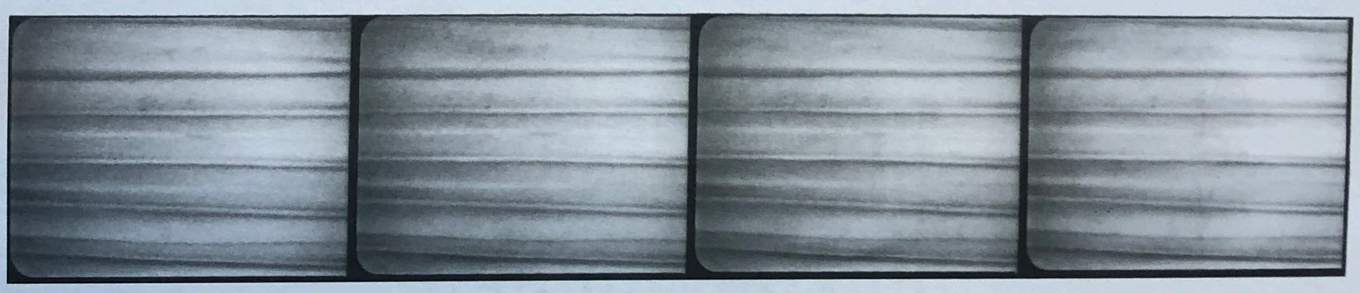


Primer for a Design Department Collective Self-Portrait, Goldsmiths University of London, 2021

Primer for a Design Department Collective Self-portrait

After the 18 months we have spent in virtual space, we tentatively return to campus to begin another year. During this academic year (2021-22) we hope to make a portrait of the Design Department. It will be a collective self-portrait, made up of photostrips taken in an analogue photobooth, pinned up on entrance wall to the Lockwood Building. Each person will receive a token to take their picture.

Over time it will gradually grow to represent the staff, students and people that make up our community. The analogue photobooth is a fitting tool to capture a return to in-person, on-site activity, as it requires being-here for the photo to be taken.

In June 2021 we ran a series of photobooth experiments with students and staff exploring the possibitiles of the photo strip format and the boundaries of self-representation. This primer publication is a record of these experiments. It contains the images we made, references to artists and designers who have worked with the photo strip, and some words inspired by the conversations and thoughts we had. It also explains how an analogue photobooth works and it's unique qualities.

We invite you to participate in our collective portrait and to use this primer to trigger ideas for your contribution.

October 2021

BA Year 2's Digital Studio, January 2021

Goldsmiths students, June 2021

Hut F, BA Design Year 2 Studio

Portraits and Landscapes

In 1925, Anotolo Josepho designed the first Photomaton. This new machine collapsed the photography studio into a booth, replaced the photographer with an automatic camera, and mechanised the photographic development process into a few minutes. Suddenly people had a way to take a photo of themselves that was high quality, cheap and spontaneous, all in the privacy of a tiny space. It created a new image format - the photo strip - which organised bodies vertically into a descending '4x1-frame' animation.

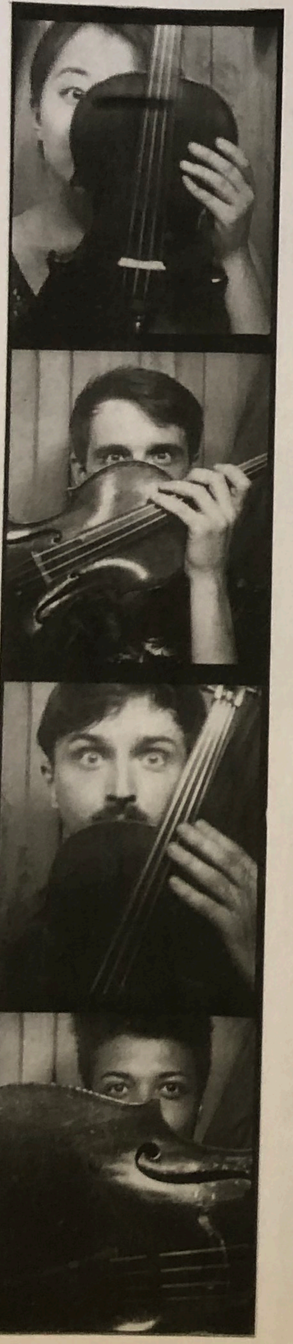
In 2020, the Covid-19 Pandemic forced students and staff at Goldsmiths to leave the studios and work online. On digital interfaces, our faces were designed into a multi frame real-time group portrait. Horizontal computer screens re-oriented portrait formats into landscape(s). Studio space collapsed into individual windows broadcast from our homes. Suddenly, these face grids became the main form of interaction in work, school, social life, politics and the news.

In this new spatial condition the interface decided who's face aligned next to whom. We experienced each other in all sorts of times: real time, another time zone, frozen in time, as time lag, and in the past as our pre-recorded selves. We could be 'present' without showing our presence. We could be together and apart at the same time.

As we return to campus and to the studio, we ask each other how does it feel to be here, together again? How do we begin to know each other again, and rebuild our studio culture? Will things ever be quite the same?

