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Rhaglen Astudio: Ffotograffiaeth yn y Celfyddydau

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Questiwn 3: **“Yosemite Valley had, during his [Ansel Adams] decades of photographing it as wilderness, a golf course, a luxury hotel, several camp sites, stores, a school, churches, and even a beauty parlour. Adams cropped it out in the name of Beauty, of formalism, of composition, but all his heirs learned to leave it out too and thus was nature photography created. And what he cropped-out, his fellow Americans learned not to see, leaving the American landscape as a chequerboard of scenic wonders and blank spots.”**

Rebecca Solnit, Landscape and Amnesia, in Creative Camera (Aug/Sept. 1998). p. 35

Using both historical and contemporary examples, discuss the attempts made by contemporary photographic artists (such as the ‘New Topographics’) to photograph the ‘blank spots’ of the landscape?

Cyfrif Geiriau: 2617

Rhestr Darluniau

Ffynhonnell 1: Adams, A. (1942) *The Tetons and the Snake River*. Ar gael yn:

<https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/usa/california/articles/the-ansel-adams-biography-pioneering-wildlife-photographer/> (Gwelwyd: 17 Tachwedd 2019).

Ffynhonnell 2: Evans, W. (1936) *Garage*. Ar gael yn: <https://www.etsy.com/listing/517043032/walker-evans-photo-garage-atlanta> (Gwelwyd: 08 Tachwedd 2019).

Ffynhonnell 3: Atget, E. (1898) *Ferme*. Ar gael yn:

https://www.moma.org/collection/works/39628?artist_id=229&locale=en&page=1&sov_referrer=artist (Gwelwyd: 28 Tachwedd 2019).

Ffynhonnell 4: Luxemburg, R. (1995) *Towering Inferno* Ar gael yn:

<https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Towering-Inferno/216E3A3469539CF1> (Gwelwyd: 01 Rhagfyr 2019).

Within this essay we will look at photographers who capture 'Topographical' images (the term topographic refers to taking photos of a man/structurally altered landscapes) due to the rise in how many people work in this way and will discuss why they choose to, by also touching on how historically the flâneur (flâneur is a French noun which suggests to actively go and observe) would concentrate on depicting the sublime (something of very great excellence and/or beauty), systemically ignoring what was actually in front of them therefore creating the term "the aesthetically rejected subject" (Evans, 1974) (a subject that is rejected due to the way it looks), that later became known as the "blank spots" (Solnit, 1998), thus creating false representations that the viewer may assume were of seemingly divine locations.

This essay shall concentrate on deconstructing the reason why some artists may choose to use their work to create false representations of locations and why, by comparing their methods to other practitioners whose philosophies differ. One influence to be discussed is Walker Evans (a photographer who was featured in many academic writings). Evans' photography provided a "description of its (Americas) vernacular architecture, its outdoor advertising, the beginnings of its automobile culture, and its domestic interiors." (Szarkowski, 1998) He believed in depicting a location the way it truly was, especially capturing the vernacular.

The vernacular refers to architecture concerned with domestic and functional use, rather than for public or monumental buildings (Dictionary.com, 2019). Photos of the vernacular or "aesthetically rejected subject" (Evans, 1974) are usually taken in a more technically, methodical and precise way, making these depictions very visually pleasing due to their perfection. Unlike landscape photography such as Ansel Adams', those photos are visually pleasing (although some would say boringly repetitive) due to the subject, not how they were taken.

Ansel Adams was a landscape photographer who was mainly active between 1920 and 1950. According to the website *Culture Trip* (2016) Adams' is most notable due to his work surrounding Yosemite National Park; he was also known for being an environmentalist. His history with Yosemite National Park runs far deeper into his career than it seems, as a 12-year-old during his first visit to the National Park Adams he was also given his first camera. His relationship with the location just grew from there, to the point where some would argue; his career is defined by his work about it.



Ffynhonnell 1 (Adams, 1942)

Above is Adams piece 'The Tetons and the Snake River (1942)', this image could be considered as a good universal representation of the work he created. This is a photo taken from a high vantage point, looking down into the valley below, the main focus of this photo is the bright, lit river cutting through this valley, the foreground is so dark it is merely a black silhouette of trees, the rest of the frame is lighter, however the mountains in the background are also quite dark, but are higher in contrast, with piercing white veins of snow that allows these mountains to have much more detail. Adams' photos are always very high in contrast, making most of the landscapes he took look extremely dark, the scenes he depicts were consistently very dramatic looking due to this technique. According to Adams (n.d.) himself, the act of taking the photo is only half the step of creating work, the other half is darkroom developing "Dodging and burning are steps to take care of mistakes God made in establishing tonal relationships". According to Joshua Dunlop (2014) Adams was also known to have used a technique early in his career where he would crop out a lot of the sky from his photos during the developing process in order to favour the landscape below and make the location seem vaster. A lot of Adams' work is quite soft due to the fact; by the time he reached a location he deemed worthy of being photographed the sun may have been setting, therefore in order to capture his 'masterpiece' he would need to use a longer shutter speed. Although Adams almost definitely would by default be using a long shutter speeds as he is quite famous for using ridiculously small aperture (f.64), using a small aperture means that there will be a deeper depth of field, a key component in

creating a good landscape photo, but less light would be let in through the shutter at a time and would need a longer time to expose the film.

Adams' work was taken during a time where there was a lot of social changes, people had more money or no money, the population was growing, there was a greater need for more housing and more industry. Thus, buildings begun being erected wherever there was space. As previously discussed, Adams' was most notable due to his work surrounding Yosemite National Park where coincidentally there is a lot of architecture, and people. However, he was also known as an environmentalist; Adams only took photos of the uncorrupted areas within these National Parks with the intention of promoting the conservation of wilderness within locations such as Yosemite.

According to Robert Turnage (1980) "Through his photographs he has touched countless people with a sense of that mystique and a realization of the importance of preserving the last remaining wilderness lands.". Therefore, some might say Adams clearly succeeded in spreading his message, he was simply using his artistic licence to represent a location, like Mark Twain (1889, tud. vi) said "You can't depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus.", our imaginations may simply be out of focus. Although others also argue it was incorrect of him not to truly represent the location as it was, to actively choose to ignore and encourage the public ignore the effect of growth within this location; therefore beginning a discussion whether you can ever truly trust photography.

Walker Evans; another American photographer working around the same time as Adams (1928-late 1960s). He was also a pioneer but in a parallel philosophy. Evans was primarily a portrait photographer who documented the effects of the Great Depression on the lowest class Americans; however, throughout his career he also created landscape or architectural work, his intention with these was to "individually evoke an incontrovertible sense of specific places, and collectively a sense of America," (Evans, n.d.). In a sense, Evans truly was the human embodiment of a flâneur, Evans chose a location of interest and created a topographical ("Topography is the study of the shape and features of land surfaces" (Wikipedia, 2019)) representation of that location. He described all his subjects as traditionally the aesthetically rejected subjects (Evans, 1974).



Ffynhonnell 2 (Evans, 1936)

This is an example of the sort of images Evans would take as architectural landscape photos. As to be observed in the photo above, Evans would often have people within frame, even in his architectural landscape images, this is due to the fact he would look at how people effect their surroundings as well as how peoples surroundings affect them. Typography can often be seen to crop up within his images, the subject of the image is consistently centre of frame and the images are quite low in contrast. Evans always seems to be able to consistently keep the frame typically quite full. An enjoyable quote that contextualises the way Evans photographed is:

His subjects were on the surface resolutely prosaic and artless, yet it can be argued that what he demanded of them was quality—he demanded that they be exemplary of the brave, groping, sometimes comic effort to create a built culture that would be consonant with an unprecedented nation. (Szarkowski, 1998)

Within this image we can see the outside of a garage, the exterior of this building is covered in old wheels, rims and other miscellaneous car parts. Sat outside the building is a car, we assume this car will or has been repaired. On the left of the frame there is a young woman, she is leaning against the building, looking in through the large double doors, she seems to be smiling at the two people who appear to be doing work on another car. Evidently this photo was taken on quite a bright, sunny day, from the direction of the shadows I'd say around mid-day, whilst the sun is around its highest in the sky as the cars shadow seems mostly underneath itself. If this photo didn't contain the people

dressed in a dated way and the clearly dated car, this photo would still have an extremely dated feel as health and safety is far more advanced now, there would be no way a garage would keep parts on display like this. Also, the sign above the building seems like it may be billboard like, in the sense it looks like paper pieces pasted onto a wall. This also supports why topographical work like this is very important, they're true depictions of time. The way Evans photographed his architectural landscapes are quite reminiscent of Eugène Atget's work, whom Evans was coincidentally heavily inspired by.

Evans was known as photojournalist in the Depression-era. Early into his career he started a project with a writer called James Agee, in 1936 both were granted the task of creating documentation of the effects of the Depression, Evans would provide the photographic evidence and Agee would publish his academic findings within a book called *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Agee, 1941). This book is almost a cross between a photographic and academic book.

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is a non-fiction account of the life of three tenant farmer families in Alabama during the great depression... Walker Evans had been photographing the lives of tenant farmers as part of a project funded by the government's Farm Security Administration. This project was then combined with Agee's writing...The perspective of the book swings between stories being told from the viewpoint of the farmers and their families, and then Agee's feelings about being viewed as an outsider who has come to profit from the misery of the people he is working with. (eNotes.com, 2019)

Within his photographs Evans aimed to convey a sense of 'helpless' and destitute, this was met with great levels of criticism, particularly by working-class people who felt themselves being misrepresented. Evans refused to romanticize these notions of poverty. Evans had an ability to revive interest in things that may have otherwise remained neglected.

Evans' work about the destitute situations that effected so many hard-working American families and towns is now seen as a warning or cautionary tale "He knew there was a dark side to modernism, that you couldn't have progress without regress, that if you increase the speed there's a greater chance for an accident" (Chéroux, 2017).

Cyn Adams ac Evans; Gweithiodd Eugène Atget ar greu cynrychiolaeth "encyclopedic, idiosyncratic lived portrait of that city on the cusp of the modern era" (Dupêcher, 2017). Sylwodd bod y ddinas yr oedd yn ei adnabod fel adref yn newid o hyd, yn cael ei ddinistrio gan foderniaeth. Oedd y ffordd

ymarferodd Atget yn wahanol i'r ffordd draddodiadol yn ystod yr oes yna, oedd technoleg fel camerâu yn newydd yn cael eu creu, cafodd eu defnyddio yn bennaf i ffotograffu beth bynnag oeddent yn gallu, rhan fwyaf o'r amser yn cymryd portreadau neu luniau tystiolaeth wyddonol, ond ei nod Atget oedd dal eiliad mewn amser, yn union fel yr oedd.



Ffynhonnell 3 (Atget, 1898)

Mae'r llun yma yn portreadu hen ysgubor ar be sy'n edrych fel iard ffarm. Wrth ymyl yr adeilad siâp heptagon mae sied to gwellt, tu ôl i hynna mae sied arall. O safbwynt modern mae'r rhain yn strwythurau rhyfedd iawn. Ni fyddem bellach yn debygol o weld toeau gwellt, heb sôn am adeilad gyda saith ochr. Tynnwyd y llun hwn yn amlwg ar ddiwrnod eithaf gwlyb, llwyd, ar fuarth ffarm yn Ffrainc.

Creodd Atget waith er mwyn dogfennu Ffrainc fel y bysa o yn ei gofio, gweithiodd rhwng croesiad y 19eg a'r 20fed ganrif. Roedd yn dyst i ddechrau un ganrif a diwedd y llall a'i nod oedd cofnodi'r hyn yr oedd eisoes yn ei wybod cyn iddo gael ei ddinistrio. Mynnodd ei bod yn cael ei adnabod fel "awdur gynhyrchydd" yn hytrach na ffotograffydd gan ei fod yn credu mai creu dogfennau hanesyddol oedd ei ddarluniau o "hen Paris" yn hytrach na darluniau artistig, hyd i'r pwynt fe fysa yn rhoi ei luniau neu "Documents for artists" (Dupêcher, 2017) i artistiaid fel ysbrydoliaeth am ddim. Er y datblygiadau technolegol yn ystod ei amser, roedd yn dal i ddewis cario camera swmpus, traddodiadol, oedd yn

defnyddio platiau gwydr mawr. Roedd yn tynnu llun yn gyson o gwmpas y wawr i sicrhau y byddai ei luniau ddim yn cynnwys pobl. Profodd Atget i fod yn ysbrydoliaeth i lawer hyd yn oed cyn ei farwolaeth, oherwydd yn y 1920au ysbrydolodd ei waith grŵp o swrrealwyr,

(his) documentary vision proved highly influential, first on the Surrealists, in the 1920s, who found his pictures of deserted streets and stairways, street life, and shop windows beguiling and richly suggestive (Dupêcher, 2017)

Oedd y grŵp yn ystyried ei ddarluniau o strydoedd gwag Ffrainc fel mwy o ddatganiad chwyldroadol yn hytrach na dogfennaeth yn unig. Fodd bynnag, tua degawd ar ôl marwolaeth Atget; ysbrydolodd Walker Evans i weithio wrth ddefnyddio yn yr arddull ddogfennol a wnaeth o. Yn bersonol, rwy'n credu mai'r sgwrs y mae Atget yn ei awgrymu yw sut ydych chi'n gwahaniaethu rhwng ffotograffydd a flâneur? A oes gwahaniaeth?

Ffotograffydd mwy diweddar yw Rut Leese Luxemburg, mae hi yn ffotograffydd Almaenaidd. Ei thechneg yw tynnu lluniau yn ystod y nos, gan ran fwyaf edrych ar y tirwedd drefol. Fel gwyliwr gallem dybio bod Luxemburg yn ffotograffydd topograffig, er nad yw'n hunan adnabod fel un, gan fod ei lluniau yn canolbwyntio ar fywyd y ddinas a sut mae presenoldeb pobl wedi newid y dirwedd.



Ffynhonnell 4 (Luxemburg, 1995)

Dyma un llun allan o gasgliad *Histories* (London - A Modern Project) Luxemburg. Gallwn arsylwi wrth edrych ar y gwaith bod lot o arlliwiau melyn, byswn yn meddwl oherwydd o'r golau stryd a golau tref artiffisial, gellid gwneud y dybiaeth nid ydi Luxemburg yn defnyddio fflach oherwydd ni fysa pwynt oherwydd o'r pellter rhyngddi hi a'i phwnc. Mae'n debyg ei bod yn defnyddio tripod oherwydd mae hi'n ffotograffydd gyda'r nos, ac os and ydi yn defnyddio fflach, buasai rhaid iddi ddefnyddio cyflymder caead araf. Canolbwynt y llun yma yw'r adeilad fflatiau aml-stori, mae'r llun wedi ei dynnu yn gyferbyn yr adeilad. Yn y cefndir mae gweddill y dref, yn dwllach. Oherwydd o'r golau trefol artiffisial mae'r awyr wedi ei oleuo yn felyn hefyd.

Cymerodd Luxemburg ran fewn arddangosfa o'r enw "Architecture of London.", pwyslais yr arddangosfa oedd arddangos pensaernïaeth Llundain trwy lygaid a gwaith artistiaid. Oedd yr arddangosfa yma yn cael ei gynnal yn Guildhall Art Gallery rhwng y 31ain o Fai a Rhagfyr y 1af 2019. Ddaeth ar arddangosfa hon a gwaith gan artistiaid mor gynnar â'r 17eg ganrif ac mor fodern â heddiw. Ei nod oedd darlunio treflun newidiol Llundain ac i gynrychioli sut mae'r dref wedi ysbrydoli artistiaid preswyl ac o wledydd dramor am dros bedair canrif. Wnaeth yr arddangosfa yma gynnwys 80 o weithiau gan dros 60 o artistiaid. (City of London, 2019)

I grynhoi; diolch i artistiaid fel Adams, mae hygredd ffotograffiaeth yn cael ei gwestiynu mwy oherwydd y diystyrwch amlwg y maent yn eu dangos tuag at y dirwedd sy'n newid yn barhaus. Fodd bynnag, mae flâneurs fel Evans, Atget a Luxemburg yn dangos i ni y gellir hyd yn oed yr hyn yr ydym yn ei ystyried yn hyll fod yn hardd, ac nad yw newid bob amser yn beth drwg.

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