



**The Complexity of
Ffotography:
Conceptualising Welsh
Photography as a Complex
Adaptive System**

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Abstract

This thesis is a transdisciplinary inquiry into expressions of national identity present in photography generated in and of Wales. It operationalises applied methods informed by complexity theory to conceptualise 'Welsh photography' as a complex adaptive system and in doing so makes contributions to the sub-fields of applied complexity, photography, and Welsh national identity.

Ontologically, both Welshness and photography exhibit characteristics that are indicative of complex systems. Traditional attempts to apply positivism to Welsh identity and photography have resulted in fracture and polarisation, both of which now demonstrably characterise these phenomena. Complexity theory advocates a dynamic approach to ontology that rejects traditional epistemological reductionism (in which phenomena are understood through their constituent components) in favour of a systems-based approach which accounts for dynamic constructionism, holism, and emergence (Cilliers, 2000). Complexity theory is particularly suited to phenomena that are irreducible, contingent, and dynamic; it places epistemological importance on interactions between components within a system, and offers strategies for apprehending, rather than solving complex phenomena.

Complexity-informed research mobilises reflexive inquiry-led methods, in which the researcher and participants have an explicit and collaborative role in the generation of knowledge. To this end, this thesis makes use of unstructured interviews and photo-elicitation to characterise photographic expressions of national identity as an ongoing complex process consisting of a variety of system components and operating within a specific but open environment.

This thesis concludes that as Welshness itself is increasingly conceptualised as multiplicitous, so is Welsh photography. Specifically, this thesis contends that photographic Welshness is a negotiated phenomenon, that is continuously constructed and deconstructed through a series of non-linear, dynamic, and fed-back interactions which can be understood as occurring between components within a complex system of photographic practice and wider contextual discourse.

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Welsh Terminology

- Cymru: Wales
- Ffotograffiaeth: photography
- Hiraeth: nostalgia or longing for a home that no longer exists. Specifically, for Wales before colonisation.
- Plaid Cymru: Nationalist Party of Wales
- Yr Fro Gymraeg: Welsh speaking Wales – this usually refers to the areas of Wales in which the majority of the population are primarily Welsh speakers.
- Milltir Sgwâr: this directly translates to English as “square mile” but in the Welsh context it typically connotes psychogeographical spaces, rather than a literal square mile.
- Eisteddfod: an annual festival held in celebration of Welsh culture, specifically associated with the Welsh language.
- Senedd Cymru: The Welsh Parliament (formally The National Assembly for Wales)
- Bwrdd yr Iaith Gymraeg: Welsh Language Board
- Amgueddfa Cymru: National Museum Wales – this title covers several heritage institutions including National Museum Cardiff, St Fagans National Museum of History, National Waterfront Museum, Big Pit National Coal Museum, National Slate Museum, National Wool Museum, and National Roman Legion Museum.

“Academics, unfortunately, spend their whole lives trying to make things very complicated.” (RP07, 2020, 00:40:59)

1. Introduction

“By nature I prefer complexity to simplicity, which may explain the lack of a single, absolute ideology in my writing” (Grundberg, 1999, p.xii)

A doctoral degree typically requires candidates to make an original contribution to a certain field (Montuori & Donnelly, 2013). People who know me often joke that my sense of direction is so dire, I would need a map to find my way out of a single, well-lit, infinitely accessible field. Therefore, it is perhaps inevitable that this doctoral thesis is the result of my sustained inability to navigate my way out of *several* fields.

The core concepts addressed by this research stem from a mixture of artistic practice, academic inquiry, and personal interest. My initial motivation for doctoral study was to further scrutinise photographic Welshness; a concept that I had encountered as part of my practice-based Master’s thesis¹. Specifically, I was interested in the notion of a national “visual dialect”, in line with the paradigm of thought that conceptualises photography as a “visual language” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). As such, this thesis initially sought to examine indigenous nuance within photographic practices and products in and of Wales. A growing field of research (both practice-based and theoretical) addresses expressions of national identity in photography. Whilst much of this scholarship (and artistic output) concerns the United States of America, researchers are increasingly considering British and latterly Welsh identity as expressed (or found) within photography (Cabuts, 2012). Whilst this thesis seeks to add to that scholarship, the relative paucity of related research posed an initial problem for the formation of a robust (and original) research context and literature review. As such, I began the inquiry by examining the wider ecology of ideas relating to the concept of “a Welsh photography”, including the formation and maintenance of Welsh identity, and the philosophy of photography.

Researchers have variously conceptualised Welsh identity as a social construct (Anderson, 2006; Curtis, 1986), a contentious and political linguistic divide (Williams, 2017; Coupland, 2006, 2012), a product of internalised colonialism (Johnes, 2020), and a victim of deindustrialisation (Burgess & Moles, 2016). Each conceptualisation is typically dictated by the traditional frameworks of whichever discipline grounded the inquiry. The concept of ‘Welshness’ therefore represents a broad spread of academic disciplines such as nationalism, social studies, history, politics, linguistics,

¹ Hopkins, E (2015) *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*. The thesis is a photographic examination of my relationship with my own Welsh heritage. It is presented as a self-published photobook and was made between 2013-2015 as part of my Master’s study at Glasgow School of Art. It was exhibited at Ffotogallery in 2018, as part of a group show celebrating Wales-based photographers, entitled *Ffotoview*.

literature, and art. As such, this thesis contends that Welshness is complicated more by a lack of holism – typically overlooked in pursuit of positivism, than by any specific characteristic.

Similarly, and as is discussed in section 2.2, the academic notion of photography also differs considerably between disciplines and epistemological frameworks. Photography has historically represented a marginalised field of study and was invariably viewed as an adjunct to other more established disciplines such as film studies (Bazin, 1960; Stafford, 2013). Whilst there have been several significant publications addressing the philosophy of photography, many of these demonstrate a (not unwarranted) preoccupation with the oppositional binaries that have characterised much of the study of photography to date. Seemingly, photography scholars have typically chosen to apprehend the medium as *either* an art or a science, representation or abstraction, modern or postmodern. Such oppositional epistemologies are further complicated by rapidly developing digital technologies and mutating teleology associated with the medium. As such, few approaches have generated sustainable holistic frameworks for apprehending photography, although many have stated the need for such frameworks (Rubinstein, 2020; Costello, 2018).

Arguably, the complexity of both Welshness and photography could be the lone subject of multiple theses within multiple disciplines. To mitigate against the danger of writing several theses (or indeed, no thesis), I attempted to locate a single field from which I might reasonably adopt epistemological frameworks and methods that would allow me to address my original research question. Given the potentially linguistic dimension of the initial inquiry (discussed in more detail in 1.2), and the growing tendency in visual studies towards socio-semiotics (Griffin, 2002), I turned to sociolinguistic scholarship that specifically examined the development of regional accents and dialects - only to discover, once again, an area of academic inquiry complicated by the imposition of disciplinary boundaries (Bastardas-Boada, 2013; Andrason, 2014).

However, within sociolinguistics there has been significant effort to move away from prescriptive rule-based epistemological frameworks that many consider to be unsuitable methods to apprehend the dynamic and non-linear construction of linguistic dialects. These approaches embrace the inherent complexity of dialect acquisition (Hiver & Al-Hoori, 2016) through the epistemological and applied frameworks of complexity theory and transdisciplinarity. Complexity theory, as discussed below, is the conceptualisation of certain phenomena as dynamic “multi-agent systems” variously described as complex systems or complex adaptive systems (Heylighen, Cilliers, & Gershenson, 2006). Transdisciplinarity is an inquiry-led approach to scholarship in which traditional disciplinary boundaries are transcended in favour of holistic epistemological

frameworks. As such, transdisciplinarity is understood to be the application of complexity and systems theory to epistemological scholarship (Montuori, 2013).

Therefore, in trying to decide in which disciplinary framework to situate my inquiry, I discovered a growing collection of scholarship that rejected the notion of disciplinarity altogether. The growing acceptance of complexity theory (and the related notion of transdisciplinarity) has contributed to a paradigm of thought and practice within sociolinguistics in which researchers are able to holistically apprehend social constructionism, radically dynamic concepts, and seemingly random phenomena. This fit well with my developing research aims and allowed me to design and implement adaptive research strategies that were predicated on my inquiry, rather than my myriad disciplinary fields.

Ultimately, whilst this thesis has retained its original goal of analysing actual and perceived Welshness in photography, the epistemological approach to the inquiry has evolved to play a much bigger role in the generation and apprehension of data than I had initially anticipated. As such, this is a transdisciplinary enquiry that, in drawing from scholarship relating to photography, Welsh studies, and complexity, aims to enrich knowledge in all three areas.

1.1 Transdisciplinarity and Thesis Design

In traditional Newtonian approaches to knowledge generation, intricate or complicated phenomena are typically broken down into their constituent parts, examined independently, and reassembled. As such, phenomena are understood to be the sum of their various parts and are analysed as reducible, cause-and-effect, linear entities. Complexity theory is predicated on the understanding that complex phenomena cannot be understood by being reduced to component parts. Instead, complexity theory considers complex phenomena as vast open systems comprised of multiple components (often themselves complex systems) and as such, highlights the interactions between component parts as sites of pertinent epistemological knowledge (Cilliers, 2005). Preiser et al state “complexity is simultaneously a combination of the attributes of a system (ontological) as well as a ‘function of our present understanding of the system’ (epistemological)” (2018, p.2). In other words, complexity refers to both the object of study (the system), and the philosophical or methodological means of apprehending that system (Heylighen, Cilliers, & Gershenson, 2006).

Given the wide applicability of complexity theory facilitated by the demonstrable variation of complex systems², a static definition of complexity has proved elusive (Mitchell, 2009). Although it is a relatively contemporary branch of epistemological scholarship, it has roots in systems theory and cybernetics (Loubser, 2014), as well as growing application in healthcare, management, and education (Parnell, 2012) amongst other disciplines. As such, there are a wide variety of applications and approaches of complexity, which tend to be shaped by (but not confined to) disciplinary paradigms.

In terms of applied qualitative research, complexity theory is itself a developing paradigm, but as Gear et al state, “there is a wide variation in complexity theory application and considerable stretch or fuzziness remains” (2018, p.2). To counteract what they have described as instances in which complexity theory has been cited but not truly understood or embraced, Gear et al (2018) encourage the application of complexity not only to research themes and corresponding tacit theoretical frameworks, but to simultaneously view the entire research environment through the lens of complexity. This congruous approach has been variously adopted - with success (Gear, Koziol-Mclain, & Eppel, 2012; Alhadef-Jones, 2013; Drury, 2016). As such, this section details the ways in which complexity theory has informed the transdisciplinary approach to both the research and the narrative employed within this thesis.

1.1.1 Transdisciplinarity

“Transdisciplinarity” is a growing epistemological framework in both applied and theoretical research. As its etymology suggests, transdisciplinary research operates beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. However, as with complexity theory, “there is still a lot of confusion round the concept of transdisciplinarity” (Dieleman, 2013, p.67). Arguably, much of this confusion lies in the “broad brush readings” of trans-, multi-, and interdisciplinarity, and has on occasion resulted in each being used as a synonym for the other (McClam & Flores-Scott, 2011).

Figure 1 illustrates the levels of disciplinary integration present in trans-, multi-, inter- and disciplinary inquiry. Further, Figure 1 highlights the type of research problem best suited to each approach; as problems become more complex, more disciplinary integration is required. Leavy makes the distinction between multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinarity on the basis of varying levels of disciplinary collaboration, stating that each exists on “a continuum of increasing interaction and integration” (2012, p.209). Multidisciplinary practice, she states, involves “collaboration between

² As will be discussed in Chapter 2, phenomena that could be characterised as complex systems present naturally in networked, biological, and sociological contexts.

two or more disciplines without integration” (2012, p.210). Integration, in this context, involves the potential for sharing frameworks and methodologies between disciplines. In multidisciplinary work, Leavy states, each discipline retains their traditional “assumptions values, and methods” (Ibid.). Interdisciplinarity, involves some more integration but is still predicated on a discipline-first hierarchy. Transdisciplinarity, on the other hand, “is an approach to research that *necessitates* high levels of collaboration and integration between disciplines” (ibid.). As such, notes Leavy, interdisciplinary research can become transdisciplinary in the face of a complex research problem that requires an inquiry-first rather than discipline-first approach.

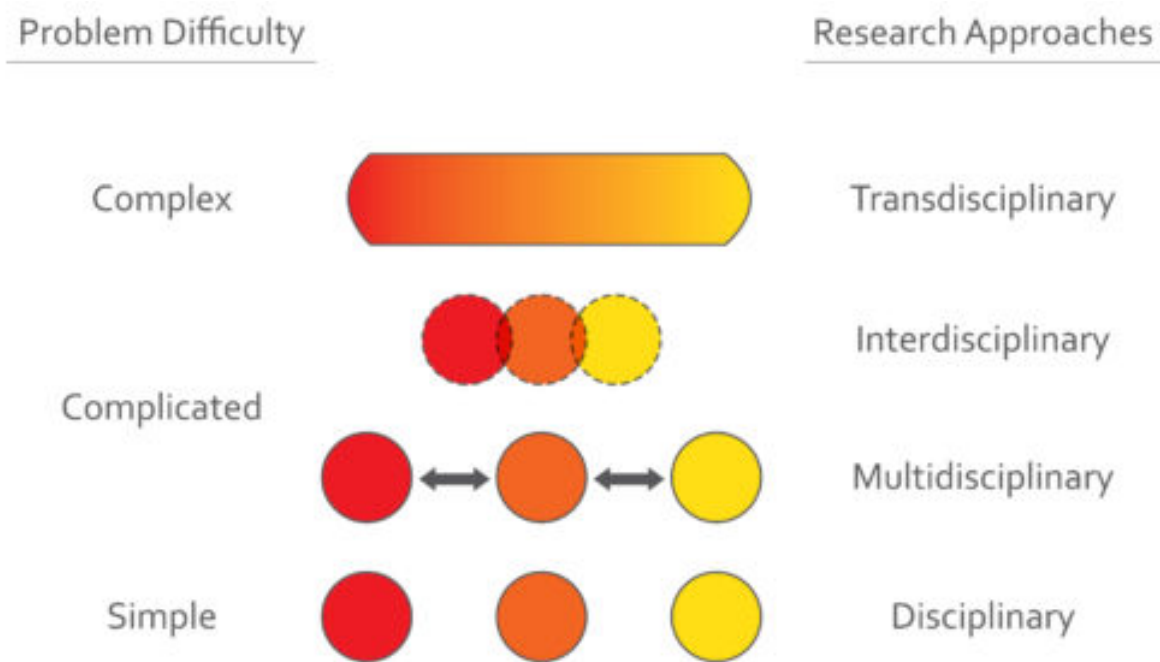


Figure 1: An index of problem difficulty matched with best research approaches (Nastase, 2017)

Like Leavy, Montuori states that transdisciplinarity is “inquiry-driven, not discipline-driven” (2013, p.50). Montuori suggests four “dimensions” of transdisciplinary research, grounded in the scholarship of complexity theorist Edgar Morin³. These are as follows: “1) inquiry-based rather than discipline-based; 2) integrating rather than eliminating the inquirer from the inquiry; 3) meta-paradigmatic rather than intra-paradigmatic; and 4) applying systems and complex thought rather than reductive/disjunctive thinking” (Montuori, 2013, p.46). These dimensions have been utilised as guiding methodological principles throughout this thesis.

³Edgar Morin is commonly considered to be a “founding father” of human complexity theory (Montuori, 2008), his work *Method* is widely regarded as his “magnus opus” on the subject (Ibid.) and his scholarship informs much of Montuori’s work.

Fundamentally, transdisciplinarity is a contemporary research approach ideally suited to a modern, systems-led world, characterised by complex socio-ecological problems that are unsuited to traditional discipline-oriented epistemological frameworks (Preiser, Biggs, Vos, & Folke, 2018; Leavy, 2012). One of the key strengths of transdisciplinarity is that it “highlights areas that would remain obscured by a disciplinary review” (Montuori, 2013, p.46). As Leavy writes, “the key principles of transdisciplinarity include: transcendence, emergence, synthesis, integration, innovation, and flexibility” (2012, p.211).

1.1.2 Transdisciplinary research design

“[A] transdisciplinary view, informed by systems and complex thought, addresses the larger whole, the context, the relationships and interactions, and the many dimensions or system levels that emerge in the process [...] the task - and art - of transdisciplinary research, is to assess to what extent these different system levels are sources of pertinent information” (Montuori, 2013, p.48)

Due to the potential for extreme volumes of information, it is critical that transdisciplinary research is designed in a way that allows the researcher(s) to apprehend unexpected data, but also to identify which ideas are pertinent to their inquiry. As such, models of transdisciplinary inquiry often require researchers pre-conceptualise the entire research process as an open complex system; in which potential interactions between components are facilitated within manageable research parameters such as timeframe, funding, and ethical frameworks. One example of this methodological pre-conceptualisation is presented by Alhadeff-Jones, who designs a “complex” research process which he then applies to his own field of education (2013). His framework is, by his own admission, not universal in its application; it is “limited to a set of finalities and the environment that contextualised it” (2013, p.20). With this caveat in mind, Alhadeff-Jones’ framework has been used as an initial epistemological model for the conceptualisation of my research process but has not been “applied” in a prescriptive sense and where the research dictated, his approach was deviated from.

Alhadeff-Jones delineates his conceptual framework into three distinct “moments” each of which represents “recurring stages of the spiraling development of research” (Alhadeff Jones, 2013, p.19), and each of which is located within the epistemological paradigms of Morinian Complexity and Le Moigne’s General Systems Theory (ibid.). For the purposes of this research design, particular attention was paid to “Moment #1” - as Alhadeff-Jones designates it. The framework for Moment #1 conceptualises the research process as a system (Fig.2), contextualised

within a research environment constituted of four sub-systems, themselves defined through their own “finalities”⁴ and environments. As can be seen in Figure 2, Alhadeff-Jones’ sub-systems are as follows: Author, System of Ideas, Object of Study, and Method.

The finality (and thus characterisation) of the Author sub-system is to produce “specific knowledge through a research process” (Alhadeff-Jones, 2013, p.25). Within this research the authors are myself, the University of Stirling (represented by the influence of institutional guidelines and regulations), and my participants - who occupied a collaborative role within the research narrative (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4).

The sub-system of Ideas is a concept which Alhadeff-Jones draws directly from Morinian scholarship⁵, and is described as a “core” of axioms located within a variety of sites such as (but not limited to): networks of theoretical organization, data, and mythologies (Alhadeff Jones, 2013; Morin, 1991). This sub-system is characterised by Alhadeff Jones as containing “the core assumptions and the principles that define the legitimacy and the logics of the framework adopted by the author in order to apprehend the research process” (2013, p.26). Due to the collaborative nature of my methodological design, the System of Ideas, as it applied to my process, was necessarily an open system, and therefore had to account for concepts presented by collaborative constituents of my Author sub-system (i.e., ideas presented by participants during fieldwork). Chapter 2 provides a review of the ecology of ideas that has contributed to the research design and outcomes, and as such directly addresses the “System of Ideas” pertinent to the formulation of this research. Alhadeff-Jones states that this sub-system is “[o]rganised around practical questions and research problems” (2013, p.24), and equates the finality of this sub-system with the notion of “interest” (Habermas, 1971 in Alhadeff-Jones, 2013). This notion is itself as dependent on the practicalities of the research, as it is the “author’s “privileged epistemology” - represented by the System of Ideas (Alhadeff-Jones, 2013, p.26). Alhadeff-Jones here stresses the importance of an holistic approach to the conceptualisation of the research, stating that the Object of Study “never exists as an entity separated from the other elements constitutive of the research process” (*Ibid.*), concluding that this sub-system should not be reified. This is salient, as the nature of Object of Study sub-system within my research was particularly contingent on data generated during fieldwork. As such, neither the Object of Study nor System of Ideas remained fixed until fieldwork and analysis were concluded.

⁴ Alhadeff-Jones frequently uses the word “finality” as a synonym for “purpose”; with the added meaning that the purpose should be understood as being contingent on the research aims and practices.

⁵ Specifically, Alhadeff-Jones cites Morin’s four-volume work *Method* (1977-1991), which is a pioneering work in the field of methodological complexity theory.

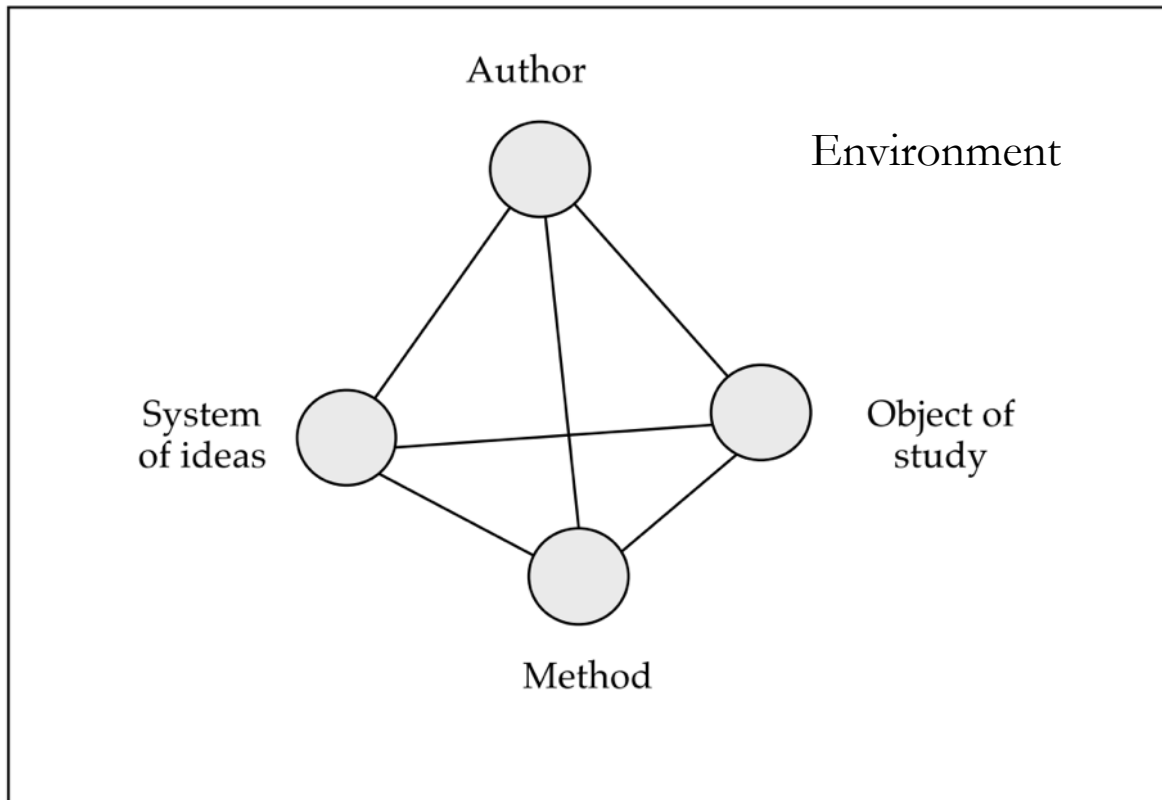


Figure 2: The research process as a system finalised in an environment (Alhadeff-Jones, 2013, p.25)

The final sub-system within Alhadeff-Jones’ framework is ‘The Method’. The method sub-system is again taken directly from Morinian complexity theory and comprises the “program” – a set of predetermined approaches (classically considered to be the method), and the “strategies”- a set of fluid approaches, the implementation of which is contingent on the emergent data and the Author’s ability to apprehend methodological uncertainty (Morin, 1992). Chapter 4 details the way in which ‘The Method’ sub-system has been operationalised within this research and draws from theoretical frameworks associated with ethnography (interviews) and visual studies (photo-elicitation). The critical aspect of this sub-system within the context of this research is the notion of emergence (apprehended through the concept of “strategies”). As both the Object of Study and System of Ideas were contingent on data supplied by participants, the methodological approach necessarily made use of adaptive “strategies” to apprehend emergent ideas.

To reiterate; Alhadeff-Jones’ model of a complex research design has been strategically employed within this research as a method of ensuring an accurate application of complexity, and of explicitly acknowledging the presence of the researcher within the research; a key component of complexity-informed research (Morin, 2008). This is achieved through reflexive acknowledgement of the epistemological organisation of ideas presented by the researcher, as well as the collaborative positioning of participants. The use of Alhadeff-Jones’ model is not intended

to be prescriptive, rather it has provided an appropriate narrative structure for the methodology adopted within this research.

1.1.3 The literature review

“[T]he transdisciplinary literature review can be particularly overwhelming because there appears to be, and often is, so much material to address, and it is scattered in so many different fields [...] A transdisciplinary literature review therefore explores how various theoretical frameworks shape our understanding of a topic, and inevitably both illuminate some aspects while obscuring others” (Montuori, 2013, pp.49-50)

The literature review in this thesis spans two chapters. Chapter 2 draws on literature from three multiplicitous disciplines; photography, Welsh identity, and complexity, to provide insight into the three narrative concepts that relate to this inquiry. As such, Chapter 2 represents the “System of Ideas” that have contributed to this thesis. Chapter 3 reviews more specialised literature that pertains directly to the research aims (expression of national identity within photography). It examines the genesis of national photography, and gradually narrows focus to consider the small (but growing) body of literature that directly addresses Welsh photography. Both chapters are predicated on the inquiry, and in drawing from multiple pertinent disciplines they aim to demonstrate an ecology of ideas that holistically frames the research. In organising the literature review across two chapters, in which the focus of the inquiry is gradually narrowed, I aim to engage in active reflexivity by explicitly indicating my own hierarchy of ideas through narrative organisation.

Montuori states that transdisciplinary literature reviews should involve meta-paradigmatic analysis, in which not just the knowledge itself but the formation of it is reviewed. Chapter 2 is an example of this approach, and as such provides a meta-paradigmatic overview of photography, Welsh identity, and complexity theory. In doing so, Chapter 2 highlights problematic facets of each and situates this thesis within that ecology. As is usual with transdisciplinary research, the genesis of the inquiry is non-linear, and as such, many of the ideas that feature in the literature review were generated during or following the fieldwork, and in collaboration with ideas presented by participants. This is particularly true in the case of 2.1, which examines complex facets of Welsh identity that were consistently cited by both participants and literature.

1.1.4 *The methods*

“One of the frequent problems doctoral students face in formulating a research topic is a tendency to lose touch with events and people as they enter the rich landscape of theoretical perspectives and methods. Grounding the research in events and people helps to bring it back to something happening in the world involving people somewhere. This description requires a complexity-based approach” (Montuori, 2013, p.47)

In transdisciplinary methodologies, methods are chosen in service of the research aims, rather than the disciplinary traditions (Montuori, 2013; Leavy, 2012; Almeida, 2010; Morin, 1992). This inquiry employs a mixed-methods approach (detailed in Chapter 4), that is largely ethnographic and specifically designed to ground the research in events, actors, and images currently circulating within Welsh photography. As such, the methods are loosely based on open-ended ethnographic interviews (adapted to suit complexity frameworks⁶), photo-elicitation, and participant-curated photography. Participants also had the option to supply written data either reflecting on or supplementing their visual and/or interview contributions and addressing any perceived shortcomings in the methods and research questions. The primary consideration of the methodological design is collaboration and reflexivity; both of which are critical to transdisciplinary research. Data analysis took the form of computer-aided thematic analysis, which was facilitated through NVivo. The data and analysis are presented across Chapters 5 and 6.

1.1.5 *Reflexivity & Collaboration*

In delineating his “four main dimensions” (2013, p.46) of transdisciplinarity, Montuori states that it is crucial to “integrate rather than eliminate” (ibid.) the inquirer from the inquiry. This is partially due to the need to highlight the way in which the inquirer organises the research ideas, aims, and methods employed within the research. However, explicit acknowledgement of the researcher, their preferred ecology of ideas, and their inherent bias also promotes the understanding that knowledge generated in transdisciplinary or complexity-informed research is contingent on the research environment that created it. Whilst it could be argued that this weakens the potential impact of transdisciplinary/complexity research, Montuori counters that recognising the influence of the inquirer does not mean that subjectivity reigns; rather that knowledge generation is a form of discourse. Further, Montuori cites the wide adoption of feminist and post-modern research approaches, all of which critically situate the inquirer in the centre of the inquiry and contribute to

⁶ This adaptation is presented in more detail in Chapter 4 but takes the form of “guided conversations” (Drury, 2016) that allow participants to co-create knowledge with the researcher, facilitating balanced and reflexive insight.

an epistemological paradigm that moves away from the “machine age” of knowledge generation (2013).

As such, reflexivity and collaboration have been critical to the design of this thesis. Reflexivity is particularly relevant in Chapter 2 which addresses the hierarchy of ideas constructed by the researcher and participants. Collaboration was particularly critical during fieldwork where participants were invited to engage directly with (and therefore challenge) the research aims and axioms. The reflexive strategies of this research are discussed in more detail in 4.4.

1.1.6 The challenges posed by transdisciplinary research

Transdisciplinary research is not without limitations, and as with any paradigm of epistemological challenge, criticisms of its application should be welcomed and (where possible) addressed. One prominent criticism of transdisciplinarity is that it evokes a “jack-of-all-trades, master of none” academic practice. This criticism is grounded in traditional modernist ideals of disciplinary frameworks that should be mastered in order to be an effective scholar within one’s field. Specifically, at a doctoral level, one is expected to generate a thesis indicating that one is an *expert* in their field. This task seems inherently predisposed to exclude transdisciplinary research if, as an epistemological paradigm, transdisciplinarity precludes disciplinary speciality. However, Montuori and Morin argue that transdisciplinarity does not negate the efficacy of specialised scholarship (2008, 2013, 2016). Instead, they claim that this approach allows scholars to become specialised in one or more *topic* – rather than a single discipline. This, states Montuori, further highlights the fact that “transdisciplinarity is inquiry-driven, not discipline-driven” (2013, p.50).

Another common criticism of transdisciplinarity is a lack of “epistemological humility” (Montuori, 2013, p.49), perceived in grand claims of contributing to multiple fields without operating from within that field. One way of addressing this, states Montuori, is to explicitly include the inquirer’s process of organising what Morin refers to as “pertinent” ideas (2013). In other words, in highlighting which ideas from which discipline have informed the inquiry, researchers can be specific about which areas of which field their research benefits. Montuori counters claims of epistemological arrogance by stating that *not* addressing the complexity (and thus inherent transdisciplinarity) of certain phenomena is itself a problematic approach to knowledge generation (2013). Further reflections on the limitations of transdisciplinarity within the context of this research are presented in 8.1.

1.2 Research Questions

This section delineates the formation (and negotiation) of the research questions. As stated above, the methodological approach taken throughout this thesis has been informed by complexity theory and therefore utilises Morin's programme and strategy approach. Morin's framework was also considered in relation to the formation of research questions. As such, the questions raised and addressed by this thesis have been split into a single primary question and multiple secondary questions. The primary question can be conceptualised as a programme – it was a predetermined question formulated through researcher interest and a research axiom. Secondary questions have been labelled as such because they were contingent on data gathered as the research progressed (i.e. were emergent) and therefore were not directly addressed by the original research question. It should be noted that the hierarchy implied by the language (primary and secondary) does not suggest that one question or its data are more important than the other, rather (as per the organisation of the System of Ideas), the labels of “primary” and “secondary” have been applied to ensure a transparent presentation of my hierarchical organisation of the research, in my capacity as author, and to facilitate emergent questions that arose during the fieldwork and analysis.

1.2.1 Primary Question

As mentioned above, the primary research question is predicated on an axiom, and services the researcher's interest. The axiom and question are as follows:

Axiom: some photographers focus their photographic practice on heterogenous notions of “Wales” and/or “Welshness” that are both implicit and explicitly identified as such by the photographers themselves.

This axiom is legitimised through various sources; at both individual (usually the photographer themselves) and institutional/group levels (primarily through the publication of printed matter, or through exhibitions that qualify the photographs as being in/of Wales/Welshness). There has also been some research addressing this concept (Cabuts, 2012; Crawford, 1984), although neither study utilised complexity theory. These axioms and associated research are discussed fully in Chapter 3. As such, the primary research question is geared towards deconstructing this practice, and interrogating photographer's notions of photographic national identity.

Primary Question: How do photographers construct and identify notions of Welsh identity through their praxis, and how do these photographs function as representations of Welshness in wider contexts?

This question seeks to understand the processes, actors, and environments through which so-called Welsh photography is both legitimised and de-legitimised. This question developed from interaction between the author subsystem (represented in this instance by both myself and some of my informants, from who's photographic output the axiom of the question was formulated), the system of ideas, and the object of study. It is derived from the way in which the historical conceptualisation of photography as an empirical representational mode interacts with more contemporary interpretations of photography as a subjective and creative medium and locates the conceptual framework within social constructivism.

As discussed earlier, this question provided scope to gather data regarding not just the explicit research theme (photography and Wales/Welshness), but to also contribute to the analysis of an emergent “meta” theme of the research; the ontological conceptualisation of photography itself. As such, the question is also geared towards exploring the understanding that those who actively engage photography as a mode of discourse have about the way in which photography itself is socio-culturally conceptualised.

Figure 3 represents which core subsystems within Alhadeff-Jones' conceptualisation of the research process have contributed to the formation of the primary research question:

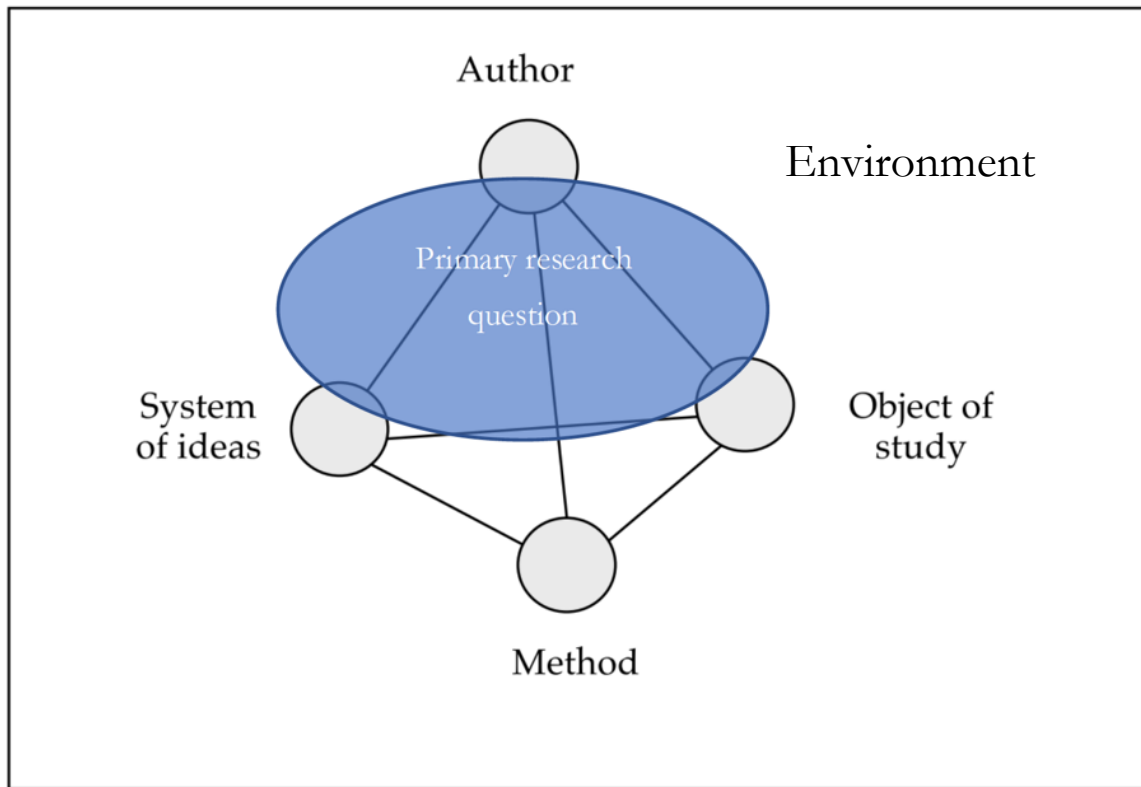


Figure 3: Primary research question in Alhadeff-Jones' complex research process (2013)

The ecology of ideas pertaining to the formulation of this question are discussed more thoroughly in 2.1 and 2.2, and are primarily located within the fields of Welsh identity and the philosophy of photography.

1.2.2 Secondary Questions

As mentioned above, the secondary research questions were emergent, and typically arose through Stage Two of the fieldwork, in which participants were invited to engage directly with the research themes and iterative analysis. This approach is commensurate with the reflexive and collaborative paradigm of complexity-informed research design. As such the secondary questions can be located more centrally on Alhadeff Jones' complex system because they were contingent on data and thus the method.

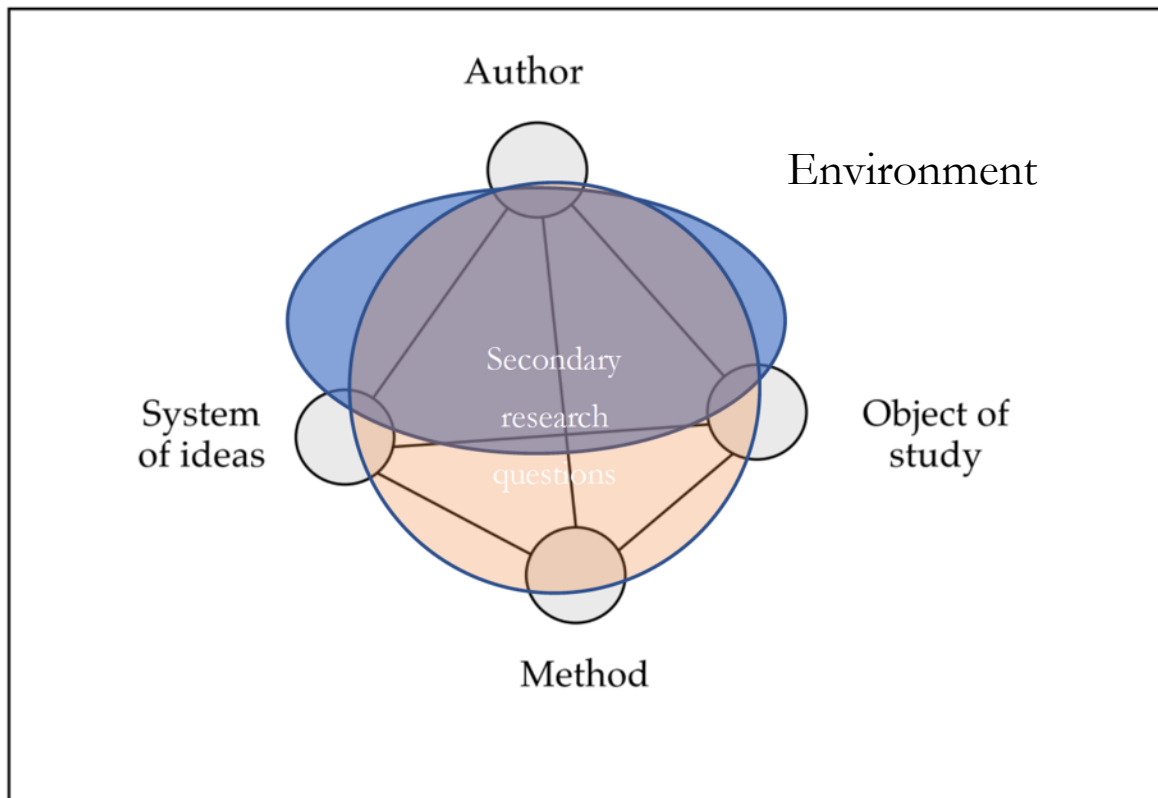


Figure 4: Primary & secondary questions in Alhadeff-Jones' complex research process (2013)

In general, the secondary research questions are related to the primary question and are addressed in Chapters 5-9. They are concerned both with deepening the understanding of photographic practices (specifically pertaining to national identity), and the meta-narrative of complexity theory as a novel ontological approach to photography. Similarly, as the secondary questions are contingent on emergent data they are not predicated on an axiom (as was the case for the primary research question).

Secondary Questions:

- Do the data make it possible to discern any specific photo-methodologies⁷ that have been designated, either by group or individual, as being essentially “Welsh” in nature?
- Is there evidence to suggest that photography, when used to explore themes regarding national identity, is exploited for its established ontological relationship with “proof” and “authenticity”?

⁷ “Photo-methodologies” is a phrase I have used throughout this thesis to indicate the methods chosen by photographers when approaching their practice. These include (but are not limited to), choice of equipment (such as lenses, digital kit, analogue kit), choice of location, and conceptual approach (such as observational, constructed, documentary etc).

- If so, is there a negotiated hierarchy of authenticity in photographic representations of nation-ness, and how is this organised? I.e. are some approaches/subjects/photographers considered more authoritative regarding “real Welshness” than others – and how is this negotiated?
- Is it possible to discern the presence of thematically resonant aesthetic amongst the visual data?
- If so, is this registered by any individual participants, or group of participants as being necessarily “Welsh”?
- If so, what are the sociocultural conditions through which this Welshness is constructed, articulated, legitimised and maintained? I.e., what, if any are the inherent power structures within this community, which “signs” of Welshness have become “naturalised” and why?
- If “a Welsh Photography” is discernable, to what extent is this a conscious effort by photographers?
- If the effort *is* conscious, why?
- If the effort is unconscious what are some potential influences that might contribute to this system of meaning-making?
- Are there any significant actual or perceived differences between the photographic methodologies of native/inhabitant Welsh photographers and visiting/foreign Welsh photographers?
- If so how significant has the “outsider” view been on the visual construction of Welshness in contemporary Welsh photography?
- What insight can be gained through the application of complexity theory to the study of photography?

1.3 Thesis Structure

Chapter 1 provides a broad introduction to the research structure and questions. It grounds the research within the paradigm of complexity and delineates the disciplinary integration employed throughout.

Chapter 2 provides in-depth insight into the context for the research. It highlights the core narrative tensions and provides axioms and descriptors that serve as the conceptual spine of the research and are referred to throughout. Specifically, this chapter “problematizes” photography, Welsh national identity, and complexity theory. In doing so it uncovers gaps in knowledge and

highlights the contribution to each field offered by this thesis. The first section of Chapter 2 explores the concept of Welshness. As the chapter demonstrates, this concept is vast and multiplicitous and as such, the focus of this section is largely directed by areas of interest expressed by participants during fieldwork. This holistic approach to research design is typical of complexity theory informed transdisciplinary scholarship. The second section of Chapter 2 provides insight into core concepts that inform the problematic ontology of photography. It considers the genesis of this ontology through a contemporary lens and includes recent scholarship that advocates for a dynamic approach to the philosophy of photography. The concepts discussed in this chapter largely arose through a systematic literature review and relied more on researcher interest than participant data. The final section of Chapter 2 provides a more comprehensive insight into complexity theory, including how it has informed both the research design and the objects of research in this thesis. This section introduces concepts that are then used to inform methods and data analysis in Chapters 4-6. Ultimately, and as mentioned above, Chapter 2 is intended to reflexively provide insight into organisation of concepts (*vis a vis* the System of Ideas) that underpin this research.

Chapter 3 provides a thematic review of existing literature that directly pertains to the research questions. The scope of literature is gradually narrowed through this chapter from the growing field of national photography to specific existing inquiries into visual Welshness and Welsh photography. Given the breadth of scholarship regarding national identity, gatekeeping of visual national identity, and national iconography, the literature reviewed in Chapter 3 has a largely Welsh “flavour” and uses Welsh national identity as a thematic lens to explore broader concepts relating to the visual expression of nationalism. As such, Chapter 3 is particularly concerned with the Object of Study.

Chapter 4 gives an overview of the methodological approach, including the epistemology of the methods, and the methods themselves. It also includes the ethical review of the research, and a section regarding the impact of the ongoing (c.2022) Coronavirus pandemic. The analysis strategy is also presented in this chapter. Chapter 4 also considers the epistemological efficacy of qualitative modeling in complexity research. The models presented in this chapter are intended to indicate the analysis strategy and promote reflexivity. As is discussed in Chapter 4, the models do not represent the actual data analysis, nor data themselves; both of which are presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapters 5 and 6 provide an in-depth discussion of the data. The narrative structure of these chapters mimics the structure of a complex system, and as such, Chapter 5 explores the system environment, whilst Chapter 6 focuses on the system itself. Specifically, Chapter 5 discusses

the role of the system environment in terms of both complexity theory and Welsh photography. Chapter 5 also explores the influence of the research and researcher on both the data and the system of Welsh photography itself. Chapter 6 explores localised interactions between photographers, images, institutions, participants, and research images. It focuses on a series of themes that emerged throughout the fieldwork and contextualises them in broader discourse (some of which is outlined in Chapter 2).

Finally, Chapters 7 and 8 offer concluding insight, impact, and suggestions for further research. Chapter 7 focuses specifically on insight offered about Welsh photography and provides a reflexive account of the research environment. Chapter 8 concludes broader research themes of photography and complexity, offering this thesis as a case study in which complexity provides an epistemological framework for ontologically and practically apprehending photography as a mode of communication. As already noted, complexity theory is geared towards *apprehending* rather than *solving* complex issues (Cilliers, 2005) and as such, the conclusions made in Chapters 7 and 8 should be considered through an open discursive lens, rather than a closed positivist one.

2. The Research Context

This chapter delineates the broad contexts within which this research sits. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the research operates around two conceptual themes, both of which are examined under the lens of complexity theory. Distinct from the thematic literature review in Chapter 3, this chapter introduces broad core concepts, and demonstrates the ways in which their interplay has informed this research. The brevity of the concepts discussed here (Welsh identity, photography, complexity) means that their treatment within this chapter will necessarily be focused on the specific research aims. As all three concepts offer scope for multiple theses, there is not space for a deep interrogation of each. Therefore, as per transdisciplinary research, this chapter introduces concepts specific to the research aims, and places them as interlocutors within the broader research discourse.

2.1 The Problem with Being Welsh

"The problem of Wales is not the Welsh but the problematic of 'Welshness'" (Smith, 1999, p.36)

Beset by complexities and dynamic sociocultural disparity, "Welshness" is perhaps the broadest concept addressed in this thesis. I therefore do not aim to provide an extensive, nor indeed a lean history of the Welsh nation; that is a task far beyond the scope of this project, and one that has already been undertaken by scholars of Welsh history and culture⁸. Instead, this section explores themes relating to participant construction of Welsh identity as a means of understanding concepts related to the complex visual national identities addressed during fieldwork and analysis. Specifically, this section considers milieu that figure in the negotiation of contemporary Welsh identity and the associated feelings of belonging to or isolation from that identity. In doing so, this thesis integrates concepts relating to national identity that are more aligned with the paradigm of social constructionism, than primordial nationalism or traditional models of top-down nation building. Williams argues that social constructionism has affected a paradigm shift in the study of nations and nationalism, stating "earlier works can be selectively adapted to become broadly compatible with the epistemological and ontological foundations of a constructivist approach" (2019, p.27). Williams also observes that scholarship regarding nationalism tends to "emphasise the 'national' component at the expense of 'identity'" (2019, p.2). Therefore, this section specifically considers scholarship pertinent to the construction of Welsh identities, rather than providing an analysis or historiography of Welsh nationalism. In line with participant

⁸ Notable histories of modern Wales include Gwyn A. Williams' *When Was Wales* (1985), and Dai Smith's *Wales: A Question For History* (1999).

contributions, this section awards specific focus to sites of discourse, contention, and ambiguity that complicate the concept of Welshness. In doing so, this section explicitly problematises the multiplicitous nature of Welshness through a variety of sociocultural and political lenses. As such, the critical focus is on the inherent complexity of Welshness as a concept, which emphasises the need for a complexity-informed approach to the subject. As this thesis is concerned with the construction of Welshness through photography, this section primarily focuses on Welshness as it has existed since the invention of photography in the mid nineteenth century⁹. More specifically, because the data was gathered from living participants (between the ages of 20 and 90), the focus has tended towards the development of twenty-first century Welsh identity. Naturally this will contain some reference to Welsh history, but primarily it will consider the development of contemporary Welsh culture and identity as experienced by research participants and informed by relevant literature.

2.1.1 *Multiplicitous identities*

“Wales is a singular noun but a plural experience” (Smith, 1999, p.36)

Much of the literature regarding Welsh national identity is predicated on a question, rather than a statement. Welsh Historian Gwyn A. Williams does not state “this is Wales”, instead he asks, *When Was Wales?* (1985). The collection of Raymond Williams’ essays on Welsh identity is entitled *Who Speaks for Wales?* (2003), Johnes asks *Wales: England’s Colony?* (2019), Jones and Fowler ask *Where is Wales?* (2007), Giggs and Pattie explore the pluralism of Welsh linguistic culture by asking *Welcome to Wales: but welcome to whose Wales?* (1992), and Smith asserts that Wales is *A Question for History* (1999) (a revision of an earlier title that was simply: *Wales! Wales?*). The ambiguity around Welsh identity arguably now constitutes some form of Welshness itself (Jones, 1992). As Bowie states, the more familiar one becomes with notion of Welshness, the more one finds “a sense of many conflicting and interlocking definitions of identity which actively compete for symbolic space and public recognition” (1993, p.169). Conflicting and oppositional views of Welshness were a common theme during fieldwork, and participants considered these problematic binaries through a variety of lenses (both conceptual and photographic). Specifically, participants discussed what they commonly considered to be polarising views of Welshness negotiated through an insider/outsider dialogue. Seemingly, conceptualisations of “outside” or “inside” Welsh identity are not fixed, nor do they follow traditional (if problematic) notions of national membership in

⁹Although there is some controversy regarding the genesis of photographic invention, it is generally accepted that photography emerged in 1839 when Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre and William Henry Fox Talbot produced the Daguerrotype and the Calotype, respectively (Rosenblum, 1997).

relation to place of birth. Instead, there are several arguments that consider Welsh identity to be a continuum; citing circumstances in which linguistic, class, and geographical divides have contributed to both intra-Welsh and extra-Welsh insider/outsider identities (Williams, 2017; Coupland, 2014). These divides are discussed in the context of the data in Chapter 7, but their prevalence in both the literature and participant conversations warrants attention within the wider context of the construction of Welsh identity.

Despite significant devolution efforts in the last decade, Wales largely remains a “stateless nation¹⁰”. Notwithstanding the establishment of The National Assembly for Wales in 1999 (and the increase in legislative power granted to Senedd Cymru¹¹ in 2020), Wales is still politically beholden to the British state (Williams, 2019). As a result, “Wales has not historically undergone the homogenizing process of unification that ‘large’ nations experience¹²” (Evans, 2019, p.168). This has arguably caused not just a conflicting and confused native identity, but a lack of recognisable Welsh identity in a global context (Johnes, 2019).

However, whilst notions of a singular Welsh identity (recognisable to either insiders or outsiders) seem problematic (Jones, 1992; Day, 2002), that is not to say that there is *no* Welsh identity. As Lewis notes, “Welsh cultural commentators and historians acknowledge that a coherent ‘one-nation’ sense of Welshness has become radically fragmented during the late twentieth century” (1995, p.153) but the genesis of these fragments is significant. As such, the notion of a “split” Welsh identity (at least, in a political context) has gained considerable traction. As former Plaid Cymru AM¹³ Phil Williams notes, “There is a more convincing academic case that might challenge the idea of Wales as a single nation: this proposes a three-way split between the rural Welsh-speaking areas, the English-speaking areas dependent on heavy industry, and the areas of new prosperity” (2003, p.9). Williams here is referring to Balsom’s 1979 conceptualisation of a

¹⁰ Williams (2017, 2019) notes that the concept of “stateless nations” is contested, and in many contexts the words “nation” and “state” are used as a synonym for one another despite “many states comprising multiple nations” (2019, p.24). Within the context of both this and Williams’ research, Wales’ status as a “stateless nation” indicates its status as a geographically, and culturally distinct entity that lacks an accompanying sovereign political entity understood to constitute a “state”. As such, citizens of stateless nations might characterise themselves as being “of” that nation but in fact belong to a broader (sometimes colonising) state. This is the case in Wales, in which Welsh-born/residing people are legally categorised as British citizens.

¹¹ In May 2020, The National Assembly for Wales was renamed Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament).

¹² Whilst it might be argued that Scotland and Northern Ireland, also beholden to the British State, have experienced a similar deficit in the creation of a top-down national identity, there are counterarguments that cite the active suppression of native Welsh culture (such as the Welsh language), that were arguably not felt quite so acutely in Scotland and Northern Ireland as they were in Wales. Further, Scotland and Ireland participated in various Acts of Union with England that, due to its status as “annexed”, Wales was largely excluded from.

¹³ “AM” (Assembly Member) was the title given to an elected member of the Welsh National Assembly. Professor Phil Williams was Plaid Cymru’s AM for South Wales East between 1999-2003. In May 2020 the National Assembly for Wales was renamed Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) and members are now given the titles of Members of the Senedd (MS) or Aelodau o’r Senedd (AS) in Welsh.

“three-way model” of political Welshness in which distinctions relating to language acquisition, class, and notional national identity were used to support the split of Welsh voters into “Yr Fro Gymraeg” (the Welsh language area), “Welsh Wales”, and “British Wales” (1985). In reality, it would seem that the geographical and cultural split of Welsh identity is evident beyond the scope of politics, but crucially, that it is also contingent and dynamic. The decline of heavy industry and renewed Cardiff-centric promotion of the Welsh language have already provided challenge to both Phil Williams’ and Denis Balsom’s notion of a three-way split, and Williams himself concedes that others have presented alternative “splits”. Indeed, Williams’ own three-way model is an adaptation of a slightly different model proposed by Alfred Zimmern,¹⁴ which refers to “Welsh Wales, American Wales¹⁵, and [...] upper-class English Wales (Zimmern in Williams, 2003, p.9).

Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to offer an in-depth analysis as to why there has been a general lack of unity in the contemporary Welsh identity, there were several common themes of division identified by researcher and participants as being critical to the (de)construction of Welshness as it relates to this thesis. Therefore, drawing from a mixture of participant data and relevant literature, the following sections specifically focus on the relationship between England and Wales, the Welsh language, the construction and deconstruction of cultural stereotypes, the influence of American culture (and the Welsh diaspora), devolution, Brexit, and Welsh independence. Many of these concepts are interrelated, and during fieldwork and literary research each were repeatedly identified as critical to the development of twenty-first century Welshness. The brevity of each of these subjects has naturally resulted in a somewhat limited summary of each. However, as explained in Chapter 1, effective transdisciplinary study demarcates the organisation of ideas employed by the research author(s) and as such, the concepts touched upon in the following sections represent reflexive insight into the ecology of ideas that has informed this thesis. Specifically, they provide contextual foundations for concepts then referenced during fieldwork and analysis (Chapters 5-7).

Ultimately, this chapter argues that Welshness is best understood as a dynamic system of national identity, rather than a fixed (and thus perhaps more instantly recognisable) national concept. In doing so it contributes to the wider argument of the thesis; that the application of

¹⁴ Sir Alfred Zimmern was the inaugural Professor of International Politics at Aberystwyth University (formerly University College of Wales) from 1919-1921. In a lecture entitled *Impressions of Wales* given in 1921 at Jesus College Oxford, Zimmern made the comment about a three-way split of Wales; Welsh Wales, British Wales, and American Wales.

¹⁵ Zimmern characterises the industrial South of Wales as “American Wales”. This is discussed in more detail in 2.1.4.

complexity theory has the potential to further discourse regarding the visual negotiation of Welsh national identity.

2.1.2 *For Wales, see England*

“Wales was the first of the English colonies and, in consequence, it has never been possible within modern history to simply be Welsh.” (Price, 1982, p.14).

In what is now a notorious (Johnes, 2019) demonstration of the complicated relationship between Wales and England, the 1888 edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica* contained a single sentence under its section on Wales: “for Wales, see England”. Therefore, as Martin Johnes writes, “understanding Wales without looking at England is impossible [...] that relationship has not only defined what it has meant to be Welsh, it has also been central to making and defining Wales as a nation” (2019, p.1). Much of the complexity between England and Wales is predicated on the fact that Wales was the first English colony (Price, 1982), and whilst it was formally annexed in 1542 (Johnes, 2019), Wales has remained a “stateless nation” ever since (Williams, 2017). The establishment of Senedd Cymru (formerly The National Assembly for Wales and discussed in 2.1.5) is a significant development in terms of unique Welsh political identity, however the devolved government of Wales is largely still beholden to the apparatus of the British state (including the monarchy and UK Government) for wider political and legislative powers (Johnes, 2019). As such, there is growing support for Welsh independence (discussed in 2.1.5) that is predicated on the understanding that Wales is still at least partially under English rule. Whilst any rhetoric communicated in the service of nationalism should perhaps be viewed cautiously, the sentiment is not without foundation. Although Wales is no longer actively colonised by England, the English influence on the genesis of Welsh national identity is arguably still salient for two reasons. Firstly, in the process of annexing Wales to build what became the United Kingdom, Welsh culture was oppressed in favour of English-dominant British culture (Taylor, 2019). This has spanned language, cultural traditions, and political independence. As Coupland writes, “the history of Welsh is also a history of marginalisation, in political and cultural dimensions” (2014, p.137). Whilst it would perhaps be inaccurate to state that Welsh culture is still systematically suppressed, it could be argued that some elements of Welsh culture have had to become relevant in Wales through renewed or institutionally sponsored interest, rather than a casual civic maintenance, as is described

in Billig's theory of banal nationalism¹⁶ (1995), amongst others. Therefore, the historical inequality between England and Wales has impacted the development of explicitly Welsh culture and has contributed to a diminished separate global identity for Wales (Jones, 1992). Secondly, the English cultural colonisation of Wales has demonstrably engendered a need to establish Welshness through the lens of "not Englishness" (Johnes, 2019). Indeed, Raymond Williams argues that the mere act of trying to disprove or distance oneself from Englishness is itself a mark of differentiation (2003) between Welsh and English identity. Put another way, being English has never been about proving what one is *not*, as centuries of colonising in the name of the British Empire has provided England with a stable identity of its own; one that has never had to compete for legitimacy. Therefore, part of being Welsh arguably involves employing active mitigations against the need to "see England" when seeking to present or discern Welshness.

However, the need to imagine a Welsh identity as separate from an English or British identity is demonstrably not a universal goal amongst Welsh cultural figures and institutions. Further, it is unlikely to figure in the daily activities of most citizens - something which itself has been argued to be a critical practice in national identity (Billig, 1995). Whilst Wales, like Scotland and Northern Ireland, is still part of the United Kingdom, even the most determined nationalist might have trouble convincing much of the Welsh population that they were still colonised by England. Indeed, as Johnes points out, "Welsh history is more complicated than a list of things the 'nasty' English did" (2019, p.3). As discussed above, scholars have previously hinted at both political and cultural intra-Welsh hybrid identities including "English Wales", "British Wales", "Welsh Wales", and "industrial/American Wales" (Williams, 2019; Coupland; 2006; Balsom, 1979). Indeed, research increasingly indicates that personal identities tend more towards manifold chosen, given, and experienced affiliations than resolute membership of a singular tribe designated by birthright or institutional validation (Williams, 2019). In research published in 2006 for example, Coupland et al suggest a more fluid adoption of personal Welsh identities. Their research surveyed c.2000 participants, who were subsequently divided into "flow groups" that covered a variety of possible affiliations such as "Welsh inside Wales", "returning émigrés", "long term in-migrants", and "Welsh-linked outside Wales" (2006). Participants were surveyed about their felt affiliation to Welsh identity (as well as Welsh language competency). Coupland et al conclude that felt affiliation to Wales was largely connected more particularly with participation in Welsh cultural practices and the Welsh language than place of birth or residential tenure and described some instances in which

¹⁶ Billig's theory of "banal nationalism" is predicated on the conceptualisation of nationalism as a collective practice of so-called banal or everyday routines, representations, and behaviours codified within the paradigm of a particular nation and largely communicated by elite institutions, through the media. Examples include flags, national symbols, sporting events, and possessive linguistic phrases.

participants who had never been to Wales considered themselves to be partially Welsh through active cultural participation and family connection. They state:

our data thoroughly problematize the issue of who counts as an “insider” or an “outsider” sociopsychologically, if “Welsh identifying” is the touchstone. Welshness emerges as a powerful and involving subjective alignment but one that is distributed with subtle emphasis and shading across “homeland” and “diasporic” groups, and groups who move fluidly in between these designations” (2006, p.371).

The multiplicity of Welshness manifests in myriad complex ways throughout Welsh culture, and the ongoing problematic relationship between Wales and England still demonstrably features within national discourse regarding identity (Williams, 2003). As Day argues, Welshness is variously conceptualised by both insiders and outsiders, but crucially, due to a continued relationship with its dominant easterly neighbour, outsider conceptualisations of Wales tend to be muddled by notions of “a strange amalgam called England-and-Wales” (2002, p.8). Therefore, as Bowie notes, the construction of contemporary Welshness still relies on disentangling Welsh and English culture and emphasises “the need to affirm [Welsh] identity, whether this be through language, nationalism, culture, religion, or a combination of these factors, in the face of what is perceived to the [sic] continual threat of cultural genocide” (1993, p.169). She maintains that one overt (and, as will be explored both below and in Chapters 5 and 6, performative) example of this can be found in the use of the Welsh language.

2.1.3 The Welsh Language

“Learning and speaking Welsh can never be a politically neutral act” (Bowie, 1993, p.169).

A great deal of scholarly attention has been devoted to the suppression and subsequent resurgence of the Welsh language. This section, in keeping with the narrative of the thesis and contributions from participants during fieldwork, examines the Welsh language as a critical component of wider identity negotiation and performance. The Welsh language has historically been a site of considerable struggle in the brokering of Welsh identity, and this has traditionally been most acute within the context of Wales’ relationship with England. As mentioned above, the English colonisation of Wales included the active suppression of cultural phenomena considered to be particularly Welsh. At perhaps its most insidious, this included fostering an ideological elitism around English culture and language through a comparative paradigm of “barbarism” that was systematically linked to Welshness and the Welsh language (Taylor, 2019). One particularly

notorious example of this was a so-called “Blue Books”¹⁷ report created by the British Government in 1847, which amongst other disparaging statements, “claimed that the Welsh language was uncivilized and holding Wales back” (Johnes, 2015, p.672). As such, gradual movement was made to suppress the Welsh language across cultural, industrial, and educational sectors. This included practices such as the infamous “Welsh Not”¹⁸ in which Welsh-speaking schoolchildren were punished for speaking their native language in classrooms. However, due in part to propaganda from the British government and an influx of English-speaking migrant workers to South Wales (Giggs & Pattie, 1992), the decline of the Welsh language happened at both a state and civic level (Johnes, 2015). For instance, Johnes points out that the Welsh Not was not a legislative measure, and was enforced largely by individual schools, teachers, and parents, rather than the British state (Ibid.). Due to the increase in English-speaking workers and institutions, encouraged by expansion of the coal and steel industries across the South Wales Valleys, these practices were somewhat localised to South Wales. Consequently, this contributed to the continued cultural separation between the industrial “American” South and the steadfastly Welsh-speaking North and West regions of Wales.

In 1993 the UK Parliament established the second Welsh Language Act¹⁹, which promoted institutional equality between the Welsh and English languages in Wales and led to the establishment of The Welsh Language Board²⁰ (Bwrdd yr Iaith Gymraeg). This inspired several smaller policy changes as well as a significant cultural shift (at least, in South Wales) towards the celebration and protection of what had been considered a dying minority language (Mann, 2007; Klein & Wardle, 2008). Renewed investment, media presence, and educational focus on the Welsh language buoyed hopes for the growth of a unified Welsh culture. As Coupland writes, “the early years of the 21st century seem to offer a remarkable opportunity for a Welsh national consciousness to gel further and be expressed in part through a burgeoning of Welsh language across social domains” (2006, p.352). However, despite considerable growth of the Welsh language in the South

¹⁷ Governmental reports from this era were often bound in blue covers and were collectively referred to as “blue books”. This specific report is sometimes referred to as “The Treachery of the Blue Books”. The report was particularly disparaging towards Welsh morality and is generally regarded to have been a document of ideological hostility that reinforced the unequal colonial nature of the relationship between England and Wales.

¹⁸ A “Welsh Not” was a form of punishment (typically in primary and secondary educational settings) used in the 19th century to discourage students from speaking their native Welsh language. It was usually represented by a small wooden plaque engraved with the words “Welsh Not” (or letters WN). The offending student would typically be required to hang it around their neck and wear it until a classmate was caught speaking Welsh (in which case it would then be passed on). Frequently, the child wearing the Welsh Not at the end of the day or week would be subject to a more severe and often corporal punishment.

¹⁹ The first Welsh Language Act, passed in 1967, pertained only to the use of Welsh in legal proceedings.

²⁰ The Welsh Language Board was dissolved by the then Welsh Assembly Government in 2004. Its remit was reconfigured into governmental administration and is now overseen by Senedd Cymru (Williams, 2009).

of Wales (particularly in Cardiff), the hopes for a unified national consciousness seem to remain largely unfulfilled.

Instead, there is a compelling argument that the promotion and uptake of the Welsh language as an essential component of contemporary Welsh culture has further politicised the language; in some cases refocusing tension from the English/Welsh relationship to intra-Welsh contexts (Williams, 2017; Coupland, 2014). As Bowie notes, “[f]or the 80 percent of the population of the principality for whom Welsh is a foreign language, any definition of Welshness which gives priority to the Welsh language poses a potential threat to their own sense of identity” (1993, p.169). This tension is particularly visible at a civic level, though is naturally influenced by institutional frameworks, such as hierarchical “language display” (signage and public-facing written text) which prioritise the Welsh language above, before, or occasionally instead of the English language (Coupland, 2012). In terms of civic complexities, Williams argues that the increased assimilation of Welsh language into Welsh life has contributed to a perceived continuum of national “purity” dictated by a variety of factors including language competency, dialect, residence, and learner-status. In other words, Williams argues that some Welsh speakers consider themselves to be “more Welsh” than their English speaking fellow citizens due either to their inherited command of the language (i.e., it is their first language) or their use of certain “superior” dialects (2017). She argues that this can tacitly contribute to a learned inferiority, in which English speaking Welsh citizens also consider *themselves* to be “less Welsh” than their Welsh speaking compatriots; in both cases directly conflating Welshness with speaking Welsh (Ibid.). Williams further explains that the notion of a national continuum of “purity” also occurs on a micro-level within entirely Welsh speaking communities; as some Welsh speakers view themselves linguistically (and, by extension, nationally) inferior to other Welsh speakers who have a perceived linguistic pedigree. Using data gathered through a series of interviews with Welsh-speaking participants, Williams conceptualises a language-driven continuum of Welshness (as measured by linguistic association) that sets “Y Fro Gymraeg” (Welsh speaking Wales) at “most Welsh” and relegates English speaking, English-born participants to “not Welsh” (Fig.5) (2017). Williams’ research highlights not only the breadth of multiplicity within Welsh identities, but also the continued impact of English colonialism that has contributed to intra-Welsh tension predicated on language competency.

Table 1. The Continuum of Welshness.

Most Welsh (Y Fro Gymraeg)	North West Walian (Gwynedd, Anglesey, Ceredigion) – First Language Welsh Speakers West Walian (Northern Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire)- First Language Welsh Speakers
Less Welsh (1) (British Wales/ Welsh Wales)	North East Walian (Denbighshire, Flintshire, Wrexham)- First Language Welsh speakers/ Welsh speakers South Walian (Swansea, South Wales Valleys, Cardiff)- First Language Welsh speakers/ Welsh speakers
Less Welsh (2) (British Wales/ Welsh Wales)	North Walian Welsh-born English speakers South Walian (Valleys, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot) Welsh-born English speakers South Walian and West Walian Welsh-born English speakers
Least Welsh (British Wales)	British Wales (Pembrokeshire, Gwent, Monmouthshire, eastern Powys, Wrexham and Flintshire)- English speaking, Welsh-born
Not Welsh	English speaking, English-born

Figure 5: *The Continuum of Welshness* (Williams, 2017, p.10)

It should be noted that outside Wales, the Welsh language also contributes to ideological conceptualisations of Welshness, and that this also happens both institutionally and at a civic level. At a civic level, Wray et al note that diasporic or aspirational groups often co-opt the Welsh language to claim affiliation with Welsh identities that are not theirs through birth or residence. This is particularly true of American “Welsh” communities (Wray et al, 2003; Coupland et al, 2006), and is discussed in more detail in 2.1.4. Many contemporary theories of nationalism cite broadcast media as a powerful forum for national discourse (Anderson, 1983; Billig; 1995; Edensor, 2002). Although there are several well-established Welsh-language media outlets such as S4C²¹, the visibility of the Welsh language in UK or transnational media is arguably lacking (Dijkstra, 2016). As such, the handful of instances in which the Welsh language has co-incidentally featured in the UK media have fostered wider discourse regarding the promotion and accessibility of minority languages and their connection to national identity. Klein and Wardle cite considerable public discourse (mostly in online forums) generated by the inclusion of two Welsh-speaking “housemates” (Glyn Wise and Imogen Thomas) in the 2006 series of UK reality television programme, *Big Brother*²². Klein and Wardle state that in response to growing public discourse regarding the broadcast of Welsh language conversations between Wise and Thomas, the series producers transitioned from initially requesting that housemates converse in English, to broadcasting Welsh conversations with English subtitles and eventually using the disembodied voice of “Big Brother” to relay tasks to housemates in Welsh (2008). They conclude that public engagement with debates regarding minority languages and UK nations demonstrated, in this instance, an appetite for discourse that was (and remains) largely unfulfilled by UK mass media

²¹ “S4C” is the branded initialism given to *Sianel Pedwar Cymru* (*Channel Four Wales*) – a Welsh language television channel that launched in 1982.

²² Big Brother was a reality television series in which a group of contestants known as “housemates” lived in a purpose-built house equipped with cameras and isolated from any other forms of social contact. Housemates completed tasks and were “evicted” from the house by public vote.

(Ibid.). Indeed, Blackledge argues that UK broadcast media has tended towards the reinforcement of micro-colonisation, by actively “othering” minority languages either through ridicule²³ or through what Bourdieu refers to as “symbolic domination” (1991) in which “speakers (or potential speakers) of the minority language come to see that language as subordinate and illegitimate” (2002, p.204) in comparison to a dominant (and often colonising) majority language.

As stated in Chapter 1, due to the need to distil large volumes of literature, the narrative of this section has in part been shaped by fieldwork conversations. This holistic approach to the research narrative is a common aspect of complexity-informed research (Montuori & Donnelly, 2016). It is therefore worth noting that the Welsh language was a popular topic of conversation amongst participants; several of whom are native Welsh speakers. Mostly, the language was viewed as a source of personal national pride, and as such, some participants described instances in which they sought to actively represent the Welsh language in their photographic practice. However, several participants also voiced concern about the cultural currency of the language, citing what they perceived to be detrimental effects of institutional support for Welsh-language artists at the expense of English-speaking equivalents (discussed in 6.4.2). The intra-Welsh continuum of “national purity” as explored by Williams was an implicit theme during fieldwork and variously manifested in the negotiation of Welsh photography; largely through a paradigm of perceived authenticity or “right to represent” grounded in conceptualisations of insider and outsider identities. This is discussed in the context of the data in section 7.3.1 but is indicative of the ongoing political potency of the Welsh language as a tool for establishing and maintaining a unique national identity.

2.1.4 Stars, stripes, and Eisteddfodau: Wales and the United States of America

“Imagining Wales was the hardest, and most valuable task performed by those who lived in ‘American Wales’. (Smith, 1999, p.162)

Whilst Western-centric globalisation efforts are arguably the primary cause of the contemporary spread of American culture (Williams, 1985), Wales and the United States have a significant

²³ Blackledge cites a 2001 episode of British comedy chat show *Room 101* – in which guests consign phenomena they find irksome to “Room 101” (televisual oblivion). In the episode discussed by Blackledge, celebrity guest Anne Robinson attempts to put “the Welsh” into room 101. When challenged by host Paul Merton, Robinson cites annoyance, perceived threat, and exasperation at hearing people in her hometown of Liverpool conversing in Welsh. After some deliberation and prolonged ridicule at the expense of Welsh speaking people from North Wales (which is geographically close to Liverpool), Merton concludes that *not* allowing Robinson to proceed with banishing ‘the Welsh’ to Room 101 would be the “safest option” for him. As such, ‘the Welsh’ are spared oblivion, but not thinly veiled colonial-esque ridicule.

relationship. As mentioned above, in a 1921 lecture at the University of Oxford, Alfred Zimmern proposed a three-way split of Welsh political culture; British Wales, Welsh Wales, and so-called ‘American Wales’ (Williams, 2003). Although Zimmern is referring specifically to voters, Gwyn Williams notes that in contemporary contexts, “American Wales” could refer specifically to the growth of American culture in the industrial south, primarily concentrated in the Valleys and Cardiff. Williams characterises this area (and related cultural hybridisation) as “the artery of Empire and the jugular vein of capitalist Wales” (1985, p.223). Whilst Williams points to Americanisation of England as a contributing factor to the subsequent Americanisation in Wales, he also notes the influence of the industrial affinity forged at geographically separate but ideologically kindred coalfaces in the USA and Wales. As Williams puts it, “[t]he predicament of working people in Wales over the previous generations had resembled that of working people in industrializing America as much as anything else” (1985, p.274). During fieldwork, participants noted that the spread of American culture had, on occasion, come at the expense of Welsh culture; sometimes hybridising the two and on others replacing Welsh customs or institutions with Americanised alternatives. Whilst there is relatively little scholarship addressing the growth of American culture in Wales specifically (indeed, it seems that more attention has been paid to this photographically than academically²⁴), there is a significant body of research that examines the development of a “Welsh American” transnational identity in the United States (Coupland, Bishop, and Garrett, 2003). Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the entirety of the complex relationship between Wales and the Americas²⁵, the legacy of the Welsh diaspora in North America is salient in the context of this research because it provides insight into the negotiation of Welsh identity outwith Wales. During fieldwork conversations, notions of “earned” or inherited authenticity of Welshness were commonly discussed by participants. As such, the creation of Welsh identity outwith Wales provides relevant frameworks from which to consider the creation, maintenance, and validity of what Coupland et al characterise as “Welsh outside Wales” (2006) identities.

²⁴ Notably Clementine Scheidemann’s *They Call Her Lisa Marie* – a project that documents the annual “Elvis Festival” in Prothcawl, and Matthew Eynon’s *Reverse Osmosis* – in which Eynon documents the growing emulation of American culture within South Wales. Similarly, in 2015, the second Diffusion (a biennial photography festival hosted by Ffotogallery in Cardiff – discussed in more detail in Chapter 3) was curated under the title *Looking for America* and included photographic projects that “investigate the status and meaning of the American dream in relation to contemporary Wales” (Drake, 2015, p.5).

²⁵ This includes a significant and colonising Welsh presence in the Patagonia region of South America and a potent folklore legend claiming that a Welsh prince (Madoc) discovered America in 1170 - around 300 years before Christopher Columbus.

During the late 19th Century, a significant Welsh diaspora migrated to Appalachian states to seek employment, kinship, and opportunity in American coalfields (Lewis, 2011). This culminated in a population of at least 100,000 at the peak of the migration in 1890 (Ibid.). The growth of Welsh immigration in the US led to the establishment of several Welsh communities and a burgeoning ‘Welsh American’ identity that continues to have significant cultural implications within the remnants of those communities (Cater, Poguntke, & Morris, 2019). A generous body of research addresses the myriad ways in which the Welsh diaspora protected and promoted their native Welsh culture in an American context. For example, Lewis notes that many of these strategies were geared towards the construction of a transnational identity that capitalised on common ground between American and Welsh culture at the time. This included religion, “loyalty to craft unionism” (2011, p.33), and support for republican ideals, but was grounded in Welsh cultural praxis and in particular the Welsh language. Much of the transnational Welsh American identity was maintained through media and culture; specifically the establishment of an American Eisteddfod²⁶, and the circulation of a variety of newspapers in both English and Welsh. Within the context of contemporary nationalism studies (in particular, Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*), analysis of the strategic mobilisation of media and culture as vehicles to communicate national ideologies provides salient insight into the institutional promotion of shared national affiliations and communities.

One such analysis was conducted by Coupland et al, who focus their attention on the Welsh language newspaper *Y Drych* (The Mirror), which ran between 1851 and 2003 when it merged with another Welsh American publication, *Ninnau* (Ourselves). Coupland et al note that *Y Drych*’s use of the Welsh language transitioned from utilitarian (first generation migrants typically spoke only Welsh) to “iconising”, in which they explain, “the Welsh language takes on a metonymic function, standing for the complete Welsh cultural experience” (2003, p.171). As such, Coupland et al argue that the increasingly ceremonial use of Welsh in *Y Drych* (which towards the end of its circulation tended more towards the English language) constitutes a commodification of Welshness through ethnolinguistic language displays (2003). Although their research focuses specifically on the iconisation of Welsh language outwith Wales, they also note that “[m]any institutions in Wales play their part in packaging the Welsh language and traditions for expatriate and home consumption” (2003, p.173). In many ways this triangulates Williams (2017) research findings which indicate that the use of Welsh language is often conflated with Welshness itself. As

²⁶ An Eisteddfod is a cultural festival, typically with explicit ties to the Welsh language and often including literature, poetry, and music.

such, the strategic use of the Welsh language allows readers and contributors of *Y Drych* to co-opt Welsh identities through cultural practice rather than geographical presence.

Wray et al have also produced research that examines performative co-opting of Welsh identities in a North American context. Specifically, they examine the practice of “turfig” – in which cultural practices are “adopted by individuals with no ‘grass roots’ affinity with the originating culture” (2003, p.49), in the hopes that roots of identity take hold through the appropriation of cultural praxis (hence, turfig). Their focus is on Green Mountain College choir – a choral society at a Vermont-based liberal arts college, established in 1834 by predominantly first-generation Welsh immigrants (Wray et al, 2003), but open to any interested student of the institution. As with *Y Drych*, the practice of assuming Welshness is primarily achieved through use of the Welsh language but Wray et al note that the choir triangulate this with several complimentary behavioural practices specific to Welsh choral societies. These include acapella, singing from memory, and a diverse repertoire of hymns, folks songs, and popular music (2003). In this instance, Wray et al argue that the commodification of Welshness is not purposefully operationalised to foster belonging in established American Welsh communities (as with *Y Drych*), but in several cases has resulted in affinity to Welshness as a consequence or by-product, rather than meeting pre-existing aspirations of belonging.

The transnational identities pursued and maintained in North American Welsh communities provide critical insight into the globalising flow of contemporary identities – including those assumed by persons who may never have been to the country with which they claim affinity. As such, cultural practices and traditions arguably become identity commodities that are negotiated through a series of interactions and are fed-back and legitimised at several levels – both civic and institutional. Whilst the coalescence of American and Welsh identities was not necessarily a common theme during fieldwork, notions of authenticity linked to geographical affinity with Wales were. The American example, in this context, provides insight into the construction of “Welsh outside Wales” identities and in doing so holds a mirror up to both civic and institutional gatekeeping practices within Welsh national identity.

2.1.5 Contentious States: The Senedd, Brexit, & Welsh Independence

Other than the renaissance of the Welsh language, perhaps the most significant development in the nationhood of modern Wales has been the continued devolution of political and legal powers

to the Welsh parliament. Following a failed referendum in 1979²⁷, Wales voted in favour of devolution in a second referendum held in 1997. This was followed by the Government of Wales Act in 1998 and the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999. In his essay *The Psychology of Distance*, Phil Williams argues that despite traditional conceptualisations of Wales as a geopolitically divided nation – as in Balsom’s *Three Wales* model (2003), perceived intra-Welsh differences are culturally, rather than geographically maintained. As such, Williams expresses hope that the establishment of the National Assembly would offer solutions for the divides in Welsh culture (such as language, wealth, and politics) that are predicated more on imagined “otherness” than they are on physical distance. As Andrews argues, the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales offered ministers and sociocultural “elites” perhaps their first chance (at least in modern society) to constructively imagine and then institutionally validate and promote Welshness (2021).

However, despite hopes to the contrary, devolution has arguably offered a new lens through which to view Welsh cultural pluralism rather, than a unifying solution. Whilst it is perhaps less obviously polarising than the Welsh language or Welsh Independence, the devolved Welsh government has become the institutional site of many of the contentious discourses outlined above, and arguably could never have been a neat solution to the “psychology of distance”, the “continuum of Welshness”, and myriad other social hierarchies that problematise Welsh national identity. As Raymond Williams expressed in the wake of the first failed devolution referendum in 1979 - within devolved nations themselves the quasi-sociopolitical autonomy granted by devolution cements a micro sense of national unity but viewed from a United Kingdom perspective devolution indicates further division (2003). Williams’ argument is salient, as devolution interests grow in Wales, so too do increasingly more visible and organised non-partisan arguments in favour of Welsh independence from Britain, following strains placed on relationships between UK nations following the “Brexit” referendum in 2016 (Nation.Cymru, 2020).

In 2016 the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. Despite being a significant beneficiary of EU funding (Mackay, 2020), Wales voted in favour of so-called “Brexit”, with a 52.5% majority (The Electoral Commission, 2016); the smallest margin in any of the four UK nations²⁸. The divide, perhaps typically Welsh, follows established fault lines of language, culture, and geopolitics with the more affluent and primarily Welsh-speaking areas representing the minority support for the remain vote. Although the long-term effects of Brexit on both the

²⁷ In a referendum held on St. David’s Day (1st March) 1979, 79.74% of voters rejected the establishment of a Welsh Assembly.

²⁸ Welsh voters were 52.5% - 47.5% in favour of leaving the EU, English voters were also in favour with a majority of 53.4% - to 46.6%. Both Northern Ireland and Scotland voted to remain in the EU with 55.8% and 62% against leaving, respectively (The Electoral Commission, 2016).

UK and Wales have yet to unfold, the immediate impact of the vote served to further undermine notions of Welsh national unity. In 2016, Welsh artist Iwan Bala caused significant local uproar (Schofield, 2018) after a collection of his political paintings, overtly criticising Brexit, was exhibited in Penarth Pavillion. The exhibition included artworks that were explicitly disparaging of the Welsh role in Brexit (Fig.6) and characterised the Welsh “leave” vote as an act of significant self-harm (Bala in Scholfield, 2018). For Bala and others, the loss of Welsh membership to the European Union strips Wales of a facet of identity that was both progressive and future looking. Further, argues nonpartisan pro-independence group *YesCymru*, Brexit has the capacity to diminish the burgeoning ideology that conceptualised Wales as a sovereign independent European nation.



Figure 6: *Dis-United Kingdom (Eton Mess)* (Bala, 2016)

The final component of contemporary Welshness discussed in this section is also perhaps the most aspirational; the Welsh Independence movement. Contemporary Welsh independence is championed by several political parties, such as *Plaid Cymru* and *Wales Green Party*, as well as the nonpartisan organisation *YesCymru*. Commonly, Welsh Independence is discussed through the comparative paradigm of the more developed Scottish Independence movement and undoubtedly

the two are linked. Scottish Independence would provide a significant challenge to the concept of the United Kingdom and has the potential to set a precedent for both Wales and Northern Ireland (Powell, 2016). Despite the country's marginal vote to leave the European Union, recent polls suggest that the handling of Brexit has increased the drive for Welsh independence, with many of the most fervent supporters championing the notion of an independent European Wales (YesCymru, 2022). As of 2022, there is relatively little academic scholarship addressing contemporary Welsh independence. However, in 2019 the Welsh Independence movement became an international news item following the "destruction"²⁹ of a piece of nationalist graffiti commemorating the Welsh-speaking village Capel Celyn. The village was destroyed when the Tryweryn Valley was intentionally flooded in 1965 at the request of Liverpool City Council to create the Llyn Celyn reservoir³⁰. The flooding engendered significant nationalist discourse in Wales and "every Welsh Member of Parliament, whether nationalist or otherwise" (Cabuts, 2012, p.109) voted against the flooding. The graffiti, created by writer Meic Stephen (Howell, 2020) read "Cofiwch Dryweryn" (Remember Tryweryn) and was painted on the side of a ruined cottage in Llanrhystud (Fig.7). Public outrage at the destruction of the graffiti drew international attention and spawned smaller Cofiwch Dryweryn murals in public and private spaces both throughout Wales and in global contexts such as the United States (Ibid.).

²⁹ In 2019 Meic's original graffiti was covered up by an unknown individual and replaced with the word "Elvis". Arguably the term "destruction" is problematic as graffiti is traditionally considered to be a form of vandalism, rather than a protected artwork. However, much of the journalistic rhetoric related to the alteration of the original graffiti used the term "destruction" and it has therefore been characterised as such in this thesis.

³⁰ Specifically, the Llyn Celyn reservoir was built to supply water to the English city of Liverpool, rather than any regions within Wales. Capel Celyn was considered to be a stronghold of Welsh language and tradition, and as such the flooding was commonly viewed as a colonising act. The flooding of the Tryweryn Valley has since been used as an ideological springboard to garner support for Welsh nationalism and Welsh independence.



Figure 7: The original site of the Cofiwch Dryweryn mural (Thomas, 2019)

The defacing of the original graffiti, which was “perceived as an attack on Welsh culture, history, and the Welsh language” (Howell, 2020, p.94), and the Welsh response is significant in that it was arguably one of the most unified displays of Welsh nationalism in modern history. The re-instating of Meic’s original text and the proliferation of further Cofiwch Dryweryn murals indicate the role and potency of art in public discourse about national identity. Crucially, through repeated association with YesCymru (Howell, 2020), the proliferation of Cofiwch murals demonstrates the use of art to simultaneously consider both Welsh history and the Welsh future, reconciling the two in wider discourse regarding contemporary Welshness.

Whilst traditional artworks such as Bala and Meic’s paintings tend to be accepted (however controversially) as creative interlocutors in discourse about identity, photography occupies a position that is at once a more potent and more problematic in the negotiation of national identity. The complex ontological discourse regarding photographic representation complicates its ability to function under the umbrella of “national art”. The following section explores the contested nature of photography, and in doing so provides context for concepts explored in Chapters 6-9.

2.2 The Problem with Writing About Photography

“Photography has accumulated a series of complex histories alongside an equally complicated set of theoretical traditions, all of which illuminate but also sometimes confound how we

understand the technological and ontological dimensions of the photographic, let alone the role of photography as a meaning-making practice” (Lusty & West Brett, 2019).

“[O]f all the visual means we have invented, we probably still understand the photograph the least” (Crawford, 1978, p.15)

The narrative concepts discussed in the previous section (2.1) were largely dictated by participant interest during fieldwork. Although conversations centred on the use of photography and most participants were photographers, the nature of photography itself was not an explicit theme during fieldwork. Most mentions of photography focused on individual’s practice or photographic education and Welshness was by far a more dominant narrative than photography. This is perhaps due to the direction in which I had guided the conversations; focusing specifically on the creation of Welshness through photography. Participants were free to deviate from this narrative, though few seemed compelled to interrogate photography itself. As such, this section is largely guided by researcher interest and relevant literature. Specifically, it contributes to the secondary research questions and the meta-narrative of the thesis, which offers complexity theory as a new lens to apprehend the ontology of photography (discussed fully in Chapter 9).

It is the contention of this section that the problem with writing about photography is, largely, writing³¹ *about* photography. In keeping with the meta-narrative of this thesis, this section argues that writing about photography has traditionally operated within a reductionist paradigm in which the photographer, photograph, photographic approach, and viewer have been apprehended as separate, sometimes antithetical entities. As such, the critical, academic, and ontological apprehension of photography has largely fallen short of adequately and sustainably characterising the practice-based applications and technological advances of the medium (Zervigón, 2019). Therefore, engaging with the ontology of photography involves contending with a tradition of contradictions and polarisations that have characterised much of the academic and cultural writing on the subject (Jay, 1978). Many of these contradictions are as old as the medium itself and are grounded in ideological tension between teleology and technology. The origins of photography are typified by what Rubinstein characterises as a metaphysical obsession with light (2020), and what Costello describes as the notion that through mechanical apparatus (the camera) nature can represent itself (2018). These epistemological approaches capitalise on the perceived nonhuman element of photography that proliferated in the late nineteenth century, with the invention of the medium. Although the roots of this paradigm of thought have arguably crumbled in the face of

³¹ The term “writing” is used in this context as a synonym for discourse; my argument being that the problematic discourse surrounding photography makes the task of writing about photography complex.

technological development, some of the ontic notions associated with the supposed inherent objectivity of nonhuman photography still have significant influence on related epistemological discourse. Digital and networked technologies, as well as postmodern and poststructuralist ideologies have provided significant challenges to established theories of photography. Yet psychosocial notions of photography continue to indicate widespread acceptance of what Costello describes as “orthodox” (2018) understandings of the medium as an objective representative mode. As such, philosophies and ontologies of photography have typically been complicated by incompatible binaries that privilege oppositional hierarchies of ideas.

This section examines the genesis of those binaries through two distinct critical themes; the perceived/actual lack of human involvement (referred to as nonhumanism) and the explicit acknowledgement of human involvement (referred to as humanism³²). It concludes by arguing that a systems-based epistemology such as complexity theory provides a new (conceptual and literal) lens for the development of a sustainable theory of photography; one that can acknowledge established binaries, without being characterised by them.

2.2.1 The camera and the photograph: non-humanism in photography

The epistemological origins of photography are grounded in notions of objectivity, realism, and automatism (Rubinstein, 2020, 2018; Lusty & West Brett, 2019; Costello, 2018; Seppänen, 2017; Zylinska, 2017; Bate, 2015; Azoulay, 2012; Linfield, 2010; Barthes, 2000; Grundberg, 1999; Tagg, 1999; Rosenblum, 1997; Bourdieu, 1990; Sontag, 1977). Largely, this is predicated on beliefs that are specific to the early technologies of photography – the camera obscuras and chemical processes necessary for producing a Daguerreotype or Calotype (two early forms of photograph). Writings produced around this time are entrenched in notions of material realism that are contingent on the (problematically) perceived absence of human interference and thus creative subjectivity (Zylinska, 2017). In 1844 Henry Fox Talbot – one of the earliest photographers and inventor of the Calotype photographic process (Rosenblum, 1997) - published a book of writings and photographs entitled *The Pencil of Nature*. In it he writes, “[photographs] have been obtained by the mere action of Light [sic] upon sensitive paper. They have been formed or depicted by optical and chemical means alone, and without the aid of any one [sic] acquainted with the art of drawing” (n.p.). Fox Talbot’s important early characterisation of the photographic process was through a comparative paradigm of drawing and painting, and in choosing to compare photography to these

³² It should be noted that within this context “humanism” refers to the explicit acknowledgement of human involvement.

more subjective modes of representation, Fox Talbot helped proliferate a conceptualisation of photography that remains problematic. That is, that photography is fundamentally a representative medium, and that through its associated technologies and critically, lack of human influence, photography objectively represents “reality”. The latter of these assertions directly underpins the former and is predicated on the understanding that the nonhuman, mechanical element of photography (i.e., the camera) prevents the influence of human subjectivity, and “traces” the reality of a scene without the need for creative interpretation (in contrast to painting – in which the artist’s creative interpretation is crucial). The epistemological precedent set by Fox Talbot, Daguerre, and most early proponents of photography continues to be problematic for two reasons. Firstly, preoccupied with mechanical objectivity, early writing on photography inextricably linked the medium to “the real” at the expense of human influence and on the understanding that “the real” is both tangible and photographically representable (Rubinstein, 2020). This has many synonyms such as referentiality, indexicality, and trace, but has prevailed alongside various cultural and photographic discourse that has claimed the opposite (discussed in 2.2.2).

The second issue with Fox Talbot et al’s enduring conceptualisation of photography is that they sought to define photography comparatively. That is, the ontology of photography was originally predicated on likeness or difference with other forms of representation that were contingent on human authorship, such as painting. Painting and photography do share similar physical qualities insofar as they are (or, at least, can be) two dimensional depictions of three-dimensional objects. As Orvell states, “for many decades during the mid to late nineteenth century, painting and photography seemed to have converged on the same paradigm” (2003, p.81). Indeed, over 100 years after Fox Talbot, André Bazin - whom Diarmuid Costello credits with establishing “pre-history” to contemporary orthodox³³ theories of photography (2018), also uses the comparative paradigm of painting to argue for photography’s nonhuman objectivity. Bazin states that “[a]ll the arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an advantage from his absence” (1960, p.6). Costello refers to this school of thought as “mind-independence” – a paradigm that capitalises on the relationship between the object photographed and the camera itself as being able to produce an image independent of human imagining but contingent on the physicality of the object photographed and object photographing (2018).

Indeed, the first tenet of Bazin’s argument originates from the notion that for a photograph to manifest, a physical referent - defined by Barthes as “the person or thing photographed” (1980,

³³ Costello refers to these as “mature” orthodox theories, meaning they retain the orthodox principles that are rooted in the mechanical origins of photography and espoused by theorists such as Bazin, but that they operate in contemporary contexts.

p.9), must necessarily be present in front of the camera at the time of exposure (Bazin, 1960). In contrast – and to return to the established and problematic comparative paradigm, painters may conjure a referent directly from their imagination. Thus, for some theorists, in capturing reflected/emitted photons from an empirical object (Seppänen, 2017) the created photograph constitutes “trace” or “essence” that metaphysically links it to its physical referent in a way that cannot be replicated with “human” arts such as painting (Barthes, 1980; Sontag, 1977). Barthes is particularly invested in this concept; utilising an exploration of the relationship between the photograph itself and its empirically experienced referent to launch his conceptual framework of *studium* and *punctum* in *Camera Lucida*³⁴ (1980). Conversely, Costello argues that Bazin’s argument is not one of metaphysics (in which the photographed object and the object itself are the same), and instead cites Bazin’s likening of a photograph to a fingerprint, stating “a fingerprint is neither the finger itself, and nor is it solely the finger’s appearance, an image of the finger’s surface; it is also a direct imprint of that surface preserved in some medium” (Costello, 2018, p.39).

Regardless of the metaphysical aspect, in theories that privilege the photograph and the camera, the photographer is typically rendered an entirely passive presence; releasing the shutter and, at most, involved “only in his selection of the object to be photographed and by way of the purpose he has in mind” (Bazin, 1960, p.7). This purpose of mind, not pursued further by Bazin, has in fact been extensively explored, and provides the basis for the counterargument to the concept of nonhuman objectivity within photography; that is, that images are almost universally primarily mediated by their author (Grundberg, 1999; Solomon-Godeau, 1999). Modernism and postmodernism both significantly challenged the established notion of nonhumanism in photography; promoting paradigms of authorship and readership that highlight the subjective humanism of photographs and photography, beyond Barthes’ *studium/punctum* binary (though Barthes’ theories undoubtedly belong more to post-structural discourses than orthodox theories). These paradigms are discussed in more detail in 2.2.2.

Ultimately, Bazin and Fox Talbot’s epistemology is limited by its eagerness to discount human influence in favour of notions of machine-centric objectivity associated with traditional (analogue) camera equipment. As has been argued almost simultaneously (Costello, 2018), theories such as these overlook the (then) necessary presence of the photographer who frames the shot, selects the lens (and thus, focal length) and makes creative choices regarding aperture, shutter

³⁴ In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes advances theories of photographic indexicality by separating potential readings of images into “*studium*” and “*punctum*”. The “*studium*” refers to the socially mandated linguistic, cultural, or semiotic reading of an image, whilst the “*punctum*” refers to the potential personal, often emotional reading that individual spectators may experience when looking at a photograph.

speed, and film stock. Further, theories such as this are contingent on a maintained status quo in both technology and the cultural apprehension of that technology. As such, the advent of digital photography has proven significantly disruptive to the notion of photographic realism but has also fundamentally altered notions of nonhumanism. As Bardis points out; the cataclysmic advent of digital culture has nurtured a condition in which “it is possible to produce startlingly real images independent of [...] a referent in the real world”. (2004, p.211). Digital photographs, argues Rubinstein, disrupt the temporal paradigm that connects photography to the core underpinnings of the “orthodox” (Costello, 2018) philosophy of photography. He explains,

“[t]he time of the digital image is not the linear, chronological time of the photographic archive, but something much more fractal, simultaneous and recursive. Multiplicity and instantaneity are now part of the digital image no less than the ability to order and demarcate historical time was part of the analogue photograph” (2018, p.9)

Thus, the ontological foundation upon which the veracity of photography was constructed (nature representing itself, or “light paintings” reliant on tangible reality) should effectively dissolve in the wake of the digital era (Bardis, 2004). However, the cultural path traced by the history of photography is not necessarily linear (Jay, 1978; Sontag, 1977). Taylor points out that “realism in photographs is a changing convention that is always connected to technological developments” (2005, p.42). Whilst digital technology threatens the traditional ontology of photography, and contrary to Susie Linfield’s assertion that “photography’s truth-value has been tossed without regret into the dustbin of history” (2010, p.12), contemporary culture still demonstrably upholds images that have inherent connotations of “truth”. Despite several contemporary cultural circumstances that demonstrate popular understanding of photographic subjectivity (mass accessibility of digital cameras, widespread understanding of photographic manipulation software, digital filters etc), within certain contexts much store continues to be set by the supposed objectivity of photography. Photographs are frequently produced as evidentiary artefacts in courts of law (Franklin, 2016; Tagg, 1988) and photographic forms of identification, such as ID cards or passports, are a globally accepted acknowledgement that photographs bear a metaphysical link with their subject (Franklin, 2016). Cultural practices such as these suggest that the objectivity or authenticity of a photographic document is something that can be institutionally validated, despite oppositional poststructuralist discourse and digital technology. As Bardis writes, “our confidence or fragile trust in photographs is contingent not on how they are actually made, but on the basis of what reasons they were made for” (2004, p.215). Conceivably therefore, it is the notion of purpose that heartily complicates the relationship between photography and truth; because to

accept the process of “purpose” represented at least by the active figure of the photographer, one must reject the notion that a photograph is merely “a mechanical reproduction in the making of which man plays no part” (Bazin, 1960, p.6).

Although digital technology initially appeared to disrupt connotations of non-humanism within photography, significant advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithmic creativity have simultaneously resurrected and subverted this discourse. As Zylinska points out, “in the age of CCTV, drone media, medical body scans, and satellite imaging, photography is increasingly decoupled from human agency and human vision” (2019, n.p). The disruptive shift in technology has arguably prompted an “uncanny valley” cultural effect in photography. As Manovich argues, as analogue photography once offered a simulation of the physical world, digital photography now offers a simulation of analogue photography (Lister, 2013). Indeed, theorists such as Bate argue photography is now so far removed from its original analogue premise, that a new radical ontology - which can account not only for networked and algorithmic photographing, but also for networked and algorithmic viewing practices facilitated by the Internet, is urgently required (2015).

2.2.2 The photographer and the reader: humanism in photography

“Neither the camera, nor the photograph are sufficient to allow us to answer the question ‘what is photography’” (Azoulay, 2012, p.18)

The contradictory discourse of non-humanism that has shaped much of the sociocultural thought regarding photography has evolved alongside a variety of conceptual paradigms that have sought to disrupt the notions of mechanical objectivity that characterise orthodox theories of photography. These oppositional paradigms are largely tied to wider contextual (and artistic) discourses such as modernism and postmodernism. Although fundamentally different, both modernism and postmodernism promote ideologies that privilege the presence, subjectivity, and creativity of humans – particularly through their positions as both authors and viewers (Galanter, 2016).

Photographic modernism is linked to the corresponding wider cultural and artistic discourse of modernism that boomed in the early to mid-twentieth century (Costello, 2018; Rosenblum, 1997). Typically, modernism places importance on a “totalising” author (Galanter, 2016) and is associated with notions of universality, realism, and formalism (Stimson, 2006). Its origins are in the orthodox theories of photography that are connected to realism, but within the paradigm of modernism have evolved to place value on aestheticism and auteurism rather than

nonhuman machinery. This does not come at the expense of photography's supposed objectivity. To the contrary, through repeated mobilisation of comparative paradigms of painting, photographic modernism contends that the very essence of photography is realism, but that photography is capable of generating an aesthetic representation of realism (Grundberg, 1999). As modernist photographer Paul Strand writes "it is in the *organization* of this objectivity that the photographer's point of view towards Life [sic] enters in" (1980, p.142). Therefore, photographic modernism "fully accepted the unadorned realism of the medium, yet used it aesthetically to make an art photography that looked superficially like documentary photography but had quite different intentions, partly formal, partly metaphorical and allusive" (Badger, 2007, p.48).

Photographic modernism marks a paradigm shift not necessarily in photography's ontology, but in the cultural treatment of the medium. At its core, modernist photography is photography *about* photography (Grundberg, 1999). It capitalises on notions of "pure" photography that are predicated on understanding and working within what are perceived to be the technological limits of the medium (Costello, 2018). As such, modernism steered discourse away from early notions of non-humanism and subverted the "passive" actor in photographic creation from the photographer (Bazin, 1960), to the camera (Strand in Costello, 2018). Modernism drew photography into a more symbiotic relationship with art; elevating its cultural status by promoting the notion of photographic artists and, critically, medium-specific approaches that were dependent on (but which aestheticised) photographic realism. Several distinct aesthetic movements fell under the umbrella of modernism, but it also had a wider impact on photographic practices and photographic culture. Specifically, modernism strengthened the cultural position of documentary photography, allowing it to become both evidence *and* art and simultaneously ascribing both an approach and an aesthetic to documentary practices. Modernist documentary was particularly potent in the USA, whilst European photographers and markets tended more towards experimental formalism (Grundberg, 1999). Consequently, modernism contributed to "aesthetics of the real" (Ibid.) and continues to impact the visual language of documentary photography and the artistic practice of documentary photographers. Therefore, it can be reasonably argued that modernism both recognised and elevated human influence in photography, without compromising the relationship between photography and "the real". This is significant because it unpicks established frameworks in which photographic realism is contingent on the lack of human influence.

Costello argues that photographic modernism, despite its integration of orthodox-leaning theories about objectivity, laid foundations for what he describes as “New Theory” epistemologies of photography (2018). He states, “rather than focusing on the photograph, or what is special about the photograph’s relationship to what it is of, [modernism] focuses instead on what is special about the *activity* of taking photographs” (2018, p.31). This notion subverts orthodox theories of “the real” that are contingent on photography *recording*, rather than *creating* realism. As such, Costello points to Kracauer’s assertion that photography:

“is capable of expanding our vision and conception of the world, whether by showing it to us from strange and surprising new points of view, or by exploiting the capacities of photography to show us either what is too fast or too small for natural vision to make out” (2018, p.32).

He summarises, “realism is a genre of which many arts partake, rather than a property specific to any” (2018, pp.32-33). As such, the crucial paradigmatic shift offered by photographic modernism is not to undermine the capability of photography to be objective, but to shift the responsibility for that objectivity from a camera to the combination of a human able to recognise and represent that reality *and* camera (which, in modernism, takes a more passive role). Although photographic modernism is still a recognised aesthetic, its epistemological value has arguably been subsumed by postmodern paradigms that have permeated both artistic and academic discourse.

Grundberg argues that a widely accepted definition of postmodernism is problematic, because each discourse that it applies to “defines its postmodernism in relation to its own particular modernism” (1999, p.3). Grundberg’s views are supported by Crimp who conceptualises postmodernism as “a specific breach with modernism” (1990, p.91). Whilst Crimp and Grundberg’s arguments both speak to the pluralistic definitions of postmodernism, Galanter argues that postmodernism’s universal conceptual spine is in the epistemological value it places on the reader of a text (2016). In the context of photography, postmodernism (like modernism) manifests both as a theory of photography and a way of photographing. However, unlike modernism, and in line with Galanter’s argument, postmodern approaches to photography also consider the significance of the practice of viewing photographs. As such, postmodern discourse within photography encompasses the influence of institutions such as galleries and museums (Krauss, 1982) and latterly, online/networked viewing practices (discussed in more detail in the following section). The specific photographic praxis associated with postmodernism includes pastiche, collage, and “re-photography” (Solomon-Godeau, 1994). Postmodern photography is therefore typically contingent on the assumed knowledge of a viewer, who’s position as meaning-

maker is given primacy (Solomon-Godeau, 1994; Badger, 2007; Bate, 2015). It is important to note that whilst postmodernism awards the viewer epistemological primacy, they are not awarded totality; meaning does not start and end with the viewer. As Badger argues, a significant element of postmodern photographic practice is related to the post-structuralist notion of deconstruction (2007). Deconstruction as contextualised within post-structuralism, refers to the mutability of meaning in relation to irreconcilable and contradictory possible interpretations of a text (Derrida, 2016). In photographic terms, for example, deconstruction might refer to the myriad possible meanings inherent in a re-photographed image, in which texts are combined (and therefore altered beyond a unified whole) to create a dialogic of meaning that is contextualised differently by different viewers. To return to Grundberg's argument – if modernist photography is photography about photography, then arguably postmodernist photography is photography about photographic discourse.

The relationship between postmodernism and post-structuralism is outwith the scope of this thesis, but the central argument of post-structuralism – that both meaning and knowledge are contextual and reliant on the concept of deconstruction (Derrida, 2016) has implications not just for artistic praxis, but for the philosophical approach to photographs as both texts and metaphysical objects (both of which are contingent on the presence of humans). As will be argued below (and in section 2.3), complexity theory shares considerable philosophical ground with post-structuralism (Woermann et al, 2018) and as such, has the potential to inform a paradigm shift in the epistemological apprehension of the medium. Ultimately, within both post-structuralism and the wider paradigm of postmodernism, the human element of photography extends beyond the photographer (modernism) and centres on the relationship between the viewer(s) and the text. In doing so, postmodernism provides perhaps the biggest epistemological challenge to notions of machine-derived objectivity within photography.

2.2.3 The whole picture: complexity theory & photography

“Photography is damned inconvenient; imagine the dismay of a mother sparrow who builds a nest to protect her eggs, only to find that one hatches into a cuckoo³⁵” (Jay, 1978, p.648)

³⁵ Jay exploits the natural phenomenon in which cuckoos deposit their eggs in the nests of other birds (typically sparrows), forcing the “foster parents” to hatch the egg and feed the baby bird, which typically grows to be much bigger than the young sparrows and uses the majority of the mother sparrow's resources. In the context of photography, Jay is suggesting that creative development of photography outstrips and undermines the societal “nests” unable to contain rapidly evolving forms and uses of the medium.

Thus far, I have highlighted the problematic nature of scholarship and practice that characterises photography. My argument has centred on the use of comparative paradigms to secure ontological premise, and a continued entanglement with increasingly strained notions of objective and/or representable reality. When Fox Talbot and his contemporaries extolled the objectivity of photography, their primary framework was one of non-humanism. Machines, incapable of conscious creativity, simply reproduced whatever sat before them. The perceived lack of human influence, coupled with notion of tangible representable reality led to the conceptualisation of photography as an objective form. From a post-structuralism perspective, this approach to the ontology of photography is contingent on the time in which it was produced. However, as previously discussed, a variety of factors – not least of which was the advent of digital technology, have considerably disrupted this notion. As technology continues to advance, the notion of non-humanism has once again surfaced in photography and within this context threatens to undermine the fundamental link between photography and objectivity and considerably disrupt the foundational understanding of the medium.

The advent of photographs generated through the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) casts doubt on Bazin's confident assertion that photography satisfies "our appetite for illusion by a mechanical reproduction in the making of which man plays no part. The solution is not found in the result achieved but in the way of achieving it" (1960, p.7). AI-generated photographs are typically produced through an algorithm which is able to use an existing data set (i.e., a collection of photographs) to learn the structural genetics of an image, and subsequently generate, without any of the mechanics traditionally necessary (such as a camera or a referent), an image that has the outward appearance of a photograph but was not created through the application of "photography" as it is generally understood. This process removes significantly more of the human factors than perhaps Bazin might ever have conceived, but rather than achieving total objectivity, appears to violate the very essence of photography. If one were searching for a finite and reductionist conclusion, there are two ways to consider this: either Bazin is wrong, or the new forms of photography that contradict his statement are no longer photography. Both ideas have merit; some of Bazin's assertions about the ontology of photography are predicated on dated analogue technology but also pre-digital thinking grounded in structural and modernist ideas of a knowable, representable reality. To dismiss connections between photography and "the real" is to underestimate the contingent, contextual, and negotiated meaning of photographs but it is also perhaps a misidentification of "the real". As Rubinstein states, the real has been philosophically linked to light and to tangible and representable phenomena (2018), but as Barthes argues in *Camera Lucida*, this somewhat sterile understanding of the real cannot account for personal or

emotional readings of an image (the punctum) (2000). As such, there is a need to account for the postmodern assertion that there is more than one potential reading of an image, but to also understand that this reading is not fixed in a tangible and knowable reality. It is ontologically salient to consider Barthes' punctum in the context of algorithmically generated portraits. Are these perhaps the first portraits without punctum? With no connection to a real person, can they elicit the emotional reaction – the contingent and contextual realism that is dependent on intimately knowing the subject of a photograph? Analysed in this context, AI generated images dispense with almost every element of established photographic production and indicate a significant paradigm shift in photographic discourse that is worthy of considerable scholarly and artistic exploration.

The secondary argument within this thesis advocates for an ontological approach to photography that is predicated on complexity thinking. Complexity theory is specifically effective in apprehending dynamic and contingent phenomena; exploring adaptive and emergent behaviour whilst both acknowledging and including the history of complex phenomena themselves in related inquiries (Cilliers, 2005). A complexity-informed approach to the epistemology of photography would arguably reduce much of the polarisation that has characterised discourse regarding the medium, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the continued relevance of historical approaches and apprehending emergent technological developments such as AI photography. Several key thinkers within the philosophy of photography have already begun to consider photography as a necessarily networked system of meaning and practice. Specifically, as non-humanism and the ubiquity of digital and online photographic communication proliferates, scholars have tended towards the conceptualisation of photographs themselves as more ephemeral objects, reliant on a specific set of networked circumstances at a specific time to evoke meaning (Rubinstein, 2020). As such, traditional semiotic approaches to reading photographs are replaced with theories that more closely resemble socio-semiotics but are grounded in post-structural network modelling and systems thinking - such as Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome³⁶. As Rubinstein states:

“[c]onceived as a rhizome, a photograph is understood as connected to other photographs, as well as to objects, entities, processes, and organisms, formatting a network that continually evolves through expansions and contractions. A rhizomatic understanding of photography takes account of the fact that meaning and knowledge are not derived from representing but from connections between bodies and their direct material engagements with the world” (p.6).

³⁶ Within the context of philosophy, a rhizome is a concept conceived by Deleuze and Guattari, in which meaning, texts, institutions, and readers are considered through networked connections with one another (1980).

As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the philosophical rhizome can prove a problematic metaphor in certain circumstances but seen as part of the ongoing nonlinear genesis of a philosophy of photography, networked and systems thinking represents a departure from fixed, binary ontologies and a move away from the static polarisation that has characterised much of the scholarship until this point. Crucially, and as this section argues, traditional philosophical paradigms for apprehending photography seem unsuited to contemporary photographic practices and processes. This is not to say that they are without merit; but that viewed in the context of digital photography and networked practices of viewing, they are unable to account for the experience of creating, viewing, and sharing an image – all of which can now happen entirely computationally. As Rubinstein states:

“[t]hat the digital image is not meaningless is evident, but it is also evident that it cannot be ‘read’ or ‘unpacked’ with the tools of visual analysis. Semiology and representation are unable to follow the narrative diversity in which meaningful sequences are not pre-given but develop out of logical statements, relational conditions, coded transformations and permutations that characterise encoded landscapes” (2018, p.10).

At the start of this chapter, I noted that one of the main problems with writing about photography is the use of comparative paradigms such as painting and drawing. Recent scholarship in photography has also employed comparative paradigms, but increasingly these paradigms are linguistic, rather than visual. Most of these arguments hinge on the conceptualisation of photography as a communicative linguistic medium, able to transpose linguistic frameworks to achieve a “visual grammar” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). This epistemological approach contributes to discourse that aims to divorce photography from the notions of pure representation or mechanical objectivity, allowing it access to paradigms of linguistic philosophy such as post-structuralism. However, this thesis contends that whilst the comparative paradigm of language has merit, it is still limited. Language can be as dismissive and obfuscate as much of the essence of photography as painting can. Where language as a relational ontology is useful, is in the advancement of theories of language that are dynamic and adaptive. Whilst Kress and Van Leeuwen’s argument that visual language can be understood through the application of grammatical epistemology is salient, the real merit of this comparative paradigm is in philosophy, rather than in building a framework in which pictures might be understood as sentences or paragraphs. As described in Chapter 1, there is a developing paradigm shift in linguistics that seeks to move away from binaries of semiotic structuralism (linked with paradigms of modernism), and instead embrace systems and complex thinking as the next logical step in post-structural discourse

(Woermann et al, 2018). The following section considers these arguments and contends ultimately that complexity theory has much to offer the ontology of photography; a medium that has already been considered through linguistic and networked epistemological paradigms. However rather than facilitating further epistemological application of comparative paradigms, the following section argues that complexity theory has the potential to allow photography to be apprehended in uniquely photographic terms.

2.3 The Problem with Complexity

As mentioned in 1.2, complexity theory has congruously informed both the object of research and the research design within this thesis. However, complexity theory is a relatively contemporary epistemological paradigm and is subject to a wide catalogue of critiques, not least of which is its problematic definition and application within qualitative applied research contexts (Davis & Sumara, 2009). In problematising complexity in much the same way that I have Welshness and photography, I aim to underline the transdisciplinary nature of this thesis; arguing that it advances not just the study of visual Welshness, nor just the philosophy of photography, but also the growing body of both applied and conceptual complexity theory within arts and humanities research.

2.3.1 *Complex, complicated, and complexity*

“I have heard it said (by someone from France, of course) that a jumbo jet is complicated, but that a mayonnaise is complex” (Cilliers, 1998, p.3).

As described in 1.2, complexity theory is the epistemological proposition that certain phenomena are unsuitable for study through traditional Newtonian reductionism; in which cause-and-effect relationships have ontological primacy and the object of study is typically reduced to component parts, which are then analysed as individual entities which once understood can account for the function of the larger whole (Heylighen, Cilliers, & Gershenson, 2006). Complexity theory argues that certain phenomena are better understood through a systems-based approach, which conceptualises individual components as complex entities functioning within a dynamic, interactive, open system - itself characterised by a particular environment. Specifically, complexity theory is contingent on the notion that it is the relationships between components, rather than the components themselves that can provide insight into the larger whole (which itself is not fixed). Paul Cilliers, who has contributed significantly to the understanding of complex systems in

humanities (Loubser, 2014), describes complexity theory as the examination of relationships “amongst constituents of the system, and the interaction between the system and its environment”. Further, he states “these relationships are not fixed, but shift and change, often as a result of self-organisation. This can result in novel features, usually referred to in terms of *emergent properties*” (1998, p.ix). Cilliers also makes a critical distinction between a “complicated system” and a “complex system”. A complicated system, he states, “can be given a complete description in terms of its individual components” (1998, p.viii), whereas a complex system cannot be reduced in this way. He states that “the brain, natural language and social systems are complex” (1998, p.xi), whereas a computer (or indeed a jumbo jet) can be completely understood by dismantling and inspecting its components as features of a finished whole.

However, as Tzefestas (2018), Cham (2009), and Davis & Sumara (2009) point out, the transdisciplinary nature of complexity complicates its ontology. The large number of conceptual frameworks and applications within both social and traditional sciences make a static definition of complexity theory ontologically problematic. Indeed, Davis and Sumara note, “[c]omplexity thinking might be positioned somewhere between a belief in a fixed and fully knowable universe and a fear that meaning and reality are so dynamic that attempts to explicate are little more than self-delusions” (2008, p.35). Therefore, in place of a definition, complexity scholars typically offer a list of common features understood to characterise complex systems (Tzafestas, 2018; Galanter, 2016; Cilliers, 2000). These are as follows:

- Complex systems are made up of a variety of independent but similar components (sometimes called “actors” or “agents”), whose interactions with one another make up the (changing) output of the system.
- These interactions are dynamic, rich, and nonlinear. Not all system components might interact with one another, and interactions are often localised (Galanter, 2016).
- Complex systems are open systems but are demarcated by a system environment. The system environment typically gives the system its identity by providing input and creating feedback loops within system output. A system environment is also open and liable to change. The system depends on the environment for survival but elements within the environment typically function outwith the system.
- Complex systems are typically adaptive; emergent behaviours ensure the continued function of the system, and stagnation or static behaviours are often seen as a threat to the system (Cilliers, 1998; Cilliers, 2000). Emergent and adaptive behaviours are typically connected to feedback loops that occur between system components or between the system and the environment.

- Feedback loops can be positive (in which certain phenomena or behaviours are amplified) or negative (in which certain phenomena or behaviours are reduced). Feedback loops are not necessarily governed by pre-existing hierarchies and as such a small interaction amongst seemingly insignificant system components might have a significant feedback impact within the wider system.
- Complex systems tend to reject centralised control, and as such are typified by “self-organisation” which refers to “the spontaneous emergence of new relationships, forms, or patterns of behaviour arising from repeated agent interaction over time” (Gear et al, 2022, p.2)
- Complex systems have a specific history, which is integrated into (rather than transcended by) the system. As such a system can continue to be influenced by its own history; this is referred to as “path dependency” (Ibid.).

Although this list is neither exhaustive nor universal, the common features identified above span natural and social sciences and have been employed in both theoretical and applied inquiries into complex phenomena (Tzafestas, 2018). Figure 8 represents a simplified illustration of a complex adaptive system, indicating the role of the environment and feedback, as well as the production of emergent adaptive behaviour.

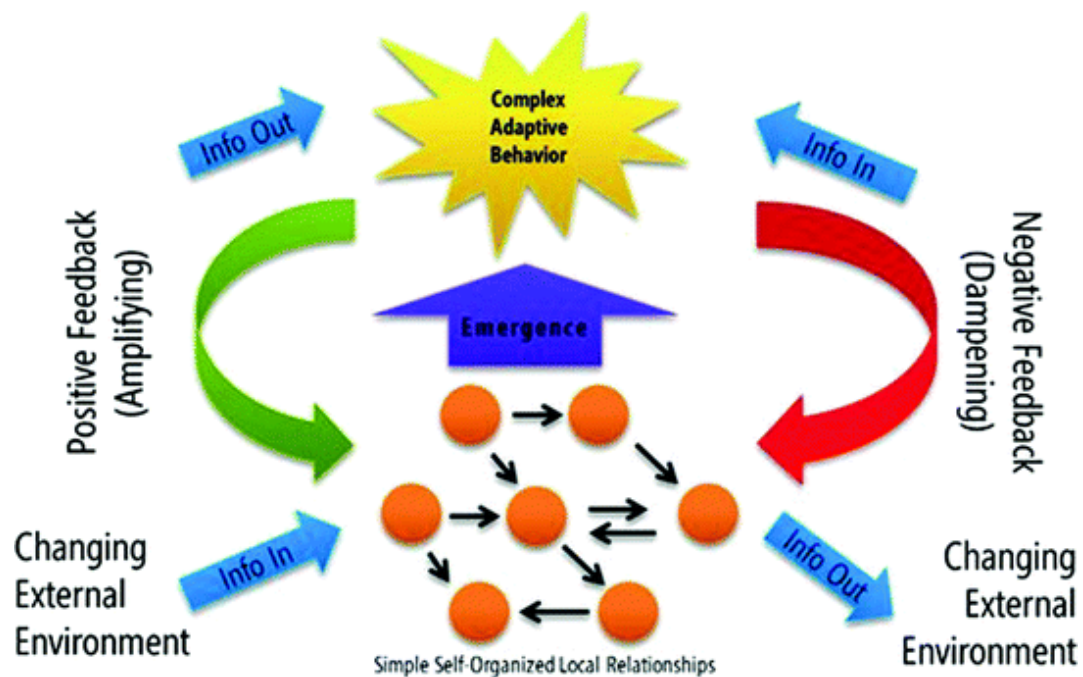


Figure 8: A generic model for complex adaptive systems in life and society based on the emergence concept (Tzafestas, 2018, p.448)

Ultimately, complexity theory functions as an epistemological paradigm that shifts the focus of analysis from individual parts of a complex phenomenon “to the contingent and context-

dependent set of relationships between the parts as determined by the functions or activities exerted by the system” (Woermann, Human, and Preiser, 2018, p.7).

2.3.2 Theoretical and applied complexity

Whilst “complexity science” is now a well-established applied practice in areas such as computing, biology and physics (Tzafestas, 2018), its application within the humanities varies. Often complexity is used as a conceptual lens and applied only as an epistemological tool on a case-study basis (Miles, 2015). Woermann, Human, and Preiser (2018) advance an epistemological approach that they characterise as “critical complexity” (2018). This approach is derived from the scholarship of Morin and Cilliers and has informed the conceptual approach taken in this thesis. Briefly, “critical complexity” constitutes a philosophical contextualization of complexity in which complex systems cannot be completely understood “from a human perspective” (Woermann et al, 2018, p.2). Therefore, objective knowledge of complex systems is impossible and an awareness of this “imperfect engagement with complex systems” (Ibid.) encourages a “critical” adoption of complexity-informed philosophies (2018). Crucially, this approach to complexity theory maintains postmodern (specifically, post-structuralist) positions that knowledge is both subjective and contextual (Ibid.). Woermann et al acknowledge that this approach to complexity has tricky implications for applied research, and as such advocate for reflexive modelling, in which the researcher[s] explicitly presents their organization of components into system and environment and recognises that this organisation is contingent on the research environment and the researcher themselves (2018). This modelling approach was applied during analysis and is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Ultimately, Woermann et al argue that critical complexity is contingent on the understanding that complex systems cannot be “solved”, nor can they be reduced to a predictable set of rules (2018). Instead, complex systems can be understood in terms of their dynamic structure, outputs, and histories as organised and presented by a researcher. This, argue Woermann et al advances several established complexity theories, and brings them in line with post-structuralist philosophies (specifically they cite Derrida and Bataille), stating that that “a serious engagement with complexity necessitates the type of epistemological, cognitive, and paradigmatic shifts that characterise the moves from modernism to postmodernism and from structuralism to post-structuralism” (2018, p.12).

Galanter (2016) also proposes an epistemological theory of complexity that he specifically relates to the dominant “-isms” – in this case the broader paradigms of traditional scientific modernism and contemporary humanities postmodernism. Specifically, he posits the concept of

“complexism”, stating that “complexism is the application of complex systems to the subject matter of the arts and humanities” (2008, p.311). Galanter argues that complexism reunites sciences and humanities “in a shared conceptual space” (2016, p15), “through a higher synthesis of the modern and the postmodern” (2008, p.311). As shown in Fig.9, Galanter presents core concepts from modernism, postmodernism, and “complexism”, aligning each concept with its equivalent in the corresponding epistemological framework. He states “[t]he apparently irreconcilable differences between modernity and postmodernity, and the cultures of science and the humanities, can be subsumed into the twenty-first-century synthesis of complexism” (2016, p.19).

Modernism	Postmodernism	Complexism
Absolute	Relative	Distributed
Progress	Circulation	Emergence and Coevolution
Fixed	Random	Chaotic
Hierarchy	Collapse	Connectionist Networks
Authority	Contention	Feedback
Truth	No Truth	Statistical Truth Known to be Incomplete
The Author	The Reader	The Generative Network
Pro Formalism	Anti Formalism	Form as a Public Process Not Privilege

Figure 9: *Complexism subsumes the modern and postmodern* (Galanter, 2016)

In ‘subsuming’ humanities-centric postmodernism and science-centric modernism, Galanter’s complexism has significant epistemological implications but leaves gaps in terms of practical applied frameworks. He describes complexism as “a form of qualitative cultural study” (2016, p.19), but is vague around the application of such as study. Whilst research around the epistemological potential of complexity within humanities continues to grow, there appears to be a sustained paucity of applied complexity in arts-based fields. As such, engaging in applied research informed by complexity thinking necessarily promotes transdisciplinary scholarship, as more examples of applied complexity exist within the fields of management, sociolinguistics and healthcare (Woermann, Human, & Preiser, 2018).

The majority of applied complexity informed research in arts exists in Galanter’s field of AI and computer generated art (2016; Somerer, 200). Examples of this include Cham’s work on

the complexity-informed application of art to science-based problems (Cham, 2009), and Galanter's work on generative art (2008). Outwith Galanter and Cham, Gear, Koziol-Mclain, & Eppel (2012) have contributed significantly to the formulation of methodologies suited to applied qualitative complexity. Although their research is situated within applied social healthcare, Gear et al note that "[r]ecognising and responding to complexity and fundamental uncertainty offers opportunities to innovate research methodologies and methods capable of evolving as we learn more about the problem" (2022, p.1). Using a conceptual framework that they align with the paradigm of post-structural complexity theory discussed by Cilliers (1998) and Woermann et al (2018), Gear et al advocate for a flexible methodological design, in which individual methods (spanning both fieldwork and analysis) are implemented and adapted as the research develops. They also highlight the importance of co-creation and collaboration with research participants, sustained reflexivity, and (as was discussed in Chapter 1), the conceptualization of both the research process and the object of study as complex systems. Through this approach, they state, complexity theory is able to offer applied methods that acknowledge but are not paralysed by post-structural discourse (2022).

A description of the construction and implementation of the transdisciplinary applied methodology used in this research is available in Chapter 4. The following section returns to Galanter's "Complexism", which has been mobilized alongside Gear et al and Woermann et al's applied frameworks to inform the epistemological approach taken throughout this thesis.

2.3.3 Transdisciplinary Epistemological Frameworks

Whilst applied complexity in the arts remains relatively under-developed, this thesis draws upon frameworks from a variety of contexts to operationalise qualitative applied complexity. As mentioned above, the inherent transdisciplinarity of complexity theory has led to a broad range of theoretical and applied frameworks that have experienced significant traction within certain fields. More generally, complexity has become a normalised conceptual and applied paradigm within health and social care (Gear et al, 2012; Sturmberg and Martin, 2013; Gear et al, 2022), whilst within the humanities complexity theory has informed several key contemporary studies in organisational management (Allen, Maguire, and McKelvey, 2011). There are areas of slower growth - for example education (Davis and Sumara, 2009) and artistic practice (Somerer, 2002; Preiser, 2010), and each new application of complexity (in terms of both theory and practice-based research) contributes an expansion of these frameworks. Some of the more developed humanities applications of complexity are within linguistics. Specifically in second language development,

accent acquisition, and dialectics (Bastardas-Boada, 2013; Andrason, 2014). As this thesis breaks new ground in the application of complexity theory to the ontology of photography and national photography, epistemologically operationalising complexity has necessarily involved adapting frameworks utilised within other disciplines. Specifically, given the growing paradigm of thought that conceptualizes photography as a negotiated visual text, applications of complexity theory that build on paradigms associated with postmodernism and post-structuralism have been significantly influential. As mentioned above, Galanter argues that “complexism” can subsume binaries present within established discourses of modernism and postmodernism and develop constructive new discourse around language, texts, and art. In a model based on authorship, Galanter illustrates the role of the text, the author, and the reader as represented by modernity, postmodernity, (Fig.10) and complexism (Fig.11). In Galanter’s conceptualization of modernity the text and the author are of central importance; the reader passively accepting the text exactly as the author intended. In postmodernity the text and the reader are the primary sites of meaning, and the author (as per Roland Barthes) is “dead” (Galanter, 2016). Galanter accepts that this is a simplification of both modernity and postmodernity but uses this summary as a conceptual point of departure to position complexism as an evolved epistemology able to incorporate both modernity and postmodernity whilst simultaneously broadening the epistemological scope of each. This is demonstrated in Figure 11, in which Galanter argues that the text, the author, and the reader function as equalized components within an open, democratic complex system of negotiated and dynamic meaning.

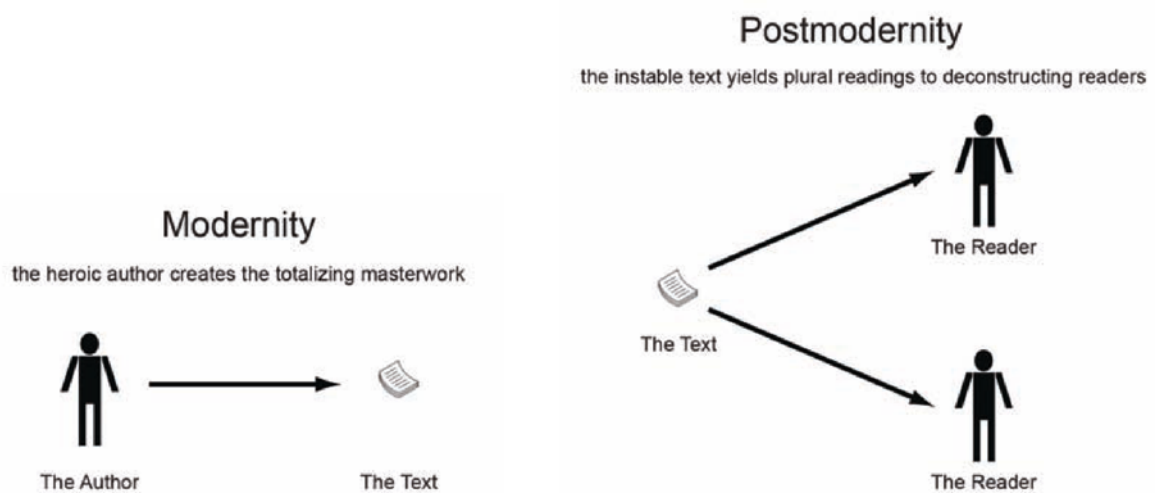


Figure 10: *Theories of authorship and modernity versus postmodernity*, (Galanter, 2016, p.24)

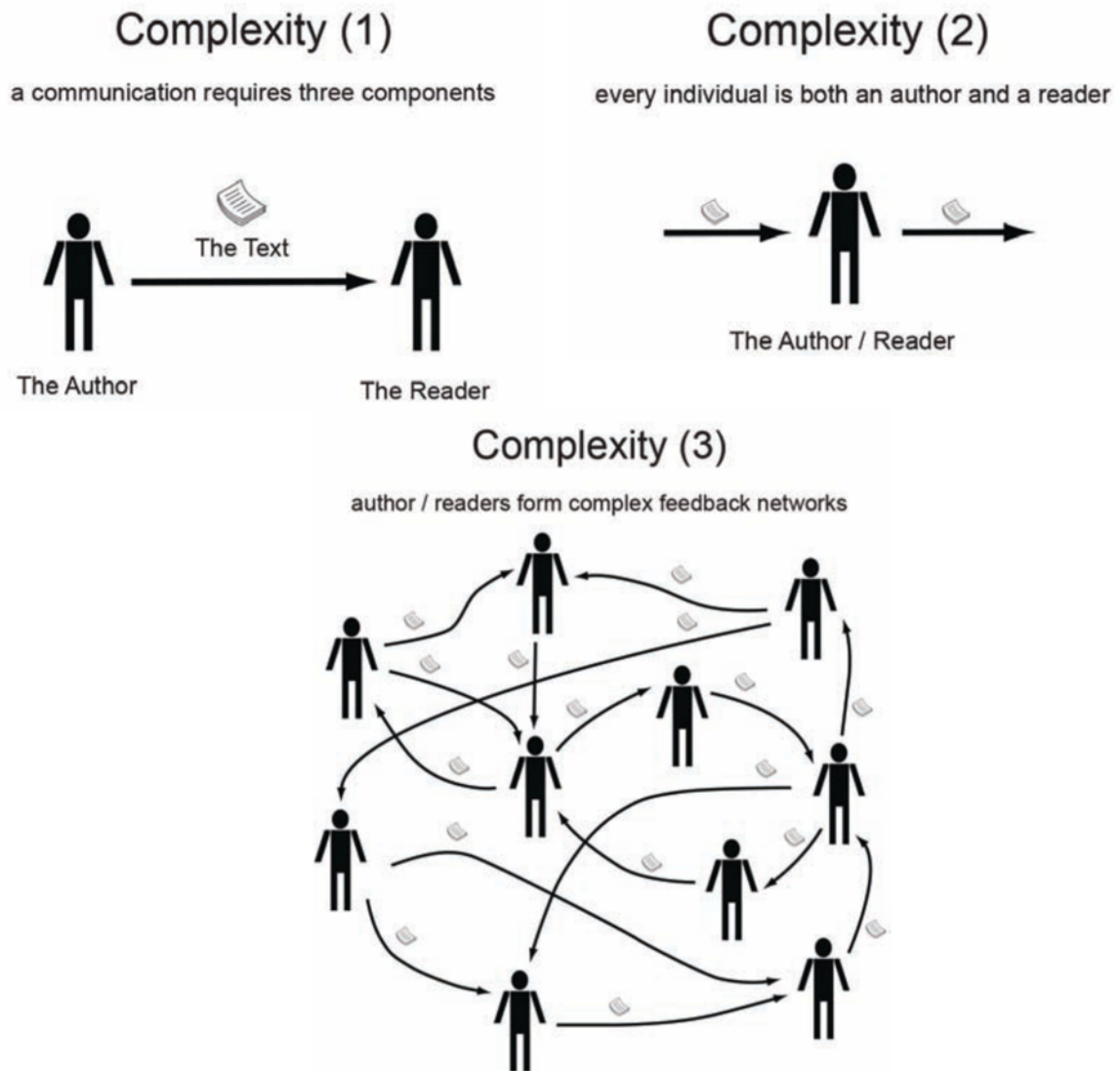


Figure 11: *A complexist theory of authorship* (Galanter, 2016, p.25)

As such, Galanter reiterates that complexism is capable of “[c]ombining both models [to yield] complex social communication networks that those studying complexity understand in terms of feedback, chaos theory, and scale-free structures” (2016, p.26).

Although radical, Galanter’s views on the applicability of complexity to art theory are shared by several scholars. Notably, Willis who writes “[a]rt, something that often exists outside of quantifiable logic, is not only created through a complex, adaptive process. Like circles within circles within circles, the theories of complexity can be seen in action within the entire art world” (Willis in Geyer and Bogg, 2007, p.6). Willis expands this paradigm of thought to include practices and processes outwith the creation of individual artworks, such as the art market, trends, and criticism. He states:

“The creation, business, appreciation, and academic study of art exists in a state far from equilibrium. The system demands variations from artists who inevitably search for their

own voice, innovation is applauded, prices fluctuate, and trends change. It is an open system with energy that flows in and dissipates, fueling the creation of work. [...] The art world is constantly evolving, creating its own structures then devouring them and rolling on. [...] tension builds up as artists, galleries and critics start to accept and attach labels to a certain style of art. This creates a feedback loop which encourages those that fit within the mold to produce more work until a point of critical mass is reached and it becomes a publicly recognised style. (Willis in Geyer & Bogg, 2007, pp.6-7)

Whilst this thesis examines art praxis within a specific environment, the more general complexity-informed observations made by Willis, coupled with applied frameworks advanced by Gear, Koziol-Mclain & Eppel, and Galanter's wider conceptual frameworks have formed the conceptualization and application of complexity theory as it applies to this research. Reflections on the efficacy of this approach, as well as suggestions for further applications and discourse are available in Chapter 8. The following chapter critically appraises literature that directly relates to the core narrative of this thesis: the development and related discourse of Welsh photography.

3. Towards A Welsh Photography

As stated in Chapter 1, the literature considered in this thesis is predicated on the inquiry, rather than a specific discipline. Chapter 2 presented a literature-informed narrative of the ecology of ideas relating to the wider contexts of Welsh photography. Subsequently, this chapter considers literature and artworks that directly relate to the academic and sociocultural conceptualisation of Welsh photography. It briefly considers the epistemological genesis of national photography³⁷ before narrowing focus to critically explore the “imaging” of the Welsh nation through referents, aesthetics, authors, and styles. This chapter also considers the role of institutional gatekeeping in Welsh photography, before presenting a thematic examination of Welsh photography through several case studies. In doing so, this chapter foregrounds concepts discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, and critically appraises the current body of literature regarding photography and Welsh national identity.

3.1 Photography and ImagiNation

“Isn’t it peculiar that photographs, at once intensely private and ubiquitously social visual signs, should be believed to be capable of producing an ‘image of a nation?’” (Sekula, 2014, p.99)

Although the ontologies of each are dynamic, photography proliferated in line with the contemporary conceptualisation of nation-ness (Stimson, 2006; Schwartz & Ryan, 2006; Price, 2020). As late nineteenth and early twentieth century notions of nationhood were rooted in primordial and top-down paradigms (Edensor, 2002), the dominant conceptualisation of photography at this time was the “orthodox” (Costello, 2018) theory of photography, in which the camera’s ability to record reality faithfully and objectively was awarded ontological primacy (Jäger, 2003). This is a salient chronological intersection in the conceptualisation of national photography. As Jäger states, “the function of photography to represent a nation [...] required a connection between the national movement, a receptive public and an intellectual framework in which [...] objectivity had to be inscribed onto photographs” (2003, p.118). Although the concept of national art was well established before the invention of photography (Lord, 2000), photography offered a culturally lucrative opportunity to authenticate national visual representation and national

³⁷ It should be noted that the literature presented in this chapter and throughout the thesis relates predominantly to Western national identity, and therefore Western identities within photography. Primarily this is due to the national/geographical specificity of the inquiry and the corresponding need to distill considerable amounts of literature into a limited project. However, I also acknowledge that a Western bias permeates the global historiography of photography (Michels, 2018) and that this impacts both the tone and scope of literature relating to photography and national identity and maintains problematic colonial ideologies.

ideologies (Orvell, 2003; Stimson, 2006). As such, the synergy between assumed photographic realism and a strategic nation building framework that promoted historical, religious, and collective primordial authenticity was (and arguably continues to be) exploited by both photographers and institutions. As Edensor writes (citing Crang), “a nationally rooted culture is not imagined as ‘the *outcome* of material and symbolic processes but instead as the *cause* of those practices” (Crang 1998 in Edensor, 2002). In the context of photography this generated various iconised “referents” that still have demonstrable cultural currency. Similarly, genres of photography premised on objective representations of reality (such as documentary and photojournalism) were predominant features of photography produced, exhibited, or collected within a national context and established specific photo-methodologies associated with photographically capturing a nation (Cabuts, 2012).

However, many of the tensions that characterise the ontology of photography naturally manifest in wider discourse related to the medium. The concept of national photography is no exception and is itself further complicated by the similarly problematic concept of nation-ness (Williams, 2019). Although the concept is culturally evident, the exact parameters necessary for defining “national photography” are debated and often polarising. In contrast to theories of national photography grounded in orthodox conceptualisations of both photography and nation (i.e. the objective recording of primordial symbols of a nation), Bleyen and Van Gelder offer what they describe as a “classic” definition of national photography in their native Belgian context, stating: “[n]ational photography is here understood as organised around ‘schools’, ‘styles’, towering ‘authors’ that have dominated the scene for years or photographic ‘innovations’ that could be labelled as national.” (2011, p.112). This definition, whilst demonstrably in effect within certain cultural contexts, notably omits concepts related to iconographic representation. It is a conceptualisation of national photography that is rooted in modernism and postmodernism; suggesting that national readings of photographs are attached by either the photographer, the viewer, or through institutional verification. In short, Bleyen and van Gelder contend that any “national” aspect of photography is more contingent on the act of photographing (how and by whom), than the contents of the photographs themselves. These somewhat conflicting definitions of what constitutes national photographic representation mirror conflicting epistemological paradigms of photography itself and demonstrate the problematic dialectic between photographic ontology and photographic teleology.

This thesis contends that both definitions have merit, and that considering photographs, photographers, institutions, viewers, archives, and publications as part of a rich complex system of national meaning provides constructive insight into the development and maintenance of

nationalised photographic practice. The following section explores some of the ways in which Wales has been visually imagined and critically analyses the process of coding visual Welshness. Section 3.2 explores the proliferation and maintenance of dominant visual tropes of Welshness. Section 3.3 explores the way in which institutions across (and beyond) Wales have negotiated, legitimised, and preserved images of Wales, as well as the “schools, styles, and towering authors” (Bleyen and Van Gelder, 2011, p.112) that contribute to the practice of photography in Wales. Section 3.4 explores the practice of several photographers that have had demonstrable influence in the photographic imagining of Wales.

3.2. “Is it a matter of rugby and singing?”: Coding Visual Welshness

“Image-makers in Wales are familiar with only a small vocabulary of resonant images on which to build, and when they do attempt to make work with national implications they find it hard to get taken seriously, in a way in which English artists do not” (Lord, 1992, p.8)

“It has been suggested that the dynamic centre of the most interesting art being produced today deals with issues of identity; this has certainly been true of recent contemporary art produced in Wales.” (Cabuts, 2012, p.3)

As argued in Chapter 2, Welsh national identity is characterised by multiplicity and problematic colonial influence. Multiplicity and colonialism have therefore also affected the construction and maintenance of Welsh visual images. As Lord writes, “the nation revealed in [artworks depicting Wales/Welshness] is diverse and complex, thereby presenting many difficulties in the construction of a coherent narrative” (2000, p.8). In understanding the genesis of Welsh visual identity and artistic praxis, two writers have been significantly prolific and influential. The first of these is Peter Lord. As well as historiographies of Welsh art (1998, 2000), Lord has published several essays discussing the cultural contexts within which Welsh art exists. In 1992, Lord published an essay entitled *The Aesthetics of Relevance*, in which he argues against an established narrative that Wales lacks an indigenous visual culture (1992). This narrative proliferated largely in the nineteenth century, but Lord cites a 1957 publication by David Bell, in which Bell states that Wales is without any “visual artistic tradition” (1992, p.7). Lord argues that Bell has misrepresented the concept of an artistic tradition, and that rather than a collection of artworks, a visual tradition should be understood as “an intellectual structure into which [...] visual images are fitted” (Ibid.). This, argues Lord, constitutes an “activation” of visual artworks; without which images are rendered “unrecognized” and lacking crucial cultural and historical contexts that invest images with national

meaning (Ibid.). In the case of Wales, Lord notes that the perceived lack of visual tradition has roots in English colonialism, stating:

“The notion of an incomplete – and consequently inadequate – national culture, as presented in Wales by Anglocentric art historians, is a powerful constraint on political evolution. No culture functions without a complex visual language, and so, in the absence of an indigenous tradition, the visual tradition of a competing culture is introduced to fill the vacuum.” (1992, p.8)

One of Lord’s key points is that for visual tradition to be maintained, it must be periodically reconstructed to fit the changed aspirations of the culture that is linked to it. Without this, states Lord, the images become irrelevant (1992). As is argued in this chapter and Chapter 6, the reconstruction of visual Welshness has been a problematic process. Whilst Lord’s argument that images no longer fitting aspirations of communities have the potential to become irrelevant, during fieldwork, many participants commented (often in frustration) on the resilience of what they considered to be outdated images of Wales/Welshness (such as images of heavy industry). As was discussed in Chapter 2, one of the challenges facing the construction of Welsh culture has been to establish a paradigm of “not Englishness”. Whilst Lord argues that the growing support for political devolution and the weakening of English dominance set the stage for Wales to transcend “this essentially colonialized state of mind” (2000, p.9), he also asserts that it would be “obscurantist to construct a historical tradition of visual culture in which the question of self-identification in the immediate context of England was not central” (Ibid.).

Writing in 1999 Iwan Bala also notes the problematic influence of English colonialism on cultural individuation in Welsh visual art. Bala, like Lord, has written extensively on the genesis of Welsh art. However, whilst Lord focuses on institutional gatekeeping, Bala turns instead to artists themselves, and argues for the recognition of what he terms “custodial aesthetics” (1999). Custodial aesthetics, argues Bala, is the coding of visual artworks with indigenous nuance that connotes the artistic custodianship of cultural memory and history. He states, “[i]n its wider sense it implies a custodianship of cultural memory and an awareness of the importance and fragility of this memory, and of its role in determining our future appearance and identity” (1999, p.12). Bala argues that custodial aesthetics are particularly relevant for so-called minority cultures such as Wales, asserting that custodial aesthetics have allowed artists to claim, preserve, and evolve cultural identity and memory outwith assigned memories or histories foisted upon minority cultures by dominant or colonising majority cultures.

Bala and Lord's arguments primarily address the genesis of Welshness through traditional artforms such as painting and sculpture. However, many of the central tenets of Bala and Lord's arguments are applicable within photography. As such, the following sections explore the prevalence of two dominant tropes of visual Welshness, as identified by both Lord and Bala: landscape and industry. Both tropes were also repeatedly discussed by participants and as Cabuts notes "[i]t can be suggested that as photography became accepted as a creative independent practice, the two key subjects in Wales [...] were timeless landscapes and heavy industry." (2014, n.p.). Whilst this thesis aims to shift discourse beyond established philosophical paradigms of pure representation and structural semiotic meaning-making, acknowledgement of the potency of symbolism in the construction of national ideology is critical. Jäger asserts that "a nation is conceived of through symbols and rites, and the diffusion and acceptance of national symbols belong to the process of forming a nation" (2006, p.117). Lord also notes that by the end of the nineteenth century the possession of national symbols "came to be perceived as essential for peoples aspiring to statehood" (2000, p.247). As argued throughout this thesis, complexity theory advocates for holistic epistemological paradigms and as Tagg asserts, "neither experience nor reality can be separated from the languages, representations, psychological structures and practices in which they are articulated and which they disrupt" (1988, p.4). Therefore, the following sections explore both the two dominant tropes of visual Welshness, and the cultural conditions that formed and maintain them.

3.2.1 *"the textural and the intertextual"*³⁸: *landscapes of Wales*

"[T]he widespread identification of Wales with beautiful landscape is the cumulative effect of a mass of visual images made over a period of more than two hundred years" (Lord, 1998, p.9)

"To record a landscape, not in terms of familiar and clichéd images of its remnant natural beauty, but in terms of our brutal unawareness and disregard for it and its indigenous culture is a radical and necessary enterprise" (Perrin in Morris, 2010, p.9)

As stated at the start of this chapter, photography and contemporary nation-building both proliferated towards the end of the nineteenth century. Alexander notes that many of the photographs that were explicitly connected to national ideologies around this time concerned

³⁸ Excerpt from Jim Perrin's introduction to James Morris' 2010 photobook *A Landscape of Wales*.

landscape (2015), and Jäger argues that many of these were grounded in the aesthetic picturesque movement³⁹. As such, the representation of landscapes as aesthetically composed objects of national significance encouraged an ideological shift in which the recording of space (physical location), became the ideologising of place (psycho-geographical location contingent on social imaginary⁴⁰) (Jäger, 2003; Bala, 2003; Alexander, 2011; Wells, 2015). This allowed photographers to connect place to national culture - as Jäger states, “[i]t was assumed that the physical environment formed the character of its inhabitants” (2003, p.117). Therefore, landscape photography has typically become a site of discourse in the construction and deconstruction of national identities (Wells, 2011). The connection between landscape and national identity is not unique to Wales, but the coding and photo-methodologies of “national landscapes” differ considerably according to the nation they seek to represent (Jäger, 2003; Alexander, 2011).

In Wales, Bala argues that much of the ‘Welsh landscape’ as constructed through artworks has largely been done by and in service of tourists, stating:

Landscape painting has commonly been seen as the closest thing to a Welsh tradition, though it was a tradition initially forged in the romantic imagination of ‘tourist’ artists in the nineteenth century. By and large it remains a product of tourism, in terms of its market or of its making, and bears little relevance to Wales beyond the topographical. Not therefore the ‘pure’ voice of authenticity (1999, p.17)

Although Bala’s argument refers specifically to painting, Jäger also notes that the creation and production of landscape photography in Britain was “boosted by the rise of tourism” (2003, p.122). There is sufficient evidence (both academic and photographic) to support the notion that Wales was consistently photographed by and for the touristic gaze⁴¹, which Jäger argues fostered a sense of collective national “experience” and allowed members of the public who purchased photographs to achieve a pseudo-ownership of the land pictured (2003). Specifically, the practice of photographic tourism proliferated through the production, dissemination, and collection of

³⁹ Jäger describes picturesque in the context of photography as “an aesthetic category between the beautiful and the sublime”, noting that the movement was “an ideology of perception and interpretation of the environment” (2003, p.123).

⁴⁰ The social imaginary refers to a common set of values, symbols, and institutions held between members of a particular society or group. These values typically differentiate the group from other social groups and promote a unique sense of identity. The social imaginary has informed seminal sociological concepts such as Anderson’s Imagined Communities.

⁴¹ The notion of “The Gaze” has been developed across a spectrum of visual studies, cultural studies, and psychoanalysis. Specifically, “the gaze” suggests an act of looking in which there is a power imbalance; whereby the object of the gaze holds less power than the “gazer” (Sturken and Cartwright, 2009). In the context of tourism and colonialism this is particularly significant. In Wales, the objectification of the Welsh countryside as an object of gaze reinforces problematic colonial ideologies and obscures a history of land theft and despoilment such as the drowning of Capel Celyn or the damages wrought by the establishment of the coal industry.

picture postcards (Pritchard & Morgan, 2003; Price, 2020), but also extended to published photographic anthologies. It has been suggested that the earliest (c.1864) photobook concerning Wales was produced by Welsh photographer Robert Napper (Carroll & Hopkins [Macdonald], 2020). Three copies of Napper's *Views in Wales* are held at The National Library of Wales, and the plates included in the book (Fig.12) demonstrate the picturesque approach to national landscape; the formal elements of which include “roughness, irregularity, a mixture of lights and shades, contrast and diversity” (Jäger, 2003, p.123).



Figure 12: *Untitled from Views in Wales* (Napper c.1864 in Dominic Winter Auctioneers, 2019)

Despite the application of picturesque techniques and aesthetics, Bala argues that touristic images of Wales are limited to topographical observation, fail to communicate true Welsh character, and are inherently colonising (1999; 2003). Jäger also notes that despite the possibility

of “regional”⁴² readings, nineteenth century landscape photography typically offered “no distinction between English, Scottish or Welsh views” (2003, p.129). To counteract a colonising gaze constructed by/for others (particularly one that has typically reinforced the conceptualisation of Wales as British, rather than distinctly Welsh), Bala argues that an “authentic” Welsh exploration of landscape requires indigenous abstraction and interpretation, informed by intimate knowledge of cultural context and site-specific cultural memory (1999; 2003). An example of indigenous, interpretive landscape photography can be found in the works of Peter Finnemore. Finnemore’s photographs, which are frequently surreal, utilise landscapes local to Finnemore (typically the garden of his family home Gwendraeth House⁴³) “in order to explore his own identity and as a more general metaphor for Welsh history and culture” (Hourahane, 1999, p.62). Figure 13 demonstrates Finnemore’s use of personal narrative through the inclusion of his shadow in the foreground of the image, which interrupts traditional landscape conventions and asserts his position within the pictured land.



Figure 13: *Gwendraeth House* from *Inheritance* (Finnemore, 1986)

⁴² Jäger’s use of the term “regional” here refers to the separate countries that make up the United Kingdom, and as such he uses the term as a synonym for “national”.

⁴³ *Gwendraeth House* is a “30 year long photographic project” staged across the house and grounds of Finnemore’s family home in which the house becomes “an expression and container of culture and history, Wales as home” (Finnemore, n.d.).

Artworks such as Finnemore's arguably subvert the supposed democratic appeal of photography (Bleyen & Van Gelder, 2011) by introducing both local and personal nuance that obfuscates universal readings of the image. As Wells argues, this has become common practice in contemporary landscape photography that deals with issues of identity:

“Inter-relations of aesthetic discourses and political tensions are taken into account in order to consider ways in which ideologies of nationhood are articulated and resonate through landscape imagery. Contemporary landscape practitioners variously engage with icons of identity. Such engagement is complex because, whilst particular rhetorics that have become woven within landscape practices may be critiques, artists nonetheless in some respects identify with the region that is their homeland. Indeed, radicalism for photographers may be as much as an exploration of self as of the environment” (2011, pp.212-213)

The practice of using landscape to critique discourse regarding national identity has been relatively common in Wales. Typically these works address the way in which land has been altered by industrial development (Price, 2020), giving rise to a formal genre of landscape photography in which industry subsumes the natural landscape through spoil tips, pitheads, and winding gear. Indeed, by the early-mid twentieth century, the picturesque mountains and unspoilt valleys no longer constituted a universal national identity, and were no longer practically available to photograph - particularly in the increasingly industrial south of Wales. As Garrett et al state:

“the folk-centered, rural, green-landscape conception of Wales is itself challenged by a socialist, industrialist and vernacular iconography, focused on the south Wales Valleys, and their iconography of mining, deprivation and political resistance” (Garrett, Coupland, & Bishop, 2005, p.533).

This shift in both physical landscape and Welsh culture represents a point of intersection between the two dominant themes of photographic Welshness - landscape and industry, that still features in the photoworks of artists such as Dan Wood and Roger Tiley. In 1994, Tiley (who, as discussed in 3.2.2, typically photographed mining communities in his native South Wales), sought to address the often overlooked impact of the slate mining industry in North Wales. His series, *Grazing Slateland* (Fig.14) combines elements of the picturesque aesthetic – which was frequently associated with the mountainous Snowdownia region in North Wales (Bala, 1999), with a wider sociocultural narrative about the effect of industry on Welsh geography.



Figure 14: *Untitled* from *Grazing Slateland* (Tiley, 2022)

Although the legacy of the coal and slate industries remain important historical facets of the Welsh identity, and whilst a re-greening both physically and representationally of Wales (the South Wales Valleys in particular) is well underway (Sayell, 2001) the spectre of heavy industry has had a lasting effect on the Welsh psyche (Price, 2020).

3.2.2 The prevailing proletariat: the image of industry

“To the world outside, Wales is still typified by another subject much dealt with in Welsh art, and also one initially imported here. Centred around coal mining and miners, a fascination with the nobility of the miner’s labour betrays the romantic viewpoint of the early practitioners”

(Bala, 1999, p.17).

As will be discussed in 3.4, photographs of coal-blackened miners have ascended to mythological status, thanks in part to the sympathetic and humanising narratives of renowned photographers such as W. Eugene Smith and Robert Frank. However, the context in which Welsh industrial labour has been portrayed is salient. In the early-mid twentieth century, the “iconography of labour, and its joined language of realism” had (in a global context) become associated with communism (Bleyen and Van Gelder, 2011). Indeed, as Cabuts argues, many of the photographic depictions of industrial labour in Wales have been decidedly Marxist in their politics (Cabuts,

2008). Whilst the post-war industrial decline attracted several photographers to Wales⁴⁴, perhaps one of the most well-documented was American photo-essayist, W. Eugene Smith. Smith visited Wales on assignment for *Life Magazine* in 1950 – a period of Welsh history in which “nation building was still very much ‘work in progress’” (Cabuts, 2012, p.14). By the time he arrived in Wales, Smith had been making work for *Life* for three years (Cabuts, 2008) and had an established presence as a photographic documentarian⁴⁵ (Rosenblum, 1997). However, the visibility of Smith’s images was often dictated by both his assignment brief and the political affiliation of his publisher/editor. During the 1950s, under the stewardship of Republican editor Henry Luce, *Life* magazine was openly hostile to the notion of post-war British socialism championed by Labour candidate Clement Atlee (Cabuts, 2012). This was at odds with Smith’s sympathetic images of proletariat Welsh communities, and though Smith made over 200 images in Wales, *Life* published only two of them⁴⁶, one of which - *Three Generations of Welsh Miners* (Figure 15), has since become a significant artefact in the establishment and development of Welsh photography (Ibid.).

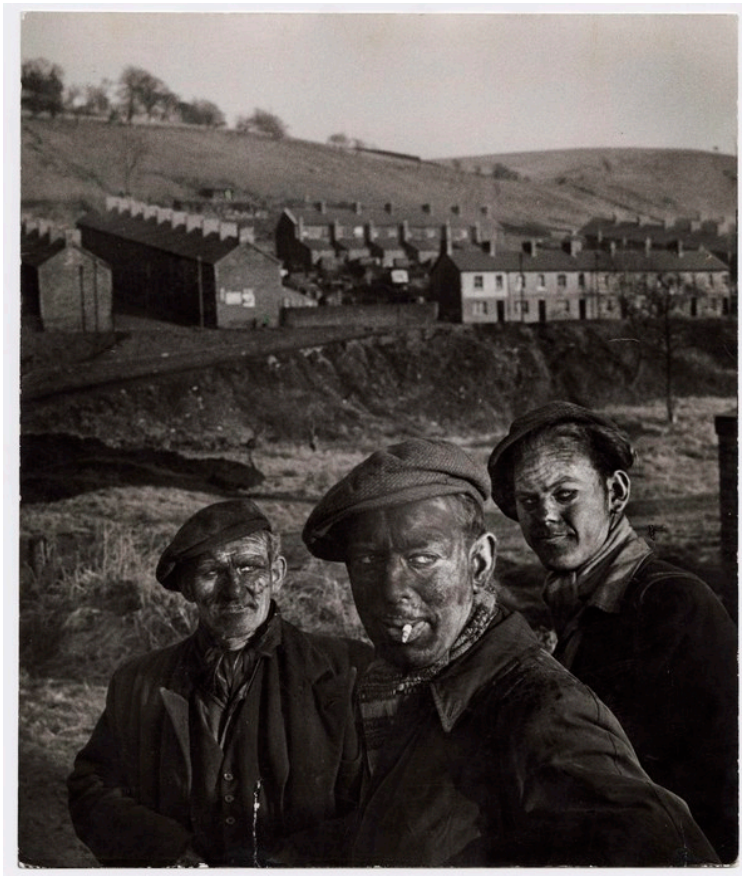


Figure 15: *Three Generations of Welsh Miners* (Smith, 1950 in Cabuts, 2012)

⁴⁴ Amongst others Bernd and Hilla Becher specifically cite the onset of industrial decline as their motivation to photograph in Wales (Cabuts, 2012).

⁴⁵ Cabuts describes Smith as “one of the most significant photographers of the twentieth century” (p.4, 2012)

⁴⁶ *Three Generations of Welsh Miners*, and an image of cows in a field that Smith made in rural Glamorgan.

Indeed, *Three Generations of Welsh Miners* is characterised by Cabuts as being an “important component in the building of the nation’s identity” (2012, p.vii). A copy of the image, hand-printed by Smith, was purchased by *Amgueddfa Cymru* for £5,700 in 2010 (Cabuts, 2012) and almost immediately exhibited (Ibid.).

Despite the limitations peripherally imposed by Life, W. Eugene Smith worked with “a strong sense of compassion” (Rosenblum, 1997, p.510), “he thought of his camera as an extension of his conscience and his images as reflections of his need to get to the heart of the matter” (Ibid.). Consequently, Smith’s images of Wales are distinguished by his empathetic humanism which arguably set the tone that has characterised much of the photographic narrative of the Welsh at work (Cabuts, 2012). As Cabuts states:

“When Smith took his photograph of three miners in Coed-Ely one afternoon in January 1950 he captured what would become one of the key images in the history of twentieth century photography. The impact of this image on the subsequent development of photography itself, and on perceptions of Wales and its people, has been significant.” (2012, p.vii).

Retroactively, the prestige of Smith’s career and the growing institutional validation of photography has engendered a revery for Smith’s work, but Cabuts argues that his influence was also significant amongst his contemporaries. Cabuts cites three other photographers (Robert Frank, Bruce Davidson, and Chuck Rapoport), each of whom visited Wales, each of whom made significant photographs depicting Welsh labour, and each of whom cited Smith as influential in their approach to photographing Wales (Cabuts, 2012). Frank’s Welsh work (discussed in more detail in 3.4.1) like Smith’s, provided a general picture of Welsh labour during a specific point in time. Rapoport’s however, is distinct in both its subject matter and its significance in the global imaging of Wales. Indeed, whilst the proletariat miner has typically been a celebrated figure, photographs of Welsh industry have also depicted sociopolitical upheaval and communal tragedy and Rapoport’s photographs (Fig.16) are significant within this narrative (Price, 2020).

On the 21st of October 1966, a wave of slurry⁴⁷ from a colliery spoil tip⁴⁸ cascaded down a hill above the Valleys village of Aberfan. The thick, black waste product of the coal industry engulfed Pantglas Junior School, killing 144 people – 116 of whom were children (Doel and Dunkerton,

⁴⁷ Slurry refers to a mixture of coal and water, that typically takes on a thick, tar-like texture.

⁴⁸ A spoil tip (sometimes referred to as a “slag heap”), is a man-made pile of waste material generated by coal mining. In Aberfan, spoil tips were constructed on top of hills surrounding the village. Villagers had reported that Tip 7 – which hit Pantglas Junior School, was increasingly unstable, but their worries went largely uninvestigated by the relevant authorities and the National Coal Board.

1991). The Aberfan Disaster received significant global media coverage, and horrifying photographs of miners retrieving the bodies of their children from the wreckage thrust an image of the harsh consequences of the coal industry into the global public domain (Price, 2020). Amongst the photographers present in the immediate aftermath of the disaster were David Hurn and Ian Berry, both of whom were already established documentary photographers, and who covered the raw days immediately following the tragedy (Ibid.). Once the initial media furore receded, American photographer Chuck Rapoport travelled from the United States to Aberfan and documented the months after the tragedy, without sensationalism, and with a humanist tone that was directly influenced by W. Eugene Smith (Cabuts, 2012). The significance of the Aberfan disaster transcended visual representation and became instrumental in a series of ongoing tensions between mining communities and institutions such as the National Coal Board. As Price writes: “Aberfan was not just a tragedy; it was also the single most important factor in reshaping the landscape of the Welsh mining valleys in the next few decades” (2020, p.37).



Figure 16: A tip worker climbs to the very top of tip #7 that had given way and crashed into the village below (Rapoport, 1966)

In the years following the Aberfan tragedy, the mining industry was dominated by sociopolitical turbulence, exacerbated by Thatcher’s Conservative government and resulting in widespread industrial action (Cabuts, 2012; Price, 2020). During the mid-1980s the miners strikes across Wales (as well as the North East of England) garnered significant media attention. Due in part to the highly politicised climate generated through the strike action, most photographic

accounts of the 1984/1985 miner's strikes were taken by "outsiders" in the form of photojournalists commissioned by largely right-leaning newspapers (Price, 2020). However, as mentioned in 3.2.1, Valleys-born photographer Roger Tiley extensively photographed both the miners at work and the strikes throughout the 1980 and 1990s. Tiley's images of the strikes (Fig.17) were unusual for their empathic insider depiction of striking miners who had largely been vilified by wider media outlets. Many of Tiley's images were published by the few union-supporting broadsheets such as *The Guardian* (Tiley, n.d.), though Tiley notes that a Fleet Street picture editor reprimanded him for his personal involvement (following an incident in which Tiley claims he punched a police officer), stating "you are a witness, not a participant" (Ibid.). The juxtaposition between photographers who identify as insiders and those deemed to be outsiders was a significant theme during fieldwork conversations and is explored in more detail in Chapter 6.



Figure 17: *Untitled from 1984/1985 Miners' Strike* (Tiley, 2022)

Viewed in a broad socio-political context, photographs from both the miner's strikes and the Aberfan disaster depict the final, painful years of the coal industry in Wales. Whilst the decline of heavy industry was perhaps inevitable, deindustrialisation has had devastating cultural and economic consequences – particularly in South Wales (Burgess & Moles, 2016). The decline of industry, and its prolonged traumatic effects on the landscape have also rendered some of the

key established visual images of Wales redundant, particularly in a contemporary context. As Garrett et al note, “contemporary images of depopulated and impoverished ex-mining communities might from this perspective be the more appropriate visual icons” (2005, p.533). Indeed, the destruction of large swathes of landscape, and almost the entire industrial workforce has facilitated a contemporary condition in which the majority of Welsh cultural icons are those of history (Perrin, 2010; Bala, 1999). As Welsh poet R.S. Thomas writes:

“There is no present in Wales,
And no future;
There is only the past,
Brittle with relics” (1955)

3.2.3 *Who’s taffing now: (the lack of) contemporary Welsh visual identities*

“If nationality is not necessarily linked to language, if it is neither simply a matter of geographical residency, then is it a matter of rugby and singing?” (Curtis, 1986, p.8)

“Cultural incoherence of this kind and the lack of confidence manifested by people in such situations inhibit the development of new imagery characteristic of the indigenous culture complex” (Lord, 1992, p.8)

As discussed previously, a significant period in the creation of a distinct Welsh identity has involved a struggle for legitimacy against Englishness - as Bala notes, Welsh cultural history has been strongly based “on a language of difference” (1999, p.14). Often this has resulted in Wales suffering from under-representation (or being entirely ignored) in transnational media, and as such there is a relative paucity of archetypes of modern Welshness. As Curtis states, “Jock and Paddy are clear and definite characters, but Taffy⁴⁹ is more elusive” (1986, p.12). As noted above, visual representations of Welshness have typically been characterised by the tendency to mythologise landscape and industry, which Bala argues has often occurred at the expense of aspirational or future-looking representations of Welshness (1999). The focus that Welsh culture awards to both lived and imagined history is a salient consideration in the context of Welsh national identity; as Johnes states, history is a “defining constituent” of Welsh identity (2015, p.667).

⁴⁹ “Taffy” is a derogatory fictional Welsh character created in the English language poem, *Taffy was a Welshman (Taffy was a thief)*. Much like the Scottish character “Jock”, Taffy has taken on significance as a maligned national caricature. The author of Taffy was a Welshman is unknown, but the poem is believed to have surfaced during the eighteenth century.

Both Lord (1999) and Crawford (1978) have argued that the creation and subsequent maintenance of a distinct history of Welsh art is critical to the proliferation of a future Welsh identity. As argued in Chapter 2, Wales has traditionally suffered from cultural amalgamation with England/Britain, leading to few unique representations of Welshness that are discernable in global culture (Day, 2002). However, the issue of a unified visual representation transcends English/Welsh tensions and also occurs in intra-Welsh contexts. For example, the abundance of mining-related imagery that has dominated the visual characterisation of Wales has contributed to a problematic south Wales-centric representation of pan-Welsh identity (Price, 2020; Cabuts, 2012). Indeed, Rees argues that the more rural North and West regions of Wales tend towards outright “rejection” of the industrial, majority English-speaking South as “rootless nonentities”, that do not represent Welshness (Rees, 1996 in Day, 2002, p.213). Therefore as well as fueling further division within Wales, the South-Welsh centric conceptualisations of Wales and Welshness have contributed to a problem with contemporary identity. Whilst the miner demonstrably endures as a historical legend of Welsh culture, his place in modern Wales has begun to draw criticism. Indeed, challenges to the traditionally male cisgender archetypes of the Welsh citizen have gained scholarly attention. As Lewis writes, “[t]he miner, rugby player, the nonconformist preacher and the male voice choir are myths that have endured” (1995, p.153). She cites the male proletariat as the catalyst for the predominantly masculine stereotypes of Welshness, noting that the process of deindustrialisation has contributed to the lack of recognisable contemporary Welsh identity for male, female, or non-binary people. As is discussed in Chapter 6, this is also noted by participants, who comment on both the lack of female representation within traditional Welsh culture and the more general gender disparity in photography (in terms of both photographic and professional representation).

As both Curtis (1986) and Williams (1985) state, the process of creating Wales involves imagining. In *Imaging the Nation*, Lord argues that despite evidence of a rich history of diverse figures represented in Welsh art, the limited array of cultural figures within international contexts has contributed to a lack of representation that continues to damage the cohesion of Welsh national identity. As such, Lord asserts that the lack of recognisable Welsh identity is an “insidious myth” (p.65), arguing that the myth significantly contributed to “the failure of the nation to manifest itself in political institutions” (Ibid). Lord’s argument therefore hinges on the politics of representation, which have largely been upheld by patriarchal or colonial political and cultural institutions. The importance of institutional validation to national identity was explored in Chapter 2, and as Lord argues Wales has typically struggled to achieve authoritative institutional presence

within a global context (1992). With this in mind, the following section explores the relationships between cultural institutions and the ongoing development of Welsh photography.

3.3 Gatekeeping Visual Welshness

“In a nation whose significant images were not generally made within the framework of academic art, this led not to the devaluation of Welsh visual culture but to the denial of its very existence” (Lord, 2009, p.60)

“In our search for Wales, it is important to understand how concepts of relevance are formed, by whom and with what effect.” (Crawford, 1997, p.3).

Although artists or photographers might produce artworks intended to have national meaning, for a national art to be recognised as such in international contexts, it typically must be validated through publication, exhibition, or through being the subject of state patronage (Lord, 1992; Jones, 2013). Bleyen & Van Gelder argue that institutions therefore have typically acted as gatekeepers within national photography; in curation, exhibition, commissioning, and preserving of national artworks, they “actively shape and construct” the very notion of photographic national identity (2011, p.111). The role of cultural institutions in shaping and maintaining nationhood forms the conceptual foundation for many well-established theories of nationalism (Williams, 2019). Therefore, this section focuses on the role of institutional gatekeeping in the nationalising of photographic products and practices in and of Wales. As such, it foregrounds Chapter 5 of this thesis, which considers gatekeepers and institutions as part of the environment⁵⁰ in which the complex system of Welsh photography functions.

Despite hosting and generating several notable photographers during the 1950’s and 1960’s⁵¹, the concept of “a Welsh photography” during this period “was almost non-existent” (Cabuts, 2014, n.p). Cabuts argues that the notion of a Welsh photography only surfaced in the 1970s when it “emerged from an institutional advocacy for photography in Wales” (2012, p.111). Growing Arts Council support for photography during the 1970s engendered several institutions and organisations that were crucial for the development of British photography (Cabuts, 2012).

⁵⁰ As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, complex systems typically function within a specific environment, which helps shape and identify the system through the proliferation of emergent behaviour and the circulation of feedback loops.

⁵¹ Visitors during this period include both W. Eugene Smith and Robert Frank, each of whom had well-established careers as photographers by the time they visited Wales. As did David Hurn, who returned to Wales in the aftermath of the Aberfan disaster.

Cabuts cites “photography-specific galleries”, publications such as *Creative Camera*, and “education in photography” as beneficiaries of increased Arts Council investments (2012, p.108). In an essay published in the exhibition catalogue for the Museum of Modern Art’s 1990 exhibition *British Photography from the Thatcher Years*⁵², Kismaric also establishes the rough start of the developmental timeline of contemporary ‘British Photography’ as around the start of the 1970s. She states:

“commercial and artistic photographs were being made in Britain throughout the twentieth century, however they lacked a cohesive and visible context: they had not been organized into collections, published in books, orchestrated as exhibitions or analysed in doctoral theses.” (p.6).

Kismaric’s point here is salient and supports both Lord (1992) and Cabuts’ assertions that it was institutional advocacy, rather than artistic output that validated the concept of British (and latterly Welsh) art and photography. Using these insights as a point of departure, this section examines the influence of galleries, publications, and educational institutions that have acted as cultural gatekeepers within Welsh photography.

3.3.1 Galleries, museums, archives, & publications

“[P]ublic institutions, such as galleries and museums, decide which pictures are considered important enough to be acquired and added to a country’s art collection. Over time and with repeated appearance, these pictures contribute to a country’s sense of its unique identity”

(Alexander, 2015, p.146)

“National museums are one of the most important expressions of nineteenth century nationalism, and Wales was slow, in European terms, to acquire this central symbol of identity”

(Lord, 1992, p.31)

As described above, Lord argues that for a national artistic “tradition” to be established, collections of artworks need to be “activated” through institutional integration into an “intellectual structure” (1992, p.7). That role has largely been fulfilled by national galleries and museums through a process of “claiming, articulating and representing dominant national values, myths and realities”, often patronised by state organisations (Aronsson & Elgenius, 2011, p.5; Jones, 2013). However, photography’s role within national heritage sites has historically been utilitarian; photographs allowed curators and archivists to catalogue objects and artworks worthy of national collections,

⁵² *British Photography from the Thatcher Years* took place at the Museum of Modern Art in New York from 14th February until the 28th of April 1990.

or provided contextual documentary evidence to existing collections, but typically did not constitute medium-specific collections (Orvell, 2003; Badger, 2007; Zurokmskis, 2008). In other words, photographs were valued for the objects they depicted, but not as objects worth collecting themselves (McWilliams, 2009). This resulted in a largely unstructured integration of photographs into collections and archives, often as supplementary material (Crawford, 1978). As such, widespread acceptance of photographs into heritage collections and the establishment of photography-specific galleries required a substantial paradigm shift in the conceptualisation of photography from an objective mechanical reproduction to a creative art object. In turn, this engendered what Badger describes as “a kind of gallery apartheid system” (2007, p.211) in which photographs by “artists” generated significantly more interest (and thus had a higher market value) than those by “mere photographers” (Ibid.).

Whilst both fields of study are outwith the scope of this thesis, it is worth noting that there is a considerable body of both literature and artwork devoted to the role of cultural institutions such as museums, galleries, and archives as authoritative gatekeeping forces of cultural collective memory (Sekula, 1986; Foucault, 1998; Edwards, 2011; Abdullah and Khadaroo, 2022). Similarly, there is a significant collection of postmodern scholarship that explores the relationship between photography and the gallery (Crimp, 1993; Solomon-Godeau, 1994; Stylianou, 2014). In Wales, there is a growing body of scholarship that addresses the role cultural institutions such as galleries and museums have in imagining both the past and future of Welsh national identity (Lord, 1992; McAleavey, 2013). Many of these studies explore narratives of colonialism (Jones, 2007; O’Connor, 2009; Rallager & Rafferty, 2012) and indicate the salience of concepts discussed by Lord (1992) – including the mistreatment, loss, lack of investment, and misclassification of Welsh art and the related consequences for Welsh identity and culture. However, despite this encouraging development, there is comparatively little literature specifically addressing the role of photographic institutions and archives within Wales. This is likely to reflect both the troubled relationship between photography and art/heritage culture, and the significant struggle for validation encountered by Welsh art. As Lord notes, national museums were typically established to assert both “the peculiarity of the nation they symbolized” and “the high quality of its culture” (1992, p.32). Unfortunately, as Lord points out, those in the position to judge “high quality” tended instead towards “high culture” (1992). Therefore, the historically problematic position of photography as art, coupled with the equally problematic position of distinct Welsh culture contributed to a significant gap in the presence and acknowledgment of Welsh photography in cultural institutions.

One of the only academic critiques of the photographic institutions in Wales was written in 1978, long after the establishment of the *National Museum Wales* (1927), by artist and academic Alistair Crawford. In his article, Crawford argues that despite exemplary attempts from both the Welsh Arts Council and various Higher Education (HE) establishments, the lack of “coordinated patronage” (1978, p.17) and specialist curation had created a deficit in both the history and future of Welsh photography. Specifically, Crawford cites piecemeal photographic collections scattered across Wales in both national institutions and private collections. He expresses concern about the conservation and accessibility of these collections as artefacts pertaining to the history of Welsh photography, which he considers to be substantially underwritten (1978). The solution, Crawford argues, would be the establishment of “a Photographic Gallery for Wales” (Ibid.), the standard for which he measures against several similar galleries established in England and Scotland⁵³. Crawford’s vision for the gallery was ambitious; the establishment of a country-wide exhibition circuit, commissions, a survey of all existing collections of Welsh photography, the creation and maintenance of a centralised collection that actively gathered the work of contemporary Welsh photographers whilst also gathering photographs, plates, and negatives relating to Welsh photographic history, public engagement, research, and the publishing of a journal were amongst his suggestions for the prospective gallery (1978).

Since Crawford’s article was published, most of his requirements for a gallery of Welsh photography have variously been attempted (if not fulfilled) across Wales - though never by a single institution, as he had envisioned. Nonetheless, a few months after Crawford’s article was published, the first iteration of a dedicated Welsh photography space was established as *Yr Oriol Ffotograffeg, Caerdydd*⁵⁴ (The Photographic Gallery, Cardiff). Yr Oriol Ffotograffeg (YOF) was the result of the success of a series of photography lectures organised by Magnum photographer David Hurn (Cabuts, 2012). As Cabuts writes, “[a]s a direct result of the lectures, fifty people met at Chapter Arts centre in Cardiff in May 1978 to discuss the establishment of a centre for photography in Wales” (2012, p.111). From this meeting, a working committee was formed in which it was decided that the gallery should “promote photography in Wales in its widest possible context, through demonstration, exhibition, education, and encouragement” (Ibid). The group were successful in applying for Welsh Arts Council funding, and the gallery launched on Charles

⁵³ Specifically, Crawford cites “The Photographer’s Gallery, London; The Photographic Gallery, Southampton; Impressions Gallery, York; Stills, Edinburgh; Side, Newcastle; The Half-Moon Workshop, London” (1978, p.14), stating that these galleries provided a “circuit” for exhibitions and were responsible for commissioning artworks from (and thus financially supporting) contemporary photographers (Ibid).

⁵⁴ Notably, despite being a Cardiff-based institute - and thus traditionally more likely to favour the English language, YOF actively pursued a synergetic connection with the Welsh language that continues to inform their institutional identity (Ffotogallery, 2020).

Street in Cardiff (Cabuts, 2012; Drake, 2018). Through various directors between 1978-1981 the gallery hosted a variety of exhibitions showcasing prominent international and Welsh photographers but began to attract criticism from the Welsh Arts Council for what was perceived to be a focus on international artists at the expense of supporting Welsh talent (Ibid.). Therefore, following what Drake describes as “strained” relations between then director Bill Messer and the management committee (which resulted in Messer’s eventual resignation), YOF reaffirmed their commitment to promoting and developing photographic practice in Wales, and “[t]he gallery undertook a facelift, part of which was to rename itself as *The Ffotogallery*” (Cabuts, 2012, pp.114-115) – which was eventually shortened to its current moniker, *Ffotogallery*⁵⁵.

Since then, Ffotogallery has continued to intermittently fulfil many of Crawford’s aspirations for a photographic gallery in Wales. From 1982 to 1985, Ffotogallery published a quarterly journal (*Ffotoview*), and in 1984 director Susan Beardmore announced the inaugural exhibition of *The Valleys Project*: a commissioned longform photographic survey of the South Wales Valleys undertaken by sixteen photographers⁵⁶. Whilst their success and significance in the development of Welsh photography is ongoing (in 2018 they celebrated their fortieth year of operation with a series of events, exhibitions,⁵⁷ and publications), Ffotogallery’s position within Welsh photography is no longer singular. Over several decades numerous regional galleries with significant space dedicated to photography have been established⁵⁸, a variety of photography festivals (including Ffotogallery’s own Diffusion festival) have been launched⁵⁹, and several prominent national heritage institutions such as the National Museum Wales, Cardiff (NMW) have invested in photography-specific exhibition spaces and events. The proliferation of smaller

⁵⁵ This final iteration of the gallery’s name suggests that the institution seeks to maintain its alignment with the Welsh language (as indicated by the blending of the Welsh word “ffotograffiaeth” with the English word “gallery”) but has also recognized a perceived need to adopt a pan-Welsh approach that does not alienate the majority non-Welsh speaking native population. Ffotogallery has since published a series of publicly accessible reports reaffirming its commitment to Welsh language access. The latest of these documents details a seven-point action plan, designed to “treat the English and Welsh languages as equal as is both appropriate and reasonable in the circumstances” (2020).

⁵⁶ The Valleys Project retains a significant place in the history of Welsh photography and forms the majority of Ffotogallery’s archival collection. Cabuts (2012), Drake (2018), and Price (2020) have produced extensive writing addressing the creation and importance of the project.

⁵⁷ Specifically, the occasion was marked with an exhibition entitled *Ffotoview* (after the now defunct journal produced by the gallery during the 1980s). The exhibition, which served to reaffirm the institution’s ongoing authority in Welsh photography displayed work from 12 contemporary photographers (Suzie Larke, Amanda Jackson, Dan Wood, Megan Winstone, Ellie Hopkins [Macdonald], Ayesha Khan, Sam Ivin, Rob Hudson, Ani Saunders, Jason Thomas, Ann Davies, and Abbie Trayler-Smith, all of whom overtly examined themes relating to Wales or Welsh culture.

⁵⁸ Including (but not limited to): *Third Floor Gallery*, Cardiff (2010-2016); *Oriel Colwyn*, Colwyn Bay; *ffotogaleri y gofeb*, Machynlleth; *Tilt Shift*, Llanrwst; *Thru The Lens*, Hay-on-Wye; *The Kickplate Project*, Abertillery (2013-2014); *76m²*, Pontypool; *The Workers Gallery*, Ynyshir; and *Ffoto Newport*, Newport.

⁵⁹ *The Eye Festival* based in Aberystwyth and *The Northern Eye*, based in Colwyn Bay and centered around the photography gallery *Oriel Colwyn*.

photography-specific galleries can likely be attributed to the growing appreciation for photography as a form of artistic expression, though there are several factors unique to Wales in the individual manifestos of some of the smaller institutions. Many of these pertain to preventing a Cardiff-centric stronghold in Welsh photography (Carroll, 2018), but several also cite a desire to show work that is international, or that challenges established stereotypes of Wales as “miners or depressing Valleys towns” (Ibid.). As Cabuts writes, “[e]ach gallery will have its own particular emphasis regarding the photography it shows”, concluding “diversity is, of course, a good thing” (2018, p.6).

Critically, as photography institutions have multiplied across Wales, so too have photographic archives and collections. As such, the unified photographic collection envisioned by Crawford has yet to fully materialise. The proliferation of archival collecting and curating within national contexts has had a significant impact on the relationship between photography and national identity (Schwartz, 2015; Ireland & Ellis, 2005). As Schwartz argues, “photographs and photographic archives served as sources of visual coherence to generate a sense of belonging to a community and to foster the idea of nation.” (2015, p.20). In other words, the proliferation of photographs within national archives serves to underline the capacity of photography to both create and reinforce national ideologies. Crawford was cognisant of this, and specifically stated the importance of building an historical archive, noting that several archives of historical Welsh photography exist across several cultural institutions⁶⁰, but lamenting the lack of a centralised catalogue or proper custodianship. As such, Crawford’s aspirations seem primarily to have been salvaging, protecting, and contextualising photographs relevant to the history of Welsh photography. His vision was for “The Photographic Gallery for Wales” to take charge of a unified catalogue of all collections, regardless of their physical location, whilst also providing “conservation, storage, and historical expertise” (1978, p.20). History is a significant factor in nation-making (Williams, 2019), and as such the practices of assembling and preserving historical photographic archives carry much weight (Edwards & Mead, 2013; Bate, 2015). Therefore, to return to Cabuts’ point, perhaps in archives as in galleries, diversity should be celebrated and maintained. This is not to suggest that Crawford recommended a totalizing approach to Welsh photographic history; on the contrary, much of Crawford’s argument advocates for collecting work of Welsh photographic artists he considers to have been overlooked in established collections (1978). However, the notion of a singular institution, regardless of good intentions,

⁶⁰ Specifically, Crawford cites collections at “National Museum of Wales, The Welsh Folk Museum at St. Fagans, the Royal Institution of South Wales (University College Swansea) and the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth” (1978, p.20).

authoring history is problematic. Therefore, whether deliberately or not, the photography archives and galleries of Wales remain spread out across several regional institutions, each of whom collect, commission, and exhibit according to different curatorial purpose⁶¹.

Writing in 1978, what Crawford could not perhaps have envisaged is the impact of online collecting, exhibiting, and sharing of photographic work. During the twenty first century, the Internet has exponentially expanded the volume and reach of photographs (Bate, 2015; Rubinstein, 2020). The proliferation of online sharing – particularly through social media platforms has significantly democratised the creation and maintenance of photographic collections, as well as altering the ways in which those collections are interacted with publicly (Rubinstein and Sluis, 2008). Critically, the ability of online communities to co-create networked collections has radically altered notions of collecting and exhibiting (Bate, 2015). However, whilst there is a growing body of academic literature addressing the nature of photographs in online spaces, many established photographic museums and galleries are failing to meaningfully take advantage of the potential for participatory exhibition and archival practice offered by the Internet (Dewdney, 2013). Therefore, where established cultural or heritage institutions are failing to engage, smaller online institutions have formed, generating networked discourse around photography - primarily through social media. As such, some of the functions of “The Photographic Gallery for Wales” envisaged by Crawford are now fulfilled by smaller institutions in online settings. For example, in early 2015 Brian Carroll and Emyr Young jointly launched the photography-oriented podcast (and accompanying website) *Ffoton*. Centered around longform audio conversations with photographers, Ffoton’s presence within Welsh photography traverses both online and offline spaces and has grown to include small exhibitions⁶² and “socials” in which photographers meet to discuss recent work. Ffoton’s ethos is grounded in grass-roots independence rather than state-affiliated nationalism, and their website states that “Ffoton was born, frankly, out of frustration” (n.d.), citing a high volume of photographers operating in Wales, yet remaining “undiscovered” (Ibid.). As such, Ffoton’s mission to “seek out both established and aspiring photographers who deserve more recognition in Wales and beyond” (Ibid.), transposes several of Crawford’s requirements to an online setting, without funding or explicit national agenda. Independence and

⁶¹ The only photographic collection specifically labelled with the title “National” is currently held at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth (NLW). The collection, containing some 950,000 images (The National Library of Wales, n.d.) is entitled *The National Collection of Welsh Photographs*, and includes “views of Wales, the work of Welsh photographers and photographs of Welsh personalities” (Ibid.).

⁶² In 2018, Ffoton collaborated with a team at the EYE Festival, Aberystwyth to curate an exhibition from a collection of photographs grouped under the hashtag #portraitycymru. This innovative use of online collecting and commissioning underlines the paradigm shift enacted by the Internet and expands the potential for groups such as Ffoton to mobilise with relatively little public funding.

grass-roots mobilisation has also characterised the final significant development in Welsh photography; publishing.

Whilst photography publishing was mentioned only briefly in Crawford's 1978 article, in a 1984 edition of *Ffotoview*, he published a second article expressing concern at the position of photography in Welsh publishing. The article, *Towards a Welsh Photography*, notes that photography books in Wales tend to position the photographs as an adjunct to "literature, poetry, politics or tourism" (1984, p.7), rather than allowing the photographs alone to constitute a narrative. Specifically, Crawford is critical of *Llun A Chân*, a book of photographs by Ron Davies, in which - much to Crawford's disappointment, the publisher has supplemented the photographs with Welsh language poetry, rather than letting the images form the primary narrative of the book (1984). Crawford's specific concern is the juxtaposition of photographs (which he considers to be a universal language), with Welsh language poetry, which he believes diminishes the appeal of the book amongst non-Welsh speakers (1984). However, whilst Crawford's opening statement is "[u]ntil recently the publication of books on Welsh photography has been non-existent" (1984, p.7) Cabuts argues that the most visible sign of the support and development of Welsh photography in the late seventies/early eighties was the 1982 photographic anthology *Cymru'r Camera (Photographers Wales)*, edited by Marian Delyth (2012). He asserts that the book "illustrates the arrival of creative photography in Wales" (2012, p.112), though in the book's introduction, Delyth writes⁶³ "[i]n a country whose literary culture is held in high esteem the amount of books for those who wish to communicate through pictures is small" (1982, p.3). Since Delyth's book and Crawford's article were published however, the growth of the photobook industry has been significant (Jones, 2019), and the collection of photobooks associated with Wales has rapidly expanded (Carroll and Hopkins, 2020). Similarly, in 2018, *Ffoton* co-founder Brian Carroll launched *Offline Journal*, a biannual print-only publication showcasing writing and photographs related to Welsh photography, and arguably filling the gap left by *Ffotoview* since it ceased publication in 1985. The growth of photographic galleries and publications in Wales coincided with increased investment in photographic education, and though Crawford does not mention education in his 1978 article, *Ffotogallery* and several HE institutions across Wales have contributed to the development of a "generous" offering in photography education throughout Wales (Sritharan, 2015).

⁶³ Delyth's original text was published only in Welsh. This English-language translation was kindly provided by Emyr Young.

3.3.2 Education

As described above, due in part to increased Arts Council investment, the 1970s marked the start of a significant period of institutional growth for photography in both Wales and the UK (McWilliams, 2009). However, galleries and heritage sites were not the only beneficiaries of this patronage. In 1973 David Hurn, a prolific Wales-based photographer and member of the Magnum photography agency was approached by Peter Jones of the Welsh Arts Council about the possibility of teaching documentary photography at Newport College of Art (McWilliams, 2009; Cabuts, 2012). The course was to be part of the Training Opportunities Scheme (TOPS), which was designed to provide a pathway into employment. Hurn's considerable professional network and experience of being a working photographer (Hurn had a substantial career in photojournalism and fashion photography during the 1960s) made him an attractive prospect in a course that was decidedly industry focused. Indeed, during the initial planning phase for the course Hurn reports that he consulted *Picture Post* picture editor Sir Tom Hopkinson, as well as fellow photographers Don McCullin and Ian Berry, asking them "if you were saying to somebody the essential things of what you do – what are they?" (Hurn in Carroll, 2018). Hurn subsequently adopted a pedagogical approach rooted in professional documentary practice and networking that characterised his tenure on the course. Cabuts describes the course as "a key development in photographic education in Britain during the early 1970s", further noting that the course "rapidly developed a reputation for excellence in teaching photography rooted in the tradition of documentary reportage" (Cabuts, 2012, p.109).

Although there were a wide range of sociocultural and political contexts at play, Hurn's course also played a significant role in shaping photography in/of Wales (Cabuts, 2012). To return to Bleyen and Van Gelder's original thesis, national photography typically includes "schools, styles, towering authors" and "photographic 'innovations' that could be labelled as national." (2011, p.112). Hurn's pedagogies, informed by his own documentary style, separated the Newport course from the other (limited) offerings in British photography education during the 1970s, including a diploma delivered jointly by Derby College of Art and Trent Polytechnic that, in contrast with Hurn's documentary-informed teaching, capitalised on a blend of academic theory with a wide range of photographic genres (McWilliams, 2009). Indeed, Cabuts argues that students of Hurn's course graduated with "a unique set of characteristics" (Cabuts in Carroll, 2018 p.21), which he describes as "creative skill, married with a strong understanding of the competitive pressures of photography" (Ibid). Specifically, Hurn encouraged students to engage in documentary projects that would lead to publication; mobilising contact sheets and lectures from his Magnum colleagues to identify and teach core principles of journalistic storytelling. In 1979 Hurn's pedagogical

approach led to the development of the Newport Survey; a longform annual photography project in which students of the course “sought to document different areas of life in Newport’s changing communities” (Ibid.). Images from the survey were published annually and exhibited across Wales (Cabuts, 2014). The success of the survey inspired the launch of Ffotogallery’s The Valleys Project, and cemented Newport as an international centre for photographic education. As such, the renown of Newport was also significant in the genesis of photography in/of Wales because it connected Wales to photography in international contexts. The course was complemented with a series of internationally respected guest and part-time lecturers including Keith Arnatt, Martin Parr, Josef Koudelka, Daniel Meadows, and Chris Steele Perkins (Cabuts, 2014). In turn, the course produced students who have since become internationally respected photographers (alumni include Tish Murtha⁶⁴, Simon Norfolk, and Paul Reas), the majority of whom continue to produce work that bears the hallmarks of Hurn’s documentary approach.

Due primarily to its success as a vocational course, Hurn was resistant to the idea of the Newport course becoming a qualification-bearing degree, citing the imposition of associated HE frameworks that he considered to be largely incompatible with his industry-centric pedagogies. However, despite Hurn’s reticence, Newport College of Art eventually became the University of Wales, Newport, and the accompanying structural changes contributed to his eventual resignation in 1989 (McWilliams, 2009). As Hurn states,

“[t]he breaking point for me was when they wanted us to become a BA course and I said, I’m sorry, what you’re actually saying is you want us to become a course which at least one third of it is going to be chat about theory, which I don’t believe in” (2018, p.20)

Following Hurn’s departure, the Documentary Photography course continued to run at the University of Newport, and although Hurn has frequently stated that it bears little resemblance to his original programme, the course still exists as both an undergraduate and postgraduate programme at University of South Wales, who continue to market it as having been “established by Magnum photographer David Hurn” (University of South Wales, 2022). Further, whilst Hurn’s course at Newport was one of the first of its kind, it was not (and is not) the only photography education on offer in Wales. Indeed, Cabuts notes that during the 1970s:

⁶⁴ Murtha’s entrance to the course has become a well-publicised anecdote often recounted by Hurn. When interviewing for a position on the course Murtha who grew up in a marginalised community in North East England, responded to Hurn’s question of “why do you want to study here” by expressing a desire to photograph “police kicking kids”, to which Hurn famously responded, “you’re in”.

“The Welsh Arts Council, along with the educational establishments at the Newport School of Art and Design, University College Cardiff, and indeed University College of Wales Aberystwyth, where Alistair Crawford taught, were providing material support for the development of photography in and about Wales” (2012, pp.111-112).

Photographic education is now widespread, particularly in HE settings (Francisco, 2007), and the range of courses available in Wales remains generous. However, the pedagogies delivered in the original iteration of Hurn’s course at Newport College of Art continue to be unique and to reflect Hurn’s personal approach to photography informed by both his professional practice and his membership to Magnum (McWilliams, 2009). As such, the course contributed to the developing but contentious understanding that photography in and of Wales has a particular specificity.

3.4 Shooting the Dragon

“Wales will have to wait some time into the future, however, for a systematic, serious, self examination of the use of photography as the independent language it is” (Crawford, 1984, p.7)

“I came to Wales because of photography” (Meadows, 2018, p.4)

The proliferation of national photography at both institutional and civic levels has arguably accelerated over the last decade, particularly within the UK, where poignant discourse about national and supra-national identities have occupied the public sphere. However, the question of Welsh photography is – as variously discussed above, characteristically complex. The previous two sections explored the proliferation of Welsh photography through the creation and maintenance of visual tropes, and the legitimization and gatekeeping of Welsh photography at institutional level. However, one crucial dialogue remains; for something to be Welsh photography, should the photographer be Welsh? Howells argues that the cultural background of a photographer excludes them from making “national” work in a country in which they are not native (2002). Cabuts argues instead that photographs made in/of a particular region qualify those photographs to be considered as part of the nation’s photographic tradition, citing the potential of those images to influence other (native and visiting) photographers, and to be collected/exhibited by national institutions. This, argues Cabuts, contributes to the visual imagining of a nation (2012) and exerts considerable influence on the way in which Wales regards itself (Lord, 1992; Bala, 1999). Therefore, the following sections divide the development of Welsh photography between two lenses (both conceptual and photographic): the work of photographers who have visited but are

not indigenous to Wales⁶⁵ and the work(s) of photographers who are indigenous to Wales. All the work discussed below was made in Wales and overtly considers Welsh identity and culture. The photographers discussed in this section have been selected either because they had access to notably wide-reaching platforms and as such were able to inform the way in which Wales was seen on a global stage, or because their works have been collected, published, or exhibited by national institutions.

3.4.1 *The visiting lens*

“Wales is firstly seen and learned as an art construct, derived from the interpretations of others.”
(Crawford, 1997, p.3).

“Obviously, the photographer who comes [...] to the Valleys will not be able to know the place with the complexity and subtlety of a resident. But will that be detrimental to the actual pictures? Indeed, while losing in depth, his or her view may gain in clarity.” (Walker, 1985, n.p.)

In his seminal text *Ways of Seeing*, Berger remarks “[t]he eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world” (1972, p.9). It has been argued that much of the British photographic perspective, and its influence on British nationality has been identified by the eyes (and lenses) those “others” who both establish and perpetuate stereotypes of Britishness (Chandler, 2016). As Martin Parr asserts in his essay *Foreign Eyes*, people tend to have an “endless fascination with how others see [them]” (2016, p.12). Indeed, in his essay included with Parr’s in the exhibition catalogue for *Strange and Familiar: Britain as Revealed by International Photographers*, Chandler remarks “[i]nvariably in attempting to navigate an unfamiliar country, these photographers brought their personal histories and certain prior expectations with them; forms of received wisdom based on national and cultural stereotypes, would often act as signposts” (2016, p.19). Whilst both Chandler and Parr’s comments were made within the context of British Photography, the validity of this sentiment in relation to Welsh photography is corroborated by both Cabuts (2012) and Walker, who states “[c]oming to the Valleys, one sees it like it is in pictures only overwhelmingly more so. One sees all the clichés, but the trouble is that they seem to be true. Of course – that is how they became clichés!” (1985, n.p.).

⁶⁵ The qualification of “indigenous” is problematic, and as discussed in Chapter 6, is controversial. In the 2015 publication *Post-War to Post-Modern: A Dictionary of Artists in Wales*, authors Jones and Hitchman present a series of requirements (such as birthplace and residential tenure) through which they categorise artists as indigenous or visiting. This framework is discussed fully in Chapter 7 and is adopted in this section.

As Cabuts states, “arguably the Valleys as an imagined place was fixed in the early years of the 1950’s largely, through photography” (2008). As noted in the following section, American photo essayist W. Eugene Smith has had considerable influence on the photographic visualisation of Wales, both retroactively, and during the period of time he made his Welsh work. Indeed, Cabuts argues that Smith’s influence on the photographic imagining of Wales featured in the work of his immediate contemporaries (2012). Therefore, the first photographer considered within this section is that of European (Swiss) photographer, and friend of W. Eugene Smith; Robert Frank. Throughout his significant career Frank typically occupied the position of the “perennial outsider” (Chandler, 2016, p.18), and as such was renowned for the radical socio-political observations he skilfully constructed through a “visiting lens”. His seminal book *The Americans* continues to be a hugely influential cultural artefact due to its unique outsider’s view into post-war American culture. Brookman characterises the significance of Frank’s foreign perspective on American culture as “a mirror reflecting 1950s America through European eyes” (2004, p.4). However, the body of work examined in this section was undertaken by Frank in during the early 1950’s - several years before he began *The Americans*. The work, which Walker Evans described as a “poetic” example of Frank’s photographic “superiority” (Evans, 1955 in Day, 2011) initially garnered little interest, and was a “personal project” (Cabuts, 2012, p.46) of Frank’s rather than a commissioned assignment. It has since been published as a photobook entitled *London/Wales* in which images taken during the same period in bustling post-war London juxtapose those taken in the small mining communities of South Wales.

The work itself primarily focuses on the town of Caerau – which is west of Cardiff, and south of the Valleys. Frank candidly documents 53-year-old Welsh miner Ben James (Fig.18) and his family. Whether consciously or not, Frank paints James as the archetypal Welsh proletariat and the tenderness with which Frank documents James’ life arguably echoes the humanism of Smith’s Welsh work. However, though Frank and Smith share “many links” (Cabuts, 2012, p.46), Frank’s portrait of Valleys life took a different methodological approach to Smith’s. This sentiment is corroborated by Philip Brookman, who in the text booklet that accompanies the 2004 reissue of Frank’s *London/Wales*, writes “as Frank grew close to the miners and their families, his photographs took in the full scope of their lives, warming as he moved beyond documentary conventions to express a personal point of view” (2004, p.4). Free from the limits of working ‘on assignment’ that dictated Smith’s working methods, Frank’s desire was to create a portfolio of images that went “beyond the traditional photo-essay towards more experimental forms of rendering his experience” (Cabuts, 2012, p.47). As such, Frank selected in Ben James a distinct protagonist – primed to represent Frank’s experience of the “hardships” (Frank in Brookman, 2004) endured by

miners at the start of the industrial collapse. Evidence of Frank's eagerness to colourfully illustrate James' life can be found on the back of one of his proof sheets⁶⁶, on which he wrote an outline intended to guide the narrative of his images⁶⁷ – much like a conventional cinematic storyboard. Indeed, the similarity between Frank's methodology and cinematic fiction is not accidental. In discussing his inspiration whilst photographing Wales, Frank cites Richard Llewellyn's poignant 1939 novel *How Green Was My Valley*, which was adapted to the screen in 1941 by John Ford.



Figure 18: *Wales, Ben James* (Frank, 1953)

Arguably it is this examination of Frank's methodologies, viewed within the context of his images, that make his work in Wales significant. This is particularly salient when one considers the notion that Frank's London/Wales images foreshadow the methodological approach he took when creating his formative photographic survey; *The Americans* (Cabuts, 2012; Brookman, 2004). Further, Frank's intimate images of James, often coal-blackened and staring directly into the camera lens, have since achieved mythical status within photographic history. Perhaps due to

⁶⁶ A "proof sheet" typically takes the form of a photographic print made in a darkroom, that indexes a roll of film. Proof sheets, sometimes referred to as contact sheets allow photographers to view several images in the context of one another and select which frames are worthy of larger darkroom prints, and which should be discarded.

⁶⁷ Brookman includes the copy from this outline in his introduction to *London/Wales*, and it is as follows: "1. Breakfast, 2. Walking to work, 3. In canteen, 4. In the cage, 5. Lunch underground, 6. Work underground, 7. Waiting to come up 8. Walking home – payday, 9. Washing up, 10. Pools, 11. Dinner 4pm, 12. Club" (Frank in Brookman, 2004, p.6)

its influence on *The Americans*, Wales has since been directly addressed by fellow “visiting” photographer - American native, John Gossage. In his book, *Looking Up Ben James: A Fable*, Gossage presents a “photographic conversation” between himself and renowned British photographer Martin Parr - who has also made work significantly influential work in Wales. Although it is arguably problematic to base the national significance of Frank’s work primarily on the effect it has had on other photographers, its ascension to the ranks of photographic mythology is salient. For example, when describing the decision to visit Wales with Gossage, Parr states:

onto Caerau, the mining village that Robert Frank photographed in 1953. He came in the winter and it was misty and atmospheric. We visit in the spring and it is sunny and bright. The pit and the slag heaps have long since disappeared, but the core of distinctive terraced houses is still there. Famously, Frank met Ben James and gave this miner the leading role in his report from the village and pit. We fantasize about bumping into the children of Ben James, who will say to us: “It’s funny, no-one has asked about that Robert guy who came and made friends with our Dad. Funny you should mention this, but he sent us some photos and you can take them for £25 if you want.” (Parr in Gossage, 2016, p.182).

Unfortunately, Parr and Gossage don’t appear to realise their dream of serendipitous contact with James’s descendants. The book contains few portraits – the majority of which are snapshots of Parr, sometimes accompanied by family members, acquaintances, or fellow photographers (including a portrait of Graham Smith and his wife), as he guides Gossage through their odyssey. Instead, Gossage seemingly searches for Ben James by documenting specific environmental details of not only Caerau but Porthcawl, Porthmadog, Blaenau Ffestiniog, and Llandudno. The “distinctive” Welsh terraced houses mentioned by Parr make several appearances (Fig.19) but largely the intimacy with which Gossage photographs his subjects is somewhat anonymising. Hedgerows, graffiti, and iron gates could as easily be from Bristol, Morecambe, or the Lake District (other stops made on the “odyssey”) as they could be from Wales. As Parr points out, Gossage actively eschews recognisable visual tropes in favour of smaller, less particular details: “we reach Blaenau Ffestiniog, in one of the most distinctive landscapes of Wales, with the slate mines and slate houses. John ignores all this, and wanders around the fringes of the town” (Parr in Gossage, 2016, p.182). Ultimately, what becomes clear is that despite Parr’s notion of finding the children of Ben James, he and Gossage have actually produced a publication in which they explore the historiography of significant photographers and their oeuvres – a narrative in which Frank, Gossage, and Parr are all key players. What therefore makes *Looking Up Ben James* salient in this discourse, is the way in which it highlights vernacular elements of the visual narrative concerning

photography and Wales, but also the importance of individual photographic methodology, and the way in which this lends a distinct aesthetic to images. Indeed, perhaps the reason Gossage never finds Ben James or his kin is because he doesn't photograph like Robert Frank did.



Figure 19: Untitled from *Looking up Ben James: A Fable* (Gossage, 2016)

Another significant ‘outsider view’ in the photographic imaging of Wales is the work of German fine-art photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher. Although ostensibly focusing on similar narrative themes to both Smith and Frank (labour and, to some extent, landscape), the Bechers – who visited Wales several times from 1965 onwards – provided a notably different view of “Welshness” than the humanistic documentary portraits offered by Smith and Frank. Indeed, when compared to the empathetic and socialised approaches taken by Smith and Frank, the work of the Bechers appears somewhat sterile and is rigidly methodical. Their body of work in Wales, like their formative series’ in their native Germany, was “evacuated of any trace of human presence” (Rosengarten, 2015, p.365), and is characterised instead by their meticulous photographic methodologies that were distinguished by “rigid taxonomic formal rules” (Bate, 2015). Using this methodology - variously described as “topographical ethnography” – which itself “went on to exert significant influence on international photographic practices” (Cabuts, 2012, p.97), Bernd and Hilla Becher systematically “catalogued” a selection of the threatened, yet

monolithic symbols of Welsh labour – the pitheads. Knowingly photographing at a time of increasing industrial decline and following a similarly motivated series of work in their native Germany, the Bechers set out to document “disappearing industrial structures” (Ibid.).



Figure 20: *Pitheads* (Becher & Becher, 1974)

As demonstrated in Fig.20 (an installation of the Bechers photographs – six of which are from the Valleys, displayed in the Tate in 2002), Bernd and Hilla Becher’s work typically lent itself to a formulaic “grid presentation” (Cabuts, 2012). By rigidly conforming to a series of fixed angles and waiting painstakingly for appropriate light to “minimize any aesthetic discrepancies”, their images provided a comparative and formalist view of the imposing mining structures. Their work constituted “detailed, consistent, objective, typological documents” (Cabuts, 2012), that in their modernism and formalism starkly contrasted the social documentary portraits of the 1950s. As Cabuts notes:

Although it came a generation later, their work, like Smith’s provided an international audience with a particular view of Wales. Perhaps ironically, considering the significant

differences in approach, the Bechers also fixed an image of an industrial Wales in decline. (Cabuts, 2012, pp.101-102)

Ultimately, Bernd and Hilla Becher's significant contribution to Welsh Photography could arguably be classified as inciting the practice of what Franklin describes as "salvage ethnography". (2015, p.31). Further, the Bechers have been credited with promoting both the celebration of banality that Billig describes as crucial to the maintenance of national identity, as well as the powerful illustration of the monumental iconographies of nationalism. As Jäger notes, "photographic images of landscapes and monuments could serve to communicate patriotic and nationalistic ideas if the subjects represented were read as such" (2003, p.137). When applied to photographic methodology, the approach of systematically cataloguing subjects has historically been associated with traditional 'colonising' photography (Franklin, 2015). What makes this association particularly notable within the context of this thesis, is the way in which several contemporary Welsh photographers have adopted this methodological approach; cataloguing what they perceive to connote 'Welshness' in either a bid to preserve, or perhaps a bid to colonise (and, as such, possess) their own identity.

Despite hosting several significant photographers, "[t]here have been less photographic visitors in more recent times, particularly in the 1990s and the start of the 21st Century" (2008) laments Cabuts. However, where visiting lens has waned, the Welsh lens has seen a boom of activity; supported and often led by specialist Welsh arts and education institutions (a significant majority of which have been noted above). The following section explores the way in which Welsh photographers have interpreted some of the visual themes discussed above, as well as the way in which the proliferation of Welsh Photography has discursively addressed some of the stereotypes that the visiting lenses of this section helped to establish.

3.4.2 The Welsh lens

"My purpose was to discover through photography what 'Welsh Culture' means. I was attempting the gathering of evidence for history" (Hurn in Hurn & Fuller, 2010, p.9)

This section considers a selection of work produced by photographers who are either Welsh by birth (and could thus claim "Welshness" as a birth-right), or who are Welsh through their residence – a condition Anthony Jones has characterised as being "of-Wales" (Jones in Hurn, 2003, p.vii), and that this chapter will refer to as being 'native' or 'resident' in Wales. The first of these bodies

of work was published in 2018 by prolific native photographer, Dan Wood. The images are taken from *Gap in the Hedge* (GITH); Wood's second book, produced and distributed by Scottish publishers *Another Place Press* (APP). Much like David Hurn in his 2003 publication *Living in Wales* (discussed below), Wood tends to make work that overtly confronts his personal experience of being Welsh. Wood's first Welsh book *Suicide Machine* (also published by APP) addresses the global perception of Wood's hometown of Bridgend, following a series of highly publicised suicides in the area that prompted a check-in desk assistant at Gatwick airport to enquire of him "Bridgend, isn't that where all the suicides are?" (Wood in Ffoton, 2016). It was, says Wood, the notion that "the town where I was born, grew up in and still live, was now infamous and synonymous with suicide" (Ibid.) that prompted him to explore his own national identity within a global context.

Whilst *Suicide Machine* has enjoyed moderate success (APP reissued the volume in 2019) GITH has garnered significant attention within British photography culture; including several high-profile artist talks from Wood and various exhibitions of the series in Wales. What tends to characterise the response to GITH however, is its explicit inherent Welshness. Writing for the *British Journal of Photography*, Pantall states "[t]hat idea of Welshness, of the effect that landscape has on identity, is pursued by Wood in the book" (2018). The concept of inhabited geometric spaces, which could arguably describe much of Wood's approach to landscape in GITH, is further discussed by Bate who asserts that photographic images are perfectly primed to explore this phenomenon as inhabited space "is codified by the camera and lens into geometrical space" (2015, p.125). He argues that through this coding - examples of which he gives as "normal", "wide-angle", "long focal length", "colour" and "monochrome" (p.125) - tangential application of aesthetic theories such as the beautiful or the sublime directly evoke imagined space that is arguably more psychologically encompassing than its geometrical representation within a photograph (Bate, 2014).

It is important to clarify, at this stage, that it is unlikely that Wood worked with this specific analytical or conceptually charged brief in mind – indeed in an interview with Cabuts, recorded by Ffoton, Wood states of GITH:

...the inspiration was the journey that I used to make with my mother [...] but it's layered, the project itself, you know, there's so much more to it. [...] I've said it before, who was behind those doors, what was behind that corner, you know down that embankment, in those forests, so this was my chance to do it and I left no stone unturned. (Wood, 2018).

Again, here the sentiment of Wood's work is similarly linked to Hurn's. Both Hurn and Wood are photographers who self-identify as Welsh (despite Hurn being born in England), but they wish to situate themselves within the wider global discourse of "Welshness"; to understand what Welsh means to them by contextualising their take on Welshness through visual language. This sentiment is echoed by founding member of Welsh photographic collective *A Fine Beginning*⁶⁸, James O'Jenkins who states that in starting the collective (which largely operates through an online blog showcasing a multitude of Welsh photographers, or photographers working in Wales) he wished to "understand where [he's] from" (Jenkins in Sritharan, 2015).



Figure 21: *Untitled from Gap in the Hedge* (Wood, 2018)

The use of photography as an autoethnographic tool to understand and locate oneself within a national identity is a pervasive theme in the considerable oeuvre of the second

⁶⁸ This name is a reference to Dylan Thomas' unfinished novel of the same name. In his article for *British Journal of Photography* Sritharan describes this use of Thomas' words as a mechanism to "nail your colours to the mast" (2015).

photographer considered in this chapter, David Hurn. Despite being “of Wales” (Jones in Hurn, 2003, p.vii.), Hurn “by a quirk of timing” (Hurn, 2000, p.12) was born in England. An established member of the Magnum photography agency⁶⁹, Hurn is a demonstrably influential figure within the cultural construction of Welsh photography, having played a crucial role not only in the global representation of Wales⁷⁰, but also in establishing the “legendary” (Jones, 2003, p.vi) documentary photography course Newport College of Art (discussed in 3.3.2). Although Hurn has extensively photographed Wales in his signature reportage style (Ibid.), this section considers the markedly different work presented in his book *Living in Wales*. In selecting this work rather than Hurn’s more established works such as *Land of My Father*⁷¹, or his documentation of the immediate aftermath of the Aberfan disaster, I aim to highlight the overt and deliberate way in which Hurn mobilises this body of work to explore constructed Welshness. *Living in Wales* was published in 2003 and consists of one hundred and one portraits, the subjects of which are united by “living in Wales”. As such, the people within the photographs represent a “roster of the famous and distinguished” (Fig.22) as well as those “who, in less public ways, make an immense contribution to the fabric of Wales” (Jones in Hurn, 2003). Accompanying each image is a small biography, that includes ethnographic information such as “occupation”, “first language”, “second language”, and amount of time “lived in Wales”. The work itself is arguably reflective of Hurn’s desire to use photography as a tool to contextually situate himself within Welsh culture – something he explicitly does by including portraits of his own family members in his collection of Welsh celebrities and citizens (Fig.23). Indeed, in the foreword, Anthony Jones explains:

This issue of being ‘of Wales’ but not ‘born there’ recurs in conversations with [Hurn]. He once said that he “lived under a vague cloud of having not been born in Wales”. So his photographs, and especially this series of portraits, are about discovering his own place in Wales and exploring his contacts with his fellow Welsh. It helped him clarify who he was, and what the culture of Wales meant to him. (Jones, 2003, p.vii)

There are several observations that could be made about the national significance of this body of work. Firstly, the portraits are constructed environmental portraits and as such directly contrast with Hurn’s typical observational, reportage style of photography. As such, Hurn’s portraits in *Living in Wales* indicate both deliberation and reflexivity. Arguably, these portraits are about

⁶⁹ Hurn “became an associate member of Magnum in 1965 and a full member in 1967” (Magnum, n.d.)

⁷⁰ Amongst his typical reportage photographs in and around Wales (significant numbers of which have been published), Hurn produced several images of the Aberfan disaster in 1966 that have been reproduced and disseminated globally.

⁷¹ *Land of My Father* is a monograph published by Thames and Hudson in 2000, containing a collection of Hurn’s “best known” photographs of Wales.

‘David Hurn the Welsh Magnum Photographer’, as much as they are about the sitters. Indeed, throughout *Living in Wales*, Hurn overtly confronts his own “Welshness” (or lack thereof), through his selection of subjects and collection of related data. Hurn’s own condition of being “of-Wales” but not born in Wales is repeatedly played out in images of distinguished residents “of Wales” such as Professor Jan Morris, whose place of birth is listed as “Clevedon, Somerset” (Hurn, 2003, p.48), but whose “lived in Wales” status is “over 40 years” (Ibid.). The second observation that could be made about this body of work relates to the application of methodical constructed “photographic cataloguing”. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this methodology has been variously connected with topological surveys and ethnographic cataloguing. As such, Hurn’s images have the potential to be viewed as ideologically colonising. Whilst Brunet points out that all photography is inherently colonising (2011), Franklin notes that many of the photographic images made by Imperial “explorers” constituted a systematic cataloguing, and thus “othering” of indigenous peoples (2015). It was through this photo-methodology, states Franklin, that stereotypes tended to arise (Ibid.). Whilst it would be inappropriate and inaccurate to suggest that Hurn’s images are viciously colonising (indeed, in the book’s introductory essay, Jones writes “David’s Welsh camera is an instrument of affection”) it could be argued that the images represent Hurn’s personal desire to possess Welshness through demonstrating the way in which living in Wales and being of Wales equates to “being Welsh”. As Azoulay notes, “taking photos, being photographed, and disseminating and looking at photos – provides a privileged access into the problem of impaired citizenship, as well as a moral practice in the face of the vulnerability this condition creates” (2008, p.38). Hurn’s characterisation of his personal circumstances as “living under a vague cloud of having not been born in Wales” (2003, p.vii) could perhaps provide insight into the “impaired citizenship” that has driven him to photograph Welshness so explicitly in *Living in Wales*. As Jones concludes, “[i]t’s not a book of portraits of *the* Welsh, it’s portraits of *his* Wales, and *his* Welsh” (2003, p.ix).



Figure 22: *Cerys Matthews* (Hurn, 1998)



Figure 23: *Roberts Family* (Hurn, 1996)

Despite carrying connotations of photographic colonisation both the ‘ethnographic cataloguing’ and ‘topographical survey’ approaches have been repeatedly echoed by native photographers. Other examples of this approach within Welsh photography can be found in various works such as Keith Arnatt’s “disarmingly” (Coppock & Cameron, 1993) titled series *Dogturds* (the subject matter of which is hopefully plain!), Gawain Barnard’s series *Y Cwm Du* which methodically documents the charred remains of objects found in the aftermath of “wildfire burning that takes place each year at the end of spring in the South Wales Valleys” (Barnard, n.d.) and Pete Davis’ *Little Tin Sheds*. Indeed, Davis’ photographs of tin sheds around Wales - described as “indigenous structures” (1997, p.3), were included in the 1997 exhibition *The Welsh Lens* (from which this section knowingly borrows its title). In an essay that accompanies the exhibition catalogue Crawford suggests that Davis’ series “could be classified as Welsh Romantic landscape” (Ibid.). However, for Crawford the images more clearly “reflect a particular quality that [he] would define as ‘Welshness’, that of *ordinariness*.” (Ibid.). Echoing Billig’s concept of ‘banal nationalism’ (1995), Crawford continues “much of Welsh life declares its love of ordinariness” (1997, p.3). Unfortunately, not all of Davis’ audience have received his work as such a positive observation of Welshness as Crawford. Davis admits that some “reviled” the series, stating “certain sections of the Welsh cultural community, actively engaged in perpetuating historical myths, have never forgiven me for what they perceived as an attack on the landscape of Wales” (1997, n.p.). Unperturbed, Davis concludes, “I have always been secure in my love of the Welsh landscape, in all its forms and guises, and not just when it conforms to some narrow mythical concept of blue skies, waving daffodils and golden sunsets” (Ibid.).

The final photographer in this section is Paul Cabuts. Like the Bechers and Davis, Cabuts’ photographic works are rooted in a topographical methodology that juxtaposes man-made structures with natural landscape surroundings. A practice that formed part of his doctoral thesis, Cabuts has photographed structures such as *Garage, Chapel, Pylons, Powerlines* and *Forest* for over 25 years (Macdonald, 2020), typically organised into mini-series. Each series is presented as a separate gallery on Cabuts’ website, the format of which echoes the Bechers’ exhibition prints (Fig.20). Further, each gallery is accompanied by a small description, written by Cabuts, explicitly connecting the topographical structures to Welsh culture and/or identity. For example, in the text accompanying the “Garage” gallery, Cabuts writes:

“[t]he development of garages in the south Wales Valleys has been shaped by the region’s unique topography, history and economy. These factors, more than in any other region or

nation in the UK, has led to transport in Wales becoming dominated by the motor car”
 (Cabuts, Garage, n.d.)

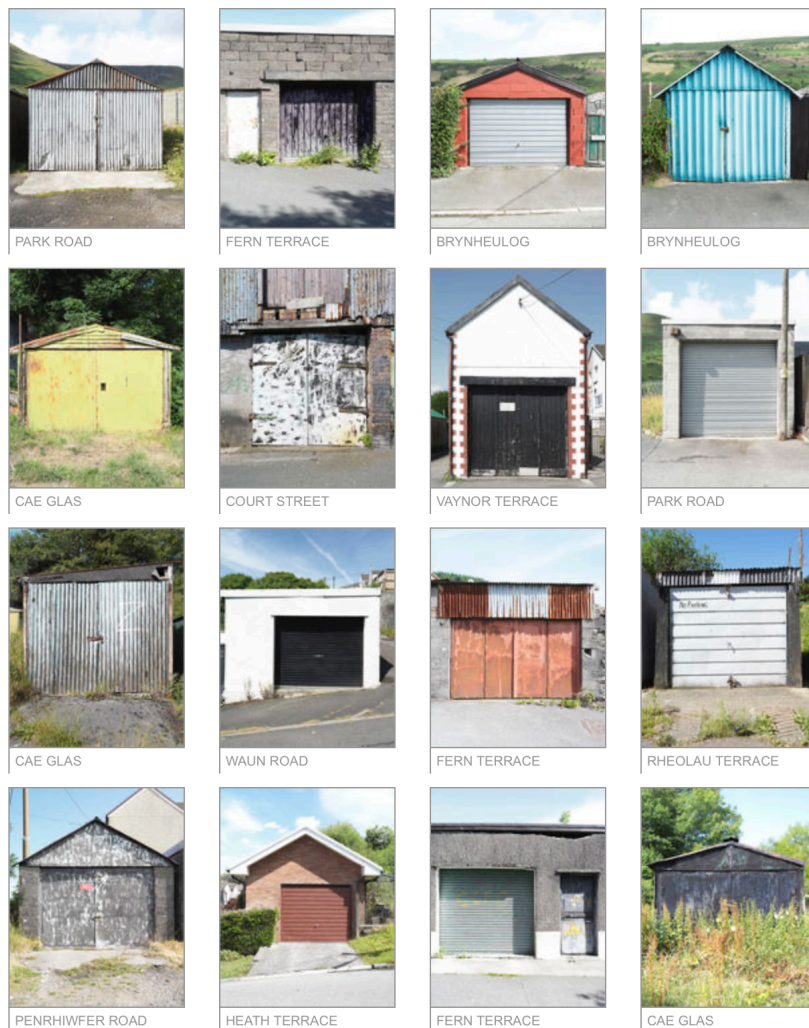


Figure 24: Screenshot of *Chapel* gallery from paulcabuts.com (Cabuts, 2022)

However, whilst Cabuts has explicitly stated the influence of the Bechers, his narrative – which is perhaps most clearly articulated through his 2020 book *Not Still*, was not one of formal topology. Instead, Cabuts’ narrative juxtaposes detached topographical formalism with lived, personal, nativism. Indeed, whilst *Not Still* presents highlights from his various series, its methodical edit is punctuated by several full-bleed images that contrast with the formal structures and provide a far more intimate detail of certain scenes. In a review of *Not Still* published in *Offline Journal*, I wrote:

“The way in which these photographs should be received is indicated in the printing. They are the only full bleed images in the book. They are a ‘closer look’ and a reminder that the photographer is not a visitor, and is not making a mere aesthetic observation; he is building

a portrait of a place he knows and understands, that moves beyond individual structures”
(Hopkins [Macdonald], 2020, p.22)

Of these images one in particular highlights the way in which Cabuts photographic praxis reflects not just his considerable academic apprehension of Welsh photography, but also his personal connection to Wales *through* photography. *Tip-School Drawing* (Fig.25) is part of the mini-series *Portrait of a Tip*. However, unlike the other images in the series, all of which are topographic landscapes, *School Drawing* depicts a painting affixed to the wall of a local school, framed by curtains and thus mimicking the view from a window. Cabuts states that the painting was created by local children who were imagining the industrial landscape that had been demolished around a decade earlier. His juxtaposition of imagined Wales versus topographically recorded Wales provides commentary not just on Welshness, but on the nature of photography and its capacity to represent Welshness. Throughout *Not Still* topologies are presented in dialogue with details, and the capacity of photography to record is equalised with the capacity of photography to invent. As such, Cabuts commentary on Welsh photography is one of ongoing discourse – of “not stillness”. It is perhaps this sentiment that in the conclusion of his 2014 article *Towards A Welsh Photography* leads Cabuts to assert that the notion of a certain way of seeing “that reflects a specifically Welsh mentality or tradition” should remain “a moot question” (2014, n.p.).



Figure 25: *Tip-School Drawing*, 1998 (Cabuts, 2020)

3.4.3 The complexity of Welsh photography

In the inaugural issue of *Offline Journal*, Carroll writes:

I feel we need more conversations, talks and, sometimes, heated but friendly and constructive debates on the work created in Wales – who’s making it; their approach; how it’s progressing; who is showing or publishing it; the choices of what we, the photography community making work, are presented with in exhibitions curated in the larger galleries. (2018, p.24)

Carroll’s suggestion is that Welsh photography is more encompassing than individual photographs or photographers and that a “Welsh way of seeing” depends instead on interactions between a range of invested actors. This sentiment reflects a shift to postmodern paradigms of thought about the cultural construction of Welsh photography and, crucially, indicates the real-world applicability of the complexity paradigm. Similarly, the language, and indeed analysis employed by Lord in *The Aesthetics of Relevance* is commensurate with the conceptual paradigm of complexity theory. Lord frequently refers to “the culture complex of Wales” (1992, p.55), which he implicitly conceptualises as a network of interactions between cultural ideologies, artists, artworks, and arts institutions. He advocates for examination of these interactions, claiming that such examinations reveal unknown or obfuscated material that counter arguments that the Welsh are “unvisual” and shape a Welsh visual tradition. Specifically, he argues that the Welsh visual tradition must function both inwardly and outwardly, offering insight not only into Wales’ vision of itself but of its vision of the rest of the world. Within the context of this thesis, Lord’s framework offers a conceptual point of departure with which to examine the interactions and resulting emergent/adaptive phenomena present in Welsh photography. The original contribution to knowledge offered by this thesis is the application of complexity theory to the specific problem of Welsh photography, and the following chapters present the methodological approach and subsequent findings of that application.

4. Methodology

The following chapter addresses the methods employed during fieldwork and analysis. It delineates the methodological approach taken across all three stages of fieldwork and contextualises this within the developing field of applied complexity research. Further, this chapter presents the data analysis method, along with reflexive analytical models generated during analysis. This chapter also discusses the ethical frameworks and guidelines employed throughout fieldwork and considers the impact of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic on the methods, research environment, and findings.

4.1 Methods

“Real understanding and effective action therefore require an approach that is not dictated by disciplinary boundaries but emerges from the needs of the enquiry.” (Montuori, in Morin, 2008, p.xxvii)

Complexity theory, argues Morin, opposes a singular “methodological recipe” (Da Conceição De Almeida, 2010) and embraces the disorder necessary to foster creativity within research (Montuori & Donnelly, 2013). However, whilst disorder and ambiguity are embraced within Complexity research (Da Conceição De Almeida, 2010), it is also acknowledged they must not characterise the method (*Ibid.*). To facilitate both methodological rigour and adaptability (a key component of complexity theory) Morin suggests adopting a methodological framework that is based on a methodological “program”, which is a predetermined method, and a “strategy”, which is the adoption of emergent or complementary methods, often designed and applied during fieldwork (1992). This section then, will discuss the specific transdisciplinary methodological program and adaptive strategies that were applied during this research.

The fieldwork itself was split into three distinct data-gathering stages. Stages One and Two (hereafter S1 and S2) were planned, and therefore could be understood as “program” as per Morinian methodology. Stage Three (hereafter S3) was emergent and was designed and employed during the fieldwork in response to participant feedback. As such, S3 should be considered as “strategy”, as per Morinian methodology. Although transdisciplinary, the methods across all three stages of fieldwork were largely visual methods, which, states Harper, “broach subject matter that could be studied in no other way” (2012, p. 155). As such, the methods take the form of participant-curated photography (S1, S3), photo-elicitation conversations and participant-led visual analysis (S2, S3). The methodological approaches were designed to foster collaboration and reflexivity between participants and researcher and many of the specific methods were shaped by

participant engagement, rather than a predetermined structure. The research conversations used in S2, for example, were modelled on an adapted unstructured interview technique described as “guided conversations” (Drury, 2016). This concept represents a reciprocal approach to research interviews, in which participants are positioned as collaborators rather than informants and are therefore able to dictate the direction and pacing of the conversations. As Drury states, this approach is more commensurate with the adaptive and post-structural paradigm of complexity than the rigid application of semi-structured interviews (2016). Ultimately, the methodological design was geared towards the generation of holistic data that regards photographic praxis as a complex system of interactions between photographers, institutions, images, and wider cultural, political, and personal influence.

4.1.1 Stage One: participant-curated photography

“The images invited people to take the lead in enquiry, making full use of their expertise” (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 105)

Stage One (S1) of the applied method was designed to fulfil several practical functions within the overall research system; not only did it generate data that are valuable to the research questions, but it also informed the sampling approach and conversation prompts in S2, as well as later analytical domains. The primary purpose of S1 was to open a channel of communication between myself and participants and to generate visual resources that acted as both research data and research tools. As such, S1 consisted of an online form (Appendix 1) that required respondents to submit image(s) that they felt had been critical in their understanding of the concept of “Welsh photography” (compiled in Appendix 1). As this concept is contested (Cabuts, 2012; Crawford, 1984), the question put to respondents did not delineate the notion of “Welsh photography”. Instead, respondents were able to interpret the concept themselves, and were given the option to justify their choice of response with a written submission (which were also collected and analysed as relevant data).

S1 participants were recruited through a mixed application of purposive⁷², self-selecting⁷³, and snowball sampling⁷⁴, all of which took place online – a matrix of participants, recruitment, and

⁷² Purposive sampling allows researchers to utilise an inductive framework (typically based on researcher’s personal knowledge of a sample population) to select specific participants for research.

⁷³ Self-selecting is a sampling model that allows participants to volunteer to take part in research, usually in response to a brief.

⁷⁴ Snowball sampling is typically achieved through a cycle of referrals amongst a sample population. In an online setting facilitated through social media this can be achieved through participants or relevant agents sharing or reposting recruitment briefs.

engagement is available in Appendix 5. Palinkas *et al* propose that purposive sampling is best exploited when combined with another sampling method, in the form of a “mixed sampling” approach (2015). As this research takes place in an environment with which I am familiar⁷⁵, purposive sampling is both convenient and methodologically appropriate. Recruitment took place on social media platforms Twitter and Instagram; both of which are sites of social engagement within my sample population. The recruitment took the form of social media posts (Twitter) or stories (Instagram), which included the recruitment brief and hyperlinked Google Form (Fig.26). Social media in this case also facilitated digital snowball sampling through online sharing functions such as retweets, and online recruitment strategies such as hashtags.

As discussed in Chapter 1, this research examines collective and creative construction of meaning through photography. Therefore, the recruitment posts were aimed specifically at photographers who, at some point, have made a body of work that examines notions of Wales or “Welshness”. The requirement for a “body of work” was included to encourage participation from photographers who had invested time into a longform project about (or relating to) Welsh identity. The reason for this stipulation is as Stimson states, intentional and sustained photographic representation is typically characterised by seriality of form (the photo-essay, exhibition, or photobook, for example) (2006). Therefore, “[m]eaning came to be derived from the relations between pictures, as much as or more than from the individual pictures themselves” (Stimson, 2006, p.30)⁷⁶. Participants were made aware of these and other criteria (such as an age restriction) through follow-up recruitment posts (Fig.27). During S1, participants were not expected to explicitly demonstrate their compliance with the recruitment criteria, however participants interviewed during S2 were engaged in discussion about their photographic practice and projects they had made relating to Wales/Welshness, thus implicitly demonstrating compliance with recruitment criteria.

To encourage maximum participation during S1, the submission of written rationale was optional, and participants were able to leave sections of the submission form intentionally blank. Images and accompanying documentation (including optional rationale and required signed consent form) were all gathered digitally through Google Forms. The S1 data gathering period lasted for two weeks (from October 28th 2019 – November 11th 2019), after which time the form was closed for submissions, having recruited a total of 17 participants who collectively submitted 52 images (available to view in Appendix 2). Following the closing date, submissions were

⁷⁵ As is discussed in both this chapter and Chapter 5, many of the participants, institutions, and artworks included in this thesis were known to me before the research commenced, due to my own photographic praxis and professional network.

⁷⁶ This statement, incidentally, bears remarkably similarity to Cilliers’ description of complexity as “determined by the nature of the interactions, not what is contained within the components.” (Cilliers, 2000, p. 24)

downloaded and anonymised and the Google Form was removed from the public domain. To protect participant data, submissions from any non-encrypted or public platform were not accepted. The period of two weeks was initially implemented to allow enough subsequent time for several S2 fieldwork trips to Wales. However due to restrictions imposed following the outbreak of Covid-19 in early 2020, much of S2 was redesigned and data were gathered online – the impact of Covid-19 on this research is discussed in more detail in section 4.6.

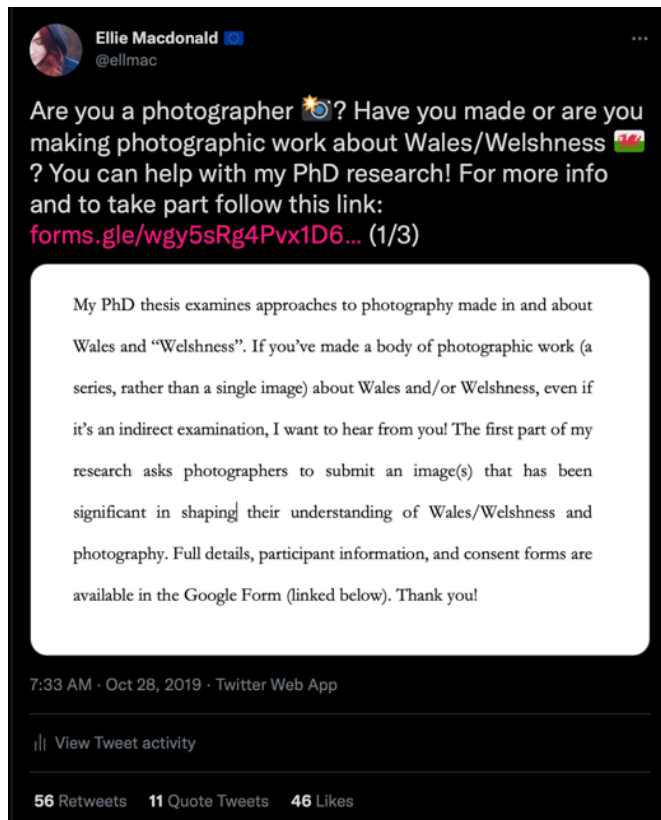


Figure 26: S1 Recruitment Post (Twitter) 1.1



Figure 27: S1 Recruitment Post (Twitter) 1.2

Whilst research exists in which participants generate research images, the terminology used to describe this process has been interpreted in a variety of ways (Tishelman et al, 2016). This has arguably led to some confusion regarding the exact process to be followed in the application of this method. Participant-generated research images have often been absorbed into the related concept of “photo-voice” in which participants create research images as part of a reciprocal ethnographic praxis. (Harper, 2012). Whilst my sample population was made up of practicing photographers, they were not required to submit their own images during S1 (though, many of them did choose to submit their own work) and as such do not fall under the typical definition of “photo-voice”. As such, I have termed the method employed during this stage “participant-curated photography”. Before Covid-19 necessitated adaptation of the methods, I had initially planned to present S1 images⁷⁷ to S2 participants as a series of small (4x6”) prints. I wanted to facilitate an embodied response to the images during S2 and allow participants to manipulate and sequence the prints; viewing them holistically in the context of one another and fostering an environment in which participants might establish specific connections between images (emulating a complex system). However, due to restrictions imposed on travel, and social distancing measures, all but three of my 23 S2 conversations took place online. This transition and its effect on the methods is discussed in more detail in 4.1.2.

⁷⁷ All images submitted during S1 were used during S2.

Once submitted, all 52 S1 images were collated and labelled. Any rationale submitted with images was anonymised and not included in S2 conversations unless participants asked for rationale regarding image selection. This was to mitigate against any internal hegemonic influences and to preserve participant anonymity. To anonymise the rationale but maintain its link to the picture it was submitted with, both rationale and image were given coded labels. Rationales were coded “AR01 – AR17” (AR = Additional Rationale) and S1 images were coded RI01 – RI52 (RI = Research Image). Participants were also given coded labels and any participant contribution reproduced in this thesis is attributed to participant labels which range from RP01 – RP28 (RP = Research Participant). To protect participant anonymity the AR data has not been included as an appendix, as many participants identified themselves by name on these documents. Similarly, the numeric labels given to the AR documents do *not* correspond with the numerical labels given to participants – so for example AR07 was not necessarily submitted by RP07. Further ethical frameworks are discussed in 4.5 and a complete list of the data labels used is available in 4.3.

4.1.2 Stage Two part one: guided conversations

Stage Two (S2) took the form of in-person and online individual “guided conversations”, each of which also contained photo-elicitation discussions. As discussed above, the notion of a “guided conversation” is coined by Drury, who describes the method as a “mutual sharing of stories and information [...] a level of reciprocity, informality and on-going continuity” (2016, p. 81). Drury, who also employs methods commensurate with complexity theory, describes traditional research interviews as a “unidirectional flow of information from informant to researcher” (Ibid.). As discussed above and in Chapters 1 & 2, complexity theory advocates an approach to research in which the researcher is both reflexive and explicit about their influence on the research process and conclusions. In Drury’s guided conversations, the researcher and participants work collaboratively to shape the narrative of data; the researcher supplies an overarching theme, but participants are free to direct the narrative of the exchange (2016). This model allowed me to understand participant construction of the concepts being discussed rather than imposing my own understanding of such concepts through prescribed questions and axioms. This approach was critical to encouraging a collaborative research process and by characterising research discussions as “conversations” participants were also free to ask questions of me during the interactions. This encouraged direct engagement with the research aims and axioms and arguably fostered an environment of collaborative reflexivity that ultimately led to the design of S3 (discussed in 4.2.4).

S2 participants were recruited via a mixture of self-selecting, snowball, and purposive sampling. All S1 participants were given the option to participate in S2, and of 17 S1 participants,

11 took part in S2. Given the practical limitations of this project (the thesis needed to be completed within a designated timeframe and I was the sole researcher), I had initially calculated a rough saturation size of 10 S2 participants. However, following the re-design of the methodology and the relocation of research conversations to an online setting, the need to create time (and raise funds) for travel to and from Wales was alleviated and I abandoned my original saturation size. In total, 23 S2 conversations took place from February – October 2020. Before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, I undertook what I had hoped would be the first of many (but was in fact my only) research trip to Wales. During this time, I conducted 3 face-to-face conversations, and recruited 3 further participants through snowball and self-selecting methods. As with S1 I used online platforms such as Twitter and Instagram to recruit participants (Fig.28), specifying only that prospective participants needed to be photographers who had made (or were making) photographic work that addressed themes of Welshness or Welsh culture. Not all participants were recruited online, several were recruited through snowball methods – largely through recommendations from other participants. More information on individual participant profiles and recruitment can be found in Appendix 5.



Figure 28: S2 Recruitment Post (Twitter)

Prior to their conversations, S2 participants were invited to supply some limited biographical data by completing a form (Appendix 4). The data gathered through this form pertained to participants' felt and geographical affiliation with Wales, and their photographic careers. To encourage

participation and ensure anonymity participants were given the option to refuse to supply any or all of this data. Any data supplied were used during analysis to construct a contextual framework that contributed to the application of what Glaveanu describes as “multiple feedback methodology”. This approach, which Glaveanu employs to explore creativity, has been developed within the paradigm of psychosocial research and holds that the assessments of “several groups of appropriate judges having dissimilar backgrounds” should be considered “in order to understand how creativity evaluations are rooted in particular sociocultural contexts” (Glaveanu, 2012, p.354). In other words, contextual information regarding participants’ own sociocultural environments can be constructively employed to triangulate and contextualise participant views into a wider system of social construction.

The conversations themselves were generally split into two sections (guided conversation and photo-elicitation), and for practical reasons (principally participant/researcher fatigue and transcription limitations) typically did not exceed c80 minutes in length. All online participants were given access to the S1 images at least 24 hours before their conversation, and face-to-face participants were presented with a set of prints at the start of their conversations. As I wanted to encourage reciprocity and collaboration within the exchange, I did not stipulate in which order photo-elicitation and guided conversations should occur, but most discussions started with the guided conversation and naturally progressed to photo-elicitation. In both segments of the discussions, the order, content, and structure of the inquiry were designed to evolve in-line with participants answers. This complimented the complexity-led methodological design, in so much as it allowed me to engage with emergent research themes. In contrast, a rigid approach in which the same line of questioning is dogmatically pursued can result in emergent themes or participant reflexivity being overlooked or discouraged (Kvale 1996 in Knox & Burkward, 2009). Due to the elongated S2 fieldwork period (caused by the outbreak of Covid-19), conversations were typically transcribed whilst fieldwork was ongoing, rather than collectively once the data gathering had been completed. Castleberry and Nolan argue that the transcription process can itself be analytic (2018) and as such, transcribing “on the fly” also allowed me to capitalise on emergent themes and integrate these into later conversations. This is discussed in more detail in 4.4.

All S2 conversations were recorded through audio and video capture. In-person conversations were recorded using a voice recorder and a video camera. Online conversations were recorded using in-built screen capture technology of Zoom, Skype, and Teams, and a secondary audio-recording device which was used as a backup. Participants were informed that conversations would be recorded prior to them taking place and consented to this via the supplied consent forms. Following transcription each participant was sent a completed transcript to review

and informed of a time period in which they could withdraw their contribution, without consequence, if they wished.

4.1.3 Stage Two part two: photo-elicitation

“When native eyes interpret and enlarge upon the photographic content, through interviewing with photographs, the potential range of data enlarges beyond that contained in the photographs themselves” (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 99)

As mentioned above, I had initially planned to present participants with prints during the photo-elicitation section of S2 conversations. This was to facilitate an embodied reaction to the images and allow them to be viewed and organised within the context of one another. This proved successful in the three conversations I was able to conduct in person, with one participant editing the images to form a storyboard. Unfortunately, during the necessary move to an online setting I had to revise this approach. In my first online conversation I attempted to recreate the original photo-elicitation experience by transferring the image files during the conversation. However, due to a poor internet connection that caused the images to arrive slowly and sporadically, the participant (RP10) found this overwhelming and suggested sharing images ahead of future conversations. Consequently, in all other online conversations, participants were sent a Google Drive link containing the 52 S1 images, each of which were given a coded label (to allow them to be easily identified during transcription and analysis). Although the reciprocity and open dialogue fostered during guided conversations was still encouraged during photo-elicitation, participants were given verbal prompts during this stage. This was primarily to focus discussion on a manageable volume of images rather than systematically exploring all 52. The prompts were not used uniformly, nor in every conversation, as emphasis was still placed on positioning the participants as collaborators and allowing them to dictate the narrative of discussion. The most common prompts employed during this section were “which images look the most Welsh to you?” and “which images look the least Welsh to you?”.

4.1.4 Stage Three: collaborative reflexivity

“People’s ability to describe a complex system is limited by their knowledge of that system and influenced by their values, beliefs, and aspirations” (Moon & Browne, 2020, p.1040)

As stated above, Morin proposes that truly complex research methods are constituted of program and strategy (1992), and whilst program allows researchers to proceed with purpose, strategy allows

researchers to apprehend (rather than dismiss or overlook) emergence through the application of adaptive methodological strategies. During S2 conversations, several participants offered reflexive feedback on the research aims and methods (often unprompted by the researcher). Specifically, participants commented that the selection of images shown in S2 was thematically limited (or did not reflect their personal understanding of Welsh photography) and therefore expressed a desire to contribute visual data to the research. Further, several participants commented that participation in the research caused them to re-evaluate their positions on one or more of the research axioms. One example of this can be seen in the following excerpt from an S2 conversation with RP16, who did not contribute data in S1 and was recruited through snowball sampling for S2:

RP16: [01:18:12] I will send you a couple of images - because I haven't really thought about this until you approached me really. I've never really analysed if I might, you know - is there something common in the way that Welsh images are created?

As such, it became clear that there was scope to gather meaningful follow-up data and that doing so would strengthen the position of participants as collaborators within the research design and outcomes. As Montuori and Donnelly state, creative inquiry is strengthened by collaborative improvisation (2013), and I therefore designed Stage Three (S3) of the fieldwork to expand the gathered data to include reflexive insight (both visual and written) from S2 participants. S3 was delivered as an optional follow-up form which was emailed to all S2 participants. The email also contained a participant information sheet and consent form. Participants who did not wish to participate in S3 were instructed to disregard the email. The form invited participants to supply qualitative data reflecting on the research process, adding any further comments, and supplying any “follow up” images they felt were worthy of consideration. The S3 questions were as follows:

- What image(s)* best represent Welsh photography, to you?
- Why have you selected the above image(s)?
- If you submitted images for Stage One of the research, has your selection changed now? If so, why?
- Following your discussion, do you have any further comments or reflections on Welsh photography that you wish to share with the researcher? If so, please indicate these below:
- Following your discussion, do you have any further comments or reflections on the interview process that you wish to share with the researcher? If so please indicate these below:

Of 23 S2 participants, 11 submitted S3 data (participant recruitment and engagement across all three stages of fieldwork is accounted for in Appendix 65). A total of 40 follow-up research images (FRI01-40) were submitted. These images were coded with labels FRI01-FRI40 (FRI = Follow-Up Research Image) and are available to view in Appendix 3. As with form responses in S1 (AR01-AR17), consent forms, and S2 transcripts, completed S3 forms (coded to correspond with the participant who submitted them) are not included as an appendix as in many cases they compromise participant anonymity.

4.2 Analysis

As previously mentioned, the first stage of data analysis was transcription. I had initially planned to engage in “multimodal transcription” – an in-depth transcription technique ideally suited to videotaped interviews, in which participant gestures and expressions are written into the transcript (Bezemer & Mavers, 2011). However, as only three in-person conversations were conducted, and video-conferencing software arguably does not sufficiently replicate a face-to-face setting in which participants might gesticulate, move around, and physically articulate themselves, I decided to apply traditional semantic verbatim transcription techniques to ensure consistency across the data. As Castleberry and Nolan argue, transcription is an important analytical process and allows the researcher to become familiar with the data, “jumpstarting” later steps in the analysis process (2018). To this end, interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after the interview had taken place. Transcription was facilitated through transcription software *Trint*. Trint is an online platform that automates initial transcription and produces a rough, timestamped semantic verbatim transcript from an uploaded audio or video file. The software then allows researchers to edit text against their original audio/video files which are available for playback alongside the auto-generated transcript. During analysis all transcripts were considered in verbatim form. However, for both readability and word economy, excerpts of transcripts presented in Chapters 5 and 6 are “gisted” (Paulus, Lester, & Dempster, 2014); a form of transcription in which repetitive phrasing and pauses are removed but the content is not altered, and no additional text is added.

Transcribing research conversations during fieldwork allowed me to identify emergent themes and adapt questions in later conversations that would have been overlooked if a more rigid interviewing method had been applied. Similarly, iterative transcription allowed me to begin to identify thematic domains that informed the structure of the thematic analysis method that was latterly applied to the data. Indeed, Castleberry and Nolan argue that thematic analysis of

qualitative data should occur in several stages; compiling (transcribing), disassembling (coding), reassembling (differentiating codes from themes, and contextualizing themes in the broader research aims), interpreting (analysing data in the context of codes and themes) and concluding (summarizing findings in the context of the research hypotheses) (2018). The analysis process applied within this thesis largely followed this framework, though (as noted in in Chapter 1), complexity theory advocates for research outcomes that prioritise the novel apprehension of data, rather than presenting positivist conclusions (Cilliers, 2005).

Once compiled, the data from Stages 1, 2, and 3 were formatted and organised using NVivo. NVivo was selected due to its capacity to apprehend both written and visual data; allowing me to code conversation transcripts, written submissions, and images simultaneously. As Bergeron and Gaboury argue, qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) such as NVivo, “can greatly increase the efficiency of qualitative analysis and facilitate the management and analysis of complex data” (2020, p.358). Before coding, all data were anonymised in NVivo and given labels, which are as follows:

- RP00: Researcher⁷⁸
- RP00-28: Research Participants 00-28. S2 transcripts were labelled using research participant labels – so for example “RP06” refers to both research participant 06, and their corresponding S2 interview transcript.
- RI01-52: Research Images 01-52 (gathered during S1)
- AR01-17: Additional Rationale 01-17 (gathered during S1)
- FRI01-40: Follow-Up Research Images 01-40 (gathered during S3)
- FUR**⁷⁹: Follow-Up Rationale (gathered during S3)

Once labelled, the data were systematically reviewed, and initial top-level coding domains were established. As the research specifically examines participant construction of meaning the thematic domains were not pre-determined; they emerged from the analysis and therefore strengthened the collaborative nature of the research methods. This approach is also adopted by Drury who states,

⁷⁸ Due to the collaborative nature of the research design, the researcher is also considered as a research participant within the data and is given the same label prefix as other participants.

⁷⁹ Follow-up questionnaires were given numerical codes to correspond with the participants who submitted them. Because not all S2 participants submitted data for S3, these codes are not chronological. As such, the labels used for S3 questionnaires are as follows: FUR01, FUR03, FUR06, FUR09, FUR10, FUR13, FUR14, FUR16, FUR17, FUR18, FUR20.

“the categories used for interpretation/analysis were not designed *into* the research, but were generated *from* the analysis” (2016, p.78).

In NVivo, themes are organised through a hierarchical system of nodes. Top level nodes represent broad themes, whilst lower-level nodes contain more specific themes. During analysis I identified three top-level inductive nodes as “complexity”, “coronavirus”, and “photography and Wales”. The coding of data into top-level nodes was both organisational and interpretive. Evans makes the distinction between “latent” and “semantic” themes that might emerge during transcript analysis. Latent themes, she states, are indicative of interpretation and are identified primarily by the research author, whilst semantic themes occur at an explicit level and are usually identified by participants during interviews (2017). In this context, the complexity node was largely interpretive as participants rarely discussed complexity theory unless the subject was broached by me, typically in response to a question about the research aims. The “photography and Wales” node, on the other hand, was largely semantic and as such this node contained by far the most lower-level nodes, as more specific themes emerged. Finally, I also chose to code any sections of the conversations that referred to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak. I was unsure of the continued impact that the pandemic would have on the research environment and outcomes but felt that its impact should be recorded as part of a reflexive narrative that is critical to complexity-informed research. This is explored in more detail in 4.6.

Once a codebook had been constructed, I utilised the native query and search features of NVivo to start establishing connections across the data, and to further scrutinize interactions between participants, concepts, and photographs. As stated in Chapters 1 & 2, a key epistemological foundation of complexity theory is the analysis of interactions between components within a system. The search function therefore allowed me to search transcripts, and the query function to search coding nodes in order to build a broad picture of both latent and semantic interactions the data. Consequently, this enabled me to simultaneously produce a mental map that represented how Welsh photography might be organised into a complex system and corresponding environment (discussed in 4.3), and a critical narrative in which connections could be analysed in depth and focused observations made (Chapters 5 & 6).

Whilst some research indicates that use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) does not necessarily facilitate more effective analysis and can limit familiarity with data (Coffey, Holbrook & Atkinson, 1996), I found that NVivo facilitated a multimodal data analysis that suited both my methods and research design. Overall, using CAQDAS reduced the

manual tasks associated with traditional coding and allowed me to quickly establish and explore critical connections within the data (AlYahmady & Alabri, 2013).

4.3 Modelling a Qualitative Complex System

As noted in Chapter 2, Woermann et al argue that reflexive models are a useful tool to indicate the way in which a researcher has both organised and influenced the complex system that is being analysed (2018). However, given the inherent emergence and dynamism of complex systems, models should be regarded cautiously (Ibid.). Traditionally, modelling indicates intent to predict an outcome, but complex systems are typified by unpredictable emergent phenomena and as such, present an ontological opposition to the purpose of traditional modelling and associated conclusions regarding causality. The inherent dynamism of a complex system can also make qualitative modelling (typically static) both practically and epistemologically problematic (Cilliers, et al., 2013; Andrason, 2014). However, when employed as analytic or illustrative tools, certain types of modelling can aid researchers in visualizing and distilling large quantities of complex qualitative data (Cilliers et al 2013; Woermann et al, 2018). In order to engage with models, Woermann et al caution that some level of reduction, “and therefore a distortion” (2018, p.2) of the system under study is likely. Naturally, reductionism is at odds with the ontological premise of complexity theory and Davis and Sumara argue that to mitigate against the distortion caused by reduction, researchers should employ a strategy they term “level-jumping” (2009). This, they state, involves “simultaneously examining the phenomenon in its own right (for its particular coherence and its specific rules of behavior) and paying attention to the conditions of its emergence (e.g., the agents that come together, the contexts of their co-activity, etc)” (2009, p.34). Whilst they do not provide visual examples to illustrate this strategy, it could comfortably be assumed that level-jumping might involve the creation of models that present both different sections and aspects of the system and the wider relationships between the system and its environment.

Whilst the results of the data analysis presented in this thesis are structured as a thematic narrative, the coding framework developed during analysis has itself facilitated some iterative modelling. This model aided analysis by visually indicating the emergent structure of the system and its environment. As such, the model also functions as a reflexive tool by indicating the way in which the researcher has conceptualised the structure, output, and identity of the system and its environment. Indeed, Moon and Browne argue that “mental models” visually represent the unconscious assumptions of the modeler and that producing an external representation (i.e. a diagram) of a mental model allows a researcher to reflexively interrogate these perceptions (2020).

To reiterate, the model represented below is not predictive nor conclusive. Nor does it represent quantitative data; the analysis itself was entirely qualitative and the model was employed as a tool to map the system and facilitate deeper analysis.

Quantitative models of complex systems typically take the form of networked diagrams indicating system components (nodes) and connections between those components (edges/links) (Galanter, 2016). However, as the data generated by this research was qualitative, the interactions between system components and the system environment are presented and analysed through a written narrative, rather than a model. Therefore, the model generated during analysis was geared towards creating an initial thematic map of the system, rather than contending with the placements of nodes and links (which typically would be dynamic in a real complex system and consequently are largely unsuited to static models). This model was constructed using a framework developed by Moon and Browne, in which researchers' mental models (i.e. their mental map of the system) are reproduced externally, creating reflexive insight into the assumptions and perceptions that have grounded their research, and providing an overview of the frameworks into which they have organised data (2020). As such, Moon and Browne divide a complex system into what they call "modules" which typically function as subsystems within a larger complex system. Modules represent processes or elements that are "integral to the larger system framework" (Moon & Browne, 2020, p.1043) and have a tangible "output" – which Moon and Browne define as "a measurable variable that is the final product of all influences in the subsystem module and can be linked into the qualitative complex system model" (Ibid.). This approach is consistent with Davis and Sumara's notion of level-jumping and allows researchers to both literally and figuratively "zoom-in" on certain subsystems whilst simultaneously viewing them in the context of the whole. Moon and Browne argue that viewing complex systems at a system/subsystem level supports "the development of a common set of explanatory variables that could apply to similar sub-systems in other contexts", enables "organization and ordering of the influence of different variables", and assists in "identifying knowledge gaps; and providing opportunities to identify connections between subsystems to develop a complex system model" (2020, p.1042).

As noted above, Moon and Browne state that the first step in compiling a mental model of a complex system is to identify subsystems and their respective outputs (2020). In this context of this research, this process was largely undertaken during the coding stage of analysis and as such was facilitated by NVivo. Through a combined method of inductive reasoning and collaboration with participants I thematically demarcated both the system and the environment of Welsh photography. This was naturally contingent on parameters exclusive to this thesis but was both reflexive and collaborative.

As described in Chapter 1, a complex system is demarcated by a system environment. Typically, the environment operates outwith the (open) boundaries of the system, and largely it acts as a conduit between the system and wider contexts. As such, the environment has a critical role in shaping the system through mediating emergent behaviour and generating feedback loops. Traditionally, components within the system environment do not depend on the system for identification or survival, whilst system components do rely on the environment for these functions. Figure 29 represents the five core subsystems/modules of the system and environment of Welsh photography, as organised by this research. For clarity, these subsystems have been colour-coded, therefore blue, yellow, and orange modules represent the system itself, whilst grey modules represent the subsystems of the system environment. Additionally, green modules represent outputs (which can also be characterised as emergent adaptive behaviours). During both research and analysis, it became clear that several of the “gatekeeping” institutions described in Chapter 3 (3.3) fulfilled roles that were typical of a system environment; able to function without the system, they exchanged energy and information (represented by, for example, publications, commissions, and exhibitions) with the system, mediated emergent behavior generated by system interactions, and therefore influenced both positive and negative feedback loops within the system (for example the proliferation of certain photographic genres). The environment also included the research itself, as not only did the context of the research have a demonstrable impact on some of the data (discussed in Chapter 5), but the explicit acknowledgement of knowledge construction is a crucial element of complexity-informed research praxis (Woermann, Human, & Preiser, 2018). Early data analysis also indicated several thematic subsystems that generally appeared to facilitate local interactions between components, and thus constituted the structural framework for the system itself. For example, participants (most of whom were photographers) regularly described being influenced by photo-methodologies, photographs, or other photographers. As such, these local interactions impacted participants own praxis, and it became clear that the mentioned photographers, photographs, and methods constituted components of a complex system, and the resultant artistic praxis represented adaptive emergent behaviour.

Subsystem	Clusters	Output
Photographers	- Making work about Wales - Influential	Photographs, photo-methods
Photographs	- Referents - Aesthetics	Symbols, auteurs
Photo-Methods	- Locations - Approach	Photographs, symbols, auteurs
Gatekeepers	- Education - Galleries and Museums	Exhibitions, archives, commissions, heritage, collections, publications, online content, pedagogies
This Research	- Research Participants - Research Images	Photographs, interview transcripts, additional written data

Figure 29: Welsh photography subsystems

Once all data had been gathered and analysed I organised the data into two subsystems within the system environment, and three subsystems within the system itself. Each subsystem contained several thematic data clusters (discussed in more detail below). The subsystems and data clusters of the environment are as follows:

- **Gatekeepers:** this subsystem accounts for institutions⁸⁰ relevant to Welsh photography, perceived as having substantial gatekeeping authority (primarily identified as such by participants). It contains two data clusters - Education, and Galleries and Museums.
- **This Research:** this subsystem accounts for the role of the research in both the generation and interpretation of the data. It contains two data clusters - Participants, and Research Images.

The subsystems that make up the system itself are as follows:

- **Photographers:** this subsystem contains two data clusters - photographers making work in/of Wales (incidentally, this includes all but one of the S2 participants), and photographers identified by S2 participants as being influential to their practice. Influential photographers do not necessarily make work that explores Welshness but were often cited for their impact on S2 participants' own practice, or ways of viewing photographs.
- **Photographs:** this subsystem also contains two data clusters: referent⁸¹, and aesthetics. These elements were identified by research participants as the core constituents (other than the photographer) of a photograph. Referent and aesthetics also appeared to be the primary rationalisations for the selection of images submitted for S1 and S3, though in some cases the identity of the photographer was also an important factor.

⁸⁰ Not all institutions within this data cluster are formal gatekeeping entities, but several have been identified by participants as have gatekeeping powers.

⁸¹ "Referent" refers to the subject of a photograph

- **Photo-methodologies:** this subsystem contains two data clusters: training and approach. Both of these elements were identified by participants as affecting the way in which they approached making photographic work.

Following this initial analysis and organisation, I was able to create a mental model that more accurately represented the structure of a complex system. As such, Figure 30 represents a model for the complex system of Welsh Photography as constructed by this research. The system itself is represented by three interconnected circles, each of which represents a subsystem. Each subsystem contains thematic data clusters, represented by smaller internal circles. Their overlap signifies their open nature and interconnectivity, discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. The dotted line represents the boundary of the system and separates it from its environment. The system environment is represented by the squares on the periphery of the system boundary. Each larger square represents a subsystem, and the data clusters of that subsystem are represented by smaller internal squares. As stated above, the purpose of this figure is to indicate the organisational structure applied to data by the researcher and participants, and each subsystem is open, dynamic, and contingent on the research environment itself.

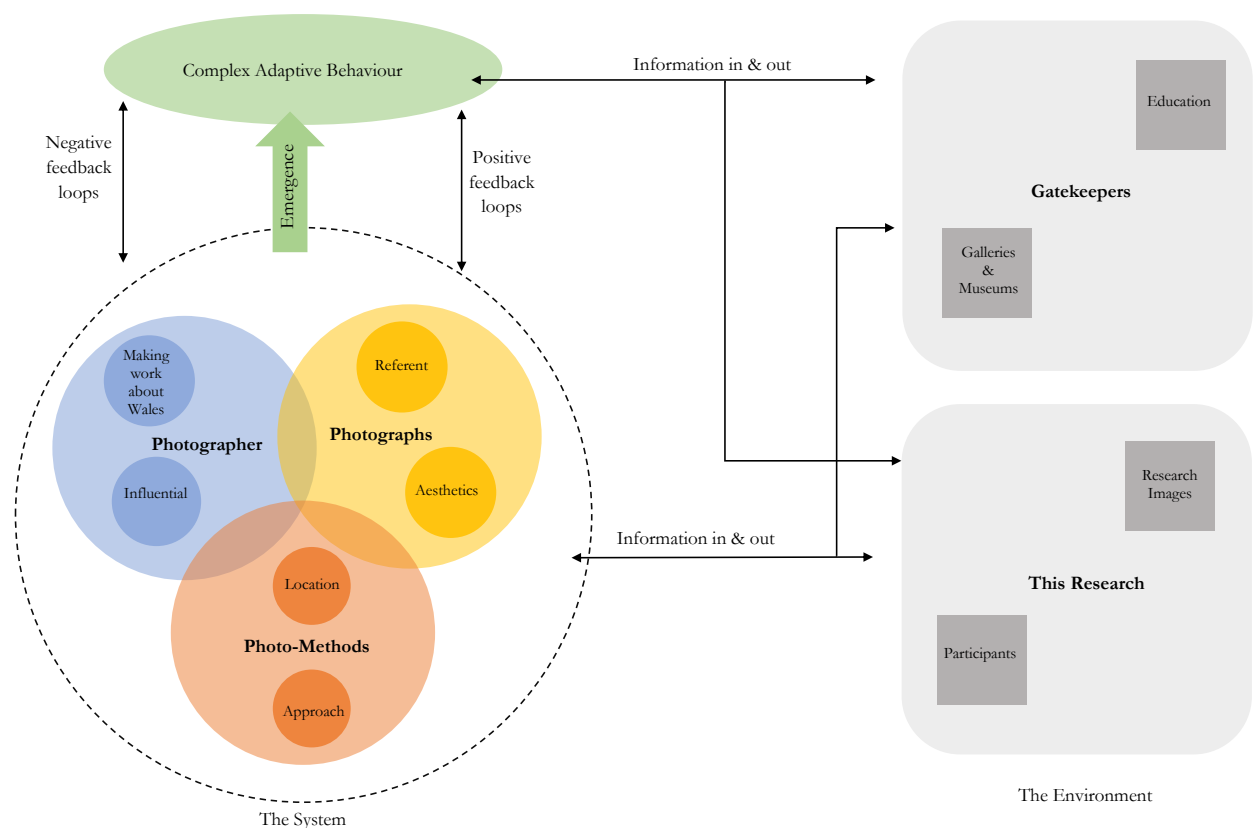


Figure 30: Welsh photography complex system mental model

It should be noted that there is significant overlap between these subsystems and data clusters. Photographs, for example, usually cannot exist without photographers or photo-methodologies (though as discussed in 2.2.3, this is not always the case). As Cilliers states, “clusters should not be interpreted in a spatial sense, or seen as fixed hermetically sealed entities. They can grow or shrink, be subdivided or absorbed, flourish or decay. The clusters are dynamic and interact with other clusters, both directly, as well as through individual members they share with each other.” (1998, p.7). Therefore, there is significant overlap within the analytical themes presented in Chapters 5 and 6. For example, in section 6.3.2, I discuss notions of intimacy as connotative of Welsh authenticity. However, as stated in that section, intimacy is also discussed within the context of photo-methodologies; participants having identified it as a methodological strategy connotative of photographic (or, in some cases, ethical) authenticity. To reiterate, Fig.30 primarily accounts for the coding framework that I have applied to the data, rather than the data itself. This sort of mental map is limited in its ability to apprehend a large quantity of complex data, and instead has been utilised to guide the thematic analysis in the following chapters, and to provide reflexive insight into the coding process.

Ultimately, I have tried to avoid overreliance on epistemologically limited models that might damage the overall complexity of the system. Indeed, the few modelling frameworks that have been developed are arguably limited in their capacity to represent the emergence, change, and unpredictability that characterise complex systems. As Cilliers writes, “[a]ny model is a reduction of the real system being modeled, understanding gained by modeling complex systems is always partial” (Cilliers, et al., 2013, n.p.). Instead, the model above primarily indicates the parameters of the research scope and analysis process, rather than providing a definitive predictive model of Welsh photography as a complex system. As Alhadeff-Jones states, complex systems as research frameworks are typified by the finalities that are imposed on them by agents within research environments (researchers themselves, participants, methodological limitations, funding bodies, etc.), and as such are as indicative of the research process as they are the object(s) of study (2013).

4.4 Reflexivity

As noted in Chapter 1, reflexivity is a core component of both complexity theory and transdisciplinarity. As Gear et al state, research biases are a common obstacle in qualitative research, and “[a] qualitative complexity researcher is further challenged as holding certain ideas about an open and constantly changing system is difficult” (2018, p.6). As expressed above, to mitigate against researcher bias in both the data and research design, I have (where possible)

fostered collaboration between myself and research participants. In inviting participants to interrogate research aims and assumptions, I was able to engage in critical reflexivity and collaboratively challenge any preconceptions or bias that could have limited the research. As Montuori argues, collaborative and reflexive methodologies are critical in so-called insider research (2013). As noted in Chapter 1, this thesis explores a complex system of which I am a participant. I was born in Wales and have a considerable network of friends and family in the country all of whom arguably influence both my own and more general conceptualisations of Welsh identity. Further, in 2015 I completed a photographic project in Wales and from 2013 I have been socially engaged with Welsh photography. Many of the participants were known to me - either through personal acquaintance or by reputation (the relationship between researcher and each participant is presented as part of the participant recruitment and engagement matrix in Appendix 5).

Practically, several of the methodological strategies I employed were particularly useful in facilitating both researcher and participant reflexivity. As mentioned above, Stage 3 of the fieldwork was designed in response to participants engaging with and challenging the existing data set and established axioms. Transcribing interviews immediately after they were completed also allowed me to engage reflexively with the methods. For example, my interview style changed as I grew more experienced and as I reflected on the structure and content of my transcripts. In earlier conversations (which were also the only in-person conversations) I frequently verbally agree with participants through affirmations such as “yeah” or “mmhmm”. Realising the way in which this interrupts a transcript caused me to reflect on the way in which this might also interrupt or change the flow of conversation between myself and a participant. In later conversations these interjections are almost non-existent, as I either refrained from such affirmations and left informants to finish their train of thought, or to give non-verbal affirmations, such as nodding or smiling.

As Montuori argues, reflexivity can be facilitated by actively situating the inquirer in the inquiry (2013). As such, I have included this research project as part of the system environment and have reflexively considered it (and my) impact on the research findings in Chapter 5.

4.5 Ethics

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the research had to comply with ethical frameworks and review procedures at the University of Stirling. In 2019 the proposed research methods were subject to peer-review by the General University Ethics Panel (GUEP) at the University of Stirling. The panel

rejected the initial proposal, citing clarification around potential copyright issues in S1 images and protection for researcher and participants in the event that distressing images were submitted for S1. Further, the initial methodological proposal did not include participant anonymity, as it was assumed that naming participants would generate data regarding the relationships between actors within a complex system. The GUEP challenged this assumption and advocated for participant anonymity, which was eventually included in the research design. The proposal was resubmitted and accepted in October 2019. As S3 was an emergent development to the methodological design, a further amendment was filed with the GUEP in September 2020 to account for this stage of the fieldwork. As such, the ethical considerations within this research are a collaborative production of the GUEP and the researcher. The primary ethical considerations have been participant anonymity and informed consent. Anonymity was observed across all three stages of the fieldwork, during analysis and in the final thesis write-up. In accordance with the institutional guidance supplied by the University of Stirling, and to comply with an approved Risk Assessment, fieldwork conversations were formally scheduled, and participants were required to give written consent before the discussion took place. Participants in S1, S2, and S3 were each given a participants information sheet detailing the research aims and in which they were advised that they may withdraw their consent to participate at any reasonable point⁸², without giving a reason for doing so. Consent forms were utilised during S1 & 2, but not S3, which was optional for S2 participants who were informed that supplying data for S3 indicated their consent to take part.

4.6 Covid-19

In early 2020 Covid-19 was named a global pandemic and significantly impacted life across the planet. Although the long-term effects of coronavirus on research and academic communities are still being explored, this section details the immediate impact that Covid-19 had on this research. When UK national lockdowns were first imposed in March 2020, I had made one research trip to Wales. After the UK Government imposed significant restrictions on travel and social mixing, I had to re-design my methodology and conduct all the remaining interviews in an online setting. Whilst the removal of in-person interaction arguably impacted the system of Welsh photography (and therefore this research), the accessibility of online interaction made online conversations both welcome and commonplace. This positively impacted my sample size, as stay-at-home orders naturally meant that prospective participants were able to accommodate interviews more easily

⁸² Participants were able to withdraw consent at any time before analysis began in November 2020. No participant withdrew consent at any point during (or following) fieldwork.

into their schedule. The pandemic bookended most conversations that were conducted online. In some cases, this was obtrusive and in others it merely served as part of the greeting. It featured in all but RP01, RP03, RP04, RP09 - whose interviews were conducted face to face or before the global outbreak of the virus.

However, the online setting did cause some issues. Occasionally technical difficulties such as dropping Wi-Fi connections meant that conversations were interrupted whilst one or both participants attempted to re-connect. This often literally interrupted the narrative of the conversation and therefore arguably impacted the quality of data gathered. It also meant that some transcripts are split in two (as video calls were reconnected or restarted) which interrupted the chronology of timestamps in transcripts. Further, some interview recordings were poor-quality or incomplete due to participants preferring to use a range of different platforms, some of which had inconsistent or dysfunctional native recording capabilities. During the in-person interviews I recorded audio on both the video camera, and on a separate voice recorder, to ensure that at least two recordings were made for each interview. I attempted to replicate this approach during online interviews, and often paired native recording technologies within apps such as Zoom, with a voice recording on my smartphone.

Coronavirus also significantly impacted photography in Wales itself. Exhibitions were cancelled, opportunities for in-person socialising were reduced. However, in what is arguably a display of adaptive emergent behaviour, several new online initiatives were set up in response to the pandemic. As Cabuts wrote in 2021, “a sense of ‘community’ has continued to emerge over the last couple of years thanks for the hard work of those who developed formal and informal activities, often serviced by the pandemic’s ‘Zoom-boom’” (p.40). As technologies rapidly advanced to cater to an increased demand for online communities, several galleries hosted digital exhibitions and events. Ffotogallery, for instance, launched an online exhibition in which viewers were able to navigate through a virtual reality rendering of Ffotogallery’s physical space and explore exhibits through a series of interactive media including artist biographies and videos. The majority of the participants stated that the pandemic and its subsequent effect on travel and socialising had impacted their practice. Some of these impacts were characterised as negative, with participants citing social distancing or stay at home orders impairing their ability to produce photographic work

(RP05⁸³, RP17⁸⁴, RP23⁸⁵) exhibit their work (RP08⁸⁶, RP23⁸⁷), and engage in collaborative exhibition or discourse (RP02⁸⁸, RP06⁸⁹, RP17⁹⁰, RP21⁹¹). However, some participants reflected positively on the impact of the pandemic; citing the creation of online social opportunities (RP22⁹²), the motivation to create new photographic projects addressing the impact of the pandemic (RP17⁹³, RP23⁹⁴), or the adoption of new projects within their locality facilitated by free time or movement restrictions caused by national lockdowns (RP17⁹⁵). Others, like Cabuts reflected more generally on the wider societal ramifications of the pandemic, contextualising these reflections within the social scene of Welsh photography, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

RP02 [00:51:37] that's the funny thing about this coronavirus thing; people are communicating a lot more now. And they want to be together because we've been isolated. We want to be together. We want our banter; we want to have fun. And we want to enjoy other people's company for who they are and not for what they do or how much money they've got or anything like that. So, it's a bit of a leveller, you know.

Whilst the impact of Covid-19 undoubtedly will continue to have implications for Welsh photography, as it will the wider world, the pandemic itself has not been considered in the analysis and discussion chapters. Largely, this is due to fact that the fieldwork occurred within the first year of the pandemic and as such, any data generated regarding the long-term impact of the pandemic were, at the point of analysis, speculative.

⁸³ Project involving portraiture put on hold.

⁸⁴ Paused a project that necessitated travel to a different region of Wales and was therefore made illegal during lockdown.

⁸⁵ Paused work on a project that involved photographing people in nightclub bathrooms.

⁸⁶ Premier of film about Welsh culture postponed.

⁸⁷ Disrupted the launch of a group project facilitated by PHRAME and exhibited at the Senedd in Cardiff.

⁸⁸ Paused the development of a Welsh language series of podcasts for Ffoton.

⁸⁹ Temporarily halted the distribution of physical material such as Offline Journal.

⁹⁰ Activities of The North Wales Project temporarily paused.

⁹¹ Also commented on the activities of The North Wales Project being temporarily paused.

⁹² Had more time to engage with informative online content such as photography podcasts (due to working from home).

⁹³ Created distanced portraits of local residents during lockdown.

⁹⁴ Commissioned by an online magazine to document the impact of the pandemic on communities in South Wales.

⁹⁵ Cited the creation of a new local project and online interaction with work from other photographers who have had more time to create projects during lockdowns.

5. The Gallery and The Gatekeeper

This chapter represents the first of two data analysis/discussion chapters. As stated previously, the data gathered comprised a mixture of photographs (gathered across Stages 1 and 3), interview transcripts (gathered across Stage 2), and written contextual information submitted with images (gathered in Stages 1 and 3). Although some quantitative data were generated through coding processes (word frequencies, for example), it primarily represents the researcher's inductive coding framework and has been regarded as incidental rather than analytical data. As such, the analysis presented across Chapters 5 and 6 is organised as a thematic qualitative narrative (Riessman, 2008). As the primary aim of this thesis is to analyse Welsh photography through a complexity lens, the narrative of the following chapters is thematically organised according to the basic structure of a complex system: an environment and system of dynamic components.

Specifically, this chapter explores the environment in which the proposed system functions, whilst Chapter 6 explores data that pertain to the system itself. Within the context of this research, the system environment is largely characterised by formal institutions that act as a conduit between Welsh photography and wider photographic and cultural praxis and discourse. Many of the institutions mentioned in this chapter are also discussed in Chapter 3, which explores their roles as cultural gatekeepers. This chapter also explores the influence of the environment in the adaptive and emergent behaviours of the system. It considers factors such as institutional politics and tensions, funding, and wider cultural factors such as the Welsh language.

5.1 The Environment

Complexity theory has emerged from several branches of systems thinking including general systems theory, cybernetics, and latterly complex adaptive systems (Heylighen et al., 2007). Although this thesis is primarily informed by notions of complex adaptive systems (referred to as “complexity” throughout), it is salient to consider the lineage of complexity science when considering the relationship between a complex system and its environment. Heylighen et al (2007) explain that in general systems theory “each system has an environment, from which it is separated by a boundary. This boundary gives the system its own identity, separating it from other systems. Matter, energy, and information are exchanged across that boundary” (p.121). As can be seen in Figure 31 these exchanges are critical catalysts in the proliferation of feedback loops within the system and in facilitating emergent phenomena/behaviours. It is crucial to note that despite the connotations of this terminology, complex systems are open; the so-called “boundary” performs an organisational as opposed to limiting function. As Heylighen et al note:

“the relationship between a complex system and its environment or context is in itself a complex problem. When dealing with social systems, it is often unclear where the boundary of a system is. It is often a matter of theoretical choice” (2007, p.129).

The notion of “theoretical choice” described by Heylighen et al., highlights another key factor within complexity research: the role of the researcher. As previously discussed, the role of the researcher in complexity-informed research should be explicitly considered through integrated reflexive practice (Montuori, 2013). As such, the influence of the researcher and research environment is a central consideration within the analytic narrative presented here. Consequently, the boundary between this complex system and its environment (illustrated in Figure 30) primarily provides critical insight into the way in which the data have been organised by both participants and the researcher, rather than any tangible limit within the system.

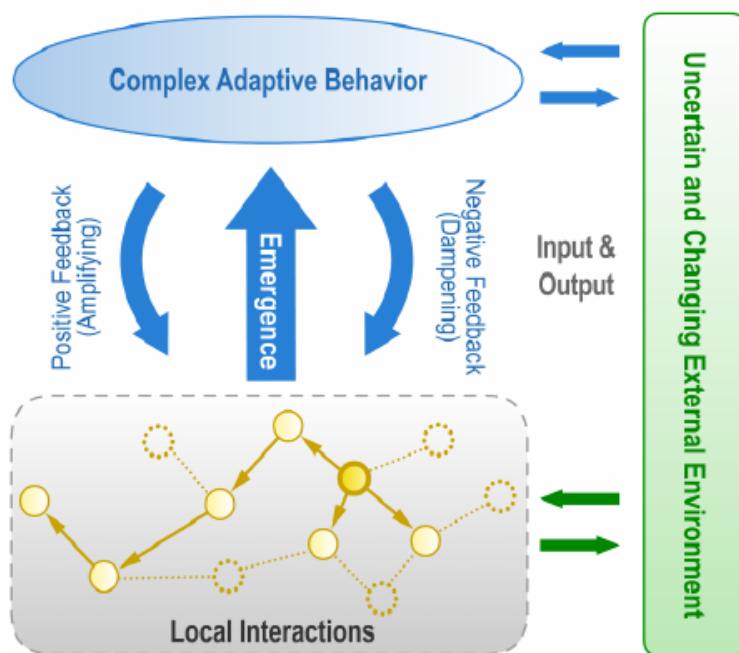


Figure 31: *Emergence in Complex Adaptive Systems* (Monostori, 2008)

Within the parameters of this research, the boundary or identity of the system reflects a co-created notion of “Welsh photography”, maintained at civic and institutional level, and collaboratively identified by researcher and participants. The system itself is characterised by components and data that are actively involved in the creation of Welshness in photography; photographers, photographs, and photographic methodologies. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the system has been organised into three subsystems that correspond to these components; Photographers,

Photographs, and Photo-methodologies. Each of these subsystems also contain thematic data clusters (arguably themselves also subsystems).

Unlike the subsystems within the system, the subsystems that constitute the environment are *not* characterised purely by a constructed notion of Welsh photography. Instead, they represent sites of interaction between system components and wider global contexts; exchanging information and energy (such as patronage, publication, exhibition, and education) with the system, but also fulfilling wider roles external to the survival of the system. As Cilliers states, the system relies on exchanges with the environment to survive, but the environment could arguably function without the system (1998). Using both inductive frameworks and context supplied by participants during fieldwork, I was able to separate various components into roles either within the system or the environment. This in itself is a complex and imperfect process, and many components within the environment (such as museums or universities) arguably function as complex systems themselves. Critically, the environment contains components/subsystems that either are specific to the research environment, or who do not rely on context supplied by the system and are therefore able to operate without it. The basic makeup of both the system and the environment are detailed in Chapter 4, but briefly, the system environment proposed by this research is made up of two subsystems: Gatekeepers and This Research. Each subsystem contains two smaller data clusters (detailed in Chapter 4) and as with the system there is significant 'real world' overlap between both data clusters and subsystems. However, within the context of the data and analysis, these subsystems were conceived as having differential effects on the adaptability and emergent behaviours of the system. This is detailed below.

5.2 Gatekeepers

Throughout the data, participants cited a variety of institutions as having significant gatekeeping authorities related both to individual artistic practice and more outward-facing conceptualisations of Welsh photography. Broadly, these institutions cover exhibition, funding, and education within photography. This section considers frequently mentioned gatekeeping practices/institutions and is divided into three subsections. 5.2.1 explores the influence of higher education institutions on the behaviour of the system; citing influential teaching (which typically manifests as photo-methodological feedback loops - explored in more detail in Chapter 6), and aesthetic and photo-methodological gatekeeping. 5.2.2 explores the ways in which system components interact with arts and culture institutions as sites of exhibition and funding. These institutions are also implicated in gatekeeping practices that have engendered specific adaptive phenomena, most significantly in the form of self-organisation amongst system components. As such, 5.2.3 explores the significant

proliferation of artist collectives, characterising this phenomenon as an adaptive strategy of self-organisation driven by a perceived lack of institutional support.

5.2.1 *“you can tell he’s been trained at Newport”*: Education

“The rapid expansion of government funding of higher education changed the nature of art colleges by drawing in large numbers of young teachers, mostly from outside Wales, at a time when ideas about art as an international language were already marginalising those for whom cultural individuation was the central concern.” (Lord, 2000, p.9).

As is discussed in Chapter 3, Wales has a comparatively generous range of educational options for photography. The vast majority of these are located within tertiary education, though some cultural institutions such as Ffotogallery also claim to contribute to photographic education in Wales. This section specifically examines the function of photographic education within the environment of a complex system. As such, education is understood as a conduit between Welsh photography (photographers, photographs, and photo-methodologies) and wider discourse relating to art practice, employment, and higher education.

Participants largely conceptualised the role of photographic education as “influential”, indicating that educational institutions and corresponding pedagogies had significant impact on their practice. This spanned both aesthetic influence and influence on professional networks/practice but was primarily understood in the context of photographic methodology. As previously mentioned, several subsystems and data clusters within the proposed system of Welsh photography have significant overlap. Section 6.4 of the following chapter also explores photographic methodologies, although the methodologies considered in that section happen at a more local level between system components. This section focuses on the capacity for education to shape behaviours within the system and to act as a catalyst for feedback loops.

Of the available higher education (HE) photography courses available in Wales, participants mentioned five: the Documentary Photography course established by David Hurn and Peter Jones in 1973 for Newport College of Art (Cabuts, 2012), the latter evolution of that course now offered at both undergraduate and postgraduate level by the University of South Wales⁹⁶ (USW), the Photojournalism degree offered by USW (distinct from the Documentary Photography degree), the Photography in the Arts undergraduate degree jointly offered by University of Wales Trinity St. David and Swansea College of Art⁹⁷, and the undergraduate

⁹⁶ <https://www.southwales.ac.uk/courses/ba-hons-documentary-photography/> [Accessed 18th May 2022]

⁹⁷ <https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/ba-photography-in-the-arts/> [Accessed 18th May 2022]

Photography degree offered by Carmarthen School of Art⁹⁸. The latter two institutions were mentioned coincidentally, as participants described their involvement in photography education (both as students and educators). Two participants were also affiliated with photography courses outside Wales; the MA in Photography Arts offered by the University of Westminster⁹⁹ and the MA in Visual Anthropology at the University of Manchester.¹⁰⁰ As can be seen in Figure 32, several participants were affiliated with photography education as both students and staff, and several had undertaken courses at more than one institution.

Institution	Student	Staff/Guest Lecture
Newport College of Art and Design	RP08, RP12, RP16, RP19	RP07, RP20
University of South Wales (“DocPhot”)	RP04, RP08, RP13, RP14, RP22	RP08
University of South Wales (Photojournalism)	-	RP12
Carmarthen School of Art	RP22, RP05	RP14
University of Wales Trinity St. David/Swansea College of Art	RP19	-
University of Westminster	RP15	-
University of Manchester	RP18	-

Figure 32: Education affiliation amongst participants

As argued in Chapter 3, the pedagogies employed by David Hurn during his tenure as course leader at Newport College of Art contributed to a specific set of photo-methodologies that were connected to graduates of that iteration of the course. Although Bleyen and van Gelder include “towering national schools” (2011) in their delineation of national photography, it would be speculative (and counter-intuitive to complexity) to intimate direct cause-and-effect between teaching on these programmes and the development of totalising national photo-methodologies. However, many S2 participants indicated that education received from these programmes has impacted their individual photo-methodologies and as such, it can comfortably be concluded that these programmes have contributed to feedback loops that amplify certain emergent behaviours (and related artworks) within the system of Welsh photography. This was particularly explicit for participants who had been students on either Hurn’s Documentary Photography course, or the

⁹⁸ <https://www.colegsirgar.ac.uk/index.php/en/art/231-courses/art-design-courses/1359-ba-hons-photography> [Accessed 18th May 2022]

⁹⁹ <https://www.westminster.ac.uk/art-design-and-visual-culture-courses/2022-23/january/full-time/photography-arts-ma> [Accessed 18th May 2022]

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/masters/courses/list/10029/ma-visual-anthropology/> [Accessed 18th May 2022]

Documentary Photography degree now offered by USW. The relationship between these two iterations of Hurn's course was discussed by several participants, some of whom have been students at both Newport and USW (the campus for which is now located in Cardiff). Indeed, though the online course description for the USW Documentary Photography course currently (March 2022) states that the course "was established by Magnum photographer David Hurn in 1973" (University of South Wales, 2022), some of the affiliated participants expressed views that the current course now bears little resemblance to Hurn's original iteration, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

RP06: [00:35:30] I think - it's been said before, and Hurn has actually said it as well, publicly, I think. But the DocPhot course just tends to cling to the old Newport course. It's not in Newport anymore. And David Hurn isn't there anymore. But it's their kind of main marketing - and I get it, that's PR, isn't it? You need some big claim to fame to help sell the course

Whilst it was never explicitly acknowledged, several participants tacitly distinguished between Hurn's iteration of the course and the current iteration by referring to them through the sobriquets "Newport" and "DocPhot", respectively. Regardless of different pedagogies, both courses were cited as being impactful on photographer's praxis, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

RP00: [00:08:46] You mentioned Newport and David Hurn - would you say that that education shaped the way you approach photography now?

[...]

RP12: [00:09:04] Definitely. It was a way of teaching that made you think. It made you research. It made you wonder, it made you look. It made you get things right as best you can. It was a way of teaching that for me, was perfect, because everything I do now is totally because of Newport.

The impact of feedback loops created by pedagogies related to Newport was also discussed during the photo-elicitation conversations, in relation to S1 images. During our conversation RP08 (who was a student of both Newport and DocPhot) asserted that it is possible to recognise fellow students of the Newport course through their photo-methodologies. This can be seen in the following observation that RP08 makes about the photo-methodologies employed by the author of RI27 (Fig.33). RP08 recognised the approach and identified the author of the image as Newport-

trained photographer Glenn Edwards, despite not having seen the photograph before it was presented to them as part of this research:

RP08: [00:58:47] You can tell he's been trained at Newport as well. You can see.

[...]

RP00: [00:58:53] Why do you say “you can tell he's been trained at Newport”?

RP08: [00:58:57] Because you're waiting for something to happen, waiting for something magical to happen. Like I say it would have been a nice picture without the Dalek. I don't know. It reminds me of East Germany or somewhere in the 50s. But the Dalek coming past is that decisive moment¹⁰¹. And that's really what was embedded into us at Newport, was just waiting for those really special moments where they may not happen ever again.



Figure 33: RI27 (Edwards, n.d.)

¹⁰¹ The ‘decisive moment’ is a phrase coined by Henri Cartier-Bresson in his 1947 publication of the same name. It refers to the moment in which a photograph “presents itself” to the photographer, from a scene composed of dynamic reality. The term has now become commonplace in photographic discourse though the meaning oscillates between active authorship (the ‘decisive moment’ being when the photographer releases the shutter to create an image), and passive observation (the ‘decisive moment’ occurring when reality organizes itself into a compelling composition, regardless of the presence of a camera).

The recognition of certain photographic methodologies within the system constitutes emergent phenomena, amplified by the photography education delivered at Newport through a positive feedback loop. Several participants indicated that the photo-methodologies taught by David Hurn at Newport were primarily geared towards producing documentary photographs for publication - with the aim of securing employment for photographers. As such, this behaviour can also be viewed as adaptive – photographers able to successfully implement photo-methodologies that result in publication and/or employment have adapted to extraneous environmental factors (such as the standards of a photo-editor). Similarly, the connection between those photo-methodologies and resultant employment or publication is likely to reinforce those approaches, thus contributing to a positive feedback loop of behaviours amongst system components. In comparison, participants understood DocPhot-inspired photo-methodologies to be more geared towards exhibition and fine art than employment or publication. RP12 was a student on Hurn's original course, and now teaches on the Photojournalism course offered by the University of Wales. They speculate that the current photojournalism programme in fact bears more resemblance to Hurn's original course, as it has a more vocational focus than the current iteration of Documentary Photography:

RP12: [00:14:40] I don't think it's [DocPhot] anything like Newport now. [...] It might still have certain elements, but I think the teaching of approach in taking the picture and what that final image is, is different because there is this new conceptual way of thinking [...] For me, a documentary picture should document something, and it should tell me something. [...] And again, I can't say every photographer that goes there is the same; they're not. But I find that a lot of the style is that element of looking at the picture. And I'm thinking, "what the... what is it? What's it about?" I don't get it. And unless it's maybe in an exhibition, where it's related to other pictures, then fine. [...] Whereas what we're [USW Photojournalism] trying to do is get people to take pictures that are relevant to getting work, not relevant to an art gallery. Now again, they may say, you look at the Sunday Times, you look at The Guardian, you look at a lot of the top end newspapers, magazines, they will be using these sorts of conceptual work. So, they will say, "well, people are using it". That's fine. Let them teach that way and we'll continue teaching ours.

Whilst the influence of Newport has demonstrably been significant, the influence of the DocPhot course has also permeated the system in terms of both visual and behavioural phenomena. In Chapter 6, I discuss the emergence of new Welsh referents as hybrid or exaggerated stereotypes geared towards image reformation, often proliferated through praxis taught on the contemporary

DocPhot degree. Indeed, several participants who have been DocPhot students discussed the way in which hybrid photo-methodologies taught at DocPhot have influenced their practice. For example, the proliferation of contemporary fashion photography aesthetics transposed with traditional Welsh referents and documentary photo-methodologies was discussed by three participants, two of whom are DocPhot alumni. Whilst photo-methodological hybridity undoubtedly reflects trends and movements within photography itself (it should be noted that the participants whose practices were more conceptual were also amongst the youngest participants in the sample), both participants cited DocPhot as having a significant impact on their creative practice. As such it could be argued that higher education institutions, whilst constituting gatekeeping entities that specifically engage in the proliferation of both positive and negative feedback loops, are also sites of interaction that proliferate emergent phenomena within the system and connect the system with wider artistic practices and cultural trends.

The tension created by different pedagogies and associated photographic-methodologies offered by Newport (documentary and reportage) and DocPhot (fine art and constructed images) is also mirrored in several remarks participants made regarding the ontological capabilities of photography to reflect national identity. Specifically, participants tended to understand photography either through a more orthodox lens, in which national phenomena existed outwith photographs and were aesthetically but objectively recorded by photographers, or through a more postmodern lens, in which photographs formed part of a wider construction of identity. Notably, participants associated with Newport tended towards the former, whilst participants associated with DocPhot tended towards the latter. Whilst it is unwise (and, again, counterintuitive to complexity theory) to assume conclusive cause and effect between photographic pedagogies and participants' ontological apprehension of photography, there is a clear relationship between photographic education and photo-methodologies. As such it is possible to understand the continued and deliberate use of both "documentary" and "fine art" approaches as emergent adaptive behavior that is maintained through a variety of feedback loops variously encouraged by educators. These feedback loops are also encouraged by the related practices of exhibition and publication, and as will be discussed below, the data indicate that galleries and museums also act as interlocutors between Welsh photography and wider contexts.

5.2.2 Galleries and museums

“During the last decade photography in Wales appears to have gone from strength to strength - one of our institutions, National Museum Wales, has a new dedicated gallery

for photography, and its first ever Senior Curator of photography; another, the National Library of Wales, has continued to purchase and exhibit contemporary Welsh photography; and Ffotogallery, the national photography agency for Wales, has produced a range of initiatives for international engagement and exchange. However, does the work of these national institutions provide what is best for the development of photography in Wales?” (Cabuts, 2019, p.50)

Galleries and Museums were widely acknowledged by participants as the core gatekeepers of Welsh photography. Within these acknowledgments was a significant amount of frustration, that largely appeared to be directed at larger and perhaps more particularly at funded institutions. In total, 12¹⁰² galleries or museums with dedicated photography exhibitions, stewards, or collections were identified by participants. 11 of these are based in Wales, with the exception being the *Martin Parr Foundation*, which is in Bristol. Figure 34 represents every gallery or museum mentioned by participants in the context of Welsh photography. It indicates the general conceptualisation of the gatekeeping role of galleries; noting the frequency with which each institution was discussed, and the contexts in which they were discussed. To maintain the collaborative nature of the data, I have included within the frequency figures the times that I mentioned institutions. However, to avoid overt bias I have categorised my own responses as “Neutral”, as in nearly every instance, they were. For a comment to qualify as “Negative”, participants had to expressly state frustration or displeasure with an institution, and similarly for a comment to be flagged as “Positive”, participants had to explicitly discuss the institution within a favourable context.

¹⁰² Although it does not feature in this table, St. Fagans Folk Museum was mentioned by RP16 during their interview. However, St. Fagans does not have a dedicated photography collection (their collections contain photographs, but typically as adjunct material to other thematic collections), nor does it typically host photography exhibitions. As such, it has not been included in this table. RP16 mentioned the museum in a conversation about the Welsh Not (examples of which are preserved at St. Fagans), and favourably discussed the way in which the institution has been set up as a “living museum”. St. Fagans was not discussed within the context of photography at any point during fieldwork.

Name	Frequency	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Elysium Gallery	1	1	-	-
<u>Ffotogallery</u>	92	8	20	63
Found Gallery	1	1	-	-
Martin Parr Foundation	8	3	-	5
Mission Gallery	1	-	-	1
National Library	13	4	-	9
National Museum	21	3	1	17
National Waterfront Museum	1	-	-	1
Oriel Colwyn	15	3	-	12
Kickplate Gallery	3	-	-	3
The Workers Gallery	1	-	-	1
Third Floor Gallery	4	1	-	3

Figure 34: Gallery Sentiment

As can be seen in Fig.34, participants largely discussed institutions with a degree of neutrality, despite overarching sentiments of negativity towards gatekeeping practices in general. However, Ffotogallery, which was by far the most cited institution, also drew a comparatively high level of negativity. As mentioned in Chapter 3, in 1978 Crawford passionately advocated for the establishment of “The Photographic Gallery” of Wales. Less than a month later, Ffotogallery opened its doors on Charles Street in Cardiff, having chosen their name from the Welsh language rendering of “The Photographic Gallery”: *Yr Oriel Ffotograffeg* (Drake, 2018). Crawford’s vision for a centralised archive, organised funding, franchising of smaller related galleries (encouraging local engagement and preventing a Cardiff-centric stronghold), research, conservation, collection, and publication (1978) was a tall and optimistic order. Ffotogallery has arguably fulfilled many of these requirements, albeit with some degree of intermittency. It’s changing directors have seemingly each brought a different vision and the evolution of Ffotogallery has coincided with the evolution of photography itself. However, participants’ opinions on the current role of Ffotogallery were mixed. Typically, participants with negative feelings towards Ffotogallery cited unfair distribution of Art Council funds, movement towards multimedia projects at the expense of traditional photographic stills, and disproportionate interest towards projects based outside of Wales. Several

participants explicitly linked perceived deficits in Ffotogallery's role in nurturing Welsh photography to its then¹⁰³ director, David Drake. An example of this can be seen in the following excerpt from RP02:

RP02: [00:38:21] The agency that looks after or promotes Welsh photography and Welsh lens-based media is Ffotogallery, and I think therein lies a problem. The problem is not the institution itself. I think the institution itself is worthy. But it comes down to personalities in the end. I think that you have the curator at Ffotogallery; it's his take on the photographic world. He curates everything. So, it's his taste foisted on the Welsh public and I'm not sure that's a good thing. I know he's been in post for ten years but going to see exhibitions at Ffotogallery is a strange thing. It's very much conceptual stuff, really. I'm not sure that that will entice people to go into the gallery because they think it's something beyond them. There's not enough of a mix of stuff shown. They try sometimes - they've shown The Valleys Project. They started an international photographic festival. But there's something lacking, there's something missing. That identity is missing because, I know that sounds really a terrible thing to say, but David Drake is based in Bristol. He's not based in Wales. He doesn't have a place in Wales. So, he's not in that mix of Welshness; he is in a mix of that academia thing, maybe, and I don't think that's healthy.

RP02's comments mirror wider contextual discourse discussed in Chapter 3 regarding the historical failure of Welsh institutions to invest in Welsh-specific artworks (Lord, 1992). Further, their comments also engage with discourse that, as discussed above, pervaded discussions regarding education – the perceived inaccessibility of fine art photography (characterised by RP02 as “conceptual stuff”) versus more traditional documentary approaches. As such, RP02's comments indicate both a set of general criteria that they deem critical to the successful “promotion” of Welsh photography, and a more personal understanding of the way in which those criteria should be met.

However, not all mentions of Ffotogallery were negative, and some participants were keen to defend the institution, instead expressing frustration at criticism of both Ffotogallery and David Drake. This can be seen in the following excerpt from RP14:

¹⁰³ On the 17th of August 2021, in a public statement released on Ffotogallery's website and emailed to newsletter subscribers, David Drake announced his plans to retire as director of Ffotogallery. This announcement was made several months after fieldwork concluded, and as such participants who discuss but do not name “the Ffotogallery director” are referring to Drake, and not Siân Addicott, who assumed the post of director in April 2022.

RP14: [00:49:18] If you're gonna call anyone a gatekeeper, you would call Ffotogallery a gatekeeper because they're the largest funded institute, I suppose. But it's a tricky line to walk. I've got to say, over the last 10 years, I've been supported by lots of institutions; Ffotogallery being one of them. And 1), I'm proud of that, and 2), I'm really appreciative of that. Because otherwise, I don't think I'd have had half the opportunities - had people like that not taken an interest. So, I call them gatekeepers, but to what extent and for what reason? If I look at them as a gatekeeper, then as a gatekeeper they've looked after me. So, anything I say, it's within bias, isn't it? But I don't see them as gatekeepers. I see them as supporters. I see them as an institution for Wales.

Critically, many participants link Ffotogallery's ability to gatekeep Welsh photography to their funding, as can be seen in the following excerpt from a RP01's conversation, in which we were discussing how a potential commission for a longform survey (such as The Valley's Project) might be managed:

RP01: [00:37:11] I think you'd have to have an element of pre-selection [of photographers] to it. You want to make sure it's a good quality body of work.

RP00: [00:37:25] What would constitute a good quality body of work?

RP01: [00:37:29] Ah, that's not for me to say, is it?

RP00: [00:37:31] Do you think it's for Ffotogallery to say?

RP01: [00:37:34] They are the people that get the funding.

Whilst funding is discussed in more detail in 5.3.2, it is worth noting that several participants argued that as much of Ffotogallery's funding is from Welsh funding bodies - such as the Welsh Government and Arts Council of Wales (Ffotogallery, 2020), their focus on international projects¹⁰⁴ constituted an unwelcome redirection of funding away from Wales¹⁰⁵. Sentiment such as this fed into a narrative that was implicit across much of the data, in which participants felt that Welsh institutions weren't doing enough in Wales and weren't showing or collecting work that reflected Welshness. However, as constituents of the system environment, institutions such as

¹⁰⁴ Participants did not cite any of Ffotogallery's specific international projects – though there have been several. The projects have typically focused on cross-cultural engagement and despite participant sentiment to the contrary have typically included photographic commissions for both international artists and Welsh artists. For example, during a 2018 international engagement project entitled *Dreamtigers*, a delegation of Welsh photographers participated in workshops and events in Jaipur, India – producing “creative responses to their visit using photography and video” (Drake, 2018, p.112).

¹⁰⁵ This was speculation on the part of participants and therefore is not an accurate reflection of Ffotogallery's actual financial activity.

Ffotogallery fulfil roles external to the overall survival and output of the system and are therefore likely to be considerably influenced by wider sociocultural contexts and funding body requirements. As Liz Wells notes, “[a]rt institutions reflect particular contemporary preoccupations and indeed may seem overly subject to shifts in aesthetic sensibilities or in social concerns” (2019, p.491). Indeed, RP02’s comments regarding a perceived disconnect between fine art photographic work and photography with more mainstream appeal (therefore likely to draw in more visitors to the gallery) is arguably indicative of emergent adaptive behaviour impacted by positive feedback loops that reflect trends in the wider art world. As Willis notes:

“The art world also displays other characteristics of a dynamic system. It is the epitome of a small-world network, with dense interconnections between artists, dealers, teachers and critics, facilitating not only the transfer of art but also the dissemination of ideas and concepts that slowly roll the art world along.” (Willis in Geyer & Bogg, 2007, p.7)

Therefore, many of the perceived issues participants cited with Ffotogallery’s role in gatekeeping Welsh photography, including their access to public funding, can also be viewed in the context of Ffotogallery’s relationship with wider trends in photographic art and the art market itself, rather than their relationship with Wales and Welshness.

Indeed, internationalism, nationalism, and Wales-specific tensions permeated discussion of gatekeeping and again were primarily linked to funded institutions. For example, the notion of support being issued unequally across international boundaries also manifested at an intra-Wales level, with several participants indicating frustration at a perceived Cardiff-centricity to photography in Wales. As such, some participants perceived a paradigm in which galleries and museums controlled the outside perception of Welsh photography (anchoring it specifically within South-Welshness) by selectively exhibiting, collecting, funding, and publishing certain artists and photographic styles at the expense of others. This can be seen in the following excerpt from RP20:

RP20: [00:22:51] the institutions of Cardiff are not particularly interested in what I'm doing. Ffotogallery, the National Museum, have no interest in my work in any way, shape, or form whatsoever. I don't have a personal problem with that because that's their prerogative, you know. But I mean, it just highlights how they do control the narrative.

RP20 follows this by discussing the way in which “Brian” [Carroll], editor of Offline Journal and co-founder of Ffoton shows a “broader” selection of work, stating.

RP20: [00:23:11] And that's where Brian's doing quite a good job because he's a bit broader in his approach and more Catholic in what he shows, you know.

Carroll and the organisations he is affiliated with were variously conceptualised as more democratic and more pastorally supportive than bigger institutions. As such, despite RP14's feelings to the contrary, Carroll, Ffoton, and Offline were frequently characterised as “supporters” whilst funded and “official” institutions such as the National Museum and Ffotogallery were characterised more commonly as gatekeepers. However, RP20 is also cognisant of the fact that any act of curation has the potential to be seen as gatekeeping, noting:

RP20: [00:23:20] But I mean, then again, he [Carroll] becomes an institution, doesn't he? He himself becomes an institution. And I don't know how you get over that. I mean, whether you have cooperatives of photographers who have some kind of philosophy about Wales in a particular way. I don't know if you ever get over it.

In terms of Complexity, it might be argued that the perceived lack of Welsh/pan-Wales support from institutions threatens the survival of the system, and as such adaptive self-organisation should be observable. Whilst direct cause-and-effect relationships are difficult to chart within Complexity (Cilliers, 1998), several participants did discuss adaptive strategies that they have personally or collectively put in place to mitigate against the perceived lack of institutional support. One common example of this can be seen in the prolific formation of photography collectives – which, as can be seen in the above quote, RP20 offers as a solution to the perceived influence of institutional gatekeepers.

5.2.3 Collectives

As Cilliers states “[c]omplex organisations cannot thrive when there is too much central control” (2000, p.26). The problematic position occupied by “central” institutions such as Ffotogallery is reflected in the tension between the expectations placed on the institutions (as with Crawford's 1978 vision for The Photographic Gallery, participants had extremely high expectations of Ffotogallery) and the somewhat inevitable failure of those institutions to deliver the diverse and ambitious set of requirements. Further, the general aversion to totalising “gatekeepers” indicates that despite having high expectations of institutions such as Ffotogallery, participants generally reject the notion of a single institution amassing a considerable amount of control over the “narrative” of Welsh photography. This creates problematic discord across the system, in which participants reject the notion of gatekeepers whilst simultaneously expressing desire for institutions to support and promote photographic Welshness in specific ways (which, arguably, constitutes gatekeeping). Indeed, as Cilliers also points out, whilst complex systems flourish without “too much” central control, that “does not imply that there should be *no* control” (Ibid). Participants’

desire for institutional support therefore indicates their tacit understanding that the survival of the system is dependent on input and output from the environment. As Martins notes, art galleries and museums “are pivotal structures of cultural legitimation which have, therefore, become significantly cherished by contemporary artists and collectors” (2014, p.132).

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, components within complex systems are typically characterised as autonomous actors, each with specific goals (Woermann, Human, & Preiser, 2018). The combined goals of individual components usually amount to the survival of the system and the interactions between components and the environment generates adaptive emergent behavior that constitutes the system’s active attempts to “survive” (Ibid.). In the context of this research, “survival” is understood to be the validation of Welsh photography in wider contexts, achieved primarily through publication, funding, and exhibition. As such, most of the system components (understood to be photographers, photographs, and photo-methodologies) are geared towards attaining publications, patronage, and exhibitions. The perceived lack of institutional support in this case constitutes a threat to the survival of the system. Therefore, participants have naturally engaged in adaptive behavior to prevent the system from collapsing (I.e., Welsh photography being unrecognised/unsupported). Writing in 2019 for *Offline Journal*, Carroll notes a recent expansion of photography collectives in Wales, citing five active groups¹⁰⁶, each of whom organise and produce work under a specific manifesto. As Stimson and Sholette argue, artist collectives have traditionally occupied reactionary or revolutionary roles; typically they are formed and produce artworks in response to a perceived socio-cultural or political issue that is understood to be in direct opposition to their manifesto (2006). Arguably, all the collectives discussed in Carroll’s article are reactionary; each responding to a perceived deficit in photographic support or representation across Wales. Of 23 S2 participants 6 were (or at least had been) affiliated with 3 photography collectives: *The South Wales Project*¹⁰⁷ (TSWP), *The North Wales Project*¹⁰⁸ (TNWP), and *PHRAME*¹⁰⁹. When those participants were asked questions about their

¹⁰⁶ The collectives included in Carroll’s 2019 article include *A Fine Beginning*, *Inside The Outside*, *The South Wales Project*, *The North Wales Project*, and *PHRAME*.

¹⁰⁷ The South Wales Project (TSWP) was formed in 2018 by Dan Wood, Jon Pountney, Siôn Marshall Waters, Rebecca Thomas, and Anna Jones. Preferred to characterise themselves as a “movement” than a collective, TSWP focus on photographic projects in and about South Wales, including the Valleys, and had initially stated that they aimed to engage in a longform photographic survey similar to The Valleys Project. However following a brief period of activity on social media, TSWP ceased operating together around the start of 2020.

¹⁰⁸ The North Wales Project (TNWP) were formed in response to TSWP by North Wales based photographers Robert Law, Ethan Beswick, Roj Smith, Philip Jones, and Hazel Simcox. They aim to represent images of North Wales that break with the perceived tradition of “sunsets and landscapes”, and as of May 2022, their social media presence indicates that they are still operating as a collective.

¹⁰⁹ PHRAME were a large collective of photographers – primarily identifying as female, who aim to challenge perceived demographic adversity in photography in Wales. In a statement on her website, founding member Kate

involvement within the collectives, they tended to explicitly state the collective manifestos, each of which revolved around filling a perceived gap in representation or exposure. RP17 and RP21, for example, are both members of TNWP and when asked to expand on the collective provided the following answers:

RP17: [00:04:01] there was a South Wales Project that started off. [...] it was a partly a response to that; that we have to do something up here as well. That friendly rivalry, you know, we're a split country.

RP21: [00:07:13] the idea of the collective is to try and give a view of North Wales that's not just sort of scenery and tourist stuff that, you know, chocolate box pictures, and things like that

Critically, none of the collectives in Carroll's article, (and therefore none of the collectives represented amongst participants) claim to represent Welsh photography regardless of genre or region. Instead, various collectives organised themselves either around a certain type of photography (*Inside the Outside*, for example, are a "landscape photography" collective), or around a particular region of Wales (as can be seen with TNWP and TSWP). This could have several causes, and as per complexity theory, is likely to be the result of a mixture of those causes. Firstly, collectives are not as well-resourced as galleries or museums and therefore in practical terms would struggle to unilaterally support a concept as demonstrably expansive and diverse as Welsh photography. Secondly, as argued throughout this thesis, both Welshness and photography are multiplicitous concepts and as such, the diverse range of collectives mirrors ontological diversity within both Welshness and photography. Indeed, when discussing TNWP, RP17 expressed frustration at the lack of pan-Wales national collective, but indicated that the established divides in Welsh culture would make this a very difficult actuality:

RP17: [00:13:29] we did a little poll of members of The North Wales Project recently and Phillip Jones made this point exactly - why should there be North/South? It should be Welsh. It's just geography and communications and I guess interpersonal relationships - meeting people face to face is nearly impossible. When the Welsh Assembly was formed,

Mercer writes: "It is not a group of only women – it is a group of people supporting people across genders, nationality, ethnicity and backgrounds, raising each other up, sharing our knowledge and our experience, helping each member get through the highs and the lows of working in a profession that can be euphoric at best, and outright hostile at worst" (2022). In 2021 (after fieldwork concluded), PHRAME announced via their social media channels that they were no longer operating as a collective.

you know, there was debate; was it going to be in Cardiff or Swansea or maybe Aberystwyth? And there was like a collective moan when it was in bloody Cardiff. You know, Cardiff has everything. But it *is* frustrating. It's an unwieldy country. It's difficult, there's no easy solution to it. There are historic, difficult differences that go back centuries. And it does annoy us that all the money goes to the south of Wales and all the media attention and even the English perception of Wales. The people speak with a strong south Wales accent, and that's just not us in the north.

As pointed out by RP17, another more practical reason for the lack of a pan-Wales collective is geographical proximity. Interactions between components in a complex system typically occur at a local level – though behaviour that emerges from these interactions can have global consequences for the system (Cilliers, 2000; Woermann et al, 2018). Therefore, as Cilliers argues, the optimal state of control in complex systems “is distributed throughout the system” (2000, p.26). In understanding themselves to be servicing localised demographics (North Wales, South Wales, landscape artists, women, etc), the collectives represent adaptive strategies that operate within Cilliers framework of decentralised distributed points of control.

However, in attempting to replace deficits perceived within the remit of institutions, several of the photography collectives also met the same considerable issues experienced by those institutions. For example, by the time fieldwork conversations began The South Wales Project had already “fizzled out” (RP03, 2020; RP17, 2020). Participants who were members of TSWP cited issues relating to unsustainable organisation and exhibition cost as the reason behind the premature failure of the collective. Arguably both problems would also be faced by galleries and museums, though as previously stated, institutions such as galleries and museums typically have considerably more resources at their disposal than artist collectives. This also indicates the transient and dynamic nature of the structure of a complex system and its environment. Indeed, if collectives are successful in filling roles within the environment, they arguably become part of the environment. As such they are likely to face problems that were seen to cause system-wide failures within the environment in the first place; such as failing to meet a remit calculated by system components with very high expectations. The following quote from RP01, indicates the precarious position between environment and adaptive behaviour occupied by TSWP, and underlines the corresponding pressure faced by collectives that seek to replace roles typically designated to institutions:

RP01: [00:28:42] I was really sort of excited to see what that South Wales Project would do.

[...]

RP00: [00:28:56] Why were you excited about it?

RP01: [00:28:57] Just because it's something to focus on. Because I'm pretty like scattergun with what I'm doing, even though I'm trying to build a small series. I thought "oh, that'll be interesting to see or maybe become part of", you know? And when Dan and Jon asked me to do the first sort of, take-over of that project on their Instagram and their Twitter feed I was chuffed with that.

The diversity and dynamic framework of collectives indicates one of the most crucial aspects of complex systems: the notion of flux. As Cilliers argues, complex systems need to remain in a state of flux in order remain reactive and thus adaptive (2000). The collectives provide insight into the type of adaptive behaviour prompted by interactions between the system and its environment, but as dynamic entities complex systems cannot be considered "solved". Therefore, the collectives are not able offer a complete nor a sustainable solution to all the perceived issues that arise between the system and its environment. Whilst the collectives represented collaborative attempts to overcome global threats to the system, several participants also cited personal attempts to overcome global issues – often located at consistent sites of tension. These issues are discussed in the following section.

Ultimately, the collectives that seem to have found some measure of success have retained their original grass-roots manifestos and are operating on a strictly local (either in terms of demographic, region, or genre) basis. This arguably minimises their risk of larger system wide threats experienced by collectives with more ambitious manifestos. The following extract from RP03 demonstrates the consistently changing nature of the system and highlights the importance of localised adaptive behaviour, citing the success of TSWP when it primarily constituted localised meetings between photographers. RP03 also highlights the system-wide threat of competition between system components, noting that this can have a negative impact on the overall survival of the system:

RP00: [00:30:01] Do you think there is a photography scene in Wales?

RP03: [00:30:09] There is. It goes through phases of all coming together and everything's great and then drifts apart. And it keeps doing that all the time, rather than there just be this permanent thing. It's because there's nowhere for us to go - if there was a central place where we could all be, I'm sure it would be a lot tighter. But I think only when there's some sort of like major show on or something like that, and we all turn up and we all know each other. And then after that we'll all disperse back into different parts of Wales and we won't

see each other for months. So, there's not this kind of... Brotherhood, if you like, of Welsh photographers. [...] I would be all for that. Because one thing that came from the South Wales Project before it fizzled out was that we used to meet every week in the Millennium Centre in Cardiff. We'd have coffee and we'd sit there for three hours, showing work, and talking. If more of that could go on, I'm sure that it would build a community as opposed to – there's so little opportunities that everyone's really cautious and cagey and you never really know what each other's up to. So, yeah I wish there wasn't that element of just, politics. I just wish everyone could just be friends, if anything. Because I'd love nothing more to just be like meet up with like-minded people every week.

5.3 Politics and Tensions

RP14: [00:45:42] I'm fed up or sick to the teeth of people fighting against each other when such a small community and you see a massive divide, now at the moment. And it's like, wow, this should not be happening, it really should not be happening.

Tensions between the environment and system components primarily manifested in two ways across the data. Firstly, as described in the previous sections, several participants discussed both personal and collective frustrations with certain institutions; citing a lack of institutional support and describing several instances of adaptive behaviour geared towards addressing these perceived deficits. Secondly, several participants expressed frustration with what they characterised as detrimental politics, feuding, or fighting between other participants and institutions or amongst the institutions themselves. Commonly, this was directed towards a perceived strained relationship between individuals connected with Ffoton and individuals connected with Ffotogallery, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

RP11: [00:58:48] there is so much hot air wasted on what's happening with Ffotogallery, what's happening with Ffoton, who's doing what, that they're not actually doing any work. None of them produce any work

RP11's notion that tension within the environment undermines the production of photographic work is shared by RP14, whose comments further underline Cilliers' notion that complex systems flourish when there is no central control (2005):

RP14: [00:46:13] This is when we should all be going, "ah whatever, let's just make work". Everybody seems to be racing to some kind of line and trying to win and dominate the

scene. And it's like, what are you doing? It doesn't need to be dominated. It doesn't need to be anything other than making work. Then once you've made it, once you have something to talk about, let's talk about it. Let's engage. Let's make a discussion. That's what it should be.

The notion that points of tension damage the global output of the system (demonstrated by RP14 and RP11's assertion that in-fighting reduced the production of photographs), was not something that participants felt able to address collectively. Indeed, the formation of artist collectives tended to arise when interactions between system components and environment components indicated a threat to the system. For example, participants involved with TNWP understood the region of North Wales to be under-represented by the environment and thus TNWP itself could be viewed as emergent adaptive behavior designed to promote the survival of system components (photographers, methodologies, and photographs) located in North Wales. As such, the perceived problem was a deficit that could be collectively addressed by components who are local to one another (both geographically and ideologically) and are assured of collective success if their adaptive behavior succeeds. In other words, if TNWP are successful, more photographs made in/of North Wales that break with perceived stereotypes will be exhibited and, more importantly, members of that collective will have *their* photographs exhibited, published, and funded.

However, in contrast to problems collectively addressed, points of tension that are localised within the system environment (rather than being an interaction between the system and its environment) were not typically met with collective action. During fieldwork there were several significant points of tension, identified by participants, which were also met with individual, rather than collective adaptive behavior. These are the influence (and patronage) of the Welsh language and wider funding distribution. Participant responses to these points of tension invariably involved recognising the tension and adapting individual behaviours to try and minimise the damage of that tension. However, as Heylighen et al argue, because components within a complex system cannot foresee all the consequences of their behaviours, "actions will generally collide with the actions of other [components], thus reaping a less than optimal result" (2007, p.127). As such, to maximise adaptive behavior, components "try out different action patterns, until one is found that reduces the friction with neighbouring [components] activities" (Ibid.). This creates small communities of "mutually adapted agents", which grow to become significantly influential (2007). In turn, this can create situations in which points of tension that originate in the environment, transpose themselves into the system through differing adaptive strategies employed by system components. The following two sections explore the ways in which individual strategies to adapt to institutional

support for the Welsh language and distribution of funds have amplified some of the related tensions across the system and resulted in several feedback loops (both positive and negative).

5.3.1 Language

As discussed in 2.1.2 the Welsh language has a powerful place within Welsh national identity. At both a civic and institutional level, command of the Welsh language has variously been linked with the concept of a “continuum of Welshness” in which some Welsh speakers consider themselves to be “more Welsh” than non-Welsh speakers; directly conflating command of the Welsh language with Welshness itself (Williams, 2017). This has contributed to a legacy of intra-Welsh tensions regarding national identity and language. This tension was also present during fieldwork conversations and largely framed within two contexts; participants with a command of the Welsh language talked of integrating the language into their work to signify their personal Welshness in both global and Welsh contexts. In contrast, those without a command of the Welsh language argued that the institutional support (and thus funding) related to the language disadvantaged photographers who do not speak Welsh. Not all participants who used the Welsh language described it as a deliberate strategy; RP14, who speaks Welsh, understands their inclusion of the Welsh language to be coincidental, stating:

RP14: [00:08:59] I couldn't record my community without having the Welsh language in it, because it's intrinsic to the culture and the visual culture. I noticed that some of the images that you've shown here [S1 Images] show the Welsh language. I can then sort of relate to it in the same way that I relate to my own community and how I make that work. There's also a poetic thing to that, I think. [...] The language brings a sense of romanticism of your culture. So, when you think of France or you think of Italy, you think of the language, don't you? It's there above it all. You hear it and you almost feel that it's intrinsic to the visual language that we see.

However, the majority of participants whose photographic work included representation of the Welsh language described this as a methodological strategy, in which their own Welshness (connoted through their use of the language) acts as a kind of signature in their images; creating a symbiotic relationship between their photographs and their personal Welshness. This can be seen in the following excerpt:

RP00: [00:16:59] why is the Welsh language included in [your] photobook?

RP02: [00:17:07] Because it's my identity. And I think that's the key to photography. If you don't have identity in your photography, then it's kind of just photographs. I'm trying to convey my identity through photography. David Hurn said you've got to leave your fingerprints on a photograph. People have got to know who the photographer is. And I think context is important as well. It's a kind of albatross around your neck, being Welsh, and especially Welsh-speaking. That adds another dimension to everything. So putting Welsh stuff in the book, I mean, there are poems that I didn't get translated because, A) they lose something in translation, and B), I wanted people to be aware there was something else. I didn't want to make life easy for people

RP02's comments mirror much of the nationalist discourse discussed in Chapter 2, in which the Welsh language is considered a defiant symbol of nationalism in the context of historical colonialism. It also indicates RP02's understanding that the use of Welsh language makes their work distinct from other photographers, allowing them to "leave [their] fingerprints on a photograph" through the incorporation of language. As such, RP02's inclusion of the Welsh language in their work constitutes a deliberate statement regarding both their identity and the social conceptualisation of Welsh as both marginalised and distinctive. RP02's use of the Welsh language could be viewed as a personal adaptive strategy designed to promote both their own work, and the Welsh language itself, as is indicated by the comment "I wanted people to be aware there was something else". RP16 also includes the Welsh language in their work as a deliberate strategy to promote the Welsh language and to locate images within Wales, giving them a distinct geographic and ideological location:

RP16: [00:40:01] even if they don't speak Welsh, they can say, "what language is that?"
Oh, that must be in Wales then.

Although it is difficult to measure the individual successes of photographers/photographs that depict the Welsh language, the establishment of the 1993 Welsh Language Act has significantly impacted the activities of photographic institutions operating within Wales. As described in Chapter 3, Ffotogallery has maintained a synergetic connection with the Welsh language (as have Ffoton and Ffoto Newport) and publishes annual commitments to an institutional "Welsh Language Plan". The plan, which is published on Ffotogallery's website, is "prepared in accordance with Welsh language Commissioner Guidelines under the Welsh Language Act 1993" (2020, n.p.) and typically involves treating Welsh and English language equally. Whilst the protection and promotion of the Welsh language is generally considered favourably (Williams, 2019), several participants who do not speak Welsh perceived the institutional promotion of the Welsh language

as both a personal and a global threat within the system, as can be seen in the following excerpt from RP11:

RP11 [00:17:11] There seems to be so many things discriminating against you. You know, we've got the language. I'm 100 percent pro the Welsh language. But the way that the Welsh language kind of dominates the art scene in Wales - in terms of positive discrimination, I think that damages other stuff. And that's not something you can really talk about without people taking what you're saying totally out of context and really giving you a hammering. What you're not saying is "I don't think the Welsh language should be represented" or whatever, but what you are saying is that it potentially gets too much focus.

RP07 is also cognisant of the influence of the Welsh language in interactions between the system and the environment, and similarly acknowledges that the institutional support of the Welsh language sometimes demonstrates a detrimental bias:

RP07: [00:13:11] what I've discovered is that the Welsh language sadly promotes a lot of very bad work. Simply because if five people are going up for a job, and you know that you've got to have Welsh, you're actually choosing from one in five, you know, 20 percent of the people. So, if you want to get the head of a museum, for example, sadly, in Wales, you usually end up with somebody who is very sort of conservative. And I mean that not in a political way; simply because of this language. And yet it's wonderful to have the language, but it's just a shame that it is so powerful and dominates so much because all it does is lower standards. It certainly doesn't higher standards.

RP00: [00:14:17] Have you found that with photography as well?

RP07: [00:14:21] Enormously. I've never had an assignment from any Welsh government or business in Wales. Never.

RP00: [00:14:31] And do you think that's because you don't speak the language?

RP07: [00:14:36] I think it's because I'm not in that Welsh, sort of thing. I mean, it's extraordinary how, you know, I can do things like, you know, get major awards from America and things like this, I get nothing from Wales at all.

RP07's comments are indicative of the tension created when actions performed by neighbouring components (both geographically and ideologically) achieve success within the system environment. Specifically, they understand Welsh-language speakers to be an influential and

exclusive community, members of which are considered favourably by institutions. As described above, as communities of components within a system achieve success and amass influence, they exert a “selective pressure” (Heylighen et al, 2007, p.127) on the system as a whole. Further, as Willis notes, “[t]his creates a feedback loop which encourages those that fit within the mold to produce more work until a point of critical mass is reached and it becomes a publicly recognised style.” (Willis in Geyer & Bogg, 2007, pp.6-7). As such, the influence of the positive feedback loop generated by Welsh language-favouring components in both the system and the environment can be seen in the following excerpt from RP23, who is not a Welsh-speaker, but who describes the practice of co-opting Welsh in their project title to distinguish their work from contemporaries operating outwith Wales:

RP00: [00:24:01] Why use the Welsh language in titles?

RP23: [00:24:07] So, with Fenyw, that was my third year BA big project. At the time I was competing with so many photographers who just discovered, “oh, we could take photos of girls; they're a narrative”. And I was like, well of course we can! It's like suddenly everyone's taking photos of their mates on beds and on periods and really using womanhood as a topic, and I'd be doing it for years. I'd been talking about sex and feminism and politicising the body and suddenly everyone was doing it. The project is not all based in Wales, but most of it is. The title Fenyw was just a take away from everyone else's project. They were always called, girlhood, babe, woman, girly girls; something like that.

RP23 also describes the way in which their strategic use of the Welsh language is considered to be an advantage when applying for funding:

RP23: [00:25:13] Then we have Tŷ Bach, and I had to name it in Welsh because I was applying for funding. That's the only reason.

The relationship between the Welsh language and funding indicates the interconnected nature of tensions within complex systems, whilst also further demonstrating the way in which systems maintain their dynamic nature. Whilst RP23 describes adaptive behaviour employed to maximise their access to funding, other participants such as RP17 and RP11 indicate an unwillingness to conform to this behaviour. As such, the opposing behaviours maintain the system tension, encouraging consistent adaptive behaviours. This phenomenon was also present in conversations that related to funding outwith the context of the Welsh language, and is explored below.

5.3.2 Funding

Funding (or lack of) has had a significant impact on Welsh art, as both a product and an ideology. As Lord writes, “[s]ome artists and writers about art have been in no doubt that the want of academic art in Wales has resulted from the want of patronage” (1992, p.15). Participants largely echoed this, indicating perceived issues such as uneven distribution of public funding amongst institutions:

RP08: [00:42:49] there's still this red tape of institutions. The Arts Council Wales need to wake up. Their funding, I understand, has been cut considerably, but it should be shared out properly

Specifically, participants tended to identify Ffotogallery as a significant recipient of arts council funding. On several occasions this contributed to the negative conceptualisation of the institution, due largely to the perceived deficits in support provided by the institution viewed in the context of the funds allocated as can be seen in the following excerpt:

RP08: [00:40:51] As far as funding goes, I think it's very unfair. The Arts Council Wales are very unfair in that they give a lot of money to Ffotogallery; they pay the director a large salary¹¹⁰.

In much the same way that Crawford measured his requirements for the Photographic Gallery of Wales against similar institutions in England, several participants explained their frustration with public funding through comparative paradigms with England. For example, RP05 cites the *Martin Parr Foundation*, which is based in Bristol as an example of well-funded institution that uses funds effectively. They state:

RP05: [00:54:32] you look at what Martin Parr is doing in Bristol. Incredible stuff. I absolutely love it that this guy's funding something like that. We haven't got anything like that in Wales, which is quite sad. And I genuinely think if I won the lottery, one of the first things I'd do is support photographers, have an archive place and you could have someone run it, look after it, and just a creative space for photographers. There isn't anything like that in Wales at the moment.

¹¹⁰ As stated previously, this is speculation on the part of participants and is therefore not reflective of Arts Council of Wales' nor Ffotogallery's actual financial activity.

RP05's comments indicate the perception that several of Crawford's requirements (institutional support, an archive, a meeting space) remain unfulfilled by current Welsh institutions. However, unlike the formation of collectives, or adaptive behaviour related to the Welsh language, participants generally acknowledged that there is little they can do to enact changes within policy for public funding. Indeed, the only two strategies participants deliberately employed were to anticipate funders' requirements (as demonstrated by RP23's use of Welsh titles in their work), or to seek funding from sources outside of Wales. This was demonstrated in a further comment from RP05 who explained that they had sought funding from Arts Council of Wales for an individual project, but that the project had been rejected due to its focus on video:

RP05: [00:55:11] I spoke to the Arts Council of Wales about a project, and they were like, "oh, we don't really see video as a means of art". And I was like it's not that, it's archival. So, there's funding for it, but they don't see it as a thing. So, I had to speak to Heritage Lottery.

Other more radical means of pursuing alternative funding involved physically relocating to England, where funding is perceived as being more democratic and abundant. Whilst none of the participants themselves employed this strategy, several noted that other photographers had moved to London to maximise their chances of attracting patronage:

RP23: [00:59:03] There's very few people who live in Wales who are dedicated to their craft. But most of them live in London because they got money.

Arguably, and as intimated by RP23, relocating from Wales to England might improve individual components' chances of success but damages the overall system and has global consequences for Welsh art in terms of both production and custody. This phenomenon is also discussed by Lord who argues that Welsh cultural institutions tended towards funding or collecting international work at the expense of Welsh work. This, he notes, is perpetuated by "the myth of the visual handicap" (discussed in Chapter 3), in which Welsh institutions bought into the colonial ideology that Welsh art was not as valuable as international art (1992).

Despite the relative lack of deliberate strategies to tackle perceived deficits in funding, several participants described smaller local actions designed to at least acknowledge the deficits. Occasionally, and as is typical of complex systems, these actions had larger global consequences that individual components would not have been able to predict (Heylighen et al, 2007). These actions were typically focused on the celebration of photographers (or, as will be discussed below, institutions) who were considered to be successful in spite of receiving little public funding. South Wales based photographer Dan Wood was repeatedly identified within this context, with some

participants noting the way in which his success can also be considered a more global success for Welsh photography, as can be seen below:

RP00: [00:26:46] If I said Welsh photography, what would that mean to you?

RP04: [00:26:59] Honestly? Dan Wood

Similarly, other participants acknowledged that Wood's success was largely self-funded, which was typically viewed favourably:

RP06: [01:02:51] the one I admire because he's stuck to his guns is Dan Wood; he receives little, if any, funding.

As such, both RP06 and RP11 expressed a desire to support Wood – viewing the action as beneficial to Welsh photography in general, as can be seen in the following excerpt, in which RP11 discusses the establishment of a fringe photography festival, in which Wood's work was included because it was excluded from that year's Diffusion¹¹¹ festival:

RP11: [00:25:20] I put my own money into doing a thing called Fotofringe, which we did three times in conjunction with Diffusion to promote Welsh photography. Because I thought that the fact that Dan's black and white work, *What is Welsh?* wasn't in that first show was mental.

General celebration of components considered to be successful despite lack of funding was also observable within the system environment. RP08 specifically mentions Brian Carroll, who is co-founder of Ffoton and editor of Offline, neither of which receive public funding:

RP08: [00:41:49] But it's these people that are pretty much doing it on a shoestring and coming out with this fantastic reflection of bringing photography to Wales and also showcasing Welsh photography. Brilliant. But I think funding needs to be looked at from the Arts Council Wales and it needs to be shared out to these people who are doing a tremendous work. Ffoton Brian doesn't get anything.

In response to system concerns regarding funding, in early 2020 Ffoton launched *Photography Survey Wales, 2020*; an online questionnaire that aimed to identify deficits or areas for development in institutional praxis across Welsh Photography. The survey ran from 15th February 2020 until 30th June 2020 (Ffoton, 2020) and consisted of a mixture of qualitative and quantitative questions. The results were published on Ffoton's website in December 2020. The document containing the results states that the purpose of the survey is to encourage “all those with an interest or remit in furthering access to, engagement with and development of photography in and across Wales [to] reflect on and give due consideration to the views and suggestions of survey respondents” (Ffoton,

¹¹¹ As mentioned in Chapter 3, Diffusion is the Biennial photography festival hosted by Ffotogallery and typically located in venues across Cardiff.

2020). Whilst it is unclear if these results have enacted change in public funding (particularly given the pressures on funding, arts, and cultural institutions during the pandemic), the findings triangulated much of the sentiment expressed by participants regarding the distribution of public funds¹¹².

Adaptive responses to perceived issues with funding across the system were typically either grass-roots (such as Ffotofringe) or designed to promote collective acknowledgement of issues (such as the Photography Survey Wales). Whilst, as previously mentioned, it is difficult to measure the success of these strategies, the strategies themselves represent ongoing and creative responses to perceived system-wide threats. These strategies typically revolve around “self-organisation” in which “the system spontaneously arranges its components and their interactions into a sustainable, global structure that tries to maximise overall fitness” (Heylighen et al, 2007, p.126). As Cilliers argues, the structure of complex systems is contingent, largely, on the research environment in which they are conceptualised, which highlights the need for transparency and reflexivity (2005). As such, the final section of this chapter reflexively interrogates the role of the research in the understanding of Welsh photography as it is presented in this thesis.

5.4 The Impact of the Research

“Complexity is therefore conceived as the property of a system that can be modeled [sic], considering the modeler’s own implication in the process” (Alhadeff-Jones, 2013, p.22)

The study of complex systems involves some level of reduction in order to delineate a complex phenomenon into a manageable “snapshot” of data (Cilliers, 1998). To mitigate the effects of this reductionism, it is critical to not only acknowledge the inquirer but to integrate them into the inquiry itself (Montuori, 2013). This process in itself is complex, as in complexity informed research, the inquirer is represented by “more than one entity” (Alhadeff-Jones, 2013, p.25), typically including the research participants. As stated throughout this thesis, the research design and corresponding analysis and narrative was co-created by participants during fieldwork. Therefore, as complexity-informed research generally requires the author(s) to model systems (Heylighen et al, 2007), it is critical to acknowledge the influence of authors on the corresponding structure of that system.

¹¹² For example, of 201 respondents, only 2.5% agreed that “public funding for photography in Wales is balanced and fair” (Ffoton, 2020).

5.4.1 *The participants*

RP06: [01:01:45] This is where I'm dying to see what your PhD says in the end. What does Welsh photography look like?

As described in Chapter 4, this research is comprised of data generated by 29 participants (one of whom is the researcher), 28 of whom were recruited across Stages One and Two of the fieldwork. Most participants were familiar with each other, either personally or professionally, and only two participants were not known to at least one other participant (including the researcher) before the research commenced. Similarly, no part of the research design was kept from participants, and they were welcome to address, question, or challenge research aims and assumptions across all three stages of fieldwork. Therefore, as photographers and participants, the participants occupied dual roles of named components within the system and anonymous collaborators within the research environment. Undoubtedly, this had implications for the way in which the complex system of Welsh photography is structured by this thesis.

As Montuori writes “every inquiry is conducted by an inquirer, a person with a history, a social and historical context, beliefs, values, biases, blind spots, ways of thinking” (2013, p.205). Therefore, it is conceivable that the participants’ implicit biases as photographers will have impacted their conceptualisation of certain elements within the system. The researcher’s decision, for instance, to position galleries and education as part of the environment, rather than the system was influenced by participants’ conceptualisation of those institutions as “gatekeepers” or as influential but peripheral in Welsh photography. Indeed, participants’ general conceptualisations of Welsh photography were almost universally related to the photographs, photographers, or approaches taken by photographers, which informed the structure of the system as it is presented in this research. Whilst no participant had any prior knowledge of complexity theory (other than brief mention during fieldwork when participants asked more about the aims and structure of the research), the shared understanding of institutions who exchange money, publication, exhibition, collection, and pedagogies with system components corresponds to Heylighen et al’s description of the system environment as entities, (often complex systems themselves) who exchange “matter, energy and information” (2007, p.121) with the system. Positioning galleries, museums, and education institutions as part of the system was also influenced by my understanding of system environments as being independent from the system (i.e., not reliant on the system for survival or identification) but another researcher might have positioned all these elements within the system and instead positioned wider societal institutions such as the Welsh Government (who actively shape Welshness in the native and foreign collective consciousness) as part of the environment.

Arguably both approaches would be valid; complexity research offers only a snapshot of a complex system at any one time (Cilliers, 1998).

Indeed, the crossover between the participant sample and the system itself only became apparent once analysis began to take place and the system was modelled, by which time fieldwork conversations were almost concluded. The decision not to widen the scope of participants to include more representatives from the environment is influenced by Alhadeff-Jones' (2013) model of complex research which is discussed in Chapter 1. Briefly, this model states that a complex system is determined by the finalities that characterise it. This research is limited by the research questions themselves and several practicalities relating to time and resources. The initial research specifically sought to understand how photographers constructed Welshness. It arose from a dialogic between Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" and orthodox conceptualisations of photography predicated on representations of the real. In other words, it sought to understand how one might photograph something that is materially imagined. As such, the initial sample population was restricted to photographers. As fieldwork progressed and participants discussed practices of collection, exhibition, and gatekeeping, it became clear that the representation of nationhood in photography was itself an ongoing discourse and involved contributions from institutions. However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the notion of "gatekeeper" was not straightforward neither was it universally agreed amongst participants. Therefore, as photographs can be legitimised as reflective (or not) of a national identity at multiple sources (both online and offline), the potential scope for participants widened exponentially. Museums, publishers, academics, online curators, podcasts, zines, journals, private collectors, arts council representatives, and so on could all potentially provide salient insight into the role of the environment in legitimising (or deligitimising) Welsh photography. As such, to ensure that the research itself was manageable with the timeframe and resources allocated, the participant sample was kept to photographers, and data relating to the environment was supplied either by participants or was available in the public domain.

The positioning of galleries and museums, and education as external to the system but part of the system environment is arguably contingent on the status of (most) participants as photographers. As such, any conclusions regarding the influence and the efficacy of the institutions that make up the environment come from within the system. Therefore, the role of reflexivity in the conclusions made throughout this thesis is critical. Indeed, participants themselves were occasionally co-incidentally reflexive - as mentioned in Chapter 4, during S2 conversations several participants noted that their participation in the research had caused them to reevaluate their

opinions on Welsh photography. Indeed, it could be argued that in occupying roles as both system components and research collaborators, some participants understood the research itself as influencing the system. Therefore, the design and implementation of S3, in which participants were invited to reflect on the research process and submit further written and visual data allowed participants to have an explicitly collaborative role. S3 can therefore be viewed as an adaptive behaviour both in terms of the research process (allowing for gathering more data) and in terms of maximizing fitness of the system; participants generally wishing for Welsh photography to be reflected in a constructive way (either through criticality or positivity).

5.4.2 The research images

Heylighen et al state that complex systems are comprised of diverse components that “can be conceived as autonomous individuals who try to achieve some personal goal or value (‘utility’ or ‘fitness’) by acting upon their environment, which includes other [components]” (2007, p.125). However, they also note that components “[do] not need to exhibit intelligence or any specifically ‘mental’ quality” (Ibid.). As such, this research considers photographs themselves as components that function across both the system and the environment. Photographs feature as part of the system due to participants understanding of what constitutes Welsh photography (photographs, photographers, and photographic methodologies), however, like the participants themselves, photographs (in the form of the research images) were also critical to shaping the structure of the system as it is presented in this research and have therefore also been considered as part of the environment.

The research images were a significant catalyst for conversation in most of the research conversations (they heavily featured in all but RP07’s interview). However, S1 research images were arguably limited in scope. I had initially intended for participants to submit influential images, noting that my own photographic practice is typically influenced through research and exposure to other photographic work. Despite this, the majority of S1 images were submitted by their authors, therefore the images were perhaps more representative of the participant sample, than of pertinent images in the system of Welsh photography. This is perhaps due to the way in which the call for participation was phrased or the fact that it was directly aimed at photographers (who are perhaps used to submitting work to open calls for publication or exhibition). As discussed above the participant sample was entirely made up of photographers, as such 42 of the 52 S1 images submitted were reflective of the participants own practice rather than images they considered to

be influential or inspiring. This slight disconnect was discussed explicitly by RP03, who did not submit their own work for S1, during their S2 conversation:

RP03: [00:51:29] It seems like everyone's just sent in their own work. Was I the one who got it wrong?

RP00: [00:51:34] No you did what I wanted people to do. I'll have to work out if I phrased the question in a way that was just too verbose. I don't know if - because I said I specifically want photographers, if people just went, oh, well she's asking for work from photographers, so here's some of my work. But what I wanted was for people to send me stuff that has influenced them.

RP03: [00:52:05] Oh I'm glad I got that.

As with any social system, many of the participants within this research are familiar with each other; either as artists, or as social acquaintances. Whilst this resulted in complexity-rich data regarding micro-interactions between system agents, it also elicited some unintended behaviours amongst participants during the photo-elicitation section of the fieldwork conversations. Specifically, this presented as a hierarchy of viewing that prevented some participants from viewing certain photographs objectively. In other words, some participants were primarily preoccupied with who had made certain images, rather than what those images showed. Commonly, this was indicated by a pattern of participants, without prompt from the researcher, attempting to guess authors of images before viewing the images as aesthetic or representative objects. Several participants likened their experience of observing the pictures (which were sent to them at least 24 hours prior to their conversations) to a quiz or a game, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

RP06 [01:16:20] Right. I think I can tell the ones that sent in their own work. [...] I was trying to play guess the photographer when I was looking through them all. As well as, you know, holding up to your brief of what I think says Wales currently. And I, honest to God, I did not do a Google search on any of them. So I've taken a guess at who the photographers are.

On several occasions I explicitly challenged participants about this behaviour, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

RP00: [00:05:26] Is it hard for you to look past the person that's taken the picture then, because you know a lot of the work?

RP03: [00:05:32] I suppose. Yeah. Because I'm familiar. You do kind of... The name pops into your head straight away.

RP00: [00:05:43] Does that influence the way you see it?

RP03: [00:05:45] I suppose it does in a way. Can't be helped, I guess

It should be noted however, that it is likely that the research setting itself was responsible for some of these reactions. It is unlikely that participants would ever have been exposed to an anonymous collection of images of Wales before, and as such their 'guessing game' responses might be more indicative of direct response to this particular mode of image curation and viewing, rather than an actual hierarchy of seeing. Indeed, when I asked RP03 whether the author of the image impacts the perceived 'Welshness' of that image, their response indicated that familiarity with authors affected their ability to objectively scrutinise photographs, but did not directly impact their judgement on the work as an artefact of Welshness:

RP00: [00:03:56] would a Welsh photo, for you, be as much about who the photographer is as what's in the photo?

RP03: [00:03:56] Not particularly, no. It would be nice if this was a pile of photos and I didn't know who any of them were. I recognise a lot of the work.

RP08 also cites familiarity as a barrier to formal or aesthetic objectivity, but instead speculates that familiarity with the content of the image, rather than the author might explain why several participants had primarily engaged with the S1 images as authored objects, as opposed to aesthetic or documentary objects:

RP08 [01:06:06] probably the Welsh photographers would try and work out the name of the photographer because we are so used to seeing the landscape, the terraced houses, the farmers, you know. So, probably there's a little bit of that coming into it. If you showed me pictures by Scottish photographers, I wouldn't try and work out who they were. I'd just look at the content of the pictures because I'd be interested to see the Scottish landscape, to see Scottish portraits, you know. So, I think there's partly that coming into it, that a Welsh photographer is going to say, "oh, it's another Welsh photographer, who is that?", rather than, "wow, look at that, look at those terraced houses", which we're pretty much used to seeing every day.

As previously noted, of the 23 S2 participants only 2 (RP09 and RP15) were completely unknown to me and were recruited to the sample population through social media (both were S1

participants who consented to S2 interviews). Both participants viewed the images more objectively than their fellow participants and had interactions with the S1 images that were primarily concerning the formal or referential aspects of the photography. Neither RP09 nor RP15 attempted to guess authors of any of the S1 images. The contrast between RP09/RP15 and all other research participants' responses to the S1 images highlights the suitability of complexity theory for understanding the social construction of phenomena such as national photography. The behaviours displayed by most S2 participants viewing S1 images indicate the inherent complexity of the relationships between system components as well as the contingent nature of analysis of complex systems. It would have been possible, for example, to implement the exact same methods with participants gathered from a sample of the general population of Wales. Given the widespread accessibility of digital photography, and the growing developments in visual literacy, a more general sample population would likely have reacted to the S1 images with the same hierarchy of seeing as RP09 and RP15; focusing more on formal and representational elements of the images rather than also viewing them as authored, mediated texts. However, in examining the relationships between the photographs, photographers, and photo-methodologies as they are understood by a specific demographic (photographers who produce serial works that explicitly represent Wales or Welsh identity), this research understands Welsh photography to operate as a complex adaptive system; typified by rich interactions between components. Therefore, Chapter 6 explores a series of self-organisation, feedback, and emergent behaviour that is contingent on the interactions between the photographers, photographs, and photo-methodologies that make up the complex system of Welsh photography.

6. Photography

“The visual image is an essential medium for the assertion of national identity: the denial of the aesthetics of the one is the denial of the politics of the other.” (Lord, 1992, p.8)

Chapter 5 explored the way in which the system environment (including the research itself) impacted the behaviours of the system. This included the exploration of feedback loops as well as sustained tensions that contributed to the necessary state of flux across the system. In contrast, this chapter focuses on the system itself and is primarily concerned with analysis of interactions of system components discussed by participants. As Cilliers states, “complex systems display behaviour that results from the interaction between components and not from characteristics inherent to the components themselves” (2005, p.257).

6.1 The System

“Complex thinking, after developing a rich picture of the phenomenon looks at the interrelationship between various systems we have selected as being of particular significance.”
(Montuori, 2013, p.49)

As stated in Chapter 4, during analysis the system was divided into three subsystems: The Photographer, The Photograph, and Photo-methodologies¹¹³. These subsystems account for the essential elements (identified by participants) to produce a photograph of Wales or Welshness. It is important to reiterate that some level of reductionism is crucial to delineate a complex system, in order to study relationships between system components (Cilliers, 2000). What is critical is the notion that neither The Photographer, The Photograph, nor Photo-methodologies can account for participants’ notions of Welsh Photography in isolation, nor can the breaking down of those subsystems to their constituent parts. It is the rich interactions between the elements of the subsystems and the environment that provides the analytical data that services the research aims. As Azoulay states: “[n]either the camera nor the photograph are sufficient to allow us to answer the question ‘What is photography?’” (2012, p.18), and here neither the photographer, the photograph, nor the photo-methodology in isolation are sufficient to allow us to answer the question “What is Welsh photography?”

¹¹³ “Photo-methodologies” refers to the various methodologies utilised by photographers to achieve a photograph. These can include (but are not limited to): choice of camera, choice of lens, choice of film stock, lighting, location.

6.2 Mountains, Dragons, and Dirty Faces: Stereotypes and Referents

“Expectations: Wales, the most beautiful, the first place, the landscapes-peerless of Ruskin and Shelley; Wales of chapel and rugby and miners and smoke-wreathed valley-side terraces; Wales of sheep-stippled slate-fenced hillsides and high shapely mountain ridges. Wales of the flooding gold diffused evening light from off the sea; Wales of the capes and cliffs and wheeling wild birds and offshore islands, old stones at the field corners, marts with the gnarled faces, the squat and solid men, crook-holding, watchful and wary; the penned and leaping sheep...

Ah! We are at the singing again. But you have seen and heard all that. And how often...!

You will not find it here.” (Perrin in Morris, 2010, p.6)

The establishment of national visual symbology provides critical insight into the longitudinal system of meaning exchange required to visually demarcate or “image” a nation (Lord, 2000). Unsurprisingly therefore, the apprehension of national visual symbols (largely characterised by participants as “stereotypes” or “clichés” of Welshness) emerged as a key semantic theme across the data.

Participants largely discussed stereotypes within the context of Welsh referents (though, they did not explicitly employ this terminology); however, this chapter also considers the proliferation of emergent Welsh referents and, in-keeping with the epistemology of complexity theory, regards both Welsh referents and so-called photographic stereotypes (as specified by participants) as components of a larger system of meaning. Further, some participants conceptualised Welsh photographic symbolism as stereotypical ‘Welsh’ photo-methodologies, whilst others referred to the way in which certain prominent Welsh photographers have proliferated or even authored stereotypical images of Wales through the success and distribution of their photography. These interpretations have been addressed in sections 6.3 and 6.4 of this chapter. The following section examines what appeared to be the most common conception of Welsh photographic symbology: the photographic referent. The establishment of ‘Welsh referents’ is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, but historically (and problematically) they have been characterised by two categories: landscape and industry (Cabuts, 2012). Participants often acknowledged these categories, both independently and in response to direct questions from the researcher. As such, this section explores participant responses to the way in which established

tropes of visual Wales: landscape, industry, and overt national symbology (such as facsimiles of the Welsh flag) prevail and evolve. In section 6.2.1, I explore participants' responses to perceived stereotypical referents in the photographs of others. This data is drawn largely from participant responses to S1 images used during the photo-elicitation portion of S2 interviews. However, reference is also made to the images submitted during S3, along with relevant contextual information supplied by participants who submitted images in both S1 and S3. In section 6.2.2 I explore the ways in which participants apprehend 'stereotypical' referents within their own practice. Within the context of complexity, I suggest that the continuation of established Welsh referents constitutes a series of feedback loops. As such, the data indicate the emergence of both positive and negative feedback loops primarily associated with the visual tropes of landscape and industry. Finally, section 6.2.3 explores the emergence of contemporary Welsh referents. Complex systems are typified by emergent phenomena which result from nonlinear, fed back, and dynamic interactions across the system (Cilliers, 2000), and often arise as an adaptive strategy. Within this context I explore emergent Welsh photographic symbology as an active act of image reformation, designed to promote horizontal conceptualisations of Welshness suited to contemporary photographic and transnational culture.

6.2.1 "*Sheep, leeks, and stuff*": regarding Welsh referents

The coding of visual Welshness is a complicated and ongoing process beset by uneasy relationships with colonial neighbours that has resulted in a perceived lack of a coherent national visual identity (Lord, 1992; Bala, 1999; Pitchford, 2001). Despite this, a national symbology of Welshness was repeatedly identified by research participants and manifested as a 'laundry list' of visual referents that have historically been designated as materially Welsh. This is demonstrated in the following excerpt:

RP11: [00:42:38] It's just that kind of thing that you can see what the photographer is trying to do in describing a kind of national consciousness of Welsh; like pictures of sheep, pictures of leeks and stuff. I think anyone could do a bullet point list of Welshness in photography.

While RP11's comments present an arguably simplistic summary (one which is perhaps more reflective of stereotypes than of 'Welshness in photography'), it is indicative of a common framework of coded visual meaning; and similar sentiments were expressed by participants across the data.

As discussed in Chapter 4, all data (interview transcripts, images, and written submissions) were compiled in NVivo and subject to a thematic analysis. Themes were emergent and therefore the coding framework was a collaboration between researcher and participants. During the coding process, I created a node for ‘photographic referents’ (physical subjects that photographers had placed in a frame) and added a lower-level node each time a new referent was mentioned by participants. These nodes were then organised into thematic collections through an inductive framework based on context provided by participants, or my own understanding of concepts being discussed. After coding, I had recorded 8 thematic nodes; culture, events, identity, industry, landscape, national symbols, people, and place. “Industry” and “landscape” were the most popular nodes by a considerable margin, and each appeared frequently across the data, in various contexts. Whilst some discussions around these themes were more tacit, participants often explicitly pointed to these two themes as dominant visual representations of Welshness. For example, in response to a general inquiry about how they thought Wales has been represented photographically, RP20 stated:

RP20: [00:02:21] Well, you try and get away from the cliches. I mean, we talked about some of those early photographers. They all came to Wales because miners were picturesque, weren't they? With their black faces and their lamps and the rest of the stuff. So, I think there was an element of that, although, of course, it was an important theme at the time; the social things that were going on. And the other extreme is the kind of the picturesqueness - pretty landscapes, which I find could be anywhere.

RP20's response foregrounds some of the problematic elements of these tropes such as the colonial connotations of ‘assigned’ stereotypes (Lord, 1992; Bala, 1999; Pitchford, 2001), perceived lack of appropriate contemporary visual identity, and the more methodological issue of authentically situating seemingly indistinct landscape images within Wales.

The frequency of the trope of industry in and of itself indicates one of the problems that spans both Welsh identity and Welsh photography; it promotes a South Wales-centric approach to Welsh national identity that demonstrably has the capacity to damage inter-Wales relationships and maintains the historically fractured nature of Welsh culture (Williams, 2019; Coupland, 2006). Of the pictures submitted during S1, and therefore used during the photo-elicitation section of the interviews, only five (of 52) bore overt reference to industry, and of those five, only two referenced the South Wales specific mining industry; the other three referenced agriculture. Despite this, visual representations of industry were a popular topic of discussion amongst S2 participants. Often, participants associated more obscure images with industry; citing the visibility of challenging

socio-economic conditions (usually economic hardship), and industry-influenced architecture, such as the purpose-built terraced houses that characterise much of the valleys landscape. Discussions around images of heavy industry¹¹⁴ were negative across all three stages of data. Certain exceptions were made for instances retroactively considered to be of historical import to Welsh photography - such as W. Eugene Smith's 'Three Generations of Welsh Miners' image (Fig.10), however, as Peter Lord points out, "[o]ne does not generally question the aesthetics of relics: they are valued because of their age" (1992, p.10).

Seemingly, negative responses to the representation of Wales through depictions of heavy industry were connected to several unfavourable connotative associations which include notions of 'ugliness', 'dirtiness' and an expired historical period, the continued proliferation of which was largely viewed as reductive and counter-productive to the promotion of meaningful contemporary Welshness. This can be seen in the following quotes from S2 participants:

RP14: [00:14:32] OK, I'll put it out there because, you know, it is what it is. I'm kind of tired of seeing this whole mining industry, the way Welsh culture has been presented, it's a bit tedious. It's got to that point, it's like, this is a bit worn out. What happened?

RP23: [00:09:26] I wanted to approach Wales in a very positive sense because looking at your pictures, there's the classic documentary pictures that are in the Ffotogallery archives, which I looked at quite a lot. And they're very dark, depressing, looking at the pit closures and the very industrial side. And it really gives this grim look of Wales like really depressing and not aesthetically pleasing.

RP05: [00:39:14] people need to move on [...] for me, you look at these kind of stuff [images of the mining industry in Wales], it's nice to see as a memory, but it's not something that I want to live.

In contrast, landscape was largely viewed as a positive trope of Welsh national symbolism. In some specifically South Welsh cases, landscape was regarded almost as an antidote to negative representations of the area connected to heavy industry. This is arguably mirrored socio-culturally, and as Wig Sayell points out, there has been considerable effort by local authorities and landscapers

¹¹⁴ Specifically mining and steelworks. Agriculture was mentioned infrequently and drew relatively neutral reactions from participants.

to “project the concept of the picturesque” (2001, p.11) in the Valleys. Landscape also appeared to have a wider connotative potential than industry. Whilst conceptualisations of industry tended to reflect socio-political notions of the coal industry as physically difficult, dirty, and working class, landscape was frequently connected with notions of poetry, melancholy, culture, sustainability, and pride. RP20 also points out that whilst industry (specifically heavy industry) is limited to a particular moment in history, landscape has the capacity to endure both physically and conceptually:

RP20: [00:14:36] I suppose the landscape is, in a sense, always going to be relevant because that's always evolving and changing and under threat and being used and abused and so on.

One example of the more abstract connotative potential of landscape was the S1 submission of images RI02, RI03, RI09, RI15 (Fig.35), and RI22, which originate from a series created by Cardiff-based photographer Rob Hudson entitled *All Day It Has Rained*. Alongside the images, the S1 participant submitted the following commentary:

“All Day It Has Rained” is based around the life and work of Welsh writer in English, Alun Lewis and loosely based on his poem of the same name. It explores our relationship with the landscape, in particular the melancholy (which is a significant element of Welsh identity) and watery metaphors that are a constant thread in his work.

Despite widespread acknowledgement among participants that landscape was susceptible to a dynamic range of abstract connotations, Hudson’s images provoked a variety of sceptical reactions during S2 conversations. Several participants highlighted these images as not being ‘Welsh’ - even in cases where participants were familiar with Hudson, who is a Welsh photographer and has been featured in several exhibitions themed around Welshness¹¹⁵, and had correctly identified him as the author of the images. Where Hudson’s images differ most markedly from those made by others, is the lack of overt national symbology employed to situate his work. Participants noted the absence of such visual signposting, and the images were often cited in response to the question “which images don’t look very Welsh to you?”. Rationalisations for this can be seen in the following excerpts:

RP03: [00:05:04] that's a great example; you'd never know that [RI15] was Wales for sure.

¹¹⁵ Hudson exhibited in the 2016 exhibition *Made in Wales*, curated by Welsh photography collective *A Fine Beginning*. Hudson also exhibited in Ffotogallery’s 2018 Ffotoview exhibition which specifically showcased “Welsh or Wales-based talent” (Ffotogallery, 2018).

RP01: [00:46:25] Those landscapes could be anywhere really; they're not tied to a place I don't think.

RP21: [00:27:11] they're quite abstract. And, it could be anywhere really couldn't it?

RP10 also takes this stance, but qualifies their position by explaining that their criteria for designating something visually Welsh is based either on the presence of an overt stereotype, or on a personal experience of Welshness, saying:

RP10: [00:31:51] It's not that they're not Welsh. They just don't represent Wales to me. They don't fit any stereotype of Wales. The landscape doesn't feel familiar as a Welsh landscape, to me. They're beautiful work. But it's not my Wales. And it's not Wales as a stereotype or the known features of Wales.

RP10's comments arguably indicate that Welshness can exist in more abstract and personal conceptualisations, but that overt visual manifestations of Welshness have a more universal authority. As such, RP10 confirms the notion posited at the start of this chapter; that there are "known features of Wales" which represent coded visual markers that can be strategically employed to visually situate photographs within a Welsh context.



Figure 35: RI15 from *All Day it Has Rained* (Hudson, 2017)

However, Hudson's images were not universally cited as lacking connection to Welshness. RP16 noted the poetic quality of the images, and in doing so aligned with the comments provided by the participant who submitted Hudson's images for S1. During the S2 conversation, RP16 mentioned that in fact, RI15 (Fig. 35) had been amongst some of the images they had flagged as being the *most* Welsh:

RP16: [01:17:21] I think that I selected some of those [images from Hudson's series]. As I said, I worked once with double exposures anyway. The only thing I did say and the point I did make is I wouldn't say they were necessarily Welsh, but they have a kind of poetic quality to them, which in a way you could say is a Welsh kind of thing. So that was my response to those really. So, they're not grounded, if you like, or in a specific location. But you could argue that there's a poetic tradition in Wales, in our culture

Further, during S3, RP16 expressed concern that Hudson's images had been flagged as not reflecting Wales (which I intimated to RP16 during our S2 conversation), and provided the following observation:

In our discussion I pointed to a rather abstract image from your samples that I considered had poetic qualities and therefore could possibly be considered a 'Welsh photograph' in view of our rich cultural inheritance and the link between literature, poetry and visual images. Your reply mentioned one response to that photo was - "It could have been taken anywhere". Hearing these words you quoted as a reason given by someone to dismiss an image as not being seen as a Welsh photo or an example of a Welsh way of seeing concerned me. In fact I woke up at 4 in the morning thinking about it! I believe that it is a very simplistic parameter to use when exploring what we consider to be Welsh photography. Therefore any abstract images would immediately be dismissed? And often it's the surprise element that engages a viewer and the incongruous. It would appear that some have a pre-conceived idea in their head of what constitutes a Welsh photograph. I think that is a rather dangerous position.

RP16's assertion that Welshness can and should exist in more abstract connotative contexts is perhaps influenced by their indigenous (RP16 identified themselves as Welsh during S2) understanding of Welshness. As Bala suggests, indigenous artists have a tradition of connecting with "deeper feelings for landscape" (1999, p.17) and as such are perhaps uniquely qualified to engage in exploration of "political and cultural identity in Wales" (Ibid.) through landscape. The tension between indigenous and "outsider" ways of seeing and presenting Welshness is also explored in sections 6.2.2 and 6.3.1.

RP16's characterisation of connotative reductionism as "dangerous" is echoed by other indigenous participants and while this largely appears within the context of South-Wales centrism and the continued proliferation of representations of industry, reductionism was also cited by some participants as being a negative effect of the landscape trope. Iwan Bala (1999) and Peter Lord (2004) have both written extensively on the conceptualisation and realisation of Welsh national art, and both assert that more traditional conceptualisations of landscape (as a purely formal aesthetic entity) are largely products of and for 'tourists'. In line with this observation, some participants were specifically critical of the volume of landscape images - usually associated with amateur/tourist/commercial photography and perceived the popular conceptualisation of Wales as a beautiful tourist destination to be a reductive, rather than productive practice. This can be seen in the following excerpt from the S2 conversation with RP01, who discusses avoiding certain famous landscape tourist attractions (such as Pen Y Fan) when making their own work, and describes their practice of purposefully infiltrating social media hashtags often populated by tourists or tourism institutions, citing a desire to promote a visual representation of Wales that is more representative of lived or experiential notions of cultural identity:

RP01: [00:43:20] I've been tagging a lot of mine, like when I find unusual characters, like #thisisWales. And the tourist-y type people use that hashtag for the golden beaches and the sunny sunsets. Blue, blue and orange sunsets, you know?

RP00: [00:43:38] Yeah.

RP01: [00:43:39] But then every so often you'll get like some kind of unusual character in the stream of it. And I quite like throwing that in there, in the mix, because that *is* Wales. [...] I suppose that's probably what you're trying to figure out, is what is Wales to me and what is Wales to people from the outside. So I guess if you had people from the outside coming in, they'd be like "oooh, look at this lovely sunset down Rhossili beach"... Probably wouldn't have that because you'd have like the [David] Baileys¹¹⁶ of the world coming in to make something unique, but to them that is Wales, because they're on holiday. But to me it's different because I live and work here. So it's my day job, you know, being Welsh.

RP01's comments indicate what appeared to be a common dissonance between the assigned outsider representation of Wales, and the tacit indigenous experience of being Welsh. RP01 also makes the distinction between reductive portrayals of Wales through tourist eyes ("this lovely sunset down Rhossili beach"), and "unique" portrayals of Wales through the lens of visiting photographers such as David Bailey.

RP01's comments also reflect a common desire to reform the image of Wales that tourists and related tourism-focused institutions promote. The practice of active image reformation is discussed in more detail in section 6.2.3 but was a popular topic of discussion within the context of reductive tourist tropes. For example, RP05 also specifically discusses the negative reductionism of landscape, and suggests a responsibility (though it is unclear whether RP05 perceives this to be institutional or personal) to dismantle reductionism within images of Wales:

RP05: [00:50:26] I think that's important to kind of show Wales as a different place. Not everything is the same. Not everything's about the landscapes.

¹¹⁶ In 1985 renowned British fashion photographer David Bailey contributed images to the third wave of *The Valleys Project*. Bailey's images are distinguished by their industrial and landscape focus, and, in a marked departure from Bailey's typical photographic style, his contribution to the project does not include a single portrait. In the archive catalogue for the Valleys Project, Ffotogallery describe Bailey's contributions as "an outsider's detached sense of bewilderment when faced with the austere geographical and social conditions of this fascinating region" (p.2).

RP05 also suggests that a distinction between more tourist-friendly commercial landscape and more niche 'fine art' photography is promoted at an institutional level; speculating that images produced and circulated by art photographers (intimated by RP05's use of the word "us") would be deemed aesthetically unpleasant, or inaccessible to the general public. RP05 makes the distinction between arts-focused institutions such as Ffotogallery, and tourism-focused institutions such as Visit Wales, further aligning with RP01's notion of visual dissonance between the two representations of Wales:

RP05: [01:24:59] It's different for us to what it is to landscape photographers, but I definitely think if you put a challenge out there to get some images, you wouldn't get Visit Wales using any of those shots that you've put in in that Google Drive [S1 images] [...] if you had Ffotogallery or any exhibition, they probably wouldn't take any landscapes because they'd be like 'yeah we're not a landscape gallery'.

Whilst the tension between multiplicitous and often contradictory institutional verifications of Welsh photography is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 3, many participants were also keen to make the more personal distinction between their practice, which they often viewed as a process of narrative (usually connected with genres of photography such as fine art or documentary), and commercial or amateur representations of Wales. As such, many participants conceptualised landscape as a narrative tool, rather than a representative trope, as can be seen in the following excerpts:

RP03: [00:15:16] for me, the landscape is not enough. I think you need to show the people who are in the landscape as well and need to get close to them and talk to them

RP20: [00:11:44] So to me, it was about the landscape, but it was about the people who lived in the landscape. It was about the way people existed, the way people utilised the landscape and the history of the place. So, to me, while they were landscape pictures, they were very much about the people; the indigenous population without showing them per se.

The perceived dissonance between tourism-centric images of the landscape, and landscape as part of a wider narrative is also impacted by established geographical tensions within Welsh identity. Notably, North Wales attitudes diverged from explicit celebration of landscape often expressed by South Wales-based participants. Much like South Welsh attitudes towards reductive industrial

stereotypes, some North Wales based participants rejected the positive connotations of landscape on the grounds that 'landscape' was a reductive trope that portrayed North Wales specifically as nothing more than a beauty spot, and as such (and as discussed above), attracted a lot of amateur photographers. This can be seen in the following excerpt from the S2 conversation with RP17:

RP17: [00:01:13] a lot of my work is about challenging stereotypes, because in Wales we're beset with a lot of stereotypical portrayal of the area. [...] This is specifically in North Wales, but it applies to the South, we're beset with a lot of landscape photography and that - I've often said is actually fine. It's great. People are going out and having fun. They're creating. But we do know that there is a lot of manipulated imagery around and stuff that is just typically overwhelming. It's viewed far too much both in print and online. Everybody can share good and bad work. So, there was literally no work coming out of North Wales or very little that was telling anything about the people that live here; where they live, or the types of places where people live and work that you don't associate with North Wales. I mean North Wales is synonymous with beaches and the Snowdonia National Park. But in reality, there are people struggling on the margins of tourist resorts in winter, in farming, and in post-industrial areas. You know, slate quarrying used to be big here and it can be grim [...] So, yeah, there's a story to be told. And that's where I'm coming from.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, RP17 is based in North Wales and is a member of The North Wales Project – a collective that specifically aims to “offer a narrative that challenges the tsunami of stereotypes in photography we always see associated with North Wales” (Law in Carroll, 2019, p.10). Indeed, when asked to describe their practice during their S2 interview, RP17’s response echoes the credo of The North Wales Project. The collective itself was founded in 2019 by Anglesey-based photographer Robert Law. In an interview for the April 2019 issue of *Offline*, Law explains that the North Wales Project aims to evolve landscape images of North Wales, rather than exclude them, and states “this is why Hazel’s interpretations are so valuable” (Law in Carroll, 2019, p.10). “Hazel” refers to landscape photographer Hazel Simcox, who produces contemporary landscape photographs often presented with poetry. Simcox’s conceptual presentation of landscape is, as will be discussed below, indicative of emergent and adaptive phenomena produced by the various feedback loops (both positive and negative) associated with landscape. Collectives are discussed in more detail in section 5.2.3.

Ultimately, participant response to seeing national symbols of Welshness seemed largely dependent on the perceived harm of that symbol to the presentation of Welshness on a global

stage. Negativity often arose when stereotypes were perceived as singular or as contributing to a reductive imaging of Wales. Participants expressed this in relation to both industry and landscape – though the reductionism itself was contextualised differently across these two themes. Also considered was the perceived “right” of certain photographers to present Wales in a particular way. Stereotypes created or perpetuated by “outsiders” seemed largely to elicit negative responses (though it is worth noting that the concept of “outsider” was not unanimously determined amongst participants) and has arguably contributed to the emergence of new Welsh national symbology (discussed in 6.2.3). The conceptualisation of “outsiders” and “insiders” was a significant theme throughout S2 conversations and is discussed in more detail in 6.3.1.

6.2.2 “I wanted people to know it was Wales”: promoting Welsh referents

Most of the research conversations opened with the question “tell me a bit about the work you’ve made in Wales”. Commonly, participants answered this question by describing both the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ of their work in Wales. The answers to this question were indicative of a conceptual hierarchy that informed participants’ understanding of their work within the wider contexts of both Welshness and photography (underlining the complex holistic and social contexts of Welsh photography). Further, the ‘why’ answers were often structured as thesis or credo and as such, provided valuable insight into the way in which participants visually imagined Wales and how they understood their contribution to the photographic vernacular of Welshness. Largely, participants strove to present what they considered to be an ‘improved’ image of Wales, implying (and occasionally explicitly stating) that they considered the established global image of Wales to be materially lacking.

Participants tended to align their own appropriation of Welsh referents with one of two practices; either strategic usage that anchored the work in Wales through overt national symbology, or as strategic avoidance of ‘stereotypical’ national symbology based on the perceived damage of those symbols as negative stereotypes. These practices, within the context of complexity theory, manifest as a series of feedback loops and emergent phenomena that occur at both a visual and behavioural level. Complex systems are typified by feedback loops, which are described as either positive (amplifying a phenomena), or negative (seeking to reduce the prevalence of a phenomena) (Cilliers, 2000). Photographic representations of heavy industry seemingly constitute a negative feedback loop at both an active and passive level. Passively, the physical industrial demise has made photographing this stereotype extremely difficult. As RP20 points out:

RP20: [00:03:53] there are no black-faced miners anymore. I last photographed a miner with a black face and a helmet on, it must be... 40 years ago now. More than that. They've all gone. You can't photograph them anymore anyway, even if you wanted to.

While several participants discussed their active intent to reduce the prevalence of industrial tropes of representation, many noted that this engendered the practical difficulty of assigning a unique human or social identity to Wales, outwith the trope of heavy industry. As, RP01 notes:

RP01: [00:32:06] that's just the reality of modern Wales, that it's becoming more homogenous with London, the rest of Europe.

As such, active negative feedback loops of industry often involved a conscious search for appropriate alternative anthropological representation. This sometimes resulted in photographers focusing on the more generalised local “communities” or “villages” that had typically characterised the secondary narrative of the industry-led trope:

RP14: [00:02:35] I think if you talk to anyone in the valleys it always looks at the idea of austerity and the disappearance of the mining industry and how that's gone and left this huge gap. I kind of want to look away from that and look at the positives. So, I'm kind of just looking at the modern Welsh community and how it survived beyond the mining industry. I want to look away from those things and the positives that still exist from those times. But without sort of putting emphasis on the whole mining industry. So that's how it all started really. I started looking at my community in a different way and trying to talk about Wales in a different way, because we get a bit tired of the same drum being banged all the time.

Similarly, in response to a question about what a modern photographic survey of Wales might include, RP01 suggests that the more homogenised service industries that typically dominate Welsh (and global) job markets provide little opportunity for distinctive or unique visual representation. Instead, RP01 states that they have turned their attention to capturing leisure pursuits as a more anthropological representation of Welsh culture:

RP01: [00:32:44] That's [images of the coal mining industry such as W. Eugene Smith's *Three Miners*] the obvious thing, isn't it? You won't have that, but there would be other unique things, you know, like who the hell would've been dressing up as a USA police officer in Wales in the 1950s? They would've been laughed out of town, wouldn't they? They'd've been put into a mental home or something. Because it would've just been so

unusual and out there. Whereas in this day and age, it's like "yeah, I do reenactments and that's what I do for fun".

[...]

RP01: [00:33:24] Perhaps it would be more to do with the leisure activities. Like who would ever go out in the 1950s or 40s or 20s, 30s. Who would go out on their bike for enjoyment, in Wales? They wouldn't. They would just be going to work on their bike. It'd be a tool, and they'd be poorer than the people that had a car. But now people are going out on their bike for their leisure time. Whereas in the 20s or 30s, they would be working six days a week in the mine.

RP01 and RP14's comments indicate the way in which passive negative feedback loops and active negative feedback loops have the capacity to work adaptively; the perceived need to replace images of coal mining has resulted in the emergence of new representational tropes that participants actively assign Welshness to. As such, active negative feedback loops could be viewed as a site of negotiation between system agents and environmental elements both internal and external to the system.

Active negative feedback loops were a common theme in the rationalisations participants gave when discussing their work. Whilst reducing industry-centric representations was a popular approach, the drive to suppress certain tropes of Welshness was not limited to industry. The excerpt below demonstrates the effect of a negative feedback loop of more general national symbology, and is again indicative of frustration with reductionism and South Welsh Valleys-centrism:

RP00: [00:07:53] So what kind of cliches are you talking about avoiding?

RP19: [00:07:57] I suppose it's the images that you see with the coal miners and the Welsh flags and these kind of valley pictures that you just associate with the quintessential Welsh postcards that you would see if you were travelling to the country as an outsider. Or if I asked, for example, someone within Europe what's their perception of Wales, they would probably at some point mention sheep or Tom Jones or Welsh valleys. So, it's essentially just kind of steering away from that. I really don't want it to be about that. I think there's so much more to the country, other than coal mining and farming. And I think it's a real kind of vibrant community from one region to the next.

RP19's comments reflect much of the sentiment discussed in previous sections of this chapter regarding the perceived harm of the proliferation of reductive stereotypes. Specifically, the issue of a South Wales-centric national image, and the frustration with reductive colonial stereotypes created by or for "others". RP19's explicit use of the phrase "outsider", suggests that the indigenous Welsh population at large no longer identifies with established visual representations of themselves, and that only an outsider would recognise Welshness in such symbology. Indeed, many of the active feedback loops (both positive and negative) appeared to be primarily proliferated by indigenous or "insider" participants. Of 23 S2 participants, 16 can be identified as being 'indigenous', through either birth or prolonged residence in Wales. Of these 16, 10 described using their practice to actively reframe established visual conceptualisations of Welsh identity.

In 2001, Susan Pitchford used Wales as a research environment to undertake research on active image reformation through the process of strategic frame (re)alignment. Characterising Wales as an "annexed" though "not entirely unwilling" (p.50) colony of England, Pitchford conceives of 'image' as an ideological perception, rather than a literal illustration of Wales or Welshness. She describes the practice of image reformation as occurring in an environment of "consistent tension between tradition and innovation" (p.48), in which both 'image-makers' and their ideological opponents shift the framing of established stereotypes in order to encourage "alternative interpretations of a group's history, culture, and identity" (Ibid.). Pitchford is clear that her analysis yields "neither Welshness-in-itself (the unattainable objective reality), nor even Welshness-as-known (the historical record) but rather Welshness-as-wished-for: the competing visions of Welsh identity articulated by sets of actors in a position to make their visions public" (Ibid.). The notion of aspirational Welshness was common amongst participants, and several explicitly connected this to their own experience of Welshness, further separating Welshness as presented by indigenous photographers, and Welshness as presented by outsiders. Aspirational Welshness, therefore, often seemed contingent on indigenous experience.

Although Pitchford's research is not conducted within the epistemology of complexity theory, her findings provide salient context to the data gathered within this research, and as such, can arguably be constructively considered through a complexity framework. Indeed, the understanding that to concretely communicate Welshness to outsider audiences some visual signposting (characterised by Pitchford as "frame alignment") is needed, is key in understanding the intricacies of feedback loops that manifest around established Welsh national symbology. As mentioned previously, feedback loops are an adaptive phenomenon, driven largely through self-organisation of seemingly disparate agents within a complex system. Whilst no participant explicitly celebrated the contemporary national "image" (to use Pitchford's context) of Wales,

many spoke of integrating national ‘images’ into their depictions of Welshness; either to identify themselves as an indigenous (and thus authoritative) photographer, or to strategically signpost the work as Welsh. Seemingly, applications of visual signposting were once again steered by the perceived damage that the continuation of certain symbols or stereotypes might create for the representation of Welshness in international contexts. For example, RP03 discusses their usage of visual signposting as a strategy to encourage tourism, and to promote the notion of Wales as both beautiful and globally significant:

RP03: [00:13:53] I wanted people to know it was Wales, I wanted there to be a Welsh flag in somewhere, and sheep and all those type of cliches.

RP00: [00:14:02] Why?

RP03: [00:14:04] I don't know. I think ultimately, I'm trying to put Wales on the map. It feels like we're pretty much forgotten in this part of the world. And, it was almost part of the synopsis, I suppose, of [RP03's photographic project¹¹⁷], was to show people how beautiful the landscape was and that it is in Wales. Come to Wales, spend your money in Wales. We need it. You know, that type of thing.

Other participants were also open to the strategic usage of stereotypes, and acknowledged that stereotypes often bear some resemblance to lived experience (though, perhaps through an exaggerated lens), as the following extract from RP12 indicates:

RP12: [00:04:24] I was at a Ffoton¹¹⁸ event the other night and they said, the photographer there - and I'm not knocking this at all - but he was doing work on Wales. And he said “it's nice to get pictures that are not of the cliché sheep” and blah, blah, blah, blah. But the fact is that Wales has got more sheep than anywhere else in the world, probably. So, you can't mistake... They're there. It's what you do with that then to create something that you hope is interesting

RP12's sentiment that “it's what you do with that then to create something you hope is interesting” is explicitly reflective of Pitchford's notion of active image reformation and indicates the way in which such practices proliferate the continuation of positive feedback loops as an adaptive

¹¹⁷ Project title redacted to protect participant anonymity.

¹¹⁸As mentioned in Chapter 3, Ffoton are an independent (non-publicly funded) photographic institution in Wales. They regularly hold social events, and their website promotes Welsh photography through a series of articles and podcasts. Ffoton is run by Brian Carroll, Emyr Young, and Glynn Shakeshaft. Carroll is also the editor-in-chief of Offline journal.

phenomenon within both the system of Welsh photography and arguably within the larger system of Welsh nationalism.

As such, and as will be explored in the following section, many of the ‘new’ Welsh referents cited by participants have emerged as evolutions of previous national stereotypes, rather than entirely novel symbols of Welshness. Viewed through a complexity lens, these practices indicate adaptive emergent phenomena, and - as will be demonstrated in the following section, often arise out of seemingly minor interactions between components of the system. These interactions then proliferate as a series of feedback loops - interacting with the wider environment and feeding back into the system.

6.2.3 “I hate green”: emerging Welsh referents

As Lord states, unless a tradition of visual art “is periodically reconstructed in ways appropriate to changed aspirations, the images it reveals are rendered irrelevant” (1992, pp.7-8). Indeed, participants frequently expressed frustration at the continued proliferation of what they viewed as irrelevant stereotypes of historical Welshness, usually citing dissonance between the established representation of Wales and the lived experience of contemporary Welshness. These feelings were occasionally rooted in contexts of problematic authorship - which participants typically constructed within an insider/outsider binary (explored in 6.3.1). However, many participants also discussed what appeared to be a largely indigenous practice of strategically employing stereotypes to situate their work within an identifiable Welsh context in order to re-frame them within more aspirational representational concepts. The process of reconstructing visual stereotypes of Wales is evident in the practice of some participants, and several explicitly discussed their motivations in engaging with visual reformation; often this was done in the service of strengthening Wales’ global identity and proliferating a more independent national narrative. As such, reconstructed or evolved Welsh referents can be conceived as examples of adaptive visual emergence resulting from “rich, dynamic, fed back, and, above all, non-linear” (Cilliers, 2000, p.24) interactions between system agents.

Emergent Welsh referents appeared to be more conceptually subjective than established reductive stereotypes. Participants associated notions of multiplicity and diversity (both aesthetically and in terms of sociocultural contexts) with emergent Welsh photography, and typically connected images with concepts or experiential cultural phenomena, rather than physical attributes of Wales such as the landscape or industry. Further, emergent phenomena were also deemed to be actively constructed, and participants often cited more contrived images and deliberate methodologies than traditional objective documentary styles. As such, emergent Welsh

referents tended to be typified (though not completely) by their active construction, rather than passive documentation. This is at odds with Crang's assertion that national phenomena are not imagined as "the *outcome* of material and symbolic processes but instead as the *cause* of those practices" (Crang in Edensor, 2002, p.1). Instead, emergent referents and photo-methodologies appeared to be more aligned with Pitchford's observation that actively constructed notions of Wales capitalised on "Welshness-as-wished-for" (2001, p.48). Within a complexity framework, this behaviour is particularly indicative of adaptive emergence - participants often explicitly linking emergent photo-methodologies or referents with perceived endurance of either Welsh identity, Welsh photography, or their own photographic practice. Cilliers notes that complex systems will organise themselves to be "maximally sensitive to events that are critical to the system's survival" (2000, p.26). Survival within this context was diversely interpreted by participants but commonly involved commercial success of their own practice, and global success of the Welsh image.

The data set that presented perhaps the most comprehensive insight into emergent national symbolism was the data gathered during S3. As previously mentioned, S3 was designed during the fieldwork, in response to participants directly engaging with research aims or expressing explicit interest in contributing visual data. It comprised an optional follow-up questionnaire, and an invitation to submit up to five images. 11 (of 23) S2 participants completed S3 and contributed a total of 40 images (Appendix 3). The images, and corresponding contextual information are particularly indicative of more abstract and personal conceptualisations of Welsh photography. This often occurred through a lens of hybridity; usually the acknowledgement (or celebration) of history juxtaposed with the recognition that the future should be contingent on a cultural break from that history. This was typically contextualised in notions of authenticity or honesty gained from "experiencing" Welshness or Welsh culture.

The drive to communicate experiential Welshness was frequently mentioned by both S2 and S3 participants and tended to occur within common contexts. The notion of indigenous authenticity, constructed as a binary to outsider exploitation is explored in more detail in section 6.3.1. Many participants also discussed finding Welshness in the "normal" or indigenously familiar (this is discussed in further detail in 6.4.1) and expressed tacit common understanding of certain "normal" phenomena as national symbols. The desire to celebrate common normality as part of a national consciousness is variously considered as being critical to the modern construction of nations (Billig, 1995), and is rooted within the conceptualisation of a collective cultural history, often manifesting as national traditions. Notions of shared history are again crucial in theories of nation-building (Hobsbawm, 1983), but history also plays an important part in the conceptualisation of complex systems. As Cilliers states, "[c]omplex systems have memory, not

located at a specific place, but distributed throughout the system. Any complex system thus has a history, and the history is of cardinal importance to the behaviour of the system” (2000, p.24). History, normality, and personal experience were common justifications given by participants for the submission of S3 images, as can be seen the following excerpts:

when I think of the Welsh in Photographs, or the photographers who best represent the idea of Welsh cultural identity I often come back to a number of photographers. These are almost always those who captured a glimpse of the old world, its landscapes, its architecture, fashions, pastimes, traditions or ideals now long lost to modern culture, gentrified, regenerated, globalized. ... Here I recognize a little piece of my Wales, my childhood, my identity. (RP14)

This image [FRI34] is an example of Nick Treharne’s travelogue in Wales. Again, humble and unchanged over the decades, echoing more (perceived) innocent times. Both Dan [FRI33] and Nick’s images have an instant familiarity about them, anchoring our identity with the recent past. (RP17)

Recognising the importance of the interaction between history and present, whilst incorporating personal experience, is an example of the way in which complexity can account for the effects of personal (micro) interactions on emergent phenomena. However, the juxtaposition of narrative concepts as sites of adaptive emergence was not limited to history and future. Many participants also cited notions of melancholy and humour as being formative ‘Welsh’ characteristics. Indeed, melancholy was directly discussed in S1, notably by the participant who submitted Hudson’s abstract landscape images. Humour was also cited as a process of active frame realignment by some S2 participants, who conceptualised it as method of reflexively perpetuating stereotypes. RP23 discusses this within the context of their series *The Valley Project*:

RP23: [00:12:31] I thought you've got to have rugby influence because everyone knows Wales for rugby. I photographed a match, and I thought no, everyone's seen a match; but no one has seen the changing room in a Valleys boys club [...] So I captured all that. And the boy who jumped out in the camera has got a tattoo on his bum saying ‘Abercynon RFC’. So, it's so nice to have that dedication to a community on your bum.

Notions of both sadness and humour were most common in S3, particularly as rationalisations for the images submitted during this stage, as can be seen in the following extracts:

Welsh photography for me is unpretentious and real. It looks at everyday life and community in a compassionate way. Things might look dry but there is always a touch of humor, sometimes sadness. Welsh photography is simple, straightforward, and most often overcast. Photographers tend to avoid the clichés of beauty. Welsh photography is inevitably social. These chosen contemporary photographers are passionate about the Welsh social landscape and create realist and powerful work about Welsh life. (RP13, submitted with images FRI21-26)

If someone asked me to show them a few examples of contemporary photography in Wales I would show them these (and maybe a few others) as I feel that they represent a modern Wales perfectly. There's a sadness in each of these pictures, and I know documentary photographers can be slightly cynical, but when photographers tell the truth about Wales the sadness becomes evident. The sadness in the pictures is symbolic of the oppression and suppression that Wales has endured for centuries. (RP03, submitted with images FRI29-32)

I also recognize that sense of humor, and that idea that, yes, it's a little bit shit but it's ours and we absolutely love it. (RP14, submitted with images FRI18-20)

I feel that there is an emphasis on humanist themes, but also a wry sense of humour in a lot of work by Welsh photographers. (RP16, submitted with images FRI08-12)

Dan's [Wood] pictures have an everyday, mundane humour with an empathetic and personable connection to place and people. They are almost unmistakably Welsh, but neither nostalgic or dramatically bleak. (RP18, submitted with images FRI13-17)

Many of these comments arguably indicate the importance of self-deprecating humour as a defensive adaptive strategy, but also imply notions of "insider jokes", further indicating the differing approaches between indigenous and outsider photographers.

The notion of indigenous reflexive humour within the Welsh visual vernacular is not a strictly contemporary notion, nor is it unique to this research environment. This is arguably indicative of the non-linear chronology of Complex systems; most acutely manifested in the form of feedback loops. For example, in 1985 Welsh photographer Peter Fraser was, somewhat controversially (Delany, 2014), included in the fourth wave of The Valleys Project (Cabuts in Drake, 2018). As part of his submission, he presented an image entitled *Public Park, Pontypridd* (Fig.36), which depicted a bright green corrugated iron shed with the phrase "I hate GREEN"

spray-painted across the doors. The image has drawn critical interpretations of dark humour, particularly when considered in the context of the prevailing global stereotypes of Welsh culture established in John Ford's 1941 film *How Green Was My Valley* (Chandler, n.d.). Fraser's photograph was submitted during S3 by RP13 and is arguably indicative of the "touch of humour" they cite in their submission.



Figure 36: FRI26 Public Park, Pontypridd (Fraser, 1985)

Fraser's image is also indicative of the hybridisation of photo-methodologies and the rejection of typical generic approaches within photography. As O'Hagan writes, "Fraser's work sits uncomfortably in the space between art photography, documentary and conceptualism" (2017, n.p.). Hybrid photo-methodologies presented at both visual and semantic levels within the data and have arguably resulted in novel emergent referents. The incorporation of techniques and aesthetics typically favoured by fashion photographers is one such example. Several S2 photographers discussed the emergence of fashion as a "new" paradigm for representing Welshness. Occasionally this appeared to be indicative of a lack of anthropological identity identified as a consequence of the decline of heavy industry (discussed more thoroughly in 6.2.2).

This is indicated by RP08, in response to a question asking what the human focus of a 2020 photographic survey of Wales might be:

RP08: [00:21:27] I need to capture 2020. So, it wouldn't be a coal miner. So, in my mind, I'd be thinking, who represents 2020? And maybe it could be done through fashion.

Unlike RP08's documentary-driven suggestion of *finding* aspects of Welshness in fashion, several participants discussed constructing a connection between Wales and fashion, largely to re-frame seemingly negative representational tropes of Welshness through the typically celebratory aesthetics of fashion photography. At the point of writing, photographic work that exploits fashion aesthetics within a Welsh context has primarily been undertaken by four contemporary photographers: Clémentine Schneidermann, Alex Fell, Megan Winstone, and Tom Johnson. Much of this work has been produced in the South Wales (largely the Valleys) region and is often cited as an explicit challenge to the negative representations of the Valleys. Schneidermann specifically cites frustration at a pessimistic BBC article entitled *The Unbearable Sadness of the Welsh Valleys* (2013) as motivation in creating her project *The Unbearable, The Sadness, and The Rest*¹¹⁹ (Newell-Hanson, 2015). Schneidermann was the recipient of the 2016 Leica Oskar Barnack Newcomer Award for the series and was commended for combining “the genres of documentary, portrait and fashion photography in extremely unusual ways” (2016¹²⁰).

¹¹⁹ This series features on Schneidermann's online portfolio but has since been renamed *It's Called Ffasiwn*.

¹²⁰ <https://en.leica-camera.com/World-of-Leica/Leica-News/Global/2016/Leica-Oskar-Barnack-Award-2016-Gewinner> [Accessed 18th May 2022]



Figure 37: from *Heads of the Valleys* (Schneidermann, 2015)

Both RP04 and RP23 discuss the incorporation of fashion aesthetics and methodologies into their own practice. RP23 specifically conceptualises this representational mode as a “love letter to the valleys”. Viewed from a complexity perspective, the strategic mobilisation of certain photographic methodologies to reform stereotypes that are perceived as harmful constitutes a fed-back set of interactions between photographic practitioners and wider environmental actors. As discussed in Chapter 2, the relative lack of contemporary Welsh visual referents threatens the sustainability of distinct Welsh culture and by extension distinct Welsh photography. As such, the subversive fusion of a relevant (and commercially successful) genre of photography with recognisable Welsh stereotypes constitutes adaptive behaviour. Further, the proliferation (as evidenced by the growing volume of photographers engaging with this photo-methodology) of this fusion suggests the

environmental validation of this behaviour, and subsequently the creation of a positive feedback loop.

However, despite the success of hybrid photo-methodologies grounded by familiar stereotypes, some participants expressed a desire to avoid overt Welshness completely within their work; advocating for a more global conception of Wales. This was often a reactionary method, implemented to mitigate against what was perceived to be a limiting tendency towards parochialism in the pursuit of photographing Welshness. RP20 was particularly concerned with the notion of parochialism, stating:

RP20: [00:34:05] I hope that the Welsh stereotype will be killed, and because of that, people will interpret their country in a way that's influenced by the wider world, you know. And it takes away that parochialism.

This view is echoed by Welsh photographer and academic Pete Davis, who in the second issue of *Offline Journal* writes:

“there is an obsession with attempting to ‘Welshify’ everything. I have never thought that dealing with issues within Wales or bringing back to Wales, images from the other places I have photographed to be mutually exclusive. If I have a personal and photographic identity then it’s shaped and enriched by all of these experiences and influences and my work is the stronger for it” (p.4).

Other participants were similarly concerned with the notion of a singular Welsh visual identity. For example, when discussing a recent body of their work that explores the multiplicity of Welsh culture and landscape, RP19 made the following comment:

RP19: [00:04:01] So I really wanted to kind of encapsulate that [multiplicity] into one body of work, but at the same time, try and steer away from those cliches that you would maybe associate with Wales. I really didn't want to play on that too much. I think that's been covered almost too much in certain photography projects by other artists. So, I wanted someone to look at it and think that this could be anywhere in the world, essentially.

RP19 indicates here that the multiplicity of Welshness necessarily divorces it from a singular identity, and as such intimates that “cliches” associated with Wales do little to service more than small pockets of Welsh national identity. As discussed previously, it can be argued that Welshness is characterised by multiplicity, and as such, divorcing Wales from a singular visual identity and confronting Welshness within a global context could be viewed as an adaptive strategy of a wider

complex system of Welsh identity. RP19's sentiments also reflect the somewhat polarising notion that in order to "kill" stereotypes, one must embrace a more globalised, universal visual language. Lord and Bala are both critical of this binary, as Lord states, "ideas about art as an international language were already marginalising those for whom cultural individuation was the central concern" (2000, p.9). Similarly, Bala writes "[t]his recognition in current art practice of the simultaneous presence of different cultural traditions is not an excuse to retreat into the hills of cultural parochialism, but rather an inducement to emerge from the corner and participate internationally with our sense of identity intact and undisguised" (1999, p.4).

The co-existence of both positive and negative feedback loops regarding the proliferation and reformation of Welsh stereotypes is indicative of the necessary dynamism that characterises complex systems. As Cilliers argues, states of equilibrium threaten the survival of complex systems; inhibiting rich interactions that are crucial for the emergence of adaptive behavior (2000). The contradictory negotiations regarding the coding of Welsh referents encourages significant local interactions between system actors, but critically encourages significant exchanges of information between the system and its environment. Indeed, the perceived and actual success of both hybrid photo-methodologies and more globalised photographic approaches indicates ongoing discourse between photographers, photographs, photographic institutions, and wider art markets. As such, photographers continue to adapt in order to ensure the ongoing success of both their own practice and Welsh visual culture (which many participants see as mutually contingent concepts).

6.3 Authenticity, Authorship, and Aesthetics

"It has always been the apparent lack of a particular or peculiarly different Welsh visual tradition that makes any claim to authenticity difficult" (Bala, 1999, p.17)

Notions of authenticity pervaded many of the S2 conversations (largely latently, but occasionally explicitly). Authenticity has a particular relationship with both photography and Welshness, and (as with stereotypes) participants interpreted authenticity in a variety of ways. Largely, participants tended to connect authenticity of image to authenticity of authorship, occasionally literally discussed within the context of photographers possessing a right to represent Wales and Welshness. This conceptualisation of authenticity is reflective of some of the complexities of Welsh national membership (as explored in 2.2). As such, sections 6.3.1 explores the ways in which "insider" and "outsider" roles have been conceptualised within Welsh photography. Section 6.3.2 explores the related discourse of intimacy. Specifically, it analyses the ways in which intimacy - which manifests both as a photo-methodology and an aesthetic, functions within the context of

authenticity. Finally, section 6.3.3 explores the connotations of black and white aesthetics as a mode of communicating authenticity of both photography and cultural history.

6.3.1 Insiders and Outsiders

As Pitchford states, perhaps one of the most simplified systems of social categorisation is the binary of “us” and “them” (2001). The polarising tension of insider/outsider is not unique to Welshness, and is certainly not unique to Welsh photography, but did characterise much of the data. Participants (both independently and when prompted by the researcher) constructed an insider/outsider narrative tension, largely within the context of perceived photographic authenticity. Several participants connected both visual and ethical authenticity with indigenous Welsh nationality. Although this was a latent, as opposed to semantic connection, participants often intimated that in order to authentically represent Welshness, one should have authentically experienced Welshness, primarily through birthright or prolonged residence.

One photographer who drew a lot of attention within this context is Parisian-born Clémentine Schneidermann. Schneidermann, a Masters student of the University of South Wales “DocPhot” course¹²¹ has achieved significant success with her project *It's Called Ffasinn* - images from which were purchased by National Museum Wales for their permanent photography collection in 2018 (Schneidermann, 2021). The series was a long-term collaborative project on which Schneidermann worked with Merthyr-born stylist and creative director Charlotte James, facilitating fashion and photography workshops for Valleys-based children, who created outfits, dressed sets, and participated in photoshoots.

¹²¹ Schneidermann graduated from this course in 2014, and subsequently progressed to PhD study. Her PhD thesis was completed in 2021.



Figure 38: FRI13 from *It's Called Ffasiwn* (Schneidermann, 2018)

However, despite the demonstrable international success of this project, it was not included in any of the S1 submissions. Two of Schneidermann's images were submitted in S3; one from *It's Called Ffasiwn* (Fig.38) and another from *I Called Her Lisa Marie*¹²². Figure 38 (FRI13) was submitted by RP18, who states: "Clementine and Charlotte's photographs have a celebratory gaze of the South Wales Valleys. Their images are both community focused and bring new vibrancy to preconceived landscapes, giving a strong voice to those photographed". RP18's comments suggest that they understand Schneidermann's images as an empowering representation of indigenous communities (indicated by their use of the phrase "those photographed"). However, during S2 interviews (and despite the absence of Schneidermann's images in the S1 dataset) Schneidermann's work was received with some hostility. This response was typically contextualised with speculation about Schneidermann's ability and authority to accurately portray indigenous Welshness, due to her perceived status as an outsider. This can be seen in the following extract:

¹²² *I Called Her Lisa Marie* is a photographic project by Clementine Schneidermann which documents Elvis fandoms in both Memphis, Tennessee and at the annual Elvis festival in Porthcawl, Wales. The project was featured in the 2015 Diffusion festival *Looking For America* and was published as a photobook in 2018.

RP23: [00:35:37] that'll be the thing that pisses me off about Clémentine; because she's not from there, she probably has never had a chip butty on a brick wall outside the chip shop. She's probably never had a crisp butty in her gran's kitchen in the Valleys. She's probably never had the meat man come down the gully, to buy meat from. You need to experience these Welsh things in order to really know Wales. Yes, admire it, but you need to be here. You need to go to the market; you need to have the experience of going out shopping but coming back hours later because you have met every single person on your way home and then you go into someone's house for a cup of tea. So, there's really a Welsh authenticity - and that battle always when you're proving - not proving - but really going down the family line. This happens all the time in the Valleys and probably with you as well¹²³ - someone comes up to you and goes oh, you're Stacie's daughter from so-and-so, from twice removed. And they know all the history. And that's Wales to me.

RP23's sentiment was also echoed by RP11:

RP00: [00:31:29] How do you feel about [Schneidermann's *It's Called Efasinn* project] as a representation of Wales and Welshness?

RP11: [00:31:34] It isn't. To me, it's like categorically not. I know she works with Charlotte who does the styling, she's from Merthyr. So you've got that kind of angle covered and she can always say, "oh, it's, you know, blah blah". But for me, the vision is totally Clémentine's. Because the pictures are so specific in the way that they're put together. It just says that's the photographer's vision to me rather than someone trying to create something which says Wales. It doesn't.

Both comments arguably reflect the notion of authorship as a negotiation between personal vision and experiential authenticity; often connected to "time served" within a particular culture or with national birthright - both of which RP23 and RP11 consider Schneidermann to be lacking.

Chapter 2 explores the inherent complexity of Welsh national membership but it is worth noting that some practical work has been done in terms of generating a framework for membership to the Welsh art canon. In 2015 Gomer Press¹²⁴ published *Post-War to Post-Modern: A Dictionary of Artists in Wales*. Edited by ex-Welsh Arts Council director Peter Jones (Jones, 2014)

¹²³ RP23 was known to me before the research took place, and as such knows that I was born in Cardiff and raised in the Valleys. Their intimation here therefore relates to my lived experience of Welshness, and their corresponding assumption about my indigenous understanding of Welsh culture. My impact on the data is discussed in 5.4.1.

¹²⁴ Gomer Press is a Ceredigion based printer that until 2021 (when they sold their publishing arm to Atebol and Y Lolfa) published both English and Welsh language books.

and ex-Welsh Arts Council employee Isabel Hitchman, the preface includes a list of criteria and states that for an artist to be included in the anthology they must match at least four of nine of those criteria, which are as follows:

- have been born in Wales or be of Welsh parentage;
- have lived/be living and/or have worked/be working in Wales;
- have trained as an arts or applied arts practitioner in Wales;
- Have exhibited in Wales (group shows included) at least three times, and in a publicly-funded exhibition space in Wales at least once;
- have been commissioned to make work for publicly-accessible locations in Wales;
- have carried out residencies in Wales;
- have received grants, awards or bursaries from the Welsh Committee of the Arts/Council of Great Britain/Welsh Arts Council/Arts Council of Wales;
- make/have made work that has direct reference to Wales;
- have had work purchased for or by a public collection or archive in Wales (2015, pp.3-4)

Schneidermann fulfils at least six of these criteria¹²⁵. As such, the perception of Schneidermann as an outsider is perhaps more potent than the actuality of her circumstances. The context of perceptions regarding Schneidermann's right to represent Welshness authentically is complex, but perhaps guided by the notion that outsiders have generated images of Wales that are largely considered to be negative, or (as discussed in Chapter 3), to have perpetuated harmful stereotypes.

Throughout the S2 conversations, the subject of influential "outsiders" was broached on several occasions. As stated in Chapter 3, several prominent photographers made photographs in Wales during the 1950s - 1980s, many of which have shaped the way in which Wales is photographically visualised in international contexts and continue to exert considerable influence on the way in which Wales imagines itself (Cabuts, 2012). The status of these photographers as outsiders drew a mixture of responses from participants across each stage of the data. W. Eugene

¹²⁵ Schniederermann lived in Wales for the duration of her study at USW and has intermittently lived there since. She received photographic training on the USW "DocPhot" course, as of May 2022 she has participated in 8 exhibitions in Wales, she carried out a residency with "Arts & Minds" in Blaenau Gwent, her work makes direct reference to Wales, and some of her prints are held in the permanent collection of the National Museum of Wales.

Smith's eponymous *Three Miners* photograph was submitted in both S1 and S3 and was met with almost universal approval from participants, one example of which can be seen in the following exchange:

RP00: [00:38:28] So does it bother you that when people talk about Welsh photography, that picture [Smith's *Three Miners* image] is arguably at the forefront?

RP03: [00:38:37] No, it doesn't bother me at all. I think that that was a time - you look at the picture, that's what Wales basically looked like back then. You know; industrial, dirty. It just represents - there's everything that picture, the way everything's dug out, and they're the men who are digging it out. It just - that one picture represents that time in Wales's history, I guess. [...] It doesn't bother me that he didn't spend much time here. He's just been lucky to get something that good in the short amount of time that he was here, I guess.

However, when I followed up by asking RP03 if it would bother them if a contemporary photographer came to Wales for a short amount of time, and produced work that was latterly considered to be seminal, their response shifted slightly:

RP03: [00:39:25] I suppose it would. If the work kind of blew up and it would feel like a kick in the balls for all the people in Wales making work, that this person came in and made this work and it's just gone above everyone else's work. That would irritate me. But if the work was good and represented Wales - it could be critical, I wouldn't mind that, because there's a lot to criticise in Wales. But, yeah, I wouldn't mind ultimately. As long as the quality of the work was good and represented Wales as probably I see it, I suppose. If that makes any sense?

The aversion to the dominance of an outsider's representation of Wales is perhaps not a specifically Welsh phenomenon - but as Lord suggests, it is potentially influenced by a tradition of perceived (and actual) English colonialism and the corresponding dominance of Britishness at the expense of Welshness. As Lord states, "[t]he idea that anything touched by English hands cannot legitimately be part of indigenous Welsh tradition is an aspect of the national lack of self-confidence to which the myth of the visual handicap has contributed substantially" (1992, p.55). Indeed, viewed through a complexity lens, the construction of "insider" and "outsider" roles can be understood as adaptive behavior derived from interactions between the system and its own history. As Cilliers argues, complex systems have memory and are therefore both cognisant of and

influenced by the continued presence of their history. As argued in Chapters 2 and 3, the international representation of Welshness has been significantly impacted by a history of colonialism and problematic tension between funded institutions and the promotion of international photographers. Therefore, the hostility some participants directed towards outsiders reflects adaptive behaviour influenced by historical threats to the overall survival of the system. Perceived threat can manifest at both global and local levels within a complex system (Heylighen et al, 2007) and whilst caution regarding “outsider” depictions of Wales is perhaps more global, reactions to Scheidermann’s work might also be considered at a local level. As mentioned in Chapter 5, Heylighen et al understand system components as “autonomous individuals who try to achieve some personal goal or value by acting upon their environment, which includes other agents” (2007, p.125). Therefore, the hostility to Scheidermann’s work might also reflect circumstances in which participants perceive her success as a threat to their own ability to achieve success. If success in photography is measured through exhibitions, commissions, and exposure then Scheidermann’s success has arguably been generous. As such, individual agents who construct a lived authenticity of Welshness (from which they exclude Schneidermann) are arguably exhibiting defensive adaptive behaviour. The visual construction of authenticity is therefore explored in the following section.

6.3.2 Authenticity and intimacy

Concepts of intimacy, often associated with physical closeness, were variously discussed by participants. These concepts were part of the construction of the insider/outsider framework that impacted thoughts on both authorship and authenticity. During S2 conversations, several participants cited connotations of intimacy as measures of both photographic and Welsh authenticity. This was largely done in response to the S1 images, and particularly concerned two photographs, which were submitted by different participants during S1. On all occasions this was done without prompt from the researcher. The images are RI23 and RI26 (Fig.39 and Fig.40), and the first participant to discuss these images within the context of one another was RP04:

RP04: [00:47:21] Yeah, but you can tell this person [author of RI26] was born in Wales. I feel like this person was born in Wales.

RP00: [00:47:24] Why do you think they were born in Wales?

RP04: [00:47:29] He seems more in touch with his surroundings, like it's [RI26] a much more sensitive, kind of romanticised picture. I know it's a sheep and a man. But I feel like

that's [RI23] further away, it's detached, you know, it's like a bit of a stranger's outlook on the place. Whereas this [RI26] guy's like fully in with him. I feel like this guy [author of RI26] was probably born the Wales. Whilst I'm pretty sure, I don't think David Hurn¹²⁶ [author of RI23] was born in Wales. But he definitely has an attachment, he has an idea of what the place is like. And he's very aware of like the imagery of Wales. You can see that. But this guy is definitely more in tune with Wales than David Hurn.

This excerpt indicates that significant interactions within the system can happen across a variety of modes, and whilst person-to-person interactions are undeniably rich, person-image interactions also provide significant information about tacit behaviours which may result in emergent phenomena. Further, this indicates that components within the same complex system can be both human and non-human. As such, and as Heylighen et al note, complexity science therefore refuses “to draw any a priori boundary between mind and matter” (2007, p.125).



Figure 39: RI23 (Hurn, n.d.)

¹²⁶ RP04 knew before seeing the images that RI23 was taken by David Hurn. Hurn was born in England, but is often characterised as a Welsh photographer, due to his ongoing residence in Wales and his frequent use of Wales and Welsh culture as photographic referents.



Figure 40: RI26 (Tiley, n.d.)

RP08 also discussed the relationship between the two images and points out that they were made at the same location. RP08 is the author of RI26¹²⁷ and during the photo-elicitation section of the interview provided another (unprompted) link between the two images that was reminiscent of RP04's comments:

RP08: [00:54:46] Is that [RI23], is that David Hurn's?

RP00: [00:54:49] Yeah it is. How did you know?

RP08: [00:54:50] Ah right, ok. No, that's really interesting because David, he hasn't got a connection with people that I would have. Probably because he sounds quite posh. And he would admit that. He likes to be a fly on the wall. He likes to be invisible. And that's the beauty of his pictures. Whereas maybe my pictures, I like to be there and say, "well I'm not a fly on a wall, you know I'm going to take your picture". So, it's probably going to show through the picture that I'm not a fly on the wall. But yeah, that's a typical David

¹²⁷ Participants were informed on the S2 Consent Form (Appendix 4) that certain information they gave during interview might compromise their anonymity. This is the case here. RP08 submitted their own images in Stage 1, and then discusses their authorship in Stage 2. The handling of participant anonymity and ethics process is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Hurn. The reason I looked at that is because it's taken in exactly the same place as I took the picture of the sheep just below it. RI26.

[...]

RP08: [00:55:54] So my approach to doing the same thing is very different. Mine is very close, wide-angle lens, and when I take still pictures, I always use a wide-angle lens. For the reason to get as close as I possibly can. But you can see from David's - it's a distant picture. [...] But again, it's that approach where I would speak to people, and I'm trying to get some information, I suppose, and be friendly, but for other photographic opportunities. [...] We're pretty much stood on the same piece of tarmac, looking at it now. But he's taken his view overlooking the valley, whereas I've gone in quite close. But we're pretty much standing in the same place, taking exactly the same picture.

To my knowledge, RP04 and RP08 do not know one another personally or professionally, and as such the similarity in their sentiments indicate tacit shared understanding of the connotations of particular photo-methodologies. However, connotations of intimacy within these images were not limited to photo-methodologies. Whilst both RP04 and RP08 discuss the notions of intimacy in RI23 and RI26 within the context of image-making, RP23 perceives emotional intimacy in RI26; reacting primarily as a viewer rather than a photographer. When prompted to select images that appear to them to be particularly Welsh, RP23 earmarked RI26 and stated:

RP23 [01:06:25] I feel this is Welsh to me. Not because of the sheep. I think it's because of the mountains behind. And the crisp packet. It's just like; that is just my dad. That is my dad.

RP23's reaction underlines the tacit personal connection that many participants cite as a critical factor within the 'Welshness' of their work. The relationship between these two images constitutes a site of phenomenological interaction that is indicative of complex systems and underlines the applicability of complexity as a germane epistemological paradigm for the analysis of visual meaning. It is crucial to note that participants would not typically have been exposed to these two images at the same time, outwith the research environment. As such, the relationship between the images indicates not only the potential for the study of micro-interactions to provide insight into the system, but also highlights the need for explicit acknowledgement of the research environment as part of the system of study (as has been done in Chapter 5). The perceived authenticity of Welshness achieved here through intimacy (as both practical and tacit personal conceptualisations)

functioned as part of a larger framework of insider/outsider discourse in which “authenticity” was a prized criterion. Authenticity was also discussed through the application of formal photographic aesthetics which expanded to the concept to include both Welsh authenticity and photographic authenticity. Specifically, participants connected monochromatic images (both within and outwith the S1 photographs) with historical authenticity in the context of both Welsh culture and photography.

6.3.4 *Black and white*

RP03: [00:49:59] Yeah, it’s funny because the ones in black and white, they tend to be the ones that look the most Welsh, you know? I don’t know why.

Formal aesthetics generally were not a popular topic of discussion amongst participants. There were infrequent conceptualisations of formal characteristics such as beauty and ugliness, however these notions tended to be connected more generally to contexts and concepts (such as industry) than to any notions of pure aesthetic formalism. Bala suggests that this more postmodern approach to aesthetics is typical of “developing” nations, in which the “message” of an artwork was considered “necessary enough to drive the artist and inform the art” (1992, p.15). However, several participants discussed black and white photography within the context of aesthetics, commonly linking monochrome aesthetics to concepts of both Welsh and photographic authenticity.

In total 92 images were submitted across S1 and S3 of the research¹²⁸. Of that number, 33 are black and white. Several participants discussed the concept of black and white as both an evocative aesthetic, and strategic methodology. Largely, discussions around the meaning of black and white photography were triggered during the photo-elicitation period of S2 interviews. During some of these interviews I asked participants to indicate five images that were the most “Welsh” to them. On several occasions, participants picked majority black and white images. I specifically questioned this on two occasions: during an interview with RP01, and then again during an interview with RP06. The exchanges were as follows:

RP00: [00:49:13] So, like four of them are black and white. Does that have an impact-

RP01: [00:49:20] -Yeah, I think it probably does yeah.

¹²⁸ 22 of 52 images submitted in Stage 1 and 11 of 40 images in Stage 3 were black and white

RP00: [00:49:21] Why, do you think?

RP01: [00:49:26] Maybe the influence of that Valleys Project. Maybe that's why I got a monochrome camera, that I could only take photos in black and white¹²⁹? Is there more authenticity to black and white? I dunno - I've got over that now, I think. But maybe it's just 'cause they remind me of Wales. And because they're black and white is what I would have seen them in before.

RP01 notes the influence of the Valleys Project¹³⁰ - the majority of which was shot in black and white, but also speculates that black and white images, through their connection to history, connote authenticity of artefact, or factual historical representation. Ireland and Ellis (2005) capitalise on this notion in a study that utilises participant observation to discover the way in which black and white photography promotes a collective consciousness¹³¹. This, they state, happens in two ways. Firstly, black and white connotes a teleological authenticity through understanding of traditional photo-methodologies. In other words, it is assumed that black and white photographs are more “authentic” than colour images due to their purity of process; their reliance on the mechanical, chemical process of photography that necessitated a physical referent, rather than contemporary colour images which are apparently more susceptible to manipulation. Secondly, Ireland and Ellis note that the ownership (and in some cases exhibition) of black and white imagery contributes to a felt ownership of cultural history, and thus acceptance into cultural presence. They demonstrate this by observing second home owners who collect black and white imagery to achieve a “pseudo-acceptance” within local society “by displaying authentic people [figures in the photographs] in an inauthentic setting [the second home]” (2005, p.377). As demonstrated in Chapter 3, the acquisition (or, at least, perceived acquisition) of antiquated history has been acknowledged as a potent tool for nation-building (Hobsbawm, 1983). This is particularly salient in the context of the Welsh nation, where a reliance on or creative imagining of history has been particularly prevalent.

Within the context of the fieldwork, black and white images appeared to suggest both national and photographic history. This is likely due to the participant sample (all but 1 of the 23 S2 participants were photographers), but nevertheless provides salient insight into the system-wide

¹²⁹ RP01 is referring to the Leica Monochrom; a range of digital cameras manufactured by Leica, without a colour filter – essentially forcing users to work in black and white.

¹³⁰ The Valleys Project was a longform photography survey commissioned by Ffotogallery. It is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

¹³¹ “Collective consciousness” is a hypothesis developed by Durkheim which refers to a set of beliefs that are shared amongst a particular society. This, states Durkheim, informs collective identity and belonging. One example of this is commonly held ideologies relating to gender norms.

implications of black and white aesthetics. RP06, for example, attributes their assertion that black and white images are the “most Welsh” to the history of Welsh photography, and in particular to established photographers who “set the tone” of Welsh imagery. Earlier in our conversation, RP06 had noted:

RP06: [01:10:04] Many people would argue that the valleys is portrayed now - and a lot of Roger's¹³² work at that time, was black and white. A lot of people would argue that the work you see of representation of the Welsh valleys still tends to be harking back to Eugene Smith. You know, and other American photographers, like Bruce Davidson, all the people that came over and kind of lurked around. Most of it was shot in black and white. Most of it showed the gritty, dirty valleys.

Following their selection of images, RP06 then reflects:

RP06: [01:49:15] So every one of those shots I've picked, bar Matt's truck¹³³ has been black and white. Why is that, Ellie? I want you to analyse that.

RP00: [01:49:25] I can't. That's down to what people think Wales is.

RP06: [01:49:32] It's grim and it's black and white.

The continued association between black and white images and Welsh identity arguably constitutes a series of non-linear feedback loops maintained in large part by the system environment. Specifically, the preservation, collection, and exhibition of images that are considered seminal in the genesis of Welsh photography (such as Smith's or those associated with The Valleys Project) contributes to micro-interactions between these photographs and other photographers who may choose to emulate or negate this approach within their own practice. Interestingly, despite some participants' observations that the “most Welsh” images are black and white, few contemporary photographers in Wales are consistently producing black and white work. Whilst cause-and-effect solutions are counterintuitive to complexity theory, it is possible the lack of black and white photography amongst contemporary Welsh photographers reflects both a negative feedback loop (in which representations of Wales as “grim and black and white” are actively eschewed), and wider

¹³² RP06 is referring here to Roger Tiley; a South Wales based photographer who is known for his photographs made (and widely published) during the miner's strikes. Tiley's work from this era, and throughout most of his career, was made in black and white. In 1986 Tiley successfully applied to take part in The Valleys Project and had his series of Mine-scapes included in that archive, which is housed at Ffotogallery. Tiley's work is discussed in more detail in Chater 3.

¹³³ RP06 is referring to RI47 - an image of a monster truck in a car park taken by Matthew Eynon.

aesthetic trends in photography. There are however two prolific photographers creating mainly black and white work in Wales. The first of these is Egyptian-born photographer Mohammed Hassan, who's work *Witnessing Wales* is produced entirely monochromatically (Carroll, 2021). The second is Magnum photographer David Hurn. Participants cited Hurn's signature monochrome aesthetic not only as being recognisable, but also influential in the context of their own practice. Due in part to his professional visibility, Hurn's almost exclusive use of black and white photography has arguably reinforced the conception of Welshness as black and white in both global and local contexts. Indeed, RP22 describes a meeting with David Hurn, that continues to influence their practice - specifically their choice to produce black and white work, stating:

RP22: [00:09:33] I do a lot of black and white. I think I got the bug from him [Hurn]. For me, to meet someone like David Hurn was something really big.

Hurn's influence across the system of Welsh photography is considerable and functions beyond aesthetic formalism. This is discussed in more detail in the following section.

6.4 Photo-methodologies and Influences

As discussed in 6.2, there is considerable evidence of both positive and negative visual feedback loops of Welsh stereotypes. However, participants identified other feedback loops that stretch beyond visual and occupy a more behavioural position within the system; often manifesting as photo-methodologies. Participants frequently connected deliberate photo-methodologies to encounters with influential practitioners or photoworks, illustrating both the importance of examining relationships between system actors, and the potential for seemingly small interactions to proliferate significantly through emergent behavior and positive feedback loops.

6.4.1 David Hurn

RP06: [00:26:58] David Hurn comes into the frame yet again, and he probably will throughout this conversation, because he always tends to be lurking in the background somewhere, Hurn; involved in this, that, or the other.

As described in Chapter 3, David Hurn is a photographer of considerable international stature, and longstanding member of the Magnum photography agency. Although often characterised as “the Welsh Magnum photographer”, Hurn was not born in Wales, and cites “the spectre of ‘born in England’” (2000, p.12) as a driving force in his Welsh photography, explaining that the medium is the tool through which he intends to discover his place in Wales (Ibid.). Across the data 67

photographers were named, either as authors of images submitted in S1 and S3, or as points of interest during S2 conversations. David Hurn was the most frequently cited of these 67; his name is referenced 125 times across the data¹³⁴ and his notability is trailed only by Dan Wood, who is mentioned 52 times¹³⁵. Hurn's influence manifests in myriad ways across both the data and the system, and his renown is a salient consideration within the context of complexity theory. As argued by Heylighen et al, most interactions between components in complex systems happen at a local level; social and geographical proximity naturally influence the probability of interactions and as such complex systems are typified by emergent and unpredictable global consequences of local interactions (2007). However, Galanter argues that the structure of complex systems is not strictly confined to local interactions, noting that in some cases highly popular system components are likely to attract other components, regardless of locality (2016). Galanter describes this as a “rich get richer” mechanism, stating that popular components therefore become “hubs” of interaction; causing further micro-interactions that might not have happened otherwise. As evidenced by both his popularity in the data and public visibility in both photography and Wales, David Hurn arguably functions as a “hub” of interaction in the system of Welsh photography as it has been constructed by this research.

Hurn's influence as understood by participants spanned two specific (yet arguably interconnected) sites of interaction. Firstly, is his pedagogical influence as founder of the Documentary Photography course at Newport College of Art. This is explored in more detail in Chapter 5, but specifically covers the teaching of documentary-focused photo-methodologies that have proliferated through feedback loops sustained by students of the course (several of whom latterly became teachers on different iterations of the course). This is symbiotic with the second way in which participants understood Hurn to be influential: his signature documentary style of photography. Several participants commented that Hurn's prolific use of unobtrusive documentary photo-methodologies have contributed to a visual “style” that is recognisable, arguably equating Hurn with an auteur, as can be seen below:

RP05: [00:27:45] Obviously, David Hurn's got a style. [...] So, for me, you've got certain artists that stand out. And David Hurn is one of those artists.

¹³⁴ This includes mentions from the researcher.

¹³⁵ These numbers are based on David Hurn and Dan Wood being referred to by their full names. Hurn was typically always referred to as “David Hurn” – even by participants who knew him personally, whilst Wood was commonly referred to as “Dan” by participants who know him personally.

RP00: [00:46:48] you said “it looks like a David Hurn”- what about it looks like a David Hurn?

RP04: [00:46:55] Well he photographed Wales in a very Welsh way, I think.

RP00: [00:46:59] Can you unpack that?

RP04: [00:47:00] Well, photographing sheep, the valleys. You'd be like, ok that's Wales, type of thing.

Hurn's typical visual documentary style was also cited as influential due to participants' tacit understand of the normative codes of documentary photography, in which the photographer objectively records a scene as it unfolds in front of them, without intervening or directing subjects. This led several participants to credit Hurn's photographs of Wales with an authenticity derived not only from tenure in Wales or black and white aesthetics (though Hurn is known for both of those criteria), but primarily from orthodox conceptualisations of photography connected to documentary practice. As demonstrated below, RP01 explicitly connects Hurn's photographs of Wales to “honesty”, which connotes both objectivity and authenticity:

RP00: [01:10:07] what do you think of [Hurn's] representations of Wales?

RP01: [01:10:10] I just think they're accurate. That's what I think more than anything, like they're honest and accurate. [...] There's just an honesty with it.

However, despite various conceptualisations of Hurn as an objective observer, Hurn himself has been candid about the elements of selection and curation in his photographic process. In a 2020 article for Planet, de la Concha Montes presents a “spiderweb” of Welsh identity created by Hurn (Fig. 41), and states that Hurn uses the diagram (which de la Concha Montes first encountered during a talk Hurn gave in February 2020¹³⁶) as a “visual crutch” (2020) when photographing Wales. The spiderweb therefore supplies insight into Hurn's conceptualisation of Wales and somewhat contradicts the characterisation of him as a passive observer. Indeed, in his 2000 publication *Wales: Land of My Father* Hurn concedes “my exploration [of Wales] is personal, thus many aspects have been ignored [...] My own truth is my ultimate criterion” (p.12).

¹³⁶ On the 15th of February 2020, Hurn delivered his final planned public lecture at Cardiff University, School of Journalism Media and Culture (JOMEC). The event was organised by the Royal Photographic Society South Wales and supported by Magnum and Amgueddfa Cymru.

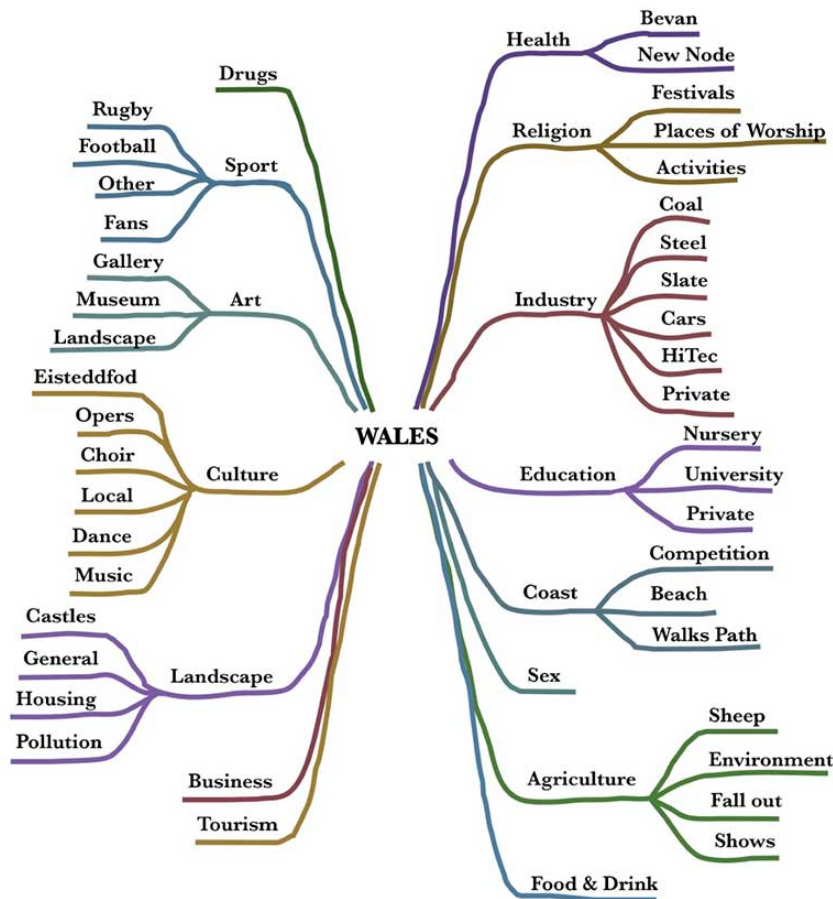


Figure 41: David Hurn's *Spiderweb of Wales* reproduced in la Concha Montes (2020)

Hurn's photography of Wales is country-wide, and, as indicated by his "spiderweb", focuses on cultural-specificity rather than a particular geographical (or indeed psycho-geographical) locality. As an influential component within the system, it could be suggested that Hurn's indiscriminate Wales-wide approach contributes to a multiplicitous representation of Wales that is independent from Welsh geography and therefore relies on the viewer to find Welshness within the image, rather than a deliberate attempt from the photographer to situate the photographs in Wales/Welshness. However, as argued throughout this thesis, complex systems require dynamism for optimal function. Whilst Hurn's influence is significant, his approach is not totalising and contrasts with the work of several participants who conceptualised their personal Welshness through geographical localities and subsequently translated this into notions of both photographic and Welsh authenticity.

6.4.2 *Milltir Sgwâr*

"*Milltir sgwâr*" is a Welsh phrase that translates to "square mile" in English. The concept was discussed by several S2 participants, in the context of both their own and others' photographic

practices. It is conceptualised as a methodological approach to photography in which photographers document something familiar to them, rather than the practice of staying within a literal square mile. The phrase, popularised by D.J. Williams (Lord, 2013), features in the opening essay written by Rachel Tresize¹³⁷ in Dan Wood's 2021 photobook *Black Was the River, You See* (Kozu Books). Tresize observes that rather than literally referring to a square mile, the phrase "refers more particularly to the patch of ground you make your own - the place that shapes you and which is shaped in return by your connection" (2021, p.6). Lord also explains that the phrase extends beyond "the cold measure evoked by the English words" (2013, p.87), describing a milltir sgwâr as "the networks of relationships amongst the people that create the identity of a rural community" (Ibid.). Both interpretations of milltir sgwâr bear remarkable conceptual similarity to complexity theory; and could arguably be thought of in terms of networked feedback loops. Indeed, as was discussed in section 6.3.1, indigenous photography was largely conceived of as having more Welsh authenticity due to its association with experiential factors such as prolonged exposure to and integration into local culture. Arguably the adoption of the milltir sgwâr photo-methodology is a behavioural manifestation of this notion; a methodology that signifies proof of membership to Wales.

As mentioned previously, participants were critical of so-called outsiders who spend a short amount of time in Wales and produced work with a claim of Welshness. This is perhaps indicative of a wider ethical movement in photography, in which photographs that claim authenticity of experience made by photographers who cannot prove authenticity of indigenous knowledge are being critically examined under the lens of colonialism, and racial/social inequality (Miles, 2012). As such, the adoption of the milltir sgwâr photo-methodology was occasionally characterised both as an ethical and an authentic approach, as can be seen in the following exchange:

RP00: [00:56:56] So would you have people stay within their sort of square mile, almost? Is that important to you that people are showing what their lived experience of Wales is?

RP23: [00:57:07] I think so. Just photograph what you know, that's what I've learnt throughout the years. Photograph what you know, don't stray too far from your community, always stay in contact, et cetera. And that's the best way to get photos because you know the people you're photographing.

¹³⁷ Tresize is a Welsh author whose fiction work has been widely published. In 2006 her novel *Fresh Apples* won the inaugural EDS Dylan Thomas Prize. More here: <https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/rachel-tresize> [Accessed 2nd June 2021]

Throughout S2 conversations, many participants cited Bridgend-based photographer Dan Wood as an example of a photographer working within their square mile. Wood's success and authorship were frequently commented on (as noted, after David Hurn, he was the most mentioned photographer), many participants noted his influential stature as an ambassador for Welsh photography:

RP00: [00:26:46] If I said “Welsh photography”, what would that mean to you?

RP04: [00:26:59] Honestly? Dan Wood at the moment.

Often both Wood's approach and his images were connected to notions of Welsh authenticity and ethical photographic practice. The way in which his approach to photographing in his square mile was characterised by participants provided further insight into tacit understanding about indigenous authenticity:

RP10: [00:00:49] listening to Dan's talk¹³⁸ inspired me. And it was, of course, his pictures, but it was more the way he spoke about his work. And I really found his authenticity really interesting. And I went, “oh my gosh yeah; just be authentic”.

RP02: [00:46:10] he is working within his square mile. You know, he's understanding his square mile and the people who function within that square mile. It's so important, I think. Maybe we don't do enough of that as photographers. We want to get about and travel around. I've been to bloody Nepal and Chile and places like that. I always come back feeling really frustrated because I've not understood the place really, you know?

RP23: [00:31:14] OK, so Dan. Dan's a Bridgend boy. I mean, his work is really real

As argued in Chapter 5, system components whose behaviour is understood to be beneficial to the entire system (in this case, Wood's international success promotes Welsh photography outside Wales) exert influence on other components, and as such their behaviour gains traction across the system. Both RP01 and RP02 discuss the phrase “square mile”, with RP02 using the Welsh

¹³⁸ RP10 is referencing an artist talk given by Wood at the 2019 Northern Eye festival in Colwyn Bay, which both myself and RP10 attended.

terminology, and RP01 providing conceptual insight that aligns with Tresize's characterisation of the phenomena and Wood's photo-methodologies:

RP01 [01:07:12] That's what I'm focusing on, is my - even though it's not, you know, I'm photographing outside of a square mile. It's just metaphorical, like that's what I'm focusing on, is my square mile. Somewhere I can get to and not have to stay overnight. That's generally a rule. Like, I'll come up to Cardiff, maybe Bristol at a push. I can get up to, you know, north of Aberystwyth without having to stay over. Yeah. That's what I regard as my square mile.

Some participants also referred to working in their local area, without explicitly recognising this as working within their “square mile”. Those who specifically employed the phrase “square mile” when discussing their methodologies appeared to wish to demarcate the practice as specifically Welsh; with two participants citing the Welsh language translation of the phrase. Indeed, whilst photographing one's locality is not a specifically Welsh undertaking, the connection to the Welsh language phrase “Milltr Sgwar”, implies a more nuanced Welshness to the practice; much like the concept of Hiraeth¹³⁹. As described in Chapter 2 and 5, the strategic use of the Welsh language has historically functioned as an adaptive strategy in contexts such as nationalism and the acquisition of funding.

Conversely, those who discussed working more generally within their local area without employing the phrase “square mile”, tended to offer this photo-methodology as an explanation of their work being *coincidentally* rather than *purposefully* Welsh:

RP20: [00:20:14] I've always kind of slightly trembled when people sort of try and pin me down, about Welshness and so on. I mean, I happen to make photographs in Wales, but my influences come from much wider. My photographic influences are more from West Coast America than they are in Wales. But if I happened to photograph Welsh things, then, yes, it talks about Wales. My tin sheds are in Wales. But those pictures are pure Walker Evans.

RP20's sentiments are echoed by RP12, who makes work concerning the African diaspora in Wales, and states:

¹³⁹ Hiraeth is a Welsh language word with no direct English translation. It is often conceptualised as a longing for Wales, when one is away from the country but has also been conceptualised as a longing for Wales outwith the colonial influence of England.

RP12: [00:08:24] I go back to the reality aspect of it. That the pictures I take are there and they are happening. Now, if there was a Welsh flag flying in the background, so be it. That's there. And it's happening. But no, there's no thought process in my head that "I want to make this look Welsh".

However, during the conversation with RP12, I challenged the assertion that any perceived Welshness in their work was coincidental, rather than purposeful, and asked how they would feel about the potential to document other significant African diasporas. RP12's response indicates a shift in thinking that echoes the inherently indigenous pretext of the *Milltir Sgwâr* photo-methodology:

RP00: [00:30:52] Would you be interested in making work about African cultures in like, the Midlands?

RP12: [00:30:57] Yeah, I would. But it's funny though, that's a good question because I would do that *if* somebody paid me to do it. That's a very good point actually, because yes; the reason I'm doing it in Wales is because I'm Welsh. So, you're right. I hate to admit this, but you're right. The fact is that I'm Welsh. I'm from Wales. And the fact is that I want to do something on *my* country.

Despite being largely acknowledged as a positive and ethical practice, the "milltir sgwâr" approach was also met with some criticism. Photographic parochialism and lack of commercial success were considered to be potential downsides for photographers focusing only on their square mile, as can be seen in the following excerpt from the conversation with RP07. Here RP07 discusses Dan Wood who, as previously mentioned, is widely considered by participants to consistently work within his square mile:

RP07: [00:37:14] Dan, I think is his own worst enemy, you know. I don't know whether it's Welsh or whether it's small country attitude or what but he photographs in his backyard almost. And I've often thought - I'm trying to think in the history of photography, what photographers have been acknowledged by their peers, to be really great. And by and large, I think if you're going to talk about greatness, you've got to talk about the peers. Not gallery owners and people like that. I couldn't give a shit what they say - or critics or anything. It's your peers. They're the important people, they always have been. Why do you just stay in your backyard and photograph there? The rest of the world is not going to know you. And it seems to me, terribly restricting.

The proliferation of the milltir sgwâr photomethodology is arguably indicative of wider cultural influences on the system. The colonialism and multiplicity that influence the global and local conceptualisations of Welsh identity manifest in this context in behaviours exhibited by certain photographers or institutions (such as overt usage of the Welsh language, or the quest to reform stereotypes). However, as is also indicated above several participants maintained their position that a Welsh specificity to their photographs was purely coincidental. These opposing viewpoints are indicative of wider paradigms of thought explored throughout this thesis (such as modernism, postmodernism, post-structuralism, and social constructionism), but are explicitly grounded in sustained uncertainty regarding a distinct Welsh identity.

6.5 Sheep, still

“If nations are vertically constituted, their symbolic corpus can be read off elite documents and pronouncements. If they are horizontally constructed, the content of national symbols exists everywhere and nowhere: it cannot be located in an individual or document but, like a forest or flock of birds, lives as a complex whole, emerging from the interaction of individuals, groups, and institutions” (Kaufmann, 2017, p.7).

National photography is always reflective of the culture that characterises it, and as such, contemporary Welsh photography is partially a reflection on contemporary Wales. The data indicate that contemporary Welshness itself is still a contentious and somewhat muddled concept, that is characterised by a particular relationship with its history. This is reflected in micro-interactions, emergent phenomena, and feedback loops discernable throughout the system. Anderson’s “imagined community” suggests a top-down, unified understanding of nationality (1983) that is arguably at odds with Wales as a nation. Wales cannot be found in the collective act of reading newspapers – particularly as those newspapers might well be in a different language. This can be traced both in scholarship and in the data gathered from participants in this research - including direct scepticism rooted in the preconceived understanding that “one-ness” and reductive unity should characterise both Welshness and Welsh photography. This is clearly at odds with the multiplicity of national identity expressed throughout Wales and by participants. As such, complexity theory provides a new way of approaching not just Welsh photography but Welshness itself. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8 but is nonetheless relevant to the close of this chapter. Although scholarship on cultural complexity is still relatively sparse¹⁴⁰, some contemporary

¹⁴⁰ As argued in section 2.3 Complexity Theory has demonstrated growth in the fields of linguistics, health, and social care, but remains relatively under-explored in arts and cultural studies - though this is changing.

literature addresses the applicability of complexity theory to the problem of nationalism. Indeed, as Kauffman states, complexity has the capacity to shed light on “variation in the content and interpretation of national identity between people, groups and places” (2017, p.6). With this in mind, the following two chapters offer insight, rather than positivist conclusions, into the use of complexity theory as an epistemological approach to apprehend Welsh photography. As described in Chapter 1, complexity theory evolved to play a much bigger role in the narrative of this thesis than originally anticipated and as such, Chapter 7 offers concluding insight into Welsh photography, therefore addressing the primary research question. In contrast, Chapter 8 offers concluding insight into the application of complexity theory, addressing the secondary research questions and advocating for further scholarship, artistic praxis, and discourse within the paradigm of complexity theory.

7. Towards Welsh Photographies

In the October 2021 issue of *Offline Journal*, Cabuts writes “[p]erhaps I put ‘Wales’ and ‘photography’ in the same sentence too often¹⁴¹ but it is because I strongly believe there should be recognition that there is a specificity to photography in and of Wales” (p.40). Both Cabuts and Crawford have written articles under the title “Towards A Welsh Photography” – it is a title I borrowed in Chapter 3 and adapted for this chapter. However, for this iteration I have chosen to make what I feel is a crucial semantic differentiation. The plurality of Welsh culture and society has been variously examined throughout this thesis, and whilst I don’t believe that either Cabuts or Crawford sought to promote a singular “Welsh photography”, shifting the terminology to acknowledge plurality seems both appropriate and constructive in the context of the data generated by this research. The academic acknowledgment of the plurality of Welshness itself has, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, already begun. A particularly salient example being Williams’ continuum of felt/actual “Welshness” based on language competency (2017). Further, the plurality of aesthetics in and of art that relates to Welshness has also been established. In 1999 Bala wrote “[c]ultural specificity engages with a content that is similar in the work of many artists though the outward appearance of their work varies greatly in formal terms” (p.19).

Similarly, and as discussed in more detail in the following chapter, photography too is increasingly conceptualised as a concept defined by its plurality, and scholars are acknowledging this through mobilisation of the term “photographies” (Arnold and Meskimmon, 2016). The potential for plurality in national photography has been explicitly acknowledged by Bleyen and Van Gelder, who adapt Deleuze and Guattari’s framework of “minor literature” to argue for “minor Belgian photographs” (2011). Their epistemology has had significant impact on the narrative of this thesis for several reasons, including similarities between multiplicitous multilingual Welsh and Belgian identities, and the fact that their article is one of few that specifically addresses practices relating to contemporary national photographs. Their framework capitalises on the inherent pluralism of Belgianness, whilst borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “minor literatures”. This concept, state Bleyen and Van Gelder, has three characteristics: firstly, a process of de- and then re-territorialisation in which the milieu of an inhabited space is decoded and then recoded. This allows localised national discourse to flourish within global spaces (both physical and conceptual). Deleuze and Guattari specifically discuss this concept within the context of language, pointing to the way in which minor languages reconstruct (and sometimes entirely dismantle) dominant languages (1987). A linguistic example of this within the Welsh context might

¹⁴¹ I know the feeling.

perhaps be the use of so-called “Wenglish¹⁴²” – “the anglophone dialect” specific to the South Wales Valleys (James, 2011) that combines dialects and phrases across both Welsh and English language (a practice known as code-switching). The word “cwtch” for example is a Welsh language word meaning “cuddle” and is frequently assimilated into the vocabulary of English-speaking Welsh citizens from the Valleys (Ibid.). Similarly, the frequent use of the “ffoto” prefix for photographic institutions (Ffotogallery, Ffoton, Ffotoview, Ffoto Newport), indicates institutional desire to connote indigenous Welshness (through appropriation of the Welsh-language word for photography – “ffotograffiaeth”), but remain accessible in global (or at least, Western/English-speaking) contexts.

Within the context of photography, Bleyen and Van Gelder conclude that “we thus can come to understand minor photographs as vivid contact zones and as practices of creatively bringing out of joint the dominant practices of the medium” (Bleyen and Van Gelder, 2011, p.115). As demonstrated in Chapter 6, the hybrid photo-methodology that combines fashion photography with traditional documentary subjects has become increasingly popular in the Welsh context. The success and increasing adoption of this methodology constitutes a de-construction of the dominant practices that have photographically represented Wales (“gritty” documentary photography), and a subsequent creative re-construction that is both celebratory and emancipatory. Indeed, the global success of Schneidermann’s *It’s Called Ffasiwn* project has thrust a local discourse regarding deindustrialisation and socio-economic decline into a global space. Writing about the work for *The New Yorker*, Dillon states that the infamous “monochrome vision of poverty and profundity” (2019, n.p.) communicated by Robert Frank and W. Eugene Smith “haunts” the project, but notes:

“their photographs respond more directly to a later iconography [...] Images of the valleys now signal post-industrial decline and, lately, a degree of Brexit-voting political self-harm. “It’s Called Ffasiwn” depicts spalling grey housing estates, but they are not always what they seem [...] The kids carry on as if it’s a royal jubilee – as so often, glamour, comedy, and some innocent purchase on the future have met in the ruins” (Ibid.).

Thus, within the framework of minor photographs, Schneidermann’s work fulfils the dual purpose of de- and re-constructing both Welshness and Welsh photography as previously

¹⁴² “Wenglish” is a portmanteau of Welsh and English and characterises several dialects spoken across Wales that merge aspects of the Welsh language (typically grammatical form) with the English language. It also refers to accent distinction.

established by dominant codes of socially-engaged documentary photography and photographic representations of Welsh life.

The second feature of Deleuze and Guattari's minor literatures transposed by Bleyen and Van Gelder is their political dimension. This, they state, is not necessarily a critique of the "major" politics, but instead is both affirmative and creative and as such, "if there is a movement of dissent in it, it is always immediately followed by a second moment of creativity" (2011, p.115). In the context of the Welsh photographic practices and products discussed in this thesis, these phenomena are evident. Participants who did disclose a political dimension in their practice often characterised this as a creative interlocutor, usually aimed at positive reimagining of socio-political thought. Indeed, as discussed above, this is evident in works such as Schneidermann's *It's Called Ffasiwn*¹⁴³, but is also explicit in works such as Michał Iwanowski's *Go Home, Polish*. Iwanowski's series documents an 1800km walk from Cardiff (his current home) to Mokreszów, Poland (his hometown). Iwanowski states that the project was inspired by a piece of graffiti in Cardiff that proclaimed, "Go home, Polish" which caused him to reflect on transnational and self-assigned identities in the hope that "people will see a mirror rather than a window" (Iwanowski in Wright, n.d.). Images from both *It's Called Ffasiwn* and *Go Home, Polish* were submitted for S3 by RP18, who notes that both offer creative responses to wider political discourse. In the text submitted with the images, RP18 states that FRI13 (Schneidermann, Fig.38.) offers "a celebratory gaze of the South Wales Valleys (RP18, 2020)" and "bring[s] a new vibrancy to preconceived landscapes, giving a strong voice to those photographed" (Ibid.). Similarly, they state of FRI17 (Fig.42) "[i]n the context of 'Welsh photography', I think [Iwanowski's images] also question whether Welsh photography is distinct from photography of Wales" (Ibid.)

¹⁴³ Schneidermann has frequently cited the influence of a particularly disparaging BBC article written about the post-industrial town of Blaenau Gwent. The article, entitled *The unbearable sadness of the Welsh valleys* [sic], was written by Mark Easton published by the BBC in 2013. During this time, Schneidermann was undertaking a residency in the same location of Blaenau Gwent, and repurposed Easton's title to name her work *The Unbearable, The Sadness, and The Rest*. The work later formed part of Schneidermann's larger project *It's Called Ffasiwn*.



Figure 42: FRI17 from *Go Home, Polish* (Iwanowski, 2022)

Finally, Bleyen and Van Gelder turn to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of collectivism within minor literatures. In this context, minor literatures turn away from the modernist celebration of the individual author and embrace contexts "where there are no towering figures that dominate the landscape and discourage innovation by inviting emulation" (Ibid.). As such, they conclude:

"Minor photographies might then be photographies that experiment with the medium, bring it towards its borders, de-territorialising dominant codes of representation and operating directly in society instead of merely representing it. It does not as much seek to develop a unique voice or style than to both address and speak for a community (hence, its practices immediately take on a collective value).

Consequently, minor photographies in many ways challenge national photographies and their criteria of authorship, style, innovation or formation of a school. Instead, they ask for the acknowledgement of the dynamics of variation and negation of dominant uses of photography and the specific socio-political and geo-historical context defining these dynamics" (2011, p.115).

As has been argued throughout this thesis, the application of positivism to both Welshness and Photography has been problematic. It is therefore the contention of this thesis that the acceptance of both phenomena as rich, complex, and dynamic pluralities (specifically, complex systems),

provides fruitful scope for discourse (both academic and artistic) that can acknowledge binaries, contradictions and problems caused through previous applications of positivism without being stalled by those concepts. Whilst my conceptual framework differs from Bleyen and Van Gelder, my conclusions are similar; in embracing plurality of concept; discourses, artworks, and perhaps institutional policies (such as curating and collecting) one might begin to advance beyond alienating, static, and polarising notions of both Welshness and photography. In abandoning the search for a paradoxical one-size-fits-all Welsh photography, I offer instead the concept of Welsh photographs; a complex adaptive system of negotiated meaning-making that holistically apprehends the inherent complexity of both Welshness and photography through the “dynamics of variation” and a voice that both “addresses and speaks for an [imagined] community” (Bleyen and Van Gelder, 2011, p.115).

7.1 Reflections on the Answers

Transdisciplinarity seeks to address restrictive disciplinary paradigms of constructing knowledge and poses a significant epistemological challenge to disciplinary positivism. At the start of this thesis, I acknowledged that established inquiries focusing on both Welshness and photography tend towards frustration at the lack of a single tangible, static ideology in which to situate research. Both phenomena are evidentially socially contingent and as culture, society, and technology have developed and adapted, Welsh identity and photography have continued to demonstrate many features of a complex system without being explicitly characterised as such. In understanding that knowledge relating these concepts has been (and continues to be) shaped by unpredictable paradigmatic and sociocultural assumptions, it is perhaps easy to see why participants presented radically diverging views on the notion of Welsh photography. In acknowledging the validity of pluralism, transdisciplinarity, and non-linearity within Welsh photographs, I am not advocating for a chaotic “anything goes” approach to epistemology. Instead, and as Heylighen et al write “[w]hat distinguishes complexity science is its focus on phenomena that are characterised neither by order nor by disorder [...] but that are situated somewhere in between, in the zone that is commonly (though perhaps misleadingly) called the *edge of chaos*” (2007, p.124). The contradictory notions of Welsh photography offered by participants arguably reflect the space between order and chaos that is typical of a complex system.

7.1.1 *“that’s the first problem I’d have”*: defining Welsh photography

RP07: [00:02:11] Can I ask you a quick question?

RP00: [00:02:14] Of course you can.

RP07: [00:02:15] What is your definition of Welsh photography? I mean, that's the first problem I'd have.

No researcher, at any juncture, really longs to be told that their hypothesis is flawed – particularly not before they have begun to analyse data. At several initially painful points during fieldwork participants and acquaintances expressed concern regarding my nominal definition of “Welsh photography”, which on several occasions included scepticism regarding the actuality of Welsh photography as a concept. Whilst this was initially an uncomfortable experience, as the fieldwork progressed, I learned that this scepticism was itself salient data and that those who were dubious about the concept were dubious for myriad reasons. The consensus seemingly was not straightforward denial of the concept and might be better described as agnostic. Participants were largely happy to debate the concept of Welsh photography, and this undoubtedly contributed to the collaborative nature of the research. The uncertainty regarding the existence of Welsh photography seemed largely to derive from two related uncertainties. Firstly, that Welshness itself is too indistinct and mutable to produce a unified image, and secondly that any Welshness found in photographs was a mere coincidence of geography. In other words, just because something was taken *in* Wales that image isn’t necessarily “Welsh” in nature. The first concern has largely been addressed through the application of complexity theory to Welsh identity. Participants who were sceptical of Welsh photography because they were sceptical of discernable Welshness tended (rightly) to deny the concept of Welsh photography as a singular notion, often contingent on the perceived lack of distinctly Welsh subjects.

The second concern is perhaps more complex and was predicated on a postmodern hierarchy of seeing that privileges the viewer. Participants who were sceptical of Welsh photography on these grounds usually considered this within the context of their own practice and typically stated that any perceived Welshness (through recognition of location or otherwise) was the responsibility of the viewer:

RP11: [00:41:42] in terms of working with Welshness, I wouldn't think that I had deliberately done that at any stage. But I think it's potentially for other people to find - if they're looking for it.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Galanter advances a theory of complexity (complexism), which, he states, is capable of subsuming modernism and postmodernism, and as such the application of complexity theory perhaps offers an avenue for this view of Welsh photography to be accepted as more agnostic than sceptical. For example, if a viewer does perceive Welshness within a photograph, then within complexity theory this is likely to be the result of a series of non-linear interactions that viewer has had with the photograph as both an authored object and a representational object. What might translate as photographic Welshness for one viewer might not for another (as was the case with Hudson's interpretive landscape images), however, over time, patterns of behaviour emerge and feedback loops proliferate. Therefore, whilst RP11 might not have intentionally coded Welshness into their photographs, Welshness might have been discerned by another viewer, who themselves might author a text containing reference to the Welshness they had discerned in RP11's image. That text then has the capacity to proliferate, influencing other texts, photographers, and photographic methodologies, and subsequently RP11's image might be understood to both contain and have influenced commonly recognised qualities of photographic Welshness. In this context complexity theory is not necessarily indicative of cause-and-effect (which in its implied replicability is counter-intuitive to complexity theory), but is instead indicative of self-organisation, feedback, adaptability, and emergence, within a dynamic and open system of components with a common identity/goal (which in this case is the recognition of Welsh photography as a concept and practice).

Critically, the application of complexity theory allows Welsh photography to be understood as an ongoing dialogue, which never reaches stasis but achieves several temporary moments of commonality. This sentiment was mirrored by several participants during S3, in which participants displayed high levels of reflexivity and general understanding of the potential for an ongoing de- and re-construction of the notion of Welsh photography:

“[W]hen we spoke I aired my misgivings and doubts about firmly defining a ‘Welsh Photography’ so my selections of those images that I think fit a sort of description are for me, reflections of Welsh society, history and politics that have shaped Wales and its people and these photographs, like Koudelka's, are a reflection of this. I'm not sure that any style or strategy of making work can really be defined as ‘Welsh’ (by all means prove me wrong) but certainly images made by someone sensitive to the ‘Welsh condition’ can be ‘of Wales’ in more than just a geographic or nationalistic sense. If that makes sense!” (RP20, 2020)

“In a way all photos taken in Wales are Welsh photographs. Most of my work is of and taken in Wales. Do the photographs that I take elsewhere display a 'Welsh Way of seeing'? Probably so, but I prefer to leave it for others to explore and have opinions on that matter.” (RP16, 2020)

Ultimately, the contingent and adaptive nature of complex systems facilitate an epistemological approach that is characterised by both flexibility and dynamism and the ability to apprehend seemingly incompatible ideologies. Whilst several participants understood Welsh photography to be a construction for or of others, they simultaneously understood that their photographs could be circumstantially perceived as Welsh. This indicates an understanding that whilst participants themselves might not consciously attach Welshness to their work, that Welshness is a concept that has the potential to be attached in certain circumstances. Further, as indicated by the excerpts above, participants understood several potential sites of Welsh photography including referents, “ways of seeing”, and the nationality of photographers. Therefore, as Bala notes, “[f]or some artists it [Welsh identity] is a conscious agenda, for others a by-product of their working process or formative experience. The custodial aesthetics is not located within one given school, style, or subject matter, but an exploration of this theme requires an analysis of certain key areas” (1992, p.17). One of the central polarisations within the data, which presented across the “key areas” of photographs, photographers, and photo-methodologies, was the tension between passively documenting Welshness and actively constructing Welshness.

7.1.2 Documenting Wales versus Imagining Wales

“[I]n one way or another art has always addressed the nature of reality, thus ‘form’ and ‘content’ are inseparable” (Bala, 1999, p.19)

When asked during fieldwork conversations to discuss their own practice, many of the participants connected their work to the genre of documentary and in doing so tacitly (or in some cases explicitly) further connected their work to notions of truth and objectivity. Indeed, previously discussed, interpretive images such as Hudson’s *All Day it Has Rained* series were almost universally rejected by participants as possessing characteristics of Welshness. This suggests that many of the participants sought to present Welshness as a tangible real subject (be that place, item, culture, or person). This has several potential causes, some of which may be rooted in the traditional uncertainty that pervades Welsh identity. However, the tendency towards realism in photographic conceptualisations of Welshness is also indicative of a continued relationship between

photography and “the real”. As other national art lends itself more obviously to creativity and interpretation, Welsh photography is still, it seems, grounded in the ontological orthodoxy of photography that privileges objective representation. This is also visible at an institutional level. For example, despite students producing work that often is more interpretive or abstract, the current iteration of David Hurn’s course now offered by USW retains the original “documentary photography” title. Similarly, the photographic collections held at The National Library of Wales, Ffotogallery, and The National Museum are still predominantly characterised by their status as documents of historical significance, rather than as creative interpretations of Wales/Welsh identity.

It is conceivable that no national photographs have yet divorced themselves from photographic orthodoxy that characterises documentary practices. This is arguably problematic, as photographic orthodoxy is also connected to the notion of reality as universal and, subsequently, of photography as a “universal language” (Costello, 2018). However, as Rubinstein points out, “reality is different for each of the observers, so no unified representation of reality is possible” (2018, p.12). In the context of Wales, for whom national identity is still a problematically complex and multiplicitous affair, this statement is echoed by Williams, who states, “[t]o imply that identities such as ‘Welsh’ [...] are static and have the same universal meaning neglects the multiplicitous nature of these phenomena; why should millions of people, who may be different in every other fact of their lives, share a common understanding of the meaning of Welshness” (2017, p.3). As such, participants demonstrated a type of meta-discourse of orthodoxy and new theory; arguably influenced by similarly opposed discourse of primordial national identity versus social constructionism within national identity. Those participants who felt particularly strongly about constructed photographs often saw these processes as violating not only the essence of photography but the essence of Wales. To these participants, tangible Welshness exists within the “the real”, and photography serves as a tool to communicate this. To participants more invested in constructed imagery, both Welshness and photography were only tangentially connected to “the real” and provocative constructed images therefore function as interlocutors in the ongoing construction of Welsh identity. Both paradigms are seemingly united in the desire to promote Welshness globally – but for orthodox documentarians, creating Welshness involves harvesting from the real.

As argued in Chapter 2, the conceptualisation of photography as a purely representative form is problematic because it occludes the consideration of photographic methodologies and the importance of both the artist and the viewer in the negotiation of meaning. Rubinstein (2018) and

Costello (2018) have both argued in favour of re-conceptualising photography as a mediated network of meaning, in which representation is not a fixed value; functioning instead as part of a dynamic visual network. Similarly, both Williams (2019) and Coupland (2014) have argued against singular and reductionist conceptualisations of Welshness; advocating instead for social constructionism, dynamism, and diversity. The application of complexity theory to photography, Welshness, and Welsh photography creates an epistemological paradigm in which established tensions form an influential part of the system's history (of which complex systems are always cognisant), rather than dismissing the influence of established theories in favour of new theories. As such, complexity theory advances stalled discourse in both Welshness and photography and creates space for new discourse that is sensitive to, but not obstructed by established polarisation. In this context it is possible to understand conflicting ideologies in both Welshness and photography, not as oppositional binaries but as adaptive strategies that are a mediated response to external environments. As argued throughout this thesis, complex systems cannot function in a state of equilibrium, therefore, conflicting theories of photography, nationalism, and Welshness contribute to the proliferation of dynamic adaptive behaviours that ensure the survival of the system through subsequent ongoing discourse and artistic praxis.

7.2 Reflections on the Questions

At this juncture, it is important to return to a concept discussed at various points throughout the thesis; that complexity theory is a paradigm of apprehension and not resolution (Cilliers, 2005). As such, it is critical to acknowledge that though complexity theory has been used to provide weight to the argument that there is a specificity to Welsh photographs, this conclusion has not been reached *because* of complexity theory, and complexity theory does not “resolve” the problem of Welsh photography. This thesis has instead offered a new way to organise ideas and concepts that already existed; to make meaning from building blocks that were already in place. Complexity theory has provided insight into a dynamic phenomenon that is not contingent on complexity theory to be recognised, validated, nor examined.

Public discourse around nationalism and globalism has dramatically intensified even in the time it has taken me to write this thesis. At a UK level the varied approaches taken by various devolved governments in the face of a global pandemic have ignited discussion around Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish independence, and the potential failure of the British project. Although this thesis concerns the plurality of Welsh identity, plurality arguably also exists in

English identities and certainly within Irish and Scottish identities (the 2014 Independence Referendum practically split the Scottish electorate in two). Therefore, it is critical to the successful application of complexity theory to acknowledge that complexity-informed research forms part of a larger discourse that will never find a resolution, because it's state can never be static. As such, the questions dealt with by this thesis arguably give rise to a greater volume of further questions than they do positivist answers.

7.2.1 *Further conversations*

A complex system can never be in a state of equilibrium. As Cilliers states, “[e]quilibrium is another word for death” (1998, p.4). Welsh Photography, when viewed as a complex system does not consistently include the same photographs, photographers, or photographic methodologies. It is an open and dynamic system of meaning that can never be conclusively understood or wholly represented. There are common elements, and the interactions between these elements can go some way to explaining the functions of the system in terms of emergent properties – such as the prevalence of certain stereotypes. However, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, research pertaining to complex social systems is limited by the time and conditions in which that research took place. Complex systems are by nature dynamic, and conclusions drawn about them should account for the fact that change has likely already taken place within that system. For example, since the fieldwork and write-up were completed, Ffotogallery director David Drake stepped down and has been replaced by Siân Addicott¹⁴⁴, a new gallery has opened celebrating the success of Hurn’s documentary course at Newport, the diversity-championing collective PHRAME have disbanded and a new collective, *Doc Cymru*¹⁴⁵ have formed. These developments do not invalidate the observations made in this thesis, but they highlight the contingent nature of the data, underscoring Cilliers’ assertion that in viewing a phenomenon as a complex system, some level of reductionism is necessary, and “only snapshots of the system as it exists at a given moment will be possible” (1998, p.109).

As such, continuing conversations are required not just within academia but across artistic praxis, political and cultural sectors, and amongst “system components” themselves. Critically,

¹⁴⁴ This appointment was announced on the 20th of January 2022 via Ffotogallery’s website and social media platforms. More here: <https://ffotogallery.org/channel/new-director-announcement> [Accessed 18th May 2022]

¹⁴⁵ Members include Roger Tiley, Glenn Edwards, Rhodri Jones, and Kristina Banholzer. The collective was formed in response to Brexit, and their website states: “Doc Cymru is an exciting collaborative project involving four experienced photographers who have come together to document the effects that this process will have on Wales” (2022).

further conversations regarding the plurality of the concepts addressed by this thesis do not necessarily need to take place within the paradigm of complexity and in the context of cultural and artistic praxis will take place regardless of contributions made by scholars. However, the contribution of this thesis is to advocate for complexity theory as a means of apprehending and understanding those conversations parallel to their taking place. Indeed, 2.1.1 I noted that texts regarding Welsh cultural history are often framed by a question, rather than a statement. It could be argued that this uncertainty implies an ongoing negotiation that has not yet reached (and might never reach) a conclusion. The predominance of questions about the Welsh identity suggests a paucity of (but thirst for) answers. Anderson's crucial contribution to the field of national identity argues that identity is built and maintained through a top-down stream of communication which organises differences between the national (inside) from the foreign (outside) (2006). As argued above, Welsh identity is characterised by its lack of coherence, perpetuated by linguistic divides and an uneasy history of colonisation and deindustrialisation. Similarly, the lack until relatively recently of a distinct Welsh government has meant the absence of the elite top-down flow of national consciousness that is central to Anderson's theory. The absence of authoritative Welshness has arguably led to a more horizontal, peer-to-peer, grassroots negotiation of what it means to be Welsh. As Gwyn Williams writes:

“Wales is a process. Wales is an artefact which the Welsh produce. The Welsh make and remake Wales, day by day, year by year, generation after generation if they want to.”
(Williams in Curtis, 1986, p.7)

The responsibility to answer the Welsh questions who, what, when, where, and how seem to have been shouldered largely at a civic level. This sentiment was mirrored by participants, many of whom considered themselves duty-bound to present Wales in a certain way through photography. This model of national identity, which deviates from traditional conceptualisations, arguably exhibits behaviours constituent of a complex system. There has been growing scholarship addressing the applicability of complexity theory to national identity (Kauffman, 2017). There have also been several case-studies (Góis, 2010) demonstrating the applicability of complexity theory to a critical analysis of certain nations. Whilst the application of complexity theory to nationality is outwith the scope of this thesis, the application of complexity to national photography hopefully provides constructive insight into the way in which systems thinking can apprehend complex identities such as nationality, that manifest at both personal and collective levels.

7.2.2 Future Research

It is the contention of this thesis that the application of complexity theory has potential to inform and strengthen future research on both Welsh identity and Welsh photography. Specifically, it is my belief that practice-based research, in which photographic work is both considered and produced, could be greatly strengthened by applying both practical and theoretical frameworks aligned with complexity theory. As Bleyen and Van Gelder note, minor national photographs “both address and speak for a community (hence, its practices immediately take on a collective value)” (2011, p.115). Therefore, future research in this area could be geared towards the generation of original photographic material, produced collaboratively by artists and researchers. This has the potential for greater integration and collaboration between researchers and the community, and for a high degree of impact, as photographic work generated could be exhibited and published as part of an ongoing community engagement discourse.

Indeed, whilst this thesis makes use of visual material, it is limited in terms of the volume of material that could reasonably be gathered and examined, and the richness of interactions with this material. As such, future research - perhaps conducted in a digital, networked setting, could include a broader range of visual source material, collaboratively interrogated by a greater number of participants, therefore providing more connections between a greater volume of participants and images. Further, the practical limitations of this project necessarily meant that gathered data pertained more particularly to the system, rather than the system environment. Future research might utilise a similar methodological framework to examine data (interviews, written material, and perhaps visual material) generated by participants who are situated within the system environment (galleries, curators, policymakers), thus providing a wider insight into the relationship between the system components and the environment and potentially generating

discourse or around gatekeeping practices within both Welsh national identity and Welsh artistic praxis.

8. Towards a Complex Ontology

As stated in Chapter 1, the secondary narrative of this thesis emerged to play a much bigger role than I had originally anticipated. Complexity theory has informed not just the (contingent) observations made about Welsh photography but the conceptualisation of the entire research process that facilitated those observations. It was the application of complexity theory that “joined the dots” in the research process and highlighted the original contribution to knowledge that this thesis offers. Whilst it is important to note that the notion of definitive conclusions is counter-productive to a complexity-informed epistemology (Cilliers, 2005), the application of complexity theory to dynamic and contingent concepts such as Welshness and photography offers new avenues for research, artworks, policies, and potentially identities themselves.

8.1 Reflections on Complexity

“Objective knowledge of complex systems is therefore impossible, and an awareness of this imperfect engagement with complex systems is denoted by the use of the word ‘critical’. Critical complexity therefore concerns an attitude that we assume when thinking about, and dealing with, complex systems. In short, we understood complex systems as inherently (or ontologically) complex” (Preiser, Woermann, & Human, 2018, p.2)

As with both photography and Welshness, there is still a lot of “fuzziness” (Gear, Koziol-Mclain, & Eppel, 2012) surrounding both the ontological and epistemological parameters and applications of complexity theory. Indeed, in outlining his paradigm of “complexism” Galanter concedes, “the goal here is not to present complexism as a fully formed and completed work, but rather as a research frontier already sufficiently rewarding enough to encourage further development” (2016, p.19). As such, presenting deterministic conclusions on the ontology of complexity is not the goal of this thesis. Instead, complexity theory is presented as an epistemological solution to more specific topics. A clear strength of applied complexity theory is its capacity to facilitate a transdisciplinary and holistic approach to a research inquiry that is predicated on a topic, rather than a discipline (Montuori & Donnelly, 2013). There are however some conclusions that might be reached regarding the application of complexity theory within both the context of this research, and related wider ontological discourse.

Though the application of complexity theory to this research has offered original insight to Welsh photography, it would have been similarly possible to explore Welsh photography from within established disciplinary paradigms and generate comparable insight to this thesis. For

example, a historiography of Welsh photography (of which several high-quality examples exist), would likely have observed that industry and landscape are established visual tropes of Welshness. It may even argue that there is limited scope for contemporary equivalents and as such new photographic representations of Welshness are required and have begun to emerge. However, in operating from within disciplinary limits and traditions this historiography might miss the influence of emergent methodologies within contemporary photography or the social construction of indigenous authenticity within certain photographs. Therefore, as argued in Chapter 1, disciplinary approaches tend to offer insight that is specifically relevant to the discipline from which the enquiry originates, excluding data that falls outwith the scope of that discipline and thus limiting the potential from wider impact and contextualization.

However, as Alhadeff-Jones states, complexity-informed research design “does not carry any universalist claim” (2013, p.20), and as such is “limited to a set of finalities and the environment that contextualized it” (Ibid.). In other words, the structure, relationships, and behaviours displayed by one complex system will not necessarily apply to a complex system that is similar. The observations made here about Welsh photography for example, may not be similarly applicable to Scottish photography. That is not because complexity theory has a fatally flawed or inadequate epistemological approach; instead, it is an approach that is *contingent* on the circumstances and finalities that characterise it (Cilliers, 1998; Alhadeff-Jones 2013; Montuori 2013). The complex system of Welsh photography, as it has been constructed here is contingent not only on the researcher and participants but on the current political climate of Wales, the current structure and outputs of the environment (such as funding, education, and curation), and the current structure and outputs of the photographers. The conclusions made within this thesis about Welsh photography are therefore arguably contingent on the environment of the research. This is perhaps one of the greatest strengths and limitations of complexity.

Ultimately, applying complexity theory to certain problems does not necessarily result in positivist solutions to those problems. In fact, complexity is better understood as a discourse-oriented, rather than solution-oriented paradigm (Cilliers, 2005) – though, as Davis and Sumara note, complexity is not a meta-discourse (2009). Instead, “[w]hat complex thought can do is to give everyone a memento, a reminder, that says ‘don’t forget that reality is changing, don’t forget that something new can (and will) spring up’” (Morin, 2008, p.57). As such, whilst it is hoped that this thesis can contribute to further discussion regarding the applicability of complexity theory to specific topics such as Welsh photography (or, indeed, Welsh identity itself), this thesis also offers

complexity theory as a potential to further wider ontological discourse relating to photography, which is regularly described a complex, but has never yet been described as a complex system.

8.2 Complexity and Photography: A New Lens

“The intrinsic uncertainty, which appeared like a weakness, actually turns out to be a strength, because it forces the system to have sufficient reserves or redundancy and to constantly try out new things so as to be prepared for any eventuality” (Heylighen, Cilliers, & Gershenson, 2006, p.127)

If simplicity allows us to apprehend what is known, complicated what is knowable, then complexity allows us to apprehend what is unknowable. The development of photography relies on the interplay between cultural and technological developments that are essentially unknowable. Unlike other representative arts such as painting or writing, in which technological and cultural developments enact change but not, arguably, at an ontological level, photography has historically undergone fundamental change because of emergent technologies and culture. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, this has engendered a problematic ontology of photography that is characterised by incompatible binaries and the subsequently problematic pursuit of positivism. The polarisation of scholarship regarding photography is repeatedly made redundant by photographic work that challenges, contradicts, and transcends these arguments. As such, much of the contemporary scholarship relating to photography indicates a desire for ontological pluralism. As Arnold and Meskimmon note, the increasing adoption of the word “photographies” in place of “photography” connotes “a myriad of lens-based practices ranging from experimental fine art photography to documentary, domestic, mass media, community-based, participatory and commercial forms of photographic practice” (2016, p.7). The ubiquity and mutability of photography in contemporary society accelerates the pace at which discourse relating to photography develops; challenging artists and often leaving scholars grappling with increasingly oppositional ideologies.

Therefore, it is the contention of this thesis that complexity theory has significant potential to advance the academic discourse of photography by both acknowledging and embracing the inherent plurality of the medium. Complexity theory facilitates adaptive thinking that is ideally suited to apprehending emergent phenomena such as advancements in technology or developments in cultural and artistic praxis. It acknowledges that complex systems have histories which are typically “remembered” throughout the system and thus continue to influence system output and behaviour. Critically, it allows the line of inquiry rather than the disciplinary boundaries

to dictate the investigative paradigm through which the medium is considered. Indeed, as argued in Chapter 2, photography has historically suffered from the imposition of comparative paradigms such as language and painting. This, coupled with the established Newtonian paradigms of discipline-oriented inquiries, has engendered an epistemological tradition of examining photography as an adjunct; typically mobilising whatever disciplinary methods are dictated by the field photography is being viewed as an adjunct to (the use of structuralism in the paradigm that compares photography to linguistics for example), and typically falling short of a holistic and adaptable framework suited to the medium. The ontological promiscuity of photography essentially renders comparative paradigms fatally problematic. Indeed, whilst painting and language are ontologically secure, photography, arguably, has never been. As Zervigón, argues “the medium’s identity has been fluid from the start, never a solid and mutually agreed upon essence” (2019, p.10). Therefore, due to its ontological dependence on its potent orthodox history and technologically unpredictable future, which do not readily coalesce, the “present” of photography is perpetually uncertain.

As has been variously demonstrated throughout this thesis, complexity theory offers specific post-structural insight into the problematic of photography; acknowledging history and apprehending future, whilst working towards a present that is actually present and not stunted by the incompatibility of history and future. Complex systems are aware of their history and the influence it continues to have. They are ideally suited to apprehend future discourse and praxis as it comes, rather than trying to predict something that cannot, in truth, be predicted. As a photograph freezes the present and allows it to then function comfortably in myriad contexts, complexity theory settles the “present” of photography into a moment that is knowable only in that moment; freeing it to function variously and simultaneously in both past and future – much like a photograph itself.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: S1 Google Form (screenshots)

A.1.1 S1 Google Form: Participant Information Sheet

(Welsh) Ways of Seeing

Participant Information Sheet

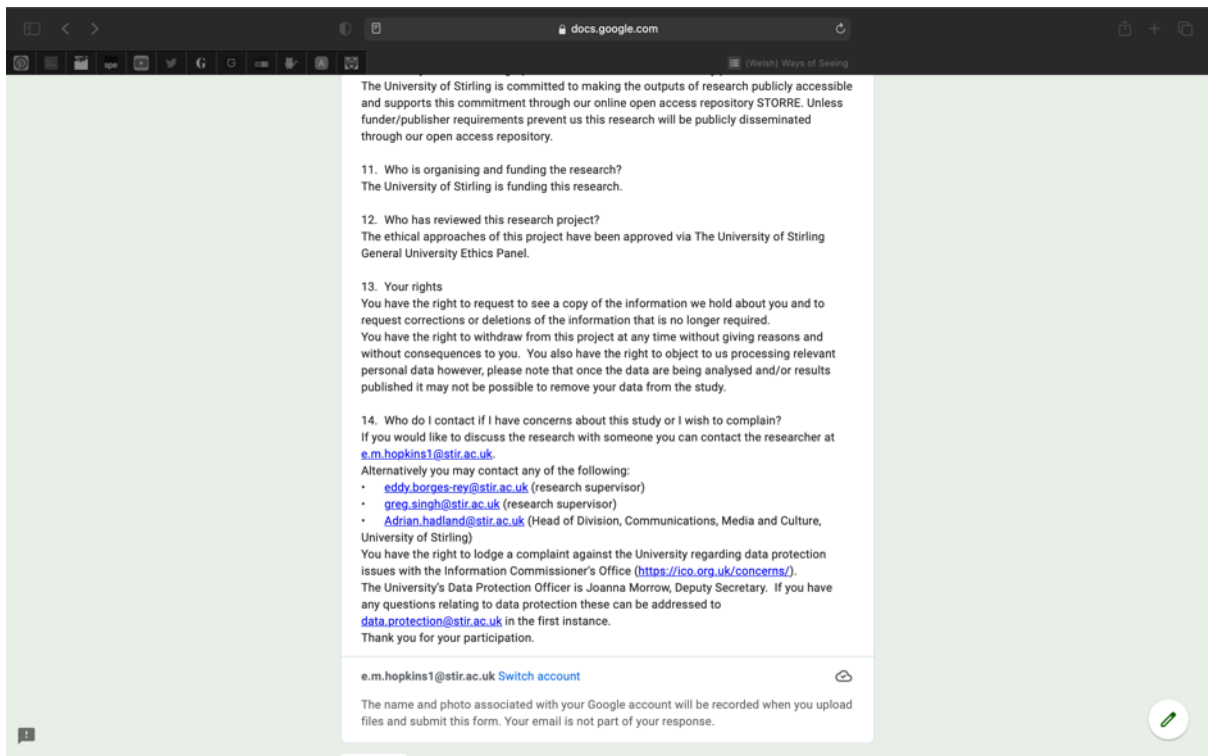
Thank you for your interest in participating in this project.

Please read the following information before advancing the form to the next stage.

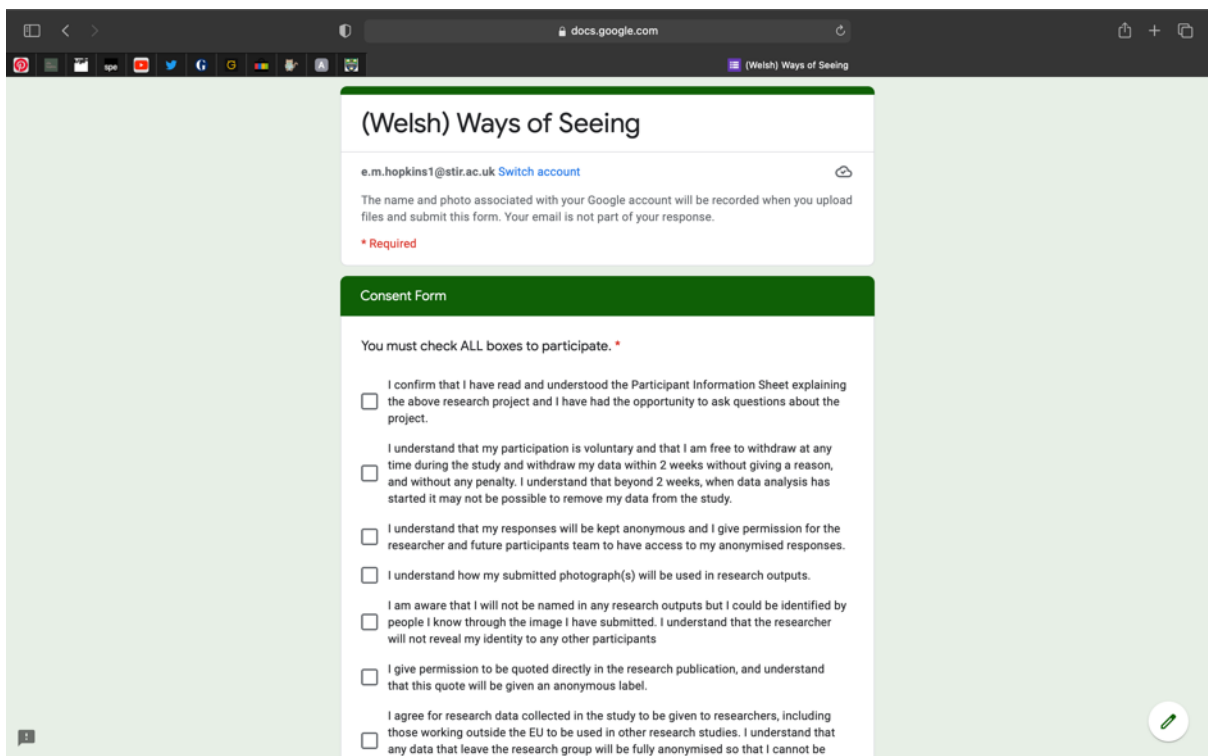
- 1. Research Project Title:**
(Welsh) Ways of Seeing
- 2. Background, aims of project:**
'(Welsh) Ways of Seeing' is a research project undertaken by Ellie Hopkins as part of a doctoral thesis supervised by the University of Stirling. The project seeks to understand the ways in which notions of Wales and 'Welshness' are conceived and constructed by photographers, and why photography is chosen as a medium to explore these concepts.
- 3. Why have I been invited to take part?**
This research is designed specifically for photographers, who are over the age of 18, and are working around the themes indicated above (Wales/Welshness). You have been invited to take part because you fit these criteria. If you feel that you do not fit these criteria, please do not participate.
- 4. Do I have to take part?**
No. You do not have to take part.
If you do decide to take part, you can withdraw your participation at any time without needing to explain and without penalty by advising the researcher of this decision. If you withdraw we will not collect any more data from you. You can also withdraw your data within 1 week of participation. To withdraw your data email e.m.hopkins1@stir.ac.uk with the date and time of your interview or submission.
- 5. Are there any potential risks in taking part?**
There are no foreseeable risks in taking part.
- 6. Are there any financial incentives to take part?**
There will be no payment for taking part in this project.

(Welsh) Ways of Seeing

- 7. What will happen to any samples I give?**
Photographs that you submit in this research will be printed and shown to interview informants in a later stage of the research. Images you submit will also be reproduced in the doctoral thesis of the researcher (Ellie Hopkins). This may involve images being cited in the text or included in the appendices of the research. It is therefore essential that you provide information regarding the source of your submission. If the image you supply is not owned by you please provide as much information as you can about the author and the source. For example, if the image has been found online, please provide a link to the website. If you found the image in a book please provide as much information as you can about the book (title, author, ISBN if available). If you submit your own image please provide an appropriate amount of information to correctly reference the image in the thesis (author, year image was published). Your responses in this research will be anonymised, and as such the images you submit will not be linked to your name – even if these images are your own.
- 8. What happens to the data I provide?**
The research data you submit will be kept anonymous using coded labels (Image1, Image2 for example). No data that identifies you to your submission (your email address for example) will be kept, nor made available to any other participants, nor will it be published. The researcher will briefly have access to personal/sensitive data in the form of your email address (this is necessary for you to upload your submission to the Google Form), but after a period of 2 weeks, submissions will be downloaded and anonymised and this data will be permanently removed.
Your submission will be kept for 2 weeks on Google Drive (this has been securely password protected, and the password is known only to the researcher), upon which it will be downloaded and anonymised (any data that identifies you as the author of the submission will be removed). Your data will then be stored on the researcher's computer (which is password and firmware password protected) until October 2021. Submissions will also be stored on Research Drive – a secure data centre on the Stirling campus until October 2012 and then will be lodged in DataSTORRE (an online data storage facility owned by the University of Stirling).
- 9. Future uses of the data**
Due to the nature of this research, it is very likely that other researchers may find the data to be useful in answering other research questions. We will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way and, if you agree, we will ensure that the data collected is untraceable back to you before letting others use it.
- 10. Will the research be published?**
The research will be published in the form of a doctoral thesis, and may also be published in a research journal or monograph. You will not be identifiable in any publication.
The University of Stirling is committed to making the outputs of research publicly accessible.



A.1.2 S1 Google Form: Consent Form



and without any penalty. I understand that beyond 2 weeks, when data analysis has started it may not be possible to remove my data from the study.

I understand that my responses will be kept anonymous and I give permission for the researcher and future participants team to have access to my anonymised responses.

I understand how my submitted photograph(s) will be used in research outputs.

I am aware that I will not be named in any research outputs but I could be identified by people I know through the image I have submitted. I understand that the researcher will not reveal my identity to any other participants

I give permission to be quoted directly in the research publication, and understand that this quote will be given an anonymous label.

I agree for research data collected in the study to be given to researchers, including those working outside the EU to be used in other research studies. I understand that any data that leave the research group will be fully anonymised so that I cannot be identified.

I hereby confirm that I have permission from the author to submit any images to this research, on the understanding that these images will be printed and shown to future research participants, and will be published in a doctoral thesis.

I hereby confirm that I do not have permission for the author to submit any images to this research, and instead have supplied the source from which I obtained this image(s). I understand that this image(s) will be printed and shown to future research participants, and will be published in a doctoral thesis.

I confirm that I am over the age of 18.

I hereby consent to take part in this research.

[Back](#) [Next](#) [Clear form](#)

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Google Forms

(Welsh) Ways of Seeing

e.m.hopkins1@stir.ac.uk [Switch account](#)

The name and photo associated with your Google account will be recorded when you upload files and submit this form. Your email is not part of your response.

* Required

(Welsh) Ways of Seeing - Research Brief

Thank you for consenting to participate in the research project (Welsh) Ways of Seeing!

Before continuing, please read the following:

This form allows you to upload a maximum of 5 images, you may upload as many or as few as you wish. Individual images should not exceed 100MB and should be in JPEG format.

As previously mentioned, you will be required to sign in to your google account in order to upload the file(s). Your responses will be automatically deposited into a Google Drive owned by the researcher (Ellie Hopkins), and will be used ONLY for the purposes of this research. Your email address will be anonymous and will not be seen by the researcher or anyone else involved in this project. Due to the necessity of this sign-in your name and Google avatar (if you have one), will be associated with your submission (explained on previous page), however once the submissions have closed (11.11.19), all responses will be downloaded from Google Drive, anonymised, and transferred to the University of Stirling's encrypted storage facility Research Drive. They will also be anonymised and held on the personal computer of the researcher (Ellie Hopkins), which is password protected.

By uploading photographs to this form you consent to them being used anonymously in this research project. This will involve these photographs being shown to future participants during interviews. At this stage your response will be entirely anonymised and your name and any explicitly identifiable details of your submission will be withheld from all other participants.

If you wish to retract your submission, you have any questions, or you wish to submit your response via email instead (please note, in this case it will not be possible to anonymise your email address) then please contact the researcher at e.m.hopkins1@stir.ac.uk.

If you no longer wish to participate you may withdraw your consent at any time by simply exiting this form before submitting, or by emailing the researcher at the above address. Please note, after 11.11.19 it may no longer be possible to completely remove your submission from the research.

A.1.3 S1 Google Form: Brief & Data Submission

docs.google.com

(Welsh) Ways of Seeing

Which photograph(s) have been influential in your approach to photographing Wales/Welshness? *

Please use this section to upload relevant photograph(s). This photograph or photographs may come from anywhere, and may be your own if you feel that best answers the brief. If possible please try to obtain permission from the original owner if the image is not your own. If you are not the author of the photograph, and it is freely available online please supply a link to the source, or any information you can about the original photographer on the form below.

[Add file](#)

Who is the author of this photograph?
(if you have submitted multiple photographs, please indicate which image your response refers to)

Your answer _____

If this photograph was obtained from an online source, please indicate this source via a link.

Your answer _____

Do you have any additional information about the photograph (location, year)?
(if you have submitted multiple photographs, please indicate which image your response refers to)

Your answer _____

If you wish, please explain why you have chosen your image(s).

docs.google.com

(Welsh) Ways of Seeing

Who is the author of this photograph?
(if you have submitted multiple photographs, please indicate which image your response refers to)

Your answer _____

If this photograph was obtained from an online source, please indicate this source via a link.

Your answer _____

Do you have any additional information about the photograph (location, year)?
(if you have submitted multiple photographs, please indicate which image your response refers to)

Your answer _____

If you wish, please explain why you have chosen your image(s).

Your answer _____

[Back](#) [Next](#) [Clear form](#)

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Google Forms

A.1.4 S1 Google Form: Further Research Recruitment

(Welsh) Ways of Seeing

e.m.hopkins1@stir.ac.uk [Switch account](#)

The name and photo associated with your Google account will be recorded when you upload files and submit this form. Your email is not part of your response.

(Welsh) Ways of Seeing - Further Research

This form constitutes the first stage of my doctoral research project. The second stage will comprise face-to-face interviews with the researcher, in which the researcher and participants will discuss the images submitted during this stage (Stage One), and the participants' own photographic practice.

Where possible, the researcher will travel to a location convenient to the participant to take part in these interviews. Interview settings are contingent on Risk Assessment approval from the University of Stirling.

Interviews are expected to take around 90 minutes and will be recorded (audio recording). These recordings will be transcribed and both recording and transcription will be stored on the University of Stirling's encrypted Research Drive.

If you wish to take part in Stage Two interviews please indicate this by supplying details below.

Please note, participation in Stage Two is NOT a requirement of participation in this stage (Stage One), and you may click "submit" at the bottom of this page, and submit your response to the previous section without filling in any of the details on this section, and without participating in interviews.

Filling in this section does not guarantee that you will be interviewed in Stage Two. However it does indicate that you are interested in taking part in Stage Two. You may withdraw your consent to participate in any stage of this research at any point, without having to give a reason, and with no repercussions. If you withdraw your consent every effort will be made to remove your data from the research, however once data analysis starts, this may not be possible.

Thank you for taking part in this research.

Would you like to be considered participate in a face-to-face interview with the researcher as part of Stage Two of this research?

Yes - please fill in the rest of this page and click next

Thank you for taking part in this research.

Would you like to be considered participate in a face-to-face interview with the researcher as part of Stage Two of this research?

Yes - please fill in the rest of this page and click next

No - please click next and hit 'submit' on the next page

If you answered yes, how would you like to be contacted to arrange this interview? (please supply contact details - including your name, as well as any preferred mode and time of contact)

Your answer

If you were selected to interview in Stage Two, please indicate a date that might suit you.

MM DD YYYY

/ /

[Back](#) [Next](#) [Clear form](#)

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Google Forms

A.1.5 S1 Google Form: Participant Debrief

The image shows a screenshot of a Google Form titled "(Welsh) Ways of Seeing" in a browser window. The browser's address bar shows "docs.google.com". The form's header includes the title and the creator's email, "e.m.hopkins1@stir.ac.uk", with a "Switch account" link. A disclaimer states: "The name and photo associated with your Google account will be recorded when you upload files and submit this form. Your email is not part of your response." The main content is a green header "Participant Debrief" followed by a white box containing the following text: "Thank you for taking part in this research. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the research please contact either the researcher at: e.m.hopkins1@stir.ac.uk Or the research supervisors: Eddy.borges.tey@northwestern.edu Greg.singh@stir.ac.uk". Below this box are three buttons: "Back", "Submit", and "Clear form". At the bottom of the form, there is a warning: "Never submit passwords through Google Forms." and a disclaimer: "This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google. [Report Abuse](#) - [Terms of Service](#) - [Privacy Policy](#)". The Google Forms logo is centered at the bottom of the page. A small notification icon is visible in the bottom left corner, and a pencil icon is in the bottom right corner.

Appendix 2: S1 Images

RI01



RI02



RI03



RI04



RI05





RI07



RI08



RI09



RI10



RI11



RI12



RI13



RI14



RI15





RI17









RI21



RI22



RI23



RI24



RI25



RI26



RI27







RI30



RI31







RI34



RI35



RI36



RI37



RI38



RI39



RI40



RI41



RI42



RI43



RI44



RI45



RI46



RI47



RI48



RI49



RI50



RI51



RI52



Appendix 3: S3 Images

FRI01



FRI02



FRI03



FRI04



FRI05



FRI06



FRI07



FRI08





FRI10



FRI11



FRI12



FRI13



FRI14



FRI15



FRI16



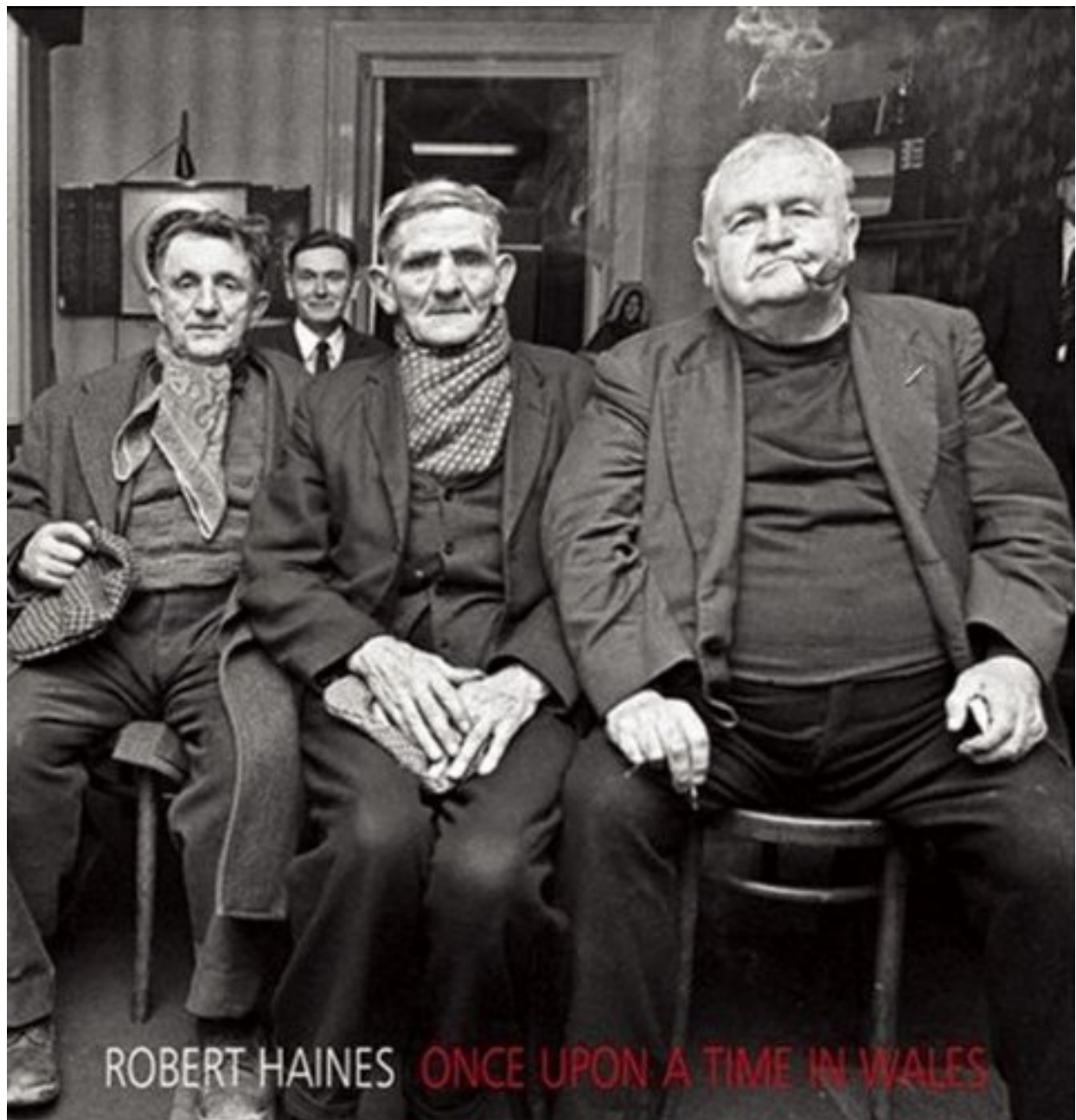
FRI17



FRI18







FRI21



FRI22



FRI23



FRI24



FRI25









FRI29





FRI31





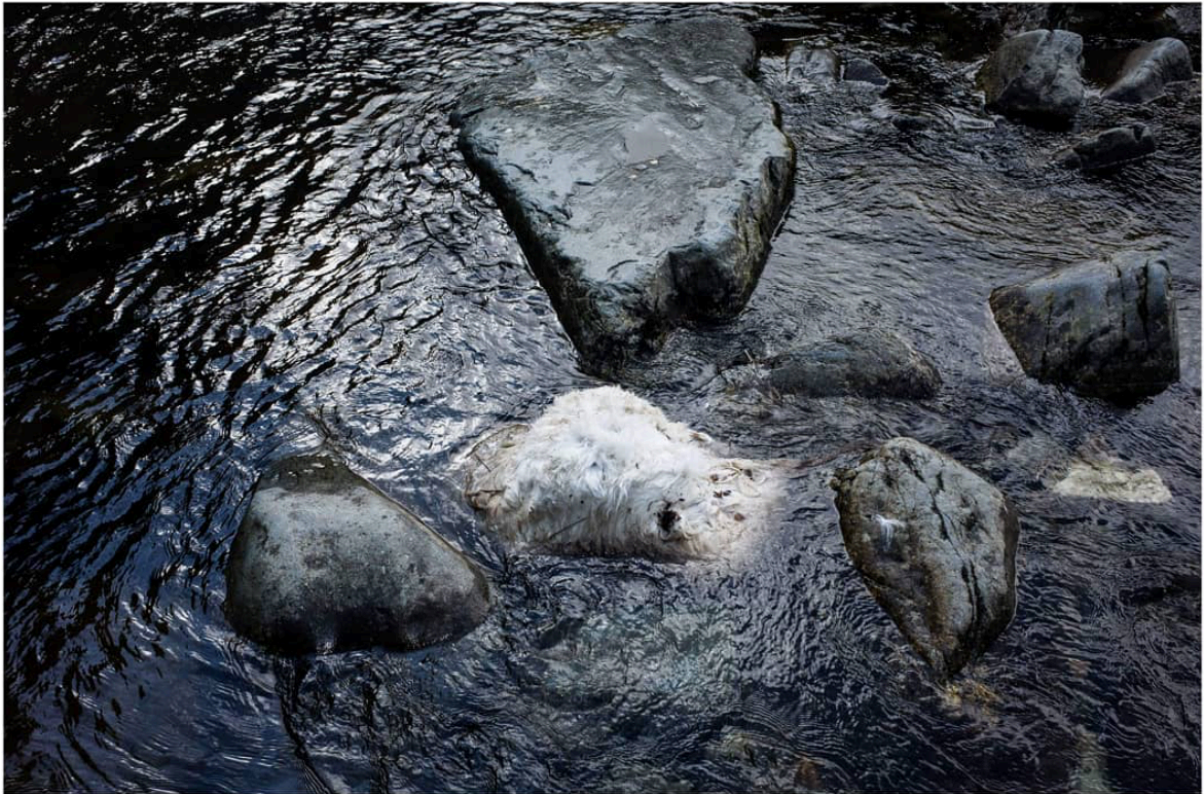
FRI33

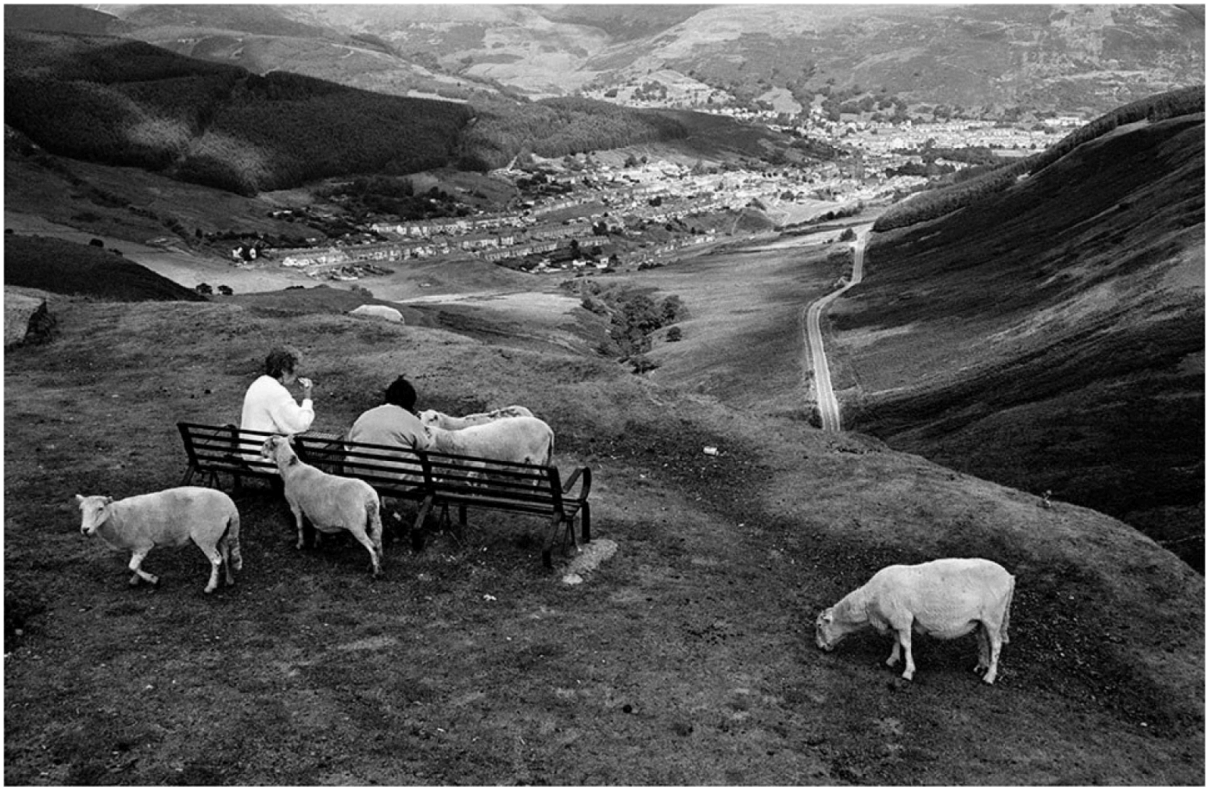


FRI34



FRI35





FRI37





FRI39



FRI40



Appendix 4: S2 Consent Form

Version date: January 2019



Participant Consent Form

GUEP/NICR Approval Number **737**

Research Project Title: (Welsh) Ways of Seeing

Please initial box	
I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during the study and withdraw my data within 1 week of interview without giving a reason, and without any penalty. I understand that beyond 1 week after interview, when data analysis has started it may not be possible to remove my data from the study.	
I understand that if I choose to give my name my responses will not be anonymised and may be attributed to me in this research publication.	
I understand that I have the option to request that my responses are anonymised.	
I consent to being audio and video recorded and/or having a Skype conversation recorded.	
I understand how audio/video/photographs will be used in research outputs. I am aware that if I have requested anonymity, I will not be named in any research outputs but I could be identified by people I know through the stories I tell.	
I give permission to be quoted in the research publication. If I have opted to remain anonymous I understand that these quotes will not be attributed to me.	
I agree for research data collected in the study to be given to researchers, including those working outside the EU to be used in other research studies. I understand that if I have requested anonymity, any data that leave the research group will be fully anonymised so that I cannot be identified.	
I agree to take part in this study	

Name of Participant

Signature:

Date: [Click here to enter a date](#)

Name of Researcher

Signature:

Date: [Click here to enter a date](#)

Appendix 5: S2 Questionnaire



A Welsh Photography?

You have received this survey because you have consented to take part in PhD Research being undertaken by Ellie Hopkins. If you received this in error, or no longer wish to participate, you may disregard this document.

You are not obliged to answer all questions. Any questions you feel unable/not inclined to answer, please leave blank. If you have any questions about this survey, or wish to withdraw your participation please contact Ellie Hopkins at either e.m.hopkins1@stir.ac.uk or 07*****

Name:

Age:

Website:

1. Which of the following best describes your identification as a photographer? (tick all that apply)
 - a. Photographer
 - b. Professional Photographer
 - c. Artist
 - d. Amateur Photographer/Hobbyist
 - e. Documentary Photographer
 - f. Fine Art Photographer
 - g. None of the above
 - h. Other (please fill in if appropriate):

2. Are you Welsh?
 - a. Yes, by birth
 - b. Yes, through self-identification
 - c. No, I am:

3. Do you currently live in Wales?
 - a. Yes (go to question 4)

- b. No (go to question 5)
-
- 4. Where in Wales do you live?
 - 5. Where do you currently live?
 - 6. Have you ever lived in Wales? If so, where and for how long?
 - 7. Have you received any formal photography education? (tick all that apply)
 - a. Yes, at school/college
 - b. Yes, at University
 - c. Yes, at a club/society
 - d. No
 - e. Other:
 - 8. Do you/have you ever deliver(ed) any photography education, if so, what was your capacity and where did your class take place?
 - 9. Have you published, or do you plan to publish any photographic books/zines/publications about Wales or Welshness? (please provide titles and year of publication, as well as any other information you deem relevant)
 - 10. Have you had, or do you plan to have any exhibitions featuring your work about Wales/Welshness? (please provide rough dates of exhibitions, gallery name, and any other information you deem relevant)
 - 11. Has your work on Wales/Welshness featured in any other media - such as podcasts, YouTube content, or television episodes? (please provide details such as name of channel, year of production, and any links)

Appendix 6: Participant Recruitment and Engagement Matrix

Participant	Recruitment	S1 Engagement	S2 Engagement	S3 Engagement	S2 Setting	Relationship with Researcher
RP01	Self-selected (recruited during S1)	Participated	Participated	Participated	In person	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP02	Self-selected (recruited during S1)	Participated	Participated	Did not participate	Online	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP03	Self-selected (recruited during S1)	Participated	Participated	Participated	In person	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP04	Purposive (recruited during S2)	Did not participate	Participated	Did not participate	In person	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP05	Self-selected (recruited during S1)	Participated	Participated	Did not participate	Online	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP06	Purposive (recruited during S2)	Did not participate	Participated	Participated	Online	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP07	Purposive (recruited during S2)	Did not participate	Participated	Did not participate	Online	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP08	Self-selected (recruited during S1)	Participated	Participated	Did not participate	Online	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP09	Self-selected (recruited during S1)	Participated	Participated	Participated	Online	Not known to researcher before fieldwork
RP10	Self-selected (recruited during S1)	Participated	Participated	Participated	Online	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP11	Self-selected (recruited during S1)	Participated	Participated	Did not participate	Online	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP12	Self-selected (recruited during S1)	Participated	Participated	Did not participate	Online	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP13	Purposive (recruited during S2)	Did not participate	Participated	Participated	Online	Known to researcher before fieldwork

RP14	Self-selected (recruited during S1)	Participated	Participated	Participated	Online	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP15	Self-selected (recruited during S1)	Participated	Participated	Did not participate	Online	Not known to researcher before fieldwork
RP16	Snowball (recruited during S2)	Did not participate	Participated	Participated	Online	Not known to researcher before fieldwork
RP17	Self-selected (recruited during S1)	Participated	Participated	Participated	Online	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP18	Snowball (recruited during S2)	Did not participate	Participated	Participated	Online	Not known to researcher before fieldwork
RP19	Purposive (recruited during S2)	Did not participate	Participated	Did not participate	Online	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP20	Snowball (recruited during S2)	Did not participate	Participated	Participated	Online	Not known to researcher before fieldwork
RP21	Purposive (recruited during S2)	Did not participate	Participated	Did not participate	Online	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP22	Snowball (recruited during S2)	Did not participate	Participated	Did not participate	Online	Not known to researcher before fieldwork
RP23	Purposive (recruited during S2)	Did not participate	Participated	Did not participate	Online	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP24	Self-selected (recruited during S1)	Participated	Did not participate	Did not participate	N/A	Not known to researcher before fieldwork
RP25	Self-selected (recruited during S1)	Participated	Did not participate	Did not participate	N/A	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP26	Self-selected (recruited during S1)	Participated	Did not participate	Did not participate	N/A	Not known to researcher before fieldwork
RP27	Self-selected (recruited during S1)	Participated	Did not participate	Did not participate	N/A	Known to researcher before fieldwork
RP28	Self-selected (recruited during S1)	Participated	Did not participate	Did not participate	N/A	Not known to researcher before fieldwork

Appendix 7: Operationalising Complexity to Discern a Welsh Photographic Dialect (ICA 2020 Poster)

Ffotography: Operationalising Complexity to Discern a Welsh Photographic Dialect

Hopkins, E. 2020

Abstract

This paper is a cross-section of a wider research project seeking to address the problematic ontological position that typically characterises the study of photography'. It presents applied Complexity Theory as an alternative epistemological paradigm for photography. Given the potential scope for such a project, the research focus is on the apprehension of national photography as a complex system. Specifically, this paper uses complexity to chart the existence of a national 'accent' within photographic visual language.

It provides critical insight into the merits and challenges of applying complexity as a methodological approach within this context.

Research Context

Complexity theory provides an epistemological lens to analyse complex systems. It has a diverse range of applications (ecological, biological, social for example), but thus far has limited scholarly application within art and creative practice. It posits that analysis of the system is not an end in itself, but a means to an end in the selection of systems to study. Complex systems are open, adaptive systems typified by emergence, and able to account for their own history within the system'. Photography in Wales as received some limited scholarly attention' but has a fertile practice-based culture. I am part of this culture, as a practitioner, and as such this research is insider research.

The Methods

Complexity researchers are encouraged to apply complexity theory not only to the research themes but to the whole of the study. This has implications for the design of the study. Complexity about Wales, about photography, about that encompasses 'program' - predetermined plans, and 'strategy' - strategies put in place during fieldwork and analysis, based on emerging themes within data'. This is often complemented with a transdisciplinary design, that allows for complementary methods from a range of disciplines.

The sample population for this research consists of photographers who have made a series of images about 'Wales/ Welshness, and/or social actors involved in institutions that participate in photography in Wales.

The data were gathered in two stages. In Stage One (S1), informants responded to an online brief, and submitted images instrumental in their understanding of photography and Wales. This resulted in a collection of 52 images, which also acted as interview prompts during Stage Two (S2). S2 consisted of 22 unstructured interviews ('complex conversations'). Sampling was a mixture of purposive and self-selection. Informants discussed their practice/involvement with photography in Wales, and then the images supplied during S1.

Using NVivo the data were coded through a thematic framework. The three macro themes of Photography, Wales, and Complexity were used as top-level nodes. Lower-level nodes comprised themes pertaining to photography and Wales and were largely dictated by informants during interviews. Themes pertaining to complexity were compiled by the researcher, through a review of relevant literature.

The System & The Environment

Complex Systems are open systems that operate within, and interact with a specific environment.

Through analysis of primary data and secondary literature, the system of study was identified as 'Welsh Photography'. This concept has been controversial amongst informants, and its conceptual fluidity makes it an appropriate candidate for a complex system.

Similarly, the environment was identified as 'Photography in Wales'. This environment is also fluid, but includes components such as institutional gatekeepers (galleries, publishers, educational institutions), as well as physical geographical environments within Wales.

David Hurn

Welsh Magnum photographer David Hurn (b.1934) was identified both by informants and the researcher as a critical social actor within the system of Welsh Photography.

His influence includes several feedback loops (both positive and negative), as well as significant interaction with the system environment (Photography in Wales).

The diagram indicates the cross section of parts of the system and environment most closely connected with Hurn. It primarily reflects connections made by informants during interviews, but where possible these connections have been verified by the researcher.

Conclusions & Impact

In the context of this research, the application of complexity theory has encouraged a holistic analysis of the dynamic system in which visual Wales has been and continues to be constructed photographically. Applying complexity to the entire research process allowed informants to take a collaborative role within the research process, and encouraged reflexivity and criticality throughout.

Though the data are still being analysed, they indicate that the dynamic notion of 'Welsh Photography' is reflective of a complex system. Whilst several S2 informants were explicitly skeptical of the concept of Welsh Photography, they were able to identify some images as inherently 'Welsh'. This would suggest that, just as there is no singular spoken Welsh accent, there is no singular visual Welsh accent. Instead a number of Welsh accents exist - some recognised more readily than others.

Whilst the aim of this research is not to predict the content or aesthetic of the next photography project about Wales, there is certainly scope for creative impact. This application of complexity might also prove a useful curatorial tool that might inform the assembling and collecting for a national archive, planning an exhibition, or commissioning future projects. It would allow potential curators to explore thematic, photo-methodological, geographical, or aesthetic links between work.

Key

- System boundary with the environment
- Institution that forms part of the environment
- Photographer/Social actor
- Image taken by that photographer
- Interaction (teaching/education)
- Interaction (collaboration/publication)
- Interaction (referent)/photographic technique
- Interaction (membership)
- Referent

References

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 eliehopkins@gmail.com

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