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GESTALT
‘TO GESTALT GESTALT’

An approach to product photography as an integrated part of the design process, as opposed to a form of documentation detached from the design process.

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GESTALT
[guh-shtahl, -shtawl, -stahl, -stawlt]

- A configuration or pattern of elements so unified as a whole that it cannot be described merely as a sum of its parts.
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01. ABSTRACT

Digital technology and the Internet has fundamentally reshaped the way photographs are viewed and shared. Today designers can reach out and publish their work via web sites and blogs without having to rely on editorial features or even the objects being in production. Most people will only see the finished products on blogs or in magazines, and it is almost as though the image is more important than the real object. How does this change the role of the image in the field of product design and what new demands does it put on product photography? Through theoretical and applied research, the aim is to identify knowledge, relevant in order to approach the creation of images as an integrated part of the design process, rather than a form of documentation done after a project is completed.

02. INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The thoughts and questions that became the starting point of this thesis project began to form in the back of my mind after an exhibition I did at the ICFF - International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York together with two of my classmates, John Astbury and Bengt Brummer in May 2010. We showed a collection of lamps and, in connection to the fair, launched a project web site with a series of press images (See Exhibit 1). The images soon had a ‘life of their own’ on blogs, online editorials and in magazines, and continued to spread long after the prototypes had been packed away.

Exhibit 1

I began to reflect on the role the images had in the outcome of this project and that “most people will only see the finished products on blogs or in magazines, and it’s almost as though the image is more important than the real object.”¹ In connection to a post about our project on the dezeen blog, someone had commented on our work describing it as ‘poetic’². This made me wonder if the comment referred to the object or the photograph? In the images, what is the expression of the object and what is the expression of the photograph? Where does one stop and the other begin, is it possible to separate the two or do they float in and out of each others expressions?

Later, seeing editorial photographs of the piece (See Exhibit 2), got me thinking further about how the perception of a piece can be tweaked, or even transformed through photographic treatment and styling and how important that becomes when you only see the objects through images. Is it even possible that decisions made while making the photograph might have an equal influence on how the object is perceived as decisions made in the design process? Are we continuing to design the object with the photograph?

Exhibit 2

Most designers have probably experienced the impact an image can have in a project. Either the object comes alive in the image or if feels like it doesn’t do it justice. See Exhibit 3 for an example for images of a desk hood designed to create a calm work sphere in landscape offices. The image on the left doesn’t make sense, why would you need to be screened off from a white ‘non-space’? In the image on the right the product makes total sense as it’s easy to imagine the purpose and benefit of the product.

¹From the article “The rendered image” by Anna Bates in ICON magazine 062, August 2008.  
²www.dezeen.com/2010/05/13/potential-energy-by-whatswhat-collective
PROBLEM DEFINITION

Over the last decade, the internet has radically changed the way images are shared and viewed, today, designers can reach out and publish their own work via the internet and blogs without having to rely on editorials features or the objects being in production. That most people who will come in touch with your designs, will do it via images on blogs & online editorials, is the reality for designers today. And we might even question weather the image is more important, for the outcome of a project, then the objects themselves. What new demands does this put on product photography, and what role can designers take in working with it?

For the master thesis projects at the industrial design department at Konstfack, press/product photography is provided by the school. A photographer is hired to shoot all projects that have prototypes. It is clear that product photography is not seen as part of the creative/design process but purely as a functional form of documentation detached from the creative process.

Designers generally work closely with photography. Processes and results are documented and used in project presentations and portfolios. The product photography manner used in most cases was developed as an objective, functional documentation of information/properties and has remained more or less unchanged since mid 20th century. And photography classes in design education have a technical focus rather then a creative one. Considering the important role this medium plays within the field of product design, product photography is surprisingly rarely analysed, discusses, critiqued and theorized on. In my opinion, we are lacking an ongoing discussion about the role of product photography in the design field.

THESIS STATEMENT

Today designers can reach out and publish their work via web sites and blogs without having to rely on editorials features or even the objects being in production. Most people will only see the finished products on blogs or in magazines, and it’s almost as though the image is more important than the real object. This change the role of the image within in the field of product design. What is an approperiate way for designers to approach product photography under this condition?

The thesis is to consider product photography as a ‘subjective’ tool for communicating design as an integrated part of the design process.

The antithesis is to consider product photography as an ‘objective’ form of documentating design as detached from the design process.

PROJECT AIM

To contribute to a discussion about product photography and it’s role in the field of design the thesis aims to

- Describing how the role of the image has changed, and what role it plays in the field of product design today.
- Identify knowledge needed in order to determine a suitable approach to how designers should work with images.
**03. PROJECT OUTLINE**

**TIME SPAN**
In total 20 weeks, starting in November 2010 and ending in March 2011

**PROJECT PHASES**
Below is a brief overview of activities carried out during each respective phase, in depth account of the processes follows.

Phase 1 - Literature Review
The first phase consisted of literature studies in the fields of Photographic theory, product photography, architectural photography, fashion photography & visual communication. Interviews were conducted with designers on their views on product photography.

Phase 2 - Form giving Gestalt
A form giving project was carried out, producing two objects, on which to base the photographic study, a pendant lamp and a stool.

Phase 3 - Photography Gestalt
A photographic study was conducted in which nine photographers subjectively interpreted the objects through photography.

Phase 4 - Analysis
Evaluation interviews/discussions with representatives from “new” design media was carried out to analyse and discuss the result of the photographic study and the role of photography in the design field from a ‘media’ perspective.

**DEMARcATIONS**
Object gestalt can, beside its physical representation, for example be photography, computer generated 3D and 2D renderings, hand sketches, film or words. This thesis is investigating object gestalt through photography.
04. THEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

RESEARCH IN THE FIELD

Setting out to find literature on the subject it soon became clear that very little written on product photography. Struggling to find literature in library catalogues and I went to Konst-ig. The owner, Helene Boström, confirmed that this is a field that is rarely written, analysed or theorized on.

One could even question weather it can be considered a field. During a visit at the Modern Museums photographic library in Stockholm the terms ‘product photography’, ‘industrial design photography’ or ‘design photography’ rendered no related hits in their catalogue, while fashion- & architectural photography got thousands.

