing pertains to the improvisational side of intelligence as it is employed in the arts. The intelligence I speak of is the ability to shift direction, even to redefine one's aims when better options emerge in the course of one's work. In many ways this willingness to treat ends flexibly and temporality flies in the face of our dominant view of rationality"(Eisner, 2002, pp. 77–78).

Again, there are two particular aspects of my own photographic practices that resonate with this idea. First, I have experienced playful visual and material improvisations in making some photographs, when short-term or long-term ideas/concepts for specific photographic project emerge. For example, I presented the improvisational photographs I made in the proposal artifact document, and I also made a small accordion book *Arriving at a Pond* which is introduced in later methods section. I narrate in detail this improvisational aspect of my experiential process in the educative reflection chapter. Second, my coming to terms with my final dreamlike photobook project illustrates flexible purposing over the past one and half years: in my dissertation proposal stage, I came to terms with potential photo series *Pondering Light* since I had been engaging with

photographing light of varied occasions; later in regular photographic walks in local university farm sites, I had an emergent realization on how walking on local Michigan plain had effected in me a metaphorical leap into a quest of my spiritual longing with photography termed *Empty Mountain*; the metaphor and its English language naming as Empty Mountain had stayed with me for months and fixed in my mind certain logic to put it into a photo series. It was when Lynn Fendler heard about my voice memo of this emergent landscape experience and re-termed it as *Missing Mountain* that this experiential terming itself was revealed in a more precise, effective, and redirecting light. This new term has pulled me out of some emotional fixation and informed my new and slightly different direction for taking some specific photographs and for different conceptual clues of sequencing the photo series accordingly.

3. Using materials as a medium. What makes materials different from a medium, or how are materials transformed into a medium? Eisner provides a helpful answer, which perfectly resonates with my prior discussion on photobook (visual photographs and printed paper materials) as creative medium:

> Materials *become* media when they mediate. What do they mediate? They mediate the aims and choices the individual makes. In this sense, to convert a material into a medium is an achievement. A material becomes a medium when it conveys what the artist or student intended or discovered and chose to leave. (Eisner, 2002, p. 80)

As experiential evidence, I illustrate my aims and choices made in practicing small handmade photobooks and the final photobook *Missing Mountain* in the methods section in particular.

4. Shaping form to create expressive content. This is a very direct aspect of doing arts in terms of the product: creating artwork that directly speaks to and communicates with audience certain idea or experience. As an illustration, I have made the final photobook *Missing Mountain*.

Rather than position this photobook as mere evidence of photographic inquiry, I have made it with an attempt and hope that it could stand on its own as an enjoyable artwork.

5. The exercise of imagination. "One important feature of the arts is that they provide not only permission but also encouragement to use one's imagination as a source of content" (Eisner, 2002, p. 82). And it is true for my own photographic experiences: during my amateur stage of practicing photography alone, I exercised visual and narrative imagination when I was brought to move from taking mere observational photographs to making composed photographs through playful improvisational exercises; after I enrolled in the photobook class, the instructor Lara continued to push us to experiment--a term used very often in our photography class.

6. Learning to frame the world from an aesthetic perspective. Eisner discussed two significant aspects on how art helps students to frame the world from an aesthetic perspective. On one hand, engaging with arts is challenging and encourages people to perceive the world in ways beyond merely practical or instrumental ethos, which is an important source of delight. Eisner used the example of seeing in particular: "Our seeing is practical, and practical perception is not usually designed to provide delight in what is seen, to challenge our beliefs, or to generate questions that lead to productive puzzlement. Most of what we do when we see does not have as its primary outcome a new way to view the world. The arts, however, do this with regularity" (Eisner, 2002, p. 84).On the other hand, seeing or experiencing something aesthetically is "more than becoming aware of its qualities. It is a way of being moved, of finding out something about our own capacity to be moved; it is a way of exploring the deepest parts of our interior landscape. In its best moments it is a way of experiencing joy" (Eisner, 2002, p. 84).Both of his points turned out to resonate with my photographic experiences regarding the process of arriving at my photobook *Missing Mountain* through photographic engagement with local landscapes. I further discuss how such processes could be seen from the point of creating richer subjectivity in the focusing thematic chapter.

7. Expression: The ability to transform qualities of experience into speech and text.

As an educational scholar concerned with what arts could offer for mainstream schooling, Eisner also talked about how experience with material qualities through arts are also helpful for cultivating expression through speech and text. "Work in the arts, when it provides students with the challenge of talking about what they have seen, gives them opportunities, permission, and encouragement to use language in a way free from the strictures of literal description. This freedom is a way to liberate their emotions and their imagination" (Eisner, 2002, p. 89).As an illustrative example from my experience, one important thread of noting that I have done through this year-long practicing process is anecdotal texts I wrote with photographs or I wrote after reading some impressive and intriguing photobooks. I have sorted out and examined this thread of word notes through the section on poetic impulse in the reflection chapter and the section articulating image-based learning (e.g. describing how photobooks are challenging and teaching me in words) in the subject chapter. I found that I have learned new terminology and new ways of expressing my own experience-based meaning. Eisner's theorization of arts-based educational experience also provided language for me to come to greater understanding of my own experiences with photography as an educational endeavor.

Enacted Methods of Photographic Inquiry

The specific methods of photographic inquiry have emerged out of my substantive and engaged photography practices from September 2017 until April 2019. There have been several finished and ongoing threads throughout my practices of photographer-in-becoming. After introducing the different threads of practices, I explain the emerged and devised methods that I have approached, enacted, and reflected on with more and more awareness and intentionality while being open to experiential impacts of random impulses, chances, and coincidences within photographic walks, and the nonlinear uncertainty of experiences. The illustrations below are mostly

written in a manner of retrospective reflection while, when practices took place in the past one year, they were not so clearly perceived, defined, conceptualized, monitored, or explicitly planned. Rather, I tried to learn to ride with some experiential flow and to push myself to just go out and take photographs when feeling stuck or trapped and finished such processes with both frustrations and unanticipated excitement.

Threads of Photographic Practices

My photographic inquiry is not a fully self-taught art journey and I am not alone in this journey. I have transitioned from personal mode of practices, to online engagement with a photography app and online communication with the photography editor of the app. Later during spring 2019, I was fortunate to be allowed to enroll a photobook class taught by Lara Shipley, Assistant Professor of Photography from the Department of Art, Art History, and Design at Michigan State University.

In the beginning stage, like any person who identifies and follows certain inner passion and longing—despite frequent hesitations, self-doubts, fears and struggles—I have actively sought out and built up a small online network of learning resources and mentors to meet my learning needs in the process. In chronic facts, until January 2019, I mostly taught myself photography through daily photographic practices, editing and posting photos online to receive reader feedback, chatting with a very few photographer friends I got to know by using the app Onetake, and (re)reading and digging into some inspiring and intriguing (famous) contemporary photobooks and photography artists (e.g. Japanese female photographer Rinko Kawauchi). Then I enrolled in the photobook class in Spring 2019 semester. I feel fortunate to have been allowed and allowed myself to practice photography over one year. During that time, I experienced more of what could be made and become possible when a mode of experiential becoming was almost purely driven by a personal passion along with intentional rejection of merely imitating or internalizing popular photographic technical manuals.

And I also feel fortunate to have enrolled in a professional studio-based photobook course at a point when I have explored self-driven and self-assembled study journey to such degree of repetition and exhaustion that my passion longs for a professional course and platform so as to gain wider and in-depth photographic and aesthetic exercises and artwork critique sessions.

Photographic practices on a daily basis with changing tempo. In the early stages of photographic practices, I took photos with an iPhone camera almost every day. It was the beginning stage when I accepted and ran the risk of starting from no prior professional background in doing photography but doing on my own and learning by doing. Amid the everyday life of teaching, working, and studying as a doctoral student with half-time teaching assistantship, I carefully kept my iPhone charged all day and being taken out conveniently for snapshots out of sudden captured attention or a more prolonged focusing portraiture about some particular object or scenes. First it was like secondary insignificant leisure, placing downward in my established hierarchy of everyday life. Then given the chance of exploring such documentary and aesthetic visual practice as a potential dissertation project, I became more and more committed and devoted. Along with the reader responses and appreciations I had been gradually receiving on the smartphone photography-based application called Onetake, I intentionally assigned an everyday task for myself by posing questions like: Can I just take and edit at least one photo qualified according to whatever judgment I could feel or make at the moment, and post it online it Onetake (and occasionally on Instagram as well)?

With such questions in mind, I more intentionally began grounded photographic practices, grounded in at least two senses. On one hand, I did not seek to produce photos by traveling somewhere else away from my time and place here in East Lansing and Lansing. I wanted to test out the degree to which I could explore mostly through the manner of taking photographs. Actually, in a direct sense, I have been traveling and living in a distant somewhere right from the moment I landed

here in East Lansing and Lansing, to pursue a doctoral degree as an international student from China. From then on, I started iPhone photo-taking in places closest in my daily life (e.g., the few university farm sites on my way to campus, and the two university greenhouses I had been attracted to for some time, the less-than-a-mile walking route from Erickson Hall to the main library along Red Cedar River, the interior space of the university main library, W.J. Beal Botanical Garden right by the main library, etc.). Then I gradually stretched out to more distant sites I was not familiar with and never intentionally walked and explored through photography before, such as the even wider and more open farm sites south in the southern part of the university campus, the neighborhoods and urban areas in city Lansing (yet with much less visiting frequency compared to my visits to the farm sites).

On the other hand, I grounded my initial serious and playful engagement with photographic practices using whatever equipment I had access to (which indeed were limited in their imaging capacities compared with ever newer and more expensive equipment) : (1) an iPhoneSE and a used Olympus E502 digital camera I received as a gift from my advisor; (2) no knowledge of using professional digital image editing software such as Photoshop. I was inspired by one famous photography manifesto that says: it is not what camera you use that matters most for taking good photographs, but your ways of looking at the world. I wanted to test myself in collaborative doings with whatever equipment I possessed to their certain functional extremes of producing good or beautiful photographs by using them all the time and in different spatial and natural lighting conditions. In fact, even the small switch from using iPhoneSE to using the Olympus camera for capturing some light scenes has resulted in exciting new visual qualities and capturing realizations. Even further, such differential experiences with each camera lens (one mobile, one more professional or customized) in terms of testing out their respective capabilities and restraints in photographic captures has actually constituted one important aspect of my photographic

experiences, which lead me to a sharpened sensitivity of different photographs taken with different camera lenses and their constitutive power in shaping certain qualities of the final photographic appearances. This is another example of Eisner's theorization of arts-based education entailing relationships with materials.

When my work and life as a teaching assistant and doctoral student got busier and I could not live up to the commitment of daily practice, along with spending more time reading and engaging with professional photography publications (photobooks and photographer websites in particular), I tried to maintain the practice of going out for photography at least once a week.

Either daily practice or weekly practice, usually with a loose plan in mind, I spent a shorter or longer time looking, moving around, zooming my sight and camera lens in and out to take photos among my usual driving and walking routes in and outside the campus. In the process, I observed how my photographic working tempo had changed between quick snapshots (e.g., done within as short a time as three minutes) out of eye-catching encounters during work transitions and more fully engagement at a particular place and time during flexible morning or afternoon or weekend time (e.g., one, two or more hours). My temporary habits of working, consisting of photo-taking, photo-selection, photo-editing and photo-sequencing, have been slightly and gradually revised as I gained new experiential and aesthetic understandings about what counts as good photos and good photographic body of work. I learned that the time period between photo-taking and photo-selection could matter in significant way. Specifically, a more detached and receptive judgment is better activated after waiting sometime after the initial photo-taking moment. In such daily practices, I also kept notes in my iPhoneSE using the apps of Apple Note and Smartisan Note. I also used a printed notebook as my artist book to jot down notes. Occasionally when I had intensive triggered or aroused feelings and epiphanies while taking photographs in the landscape, I used iPhone Voice to record my thoughts orally. With all such notes and combining my gradual readings about and

exposure to more photobook publications and formats, I see how certain loosely affective theme and expressive inspiration emerged over time. This is another example of Eisner's "learning to frame the world from an aesthetic perspective."

Emergent intensive site-specific practices. During such daily photographic practices, I have gained accumulative experiential observations with a camera at hand, and I become more intentional while reminding and allowing myself to stay open to playful movement and attempts without intentional purposes as a way to let uncertain in and to let myself experience again and again some unexpected photograph due to such photograph play. Accumulative and repetitive photographic practices have also enabled me to better sense some photographic possibility. Therefore, I could enact some intensive site-specific photographic work the moment upon observing and receiving some emergent inspiration from the surroundings. I have one particular unexpected productive case to illustrate this thread of photographic practice.

One day in 2018 September, the beautiful Michigan summer time, I took a walk again to the small pond inside W.J. Beal Botanical Garden. I had walked around this tiny pond and photographed some water surface, the reflection of my hand, and the assembled small scenes of plants leaning over the water surface in morning and noon time mostly. And they were all done with iPhoneSE during July. I wanted to try more, I felt there was something more there, ambiguously and anticipatedly, something more I could play with my own body and whatever materials at hand, and I had not used the digital camera to work in the site yet, so I came back in September, a new teaching and studying semester. This time I came to the place during a daytime of a late afternoon, when the angle of the sunlight sweeping through tall trees and low plants was different from my prior experiences, and walked around the pond, leaning my body towards the water, putting out my hand over the surface or touching it, noticing for the first time the long thin plant leaves situated in the middle of water, experimenting with the camera flashlight addition to the scene etc. Unexpectedly, I

noticed this short period of time when the sunlight swept this pond area partially and presented a changing shiny scene of light and shadows among plants and the water surfaces. I knew something special here, but I didn't feel a photographic completion after the angle of sunlight lowered to the degree of not lightening the scene this time, so I left and went back to the office feeling not fully accomplished. Thanks to the great sunny weather for the following entire week, I came back to the same pond location in a similar late afternoon time to photograph again, and again for several more days. It was intensive site practice due to the fact that I needed to figure out and play as much as possible with my bodily and the surrounding visual elements to join in the undefined and unfolding happenings within that one-hour like short period of sunlight time. At the end of 2018, when I reviewed the digital folder of photographs taken during those several days, I realized how productive and special it was since there were better and special photographs made through the process than my usual daily photographic practices. It almost felt magical for such one-time concentrated and site-specific photographic practice finished with both anticipated and unanticipated scenes and moments. This is an example of Eisner's "learning to frame the world from an aesthetic perspective."

Participation in a photobook class from MSU College of Arts & Letters. After living and practicing as a serious-minded amateur photographer for one year, now in 2019 Spring semester, I got a chance to take a professional photography course (STA475) from the Department of Art, Art History, and Design at Michigan State University. It is a total practice-oriented undergraduate course focusing on the specific medium of photobook. The instructor is a photographer and assistant professor, Lara Shipley. The course is focused on reading and studying contemporary flourishing publications of photobooks and making our own photobook in the end. The whole course is structured in a workshop format when we are exposed to different core phases of photobook making (e.g., editing photographs, printing photographs, sequencing printed

photographs, making dummy book[3], selecting papers, book bindings, etc.). Through several small bookmaking assignments, I am allowed to try and test out each practical and technical aspect of making a photobook. Amid such mini photobook making assignments, we are also required to continue taking and making photographs for our final integral photobook project. All the small photobook assignments and photographs are printed out in the material form of papers and they are all subjected to being read and critiqued by the instructor and classmates.

