

Editorial

How do you tell a story, in photographs? With a beginning, a middle and an end, of course. How do you record and explain what people are doing? By showing all the different things they do. But how do you express a simple idea? An emotion? I suggest that one way is by repetition.

An idea can be expressed or reinforced by exact repetition – think of Warhol’s Campbell’s Soup can prints – though it can quickly get uninteresting. But *similar* repeated images can powerfully explain ideas through slight differences. You lose sight of repeated common elements because it is the differences that convey the meaning.

Three of the contributors to this issue use repetition in their work. Dániel Szalai has gone to great lengths to take his portraits of chickens against identical backgrounds in identical lighting – without being told otherwise, we would assume they were one chicken. They are in fact individuals, though it is their near-identity that allows us to exploit them for the mass production of eggs for use in vaccine production. Szalai’s work shines a light on how we see ourselves in relation to other species on this planet; through that, perhaps, he also questions our capitalist culture.

Alan Cameron’s repetition is in the mechanics of his photography, taking shots of the same location at fixed time intervals. The differences are in the people who occupy that space – taking slivers of time from their lives, extracted (as he explains) from the immensity of the space-time continuum. From these fragments recorded in a confined space, we can try (limited only by our imagination) to fill in the rest of their lives in other spaces. Donna Bridgewater’s repetition is in her approach to photographing her subjects; the differences are visible firstly in their written messages, and then through the wide spectrum of people writing them.

Stravinsky’s *Apollo* ballet is performed by individual dancers for each role. Douglas May has taken just the one dancer, Jack Anderson as Apollo, to provide the common element in his series. We can see, though, how one photographer and one performer together create a distinct theme or character for each sequence.

By contrast, Tomasz Loboska and Michal Solarski tell true stories with no repetition; even the people shown are substitutes for those they are depicting. But is there a common element holding the images together? I think there is, in a certain formality of composition, that stops them from being just a documentary record of what happened.

Repetition is one end of a spectrum of ways to create a coherent body of work.

Paul Ashley, Editor

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Back cover: © photo by Tomasz Liboska & Michal Solarski
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Contemporary Photography

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Deadline for the Summer 2021 issue is 1 June 2021.

Contemporary Group ethos - Photography that conveys ideas, stimulates thought and encourages interpretation; photographs ‘about’ rather than ‘of’.

