

Notes - David Campbell: Narrative, power and responsibility

Key:

Of interest

Artist

Artwork/book

Quote/extended

<https://soundcloud.com/mattjohnston/david-campbell>

David Campbell website

<https://www.david-campbell.org>

Notes from lecture from David Campbell's website:

Photography and narrative: What is involved in telling a story? 18th November 2010. Available at: <https://www.david-campbell.org/2010/11/18/photography-and-narrative/> [accessed 23rd January 2018]

David Campbell (DC)

Talk about **theory and concepts of storytelling** involved in idea of **narrative**

Narrative central to photography but originates from literature and we can take ideas from literary theory

Power and responsibility (as they relate to photographer) - interested in ways in which in pursuing particular forms of narrative/storytelling they position themselves

Interested in documentary/photojournalism

Within this there are often powerful and oft recited way of thinking about the image and what it can do in terms of capacity for change - becomes a form of justification/rationale for photographic practice

Wants to challenge - doesn't believe we have a good understanding of the way the image effects the world/change

Tod Papageorge (TP)

Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tod_Papageorge

Michael Hoppen Gallery Website:

<https://www.michaelhoppengallery.com/artists/78-tod-papageorge/overview/>

Lens culture website: (features Studio 54 project)

<https://www.lensculture.com/tod-papageorge>

Recently recognised as a significant American photographer

E.g. -

Passing through Eden: photographs of central park

Lens Culture Website: <https://www.lensculture.com/books/10126-passing-through-eden-photographs-of-central-park>

Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/38993127>

American sports, 1970: or, How we spent the war in Vietnam

Lens Culture website : <https://www.lensculture.com/books/6681-american-sports-1970-or-how-we-spent-the-war-in-vietnam>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6cHR1uORA>

Came out of street photography tradition

One of the most significant American academics of photography

Students included - Gregory Crewdson, Philip Lorca di Corcia

Talk - New York public library (2008)

Robert Capa (RC) quote - if you're pictures aren't good enough, you aren't close enough

RC was talking about the practice of photography and taking photographers in the moment

TP - observed that what is important now is that if you're pictures aren't good enough, you're not reading enough

Directing attention to necessity for understanding issues/context before image is recorded

For DC essential - raises context and idea of narrative

Reading is about research, developing understanding and locating moments to other moments and how they link to larger stories

Questions of context and narrative are fundamental to producing work that is meaningful and stands the test of time

Narrative

Relationship between idea of story to idea of an event/issue

Story - might produce over time

Will have a relationship to event or person/situation

Not automatic - needs to be made - become larger ideas of story

Alan Feldman (AF) - American anthropologist

Work on violence in different communities

Famous book on violence in Northern Ireland: Formations of violence

Said - the event is not what happens, the event is that which can be narrated

Into fundamental philosophical ideas - nature of truth, reality, objectivity

AF is saying events are not encountered with meaning formed already but events are understood, and understood as an event, by process of narration itself

Narration can be from participants or observers or combination of both

Key issue - we understand historical events having taken place, at time events were underway people did not understand themselves as being part of this events

E.g. French revolution, holocaust

What we take to be significant parts in history only become this way because they are narrated in a certain ways e.g. participants/storyteller

Narrative - a whole set of practices of mediation and representation which makes them appear to us because locates them in stories so we can transmit information about these events to other people

If you understand how narrative relates to storytelling then reading and research is essential

You are involved in construction - narratives are not found, fully fledged

Often there will be massive differences/clashes in what people tell than story eventually told

Accumulation of evidence - judgments must be made

Drift of evidence

Although questions idea of objectivity does not mean anything goes

There are limits

Hayden White - American philosopher/historian

Said - it would be difficult, but not impossible, to tell story of assassination of JFK as a comedy

quote: Every narrative however seemingly full is constructed on the basis of a set of events which might have been included but were left out

Process of **construction** is about including some things and excluding others

Impossible to think of a narrative that included everything

Must have an angle or perspective - point is to **understand limits and what is included/excluded**

All narratives fail in terms of comprehensiveness - can't included everything relevant

Understanding limits and reflecting on own practice of narration/process of construction - increasingly important part of the story

These basic theoretical concepts are essential in understanding what is going on in process of narration

Why is narrative such a common form?

Value attached to narrative - offers sense of coherence and purpose even though life does not offer that - we know it is unobtainable but we desire it anyway

When we construct a narrative we attempt to make sense of life and what was previously opaque

Desire

We desire stories that offer us a comprehensive account, help us make sense, have beginning, middle and end - even though we know this is too simple/does not replicate the messiness of life

Completeness

Contexts:

Reason why we exclude/include is because of everything is located series of contexts

Dict def: circumstances that form the setting for an event, a statement, an idea in terms of which that event, statement, idea can be understood and assessed.

Everything has condition is linked to things beyond it/around it - don't necessary see at the time

Need to get a sense of what these themes are

Narrative/storytelling is directly related to context

Always trying to context/place in context included/exclude context
Trying to make inclusion/exclusions obvious

In **journalism** where thinking about these issues there is a debate about context
Conferences about this (links?)

Feeling lack of context in structure of news

Usually something exceptional in the last 24/48 hrs but don't get linked to reasons why

Something in structure of news itself that works against context

Are there better ways of making context available

E.g. social media, topic pages in newspapers

Although issues of context and narrative are broad and conceptual there are also practical ways these are being applied

How to report/tell stories

What are the traditional forms/structures/conventions of narrative?
(not a template as there are other forms of storytelling)

Time - most narrative linear

Beginning. Middle and end

Often a lot of moving backwards and forward e.g. film
Conventions are always unpackaged and
Will have temporality - even non linear narratives

Characters - drive story forward

Story arc - over a series of episodes come back to parts of story

A narrative is always an account of connected events, no matter how put together

Time

Space

drama

Causality - may offer accounts about how things come about

Personification - identification of characters

Even in non linear narrative have these

Relationship between individuals and context

One of the fundamental/most important parts of narrative

How can a person embody the story you are doing?

E.g. project HIV/AIDS

We don't encounter disease as an object itself but come across people involved in the story

What coming across is the traces of issue embodied in the people or places

People say about photography - trying to put a face on the issue

What they mean is relationship between individuals and context

Not suggesting problematic but a particular/narration - way of working

Are there other ways of working?

Storytelling structure: (classic narrative structure)

Linear -

Exposition - where things are revealed/made obvious

Conflict

Climax

Resolution

Non linear - may be mixed up

Not all stories are resolved

Introduce location

Give story a face

Let people tell their own story

Contextualise

Use all channels to deliver the story

Part of thing about narrative is not just what they say but how they are relayed

Point of a narrative is to relay information

In end - most important thing is not structure but what is the story you want to tell?

Will change and alter

Can't just turn up in a place thinking I will make some pictures

Will have a much better outcome if considered before hand

Questions to consider:

What is the issue/motivation?

What are the event?

Who are the characters?

What are the contexts? Won't know unless done study before hand - without this wont know what to photograph/story will tell

Power and responsibility:

Ways in which photographers have used images in stories and what is the relationship between image and context?

Nck Ut: girl after Napalm attack (**The terror of war**, 1972)

<http://100photos.time.com/photos/nick-ut-terror-war>

Icon of Vietnam war

Claim - helped end war because changed public opinion

DC believes important, but idea that picture ended war ridiculous

War didn't end for 3/4 yrs.

Huge demand to make of photo

Would this claim be made for other forms? e.g. newspaper article

Something in discourse of photography that wants to make this claim

Misunderstands the way images work and sets bar too high

Claim is often made for photography e.g. websites that claim 'images that have changed the world'

Claim sets bar too high - have significant social impact but mistake to say they have changed the world

too demanding and misunderstands the nature of image and context

Not to say opposite can be true

Marcus Bleasdale (MB) - Congo work

Interesting because able to identify specific change that followed exhibition of his work

Partnered human rights watch

Exhibited in Geneva - interested in getting to people who worked in the gold trade

Able to point out a company in Geneva decided would no longer trade gold in the region because the trade was clearly supporting the violence

Important to recognise change that happened - not end of war in Congo but one company changed its policy

Significant but not going to end war by itself

When start to think about change realise it is lots of things together

To maximise possibility of change MB uses a variety of means

E.g. photography, multi media, cartoon version (to reach a different audience/generation)

Cant say will automatically bring change, but multiplying different channels of work will undoubtedly have interesting effects

Responsibility:

Wendy Watriss - agent orange in Vietnam

<http://odysseus.nervegarden.com/2010/11/01/wendy-watriss-agent-orange/>

<http://niemanreports.org/articles/agent-orange-pressing-the-government-to-take-responsibility/>

Realise wasn't published as she was intended originally - most graphic shown, not full work

Despite this - won awards

Realised did not help any veterans

Switched from photographer who was an activist to activist who used photography

Demonstrates the limits of the image itself to make change desired by image maker

Not a failure of photography but shows the hype that often takes place

Stuart Friedman article:

Embodies some of this hype

Says we have to speak a language audience can understand

In tradition of **humanist documentary**

In conclusion says it is amount of thought research as well as beautiful execution that ensures maximum outcome

Prospects for change increased if ideas of narrative and context understood more work can be related to particular contexts the more impact it will have and impact of work itself

Q + A

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