‘The Poetic’ as visual rhetoric in book design

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2021

Chong, Y. C. (2021). ‘The Poetic’ as visual rhetoric in book design. Master's thesis, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. <https://hdl.handle.net/10356/153423>

<https://hdl.handle.net/10356/153423>

<https://doi.org/10.32657/10356/153423>

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‘THE POETIC’ AS VISUAL RHETORIC IN BOOK DESIGN

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SCHOOL OF ART DESIGN & MEDIA

2021

‘THE POETIC’ AS VISUAL RHETORIC IN BOOK DESIGN

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SCHOOL OF ART DESIGN & MEDIA

A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University
in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts (Research)

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Abstraction	In this research, it refers to visual abstractions, where design elements are kept to the bare essence to reduce distractions and bringing focus to the main subject.
Ambiguity	A poetic device that enables an alternate reading of more than one meaning relating to a subject, to create space for imagination in the reader.
Analogy	The poetic device of Analogy is interpreted in visual form as <i>abstract impressions</i> (a design feature described in section 5.0).
Artefact	<p>In relation to poetic, it refers to a “thing created” or “reproduced”. To “transform” or “give new qualities to” an existing notion, and furthermore, its “preservation” by forming connections (“forge links”) between fragments from different time and space (Greene et al. 2012).</p> <p>In the context of this research, it refers to book artefacts created by designers.</p>
Poetic language	It refers to poetic devices gleaned from figures of speech. Its use is extended in non-linguistic forms of “pictorial expression” to communicate or enable the “picturing of scenes in the reader’s mind” (Benjamin 2012) and recreate a desired poetic effect through the design artefact.
Resonance	It pertains to a design artefact’s ability to elicit an emotional response and an evocation of mental images and memories, for a formation of perceived meanings and personal significance in the reader towards the subject depicted. (Kelly 2014)
Self-reflexivity	A process of “self-transformation” through “introspection” (Popoveniuc 2014) on the subject matter in relation to oneself and practice.
Poetic effect	In general terms, “effect” refers to “a result generated from an action or event”. In this case, it occurs upon the action of reading a book (artefact) with poetic qualities (lyrical mood), that triggers a deepened sentiment towards the depicted subject.
Poetic properties	<p>It includes devices borrowed from the poetic language and synthesized from literature review. (See fig.7b)</p> <p>The properties include: 1) devices: ambiguity, analogy; 2) effects (see above for descriptions): Evocation; resonance, self-reflexivity.</p> <p>Its usage is tagged to and relative to ‘the Poetic’ in this research.</p>
Poetic qualities	It refers to design representations and visuals attributes, that creates a lyrical mood around the artefact.

‘The Poetic’

It constitutes the act of creating an artefact poetically and inheriting an evocative quality imbued on it through the creation process.

Visual rhetoric

This research identifies with the notion of visual rhetoric as a communication space, where narratives gain its meaning and persuade readers through visuals.

It also refers to a perspective of study (Foss 2005) in visual images and artefacts, of how humans “uses symbols to communicate with one another”. (Sonja Foss, Karen Foss, and Robert Trapp)

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I would like to express gratitude to my supervisor Associate Prof Cindy Wang I-Hsuan, for her guidance, patience, and continuous support for me during the years, even before I embark on this academic journey. She has been a firm believer of my creative practice.

To the examiners on my qualifying examination panel and final thesis reviews, for their genuine interest in my research topic and the highly perceptive responses, which has helped immensely in guiding and refining my writing.

To Regina De Rozario and Seah Sze Yunn for the generous sharing of knowledge and insightful feedback on my research. I managed to arrive at important perspectives in this thesis, as the result of our sessions of critical discussions.

To my husband, Lex Tan for believing and supporting me in every endeavour I have taken on. To my family and friends, for their encouragements.

Lastly, my sincere appreciations to all who have supported me in any forms during my research.

Abstract

This dissertation aims to examine poetic expressions in design artefacts¹ as a phenomenon that exists in contemporary design. The objectives for this research are shaped by a perceived lack of analysis into what constitutes *poetic-ness* within the area of contemporary book design.

In this research, ‘the Poetic’² is a framing device that serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it expands the adjective *poetic* by tapping into its evocative effects and transformative qualities. It refers to a category of design artefact that evokes emotional resonance and self-reflexivity. Secondly, ‘the Poetic’ is a proposition drawn from the study of visual rhetoric in design artefacts. It involves analysing, identifying, distilling characteristics of *poetic-ness* and translating into a working model for design thinking to recreate poetic effects in book design.

Could ‘the Poetic’ operate as a form of visual rhetoric and create new perspectives in book design? How might it enable design possibilities and create unique experiences when integrated as visual rhetoric?

The study takes the form of visual research³, which begins with an investigation on selected book artefacts created by contemporary graphic designers like Irma Boom, Richard Nieesen and Xiaoxiang Liu. The case studies identified design strategies adopted and elucidate factors that constitute the poetic attributes in this category of work. A book prototype facilitates the demonstration of ‘the Poetic’ as visual rhetoric in book design.

¹ Artefact as defined in the Oxford English Dictionary: “An object made or modified by human workmanship, as opposed to one formed by natural processes.”

² ‘The Poetic’ in upper case ‘P’ and single inverted commas, denotes ‘**the Poetic**’ as a differentiator from its language form of an *adjective*; *poetic*, without the inverted commas.

³ Follows the methodology in “Visual Research: An Introduction to Research Methods in Graphic Design” by Ian Noble and Russel Bestley, 2016.

Preface

The topic of *poetic* has been a recurrent theme and area of interest in my creative practice. My fascination with books and design have always revolved around themes that are related to poetry and poetic-ness. I admire the subtlety in expressions, but at the same time, the intensity it brings as waves of emotional resonance. Progressively, my design interest has gravitated towards the creation of such artefacts and particularly in books.

I have come across many books that were exquisitely executed and excelled in concepts and design, but the ones that truly stood out for me from the rest and forged a stronger connection than others were fewer. It brought up some questions: How do some books manage to form a more profound emotional connection with the reader than the rest, despite all being equally well-designed? Why are these books so special and unique? What is the design and thought processes that went into the creation of these *poetic* artefacts? As the topic is highly abstract, I only had a vague idea of what it might be at the beginning of the study. There may also be diverse versions of poetic-ness that appeals and resonate in different ways with every person. Therefore, I felt that it would be best, to begin with uncovering my version of poetic-ness and investigate the process for recreating this category of books from my practice. I must first gain a foundational understanding of the subject before the area of investigation can be expanded externally.

In my opinion, the process of creating works with poetic qualities often requires deep thinking and exploring layers of meanings that surround an identified subject. It involves contemplating the various contextual relationships between the subject matter and approaches in creating an immersive (and poetic) experience for the audience (or reader). The mood and atmosphere are critical aspects to creating a poetic experience in this category of work and are directed towards engaging the readers' emotions which includes an association of personal values with the design artefact. To me, this is a particularly self-reflexive process.

As a designer in practice, the focus would usually be on communicating the concept and creating the desired design experience. On the other hand, a researcher investigates a topic (define, scope, etc.) and the process involved to arrive at the envisioned outcome. Therefore, a researcher would commonly be perceived to assume the role of an audience, while the designer is a creator. But at certain junctures, the two lenses tend to overlap, and the dual-lenses of a designer-researcher is required to fulfil the varying needs at different stages. These activities require different kinds of thinking processes and brain functions. Therefore, the research is highly relevant as there is much more to be discovered, as it is something I have been practising but had no name for — 'the Poetic'.

1.0 Introduction

The core purpose of books has remained unchanged since antiquity, but its forms and functions have evolved beyond the communication of information. Printing technology has become more accessible to the mass since the onset of the 20th century. This advancement has helped propel the emergence of independent creatives and contributed to growth in artistic appreciation towards book design (吕敬人 2017, 128-141).

Book design is an area within the process of graphic design and has accompanied art movements in history, while the roles of designers shifted along with its evolution. As visual communication progressed in the latter part of the century, communicative aspects of visuals became recognized, the focus of design started to shift. It moved from the book cover and binding to encompass the visual language of the entire book from planning, formats, layout, materials to coordinating its production. With the popularization of desktop publishing, it became easier to self-publish. The role of the designer has again expanded to cover a broader and more varied scope. Self-publishing by independent ‘author-creators’ has become a common practice in recent decades (Triggs 2009). This move has enabled more design freedom for exploration and experimentation with a range of themes and approaches.

Following the changing landscape in the industry, designers began to take on the role of a ‘co-creator’, where the book had taken centre-stage on different instances. An iconic example is the Chanel No.5 book designed by Irma Boom. A perfume is a sensory object which it is often subjected to personal preferences. However, the visual rhetoric and design choice of a fitting material conveyed the abstract concepts through a blind embossed white book. Its thickness gave an impression of heft, yet the choice of paper created a surprisingly light book when held in hand. In essence, it became an embodiment of the perfume by engaging the reader’s senses and stimulating imaginations. Designers have increasingly adopted varied approaches to frame the narratives and engage readers in diverse ways.

This thesis proposed that ‘the Poetic’ could enable design possibilities through visual rhetoric. It is situated within the visual communications perspective and investigates the physical book as a design artefact. An empirical study of artefacts is vital in substantiating the reading experience and in which visual rhetoric functions between images and text in book design. Henceforth, the visual research was carried out on case studies of selected books by various contemporary designers. The analysis was conducted primarily from a researcher’s point of view but involved the lens of a creator during certain phases, which required a different thinking process.

In this research, ‘the Poetic’⁴ serves a dual purpose: Firstly, it is expanded from its adjective *poetic*, with properties of a descriptor. It borrows several devices from the poetic language, by tapping into its evocative and transformative qualities, and its effects on design artefacts. Secondly, as a proposition that is drawn from the study of visual rhetoric in design⁵ artefacts. In the context of this research, design artefacts refer to contemporary book design. Traditionally, visual rhetoric has been defined as a communication space, where narratives gain their meaning and persuade readers through visuals. The study was done through analysing, identifying, distilling notions, and synthesizing characteristics of *poetic-ness* and adapting as a working model for design thinking to recreate poetic effects in book artefacts. How would the books case studies demonstrate the application of visual rhetoric to communicate the designer’s intended meanings? Could the findings be synthesized and adapted to create an alternate perspective in book design?

Books are intriguing mediums to investigate ‘the Poetic’ as a design process due to their open-ended nature and adaptability for different usage. It is also a fitting artefact to examine the process of imbuing poetic effects onto a design artefact to recreate a poetic experience. “Effect” in general terms refers to “a result generated from an action or event”. In this case, poetic effects occur upon the action of reading a book (artefact) with poetic qualities (lyrical mood) that trigger a deepened sentiment towards the depicted subject.

Andrew Haslam proposed a version of the definition for books as “A portable container consisting of a series of printed and bound pages that preserves, announces, expounds, and transmits knowledge to a literate readership across time and space.” (Haslam 2006, 9) The idea of time-space and book is a thought stimulating idea that motivated the case studies investigation, which led to the eventual creation of a book prototype. It was made to explore the interaction between time, space, and people. The concept was partly inspired by Japanese designer Kohei Sugiura’s notion of “Space and time are folded into multiple layers, creating a universe in the shape of a book”. Sugiura demonstrated the concept through his prominent work, *summa cosmographica*, 1986, which he described as “the entire cosmos of heavenly bodies and constellations” are “wrapped” within pages of the black book. (Rajguru and Suga 2017)

How then, would narratives be folded into the book during its creation and unfolded through its reading (experience), from a designer’s interpretation? According to Sugiura, a single piece of paper has the potential to take on multitudes of forms. Through its folding, and binding, the contrast of size and

⁴ ‘The Poetic’ in upper case ‘P’ and single inverted commas, denotes ‘**the Poetic**’ as a differentiator from its language form of an *adjective*, *poetic*, without the inverted commas.

⁵ **Design** in this thesis refers to graphic design, a process in visual communications.

typographical presentations constructs narratives between pages. The narrativity of the book medium is experienced through its 4-dimensional space. Akin to the book signatures bounded by a thread, the analogy can be applied to the narrativity of the book medium through the arrangement of text and images. When the book is opened, the storyline connected by text and visuals is unfolded through the line of reading. The gesture of flipping unveils different dimensions of time and space, overlapped onto the pages. (杉浦康平 2013, 123-127) A book can be viewed as 4-dimensional and a transition space between dimensions. This concept is inferred and reinterpreted as *navigating narratives* in the prototype. In the context of this research, *Navigating Narratives* denotes the guiding of readers through narratives with visual cues in design artefacts. Continuing the thought trajectory, a book should not be perceived as an object that is devoid of life and stationery within a certain solidified time, but as an element that is full of life and aptitude to construct and direct the surrounding environment.⁶ (Lü, 2017, p.178) Therefore, by incorporating appropriate visual rhetoric in its design, the reader's experience and perceptions towards a subject can be transformed.

In the process, how could the effective use of visual rhetoric create a poetic effect and bring about an embodied experience of space in the book?

