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EMOTIONAL AND SEMIOTIC LANGUAGE IN
VISUAL CULTURE

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Project submitted to IADE – Faculty of Design, Technology and Communication at Universidade Europeia, in fulfillment of the requirements for the Master’s Degree in Design and Visual Culture, carried out under the scientific supervision of Professor Filipe Figueiredo, Coordinator of the Master's Degree in Design and Visual Culture and Assistant Professor

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Keywords Visual semiotics, color theory, photography as language, photobook studies, emotional aesthetics, analog photography, visual culture.

Abstract

This project investigates how color functions as an emotional and semiotic language within photography, exploring its capacity to communicate affect and meaning beyond verbal expression. It analyzes how visual culture integrates emotional states through chromatic elements, with particular attention to the symbolic, perceptual, and psychological dimensions of colors such as red, blue, yellow, green, and purple. The main objective is to understand how photography, particularly in the form of the photobook, can construct visual narratives where color serves as a central expressive agent. The research is grounded in a transdisciplinary theoretical framework, encompassing color theory, semiotics, psychology of color, and photographic studies. Methodologically, it follows a Research Through Design (RtD) approach, where practice and critical reflection are intertwined. As a result, a photobook titled *Purple Is Where I Always Am* was developed, using analog photography to evoke emotional resonance through a careful orchestration of color. While purple emerges as the emotional anchor, the dialogue between hues reveals the layered, symbolic, and sensorial language of color. This project reflects on color's ability to serve as both symbol and sensation, proposing photography as a universal language of emotion and experience. The thesis contributes to contemporary discussions on image making, perception, and the poetic potential of color in visual storytelling. More broadly, it reflects on photography as a nonverbal language and color as a visual signifier capable of evoking emotional and cultural meaning. By exploring color as a form of affective and symbolic communication, the project reinforces photography as a universal language within visual culture, one that transcends words to speak directly to perception, memory, and emotion.

Palavras-chave	Semiótica visual, teoria da cor, fotografia como linguagem, estudos sobre fotolivros, estética emocional, fotografia analógica, cultura visual.
Resumo	<p>Este projeto investiga como a cor funciona como uma linguagem emocional e semiótica na fotografia, explorando sua capacidade de comunicar afeto e significado para além da articulação verbal. Analisa como a cultura visual integra estados emocionais por meio de elementos cromáticos, com atenção especial às dimensões simbólicas, perceptivas e psicológicas de cores como vermelho, azul, amarelo, verde e roxo. O principal objetivo é compreender como a fotografia, particularmente na forma do fotolivro, pode construir narrativas visuais em que a cor atua como agente expressivo central. A pesquisa fundamenta-se num referencial teórico transdisciplinar, que abrange teoria da cor, semiótica, psicologia da cor e estudos fotográficos. Metodologicamente, segue uma abordagem de Pesquisa por Meio do Design (Research Through Design, RtD), em que prática e reflexão crítica se entrelaçam. Como resultado, foi desenvolvido um fotolivro intitulado <i>Purple Is Where I Always Am</i>, utilizando fotografia analógica para evocar ressonância emocional por meio de uma cuidadosa orquestração cromática. Embora o roxo emergja como âncora emocional, o diálogo entre diferentes tonalidades revela a linguagem simbólica, sensorial e estratificada da cor. Este projeto reflete sobre a capacidade da cor de funcionar tanto como símbolo quanto como sensação, propondo a fotografia como uma linguagem universal da emoção e da experiência. A tese contribui para os debates contemporâneos sobre criação de imagens, percepção e o potencial poético da cor na narrativa visual. De forma mais ampla, propõe uma reflexão sobre a fotografia como linguagem não verbal e a cor como signo visual capaz de evocar significados emocionais e culturais. Ao explorar a cor como forma de comunicação afetiva e simbólica, o projeto reforça a ideia da fotografia como uma linguagem universal dentro da cultura visual, uma linguagem que transcende as palavras para falar diretamente à percepção, à memória e à emoção.</p>

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INTRODUCTION, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This project explores photography as a universal language, focusing on how color functions as an emotional and semiotic tool within that language. Photography, as a visual medium, has long been understood as capable of transcending verbal language. This research proposes that color, beyond its descriptive and aesthetic qualities, operates as a language in itself, a system of signs that communicates mood, memory, meaning, and emotion without the need for translation.

This work investigates photography as a universal language, capable of using color and composition to transmit messages that do not depend on a common spoken language. In this sense, a photograph can, through its composition, convey, for example, melancholy, mystery, or joy, among countless other feelings and messages. This language can be constructed with diverse elements such as depth, movement, point of view, and focus, among others. In this project, the focus is on color, that is, the aim was to understand the language of color in photography, and what kinds of messages can be conveyed through different color combinations.

Gunthert (2014) wrote about how photography reaches “the universality of a language”, and Ginger (2012) also discusses a “historical notion of photography as a universal language”. In the same vein, Allbeson (2015) describes UNESCO's use of photography to transmit internationalist messages. Thus, the idea of photography as a universal language is not unfamiliar to the specialized literature.

Faced with the breadth of this analytical theme, and in dialogue with my own photographic work, I chose to focus on the use of color. This investigation represents the theoretical component of my photographic project, which also includes the photo book *Purple is Where I Always Am*, containing photographs taken by me between 2022 and 2025. Regarding my photographic work, I mainly photograph people in diverse settings. I have a strong interest in the relationship between humans and their environment. Colors are a central element in my work, which I use to convey emotions and the energy of the environment. I strive to highlight color, and often play with oppositions and contrasts, such as cool and warm tones.

Theoretical Problem

The central theme of this project is the investigation of photography as a universal language, with a particular focus on the role of color as a communicative element. My aim is to understand how color, in photographic practice, can transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries, functioning as a medium of emotional and sensory communication.

The project is intrinsically linked to my own artistic project, the photo book entitled *Purple is Where I Always Am*, in which I visually explore the expressive potential of colors through chromatic chapters (blue, yellow, red, green, and purple), each representing distinct emotional states. The theoretical investigation accompanies and justifies this artistic practice, drawing on references from fields such as color theory, visual semiotics, perception psychology, aesthetics, art history, and contemporary photography.

Thus, the theoretical framework adopted is multifaceted, bringing together classic authors such as Roland Barthes, Johannes Itten, and Josef Albers, as well as contemporary figures like Wu et al., Robson Ruiz, Zappavigna, among others. The project is structured around an expanded concept of language, not restricted to verbal expression, but open to any sign system capable of conveying ideas and emotions, photography in this case, and more specifically, color in photography. The text seeks to articulate photographic language with semiotic theory, particularly drawing on the contributions of Saussure and Peirce, to support the view that color can be understood as a visual sign with symbolic, relational, and emotional meaning. Color, as a physical phenomenon, is also interpreted as psychological, sociocultural, and historical, revealing itself as a complex and polysemic language.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding the project are: In what way can photography be understood as a universal language? What role does color play in constructing this visual and emotional language? How are different colors emotionally and symbolically perceived in various contexts? How can colors in contemporary photographic practice communicate affective and subjective states?

These questions are investigated through a narrative literature review and an analysis of my own artistic production. Thus, the study is not limited to describing theories or presenting images; rather, it offers a critical reflection on how color operates as a language, both in art history and in contemporary practice, including analog and digital photography. Color is

examined as a compositional, technical, symbolic, and affective element, valued not merely as ornament, but as a narrative structure of the image.

General and Specific Objectives

The objectives of this research are both general and specific. Broadly, the work seeks to investigate how color can function as a language in photography, constructing shared meaning beyond linguistic or cultural codes. More specifically, it seeks to examine how colors operate as visual signs, carrying symbolic, emotional, and cultural value, and how this symbolic system can be employed intentionally within photographic practice. Another objective is to articulate theory and practice through the creation and analysis of the photobook project *Purple is Where I Always Am*, where the subjective dimension of color choice is approached as a methodological and communicative act.

Methodology

The methodology of this research is qualitative, theoretical-practical in nature, and situated in a visual-cultural and autoethnographic perspective. It includes a narrative literature review, allowing flexibility in the articulation of sources across multiple disciplines. It also includes the creation and analysis of a photobook as a site of sensitive research. The theoretical analysis is supported by more than forty referenced authors. The affective and symbolic interpretations of color are analyzed through both scientific studies and visual semiotic frameworks, with a special focus on analog photography, valued here not only for its aesthetics but for its tactile, unpredictable, and emotional qualities.

Methodologically, the project follows a *Research through Design* (RtD) approach. This framework acknowledges that knowledge is not only produced through theoretical study, but also through cycles of practice, experimentation, and reflection. In this sense, the act of conceiving, producing, and sequencing the photobook *Purple Is Where I Always Am* is itself a form of research: design and artistic decisions—such as the orchestration of colors, the use of analog processes, and the construction of a chromatic narrative—generate insights that theory alone could not reach. RtD provides the methodological ground where making and thinking become inseparable, and where practice is both process and result.

The photographic process is integral to the methodology. Through analog techniques and intentional chromatic choices, each chapter of the photobook corresponds to an emotional state. Blue suggests solitude and introspection; yellow, joy and openness; red, passion and

urgency; green, harmony and pause; and purple, ambiguity, intuition, and synthesis. Purple, as the final chapter, operates as the emotional center of the book and the project, symbolizing that which cannot be easily named what exists between the visible and the felt.

Analog photography is not merely a stylistic choice, but an epistemological one. Its materiality, its grain, and its temporal rhythm align with the conceptual concerns of the project. Light, exposure, and film selection are not only technical parameters but emotional decisions. In this sense, the photobook becomes not just an outcome of the research, but an active part of the methodology, a visual essay that speaks where theory alone cannot.

The structure of this thesis reflects the constant dialogue between thought and image. Following the introduction, which outlines the research problem, questions, objectives, and methodology, Chapter One presents the theoretical framework. The literature review is organized around five axes: photography as a universal language, color theory and photography, semiotics and visual signification, the psychology of color and affective response, and the photobook as a structure for chromatic storytelling.

Chapter Two develops a deeper discussion on photography as language and color theory, addressing studies on color in photography, the role of color as a sign in visual communication, the specific use of purple, visual semiotics, and the materiality of analog processes.

Chapter Three gathers the case studies. The first part examines “masters of color” such as William Eggleston, Alex Webb, Constantine Manos, Martin Parr, and Edward Burtynsky, highlighting different approaches to chromatic meaning. The second part focuses on contemporary practices organized by themes—emotional realism and narrative intimacy, youth and material atmospheres, dreamlike visuality, chromatic experimentation, and the limits of representation.

Chapter Four turns to my own project, *Purple is Where I Always Am*. It presents the concept, layout, and chromatic narrative of the photobook, structured into five chapters (Blue, Yellow, Red, Green, Purple). This section also reflects on the narrative structure through color, showing how sequencing and chromatic rhythm guide the reader’s affective and perceptual journey.

The Final Considerations integrate theory, case studies, and practice in a critical reflection, noting limitations and potential future directions. Finally, the Appendix documents the printed version of the photobook with layout spreads and additional visual material.

This project proposes that photography is not merely a visual record, but a language of interiority, where color becomes a tool for emotional and symbolic communication. It argues that the photographic image is capable of translating the unspeakable of touching that which escapes logic but is deeply felt. By positioning color as the core of this language, the study invites a reconsideration of how we perceive, interpret, and feel images. It is a call to look more slowly, more attentively to see not only what is there, but what is being said in silence, in shadow, in color.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a narrative literature review organized around five key axes that support the theoretical foundation of the project: photography as a language, the study of color in photography, semiotic and symbolic analysis, the psychology of color, and the photobook as a medium for reflection and communication. The review draws from a diverse range of disciplines including visual culture, aesthetics, communication theory, art history, and psychology. Together, these sources create an interdisciplinary framework for understanding how color in photography functions as a form of emotional and symbolic language.

1.1 Photography as a Universal Language

The idea that photography constitutes a universal language is echoed throughout visual culture studies. Authors such as André Gunthert (2014) and Jason Ginger (2012) emphasize photography's ability to communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Gunthert speaks of photography's reach toward the universality of a language and, in the context of digital networks, identifies the emergence of the conversational image, a mode of circulation that fosters interaction rather than passive consumption. Ginger situates photography historically as a universal language of modernity, yet also reveals that claims of universality were always mediated by cultural translation, since what was presented as universally legible was often constructed through Western visual codes.

Similarly, Allbeson (2015) explores UNESCO's use of photography in the postwar period to construct internationalist narratives, underlining its rhetorical power in political and humanitarian discourse. Such projects demonstrate how institutions mobilized the medium's claim to universality in order to generate empathy and solidarity across borders. Hall's (2020) broad definition of language as any organized system of signs supports this perspective by providing a conceptual basis for seeing photography as a communicative system. Urban (2014) reinforces this view by stressing that language, broadly conceived, is always a fabric of signs and codes—an idea that strengthens the argument that photography, by producing and circulating signs, operates as a legitimate linguistic system. Luong (2023) and Yao and Wu (2023) extend this approach, arguing that photography functions as a formal language that can travel across contexts and become, in Wu's terms, a borderless form of communication. Lyons (1995), focusing specifically on color, reinforces that chromatic decisions operate as semiotic elements within this language.

The universality attributed to photography must, however, be understood as a horizon rather than a given fact. Harrison (2002) frames photography as narrative inquiry, emphasizing how photographic practice constructs discourses that can be read and interpreted as forms of storytelling. This highlights that even when photographs circulate as seemingly transparent evidence, they remain situated in systems of meaning. Iskin (1997) contributes to this critique by reading photography through Lacanian theory of subjectivity, demonstrating that photographs both reflect and construct the subject who views them. Evans (2013) continues this line of thought in the study of erotic photography, showing how formal and chromatic codes shape not only representation but the construction of desire and subjectivity itself.

At the same time, photography's universality has been expanded by its digital circulation. Zappavigna (2016) demonstrates how networked photographs, especially those circulating through hashtags, create social bonds that are not limited to linguistic communities. Images move across contexts and generate new publics, reinforcing the claim that photography can serve as a universal visual connector. This circulation also recalls Michel Foucault's (1986) notion of heterotopia—spaces that hold multiple, layered meanings simultaneously. Photography, by creating visual heterotopias, allows disparate temporalities, cultures, and perspectives to coexist within a single image, enriching rather than undermining its claim to universality.

Finally, the notion of universality intersects with theories of aesthetic experience. Mead (1926) and Lund and Anastasi (1928) argue that responses to beauty, tension, and harmony precede verbal language and are widely accessible across different audiences. Their insights suggest that photography communicates by appealing to preverbal sensitivities, even while its meanings are always shaped by cultural and social contexts. In this sense, photography as a universal language does not impose one fixed meaning but provides a shared field of experience where diverse interpretations can take shape.

1.2 Color Theory and Photography

Within the broader conception of photography as a language, color emerges as one of its most powerful and complex components. Since the early twentieth century, artists and theorists have studied the expressive and communicative potential of chroma. Johannes Itten, a key figure at the Bauhaus, proposed that the relationships between hues—through harmony, contrast, and complementarity—carry specific emotional and symbolic resonances. His

model, which includes a color wheel with primary, secondary, and tertiary tones, framed color as an organized system that could be mobilized like an alphabet for constructing meaning (Borges & Angeli, 2022; Heitlinger, 2007). Josef Albers further developed this understanding by demonstrating that color is relational: the same hue shifts in value and affect depending on its context. For Albers, the perception of color is never isolated but always shaped by adjacency, interaction, and light conditions, a principle that has been crucial for photographic practice, where palette, contrast, and temperature can entirely change the reception of an image (Robson Ruiz, Henschel, & Lampert, 2023).

At the same time, philosophers and scientists had long recognized that color challenges the boundaries of perception. For example, Brentano, as cited in Massim and Hämmerli (2017), already posed the paradox of purple as a perceptual synthesis rather than a physical wavelength. Massim and Hämmerli build on this by showing that colors such as purple resist strict optical explanation, existing instead as complex perceptual events. This argument is particularly relevant to photography, where color is not only measured by light physics but interpreted through the subjective eye and cultural imagination.

The historical and cultural dimensions of color reinforce this point. As an example, Lyell (2022) traces the associations of purple across Antiquity, from Homeric Greece and Mesopotamian inscriptions to Biblical Hebrew traditions, showing how a single hue could symbolize power, prestige, or generosity depending on the context. Ferraro (2012), Thyreen (1999), and Proudfit (2008), through their readings of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, emphasize how purple in literature and culture is mobilized as a sign of spirituality, identity, and resistance. Schliephake (2024) adds that purple has retained its connection to the sacred across multiple traditions, from antiquity to modern art, where it functions as a bridge between visible reality and transcendent meaning. Taylor (2018), in his broader analysis of color in visual culture, situates purple within a cross-disciplinary conversation that includes photography, literature, and cinema, emphasizing its role as a chromatic operator of spirituality and affect.

These cultural histories remind us that chromatic meaning is never stable. Pastoureau (2023), in his *longue durée* study of red, demonstrates how a single color shifts its symbolic weight across centuries, from vitality and sacredness to danger, prohibition, and passion. Such studies underscore that colors operate simultaneously as perceptual phenomena and symbolic codes, and that photography, by mobilizing them, inevitably participates in historically sedimented discourses.

1.3 Semiotics, Symbolism, and Visual Signification

Semiotics provides one of the most productive frameworks for analyzing how photography communicates. By studying signs and systems of meaning, semiotics allows us to understand how colors, forms, and compositions function not merely as perceptual phenomena but as signifiers embedded in cultural codes. Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) defined the sign as a structure composed of signifier and signified, while Charles Sanders Peirce (1991) introduced a triadic model of icon, index, and symbol that continues to shape visual analysis. Umberto Eco (1986) consolidated these foundations by describing semiosis as an open process of interpretation. These theoretical pillars have been central to framing photography as a language of signs rather than as transparent evidence.

Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida* (1981), extended semiotic thinking into the realm of affect by distinguishing between the studium and the punctum. The studium refers to cultural and coded readings of the photograph, while the punctum describes the detail that wounds or pierces the viewer, creating a personal, affective resonance. Fontanari (2015) develops this idea in relation to color, arguing that chromatic elements often serve as punctum, a sudden red dress, a blue cast, or a golden glow that cannot be paraphrased in language but powerfully shapes how an image is felt.

The semiotics of color has increasingly been studied as a system of its own. Kress and van Leeuwen (2002) argue that color constitutes a semiotic mode with its own grammar, including parameters such as saturation, brightness, contrast, and modulation. They show how these features organize meaning, guide attention, and establish symbolic associations. Almalech (2017) further insists that color operates as an autonomous semiotic system, complete with codes and rules that extend beyond the visual arts into everyday communication. Hasiana, Agustina, and Trisnawati (2024) reinforce this point by examining how emotions are encoded and decoded through color in cultural contexts, demonstrating the direct link between chroma, affect, and meaning.

At the same time, semiotics opens questions of subjectivity. Iskin (1997) situates photography within Lacanian theory to show how images not only reflect but construct subject positions, embedding desire and identification within visual codes. Evans (2013), in her study of erotic photography, expands this by analyzing how technical and chromatic decisions inscribe subjectivity, shaping how intimacy and desire are represented and

perceived. These perspectives suggest that semiotics is not limited to structural analysis of signs but also to the psychic and cultural positions created through them.

Other scholars highlight the importance of context in visual signification. Jonathan Culler (1986) emphasizes interpretive codes that enable symbolic readings, while Floyd Merrell (2005) underscores the role of cultural frameworks in shaping how signs are understood. Uslucan (2004) and Yakin and Totu (2014) similarly show how semiotic tools can decode color meanings across traditions, and Wu et al. (2019) describe color perception as a threefold process—physical, physiological, and psychological—culminating in what they call color language. These perspectives converge with David Batchelor’s *Chromophobia* (2000), which maps the persistent suspicion of color in Western thought and shows how cultural discourse has long treated color as excessive or secondary compared to line, reason, or form.

Semiotic traditions extend this insight. Waterman (1956) and Hoopes (2014) analyze the foundations of Saussurean and Peircean semiotics in relation to visual systems, highlighting how colors can be understood as signs with both arbitrary and relational meaning. In Peirce’s triadic framework, a color may function iconically (resembling natural appearances), indexically (indicating states such as fever through redness), or symbolically (red as a cultural marker of prohibition or love). This multiplicity reinforces the semiotic flexibility of color in photography, which can operate across registers simultaneously.

Finally, psychological and anthropological approaches confirm that color is not only symbolically constructed but also affectively embodied. Jeong and Kim (2025) show continuity between humans and primates in responses to red as a signal of sexual attraction and social dominance, demonstrating that certain chromatic associations are not merely cultural conventions but have deep biological roots. This evidence complements earlier psychological findings and expands the claim that color in photography resonates at once through cultural codes and through embodied perception.

Taken together, these perspectives show that color in photography must be read across three interwoven domains: the formal and perceptual, where chromatic relations shape visual impact; the historical and cultural, where meanings evolve across time and societies; and the symbolic and semiotic, where colors act as signs embedded in broader communicative systems. In practice, photographers constantly navigate these domains, whether by selecting film stocks with particular chromatic tendencies, using digital palettes to evoke atmosphere, or sequencing photobooks to build chromatic narratives. Color in photography is thus not a

surface attribute but a structuring element of the medium's language: a grammar of hues that communicates perception, affect, symbolism, and cultural resonance.

In summary, semiotics and symbolism reveal that color in photography is not simply an aesthetic choice. It is a sign system that communicates on multiple levels: through codified cultural meanings, through subjective resonance and affect, and through historically sedimented discourses that have elevated or devalued chroma. Semiotic analysis thus provides the conceptual tools to read color as language, one that is both conventional and affective, shared and intimate.

1.4 The Psychology of Color and Affective Response

The psychology of color provides empirical grounding for the idea that chromatic choices in photography are not neutral but elicit affective and behavioral responses. A wide body of research shows that colors influence mood, perception, and action, though the strength and direction of these associations vary across contexts and cultures.

Kumarasamy, Apayee, and Subramaniam (2014) compile multiple studies to demonstrate that color functions simultaneously as an objective stimulus, grounded in physics and physiology, and as a subjective experience, shaped by emotion and cultural learning. Their synthesis highlights that effective communication with color depends on this dual dimension. Carol and Edward Lawler (1965) found that even children as young as three associate yellow with happiness and brown with sadness, suggesting an early intuitive grasp of chromatic affect. Norton (2009), working with university students, found that bright hues such as red, yellow, blue, green, and purple were largely associated with positive emotions, while achromatic colors like black and gray tended to elicit negative responses. Hemphill (1996) confirmed this pattern by showing that bright colors often evoked positive feelings, while darker tones correlated with negative reactions. Odom and Sholtz (2004) demonstrated that primary colors generated stronger affective responses than their lighter shades, indicating that intensity of hue influences emotional impact.

Other research highlights the importance of situational context. Kutchma (2003) found that red walls increased reported stress compared to green or neutral rooms, suggesting that color in the environment can modulate physiological and psychological states. Diana (2006) challenged claims of innate universality by arguing that many color–emotion links are learned through experience and cultural conditioning. Isaacs (1968) supported this with evidence of cultural variation, noting that white signifies purity in many Western contexts but mourning in

parts of Asia. Won and Westland (2017) emphasize that the psychological and affective meaning of color cannot be reduced to intrinsic qualities but must always be understood in relation to its context. As they note, “the meaning of a colour is not fixed but changes with its context, such as illumination, material, and culture” (p. 450). The same hue may therefore evoke radically different emotional states depending on the lighting conditions in which it is perceived, the material surface it inhabits, or the cultural framework through which it is interpreted.

At the same time, certain colors show recurring affective associations that span both biology and culture. Red, for instance, is consistently linked to urgency, passion, and attraction. Hale (2010), drawing on Jungian psychology, interprets red as a color of vital energy and affective urgency, able to provoke immediate psychological arousal. Tai-lynia (2020) empirically reinforces this association by documenting how red visual stimuli are processed with heightened speed and intensity. Elliot and Niesta (2008) add a biological dimension, showing how red is associated with sexual attraction in both humans and primates, a finding that anchors semiotic convention in evolutionary psychology. Abdelaal and Sase (2014) extend this argument to audiovisual contexts, analyzing how red in photography and film intensifies emotional engagement, particularly in themes of desire and passion. Together, these studies confirm red as a color of arousal, urgency, and emotional intensity, making it an especially potent resource in visual storytelling.

By contrast, blue tends to evoke calm, longing, and distance. Jungles (2019) poetically reflects that “blue longs to be close to what will always remain distant” (p. 6), capturing the affective paradox of the color: it soothes while also evoking unattainability. Solnit (2005) similarly describes blue as the color of the horizon, of what we desire but can never reach, a color of loss that retains its mystery and beauty precisely because of its distance. Martinez (2017) builds on Solnit to show how blue continues to act as a visual metaphor for desire and depth in contemporary practice. Luostarinen (2020), through her participatory project *On the Blue Path of Place Empathy*, demonstrates how blue not only evokes solitude and introspection but also fosters empathy with landscape and environment. Her work with analog photography reveals how blue becomes a medium for reimagining place and inhabiting time differently, linking psychology of color with ecological awareness. These perspectives situate blue as a chromatic mode of introspection, distance, and poetic memory.

Green, in turn, is strongly associated with harmony, peace, and restoration. Nurliah and Karim (2022) study its therapeutic effect in the treatment of high blood pressure, while Kuo

and Zhang (2023) confirm that exposure to green spaces lowers stress and increases perceptions of balance and vitality. The abundance of green in nature contributes to its association with renewal, calm, and connection with life. These findings are significant for photography, where green can serve not only as a visual backdrop but as an affective code that evokes tranquility and ecological belonging.

Yellow and other warm tones are generally linked with joy, energy, and openness. Asarkar and Pathak (2020) describe yellow, orange, and red as warm colors that consistently generate affective warmth. Cerrato (2012), Chen et al. (2024), and Hasiana, Agustina, and Trisnawati (2024) confirm yellow's association with happiness, optimism, and extroversion. Gao (2022) and Mehta (2024) emphasize its strategic use in design and branding to stimulate engagement and emotional connection. Wahidiyat (2021) shows that warm colors like yellow encourage motivation and participation, while cool tones are more calming or suppressive. These applied studies highlight that yellow does not merely brighten compositions: it actively transforms perception and mood.

O'Connor (2011) provides an important cautionary voice, pointing out that popular accounts of color psychology often overstate scientific consensus, particularly in therapeutic or marketing contexts. For O'Connor, careful distinction between empirical evidence and speculative claims is essential for responsible use of color theory. This critical note is especially relevant for photography, where affective associations may be powerful but not always predictable.

The study of color and its affective impact cannot be separated from the historical attempts to systematize and interpret chromatic experience. Already in the early nineteenth century, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, in his *Theory of Colours* (1810/1970), challenged the Newtonian reduction of color to measurable wavelengths. Instead of privileging the scientific abstraction of light, Goethe proposed a phenomenological approach: color as a lived, embodied perception rooted in human sensibility. He argued that colors carry inherent affective qualities, describing yellow as “in its highest purity... serene, gay, and softly exciting” (p. 310) and blue as a “contradiction between excitement and repose” (p. 311). His system works through polarities of light and darkness, activity and passivity, warmth and coldness. Within this schema, purple emerges as a liminal and ambivalent color, born of the tension between the inward and melancholic pull of blue and the outward and vital energy of red. Goethe considered this mixture unstable, carrying within it the psychological oscillation

of attraction and withdrawal, a chromatic state that echoes the affective dualities central to my project *Purple is Where I Always Am* (pp. 313–315).

Later, Gestalt psychology, as developed by Wertheimer, Köhler, and Koffka, emphasized that visual perception operates through holistic patterns rather than isolated stimuli. As Wertheimer (1938) observed, “There are wholes, the behavior of which is not determined by that of their individual elements, but where the part-processes are themselves determined by the intrinsic nature of the whole” (p. 71). Applied to color, this means that the affective resonance of purple cannot be divorced from its contextual relations. A violet garment against a green background, or a lavender light beside warm skin, is not perceived as purple in the abstract but as a relational force that can retreat, vibrate, or destabilize. Gestalt theory therefore highlights the liminal status of purple. It is neither primary nor secondary in perception and is always mediated by contrast, proportion, and figure–ground dynamics. In photographic practice, this helps explain why purple often appears elusive on film, its affect intensified or muted by surrounding chromatic structures, the grain of the medium, or the light conditions under which it is captured.

The bridge between affect, perception, and art is perhaps most clearly articulated in the writings of Wassily Kandinsky, particularly *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911/1977) and *Point and Line to Plane* (1926/1979). Kandinsky advanced the notion that colors possess an inner sound or resonance capable of directly touching the soul. For him, blue “inclines to depth... the inclination of blue to depth is so strong that its inner appeal is stronger when it is darker” (1911/1977, p. 59), while yellow carries “an unsettling character, an insistent aggressive note, which can be maddening to the observer” (p. 56). He described violet, the product of blue and red, as “a somewhat morbid, extinguished red... very retiring, gloomy, and a color that has a certain sadness about it” (1926/1979, p. 70). Violet, in Kandinsky’s view, stood as a symbol of fading life, contemplative and fragile, an old age of color. Such characterization underscores purple’s historical association with ambiguity, transition, and thresholds between states of being. In contemporary affective terms, it becomes a chromatic metaphor for liminality, nostalgia, and suspended desire.

Taken together, these perspectives highlight different dimensions of color’s psychological and affective role. Goethe’s phenomenology foregrounds the subjective and qualitative, Gestalt psychology stresses relational perception and contextual balance, and Kandinsky develops a spiritual and expressive framework in which violet operates as a

retreating yet emotionally charged hue. These approaches, while historically distinct, converge on the idea that color transcends its physical substrate and becomes a medium of affective communication. For photography, this means that chromatic decisions, whether intuitive or deliberate, carry the potential to orient perception, modulate emotional states, and establish symbolic resonances. Purple crystallizes this convergence: it is phenomenologically unstable, perceptually relational, and spiritually ambivalent. It functions not merely as a color but as an affective territory, an in-between zone where memory, longing, and ambiguity coalesce.

These studies confirm that color in photography can guide attention, suggest mood, and shape interpretation with considerable reliability. At the same time, they also demonstrate that affective responses are not fixed, since context, culture, and personal experience significantly influence chromatic meaning. In this sense, color psychology reinforces the view of color as a flexible communicative vocabulary: one that can operate universally to move viewers, while also adapting to specific cultural and situational conditions.

1.5 Photobooks: Structures of Chromatic Storytelling

The photobook has emerged as one of the most influential forms of photographic practice in the last century, increasingly recognized not as a secondary format but as a medium in its own right. It is not simply a container for images but a site where photographs acquire sequence, rhythm, and context. The act of turning pages establishes a temporality unique to the book form, where each spread functions as both an autonomous visual encounter and part of a larger narrative arc. In this sense, the photobook creates meaning through structure: editing, design, typography, pacing, and paratext all intervene in how images are read.

Early critical reflections already emphasized that the photobook is a hybrid medium that operates between photography, literature, and design. Neves (2022) has traced its roots to early photo-textual experiments, where word and image were combined to produce a new kind of visual syntax. He argues that “the photobook has to be considered an autonomous medium, not a mere container of images, since meaning arises from the interaction between its multiple elements” (p. 4). This line of thought extends to his earlier essay *What is a Photobook?*, where Neves (n.d.) defines it as “a work of art whose language derives from the sequencing of images, the rhythm of pages, and the materiality of the book itself” (p. 2).

Scholars and curators have underlined that photobooks often carry more enduring influence than exhibitions, since they circulate widely and reach audiences across time and space. This recognition is especially evident in studies of Japanese photobooks (Bros, 2008; Romig, 2010), which demonstrate how material experimentation, choices of paper, binding, and format intertwined with sequencing strategies to produce narrative models that inspired global practice.

More recent scholarship has foregrounded the conceptual and political dimensions of the photobook. Dewan (2021), for instance, argues that “the photobook is not just a mode of display but a space of authorship, where women artists can inscribe personal and political narratives that would otherwise remain invisible” (para. 3). Neumüller’s (2024) edited volume *Talking about Photobooks* consolidates current debates, presenting the photobook as both artistic form and cultural phenomenon, reflecting how societies think about memory, authorship, and circulation. Lockemann (2022) likewise insists on the need to “think the photobook not only as a practical outcome but as a theoretical object, where every design decision carries interpretative weight” (p. 12).

This emphasis on narrative aligns with earlier reflections by John Berger, who argued that “the meaning of an image depends not only on itself but on the company it keeps” (Berger & Mohr, 1982, p. 30). In photobooks, this principle is elevated to a structural level: images acquire new meanings when placed in sequence, juxtaposed with text, or framed by the rhythm of page turning. Similarly, Clive Scott (1999), writing on photography and language, describes how the ordering of images in book form transforms them into “discourses” rather than isolated statements (p. 18). Lévi-Strauss (2003) pushes this argument further by suggesting that the photobook positions the image “between the eyes,” so that the act of looking itself becomes part of the story being told (p. 22).