Anotolo Josefo, 1927

Saundra & Ruby, 2021



A string quartet from the Royal Academy of Music, visiting Goldsmiths, June 2021

The Swanky Swotters, 1910

Sketching Club, Goldsmiths College, 1910

Advanced Music Class Goldsmiths College, 1929-31

Historic images provided by Special Collections & Archives, Goldsmiths University of London.

Goldsmiths seniors 1913, Goldsmiths College

Goldsmiths group photographs

Group photographs have long been a tradition of University life. These images, held in the Goldsmiths Library Special Collections Archive, show Goldsmiths students almost 100 years ago posing informally for their group photo. They hold signs, images, objects and scrawled messages and in-jokes on chalkboards. Their bodies fall out of the linear and regimented form typical of a school photograph, and their expressions emit an energy that communicates something essential about them as a group.

A group of students (and their tutors) are a product of their time and also of each other. The group embodies a dynamism and energy which is produced collectively, and which in turn informs each person's thinking, their experience and their work. Could a similar energy be captured in a group portrait that is produced in pieces, over a longer period of time?

How would you decide or design who is placed next to whom? How do you play with the format to signal friendships, through gesture or a sideways glance? Could certain positions and alignments create new connections and friendships?

Women Eurythmics Dancers 1916-18

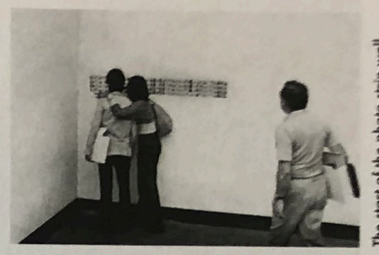
Surrealists group photo, as part of *I Do Not See the [Woman] Hidden in the Forest*, Rene Magritte, 1929

"Photomaton, I've been seen, you've seen me, I've often seen myself. The first strip surprises you as you struggle to find the individual you always believed yourself to be. After the second strip, and throughout all the many strips that follow, while you may do your best to play the superior individual, the original type, the dark fascinating one, or the monkey, none of the resulting visions will fully correspond to what you want to see in yourself."

Definition of a Photomaton, from "Varietes: Revue Mensuelle Illustree de l'Espirit Contemporain", December 15th 1928, Belgium

Varietes magazine, 1928

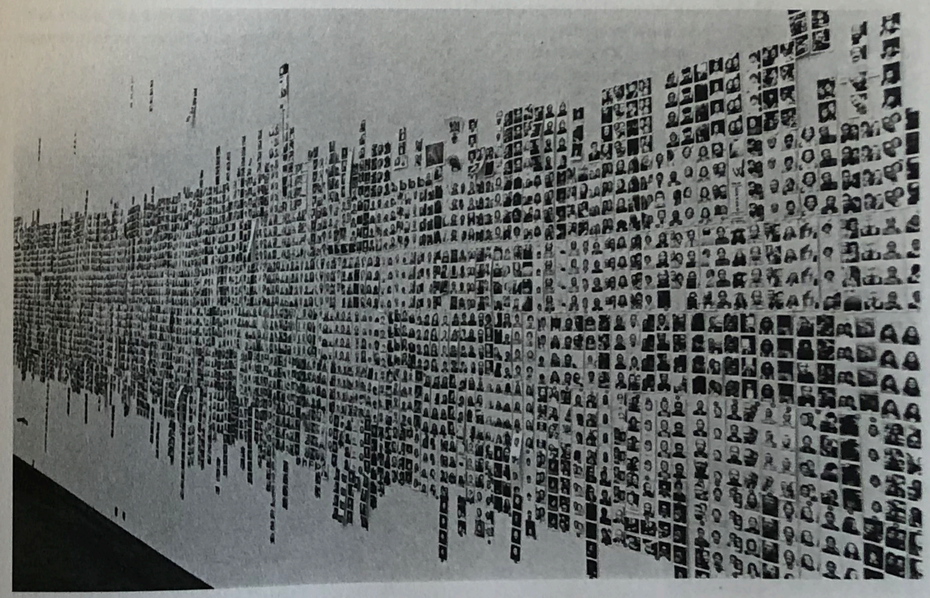
The gallery space, Venice Biennale



The start of the photo strip wall

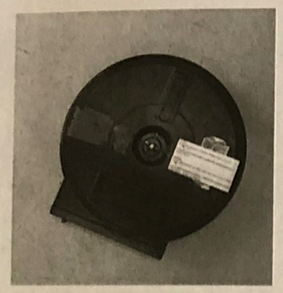
The Group Self-Portrait

In 1972, Italian artist Franco Vaccari presented his "Exhibition in Real Time" at the Venice Biennale. In an empty gallery room, stood an analogue photobooth, with instructions to visitors to "On These Walls, Leave a Trace of Your Fleeting Passage". He took a single photo strip and pinned it on the wall and over the duration of the exhibition, visitors photographed themselves, in a slowly growing portrait of visitors to the exhibiton. Their presence was captured in an organic and sprawling group photo. In 2022 it will be 50 years since this exhibition.



