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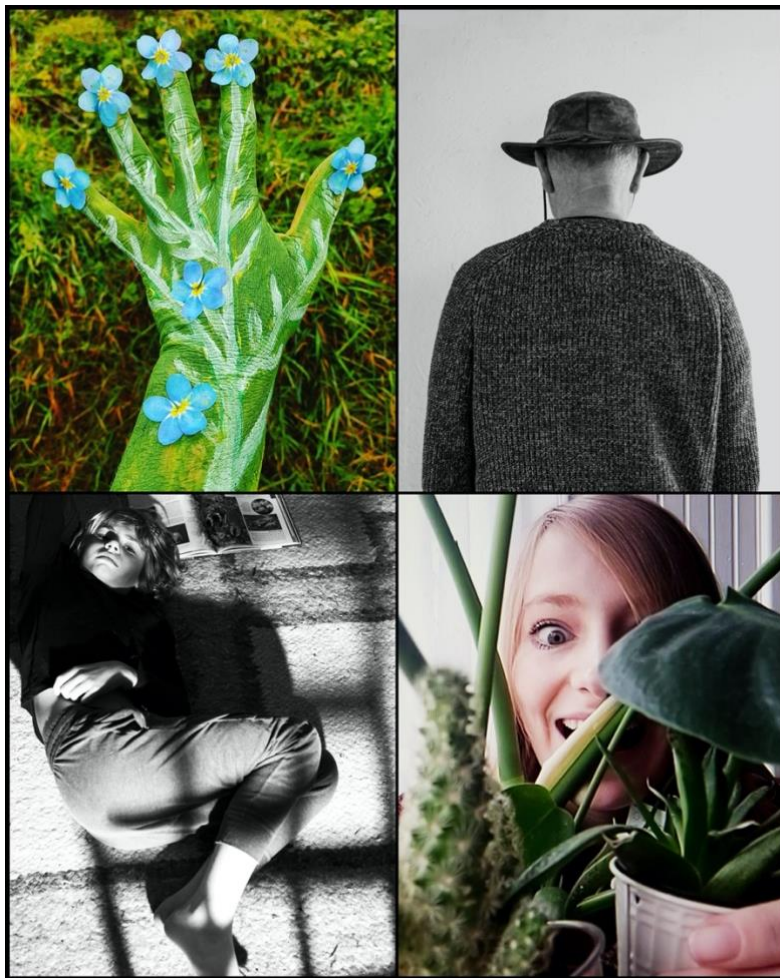
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Programme of Study: Documentary Photography and Visual Activism

Module: M4X01631

Lecturer's Name: Ryan Moule, Paul Duerinckx, Sian Addicott

DOCUMENTARY PRACTICE



By Sarah Grounds

For this Module we had to create four contrasting styles of images.

A Game of Chess

(The Poetic Image)

We had to create an artistic reaction to T.S. Elliot's 'The Waste Land'.

When I first started this work, I thought it would be quite a simple task for me, as I produce a lot of work in reaction to other work in the arts. Including doing a project with my friend reacting to poems by Emily Dickinson.



But I discovered that creating 5 images that relate to each other in an emotional way, is very interesting and something I actually have not done before.

I read the poem many times and was immediately drawn to the section of the poem entitled 'A Game of Chess' I did some research into why T. S. Elliot wrote this poem

(<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2018/feb/13/ts-eliot-the-waste-land-mental-illness>) . I discovered there is an even stronger link to mental health in the poem than I first

thought, as he and his wife both suffered greatly from mental health problems. There is also a strong link in the poem to water and loss of religion and tradition.

(<https://www.lboro.ac.uk/subjects/english/undergraduate/study-guides/the-waste-land/#:~:text=Analysis%20of%20The%20Waste%20Land,%2C%20psychological%2C%20and%20emotional%20collapse>.) I wanted to have the work be on 2 levels, the personal but

also a commentary on modern society.

The lady's internal turmoil and isolation spoke to me and I tried to portray this internal struggle with a video piece using long exposure shots.



I tried to show her isolation from her husband and children by having all the other portraits have their backs to the camera. I created a sound piece to be played as the images are viewed. Her angst and the people turned away, also portrays my own frustration that people in the World do not seem to realise that we are hurtling to disaster.

As I was creating this project I realised I was designing it as an exhibition, which really excited me.

Description of the Exhibition Room

As one walks in, words from the poem are written over the doorway 'Hurry up please, it's time'. There is the sound of running water and a woman quietly, sadly singing to herself.

Three of the walls are lined with black and white portraits of people with their backs to the

camera. The photos are very small, in large frames with wide white mounts. On the far wall, there is a large gilt frame with the video piece playing.

To bring across the feeling I am trying to create in the room I created a video piece. For this piece I discovered I am very bad at choosing Fonts. So I have done a lot of research into what Fonts are used in modern art.(<https://fontsinuse.com/tags/1245/art-galleries>) I have also noticed that I am now making mental notes of styles of fonts used when I look at art! This project moved me from thinking about one image to thinking about a collection of images and how they would be presented and how that presentation also influences how the viewer perceives the work.

The Window

(The Cinematic Image)

The next project was the Cinematic image. My initial idea, to base the work on a Femme Fatale theme, was not very good. But then I took this photo of my son which inspired me.



I decided to create my images based upon a Post Apocalyptic World. My partner is a writer and has written a short story about a Mother and daughter living in isolation. I decided to base my work on this story but had to change it to a Father and son, as they were my only

available models. I created some mood boards to get an idea of feel and texture for the photos.



I had created a mood board for my Femme Fatale idea and really love the use of lighting and atmosphere in Film Noir. So I decided to incorporate aspects of this in this project.



I borrowed a 5D Mark iii and Elinchrom location lighting from University. I had never used flash location lighting before, so I did some Youtube tutorials to help me work out all the controls. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJDr4O_9ArE)

I wanted to create some stark contrasts with lighting so experimented with different objects to make shadows. For my main image, I set up the lighting inside and took shots of my son outside looking into the window. He had to close his eyes, as the flash was so bright.

I had also seen artists taking portraits through windows during the lockdown in 2020 with normal, household light, such as Ruth Medjber and thought this would be an interesting image idea to add to my project. (<https://www.irisht Examiner.com/lifestyle/arid-30996674.html>)



(Images by Ruth Medjber 2020)

I was very surprised at how much I enjoyed creating these images. Creating the scenes, the lighting, directing my son, who was amazing, was so much fun. I never thought of myself as this kind of photographer. But I think I have actually produced some of the best visual outcomes I have ever made in this project. Working with my son has made me feel very excited about the thought of working with actors and sets, a thought that terrified me before. I felt in control of all aspects of the shoots and was able to get across the mood and feel I wanted my son to show. I have been very worried about being able to translate my idea of emotion for a piece to another person for an image and this experience has made me feel a great deal more confident about it.

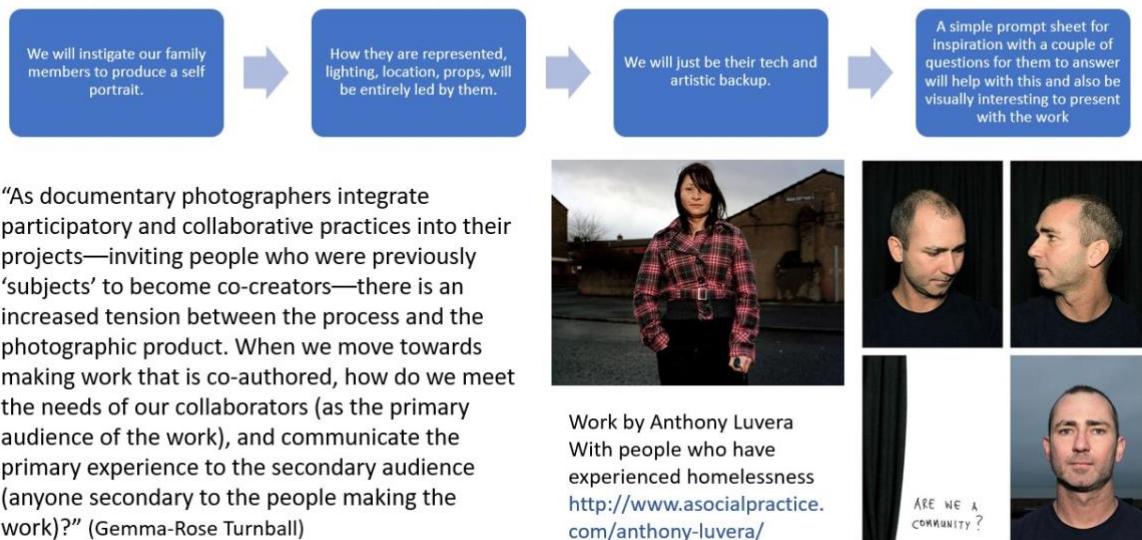
My Family

(The Collaborative Image)

The next project was completely different. My friend and fellow student Lucy Beckett and I, decided to do a collaborative project together. We are both studying Documentary

photography and we are both very interested in Assisted self portraits. So decided to base our project on these.

PHASE 1 – ASSISTED SELF PORTRAITS



We were very inspired by the work of Anthony Luvera. He produced a series of assisted self portraits with people who had experienced homelessness.

(<http://www.asocialpractice.com/anthony-luvera/>) I had thought already about doing projects with different communities and how I could involve them, questionnaires was one of my ideas. So Lucy designed a questionnaire for us to give to our families.

We gave our family members complete free range with the artistic direction of the shoots, to the point that they could press a remote trigger themselves if they wished. I also asked my family members to choose their favourite photo in the shoot to present in my project. My daughter lives in Cardiff and we did a remote shoot over Zoom. I have never done this before, but had seen many photographers who do it, share their work on Instagram.

(<https://www.instagram.com/sozzledmaise/>) So I did a little research about how you actually do a shoot over the internet.(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0A1asSgKdT0&t=315s>) I was very surprised that a lot of photographers still use their DSLR cameras, so I did this.



I learnt a lot and also made a lot of silly mistakes. Like taking the photos in landscape whilst my daughter's video was in portrait. My daughter is very keen to do more though, so hopefully I will improve at this type of shoot, as it opens up a lot of possibilities as a photographer.

Then we moved onto the next stage of the project.



PHASE 2 – COLLABORATIVE EDITING

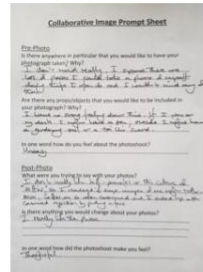
For the second part of the project we will then edit the produced photos. Hopefully highlighting the difference between producing an image with collaboration and not.

We are both keen to work together and also to experience editing work that is not our own.

How this will be achieved has not been finalised yet. Some of our ideas are...

- Invert the image of the other person's family member in the edit
- Getting the family member to collab. on the edit and then showing the differences of someone not having ever met the subject, editing the image and them editing it themselves.
- Edit in response to the other person's edit

We showed each other the shots from our shoots and choose one photo of each family member to edit.

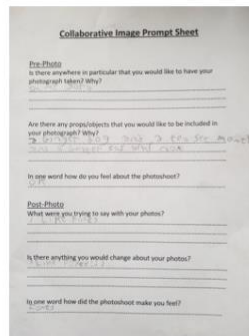


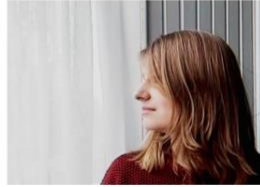
PAUL

- Paul wanted his photos to be b/w.
- He realized through the questionnaire that he was not keen on self portraiture :D
- So he wanted photos of his hands. I talked him into doing a few with his face in though

ALFRED

- Alfred wanted to be scummy and be the complete opposite to what I normally ask him to be in the photos I do of him :D
- I have not done anything to these apart from shrink them into jpeg. Thinking my desire to redo them is actually me and not him. He is actually happy with them.....
- I am a control freak and am finding this collaborative photo taking rather difficult :D





HOPE

- Hope had no fixed idea of what she wanted to do. She helped me a lot with work when she lived at home, so is used to us working together with photography. As she lives in Cardiff now, we thought it would be fun to try a photoshoot through Zoom. This is something that we have agreed we will try again when we have more time. The image quality is quite low, but I am pleased for the fact it was my first try

We talked about different ways we could edit the work, if we should edit them in a reaction way to each other or edit them independently. We decided to edit each photo as we felt adding a word that came to us upon looking at each image. We decided in the final edit to remove these words, as they were too leading. In my editing I was trying to bring across the fact that a stranger does not edit a photo of someone in the same way as a loved one would. I think I failed at this for this project but I am very interested in this idea.



LUCY'S FAMILY AS SEEN BY ME

Lucy and I found this project fascinating. Upon starting we thought that the second part would be the most interesting part of the project. But actually, working with our families was fascinating and very enlightening. We both found that our families were intimidated by the questionnaires. Everyone was very concerned about their images and nervous and awkward being in front of the camera. No-one in my family felt comfortable using a trigger and wanted me to take the photos. I am interested in how different a subject would feel if they had their own disposable camera, that they could use in private. I am now researching different ways that artists are working with people and communities. Such as Kirsty Mackay (<http://www.asocialpractice.com/the-fish-that-never-swam/>)

We've Got This!

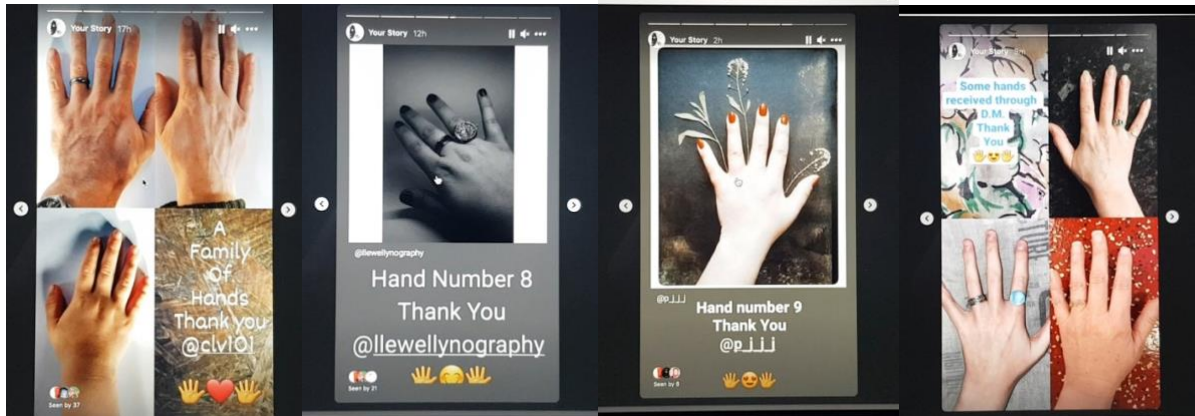
(The Networked Image)

This was my final project and I feel I was more of an artistic instigator and organiser in this project. I decided I wanted to do a positive, community online project. Everyone had had a difficult year and I thought it would be nice to welcome in 2021 with a bit of positivity.

‘We’ve Got This!’ was an online community art project that I ran for a week on Instagram and Facebook. I asked people to send in photos or drawings of the backs of their hands with the hashtag #VIRTUALHANDSTACK. To do this I had to create a poster.



I took photos of my own hand every day for the week and shared photos sent in every day on my newsfeed.



I received 41 submissions. I then got them printed up and made a video creating a virtual hand stack. I created the video by taking a shot every time I added a hand to the wall and then making a gif in photoshop which I then turned into a mp4 on my phone. I released this video on my Instagram on New Years day.

Funnily, I discovered that doing any project from home in late December is a very bad idea for me. I live off grid and for half of the days of this project I had no electricity. So running the project and creating my own images was a bit harder then it would have been normally. So I must remember this for future projects.

This was a very positive experience. It was really nice to talk to the people involved and they all seemed happy with the outcome. I am very interested in doing more online community projects. With this one, I yet again found people were reluctant to share photos of themselves. Many people private messaged me with the photos of their hands saying their hands were ugly. I think this may have impacted the number of submissions that I received. My next idea is a 'Positivity Wall' where I will ask people to write one positive word about their lives.

Conclusion

I really enjoyed doing this Module. The diversity of the projects resulted in each project being very visually different, which I liked very much. I felt each project stretched me and took me out of my comfort zone and I am very happy with the outcomes that I have achieved. All the work has inspired me to follow the ideas more.