Getting Through This

Donna Bridgewater

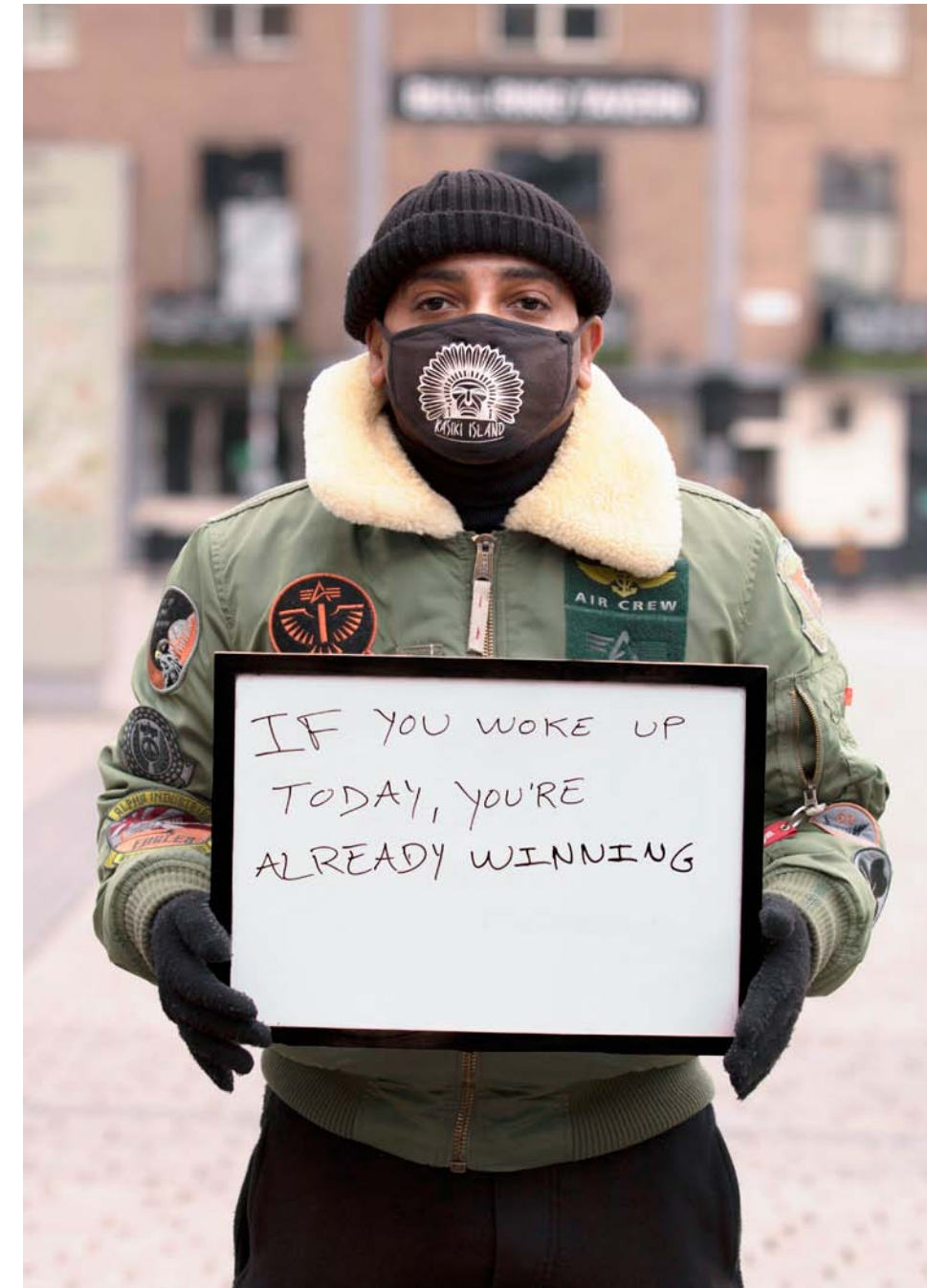
As we have lived through the coronavirus pandemic, Donna Bridgewater has been chronicling people's emotions to create a conversation around mental health. The project documents a variety of messages from people and how they are feeling during the pandemic.

