

Institution: University of Chester
Unit of Assessment: 27: Area Studies
Title of case study: Memories of a Lost Shark: Framing cultural imaginaries of Havana, Cuba
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>James Clifford Kent is attracting new global audiences to the theorisation of how space and place is constructed and consumed in contemporary society. His practice-led research project, <i>Memories of a Lost Shark: Framing cultural imaginaries of Havana, Cuba</i>, engages the public in a re-examination of the way we construct cultural imaginaries, impacting upon cultural life, education and public discourse. Kent's series of photographs of Havana combine his contemporary re-workings of historic and iconic Cuban imagery with annotations written by the renowned Cuban writer Edmundo Desnoes. These have been made accessible through public exhibitions, gallery talks and events, as well as through online galleries available on his own website, jckent.com.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>While images of the city of Havana are well-documented worldwide, the actual state of the city's image is one which has been steadily misconstrued and idealised in the global imaginary over the course of the 20th and early 21st centuries. <i>Memories of a Lost Shark</i> has challenged these varied representations, which multiplied in the wake of the worst years of the Cuban Special Period (1991-1994), and its key research insight has been to offer different ways of engaging with the space and place of Havana as a socio-cultural product via text and image. The project, underpinned by Kent's work in the fields of Cuban and visual culture studies, has provided a platform for further scrutinising the way in which image-makers frame a psychogeographical experience of cultural space and for reconsidering how these framings are interpreted by the reader/spectator. One of the most significant aspects of this research project has been his practice-led approach and this has been acknowledged by those working in the aforementioned areas of study as not only an important contribution to new scholarly approaches to Cuban visual cultures but also of considerable significance to the wider public on both a national and international level.</p> <p>Over the course of the last decade, Kent has built upon a body of work relating to the proliferation of Cuban visual constructs within the global imaginary. This work originally took shape in his doctoral project at Royal Holloway, University of London, between September 2008 and February 2012. This period of research benefited from AHRC funding and was further developed through archival research relating to documentary photography completed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, and through collaboration with the Cuban writer Edmundo Desnoes in May and June 2012, which was funded by a Santander Universities research award. Since this collaboration, Kent has reflected further on the methods and processes of the documentary photographer and the way in which these are informed by the practice of psychogeography. He has developed his theoretical discussion of this by further exploring the act of urban wandering and the figure of the <i>flâneur</i> and is suggesting that these practices directly inform the photographer's visual understanding of the physical presence of the city. Kent's research seminar on documentary photography and psychogeography on 22 February 2012 – part of a Royal Holloway, University of London, seminar series on 'The Flâneur' – was made available as a podcast on iTunes following the event and received approximately 800 downloads at http://tinyurl.com/kmx3p9p.</p> <p>Kent, the key researcher on this project, was appointed to a lectureship in Spanish at the University of Chester in September 2012, at which point he continued to pursue further research into documentary photography and psychogeography (2 September 2012 – 31 July 2013). This resulted in the publication of "Walker Evans's Psychogeographic Mapping of Havana, 1933" (<i>History of Photography</i>, 37:3), which served as the point of departure for the <i>Memories of a Lost Shark</i> project, and he has since gone on to explore new ground with his practice-led research regarding the psychogeographical experience of Havana. Moreover, as has been pointed out by other researchers and practitioners, this historical conjuncture is conducive to breaking the Revolution-fixated prism through which practically all research in this country has been carried out to date.</p>

3. References to the research

1. James Clifford Kent. "Walker Evans's Psychogeographic Mapping of Havana, 1933". 2013. Journal article. Journal title: *History of Photography*, 37:3, pp. 326–40. DOI: 10.1080/03087298.2013.815458. <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/thph20#.UhD6KWSqIR8>
2. James Clifford Kent. "Memories of a Lost Shark". 2013. Exhibition. Oriel Colwyn, Colwyn Bay, North Wales. 1000-1700, 1-21 June 2013. jckent.com
3. James Clifford Kent. "Memorias de un Tiburón Perdido". 2013. Exhibition. Galería Fayad Jamís, Centro de Arte y Literatura, Alamar, La Habana del Este, Havana, Cuba. 1-24 July 2013. jckent.com

History of Photography is an international, peer-reviewed journal devoted to the history and criticism of the photograph. The journal is intended to address the needs of scholars, curators and critics. The Oriel Colwyn photography gallery in Colwyn Bay, North Wales, has been attracting an international and specialist audience interested in photographic based work since its official opening in April 2012. The gallery has hosted work from established photographers and provided a space that showcases outstanding photographic based work, which is also made available internationally via its website <http://orielcolwyn.org>. Galería Fayad Jamís: Centro de Arte y Literatura, founded in 1989, is part of a network of galleries (the Sistema de Galerías de Ciudad de la Habana) renowned for its promotion of fine art, literature and music. It is linked to the Centro Provincial de Artes Plásticas y Diseño, which has built a reputation based upon the international profile of the artists and writers it has worked with (including Tomás Lara, Reinier Nande Pérez, Yolanda Wood Pujols, and Aldo Soler), whose exhibitions are also made available to a worldwide public via the internet <http://www.habanadeleste.sancristobal.cult.cu>.

4. Details of the impact

Memories of a Lost Shark is a project in which text and image combine to explore the role of photography and literature and the way in which these two mediums may both complement and invade each other's spaces – a construct that allows for us to deal with, and make sense of, the various themes we attach to Cuba. In the project, the correspondence between a series of black and white photographs and texts invites the spectator to enter a conversation with both photographer and writer in an act of imaginative solidarity with the content revealed in both the texts and images. The project offers alternative ways of seeing Cuba's past, present and future, presenting an opportunity for the rethinking of different myths and realities which have formed (and, at times, distorted) representations of the nation over the course of the last century. In doing so, it also uncovers and contests new and different knowledges relating to Cuba and the city of Havana by mapping out new imaginaries and narratives via a form of visual storytelling. In *Memories of a Lost Shark*, these different realms are informed, first and foremost, by the passing of time and by our memories of it, but also by the way in which these memories are evidenced and recorded by both the photographic and written text. Through engaging with the public in photographic exhibitions and talks, the project develops understanding of the processes by which visual imaginaries are constructed and communicated, and raises public awareness of the idealisation and metaphorical imaginaries of space and place. This has been enabled by the application of theories and ideas relating to documentary photography and psychogeography, previously explored in Kent's research in the field of Cuban and visual culture studies (as noted above), that are now being made visible through his touring exhibition.

Kent's collaboration with Edmundo Desnoes has developed directly out of his discussions with the writer regarding documentary photography (September 2012 – September 2013), with a focus, first and foremost, upon the way in which both the photographer and the writer deal with the key themes and ideas relating to psychogeography and urban experience. Desnoes' review of a republication of Walker Evans's Cuban portfolio in *Aperture* magazine (Summer 1990) formed the basis for this exchange. In his review, Desnoes commended Evans's photographic style at this formative stage of his career, which he saw as bearing 'no theatrical dramatization of underdevelopment,' in turn uncovering a more transparent representation of city-life which forced the viewer to 'contemplate with a poignant and indifferent eye the poverty, the flow of quotidian existence.' This reading of the role of the documentary photographer markedly informed the shape of the research project in terms of its theoretical and visual formation, and the resultant exhibitions

Impact case study (REF3b)

have been acknowledged by experts in the field as a product of this dialogue. This has been reflected in the project, for instance, through both Kent and Desnoes' continuous recalling of Evans's influential and self-penned "documentary style" in their collaboration. This is illustrated within the framework of the exhibition itself, in which Desnoes' meditation on the photograph *El vagabundo (The Wanderer)* reflects upon the image in question as redolent of the representation of poverty depicted by a number of influential documentary photographers, including Walker Evans, Cartier-Bresson, Capa and Frank; '[this photograph] keeps us aware of the heartrending plight of those that ironically survive thanks to our crumbs.'

As noted above, *Memories of a Lost Shark* has been made accessible through travelling international public exhibitions, gallery talks and events, as well as through online galleries available on Kent's website, jckent.com. Combined, these have had an educational impact upon public discourse and have raised cultural awareness of the project's main themes. His exhibition at Oriol Colwyn, North Wales (approximately 30-50 visitors daily, open daily 1000-1700, 1-21 June 2013) represented the first public display of the project. This exhibition was accompanied by a series of public events, the first being an opening reception alongside a screening (31 May 2013) of *Memories of Underdevelopment* (directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1968) with approximately 150 members of the public in attendance (150 tickets sold via Theatr Colwyn and Venue Cymru). A second event, a photographer's talk, which was open to the public (audience of 25, 19 June 2013), brought together scholars, practitioners and the local community. The follow-up exhibition to this first show took place in La Habana del Este, Havana, Cuba, at the Galería Fayad Jamís: Centro de Arte y Literatura (approx. 30-50 visitors daily, open daily 1000-1800, 1-24 July 2013), with an opening reception taking place to mark its inauguration (2 July 2013, 60 in attendance).

By using these exhibitions as a platform for the dissemination of Kent and Desnoes' collaborative work, the impact from this project has enriched cultural awareness of local and global cultural heritage and has provided expert opinion on presenting this to the public. More specifically, its educational impact has been to enhance the public view of existing dominant representations of Havana, deconstruct the visual imaginary into component visual and ideological constructs, and make visible this deconstruction through photographic representations of contemporary Cuba. The project has also provided an interface through which the public, professionals and academics have been able to explore new ways of engaging with space and place as a socio-cultural product. In North Wales, the public were engaged via the exhibition, opening reception and photographer's talk, as outlined above. In Havana, the exhibition benefitted from an opening event in which the exhibition's inauguration and an artist's workshop were combined. In the case of both exhibitions, the public included academics, artists, curatorial and gallery staff, cultural advisers, the local community, photographers and practitioners. Kent's photographer's talk in North Wales was presented as a workshop in which he explained both his methods and processes in creating and selecting the photographs that form part of the exhibition and the development of his collaboration with Desnoes. This generated further discussion between the participants relating to both the way in which we deconstruct visual imaginaries of historically 'othered' spaces, but also regarding the influences at work in our construction of them. These events represented attempts to further develop public understanding and to engage public awareness as to the way in which Cuba continues to be framed by the foreign image-maker. Both of these opening receptions offered a chance for Kent to introduce the project to both British and Cuban artists and the public, whilst also providing an opportunity to explore a number of the themes relating to the ways in which both photographers and writers, especially in the case of Cuba, have engaged with the construction of space and place as a socio-cultural product. This was exemplified at the opening reception for *Memories of a Lost Shark* in Havana, at which the exhibition's cultural adviser described the show in a recorded interview as 'an excellent opportunity to look from a Cuban perspective at the way in which a British photographer's lens captures images of our country'. In doing so, he also affirmed that the show was one of the many dialogues that have taken place between Cuba and the outsider in relation to the representation of physical spaces, anthropological constructions, and the socio-political condition of the nation's people. Over the course of the exhibition's run in both North Wales and Cuba, Kent was also in a position to discuss the practice of photography with other artists and to compare different conceptual readings of the project with them inside the gallery space. The educational impact of these events was highlighted in guestbook comments, recorded interviews and reports of the exhibition on jckent.com.

Publicity for the project, both at home and abroad, has benefited from a strong online presence created through the use of online media and social networks. Kent's professional photographic website also provided a platform for an online exhibition of the project, receiving several hundred visits during Summer 2013 (Google Analytics data), and coverage of the exhibitions in North Wales and Cuba has also been shared extensively by the public on Facebook and Twitter. The opening reception in North Wales benefitted from creative use of social media and extensive publicity via a number of different networks and institutions (including Redeye: The Photography Network and Venue Cymru), whereas the opening reception in Havana was recorded by the national press and later publicised in television and radio coverage throughout the run of the exhibition. In addition to featuring on various radio programmes (Radio Metropolitano, Radio Taino [twice weekly, 1-24 June 2013], Habana Radio [part of Friday's Revista Cultural – 2-5pm], Radio Reloj, Radio Rebelde – Revista Diaria [daily, 1-24 June 2013]), footage of the opening event and a review of the exhibition were televised in the national news, broadcast by Cubavisión International (15 July 2013) – available to in excess of 2.5 million homes in Cuba and shown throughout the Americas, Europe, North Africa and parts of Europe. In this televised review, the reporter highlighted that whilst the photographs work as standalone images, the texts “underscore” them, in turn imbuing the spectator's experience with a sense of the writer/photographer's experience and a “knowledge of the psychology of those represented [in the frame]”.

The successful delivery of these exhibitions has led to the creation of an on-going dialogue between Kent and members of the various groups that have been involved with *Memories of a Lost Shark* (from curatorial staff to workshop participants). The product of this dialogue has been continued educational impact upon public discourse and cultural life, initially documented, as noted above, in guestbook comments, recorded interviews and reports of the exhibition, available on jckent.com, but also supplemented more recently by artists and writers who have written about and shared the project's findings online.

Kent has been invited to exhibit the project in various forms over the course of the next 12 months. *Memories of a Lost Shark* will be shown from 17 October to 17 December 2013 in Manchester at the Instituto Cervantes, and will again be accompanied by a series of public events, including an opening reception (17 October 2013) and a series of workshops. These events will run alongside the 2013 Manchester Literature Festival and will be funded by the Arts Council England. Kent has also been invited to show the project as part of the ¡Viva! Latin American Film Festival taking place at Cornerhouse, Manchester in March 2014. Kent was also awarded a University International Research Excellence Award in support of the project in October 2013. This will be used to fund further collaborative research with Edmundo Desnoes in New York City and will facilitate development and expansion of this on-going project in the form of recorded interviews, the production of new photographic and written work, and the advancement of plans for a photobook to be published in 2014.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. An independent documentary photographer and writer may be contacted to corroborate the impact of the project in breaking new ground in relation to Cuban visual cultures.
2. The impact of the Oriel Colwyn events can be corroborated by (i) the Curator at Oriel Colwyn gallery, Colwyn Bay and (ii) an independent writer and artist. For media coverage, see also: (iii) Red Eye Photography Network: <http://www.redeye.org.uk/exhibition/memories-lost-shark>
3. The impact of the exhibition at Galería Fayad Jamis on the Cuban public can be corroborated by (i) the Curator and (ii) a Cultural adviser at Galería Fayad Jamis, Centro de Arte y Literatura, Alamar, La Habana del Este, Havana, Cuba. For media coverage and reviews, see also: (iii) Cubavisión International News, Instituto Cubano de Radio y Televisión, Monday 15 July 2013: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iGfrf5sib8>
(iv) Report written by Cubavisión International journalist: <http://www.jckent.com/press/cubavisin-report--july-2013>
4. The impact of the project on public discourse and cultural life is documented in guestbook comments, recorded interviews and reports on jckent.com. For discussion of the project by other artists, see: <http://ameblo.jp/rincon-del-cine-cubano/entry-11600136565.html>