Beyond their content, photobooks invite a form of reading that is tactile, temporal, and immersive. Romig (2010) stresses that “the rhythm of page turning becomes part of the narrative itself” (para. 4), while Zum (n.d.) describes photobooks as “a privileged form of photographic storytelling because they create a choreography of looking” (para. 2). These perspectives underscore that the photobook is not a passive collection but an active structure that choreographs the viewer’s perception.

Although much of the literature has concentrated on narrative and material qualities, it is equally important to consider how color functions within photobooks. Sequencing does not

only create visual rhythm; it also establishes chromatic rhythm. Neves (2022) highlights how “the juxtaposition of images in a sequence produces meaning not only by content but also by chromatic interaction” (p. 6). Dewan (2021) similarly points out that women photographers in South Asia use color symbolically in photobooks, constructing atmospheres that convey affect and identity. Here, Albers’s relational theory of color perception becomes particularly relevant, since the meaning of each hue shifts according to its neighbors. Balseiro (1979), editing and contextualizing Albers’s *Interaction of Color*, stresses that chromatic effects unfold in sequence, through comparison and juxtaposition. This insight provides a conceptual bridge to photobooks: the book form itself becomes an experiment in relational perception, where meaning emerges from successive contrasts, continuities, and tonal modulations.

Thus, photobooks can be understood as structures of chromatic storytelling, where turning the page not only reveals a new image but reshapes the viewer’s chromatic experience, producing narrative through hue, tone, and atmosphere. The materiality of paper, the saturation of print, and the tactile rhythm of sequencing amplify this effect, making color an active agent in how stories are constructed and felt.

The study of photobooks as narrative and chromatic structures provides an essential foundation for what follows. The next chapter moves beyond the medium of the book to consider photography itself as a system of signs. By situating photography within theories of language and communication, and by examining how color functions semiotically and emotionally within this framework, it becomes possible to understand color not simply as a representational detail but as a communicative force that structures photographic meaning.

These perspectives situate the photobook as both medium and message. Building on this, the next chapter explores photography and color themselves as a system of signs.

CHAPTER 2: PHOTOGRAPHY AS LANGUAGE AND COLOR THEORY

This chapter turns from the photobook as a medium to photography itself as a system of signs. Here the central concern is the conception of photography as a language, and more specifically, how color operates within that language as a semiotic, symbolic, and emotional force.

The chapter is organized into five sections. Section 2.1 discusses photography as a universal visual language, synthesizing theoretical perspectives that describe how images communicate beyond verbal and cultural boundaries, while also acknowledging the tensions between universality and specificity. Section 2.2 reviews studies on color in photography, drawing on classic theories by Johannes Itten and Josef Albers as well as psychological research on color and emotion associations to show how chromatic choices contribute to meaning making. Section 2.3 introduces the notion of color as a sign of language in visual communication, drawing from semiotic theory (Saussure, Peirce, Eco) and more recent approaches (Kress and Van Leeuwen, Almalech, Staszewska) to argue that colors operate as signs—iconic, indexical, and symbolic—within systems of meaning. Section 2.4 engages visual semiotics more broadly, situating color within processes of signification, with particular attention to Roland Barthes and later developments in cultural semiotics. Finally, Section 2.5 reflects on analog photography and chromatic materiality, underlining how the tactile processes of film introduce unpredictability, slowness, and a distinct sensory engagement with color.

Together, these perspectives demonstrate that photography does not merely depict but communicates through a grammar of light, form, and hue. By articulating photography as a language and situating color within theories of communication, semiotics, and material practice, this chapter provides the theoretical foundation for understanding color not only as representation but as metaphor, code, and atmosphere—a language of its own within the broader language of photography.

2.1 Photography as a Universal Visual Language

Language, in its broadest sense, is any system of signs that allows the communication of ideas, feelings, desires, or information between human beings (Hall, 2020). Although traditionally associated with spoken or written words, language encompasses multiple forms of expression, such as gestural, musical, and visual.

Therefore, for a communicative manifestation to be considered a language, it must be capable

of organizing recognizable signs for an interlocutor, structuring them in a way that conveys shareable meanings. In this context, photography can legitimately be understood as a language, as we read in works such as those by Luong (2023) and Yao & Wu (2023), since it constructs visual messages—through the combination of light, shadow, composition, and color—that can be received, interpreted, and felt by different audiences, not subject to the same barriers as verbal languages. Photography does not rely on words to communicate; its medium of expression is the image itself, laden with symbolism, emotions, and silent narratives. While there is an undeniable relationship between perception, subjectivity, and culture, the possibilities of photographic language transcend conventional boundaries. Lyons (1995) specifically investigates color as a form of language. It is this combination—photography, color, and language—that this project is dedicated to.

The defense of photography as a universal language is based on its unique ability to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers. Unlike verbal languages, which require translation to be understood by different communities, photography communicates through immediate visual experience: an emotional gaze, a desolate landscape, the warmth or coziness of a folk celebration, the silent drama of a farewell—these are messages that can be understood regardless of spoken language. The structure of the image, the intensity of the colors, the framing of elements, and the choice of captured moment constitute a grammar of their own, enabling the transmission of meaning in an intuitive manner, such that photography speaks directly to the senses and emotions, without requiring the same mediation of linguistic reasoning as verbal language—granting it a unique communicative effectiveness on an international level. This does not mean, of course, that linguistic reasoning is absent in the apprehension or appreciation of a visual message. But it certainly does not operate in the same way.

Thus, in defending photography as a universal language, it is important to acknowledge that this universality does not imply absolute homogeneity in interpretation. Although certain feelings and reactions may be common to all human beings—such as pain, joy, fear, or love—the ways in which these emotions are visually expressed and read may vary depending on cultural, social, and historical contexts. A gesture, a color, or a landscape can carry distinct connotations in different cultures, meaning that the reading of a photograph is never entirely neutral. The universality of photography therefore lies in its ability to offer an open field of communication, in which multiple meanings can be created, shared, and reinterpreted, not in the imposition of a single fixed and immutable meaning. It is, in fact, the opposite: this

tension between universality and cultural specificity is, far from being a problem, one of the greatest strengths of photographic language. It allows the same image to be understood both broadly—evoking common human emotions—and specifically—awakening memories, associations, and meanings unique to different audiences (Won & Westland, 2017). A simple example can be found in the representation of the color white. In many Western cultures, white is associated with purity, marriage, and peace, whereas in several Asian cultures, white is associated with mourning and death, as described by Book (2025) and previously noted by Isaacs (1968). A photograph of a woman dressed in white may thus evoke feelings of hope and celebration in one context, and feelings of loss and remembrance in another—a phenomenon that reveals how photography, while offering a common platform for communication, is enriched by the layers of meaning that each culture, life story, and individual gaze can contribute.

The conception of photography as a universal language also relates to the notion of shared aesthetic experience. The shared character of aesthetics has been described by authors since the early twentieth century, as in Mead (1926) and in Lund and Anastasi (1928). The experience of beauty, tension, desolation, or visual exaltation transcends logical discourse and can be immediately and deeply felt by people from very different backgrounds. For this reason, we argue that this sensitive experience is a form of language that precedes words, linked to the very sensory and emotional constitution of the human being, such that photography—as the art of light—captures and reinterprets this sensitive dimension of existence, making it possible to build bridges between different cultural worlds without the need for verbal translation. In this way, photographic language functions as a meeting ground between differences, where alterity can be perceived, respected, and even celebrated.

Throughout history, photography has repeatedly been mobilized as a tool of transnational communication. From nineteenth-century ethnographic projects, as analyzed in the works of Perera (2019) and Pink (2012), to contemporary humanitarian campaigns, as we see in Allbeson (2015), the photographic image has been used to bring visibility to distant realities and raise international awareness about social, political, and environmental issues. The specialized literature records that in times of crisis—such as wars, natural disasters, or population displacements—photographs become powerful vehicles of empathy and solidarity, capable of touching hearts and minds across the globe. This effectiveness of photography as a means of generating recognition and compassion attests to its strength as a universal

language, even though, evidently, the reception of images continues to be mediated by diverse cultural and ideological contexts.

Clive Scott's (1999) *The Spoken Image: Photography and Language* examines how photography communicates its message, with or without the aid of verbal discourse, foregrounding the photograph as both autonomous sign and intertextual construct. Earlier and later works also provide a theoretical foundation for asserting photography as a language and exploring its universal potential. Victor Burgin's writings, particularly in *Thinking Photography* (Burgin et al., 1982), framed photography as a system of representation deeply entangled with ideology, cultural codes, and semiotic structures. His perspective complicates the notion of photography as a "universal" language, insisting instead that meaning is always mediated through social and discursive frameworks. In a different register, Charles Harrison's *Essays on Art & Language* (2002) revisits questions of signification and interpretation in visual culture, situating photography within broader debates on the nature of art, textuality, and critical theory. Together, these contributions expand the discussion initiated by Scott by showing that photography's communicative power rests not only on its indexical qualities but also on its insertion into cultural, linguistic, and theoretical contexts.

While Burgin (1982) and Harrison (2002) remind us that photographic meaning is never neutral but always mediated by cultural and discursive frameworks, this does not negate the medium's potential to resonate across those frameworks. Rather, it suggests that photography operates simultaneously on two levels: at the structural level, where images participate in systems of representation and ideology, and at the affective level, where they can elicit recognition, empathy, and memory in viewers regardless of cultural origin. In this way, the photograph demonstrates a paradoxical capacity: it is both context-bound and context-transcendent. This paradox is precisely what allows contemporary photographers to draw on themes such as childhood, migration, or familial bonds in ways that are rooted in specificity yet capable of evoking universal emotional responses.

In contemporary artistic practice, many photographers consciously explore this paradoxical capacity of the image to be both situated and resonant across contexts. By drawing on themes such as childhood, migration, nature, or familial bonds, visual creators invest in the expressive power of photography to tell stories that are deeply grounded in specific cultural frameworks yet open to recognition by diverse audiences. Even when meaning is mediated by codes and discourse, the affective force of the image can transcend those boundaries, allowing viewers from other realities to find personal and emotional

connection. In this sense, photography universalizes experience not by erasing singularity, but by inviting encounters where difference and resonance coexist.

The power of photography as a universal language is also closely linked to its technical materiality. The camera, by recording light reflected from objects, preserves a fragment of visible reality. This fragment is always an interpretation, resulting from choices made by the photographer: framing, angle, lighting, focus, lens, aperture, exposure, and the moment of capture. These choices are themselves acts of communication, establishing a relationship between photographer and viewer, even if they never meet personally or share a common spoken language. Technique is not neutral: it is an extension of the creator's communicative intention. Thus, the language of photography is simultaneously objective—anchored in visible reality—and subjective—shaped by the gaze and sensitivity of both photographer and viewer. These conclusions, concerning objectivity and subjectivity in photography, are supported by works such as Iskin (1997) and, with more specific case studies, Zappavigna (2016) and Evans (2013). Zappavigna, in her study of social media photographs collected via hashtags, shows how photographers' choices shape the relationship between themselves, the image, and its recipient. Evans, in her study of erotic photography, explores technical ways of constructing subjectivity. It becomes evident that photography comprises a language, with intentionally chosen communicative elements. In the following chapter, we will focus on communication through color.

For now, another fundamental aspect of photography as a language is its simultaneous character of evidence and suggestion. A photograph shows something that existed at a given moment and place, but also suggests worlds of meaning that go beyond the visible. What is included in the frame and what is excluded, what is in focus and what remains blurred, what is illuminated and what is plunged into shadow—all these elements contribute to constructing a visual narrative, as argued by Hughes and Noble (2023). In this way, photography enables not only seeing, but imagining, feeling, and reflecting. Its language is therefore both documentary and poetic, both testimonial and metaphorical.

The ubiquity of photography in the contemporary world, amplified by digital technologies and social networks, further reinforces its dimension—or its potential—as a universal medium. It has never been easier to create, share, and access images produced in all parts of the globe, as noted by Zappavigna (2016). This global circulation of photographs contributes to the construction of a shared imaginary, in which local experiences become visible to distant communities. Photography, in this sense, becomes a form of intercultural

dialogue, in which the diversity of perspectives may enrich mutual understanding—depending on how it is used. This democratization of the image also calls for responsibility: the universal language of photography must be used with critical awareness, respecting the dignity of the subjects portrayed and avoiding the reproduction of stereotypes or the inappropriate appropriation of other cultures.

Therefore, photography can and should be understood as a universal language—a language that speaks directly to the human heart. Its universality lies in its capacity to create sensory and emotional bridges between people of different languages, cultures, and life histories. This capacity for cross-cultural communication, however, does not eliminate interpretive diversity nor erase the cultural specificities that each gaze brings to the reading of the image. On the contrary, the richness of photographic language lies precisely in this tension between the universal and the particular, between the human commonality and cultural singularity. By capturing the visible and suggesting the invisible, by recording the instant and evoking memory, by documenting reality and provoking imagination, photography affirms itself as a living, dynamic, and universal language—capable of uniting, moving, and transforming.

2.2 Studies on Color in Photography

As previously discussed, photography, as both an artistic expression and a medium of visual communication, is often described as a universal language, capable of transcending cultural and linguistic boundaries. This concept recognizes in the photographic image an ability to convey meaning independent of written or spoken language. Within this visual language, various elements contribute to the construction of meaning: composition, point of view, focus, light, movement, and color. It is on this final element that the present research concentrates. The aim is to examine how color functions as a communicative agent in photography, exploring how specific chromatic combinations generate sensations, atmospheres, and symbolic messages. This section therefore brings together key studies and reflections on the use of color in photographic practice, with the objective of mapping its symbolic, emotional, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions and establishing the theoretical foundations for understanding color as a visual language.

Interest in color as a visual language is not new. Since the early days of artistic theory, color has been the subject of studies seeking to understand its impact on human perception and its role in communicating ideas and emotions. One of the seminal figures in this tradition is

Johannes Itten, whose work on color theory, developed in the context of the Bauhaus, proved foundational for artists and photographers alike. His exploration of relationships between colors, their harmony and contrast, proposed that each chromatic combination holds a specific expressive potential. His approach links colors with emotions and symbolism, establishing a visual alphabet that can be used to construct meaning without verbal language.

Itten developed a twelve-hue color circle, composed of three primary, three secondary, and six tertiary colors, and articulated a series of fundamental contrasts, including contrast of hue, light–dark, warm–cool, complementary, simultaneous, saturation, and extension—that organize harmony and tension in composition. These contrasts, as Heitlinger (2007) also emphasizes, provide a structural framework for understanding how colors interact, balance one another, and generate expressive effects in visual communication (Itten, 1961; Itten, 1970). As Itten observed:

“Colors have an expressive and symbolic character which affects man’s psychic organism” (1961, p. 13).

Similarly, Josef Albers—studied by Robson Ruiz, Henschel & Lampert (2023)—in his work on color interaction, demonstrated that chromatic perception is always relational and contextual: the same color may assume different meanings depending on the colors surrounding it. These reflections are particularly relevant to photographic practice, where choices regarding color palette, saturation, contrast, and temperature can significantly alter the reading of an image.

Photography, therefore, by appropriating these color theories, transforms color into a narrative tool. Beyond its descriptive function, color takes on symbolic and emotional roles, communicating moods, intentions, and atmospheres. The psychology of color—a field that explores the emotional and behavioral effects of color—has proven to be a valuable resource in understanding this phenomenon. Studies support that certain colors are associated with common emotional responses. This emotional grammar of color, though subject to cultural and contextual variations, provides photography with an effective vocabulary for constructing visual narratives.

Kumarasamy, Apayee & Subramaniam (2014) researched associations between colors and emotions, exploring how color is emotionally perceived and how different hues can provoke varied reactions in individuals. They emphasize the importance of color in daily life,

both as an aesthetic element and as a means of visual communication, alerting, representing moods, and reinforcing the messages of artworks. Color is thus described as a visual language that has both an objective dimension—based on physics, chemistry, and physiology—and a subjective one—related to psychology and human emotion. Through artistic training, it is understood that mastering color is essential for effectively conveying an artist's intent.

Kumarasamy, Apayee & Subramaniam refer to several studies. One, by Carol and Edward Lawler (1965), analyzed associations between color and mood in children aged 3 to 4, finding that colors like yellow (for happy stories) and brown (for sad stories) suggested an intuitive relationship between color and emotion from early childhood. Another study by Kaya, N., & Epps, H. H. (2004), with 98 university students, used the Munsell color system (analyzing hue, value, and chroma) to show that colors such as red, yellow, blue, green, and purple elicited positive emotional responses (80%), while achromatic colors evoked sadness, fear, and depression—with the exception of white, which was associated with positive qualities such as purity and hope.

Dan Mazzarini et al. (1999) investigated how six colors (black, white, red, yellow, blue, and green) affected participants' moods through personality tests divided into three parts, aiming to explore the relationship between color and emotional dispositions. V. Diana (2006), in turn, argued that associations between color and emotion are learned rather than innate. Her critical analysis of cross-cultural and age group studies supported the idea that emotional reactions to color are shaped by experience, rejecting the notion of emotional universality of color—though she acknowledged that deeper studies on this topic are still needed. While her position is noteworthy, this project focuses on the opposite possibility: that color in photography may function as a language beyond cultural boundaries.

Teresa M. Kutchma (2003) examined the effects of room color (red versus green) on perceived stress among university students. Though significant results were found only between the red room and the control condition, it was observed that red increased levels of perceived stress.

Hemphill (1996) analyzed adults' emotional associations with colors and found that bright colors (white, pink, red, yellow, blue, purple, and green) evoked mostly positive responses (61%), while darker colors (brown, black, gray) generated more negative responses (63%).

April S. Odom and Shannon S. Sholtz (2004) studied the intensity of emotional association with primary colors and their lighter shades. They found that primary colors like red, blue, and yellow were more strongly associated with emotional states, being more stimulating and cheerful than non-primary colors—with the exception of blue, which was consistently associated with calm. Light shades of these hues evoked milder emotional reactions. Many studies conducted in diverse contexts register similar color responses.

Kumarasamy, Apayee & Subramaniam (2014) also highlighted specific emotional responses to individual colors. Blue consistently received the most positive reactions, associated with tranquility and nature (sky and ocean), with minimal negative responses. Red evoked both positive emotions (love, passion) and negative ones (blood, violence). Green was associated with calm, relaxation, comfort, and nature, reinforcing its link to positive emotions. Yellow, with 93.9% positive responses, was seen as energetic and joyful, associated with sun, flowers, and childhood. White was associated with purity, innocence, and peace, but also with negative feelings such as loneliness and emptiness. Black evoked emotions such as mourning, sadness, and fear, though it was also linked to elegance and power. It is important to remember that color names alone do not convey their full meaning—perception is also shaped by hue and brightness. Gray generated the highest rate of negative responses, linked to overcast days and sadness.

Intermediate colors were also analyzed. Blue-green had the highest rate of positive responses (81.6%), associated with nature and freshness. Yellow-green generated more negative reactions (71.4%), often associated with illness and disgust.

For all these reasons, Kumarasamy, Apayee & Subramaniam (2014) conclude that the association between color and emotion is real and supported by multiple studies. Understanding color as an emotional language is essential to visual communication, and future research should continue expanding this interdisciplinary field.

Let us return to the domain of photography, where the intentional use of color can reinforce a photograph's message or, conversely, introduce ambiguity and subversion. Color can create visual tension through strong contrasts between warm and cool tones, or suggest harmony with soft, harmonious, and/or monochromatic palettes.

In recent decades, cinematic aesthetics have strongly influenced the way contemporary photographers approach color, particularly through color grading, where hues are digitally manipulated to reinforce specific atmospheres. This practice, common in film and television,

resonates with artistic photography, where post-production becomes an essential creative stage. Here, rather than merely capturing colors, the photographer selects, constructs, and shapes them according to the communicative intent of the image. The influence of cinema on photography is well documented and longstanding: Vanoglio (2022), for instance, recalls how color photography was shaped by the Lumière brothers' autochrome films, which consolidated the practice of fixing color on a photographic medium. Yet while this historical case emphasizes a technological inheritance, the contemporary dialogue goes further: cinematic aesthetics today are not only inherited but reworked, transforming color into a deliberate language of mood and emotion rather than a simple technical borrowing. Several studies support this view. Ambrogi (2018), for example, shows how cinema and advertising have relied on color grading as a key creative practice, while Ajiva et al. (2024) highlight how such techniques, inspired by cinematic vision, enhance visual storytelling in contemporary photography and commercial contexts.

In the realm of artistic and conceptual photography, particularly from the second half of the twentieth century onwards when color processes became more widely accepted in the art world, color has often been employed as a structural element of the artwork. William Eggleston, considered one of the pioneers of color in artistic photography, explored the saturated hues of American daily life to reveal the poetics of the banal. His work exemplifies how color, far from being mere ornamentation, constitutes the very content of the image. Eggleston himself argued that color is more truthful than black and white, in the sense that it brings the viewer closer to the real experience of the visible world. Other photographers working in different contexts, such as Alex Webb, Steve McCurry, or Saul Leiter, also explored color as an expressive vehicle, using it to guide the gaze, establish compositional relationships, or suggest implicit narratives. Within these practices, color does not simply represent; it becomes metaphor, language, and visual discourse.¹

Davenport (2014), presenting Alex Webb, writes that he “is best known for his vibrant and complex color work” (p. 6), and his color photography was already being analyzed by Edwards (1991), Martin (1995), Chalifour (2001), and more recently by Nordström (2010). Luong (2023) also references Webb's work on color, stating in an article that “Photography

¹ It is important to note, however, that the role of color in photography has varied significantly depending on historical moment, technology, and aesthetic paradigm. For instance, early twentieth century movements such as Pictorialism often favored monochrome processes for their perceived artistic legitimacy, while Bauhaus experiments and later New Color photography redefined chromatic possibilities in radically different ways.

works as a language on several levels” (p. 181). Of greatest interest to us, Taylor (2018), analyzing Steve McCurry’s photographic work in India, observes that:

“McCurry utilizes color—the stark ruby red saris, rather than greeting eyes—to draw our attention to the subjects within the frame. By composing the subjects in the center of the frame with highly contrasting colors, McCurry guides our eye, comparable to how the gaze does, only to then refuse the ephemeral glance of consent” (p. 39).

This is a clear example of the language under investigation here.

2.3 Color as a System of Meaning

We see that color, as a powerful visual element, transcends its status as a physical attribute and becomes a potent sign capable of communicating ideas, emotions, values, and cultural identities. Far beyond its aesthetic role, color functions as a system of signification, operating within social and semiotic codes that give meaning to images, spaces, and objects. The analysis of color as a sign involves understanding its symbolic dimension, its relational value, and its ability to produce affects, interpretations, and behaviors. Like any sign, color does not have a fixed meaning; it is interpreted according to context, culture, individual experience, and the medium in which it appears. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002) speak of a “grammar of color,” while Almalech (2017) delves into a “semiotics of color.”

The concept of the sign is one of the foundational elements of language, semiotics, and communication studies. Generally speaking, a sign is anything that stands for something else—that is, any element that refers to a meaning beyond itself. It is through signs that humans communicate ideas, emotions, concepts, and information (Eco, 1986). In language, signs are the basis of the signification process, allowing a set of sounds, images, or gestures to be understood as carriers of meaning (Urban, 2014). The understanding of the sign as a unit of meaning was deeply developed by two key authors: Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), a Swiss linguist studied in classical works such as those by Culler (1986) and Waterman (1956), and Charles Sanders Peirce (1991), an American philosopher and logician, studied in works by Hoopes (2014), Merrell (2005), and Uslucan (2004), with Yakin and Totu (2014) offering a comparative study of Saussure and Peirce.

For Saussure, the linguistic sign consists of two inseparable elements: the signifier and the signified. The signifier corresponds to the material form of the sign—be it the sound of a word, its graphic form, or any other sensory support. The signified is the mental concept

associated with that signifier—the idea formed in the mind upon hearing or reading a given term. Saussure emphasizes that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary, the result of conventions within a linguistic community. Furthermore, he highlights the relational nature of language: signs gain value within a system, by opposition to other signs. Charles Sanders Peirce, in contrast, proposes a broader and more philosophical conception of the sign. According to Peirce, a sign is something that stands in place of something else for someone, in some respect or capacity. His theory is triadic, composed of three fundamental elements: the representamen (the sign itself), the object (what is represented), and the interpretant (the effect produced in the interpreter—the meaning assigned to the sign). Peirce further classifies signs into three main categories based on their relationship to their object: icons, indices, and symbols.

Peirce's model is especially valuable for color, since a single hue may operate in all three modes simultaneously. As an icon, color refers to its object through resemblance—for example, the blue of the sky in a photograph resembles the actual sky. As an index, color can be causally linked to its object—such as the red of a face indicating fever or emotion. As a symbol, color represents something by convention, like green at a traffic light signaling permission to go. This versatility reinforces that color is not mere decoration but a structuring element of visual discourse.

At the same time, it is essential to recognize the ambiguous and relational dimension of color. As theorists such as Josef Albers and Johannes Itten demonstrated, chromatic perception is never absolute: it depends on the visual context in which the color appears. The same shade of green may seem lighter or darker depending on the adjacent color; red may appear warmer next to orange, or cooler beside blue. This means that color does not communicate in isolation: it depends on composition, light, material, and its relationship with other colors.

Furthermore, the way color is interpreted varies historically and culturally. Black is traditionally associated with mourning in Western cultures, while in others, such as parts of Asia, it is white that carries this symbolic function. Red in China is a color of luck and celebration, while in the West it may symbolize violence or prohibition. Purple may be understood as a symbol of spirituality, power, or introspection, depending on time and place. These variations demonstrate that the meaning of color does not reside in the color itself, but in the cultural and symbolic weight attributed to it.

That same initial chapter pointed to the duality between the idea of a universal language and the cultural construction of sign interpretation. As I stated then, I argue that there is not necessarily a contradiction here. Cultural differences influence interpretations, yet the universal language of color refers to its independence from a common spoken language. Even if different cultures interpret certain colors in varying ways, color remains a language more accessible and capable of crossing borders than words.

Therefore, when used in photography, colors possess the power to communicate beyond linguistic barriers, becoming, in many cases, a form of universal language. Even though each culture may assign distinct meanings to certain colors, the fact remains that colors provoke immediate sensory and emotional reactions that are broadly shared. The physiological basis of chromatic perception, common to all of us, allows colors—despite being interpreted differently—to be felt by everyone. Thus, a deep blue can evoke in any observer a sense of calm, distance, or silence; a vibrant yellow may suggest light, warmth, attention; red can unsettle, seduce, or alarm. In this sense, color in photography functions as a universal language—not because everyone interprets it the same way, but because everyone feels it.

Visual communication is not limited to the logic of fixed meaning, but expands toward affect, perception, and experience. In this context, colors are tools of empathy. A portrait immersed in purple hues may speak of introspection, dreaming, or interiority—and even if purple carries divergent cultural meanings, its sensory vibration touches anyone who sees it. The power of color lies less in the rigid encoding of a symbol, and more in its ability to evoke the invisible: states of mind, atmospheres, intensities. That is why, despite cultural differences, I argue that color in photography can be interpreted as a universal language—not because it says the same thing to everyone, but because it says something to everyone.

This is why in the field of visual communication, color plays a decisive role in how messages are transmitted and interpreted, as analyzed by Staszewska (2023). Designers, advertisers, photographers, and visual artists use color as an intentional semiotic tool, capable of generating emotional impact, guiding the eye, creating informational hierarchies, or reinforcing the symbolic value of a brand. As Mehta (2024, p. 3) wrote: "For example, blue is associated with reliability and trust, whereas red is associated with zeal and ardour." Here, color acts as a conventional sign, recognized and understood as such.

Color in photography is, therefore, fertile ground for exploring its function as a sign. Through the choice of film, filters, lighting, editing, and other elements, the photographer can

manipulate colors to suggest emotional states, highlight narrative elements, or create symbolic atmospheres. In this sense, color becomes an affective operator within the image, guiding the viewer's reading. And it is precisely in this capacity to suggest rather than state that color demonstrates its full power as language.

It is important to emphasize that color, as sign, is not limited to the visual surface. It has real effects on how we perceive the world, how we behave, and how we feel. Studies in color psychology (O'Connor, 2011) show that environments dominated by certain colors can influence mood, attention, thermal sensation, and even appetite. In this sense, color not only communicates but also affects, shapes, and transforms.

Therefore, color is a powerful tool for constructing meaning. It operates in a complex field where perception, culture, emotion, and communication intertwine. Far from being a merely sensory phenomenon, color is language: a system of signs capable of conveying profound meanings, often without words. To understand color as a sign is to understand an essential part of human experience—a universal language that speaks to both the eye and the mind, to the body as well as to culture.

2.3.1 Use of Purple

It is necessary to pause here and reflect specifically on purple. This color is not only theoretically compelling in the history of color studies but is also central to the structure of my own project *Purple is Where I Always Am*, which I will analyze in depth in Chapter 4. Because the photobook culminates in a chapter dedicated entirely to purple, it is essential to situate this choice within a broader symbolic, perceptual, and semiotic framework. Understanding how purple has been theorized and culturally constructed provides the foundation for interpreting how it later operates in my photographic work as both atmosphere and affective language.

When talking about purple, Massim and Hämmerli (2017) analyze whether purple is a chessboard with blue and red pieces, in the manner of Brentano, or, as they argue, rather than being spatial parts indistinctly perceived as purple, red and blue are non-spatial parts distinctly perceived. The main point is the complexity of purple's formation, as a color that, as we have seen, does not properly exist. Goethe had already noted this ambivalence, describing purple as the unstable synthesis of red's vitality and blue's depth, a chromatic oscillation between attraction and withdrawal (1810/1970). Kandinsky, in turn, characterized violet as “a

somewhat morbid, extinguished red... very retiring, gloomy, and a color that has a certain sadness about it” (1926/1979, p. 70). These perspectives anticipate the tension explored by later studies, where purple emerges as a color defined precisely by its instability and affective ambiguity.

A particularly interesting article is that of Lyell (2022), who investigates perceptions of purple in the Archaic Greek period, Ancient Mesopotamia, and Biblical Hebrew tradition. The author recounts how, in Antiquity, purple was generally associated with ideas of power, prestige, and generosity. It was frequently believed to have originated in the Phoenician region along the Levantine coast, where purple dye was produced and traded. However, despite these recurring associations, representations and interpretations of the color purple varied significantly across different literary and cultural contexts. The article explored the social role of purple, both as raw material and as a visible color. As with any cultural element, the meaning of purple is relative, shaped by historical context, the type of object, the intended audience, and the specific properties of the material used. Through a comparative and sociological analysis, Lyell examined the use of purple in Homeric epic, ancient Mesopotamian inscriptions, and biblical texts, demonstrating how purple pigments and dyed objects functioned as symbolic vehicles conveying deeply rooted cultural meanings.

Perhaps something of this relation persists today: this is suggested by Hynes (2009), who, investigating the role of color and design in the messaging of corporate logos, identified purple as a rarely seen color in nature and one associated with power, having been used by many emperors across centuries. In any case, all these studies demonstrate the communicative capacity and linguistic function exercised by colors.

At this point, it becomes particularly relevant to reflect on how this symbolic, historical, and perceptual dimension of purple translates into contemporary visual practice, especially in photography as a medium of emotional expression and translation. If, as we have seen, purple has historically been associated with power, spirituality, rarity, and the sublime—and if perceptually, it is a color that does not exist physically in the light spectrum but only in our minds as a synthesis of red and blue—then it carries an ambiguous quality, both constructed and experienced. It is this ambiguity that makes it so expressive as an element of photographic visual language.

Our work is based on the paradigm that photography, as both a technical and artistic medium, operates between the visible and the invisible, between the recording of the real and

the suggestion of the sensitive. The presence of a color in a photographic image is never neutral: it always implies an aesthetic decision that triggers symbolic, emotional, and cultural readings. Even more so in the case of purple, which rarely appears spontaneously in the photographed scene. Unlike other colors more commonly found in nature—like the green of plants, the blue of the sky, or the brown of the earth—purple demands a search, a deliberate composition, or a chromatic interpretation in the development and editing process. And precisely because of this, when it appears in an image, it tends to stand out as a sign. And not just any sign, but one of estrangement, pause, and reverence.

It is remarkable, for instance, how purple is frequently used in fashion photography to evoke luxury, mystery, uniqueness, and at the same time the dreamlike, the fantastical. It is no accident that advertising campaigns aiming to convey elegance or boldness often use purple backgrounds, violet filters, or clothing in this color. We've seen this in Hynes (2009), and it is also present in Elgamall (2023) and Aslam (2006). The visual language constructed in these images draws on the entire symbolic heritage of color to project a universe of sophistication beyond appearance: it suggests aura, intangibility, and difference. But artistic photography also appropriates purple in a distinct way—not as mere visual ornament, but as a vehicle for deeper affective states.

In analog photography, for example, purple may appear as a chromatic accident—a chemical deviation resulting from specific interactions between film, light, and time. In this case, purple is not deliberately inserted, but emerges as an effect—and paradoxically, carries even greater emotional weight due to its unexpected nature. Many photographs feature light leaks, exposure errors, or development alterations that produce purple stains or mists. These "mistakes"—which often become poetic triumphs—are embraced by photographers who work with the materiality of the image, with imperfection as language.

