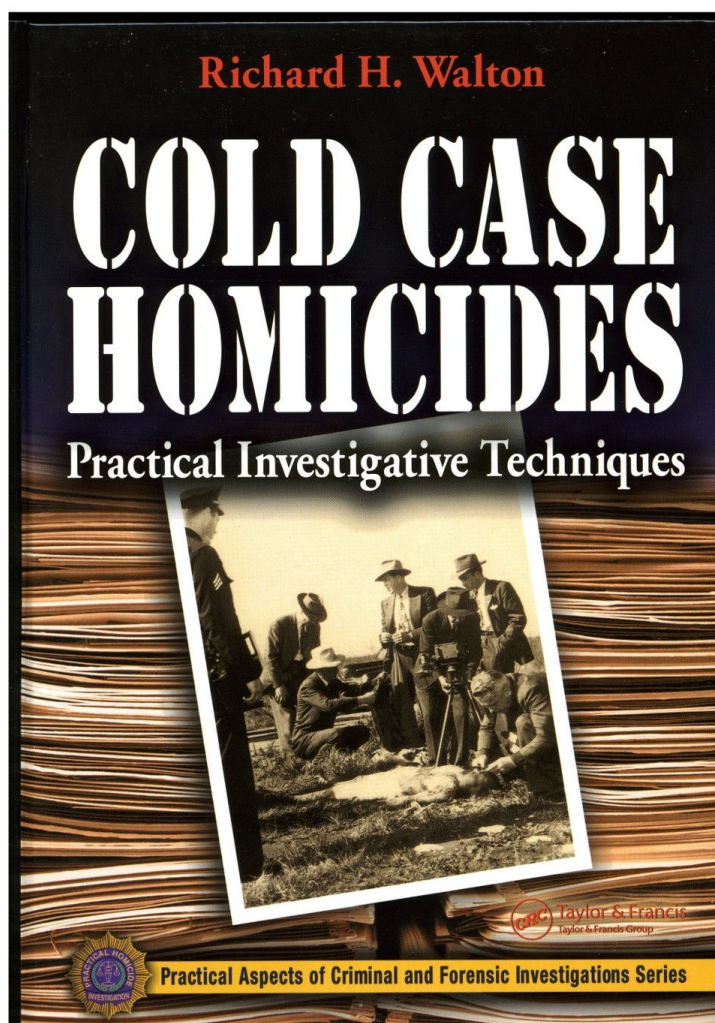


FAQ 13

13.1

Q: You coined the term “thoughtprints” in your book. Could you elaborate on it?

I have described the term in detail in a previous FAQ. Dr. Richard Walton's outstanding textbook, *Cold Case Homicides: Practical Investigative Techniques*, (Taylor & Francis CRC Press NY 2006) has just been published. He asked me to write a description of “thoughtprints” which he included in his chapter on criminal investigations. Here is my description from his book pages 109-112: entitled, **MODUS OPERANDI (M.O.) IN THE 21ST CENTURY—“THOUGHTPRINTS”**



Investigation

109

- Identify previously unidentified witnesses or associates of suspect.
- Obtain cooperation of previously uncooperative witnesses.

Interview Sequence

- Cold case investigators may consider the order of the witness interview process.
- Begin with law enforcement and other officials as necessary.
- Consider those witnesses on the outside periphery of those initially contacted and work toward the center, those most immediate to the victim. These on the outside may know more than they told, or have picked up new information over the years. Of course, remember, the more people you contact, the more likely that word may get back to the suspect.
- Material witnesses. Prior to contacting material witnesses, compile as much background information on them as possible. Ascertain any pending legal difficulties, including custody, probation, or parole status.
- *Before you begin the interviews*, run background checks on *all* subjects, including witnesses, family members, or others involved in the case as you would if the case were a fresh homicide. Use the advantage of time to obtain further insight into various individuals.

During the background and interview process, look for:

- Lifestyle changes. These include downhill slides as well as improved lifestyle and relationships or religious embracement.
- Movements out of city, county, or state. It has been my interesting observation that many of those who commit their crimes in the vicinity of where they were raised may often move out of state, and those who commit their crimes far from where they were raised may return to their comfort zone of family and friends.
- Arrests.
- Violence.
- Changes in personal relationship or inability to maintain relationships. Keep in mind that former friends, lovers, and secretaries can be the most valuable sources of information. Identify these when possible and as necessary.
- Other evidence of self-destructive behavior.
- Be careful not to give out more than you receive.

MODUS OPERANDI (M.O.) IN THE 21ST CENTURY — “THOUGHTPRINTS”

In his international bestseller, *Black Dahlia Avenger: A Genius for Murder*, retired Los Angeles Police Department homicide detective Steve Hodel introduces us to the term, “thoughtprints.” Beginning in 1999, Hodel began to research the possibility that his father, the late Dr. George Hodel, was responsible for one of the most infamous unsolved homicides in Los Angeles history, the 1947 “Black Dahlia” murder. In doing so, he uncovered compelling evidence that suggested his father was responsible for this and other unsolved murders. During his investigation, he conceived the idea of “thoughtprints” and provides this definition:

Our thought patterns determine what we do each day, each hour, each minute. While our actions may appear simple, routine, and automatic, they really are not. Behind and within each of our thoughts is an aim, an intent, a motive.

The motive within each thought is unique. In all of our actions, each of us leaves behind traces of our self. Like our fingerprints, these traces are identifiable. I call them thoughtprints. They are the ridges,

loops, and whorls of our mind. Like the individual "points" that a criminalist examines in a fingerprint, they mean little by themselves and remain meaningless, unconnected shapes in a jigsaw puzzle until they are pieced together to reveal a clear picture.

If we are careful and clever in committing our crime, we may remember to wear gloves and not leave any fingerprints behind. But rarely are we clever enough to mask our motives, and we will almost certainly leave behind our thoughtprints. A collective of our motives, a paradigm constructed from our individual thoughts, these illusive prints construct the signature that will connect or link us to a specific time, place, crime, or victim."

In his book, Hodel cites numerous examples of Dr. George Hill Hodel's thoughtprints. I asked Hodel if he might provide us with a few examples of thoughtprints, and if he would explain how they might be useful to cold case investigators. Here is his response:

First let me clarify a misconception. Thoughtprints have absolutely nothing to do with anything psychic or metaphysical. They can apply to any crime. However, in the specialized field of homicide investigation, they should be thought of as a tool to complement M.O. and signatures.

As with the "Zodiac" unsolved murders in the San Francisco area in the 1960s and early 1970s, the slayer in the Black Dahlia case taunted police with notes and documents mailed to the news media. Figure 4.7 shows notes mailed to a local newspaper after the homicide. I believe the sender reveals training as a journalist and crime reporter through the pasted headline "copy" he sent to the press and the police as the "Black Dahlia Avenger." During the investigation, I learned that my father had training as a journalist and crime reporter for newspapers.

*In another instance, as illustrated in Figure 4.8, the careful posing of the victim's arms and body mimicked the surrealist photograph, *The Minotaur*, created by Dr. Hodel's personal friend Man Ray. This artist's photograph illustrated a nude woman bisected at the waist (see Figure 4.9). The nude victim was found bisected at the waist and similarly posed.*

*Within months of the murder, George Hodel's 11-year-old daughter asked him to help her name her play doll. Interviewed decades later, the woman recalled that Hodel told her to name the doll, "Elizabeth Ann." As revealed during my investigation, *The Black Dahlia's* dossier from the FBI revealed the victim's name as Elizabeth Ann Short.*

In another instance, I discovered a witness statement that described attendance at a "Hollywood" party at George Hodel's Hollywood house. The witness told officers that the doctor used lipstick to write words on the bare breasts of a partygoer. After concluding that the evidence strongly suggested Dr. Hodel stomped a woman to death months later, my research indicated that Dr. Hodel wrote a taunting message to the police on her nude body—using lipstick.

The concept of thoughtprints can best be utilized by cold-case investigators, by providing them a fresh start, and emphasizing the need to "think outside the box." I suggest that investigators should look for connections in a suspect's background, profession, or personal life. These could link him or her, to the crime, the victim, or the location. One of the best sources for finding potential thoughtprints comes through the reinterview of close friends. In very cold cases, careful research and review of all newspaper articles from the period can be invaluable. In the Dahlia-related serial killings from the 1940s, I extracted the documented statements of over seventy-five witnesses, and after placing them in chronological order, discovered they yielded critical information on both the victim and the suspect. Another huge potential source for latent thoughtprints is the original crime-scene photographs. Investigators can re-scan them at high-resolution, then magnify and zoom in, and conduct a present day "walk-through," right from a laptop. Reexamine the scene, inch by inch, quadrant by quadrant.

Good luck and good hunting.

Steve Hodel
Los Angeles, California
January, 2005

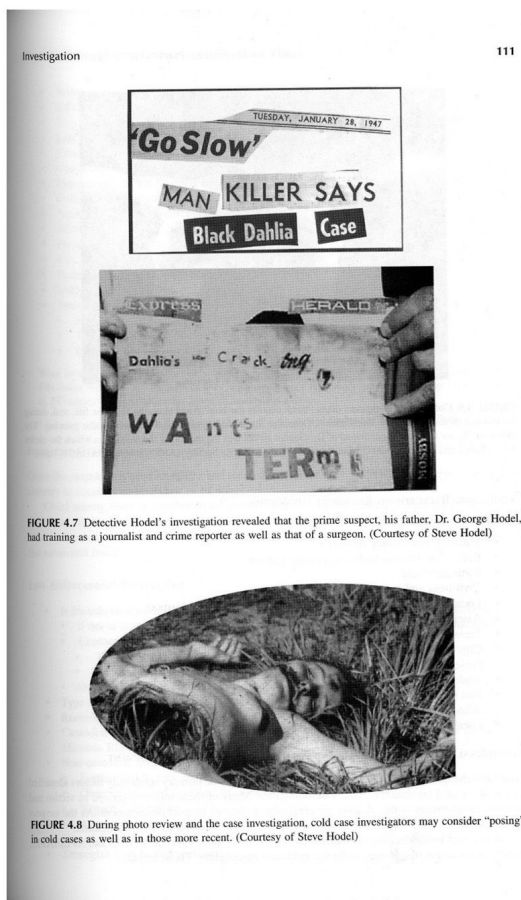


FIGURE 4.7 Detective Hodel's investigation revealed that the prime suspect, his father, Dr. George Hodel, had training as a journalist and crime reporter as well as that of a surgeon. (Courtesy of Steve Hodel)

FIGURE 4.8 During photo review and the case investigation, cold case investigators may consider "posing" in cold cases as well as in those more recent. (Courtesy of Steve Hodel)

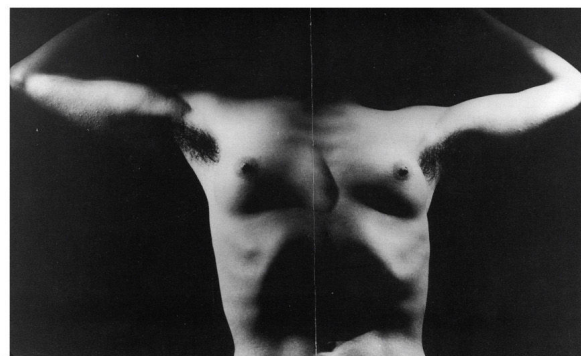


FIGURE 4.9 Cold case investigators often "think outside the box" when studying the case file, and, during the conduct of the subsequent investigation. Detective Steve Hodel reasoned that the surrealist painting "The Minotaur" by an artist and close friend of Dr. George Hodel was the model for the manner in which the victim was bisected and posed. (© 2005 Man Ray Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York/ADAGP, Paris)

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND RESOURCES FOR VICTIM AND SUSPECT INFORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT

- Marriage and divorce records
- Real estate records including grantee/grantor
- Birth certificate
- Civil liens and judgments
- Local Fire/police/ambulance reportings of victim/witness/suspect
- Assessor
- Treasurer/tax collector
- City/County clerk
- Professional licensing and certification
- Trade Unions
- Post Office
- Schools
- Local voter registration

ADDITIONAL INVESTIGATIVE MEANS AND METHODS FOR SUSPECT DEVELOPMENT

Time and changes in relationships as well as technology are the primary solvability factors identified in the successful resolution of cold case homicides. Many of these topics discussed in victim and witness development in this chapter are applicable to further suspect development. As the suspect is identified, many of these investigative avenues may prove useful to the investigation.

In addition to reexamination of evidence and use of databases such as CODIS and AFIS/IAFIS, other means and methods may assist the cold case investigator. These include: