

Letter of Motivation

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Despite undergoing many technological and cultural mutations in the two centuries since its invention, photography as an activity remains a unique and ever-present method of paying and bringing attention to things. Whether collecting or creating, recording evidence or manipulating appearance, people use pictures to preserve and promote those specific sights which they believe necessitate a closer study. No matter the audience, subject matter or technical process, photography is at its core a call to say “have a look at this”. It is the recognition and consideration of this endeavour which has driven the various personal projects which make up my photographic practice.

Though unanchored to a particular practical style or subject I would say my practice currently sits in visualising social and physical constructs through patient, investigative and/or speculative documentary projects -typically made with the photobook in mind as a destination. Examples of these include ‘Beyond Sharing’, where I photographed time-determined populations and activities over the span of 24 hours in one McDonald’s Restaurant, and ‘Before the Blue Passport’, in which I photographed my social and psychogeographic experience living in an ‘International Village’ whilst studying in Sweden, one year before Britain was due to leave the European Union. However, the project which most closely reflects my direction is ‘Manifesto for a Studentopia’, in which I spent time investigating the transformative boom of purpose built student accommodation and a continued tradition of conflict between university students and traditional residents in one UK city. A photobook of joined dots, the work considered this conflict as something purveyed and ultimately profited-on by a marketised Higher Education sector, institutional management, satellite businesses and a host of aggressive private development companies. Deliberate documentary-style photographs of various sites were paired with narrative captions alluding to a corporate, dystopian prospectus; bringing multiple issues together with a fictitious ‘initiative’ as a proxy for the invisible neoliberal motivations behind the collaborative changes described, I looked to invite a more imaginative reflection on a very real phenomenon. The hope is that photography, itself treading the line of objectivity and subjectivity, can offer something to subjects such as this that is more layered and patient than a newspaper article, but more efficient, available and penetrable than an academic text.

I have a particular appetite for photography which recognises itself as system for representation and comprehension, as well as being able to play along with its unique cultural relationship to “truth”. For me this makes it, over the course of long-term projects like the above, well-suited in offering imaginative responses to topics and ideas which otherwise might remain more inconspicuous. In photographing various subjects, I have a keen interest in the instrumentality of cameras and so too the implications of particular technologies and aesthetic decisions which can both inform, but just as easily deceive, the viewer. This is of course not a new concept, deception has existed in the field for a long time, but with a rising public awareness of artificiality, declining perceptions of “photographic truth” and new methodologies in image-making becoming more common, it is increasingly imperative to have a

handle on as many modes of practice as possible. We are fast approaching a world in which intent and its material translation becomes all the more powerful. I believe that this course shares this sentiment. I do not want to make work that is only viewable within the walls of a university, trying to be too clever for its own good. Whether commercial or not, I want to make work to be seen and have some kind of public contribution to issues that inform it, even if that is just bringing attention to something niche. Within a visual arts context I know where I want to be moving towards, the kind of work I want to be making, and Photography Practice at Goldsmiths feels like a significant opportunity to begin realising this ambition. Having previously thrived in the space, time and resources afforded by university study, for me this course specifically represents that chance to expand and bolster my overall photographic practice and positively informing the work I make thereafter.

Since graduating Coventry University's Photography BA (Hons) course in November 2019 (awarded 1st Class and recipient of the Course Tutor Prize), I have been working full time whilst searching for opportunities to sustain my photography and research. Graduating shortly before the national lockdowns of 2020-2021, I kept a very non-photography job and this significantly took away the momentum I felt I had coming out of university. Whilst I understand that this is certainly not a rare situation within the arts, I am eager to excel and feel that if set in the right direction I could far better realise my potential within the field. Right now I find myself swimming against the tide in what already seems to be both, with regards to exhibitions, assistant roles, expensive competitions and even portfolio reviews, a who-you-know and often pay-to-play industry. The idea of marketing oneself admittedly seemed like an afterthought as an undergraduate, a module bolted on to the end of our final year that ended up being quite generic given the latitude of skill-sets and career directions on the course. Taking a look at some of photography's contemporary success stories, at those who are getting shows, residencies and spin off commissions, I realise that this is an area that I must vastly improve upon and a key aspect of development where I could learn so much from both the core and associate staff. I was very excited to hear about participation from people such as Emma Bowkett and Vivienne Gamble for example, both of whom's respective work in publication and exhibitions I have admired for a long time. That figures like these have been recruited to the course gives me confidence that there is a genuine effort to help equip students with a toolkit of skills necessary for weaving contemporary photography into a sustainable career post graduation. Whilst the idea I introduced this letter with is simplified, that photography is a matter of selection, preservation and attention, I believe that this course poses an ideal point at which to reorient myself and advance my capabilities in all of those aspects.

My undergraduate experience of photography was truly mobilised by its network of peers, between which ideas could be bounced and appropriate critique made. I hate to think what I might have abandoned in small scrappy notebooks had I not had that platform for open and constructive communication. One of the biggest attractions to this programme is the opportunity to work within a network where I can not only cultivate and contribute my own voice but be able to soak advice from those with different backgrounds and specialisms; I want to give myself the best chance to inform and ensure the strongest outcome for both my current work and career. After visiting Goldsmiths a few times in my consideration of postgraduate study, I see a hive of vibrant research and genuinely really exciting activity from all sorts of courses. Even outside sharpening my own artistic proficiency with greater technological comprehension in the Photography Practice course, the prospect of exposure to interdisciplinary conversations is genuinely so exciting, and that reputation which first attracted me to the university, since backed up by conversations with staff, buoys my conviction in pursuing my postgraduate education here.

Thank you for your consideration.