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Programme of Study: Photography in the arts

Module: ADAD5004 Research in Context

Word Count: 2598

Tutor Name: Paul Duerinckx

Three Keywords: Landscape, Cultural Identity and Welsh Artists

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Welsh Community, Landscape, Culture and Welsh Artists within Art,

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Introduction

This essay will be discussing three different key words with expectations of finding a question, argument, or statement that could possibly be used for a dissertation in the near future. The essay will discuss each keyword separately and gather the information to form a question for further research. The three keywords that will be discussed in this essay are Landscape, Cultural Identity and Welsh Artists. I will be researching these keywords that are relevant to Wales and Welsh art. This essay will also discuss artists that are relevant to the keywords. Some of the artists that will be discussed within this essay are Ansel Adams, Bernard Mitchell, and Peter Finnemore.

Landscape

Landscape with Photography and Art

Landscape art and photography are very popular forms of art and is seen a lot within photography. Landscape photography and art can be defined in many different ways, “camera objectifies the land as landscape and in doing so renders it as a visual phenomenon for the sense of sight and as a surface for aesthetic appreciation.” (Giblett and Tolonen, 2012, p. 53). This quotation conjures the impression that landscape photography is mostly for aesthetic purposes and creates something distinct from the original landscape that was photographed, nevertheless can this be true for all landscape photography? However, it can be possible for landscape photography and landscape art to tell a story and plays an important element in cultural identity.

Ansel Adams



Figure 1. *Clearing Storm, Sonoma County Hills*,
Ansel Adams, 1951

Ansel Adams is a well-known American photographer, known mostly for his black and white photographs of picturesque landscape as seen on the Website *The Ansel Adams Gallery* (The Ansel Adams Gallery, N.D). Ansel Adams is relevant research for the key word landscape for the reason that the majority of his renowned photographs are black and white landscapes that display the land. The photograph seen in *figure 1* is representative of his work. This particular photograph in *figure 1* is very intriguing as it is a black and white photograph of a specific location in the Sonoma County, however if the location of where the photograph was taken was not known, it could possibly be difficult to understand the landscape and the photograph as a whole. It could be considered that Adams' wanted the viewer to know the exact location of the landscape for the reason that he included the name of the location within the title of the photograph, implying that location is significant for landscape photography. Alternatively, is it important to know the location of a landscape to fully understand it or does not knowing the exact location of the landscape let the viewer view the photograph without any biases?

The Welsh Landscape

The Welsh landscape itself is used a lot within media and art including film, photography, art, and books. When the Welsh landscape is used within media and art, it often plays a big role in the story "In Gast, Carol Swain emphasizes the empty, rolling fields and hills of rural Wales to highlight the theme of isolation that runs throughout the graphic novel" (Vernon, 2019, p.15). This quote implies

that Carol Swain uses the Welsh landscape to create a specific atmosphere therefore the Welsh landscape plays an important role in her graphic novel.

Cultural Identity



Figure 2. *Danial Backhouse*, Bernard Mitchell, N.D

I believe that cultural identity plays a vital role in all forms and mediums of art. I also believe that Cultural identity is extremely beneficial for Welsh art and artists.

Welsh Culture and Bernard Mitchell

One Welsh photographer that is very well known in Swansea is Bernard Mitchell. It could be argued that Mitchell's Welsh identity has helped develop his practice and assisted him to become a successful photographer. Mitchell photographs other Welsh artist of all mediums including painters, poets and writers in their studio spaces as seen in his archive on his website (Mitchell, 2021).

Figure 2 is a photograph of Danial Backhouse taken by Bernard Mitchell. Because of Danial Backhouse Welsh identity, he was given the opportunity to be photographed by Bernard Mitchell like many other Welsh artists simply because he is Welsh and a respectable artist. It is obvious that having a Welsh cultural identity has benefited Bernard Mitchell because he has decided to focus on photographing Welsh artists and by being a Welsh artist himself, he has had an easier access to other Welsh artists. Therefore, his cultural identity plays an important role within his practices.

“The very problems of Wales – the two languages of its literature, the deepening cultural crisis – have provoked, here as in other areas of Welsh life, initiatives and kinds of confidence that on their own but especially comparatively are remarkable”

(Williams and Williams, 2021, p.61).

