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Course: MA Communication, Culture and Media

Module: Post Photography

Project Review

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From Theory to Practice

"From theory to practice" has been chosen by the researcher to explain the rationale behind the project. The project titled "The Water Fountain and its Visitors" is a product of learning and participation in class sessions as well as reading and practice. Prior to the Post Photography class, the researcher did not really understand issues bothering on photography such as responsibility, privacy and trust (Campbell 2015). However, with the completion of this project, the researcher does not just see himself as a photographer but also as a photojournalist. This position is reflected in the study that incorporates those being studied: they were informed of the essence of the project and gave their consent to be included.

Participating in class sessions contributed to the success of this project. Listening to authors and professional photographers helped the researcher to engage and share in their thoughts. Also, the sessions taught the researcher techniques on interviewing, narrative and storytelling. Tweets on the various lectures shaped the project (See maphotography.info). For instance Bleasdale (2015) opines that the photographer's work should tell a logical story and the method in which Jonathan Worth arranged our tweets in chronological order is replicated in my narrative on my interviewee – Ucheowaji Ogbologugo, chronicling his photographing experience from childhood to adolescent to youthful stage and adulthood. Fred Ritchin also emphasized this method which he notes that it is the God-creation story pattern of narrative as opposed to most disjointed style where the narrative begins with the end and moved to the beginning and terminating at the middle (Ritchin 2009).

David Campbell in his lecture on "Narrative, Power and Responsibility" explains the reason for bad pictures, linking it to poor reading (Campbell 2015). So, to avoid bad pictures, the researcher engaged in reading. Accordingly, the subject matter of the project "Water Fountain" was derived from similar setting the "Most Photographed Barn in America" described by Fred Ritchin in "After Photography" (Ritchin 2009:54). Just like the barn attracts lots of visitors, the water fountain too attracts visitors. It is true that "… the event is that which can be narrated". Before undertaking this project, people have been visiting the water fountain but it was never an event. However, my photo essay showing the various groups that visit the water fountain: those who photographed the water fountain, those who photographed themselves, those who walk through the water fountain, those who watch the water fountain and those who sit by the

water fountain; can be said to be an event because the various scenes tells a story of visitors to the water fountain.

An analysis of the project reveals that the study is in two sections: the photo essay and the storytelling. The traditional pattern would have been telling a story about the water fountain which the researcher felt would have been a repetition of other stories told about the water fountain or similar water fountains. In the light of originality, the researcher decides to tell a story about one of the visitors to the water fountain. I feel this position is justified because Dalia Khamissy in her project in Lebanon on "The Missing" also talked to her subjects to hear their ordeal about lost loved ones (Khamissy 2015). But just as Campbell (2015) observes that a narrative must have an angle, it has to be stated that the two sections have a single angle and that is photography: the photo essay showcases those photographing with their phones or viewing with their eyes while the narrative highlights Ucheowaji's photographing experience. I perceived that the project attempts to touch on the various goals of the course.

Independent Work & Practice

There is no limitation of possibility in the world of imagination which is stronger than reality (Ritchin and Cuzner 2015). This project which springs from imagination is the brainchild of the researcher, who also took all the shots. The long shots show the route to the water fountain. The open shots focus on the major subjects on the water fountain: the various groups to the water fountain. I feel this work falls under the category of a rich story as the researcher communicates with his camera (Mayes 2015). The researcher also undertook some class tasks which improved his photographic experience: Half masting of British flag (See maphotography.info and Appendix A), review of chapter one of After Photography (see victorgbanigo.wordpress.com), the Unphotographable "My journey to Coventry" (See Appendix B) and "A picture of how I lost my camera" (See Appendix C). Also, the class sessions are summarized and blogged on victorgbanigo.wordpress.com.

Post Photography

Bleasdale (2015) describes photography as a creative adventure and I think the photo essay and the narrative addresses narration, curration, storytelling and collaboration. Moreover, the various tasks undertook by the research are examples of storytelling. The question that was always raised in the class sessions about who is most powerful in a photograph, I feel it is the photographer because without his work, the subject will not be seen as significant for the publisher to publish and made available to the audience. The photographer gives meaning to the definition of photograph as "a two-dimensional picture of an actual object or event". This project is an example of a photographic piece by a visual journalist (Ritchin and Mayes 2015).

The size of the photographs was chosen to allow for multiple photographs on a page. This method is related to how photo essays appear on Magnum Photos, a photo sharing site that was recommended by the tutor (Magnum Photos 2015). The choice of four photographs on a page is to present the actual event on each subject. Using just one photograph for a subject would have left the viewer wondering what happen before and after that image but the four images explains the scene.

Social and political issues:

All major participants (subjects) were briefed on the essence of the project. The researcher would have still photographed without informing them but it would have been an invasion of their privacy. However, those captured in the long shots and those at the background in the open shots were unavoidable. Following the digital culture would have mean manipulating the photographs to remove them. However, David Campbell's lecture on "Why does manipulation matter?" which he advised those involved in the photography process to ensure "the integrity of the image" through conscious effort remains a food for thought. So I decided to go natural with the understanding that my camera is "a picture-making device" not necessarily "a data-collection device" that would have led to my work becoming a "computational photography" (Campbell 2015). In addition, Ritchin (2015) admonition that photographs should not be distorted because "… is a quotation…" still rings in my memory.

Wright (2004) observes that photography falls within the "realism" paradigm because of its ability to reproduce the things that are visible to the eyes. So, in this photo essay, the researcher used real names for the captions except for the two that were indicated as pseudo names. The reason for the pseudo names was because the subjects left immediately after photographing them and the researcher felt it would be unfriendly to chase them for their names. If the researcher had not indicated them as pseudo names, then it would have been an issue of misrepresentation similar to the middle class Lebanese photograph that was wrongly captioned as affluent Lebanese (See Appendix D).

Conclusion:

My project has attempted to engage my viewers by presenting various groups of visitors to the fountain in a single narrative. I believe this is the goal of photography whose language is understood by all as real and cannot be denied (Ritchin 2013). The story that accompanied the photo essay is presented in a chronological order which gives the reader a clear understanding of the message. When photographs are not manipulated, the viewers' appreciate it as "an actual event" and I think that photography is a way of life.

Acknowledgement:

My appreciation goes to those who accepted to be included in the study. Special thanks to my friend Pascal Obi who photographed me while conducting the interview with Ucheowaji (See Appendix E). My gratitude to my tutor Jonathan Worth for his encouragement: I had earlier done a work on "strictlynophotography.com" a site that encourages people to take photographs in restricted areas. But I remembered the tutor emphasizing professionalism and I aborted that project. I also ventured on a review of some of the best photographs ever taken and the tutor pointed out originality and practice and again that project was aborted. But I'm glad to have undertaken this project and completed it – the experience gathered will ever remain with me.

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