In this context, purple ceases to be just a color and becomes an index of affective time. It is the visible trace of a flaw, a ghostly presence, a moment not controlled but which, for that very reason, carries the beauty of the unforeseen. It is precisely this quality of purple—its refusal to be fixed, its resistance to control, its lack of physical presence—that links it so closely to the unconscious, memory, and dream. In many contemporary photographic images, purple is used exactly to create this dreamlike atmosphere, as if photographs were windows into a parallel reality saturated with silent emotions.

In this sense, purple functions as a chromatic operator of introspection. It directs attention inward, to what is not evident. Unlike yellow, which explodes into view, or red, which summons the body and impulse, purple calls for listening. It is a low-frequency color. It does not shake us—it whispers. And it is this visual whisper that many contemporary photographers seek when turning to intimate narratives, self-portraits, or emotional landscapes. Purple here is not decorative: it is a way of embodying that which would otherwise remain unspeakable.

This emotional use of color in photography inevitably leads us to Barthes and his famous notion of the punctum—the detail that wounds us, that escapes rational reading of the image and strikes us emotionally. Purple, we might say, can function as a visual punctum. Its unexpected, rare, vibrant presence can tear through the surface of the image. It does not explain—but it touches. It does not argue—but it suggests. And it is in this act of suggestion that its power as language resides.

Similarly, Josef Albers demonstrated in his experiments on color interaction that the meaning of a color always depends on the colors surrounding it. Purple next to black may disappear. Next to white, it vibrates. Next to green, it gains a surreal, artificial connotation. That is, purple is never an isolated entity—it is always relational. And it is precisely this instability, this dependence on context, that makes it so expressive. Like language, its meaning only emerges in relation. Purple communicates through contrast, relative presence, emotional resonance.

In contemporary photography, many artists have explored purple as a tool to represent psychological and emotional states in authorial projects. In series dealing with grief, loneliness, mental illness, or trauma, purple appears as a backdrop, a mist, an enveloping atmosphere. It is as if purple says nothing directly but creates a field of sensations where certain affects become possible. It is a use of color that often does not aim at clarity, but at density—that does not seek to communicate an idea, but a sensitive texture of human experience.

Therefore, purple in photography can function as a meaning operator. It shifts the gaze. It installs a pause. It opens space for the unsaid. Its history, full of deep cultural associations, its illusory perceptual nature, and its visual rarity converge to make it one of the most expressive colors in constructing a visual language that is emotional, symbolic, and sensitive.

That is why, in photography—this medium where light and shadow are inscribed in time—purple is not just a color. It is a presence. A gesture. A way of seeing.

When purple appears in an image, it is not merely coloring an object. It is offering a reading. It is inviting the viewer to feel, to remember, to immerse. Just as in Antiquity it evoked the sacred and the unattainable, today it continues to function as a sign of emotional depth—a code that, rather than communicating something concrete, summons a sensitive experience. And it is precisely this capacity—to evoke without naming, to touch without invading—that makes it indispensable in a broader reflection on color as language in photography.

Because if photography is a way of seeing, then purple is a way of feeling. And perhaps for this reason, in the language of images, purple does not quite say “I am here.” It says something subtler: feel me, even if you cannot fully see me.

2.4 Visual Semiotics

It is also important to consider the contributions of visual semiotics to the study of color in photography. Semiotics, by investigating signs and processes of signification, provides tools to understand how colors operate as visual signs. According to Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*, photography contains elements that “wound” the viewer, that move or shock them (Fontanari, 2016, 2015). Color, in this sense, can be the poignant element (*punctum*) of an image, that which escapes narrative structure but provokes an intimate and intransmissible reaction. Semiotic analysis thus allows us to approach color as a sign—precisely what enables it to function as language.

It is important to emphasize that while the primary focus of this work is on photography’s ability to function as a cross-border language—specifically through the use of color—this does not mean disregarding the cultural dimension of color in photography, which cannot be overlooked. Recognizing cultural difference in symbolic repertoires does not imply an impediment to universality.

David Batchelor’s *Chromophobia* (2000) is a critical study of the fear and suspicion of color in Western thought and aesthetics. In the book, Batchelor traces how philosophy, art history, and cultural discourse have repeatedly marginalized color, treating it as secondary, corrupting, or excessive when compared to line, form, and reason. He shows that color has often been associated with the feminine, the emotional, and the superficial—as opposed to the

rational, structured, and “pure” nature of black and white. This devaluation of color as a serious element of visual discourse persists in some artistic contexts, though it has been widely challenged in recent decades. In this sense, the contemporary appreciation of color as a meaning-making tool reflects a paradigm shift, where color ceases to be “decoration” and becomes language in its own right. This is the place of color as language, and the breadth of that language’s possibilities. Such reevaluation aligns with contemporary visual studies, which recognize in the colored image a communicative complexity that goes beyond the immediate.

Wu et al. (2019) refer to "color language," using the "theory of color language" (p. 7). The text argues that in photography, color transcends its physical role as an optical phenomenon and becomes an element of emotional and cultural communication. Initially, color is described as a physical manifestation of light, without inherent emotion. However, humans spontaneously associate colors with feelings, assigning them subjective meanings. The formation of color perception occurs in three stages: first, at the physical level (nature and intensity of light); then at the physiological level (sensory responses of the eyes and transmission to the brain); and finally at the psychological level (emotional and cognitive reactions associated with color). This association may be concrete (relating a color to a specific object, like yellow to bananas or blue to the sky) or abstract (relating a color to an emotion, like white to purity or red to passion). When these abstract associations become widely accepted within a culture, they solidify as conceptual meanings of color, forming what the text calls "color image" (p. 17).

It must be remembered that today, visual references have achieved unprecedented internationalization, as seen in the works of Elkin, Devjee & Farnsworth (1995) and Zollo (2016), who discuss "social semiotics" (p. 1). Yao and Wu (2023) describe photography as having become a "borderless language" (p. 20).

2.5 Analog Photography and Chromatic Materiality

Analog photography introduces a chromatic experience deeply rooted in materiality and time. Unlike the precision and immediacy of digital processes, working with film involves a slower, more tactile engagement with light and color—one that invites unpredictability, attentiveness, and poetic deviation. Through chemical reactions, exposure nuances, and the physical qualities of different films, color emerges not only as an aesthetic choice but as a layered, emotional language. This approach fosters a distinct visual sensibility where intention

and chance coexist, and where the image becomes a site of both technical construction and sensory resonance.

Color in analog photography depends on chemical processes, resulting in a visual and aesthetic experience profoundly different from the digital. As Rogers (2007) notes, photography has a chemistry. When light hits the photosensitive film, it activates a chemical reaction that produces a latent image, which will later be developed and fixed in a lab. In this process, color is not digitally interpreted or converted into code—it is retained in physical emulsions, resulting in tonalities with unique characteristics, often unpredictable, carrying a materiality that digital images do not replicate. Each type of film—Kodak Portra, Fujifilm Provia, and others—has a particular chromatic signature, marked by variations in saturation, light sensitivity, and grain, giving images a distinct personality and visual identity. This uniqueness of color in analog photography lies not only in its representational fidelity but in how tones interact with ambient light, exposure, and development time, creating a palette that is both technical and poetic.

In analog practice, photographers develop a distinct awareness of color. As results cannot be immediately reviewed, unlike in digital photography, there is a greater need for sensitive and careful anticipation of light and tones present in the scene. This fosters a more prolonged, committed gaze, requiring technical knowledge but also intuition developed through practice. Light measurement, ISO selection, and film choice all affect how color will be recorded—and therefore perceived. In chromogenic films, for example, colors are formed from layers sensitive to different wavelengths of light—one for blue, one for green, and one for red—which together reconstruct the image. But unlike precise digital encoding, color here is the result of an interaction between physical and chemical layers, which are not perfectly predictable. Heat, humidity, film shelf life, and even the type of developer used can affect the final outcome, generating chromatic deviations often welcomed and incorporated as part of an aesthetic language.

Moreover, color in analog photography is deeply associated with the temporality of the image. Many photographers turn to analog precisely for the visual nostalgia it conveys—not only emotionally, but in the texture and warmth of its colors, which seem to evoke a tactile and less mediated past. Some films have a warm, grainy chromatic signature that recalls family albums and memory archives. Again, colors are not neutral; they are loaded with history, era, and material context. Shooting on film is also choosing a color regime that is not instantly malleable, as in digital editing software, but requires surrendering to chance and

respecting the process. There is a poetics of imprecision in analog color, which escapes the millimetric precision of digital calibration and thus allows for more organic, imperfect, and human atmospheres. Analog photography also modernizes and evolves—Bjelkhagen & Brotherton-Ratcliffe (2013) show how advanced techniques exist in analog photography as well.

This material and sensory dimension of color in analog photography continues to attract photographers well into the twenty-first century. The choice of film, the limited number of exposures per roll, and the anticipation of development all invite a slower, more contemplative creative rhythm. In terms of color specifically, this often means reconnecting with a less manipulable, more process-oriented visuality—one in which chance and physical contingency are embraced as part of the act of creation. Margadona (2023) argues that this “new analogue photography” is neither simply a technical whim nor an aesthetic retreat; it has gained significance as a means of reclaiming a tactile, unhurried, and emotionally engaged relationship with the image. In an era dominated by filters and presets, analog color offers resistance to the standardization of visual aesthetics, asserting itself as a living, organic language that resists the fixed, quantifiable constraints of digital imagery.

Another relevant point is that, unlike digital photography — where image data can be endlessly adjusted in software — color in analog photography is, to a great extent, irreversible. Underexposure may result in cool, bluish tones; overexposure, in burnt yellows and intense reds. These outcomes are not necessarily flaws; they can be expressions of the image’s materiality, often incorporated into the author’s aesthetic intent. Error can even become part of the language itself, as seen in many contemporary works that use film photography to create atmospheres unattainable by other means. The grain of the film, the vibrancy of the colors, the depth of the light—all contribute to a visual experience that is not easily replicable by digital means.

It is also important to remember that the laboratory, in the case of analog photography, is an essential part of color construction. Development, the type of paper, chemical baths—all influence the final result. Many photographers choose to perform manual development precisely to better control this creative stage. Others prefer specialized labs that preserve certain specific chromatic standards. The enlargement of the image on paper also affects how color is perceived, especially in terms of saturation and contrast. Each print is unique, and this singularity is part of the symbolic value of analog photography. It is in this interplay between

intention, technique, and unpredictability that color asserts itself as a complex, sensitive, and unrepeatable language.

At the end of this stage, it becomes clear that the literature review on studies of color in photography allows us to understand that color is a structuring element of photographic language. Color communicates, provokes, moves, suggests, confuses — it functions as a sign, emotion, code, and metaphor. At the same time, it is the sensitive body of the image, the first thing that strikes the eye. This communicative power of color reinforces the idea of photography as a universal language, capable of crossing borders and reaching others through a palette that speaks to instinct and sensory experience.

CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDIES

This chapter presents a selection of case studies that exemplify the theoretical themes explored in the literature review. These cases illustrate how color operates within photographic practice as an expressive and symbolic tool. These case studies are selected not only for their visual impact but for how they demonstrate color as emotional language and semiotic material.

The constellation of case studies—both contemporary practices and foundational “masters of color”—collectively map the diverse ways in which chromatic language has shaped photographic discourse. Rather than treating these groups separately, they are woven into a single framework organized thematically, where influential figures such as William Eggleston, Alex Webb, Constantine Manos and Martin Parr, enter into dialogue with contemporary artists and projects including *Salitre* and a broader selection of photobooks and exhibitions.

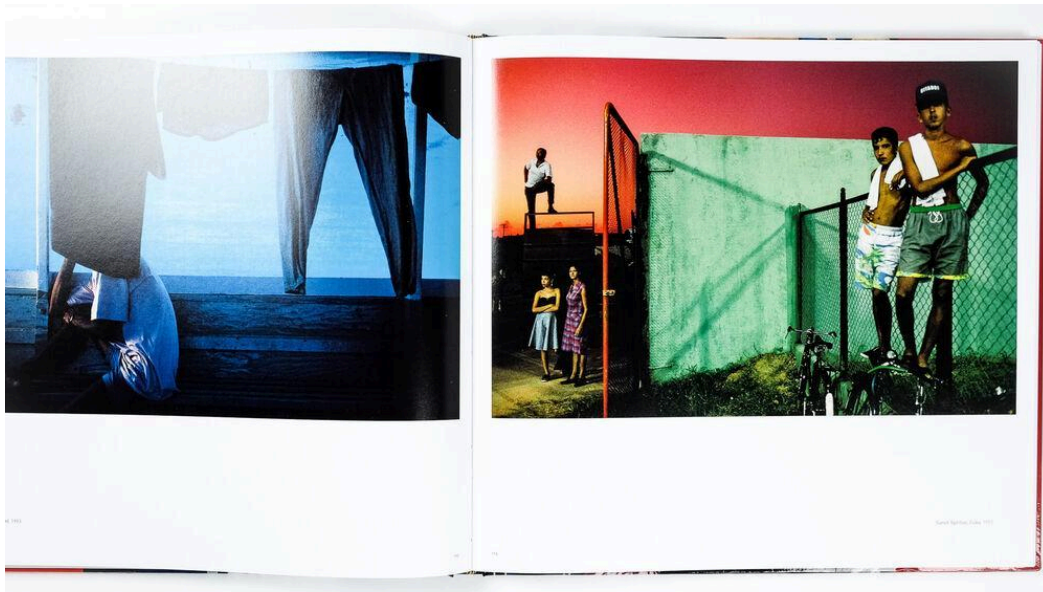
These cases represent a spectrum of visual strategies and conceptual approaches, each demonstrating how color operates not only as a formal element but as a communicative agent across emotional, symbolic, and socio-political dimensions. Some employ color to heighten narrative intimacy and emotional realism; others emphasize materiality, youth, and the atmospheres of leisure or consumption. Still others explore dreamlike visualities through chromatic experimentation, or push photography to its symbolic limits, questioning its capacity to represent ecological and cultural realities.

By organizing the discussion into these four thematic categories, the chapter highlights continuities and contrasts between past and present approaches. While certain contemporary practices draw explicit influence from earlier masters, others carve new pathways, emphasizing photography as a site of personal memory, poetic resistance, and embodied emotion. Taken together, these cases offer a multifaceted perspective on color as both affective and semiotic language, underscoring its enduring power to shape the visual narratives of culture.

3.1 Emotional Realism and Narrative Intimacy

This category highlights photographers who use color as a vehicle for intimacy, emotion, and the subtle narration of human experience. Here, chromatic language is not decorative but deeply tied to the rhythms of daily life, fleeting gestures, and emotional atmospheres. Through their frames, color becomes a pulse that sustains narrative tension and draws viewers into the affective resonance of lived moments. Within this perspective, Alex Webb exemplifies how chromatic density can amplify realism while maintaining poetic ambiguity.

Alex Webb's *The Suffering of Light* (2011) and *La Calle* (2016) are rich explorations of chromatic saturation and compositional density. Recognized as a pioneer of American color photography since the 1970s, Webb has consistently produced photographs marked by intense color, dramatic light, and intricate layering. His work often traverses multiple genres, street photography, photojournalism, and fine art, while always remaining grounded in a humanistic and visually intuitive approach.



Webb's photography, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, orchestrates complex frames full of reflection, shadow, architecture, and movement. He waits patiently for the perfect alignment of gesture, architecture, and light, allowing color to act as both atmosphere and anchor. His compositions are known for their narrative ambiguity and emotional charge, distilling cultural tensions, irony, and poetic contradictions into single beguiling images.



In *La Calle*, Webb’s vibrant, shadow-filled scenes of Mexican street life utilize saturated tones—yellows, reds, and blues—to evoke haunting, enigmatic moments of the everyday. He has said of his practice, “I work extremely intuitively. I wander, I respond. I don’t work rationally at all.” This openness to chance and emotion is evident in the way color guides his frames, often functioning as a visual pulse that directs the viewer’s attention across multiple narrative planes.

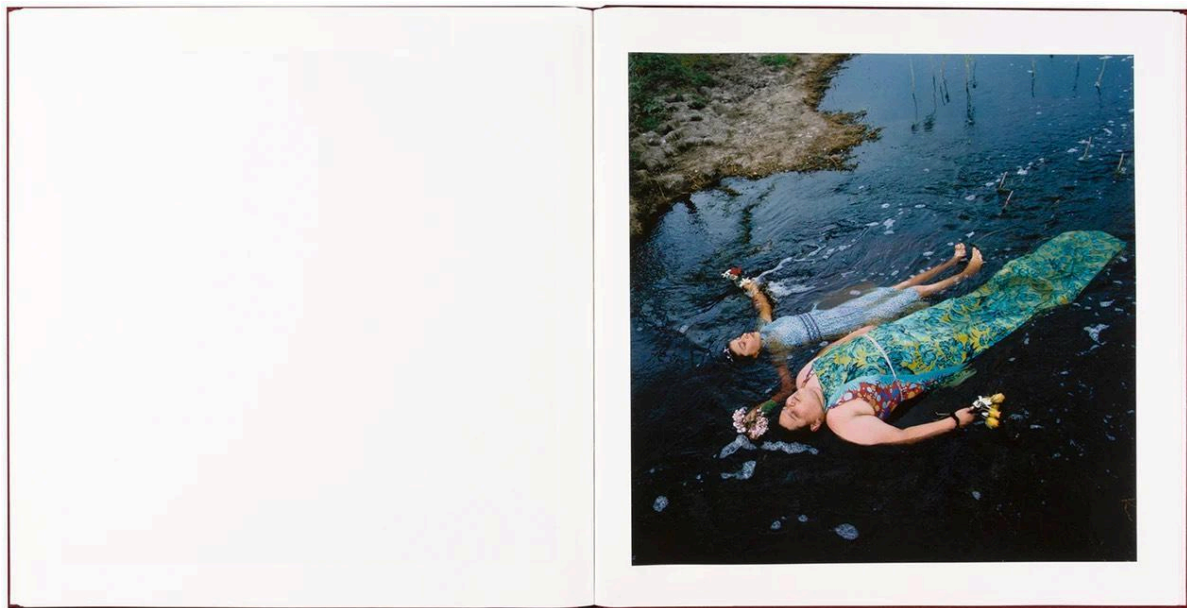
There is also a structural affinity: in both projects, color sets the visual tempo, shaping spatial rhythm and emotional undertone without relying on textual explanation. Webb’s intuitive color logic has profoundly influenced my own, reinforcing the idea that meaning can emerge from the interplay of light, hue, and fleeting gesture.

Alessandra Sanguinetti’s long-term photographic exploration of two cousins growing up in rural Argentina, *The Adventures of Guille and Belinda* (2003–2020), serves as a profound reference point for the emotional intimacy and temporal layering that a photobook can carry. The project began in 1999, when Guille and Belinda were just 10 and 9 years old, living in a rural province of Buenos Aires. Their path crossed with Sanguinetti, who was immediately drawn to their intense bond, a relationship made visually striking



by their mismatched physiques and deep emotional connection.

What began as documentation gradually transformed into a collaboration of play, fantasy, and trust. Over the years, Sanguinetti photographed the girls as they dreamed, played, imagined, and matured, allowing the work to grow organically from their evolving relationship. The result is far more than a straight documentary record. As with her earlier book *On the Sixth Day* (2006), Sanguinetti captures the subtle choreography between reality and fiction. The photographs offer a touching, captivating, and at times surreal insight into the enchantment of childhood and adolescence. The images are emotionally resonant not only



because of the bond between the cousins but also because of the unspoken dialogue between the subjects and the photographer—a connection built over years of shared experience.

Her chromatic sensibility is grounded in warm, earthy tones: the dusty gold of the pampas, soft greens, dim reds, and muted sunlight that reflect both the Argentine countryside and the psychological landscapes of her protagonists. These tones, rich yet never loud, serve to crystallize moments of vulnerability, transformation, and reverie. The sequencing of the book mirrors a fictional narrative arc, although deeply rooted in reality, allowing the viewer to feel rather than interpret.

Sanguinetti's images reveal that the passage of time can be marked not only by subject or setting, but by the evolving tones and light of the photographs themselves. The transition across her series mirrors a journey of interiority, where subtle variations in hue, light temperature, and visual pacing express emotional depth without relying on text. Her work

demonstrates that color can be not only symbolic, but also temporal, relational, and deeply human.

Nan Goldin's diaristic approach, particularly in *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1986), places color in direct relation to vulnerability, addiction, love, and queer identity. First published in 1986, this visual diary chronicles Goldin's intimate circle—her chosen family of friends and lovers—capturing their struggles for intimacy and understanding in a world both tender and chaotic. These photographs described a lifestyle that was visceral, charged and seething with a raw appetite for living. Goldin once referred to this book as a personal narrative, and indeed, it became the swan song of a generation shaped by emotional excess, sexual freedom, and looming loss.



Her use of warm reds, dim yellows, and deep blues intensifies the sensory quality of the work—what she calls the color, smell, sound, and physical presence of memory itself. As she writes, “Real memory, which these pictures trigger, is an invocation of the color, smell, sound and physical presence, the density and flavor of life.” The lushness of her palette is not decorative; it operates with the weight of lived experience. Her candid, emotionally charged style still demands that the viewer encounter the images head on, without the safety of distance.

Goldin's sequencing in the photobook creates a cinematic rhythm, building emotional tension and release like a visual symphony of desire, despair, and resilience. The raw and tactile textures of her imagery demonstrate how photographic practice becomes a visual diary, where color intensifies the affective pulse of existence. As Barthes suggests in *Camera Lucida*, photography operates not only through what is represented, but through the punctum,

what pierces the viewer (Barthes, 1981, pp. 26–27). In Goldin’s work, color often performs that role.



Nan Goldin’s photographic work exemplifies a strategy of emotional chromaticism, using color to explore memory, longing, and desire. In *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, reds, blues, and purples function as thresholds of intimacy, excess, and grief. Goldin turns to color not merely for atmosphere, but as a visceral extension of the self—a language of experience that is raw, fractured, and deeply human. Her photographs speak not only of aesthetics, but of lived emotional states, making color a central conduit for vulnerability and meaning.

3.2 Materiality, Youth, and Color Atmospheres

Here, color is approached as a material excess—saturated, tactile, and bound to consumer culture, youth, and leisure environments. Photographers in this category employ color not merely as a descriptive tool but as a heightened atmosphere that defines social identity, collective habits, and visual irony. Their palettes often verge on exaggeration, drawing attention to the banal and the grotesque alike. In this context, Martin Parr demonstrates how garish color atmospheres can expose cultural codes, consumerist obsessions, and the uneasy pleasures of modern material life.

Martin Parr’s work exaggerates social reality through garish, saturated, and sometimes grotesque color. In *The Last Resort* (1986), his now-iconic series of photographs taken in New Brighton between 1983 and 1985, Parr documents British leisure culture amid a backdrop of economic decline. Using on-board flash and hyper-saturated film, he illuminated

candy-colored plastic chairs, greasy chips, and sunburnt bodies along the litter-strewn, concrete promenade of a fading beach resort. The result was an unflinching yet oddly tender look at working-class holidays during Margartaet Thatcher’s Britain. “The beach is always going to be an integral part of what I do – it just goes on and on,” Parr has said. “I’m off to the beach tomorrow.”



This obsessive attention to leisure as both spectacle and symptom recurs in his later work *Common Sense* (1999), a smorgasbord of over-the-top visuals highlighting everything from tacky clothes and jewelry to processed junk food and garish packaging. From kitsch to grotesque, *Common Sense* documents modern consumerist culture through vivid and often lurid photographs that are both funny and sad, taking a forensic look at everyday items. Here,



color is pushed to its visual limit: neon oranges, acidic greens, and synthetic pinks dominate scenes of excess. Parr's aesthetic is intentionally abrasive, making discomfort visually pleasurable and pleasure visually absurd.

His photographs do not aim to beautify but to satirize. Color becomes a weapon: his saturated palette is not expressive in the romantic sense, but diagnostic, a tool for social commentary that makes the grotesque appear banal, and the banal grotesque.

Parr's influence lies in his fearless use of color to provoke. His photographs show that color can operate beyond beauty or realism—it can be uncomfortable, comical, or confrontational. In channeling some of that energy into my own work, I came to understand that visual discomfort, when handled thoughtfully, can lead to emotional depth rather than detachment.

Mike Brodie's project *A Period of Juvenile Prosperity* (2013) captures the rawness of transient youth across the United States. Using 35mm and Polaroid film, Brodie documents a subculture of freight train hoppers and nomadic teenagers. His chromatic strategy—dusty oranges, vivid greens, sun-burnt reds, adds a visceral and atmospheric quality, conjuring sensations of heat, rust, movement, and impermanence. These tones do not merely represent his subjects' environment but immerse the viewer in the texture of their existence.



Argentinian photographer and director **Marina Mónaco** (Buenos Aires, based in Berlin) works primarily with 35mm film, documenting youth cultures across Latin America and Europe. Her projects *Kids*, *Neue Welle*, and the photobooks *I Saw You in a Song* and *An Anti-Memoir* combine intimate portraits with an exploration of friendship, music, and

subcultural spaces (Colantonio, 2024; Haase, 2025). Her work moves between color and black-and-white, each chosen deliberately to express atmosphere and temporal dislocation.



Mónaco explicitly frames her commitment to analog film as both an aesthetic and existential choice. She notes that the slowness of film “keeps me present” and resists the instantaneity of digital capture, which she perceives as too polished or “fake” (Haase, 2025). Shooting with a Canon AE-1, she emphasizes tactility, chance, and temporality: negatives and prints become objects that embody memory and process. This DIY and lo-fi ethos extends to her photobooks, where she interweaves images with diaries, notes, and ephemera, heightening the materiality of memory (Hopgood, 2025).



Her work persistently documents youth cultures. In *Kids*, Mónaco photographs friends in suburban Buenos Aires and later in Europe, rendering adolescence through warm, saturated palettes; bedrooms, parks, and skateboards suffused with the tenderness of proximity (Colantonio, 2024). Here, color operates as an affective atmosphere, a way of holding the fleeting intensities of youth.

By contrast, *Neue Welle* (2019–ongoing) turns to Berlin’s underground music scene. Shot largely in black-and-white, this series emphasizes the raw textures of concerts and backstage spaces, where grain and shadow accentuate Berlin’s “dark energy” (Atalay, 2025). Yet even here, Mónaco identifies the *blue hour* as a privileged chromatic space for reflection,



particularly at Tempelhof, where she often photographs, suggesting a sustained attention to atmosphere even in monochrome (Berlin Views, n.d.).

Mónaco’s case aligns precisely with this category. Her reliance on analog methods foregrounds materiality. Her recurring subjects—friends, peers, and subcultures—underscore youth; and her navigation of chromatic worlds, from warm saturated colors in *Kids* to the cool shadows of *Neue Welle*, demonstrates how atmosphere emerges through color as both emotional and symbolic language.

3.3 Dreamlike Visuality and Chromatic Experimentation

This section focuses on artists who destabilize the boundaries of realism through dreamlike and experimental uses of color. Their images often transform the ordinary into the surreal, suspending narrative certainty and instead relying on chromatic fields, juxtapositions, and psychological intensity. Color in this category functions like a poetic device: it evokes estrangement, mystery, and emotional drift.

As a pioneer of dreamlike chromatic experimentation, **William Eggleston** radically redefined the expressive potential of color photography. In 1976, *William Eggleston's Guide* marked a turning point in the acceptance of color within fine art photography. It was the first one-man show of color photographs ever presented at The Museum of Modern Art, and the museum's first publication of color photography. The reception was divided and passionate. The book and show unabashedly forced the art world to deal with color photography, a medium scarcely taken seriously at the time, and with the vernacular content of a body of photographs that could have been, but definitely weren't, some average American's Instamatic pictures from the family album. These photographs heralded a new mastery of the use of color as an integral element of photographic composition.



Eggleston's chromatic vocabulary, centered around saturated reds, vibrant yellows, and deep blues, transformed mundane Southern American scenes into emotionally rich visual

experiences. In *Los Alamos* (2003), the sequencing of chromatic fields guides the viewer through a dreamlike drift, a technique that deeply resonates with the structure of my own photobook. His use of magenta shadows and candy-colored surfaces finds a visual echo in the Red section of *Purple is Where I Always Am*, where a similar intensity transforms domestic spaces into emotionally charged scenes. Eggleston's color is not illustrative but deeply affective, each tone imbued with a subtle psychological charge that invites contemplation.

His approach to everyday subject matter, the interior of a refrigerator, a tricycle on a suburban lawn, has come to define the expressive potential of color photography. By removing narrative expectations and relying instead on chromatic punctuation and spatial composition, Eggleston allowed color to assume symbolic and emotional weight. This same trust in color's autonomous power is echoed in my decision to let color dictate the book's structure and mood shifts. His influence is both aesthetic and philosophical: a belief that color alone can speak volumes.

Though grounded in documentary, **Constantine Manos** constructs surreal atmospheres through chromatic contradiction. His visual estrangement and psychological ambiguity position him within the dreamlike/experimental realm rather than strict realism. In *American Color* (1995), Manos captures fleeting moments of vibrant contradiction across urban and leisure environments in the United States. Often photographing in visually chaotic public events and destinations—such as Venice Beach, Bike Week at Daytona Beach, Mardi Gras in New Orleans, and Atlantic City—Manos constructs a kaleidoscopic view of American culture. While his images are rooted in specific sites, they are not meant to offer a definitive statement about the country or its people. Instead, they isolate particular instants of visual



strangeness, where form, gesture, and hue collide to create a sense of the surreal within the real.

His palette is clean yet electric: carnival rides, chrome, plastic fashion, and neon signage appear in surreal color combinations that are both seductive and alienating. Figures are often set against flat, saturated backdrops—fluorescent swimsuits beside hedges, gleaming motorcycles under purple skies, where their silhouettes become graphic elements within tightly composed visual fields. This graphic clarity enhances the psychological ambiguity of the scenes: are these celebratory moments or subtle critiques? Are we seeing joy, irony, or disorientation?

In the preface to *American Color*, Manos writes:

“The flow of people in a setting, their changing relationship to each other and their environment, and their constantly changing expressions and movements – all combine to create dynamic situations which provide the photographer with limitless choices of when to push the button. By choosing a precise intersection between subject and time, he may transform the ordinary into the extraordinary and the real into the surreal.”



The contrast between deep shadow and electric hue draws from this logic, tension emerges not from subject alone, but from the visual friction between colors themselves. I was particularly influenced by how Manos allows chromatic contradiction to guide mood: blue as coldness, confusion, or contemplation; electric yellow as intrusion or escape. His ability to

generate emotional dissonance through formal precision helped me understand how color, when isolated and juxtaposed intentionally, can destabilize narrative meaning while suggesting deep emotional undercurrents. In this way, Manos's work becomes less about capturing reality and more about constructing an atmosphere of surreal estrangement, an idea I tried to translate photographically in my own chromatic sequences.

Viviane Sassen's vibrant, surreal compositions, notably in *Flamboya* (2008) and *Parasomnia* (2011), blur the lines between fashion, fine art, and documentary. Her use of color is sculptural and emotive, often bending reality into abstraction. Her integration of the body, shadow, and saturated palettes form spatial constructions that destabilize representation while amplifying the effect. Purple recurs in her work as a symbol of transformation and ambiguity.



Petra Collins, known for her intimate and often surreal imagery, uses colored lighting, particularly purple, pink, and blue hues, to build visual narratives rooted in femininity, adolescence, and interiority. Her photographic series and short films since the early 2010s often adopt a dreamy atmosphere that fuses the diaristic with the fantastical. In my photobook, particularly in transitions between colors, I explore a related visual vocabulary: soft-focus edges, symbolic lighting, and sensual palettes that resist realism in favor of emotional suggestion.



Maisie Cousins' work, especially *Rubbish*, *Dipping Sauce*, *Grass Peonie Bum* (2018), embraces hyper-saturated close-ups of bodily textures, decaying food, and organic material. The visual excess, often in purples, greens, and pinks, turns color into a statement about consumption, sensuality, and abjection. Petra Collins' unapologetically tactile aesthetic blends color and texture to evoke desire, decay, and emotional excess. Her photographic language, often saturated with pinks, purples, and blues, builds intimate, surreal environments that blur the boundary between fantasy and memory. Through visual proximity and sensual chromatic palettes, Collins constructs a world that is both hyper-feminine and subversively raw, where the body and its surroundings dissolve into an emotional atmosphere.



Rinko Kawauchi's delicate compositions in books like *Illuminance* (2011) and *Ametsuchi* (2013) are grounded in the poetics of daily life. Her quiet palettes, soft blues, muted pastels, occasional lavender, convey transience and emotional subtlety. Her sequencing emphasizes visual and chromatic resonance over linearity. Kawauchi's sequencing emphasizes visual and chromatic resonance over linearity, often using calm hues and temporal pauses to create breathing spaces within the emotional arc of her photobooks.



3.4 Photography, Symbolism, and the Limits of Representation

In this final category, color acquires symbolic gravity, testing photography's ability to represent large-scale or abstract realities. The emphasis is on works where chromatic vocabularies exceed mere depiction, instead embodying ecological, industrial, or philosophical questions. These images negotiate the tension between beauty and critique, aesthetic wonder and ethical unease.

Within this symbolic framework, **Edward Burtynsky** exemplifies how color can render industrial devastation both visually sublime and conceptually disturbing, revealing the fragile limits of representation in contemporary photography. In *Manufactured Landscapes* (2003) and *Oil* (2009), Burtynsky documents large scale environmental transformation with uncanny beauty. Rusty reds, chemical yellows, and cobalt blues turn industrial decay into abstract, painterly compositions. His aerial and large format images blur the line between image and data, between aesthetic wonder and ecological warning.



Sofia Borges, born in Brazil in 1984, explores the philosophical tension between image and meaning. Her series *The Swamp* (2016–2020) and earlier work included in *The Book of Images* (2016) interrogate photography’s inability to fully “translate” the real, presenting highly staged or obscurely cropped images that destabilize visual certainty. Her chromatic palette is dense and moody—deep blacks, dark purples, bruised greens—emphasizing an interior, psychological landscape rather than descriptive representation.

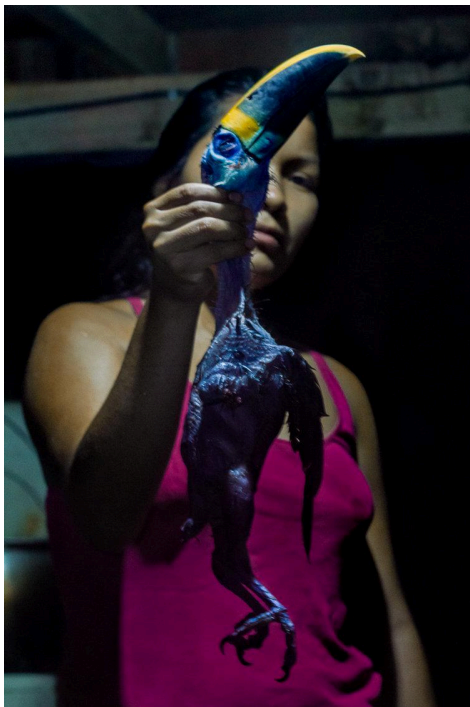


SOFIA BORGES REVISION | solo show and book launching at Kandlhofer Gallery, Vienna, Austria, 2016

Rather than illustrating subjects, Borges proposes images that resonate symbolically, drawing viewers into existential disorientation. This logic resonates in *Purple is Where I Always Am* through the deliberate ambiguity of many photographs in the Purple and Blue sections. These images, often blurred, dark, or visually obscure, embrace the symbolic "gap" Borges outlines—inviting the viewer into the space between what is seen and what is felt. This reflects my desire to work not with photography as evidence, but as an emotional cipher.

Isadora Romero, an Ecuadorian photographer and visual artist born in 1987, works at the intersection of documentary and speculative fiction. In series such as *Amazona Warmikuna* (2017), Romero creates images that fuse ecological crisis with feminine embodiment, often through vibrant, sensual, and deliberately non-naturalistic color. Her use of color moves between enchantment and confrontation, illuminating structural violence through beauty and metaphor. Romero’s photography often embodies a duality of beauty and resistance—using color not only to evoke inner states but also to gesture toward external

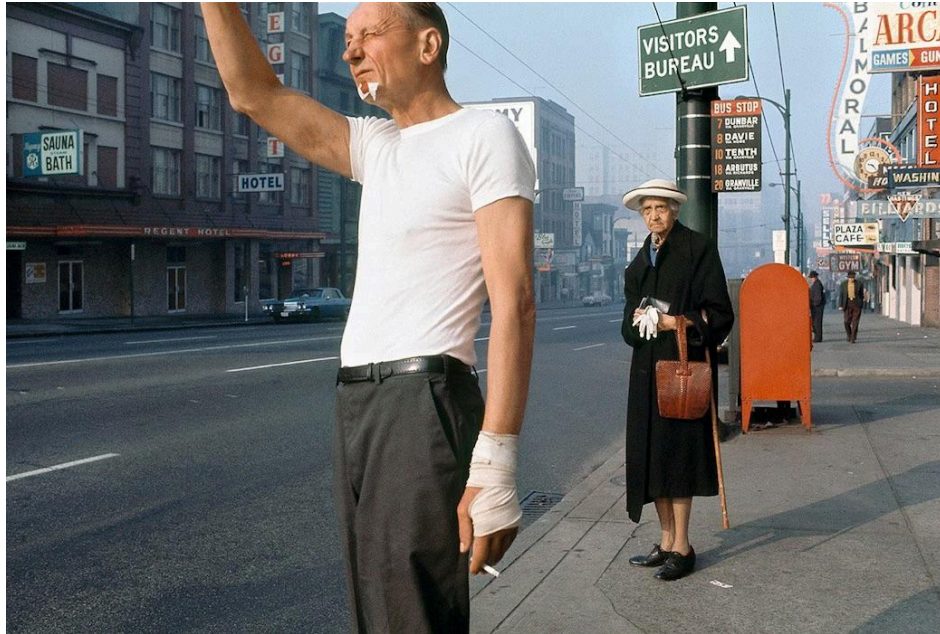
critique. Her images navigate the tension between softness and urgency, treating color as a form of poetic resistance.



Fred Herzog's *Modern Color* (Hatje Cantz, 2017) offers a compelling case within the discussion of photography, symbolism, and the limits of representation. Working in the 1950s and 1960s with Kodachrome, Herzog documented Vancouver's urban life with an intensity of color that challenged the prevailing black-and-white conventions of the time. His saturated palette elevated the everyday into a symbolic register, demonstrating that color could reveal cultural meaning rather than merely decorate form. The historical marginalization of his work, recognized only decades later, exemplifies how the boundaries of representation are culturally and temporally constructed. As Company and Koetzle argue in the accompanying essays, Herzog's contribution was not only technical but conceptual: his use of color anticipated the recognition of color photography as a legitimate artistic language.

In *Man with Bandage* (1968), a passerby with a white bandage on his head moves against the glow of a red neon sign. The luminous Kodachrome red functions as both a compositional anchor and symbolic charge: vitality and consumer spectacle clash with the vulnerability of the injured figure. Similarly, *Foot of Main* (1963) depicts a working-class street corner punctuated by green storefronts, a turquoise car, and yellow signage. These colors transform a banal scene into a tableau of modern design, commerce, and postwar optimism. In *Red Stockings* (1961), a woman's bright red pleated dress resonates with a

nearby girl's tights, exemplifying the chromatic intensity that threads through Herzog's practice. As critic Sarah Milroy observed, "One of the things that strikes a viewer almost immediately ... is the pop of 'Kodachrome red' that appears in almost every image" (as cited in *Modern Color*, 2017).



The essays that accompany the book shed further light on Herzog's practice. David Company situates Herzog within a lineage of photographers who anticipated the so-called New Color movement of the 1970s, underlining how his street work demonstrates that the apparent naturalism of color photography is in fact a complex cultural construction (Company, 2017). By framing color as both document and interpretation, Company shows that Herzog's photographs not only recorded urban life but translated it into a chromatic language.



Hans-Michael Koetzle, in turn, emphasizes the paradox of Herzog's reception. He notes that Herzog's photographs remained largely unseen for decades, not because of their lack of artistic merit but because the art world was still dominated by the monochrome canon. For Koetzle (2017), Herzog's belated recognition illustrates how institutional and technological contexts shape what counts as legitimate representation in photography.

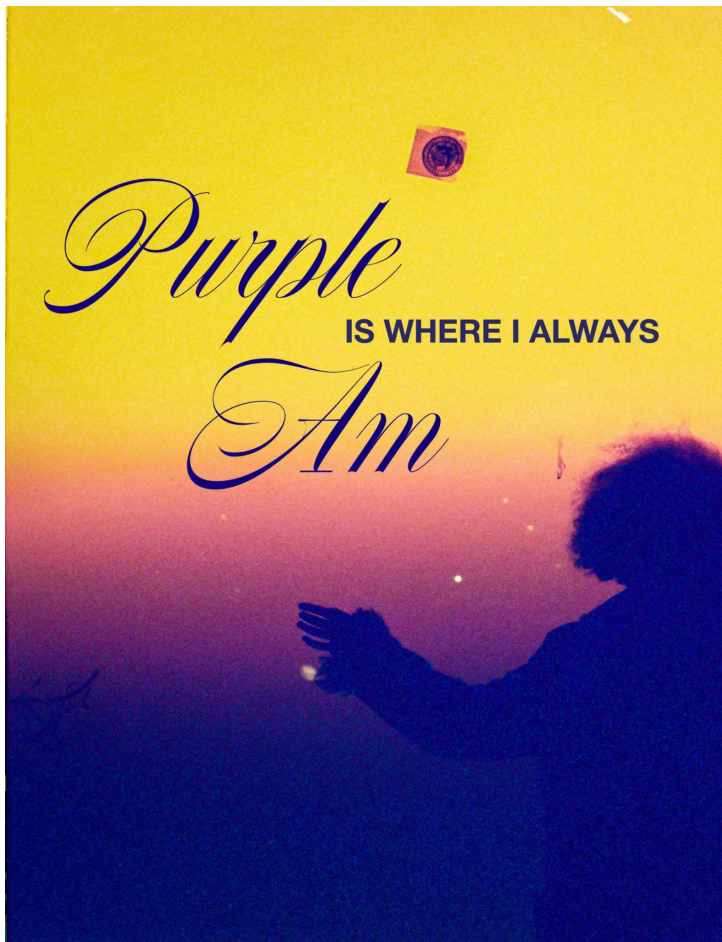
Taken together, Herzog's recurrent use of reds, greens, yellows, and blues did more than decorate his images: it captured the atmosphere of postwar urban life in its contradictions, at once vibrant, commercial, and alienating. With the support of Company's and Koetzle's analyses, *Modern Color* emerges not only as a technical archive of Kodachrome's brilliance but as a conceptual intervention into the very status of color in photographic practice. Herzog demonstrated that color could embody both the vitality and the tensions of modernity, insisting on its expressive and symbolic potential as a language that speaks beyond representation.

Having examined how other artists mobilize color in narrative sequencing, the following chapter turns to my own project, positioning *Purple is Where I Always Am* within this lineage.

CHAPTER 4: PROJECT PRESENTATION: *Purple is Where I Always Am*

4.1 Concept

The photobook *Purple is Where I Always Am* was conceived as a visual exploration of color as language, testing through practice the hypotheses and intuitions developed during this research. If the theoretical framework has examined color as a communicative structure, this project embodies the same question in artistic form. It is a book that does not illustrate concepts but rather puts them into motion, using photography as a space where color itself



becomes narrative, rhythm, and atmosphere. In this sense, photographic practice is not only the medium of expression but also an integral part of the research methodology, where making and reflecting evolve together.

The **title** evokes the centrality of purple in the project: a color of ambiguity, transition, and depth. Neither fully warm nor fully cool, purple exists as an unstable synthesis of red and blue, a vibration more than a wavelength. Historically tied to power, spirituality, and mourning, and described by theorists as melancholic and ambivalent, it

remains a liminal hue. In analog photography it often arises through accidents, expired films, Lomography stocks, chemical shifts, transforming imperfection into atmosphere. To name the book *Purple is Where I Always Am* is to affirm this instability as metaphor and presence: a chromatic language of uncertainty, reverie, and emotional resonance. A space of in-between. The book itself is divided into five chromatic chapters—Blue, Yellow, Red, Green, and Purple—structured according to perceptual, symbolic, and affective criteria. These choices, briefly introduced here, are further examined in Section 4.4, *Chromatic Narrative Structure*,

where I explore in depth how sequencing and rhythm transform color into narrative and affective progression.

4.2 Materiality

The **materiality** of the book reinforces and embodies its chromatic journey. Printed digitally in four colors on uncoated Munken Lynx 150 g paper, the pages preserve the texture of film grain and the softness of analog color, creating a tactile surface that resonates with the vulnerability of the images. Measuring 21 × 28 cm, the format offers a balance between presence and intimacy: large enough to immerse the reader in each atmosphere, yet modest enough to be held closely, like a personal diary.



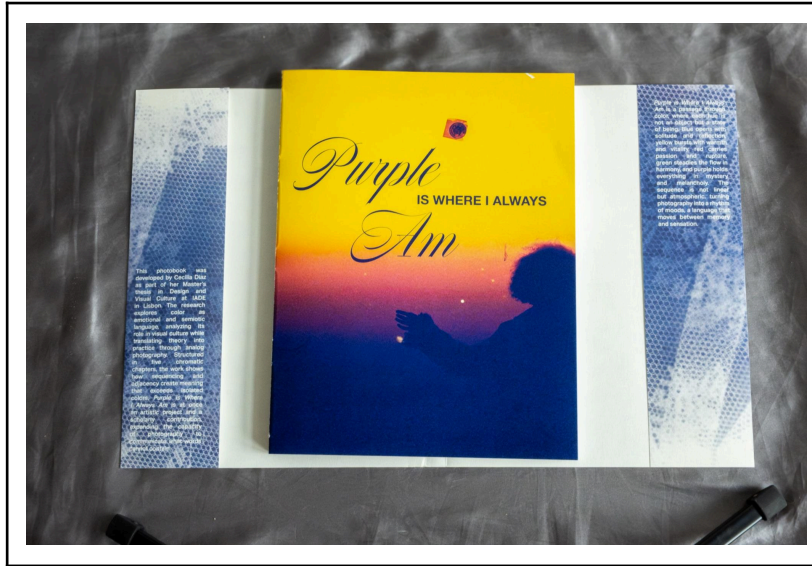
The interior is bound using French cross binding, with a sewn block left without a cover so that the physical structure itself remains visible. This choice echoes the book’s conceptual interest in transparency and fragility: just as purple reveals what is normally unseen, the exposed spine lays bare the process of construction. In the Appendix of this document, I include a link to videos showing both the binding process and a complete walkthrough of the book itself, offering the reader an expanded view of its materiality and narrative flow.



A dust jacket, printed on Fedrigoni Limestone 120 g, envelops the book as both protection and gesture. The design was developed in collaboration with London-based artist Sara Vieira, who helped me translate an initial idea of covering the book in lace into a more

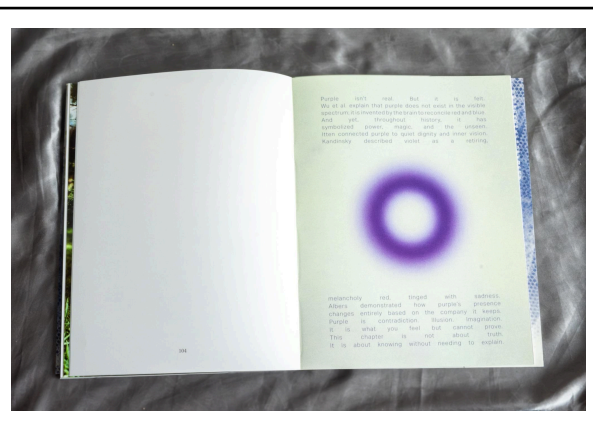
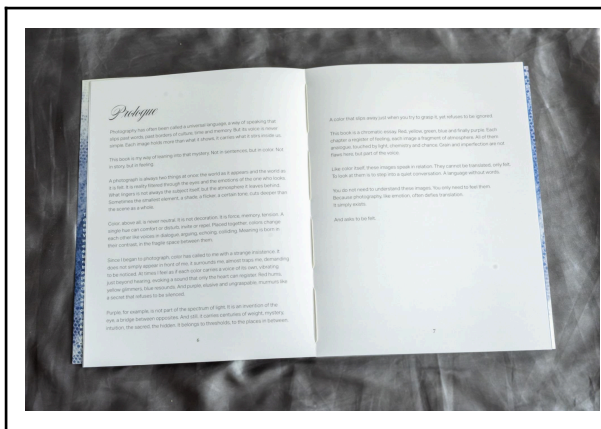
durable and manipulable solution. Instead of physically wrapping the book, I scanned lace fabric to preserve its texture on paper. This process soon evolved into the decision to create a cyanotype of the lace rather than a simple scan, aligning with the analogue ethos of the project. Cyanotype, with its tactile manuality, tonal unpredictability, and deep blue imprints, echoes the imperfections and materiality that define analog photography. It embodies the project’s commitment to processes where chance and craft intertwine, where texture and atmosphere emerge not from control but from openness to transformation. Vieira’s collaboration was key in bringing this vision to life, ensuring that the dust jacket resonates as both surface and concept—an analogue echo of fragility made tangible.

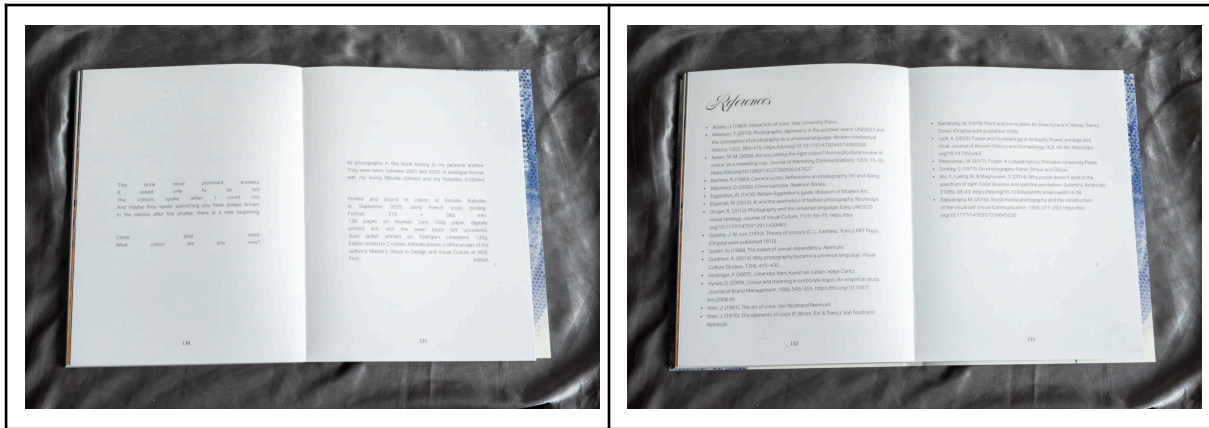




The dust jacket also carries two flaps that frame the book conceptually. On one flap, the central idea of *Purple is Where I Always Am* is summarized, offering the reader an entry point into its chromatic journey. On the other, the purpose of the project is contextualized within the scope of this thesis at IADE, clarifying its role as both research and creation.

Inside, the reader encounters a prologue that functions as a conceptual, poetic distillation of the project. Rather than offering linear explanation, it evokes the atmosphere of the book and opens a space of wonder, preparing the reader to enter a chromatic narrative. Before each chapter begins, a circular design appears, representing the hue of the chapter's dominant color. Accompanying these circles are short texts that introduce each color through voices from the theoretical framework—authors who articulate the psychological, symbolic, or perceptual qualities that structure the book's chromatic journey.





The tone of the book oscillates between academic precision and poetic evocation. It is at once a piece of research and a piece of design: rigorous in its conceptual grounding yet deliberately mysterious and dreamlike, echoing the ambiguity of purple itself. This sense of enigma permeates the book, suggesting that color is never fully graspable but always in transition, always whispering more than it declares.

At the end of the chromatic sequence, a closing text appears:

*This book never promised answers.
It asked only to be felt.
The colours spoke when I could not.
And maybe they spoke something you have always known.
In the silence after the shutter, there is a new beginning.
Close your eyes. What colour are you now?*

This final passage leaves the reader with an open question, reinforcing the affective and experiential dimension of the project.

Afterwards, a note specifies that all photographs in the book belong to my personal archive, taken between 2021 and 2025 in analogue format with my Minolta (35mm) and Rolleiflex (120mm). The book concludes with a colophon and a list of references, situating the work within the broader field of photographic and theoretical inquiry.

These design decisions are not neutral. They reflect the conviction that the photobook is not merely a container for images but a medium where paper, ink, binding, and format actively participate in meaning-making. *Purple is Where I Always Am* becomes an object to

be touched, handled, and inhabited, a physical extension of its chromatic language. The reader's encounter with the book is therefore not only visual but haptic and temporal: a choreography of turning, pausing, touching, and dwelling in color.

I work with a wide variety of film brands, selecting each one according to the atmosphere and chromatic language I want to achieve. When I am seeking a cleaner aesthetic, with clarity and reliability in the rendering of tones, I often turn to Kodak stocks. Each film has its own chromatic personality. *Kodak Gold 200* tends to favor warm hues: yellows appear luminous, reds are saturated without bleeding, and skies shift toward a nostalgic cyan. It is a film that works beautifully in daylight, where its golden bias enhances a sense of intimacy and softness. *Portra 400*, by contrast, is known for its subtle treatment of skin tones and its pastel register. Blues are muted, greens lean toward neutrality, and highlights remain controlled. This makes it a versatile choice for portraits and for moments when I want color to suggest calmness or introspection rather than intensity. *Ektar 100* sits at the other end of the spectrum. It is extremely fine grained and highly saturated, producing vivid reds, intense greens, and striking blues. It is the film I turn to when I want color to dominate the frame, when the chromatic field itself becomes the protagonist of the image. *Ultramax 400* offers a balance between accessibility and expressiveness: it handles mixed lighting conditions well, pushing blues toward vibrancy and rendering purples with unusual clarity compared to other consumer films.

In contrast, when I am pursuing a more experimental or cinematographic atmosphere, I turn to stocks such as *Harman Phoenix*, Lomography rolls, or even expired films. These materials are unpredictable, producing color shifts, strong contrasts, or spectral hues that lend themselves to a more dreamlike or uncanny register. *Harman Phoenix*, for instance, shifts shadows into magentas and purples, producing a spectral cast that I often use to evoke mystery or dreamlike sensations. Expired films frequently bend greens and blues into unexpected territories, introducing color casts that destabilize the image. Expired films or Lomography rolls can also generate unexpected magentas, murky greens, or spectral blues, transforming the palette into something uncanny and surreal. These accidents extend the expressive potential of color, opening the possibility for images where purple appears not as a stable hue but as an emergent vibration between red and blue. Rather than correcting these flaws, I embrace them as an extension of the language of photography, where material imperfection becomes meaning. This liminal quality, unstable, emergent, vibrating, is one of the reasons why purple became the conceptual and emotional anchor of *Purple is Where I*

Always Am. The accidents of film do not simply color the image; they embody the uncertainty, ambiguity, and resonance that this project seeks to foreground.

Lomography, as both a brand and a movement, emerged in the 1990s out of a renewed interest in inexpensive Soviet cameras such as the *Lomo LC-A*. Its philosophy centered on experimentation and spontaneity, encouraging the use of films with intensified colors, unexpected contrasts, and unpredictable outcomes. The emulsions produced by Lomography continue this tradition: they tend to saturate magentas and cyans, shift greens toward acidic registers, or generate halos of color along the edges of the image. These films are not designed for neutrality or fidelity but for play and expression. Incorporating them into *Purple is Where I Always Am* is another way of working with instability and accident as creative engines, reinforcing the idea that color, and especially purple, is not a physical constant but a perceptual and affective vibration.

Within the material dimension of the project, the choice of photographic film plays a crucial role. The chromatic qualities of each stock become part of the book's material language, shaping not only the look of the images but their emotional register. I work with a wide variety of film brands, selecting each one according to the atmosphere and chromatic language I want to achieve. When I am seeking a cleaner aesthetic, with clarity and reliability in the rendering of tones, I often turn to Kodak stocks. Each film has its own chromatic personality. Kodak Gold 200 tends to favor warm hues: yellows appear luminous, reds are saturated without bleeding, and skies shift toward a nostalgic cyan. It is a film that works beautifully in daylight, where its golden bias enhances a sense of intimacy and softness. Portra 400, by contrast, is known for its subtle treatment of skin tones and its pastel register. Blues are muted, greens lean toward neutrality, and highlights remain controlled. This makes it a versatile choice for portraits and for moments when I want color to suggest calmness or introspection rather than intensity. Ektar 100 sits at the other end of the spectrum. It is extremely fine grained and highly saturated, producing vivid reds, intense greens, and striking blues. It is the film I turn to when I want color to dominate the frame, when the chromatic field itself becomes the protagonist of the image. Ultramax 400 offers a balance between accessibility and expressiveness: it handles mixed lighting conditions well, pushing blues toward vibrancy and rendering purples with unusual clarity compared to other consumer films.

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Lomography, as both a brand and a movement, emerged in the 1990s out of a renewed interest in inexpensive Soviet cameras such as the Lomo LC-A. Its philosophy centered on experimentation and spontaneity, encouraging the use of films with intensified colors, unexpected contrasts, and unpredictable outcomes. The emulsions produced by Lomography continue this tradition: they tend to saturate magentas and cyans, shift greens toward acidic registers, or generate halos of color along the edges of the image. These films are not designed for neutrality or fidelity but for play and expression. Incorporating them into *Purple is Where I Always Am* is another way of working with instability and accident as creative engines, reinforcing the idea that color, and especially purple, is not a physical constant but a perceptual and affective vibration.

Ultimately, the materiality of film stocks—whether reliable Kodak emulsions or experimental Lomography rolls—works in tandem with the paper, binding, and design choices of the book. Together, they construct a tactile and chromatic language in which imperfection, texture, and unpredictability are not limitations but integral components of meaning.

4.3 Framework and Influences

The project emerges from an extended process of investigation into theories of color, semiotics, and the photobook as medium. Authors such as Neves (2022), Dewan (2021), and Lockemann and Holt (2022) argue that the photobook constructs meaning through sequencing, rhythm, and materiality rather than through text alone. Their reflections, together with the long tradition documented in catalogues such as Bros (2008) and Romig (2010), provided the conceptual framework for conceiving *Purple is Where I Always Am* as a book whose language is fundamentally chromatic. Historical surveys and critical perspectives, including Lévi Strauss (2003), Neumüller (2024), and the editorial positions of *Zum*, reinforce that the photobook should be understood not only as a format of publication but as a medium of thought, where structure itself generates meaning.

At the same time, the actual construction of the project is rooted in practice and in a dialogue with photographic influences explored in the case studies. At its most intimate level, the work echoes Alessandra Sanguinetti's long arc of emotional closeness, where subtle shifts in hue and light chart psychological landscapes across time. From Nan Goldin, I inherited a diaristic, chromatic strategy—color not only as mood but as memory, a way of articulating longing and loss. Marina Mónaco's portraits of youth in Berlin showed me how twilight atmospheres can hold ambiguity and tenderness at once, a lesson that resonates in the Purple chapter and in the cooler edges of Blue. What I learned from her work is not only the chromatic weight of dusk light, but also how youth itself can be framed as a liminal state, suspended between fragility and self-assertion. Mónaco's subdued, velvety tones taught me to value atmosphere as much as gesture, and her insistence on analog processes reaffirmed my conviction that film grain and imperfection can become emotional language. In *Purple is Where I Always Am*, this influence is visible in portraits where bodies appear enveloped by color as if by memory itself—not sharply delineated, but blurred, porous, and tender.

From this intimacy, the project opens outward into the raw textures of analog materiality, where the works of Mike Brodie and William Eggleston become touchstones. Their commitment to film's unpredictability—its light leaks, tonal depth, and grain—taught me that imperfection itself can be a form of truth. Webb's orchestrated chaos and bold color juxtapositions shaped the spatial rhythm of my Yellow chapter, while Manos's surreal clarity helped me think of color as contradiction rather than harmony. Fred Herzog's *Modern Color*

offered a model of how street life and everyday gestures can be elevated through chromatic attention, a lineage that echoes in my own images of ordinary encounters reframed by color.

From there, the project embraces exaggeration and intensity. Martin Parr's abrasive saturation, especially in *Common Sense*, pushed me to lean into discomfort in my Red chapter—not as satire but as a way to evoke urgency and vulnerability. From Burtynsky, I drew the impulse to aestheticize melancholy, especially in my treatment of purple as a site of emotional transformation.

These lessons converge with contemporary voices such as Viviane Sassen, Petra Collins, and Rinko Kawauchi, who offered chromatic languages of ambiguity, sensuality, and dreamlike atmosphere. Their influences surface most clearly in transitions, where color operates less as symbol and more as sensation, guiding the viewer not toward fixed meaning but toward open states of perception. Borges and Romero challenged me to think of photography not only as representation but as symbolic inquiry—an image as threshold and riddle—and their work encouraged me to embrace ambiguity and poetic resistance.

In my own book, the transition from yellow to red to purple mirrors a journey of interiority, each color shift an echo of personal transformation. As in Sanguinetti's work, I allowed subtle variations in hue, light temperature, and visual pacing to express emotional depth without relying on text. Her work showed me that color can be not only symbolic, but also temporal, relational, and deeply human. In *Purple is Where I Always Am*, and in much of my portrait work, I have drawn from Goldin's strategy of emotional chromaticism to explore memory, longing, and desire. Like her, I turn to color not just as mood, but as meaning, as a visceral extension of the self. The reds, blues, and purples in my book function as thresholds of intimacy, excess, and grief. Inspired by her example, I allowed color to speak not just of aesthetics, but of experience—raw, fractured, and deeply human. Her unapologetically tactile aesthetic encouraged me to experiment with visual proximity in *Purple is Where I Always Am*, especially in the Red and Purple sections, where color and texture intertwine to evoke desire and decay. Romero's influence is also felt here: in the Red, Blue, and Purple chapters, color gestures toward inner states but also toward external critique, a strategy of color as poetic resistance.

Finally, the project is deeply indebted to the culture of the photobook itself. Theoretical accounts and historical catalogues, from Parr and Badger's histories to the reflections

gathered in *Zum* and in *Talking About Photobooks* (Neumüller, 2024), emphasize that the photobook is not merely a vehicle for images but a site where structure, pacing, and material form create meaning. As Neves (2022), Dewan (2021), and Lockemann and Holt (2022) argue, the photobook's communicative power lies as much in its sequencing and materiality as in the photographs themselves. In *Purple is Where I Always Am*, this understanding shaped concrete decisions: the choice of uncoated paper to preserve the tactile quality of film grain, the 21 × 28 cm format to balance intimacy and presence, and the lay-flat binding to allow chromatic atmospheres to flow uninterrupted across the gutter. Even the generous margins were conceived as pauses in the narrative, visual silences that echo the rhythm of color itself.

These decisions resonate with specific precedents. Fred Herzog's *Modern Color* demonstrated how format can elevate everyday life into a chromatic meditation, inspiring my choice of a size that grants color both weight and openness. Alessandra Sanguinetti's *The Adventures of Guille and Belinda* showed me how pacing and the white of the page can function as breathing space, a lesson I applied in my use of margins and pauses. Rinko Kawauchi's photobooks offered a model for tactile atmosphere, where paper choice itself becomes part of the work's sensibility. And Nan Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* revealed how sequence can create emotional crescendo, a principle that underpins the chromatic progression of my chapters.

Within this lineage, *Purple is Where I Always Am* positions itself as a book to be handled, sequenced, and lived with, where the turning of pages enacts the chromatic rhythm of the images and the object itself becomes part of the narrative.

What unites these references is their approach to color as more than aesthetics—color becomes a method of storytelling, a trigger of memory, a symbolic portal. By studying these works, I positioned my own practice not in imitation, but in conversation, finding in their techniques and sensibilities echoes of my own artistic intuition. The case studies convened before demonstrate the diverse ways in which color can function as a carrier of emotional meaning and symbolic resonance in photographic practice. The photographers explored here provide methodological and conceptual parallels that inform and enrich the understanding of my own project. In this way, the photobook is both the outcome and the method of research: the site where theory, practice, and reflection converge in the Research through Design approach.

In this project, the use of color is inspired by classical theories of chromatic interaction, Goethe, Itten, Kandinsky, and Albers, but also informed by the possibilities of contemporary digital practice. While post production today allows extensive manipulation of chroma, I consider editing an extension of vision rather than a falsification of reality. Even so, my preference is to work with color as much as possible *before* the act of capture. This is not only a technical decision but also one of several aesthetic and communicative strategies: it allows the expressiveness of the image to emerge directly through the material and situational choices of film, light, and exposure. Fidelity to reality gives way to resonance, and photography becomes a field of experimentation where color suggests atmospheres and narratives that reach beyond the visible.

4.4 Chromatic Narrative Structure

The structure of *Purple is Where I Always Am* is entirely chromatic. Rather than organizing the photographs by chronology, geography, or subject matter, the book unfolds through a sequence of color atmospheres—Blue, Yellow, Red, Green, and Purple—each corresponding to a dominant hue and an emotional state. The transitions between them create a rhythm that carries the reader across registers of feeling and perception. Meaning does not arise from textual explanation or narrative plot but from the sensorial and affective progression of color. By sequencing images according to chromatic relations, the book demonstrates how photography can tell stories without words, relying on color to articulate emotion and temporality. The affective progression becomes a narrative in itself, grounded not in event but in perception.

This section translates the theoretical reflections on color into the sequencing logic of the photobook. Whereas earlier parts of the thesis examined each hue in isolation—attending to its symbolic, psychological, and semiotic resonances—here the focus is on how these chromatic atmospheres interact to form a continuous narrative arc. The photobook intensifies color's relational quality: meaning emerges not from isolated hues but from adjacency, from the way blue prepares yellow, how red ruptures that expansion, how green steadies the flow, and how purple suspends the arc in ambiguity. Each chapter is a tonal state, a rhythm, and a breath within a larger structure of affective storytelling.

