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Mémoires du livre
Studies in Book Culture

PSEUDOPHOTOGRAPHS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A NEW OBJECT FOR PHOTOLITERATURE STUDIES

Alya Farzana SHAMSHUL ARIFFIN & Clémentine BEAUVAIS
University of York and UK/Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This article proposes to theorize the study of *pseudophotographs* as a subtype of photoliterature studies. Pseudophotographs are any illustrations understood within the context of a picturebook or graphic novel to be representations of photographs. This article attempts to define this undertheorized graphic object, to discuss its various functions, and to analyse what pseudophotographs can tell us about how real photographs and photography are considered in children's literature. Because pseudophotographs appropriate some of the conventions of photography and yet are unlike real photographs in many ways, they are, we argue, a significant place for implicit discourse about the art and practice of photography and about affective encounters with photographs.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article propose de théoriser l'étude des pseudophotographies en tant que sous-genre des études photo-littéraires. Une pseudophotographie est une illustration qui, dans le contexte d'un album ou d'une bande dessinée romanesque, se veut la représentation d'une photographie. Nous cherchons ici à définir cet objet graphique sous-théorisé et à en exposer les diverses fonctions. Notre analyse porte également sur ce que les pseudophotographies révèlent quant à la représentation de la photographie en littérature jeunesse. En effet, parce que les pseudophotographies imitent certaines conventions de la photographie tout en en transgressant d'autres de multiples manières, elles portent un discours implicite sur l'art et la pratique photographiques, ainsi que sur les affects liés aux photographies.

Keywords
Pseudophotographs, photography, nostalgia, belonging, children's literature, picturebooks.

Mots-clés
Pseudophotographies, photographie, nostalgie, appartenance, littérature jeunesse, albums.

This article explores a common feature of many children's and young adult books: images of photographs, or, as we call them here, *pseudophotographs*.[1] We define a pseudophotograph as any illustration that is understood within the context of a book's diegesis as being a photograph—a framed family portrait on a wall in a larger illustration, for instance, or a picture of a magazine with front-page headlines and accompanying "photos." Once one starts noticing pseudophotographs, one sees them everywhere in children's literature; however, puzzlingly, they have remained consistently under the radar of theory, and mark a blindspot at the intersection of literary analysis, photoliterature studies, and visual studies.

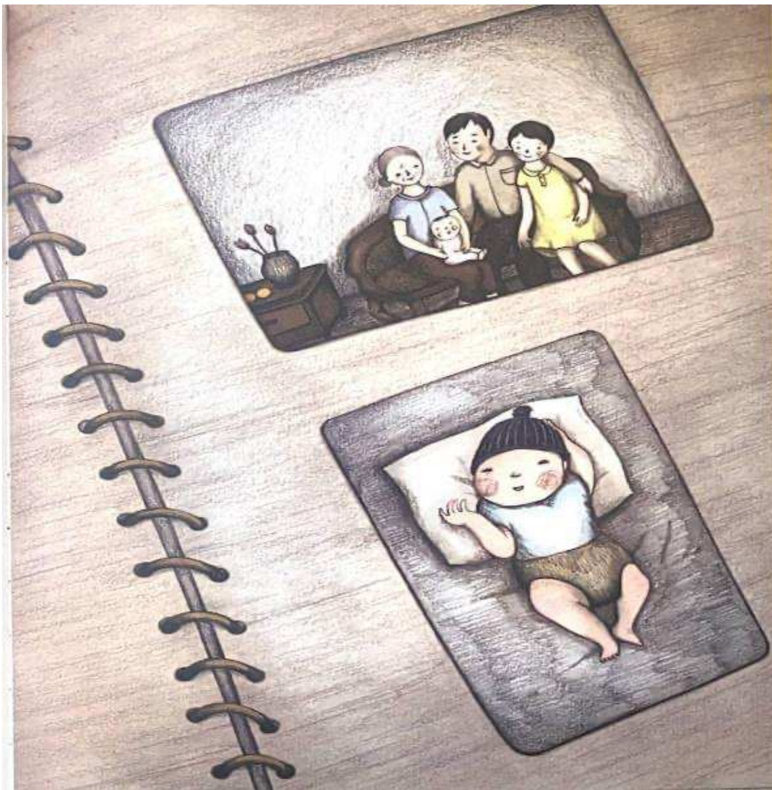
Yet pseudophotographs are a fascinating object from many perspectives dear to all those fields. The very definitional proposition we outlined above—that pseudophotographs are illustrations "understood in the context of a book's diegesis as being photographs"—raises a key hermeneutic question: how *do* we manage to understand them as photographs? In the case of children's literature, especially for very young readers, how are *they* supposed to understand them as photographs? Next come functional, semiotic, and narrative questions: what are they for? What are their roles in storytelling, in characterization? Issues of referentiality arise, as well. If a photograph is primarily understood as a reproduction of an object in the world, what does a pseudophotograph refer to?

We begin to recognize here the pseudophotograph as a specific kind of simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1981), which can be seen as an indirect commentary on the functions of photographs in everyday life, the art of photography itself, and the place of that artistic practice in literature in general and in children's literature in particular. We thus propose that the study of pseudophotographs be treated as a subcategory of photoliterature studies, as its object incorporates, mimics, transgresses, but always *thinks about* conventions of photography. Pseudophotographs may therefore

condition children from a very early age to develop specific ideas about what photography is, what role it plays in society and in personal lives, and what kind of narratives it is able to tell.