For me, the important pedagogical component of constantly producing personal work and critiquing each other's work in class has been a very beneficial mode of expansive visual reading and feedback receiving, which is more detailed and well-rounded compared to merely posting and receiving separate photos online. This practice of critique was an example of Eisner's "ability to transform qualities of experience into speech and text."

The Enacted Material and Visual Methods

Embedded in these several threads of photographic practices, I have been using a range of visual methods to record, reflect, ponder, play with experienced observations, thoughts, feelings, techniques, and emergent mini photographic projects. [4]

Walking with a camera outside. Walking outdoors with a camera has been an inherent and indispensable component of my photographic practices. It is through taking photographs in the surrounding environments (e.g. buildings, streets, landscapes) that I get to engage with the material world through bodily movements and visual captures.

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[3] Dummy book, also called mock-up, is an in-process and full-size material model for a final book design, which has been applied in a wide range of artwork and artist book creations. It is the model the artist could revise or play with to work out his/her final presentation in an offline material form compared to a total digital format. For photobook in particular, a mock-up is necessary for photographer to include the physical and constitutive element of flipping pages in working out photograph sequencing.

[4] As I proceed in writing this section, I have the impression that it is actually hard for me to separate or differentiate processes of practices/studying from explicitly articulated/named method enactments throughout my experiences of photographic inquiry. This impression is interesting and to me, which also poses a challenge that I cannot solve at this moment. And I do want to thank Mareen Michael for her modelling a framing of artistic methods in such a way to push my own understanding of my enacted photographic process in terms of methods.

While such outdoor walks with a camera may sound too mundane and trivial to be regarded as an inquiry method, walking has actually been conceptualized and enacted by educational researchers and artists as a rich, creative, productive, and critical methodology. For example, a group of arts-based educational researchers have explored walking as sustaining practices to create aesthetic and spiritual pedagogy of self (Irwin, 2006; Triggs, Irwin, & Leggo, 2014). On one hand, the idea of *flâneur*—a figure of an alone urban idler traced back to French literature in 1900s—has been diversified and redefined by scholars as new and creative inquiry metaphor in terms of knowing and data production (Cutcher & Irwin, 2018). On the other hand, walking alone and walking in groups have been critically and artistically designed, enacted, and examined through conducting walking art projects and thus have been in constant reconceptualization in terms of critical material inquiry approaches and approaches of public pedagogies (Springgay & Truman, 2018).

Inspired by such framing of walking as potential creative methodology, I also count my outdoor walks with a camera as constitutive of a method of inquiry. Through outdoor walks with a camera, not only have I engaged with the raw visual materials to play out and make the initial pools of photographs for further possible photographic work in larger scale (i.e., a photobook), but also have my bodily senses about and with things (e.g., light, trees, body itself, shadow, etc.) been reactivated and rejuvenated, my experiences and understanding of walking-in-landscape extended and transformed.

Online posting and feedback on Onetake. During a significant phase of my photographic project, from September 2017 to December 2018 in particular, online posting via smartphone has been an important practice/method in which I edited photos and exposed them to a wider online audience to receive critical feedback. I have been using the apps Onetake and Instagram, and

Onetake[5] has been the main online platform where I have been posting my own photos (more than 1200 so far), discovering other users/photographers, and (re)organizing my posted photo archive through creating my own tags. For example, I have used tags "photowithwords" to sort out photos I had strong triggered feelings or associative thoughts while and after I edited them, and had thus written short texts (in both Chinese and English) in the posting area of photo description on the app.

It was a total chance and encounter that I ran into the newly published Chinese domestic smartphone app Onetake in September 2017. I got to know it online while trying to find some photo-editing app that would provide better visual and color filters than Instagram (I registered on Instagram in 2013 right after I came to Michigan State University but found myself not satisfied with its color filter aesthetics). During the self-taught and self-exploratory phase of photographic practices, I became more and more obsessed with using the app to edit and post my iPhone and camera photos, almost each every day, with the anxious hope that some and more of my photos could be selected by the unknown and anonymous editor at Onetake. Yet the deeper reason why editing and posting my photographs on Onetake has constituted one important methodological component of my photographer-in-becoming journey is more than that. It was through getting to contact with and occasionally communicating with the app editor on and off this app platform that I had carried out inner conflicting and conversational dialogues around aesthetic and meaning-related questions around my own photographic practices and products, such as figuring out issues and questions like: among so many photos I posted on Onetake, which I considered as possessing

[5] Not like Instagram with its smartphone and web page format, Onetake is only available for smartphone usage at this stage. Here is the link to my Instagram account on web page: dawnlight 2013. I have also been posting photos on Instagram and some of them are the same ones I posed on Onetake. My online engagement with Onetake and Instagram has also become more and more strategic in the process to better support my own felt needs in studying photography in regarding their respective advantages: while I post and share my photos a lot on Onetake knowing they are reviewed by the editor as part of his daily work, I use Instagram to follow photographers I have been intrigued by, and to explore accounts of other world famous photographers (e.g. Magnum photographers) and photography institutions or publishers (e.g. Magnum, Lensculture, Jiazazhi) to get a glimpse of what they are doing and posting.

relevant good aesthetic qualities compared to my raw pools of photographs, why did the app editor select this one and not that one? After I posted and view photos on Onetake for months, I also felt compelled to articulate in my own words what good photography meant to me and why I wanted to pursue the art of it, an example of Eisner's value of expression in arts-based education. I have gained huge appreciative feedback, encouragement, and confidence about my own work via receiving the appreciations and recommendations from Evan. For example, he recommended my Onetake photos twice on his Microblog under his hosting topic "Evan Recommendations"(see the snapshots below); he had also recommended two of my iPhone photos posted on Onetake to be published in a Chinese photography magazine when there was a feature presentation of photographers on Onetake in the issue. These have been some encounters I could hardly experience in a highly developed worldwide platform with more than 800 million users like Instagram.

I became more and more aware that my judgment of quality photos through initial visual editing and selections relied too much on the editor's selections. Also, I had gained a symbolically large group of followers, which had an impact on my motivations and working habits of doing photography, so I began to struggle through my tangled and conflicting feelings of living too much with Onetake. I realized more and more the urge to develop more independent aesthetic sensibilities, criteria for making judgments, and also to expand my visual photographic readings beyond mere online and digital platforms and mediums.

Photo juxtaposition, photo sequencing, and photobook making[6]**.** Earlier I articulated the importance of photographic sequence and the medium of photobook as a visual approach to carving new space of experiencing and meaning-making. Therefore, making such work or projects is

[6] All the photographs presented in the dissertation and in the photobook artifacts do not involve any other people but myself and a few family photos of mine and my parents, except one photo in a later chapter when the back of a stranger without any recognizable face was framed into the photo.

an important method inherent in photographic inquiry. By strategically enrolling in a photobook course from the arts department, I have been able to exercise, try out, be mentored, and extend my photographic sensitivities, aesthetic understandings and crafting skills for making expressive photographic narrative through doing small assignments which all add up to the necessary artistic and practical components of my final photobook making project. In the table below, I summarize the main small projects/assignments designed by the course photographer/bookmaker/instructor Lara Shipley, which I have all done for the purpose of pushing and finishing my own photographic inquiry project. Therefore, I change the term course assignments to material practices to both underscore the material characteristics of photo printing and handcrafting in terms of bookmaking, and to gesture how I actively and purposefully reframe the course assignments into inherent and beneficial components of my own photographic inquiry and artwork making. All the products of those material practices have undergone in-class critiques.

Table 1 Summary of material practices of making small photobooks

Material Practices	**What nuanced photographic qualities are explored and tested out? what photographic grammar have I exercised in this particular material practice?**	**Craft and resources of bookmaking involved in this particular photobook making practice**
Three mini origami books (six pages) on the general theme of memory	• make one mini origami book to present a few photographs with a few short personal memory texts to see whether or how such photo-text may go together. • make the other two mini origami photobooks to exercise photo juxtaposition placed and printed on the entire front and back cover of the big unfolded paper. Then fold this big paper into a small book, figuring out how page-flipping, paper-unfolding and the revealing of the complete images via unfolding pages could all be considered and built into the selection of the two photographs for one book, along with the selected poetic lines to write on each folded page to convey certain holistic idea or aesthetic experience.	• get familiar with available color printing services in the arts department and in the library media center • experience and experiment with different types of color printing paper with different haptic textures practice handcraft of folding and cutting papers, which is good for final photobook project.

Table 1 (cont'd)

One mini photobook titled *Once Upon Light* (ten pages) on the general theme of journey	• exercise and play with photo sequencing in larger scale (10 photos at minimum) for furthering my understanding capacity to create aesthetic visual narrative. In reality, I tried out sequencing 11 photos in three different orders. • pay attention to how certain texture of print paper could also go with the concept of the photo series.	• continue experiencing and experimenting with different textured paper types for color printing, preparing for final photobook project. • exercise handcraft of binding for mini non-folded book format. • learn and practice the professional imagery software Adobe InDesign for designing pages in alignment with book page bindings.
A multi-signature photobook titled *Empty Mountain*	• really learnt the lesson of attending instead of intending when curating photographs after my first attempted dummy book received critical feedback in class. • more substantially experience the different effects between placing photographs in facing pages and placing them one per flipped page. • Sequence more than 30 pages, thinking I would come up with the final photobook ideas through the process.	• start to select and curate the group of photographs for my final photobook • exercise photo sequencing in book dummy • exercise making hard covers and folded book pages through sewing multiple signatures together • learn to use Adobe InDesign to design pages to print out for the final product • reduce to sequencing of 15 pages after in-class critique of the first attempt • sequence product, took it slower and more carefully by giving up putting photographs on facing pages.

Table 1 (cont'd)

An accordion book titled *Arriving at a Pond*[7]	• practice to make folded pages into an accordion-structure book • practice coming to terms with a photobook concept that could be brought out by the structural characteristics of accordion book. It could be regarded as a practice of combining form and substance together in a more organic way. • try to play a little bit more page design element for the purpose of effecting some concept of experiential aesthetic walking.	• continue experiencing the fundamental method of making material dummy book in order to edit and sequence photos in the very first place. And it is a very hands-on process to navigate through aesthetic judgements and narrative considerations, which also well paves the way for later digital printing page design in Adobe InDesign software
One complete final photobook with revised title *Missing Mountain*	• how many photographs are appropriate in terms of balancing between when the whole sequential narrative is expressed to certain completeness and when photographs are too much or repetitive that they make reader bored. • do I design any specific interior page structure such as folded big paper, and for what aesthetic and experiential consideration of the photobook concept? • what possible affective or narrative clue I may use to guide the sequencing of big number of photos? (I anticipate making this photobook out of 35 to 36 photographs) • buy the print paper myself after decision-making. Buy the book cloth that fits the photobook title. Decide the binding type of the book that goes well with paper texture and page thickness. • Decide which type of printing I could afford given the number of five editions of book I need to make by hand and given my limited budget for purchasing all the materials and paying for color printing.	• continue practicing using Adobe InDesign to finish creating print document on the basis of dummy book making and editing process. • get to practice handmaking hardcovers again and again. • get to bring a few book design ideas altogether for the message of this final photobook with the largest volume of photographs I have worked with so far.

To better show how each of the material practice of photographic art-making presented in above table looks like, I present below five illustrative images, each of which is a collage of several

[7] I have uploaded a complete page-flipping video of this small accordion book to better showcase its complete interior design. And this is the YouTube video link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRTK4fbwH0c&feature=youtu.be

iPhone snapshots I took while sequencing photographs, making dummy pages, and of the final small photobook products.

Figure 1 Brief iPhone snapshots of appearances of the three mini origami books I made using the photographs I took.

Figure 2 Brief iPhone snapshots of the ten-page small photobook *Once Upon Light* and the in-progress page sequencing.

Figure 3 Brief iPhone snapshots of photo sequencing, dummy book making, and the final product of my two-signature photobook *Empty Mountain*.

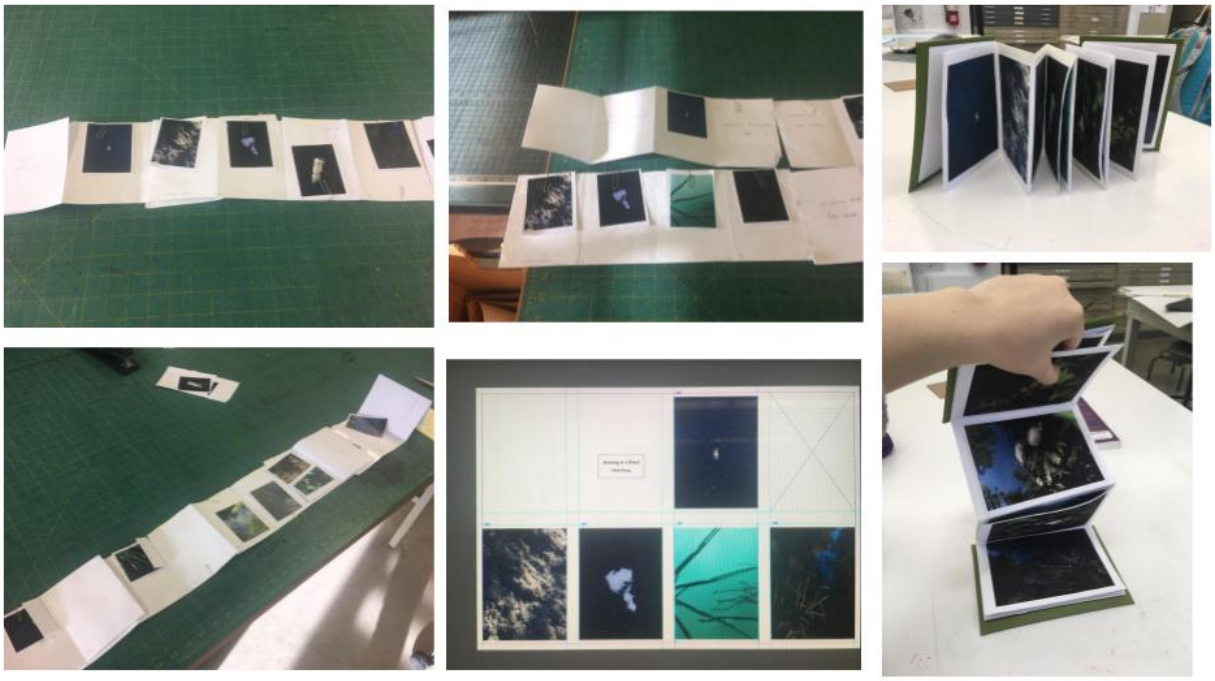

Figure 4 Brief iPhone snapshots of photo sequencing, dummy book making, digital page designing in Adobe InDesign, and the final appearance of the small accordion book *Arriving at A Pond*.

