

Positions through Contextualising

Written Response

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Part 1

Annotated bibliography

Rubinstein, D. and Sluis, K. (2013) 'The Digital Image in Photographic Culture: Algorithmic Photography and the Crisis of Representation', in *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*. London: Routledge, pp. 22–40.

The book explores how algorithmic processes in photography—like those used in image editing software—are reshaping our understanding of what images represent and how they function in digital culture. I was inspired to think more critically about the relationship of images to reality and the implications of my experiments. I experimented with layering images. By printing a modified version of the image on transparent paper and placing it over the original, the distinction between a 'real' image and a fabricated one becomes blurred. This fusion shifts the audience's perception of the image, thus initiating new dialogues.

Miller, J.A. (1994) 'Pictures for rent', *Eye Magazine*, 14, pp. 68–77.

The text mainly explains how the history of photography often focuses on inventions, genres and influential photographers, but ignores the relationship of the medium to graphic design, as well as the ubiquitous but less fashionable “stock photography”. Stock photography breaks through the limitations of various types, effectively challenging class distinctions of graphic design. It is neither an award-winning piece commissioned by top art directors nor a heartfelt grass-roots expression. Stock photography provides a way for me to study images through process. Since we need to do 100 iterations, the moves must be small and focused. I chose screenshots as my experimental medium. It provided a lot of inspiration for my later design experiments.

Wuqi, (2023) *The Issues Issue*. Shanghai: Shanghai Literature & Art, pp.42-58.

The text mainly discusses how the rise of the Internet led to the birth of the Internet identity. In the virtual world, people tend to have more than one identity. Interestingly, someone's multiple online identities are not identical. This reflects a shift in recent trends where people are steering clear of using their own photos as profile pictures on social platforms. Perhaps babies could also represent our digital selves as well. So I invited my friends to use baby photos as their profile pictures and engage in discussions with me. We talked about retirement and found the contrast between the adult concept of retirement and the innocence and simplicity of babyhood was very strange but interesting.

Ekman, P., 2003. *Emotions Revealed: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life*. New York: Times Books.

The book provides deep insights into how emotions are universally expressed and interpreted through facial cues, guided by Ekman's groundbreaking research. It introduces the Facial Action Coding System (FACS), which categorizes how facial muscles represent emotion. This greatly helped me in the process of analyzing the performance videos to capture the subtle and genuine emotions of the babies, so as to use their facial expressions as a visual language more accurate and detailed way.

Boring Angel (2013) Available at: <https://vimeo.com/82021800>

This music video uniquely narrates a story, relying exclusively on the transformation of emojis to convey its narrative, tapping into the rich potential of modern emoji-based communication. This creative approach inspired me to view the facial expressions of babies not just as cute gestures but as a groundbreaking communication tool. Enthused by this insight, I began experimenting with infants' expressions, attempting to use them as the content for engaging dialogues and crafting compelling image narratives. This exploration into non-verbal communication could open new pathways for storytelling, where even the subtlest facial changes offer profound insights into emotions and interactions.

Same Paper (2023) Closing Ceremony. Available at: <https://www.itnicethat.com/articles/same-paper-closing-ceremony-photography-publication-211123>

The publication highlights the power of smile and emotion in photography. Photographers seek to transcend traditional photographic boundaries and use their practice as a language. What caught my attention was that the team mentioned that they took a lot of serious portraits while hanging around New York, but then they used smiling filters to enhance them. This motivated me to use AI to modify the serious expressions of the babies and exaggerate their "compliant" features. The layout of the magazine is also striking. Unlike traditional photography magazines, which take a minimalist approach, they have created a 'mix' that allows the images to interfere with each other, creating strange but intriguing conversations. This also affects the way I organize my work.

Hara, Kenya (2007). *Designing design*. Lars Müller Publishers.

Kenya Hara's book "Designing Design" profoundly inspires graphic designers to embrace tactile design through the medium of paper. Hara emphasizes the unique tactile qualities of paper, such as its tension and pleasing texture, and highlights its potential to deeply engage the human senses deeply. This sensory engagement is critical for designers seeking to create meaningful, memorable experiences.

