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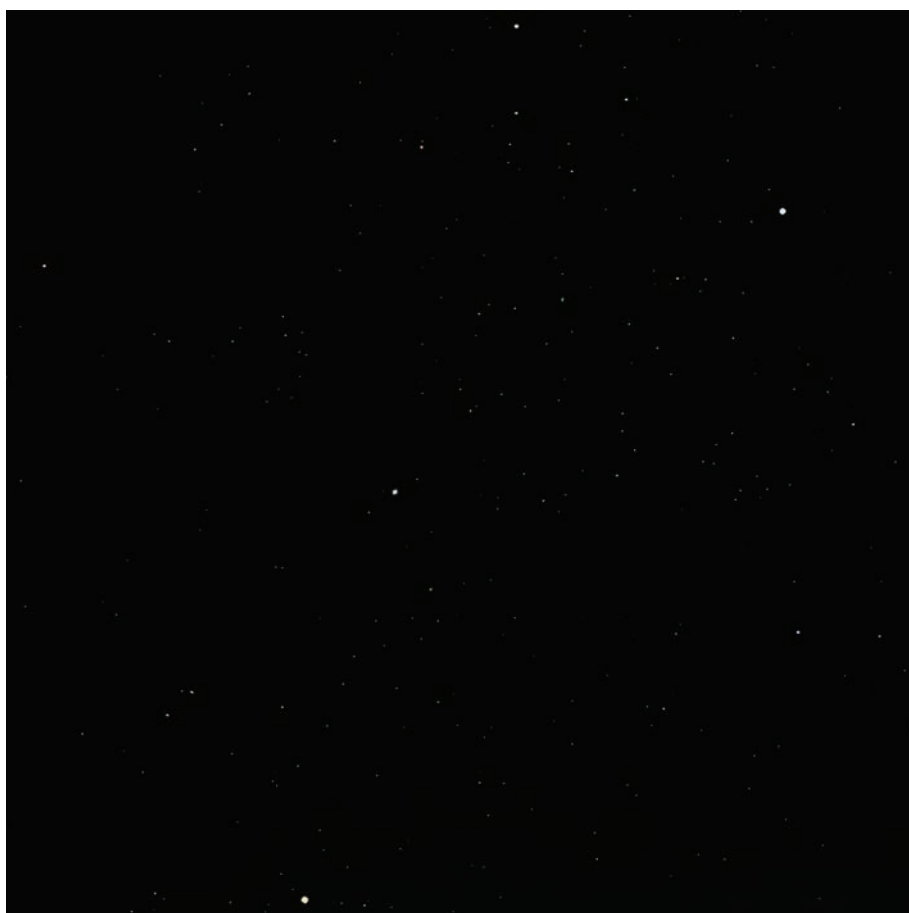












































O n b r i e f l y m i s p l a c i n g m y s p e c t a c l e s (a t r u e s t o r y)

A Sunny afternoon, central London, three weeks ago.

After a productive few hours working on the magazine with the designer in Smithfield, Guy made his way to the bus stop by St Paul's (he would usually have cycled, but his bike had got a puncture the day before). After waiting twenty minutes he grew frustrated, due both to the absence of any buses and the noise of the police helicopter circling overhead, so started the walk east towards London Bridge to catch a bus north from there.

He was met by the crowds at Queen Victoria Street, in the financial district, near Bank. They had spoken about the protests on the Today Programme that morning. He had read about them, too, in the various London rags (delighted, he thought, to have something other than pictures of Peaches Geldoff falling in and out of nightclubs with which to fill their pages). He was quietly amused that the bankers had all 'dressed down' that day in their casual weekend gear, to avoid becoming the pin-striped targets for the thousands who had gathered in the capital with their banners and beer cans and discontent. And so he entertained images of the city boys in their chinos and polo shirts, as conspicuous as ever, amongst the combat trousers and Palestinian-style scarves which had come together that afternoon outside their assorted work places.

Entering the crowd, he fondly recalled the burning of Poll Tax bills and the chants of 'Maggie, Maggie, Maggie, Out! Out! Out!', which he would always insist were so integral to his childhood. So he struggled, too, with the slight guilt he felt for not having called off the meeting with the designer and joined the masses (not unlike the time he'd worked in the local cinema on the day of the big Iraq protest years before). Although he had, last week, made a conscious effort to track down some pictures of the recent riots in Athens on the Observer website, and had forwarded the link to any number of friends.

Fully immersed now, he looked across the hordes that had gathered beneath the headquarters of one of the big banks (he couldn't, later on, remember precisely which). The police,

as everyone would subsequently learn, were out in force that day. Moving in single file through the crowd with shields and batons, asserting their presence and, at times, he thought, looking visibly scared.

Yet, for all the sense that something might be simmering here (indeed, as things turned out, it was), the crowd to Guy seemed strangely muted. Glancing occasionally across to one another for some hint of what they might do now, from time to time a chant would start up, as two fingers were raised to the glass and steel and chants of 'scum' or 'shame on you' gradually grew louder. But these moments were short-lived, petering out as the crowd lost interest or, one by one, became self-conscious, even a little embarrassed, at the futility of their efforts. A critical mass, perhaps, united in their discontent, but incapable, he thought, of articulating this in any meaningful fashion. He loathed how smug he had become.

Then, as though by some default reaction or a perverse and pre-programmed mechanism, the crowd reached for their phones, pointing the small screens up at the bank staff who had gathered at their windows. A group of twenty-somethings, mainly, probably involved in admin, he thought. Perhaps complicit in recent wrong doings - as the dispensable cogs in a bigger machine - but certainly not its operators.

And, in the end, who there wasn't complicit in all of this, in one way or another? Soon the gesture was returned by the bodies huddled at the windows, who, with bemused smiles, pulled out their own phones and began to photograph the people gathered below. As though intuitively aware of their impotence, the all-pervasiveness of the system that had prompted this peculiar confrontation, the crowd sought solace in a world of images, a world the two sides shared - if you could even call them sides - not to mention the news crews and CCTV cameras that surveyed the whole absurd and sorry scene. Protester photographing banker photographing protester, whilst the helicopters circled overhead. No one, it seemed, could imagine it any other way.

Ben Burbidge, London, April 2009.

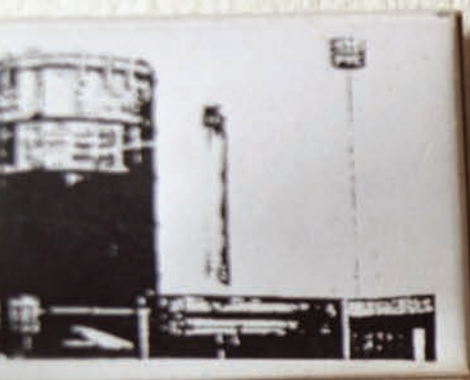
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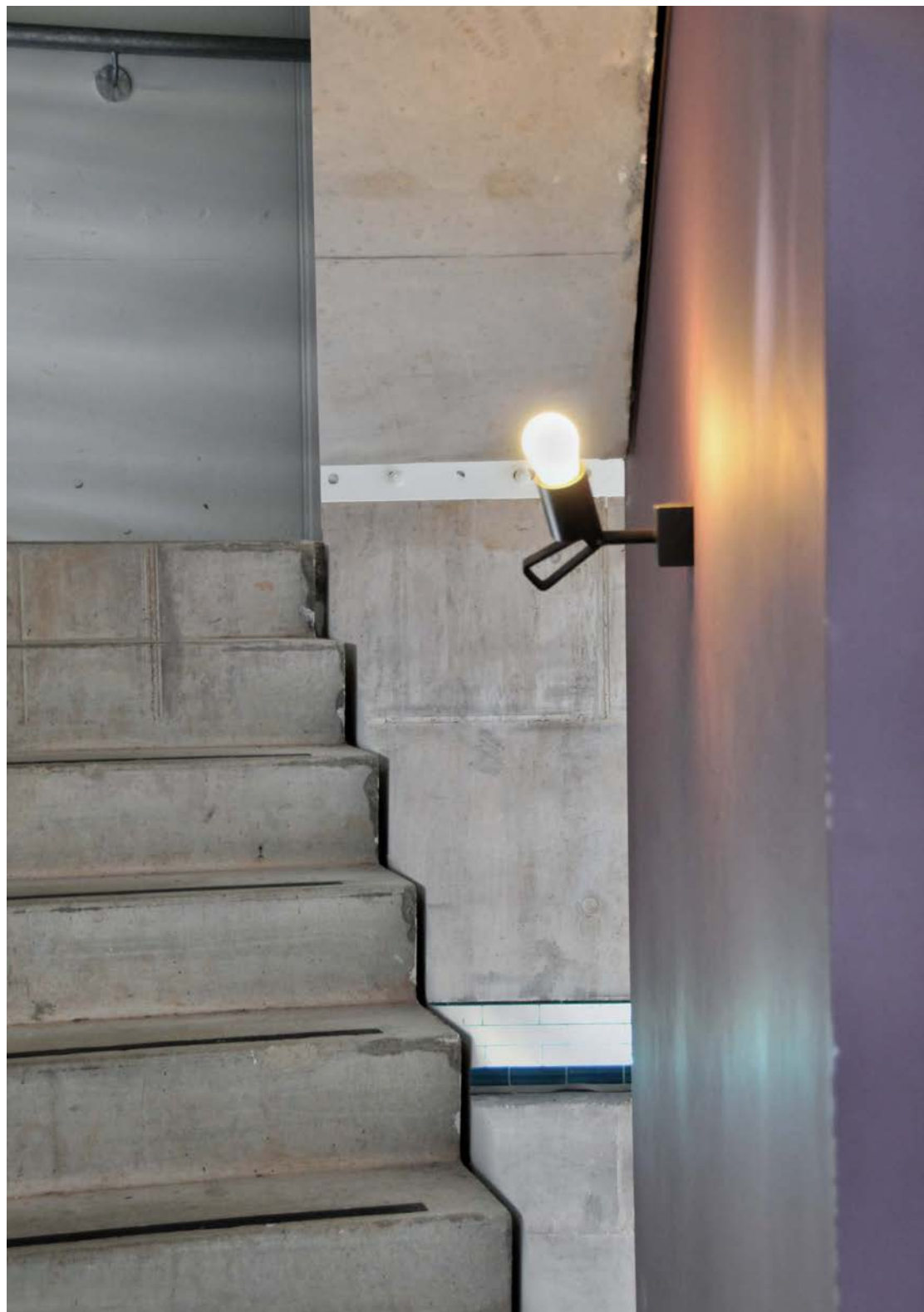




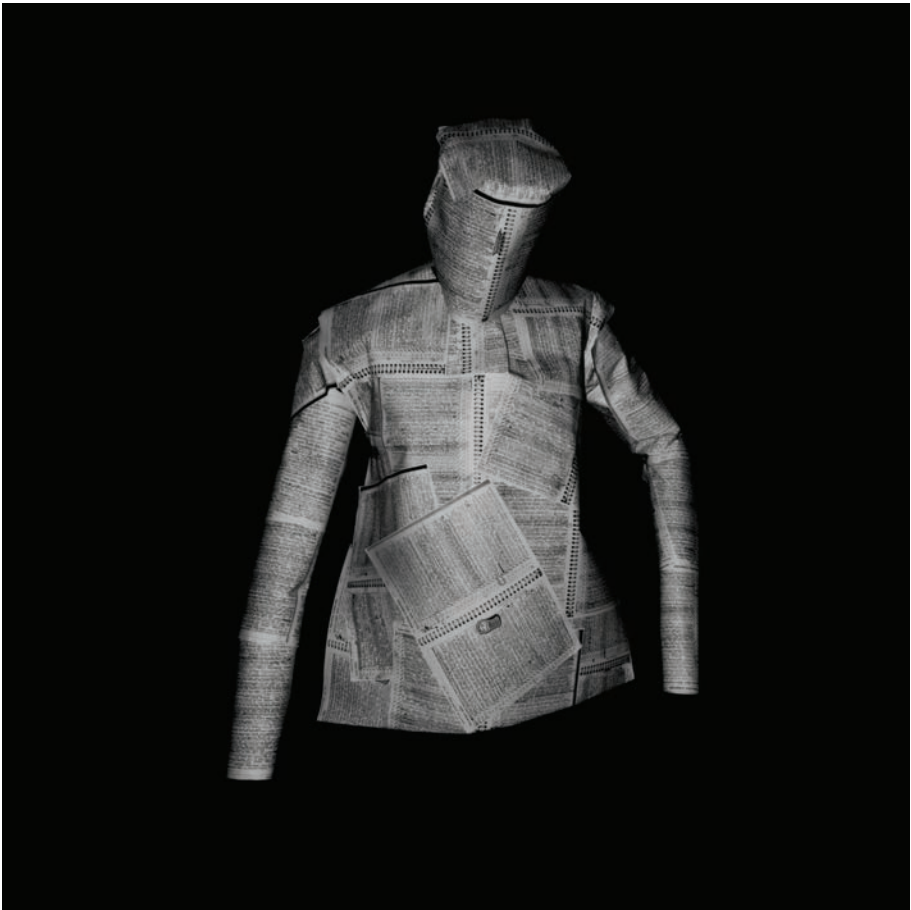






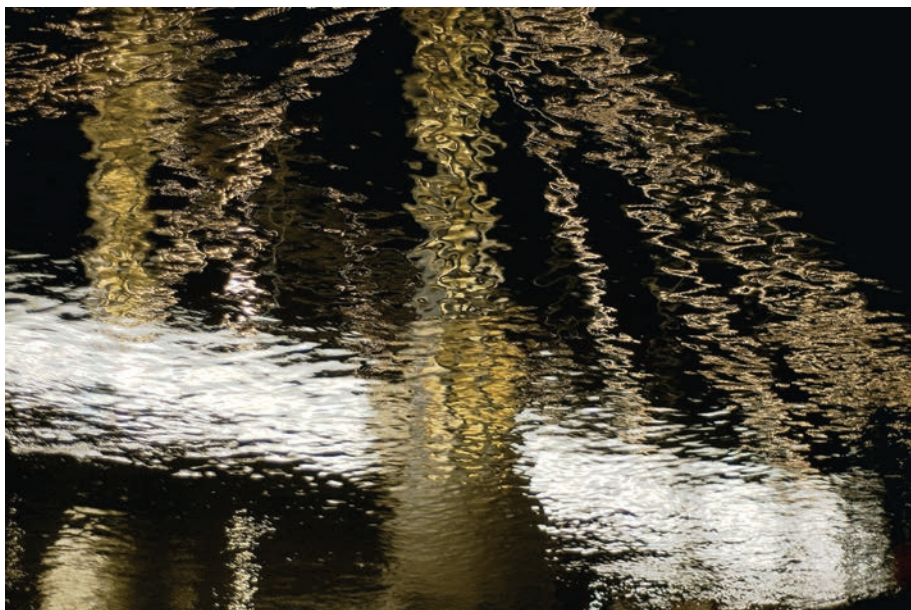
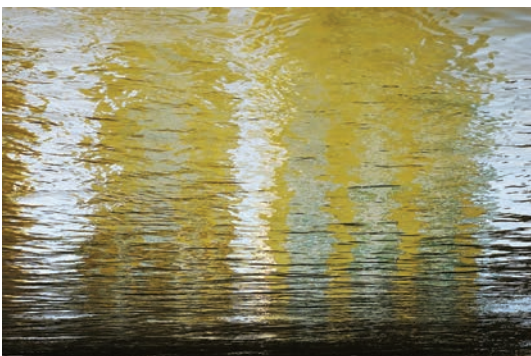
















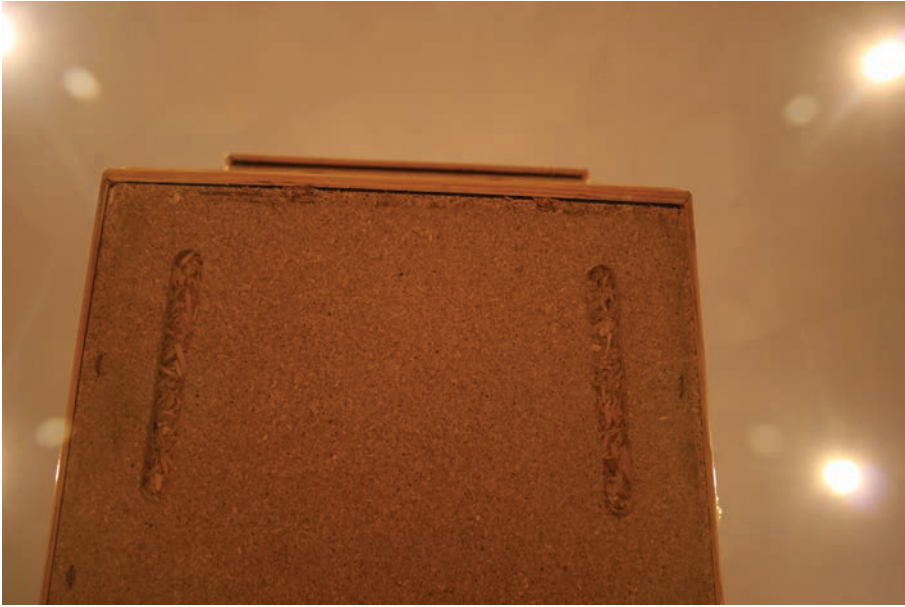
















A f t e r w o r d

The past twenty years have witnessed an unprecedented embrace of photography by museums and art galleries. As Michael Fried has recently gone to lengths to suggest, this was prompted by, and served to encourage, a certain self-consciousness at the level of production – the anticipation of particular forms of attention acting to guarantee particular forms of picture making. Large-scale prints, typological detachment, and elaborate cinematic productions, each in their own way struck a contemporary chord, successfully tapped into the zeitgeist.

As crucial as this period may have been with regards to photography's successful consecration as part of an artistic mainstream, when one looks back on this most recent of histories (particularly from our recession-fixated present) it is difficult to avoid a niggling uncertainty regarding the ethical implications of such detachment, the slickness of such surfaces, the manner in which scale sometimes risks overwhelming subject matter. We can, perhaps, recognize something inappropriate in the decadence of these lavish creations or gargantuan prints. Just as uncritical seriality and practices founded on repetition seemed at times to be strategically geared towards the market, production values such as these may now speak too openly, too enthusiastically, of money.

In their place, we are beginning to encounter a spirit of engagement and of play, as seriality and detachment are gently nudged aside by the receptive, the responsive, and the individually conceived, and viewers are tentatively guided towards new ways of seeing. An immersion in the world resulting in a renewed commitment to the particularities of subject. Subtle synchronicities and telling anomalies unearthed amidst the detritus of the everyday. Hidden meanings accessible only via involved and intuitive scrutiny of more concrete domains. Quiet observations, simple discoveries, modest but effective re-imaginings.

Something necessary and positive is potentially affirmed by this involvement. The world, in all its banal and exquisite detail, may still prove an intriguing, bewildering and quietly enthralling place. A place we should – indeed must – continue to renew, through our engagement.



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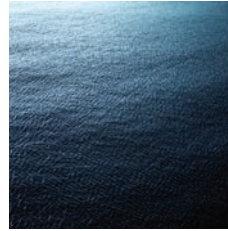
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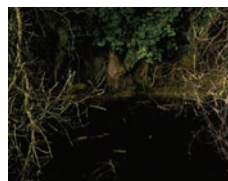
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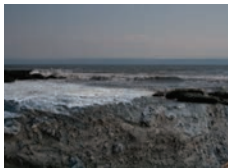


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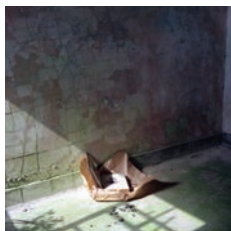
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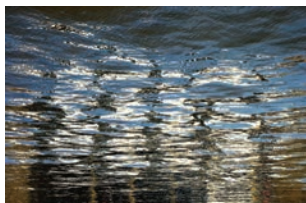
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UWN BA PHOTO ART

Published by The University
of Wales, Newport

University of Wales, Newport
Caerleon Campus
Lodge Road
Caerleon
Newport
South Wales
NP18 3QT

ISBN: 978-1-899274-40-6

Edited by: Benedict Burbridge

Publication Design: Steven Dawson
Cover Printed on Think4 Bright (fsc) 300gsm
Text Printed & Images on Think4 Bright (fsc) 170gsm

Printed by Taylor Brothers
13 - 25 Wilder Street
Bristol
BS2 8PY

Published in an edition of 600
June 2009

**University
of Wales,
Newport**

Newport School
of Art, Media and
Design

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Cymru,
Casnewydd**

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