Figure 5 Brief iPhone snapshots of the photo sequencing, dummy book making, and the final appearance of my final photobook *Missing Mountain*.

Notes-taking (writing) along with photographic walks, photo editing and posting.

Note- taking is one necessary and important aspect in my photographic inquiry, which is connected to Eisner's "ability to transform qualities of experience into speech and text." Bit by bit I have been learning to articulate my understandings and experiences in reading and creating photobook, as well as in jotting down my thoughts, questions, attempts of poetic lines and wonders in and triggered by processes of photo-taking and photo-editing. It is important to note that transforming experience into speech and text is **not** the same thing as translating an image into speech and text. I have used both smartphone apps of Apple Note and Smartian Note, I also used two notebooks for recording any emergent thoughts. Such writings have become important records I go back to when I concentrate on writing this dissertation text.

Photographic visual essays presented in different formats. I borrow the term "visual essay" from Maureen Michael when she uses the term "to describe the different forms of visual presentations designed to critically engage with audiences in a variety of dissemination events"

(Michael, 2015, p. 101). While she used both photographs and drawings to analyze and present her research throughout inquiry processes, I used printed and digital arranged photographs (sometimes with texts) to engage with audiences in the academia to share my projects with more specific inquiry framings. Similar to the practice of making small photobooks, creating visual essays in forms other than book format also exercise visual juxtapositions and aesthetic judgement-making accordingly, which, again, is different from my posting separate photographs on Onetake like any ordinary Internet users and photography lovers. I have exercised so far 4 main occasions for visual essay presentation and sharing to different groups of audiences.

1. Exemplar photographic artifacts assembled for the dissertation proposal defense meeting in September 2018. Preparing this artifact document was the first time I tried to sort and sequence my photo archive. I tried to work through some aesthetic understanding about sequencing of my own photographs to figure out what (my) story might be out there (i.e., the mini series titled Pondering Light) and about photo-triggered poetic impulses. Due to the nature of working on this assembled artifact on a Google document, I tried out a process of sorting, pairing, and grouping photographs in a digital format. And it was the first time my curated photographs were exposed to an audience other than Internet users on Instagram and Onetake.

2. A small photographic exhibition-formatted conference presentation. When preparing my paper presentation about defining photographic inquiry besides photovoice in the annual conference of Curriculum Theorizing at Dayton, Ohio in November 2018, I happened to test out the non-digital material format of mini photographic exhibition on the wall of the meeting room. This format was not preconceived or planned, but emerged out of taking into positive consideration of the technical limitation of the conference room: since there was no projector for slideshow, I was pushed to think of an way to present my photographic series Pondering Light, which was an inseparable component of my argument for photographic inquiry besides photovoice methodology.

It turned out to be a quite revealing experience to me since I arrived at this exhibition format out of logical consideration, which turned out to be similar to what other arts-based educational researchers have been doing for sharing their projects.

During the whole session, instead of presenting a short talk with slides, I did nothing but ask the audience to take a look at my mini exhibition of photographs (printed out in a local convenience store in glossy photo paper with limited quality) and texts on the wall. Then I listened to their feedback and answered their questions. This arts-integrated academic presentation and communication experience helped me to experience and figure out the appropriateness and advantage of such photographic visual presentation/exhibition format, which allows for viewer self-paced reading of my work. It also made me experience the difference and great challenge of curating a mini presentation in offline material format.

Figure 6 Brief iPhone snapshots of my preparation and final setup of a visual presentation I did in November 2018 at the Annual Conference of Curriculum Theorizing in Dayton Ohio.

3. Photographic slideshow presented in two courses in teacher education department. On March 12, 2019, I gave a 40-minute sharing session in an undergraduate course called TE430

Introduction to Arts in the Classrooms. I presented the same photographic series as I did for the two-signature photobook, yet in the format of digital slideshow instead, followed by a brief Q&A session. The audience in the class were preservice teachers who did not specialize in arts education. It turned out to be a good occasion for me to test out whether my curated photographic work could move or impress people in some way very directly, a necessary and important phase of most artistic practice. On April 2nd, I got another opportunity to share my photographic work and ideas round photographic inquiry in TE939 Humanities-oriented Research Methods course. With an extended one-hour time, I introduced things I had learned and thought about from photography before showing the slideshow with setup photo-to-photo transitioning effect and speed. According to a few reactions I heard from the audience, this digital photographic slideshow turned out to be effective in arousing certain feeling or experience in them. Such reactions are very encouraging since I finally got some validating affective feedback through my own photographic narrative from an audience outside of the small photographer network I know.

CHAPTER 3 Creating A Subject as Work of Art

This chapter focuses on an examination towards practices of (my) subjectivity throughout the enacted photographic art experiences. Inspired by a Foucauldian concept of subjectivity (Fendler, 2010; Foucault, 1997),I have been pushed and informed by Lynn Fendler to examine and articulate on the grounds of photographic practices answers addressing these basic questions: is there any new mode of sensing, thinking, doing, and even manner of everyday living brought out by photographic practices? How is the mode similar to or different from the mode I used to perform? This chapter is devoted to answer such questions.

What is the Subject?

I have encountered the interpretive or literary language of exteriority and interiority through reading photography-related texts (i.e., mostly texts written by photographers). I gradually came to terms with why this language of exteriority and interiority matters in understanding photography. The understanding came through a few incidental moments in my own photographic practices when some process and result of taking certain photographs of surrounding objects or scenes (i.e., the exterior) without explicit intentional subjective emotions or preconceived purposes have ended up as alternative self-understandings for me (i.e., the interior).

Documentary photography, when very broadly defined as "the art of the real," quite implicitly and firmly came to my understanding in the beginning as the art of capturing some external reality during the time when I began to read photobooks. Unless the photographs were human-body or human/animal portrait related, I usually read photographs as if they were impressions or portraitures of what the photographer found to be aesthetic or valuable objects to document in the scenes and environments; I did not read photographs as if they were expressive of the photographer's subjectivity. Yet sometimes in the preface or postscript the photographer wrote for their photographic work, they often talk about how photography, like some other longstanding

forms of arts (e.g. painting, music, novels) could be a form of art that simultaneously effects emotive or spiritual experiences while the photographer explores the material surroundings or objects. This idea has also been paraphrased as reading or interpreting photographs. How have some photographers talked about the interiority and exteriority of photography, and how do their articulations help me approach photography with new understandings? I try to come to terms with some connective understanding here.

> Photographs have an uncanny way of reflecting the life and interior world of a photographer, sometimes revealing insights--often elliptically or obscurely--of which the photographer is not fully aware at the time. (Webb & Webb, 2014, p. 7)

> The Thing/Desire
>
> .....
>
> A photography is always a double image,
>
> Showing, at first glance, its subject,
>
> But at a second glance --more or less visible,
>
> 'hidden behind it,' so to speak,
>
> the 'reverse angel':
>
> The picture of the photographer
>
> in action.
>
> …..
>
> The camera therefore is an eye
>
> capable of looking forward and backward
>
> at the same time.
>
> Forwards, it does in fact 'shoot a picture,'

backwards, it records a vague shadow,

sort of an x-ray of the photographer's mind,

by looking straight through his (or her) eye

to the bottom of his (or her) soul.

Yes, forwards, a camera sees its subject,

backwards it sees the wish

to capture this particular subject in the first place,

thereby showing simultaneously THE THINGS

and THE DESIRE for them." (Wenders, 2010, pp. 7–9)

The dual concepts of exteriority/interiority and Thing/Desire help me to look at my earlier photographic practices in a different light, similarly to how Jane Hirshfield's essay on outward and inward looking in poetry (elaborated in the following chapter) helps me to think through what and how photographic practices have enriched my self-world relational experiences. In the beginning stage of my regular photographic practices, I just observed and captured a moment or scene that attracted and impressed me, which primarily sounds like an outwardly perceiving and documenting orientation. Yet the Thing/Desire framing helps me to think about how such seemingly outwardly observation, impulsive attraction, and image documentation may also have had an impact in my interior landscape like my heart and my mind. Some photos and photo-making processes I once characterized as therapeutic, particularly the case of making landscape photos of warm houses at night, during winter. It is easy to understand how sometimes I-as-photographer felt something emotional, energizing, and spiritual when walking outside taking photographs, which, however, in no way guarantees that the photographs themselves make myself or other viewers--who are detached from the embodied walking process--feel similar striking or intensive emotional or spiritual moments. On the other hand, as a beginning reader of photographic works myself, I still felt a gap

between what I could feel from other photographers' photographic works and what they write about as the interiority (invisible) present in photographs. It was not until I experienced the unexpected power of photographs I incidentally made with no prior charged emotions or preconceived intentionality that I came to better understand and validate how photographs could be revealing to some corner of my own interiority that I had not previously noticed.

The first experiential and revealing moment of this realization came on February 26, 2018. I noticed the window shadows on the floor in the empty bedroom of the apartment where I lived then. I had taken photos of shadows very often by then: shadows of plants, of my spare hand. Without further thought, I took out my iPhone and tried to frame this shadow scene of an empty room. I tried framings in portrait orientation and in landscape orientation. I tried framings of the shadow on the floor only and also of the shadow together with the window. After some initial impulsive iPhone shutter clicking in the process, I questioned the point of taking this shadow photo the same way as before, and I started to think about adding an item to the scene to contribute an extra dimension of richness. I came up with no handy parameter for choosing the object except thinking of some item that was relevant to me personally. Then I found the childhood doll my mother made me when I was a little child, which I brought with me to the US. I placed the doll in the shadow spot and framed several more photos. It was quite an emotionally neutral process when all my attention was put on mere visual composition. The next day when I reviewed and edited the photo, it hit me unexpectedly with certain psychological and metaphorical afterthought that was completely outside of my intention or explicit plan. I was attending instead of intending. Beyond mere visual composition, the final photo made me notice and almost feel a certain weight of the strip shadows on the woolen doll and its distance to the glass window and the sunny sky outside. It surprisingly hit me with emotionally charged afterthoughts about memories of my mother and our past difficulties.

I thought I was just photographing a window and its shadow in one empty bedroom of the apartment. Yet it turned out to make me feel and experience emotional reaction more than that: staring at the final selected photograph, I came to notice how without knowing I also photographed an expression of my unspecified feelings and memories about my relational stories with my mother embedded as a little child.

Figure 7 Two iPhone photo examples of the bedroom shadow scene. Left, the initial photographic framing; right, the final selected photo I judged to be finished after I placed the childhood doll in the frame.

Another experiential and revealing moment came on April 20th, 2018. It was sunny afternoon. I was walking towards main library. Right across the bridge over Red Cedar River, I noticed the plastic black surface-covering cloth on the flood barrier constructed by Red Cedar River outside of Hannah Administrative Building. There were water puddles on the black plastic cloth, and I could see the reflected sunlight spot on the surface. Out of some compulsive photo-taking habit with iPhone, I paused my plan and walked around the barrier to photograph the light spot. Like

usual, I started out to put my spare hand on top of water surface with an attempt to compose a photo including the light spot in some spatial relationship with my hand shadow. It was not after several attempts I saw in the viewfinder the double shapes of my hand. I paused and spent one minute to figure out the reason why: it turned out to be a shadow and a shade at the same time of my hand. It was an unexpected and exciting observation since then I had two hand shapes to compose into the frame along with sunlight spot, my very first time of such shadow-shade encounter. Such encounter enabled me new photo framing with my spare hand that was more than the boring one shadow or shade. I started to adjust my hand gesture (I would count this as a little bit bodily performance) so as to adjust the visual relationship between the hand reflection and the hand shade to try out some emotive compositions. It was a very delightful process. Later during the day, when I reviewed this iPhone photo archive and did initial photo selections, and I saw this photo (the left photo below), which suddenly affected me a feeling of explicit loneliness and a sense of longing for contact. This final photo unexpectedly aroused me some unspecified emotion as well.

Both experiential moments could be seen as examples of how certain facts of subjectivity (e.g. emotion, intimate memory) could be triggered, confronted in awareness, and possibly reworked through outwardly photo-taking practices and photograph sequencing practices.

Figure 8 Two iPhone photo examples of the hand shadow and shade scenes. Left, the photo I took while walking on campus; right, the photo I took in the bath room. with the help of shower curtain, when the sunlight was at that perfect angle and perfect brightness of pale, to affect me a similar emotional reaction as the left photo.

A Pedagogy of Self through Photographic Practices

I write this section to basically address one challenging reflective question posed by Lynn Fendler, which is: How much of the pedagogy towards myself through this dissertation project is a product of photography, and how much is it a product of self-directed learning? In summary, my answer would be half and half, while I sense a growing interest in photography could be a more and more guiding power for continuing a photography-based a/r/tographic journey in the future.

A Self-directed More than Institutional Processes of Exploring Photography

Reflecting about my photographic journey so far, I regard myself as having experienced a certain degree of self-directed learning instead of learning merely under institutional curriculum structures. While I transitioned from self-directed learning with no institutional curriculum structure to self-directed learning under an extended structure (i.e., taking the photobook class), it could be

helpful to look back and examine what process of self-directed learning has taken place so far. I address this reflection by making the following list of four modes and methods for studying photography I have been practicing--in varying degrees of continual everyday persistence, which has helped to free my old internalized and more externally formed mindset of what "education" could mean.

1. In the beginning stage, I intentionally refused to approach photography through reading and mechanically imitating those popular aesthetic or textual manuals I found in online posts or published books about how to produce beautiful or cool smartphone photos. Most such manuals talk about techniques of framing good-looking photos and techniques of color editing for different desired styles. While reading and imitating such manuals may have sped up my process of producing so-called beautiful or cool photographs, it would also have betrayed my initial aims of starting photography: I just wanted to learn something from scratch on the grounds of first-hand experiences and reflections. I had had enough externally oriented schooling and learning that I wanted to get away, despite the very conscious awareness that I may go astray, produce photographs that are repetitive of what is already out there in the world, and go through processes and realizations that other people like professionals or masters have already produced and summarized. I cling to a quote to encourage myself to trust this self-directed journey with more faith: it has been done before, but it has never been done by me.

2. Before consciously contacting and enrolling in the photobook class from MSU Department of Art, Art History, and Design, I somehow vaguely knew the need to assemble my own photography curriculum materials. The process started out by viewing selected photographs on Onetake which had been picked by the editor. After realizing how curated groups of photographs can become a form of visual writing beyond separate images, I inferred about books made of photographs and started out reading some photobooks. As I got intrigued by a few photographers'

works (i.e., I felt something intensive or inspiriting for the work), I started out to search, read, and listen to some major photography websites (e.g. Magnum, LensCulture, Aperture) and photographer podcasts (e.g., A Small Voice, The Magic Hour); I also started to subscribe to Chinese emergent independent photobook publisher's media posts on WeChat (e.g. Jiazazhi Press, Imageless Studio, Muge Studio, Three-Shadow Photography Award). After encountering the wonderful and highly resourceful and pedagogical tool-book called *The Photographer's Playbook: 307 Assignments and Ideas* (2014), I have tried to use it in different ways depending on emerging needs to proceed my photographic practices. Since my amateur and online posting stage of photographic practices, this book served as the richest and most wildly pedagogical resource I have ever encountered. Most of the assignments are beyond mere technical manuals, not a single assignment written in standard format, are very connective with other forms of arts such as poetry, writing, and extend to rich thoughts, ideas, creative processes, sensations, and philosophies of doing photography. Here are the three main ways I have been using this pedagogical tool-book.

- I searched within doable photography assignments I could practice for my dissertation project on an everyday or weekly basis. For example, one street photography assignment is driving to an unknown district in a random manner within seven-minutes, then park anywhere when the time is up and practice photographing the surrounding place (The Seven-Minute Game assignment by photographer Mike Slack, cited from Fulford & Halpern, 2014, p. 320), and I intentionally tried out this assignment twice when I had short trips to Columbus and Dayton Ohio in late 2018.
- I searched related index items within when I arrived at some vague realization from my own photographic understandings. For example, after I noticed my own cases of playing with some handy visual items to more actively improvise and compose photographs, I searched the index keywords "improvisation" and tried to see how photographers have thought about

and designed improvisational photographic practices. And it would always be a great pleasure to me when I find myself arriving at some practicing method similar to those described by the photographer/educator, and when I find out how their designs actually further extend my experiential thoughts.

- I turned to any page and read the assignment descriptions and paid attention to the vocabulary the photographers used to describe visual art works or experiences of artmaking. As a photography beginner, more input of vocabularies articulating photographs and photographic works helps me to expand my language for talking about my own photographic practices and understandings.

3. I made efforts to do close readings of attractive and challenging photobooks, and develop specific prompts to myself for approaching some established photographers' aesthetic sensibilities and thinking, which seems to be an analogous crafting process of studying to write literary texts: merely taking photographs on my own is not enough, I have to start more regular and richer visual reading exposure to encounter more aesthetic and experiential possibilities. Below is a major example of the process-prompt I have developed and tried to impose on myself when reading and digesting other photographers and photobooks:

A prompting study order of exploring photography artist:

- Read the photobook *The Thirty-Two Inch Ruler (2010)* by John Gossage
- Write down whatever thoughts, feelings, inspirations out of myself reading the book
- Read other essays on this photobook and possibly on photobooks of John Gossage in general; search YouTube videos of him as well. There are mainly two purposes for doing this: first, a constant self-immersion of relevant vocabularies on articulations about photography and visual experiences for purpose of writing; two, constantly compare what myself can feel, see, and put into words in the photobook with what other art

critics have articulated and commented on the same artist and work. (the date of note unspecified)

Yet despite it all, what am I looking at when I try to read the established and renowned photographers? This is an important question worth constant self-examination since it has been so easy and kind of habitual for me to imitate the visual techniques (e.g., framing, color, subject matter) that I can notice and dissect from these photographers in my own photographic practices. But what stands out in their visual expressive language is far more than what I try to decode from their works. (personal notes; date unspecified)

Another example of my emerging self-prompting note is a reminder about balancing the desire for photo-taking and the necessity of focusing on embodied experiences when wandering outside in local landscape. And I consider all such notes of self-prompts to be illustrations of a self-directed studying process. Further landscape and farm wandering prompts:

- Be patient and open: walk around, feel the place, feel the space, and maybe jot down some conscious flow. This part may be helpful for observing before jumping to the instrumental photo-taking. Remember that while I cannot capture everything in photos, I should allow my body and heart to more fully embrace the farm landscape wandering, and such embodied experience is important for me to write out lines from it.
- Continue exploring and feeling the place and moment through photo-taking in particular. On one hand, it is practice of taking photos with attempt to present certain embodied expression. On the other hand, photo-taking usually pushes me to walk around for visual and affective impressions and inspirations. (4/4/2018)

4. Such mode of self-directed learning has allowed me to experience active spontaneity to explore the photography field through assembling small networks of resources and communications (i.e. Instagram, Onetake, WeChat) according to my own emergent curiosity and intuition. However,

I have also been confronting the challenge of changing certain felt and observed existing habits and learning networks for working around photographic project. This has particularly been a case after I enrolled the photobook class. Before the photobook class, I navigated through my photo archives by editing and posting photos on Onetake and Instagram, all in digital format on a photo-to-photo and almost day-to-day basis, when I usually received immediate responses from other users who followed me on such apps. Since taking the photobook class, I have been gradually transitioning to a more offline mode of choosing photos from my archive without immediate social media feedback, and to work through photo sequencing around a few small photo series concepts through moving around and laying out printed photos and handmade book projects. It has been a transition for me to work on photographic work in extended time frame (i.e., from reviewing/posting photos almost every day to a bi-weekly tempo), on a larger content scale (i.e., from separate photos to groups of photos), with more intentional practice of exercising my independent aesthetic judgement (i.e. no immediate social media likes from followers and from Onetake editor Evan in particular). It was also during this course when I was pushed by the course instructor to continue experimenting and taking new photographs while I myself more hoped to do some easy work of assembling and arranging existing photo archives. And the photographic result turned out beneficial and convincing (i.e., many photos for my final photo series Missing Mountain were created during this spring semester).

What is more? After experiencing a certain degree of the limited online small user network culture of discussing photographs on Onetake, I was more able to appreciate the in-class critiques of photographic assignments and photo prints for the final photobook project from this formal course. Without this photobook class, I would hardly have my own work read in such critical careful way and hardly received very substantial and critical feedback that is far beyond the number of likes or brief comments like "great" "beautiful" on photography-based social media, not to mention the small handmade photobook projects along with the embedded methods of working I was pushed to

finish and build during the course, a path would otherwise have taken me much more time. After enrollment in the course, I also gained access to more professional resources from the arts department, such as access to their visual printing lab and to their professional digital cameras, all of which are hard to find by myself or merely online.

Yet on another note, I also realize that, without my prior amateur approach towards photographic practices, I may not have appreciated or taken advantage of this photobook class to the degree of self-realization that allowed me to make the best use of its structure and resources to explore, test out, and create my own photographic work. Without prior long extended time (i.e., almost an entire year) of self-directed photographic practice, I may end up, again, merely and painfully internalizing and inserting myself into the formal curriculum structure and performance criteria--a mode and a mindset of institutional learning I have been used to since adolescence--without sufficient inner power and some more flexible mind to breathe in such formal curriculum based on judgements of what I need, want, and feel pedagogically effective to myself in particular.

This process of self-directed learning journey resonates with John Deweyan idea that underscores a spontaneity of learning as a student and the constant adjustment made through judging what I need and what is accessible in the surrounding environment.

Image-Based Knowing and Word-Based Knowing

Photographic practices have enabled me to experience every day grounded in the sensory and visual. By moving my body through the material surroundings in everyday life, I have experienced a liberating, inspirational, and educative process when compared with my relationships with words. I have been formally trained in the uses of words, and I internalized that training to survive throughout my institutional schooling journey, even though I have had many bouts with writer's blocks dating back as early as my secondary schooling experiences. I have felt a much freer relationship with image-based composing through taking, grouping, sequencing and reading/viewing

photographs. Unexpectedly, as I continue to experience photography, I cannot help always making the analogy to compare it with conventional linguistic textual writing and reading: one is image-based writing, the other is word-based writing; one is visual arts, the other is language arts. With a more stretched-out self-world, experiential processes through sensory and image-based photographic practices constituted with multiple layered flows of feeling, sensing, perceiving, understanding, and cognitive thinking, I unexpectedly came to a much more liberated and freer experiential relationships with linguistic words and texts. Experiences with image-based texts gave me more fluency with word-based texts:

> Photography and traditional writing about personal and individual experiences: photo-taking, photo-making, photo-sequencing, and photo-printing may be one of the most visualizing way of exposing the processing and inventive texture of writing and composition to me. A photo could be a single word, a short phrase, a paragraph, and a mini novel. A series of photos can be something similar or even bigger. And it seems so far only in photography can I impressively experience the power of the idea about writing as composition and composition as putting/framing elements in certain way in an effort to achieve effective expression, be expression as single photographs and as curated photographic work. (12/25/2018)

I had internalized and had been socialized by prescriptive rules and routines about what writing (academic writing in particular) should look like, which has then turned out to be one significant source of my procrastination and writer's block. It is not easy to let go of an internalized mode of writing in which I have been unable to separate two fundamental phases of writing in any genre: 1) the process of (uncensored) drafting/creating and 2) the process of revision (when judgment of quality text intervenes)(Elbow, 1998). Surprisingly somehow, after experiencing the beginning intensive photo taking and online posting stage, the process of taking and reviewing

photographs from scratch as an amateur has helped me to confront the mental blocks associated with word writing: it felt much less painful when I drafted my pool of raw photographs, even when a lot of them turned out to be mere junk, and when I had no idea of what final photographic project would be about except to wait and feel its emergence or inspiration during the process of happenings, a process I was motivated enough to navigate through. I recall what Elliot Eisner remarked about arts again, when he said engagement with arts "invites the development of a disposition to tolerate ambiguity, to explore what is uncertain, to exercise judgement free from prescriptive rules and procedures" (Eisner, 2002, p.10). Practicing photography has lent me the power to face the unknown and uncertain during writing, even writing in a scholarly genre.

> Why did I start to take and post online so many photos almost in a self-indulging manner? It is probably because that, particularly in recent months, I have started to experience an intriguing sense of freedom: I can happily get rid of methods manuals and not force myself into any prescribed techniques and directions for photography; I can be much less concerned about failures, and to a much larger degree overcome my inability and hesitance of actions led by perfectionistic inclination due to internalized censorship and performance criteria; I can almost free myself from the kind of obsessive-compulsive disorder for achieving some assumed qualified creativity, the mode of which was produced by an self-internalized literature-review mindset; And I have so much often realized that, despite of the fragmented experiential manner, uncertainty is not terrifying--rather, uncertainty has manifested to me how intriguing it is and what daily discoveries and surprises it could make happen to me. I start to pay more attention to angles and perspectives of seeing, to subtle changes in my aesthetic judgement of images, and to some intentional efforts made to see and read the visuals which are heterologous to my existing perceptive and sensitive frames. I start to feel much stronger impulse of wandering outside when at the same time I feel like

keeping myself at apartment again. Maybe I have become braver because of doing photography. And even more than that, at present, I start to think about what it could mean for issue of self and education defined broadly after partially going through such a personal documentary and aesthetic journey with photography. (12/20/2017)

"I'm starting to understand more and more that creative practice is not about knowing what you are doing. It's about confidently not knowing what you are doing." I just find this quote by a photographer/educator Mitch Goldstein to be fascinating, and I saved it from his Instagram post, despite the fact that I have only vaguely experienced limited delightful moments out of such unknowing and uncertainty when I walk outside and take photographs.

When to stay, when to break away the familiar comfort zone? Sometimes repetition is fine and okay, for which I find validating and confirming thoughts from two artists. One quote comes from an American nun artist Sister Corita Kent: "Find a place you trust, and try trusting it for a while" (citing from a YouTube video created by the public PBS art channel called The Art Assignment, the particular episode titled *Art + Life Rules from a Nun*). One comes from the established photographer Todd Hido in his photography workshop book, when he mentioned that, sometimes it is okay to stay in one location and keep photographing it when one can trust the enduring and non-exhaustive interest of staying in the same place for a duration of time while doing some seemingly repetitive work. With such inspiration, I would be just patient to try it out, be patient to continue photographing what I'm often drawn to and repeat such process to the degree that it just wears out and I no longer take interest in it. "It's okay to stay in the same place for a while and to trust the desire to do so." (Hido & Halpern, 2014) (10/4/2018)

One aspect of this image-based process to my experiential learning is about how the image-based reading and composition has helped me to better appreciate word-based reading and composition. Experientially, through ongoing process of working on my photobook project *Missing Mountain*, I have come to understand how felt and experienced qualities within photographic processes could guide me to navigate from the end and the center of what I want to convey through curating a body of visual work. Yet I have much less (or no) such aesthetic sensing, perceiving, judging and thinking experience in word-based writing.

In this sense, finishing this photographic inquiry project has made me wonder how I could apply what I have learned and experienced in photographic visual writing into word-based writing, and how I could better approach intellectual and academic words and texts with more subtle aesthetic awareness and perceiving sensibility in terms of what and how they feel in experiential qualities beyond rationalist and analytical logics. Upon such thoughts, I have come to better grasp what John Dewey once discussed about the qualitative aspect of intellectual writing, and how feelings about such qualitative aspects of thoughts could actually guide the path and judgment of thinking:

> Different ideas have their different "feels," their immediate qualitative aspects, just as much as anything else. One who is thinking his way through a complicated problem finds direction on his way by means of this property of ideas. Their qualities stop him when he enters the wrong path and send him ahead when he hits the right one. They are signs of an intellectual "Stop and Go." If a thinker had to work out the meaning of each idea discursively, he would be lost in a labyrinth that had no end and no center. Whenever an idea loses its immediate felt quality, it ceases to be an idea and becomes, like an algebraic symbol, a mere stimulus to execute an operation without the need of thinking. For this reason certain trains of ideas

leading to their appropriate consummation (or conclusion) are beautiful or elegant. They have aesthetic character. (Dewey, 2005, pp. 124–125)

What is quoted above turned out to be a very striking, refreshing, and educative idea to me. It made me deeply recall and wonder to what extent I have felt and let some emerging, immediate, and flowing qualities beyond mere discursive rules (e.g. limited version of logic and taxonomic rationality) to be the primary (judgement-making) guide of my process of thoughts and in writing and appreciating scholarly texts. Recall what and how I went through my master's degree and finished a graduation thesis in the specialization of philosophy of education with a very analytical philosophy approach, while there were occasionally remarks about how certain philosophical texts make us feel, such articulations of feelings never took the foreground or the primary judgmental role in reading and writing disciplinary texts. Through photographic experiences, I have come closer to appreciating and understanding Dewey's above quotation. It makes me wonder what different mode of feeling, sensing, and judgment-making is demanded and exercised, if I allow and even push myself to prioritize feelings of immediate qualitive aspects of thought and thinking when navigating through intellectual/academic reading and writing.

Facing such critical questions around workings of myself, I have no clear elaborated answer yet, and I could hardly articulate whether and to what extent my writing of this dissertation text has achieved certain degree of that aesthetic experience with thinking. But it has now become a very explicit issue I hope to continue exploring and experiencing in my future intellectual journey, and I look forward to composing an academic text with the primary guidance of feeling and perceiving immediate qualities of (discursive) thinking in making judgements of the process and final product.

The other pedagogical aspect of a photographic image-based experiential process towards myself concerns how certain fixated or routinized sensing and perceiving capacities could be shaken and cultivated again—through reading and appreciating affecting photographs—in new subtleties.

