

Photography 1: Digital Photographic Practice

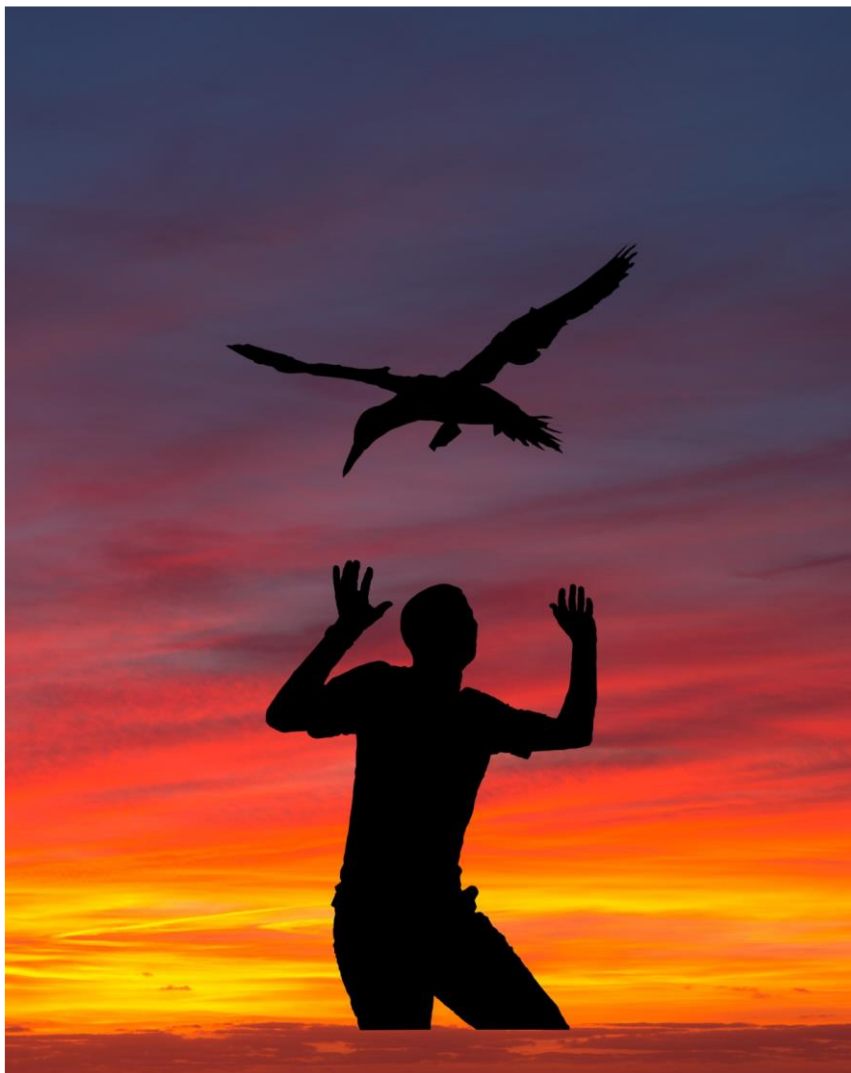
Assignment Four (Real or Fake)

Mike Nott (Student Number 510717)

PHOTOGRAPHY 1: DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICE Assignment Four (Real or Fake)

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15th May 2015



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This supports the submission of the fourth assignment for Photography 1: Digital Photographic Practice. This assignment is titled 'Real or Fake' and the requirements for this assignment are repeated below from the course material:

"The objective is to produce a photographic image to illustrate an imaginary book or magazine cover. Covers sales vehicles for their content, and so often quite widely interpreted by art directors, illustrators and photographers. The moral ground is therefore potentially ambiguous.

Decide on a topic to be illustrated. You could, if it makes this decision easier, take an existing book that you know and devise alternative photographic cover illustration that will get the feeble story across a prospective reader, taking a photograph, especially for it.

Explore the areas of adjustment and (possibly) manipulation that would make the image successful as a cover. This might, as just one example, involve shading or extending an area at the top in order to display the title. We might choose to combine to visual elements (juxtaposition is a frequently used device this kind of photographic illustration).

Accompany the finished image with a description of the techniques you considered using and finally used, and also your ethical justification".

The preparation for this assignment has been somewhat protracted. As would be expected, I had looked at the work of other OCA students via their online blogs and what they had produced in support of this assignment. There were some very good composite images being produced and clearly some people have an artistic and creative 'eye' and have a very good working knowledge of photographic editing applications. I'm still not convinced that I have what it takes to fully compete with these gifted people, but if I am to continue in my development and learning, I'll have to up my game.

I have been formulating a plan or body of work in support of the final assignment 'project' for this Digital Photographic Practice module based around the still-life works of Edward Weston. Even though his images are now between 85 and 90 years old, they still have a resonance and artistic effect on me. As I have been studying Weston's work, I started to consider whether I could also start creating some of his nude/body images as the basis for the book cover? As a related thread, my increased awareness of the work of Edward Steichen through my attendance at the 'Edward Steichen, In High Fashion, The Conde Nast Years' at the Photographers' Gallery in London, and despite a very different approach in their work, I felt that there was the potential for some cross-over in the form of the human body and associated poses that would create both 'flowing' and more 'graphic' forms of visual representation (see my blog here <https://nott249.wordpress.com/2015/01/30/dpp-reflections-24-edward-steichen-in-high-fashion-the-conde-nast-years-1923-1937/>). The trouble was that I liked the work of both photographers, albeit they are very different in approach, so I might end up in a bastardised set of images, but I was happy to proceed on that basis...but you'll have to forgive me the artistic license of doing this.

