

Ba photography in the arts

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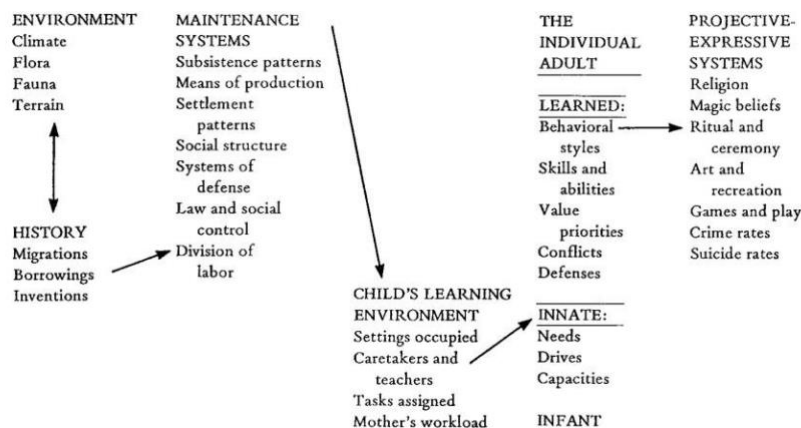
Research in Practice (ADAD5004/C)

Lecturer: Paul Duerinckx

Dissertation proposal

List of illustrations:

- Figure 1



- Figure 2



- Figure 3



- Figure 4



- Figure 5



Context

In my dissertation I will be exploring how the heritage and surroundings of an artist shape not just the nature of someone's character but defines their style and symbolic themes. As I have lived through many challenges, changes and heartbreaks changing my attitude and demeanour towards life, which in turn I feel has also impacted my artwork. I believe my heritage is what led me to take up my hobbies, interests and of course my practice. In contrast to this my surroundings I feel have meant a great deal to me over the years, from the land to the people I surround myself with, it is all interconnected in shaping the person I have grown to be, as well as the way I perceive art. I will also follow up on this by researching into how attachment and detachment from an area, person, event or point in time can either mould or completely change an artist's response /perspective to their motif.

Heritage

Heritage is diverse and complex, as the direct definition of heritage being valued objects and qualities such as historic architecture and cultural traditions passed down from previous generations. But I believe that there is a deeper connection between these qualities and the person. As a Welsh artist it means a great deal to me that I recognise this and is part of why I use things like the Welsh language or Welsh literature within my work, it is also a way for me to do my duty to my culture and country as well as giving a platform / space to preserve the language. To fully understand heritage, it's important to consider how culture is made up of a multitude of specific influences and experiences that contribute to each other in order to shape a person, after reading Barbera Rogoff's book (2003) titled *The Cultural Nature of human development*¹ it refers to a model for psycho-cultural research (Figure 1) made by a man named John Whiting and it highlights key factors that influence and shape culture, this is useful as although it delves deeper into subject matters that focus more on

¹ Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. Oxford University Press. Page 43 ²
Prendergast, Peter. (1992). *Daffodils*, (painting), Viewed on the 29th of March

the scientific research it does has relevance and meaning to prove my statement. It specifies that history, social structure, borrowings, inventions, skills, abilities all are interconnected key components in culture as a whole.

These key components such as social structure, history etc fall under heritage, to understand how these have shaped me and my practice I will be looking at artworks I relate to value highly that have also contributed to influencing and shaping my artwork, as well as addressing personal experiences that mean a great deal to me and my practice. As previously stated, within my practice I believe it is imperative to contain elements of Welsh language or Welsh history, and this applies to many Welsh artist's. For example, take Peter Prendergast who's a Welsh painter and his artwork *Daffodils*² (1992) is an iconic painting (figure 2) that puts Wales's national flower to the forefront of the painting.

This painting is very important to me as it was suggested to me by a friend as they thought it would interested me and they were right as the painting speaks greater than just a simple depiction of the national flower, in Welsh culture the daffodil stands for rebirth which can be considered a nod to the persistent preservation of our native tongue. Prendergast's painting does not have a very clear outline of these flowers and it leads me to question if there was specific meaning to the artist for it to be painted this way, if so it would make sense to me as I believe the unclear outline can be considered to represent the many times the Welsh language has faced an uncertain and unclear future yet it still has persevered. As said by theorist Salvador Munoz Viñas's book (2009. Page. 40)² "heritage is not limited to material objects. It can be intangible, which can consist of tools of major importance to a culture or any group like language" understanding this and being a first language Welsh speaker allows me to see what it means to preserve and protect the language but not only that what it means to

understand the history behind our heritage as native speakers. In the past Welsh was in decline until the last few years the language has been spoken more among all ages. However the language still faces challenges to

² Muñoz Viñas, S. (2005) *Contemporary theory of conservation*. Amsterdam ; Elsevier ButterworthHeinemann..

this day and this painting is something I have grown to admire as I like to visualise this artwork as a reflection on the fragility of not just culture but its heritage and language.

Of course, heritage does not entirely revolve around language, once again referring to Viñas's statement in his book, heritage can be an intangible tool of great importance and while thinking about this I thought of an image taken by Peter Finnemore (1999)³ this artwork (figure 3) was taken during a very important time for Wales, and as seen above it acknowledges this as it has the date in an oak sapling pot the figure in a suit standing in the centre uses to obscure his face. This work was made following the months of the Welsh assembly vote on September 18th, 1997, the reason this particular image is so important is due to the deliberate focus of the year being directly centre of the image and it adds to its significance as the Assembly being created in 1999 which is also further elaborated in the *Institute of Government Website* (2021)⁴. The Senedd, as the legislative body representing the people of Wales, holds profound importance in Welsh culture and heritage. It stands as a symbol of Wales' distinct identity and aspirations for self-governance within the United Kingdom. By providing a forum for Welsh politicians to debate and make decisions on matters of significance to the Welsh people, the Senedd plays a vital role in shaping the cultural, social, and economic fabric of Wales. It represents Wales' rich heritage and the resilience of its language, traditions, and values. Through its legislative powers, the Senedd has the ability to preserve and promote Welsh culture, language, and heritage, ensuring that they remain vibrant and integral components of Welsh society for generations to come. As a beacon of Welsh democracy and representation, the Senedd embodies the spirit of Welsh nationhood and serves as a testament to the enduring legacy of Welsh culture and heritage. I believe that when Finnemore created this image he could see the importance of what the Senedd meant to not just Wales and its people but the heritage we intend to preserve, and in doing so using photography to acknowledge this. According to Alvarado,

³ Finnemore, Peter, 1999, *The Oak Seer*, Published by Ffotogallery Caerdydd

⁴ Institute for Government, 2021, Senedd Cymru (Welsh parliament), Available at: [senedd-cymru-welshparliament](https://www.senedd-cymru-welshparliament.gov.uk/) accessed at 6th April

Buscombe and Collins in their book (2001) titled *Representation & Photography*⁵ its stated “A photograph is a space in which the reader is deployed by which codes they are familiar with in order to make sense” the codes I find familiar with this image are similar to the last artwork as the figure dressed in a suit suggested alongside the importance of the year that he is of political prowess whilst holding an oak sapling which symbolises growth and birth.

I would go as far as to say rebirth is a recurring theme with Welsh heritage as I believe the artist intends to address that this sapling is our heritage is in the hands of a governing body. Furthermore, the oak sapling which is once again a symbol of our heritage will grow into an oak tree which are renowned for being ancient and long lasting as well as strong, resistant and possessing wisdom. This is why I appreciate this art piece although I was not born at the time of this image’s reveal and the creation of the assembly, I have grown through an education system learning our native tongue and history as well as important elections that have been in support and favour of Welsh heritage and culture by the Senedd. As a result of this I have understanding and respect for what it means to have the Senedd, and how this image from Peter Finnermore immortalises that pride and privilege that comes with it prioritising a promising future for Wales.

⁵ Alvarado, M., Buscombe, E. and Collins, R. (2001) *Representation and photography : a Screen education reader*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Surroundings

My practice has evolved on countless occasions, whether it be influenced by other artists work or literature. I know definitively that my surrounding, when growing up to present day have had a great deal of influence upon me. As a child I was brought up in two worlds, I was shown the busy life of the city, it's ever changing and ever-growing nature, granting opportunity for leisure, work, and entertainment. Additionally, I have been in awe of both the coastal and urban beauty and its presence within the landscape. I was also brought up in the countryside, where I had learned and experienced the beauty and the connections we have to nature and its harsh aspects. Working on a farm has given me an understanding of Conservation and but also the hard choices it brings in managing a landscape. This may not seem like much of an importance but to me it means so much more, as I feel being surrounded by two drastically different landscapes and in essence perspectives of life, has taught me how little people choose to see and recognise from both angles. I've experienced and witnessed very difficult choices to be made on a farm, as well as hiking all day across an area of outstanding beauty namely the Gower peninsula, which has brought me closer to the landscape; allowing me to admire the natural world. I've also been a part of an interconnected city of aspiration and community which is Swansea; meeting plenty of friends

and people who all value the city's image, further development, despite these underlying issues around drugs and homelessness to name but a few. In my practice I've been in awe of both areas they're beauty within its landscape and its people. This has led me to photograph and create artwork through these inspirations although I know that there's so much more to explore, so when looking at my work I've taken the time to sit in my surroundings and learn, observe and get comfortable with them and if I am not comfortable all the more reason to explore why.

Robert Frank and his book (2004) titled *London/Wales*⁶ is a perfect example of how surroundings shape and mold people, it is a photographic exploration that vividly captures the essence of two distinct landscapes and the people inhabiting them. Through his lens, Frank skilfully illustrates how surroundings shape individuals, reflecting the unique cultural and social contexts of *London and Wales*. This book allows the reader to observe and learn much about the reality of life in both lifestyles through the imagery, highlighting aspects such as the run down area's to a busy industrial city as well as harsh life of the rural working man. In his photographs (figure 4 & 5), the urban bustle of London and the rural tranquillity of Wales serve as backdrops against which the lives of their inhabitants unfold. Frank's keen observation reveals how the physical environment influences people's identities, behaviours, and interactions, whether amidst the vibrant energy of city streets or the serene beauty of rural landscapes. Moreover, Frank's artistic response to these surroundings is deeply intuitive, as he engages with the people and areas he encounters, capturing moments of connection, contemplation, and introspection. Through his art, Frank not only documents the external landscapes but also delves into the inner landscapes of human experience, offering a poignant reflection on the intricate relationship between people and their surroundings.

⁶ Frank, R. and Brookman, P. (2003) *London/Wales*. Zurich: Scalo.

Frank's book also contains a special quote from Poet Richard Llewellyn (1939) *How green was my valley*⁷ it's a poem that symbolizes the loss of innocence and the passage of time, as well as the enduring bonds of family and community in the face of change. Capturing the complexity of Welsh valley folk's experiences and the enduring power of its industrial age of black gold mines.

The importance of this quote is that contributes to the additional weight of class difference in this book and how the working man in Wales at the time would be covered in soot head to toe and a handful with a smile while the working men in London are in a rush in suits. This book is a perfect example of artwork that highlights realism within the harsh change in surroundings and people, as Bernd Stiegler theorised and is addressed in Kelsey's and Stimson's book (2006) titled *The Meaning of Photography*⁸ "photographs continue to be the visual reflecting of reality, they are realism meditated by the medium and concentrated in the image" these images are of great significance to each other as they are almost polar opposites in lifestyle, reflecting the harsh reality yet again proving how our surroundings shape us and lifestyle. I can relate to Frank's imagery as he is an observer in two different worlds, I feel similar towards my own work in a site-specific response to urban and rural areas, and in doing so it's given self-understanding in how I can be merely more than just an observer at times when exploring key areas of my life.

In conclusion, I have addressed how surroundings and Heritage play a vital role in people's identity, profession, language, and literature but also for me and my practice. However, in this proposal it has been the case of recurring themes all interconnected to my keywords, no question I pose will have an answer with absolute certainty and definitely won't be of interest to some people. It's clear that as an artist and a practitioner my heritage and surroundings have influenced and altered my response to personal artwork. Therefore, it leads me to question whether, there are themes such as heritage and surroundings of an artist's practice which subsequently is a prerequisite for their future symbolism and style?

⁷ Llewellyn, Richard. 1939, *How green was my valley*. Publisher Joseph, Michael

⁸ Kelsey, R. and Stimson, B. (2008) 'The meaning of photography', in. New Haven, Conn. ; Yale University Press.

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