In an era dominated by digital media, Hara argues for the intrinsic charm of paper, suggesting that its materiality can enhance the perception and appreciation of information. By choosing paper thoughtfully, designers can create "information sculptures"-books and printed materials that resonate on a sensory level.

This approach emphasizes the importance of material choice in design and encourages designers to consider how the physical properties of paper can enhance the user experience. I was then inspired to create with a renewed appreciation for the tangible and the tactile.

Beijing silvermine. *Until Death Do Us Part*. Available at: <https://www.beijingsilvermine.com/until-death-do-us-part>

“Until Death Do Us Part,” by Thomas Sauvin and Beijing Silvermine, offers rich inspiration for me on tactile design. The collection, characterized by scratched and stained film negatives, underscores the importance of texture in evoking emotion and memory.

Sauvin’s use of nostalgia and collective memory, through vintage aesthetics and historical references, encourages designers to blend past and present elements in work. The interactive presentation of the photo collection, which transforms opening the book into a ritualistic experience, highlights the potential of engaging design features such as fold-outs and pop-ups.

Contextualizing everyday images within broader social narratives, as Sauvin does, allows us to embed cultural meaning and provoke thought. By reviving and reinterpreting historical materials, we can create works that pay homage to the past while offering new perspectives.

Spector, D. *I forbid you to forget me, Daniela Spector Photography*. Available at: <https://danielaspector.com/I-Forbid-You-to-Forget-Me>

Daniela Spector’s work, “I Forbid You to Forget Me,” explores the tactile nature of memory and grief by transforming family archive photographs into intricate collages. This process not only preserves the narrative, but also physicalizes it, making it tangible and intimately personal. Each piece in the series serves as a physical manifestation of the artist's journey through grief, which made me think more deeply about how to invite viewers to engage with the narrative in a tactile, intimate way.

McLuhan, M. and Fiore, Q (2001). *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects*. Berkeley:Gingko Press.

In “The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects” Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore explore how media shape our perception of and interaction with the world. McLuhan posits that the medium itself, rather than the content it conveys, fundamentally influences and alters human experience and social structures. Media essentially become extensions of the human senses, transforming reality by mediating how information is received and processed.

This perspective has deeply inspired me to work with paper in the field of tactile design. By exploiting the physical properties of paper (texture, weight, and finish), it can create more engaging and sensory experiences. And it can also effectively communicate emotions, ideas, and narratives, enhancing viewer interaction beyond visual aesthetics.

Part 2

Designing Design

In this book, Kenya Hara explores the “boundaries” of the possibilities of paper, conveying the idea that estranging the familiar is also a form of creation. Therefore, the first step is to reshape the original cognition. As a graphic designer, if one only thinks within the two-dimensional and visual realm, it seems that the divergence boundaries of the creative perspective already have limitations. Therefore, one could think from a higher-dimensional perspective, such as the field of sensory perception, hence, the author proposes the awakening of the five senses.

Design can stimulate viewers through sensory experiences such as visual, tactile, auditory, olfactory, and gustatory perceptions. It is based on the designer’s sensory feelings about objects and uses these feelings to guide specific product designs, thereby better expressing the essence of the product and creating more humanized works. This is similar to the visceral level design proposed by Donald Arthur Norman (the other two levels being behavioral design and reflective design), which refers to the initial sensory stimuli, i.e., the interrelation of the five senses, establishing cognition.

This viewpoint sounds similar to Tactile Design, but in comparison, Tactile Design is closer to three-dimensional visual stimuli. It uses captivating images to attract the audience’s attention. Its essence is still a form of singular vision. Additionally, due to the development of the technology industry, electronic media has emerged, and its pace has far surpassed people's thinking and understanding of it. We have started consuming it before fully recognizing its more purified characteristics and deeper implications, which is a dangerous tendency.