This article, necessarily exploratory, aims at mapping an object that has not yet been studied. The analysis presented here draws from a corpus of over three hundred works from all around the world, and several thousand pseudophotographs, coded by one of the co-authors in two sessions at the Munich International Youth Library. We cannot seek to give an account of the quantitative data results here, but it will occasionally allude to some of the findings. It is our hope that this synthesis will form the basis for new theoretical and empirical explorations, in children's literature, within the field of photoliterature, and in other relevant areas of visual and cultural studies.

Defining Pseudophotographs



Reproduced with permission of Epigram Books. Illustration by Tan Zi Xi from *Where's Grandma*, 2012.

Pseudophotographs, as their name indicates, are not real photographs. However, unlike doctored photographs, fake photographs, or photographs generated by artificial intelligence, they never seek to pass as real photographs or to fool their viewer into thinking they might be. They are, uncontroversially, illustrations (most often hand- or digitally-drawn, or sometimes in collage) that are understood by the reader to be photographs within the diegesis of a given book. The illustration of a family portrait above is an excellent (and very common) example of the fictional pact struck by a pseudophotograph. While the illustration is clearly hand-drawn and coloured, we are meant to understand that the story is giving us access to a "real" photograph owned by one of the characters, which represents "real" people in the diegesis (but not in the real world), suspending disbelief about its actual nature as an illustration.[2]

Because the picture is understood to be a photograph, the mental operation entails a transfer of knowledge from what we know real photography to be. We imagine firstly that there is, somewhere in the world of the diegesis, a character whose photograph this is; in other words, we assume that the pseudophotograph is as referential in the diegetic world as a photograph would be in our world. We might assume by extension that the rest of the illustration depicts a photo album, which we know to be a privileged place for family photos, and we understand that a character is probably looking at this picture, as we currently are in the real world. We may continue our imaginative process to infer affective reactions from said character as they view (what is to them) an album or photograph. In terms of visual communication, the pseudophotograph thus acts here as frame to understand the larger context. By convoking the norms of photography as an art, as a practice, and as a way of connecting to reality (especially to the past), the pseudophotograph offers the reader a highly allusive window to character, narrative, tone, and affect.

This definition, however, relies on one axiom: readers intuitively know that a pseudophotograph is a diegetic photograph. But how? After all, there are many instances in picturebooks where smaller illustrations are inserted within larger ones. This is the case, for example, of vignettes, moments when small images float into spreads, with or without clear contouring. Additionally, picturebooks are also full of other pseudo-images—pseudopaintings, for instance, or pseudoillustrations such as a poster, or a

book cover, or a child's drawing which appears within the picturebook. So how do we understand that a specific part of the illustration is supposed to be read as a photograph, and not, for instance, a painting?

One obvious way of understanding that a picture is a pseudophotograph is through the information given in the text. Some picturebooks that are full of pseudophotographs use the word "photograph," are generally about photography, or even reflect deeply on the very art of photography. Similarly, the spreads might show unequivocal clues, such as a camera, or someone taking a picture. Probably the best-known example, and by far one of the most complex and interesting, is David Wiesner's *Flotsam* (2009), a wordless picturebook featuring a young boy who finds a camera washed ashore on a beach; the camera is full of fantastical pictures from under the seas, and also contains photographs of all the children who have found the camera before. The evolution of their clothing and the evolution of the photographs' colours (from black and white to sepia to full colour) recapitulates simultaneous histories of photography and of childhood. In this article, we shall leave aside picturebooks of this kind that are intensely concerned with the act of taking photographs and the art of photography—the pseudophotographs in them deserve an analysis of their own—and focus on picturebooks where pseudophotographs are more incidental, or offer ways to reflect on other concepts beyond photography. We therefore come back to this question: how are pseudophotographs, in books not about photography, supposed to be recognized by the reader?

As we shall show, pseudophotographs as graphic objects overwhelmingly tend to adhere to a range of set visual conventions. First, they take a trompe-l'oeil-type approach to key material features of real photographs, designing them with an impression of depth and perspective despite the fact that the subjects of the pseudophotographs themselves are not often photorealistic and that the object itself does not intend to trick the eye into being mistaken for a real photograph. Second, they are characterized by quite intense work around bordering and/or framing (including by the use of colour), with the effect of setting them out visually as well as substantially from the rest of the illustration. Third, pseudophotographs tend to overemphasize posing. In doing so, they are interestingly un-modern, as the characteristics of real photographs that they evoke tend to be out of step with twenty-first century practices around photography.

Shadows, Sellotape, Frames: A Trompe-l'oeil Approach to Materiality

In the vast majority of instances, pseudophotographs are depicted as though they are real physical objects, mostly images printed on photo paper. This already tells us a lot about how visions of photography itself get transmitted through children's picturebooks: the photograph, which today is overwhelmingly for children a thing of the screen, is given to them in even the most recent books as a thing of paper. Roland Barthes would not bemoan this fact, he who describes the photograph as a material object first and an image after;[3] neither would materialist theorists of photography such as Edwards and Hart, who uphold the importance of "photographs [existing] materially in the world," as chemical deposits on paper of various sizes, shapes, and colours.[4]

The visual insistence on materiality is often achieved through a trompe-l'oeil approach regarding the materiality of the pseudophotograph, giving an impression of three-dimensionality through perspective, texture, shading, and other features. In many instances we can see a hand holding the pseudophotograph, or it is clipped, pinned on a board, Sellotaped, stuck inside a photo album, etc. The pseudophotograph's flatness might be highlighted using perspective, or it may look crinkled or folded. In Nicola Senior's *Wolfie's Secret* (see figure 2), the characters' trotters are shown holding the pseudophotographs, which throw a shadow onto the page and overlap with other pieces of paper whose materiality is also emphasized in a trompe-l'oeil manner.