A selection of book artefacts was examined as case studies, to analyse visual rhetoric approaches adopted by contemporary designers like Irma Boom, Xiaoxiang Liu and Richard Niessen. The case studies visual analysis will also elucidate what constitutes the poetic attributes in this category of work. In the following chapters, the design research investigates answers to the array of questions surrounding 'the Poetic' and the potentialities it may bring to the study of visual rhetoric in book design.

1.1 Significance of Research

This research identified a perceived lack of analysis into what constitutes *poetic* design artefacts. There were several studies from various disciplines relevant to the topic of the poetic in design and has been examined from a range of design disciplines like product, interactive, etc. (Ionascu 2010) (Lin, Chang, and Liang 2011) (Lin et al. 2014). However, there seems to need a perspective from the visual communication. In terms of approach, the existing studies (Ionascu 2010) (Lin, Chang, and Liang 2011) highlighted were generally framed in the researcher to end-user perspective, that evaluated the end-users experience with the poetic object. Apart from the user experience, this research propositioned the equal importance to approaching the subject from the designer's frame and communication space. Hence, the research direction emphasized the designer's lens, functioning on the dual role of creator and

⁶ Original quote in Chinese, from Tao of Book Design, p178: "一本书不是停滞在某一凝固时间的静止的生命，而应该是构造和指引周围环境有生气的元素"。

user. It is a rational approach as the designer is usually the *first user* of the work before handing it to another person. Additionally, discussions from this perspective are fewer than the former approach, with potentials for a more in-depth study. It aims to address the gap, expand on the existing studies, and contribute a new perspective to the discipline as a piece of knowledge, that has the potentials to be built on by fellow researchers and further development in future studies.

1.2 Research Questions

The research sets out to understand the phenomena and demystify what is ‘the Poetic’, in contemporary design. Furthermore, how it could contribute towards enabling new possibilities in book design. The investigation sets out with the following research questions:

1. **What is ‘the Poetic’?** [Refer to Section 2.0]
2. **What makes a book a poetic object?** [Refer to Section 4.0]
3. **What are some characteristics or features that might have contributed to the poetic effects and an embodied experience with a design artefact?** [Refer to Section 4.3]
4. **Could the ‘the Poetic’ operate as a form of visual rhetoric and create new perspectives in book design?** [Refer to Section 5.0]

1.3 Research Objectives

The research will investigate poetic expressions in design artefacts as a phenomenon that exists within contemporary design. The study attempts to uncover insights on what constitutes poetic-ness in this research. Furthermore, it examines how ‘the Poetic’ could operate as a form of visual rhetoric through the study of selected book artefacts by ‘unveiling’ the “invisible” workings of ‘the Poetic’ with the “visible” workings of visual rhetoric. A set of ‘the Poetic’ concepts and design features could then be derived and demonstrated through a research archetype in the form of a book prototype. This research looks towards contributing a new perspective of book design, through the research outcome and open further possibilities in design communication artefacts.

1.4 Summary

This chapter introduced the motivation for the research and the site of investigation. It sets out to uncover characteristics and design features that might have contributed to a poetic effect in design artefacts. How will these findings be synthesized and incorporated as a discourse in visual communication? This research defines ‘the Poetic’ as a proposition for design thinking in visual communication and operates as a form of visual rhetoric to enable possibilities in graphic design. The role of the designer and medium of book design is foregrounded, as the site of investigation. Whereby the study will be approached from the frame of the researcher as both the creator and user. Through the

dual-lens of a researcher-designer, towards the presentation of an alternate perspective from the designer's workspace and experience, that is distinctive from the approaches undertaken in the existing studies.

2.0 Literature Review

This research took on a pragmatic paradigm (Goldkuhl 2012, 2011), which incorporated the interpretive perspectives of a visual research. It acknowledges and builds upon the knowledge from existing studies relevant to the notion of *poetic* within various fields of design (Product design, interaction design, etc). Furthermore, investigate how this knowledge could be adjusted for a study in visual communication and integrated as a thinking model for designing visual communication artefacts. Every field within the design discipline varies in nature, the application of similar knowledge may pose a certain degree of differences. For example, a product designer may ponder about poetic in relative to the forms of the object and its handling. An architect could be concerned about the experience of poetic atmosphere in space. While an interaction designer may be interested in how different users would interact with each other through a poetic object. Hence, the subject of poetic-ness can generate a range of perspectives based on the type of studies.

Nonetheless, the inquiry into the phenomenon began with a research question, *what is poetic?*

2.1 'The Poetic'

This chapter reviews several key ideas surrounding poetic and aims to distil what constitutes poetic-ness, and its role in this research, which will be further deliberated in the subsequent sections that follow.

The *poetic* has its roots in poetry and could be traced back to the Greek word *Poiesis*, which generally relates to "making" or "creative production" (Preminger, Warnke, and Hardison 1974, 130) Whitehead (2003) provided a further explanation of the term from the Greek sense, "Poiesis was conceived as bringing something from concealment into the full light and radiation of a created work" and "to produce into presence". He suggested, "notion of the poietic act, something which has the potential to reinvigorate the artist's creative energies in and for our times." This sense of "transforming potentials" could be found in the openness of the material, through engaging the "raw materials of imagination (ideas, concepts, schemata)" (Whitehead 2003). In essence, the act of creation brings about something unknown to light. A process that constantly inspires the creator to participate in a renewal of creative thinking, to brings about new possibilities. It employs the imagination of both the creator and viewer, in the exploration of various design expressions.

Inferring Whitehead (2003), *poetic* can operate both as a descriptor (adjective) for a category of artefacts and a creative process (making). This research proposes a dual-purpose for the term, as ‘the Poetic’, in upper case ‘P’ and single inverted commas, to facilitate the differentiation from its language form of an adjective, *poetic*. In essence, it constitutes the act of creating an artefact poetically and the artefact inheriting evocative qualities imbued on it through the creation process.

As introduced at the beginning of the chapter, some of the fundamental theories and concepts of ‘the Poetic’ shared certain similarities and extend from existing studies. Ionascue (2010) acknowledged the derivation of the term in her research, from the domain of language: “... this text approximates the term with its literary form, where poetry uses particular forms or conventions to suggest alternative meanings in the words, to evoke emotional or sensual responses. Moreover, in literature, the use of ambiguity, symbolism, irony, and other stylistic elements of poetic expression leave poems opened to multiple interpretations.” (p.9) However, there was no direct reference or elaboration to the literary devices behind the “stylistic elements of poetic expression”. Regarding language, these “stylistic elements” could be understood as *figures of speech*, which operates as meaning-making devices.

Ionascue (2010) referred to Design poetics as “an ‘Open-ended’ process of design thinking” (p.54) and argued that “... ‘open-ended’ objects, *poetic forms* of design *transform* users, provoking them to act in different capacities, offering them roles and scenarios for alternative practices of living.” (p.130) Furthermore, she contended that the form of an object could influence or transform the way it is handled by the user. (p.42). In other words, the poetic experience of the user could be altered by the poetic form of the artefact. Through evoking an emotional response and reflective contemplation in the process, the relationship between user-context-object is recreated. (p.131)

These “*open-ended*” work open possibilities of multiple interpretations. Regarding psychology, it could be related to the theory of Gestalt, which is the mind’s ability to see an incomplete image as a whole, dependent on the reader’s personal experience and cultural frame of reference.⁷ In the field of Poetic Interaction Design, Yi-Chu Lin’s (2011) proposed that “The poetic image could be created by leaving blanks in the design expression and be delivered via users’ reflection and imagination” In other words, the poetic experience is completed upon the input of the user’s interpretation within an “incomplete expression”. (Lin, Chang, and Liang 2011) This notion of “incomplete expression” can be translated to stylistic **Abstractions** in visual materials; where design elements are kept to the bare essence to reduce distractions and bring focus to the main subject. (refer to Section 5.0)

⁷ Paraphrased from the **Oxford English Reference**, ‘Gestalt’ “originates with Gestalt psychology developed by Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka, and Wolfgang Köhler...”, in simplified terms refers to how we see parts of an image and the brain fills in the gaps to form the full visual. (Buchanan 2010)

Yu Ju Lin (2014) propositioned that “poetic feelings emphasized recalling the interlaced feelings generated from poetry” and designers convert such feelings from their experience with scenes or images, interpreted and expressed in the form of poetic design. The creative work has also been referred to as “vessels for expressing emotions” and as a stimulus to trigger emotional resonance in the user towards the design object. (Lin et al. 2014) In other words, poetic feelings can be understood as mood or atmosphere that surrounds a poetic work and emotions generated from the encounter — the **Evocation**⁸ of emotive response, to “draw upon images, memories or feelings to mind”.

Despite several overlapped concepts within existing studies, this research took a different approach on the subject. The existing studies discussed earlier, have investigated the end-user experience and behaviour with poetic design. Therefore, it is essential to look back at the creation process and examine the role that ‘the Poetic’ plays, in the making of such design artefacts. ‘The Poetic’ in this research is focused on books as space of creation and examined the poetic experience with the artefact, from the lens of the designer. It takes the stand that a poetic experience is conceived first in the graphic designer’s thinking space, where the first point of transformation takes place, from conceptual to its materialization.

According to Maritain, “...poetic experience is necessarily formative or operative... embodied in subjectivity itself and therefore as impossible to express in a concept... it can emerge only in a work externally produced.” (Maritain 1944, 394) The study follows this notion and is thus scoped around the investigation of *poetic* design artefacts and their creation but will not extend into the evaluation of the end-user experience. Despite the notion that design experience is inherent in visual communication, the decision should not be misinterpreted as an act of disregarding the end user’s perspective. Instead, the decision has been carefully contemplated, to streamline the scope towards a more directed research trajectory and to avoid a possible dilution of focus.

The subject of *poetic* relevance to the design discipline has been studied by several scholars, within their respective fields. Each of them has defined a version of *poetic design* and adopted different research approaches.

⁸ Based on the **Oxford English Dictionary**, to ‘evoke’: “To call (a feeling, faculty, manifestation, etc.) into being or activity. Also, To call up (a memory) from the past.” From the **Oxford English Reference**, ‘Evocative’ indicates “bringing strong images, memories, or feelings to mind. (Stevenson 2010)

Ionascue (2010) defined poetic design as a user-led process and reinvestigated the relationship between user-object. Through a “reflective and exploratory” approach by testing and observing participants’ experience and behaviour in a domestic setting where they “performed” the use of a collection of experimental objects (utensils prototype) made to work in unconventional ways. The objective was to trigger user’s reflection and change perception of everyday objects through its “use”. She concluded that poetic design does not only bring about unique experiences but transforms user perception and the way these objects were handled. Ionascue referred to her approach as reflective, but the notion of transformation and contemplation implied a likeness to characteristics of *reflexivity*. Is it possible to shift the lens from reflective into a reflexive perspective, by examining the designer’s creative process? Furthermore, to understand how ‘the Poetic’ functions from a **Self-Reflexive** (Popoveniuc 2014) position, as a designer and researcher in this research.

Popoveniuc (2014) referred to reflexivity as “a process and stance, an activity and result altogether”. The design process is a “non-linear” iterative process that is “evolutive and non-static”. For design research, the knowledge “has to be constructed by the very act of its ongoing process”. Moreover, self-reflexivity is a process of “self-transformation” that could reshape our understanding of the world. Designers often posit themselves in the contemplation of representing a subject within a specific context, to the world. A design could change user’s perceptions of the subject depicted. At the same time, the creative process, and the work itself can also transform the designer. It could be a process that many graphic designers have been practicing, knowingly or unknowingly. Therefore, situating self-reflexivity in this research within the designer’s creative space instead of end-users’ participation.

Yi-Chu Lin (2011) created a prototype to test users experience based on the Action Research Method, an iterative process that involves designers in workshops to develop design principles of Poetic Interactions. After the data collection of user inputs on their poetic experiences, it was followed by a further quantitative assessment to avoid any inaccuracies and reservations in the participants' responses (Lin, Chang, and Liang 2011).

In the instances of Ionascue (poetic design / everyday objects) and Yi-Chu Lin (Poetic interaction); evaluation of the user experience with the poetic design were both set in the researchers' stance on poetic encounters as events that often happens in the ordinary. Both studies are in the context of the everyday objects within the day-to-day practices in domestic environments.

Similarly, Yu-Ju Lin (2014) suggested a transference of the designer’s own poetic experience and vision onto a poetic design artefact. She described the concept through the example of Ripple Lamp, which gives the impression of “sparkling waves of oceans and ponds” where light and shadows generated by the water surface, was translated onto the lamp design to recreate the poetic experience.

The research proposed a “Poetic Design Architecture”, to illustrate the process whereby a design work could generate poetic significance and bring about feelings of “living unique experiences” in users. She refers to this process as the effective use of an “objective” commonly recognizable image to generate a “subjective” response in the user (Lin et al. 2014, 20-21). It suggested a similarity to the formation of signs in semiotics. This research inferred the notion of Lin's (2014) “unique experience”, as an event that arose from a user's association with the subject that resulted in an understanding or connection formed. Hence, the experience is “unique” to different individuals, based on the kind and depth of emotional connection established through the interaction.