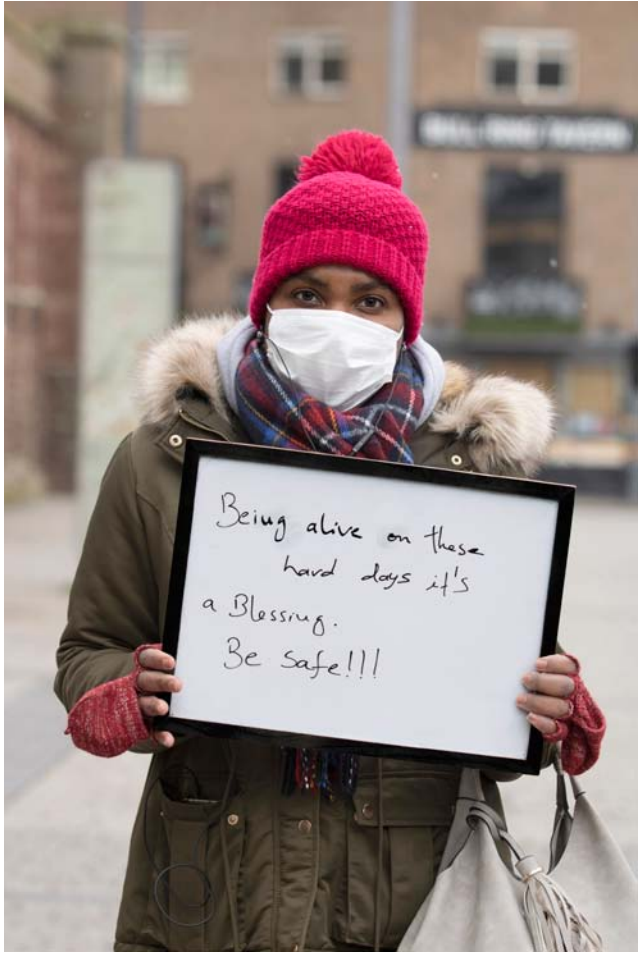
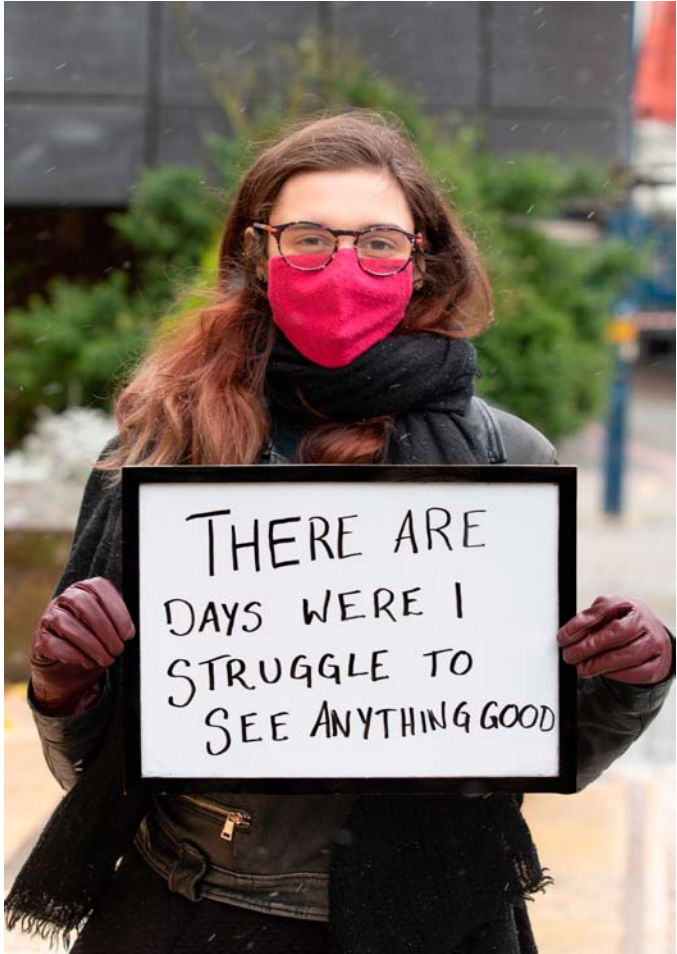
The main inspiration for the project was losing her sister to suicide in 2019, but also hearing in the media how COVID-19 is affecting so many lives, leading to mental health illnesses and suicides. Donna herself has suffered with mental health and anxiety; she finds that when you hear how others are struggling it can help your own emotions, making you feel you're not the only person feeling this way. Furthermore, exploring positive quotes can help bring light to the darkness in your mind.