My selection of hues was guided by three interwoven criteria: perceptual clarity, symbolic resonance, and affective contrast. From a **perceptual** standpoint, they correspond to some of the most stable and recognizable fields of color in human vision. They belong to what

Itten (1961) described as the primary circle of color relations, which has historically served as a foundation for the organization of chromatic systems in art and design. By working with these hues, I tap into what Goethe (1810/1970) already described as psychologically charged colors: blue as contemplative and distant, yellow as luminous and vital, red as intense and corporeal, green as balanced and restorative. Purple, in contrast, operates as a liminal synthesis—historically tied to spirituality, power, and mourning, and perceptually elusive as it does not exist in the spectrum but only in the blending of red and blue. In Kandinsky’s terms (1926/1979), violet is “retiring and melancholy,” yet in this project it is rearticulated as intimate, dreamlike, and transformative.

Symbolically, these colors carry layered cultural and historical associations that enrich their affective charge. Blue has long been linked with transcendence, melancholy, and the infinite; yellow with sunlight, energy, and attention; red with passion, desire, and danger; green with nature, fertility, and equilibrium; and purple with spirituality, power, and rarity. **Affectively**, this chromatic palette allows for a progression of moods that generates rhythm and narrative tension. Blue opens the book with introspection and longing; yellow interrupts with exuberance and immediacy; red follows as intensity and flesh; green offers suspension and balance; and purple concludes as a synthesis, a whisper, an affective ground where ambiguity and memory converge. This sequence echoes Gestalt’s insight that colors acquire meaning relationally, intensifying or softening depending on what precedes or follows them.

At the same time, the sequencing of images produces connections, contrasts, and pauses that deepen the chromatic narrative. Each image functions as a sentence in a visual language where color is the primary vocabulary. Warm colors such as red and yellow tend to evoke sensations of proximity, energy, or urgency, while cool colors such as blue and green suggest serenity, introspection, distance, or tranquility. These associations are not universal or immutable—they are influenced by cultural, historical, and personal contexts, as shown in the studies cited throughout this thesis. Still, perceptual regularities can be identified that allow color to perform communicative functions within visual culture.

Thus, the chosen colors function as more than aesthetic devices: they are structuring elements of the photobook’s visual language, organizing perception, guiding emotional response, and offering symbolic density. Each chromatic chapter proposes an atmosphere that invites the reader to inhabit an affective register: the calm of blue, the vitality of yellow, the intensity of red, the balance of green, and the intimacy of purple. Together, they create a

chromatic journey that mirrors the central thesis of this work—that color in photography communicates not by fixed meanings but by generating affective fields where sensations and interpretations emerge.

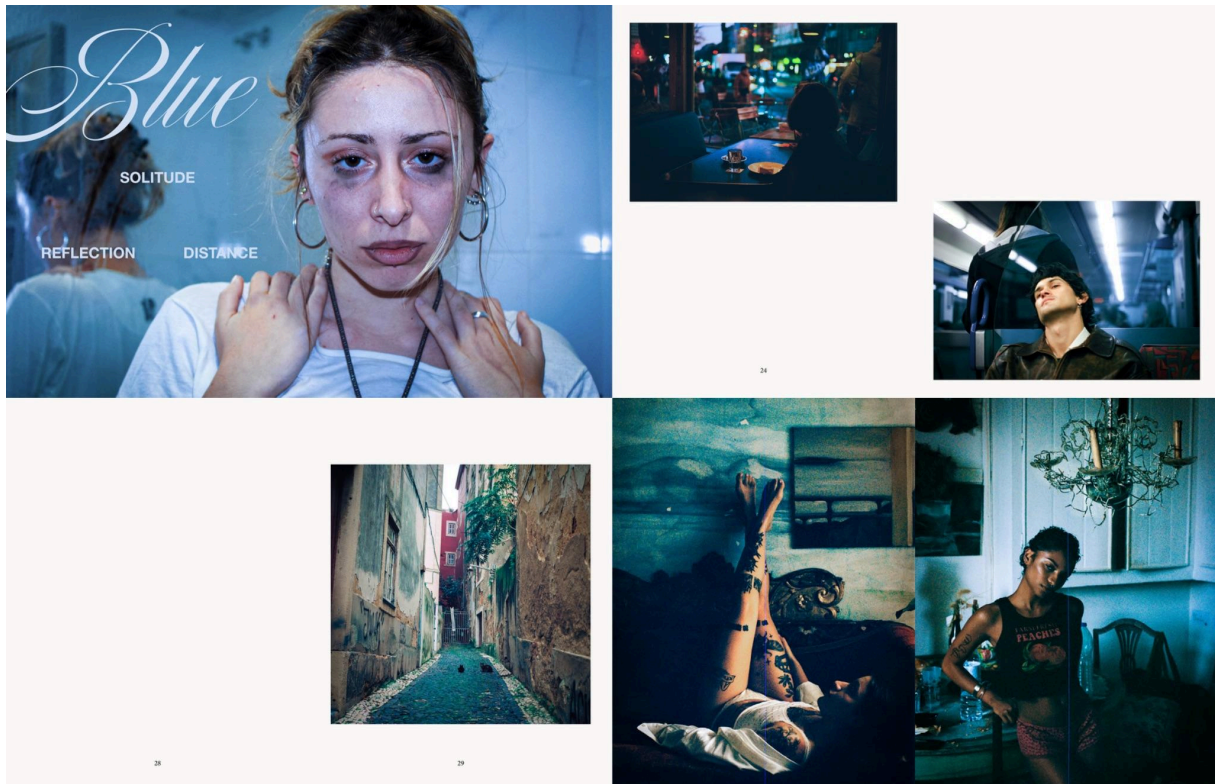
This language of color is reinforced by the deliberate use of analog photography, which allows for a more tactile and unpredictable grammar of tone, light, and grain. The choice of film stock, already discussed in the materiality section, as well as exposure, timing, and chromatic environment, all form part of the construction of this language and of the experiment that underpins the project. Unlike the highly manipulated aesthetics of digital imagery, analog film asserts a chromatic language that is more organic, less predictable, and more deeply connected to the experience of time, light, and materiality. In a visual culture saturated with filters, effects, and standardized editing, this return to analog is a critical act: an affirmation of imperfection, accident, and tactility as central to meaning.

Ultimately, *Purple is Where I Always Am* presents images captured between 2021 and 2025, focusing on portraits and scenes that explore the relationship between humans and their environments. Color is used deliberately to construct atmospheres—sometimes emphasizing the radiant energy of a place, sometimes provoking tension or ambiguity through chromatic contrast. The choice of colors, their saturation, balance or imbalance, is not arbitrary but a communicative gesture—an attempt to speak to the viewer’s gaze without verbal mediation. Each page-turn enacts a visual and emotional proposition, showing how sequencing and chromatic rhythm guide the reader’s affective journey. In this way, photography, in dialogue with color theory and personal experience, transforms pigment into language, offering a mode of storytelling that is at once perceptual, symbolic, and deeply human.

In order to delve deeper into this chromatic construction, the following section is organized around the five dominant hues that structure the book. Each color is approached as both a visual atmosphere and an emotional condition, shaping not only the perception of the images but also the symbolic and psychological associations they carry. These book sections? do not intend to offer fixed meanings for each hue, but rather to trace the ways in which color modulates the affective rhythm of the book. By examining Blue, Yellow, Red, Green, and Purple, I seek to reveal how chromatic sequences generate narrative intensity, how transitions create continuity, and how photography, in dialogue with color theory and personal experience, can transform pigment into language.

4.4.1 BLUE

In *Purple is Where I Always Am*, blue is the chromatic entry point, a chapter that sets the tone for the emotional and symbolic journey of the book. The choice to begin with blue was deliberate: it is not a color of immediacy or rupture but of solitude, reflection, and distance. Blue holds the paradox of being both everywhere—the sky, the sea—and yet elusive, always associated with what is far away, what cannot be touched. This duality makes it a perfect threshold into the photobook’s chromatic narrative.



Philosophically and poetically, blue has long been tied to distance and desire. As Solnit (2005) reflects, the color blue often belongs to the farthest visible point—the horizon, the mountain veiled in haze, the sky receding infinitely. Blue thus comes to symbolize the beauty of what we cannot reach, what remains just out of grasp. Martinez (2017), in dialogue with Solnit, expands this idea by linking blue to the body’s relation to space: blue as the experience of being aware of distance, of existing in relation to what withdraws. Similarly, Jungles (2019) captures this poignantly: “The color blue is captivating in its own right as it relates to light and distance. It is longing to be close to something that will forever be distant” (p. 6).

These readings reveal blue as a chromatic embodiment of longing itself, an affective code for presence through absence.

In psychology, blue is often associated with calm, reflection, and melancholy. Cerrato (2012) and Gao (2022) suggest that cool tones such as blue lower arousal, slow heart rate, and induce contemplative states. Yet this tranquility is not mere serenity; it carries the weight of solitude. The affective ambivalence of blue—soothing yet tinged with sadness—makes it particularly resonant in photography, where stillness and suspension of time are central. Luostarinen's (2020) participatory photography project *On the Blue Path of Place Empathy* provides a compelling example: in her work on the Finnish island of Ärjä, blue emerged as the dominant chromatic presence, structuring not only visual atmospheres but also emotional connections to place. For participants, blue was not passive; it became a language of empathy, of belonging to both landscape and memory.

This idea of blue as heterotopic is echoed in Foucault's (1986) notion of heterotopia—spaces layered with multiple temporalities and meanings. Blue, in this sense, acts as a heterotopic hue, capable of holding overlapping registers: the everyday (the blue of the sky) and the transcendental (the infinite horizon). Within photography, it becomes a bridge between the here and the elsewhere, a sign of presence always laced with absence.

Culturally, blue's meanings shift yet remain tied to this fundamental ambivalence. In Christian iconography, blue is the color of the Virgin Mary's mantle: purity, humility, but also distance from the earthly. In Islamic art, it adorns mosques and tiles as a symbol of infinity and divine presence. In European painting traditions, particularly since the Renaissance, blue became the pigment of depth, used to give landscapes a sense of infinite extension. In modern visual culture, blue has carried associations with technology (screens, LEDs) but also with melancholy—the “blues” of music, the chromatic metaphor for sadness. Across these contexts, blue remains a chromatic paradox: ubiquitous yet unreachable, grounding yet transcendent.

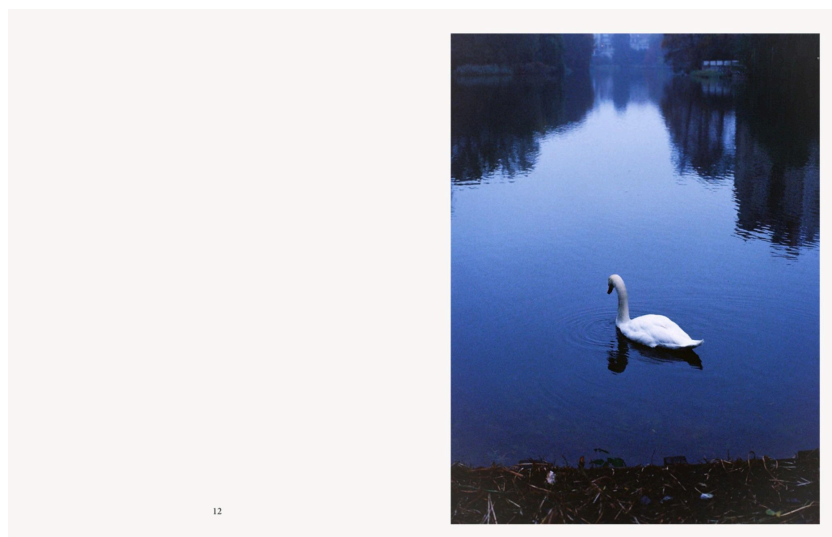
In photography, this paradox becomes a compositional tool. Blue light filters entire atmospheres, bathing scenes in a mood that can be both intimate and distant. The analog grain accentuates this effect, turning blue into texture as much as color—a veil through which the world is seen as memory rather than as immediate presence. Barthes' notion of the *punctum* also resonates here: blue often functions as the chromatic detail that pierces the surface of the

image, producing affect not through narrative but through sensation. Blue punctures not with violence, as red does, but with absence—with the quiet reminder of what cannot be reached.

Albers' and Itten's color theories illuminate the relational quality of blue. Depending on its chromatic neighbors, blue may recede or vibrate. Next to white, it glows with clarity; next to black, it deepens into mystery; next to orange, its complementary, it becomes electric and tense. This relational instability is crucial in photographic sequencing: blue does not merely appear but interacts, shaping atmosphere through contrast and adjacency.

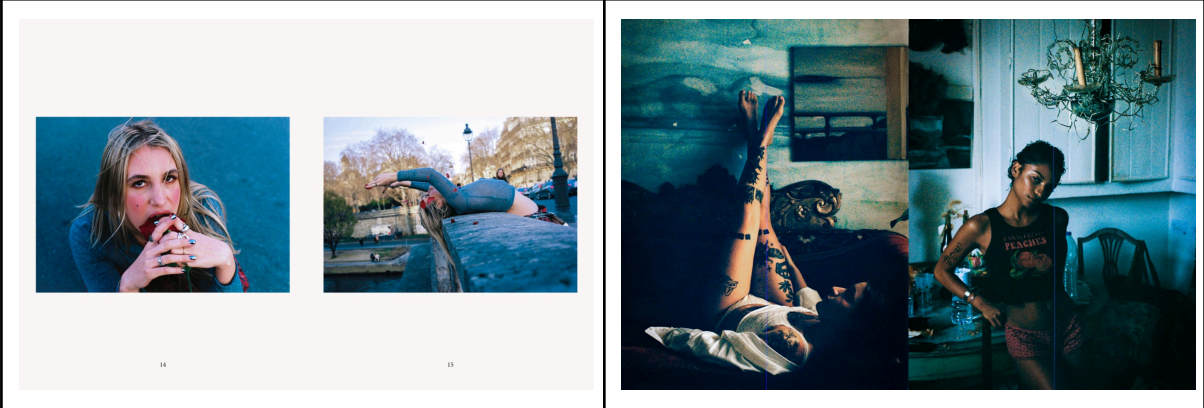
In contemporary practice, photographers have repeatedly turned to blue to articulate interior states. Kawauchi's pastel images dissolve into pale blues that suggest fragility and dream. Collins' and Cousins' sensibilities lean on cool tones to evoke ambiguity and sensuality. In my own work, these influences converge with Sanguinetti's long temporal arcs and Mónaco's twilight atmospheres, where blue light transforms youth into an in-between state: tender, fragile, and luminous.

Blue opens the book with a gesture of retreat. Its first spreads depict bedrooms where filtered daylight softens walls, foggy paths that dissolve into distance, and still water surfaces that mirror the sky. These images establish not only a chromatic atmosphere but also a pace: the rhythm of page-turns here is slow and meditative, drawing the viewer into silence before narrative intensity builds. The swan floating alone is not only a bird in water but an emblem of silence, of stillness, of something unreachable. The surface of the lake mirrors the sky and buildings, yet what it reflects most strongly is absence. It sets the tone for the entire chapter: blue as threshold, blue as a way of holding distance. When the portraits enter, they do not cancel that solitude. Instead, they echo it in human form. A friend biting into a rose against



the blue pavement, her gaze almost breaking through the image — yet what frames her is not closeness but detachment. The color surrounds her, keeping her at arm’s length, even in intimacy. On the next page, the same body stretches outward, suspended above the river, in a gesture of both surrender and reach. Blue becomes not only background but atmosphere, shaping the act of being seen.

The interiors carry this further. Friends in their rooms, leaning against couches, under dim chandeliers: the photographs feel close, almost intrusive, yet the grain, the blue tint, the shadows render them remote. There is no full access to them, only a mediated encounter. This is exactly what my research suggested — that color can impose distance, can mark the space between the subject and the viewer, even when the bodies themselves are vulnerable and exposed.

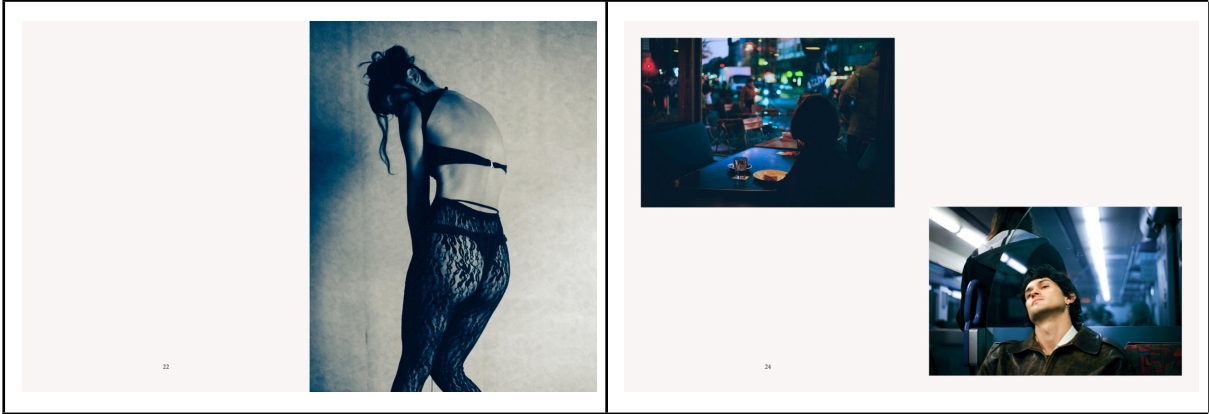


The solitary figure on the beach and the man reading on a bench complete this movement. Here blue becomes the air of solitude itself, placing each figure in an environment that is not hostile but indifferent, infinite. Both are together with the world and apart from it.

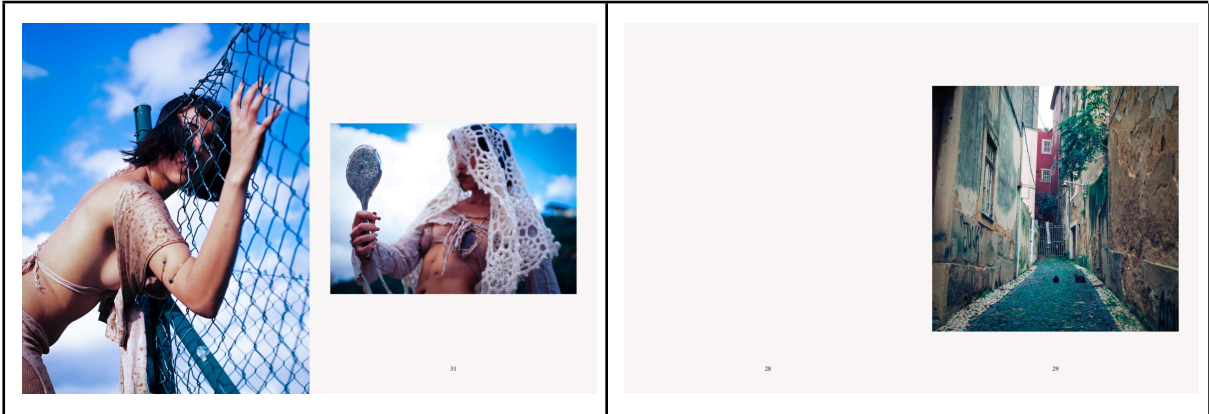


Even when the sequence returns to portraits — a necklace across a back, a body leaning forward in lace, a stranger resting on the train — the same paradox persists. Blue wraps each

scene in reflection, not only of surfaces but of states of mind. It turns presence into longing, embraces into pauses, moments into distances.



In the end, this chapter does not simply illustrate solitude; it enacts it. The images themselves are suspended, unreachable, as if seen from the other side of a glass. Blue performs what theory names: it creates the sensation of being both everywhere and untouchable.

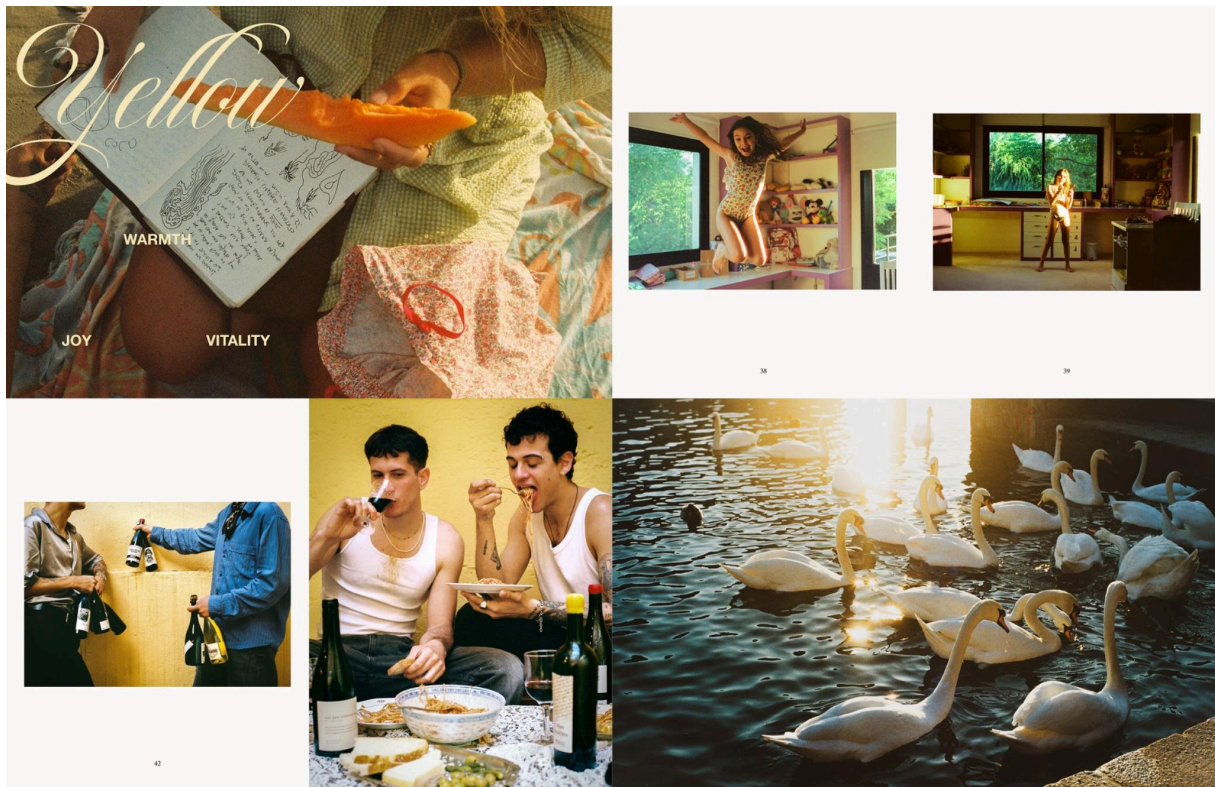


As mentioned before, blue has long been associated with distance, longing, and introspection. In the sequence, these meanings become structural. Blue works like a threshold, slowing perception and preparing the reader to enter the subsequent chromatic registers. Its temporality recalls Sanguinetti's long arcs of emotional intimacy, where attention stretches across years, and Mónico's twilight atmospheres, where dusk becomes a condition of

tenderness and ambiguity. Blue here is not a conclusion but a proposition. It asks the reader to slow down, to inhabit the space between presence and distance, to see photographs as atmospheres of longing. By combining theoretical resonance and narrative sequencing, blue inaugurates the chromatic journey with the central thesis of the book: that color in photography is not merely surface, but language—an affective, symbolic, and perceptual grammar that speaks in silence.

4.4.2 YELLOW

If blue opens the photobook with solitude and distance, yellow arrives as expansion, contact, and radiance. It is a chapter marked by joy, warmth, and vitality. Yellow is a color of excess: it does not whisper, it bursts. It floods the image field with light, saturating not only the visual register but also the emotional atmosphere. In *Purple is Where I Always Am*, yellow



structures the second chapter as an invitation outward—toward others, toward movement, toward the exterior.

Historically, yellow has carried an ambivalent status in Western culture. Pastoreau (2023) reminds us that in Medieval iconography it could symbolize light, gold, and divinity,

yet also betrayal and treachery—as in the robes of Judas or the stigmatization of Jews through the yellow badge. This ambivalence continues today: yellow can signal vitality, joy, and abundance, or, conversely, toxicity and warning. The ambiguity makes yellow a fertile color for photography, where it can simultaneously attract and unsettle.

Psychological studies have consistently associated yellow with high arousal states. Norton (2009) and Hemphill (1996) both confirm that bright yellows are read as cheerful and stimulating, often linked to happiness and attention. Yet, as Odom and Sholtz (2004) demonstrate, the intensity of hue matters: saturated yellow provokes stronger affective responses than pastel shades, which may appear fragile or soft. Wahidiyat (2021) adds that warm colors such as yellow can increase motivation and engagement, pulling viewers into interaction. At the same time, Diana (2006) and Isaacs (1968) caution against assuming universality: in some cultural contexts, yellow is connected to mourning or cowardice, showing that its affective valence is not fixed but contextual.

In **literature and philosophy**, yellow has often been linked to exuberance and madness. Consider Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, where the color becomes oppressive, sickly, and suffocating. Yet in Van Gogh's canvases, yellow is vitality itself—sunflowers exploding with light, wheat fields blazing under the sun. These dualities highlight how yellow oscillates between life-giving energy and sensory overload.

Within **photography**, yellow often emerges as an ambient presence rather than as a singular object. Sunlight filtering through curtains, painted walls, fabric textures, flowers, and food all radiate with a hue that is both intimate and excessive. In my own book, yellow sequences show gatherings, swans on a lake, wine glasses, faces lit by late afternoon light. The chromatic atmosphere is expansive, echoing Webb's orchestrated chaos—his dense, saturated frames where yellows and reds collide in a choreography of visual tension. Yellow also resonates with Manos's ability to treat color as contradiction: its brightness may invite joy, yet its intensity can overwhelm.

Analog photography further complicates yellow by embedding it in the materiality of film. Stocks such as Kodak Portra render yellows with a softness that leans toward warmth, while Ektar intensifies them into near-neon brightness. Light leaks or expired emulsions often push highlights into yellow, producing an accidental exuberance. These material qualities

make yellow particularly vivid in film photography, where warmth can become both a trace of time and an excess of light.

Yellow in *Purple is Where I Always Am* operates as expansion after the contemplative silence of blue. It accelerates rhythm, shortens pauses, and invites the reader into sociability. Yet it does not remain wholly positive: some images are almost aggressive in their brightness, reminding us of yellow's duality as both radiant and unsettling. It is this oscillation that gives yellow its narrative force. Barthes' concept of the *punctum* finds resonance here as well. In some images, a small patch of yellow—a shirt, a glass catching sunlight, a child's hair—becomes the detail that pierces the surface, drawing attention and anchoring memory. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2002) idea of a "grammar of color" also applies: yellow organizes perception by commanding the eye, directing attention immediately.

In contemporary practice, yellow has been used to evoke youth, vulnerability, and exuberance. Marina Mónaco's portraits of Berlin's youth often dissolve into twilight tones where yellow intermingles with purple and blue, creating ambiguity between warmth and distance. Parr's abrasive yellows in *Common Sense* saturate the viewer into discomfort, exaggerating the everyday until it becomes absurd. My own book takes inspiration from these approaches but repositions yellow as both joy and excess—a chromatic space of openness that simultaneously overwhelms and invites.

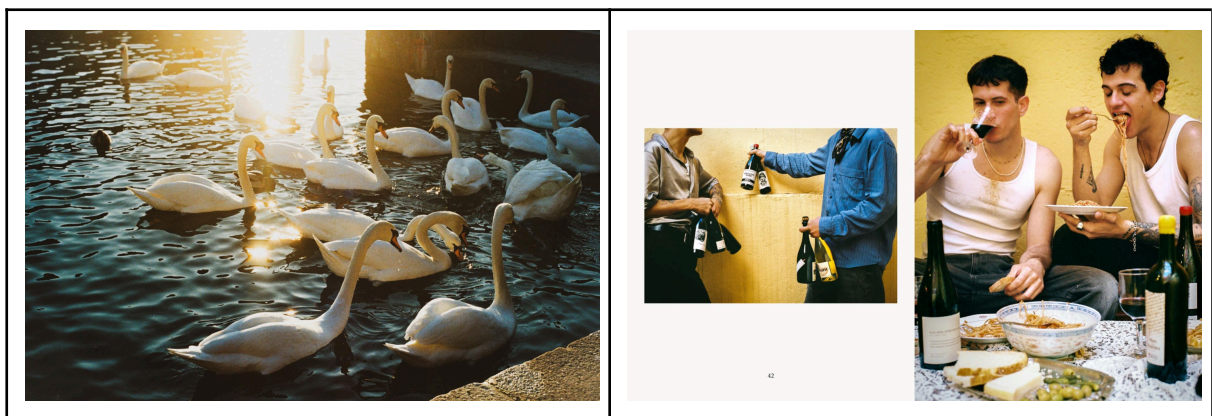
As analyzed, yellow embodies both warmth and vitality. In the photobook, these qualities are enacted in the alternation between exuberant frames and moments where brightness nearly overwhelms perception. This oscillation is deliberate. It mirrors the dual nature of yellow as joy and as excess. The sequencing owes much to Webb's orchestrated chaos, which taught me to balance crowded saturation with compositional order, and to Manos, who showed me that color can contradict rather than resolve.

The first image of the Yellow section opens with a figure by the window, back turned, bathed in muted gold. It feels like an awakening — yellow here is not an explosion but a quiet entrance of light, a reminder that warmth often begins as something fragile.



Then, the child jumping in her room: pure joy, unmediated, the body in suspension. The room is saturated with toys and color, but what carries the scene is the sunlight painting her skin, lifting her into radiance. The following frame, where she stands still in the same light, contains the paradox of yellow — it bursts, but it also lingers, it floods the room and freezes time.

When the swans reappear, this time in golden water, they transform from solitary silence (in blue) to collective radiance. The glimmer of light on their feathers and the water's surface embodies vitality, excess, the almost overwhelming generosity of yellow.

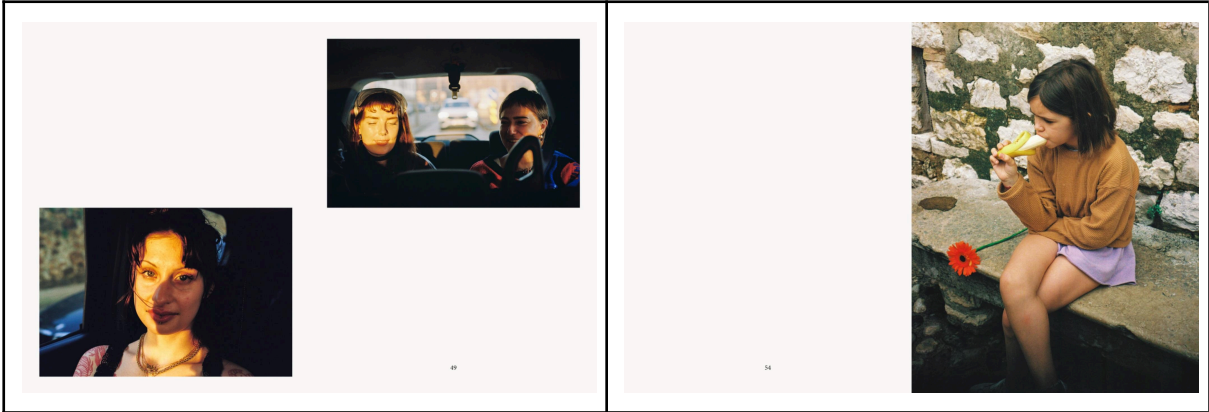


The sequence of friends eating and drinking under yellow walls carries the same overflowing quality. Here yellow is not contemplative but excessive: it stains shirts, spills wine, saturates gestures. It is warmth that touches everything, a color that refuses to stay in the background.

On the beach, the rock becomes monumental, its surface illuminated into gold. Yellow expands the scene, turning stone into presence, into something almost sacred. Later, the umbrellas in Lisbon, the women passing, the abundance of flowers — this is yellow as everyday radiance. It floods ordinary corners with an almost theatrical vitality.



Inside the car, light falls across faces. One friend squints against the sun, another smiles into it, and a third turns luminous, as if yellow has become skin itself. These portraits remind me that yellow doesn't just illuminate — it transforms bodies into light.



The chapter closes with fragments: a table after breakfast, crumbs and flowers, gestures of morning. A park where the sun reflects on water, too bright to look at directly. A child smelling a flower, caught between innocence and awareness. Each of these images insists on yellow as presence, as insistence, as something that does not whisper but bursts.



Ultimately, yellow in photography functions as a paradoxical code: it radiates life and connection but risks spilling over into too muchness. In *Purple is Where I Always Am*, yellow is the chapter of expansion, contact, and exposure to the other. It is the chromatic gesture that opens the body after blue's silence, yet it also warns of saturation, foreshadowing the rupture to come in red.

4.4.3 RED

If yellow in *Purple is Where I Always Am* radiates sociability and exuberance, red arrives as rupture. It is the most visceral of the book's chromatic chapters, structuring passion,



love, and intensity through proximity, saturation, and raw affect. Red does not suggest—it insists. It demands presence, intruding upon perception and leaving no space for neutrality.

Historically, red has been one of the most symbolically charged colors. Pastoureau (2023) traces its shifting associations across centuries: from life, fertility, and vitality in prehistoric art and Roman traditions, to passion, sin, and blood in Christian iconography, to revolution and urgency in modern politics. Red is simultaneously sacred and profane, life and death, love and violence. This multiplicity makes it a potent visual signifier, capable of embodying both extremes at once.

Psychology confirms red's affective urgency. Elliot and Niesta (2008) demonstrated that red enhances perceptions of attraction, linking chromatic stimulation to biological responses. Hale (2010), drawing from Jungian psychology, interprets red as the color of the unconscious drive, associated with libido, intensity, and transformative energy. Tai-Lyniya (2020) empirically reinforces red's association with urgency, finding that exposure to red accelerates reaction times and heightens emotional arousal. Abdelaal and Sase (2014) show how red is consistently mobilized in audiovisual contexts to mark danger, attraction, or heightened affect. Together, these studies confirm what is evident in experience: red is never passive; it presses upon perception and reshapes behavior.

Culturally, red is equally ambivalent. In China, it signifies luck, prosperity, and celebration. In Western contexts, it has often been linked to prohibition and transgression: the red light, the stop sign, the scarlet letter. Religious symbolism is also rich: in Catholic ritual, red evokes both Christ's sacrifice and the fire of the Holy Spirit. Across these diverse uses, red consistently marks intensity, boundaries, and the crossing of thresholds.

In **photography**, red frequently functions as *punctum*, the detail that pierces the image surface with force. A red dress in a monochrome crowd, a smear of lipstick, the glow of a neon sign—all demand immediate attention. Barthes' definition of *punctum* as that which "wounds" resonates acutely here: red wounds not metaphorically but chromatically, through saturation and contrast.

Analog materiality amplifies this effect. Certain films, like Kodak Ektar, render reds with an almost electric saturation, while expired stocks often shift warm tones toward crimson or rust, producing chromatic accidents that heighten affective charge. Light leaks may push highlights into red, producing flames or smears that transform the photograph into an index of

accident and urgency. Red is often not only captured but inscribed by the material itself, becoming a sign of photography's embodied process.

In my own photobook, red is staged as climax. It interrupts the expansiveness of yellow with a sudden contraction into desire, intimacy, and exposure. Some images verge on abstraction, where red overwhelms form and dissolves into pure affect. Others are raw and diaristic, echoing Goldin's chromatic urgency, where red becomes memory itself—of passion, of loss, of the vulnerability of touch. Parr's *Common Sense* also resonates here, with its abrasive reds that saturate the everyday until it collapses into excess. Yet, while Parr uses this exaggeration for irony and critique, my own use of red leans toward exposure and urgency: it is not satire but intimacy pressed into intensity.

The semiotic richness of red is also evident in its versatility across Peirce's triadic model. As icon, red resembles its object: blood, flame, a rose. As index, it points causally: flushed skin indicating desire or fever, smoke glowing red as signal of fire. As symbol, it works by convention: red lights demanding stop, red flags signaling revolution. Few colors operate so powerfully across all three modes at once.

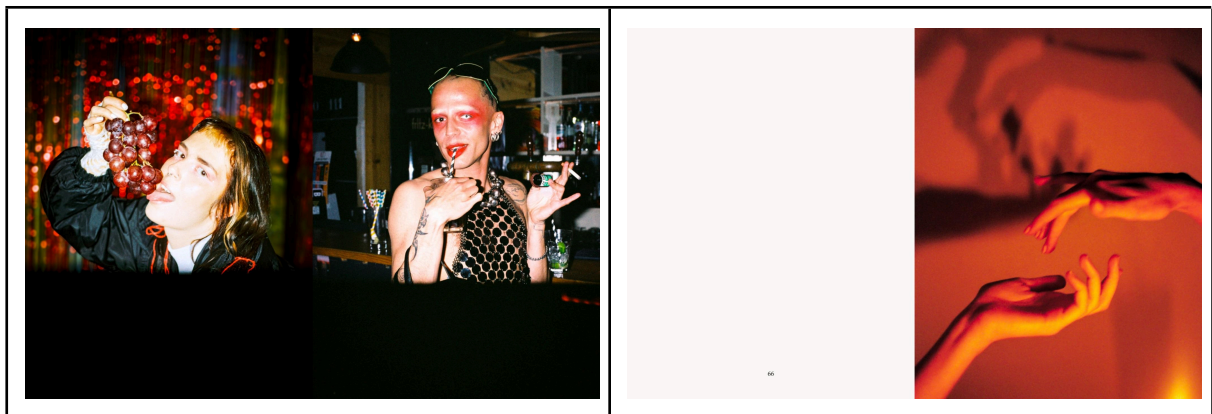
Red interrupts the photobook, an immediate call impossible to ignore. If yellow invites, red insists. Its spreads are visceral: mouths parting, sweat glistening on skin, flowers burning, a cigarette lit directly from a candle flame. Other images dissolve into near-abstraction, with fields of red and black that vibrate as pure affect. Sequencing builds pressure here: every page-turn adds intensity, creating a crescendo of urgency that does not allow escape.

The symbolic power of red, desire, passion, danger, was discussed in 4.1.3. In sequencing, this becomes climax and punctum, the point where the photobook presses closest to the body. Red is visceral and tactile, tied to Goldin's diaristic chromaticism where color embodies memory and longing. Parr's abrasive saturation encouraged me to lean into exaggeration, not for satire but to register vulnerability.

The first mirror image returns the color in its double register: light and body. The figure is framed by a yellow glow, but it is the red of the wall that surrounds everything, transforming an everyday gesture into a burning threshold.



The series then opens onto the street: a parked car, a woman leaning into the glass; further on, a body stretched across plastic chairs outside a snack bar. The scene is banal, even vulgar, yet the red of the van and the chairs multiplies the intensity, turning these simple gestures into images charged with desire and exhaustion. Here red is not ornament, but excess overflowing the everyday.



At the party, red becomes theatrical. Sequined backgrounds and lights burst open, while one friend bites into a bunch of grapes and another poses with painted lips and a cigarette in hand. This is not just about documenting the night: red imprints intensity, an energy that oscillates between the erotic and the grotesque.

Later, bodies are abstracted into fragments: hands illuminated, shadows touching without touching. Red here is suspended contact, desire never fully consumed. Passion as minimal distance, as halted friction.



The peeling walls of Lisbon, portraits of friends against reddish backgrounds, remind me that red is also wound and time. The color carries memory: what decays, what persists, what keeps pulsing.

A rose set alight by a lighter condenses the entire chapter: love and violence, tenderness and destruction, all at once. That burning flower is a direct metaphor for what I seek in this book — to show how color can contain the contradictions of human emotion.

The final images deepen this duality. A body touched in shadows, almost smothered by intensity. A portrait from behind at the harbor, tight dress, city in the background: the scene vibrates between fragility and defiance, between exposure and power.





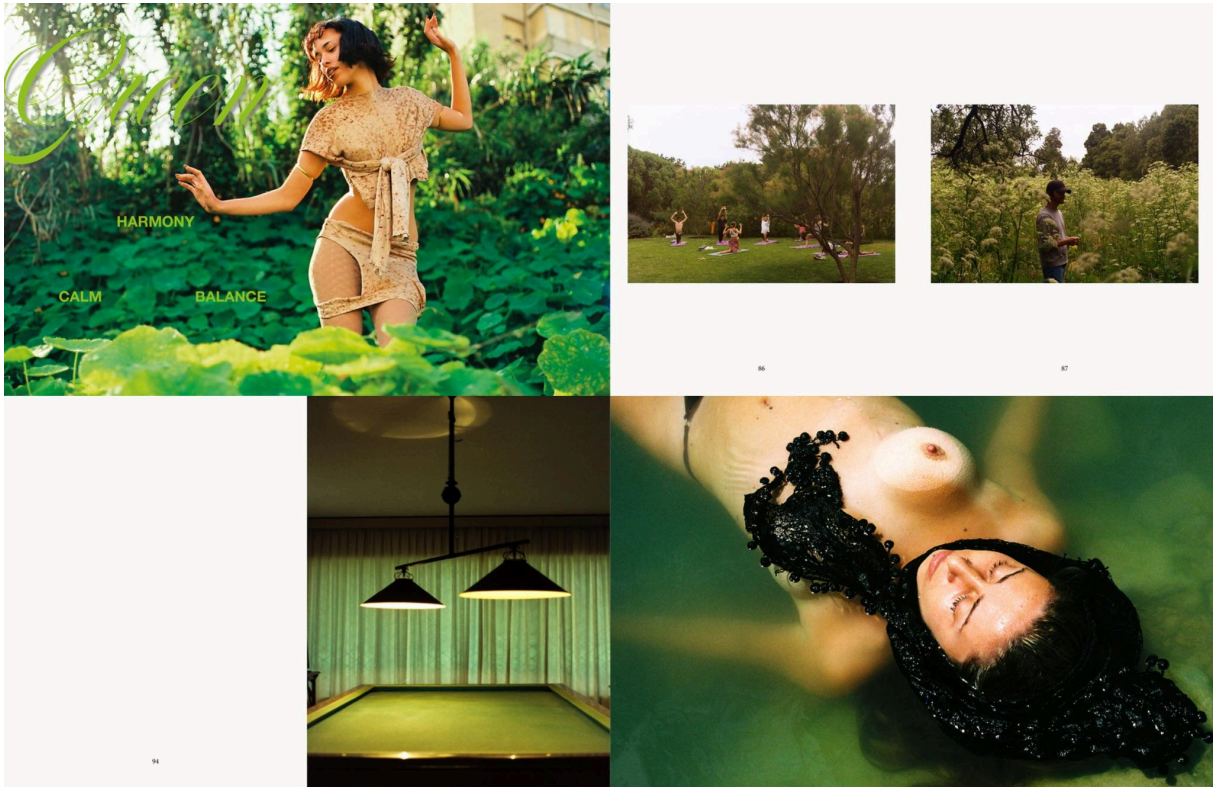
Even the fallen flowers on the sidewalk, reflected in a puddle, insist on ambiguity: beauty and loss in a single blow of color. Red never fully yields to calm.

This chapter does not tell a linear story. It is more like a continuous vibration: desire, intensity, danger, love and violence fused into a single tonality. Red here is the language of excess, and at the same time, of what burns from within.

Ultimately, red in photography functions as rupture. It interrupts calm, destabilizes balance, and insists on presence. In *Purple is Where I Always Am*, red is the emotional high point, the chapter where color presses most directly into the body. It is both climax and wound, threshold and exposure. By structuring the photobook around red as intensity, I align with traditions of using chroma not merely for aesthetics but as a visceral language—a code that acts before it is interpreted, felt before it is understood.

4.4.4 GREEN

If red marks rupture and climax in *Purple is Where I Always Am*, green follows as breath. It is the chapter of harmony, calm, and balance. Where red insists, green steadies. It pulls the narrative back into continuity, offering a chromatic space of renewal after the storm of intensity.



Historically, green has carried symbolic ties to nature, fertility, and rebirth. Pastoureau (2023) observes that in Medieval Europe, green was associated with youth, vitality, and chance, but also with instability—gambling tables and dice were often green, signaling risk and change. In Islamic traditions, green is the color of paradise, eternity, and divine blessing (Mohyuddin & Khan, 2015). These symbolic registers converge around an idea of green as both grounding and transcendent: rooted in nature yet reaching beyond.

Psychologically, green is consistently associated with calming and restorative effects. Nurliah and Karim (2022) emphasize its therapeutic use in health and educational environments, linking it to lower stress and enhanced concentration. Kuo and Zhang (2023) confirm that warm greens increase perceptions of comfort and hospitality, while cool greens convey order and formality. Color psychology research (Hemphill, 1996; Won & Westland, 2017) also points out that green mediates affective balance, working as a stabilizer between warm and cool palettes. In design contexts, Gao (2022) notes that green atmospheres encourage relaxation, empathy, and spatial belonging.

From a **semiotic** perspective, green often operates as an index of life: leaves, grass, plants all stand as signs of vitality and growth. Yet it is also symbolic by convention: the

green traffic light signals permission to go, a social agreement detached from nature itself. This dual role—natural and conventional—makes green uniquely polyvalent, functioning across Peirce’s categories as icon, index, and symbol.

In **photography**, green often emerges not as an accent but as atmosphere. Entire frames can be washed in green light, whether from nature, architecture, or artificial filters. In analog practice, green is especially responsive to shifts in exposure and film chemistry: expired stocks often tint highlights with a green cast, while color shifts in shadows can move images toward mossy or turquoise tones. These chromatic accidents become signs of temporality, embedding time into the material itself.

Green follows as relief, a breath after rupture. It steadies the book, guiding rhythm back toward balance. Sequencing slows again: margins open wider, compositions rest at the center of the page, and the flow of images creates calm continuity.

As discussed in 4.1.4, green has long symbolized renewal and balance. In this sequence, it functions as a narrative interlude. It does not resolve but recalibrates, bringing harmony after red’s rupture. The green chapter recalls the interludes in musical composition, where quieter movements allow the intensity of preceding notes to resonate. Its function is restorative: not to close but to prepare the ground for purple’s ambiguity.

The sequence opens with an image of double exposure, a body merging with leaves and branches, suggesting a dissolution of the self into the environment. Here, green is not only color but also a gesture of integration, a reminder of the interdependence between the human figure and the natural world.



The images that follow reinforce this sense of harmony. A group practicing yoga on a lawn, or a solitary figure immersed in tall grass, translate the chromatic symbolism into lived gestures of calm and presence. Green appears as a chromatic grounding, a way to anchor the body in space and time.

The chapter also plays with ambivalence: the figure floating in water, veiled in black lace, carries both serenity and strangeness. This is where green brushes against mystery, showing that calmness is never absolute but layered with other emotional resonances.



In more urban settings—flowers on a city table, a billiard table under warm light, or figures leaning against walls—the color still mediates a sense of balance. It softens edges, weaving the natural into the constructed, the intimate into the public. Even the cat wandering through the garden or the double exposure of a man by the water echo this chromatic state of in-between: grounded yet fluid.



The chapter closes with the railway lines stretching into the horizon, tinted in greenish hues. It feels like a transition, a movement outward, carrying the calm and balance of green forward, but also preparing for what comes next.



This interlude function resonates with musical structures, where quieter movements allow the intensity of previous notes to echo. Green in *Purple is Where I Always Am* is not resolution but recalibration, holding the photobook in a suspended balance before it turns toward purple. It is a reminder that photography is not only about rupture or climax but also about rhythm, the spaces between intensities.

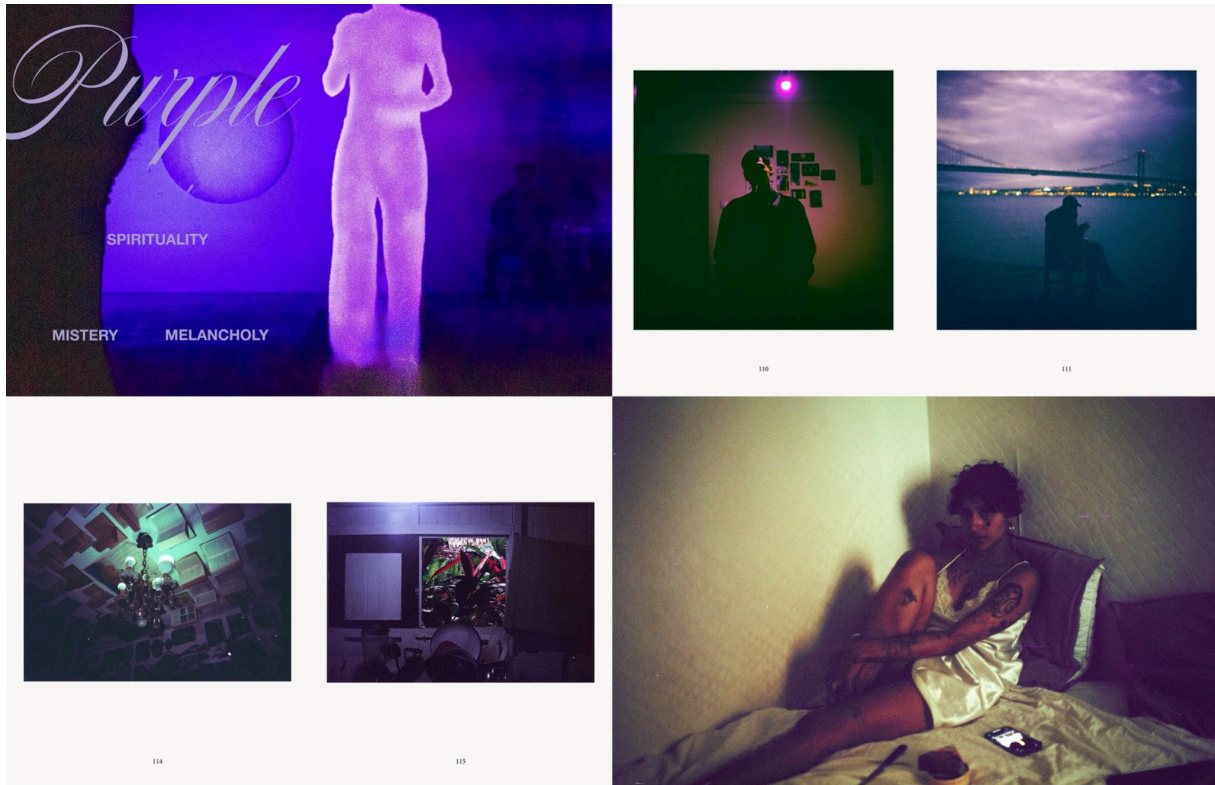
Influences here include Eggleston's ability to find significance in ordinary chroma—his grass, his interiors tinged with greenish shadows—and Burtynsky's industrial landscapes where green becomes toxic, oscillating between natural vitality and chemical artifice. Kawauchi's delicate use of green in foliage and light also informed my approach, where color does not dominate but permeates as an atmosphere.

Ultimately, green in photography is a color of mediation. It connects body and environment, image and rhythm, intensity and pause. In *Purple is Where I Always Am*, it is the breath between chapters, the chromatic interval that steadies the eye and prepares the reader for the convergence of purple. By functioning both symbolically and structurally, green shows that color in photography is not only aesthetic surface but narrative rhythm, a sign that organizes perception and affect.

4.4.5 PURPLE

Purple is the symbolic and emotional center of *Purple is Where I Always Am*. More than a color, it is the book's anchor and metaphor: a chromatic space of spirituality, mystery, and

melancholy. Purple does not exist as a wavelength in the visible spectrum but as a perceptual synthesis of red and blue in the brain. This illusory nature makes it the perfect emblem of what cannot be said but only felt—of everything that photography as a language of color can evoke beyond words.



Philosophical accounts highlight purple’s liminal status. Massim and Hämmerli (2017), revisiting Brentano, ask whether purple is a “chessboard of red and blue pieces” or a distinct perception of its own. Their analysis shows purple’s refusal to be reduced to either component: it is both and neither, a color defined by its ambiguity. Goethe, in his *Theory of Colours*(1810/1970), described yellow as “serene, gay, [and] softly exciting” (p. 310) and blue as a “contradiction between excitement and repose” (p. 311). For him, purple emerged as the unstable convergence of these polarities, a chromatic state marked by oscillation between attraction and withdrawal (pp. 313–315). This perceptual and affective instability makes purple inherently resistant to closure, always suspended between contradiction and synthesis.

Historically, purple has been tied to rarity, power, and spirituality. Lyell (2022) traces its cultural significance in Antiquity, from Mesopotamian inscriptions to Homeric epic and Biblical Hebrew traditions. Purple dye, costly and difficult to produce, was associated with

prestige, generosity, and divinity. It was believed to originate in Phoenicia, where murex shells provided the pigment that became synonymous with luxury and authority. Yet even in these contexts, purple carried multiple meanings: sometimes associated with kingship, other times with sacrifice or mourning. Its symbolic weight was never fixed but always contingent on material, audience, and ritual use.

In contemporary visual culture, echoes of this history persist. Hynes (2009), analyzing corporate logos, notes that purple is still perceived as rare, powerful, and unconventional—a chromatic marker of difference that conveys both elegance and mystery. In advertising campaigns, purple backgrounds or violet filters are often deployed to evoke luxury, boldness, or otherworldly aura (Aslam, 2006; Elgamall, 2023). In these uses, purple operates less as decoration than as an atmospheric code, a color that immediately signals uniqueness.

Yet **artistic practice** approaches purple differently. In photography, purple is often a chromatic accident: light leaks, expired film, or chemical shifts in development that tint shadows violet. These accidents carry unexpected emotional weight, transforming error into atmosphere. Purple emerges as an index of time, a visible trace of imperfection, often embraced by analog photographers for its ability to materialize memory and dream. Unlike green, blue, or red—colors abundantly present in nature—purple rarely appears spontaneously in the world. Its rarity makes it immediately perceptible as a sign: it draws attention, demands pause, and opens interpretation. Kandinsky, in *Point and Line to Plane* (1926/1979), described violet as “a somewhat morbid, extinguished red... very retiring, gloomy, and a color that has a certain sadness about it” (p. 70). This association of violet with withdrawal and fragility has deeply marked its artistic reception, yet my work expands this framework, showing purple not only as melancholic but also as intimate, tender, and contemplative.

Psychological and **cultural** perspectives expand this ambiguity. Ferraro (2012) and Proudfit (2008) associate purple with mysticism and creativity, while Thyreen (1999) links it to introspection and ambiguity in literature. Schliephake (2024) situates purple within spiritual discourse, framing it as a liminal color between the earthly and the transcendent. Taylor (2018), in his study of spirituality and chroma, reinforces purple’s symbolic connection to transcendence and the ineffable. Gestalt psychology, with its insistence that perception is relational rather than atomistic, also helps explain why purple rarely appears as a stable or isolated phenomenon. As Wertheimer (1938) noted, “There are wholes, the behavior of which is not determined by that of their individual elements” (p. 71). Purple acquires its resonance in

context: it emerges in relation to surrounding tones, intensifying or receding depending on contrast, proximity, and compositional balance.

In *Purple is Where I Always Am*, the purple chapter is where the photobook's narrative converges. The spreads fragment bodies, veil faces, and dissolve light into lavender, violet, and deep wine atmospheres. Sequencing slows, each page-turn becoming a pause that suspends linear time. Unlike red's insistence or yellow's exuberance, purple whispers. It directs attention inward, toward memory, reverie, and dream.

Influences converge here. Burtynsky's aestheticization of melancholy resonates in my treatment of purple as an atmosphere of transformation. Marina Mónaco's twilight portraits, with their subdued tones and fragile tenderness, taught me to value dusk light as a metaphor for liminality. Goldin's diaristic urgency inspired me to use purple as memory itself: a color of grief, desire, and unresolved intimacy. Purple thus embodies both collective history and personal affect, functioning as sign, index, and atmosphere.

Semiotically, purple is polyvalent. As an icon, it resembles its referents: lavender fields, twilight skies, bruises. As an index, it marks accidents: the violet haze of expired film, the color shift of chemical reaction. As a symbol, it stands for royalty, spirituality, or creativity, depending on cultural code. This polyvalence is central to its communicative power: purple resists singular meaning, opening instead to layered interpretation.

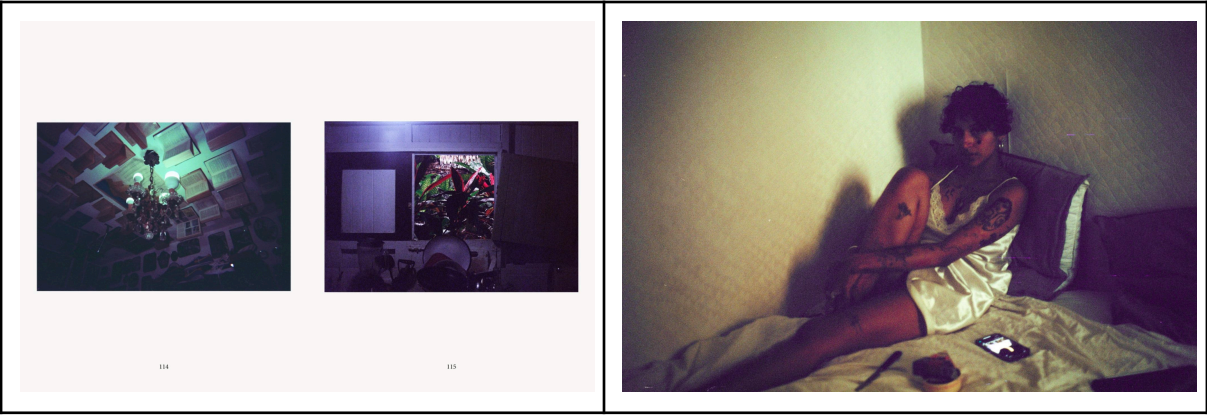
Purple closes the book not with resolution but with suspension. Sequencing here resists linearity: page-turns do not drive the reader forward but invite lingering. Purple suspends time. As detailed before, purple has historically carried associations of ambiguity, spirituality, and transformation. In the photobook, these meanings become narrative functions. Purple is the emotional anchor, the point where all preceding registers converge into dream and memory. Its rare presence in nature makes each page that carries it feel deliberate, almost sacred. Influences include Burtynsky's aestheticization of melancholy, Mónaco's dusk light as tenderness, and Eggleston's chromatic sensibility, where color itself becomes a narrative force. Purple's role here is not closure but opening: a gesture that holds the reader inside a space of feeling rather than finality.

The chapter begins in shadow. Candles flicker against the wall, their light multiplied into abstract shapes, and what might be sacred becomes ambiguous. Purple here does not

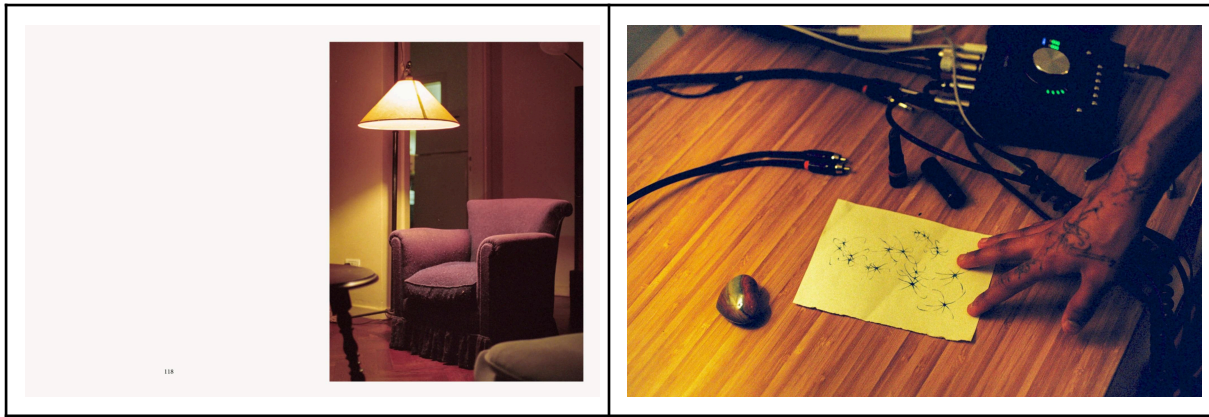
assert itself as clarity but as aura, as an atmosphere that blurs boundaries between the physical and the immaterial.



Portraits follow — a figure under violet light, another reading by the river with the bridge behind him, submerged in dusk. These scenes embody purple’s dual nature: spiritual and melancholy, expansive yet solitary. They are not luminous in the way yellow is, nor intense like red; instead they hover in a liminal register, closer to mystery than to revelation.



The sequence continues through domestic interiors and nights turned spectral by colored bulbs, by windows half open to tropical plants. Purple transforms these spaces into thresholds, sites where intimacy becomes uncanny. A woman on a bed, cigarette at her side, exists in half-light — fragile, yet also guarded by the thickness of the color itself.



Objects too become carriers of this chromatic ambiguity: an empty armchair under a warm lamp, chandeliers in dim rooms, fragments of paper marked with sketches, musical instruments resting in silence. All are touched by purple as if by residue, a suggestion of absence and memory rather than presence.

In the club, faces and gestures appear suspended, caught between euphoria and detachment. Purple here mediates the tension between being fully in the moment and simultaneously elsewhere — the melancholy of transience.



The chapter ends with images of solitude: a woman alone with her guitar, a car in an open landscape, a box of frames at a flea market. Like treasures, they form not closure but lingering. Purple does not resolve; it leaves traces, it haunts, it stays.

This is the color of the book's title, "Purple is Where I Always Am." It gathers everything that preceded it, distilling the languages of solitude, joy, passion, and calm into a chromatic state that is both spiritual and melancholic. Purple is the threshold where the emotional register of the photobook becomes memory itself.



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Ultimately, purple in photography is less about what it represents than what it evokes. It is a chromatic operator of introspection, ambiguity, and suspension. In *Purple is Where I Always Am*, purple does not close the book but holds it open, leaving the reader in a state of reverie. It embodies the thesis that color is language—not because it communicates fixed messages, but because it creates affective fields where meanings are felt before they are spoken. Purple is the final gesture of the book, but also its essence: a language of ambiguity, presence, and emotional resonance. If photography is a way of seeing, then purple is a way of feeling, an in-between state that reminds us that the most powerful forms of communication are not those that explain, but those that invite us to dwell in silence, memory, and sensation.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This project began by contextualizing photography as a powerful and universal visual language, one that transcends verbal communication to translate the emotional, symbolic, and conceptual layers of human experience. Photography, throughout its history, has evolved from a documentary tool to an autonomous art form capable of articulating affect through the silent logic of images. This project is grounded in that understanding, proposing an investigation into the chromatic language of photography and exploring how specific color choices operate as communicative, emotional, and symbolic vectors.

The core of this inquiry is the authorial photo book *Purple is Where I Always Am*, which is structured chromatically into five chapters: blue, yellow, red, green, and purple. Each color was treated not only as a formal or aesthetic decision but as a narrative agent, evoking states of mind, atmospheres, and subjective resonances. The theoretical and artistic paths of this research developed in parallel, unfolding through chapters that trace both the conceptual frameworks and the experiential processes of photographic creation.

The literature review revealed that the communicative power of color has long been theorized across disciplines. From Goethe's early reflections on the affective properties of color to Johannes Itten's and Josef Albers' foundational work on its expressive and relational qualities, to Kandinsky's conviction of its spiritual resonance, color emerges as both a scientific phenomenon and an affective language. Contemporary studies such as those by Kumarasamy and colleagues confirmed this dimension, proposing emotional grammars that link chroma to mood and perception. Semiotic analysis, particularly through Roland Barthes' concept of *punctum* and Peirce's notion of the sign, helped frame color not merely as visual stimulus but as signifier, something that wounds, seduces, and speaks.

This theoretical scaffolding allowed for a deeper interpretation of photographic language. Photography was not approached here as a neutral medium but as a constructed discourse, a visual syntax of mood, rhythm, and sensation. Authors such as André Gunthert, Jason Ginger, and Tom Allbeson reaffirmed the idea of photography as a language capable of borderless communication, while David Batchelor's *Chromophobia* offered a cultural critique of color's historical marginalization. In parallel, Mirzoeff's work on visual culture emphasized photography's social dimension, while Susan Sontag reminded us of its ambivalence — at once an instrument of memory and of distance. These perspectives

reinforced the premise that color is never innocent. It is historically, culturally, and emotionally charged.

The chromatic structure of the photo book was rooted in this grounding. Red evokes urgency and desire. Yellow radiates clarity and expansion. Green suggests equilibrium and return. Blue opens distance and contemplation. Purple, symbolic center and final gesture, is the convergence point of all previous chapters, the most elusive and emotionally dense. Purple is not just the last color. It is the work's hypothesis and its return. It signifies a way of feeling that escapes categorization, a spectrum of emotions that language cannot contain.

Case studies such as *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* by Nan Goldin, *A Period of Juvenile Prosperity* by Mike Brodie, and *The Adventures of Guille and Belinda* by Alessandra Sanguinetti informed the structural and affective design of the book. Their approaches to intimacy, sequence, and photographic narration offered precedents for building a photobook where emotion unfolds across pages. Visits to Lisbon's photobook shop STET also contributed to refining my sense of materiality and visual storytelling.

Throughout the project, I maintained a reflective writing style that seeks to weave personal experience with theoretical clarity. The work emerged from a sensitive listening practice, to the world, to images, to colors, and from an intuition honed through analog photography. I emphasized the importance of analog methods not only for their tactile materiality but for their slower, more attentive rhythm of creation. As discussed in the literature, analog photography retains a unique chromatic quality, unrepeatable, unpredictable, and emotionally textured, that resists the smoothness and standardization of digital aesthetics.

I believe that the power of color, when used with attentiveness and honesty, can provoke affective responses on a preverbal level. The creation of the photo book was for me an intimate journey, a reconnection with body, silence, time, and the emotional currents that flow beneath language. It is a form of visual thinking, of poetic composition, of sharing what cannot be said. It is not about representing emotions directly, but about creating atmospheres where the viewer might feel recognized. This affective potential is what gives meaning to the entire investigation.

In closing, this project is a cartography of visual feeling. It is a conceptual, artistic, and emotional journey that affirms photography as a medium of affective language and color as its voice. It proposes a methodology where theory and practice are not separate but interwoven.

It invites a way of seeing through color, a way of being in the world with attention, vulnerability, and presence. *Purple is Where I Always Am* stands as both the result and the method of this exploration, a photo book that speaks in color, that listens in silence, and that communicates where words fall short.

While this project demonstrates how color can operate as an affective and semiotic language in photography, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The interpretations of color proposed here are inevitably situated: they reflect my own cultural background, experiences, and subjective lens. Reception of color can vary across cultural contexts, and future research might explore how readers from different geographies or traditions interpret the chromatic sequences of *Purple is Where I Always Am*. Similarly, the autoethnographic scope of this work, grounded in my own practice, leaves open the possibility for reader-response studies or cross-cultural surveys that could further test and expand these hypotheses.

At the same time, the methodological choice of working primarily with analogue processes introduced productive constraints. The limitations of film, its fixed sensitivity, chemical dependencies, and delayed feedback, became catalysts for a more deliberate engagement with color. Rather than restricting the project, these constraints intensified its focus, reinforcing the idea that limits can themselves generate creativity and open new paths for interpretation.

Ultimately, purple remains the book's final word and its silence. Not a color that explains, but a color that lingers. Not a conclusion, but a resonance.

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APPENDIX

Documentation of the Photobook

This appendix provides the physical and visual documentation of *Purple is Where I Always Am*. Its purpose is to offer a material perspective on the objectual and tactile dimensions of the work, underscoring the significance of the printed form as an extension of the visual and emotional language explored throughout the project.

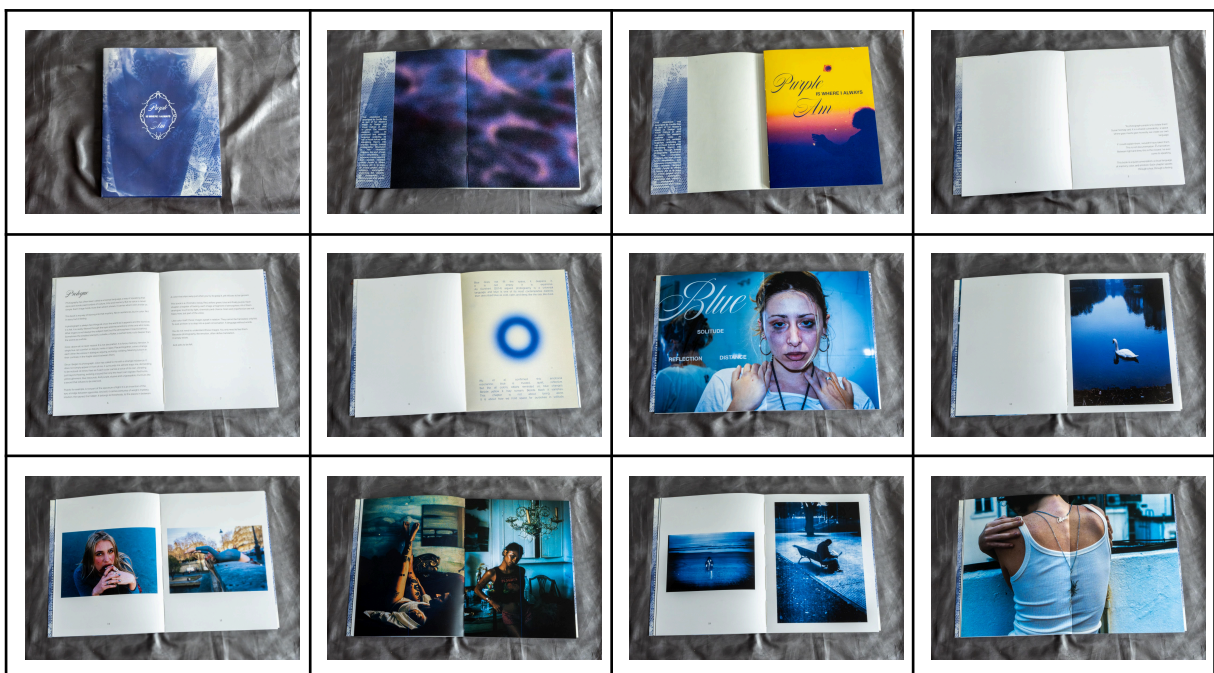
The appendix includes the **complete visual layout of the photobook** and high-quality **photographic documentation of the object**, highlighting the cover, binding, interior spreads, and material finish. In addition, a **video walkthrough** is provided to illustrate the experience of browsing the book, giving insight into its pacing, sequencing, and tactile qualities, together with **process footage of the binding of the object**.

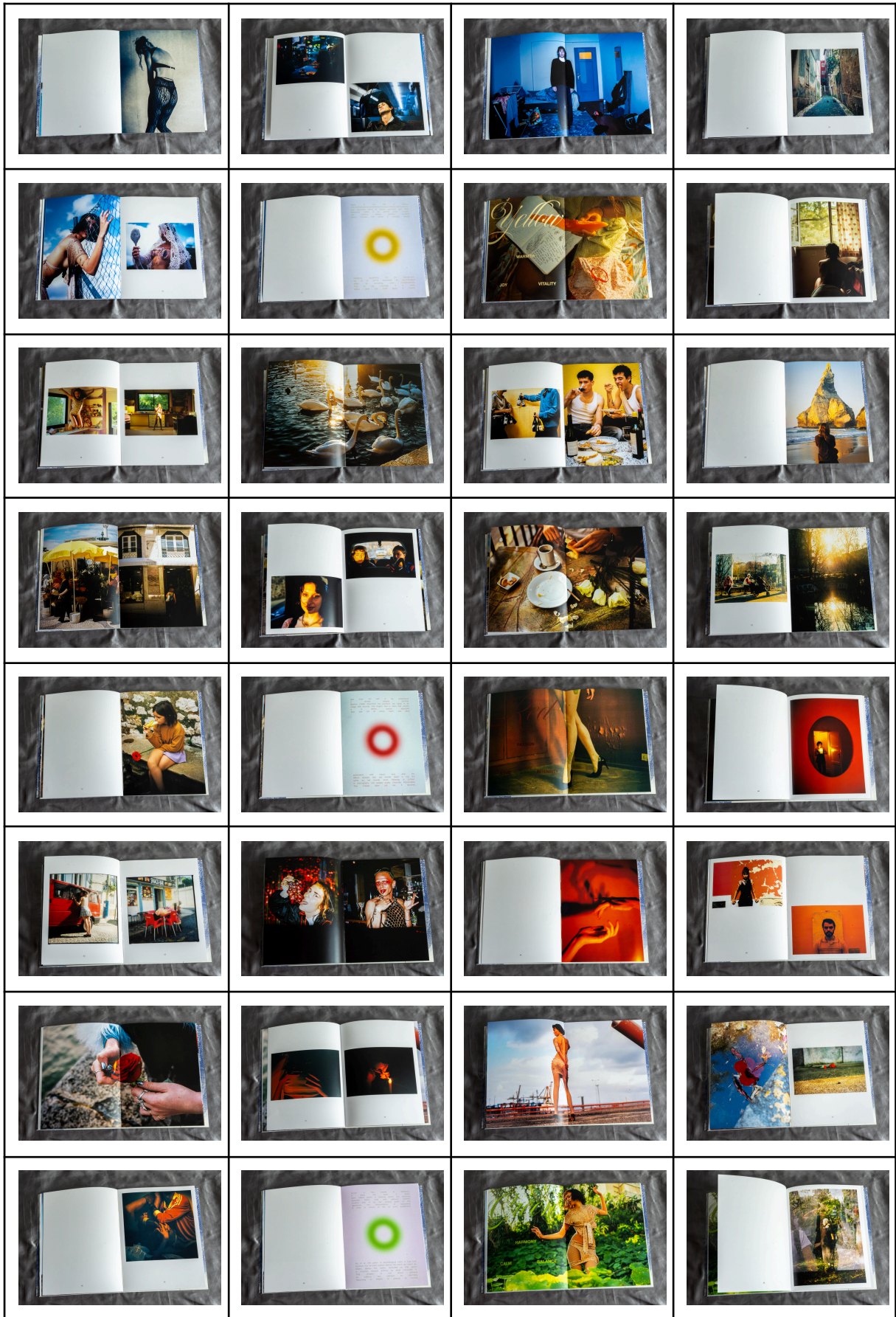
The video is available at the following link:

["Purple is Where I Always Am" - Documentation](#)

Together, these materials complement the analysis developed in the main body of the project and offer the reader a direct visual and sensory connection with the printed object.

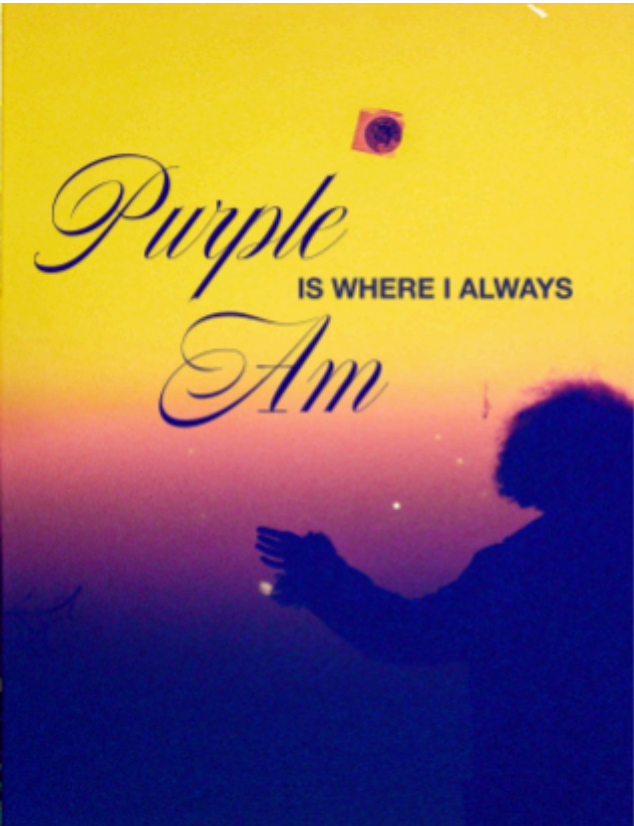
Physical Object







Photobook Layout





4

5

"To photograph people is to violate them"
Susan Sontag said. It is a shared vulnerability, a space
where gaze meets gaze honestly, we create our own
language.

If i could explain them, i wouldn't have taken them.
This is not documentation, it's translation.
Between light and time, this is the closest i've ever
come to speaking.

This book is a quiet conversation, a visual language
of memory, color, and emotion. Each chapter speaks
through a hue, through a feeling.

Prologue

Photography has often been called a universal language, a way of speaking that slips past words, past borders of culture, time and memory. But its voice is never simple. Each image holds more than what it shows, it carries what it stirs inside us.

This book is my way of leaning into that mystery. Not in sentences, but in color. Not in story, but in feeling.

A photograph is always two things at once: the world as it appears and the world as it is felt. It is reality filtered through the eyes and the emotions of the one who looks. What lingers is not always the subject itself, but the atmosphere it leaves behind. Sometimes the smallest element, a shade, a flicker, a certain tone, cuts deeper than the scene as a whole.

Color, above all, is never neutral. It is not decoration. It is force, memory, tension. A single hue can comfort or disturb, invite or repel. Placed together, colors change each other like voices in dialogue, arguing, echoing, colliding. Meaning is born in their contrast, in the fragile space between them.

Since I began to photograph, color has called to me with a strange insistence. It does not simply appear in front of me, it surrounds me, almost traps me, demanding to be noticed. At times I feel as if each color carries a voice of its own, vibrating just beyond hearing, evoking a sound that only the heart can register. Red hums, yellow glimmers, blue resounds. And purple, elusive and ungraspable, murmurs like a secret that refuses to be silenced.

Purple, for example, is not part of the spectrum of light. It is an invention of the eye, a bridge between opposites. And still, it carries centuries of weight, mystery, intuition, the sacred, the hidden. It belongs to thresholds, to the places in between.

6

A color that slips away just when you try to grasp it, yet refuses to be ignored.

This book is a chromatic essay. Red, yellow, green, blue and finally purple. Each chapter a register of feeling, each image a fragment of atmosphere. All of them analogue, touched by light, chemistry and chance. Grain and imperfection are not flaws here, but part of the voice.

Like color itself, these images speak in relation. They cannot be translated, only felt. To look at them is to step into a quiet conversation. A language without words.

You do not need to understand these images. You only need to feel them. Because photography, like emotion, often defies translation. It simply exists.

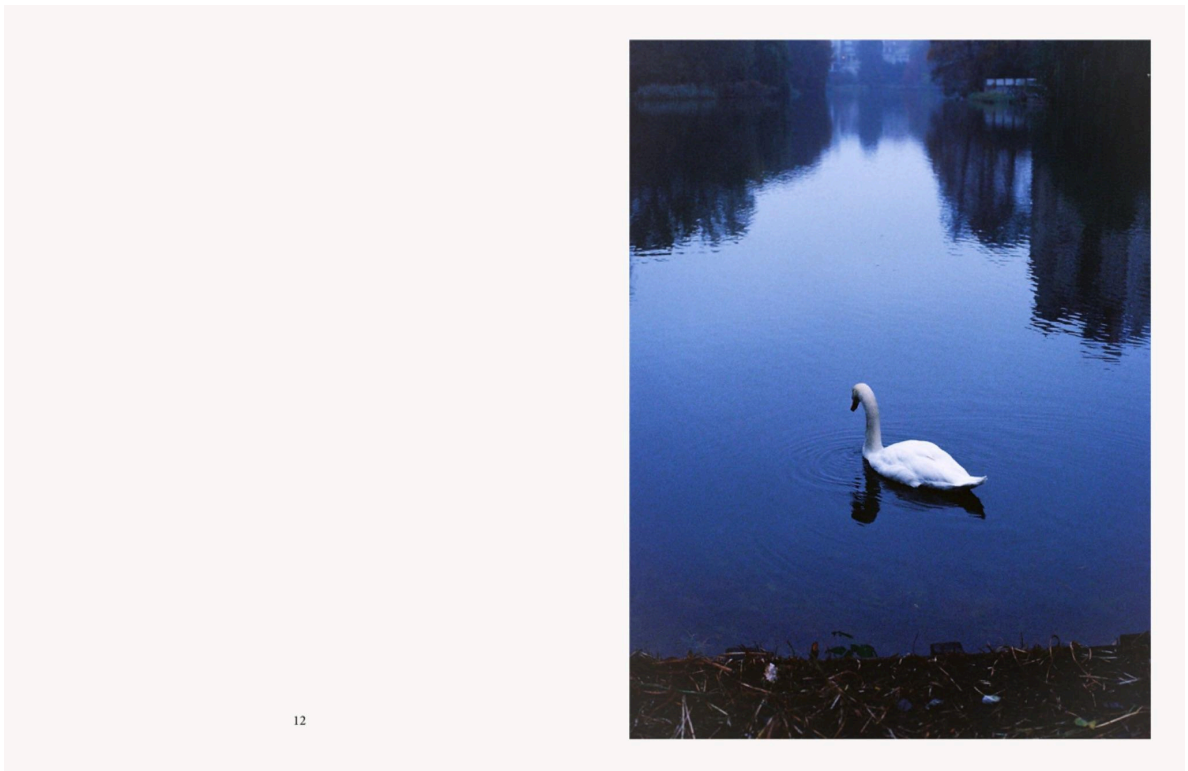
And asks to be felt.

7

Blue does not fill the space, it deepens it. It is not empty. It is expansive. As Gunther (2014) argued, photography is a universal language, and blue is one of its most contemplative dialects. Itten described blue as cold, calm, and deep, like the sea, like dusk.

Wu et al. confirmed this emotional resonance: blue is trusted, quiet, reflective. But like all colors, Albers reminded us, blue changes. Beside yellow it may scream. Beside black it vanishes. This chapter is not about being alone. It is about how we hold space for ourselves in solitude.

8



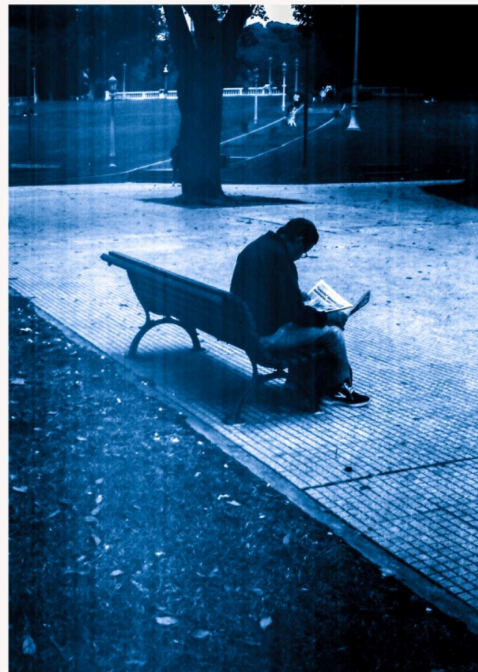


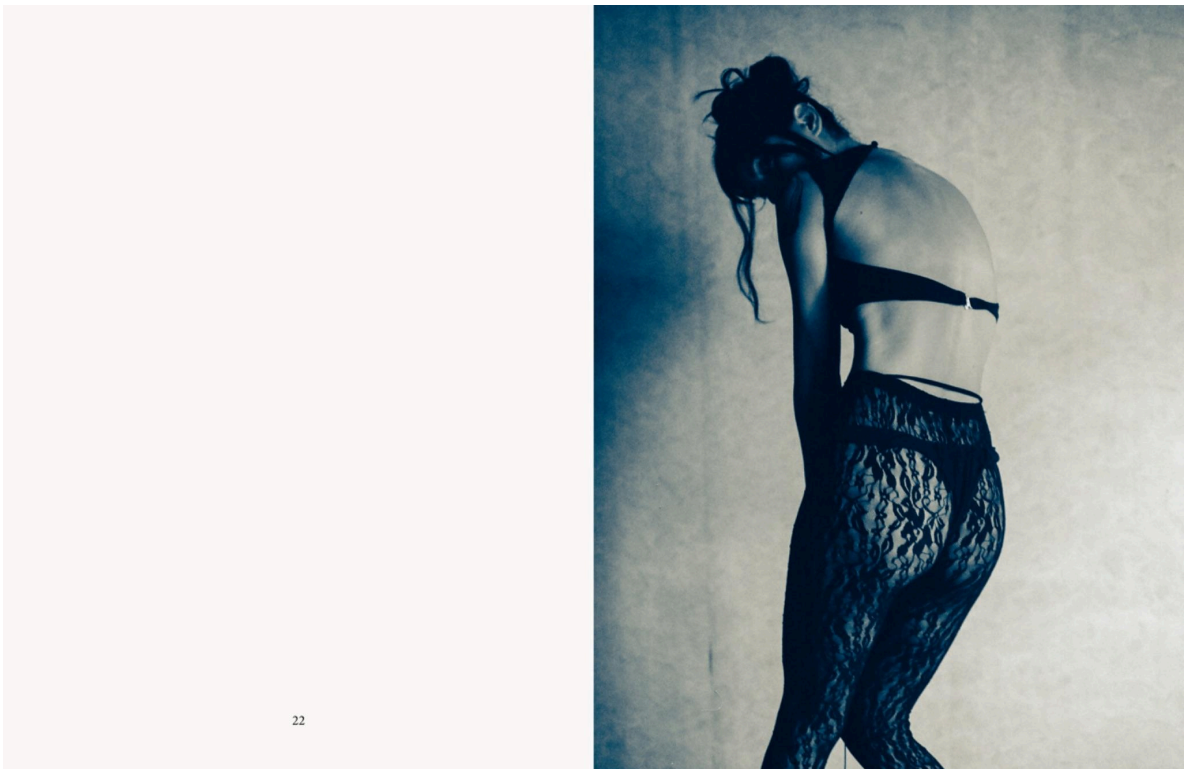
14

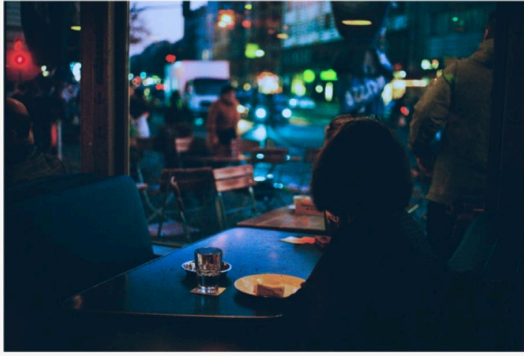


15

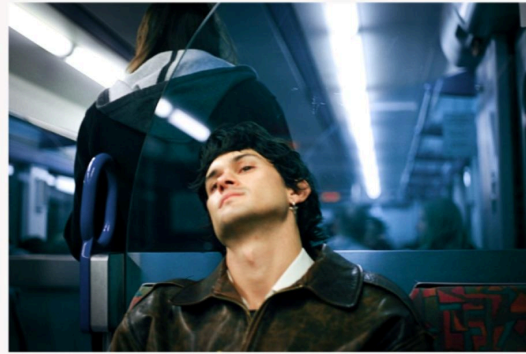


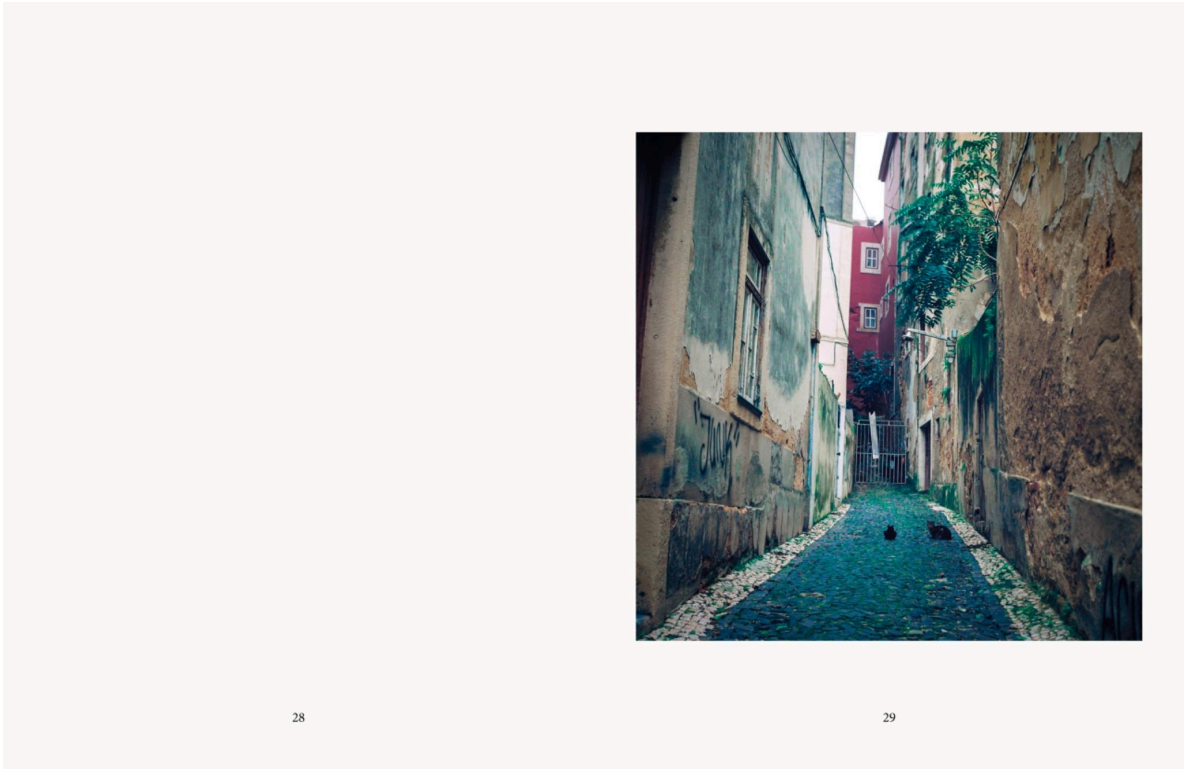






24



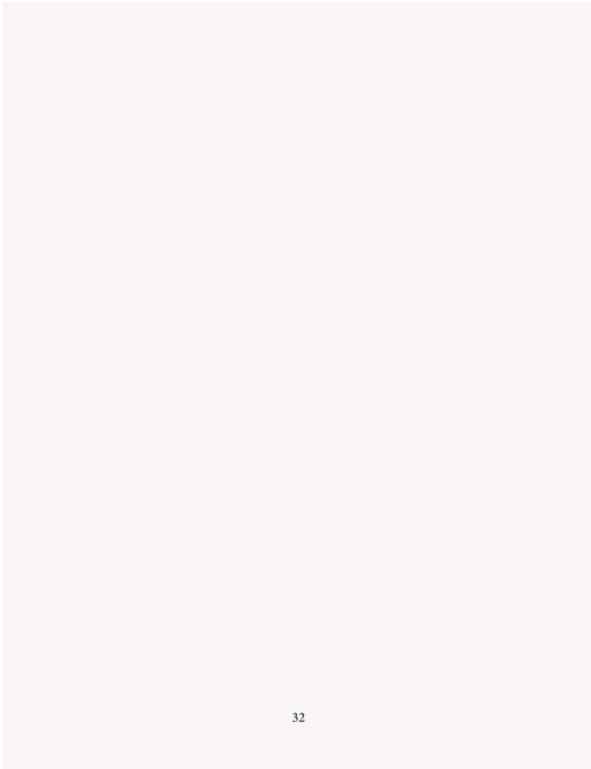


28

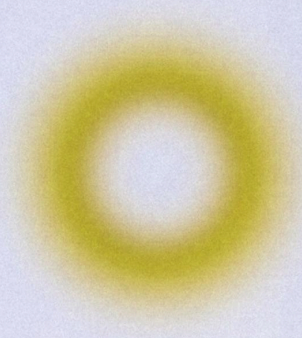
29



31

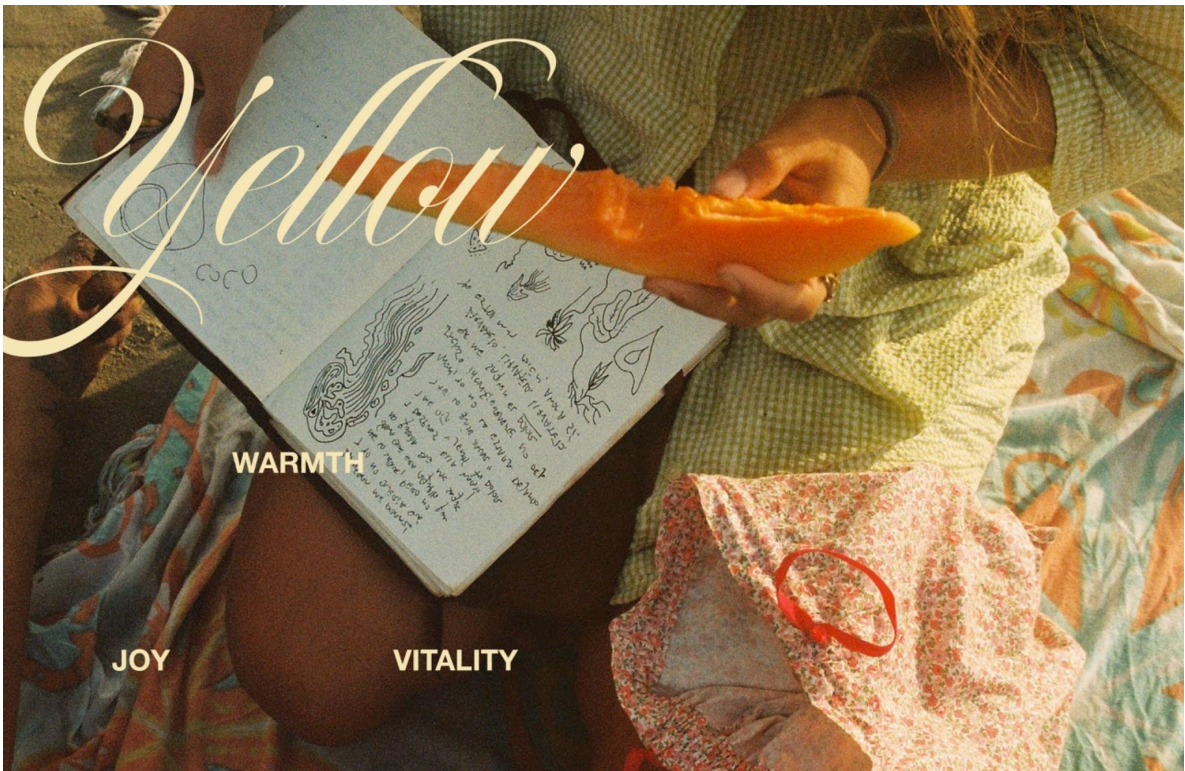


Yellow is not still, it flickers. It dances between joy and attention, between intimacy and exposure. Itten described yellow as radiant, optimistic, light filled. Kandinsky called it an earthly color, insistent and restless, always pushing outward. Albers showed that yellow is unstable, always



changing depending on its background. Wu et al. (2014) described its psychological effect as activating, even overstimulating. This is not nostalgia. It is clarity. Yellow does not hold back. It beams.

