

Jacob Morris

LB2 THESIS OUTLINE

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Thesis Outline

I. Introduction

I am a visual artist whom concentrates on analogue photography and film-making. My interests revolve around place and people, previously I have engaged in investigating the concepts of identity and attachment, cultural narratives and traditions, environmental challenges, as well as extremes of social realities, and psychological theory. The main body of work I produced that relates to this, would be a photo series I created in Lockerbie, Scotland. The project began with photographing the youth of Lockerbie, a town where in 1988, Pan Am Flight 103, a regularly scheduled Pan Am transatlantic flight from Frankfurt to Detroit via London and New York was destroyed by explosion, killing all 243 passengers and 16 crew, before landing on the small unsuspecting town of Lockerbie, killing the eleven residents below. The photographs taken in this series were both portraits of some who grew up after the bombing, and landscapes of the small Scottish town and the crash site. The portraits of the youth from this series, stand as reference to 'Trauma and Transcendence' theory, which was the main theme of the entire project. Upon completion the output took the form of a book, portraits, local news clippings of the disaster and quotes from the subjects.



Figure 1: A photograph of *Industrial Homes*. A photograph I have taken as an exploration of architecture and its relation to place.

My previous work has brought me to become interested in place and placelessness, as defined by geographer Edward Relph, 'the loss of uniqueness of place in the cultural landscape so that one place looks like the next. Nonmaterial Culture. The beliefs, practices, aesthetics, and values of a group of people'¹. Coming from Coventry, a war city² in England, I find that much of the city feels by Relph's definition, *Placeless* due to its post war, brutalist architecture and because of this it always felt very placeless to me with its stark vectors and grey buildings, which could relate to Figure 1 as the industrial look of these structures stops it looking like the homes of people and more a building with an industrial purpose. When I was sixteen years old I was mugged at gunpoint in Coventry, and struck in the face with the firearm. Ever since I have felt no attachment to my hometown and have only ever wanted to leave it. I do however find it interesting that I have moved from one post war city to Rotterdam, another war city, which is where Figure 1 was photographed. I would like to know if this is a common feeling for those who have been displaced, and became refugees in other cities as they are not necessarily connected at all with the places they find refuge, which would provide a feeling of *Placelessness*.

Another thing which draws me to investigate '*Place and Placelessness*' is how a photographer could be considered to have a similar approach to that of an anthropologist, a phenomenologist or a geographer and how this could be conveyed through lens based media. The term *Psychogeography* is defined by the Tate as a movement by Marxist theorist Guy Debord in 1955, where he questions "How do different places make us feel and behave?"³ Debord wanted to remove the parameters surrounding culture and everyday life, and a new approach to architecture that was more open to interpretation and exploration. During this thesis I will engage in a photo project which will operate as a continuation of my previous work by exploring themes of people and place, and psychogeography but more particularly the relationship between people and the structures of Rotterdam.

¹ RELPH, E. 1976: *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion.

² McGrory, D. 2015: *Coventry's Blitz*. 1st ed. Stroud: Amberley Publishing.

³ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/psychogeography>

II. Thesis Statement

This thesis will operate as an ongoing research enquiry into place, placelessness and its relation to people inhabiting place, particularly around in and around Rotterdam, a post-war city. Finnish Architect *Pallasmaa* portrays his encounters with place as an experience; “I confront the city with my body; my legs measure the length of the arcade and the width of the square; ... I experience myself in the city, and the city exists through my embodied experience. The city and my body supplement and define each other. I dwell in the city, and the city dwells in me.”⁴ *Pallasmaa*

III. Body of thesis

First Topic:

Point A: Place, Placelessness and Photography

1. Place and Placelessness being portrayed through the lens
2. How a feeling of *Placelessness* and *Psychogeography* can relate to the photographic medium
3. Exploring displacement and its relation to Placelessness

Point B: Examples of photographers establishing the feeling of Place and Placelessness

1. Examination into how Alec Soth, Chloe Dewe Mathews and Chris Killip can provide feelings of Place & Placelessness through their photographs
2. Investigate whether people are necessary in order to establish a feeling of *Place and Placelessness*

⁴ PALLASMAA, J. 2005: *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*: John Wiley and Sons. p. 40.

Point C: Relation to my own practice

1. Cite texts and other artists' practices and their use of *People, Place and Placelessness* in photography
2. Methods I used in my practice
3. How incorporate *People, Place and Placelessness* into my practice

IV. Conclusions

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