An opportunity to have a full day at a studio with a model presented itself with a small group of members of my camera club. This was to be my second session in a professional studio and using a professional model, so I had more of an idea of what the whole process was about, so I boned up on some of the poses and compositions from previously seen work of both

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photographers with the intent of creating something similar, but yet different, to display as the primary cover image. I was thinking legs, legs and legs (e.g. Edward Steichen's *Model Wearing Sandals*, 1934) and a twisted pose of arms and legs, in particular Edward Weston's 'Nude' 1936:



Edward Steichen, Model Wearing Sandals, 1934



Edward Weston, Nude, 1936

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During the excellent and productive session at 'The Cottage Studio' at Henfield (<http://www.thecottagestudio.co.uk/>) under the gaze of Brian, the ever-watchful owner and with the very able assistance of our model Elle Black (<https://purpleport.com/portfolio/elleblack/>), I created a number of images that would fit the bill for the primary images for use on the cover.

My intent was to produce a small coffee-table type book with the dimensions of 12" x 18" (noting the ease of subsequent printing of the final output), and I didn't want to just create a 'front' cover, so I factored in for front and back covers and the spine.

I worked on the assumption that I am a prolific photographer and would have sufficient numbers of 'quality' images to make a book of 200 pages (one image per double page, words on left and image on right).

I researched the subject of what makes an effective cover including the layout and 'flow' of images and words on the front cover. The key messages for making a book stand out from the other books on the shelves include:

- Apparently size does matter. The bigger the image or text will dominate similar, but yet smaller, images or text;
- Use of 'visual' lines within the design, either within the image or in combination with appropriate text layout, can help draw the eye towards specific words or image area;
- Centering an image at the centre of the page or design will have a tendency to gain more focus and attention that similar images positioned elsewhere on the page;
- Simple is often best; having the main visual 'object' within an image, or a single image on the page, surrounded by a plain and neutral colour will focus visual attention;
- A strong image, or graphical composition within it, can help define and dominate the overall page layout in a positive way – making the title and any supporting text secondary items within the page;
- The 'old' rules applied to photography also apply to cover layouts; the 'rule of thirds' remains effective and key elements on the page or within the image should be on the thirds rather than in half;
- In Western culture, people have been conditioned and have a strong tendency to read left to right and top to bottom, where the eyes tend to move diagonally across the page in left to right 'sweeps'. This is called 'Reading Gravity' and can best be seen in the 'Gutenberg Diagram' shown in the links to a number of websites below (http://www.cuttingedgepr.com/articles/coreprskills_double_effectiveness.asp, <http://www.vanseodesign.com/web-design/3-design-layouts/> and <https://medium.com/user-experience-3/the-gutenberg-diagram-in-web-design-e5347c172627>);
- Triangular compositions are also an effective composition arrangement.

There is also some science that can be applied to creating book covers from scratch and the 'creator' would need to include the width of the spine (this being dependent on the weight of the paper and the corresponding Pages Per Inch (PPI) – basically, $\text{Number of Pages} \div \text{PPI} = \text{spine width in inches}$). Should the discerning student be interested, Xerox has some useful information that would help define the width of the spine based on the number of pages and the selection of paper and the paper weight:

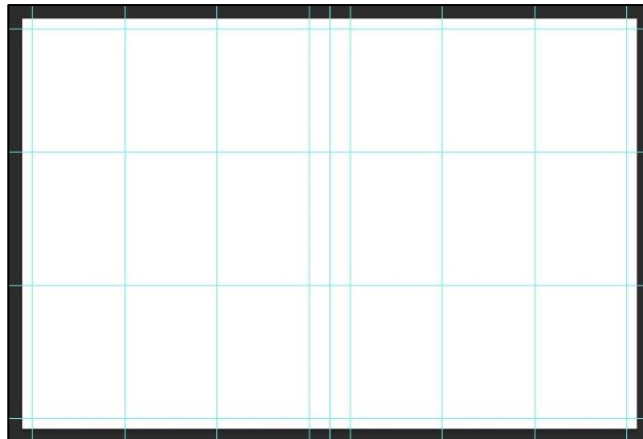
http://www.xerox.com/downloads/usa/en/s/supp_lib_Helpful_Facts_About_Paper.pdf

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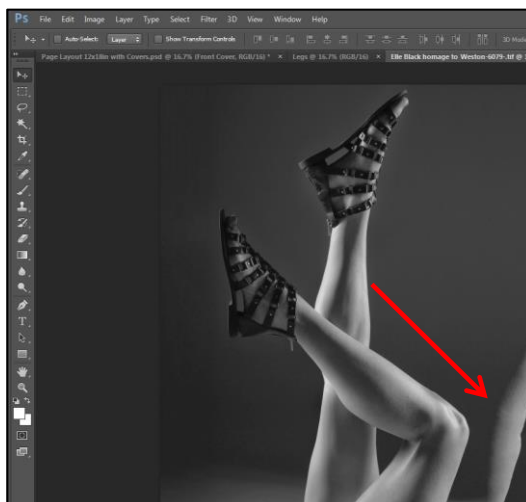
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I created a new blank document in PhotoShop and entered the dimensions of the book cover. Just to help, I set up some 'guide lines' on this page in both the horizontal and vertical orientations to help in the layout on the page (View -> New Guide and Snap To -> Guides) for the 'thirds' on both the front and back covers and to mark out the spine are.



I selected my 'Legs' image as my main visual component, but having now realised how the western 'eye' scans a page I really needed to change the direction of the legs, such that the top most foot was positioned in the upper left of the page with the triangle of the legs and other foot creating a triangular arrangement flowing downwards the lower right of the page.

The 'Legs' image had already been post-processed within Lightroom from the original colour RAW file to create the monochrome image using the adjustment brush for local changes to brightness/contrast and the colour sliders to get the desired effect that we would work with. So, I open edited file and because I wanted the line of direction to flow from the top left to bottom right (line of the foreground leg sloping to the right) I flipped the image (Image -> Image Rotation -> Flip Canvas Vertical). I also wanted some more 'space' on the right hand side of the image to allow some title/text to have more space – so I had to go back and edit the 'Legs' image within Photoshop. Being lazy, I used the Content Aware tool to try and extend the right hand side of the image with neutral and content free 'space' (Magic Wand, Content Aware Fill- left side first and then right). Unfortunately, the content aware 'fill' managed to create an area of leg in the lower right of the image that then needed some more substantive manual cloning/blending to remove the offending area.



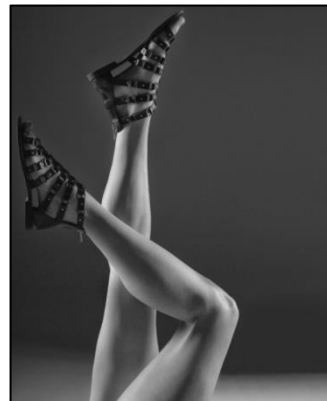
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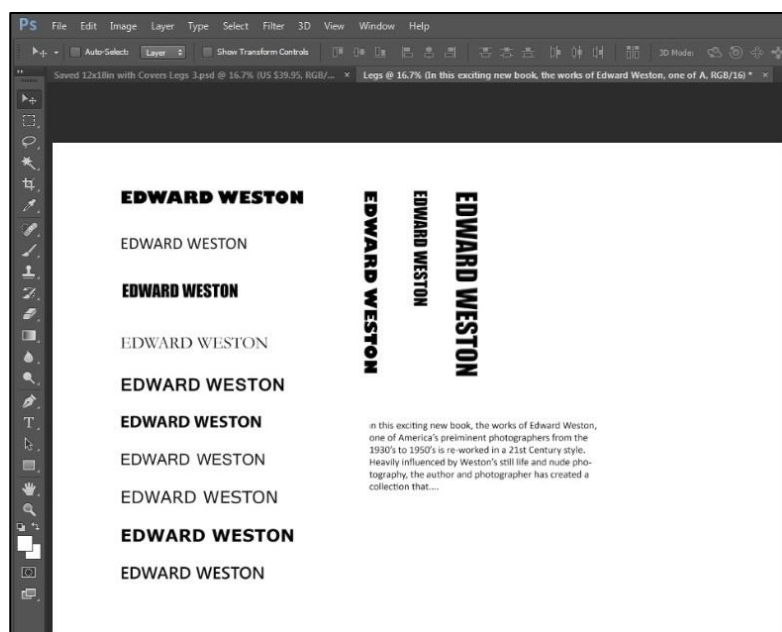
Original



Flipped and Extended

This newly edited (flipped and extended) image was pasted into an empty book cover image for positioning on the right-hand side (i.e. the front page). I used the Free-Transform tool to re-scale the image (using Shift to maintain the proportions). I also intended to have a grey background page colour such that the 'Legs' image would flow into the remainder of the front cover and have the same colour for the spine and back page. I used the Eye Dropper tool to select a colour from the 'Legs' image and applied to the background page colour and attempted to blend the image into the background using a Layer Mask; I wasn't really wasn't that successful in making an effective blend as the bottom portion of the image had a band of lighter colour, so I backed out of that change and re-thought.

An alternative background page colour (gold) was selected to complement the monochrome images and applied a 10 pixel white coloured stroke line around the 'Legs' image to provide a degree of 'framing' around it. I then wanted to apply the book title and author text to the front page, experimenting with various text fonts and sizes, before applying the text across the page in various orientations, whilst working within the constraints of the available 'free' space on the page.

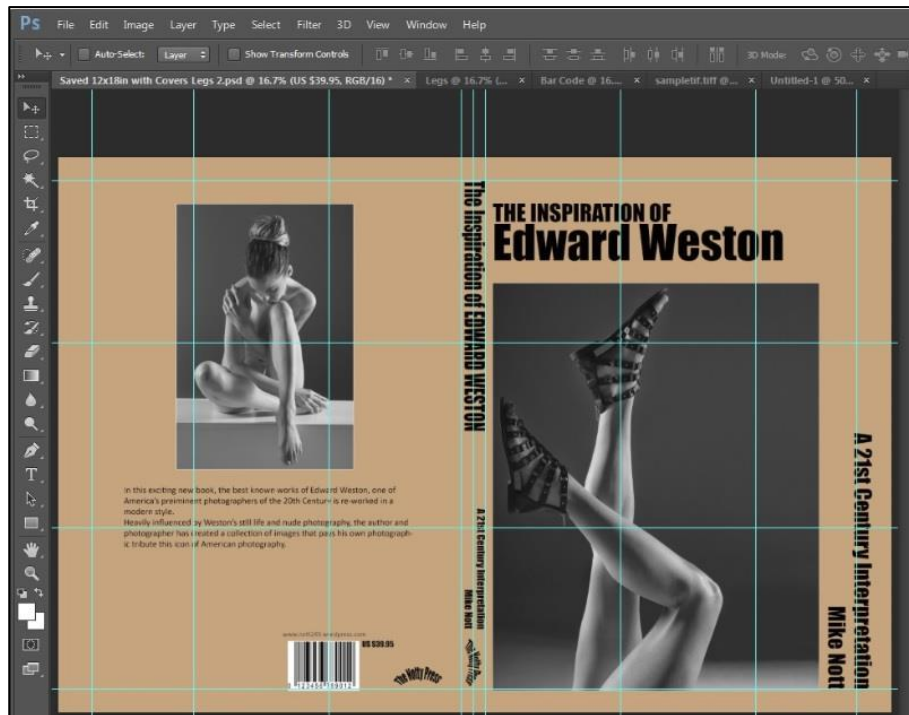


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The second selected image was pasted onto the back page, using the same white stroke line to provide a subtle framing. I applied text on the spine and back page, using the same type of font, but altering the font size and orientation as required – and a generic bar-code image, price and publisher information (The Notty Press) to complete the overall layout.



Whilst I was generally happy with the overall result, I was concerned that the assignment brief had not been met, as there was insufficient modification or 'compositing' within the page layout. I dropped my tutor an email with the image and asked for some initial feedback.

Hi Pete

I'd welcome your thoughts on the attached image.

I know I spoke about using inspiration from Edward Weston's still life (vegetables/fruit) work for my Assignment 5 project, but I've also managed to spend some time in a studio with a model and I've been creating some imagery inspired by his work. My concerns are:

a) the underlying inspirations for both assignments 4 and 5 are the same;

b) despite the amount of time taken to create attached, the level of "jiggery-pokery" of the images and the remaining cover content is too simplistic for the 'Real or Fake' - despite the time spent on the work.

Please advise.

Needless to say, my tutor agreed that the image lacked the required manipulation:

I agree that the book cover here doesn't really work for A4, you really need to produce a composite image, although you could print the cover out and make a 'dummy' book and then set this up in a still life? This could, in some way, lead on to your work for A5?

I do think the two shots you have used on the cover are really strong and I would encourage you to continue with this for A5, how does all that sound?

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So, I had some options to consider, namely whether to persevere with the 'Weston-esque' book cover in a still life arrangement or whether to apply what I had learnt so far and try something different. Despite the encouragement to carry on and use the images, I decided, perhaps unwisely, to do the latter!

An alternative cunning plan started to develop in my mind over the following days; I had a series of images from a trip from the RSPB reserve and gannet colony at Bempton, Yorkshire that I thought could be used in an abstract manner in attempt to create a new book cover in homage to 1950's 'The Birds' by Daphne du Maurier. Strangely enough I was going to call it 'The Revenge of the Birds'. I think those people of the *right age* would remember the strong visual imagery from the advertising images from the better known Alfred Hitchcock's film adaptation of the book. Even though I was not contemporary to the release of the film, I deliberately did NOT go out and look at what previous book cover designers had done, nor did I look at the film advertising posters. I had a vague recollection in my memory of black birds and people being attacked by them and having their arms raised above the head and it was that aspect that I wanted to convey in my new book cover. Rather than a coffee-table book, my new design would be for a hard-backed reading book.

Firstly, I wanted to take the previously taken bird images and create silhouettes from them – and I also needed to do the same with a person or persons for the human interest element. I set up shop outside in the garden and draped a plain background over some guttering and started taking some 'selfies' using tripod and self-timer, I took a series of images in various poses simulating being attacked by something in the air. Given the strength of the wind that morning, some of the images were not quite sharp, but that wasn't critical for what I needed to do. Once I had a set of images, I selected two of the best from them.

A number of techniques and tools were tried out to select individual birds and my good self from their respective backgrounds, but I found the most successful to be the 'Pen' tool (even though it resulted in a very length process of selecting the outline around the birds and the two images of myself). I'm sure there is a better, or rather more time efficient, way of using the lasso tools, feathering and refining masks, but the Pen tool process I applied worked just fine and I created four different bird silhouettes that I could use in various orientations within the cover composition.



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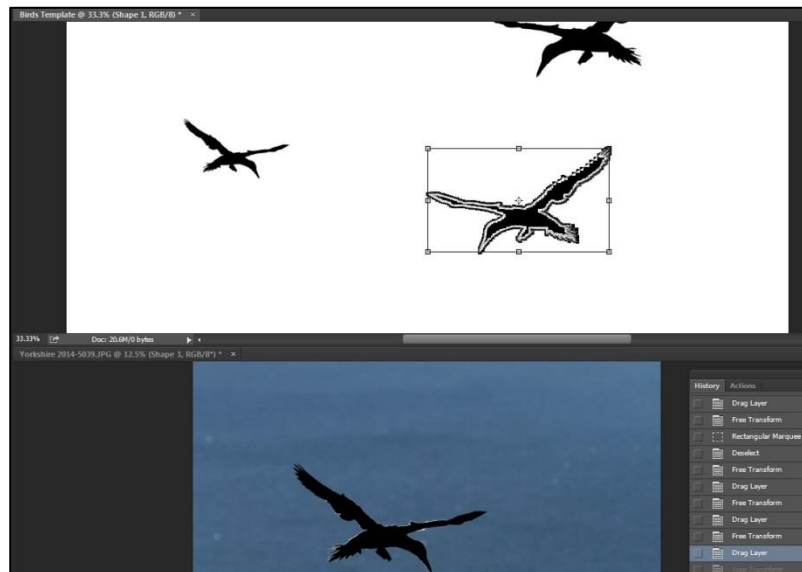
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Original Gannet Bird Images

Each of the four bird silhouette images were extracted out into separate Photoshop files and multiple versions of each bird image were created changing the size and orientation for the same image, thus allowing me to copy and paste them into the book cover to vary the nature of the attacking birds (as seen below).



Bird Silhouettes

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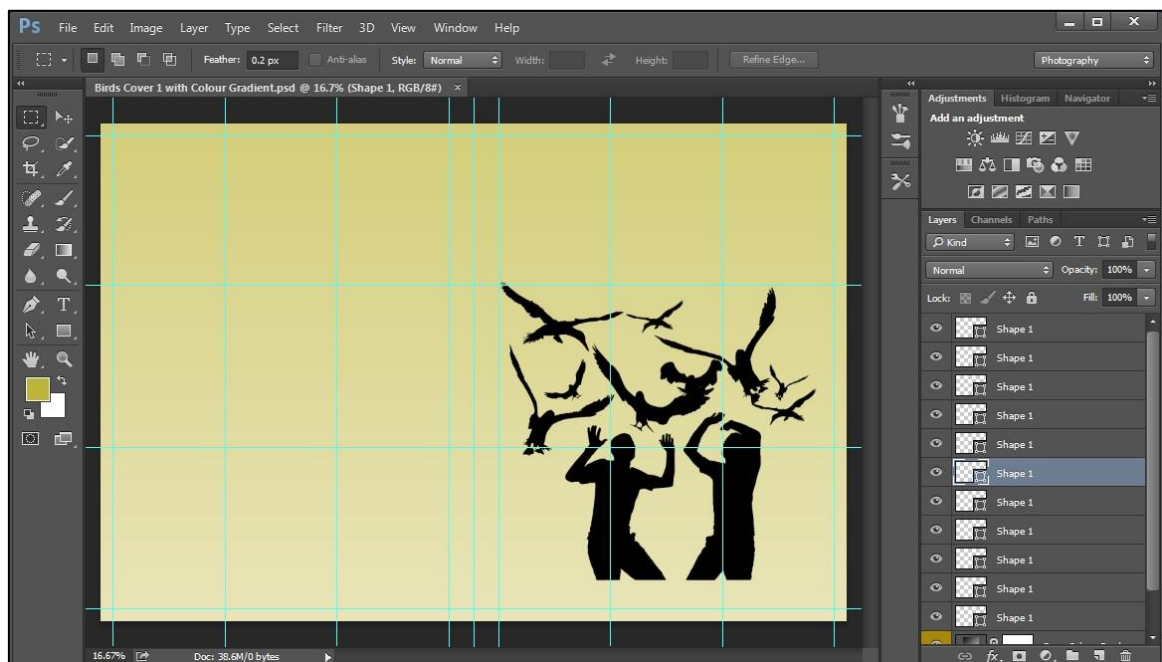
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I created silhouettes of the human forms in the same manner, trying to have the arms and hands showing clearly against the backdrop.



“Selfie” Images

Now that I had the major elements of the book cover to hand, I started with a new image file with a graduated colour page background in Photoshop and started to build up the composition by applying the individual components, such as the people, birds, text, etc. in a very similar manner performed for the original Weston book cover. It’s great that things can be repeated so much quicker once you know what you are doing....



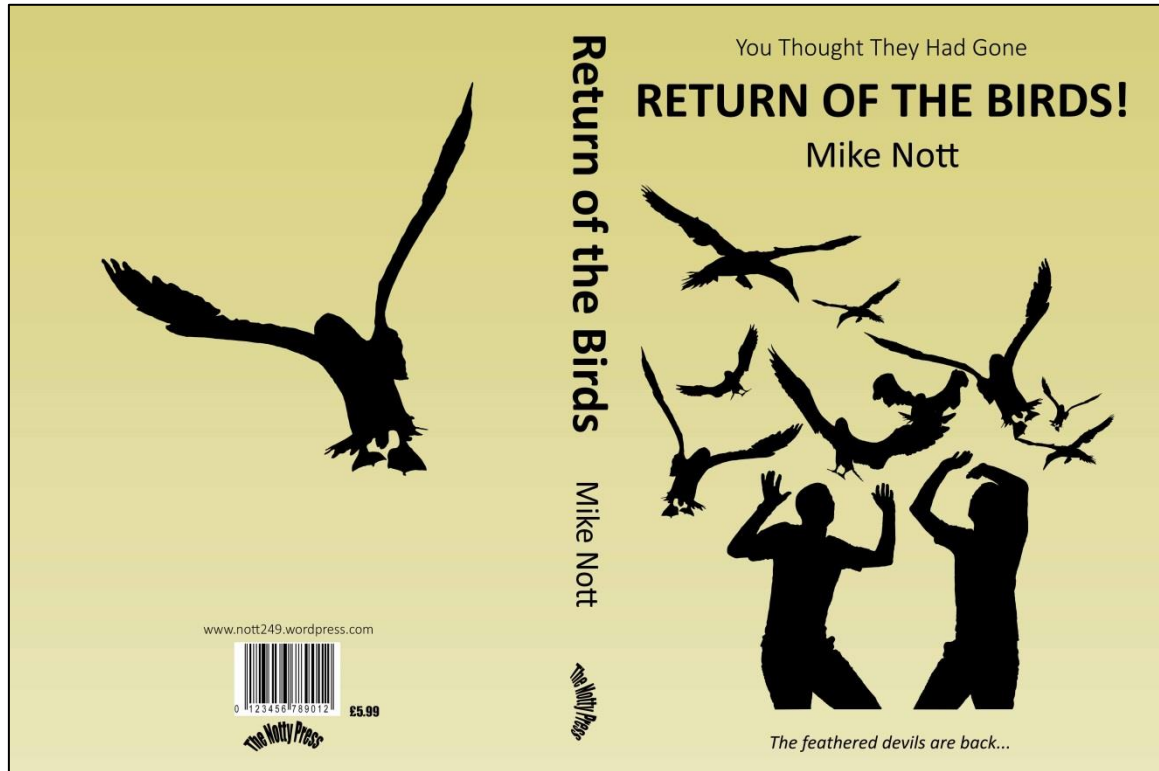
Photoshop Screen – Building up the Composition

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The final version of this book cover, whilst having the strong visual effect that I had originally wanted, still didn't do much for me; it looked bland and rather dated. Sure, I could have added more bird images, changed position, added text etc. but I would have been wasting my time.



I left the work for a few days and pondered and ultimately decided that it was the page background that was the problem; something more dramatic was required that didn't detract from the primary compositional elements of the birds and people.

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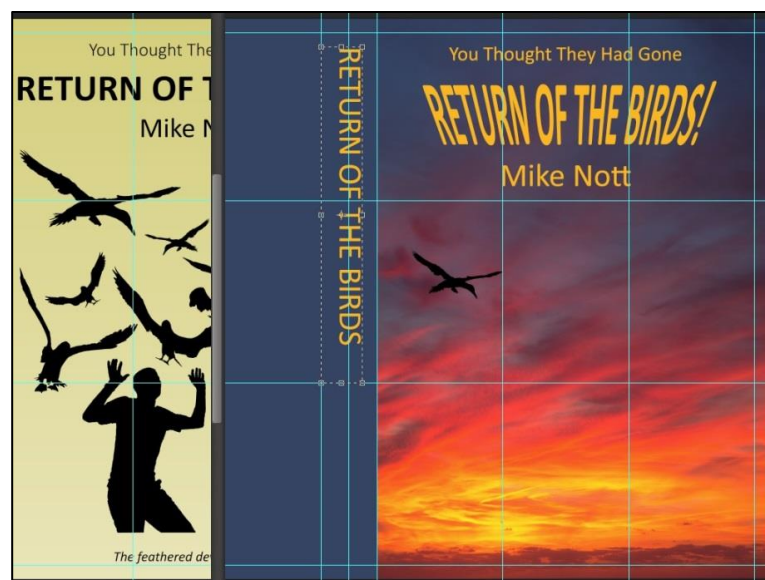
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A previously taken sunset image down at Lands' End was selected that had some cracking colours and cloud textures within it and thought that it would work – and started on the third attempt of a book cover for this assignment! No further saturation was applied to this image and it really was as vibrant as can be seen.



A Stunning Sunset – Lands' End, Cornwall

I opened up a new Photoshop image/document and as performed twice previously, I set up my grid lines on the front and back pages and the spine. I pasted in the sunset image and used the Transform tool to move it around and re-size within the front page area, positioning it right across the page area to the edge. I then used the Eye Dropper to select a small area from the sky and made the page background colour the same (I selected the text colour the same way – using a yellow/orange area lower down in the sunset image). I was satisfied that the background would now form a good basis for the rest of the work. I copied over the rest of the visual elements from the original 'plain' book cover image onto the new vibrant book cover, repositioning/re-sizing as required to achieve the final result.



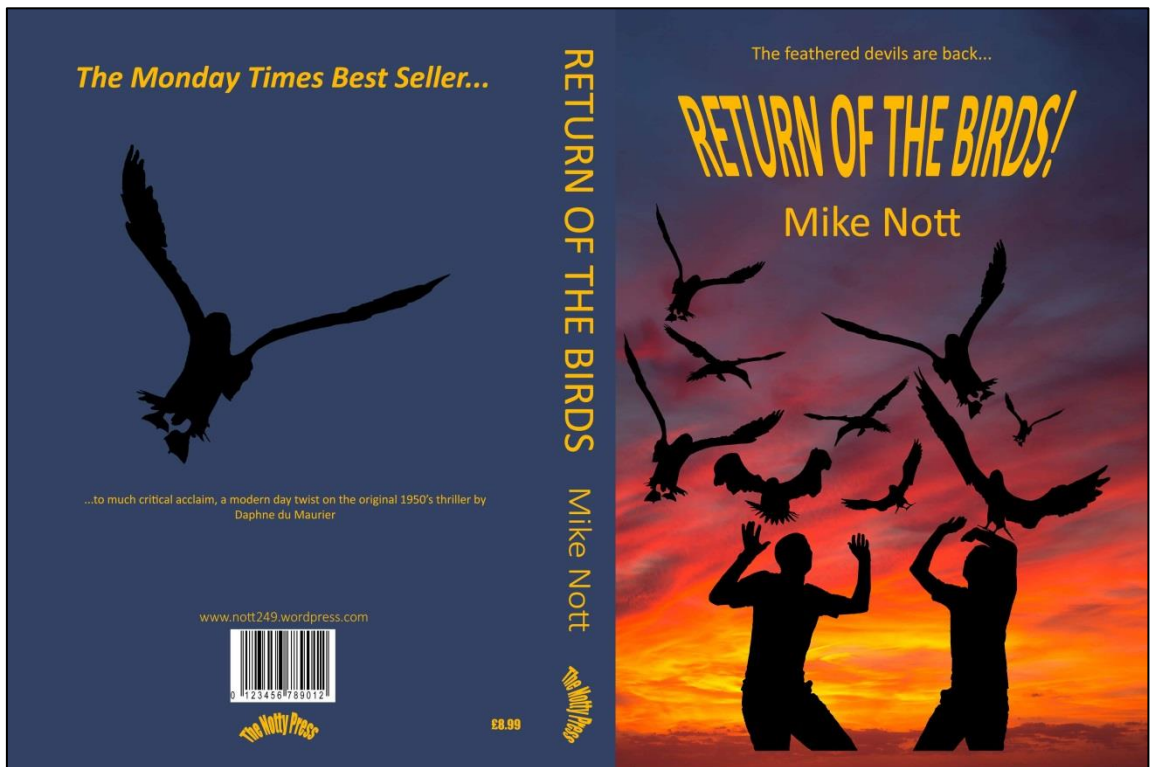
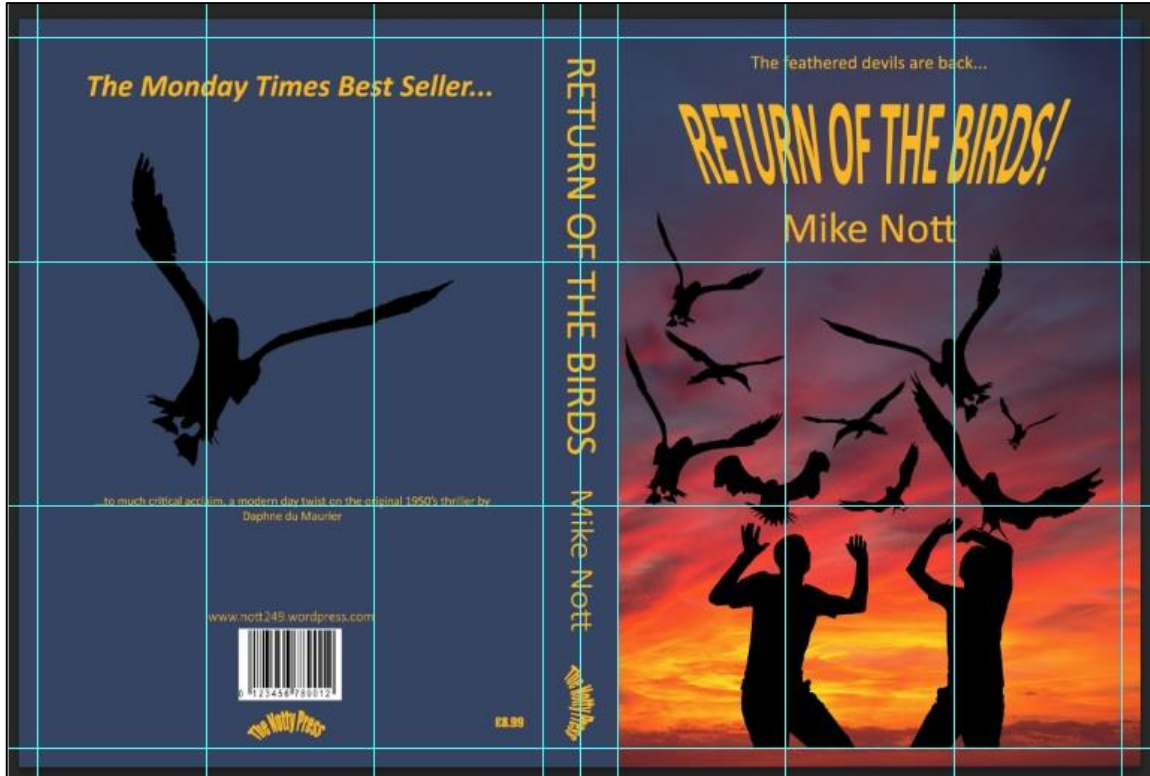
Copying Content between 'Books'

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The final image for submission for Assignment Four would be the third attempt of the book cover and can be seen below.



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1) Self-Assessment and Reflection:

This is the fourth assignment for Photography 1: Digital Photographic Practice.

In terms of the assessment criteria laid out within the coursework, there are four main areas to be considered:

- Demonstration of technical and visual skills
- Quality outcome
- Demonstration of creativity
- Context

In the introduction of this assignment, I made comment to the obviously gifted OCA students, artists and technicians of photographic editing applications. Having now completed this assignment, after two additional stages of re-working, I think my appreciation of someone who can foresee a graphical or photographic image comprising of many elements brought together and creatively enhanced or manipulated - and what would and would not work, to create something 'new' has increased immensely.

The student is asked to consider their assignment submission against the four main elements of the OCA assessment criteria (see Annex A, Supporting Material). Reflecting on the two main elements for this assignment development and the ultimate submission, I am very pleased with the images presented of the 'legs and sandals' and the posed model and their conversion to monochrome. Ultimately, they lacked any real scope for addition or manipulation that was required for this assignment. My tutor and Assessor will have to forgive the boundary 'blurring' of the Steichen and Weston imagery, but ultimately the output of that work has not been submitted as part of this assessment, but I have felt it appropriate to include the development of that material as demonstration of my self-assessment and critical analysis. Had I submitted it, then clearly it would have been misleading in the context that it was being described and I would have felt compelled to use alternative images from the studio session that might not have been as visually strong as the front cover 'legs' image, but I guess integrity of images is one of the main tenets of this section of the DPP module. I have written extensively in my blog on the ethics of image manipulation here -> <https://nott249.wordpress.com/category/dpp-reflections/>.

The gannet is an impressive bird; it is acrobatically agile, smooth gliding in the wind and a master of high speed dives into water in search of fish. The question is whether the selection of this type of sea bird has provided the degree of 'menace' that something like a crow, raven, rook etc. would have? Converting them to a silhouette certainly helps, but the images that I selected for processing generally lack the one thing that people see as the 'weapon' of a bird – a sharp pointy beak! Unfortunately, that was an artefact of the positioning of me, the photographer, relative to the birds in flight, or in their preparation to land on the cliff tops. With hindsight, that is a lesson learned; make sure you select the best subject for the context or story that is being described or 'sold'.

As mentioned previously, I made a point not to go out and find images of book covers and film posters for when 'The Birds' film was something more contemporary back in the 1960's. Once I had completed the final version of "Return of the Birds" cover I did search to see what had been done previously – and examples of both book covers and film posters can be seen in Annex A. Does my work compare favourably to those? I think the jury is still out on that one, but my

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attempt is certainly more modern in look-and-feel and broadly aligned with the theme that the original artists had envisaged.

Overall, I suspect that this submission does lack the creativity required to be successful in this assignment, but I have done new things and learnt from them and I can build for my future exercises and assignments.

I have deliberately not included my observations and comments from the supporting the 'Digital Image Qualities' exercises associated with this section of the course. My write ups for these exercises can be seen using the following links:

Exercise 19 (Correction)	https://nott249.wordpress.com/2015/02/13/dpp-exercise-19-corrections/
Exercise 20 (Improvement or Interpretation)	https://nott249.wordpress.com/2015/02/14/dpp-exercise-20-improvement-or-interpretation/
Exercise 21 (Enhancement)	https://nott249.wordpress.com/2015/04/17/dpp-exercise-21-enhancement/
Exercise 22 (Addition)	https://nott249.wordpress.com/2015/02/14/dpp-exercise-22-addition/
Exercise 23 (Alteration)	https://nott249.wordpress.com/2015/04/10/dpp-exercise-23-alteration/

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ANNEX A - SUPPORTING MATERIAL

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General Course Assessment Criteria

Repeated verbatim from the OCA course study material:

“Here are the assessment criteria for this course. These are central to the assessment process for this course, so if you are going to have your work assessed to gain formal credits, please make sure you take note of these criteria and consider how each of the assignments you complete demonstrates evidence of each criterion. On completion of each assessment, and before you send your assignment to your tutor, test yourself against the criteria – in other words – do a self-assessment, and see how you think you would do. Note down your findings of each assignment you’ve completed in your learning log, noting all your perceived strengths and weaknesses, taking into account the criteria every step of the way. This will be helpful for your tutor to see, as well as helping you prepare for assessment.

Assessment Criteria Points:

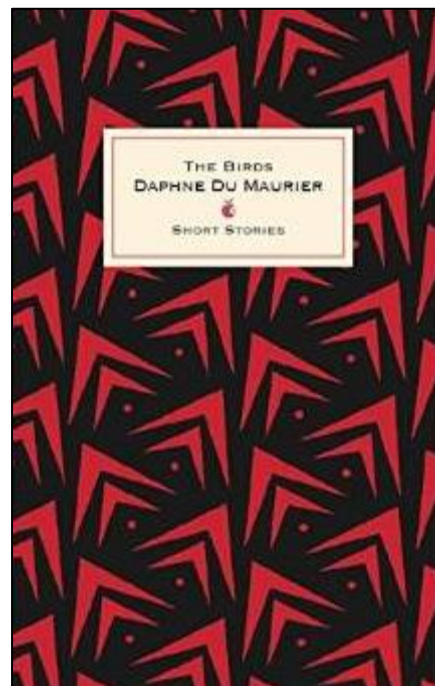
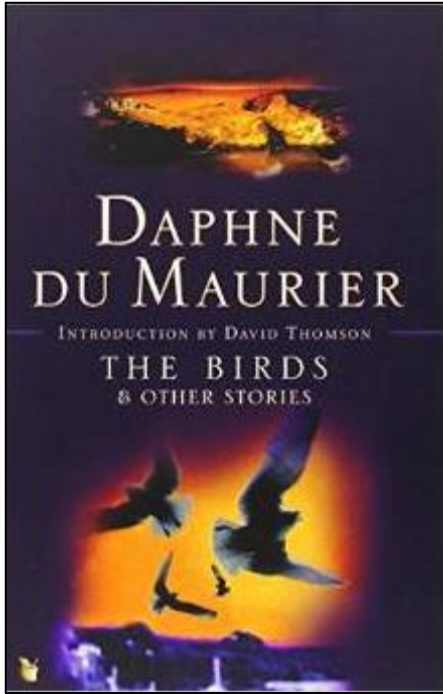
- Demonstration of Technical and Visual Skills material, techniques, observational skills, visual awareness, design and compositional skills;
- Quality of Outcome content, application of knowledge, presentation of work in a coherent manner, discernment, conceptualisation of thoughts, communication of ideas;
- Demonstration of Creativity imagination, experimentation, invention, development of a personal voice;
- Context reflection, research, critical thinking (learning log).”

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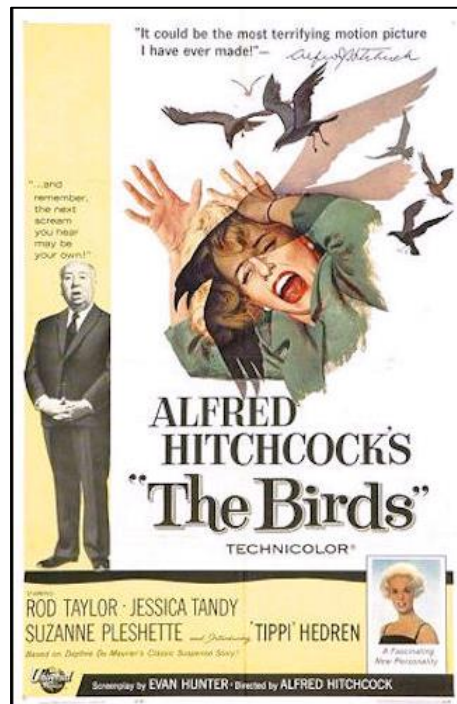
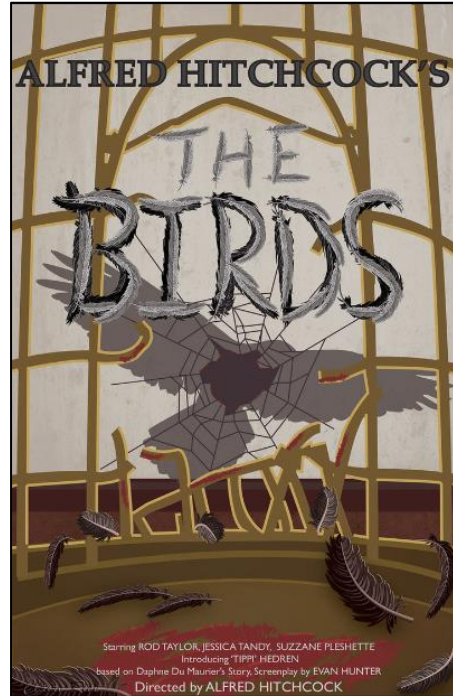
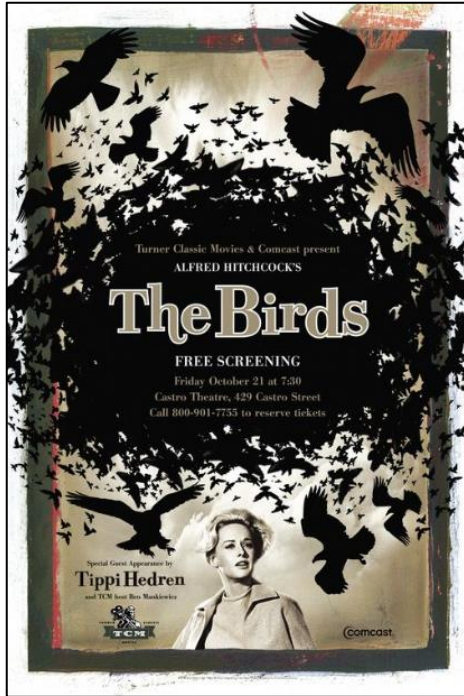
Example Book Covers and Film Posters



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