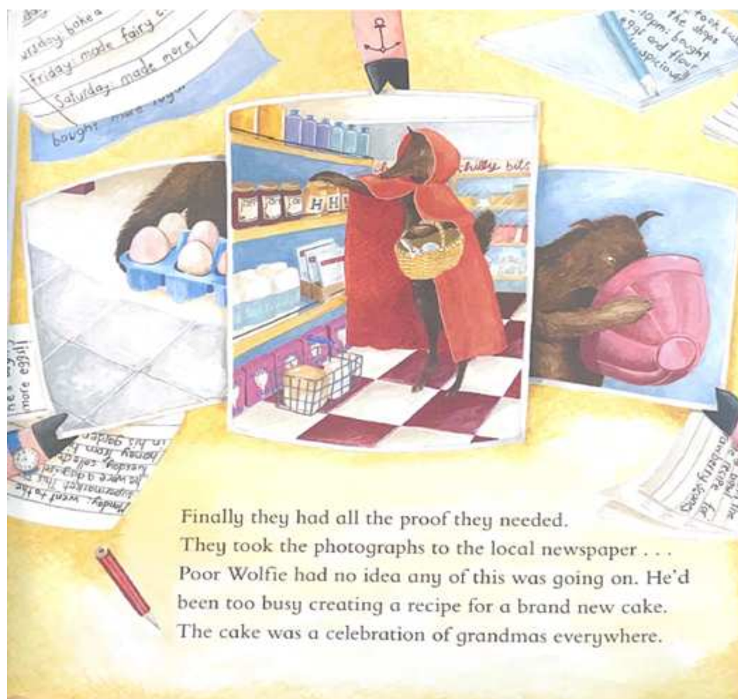


Illustration by Nicola Senior, *Wolfie's Secret*, 2017.

Notable, too, in Senior's illustration is the white border around the pseudophotograph. Borders are a feature of many pseudophotographs, though of course they are quite rare today in real photographs, even in printed form. The explanation for this overemphasis on framing and materiality of the pseudophotograph is obvious: it seeks to counterbalance the similarity in style of illustration inside and outside the pseudophotograph. The border and the overemphasized materiality visually interrupt the flow of the overall illustration, making the reader aware that this particular segment of the spread is to be understood as, uncontroversially, a photograph in the diegesis. Combined, those two elements make it impossible (in theory) to misrecognize the pseudophotograph as an alternate element—a vignette, for instance.

While borders are a clear indication that an image should be considered as separate from its surroundings,[5] trompe-l'oeil-type framing makes the exact nature of that separation more explicit by bordering the pseudophotograph *and* emphasizing its materiality. Eliza Wheeler's *Fairy Spell* provides an example of uncontroversial pseudophotography through framing (figure 3).

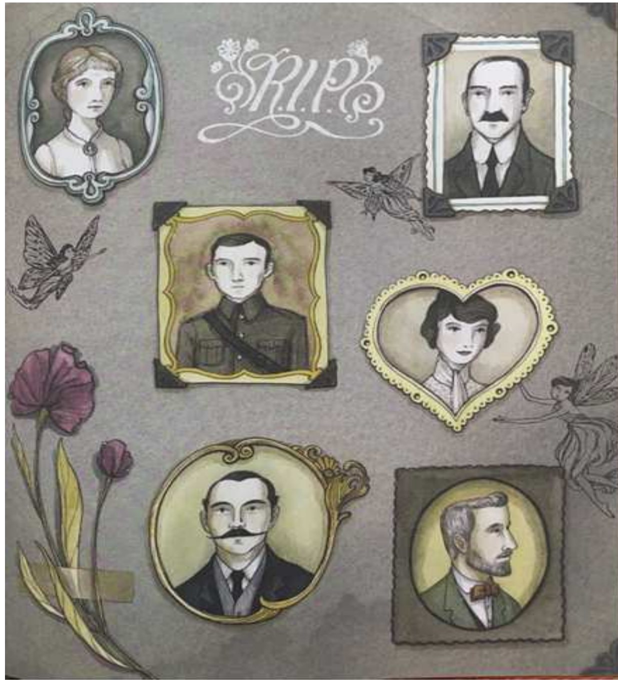


Illustration by Eliza Wheeler*, Fairy Spell: How Two Girls Convinced the World That Fairies are Real*, 2018.

This picture is trompe-l'oeil-heavy, with not only frames but also corners and a trompe-l'oeil flower stuck with tape, on paper whose grain has been minutely rendered. This example also illustrates that the framing of pseudophotographs in children's picturebook is often highly inventive; frames appear in numerous designs, shapes, and sizes, including in other objects such as jewellery pieces like lockets.

Frames can also be representative of the type of photograph the pseudophotograph is supposed to mimic: our corpus of well over 300 picturebooks includes instances of pseudophotographs that are Polaroids, photo-booth pictures, and even negatives. Digital pseudophotographs make for a very low number of occurrences in that corpus, especially considering that contemporary children are far more likely to encounter digital photographs than paper ones in their daily lives. When such pseudophotographs do occur, they are recognizably framed in computer or smartphone screens.

