

What we leave behind

Visual anthropology is described as the study of media in order to understand and analyse human behaviour. Anthropologists such as Sarah Pink express that the use of visual anthropology should not be to “translate ‘visual evidence’ into verbal knowledge, but to explore the relationship between visual and other knowledge” (Pink, 2013, p. 96). The use of visual anthropology does not just revolve around just photos or videos, rather it also introduces the use of recordings, art and multiple other facts. For this essay there will be a large emphasis on the use of photography which became popularised in the discipline in the mid-19th century. Photography, or cameras in general, can be used in a multitude of ways by the anthropologist. Visual anthropology is not just used to take photos and conserve a certain group or culture, rather it is used to express those people's traditions, their beliefs and their lives. Through analysis of pictures anthropologists can understand the ways in which a culture operates and how they present themselves.

When discovering my theme for this essay I began by following an interest of mine, birds, and with the multitude of different kinds in Lampeter it was easy to focus on that specific idea. However, as I walked around to collect my data I was passing the rubbish and waste left by others on nature walks around the area, this made me rethink my idea to have a more eco-conscious outlook. Instead of focusing primarily on the nature around the waste I started to think of how the waste affected the environment it was in and therefore eventually affected the ecosystem around it. As I started to collect these photos, I began to think of the people who left them there, the reason they chose to leave them, this thought was only exemplified with the paw prints I noticed on my walks, which made me realise that things left behind didn't have to be waste just a byproduct of life. My idea then developed again, creating the final idea of ‘What we leave behind’.

The theme revolves around the idea of how we as humans, animals and plants leave things behind, not just synthetic waste but also natural waste such as the dead leaves from the trees, the feathers from a bird or the rotten fruits from bushes. Through this analysis of waste we can make assumptions of who or what left them behind, what the material they left behind tells us about the individual and how where it is left changes the meaning of the object. I chose to take a narrative standpoint in this essay as it allows me to take a deep look into the interpretations of the photos I have taken, processing the whole picture and developing it into a readable story, almost as if I was speaking for the object and advocating for its agency in relation to who left it there.



As the sun beams down on the small town, Lampeter is caught up in the change of season, one that is evident on the ground and in the trees, spring. The pine cones crunch against the wheels of passing cars and the shoes of the population. Gentle breezes change to strong winds as the branches and cones fall to the ground, patches of green grass escape the brown background, again showing the small town that new life is growing. Leaving behind the old winter months of growth and bringing a new. But the branches do not stay in one place, breaking from their trees is only the beginning of their lives as they are picked up and used for something new.

Birds pick up the branches they deem useful and take them back into the trees they fell from, creating nests and homes for themselves and offspring. The old building's trees are filled with the sounds of jackdaw's as I walk by, branches lay dormant on the ground, dropped from the birds' nests and their movements. The branches left behind lead my eyes to the ground as I walk around, through this my eyes are led to the grass on the edges of the paths, the mud that holds prints.





Paw prints. Left behind on every grassy landscape in the small town, evidence of the multitude of dogs that inhabit Lampeter. When looking at these paw prints a variety of questions came to mind, what kind of dog? How old was the dog? Was it running or walking? Does it work in the farms or live a more sedentary life? Each question left me with another and though we cannot derive the answers from the photo of a paw print we can still imagine the dog running around as the owner throws a ball. Interpreting the print makes us question the animal that left it, that animal that also leaves fur behind.

The winds scatter the fur across the grass, over the paw prints and latching onto the bark of the trees. I watched as the person brushed out their dog, knowing that they did not need the clean up as the wildlife would clean up for them. This instance is a perfect representation of cohabitation, the byproduct of a task being beneficial to another, helping consciously through an arbitrary chore. Tasks such as building walls to keep livestock safe.





High in the hills on the outskirts of town lies a small wall of stones, melded together with the overgrowing moss and the towering trees that permeate the holy infrastructure. Left to grow wild as a new build takes its place, simple yet efficient the fence behind the wall would be easier to rebuild and does the same job as the stone wall. A show of agricultural development yet also a question as to why it was left. Possibly it was too overgrown when the new owners took up the land, possibly it took too long to deconstruct it and the farmer did not have the time. It is left to its own devices, creating homes for the bugs and foundations for the trees. But the trees themselves are not void of human intervention.

The wire digs into the wood, strangling it like vines yet being unable to bend with its growth. The tree holds indentations of our interactions with the environment and to be left behind it is slowly being consumed by nature it so restricted. It made me think of why it was left like it was, was it already too absorbed in the bark to be able to cut out? Was it too much work for too little reward, just as the wall? Each question led me to focus on how what we leave behind impacts our world, our new synthetic future does not focus on sustainability but rather than here and now.





Hidden in the vines of the university walls hides our attempts of an eco-conscious future, the paper cup leaves little to be desired in terms of its design but it only makes it stand out more through the green background. The individual who left it contradicts themselves, the material alludes to an idea of renewability but its blatant disregard instead shows that they did not wish to recycle it. But is this enough evidence to make us question their moral nature? It could have been forgotten about, they could have been speaking to another and forgot to put it in the bins as they were engrossed in conversation. They left it behind but they didn't leave all of themselves behind with it, the cup itself holds the agency of being moved and crumpled, being used and discarded.

Just as the plastic bottle of a drunken Pepsi max has been crumpled and discarded in the empty field of a wellbeing walk. It stands out amongst the green, a subtle reminder that the plastic is out of place, left behind in a context that seems abstract. Who left it and why do it so blatantly? Maybe the high winds blew it from its original disposal place, maybe the individual doesn't care for the nature that surrounds them, unlike the paper cup there is no wish for a 'green' outlook despite the 'recycle me' written on the caps.





But as we walk with this idea of moral high ground and a belief to always recycle, I pause seeing the glass sat on the window sill, a quarter filled with beer. I believe this picture encompasses this essay. Perfectly framed in the corner of the sill, above a 'keep local' sign and carrying an air of mystique of it. A person's item that could have been left due to a drunken mind, or maybe a distraction tearing them away from their drink, the multitude of different scenarios brings the theme of 'what we leave behind' to a head. Prejudices from others on the choice to drink or what they drink, possibly even why they drink, it's fascinating. But each different idea all revolves around this personal feeling, a bias we can only acknowledge with our personal experiences.

When going forward I'd be looking more at the agency of the materials, taking in the social implications of the objects and their locations to develop a story for the object. But why continue to look at what's left behind? Why is it important? In my outlook, the idea behind this essay was to allow myself to create the unknown, to form assumptions and interpretations on the objects or lack of objects and how they work in the greater stage of Lampeter as a whole. Lampeter is a trove of the old and new, synthetic and natural and by looking at them both in their respective context it can showcase how humans and animals can and do cohabit while also keeping these personalised feelings towards what we consume and how we interact with the world.

Reference list:

Pink, S., 2013. *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*. 3rd ed. London: SAGE Publications