Exhibition in Real Time, Franco Vaccari, 1972

Exposed reel of film in cassette, Autofoto, 2021



Film cassette, Autofoto, 2021

Reel length

All analogue photobooths use reversal photographic paper, produced by only one supplier in the world, based in Russia. The paper comes tightly curled on a reel, sealed in a black bag to prevent exposure to light.

The length of this reel is 180 metres, and with each photo strip measuring 200mm, a reel holds approximately 900 photostrips. With each photostrip containing four separate images, an entire reel potentially contains 3600 individual exposures.

Like a vintage car, the photobooth was designed as a mechanical chain of events driven by finely calibrated moving parts. It uses the language and logics of driving with its gears, transmission and clutch. But it is the paper strip rather than the machine that travels the distance. The way we consume images today has echoes of this feed-down image making. But in the *digital*, the scroll is endless, the images infinite, and the reel never runs out.

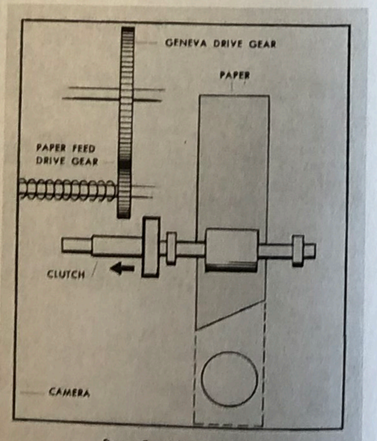


Diagram from PhotoMe manual, 1970's

Paper Feed-Down Clutch

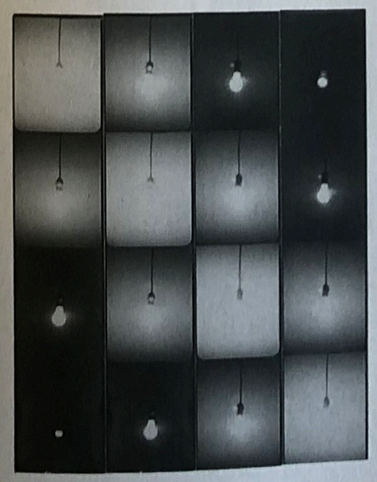
Colour and Contrast

Although invented in the late 19th Century, colour film entered the mainstream as the dominant form of photography in the 1970's. The way we perceive history is shaped by this. Black and white images belong to the past, a different reality. If the recolouring of old black and white pictures can make the past seem more real and relatable, what does the de-saturation of images do to our experience of the present?

Colour contextualises an image. Every era has its colours - an orange rayon sweater from the 1970's or a lime green tank top from the 1990's. But these references are lost in desaturation.

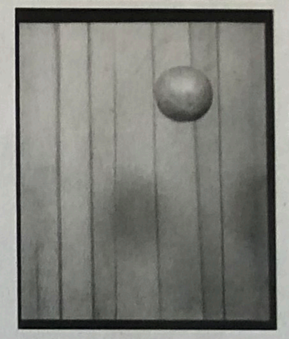
Colours can act unexpectedly when translated into black and white. Red lipstick appears black, baby blue appears white. The black embroidery on a black silk jacket stands out in the photo, its shiny texture illuminated by the flash of the camera. Contrasting colours of the same tone can appear as the same shade - the difference between electric blue and blood red is flattened into the same grey.

But what else could desaturation reveal that we don't notice? What subtle details does colour override? How could the loss of colour completely shift the meaning of an object or a graphic?

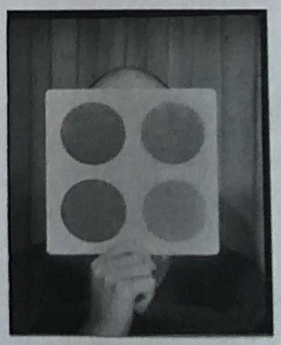


Untitled, Jared Bark, 1974

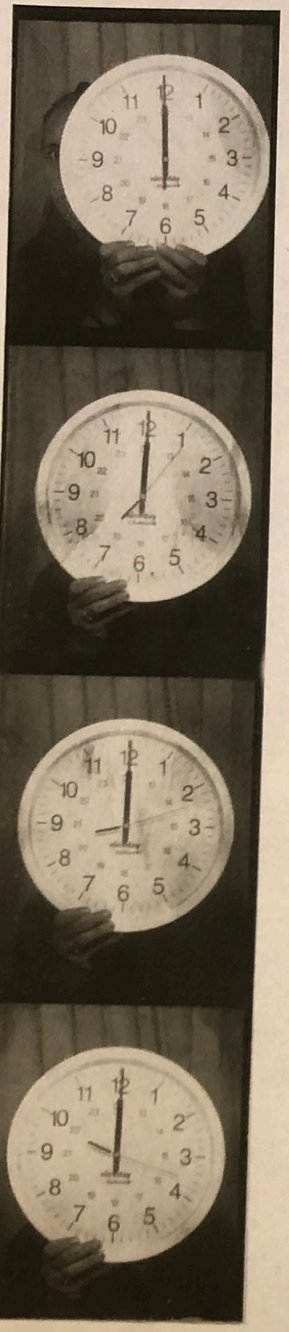
John with torch, June 2021



An orange that isn't orange, 2021



Passport Colour Photo Tests, James Goggin, 1997 - ongoing



Time between flashes, Corinne, June 2021

Trigger >
3 seconds (flash 1)
6 seconds (flash 2)
6 seconds (flash 3)
6 seconds (flash 4)
Development >
300 seconds
Delivery

Womens Ball team Goldsmiths, 1912-13

Invasion of Prague, Joseph Koudeka, 1968

Indicating time

The photobooth strip is a survivor. Because the technology has not changed since the 1920's, photo strips from 100 years ago have the same quality as those produced today. It is likely that any photobooth strip you make will survive 100 years into the future, so it's important to write the date on the back of the strip, otherwise it a be lost in time.

There are many ways to bring a time signature into an image itself. A daily newspaper, a calendar, an era specific object / gesture are a few. On August 20, 1968, a young Czech photographer called Josef Koudeka took a picture of a deserted street during the Soviet invasion of Prague, with his wristwatch in the foreground showing the time of this exact moment.

What objects indicate the times we're living in?

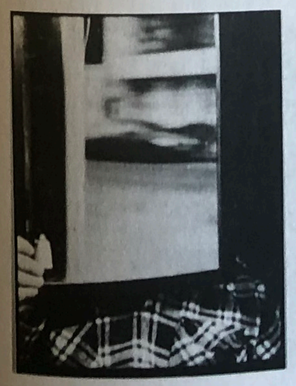
Nowhere, now here

The photobooth strip has a special kind of timelessness. Each portrait is frozen within the same format, image quality and backdrop. Each photostrip looks and feels the same in it's materiality, texture and weight.

The photo strip is a place where time and geography don't register... a portal to another dimension. It is everywhere and nowhere. When photo strips from different eras are put together, it's almost impossible to tell the difference in time - except for small nuances in a hairstyle or the shape of a collar. Decades disappear into a guessing game of significant details.

In 2013, an Argentinian artist visited several photobooths on the streets of Berlin. Using a mirror he reflected the street back into the camera, allowing the photobooth to take a picture of its own location, undoing some of its mystery and placenessness.

Empty frame, 2021



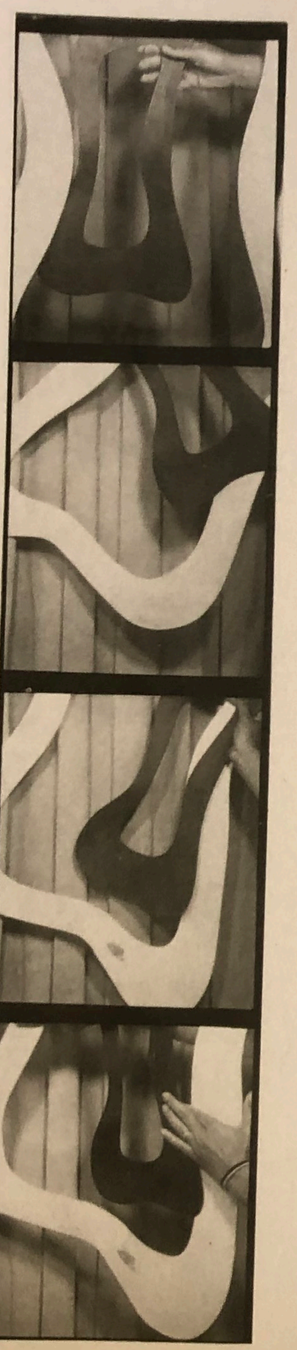
Gabriel Litwin, 2013

Unknown woman, USA, 1970's

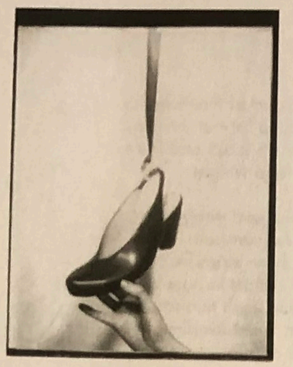
Jeff, Canada, 1980's

Ruby, UK, June 2021

Unknown woman, USA 1950s



BA Design Year 2 student work, June 2021



SS19 Shoe by Tracey Neuls, 2019

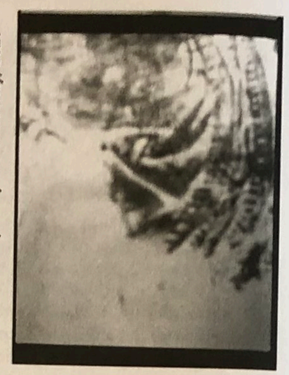
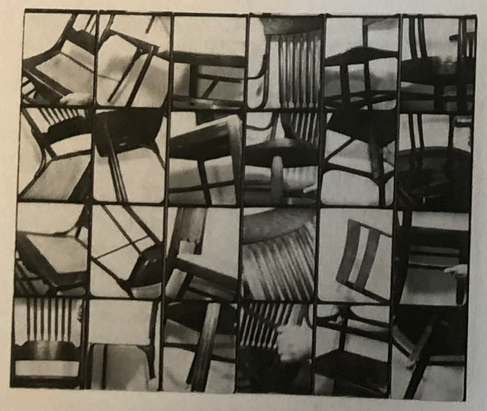


Photo of a denim print by Katherine May, 2021

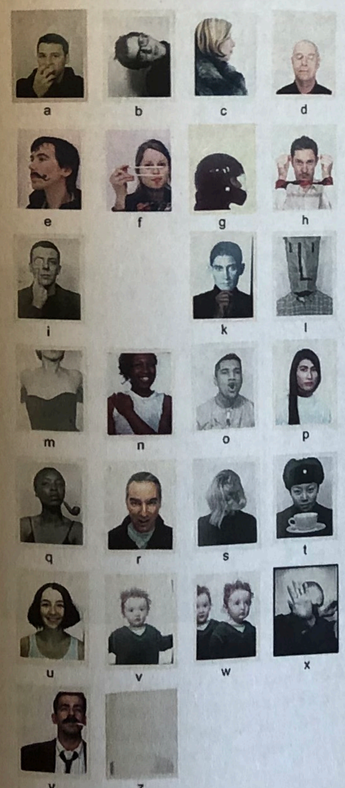
Beyond the portrait

Within the photostrip format is the potential to communicate something beyond a portrait. Its 4 x 1 frame structure can be played with - both conceptually and physically. In the 1990's, Paul Elliman created an alphabet using a photobooth. In the 1970's Jared Bark used the photobooth to explore the form of a chair. If we think of the photobooth as a tool, a method or a process for design, what new types of images, ideas and forms could be produced using it?

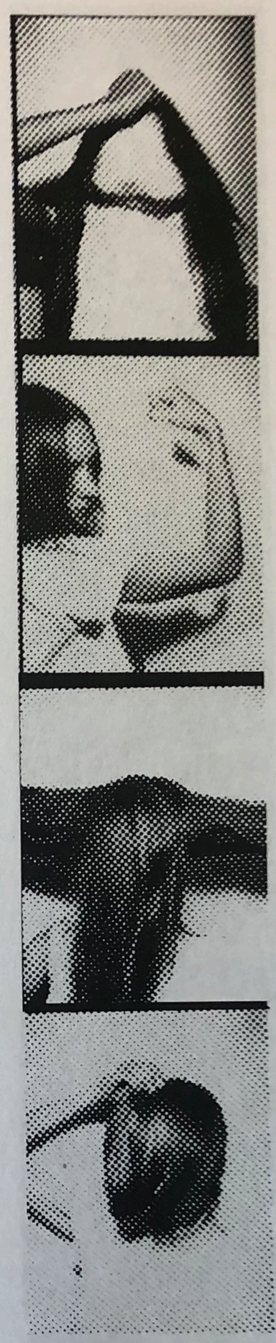


Untitled, Jared Bark, 1974

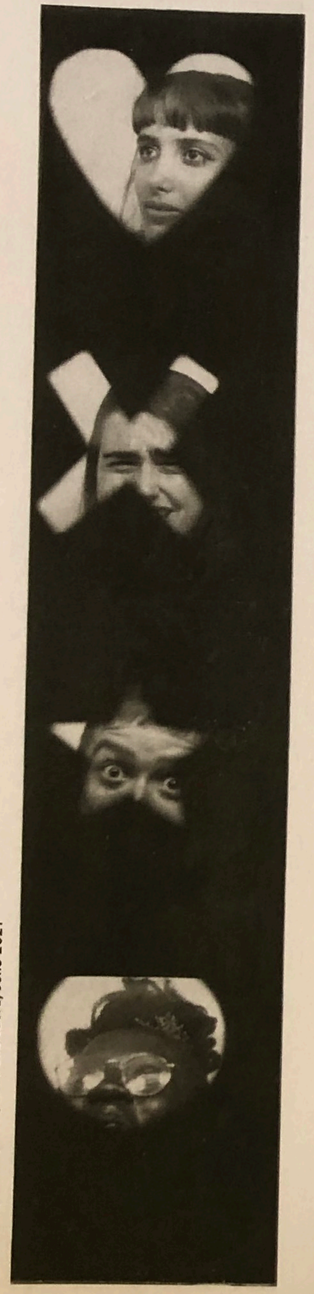
BA Design Studio Signage, 2019



Alphabet, Paul Elliman, 1992



Erika Wall, after Paul Elliman's Alphabet, 2020



DIY filters by Maria, Nick, Lara and Laura, June 2021

"The antiquarian idea of the selfie finds itself in the invention of the photo booth. It is perhaps the first true invention that could address this notion of photographic self-allegiance, except that you can't fit it into your pocket like a cell/sel(f) phone because you fit inside of it."

from "The History of Ideas Blog" by John Ptak

Digital in Analogue

Most people now carry image makers. We selfie, we edit, and put our images into *post-production* where we enhance an image with filters, in vintage, nostalgic, or black and white. The photobooth cannot not selfie, or filter, or edit. These special effects would have to be made physical for the photobooth to register them. Analogue versions of digital filters would have to be designed - a kind of *pre-production*.

The photobooth is an analogue technology in a digital world. The smartphone photographing the photobooth is like a cowboy showdown at dawn. The digital image maker faces the analogue image maker, new and old, one century against another, ready for a shootout. Who would fire first, and who would win?

Ella and Goldsmiths students, June 2021

Untitled #479, Cindy Sherman, 1975

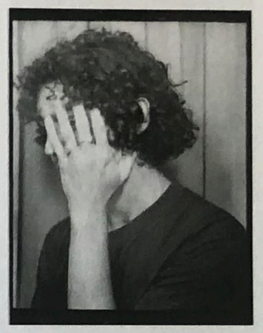
Self Portrait at 17 Years Old, Gillian Wearing, 2003

Identity and Disguise

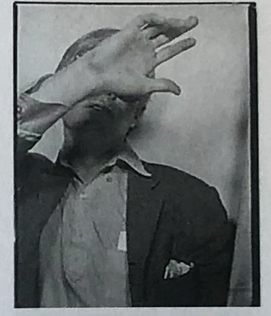
The analogue photobooth picture is not an ID picture. It no longer conforms to passport regulations. It is a 20th Century relic that translates your image into its language.

There are many ways to disguise yourself, to play with your identity or obscure it. You can look like someone else (Cindy Sherman), you can create a mask of your own face (Gillian wearing) or you can obscure your face in many other kinds of ways.

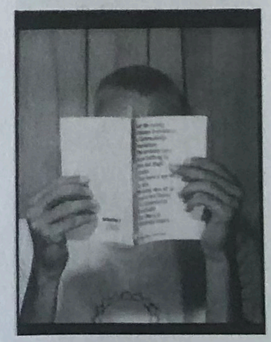
Corinne with mask from ceramics Lab, 2021



Ross covering face, June 2021

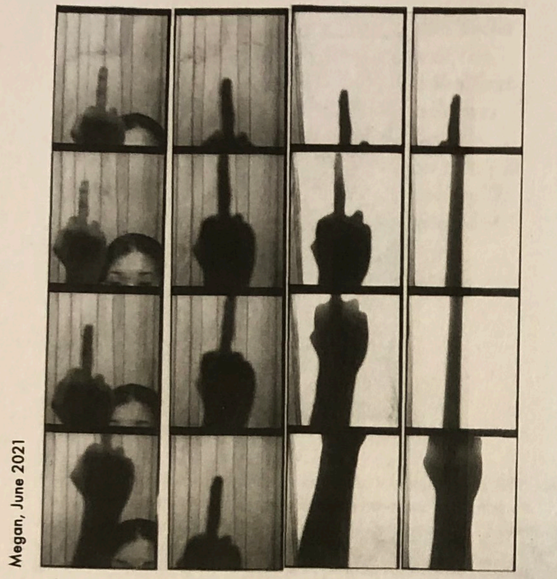


Photobooth Self-Portrait, Andy Warhol, 1963

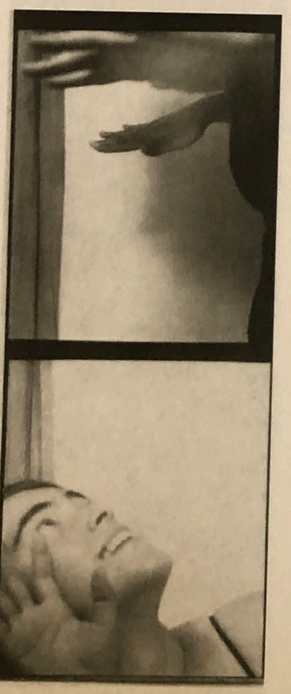


Oli reading book, June 2021

Yuna, June 2021

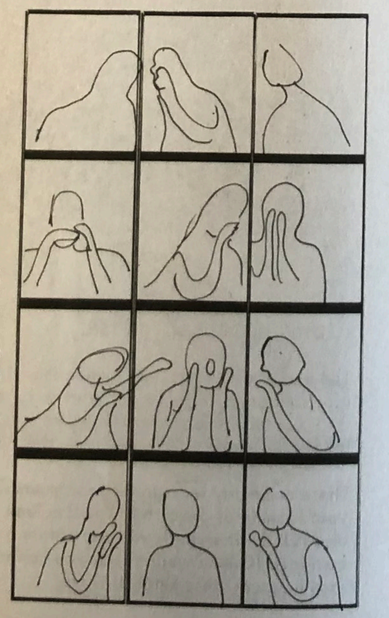


Megan, June 2021



Lara, June 2021

1 2 3

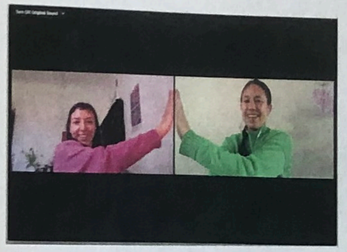


Storyboard for photograph (right), June 2021

Storyboard

A photobooth strip typically invites four spontaneous expressions. But with with a bit of planning the illusion of an interaction, conversation or story across frames can be created. This is a great way to collaborate as a group and inhabit each other's photo strips.

By storyboarding it is possible to cheat time, and make four frames seem like a single image. Or four moments in time seem like the same moment. It's a process of trial and error, and luck. A 4-strip storyboard template is on the back of this primer.

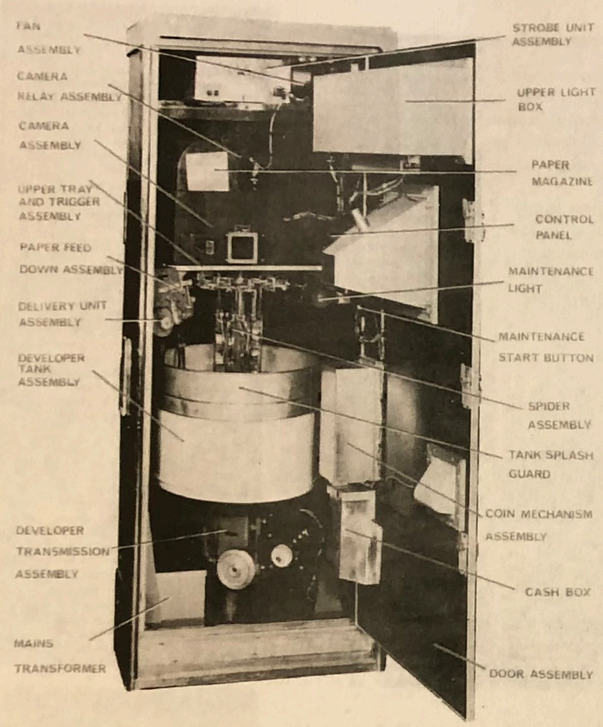


BA Year 2 tutors on Zoom, 2021

Natasha, June 2021

Anna, Teodora, Ella, June 2021

Oli, June 2021



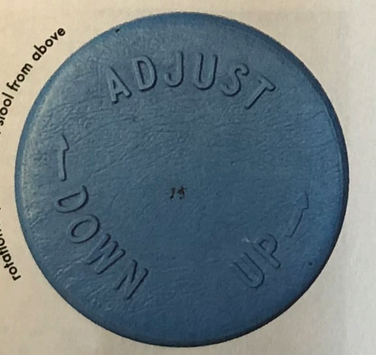
Studio Assembly diagram, from Photo Me manual 1970's

How does an analogue photobooth work?

From the outside, the photobooth process appears simple; customers sit down, pay, and pose as the camera flashes. After four minutes the photo strip is deposited in a delivery unit on the outside of the booth and the happy customer goes on their way. Inside however, hidden from view, is a carefully orchestrated system of electromechanical parts, gears, solenoids, relays, and switches all working in a perfect symphony.

On receiving payment, the mechanical camera inside the booth kicks into gear pulling a strip of paper from a large roll enclosed in a light-tight chamber. This strip of negative-to-positive silver gelatin photographic paper is placed in front of a prism that properly orients the image. A focal plane shutter turns as the paper moves across each flash.

When the photography process is complete, a spider assembly on top of a transmission flips out an arm. The arm takes the paper strip and moves it through a merry-go-round of tanks, dipping and dunking it in water baths, developer, bleach, clearing agent, and finally toner. Once it has been submerged in each tank, the arm drops the finished strip into a delivery unit outside of the booth where it is collected by the customer.