In her study of frames and framing in children's picturebooks, Vivienne Smith emphasizes both the boundary-making and the connection-enabling nature of frames through the analogy of a pair of spectacles, which "holds

the lenses in place that make the world come in to focus."[6] Similarly, framed pseudophotographs in picturebooks are often paradoxically both distinct from, and essential to, the rest of the story. The trompe-l'oeil materiality enhances their substantial difference from the visual world of the picturebook, but it also emphasizes the fact that they are a point of interest within it: they act themselves as a framing device to direct the viewer's attention towards what is photographed. The frame, Smith adds, selects which image to display to the observer and assists the looker in seeing what should be perceived. The very act of enframing thus hints at possible connections with what lies outside of the frame. (We will return later to what this implies for affective and narrative extrapolations from pseudophotographs.)

Other ways of framing pseudophotographs as substantially distinct from the rest of the illustration are colour and style. Similarly to real photographs, pseudophotographs come in a range of colours. Pseudophotographs in children's picturebooks are commonly multicolour; however, there are many instances (arguably, far more than a child would naturally encounter in the real world) where pseudophotographs are black and white or in sepia tones. The visual texture of pseudophotographs may also be distinct from the rest of the illustrations, as with the example from Alison Jay's *Looking for Yesterday* (figure 4), where the pseudophotograph is painted with a crackled effect:

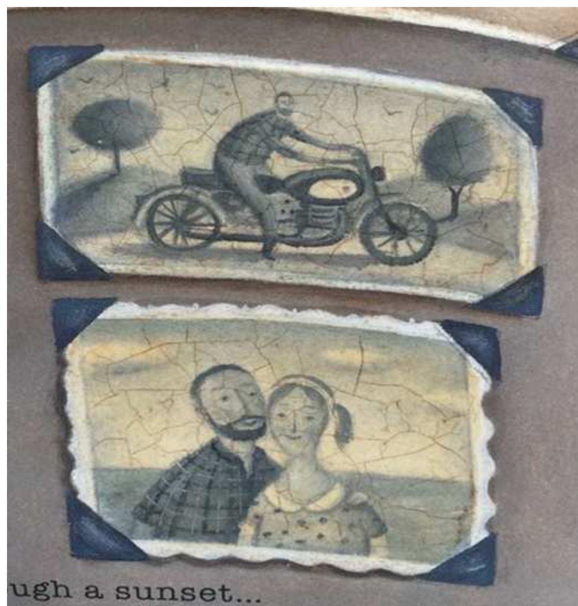


Illustration by Alison Jay, *Looking for Yesterday,* 2017.

The colour-coding and distinct textural renderings have visual, narrative, and symbolic effects. Visually, they help to further differentiate the pseudophotograph from a vignette or pseudopainting—sepia tones, especially, are recognizably exclusive to the field of photography. Narratively, these decisions might help determine the age of the pseudophotograph, imparting clues as to story elements such as historical setting, or suggesting how old the adult characters are. However, black-and-white and sepia tones are not so reliably datable in picturebooks as for photographs in real life, and in fact the symbolic function of those colours and effects are doubtlessly the key point: quite simply, black-and-white and sepia tones and crackled or grainy effects index the past.

Posing and Exposing: Subjects of Pseudophotographs

Let us now move on from the pictorial decisions that inform the recognition of an image in a picturebook as a pseudophotograph, and on to the elements of context and content that further help the reader understand it as such. Context and location is of course, key: seeing a framed picture of a family hung on the wall of a living room makes it much more likely to be interpreted as a pseudophotograph than a pseudopainting, for instance. Front-page pictures on represented newspapers or identification documents are also immediately understood to be pseudophotographs, at least if we are aware of the conventions of newspapers and ID.

Subjects of pseudophotographs are represented differently than characters in the picturebooks, even the very characters they are supposed to portray. As the previous images illustrate, pseudophotographs often show characters posing and use a composition recognizable in the context of the history of photography. Added to the elaborateness of the imbricated frames around pseudophotographs, photographic posing and composition contribute to ensuring pseudophotographs' recognition as such, and establish their ability to "hold in place" their subjects, who are therefore not expected to behave as characters from the picturebooks. We guess immediately, for instance, that a face inside a pseudophotograph is not able to talk, walk, and take part in the plot (apart from peculiar cases, as in magical or magical realist worlds). While the specific act of visualization associated with picturebook

reading and framed by its fictional pact allows us to think that a represented character is simply "frozen" into a position but can actually "move around," we know that a character represented in a pseudophotograph cannot. This fact is all the more poignant in the picture above (figure 4), where the pseudophotograph on the screen represents a character who has died, or is absent. This evocation of dead, missing, or absent people is common for pseudophotographs in picturebooks, a theme we address later as part of pseudophotographs' affective function of longing.

Parergonal Functions: Decoration, Indirect Characterisation, and Reality Effect

Having looked at how pseudophotographs normally assert their status as such in picturebooks, we now move on to examining the various functions that this graphic object can have. The first one, and perhaps the most obvious, is what we might call "decoration." Indeed, while any enframing implies a wish to attract attention, not all pseudophotographs in picturebooks, even framed ones, are supposed to be arresting. Many instances of pseudophotographs in children's picturebooks are best described as "parergonal," a term used in art history for a framed or bordered element understood as an accessory or subsidiary motif to the main subject, and ornamental.[7] A parergon can have more involved aesthetic purposes, or simply please the eye or give a sense of atmosphere; many of the pseudophotographs in our corpus are parergonal.

