



@flexwon



Alexander Brennan

My dissertation explores online reactions to the Grenfell Tower fire, which caught fire on the 14th June 2017. Specifically, I aim to untangle the dynamic between graffiti painted about Grenfell and users of the social networking site Instagram, who have curated it en-masse. The example shown was painted by graffiti artist Flexwon, rose to 'insta-fame' after it was 'whitewashed', which many users took to be symbolic of how the local council had responded to the tragedy. As a free and accessible mobile phone application, I argue that Instagram provides a way for the local people who use it to circumvent institutionalised narratives of the event and instead curate their own vernacular perspective. As a result, this dissertation considers a new conception of Instagram, that of the operational archive, as it becomes a place to actively memorialise the dead and narrate the event itself. The way in which local people use graffiti to ignite certain conversations illustrates how such a public and vernacular act can be instrumental in the sense-making of tragedy. My threefold argument that curating graffiti documents a reclamation of space, aids the formation of a collective memory and is the performance of a secular ritual begins to shed light on the way in which new forms of communication are mobilised following traumatic events. By extension, with very little existing research about one of the world's largest social media applications (Instagram), this dissertation adds to anthropological discourse about the ways in which people form communities as well as memorialise and make sense of death in the contemporary socio-technological landscape.

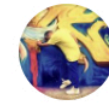


51 likes

JULY 13, 2017

Add a comment...





Alexander Brennan

As a free and accessible mobile application, Instagram has created new spaces in which people can curate their lives, form new relationships and express intense emotions. It has altered traditional dynamics of influencer and influenced, author and reader, and painter and curator. As appropriators of public space, graffiti artists were once considered narrators of social discontent and spokespeople for the vernacular. However, as platforms such as Instagram become increasingly normalised the authorship of such discontent is expanding. Furthermore, as the private becomes the public in the various processes of grieving, the audience member is transformed into an active participant in the sense-making of tragedy. Thus by sparking conversations about social discontent and creating a sense of order and rationale to the chaos of tragedy through its curation, graffiti as a piece of art moves from an object of passive reception to one of instrumental action (Gell 1998). Moreover, by asking who and where the cultural memory of a particular event is forged and made sense of, my dissertation shows how new technologies can be subjectively used and appropriated 'in order to serve the needs and possibilities' of users (Lefebvre 1991:165). This highlights how facets of social life and cultural artefacts are reconfigured in the face of tragedy: rather than simply a discussion of social hierarchy graffiti can become a visual narrative of the past and a shrine to the deceased. Similarly, no longer dictated by individualistic and whimsical communication, the aesthetic patterns of Instagram can become controlled by collective emotion.



40 likes

JANUARY 23

Add a comment...



@ilariadifiore