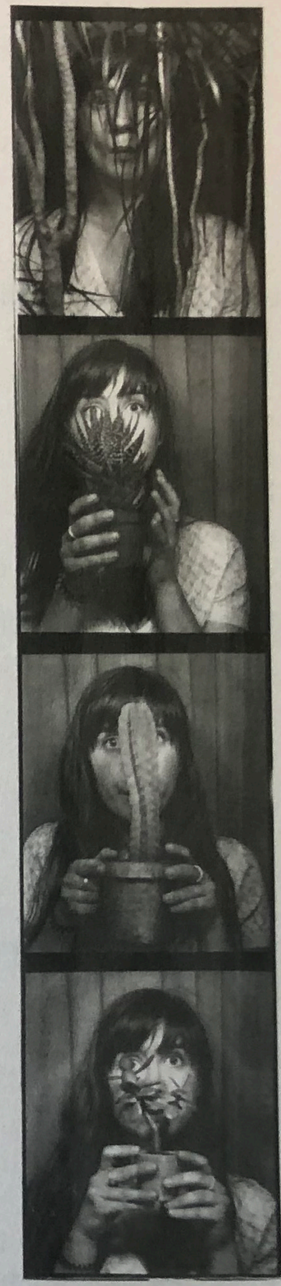


Rotational photobooth stool from above

Autofoto photobooth delivery unit, 2021

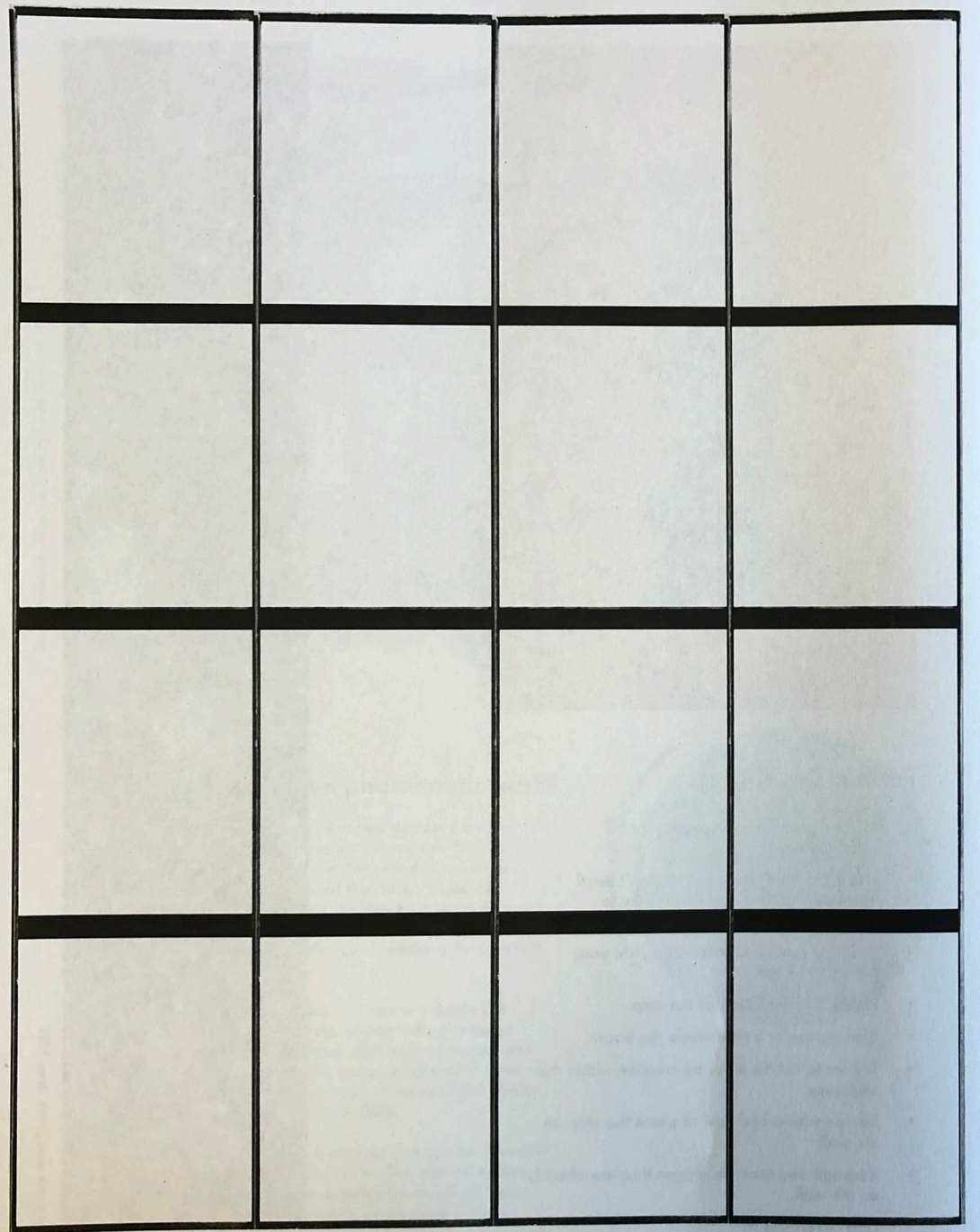
Portrait Tips & Tricks

- Make a plan for your photo / or be spontaneous!
- This is not an ID image - you don't need to show your face, just find a way to communicate yourself.
- You can work as a group and plan your photos together
- Play with orientiation of the strip
- One person at a time inside the booth
- Try not to cut the strip, be creative within the sequence
- Decide where and how to place the strip on the wall
- Respond and react to images that are already on the wall
- Don't overthink it!



Lucy with desk plants, June 2021

Use this grid to storyboard your photo strip. Or, get together with some friends and plan a collective portrait.



Invented nearly a century ago, analogue photobooths produce intimate black and white self-portraits developed within their small mechanical darkrooms. The exceptional quality of the photo strips make these spontaneous and uninhibited images a rare physical memento in today's digital age. Once ubiquitous in shops and stations across the globe, analogue photobooths are quickly disappearing with only a handful left in the world. Our mission is to ensure the survival of these beautiful machines and this unique medium of photography for future generations.

www.autofoto.org | www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/design | Primer assembled by Corinne Quin c.quin@gold.ac.uk | Printed in July 2021