Based on the studies highlighted above, evaluations of the end-user experiences with the poetic objects have already been well-defined. Therefore, instead of following a similar trajectory of further examining participants experiences, this research aims to investigate the conception of design experience from the designer's perspective. It began with a similar direction as Yu-Ju Lin — to analyze ‘the Poetic’ approaches in design artefacts. Instead of concluding with relevant principles or frameworks derived from the study, a further step would be producing a book prototype to test the new findings.

The key purpose of graphic design (as a process in visual communications) is to communicate to an audience. To facilitate communication, the relationship between the design and content is vital. Communication has its roots in *Rhetoric*, the ancient term from Classical Greek that traditionally means to “persuade”. The overlap between graphic design and rhetoric (both verbal and visual) have been discussed by scholars and generally revolved around advertising and across communications materials as a whole (de Almeida 2009). This research focus on book design aims to contribute a valuable perspective to the discussion. Hence, it is essential to further deliberate on the roles of Visual Rhetoric and ‘the Poetic’ in this study.

2.2 Visual Rhetoric

Visual Rhetoric as defined by Sonja K. Foss (2004), has two meanings. Firstly, it refers to “the visual images themselves — visual communication that constitutes the object of study”; secondly, “a perspective or approach (of study)” (Foss 2004, 304).

Scholars (Blair, 2014; Foss, 2005; Hill, 2004; Finnegan, etc.) on several occasions, have propositioned the rhetorical nature of images and the fundamental similarities both design and language shared. The contemporary perspectives on rhetoric “define rhetoric broadly as the uniquely human ability to use symbols to communicate with one another” (Sonja Foss, Karen Foss, and Robert Trapp) (p.262) Blair (2012) argues that there is more to persuasion than just altering, manipulating, or influencing a person's thinking. The audience owns the decision to accept or deny the “persuasion” if it does not align with

their belief or attitude towards the suggested idea. "The narratives we formulate for ourselves from visual images can easily shape our attitudes." (p.263) Therefore, "all images are polysemous" (Barthes 1977), where its reading is highly dependent on the reader's perception of images presented to them. So far, the notions surrounding *poetic-ness* and *narratives* imply that visual rhetoric can help direct the viewer towards the formation of personal anecdotes through the narrative structure constructed in the design artefact.

Albeit the lack of explicit mention between the poetic language and visual rhetoric, some similarities suggest the possible connection. *Poetic* in both linguistic and non-linguistic forms is referred to a metaphorical system of expression (Benjamin 2012, 90), despite the different modes of expression (words and image). Hence, 'the Poetic' extends from the poetic language in the non-linguistic usage, of a "pictorial expression" to communicate or enable the "picturing of scenes in the reader's mind". However, in design these notions are intertwined, where words in the context of typography it is essentially a visual form, and the design presentation further enhances its communicative aspects. Visual rhetoric is fundamentally rooted in language, with the function of steering the audience towards an intended communicative purpose. To create a poetic effect in a rhetorical argument, both poetic language and visual rhetoric use figures of speech (metaphor, metonymy, personification, etc). As visual rhetoric is the study of how visuals and symbols are used to communicate and persuade an audience, it can affect perceptions of the audience through a visual artefact. (Foss 2005) This aligns with the notion that a poetic object has the aptitude to create alternate meanings and "transforms" the way a user views or interacts with an object. (Ionascu 2010) Hence, suggesting that 'the Poetic' may be able to operate as a form of visual rhetoric.

To "transform" the reader's perceptions, the design artefact's ability to elicit an emotive response and create emotional resonance is key. Above all, the emotions experienced should create a "lasting effect" (Hill 2004, 36) on the audience, to relate to perceived meanings and personal significance in the receiver. In other words, emotional resonance (to "reverberate" in the reader's mind).

Blair acknowledged the evocative power of visual arguments over the written or spoken arguments, and "visuals images can thus be used to convey a narrative in a short time" (Blair 2012, 271). He added that "To be effective, the visual properties of a visual argument must resonate with the audience on the occasion and in the circumstances." (p.272) This immediacy of a visual resonating with the audience is liken to an *impression*, that happens quickly but leaves a mental image that could be recollected. (This notion is translated to visual form and applied in the book prototype as *Abstract impressions*, refer to section 5.2). For instance, the "evocative power" of a visual argument when put into the context of book design, could be expanded into a series of interactions between visual impressions and narratives, that

develops throughout its reading, a “lasting effect” (emotional resonance) on the reader may be achieved from the periodical exposure.

‘The Poetic’ in the context of graphic design, designates that fundamentally it is a conscious process and not merely a play of chance or spontaneous expressions. As “design is never neutral or value-free” (Kelly 2014), design work is always created to take a particular stance, to communicate a specific message or idea through visuals. A designer’s involvement in the creation of an information structure to direct a narrative is an “intervention” driven by an objective in mind. Therefore, ‘the Poetic’ in graphic design, engages the use of visual rhetoric, to gain “an audience’s attachment to the values and beliefs of the argument being presented” (Kelly 2014). Since books have been identified as “the object of study” in the previous section, how does it fit the criteria of a “communicative artefact”?

According to Foss (2004), visual rhetoric is the study of a visual artefact and requires a *medium* between the sender and receiver for communication to take place. Hence, in this research, it was identified to fit the **3 characteristics of a “rhetoric visual object”** (304, 305). **1) Symbolic** (use of signs to suggest and communicate symbolic meanings) — A book is a medium that could embody and communicate symbolic ideas⁹ (Cummings 2013); at the same time symbolic signs are used to convey these ideas through stylistic expressions (design) and its material form. **2) Involve human intervention** — Books are artefacts designed and made by people. **3) Presented to an audience for purpose of communication** — Communication of ideas and information to the intended audience is the core and fundamental purpose of a book. Foss (2005) added, “The creator of an image can serve as that audience; the audience need not be external to the rhetor.” — In this context, the designer who produced the work can also be considered as an audience of their work. Thus, it is sound to suggest that the study of the design artefact can be examined from the perspective of and based on the interpretation of a designer; instead of only from the (end-user) reader’s view. Following these criteria, the book artefact can “qualify” as a “communicative artefact” for the study of visual rhetoric in this research. As the study of visual rhetoric in this research involved the analysis of signs to deconstruct underlying meanings in design artefacts, semiotics analysis and relevant theories would be incorporated under the same umbrella for the discussion but does not conflate the two branches as the same entity.

Books have been identified as suitable sites of investigation in this research, due to a common convergence point between the two; the activity of reading and the poetic experience of an embodied encounter with an artefact both require time. A book engages the reader over a duration of time, and through its reading process, it employs the readers’ imagination in the textual unfolding of narratives.

⁹ Paraphrased from the book’s chapter “The Book as Symbol” by Brian Cummings (2013) in “The Book: A Global History” (Suarez 2013).

The reader reads the book with imagined images or scenes in their mind. Likewise, this is a necessary condition for a poetic effect to take place and engage the user. (Lin, Chang, and Liang 2011) Reading is an embodied encounter, that involves not only the vision and mind (imagination). The experience of reading a book is influenced by its form and the way it is designed to be handled. The proximity between the reader and book could be affected by various factors: for example, its size and weight; whether small and light, easy to be held while standing; or big and weighty, that requires the reader to be seated or placed on the table during its reading. Sensory aspects of thickness, texture, and smell of paper; the visual relationship between images and typography, mood, colour, etc., are all factors that will contribute to the communicative and sensorial experience.

Hence, to build a foundational understanding of ‘the Poetic’, and how it could function as a form of visual rhetoric. It is necessary to conduct a study of selected books, identified with characteristics of a poetic object. Visual rhetoric is a key component of analysis in visual research, as it is essential in bridging understanding between the object of study and meanings behind its creation (Symbol it represents, message it communicates and the function it serves).

The visual research method incorporated Foss’ (2005) proposition of visual rhetoric as a perspective of study “the analysis of visual data in a communication artefact”. (p.141) The theoretical and critical mode of inquiry in this research constituted a rhetorical and design perspective. When incorporating theories from different disciplines, some deviances are bound to exist and is inevitable even amongst scholars from the same discipline. For example, three focus areas of inquiry for visual artefacts (nature, function and evaluation) from a rhetorical scholar’s perspective was listed (Foss 2004, 307-308). About the *function* of artefacts, scholars generally disregard the creator’s intention, which has been argued to be due to the limitations of the researcher’s access to the evidence of intent. Some felt that it would avert influencing or limiting the full experience of the artefact. However, as a design-based study, it is critical to understand the designer’s voice (Bestley and Noble 2016, 190). Foss similarly contended on the singularity of the rhetorical view for a wider understanding in the evaluation of visual materials. It is a necessary consideration, especially for design research aimed at understanding how ‘the Poetic’ operates as a form of visual rhetoric in book design. Henceforth, this research will not be discussing the wide range of scholars’ perspectives on visual rhetoric. Instead, it acknowledges the differences in approach and point of view between both disciplines and adapts as necessary to suit the research needs from a visual communication angle.

Before commencement of the visual research, it is necessary to review the criteria for the case studies selection. Thereafter, a close empirical study of book artefacts would be conducted and derive at a classification of ‘the Poetic’ (table 3). Several key ideas from the qualitative analysis would be translated into design features and applied to the creation of a book prototype. These concepts and

features were subsequently incorporated with the design approach, as illustrated in the conceptual framework (refer to section 4.4).

2.3 Criteria of selection for case studies

The “contenders” for the case studies should fulfil the need to understand how ‘the Poetic’ and visual rhetoric function in book design. Table 1 at the end of this section summarized several critical considerations for the selection. These criteria are informed by key ideas sieved from relevant literature and design philosophies of contemporary designers.

First, **to understand ‘the Poetic’, it is logical to survey the poetic qualities of creative works** based on the mood and atmosphere surrounding them. **These qualities tend to trigger the emotional faculty of readers.** Emotion is an important aspect to achieve resonance (Kelly 2014) and create a poetic experience in the work, as feelings bridge the communication of ideas and bring the reader into the mind of the creator (Parker and De Witt 1946). As Dewitt (1932) suggested, “feeling is a function of ideas” in which the creator finds expression of his personal experience in the work made and the reader finds similar relief in the experience with relevance to oneself. (p.36) Additionally, the expression itself is an action of conveying thoughts and feelings, through a medium¹⁰. Hence, the absence of feelings in design would likely render the work to mere functional or instructional aspects and does not further evoke the imagination of the user beyond its “use”. According to Jacques Maritain (1944), poetic experience is conceived in the creative activity, as a poetic creation is subjective and lies within the mind of the creator, it remains only as thoughts not to be known unless materialized (which Maritain referred to as “object of poetic experience”). He further emphasized, the poetic experience should not be confined to poetry or activity of the poet but includes all kinds of artistic work, as poetic experience could happen in the absence of a poem, but not the other way round. Above all, this poetic experience does not relate to superficial sensations and affective emotions¹¹, but at a deeper level in the unity of “imagination”, “intellect” and “intuitive emotions”¹² (Maritain 1944). These notions suggested the alignment with *resonance* and *self-reflexivity*, which the ‘the Poetic’ aspires to achieve. Although the literature generally referred to the “creator” and “user” as disparate entities, this research reinterprets it in the context that the designer is both the “creator” and “user” of the design artefact. The designer is identified as the first user of their work before it gets handed to another person.

¹⁰ As Dewitt (1932) implies, “*In art, ideas, like feelings are objectified in sensation*”.

¹¹ Maritain (1944) described such ‘superficial’ emotions that merely communicates “thrills or ecstasies” does not sustain and eventually becomes dull. In other words, does not appeal to the inner depth of intellect. (p.400)

¹² He defined intuitive emotion as rooted in the ‘soul’, a “spiritualized emotion” that is both “intentional and intuitive”, where “the real and the subjectivity, the world and the soul coexist actively. Then sense and sensation, images and imagination are brought back to heart, blood to the spirit, passion to intuition.” Such emotions are conceived from the artist’s knowledge and experience of the world. (Maritain 1944)

To evoke self-reflexivity, it is crucial to establish two-way communication between reader and design artefact, to create unique experiences and symbolic meanings through relation back to oneself (吕敬人 2017, 杉浦康平 2013). Conversely, Maritain's interpretation suggested a valuable perspective that this process should also be considered from a creator's view, where it first takes place in the creation process (Maritain 1944) before the completed work lands on another reader's hand. The notion of *self-reflexivity* to bring about the intended poetic experience with the design artefact was investigated from the designer's workspace — taking on both roles of a creator and user in this study. As highlighted earlier in the literature review, the approach of investigating end-user experience has been well covered by previous researchers, therefore will not be discussed in this research.

As the study is situated in the discipline of visual communication, **it is essential to analyse the communicative aspect, based on the relationship between text and images** (in this context, the text refers to the informational contents, instead of typography). A text could take on limitless interpretations by different designers and express in varied creative forms. Chinese designer Xiaoxiang Liu described books as poetic dwellings of information, where the designer deciphers the information and gives a new form to the text when it is materialized in the work made. He believes “poetic expression of freedom in design” takes place through the navigation of time and space in the book, where the text “roams freely” within the “constant” (book formats and information structures) and “variables” (imagination and design experimentation)¹³.

