

Beyond Facsimile: The haptic photobook as a distributed archive

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My name is Tim Daly - I teach photography at the University of Chester and I have a research interest in the materiality of the photographic print. Since the mid 1980's I've worked on photographic projects that have emerged largely in the book form, exploring touch and disruptive sequencing. Within this short paper, I'm aiming to scrutinise books that re-materialise archive matter to create new, tactile 'things' that challenge our notions of the past and the present; public and private and the original and the copy.

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The materiality of the photographic print was once dismissed by Szarkowski as '*not intrinsically beautiful. You're not supposed to look at the thing, he said. You're supposed to look through it. It's a window.*'

Yet many photographers employ 'thingness' as a reflexive strategy in their books and as Vartanian observes, an astute choice of materials '*can bring a heightened level of physicality to the photobook as [an] object.*' For photographers and visual artists of all disciplines, self-publishing has grown exponentially since digital print technologies and the Internet provided new ways to distribute their work to a worldwide audience. Gilbert suggests such practitioners now engage in publishing as art practice and have renegotiated the traditional frameworks of processes, institutions and discourses.

Slide 4 – New section

Facsimile Works

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As Mark Durden observed, the spiralling interest in photographers' publications '*feeds the expanding market for that new bourgeois fetish and collector's item, the photobook.*' Whilst the complexities of the art and photobook market remains outside the scope this talk, the existence of a well-established hierarchy of published and editioned books continues to impact on our reception. Interestingly, recent publishers such as Visual Editions and SP Books explore haptic print by rejuvenating classic literature and facsimiles of author's original handwritten manuscripts.

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Like a souvenir for the superfan, facsimile journals allow us to be privy to the artist's raw materials and re-witness the gestation of the work. The deluxe edition facsimile, *A Road Trip Journal* by Stephen Shore, includes images but also autographic marks, handwriting and simulated ephemera, evidencing the touch of maker's hand and promises the reader a physical interaction of sorts, with the author.

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Facsimile books i.e. those reproduced verbatim as copies of a unique source, provide a kind of gateway haptic experience. Arguably, the fascination with materiality in recent publishing evidences a growing interest in fuller, sensory experiences for the reader. Published as facsimile journals, albums, notebooks, photographers' contact prints and in Duchamp's *Étant Donnés* – an instruction manual, these works suggest a re-instatement of the haptic, and also act as material souvenirs from a pre-online world.

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Yet, the very nuances between the haptic and the optic in a facsimile such as *Étant Donnés* can be contradictory. In this publication, the ring binder mechanism looks real enough but is in fact simulated by photography in print. Do such publications perpetuate a passive reception or do they empower us to be a more active participant in the reading?

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Artists' books however, such as Christian Boltanski's *Sans Souci*, have a rich and material narrative quoting and cross-referencing other books. Artists employ a wide variety of material strategies gleaned from handmade traditions to mass production – both inviting a haptic experience for the reader. Handling such a book can, as N. Katherine Hayles suggests, provide *'the feedback loop from materiality to mind.'*

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The posthumously published facsimile of Kiyoshi Suzuki's *Soul and Soul* is a photobook that celebrates not an original book through the reprint process, but a facsimile of the photographers' own unique book dummy.

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What we have here is an intriguing volume, richly marked and handled, perhaps in itself a document of the photographer's struggle to get published.

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Come Again, a work by Robert Frank and Steidl, simulates the haptic materiality of a handmade journal into commercial edition, engagingly different through its design, yet neither priced as rare or exclusive. In this title, Steidl adopts production and reprographic techniques from corporate print and artists' book fields through the use of thick spot varnish and an exposed spine binding. We know it's a facsimile, but we still enjoy the feeling of an enhanced handling experience.

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Dossier format works

Slide 14 – Quote panel

As N. Katherine Hayles has suggested,

'We are not generally accustomed to thinking about the book as a material metaphor, but in fact it is an artefact whose physical properties and historical usage structure our interactions with it in ways obvious and subtle.'

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In many ways, the dossier format perfectly illustrates Hayles' observation. Best described as a generic folder or receptacle used to store important papers for future examination and perusal, the dossier is used by libraries and archives, rather than as a final publication form. In the 1930's, successful crime writer Dennis Wheatley collaborated with JG Links, to publish four facsimile crime dossier novels.

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Narrated by Wheatley's protagonists through typed letters, police notes, staged crime scene photographs and, most interestingly of all, fake evidence artefacts, the dossiers invited readers to engage in a kind of visual puzzle, through discovery, assimilation and reassembly. The dossiers provided notepaper for the readers to jot down their suspicions.

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'Evidence' from the various crimes were presented in the dossiers as human hair, bus tickets, blood stained fabric samples, a cyanonide tablet and other clues,

encapsulated in glassine bags or stapled to the pages, a remarkable feat of hand finishing.

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The crime dossiers used different size pages, weights and colours, facsimile handwriting and typescript which are simply bound by three drilled holes and a tied, figure of eight ribbon. Each book demands a different kind of scrutiny from the reader, they are presented with a challenge to solve by way of examining various visual, textual and material clues along the way.

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Michael Hampton describes the Wheatley dossier novels as '*conceptual in their basis,*' and received by contemporary readers who '*appraise this display of many different linguistic codes and their relationships.*'

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Compiled largely by a team of hand finishers and including wonderfully bland, staged forensic photographs, the books are an extraordinary example of a materially rich, mass publication that disrupts all reader expectations. Excluding the cryptic/detective angle, the dossier presents a loosely threaded narrative that engages the individual reader in a journey of speculation.

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The dossiers were also published in the US and Germany, and early books sold hundreds of thousands of copies despite being expensive to produce. As the craze eventually waned and production budgets cut, Wheatley and Links were forced to economise by using themselves in the staged photography.

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Dossier as distributed archive

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The importance of the Wheatley publications shows the potential of the dossier format to present text, images and ephemera as a distributed archive. The following two pieces of work attempts to do the same – reproducing archive matter sourced from public collections and not easily accessible.

Desires No Publicity

This work is an envelope of promotional photographs from the Littlewoods Archive held at the National Football Museum and explores the social history of photography for the football pools industry. The original press prints were produced to protect prizewinners who had requested anonymity from publicity and show how the photographers employed different tactics for hiding the identity of the subject.

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Many of the resulting portraits are unexpected by today's standards. The final work is reproduced as thick, materially significant prints housed in a manila folder, together with photocopies taken from press releases of the time.

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A more complex dossier presents the Southgate housing estate in Runcorn, created by James Sterling in 1977 using colourful glass reinforced plastic panels with circular windows. Known locally as the 'washing machines', the estate was beset by social problems and finally demolished in 1990.

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Southgate Disposal Runcorn contains a wallet of c-type prints of the estate alongside architects drawings, minutes of meetings, consultation documents and resident's correspondence held in the Cheshire County Archives. Within the extensive archival records are hidden stories presenting additional voices to the narrative.

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Excerpts from these sources describe the complex decommissioning phase of the estate together with the poignant account of one resident's communication with the office of Stirling & Partners, worried about the weight of her waterbed within a prefabricated structure.

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The Long Grove Project

Slide 29 – Quote panel

Susan Hiller who has just sadly passed away, once stated

My starting points were artless, worthless artefacts and materials, rubbish, discards,

fragments, trivia and reproductions which seemed to carry an aura of memory and to hint at meaning something, something that made me want to work with them and on them.

My substantial dossier format book was completed over a period of twenty-four years. The book documents the disposal of a large scale Edwardian asylum complex that closed in the early nineties.

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Long Grove Asylum, one of five institutions for the mentally ill known as the Epsom Cluster, was opened in 1907 on the site of a former orchard, housing up to 2500 patients. The story is a long and complex one and perhaps too long for this short talk. The estate had its own railway line connected to the London train network, a self-sufficient farm, its own theatre, printing press and extensive grounds furnished with exotic overspill from Kew Gardens. As Showalter observed, in these early hospitals the building itself was a special apparatus for the cure of lunacy.

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At the time of closure, ownership and responsibility of the site became a contentious issue between the newly formed trusts and the Secretary of State. As such, the site was evacuated carelessly and much sensitive material was left in-situ. I gained permission to document the aftermath of the site between 1993-98, before it was privately developed into an executive housing estate.

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The hospital was full of patient's personal effects, keepsakes, letters and discarded photographs

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Official documents were abandoned

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The hospital's extensive lending library was still intact, albeit in a state of some disarray.

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Patient works were still evident in the occupational and art therapy units

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Curious clothing and artefacts from the 1950s were present too.

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There were extensive medical record books left at the site, some dating back to Edwardian times.

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At the same time and without my knowledge, a council archivist was rescuing the same documents, ephemera and artefacts from the hospital grounds, which would later be housed in the Surrey History Centre and available for public access fifteen years later. The archive contained material that I'd already photographed in-situ back in 1995 and also new material that I'd never seen before.

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My visit to the archive in 2014 was a profound experience as I had the chance to re-encounter materials I assumed were destroyed and it triggered recollections about the material properties of the record books in the hospital – the copperplate script, ruled ledgers, laid paper textures, hand tooled leather covers, patinated by a hundred years existence but also from more recent damage caused by abandonment and vandalism.

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My new photographs taken in the archive of end papers, edge details, alphabet tabulations, letters and ledger entries each with their own distinctive handwriting added to my in-situ photographs became a distributed archive in itself.

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The combination of all these different sources, my own original and recent photographic prints and also found within the SHC archive; ephemera, ledger excerpts, material change through ageing and vandal damage, all combine to create a much richer end piece.

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Using the dossier format to house loose-leaf prints creates an unbound box/archive of fragmentary material rather than a fixed codex form with inserts.

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The final dossier form mimics the size and shape of one of the large medical journals.

Conclusion

The physician Oliver Sacks, when helping to restore sight to a previously blind patient, observed that 'natural vision itself is a braiding and nesting of the optical and the tactile.' Handling as a method for engaging with art is found within the discourses of material culture and museology, but less within the field of photography. The recirculation of material artefacts within the dossier provides an additional kind of archive experience recalling souvenirs, the museum and private collecting. As Scott suggests '*The interaction between the book as a material object and its readers brings the book to life, just as the materiality of the book interacts with its narrative.*'

Designed to be handled and navigated in a manner that wouldn't be possible with fragile originals, the choice of papers, unconventional printing processes and hand assembly techniques creates an enhanced experience for the reader. Disrupting the reader's expectations of a facsimile, the book encourages touch and explores a type of tacit knowledge that is unavailable from viewing alone.

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End

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