Kenya Hara’s understanding of the senses is more about allowing images to permeate the five senses at a microscopic level, making information stimulate the individual. Therefore, information is not a one-way transfer from graphic design works to viewers, but an interaction or communication relationship between information and the viewer’s personal experience. Design should be inclusive, triggering the viewer’s memory and cognitive ability to unleash. This is a new direction for design development in the 21st century. An example mentioned in “Designing Design” is the square roll of toilet paper that reminds users to be economical (Hara, 2007, p.23). Thus, design is about infection, because the inspiration created in the process is based on the resonance of human beings in universal values and spirit. To achieve this interaction between information and the viewer’s personal experience, it is necessary to explore the essence of media (such as

paper, electronic media, and other technologies). Additionally, the meaning of media can also extend to “home.” In 2016, the author Kenya Hara hosted the “Ideal Home” event, which explored the various possibilities of the concept of home, including expressions of the five senses and home. Therefore, his understanding of design can be extended to many aspects. Exploring media is also the essence of design, and the increase in the number and complexity of media leads to the diversification of our communication channels. Technology is not a tool but a material, and the same is true for paper or home.

Until Death Do Us Part

Cigarettes play an important role in traditional Chinese wedding banquets. Offering cigarettes is a conventionally established tradition at Chinese wedding banquets, where the bride is expected to light a cigarette for every attending male guest as a sign of gratitude. However, this custom has gradually faded from modern life. In fact, cigarettes appear not only at Chinese weddings but also accompany the Chinese public through life's commemorative moments and everyday living, symbolizing both joyful commemorations and decadent leisure activities. Quite similarly, this collection of photos comes from a “ruin” forgotten by a rapidly developing city—the “garbage station on the outskirts of Beijing.” Ingeniously, many of the film negatives, being discarded items, have retained irreparable traces of scratches, water stains, mildew, or erosion by other corrosive substances. The situation of being unable to rid of the image and its traces has opened up another layer of potential relationship.

From a historical perspective, the locations where this series of photographs was taken are all in Beijing, from the end of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century. At that time, China was undergoing a period of reform, opening up, and rapid economic development. It was also the era when film photography was gradually being replaced by broadly adopted digital photography. Thus, “Until Death Do Us Part,” as a collection of a large number of discarded everyday photographic images, documents the incremental transformation of a post-socialist society (Olga 2015). It symbolizes both a new stage in the lives of newlyweds at weddings and a new phase in the development of the era, presenting a shared sense of nostalgia and populist thought. In conclusion, the title of this collection, “Until Death Do Us Part,” the act of smoking itself, marriage, and the origin of this series of photos—the ruins of this city—also bear certain similarities. Each element symbolizes both destruction and a new beginning, filled with the contradictions of life and death, joy and sorrow.

The presentation of this collection creates a subtle connection to the overall theme, which goes beyond merely adopting the form of cigarette packaging. It transforms the viewer's act of opening into a ritualistic experience, engaging “tactile” and “visual” senses to awaken memories and nostalgia. This approach is reminiscent of the perspective presented in “Designing Design,” where stimulation is used to awaken people's memories and interact with new information within the artwork. Such interaction yields a composite image, facilitating a rapid connection with the works in the photo collection and achieving resonance. This

method not only enhances the thematic depth of the collection but also enriches the viewer's engagement with the art, bridging personal recollections and the thematic essence of the works.

Designing is an individual's expression towards society, originating from a deeply personal perspective. Thus, only the artist truly understands the origin of their work. Thomas Sauvin has unearthed the cultural significance behind these images created by the masses. Instead of simply cataloging these images, he cleverly combines them with his interpretation, bringing them into a game state that is both vague and humorous. This approach revives discarded memories, thus propelling this photography collection beyond merely serving as an archive of photos from the Beijing Silver Mine. Through Thomas Sauvin's inventive construction, the cultural significance he discovered is presented in an innovative form. This transformation showcases the unique ability of art to reinterpret and bring newfound vitality to neglected aspects of history and society.

Reference List

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Beijing silvermine. *Until Death Do Us Part*. Available at: <https://www.beijingsilvermine.com/until-death-do-us-part> (Accessed: 17 May 2024).

Olga Yatskevich,(2015).*Thomas Sauvin, Until Death Do Us Part* [online].Photobooks. [Viewed 25 June 2015]. Available at:<https://collectordaily.com/thomas-sauvin-until-death-do-us-part/>