A similar view has been propositioned by Sugiura and Lü, in which **the book should be designed as a ‘holistic’ package to facilitate the poetic experience** (吕敬人 2017, 杉浦康平 2013). It can be an incredibly challenging task to ensure a seamless implementation of the creative direction, if a book were to be produced as separate components and merely put together into standardized formats. The designer's intent must weave through the whole narrative structure of the book design as a unified body, to realize the creative objective. Inferring Lü, the book creation process is reflexive and poetic, as it requires the constant shift in perspectives on the part of the designer to ensure that the work encapsulates the concept. Different modes of thinking are at work concurrently, toggling between the macro and micro views. It involves deconstructing and restructuring a system of information, interweaving space and time in various dimensions from conceptual to materialization, balancing logic and imagination between the design and communicative aspects. (吕敬人 2017) Thinking and making are highly

¹³ Golden Pin Design Award. “Creative Design Gives Expression to a New Form of Text - Xiaoxiang Liu.” Golden Pin Design Award, August 29, 2019. https://www.goldenpin.org.tw/en/perspectives_xiaoxiang-liu/.

interwoven processes. Thus, the book is an entity itself that should not be a convenient assemblage of independent creations.

Referencing the origin of the term *Poetic* (*poesis*, which refers to the “making”), it is essential to factor in the production of selected book artefacts for the study. According to Dutch designer Irma Boom, books are designed to be produced industrially and therefore should consider the challenges and overcome constraints during design and production, but at the same time balanced by freedom to be experimental so as not to be limited creatively.¹⁴ The study selected books that **push creative boundaries within the function and format of a book, at the same time taking into consideration of the reading experience**. Books that were made to be appreciated as conceptual forms of artistic objects or sculptural works, were excluded for purpose of a more specific scope of the study.

The following table 1 is a summary of the abovementioned discussion, listing the criteria of selection for the case studies. It is separated into “YES”, which highlighted characteristics of suitable “contenders”, and “NO” to exemplify several distinguishing factors for those that do not fall within the selection of artefacts in consideration to the study.

Summarized Criteria of Selection* for case studies		
<i>*This list is non-exhaustive and non-prescriptive</i>		
YES (The following points highlighted criteria of selection for artefacts that are suitable for the study .)		NO (The following points highlighted criteria that does not fall into the selection of artefacts for the study.)
1	Exhibits poetic qualities, focused on eliciting emotional response and creating poetic experiences.	Art objects or sculptural book that are purely conceptual expressions; does not take into consideration of reading experience.
2	Evoke self-reflexivity: to create a 2-way communication between reader and design artefact.	Linear or one-way instructional format. (for example, instructional manual)
3	Books that include both text and image, with emphasis on the intrinsic quality of text and material, relationship between text and images.	Books that are made to solely fulfil practical and functional purposes.
4	Created and designed holistically.	Books which are created as separate components and merely put together within standardized formats for convenience, without consideration of its implication.
5	Push creative boundaries of book conventions, within the format and function of a book.	Confined within conservative traditions of mainstream publishing as a commercially focused product.

Table 1: Summarized criteria for selection of design artefacts for case study.

¹⁴ From Irma Boom’s interview with Eye Magazine, first published in Eye no. 88 vol. 22, 2014. Retrieved: <http://www.eyemagazine.com/feature/article/reputations-irma-boom>

After the main criteria of selection have been determined, the next section further scoped the categories of analysis for the design artefacts.

2.4 Categories of analysis for visual research

Table 2 summarized several key points from the literature review, as categories of analysis for the visual research, segmented into the **theoretical underpinnings** and **visual** aspects.

The component of analysis under **theoretical underpinnings** is branched out to include two sub-categories, the **poetic properties** (refer to fig.7a) and **visual rhetoric**. Semiotic theories were categorized under the umbrella of visual rhetoric to facilitate the discussion, due to their relevance (Danesi 2017) in the analysis of visual artefacts in this research. It is followed by the categories of analysis for the case studies, which includes the formal attributes, meanings, narrative, and intentionality of the designer. This segment pertains to the visual aspects in the analysis of selected design artefacts. Together, the study aims to identify patterns of similarities or differences in the selected design artefacts, which will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

Categories of Analysis for visual research		
THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS		VISUAL
Poetic properties	Visual rhetoric	Formal attributes: format, layout, typography, colour, materials, etc.
Devices: Abstraction; Ambiguity (<i>Open-endedness / Space for multiple interpretations / imagination</i>)	Communication: Images & Text	Meanings: concept, context, purpose, etc.
Effects: Evocation (<i>mood / atmosphere of work</i>); Self-reflexivity.	Semiotics: symbols + message (denotated & connotated; symbolic & direct.)	Narratives
	Resonance	Intentionality of designer

Table 2: Categories of Analysis for Visual Research.

2.5 Summary

The term '*the Poetic*' (process) differentiates itself from the descriptor *poetic*. On the other hand, the intended similarity also implied acknowledgement of its affiliation and derivation (poesis). This research builds upon existing theories and notions surrounding poetic and visual rhetoric gathered from the literature review. Studies relevant to the poetic and design were predominantly from within the fields of interaction and product design. Despite several similarities identified in the existing research, the review showed variance in methods and applications adopted by the researchers. These studies were conducted in correspondence to their respective disciplines and practices and similarly based on the

evaluation of end-user experiences. The literature review has thus revealed a gap that pointed to a potential for an expanded investigation from the designer's workspace through the lens of visual communication.

To understand how the 'the Poetic' operates as a process of book design and site of investigation, visual research and prototyping have been identified to be appropriate methods for the study. The *criteria of selection* (Table 1) and *categories of analysis* (table 2) have scoped the selection of design artefacts for the case studies. Details on the methodology and conceptual framework for the 'the Poetic' as a proposed design thinking model and the design approach for prototyping, will be discussed in the next chapter.

3.0 Methodology

In the previous section, the literature review has uncovered the gap and position of this research. A set of criteria (table 1) for the selection of artefacts and the categories of analysis (table 2) have also been established and substantiated with the rationale for its derivation. This chapter provides an outline of the research methodology, including the research approach, process, methods, and the corresponding research questions. The following diagram (fig 1) illustrates the methodology, adapted from Design Innovation Process (Kumar 2012) and Visual Research (Bestley and Noble 2016). Key stages are corresponded with the respective research questions, to guide the research thinking process. The methodology outlines the research path, details of approach and methods will be iterated in the next section.

Fig. 1. Diagram of Methodology, adapted from Design Innovation Process (Vijay Kumar, 2013) and Visual Research (Bestley & Noble, 2016)

3.1 Research Approach and Process

This design research is based on a pragmatic approach (Goldkuhl 2012), which incorporated the interpretive perspectives of a visual research. As introduced in the methodology (fig 1), the Visual Research (Bestley and Noble 2016) is integrated within the Design Innovation Process (Kumar 2012). The qualitative study includes a close examination of selected design artefacts created by graphic designers as case studies, to disentangle the invisible workings behind 'the Poetic' in book design.

The Design Innovation Process uses a 2x2 map and each quadrant represents a stage of the process: (fig.1) Begins clockwise from the bottom left quadrant, **Intent**, **Research**, **Analysis**, **Synthesis** and **Realization**. Seven modes of activity are distributed amongst the quadrants, where different research methods could be integrated into each of the modes and form the research process. The Seven modes are guides to lead the research and do not designate any fixed order, it could work in a non-linear iterative manner, based on nature and needs of each research. (Kumar 2012, 8-9) The following describes the process of integration for this research.

INTENT:

1. Identify objective and argument to frame the research and determine position.

RESEARCH:

2. Identify audience.
3. Identify context: Select and collect design artefact as case-studies for visual research based on the list of criteria for selection (refer to table 2). Thereafter, carry out an empirical study of the selected artefacts.

ANALYSIS:

4. **The analysis works in 2 phases: a) A preliminary study of secondary sources**, which includes: photographs of book artefacts, relevant interviews and literature published. It was carried out during the shortlisting of the artefacts for the study. **b) A close study of primary artefacts**, this step is important in validating the preliminary analysis by experiencing the design artefact in person and justify the significance of a physical object in comparison to a digital version where the tactile experience could not be replicated. The case-studies are further narrowed down during this stage. **The observations (a & b) are compared and analysed**, to identify similarities or divergences between secondary and primary sources. **The visual data are recorded and compiled**. Frame insights to find patterns in the study — uncover new concepts and features of ‘the Poetic’ in book design.

SYNTHESIS:

5. Review and reframe assumptions: a classification of concepts and features identified from the case-studies and insights from literature review are synthesized.
6. Derive at Conceptual framework of ‘the Poetic’ to guide planning and conceptualization of the prototype.

REALIZATION:

7. A book prototype is created based on established ‘the Poetic’ design features.

EVALUATION:

The process is iterative, upon completion of the prototype, the outcome will be evaluated to determine if the research question has been answered and objectives has been met.

3.2 Research Methods

The methods comprise a visual research to deconstruct design strategies, adopted in the case studies of selected book designs. It is followed by the creation of a prototype in the form of an artbook, to evaluate how the concepts and design features perform.

3.2.1 Visual Research

Visual Research methods have been embraced by various disciplines, in the analysis of images. In the field of visual communication, it involves the “deconstruction and interpretation of existing visual works and the development of new design strategies and methods” Hence, it consisted of both analytical

(analysis of visual materials) and propositional (in the form of a prototype) methods (Bestley and Noble 2016, 112). Apart from the researcher's interpretation, *intentionality*¹⁵ of the designer is an essential reference point in the analysis. The visual research began with an empirical study of design artefacts (case-studies), based on the abovementioned categories of analysis (table 2). Three design artefacts were chosen from a collection of books, to streamline the comparison and facilitate discussion in this thesis. The analysis is based on observation of formal attributes, decoding meanings in the visual, the intentionality of the designer and how design guides the navigation of narratives in the artefacts. The case studies were compared and evaluated, to form 'the Poetic' concepts and features (table 3). These findings were synthesized with key ideas suggested from the Literature review as the proposed conceptual framework (refer to section 4.3) and applied in the making of a book prototype.

3.2.2 Prototype in Design Research

Prototype in design plays different roles, Wensveen and Matthews categorized four roles of a prototype and the practice of prototyping in design research. This research identifies with one of the four roles of prototyping, as "a research archetype" that functions as a "physical embodiment of concepts". As a physical artefact, it is a designed space that aids understanding of the abstract notions surrounding the 'the Poetic' in this research. (Wensveen and Matthews 2015, 268) The prototype constitutes the foundational understanding of 'the Poetic' through its making. At the same time, demonstrating its potential of operating as a form of visual rhetoric through the design artefact, as "the most effective way to increase an object's rhetorical presence is to make it physically present..." (Hill 2004, 29). The prototype serves a critical role in the understanding and proposition of new design strategies in a design research.

3.3 Summary

Plans for the integration of methods within the research process have been described, guided by research questions at each stage of the investigation. The visual research method was chosen to build a foundational understanding around the relationship between 'the Poetic' and visual rhetoric, as well as what might have contributed to the poetic effect of the selected design artefacts. Observations would be analysed and synthesized with key ideas from the literature review, to inform the creation of a conceptual book prototype. It would serve as a research archetype and functions as an embodiment of 'the Poetic'. The next chapter will describe findings from the visual research and formation of a conceptual framework.

¹⁵ In the context of design research, it refers to the "purpose and functions of the design artefact and aims and objectives of the creator". (Bestley and Noble 2016)

4.0 Visual Research and Findings

This chapter describes the analysis and findings from the visual research. Later in the chapter, a conceptual framework illustrating key concepts that govern ‘the Poetic’ will be introduced. It would be followed by the design approach for a book prototype.

4.1 An empirical study of the case-studies

Selected books by designers Irma Boom, Liu Xiaoxiang and Richard Niessen, were identified for the case studies. However, this selection does not imply these selected case studies as the only poetic books amongst many others. The choice was solely due to their suitability and to provide a range of styles and themes for discussion. Three out of a collection of books were featured for discussion, as it would be too extensive to describe every book collected within the span of this thesis. The following case studies (Artefacts 1-3) consisted of a preliminary inquiry based on secondary sources (photographs, articles, interviews, etc.), followed by an empirical study of each artefact. It is based on the abovementioned categories of analysis (table 2), which includes formal attributes, meanings, and how narratives guide the navigation of each design.s

Case Study of Artefact 1:

No.5 Culture Chanel a tribute to Coco Chanel and the iconic perfume — The book *Chanel No.5*, designed by Irma Boom for the exhibition at The Palais de Tokyo in 2013. The book¹⁶ was made entirely white and embossed without any ink, bound in paperback, and enclosed in a black box with an embossed image of the perfume. Boom emphasized that it made to be “invisible” like the perfume, which she described as “something that is present yet not there”¹⁷ — An abstract form of perfume experienced through the “concrete” form of a book. She hints at the “absent” through the “present”, where the book is “present” and so does the content but could only be fully experienced and “read” with our all senses, beyond visual perception.

Boom’s experience in the garden of Chanel, South of France, where the source of the main ingredients grows, was where the idea took form. The scent in the air reminded her of the perfume and inspired the concept of an “invisible perfume”. Both the smell and the perfume are absent, yet every visual and material element in the book creates allusions¹⁸ to it, which readers could imagine in their minds. A poetic experience of the perfume materialized in the form of a book and “transferred” from the creator

¹⁶ Description of the book retrieved from a video of Irma Boom interviewed by Christian Lund at her home and studio, Irma Boom Office, Amsterdam, the Netherlands in 2014. “Irma Boom: A Tribute to Coco Chanel.” (Zanten 2015)

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

to the reader — akin to reading a poem without its words yet resonates through the sensory reading experience.

A second study validated some of the initial analysis in the preliminary inquiry. An observation of the physical book¹⁹ in person revealed several new findings. At first sight, the book looks rather bulky and thick, but it felt surprisingly light for a 5cm thickness book when held, this experience aligned with how Boom described it. The embossed pages contain pieces of information related to the perfume and snippets of Coco Chanel's life, in the form of line drawings by her artist friends, quotes and writings²⁰. Due to the nature of blind embossing, the book consists of single pages instead of facing spreads. It made sense to exclude the page numbers and any form of segmentation of chapters. Instead of a constrain, the design enabled the book to be more expressive without restraints. The absence of informational “anchors” or a distinct content structure implied a non-chronological reading order. It created a sense of openness, where the reader could decide any order of their preference. The flow of content and reader are freed, providing the perfect environment for the design intention and poetic mood to shine through.

The content may appear fragmented and arbitrary, but a closer inspection revealed careful thoughts on the relationship between visuals on each page. For example, a spread in the book featured the rose garden on one page and a perfume bottle on the other; it created a visual connection between the two without needing any implicit indication in words. The narrative continues throughout the book as the reader navigates the pages and makes meaningful connections between images. Despite the absence of smell, it did not diminish the experience but created a more lasting impression. Scents could be very personal and subject to individual preferences. Not everyone would appreciate the same scent but more likely to relate to the narratives crafted around the perfume. The artefact creates resonance in a reader when personal values and ideas are associated with the stories embedded. (Kelly 2014)

The reading environment is another critical factor for an embodied experience, as the book reads better and is more legible under certain lighting conditions (refer to fig 2). For example, when placed under strong sunlight, the images and texts imprinted on the white paper tend to appear more pronounced than regular fluorescent lighting. The indoor lighting pales the details, giving it a “flatter” and less natural appearance. This subtle observation would only be discernible in person and hard to be noticed during the preliminary study, solely based on secondary sources of videos and photographs of the book. Therefore, the physical book was imperative for this study.

¹⁹ The book was accessed from University of Amsterdam (UvA) Special Collections Library.

²⁰ Ibid.

The book is an embodiment of the perfume, weaved together by narratives surrounding it. Consequently, it is a book created to be experienced in its physical form, for it would be nothing in a digital format.

Fig. 2. Photos of spreads from 'No.5 Culture Chanel' by Irma Boom, to compare the appearance of blind embossed pages under the sunlight and fluorescent lights.

Case Study of Artefact 2:

*Au cœur des Montagnes et des Eaux*²¹ (In the Heart of Mountains and Waters), was designed by Chinese Graphic Designer Xiaoxiang Liu²², for the 'Treasures of the Beijing Art Museum' exhibition held at the Museum of Fine Arts, in the city of Gaillac, July 2018. It featured Chinese paintings and objects from the 17th century to the 20th Century by Qing Dynasty scholars. The exhibition revolved around the narratives of Antoine Gaubil and links between Gaillac and China from the 18th century²³.

The book serves as a "passage" for the exchange between two cultures, (the French and Chinese) through Chinese Art. Metaphors of windows and arched entrance, bear the symbolism of "crossing" from one cultural space to another. Qing Dynasty was a period in China where scholars were exposed to western cultures and thinking, and traces of this cross-cultural exchange were reflected in the architecture of the Beijing Art Museum²⁴, where Liu drew his inspirations. The travelling between passageways through the arched entrance and exiting from another was likened to the "crossings" of Qing scholars, transiting between Confucianist teaching and western ideas.

²¹ Full title: 'Au cœur des Montagnes et des Eaux'; 'In the Heart of Mountains and Waters: The art and life of Chinese scholars from the 17th to the 20th century'; 《心在山水：17-20 世纪中国文人的艺术生活》，2018.

²² Xiaoxiang Liu 刘晓翔: founder and Art Director of XXL Studio, Member of the Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI) and Chairman of the Book Design Committee of the Publishers Association of China. Retrieved from: <https://www.xxlstudio.design/about>.

²³ Exhibition info Retrieved from <https://tresorsdumuseedartdepekin-gaillac.fr/exposition2/>

²⁴ Work descriptions published in zcool by Xiaoxiang Liu. Retrieved from: <https://www.zcool.com.cn/article/ZNzE1NjQ4.html>

The cover design is kept relatively minimal, in a pale grey canvas material of subtle woven textures that resemblances the surface of the walls. The titles are printed in a prominent purple, forming a contrast with the faint lines of two half arches on the front and two corresponding semi-circles on the back cover. This design decision laid the form in a neutral zone, where it could take on a broader meaning beyond its direct inspiration (arched gates and round windows in Beijing Art Museum). Therefore, it could represent any window or gate from anywhere, depending on the reader's perspective. This visual abstraction opened the dialogue between different cultures, where the image is open to multiple interpretations — The sign is constantly being formed through the meeting of signifiers and signified even within the two cultural codes. Hence, every reader would conceive their reading of the abstract form.

The abstraction of form reveals the essence of the message upon its “active” reading. When closed, the book lies flat, but upon flipping open, an abstracted form reminiscence of the arched gate entrance revealed through interaction with the light in the surrounding environment. As light shined through the book, it cast shadows that create an impression of the passage space through the die-cut details on the cover. The reader is “transported” into the designer’s envisioned space and unveils the narrative of “crossing”.

The narrative continues to unfold at the reader’s pace, following the visual cues passing through the content alternating between text in languages of Chinese and French and sections distinguished by a different coloured paper of pale grey, purple, white and accents of gold ink. Images of paintings in long horizontal scrolls or sets of long vertical scrolls are hidden within several pages of accordion folds and revealed when extended. The gesture of pulling out the accordion and folding back seems to flow naturally, with the extending and receding of the painting while following the movement of information. The layout of texts is arranged close to the outer edge of the page, leaving a small margin space around but keeping a relatively wide space near the spine, where the tiny page numbers sat quietly. The Chinese title is anchored to the top left corner of the spread and the French title on the top right. The body text with a description of artwork aligns to the bottom left, leaving a considerable amount of space in between, where the artist’s name and a short corresponding biography sat. The artist information is typeset in a rather unusual manner, where the texts are set in a smaller type size and centre aligned as opposed to the rest left aligned. Instead of appearing out-of-place, the unique typesetting of this secondary information creates interest on the page. At the same time complementing the poetic mood subtly and delicately.

As the reader reaches the end of the book, coming to face with another abstract form — this time, in the shape of a round window. It closes while folding back to flatness and once again is concealed within the back cover. Signifying the reading journey through the book coming to an end, yet the narrative is

not closed but hinted at further exploration. The window bears the connotation of “peeking out of the opening” into another space outside the book. The poetic experience unreels through the temporal-spatial relationship between the designer-book-reader, constructed by the designer, leading the reader in following the narrative through visual cues in the book. The notion of concealing and revealing could be related to the concepts of Chinese paintings. Opposite complementary pairs, working in perfect harmony; light/dark, hidden/reveal, rest/action, present/absent.

A study of the physical book in person was slightly perplexing at the initial encounter, as the main design feature on the book cover was not prominent and did not perform as expected. However, a chance discovery led to surprise elements hidden within the subtle details. On another separate occasion, a ray of light shines through the die-cut on the cover when held at a specific angle. The arch and circle design “lit up” through the thin cover paper and cast a shadow on the endpaper, creating an atmospheric mood around it. In that instance, the mind felt as if drawn into another space, another world. The hidden design detail revealed when least expected and completed the experience. Prior knowledge of this design feature did not seem to reduce the poetic effect experienced in person. The subtle revelation left a profound impression and an elevated experience.

Fig. 3a. Photos of die-cut on book front and back cover of ‘In the Heart of Mountain and Water’ by Xiaoxiang Liu.

Fig. 3b. Photos of book spreads from ‘In the Heart of Mountain and Water’ by Xiaoxiang Liu.

Case Study of Artefact 3:

The Palace of Typographic Masonry by Liam Nieesen posits books as poetic spaces and takes the form of an imaginary building that defies conventional navigation. It is a publication intended at providing a platform and brings attention to the richness of graphic languages and their discourse (Niessen et al. 2018).

The cover page is visually segmented into nine grid sections whereby each represents a department: sign, symbol, ornament, poetics, construction, play, order, craft, and practice. Two stripped bars cross in the foreground. The book title is only visible on the book spine and the spread that follows the content page. It reflects the concept of an imaginary building, and the book title serves as “signage” of the building to welcome the readers. The overall aesthetic depicts an environment “under-construction” to resonate with the idea that “design is forever under construction”. As the reader proceeds further, she is greeted with a welcome message at “The Masonic Lobby” and a brief intro of the space; by a narrator who assumes the role of a tour guide. He went on to introduce the creator as the “architect” of the imaginary building. The book design is characterized by the large typography that functions as the navigational cue for readers. The different font sizes suggest the reading order or priority of information and guide the readers through the “tour”. For example, text in large font sizes when the narrator speaks directly to the reader to get their attention. Medium font size when elaborating on specific “exhibit” items or introducing relevant background information. Small font size is generally for captions or descriptions of “exhibit”. Some text and images are seemingly cut off on one page while flowing into the next. Some are vertical, others horizontal, engaging the reading experience and creating impressions of physically exploring the “exhibits” in the building.

The guide introduces the interview sections by “leading” the audience to a space or room in the building relevant to the interviewee. Often, they are pictured to be already in the environment and ready for engagement. At the end of the tour, the guide bid the readers goodbye in the Court Garden (as the epilogue section), where he concluded the “tour” with a conversation between the creator and contributing writers.

There are minimal graphic distractions, without any descriptions or any form of graphical representation to suggest how the “building” looks. The only clues are from navigational descriptions of the space narrated by the guide, accompanied by pieces of information and photos of “exhibits” from respective departments. The entire palace is abstracted and only exists in the form the reader imagined it to be. The poetic effect manifests through this mode of engagement.

“It is also a medium that connects dimensions and forms to meanings. The process itself isn’t without its uncertainties, ambiguities, friction, and irony. But that’s exactly what gives life to any attempt at poetic effect.” (p.27)

Fig. 4. Photos of spreads from 'The Palace of Typographic Masonry' by Richard Nieesen.

The case studies review has unwrapped notions surrounding books as a poetic space and examined how narratives work with design strategies to create visual arguments. The subsequent section will further discuss the analysis and compare the findings sieved from the case studies.

4.2 Visual Research: Analysis of case-studies

Three books were picked for discussion from the shortlisted collection to facilitate the comparison. They comprise a variety of design styles whereby each exudes a different mood. As described in the previous section, it spans from the sensorial white blind embossed, the elegant and delicate, to the bold and experimental. The colour schemes of the design artefacts are generally in the neutral zones of black and white or subtle greys and muted earth colours, paired with a few accent colours, to highlight a specific point of focus or an indicator for a shift in types of content. For example, the colour differentiations can be found in chapter sections or supporting information on the side. These artefacts push creative boundaries of book conventions, within the means of limitation present in the format and function of books.

The discussion attempts to review the following questions: What might be the reasons which contributed to a poetic mood or atmosphere in the case studies artefacts? What are some of these poetic attributes and design features? How do the governing theories at work in the background help to bring about such effects?

The following scale illustrates a simplified comparison of the relativity between image and text, based on Barthes’ semiotics theory of Anchorage and Relay (Barthes 1977, 33-51). He contended that “all images are polysemic”, text anchors images to meanings and direct the reader towards the intended reading of the message. He suggested the possibility of “co-exist” between image and text but argued that one usually takes a dominant position over the other. For instance, when text takes prominence,

there is a general shift towards a more controlled territory. At the other end of the spectrum, when the image takes centre stage, information moves towards a “quicker” and “less laborious” (Barthes 1977, 39) reading experience; as images are generally more *impressionistic* due to “immediacy of visuals” (Blair 2012, 273).

Design Artefact 1 (CN5): Chanel No.5, Irma Boom

Design Artefact 2 (HMW): In the Heart of Mountains and Waters, Xiaoxiang Liu

Design Artefact 3 (PTM): The Palace of Typographic Masonry, Richard Niessen

Fig. 5. The scale depicts a simplified comparison of the relativity between image and text, based on Barthes' semiotics theory of Anchorage and Relay.

The centre of the scale indicates the “ideal communication” between text and image. The closer it gets to the middle point, the more “directed” the message is towards its intended reading. The further it moves towards either end of the scale, the less “literal” the message becomes, making it more “symbolic” and open to interpretation. Therefore, require more imagination on the reader’s part.

In essence, when a design artefact takes on one end of the scale in a higher percentage, either as an image-based or text-based narrative format, the more poetic effect it may generate. For instance, when the reader is presented with a generic image of a beach without any textual information or caption attached to it, it could be interpreted as any beach that comes to mind. When a location is suggested, for example, Hawaii, one with prior knowledge may draw relevance to the Waikiki beach.

Findings from the analysis of artefact 1 and 3, formed the basis for the scale. The abovementioned artefacts are plotted within the range of the scale as points of reference to their relationship. Design artefacts 1 and 3 each lean outward to one end of the scale, while artefact 2 takes a position between the two, with an inclination towards the left.

Artefact 1 is a predominantly image-based book with text that provides pieces of information related to the perfume. These texts functions as images and forms part of the narrative. The image-based approach

opens the design to multitudes of interpretation. On the other hand, the subtle integration of text provided just enough control to rein in the otherwise ambiguous images and communicated the desirability of the perfume. Artefact 3 sits towards the other end of the scale as a text-based format. However, unlike most information-dense books, the textual narration of the “guide” is not dull at all. Instead, it managed to engage the reader's imagination effectively, without any images. This unusual approach enabled an information-heavy book to be highly enjoyable and created a unique reading experience. In design, text communicates the information and its typeset influences the mood and tone of the design. Typography is a visual component and naturally assumes an imperative role as part of visual rhetoric. Artefact 3 demonstrated a well-executed example of text (typography) guiding the intended reading experience yet does not negate the poetic effect.

Artefact 2 relates more towards Barthes’ semiotics theory of *relay*, where the text provides further information and meanings absent in the image (Barthes 1977, 39). The following diagram depicts how the design approach encapsulated the whole idea within the book. Text (content) in the book provided information about the event and its exhibits, which were held together by the book cover bearing symbolic images of the arched entrance and round window, as metaphors of the “crossing” between different dimensions (time and space). When the reader flips open the book, it symbolizes the beginning of the “crossing” through the arched entrance, transit through the passageway of information and eventually exits from the round window. The visual metaphors do not relate directly to the text in a literal manner but complemented it in the best way to visually communicate the message. The poetic effect is delivered and magnified through the hidden surprise elements on the book cover, which only reveals when interacted at specific angles and with the lighting conditions in the reading environment.

**The PASSAGE connects
different Time & Space:**

Time:
Reader’s frame of time
Qing scholars & artists’ frame of time

Physical Space:
Beijing Art Museum
Museum of Fine Arts (France, city of Gaillac)
Design Artefact (Book)

Imaginary Time:
“Transport” reader into an imaginary time frame.

Imaginary Space:
The space in reader’s mind; takes on symbolic meanings; association with individual’s interpretation and experience.

Fig. 6. Diagram illustrating how the concept and design function in the book, to bring across idea of “crossing” between different dimensions (time and space).

Before proceeding further, it is essential to highlight that this comparison model should not be equated to a simplistic formulaic application across the board. It does not suggest that shifting the control to either end of the scale would ensure a “maximum” poetic effect. The illustration is based on an assumed scenario, in which the type of images and text are carefully considered and is not arbitrary. As this discussion is within the visual communication domain, the key objective is to communicate. Hence, it is crucial to maintain a delicate balance between the text and image instead of excluding the other. The outcome is highly dependent on the designer’s judgement when deciding how much further to push the controller on the scale to achieve a poetic effect without losing its communicative purpose entirely. This is not a prescriptive approach but a conceptual reference for the comparison. The outcome is relative to the nature and needs of each design scenario, where the different variables should be a consideration.

In essence, when ‘the Poetic’ operates as a form of visual rhetoric, it pertains to a “hidden persuasion”, where the rhetorical function aims to maximize “impact” (resonance) with the “subtle gestures”. It functions in the background by inviting the readers to “fill in the gaps” and completing the “persuasion” when a personal association with narrative is established. The seemingly complex chain of effects implies two modes of operations functioning concurrently: the **visible** and **invisible** workings (refer to fig 7: the conceptual framework).

4.3 Classification of ‘the Poetic’ features and concepts

Several key features were identified in the previous section based on the case studies analysis. The narrative plays a significant role to create poetic effects in design artefacts. The design strategies or approaches adopted by designers align towards guiding the readers, in their navigation of these narratives. Hence, this research refers to this concept as *Navigating Narratives*, which denotes the visual guiding of narratives through design cues in book artefacts. For example, *The Palace of Typographic Masonry* created an everchanging space for imagination to pique curiosity and engage exploration. The case studies highlighted books as constructed imaginary space which serves as a transition between different dimensions. It transports readers into the designer’s envisioned space by employing visual rhetoric to direct communication of information and “heightens an audience’s attachment to the values and beliefs of the argument being presented” (Kelly 2014, 3).

Interaction with the reading environment brings the content and concept to life (for example lighting, material, etc.) In the instance of Irma boom’s *Chanel no. 5* book, as it is fully blind embossed and readable only in its material form, as it requires suitable conditions in the surrounding environment to

complete the experience. Therefore, a physical book is essential as the reading experience is impossible to replicate in a digital version.

The poetic mood and atmosphere shines in an open-ended work, often in abstracted forms or visuals. Adopting a minimal aesthetics is one of the ways, to allow the essence of the work come through. When unnecessary “distractions” are eliminated and familiar stereotypical images are abstracted, it engages the reader’s imagination in varied ways. Therefore, expanding the design possibilities and experience.

Element of Surprise could aid the creation of poetic experiences; as demonstrated in the book, *In the Heart of Mountains and Waters*, by Xiaoxiang Liu. He contended that “There can be no poetry without the unexpected.”²⁵ The unanticipated encounter with hidden surprise elements, help complete the narrative and elevate experience of the design artefact.

The following table (table 3) is a summarized classification of ‘the Poetic’ concepts and features discussed above. Section 5.0 will further elaborate on the relevant details through the book prototype.

Classification of ‘the Poetic’ concepts and features	
Concepts from case-studies	Features (Details in section 5.0)
Navigating Narratives	Dominance of either image or text; or the relativity of percentage (between image and text) to its poetic effect.
Interaction with the reading environment	Creation of images in space, factoring in conditions of reading environment.
The poetic mood and atmosphere shines in an open-ended work, often in abstracted forms / visuals.	(Visual) Abstraction: abstract photography styles; abstract impressions.
An element of surprise could aid the creation of poetic experiences.	Subtle element that is hidden, reveal certain info, brings about particular interactions between reader and book.

Table 3: Classification of ‘the Poetic’ concepts and features.

4.4 The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is conceived by synthesizing key ideas from the literature review and visual research findings. It is comprised of a three stages process that begin with A) an illustration of the designer’s mental process, followed by B) design approach for C) application on the book prototype.

²⁵ Xiaoxiang Liu responded to an interview for the golden pin design awards. https://www.goldenpin.org.tw/en/perspectives_xiaoxiang-liu/

Fig. 7. Conceptual framework.

4.4.1 The Mental Process of a Creator

It is essential to first understand the mental process of a creator before diving into the framework.

Fig. 7a. Diagram to illustrate how a creator's mental process functions in relation to 'the Poetic'.

The mental process constitutes two concurrent operations from a creator's viewpoint. The first is represented by directional arrows in a looped cycle and the second as a Venn-diagram. The former integrated properties borrowed from the poetic language, **Evocation** (evoke emotional response) and **Self-Reflexivity** (Popoveniuc 2014) with **Visual Rhetoric**, synthesized from the literature reviews and relevant studies. The process begins with a *scene* (could be people, object, event, etc.) that triggers an emotional response and interpretations from the stimulus to make sense of and reframe the encounter (with a scene or information). Consequently, bringing forth self-reflexivity and inspire creative investigation towards the desired outcome. Emotions and experience (encounter with the scene) were translated and materialized as the creation. Visual Rhetoric aids communication of the designer's intent and brings about the envisioned poetic experience. Moreover, to achieve emotional resonance (Kelly 2014) with the design artefact and formation of a "lasting effect" (Hill 2004) on its reader through the reading process. The second layer of a Venn-diagram situates the creator (designer) at the intersection of the three activities: *interpretation*, *creation*, and *experience*. Together, it encapsulates the mental process of the designer with 'the Poetic' as visual rhetoric in the creation of design artefacts.

4.4.2 Design approach in creating the book prototype

Fig. 7b. Design approach of 'the Poetic' as Visual Rhetoric.

The conceptual framework synthesized properties from the literature reviews and design features from selected case studies findings. It constitutes two domains, the *invisible* and *visible* workings. The *invisible* workings represent the *intangible* domain, comprises of properties borrowed from the poetic language. Under the properties, encompasses two *poetic devices* of **ambiguity**²⁶ and **analogy**, and three *poetic effects* of **evocation**, **resonance**, and **self-reflexivity**. The poetic effects are extended from the *mental process of a designer* (fig.7a), to elucidate how it operates in the design approach and development of a prototype. On the other hand, the *visible* workings relate to the *tangible* aspects and *Navigating Narratives*. (fig.7b and 7c) In the context of this research, *Navigating Narratives* denotes the guiding of readers through narratives with visual cues in design artefacts (book). Domains of the visible and invisible workings function hand in hand to demonstrate how 'the Poetic' could operate as visual rhetoric in design artefacts. A book prototype was created to explore the conceptual framework (refer to 5.1 Prototype). The framework is self-reflexive, where the designer would engage in an iterative process, to deeply contemplate the most suitable decision that best fulfils the design needs at hand.

4.5 Summary

Three case studies were highlighted and examined for visual research. Findings from the analysis were presented, through a simplified comparison model of the relativity between image and text, based on

²⁶ In relation to the poetics, "ambiguity is primarily defined as the simultaneous availability of more than one meaning or interpretation." (Greene et al. 2012, 43)

Barthes' semiotics theory of Anchorage and Relay (fig.4). The model illustrated what might have contributed to the poetic effect in the design artefacts. Several themes and patterns in the book artefacts were revealed and synthesized with existing knowledge from the literature review. A classification of 'the Poetic' concepts and design features (table 3) were derived and integrated into the conceptual framework (fig.7). The three stages framework portrayed an iterative process from the designer's mental process to the development of a prototype. The mental processes elucidate 'the Poetic' design thinking model as an iterative process involving a self-reflexive practice of the designer. This is followed by a design approach, where the 'the Poetic' concepts and design features (table 3) would be reinterpreted and applied to a book prototype. Details of the prototype will be elaborated on, in the next chapter.

5.0 Applications of Findings: A book prototype

A prototype of an artbook titled *Time—Space—People* (refer to the appendix for images of the book) facilitates the demonstration of 'the Poetic' as visual rhetoric in this research. The book (*Space*) focused on the notion of *experience of space* and is part of a series of 3 artbooks. To streamline the discussion, the other two books that represent the theme of *People* and *Time* are excluded from the thesis fulfilment and therefore not discussed in this paper. The *Space* book navigates through a narrative format of recounted experiences in the ten featured spaces (refer to book prototype index pages). These spaces depict neutral *vessels* that allow the observer's imagination to manifest. The designer takes on the observer's view in the book, as her thoughts were narrated and materialized. Likewise, the book invites the reader to form interpretations through the reading experience. As artefacts could "forge links" between different time-space, thus, "forming a common world" where "the maker gathers pieces of the past and send them to the future" (Greene et al. 2012, 87). The investigation of 'the Poetic' follows this path to construct a *neutral space* that facilitates emotional connections between the reader and the subject depicted in the design artefact.

5.1 To Navigate Narratives through the *Neutrality of Space*

In the previous chapter, the concept of *Navigating Narratives* was defined as *the visual guiding of readers through narratives in design artefacts (book)*. When the 'the Poetic' operates as a form of visual rhetoric, it directs the viewer towards forming narratives through visual cues in the design artefact. It functions as the *visible workings* of the *tangible* aspects of visual materials, operates in complementary to the *invisible workings* of the *intangible*, constituting several properties borrowed from the poetic language (refer to fig.7c). Based on the concept of navigating narratives, the next section will elaborate on the applications of the following **design features: i) Poetic mood and atmosphere of work; ii) Abstract impression of narrative; iii) Interaction with the reading environment; iv) Introducing element of surprise;** through the book prototype.

Fig. 7c. Application of findings in the prototype

The Neutrality of Space

In the book prototype, *Navigating Narratives* was explored through the design concept of *Neutrality of Space*. It refers to the momentary detachment of any pre-conceived or commonly recognized knowledge of a place. The result is a neutral space, where reading experiences could flow freely and establish new connections. A constructed imaginary space that operates as a transition medium, connecting different dimensions (time and space). Each was represented by a narrative, independent yet connected by a continuous story-telling approach. This narrative structure was incorporated into the visual language, encompassing visual aspects of photography styles, graphical representations, and information structure layout. Methods of Abstraction was adapted in the book prototype with poetic devices of ambiguity to create space for imagination and create possibilities of multiple interpretations of the text (content) presented.

Constructing the structure of navigation in the book prototype

The book consisted of layout spreads in several design formats, including narrative descriptions, photo spreads, and index pages. The book spreads began with a textual description of the experience of space

in an open, free-verse form. Descriptions of each depicted space correspond with various conceptual abstract representations (referred to as abstract impressions) that respond to the narrative. Photos were presented in subsequent spreads, introducing a different form of reading experience from textual to visual. It encourages the reader's imagination and the formation of personal mental images with the stories recounted. The intentional separation of photos from texts experiment on the different types of narrative navigation structure relative to the poetic effects it could generate, based on Barthes' semiotics theory of Anchorage and Relay (Barthes 1977) (refer to discussion in section 4.2). The design model partially adopted the approach of Richard Nieesen's *The Palace of Typographic Masonry*, where navigational text guides the reader's experience of exploring an imagined space.

Furthermore, in the narrative description pages, headers function as "openings" that leads to the story which follows. It could be the first line of the body text or a short description that encapsulates the gist of the narrative. Any mentions of respective background information kept to a minimum, with subtle indications to reference the index pages at the end of the book. The rationale is to focus the reader's attention on the experience of space over its functions as a place.

Unlike most conventional book formats, where the content page usually takes a position on the first few pages, it took on a new form as the index and shifted to the end of the book. The index combined the background information of each space and its respective page numbers. Readers could then search for the information-based content later if they are interested to find out, without disrupting their reading experience.

Following the introduction of the navigation structure of the book prototype, the following section elaborates on the application of several **design features** to demonstrate how 'the Poetic' functions.

5.2 Application of Design Features in the working proposition of a poetic artefact

The section describes the application of **design features** (denoted by points i-iv, as highlighted in figure 8c), each accompanied by a detailed explanation and images of spreads from the book prototype for illustrative purposes.

i. The poetic mood and atmosphere shines in an open-ended work, often in abstracted forms or visuals.

The design direction sets a lyrical mood and atmospheric environment for a poetic experience of the spaces, through abstract photography direction and minimalist design aesthetics. The black and white, almost graphical photography style focused on capturing interactions between light and shadow. Superfluous details were omitted, with each image tightly framed, limiting the visual

information to minimal elements in the space. Most of the photos excluded people in the space entirely, or only to a few passers-by that happened to be in the frame. It enables the *space* to be “neutralized” and open to multiple interpretations with the flexibility to be grounded in different contexts. Consequentially, it becomes a *neutral vessel* to allow the reader’s imagination (mental images) and emotions to manifest within. Poetic feelings towards the work can be created by drawing upon the reader’s interpretations and association with personal experiences through abstract impressions (Lin, Chang, and Liang 2011).

Similarly, the minimal aesthetics is extended into the layout design to enable the essence of the work to come through. The elimination of (unnecessary) “distractions” and deconstruction of familiar (stereotypical) images into abstract forms can help expand the range of design interpretation and experience to engage imaginations in varied ways. The photo spreads present abstract photography in various sizes and constructs visual dialogues between images in facing pages. These continuous spreads created a visual experience to immerse the reader in the poetic atmosphere of the spaces depicted. There are several design formats for the image spreads. One example consisted of stacked photographs of a particular space, captured from different views, to engage spatial visualization and guide the experience through another angle. This design strategy paced out the introduction of visual information to avoid overwhelming the audience. The formation of poetic experience requires space and time for contemplation. Maintaining a comfortable reading pace is crucial to prevent foiling the experience in haste. On the contrary, in the instance of the thumbnails page (refer to page 13 in book prototype), is an opposite example whereby the intention is to give a quick overview of the mood or information, without the need for the audience to invest extra time to take in specific details.

The following figure (fig.8a) explains the application of the abovementioned design features.

Abstract Photography:

Captured in black and white, with a focus on the graphical lines and lights interacting in space.

Mood / atmosphere of space:

Each narrative is followed by a series of photographs on consecutive spreads, that resonates with the mood.

Experience of Space:

Photos of space in different angles are stacked, to aid reader in visualising the atmosphere while reading.

Fig. 8a. Book Prototype: Poetic mood and atmosphere of work

ii. Abstract impressions

Abstract impression consisted of conceptual visual representations. The notion of *impression* was an inference from Yu Ju Lin's "characteristic impression" which guides and "allocates emotions." These "impressions" took on a new form as reinterpretations of a prior encounter, described as "a series of interwoven scenes". She then translates this experience into "poetic compositions" (design). The resultant design artefact connects "ambience" (mood/atmosphere) to different contexts through the combination of "subjective emotions" and the objective "common poetic nature of people" (Lin et al. 2014). The "common poetic nature of people" was not explicitly defined by Lin (2014) but implied a semblance to recognizable tropes or commonly understood metaphors that the audience could be associated with their personal experiences.

From a rhetorical perspective, visuals tend to have the ability to resonate with the audience more immediately than words or speech (Blair 2012). Similarly, this immediacy of visuals echoes resemblance to an *impression*, which happens quickly but leaves a mental image for recollection. As a mental image condenses into an *abstract impression*, it becomes an encapsulation of the depicted narrative. In other words, when the “evocative power” of a visual argument fits into the context of book design, it expands into a series of interactions between visual impressions and narratives, which develops during its reading towards a “lasting effect” (Hill 2004).

When the image takes an abstract form, it opens up the range of reading to “the potential of a multiplicity of interpretations” that simultaneously (Barthes and Harari 2019) interact between significations and contexts (Greene et al. 2012, 44). Hence, the *abstract impressions* stimulate emotions and function as visual cues that guide the navigation of narratives in the design artefact.

The following book spreads demonstrate **three examples of ii) *abstract impressions*** (right page) that correspond to the narrative (left page) in the book prototype: **1) A hazy fragmented memory reconstructed** (Fig 8b); **2) Contrast of experience between two spaces in the same building** (Fig 8c); **3) Extension of concept into the process by creating images in the depicted space** (Fig 8d).

1. A hazy fragmented memory reconstructed

The abstract impression corresponds to the narrative description, depicting a piece of hazy memory related to a place. Since a brief visit from many years ago, it has become difficult to recall a clear mental image of the space. The result is a conceptual representation that echoes this sentiment and recollection of the fragmented memory. It is translated into a metaphor in the visual form of an abstracted floorplan, constructed from pieces of paper in various materials and opacity, pieced together on a transparent sheet and overlaid onto the actual floorplan drawing of the space. Variance in the different opaqueness of paper material signifies the various degrees of clarity, where some parts of the memory are more vivid than others. Introducing only the abstract composition may lead to an overt vagueness and a clueless reader. In this case, the visual would have failed to communicate and becomes a mere expression. The floorplan drawing serves as a visual association to help the reader make sense of the image and balances out the degree of ambiguity at the same time. Ascribing a literal explanation to the abstract composition may break the poetic visual flow and shrink the imaginative space. Furthermore, a reader may miss the textual description easily, compared to a floorplan drawing that is likely to communicate readily in this example. The manual action of piecing together the abstract floorplan, ties it to the notion of reconstructing an old memory as a mental activity. The concept and action of making blends into each other as a seamless whole.

Abstract visuals to suggest a pieced up fragmented memory:

The floorplan of the Stamford Road old National Library is put together in the form of an abstract impression.

A hazy and fragmented memory of the space:

Pieces of paper in various materials cut out and pieced together on a transparent sheet.

Visual association of floorplan to abstract visual:

When the transparent sheet is flipped, reveals a drawing of the actual floorplan

Fig. 8b. Abstract impression: A hazy fragmented memory reconstructed

2. Contrast of experience between two spaces in the same building

The following example (fig 8c) depicts a contrast between two spaces residing in the same building. One is a chapel at the heart of attention, while the other is a little room on the top floor of the building that is often hidden from view and infrequently visited. The contrasting spaces form a visual dialogue between the complementary pairs: big and small; light and dark; open and hidden.

The contrast is highlighted through different spread sizes, with the former occupying the main spread, while the latter takes the form of a smaller extendable page. A distinction of white and black background further suggests the divide. The inconspicuous little room reveals only when the page extends outward. A photo of the staircase from a bottom-up perspective mimics the upward journey leading to the little room. At the same time, it serves as a visual cue to the storyline trajectory. A detailed image of the little room is absent, except for a thumbnail photo that reveals a subtle peep through space at the back of the extended spread. It maintains a sense of ambiguity and mystery around the place, to stimulate readers' imagination and construct their mental image of the perceived space. In the context of the book prototype, a poetic work advocates the richness of experience over a precise representation.

Contrast of experience between 2 spaces within the same building:

Visuals depicting visual language of the opposites; Light and dark, open and hidden, big and small.

Chapel: Center of attention

Big and open, follows the regular layout, on white background.

Little room at the top floor: Hidden from view:

Smaller in size and only reveal itself when reader follow the stairs up to the room. Bottom up perspective to suggest the location of room above.

Inconspicuous little room at the top the floor: Hidden and only unveiled when page is extended outward.

Fig 8c. Abstract impression: Contrast of experience between 2 spaces in the same building.

3. Extension of concept into process by creating images in the depicted space

The notion of time-space is intricately interwoven into various perspectives on different dimensional levels, threading through the **contextual** to the **conceptual** and **process** of creation. Poetic significance and concept extended beyond the physical design artefact into the act of making.

In the context of space, the environmental factors are crucial considerations: Firstly, the **context** in which the **geographical or social environment** (background) the work is set in. For example, the narrative trajectory moved from a social (national) to an individual (personal) perspective, exhibited through the ten spaces featured in the book, which comprised eight *public* spaces and two other *personal* spaces of the author. Secondly, the **conceptual** process; involves the design deliberation on weaving contextual meanings into the work, followed by how it would unveil and interact with the reading environment for effective communication and engaging imaginations. Thirdly, **the environment or space** of its creation, where the concept becomes embedded into the **process** of making.

As depicted in the example (Fig. 8d), the photosensitive paper was placed in the respective spaces and exposed over time as the image “develops”. Light (bearing metaphor of time in this book) interacts with architectural structures of the space and left marks of the arched silhouette on the photosensitive paper. The result was a series of images created with light over time, where the gesture poetically embodied and interwove the concept into the book. The abstract print may not look discernible initially, but when the image is flipped, it reveals a photo that documented the process of its creation. Due to the highly abstract conceptual process, a more specific indication is necessary to guide the reading, and therefore, a caption was anchored to the process photo underneath. The design subtlety observes a delicate balance between text and image to avoid a didactic overtone.

Image created in the space:

The prints are created in the space with photosensitive paper and exposed over a period of time. The arched patterns bears traces of architectural structures it is placed under.

The gesture embodies the concept of time (light as metaphor of time) and space, extending beyond the visual image into its creation process.

When the image is flipped, reveals a hidden photo of its creation process.

Fig. 8d. Abstract Impression: Extension of concept into process by creating images in the depicted space

iii. Interaction with the reading environment

The following example will explain the application (fig.8e) of this design feature, in which the artefact interacts with its reading environment. Following the narrative, the side façade of the featured building was captured at different times, documenting the change of light from day to

night-time. It depicts the theme of the passing of time through a series of photos representing various times in a day, through the subtle changes in shadows cast and the fading of daylight into night. Through this analogy, the visual metaphorically connects to the notion of the time that has faded into history. The remnants of past events are images captured on film or photos, similarly, created with light. In the book, this specific page reflects this idea and gives an impression of a roll of film. Printed on transparency, the visual shifts under different lighting conditions and performs differently upon interaction with the materials or images beneath. For example, it could appear indiscernible when placed over another photo or concealed in a dark background beneath. The concept of light and time is weaved through the narrative and expressed in the visual representation.

Interaction with the reading environment:

The spread creates an impression of a film roll featuring the side façade of The Cathay building at different times of the day.

It revolves around the theme of the passing of time in a day, and time faded into history.

Visuals shift in different lighting conditions:

Images imprinted on the "film roll" requires readers to explore various angles to allow the light to shine through.

Fig 8e. Book Prototype: Interaction with the reading environment

iv. Introducing an element of surprise could aid the creation of poetic experiences.

This section describes how introducing an element of surprise can aid the creation of poetic experiences. The feature of interaction with the environment is continued and represented in this example (fig.8f).

Coloured transparent cut-outs of various geometrical shapes in abstract forms of doorways are arranged on a clear transparent sheet, with slits to anchor the cut-outs. The pre-arranged composition function as a visual indicator and example to guide the reader and encourage free play. On the next page, a brief description informs the reader of the concept and suggestion of the activity — rearranging the shapes in various configurations to create different “doorways”. The metaphor symbolizes different phases one passes through in life, but sometimes finding oneself back in an old familiar place where fond memories reside. Besides interaction with the reading environment, a small surprise awaits in the book. Depending on the composition created with the overlapped coloured transparent sheet provided, when held at specific angles under a light source, it could cast a ray of colourful light through the die-cut window onto the next page. This discreetly hidden surprise can create a poetic effect if a reader chances upon an encounter with it. This design feature explores the sentiments of Chinese graphic designer Xiaoxiang Liu, whereby “There can be no poetry without the unexpected.”²⁷

Therefore, a surprise encounter with the hidden design element can potentially complete the narrative and elevate the experience of the design artefact with the right conditions meeting on point.

²⁷ Xiaoxiang Liu responded to an interview for the golden pin design awards. https://www.goldenpin.org.tw/en/perspectives_xiaoxiang-liu/

Interaction with the reading environment:

The colored transparent sheets are cut-out in geometrical abstract forms of doorways. The shapes can be arranged by readers in various configurations, to create different versions of "doorways". It signifies the different phases and events one passes through, before eventually realising that they are back in an old familiar space.

Interaction with the reading environment + Element of surprise:

At a certain angle, the reader may chance upon an interesting meeting of colorful light, shining through the die-cut window on the page. Created by the overlapping colored transparent sheets, under a light source. The effect may appear differently under different types of lighting conditions, for example, daylight or a under directed table lamp in dimmer lightings.

Fig 8f. Book Prototype: Interaction with the reading environment and element of surprise

5.3 Summary

This chapter has expounded on the design thinking model of ‘the Poetic’ that operates as visual rhetoric to create a desired poetic experience through the design artefact.

Devices of Ambiguity and Analogy are incorporated through the method of **Abstraction** (refer to fig.7c), to **evoke an emotive response and resonance**. **Ambiguity** creates space for imagination and multiple interpretations based on an individual’s experiences. **Analogy** is interpreted as *abstract impressions* (as illustrated in the prototype through visual analogies of doorway, film, fuzzy memory, etc.) expressing the essence of each narrative in visual forms, to communicate meanings and engage a variety of reading possibilities. **Self-Reflexivity** motivates the designer’s creative investigation towards the desired outcome in the creative work. It plays a significant role in the iterative creative process, to stimulate “reinvigoration” (Whitehead 2003) of ideas in different contexts.

Narratives in the prototype are navigated through the *design concept* of **Neutrality of Space** and synthesized *design features*: **i) Poetic mood and atmosphere of work** (fig 8a); **ii) Abstract impression of narrative** (fig 8b-d); **iii) Interaction with the reading environment** (fig 8e); **iv) Introducing an element of surprise** (fig 8f). The resultant design is a research archetype in the form of a book prototype. It is “both a combination of the personal exploration of the subject and a nascent visual language that operates within a set of predetermined objectives.” (Bestley and Noble 2016, 114) In turn, it prompts a reflexive practice of the designer-researcher through the investigation. Creatives often operate from an intuitive approach, so it may seem counter-intuitive to investigate a design process that happens naturally for some. Conversely, for like-minded creatives interested in enhancing existing strategies and discovering new perspectives in book design, the self-reflexive inquiry could provide a helpful outlook on the subject.

6.0 Summary of Research

The study set out with an inquiry into the existing notions surrounding poetic and what constitutes poetic-ness in design artefacts. A perceived lack of analysis on the subject motivated the investigation. Pertinent literature related to the concepts of poetic and ‘the Poetic’ were discussed, together with visual rhetoric and semiotic theories, through the lens of a visual communicator. The relevant studies were predominantly from interaction and product design, which revealed a gap that pointed to the need for a perspective from visual communication. Furthermore, instead of conducting further studies on the end-user experience, a path taken in existing research, more potentials thrive in switching the investigative lens onto the designer.

This research foregrounded the role of the designer and the medium of books as sites of investigation. The foundation of this research builds upon existing theories and concepts surrounding poetic and visual rhetoric gathered from the literature review.

In the context of this research, the study identifies with the notion that *poetic* is a category of book artefacts that effectively incorporates poetic properties (refer to fig 7 & 7b) towards creating unique personal experiences (Lin et al. 2014) by evocating emotional resonance (Kelly 2014) through its encounter. It serves a dual function and is distinguished by 1) *poetic* (a descriptor, without the single quotation marks) as a category of design artefact; and 2) ‘the Poetic’ (enclosed within the single quotation marks and uppercase “P”) refers to a design thinking model in this research. It taps into the evocative and transformative qualities inherent in poetic language and operates as visual rhetoric to enable new possibilities in contemporary design. On the other hand, the similarity in both terms is an acknowledgement of its affiliation and derivation, which traces back to its Greek origin of *Poiesis* (“making”) (Whitehead 2003).

A visual study is necessary to enable a foundational understanding of poetic-ness in book artefacts and the design process for its creation. The research methodology adapts the visual research methods (Bestley and Noble 2016) within the design innovation process (Kumar 2012). It integrates the visual rhetorical perspective of Foss (2004) into the process as part of the theoretical arc. Governing conditions of the research includes criteria of selection for the case studies (table 1) and categories of analysis (table 2) for the visual research; based on inference drawn from the design philosophies of several designers (Irma Boom, Liam Niessen, Kohei Sugiura, Jingren Lu, Xiaoxiang Liu, etc.).

Upon establishing the methodology and the governing conditions which would steer the investigation, a selection of book artefacts for the case studies were picked. The visual study of book artefacts was conducted in person, which uncovered valuable findings and design strategies that designers have used to imbue the artefacts with poetic qualities (attributes) and achieve poetic effects. Additionally, the empirical study revealed several new observations unknown from the preliminary studies on secondary materials (photographs, videos, interviews, etc.). The new observations tied in with the initial presumption that physical books are essential, in bringing about a richer reading experience in this category of design.

Findings from the analysis were presented through a simplified comparison model of the relationship between image and text, based on Barthes’ semiotics theory of Anchorage and Relay (fig.4). The model suggested the relativity between words and images, in enabling navigation of narratives in the book artefacts and its influences on the poetic effect. Poetic effect in this research occurs upon the action of reading a book (artefact) with poetic qualities (lyrical mood), that triggers a deepened sentiment towards

the depicted subject. A classification of ‘the Poetic’ concepts and design features (table 3) were derived and synthesized as part of the conceptual framework (fig.7), based on the expanded notions sieved from the literature review and findings from the visual research. The design thinking model of ‘the Poetic’ operates as a form of visual rhetoric, to create a poetic experience through the design artefact. The self-reflexive process was illustrated and elucidated through the three stages conceptual framework (fig.7); which explained the iterative activity from the designer’s mental process to the design approach and the application of design features (table 3) in the prototype.

In short, the research started from examining books and wrapped up with a practice-based book prototype, that serves as a medium to help us understand what the study sets out to uncover upon completing the loop of investigation. It was conducted primarily from a researcher’s point of view but involved the lens of a creator during certain phases, like the application and prototyping process which required design decisions. As designing is a complicated process; it demands creatives to immerse themselves in their mental space and visualize the intended design experience before they can recreate or translate it into something similar. The final book prototype *Time—Space—People* is, therefore, an embodiment of ‘the Poetic’, which constitutes the act of creating an artefact poetically and inheriting an evocative quality imbued on it through the creation process. At the same time as a research archetype, which demonstrated how ‘the Poetic’ concepts and design features (table 3) function, in the making of this category of book artefact.

6.1 Achievements

The previous section has summarised the research and respective milestones in detail, therefore, it will be not be elaborated here. Overall, the research has achieved a positive outcome and uncovered valuable findings it sets out to discover. A brief outline of the key achievements are as follows.

Firstly, the research gained a foundational understanding of poetic-ness and unwrapped several notions that bring about poetic effects in book artefacts. Secondly, presented an expanded view of the topic on poetic design, from the visual communication lens. Thirdly, a design thinking model of ‘the Poetic’ was proposed and demonstrated through a book prototype titled *Time—Space—People*. Fourthly, the applicability of ‘the Poetic’ as a form of visual rhetoric in book design was addressed. Finally, a relevant study²⁸ to ‘the Poetic’ by the researcher was selected and presented at an international conference²⁹, the

²⁸ “Time—Space—People: An exploration into poetic expression in book design”

²⁹ The International Conference “Text, Image and Audiovisual Culture of Taiwan and East Asia” will take place online on the 25 and 26 June 2021. Participants includes scholars from Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. The topic for discussion revolves around text and image studies, literature, and cultural studies.

event has opened the subject to a wider audience and insightful discussions that can pave new paths for further study.

6.2 Limitations

Despite reaching the research targets, the study has a few limitations: a) Researcher's language limitations outside book that are available in Chinese or English; b) Limited access to a larger collection of books for the study due to the Covid-19 global pandemic restrictions; c) A lack of data on user experience, due to the research direction and scope. Nonetheless, the researcher was able to work with the limitations and found workarounds to offset significant concerns.

- a. A trip was made in December 2019 to the University of Amsterdam (UvA) Special Collections Library in the Netherlands to study in person some of the books designed by Irma Boom. In particular, the book titled 'No.5 Culture Chanel' (2013), one of the books identified for the study but was inaccessible to the researcher where she was based. The language of books posed a challenge, as the selection are limited to those written in the languages that can be understood by the researcher, which is the Chinese and English books. For example, books that are only available in Dutch are off the list. There were futile attempts made with the google translator, but it proved to be more time-efficient to keep within the language capabilities of the researcher. Fortunately, the trip to UvA was fruitful and insightful, accompanied by surprise discoveries of other well-designed books by Dutch designers.
- b. Shortly after the trip to the Netherlands, the COVID-19 global pandemic took place and followed by the commencement of social distancing measures by the government. The cease in travel and reduction of social interaction derailed the original plans to gather research materials in other countries. Books previously shortlisted for the case studies were further streamlined, to those that remained available to be bought online and accessible in Singapore. Consequently, the books selected for visual research principally comprises Dutch and Chinese designers. The limitation did not pose too big of a hindrance, as it turned out that the constraint has helped tightened the book selection. There are too many well-designed books to be discovered out there and impossible to be included in their entirety. The researcher was able to maintain a careful balance and variety between the book selection for the study. The three case studies selected for discussion in this thesis comprises a range of design style, mood, and themes to facilitate the discussion (refer to section 4.0). In the case of research on books, more digital repositories will likely be available in time to come. Despite uncertainties on whether the experience with the physical books could be fully replaceable by its digital version. It will positively lend some help as the world navigates through the pandemic and measures are being sorted. In the ever-changing sphere of the design world, more potentials remain uncovered.

- c. The primary objective of this research is to establish a foundational understanding of ‘the Poetic’ due to its abstract and open nature, the grounds to cover can be rather broad. Therefore, to direct and streamline the study, it was conducted in the workspace of a designer and from the practice of the researcher. The researcher-designer took on the roles of both creator and user in the study instead of evaluating the experience of participants as end-users. The study recognizes a lack of data on the end-user experience with the prototype. Nevertheless, it maintains that this decision is sound to scope the research and ensure the objectives are achievable within the stipulated time frame and constraints.

Limitations would always emerge, but fresh discoveries will be uncovered and pave ways for the formation of new knowledge. The beauty of research investigations is that one may never fully comprehend, what other interesting findings awaits. The next section will discuss several recommendations for further studies and concluding notes for the dissertation.

6.3 Recommendations for further studies

As the primary audience of this research are fellow creatives, the researcher suggests expanding the study to include approaches and strategies of like-minded designers who share a similar interest in the topic of ‘the Poetic’. Inputs by designers in the field and practice could contribute to more in-depth findings relevant to the topic and pave the way towards further development of the proposed framework. It is valuable to consider an expansion of the subject beyond book design and possibly other areas of visual communication or relevant fields to lend a broader view through different lens. Building a refined conceptual framework and design thinking model is something to look forward to in future research.

6.4 Concluding notes

As the study concludes and pans out, an unexpected point surfaced — the evolution of book design and the shifting roles of a designer. Introduced at the beginning of the thesis, the role of graphic designers shifted along with the evolution of book design, from a ‘service provider’, to a “co-editor”, “producer” and ‘author-creator’ who self-publish their works. This notion of an "ever-changing landscape" of graphic design (Niessen et al. 2018) and the evolving role of a designer is not new, a view that was shared by creatives and scholars in the recent decades (Boom 2011), (Bestley and Noble 2016), (Lupton 2012, 1997), etc. Despite knowledge of the existing discussion, it still struck as an astonishing realization (at least on a personal level) that from the investigation of book design alone, highlighted a piece of the evolution and the varied roles of a designer.

Besides valuable insights uncovered, the journey has been introspective as a practice-led study. The fast-changing landscape of the discipline continually challenges the adaptableness of the designer, to take on a gamut of roles. For instance, this design research has pushed the researcher to take a step back, to relook at her practice that used to function on a primarily intuitive-driven approach and engage in a critical self-reflexive process. It required a constant toggle between different brain function and shifting perspectives, through the dual-lens of the researcher-designer. However, the process brought about valuable perspectives for navigating and transforming hurdles into opportunities to be explored and enabling new possibilities for process refinements in our practice. It has been immensely meaningful to be able to participate in this poetic investigation, both in practice and research.

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APPENDICES

The following includes selected images of the book prototype.

Top: book cover; Right and Bottom: book pages 02-04, features a slit in page to represent notion of light shining into space of book.

Top: book pages 16-17, thumbnails; Bottom: book pages 26-27, staircase graphics printed on transparency suggesting the narrative moving from one space into the next

Top and bottom: Photo spreads

Top: Page 53, details on colored transparent geometrical shapes ('doorways'); Bottom: Page 54 and 55, 'window' die-cut and stacked stairway images.

Top: Page 54, detail of 'window' die-cut; Bottom: Page 55, detail of stacked stairway images.

Top and Bottom: Page 62, detail of 'film' abstract impression.

Top and bottom: Photo spreads

Top and bottom: Page 86 and 87, details of stacked 'calendar'.

Top and bottom: Page 86 and 87, details of stacked 'calendar'.

Top and bottom: Pages 104-107, details of Index spreads.