However, parergonal pseudophotographs are never simply pretty or decorative. A prime function of pseudophotographs in picturebooks is indirect characterisation: pseudophotographs of animals in a child character's bedroom, of music bands in a teenager character's school planner, or of family pictures in a family's living room are excellent ways to convey information about the tastes, activities, and personalities of said characters. Parergonal pseudophotographs also contribute, along with other graphic elements, to what Roland Barthes would call a "reality effect"—namely, a sense that the world of the picturebook can be trusted to expand beyond the limits of what is shown, and to continue to exist under the same systematic rules.[8] In this analysis, seemingly superfluous, non-narrative

details all cohere into a sense of solidity which allows for extrapolation. The "reality effect" of parergonal pseudophotographs is particularly interesting, because unlike other objects which may appear in the picturebook, pseudophotographs hint by their very nature at the expanded universe of the picturebook. Because a pseudophotograph triggers the same kind of expectation as a real photograph, with the diegetic space taken as "reality," then the reader must assume that a pseudophotograph represents something that "really exists" in the diegetic space. Even more, that thing might not even be part of the plot of the picturebook—it is very common for pseudophotographs to show people, landscapes, or objects which never play any narrative role and are not shown anywhere else. Yet we assume that these things "exist," somewhere in the diegetic space, perhaps living their own stories.

This is quite a remarkable thought, especially if we remember that picturebooks are intended for young children, who are just beginning to learn the rules of referentiality and of fictionality.[9] We cannot know without empirical evidence what young children understand of pseudophotographs, but the cognitive work a pseudophotograph asks them to do is very sophisticated. It is not just world-building, but world-expansion, the understanding that the diegetic space is larger than the sole story represented, and that the picturebook itself "frames" (to get back to that metaphor) only one of the possible stories within it. The reality effect that Barthes theorizes—a sense that there is infinite potential narrative expansion within a diegetic universe—is conveyed graphically by pseudophotographs in a far more efficient way, we believe, than by other, less clearly referential decorative objects that may be portrayed alongside them.

Narrative Functions: Revealing Information and Foreshadowing

Many instances of pseudophotographs in our corpus fall under the broadly related categories of informative or explanatory functions, including the more sophisticated effects of foreshadowing. An obvious example appears in Yvonne Coppard's *The School From Hell: Here for a Year? Forget it!*, which

features a pseudophotograph on the book cover, presumably of the main character in school uniform that is fitting to the title and the theme of the book. The German graphic novel *17. Juni* incorporates a black-and-white pseudophotograph of a couple, Eva and Armin, on the book cover (figure 5).

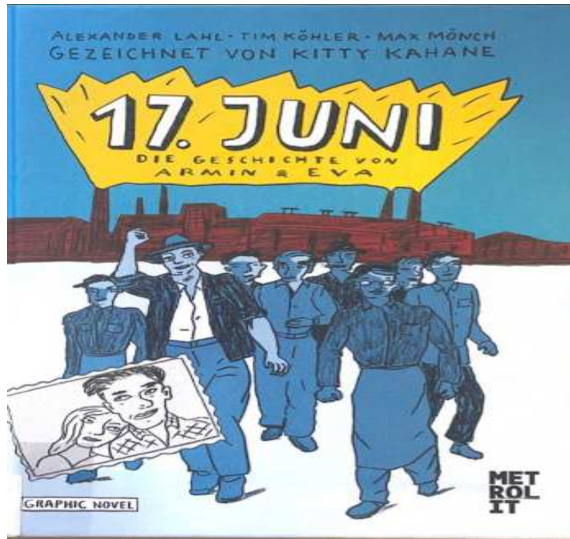


Illustration by Kitty Kahane, *17. Juni*, 2013.

The graphic novel tells the love story of Armin and Eva, separated in the events of June 17, 1953, due to Armin's arrest in Berlin as a protesting steelworker. Eva, his fiancé, attempts to find him by reaching out to a reporter with a photograph of her and Armin. The pseudophotograph illustrated on the cover is the "photograph" of reference for the reporter. The book cover foreshadows the significance of the pseudophotograph within the book's plot in finding Armin. Parergonal pseudophotographs can also reveal information by hinting at the past or the future of the characters in the narrative; this device, which in some cases verges on syllepsis (side-story) is typical of postmodern picturebooks, and allows for rich rereadings where the child might discover that information was revealed early on for episodes that happen later in the story.

Affective Functions 1: Belonging

Preliminary findings from our corpus analysis lead us to identify a number of key functions of pseudophotographs as regards the *affective* purpose of

pseudophotographs. Neither completely focused on character nor on narrative, those affective functions derive from a combination of the photographic nature of pseudophotographs (they are understood to refer to something in the diegetic world) and of their illustrative nature (they are strategically placed within larger illustrations to exchange information with other elements within the doublespread and beyond). Our question here is: what kinds of affect do pseudophotographs most commonly evoke in picturebooks? Are there "affective hotspots" within stories when pseudophotographs are most likely to appear or cluster?