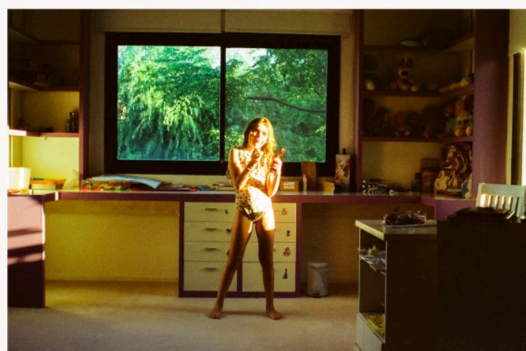
32



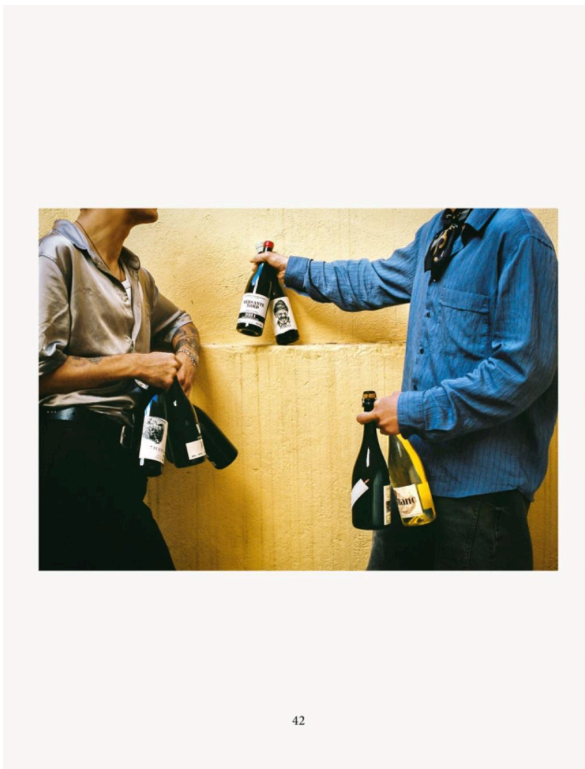
36



38



39



42

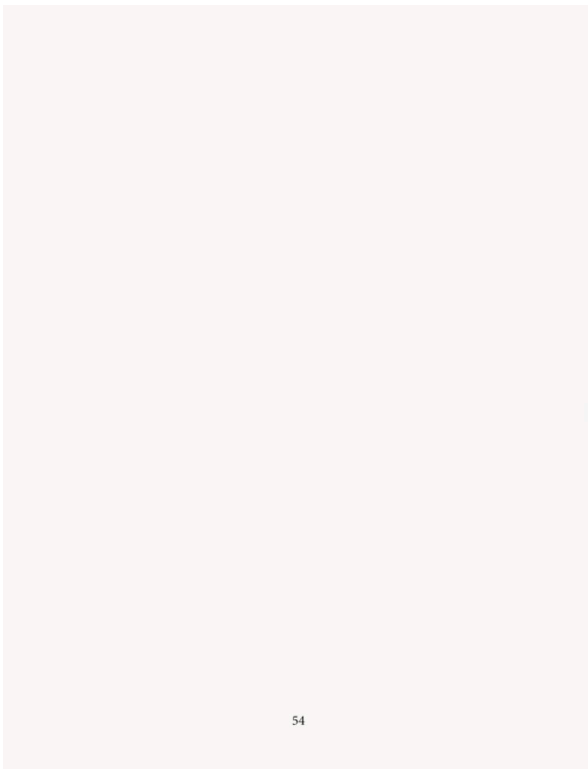
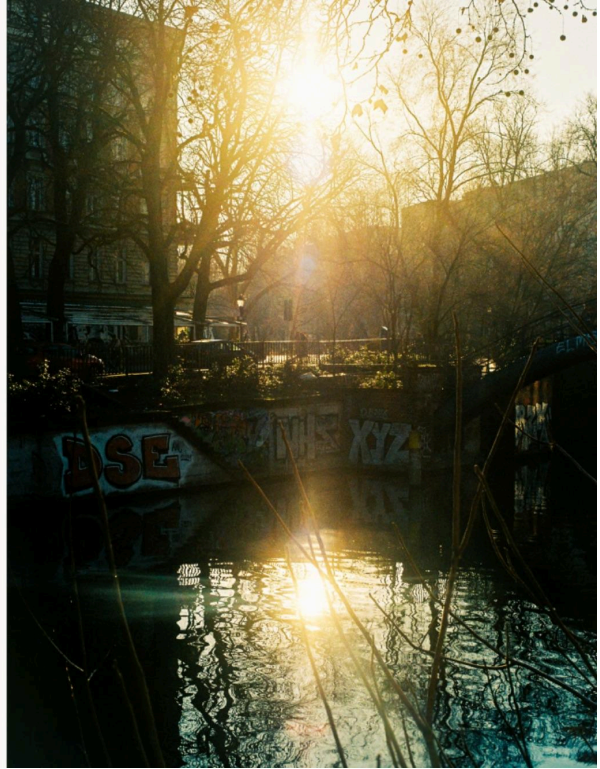






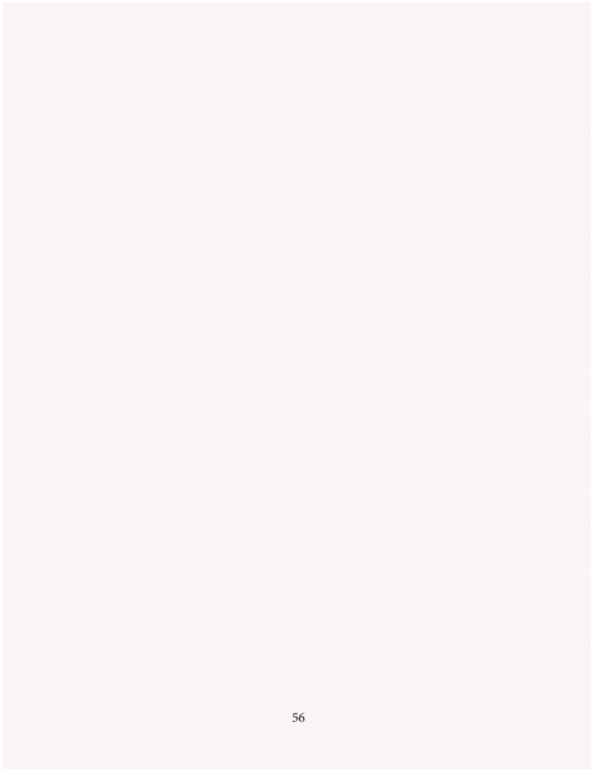


52



54

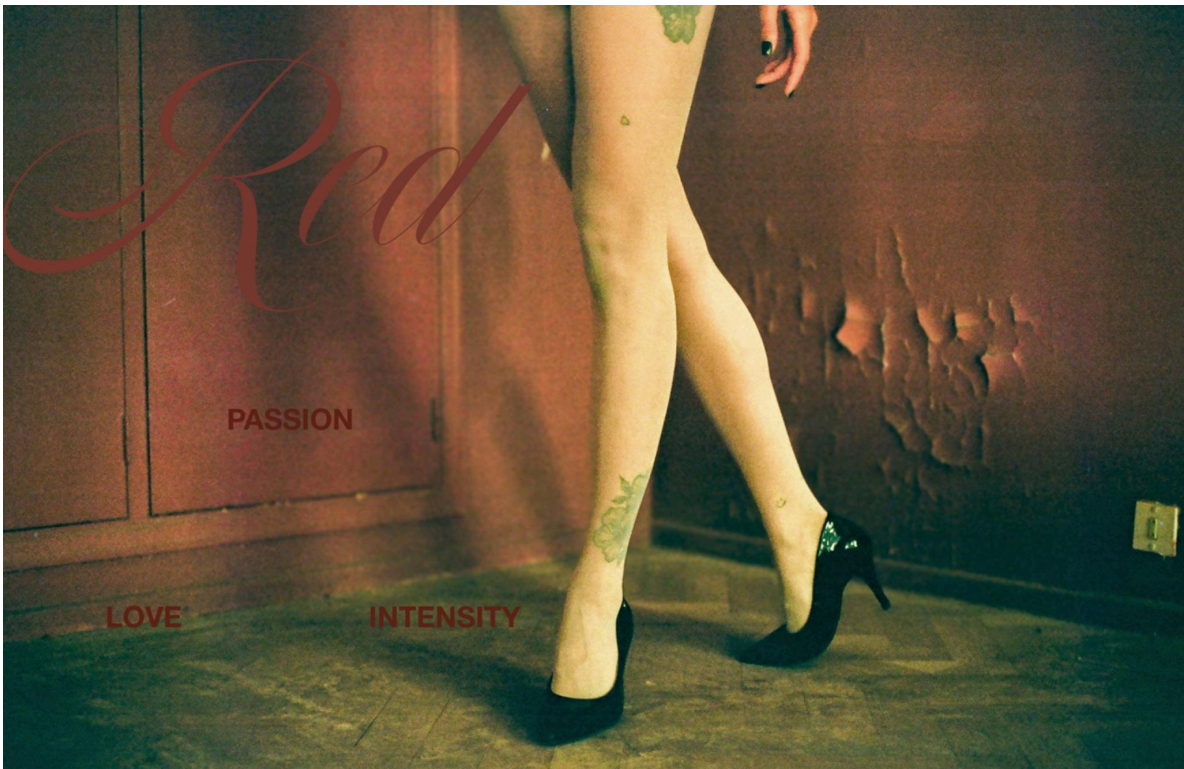




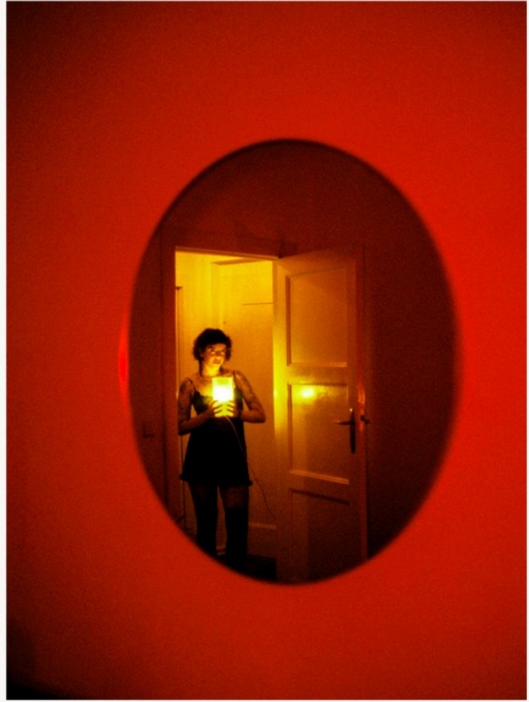
Red does not wait to be understood. It arrives already burning. Barthes (1980) described the punctum, the detail in an image that wounds, that lingers. Red is often that wound. It is desire, rupture, exposure. Itten saw red as active, warm, and alive,

associated with blood, love, and fire. Albers showed that red beside black is not the same as red beside white. Meaning is context. In photography, red speaks loudly. Viscerally. Passionately. This chapter does not ask. It declares.

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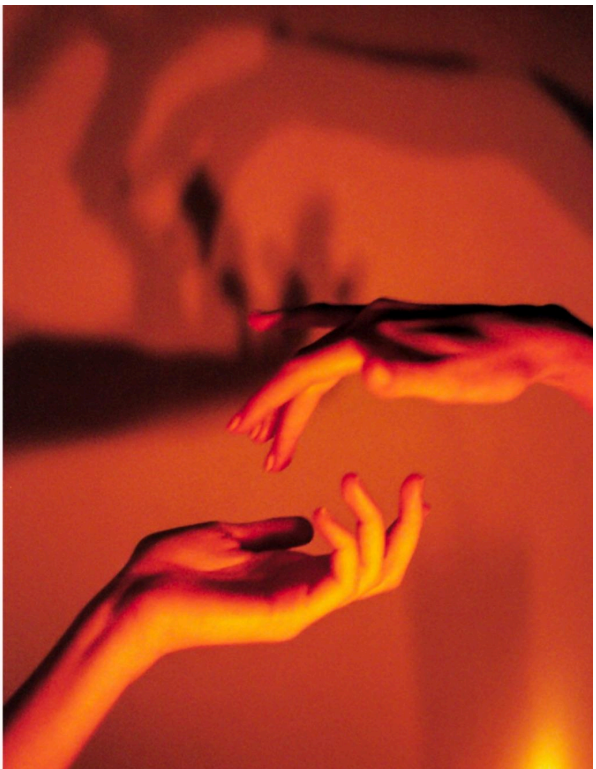
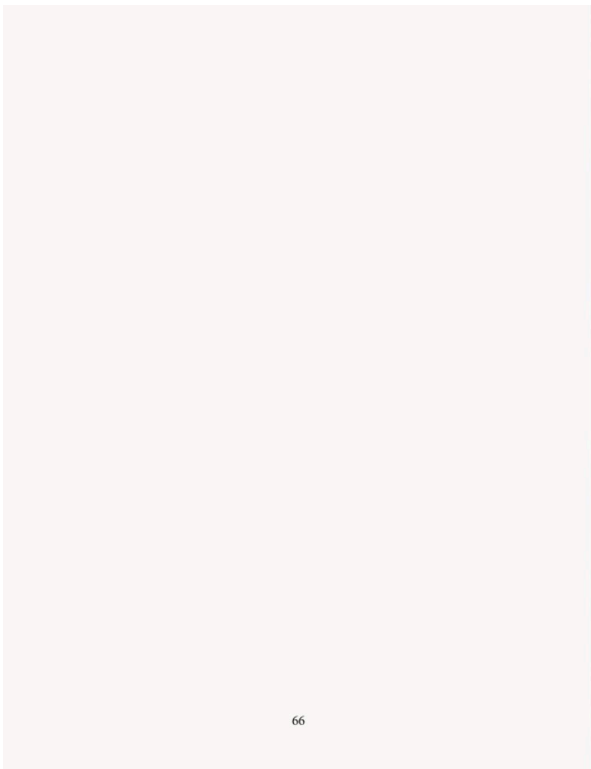
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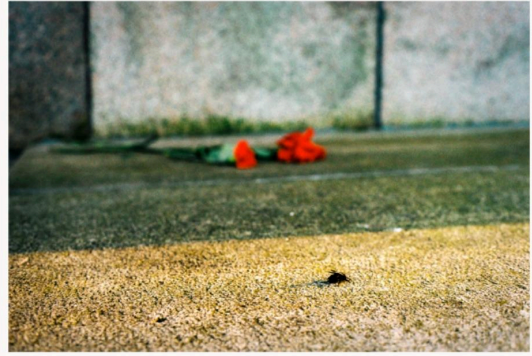


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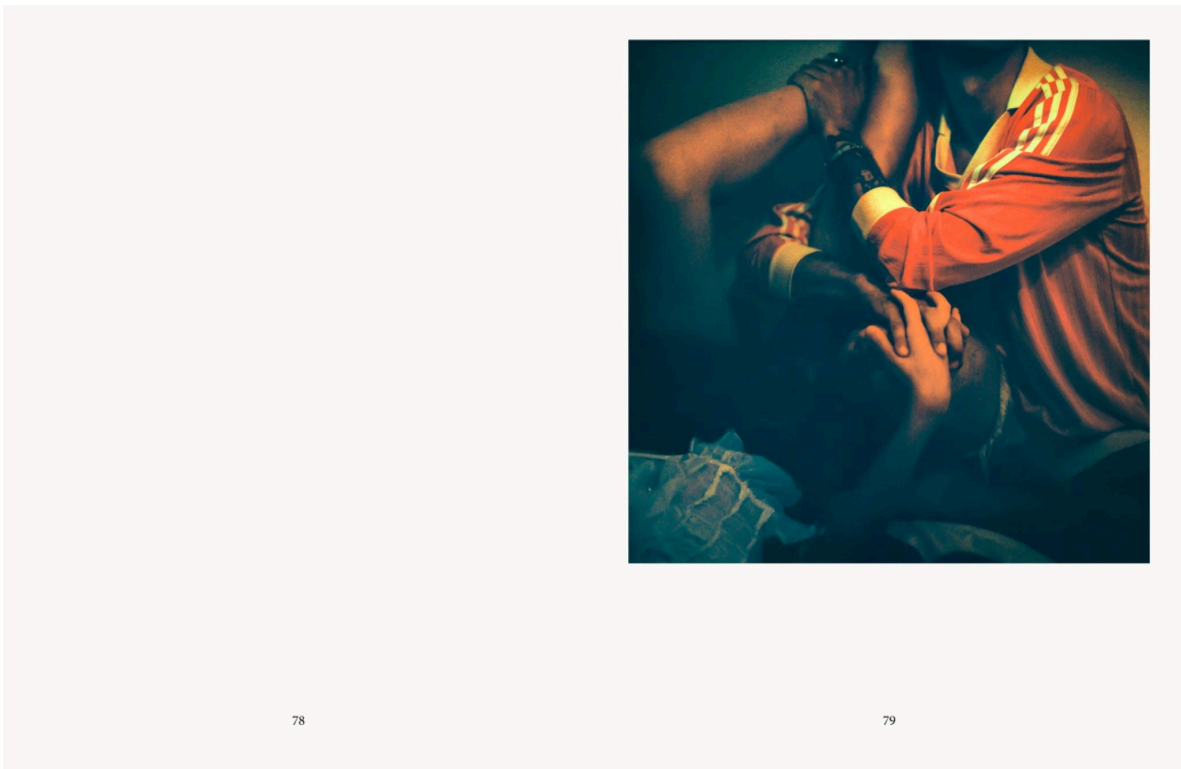


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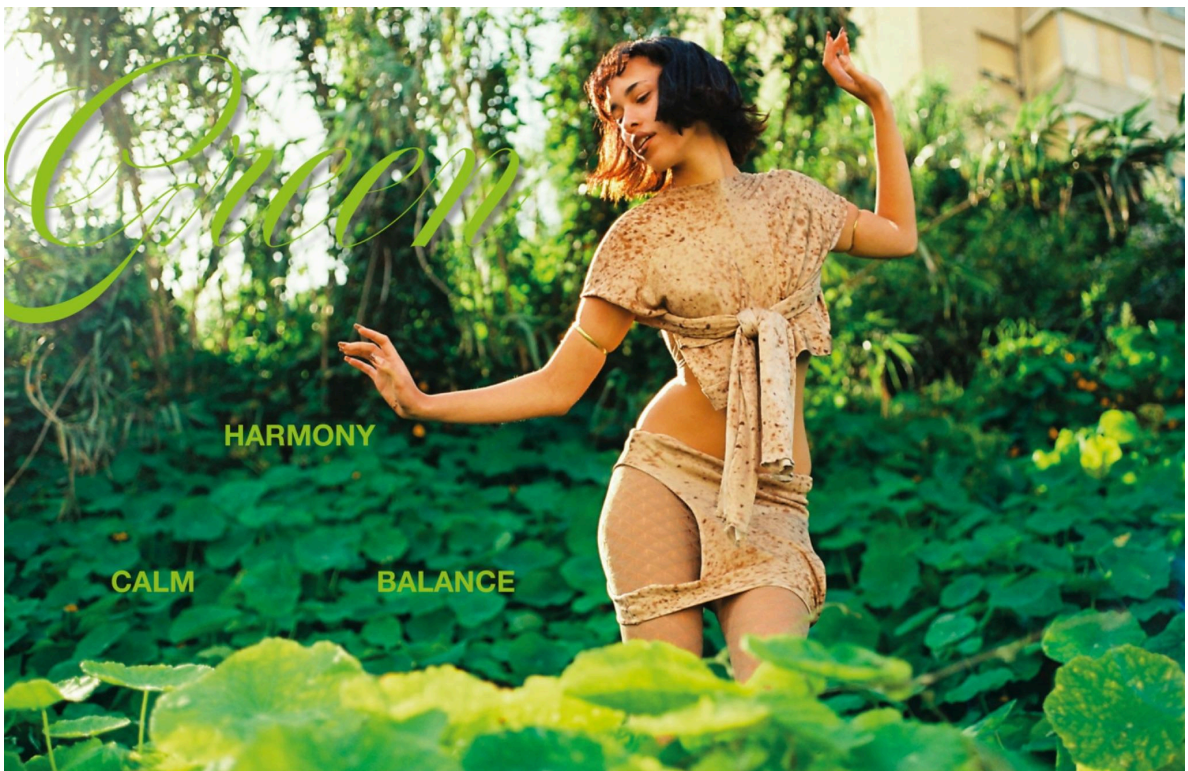
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Green is the breath in between. It does not push. It rests. Itten called green a balance point, the harmony between blue's cool and yellow's warmth. Goethe saw it as the resting point of the spectrum, the reconciliation of opposites. A color of nature, of life, of quiet equilibrium.

Wu et al. link green to physiological calm, a hue that soothes the nervous system before the mind can catch up. Albers, always the realist, reminded us that green is reactive, shaped entirely by what surrounds it. This chapter is not about stillness as silence, but stillness as returning. Returning to breath, to ground, to source.

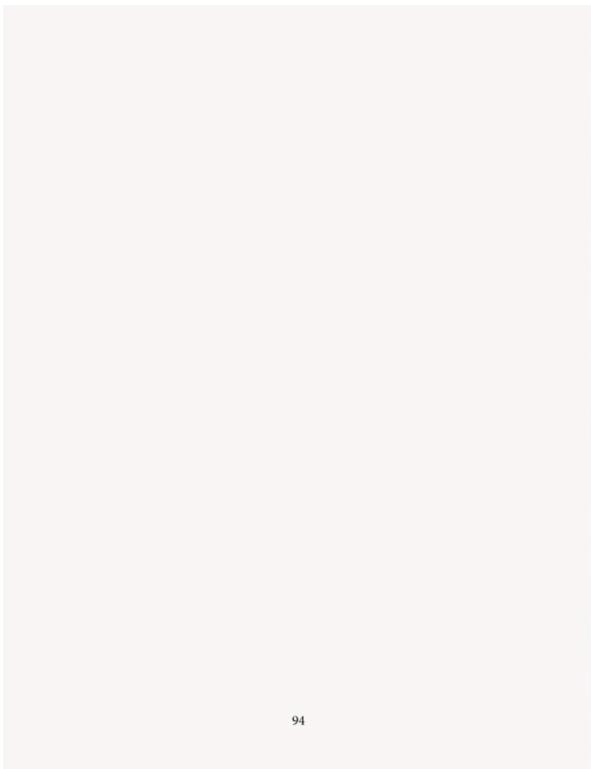
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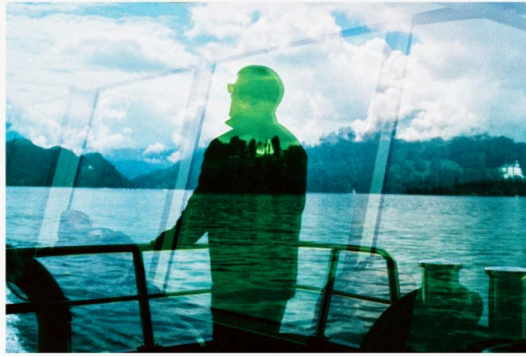


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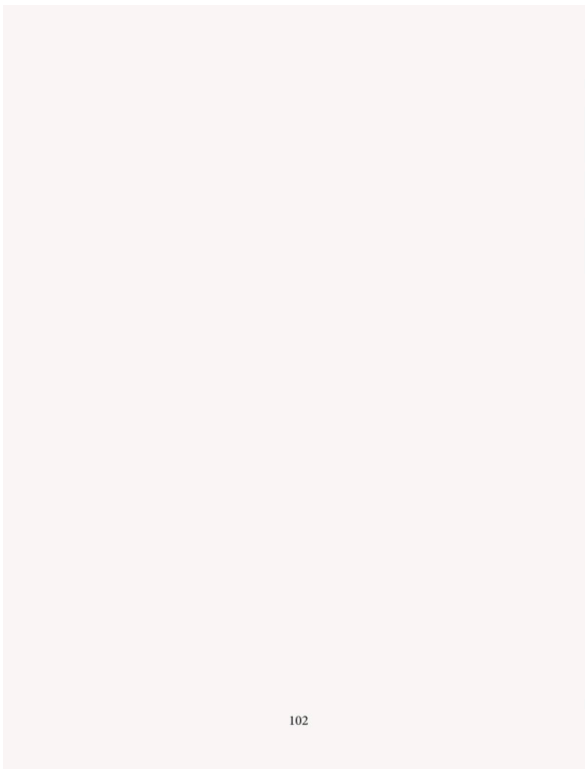




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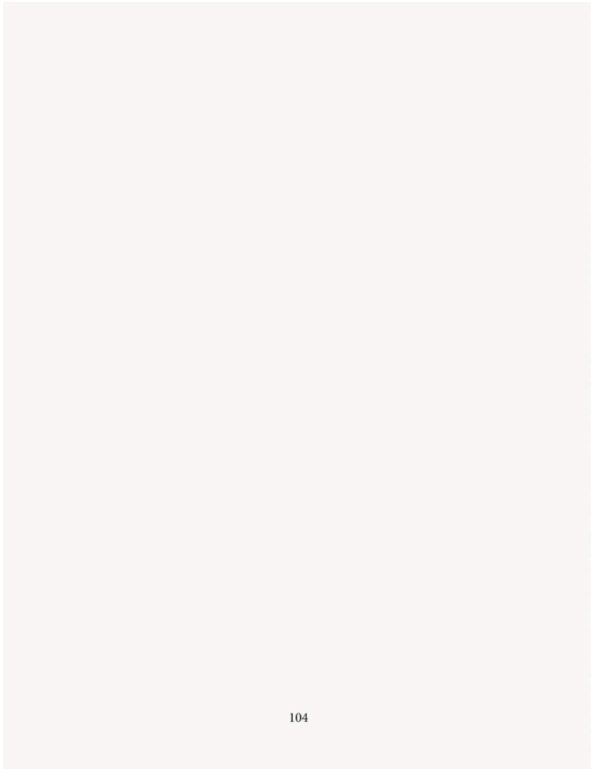


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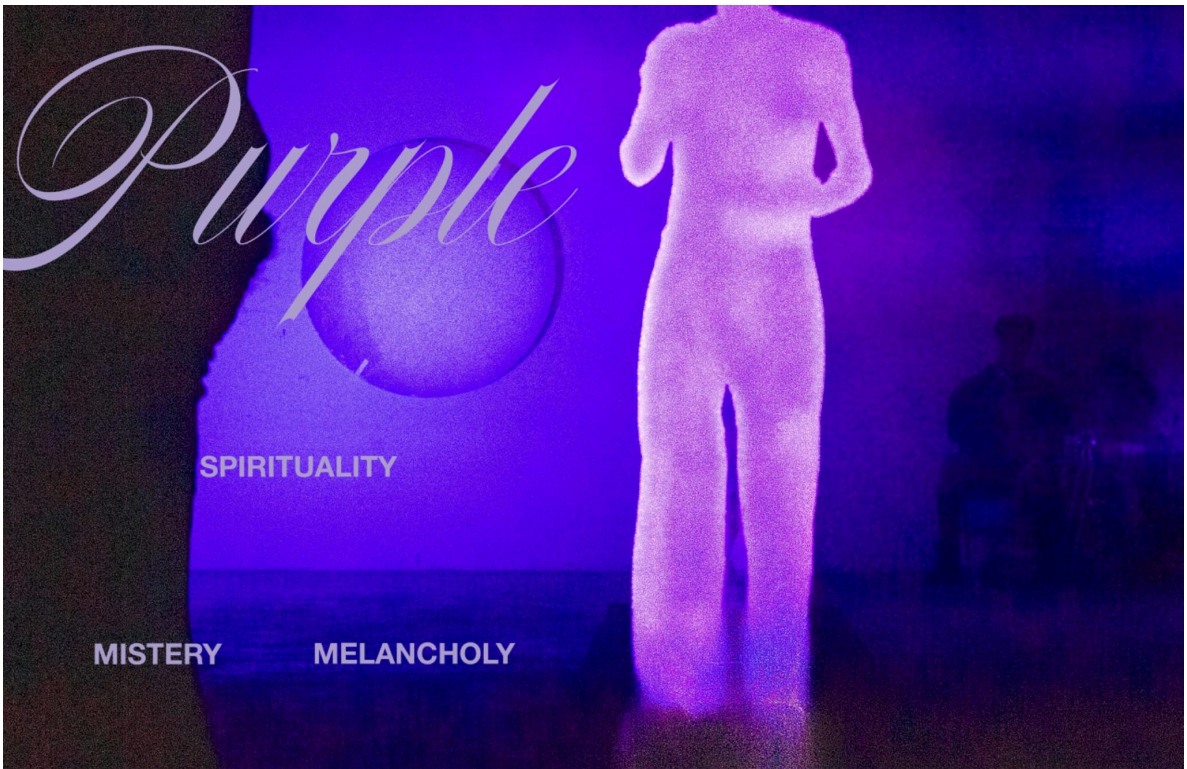
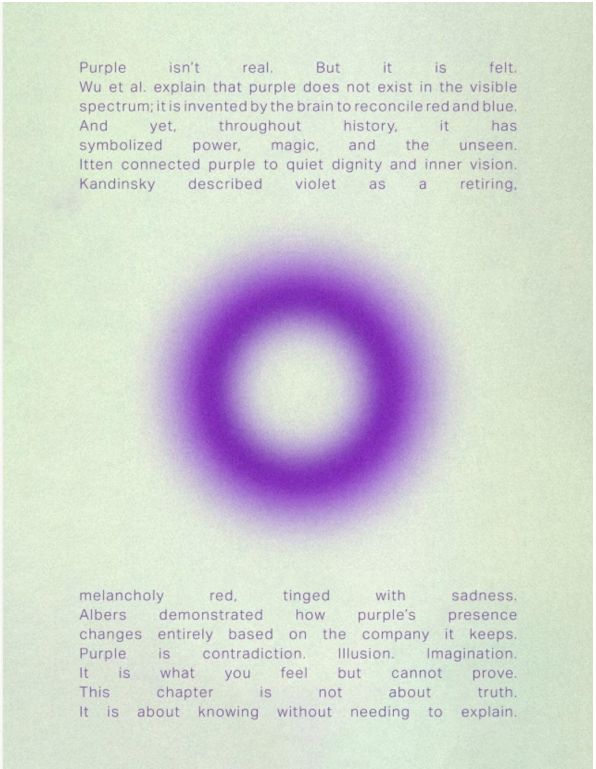
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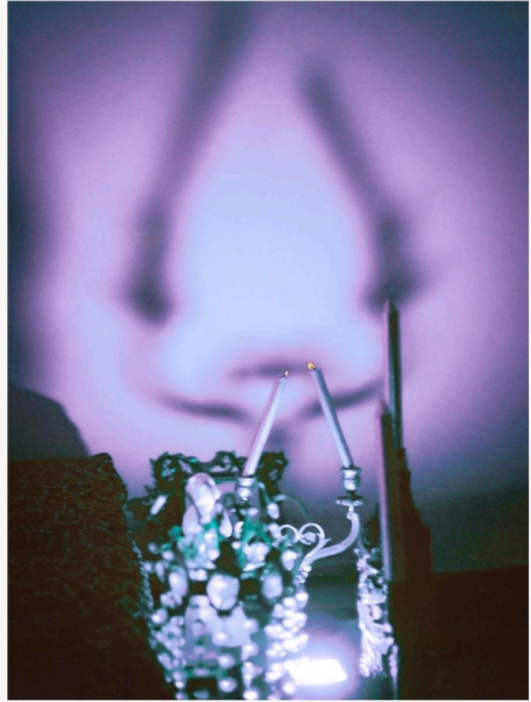


Purple isn't real. But it is felt. Wu et al. explain that purple does not exist in the visible spectrum; it is invented by the brain to reconcile red and blue. And yet, throughout history, it has symbolized power, magic, and the unseen. Itten connected purple to quiet dignity and inner vision. Kandinsky described violet as a retiring,

melancholy red, tinged with sadness. Albers demonstrated how purple's presence changes entirely based on the company it keeps. Purple is contradiction. Illusion. Imagination. It is what you feel but cannot prove. This chapter is not about truth. It is about knowing without needing to explain.



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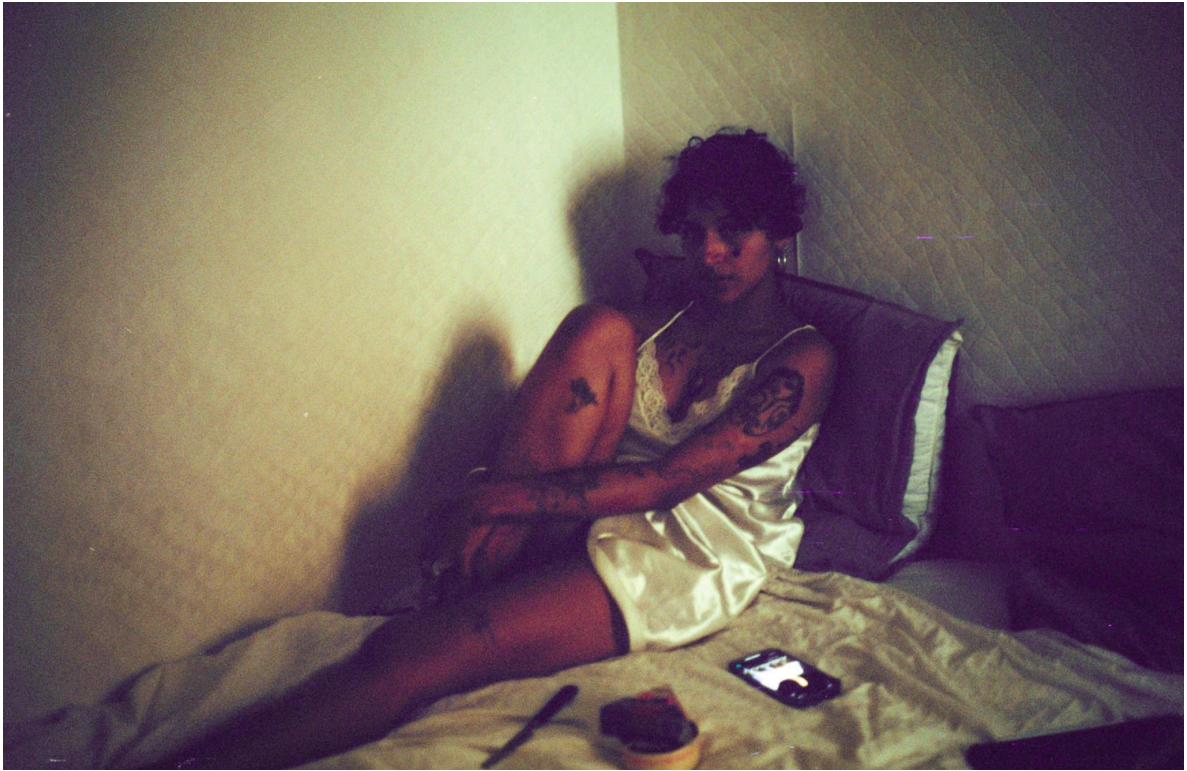
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All the images in this book come from places I've seen, but also from places I've felt. Each chapter speaks through a different hue: red, yellow, green, blue. Each one carries a feeling, a memory, an atmosphere. But there is one colour that holds them all together: purple.

I've always been drawn to it, even before I knew why. Then I learned something that stayed with me: purple doesn't really exist. It's not a colour on the visible spectrum. It's not found in pure light like red or blue. It's created by the brain, a bridge between opposites. Something that can't be measured, but still moves us deeply. A feeling more than a fact. That made sense to me.

Because I've never felt entirely at one end or the other. I exist between - between intensity and distance, silence and saturation. Not entirely here, not entirely there. But entirely real in feeling. And purple is exactly that: a contradiction, a harmony, a mystery.

For me, it became the colour of emotion. Of intuition. Of self. It holds everything I couldn't say directly, and everything I could only express through images.

But this isn't just personal. This book, as a body of work, explores how colour can communicate feeling, and how photography can speak a universal language.

Purple is where those ideas converge. It doesn't explain. It evokes. It doesn't belong to one meaning, it creates space for many. It's the language of the in-between.

So the title, "purple is where i always am", means just that: It's where I feel most like myself. It's the place in the spectrum where this book returns to itself. The emotional, conceptual, and personal centre of it all. And maybe, if you've ever lived between clarity and confusion, between presence and memory, you'll recognise something here too.

Maybe purple is where you are sometimes.

This book never promised answers.
It asked only to be felt.
The colours spoke when I could not.
And maybe they spoke something you have always known.
In the silence after the shutter, there is a new beginning.

Close your eyes.
What colour are you now?

All photographs in this book belong to my personal archive. They were taken between 2021 and 2025, in analogue format, with my loving Minolta (35mm) and my Rolleiflex (120mm).

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Edition limited to 2 copies. Intimate pieces, crafted as part of the author's Master's thesis in Design and Visual Culture at IADE.
First edition.

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