According to the quote above, Wales has two languages that create a cultural divide between some Welsh people. This cultural divide could possibly be seen in art and media that has been produced by Welsh artists that speak Welsh and Welsh artists that do not speak the language.

Photographs can act like a timebox, preserving important moments in time that create what happens today “Taking photographs seems no longer primarily an act of memory intended to safeguard a family’s pictorial heritage” (Van Dijck, 2008, p. 1). This quote implies that photography is used to preserve and protect heritage and heritage has a close connection to cultural identity. Heritage is a vital part in cultural identity.

We often use photography to capture our own idea of what we believe to be important to our own culture and we create culture surrounding photographs that have already been taken:

“In addition to their growing usage as tools for communication and experience, digital photo cameras have been touted as novel instruments of identity formation, particularly as they allow users to manipulate their own images. However, it should be noted that photo cameras have always been important instruments for the shaping of self-identity”

(Van Dijck, 2008, p. 7)

It is obvious that photography is not only important for cultural identity but also self-identity and self-identity itself has an important role within cultural identity because both are linked.

Welsh Artists

According to some people from Wales, they often see famous people that come from Wales in film and/or print be mistaken as English or just called British and their Welsh Identity is ignored or

forgotten. This can also be true for Welsh artists and photographers. However, how true this statement is and why is it that people's Welsh identity is forgotten when it comes to art including film, photography, and music?

Wales has an Arts Council which helps to gather great artists from around the country "The Welsh Arts Council has one Special advantage: that it is attempting its difficult work at a time when both levels of its definition – the Welshness and the arts – are in active movement" (Williams and Williams, 2021, p. 61). The book then goes on to say that the Welsh Arts Council has to work harder compared to England, but it is also extremely impressive (Williams and Williams, 2021, P. 61).

It could be considered that Wales has had a difficult time convincing the rest of the world that Welsh art and artists are equivalent to the rest of the world. "At the Beginning of the twenty first century the words 'Wales' and 'Art' may no longer be humorously juxtaposed." (Fairclough, Curtis and Mitchell, 2000, p. 9). This quote proposes that in the past Welsh art and Welsh artists were not taken seriously at all until the twenty first century and is still not always appreciated as it should even in the twenty first century. Why was the idea that these two simple, non-threatening words being used in the same sentence was humorous, and what could have changed that? It could be that a new age of Welsh artists have brought about change and these two words now have a stronger bond between each other. "Against this enriched context of historical and critical work new, young artist artists are developing" (Fairclough, Curtis and Mitchell, 2000, p. 11). The book that this quotation is from was published over twenty-two years ago in 2000, but it could be argued that this statement is true today because young Welsh artists are still changing how the world views Welsh artists and art. One young Welsh artist that is part of this movement is Abby Paulson who speaks the Welsh language. Paulson has been a guest lecturer at Swansea College of Art, inspiring other young Welsh speaking photographers and other students. Paulson is also on the board for Peak Cymru as a part of Speak and Pegwn and her speciality is young artists and the Welsh language (Peak Cymru, 2022a), implying that Paulson herself is a young artist developing her own practice in Wales, but also

Helping other young Welsh artists to develop their own practice in Wales. Young artists are the ones that are developing and strengthening the bond between Wales and art. Even though the artists that Tony Curtis was interviewing are no longer young artists but are established artists, they still have an impact on Welsh art community and artists to this day.

Wales has been lucky over the past one hundred years because the small country has produced many artists from different mediums.

“That unique gathering of young talents in Swansea in the thirties – Danial Jones and Dylan Thomas and Vernon Watkins and Mervyn Levy and Yourself – was one of those special periods in Welsh cultural history. It was a meeting of extraordinary talents, so was there a sense in which that coloured the rest of your life?”

(Fairclough, Curtis and Mitchell, 2000, p. 15)

This is a question Tony Curtis asked Alfred Janes and the statement that he made about the thirties being an important time for Welsh artists is very fascinating because some of the artists that Curtis named are very well known within Wales and globally and many were an important part of my education in Welsh speaking primary and secondary schools. Alfred Janes answer the question with:

“Danial Jones was a real polymath – I miss him terribly; I miss them all terribly. Buy, no, that film BBC Wales made was a bit apocryphal, a bit romanticised. Showing us all going around together in a gang, that never happened. For one thing, for most of that period Dan Jones lived in London, because his parents had moved there. Dylan was an itinerant, moving around all the time.”

(Fairclough, Curtis and Mitchell, 2000, p. 15)

Alfred Janes goes on to talk about Composer Tom Warner and talks more about the type of person that he was. Alfred Janes mentioned that two of Wales’s most famous artists where not actually in Wales during the thirties, a time that is supposed to be a significant period for Welsh artists according to Tony Curtis. Curtis also mentioned Danial James. Danial James is known for writing the lyrics for the famous Welsh song Calon Lan which is viewed like a second national anthem for Wales. James will always be known for writing Calon Lan, a song in the Welsh Language, he was also buried

next to the old Tirdeunaw primary school in Swansea. However according to Janes, Danial James was living in London for a Period of time during his life. This does not mean that he wrote one of Wales most renowned songs in London but does suggests that he spent a period of his life not surrounded by Welsh culture, living, and experiencing English culture. It seems that James could possibly have a conflicting view on Wales and Welsh art and artists compared to English artists and art as he has been able to observe Welsh art and artists from an outsider's perspective.

“The state of the visual arts in Wales is strong and promises much; commercial and public galleries are attracting larger audiences, some of whom are themselves buying work and seeing Welsh art as part of their fuller life in Wales”

(Fairclough, Curtis and Mitchell, 2000, p. 12)

The book that this quote is from was published in 2000 and it could be said that twenty-two years later the visual arts are still strong and thriving in Wales, especially Swansea. In Swansea alone there are numerous galleries that have made names for themselves, including the Glyn Vivian, Elysium, Volcano Theatre and Mission gallery.

The key word Welsh artists connects with the other key words landscape and cultural identity.



Figure 3, *Wallpaper Fragrance*, Peter Finnemore, 1996

One artist that connects all three key words is Peter Finnemore, and the best example of this is his book *Gwendraeth House* (Finnemore, 2000). The book is written in Welsh and English which suggests that his Welsh culture and language are important to his practice. “Finnemore has been making photographs about his home place in the Welsh-speaking heartland of rural west Wales, where his family have lived for five generations” (Finnemore, 2000). This section his from his book *Gwendraeth*

House and was written by Mark Durden at the beginning of the book. This implies that Finnemore uses the landscape of his home to showcase his family heritage and culture.

Figure 3 is one of the photographs included in *Gwendraeth House* (Finnemore, 2000). As you can see *figure 3* is a landscape photograph of the wallpaper inside a very old house. This one photograph displays years' worth of Welsh history and culture as well as his family history and culture. His photographs are unique "with a biting, hard-edged depiction of the bleakness of structures in the post-industrial landscape" (Adams, 2003, p. 66).

Finnemore's practice consists of Welsh culture, language, and landscape.

Conclusion

Personal Practice

Landscapes are a significant part of my personal practice as one of the first things that I started to photograph was the landscape of my local village. The local landscape is important to me as it is a part of who I am as a photographer, and landscape plays an important in who I am as a person. But is the fact that I know the landscape well means that I can see more in the photographs of the landscapes? Cultural identity is also an important part of my personal practice because I use my Welsh history and education to create to create unique photographs. The key word Welsh artists is also relevant to my practice as I myself am a Welsh artist and Welsh art has been a major component of my education.

Further Research for Dissertation

The dissertation could include interviews with Welsh artists from different mediums discussing how their Welsh identity has shaped their practice. The dissertation could include similar discussions and interviews as Tony Curtis does in his book (Fairclough, Curtis and Mitchell, 2000) with other Welsh artist Including young and old Welsh artists. For those artists that speak Welsh, they can discuss how has the Welsh Language influenced their practice. Some of the artists could be English artists that

have moved to Wales during their practice, and they can discuss the differences they have notice in their practice in Wales and in England.

Final Conclusion

After examining the three keywords Landscape, Cultural Identity and Welsh Artists, it can be seen that there are multiple connections between all three key words. Landscape has an important role within cultural identity, and cultural identity is important to Welsh artists and art. In conclusion the question that could possibly be used for a dissertation is 'How has Welsh Culture, Identity and Landscape shaped and developed within Art, Photography, and Media?'

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