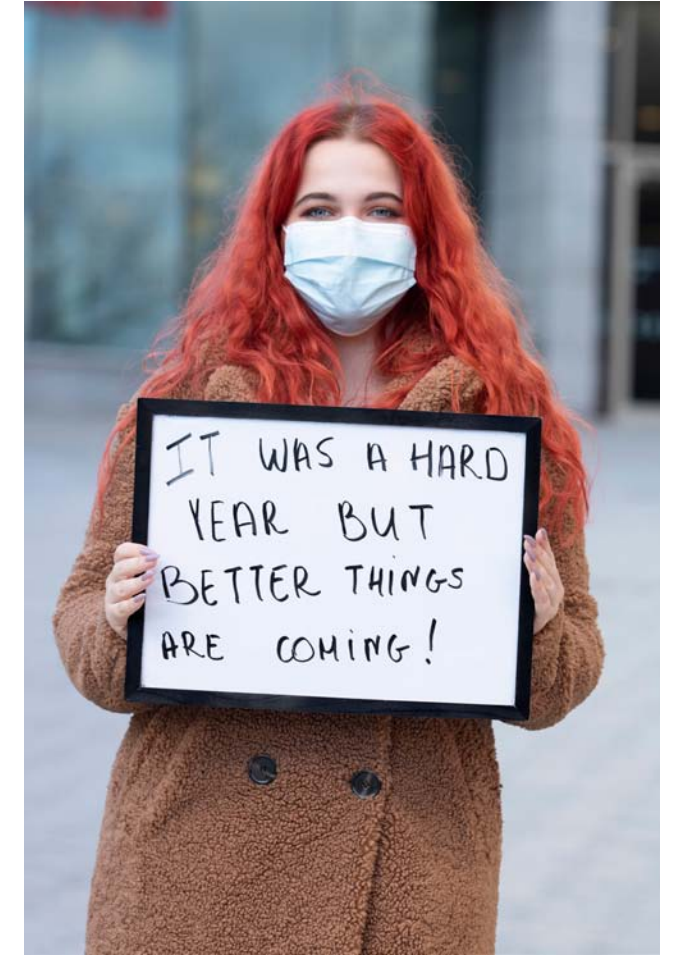
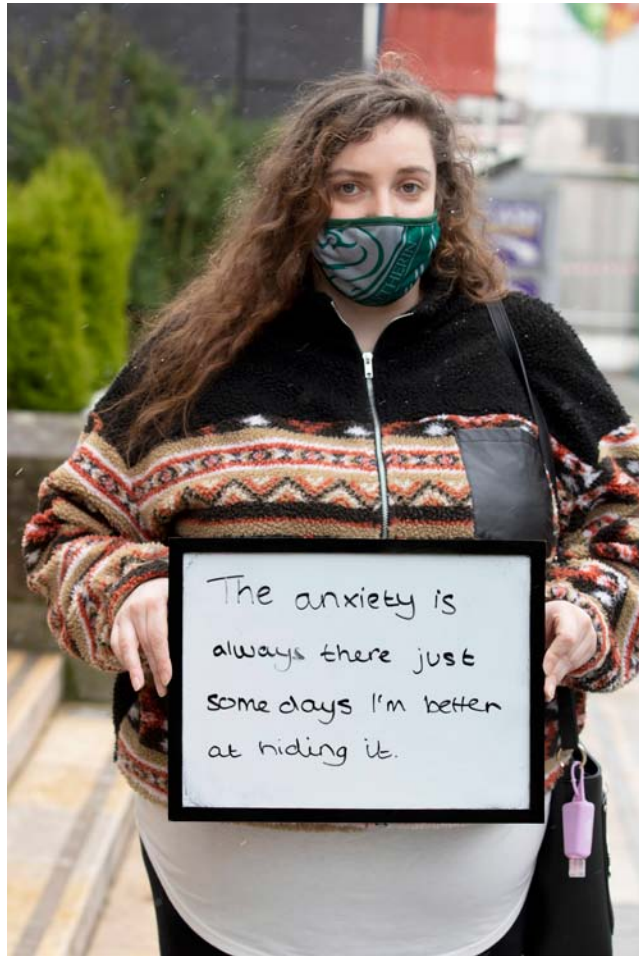
Through the project *Getting Through This* she has connected with people in the community from different backgrounds, ages and cultures. It has given people a platform to open up about their own emotions and feelings around the current pandemic. In each of the portraits the subject displays a powerful but positive message to help people get through these uncertain times. She wants people to read the message and feel like they are not alone; she wants to bring a positive outlook on someone's day, to let people know that it is OK to not feel OK, and to allow people to connect with the messages expressed by others.

As everything eases there are lots of people still struggling with anxiety and depression, *Getting Through This* is a project Donna will be continuing to work on after the pandemic to help people that are struggling with mental health.

See: www.bridgewater-photography.com







Stealing from Space-Time

Alan Cameron LRPS

Our earth moves continuously within the space-time continuum. From second to second it changes position in relation to the sun and within the universe. We can never reverse time, but can we somehow extract a little piece of it? I would argue that we photographers steal a small portion of that continuum each time we make an exposure.

Time can be measured in aeons or milliseconds, and space in parsecs (roughly 3.1 trillion km) or nanometres (one millionth of a millimetre). In photography the space we capture is constrained by location, the angle of view of the lens we use and the distance to any object that limits our view. Photographic time is measured by the shutter speed, as fast as 1/8000s or as slow as hours, days, or even months.

On 13 October 2018 I stood in one place in front of the Triton Fountain in Regent's Park in London and made 18 exposures between 15.49.55s and 15.58.45s pm GMT. I captured small snippets of the space-time continuum (between 1/40s and 1/160s) in the 73.7° angle of view of my lens to record that period of 8 minutes and 50 seconds.

In those few minutes the stones of the fountain did not noticeably change, though many litres of water will have flowed through the jets and into the basin. I will have breathed roughly 100 times and my heart will have beat about 650 times. Within my brain the many trillions of neurons will have been creating and processing messages that helped me to be aware of my surroundings and create a memory of the event.

My memory soon became hazy – I certainly remember the event, and, while I remember it was very warm for October, I don't remember the wind direction or the strength.

Unaided recall is surprisingly malleable, being more or less accurate, depending on the state of arousal of our amygdalae, bodies within the brain that determine the quality of our memories. As time passes we struggle to retrieve a memory accurately, but that becomes much less true when we take a photograph.

What I captured was the changing human aspect of the landscape. People moved singly or together through the space I had delineated and some sat down to rest. A photographer stood close in front of me and took a picture while a small child played. An elderly woman walked the long way round the fountain



while her younger companion (her son or carer?) took the shortest route until they met again. Lovers stopped, kissed and walked on, ignoring their surroundings. A toddler became fascinated by the water.

As for my subjects: I do not know what preceded or succeeded the events unfolding in those nine minutes beside the fountain. We can invent all sorts of possibilities for the time before or after the few milliseconds of each exposure, but my photographs have forever captured the instants when I tripped the shutter.

I stole effortlessly from space-time using a box with a lens, a shutter and a recording medium. I am enamoured of the idea that any viewer, with the context explained, can visit and revisit the visual aspect of those nine minutes at will.

see arcamphotos.uk





Apollo

Douglas May FRPS

Apollo was the Greek god of music. His half sisters were Muses who visited him and instructed him in their arts. Calliope is the Muse of poetry whose symbol is a tablet. Polyhymnia is the Muse of mime whose symbol is a mask which represents the power of gesture. Terpsichore is the Muse of song and dance whose symbol is a lyre.

Out of this story Stravinsky composed a ballet in two scenes. The first is the birth of Apollo. The second is the visit of the Muses and the lessons learned by Apollo from them. It finishes with Apollo's journey and ascent to Parnassus.

The dancer Jack Anderson and I have sought through dance, photography and Stravinsky's music to interpret the story.



Birth of Apollo



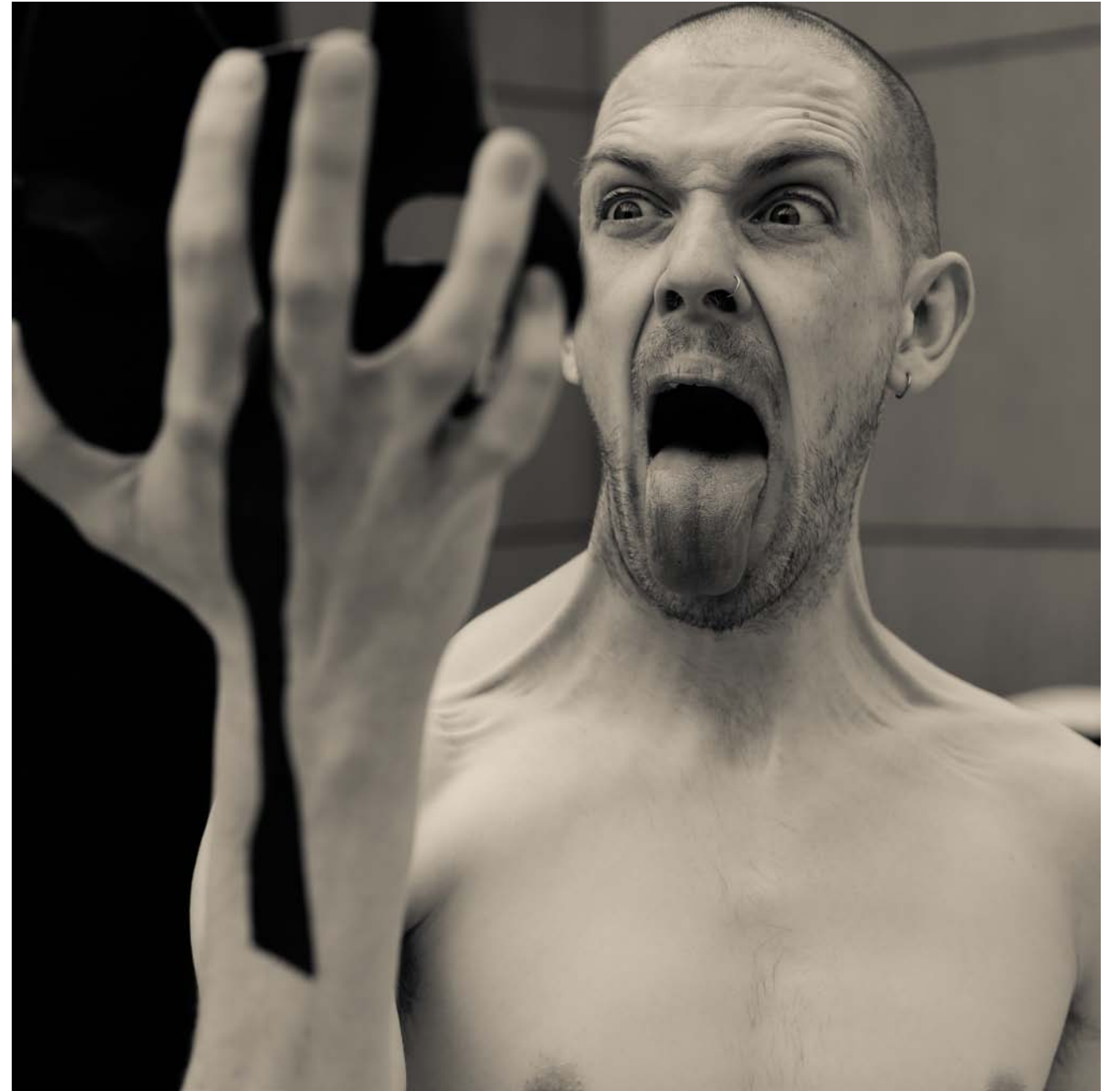
Birth of Apollo



Calliope



Polyhymnia



Polyhymnia



Terpsichore



Apollo's ascent to Parnassus

Novogen

Dániel Szalai

The notion of the 'anthropocene' was developed this century to describe the geological epoch when the impacts of humans are detectable in the stratigraphic record. As a geological term it covers a minuscule interval: 10,000 years at most, where other epochs are measured in millions of years.

Perhaps our need for such a term is significant in itself: the earth has managed perfectly well for 5 billion years without our help, but we think we are now so important that we must give our name to a part of its history – we take an 'anthropocentric' view of time itself. We take a similarly anthropocentric view of our environment and the other species with which we share it. Not content with just cohabiting, we classify, name, manage, consume, harvest, crop and herd them – and breed them the better to serve our needs. What is it about our view of the world that permits us to exploit other species so comprehensively?

Dániel Szalai addresses this question by looking, not at the now familiar battery chicken and egg production factories that yield us food, but at how we use another species to produce on our behalf the ingredients of pharmaceuticals that we rely on for our health.

The Novogen White is a breed of chicken genetically engineered by the French company, Novogen. When raised under rigid hygiene and biosecurity controls, they lay so-called SPF (Specific Pathogen Free) eggs. These eggs are suitable substrates for human and veterinary vaccine production, as well as for pharmaceutical research and development. The life cycle of the hens lasts 90 weeks, and comprises an 18-week rearing period followed by a production period of 72 weeks. A hen lays around 400 eggs, worth up to seven euros each. At the age of 90 weeks, when the quality of their eggs no longer meets the required standards, the hens are euthanized. Since the bodyweight of a Novogen White layer is only a fraction of a broiler's, processing them is not profitable; their carcasses are incinerated.

The power of Szalai's work comes from its depiction of the loss of the individual in the collective, alien purpose we have chosen for them. He has taken multiple, beautifully-lit, formal 'portraits' of healthy individual hens: they are otherwise indistinguishable from each other, a sense reinforced by the images of the laying sheds, the egg sorting machines and the stacks of egg trays. The ultimate end is shown in the view of the eggs being injected with the virus or antigen to be grown in them. Dániel Szalai is not overtly judgemental, but his questioning of our anthropocentric view of the world implicitly also asks questions of our own capitalist culture.

Text by Paul Ashley

See: danielszalai.com







Cut It Short

Tomasz Liboska & Michał Solarski

We come from a little town of more or less four thousand people, in the southern edge of Poland. This is the place where twenty years ago, both of us were coming of age. It was nothing unusual, growing up is a process everyone goes through and there are certain things we all must encounter and discover at some point or another, and people of a certain generation find themselves going through the same fads and trends as fashion, attitudes and politics enter our awareness, well, at least that's what we think.

It was the early 90's, and if you really wanted to be cool, there was only one way – to declare war on your hairdresser, wear anything stripy and dive into the very depth of the Grunge revolution. Of course, we had our own band and dreams of bundling off to Seattle. How the hell would we know back then that the rain there can be as persistent as acne?! One way or another, achieving rock star status was only a matter of time for us. We were keeping our fingers on the pulse of affairs – even when the intricate plan to bone our friend's older sister went haywire... The commotion when the parents came home earlier than expected – what a story! Oh yes, losing our virginities was the priority, it was even more important than the stage career.

One day we decided to make the world a better place – then and there, just like in the musical about hair, before we reached 30 and lost all faith in ourselves. We cut our hair short and became vegetarians in an act of defiance against mainstream society. You have to realize that in

those days, in a place like our town, you were risking public outcry for openly rejecting meat! Did we mention we cared little about conventions?!

All that counted was our friendship and our dreams. And always, while listening to another new CD, somewhere in between the first and second bottle of cheap wine, that absolute certainty of having our lives under control was coming back. Time had stopped. But, before we learned the rules of the game, it was already over. Fate pushed to the front row unannounced. It wasn't the first time fate had played unfairly. We happened to choose different schools, we started to eat burgers and to visit hairdressers from time to time. Both of us went to find our own happiness far from the little town we once used to call 'home', choosing different places in different parts of the world. Something else happened along the way, something that was not at all part of the plan – we both started taking pictures.

Today we return to the familiar place with Dominik and Marek. With their help we are trying to reconstruct past events of our lives. We are playing the scenes, one by one, trying to remember every possible detail, each gesture, each word, but still we have to improvise. Many of the places we used to know, either don't exist anymore or have changed completely. Slowly, we are back in the game. Sneaky fate – you better play your cards carefully this time!

See: www.tomaszliboska.com / www.michalsolarski.com









The Pilgrims Touch

Book Review by Tom Owens ARPS

This book is the culmination of on-line coaching sessions for seven photographers with two very experienced and practising photographers. I know nothing of the original aims and outcomes of attending the workshops and whether a book was always going to be the product.

I wonder at how the working title was construed. Was it the serial nature of imposed lockdowns that made their physical attendance give way to a virtual attendance, and therefore subliminally a spiritual attendance in the presence of leading practitioners of contemporary photography?

The term 'pilgrim' conjures up the notion of someone on a personal crusade, for whatever reason, to reach a more elevated state of consciousness and wellbeing. I suppose if one has identified a path of photographic progress that requires some mentorship then this is in truth a form of pilgrimage.

Virtually all the images in this book are constructed or manipulated images with very little text so there needs to be some form of visual pull purely on the aesthetics of the images in the context of the brief description of each of the storyteller's synopses. Technically, they are fine but the narrative needs to be obvious to a casual reader and I am not sure that this is achieved.

There are some visual signposts and there is some accompanying text but for me I find it difficult to understand the narrative and maybe there is nothing wrong with that in that pilgrimages are normally quite selfish indulgences that mean something spiritually to the individual that is enhanced by the experiences of their fellow temporary companions. To that end, I expect the stories mean something to the group, but that message is lost on me. It seems to be more a memento of their collective experience than book of narrative photography.

Being an outsider, and not knowing the baselines from which each of these pilgrims started their personal quests, it is difficult to assess their relative successes. Not all pilgrimages attain success and sometimes the path well-trod has to be trodden many more times before that nirvana is reached.

For me, it is unclear that the obstacles put in their way by COVID-19 and the serial lockdowns has been articulated in the visual narratives other than some of the more obvious literal ones. Many suggest the barriers are still very much there and will not be overcome. Some of those barriers may well have been there before the pandemic struck.

Overall, I feel that maybe each participant could have presented their own narrative in their individual styles in separate books or have had an editor select and layout the stories in a more conversational way. I suspect that would have been costly but this book as it is presented is more akin to an album of a journey undertaken by a group of 'seven strangers' over a short period.

The contributors to *The Pilgrims Touch* are Claude Trew, Peter Ellis, Gunilla Treen, Brian Etherington ARPS, Val Lear, Julie Waldmann and Gail Macindoe LRPS.

To see and purchase *The Pilgrims Touch*: www.bit.ly/3s7WB46



View from the Central Region

Steff Hutchinson ARPS

In the Central Region, the Contemporary and Documentary special interest groups have joined forces to set up the newest regional sub-group. As members of both groups tend to work in series rather than one-off images, and both are creating work with ‘something to say’, this seems to have been a good fit.

We had our first meeting in October, via Zoom, and have met monthly ever since. We meet on the second Wednesday of each month – chosen in the hope that it wouldn’t clash with other activities, as everyone else chooses the first week of the month – at 7pm. We’ve discussed having less frequent sessions, but at the moment meeting monthly suits us well.

In each meeting so far, we’ve shared the work of members of the group, with some people sharing several projects over the six months we’ve been meeting. We usually have about 4 projects to look at and discuss. These have included audio-visual work; work using interesting techniques, such as in-camera double-exposure and using infra-red sensors; formal presentations and informal discussions. We’ve also shared project proposals and part-finished work, encouraging each other to continue and sparking new ideas for creativity.

At our next meetings, we have invited each member to share something we can all take part in. This could be a theme for future photographic work, or an article we could all read to discuss at a future meeting.

There are about eight stalwarts of the group, who attend every meeting, but a mailing list of about 25, so others drop in and out as their other activities allow. We come from across the Midlands, from Newport and Shrewsbury in the North-West of our region, to Leamington Spa and Kenilworth in the East, down to Worcester and then Ross-on-Wye in the South-West. We’re very happy to welcome new members at any time.

Meeting up in person when we’re able would be interesting but also tricky to negotiate. The online nature of our group has allowed us to forge links that would have been hard to maintain in any other form. It’s brought discussion of contemporary and documentary photography into our living and creative work spaces, and in the current situation, that’s no bad thing.

GROUP AND RELATED SOCIETY EVENTS

Social distancing is likely to be part of our lives for some time to come, so the Contemporary Group is developing a programme of online events. The Society also offers a wider range of events and courses than we can list here. Creativity is also helping some of our regional groups with distanced meetings.

See the RPS website for more details of these meetings and to book your place. Keep an eye on the RPS website, *Concept* and the group Facebook page for details of future talks.

Group online meetings

Getting through this, a conversation with Donna Bridgewater, 17 May 2021, 19.00-20.00.

See the RPS website for more details of this meeting and to book your place. Keep an eye on the RPS website, *Concept* and the group Facebook page for details of future talks.

Regional online meetings

- Contemporary East. Meetings are held monthly in the afternoons. Contact Tom Owens for more information.
- Contemporary North. Meetings will be held on 15 May and 19 June. Contact Patricia Ruddle for more information.
- Contemporary South West. Contact Adrian Hough for details of regional meetings.
- Contemporary Northwest. Contact Alan Cameron for details of regional meetings.
- Contemporary Central. Meetings are held jointly with the Documentary Group on the second Wednesday of the month at 7pm (12 May, 9 June, 14 July). Contact Steff Hutchinson for more information.

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