It appears that one of these hotspots concerns a range of affects we might call, broadly, "belonging"—a sense of rootedness, of feeling part of a larger whole. Pseudophotographs are often used in picturebooks that revolve around or problematize belonging, especially (and unsurprisingly) when families are concerned. Family pseudophotographs on the wall are clearly evocative of how much a family loves itself and values its togetherness. In Lorraine Yoong's *Two Sisters, One Sarong*, for instance, two individually-framed pseudophotographs of two sisters hang on the wall of the living room. The incorporation of these pseudophotographs are parergonal. They are decorative but they also act as proof that the sisters belong together, and to the house, and that someone in the home cares enough about them to put their faces on the wall. The visual repetition both of a home-type construction (the tent, and the room) and of the sisters' faces in the "real world" and in the pseudophotographs further heightens the impression of safety, cosiness, and belonging (figure 6).

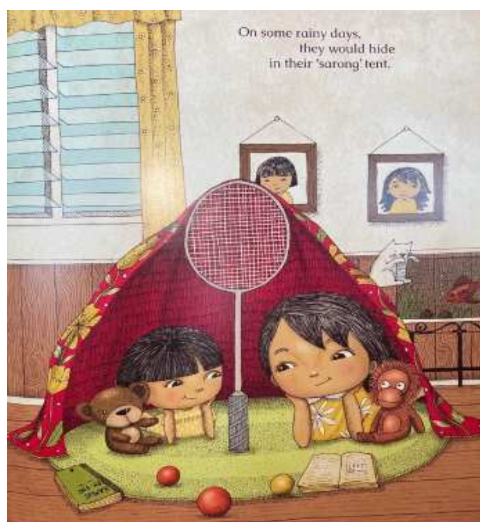


Illustration by Emila Yusof, *Two Sisters, One Sarong*, 2018.

The sense of belonging, warmth, and comfort is eminently bourgeois, in line with the very tradition of family photography.

Affective Functions 2: Longing

The first affective function of pseudophotographs can happen with or without characters being present: the pseudophotographs can stand on their own to convey a sense of belonging, and in this function they are often visible and shown in full. Contrariwise, the second key affective function of pseudophotographs, the evocation of a sense of *longing*, requires the presence of characters; it is activated by the encounter between a character's gaze and a pseudophotograph. Here, the pseudophotograph borrows one of the main properties of its real-world equivalent (direct reference to absent people or places), and tinges it with nostalgia, melancholy, and wish for reunion. These affects are more common, we find, than other possible affects linked to photographs in the real world, such as laughter, tenderness, wonder, etc.; in picturebooks, the use of pseudophotographs very much emphasizes the absence of its models.

Certain visual tropes (or even clichés) often accompany the evocation of longing. A prime example is in illustrations showing a character, seen from the back, looking at a pseudophotograph which may not even be shown in full. This is what happens, for instance, in the illustration from *Bear Shaped*, by Dawn Coulter-Cruttenden (figure 7): the picturebook revolves around a young boy who loses his teddy bear, whose absence is evoked meaningfully by the aforementioned convention.

Illustration by Dawn Coulter-Cruttenden, *Bear Shaped*, 2020.

A far more sophisticated example is Shaun Tan's wordless graphic novel *The Arrival*, which follows a man who is forced to leave his family and home to seek opportunities in a foreign land. The story follows the protagonist's immigration and the problems he faces: the language barrier, adjusting to new culture, seeking employment, and his separation from family and homesickness. Along the way, he meets and is helped by strangers, each with their own history. Ever-present in the story is the memory of his family, who are shown in a pseudophotograph (figure 8).

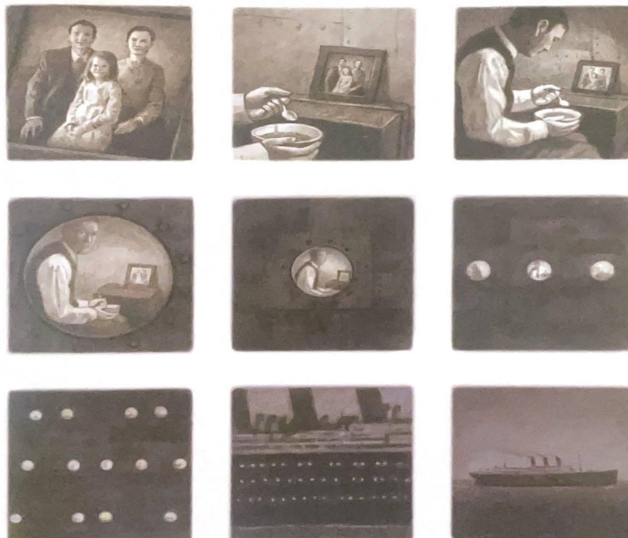


Illustration by Shaun Tan, *The Arrival*, [2006] 2007.

In this masterful spread, visual play on framing, sizing, and zooming exacerbates the complex process of longing for absent people who are portrayed on a photograph. In the first panel, the image could almost be mistaken for "reality," as the tell-tale frame of the pseudophotograph almost merges with the border of the panel. Here, the pseudophotograph is a prime example of an affective sense of belonging. But quickly, as the picture zooms out, the man's solitude appears, symbolically emphasized by his eating dinner on his lap, a poignantly un-familial practice. As he does so, his distance from the pseudophotograph increases, to the extent that the image is no longer even clear. He himself then becomes enframed into the round window of the ship—but there is no mistaking this fourth panel for a pseudophotograph. It is closer in spirit to a fish-eye lens on a door, giving us stealthy access to his isolation. The final, vertiginous backward zoom hints at a hundred more stories of isolation, a hundred more men staring at family photographs, perhaps, as they eat their solitary dinner, united in their longing for home.

The pseudophotograph reappears in the story as a proxy for a feeling of longing, using, for instance, the graphic cliché of a character looking at a picture in an intimate sphere by holding it in his hands (figure 9).

Illustration by Shaun Tan, *The Arrival*, [2006] 2007.

Note that we do not even need to see the character's face, nor even the pseudophotograph itself, to understand that the character is longing for home; the posture and situation, combined with what we know of photography in general (it evokes absent people and places) are enough to trigger that particular affective function. The panels above the large picture, which show a creature feeding its babies, add yet more poignancy through contrast.

Incidentally, Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* is also notable for the fact that the entire book is in sepia tones, which is typical of old photographs and exclusive to that medium. The borrowing of that colouring for the entire picturebook hints at the complex entanglement of photography and illustration within contemporary picturebooks, and at the ongoing reflection by picturebook artists about cross-fertilization between the respective visual identities of the two media.

Having thus explored some of the key functions of pseudophotographs in picturebooks, we end this article with a discussion of what happens when pseudophotographs do *not* behave like real photographs. As we shall see, transgressions by pseudophotographs of the norms of photography can further enhance our understanding of that graphic object and what it tells us (and children, especially) about photography in general.

Pseudophotographs and the "Treachery of Images"

There is a category of pseudophotographs, appearing especially in the more postmodern picturebooks of our corpus, which maintain ambiguity regarding the nature of a picture. For instance, in the surrealistic image by Amalia Restrepo (figure 10), is this a painting on the wall, or a framed photograph?

Illustration by Amalia Restrepo, *Las Visiones Fantásticas*, 2017.

The text states it is a photograph, but the equivocal nature of the image is reinforced by intervisual knowledge of René Magritte, especially with the floating window, the masked eyes, and the motif of the cage and the flown bird. Magritte is well-known for his constant playing with questions of referentiality, and the difficulty to decide whether this is to be read as a pseudopainting or a pseudophotograph brings to mind Magritte's "Treachery of Images" (1929)—and his work in general, a veritable catalogue of disconnections between signifieds and signifiers.

But in fact, what the illustration above merely exacerbates, or renders visible, is a property of *any* pseudophotograph. Pseudophotographs are indeed in a fundamental way a transgression on the usual rules of referentiality, with strong consequences on literary understanding and literary education. If "this is not a pipe," as the famous painting goes, then a photograph of a pipe is not a pipe either; however, we assume that a real pipe exists which was captured on camera, whereas a painting of a pipe could be made even if all real pipes in the world had disappeared. Similarly, a pseudophotograph does not require a real-life model, and yet we have no difficulty accepting that it is referential of "something real" when we read a pseudophotograph as such. A pseudophotograph is therefore an excellent example of what Jean Baudrillard calls a third-order simulacrum: a copy with no original, but that still manages to pass, within specific contexts, as being a

copy of something. Understanding that muddled referentiality is difficult, especially for a novice reader like a child, despite its inconspicuousness we must recognize the pseudophotograph as a complex object in visual literacy and in literary education. Repeated encounters with pseudophotography, both normative and transgressive, encourage reflection on the reliability of photography in itself. In its normal manifestations, pseudophotography thinks about photography, and in its transgressive manifestations, problematizes it.

Pseudophotographs in picturebooks also misbehave relative to their real-life equivalents by breaking the frames, literally as well as figuratively. In Alison Jay's *Looking for Yesterday*, a boy who desperately wishes to go back in time seeks his grandfather's help. They revisit some of the grandfather's best memories through his photo album (figure 11).

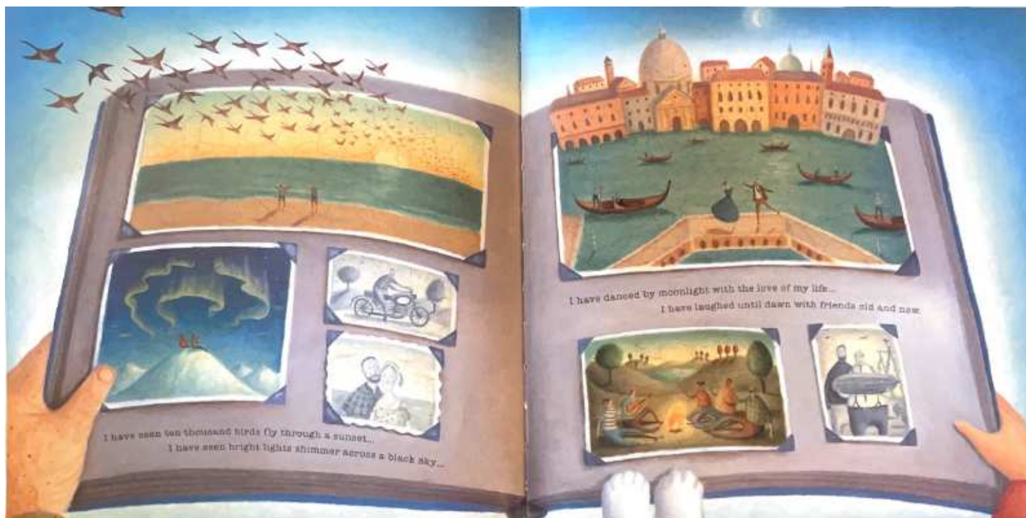


Illustration by Alison Jay, *Looking for Yesterday,* 2017.

The pseudophotographs, which are in all possible colours (sepia, black and white, and full colour) respect almost all the visual conventions we detailed earlier. We can observe trompe-l'oeil materiality, clear borders, and stilted or conventional poses and models. The doublespread with the hands of a child and an adult even suggests a trompe-l'oeil resemblance with the reading situation of any picturebook, giving the impression that one is staring directly into the photo album in subjective camera. But the reader's attention is drawn to the top two pseudophotographs, where Venetian palazzi and a flight of wild geese emerge off the photo album's page into a moonlit sky. The symbolic connotation here is obvious: memories are

"brought to life" by one's contact with them through photography. The pseudophotograph amplifies that affective property available to real photographs by making it visually explicit. As a graphic object, the pseudophotograph is thus able simultaneously to comment on and represent photography's power to memorialize and evoke the past.

The example above could be dismissively characterized as mawkishly sentimental, or even kitsch, and its symbolism unsubtle. But it is worth remembering that those picturebooks address very young children who have very few points of reference with their own (brief) personal history, and almost no understanding of the temporal depth that an adult life involves. By explicitly "bringing to life" a pseudophotograph, picturebooks like *Looking for Yesterday* teach children about the value of photography in the real world as an awakener of memories. We may debate the legitimacy of that function of photography, but it is doubtlessly reinforced, again and again, by pseudophotographs in children's picturebooks.

Those visually transgressive examples of pseudophotography clarify the complex links between that graphic object and its real-world equivalent. Their rupture with the conventional trompe-l'oeil approach allows pseudophotography to explain its connection, on a more symbolic and analytical level, with its model (real photography). They are moments of questioning, of theorizing, moments when traditional orders of referentiality are suspended, and as such they offer child readers a space to begin to recognize the referential and affective nature of photography in general.

Pseudophotographs do not go without *seeing*, but they have remained invisible to theory for too long. In this exploratory article, we have attempted to show some of their key characteristics, both visual and functional. As we have explained, pseudophotographs enjoy an ambiguous relationship with their real-world equivalents. They are overwhelmingly "old-fashioned," with few examples of digital photography and many examples of black and white or sepia tones. Pseudophotographs strive to render some of the material features of real photographs; like real photographs, they retain a strong referential function, and are assumed to represent something in the diegetic world. Unlike real photographs, pseudophotographs are just one intentional segment of an intentional

whole: they therefore fulfil many functions in the larger picturebook, be they decorative, narrative, or affective.

Pseudophotographs are by nature a commentary on photography, even in the most banal cases, and it is clear to us that they are a major entry-point for children into perceptions of the art of photography, of what a typical photograph looks like, of what photographs should evoke, and more. To understand that a picture in a picturebook is a pseudophotograph rather than a vignette one must be aware of some photographic conventions; and, as we have argued, repeated encounters with pseudophotographs may reinforce specific attitudes towards photography in general. For instance, the fact that pseudophotographs appear to be strongly associated with bittersweet affects, such as longing and belonging, is not neutral. It cultivates an attitude towards photography as a privileged medium for accessing those feelings in relation to one's family or to one's past. The fact that pseudophotographs are overwhelmingly physical in children's picturebooks, unlike the photographs in most children's real lives, implies that the "legitimate" way of access to those affects remains printed photography.

There are many avenues for further research that we have not even touched upon. Political and social critique of pseudophotography is one: pseudophotographs are often old-fashioned and bourgeois in aesthetic, in posing, and in activities depicted; but we did not have the space to delve into ideological analysis here. Subgenres of pseudophotography-heavy books, such as non-fiction picturebooks about photography itself, or activity books about genealogy, are worth investigating separately. Finally, empirical research with children and teenagers to assess the ways in which pseudophotography is understood by its target readership would doubtlessly tell us more about the ways this strange graphic object informs their perceptions of photography in the real world.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICES

Alya Farzana Shamshul Ariffin is a PhD researcher in Children's Literature at the Department of Education, University of York (UK). She has worked as a lecturer at the Sultan Idris Education University Malaysia and is funded by the university and the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia for her PhD studies. She holds an MRes in Children's Literature from the University of Reading, England. Her academic interests include photographs and pseudophotographs in children's literature, picturebooks, and Malaysian Literature in English among many others.

Clémentine Beauvais is an Associate Professor in Children's Literature at the University of York (UK). Her research interests span the theory of children's literature, practices of translation with children and teenagers, and the cultural sociology of childhood. Her most recent work includes a special issue of *Children's Literature in Education* on the aesthetics of baby books. She is also a children's author and translator.

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[1] The term "pseudophotograph" has been occasionally used in legal studies to define doctored or artificial photographs; but the term remains claimable, it seems to us, by our field.

[2] Various formulations of "the willing suspension of disbelief" date back to antiquity, but it is most influentially articulated for modern readers and literary critics in Samuel Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817).

[3] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, 2nd ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982), 67.

[4] Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, eds., *Photographs, Objects, Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 1.

[5] Jane Doonan, *Looking at Pictures in Picture Books* (Stroud: Thimble, 1993), 32.

[6] Vivienne Smith, "Making and Breaking Frames: Crossing the Borders of Expectations in Picturebooks," in *Talking Beyond the Page: Reading and Responding to Picturebooks*, ed. Janet Evans (London: Routledge, 2009), 81.

[7] Paul Duro, "What is a Parergon?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 77, no. 1 (2019): 23–9.

[8] Roland Barthes, "L'effet de reel," *Communications* 11, no. 1 (1968): 141.

[9] See Maria Nikolajeva, *Reading for Learning* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2014).

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