Looking back at my digital notes, a similar thread of short writings more stands out to illustrate such effect: I have gradually written out what photographic work teaches me to breathe in new possible orientation of sensing, perceiving, and relating in the everyday, in possible ways I have not been taught and experienced in schools. I present three short journaling entries from my digital notes.

> What an intensive and enjoyable feeling after closely reading some posted photographs on Instagram by the Taiwanese visual artist Yu Cheng Lin!
>
> Make those small raindrops of careful and creative observations be condensed, focused, enlarged and concentrated; and then arrange and combine those creative raindrops with the artist's expressive intention and thoughtful arrangement--this could turn out to be a storm of sensations and meanings. (5/9/2018)
>
> Most impressive insight after re-reading Illuminance by Rinko Kawauchi: when two or more photographs are placed and arranged together, a new possibility comes into being: from experiencing what can be experienced to experiencing what was transcendental. (6/14/2018)
>
> My noted feelings and thoughts right after an attempt of closely viewing/reading the three-volume photobook *Pomodori a grappolo* (2015)by John Gossage:
>
> One page after another, unnoticeably, eyes extend, penetrating skin, as if the whole body grows into them, growing to be eyes.
>
> Cognition, judgement, ideas and concepts are pleased to yield to peaceful and concentrated sensing and perceiving, as if there has been nothing like this before, as if it is happening for the first time.
>
> Gullies of brain and acquired emotional pattern are loosened, gradually gaining an impetus and willingness to flow and wonder.

Scenes, things, and details begin to shed the given social names and functions, shed the artificial value hierarchies; inside a room of seeing, they are more closely sniffed, touched, and heard at the same time.

Once again, as amazing as the earth and the starry sky,

Once again, as taken-for-granted as the earth and the starry sky.

Like the very first encounter, like encounter itself, like a revelation and completion of an encounter.

Not far away, not in another distant foreign land, not in heaven or abyss,

just arrived here from reading a photobook.

It is just here, a place I may have never reached before.

And the vision lived by this book feels like it is not wearing any clothes that are warm, showcasing personalities, yet occasionally like shackles.

A clear, clean, and naked vision that seems to be inclusive of anything and existence.

As if. (9/19/2018)

Recalling the above note, I think of a paragraph from John Dewey again, which helps to validate and extend--in greater depth and more beautiful language--what I wanted to say regarding what photographs and photographic work have taught me:

> Familiarity induces indifference, prejudice blinds us; conceit looks through the wrong end of a telescope and minimizes the significance possessed by objects in favor of the alleged importance of the self. Art throws off the covers that hide the expressiveness of experienced things; it quickens us from the slackness of routine and enables us to forget ourselves by finding ourselves in the delight of experiencing the world about us in its varied qualities and forms. It intercepts every shade of expressiveness found in objects and orders them in a new experience of life. (Dewey, 2005, p. 108)

Upon this quote, I am left to continue pondering questions I still have no easy answer yet, such as: What works and practices around the self does it take for becoming able to break away from inhabited and internalized hierarchies of things and objects in relationship when judging what objects are valuable to capture and what are not, and when judging what qualitative aspects of (experience with) objects are and are not valuable to capture for a serious purpose of meaning-making and/or practice of knowing?

Approaching a New Materialist Ethos of Engagement with the World

In this section, I illustrate how engaging with photographic practices in local landscapes has unexpectedly brought me closer to appreciating and understanding one line of new materialist theories from the discipline of cultural geography. I particularly draw on a few writings from two British cultural geographers, John Wylie and Nigel Thrift, to further engage with the issue of subject (subjectivity) that photographic practices have enabled in particular. I focus on two particular aspects of subject(ivity):

1. A new possible understanding/conceptualization of body that is different from its phenomenological definition, which is made possible by presenting and examining my experiential notes about camera as my sensing body extension.

2. Describe how certain performative elements of my body-involved photographic practices and a challenging conceptual uptake on non-representational subject by John Wylie (2010a) have helped me better approach Nigel Thrift's (2004) idea about "an ethos of constant experimentation", which seems to indicate a potential relationship to work around the self.

Collaborating with the Camera Eyes and Its Flash: Experiencing the Camera as an Extension of the Body

Photographic practices that challenge and activate in me new understanding about what counts as body through an experiential possibility of both sensing and making sense of camera as

extended practicing body. It is not deniable that my walking experiences with a camera in local sites have affected embodied sensory experiences such as outward seeing of my flesh eyes, bodily movements on foot, hand touching of soil and plants, skin feelings of different air temperatures and wind etc. Such aspect of body-based experience in and with landscape has been traced by cultural geographer John Wylie (2007) basically from a phenomenological point of view, when body is conceptualized as the fundamental site of sensory experiences and sites of knowing (embodied experience) in contrast to prior representational theories merely underscoring the fundamental functional sites of cultural discourses in defining landscape. While his earlier personal narrative and phenomenology-inspired approach to making sense of landscape (Wylie, 2005) has shed light on some aspect of my photographic walking experience in local landscape of East Lansing, my particular embodied experience with camera (i.e. presented in the following two journal entries with examples photo illustrations in terms of how camera flash has made me to ponder) is hard to be addressed in the same substantial manner.

4/7/2018

Inspirations from the water puddle photograph I happen to try out, in great surprise: There seems to be almost infinite ways a seemingly realistic photo could call some other scenes or imaginations into being:

- Water reflection just as water reflection
- A realistic water puddle reflection (of sunsetting cloudy sky) just looks like water springing from the ground or nowhere (while in fact the water is melted from the winter snow). And such imagination is made possible by taking and looking at photos accidentally took with the flashlight function of the camera: the intensity of the pictorial elements as well as the spatial relationships between them.

- After taking photos of varied water/glass reflections at varied places and corners at different times and weather, this point is most renewing and provocative to me: when what the camera flashlight captures totally exceeds what my flesh eyes can see and imagine the photographs to resemble what they(I) think they(I) see.

Figure 9 The first camera photo I took with flashlight on accidentally during late afternoon sunlight. This photo-taking experience then became an ambiguous insight I kept in mind when once in a while to sense a photographing moment with imaginative anticipation of its possible imaging effect.

9/5/2018 Visual editing and reading notes after reviewing the digital camera photo archive, the ones I took when I extensively tried out digital camera photo-taking around the pond in W.J. Beal Botanical Garden during late afternoon time with different degrees of flashlight, given the incidental impressive image of the sky-reflecting water puddle by the roadside, taken on April 4th, 2018.

1.key point number one: keep in mind the potential magic power of flash and try experimenting with it in terms of different daylight or night, of different layers of materials in the frame, different degrees of brightness, and different camera eye focusing effects. while editing the photos, particularly the ones taken in the pond, playing with the elements of sunlight spots and the floating leaf/leaves, by using flashlight to increase the contrast to

the degree of total blackness, that I see the potentiality of creating strong affective intensity by framing such simple but powerful elements in an infecting and focusing way.

Regarding the photos taken with flashlight on, which unexpectedly achieve a centering/staging intensity of the sun and a leaf on the black water surface, it seems to be a creative and sensitive inspiration occurring to me today. And for the few photos I've selected, at this point, I think they can go to either *Ponding Light*[8] series, or *Meditative Pond*[9] series.

Particularly for the finalized Pondering Light, I feel this unexpected photo made for Meditative Pond could bring its existing affective potential to another mood or level. I can further think about it.

Through photographing practices, I come to the understanding that camera flash could actually be used at least in two ways or for two effects[10]: One, it is used for illumination; Two, it is used for light offset, namely in relation to other existing sources of light such as sunlight.

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[8] This *Pondering Light* series has been given up and been adjusted into one visual motif of my final photobook *Missing Mountain*.

[9] This *Meditative Pond* idea has been temporarily realized in the making of the small accordion book with the revised title *Arriving at A Pond,* as briefly introduced in the methods section of the previous chapter.

[10] I have to admit that with more visual reading exposure of contemporary photographers, I have realized how the usage of camera flashlight in bringing about impressive and impactful photographs has been circulated among some established photographs (see for two established Chinese photographers I have been following and doing visual reading for some time: Feng Li, Yishu Wang). Given such visual context, I have also observed how some young Onetake users are copying such visual rhetoric via intensively using camera flashlight in imaging a final photograph. With this regard, I understand what a qualitative fine line I need to perceive and identify in judging what photo products using flashlight are already formulaic imitations and what photo products using flashlight are created and selected with sensible affecting qualities. Such practice of close visual reading is also reminding myself of not sedimenting my inspirational experiential moments of photo-taking with camera flashlight into numbing habits of using cameras in ways without "aesthetic intelligence" (a term I heard and learnt from American photographer Stephen Shore).

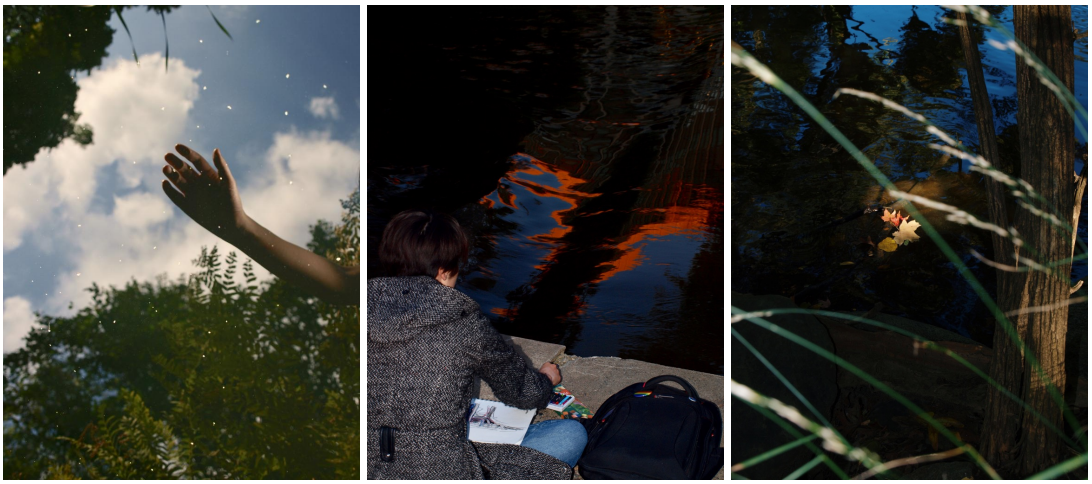

Figure 10 Three exemplar camera photos taken with the flash on. Left, taken by the pond inside W.J. Beal Botanical Garden on MSU campus, September 13th, 2018; middle, taken along the resting riverside of Red Cedar River, right across Hannah Administrative Building during sunsetting time, October 4th, 2018; right, taken along the bushes by Red Cedar River on campus when walking closer towards the iconic bronze statue of MSU's mascot, October 4th, 2018.

The unexpected experimentation with a camera flash during the daytime (in contrast to its usual usage during total dark or dim light conditions for proper illumination to make digital sensor work) makes me wonder: what has been made possible for me to see and perceive with the enabling as well as distortive (i.e., in terms of comparison with flesh-eye seeing) capacities of a digital camera--given the fact that with its varied functional settings on brightness, focusing, exposure, color saturation, and flash? After substantial collaborative work with the Olympus digital camera for more than one year, how would I describe the affective experiential seeing made possible by using and playing with its different flash-imaging functions? How the task of addressing this question could be calling for an extended understanding of photographer body-camera. That is because without such collaborative capture of the camera, the impressive photo products and my affective reactions to such products are not possible. It is through efforts to answer this question that I connected with Thrift's (2004) radical and elusive reconceptualization of body and embodiment with non-representational ethos of engagement.

> ...recent work has tended to radically undermine the idea that the body is a finished organic whole beginning or ending at the wall of skin. Rather, the body is seen as a set of interdependent associations or interactions or populations, stressing commonality over isolation, which are born out of the force, even vehemence (Fisher 2002), of expression as *embodiment*. And this really does mean commonality out of force. So, to begin with, embodiment is a set of spatially and temporally distributed series: body a-where-ness rather than body awareness. It consists of the differential flow of a particular kind of constantly moving carnality which has its reasons and its modes of reasoning, but these are not necessarily cognitively framed. (Thrift, 2004, p. 126, emphasis original)

While the above quotation reads as quite elusive, and I cannot precisely match my photographic experiences and inspirations with camera flash, I am still able to grasp each and every sentence of the quoted paragraph. I have been caught by the idea of body as "a set of interdependent associations or interactions." I think about how photographs, and especially photographs with particular flash imaging effects, are not able to exist in the very first place without the flash function of a camera --my flesh eyes cannot take photographs, and I could only work with cameras to produce photographs through a process of getting familiar and experimentally collaborating with its digital and mechanical imaging eyes. I also cannot help but ponder and imagine to what extent my three illustrative photos taken with a flash could be considered as specific expressions (*embodiments*) of this body-camera set or this extended sensing body consisting of human flesh and metal camera. Further, could certain photographic work like photobooks be approached and thought of as specific expressions (*embodiments*)? While this new possible lens still sounds quite elusive and challenging to pin down in greater clarity, it does teach me a language and makes me imagine a mode of sensing and perceiving I have hardly tried out in other visual reading experiences.

Towards a non-representational subject?

In the book chapter *Performance and Performativity: A Geography of Unknown Lands*(2004), which seems to be an important prelude to his later monograph *Non-Representational Theory* (2007), Thrift poetically proposes a reformation on "an ethos of constant experimentation across many registers of experience in a world 'saturated with phenomena'" (Wylie, 2010). Given such generative framing helps me what I have tried to reflect on and examine in terms of practices of the self through photographic art making. I have articulated a mode of subject-making in a Deweyan sense when the subject is in constant flow of interaction and communication--acting and undergoing--with objects and the surrounding environment with an aesthetic orientation; I have examined a mode of subject-making through the meeting space where exteriority meets, informs, and may even collide with interiority; a mode of subject-(re)making through experiential learning that is self-directed more than institutionally-based and that is more image-based than word-based. Now given such new possible premise and reconceptualization of body, embodiment, and experience[11] itself towards a non-representational ethos for engaging with the world, how to make sense of a non-representational engaging subject while also acknowledging the power of nonhuman agencies in such engagement? Further, how such new ideas of subject and subject-making could inform, confront, or extend what I have experienced and made sense of regarding mode of being, feeling, living, and writing/creating?

John Wylie could be helpful to lend a temporary articulation of this new (and elusive) subject as a starting point for me to proceed in thinking for the future. In a book chapter that maps conceptualization of subjectivity in the context of non-representational theories, Wylie outlines two

[11] Near the end of this chapter, I arrive at a conceptual and ontological issue that is both inspired by and yet goes beyond the scope of current writing, which is: how could the conceptualizations of experience and practice between the discourse of John Dewey philosophy (or pragmatism) and non-representational theory be put into fruitful dialogue to make sense of how they relate and differ from each other, and how they inform related and different ideas of subject and subject-making? Upon this realization, I have come across some starting literature to further read and tackle with, such as the article *Feminist Philosophy, Pragmatism, and the "Turn to Affect": A Genealogical Critique* (2016) by Clara Fischer.

main threads of post-humanism theories that greatly inform non-representational theories in terms of how each conceives subject: one is the Deleuzian subject that is "emergent and affective", and the other is the Derridanian subject that is "ghostly/in-absence, hospitable and lonely" (Wylie, 2010a). The Deleuzian term of the "emergent and affective" does resonate with my emergent much more often usage of the same terms in my photographic field notes (e.g. I have a couple of digital and written notes that are "emergent photographic project ideas for the future"). I find it hard to approach the latter Derridanian term of the ghostly/in-absence subject—yet how can I know whether or not I have put into some work of such in-absence subjectivity through the separate photobook artifact that is coincidentally titled *Missing Mountain*?!

CHAPTER 4 An Educative Reflection on Photographic Practices

This chapter is a more fully unfolded illustration of what and how photographic practices have taught me, which is both informed by and fits with Elliot Eisner's several aspects of what arts teach in general. Each of my illustrative and experiential example below is a reflection made to make sense of what photographic practices have taught me so far. In summary, there are four illustrative examples in this chapter, and each example helps me to reflect more deeply on what photographic practices have taught me, given Eisner's inspirational categories. In the example of "to attend, not to intend," I reflect on how sequencing and placing photographs to compose a series involves the challenging tasks of flexible purposing (i.e., prioritizing what photograph informs than what I intend) and attention to relationships (i.e., matter of photo sequence and placement on pages). In the example of "unexpected poetic impulse and extended self-world understandings," I reflect on how photographic experiences have informed and renewed in me poetic impulses of writing short lines, which, could also be regarded as example of how photographic practices have affected certain abilities (at least impulses) to transform aesthetic and experiential qualities into text. In the third example "a practice of playful improvisation in making photographs" and the last example about the emergence of my photobook *Missing Mountain*, through sorting out journaling notes again, I reflect on photographic practices that have renewed in me a playful mode of working and an exercise of imagination with surrounding environment and objects through making photographs.

To Attend, Not to Intend

On February 27, 2019, my photobook class was devoted to an in-class critique of the multi-signature book, a small photobook assignment to work on this particular format of hand-making craft and to test out some personal photographic ideas. In preparation, I took this chance to try out a potential dummy book sequencing for my own final photobook, which both served as the final course project and as my dissertation photobook component. For this final photographic work, I

had been haunted by the metaphorical title Missing Mountain[12] for several months, which emerged during one of my short wandering trips in a local university farm, therefore I wanted to use this multi-signature book assignment to try putting my felt emotions and experiences into this small concrete material book.

I tried out the sequencing of 52 photographs for the very first time--the largest number of photos I had sorted out and sequenced to the point. All the photographs were part of the relevant visually better photographs and ones I felt attached to, all I kept handy on iPhone. I did this amount for the sake of covering up all the pages of the sample multi-signature blank book we made in a prior class step by step under the instructor's illustration, and for the sake that I imagined my own final photobook to be consisting of such image amount at minimum. And I hastily finished the whole sequencing process, printed, sewed and brought the book to class for mutual critique.

The critical feedback from classmates and the instructor was really intense and informing. It has been the most triggering lesson when I was more deeply pushed to think in terms of better receiving and examining my own in-progress photographic work, which seems more difficult compared to receiving and examining other's work. It has brought me a realization almost as clear and sharp as penetrating my skin regarding the great challenge and difficulty of sequencing photographs to establish and communicate a message to other potential readers/viewers in a sensible way. Such a way is not a self-assumed and self-imposing representational vision where photographs themselves could actually fail my intentionality if not carefully observed and treated.

In other words, I am not making, and I will never be able to make the photobook to directly express or to be representative of my experiences and feelings about living and wandering in East

[12] I originally came up with this ambiguous title of 空山 as "empty mountain" in the voice memo I recorded the first time this expression emerged. After hearing 空山, Lynn suggested to me the different English term "Missing Mountain" when she heard more about what I meant. "Missing mountain" better suits what I felt about and ambiguously hoped to express and explore through a photobook.

Lansing landscape sites. The photographs will always betray my intentionality once I foreground my own subjectivity (i.e., fixed meaning-imposition into photographs selections and into the arrangement of them merely out of my own head or emotion) instead of closely listening to each of them to ground the sequencing of them to better craft the message into a body of work that could potentially be touching to other reader/viewer. In Eisner's terms, this example illustrates how I am still learning to frame the world in an aesthetic (rather than analytical) way.

In addition to receiving such critical overall feedback regarding the entire book during the critique, some other reading/viewing reactions and thoughts from classmates and the instructor also caught my attention and made me realize how my unattended visual placement grammar also betrayed my subjective intentionality and meaning-making of the book. I heard how unexpectedly the two-photo pairings placed on a left and right page design were interrupting when they were received altogether as the book components to connect with the book title and theme. I also heard about how some paired photos were really beautiful and made sense, yet these paired photos diverged from other photo pairings before and after in the whole image sequence. This made me realize how I had unconsciously stuck to the basic photo-pairing as one visual grammar[13] to arrange photos instead of sequencing them into one-by-one manner (one photograph per page turning) to break visual implication brought by the left-to-right-page photo pairings.

This critiquing class has helped me think about the issue of visual representation in creating and making one's own photobook and photographic work. A representational chain is a chain binding the immediate mood/feeling/emotion of me the photographer when taking the photograph and the expressive quality of the produced photograph itself. I once took this representational chain

[13] One reason for such insistence of using paired photos on left and right pages may come from my engagement with and a great appreciation of Rinko Kawauchi's photobook *Illuminance* (2011), where she made paired photos as the basic visual grammar for this particular book and made it to be so indicative and imaginative that has been validated in my own reading experiences. And I somehow imitated what I learned from reading that book without thinking whether this visual grammar really fits my ongoing photographic work.

for granted, but now that chain has been revealed to mean something different or seen from a different light. The practice of in-class photobook critique really helped me to see this: what I think I have put into the presenting art piece will not be what the reader receives. The materiality of the photograph will always escape my meaning-making and strong intentional imposition. And it may not be helpful for practicing better photography art to assume that the produced separate photographs are able to carry my subjective intentionality.

Yet such understanding of how photographs themselves work in separation from the photographer's intentionality raises another related important question: then how to conceive the role of photographer, or how to conceive the role of photographer-as-author/director if it is thought to be possible? And here I recall the idea of "re-vision" from the photographer-poet Rebecca Norris Webb, which I initially read more than one year ago, and only to find myself arriving at a similar understanding through experiential practices one year later.

> ...one of the most difficult creative lessons has been learning how to *attend* to the work, not to *intend*. What I call my "re-vision" process...is based on the faith that my images are wiser than I am.
>
> Essentially, it involves trying to use the same spontaneous and intuitive eye in the studio, while editing contact sheets, that I rely on when photographing out in the world. (Webb & Webb, 2014, p. 90, emphasis original)

It reminds me the idea that selecting and sequencing photographs is another round and inherently a new round of photographic practice (i.e. a practice of seeing and observing when the viewed objects and material things are the photographs, particularly the photographs that are printed on paper instead of being merely displayed on a digital screen). The two seemingly different processes--taking photos outside and selecting/sequencing photographs later in the studio--could then be enacted as some same practice of receptive and responsive viewing and feeling without

assumed representative chain binding one another. In both processes, I the photographer am always treating raw materials and the photographs taken outside do not naturally possess any essential meaning I once thought I could intend and fixed into them for the sake that I was the person choosing and framing the perspective to make them--in the very first place--with some emergent emotional charge during the observant and compositional process.

Upon such emerging new understanding about the (dis)connection between the process of wandering and taking photographs outside--which could include intensive embodied experiences or emergent thoughts, and the process of reviewing, selecting and sequencing photographs from the initial archive, I came to an understanding of why photographers are called photographers rather than authors[14]. I may be the author/owner of the photographs I take, but I am still unable to intend or impose meanings that I assume to be manifesting in the work itself and to be continuous with my emotional experiences during the photo-taking process. Gradually and upon receiving critical feedback of my own work, I came to the understanding that photographs are not supposed to be the containers I, the photographer, can or should use to directly carry my intentionality, neither would the photographs—either separate photographs or sequenced body of work—be a romantic landing place of the photographer's own experiential meanings realized via the process of encountering the scenes. This is how I learned how problematic "representation" is. Yes indeed, to attend instead of to intend. Yet I should also be careful to note that the experiential processes I have been going through is still at a beginner's stage in terms of making photographic work. It is very possible that for a very experienced photographer and photobook maker, the gap between what s/he intends and what s/he perceives or attends the work itself to expresses will be closer, thus s/he the artist is more skillful and good at attending to his or her own work.

[14] As Lynn Fendler reminds me, this same question underlies Foucault's essay "What is an author?" and "the author is dead." It would worthwhile for me to engage my emergent questions about photographer/author with these two essays by Foucault to further proceed my thoughts and understandings.

Above episode from taking this photobook class also made me recall another moment—after a long awareness detour—from more than one year ago, the episode when I participated in a photovoice workshop and a realization came to my photo-narrative writing practice.

In October 2017, soon after making the commitment to explore photography, I participated in a two-session photovoice workshop offered by Michigan State University outreach office. It was my first time to experience this methodology first hand. It was the first half training session. We participants were asked to take photographs with the prompt "How does it feel for you to be a Spartan?" after the introductory lectures on photovoice and skills of taking good photographs. That was a 40-minute field photo-taking session when we each participant just walked around campus around the meeting hotel. After the field session, we were asked to select one single photograph we liked the most from the field archive and submit it to the workshop shared cloud drive. I selected and submitted the first photograph, mainly for the sake of its beautiful layers of autumn colors, while I somehow did feel and knew at the photographing moment that the total-unexpected encounter with the lost/abandoned/forgotten soccer ball in a low bush was the highest experiential moment during that photo-taking session.

After one week, in the latter half of the workshop, we each got a printed version of our selected photo. We were then given white paper to write a personal narrative along with the photo and then paste the photo with the written narrative on the walls of the conference room we had stayed. The whole workshop ended with us doing a gallery walk around the artifacts on the wall, and a short wrap-up discussion to share our feelings and thoughts about the exhibition and photovoice methodology. What informed me most during that workshop experience was the narrative writing phase, when I consciously thought about possible different reactive relations with the printed photo in expressing my personal voice: Do I search in my mind and memories some thematic moments of studying and living in East Lansing as an international student in order to put them into describing

sentences? What if I approach this narrative writing from a different direction---a chosen position of no prior certainty/framing? Then why not start right from this moment with the printed photograph and practice listening to it? As Alex Webb and Rebecca Norris Webb once remarked: "sometimes the photographs are smarter than you (the photographer) are."

With such newly oriented narrating setup, I put the photo on the table and started taking a closer look at it while jotting down some words. My writing hand inevitably started from some direct description of the photographed objects: the soccer field, the surrounding plants, how the space appeared to me. Gradually I moved to the metaphor of "platform" as I hoped to connect the photo with whatever personal experience I had as an MSU graduate. The image of the soccer ball from the other photograph just hit me surprisingly and landed into the last three questioning lines I pose to myself, during such a stage of uncertain identity transitioning as a doctoral student and as a grown-up person. It was a very enjoyable process finished with something new, some experience I had not anticipated, planned, or imagined.

Connecting this photovoice workshop episode in 2017 and the new episode of making multi-signature book in the photobook course in 2019, I more clearly see how I attended to the photographic visual in polarized degree of receptive perception. In some sense, during the photovoice workshop, the theme was so pre-given and explicit that I tended to resist it. Yet for the multi-signature photobook, I had had for months an emerged theme from a field photo-taking experience that I felt hard to change and even to give it up totally. That challenge led me to some one-sided and narrow perceptive mode of meaning-imposing through selecting and sequencing the photos to put them into the small multi-signature book format. I was intending rather than attending.

I came to terms with two other reflective moments to carry my photographic practices further. One, more thoroughly separate the process of photographing or photographic drafting and

the process of photo editing (e.g., photo selection). Two, either in drafting or editing phase, continue attending to the compositional issue of element inclusion/exclusion in potential effecting differences in terms of creating certain (weak/strong, sensible/hard-to-feel) viewer experiences. Now I better understand the need of developing and enacting different techniques for writers to be more discerning (receptive) of their own products in relation to their own intentionality and subjective feelings. And it is no different for the photographer as well.

Those being said about the elusive idea of photographer as author, I feel it does not follow to conclude that I cannot do anything or to create any potential meaning by sequencing a group of photographs and by making them into a book. Remember, it is another round of photographic process of receptive attending to the taken photographs before coming up with some ideas to arrange them. In a sense, curating a photo sequence is some kind of doing as a (film) director rather than a reporter. It is the combined process and product where the enactments of representing meets presenting, where reflecting meets becoming. Upon this reflection, I come to deeper understand about the point underscored by photographer educator Jörg Colberg on how "the pictures need to drive the project, not what the photographer thinks the project is", the aspect of which "might be one of the toughest challenges for any photographer"(Colberg, 2017, p. 68). And I come to better understanding of Elliot Eisner's remark about art process in general: "The work…also speaks, and at times it is the artist who listens. The work in progress begins to look more like a conversation than a lecture" (Eisner, 2002, p. 78). Along the words from Eisner, John Dewey also underscores the esthetic receptive perceiving (attending) of a craftmanship in fully fulfilling an aesthetic artmaking experience: "The doing or making is artistic when the perceived result is of such a nature that *its* qualities *as perceived* have controlled the question of production….The artist embodies in himself the attitude of the perceiver while he works" (Dewey, 2005, p. 50, emphasis original). What Dewey termed as the perceiver directly connects with the idea of a photographer that attends

(perceives) the qualities of his/her own product to further guide and proceed the process of art-making, without which the quality of artwork would turn mechanical or below fulfillment. "The making comes to an end when its result is experienced as good"(Dewey, 2005, p. 51), in an analogous understanding, a sequencing of photograph series comes to an end when its result is also experienced/perceived as good rather than is intended to be good.

Unexpected Poetic Impulse and Extended Understanding of Multiple Self-World Relational Possibilities

The impulse of writing some short lines has emerged much more often since I practiced outdoor walking and taking photographs more regularly. I would certainly not call these simple rough word lines poems or poetry since they are nothing but rough and fragmented word lines with almost no poetry writing refinement and language craft[15]. Yet I would term that unexpected strengthened impulse as some kind of poetic impulse, an impulse compelling me to express something in short lines, a form akin to poetry in a most superficial way. In some sense, the term of "poetic" is broader and more inclusive than the term "poetry": the triggered expressive impulse is poetic since it makes me want to write down some word lines that could more closely reach some

[15] Photographic visual poetry and text-image relationship may be a fascinating area to further explore in the future, which I have seen from some new publications. While I have been experiencing some poetic impulse and a renewed interest in poetry reading, focusing on topic of photography and poetry (or put in a broader sense as text-image) is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In the photography artist world, I have seen exemplars such as photobooks by poet-photographer Rebecca Norris Webb (e.g. the photobook *Slant Rhymes* (2017) with photo-text design), or the heavily poetry-engaged fine art photographer Alec Soth for his explicit engagement with poetry through frequent Instagram posts and for his careful usage of other poet's poetic lines—usually very few and concise lines—in his photobook *Songbook* (2017) and *I Know How Furiously Your Heart Is Beating* (2019) when the title itself is a poetic line by Wallace Stevens. In the academia, I just encountered the book by scholar Michael Nott specialized in history of photography from UK. The book is titled *Photopoetry, 1845-2015: A Critical History*(2018) which is said to be the first monograph that investigates a wide range of intersectional art and literary practices between photography and poetry, texts and images, by photographers, poets, and their collaborations in the United States and UK within that historical period of time. On another hand, Lynn Fendler has also informed the newly published work *Photographic Literacy: Cameras in the Hands of Russian Authors* (2018) by literary scholar Katherine M. H. Reischl, where she critically investigates authorial practices of renowned Russian writers during late 1800s and early 1900s when they started to use the invented camera and incorporated photography into literary writing, and further examine what sense of photographic literacy and what sense of author has been complicated by this emerging practice of image-text writing. The two monographs could be beginning literature to more focus on the authorial and literacy issue of image/photo-text practices.

aesthetic quality, and such poetic quality could manifest in language forms apart from poetry (e.g. an article or a paragraph are not poems but could feel poetic). Looking through my notes along this photographic journey, I could identify emergent writings out of small photographic field trips and out of viewing experiences of my own and other artists' photographs. Most of them were lines after experiencing visual/material intensity that affected in me certain wonder to write out some words like some raw experiential markers and articulated thoughts. I keep them in records until this point, when I could further analyze them to arrive at some extended understanding.

When looking back and reflecting on the notes of this experiential thread, I identify two main aspects. On one hand, I could identify the few notes when reflections of particular photographic experiences brought me new understanding and a closer distance to appreciate poetry and even to write some simple poems myself. On the other hand, this poetic impulse has also been helpful to engage me with poetry-related readings and thoughts as well, such as reading poems (more often Chinese poems or Chinese translation of foreign poems) and reading poet's interviews or their public talks. Such beginning reading exposure with poetry has occasionally resonated with my understanding of the process of photography as well. I present my reflective thoughts respectively about how my beginning poetic understandings and photographic practices have influenced each other in the following two parts.

Two Photographic Inspirations I Experienced for How Poetic Writing Could Feel for Myself

It begins with a routine campus walk in January 2018. One ordinary evening, after working in the university library, I packed my backpack and went to the parking lot to get my car like usual. The campus was not bright, dim road lights by its both sides. It was still winter time, previous accumulated snow not totally melted yet. I passed the entrance, walked towards my car, and something caught my eyes, quite slightly. Without any hurry or burden to leave right away, I allowed

myself a moment to stop and take a closer look. It was a tree near a road light, a dark-lightning appearance I'd hardly seen of trees at darkened night. Out of familiar impulse and habit, I immediately took out my iPhoneSE and spent 15 minutes with the tree through walking around its trunk, observing how differently the branch outlines scattered the road light and photo-taking, until I arrived at a framing that looked strikingly impressive after at least eight or nine different framing attempts. While reviewing the photos taken along this night tree moment, I arrived at an initial (tiny) inspiration on poetic writing:

> An aroused attention or a moved heart begins to take time looking at whatever lingers or allures;
>
> Keep playing with as varied as possible the vague expressive angles to capture/crystalize that ambiguous impression,
>
> until some expression/presentation takes shape to the extent that it can equally or even more surprisingly impress me the author by standing on its very own.

Almost one year later, with several more photographic experiences involving contingent visual and material improvisation, I wrote the following lines with an enriched understanding about how to write my possible poem:

> This Is How I Learn to Write a Possible Poem
>
> Two experiences of photo-taking: from the tree moment, to the on-the-spot composition and improvisation moment: new spring flower, fallen leaf from last autumn, placed closer to each other by my right hand, captured with iPhone carried by my left hand.
>
> The process of walking, of starting from a sudden observation to the temporary contingent creation (crystallization) of an expressive delivery intended for some reading experiences via the final made photograph. (4/17/2019)

As an ordinary language arts reader, I know there are different types of poems out there: some of them are as short as one line or a few lines on no more than half-age, and some of them are as long as a novel or a small book itself; some of them are written in words mostly figurative and referencing or signifying everyday life materials, scenes and events (yet in surprising arrangements or combinations), and some of them are written with or including loads of specific quotations and/or references from its literary histories. In this regard, I find how there is some kinship between single photograph and short poem with few or no literary quotations: they seem to be only about surface or mere directly visible/sensible stuff, they are brief and concise in their presenting format, and they are able to express some intensive momentary and ephemeral attentions or experiential insights in such relevantly simplistic forms. Because of photographic practices, I have come closer to that particular type of short poems written with and about everyday life vocabularies and realities. In this section, thoughts about poetry are combined with thoughts about photography as a way of extending arts-based thinking about educational experiences. My photographic practices also opened the realm of poetry to my awareness.

Using A Poet's Three-stance Framework on Inward-Outward Looking: Thinking Through My Photographic Notes

Even though I know there has been a thread of digital and written notes (i.e., short brief lines on poetic impulse after field walking, about my and other artists' photographs, and about triggered personal memories and thoughts), yet for a long time, I had no clear idea how to make sense of them in a way better than keeping them the way they were (i.e. mere scattered diary notes). Then I came across an essay by American poet Jane Hirshfield (1998) titled *Two Secrets: On Poetry's Inward and Outward Looking*[16]. In this essay, combining conceptual articulations and illustrative close

[16] It may be interesting to note this anecdote: I read this essay initially from a Chinese poetry media source, which I have subscribed and kept for leisure reading over the past year. What I read in this media was a well-translated Chinese version of the complete essay. Then I sourced back to the original essay and used it in this dissertation writing.

readings of poems and sections of poems, Hirshfield presents the three possible stances of poetry writing in terms of inward and outward looking:

> Outer images carry reflective and indirect meanings as well. Poems of this kind--the great majority of poems, that is--generally takes one of three possible stances. In the first stance, outer reference serves the poet's interior thinking: the world beyond the self appears, but the relationship is that of monologue, with a human-centered consciousness dominating. In the second stance, the poet and the outer world stand face to face in mutual regard; out of that meeting, the poem's statements arise. Here the relationship is that of dialogue, with the wider world treated as both equal and other. In the third stance, the poet became an intermediary, a medium through whom the world of objects and nature beyond human consciousness may speak; in poetry's transparent and active transcription, language itself becomes an organ of perception…...We can think of these three stances as the subjective, the reflective, and objective modes. (Hirshfield, 1998, p. 131)

What Hirshfield has termed as the subjective/monologue, the reflective/dialogical, and the objective/intermediary greatly informs the reflection and critical examination of my notes. While I still feel unable to really identify whether there are any notes manifesting certain reflective/dialogical and objective/intermediary stances between myself and the world, I could sort out the notes by considering how they are pulled towards the subjective stance (inward looking and monologue), and towards the more receptive, dialogical stance (outward looking) when the objective world is more closely observed or pondered about. Given Hirshfield's inspiration, I sort out my photography-triggered lines, with the consideration of arranging them with the beginning lines indicating a more subjective monologue mode and then towards the more receptive mode of the surrounding (objective) world.

Starting from the subjective stance towards the world (a somehow romantic stance towards the world):

Childhood in the South, the First Snowing Day

Grandma woke you up from the womb woven by dry straw, cotton quilt, and a body warmth of dreams. The word " snow" drifted into the cochlea for the very first time. Cold is the weight of air, condensing between breaths, weakly, briefly, and you are totally ignorant of its extreme state. In a country all skins isolate into, the voices and images once active and vacant are banished into the outside, transformed into some peaceful objectivity., Objective yet cordial. Eyes closed still, you instinctively and accurately stretch out hands towards a face that you believe to be eternally safe. Then you are carried out from the inside.

In front of the old wooden window lattice, the working arms are holding the thin little body tight. Falling inside, once again, gliding and perching, the second kind of warmth. Then I look outward together with the direction of your pointing fingers. (1/15/2019)

Playground[17]

A soccer field corner, a platform, a public arena

For competitive games, for leisure entertainment, for stepping-forward performances, for a sitdown as well as for a walk

A playground enclosed by layers of bushes and trees, a space half hidden half open

A playground in a gray cloudy day, yet still with rich colors to shine

[17] This is the exact short text I composed during the photovoice workshop, when one of the participating episodes is narrated earlier in the section of "to attend, not to intend". While in the scene of writing with the photo taken during the photovoice workshop with the prompt of representing "What/how does it feel to be a Spartan?". When composing the text, despite of being evoked to be more receptive towards the photograph itself, the final text titled The Playground was indeed pulled by the subjective stance of the workshop prompt, when the certain degree of photo observation was reordered into my subjective feeling (of being a Spartan).

A playground in the camera eye, empty and awaiting, gazed by an inferred presenter

Do you have a ball to kick into the goal?

What is your ball?

Where is your ball?

(10/27/2017)

All the raindrops before autumn have formed a clean and transparent sea

branches of the leaf-falling trees quietly settle within

The filtered sunshine turns out unusually soft and gentle from its initial blazing thickness

I walk with my everyday life on the unseen ocean floor

working

living

waiting for the winter

that freezes everything

(10/9/2017)

Black Leaves

Snowing, falls another white.

And how many years has it taken for me to singularly notice the black leaves?

Five and half.

Black leaves,

some fermented bodies and flesh in one of those utterly hitting coldness.

Standing on this far land, this moment, I'm able to approach the world in

two windows only,

some roomed light,

some branched white.

And I see black leaves, for the very first time,

back in pale green,

front in mellow black.

(11/29/2018)

Imagine Mountains Out There:

(A felt moment on the fourth floor of the main library, looking out windows inside the space of the fine arts library.)

I once inhibited a vision, one longing for mountains and rivers

I am now experiencing another vision, one that will enable me to see wild plain even when living in steel forests

(1/25/2019)

Now I move to my photographic and poetic lines, which seem to go towards a more receptive and objective stance:

From here, a place so plain and familiar in appearance, into somewhere unknown yet intriguing, with a growing intuitive eye and a camera friend.

May that place-in-becoming not a total self-indulgent romanticization, but a potential existential illuminance—however evanescent it can be—grounded in the ongoing experiential actuality of me in the world. (8/5/2018)

I think of the balance of two voices: the receptive expression and the self-expressive expression. Even how learning about some poetic ethics such as Emmanuel Levinas ethic of alterity may implicitly inform my photo-making and photo-reading? (4/19/2018)

Define Light Skipping

Throw light downwards at a sixty-degree angle.

Gliding at a speed neither the flesh nor the digital mechanical eye can ever capture or cut off, the light simultaneously lands into

dazzling spots of an infinite amount right every moment

it hits waverly water of any size or kind.

(5/31/2018)

I went to the university garden again, and then played with my hair.

the body is longing like water grass

(and I think the symbolism of flower seems cliché, yet the flowers are not cliché forever)

the body is getting old, the scars grow too

the body becomes its own cave

the body tries to understand itself

the body embraces and is embraced by its own shadow, a shadow quit not like shadow of herself but of someone else (and I've played twice with my own hands).

(9/13/2018)

On My Photographic Walk in Dayton Ohio

An initial mini-project inspiration:

Let the street tell, let the thing tell.

When the streets are quiet and empty, are the human traces sounding, or are the things sounding for and within themselves?

Let the streets tell, let the thing tell.

I am learning to feel and listen.

Let the streets tell, when they are charged by their own materiality.

(11/12/2018)

To frame a photo:

What counts as the background and what counts as the foreground?

What counts as the focus and what counts as the peripheral?

What counts as the subject and what counts as non-subject?

What counts as the content of representation and of presentation?

(date unspecified in note)

The most striking moment this morning. I still remember the intensive affect I felt right the moment when I moved to this viewing angle, an immediate felt illusion even just right on my small iPhone screen. And I was feeling a moment of real surprise. And I was feeling I just got the chance to see a tiny slice of the reality that I had never seen before. (10/17/2018)

Let that sudden illusion stay longer, staying in the frame of reference with clear details instead of staying in the romantic impressionistic and purposeful intentionality. Will this be too chilly a vision? Maybe. Yet, the warmth and heat along this path should also be more sustainable and strengthened than the other. (8/22/2018)

I took this branch back home after I encountered it one windy night just walking out of the main library gate. I took it for no particular reason except some ambiguous attachment

feeling after I photographed it on the ground when it was soothed in dark yellow campus road light, looking special somehow.

It has been put on the desk for a few weeks, right to the bed where I sleep every day. And I look at it when doing nothing. I have not figured out how to respond to it yet, then let it be that way on the desk. I feel like finding a wordless and strange companion.

It feels like picking up a vocabulary and taking it to spend an unknown amount of time to understand and appreciate, a vocabulary consisting of no differences between the signifier and the signified. A word, a phrase, a fragmented essay. (3/10/2019)

When sorting out my noted lines over the past year, experiential clues from my distant past and recent photographic life are reconnected and renewed unexpectedly. I recall an unforgettable impression near the end of my adolescent times, a living crisis moment happened when some prior firm emotional attachments or imprints for raining storm suddenly disappeared or was stripped from the material object or the material scene. The moment swiftly led me to be doubtful for any subjective emotion/meaning imposition on material objects. Language arts of such in high school textbooks felt void and fake to me, and I hardly had any emotional resonance with works attaching author's subjective emotions with outer world and objects. It was a time of a strong estrangement when I felt detachment from objects and felt lost in approaching them in ways other than putting them aside in my peripheral vision and merely utilizing them instrumentally for the purpose of my everyday work and living.

An enriched self-world relationality has been made possible to me through photography: besides emotional and subjective monologue as the self-world relational mode, I could listen to and breathe in the surrounding world and objects with no practical or utilitarian purposes, and I could

experience their living energy flowing through my body and renewing my spirit as well.[18] Such new potential relationality of the self towards the world also reminds me of David Hansen's (Hansen, 2017a, 2017b) recent writings on bearing witness as an ethical orientation to studying teachers and their teaching practices, for whom, a witness is like a forest walker along a path breathing in surrounding happenings in a receptive ethos, who differs from and contrasts with a botanist walker who explicitly intends for extracting certain knowledge by going through forest.

Not only does such a set of three inward-outward looking (or self-world relational) stances inform my extended understandings of my photographic practices and relationality between myself and the world, it has also taught me to understand and appreciate ideas from professional photographer and photography educator with a richer range of sensibilities.

I recall the notes I took from a Magnum interview of the photographer Gregory Halpern, who also teaches photography in Rochester Institute of Technology. In the interview, he was asked "what is missing from students' work? What would your best piece of advice be?", and his answers remind me of the importance of not get drowning in one's own subjective ethos/stance--which could turn out quite void, and to move toward the world (looking outward) in a more receptive and respectful ethos:

> If I had to generalize about what is missing too often from American students' work, it would be *content*, simply put. Sometimes students are so well-versed in aesthetics and trends, or in their own emotions and lives, that the pictures are all style and feeling, no content. I'd prefer that students point their cameras at interesting content in an artless way than make photographs of beautifully-seen but relatively insignificant details. (Halpern, 2019, emphasis original)

[18] And now I come to a more explicit understand about why and how photography and other arts practices can be therapeutic.

