

Institution:

London Metropolitan University, Sir John Cass Faculty of Art, Architecture and Design

Unit of Assessment:

UoA 34 (Art and Design theory, history and practice)

Title of case study: *Challenging Cultural Japanese Stereotypes of the Home through Photography and Exhibition Display*

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

This case study demonstrates how through the innovative use of photography and the creation of a multi-sensory, spatial context within the museum, distinctive opportunities are produced for re-evaluating deep-rooted cultural stereotypes and disseminating complex knowledge to the general public. The exhibition '*At Home in Japan*' focused on everyday domestic life to question popular stereotypes that depict Japan as the quintessential, exotic other. The exhibition had an impact on multiple audiences as substantiated by the large visitor numbers, the success of the schools' programme, community outreach workshops, curatorial tours and study days, the subsequent interest in the use of these experimental techniques by museum/academic institutions overseas, and extensive coverage internationally in the traditional media and on the internet.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

The exhibition '*At Home in Japan – Beyond the Minimal House*' was held at the Geffrye Museum in London from March 22 until August 29 2011. The exhibition draws greatly on project specific photography by Andrews (2006) conducted inside the urban homes of 10 participants in the Kansai area (Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe), which responded to specific ethnographic material from fieldwork conducted in the region by Dr. Inge Daniels' (University Lecturer in Social Anthropology at University of Oxford). This research was published in the academic book entitled *The Japanese House – Material Culture in the Modern Home* [1], which challenges widespread stereotypes about Japanese aesthetics by revealing the messiness and contradictions of everyday domestic life [1, 5]. This is the first academic study to elucidate through the extensive use of photographic imagery, the implicit but interconnected logics of the use of space and the use of material culture within the home. The book highlights the impact of post-war changes to the exterior, layout and the use of dwelling spaces, while paying particular attention to the multiple connections between the home, the community, the state [5], and to create beneficial alignments with spirits, ancestors, and the material world [3]. The photographic study highlights both local specificity and common, cross-cultural human experiences. More generally, this publication offers a model for future academic publications where academic rigour and knowledge may be imparted through visual and text-based information on an equal and complementary footing. Traditionally, academic publications have relegated photographs to a secondary and supporting role in relation text, but in *The Japanese House*, Andrews photographs were used as "autonomous sources of information on a par with the text". [2] Indeed, the book has been recognised for its "outstanding production values" by the International Convention of Asian Scholars.

The exhibition extended the experiments with photography within this context, to investigate how to employ photographs more creatively and effectively in museum displays. The exhibition explored how documentary photographers may benefit from using innovative visual methods and representations as well as three-dimensional environments to disseminate research results more effectively to a wider audience. [4, 6] To this end, a standard Japanese flat was re-created and filled with everyday objects donated by participants from the photographic study, whilst Andrews photographs were used in a variety of ways to create a sense of "feeling at home" in contemporary Japan. The photographs were made into light-box windows to simulate exterior spaces, image/text wallpapers, moving image films using sound recorded in the apartments, autonomous photographs (some of which were life-size) and image/object pieces. This multi-modal approach does not treat culture and experience as text, but creates an immersive space filled with everyday goods (instead of unique iconic objects) that visitors can explore with all their senses. Thus,

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people could put on slippers, look inside closets, open drawers, try on clothing, sit on chairs and sofas, and generally pick up and handle any of the objects used in the exhibition. Importantly, the exhibition did not assume one mode of 'passive' learning, but, by stressing complexity and ambiguity, it challenged any totalizing view and aimed to foster a more personal, intuitive understanding, thereby empowering both the audience and those depicted. The exhibition particularly challenged conventional museum display by encouraging interactive participation with the audience, through the extensive use of photography in a variety of forms, and through the use of everyday, rather than iconic, precious objects. [6] (It was the first such exhibition at The Geffreye.)

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Publications:

Monograph and exhibition catalogue:

[1] Daniels, I. 2010. **Photography by Susan Andrews**. *The Japanese House: Material Culture in the Modern Home*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.

Refereed Review relating to the above:

[2] Gygi, F. 2011 'The Japanese House' - Book Review. *Home Cultures* 8 (3): 351-354

Exhibitions and Events:

[3] 1. 12. 2010

Book Launch, Panel discussion and exhibition of Photographs, *The Japanese House* at The Japan Foundation, London

Conferences:

[4] 24.3.2012

Society for Photographic Education National Conference in San Francisco

Panel –Intimacy and Voyeurism: The Public/Private Divide

Andrews/Daniels collaboration

Articles and chapters in Books:

[5] Daniels, I. 2008. 'Japanese Homes Inside Out' *Home Cultures* 5(2): 115-40.

Photography by Susan Andrews

http://www.academia.edu/608280/Japanese_Homes_Inside_Out

[6] Daniels, I. Dec. 2013 Museum Experiments in Living Ethnography: 'At Home in Japan' in London. Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka

Grants, Financial Support:

03-09/2011 Geffrye Museum Exhibition Budget (£50,000)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The exhibition, co-curated by Andrews and Daniels, explored an interactive 2D/3D model for communicating complex knowledge to multiple audiences. *The Japanese House* both advances academic knowledge and served as a catalogue for the exhibition. The book has been favourably reviewed in academic journals and elsewhere. To date 2,100 copies (210 in the Museum shop) have been sold and the book was reprinted only nine months after it was first published. The exhibition (2011) had more than 12,000 visitors over six months and was accompanied by extensive school and local community outreach programmes, craft workshops, and curatorial tours and study days that Andrews participated in. The school programme supported QCA Unit 2 'What sort of homes do people live in today?' and QCA Unit 22 'A contrasting locality overseas'. In total 235 children and youth attended these sessions (8 Primary Schools, 1 Secondary School, 1 Higher Education College, and 1 Special Education Needs school). 374 people attended the Adult Education and Learning programme, while 242 participants, both adults and children, attended eleven community outreach sessions. Finally 1,478 children and 1,150 adults participated in 125 holiday creative activities. In total 2,628 people participated in educational activities, which

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compares favourably with the 803, 2,402, and 1,045 people who attended the three previous temporary exhibition events.

Between June and August 2011, Laura Haapio-Kirk and Rosanna Blakeley, Msc students from University of Oxford conducted an audience study of sixty visitors, who were selected at random. They were first observed and then their interactions with the displays and each other were recorded. They were interviewed afterwards. Some participants were in search of knowledge (40%), but more were driven by the pleasure of the unexpected (50%), while a minority sought inspiration for their own homes (10%). Most participants were positive about the interactive/immersive aspect of the exhibition as Natasha, an American in her 30s, put it: 'One thing I really liked was that it was extremely personal: I actually felt like I was in a Japanese film quite often'. The study showed that the exhibition was successful in questioning preconceptions about Japan. A British woman in her 70s admitted that because of the war she held anti-Japanese sentiments but 'the display of everyday normal living made me feel that Japanese people are very similar to us', while two British women in their 20s expected that Japanese homes were 'compartmentalized and ordered' but they actually 'looked messy and normal'. Of the 1,305 entries left in the visitors' book only 23 were negative; they complained about the lack of real furnishings and fittings and the entrance fee. Other comments demonstrated that the exhibition had the desired impact. Typical examples were: 'Fascinating. Totally different from the stereotypical image. A real eye opener', and 'Excellent exhibition of contemporary Japanese people's houses and lives. Very precise and detailed description of Japanese life. This contributes a lot to understanding Japan.' Finally, all Japanese participants (10% of total visitors) were upbeat. In the words of a Japanese man in his 30s living in London: "The exhibition shows Japanese lifestyle and not the stereotype. It is really what the Japanese are like and not just what Westerners think they are like'. When the exhibition closed, most objects were given away in a free raffle attended by more than two hundred people, and Andrews and Daniels are currently investigating the direct impact of some of these objects inside people's homes in the UK. Ethnographic museums in Leiden, Stockholm, and Vancouver have expressed an interest in hosting the show.

The exhibition had public reach through more than one hundred articles in popular print media including *The Guardian*, *Japan Times*, *Telegraph* ('top five exhibitions in London'), *Evening Standard*, and *Time Out*. The exhibition was reviewed in a range of design and interiors magazines such as *Blue Print* ('it certainly succeeds in its mission to demystify the Japanese home'), *ID Magazine*, *Styles*, and *Interiors*. It also featured on various blogs such as The British Council: 'A number of strong similarities emerge in the ways people behave at home which help the sense of empathy the exhibition tries to create. The myth of minimalism is finally debunked.' Haikugirl: 'I think the exhibition fulfilled its aim completely. I felt so at home in the exhibition, and so like I was really in Japan.'

When the exhibition closed most of the objects were given away in a free raffle. Daniels and I are currently conducting further research based on the use and display of these items within their new homes.

The international museum curating and academic community has also benefited from the challenge to museum orthodoxy in terms of reconsidering objects and display, interactive activities, and the experimental use of photography in this environment. Professor Dr. Akiko Mori, the anthropologist responsible for the European exhibitions collections at the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, Japan commented that "At Home in Japan' is a exceptional project that successfully experiments with novel ways of displaying other cultures, thereby highlighting the complexity and ambiguity of cross-cultural understanding and questioning deeply ingrained stereotypes. She stated that at 'At Home in Japan' offers museum practitioners a new model for facilitating more subjective, immersive visitor engagements with exhibition displays." She further commented on the use of photography stating, "Another unusual and innovative aspect of the exhibition was its use of life-size photographs of interiors that were taken by Susan Andrews, a professional photographer who co-curated the show. For those of us involved in museum design the following two techniques were of particular interest: firstly, life-size photographs of windows that were lit from behind that added a feeling of space and experience of the larger community and world outside, and, secondly, life-size photographs to which objects were attached to create a trompe l'oeil effect. One of my colleagues here at the museum, Prof. Hiroko Yokohama, who is an anthropologists working in China, was so impressed by these techniques that she has consulted Dr. Daniels about how the same kinds of displays could be produced for an upcoming exhibition

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about Chinese homes at our museum, that she is currently preparing... Finally, in my view, the exhibition was unique in situating itself at the intersection between cultural stereotypes, imagination, and actual everyday lived experiences.”

Additionally, the experimental use of Photography in the exhibition and its challenge to museum orthodoxy led to an invitation to give a presentation for the annual conference for *The Society for Photographic Education* (SPE) in San Fransisco on the *Intimacy and Voyeurism panel: The Public/Private Divide in Photography* (24.3.2012). Daniels and I discussed our collaborative venture and the impact of experimental use of photography within the museum environment.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)**1. Symposium at The Geffrye**

<http://www.japansociety.org.uk/18450/symposium-at-home-in-japan-beyond-the-minimal-house/>

2. Exhibition Review in Refereed Journal

Teasley, S. 2012. 'At Home in Japan' - Exhibition Review. *Home Cultures* 9(1): 99-104

http://www.ingedaniels.com/exhibitions_29_2826203446.pdf

3. Laura Haapio-Kirk, Msc Thesis Visual Anthropology, University of Oxford (09.2011)

http://oxford.academia.edu/LauraHaapioKirk/Papers/1094036/Thesis_At_Home_in_the_Museum

4. Selected list of Educational and Outreach Programmes:

Horizon, a special needs school in Hackney, worked with Artist Matthew Larkinson and Geffrye staff during a week of creative activities that used the exhibition as inspiration

<http://www.geffrye-museum.org.uk/learning/schools-geffrye/horizon-partnership/>

5. Special Projects for Schools:

<http://www.geffrye-museum.org.uk/learning/schools-geffrye/special-projects-for-schools/special-projects-archive/>

6. The British Council (16.05. 2011):

<http://backoftheenvelope.britishcouncil.org/2011/may/16/home-japan/>

7. Diverse Japan (15.07.11):

<http://diversejapan.com/2011/07/15/at-home-in-japan-beyond-the-minimal-house-geffrye-museum-london/>

8. Book Award:

<http://www.icassecretariat.org/icas-8-reading-committee-accolades>

9. Statement provided from Head of Collections and Exhibitions at the Geffrye Museum

10. Statement provided from European Exhibitions Curator, Department of Cultural Research, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan