Between Something and Nothing

Professorial Lecture by Mark Power. University of Brighton. November 2005

In Bill Jay's wonderful collection of essays, *Occam's Razor*, he writes: "Like amnesia victims after the shock of a horrendous accident, I have forgotten most of my schooldays. The brain has a blessed ability to expunge unpleasant memories". This rings true, although while I was thinking about this lecture, trawling through my past while trying to make some sense of why I do what I do, there was one specific event that returned with a vengeance.

It's 1967 and I'm a tubby eight year old. I'm on a school trip through Foxton Locks, a notable engineering feat punctuating the Grand Union Canal in Leicestershire. Hidden deep in my brown satchel is my first camera, a simple point-and-shoot Ilford Instamatic. Grandad had saved enough Green Shield Stamps (these were awarded with purchases in a variety of shops, and then pasted into albums) to claim his prize. He was a modest man, seldom proud, but announcing that it had cost him *three and a half books* - a monumental effort of collecting by any standards - he was clearly very pleased with himself.

I'm on the barge with all my classmates and I take out the camera and snap my first photograph. It shows our teacher, Miss Allen, looking like she'd rather be anywhere else but there. It's not a particularly striking image and doesn't suggest the dawn of any great talent, but the events that followed are the point.

Craig Smalley might not have been the *school* bully - that I can't remember with any clarity - but he was *my* bully. Since the first time he had spotted my rotund figure across the classroom he had terrorised me. Poking seemed to be his preferred method, hard and deep into my flesh, relentless, painful and masterfully devious.

Perhaps choosing Miss Gibson as my first subject was a cry for help, a pact between the two of us that she would look after me. But she didn't. Craig Smalley had spotted

the camera. All the other pictures were to be of him, and him alone. “Or else, Power”. Or else he’d poke me overboard probably.

I wonder if he still has those pictures? Of course I had to hand them all over to him after I got them back from Boots, or wherever it was my parents took the film. These days, when I collect my daughters en-prints from Spectrum I always have a sneak preview. If my Mum and Dad had done the same they could only have imagined that here was my very best friend. So many nice pictures of him.

I told my Grandad; I had to explain why I had only this one picture to show him. I guess he later said something to my parents because the Smalley threat began to subside, only to be replaced by another, equally terrifying Flashmanesque figure. My plan of recounting the trip aided by *twelve* pictures came to nothing, and felt somehow ‘less real’ because of it.

So photography was immediately elusive, precious, challenging, desirable. I didn’t take it for granted then, and I haven’t since. As a nervous, painfully shy pre-pubescent, and then throughout my entire childhood, I would painstakingly caption and catalogue all my pictures. Today I imagine they lie somewhere deep in my fathers loft, to be re-discovered in some painful but inevitable future.

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Sometime in 1982 or ‘83 I decided to become a photographer. I only wish I could remember, exactly, this pivotal moment, though I suspect it was simply because I couldn’t think of anything else I either could, or wanted to do. However, I do remember, in 1980, seeing an exhibition by the war photographer Don McCullin at the V&A. The pictures touched me deeply - you’d have had to be made of stern stuff if they didn’t - and they clearly moved others. Some people were in tears. This, to a young man used to working everyday in the life room, trying to tease an emotional response from a stick of charcoal, a piece of cartridge paper, and a naked man (most of the time), was a revelation. I knew Rothko could move people, if you were of the right frame of mind and you were prepared to give his paintings time, but this, these *photographs*, were so

powerful. So immediate. They really *did* communicate. And not just to other artists but to apparently *ordinary people*. I liked this democracy.

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Some years later I was given my first substantial commission. It was for *The Children's Society*, a charity working with young people in Britain. This, I thought, was my chance to become another McCullin.... I wrote to him, asking for advice, and received a reply on Sunday Times headed note-paper. “As photography is much overcrowded” it read, “ it’s a matter of getting stuck in, or bust. I might say one thing: The *Third World* does not need another photographer in it’s ranks. Go and refresh the world by photographing something else. What about here in Britain?” This then was the incentive I needed to work in my own country, even though what I was about to photograph was, if you like, our very own version of the Third World.

My ‘brief’, which was vague to say the least, was to travel to England’s inner cities and try to show, in photographs, the lives of the young in the vast ‘sink estates’ which were burgeoning in (particularly) the Midlands and the North. It was 1985, and Britain was in the grip of a Thatcher government hell bent on destroying the manufacturing underbelly of our country, along with, famously, any notion of ‘society’.

It’s impossible to imagine being able to take pictures like this nowadays. I would meet people in pubs or in churches, it didn’t seem to matter which, and be passed around extended families keen to show the world that they, along with countless others, had completely missed out on the short-term economic boom of the time.

I thought, with some naivety, that this is what photography was. Valiantly I thought my photographs might change the world, or at least make Britain a better place. On the contrary; after some of the pictures were used by the Children’s Society in a billboard campaign, the most notable upshot was a no-holds-barred investigation by the *Daily Mail*, first of all to establish if these families existed at all and were not just a fabrication, next that they were not claiming the dole while also working on the side, and finally to see if I’d *paid* my subjects, which would, for some reason, have rendered the campaign

a hoax. Needless to say they failed on all counts. But it was nasty, and some disillusion set in. I began to ask myself some hard questions about the morality of working like this, of making the open wounds of others less fortunate so very public.

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Four years later, however, I was still doing much the same thing. Jim Cooke and I tried to challenge the so-called North/South divide by juxtaposing accepted notions of Brighton, in all it's pomp, with the towns expanding homeless population. Then, in 1988, it was officially the *wealthiest town in Britain*, according to a curious survey published boastfully in the *Evening Argus*. The work was made to be shown in the North, to suggest that life down here wasn't all it was cut out to be. But it was inexplicably deemed too parochial, and, ironically, was only exhibited out there, in the then Polytechnic gallery. *Beyond the Facade* was published in Spain, but most British magazines had moved so far towards 'infotainment', in the control of the whims of advertising and fashion, that stories like this were the last thing they wanted.

Martin Parr was one of the first to recognise the potential of this situation, and in 1989 published *The Cost of Living*, a penetrating and perceptive look at the middle classes. Parr was acknowledging his own social roots, commenting, critically, on people like himself. Although I was slow to recognise it at the time, that book was to became an inspiration. In a little over two years I was to begin *The Shipping Forecast*, based on a Radio 4 broadcast, which is about as middle class as it's possible to get.

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But first, at the end of the '80s, I was disillusioned and very seriously in debt. I decided to give up trying to make any sort of *living* as a photographer and made enquiries about training, instead, to be a carpenter. By chance, an old acquaintance, then a picture editor for a prominent lifestyle magazine, heard about this, took me to lunch and gave me, to my embarrassment, a cheque for £200 from his own bank account. 'Take this', he said, 'and do something with it'. So, together with a friend, George, who was already a carpenter, I bought a ticket to Berlin. We'd been watching the situation develop in

Eastern Europe; it seemed that anything might happen, but no one was quite sure exactly *what*. We arrived, booked into the youth hostel, and went out for a walk. It was November 9th 1989.

A few people were milling around Checkpoint Charlie, and we asked why. ‘Because we think the Wall might come down tonight’ came a excited reply. Within an hour the crowds, and the rumours, had swollen. We pushed our way to the front, to a line stretching left to right across the road. Then, at midnight precisely, the door in front of us opened and a bewildered looking East German appeared, and promptly gave George a bear hug. Not only were we at the front, but we were at the *right part* of the front. We were pushed through the door by the heaving crowds behind us, to find ourselves in no-mans land, alongside a small group of confused East German border guards, clearly unable to believe the orders they’d been given. What I remember most was the noise. Screaming, shouting, cheering, wailing, a great wall of sound. An endless stream of people stumbled by, pausing agog at the door, before passing joyfully into the arms of the crazed masses beyond.

And so, by accident, I had become a news photographer. ‘Chance’, goes the proverb, ‘favours the prepared mind’. But whatever it was, serendipity, fortune, or just that it was *meant to be*, it’s why I’m here now, standing on this stage, and not making probably very bad furniture.

The assumption that I was some kind of soothsayer, that I had my finger on the pulse of international current affairs, meant that for the next three years I had regular work for a variety of magazines and newspapers. But I was unhappy; I knew I was in real danger of getting sucked into that world, and I needed to get out. Surely, I thought, there must be a world apart from the media where I could make the work I wanted to make and not end up in a debtors court because of it.

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The Wall, and the authoritarian Communist regimes that supported it, fell, suggests Andy Grundberg, because of television. ‘The East Germans in particular’, he writes,

‘were tuned in not to their state-run television but to West German stations that fed them consumerist messages and shows like Dallas and Miami Vice. Who would have thought that Don Johnson’s speedboat would have become a political instrument?’

In the same piece Grundberg argues, quite rightly, that the demise of traditional photojournalism was due to *live* TV. In fact, I’d hazard a guess that it’s not the still pictures of that momentous night in Berlin that you most remember but the television footage instead.

This phenomenon may have began as early as 1963, when much of America watched Jack Ruby shooting dead Lee Harvey Oswald, widely believed to be President Kennedy’s assassin, live on TV. Although Robert Jackson’s photograph of the same event appeared in several newspapers the next day, and even won the Pulitzer Prize, it’s the moving images that most clearly evoke an emotional response from anyone that was around at the time.

Now it’s mobile phones, amateur video and, of course 24-hour CCTV that are further endangering the livelihood of the professional news photographer. Consider the pictures of the London bombings: the chilling images of the suspects with their rucksacks passing through ticket barriers, taking escalators to the platform. These and the low resolution phone images taken on the spot by members of the public, actually experiencing the horror first hand, are what remain with us.

Not only did several people remember to take pictures when they couldn’t have known if they’d get out alive (which is extraordinary in itself as well as disturbingly seductive for the viewer) but some of them very quickly recognised that their pictures had a currency, that they *were worth something*.

It was the speed with which images like this became available on that day that arguably made the early news broadcasts so compelling. Adam Stacey's picture of a man covering his mouth (or is it a self portrait?) after a bomb exploded on the Piccadilly line near Kings Cross was blogged from his mobile phone within fifteen minutes of the blast. It was immediately syndicated by Scoopt, an organisation dedicated to finding a home

for pictures taken by the general public*. 'If you capture a newsworthy event',* they claim on their website, *'you could have a valuable scoop on your hands. We can sell your photos and videos to the media - and you'll get paid just like a professional'.*

The poor quality of these images is, of course, irrelevant. Stepping back seventy years, Robert Capa's iconic images of the D-Day landings could be argued to better communicate the horror of war *because* the negatives were cooked by an over-enthusiastic lab technician. Capa's pictures, and those from mobiles and videos, are so far removed from the slickness of contemporary advertising that they seem so much more like life itself, in all it's fragility.

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Here is a picture of my son Milligan, taken inside a tent in Dorset last summer by my daughter Chilli, who is just seven years old. It's a beautifully composed, exposed and sharp picture, taken using a mid-price digital camera, and is so much more visually sophisticated than my picture of Miss Allen, when I was a similar age. Clearly I was not cut out for a life as a news photographer and so it's easy for me to say this, but the ease and ever increasing democratisation of photography is in my opinion to be celebrated.

A different *space* has opened for documentary photographers (something I consider myself to be), a space free from specific events, where there are different expectations, where it is first and foremost about *ideas*. Now we can all take pictures, with varying degrees of consistency, more than ever before it's about what we *do* with photography.

I want to show you, briefly, two recent projects which are all about ideas. Jacqueline Hassink's tiny book, *Table of Power*, attempts to show us the boardroom tables of Europe's forty most powerful companies. I say 'attempts' because in nineteen cases she failed to get access. But, in the manner of Nick Broomfield's movie *Chasing Maggie*, in which the premise and indeed the success of the film is that he never actually manages to meet Thatcher, Hassink also turns failure to her advantage. Blank, black pages indicate an omission, and these sit in sequence among her successes.

These are not ‘great pictures of tables’ (if indeed there can be such a thing!) but are instead pure ‘documents’, augmented in the appendix by a description of each piece: age, maker, material, (*the table is seven years old and was bought in consultation with a member of the board by catalogue. It is an oval form so that everyone can see each other*). The appendix also carries the reason for being refused access, some of which are so petty as to be laughable. (*The meeting table is made by... putting together several smaller tables. They don’t want this table shown in public... They are working on making a real meeting table for the Board of Directors*). The book is small enough to hold all that power in the palm of a hand.

Proving that simple ideas are very often the best is Christina Meindertsma’s *Checked Baggage*. The artist bought a weeks worth of confiscated goods at Schipol airport, those items that you see in clear perspex boxes as you approach security. The number of items she bought, 3,264, matches exactly the number of books published, as one confiscated article is included with each. Inside, the goods are carefully arranged into ‘types’, penknives, scissors, lighters and so forth, and are individually numbered to correspond with a tag on the real piece, so you can find your potential weapon in the catalogue. The work is about, of course, our own paranoia, asking the question, ‘is not our *fear* of danger more dangerous than the danger itself?’

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I sat with a student the other day who was searching for direction. From his body language it was clear that he thought I was keeping something from him. *Just tell me how you get an idea*...!

Really, I wish I knew. The photographer Paul Graham wrote recently: “When you have a worthwhile idea you should be prepared to gamble on it, to test it out and see what the world gives you back”. True enough, but first you have to learn, probably from a mix of experience and intuition, to *recognise* an idea when it’s right there in front of you. The genesis of *The Shipping Forecast* came from a tea towel I bought in the RNLI gift shop

in Great Yarmouth.

The forecast was very much a part of my childhood, drifting gently across our living room from the mahogany radio gramophone in the corner, near the wicker chair which hung from the ceiling by a chain. Back then, when the choice of stations was limited, most people would listen to the Home Service. Part of the appeal of the forecast, I think, is that it forms a sort of wallpaper backdrop to so many lives. In his diaries, Alec Guinness described it as 'the best thing on the radio. It is authoritative and mesmeric. My imagination provides me with stinging spray and I think I hear breakers and the clanging bell of a buoy'. Its strange, rhythmic, esoteric language is clearly romantic, forming an image of our island nation buffeted by wind and heavy seas, which explains why everyones favourite place to listen is from a nice, warm, safe bed.

The forecast, of course, exists to save lives. It warns sailors at sea, or about to put to sea, of inclement weather. But for the majority of us it's just simply there, unthreatening, comforting, incomprehensible. *The general synopsis at 0 1 00. Low southeast Iceland 995 moving slowly southwest, filling 1 00 7 by 0 1 00 tomorrow. Low, Biscay 958, expected Wales 1 00 5 by the same time. Low, Trafalgar 1 00 3, moving slowly east, losing its identity.*

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When I bought the tea towel back in 1990 the names, which were so familiar to me - Forties, Cromarty, Fisher, German Bight - all came to life. These were *real* places, and this is where they were. I wondered what they might look like. Did they correspond at all to the pictures already in my imagination, carefully constructed over all those years? And so, quite simply, I decided to find out.

The work took four years to complete. This was mainly for logistical reasons. In photography - and I would imagine this to be true in most of the arts, if not life itself - it is always a balancing act between time and money. If you have money, then you have no

time. If you have time, then it usually means you have no money.

Thinking about this now, some twelve years later, it's clear that I did not consider another logistic. How exactly was I going to get to all these places, all thirty-one sea areas? Perhaps, if I had considered this, I might never have started, so daunting would have seemed the task. But I'm a spontaneous photographer. I don't sit in my office working out a strategy, imagining the completed work somewhere out there in front of me, before going out to make the pictures. It's a fundamental difference between what I do and the likes of *Table of Power* and *Checked Baggage*, which I admire immensely, but would not have the mindset to make myself.

Instead, I go out and make a start and work through intuition and sometimes, but by no means always, a more specific concept begins to emerge. "I'm not aware," writes the photographer Richard Misrach, "that I have the mindset to discover in the world exactly what I'm looking for. Perhaps the best pictures are a seamless hybrid of discovery and construction".

It also took some time to fix upon the type of *language* I might use, the kind of pictures I might take. My influences included the gentle, charmingly quirky English pictures of Tony Ray Jones, the quiet, unassuming but beautifully constructed landscapes of Ray Moore, and Chris Killip's extraordinary *In Flagrante*, which offered an altogether bleaker vision of modern Britain, far removed from the conventional nostalgia for a disappearing, class-ridden country.

Seeing Hiroshi Sugimoto's monumental and beautiful seascapes for the first time, right in the middle of my project, did confuse me: should I be making pictures more like this? But in the end I reverted to what I knew best, a spontaneous reaction to any given place I found myself in, to the clash between the imaginary landscapes in my head and the reality of what I found. In other words, I would carry with me what I thought Finisterre would look like, and then respond when this did not, of course, correspond with what was actually there.

In so doing, the work is clearly to be seen from the point of view of the lay-listener, the accidental listener, and not from that of the heroic fisherman. There are no pictures of trawlers here, or of great waves washing the decks. The nearest I got to that was a gale force eight while on a car ferry crossing the North Sea, or a hitch hike onto a met-office research flight, cruising at a terrifying fifty feet above sea area Sole.

Long term projects like this, which are able to sustain ones interest for most of the time, are few and far between. Which is not to suggest, at all, that *The Shipping Forecast* (and all the other projects I've worked on since) was a consistently joyous and fulfilling experience. For much of the time I quite simply hated doing it. I was always full of doubts. Why was I doing this? Who the hell cares anyway? What a criminal waste of time and money.

But the beauty of working like this, a method which is - essentially - street photography, is that you can never be sure what will happen next. When at my lowest ebb, /when it felt that I haven't taken a decent picture for three or four days, something extraordinary would appear from nowhere. A headless child on the promenade in Aberystwyth; a beautiful tableaux of a mother photographing her daughter, the marks on the beach like the sleeve of a sea captain; a middle-aged man in a three piece suit with a rolled umbrella and a fob-watch playing football, while an elderly couple makes sandcastles in the foreground; a plastic drum which, if you stood in the right place, looked like a fish.

It is impossible, in my opinion, to make work like this unless you are alone, for it is about concentration. It's why I don't carry a camera with me at all times. I go shopping, I go on holiday, I go to work - altogether different activities. When working, it's important to be aware of what is happening around you, however subconsciously, all of the time. You cannot do that while choosing the colour of a pair of socks. Maybe this is a gender thing? They say that men are incapable of doing more than one thing at a time.

The text in the pictures is the 6am forecast as broadcast by the Met Office for that

specific sea area, on the day the picture was taken. Given the confusing, esoteric nature of the words, the pictures which I consider to be most successful are those which are in their own way confusing, unexplainable, mysterious. You must remember that before I began *The Shipping Forecast* I was a magazine and occasional newspaper photographer, expected to *illustrate* a given text and very little else, where most pictures needed to contain as much information and be as easily digestible as possible. But now the less I offered - the more confusing the situation depicted - the more interesting it became. Imagine how exciting that was!

The exhibition, first shown in Brighton Museum in 1997 before touring to a further twenty-two venues, included a sound installation. Messer's Miller and Porter, experienced Television composers whose hits include the themes to *Art Attack, Bruce's Price is Right* and the remake of *The Sooty Show*, recorded over one hundred forecasts and then split them up into segments. These were fed into a sampler which randomly pieced together original forecasts. There were over one million possible outcomes; in short, you could never predict what would happen next. The computer then randomly selected one or more Roberts radios - another great British institution - which were scattered around the gallery, thereby causing the forecasts to move around the space. Silence added between each sentence emphasised the beauty of the language. And finally, sampled or original sounds associated with the sea and shipping, including extracts of the enigmatic *Sailing By,* drifted throughout the space from speakers positioned high above.

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Three years ago I was invited to join Magnum. (No one was more surprised about this than I was!). As things stand, I'm an Associate, on the second rung of a three rung ladder to full membership, a lengthy process not unlike an ascension to a religious order. These are pictures from Magnum's archive, by the way.

In 1994 Martin Parr was applying to move from Associate to Full Member. Just before

the vote, a letter circulated around the photographers in a last-ditch plea to reject him. It's tenor is indicative of the strength of feeling generated by the shift from the humanist tradition of Magnum, and the time-honoured values of photojournalism, to a more critical, individual take on the world. 'The vote', went the letter, 'will be a declaration of who we are and a statement of how we see ourselves. His membership would not be a proclamation of diversity but the rejection of those values that have given Magnum the status it has in the world today. Please don't dismiss what I'm saying as some kind of personality clash', concluded the note, 'Let me state that I have great respect for him as the dedicated enemy of everything I believe in, and, I trust, what Magnum still believes in.' But, despite all this, Parr was accepted as a Full Member by a single vote.

His election sparked a significant move towards a different kind of Magnum. While more traditional members *are* still elected, perhaps as a kind of *trade-off*, current new nominees and Associates also include the Frenchman Antoine D'Agata (very much the *enfant terrible* of his day*)* and the Americans Alec Soth and Jim Goldberg*.* They - or should I say *we* - have*,* to varying degrees, divided the membership. None of us are news or current affairs photographers. Quite the contrary in fact. So cue the most contentious debate of all amongst it's members: what exactly *is* Magnum now, and what is its purpose?

Should the agency, for instance, have a photographer 'on-the-ground' as soon as any major news event occurs? This has been an exceptional, terrible year for natural disasters, so this debate has seemed particularly poignant. Magnum had three photographers in Indonesia or Sri Lanka within four days of the Tsunami, though this, it was argued by some, was not soon enough. Hurricane Katrina was more accessible, because it happened in America, but no Magnum photographer went to the Kashmiri earthquake. It was difficult to reach of course, and those that might normally have been expected to go had *other things to do*. "If I was twenty years younger I would have gone", argued one member, chastising the younger core for what he perceived to be a lack of ambition and humanity.

But the world has changed. Let's face it: what we really wanted to see in the hours and days following the Tsunami was amateur video footage of the wave approaching the beach, shot by tourists who could not have comprehended that what they were witnessing was a catastrophe of international significance. Although it was important, and certainly very moving, to see the refugees and the devastated landscape of Banda Aceh in the following days, shot by professionals, including Paolo Pelligrin from Magnum, these pictures couldn't hold a candle to the holiday-turned-nightmare video footage we saw on TV.

Magnum accepted, long ago, that it did not have the resources to compete with the massed ranks of Reuters and Associated Press, with their stringers all over the world. Magnum, after all, only represents about sixty photographers. Instead it has aspired to 'reflect' on world events, to spend a little more time, to stay a little longer, to go beyond the single picture solution. As a result, Magnum's visual archive of world history over the past sixty years is arguably second to none.

That enviable position is the fuel to the debate. Should Magnum be continuing to build on this tradition despite the demise, or near death, of the editorial marketplace, traditionally the vehicle for getting work seen? The fact that a slush-fund has now been established to enable a member photographer to respond quickly to any major world event, and not have to worry about getting an assignment first, is clearly a calculated step to build on the archive.

But at the same Magnum's immediate future seems to lie in so-called 'cultural projects', often sponsored by industry, or books and exhibitions of personal, long term work funded by corporate or advertising assignments. This is the way of the world now, and Magnum must embrace it if it is to survive. As the membership evolves - younger members are accepted, older members pass away - one perceives a move towards ever more esoteric, ideas-based work.

And meanwhile the debate continues, and will surely never reach a consensus. It was

ever thus; Robert Capa and Henri Cartier-Bresson, two of the founder members of Magnum back in 1947, were constantly at blows in the ‘journalism versus art’ debate. Rarely is there a unanimous vote about anything (except, famously, the decision, taken some years ago, *not* to sell out to Getty).

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Magnum has helped me to consolidate a reputation for commissioned construction work. It all began, pre-Magnum, back in 1996, when I was asked to photograph, first from a helicopter and then from the ground, a wasteland in Southeast London. Back then it was necessary to wear sophisticated breathing apparatus on the site since, for twenty-five years, British Gas had used it as a dumping ground for toxic waste.

The Millennium Dome had been a fantasy of the Conservative Party, and Michael Hesseltine in particular. But when, in May 1997, the Labour Party were elected, the expectation was that Tony Blair would surely abandon the project. But, in June, he announced in Parliament that the Dome was to be embraced by New Labour. It would be, in Blair’s words, “a symbol of British confidence, a monument to our creativity, and a fantastic day out”.

Having already begun to photograph the site, surely I was in the ideal position to continue to work through to completion? But not a bit of it. Much of the Public Relations department that had got the Labour Party elected from a seemingly impossible position had been moved sideways to the publicity division of the Dome. These people trusted no one with any possible link to the media, and I was clearly included in this category.

Yes, they told me, there would be photographs of the construction; each of the contracted companies would have their own photographer, and they would all, no doubt, visit periodically. No, there were absolutely no plans to allow a single photographer into the site from start to finish. Yes, they were planning a book, and yes, they were sure they would have enough pictures to fill it.

I'm a passionate collector of photography books. I am well aware that some of the most valuable (sadly I own none of them) are privately published albums of a number of 19th Century public building projects. Then, it was considered quite natural for a photographer to follow the progress of a building since both disciplines share a preoccupation with space and time. Charles Marville's pictures of the construction of Cologne Cathedral in 1853,
Durandelle and Delmaet's photographs of the Paris Opera in the 1860's, and my real heroes, the Chevojon Studio, or rather 'dynasty' - Albert, Louis, Jacques, Bernard and Gerard, all from the same family - whose work in and around Paris - the Gare D'Orsay, the Eiffel Tower, the Grande Palais - in the mid-to-late 19th Century, I continue to marvel at. I began to send photocopies of some of these pictures to the newly formed New Millennium Experience Company, or NMEC. Surely history suggests that they should have one consistent vision of the building of the Dome? But still their answer was no.

So I moved into the 20th century. I sent some of Charles Kinsey's wonderfully spectacular pictures of the US railroad construction from 1916 and Lewis Hine's work at the Empire State Building in 1930. Still no.

My final assault were pictures of the construction of public *exhibitions*: I sent them Delamotte's photographs of the construction of the Crystal Palace - unfortunately I don't have one here, but instead I have an engraving made of the finished article. Interestingly the Palace, built to house the Great Exhibition of 1851, was a high-tech, waterproof structure, sheltering a popular display of technology and exotica, and therefore has a claim to be the spiritual ancestor of the Millennium Dome. I sent R J Bingham's splendidly titled 'The State of the Arrangements on the first of May 1855', from his series about the Paris Universal Exhibition of the same year, and, last but my no means least, there were a few completely inconsistent pictures of the Festival of Britain, 1951, (including the Dome-like Skylon), as an example of what happens when a single photographer is *not* employed throughout a construction, as was the case then.

Finally, NMEC succumbed. They *would* allow me onto the site but only if they *commissioned* me to do so. Bizarrely I was to get paid for doing the same thing that I was happy to do for free.

The project marked a significant shift in my work as I began to use a large format 5”x4” plate camera, which I continue to use today. My aim had always been to make a body of work for posterity, as a piece of history, very much in the manner of those 19th Century practitioners discussed earlier. However Robert Elwall, curator of photographs at the Institute of British Architects, disagrees. In his book *Building with Light* he suggests the work is about something else altogether: ‘Whereas Durandelle’s Opera photographs acted as *aides memoirs* to both architect and contractor,’ he writes, ‘Power’s images serve no practical purpose at all. Instead they display an aesthetic sensibility alive to the construction site’s drama, it’s messy race against time, and it’s human foibles and absurdities’.

‘Satisfying dreams is a tricky business, especially when matched against the cost of basic human needs, but this, for better or worse, is what the Millennium Dome has set out to do’. Thus wrote David Chandler back in 1999. Looking at the pictures in hindsight, he suggests, they seem now to illustrate a subtle shift from dream to nightmare, as the full magnitude of the disaster that was, or is, the Dome is realised. Time, a mere five years, has changed the reading of the work already.

I had a love/hate relationship with the place. I would wonder at the sheer scale of the thing, and what a remarkable feat of engineering it was. Let’s face it, the building itself - not what they put in it, but the structure - won numerous architectural and engineering awards. It seemed pretty impressive to me to make something from teflon coated material and some strategically placed wires which was strong enough to support a jumbo jet.

Further phenomenal facts and figures were leaked out on a regular basis. It was the

largest building of it's type in the world, over one kilometer in circumference and covering 80,000 square metres. It could contain two Wembley Stadiums, or the Eiffel Tower on it's side. You could even fit the Great Pyramid of Egypt inside it.

Despite NMEC's expectations I was not at all interested in getting pictures in tomorrows newspapers, or to change public opinion. Frankly, there was little I could do about either anyway. Instead, I just concentrated on my pictures, trying to reach the truth, whatever that was, of what was happening in front of me, in all it's complexity. I was not, and I still am not, an industrial photographer in the true sense of the word. I'm afraid I don't understand why or how a building stands up, or, for that matter, how a plane flies (I'll come onto that in a moment). I work, instead, visually, on what appeals to me.

Somehow, and it gets easier the more of this sort of work I make, I manage to avoid the dictates of my 'employers'. I am instead left alone to get on with it because some kind of trust is established between us that something unexpected will emerge that pleases and surprises them. In short, they let me do my job while they got on with theirs. The last picture in the series is indicative of this; rather than pressing me to spend the evening on the ground, photographing the celebrations, they allowed me instead to stay up a lighting gantry to get just one picture, taken during the change of Millennia, two seconds in 1999 and two seconds in 2000.

Towards the end of the project I put together a book dummy to show to NMEC in the hope that they would sanction it's publication. It was, I'll admit, a battle, but in the end it happened. The only addition to my edit which they requested was a list of all 10,000 people involved in the build, which sits across the last fourteen pages of the book in tiny 3-point type and with the minimum of punctuation. It looks uncannily like a war memorial, and a battle is exactly what it must have felt like to all these people at the time.

*

The Treasury Project followed on almost seamlessly after an architect from Norman Foster's partnership happened upon the Dome book while browsing in Waterstones. Foster's had just begun the refurbishment of the Treasury building, on Whitehall, and my book suggested that a similar photographic record could be instigated there.

But it was a far cry from the Dome. Everything about that had been shiny and new, a homage to commercialism. Not so the Treasury. It and its neighbours - the Houses of Parliament, Downing Street, the Foreign Office - are the pillars, bricks and mortar of the British establishment. It was a century old, a listed, Grade Two star building, dictating what the developers could, or more often could not, do with it. The aim, essentially, was to transform a claustrophobic labyrinth into a modern democratic space.

Perhaps it's best if here I simply read a selection of the introduction I wrote for the book. In it I draw an analogy between what was happening at the Treasury and what we were doing to our own house.

"Over time, as I watched the destruction process continue, fragments of a more glorious past were revealed as each layer of the building was stripped away. It soon became clear that there was something familiar happening here; this was domestic redecoration writ large, and I sensed something more tangibly human embedded in the grand architectural scale.

"Back in Brighton, it had been a familiar story. A brother and sister had grown up in the house and returned in their middle-age to sell, following the death of their mother. They were comforted that it would remain a family home when they sold it to us.

"Over the years we have made the house our own, demolishing walls, erecting bookcases, sanding floors. But the process of change has inevitably uncovered the past. Ancient copies of the *Daily Express* below swirling carpets; delicate drawings and mathematical notations under layers of floral wallpaper; a pile of towels in the loft. Sturdy panel doors were hidden beneath flimsy hardboard. Revealed on one we found the words '*Brian and Susan - October 1984'*, perhaps an acknowledgment that they

knew what they were doing was wrong, yet confident in the knowledge that the boards would be removed one day, their signature displayed and whispering once more.

“We have painted our home in the colours of today: deep reds, salmon pinks, lilacs. Our kitchen is pink Formica. Tastes will change and I know that our choices will be frowned upon one day, probably sooner than we’d like to think. It would disappoint Brian and Susan already because, in their memories, the house will always look like it was, and memories are rarely tolerant of change.

“While still at University, the photographer Petra Creffield returned to the house in Leeds where she had lived as a child. She projected old family snapshots into the building which had become, after a succession of occupants, home to a group of students. It was powerful work, but the picture which really touched me was altogether more simple: it showed a badly chipped newel post, the marks revealing tiny flecks of paint down to the bare wood below. ‘That was our colour’, she said, pointing at a scarcely visible, very dull green hidden amongst the browns, pastels, primaries and whites, the fashionable colours of successive generations.

“And there it was again, a personality laid bare, at the Treasury. As I watched and made photographs, a living, breathing piece of history was stirring; something was being released. My work became a search for this elusive thing, a more compelling quest than simply recording the building’s transformation from that..... to this.

“The demolition complete, some of that essential character, the history of the building itself, had been destroyed forever. This process had been painful to watch, yet the inevitable clash of violence and beauty, the very aesthetics of destruction, had been something to delight in. For different reasons we shared a similar guilt”.

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The Airbus A380 is the largest passenger plane ever built. With a basic configuration of 555 seats, it could accommodate 850 passengers if a budget airline so wished, or even 1000 if the fuselage was stretched.

I began working on this project in 2003, at a site just outside Toulouse, which was then, like the Dome had once been, a piece of wasteland. Forgive me for bombarding you with yet more figures (they seem to follow me around), but the world's largest single interior space, built here in just a year, can accommodate 24 football pitches. Eventually it would house the Final Assembly Line, where the planes, using parts manufactured all over Europe, would be pieced together. Here you see the static test hanger, which is large enough to hold just one plane, with a metre to spare all round.

The A-380 is a truly pan-European project. The fuselage is made in France and Germany, Spain make the tailplane. The wings, as with all Airbus planes, are made in Broughton, in North Wales; the undercarriage in Filton, near Bristol. Smaller factories in Italy, Holland and Belgium also contribute.

I would have loved to have been a fly-on-the-wall at that first meeting when someone suggested the idea to make a plane so huge that many of the individual parts would be too big to fit in the regular Airbus transporter plane - the Beluga - and that, instead, Airbus could commission specially built ships, barges and road trailers to carry the loads. Such are the logistics that - please pardon the pun - how this thing ever got off the ground I shall never understand.

A ship, the *Ville de Bordeaux*, was indeed commissioned, built in Shanghai. When the plane is in full production early next year the boat will make a weekly trip around the coast of Europe, collecting the fuselage and wings for a single plane from ports as distant as Cadiz and Hamburg. Offloading the parts at Paulliac, near Bordeaux, a barge, the *Brion*, then takes them, piece by piece, up the Garonne river, passing under medieval bridges in Bordeaux along the way. The bridges, by the way, can only be negotiated at low tide. After about 100 kilometers of river the barge offloads at Langon, meeting the 16 juggernauts ready to take everything the final distance to Toulouse, along a mix of specially built and existing roads. The convoy travels only at night and at average of only 10km an hour, so this final leg of the journey takes 72 hours.

In Toulouse, the parts are assembled. Perhaps miraculously, the pieces fit snugly together. Airbus claims a 35% quieter engine and 13% lower fuel burn than a jumbo jet. Passenger for passenger, they continue, it will dramatically reduce carbon emissions and therefore damage to our planet. Apparently it is more economical than a family car, but this does not mean that it's 'green'. The rampant increase in air travel means that environmental harm will continue unabated. As things stand international air travel is still largely governed by rules drawn up in the late 1940s. Now, at last, there is some talk of environmental taxes on aviation fuel.

At the reveal, in January of this year, 2000 invited guests watched an extravaganza surely only matched in scale by the Olympic and World Cup opening ceremonies. At this point Airbus were behind in the orders necessary to break even, and so, in true Hollywood fashion, yet more money, £1.4 million to be exact, was pumped in to make the plane, like a child's toy advertised in blanket fashion at Christmas, a must-have item. Orders increased. At last count they had 149 from 13 different airlines, but this is still a far cry from the 700 they need to recoup the investment.

Virgin Atlantic, which has ordered six planes, plan to use the extra space for in-flight gyms, beauty salons, casinos and private rooms with double beds, prompting Richard Branson to quip that his passengers would have "two chances to get lucky".

In April, I watched the first flight. I wasn't the only one to be reminded of Titanic, or the movie at least. The worlds press were there half expecting, it seemed, a disaster. Would it fly? Rumours abounded that there was a design fault. That it was too heavy. That it couldn't possibly get off the ground. But it did, to rapturous cheering.

Flights between London and Singapore, already delayed by six months, start this time next year. Airports the world over are having to adapt to accommodate this monster. No longer will we board just by seat number; there will be an upstairs and downstairs as well. Offered a choice, most of us would probably opt to fly on a smaller plane. But in

the end we won't have that choice. This is, undoubtedly, the future of air travel, whether we like it or not.

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Such spectacular building projects, often overwhelming in their scale, demand to be countered by other, more gentle, more contemplative ideas. Hence my attraction to the A-Z.

In 1935, frustrated by the inaccuracies of the available London street maps of the time, Phyllis Pearsall decided to create her own. Everyday, without fail, (or so the story goes) she walked from 5 in the morning until 11 at night, hand drawing over 3000 miles of roads and passageways as she went.

Her map was an instant success, and the following year, 1936, Pearsall formed *The Geographers Map Company,* opening offices in a building on Grays Inn Road they still occupy today.

The offspring of that original publication, the A5 sized *A-Z London Street Atlas*, is the most popular map of any kind in Britain today, selling over 200,000 copies a year. It's the basis of 'The Knowledge', and is therefore the London cabby's bible, mapping, at last count, 610 square miles of the capital. We've all got one, surely, and some of you, I'm equally sure, will own more than one. Me, I own eleven. Black and white or colour, they've been bought over the years during plentiful trips to London... without a map. Too shy to ask directions to where I'm going, I buy another.

Quite by chance, the idea for *A System of Edges* came during a picnic. It was at Hampden Court in the Spring of 2003. I was idly leafing through my copy of the A-Z when I noticed that the stream in front of me ran along it's very edge, and that the field beyond was off the page altogether. Was this, I wondered, where London ends?

Later I did a little research and discovered that the extremities of the atlas change with each new edition. I sent an email to the The Geographers Map Company asking why this was, and who decided where, year on year, the map should end. I received a courteous but uninspiring reply: “Whatever the coverage published, we get requests for the atlas to be extended still further to include an address which is just beyond the existing coverage”. Fair enough, but still someone somewhere decides which parts of the periphery of London should be included, and which should not. Incidentally, the 2003 edition, which I used throughout my project, puts Hampden Court well *within* it’s boundaries. Had I had this edition with me during that picnic the implication is that I would never have thought of the idea in the first place.

*

I’m aware of a number of other photographers who have worked at ‘the edge of the city’. In Spain, for instance, there are three projects which immediately spring to mind. I remember Jim Cooke producing a piece, perhaps 20 years ago, about the periphery of Madrid, the home of his wife Maria. Another colleague, Xavier Ribas, made a series, which he calls *Sunday Pictures,* about the use of the outskirts of Barcelona for leisure. Jean Marc Bustamente’s *Tableaux* explored the inexorable growth of the same city. In America the so-called *New Topographic* photographers, in particular Lewis Baltz and Robert Adams, were concerned with the disappearance of precious land beneath the burgeoning settlements of the New West. The concept of Suburbia has lent rich pickings as well: from the gentle observations of Bill Owens to the nightmarish visions of Jeff Wall and Gregory Crewdson.

Three or four years ago I begun, tentatively, to work in a kind of suburbia, in sleepy Sussex towns like Hassocks and Burgess Hill. But the work lacked any direction. Even in a place as compact as Wivlesfield the world seemed too big, too overwhelming for me to handle and I felt lost, directionless.

What the A-Z gave me was a structure, a framework. *I’ll go to the edge of each of the*

56 pages which make up the periphery of the map and I'll photograph the landscape beyond, those places unlucky enough to fall just off the edge. There was, too, another more practical reason: our son Milligan had just been born and I wanted to do something which didn't mean my being away for several days at a time. With this idea I could make a series of day trips. If the weather was right and I had a free day then I'd drive to the edge of page 57, or 148, or 12. I'd make some pictures and I'd drive home. It was as simple as that. One night I spent at a Travelodge right on the cusp of page 10 but it was such a thoroughly depressing, never-to-be-repeated experience, it only reinforced the notion that day trips were the way to go.

So I had a structure. But what the map failed to give me was a *meaning*. For that I've had to consider *why* I was drawn to the idea in the first place; why I chose this above all the other possible schemes I've jotted down over the years following those rare 'Eureka' moments, most of which will probably sit forever undeveloped and unemployed, on a sheet of A4.

In many ways *A System of Edges* returns to some of the ideas I explored in *The Shipping Forecast*. Both make obsessive use of a single map and explore a familiar British institution, and both investigate a dialogue between real and imagined space. But to be perfectly honest I don't think it was until I had completed it that it started to dawn on me what - *perhaps* - it is *really* about.

In the visitors book to the exhibition someone has pointed out, quite correctly, that such an edge only exists on a map, and that there surely would exist another map which *would* include the spaces and places I've photographed. I agree, but I think he or she has missed the point. To be included on, or omitted from, such a popular volume is about belonging, or not. If I tell you that I was born in Harpenden, in Hertfordshire, just a mile or two from the maps northern edge, my interest in the idea might make a little more sense. Later, growing up on the outskirts of Leicester, I wanted so much to be able to tell my classmates I was born in London but of course I could not. We had a copy of the A-Z at home, and I knew full well that Harpenden was not on it.

*

I have a friend in Poland who, for many years, has been trying to see if it's possible to photograph 'nothing'. But, of course, he's finally realised what I was trying, gently, to tell him in the first place: that it's impossible. There's always something.

So I won't suggest that making pictures in the hinterlands of London is in any way *impossible*. But put it this way: I made only 407 pictures during the two years I spent on this project. Compare that to the 12,000 I took while making *The Shipping Forecast*. It's been suggested that *A System of Edges* was an exercise in photographing the unphotographable. But I don't think that's quite true. Almost, but not quite. But sitting in my car waiting for the rain to stop, staring blankly into a bleak landscape of grey brick, grey tarmac and grey people - mind-numbing blandness - I would sometimes think it was.

"To live and work here", writes David Chandler, drawing on his own experience of growing up on the edge of South West London, "is in many ways to be trapped by it's sense of unending dislocation; trapped because the area - like urban peripheries all over the world - fosters lifestyles where place and identity become irrelevant, and where time drifts forward inevitably but lifelessly, like a mechanical heartbeat".

Romford town centre is right on the edge. As is Chessington World of Adventures. And the flightpath to Heathrow Airport. I would save those locations for *special occasions*, when the very idea of driving to yet another housing estate became too much to bear; when I couldn't face my fifth trip to page 24, already knowing the line along it's edge like the back of my hand, unable to find anything of note and not understanding what I was looking for anyway, and without even a trick of light to help me. When a trip to Scratchwood Services, which is also on the edge, becomes a real *treat*, a *Grand Day Out*... well.... perhaps I was onto something after all.

From the outset I had considered that I could, if I wished, be rigidly systematic in my approach. With an inexpensive GPS I could have found the very middle of the edge of each page and pointed my camera at *exactly* what was there. This system would have borrowed, in some ways, from conceptual photography of the 1960's, and in particular the work of Ed Ruscha. His pictures, amassed in series, were not about authorship. It was the idea that mattered, not the technical or aesthetic quality of the pictures. But that approach was not for me.

Instead, I walked or drove the edge. I drove off it sometimes and often had great difficulty finding my way back again since, intentionally, I didn't carry the map of Greater London that does indeed extend further than my A-Z. So what *was* I looking for?

I believe that we are products of our own backgrounds. Our characters are shaped by the places in which we grew up. Therefore I can only assume that I was looking for something I recognised, a landscape, a thing, perhaps just a feeling, something I wanted to share with others. While making this work I did, often, sense an identification with the way that other people lived.

I spent the vast majority of my childhood in a suburban sprawl on the edge of Leicester. Oadby, which is three miles from the city centre, had once been a tiny village but it had been consumed by the growth of the city, and, therefore, it became no different from thousands of other such places all over the country. As the spaces between the city and the town were filled there was a sense that nothing was planned anymore. Things were just *put*. So I grew up not in Leicester itself, but somewhere on the edge, in a messy, incoherent place that clung limply to it's 'village' status (my parents always said that they were going down to 'the village' whenever they went to the local shops). But it was clearly a village no longer.

Lacking a decent sense of direction - perhaps a reason why I collect maps, and have to have one of everywhere I go - I would often get lost among the myriad of yellow brick houses, all seeming to lack any character at all. There was no sense of community. Had

there been such a thing as Neighbourhood Watch back then, the whole vast estate would surely have signed up.

We lived in a cul-de-sac. Although our house was near the entrance, the top of the bottle if you like, I would retreat further inside, pummeling the go-cart, lovingly made for me by Dad, up and down the short incline at it's depths. Three Scandinavian teenagers lived in the house overlooking my ramshackle circuit. How wonderfully exotic they seemed, but what on earth had brought them *here*? But I never asked them.

I was a lonely child, lacking friends, and as you know terrified of bullies. The cul-de-sac was a sanctuary, but I knew, one day, that I wanted to get out. The trouble was, I had no idea how.

A young family opposite our house, at number 2, decorated their garage door with purple, black and white geometric shapes. True, it was badly painted, and looked, frankly, pretty terrible, but as a child I couldn't help but find them fascinating. However, it seemed that all the children in our road were actively discouraged from playing with their children. I think they must have done something else beyond painting their garage badly, but to this day I don't know what it was. They were outcast because they were different. I thought I was somehow different too, but I didn't have the courage to say so. All *I* did was do my best to fit in.

The land artist Robert Smithson once wrote: 'The suburbs exist without a rational past and without the big events of history. Maybe there are a few statues, a legend and a couple of curios, but no past - just what passes for a future'. In 1967, Europe's first out-of-town superstore, *Woolco* (a swollen version of Woolworths) opened the other side of the dual carriageway. It was our very own legend. It *was* the future! To an eight year old, heaven had come early. Woolco sold books about dinosaurs. Airfix kits. Comics. In fact it seemed to sell everything. It had a drive-in tyre bay. A travel agent. It was the only place in Oadby you could buy records. It even sold guns... not just air rifles, but proper shot guns. It had *ample parking*. Saturday mornings would never be the same again.

Except nowadays it’s just a plain old Asda.

So, I guess that in some way the pictures from *A System of Edges* are about all that. They draw on *my* memories and the hope is that they communicate something to others too. Although I’ve provided a key map in the exhibition the work isn’t about specific locations; I’m not trying to describe a particular part of Shepperton, New Addington or Hornchurch. Instead it tries to describe a type of generic space which might exist anywhere.

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The last body of work I want to show you, like the Airbus A-380 assignment, is work-in-progress. It began as a Magnum group project, ten photographers, each sent to one of the ten new European Union countries. I asked to go to, and was chosen for, Poland

Initially we were each expected to spend one month in our allotted countries. But I found myself so enamored with the place that I have continued well beyond the commission. I’ve now made eight visits.

Poland is by far the largest of the ten new EU members. In fact, if you take the populations of the other nine and add them together the figure you get is approximately the same as Poland on its own. The same equation applies to its physical size.

I didn't set out to try and prove a pre-conceived thesis. I'm wary of the problems associated with working towards a specific goal in a foreign land: there is a danger that you only see what you want to see. Instead I like to remain intuitive, to learn as I go and be open-minded. Then, hopefully, the work develops naturally, with it's own momentum.

Again, I’m going to be honest with you: it’s the notion of an ‘idea’ that I’m struggling with. I don’t really know what I’m doing, what I’m trying to say. All I do know is that I have a yearning to continue, to keep going back. Part of the challenge, I think, is that Poland hasn’t really been *defined* visually. Go there now and you see only two types of picture books about the place. First, as we would expect, there are books about the ghettos

and the concentration camps, powerful, gut-wrenching, devastating collections showing life, and death, under Nazism.

And secondly there are the glossy coffee table tomes, aimed primarily at tourists, featuring all the official sites of beauty, and shot in glorious sunshine.

There is not much else. Any books by Polish photographers are either about somewhere else altogether, or otherwise of quite specific, often very personal, subjects. No one, it seems, is trying to show the bigger picture. Perhaps this is the advantage that a foreigner has; an ability to look at a country *as a whole*. It's a macro versus micro argument. In Poland I have no problem bringing together pictures from far flung parts of the country and putting them together to suggest something else. I know, however, from all the time I've spent working in England, that this is difficult to do in your own country.

I’m suspicious of photographers who claim they can get under the skin of a foreign land in just a few short weeks. Certainly I am making no such claims. I resolutely remain an outsider, freely admitting that Polish culture is different from my own and that I don't really fit in, no matter how many books I read, films I watch, or people I talk to.

In a sense my work is more akin to a topographic survey, though not in the late twentieth century manner of, say, Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz or even Joel Sternfeld and Stephen Shore, who were all dealing with a landscape and a culture they were familiar with. Perhaps, instead, I aline what I’m doing in Poland with the pioneering American photographers of the 19th century - William Henry Jackson, Timothy O'Sullivan and the rest - or the travel photographers of Victorian England. This is, of course, not to suggest that my work is in any way *pioneering*, but it's the idea of *discovery* that I find most appealing. Photography, as ever, gives me a passport to be nosey.

Poland and communism were unhappy bedfellows; I've met no one who looks back on that time with any fondness. Stalin famously said that fitting communism onto Poland was like putting a saddle on a cow. I remember very clearly watching the Solidarity

strikes on TV in the 1980's. Like a lot of us, I sold badges in support of the workers on the streets of Brighton. Today there's a museum outside the gates of the Gdansk shipyard which continually loops the footage I remember so clearly, as well as Lech Walesa's imprisonment and the chilling moment when General Jaruzelski appeared on morning TV to announce the imposition of martial law.

I must have built up a picture of what life had been like inside the shipyard, but the reality, today, is very different. It's shocking to see the place now, operating at only 20% capacity, a part-abandoned shell. There is a compelling irony here: many of those workers who fought for better pay and conditions, and who, by domino effect, paved the way to the fall of the Berlin Wall, have lost their jobs because their new employers couldn't compete with the Chinese.

I travel with a guide and interpreter. Konrad Pustola is an economist-turned-photographer. His wife Magda is a sociologist and cultural historian. Together they keep an eye on me to ensure that I don’t deal in cliches. They tell me I’m getting better. But a complication, as I try my best to avoid cliche, is that Poland is experiencing 20% unemployment. In the major cities, of course, this figure is much lower, but the former mining towns of Upper Silesia are further testament to a dream of capitalism gone sour. This region, one of the bleakest places I have ever seen, is now home to one of Europe's largest shopping malls as Poland continues it's inexorable rollercoaster ride West. Quite who this mall is targeted at I have no idea. Most people seemed only to be using it to shelter from the incessant rain.

How could I have possibly imagined, as I sat heavily on the top of that poor camel (on a memorable but utterly bizarre family holiday to Rumania at the height of the cold war) that one day I’d be standing here, on this stage. Photography has helped me escape from my own cul-de-sac, and I’m very grateful for that.