I recall another commentary I once copied in my notebook, a commentary made by the photographer-writer Teju Cole, when he was asked about reasons why he had felt and judged some photographs to be art, and when he talked about his understanding of art in general:

> I just find that anything really loud and hectic can just last for a moment, but it does not get to the deepest place, that place of self-recognition, which becomes indistinguishable from other-recognition, which is continuous with world-recognition. So, I'm attracted, in all the arts, to those places where something has been quietened, where concentration has been established. I think one of the great artistic questions for any practitioner of art is, how do you help other people concentrate on a moment?.....In all the arts, there are those moments that are as though somebody has made the gesture of raising a palm, which is not a stop sign, but a - "Attend, hush, listen."
>
> I think those are the moments we really live for in art, the moment where the artfulness falls away, and all that is left is that thing we don't have a better word for beyond poetry. (Cole, 2019)

Both Gregory Halpern and Teju Cole mentioned the idea of "artless" as better or more desirable art (in an art context when aesthetic rhetoric might be overused or artist subjectivities might be overflowed), and I cannot help paraphrasing them in the language of Hirshfield cited before: artful to the degree of artless is true and better art, when "language itself becomes an organ of perception", be it language as words, as sounds, or as images (photographs).

Yet recalling the brief discussion towards a non-representational subject from the previous chapter that examines subjectivity of this photographic journey, I am pushed to think about the subject-object relationality assumed by Hirshfield as well. She seems to assume a clear self-world and subject-object distinction in articulating the three different stances. Consider that non-representational theories challenge assumptions of such basic distinctions by first placing the self

and the flesh body as one component of the object world with excesses beyond subjective consciousness and treating human and non-human altogether as simultaneously subject and object. It might be interesting to further analyze how the objective stance described by Hirshfield is somehow inherently ideal and ultimately impossible to realize in Hirshfield's own terms.

A Practice of Playful Improvisation in Making Photographs

> ...play is often considered to be a lightweight activity. But it is equally possible to argue that play is one of the most serious activities that it is possible to participate in, not least because its sense of space depends upon the inversion of the relation of position to movement. (Thrift, 2004, p. 133)

I do not remember playing with material by myself as much often as what I have experienced along this photographic journey. Given the necessity of going outside to take photographs in the very first place to accumulate photographic drafts, I gradually came to a beginning experiential understanding about how playful improvisation could be valuable and even enjoyable in itself in making photographic work. My reflection on this theme is presented below with my sorted journaling notes. Some of the improvisational ideas worked out, and many more of them did not work out. Yet they have become personal records reminding me again and again a spirit of playful improvisation, a mode of acting and feeling towards the uncertain result through experimenting with objects and the surrounding world.

> 4/28/2018
>
> My roommate moved out, leaving an empty room in the apartment. It has stayed empty for months. I didn't move in any stuff.
>
> An empty room, an empty space. What do I want to make out of it? I have taken two setup photos in the room in idle sunny afternoons without intentional planning: first caught by the clear shadow of the window on the floor, tried to take a snapshot of it; then it ended up with

me adding one more visual element (i.e., a childhood doll I've brought with me from China, an empty wine bottle with one flower placed inside).

It makes me think of a possible mini project. Imagine what photo setups I can create inside this empty room? Just imagine I make this empty room into my own photography studio: a room as my personal art studio--even the thought of it sounds luxurious yet intriguing. Now I even start to think about doing some intentional collections of daily stuff, treating them as potential compositional elements for photographs. I now think of flowers, the black plastic cover cloth I saw earlier on campus when it is used on the flood prevention barrier.

Such studio-based image-making is really like writing and composition to me. Then my empty room becomes the place where I play, develop, and experiment with some very basic and enriching visual elements: light, window, interior space, my own body, etc.

Yet upon this thought, I know clearly from this point on that this self-enclosed studio-based image making is not my major approach in the long run.

5/8/2018

after improvising on a photograph in the backyard of Erickson Hall while going to the food court for lunch during noon break.

I don't need a particular place or room as my studio, the world can be my studio. And I practice visual composition with anything I may encounter inside or outside.

Just play around, observe, listen, imagine, try and error, and see what may come out of this process.

Figure 11 The first iPhone photo I took with an inspirational emerging idea around visual and material improvisation for making more interesting photograph.

It is a potential art studio filled with material/visual vocabularies, less than five percent of which I have ever touched, felt, listened to, played with, and composed into the photographic frames:

a dandelion I picked up and placed on

a piece of blank white paper taken from my notebook at

a corner of the Erickson Hall backyard pavement on

a cloudless sunny day while

I walked back from International Center food court after buying lunch, and happened to be caught attention by

the transparent green shadow of the giant outdoor green umbrella.

10/19/2018

a short trip during sunrise time, encountered another initial photographic improvisation material at this MSU landscape site, and needs to be during such sunrise/sunset time with such light angle to make shadows possible.

Figure 12 Two iPhone snapshots recording some initial idea for further visual and material improvisational practice while visiting a local farm site.

Two snapshots from that short sunlight leaking time, and an initial compositional idea that can serve as the basis for detailed planning to be carried and tried out in the near future on whatever sunny days, with the other two defining conditions:

- the improvisation can only take place during the weekday time when this landscape site is open. I've learned so far that they don't open on weekend or during university holidays.
- the improvisation can only take place when this detached unused white door is still there in the site and is not used as well. (I have the intuition that once the weather gets cold, the stuff there will most probably cover the current exposed shelters and also use this door. So, for me know, I feel my most possible chances are within this October time

For possible deliberate improvisational photoshoots to be composed with these basic material/visual elements:

- the light during sunrise time with its perfect angle to make shadows on the white door, and better sunny days
- the detached unused door
- some possible existing bowls of plants to add a little flavor to the shadow scene.
- early preparation and trying out: better arrive at the scene before sunrise, so I can try out some prepared materials(decorations)

Now comes the part for testing and exercising my imaginations: deliberate design for further onsite photographic shooting: How to make and remake affecting scenes with such already-observed material availabilities? Some tentative thoughts:

- think about a possible different background for the white door. I may move it into a different position around, as long as I can make it with my hand and body....
- think about making some changes to the door to make it just visually special in some way. I'm already having the idea of sticking some color paper (I've already have) on the surface of it to add one layer to the shadow.
- if somehow the door is kept unused into winter, snowing winter, it's perfect for imagining and making some clean and poetic scenes.
- Bringing in tripod

Some emerging keywords for my improvisational practices:

- The open space and the open place. Sites built up for other people, functions, which I somehow ambiguous like to go around. an open site, not an enclosed indoor studio where the artists need to take care of every material setup, including light.

- Sensing artistic affects and just try out, making efforts to turn what looks seemingly limiting and constraining into the poetic constitutive elements.

Thinking of my photographic improvisation and composition, some further thoughts and visions. I've used to the small scenes, scenes more presenting details. That's mostly because I have to click the shutter, or my hand/body shadows are the only available shadows I can make of at that moment. With tripod, I may begin to do something differently or at large scale, photographing my whole body as one visual/narrative element in the work.

Yes, I need to work on photographs--at least try it out--with richer spatial layers.

12/1/2018

(emerging) micro-theme: visual improvisation in the fence corner of the farm site；macro-theme: Crystalizing an encounter

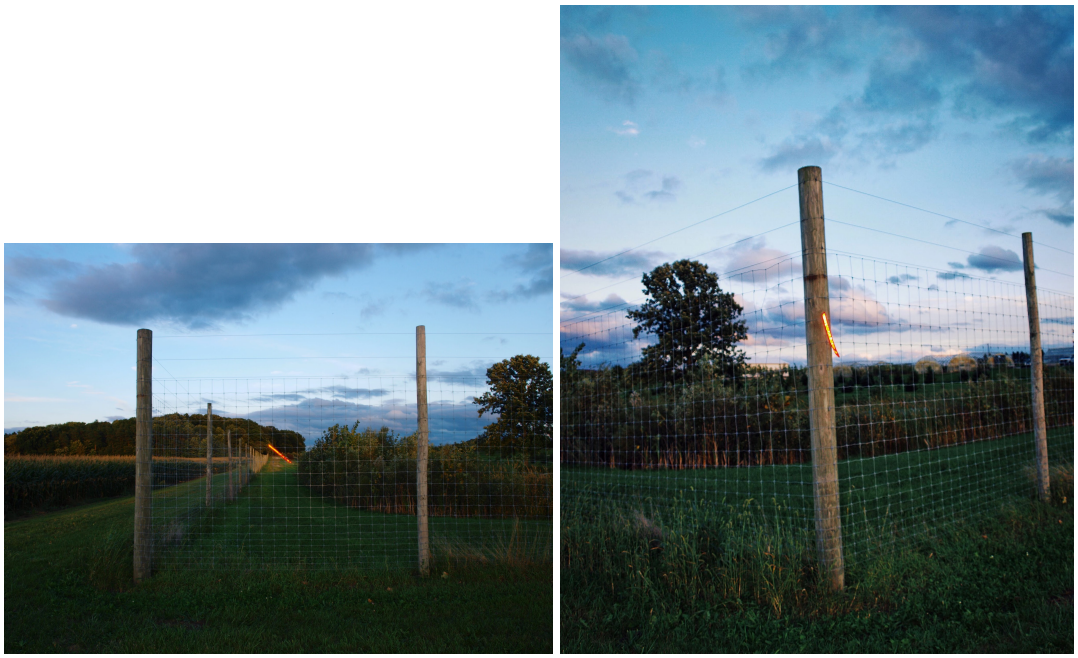

Figure 13 Two camera photo records I had when using the camera flash to frame this corner of farm fence, with a car bulb item I picked up from the road by the farm.

After accidentally capturing a scene of the fence corner on one side of the MSU landscape nursery farm, an impulsive idea emerged in mind: why not treating this small site my temporary and contingent art studio? I cannot find any better light with such incomparable quality than this Michigan place I am living in. Yes, think of how I could not only imagine but to try it out. Last week when I visited this farm site, I saw and played with a lost car bulb section on the road just by the side of the farm. I tried playing it on the fence and I tried capturing some composed scene including this random encountered object with flashlight--given the fact I noticed earlier that the car bulb section is glassy enough to be reflective of light. Then think about what other materials I could intentionally bring to the scene on a different day to test out some compositions.

- The immediate thought I have about material/compositional element for the scene is flowers.
- Something by my side in my everyday living and/or connected with my memories and living impressions of the past.
- The kind of objects that could reflect light? Such as the lost car bulb section I picked out this time.
- Why not going to Dollar Tree to purchase some interesting shiny cheap materials and objects to play on site for exploring photographs?

Upon such on-site experiential and improvisational play in making a photograph that could be somehow interesting to see, I generated a self-prompt: Improvising play with any material objects found or capturing my attention (even for unexplained and unknown reason) on site to temporarily construct something, some scene, and take photographs of it, despite the fact that the two imagined and half-planned out further improvisational photo-

taking projects in the MSU landscape nursery farm did not turn out with qualified photo products.

Experience Surrounding World from an Aesthetic Perspective: The Emergence of Photobook *Missing Mountain*

As noted in the previous chapter, Elliot Eisner talked about two significant aspects on how art helps students to frame the world from an aesthetic perspective: first, experiencing/seeing the world from a perspective that is beyond practical and instrumental mode of rationality; second, being able to explore one's own interior landscape through discovering and acknowledging the world outside. They are also what photographic practices have made possible for me to experience and realize to some degree. On one hand, the necessity of walking outside with a camera (I also call it photographic walk) has pushed me to experience my everyday surrounding environment (e.g. the walking route from Erickson Hall to the library and the few southern university farm sites) in a non-instrumental and appreciative observational manner instead of treating them as peripheral noise in my everyday perceptions. I illustrate in more details in the enacted methods section in the previous chapter how photographic walk has enabled me to approach sites and landscapes in my everyday life with aesthetic uptake of surface beauties and spatial relationalities. On the other hand, I also experienced how aesthetic outward seeing can also affect new self-understandings that is filled with delight (such aspect is more discussed in the chapter on creating a subject as work of art). I provide below a transcription of a voice memo I recorded during one of my many photographic walking trips in one of the university farm sites. This memo indicates the metaphorical transformation taking place in my mind and heart in a moment, the very seed of my current final photobook. It is an

example of how some corners of Lansing and East Lansing has been perceived, felt, and made sense of by me aesthetically[19].

> I just finished another sunrise photography, just one trip to one of MSU farm spots I haven't explored before.
>
> Just feel happy, so so happy. Right now, the sun is fully rising, and I feel myself the voice, the sound of my voice is shaking because still not fully recovered from the cold. And I got some new thoughts, regarding empty mountain. Why the feelings? I just, just…. Just this morning, it evokes in me so much about the metaphor of seeking mountains in a plain, in my Michigan plain. I fully know, more fully know, why this metaphor came to my heart. Mountain, what is mountain? Traditionally something to achieve, a goal, something to conquer. The plain, in contrast, the wild plain, feels so empty, feels it goes anywhere, everywhere, with such wide sight, with no obstacles, no goals, no stuff, no ways of back-and-forth twisted routes. I'm searching for something. And that something could be a kind of metaphor as a mountain that is empty, but it is a way of constructing my route, constructing my life, constructing, finding something, so now I could see the feeling of wandering on my very limited Michigan plain: the different MSU farms could be kind of parallel to my life confusions, my practice of life, of finding a route, finding some goals, finding some mountains to climb up to, not necessary to conquer, but to wonder, while with the freedom of the plain, also with the height of the mountain. And that's something. It makes me think about: oh, the interior aspect of my landscape photography is my longing for life, for certain kind of life, for certain mode of life, but as not--at this moment--as I can say to myself. It's

[19] It might be interesting to note that experiences of photographic walking have brought me closer to some literature from cultural geography, such as the strand emphasizing landscape as a relational encounter on the basis of embodied experiences, and how experiences with and in landscape could imbued with personal interior landscape such as memories and sense of identity and belonging (see for example: Crouch, 2013; Tuan, 1977; Wylie, 2007, 2009, 2010b, 2012, 2014, 2016).

not a life totally rid of the Michigan plain--I've so much enjoyed it in my photography practice. And what do I know? Hum, the kind of freedom I'm kind of wandering(wondering) about. I'm not even there into the realm of getting lost yet, but I've enjoyed the freedom of going anywhere without obstacles, you know, some, um, boredoms, but so much excitement. The practice of living a good life, the practice of my longing life, and my landscape photography trip around Michigan plains.

Within my heart, the metaphor of empty mountain (i.e. missing mountain).

(Transcribed from one voice memo (4'42") recorded on iPhone, me sitting in car before leaving Beaumont Nursery, Landscape Services, Michigan State University, 4120 Beaumont Rd., March 23rd, 2018.)

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