Due to the sparse directly related literature, the approach has been to study photographic theory in general, architectural- and fashion photography and visual communication theory. Magazine articles, lectures and exhibitions will also be referred to in the text.

THE NATURE OF THE PHOTOGRAPH

“The history of photography could be seen as the struggle between two imperatives, embellishment & truth-telling” 4. This seems to be the question that keeps reappearing in literature on photographic theory, fashion- and architectural photography, what the premise of the photographic medium is. The tension between photography as documentation, a mechanical analogue of reality, simply a representation of another artwork or the photograph as an interpretation, a translation into an artwork in itself.

Historically there have been notions that photography is ‘objective’ and strictly depictive. It’s hard to stand by that perspective as every photograph is composed, constructed, worked on, chosen, treated and cropped according to professional, aesthetic or ideological norms. In making these choices, weather consciously or subconsciously, it is always a subjective translation, which in its turn leaves room for interpretation in reading. “A photograph is not only received, it is read”5, as “The photograph determine what the audience will see and how they will see it.”6

TAKING A PHOTOGRAPH VS MAKING A PHOTOGRAPH

Susan Sontag refer to photographer Ansel Adams, in the book ‘On Photography’, who makes a difference between taking a photograph and making a photograph. One can easily recognize this attitude in the field of product design where photographs often seem to be taken in an unconsidered way as opposed to made deliberately.

PERCEPTION

Two factors are relevant to consider regarding perception of an image, the context within the image and the context the image is in. When it comes to perception within the image, Roland Barthes talk about two levels of reading, the denote message and the connote message7. The denote message being the ‘matter of fact’, the analogue content (scene, object, landscape, people, props), and the connote message being the further understanding of the message, technical treatment, composition, point of view, angle, lighting, composition, focus, focal length, tone, exposure, colour, saturation, framing etc.) Product photography can easily bee seen as mainly concerned with the earlier, that the treatment of the image shouldn’t blur the perception but contribute to a photograph that to the furthest extent being an “indisputable report”8.

But a photograph is also “changed according to the context it is seen in”9 (Gallery, political demonstration, glossy lifestyle magazine, police register, photo magazine, newspaper, book, living room wall, blog.) Relating to architectural photography, we can read that, “Our experience of a building has thus often been through a complex process of filtering involving the vision of the photographer and the design skills of the art editor. This is the process we need to analyse”10. Connecting back to product design, the object filters down from the designer via the photographer to the art director/curator of a magazine, gallery, book or blog where it is then conveyed to the audience. The perception of the image is not only affected by photographic treatment but also by the context of graphic layout, copy, media and cultural context.

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3 The largest independent bookstore in Scandinavia focusing on art, photography, architecture, design and theory
5 Roland Barthes, 1977, Image, music, text.
7 Roland Barthes, 1977, Image, music, text.
CONSUMING DESIGN THROUGH IMAGES

“Digital technology and the Internet are beginning to reshape fundamentally the way photographs are produced, disseminated and received.”11 The online ‘media space’, i.e. blogs, web sites, digital magazines offer designers an opportunity to reach out and publish their own work without having to rely on editorials features or even the objects being in production. One can question how important the experience of the actual object is in this fast moving online visual culture where some objects might be one offs that you will never see in real life. Sontag claims that “the need to have the experience enhanced through photography is an aesthetic consumption all humans are used to.”12 It might be more productive to consider the photograph the final product and put effort in to how that image is perceived.

“For good or for ill, photographs have become the indispensable currency of architectural exchange” and “the strong comprehensible facade images of post-modernism can be ascribed to their architects’ realization that they were more likely to be seen and judged through photographs than in actuality.”13 This realization is likely to be as valid for product designers in today’s culture of visual mass consumption as it was to the post-modern architects. Product designers need to be aware that more often then not, the encounter with our designs will be through images, online and in magazines. The design will be perceived based on the image of the object, not by “becoming conscious of them, as it were, by absorption and use.”14

COMPARATIVE STUDIES

As previously mentioned, Barthes reason that the image has two planes, one of content (denotation) and one of expression (connotation). To decipher the different “planes” of an image, one would have to “artificially vary certain elements of a photograph to see if the variations of forms led to variation of meaning”15. I have found two comparative studies relevant in support this point of view, Stephen Bakers ‘Visual Perception’ and Lars Halls ‘Ett Glas Vatten’.

Bakers argues that the subject matter itself, of course, determine the mood of the photograph but is not necessarily the most vital aspect. More important factors are treatments like props, lighting and environment. To illustrates the argument with a comparative study featuring a chair (See Exhibit 4). Opposing adjectives, like sombre and happy, forlorn and cozy, masculine and feminine, are represented in the photographs. As the images are prints of a copy of a photograph of a photograph, the quality is quite low which influences the perception of the photographs. Despite this, it demonstrates the point.

In Halls’ study, 25 photographers were asked to take a photograph of a glass of water, no more, no less. The photographer was free to determine

Exhibit 4 - Examples from the book Visual Persuasion, Stephen Baker, 1961
type of glass, background, composition and technique. The results, despite de denotation, the actual content, being more or less the same in each photograph, do vary widely. (See Exhibit 5 for examples) Differing in expression, level of descriptiveness and abstraction, similar denotation, different connotation. Hall concludes the book by asking: “If 25 photographers photograph one glass of water with 25 completely different results, how can we then regard one photographers image of a person, community, event or war?”

Exhibit 5 - Examples from the book Ett Glas Vatten. Lars Hall, 197?. Arne Tryckare.

As designers, we need to be aware that a photograph is only one of endless possibilities to portray that object, and that the way we chose portray it will effect the way it is perceived. Therefore the approach to ‘choosing’ might benefit from a more aware and considered work process.

**ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY**

“The recognition of photography’s’ promotional potential was accompanied by a dawning realization that far from being the mechanical act photographers liked to pretend, photography could be a creative force, playing a major role in how an architects work was perceived.”

As a result, some architects, in the early 20th century, began to intervene more directly in the photographic process. Photography had become “too important to be left to the photographer alone”, and architects began to form relationships with photographers they felt understood their work. Some examples are Le Corbusier and Gravot, Rietveld and d’Oliviers, Arne Jacobsen and Aage Strüwing.

Frank Lloyd Wright used photography to explore ideas of architectural space, as a result, he had pronounced views on how his buildings should be photographed. However, one of the most celebrated architectural photographs ever taken, Bill Hedrichs’ photograph of ‘Falling Water’ (See Exhibit 6), Frank Lloyd Wrights house for Edgar Kaufmann from 1937, was originally dismissed by Wright as ‘acrobatic’ but later became one of his favourite views of the house. Elwall on the photograph: “It’s supreme merit lies in the way it portrays the building as rising almost organically from the landscape, wile the low viewpoint emphasizes both the structural daring of Wright’s cantilevered balconies and their rhythmic repetition of the rock formations below. Contrast this with photographs of European Modernist houses in which, even if the architect regarded landscaping as important, photographers tended to keep house and landscape rigidly separate.”

Interestingly, it is not really the building that is famous but the photograph. I would like to illustrate that by showing a photograph depicting another angle of the house, few would know that this is the Falling water house. (See Exhibit 6 again for both photographs of the house) Yet, the photograph has made Frank Lloyd Wright famous, not the photographer. Naturally the photograph can’t live without the building as it is a ‘translation’,

16 Lars Hall, 197?, Ett glass vatten.
but it is still an intriguing thought.

“The architectural photography is in the public relations business. His or her images are as likely to illustrate the architects glossy practice brochure and award submissions or the contractors advertising as the pages of a professional journal”[20]. Neither in the field of architectural photography nor product photography is the image not a one purpose tool. What was taken as a presentation image might later be the one circulating new media, functioning as an advertisement image. We can easily assume that carefully considering where the image will be used and who will be its receiver, is of great significance in the creation of images.

Product photography and architectural photography does bare resemblance, but also differ from one another. Mainly on the point of scale, but also because architectural photography is always in context. In product photography the objects are often taken out of context completely and shot against neutral studio backgrounds. Artificial studio lighting also has a tendency to ‘flatten’ the objects, whereas in architectural photography, natural daylight creates a play with light and shadows that gives more ‘life’ to the structures. Context and lighting are factors that will play a role of major importance to the perception of the object.

Exhibit 6 - Photographs of Frank Lloyd Wrights Falling Water, Bear run, Pennsylvania.

FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY

Fashion photography does, in terms of scale, have a more closely relation to product photography than architectural photography do. But the resemblance end there, if architectural photography is still, more or less, documentation and representation of buildings, fashion photography has moved on to being something all together different, an art form in itself.

The exhibition Fashion! at Fotografiska Museet showed an overview of the development and trends of fashion photography from 1920 to present day. Chief Curator of Fotografiska Michelle Marie Roy and Steffi Schulze, Gallery Manager of Camera Work, write; “The creation of Condé Nast Publications in 1909, and later, its acquisition of Vogue, particularly helped fashion attain its triumphant worldwide success through photography.”[21] In fashion photography, largely due to the creative platform that Vogue has been, it has never been a question of depicting garments and accessories as a veracious representation of reality. “In works by Irving Penn, it became apparent early on that clothing was to be successively stripped away as the central focus in fashion photography. Indeed, instead of fashion, figuration and increasingly expensive arrangements as well as interpretation moved to the foreground of the image.”[22] In fashion it has always been about portraying an attitude, a dream and a lifestyle. Also, due to the frequent use of models, it has been possible to portray an expression and attitude through the model, not only the garments.

It is important to mention that fashion photography is a force of it’s own, which beyond the fashion shows and look books, is not controlled by the designers but by the stylists and photographers, the ‘interpreters of fashion’. In fashion the photographers have had extensive creative freedom far beyond beening ‘tools’ for the designers to document and communicate their work.

Observing how different products are treated, photographically, depending on if they fall under the umbrella of fashion or nor is thought


21 Exhibition text from Fashion! - Modefotografi genom tiderna at Fotografiska Museet, written by Chief Curator of Fotografiska Michelle Marie Roy and Steffi Schulze, Gallery Manager of Camera Work
22 Exhibition text from Fashion! - Modefotografi genom tiderna at Fotografiska Museet, written by Chief Curator of Fotografiska Michelle Marie Roy and Steffi Schulze, Gallery Manager of Camera Work
provoking. For example handbags (fashion) can be portrayed with a very different ambition from its relative, the suitcase (product). (See Exhibit 7 for examples) The photographs of the suitcase are focused on communicating functionalities and features while the handbags are all about storytelling.

Exhibit 7 - Photographs illustrating the different attitudes and ambitions of fashion and product photography. Samsonite and Ports 1961

Fashion photography has the heritage of the ‘fashion story’, a story narrated over a sequence of images far more intricate than communicating the properties objects featured. This emphasize the difference in attitude, ambition and functionality between fashion and product photography.

PRODUCT PHOTOGRAPHY
There seems to be a very definite ‘default’ style in product photography. And is has changed very little over time, It can be hard to tell the difference between a photograph taken in the fifties and one taken today. It’s almost as if there is a ‘silent agreement’ on how product photography should be executed. What most product photography seem to have in common is a very descriptive, pedagogical, clean, minimalist style. The objects are either shot against neutral backgrounds in a studio, or in raw, nondescript environments such with an ‘industrial’ or ‘studio’ feel. Other objects then the design in question, is rare to see in a photograph. However if it supports a function or to explain scale, for example a human hand to explain how to hold an object or a flower can be put in a vase to hint at it’s area of use. It is often a series of images including a front view, a 3/4 angle view, side view and detail close ups. Very little is ‘in the way’ to blur the denote message in the photo. It is a functional manner of describing objects, their elements, properties and function. (See Exhibit 8 for examples)

Exhibit 8

Predictably yet interestingly, this style of functional photography has not simply ‘emerged’ over time. It is the result of considerate and dedicated development. Naturally, it doesn’t originate from a specific time and place, but is rather a result of cultural contexts, perspectives and tendencies developing over time. However, an interesting and important part of the story can be found at the school of industrial design in Ulm, Germany during the 1950s. The department expressively distanced itself from photography as an art form, rather, it devoted it’s energies to developing a new type of objective product photography devoid of fantasy or feeling.
Products were typically photographed against blank neutral backgrounds, with a good amount of artificial light to banish most shadows, as a means of blocking any cheap sentimentalism or emotional appeal. The Ulm institute invented this stark, sober style of product photography. Both the Bauhaus and 1930s Swiss photographers had pioneered new aesthetic models of photographing everyday commodities in noncommercial settings, but what distinguished Ulm’s contribution from the others, was it’s systematic effort to annul the last residue of artistic subjectivity and ‘irrational’ pathos in these older path breaking historical styles. The Ulm photography strive to re-present the item, not as an object of desire, but as a design concept conveying information about it’s product function.23 (See Exhibit 9)

Exhibit 9 - Examples of photography from Ulm Institute of Design

This ‘new’ style of product photography was invented a to accompany their modernist theories and views on industrial design as a practice. Since then the industrial design practice has gone through ground breaking changes both in terms of stance and direction, but also, the ‘digital revolution’ has fundamentally changed the way images are viewed and distributed. But the photographic style has with few alterations continued to influence product photography till present day. This makes it evident, that in practicing an emotional approach to industrial design, there is a gap between the aesthetics of the designs and their images.

TREND

Digital technology and the rendered image has more recently influenced product photography. “There was a time when the computer-generated image wanted to be like a photo. Now, it’s the other way round. The weird perfection of renderings has influenced designers to the point that when they publish their work, they no longer want it to look real.”24 (See Exhibit 10 for examples of photographs mimicking renderings) Instead of reinventing the image culture, this ‘hyper real’ image style has, in a way, further cemented the ‘objective’ approach to product photography.

Exhibit 10 - Hyper real, retouched photographs
Left image, retouched photograph of Geoffrey Lilge’s L40 armchair, 2008
Right image, retouched photograph of Mattia Bonetti’s Heather chest of drawers, 2008

However, voices are raised that the aesthetic of the “hyper real” image is not immortal. Photographer Tom Vack explains that he “wouldn’t be at all surprised if there is a strong back-to-nature, natural movement in commercial photography”. Designer Konstantin Grcic adds; “People will stop believing in these images - they will be sobered up by their disappointment when they see the real thing.”25

In and around the field of product design we
23 The Authority of Everyday Objects: A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design” (Weimar and Now, 34)
24 Anna Bates ICON 062 | August 2008 > The rendered image Internet
25 Anna Bates ICON 062 | August 2008 > The rendered image Internet
can now observe the beginning of a trend shift from ‘functional’ photography towards a more ‘emotional’ style. Internet and the blog culture is clearly one of the driving forces for this trend tendency. Next to the established design blogs such as dezeen, a new generation of image based ‘inspiration’ blogs has emerged, featuring product design alongside for example, fashion, architecture, art and illustration. These blogs tend to often use editorial images instead of press images as their audience are looking to be inspired, not informed. (See Exhibit 11 for examples of blogs with different approaches.) It easy to assume that these bloggers select visual material for their blogs based on the ‘feel’ of the images rather then how ‘truthful’ the subject matter is portrayed.

Exhibit 11 - http://www.dezeen.com/
http://todayyouinspiredme.blogspot.com/

Stockholm based design duo Folkform collaborated with fashion brand WHYRED the Candle Collage Collection which was exhibited at the Stockholm Furniture Fair 2011. In connection to the show they also released a book about the project with strong ‘storytelling’ images about the production process. (See Exhibit 12) They are clearly referencing the fashion world with this ‘look book’ format. And the ‘story’ is more prominent here then the ‘result’, the final design.

Exhibit 12 - Images from Folkforms collaboration with WHYRED.

Design and production studio Massproductions demonstrate an interesting approach to working with photography. They work with fashion photographers in creating strong stories and ‘poetic’ images. (See Exhibit 13) Their role as both designers and producers and the meeting of creative and commercial is evident in their visual language.

Exhibit 13 - Examples of how Massproductions work with images


27 Julia Hetta www.agentbauer.com/photographers/juliahetta
IKEA’s recent shift from very functional “show it as it is” image tone, to a ‘dreamy’ and ‘eclectic’ style is an interesting example of where the ‘feeling’ has higher priority than representation. (See Exhibit 14 to compare the previous and current styles.)

Finally, new real estate agency Fantastic Frank is also worth mentioning here. Their approach to photography is to communicate the ‘character’ or ‘essence’ of the property, rather than explaining the volume and attributes of the space. (In Exhibit 15 the difference compared to traditional real estate photography is shown.)
05. OBJECT GESTALT

PURPOSE
The purpose was to produce ‘guinea pigs’ for the photography study. The photographic study could, in theory, be based on already existing objects. But as the thesis is arguing to approach product photography as an integrated part of the design process, it felt more appropriate to execute a form giving study on which to build the photographic study. This way there is also no preconception of the objects.

METHOD
The objects were designed to, in the best possible way, facilitate the photographic study. A stool and a pendant lamp was chosen as ‘guinea pigs’ for the photographic study. As the objects are ‘self explanatory’ they allow the efforts of the photograph to focus on communicating gestalt and expression, not describing features or functions. Having two objects allows for interplay in the images, where one might limit the variation and three, or more, would easily get cluttered. The difference in size will allow for a visual hierarchy in the image. Having one ‘grounded’ and one hanging object opens up for variation in composition. Materiality is key to allow the photographer to render surfaces, textures and contrasts.

As I was interested in working with leather, I began this project phase with a visit Tärnsjö tannery and saddlery school (see pictures from my visit in Exhibit 16). When I showed Torbjörn Lundin, CEO of Tärnsjö Tannery, a sketch of a half spherical leather lampshade he told me that I wouldn’t be able to create such a three dimensional structure from leather. Challenged, I went back to school and in to the workshop determined to prove him wrong.

I immersed in hands on material exploration working with full scale prototyping. Experimenting with everything from hand forming to ancient leather techniques such as ‘Cuir Bouilli’ as well as trying to treat the leather with modern techniques like heat vacuum forming, I tried, failed, and tried again. And after many versions and iterations I finally got satisfying results trough a technique combining soaking and pressing the leather. A hood for the lamp and a base for the stool, were prototyped, full scale, in wood and foam and then ordered from a metalworking shop. (See Exhibit 17 for images from the process)

What made the process different to how I would normally work was that I continuously sent snapshots of sketch models a photographer who gave me feedback on their properties from a ‘photogenic’ perspective. This influenced my decision making process in a productive way and it was interesting to have form discussions with someone outside the field but who is still a visual expert.

Exhibit 17 - images from the material exploration leading up to the final design.

Exhibit 16 - Visit at Tärnsjö Tannery and saddlery school.

28 Simon Larsson
06. PHOTOGRAPHY GESTALT STUDY

PURPOSE
The purpose of this study is to learn more about the creation of images. How different photographers work, what their processes look like and what their skills are. The outcome of the study is to function as a basis for the image analysis and a basis for discussion in interviews with representatives from ‘new’ design media.

Exhibit 18 - From the photo shoot with Rikhard Nelson.

METHOD
To be useful the study needed to be rich but yet reviewable. I set the aim to produce ten photographs, as this felt like a manageable number. To attain a diverse result I decided to work with different photographers for each of the photographs. Below mentioned photographers from varying fields and professional backgrounds were ‘cast’ for the task.

Anthony Hill - Fashion/Architecture
Kent Johansson - Product
Simon Larsson - Portrait/Art
Anders Lindén - Fashion/Interior
Lovisa Lindström - Architecture
Rikhard Nelson - Advertising/Product
Viktor Sjödin - Product
Karin Wallenbeck - Designer
Stephanie Wiegner - Staged/Storytelling
Johanna Åkerberg-Kassel - Portrait

See Appendix 11.01, for examples of previous work from the photographers.

The brief given to the photographers was to ‘subjectively interpret the objects in a photograph’.

Location, context, treatment, props etc was to be chosen according to personal preference.

As the goal was to create a diverse and interesting, rather then functioning and applicable result, I could ‘afford’ to allow the photographers creative freedom. By doing so, and letting go of the control, I took risk of the result being uneven, but also the chance to reach results beyond my own imagination. And as product photography is not my expertise, taking control would be to undermine the photographers skills. My creative influence lies in the ‘casting’ of the photographers. As my goal was to learn, I attended the photo sessions but took an observing role. I asked many questions but refrained from interfering creatively or making decisions.

OUTCOME
See images in Appendix 11.02

07. IMAGE ANALYSIS

PURPOSE
The purpose of the analysis is to evaluate the images and get a better understanding of how they communicate and how they “work”.

It is also to get a better insight in how the images are ‘met’ at the receiving end, i.e. ‘new’ media. What do their processes look like, what criteria influence the selection and use of images.

Finally, to get closer to a ‘vocabulary’ around the images, starting to put word on elements, factors and qualities in the image to better understand the image, how it is created and read.

METHOD
To make the analysis less subjective and also to get input from the ‘receiving’ end, I invited three representatives from ‘new’ design media to discuss the results of the photographic study. I invited three ‘bloggers’ with different ‘profiles’ to get variation in the input.

First Interviewee is David Carlsson from David report/Design Boost29 whose ‘profile’ is more towards ‘information’. Second participant is Stefan Nilsson from Trendgruppen30 with a ‘trend profile’. Last but not least Johanna Vighagen Sten from

29 www.davidreport.com/www.designboost.se
30 www.trendgruppen.se
Today you inspired me with an ‘inspiration profile’.

They will be paraphrased and referred to as, ‘David’, ‘Johanna’ and ‘Stefan’ in the discussion below. My personal comments will be referenced to as ‘Karin’

The interviews were conducted separately, to avoid the ‘consensus risk’ associated to a group discussion. The result from the photographic study was used as a basis for discussion. The outcome of the interviews is presented below as a general discussion about product photography and its role within ‘new media’, an image analysis going through the images one by one and finally a comparative analysis.

Exhibit 19, Skype interview with David Carlsson from David Report

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Stefan: I have two blogs, one where I take all the photos myself to convey my way of seeing of the objects, and one where I use existing product photographs. For the latter I often choose between different projects to post and then I pick the one with the best picture. To me, good picture has to look ‘designy’. I want to show a different type of images then the ones the magazines show. As a blogger I want unique photos, designers should be picky where they send their work, I don’t want to post a project I have already seen on several other blogs, I want to be first. On style specific blogs, like Lotta Agatons they are limited to picking images that fits with their visual manner, she is probably more concerned with the image, I am more interested in the object ‘behind’ the image.

David: How I perceive an image depends the purpose of which I view it, to be entertained, find information or report? On David Report I try to control the ‘tone’ and choose images accordingly. There has to be consistency, its brand building, like having a graphic identity. I receive around 25 press releases per day but make only a few blog posts per week. In the cases I do post it’s usually because of a good image. A ‘good’ image is an ‘attractive’ image, it’s subjective. I’m jaded after more then 20 years in the business and incredibly bored with traditional product photography. I like ‘punky’ images.

Johanna: I often come across objects that I find inspiring but can’t post it because there is no appropriate image. An appropriate image has more to do with conveying a ‘feeling’ then necessarily depicting the objects. Classic studio shots rarely make it on to the blog, then I have to really, really love the object. I want the material on my blog to be used as inspiration, not a reference. I always put up links, so if you want to know more about the project you can make your way to the creators web site. I convey inspiration, not information.

Karin: Johanna happily confided that her way of working with and selecting images is subconscious and intuitive. That she has never considered her selection process, but that she will definitely start doing it after our discussion. David and Stefan both had pronounced opinions about product photography. However, I see a disconnect between what they said in the interviews and what the reality on their blogs look like. Maybe their opinions are different in theory and practice, or maybe they don’t really have a pronounced approach to the way they use images, but rather, like Johanna, became conscious, and ‘made’ opinions while saying them out loud.

IMAGE ANALYSIS - ONE BY ONE

Refer to photographs presented in Appendix 11.02 for the following analysis.

IMAGE 1

Stefan: The quality is high and they could work as a teaser. But they are so detailed focused, I get no overview of the objects. Also the fact that there are multiple images makes it hard to use. For me, these are unusable.

David: I appreciate that it’s classic product photography but creative cropping which provoke interest, I want to see more. Fun in comparison to traditional product photography.
Johanna: I really like these, they are cropped in an interesting way which makes you interested in seeing more. I like that it renders material, meetings and joins. Would work perfectly on the blog, but only as a series, otherwise it’s impossible to determine the type of objects, proportions or size.

Karin: Abstract and ‘fetish-esque’. I can ‘smell’ the materials, especially the metal. The leather looks shinier then it is. The images feel very controlled, ‘precision creativity’. The photography has ‘sharpened’ the objects.

(This photographer chose to ignore that I requested one photo showing both objects. But as the manner he chose to work with demands a series I include it, it interesting and points at a limitations in the format of the study.)

**IMAGE 2**

Stefan: This is nothing more than Image 8 after a beer, a ‘lättöl’.

David: What’s the deal with always showing objects in industrial settings? Apart from the objects possibly having been produced in an industrial environment the connection is bizarre.

Johanna: Nice and warm image, the lamp being lit makes a big difference. I get a good notion of the leather.

Karin: No surprise here, expected. Dark materials against a dark background is difficult, the photographer ‘solved’ this by throwing dust on the wall to pop the shadow side of the objects. This works well on screen but the contrasts are too low to communicate in print. There is also a dusty light beam coming in from the right of the picture that disappears in print. Subtle comes across as indistinct. It limits the possibility of use if the image is heavily ‘blurred’ by low res screens or prints.

When I spoke to the photographer to plan the shoot he asked me “studio or industrial setting”? It’s interesting that the ‘industrial’ background is somehow ‘kosher’ compared to for example home environments. Maybe it’s because they are nondescript nor time specific compared to an interior where the image risk becoming dated as it’s easily placed in time and trend.

**IMAGE 3**

Stefan: This image provokes me, it’s so bad, the photographer has just done his own thing with no consideration of the brief. This is not interpreting the objects, the objects are just props in a portrait photograph.

David: I like this, there is something ‘else’ going on. I like the fact that the stool and lamp are subordinate.

Johanna: I like, it’s really cool. You become very curious of the guy, the objects kind of disappear in the background though.

Karin: This image might be perceived as being in the ‘outskirts’ of the brief, that the objects have simply been downgraded to props. But the photographer has interpreted a ‘feeling’ he gets from the objects, some kind of ‘gentlemens club’ feeling, and then simply exploded that story in the image, where the object function as a kind of support for their own story. It’s not functional in terms of communicating the properties of the objects but it’s functional in terms of communicating a ‘story’. To decide if an image is ‘functional’ we need to consider what function we are after, how and to whom we want to communicate it. Personally, I think the story is a bit obvious and ‘done’. I feel like the ‘dandy’ theme is so easy and expected.

**IMAGE 4**

Stefan: Oh, really good but really wrong! It’s ‘arty’ but over worked. The wire doesn’t support a story, it’s just there, it could have been anything, like soap bubbles, instead. The metal reads like copper not brass.

David: I like this, but it’s odd, it’s not really ‘selling’ the objects. The photographer is very ‘visible’ in the image, it’s a strong ‘signature’. This is more of an interdisciplinary artwork. But then we have to ask ourselves how we want to see the world, accurately reproduced or subjectively interpreted?

Johanna: Wow! It’s not very clear, you are left wondering. I think it’s easy to forget about the objects here, to become more concerned with the image, what is what? But I will definitely remember this image.

Karin: This image is happy and ‘whimsical’ which stands in contrast to the expression of the objects which
are quite static and sober. I think that tension is interesting. I want to keep looking, my eyes ‘stick’ to it. It renders the leather in a nice way but the brass looks like copper. I think it’s interesting how the photograph really has a power over the materials. The photographer can easily ‘change’ a material. Here the photographer is getting very close to the form giving process.

**IMAGE 5**

**Stefan:** This feels dated, more over the image is just plain bad, you can’t see the lamp.

**David:** The flowers are odd, why are they there? I’m not intrigued, I don’t see the connection.

**Johanna:** Haven’t we seen this already? The image doesn’t do anything for the objects and the objects doesn’t do anything for the image. It’s hard to even have an opinion.

**Karin:** This ‘raw meets romance’ concept feels old and lacks a connection to the objects. The quality of the image is low and the lamp is placed very unfortunately. It would benefit from hanging in front of the lit wall. The fact that the photographer is an amateur is apparent throughout concept, execution and rendering of objects.

**IMAGE 6**

**Stefan:** This type of image is compulsory if you want to appear in magazines.

**David:** By the book

**Johanna:** I don’t know what to think, is it a rendering or a photo? If there are nice prototypes you should make use of it. If you make the photo look like a rendering then it’s a lot easier and cheaper to just render it. It’s so sharp, to much contrast, it almost hurts my eyes.

**Karin:** It’s almost surreal. The materials ‘die’ in this artificial light, the leather looks like rubber almost. Charmless, and not really descriptive either, lose-lose.

**IMAGE 7**

**Stefan:** I appreciate that I can see the details like solders, it makes it possible to judge the quality of the craft. The image is meticulous, it communicates the material in a clear way, interesting.

**David:** How boring, so flat, there is nothing there. The only case where you need this much ‘information’ about an object is to evaluate the condition if you are bidding at online auction.

**Johanna:** It is clear but there is still an atmosphere and a tone in this image which is favourable for the materials. It subtly hints at a setting where I can imagine the object existing, a ‘loungy’ masculine environment.

**Karin:** It’s distinct while still conveying a ‘mood’. But I’m not necessarily ‘attracted’ to it, it gives everything away at once, I find no reason to rest my eyes on it, there is no depth to discover.

**IMAGE 8**

**Stefan:** No, I can’t bare another concrete floor!

**David:** Standard.

**Johanna:** ‘Here-are-my-designs-straight-up’. Honest.

**Karin:** This photograph was taken as a counterpoint in the study, representing a ‘typical’ style used when designers document their own work. And as we can see, from the above comments, it’s a style we are used to seeing which doesn’t stir a lot of emotion.

**IMAGE 9**

**Stefan:** We are invited to interpret a story. This is the nicest one in my opinion. But I would never be able to use it since the objects are too small.

**David:** This is ugly-cute, it’s obviously ironic, right? It’s hideous, the heater is so heavy, it seems abandoned, it’s sad and depressing. Too constructed, it’s not believable.

**Johanna:** I like that it is so ‘pastelly’ buy yet so dirty. Nice composition but it doesn’t bring the objects forward. The story has the overhand and lead my thoughts away from the objects. The objects don’t really have a part in the story, the location and the other props carry the story, the lamp and the stool are just ‘extras’.

**Karin:** The objects seem a little out of place here, what are their role in the story? My eye wanders from the curtain via the bra, to the tights and finally the shoes. I barely take notice of the objects. There is also a problem of scale here, this is difficult to use an image like this small.
**IMAGE 10**

**Stefan:** The story completely takes over here, and it is just served to you, you are not invited to interpret, I just don’t get it.

**David:** There is a poetry here, this is my favourite. It reaches further, it strikes a chord for me.

**Johanna:** This doesn’t appeal to me at all, it’s weird. The transparencies are messy, and why is it outside? I get a feeling that there is supposed to be a story here, but I don’t get it, at all, I’m lost!

**Karin:** I like the tone in this image, but that’s about it. The objects are ‘lost’ in the story. And what is the story? Why is the bush in focus? And why is there a lamp in it? Who is the girl and why is her back turned to the image? A lot of questions, no answers.

**IMAGE ANALYSIS - COMPARATIVE**

Refer to the overview presented in Appendix 11.02 for the following analysis.

**SIZE**

This is maybe an obvious one but still worth mentioning. Size, resolution, format, file type and ‘zoom level’ is important to consider in relation to where the images will be used. If it’s for blogs, the images will be quite small and the zoom level will have to be closer to the objects. Whereas if the image is intended for a large print, you might afford to leave some ‘room’ for the objects.

**ROLE**

In comparing the ten images, it is apparent that the objects are paying different roles in the different images. In images 1, 2, 6, 7 and 8 the objects play a clear ‘leading role’. The objects have centre stage against reduced backgrounds. In image 4 the objects are still in the leading role but the ‘stage’ is more expressively decorated. In image 3 and 9 the objects have more of a ‘supporting role’ to the ‘larger’ story in the image. In image 5 and 6 the objects have been reduced to ‘extras’, they are not prominent and are in no clear way supporting the story of the image, the image could live, with it’s expression, even if the objects were removed from it. I am not saying that one is right and the other wrong, but when planning an image it’s useful to know what role you want the objects to take on in the image.

**STORY**

‘Storytelling’ is a frequently used word in the design world, but what does it mean? If you want to tell a story through a photograph, you need to know if you want to tell a story through the objects or are you telling the story of the objects? Naturally all images in this study communicate a story of some sort, but I would like to argue that images 1, 2, 6, 7 and 8 are not really storytelling at all and that the remaining images are telling a story through the objects. None of the images are telling the story of the objects. Layering stories, the one of the objects and the one of the image, is complex as they intersect each others existences. But to successfully design the photograph, there has to be a clear understanding of weather the story in the photograph should be supported by the object or weather the photograph should support the objects story.

**JUXTAPOSITION**

If we consider the expression in the images in relation to the expression of the objects we can clearly define a difference between a correlating expression and an opposing expression. Images 3 and 7 have correlating expression for example tactile, exclusive and timeless. Whereas images 4 and 9 have opposing expressions like dynamic, whimsy, bright and sheer. I think the cases where the expressions are correlating are more clear, but also obvious, and the objects run the risk of ‘blending in’ to the expression of the image. The meeting between opposing expressions are less clear but more dynamic and might in a sense ‘point at’ the expression of the objects.

**RENDERING**

The photographers demonstrated different levels of skills and preferences when it came to rendering the materials of the objects. This is really where the gestalt of the object and the gestalt of the photography start to overlap and interfere with each other. Through the ‘treatment’ the photographer gets access to the design process and can easily change the properties of a material. In the study we can see the leather rendered matte (image 4), shiny (image 1), rubber like (image 6) and textured (image 7). The brass is rendered dramatically different (image 1/2/6) and tones represented from yellow (image 8) and gold (image 9) to more copper like (image 4). The photograph has real influence over the materials, and is really an extension of the decision making in the design process.
PHOTOGRAPHERS

I see two different tendencies in the ‘cast’ of photographers. On one hand the ones whose main objective is to ‘portray’ the objects where the ‘theme’ of the image becomes secondary (images 2, 6, 7 and 8) and on the other hand the ones who prioritise the ‘theme’ and where the objects are portrayed less ‘accurately’ (images 1, 3, 5, 9 and 10). Image 4 is the only one where there is a strong presence of the images expression while the objects are still ‘readable’. In casting a photographer it’s crucial to know what is important to express in the image. If material rendering is important then the photographer needs to have a good understanding of form and light, if the ‘mood’ is more important the photographer needs to be ‘cast’ accordingly. To generalize between the photographers in this study, the portrait photographers where struggling to tell a ‘story’ without a human expression and “forgot” about the objects (Image 3, 9 and 10). The product/architecture photographers where mainly concerned about the representation of the objects and the story was vague or non existent (Image 2, 6 and 7). Whereas the photographers with backgrounds in fashion had a good eye for representation of materials and form but also dared to bring in a strong visual language in the photograph (image 1 and 4).

08. CONCLUSION

References below are to the ‘said’ in the thematic literature review (04), object gestalt study (05), photographic gestalt study (06) and the image analysis (07) above. Through wich I have collected knowledge and information to put forward arguments to support my thesis, that photography should be considered an integrated part of the design process, as opposed to my antithesis, that photography should be considered a form documentation done after the design process is completed.

I have argued that the general notion, in the design field, is that the object is the final outcome of a project and that product photography is a tool used to document the object.

To Support this argument I have ‘said’ that the Industrial Design Institution at Konstfack views product photography in this fashion, I have pointed towards such historic notions, for example from the Ulm institute of design and I have made asserting observations in the field.

Further, I claim that in a time and culture where most people will only see the finished products on blogs or in magazines, it might be more appropriate to consider the photograph a part of the creative process and as it will be the ‘voice’ of the design.

To establish this point of view I have ‘said’ that the Internet and digital technology has reshaped the way images are shared and ‘consumed’. I have also ‘said’ that in this ‘new’ media landscape, the role of the image has shifted and is no longer solely a conveyor of ‘information’ but also of ‘inspiration’. This view has been backed through input from representatives from ‘new’ media.

I put forward arguments that photography is a creative ‘design tool’ that will play a big part in how a design is perceived. Through the photographic ‘treatment’ the perception of the design can continue to be ‘designed’, tweaked and transformed.

This is demonstrated through the ‘said’ analysis of the photographic study and is further backed through comparative studies and photographic theory regarding perception in the literature review.

To support the above statements, I have put forward strong arguments as to why I think photography should be considered an integrated part of the creative design process which establishes this approach as ‘preferable’ (I want to stay clear from the word ‘true’ as I feel it’s not appropriate in discussing subjective matters of this sort)

09. DISCUSSION

As established methodology, on the use of product photography as a part in the design process, is lacking, it was hard to decide on an approach to go about tackling the ‘question’. I was inspired by the comparative study in one of the books from theoretical study, Ett Glas Vatten

Lars Hall, 197?,
But sitting at my desk thinking about it wasn’t going to get me any closer either. As I didn’t know much to start with, I didn’t know what I needed to find out either. But as I got ‘in to it’ things began to take form. But the more knowledge I acquired, the more I realized how little I knew. The thesis question has formed ‘itself’ along the way.

It’s hard to be ‘scientific’ about a matter that can by it’s nature not be scientific as it is subjective and based on intuition and ‘gut feeling’. I started out trying to fit my thoughts in to ‘models’ and charts, but realized pretty soon that this wasn’t going to give me any room for exploration. I decided to ‘let go’ of my structured thoughts for a while and just trust in the process and the people I had involved. However, as a control freak, this is hard. And as a reaction to my lack of control and insecurities in the outcome of the study I began to take photographs myself. But as I got closer to the end of the project I realized that, myself acting as a photographer, was totally counterproductive to my thesis. (See Appendix 11.03 for examples from my individual photo studies.) But what I did get out from this side track, was insight in terms of communicating input to the photographer, where to be specific in the brief and where to leave room for interpretation and spontaneity.

The path I have chosen to take through this project has proven rich and productive for me, personally. But there are definite ‘flaws’ in it’s structure. The results from the photographic study are definitely ‘hit and miss’, this is not due to lacking skill from the photographers side but a lack in skill from my side in defining the task for them. I think that missing the background story about the objects, makes it hard for the photographers to ‘withdraw’ an appropriate story/theme. But had I told them the background story, we might be looking at ten very similar results now. Also, knowing that you are one of ten participants in a ‘comparative study has a tendency to producing ‘loud’ results. However, as the purpose of the study is to define knowledge and facilitate a discussion, not delivering “usable” results, it is still a rich and functional study.

What I discuss and explore through my work is not ‘new’, we are all working creatively with product photography already, but we might not have concious processes. So through my work I’m aiming towards making that process more aware and conscious. To frame it as a ‘point of view’ suitable for the design field today.

The approach is not intended to apply only to ‘simple’ objects but across the field, weather you are designing kitchen appliances, medical devices, personal accessories or a cooking stove for developing countries. It’s not a ‘style’ approach but a purpose based approach where you consciously consider what you want to say with the image, to whom you are saying it and through which media. Thinking that you can always ‘play it safe’ with a descriptive studio shot is not the case. You need to know what you want to communicate with the image and make sure that the image is communicating that message.

My hope is that I have understandably described a point of view towards product photography and it’s role in the design field and given it sufficient bearing for it to be considered valuable and profitable for the design practice.

If elaborated and expanded on, my notion is that this could be used as a valuable method to be taught in design school and used as a tool in the design process.

**PROPOSED FURTHER RESEARCH**

Once this approach is established as ‘preferable’, you arrive to the question of ‘how’. How do we integrate it as a part of the design process?

This is not the question of this thesis but an inevitable follow-up question. And might be an appropriate starting point for another research project? How to establish a distinct method, answering ‘how’ we could best integrate it in the design process.

But of course, the knowledge gained through my studies has given me a better understanding on ‘how’. I don’t want to even attempt to answer the ‘how’ here but I will share some insights gained that I will personally explore in my future work with product photography.

I want to stress that I dont consider ‘making photography a part of the design process’ the same as ‘the designer doing it all themselves’. A common trait for industrial designers is a ‘we can do it all’ - attitude that is not appropriate in this case. The skills needed to work with photography in a good way are not necessarily ‘implementing’ skills but skills of a ‘directing’ nature. For example knowing how to include other creative’s to perform parts of the process where their expertise exceeds your own. The skill needed is to appropriately...
‘cast’ participants in your projects.

To facilitate the shift from a ‘documentary’ approach towards a ‘purpose based’ approach to product photography one tool might be a type of ‘functional analysis’ or ‘process framing’. To determine what is an appropriate and purpose based photograph to communicate and represent a project one must consider all aspects of the photograph from how it is conceived to the way it is conveyed to who will receive it. Let me share some further thoughts on what that might mean.

Conceived - How will the image be created.
Things to consider might be;
What it it is you want to say with the project and how the image can help you communicate that. Shall it tell the story of the objects or shall the objects tell a story?
What role shall the object play in the story, leading or supporting?
Who should the photographer be and what skills are important that he/she has?
Where should it be shot, context, location?
Budget in terms of percentage of project budget, how important will the image be in the ‘life’ of this project?

Conveyed - Where the image will ‘live’.
Things to consider might be;
Where will the image be used? (Presentation/portfolio/website/blog/catalogue/pitch etc)
Will it be shown printed or digital?
What format, size and resolution is appropriate for the media an question, different ones?
Single shot or series?
What is the visual/graphic identity of the context where it will be shown?

Received - Who is the ‘target’ of the image.
Things to consider might be;
Who is the image intended for? (Employer, Client, Professor, customers, media, jury etc)
What are they looking for? (Information, inspiration, processes etc)
How ‘invested’ will they be?
How much time will they have to view the image?
Will it be in connection with spoken/written words, how does that change the demands on the image?

To clarify, I am just ‘brainstorming’ here. To identify a method a new research project will have to be carried out.
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INTERVIEWS
INITIAL - DESIGNERS
Stina Wessman
Maria Johansson
Marcel Granfelt Saavedra
Johanna Vighagen Sten

Evaluation - REPRESENTATIVES FROM “NEW” DESIGN MEDIA
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