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UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

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Ph.D

Waste of a Nation: Photography, Abjection and Crisis in Thatcher's Britain

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ABSTRACT

This examination of photography in Thatcher's Britain explores the abject photographic responses to the discursive construction of 'sick Britain' promoted by the Conservative Party during the years of crisis from the late 1970s onwards. Through close visual analyses of photojournalist, press, and social documentary photographs, this Ph.D examines the visual responses to the Government's advocacy of a 'healthy' society and its programme of social and economic 'waste-saving'.

Drawing Imogen Tyler's interpretation of 'social abjection' (the discursive mediation of subjects through exclusionary modes of 'revolting aesthetics') into the visual field, this Ph.D explores photography's implication in bolstering the abject and exclusionary discourses of the era. Exploring the contexts in which photographs were created, utilised and disseminated to visually convey 'waste' as an expression of social abjection, this Ph.D exposes how the Right's successful establishment of a neoliberal political economy was supported by an accelerated use and deployment of revolting photographic aesthetics.

My substantial contribution to knowledge is in tracking the crises of Thatcher's Britain through reference to an 'abject structure of feeling' in British photography by highlighting a photographic counter-narrative that emerged in response to the prevailing discourse of social sickness. By analysing the development and reframing the photographic languages of British documentary photographers such as Chris Killip, Tish Murtha, Martin Parr and Nick Waplington, I demonstrate how such photography was explicitly engaged in affirmative forms of social abjection and 'grotesque realism'. This Ph.D examines how this renewed form of documentary embodied an insurgent photographic visual language which served to undercut the encompassing discourses of exclusionary social abjection so pervasive at the time.

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:.....Alice Compton.....

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Section One: Introducing the Sick Man of Europe

Introduction

i. Research Context and Questions

The principal objective is to persuade the electorate to reject Socialism... [to feel] a deep aversion to the Labour-trade union leadership link and its result – the “Sick Society”... [and] a strong desire for something better – the “Healthy Society”.¹

John Hoskyns, ‘Stepping Stones’ report, 1977

A new and more confident country is waiting to cut loose the shackles of Socialism.²

Margaret Thatcher, Speech to Conservative Rally at Blenheim Palace, July, 1977

I’m also interested in making the photographs work on another level, showing how British society is decaying; how this once great society is falling apart... [I am] looking at wider aspects of the decay in the fabric of a society, our supposedly affluent society.³

Martin Parr on his project *The Last Resort*, 1983–6

This examination of photography, abjection and crisis in Thatcher’s Britain explores the longterm photographic responses to the discursive construction of ‘sick Britain’ articulated in policy advisor John Hoskyns’s *Stepping Stones* report of 1977. Hoskyns’s communication strategy provided the Conservative Party leader Margaret Thatcher with a master-plan for communicating the need for a wholly new way of life to a discontented electorate. For the Conservative Party to fully establish a political economy structured around entrepreneurial freedoms, private property rights, the free market, minimal state intervention, and expanding personal wealth,⁴ winning the election, Hoskyns argued, was not enough. What the party needed to encourage was ‘a sea change in Britain’s political economy’, a fundamental revolution of its ‘mental set’, and an explicit rejection of socialism in favour of a ‘social market economy’.⁵ Hoskyns’s report outlined the ‘stepping stones’ that would pave the way for this neoliberal

¹ J. Hoskyns, “Stepping Stones” report (final text), 14 November, 1977, p. 2. Thatcher MSS, Churchill College Archive, Cambridge, THCR 2/6/1/248.

² M. Thatcher, Speech to Conservative Rally at Blenheim Palace, 16 July, 1977, Margaret Thatcher Foundation (digital collection) Document 103420. All references to Margaret Thatcher Foundation Website will henceforth be cited as MTFW Document [number].

³ Martin Parr reflecting on his project *The Last Resort* (1986) in 1992. Quoted in V. Williams, *Martin Parr* (London: Phaidon, 2004) p. 160

⁴ The characteristics of a free market economy described here are based upon the attributes of neoliberalism as defined by David Harvey in D. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), p. 2.

⁵ Hoskyns, “Stepping Stones” , p. 28

revolution by advising the Conservative Party to unambiguously align visions of sickness and health with social, political and economic policies of the Left and the Right. The influence of Hoskyns's report on Thatcher's Conservative Party is apparent in the abject references to the health of 'sick Britain' and the condition of the 'national body' that became hallmarks of the Conservative Party's discourse from the late 1970s onwards.

The *Stepping Stones* report advised the Conservative Party to use bodily analogies and metaphors of infectious diseases to intelligibly convey the degenerative and pathological nature of the Labour Party's social and economic programme of Government. By the winter of 1978, the Conservative Party and most of the print media saw the nation to be suffering from an acute manifestation of 'the British disease'. When the refuse workers, the gravediggers and the hospital ancillary staff went on strike during the 'winter of discontent', the print and television news media was replete with photographs and footage of rubbish-strewn streets, blockaded roads, and sick hospital patients.⁶ The scenes sought to convey that Britain's ailing social body was 'under siege' by trade unionism and its economy was being propped up by a lethargic workforce.

Margaret Thatcher's references to the tethered 'sick man' being 'held to ransom' by the immoral agenda of socialism were primarily responses to the international perspective that viewed Britain as the 'sick man of Europe'.⁷ Britain's diminishing influence on the world stage enabled Hoskyns's strategic discourse of a crisis in the 'national body' to be intelligibly conveyed throughout the decade.⁸ Such corporeal analogies have been central to the presentation of complex political thought throughout history, especially during times of socioeconomic crisis.⁹ The rhetorical device could animate references to a 'crisis' in the national body through its

⁶ For clarity and ease of reading, the winter of discontent will hereon be referred to in lowercase without inverted commas.

⁷ *Der Spiegel* described how 'sick England' was beset by an 'economic and political decay... a sort of paralysis caused by the loss of empire'. Cited in S. Buschschluter, 'Looking at Sick England', *Observer*, 18 February, 1979, p. 7. Harvey sees the successful establishment and preservation of neoliberal political economies is the presentation of the national body as being under a constant threat. *Ibid*.

⁸ The Institute of Economic Affairs think-tank saw 'the British disease' being used as 'economic schadenfreude' by France and Germany. The Conservatives worked concurrently with the IEA to diagnose Labour's Britain as the sick society in need of a cure. C.G Allen, *The British Disease: A Very Short Essay on the Nature and Causes of the Nation's Lagging Wealth* (London: Institute for Economic Affairs, 1979) p. 10. This relationship is explored in R. Brouillette (dir.) *Encirclement - Neo-liberalism Ensnarers Democracy*, 2008.

⁹ Historian Antoine de Baecque saw the body metaphor used to articulate 'the condition of one political system, its death, and then the birth of another'. A. de Baecque, *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 4. Other 'body metaphors' are explored in: J. G Harris, *Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism and Disease in Shakespeare's England* (Philadelphia: UPP, 2004); D. Stuckler and Sanjay Basu, *The Body Economic: Why Austerity Kills* (New York: Basic Books, 2013) and 'ideological prosopopoeia' in S. Žižek, 'Save Us from the Saviours' in *London Review of Books*, vol. 34, no. 11, June, 2012, p. 13.

association with degeneration, rebirth and transformation,¹⁰ which as sociologist Zygmunt Bauman describes, can convey ‘the image of a moment of transition from a previous condition to a new one’.¹¹ The transitional crisis of the late 1970s saw the birth of neoliberalism emerge as the postwar consensus withered away. Throughout the 1980s, the Right continued to promote the benefits of the ‘healthy society’ through their discursive commitment to conveying the abject conditions of the ‘sick society’ in public discourse, even as unemployment soared, as inequality rose and as standards of living declined. Responding to the incongruity between the discursive projections of the healthy and the sick society were the photojournalists, independent and social documentary photographers of the 1980s who worked to provide visual counter-narratives that would feed back an equally wretched language of crisis.

In her catalogue essay for the exhibition *British Photography in the Thatcher Years* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1991, curator Susan Kismaric described the economic and social context in which a new kind of British documentary photography emerged in the 1980s. Discussing the work of documentarists such as John Davies, Martin Parr, Paul Graham and Chris Killip, Kismaric argued that these photographers were responding to Thatcher and her Conservative Party’s austerity programme and to the elevating levels of poverty in Britain which meant that those ‘at the bottom of the economic scale’ were rendered even ‘more abject’.¹² Alongside social degradation, Kismaric described the other ‘side effects’ of the Thatcherite revolution as an expansion of the middle class which ‘now enjoys the comforts previously available only to a smaller segment of the population’.¹³ Kismaric was reflecting on ‘Thatcher’s Britain’ and, like Martin Parr in his description of national decay and affluence, saw the growth of consumerism and poverty as defining characteristics of her tenure. On viewing the exhibition in New York, critic Andy Grundberg saw ‘malaise’ as the central theme in the show, noting how the pictures embodied a ‘startling and disturbing inversion of the conventional picture of what the Thatcher years were about’.¹⁴ This dissertation is preoccupied with both the ‘conventional picture’ of Thatcher’s ‘healthy society’ and the photographic manifestations of these ‘startling and disturbing inversions’ of national sickness. Examining the various outlets for photographic expression in the 1980s from the traditional print media to the radical photography magazines, this analysis of the ‘conventional picture’ and the salience of these ‘disturbing’ photographs is sought through documentary, press, photojournalism and vernacular photographic works that referenced the ‘side effects’ of Thatcher’s programme.

¹⁰ For histories of etymological and metaphorical uses of ‘crisis’ see: A. Nunning, ‘Making Crises and Catastrophes: How Metaphors and Narratives Shape their Cultural Life’, in C. Meiner and Kristen Veel (eds.) *The Cultural Life of Catastrophes and Crises* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2012), pp. 59–88.

¹¹ Z. Bauman and Carlo Bordoni, *State of Crisis* (London: Polity, 2014), p. 1 and p. 7

¹² S. Kismaric, *British Photography from the Thatcher Years* (New York: MoMA, 1990) p. 7

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ A. Grundberg, ‘Fresh Images from France and Thatcher’s Britain’, *History of Photography*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1992, p. 175

The abject photographic inversions examined in this dissertation are visual responses to the social and physical detritus that resulted from the Conservative Party's socio-economic programme of industrial 'waste-saving'. The Conservatives's general election manifesto of 1979 described the Party's endeavour to dispose of unprofitable industries, promising a 'reduction of waste' and the 'creation of conditions' in which 'efficient' industry could thrive.¹⁵ The reduction of economic waste led to the production and exclusion of disposed citizens as they were made redundant by the Right's efficiency drive. Waste as an expression of social marginalisation emerged as unemployment soared in the early 1980s. The Labour-supporting newspaper the *Daily Mirror* responded to the programme of 'waste-saving' by publishing the recurring features-series 'Waste of a Nation' to present photographic and textual narratives of the mass disposal of working-class lives through the 'waste-making' effects of 'Thatcherism'.¹⁶ The endeavour to visualise the abject 'waste' of the Thatcher years is mirrored in the wider documentary works of the period. Art historian David Alan Mellor has described how this context of deindustrialisation led many 'realist' documentary photographers to respond with 'anti-pastoral' visions of abraded catastrophe.¹⁷ This dissertation closely examines a selection of 'anti-pastoral' documentary works drawn from Mellor's exhibition and catalogue *No Such Thing As Society: British Photography 1967-1987* and other comprehensive surveys of postwar British documentary photography such as *Making History: Art and Documentary in Britain from 1929 to Now*, Gerry Badger's *Through the Looking Glass: Photographic Art in Britain, 1945-1989*, and Val Williams's *How We Are: Photographing Britain*.¹⁸ Situating the documentary works in their wider photographic and political contexts sees numerous photographers of the decade focus on the 'disturbing' state of abject social and economic disrepair by responding to governmental forms of creative destruction.

The relationship between the use of abject political narratives in the print media and the abject aesthetics of photographic discourse is fleshed out through reference to Imogen Tyler's exploration of 'social abjection'. In *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*, Tyler examines the dehumanising effects of being 'mediated through revolting aesthetics' in the discourses of media and political communications in contemporary

¹⁵ M. Thatcher, *The Conservative Manifesto, 1979* (London: Conservative Central Office, 1979)

¹⁶ The 'waste of a nation' series ran from 1980 to 1983, becoming a weekly (and sometimes daily) feature in the weeks leading up to the General Election of 1983.

¹⁷ See: D.A. Mellor, 'Romances of Decay, Elegies for the Future', M. Haworth-Booth *et al* (eds), *British Photography, Towards a Bigger Picture* (London: Rosetta Books, 1988), pp. 52–67

¹⁸ See: Mellor, *No Such Thing As Society: Photography in Britain, 1967-1987* (London: Hayward Publishing, 2008). Mellor's publication provides a comprehensive catalogue of postwar British photography from which this thesis is indebted.

Britain (a theoretical position that will be further explored in Chapter 1).¹⁹ The thrust of this dissertation is to expose Tyler's consideration of social abjection to the photographic field of 1980s Britain. Examining a diverse selection of photographs, the central questions of this research ask: how did Thatcher's Government and its advocates use photographs to convey the 'healthy' and the 'sick' society in the 1980s to drive their waste-saving project? In what ways did photographers focus on themes of waste to provide 'startling and disturbing' visual counter-narratives of Britain in the 1980s? How far could the photographic representations of socially abjected subjects of 1980s Britain be used to discredit the prevailing discourses of the 'healthy society' and how could such representations serve to bolster the Right's exclusionary endeavours? Drawing on Tyler's exploration of discourses of social disgust and Mellor's emphasis on rhetorics of abrasion in documentary photography equips this research with the tools for excavating how far the discursive rhetoric of photography in neoliberalising society has been embedded in the construction (or disavowal) of 'revolting aesthetics'.²⁰ By uncovering the intricate entwinement of the birth of neoliberalism with the rise of a socially abject photographic language, this dissertation is concerned with understanding how 'revolting aesthetics' were employed by photographers to bolster or resist the discursive construction of socially abject populations of the neoliberal age.

This trajectory through the abject landscape of Thatcher's Britain is guided by Hoskyns's communications plan, which highlighted the importance of channelling the Conservative Party's message through 'speeches, newspapers and television interviews, conferences, newspaper articles, etc. Each... [of which] has their own purpose, content and style'.²¹ The multifaceted, all-encompassing cross-media campaign used by the Conservative Party provides this research with a route through the constellation of photographs and contexts in which images and visual manifestations of this sick discourse were deployed. This route will include, for example, analysis of press imagery and photojournalism, photo-opportunities, the use of photography and photomontage in political propaganda and their relationship to discourses in speeches, newspaper articles, conferences to wider aspects of popular culture; literature, film and television to ascertain the role played by these media in confirming or contesting narratives of the sick or healthy society.

This examination of abjection and photography is distinct from studies such as Rina Arya's *Abjection and Representation* which have tended to focus on the visceral and transgressive

¹⁹ I. Tyler, *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain* (London: Zed Books, 2013), p. 25

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "Stepping Stones", p. 1

capacities of the body in art.²² The subject matter of Annette Joy Jemison's iconographic analysis of 'barrenness and abjection' in the represented wastelands of British interwar documentary photography more closely resembles the themes and objects of study in this research.²³ The connections between the photograph and wider culture will be explored through photographic representations of social decline but unlike Jemison (who did not situate her study within the photographic or critical histories of abjection or their social implications) this research will go beyond concerns of iconography to understand how photography could influence the very culture it represented. Bridging Mellor's exploration of documentary photography with Tyler's analysis of exclusionary discourses accommodates an expanded view of the way different styles of photography have shared in representational forms of economic crisis and social marginalisation through both mainstream media channels and radical photographic publications. Examining a variety of photographic outputs, I uncover not only how photographs could serve to bolster or resist the abject and exclusionary discourses of the era but how they were also employed by the voices of the discourse they represented. Through close visual analyses of photographs and their use, I will unearth the abject manifestations of a neoliberal political economy through the lens-based visual culture of Thatcher's Britain and expose how the Right's programme of government was bolstered by an accelerated use and deployment of the exclusionary aesthetics of social abjection in photographic discourse.

ii. Approaching 'Thatcher's Britain'

The unsettling scenes during the closing years of the 1970s marked a moment that political historian Colin Hay has described as Thatcherism's 'decisive intervention'.²⁴ As Hay sees it, Thatcher's success between 1978 and 1979 was generated by the ability of the New Right to discursively construct the moment of the late 1970s as 'a moment of crisis'.²⁵ He explains that: 'Thatcherism as a state project, though conceived long before, was born in the context of crisis', in which persistent references to the nation's decline became a discursive mainstay.²⁶ During the winter of discontent, the cumbersome figure of the 'sick man of Europe' was employed to personify Britain's lethargic, unproductive and undisciplined industrial and socio-economic identity under the Labour Party. Unlike that of its European counterparts, Britain's relationship with the trade unions and their 'culture of decline' needed to be continually associated with, as

²² See: R. Arya, *Abjection and Representation: An Exploration of Abjection in Visual Arts, Film and Literature* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)

²³ A. Joy Jemison, 'Barrenness and Abjection? The Iconography of the Wasteland in the Photographs and Collages of Julian Trevelyan, 1937-38', *Visual Resources*, vol. 25 no. 3, 2009, pp. 169-191

²⁴ C. Hay, 'Narrating Crisis: The Discursive Construction of the 'Winter of Discontent'', *Sociology*, vol. 30, no. 2, 1996, p. 254

²⁵ Ibid., p. 255

²⁶ Ibid., p. 254

Thatcher put it, ‘the ultimate cause of many of Britain’s economic problems’.²⁷ The sick body in crisis was employed by Thatcher to explain, in terms the electorate could relate to, the ideological shift that the Conservative Party’s new socioeconomic ‘remedy’ would effect.²⁸ The deployment of sick discourse was most apparent during the winter of discontent when Thatcher saw the Trade Unions to be ‘holding the nation to ransom’.²⁹ As Thatcher saw it, for the nation to flourish, it needed to ‘cut loose the shackles of socialism’. Thatcher’s employed this wretched-body analogy to convey the wider ideological aspirations of the party: mirrored in the image of the shackled ‘sick man’ was the Conservative Party’s compelling vision of economic ‘freedom’ proffered by the liberties of the free market.³⁰ Economist Christopher Payne has emphasised the visual in the Conservative Party’s discourse as key to their electoral success in the late 1970s. In *The Consumer, Credit and Neoliberalism* Payne describes the Right’s self-promotion as a persuasive tool: ‘like any product... [the Conservative Party] had to be marketed, advertised, differentiated’³¹ and by drawing upon ‘images of the sick society and appropriate slogans’ it could ‘effect a shift in values and disturb existing mental states, preparing the ground for electoral victory and the acceptance of the legislative programme to come’.³² As commentators at home and abroad grew to see the Labour Party and its advocacy of postwar, welfare-centred ‘consensus politics’ as a symptom of the nation’s ill-health, the Conservative Party’s persistent reference to a crisis in the national body bolstered the Thatcherite palliative for ‘sick Britain’.

When the Thatcher Government came to power in 1979, the Conservatives began implementing the ‘waste saving’ policies of financial disinvestment in industry. The devastating effects of the Government’s experiments with monetarism led even Thatcher’s closest advisors to lament that the state of Britain was so ‘unredeemably bad...[with] economic decline, rising unemployment... riots in many towns’.³³ The effect of this economic experiment saw the Conservative Party obliterate the tangible and intangible support structures of the postwar period. As heavy industries were dismantled and communities fragmented, the Right began a programme of

²⁷ M. Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (1993; London: Harper Press, 2012) p. 30

²⁸ Stuart Hall described how Thatcher articulated a ‘theoretical ideology’ in a ‘populist idiom’. S. Hall, ‘The Great Moving Right Show’, S. Hall (ed.), *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988), p. 47

²⁹ M. Thatcher, Speech to Paddington Conservatives (pay policy and unions), 18 December, 1978. Thatcher Archive: CCOPR 1619/78

³⁰ For David Harvey ideas of ‘freedom’ are central to the constitution of neoliberal economies as advocates appeal to the ‘compelling and seductive ideals’ of liberty and, ultimately, to the electorate’s common-sense ‘intuitions and instincts... values and desires’. Harvey, *A Brief History*, p. 5

³¹ C. Payne, *The Consumer, credit and Neoliberalism: Governing the Modern Economy* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 84

³² Ibid.

³³ Nicholas Henderson quoted in R. Vinen, *Thatcher’s Britain: The Politics and Social Upheaval of the 1980s* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009), p. 103

mopping up the manifest ‘sickness’ of past ideological, political and economic relations. The Party sought a technologically streamlined industry where the successes of service and finance economies would cleanse the smoke and grime of the heavy industrial struggles of the past, to provide a wealth of consumer possibilities. The Conservatives’ capacity to overcome the ‘unredeemable’ decline was assisted through an adherence to the discursive fashioning of the ‘sick man of Europe’ and the wider pathologisation of any economic or social alternative. The Party would figuratively situate Labour’s ‘repressive political regime’ in contradistinction with the Conservative Party’s vision of ‘enterprise, freedom and participation’.³⁴ The Conservatives embarked on a discursive project that conveyed Labour’s Britain and its advocacy of consensus politics as the abject remnants of a decaying political system, which Tyler has (in a contemporary context) described as ‘the mediation of revolting aesthetics’.³⁵

This exploration of Britain in the 1980s thus concentrates on the kinds of discourses promoted by the Thatcher governments throughout the decade. It is worth noting, as historians Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders have recently advised, that ‘Thatcherism’ as an ideology should be approached with caution and ‘viewed as a discourse to be interrogated not as an explanatory tool for the actions of the Thatcher governments’.³⁶ Stephen Brooke’s recent essay on approaches to historicising 1980s Britain is similarly wary of viewing ‘Thatcher’s Britain’ and ‘Thatcherism’ as stable entities. Brooke’s assertion is based on an encounter with a list of funding initiatives granted by the Greater London Council (GLC) before its dissolution in 1986. Money for ‘children’s crèches, south Asian cultural groups, feminist photographic collectives’ was, he describes, ‘the stuff of neo-liberal Thatcherite nightmares’.³⁷ Brooke uses this example to explain that while it would be wrong to ignore the impact of Thatcher and her Conservative Governments throughout the 1980s, ‘much might be gained by thinking historically about an eighties in Britain that is not overdetermined by Thatcher or Thatcherism’ but through explorations of the ‘plurality of trajectories’ in the many crises of the period.³⁸ The kinds of initiatives sponsored by the GLC exemplifies the numerous channels of resistance to the exclusionary mainstream discourse at the time, the kinds of subversive activities or ‘counter-narratives’ that will be discussed throughout in the context of photography, especially through reference to radical photo-magazines such as *Camerawork* and *Ten: 8*, which provided an outlet for debating and disseminating the visions of neoliberal ‘Thatcherite nightmares’. While I do not seek to overdetermine ‘Thatcher’s Britain’ as a cohesive history bound to the time

³⁴ Vinen, *Thatcher’s Britain*, p. 103

³⁵ Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, p. 25

³⁶ B. Jackson and Robert Saunders, *Making Thatcher’s Britain* (Cambridge, CUP, 2012), pp. 12-13

³⁷ S. Brooke, ‘Living in “New Times”’: Historicizing 1980s Britain’, *History Compass*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2014, pp. 20-21

³⁸ Brooke, ‘Living in “New Times”’, p. 21

constraints of the 1980s, or ‘Thatcherism’ as a stable ideology, I use it as a sounding board against which these photographic counter-narratives can best be projected as the ‘startling and disturbing’ inversions of neoliberal normativity.

iii. Photography and Social Abjection

When Andy Grundberg noted the unifying theme of ‘malaise’ in the documentary works on show in New York, British photography historian and keeper of photographs at the Victoria and Albert Museum Mark Haworth-Booth had only recently described how a ‘canon of photographic art’ had yet to be written in Britain.³⁹ The canon of contemporary British photography was being established throughout the late 1970s and 1980s in the writings of Haworth-Booth, Val Williams, Ian Jeffrey, Gerry Badger amongst the theoretical texts of Victor Burgin, Allan Sekula and John Tagg in the photographic journals such as *Creative Camera*, *Camerawork* and *Ten: 8*, which helped shape a history of British documentary photography and photojournalism. Other histories were emerging through the photobooks and monographs published; the exhibitions at influential spaces such as The Photographers’ Gallery in London, Impressions in York and other smaller spaces such as Cornerhouse in Manchester, the Side Gallery in Newcastle, Camerawork’s Half Moon Photography Workshop and the Cockpit Arts Workshop in London as well as large scale retrospective and group shows at the Serpentine that sought to contextualise the emergence of a specifically British tradition of documentary photography.⁴⁰

Since the 1980s, various retrospective exhibitions and publications have narrated British documentary photography’s development, especially in the postwar period, which will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter. Alongside accounts such as Mellor’s *No Such Thing As Society*, numerous monographs, including extensive accounts on documentarists such as Martin Parr, Daniel Meadows, Anna Fox, Paul Reas and Paul Graham have explored in detail the work of individual photographers by locating their practices in wider social and photographic contexts.⁴¹ These monographs (which are integral to this exploration of British photography) track the gradual movement of independent documentary photography’s display in magazines and small scale publishing in photobooks during the early 1980s to the large format pictures made for display on gallery walls by the end of the decade. The movement of

³⁹ M. Haworth-Booth, ‘Where We’ve Come From: Aspects of Postwar British Photography’ in *British Photography: Towards a Bigger Picture*, p. 2

⁴⁰ Such as the exhibition and book by Ian Jeffrey and Brett Rogers, *Inscriptions and Inventions: British Photography in the 1980s* (London: British Council, 1987) and Badger’s *Through the Looking Glass: Photographic Art in Britain, 1945-1989*

⁴¹ See for example, Val Williams and David Chandler’s monographs: *Anna Fox Photographs, 1983-2007* (Brighton: Photoworks, 2007); *Martin Parr* (London: Phaidon, 2004); *When We Were Young: Derek Ridgers* (Brighton: Photoworks, 2004); *Daniel Meadows: Edited Photographs from the ‘70s and ‘80s* (Brighton: Photoworks, 2011)

socially concerned photography from consumption and display in magazines and books to the ‘postmodern’ art photography by the 1980s evidences as David Bate has recently described, the second ‘pictorialist turn’ of the twentieth century.⁴² This gradual transformation was, Mellor described, ‘a redefinition of photography as art that reevaluated the pictorial over documentary realism’.⁴³ The narrative of photography’s assimilation within the art world, while important to the development of documentary photography in Britain, obscures the extent to which the photographic works of the period responded to and were often shaped by the wider visual contexts of ‘Thatcher’s Britain’. While not ‘party political’, photographers were creatively responding to the politically endorsed changes as they took effect on the social landscape. By making the connections between documentary photography and wider forms of lens-based visual culture this research will expand on Mellor’s account (which was mostly drawn from and thus necessarily limited to discussing the works held in the photography collection of the British Council)⁴⁴ and can thus engage in wider aspects of British photographic practices to demonstrate the areas of shared concern. This research fills a gap in the knowledge of this period of British photography by examining the documentary photographic works in their wider social and photographic context (the work of press and photojournalism, vernacular, and photography in political propaganda, for example). In doing so, this research will uncover how these diverse forms of photography resonated with, bolstered and resisted the wider discourses of the era.

This approach to the history of British photography through the lens of social abjection is one that art historian Simon Watney would find problematic. In his analysis of British photography in the 1980s Watney laments the ‘baleful influence’ of critical theory in the pedagogical development and production of documentary in the decade, arguing that the photographic theories of Sekula and Tagg justified a ‘total refusal to consider the role of individual practitioners... [they] wished to blame photography for the very social ills it was often (doubtless inadequately) attempting to describe’.⁴⁵ Watney further argues that the elevation of critical theory and demotion of the photographer is still felt ‘in the widespread tendency to overemphasize the political to the virtual exclusion of other issues, especially the aesthetic, and all too often considering photography to be no more than a passive instrument of other agencies’.⁴⁶ This approach does consider the political landscape in which photography was

⁴² D. Bate, *Art Photography* (London: Tate, 2015), p. 31

⁴³ Mellor, *No Such Thing*, p. 129

⁴⁴ This limitation was the subject of a critical review by Chris Steele Perkins. See: C. Steele-Perkins, ‘No Such Thing As Society: Photography in Britain, 1967-1987’, *Foto8* 14 November, 2008 <http://www.foto8.com/live/no-such-thing-as-society-photography-in-britain-1967-1987/>. Accessed 15 May 2014.

⁴⁵ S. Watney, ‘Tunnel Vision: Photography Education in Britain in the 1980s’, *American Suburb X*, 14 May 2009. <http://www.americansuburbx.com/2009/05/theory-tunnel-vision-photographic.html>. Accessed 20 July 2013

⁴⁶ Ibid.

created, disseminated and consumed in the 1980s but does not seek to cast photography as ‘a passive instrument of other agencies’. This approach sees the ‘startling and disturbing’ works of the independent documentarists presented in the alternative media of radical photo-magazines such as *Camerawork* and *Ten: 8* as a mode of picture-making inherently distinct from mainstream media discourses of press and photojournalism.⁴⁷ The independent documentarists worked ‘independently’ of the commercial interests of press and magazine commissions allowing them to transmit back more considered mediations, which alongside their aesthetic aspirations (as Watney rightly points out) meant they could convey the nature of socioeconomic crises outside of the demands of instantaneous news provision or propaganda.⁴⁸ The analyses contained here see photographers creatively mediating and responding to the state of crisis like the abject literary aesthetics of J. G. Ballard, the postindustrial sprawl of William Gibson and the dystopian film of the era. By analysing the counter-narratives provided by British documentary photographers in concert with other forms of lens-based image-making will show not only how political discourses of abjection and exclusion influenced the kinds of work being created at the time but will also show how photographers too could influence this discourse of social abjection through their various mediations of ‘revolting aesthetics’.

The analysis of socially concerned documentary photography in Britain is intimately ensnared in debates on the representation of ‘abject poverty’, which became the subject of texts by critics such as Martha Rosler, Sekula and many others in the early 1980s (these debates will be thoroughly explored in Chapter 1). This examination reroutes debates on ‘abject poverty’ by considering the wider forms of photographic expression in the 1980s that were subject to and shaped by wider and more insidious discourses of social abjection. This research looks at both the abject subjects of documentary photography alongside image-makers concerned with rendering the residua (the people, places and ideological manifestations) of the collectivist postwar culture as abhorrently abject. By conveying the violence with which the discourses of exclusion abjected vulnerable populations, this recontextualisation of British documentary photography in its wider photographic context seeks to uncover an insurgent mode of picture-making that sought out excluded subjects and subject matter to provide a counter-narrative to the exclusionary ‘waste-saving’ discourses of the time. The notion of a pervasive photographic counter-narrative was noted in Annabella Pollen’s account of the 1987 *One Day for Life* amateur, mass-participation photography competition. Pollen’s analysis of the submitted photographs found that alongside the vernacular tropes of everyday life, from happy families, pets and everyday activities were ‘photographs of the profane’, which she described as ‘carnavalesque’ representations of ‘everyday life in contemporary Britain’.⁴⁹ The photographs of

⁴⁷ See discussion of independent photography in Badger, *Through the Looking Glass*, pp. 30–31

⁴⁸ L. Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2015), p.80

⁴⁹ A. Pollen, *Identity, Memory, Compassion and Competition: Mass Participation Photography and Everyday Life*, Ph.D Thesis (London: London College of Communication, 2013), p. 41

nudity, obscene gestures, representations of unemployment offices and derelict buildings were visual protests, Pollen concluded, against ‘the declining state of the nation’.⁵⁰ Pollen’s analysis sees this visual counter-narrative – what we will call the ‘abject structure of feeling’ – emerge in vernacular accounts of everyday life, which reflected the wider photographic output of the time.

To fully understand the importance of a photographic counter-narrative, this examination is concerned with the way photographic responses to the sick corporealisation of social and economic crisis are implicated in processes of social abjection.⁵¹ Tyler’s book focusses is on the discourse of politicians and the print and television media’s abject representations of marginalised subjects such as refugees, the homeless and the disabled since the financial crisis of 2008. Drawing on the critical and theoretical writings of Frantz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Georges Bataille and Julia Kristeva, Tyler argues that the discursive rendering of certain groups as ‘socially abject’ creates ‘waste populations’ made up of economically and socially alienated subjects. Tyler’s work is strongly influenced by Bauman’s exploration of ‘waste populations’ in his book *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*, where he analysed how vulnerable subjects are rendered disposable in neoliberal economies for the benefit of global economic expansion. Tyler’s work builds on this by examining the ways social abjection is deployed in public discourse to reify neoliberal consensus in the abiding centre of the social body and the ways this might be resisted.

Tyler is strongly influenced by Foucault’s writings on disciplinary power.⁵² Social abjection, Tyler explains, is a form of ‘governmentality’ – an insidious discursive technology that works to organise and discipline bodies within the population.⁵³ Tyler’s work distinguishes between two distinct forms of social abjection: the imposed form of exclusionary discourse: ‘a mechanism of governance through aversion’, and a self-imposed, revolutionary form of affirmative social abjection employed as a means of resistance.⁵⁴ The self-assigned form of social abjection is a mode of resistance and resignification that can be considered alongside Judith Butler’s call to ‘queer’ bodies through ‘subversive bodily acts’ which offers potential to expose the nature of exclusionary social abjection.⁵⁵ If Thatcher’s Britain was one built upon, as Hay suggested, a

⁵⁰ Pollen, *Identity*, p. 41

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² In particular, Foucault’s lectures on governmentality, see: M. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-9* (London: Palgrave, 2008).

⁵³ Foucault’s lecture ‘Governmentality’ and discussion of bio-power is crucial to ‘social abjection’. See: M. Foucault, ‘Governmentality’ in J. Faubion (ed.) *Power: The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984* (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. 201–222.

⁵⁴ Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, p. 37. The notion of ‘affirmative abjection’ was explored in C. Liu, *The Abject, America* (New York: Lusitania Press, 1993)

⁵⁵ J. Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990; London: Routledge, 2008)

discursive intervention, this dissertation considers photographic engagement in abject forms of social life as an alternative discourse or counter-narrative that offers a site of resistance to the otherwise enveloping modes of neoliberal normativity.

A central argument in Tyler's work is that social abjection can be beneficial to those who adopt it as an instrument of political resistance. Such subjects defy the abjectifying discourse of disgust through 'revolt' and become actively 'revolting' bodies in protest. Tyler draws on Lauren Berlant's description of the political uses and manifestations of abjection. Berlant cites Walter Benjamin's assertion that:

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule... it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency.⁵⁶

The 'political counter-emergency' that Berlant goes on to describe is a response to forms of 'hygienic governmentality' in which the governing party uses images and narratives to dramatise its 'attempt to maintain its hegemony by asserting that the abject population threatens the common good and must be rigorously governed and monitored by all sections of society'.⁵⁷ Berlant's framing of social hygiene – the maintenance of normative behaviour – and Benjamin's call for resistance against the discourses of social cleansing are vital to this dissertation's examination of photography's implication in the visual discourse of social abjection.

This analysis is structured chronologically and is divided into three sections. Each chapter approaches the various ways in which crises and the subjects of crises were mediated in photography and the ways in which these photographic mediations were deployed. Through a combination of close visual analyses of press photographs, archived press pictures, photography in political advertisements, vernacular and documentary images set within their wider visual cultural and discursive contexts, I examine the ways photography bolstered or resisted the abjectifying discourse disseminated through these modes of communication denoted in the *Stepping Stones* report, which will be used as a guide.

The context of British photography in the 1980s is further examined in Chapter 1 where the methodological trajectory through the theoretical landscape of photography in the 1980s is fully explored. The chapter considers the construction of crisis in the British 'social body' in the late 1970s and introduces photography's concurrent crisis in representation. I consider how the 'abject structure of feeling', with reference to other writings on abjection, can provide a framework to ascertain the significance of the counter-narratives provided by the photography

⁵⁶ L. Berlant, 'The Face of America and the State of Emergency' in *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 175

⁵⁷ Ibid.

of the decade. Chapter 2 acts as a case study of photography's political utilisation and implication in the discursive construction of crisis during the winter of discontent. This chapter analyses the party political advertisement *Britain isn't Getting Any Better* to assess how far photography, as a medium invested with cultural trust, established a visually communicable language of socioeconomic crisis. This chapter explores the representation of the 'degenerative' national body, a group of people awaiting state welfare, as a visualisation of the collectivist social body in crisis in the run up to the general election of 1979. This analysis examines photography's role in legitimising the Right's construction of crisis in the 'sick' social body.

Section Two explores the various incarnations of 'the enemy within'. In a focussed examination of the inner city uprisings of 1981, Chapter 3 considers how photojournalistic and vernacular responses to these scenes of unrest tended towards a visuality of destruction anchored in the past and sought to emphasise the 'sickness' and immorality of abject subjects of contemporary life. These images set the scene for the next two chapters, in which the abject visual language (drawn from the degraded sensibilities of the past) is cast in the visual representation of 'the enemies within'. Chapter 4 analyses the Government's championing of technological progress and the Left's rhetoric of wasteful redundancy, which also emerged in other areas of popular culture including film, television and literature. By exploring processes of deindustrialisation, a 'crisis of obsolescence' and the rhetoric of 'waste-saving', I examine the recurring photographic trope of the 'waste gatherer' in Chris Killip's documentary work of the early 1980s. The Left's endeavour to objectify the abject state of deindustrialisation and redundancy is examined in relation to youth unemployment in Chapter 5. Set against the backdrop of the Peoples' March for Jobs, I consider the performative conceptions of 'recession culture' that utilised the wasteful scenes of ruin as authenticating the experiential qualities of social decline. Looking at archived press images, I consider how young people's representations were manipulated and even excluded from representation. This chapter examines the documentary work of Tish Murtha, who explored themes of youth unemployment and alienation in Newcastle in 1981.

Section Three begins by introducing the stock market crash of 1987 through the lens of the 'grotesque body'. Chapter 6 considers Anna Fox's pictures of office life in concert with the oppressively abject narratives of Martin Amis's 1984 novel *Money* to convey the stifling aesthetic capabilities of colour photography in a capitalist economy. This examination becomes the basis for Chapter 7, which examines the rise of the consumer society and the symbolic fall of industry in conjunction with the national press's turn to the so-called 'new colour epoch'. Beginning with the photograph of Thatcher 'walking in the wilderness', the chapter examines the historical cleansing of former sites of industry from areas of 'dirty' production to spaces of hyper-consumption. By looking at the transformation of heavy industry into the consumer-centred 'heritage industry', this chapter examines what I term the 'grotesque realist documentary photography' and works to uncover a photographic critique of the 'side effects' of

an obscene consumer culture. After exploring the political possibilities of grotesque realism as a form of affirmative social abjection, Chapter 8 looks at the housing crisis of the late 1980s and during the recession of the early 1990s. Against the backdrop of the 1992 general election I consider how photographers worked to both capture the destruction of the welfare state and its own destructive characteristics by recasting the figure of the sick man of Europe. I analyse how the 'sick Britain' analogy worked to consolidate the existence of, and to vilify the new social crisis of, the 'underclass'. This analysis of the underclass considers the importance of 'hygienic governmentality' to a political culture obsessed with the surface appearance of poverty, deprivation and the visual manifestations of societal waste. I consider the various interpretations of Nick Waplington's work 'Living Room' and how it could offer the wider field of documentary photography a renewed approaching to working with and alongside people cast as social abjects.

As this dissertation tracks the enduring nature and normalisation of neoliberalism in Britain since the late 1970s,⁵⁸ I will argue that photographic visual culture has played a vital role in bolstering what Colin Hay has called the 'compelling ideological prerequisites' of freedom and common sense with powerful signifiers to present antithetical ideas (of 'socialism', consensus or collectivist politics) as abject and immoral. By examining the crises since the late 1970s I seek to understand how social abjection was normalised and assimilated into the everyday and how photographers could serve to disturb and disrupt the exclusionary discourses through photographic interventions.

⁵⁸ As political scientist Colin Crouch has called it, 'the strange non-death of neoliberalism'. See C. Crouch, *The Strange Non Death of Neoliberalism* (London: Polity, 2011)

Chapter 1:

Is Britain Dying? Approaching Photography in Crisis and the Abject Structure of Feeling

The crisis during the closing months of 1978 became known as ‘The Winter of Discontent’.¹ As the landscape was littered with pickets of striking workers, the national press conveyed the horrors of an unfit, languishing nation wallowing in its own filth with front-page photographs of dead rats (Fig. 1), sick patients, and rubbish-filled cities (Fig. 2). During the winter, photojournalist Homer Sykes negotiated the litter-strewn streets of London’s West End to document the unsanitary conditions produced by the refuse-collector strike. Sykes photographed an alleyway outside a hospital where the sign ‘Rubbish must not be put here’ floated ineffectively above piles of medical waste (Fig. 3). In contrast to the chaotic imagery on display in the national press and news footage of the time – of city centres overflowing with rubbish and frantic shoppers hoarding diminishing supplies – Sykes’s photograph quietly documented the increasingly unsanitary conditions of the closing years of the 1970s as mounting rubbish fermented dangerously outside hospital doors, encroaching upon the clinical walls of the national body’s last line of defence.

Months later a diverse group of historians and politicians reflected on these abject scenes of decline in essays contributed to the anthology *Is Britain Dying? Perspectives on the Current Crisis*. Editor Isaac Kramnick wrote of the publication’s endeavour to examine the recurring claims of Britain’s status as the ‘sick man of Europe’ and to assess whether Britain’s crisis and decline was ‘real or imagined’.² Kramnick’s desire to question the ‘realness’ of this crisis implicitly challenged the verisimilitude of the prevailing ‘sick Britain’ discourse, suggesting that the narratives of disease and decline were exemplary of fictional or ‘imagined’ embellishments. In questioning the realness of this crisis, Kramnick’s assessment seemed to challenge the kinds of photographs that adorned the front pages of the national press as evidence of Britain’s decline and seemed to question whether the plethora of photography of ‘sick Britain’ was faithfully conveying the reality of a crisis. Unlike the chaotic imagery of a ‘dying’ nation that dominated the print media during this winter, Sykes’s cold, almost deadpan documentary photograph, of waste impinging on the social body, represents what I will explore as ‘the abject structure of feeling’ that emerged in the photographic responses to the crisis of 1978–9. Against this backdrop of crisis, I look at the debates around documentary photography in the late 1970s and the ‘crisis of representation’ that would define the work made in the 1980s. I then map out the literature on ‘social abjection’ which assists in providing a theoretical and methodological trajectory through the photographic landscape of the period.

¹ See Conservative Party Broadcast, ‘The Winter of Discontent’, first aired 11 January 1979; and Larry Lamb editorial, the *Sun*, 11 January 1979, p. 2

² I. Kramnick (ed.), *Is Britain Dying? Perspectives on the Current Crisis* (New York: Cornell, 1979), Preface

i. Sick Britain and the ‘Abject Structure of Feeling’

If comedy had been the generic key to much of the photography in the late 1960s and early 1970s, then the photography of the darkening social panorama of the late 1970s and 1980s belongs to tragedy.³

David Alan Mellor, *No Such Thing As Society*, 2008

The ‘sick Britain’ discourse that emerged in the rhetorical flourishes of Thatcher’s party, and the print and television media at this time was not confined to those on the right. Tom Nairn contributed his perspective on the nature of crisis in Britain in *Is Britain Dying?*. Using a protracted ‘sick Britain’ metaphor, Nairn explained how the word ‘crisis’ has associations with ‘the sickroom or even the deathbed’.⁴ For Nairn, crisis had ‘long been a permanent state of affairs [in Britain] that inexplicably never seems to change anything’.⁵ In his analysis of the cultural feeling of crisis in the late 1970s, he goes on to describe how the ‘literary nightmares’ of Aldous Huxley and George Orwell, and the contemporary dystopian television series *Survivors* and *1990* reflected a ‘potent seam of cultural pessimism’ in Britain.⁶ For Nairn, the futuristic ‘strain of gloomy dystopia’ so pervasive in popular culture was not only manifested in cultural and literary texts but also in contemporary society more widely where perpetual crisis was anticipated and where ‘the only imaginable future seems to be a black one’.⁷ The bleak outlook that Nairn describes resonates with Mellor’s assessment of the tragic documentary photographic works of this period. The wretched sensibility of crisis is evident in Sykes’s sinister hospital alleyway where he depicts a space devoid of human presence and in doing so references the kinds of dystopian and apocalyptic narrative tropes that pervaded pop-cultural references to Britain’s decline. Like the deluge of rubbish and residuum that littered the corridors of J.G. Ballard’s *High Rise* in 1975, Sykes’s photograph reflected a collective social breakdown as the encroaching and seemingly unstoppable threat to the health of the social body fevered amongst the sacks of rubbish. Nairn’s discussion of cultural pessimism, the feeling of social and economic crisis and decline as it manifests in the arts, is vital to this analysis of British photography. The gloomy cultural textures and the bleakness of dystopian literature resonates with a ‘startling and disturbing’ photographic visual language that sought to document this political fracture, as Sykes had done, with references to a literary and televisual dystopian *mise-en-scène*.⁸

³ Mellor, *No Such Thing*, p. 109

⁴ T. Nairn, ‘The Future of Britain’s Crisis: A Political Analysis’, Kramnick (ed.), *Is Britain Dying?*, p. 233

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., p. 238

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Mellor has described how television series and programmes such as the apocalyptic *Threads*, 1984 had a profound affect on the visuality of the anxious world of the mid-1980s. See: D.A. Mellor, ‘Youth Unemployment in West Newcastle’, *Photoworks*, issue 15, 2010, p. 14.

Photographic references to cultural decline, dystopian literature and narratives of the ‘sick body’ evidence an emergent shift in what Raymond Williams terms the ‘structure of feeling’. For Williams, the structure of feeling is:

the culture of a period... the particular living result of all the elements in the general organisation. And it is in this respect that the art of a period, taking these to include characteristic approaches and tones in argument, are of major importance.⁹

The structure of feeling is thus the timbre of ‘human cultural activity’ resonating in the everyday lives of people living within a particular society.¹⁰ Williams further developed the idea of the structure of feeling in the late 1970s, describing how the word ‘feeling’ is chosen to emphasise ‘a distinction from more formal concepts of ‘world-view’ or ‘ideology’” and a concern with ‘meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt’.¹¹ He continues:

The idea of a structure of feeling can be specifically related to the evidence of forms and conventions – semantic figures – which, in art and literature, are often among the very first indications that such a new structure is forming.¹²

The formation of the abject figure of sick Britain in the late 1970s, as the Right sought to encourage a shift in the nation’s ‘mental set’, is significant here. Williams explained that the structure of feeling can be accessed through the documentary culture of the period: ‘from poems, to buildings to dress-fashions’.¹³ These everyday manifestations enables this research to engage with the directives issued by archives such as Mass Observation and the letters to national newspapers, which give a voice to the day-to-day experience of the abject structure of feeling emerging through the photography of the decade. This research will observe how such responses resonated with the emergence of the sick body analogy as an accepted means of discussing the state of the nation’s social, political and economic identity in the anxious mode that Nairn described. As the culture of social and political crisis reached its discursive apogee during the winter of discontent, the shift towards this ‘darkened social panorama’ found its cultural expression in the abject aesthetics of documentary and reportage photography of the 1980s. Williams’s emphasis on the ‘documentary’ evidence of cultures giving access to the ‘structure of feeling’ is, however, complicated by the crisis in the photographic form of documentary picture-making which was subject to questions about its ability to provide evidence for the structural inequalities in society. The collision of documentary photography’s

⁹ R. Williams, *The Long Revolution* (1961; Peterborough: Broadview, 2001), pp. 65–66

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 65

¹¹ R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1977), p. 132. Williams’s emphasis on the affective quality of the structure of feeling is at odds with Ballard’s belief that the 1970s signalled the ‘death of affect’.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

crisis with this downcast structure of feeling would occur at a moment of social crisis which was becoming visualisable in the landscape as processes of deindustrialisation wreaked havoc on cities, towns and their communities. In order to access this abject structure of feeling, the challenges faced by ‘documentary culture of the period’ must be considered. As photographers tried to represent the neoliberal world that Thatcher ushered in, the very tools and stylistic methods they deployed to do this were called into question. Documentary photography’s concurrent experience of crisis arose in an increasingly abject social context.

ii. “Poverty is beautiful”: Documentary Photography in Crisis

By the late 1970s, British documentary photography was in a state of crisis. John A. Walker has described how, as in the 1930s where crisis became an everyday experience, ‘there were crises in the visual arts that paralleled the ones afflicting Britain’s economy and social order’.¹⁴ The challenge for artists and photographers was, Walker describes, to create work of both ‘political utility’ and ‘self-reflexivity’.¹⁵ This challenge was one mired in a visual practice which often turned to the visuality of the 1930s to ‘validate’ the visual renderings of economic and social crisis with a degree of authenticity. For documentary photography, recourse to ‘the thirties’ identified the mode of ‘independent’ photography that emerged. Curator Val Williams describes how British documentary photography in the 1970s was characterised by a form of ‘concerned’ social documentary photography, ‘a heady mix of a rediscovered and reinvented English folk culture, modernist documentary from the United States and leftist community politics’.¹⁶ Independent documentary drew upon a mode of photographic anthropology from the 1930s, signalling a visual appetite for the ‘golden age’ of social documentary photography.¹⁷

The revitalisation of social documentary in the early to mid-1970s is exemplified by the work of various photographic groups. The Newcastle-based documentary and film collective Amber were the most vociferous exponents of the social documentary mode of concerned photography in the 1970s. Amber and its Side Gallery exhibition space bolstered a visual language of British social realism by exhibiting works by British and American photographers of the prewar period, such as Bert Hardy, Humphrey Spender, Berenice Abbot and Lewis Hine, in contiguity with contemporary works by Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen, Keith Pattinson and Chris Killip.¹⁸ Other independent documentary photographers in the 1970s such as those connected to the Half Moon

¹⁴ J. A. Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London: I.B Tauris, 2002), p. 7

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 7–8

¹⁶ Williams, *Daniel Meadows*, p. 10. See also: Badger (ed.), *Through the Looking Glass*, p. 23.

¹⁷ Badger, *Through the Looking Glass*, p. 23

¹⁸ See: G. Rigby, Side Gallery Archive Listings, unpublished document, 2014–2015. Side Gallery Archive, Newcastle.

Photography Workshop in London were driven by the desire to record the 'social realities' of everyday life. The early documentary work of Jo Spence such as *Gypsies and Travellers* mirrored the styles of observation published in *Picture Post* in the late-1930s and the devastating hardships documented by Farm Security Administration photographers of the same period in the USA.¹⁹ Photography of transient groups, their impoverishment, their experiences of social breakdown, destitution and degradation have a rich history in the social documentary mode. Such photography endeavoured, as critic Don Slater argued, 'to make visible that which is excluded from vision – sub-cultures, and ethnic minorities, positive images, the poor'.²⁰ These photographs of the ennobled subject in conditions of 'abject poverty' were created to reveal the social experiences of destitution to the viewer. In the early to mid-1970s, this mode of social documentary photography was driven by the conviction that the representation of poverty and working life could expose the given realities of inequality, deprivation and struggle and could provoke viewers to respond.

The photograph's capacity to act as a call-to-action was key to the charitable sector. Photographer Nick Hedges worked with the housing charity Shelter throughout the 1960s and 1970s. He described how his photographs were used because they 'personalised issues and statistics' by stereotyping:

badly housed families as being depressed, without hope and in need. The portraits were loaded, although at the time there was no attempt made to disguise the origin or purpose of that version of reality.²¹

Hedges explained how Shelter 'relied heavily on emotive photography to make effective propaganda'.²² The individuals he photographed were, he believed, 'genuinely depressed' but pointed out that, 'whether they were also angry was a question the charity did not ask'.²³ Hedges pointed towards socially concerned photography's desire for the right kind of noble suffering that would spark charitable action from the viewer. Photographer and critic Allan Sekula had described this kind of photography as a 'celebration of the dignity of the passive victim'.²⁴

¹⁹ Jo Spence described: 'like many groups which emerged in the 1970s Photography Workshop began by producing exhibitions in the 1930s documentary mode similar to that of the FSA and *Picture Post* photographers'. See: J. Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political, Personal and Photographic Autobiography* (Seattle: Real Comet Press), p. 30.

²⁰ D. Slater, 'The Object of Photography', *Camerawork*, April, 1983, pp. 4-10

²¹ N. Hedges, 'Contemporary Portraits', *Camerawork*, January, 1979, p. 8

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ A. Sekula, 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning', V. Burgin (ed.) *Thinking Photography* (London: MacMillan, 1982) p. 109

The extent to which that passively depressed ‘version of reality’ became the primary means through which poverty and deprivation would be represented is related to the work of collectives such as the Exit Photography Group whose 1974 project *Down Wapping* was inspired by Walker Evans and James Agee’s *Now Let Us Praise Famous Men*.²⁵ Exit member Chris Steele-Perkins has described the group’s belief that poverty was ‘endemic and for an advanced industrial society, intolerable... [We believed that] poverty, injustice and discrimination was leading to serious social disorder’.²⁶ In his picture *Family Living in Poverty, Glasgow*, 1975 (Fig. 4) Steele-Perkins focussed on the state of domestic interiors ravaged by structural neglect, which etched the physical scars of economic and social decline upon the squalid environments in which the family lived. The Exit Photography Group’s indictment of the political landscape was thus written upon the physical verisimilitude of peeling walls and squalor of inner city housing. The collective’s sombre focus on the degradation of working class life was created at a transitional period in British photographic history. The collective’s sombre pictures mirrored the efforts of ‘concerned’ photographers whose intentions were being thrown into doubt by critical writings on photography’s capacity to bear objective truth.

By the mid-1970s, continental philosophy and texts of the Frankfurt School alongside other works of critical theory were being translated and published in English, often for the first time.²⁷ These writings offered new perspectives and led to questions being posed about the very nature of concerned documentary and its problematic relationship as an index to the ‘real’.²⁸ Susan Sontag’s collection of essays synthesised these theoretical texts in an accessible way when published as *On Photography* in 1977. In her influential book, she argued that ‘concerned’ documentary photographers ‘assume that their work can convey some kind of stable meaning, can reveal truth’.²⁹ Sontag described how this conviction in the harsh reality of their imagery alienated the viewer, and asserted that ‘in these last decades, “concerned photography” has done at least as much to deaden conscience as to arouse it’.³⁰ In their search for the authenticities of deprivation and poverty, ‘humanist’ or social documentary photographers were seen to resemble ‘class tourists’ who sought out scenes of sublime destitution.³¹

²⁵ See: Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 30

²⁶ C. Steele-Perkins, ‘Exit Photography Group’, *Photoworks Ideas*, 14 August 2014. www.photoworks.org.uk/exit-photography-group. Accessed 14 August 2014

²⁷ Walker, *Left Shift*, p. 5

²⁸ For example: A. Sekula, ‘Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)’, *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 19, No. 4, Photography, Winter, 1978, pp. 859–883

²⁹ S. Sontag, *On Photography* (1977: London: Penguin, 2008), p. 21

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ M. Rosler, ‘In, Around and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)’, M. Rosler (ed.) *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975–2001* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), p. 179

The notion that social realist or humanist documentary was a form of ‘victim photography’ was the subject of Abigail Solomon-Godeau’s essay ‘Who is Speaking Thus?’ in 1986. The writer questioned ‘whether the documentary act does not involve a double act of subjugation: first, in the social world that has produced its victims; and second, in the regime of the image produced within and for the same system that engenders the condition it then re-presents’.³² Solomon-Godeau’s emphasis on the passivity and disenfranchisement of the photographed subject lay at the centre of critic Martha Rosler’s earlier view that documentary photography ‘carries (old) information about a group of powerless people to another group addressed as socially powerful’.³³ This power relation is cemented by the ‘naturalness’ of the subjects’ predicament. Rosler continues:

In the liberal documentary, poverty and oppression are almost invariably equated with misfortunes caused by natural disasters: causality is vague, blame is not assigned, fate cannot be overcome. Liberal documentary blames neither the victims nor their willful oppressor.³⁴

The belief that documentary photography served only to convey the surface appearance of passively-experienced deprivation (in Hedges’s Shelter imagery, for example) rather than interrogate the very ideological or structural causes of inequality and poverty would greatly influence the debate around the documentary mode. The aesthetic component of these uncritical documentary works reignited debates that Walter Benjamin had discussed in his essay ‘The Author as Producer’ in 1934 where he argued that forms of documentary risked fetishising degradation, becoming incapable of photographing:

a run-down apartment house or a pile of manure without transfiguring it... making misery itself an object of pleasure, by treating it stylishly and with technical perfection.³⁵

‘The Author as Producer’ grew out of Benjamin’s critical essay ‘Left-wing Melancholy’ in 1931, which was published by the influential British film and visual culture journal *Screen* in 1974. Benjamin argued that the photographic and literary movement known as New Objectivity signified a ‘left-wing radicalism... to which there is no longer in general any corresponding political action... [A]ll it has in mind is to enjoy itself in its negativistic quiet’.³⁶ Such ineffective works dwelt in the past, which, Benjamin argued, transformed ‘political struggle from a compulsory decision into an object of pleasure, from a means of production into an

³² A. Solomon Godeau, ‘Who is Speaking Thus?’, Solomon-Godeau (ed.) *Photography at the Dock* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 176

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ W. Benjamin, ‘The Author as Producer’ in *New Left Review*, July–August, 1970, p. 90

³⁶ Ibid.

article of consumption'.³⁷ Benjamin's belief that 'left-wing melancholy' failed to propose any critical or revolutionary action transformed its message into 'objects' which were then 'supplied for consumption'.³⁸ Benjamin's work greatly influenced debates around the future of documentary in the 1970s.

The passive aesthetic engagement with surface was one that angered documentary photographer Tish Murtha. Murtha, often associated with the concerned photography of Amber, believed that the advocates of social realism in British documentary photographic practice held a 'peculiar' belief that 'poverty is beautiful' and worked to manipulate the narratives of photographic projects to suit a 'philosophy of working class culture' in which the aesthetic dimension ennobled and naturalised the conditions of an always-passive subject.³⁹ Such perspectives were shared by those who saw photographers looking backwards towards a 'golden age' of documentary picture-making. As Jo Spence later put it, while documentary photographs may be 'useful for showing what appears to be happening in the world, they are still incapable of showing how institutional structures work'.⁴⁰ The desire amongst photographers to seek out the seemingly unphotographable aspects of social struggles arose at a time when documentarists were also eager to convey the changing socio-political climate as it took effect on the physical and social landscape.

In this emerging climate of visual critical theory, some photographers 'felt that relations between the subject, photographer and medium should be cracked open somehow'.⁴¹ This desire for transparency prompted a shift, as photographer and critic Victor Burgin put it, from 'the representation of politics' to the 'politics of representation'.⁴² Spence expressed this shift in her reflections on *Gypsies and Travellers* by articulating the pressing political concerns of documentarists, questioning her 'right to act on behalf of those I photographed who had no control over what was done with their images'.⁴³ Such realisations that concerned documentary served this 'double act of subjugation' would greatly affect the kinds of work created in the 1980s, which occurred in timely conjunction with Thatcher's rise to power. Thus, documentarists who depended on the visualisable physicality of social inequality manifested as

³⁷ W. Benjamin, 'Left-Wing Melancholy (On Erich Kästner's new book of poems)', trans. by Ben Brewster, *Screen*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1974, p. 30

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See: T. Murtha, draft letter to Chris Killip, c. 1981. Tish Murtha Estate and T. Murtha, draft letter to Marie-Luis, commissioning editor of *Extrablatt Magazine*, c. 1981. Tish Murtha Estate.

⁴⁰ J. Spence, *Cultural Sniping: The Art of Transgression* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 81

⁴¹ A. Luvera in the unabridged recording of the 'Photography and community' roundtable conversation at London College of Communications, 19 May 2014.

⁴² V. Burgin, *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity* (London: Palgrave, 1986), p. 39

⁴³ Spence, *Putting Myself in the Picture*, p. 82

culturally readable forms of deprivation (the peeling walls and squalor of slums) and those seeking to explicate the severity of Thatcher's neoliberal project as it effected change in the social body were working not only against the unsettled political climate but also against a growing body of critical theory that discredited the practice.

This crisis in documentary representation by the 1980s was also compounded by pragmatic issues of funding. Soon after Thatcher's government came to power in 1979, the Arts Council's photography sub-committee was axed,⁴⁴ and support for photographic projects and public funding for photography projects waned. Magazine commissions, controlled as they were by a greater editorial influence of advertising and corporate ownership, became less accessible for those hoping to expose the iniquities of the social and economic model as it generated change on the landscape. *Ten: 8*, a defender of the concerned documentary reportage mode, articulated this crisis in access to the very subjects they sought to represent when they discussed the 'crisis in British photography' in 1982. The magazine's editorial board believed there to be a crisis of 'cash and... of confidence in the power of the documentary image [which] converge at a time when the need to document life in Britain is at its most acute'.⁴⁵ The writers and photographers of *Ten: 8* were highlighting the greater restrictions placed on photography in the public domain whilst concurrently lamenting the ways in which they could represent contemporary life if both the financial means and belief in the importance of the imagery produced were bankrupt. These photographers felt such themes were especially pertinent in the context of Thatcher's implementation of waste-saving policies as they cast visible change in the physical and social make-up of Britain. The reasons for this can be best expressed in considering the radical effect of economic crisis on the social and physical landscape. David Harvey has considered how, alongside the transformation in dominant ideologies, psychological dispositions and 'political subjectivities', the physical fallout from economic crisis entails much getting:

torn down and laid to waste to make way for the new. Once productive landscapes are turned into industrial wastelands... [in a] wholesale reconfiguration of physical landscapes.⁴⁶

For Harvey, crisis affects not only the organisation of societies and relations, social thought and understanding of dominant ideologies, but also the physical landscape in which these take place. The photographic documentation of austere, melancholy visions of decline offered photographers a sounding board against which they could convey the fragility and ensuing emaciation of the social body as economic changes took effect throughout the decade.

⁴⁴ See: M. Weaver, 'The Arts Council and Photography', *Camerawork*, no. 18, March, 1980, p. 15

⁴⁵ 'Editorial', *Ten: 8*, 1982, p. 2

⁴⁶ D. Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2014) Prologue

As Thatcher's neoliberal project expanded, however, the physical traces to which these documentarists responded were incrementally eroded by a practical form of what Berlant described as 'hygienic governmentality' (a cultural cleansing and management of the abject forms of social life).⁴⁷ In his analysis of photography in the late 1970s and early 1980s, David Campany has described how documentary photography experienced 'a radical change in character' due to:

the expansion of international capitalism... [U]rban life was becoming socially divisive, subject to unstable markets... [T]he growth of telecommunications and the decline of urban manufacturing [meant that] significant city functions became electronic and thus invisible to the camera.⁴⁸

Technology's role in the dematerialisation of industry in the 1980s becomes especially relevant to a photographic discourse reliant on the visual rendering of issues such as work and industry. By the mid-1980s, photographers questioned how the visually intelligible photographic tropes and motifs of struggle, the poverty and the abject squalor of social housing, the hardships of the destitute – so central to the documentary realist approach – were politically outmoded by this new culture of critical theory or disappearing as they were physically and discursively swept away by forms of hygienic governmentality. Therefore, as the political credibility of socially concerned documentary photography was called into question, photographers, writers and critics were simultaneously mired in questions of how best to document and challenge the effects of Thatcherism (issues such as access to work, unemployment, deprivation, social inequality) if they were, seemingly, no longer visible.⁴⁹ Thus, not only did the debates on representation in postmodernising society affect the mode of representation, the very elements of globalisation, neoliberalism and new technologies effected a profound crisis in photographic representation. As the abject manifestations of the industrial past were swept away and as the socially redundant were excluded, photographers needed to find new ways to engage in with the lived experiences of life in 1980s Britain. To fully comprehend the important role that abjection played in revalidating and renewing aspects of British photography in crisis the 1980s, we must assess the various understandings of abjection and how they might be methodologically applied to this analysis.

iii. Defining Social Abjection

Imogen Tyler's account of 'social abjection' is chiefly concerned with the ways in which economically unproductive people (the unemployed) and socially and physically vulnerable

⁴⁷ Berlant, 'The Face of America', p. 175

⁴⁸ D. Campany, *Photography and Art* (London: Phaidon, 2012), p. 29

⁴⁹ See: 'Restricted Practices: Documentary Photography in Britain Today', *Ten*: 8, no. 7/8, 1979

minority social groups (refugees, the disabled, for example) are mediated through ‘revolting aesthetics’⁵⁰ in linguistic constructions within mainstream discourse. This dissertation’s adaptation of ‘social abjection’ as explored by Tyler sees subjects reviled in photographic discourses. To understand how photography has been implicated in the application of and resistance to social abjection, especially given its capacity to give visual form to such discourses, it is vital to first explore the various meanings of ‘abject’.

The Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of ‘abject’ lends a fuller account of the many ways abjection can be considered. In its verbal form, ‘to abject’ is to ‘cast off or away; to cast out, exclude, reject, especially as inferior, unworthy, or repugnant’. In its adjectival form, an abject is ‘a person, an action, a situation of low repute; despicable, wretched; self-abasing, servile, obsequious’. Such actively repugnant manifestations of the abject were explored in Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytical text *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* in 1980.⁵¹ For Kristeva the abject is a grotesque ‘other’, an objectified *thing*, and abjection is the abhorrent *experience* or confrontation with that abject thing. The abject, in its disgusting disposition, ‘disturbs identity, system, order’.⁵² Kristeva vividly describes abjection as an experience of disgust towards the ambivalent when she details a scenario in which bodily waste and food take on a shared corporeality:

Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung... The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck... When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk... I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach.⁵³

The abject is thus the experiential confrontation with a slippery, uncontrollable object that ‘does not respect borders, positions, rules’ so must be violently *abjected* – cast off from the body – in order to avoid contamination.⁵⁴ Kristeva’s physical experience of abjection is a reaction to seeing the inanimate emulating the materiality of the body.⁵⁵ For Kristeva, the capacity for disgusting objects to metamorphose – to transgress borders of identity – is central to their indispensability. She explains: ‘the abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture’.⁵⁶ The corporeal experience of the abject translates into culture whereby the abject

⁵⁰ Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, p. 25

⁵¹ Originally published in French as *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 1980, and as *Powers of Horror* in 1982.

⁵² J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. by Leon S Roudiez (New York: Colombia University Press, 1982), p. 4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 2

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4

⁵⁵ K. Goodnow, *Kristeva in Focus: From Theory to Film Analysis* (Oxford : Berghahn Books, 2010), pp. 29–30

⁵⁶ Kristeva, *Powers*, p. 2

confrontation with socially designated contaminants fortifies cultural norms and bolsters societal consensus.

Tyler's account of the social experiences of abjection is critical of Kristeva's perspective, which is always accounted from that of the person abjecting.⁵⁷ What is absent from Kristeva's account is, Tyler argues, 'what it means to be (made) abject, to be the one who repeatedly finds herself the object of the other's violent objectifying disgust'.⁵⁸ Thus, for Tyler:

Abjection is not just a psychic process but a social experience. Disgust reactions, hate speech, acts of physical violence and the dehumanising effects of law are integral to processes of abjection. Indeed, abjection should be understood as a concept that describes the violent exclusionary forces operating within modern states... that strip people of their human dignity and reproduce them as dehumanised waste, the dregs and refuse of social life.⁵⁹

Tyler is strongly influenced by Georges Bataille whose short essay in 1934 titled 'Abjection and Miserable Forms' described abjection as a social experience of marginalisation: 'an imperative force of sovereignty, a founding exclusion.'⁶⁰ Abjection, for Bataille, is a disbarment whereby part of the population is constituted as moral outcasts: 'represented from the outside as the dregs of the people'.⁶¹ Writing in the context of the rise of fascism, Bataille saw the classless abjects of modern life as unable to escape the structural forces that rendered their bodies closer to the disgusting qualities of life, from the defilement of dirty labour to their habitation in diseased environments. For Bataille these waste populations, while cast off from the mainstream, 'intrude at the centre of public life as objects of disgust', serving, as Kristeva similarly argued, to prime cultural norms.⁶² The intrusion of abject populations in public life resonates with Berlant's articulation of hygienic governmentality whereby the objectification of abject bodies is deployed to bolster its hegemony in the service of 'the common good'.⁶³

Bataille's work on the dehumanisation of abjected populations would later be explored through the figure of the societal castaway in Bauman's book *Wasted Lives*. Bauman discussed the expanse of 'liquid modernity' against the rise of 'waste populations' whose precariousness is best exemplified in the figure of the refugee. The stateless, jobless and homeless figure

⁵⁷ For Tyler's extensive critique of Kristeva's formulation of abjection, see: Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, pp. 29–35 and pp. 104–124.

⁵⁸ Tyler, *Social Abjection*, p. 4

⁵⁹ I. Tyler 'Against Abjection', *Feminist Theory*, vol. 10, no. 1, April, 2009, p. 87

⁶⁰ I. Tyler, 'The Wretched of the Earth', 11 July, 2013. <https://socialabjection.wordpress.com/2013/07/11/the-wretched-of-the-earth/>. Accessed 15 January 2015.

⁶¹ G. Bataille, 'Abjection and Miserable Forms', S. Lotringer (ed.) *More & Less* (Cambridge: MIT, 1999), p. 9

⁶² Ibid., p. 10 and Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*: p. 2

⁶³ Berlant, p. 175

embodies the haunting image of the friction between the ever-expanding ‘liquid modernity’ of neoliberal capitalism and the wastefulness of the West’s excessive consumption.⁶⁴ Bauman’s analysis sees the connection between the relentless expansion of capitalism and the growth of ‘waste populations’ – migrants and refugees, for example – who are discursively rendered threateningly abject in western media.⁶⁵ Bauman’s observation of the synonymy between excluded populations and waste resonates with Bataille’s view that, as Sylvere Lotringer describes, ‘people don’t just become abject because they are treated like a thing, but because they become the things to themselves’.⁶⁶ Thus the relationship between the rendering of valueless subjects as waste, the abject subject’s performative enactment of the state of abjection and the cultural policing of the abject are closely connected.

The social formulations of abjection are thus closely linked with notions of value, the impoverished embodying the waste of a system which renders their bodies disposable. The relationship between value and waste in late capitalist society was explored in a visual context by art historian Julian Stallabrass in his book *Gargantua: Manufactured Mass Culture*. Stallabrass analysed a confrontation with the visual representation of waste and its power to provoke greater understandings of value. By examining the relationship between the production of commodities and the creation of waste, Stallabrass argued that the vision of the discarded commodity exposes the fragility of capitalism. He explains:

In becoming rubbish the object, stripped of this mystification, gains a doleful truthfulness... it becomes a reminder that commodities, despite all their tricks, are just stuff; little combinations of plastics or metal or paper... we greet old adverts and the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of design in old commodities: their arbitrariness and alien nature are suddenly revealed.⁶⁷

Central to Stallabrass’s examination of rubbish is the capacity for its visual presence to unravel the mystique of commodities. Rubbish exposes ‘the broken promises of capitalism’ as its waste-objects reveal their deceitful actuality through decay.⁶⁸ This revelation and demystification through decomposition relates to the abject experiences of ambivalence as the ‘alien nature’ of consumer advertising and design decompose. Such analyses offer this examination a means to consider how different meanings and values are applied to the representation of social and physical waste brought about by crisis.

⁶⁴ See chapter: ‘To each waste its dumping site: Or the waste of globalization’, Bauman, *Wasted Lives*, pp. 63–93

⁶⁵ Ibid. pp. 66–67

⁶⁶ S. Lotringer, ‘Les Miserables’, S. Lotringer (ed.) *More & Less* (Cambridge: MIT, 1999), p. 6

⁶⁷ J. Stallabrass, *Gargantua: Manufactured Mass Culture* (London: Verso, 1996), p. 175

⁶⁸ Ibid.

In his critique of Stallabrass's essay, art historian John Roberts questioned whether the presence of a rubbish dump or an overflowing waste bin can truly offer a moment of 'critical insight into the law of value'.⁶⁹ Similarly, art historian Gillian Whiteley has argued recently in her book-length study of junk in twentieth century British art that:

trash is not inherently a conduit for the subconscious and neither is it a universal state of transgression or dissent... As Jacques Ranciere has implied in his exploration of the correlation between politics and art, meaning is usually dependent on an exterior state of conflict. There are no inherently politicised materials or art objects – there are only political 'contexts'.⁷⁰

While the exposition of rubbish itself may not provide robust critical tools for the examination of social breakdown, rubbish and waste (social, physical, economic) in its political context provides this research with a means to assess the abject state of disposability and visual degradation as it emerged in the photography of the period. This dissertation engages with the wider political context of social disgust and marginalisation as it spread throughout the 1980s. To what extent, then, can visions of waste and rubbish – in their social contexts – bring about a greater understanding of societal values?

Answers can be found in the assessment of assertions such as Gay Hawkin's analysis of Kristevan abjection in her book *The Ethics of Waste*. Following a similar line of argument to those of Roberts and Whiteley's examination of the limitations of Stallabrass's exploration of trash, Hawkins describes:

while psychoanalysis is useful for explaining the visceral power of disgust in relation to bodily waste... most of the waste we encounter is not bodily and nor is it experienced as abjecting. The detritus of urban life congealed in gutters or dumped on the street doesn't destabilise the self. It just hangs around largely ignored.⁷¹

While Hawkins is correct to argue that all landscapes of detritus may not destabilise the psyche in the horrifying mode that Kristeva meditates upon nor act as catalysts for understanding 'the law of value', this dissertation's adaptation of Kristeva's abject asserts that visions of society's loss of control manifested as waste – social, physical, industrial and so forth – destabilises the *social* through the visual. The most potent example of this politically and socially abject 'context' that destabilised the social body through the stream of abject imagery is evident in the chaotic scenes of proliferating waste during the winter of discontent. Like that abject winter of 1978–9, the 1980s was marked by socially abject contexts, the photography of which homed in on imagery of physical and social waste to convey a national body in crisis. A mainstay in these

⁶⁹ J. Roberts, "'Oh, I love trash...'", *Variant*, issue 1, 1996 http://www.variant.org.uk/1texts/John_Roberts.html. Accessed 2 March 2015.

⁷⁰ G. Whiteley, *Junk Art: Art and the Politics of Trash* (London: I.B Tauris, 2010), p. 25

⁷¹ G. Hawkins, *The Ethics of Waste* (Oxford: Rowman and Littleford, 2005) p. 3

contexts was the various incarnations of ‘the enemies within’; cast as the lingering residua of ‘the British disease’, they were presented as the morally, socially and sometimes physically abject threats to the health of the social body.

iv. The Enemies Within and the Politics of Disgust

The studies and assessments of abjection discussed so far are united by their emphasis on the perspective of the person or social group ‘doing’ the abjecting. Engagement with the waste-making capacities of neoliberalism must go further than examining only the photographic responses to the abject. What kinds of analytical tools might we use to ascertain how subjects are visually made abject through hegemonic institutional frameworks? We now turn to the ways in which sections of the population or areas of social life were abjectified – made disgusting – and the methods photographers employed to confirm and contest this.

Kristeva’s conceptualisation of abjection offers this examination an understanding of the corporeal *experience* of abjection, which is vital to comprehending the means through which feelings of abhorrence were engendered in the population. As this dissertation will uncover, Thatcher’s party, alongside other political groups, sought to stimulate the olfactory, visual and visceral senses to bring out the economic, social and political sensibilities of disgust in the social body. These physical responses to abject formations enable visual and textual manifestations to be received at the base level of emotive political understanding. These are the senses that politicians have often sought to stimulate.⁷² The corporeal dimension to Kristeva’s assessment of abjection sees disgust as a spatialising experience; it has the capacity to establish and transgress borders. The discursive construction of borders and boundaries between the remnants of ‘sick Britain’ and the new ‘healthy’ neoliberal social body, are important, especially to a culture that increasingly deployed politics at a bodily level.⁷³ The Conservative Party’s advocacy of abject discourses of social transgression is reflected in politician Enoch Powell’s 1968 ‘rivers of blood’ speech where he recounted the story of an elderly white woman who ‘finds excreta pushed through her letterbox’ by young black ‘foreigners’. Since then abject narratives of corporeal transgression became commonplace in Conservative Party rhetoric.⁷⁴ Thatcher would implement such abject devices in her leadership campaign in 1978 when she

⁷² The relationship between right-wing political convictions and disgust has been examined. See: C.J Brenner, ‘Disgust sensitivity predicts political ideology and policy attitudes in the Netherlands’, *European Social Psychology*, vol. 45, issue 1, February, 2015, pp 27–38.

⁷³ Artistic preoccupations with the ‘polluting’ body focussed on representations of marginalised groups in the 1980s, especially amidst the AIDS crisis and later the social transgressions of ‘the underclass’. See discussion in D. Green, ‘Critical Realism: Text, Context and Time’, J. Baetens and H. Van Gelder (eds) *Critical Realism in Contemporary Art: Around Allan Sekula’s Photography* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2006) p. 172

⁷⁴ ‘Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ Speech’, *The Telegraph Online*, 6 November 2007, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html>. Accessed 10 November 2014

sympathised with citizens who felt themselves to be ‘swamped’ by immigrants.⁷⁵ The Conservative Party’s appeal to politics at the level of bodily abhorrence, and the ‘other’s’ indiscriminate capacity to transgress these social borders, has been a powerful rhetorical device for stimulating consensus in the predominantly white, British-born social group. Where Powell abjectified black children through sensational and disgust-generating references their bodily waste’s abject transgression of intimate boundaries, this analysis will see how similar abjectifying devices – the ‘othering’ of economically vulnerable or minority groups – saw the Conservative Government electoral campaigns bolstered throughout the 1980s by abject rhetorical devices of disgust. The rhetoric of disgust is a powerful instrument of political persuasion as William Ian Miller argues in *The Anatomy of Disgust*: ‘no other emotion... forces such concrete sensual descriptions of its object’.⁷⁶ Disgust’s ‘powerful image generating capacities’ function to structure the moral, social and political world of hierarchies, order and boundaries.⁷⁷ To a society whose political leaders used disgust as a rhetorical device, the abject visualisation of social issues were recruited to illustrate such narratives, especially during general election campaigns where, as the following chapters will show, recourse to rubbish, sickness and mire became a thematic mainstay.⁷⁸

The vocabulary of deluge deployed by Powell and Thatcher was a device that anthropologist Mary Douglas observed in her influential study of pollution and purity. Douglas saw the rhetorical creation and framing of communities ‘under siege’ as a means to indicate a ‘system at war with itself’.⁷⁹ Rhetorics of threat to the social body, or the sense of being mired by ‘the other’ work as a means to enable the external danger to foster ‘solidarity within... when [the social body] is attacked from within by wanton individuals, they can be punished and the structure reaffirmed’.⁸⁰ Thus the abject is deployed as a means to reify the frontier of normative society. As the introductory chapter explained, Colin Hay saw this ‘system at war with itself’ during the winter of discontent when the media sought to engender the feeling of crisis within the reader. David Harvey sees the elevation of national threats, whether ‘real or imagined, both at home or abroad’, as central to the ‘neoconservative restoration of class power’.⁸¹ The

⁷⁵ UK Independence Party Leader Nigel Farage recast politics at the level of the body in the 2015 general election campaign, reviving and transposing the ignorance and fear of HIV prevalent in the 1980s onto the body of the ‘contagious immigrant’. See: ‘Leaders Debates’, BBC Election Debate 2015, BBC One, 16 April 2015. (Dir. Peter Day)

⁷⁶ W. I. Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (London: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 9

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 28. See also: W. Menninghaus, *Disgust: Theory and History of a Strong Sensation* (New York: SUNY, 2012)

⁷⁸ Recourse to the ‘winter of discontent’ and rubbish throughout the 1980s became a campaign mainstay.

⁷⁹ M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (1966: London: Routledge, 2002), p. 173

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Harvey, *A Brief History*, p. 82

presence of a persistent threat serves, as Berlant similarly describes, for the ‘ruling bloc to maintain its hegemony’.⁸² This internal war is a defining characteristic of Guy Standing’s titular embodiment *The Precariat: The Dangerous New Class* whose poverty and precarity is targeted by ‘the populist peddlings of neofascist agendas’ such as those Harvey discusses.⁸³ For Standing, the white British segment of the precariat typically blame the “other” (non-white) for their plight and are keen to punish others in the precariat by cutting “their” benefits’.⁸⁴ The Right’s advocacy of this inverted class discrimination atomises the already alienated and marginalised classes, ridding them of the possibility of solidarity as it casts fragmented and vulnerable groups further and further both from each other and the political centre. Social abjection is thus at work in a variety of political contexts in which disgust is deployed as a compelling means of political persuasion and an effective tool for implementing forms of alienation and social marginalisation.

The production and preservation of the alienated outsider is reflected in the discursive construction of socially abject groups in the late 1970s and 1980s. The ‘othering’ deployed by Powell and Thatcher enabled abjected subjects and groups to be discussed as socially, morally and physically revolting and dangerous to the culturally-constructed figure of the ‘social body’. Judith Butler has described how such disenfranchised ‘spectral’ segments of the population are ‘not just stripped of status... they are *produced* at the same time as they are jettisoned from juridical modes of belonging... In different ways they are, significantly, contained within the polis as its exteriorized outside’.⁸⁵ Butler articulates the ambivalence to which abjected subjects are subjected as they are cast as outsiders. In the 1980s, these spectral segments of the population were *produced* through the rhetoric of exclusion and cast, incongruously, as the ‘enemies within’. Tyler’s analysis draws on the kinds of social groups cast as the enemy within. She examines the many ways in which the ‘figurative scapegoats’ have been generated and coaxed into the scrutiny of public life, deployed by the state to ‘do the dirty work of neoliberal governmentality’.⁸⁶ She explains how the unemployed ‘scrounger’, the ‘illegal immigrant’ and ‘the chav’ are utilised as figurative emblems through which a ‘climate of public anxieties and hostilities are channelled towards... [These abject people] are imagined to be a parasitical drain and threat to scarce national resources’.⁸⁷ These groups of people are registered as the ‘dregs of society’, and as ‘wasted humans’ they are ‘transformed into “national abjects” who are employed to legitimise neoliberal forms of governmentality by effecting insecurity within the

⁸² Berlant, p. 175

⁸³ G. Standing, *The Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) p. 29

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ J. Butler and G.C Sprivak, *Who Sings the Nation-State?* (New York: Seagull Books, 2010), pp. 15–6

⁸⁶ Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, p. 9

⁸⁷ Ibid.

body politic'.⁸⁸ Where Tyler's concern is purely discursive, this analysis sees the visualisation of these forms of social abjection. The centrality of these visualised abject subjects to the preservation of a neoliberal political economy is, I argue throughout, enabled by a photographic visual language which deploys the aesthetics of social and physical disgust. These aesthetics emerge in political advertising and the visual discourses of press photography throughout the decade and are contested by the photographic counter-narratives that sees photographers actively resist this visual culture of disgust by mirroring the socially abject state of the political economy.

v. Methods for Approaching British Photographies in the 1980s

This study of the exclusionary and affirmative forms of social abjection in the photography of Thatcher's Britain is, then, intrinsically tied to notions of how the photographed subject's place within the nation and the 'national body' is formed, enforced, controlled, and perpetuated.⁸⁹ The maintenance and perpetuation of certain forms of consensus regarding the 'abject structure of feeling' must account for the subject, the photographer and the viewer of the imagery. These three participants are central to what Areilla Azoulay termed 'the civil contract of photography', which she describes as a method of reading images in 'an attempt to anchor spectatorship in civic duty towards the photographed persons',⁹⁰ a triangulated relationship between 'the photographer, photographed persons, and spectator'.⁹¹ Within this photographic experience, the photograph can bear witness to the ways in which the image has been deployed to bolster or resist the apparatus that renders certain segments of the population abject. By unearthing the visual means through which the various forms of abject Britain were solidified in the popular imagination, I seek to uncover how photographers worked to disrupt and – as Judith Butler would put it – 'trouble' the hegemonic discourse of the time. If a photographic visual language of destitution was both a tired and visually suspect area of representation, I examine the works of photographers who drew upon these histories and fed back a distorted mirror to the time. By looking at the work of photographers and subjects who worked to performatively convey a counter-narrative to the kinds of imagery championed by the Right, it is possible to reframe and re-present aspects of British documentary of the Thatcher years through the affirmative lens of social abjection that Tyler describes.

⁸⁸ Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, p. 47

⁸⁹ John Taylor's exploration of national identity in and photography in *A Dream of England: Landscape Photography and the Tourist's Imagination* (Manchester: MUP, 1994) becomes especially relevant in Chapter 6.

⁹⁰ A. Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (London: Zone Books, 2008), p. 16

⁹¹ Ibid.

The reframing of documentary projects is set within the wider photographic discourse, especially its relation to modes of governmentality. By considering how Azoulay's 'civil contract of photography' accounts for a mode of relations between the governed – where even the disenfranchised and stateless can become 'citizens' in the citizenry of photography – offers this examination a means to consider how a counter-narrative can be performed in and through the photograph. John Roberts in his analysis Azoulay's work describes how capitalist economies have sought to constrain the citizenry of photography through controlling photographic images. He describes:

What capitalism dislikes about the photographic document is precisely this uncontrollable volatility of the photograph, in which even images that are supposedly secure within the very heart of the system spill out to be used and reframed by others to defame and embarrass the state.⁹²

This dissertation's concern for the affirmative manifestations of social abjection are bound by the notion that photography can work as a means to 'defame and embarrass the state'. The photographs discussed throughout seek, in varying ways, to provide an account for the abject counter-narratives that sees aspects of social life spill out into the visual field of representation to discredit the neoliberal rhetoric of the age. In order to understand how photographers could gauge the kinds of imagery that would defame and embarrass, it is necessary to engage with the kinds of imagery the state had hoped to project. This dissertation thus examines the visual manifestations of an emerging abject structure of feeling and a socially abject visual register in the counter-narratives of the British documentary tradition by first engaging with the various discursive strategies deployed by the narrators of this abject discourse.

This approach to assessing the variety of photographs of the period reflects the nature of debate around photographic picture-making of the time. Tracking and debating the crises of representation in the 1970s and 1980s were radical photography magazines *Camerawork* and *Ten: 8* which, as Gerry Badger describes, 'examined photography as a social and political force rather than as an "art"'.⁹³ Photographic historian Noni Stacey describes how these radical photo magazines were 'examining all of those boundaries between the producers and distributors of photographs, and between picture editors, journalists and photographers'.⁹⁴ The analyses of photography in these periodicals emphasised the political environment and so their concern spanned a variety of media, from the examination of advertising, political propaganda, the use of press photography, photojournalism and vernacular images to exhibition, book and portfolio reviews. The magazines' concerns for the various citizens of photography enabled, as

⁹² J. Roberts, *Photography and its Violations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 10

⁹³ Badger, *Through the Looking Glass*, p. 31

⁹⁴ Burbidge, 'Community Photography', p. 129

photographer Andrew Dewdney has described, photojournalists, documentarians, artists, community artists and activists to see 'photography as a means'.⁹⁵ He continues:

In *Camerawork* and, later, *Ten: 8*, photography was used to show another kind of life that was absent from mainstream media. At that time, Rupert Murdoch owned and promoted a certain view of the world, which many of these groups opposed.⁹⁶

Dewdney highlights the ways in which such journals provided an alternative forum for the dissemination of ideas, discussion and debates on a variety of photographic perspectives – those of the in-house press photographer, the concerned documentarist, the photojournalist, the photo-montage artists of the era. The all-encompassing assembly of photographs discussed in these magazines provides a platform upon which this dissertation can explore the representation of crisis in the 'mainstream media' (the photography of which has received little attention from an art historical perspective)⁹⁷ and the pictures created by independent image-makers who exhibited their version of contemporary social life in these magazines and books, and in exhibitions of the era.⁹⁸ Examining a variety of photographs deployed to represent moments of crisis and change especially in response to contexts such as the miners' strike, youth unemployment, the inner city revolt, financial crises and homelessness can uncover a shared visual language of crisis emerging through the abject structure of feeling. As such, this dissertation does not purport to be an exhaustive survey of British documentary photography or photojournalism in the 1980s but instead expands on Mellor's catalogue essay to assess the wider visual context in which an abject photographic language was created, disseminated and consumed. This analysis exposes the strategies adopted by photographers to fully convey the abject structure of feeling as it fomented in response to the social, economic and political transformations of the era, endorsing and contesting the waste-making politics of Thatcherite neoliberalism.

⁹⁵ Burbridge, 'Community Photography', p. 130

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ However, a number of the press photographers discussed in this dissertation have been subject to reappraisal through recent exhibitions; for example, Neil Libbert at the National Portrait Gallery, London, September, 2012.

⁹⁸ For example, *Guardian* photographer Neil Libbert whose photographs of homelessness, unemployment and poverty are directly influenced by Henri Cartier Bresson's work. See: Guardian Media Archive, Neil Libbert: OHP/47.

Chapter 2:

The British Disease: Queues, Crisis and Propaganda during the Winter of Discontent.

Rubbish collectors are the unsung heroes of modernity.¹

Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives*

As I walked down the road I noticed the most vile overpowering smell. I tried to pretend it was the smell of industrial waste but I knew I was getting close to the deceased.²

Caroline Blackwood, *New Society*, May 1979

To most voters, political products inevitably look very similar, because they are being formulated to deal with the same problems. It is only at the level of ideology – what sort of society is being proposed – that differences are likely to be perceived.³

John Hoskyns, 'Stepping Stones', 1977

The cultural memory of the late 1970s is often pictured, as historian Nick Tiratsoo describes, in the 'hues of blackest black'.⁴ This bleak mental image of the period is a consequence of the events that occurred at the turn of 1978–9. The winter of discontent is often discussed in historical accounts as the abject denouement of a decade that saw Britain battle with inflation, recession, strikes, wage restraints and national debt.⁵ Such accounts are supported by figures which show that January 1979 saw the most working days lost to industrial action since the general strike of 1929 as public sector workers such as lorry drivers, ambulance drivers, nurses, hospital ancillary staff, waste collectors and gravediggers withheld their labour.⁶ As supermarkets ran out of stock, as hospitals closed and rubbish bins went un-emptied, stories describing the effects of the pickets were ever-present in the daily press.⁷ As strike action persisted throughout the winter and across the country, the anti-Labour press launched an attack on government.⁸ In his analysis of this period, Colin Hay describes how:

¹ Bauman, *Wasted Lives*, p. 28

² C. Blackwood, 'Notes from Underground', *New Society*, vol. 48, no. 865, 2 May 1979, p. 256

³ "Stepping Stones", p. 22

⁴ N. Tiratsoo, 'You've Never Had It So Bad: Britain in the 1970s', N. Tiratsoo (ed.) *From Blitz to Blair: A New History of Britain Since 1939* (London: Orian, 1997), p. 186

⁵ See for example: D. Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun: the Battle for Britain, 1974–1979* (London: Penguin, 2012)

⁶ T.M. López, *The Winter of Discontent: Myth, Memory and History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014) p. 1

⁷ See: J. Winter and Sue Willis, 'Shops under siege – fury of the wives', *Daily Mail*, 19 January, 1979, pp. 1–2 and A. Kent, 'What a load of old rubbish!', *Daily Mail*, 2 February, 1979, p. 9.

⁸ Apart from the *Daily Mirror*, the mainstream print media were at this time overwhelming anti-Labour. Stuart Hall saw the Right's 'colonisation of the popular press [as] a critical victory in the struggle to define the 'common sense' of the times', 'The Great Moving Right Show', p. 48. See also discussion in chapter 'Election and Depression, 1979–1981' in E. J. Evans, *Thatcher and Thatcherism*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013)

the winter of discontent can be interpreted as a strategic moment in the transformation of the state. It also emerges as a moment in which the influence of the media, perhaps more than at any other point in postwar British history, was crucial.⁹

Hay argues that during the closing years of the 1970s, the Conservatives and the print media worked mutually to present the electorate with an image of Britain in crisis.¹⁰ Hay's work, following Louis Althusser, is concerned with the way the print media used language to render readers 'interpellates', or subjects, of the text. The media, Hay argues, used language that enabled readers to accommodate themselves as subjects within in narratives of collective national strife, which served to encourage dissatisfaction with the Labour Government.¹¹ While Hay examined how the press endeavoured to inculcate feelings of crisis in the reader, I am here concerned with the way the print media used photographs and imagery to support stories that would disgust their readers on a social, moral and visceral level to instil within the electorate a desire for political change. Some historians are eager to point out that analysis of the winter of discontent is often exaggerated, that life, for a majority of the population, simply went on.¹² While this was certainly true for many, the media at the time, as Hay indicates, were eager to describe the tumultuous effects of strike action across the country. The visibility of conflict – from the emotive scenes of cancer patients stood in the cold outside hospital pickets to the uncollected refuse across parts of Britain – was central to the constitution of this time as a period of profound crisis. If it is accepted that only a small section of the population was directly affected by the conflict, it was during the winter months that the electorate would become, as Hay describes, injected 'into the narrative structure loosely framed by a media discourse'.¹³ By analysing the emergence of the abject vision of 'the sick man of Europe' in the print media, political advertising, press and documentary photography, it is possible to see that as the population bore witness to the chaotic visual imagery manifesting in their newspapers and on their television screens, they would begin to experience, vicariously, the symptoms of a deteriorating national body in crisis.

To ascertain the extent to which the Conservative Party depended upon the visual construction of crisis, I analyse 'the poster that won the election' to consider the power of the visual at this

⁹ Hay, 'Narrating Crisis', p. 261

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 262 and C. Hay, 'Chronicles of a Death Foretold: The Winter of Discontent and Construction of the Crisis of British Keynesianism' in *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 63 No. 3, 2010, pp. 446–470

¹¹ Hay, 'Narrating Crisis', p. 262

¹² See: Sandbrook, *Seasons in the Sun*, and A. McSmith, *No Such Thing As Society* (London: Constable, 2011)

¹³ Hay, 'Narrating Crisis', p. 262

time.¹⁴ Examining the posters *Labour Isn't Working*,¹⁵ (Fig. 5) and *Britain Isn't Getting Any Better*, (Fig. 6) reveals how the use of photography helped differentiate the Conservative 'brand' from the other political 'products' on offer. As Thatcher later argued, the Party's electoral success in 1979 lay in their well-thought-out programme of government combined with their 'apprenticeship in advertising', where they 'learnt how to put a complex and sophisticated case into direct and simple language... so our agenda would... strike people as familiar common sense rather than a wild radical project'.¹⁶ Stuart Hall, however, believed the campaign began in the preceding years, when:

an effective ideological crusade was waged by the radical right. This was not a simple vote for Mrs Margaret Thatcher propaganda campaign. It was an attempt to penetrate to some of the core and root social ideas in the population. They seized the notion of freedom.¹⁷

Hall points towards the incremental establishment of a neoliberal sensibility in the population, gradually instilling the desire for 'freedom' from 'the shackles of Socialism' as the motor for societal change. The rhetoric of freedom, as the introductory chapter explained, has been crucial to the establishment of neoliberal political economies and allusions to freedom have been central to the histories of Conservative Party advertising. This historical contextualisation explores the visual significance and the contemporary relevance of the sick national body in the poster *Britain Isn't Getting Any Better*. Hall's critique of Thatcher's 'effective ideological crusade' leaves open the possibility that the print media were, too, rendered as 'interpellates' of the *Stepping Stones* communications strategy, whereby they could fulfil the report's mission to establish the Right's vision of 'the healthy society'.¹⁸

i. Abject Analogies and the Winter of Discontent

In the week before the general election of 1979, *New Society* magazine reflected on the state of Britain during the previous winter. Renowned for its bold cover images, this edition of *New*

¹⁴ The election campaign's visual material was seen by many to contribute to the Conservative Party's victory. As discussed in S. Seidman, *Posters, Propaganda, and Persuasion in Election Campaigns Around the World and through History* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 153. Furthermore, the Conservative Chairman Lord Thornycroft also concluded that *Labour Isn't Working* was the poster that 'won the election'. Quoted in W. Fletcher, *Powers of Persuasion: The Inside Story of British Advertising, 1951–2000* (Oxford: OUP, 2008). This poster has enjoyed a number of accolades, most notably its award from *Campaign* for best billboard advertisement of the twentieth century. See J. Webster, 'Campaign Hall of Fame: Chairman's Comment', *Campaign*, December 20, 1999, p. 2

¹⁵ C. Elebash, 'The Americanization of British Political Communications', *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 1984, p. 50. See also M. Scammell, *Designer Politics: How Elections are Won* (London: Macmillan, 1995) and A. Davies, *Promotional Cultures: The Rise and Spread of Advertising, Public Relations, Marketing and Branding* (London: Polity, 2013)

¹⁶ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, pp. 3–4

¹⁷ S. Hall, 'The Battle for Socialist Ideas in the 1980s', Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal*, pp. 190–191

¹⁸ "Stepping Stones", p. 22

Society featured a photomontage front cover (Fig. 7). Pasted on top of the bold red background were black and white cut-out photographs of people carrying out various jobs. Behind a barefoot elderly man gazing forlornly at the ground, a large woman carries a bucket; a man forces a spade into the ground, while another, on his knees, scrubs the floor. These figures were the 'dirty job workers' whose poor labour conditions and low pay led to the most visually striking scenes during the winter. This edition of *New Society* focused on unemployment and the effects of the strike action during the winter. One article reflected on the state of Liverpool during the height of the winter. Caroline Blackwood's vivid description of the vile and overpowering stench generated by the gravediggers' strike is an unapologetically dystopian presentation of the city. Blackwood utilised binary similes which described a 'hellish landscape where cheap prefabricated factories... roll on like fields. Barbed wire fences provide the only hedges and the menacing silhouette of pylons are the nearest thing to trees'.¹⁹ Like the bodies stored in disused warehouses, the writer described how the city of Liverpool 'gives the feeling that it died a long time ago and no one chose to bury it'.²⁰ The writer is unforgiving in her criticism, not only of the gravediggers but of the abhorrent state of the city's overall decay.²¹ Her article utilises a combination of sociobiological and corporeal metaphors to reflect upon the social, physical and moral sickness of both the city and its inhabitants.

The writer's use of abject metaphors alongside synthetic and organic similes reveals the influence of the 'sick Britain' discourse promoted by Hoskyns. Blackwood's description of an insidious and all-pervading deathly stench defines a landscape that viewers of the BBC's post-apocalyptic drama *Survivors* would relate to well. The programme, which ran between 1975 and 1977, concerned the survivors of a plague known as 'the Death' which was spread across the globe by a Chinese doctor. The programme's slights against communism and socialism were a mainstay throughout, especially as the administration of the remaining survivors was overseen by a sinister and megalomaniacal trade union leader. The programme's most emotive scenes were those drawn from Britain's contemporaneous states of emergency: the trains stop running, the lights go out and communication lines are cut; people queue up in hospitals and it is feared the nation may become overwhelmed with un-buried bodies.²² *Survivors* presented the insidious nature of 'the Death' as a mirror to the contemporary social economy of the nation in crisis, a state of emergency caused and perpetuated by socialism.

¹⁹ This Ballardian description is aided by one Liverpool resident who describes the gravedigger strike as 'barbaric. It's like something in science fiction'. See Blackwood, p. 256

²⁰ Blackwood, p. 257

²¹ Ibid.

²² In contrast to these projections of London in a state of emergency, the protagonist refers to a form of corporeal hygiene as she describes the city like 'a pampered baby with thousands of people feeding it and cleaning it'.

This kind of abjectification of politics and the physical landscape of modern Britain would recur through similar corporeal metaphors in the print media at this time. Such sociobiological metaphors of abjection and discourses of disease and addiction had occurred in previous years when newspapers ran campaigns against ‘benefit scroungers’. The unemployed ‘skivers’ were Britain’s ‘Welfare Junkies’, or *The Sun*’s ‘Parasites’, vilified as abject leeching layabouts. As the *Daily Mail* saw it, the ‘welfare system, complex and cumbersome, now covers the whole body politic with a rash of benefits, payments and allowances’.²³ This construction of moral crisis in the body politic through the language of corporeality and addiction was a powerful precursor to the way the media would visually and textually negotiate the construction of crisis in 1979.

The print and television media recast the pestilence metaphors and abject prosopopoeia during the winter of discontent. Thatcher’s narrative of crisis was aided, as Hay has pointed out, by ‘the tabloid and broadsheet media alike’.²⁴ The language used by the national media employed the vocabulary of the body to describe the infirmity of the economy. The *Daily Mirror* observed how pickets were ‘paralysing exports’ and factories were ‘starved’ of materials.²⁵ The broadsheets, including *The Guardian*, often referred to the ‘grave’ situation of the British economy in decline, describing a nation whose ‘nerves were squeezed’²⁶ by planned strikes and referred to government spending as a ‘contagious British disease’.²⁷ As trade unions representing the lowest paid public sector workers, from petrol tanker drivers to nurses and refuse collectors, held strikes across the country in December 1978, the Labour Government was said to be ‘held at ransom’, ‘strangled by picketing’ and experiencing ‘industrial paralysis’.²⁸ Set against these stories of ‘paralysis’ were images of consumers responding to the elevated media crisis around the petrol tank drivers’ strike: frenzied motorists queueing for petrol and consumers grabbing the remaining canned goods in emptied supermarkets. The Labour Government’s economic policy was seen to be haemorrhaging and the citizens were in panic. The Labour Party’s eagerness to allay any notion of crisis led to James Callaghan’s much maligned dismissal of ‘mounting chaos’ on 10 January 1979. Callaghan’s belief that ‘other people in the world’ would not share the view ‘that there is mounting chaos’ gave rise the next day to *The Sun*’s front page headline ‘Crisis, What Crisis?’.²⁹ *The Sun* was determined to portray a government out of touch. Callaghan’s repudiation served to exacerbate public perception of Labour’s remove from reality.

²³ ‘Daily Mail Comment’, *Daily Mail*, 30 September, 1977, p. 6

²⁴ Hay, ‘Chronicles of a Death Foretold’, p. 466

²⁵ A. Law and J. Desborough, ‘This is your strife’, *Daily Mirror*, January 12, 1979, p. 1

²⁶ R. Norton-Taylor, ‘Nation’s nerves squeezed’, *Guardian*, February 26, 1979, p. 1

²⁷ M. Walker, ‘The contagious British disease’, *Guardian*, February 26, 1979, p. 13.

²⁸ D. Jack, ‘Life or death picket’, *Daily Express*, January 25, 1979, p. 1

²⁹ ‘Crisis, what Crisis?’, *Sun*, January 11, 1979, p. 1

In the early months of 1979, evidence of a 'sick Britain' did not go unnoticed by the international media either. The hardship for British citizens faced with union strikes was, for German media, part of a wider historical picture. The Institute of Economic Affairs saw 'economic schadenfreude' emerging in reports such as the German magazine *Stern*'s 1979 edition dedicated to the discussion of 'The British Disease'. It stated that 'Britain today is regarded as the sick man of Europe who prefers the cup of tea to working, would rather go on strike than make compromises and nurtures his tradition rather than thinking about his future'.³⁰ The British nation as analogous with the British citizen, the landscape and the body, was a vision Thatcher would invoke in a party political broadcast. Thatcher's affirmation of national crisis was delivered in a broadcast titled 'The Winter of Discontent' on 17 January, 1979. In this broadcast she empathised with the crisis citizens faced, describing how trade union action was orchestrated to make the public 'suffer', particularly for 'the sick and the disabled'.³¹ Against this bleak crisis she spoke of Britain's 'fertile land' as a place of 'great human resources'. Thatcher's narrative of suffering and crisis (the transcript of which was reprinted in the *Daily Mail* the following day) set against that of the healthy society of abundance and fertility during this bleak winter was a powerful rhetorical foil. As the pathological nation was seen to be thwarted, the vision of the immobile, workless and parasitic benefit claimants would evoke strong public sentiment.

ii. Labour Isn't Working

The Conservatives began their advertising campaign on March 30, 1978. Former television producer and the Conservative Party's director of publicity Gordon Reece commissioned the advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi to lead the party's electoral advertising campaign. The emerging design agency was employed to create both poster advertising and party political broadcasts in anticipation that Callaghan would call an election in September that year. The Prime Minister's decision to postpone the election lent the Conservative's commission time to experiment with methods of marketing the Conservative brand. The experiments manifested in 'negative' advertising campaigns, attacking the perceived weaknesses of the Labour Party.³² This communicative strategy was popularised by the Conservatives in the early 1950s.³³ The rationale for this negative campaign was, as Tim Bell, head of the Saatchi & Saatchi commission, later explained, the conviction that 'an opposition must use communication

³⁰ Quoted in Walker, 'The contagious British disease', p. 14

³¹ M. Thatcher speaking in 'The Winter of Discontent', Conservative Party Political Broadcast, January 1979

³² For a discussion of negative political advertising at this time, see M. Rosenbaum, *From Soapbox to Soundbite: Party Political Campaigning in Britain since 1945* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1997), pp. 152–154

³³ Rosenbaum, *From Soapbox to Soundbite*, pp. 10–11

techniques effectively to sharpen public dissatisfaction with the government... everything we did [in this campaign] was directed towards increasing the salience of this dissatisfaction'.³⁴ The agency sought to depict Labour as a party of regression, one whose economic and social policies had encouraged the nation to contract.

On the evening of 17 May, 1978, the BBC aired the Conservatives' first party political broadcast of the campaign, titled *Britain is Going Backwards*. Saatchi & Saatchi's broadcast, scripted by the creative director Jeremy Sinclair, saw a climber descending a mountain, a businessmen walking backwards over Waterloo Bridge, and the arms of Big Ben turning anti-clockwise. Michael Heseltine provided the narration and declared: 'in a word, Britain is going backwards. How have we got into this state?'. Bell later described the rationale for this advert:

the idea was that as a result of the way the country had been governed for the previous years, Britain had gone backwards in its achievements. Whereas in the past it had gone forwards. And, if we could bring the past into the future – into the present – then we could go forwards ourselves. We reversed the film so that the things that had become achievements became failures. And the idea was that if we could bring the glories of the past into the present and gain the economic strength of the past, then we had a chance of regaining the glories of the past in the present.³⁵

Britain is Going Backwards represented the agency's emphasis on Labour's synonymy with *recession*. However, while the Conservatives saw Labour's receding nature as debilitating, they also saw the invocation of the past, in the present and the future, as illuminating. The wholesale emphasis on the past in the broadcast was seen by the *Daily Mirror*'s political editor as 'undiluted nostalgia'.³⁶ Rather than suggest that Britain was going backwards under Labour, for this writer, 'all it proved was that the Tories are going backward under Margaret Thatcher'.³⁷ Thatcher was, of course, looking backwards.

As art historian Sarah James has noted, 'Thatcher looked into the past and sought to project it into the future, but her version of the past, however – the once 'great' Empire also sought by Churchill – was a skewed and selective version of British history'.³⁸ Saatchi & Saatchi integrated Thatcher's belief that the past was the ideal future for Britain. As historians Stephen Evans and E.H.H. Green have argued respectively, Thatcher's politics at this time were influenced by a similarly skewed and selective adaptation of the policies and values of the One

³⁴ Rosenbaum, p. 13

³⁵ A. Curtis, 'The Attic' from *The Living Dead: Three Films About the Power of the Past*, dir. Adam Curtis (BBC Two, Spring 1995)

³⁶ T. Lancaster, 'Land of soap and tory', *Daily Mirror*, May 19, 1978, p. 10

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ S. James, 'Maggie and the Fairytale of the Free Market', *Either/And*, <http://eitherand.org/protest-politics-community/maggie-fairytale-free-market/> [accessed July 1, 2013]

Nation group of the 1950s.³⁹ Thatcher's selective approach to One Nation is best exemplified in the influence that Angus Maude, a One Nation member serving in Thatcher's opposition party in 1978, had in his advocacy of the individual over the collective. He once stated that:

Society...is our real enemy. First it has become the repository of all the primary responsibilities of individuals and families; all the claptrap about 'social security... and 'social needs'... is an elaborate conspiracy of self-deception... Society does not provide 'social security' which is State officials doling out the taxpayers' money... I think we have to destroy society.⁴⁰

Maude's attack on the abstract concept of society was something Thatcher would later famously echo.⁴¹ Maude conflated – and Thatcher would later conflate – social security with irresponsibility. Thatcher was determined to roll back the state, to allow the free movement of capital, to promote self-determination and private enterprise. As Green argues, both One Nation and Thatcherism were seeking to rectify a social and economic 'imbalance' of state intervention which they saw as having been 'caused by the advance of Socialism'.⁴² The imbalance of state control over social and economic policy was seen to One Nation Conservatives to be throttling the 'freely-operating competition' so desired by Thatcher.⁴³ Thatcher's conviction that Britain had stalled in an immutable postwar settlement could be visualised in an image that had a great deal in common with the lived experience of Britain in the 1940s and 1950s. Anathema to the ideology of free movement, economic expansion and personal independence was the static vision of state dependency. The agency adopted a powerful symbol of economic and social depression through the depiction of an immobilised line of people stood waiting for officials to 'dole out' money, a queue of benefit claimants waiting for the welfare system to provide.

Labour Isn't Working became the defining image of Thatcher's campaign. The poster incorporated the photographic documentation of a vast serpentine queue of people stretching from the top of the image to the sign of the 'Unemployment Office' in the bottom foreground. The people queuing in *Labour Isn't Working* are set against a white backdrop, decontextualised from any surrounding landscape. Created in August 1978 (and refashioned in landscape form for billboard display later on) Saatchi & Saatchi manifested their aim to present a dialogue between past, present and future tenses in a single image. This queue was able to reference a specific history of cultural anxiety drawn from the depression era levels of unemployment; it was able to comment on the state of unemployment in 1978, and crucially indicate an emerging

³⁹ S. Evans, 'The Not So Odd Couple: Margaret Thatcher and One Nation Conservatism', *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2009, pp. 101–121; E.H.H. Green, *Thatcher* (London: Hodder Education, 2006), p. 45

⁴⁰ Quoted in Green, p. 45

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., p. 46

⁴³ Ibid.

Conservative agenda regarding state welfare in the future. The billboard poster *Labour Still Isn't Working* (Fig. 8) adorned over one thousand hoardings across the country by late August 1978.⁴⁴ Saatchi & Saatchi's commercial contacts had enabled the Conservatives to display their poster on prime location hoardings across the country, secured surreptitiously under the names of other clients.⁴⁵ While the poster was created for these large scale hoardings as a public visual experience,⁴⁶ it enjoyed wider circulation through the news media than first anticipated.

As letters to national newspapers reveal, some readers were eager to dispel the apparent veracity of the picture. A letter to the *Daily Mirror* attempted to clarify that, despite appearances, the queue was in fact artificial: 'to pretend they are genuine unemployed disgusts me... Nothing about it is real. You don't find dole queues like that in real life. The public is being conned into believing that something is real which is not real'.⁴⁷ For similar reasons, the poster infuriated the Labour Party. During a parliamentary debate in July 1978 the Labour General Secretary claimed that 'the dole queue consists entirely of Saatchi & Saatchi employees each one of whom appears on the poster five times'.⁴⁸ This queue was, of course, fictional – a photo-composite. The people depicted were not unemployed but were a group of twenty volunteers from Hendon's Young Conservatives.⁴⁹ These volunteer models were taken to a park in North London, photographed and rephotographed along a winding rope, and the photographs were then montaged together to create the final image.

Under pressure from Labour's demands for photographic veracity, Gordon Reece was forced to admit that the image was a composite photograph. He added, however, that to focus on the way the picture was created was to 'fiddle about the periphery'.⁵⁰ In the face of similar criticisms, Angus Maude argued that the 'tragedy' of unemployed people 'should not be aggravated by their being photographed and possibly recognised on poster hoardings'.⁵¹ The revelation that this image was a composite was embarrassing to the Conservatives, not only because

⁴⁴ Rosenbaum, p. 14

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34

⁴⁶ Critic David Bellamy described billboards as a 'visual experience of all city dwellers'. See D. Bellamy, 'Windows and Danger: On Billboards and Cigarette Advertising', P. Holland (ed.) *Photography Politics Two* (London: Comedia, 1986), pp. 54–57

⁴⁷ C. Hamson, 'It's a Phony War by Tories!', *Daily Mirror*, 31 July, 1978, p. 2

⁴⁸ Quoted in F. Emery, 'Tory dole-queue poster angers Labour party', *The Times*, 1 August, 1978, p. 2

⁴⁹ S. Ball, *Dole Queues and Demons: British Election Posters from the Conservative Party Archive* (Cambridge: Bodleian Library, 2011), p. 130

⁵⁰ Quoted in Emery, p. 2

⁵¹ 'Volunteers' queued for Tory poster', *The Times*, 3 August, 1978, p. 2

photomontage, the ‘visual language of opposition’,⁵² was shot through with socialist and revolutionary aesthetic connotations, but because Maude’s acknowledgment that an image of political and rhetorical importance was a fictional construct implicitly revealed that this fabricated imagery was not fully an aspect of lived experience.

Historian Joe Moran in his essay ‘Queuing Up in Post War Britain’ describes the controversy around this image as ‘not simply how symbolic the dole queue had become... but how contrived the imagery was in general’.⁵³ The fabricated nature of the image led Dennis Healey, in August 1978, to condemn the Conservatives for branding themselves like soap powder.⁵⁴ Healey’s attack on the image led to its being reprinted in national newspapers for illustrative purposes, giving it a wider transmission than it had previously enjoyed.⁵⁵ By the autumn of 1978 the poster’s visibility in the public domain was far greater than it otherwise would have been from its position on hoarding sites alone.⁵⁶ The Labour Party’s inability to acknowledge the metaphorical nature of this queue and other observers’ vociferous demands for indexicality served to further its distribution in the public domain.

Saatchi & Saatchi’s artwork capitalised on what Roland Barthes termed the ‘rhetoric of the image’.⁵⁷ The agency exploited the trust invested in photographic renderings of people as faithful accounts of a given reality. The fact that the advertising agency were seen to have been ‘exposed’ as having used ‘trick effects’ in this photocomposite is a telling sign of society’s conviction in photographic truth. Such responses exemplify how the photographic image of people queueing was so embedded in popular consciousness as a communicable visual language of crisis that the message appeared natural.⁵⁸ Barthes describes how ‘trick effects’ such as this ‘intervene without warning in the plane of denotation; they utilise the special credibility of the photograph... its exceptional power of denotation – in order to pass off as merely a denoted message which is in reality heavily connoted’.⁵⁹ The queue as a heavily connoted message could call upon the electorate’s anxieties through its mass depiction of people representing the social body in a way that Barthes describes as a code of connotation that is neither artificial nor natural

⁵² See: *Photomontage Today: Peter Kennard*, dir. Chris Rodrigues and Rod Stoneman (London: Television Cooperative, 1983)

⁵³ J. Moran, ‘Queuing Up in Post-War Britain’, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2005, p. 295

⁵⁴ ‘Tory leader “is being sold like soap powder”’, *The Times*, 10 August, 1978, p. 1

⁵⁵ Elebash, p. 53

⁵⁶ López, p. 19

⁵⁷ R. Barthes, *Image Music Text*, trans. S. Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977)

⁵⁸ Barthes, *Image Music Text*, p. 21

⁵⁹ Ibid.

‘but historical’.⁶⁰ For this image to affect the sensibilities of a citizenship in crisis, it drew upon its connotative visual history, the naturalness of queueing to British cultural histories of crisis, from the Depression to the ration queue, to achieve power in the present. To convey a crisis in the body politic, Saatchi & Saatchi utilised a sign that was deeply embedded in twentieth century visual culture – a trope that could reference issues of freedom and privation.

iii. Queuing and Discourses of Freedom

For postwar Conservatives, queueing had long been conveyed as a characteristic of life under a Labour government. In 1950 Winston Churchill referred to Britain as a ‘Queuetopia’, a term widely adopted by the print media.⁶¹ Churchill’s frustration with queues and his belief that their existence encouraged a closer alignment with communism became a mainstay of the print media in the early 1950s. As Moran points out, in the decades that followed the Second World War ‘it became something of a journalistic cliché to say that the queues in certain British institutions were longer than anywhere “this side of Moscow”’.⁶² The queue became a recurrent trope in consumer advertising of depression era and wartime Britain and was a recurring theme in the Home Intelligence morale reports.⁶³ In wartime and postwar Britain, adverts for a diverse array of products such as chocolate bars, jams, shoe polish and cat food employed the image of the queue to claim that their products could be used to solve, minimise or distract the consumer from the burden of queueing in daily life. The austerity of queueing thus acted as a powerful foil to the liberties of unabated consumerism.

The Conservative Party’s use of the queue is illustrated in the 1955 electoral campaign. In a bid to secure power for a second term, the Conservatives distributed the poster *Queues, Controls, Rationing* (Fig. 9). The bold yellow text overlaid a black and white photograph of women and children standing in a queue outside a shop. Below the image, a warning: ‘don’t risk it again!’. The poster alluded to the government of the late 1940s as materially lacking, immutably authoritarian and devastatingly grey. The poster sought to reinforce Labour’s synonymy with a bleak socialist lifestyle of privation. This image resonates with Stuart Ball’s assertion that postwar Britain by 1955 was characterised by a ‘powerful sentiment of “never again”’.⁶⁴ This sentiment was felt most compellingly by middle class women who, as the 1948 Mass

⁶⁰ Barthes, *Image Music Text*, pp. 21–22

⁶¹ Moran, ‘Queueing Up in Post-War Britain’, p. 287

⁶² Ibid. p. 291

⁶³ National and regional newspapers and magazines featured letters, photos, essays and poems lamenting the role of queueing in public life. I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939–1955* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 118

⁶⁴ Ball, p. 67

Observation report concluded, were subject to ‘the brunt of all queueing’.⁶⁵ Thus during a period of post-austerity affluence, the monochrome image of ration queues bracketed by the bright yellow cautionary text was a powerful visual device that sought to strike a chord with middle class women who had for many years fought against queueing in public life.

Women, consumerism and queueing had been the chief concerns of the British Housewives’ League in the late 1940s. The League, who received growing attention at ‘Anti-Queue Campaigns’ in central London in the 1940s,⁶⁶ was committed to elucidating the relationship between queueing and national decline. A spokeswoman at one anti-queue demonstration stated that the group sought to ‘become an international medium for ensuring world peace as well as watching the British housewife’s interests’.⁶⁷ These grandiose claims were disseminated through the most pervasive media platform available in the mid-1940s: British Pathé’s Cinema Newsreels, which would reach cinema attendance of over 1.64 billion annually.⁶⁸ The One Minute News features on the British Housewives’ League’s protests against the ration queue effectively condemned the policies of the Labour Government.

Women’s experiences of queueing were discussed in other popular media platforms of the day. The burden of queueing was the subject of a 1949 *Picture Post* article ‘Is the Middle Class Doomed?’ which framed the queue as a potential catalyst for social de-stratification. The article began by analysing prewar middle class women’s acquaintance with privacy and the domestic space and went on to consider the inevitable burden of the ration queue:

Today the middle class wife and the council flat wife queue side by side for the fish. Later they meet again at the doctor’s surgery... They both wear Utility coats and carry heavy shopping bags.⁶⁹

The article highlighted the democratisation of consumer culture with the queue representative of collapsing class stratification. Prewar middle class women, who were well acquainted with abundance in the private sphere, became engulfed in a social continuum of privation in public spaces. The queue represented the space where social classes collided and where the perceived ills of the postwar consensus were at their most visible.⁷⁰ The Conservatives’ poster thus drew upon women’s everyday experience of queueing, one that the middle classes in particular viewed

⁶⁵ Ball, p. 67

⁶⁶ Quoted in ‘Anti Queue Campaign’, *The Times*, 5 August, 1945, p. 2

⁶⁷ Quoted in Ibid.

⁶⁸ I. Christie, *Audiences: Defining and Researching Screen Entertainment Reception* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), p. 229

⁶⁹ R. Bowley, ‘Is the Middle Class Doomed?’, *Picture Post*, 4 June, 1949, p. 13

⁷⁰ A Mass Observation respondent stated ‘the queueing system always operates in favour of... the least useful members of the community’ in ‘Queueing’, FR 3036, September 1948 (University of Sussex: Mass Observation), p. 11

adversely due to its inherent egalitarianism.⁷¹ The queue became a symbol of British social life so powerful that Labour's electoral defeat in 1951 was seen by one Labour supporter as being 'lost mainly in the queue at the butcher's or the grocer's'.⁷²

The Conservative Party poster of 1955 therefore utilised a photograph drawn from the past image to bolster its rhetoric of liberation; the picture sought to highlight how the Conservatives had unshackled these women from the socialist chains of privation and granted them the freedom to consume. By depicting these homogenous, austere women awaiting rations whilst wearing utility coats, the poster pointed towards the ways the Conservatives would continue to liberate women from the privations of an egalitarian society. In 1955, the queue symbolised a return to postwar rationing, and in 1979 it was a fear of an ailing nation in decline giving rise to a new socialist order. Thus, visions of queues at times of crisis are culturally provocative. The Conservatives had drawn upon their own cultural construction of queueing, transposing an image of capitalism's crisis into a disparaging visualisation of dystopian socialism.

The Conservatives' endeavour to align Callaghan's government with totalitarian socialism was exhibited in the party election broadcast *Britain is Going Backwards*. As one *Guardian* journalist saw it, the narrator's 'patriotic voice' explained that 'the country was being pulled apart by divisive government... illustrated rather unpatriotically by pictures of a Union Jack being torn... [and] scrunched up in a menacing socialist fist'.⁷³ The aggressive depiction of socialism was further developed in the 1979 poster *1984: What would Britain be like after another 5 years of Labour?* (Fig. 10). Saatchi & Saatchi's allusion to George Orwell's novel attempted to incite anxiety about the coming of totalitarianism, an endeavour stylistically connected to *Labour Isn't Working* with its heavy Franklin Gothic font and overall design. This aesthetic and formal unity enabled *1984* to consolidate a campaign that drew upon a distinctly dystopian visual imagining of Britain under a Labour government.

Taken together, these posters and broadcasts were not simply suggesting that the queue was a nuisance to daily life but were also inciting a much greater emotion in the electorate, that of moral and social degeneration caused by a left-wing political ideology. As the *Stepping Stones* publication had advised, the Conservative Party's communications strategy should invoke fear in the electorate. With this fear, the publication argued, the electorate should be 'made to dislike [the unions] so intensely that their fear turns to anger'.⁷⁴ This dystopian vision of a declining

⁷¹ A Mass Observation respondent stated queueing 'reduces me to a humility lower than being caught in some nasty vulgarity' in 'Queueing', FR 3036, September 1948 (University of Sussex: Mass Observation), p. 12

⁷² Quoted in J. Moran, *Queueing for Beginners: The Story of Daily Life from Breakfast to Bedtime* (London: Profile Books, 2008), p. 63

⁷³ D. Brown, 'Trendy Tories go back to hope and glory', *Guardian*, 18 May, 1978, p. 26

⁷⁴ "Stepping Stones", p. A.1

totalitarian socialist nation alluded to in the poster *1984* would resound with the media's portrayal of the Orwellian landscape of physical and social deterioration during the winter of discontent.

iv. *Britain Isn't Getting Any Better*

By early 1979, *Labour Isn't Working* was able to surpass the connotations of past industrial action and contemporary unemployment levels through the mass strike action taking place. Britain's ongoing characterisation as 'the sick man of Europe' gave the agency sustenance through which to visualise the national body experiencing a corporeal crisis. Saatchi & Saatchi's poster, *Britain Isn't Getting Any Better*, was able to reference the trope of physical deterioration through its redeployment of the queue. In *Britain Isn't Getting Any Better* the Conservatives drew closely upon the crisis in the NHS through the depiction of a queue leading to the sign of a hospital. The image featured predominantly elderly queuers wearing heavy winter coats; others are in wheelchairs, holding crutches, and many have bandages wrapped around their heads. Replicating the format of *Labour Isn't Working*, the line of sick queuers are decontextualised against a white backdrop. As the supplementary 1978 party political broadcast *Coming Soon: The Conservatives* had already alluded to, the Conservatives were eager to highlight the variety of queues – both real and metaphorical – that existed across the country. In the broadcast, a young couple wander from the 'dole queue' to the 'council house queue' to 'the serious operation queue'. The broadcast framed 'queuing' as both an everyday experience and an allusion to the statistics on the nation's access to welfare. As a *Guardian* journalist would find in February 1979 in their own metaphorical construction, 'the queue that people are joining is already very long indeed. Last June there were 609,000 people in them... the average amount of time an individual spends in a queue for surgery is now well over a year'.⁷⁵ Through this spatial and temporally figurative queue, statistics and the health of the nation had become intricately entwined.

At a time of NHS staff strikes, Saatchi & Saatchi's new work gave weight to Thatcher's campaign that emphasised a corporeal and moral crisis in the national body. On Monday 22 January 1979, members of the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE), including NHS nurses, ancillary workers and other staff, went on strike. By early February, the tabloid papers were running stories on the individuals affected by the NHS strikes. The papers' emphases moved from representing the 'sickness' of the union members who refused to work under their pay conditions, to the sickness of the victims caught in between a struggling government and trade unions. The *Daily Mail*'s headline read 'Target for today – sick children'; the *Daily Express* asked 'What right have they got to play God with my life?' and the *Daily Mirror*

⁷⁵ 'The painful queue for surgery', *Guardian*, 26 February, 1979, p. 12

described how there was a ‘Strike threat to Bone Boy’, a child with leukaemia. These emotive articles, deploying subjective accounts of the effects, rather than the causes, of strike action, were a stylistic mainstay of the tabloid press that endeavoured to make the personal political.⁷⁶ The characterisation of Britain’s ill-health in these months did not go unnoticed by Callaghan, who would discuss in private with his cabinet how such depictions were ‘very damaging’.⁷⁷

By February 1979, Saatchi & Saatchi’s poster campaign had taken on a new dimension. For the agency, the days of action demonstrated by NHS staff and the stories of the sick that adorned the daily newspapers enabled the visualisation of the hospital queue to resonate within the personal narrative crisis of the trade unions’ moral decay. The emphasis on moral degeneration reached its emotive peak in stories describing the strikes held by the General and Municipal Workers Union (GMWU). Fifty members of the GMWU, which included gravediggers and crematoria workers, caused public outcry when corpses went unburied. As the *BBC News* stated, it was Liverpool which was ‘most gravely affected’, where strikes lasted for over three weeks.⁷⁸ Numerous articles occupied front pages of newspapers with stories of the mourning families digging graves for their deceased. As Hay describes, the gravediggers’ strike enabled publications like the *Daily Mail* to declare: ‘They won’t let us bury our dead’.⁷⁹ The combined use of third and first person plural pronouns to inculcate nationwide disgust invited the reader to share in the feelings of national abhorrence.⁸⁰

The gravediggers’ strike was at the heart of Blackwood’s article in *New Society* in 1979. As she put it, Liverpool ‘had hundreds of bodies decomposing. The mortuaries, the hospitals, the chapels of rest were full to overflowing... The overflow of corpses was being put in storage in unrefrigerated disused warehouses’.⁸¹ For Blackwood, ‘the gravedigger strike was traumatic in its melancholy symbolism. It seemed the inevitable outcome of the way the country had been going’.⁸² The photographic reports to emerge from the gravediggers’ strike were exceptionally minimal. More commonly such stories went unillustrated. The mental image of the nation’s inability to manage ‘the overflow of corpses’ was seen, as *New Society* put it, ‘as some horrific last straw’.⁸³ These unphotographable visions of an industrial impasse had become a symbolic indictment of the unions. The historical accounts by Andy McSmith and Tara Martin López

⁷⁶ M. Conboy, *Tabloid Britain: Constructing a Community Through Language* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 153

⁷⁷ ‘Conclusions of a Cabinet Meeting’, 1 February, 1979, TNA, CAB/128/65/6, pp. 1-2

⁷⁸ Quoted in Blackwood, p. 255

⁷⁹ Hay, ‘Narrating Crisis’, pp. 262–264

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Blackwood, p. 258

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 255

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 258

have described respectively how the gravedigger strike became one of the defining ‘stock images’ of the crisis.⁸⁴ While these writers refer to ‘stock images’ loosely, it is significant that such photographs do not exist in the public domain. As the *New Society* writer demonstrated in her description of the stench of dead bodies drifting through the city like industrial waste, other newspapers would instead emphasise other olfactory and visual elements effects of strike action. Newspapers turned to the waste that was seen to emanate from the moral and physical degeneration of Britain’s trade unions.

The GMWU strikes in late January and early February led to the most memorable photographs to arise from this winter when the refuse workers went on strike. In the City of Westminster local businesses and residents were urged to take their rubbish to Leicester Square, which was one of thirty-three ‘emergency rubbish dumps’ in central London. Leicester Square became the dumping ground for uncollected refuse. The Conservative-run Westminster City Council was led by anti-litter campaigner Shirley Porter, chairwoman of the Highways and Works Committee, who was responsible for the coordination of refuse collection. Porter, who entered politics to rid London of litter, and who in 1978 set up the unsuccessful ‘Mr Clean-Up’ campaign, was committed to privatising refuse collection. As Porter’s political biographer Andrew Hosken hints, the piles of mounting rubbish in the late 1970s lent the councillor ‘her first impact on national consciousness’.⁸⁵ The potential for a spectacle of abject chaos on a national and international level was grasped by Porter. She gifted visions of mountainous swathes of commercial and residential rubbish to the print and television media as evidence that local councils hands were economically tied by the incompetencies of the Labour Government. *BBC News* footage showed spectacularly chaotic scenes of Leicester Square overflowing with mounds of rubbish bags. A *Daily Express* article wished ‘farewell to Leicester Square’ next to a photograph of pedestrians in Leicester Square flanked by head-high bags of rubbish (Fig. 11). Such images of mounting waste were key to visualising the apocalyptic chaos that echoed the abject visual language of trench warfare.

Photojournalist Homer Sykes traversed the emergency rubbish dumps of central London, photographing the mountainous scenes of uncollected refuse. In Sykes’s picture of the West End in London in 1979, he photographed a suited man wrapping his arm around a woman in a fur coat as they walk huddled together under an umbrella (Fig. 12). This amorous vision echoes the romantic Parisian scenes of Robert Doisneau, but is beset by the pavement of rubbish bags and cardboard boxes piled head-high on the left. Sykes was drawing purposively upon the kinds of romantic reportage images of the interwar period in a way we might describe as a ‘startling and

⁸⁴ McSmith, *No Such Thing*, p. 16 and López, *The Winter of Discontent*, p. 110

⁸⁵ A. Hosken, *Nothing Like a Dame: The Scandals of Shirley Porter* (London: Granta, 2007), p. 42

disturbing inversion'. Sykes rendered a glamourised, saccharine aesthetic colliding with its abject and abraded reality.

The press photography of the time was more explicit in its depiction of the filthied landscape. The *Daily Mirror*'s front page on 9 February 1979 saw a woman thrusting a dead rat towards the camera (Fig. 1). The *Daily Express*'s absurdist coverage on 'a young rat about town' as he dines on the 'rich pickings' of central London sought to heighten the extraordinary, almost carnivalesque state of the nation's decay. These visions, the *Daily Mirror* argued, represented 'the grim symbol of the peril that lurks in rubbish piling up around Britain'.⁸⁶ With vermin threatening to plague cities, the health of the nation came under scrutiny. These images visualised the state that Britain found itself in, threatened by the proliferating diseases emanating from its own waste. By late February 1979, the nation was seen as bedridden, endangered by the impurities that arose in the face of industrial action. The redeployment of the queue in *Britain Isn't Getting Any Better* had a representational function that exceeded the allusion to the crisis of the NHS. By April 1979, Saatchi & Saatchi had created another political broadcast in which they united both the media and the Conservative Party's construction of corporeal crisis. The advert's scenes of pickets, strikes and mounds of rubbish were overlaid by an increasingly distressed narrator repetitively questioning: 'Crisis, what crisis?'. In the broadcast, the narrator stated that the world's economy 'did have a bit of a cold but it seems to be getting over the worst of it. In Britain, that cold seems to be turning into double pneumonia'.⁸⁷ This broadcast's emphasis on an ailing Britain embodied the final push to align Labour's 'sick Britain' economic policies with the disease and social lethargy which had infected the nation.

The images and the stories that the media focused on, Hay suggests, appealed on a 'very personal level, enlisting the direct experiences of bins left un-emptied, gaps on supermarket shelves, queues for basic commodities' to support the Right's 'crisis narrative'.⁸⁸ For Hay, this construction of crisis 'discredited Keynesianism and offered monetarism in its place by way of a solution'.⁸⁹ This appeal to personal experience was similarly cast in *Britain Isn't Getting Any Better*. The reuse of an image of stasis when referencing the metaphorical health of the nation described an economic and social philosophy that was withering. The relationship between the media's construction of discontent at this time, its emphasis on the sick, the rubbish and the deceased's mourning families, transferred visual emphasis away from imagery of strikers at pickets. Amongst all the narratives of rubbish and corpses it was easy to forget the low-paid

⁸⁶ 'Health warning as the rubbish piles mount up: Rats!', *Daily Mirror*, 9 February, 1979, p. 1

⁸⁷ 'Crisis what crisis', p. 1

⁸⁸ Hay, 'Chronicles of a Death Foretold', p. 446

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

nurses, hospital cleaners and other unsung heroes of modernity, who as Zygmunt Bauman describes, ‘day in day out... refresh and make salient again the borderline between normality and pathology’.⁹⁰ While certainly not the Conservative Party nor the media’s intention, the emphasis on chaos during the winter of discontent served to explicate the vital role played by those who carry out ‘the dirty jobs’, the workers who uphold the boundary between cleanliness and dirt, order and chaos. The images used in the print media at this time offer little sympathy for the monetary demands of those who help buttress the boundaries of abjection, to maintain the cultural expectations of ‘identity, system, order’.

v. Cutting Loose the Shackles of Socialism

While *Labour Isn't Working* was first distributed in 1978, the image acquired a new relevance in the early months of 1979. Rather than adopt the visual imagery that dominated the front pages of the print media, Saatchi & Saatchi redeployed the queue as a signifier that could encompass the absolute paralysis and ill-health of ‘sick Britain’. The ‘direct and simple language’ of this poster was something Thatcher believed enabled the Conservative Party’s agenda to ‘strike people as familiar common sense rather than a wild radical project’.⁹¹ This belief is revealing when Thatcher’s neoliberal project is considered as an endeavour to inculcate its naturalness and common-sense philosophy in the population.⁹² Saatchi & Saatchi emphasised the spatial and temporal stasis of the queue to transpose a mainstay of the Conservative Party’s postwar political advertising campaigns, namely the rhetoric of liberation from socialism. The agency drew upon the queue’s disruption to public life by employing imagery that signified an impending return to the necessity of collectivist austerity culture. As a visual anchored in and upheld by the past, Saatchi & Saatchi employed contemporary design and contemporary methods of image manipulation that would mask the reconstitution of an image that bore greater relations with the lived experiences of both wartime and postwar Britain.

The advertising agency were shrewd in their depiction of the disaffected strung out helplessly in public space. Through the rhetoric of liberation (a the leitmotif of the Conservative’s queue imagery propaganda) for women, the unemployed and the weak, the agency had drawn upon this discourse of restraint by projecting the notion that the vulnerable could be emancipated from the repressive chains of socialism. The images suggested women could reclaim the home and the weekly grocery expenditure, the unemployed would work and the infirm would be cured by a future Conservative government intent on minimising state control. By corralling the socially and economically marginalised – women, the unemployed and the ill – into narratives

⁹⁰ Bauman, *Wasted Lives*, p. 25

⁹¹ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, p. 4

⁹² Harvey, *A Brief History*, p. 41

of crisis, these posters established a contrived visual language of freedom. Against this, Thatcher's emerging brand of neoliberalism – of individual self-interest, liberty and minimal state welfare – could be highlighted. By depicting people in this manner, these posters worked 'at the level of ideology' by defining, through binaries of freedom and restraint, 'what sort of society is being proposed'.

Notions of liberation from the stalled state of Britain in 1979 were central to the some-times Labour-supporting newspaper the *Sun*, who, on the eve of the election, utilised calls to freedom to describe how the voter held a choice between 'freedom to work with or without a union card – or to be shackled to a dole queue in a declining economy... Freedom to live life your way'.⁹³ The *Sun* declared that personal gain was both a common sense aim and an anathema to the throttling stasis of the dole queue. The paper reaffirmed the image that Thatcher had articulated in 1977 when she declared that a 'new and more confident country is waiting to cut loose the shackles of Socialism'.⁹⁴ The *Sun*'s interpretation of freedom fulfilled a major element of the *Stepping Stones* agenda, which was to undermine the influence of the trade unions. As political economist Christopher Payne has described, in order to make unions 'appear to the public as the British Disease' it was vital that battles were picked appropriately.⁹⁵ 'The point was', Payne continues, 'that attitudes had to change before legislation could be passed'.⁹⁶ The Conservatives revelled in the chaos of the winter of discontent, drawing most spectacularly on those union workers whose jobs would render the greatest visible crisis. The *Sun* assisted in the Conservative Party's endeavour to convey freedom from the unions as a defining characteristic of the Right's new political outlook. The *Sun*'s conviction that the Conservative Party would generate work for all resonated with the intended message of *Labour Isn't Working*.

The Conservative Party's subsequent dismantling of industry, the incremental erosion of worker rights, the debilitating removal of union power and the inbuilt plan for mass unemployment as a means to control inflation would later undercut any of these intended messages. As E.H.H. Green notes (and as the following chapters will explore), 'a leitmotif of Thatcher's leadership of the Conservative Party and her premiership' was, as Thatcher herself stated, a 'conviction that the welfare state creates a culture of dependency'.⁹⁷ Deploying these fabricated photocomposite images within their posters was not a means to protect the genuine unemployed subjects from the humiliation of being represented, as Angus Maude had described. *Labour Isn't Working* and *Britain isn't Getting Any Better* were not visions of sympathy for those who could not work or

⁹³ 'Crisis, what crisis', p. 1

⁹⁴ Thatcher, Blenheim Palace, 1977

⁹⁵ Payne, *The Consumer*, p. 85

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 85

⁹⁷ Green, p.28

access to the NHS but were rather, like the parasitical rhetoric deployed by the press in 1977, a visual denunciation of Labour's support for those who were cast as addicted to this 'culture of dependency'. Both posters reference social and corporeal malaise in distinct ways and reflect how the socially abject structure of feeling was emerging in both images of dirty and disgusting subject matter (the rubbish, the rats, the disease) and, crucially, in the historically engrained imagery of social, moral and corporeal debasement. The abject visions of waste illuminated the social maladies of 'sick Britain' to confirm that the nation's disease could only be cured by a revolutionary neoliberal remedy.

Section Two: The Enemies Within

Chapter 3: 'Sick Carnival': The Inner Cities in Ruins

The reggae music booming from every open door, the Sunday-best clothing of families with Instamatics recording the burned and looted stores gave it all an air of sick carnival. Everywhere discarded coat hangers, the dismembered limbs of tailors' dummies... the dismal drone of burglar and fire alarms sounding redundant warnings.¹

Daily Mail Report, Brixton, 1981

The police were attacking photographers in a concerted, well organised and premeditated sort of way. I was photographing the police arresting a black youth...my finger was smashed by a blow from his truncheon.

'Freelance photojournalist, Brixton', 1981

Ammunition was all around in derelict sites and empty houses.²

BBC News Reporter, Toxteth, April, 1981

In 1980 the American economist John Kenneth Galbraith judged that Britain was the ideal testing ground for new economic experimentation.³ Such was his confidence in the nation's docile relationship with economic disaffection that Galbraith believed monetarism could be tested because, as historian Richard Vinen paraphrases, 'the British rarely translated economic despair into physical violence'.⁴ The precedent for societal restraint had been set, Galbraith concluded, amongst the working classes in the years of economic depression and mass unemployment in the 1930s.

Galbraith's assessment of the nation's social temperament in the face of stringent economic circumstances, rising levels of unemployment and heavily stoked racial tensions (fueled by Thatcher's reference to the multicultural 'swamp' of modern Britain during the election campaign of 1979) was discredited as the uprisings in Brixton and Toxteth occurred in April and July 1981.⁵ As sections of the media turned their attention towards the debilitating reality of racism in Britain and as others persevered with the kind of xenophobic discourse of the 'other' as criminal, Thatcher's Government was eager to assign blame for the unrest to the 'radical' left wing. Soon after the inner city uprisings in April, Thatcher argued that high levels of

¹ J. Brian, 'In the Police Fort at Brixton', *Daily Mail*, 13 April, 1981, pp. 6–7

² 'Report on the "Toxteth Riots"', *BBC News*, BBC One (London, BBC, 5 July, 1981)

³ Vinen, *Thatcher's Britain*, p. 103

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ In the summer of 1985, unrest occurred in Tottenham, Hackney, Brixton and Handsworth.

unemployment were not the main cause of the unrest: ‘After all’, she assessed, ‘we had much higher unemployment in the 1930s but we didn’t get this behaviour in any way’.⁶ When civil unrest arose, the visual and textual stories that accompanied the events were a continuation of the moralising sick discourse that had characterised the reporting around the winter of discontent: visions of chaos, references to ‘left-wing radicals’ and photographic manifestations of their moral diseases were characteristics amplified in the reports.

By way of introduction to this section *The Enemies Within*, this brief analysis of the documentation and presentation of inner city riots hopes to bridge the visual languages of press, documentary and vernacular photographic responses to crisis to convey how the abject structure of feeling emerged in visions of destruction. As photographs of the ‘burned and looted’ inner city landscape emerged and as the documentations of resistance were quashed by the presence of the truncheon-yielding police force, photographers in Brixton and Toxteth were left to calmly document the aftermath imagery of the unrest in the days that followed. Examining the pictures of destruction, it is possible to see how these moments of unrest further moulded the abject visual discourse of ‘the British disease’. As media outlets published this imagery of ruin, parallels with the Blitz were inevitably drawn in the accompanying articles. The ruinous subject matter documented by the ‘Instamatic recording’ residents of Brixton alongside their professional counterparts⁷ echoed the wartime coverage of mass devastation perpetrated by ‘the enemy’. How did this imagery bolster the rhetoric of the tabloid press who used imagery of ruin to mirror the moral decay of these marginalised populations? More widely, the chapters in this section ask, how did photographic recourse to the past bely the realities of being a disenfranchised subject in early Thatcherite Britain? Through these questions, we will begin to see how a culturally embedded visuality of destruction was also part of a wider photographic counter-narrative that was elsewhere emerging in the visual and textual narratives of social disaffection in the early years of Thatcher’s Britain.

i. Brixton, April, 1981

The scale of the unrest across the country in 1981 was unique in British history, framed as it was by both economic decline and racial discrimination. In Brixton, the riots in April lasted for five days and were primarily a response to a form of Government-sanctioned ‘saturation policing’ called *Operation Swamp 81*. The operation deployed a reincarnation of the nineteenth century Vagrancy Act, specifically the ‘Sus law’ which granted police forces the authority to arrest people based on the suspicion that they might commit a crime.⁸ *Operation Swamp 81* echoed

⁶ M. Thatcher, interviewed by Alastair Burnet, *News at Ten* (London: ITN, 13 April, 1981)

⁷ See: ‘Photographers at Brixton’, *Camerawork*, 1981 p. 7

⁸ For discussion of 1824 Vagrancy Act, see: T. Cockcroft, *Police Cultures: Themes and Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 73

Thatcher's allusion to the saturated cultural 'swamp' of contemporary Britain and resonated with the socially abject connotations that permeated the racist discourse of the time.⁹ The police's discriminatory deployment of the Sus law – used disproportionately against non-white citizens – would sit at the heart of Lord Scarman's subsequent inquiry into the disorder. Before the unrest occurred, the presence of police discrimination was noted by the conservative magazine *The Spectator*, which concluded in 1979 that in London the 'police treatment of blacks – all blacks – is discriminatory'.¹⁰ This deep-seated and ongoing discrimination was not acknowledged by the national daily press until the first makeshift petrol bombs were thrown. The media's longstanding disregard for the discriminatory and oppressive practices of the police meant that the uprisings were portrayed, as *New Society* later described, through the language of impulse: these were 'eruptions' and 'explosions' of spontaneous violence.¹¹ The tensions between the police and the communities of Brixton and Toxteth caught the attention of the press only when the unrest transformed into a spectacular display of 'fire and fury'.¹²

After the riots, Thatcher and a number of other governmental figures were eager not delimit culpability to non-white communities. Thatcher later reflected that 'racial tension and bitter hostility to the police – in my view encouraged by left-wing extremists – were more important' than issues of institutional racial discrimination.¹³ Thatcher's cabinet endeavoured to shift responsibility away from people's experience of racism and the economy, which would incriminate the Government, and instead to emphasise the role played by socialists and community activists in promoting violence against the state. This perspective was shared by Brixton's white church leader Reverend Pattenson who blamed 'gay and lesbian socialists' for inciting and perpetuating the violence.¹⁴ Thatcher, like the local church leader, attempted to present the unrest as a moral issue, exacerbated by 'deviant' lifestyles of the Left. Issues of morality pervaded the way unrest in Britain was reported and represented in the photojournalism that it spawned. The Government's emphasis was overwhelmingly directed towards a *moral* degeneration that was leading to the spread of social malaise. Journalists utilised the parasitic trope as a vehicle to express this. The *Daily Express* described how the rioters had 'infested the streets', the *Daily Mirror* feature presented a 'Close up Special on the Disease that Threatens Our Survival', the *Sun* described 'The hatred that is poisoning Britain',

⁹ Cockcroft, *Police Cultures*, p. 73

¹⁰ J. Monahan, 'The Brixton Delinquents' in *The Spectator*, 31 March, 1979, p. 11

¹¹ 'The riots in perspective 2', *New Society*, 20 August, 1981, p. 303

¹² This idea is explored in *The Battle for Brixton* (London: BBC Two, 11 April, 2006)

¹³ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, p. 144

¹⁴ 'Rev. Dennis Pattenson Testimony', in Black Cultural Archives, London. Box: Uprisings, Brixton Uprisings box 1/2. p. 2. This is also central to the 'Brief for a Debate on the Recent Outbreaks of Civil Disorder in Great Britain', Home Affairs, HAC (81) 8, pp. 3–5 (1–15 pages)

and the *Financial Times* described the riots as ‘like an epidemic of some alien disease to which the body politic has no immunity’.¹⁵

The language of religion and disease was used to heighten the sense of the rioters’ moral and social atrophy. The *Daily Mail*’s Roy Kerridge also believed that this pervasive moral decay was being spread by the deviant agents of the Left, especially left-wing teachers who were inciting anti-Christian bias in schools.¹⁶ References to Christianity were not arbitrary. The moralising press employed references to medieval Christian imagery and iconography starkly juxtaposed with the language of moral debasement: the *News of the World*’s Miltonesque ‘orgy of fury and fire’ and *The Times*’ description of a ‘street of sleazy shops’ below an ‘inferno, a tunnel of fire [and] smothering smoke’.¹⁷ Photographs of destruction – burnt-out vehicles, buildings and roads – sat amongst the ecclesiastical and moralising references to Christian values.¹⁸ For the *Daily Mail*, the Scarman report was ‘a sermon... [which] raises as many questions as it answers’.¹⁹ These reverent analogies were matched by imagery of monumental devastation.

The *Daily Mail*’s selection of photographs by Chris Barham (Fig. 13) were taken in the hours and days after the unrest had occurred and were used to convey how Brixton was ‘a tragic replay of wartime desolation’.²⁰ Barham’s photographs of the Windsor Castle pub resonate with the iconic photographs of blitzed London with the stuccoed ruins, twisted wires, fire-blackened stone and bricks looming over the firemen who traverse the rubble ground. Such familiar visions to the wartime generation enabled the destruction of the pub to become the press’s defining vision of a community’s self-destruction. Such scenes of desecration would also become the prime site for the Instamatic-wielding residents of Brixton. As an unattributed contact sheet²¹ reveals (Fig. 14), the anonymous photographer wandered one morning amongst the devastation, focussing on the monumentality of destruction. The photographer pictures the burnt out buildings from a two-point perspective, which allows the central steel structure to rise in the middle of the photograph like the front of a chapel’s facade (Fig. 14b). This device was one Barham utilised to enable the monumental debris to mirror that which surrounded Coventry Cathedral during the Blitz (Fig. 15). The Windsor Castle and other ruined buildings in Brixton

¹⁵ ‘Outbreak of an Alien Disease’, *Financial Times*, 11 July, 1981, p. 1

¹⁶ R. Kerridge, ‘Why these blacks of Brixton hate the police’, *Daily Mail*, 13 April, 1981, p. 4.

¹⁷ M. Huckerby, ‘Looters moved in as flames spread’, *The Times*, April 13, 1981, p. 4

¹⁸ For discussion of heat and fire as tropes in the riot reporting, see: J. Ho, *Nation and Citizenship in the Twentieth-Century British Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 164

¹⁹ ‘Blitzed, battered and bewildered’, *Daily Mail*, 13 April, 1981, pp. 2–3

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ See: ‘Contact sheet of the Brixton Uprisings’ in Black Cultural Archive, London: Photographs, Box 57.

became surrogate sites of reverence; the blackened gutted shells of steel and burnt wood became monuments to civil devastation.

As the freelance photographer in Brixton described in an edition of *Camerawork* in 1981, the photographic documentation of residents' resistance was closely and violently policed. The kinds of photography that made its way into the mainstream press were a consequence of this policing. The imagery can be divided into visions of fire and chaos – burning buildings, overturned cars, looting and confrontational rioters; and visions of its aftermath – the desolate ruins of pubs and burnt out shops. The emphasis on looting and ruined commercial properties was, for Dick Hebdige, a consequence of material deprivation in an economy increasingly promoting the role of the consumer to a 'healthy economy'. In his analysis of the inner city unrest, Hebdige described the visual response that focussed on the ruin of commercial premises as an amalgam of wartime defence strategies and dystopian science fiction films' battle scenes. He described how:

For a week or two in 1981 in city centres, the shopping precinct... took on the grim aspect of the medieval city state, an embattled community of goods under siege... the rows of boarded up shop fronts, reminiscent of the blitz and science fiction television series, marked a line of defence in a new price war.²²

Hebdige's vivid description of Blitz-like destruction and dystopian warfare were characteristics that resonated in the documentary work produced in the early 1980s that will be discussed over the next two chapters. Hebdige's analysis chimes with the *Daily Mail's* description of disembodied 'tailors' dummies' set against the drone of burglar alarms which framed the backdrop to this surreal world of 'blitz and science fiction' that characterised the time. As the BBC reporter alluded to in her description of Toxteth in 1981, the unrest occurred amongst these 'grim' surroundings where the near war-torn dereliction of the town was crucial to providing instruments of revolt. In this decaying postindustrial cityscape, the rioters in Toxteth did not use conventional weapons of warfare but rather enlisted the crumbled remnants of their encompassing dereliction; the kind of subject matter central to the media's visual language of inner city communities' moral decline. The dilapidated and ruinous environment of a deindustrialising economy became a form of weaponry against the very system that contributed to its demise.

The images that emerged in response to the Brixton unrest in July 1981 were, Hebdige argued, 'steeped in the ideology of the documentary photograph, the photograph as evidence, austere, cold, objective'.²³ As the next two chapters will show, this kind of sublime destruction emerged in the documentary photography that sought to render the effects of these forces of

²² D. Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things* (London: Routledge, 1988) p. 36

²³ Ibid.

governmental technologies upon the people and the landscape. This visual and discursive adaptation of the past's ruinous visuality and the means through which its characteristics were transposed sees photographers render the destructive spectacle of government action on the landscape and the social body by borrowing the perceived authenticity of a documentary visual languages. When Thatcher spoke of societal restraint through references to the depression era, photographers too provided a counter-narrative that recast the visual language of destitution and destruction from the past. This visual language of the thirties as a benchmark against which social disaffection with Thatcher's neoliberal project could be measured evidences a photographic approach preoccupied with social transformation and crisis.

Chapter 4:

Machines Don't Strike: Technology, Redundancy, and the Seacoal Gatherer, 1979–1985

‘The Silicon Chip is on everybody’s lips’.¹

New Society, May, 1979

‘Robots create wealth, not redundancies’.²

Margaret Thatcher, Speech at *Automan* ‘81

‘Redundancy’ shares its semantic space with ‘rejects’, ‘wastrels’, ‘garbage’, ‘refuse’ - with *waste*... The destination of waste is the waste-yard, the rubbish heap’.³

Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives*

On 24 June 1979, car manufacturer Fiat aired the advert ‘Hand Built by Robots’ on British television. Created by British film director Hugh Hudson, the advert depicted a production line of cars being assembled by robots. The advert’s low-lit opening sequence focused on the robots’ mechanised welding and gradually grew brighter in the final scenes when six vibrantly coloured (and seemingly driverless) cars glided across the screen, set to the overture to Gioachino Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville*.⁴ This colourful advert with its industrial choreography and comedic score was a humorous dramatisation of the reality that Fiat had entered a new and revolutionary era of automated industrial mass production.⁵ This age of robotised manufacturing posed a very sombre threat to the industry’s workers. On location during the day of filming, employees at the Fiat factory in Turin held a protest against further robotisation of the industry.⁶ As an entertaining representation of technological autonomy and industrial change at a time of occupational anxiety, the advert would go on to influence a cross section of visual art and literature, including the work of science fiction writer J.G. Ballard.⁷

¹ ‘The Silicon Chip is On Everybody’s Lips’, *New Society*, 3 May, 1979, p. 255

² M. Thatcher, Opening Speech at ‘Automan ’81’ Information Technology Conference, Barbican Centre, London, 8 December, 1982. MTFW Document 104651.

³ Bauman, *Wasted Lives*, p. 12

⁴ The advert playfully uses the music and the words ‘largo al factotum’ – meaning the multifunctional, enslaved creator – to reference the creativity of the factotum and his ‘handcraft’ that can do almost anything. The advert united the notion of Italianate artistic genius with the intelligence and beauty of robotised automation.

⁵ A. Burns, J. Winterton et al, ‘The miners and new technology’, *Industrial Relations Journal*, no. 14, issue 4, 1983, p. 8

⁶ ‘Fiat Strada “hand built by robots” by Collette Dickenson Pearce’, *CampaignLive*, <http://www.campaignlive.co.uk/thework/893171/> Accessed 1 March 2013

⁷ J.G. Ballard and Sue Lawley, ‘Desert Island Discs’, BBC Radio 4, 4 September, 1992.

Six years later Magnum photographer Peter Marlow published his photo-essay on the Bidston Moss waste-pickers in *The Sunday Times Magazine*. Spread over two pages, Marlow's photographs document a vast landscape of rubbish in Merseyside. The central photograph (Fig. 16) depicted the Birkenhead local authority Waste Management tipper-truck unloading sacks of refuse upon the expansive wasteland. A group of fifty newly unemployed men standing in the foreground pull at the cascading black plastic sacks. The accompanying article detailed the former dockers and steel makers, the 'unemployed men' who create 'a living of a sort by scavenging among the thousand tonnes of waste matter'.⁸ Within this set of pictures Marlow included a close up photograph of a hooded man with a large hessian sack filled with copper wire slung over his shoulder as he heaves his way across a snow-blanketed terrain (Fig. 17). Such pictures reflected, as the accompanying text declared, that rising levels of unemployment in Britain were 'creating a new scavenging class'.⁹ As the prospect of wide-ranging mechanisation and robotisation in manufacturing became more probable, the human remnants of former industry, the newly redundant shipbuilders and steel makers, were thrown onto the recurring trope of the scrapheap, scouring to find value in the devalued.¹⁰ Marlow's monumental photographs of the redundant, scavenging waste-pickers labouring against an austere environment attest to this sense of wasteful obsolescence and are part of the photographic history of visual abjection that concerns this chapter.

The tensions between modernisation and regression – new technology and old industry, employment and redundancy – during Thatcher's first term as Prime Minister occur against the backdrop of the 1981 recession. The Conservative Government had spent the preceding years tackling high levels of inflation through a strict adherence to the principles of monetarist economic policy and this unerring commitment to inflation control was, as E.H.H Green has argued, such that if 'high unemployment was attendant upon the measures required to [control inflation], the end was to justify the means'.¹¹ Central to the Government's commitment to controlling inflation was the withdrawal of financial support for what it saw as 'wasteful' and 'inefficient' industries. As redundancies were served, and as unemployment became accepted as a social reality, soaring to three million by 1983, Thatcher's revolutionary measures began to reveal the implementation of an ideological, rather than purely economic, programme of austerity.

⁸ I. Jack, 'Life on the Scrapheap', *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 19 May, 1985, p. 26

⁹ Jack, 'Life on the Scrapheap', p. 29

¹⁰ B. Highmore, *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 63. Highmore draws on Marx, in *The Eighteenth Century Brumiere* explanation of 'ragpickers, outmoded by modernisation, struggle to get by, by finding value in what has been devalued, outmoded. The detritus of modernity is scoured for its use value.'

¹¹ Green, p. 69

Mapping out the social context of the early 1980s, this chapter unearths the cultural constructions of forced modernisation and new technology in political discourse, television, literature, advertising and the print media. The everyday perceptions and fears of technological change see the kind of dystopian cultural pessimism that Tom Nairn viewed as characteristic of the British mental state in the late 1970s emerge with a renewed relevance. While new technologies promised the streamlined benefits and variety of consumer choice (like Hudson's multicoloured, machine assembled cars), the pervasive sense of technology as an entropic force that would steal the jobs of the manual labourer effected a shift in the structure of feeling, especially through the discussion of work and industry. The dialectic of technological advancement and the wasteful regression of unemployment becomes a compelling conceit in the documentary, press photography and political advertising of the Left in the early 1980s.

Documentary photography's collusion in rendering what Zygmunt Bauman saw as the wastefulness of redundancy emerges in a cultural climate of anxiety dominated by fears of social obsolescence. Therefore, this analysis is framed by the debates around documentary image making. Reviewing Peter Marlow's photobook *Liverpool Looking Out to Sea* in 1993, photography critic Paul Caplan argued that Marlow's photojournalism recast a well-worn 'myth' of Liverpool as the crumbling 'self pity city'. Caplan's suggested that documentary photographers were rehashing timeless clichés of the 'objective' documentary visual histories. Instead he suggested that photographers should 'cast shadows across their representations' by intervening in the narrative plane to represent a space that was 'at once very real and also simply hyperreal', like the 'post-modern, post-capitalist, post-urban city, the "sprawl" of cyberpunk fame'.¹² Documentary photography, Caplan argued, required a dose of postmodern science fiction to 'throw off the cloak of anonymity and engage with its subject'.¹³ Caplan's critique responds to the kinds of debates that dominated the discussion of documentary in the 1980s, especially the medium's claim to objective truth, which he felt should be indulged by subjective and quasi-fictional embellishments of documentary picture-making. In this analysis I show that a selection of documentary photographers in the early 1980s were already 'casting shadows' across their imagery through the visual echoes of the 1930s embodied by these destitute figures who scoured the postindustrial fringes – the 'cyberpunk sprawl' – of a postmodernising society.

¹² Green, p. 69

¹³ Ibid.

i. Technology and the Emerging Structure of Feeling

Images of technology are much more widespread than technology itself.¹⁴

Stuart Hall, 'Left in Sight', 1983

In 1983, Stuart Hall observed that consumer advertising placed a 'high-stress on technology' to communicate the progressive nature of consumer capitalism. These representations of technology's capabilities, he argued, were wildly overstated. The representations of technology pervaded public discourse at this time. As the newly elected Conservative Government reduced state support for industries, Thatcher began to talk of the coming technological revolution, declaring in 1982: 'the information technology revolution is our revolution'.¹⁵ To support these assertions, Thatcher had appointed former computer specialist Kenneth Baker as Minister for State, Industry and Information Technology, a newly established ministerial position created to hasten the 'process of producing a society in which information itself becomes the key resource, demoting the traditional factors of production like capital and labour'.¹⁶ This conviction in technological innovation through information occurred against a backdrop of industrial unrest as manual labourers, from shipbuilders to automotive workers at British Leyland, steel makers and coal miners, held on precariously in a diminishing labour market, threatened, as the media and politicians informed them, by an imminent industrial transformation: the rise of the machine and the fall of the worker.¹⁷

Manual workers were led to believe that their jobs would soon be obsolete; their daily labour would instead be carried out, like in Hudson's advert, by robots. When Thatcher asserted at the British Robot Association annual conference that robots do not create redundancies, she sought to allay fears about industrial streamlining that had led sections of the media like *New Society* magazine to declare in 1979 that, for the workers at a car factory in the midlands, the silicon chip was 'on everybody's lips'.¹⁸ The sense of precariousness in industry at this time mirrors what David Harvey has described the importance of technological innovation to processes of creative destruction and the preservation of a neoliberal political economy, as it sets out to effect:

¹⁴ S. Hall and Kathy Myers, 'Left in Sight', J. Evans (ed.) *The Camerawork Essays: Context and Meaning in Photography* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1997), p. 221

¹⁵ Thatcher, Opening Speech at 'Automan '81

¹⁶ P. Large, 'Keyboard generation', *Guardian*, 20 August, 1981, p. 16

¹⁷ See for example: 'Now the Chips are Down', *Horizon*, BBC Two, 31 March, 1978 (Dir. Edward Goldwyn); R. Coombs and Ken Green, 'The Slow March of the Microchips', *New Scientist*, 1980, pp.17–19; P. Grosvenor, 'Mighty Micro', *Daily Express*, September 7, 1979, p. 8.

¹⁸ 'The Silicon Chip', p. 255

instability, [the] dissolution of social solidarities, environmental degradation, deindustrialisation, rapid shifts in time-space relations, speculative bubbles and the general tendency towards crisis.¹⁹

Harvey sees the advocacy of rampant forms of technological innovation as key to the precipitation of creative destruction,²⁰ effecting the growth of precariousness in other areas of life.

The exponential rise in unemployment in the early 1980s grew against a backdrop of anxiety exacerbated by narratives of the dystopian forces of technology in popular culture. Between 1978 and 1979, the television and print media discussed automation and the prospects of mass redundancies in factories and presented technology as inherently entropic, autonomously and unstoppably expansionist.²¹ The BBC's science and technology programme *Horizon* explored the microchip in an episode titled 'Now the Chips are Down' in 1978.²² The programme painted a bleak picture of the microchip's role in revolutionising industries, transforming the nature of work for everyone from secretaries and typists, to doctors, scientists and heavy industry workers predicting mass unemployment as industries brought in machines to replace humans. The narrator's doom-laden assertions that 'such chips will totally revolutionise our way of life. They are the reason why... our children will grow up without jobs to go to'²³ was an austere and unapologetically dystopian presentation of new technology. The programme presented the nation's apparent submission to technology's forces and conveyed young people's obsolescent futures as a fact rather than science fiction. The programme sparked widespread consternation and led to ministerial debates on ways in which the Labour Government could prevent unemployment in the face of this new technology.²⁴ Programmes such as *Horizon* served to conflate 'technology', 'industrial change' and feelings of hopelessness giving the impression of inevitability.

Changes in the technological sector coincided with Thatcher's experimentation with monetarist economics. Thatcher's massive programme of deindustrialisation – the wholesale withdrawal of

¹⁹ Harvey, *A Brief History*, p. 82

²⁰ Thatcher's dismantling of industries such as steel and coal was a form of wholesale industrial creative destruction becoming the instrument that would 'devalue, if not destroy' the technological achievements of the past to maintain domination over the labour force in the present. See D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp.105–106

²¹ Sensational narratives of technological transformation through the 'silicon chip' became ever more pervasive in popular culture. See Grosvenor, 'Mighty Micro', p. 8.

²² A. Lloyd, 'How do Governments support microelectronics?', *New Scientist*, November 1979, vol. 84, no. 118, p. 518

²³ After seeing the programme, the Labour Government pledge over £300 million to promote industry awareness of new micro-technologies. See: Lloyd, 'How do Governments support microelectronics?', p. 518

²⁴ Lloyd, 'How do Governments', p.518

finance to struggling heavy industries – enabled the Government to exploit the possibilities of creative destruction by promoting the dehumanisation of the mode of production.²⁵ The leader would go on to hail a British ‘technology revolution’, if only to promote the vision of a future industry run on electronic muscle to sever the stranglehold of the trade unions. As twenty-five percent of British manufacturing capacity was lost in Thatcher’s first term, and as unemployment reached three million,²⁶ one fearful Mass Observation respondent reflected: ‘the robot will put more out of work, because it is cheaper to run machines than to pay men. Machines don’t strike’.²⁷ The Mass Observation respondent’s analysis is salient as it reflects the dystopian vision of a mechanised future envisaged in the visual and popular arts of the time which suggested that the adoption of technology could transform industrial, social and personal life.

By the early 1980s, the dissemination of numerous nonfiction books,²⁸ government-funded and union-supported academic research publications,²⁹ newspaper and magazine articles,³⁰ television programmes and films,³¹ popular music,³² commodity advertisements and emerging genres of literature,³³ in varying ways described, analysed and (often irresponsibly) projected the transformational and sometimes detrimental repercussions of microchip technology on the economy, employment, industry, the work place, leisure, and social and moral life. This presentation meant that unskilled and semi-skilled manual labourers saw little future for themselves in this high-tech world. Alongside and resultant from the grim outlook of obsolescence and redundancy, these informational resources and policy initiatives shared the general view that new technology would cause a ‘crisis of leisure’. Conservative MP and member of Thatcher’s cabinet Peter Walker would speak, when in opposition in 1978, of the

²⁵ This narrative mirrors that which Naomi Klein has since discussed as ‘the shock doctrine’. N. Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Penguin, 2008)

²⁶ Tiratsoo, p.194

²⁷ See MOA Replies to Summer 1983 Directive DR D156.

²⁸ C.D. Renmore, *Silicon Chips and You* (London: Sheldon, 1979); C. Evans, *The Mighty Micro* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1979); P. Large, *The Micro Revolution* (London: Fontana, 1980)

²⁹ J.R. Gribbin, *Future Worlds* (University of Sussex: Science Policy Research Unit, 1979); R. Rothwell, *Technical Change and Unemployment* (London: Pinter, 1979); C. Jenkins and Barrie Sherman, *The Collapse of Work* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979)

³⁰ Lloyd, ‘How do Governments’; Coombs and Green, ‘The Slow March’; J. Edwards, ‘The Geisha and the Robot’, *Daily Mirror*, 16 March, 1982, pp.14–15; ‘Technology will cost 1/2 Million Jobs’, *Guardian*, 8 December, 1980 p. 2; B. Rimmer, ‘Tomorrow’s World Through the Eye of a Needle’, *Daily Mirror*, 21 September, 1978, pp. 16–17

³¹ ‘Now the Chips are Down’; ‘A Fish that comes with its own chips’, *Tomorrow’s World*, BBC One, 13 May, 1982; *The Silicon Factor*, BBC One, 14 September, 1980; *The Right to Work?*, BBC 1, 1980

³² Basement 5, *Silicon Chips*, 1980;; UB40, *Forget the Cost*, 1982; 10cc, *Tomorrow’s World Today*, 1981; XTC, *Leisure*, 1982

³³ Cyberpunk most notably the work of William Gibson, *Burning Chrome*, 1982 and *Neuromancer*, 1984

potential to ‘create an Athens without the slaves’³⁴ through the introduction of microchip technology, robotics and mass automation in industry and the home.

As the dynamism of technology and industrial degradation were drawn into dialogue with narratives of moral and social decline, visions of the future were dominated by the bleak responses that mirrored the tropes of dystopian science fiction in the film, literature and art of the period. The 1983 Mass Observation directive, which asked users to detail their past and present experiences of unemployment and redundancy and to describe their predictions of technology in the future, expresses these dystopian tropes.³⁵ Many respondents painted a desolate picture of technology’s affectless consequences; instead of Athens, one respondent vividly aligned the coming technological future with the abject moral and physical decline of the Roman Empire.³⁶ He predicted, with an almost Ballardian use of comparisons, how:

by the millennium we will have at least half the nation slumped in armchairs with progressively atrophying muscles... At its decline the Roman Empire[’s]... slaves performed the menial tasks... gladiators killed one another, captives... were compelled to have sex with each other... We are rapidly going down the same path. Our slaves today are electric motors and hydraulic servers controlled by electronic brains.³⁷

This vision of technological and corporeal debasement was reflected in other responses that projected visions of a fearsome British urban landscape in which unemployment was an inevitable mainstay against a backdrop of social, moral and physical degeneration.³⁸ Tellingly, where the respondents were asked to describe the future, their predictions were bound by the realities of the present tense; one respondent wrote that a future defined by technology ‘worries me enormously’ because ‘morality is suffering’.³⁹ These dystopian imaginings of postindustrialism were pervasive in wider popular culture because they were drawn, as one critic put it, from ‘the amorphous and decaying urban wasteland of the postindustrial and deindustrialised present’.⁴⁰

These examples build a picture of societal attitudes towards technology and moral atrophy that were well rehearsed in the culture and arts of the period. John Roberts sees this cultural anxiety

³⁴ Quoted in P. Large, ‘So how do we fill time in an Athens without the slaves?’, *Guardian*, November 19, 1980, p. 14

³⁵ This directive (MOA, ‘Work Directive’ Summer, June, 1983, University of Sussex, Falmer) indicates the cultural connections made between redundancy and technology.

³⁶ MOA, DR R470 reply to Summer 1983 directive.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ See MOA Replies to Summer 1983 Directive including DR G226 and DR C108.

³⁹ See MOA, DR G226, reply to Summer 1983 directive.

⁴⁰ P. Novotny, ‘No Future! Cyberpunk, Industrial Music, and the Aesthetics of Postmodern Disintegration’, D.M. Hasler and Clyde Wilcox (eds.) *Political Science Fiction* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), p. 103

stemming from the presentation of technology's elision with totalitarianism in popular culture, particularly in the film of the early 1980s such as *Escape from New York* and *Bladerunner*. Films like these, and television series of the time (*Survivors* in the late 1970s, for example), were often structured around a repressive socialist totalitarian regime's abuse of technological power (resembling and often directly influenced by conceptions of the Soviet Union). Roberts argued that:

The view of technology as 'autonomous' is one that sustains the popular imagination. This creates a powerful bifurcation between the dystopian view of science and technology as being 'out of control' and a utopian faith in science and technology as bearers of freedom.⁴¹

Such ambivalence towards the morality of new technology as an entropic force and a bearer of freedom is unsurprising given the media's and industry specialists' sensationalist presentation of its effect on industry and social life.⁴² As newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express* and *The Daily Telegraph* lauded the liberating possibilities of mass automation, the automated leisure society was a utopia greatly anticipated by radical left wing writers too.⁴³ The Marxist philosopher Andre Gorz, in *Paths to Paradise: On the Liberation from Work*, predicted a leisure society of vastly reduced working hours due to mass automation. Such utopias were dependent on a climate of all-round industrial modernisation. Governmental responses to the silicon chip revolution⁴⁴ were spurred by numerous scientific, industrial and sociological texts on technology and industry.⁴⁵ While Thatcher's programme of cuts centred on heavy industry, their results were said to take effect in private life. Arguments for the implementation of high technology were, as cultural sociologist Andrew Ross observed, 'not just a revolution in capitalist production but also a revolution in living... touching all cultural and social spheres in the home and the workplace'.⁴⁶ This revolution in the home suited a leader who promoted forms of individualism through consumerism and the maximisation of personal gain.

The visual language of technological modernisation was, as Hudson's Fiat advert demonstrated, the triumph of colour over colourlessness, light over dark, freedom of choice over repressive

⁴¹ J. Roberts, *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography and the Everyday* (Manchester: MUP, 1998), p. 217

⁴² See Lloyd, 'How do Governments', p. 517.

⁴³ For example, Andre Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism* (1982: London, Pluto Press, 1997), 1980 and *Paths to Paradise: On the liberation from Work* (London: Pluto Press, 1985).

⁴⁴ M. Thatcher in conversation with Norman Pearlstine and Alan L. Otten; interview for *The Wall Street Journal*, House of Commons, 29 March 1983, MTFW Document 105125

⁴⁵ See: C. Mitcham and Alosi Huning, *Philosophy and Technology II: Information Technology and Computers in Theory and Practice* (New York: Springer, 1986), p. 195

⁴⁶ Ibid

uniformity.⁴⁷ Fellow British director Ridley Scott deployed these binaries in his celebrated advert *Apple: 1984*. Drawing explicitly upon Orwell's vision of totalitarianism, Scott juxtaposed the bleak dystopia of grey uniformity and machine-like social conformity with the sledgehammer-wielding, blonde athlete who emerges to shatter IBM's market monopoly.⁴⁸ She is the personification of postmodernity as she emerges in full colour to devastate the autocratic and grey grand narrative to yield choice. Like the colourful range of cars exhibited in the Fiat advert before, these adverts were corporate, postmodern visualisations of technology separating out the tedious production line aesthetic of uniform greys of the past with the colourful variety of consumer possibilities in the present and future. Colour was the visual language of capitalism, of individualism and ruthless, forward-thinking change that accepted the dehumanisation of labour as a price fairly paid for the benefit of consumer choice. A future marked by a boundless consumer culture and the potential for a better quality of life at home was thus presented as the upside of technological change, industrial transformation and mass redundancies.

By 1983, as unemployment reached its postwar peak, it soon became clear to many that the 'information revolution' and its associated benefits were not everyone's to enjoy. Many of the newly redundant workers cast aside by the financial withdrawal from national industries were not enveloped in the new technological present but were cast to its margins. Acknowledging the disproportionate share of technological innovation on the population,⁴⁹ Thatcher later sought to justify this uneven development under the guise of meritocracy: 'prosperity', she argued, 'is not guaranteed, but needs to be earned'.⁵⁰ This new neoliberal world of meritocracy, competition, self-interest and high levels of unemployment became ideologically engrained; Labour and the Left more widely would draw upon technological change as 'the enemy within'.

ii. Like an old tin can: Nostalgia and Obsolescence

They just think Corby is like an old tin can and now they want to throw us in the dustbin.⁵¹

Steelworker quoted in *Daily Mirror*, July 1979

⁴⁷ Apple's advert 'Apples make great carrots', 1982, referenced the computer's capacity to conquer darkness.

⁴⁸ C. Budtz and Philip Munch, *Storytelling: Branding in Practice* (New York: Springer, 2010), p. 169

⁴⁹ Quoting Walter Bagehot, Thatcher stated that 'changes do not at first act equally all people in the nation. For many, for a very long time they do not act at all', speech to the Confederation of British Industry, April 19 1983. MTFW. Document 105295

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Quoted in F. Palmer, 'Close-up on the town of steel that faces the axe', *Daily Mirror*, 23 July, 1980, pp. 6-7

The similarities between the experience of unemployment in the 1930s and 1980s are not hard to find... The same images are evoked – the scrapheap, people rotting away, the laying to waste of human lives just as old industrial areas have been devastated.⁵²

Jeremy Seabrook, *Unemployment*, 1982

The government-owned steelworks plant in the town of Corby, Northamptonshire was one of the first industrial sites to face closure during Thatcher's first term. One worker, fearful of losing his job, believed the Government was treating not just the plant's employees but the whole town and community like rubbish. The steelworker's description is revealing of the collective and localised solidarity that existed in the steelmaking town. The use of geographical prosopopoeia to describe the community's distress at the Government's violation of industry exemplifies why Robin Blackburn, editor of the *New Left Review*, would go on to argue that 'a fundamental shift' was occurring on the Left in 1980. Blackburn believed that the Government's programme of austerity meant that 'moral and social imperatives' were 'thrusting themselves on the Left's concern' as they had at the end of the war.⁵³ This shift was occurring in places surrounding these newly redundant industries. The resultant desecration of industries and dissolution of social solidarities disproportionately affected communities whose identities were, as David Harvey has described, 'place bound'.⁵⁴ Harvey has observed how workers' fear of disposability leads to an establishment of the unity between place and social identity: 'the localisation of the fight against capital', as exhibited in the steelworker's quote, is integral to histories of 'working class struggle'.⁵⁵

In the run up to the 1983 general election, the Government's eagerness to champion the role of technology in society enabled Michael Foot's Labour Party to call upon such communities whose nostalgia for a diminishing and fragmenting working class culture engendered unity, responding directly to Thatcher's desecration of industry and social solidarities in the name of technology. On the eve of the 1983 general election, Foot declared: 'we are here to provide for those who are weaker, hungrier and more battered and crippled than ourselves... that is our only great purpose on earth'.⁵⁶ As critics on the left such as Stuart Hall saw it by 1983, the Labour Party was attempting 'to sell itself on the strength of its caring properties... the young, the old,

⁵² J. Seabrook, *Unemployment* (London: Quartet, 1982), pp. 11–12

⁵³ Walker, 'How do you orchestrate an emotion like boredom?', *Guardian*, December 10, 1980, p. 14

⁵⁴ Harvey, *The Condition*, p. 302

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ 'Waste of a Nation', *Daily Mirror*, 8 June, 1983, p. 3

the sick',⁵⁷ which served only to 'substitute history for nostalgia'.⁵⁸ Foot's endeavour to unify the Labour movement through selfless calls to working class solidarity, to revive the Beveridge spirit by highlighting the struggle of the needy, was a leitmotif of this failed campaign.

As early as 1982, the National Association for Local and Government Officers trade union report found that the electorate was beginning to exhibit widespread feelings of resignation to the realities of elevating levels of unemployment and industrial change.⁵⁹ Thatcher's Government, the report implied, had succeeded in normalising and naturalising unemployment as a price fairly paid for the benefit of the promised consumer possibilities. As the Labour Party's core electoral issues of unemployment were becoming accepted as a social reality, the Left drew upon a narrative crisis of obsolescence and disposability that sought to highlight how the bodies of the redundant and unemployed were entwined with refuse as they were thrust upon the scrapheap like old tin cans. While the Conservatives utilised the trope of waste in their celebration of privatisation to refuse-collection services in their poster *Even when the Conservatives talk rubbish it makes sense* (Fig. 18), the 1983 election campaign saw Labour engage in what many traditionalists saw as the 'necessary evil' of advertising to produce a selection of posters that dealt with abject themes of waste and corporeal debasement. Labour commissioned the agency Wright and Partners, led by Labour supporter Johnny Wright, to work on the party's first commercial advertising commission.⁶⁰ Wright's work resulted in a series of print advertisements created to adorn the pages of national daily newspapers. Unlike most high colour consumer adverts of the time,⁶¹ Wright's original artworks were photomontages produced in black and white. These unconventional advertising images were dramatic visual metaphors for the economic and social situations faced by Labour strongholds, particularly in Northern Britain. The adverts focused on issues that political communications scholar Camille Elebash cited as 'unique product propositions' – a concentration on the Conservative Party's weakness areas of unemployment and the welfare state.⁶²

Photomontage was a technique Labour politicians had vehemently criticised as lacking in any indexical relation to reality in the previous election. As *Camerawork's* editor Kathy Myers saw it, Wright's photomontage technique was seen by Labour to be legitimate in 1983 because it was

⁵⁷ K. Myers, 'Left In Sight' in *Camerawork*, Winter, 1983–4, no. 29, p. 19

⁵⁸ See also: P. Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (1985: Oxford: OUP, 2009) and A. Croft 'Forward to the 1930s: the Literary Politics of Anamnesis', C. Shaw (ed.), *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (Manchester: MUP, 1989)

⁵⁹ J. Torode, 'Nalgo spending cuts inquiry reveals "mood of cynicism"', *Guardian*, March 25, 1983, p. 4

⁶⁰ The Labour Party were divided over advertising expenditure. Some deemed it a 'necessary evil'. See B. Hipkin, 'Advertising for Change: Interview with Johnny Wright', *Marxism Today*, 30 January, 1985, p.31.

⁶¹ Elebash, p. 53

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.56

a style that had ‘spearheaded left political rhetoric and revolution in the past’.⁶³ Furthermore, their subject matter was authenticated, Labour believed, because Wright had used photographs of bonafide unemployed subjects, rather than party activists. The bold, capitalised ITC Machine typeface mirrored the typography commonly associated with the aesthetic of science fiction film and book covers.⁶⁴ The otherworldly posters asked questions such as ‘Are You Going to Vote Your Children Out of a Future?’ which saw two children stood at the foot of an oversized ladder (Fig. 19). Next to a photograph of a derelict factory behind a bolted gate, another poster asked: ‘Are you going to vote another 34,000 more firms out of business?’ (Fig. 20). One dramatic print, which asked ‘Are you going to vote yourself out of a job?’, depicted miniature men and women being brushed down a City of Westminster gutter (Fig. 21). This purgatorial image of pained faces and outstretched arms sought to emphasise the immorality of the Conservatives’ cuts to public spending whilst alluding to the waste of deindustrialisation as jobs and lives ‘go down the drain’. The advertising agency’s use of what Myers termed the ‘iconography of despair’ recast the visual language of 1930s social realist photography, striving to document the ‘oppressive “reality” of people’s lived experiences, the grime, the poverty, the hopelessness’.⁶⁵ The redundant figures embodied the disenfranchised class of Bataille’s wretched abjects: the ‘dregs of the people, populace and gutter’.⁶⁶ These visions of the wretched being flushed down the drain reflect the phrases such as ‘natural wastage’ and ‘wasted youth’ in the ‘wastelands’ of former industry which had become central to the discourse of the Labour-supporting *Daily Mirror*.⁶⁷ These descriptions are part of the semantic space that Bauman saw connected with redundancy. This lexical constellation of redundancy, waste and obsolescence found its metaphor in the unity of the labourer and the land, the unemployed and rubbish.

Myers later reflected that Wright & Partners’s work, rather than engendering a mood for positive change, alienated the very people to which it sought to appeal with ‘these stark, depressing montages’.⁶⁸ Writing in *Camerawork*, Stuart Hall and Myers discussed how the Labour Party’s mode of self-representation was by 1983 ‘stuck’ in a bygone period, which is why the content of their poster advertisements was seen to be appropriate to the party overall.⁶⁹ Hall and Myers agreed that the incongruity between the highly dramatic imagery and the

⁶³ K. Myers, ‘Loves Labour Lost’, J. Evans (ed.), *The Camerawork Essays: Contexts and Meaning in Photography*, p. 233

⁶⁴ See the 1984 first edition cover art by James Warhola of William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books, 1984).

⁶⁵ Myers, ‘Loves Labour Lost’, p. 233

⁶⁶ Bataille, ‘Abjection and Miserable Forms’, p. 6

⁶⁷ See *Daily Mirror*’s series: ‘Waste of a Nation’, *Daily Mirror*, 8 June, 1983, p. 3; ‘Waste of a Nation’, 7 April, 1980, pp. 14–15 and J. Gilbert and Alan Price, ‘Echoes of Jarrow’, 24 July, 1980, pp. 14–15.

⁶⁸ K. Myers, *Understains: The Sense and Seduction of Advertising* (London: Comedia, 1986) p. 119

⁶⁹ Hall and Myers, p. 19

optimistic slogan ‘think positive, act positive, vote Labour’ reflected a fundamental problem with Labour’s ‘image’ – its capacity to represent the working class only as ‘victims’ and its inability to find a visual language for the future.

Despite the problems with Labour’s capacity to represent its version of the future, the advertising agency had made visual the idea of the ‘throwaway society’ to attack Conservative policy. The ‘throwaway society’ is, for Harvey, more than just the reckless disposal of devalued commodities – it is the throwing away of ‘values, lifestyles, stable relationships, and attachments to things’.⁷⁰ The Conservative Party’s waste-saving agenda at this time meant that ‘individuals were forced to cope with disposability, novelty and the prospects of instant obsolescence’.⁷¹ The place-bound identities, such as that articulated by the steelworker, are Harvey argues, exhibited in the face of ‘radical historical change’ and cling to ‘the motivational power of tradition’.⁷² The visual tradition of picturing the working class as connected to the land emerged in one poster that, as David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh found, resonated emotively with the electorate in 1983.⁷³ ‘Are you going to vote for retirement at 16?’ featured a montage of five young people seated amongst a towering mound of rubbish (Fig. 22). Wright and his team visualised the collision between the contracting economy and a ruthless government with the expanding metaphor of waste and disposability of human potential. The poster reinforced Foot’s evocation of the past in its monumental vision of waste. The poster resonated visually and emotively with the ruinous scenes that Bill Brandt documented in front of St Paul’s Cathedral in 1942 (Fig. 23). In Brandt’s photograph the wreckage in the foreground set against the deep black silhouette of the cathedral bounces off light in the fashion of a pasted montage. This visual parallel with wartime Britain resonates with Foot’s consistent invocation of wartime and postwar defiance against the enemy.

Myers, like other critics, saw the transposition of the prewar and wartime visuality as a pervasive aesthetic in social realist photography in the early 1980s, which resonated with criticisms that Labour were too concerned with ‘slums, decaying shipyards, immigrants, cloth caps and caring only for minorities and underdogs’.⁷⁴ Such concerns were those that Gwen Lee and Simon Griffin described as ‘the well worn codes of Northernness’⁷⁵ that emerged in the social realist photography of the time, describing how ‘the ever present icon of the pit head’

⁷⁰ Here Harvey discusses the dialectics of obsolescence and modernisation central to futurologist Alvin Toffler’s book *Future Shock* in which he described the ‘throwaway society’ that emerged in the 1960s. See: Harvey, *The Condition*, p. 286.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., p. 303

⁷³ D. Butler and Dennis Kavanagh (eds.), *The British General Election of 1983* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 212

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 136

⁷⁵ Lee and Griffin, p. 22

pervaded such works.⁷⁶ Hall and Myers saw social realist documentary photographers using anachronistic and propagandistic ‘flatcap’ imagery as a dangerous device – evidence that the Left was ‘locked into the rhetoric of its own past’.⁷⁷ Hall similarly argued that ‘social realism is not realist in the way it pretends to be. It’s a regressive language’.⁷⁸ The sense that social realism fell back onto the visual certainties of the past is vital here to appreciate the representational crisis in British photography at this time. It was a crisis that mirrored the problems faced by the Labour Party and the Left overall. When Foot declared that the Labour Party existed to care for the weak and needy, he spoke of contemporary Britain as if it were 1945, as if the abjected youths and disposed workers scattered on the scrapheaps of the nation were, like St Paul’s, still standing strong and defiant amongst the detritus of blitzed devastation. This scrapheap imagery was a pervasive trope in the early 1980s and one thrown into sharp relief against a backdrop of industrial and technological change. As Huw Beynon identified, the scrapheap represented ‘an allusion to the machine world that represents the final insult to human labour’.⁷⁹ Beynon elucidates the connection between the cultural anxiety surrounding technology, unemployment and the fear of being laid to waste. Visualising these metaphors in photography – visually casting citizens as waste – was something the Labour-supporting *Daily Mirror* worked to create during Thatcher’s first term.

iii. Seacoal and the Economies of Waste

From the early months of 1980, the *Daily Mirror* ran the intermittent ‘Waste of a Nation’ features which detailed the social and economic effects of Thatcherite policy on the lives of Britons.⁸⁰ If the Labour Party was seen to be obsessed with the rhetoric of the past, the *Daily Mirror* features would compound this in articles such as *Echoes of Jarrow* which explicitly amplified the reverberations of the 1930s in the present (Fig. 24). The spread featured the story of a frail unemployed ‘sea coaler’ who would cycle to the Durham coast to gather washed-up beach coal from the neighbouring colliery to heat his home. The article made direct references to the 1930s stating that then ‘in the black years’ these coal gathering journeys were necessary ‘to keep many families alive’.⁸¹ The *Daily Mirror*’s photographer Eric Piper captured the frail seacoaler, with the front of his bicycle burdened with large bags of coal, hunched over the handlebars pushing his bicycle up a rain-battered hill. Piper’s image was a direct echo of

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Myers and Hall, p.19

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ S. Rowbotham and Huw Beynon, *Looking at Class: Film, Television and the Working Class in Britain* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2001), p. 28

⁸⁰ Other daily national papers deployed emotive imagery to illustrate narratives of life in Thatcher’s Britain but the *Daily Mirror* was particularly sensational in generating and extending crisis narratives.

⁸¹ Gilbert, ‘Echoes of Jarrow’, p. 15

Brandt's desolate picture *Coal-searcher Going Home to Jarrow*, 1937, which sees a frail man bent over and forcing his bicycle along a winding path punctuated by slag heaps and a bleak horizon behind (Fig. 25). While these visual parallels may not have resonated with every reader, the article and the photograph sought to affirm the subtitle's assertion that 'now history could repeat itself'.

Brandt's seacoal photograph has also been used as an emblematic example of the capacity for history to repeat itself. The photograph was used in *Picture Post*'s 'Austerity issue' in 1947 in an article that questioned 'How did we get into this mess?'. The article described how between the wars 'new technical developments revolutionised industry and trade – developments in air craft, motor cars, modern household utensils and films', and asserted that the nation had 'failed to establish British leadership in any of them'.⁸² Brandt's picture was used to describe how the unemployed in North East England were part of the 'wasted years' and exemplified how Britain was still paying the price for failure. These seacoalers were, the writer argued, the result of a nation that had failed 'to modernise industries'.⁸³ Similarly, the *Daily Mirror* article described how decaying areas of the North East were incapable of competing in the global market economy without monetary support and investment. The article ended with the bleak description that to save the North East from barrenness at the turn of the century, it was imperative that 'new industry be brought in'.⁸⁴ The seacoal gatherer in *Picture Post* and the *Daily Mail* were both deployed to draw attention to mishandled modernisation and investment in industry. The seacoal gatherer emerges as the inevitable result of failed industrial and technological policy, an embodiment of national decline. Both articles tried to illustrate the present by suggesting the return of the past; both usages served to set the mid-1930s as the barometer against which physical and social struggle with poverty, industrial change and unemployment could be measured.

The withdrawal of state support and investment in heavy industry would culminate in a seismic confrontation between the Government and the National Union of Mineworkers between 1984 and 1985. Jonathan Winterton noted in his essay 'The 1984–5 miners' strike and technological change' that the media's emphasis on the devastating effects of pit closures on communities and workers, the confrontations with the police force and debates around the role of trade unions, 'obscured the fundamental causes' that led to the strike.⁸⁵ The strike generated a wealth of photographic imagery, unequivocal photojournalistic pictures of the unions confronting the

⁸² S. Elliot, 'How did we get into this mess?' in *Picture Post*, 19 April, 1947, p. 14

⁸³ Elliot, 'How did we get into this mess?', p. 14

⁸⁴ Gilbert, p. 15

⁸⁵ J. Winterton, 'The 1984-5 miners' strike and technological change' in *The British Journal for the History of Science*, vol. 26, issue 1, March 1993, p. 6

state. While these images of resistance dominated the news media, the photographic community's concern for the visual conflict between the two sides obscured the abject repercussions of the strike effected by technological change. In Winterton's essay, he tracks a history of the National Coal Board's 'piecemeal' implementation of computers called Mine Operating Systems.⁸⁶ As the Government prepared for a grand-scale confrontation with the miners, they deployed technological innovations to stockpile coal and ensured that imported supplies from abroad were available.⁸⁷ The revolutionary use of technology effected the proliferation of waste gathering populations and it is these photographic projects that saw the redundant scavenger raking the detritus of society in crisis.

iv. Zones of the Written Off

In a crowded, dirty little country like ours one takes defilement almost for granted. Slag-heaps and chimneys seem almost a more normal, probable landscape than grass or trees, and even in the depths of the country when you drive your fork into the ground you half expect to lever up a broken bottle or a rusty can.⁸⁸

George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 1937

The sky above the port was the color of a television tuned to a dead channel.⁸⁹

William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 1982

British photographer Chris Killip's seacoal photographs – published in his 1988 book *In Flagrante* – show how photography critic Paul Caplan's desire for the documentary photographer to cast (metaphorical) shadows and to heed the cyberpunk aesthetic is embedded in the pictures from the North of England. It is within these documentary works that we begin to see an emerging counter-narrative to the prevailing modes of governmentally supported and technologically-assisted industrial cleansing. Killip had spent much of the late 1970s and early 1980s in the North East and on the West coast of England. As a founding member and one-time director of the Side Gallery in Newcastle, home to the social documentary film and photography group Amber, Killip's work has been read through histories of concerned documentary of working class communities.⁹⁰ Killip's photographs from Lynemouth were first exhibited at the

⁸⁶ Winterton, 'The 1984-5 miners' strike', p. 6; A. Burns, J. Winterton et al, 'The miners and new technology' in *Industrial Relations Journal*, no. 14, issue 4, 1983, p. 8

⁸⁷ See Evans, *Thatcher and Thatcherism*, p. 39

⁸⁸ G. Orwell, 'The Road to Wigan Pier' in P. Davidson (ed.) *George Orwell: Orwell's England* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 67

⁸⁹ W. Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1984; London: Voyager, 1995), p. 9

⁹⁰ Amber also commissioned a number of projects on Lynemouth Beach, including Mik Critchlow's *Seacoalers*, 1981-3, and the film *Seacoal*, 1985. See: D. Newbury, 'Documentary Practices and Working Class Culture: An Interview with Murray Martin (Amber Films and Side Photographic Gallery)' in *Visual Studies*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2002, p. 116.

Side Gallery in 1984 and subsequently shown at the Serpentine in 1985 in an exhibition titled 'Another Country', and have been published in various formats since.

In a bid to distance his pictures from 'concerned' documentary interpretations, Killip's introductory text to his photobook *In Flagrante* described that his pictures are 'a fiction about a metaphor'.⁹¹ The fictional element of the book is evident from the start. The photographs in *In Flagrante* begin and end with two shots taken at the same location. The first picture in the book shows a hooded woman sat on the pavement, her arms wrapped around her legs and her head on her knees (Fig. 26). In the last picture the same woman is seen curled up in a foetal position on the pavement by a graffitied bus stop (Fig. 27). These photographs of despair both share the photographer's black silhouette cast across the lower foreground of the picture. Killip and his plate camera's shadow serve as reminders that the pictures inside the book are governed by his metaphorical, subjective and at times fictional approach to his subjects who exist amongst 'the reality of deindustrialisation in a system which regards their lives as disposable'.⁹² The photographer's metaphorical fictions are thus concerned with notions of disposability; an exploration of a visual language of the 'throwaway society' that was coming to define the relationship between labour and communities experiencing processes of technological and industrial change. Killip's emphasis on the seacoaling communities could elucidate this visual language of disposability because, as Gerry Badger describes, seacoaling was 'a harvest of waste'.⁹³ The coal gathered by the seacoal gatherers was, Badger continues, a byproduct: 'the residue... of uneconomical coal waste from the nearby mine by the National Coal Board'.⁹⁴ Badger's emphasis on waste resonates with the 'more probable landscape' of slag-heaps and rubbish that George Orwell observed in the 1930s.

In Orwell's description of the sullied English landscape he focuses on the abject fruits of the earth that would also fascinate Killip. In Orwell's abject landscape, even the soil is polluted by junk and mass-produced waste. Broken bottles and rusty cans rest under the earthy dermis of the land like aluminium pustules ready for harvest. In a deadpan visual mode, this is the kind of image that Killip pictured on a small patch at Askam seacoal beach (Fig. 28). In this ornamental scene of abjection, Killip photographs white seashells, rocks and sand intermingled with a smashed glass, a used condom and a fleshless animal bone. Killip's rendering of the organic and inorganic elements of waste on the coastal spaces expresses his concern for the abject qualities of the environment. Such engagement with the landscape's artificial defilement was a device employed in William Gibson's 1984 science fiction novel *Neuromancer*, which similarly

⁹¹ C. Killip, *In Flagrante* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1988)

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ G. Badger, *Chris Killip* (London: Phaidon, 2001), p. 74

⁹⁴ Ibid.

articulates the relationship between the natural, technological and corporeal degradation of the postmodern cityscape. Gibson's near future landscapes are characterised by their corporeal relationship with junk, and industrial and technological waste. The description of a grainy, monochromatic electric sky and the synaesthetic rustling of static deadness resonate with Killip's coastal photographs, where he captures a grey sky fuzzing over the junk of a landscape in crisis. As critic Rob Powell saw it when reviewing Killip's work in *Another Country*: 'the sun appears to be permanently on strike. English Disease spreads to its elements... the overwhelming greyness and gloom... [sees] punk kids and old men alike hang around the benches and beach... bored and futureless'.⁹⁵ This expansive greyness is central to the photograph *Crabs and People, Skinningrove*, 1981 (Fig. 29) where the scene appears on standby; the people sit and wait as the grey sky frames the overwhelming feeling of futile white-noise.

The description of the emaciated greyness of the landscape and its people does however overlook the strange fantasies of time and place that were central to this set of pictures. As Badger observed, 'Killip finds not just disquiet but reverie among the shards of our civilisation of waste',⁹⁶ and this fantasy is most apparent in *Helen and Hula-Hoop, Seacoal Beach, Lynemouth, Northumberland* (Fig. 30) where he captured the balletic pose of a young girl and her hula-hoop set against rolling wasteland behind. The girl's hands orchestrate the tilted framing of the image; she stands in tune with the destabilised backdrop of rubbish freckling the sparse land as it slants towards the sea. The unity between the bodies of Killip's subjects and the landscape emerges in other pictures. In his review of the Serpentine show, Mark Haworth-Booth described the presence of a 'restyling echo and synthesis' of Brandt's seacoaler image of 1937 in Killip's work.⁹⁷ In "*Cookie*" in the Snow, *Seacoal Beach, Lynemouth*, 1984, (Fig. 31) Killip freezes the figure of the seacoaler in the blizzard as he marches up towards the camera. Killip was able to transpose the perceptive weight and strain of nature enforced upon the body of the seacoaler and the frozen landscape in which he labours. These were the characteristics that Brandt caught on the sloping path in the thirties, and qualities explored in Marlow's visions of Liverpool's waste-pickers. The synthesis of this historical imagery led a number of critics to view Killip's work as anachronistic, believing the images reinforced the Labour movement's iconography of worker struggle outmoded in postmodern discourse.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ R. Powell, 'Askam and Skinningrove', *Creative Camera*, March 1983, p. 876

⁹⁶ Badger, *Chris Killip*, p. 92

⁹⁷ M. Haworth-Booth, 'Chris Killip: Scenes From Another Country' in *Aperture*, Summer 1986, Issue 103, p. 23

⁹⁸ Badger, *Chris Killip*, p.11

Fionna Barber has observed that Killip's work belongs to 'a tradition of documentary photography stretching back to the 1930s'.⁹⁹ Having spent much of the 1960s working in America, the work of documentarists such as Walker Evans and the aesthetics of FSA pictures – of the everyday stoic endurance of rural poverty and near peasantry – would greatly inform Killip's work. The most salient of these influences emerges in *Rocker and Rosie going home to Lynemouth*, 1984, (Fig. 32) where Killip photographs a young boy and his mother seated on a wooden cart filled with scavenged seacoal near the shore. Like the buckled creases of Walker Evans' 1937 portrait of Allie Mae Burrough's (Fig. 33), Killip captures the force of the elements on Rosie's weathered face as she looks on in the direction of travel. Killip's pictures resonate with the endeavour of the FSA photographers to draw connections between the people and the land. The emphasis on the corporeal and environmental unity is further explored as the boy's coal-blackened hand clenches in the cold.

Reviewers who saw Killip's pictures as concerned documentations of life in the North were inevitably disappointed on seeing the work. A one reviewer reflected: 'there is virtually no sign here of newsworthy strife'.¹⁰⁰ Killip's photographs of coal gathering communities are distinct from those created during the miners' strike, of organised labour and the state. Sylvia Harvey and John Berger were eager to point out in their accompanying essay to *In Flagrante* that Killip's work 'does not belong to this tradition'.¹⁰¹ While past photographic influences are relevant to this set of pictures, it must be stressed that the past visibility does not define their contemporaneous rhetoric. Killip did not seek the spectacle of confrontation; his fictional metaphors were symbolic visions of seacoal gatherers raking the detritus of the nation's margins. Killip's pictures of near-feudal, place-bound struggle of corporeal endurance are subversive in that they jar with the political discourse of rapid modernisation and technological change. Killip spoke of his ambition to consciously 'open up a dialogue with history'¹⁰² describing his images as 'not about the North East specifically' but instead 'about de-industrialisation in England, generally'.¹⁰³ The spatial and temporal looseness of these pictures is significant. Through these coastal spaces Killip sought 'to track an evolutionary history, a recent history' through peoples' 'relationship to the land and sea'.¹⁰⁴ He hoped to document what Barber termed a 'peasant tradition' as an 'activity that operates outside of the regulated

⁹⁹ F. Barber, 'Shifting Practices: New trends in representation since the 1970s' in L. Dawtry (ed.) *Investigating Modern Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 165. Additionally, before arriving in Northumberland Killip had spent the preceding years working on the Isle of Man photographing portraits, by way of August Sander, of the kinds of workers found on the small island.

¹⁰⁰ W. Feather, 'Quack, Quack Here: Art' in *Guardian*, 8 September, 1985, p. 19

¹⁰¹ J. Berger and Sylvia Grant, 'Walking Back Home' in Killip, *In Flagrante*, p. 87

¹⁰² C. Killip, interviewed by Mark Haworth-Booth, 1997, Oral History of British Photography, British Library, London, C459/92

¹⁰³ D. Lee, 'Chris Killip: In Flagrante', *Creative Camera*, May, no. 5, 1988, p.11

¹⁰⁴ Killip, interviewed by Mark Haworth-Booth

workspace of industrial capitalism'.¹⁰⁵ The emphasis on the temporal and tellurian relationship of his pictures is seen as his subjects wait on the nation's threshold, the wasted border zones on the edge of the nation between the land and the sea.¹⁰⁶

In her analysis of social marginalisation, Tyler describes how social abjects are cast outside of the social mainstream and are at times called upon as signifiers of changes or social problems; they become representational scapegoats for economic failure. She describes how:

Social abjection... [as a conceptual and theoretical device] enables us to consider [the] production of human waste from multiple perspectives, including... those border zones within the state in which the overwhelming imperative is not transgression but survival.¹⁰⁷

The images of seacoal gatherers offer an alternative perspective on the struggle of the economically, socially and spatially marginalised, exposing, as Killip described, the 'sense that people are on the edge of society'.¹⁰⁸ The seacoaler, the gatherer of industry's waste, is utilised as emblematic of the Government's economic and technological failure – these seacoalers, as captured by Killip, are the effects of creative destruction and the manifestation of mishandled socio-economic realities. They are, on the one hand, abjected – degradingly cast off – from the economic and social mainstream, labouring outside any officially recognised means of income production. On the other hand, they are abject pestilent coastal ragpickers spurred by deindustrial advances – abject in their lowly connection to the land, reliant on the economy of nature to wash ashore its waste.

Seacoal gatherers were sometimes referred to as 'moon miners' in the national press.¹⁰⁹ This epithet confirmed that the earthly relationship between the struggling unemployed gatherers depends upon the ebb and flow of the sea for nature to bear its fruits. This kind of archaic relationship resonates with Killip's belief that the pictures are representative of a place that 'confounded time; here the Middle Ages and the twentieth century intertwined'.¹¹⁰ Haworth-Booth similarly described how the scenes are 'both past and future but only marginally of the present'.¹¹¹ Killip refers to the 'symbolic landscape' where the temporal registers of an organic

¹⁰⁵ Barber, 'Shifting Practices', p. 165

¹⁰⁶ Killip was fascinated the idea of the 'threshold' as a domain in which the body is neither 'within or outside'. See Badger, Chris Killip, p. 92

¹⁰⁷ Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, p. 47

¹⁰⁸ Killip, interviewed by Haworth-Booth

¹⁰⁹ V. Heath, 'Gathering Winter Fuel', *Guardian*, 17 December, 1983, p. 16

¹¹⁰ C. Killip, *Seacoal* (Gottingen: Steidl, 2011), p. 4

¹¹¹ Haworth-Booth, 'Chris Killip', p. 16

past are pitted against the mechanisms of deindustrialising life. The diverging temporal registers are best illustrated in a photograph of a man mounted on a cart reining in his horse from the thrashing sea behind (Fig. 34). This 'beast of burden' further reflects the archaic nature of seacoaling in its juxtaposition with the rusting hunk of a redundant car, with broken windows, expelling seaweed from its engine. This dialogue between natural and artificial – present and past – parallels a feudal peasant tradition whereby cultural anxieties of a changing society, from class, industry and new technology are displaced onto the toil of equine imagery.¹¹² As the car rusts and decays amongst the moss and seaweed, it is as 'written off' as the men and women who struggle around it. The car (as an established symbol of a nation's industrial and manufacturing prowess) was fast becoming a sign of a nation's technological advancements. As such, the car's manufacture was beginning to symbolise, for the redundant worker, as Beynon described, the machine world that represents 'the final insult to human labour'.¹¹³ Rusting and obsolete, Killip's unproductive car mirrors the redundancy of the waste gatherers. Killip's concern for referencing the future of high-tech postmodernity and atrophy play out in these juxtapositions.

Grant and Berger's essay asserted that the 'tragedy' in these images 'has little to do with new technology as such, or with so-called de-industrialism'.¹¹⁴ The tragedy, they argued, 'stems, it bleeds, not from the fact that science has discovered electronics, but from the fact that everything which constituted the loves of those living [in the North East] is now being treated as irrelevant'.¹¹⁵ Grant and Berger's observations resonate with the vision of the 'throwaway society' in which social solidarities and relations are discarded. In Killip's pictures they found the ruins of late capitalist society: 'thin, torn, worn out, empty... spaces which have been abandoned. Zones of the written off'.¹¹⁶ The waste-making nature of Thatcher's industrial agenda, the championing of profitable production at the expense of the citizen, created the highly precarious and fragmented 'new scavenging class' of the socially abjected.

In both *Picture Post* and the *Daily Mirror* the seacoaler emerges as the waste matter of governmental mishandling of technological change. The detritus borne from this incompetence emerges in – like the symbolic figure of modernism,¹¹⁷ the ragpicker or *chiffonier* of Baudelaire or Atget's Paris – the seacoaler or scavenger on the coastal wastelands of Northern England, a

¹¹² As explored in G. M. Dorre, *Victorian Fiction and the Cult of the Horse* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) and alluded to in F. Barber, 'Shifting Practices', p. 165

¹¹³ Beynon, *Looking at Class*, p. 28

¹¹⁴ Berger and Harvey, p. 87

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Whiteley, *Junk Art*, p. 16

symbolic waste-gatherer traversing the social landscape on the cusp of postmodernity. The revival of the waste-gatherer figure in the works of Peter Marlow and Chris Killip served to undercut the cultural discourses of streamlined and rapid modernisation through the exposure of waste-saving's abject side effects. Killip and Marlow focussed on the sprawling landscapes of abjection as redundant subjects whose bodily entwinement with, and dependency on, the waste-matter of the social body could provide a counter-narrative to the neoliberal reification of new technology and the desires of a consumer-centred society at the time. While the Labour Party and the Left generated visual discourses of passivity around the disposed working class (left on the scrapheap and swept down the drain) in a visual language anchored in the past, Killip sought out the activity of the excluded as they existed outside on the strange, excluded border zones of the social body.

In contrast with the kind of endurance exhibited in on the beaches of Lynemouth, Killip also photographed, as Powell wrote in his review, the old men and punk kids who hang around 'bored and futureless'.¹¹⁸ Powell highlights the shared generational discontent. Killip saw this nihilistic anger at the punk band Angelic Upstarts' gig in Sunderland where he focussed on the corporeal chaos, disorder and angst of the younger generation (Fig. 35) who were renewing and renegotiating the sense of uselessness felt at a time of widespread obsolescence. Mark Haworth-Booth analysed this generational theme through Killip's earlier work *Youth on a Wall, Jarrow*, 1976 (Fig. 36), through which he saw a direct relationship with Brandt's picture of a youth gathering coal in Jarrow in the 1930s. The subjects are, Haworth-Booth described, linked by both their geographical location and also by their haircuts; in the 1930s it was 'not a style but a medication (against lice)' and in Killip's image the skinhead has transposed the vision of destitution through fashion. The nihilistic revival of the abject realities of the past sees the youth culture of early Thatcherite Britain transpose and further entwine their bodies in the abject realities of the past. As the next chapter will explore, such abject revivals would strongly influence the photography of youth unemployment in these years.

¹¹⁸ Powell, 'Askam and Skinningrove', p. 876

Chapter 5:

“Like a Black and White Photograph”: Youth Unemployment and the Aesthetics of Recession Culture

The punk phenomenon was the first wave of the recession culture that will dominate the 1980s. The decadence of the micro-chip, music for the unemployable.¹

Martin Walker, *Guardian*, 1980

She had to kneel to examine it; [the picture] had been projected from the vantage point of a small child... A dark wave of rubble rose against a colourless sky, beyond its crest the bleached, half-melted skeletons of city towers... textured like a net, rusting steel rods twisted gracefully as fine string, vast slabs of concrete still clinging there... Children. Feral, in rags. Teeth glittering like knives. Sores on their contorted faces.²

William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 1982

The producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum.³

Fredric Jameson, ‘Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism’, 1982

In Martin Walker’s *Guardian* article he forecast a vision of youth culture in 1980s Britain characterised by unemployment and a culture of technological excess and industrial decline. As a result of these new realities, he anticipated a revival of the labour movement, describing how the British Left ‘is being re-inspired, as the old verities of dole queues and crisis capitalism send a rush of new red blood through thickened arteries’.⁴ Walker saw familiar visions from the past emerging in this renewed expression of recession culture. As the previous chapter described, Labour leader Michael Foot’s attempted revival of the Blitz spirit in 1983 sought to awaken ‘the moral and social imperatives’ that led to the establishment of the welfare state. This reality of a reinvigorated labour movement in a society undergoing technological change was fundamental to Walker’s vision of youth culture in the 1980s.

This chapter looks at youth culture’s revival of the past as imaged through the photography of the labour movement. By assessing the shared performative visual language between young people in the eighties with the labour movement of the thirties, this analysis examines the dramatisation of ‘recession culture’ reflecting what Fredric Jameson saw as a ‘play of historical allusion’ through the reestablishment of dead styles and the reinvention of the ‘feel and shape’

¹ Walker, ‘How Do You Orchestrate’, p. 14

² Gibson, *Neuromancer*, p. 251

³ F. Jameson, ‘Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism’, *New Left Review*, no. 146, July-August, 1984, p. 65

⁴ Walker, ‘How Do You Orchestrate’, p. 14

of the past.⁵ Drawing on Walker's description of a multifaceted montage of culture in the early 1980s sees the emerging postmodern conviction in the ability to pick and choose which relics of the past could be enveloped in the present. His article was illustrated with two photographs of youth subcultures taken by the young portrait photographer Derek Ridgers (Fig. 37). Ridgers was a London-based documentarist who photographed the emerging artists, designers and performers of Soho's *Blitz* nightclub. His pictures of London's club scene often featured in style journals such as *The Face* and *Blitz* magazine. In the *Guardian*, his picture of an openmouthed, wide-eyed punk, and another of a couple of Blitz Kids illustrated the forthcoming stylistic merging of tribes: the aestheticism of the New Romantics and the grittiness of an anarchic social realism.⁶ Ridgers's two photographs illustrated Walker's seemingly disparate connections between recession, technology, the labour movement, subcultures, morality and industrial decay.

The myriad concerns expressed in Walker's text – youth culture, technological decadence and social redundancy – were characteristics that pervaded the landscapes of cyberpunk author William Gibson's novels. In the above passage from *Neuromancer*, Gibson describes a scene in which his character looks at a hologramatic-photograph of children shimmering like silver amongst the debris of the postindustrial cityscape. His prose reflects the artistic concerns of the period that art historian Giuliana Bruno saw as visual culture's obsession with the aesthetics of postindustrial junk, born of the postmodern city's accelerated production of waste. Bruno observed the ways in which visual artists of the period revelled in 'an aesthetic of recycling' by turning to waste's formal qualities, utilising junk's capacity to signify how, '[c]onsumerism, waste, and recycling meet in fashion, the "wearable art" of late capitalism'.⁷ Gibson's characters (and the subjects within the photographs described by his characters) enact their precarious existences against these abject backdrops of ossified and rusting buildings. The powerful descriptions of emaciated landscapes infested with the junk of the modern throwaway society would emerge in the visual language of the surrounding landscape that young artists, photographers and their subjects would seek to capture in the early 1980s. Examining how the 'worn' degradation of the postmodern landscape was enveloped in the self-representation of young people and worn – sometimes physically cloaked around their bodies – sees photographers engage in the 'wearability' of the abject landscape to authenticate their own visual experiences of 'recession culture'.

⁵ Jameson, 'Postmodernism', p. 65

⁶ Ridgers exhibited his portraits of punks at the ICA in 1978.

⁷ G. Bruno, 'Ramble City: Postmodernism and Blade Runner', *October*, no. 41, 1987, p. 62

i. Dramatising Britain's Decline

We know about the unemployed but we don't see them. They aren't lounging about on street corners like they did in the Thirties... They are the lost invisibles.⁸

Barrie Sherman, *The Guardian*, 1980

I wanted to look like a black and white photograph.⁹

Scarlett Canon, *Blitz*, 1984

In 1984 the alternative fashion magazine *Blitz* featured a shoot by a group of young models and photographers who were inspired by the anniversary republication of George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*.¹⁰ The group wanted to emulate the look of destitution to lend a sense of authenticity to the trend of 'scruffy chic' popular at the time.¹¹ The photographs featured in the magazine show the model Cerith Wyn Evans alongside another skinhead model in oversized striped jackets slumped on park benches (Fig. 38). Another shoot in the issue saw model Scarlett Canon wearing designer clothes enmeshed with a backdrop accessorised with, as the photographer recalls, 'discarded detritus... found around the East End wasteland'.¹² The pictures in *Blitz* reveal a duality of concerns amongst young photographers and subjects at this time: the abject visual revival of the 'dirty' past and the performative enactment or dramatisation of the past's visibility in the present. The *Down and Out* models later recalled how the images 'caused a bit of a stir because we were impersonating homeless people in ridiculously expensive clothes' (the Comme de Garçons jackets they wore were designed to be 'intentionally aged and worn-looking').¹³ This fashioning of the abject past into a desirable aesthetic reflects the wider subcultural yearning for the gritty authenticities of the past.¹⁴ Other photographs displayed in this issue of *Blitz* see a desire for the photographic verisimilitude of the bleak social documentary depression era Britain that the model had hoped to recast on the pages of the colourful publication. This performative enactment of 'lounging about' is reflective of the kind of visual register that Barrie Sherman, author of *The Collapse of Work*, described as prevalent in the 1930s.

⁸ Barrie Sherman quoted in Walker, 'How Do You Orchestrate', p. 14

⁹ Scarlett Canon quoted in I.H. Webb, *As Seen in Blitz Magazine: Fashioning the 1980s* (London: ACC, 2014), p. 8

¹⁰ *Blitz* reflected fashion's capacity to quote from historical sources. *Blitz*'s Simon Tesler cited 'Angus McBean, Man Ray and other Surrealists of the Twenties and Thirties' as influences. See S. Tesler, 'Introduction', *Blitz Exposure: Young British Photographers, 1980-1987* (London: Ebury Press, 1987)

¹¹ Editor of *Blitz* David Hiscocks quoted in *As Seen in Blitz*, p. 40

¹² Monica Curtin, quoted in *As Seen in Blitz*, p. 36

¹³ Webb, *As Seen in Blitz*, p. 40.

¹⁴ Editorial, "'Fashion'", *Aperture*, no. 216, Fall, 2014.

The revival of the past was important to youth culture's self-stylisation. As the previous chapter noted, Mark Haworth-Booth saw the skinhead as emblematic of working class youth's recasting of the abject afflictions of the depression era. For Haworth-Booth, the skinhead's aesthetic transposed a remedy for a working class malady – the hairstyle being 'not a style but a medication (against lice)' and its reincarnation in the 1970s was like the boots they wore, a stylistic interpretation of proletarian, macho expression.¹⁵ The abject fashioning of skinhead culture and its stylistic displacement of the abject features of the past was a leitmotif in the findings gathered by cultural studies scholars in the early 1980s. John Clarke's short essay 'The Skinhead and the Magical Recovery of Community' offers insight into disaffected youth and their relationship with the past. Clarke argued that skinhead style 'represents an attempt to re-create through the "mob" the traditional working class community, as a substitution for the real decline of the latter'.¹⁶ In doing so 'the skinhead had to use an *image* of what that community was as the basis for their style... The themes and imagery still persisted, but the reality was in a state of decline and disappearance'.¹⁷ Clarke's emphasis on the performative revival of the past's visuality is crucial here. Dick Hebdige similarly observed the deployment of the past's image to authenticate contemporary experiences of economic hardship in his analysis of youth culture in 1979. Hebdige observed how the punk subcultures of the late 1970s constructed a performative, self-stylised visual language through which they were 'not only directly responding to increasing joblessness, changing moral standards, the rediscovery of poverty, the Depression, etc., they were *dramatising* what had come to be called "Britain's decline"'.¹⁸ Hebdige saw the drive to reaffirm a community of the disaffected and the dispossessed constructed through the transposition of the past image to performatively authenticate their disdain. Central to this resurrection of the past's image was the celebration of degradation and abject poverty. Hebdige described the punk style of the late seventies as 'the swearword made flesh', made up of:

objects borrowed from the most sordid of contexts [which] found a place in punk's ensembles: lavatory chains were... encased in plastic bin liners... fragments of school uniforms... were symbolically defiled... the perverse and the abnormal were valued intrinsically.¹⁹

¹⁵ Haworth-Booth, 'Closely Observed Photographs', p. 884

¹⁶ J. Clarke 'The Skinhead and the Magical Recovery of Community', S. Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds), *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (1976; London: Routledge, 2012), p. 81

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ D. Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979; London: Routledge, 2002), p.87.

¹⁹ Hebdige, *Subculture*, p.107

Hebdige further described how ‘safety pins and bin liners signified a relative material poverty which was either directly experienced and exaggerated or sympathetically assumed’.²⁰ This chaotic style was a visual celebration of disorder and a montage of abject poverty seized by the bodies of its actors.²¹

The decaying ‘no future’ mentality of punk mirrors Bruno’s description of postmodern society’s culture of junk. Punk’s nihilism was recast in the post-apocalyptic performance art of the Mutoid Waste Company, whose theatrical and sculptural forms sought to reveal the anxieties of living in ‘post-punk 1980s Britain [that] was developing a looming sense of apocalypse’.²² The MWC’s junk sculptures were abject spectacles of apocalypse, carnivalesque celebrations of industrial degradation motivated both by anxieties of deindustrialisation and the threat of cold war destruction. The collective’s work is part of the same history that Clarke observed in the skinhead community, of an ‘exaggerated and intensified’ performance of decline through which the looming sense of doom and cultural anxieties of degradation could be articulated.²³

Against an artistic and subcultural backdrop preoccupied with cold war anxiety of total destruction, young people’s attempts to present an ‘authentic reality’ of decline were captured by a photographic culture whose claims to authenticity were increasingly under fire. Sherman’s observation of the unemployed’s invisibility is based on the ‘look’ of the ‘black and white photograph’ drawn from the *Picture Post* documentary tradition of picturing the destitute. Used as the benchmark of decline, this vision of the unemployed ‘lounging about’ is something that Stuart Hall criticised as the Left’s reuse of ‘Jarrow march’ iconography. This representational reliance on the past was, Hall believed, ‘not the reality of unemployment today’.²⁴ While this may have been the case, theoretical discussions taking place around the truth claims of documentary and photographic culture were at odds with a movement that self-consciously sought to revive the authenticating visuality of the past. The photographic tropes of thirties unemployment would greatly influence the unemployed youth movement and the revival of the labour movement that that would spawn.

The *Blitz* photographs, then, embody two performative strategies adopted by young people at this time. On the one hand, they exhibit the desire to emulate the photographic techniques and posturing found in the ‘realist’, ‘black and white’ photographs of the past. On the other hand

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ The dialogue surrounding punks in the late 1970s was framed by their abject qualities. See *Brass Tacks*, a special episode on ‘Punk Rock’, director unknown (Manchester: BBC, 1977)

²² ‘History of Mutoid Waste Company’, www.mutatebritain.com/history. Accessed 23 March 2014.

²³ Clarke, ‘The Skinhead’, p. 81

²⁴ Hall and Myers, p. 222

they reveal a desire to revive and reinvent the abject visuality of the past, a nihilistic, ruinous aesthetic of physical and corporeal decline. Both strategies relied heavily on the subjects' performance to lend a feeling of 'authenticity' to the pictures. This reflects Hebdige's perspective on young people and performance. Hebdige observed that punks debased their bodies because they were a means through which they could exert power: 'If teenagers possess little else, they at least own their bodies. If power can be exercised nowhere else, it can at least be exercised here'.²⁵ In the early 1980s, these young bodies in protest would again recast visions of the past to substantiate their claims to struggle. As fresh blood was shot through the fatigued national body, the authenticating nature of dole queues and crisis capitalism would, as Walker described, pump new red blood through the thickened arteries of a youth movement on the march.

ii. The People's March for Jobs

On 1 May 1981 regional councils of the Trades Union Congress sponsored a month-long march from Liverpool to London. The People's March for Jobs built on the momentum of disaffection that the unrest in Brixton and Toxteth had made clear. The protest march concluded in a mass meeting of 100,000 people in Trafalgar Square on 31 May. On the final day of the march Michael Foot declared that the march would 'take its place in British history, alongside... the Jarrow March... Peterloo, Tolpuddle, and many more.'²⁶ While the march failed to influence popular memory in this way, the framing of this march through the lens of the past is crucial.

The *Daily Mail's* report on the protest featured a full page photograph of a line of marchers walking down a winding country lane from the horizon towards the People's March for Jobs banner in the foreground which headed the snaking queue (Fig. 39). In the accompanying report, a critic states that the protest served only as a means to give 'inarticulate 17 year olds' a way to 'vent their feelings'.²⁷ The reporter's desire to portray a rabble of angry and inarticulate marching youths reveals the connection between the young unemployed utilising their performative presence to communicate their discontent. The photograph used by the *Daily Mail* expresses what historian Ben Pimlott later described as the march's visual rationale: a 'slowly lengthening column' acting as a 'nationally representative dole queue' stretching from the North West to the capital.²⁸ To give the impression of a national dole queue the marchers utilised their own bodies to bring the socioeconomic trope of crisis into being.

²⁵ Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light*, p. 31

²⁶ Foot quoted in D. Norris 'Marching in History', *Daily Mail*, 1 June, 1981, p. 16

²⁷ R. Lewis, 'On the March', *Daily Mail*, 27 May, 1981 p. 11

²⁸ B. Pimlott, 'Jarrow Crusade', *Guardian*, 21 June, 1986, p. 9

Drawing on the success of The People's March for Jobs, another march was planned for the fiftieth anniversary of the 1936 'Jarrow Crusade'. Organised by the student-led socialist theatre company Red Ladder, the march retraced the steps of the Jarrow marchers under the name *Jarrow '86*.²⁹ Funded by the TUC and the Labour Party, the marchers left Jarrow on 5 October and, after the three hundred mile journey, gathered in Trafalgar Square as their predecessors had done in 1936.³⁰ The original Jarrow march, like its reenactment in 1986, was concerned with the spectacle of deprivation³¹ and its purpose, as Pimlott saw it, was 'to use a moral victory of the past to mobilise people in the present'.³² This performative expression of the past became the chief area of contention.

Cultural historian Patrick Wright argued in his book *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* that unemployed marches tended to be an exercise in nostalgia, clouding the present realities of socioeconomic struggle especially through their exclusion of women. Wright argued that the contemporary labour movement should 'be defined in relation to the *present*, rather than just inherited in the often archaic forms of their past expression'.³³ He saw these nostalgic and anachronistic visions as a romanticisation of struggle where:

both the official and the oppositional ceremonies the stage is occupied almost exclusively by men... aligning them with more controllable terms of a nostalgically organised 'past' of the labour movement's own.³⁴

This nostalgically organised past was a controllable visual language that the media relied upon in its coverage. The male dominated and indeed middle aged performance of the past evidenced in the photographs that emerged in the national press was one journalist Beatrix Campbell (who was herself retracing the footsteps of George Orwell in her book *Wigan Revisited*) saw as limiting for Trade Unions.³⁵ While the march was accompanied by authentic props (the original petition box and banners), the photographs of the march reveal that the presence of women, such as the original march's orchestrator Ellen Wilkinson, was almost non-existent.³⁶ As Campbell pointed out, 'marches are a striking and often emotive attempt to make the movement

²⁹ See D. Douglas, 'Bid to bring back "true fringe ideal"', *Glasgow Herald*, 25 August, 1984, p. 5

³⁰ The performative nature of this event was magnified by the organisers who programmed a theatre troupe of 22 actors to stage musical-theatre performances of 'Heads Held High' en route.

³¹ See: M. Perry, *The Jarrow Crusade: Protest and Legend* (Sunderland: USP, 2005)

³² Pimlott, 'Jarrow Crusade', p. 9

³³ P. Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (1985: Oxford: OUP, 2009) p. 142

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ B. Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the 80s* (London: Virago, 1984), p. 214

³⁶ Campbell, *Wigan Pier*, p. 215

move', but the unions, she argued, failed to maximise the potential for spectacle through the exclusion of women, particularly mothers who were often pragmatically excluded from these lengthy excursions.³⁷ While Campbell's analysis is useful, it neglects to consider the ways in which women who did participate were written out of these narratives' presentation in the press to reinforce the correlative and authentic relationship with the past.

Not only were young participants recasting the visual language of the past at *Jarrow '86* but this transposition of the labour movement was perpetuated too by photography's use in the national press. Covering the rally at Trafalgar Square for the *Guardian*, Gerry Weaser photographed two men, a moustached middle aged man on the left wearing a flat cap and next to him a young man self-consciously imitating his older counterpart with a finer moustache and a flat cap stapled with punk's ensemble of badges and stickers (Fig. 40). These men stand united lending the photograph an authentic narrative of generational continuity which speaks of men's jobless struggle over time. However, this narrative continuity would be confused had the picture editor not cropped out a young woman from the original photograph. The unedited photograph shows a young woman in a flat cap adorned with badges in a similar way to the younger man on her right (Fig. 41). She appropriates the iconography of the 1930s manual labourer like her young male counterpart but in being female she confuses the traditional representation of 'Jarrow iconography'.³⁸ The cropping of Weaser's photograph reveals two important aspects of this revivalism. First, the marchers' wholesale adoption and performance of the past's visuality to authenticate their own predicament. Second, the ease with which women can be written out of the present narrative when the performing subject, the photographer, and picture editors seek to perpetuate tropes and authenticate performances visually anchored in the past. Taken together this photograph exposes the problems of this postmodern adoption that Jameson called the 'dead styles' which 'speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum'.³⁹ This revival romanticises the solidarities of the past but speaks, as Wright suggested, very little on the present experiences of unemployment.

The cropping of Weaser's photograph does however reinforce the fact that the performative enactment (as a means of rendering the state of unemployment visible) did not honour the ways in which unemployment and destitution were lived out and represented in the early 1980s. If *Jarrow '86* was a march for the new generation of the destitute, these were young men and women who had little experience of having ever worked. Manual and unskilled labour in a deindustrialising nation bore little reality to a young generation suffering from chronic unemployment. Weaser's photograph reaffirms, like the other photographs discussed so far, that

³⁷ Campbell, *Wigan Pier*, p. 215

³⁸ 'Unemployment', Box OBS/6/9/2/1/U, Gerry Weaser, 2 November 1986, Guardian News and Media Archive, London.

³⁹ Jameson, 'Postmodernism', p. 65

the parodic nature of young people's engagement with the visual language of the past was effectively a play of 'dressing up' as the destitute. If these young people were performing destitution – a 'play of historical allusion' – through the fashioning of decline, the stages on which they performed would become as vital in authenticating the narratives of their declining world.

Journalist and post-punk musician Liz Naylor's account of the early 1980s is useful in gauging the importance of young people's fashioning of the past at this time. She recalls how young people's remaking of the past was dependent upon the visual authenticities offered by the fabric of the landscapes against which the parodic performances took place. Naylor, who lived on the postwar Hulme Estate in Manchester, recalled how:

during the early 1980s there was a 'Hulme look' when the whole male population of Hulme seemed to be wearing clothes of dead men and everyone looked as if they had stepped out of the 1930s with baggy suits and tie-less shirts.⁴⁰

Youth culture's embrace of the Hulme Estate is, as David Alan Mellor points out, expressed in Kevin Cummins's black and white photographs of the band *Joy Division*, who used the estate as the backdrop to their promotional material in 1979.⁴¹ Hulme became an authentic embodiment of a past utopian future. The building enabled young people to, as architectural writer Owen Hatherley has recently articulated, 'romanticise the... sense of a Modernist utopia decaying, gone crumbled and decadent'.⁴² This fashioning of the body in the guise of the thirties to complement the fictional fantasy of a ruinous modernity is revealing of the sought-after authenticities rendered in a creative fabrication of the past.

Youth's collusion with abject surroundings was something that Val Williams viewed as central to the portrait work of Derek Ridgers. Williams describes how Ridgers's 'studio' was built from 'the bleak backgrounds of the urban landscape and the raw interiors of clubland'.⁴³ This transposition is personified in Ridgers's 1981 photograph of Chris Sullivan, the owner of Soho's *The Wag Club* (Fig. 42). Sullivan, a fashion graduate from Central Saint Martins, illustrates the revival of thirties labourer attire as he leans against the wall in a large overcoat, dungarees, black boots and a black flat cap. He embodies what *Blitz* magazine art director Iain R. Webb described as the 'part nostalgic and rose tinted, part broken and dystopic post-punk' aesthetic of the time.⁴⁴ Mellor describes how by the 1980s this recession aesthetic was becoming more

⁴⁰ Quoted in O. Hatherley, *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain* (London: Verso, 2011), pp. 126-7

⁴¹ See Mellor, *No Such Thing*, p. 83

⁴² Ibid., p. 127

⁴³ V. Williams, *When We Were Young: Derek Ridgers* (Brighton: Photoworks, 2004)

⁴⁴ Webb, *As Seen in Blitz*, p. 8

mainstream as ‘the band Dexy’s Midnight Runners were popularising what became dubbed as a ‘Hard Times’ aesthetic in their dress and Soul revivalism in their music’.⁴⁵ This fashioning of environmental and social degradation within young people’s popular performative presentation lent the fabric of their surroundings a central role in validating their experiences of economic and social decline. If the youth were disaffected, alienated and unemployed, the physical landscape and interior backdrops in which they were set would reflect this.

iii. Youth and the Scrapheap

The landscape of the northern Sprawl woke confused memories of childhood... The junk looked like something that had grown there, a fungus of twisted metal and plastic.⁴⁶

Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 1984

[I]t is the sameness of the feelings that strikes you, the recurrence of identical responses to those registered in the ‘30s... the same references occur in people’s accounts of themselves; being thrown on the scrapheap, feeling rejected.⁴⁷

Jeremy Seabrook, *Unemployment*, 1983

The collision of young bodies with the natural and artificial visions of wasted landscapes pervades Gibson’s *Neuromancer*. In the northern Sprawl of unending urbanism, the organic and artificial visions of rubble echoes George Orwell’s expectation of the ‘more probable landscape’ explored in the previous chapter.⁴⁸ This vision of perpetual all-pervading ruin in a landscape of ever-weeping junk was also a theme in the photography of the period, where young people’s bodies became entwined with the organic and postindustrial decay around them. As the previous chapter briefly noted, Labour’s 1983 election poster used this collision of the defiled landscape and unemployed youth in ‘Are you going to vote for retirement at 16?’. Election analyst David Butler found that this poster resonated with the electorate more so than any other advertisement created in this campaign.⁴⁹ On this scrapheap a girl rests against an old tin can, and the four boys are draped by banana skins and bracketed by old fish bones and other items of waste. Each teenager bears a similar expression of dejection and hopelessness, slumped passively into the rubbish as they gaze out towards the distance.

⁴⁵ Mellor, ‘Youth Unemployment’, p. 14

⁴⁶ Gibson, *Neuromancer*, p. 28

⁴⁷ J. Seabrook, ‘The Changing Face of Unemployment’, *Ten*:8, issue 11, 1983, p. 4

⁴⁸ Orwell, ‘The Road to Wigan Pier’, p. 67

⁴⁹ A post-election opinion poll found that this advert ‘went down well’ with the electorate. See D. Butler and Dennis Kavanagh (eds), *The British General Election of 1983* (London: Macmillan, 1984) p. 212

On 6 June 1983, the front page of the *Daily Mirror* corroborated the metaphors of the Labour poster with photographic ‘evidence’. The headline article ‘On the Scrapheap... Britain’s future’ featured an image by *Daily Mirror* photographer Ron Burton of an unemployed young man seated with his chin resting on his hand, enclosed behind railings that frame the wreckage of a huge scrapheap (Fig. 43). Significantly, from the South East of England, this man’s career ambition was to become a computer programmer, but instead he had only worked one day as a fruit picker. While it was arbitrary then that this young man should find himself seated on a monumental scrapheap, the article and the photograph worked to visualise the expanding metaphor of youth and waste; the existent crisis between education, technology, manual labour and unemployment existing not just in the industrial wastelands of the North East but on the scrapheaps of Southern England. Burton’s picture is representative of the newspaper’s desperation to visualise social waste in a culture that seemed to believe, as Sherman articulated, that unemployment was invisible. Burton returned to the *Mirror* offices with four images taken at the scrapheap (Fig. 44).⁵⁰ Two photographs were taken close up, allowing the scrapheap to exceed the frame of the image. The two other images, taken further back, allow the sharp spiked railings in the foreground to separate the scene and the peak of the scrapheap to be made visible. The latter image was chosen to accompany the article because the scrapheap’s visible peak adds greater context and monumentality; it resonates with ‘the well worn codes of Northernness’ that Gwen Lee and Simon Griffin described as crucial elements of social documentary photography in the North.⁵¹ The peak of the scrapheap signifies the authenticity of working class struggle, resonating with ‘the ever-present icon of the pit head’.⁵² The *Daily Mirror* ran this particular image, with the scrapheap’s summit visible to encourage visual connections with the social realist worker imagery of the past and to enhance the towering monumentality of youthful waste.

Such visual strategies were consistent throughout the *Daily Mirror*’s election coverage. The paper’s commitment to making material impoverishment visible in the backdrops of its images was most effectively illustrated in a ‘Waste of a Nation’ feature on the state of social housing in Rotherham. In Tom Buist’s photograph, Victorian terraced houses frame mounds of bricks, rubbish and scrap metal that embellish the street stretching towards the horizon (Fig. 45). Amongst the devastation stands a little blond boy holding a piece of scrap wood. This representational device, juxtaposing the purity of youth against crumbling buildings, has its roots in the muckraking social reformist documentary stretching back to the nineteenth century in the slum imagery of Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine through to Hedges Shelter pictures. For newspapers intent on evidencing the effects of Thatcher’s economic and social programme on

⁵⁰ *Daily Mirror* Image Archive: Ron Burton, 1983, Image Numbers: 00367735, 00367734, 00367733, 00367732

⁵¹ G. Lee and Simon Griffin, ‘Easington: The Case for Socialist Photography’, *Camerawork*, no. 31, 1985, p. 23

⁵² *Ibid.*

daily life, they deployed the visuality of poverty and dereliction, connotations of purity and innocence corrupted by the social, political and physical devastation of the landscape. The image is illustrative of what *The Times* would describe in their own analysis of children and social housing as ‘citizens of the future caught in the squalor of the past’.⁵³

The trope of the child framed by the dilapidated home mirrors Bataille’s discussion of abjection. Bataille described the child’s inability to resist the ‘filth, snot and vermin [which] are enough to render an infant vile; his personal nature is not responsible for it, only the negligence or helplessness of those raising it’.⁵⁴ This imagery recurs in the left-leaning print media as a shaming vision of first world poverty, a testament to governmental neglect. Don McPhee’s photograph of a boy encircled by a council-owned housing estate was used consistently by the *Guardian* to illustrate stories of infrastructural decline (Fig. 46).⁵⁵ The estate becomes an enveloping coliseum of decline, acting much like Cummins’s photographs of *Joy Division* in 1979, to call upon the failed utopia and encroaching dystopia of the surrounding environment.⁵⁶ Another set of McPhee’s photographs, which showed a group of boys walking across a wasteland of demolished houses in Salford, was captioned ‘on the debris from which it is hoped new prosperity will rise’.⁵⁷ Economic regeneration written through an organic metaphor of prosperity, rising like flowers out of the sullied earth, reinforces the contrastive elements of natural and artificial rubbish and ruin, greed and poverty, purity and defilement the abject perception of the surrounding environment.

Young people’s bodies set against hostile backdrops were thus used by the print media to condemn the state of the nation’s social and physical disrepair. Chris Killip similarly photographed this subject in 1981 on a social housing estate in North Shields where he found a group of children hanging around and climbing upon a brick wall (Fig. 47). Behind them, like in McPhee’s photograph, a backdrop of semi-derelict, burnt-out social houses; the estate’s ongoing utility is discernible only by the line of laundry hanging out to dry in the background. Killip recalls that such was the appalling state of social housing at this time, tenants in North Shields would intentionally burn down their decrepit flats in hope of being rehoused.⁵⁸ This was the kind of landscape that Campbell would explore on her journey to Wigan Pier. In her chapter on

⁵³ N. Timmins, ‘Quest for Home Comforts in the East End Slums’, *The Times*, 16 November, 1982, p. 5

⁵⁴ Bataille, ‘Abjection and Miserable Forms’, p.10

⁵⁵ See for example: Don McPhee’s photographs in: J. Stead, ‘The chill factor in a city warming for a fight’, *Guardian*, 18 February, 1985, p. 17; and M Smith ‘Now it’s official the nation is falling apart’, *Guardian* 11 July, 1985, p. 24

⁵⁶ For example, D. Van der Vat, ‘Britain’s Youth: Part two of *The Times* Investigation’, *The Times* 8 October, 1981, p. 11 and M. O’Connor, ‘Inner Thoughts’, *Guardian*, 10 June, 1980, p. 11

⁵⁷ J. Lewis, ‘Hope that turned to fear’, *Guardian*, 1 June, 1981, p. 4

⁵⁸ Haworth-Booth, Interview with Chris Killip.

‘the landscape’, she focused, as George Orwell had done in the thirties, on the landscapes of social housing, which were characterised by:

low-rise blocks of flats on... scabby scraps of grass, a minefield of dog shit and broken glass. One patch is even rougher than the rest, the landscaped relic of a bulldozed block, which had to come down because sewage erupted into the sinks and lavatories.⁵⁹

Campbell concentrated on the abject qualities of the domestic landscape because she hoped to convey that the unemployed ‘are not to be found in the streets, hanging around day after day on street corners, queueing for soup or for the dole, they’re at home watching television in the middle of the afternoon’.⁶⁰ In these private, domestic settings, experiences of poverty, unemployment and deprivation were far from the public spectacle of the Jarrow march or the ‘lounging’ about on street corners. Campbell’s emphasis on her subjects’ material and physical surroundings to represent manifest poverty was a device used by both documentarists and press photographers at this time.

The emphasis on the subjects’ clothing, comportment and their spatial surroundings to describe what Seabrook saw as the ‘inner landscape of the mind’ became a means of documenting unemployment in the early 1980s. British documentarist Paul Graham’s exploration of this inner landscape emerged in his pictures taken in the Department of Health and Social Security waiting rooms for his project *Beyond Caring*, 1984–5, which became a celebrated photographic denunciation of Thatcher’s Britain. Graham’s covert photographic documentations of the depressingly peeling interiors of DHSS waiting rooms elucidate the capacity for the environment to articulate the psychological landscape of his subjects. In *Untitled* (Fig. 48), claimants sit and stand with their backs against the wall as the austerity and sparsity of the room take centre stage. Graham captures the tiny figure of a toddler in the background who gazes along the line of unemployed people. Graham described that this project started from the perspective of the physical conditions of the offices, rather than the plight of unemployment.⁶¹ Like the figure of the unemployed man, Graham caught his subjects ‘slumped forward [with] bowed heads [and] glints of anger’ but above all sought to emphasise the interior decay of the offices in full colour to convey, as David Chandler describes, ‘the discordant and stifling atmosphere of the room... pinpointing the fine details of degradation, the exact qualities of accumulated litter and dirt’.⁶² For Graham, the ruination of these humiliatingly dilapidated state-owned interiors (photographed in colour with an inexorably penetrating flash) became the

⁵⁹ Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited*, p. 37

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 208

⁶¹ ‘Past Caring: An Interview with Paul Graham’, *Creative Camera*, no. 8, February, 1986, p. 23

⁶² D. Chandler, ‘A thing there was what mattered’, *Paul Graham: Photographs, 1981-2006* (Gottingen: SteidlMack, 2007), p. 30

vehicle through which he could deliver a blazing indictment of the state of unemployment at this time. The environments to which these subjects were bound thus became the stage sets against which photographers could capture the devastation of Thatcher's neoliberal project. This kind of documentation had long been a technique employed by Shelter photographer Nick Hedges and was central to the photographic concerns of another Shelter photographer, Tish Murtha, who went on to document the abject landscape of youth cultures in Thatcher's Britain.

iv. Landscapes of Abjection in Tish Murtha's Newcastle, 1981

The passage from *Neuromancer* quoted at the beginning of this chapter describes an image of ragged children standing in front of a decaying urban backdrop.⁶³ In the work of Tish Murtha, the young Newcastle-based photographer, similar visions – crumbling bricks and concrete buildings, and endless sprawl – surround her scenes of children and adolescents at play. Like the corporeal landscape of melting architectural bodies that Gibson describes in his book, Murtha imbues her visions of dark rubble with a gracefulness borne of the ways in which her subjects pose, glittering amongst the contorted slabs of dereliction around them.

In 1979 Tish Murtha returned to her childhood home in West Newcastle after completing a photography degree at Newport under the tutorship of David Hurn. On her return she began an assignment for the Tyneside Housing Aid Centre and Shelter's 'Year of the Child' campaign.⁶⁴ Murtha produced a number of photographs that documented the substandard living conditions of children and their families in the area. The emphasis on moulding walls, cramped conditions and the oppressiveness of neglected social housing estates is written on the fabric of the pictures. The physical and social rot in their homes is visible, from the moulding walls that cause tuberculosis to the dystopian visions of concrete courtyards punctuated by barbed wire. These homes threaten their inhabitants through their organic and artificial deficiencies and are shot in the kind of style associated with the charity's depiction of 'abject poverty'. While Murtha's personal letters reveal a degree of embarrassment at taking on this assignment,⁶⁵ this work experience enabled her to explore the capacity for the photograph to reference the subjects' relationship to their surroundings. One seemingly ordinary photograph is on first inspection a simple family portrait of parents and children (Fig. 49). The mother and father in the centre of the picture are, however, draped by their nine children. Murtha, who was herself

⁶³ Gibson was influenced by the urban and architectural imaginaries of the Tyneside director Ridley Scott who shared a similar visual code to those explored in the crumbling urban scenes of Murtha's work. Gibson recalled how these aesthetics influenced 'every frame...like compost heaps...the past and the present and the future can all be totally adjacent'. D. Wallis-Wells, 'William Gibson: The Art of Fiction', *The Paris Review*, no. 197, Summer 2011. <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6089/the-art-of-fiction-no-211-william-gibson>. Accessed February 5, 2015.

⁶⁴ See K. Jamieson, 'Home Truths in the Year of the Child', Tyneside Housing Aid Centre, April, 1979

⁶⁵ She describes how, being short of money, she had 'even taken on a job with Shelter!', see Murtha, draft letter to Marie-Luis, c. 1981

one of nine children, could convey the stifling conditions of these homes in her proximity to the family as they are squeezed within the frame.⁶⁶ In this tight space, all eleven gazes diverge, revealing how the members of the unit, whilst intimately crammed together, are seemingly psychologically disengaged from each other.

In 1979, Murtha was commissioned by the Side Gallery to photograph the child-marching bands of the area. The resulting project *Juvenile Jazz Bands* went on display at the gallery in the same year. The photographer wrote the accompanying exhibition text in which she made her disdain for the groups clear. She described how the jazz band revival occurred ‘mainly in areas where economic and social deprivation are the norm’.⁶⁷ A friend of Murtha and journalist at the local *Evening Chronicle* newspaper expressed how Murtha believed the bands to be ‘militaristic and harmful to their young members’ where they ‘teach youngsters nothing except how to keep in step and create a conformist, obedient, unquestioning mentality’.⁶⁸ Murtha believed these disciplinarian marching bands were a throwback to a form of right-wing nationalism where ‘every spark of individuality’ is sucked out of the performing children.⁶⁹ Created mainly by unemployed men, these marching bands were sources of entertainment in which, Murtha explains ‘their children were encouraged to participate, thereby developing a vital cultural expression of their life and times’.⁷⁰ The performance of the ‘official’ cultural expression of the past was central to this project and she was keen not to limit her work to what she described as visions of children ‘acting out the confused fantasies of an older generation’.⁷¹ Murtha also photographed the jazz band rejects, the wayward children who would create their own improvised bands; her concern with the emulation of this pomp and ceremony reveal her fascination with the work of Weegee,⁷² as the children, eager to be photographed, revel in their feigned ceremony with their own handmade banners and uncontrolled excitement (Fig. 50). Murtha’s pictures of “the official” bands’ rejects’ are photographs of the children she believed to have ‘too much imagination or are too scruffy’,⁷³ they are pictures of the excluded and the alienated outcasts. Murtha would carry this theme of exclusion on to her next body of work.

⁶⁶ Conservation with Ella Murtha, January 2016.

⁶⁷ T. Murtha, *Juvenile Jazz bands*, Exhibition Leaflet, Side Gallery, 1979

⁶⁸ Jamieson, ‘Junvenile Jazz Bands’, p. 2

⁶⁹ T. Murtha, draft letter to Dennis, c. 1981. Estate of Tish Murtha. p. 1

⁷⁰ Murtha, *Juvenile Jazz bands*

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Murtha advocated that Side Gallery hold an exhibition of Weegee’s work after learning about him at Newport. Conversation with Graeme Rigby, 2015.

⁷³ Jamieson, ‘Juvenile Jazz Bands: A personal view’, p. 2

As an unemployed recent graduate, Murtha received another commission funded by the Youth Opportunities Scheme to create a project in the area. She chose to document youth unemployment on her own housing estate in West Newcastle to explore the effects of government policy on employment statistics.⁷⁴ The photographs she captured were eventually exhibited as *Youth Unemployment*, the product of over a year's work photographing her home and the surrounding environs of the rundown and endlessly dilapidating Cruddas Park Estate. In this set of photographs are portraits of her friends, brothers, sisters and neighbours. This series of photographs would later be exhibited at the Side Gallery in 1981 and published in *Ten: 8* in 1982. In a portrait of two young men Murtha orientates the photograph in landscape giving both the subjects and the crumbling wall and wasteland behind equal prominence (Fig. 51). In this picture the young man on the left in a bowler hat and open cardigan is styled with a confidence that seems more suited to the pages of *Blitz* magazine than to the analytical photo magazine *Ten: 8*. David Alan Mellor saw Murtha's capacity to imbue her images with 'visual rhetorics of punk and New Wave' as qualities that enabled her subjects to act out 'in a drama choreographed... by structures from a dissident popular music subculture'.⁷⁵ Murtha's stage is strictly inhabited by young people; the alleyways and courtyards are like visual manifestations of the 'ghost town' that *The Specials* sang about in the same year.

The 'choreography' of her subjects against these devastated backdrops is best exemplified in a smouldering courtyard scene where a young girl rests against an upturned armchair; its velvety black curved structure supports the drapery of her coat and her tousled hair is arranged across her reclining figure in a mode attuned to models' poses found in the fashion photography of the mid-century (Fig. 52). It is the location, the stage sets of decadent ruination, which reminds viewers that, as the young girl pokes a stick amongst the debris of the rubble land and as a young boy searches for scraps of wood behind her, we are observing the crumbling physical and social environment of Thatcherite Britain. On these empty and derelict streets of West Newcastle Murtha draws upon visions of apocalypse, scenes that had fascinated the post-punk generation, most notably the Mutoid Waste Company. The most prominent examples of this mass devastation are reflected in the photographs that see domestic objects thrust outdoors, from upturned armchairs to ragged sofas. These domestic objects are, like the evasive figure of the unemployed man, private objects made public as they 'loungue about' in a spectacle of destitution. These domestic objects are the social privations of the private world made public.⁷⁶

Sirrka Liisa Kontinnen, a contemporary of Murtha, photographed the nearby Byker area of Newcastle in the early 1970s. In her project, she photographed a group of young children seated

⁷⁴ 'True/Grit: A Celebration of Northern Realism', Side Gallery exhibition pamphlet, June 2013

⁷⁵ Mellor, 'Youth Unemployment', p. 14

⁷⁶ This device was similarly deployed in Peter Mitchell's work of the same period.

on a sofa outdoors having created a makeshift outdoor living room from scraps of junk, old prams, sofas and even a television set (Fig. 53). Murtha created a picture that recast this exteriorised domesticity in her image of a group of young people seated on an upturned armchair and sofa amidst the ruin of the condemned building (Fig. 54). Unlike the clean clothes and white socks of Kontinnen's young subjects, Murtha's adolescents are more disordered and their colours far bleaker, embellished as they are by the dirtied and ragged clothes and the ubiquitous plumes of smog. One boy's cheeks are painted with ash and another child's glasses are smeared in soot. The blitz-like destruction and industrial fumes that surround her subjects resonate with the kinds of photographs of the post-riot destruction in Brixton and Toxteth in 1981.

Murtha's photographs are timeless in their visual allusions to the past and future, suggesting that life doesn't go on as normal in this strange blitzed present but stalls somewhere between the squalid past of depression era slums and a cyberpunk near-future where the detritus of postindustrial ruin is laid bare. These temporal signposts are reflected in Murtha's own engagement in the debates about the future and the impact of technological change. Murtha's polemical essay on the nature of unemployment and the technological rhetoric of social change accompanied her set of pictures in *Ten: 8*.⁷⁷ In her essay she argued that 'unemployment and its associated deprivations are not only getting worse, but new technologies threaten to make the situation permanent'.⁷⁸ Murtha consciously pitted themes of unemployment against the emerging narratives of a mass culture of leisure being espoused by some thinkers on the Left. Murtha's photographs make visual the kinds of narrative anxieties being sung in the lyrics of post-punk bands of the time, most noticeably XTC's lamentation of technology's creation of mass unemployment in their single *Leisure*.⁷⁹ Murtha was critical of the Left's belief that a future of leisure was imminent; instead she saw a future characterised by enforced idleness which would encourage boredom and vandalism. She argued:

Behind the empty and pathetic talk of increased leisure opportunities and freedom from repetitive labour, stands the spectre of enforced idleness, wasted resources and the squandering of a whole generation of human potential. This is vandalism on a grand scale.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Murtha's writings were published in various formats: as captions for the exhibition at the Side Gallery; as an essay published in *Ten: 8* and in a self-published school magazine called 'Roundabout'.

⁷⁸ T. Murtha, 'Sights of the Struggle', *Ten: 8*, issue 15, 1983, p. 14

⁷⁹ References to this dystopian urban scene and microchip technology emerged in popular music; Basement 5's *Silicon Chips*, UB40's *Forget the Cost*, 10cc's *Tomorrow's World Today* and XTC's *Leisure* all written between 1980 and 1983 speak of the role of microchips, unemployment and unadulterated leisure time in which video games mediate between reality and illusion.

⁸⁰ Murtha, 'Sights of Struggle', p.7

Murtha's lamentation of wholesale degradation in the future was central to the political agenda of her prose. Her essay, as the *British Journal of Photography* noted in their review of her exhibition, is a didactic manifesto which transformed 'the exhibition from overt reportage to overt propaganda'.⁸¹ Rallying against Thatcher's programme of austerity, Murtha described how unemployment, 'intensified as it is by the Thatcher Government's extreme "Free Market" philosophy opens up a period of bitter conflict as young people grow more frustrated and refuse to accept the logic of an economic system which deprives them of a productive and meaningful future'.⁸² Murtha articulates the 'no future' discontent that was rendering itself in adolescent disaffection, and it was this sense of destructive apathy that she found to be most troubling.

In Murtha's picture of children and teenagers at play on a half-demolished block of houses is her most cutting critique of this decadent 'culture of leisure (Fig. 55)'. As the children look up towards the first floor of the crumbling building they watch Murtha's younger brother jump onto a bed of mattresses below. The child in the foreground clasps a peculiar looking ventriloquist's dummy. In Murtha's intricate stagecrafting she enables this ugly figure, as it looks out beyond the viewer, to mirror the manipulation of the vulnerable and the statistics that rendered them invisible. In her article, Murtha expressed anger towards the Youth Opportunities Scheme, which she saw as a diversionary tool to disguise the reality of joblessness. She described how the scheme enabled people to 'participate in short-term, low-paid and futile labour, which keeps them temporarily out of the statistics'.⁸³ Murtha's capacity to write objectively on issues that affected her directly suggests she kept herself at a remove from the reality of unemployment, maintaining a sense of independence from scenes and scenarios she photographs.⁸⁴ Yet her own subjective experiences of unemployment on this estate and her emphasis on the children playing precariously amongst the dilapidation of the area jar with her didactic article and captions.

Murtha's private notes and letters reveal her disdain for the pacification of her subjects and the manipulation of her work to serve the interests of a 'peculiar' philosophy of 'working class culture'.⁸⁵ Murtha saw her photographs working not through notions of the Labour movement as these were, after all, children and young people who had never worked. Murtha's pictures of young people who dominate this landscape nearly devoid of adult presence reflect on the extent

⁸¹ R. Powell, 'Tish Murtha and Russell Lee: Side Gallery', *British Journal of Photography*, 10 December, 1981, p. 237

⁸² See board-mounted exhibition caption panels held with Tish Murtha's archive of prints at Side Gallery Archive, Newcastle.

⁸³ Murtha, 'Sights of Struggle', p.7

⁸⁴ The objective language Murtha employed enabled Robert Brown, Murtha's local Labour MP to quote her essay when he discussed the 'Redundancy Fund Bill' in Parliament in 1981. Quoted in Robert Brown (Lab), Parliamentary Debates, Hansard, 18 February, 1981, p. 168

⁸⁵ Murtha, Letter to Marie-Luis, p. 1

to which young people were written out, alienated and excluded even from their own families. Her notes explain:

Most parents have established attitudes and responses based on their experiences of unemployment, which are inappropriate in this unprecedented situation and this is another factor which alienates kids from their own families.⁸⁶

Murtha's concern for the exclusion and alienation of her subjects from the normative discourses of left-wing histories is crucial. Like the young girl in Gerry Weaser's photograph in the *Guardian*, Murtha saw the children she photographed being excluded through a visual discourse that subsumed their histories within a visual language of 'working class culture'.⁸⁷

Murtha's disdain for the passive and voiceless presentation of 'working class culture' means her pictures might best be re-framed through a more familial lens. In *Youth Unemployment*, the same young faces recur throughout the series, including Murtha's many brothers and sisters. These are domestic pictures, photographs of her friends and family, subject matter that seems incongruous with the prior interpretation of the photographer's seemingly objective prose.⁸⁸ They are photographs through which she sought, as she wrote in her private notes for the series, a 'tool for exploring and even changing the many and varied aspects of our lives'.⁸⁹ The young boys with guns and the teenagers reposing against graffitied walls (Fig. 56) are photographs created in the tradition of a photography voiced, not through references to the labour movement, but through the oppressive reality of being young (and being female) in a society that has rendered your representation and your history disposable. Murtha described how 'the number of girls actually obtaining places [on the YOP] is small' and described the predicament of a young mother who, struggling to support herself and her child, turned to prostitution and, 'when the pressures of earning her living intensify... swallows her prescribed tranquillisers, and then slashes her arms with nails, razors and penknives'.⁹⁰ These photographs and their narratives presage the ensuing mode of intimate and visceral photography that emerged in the 1980s such as American photographer Nan Goldin who was similarly engaged in such themes at the time.

In Mellor's essay he observed that in Murtha's work it was 'as if socially stigmatised youth had become a corporeal sign of the harm done to the greater social body of a region and nation'.⁹¹ Mellor's perspective turns the visual language of children and abjection on its head, pointing

⁸⁶ T. Murtha, Notes for 'youth unemployment', c. 1981

⁸⁷ This exclusion resonates with Azoulay's discussion of a photograph's capacity to act as an 'emergency claim'.

⁸⁸ For example discussion of Murtha in *For Ever Amber* (Side Gallery: Newcastle, 2015)

⁸⁹ T. Murtha, Artist's statement, c. 1979. Estate of Tish Murtha.

⁹⁰ Murtha, 'Sights of Struggle', p. 7

⁹¹ Mellor, 'Youth Unemployment' p. 14

towards the idea that these youths are rendered as socially abject as the surrounding landscape. This sociobiological reading is supported by the smoke that drifts through these images, floating around Murtha's subjects, attaching itself to their skin and stapling stains onto the fabrics of their clothes. These young bodies are not only sat in contrast to their abject surroundings, but they begin to become one with each other, saturated as they are by the air of decline around them. Indeed, this unity was something Murtha saw as the 'physical symptoms of industrial decline [that] are apparent in the area's general air of dereliction and decay'.⁹² The photographer's use of the sociobiological symptoms metaphor recasts the kind of language used by J.B. Priestly in his *English Journey*, where he lamented the lack of clean air in Jarrow, a place of 'thick air, heavy with enforced idleness, poverty and misery'.⁹³ The connection with the past is not arbitrary. One photograph by Murtha reverberates with Bill Brandt's coal gatherer and Killip's *Boy on a Wall*, Jarrow. Murtha's photograph is of a young boy sat on a doorway step with his head in his hands surrounded by shards of wood (Fig. 57). These scavenged shards of scrap wood were hollowed out from the decaying shells of derelict houses and used to heat their homes.⁹⁴ This fraught little figure wears an oversized jacket, buttoned up to the collar and slightly ripped, and slightly flared trousers – once smart hand-me-downs from an older sibling, perhaps. The boy's short hair and his clothes locate him in this temporal schism where the waste-gathering children of Thatcherite Britain play a strange social role in this endless world of sprawling dereliction.

v. Documentary authenticities

In the early 1980s, the ruinous landscape weeping with the junk of the throwaway society of mass unemployment and redundancy saw young bodies physically embedded in waste. Both the Labour Party poster and the *Daily Mirror*'s reenactment were part of this visual discourse that utilised the landscape of junk to illustrate the collision of the natural and the artificial to convey the severity of Thatcher's destructive political programme. The 'shape and feel' of material degradation and the performative solidarities of the past were rendered in press, documentary and political advertising imagery of these years. The authenticity rendered by the black and white documentary photograph seemed to validate the reality of young people's experiences of economic decline. The press photographs discussed in this chapter, like those in Chapter 4, are part a photographic discourse of crisis and decline which were drawn from visions of the past. The performative reenactments and visual transpositions of the past served, as Murtha demonstrates, to mask the most pertinent experiences of redundancy and exclusion in early Thatcherite Britain. Murtha's disdain for the pacification of her subjects, her anger at attempts

⁹² Murtha, 'Sights of Struggle', p.7

⁹³ Priestly, *English Journey*, p. 313

⁹⁴ Conversation with Graeme Rigby, Side Gallery, Newcastle, January, 2015

to ennoble the experiences of poverty ‘in working class culture’ reveals how she, like Killip, sought to distance her work from histories of the Labour Movement. For Killip and Murtha, political and social recourse to the 1930s as a benchmark against which working class nobility can be measured against served to mask and detract from the present realities of living in a postindustrial nation. The desire amongst photographers for the perceived visual authenticities of ‘recession culture’ – the dole queues and the lounging about on street corners – belied the experiences of young people, and especially those of women and girls, who found themselves excluded not only from deindustrialising society but also from the labour movement that favoured this outmoded visual language.

The discourse of the Labour movement has influenced the making, dissemination and overall reception of Murtha and Killip’s pictures, which have been bound to a propagandistic visual language of documentary authenticity – based in a visual language anchored in the past – because the surface appearance of their work resonated with a form of ‘concerned’ picture-making. The ability for the black and white photograph to provide a sense of ‘authenticity’ exemplifies the extent of documentary photography’s crisis at this time. As David Company reminds us, by the early 1980s documentary photography ‘had to confront the fact that everyday life was undergoing a radical change in character’ as the ‘expansion of international capitalism’ accelerated. Documentary photography, he concludes, could only ‘remain a significant means of engaging critically with this new environment if it could revitalise itself’.⁹⁵ One such indicator that documentary photography was reappraising its capacity to offer significant comment upon Thatcher’s neoliberalising nation is exemplified through the colour photography that Paul Graham produced in 1985. Graham had used colour, as Chandler explains, to capture in full glare the ‘failed optimism of those orange benches and yellow walls’ that upholstered the depressing interiors of DHSS offices.⁹⁶ Photographing in colour was fast becoming the means through which this renewed engagement in the abject qualities of Thatcherite Britain could be most vividly depicted.

⁹⁵ D. Company, *Art and Photography*, pp. 28-29

⁹⁶ Chandler, ‘A thing there was what mattered’, p. 30

Section Three: Affluence to Effluence

Chapter 6:

Junk Bonds: The Ugliness of Deregulating Capitalism, 1984 to 1987

You have declared war on regulations and controls, so did we... that is what capitalism is: a system which brings wealth to the many and not just to the few.¹

Margaret Thatcher, Speech to US congress, 1985

I'm the new kind, the kind who has money but can never use it for anything but ugliness.²

John Self, *Money* (Martin Amis, 1984)

In Thatcher's speech to the United States Congress in 1985, she described how the Conservative Party had opened up capitalism to the masses through a 'war on regulations'. Wealth, she argued, could now be guaranteed, as long as you worked hard enough. By the late 1980s, the nature of work was changing. As the Government's programme of deindustrialisation accelerated, the service sector expanded alongside the deregulation of the financial services industry. The 'new kinds' of financial workers embodied a meritocratic capitalism of which Thatcher dreamed. In the Spring Budget of 1986, Chancellor Nigel Lawson announced plans to enable a nation of share owners 'to create a popular capitalism in which more and more men and women have a direct personal stake in British business and industry'.³ The Conservative Party were riding high on a tide of optimism driven by the notion they would deliver on their promise of creating a 'capital owning democracy'.

By 21 October 1987 the dream of popular capitalism turned to the nightmare of Black Monday as shares in the City of London and other financial centres around the world plummeted. As the stock market tumbled over the next few days, newspapers featured photographs of distraught brokers clutching their faces and clenching their fists. The *Daily Mirror* displayed a selection of photographs from stock exchanges around the world (Fig. 58). As the financial system fell into free fall, one photograph showed a potbellied Canadian broker sat stupefied amongst the thrown detritus of confetti paper certificates raining down around his feet. The 'throwaway society' of deindustrial Britain was recast in the scenes of financial devastation. These scenes of global panic and despair would advance the visual language of instability and anxiety that would come to define the latter years of Thatcher's premiership. The crash cast a bleak cloud over the financial industry and engendered a greater feeling of precariousness in the workforce. The

¹ M. Thatcher, Speech to Joint Houses of Congress, Washington, 20 February 1985. MTFW Document: 105968

² M. Amis, *Money: A Suicide Note* (1984; London: Vintage, 2005) p. 58

³ N. Lawson, 1986 Budget Speech, 18 March 1986, Hansard HC, 166 [94/166-184]

following chapters in this final section analyse the boom and bust crisis economy that framed the latter years of Thatcher's leadership. This short introduction to the photographic visual language of deregulated capitalism asks: what was 'work' by 1985 and how did photographers choose to represent it?

i. Financial Futures

In 1985, Homer Sykes arrived on the trading floor of the London International Financial Futures Exchange (LIFFE) to photograph the melee of workers congregating on the trading floor known as 'the bear pit' (Fig. 59). At this time, Sykes was photographing Britain in both monochrome and colour. The photographer's use colour on these trading floors was both a stylistic and a pragmatic decision. Sykes hoped for his pictures to be used in the weekend colour supplements and so needed to align his photographic output with the demands of these full-colour publications. In addition, colour was a necessary device in the photography of the financial industry. At LIFFE, colour was essential to fully render the story being told. Sykes's subjects wear a variety of coloured jackets – bold reds, deep blues and yellow stripes – to highlight their position in the crowd. In 'the bear pit' Sykes documents the multicoloured herd-like stampede of brokers straining and gesturing to brokers outside the picture's frame. The workers squeeze tightly onto the floor and they are flanked by a staircase littered with paper certificates. Colour's ability to spotlight the competition between these colourful bodies vying for attention highlights how useful it was in providing a fuller account of life in a visual economy of capitalism. Sykes's picture exemplifies the capabilities and limitations of colour, which dominated the debates around British documentary photography in the mid-1980s. As high colour photographs of 'work', Sykes's pictures of LIFFE stand in contradistinction with the kinds of melancholy black and white photographs discussed so far that focused on the collapse of physical industry and the disintegration of community. If the social documentary photographs of work and redundancy can be characterised by scenes of human desolation, environmental degradation and sparsity, the works of colour documentarists can be described as visions of mass excess, overrun with bodies stuffed in clinical interiors replete with the corporeal stresses orchestrated by the demands of free market competition.

Colour's capacity to render the saturation of bodies and the stuffy excessiveness of the scene was an oppressive stylistic device deployed by Martin Amis in his 1984 novel *Money: A Suicide Note*. In *Money*, the reader is confronted with the suffocating ugliness of the protagonist's first person narrative. *Money* vividly recounts the intemperate life of John Self, a film producer whose '200 pounds of yob genes, booze, snout and fast food' epitomised a grotesque caricature of the greed that emerged in the financial service industry in the 1980s. Incapable of anything other than the satisfaction of visceral desires and the perpetual proliferation of wealth, *Money* sees the grotesque individualism of Self self-destruct through a combination of unbridled

consumption and vice.⁴ Self presages a metaphor for the British economy in the latter half of Thatcher's Britain, of aggressive individualism, of profound affluence and abject effluence. While Self embodied an exaggerated figure of excess, he mirrored other satirical figures in popular culture and anticipated the 'loadsamoney' caricatures that would be derided by both comedians and politicians alike.⁵ In the months following the crash of 1987, Thatcher saw the 'new kinds' of financiers being unfairly attacked and she questioned why, when her party 'strive[s] to increase the prosperity of the nation and its citizens, we are accused of materialism'.⁶ She argued that 'the truth is that what we are actually encouraging is the best in human nature'.⁷ Thatcher's steadfast confidence in the nature of the market, with its natural and common sense rationality, was met by a photographic culture that sought out the 'human nature' of contemporary capitalism with an interrogative use of colour.

In an age when the nature of 'work' no longer seemed connected to the corporeal endurance so deeply associated with the monochrome works of social documentary, what techniques did new colour documentarists use to expose the ugliness and avarice of the economy in the late 1980s? In what ways were colour documentarists rendering, like Amis in *Money*, the undulating and precarious nature of this 'new economy' through the lens of the grotesque?

ii. *Work Stations*

Between 1987 and 1988, documentary photographer Anna Fox would explore the Government's financialisation of its citizenship through the landscape of corporate office life. Fox, who had spent the preceding year documenting the undulating and insecure socioeconomic identity of the Hampshire town of Basingstoke, brought her critical eye to a world where confident 'yuppies' with mobile phones clashed with the anxieties of work in a world of fierce competition. Fox's joint commission from *Camerawork* and the Museum of London homed in on the conflicting avarice and insecurity of the City by pairing photographs with textual material drawn from business publications. Fox deployed techniques of montage – juxtaposing photographs shot with a glaring flash and incongruous captions – serving to heighten the strangeness of the overall scene. In a photograph of a business breakfast, Fox focuses on a particularly unflattering scene of a suited man with a half-closed eye whose outstretched tongue catches an anaemic slice of bacon hanging from his fork (Fig. 60). Fox accompanies this photograph with a quote from *Business Week* which informs the viewer that: 'Fortunes are being made that are in line with the

⁴ Amis, *Money*, p. 35

⁵ Comedian Harry Enfield's character 'Loadsamoney' and Neil Kinnock's reference to a 'Loadsamoney economy'. See McSmith, *No Such Thing*, p. 188

⁶ M. Thatcher, Speech at the Conservative Party Conference, Brighton, 14 October 1988. MTFW Document: 107352

⁷ Thatcher, Speech at the Conservative Party Conference.

dreams of avarice'. The combination of image and text lends the project reference points to the grotesque form of hyper consumption that Amis explored in *Money*. Fox delights in the red of the ketchup bottle on the left-hand side and utilises its luminous unmistakability and everydayness in contrast with the grotesque avarice of the figure eating in the foreground. Fox deploys visions of bodily consumption with the hyperreality of red to heighten the capacity for her subjects to repel on both visual and moral levels; she renders her scenes grotesque with the assistance of the synaesthetic nature of colour.

Work Stations is a collection of jarring contrasts and sinister harmonies between the depicted scenes, the uses of text within the picture, and the business-speak quotes deployed as captions. In one disquieting scene (Fig. 61), commuters shuffle towards the exit of a train station on their daily route to the City, where they are greeted by a large billboard declaring 'FREEDOM' – an advert for the temporary work recruitment agency Reed. Fox highlights the dystopian presence of work-related propaganda hanging over the heads of workers whilst alluding to the rhetoric of 'freedom' so central to neoliberal economies that promote the temporary, flexible and thus insecure nature of the service sector work environment. Themes of precariousness and insecurity resonate throughout the project in accord with Fox's references to competition. A leitmotif in *Work Stations* is the competitive, free market fundamentalism of office life spoken through references to blood sports. An image captioned 'Should a competitor threaten to kill a sale the modem would provide a lifeline back to base computer' sits with a photograph of a male recruiter eying his female interviewee's legs (Fig. 62). For the photograph 'Celebrating the Killings' Fox photographs a group of people dancing and makes connections between collective celebrations and the synonymity of 'killing' and 'earnings' (Fig. 63). This kind of semantic ambiguity resonates with Thatcher's Darwinian reference to the 'best in human nature'. The animalistic theme and parallels are reflected in the *Computer Weekly* quote that explains 'if we don't foul up no one can touch us', a quote resonating with animal scatology that sits uneasily with a shot of a woman holding a large mobile phone.

Issues of rapaciousness and animal survival in this cut-throat world are pertinent to this business setting where the threat from competitors is rife. Fox's references to the predatory nature of new technology in work call to mind the kinds of animal competition articulated by the 'junk bond' financier James Goldsmith.⁸ Goldsmith, like Thatcher, promoted a Darwinian view of the economy, whereby the predatory nature of threat and risk was, as in the animal kingdom, necessary to stimulate survival. He described how:

Predators are a necessary stimulant. If you eliminate predators in business and just create comfortable bureaucracies and monopolies with no predators you will have a dead industry, the prosperity of the country will shrivel away and your people will

⁸ Goldsmith and others' roles in the 'junk bonds' market is discussed in 'Wall Street Junk Bonds' in F. Betz, *Stability in International Finance: Applications of Price Disequilibrium Theory* (New York: Springer, 2016), pp. 29–33

suffer infinitely more than by being subject to the constant stimulation of threat and competition.⁹

The predatory nature of capitalism and the precariousness of the economy in the late 1980s created a climate in which citizens were subject to a constant threat. Fear, volatility, ambivalence and worker insecurity characterise Fox's experimentation with colour in *Work Stations* as she deploys high flash to contrast the aggressiveness of the economy against the sombre realities of precariousness. The precarious reality of the British economy at this time is reflected in the financial reporting in the summer of 1987. One week Britain was experiencing an 'economic miracle' that was 're-conquering markets both at home and abroad'¹⁰ and two weeks later 'booming Britain' was plunging 'into the red'.¹¹

The following two chapters in this section explore the intervening years between the miners' admission of defeat in March 1985 and the devastating recession of the early 1990s. The abject structure of feeling that emerges through the colour photography of the period is one of insecurity, of excess and waste – a dialectic similarly at play in Amis's novel *Money*. When Self confesses his inability to use money for 'anything other than ugliness', Amis moulds his protagonist to embody the relationship between excess and greed on the one hand and issues of unsightliness and moral turpitude on the other. Self is the grotesque corporealisation of this 'new kind' of person born of a deregulated, highly financialised society that elevated the importance of consumption to the level previously enjoyed by industrial production. A gargantuan figure of excess, Self mirrors the politically-endorsed character of contemporary neoliberal Britain that would, inevitably, implode. As the transformation from heavy industry to the service economy accelerated, British documentary photography, until now so reliant on physical and tangible signs of 'crisis', needed to find new ways to engage in this new world of hyper capitalism. What emerges in the documentary photography of this time is an engagement with the grotesque manifestations of neoliberalism. Junk, in all its abject forms, became the means through which the latter stages of Thatcher's Britain would be visually rendered.

⁹ James Goldsmith, speaking in archive footage in *The Mayfair Set: Four Stories About the Rise of Business and the Decline of Political Power*, directed by Adam Curtis (BBC Two, August 1999)

¹⁰ 'Britain "heads for economic miracle"', *Daily Mail*, 11 July 1987, p. 2

¹¹ 'Booming Britain plunges into the red', *Daily Mail*, 23 July 1987, p. 2.

Chapter 7:

Consuming Bodies: Colour, Heritage and Grotesque Realism, 1984–88

Thrift has gone out of fashion. Indeed, the all too prevalent outlook on life has become “I want it, and I want it *now*”.¹

Robin Leigh-Pemberton, Governor of the Bank of England, 1990

Is this materialism? Is this the selfish society? Are these the hallmarks of greed?²
Margaret Thatcher, Conservative Party Conference, Brighton, 1988

Black and white... refines and keeps the world of touch and stench at a distance. Colour by contrast brings things as they are, heavy in the touch or palpable with their own presence.³

Ian Jeffrey, ‘British Photography Flourishes’ in *Camera Austria*, 1988

By 1987, as the rate of inflation stabilised around five percent, Thatcher’s government believed that a change in the psychology of the nation had taken place. The incremental neoliberalisation of the populace – what the Government termed ‘the quiet revolution’ – occurred in a newly established culture of consumer credit and enterprise, a place where, as Christopher Payne described, the ‘consumer is sovereign’.⁴ Payne argues that Thatcher was governing for the consumer because she believed unconditionally that ‘being free to consume was an essential part of being free to maximise self-fulfilment’.⁵ To honour this belief, changes to the financial sector meant that various forms of consumer credit were made available.⁶ Central to this credit-fuelled consumer philosophy was the conviction that consumption can be productive, a notion that Payne points out was ‘totally anathema to classical political economy’.⁷ Thatcher’s neoliberal project expanded as the world of consumer possibilities widened: while manufacturing migrated to the global south,⁸ cheap imports became a new reality for British consumers. As Guy Standing sees it, the Government’s emphasis on consumer sovereignty was a Faustian bargain in which a loss of manufacturing was the price fairly paid for cheap imported

¹ R. L. Pemberton quoted in Payne, *The Consumer*, p. 123

² M. Thatcher, Speech to Conservative Party Conference, Brighton, 14 October, 1988. MTFW Document 107352

³ I. Jeffrey, ‘British Photography Flourishes’, *Camera Austria*, 1988, p. 58

⁴ Payne, *The Consumer*, p. 106

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 113

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7

⁸ Guy Standing explains that the ‘global labour market [opened up], trebling the world’s labour supply; two billion extra workers became available, habituated to labour for incomes one-fiftieth of those in the rich countries’. See G. Standing, *The Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) p. 34.

goods.⁹ As Britons became accustomed to a world of cheap stuff, Payne describes that Thatcher had established a culture in which it was believed that:

more of the economy geared towards the high street would incentivise people to work harder and be more successful... to benefit from new innovations and fashions... Consumers as entrepreneurs-of-the-self, whether individually embodied or coalesced in the 'household', now had to be free to conduct their own balance sheets.¹⁰

The effects of these financial changes and the growing promotion of 'entrepreneurs-of-the-self' through privatisation helped realise Thatcher's dream of popular capitalism. Privatisation was, for the Conservative Party, an economic, political and moral project. As historian Eric J. Evans sees it, Thatcher 'looked forward to the time when shareholders (good symbols of freedom) would exceed trade unionists (bad symbols of restrictive practice)'.¹¹ The kind of cultural change that emerged alongside the selling of public assets to the new capital-owning democracy would fascinate documentary photographers who sought to render this new consumer world in the vibrant hues of colour. A shift in focus from the anxious world of producers, or workers struggling against the debris of deindustrialism, towards the moral issues of the rapidly expanding service sector of consumer-oriented industry became the chief concern of the photography examined in this chapter.

This chapter is concerned with the Conservative Party's management of the waste produced by its advocacy of consumerism in the late 1980s. Through analysis of the 'walk in the wilderness' photograph is a defining image of Thatcher's waste-saving programme this analysis tracks the ways in which the Conservative Government sought to shroud recent industrial conflict between the workers and the state by promoting an emergent consumer culture of heritage. The governmental advocacy of this seemingly quaint culture of heritage consumption – the museumification of recent history and the concomitant consumption of gift shop commodities – obscured the waste-making nature of the Government's economic policies. Set against the backdrop of the print unions' Wapping Dispute in 1986, which saw popular opinion shift from concern worker rights to obsession with consumer rights, this chapter analyses how the changes in wider society – the throttling of the old left, union disputes, and the triumph of heritage and consumerism – played out in the photographic discourses of the era. If British photography was renewing itself in these 'new times' by rendering the culture of excessive consumption around it in colour, how did the visual language of capitalism become synonymous with the abject and grotesque hues of new colour documentary? This analysis concludes by examining the socially abject documentary responses to this culture of consumerism. As

⁹ Payne, *The Consumer*, p. 108

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Evans, *Thatcher and Thatcherism*, p. 36

Zygmunt Bauman observes, inherent to consumption (he cites its etymology: ‘*consumere* – to use up, to devour, to waste’) is the ‘metabolic cycle of ingesting, digesting and excreting’.¹² Photographic concern for the grotesque manifestations of consumer culture in an unequal society is observed in conjunction with Bauman’s observation that a ‘society of consumers is unthinkable without a thriving waste disposal industry’.¹³ The chapter thus concludes by considering the abject fallout of British consumer sovereignty.

i. Walking in the Wilderness

The unskilled and semi-skilled manual labourers who feared a technological revolution where robots and mass unemployment became the norm were the subject of Chancellor Nigel Lawson’s speech to the International Monetary Fund in 1984. Lawson sought to allay these fears, arguing that governments ‘should not be seduced by the advances of high-tech’ as future jobs would be characterised by ‘labour-intensive service industries – not so much low-tech as no-tech’.¹⁴ Lawson’s emphasis on a de-skilled future of the service sector reflects, as Payne argues, Thatcher’s belief ‘that the high street was at least, if not more important for economic growth as the factory floor’.¹⁵ The Government’s promotion of the private service sector was famously captured in September 1987 in a set of photographs and television footage that became known as Thatcher’s ‘walk in the wilderness’ (Fig. 64). This photo opportunity was planned to enable the Conservative Party to exhibit their contribution to the ever-modernising progress of British industry. To present the party’s rationalised vision of industrial change, set against the decaying landscape of redundant manufacturing industries, Thatcher visited an old steel-making site near Middlesbrough.¹⁶ The iconic photographs, which were printed in numerous national daily newspapers,¹⁷ saw Thatcher walking across the overgrown weeds of a vast industrial wasteland. This vision of the Prime Minister walking on a wasted landscape was able to speak connotatively, on the one hand, of her ruthless destruction of communities and livelihoods, and on the other, to symbolise a tidying up of the past through which a future cleansed of industrial conflict would flourish. The *Independent*’s in-house photographer John Voos was there to capture the moment amongst a swathe of press photographers. He recalls how there was:

¹² Z. Bauman, *Consuming Life* (London: Polity, 2008) p. 25

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Quoted in Payne, *The Consumer*, p. 107

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The old steel making site Thatcher visited was significant in that such industry was one of the first casualties of the her economic programme in 1980.

¹⁷ These photographs were published in the *Independent*, *The Times*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Guardian* and other regional newspapers.

a lot of security. No public were allowed – it was a ‘sanitised area’. We got no pictures at all, so eventually we asked her to walk towards us through the bit of waste ground. I took a picture as she walked away to get into position, and that was that.¹⁸

By transferring the leader from the ‘sanitised’ location to the dirtied ‘waste ground’, Voos and other photographers played a vital role in framing the kind of connotative accounts that accompany the image. The wasted landscape – visual synecdoche for Thatcher’s desecration of the working class – resonated with the speech she gave on the day in which she revealed her indifference to the industries she had dismantled. She spoke of the virtues of creative destruction encouraged by her policies, stating that ‘I am very much aware that I am on the site of the old iron masters who succeeded because they were ahead of their time... We are setting out once again to be ahead of our time’.¹⁹ She declared how private investment would regenerate this decaying area of the North East. By choosing to reference the workers of the Victorian era she chose not to acknowledge the mass redundancies and unemployment rendered by her policies; she referred to the industrial revolution in a bid to affirm her own.

While the photograph has since been used to demonstrate the Conservative Party’s ruthless destruction of the North,²⁰ the photo shoot was purposively arranged to exhibit the Government’s advocacy of private investment in enterprise. The Conservative Party had hoped to exhibit their role in transforming an area of old industry into a newly sanitised service industry of shops, small businesses and offices. Such self-congratulatory photo opportunities to demonstrate governmental commitment to the gentrification of former industries mirror other consumption and service-centred projects like Michael Heseltine’s Garden Festival in Liverpool in 1984. Heseltine’s project was primarily a response to the Toxteth riots of 1981, aiming to regenerate a disused former industrial space.²¹ The short-lived commercial success of this festival encouraged a move towards spatial regeneration that was reliant on the commodification of culture and heritage rather than employment in production. In a rapidly deindustrialising landscape, there was a wealth of derelict land upon which opportunities for this commercially-centred cultural regeneration could be created. These cultural regeneration projects were facilitated by the establishment of English Heritage in 1983.

¹⁸ Quoted in A. Renton ‘If she sought a monument’, *Independent on Sunday*, 24 October, 1993, p.20

¹⁹ Quoted in G. Levy, ‘The inner cities - Maggie’s way forward’, *Daily Mail*, 18 September, 1987, p. 6

²⁰ See for example E. Robinson, *History, Heritage and Tradition in Contemporary British Politics: Past Politics and Present Histories* (Manchester: MUP, 2012)

²¹ J. Chartres, ‘Heseltine praises dock site regeneration’, *The Times*, 24 March, 1982, p. 3

ii. 'Heady with the smell of success'

Investment in what became known amongst its critics as 'the heritage industry' became a lucrative enterprise by the late 1980s thanks to both the investment in cultural consumerism and these sites' own emphasis on consumption.²² Critics at the time saw this 'heritage culture' (a major genre in British television and film) as an ideological project cloaked in the quaint pastoralism of the past.²³ The 'heritage industry' was, as John Corner and Sylvia Harvey argued in their account, prevalent across various aspects of British culture, reflected in the 'Laura Ashley-effect' of 'a processed past' which was informing 'trends in interior design, clothing and the packaging and marketing of a wide range of consumer goods'.²⁴ The sector grew rapidly in the late 1980s and by 1987 it was estimated that a new heritage museum opened every fortnight.²⁵ Contemporary life was blurring with Victorian history²⁶ and this temporal disjuncture was well illustrated in Thatcher's praise of the Victorian iron masters during her walk in the wilderness. Aspects of recent history were being transformed into 'living museums' – places where the boundaries between education and contemplation blurred with entertainment and leisure. In her analysis of the heritage industry, the *Guardian*'s Maev Kennedy argued that sites were 'heady with the smell of success' as they recreated the authentic visual and olfactory details, 'the sights, sounds and smells of the past' to attract heritage consumers.²⁷

The heritage sites of the mid-1980s became the basis on which documentary photographer Paul Reas would launch his critical project *Flogging a Dead Horse* which he began in 1985. As contemporary Britain rapidly historicised its recent past and sold it back to a new market of heritage consumers, Reas worked his lens to make a strong case for the absurdities of this 'nostalgia for the past'.²⁸ In one picture Reas focuses on a recently redundant coal miner now employed to perform the role of a Victorian coal miner in a 'living museum' (Fig. 65). Reas's off-kilter picture sees this 'coal miner' as he poses for a photograph with a tourist. Reas's pictures expose the choices faced by redundant workers of redundant industries in the late 1980s, which was as one heritage worker assessed, a choice between 'compulsory purchase orders or dressing up in clogs and shawls'.²⁹ Reas's critical project further exposed the

²² See R. Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen Press, 1987)

²³ See Hewison, *The Heritage Industry* and Wright, *On Living in an Old Country*

²⁴ J. Corner and S. Harvey, 'Heritage in Britain: Designer History and the Popular Imagination', *Ten*: 8, no. 36, Spring 1990, p. 14

²⁵ D. White, 'The Born Again Museum', *New Society*, 1 May 1987, p. 10

²⁶ See detailed discussion in chapter: "'England' as a reliable make', Taylor, *A Dream of England*

²⁷ M. Kennedy, 'Heritage sites heady with the smell of success', *Guardian*, 27 December, 1989 p. 6

²⁸ Taylor, *A Dream of England*, p. 248

²⁹ Quoted in L. Gill, 'Presenting the Past Imperfect', *The Times*, 4 October, 1989, p. 23

consumer absurdities of heritage culture when he photographed the museum gift shop as visitors, set against the harsh flash of his lens, glared vacantly at pens and pencil sharpeners and other historically incongruous products on sale.

The consumer-centred heritage experience and the capacity for these museums to market themselves effectively to this new world of entrepreneurial cultural enterprise³⁰ was a reality best summed up by the commercial sentiment of Arts Minister Richard Luce in 1987 when he explained that ‘the only test of our ability to succeed is whether we can attract enough customers’.³¹ However, as the marketisation of heritage and culture merged with industry and social life, these heritage sites manifested an even more ambitious ideological project than the promotion of consumerism alone. As former sites of industry were marketed towards heritage tourists, the Government’s cultural cleansing projects could frame, as historian Emily Robinson points out, ‘large-scale manufacturing as inherently ‘of the past’’.³² Through this process of historicising the recent industrial past, a culture of heritage could shift the abject remnants of Britain’s industrial past into the archives of history and confirm Britain to be a land of consumption and consumer possibilities rather than production and industrial strife. Thus, Thatcher’s ‘walk in the wilderness’ photograph can be seen as a physical manifestation of what Berlant discussed as ‘hygienic governmentality’ – a cleansing of the abject threat to the established healthy society. By exposing the dirty industrial sickness of the heavy industrial past, its displacement would confirm the historical, technological and ideological progress that Britain had made since 1979.

The veiling of old industry by investment in the service sector saw one of the most controversial redevelopment projects take place in the East London docklands area. The redevelopment of the docklands and the displacement of local predominantly working class communities had long been the concerns of photomontage artists Loraine Leeson and Peter Dunn. The artists utilised a combination of consumer advertising methods and photomontage in their billboard posters, which went on display in the local area. Their 1981 series of posters ‘Big Money is Moving In’ set the landscapes of detritus in the foreground – aluminium rubbish bins and scrapheaps – against towering skyscrapers made of paper money and coins to elucidate how gentrification would expunge local communities. The eventual establishment of Canary Wharf became the symbolic denouement of the dockland community’s battle against the corporate imposition. In

³⁰ Allan Sekula similarly observed the marketisation of museums in the establishment of marketing departments in A. Sekula, ‘The Weight of Commerce’, *Creative Camera*, October/November, 1990 pp. 49–56

³¹ Quoted in J. Corner and S. Harvey, *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 67

³² E. Robinson, ‘Inspirations and Obligations: Remembering the Industrial Pasts in Modern Britain’, P. Itzan and Christian Muller (eds), *The Invention of Industrial Pasts: Heritage, Political Culture and Economic Debates in Britain and Germany, 1850-2010* (Augsburg: Wißner-Verlag, 2013) p. 114

the early 1980s, the reality of big money moving into the area was no more apparent than when Rupert Murdoch decided to move News International to Wapping.

iii. Living in the Past

Skilfully handled, however, the rising tide of public feeling could transform the unions from Labour's secret weapon to its electoral liability.³³

John Hoskyns, *Stepping Stones*, 1977

When Rupert Murdoch bought *The Times* in 1981 his plans for the construction of a new publishing facility in the run-down docklands area of Wapping in East London were underway. Murdoch was inspired by Eddie Shah's success in establishing the full colour newspaper *Today* produced by a union-free workforce. The derelict former docking site in Wapping was chosen to house his colour printing systems because the Government would provide generous development subsidies to the company to renovate this former area of industry.³⁴ Unlike Shah's production system, the Wapping development did not house the most advanced offset litho printing technologies available but instead utilised simple technology. These new printing machines would be operated without the need for typesetters – the skilled labourers previously indispensable to print production. The machines could be operated by what Murdoch described as 'half-trained manpower'.³⁵ This 'manpower' was drawn from members of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunication and Plumbing Union. Murdoch had close ties with EETPU leader Eric Hammond who was eager to take advantage of providing a deal for his union members. Murdoch's efficiency drive, which rendered all his former skilled typesetters redundant, enabled the savings made in employment and production to subsidise full colour advertising space offered at a quarter of the market rate.³⁶ Murdoch saw how profitable the turn to the technology of full colour printing could be.

On 23 January 1986, Murdoch announced that News International staff would transfer to the Wapping development the next day. These members of staff did not include the 6,000 print workers. On 24 January 1986 the Wapping Dispute began as the print unions, led by the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades and the National Graphical Association, went on a strike that would last over one year. Despite the longevity of the strike, its ineffectiveness was made apparent from the first day as Murdoch went on to produce the next editions of *The Sun*, *The*

³³ Hoskyns, *Stepping Stones*, p. s.1

³⁴ S.M. Littleton, *The Wapping Dispute: An Examination of the Conflict and its Impact on the National Newspaper Industry* (London: Ashgate, 1992), p. 4

³⁵ Littleton, *The Wapping Dispute*, p. 4; M. Temple, *The British Press* (London: McGraw-Hill, 2008), p. 77

³⁶ Littleton, p. 4

Times, and the *News of the World* with the assistance of his auxiliary workforce. To ensure the smooth dissemination of his newspapers, and to avoid a show of solidarity from transport unions, Murdoch employed a private distribution firm to haul the papers across the country.³⁷ Pickets outside the Wapping facility, with demonstrations often in their thousands, were at times larger and more brutal than those seen during the miners' strike throughout the previous years. The demonstrations and protests were, however, dissimilar to the miners' strike, given the changes effected by the Public Order Act of 1986 relating to laws regarding public assembly.³⁸ In addition, these pickets occurred at a moment when the British population was calmly marching through a 'quiet revolution', buoyed on by rhetoric that reassured them that they had access to more money than ever before – a time when confidence in consumer spending power was at its height.

Two months later in March 1986 Chancellor Nigel Lawson's Spring Budget modestly cut the basic rate of income tax.³⁹ Lawson's adjustment signalled the beginning of his drive to lend Britons, mainly working homeowners from southern England, greater disposable incomes and access to credit unlike anything they had enjoyed before. Lawson's populist economic policy was mirrored by the triumphalist tone of the Conservative Party's 1987 general election poster *Britain is great again, don't let Labour wreck it* (Fig. 66). The poster's bold type resembled a newspaper's front page statement and sought to express fact confidently as they had done in 1959 with *Britain is great again*. The declaration underscored, like its postwar blueprint, the party's post-austerity confidence in Britain's consumer power. As the Conservative communications machine sought to underline the party's commitment to consumer credit, Thatcher and Lawson drew up a policy statement for the 1987 election, which was, as the *Guardian*'s William Keegan saw it, 'a manifesto for the card-carrying society'.⁴⁰ The Party's declarations of prosperity sought to affirm Britain's transition to a deindustrialised economy – characterised by entrepreneurialism, individualism and technological advances – and to suggest that the left-wing struggles of the worker and the state were incongruous to the realities of contemporary Britain.

The Conservative Party reaffirmed the incongruity of industrial struggles with contemporary life in the poster "*Secondary picketing... is a right that should be enjoyed*" (Fig. 67). Saatchi & Saatchi deployed a stylistically inconsistent sepia-tinted reportage photograph of shirtless, balaclava-wearing men hurling objects into the distance while a building burns with billowing smoke in the background. The image's muted tones and documentary style, together with the

³⁷ See Letwin, pp. 146–149

³⁸ See: 'Imposing conditions on public assemblies' in Public Order Act, 1986, Part II, section 14, c.64, p. 10

³⁹ 'Lawson's main changes', *Observer*, 23 March, 1986, p. 38

⁴⁰ W. Keegan, 'A manifesto for the card-carrying society', *Guardian*, 8 February, 1987, p. 34

quoted text from Labour leader Neil Kinnock, referred to the Left's visual language of struggle – one more closely aligned with the aesthetics of the *Socialist Worker* than the Conservative Party. Saatchi & Saatchi inverted this photographic visual language of protest to present the strikers not as heroes but as violent and destructive hooligans, framing Labour's claims to struggle as both visually and ideologically outdated. Taken together, these posters sought to confirm, like the cultural fascination with heritage, the idea that Britain had moved on to a more prosperous present. The poster reflected that the rising tide of public feeling toward the unions had transformed. It was this sentiment that historian Mick Temple in his analysis of Wapping describes as a moment when the public saw the striking skilled typesetters as 'living in the past'.⁴¹

This visual presentation of the past, the monochrome and sepia-tinted world of social realism, of union disruption and violence, was intimately connected with the overhauling of the heavily unionised news print industry. The ultimately unsuccessful dispute in Wapping which began only months after the defeat of the miners marked a significant victory for Thatcher and for enterprise. These streamlined, de-unionised, technology-assisted workforces would help drive the daily proliferation of full colour advertising. *Campaign* saw this 'new colour epoch'⁴² as a lucrative source for papers, as brands would pay more to align themselves with the visual language of high commerce.⁴³

iv. The New Colour Epoch

This 'new colour epoch' would affect the work of photojournalists, documentary, reportage and press photographers working at this time. In 1986 *Observer Magazine* Picture Editor Colin Jacobson lamented the centrality of advertising in the Sunday colour supplements, which he argued were wholly uninterested in documentary and reportage photoessays and more concerned with 'an endless preoccupation with objects to buy, ways to make life more presentable', which he believed reflected 'the characteristic shallowness in much of Britain today'.⁴⁴ The reason for this, Jacobson observed, was the editorial influence of advertisers who 'hate features about the Third World, politics, war, psychopathic murderers, social deprivation and injustice' and 'love beauty, fashion, cars, food, wine, computers, glorious lifestyles and, of course, royalty [original emphasis]'.⁴⁵ Jacobson argued that 'the basic motivation for colour

⁴¹ Temple, *The British Press*, p. 79

⁴² A. Jivani, 'Mirror Spearheads new colour epoch', *Campaign*, 24 April, 1987, p. 6

⁴³ For example, Eddie Shah, Rupert Murdoch and Trinity Mirror. Product advertising deploying full colour was fast becoming a daily feature in the print media.

⁴⁴ C. Jacobson, 'What is the Status and Future of Documentary Photography in Britain in the Eighties?', *Creative Camera*, no. 254, February, 1986, p. 8

⁴⁵ Ibid.

magazines is not editorial but commercial'.⁴⁶ This perspective was echoed by Don McCullin, whose twenty-year tenure at *The Times* saw, soon after Murdoch took over, his hard-hitting documentations of war, famine and humanitarian crises replaced by commercial photography.⁴⁷ Taken together, there was a consensus amongst 'concerned' documentarists and photojournalists that the advertising managers, rather than the picture editors, were increasingly able to define the editorial 'bias' and concern of these picture-heavy magazines.

This new reality of colour bleeding into the documentary mode conflicted with the world of photojournalism, whose visual language was black and white. Magnum photojournalist Philip Jones Griffiths saw this new 'curse of colour' as an obstacle to any real documentary meaning.⁴⁸ He argued that:

We become consumed with colour composition and neglect the message. For it's hard to concentrate on capturing an exquisite moment of tenderness between lovers in a café whilst trying to minimise distracting bottles of ketchup!⁴⁹

Jones Griffiths saw the artifice of modern life and the consumer props of the everyday as valueless adornments that distracted from the art and romance of the overall picture. He also believed that colour was the frivolous language of magazine advertisements; black and white was for serious editorial work. Jones Griffiths's romanticisation of the black and white photograph assigns the same power of authenticity that the *Blitz* model had done in 1984. The belief that the monochrome aesthetic could filter out the aggressive imposition of consumer culture in everyday visibility was a device employed by advertisers of the period.

In 1987, advertising and media critic Judith Williamson examined how colour in contemporary television advertisements was being used to strike at the very core of consumer desire and social anxiety. She described how television adverts began in black and white and suddenly came to life with colour; 'to emphasise the grimness of urban dereliction before cash floods pavements and shop windows with light and colour'.⁵⁰ Williamson saw the injection of colour as closely connected to the trope of 'throwing away', which was a staple in these adverts' iconographies.⁵¹ She cited the 1987 Volkswagen advert *Changes* (directed by David Bailey) which, beginning in black and white, sees the protagonist discard her belongings and drive into the emerging

⁴⁶ Jacobson, 'What is the Status', p. 8

⁴⁷ Don McCullin interviewed in *McCullin*, directed by D. Morris and Jacqui Morris (London: British Film Company, 2012)

⁴⁸ J. Stallabrass, *Documentary* (London: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2013) p. 14

⁴⁹ P. Jones Griffiths, 'The Curse of Colour', in Stallabrass (ed.), *Documentary*, p. 39

⁵⁰ J. Williamson, 'Beauty and the adman', *Guardian*, 9 December, 1988, p. 25

⁵¹ Ibid.

morning sunlight abandoning the values of her former life and replacing them with a new car. Williamson likened this trope to the 'anxious social world' of the late 1980s where the policies of the Government's ruthless streamlining and waste-saving programme meant people and things could simply be discarded and replaced; consumer goods and consumer culture could illuminate the bleak void created by the dissolution of social relations and solidarities. The fickleness of colour and consumer culture was seen to have trampled on the disintegrating corpse of a concerned social documentary visual language. How could the 'new colour documentarists' inject new life into this mode of representation?

v. Mourning Social Documentary

From Today Black and White is Dead.⁵²

Susan Butler, *Creative Camera*, 1985

The repercussions of this anxious throwaway social world alongside changes in the print media and the failure of industrial action were reflected in wider photographic culture of the time. In December 1985, editor of *Creative Camera* Susan Butler declared the death of black and white photography, believing such aesthetics were 'exhausted'.⁵³ Simon Watney also took the 'opportunity to write a brief obituary notice for the British documentary tradition' alongside other critics in *Ten: 8* who questioned the future of documentary photography, noting a crisis in the practice. These debates are reflective of a resignation more widely amongst picture-makers to the realities of a changing social economy. Editors and photographers seemed to be questioning whether the language of left humanism, black and white social documentary of the concerned photographer, was an adequate language to visually describe, narrate and investigate the state of a deindustrialising society.⁵⁴ Critics and photographers seemed to question: could black and white documentary adequately interrogate and represent the structural foundations of what Fredric Jameson termed 'the cultural logic of late capitalism'?

Answers to such a question can be found through a brief examination of documentary photography's responses to social life after March 1985. When the miners conceded defeat after a yearlong battle, a memorialisation occurred in British photographic culture. As the Amber collective member Graeme Rigby reflects, there was a sense of defeat amongst the social realist wing of documentary photographic practice, which was exacerbated by the Government's apparent triumph over the labour movement.⁵⁵ This sense of loss is evident in the numerous

⁵² S. Butler, 'From Today Black and White is Dead', *Creative Camera*, no. 252, December, 1985, p. 13

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Critics had for the past six years questioned the objectives of social realist photography. See Hall, 'Left in Sight'; Sekula, 'Dismantling Modernism', and Rosler, 'In, Around, Afterthoughts'

⁵⁵ Conversation with Graeme Rigby, Amber/Side Gallery, Newcastle, January 2015.

exhibitions, books and magazines that dedicated space to representing the miner and the wider struggles faced in mining communities.⁵⁶ Two prominent examples include Graham Smith and Chris Killip's *Another Country* and the Photographers' Gallery publication and exhibition *Striking Women*, both of which went on tour around Britain in 1985. These expositions of mining community experiences appear now like visual requiems or epilogues to an era of working class resistance to Thatcherism and the concerned documentation of working communities.

In conjunction with the changes in labour relations, British documentarists emerged from the growing number of photography courses offered by universities around the country. The rise of undergraduate degree courses contributed to the growth of a young school of new picture-makers who, having read the theoretical writings by Victor Burgin, John Tagg, Allan Sekula and Martha Rosler amongst others on the suspect nature of the 'concerned photographer', adapted their approach accordingly.⁵⁷ This was a time when photographers were looking to engage in the configuration of 'new times'.⁵⁸ David Chandler describes how by the mid-1980s:

[British photography's] long established values and traditions were being revised and disposed of by contemporary practices of the period. This was partly conducted by young photographers who were searching for new ways to engage with what was widely perceived as 'new times'.⁵⁹

This search for new means of engaging with a growing consumer society is reflected in Ian Jeffrey's assertion that British photographers were becoming 'infatuated by colour' by the mid-1980s.⁶⁰ In the work of these new colourists, the working class were no longer corralled within the frame of the concerned photographer's picture, but instead became the active participants constantly dodging the snapshot aesthetic of the camera's lens. This reversal sought to question documentary's own rhetoric and demand that the viewer question their own assumptions about representation in an age of conflicting values, rampant consumerism and social insecurity.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Other exhibitions include: *Easington: Portrait of a Pit Village* (Side Gallery, 1984–5); *Lea Hall: Portrait of a Strike* (Coventry, 1985); *Family of Coal Miners* by Milton Rogovin (Stills Gallery, Edinburgh, 1985); *A Few Hotheads: Tondu Photography Workshop* (Glamorgan, South Wales, 1985). Books include: Geoffrey Goodman, *The Miners Strike* (London: Pluto, 1985); *News Line: the Miners' Strike* (London: New Park, 1985); Huw Benyon, *Digging Deeper* (London: Verso, 1985).

⁵⁷ See Campany, *Photography and Art*, p. 19

⁵⁸ This conception of 'new times' would become the subject of S. Hall and M. Jacques, *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1989).

⁵⁹ D. Chandler, *Peter Fraser* (London: Tate Publishing, 2013), p. 9

⁶⁰ Jeffrey, 'British Photography Flourishes', p. 58

⁶¹ These concerns were central to Hall and Jacques' 'New times' thesis.

A group of photographers emerged from West Surrey College of Art and Design in Farnham under the tutorship of colour photographers Martin Parr, Paul Graham and Keith Arnatt. Anna Fox, Paul Reas, and later David Moore emerged to create projects about the changing physical and social landscape of Britain in full colour. These young British photographers were, as Butler put it, using colour to act ‘as a vehicle for the expression of a range of contemporary concerns and the expansion or transformation of traditional ones as well’.⁶² While Martin Parr, the most celebrated and most reviled of this group of photographers, had little concern for people ‘who still believed in the existence of a working class culture, born of the Jarrow march and the general strike’,⁶³ other photographers such as Reas combined the social concerns of the British documentary tradition with the new world of consumer culture. The move to colour in independent British photography brought with it the frivolities of the everyday, the distractions of modern life in all their multihued tones. The working class were no longer seriously rendered as nobly suffering but as alive with their own deprivations. Fleshed out in the synaesthetic odours of colour they became as Jeffrey described, ‘palpable with their own presence’.

An essential aesthetic of this snapshot imagery is its everyday visuality – its disregard for the flattery of its subjects. The controlled ugliness of this method is an aesthetic that Daniel Meadows saw emerging in Parr’s work through ‘the cruelty innate in the photographic tools he uses.’⁶⁴ With a dramatic use of high flash, Parr ‘penetrates, even through make-up’ to puncture his imagery with an added layer of hyperreality. In Mellor’s assessment of the period, he describes how Parr’s use of colour ‘took on the violence and insolence never seen before in British photography’.⁶⁵ These photographers, following Parr, captured these ‘new times’ of overabundance and excess in this emerging grotesque form of consumer culture.

vi. The New Economy and Rhetorics of Ugliness

Thatcher described Lawson’s Budget of 1986 as an attempt ‘to consign to the dustbin the most damaging of phrases “the two sides of industry”’, a reference in part to the Wapping Dispute.⁶⁶ In her endeavour to discard the labour/state divide of the past, Thatcher ushered in a time when shares in state-owned assets went on sale to the public. Advertising campaigns like *Tell Sid* invited the public to buy shares in British Gas and others in British Airways. This large-scale mass selling of public assets resonated with the bloating scale of consumer culture at the time. As hypermarkets and new American-style malls saw a relocation of the high street to the newly

⁶² Butler, ‘From Today Black and White is Dead’, p. 13

⁶³ Williams, *Martin Parr*, p. 159

⁶⁴ Meadows, quoted in Williams, *Martin Parr*, p. 159 p. 160

⁶⁵ Mellor, *No Such Thing*, p. 130

⁶⁶ M. Thatcher, Speech at Lord Mayor’s Banquet, 10 November 1986. MTFW. Document: 106512

developed precincts these suburban retail developments catered for the new hyper consumer.⁶⁷ This new consumer was one who exploited the deregulation of hire-purchase and freely accessible credit bequeathed by Lawson's economic changes; a consumer who bought large household products, suitable for mass display in warehouse-sized shops unimaginable on the traditional high street.⁶⁸

Reas and Parr's respective projects used the camera's flash as a forensic device to penetrate the consumer-centred world. Earlier in 1982 Parr was commissioned to explore the changing nature of commerce in the project *Point of Sale*. In this project, the seeds of this hyper consumer culture are sewn. As Val Williams sees it, *Point of Sale* was 'an intriguing and powerful series spinning between Parr's fascination for the vestiges of an older, more gentle society and a new, anxious consumerism'.⁶⁹ As Parr would write in his diary of the time, 'I do anticipate trouble with the big hypermarkets'.⁷⁰ This trouble manifests in the mania that would be explored in his student Reas's project *I Can Help*.

Fascinated by credit and 'the new economy', Reas's work examined the chaos of 'lifestyle consumers'.⁷¹ Reas focused on rampant household consumption in suburban and out-of-town retail developments.⁷² Photographing his open-mouthed shoppers crazily grabbing products, weaving past other shoppers with buggies and trollies carrying their purchases, Reas's subjects seem hypnotised by the demanding incantations of price tags and discount posters that adorn the shelves shouting 'Buy Me!'. These pictures render the blurred film of strip-lighting, which clashes with the photographer's flash, serving to exacerbate the freneticism of the imagery overall. These manic subjects high on credit embody the capitalist ideal of the credit-drained consumer, who, as David Harvey describes, like debt-encumbered homeowners, don't go on strike.⁷³

In conjunction with the blurred flash, Reas deploys the colour red throughout this project to heighten the grotesque nature of unbridled consumption. Red, as Mellor describes, connotes

⁶⁷ C. Guy, *Planning for Retail Development: A Critical View of the British Experience* (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2006), p. 36.

⁶⁸ Decentralised shopping centres also encourage use of cars, the consumption of petrol and bulk buying. See D. Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2011), p. 107

⁶⁹ Williams, *Martin Parr*, p. 156

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 157

⁷¹ P. Reas, quoted in A. McNeill, 'Paul Reas: "Daydreaming about the good times?"', Impressions Gallery Touring Exhibition Guide, 2015.

⁷² Themselves similar to the heritage sites. Suburban retail developments are, as David Harvey describes, connected to a geographic transformation essential to capital accumulation.

⁷³ Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, p. 50

excess and is exploited fully in the image *Pig Motif* (Fig. 68) where a man, riffling through a large fridge filled with raw red pork, wears a black and white jumper adorned with a pig motif. These comic and absurd kinds of scenes recur throughout his project. In another image, Reas photographs a baby in a trolley stuffed alongside bleeding polystyrene packs of raw meat (Fig. 69). Critic Susan Beardmore observed how such photographs confront the viewer with 'the murderous aspects of the commodity'.⁷⁴ Such horrific synonymies are deployed more subtly in another picture's use of red. In a showroom filled with beige mattresses, beige people and other items of beige home furniture, the red of the salesman's blazer is thrust forward against the landscape of pale homogeneity, working to heighten the illusion of consumer choice (Fig. 70).

Critic Rod Jones viewed Reas's work as an indictment of the political pacification of the working class. He describes how Reas's work seemed to confirm the dissolution of the working class, a realisation that 'Lukacs has given way to Gorz'.⁷⁵ These grotesque consumers, he argued, look 'more like hospital outpatients or DHSS claimants' as they queue up 'for a piece of the dream at the picking up point at the furniture store'.⁷⁶ The pathologisation of the photographer's subjects mirrors Beardmore's analysis in which she argues that Reas's use of high colour and flash acts as a means to exaggerate his subjects' 'dreamlike, automaton progress', which gives the 'uneasy feeling that we are all consumerist victims'.⁷⁷ These perspectives share in the notion that Reas felt his subjects to be 'victims' of this strange consumer world. Reas does not set out to portray his chronic consumers as victims, but rather as perpetrators of consumerism

This critical perspective of hyper consumerism was also exhibited in Parr's exploration of the British 'booze cruise' in *One Day Trip*, where he focused on consumer pilgrimages to Calais. Parr described this project as an 'epitaph to consumerism' and transposed his working methods from those used in supermarkets a few years previously.⁷⁸ Using a fill-in flash to heighten what he described as 'the alienation which is so often the trademark of these large anonymous stores',⁷⁹ the corporeality of his subjects is more prominent than in Reas's work. Parr's red-faced and sweaty consumers grab and haul large crates of beer (Fig. 71), they queue with obscenely overloaded trolleys (Fig. 72) and collapse in piles of visceral devastation and emaciated exhaustion at the check-out with their heads in their hands and their trollies piled high (Fig. 73).

⁷⁴ S. Beardmore, 'I Can Help: Photographs by Paul Reas' in *Creative Camera*, no. 8, 1986, p.18

⁷⁵ R. Jones, 'Review: I Can help' in *Ten*: 8, no. 23 1986, p. 40

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Beardmore, 'I Can Help', p.19

⁷⁸ Parr began photographing 'hypermarkets' like Asda in 1979. See *New Society*, and later *Point of Sale*, 1982.

⁷⁹ Williams, p. 159

Parr's infamy amongst the 'concerned' documentarists and others is born from his apparent disregard for the histories of working class culture. He described how little sympathy he held for people, especially photographers, who drew upon the histories of working class struggle.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, his photography recasts a number of visual strategies from the very kinds of photographic work he criticised. The strain and laboriousness of consumerism on the bodies of his subjects references the toil more commonly rendered through the social documentary works of photographic history. In a photograph of a congested aisle of shoppers in Calais Parr frames a strange mirroring montage of bodies as the trolley pushers each hunch over their load (Fig. 74). This strange multitude of people crammed within the frame, slumped over their piled excess and urging their collected cargo through the image plane resonates with the perceptive weight and strain that Killip caught on through the bodies of seacoalers and Brandt had caught on the sloping path of Jarrow in 1937. The resonances of this kind of social documentary in the work of these colour photographers was something Beardmore noted in 1986. She argued that morality remained a core concern for these new independent colourists, and these concerns were often rooted, she argued, in 'humanitarian or socialist ideas'.⁸¹ The strange happenings in Parr and Reas's colour works do hold similarities with the monochrome photography discussed previously. By highlighting the corporeal stresses of consumerism in its excessive ugliness they generated a visual language of unbridled consumption defined by its grotesque characteristics.

The post-austerity confidence in the consumer that Lawson had celebrated in 1986 would soon be smashed in October 1987 as the dream of the capital and asset-owning democracy seemed unstable. Private debt from credit cards to mortgages and spiralling excesses of the banking sector, twinned with rapid inflation in house prices, precipitated inflation on the high street. Payne argues that the boom and bust economy of the late 1980s marked the first crisis of neoliberalism, which was caused by a crisis in governmentality. Blame for the crash lay on 'the consumer-as-entrepreneur... and the realities of excessive consumer and household borrowing'.⁸² Accountability for the ensuing recession in the late 1980s was surveyed in retrospect by the Governor of the Bank of England Robin Leigh-Pemberton, who saw it not as a failure in governmental policy but a weakness in the morality and discipline of the consumer. The moralising nature and finger-pointing enabled various sectors of the population to be perceived as greedily grotesque.

As the works of Reas, Parr and Fox show, colour photographers utilised the techniques of glaring flash to penetrate and excavate the abhorrent characteristics of a financialised, consumer

⁸⁰ Williams, p. 159

⁸¹ Beardmore, 'I Can Help', p. 19

⁸² Payne, *The Consumer*, p. 98

culture; homing in on the grotesque corporeality of consumerism, they transposed the burden of consumption through the sweat and mania of the service economy. Their concerns for the abject side of consumer society coincided with the establishment of a political economy that on the surface decried the visual presence of waste, but drove its excess. As the newly established 'sterility' of the consumer landscape of heritage conveys, the 'sanitised' landscapes of consumer culture became prime locations to uncover the defilement of a culture bursting at the seams. By the late 1980s, the physical and social landscape became a site where a political economy endeavouring to cover up its waste and its proliferating excess manifested in the abraded litter of cultures of consumption, generating the 'thriving' disposal industry that Bauman discussed.

vii. Tidy Britain and Grotesque Realism

The litter is not the Government's fault. The litter is the fault of the people who knowingly or thoughtlessly throw it down and pollute the environment in which they live.⁸³

Margaret Thatcher, press conference launching the 'Tidy Britain' campaign, 1988

A society of consumers is unthinkable without a thriving waste disposal industry.⁸⁴

Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life*, 2013

By the late 1980s, rubbish and its disposal was becoming a matter of national awareness and importance. The arrival of the wheelie bin and the weekly refuse collection led Mass Observation to issue a directive that asked respondents to detail their disposal habits and their attitudes towards their own consumption and waste.⁸⁵ Respondents revealed their changing habits, from a culture of postwar austerity thrift to a reckless waste disposal on a gargantuan scale unknown to them before.⁸⁶ The visibility of litter was also becoming a matter of national importance.⁸⁷ In 1984 Keep Britain Tidy, a postwar Women's Institute anti-litter campaign, became a limited company. Since its establishment in 1955, Keep Britain Tidy had drawn together issues of rubbish and waste's relationship with national identity. The growing awareness of rubbish as a matter of national consciousness was highlighted in what Thatcher saw as a tidy Britain being 'a matter of civic and national pride'; the rubbish strewn about the

⁸³ M. Thatcher, Press Conference launching the 'Tidy Britain' campaign, 22 March, 1988, MTFW Document 107201

⁸⁴ Bauman, *Consuming Life*, p. 21

⁸⁵ See MOA replies to the 1987 summer directive. Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex, Falmer

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ See discussion of pollution in J. Black, *Britain Since the Seventies: Politics and Society in the Consumer Age* (London: Reaktion Book, 2004), p. 15

roadside was a national shame thrown, she argued, into sharp relief when transporting foreign heads of state through London's littered roads and streets.⁸⁸ During her speech at the Tidy Britain campaign launch in 1988, Thatcher thanked Westminster City Council MP Shirley Porter for setting a national example by providing business-sponsored bins to the local area and imposing fines for those caught littering.⁸⁹ This was significant, of course, as Porter had played an important role during the winter of discontent when she stood against a spectacular backdrop of rubbish in London's Leicester Square and threatened to privatise refuse collection.

Thatcher's advocacy of the Tidy Britain campaign is illustrative of the Government's concern for the banal manifestations of waste and litter as a distraction from other discussions of pollution. The level of public discourse around Britain's waste is best exemplified in the press's handling of the Greenham Common Peace Camps, which were often discussed through references to how far the camps (and the women's moral values) littered the roadsides rather than addressing issues of nuclear weapons.⁹⁰ The Government's near absurd disengagement with the proliferating levels of pollution at this time is reflected in the wider cultural fascination with rubbish in the documentary works of the period. The works discussed here deal with the subject matter that the Thatcher government had sought to keep a lid on, but instead, as John Roberts has elsewhere articulated, is the matter that spills out 'into the public domain to defame and embarrass the state'.⁹¹

As Parr and Reas's works show, colour documentary of the mid to late 1980s was concerned with the ugliness of contemporary British social and cultural life. This mode of representation – the documentary aesthetic of these photographers – is, I argue, best described as a form of 'grotesque realism', which shares many aspects of what Mikhail Bakhtin described as a literary trope in the representations of the medieval carnival. A central component of the grotesque realist mode is the 'grotesque body' – the corporealisation of the abstract – the bringing down of ideas to the materiality of the body and its degradation. As Bakhtin explains, 'to degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly'.⁹² The unity of consumption, degradation and excretion is fully conveyed in the grotesque realist mode. The grotesque body, as a central element of this mode, is a corporeal protest in abjection; it stands

⁸⁸ Thatcher, Press Conference Launching 'Tidy Britain'

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ This abjectification saw the press discuss the women through their failure to conform to standards of 'motherhood', 'femininity' and their bodily capacities to pollute the surrounding environment.

⁹¹ Roberts, *Photography and its Violations*, p. 10

⁹² M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). p. 21

against classical notions of the aesthetic body and against ‘the sterility of dominant norms’.⁹³ As Bakhtin further explains:

To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it in to the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum... Grotesque realism knows no other lower level.⁹⁴

The grotesque in British photography at this time was noted in 1985 by Jonathan Bayer, who observed a turn towards a new aesthetic characterised by ‘rubbish’.⁹⁵ As the previous chapters have shown, the interest in and aesthetic engagement with junk and degradation was nothing new. Detritus had embellished the backdrops of Murtha’s work and been the central conceit in the representation of unemployment in Killip’s photography. However, in the illuminating visual language of colour, Parr’s work, as Mellor describes it, took a ‘decisive shift into a grotesque register’ by the early 1980s.⁹⁶ As Parr and Keith Arnatt engaged in the visuality of waste, they each highlighted the absurdity of a culture which sought to obfuscate both its dirty histories and its accelerated production of refuse.

Former conceptual artist Keith Arnatt became fascinated with the encounter between the pastoral and the discarded object in the landscape when he reinvented himself as a photographer in the 1980s. The project *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (A.O.N.B)*, 1982-4 marked the beginning of a very unique engagement in the detritus of contemporary society. Arnatt used his camera to analyse the peculiarity of landscapes of waste. In *A.O.N.B* he drew upon the pastoral marketing of heritage and inverted this visual language by pinpointing the degradation, waste and foreign objects that disrupt the imagined landscape. In a photograph taken on the edge of a lake (Fig. 75), the white and grey char from a fire sits near a large rolled up carpet and two fruit boxes from Morocco and Germany, uniting to more closely resemble a crime scene than an exposition of natural beauty. This sinister scene with its visual allusions to the encroaching nature of globalisation exploits the discordance of contemporary heritage culture that celebrates specific histories of ‘Englishness’.

The photographer’s forensic visuality was carried over to his colour project *Miss Grace’s Lane* where he turned to a small country path used as an unofficial rubbish dump by local residents. Amongst the yellowing weeds on the path Arnatt photographed what looks like an elaborate, glistening cobweb climbing its way up some overgrown weeds (Fig. 76). The small flower

⁹³ A. Robinson, ‘Carnival against Capital, Carnival against Power. Part Two’ in *Ceasefire Magazine* 9 September 2011. <https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-bakhtin-2/>. Accessed 20 October, 2014

⁹⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 21

⁹⁵ J. Bayer, ‘What a load of rubbish! A New Aesthetic’, J. Bayer and Alex Noble (eds.), *Image and Exploration: Some Directions in British Photography, 1980-85* (London: Photographers’ Gallery, 1985), pp. 12–13

⁹⁶ Mellor, *No Such Thing*, p. 130

heads and the glinting cobwebs are, on closer inspection, the printed design of a jettisoned plastic sheet of transparent *Interflora* wrapping film reclining on weeds. This photograph illustrates how Arnatt exploited colour to engender synaesthetic visual experiences in his viewers by juxtaposing the synthetic with the organic. Arnatt's work collapses the boundaries between the natural and artificial, which adds a dose of humour to the visual experience as his viewers struggle to decipher waste from non-waste. This deceptive humour occurs in other pictures as rubbish begins to take on anthropomorphic qualities;⁹⁷ a black plastic sack's ripped, open mouth vomits beer cans down the side of a muddy mound (Fig. 77) and a rusting old vacuum cleaner sits alienated on a scrapheap as its ineffective tentacles reach out across the picture plane (Fig. 78).

The photographer's most explicit engagement with waste is in *Pictures from a Rubbish Tip*, 1988-9, where he moved in more closely with his camera, progressively discarding the landscape in favour of a more forensic visuality. His motivation was an interest in the changing contents of society's rubbish, describing how 'the kind of rubbish you have now is unlike the rubbish you had twenty years ago'.⁹⁸ In this project, as Susan Butler explains, Arnatt was moving 'in close on the proliferating debris of consumer society'.⁹⁹ His photographs of decaying foodstuffs include a fatty slice of red meat garnished with rosemary and mud set against the abstract mosaic of colour lent by the cracked plastic bag (Fig. 79); in another a slice of bread is peppered with soil and teal mould against a multicoloured backdrop (Fig. 80). Arnatt recalled his fascination with the way these materials are transformed by 'both the light by which [waste objects] are photographed and the photographic process as well'.¹⁰⁰ In interviews he expressed that he did not wish for his pictures to be interpreted as political or environmental statements on the nature of pollution or societal excess.¹⁰¹ Despite his dispassion for environmental causes, Arnatt's photographs resonate closely with the kinds of abject discourse being spoken at the time. His technical experiments with colour employ the lighting and staging of high quality food photography. Through colour and composition, Arnatt's beautification of grotesque subject matter flirts with the boundaries of abjection: of both desire and disgust. His images resonate with the Kristavean notion of abhorrence and ambivalence, challenging the viewer to confront the abject fashioning of consumer goods as they fall into their inevitable decay. Arnatt's forensic photographs of rubbish offer a counter-narrative to the wider social

⁹⁷ He liked to explore 'photography's capacity to transform that which is photographed'. See K. Arnatt interviewed by Susan Butler for Oral History of British Photography, 14 April 1993, British Library Sound Archive, C459/36

⁹⁸ M. Craiger-Smith, 'Keith Arnatt: Transport to another world', *Creative Camera*, issue 6, 1989, p. 21

⁹⁹ L. Heron, and Val Williams (eds.), *Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from the 1850s to the Present* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1996), p. 387

¹⁰⁰ C. Grafik and David Hurn, *I'm a Real Photographer: Keith Arnatt Photographs, 1974-2002* (London: Chris Boot, 2009) p. 10

¹⁰¹ Arnatt interviewed by Susan Butler

sanitisation taking place in the ideological and political projects of the day. By fetishising waste in a culture eager to conceal it, his photographs also play with the boundaries of cleanliness and dirt that were central to the political rhetoric of the time.

Arnatt's Kristevan meditations play upon the sensations of disgust and desire but do not engage with the processes of social abjection as it is assigned to the subjects of this 'grotesque' time. Where, in this new visual rhetoric of British colour photography of the mid-1980s, did photographers expose, as Tyler demands, 'what it is to be made abject – to be the one who repeatedly finds themselves the object of others' violently objectifying disgust'?¹⁰² The carnivalesque and grotesque visual protest against the abjectifying discourse of Thatcher's Britain would emerge in Parr's seaside project *The Last Resort*.

viii. Consuming on the Margins of Society

Parr's controversial photobook *The Last Resort*, published in 1986, was shot on a concrete seaside resort in New Brighton between 1984 and 1986 and was a symbolic embodiment of the uneven development of leisure in Thatcher's Britain. Spatial and thematic parallels can be made between the marginal, coastal waste gatherers of Chris Killip's *Skinningrove* and Parr's seaside resort consumers. In Parr's landscapes, his subjects do not gather but rather produce the waste around them. In *The Last Resort*, the photographer focuses on scenes of consumption in varying guises: from children queueing impatiently for ice cream, to babies drinking cans of Coca-Cola, to half-dressed men and women lounging around amongst the littered debris of contemporary life at leisure. The pictures are, as critic Peter Hegarty describes, 'a fictional alchemy... a visual miasma of sense and nonsense';¹⁰³ they are carnivalesque visions of consuming bodies on the margins of society.

Many of Parr's photographs are both absurdly funny and woefully melancholy. Stylistically, he deployed the vicious use of flash to spotlight the comedic and the depressing. The comedy of Parr's pictures is drawn from a use of montage-like compositions where his subjects appear alienated by their surroundings. A mother and child on an orange merry-go-round cart bear despairing looks which stand in stark contrast to the garish clashing of colour around them (Fig. 81). In another, a woman's sunbathing body appears to have been plucked from the Mediterranean coast and pasted on the sloping concrete path next to a heavy industrial crane (Fig. 82).

¹⁰² Tyler, 'Against Abjection', p. 17

¹⁰³ P. Hegarty 'The Last Resort at Open Eye Liverpool', *Creative Camera*, March, 1986, pp. 9–10

The comedy of Parr's strange juxtapositions brought him critical appraisal and disapproval from art critics and the wider photographic community alike.¹⁰⁴ Many observed a cruel and exaggerated portrayal of both working class culture and working class bodies. Critics deployed an abject vocabulary to describe not only the surroundings but also the disposition of Parr's subjects. Robert Morris described the scenes as 'a clammy claustrophobic nightmare world where people lie knee deep in chip papers, swim in polluted black pools, and stare at the bleak horizon of urban dereliction', implying that the photographer sought out the depressing and melancholy in a cruelly unrepresentative manner.¹⁰⁵ Val Williams has since questioned why critics were 'so terrified and disgusted' by the project.¹⁰⁶ She concludes that the criticisms of Parr's work, which were 'political, scathing and controversial' in disposition, reflected well on a culture that was itself 'highly controversial and deeply disturbing'.¹⁰⁷ It is true that many critics expressed disgust at the environment, and while this may have been relevant to the social landscape of Thatcherite Britain, Williams does not account for the abject description of the subjects in Parr's work, which formed the basis of most critiques of the project.

Photography critic David Lee offered high praise for Parr's project, an enthusiasm which was matched by his disgust for the people depicted. Lee's analysis is useful in synthesising the abhorrence felt within sections of the photographic community towards Parr's project overall. He described how Parr:

habitually discovered visitors at their worst, greedily eating and drinking junk food and discarding containers and wrappers with an abandon likely to send a liberal conscience into paroxysms of sanctimony.¹⁰⁸

The emphasis on the nature of consumption – the gluttonous eating and drinking of Parr's subjects – seemed the biggest concern amongst critics. The reason, Lee described, was because of Parr's status as a documentary photographer. He argued that 'our historic working class normally dealt with generously by documentary photographers, become a sitting duck for a more sophisticated audience'.¹⁰⁹ Lee's assertion strikes at the heart of the debate on documentary photography at this time. The conviction that Parr treats his subjects ungenerously by photographing them semi-dressed, in stupors of excess with a plentiful dose of humour is representative of a photographic culture attuned to the sensitivity of representing the working class. Critics were unable to see that Parr's project was a kind of carnival of affirmative social

¹⁰⁴ See Williams, *Martin Parr*

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in *ibid.* p.160.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p. 161

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ D. Lee, 'Review: The Last Resort', *Arts Review*, 15 and 29, August, 1986, p. 440

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

abjection. Parr's chaotic photographs do, as Williams argues, mirror the social and political time, but on a more fundamental level the reception of this shameless parade of bodies reveals a more deep-seated disgust at the socially abject body as, in this carnival of leisure, it parades itself unabashedly in the documentary photograph.

Literary theorist Terry Eagleton describes characteristics of the carnival as 'vulgar, shameless materialism of the body... [which] rides rampant over ruling-class civilities'.¹¹⁰ Critics' drew upon the kinds of characteristics associated with the grotesque body, especially its capacity to bring things down to the material and visceral level, as Parr's subjects are depicted eating, drinking and discarding waste with abandon.¹¹¹ Such descriptions were compounded by Parr's shameless disregard for both photographic convention and his subjects' disregard for social norms. This combination was rendered most spectacularly in a photograph of a family as they happily dine outdoors amongst the surrounding detritus (Fig. 83). The scene is dominated by the central overflowing dustbin draping from the pole like a hanging basket of dead flowers in the foreground. Parr juxtaposes this scene with the background building's fascia that reads 'PALACE'. The absurdity of this majestic scene embodies the comedy of Parr's fascination with the abject and the grotesque as they manifest themselves socially and culturally through his subjects' bodies and their composition within the defiled environment.

In simple juxtapositions and visual flourishes, Parr highlights the unity of consumption and waste, and his subjects' proximity to purity and defilement throughout his project. In doing so, Parr is able to convey how far the body becomes ensnared within the waste around it. For example, in a picture of a ballerina striking a pose on a bandstand, the photographer captures the woman with her legs and arms stretched out in a triangular shape and she is mimicked by the green steel waste bin that stands posing at full thrust in the foreground (Fig. 84). This unity is more explicit in a picture of a mother changing her baby's nappy whilst she rests her feet in the swampy water of stagnant rubbish (Fig. 85). In a similar scene, Parr captures a young boy eating his lunch whilst dipping his feet into the gutter (Fig. 86). The depiction of child amongst this litter recasts the polemic contrast between the boy's youthfulness and the body's inevitable decay. In this tragi-comic scene, the boy's blue towel is emblazoned with a map of the Canary Islands, a gesture towards sunnier times, which stand in contradistinction with the lonely union flag that waving on concrete background of the image. Parr exploits the disconnection between reality and fantasy, between the rhetoric of liberation spoken through Thatcher's consumer society and the very real concrete realities of abjection and uneven development of a consumer society in Britain.

¹¹⁰ T. Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: Verso, 2009) p. 150

¹¹¹ Eating and drinking are the manifestations of the grotesque body. See Chapter Five: The Grotesque Image of the Body in Bakhtin, *Rabelais*.

Parr later declared that he endeavoured to make ‘the photographs work on another level, showing how British society is decaying; how this once great society is falling apart’.¹¹² This kind of melancholic patriotism for a disintegrating British culture embodied by the visual rendering of decay, of waste and dereliction, mirrors the ‘sick Britain’ rhetoric of the Right’s political discourse. Parr’s humorous visual devices obscured and clouded the sharp critique he directed towards the causes of the nation’s political sickness. *The Last Resort* is representative of colour documentary photography’s embrace of the grotesque and the socially abject to provide political counter-narratives to the widespread cleansing taking place in the documentation of Britain’s recent past. Parr used social abjection as a weapon with which it could inflict the abjectifying and exclusionary discourses with celebratory visions of the social body in all its shamelessness. This kind of visual strategy, of pathologising the Government’s effect on the nation’s health, would greatly influence visual renderings of Britain by the early 1990s. The new colour documentarists explored the strange terrain of financial and consumer capitalism in all its grotesque ugliness. These cultures of excess rendered in the wasteful scenes of Thatcher’s Britain, their emphasis on the visceral responses of abjection, an emphasis on metaphor and metamorphosis of their chosen subjects, are reflective of a cultural and artistic shift towards the body as a vehicle to register political engagement, a central theme that would characterise art and photography in the early 1990s. The disgust critics articulated in their descriptions of Parr’s subjects were precursors, as the next chapter will explore, to the wider abjectification of represented social groups.

In a political culture so eager to veil the proliferating nature of its waste-making forces, the new colour documentary of the period homed in on the grotesque aesthetics of abject picture-making to spotlight a variety of cultural absurdities. Through the farcical sanitisation of history in the heritage industry and the visual rhetoric of Thatcher’s ‘walk in the wilderness’ photograph, the Government sought to pave over the abject refuse of the discarded workforce of the past. Like an underground landfill bubbling with its abject fuels, the colour documentarists of this era sought to prick holes in the surface to excavate the grotesque excretions of this highly precarious consumer culture. Using the forensic tools available through colour photography they endeavoured to ‘embarrass and defame’ the state, to discredit the beliefs embodied in the Conservative Party’s campaign material that declared: ‘Britain is great again’.

While these photographers interrogated the carnival of precarious capitalism, poverty and deprivation remained a very present reality in Britain. As Eric J. Evans explains, Lawson’s tax policies:

contributed to the increasing inequality of British society. Few in the poorest 20 per cent of Britain’s population – which of course included most of the unemployed – benefitted

¹¹² Quoted in Williams, p. 160

from the boom of the mid 1980s. The trend towards greater inequality... under Thatcher led to the charge that she had created an underclass in numbers not seen since the Victorian times.¹¹³

Despite the theoretical and technical changes that occurred in British documentary photography in the 1980s, the ongoing state of deprivation remained the subject for many of the social documentarists of the North East, who laboured to capture a Britain in all its contradictory decay. Amber photographer Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen photographed the conflicting nature of this time in Newcastle (Fig. 87). Amongst a desolate car park-cum-wasteland littered with junk from sofa cushions, bottles and bricks stewing in a large puddle, we observe the contradictions as the imposing white billboard behind declares the monumental contradiction: *Britain is Great Again, Don't Let Labour Wreck It*.

¹¹³ Evans, *Thatcher and Thatcherism*, p. 33

Chapter 8:
Dirty old Blighty: Urban Abjection and the Underclass in the Early 1990s

Dirty old Blighty. Undereducated, economically backward, bizarre. A catalogue of modern miseries. With its fake traditions... its ill-health and bad food, its sexual repression, its hypocrisy and racism, and its indolence. It's so exotic, so homemade.¹

Narrator, *London*, dir. Patrick Keiller, 1994

The most depressing urban ruin I have ever seen in Britain... a testament to bad planning and a tragically dehumanising side effect of the welfare state, with its rotting concrete towers – many half empty as they await destruction – and its amorphous sterility. Close up you are hit by myriad odours; the product of stagnant water, rotting garbage and burnt out flats all mixing with animal and human excrement.²

Dan Ehrlich, *Daily Mail*, 1993

There is a case not just in moral terms but in enlightened self-interest to act to tackle what we all know exists – an underclass of people cut off from society's mainstream, without any sense of shared purpose.³

Tony Blair, 'The Will to Win' speech, 1997

British filmmaker Patrick Keiller's 1994 feature *London* is littered with references to the abject figure of the British national body. Set in the weeks before the general election of 1992, Keiller's photo-filmic treatise on the capital city is voiced by an unnamed narrator who recasts Britain as the 'sick man of Europe' when he speaks of the body politic as economically backward and socially lethargic. For the narrator, Britain's anthropomorphic characteristics of ill-health, indolence and dirt are ambivalent, 'other' in their foreignness; both miserable and exotic these abject features both attract and repel.⁴ Later in his film, Keiller spatialises the corporeal analogy of the decaying national body, aligning it with the physical deterioration of the British political system and the physical landscape.⁵ The narrator surmises on the eve of the 1992 general election that, if John Major were to be elected, a domino-effect of social, economic and corporeal deterioration would ensue; as the camera stalls on the exterior of the protagonist's council flat in south London the narrator describes how his home would:

¹ *London*, directed by Patrick Keiller (London: BFI Production, 1994)

² D. Ehrlich, 'Moss Side Story' in *Daily Mail*, 9 January, 1993, pp. 14–15

³ T. Blair, 'The Will to Win', Aylesbury Estate, Southwark, 2 June, 1997

⁴ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 6

⁵ See: B. Campkin, *Dirt: New Geographies of Cleanliness and Contamination* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007)

continue to deteriorate and his rent increase... his job would be at risk, his income would decrease, he would drink more and eat less, he would be ill more often. He would die sooner.⁶

Keiller's bio-political mapping of Major's degenerating neoliberal landscape – of deteriorating housing stock and the economic strains on the human body – amalgamates a number of themes that will concern this chapter, namely Labour's contribution to the metaphorical recasting of 'sick Britain' discourse, the abject social body and the decaying household as metonymic for the declining nation state. This final chapter, in its analysis of the abject structure of feeling in the early 1990s, is concerned with the revival of 'sick Britain' in the political advertising, press photography and documentary work of the period on both the Left and the Right. Both the Right and the New Left saw the 'emerging underclass' as a result not of governmental failures in policy or ideology, but of what Thatcher described in her memoirs published in 1993 as the self-perpetuating 'council estate culture', a throwback to the collectivist culture of the postwar consensus. The abject body was used by politicians, writers and image-makers to reference the problems of the underclass through the language of scatology, sickness and chaos,⁷ thus 'the British disease' was seen to be thriving on the housing estates of low income citizens as the nation experienced an underclass 'epidemic'.⁸ This examination of 'sick Britain' reveals the extent to which the welfare state was presented not only as parasitical but as intrinsically dehumanising and hazardous to social, moral and corporeal health.

Set against the backdrop of the 1991 recession where widespread asset depreciation meant mortgages were paid for with the overdrawn remnants of consumer sovereignty, this was a time, as Michael Heseltine later reflected, when the 'politics of the property owning democracy had come temporarily unstuck'.⁹ The unaffordable prospect of home ownership arose as issues of homelessness emerged in tandem with outrage towards the widely condemned introduction of the 'community charge'. Thatcher's ill-fated plans to impose the poll tax in the last months of her leadership led to violent scenes during the protest demonstrations on 31 March 1990.¹⁰ The widespread unpopularity of the residential charge amongst both citizens and politicians (including those in her own cabinet) would contribute to Thatcher stepping down as Prime Minister in November 1990. Despite Thatcher's resignation from office, this chapter seeks to

⁶ *London*, dir. Keiller

⁷ Specifically *The Times*, which commissioned research into the 'British underclass'.

⁸ 'Epidemic' became the preferred medical noun used to describe the reproduction of the 'underclass' at this time.

⁹ Quoted in A. Turner, *A Classless Society: Britain in the 1990s* (London: Aurum Press, 2013), p. 96

¹⁰ The poll tax demonstrations in central London demonstrated the level of public disaffection felt across the political spectrum as well as the Government's determination to quash its opposition with severe force. See D. Deacon and Peter Golding, *Taxation and Representation: The Media, Political Communication and the Poll Tax* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1994)

show how the legacy of social abjection did not leave with her but rather spread laterally across the political spectrum and accelerated in its intensity.

The visions of violence and police brutality that emerged from the anti-poll tax demonstration in March 1990 led to greater discussion of ‘an emerging British underclass’ in the tabloid press. The commissioning of new writings on the social group began in 1989 when Murdoch’s *The Times* invited the right-wing sociologist Charles Murray to translate his American underclass thesis into the British setting. In the days following the anti-poll tax demonstrations in Trafalgar Square, analysis of the underclass appeared in the *Daily Mail*. Murray was again given an inroad to public consciousness when he was commissioned to describe how the unrest in Trafalgar Square was a deep manifestation of ‘the British underclass’. Such analyses led to the underclass discourse becoming part of popular culture and an accepted means of discussing low income groups. This is made apparent in Tony Blair’s first speech as Prime Minister in 1997. Ten years after Thatcher traversed the wild wastelands of the North East for her infamous photo opportunity in 1987, the newly elected Blair would make his first speech on the walkways of the Aylesbury Estate, a 1970s housing complex in south east London. Blair had chosen this setting – renowned for high rates of crime and unemployment – as it embodied the urban ‘sink estate’ etched into the popular imagination through various modes of literature, film and television.¹¹ Standing against the backdrop of this towering estate, Blair did not seek to discredit the existence of a social class – formulated, structured and substantiated by right-wing thinking and abject textual descriptions in the late 1980s and early 1990s – but instead spoke of Labour’s mission to ‘tackle’ the underclass problem. Blair affirmed the existence of certain communities whose abject social lives required a fundamental cure. His speech is a result of the Left and New Labour submitting to the Right’s construction of the ‘estate’ and its residents as metonymic for social decline. Blair came to espouse the Right’s long-held belief that the problems of poverty and homelessness during the 1990s were not caused by any governmental mismanagement of the economy, but rather by the physical maladies and the social diseases spread by those who experienced the problems.

A consensus emerged in which a social and cultural rot was seen to be germinating in the infrastructural body of the welfare state. The dirty council estate and the urban ruin became the stock descriptor for discussing the postwar residua of Britain’s social and economic make-up in the early 1990s, a manifestation exemplified in American journalist Dan Ehrlich’s examination of Manchester’s Hulme housing estate. Ehrlich’s above passage is exemplary of the tabloids’ scatological engagement, which was deployed to engender feelings of social disgust in the reader. Ehrlich’s prose sees the dirty, sickly welfare state embodied in the ‘lumpen’ and ‘dehumanising’ concrete mould of the estate’s decaying fabric. The article was accompanied by

¹¹ For example, Irvine Welsh’s novel *Trainspotting*, 1993 and Danny Boyle’s film adaptation *Trainspotting*, 1996.

a bleak photograph of the housing estate (Fig. 88). The image, taken on a rainy night, depicts the damp exterior of the council estate's block of flats. The brick wall in the foreground is plastered with a large public health billboard poster. Set against the dystopian concrete walls of the council estate, the billboard is adorned with a threatening anti-narcotics advert picturing a dull-eyed young heroin user expiring on a hospital bed. The photograph supports the writer's description that sees a vision of the monstrous concrete welfare state sat amongst the human excrement of its own making. This photograph within a photograph encapsulates the discourse of ruin, junk, dirt and sickness, that, as this chapter will show, became the means through which the 'contagious' contemporary housing estate – and thus the nation's social sickness – was visually and textually articulated.

i. 'If you vote Conservative, don't fall ill.'

Reference to the housing crisis was central to Labour's electoral campaign in 1992 and their creative responses to it were shot through with corporeal metaphors. Poet, painter and assemblage sculptor Adrian Henri was commissioned to write a poem to accompany Labour's manifesto in 1992. Henri's poem *Winter Ending* highlights visions of urban decline which reflect his wider artistic preoccupation with urban detritus.¹² The poet used contrasting stanzas to oppose the cold and bleak Thatcher years with the flourishing warmth that would spring forth from Labour's Britain, describing Britain as a place where people are:

huddled together in cardboard cities,
crouched over shared books in leaking classrooms,
crammed into peeling waiting-rooms.

...

tentative chords behind boarded facades;
factories open like daffodils,
trains flex frozen rheumatic joints,
computer-screens blink on
in the sudden daylight

Henri's poem references the deterioration of social values alongside the decline in public services that had been central concerns to the documentary and press photographers of the 1980s. Against these dystopian, damp visions and the pest-like analogies of people 'crammed' and 'crouched' into the leaking and peeling surroundings, Henri reflects on Labour's plans to regenerate Britain through its commitment to manufacturing, infrastructure and technology.¹³

¹² Henri believed: 'it was always possible to find beauty in any bit of urban wasteland if you look at it in the right way'. See Whiteley, p. 93

¹³ Henri's lightbulb metaphor materialised on *The Sun*'s front page in an unflattering portrayal of Kinnock: 'If Kinnock wins today will the last person to leave Britain please turn the lights out' in *The Sun*, 9 April 1992, p. 1

Henri's techno-organic metaphors see the living animating the inert to speak of the relationship between and interdependence of the sick body and sick architecture.¹⁴

Sickness was a leitmotif in Labour's advertising campaign. This discourse was one corroborated by the loyalty of the *Daily Mirror*, whose Political Editor (and later Labour aide) Alastair Campbell was a close friend and political ally of Labour leader Neil Kinnock. The paper collaborated on the campaign. From the party political broadcast themed around the NHS which became known as 'The War of Jennifer's Ear' to the *Daily Mirror's* report on the unhealthy state of schools, both the party and the newspaper sought to visualise that Conservative Britain was bad for the nation's health. The PEB warned 'If you vote Conservative, don't fall ill'. This slogan drew upon economic and corporeal concerns, of NHS privatisation whilst echoing Kinnock's celebrated 1983 speech in which he warned voters 'not to be ordinary... not to be young... not to fall ill... not to get old'.¹⁵ The Labour Party endeavored, like Keiller's narrator, to describe the perceived physical deterioration of Britain's infrastructure which was contributing to a nationwide social affliction.

During the week leading up to the election, the National Union of Teachers published a series of adverts in the national papers including one in the *Daily Mirror* that headed: 'Diarrhoea. Dysentery. Hepatitis' (Fig. 89). Below the text was a photograph of a filthy toilet cubicle surrounded by bodily waste and rubbish. The text underneath the image read: 'The Third World? No. The Third Form.' In the same issue of the *Daily Mirror*, a double page feature on the state of school toilets sat only a few pages away. The article described how a young girl, along with her fellow pupils and teachers, suffered a viral infection because her school did not have running water in their 'crumbling' outdoor school toilets.¹⁶ The accompanying images show the young girl stood amongst the peeling, red-coloured toilet cubicles, while in another image the threatening words 'DANGER AREA' are painted on the floor (Fig. 90). The newspaper's emphasis on infrastructural dilapidation utilised the persuasive rhetoric of disease and infection which implied that government disinvestment in public buildings was infecting the bodies of vulnerable citizens. Taken together these stories endeavoured to convey governmental neglect that was not only responsible for the spreading of affliction but was, metonymically, the disease itself.

Such features were part of the *Daily Mirror's* pre-election campaign, intent on exposing the dirtiness of Conservative Britain. Another feature focused on 'urban blight' and the dilapidated state of council housing. Ken Lennox's accompanying double-page photograph heeded the Blitz

¹⁴ Turner, *A Classless Society*, p. 96

¹⁵ Quoted in D. Rubenstein, *The Labour Party and British Society: 1880-2005* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2006), p. 157

¹⁶ 'Remember us... We are the future' in *Daily Mirror*, April 8, 1992, pp. 12-13

revival of the early 1980s by placing his subject, a three year old girl stood clutching a doll, amidst a monumental wasteland of litter and discarded rubbish on an all-encompassing housing estate (Fig. 91). This double page spread is presented as a theatrical backdrop of neglect. Lennox's use of colour brings the bags spewing bottles, tin cans and scraps of plastic to the fore, lending the image resonances of Keith Arnatt's ensembles of the late 1980s as they permeate the wasteland amongst the weeds that lead towards a blackened, fire-damaged wall behind. By recasting the well-worn trope of the innocent child amidst the impurities and dangers of encircling dereliction, the article absurdly explicated the abject nature of the scene by quoting the child's mother who stated: 'I don't want my daughter playing with rats and filth'.¹⁷ The article references the sense of uselessness that Bataille described as the abject subject's 'inability to assume with sufficient force the imperative act of excluding abject things'.¹⁸ The residents are helplessly surrounded by 'discarded dirty nappies, smashed bottles and sheets of corrugated iron' strewn about the estate because, as one dweller explained 'we don't even get any dustbins'.¹⁹ This feature conveyed communities overwhelmed by their own waste, a direct consequence of governmental failures to provide local authorities with essentials. The dwellings, in their decaying state, were shown to be infecting their inhabitants and by association the wider national body.

On election day in 1992, Labour and the *Daily Mirror* called on the electorate to 'remember' these vulnerable children and their revolting surroundings. Labour's altruistic message echoed Michael Foot's failed attempt in 1983 to inculcate compassion for the less fortunate, to help the homeless, the poor, the sick for the betterment of society. Kinnock's emphasis on the vulnerable did not affect an electorate now accustomed to the laissez-faire rhetoric of self-reliance and individualism because, as one critic saw it, 'in the 1990s, there are not many votes in being seen to care'.²⁰

The Labour Party, the trade unions and the *Daily Mirror* attempting to use photographic evidence of real people as representative victims of the wider sociopolitical problems of the Conservative Party's neoliberal regime proved a far harder task than anticipated. Thatcher believed, much like Keiller's protagonist, that John Major's re-election in 1992 signalled 'the end of socialism'.²¹ Such neoliberal triumphalism led many to echo Thatcher's earlier conclusion that 'there is no alternative'. Writing in 1996, the gritty realist novelist Irvine Welsh described a gradual de-politicisation of culture where poverty was 'so obvious that we don't talk

¹⁷ S. Young, "'We have a big job to do in those inner cities'", *Daily Mirror*, April 6 1992, pp. 16–17

¹⁸ Bataille, 'Abjection and Miserable Forms', p. 10

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ M. Dean, *The Lancet*, vol. 335, issue 8691, 24 March 1990, pp. 715–6

²¹ Quoted in: Turner, *A Classless Society*, p. 40

about it anymore'.²² The abject photographic stories narrated by the *Daily Mirror* to affirm the rhetoric of Kinnock's campaign, the call to empathy through the perceived indexicality of their 'personalisation of the political' was ineffective in a society increasingly characterised by the belief that poverty was both an unchangeable fact and a self-perpetuating fault of the poor. This prevailing belief in self-perpetuating poverty was most apparent in the way central London's 'cardboard cities' (a problem alluded to in Henri's poem) were dealt with. The levels of homelessness particularly among young people became a visible problem in London and the governmental panic centred not on the fact that young homeless men and women were dying on the streets in the winter, but that this social problem was publicly visible.

ii. Homelessness: A Visible Step Forward

In 1990, when medical journal *The Lancet* questioned whether homelessness was a 'housing or a health problem', homelessness in central London was fast becoming a political problem. The cardboard cities in Henri's poem had been growing steadily since the mid-1980s, resultant from persistently high levels of unemployment, diminishing housing supply, and changes to housing and social benefits. As the numbers of rough sleepers on London's streets began to rise, the most visible manifestation of homelessness was in central London's Bullring, near Waterloo station, situated over the river from the Houses of Parliament, where hundreds of homeless people lived in what became known as 'Cardboard City'.

New Society magazine often ran features on the 'down and outs' of Waterloo and Charing Cross underground stations. These subterranean cities of destitution where, as Roy Kerridge described the stench of 'haggard, hollow-eyed AIDs sufferers'²³ whose smell echoed the spectre of the homeless man 'lounging about on street corners' that had seemed so elusive to photographers in the early 1980s. The magazine's writers vividly described the 'noxious' odour of the 'old unwashed men [whose] filthy bodies... stink of urine stained clothes, the stink of excrement'.²⁴ Dirt, disease and smell were the defining characteristics of these subterranean abjects. Another *New Society* writer described how on his last visit to Waterloo he saw 'a rough young man take his trousers off in full view of the public'.²⁵ Such public revelations were, like the furniture that littered the northern sprawl of Tish Murtha's Newcastle in 1981, the private domain merging with the public. Such exteriorised deprivation was the subject of *Guardian* and *Observer* photographer Neil Libbert, who had spent much of the 1980s photographing not only the

²² Welsh quoted in: N. Waplington, *Weddings parties anything* (New York: Aperture, 1996)

²³ R. Kerridge, 'Down and out in London' in *New Society*, 4 July, 1986, pp. 13–15

²⁴ J. Sweeney, 'Down and Out in St James's Park' in *New Society*, 30 Jan 1987, pp. 8–9

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8

unemployed but also the homeless on the streets of London. In March 1990 his cast of homeless people slumped in doorways, park benches and library reading rooms went on display at Camden Arts Centre.²⁶ Libbert's pictures support Eric Hobsbawm's description of the scale of poverty and squalor in the late 1980s, that meant people were 'getting used to the everyday sight of beggars on the streets and the even more shocking spectacle of homeless sheltering in doorways in cardboard boxes'.²⁷ Historian Arthur Marwick later argued that the beggars and rough sleepers of Waterloo's Bullring were one of the most 'evident consequences of the Thatcher revolution'.²⁸

New Society's near-Dickensian description of the spectacle of homelessness and the *Guardian's* visual indictments of Thatcher's Britain were approaches to the representation of poverty challenged by a group of homeless photographers in the early 1990s. Young residents of the Rufford Street Hostel in central London began working with the collaborative photographers and educationalists Andrew Dewdney, Clair Grey and Andy Minnion in 1988 and published the project *Down But Not Out* in 1994. The photographer-residents voiced objection to the visual language of deprivation so often adopted by national press photographers. The depictions of homeless people standing against derelict or dystopian-looking buildings were used, as one participant put it, to 'make it look like [we] live in the dingy building in the background' when, in fact, '[our hostel] was somewhere around the corner'.²⁹ They concluded that press photographers 'just wanted us to look as hard and tough as possible'.³⁰ The young homeless participants contested the media's visual language of abject poverty, passive squalor and displaced angst (whereby the decaying backdrops are deployed to heighten the overall tragedy of the scene in the foreground). The young photographer-residents' challenge to the spectacle of 'abject poverty' was met with a desire to play an active role in the construction of their own representation.³¹

The active roles in the construction of meaning so desired by the residents of Rufford Street jarred with the culturally readable visual tropes, the abject olfactory descriptions central to the print media's depiction of homelessness, which proved necessary to effect government action in central London. Like the spectacle of rubbish that had troubled Thatcher in the late 1980s, the

²⁶ Steven Pritchard, interview with Neil Libbert in Oral History Project no. 47, 19 December 2001, Guardian Media Archive, London.

²⁷ E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1994) p. 406

²⁸ Marwick, *British Society Since 1945*, p.371

²⁹ A. Dewdney *et al*, *Down But Not Out: Young People, Photography and Images of Homelessness* (London: Trentham Books, 1994) p. 33

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Artist and photographer Gillian Wearing was exploring this active role in her collaborative projects around this time.

prospect of homeless bodies piling up over the river from Parliament was a visual reality that required governmental intervention.³² As the prospect of another winter of discontent hovered over Major's government, the *Guardian* leaked an official document³³ that detailed discussions of the 'rough sleepers initiative' which did not seek to engage with the experience of homelessness but rather with levels of its visibility. The document acknowledged that while the areas of 'Victoria and the Strand have the highest visibility, [attracting] numbers of beggars and cause most public concern', the authors expressed delight at the temporary closure of the Bullring, stating that, 'given the symbolism of the Bullring as the home of Cardboard City, the minister regards its closure as a very valuable and visible step forward'.³⁴ This temporary masking of social ills remained the greatest concern for a government obsessed with surface appearances of dirt and cleanliness.

In sociologist Robert McAuley's ethnographic study *Out of Sight*, he argues that the Conservative governments of the early 1990s sought to veil the realities of destitution by turning the lens towards the 'undeserving poor'.³⁵ This ideological refocusing is reflective of the historical cleansing of British industry in the late 1980s discussed in the previous chapter. By the 1990s, the governmental responses to issues of destitution were diversionary, concerned, McAuley explains, with exposing Britain's own 'waste':

successive Conservative administrations were elected because Britain's consumer society had a stake in objectifying its own waste; communities living and working in poverty. As Britain's consumer society proliferated during the 1980s, the idea of a new urban underclass, along with debates about crime, allowed many people to avoid thinking about poverty.³⁶

McAuley's perspective hints toward the notion that the Government at this time were concerned with the framing of 'self-inflicted deprivation' through the management of its visualisation. The belief in poverty a chosen lifestyle characterised by shameless squalor gave the government and wider society license to ignore its most severe manifestation. The clearing of Cardboard City was a 'cosmetic solution' for what was viewed as a solely visual problem. The Conservative Party required a remedy for the spectacle of poverty augmenting in subterranean areas of urban

³² With freezing in the early days of 1990, the Government 'was prepared' to make 1000 beds available for the homeless in London. Shelter surmised that 'the government does not want dead bodies on its hands'. See B. Wylie, 'Help for London Homeless Angers MP', *Guardian*, 14 January, 1990, p. 3

³³ The *Guardian* published extracts of a leaked government document in 1991 which revealed the extent to which the spectacle of poverty affected policy. In the summer of that year the council began 'maintenance works' on the Bullring and so dispersed its inhabitants.

³⁴ Quoted in D. Brindle, 'Clampdown to keep homeless off streets', *Guardian*, 17 September, 1991, p. 4

³⁵ R. McAuley, *Out of Sight: Crime, Youth and Exclusion in Modern Britain* (Milton: Villan, 2006) p. 153

³⁶ Ibid.

centres and it is one that McAuley locates in the need to objectify the 'waste' of its people. These people were the unemployed residents of council estates across the country.

iii. The Underclass in Dirty Ruins

When Thatcher declared 'the end of socialism' on the evening of Major's re-election, she was convinced that her brand of politics had created a new neoliberal electorate of eager homeowners, welfare state critics, individualists and capitalists. The belief that socialist utopias had been categorically proven to have failed is reflected in the wider attitudes to the welfare state and its dependents. The postwar idealism of utopian architecture was seen by the Right as a throwback to the collectivism of a failed postwar settlement, which could be characterised by its lack of progress and its promotion of a wholesale dependency culture.³⁷ This is something Thatcher would later go on to discuss in her memoirs published in 1993, describing the 'council estate culture' and its inhabitants as 'the worst source of immobility... they mutually reinforce each other's passivity and undermine each other's initiative. Thus a culture grows up in which the unemployed are content to remain living mainly on the state'.³⁸ Thatcher saw council estates as inherently dirty and she wondered: 'how people could live in such surroundings without trying to clear up the mess and improve their surroundings'.³⁹ The passive, state-draining characterisation of tenants residing amongst their own mess, was a popular characterisation of the 'underclass' in the early 1990s. Blair's decision to launch his political leadership on the walkways of the Aylesbury Estate in 1997 was a consequence of this characterisation. He utilised the visual emblem of what was perceived as a growing national crisis of state welfare. In the years preceding, the news media in the early 1990s orchestrated what sociologists have termed a 'deviancy amplification spiral', a wholesale exposure of poverty, deprivation and crime driven by emotive text and imagery that led to the revival of underclass discourses.⁴⁰ These perspectives on 'council estate culture' were articulated by a group of sociologists and policy advisors in the late 1980s.

In 1989, when Charles Murray was commissioned by *The Sunday Times Magazine* to explore the British underclass, his writings, which were subsequently published across the tabloid media, concluded that Britain had established, without hope of remedy, an underclass of people characterised by illegitimacy, violence and long-term fecklessness.⁴¹ This new class of people were not victims of Thatcherism but were simply, like the rotting concrete towers in which they

³⁷ B. Campkin, *Remaking London: Decline and Regeneration in Urban Culture* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), p. 92

³⁸ Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, p. 671

³⁹ Evans, *Thatcher and Thatcherism*, p. 144–5

⁴⁰ J. Welshman, *Underclass: A History of the Excluded, 1880–2000* (London: Continuum, 2006) p. 157

⁴¹ C. Murray, 'The Emerging British Underclass' in *Sunday Times Magazine*, 26 November 1989, p. 26

lived, another 'side effect of the welfare state'.⁴² For Murray, the underclass did not 'refer to the degree of poverty, but to a type of poverty'; thus the underclass was composed of qualitative degrees of self-inflicted social sickness.⁴³ According to Murray the growth of the underclass embodied the 'haunting question' facing Britain at the turn of the 1990s: 'how contagious is this disease? Will it spread indefinitely, or will it be self-containing?'⁴⁴ Murray was well versed in sociobiological metaphors, finding multitudinous ways with which to align his notion of the underclass as a self-medicating, state-draining, contagious disease.⁴⁵ Contamination and social defilement were central themes in his writings: the belief that the moral sickness of the underclass can be passed on, not only like an infection, but through reproduction, noting that an 'illegitimacy epidemic' is 'strikingly concentrated among the lower social classes'.⁴⁶ Not only was the underclass spreading its moral sickness but it was, as described in Murray's eugenicist inflections, reproducing 'illegitimate' offspring.⁴⁷ The objectification not only of social deviance but, more fundamentally, the biological reproduction of deviance, was central to Murray's work.⁴⁸

The belief amongst sociologists like Murray, land planners, architects and social policy advisors was that the postwar architecture of social housing estates was conducive to moral decline. As the American architect Oscar Newman saw it when visiting a council estate in 1974: 'where everything you see is anonymous, dull and concrete, it is not perhaps surprising that inhuman acts occur'.⁴⁹ Newman's work on the effects of architectural design on inhabitants would greatly influence (in very distinct ways) the work of writers such as J. G. Ballard and the British geographer Alice Coleman.⁵⁰ Coleman, like Murray, viewed council housing as conducive to the reproduction of social and moral deviance⁵¹ and her work *Utopia on Trial* was a key influence on Thatcher's housing policy in the late 1980s.⁵² Coleman's writing contains, like Murray's work, emphasis on the symbiotic relationship between the body, architectural design and

⁴² Ehrlich, 'Moss Side Story', p. 14. The assertions made by Ehrlich, Murray and Coleman reflect the nineteenth century belief that living amongst dirt breeds poor morals, including laziness and promiscuity. See G. Whiteley, p. 15

⁴³ Murray, 'The Emerging British Underclass', p. 26

⁴⁴ C. Murray, 'Where does society go from here?', *Daily Mail*, 12 April, 1990, p. 44

⁴⁵ Murray emphasised the biological inadequacies of the class group, from poor IQs to innate criminality, which could be biologically reproduced. C. Murray, *Charles Murray and the Underclass: Developing the Debate* (London: IEA Health and Welfare, 1996) p. 24

⁴⁶ Murray, 'Where does society go from here?', p. 44

⁴⁷ Quoted in M. Durham, 'Britain's New Underclass' in *Sunday Times*, November 26, 1989.

⁴⁸ Whiteley, p. 15

⁴⁹ Quoted in Campkin, *Remaking London*, p. 93

⁵⁰ A. Coleman, 'The Psychology of Housing', in *The Salisbury Review*, Summer 2009, p. 10

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Campkin, *Remaking London*, pp. 92–93

societal health.⁵³ In 1987 Coleman was commissioned by the Government to redesign ‘seven misery estates’, in particular ‘Modernist’ buildings which produced ‘packs of rowdy children’.⁵⁴ Policy-makers like Coleman and critics like Murray were eager to highlight the animality of life on the housing estate, often utilising such animalistic parallels to discuss the ‘packs’ of children. This characterisation was the subject of photojournalist Mark Power’s photograph of a Toxteth estate where the graffiti painted on the inside wall of a balcony states: ‘People live here not animals’ (Fig. 92). The perception of people, families and communities incarcerated or caged like animals in poor-quality housing had long been a concern for documentarists and photojournalists such as Nick Hedges and Tish Murtha in her work with Shelter. In Power’s photograph it appears that the words, painted on the inside of the block of flats, were not meant for the people ‘out there’ but rather served as reminders to the residents. Power’s photograph attests to the pervasive rhetoric that sought to dehumanise people living in poverty.

The presentation of ‘the underclass’ in the writings of Coleman and Murray was supported by the tabloid media. Working with a similar motivation to the *Daily Mirror* in their support of the Labour Party, the *Daily Mail* sought to concretise the sociological research with visual and descriptive evidence. Unlike the *Daily Mirror*, the tabloid news on the Right did not engage in individual experiences of deprivation but instead deployed the all-encompassing idea of ‘the estate’ to explain ‘a culture of the underclass’. As such the presentation of the estate, in its dilapidated condition, became synecdoche for the social ills of its inhabitants. One article saw ‘ignorant parenting, drugs and video nasties’ as everyday council estate experiences where the ‘odour of staleness, that perfume of poverty worn by the working classes’ contributed to the moral acidity drifting through society.⁵⁵ The emphasis on immorality in settings where poverty and unemployment predominated was presented as a bad smell, an olfactory rhetorical device once deployed by George Orwell by way of Marx to describe the lumpenproletariat.⁵⁶ This foul odour of poverty and the abject connotations of rubbish and waste were presented as self-inflicted and self-perpetuating. These assertions were corroborated by the accompanying imagery that demonstrated the self-inflicted nature of poverty; the photograph of the dying drug addict personified their otherwise general, depersonalised descriptions of the ‘estate’, which served to remind their readers of the visceral connection between the social, physical and moral contamination of the estate and the body.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 92

⁵⁴ Coleman, ‘The Psychology of Housing’, p. 10

⁵⁵ B. Bainbridge, ‘I see little boys damaged beyond repair by ignorant parenting, drugs and video nasties’, *Daily Mail*, 20 February, 1993, pp. 26–27

⁵⁶ See discussion in Kelly, *Yuck!*, p.2. Murray described the word ‘underclass’ itself as ‘ugly with its whiff of Marx and the lumpenproletariat’. See: Murray, ‘The Emerging British Underclass’, p. 26

The *Daily Mail* writers' accounts of the miasma, the 'myriad odours' in the 'rotting concrete towers', while richly descriptive, were no match for the persuasive nature of the visual. Moral degeneration, fear, bad smells – of all the perceptible senses that offended the policy-making classes, it was the visual offences and their connotative moral afflictions that were most potent in effecting tangible change on the landscape. The bodily connotations in these articles were bound by rhetorics of unsightliness which pervade the kind of language used at this time to describe postwar housing as ideologically ugly.⁵⁷ Indeed, Coleman's own field research carried out on council estates into the harmfulness of social housing was not built on objective data or crime statistics but rather on a more subjective account of visual abjection. As she explains:

Crime statistics were not at first available for individual blocks so I used visible signs of social breakdown; litter, graffiti, vandal damage and pollution by urine and faeces.⁵⁸

Coleman's government-funded work indicates the important role that visual abjection played in housing policy at this time. These visual tallies of abjection enabled Coleman to advocate for the cessation of government-funded house-building and to encourage 'demolishing those that were too obtuse for modification'.⁵⁹ Subjective accounts of abjection – of ugliness and unsightliness, of foul odours and bodily pollution – as a methodology have been used to legitimise the visual eradication of rough sleepers and the demolition of great swathes of social housing as a means to fragment communities since. Stuart Hall saw the destruction of social housing estates as a practice in cosmetics. Postwar housing's collectivist ideological and aesthetic principles⁶⁰ led Thatcher to demolish council homes because she 'did not like their political complexion'.⁶¹ Where descriptors of smell, touch and sound could be described in sensational terms, the cultural temptation to eradicate and cleanse the abject spectacle was especially potent.

Newman, Coleman and Murray's belief that postwar housing was bad for society's health was bound by notions of family life. The 'packs of rowdy children' and the 'reproduction of illegitimacy' were central themes of their work that suggested the underclass could be biologically, socially and geographically managed. These perspectives on the familial reproductive capacities of the underclass occurred in a culture and media preoccupied with the

⁵⁷ Coleman reflected on the 'utopia' of postwar architecture, describing how it 'aimed to beautify the urban environment, but has been transmogrified into the epitome of ugliness'. A. Coleman, *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing* (London: Shipman, 1985), p. 180

⁵⁸ Coleman, 'The Psychology of Housing', p. 10

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Coleman, 'The Psychology of Housing', p. 10. See also: M. Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland* (New Haven: Yale University press, 1994) p. 327

⁶¹ S. Hall, 'The Crisis of Labourism' in *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988) p. 197

changing make-up of the family.⁶² Central to Murray's underclass thesis was the rise of single parent families and 'declining family values', all taking place on these symbolic stages of postwar abjection. It was in this political climate – the politics of the familial environment – that Val Williams would create the highly successful exhibition *Who's Looking at the Family?* in 1993 at London's Barbican Art Gallery. The photographic landscape was ripe for an exhibition that turned the lens toward the private and domestic worlds of the home, a visual unpicking of the domestic interior in forensic detail. A documentary practice that had seemingly turned away from the overt social concerns of the previous decades emerged at this time. The exhibition presented the world of new and established picture-makers including the young British photographers Richard Billingham and Nick Waplington.

iv. Want to Live like Common People

There is another class of poor who don't lack just money. They are defined by their behaviour. Their homes are unkempt. The men are usually out of work. Drunkenness and criminality are commonplace.⁶³

Charles Murray, *The Underclass*, 1996

The kind of language displayed in the pages of the *Daily Mail* to describe the 'emerging underclass' was constructed through simple binaries of cleanliness and dirt, order and chaos, drunkenness and sobriety. These binaries enabled writers like Murray to convey the disorder and moral debasement of this social body. The abject side of these binaries would engage a diverse set of artists and photographers in the early 1990s. In recent histories of British art in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it is well documented that the Young British Artists, who emerged with a distinctly Thatcherite zeal for entrepreneurial self-promotion, began exploring the connections between art and the urban environment. This was also a moment when the cultural landscape of British art shifted to the entrepreneurial right. As Val Williams explains, for documentary photographers, this meant that, 'debates on the ethics of representation, which had dominated the decade, gave way to an energized photography that was directed by new interest from the art market'.⁶⁴ In the British setting, these ambivalent themes manifested as a cultural engagement in the perceived authenticities of 'working class culture' and the urban environment.

The urban spaces that Murray, Coleman and other influential policy-shapers had described as unhealthy and dangerous environments became the kinds of 'authentic locations' sought by emerging artists. The authenticities of 'estate culture' alongside the derelict and decaying areas

⁶² Central to Murray's thesis, and a growing body revival of functionalist sociology on the New Right.

⁶³ Murray, *Charles Murray*, p. 24

⁶⁴ Williams, *How We Are*, p. 161

of east London in the late 1980s and early 1990s would emerge as the prime settings and concerns for a new generation of artists and photographers.⁶⁵ Geographer Guy Baeten has recently reflected on the ways in which physical degradation can become aesthetically desired, describing how ‘downtown dirt and danger is a source of bourgeois contempt, but in its neatly polished and commodified version, quickly turns into a source of bourgeois desire’.⁶⁶ The artistic re-working of the defiled landscape described in the popular press was the terrain explored by these artists and photographers. In America too, shows such as *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art* at New York’s Whitney Art Gallery in 1993 exemplify how the art world was engaged in themes of corporeal debasement, disgust and desire. In his assessment of the cultural landscape of British art at this time, art historian Richard Shone has observed that ‘the fragmented, despoiled, high-rise, war scarred urban landscape in the East End and the docklands has made an immeasurable impact on the look’ of British art.⁶⁷ This aesthetic engagement or cultural slumming is something Julian Stallabrass later termed the ‘urban pastoral’. The pastoral as a false imaginary conjured during the heritage boom of the 1980s was turned, Stallabrass argues, ‘from the rural to the urban, particularly to the landscape of the inner city’.⁶⁸ For Stallabrass the urban pastoral is ‘plainly an art about common people but not for them’.⁶⁹ This perspective was one explored in Keiller’s satirical assessment of the fetishisation of poverty in *London*. The narrator recounts the protagonist’s desire for authentic documents of deprivation when he visits the homeless camp at Lincoln’s Inn Field and asks the homeless residents to pose for him.

British artists deployed the sensationalised caricatures of modern Britain in a way that aestheticised the exotic authenticities of relative poverty and bolstered the tabloid rhetoric from which they were drawn. These artists drew upon the home as a site of authentic social experiences.⁷⁰ As the growing aestheticisation of aspects of working class life became ever more attractive to the art market,⁷¹ photographers such as Richard Billingham would achieve success with his snapshots taken with a disposable camera of his parents’ fraught and alcohol-fuelled relationship in their Nottingham flat. Billingham’s project *Ray’s a Laugh* embodied the

⁶⁵ Patrick Wright was one of the first writers to reflect upon this cultural gentrification in his reflection on ruins: P. Wright, ‘Life among the ruins’, *Guardian*, 2 May 1991, pp. 22–23

⁶⁶ G. Baeten, ‘Hyprochondriac Geographies of the City and the New Urban Dystopia’, *City*, vol. 6 issue 1, 2002, p. 111

⁶⁷ R. Shone, *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998) p. 15

⁶⁸ Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*, p. 238

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 239

⁷⁰ See Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*, p. 25. Artists include, Rachel Whiteread, *House*, 1993, Rut Blees Luxembourg, *Vertiginous Exhilaration*, 1995 and Richard Billingham, *Ray’s a Laugh*, 1996.

⁷¹ Mark Steel quoted in Turner, *Classless Society*, p. 76. This culture was also the subject of the band Pulp’s 1996 song ‘Common People’, which explored the desires of a middle class artist from Saint Martin’s College who wanted ‘to live like common people’.

art market's desire for a familial gritty realism created with authentically cheap photographic tools. Cultural scholars Heather Nunn and Anita Biress have described Billingham's work as the 'promotion' of a family album 'as both real and cool', offering 'the thrill of authenticity' which was reflective of the desires of the wider art world at the time.⁷² The writers highlight the critical differences within the documentary work of the 1980s that saw the outsider photographer enter a new world with the artist-photographer bringing forth the authentic narratives to satisfy the slumming appetites of the art world.

Stallabrass saw Billingham's work as representative of what he called 'high art lite's' tendency to refer 'indirectly to that deflated, unemployed lumpen segment, with pleasure at the opportunity they present for wallowing in abjection'.⁷³ Art historian Kieran Caskell, in his analysis of Billingham's work, contests Stallabrass's assumption that the viewer of the work is 'middle class' and suggests that Billingham frames the viewer as 'a cultural tourist' and endeavours to 'make the viewer ashamed for looking'.⁷⁴ Caskell's emphasis on shame and shamelessness reflects the concerns and discussions taking place within the pervasive discourse of the underclass in the late 1980s. When Murray presented his thesis of the underclass to the British public in 1989, *The Sunday Times* editor noted the increasingly unashamed publicisation of private life. In the past, he argued, the spectacle of deviance and the 'social stigma of illegitimacy and unemployment kept both rates low'.⁷⁵ He went on to describe how:

Getting your name in the papers used to be the final shame for criminal misconduct. Today, many local courts go completely unreported, as do local councils. But social stigma is an essential ingredient of social order and must, slowly and cumulatively, be restored.⁷⁶

The editor highlights the wider cultural tendency of the time to equate deprivation with a moral decision, a chosen lifestyle that could be compared and contrasted with the higher moral standards of the past. The spectacle of stigma as a means to deter the poor from 'the monster that is being created in our midst' and the belief that publicity should provoke shame was something Waplington would explore in his project *Living Room*.

⁷² Williams and Bright, *How we Are*, p. 161

⁷³ Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*, p. 253

⁷⁴ K. Caskell, *Aftershock: The Ethics of Contemporary Transgressive Art* (London: I.B Tauris, 2009) pp. 26–27

⁷⁵ 'The British Underclass', *The Sunday Times*, 26 November, 1989, p. 1

⁷⁶ Ibid.

v. *Living Room*

The pictures are about producing positive images of the underclass that was created in Britain in the 1980s.⁷⁷

Nick Waplington on *Living Room*, 1992

In the context of an artistic culture increasingly accustomed to interrogating and fetishising the lives and environs of ‘the working class’,⁷⁸ it is unsurprising that when Nick Waplington published the controversial book *Living Room* in 1991 it would go on to achieve the transatlantic acclaim it did and indeed, conclude in a follow-up book *Weddings, parties, anything* in 1996. Waplington’s project began in the late 1980s when, as an undergraduate photography student, he started photographing the family living next door to his grandfather on a council estate in Nottingham. His intention, as he later put it, was to produce ‘positive images of the underclass’. When Waplington was ‘discovered’ by fashion photographer Richard Avedon on a lecturing visit at the Royal College of Art in 1991 his work was fast-tracked to publication and the attention of ‘important museum and gallery curators’ such as John Szarkowski.⁷⁹ The friction between (or indeed disconnect between) these two worlds led Waplington to insist on his subjects’ autonomy. Interviews and articles at the time are peppered with references to the photographer’s intimate ties to the family depicted, emphases on the lack of exploitation, allusions to his own working class lifestyle and affinities,⁸⁰ and the lack of hierarchy or voyeurism of his lens.⁸¹ Justification and qualification have accompanied this project and the one that followed, *Weddings, parties anything*, in 1996, since their publication. With short accompanying texts by Avedon and John Berger (and in the second book, Irvine Welsh) the front cover of *Living Room* features an image of three young girls in identical gingham dresses in their front garden (Fig. 93). The chubby girl in the foreground forces a Hoover over the grass and is mimicked by her younger sibling behind. This front cover seamlessly introduces the theme to the set of photographs that follow inside the book – of a rebellious private world exposed, a place where the domestic, like the vacuum cleaners they use outside, becomes public.

The family in *Living Room* is constantly active and the subjects are captured by Waplington from a diverse array of angles. In one picture, as in many others, the photographer lies on the

⁷⁷ Waplington quoted in E. Sozansk, ‘Documenting Life: Meet Nick Waplington’, *Inquirer Art Critic*, 1 May, 1992

⁷⁸ J. Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*, p. 238

⁷⁹ D. Lee, ‘What comes after the big break’, *British Journal of Photography*, no. 6862, 12 March, 1992, p. 21

⁸⁰ Waplington quoted in Sozanski, ‘Documenting Life’. He describes that while studying at Trent Polytechnic when he was discovered he was also ‘working in a pork pie factory’.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

floor as the activity takes place above him; a baby is passed around amongst family members and appears in transit across his lens (Fig. 94). In another image, a parent dangles a child by her feet above the floor (Fig. 95). Waplington watches as parents grab and hit each other and as others eat their dinner on the kitchen floor (Fig. 96). The patterned fabrics and peeling wallpaper that upholster the images add an extra layer of freneticism as children crawl over and around the furniture, as spare pairs of legs and shoes are scattered throughout the photographs, often appearing disembodied as the layers of people in the scenes overlap. Side tables are always filled with objects – cups and bottles – and the underside of the sofa seems to inhale forgotten objects on the floor, lapping up the likes of plates, socks and food wrappers (Fig. 97). Waplington's pictures are marked by the competing narratives taking place in a single frame; as a mother and two young girls engage in their own activity, each photograph is shot through with contending visual stories (Fig. 98).

Waplington's work, much like Parr's *The Last Resort*, was subject to photographic debate (albeit less impassioned than in Parr's case) and political repercussions, of which the latter can perhaps be best exemplified on a local scale. In 1991, Waplington organised an exhibition of these large scale images on the housing estate on which they were taken. When the photographs went on display the Labour-controlled council became increasingly concerned about the 'political correctness' of the images and so created what Irvine Welsh recounts as 'a counter-exhibition to show what they saw as the "positive side" of the estate'.⁸² Welsh further notes how the local authority had questioned why Waplington had not taken 'any pictures of the environmental improvements made by the council'.⁸³ The council's desire to conceal what they saw as 'negative' representations is especially revealing. The council's anxiety exposes the power of the visual representation of 'working class culture' to offend, a perspective proffered by papers such as the *Daily Mail*, *The Times* and the *Daily Express*. The Labour council's demands for 'positive' representation reveal the Left's engagement with the Right's emphasis on social decorum, on presenting a community visually cleansed of stigma.⁸⁴

Welsh's accompanying text for Waplington's second publication contextualises both the reception of *Living Room* and anticipates the readership of the new book. The writer references a culture of scrutiny around consumption, borne out through the tabloid dissection of deprived environs: 'Every can of lager lying around, every full ashtray, every television set... is seen as an

⁸² Welsh, *Weddings*

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ The kind of circumstances that Labour-supporting writers and journalists in the early 1980s had sought and those that newspapers such as the *Daily Mirror* sought to convey amongst the detritus of neglect.

indictment'.⁸⁵ Welsh's description mirrors the kind of criticism art writer David Lee directed at Waplington in his critiques. Lee observed how:

overflowing ash trays and several night's empties are still strewn around the living room floor and that piece of orange peel, which seems oddly familiar from the previous book, has now taken root under the gas fire.⁸⁶

Lee's contempt for Waplington's characters, whom he referred to as 'congenitally empty-headed' (a biological metaphor with echoes of Murray's eugenicist rhetoric), is clear. These people, Lee believed, 'have nothing to offer but their low social situation', making them 'a curious subspecies for the books [sic] intended readership'.⁸⁷ Despite Lee's revival of the bestial metaphor, he makes a salient point about the book's readership, which was a problematic theme in a culture that both vilified 'visions of the underclass' and an art world that fetishised 'working class authenticities'.

In his accompanying text Welsh briefly mentions the problems faced in creating an expensive photobook for consumption by the British and American middle classes.⁸⁸ Lee had previously noted after the publication of *Living Room* that the book was 'flawed by the conspicuous association of not one but two heavy weight apologists' giving the impression that 'Aperture has to justify publication'.⁸⁹ Welsh himself makes no apologies for the representation of people in the book, but he insists their activity within the photographs 'is nobody's business'. He suggests that: 'In exposing themselves in this book, the people concerned are well aware of the potential for ridicule'.⁹⁰ For an author who gave a voice to a cast of fictional characters injured by the socioeconomic policies of Thatcherism in his novels *Trainspotting* and *Junk*, Welsh's perspective on the performative silence and awareness of their 'social stigma' is revealing of the power of underclass discourse at this time. As Lee warned more explicitly than Welsh, in these images 'there is an arsenal of ammunition... for *Daily Mail* editorial writers', which may 'fuel a fire of middle class bigotry and prejudice'.⁹¹ Rather than celebrate the familial chaos that the family present to the lens, a disorder that would enrage the sensibilities of *Daily Mail* readers, Berger and Welsh seem to reinforce the passive discourse of social decorum that was used in the

⁸⁵ Welsh, *Weddings*. Welsh's analysis resonates with media scholar Martin Conboy who described how 'criticising how poor people spend their undeserved wealth has always been one of the tabloids favourite occupations', M. Conboy, *Tabloid Britain: Constructing a Community Through Language* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 17

⁸⁶ D. Lee, 'Review: Weddings, Parties, Anything' originally published in *Source* 1996, *Source* [undated] <http://www.source.ie/issues/issues0120/issue09/is09revwedpar.html> [accessed 12 November 2014]

⁸⁷ Lee, 'Review

⁸⁸ Welsh, *Weddings*

⁸⁹ D. Lee, 'What comes after the big break', *British Journal of Photography*, no. 6862, 12 March, 1992, p. 21

⁹⁰ Welsh, *Weddings*

⁹¹ Lee, 'What comes after the big break', p. 21

past to describe the working class as victims of middle class hegemony and as objects of the photographers' lens simply making the most of their lot.

The controversy around these two photographic projects centred, like Parr's *The Last Resort*, around the *documentary* representation of these families and the role played by the photographer indulging the minutiae of low-income domestic experiences of living in rented social accommodation. The peeling wallpaper and stained walls behind them were not, like those of Shelter photographers and the scenes of dingy backdrops decried by the Rufford Street Residents, scenes of governmental neglect or calls for empathy but were seen, rather, as the abject stages upon which the underclass bodies performed a grotesque spectacle of wilful and self-perpetuating impoverishment. Waplington's photographs seemed to suggest to critics that the malaise embedded in the very structure of these homes mirrored that of its problematic occupants. As the beginning of this chapter explained, parties of the Left and the Right sought to explicate the connections between poor housing, poor morals and poor health. Such perspectives fail to consider the persuasive power of visual abjection at this time and the role it played in managing and influencing attitudes towards low income groups. The exclusionary language spoken about council estate residents, their social diseases and 'illegitimacy' was met with a near carnivalesque protest against the discursive pacification of this new subterranean class. Above all, Waplington's energetic images are driven by the activity of the children, who exhibit the sort of endless activity and carnivalesque carelessness that gestures obscenely at those institutions which sought to define them as lethargic, parasitic or feral, with Charles Murray, the *Daily Mail*, David Lee, and Alice Coleman among them. In participating and collaborating as subjects of Waplington's work they actively make their lives public business with a shamelessness which the editor of *The Times* would deplore.

When discussing the processes of social abjectionification, Imogen Tyler has described the ways that politicians on the left have sought to emphasise the 'dignity' of 'hard-working families' as a means to differentiate this group from 'the underclass'. Such social designations lead to, Tyler argues:

the creation of authentic working class culture through the figure of the noble suffering worker... it is the same myth of worthiness which New Labour appeals to in its pitting of "honest hard-working families" against the parasitical, pathological underclass. Indeed the use of this strategy by the left often works to the advantage of the right, which also appeals to the "real working class" in order to legitimise its mockery of the poor.⁹²

The writers in Waplington's publications thus serve to bolster this underclass rhetoric and further legitimise what McAuley described in mainstream discourse as an objectification of the

⁹² Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, p. 70

nation's social waste. In seeking to justify the family's representation, by endeavouring to lend the images a level of 'respectability' such justifications are written in the dominant rhetoric espoused by the right-wing tabloids. It was the kind of language that would define New Labour and a mode of communication that Blair would voice on the walkways of the Aylesbury Estate where he pitted the hardworking working class against the 'underclass of people... without any sense of shared purpose'.⁹³ His speech was a cumulative response to the preceding years' narratives of a national crisis in state welfare. Blair had dispensed with the argument that it was the Government's role to create and provide jobs; he spoke the language articulated by Thatcher, believing the nation's problems were henceforth not governmental failures in policy or economics but an intrinsic social sickness of those who chose not to operate within the social and political economy constructed by his predecessors.

The writing around Waplington's projects exposes one of the unresolved conflicts of the British Left and one that came into clear focus when New Labour came to power – its inability to speak of social inequality outside of the language and the discursive constructions of the Right. Waplington described his pictures in terms of 'producing positive images of the underclass that was created in Britain in the 1980s'.⁹⁴ This contradictory motivation not only reveals the influence of underclass discourse as embedded and natural at the time but also realigns the project with the Right's discourse of social malaise and neglects to consider how these images work best: on the level of agitation and resistance to the discursive construction of imposed forms of social abjection.

Waplington's project was not a collaborative project in the mode of Dewdney, Grey, Minion and the residents of the Rufford Street Hostel, yet the performative collaboration of the family in this cultural epoch is crucial. Ariella Azoulay has considered the power of being represented by others in a culture of exclusion, explaining how:

Large parts of disenfranchised populations are prone to turn into photographs taken by others, more than they tend to become photographers themselves or self-photographed subjects. However, even as merely photographed persons, they take part in the power play on which they leave their photographed mark, even as they remain excluded from the hegemonic game.⁹⁵

The family's performative disregard for the normative controls exerted by the core players in this 'hegemonic game' is a powerful visual riposte to the exclusionary discursive practices of this epoch. Against the savage rhetoric levelled at segments of the population, including, as Lee exposes, the people in Waplington's images, writers and critics have tended to avoid celebrating

⁹³ Blair, 'The Will to Win'

⁹⁴ Sozanski, 'Documenting Life'

⁹⁵ Azoulay, *The Civil Contract*, p. 176

these images as a visual retort to those who consider the subjects' biological existence, their representation and their environs equivalent to a socially contagious disease. It is through critics' consistent realignment of the images with the propagandistic narratives of a brand of working class culture that bore little relevance that the images lose their potency as vital documents and agitators of their time in which they could serve to 'defame and embarrass the state'. The very act of being visual, the capacity to embody the culturally grotesque, for those rendered socially abject to present themselves and contest those that seek to silence them, is vital. Waplington's subjects in their contestation of shame and stigma reveal a set of cultural values that crystallised around attitudes towards the welfare state in the early 1990s. The media on both sides of the political divide sought to reveal the abject realities of social housing. At the heart of these descriptions, and the images that accompanied them, was a politics of disgust. As Tyler describes:

disgust reactions are always contingent and relational revealing less about the disgusted individual, or the thing deemed disgusting, than about the culture in which disgust is experienced and performed.⁹⁶

The abject visions of the housing estate and its inhabitants reveals the cultural preoccupations of the time. The capacity of the family in Waplington's images to contest the connections being made in wider culture between the welfare state and social ill-health through their very performative presence is vital to understanding the importance of this work. The capacity for the family and their environs to act metonymically for the national body is contested by their capacity to be visualised. In a political and social culture increasingly defining policies and social principles at the level of the visual, the power wielded by the visual presence of Waplington's subjects cannot be underestimated.

⁹⁶ Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, p. 23

Conclusion

The production and mediation of these revolting subjects are not simply an effect of neoliberal ideologies and policies but are ‘a core organ’ of neoliberal governmentality.¹

Imogen Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, 2013

[W]hat I’m interested in is not the big picture, not the riots and stuff like that. What I care about is the smaller things. I want to photograph the roadside memorial, not the accident... [With] the memorial you get a look at the pathetic nature of life.²

Si Barber, Interview with *Vice*, 2013

Documentary photographer Si Barber’s 2011 project *The Big Society* explored the ‘underlying sadness’ of contemporary Britain as it is subjected to the side effects of austerity.³ Barber’s pictures reflect the wretchedness expressed by Martin Parr who sought for his images to ‘work on another level’ by showing how ‘British society is decaying’.⁴ Barber’s indifference to the riots and other spectacular repercussions of economic crisis is supplanted by grotesque realist documentations of the insidiousness of ‘the smaller things’ – the symbols of crisis and decline as they pervade the landscape of Britain and the bodies of its inhabitants. Through forensic documentations of makeshift crack-pipes, ‘massage’ caravans on roadside wastelands (Fig. 99) and portraits of sex workers in Bradford, Barber documents the modern-day entrepreneurs of ‘the Big Society’ as they are corporeally entwined with the abject landscape of discarded belongings and derelict buildings.

Barber’s pictures of Britain are not, he describes, of ‘the movers or the shakers’; they are instead about ‘those surviving the will of the powerful’, visions of those ‘trapped beneath the seismic movement of collapsing ideologies... people trying to negotiate their way through the chaos’.⁵ Many of Barber’s pictures reflect back an abject riposte to the notion that ‘we’re all in it together’ as the ideological weight of ‘the Big Society’ is ruthlessly shifted onto the shoulders of the nation’s most economically and socially vulnerable. In a photograph of a repossessed home (Fig. 100), a door is painted with the graffitied words ‘nothing left’ and so mirrors sociologist Carlo Bordoni’s recent assessment of that sees austerity politics as a “parasite” on the population concerned only for its own survival, demanding more and more and giving less

¹ Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, p. 212

² S. Barber and Elektra Kotsoni, ‘Si Barber Photographs the Reality of Britain’s “Big Society”’, *Vice*, 2 August, 2013 http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/si-barber-big-society-interview Accessed 2 February, 2016

³ Si Barber quoted in ‘Shopping Trolleys, Morris Dancers and Claudia Schiffer in a Hijab’, Daily Mail Online: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2454272/Shopping-trolleys-Morris-Dancers-Claudia-Schiffer-hijab-Photographer-travels-UK-capture-essence-modern-Britain.html#ixzz42rW7jv2o> Accessed 2 February, 2016

⁴ Williams, *Martin Parr*, p. 160

⁵ S. Barber, ‘The Big Society’, *Either/And*, <http://eitherand.org/protest-politics-community/big-society/> Accessed 2 February, 2016

and less'.⁶ The environmental ruin of the derelict home is mirrored in the references to corporeal decay with crucifixes and crosses hinting at the presence of and proximity to death: a mangled crow is tied to a cross in a cornfield (Fig. 101), a child's memorial is made of old sticks and a contorted Barbie doll, and a man's chest is emblazoned with a tattoo of a cross (Fig. 102). These iconographic references all attest to the sense of decay as the insidiousness of a parasitic culture of austerity continues to demand as much as it abjects. Barber's pictures evidence the abject structure of feeling reemerging in the Coalition years of 'austerity Britain'. Barber's photographic counter-narratives of affirmative social abjection disturb the conventional picture projected by the Coalition Government; his pictures 'defame and embarrass' the state by presenting a 'startling and disturbing inversion' of David Cameron's 'Big Society'.

i. Paving an Abject Path

The chapters in this dissertation have mapped out the abject path paved by the Conservative Party's adherence to the *Stepping Stones* report throughout the 1980s. The close visual analyses of diverse forms of photography have explored the ways in which photographers represented Britain at this time and the role photographic representations have played in bolstering or resisting the abject narratives of the sick and the healthy society. The introduction outlined the context in which this abject discourse was promoted and voiced by the Right throughout the 1980s to promote the ideals of free market capitalism. Chapter 1 mapped out the various ways in which photography and photographic representations responded to the tension between the Right's 'waste-saving' endeavours of social and industrial change and their 'waste-making' consequences.⁷ By exploring abjection and discourse, the chapter considered how a visual analysis could account for the Conservative Party's stimulation of the olfactory and the visceral senses to bring out the economic, social and political sensibilities of disgust in the social body. This theme was drawn out through the socially abject terrain of 1980s' Britain to expose photography's capacity to shape and be shaped by the discursive (societal and contextual) forces at play in wider cultural life. Chapter 2 acted as a case study for exploring both the iconographic use of photography and the contextual deployment of photographs by the Conservative Party to visualise their programme of socioeconomic change. The chapter exposed how the Right's discourse of the 'sick' and the 'healthy' society was bolstered by its own 'apprenticeship in advertising' (the deployment of photographs and photographic manipulation in their party political propaganda) and the print media's deployment of abject photographic manifestations of 'sick Britain', which encouraged the electorate to draw borders between the abject past of

⁶ Bordoni in Bauman and Bordoni, *State of Crisis*, pp. 17-18

⁷ Tyler explained that her aim was to 'understand a little of what it means to be made abject – to be tortured by words, images, policies and mechanisms of policing and control which continuously produce you as less than human'. Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, p. 213

industrial impasse and a future free of the waste populations that were seen to be throttling national prosperity.

The chapters in this dissertation have seen how ‘waste populations’ such as those spotlighted during the winter of discontent and those cast amidst the ruins of Brixton and Toxteth were discursively constructed, coaxed into the scrutiny of the camera and disseminated in public life.⁸ The discursive and visual alignment of subjects with waste discussed throughout is, as Bataille describes, evidence of a disbarment whereby the abjected populations ‘intrude at the centre of public life as objects of disgust’.⁹ The *Daily Mail*’s photograph of a billboard showing a young heroin user discussed in Chapter 8 exemplifies Tyler’s assertion that abjected populations were not only employed to bolster neoliberal ideology but were vital instruments in exercising modes of neoliberal governmentality.¹⁰ This cajoling of the scrutinised body in abjected environments recurred throughout the 1980s. It is a mode of ‘hygienic governmentality’ that Lauren Berlant described as the intrusion of abject bodies in public life to bolster governmental hegemony in the service of ‘the common good’.¹¹ The dehumanising visualisations of the abject subjects of Thatcher’s Britain were crucial to accelerating the prevailing discourses of neoliberal normativity. The first three chapters established the methods and means by which photographers and photographs could be deployed to bolster the Right’s programme of the ‘sick’ and the ‘healthy’ society. This dissertation then went on to explore the kinds of counter-narratives that sought – through their creation and utilisation – to discredit the *Stepping Stones* narrative.

Section Two explored the depiction of ‘the enemies within’ through references to the corporeal and environmental entwinement with waste. Set against the rhetoric of economic, industrial and social waste-saving and the backdrop of rising levels of unemployment and social disaffection, these analyses sought to expose the salience of the abject structure of feeling as photographs highlighted the exclusionary nature of a neoliberalising national body in crisis. The Labour Party’s advertising agency deployed photomontage to illustrate the wastefulness of Thatcherite economic policy and Chris Killip drew upon themes of waste and temporal drift to undermine the discourses of progress voiced by the advocates of technological and industrial change. The rhetoric of wastefulness was explored in Murtha’s photographs of young people when she drew upon their pervasive feeling of alienation as they were excluded even from the abjected populations of Thatcher’s Britain. The analyses in chapters 4 and 5 located Killip and Murtha’s photographic projects in their wider cultural context and saw how their subjects could play a role in defining their own performative resistance to the enveloping discourses of neoliberal

⁸ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 2

⁹ Ibid., p. 10

¹⁰ Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, p. 213

¹¹ Berlant, p. 175

normativity on the right and the discourses of abject passivity on the left. In these analyses, social documentary's engagement with the marginalised and excluded subjects of the neoliberal social body was re-framed to exemplify how its investment in themes of affirmative social abjection was distinct from those photographies concerned with representations of passive suffering.

Documentary photography was further examined in relation to the Right's promotion of a national body cleansed of postwar consensus residua in the late 1980s. Section Three saw colour documentarists of the mid-1980s working to expose the absurdity of the Government's endeavour to 'tidy up' a nation grossly overwhelmed by the waste of its own ideological advocacy. The ugliness and grotesque visual languages of Parr, Reas and Fox reflect on the Government's promotion of a culture of competition, consumption and uncertainty. While Arnatt rejoiced in the aesthetic possibilities and colourful splendour of rubbish, his photographs of food waste flirted with the notion of consumerism and decay, while Parr utilised the presence of litter to exemplify the social body's carnival of detritus as an abject protest against the pacification of socially concerned documentary. These documentary modes of picture-making indulged the abject in their glaring concentration on the side effects of mass cultures of consumption. Parr's photographs served to embarrass not only the political state but also the state of 'concerned' documentary image making overall, which was disgusted with the documentary presentation of the 'working class'. In a similar mode, Waplington's *Living Room* provided a powerful riposte to the widespread modes of exclusionary discourse of disgust which were rife in the early 1990s. The photographer's pictures reflected back visions that would disgust the media and embarrass the state that abjected his subjects.

As the Introduction noted, the documentary projects discussed would be distinct from those images restrained by the editorial or propagandistic intentions of the media and party politics. The analyses of independent works have shown how photographs can engage in modes of affirmative social abjection to, especially in Parr and Waplington's cases, agitate not only those who seek affirmative imagery of working class culture, but also those who consider such subjects abhorrent. Chapter 8 confirmed that the establishment of a neoliberal political economy and an accelerated use of the aesthetics of abjection in political and visual discourse had become intricately entwined. Exploring these projects in their discursive contexts has enabled a greater understanding of the vital roles photographers and photographs have played in reifying or contesting the enveloping modes of neoliberal normativity to expose governmental modes of waste-making. As Barber's practice exemplifies, the insurgent modes of documentary photography and social abjection are still very much active, offering an embarrassing riposte to the otherwise enveloping nature of normative and passively accepted forms of austerity politics.

Guided by Imogen Tyler's conceptual framework of social abjection, this examination has sought to go beyond merely analysing the iconographic or visual strategies deployed by photographers to convey a state of crisis in Britain. Analysis of divergent modes of visual communication – the press imagery in the mainstream media and the independent documentary and photojournalism published in the radical photographic media of the 1980s – showed how discourses of exclusion pervaded not only the photographic representations but also the photographs used as representative photographic documents of Thatcher's Britain. My concern for the 'citenry of photography' – the parties subject to the photographic act (the subject, photographer, editor and viewer) – has exposed how the representations and the presentation of photographs could serve the interests of exclusionary or affirmative modes of social abjection. As the Conservative Party and the right-leaning press sought to highlight the necessity of Thatcher's programme of change through the utilisation of photographs that focussed on abhorrent visions (the abject forms of social life) to engender disgust in the viewer, independent documentarists and socially concerned image-makers sought to visualise the exclusionary politics of Thatcher's Britain through picturing redundant subjects as closer to the abject qualities of life. In highlighting the socially abject concerns of these various photographers, I have filled a gap in the knowledge of this period of British photographic history. This dissertation has uncovered two distinct photographic narratives: firstly, I have exposed photography's wider implication in modes of exclusionary forms of social abjection by exploring the ways photographs have been made, utilised and disseminated to strengthen the many objectives of the Thatcherite project in the 1980s; secondly, I have uncovered how an insurgent mode of photographic practice existed in which photographers, subjects and editors responded to the widespread discourse of exclusionary social abjection and fed back a counter-narrative that sought to discredit the cleansing nature of 'hygienic governmentality' through subversive photographic acts. These counter-narratives served to expose the grotesque nature of the Right's 'waste-making' project.

As an analysis of 'revolting' photographic resistance to the abject discourses of the Thatcherite project, this dissertation has taken a very specific route through the visual culture of 1980s Britain, incorporating a diverse range of photographic work, which held varying levels of reach and influence. While not seeking to act as a catalogue for the crises of Thatcher's Britain nor act as an exhaustive survey of British documentary photography, photojournalism or press photography, this research could have been more highly focussed in its approach to the era. An analysis of photojournalistic representations of conflicts, from a more in-depth visual analysis of the social unrest in 1981 and 1985 or the anti-poll tax demonstrations of 1990 might have richly attested to the sense of crisis during the decade. An approach that focussed on one strand of photographic discourse, such as realist documentary or the seen and unseen photojournalistic images of the era, might have provided more explicit examples of an abject structure of feeling as it manifested in the photography of the time. However, this present analysis of photography

has uncovered the shared visual concerns of a diverse array of photographers and users of photography and has seen how press images, archive photographs, political advertising and vernacular images (in their wider photographic, artistic and cultural contexts) were disseminated while others were edited and hidden from view. Analysis of documentary and press archive images has yielded important evidence of the exclusionary and socially abject discourses of the decade and such findings only attain significance in their wider discursive and social context. By analysing such pictures, I have uncovered the emergence of the abject structure of feeling, which resonates with Si Barber's desire to look at the memorial rather than the accident, to focus on the 'smaller things' to more fully understand the wider context in which the abjected subjects and their experiences of exclusion and crisis are lived. An analysis of representations of 'revolt' (in its more spectacular sense) against governmental forces would not have been able to account for the subtlety with which the abject structure of feeling insidiously pervaded the banal and unphotographable elements of life. By concentrating on the exclusionary discourses at play throughout the 1980s I have shown how the side effects of the neoliberal remedies of the age manifested in the (both physical and metaphorical) margins of society and the social body.

Through these explorations of photography in Thatcher's Britain, this dissertation has tracked the emergence of an abject structure of feeling in photographic representations and the use of photography in 1980s' Britain which resonated with the Conservative Party's rhetoric of disgust. Through a diverse collection of images, I have unearthed and narrated the exclusionary and affirmative visual discourses of photographic culture during the decade and beyond. In particular, I have shown how documentary photography, press photography and aspects of propagandistic political visual culture have shared in the visual rhetorics and discursive constructions of varying modes of 'sick Britain'. By conveying people and places, citizens and locations as wasteful throwbacks, blocking the fluid development of economic expansion, these abject people and places were thus cast as the pestilent deviants to do, as Tyler describes, 'the dirty work for neoliberal governmentality'.¹² In seeking to go beyond viewing photography as a solely representational medium I have explored its implication as what Tyler describes as a 'core organ' of neoliberal governmentality' by conveying how photographs were utilised by political parties and the voices of exclusionary social abjection to further their political aspirations. The counter-narratives explored in the documentary and photojournalism works of Sykes, Killip and Murtha, Fox, Reas, Parr, Arnatt and Waplington exemplify committed photography's capacity to visualise the bodies of Britain's citizens and their environments to subvert the enveloping normativity of cleanliness and surface that had come to define Thatcher's programme of 'hygienic governmentality'.

¹² Tyler, *Revolting Subjects*, p. 9

ii. Abject Present

The post-2008 financial crisis, as Tyler's examination of social abjection explained, has seen socially abject politics deployed in many areas of cultural and political life in Britain. By examining the shared visuality of photographs in the 1980s, the visual representations of Thatcher's austerity project and the visual languages of economic and social crisis throughout the decade, I have contributed to this body of knowledge, offering future scholars a springboard from which new research might examine the contemporary manifestations of social abjection in photographic discourses. As Barber's contemporary work demonstrates, the years of recession and financial crisis have reestablished the salience of social abjection in documentary photography and indicate the ways the abject structure of feeling can be seen reemerging in the contemporary setting. In the present neoliberal era of mass photographic participation where greater numbers of young people see poverty as the fault of the poor (despite being the group most likely to experience economic deprivation),¹³ it seems timely for scholars of visual culture to explore the means through which these prejudices are upheld and bolstered by photographic discourse and the use of photography in popular culture. This research has provided a foundation from which it is hoped other researchers might further explore the photographic forms of social abjection at play in the visual renderings of the post-2008 global economic crisis and the subsequent tenor of the exclusionary discourses voiced across the media in response to the refugee crisis in which austerity politics and the politics of disgust are intricately bound. In an age of mass digital communication in which photography of the many styles and modes described throughout this dissertation pervades, the extent to which the abjectified social groups of the present might lend themselves the means for affirmative social abjection is rich in possibilities. It is hoped that this dissertation might act as a solid historical and contextual foundation upon which future scholars will depart on further examinations of photography and social abjection in the British visual culture of the neoliberal age.

¹³ E. Cleary, Lucy Lee and Sarah Kunz, *Public Attitudes to Poverty and Welfare, 1983-2011* (London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2013)

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30

RATS!

Fester Square—Page 5



BITING: Bulley quickly immobilizes a dead cat during the down-control station routine. **Picture:** DAVID BRINCHLEY



VICTORY: Thumbs up from Anne last night.
"It's been 12 months of just hell."

FREED FROM HELL!

Landlady in rocking chair murder case is cleared

By MICHAEL REPORTER

I took the train from one of the dozens of railway stops some 200 miles east and found the town crowded.

Mrs. Halperin was arrested in January 1968 and charged with harboring three escaped convicts in her home for six days in Southern Blvd. Washington Square.

She was charged in two counts, both involving a finding of guilty to first-degree murder.

It was said that Mike Muckernagel, 34, long and muscular, stands at least four feet and weighs two hundred as a minimum. Mike, Arnold said, has

series after changing the
oil in the thermostat
the engine died

The authors state that the results indicate that people "perceive engineering" as the best and that the engineers are "active and knowledgeable".

LEYLAND BREAKDOWN — Page 1

Fig. 2 'A right old mess', *Daily Express*, 9 February, 1979, p. 1

Fig. 3 Homer Sykes, *Winter of Discontent*, 1979. Courtesy of Homer Sykes Archive.



Fig. 4 Chris Steele-Perkins, *Family Living in Poverty*, 1975



Fig. 5 *Labour Isn't Working*, 1978. Conservative Party Archive, Shelf-mark: 1978/9-01

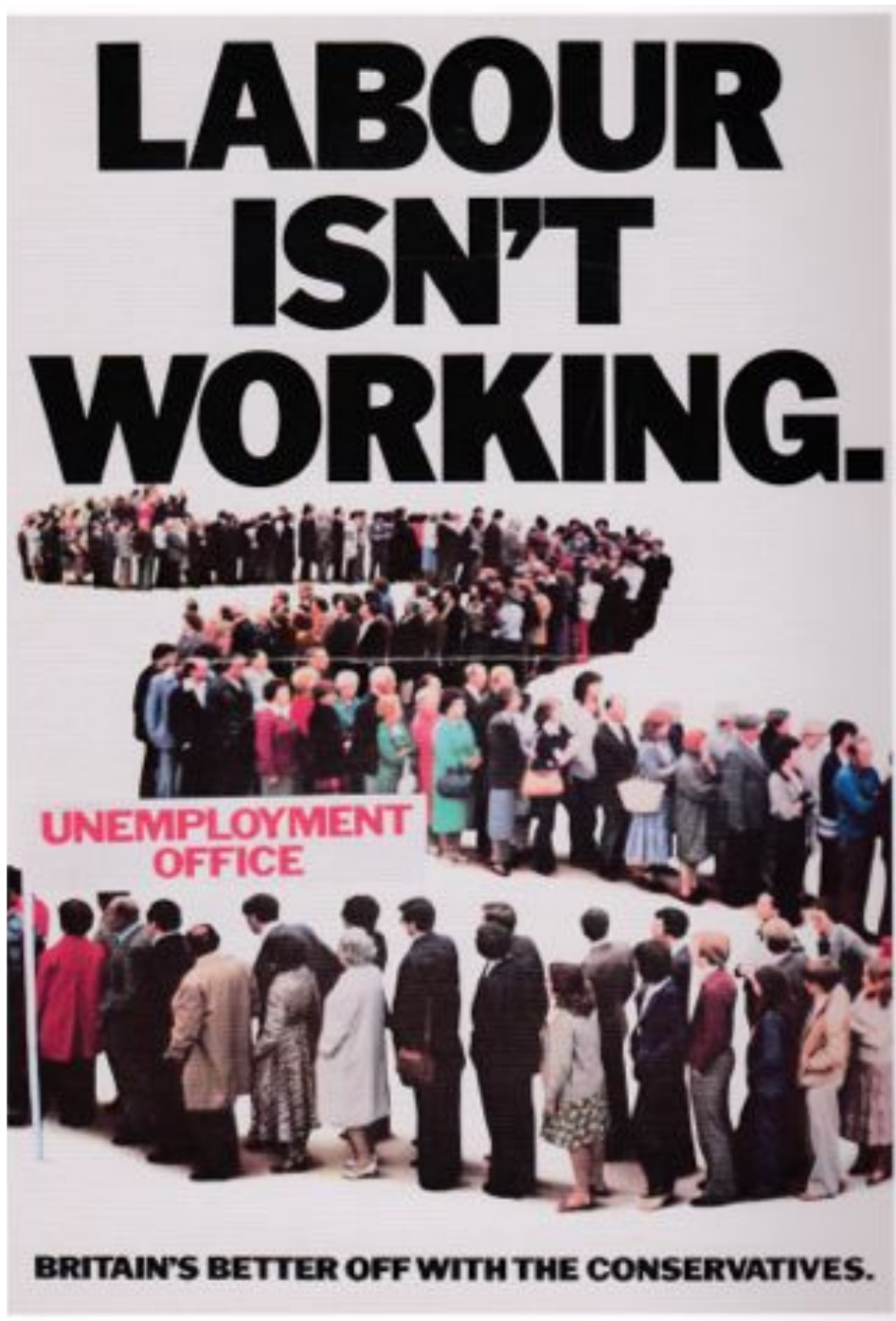


Fig. 6 *Britain Isn't Getting Any Better*, 1979. Conservative Party Archive, Shelf-mark: 1978/9-12



Fig. 7 Cover of *New Society* magazine featuring cover art designed by Michael Bennett. Vol 48, no. 865, 3 May, 1979.

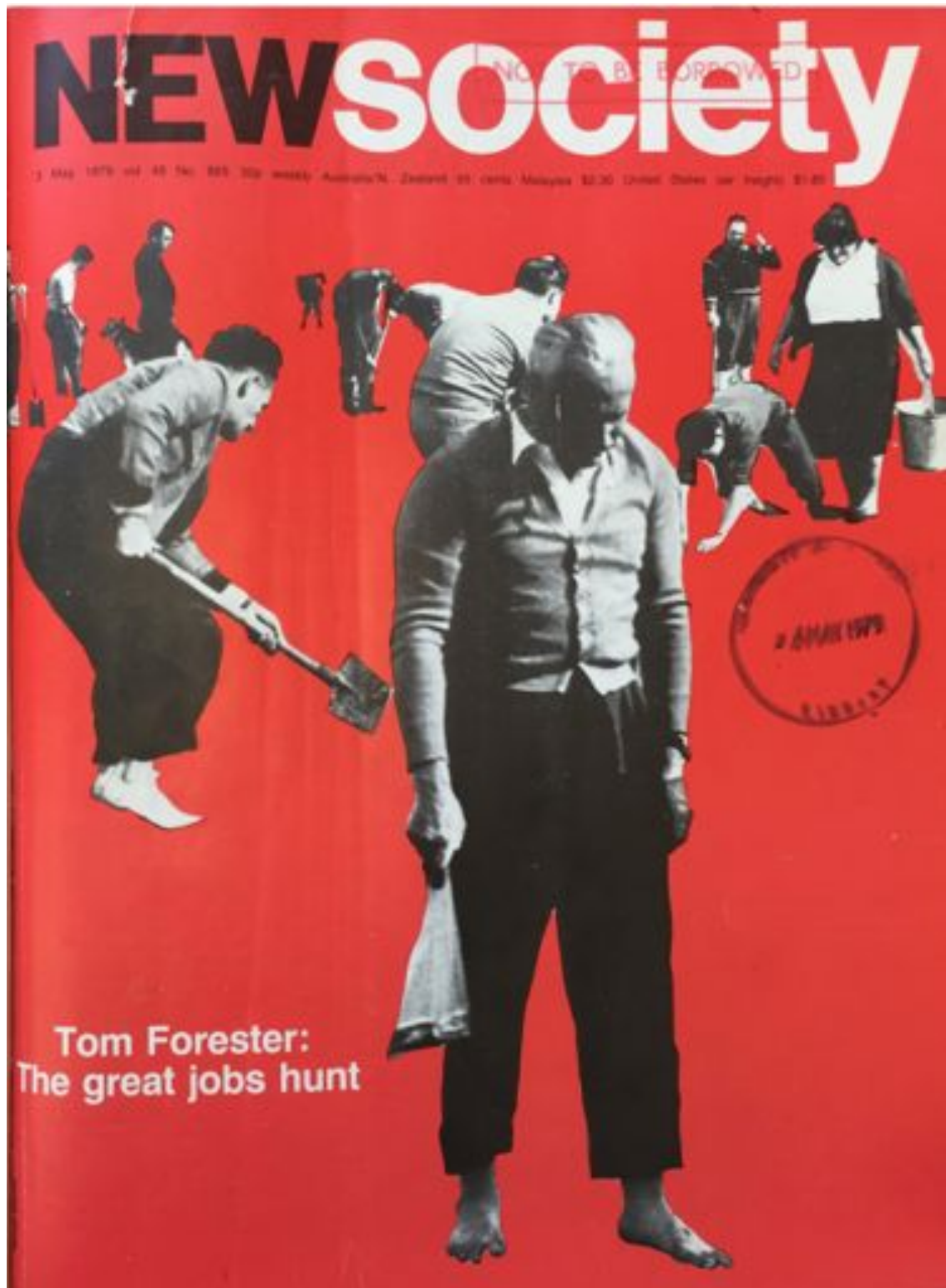


Fig. 8 *Labour Still Isn't Working*, 1978. Conservative Party Archive, Shelf-mark: 1978/9-10

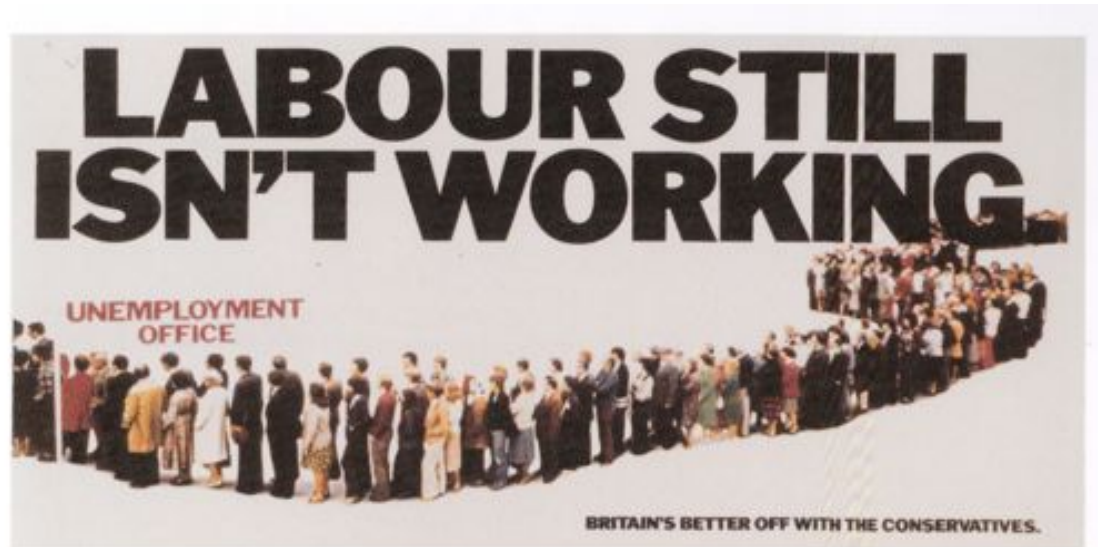


Fig. 9 *Queues Controls Rationing: Don't Risk It Again!*, 1955. Conservative Party Archive, Shelf-mark: 1955-04

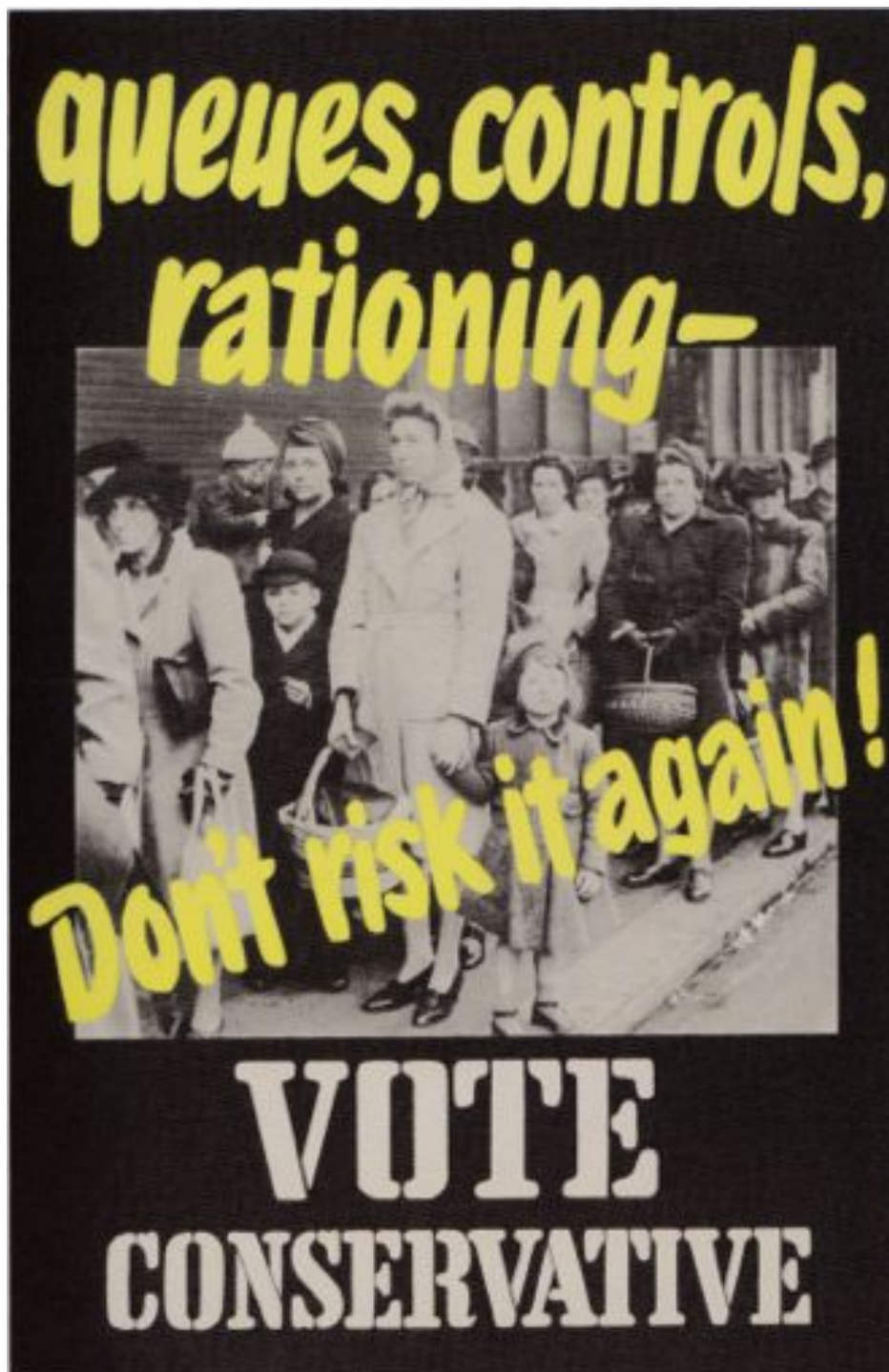


Fig. 10 *1984*, 1979. Conservative Party Archive, Shelf-mark: 1978/9-11



Fig. 11 Photographs of rats and rubbish in 'Farewell Leicester Square', *Daily Express*, 2 February, 1979, pp.2-3



Fig. 12 Homer Sykes, *Winter of Discontent*, 1979. Courtesy of Homer Sykes Archive.



Fig. 13 'Blitzed Battered and Bewildered!' photographs by Chris Barham in *Daily Mail*, 13 April, 1981, pages 2-3



Fig. 14 Anonymous contact sheet detailing, Brixton, April 1981. Box: Uprisings/2/Photos. The Black Cultural Archives, London.



Fig. 14b Detail of anonymous contact sheet detailing, Brixton, April 1981. Box: Uprisings/2/Photos. The Black Cultural Archives, London.



Fig. 15 Chris Barham detail showing the ruins of Windsor Castle pub in *Daily Mail*, 13 April, 1981 p. 3



Fig. 17 Peter Marlow photographs of the 'Bidston waste pickers' in Ian Jack's 'Life on the Scrapheap', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 19 May 1985, pp. 30-31



Fig. 18 *Even when the Conservatives Talk Rubbish it Makes Sense*, 1983. Conservative Party Archive, Shelf-mark: 1983-11



Fig. 19 Are You Going to Vote Your Children Out of a Future?, 1983. London, Wright & Co. Reproduced in the *Daily Mirror*, May 1983

Page 18 Daily Mirror, Wednesday, May 4, 1983



ARE YOU GOING TO VOTE YOUR CHILDREN OUT OF A FUTURE?

To see your children's future under the Tories, you only have to look at the present. Nursery school places are closing. Primary schools are rapidly losing teachers. Secondary school pupils are having to share essential books. And once they leave school, 2 out of 3 youngsters enter the nightmare of no work. Are you seriously going to vote your children into this kind of future? Or are you going to think positive and vote Labour?

Only Labour has the experience and policies to give Britain's children and adults a future again. To begin, we'll invest heavily in developing transport, housing and new technology. It's a tried and tested way of building new jobs and lowering the price tag. (Currently a monstrous £17 billion!) With jobs again, people buy things again. To produce them, industry hires more people still.

We will also spend more on pensions, child benefits, the NHS and education. We will especially speed move on training the young jobless to get jobs. But the Tories claim Britain cannot afford all this.

Under the Tories, that's true. The Tories waste Britain's savings and oil wealth abroad. Labour will invest them in Britain.

To discover Labour's further plans for a healthier society, send the coupon. And stop a Tory future before it stops your children's.

To Sir Wright, The Labour Party, PO Box 200, 100 Piccadilly, London W1A 0AA. I would like to know more about Labour's plans for Britain's future.

Name _____
 Address _____
 Post Code _____

THINK POSITIVE ~~X~~ VOTE LABOUR.

Fig. 20 Are You Going to Vote Another 34,000 Firms Out of Business? 1983. London, Wright & Co. Reproduced in the *Daily Mirror*, May 1983

Page 20 DAILY MIRROR, Friday, May 20, 1983



ARE YOU GOING TO VOTE ANOTHER 34,000 FIRMS OUT OF BUSINESS?

Since the Tories took over, 34,000 firms have gone under. In England and Wales alone.

That's one firm every hour. And the shut-downs are speeding up. 22,000 of them were in 1982.

And investment in Britain's industrial rebirth? Down by a third since 1973.

And productivity? Up 5% per worker. Versus Labour's 14% increase in the previous 4 years.

Are you going to vote for another 5 more years of economic suicide?

Or are you going to think positive and vote Labour on June 9th?

Only Labour has the policies and experience to open Britain for business once again.

Our opening move will be heavy investment in industry: transport, housing, new technology.

It won't be the first time this method has produced a rise in new jobs and a drop in the dole bill (Currently a crippling £17 billion.)

With jobs again, people can spend money again. To produce what they buy. Industry takes on more people in turn.

We'll also get people spending by increasing pensions, child benefits, education and NHS funding.

But the Tory story is that Britain can't afford it.

With the Tories, it's a true story. Because they waste Britain's savings and oil wealth abroad.

But Labour will invest them in Britain.

If you truly want a healthier society, vote Labour on June 9th.

And put the Tories out of business before they put Britain out of business.

THINK POSITIVE. ACT POSITIVE. ~~X~~ VOTE LABOUR.

Fig. 21 Are You Going to Vote yourself Out of a Job? 1983. London, Wright & Co. Reproduced in the *Daily Mirror*, May 1983

Page 16 Saturday, April 24, 1983

ARE YOU GOING TO VOTE YOURSELF OUT OF A JOB?

Every day this government hangs on to its job, another 1,385 people lose theirs. Adding millions more to the country's £17 billion dole bill.
In fact, the Tories spend more on keeping people jobless than they do on keeping people healthy.
Are you going to vote for another five years of this nightmare?
Or are you going to think positive and vote Labour?
Only Labour has the experience and policies to get Britain working again.
The moment you bring Labour back, we will start an emergency programme of

investment in industry, transport, housing and new technology.
It is a tried and tested method for creating new jobs and reducing the dole bill.
With jobs again, people can start to buy things again. To produce them, industry then takes on even more people.
We'll also encourage the economy to grow by increasing pensions, child benefits, education and health service spending.
But what of the Tory claim that Britain can't afford it?
It's a matter of priorities.
Where the Tories waste Britain's vital savings and oil wealth abroad, Labour will

invest those precious resources in Britain.
For details of Labour's plan to build a healthier society send the coupon.
And sack the Tories before they sack you.

To Jim Wright, The Labour Party, FREEPOST, 355 Shaftesbury Road, London WC2H 9BA.
I would like to know more about Labour's plans for Britain's future.

Name PLEASE PRINT
 Address
 Post Code

THINK POSITIVE ~~X~~ VOTE LABOUR.

Fig. 22 Are You Going to Vote for Retirement at 16? 1983. London, Wright & Co. Reproduced in the *Daily Mirror*, May 1983

Page 12 DAILY MIRROR, Tuesday, May 10, 1983 ADVERTISEMENT



ARE YOU GOING TO VOTE FOR RETIREMENT AT 16?

This summer, two out of every three school leavers will find it impossible to get a job.

They'll join more than a million other young people who are under 25 and unemployed.

And under the Tories, there is little hope of their prospects improving.

Over the past two years, long-term unemployment among Britain's young has increased threefold.

Are you going to vote for another five years of this waste?

Or are you going to think positive and vote Labour on June 9th?

Only Labour has the policies and the experience to get Britain working again.

The moment you bring Labour back, we will start an emergency programme of investment in industry, housing, transport and new technology.

It's a tried and tested method of building new jobs and reducing the dole bill (Currently a crippling £17 billion.)

With jobs again, people can spend money again. To produce what they buy, industry hires more people still.

We will also encourage spending by increasing pensions, child benefits, NHS and education funding.

We will especially spend more on training the young jobless to get jobs.

But what of the Tories' claim that Britain cannot afford all this?

It's simply a matter of priorities.

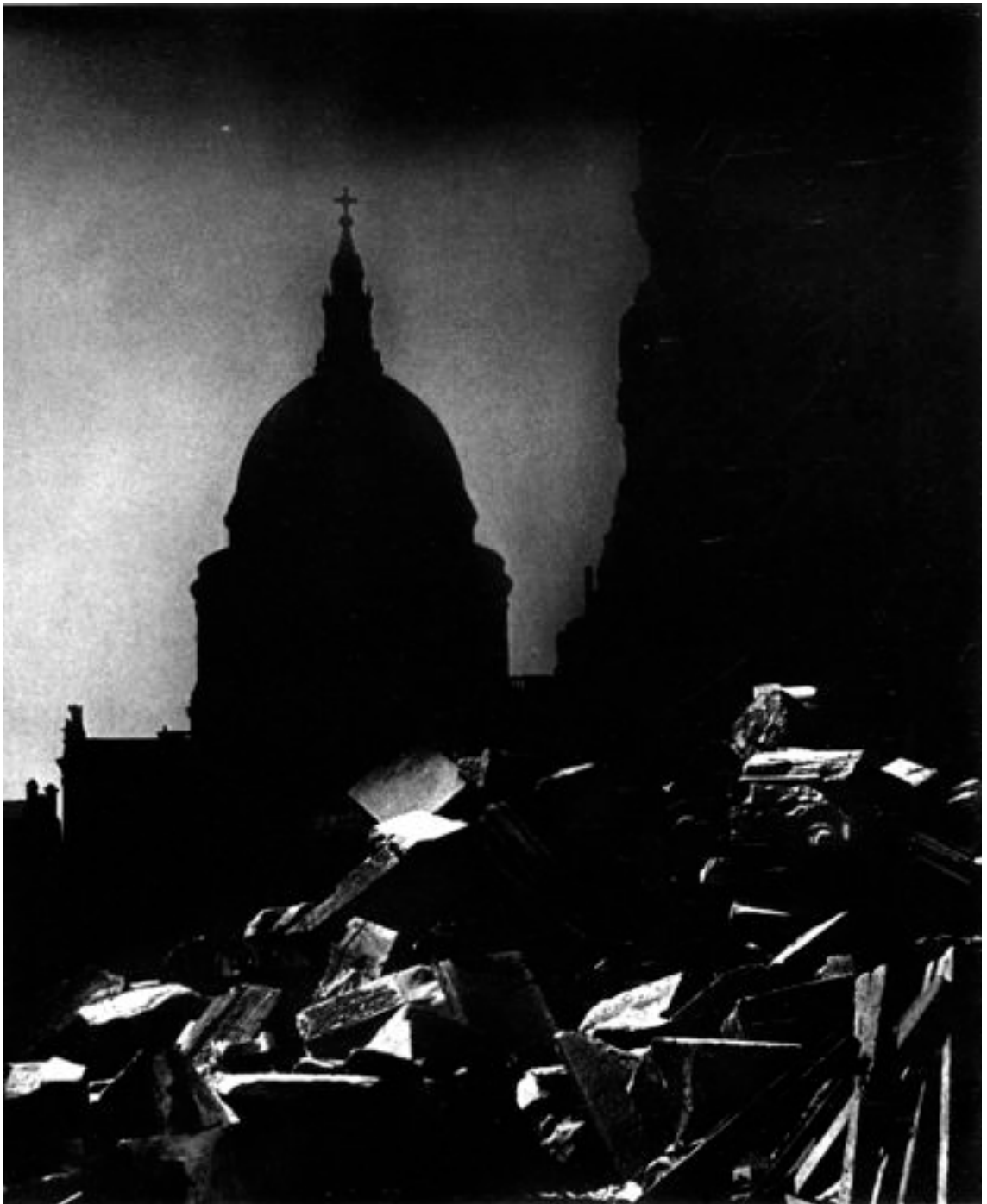
Where the Tories waste Britain's savings and oil wealth abroad, Labour will invest them in Britain.

To help us build a healthier society, vote Labour on June 9th.

And retire the Tories before they retire you. Or your children.

THINK POSITIVE. ACT POSITIVE X VOTE LABOUR.

Fig. 23 Bill Brandt, St Paul's Cathedral in Moonlight, 1939.



[illegible]

Fig. 25 Bill Brandt, Coal searcher going home from Jarrow 1936, in *Picture Post*, April, 1947.



Fig. 26 Chris Killip, Woman in a bus shelter, Middlesborough, 1976



27. Chris Killip, Women at a bus stop, Middlesborough, 1976



Fig. 28 Chris Killip, Beach, Askam in Furness, Cumbria, 1982



Fig. 29 Chris Killip, Crabs and people, Skinningrove, 1981.



Fig. 30 Chris Killip, Helen and Hula-hoop, Seacoal Beach, Lynemouth, Northumberland, UK, 1984



Fig. 31 Chris Killip, 'Cookie' in the Snow, Seacoal Beach, Lynemouth, Northumberland, UK, 1984



Fig. 32 Chris Killip, Rosie and Rucker Going Home, Seacoal Beach, Lynemouth, Northumberland, UK, 1984



Fig. 33 Walker Evans, *Allie Mae Burroughs*, 1935 or 1936. Image courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Collection.

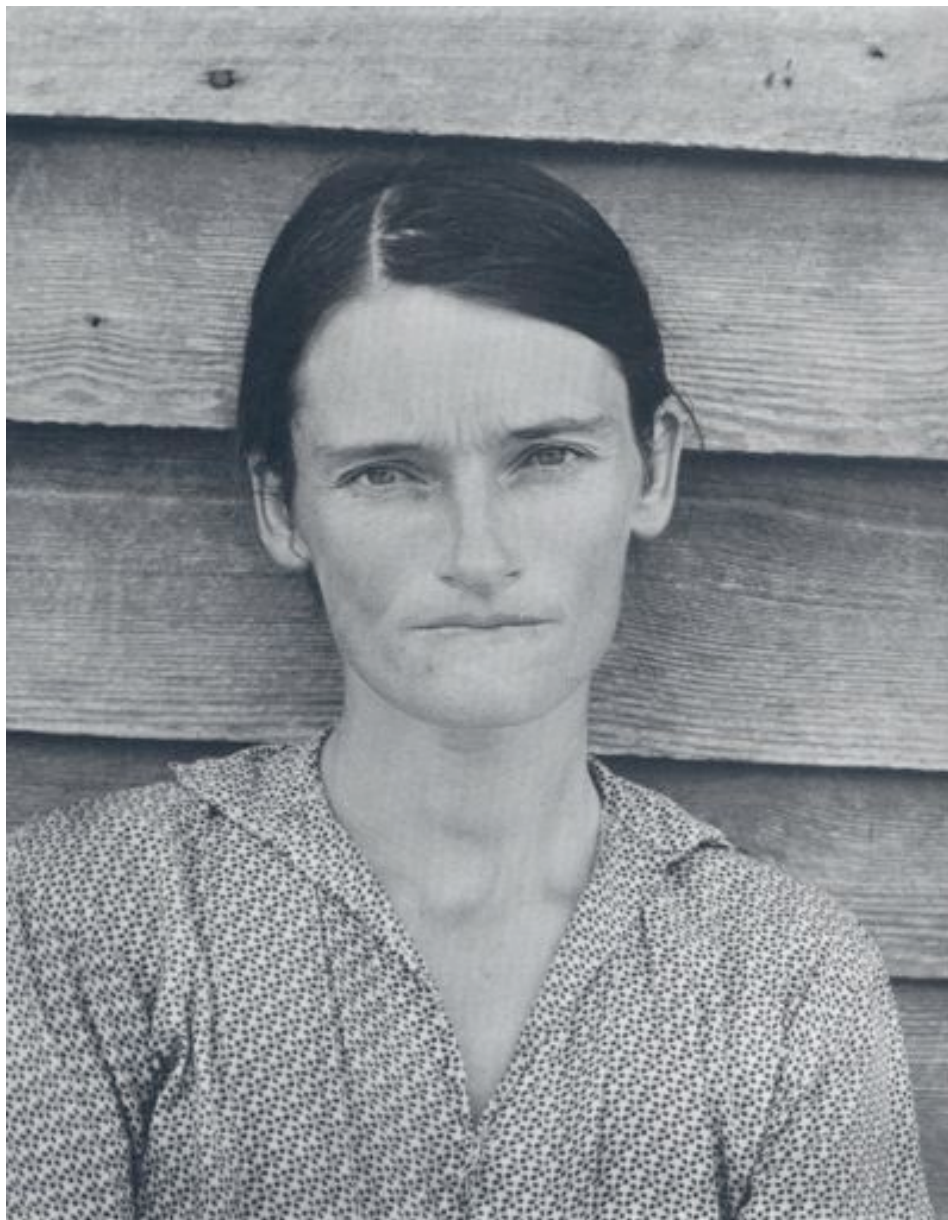


Fig. 34 Chris Killip, Untitled, 1984



Fig. 35 Chris Killip, *Angelic Upstarts Gig, Middlesborough, 1986*



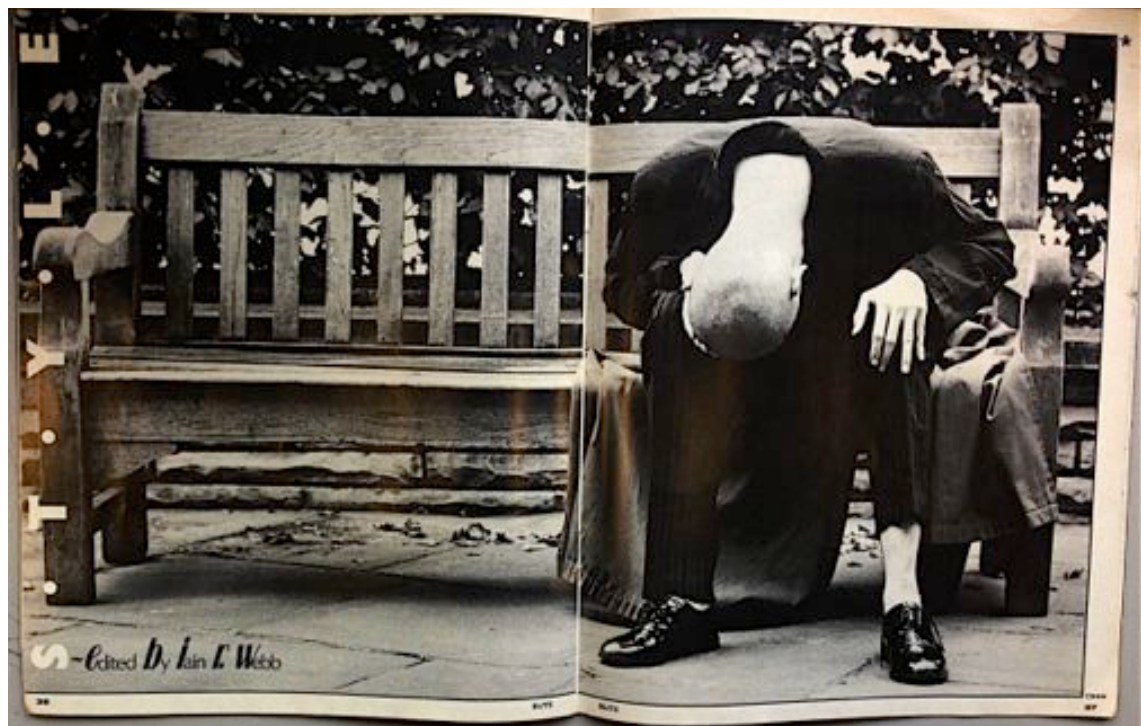
Fig. 36 Chris Killip, Boy on a Wall, Jarrow, Tyneside, 1976



Fig. 37 Derek Ridgers Punks and Blitz kids in *Guardian* 'How do you orchestrate an emotion like boredom?', 10 December, 1980, p. 14



Fig. 38 'Style: Down and Out!', photographs by David Hiscox in *Blitz*, November, 1984 p. 36-7



All together—Labour stalwarts, Women's Libbers, militant Lettles...



IT was the 20th day out of 25 that the rain had cascaded over the heads of the marchers and rolled in miniature rivers down the regulation-issue green jackets.

It was the 20th day out of 25 that the rain had cascaded over the heads of the marchers and rolled in miniature rivers down the regulation-issue green jackets.

[illegible]

**Heartening
enthrone**

[illegible][illegible]

Genuinely
non-political

It is hard to remember the detailed circumstances, but I remember the fact that I was not alone. I was with a group of people, and I was not alone. I was with a group of people, and I was not alone. I was with a group of people, and I was not alone.

RUSSELL
LEWIS
JOINS
THE WET.



GREEN
SNAKE
ON ITS
PROTEST

THE NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION, established in 1908, is a non-profit corporation. It is the largest and most influential of the state bar associations in the United States. The association is composed of lawyers who are members of the New York State Bar. The association's primary purpose is to promote the highest standards of the legal profession and to protect the public interest. The association's activities include the publication of the *New York State Bar Journal*, the holding of annual meetings, and the provision of continuing education for its members. The association also maintains a fund for the benefit of the poor and the indigent. The association's headquarters are located in New York City.

Agathis
lysandera

The last year has been a very busy one for me. I have been working on a number of projects, including a new book on the history of the United States. I have also been traveling a great deal, visiting many of the most interesting places in the country. I have been very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with some of the best people in the field, and I have learned a great deal from them. I am looking forward to continuing my work in the future, and I am grateful for the support and encouragement I have received from my friends and colleagues.

Fig. 40 Gerry Weaser photograph in 'Rallying Call' in *Guardian*, 3 November, 1986, p. 2

HOME NEWS

Union report attacks 'disaster' of the Telecom privatisation

Firms gain 'at cost of private BT customer'

By Paula Whelan, *Telecom Correspondent*

As the Telecom Commission's report on the privatisation of British Telecom (BT) is published, it is likely to be a damning indictment of the process. The report, which is expected to be published in the next few days, is likely to be a damning indictment of the process. The report, which is expected to be published in the next few days, is likely to be a damning indictment of the process.

Yamani ponders future outside oil

By John Ridd, *Energy Correspondent*

Yamani is ponders the future of his country outside oil. He is a member of the National Assembly and is a member of the National Assembly.

Archer alibi under Tory scrutiny

By John Ridd, *Energy Correspondent*

Archer's alibi is under Tory scrutiny. He is a member of the National Assembly and is a member of the National Assembly.

Woman in Nirex protest faces gaol

By John Ridd, *Energy Correspondent*

A woman who took part in a protest at the Nirex site has been charged with criminal damage. She is a member of the National Assembly and is a member of the National Assembly.

TV dispute nears an end

By John Ridd, *Energy Correspondent*

The dispute between the BBC and the Independent Television Companies has nearly come to an end. The dispute between the BBC and the Independent Television Companies has nearly come to an end.

Kinnock tackles reshuffle

By John Ridd, *Energy Correspondent*

Mr Kinnock is tackling the reshuffle. He is a member of the National Assembly and is a member of the National Assembly.

Union leader urges deal on shorter working week

By John Ridd, *Energy Correspondent*

A union leader is urging a deal on a shorter working week. He is a member of the National Assembly and is a member of the National Assembly.

Screening starts for meningitis

By John Ridd, *Energy Correspondent*

Screening for meningitis has started. He is a member of the National Assembly and is a member of the National Assembly.

MPs in question

By John Ridd, *Energy Correspondent*

MPs are in question. He is a member of the National Assembly and is a member of the National Assembly.

Disobed to grow

By John Ridd, *Energy Correspondent*

Disobedience is growing. He is a member of the National Assembly and is a member of the National Assembly.

Mass arrests in nuclear protests

By John Ridd, *Energy Correspondent*

Mass arrests have taken place in nuclear protests. He is a member of the National Assembly and is a member of the National Assembly.

Brighton murders: man released

By John Ridd, *Energy Correspondent*

A man has been released in the Brighton murders case. He is a member of the National Assembly and is a member of the National Assembly.

Couple find son's friend murdered

By John Ridd, *Energy Correspondent*

A couple have found their son's friend murdered. He is a member of the National Assembly and is a member of the National Assembly.

Private pupils turn to the tuck shop

By John Ridd, *Energy Correspondent*

Private pupils are turning to the tuck shop. He is a member of the National Assembly and is a member of the National Assembly.

'Bland pap' over merger

By John Ridd, *Energy Correspondent*

The paper is 'bland' over the merger. He is a member of the National Assembly and is a member of the National Assembly.

MAKE THAT CALL

MIDLAND
The Listening Bank

We always like to keep our ears open for any comments you like to make on improving our services. Now we've made listening to you even easier. We've introduced new equipment and telephone numbers into our main offices in London and Sheffield, which will enable us to deal more efficiently with your telephone enquiries and will allow you to deal directly to individual customers in these offices.

From Monday 2 November the new numbers are as follows:

| | |
|--|---|
| Midland Bank plc Head Office, 25 Abchurch Lane, London EC4N 3DF | Midland Bank plc, Public and Private Bank Branch, London EC4N 3DF |
| Midland Bank Trust Co. Ltd., Regent Office, 10 Grosvenor Street, London W1A 3AA | 01-260 70000 |
| Midland Bank Insurance Services Ltd., 25 Abchurch Lane, London EC4N 3DF | 0442-528000 |
| Midland Bank plc International Division, 100 Cannon Street, London EC4N 3AA | 0442-529000 |
| Midland Bank Group International Trade Services Ltd., 100 Cannon Street, London EC4N 3AA | 01-260 6000 |
| Midland Bank plc Group Treasury, Bank House, Leamington Spa, Warwick CV34 5EF | 01-260 0600 |

MAKE THAT CALL

MIDLAND
The Listening Bank

Fig. 41 Unedited Gerry Weaser photograph, 'Man with crossed arms, flat cap', 2 November 1986. OBS/6/9/2/1/, Box 6 in Guardian News and Media Archive, London.



Fig. 42 Derek Ridgers, Chris Sullivan, The Venue, London, 1981



Fig. 43 Ron Burton photograph in 'On the Scrapheap, Britain's Future', *Daily Mirror*, 6 June, 1983, p. 1



Fig. 44 Ron Burton's alternative 'scrapheap' images. Daily Mirror Picture Archive/Mirrorpix



Fig. 45 Tom Buist photograph in 'The missing homes' in *Daily Mirror*, 'Waste of a Nation' feature 2 June 1983, p. 3

WASTE OF A NATION

The missing homes

■THE number of houses built by councils in Britain has more than halved under the Tories—dropping from 104,000 in 1979 to 49,000 last year.

■COUNCIL rents have more than doubled in the first four years of the Thatcher Government. Court summonses for repossession of houses for rent or mortgage arrears have doubled, too.

■LOCAL authorities are spending just £500 million on new homes this year. Under Labour in 1978 the figure was £1,400 million.

■NEARLY 400,000 building workers are on the dole. More than 2,000 building firms went bust last year.

Waiting

■IN 1978 there were one million people on council house waiting lists. By next year the numbers are expected to reach two million.

■THERE are more than a million unfit homes in Britain today and a further million needing extensive repairs.

■AROUND 500,000 council houses have been sold since the right-to-buy Act. Only 240,000 have been built.

■UNDER Tory plans, the most heavily subsidised householder will be the high-income owner with a £30,000 mortgage, who can expect to get back £30 a week in tax relief.

■STAMP duty nets the Treasury almost £500 million from house deals.



HEARTBREAK HOMES: Families actually live along this terrace in Doncaster Road, Rotherham. They pay £16.20 a week for the two bedroom council homes—with little hope of moving

Picture: TOM BUIST

Fig. 46 Detail of page showing Don McPhee's photograph in Chris Huhne's, 'Now it's official - the nation is falling apart' in *Guardian*, 11 July, 1985, p. 24



Fig. 47 Chris Killip, North Shields Housing Estate, 1981.



Fig. 48 Paul Graham, Untitled, from the series *Beyond Caring*, 1984-5



Fig. 49 Tish Murtha, photograph of a Tyneside family in Tyneside House Aid Charity (Shelter) booklet, 1979

At 13 years . . . a life of overcrowding

In 1979, the YEAR OF THE CHILD, George 15, Andrew 14 and Kevin 4, share a 2m x 1½m boxroom called 'bedroom'—George sleeps in one bed and his two brothers only inches away in the other, smelly socks and other clothes tucked under their pillows because there is no room for drawers or wardrobes. "We have to leave the window open every night so that we can breathe," George said during the coldest winter for 40 years.

His 5 younger sisters, he said, had been sharing one of the two bigger bedrooms, with his parents in the other, and his 17 year old brother in the second boxroom-like bedroom. But because the girls could never get any sleep his parents moved their own bed into the living room. Now they can't go to sleep until everyone else has gone to bed and it upsets his mother that the children will sometimes notice the bloody evidence of her illness on the sheets because "there is no privacy here—not even when you are sick."



The nine Atkinson children aged 3-17 have always had to suffer the stress and limitations of being overcrowded in council houses built for the average four-person household. There has never been enough room to sit together for a meal or cup of tea, not even at Christmas, or to put up enough drawers and wardrobes so that everyone can find their clothes. Friends have always been made and lost again because there hasn't been the space to take them home. Homework on the other hand is simply impossible. "I try to do it now and again," 12 year old Sheila said, "but the little ones keep interrupting and I get all muddled up and then get told off at school." The fight for tidiness is a losing battle despite four daily sessions of

Fig. 50 Tish Murtha, *Untitled*, from the series *Juvenile Jazz Bands*, 1979.



Fig. 51 Tish Murtha, *Untitled*, from the series *Youth Unemployment*, 1981



Fig. 52 Tish Murtha, *Untitled*, from the series *Youth Unemployment*, 1981



Fig. 53 Sirkka Liisa Kontinnen, Byker children with collected junk, 1971, from the series *Byker* 1983.



Fig. 54 Tish Murtha, *Untitled*, from the series *Youth Unemployment*, 1981



Fig. 55 Tish Murtha, *Untitled*, from the series *Youth Unemployment*, 1981



Fig. 56 Tish Murtha, *Untitled*, from the series *Youth Unemployment*, 1981



Fig. 57 Tish Murtha, *Untitled*, from the series *Youth Unemployment*, 1981



2 PAGE 2 DAILY MIRROR, Wednesday, October 27, 1987

++ MONEY CRISIS ++ MONEY CRISIS ++ MONEY CRISIS ++

CRASH DIVIDE!

LONDON +++ Traders watching a price guide are wide-eyed with anxiety

Round the world

WAVE after wave of selling swept world stock exchanges yesterday in the wake of the great crash of Black Monday.

From Athens to Zurich, sharp-eyed investors were dumping their shares on panic-stricken markets.

But before even traders got on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, where other stockholders looked from across.

One official said: "Panic was being all over the place."

By ROBERT HEAD in London and STEWART JACKSON in New York

The storm is simply unprecedented and creating up a lot of panic.

"There had to be a crash by market rule for the first time in 100 years," said a senior official.

President Reagan's last night's address to the nation, promising to restore the economy.

But when asked what had caused the crash the President looked puzzled, stressed and

hesitant and said: "I just don't know."

The crash went started in NEW YORK'S Wall Street, where it started on (LONDON) yesterday morning, when panicked traders sold their shares then they had all day Monday.

In TOKYO Japanese shares dropped by nearly 10 per cent in their biggest crash and sell-off since 1931.

Even India in KUTNEY the stock was nearly down - nearly 20 per cent. Some shares there had lost their value in one day.

In FRANKFURT Germany was more recovery after heavy fall.

YOUR SHARE PRICES

HERE'S how shares of the "crashed" giants — domesticated industries and TSB — stood at last night's closing prices compared with what investors paid for them when they were first sold off.

| Company | DATE SOLD | 1987 END | 1987 NEW |
|---------|-----------|----------|----------|
| A&E | Feb. 87 | 100 | 122 |
| Amstar | Feb. 87 | 100 | 142 |
| Amstar | Feb. 86 | 100 | 142 |
| Amstar | Feb. 86 | 100 | 142 |
| Amstar | Feb. 86 | 100 | 142 |
| Amstar | Feb. 86 | 100 | 142 |
| Amstar | Feb. 86 | 100 | 142 |
| Amstar | Feb. 86 | 100 | 142 |

Shambles

Quitting words from Government Ministers and stock exchange officials said they had been left in London and New York.

London Stock Exchange chairman Sir Nicholas Leitch said that there was an internal reason for the fall and "the market will bounce back."

But the heavy wave was swept away in a hurricane of selling which wiped out over 500 billion of the value of Britain's stock exchange for the second day running.

The shambles was summed up by one top American money dealer.

"The market's gone for good," he said.

"There are no more serious price declines. It's just a sell-off."

In London's Yuppies last, City where both were left with nothing except to trade except disaster strikes.

Profit

Ken, from Detroit, waited until one share, before he selling point, when he sold his 10,000 shares for 10,000.

But within five minutes he had lost his 10,000 shares for 10,000.

"It's the way the market works," he said.

"Some young man up with an offer to sell me shares and I accepted it."

"There were similar bids from London. The Queen has lost her job. It's the end of the world."

"This is not the end of the world," he said.

"Things are going to be worse and I'll be in there. They cannot do without people like me."

What the big crash means to you, Page 5 Mirror Mirror, Page 2

WELLINGTON +++ A trader's frowny brow

SAN FRANCISCO +++ Head down in despair

STONEY +++ Open-mouthed down under

NEW YORK +++ Getting to grips with panic

TORONTO +++ Someone give me a hand

TOKYO +++ Incredible as ever in Japan

Fig. 59 Homer Sykes, London International Financial Futures Exchange (LIFFE) late 1980s.
Courtesy Homer Sykes Archive.



Fig. 60 Anna Fox, 'Fortunes are being made that are in line with the dreams of avarice'
from the series *Work Stations*, 1988



Fig. 61 Anna Fox, 'Freedom', from the series *Work Stations*, 1988



Fig. 62 Anna Fox, 'Should a competitor threaten to kill a sale...' from the series *Work Stations*, 1988



Fig. 63 Anna Fox, 'Celebrating the Killings', from the series *Work Stations*, 1988



Fig. 64 Ted Ditchburn's photograph of Margaret Thatcher 'walking in the wilderness' in Peter Hetherington, 'Thatcher closes her purse on cities', *Guardian*, 17 September 1987, p. 1.



Fig. 65 Paul Reas, Redundant Miner, from the series *Flogging a Dead Horse*, 1985-1993



Fig. 66 *Britain is Great Again Don't Let Labour Wreck It*, 1987, Conservative Party Archive, Shelf-mark 1987-14



Fig. 67 *Secondary Picketing*, 1987. Conservative Party Archive, Shelf-mark 1987-22



Fig. 68 Paul Reas, *Pig Motif*, from the series *I Can Help*, 1988



Fig. 69 Paul Reas, *Baby and Meat*, from the series *I Can Help*, 1988



Fig. 70 Paul Reas, *Selling Beds*, from the series *I Can Help*, 1988



Fig. 71 Martin Parr, Untitled, from the series *One Day Trip*, 1989



Fig. 72 Martin Parr, *Untitled*, from the series *One Day Trip*, 1989



Fig. 73 Martin Parr, Untitled, from the series *One Day Trip*, 1989



Fig. 74 Martin Parr, Untitled, from the series *One Day Trip*, 1989



Fig. 75 Keith Arnatt, Untitled, from the series *Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (A.O.N.B.)*, 1982-1984



Fig. 76 Keith Arnatt, Untitled, from the series *Miss Grace's Lane*, 1986-1987



Fig. 77 Keith Arnatt, Untitled, from the series *Miss Grace's Lane*, 1986-1987

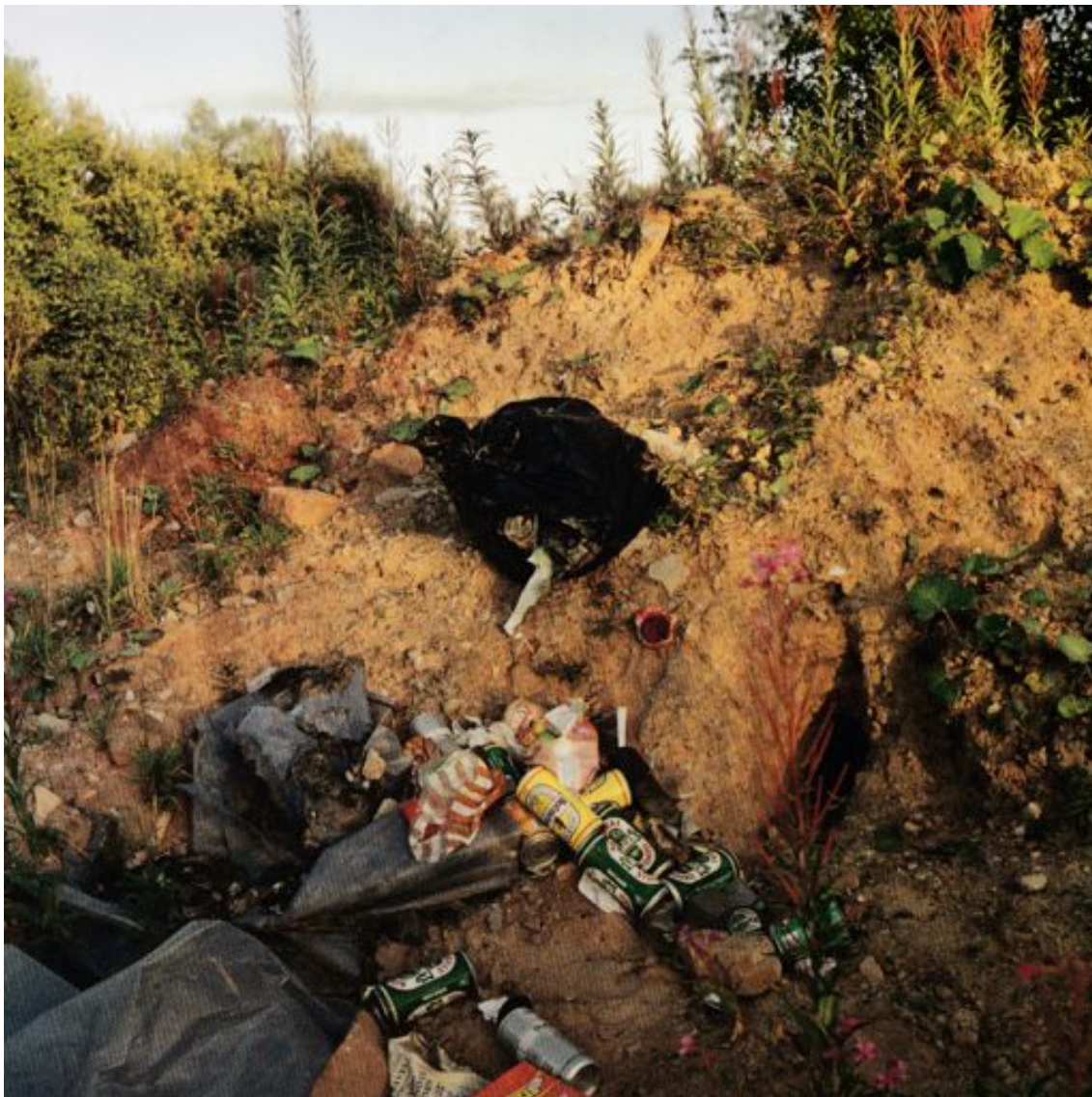


Fig. 78 Keith Arnatt, Untitled, from the series *Miss Grace's Lane*, 1986-1987



Fig. 79 Keith Arnatt, Untitled, from the series *Pictures from a Rubbish Tip*, 1988-1989



Fig. 80 Keith Arnatt, Untitled, from the series *Pictures from a Rubbish Tip*, 1988-1989



Fig. 81 Martin Parr, Untitled, from *The Last Resort*, 1986



Fig. 82 Martin Parr, *Untitled*, from *The Last Resort*, 1986



Fig. 83 Martin Parr, Untitled, from *The Last Resort*, 1986



Fig. 84 Martin Parr, Untitled, from *The Last Resort*, 1986



Fig. 85 Martin Parr, Untitled, from *The Last Resort*, 1986



Fig. 86 Martin Parr, *Untitled*, from *The Last Resort*, 1986



Fig. 87 Sirkka Liisa Kontinen, Walker, Newcastle Upon Tyne, 1987 from the series *Step by Step*, 1989



Fig. 88 Unknown photographer in D. Ehrlich, 'Moss Side Story' in *Daily Mail*, 1 September, 1993, pp. 13-14

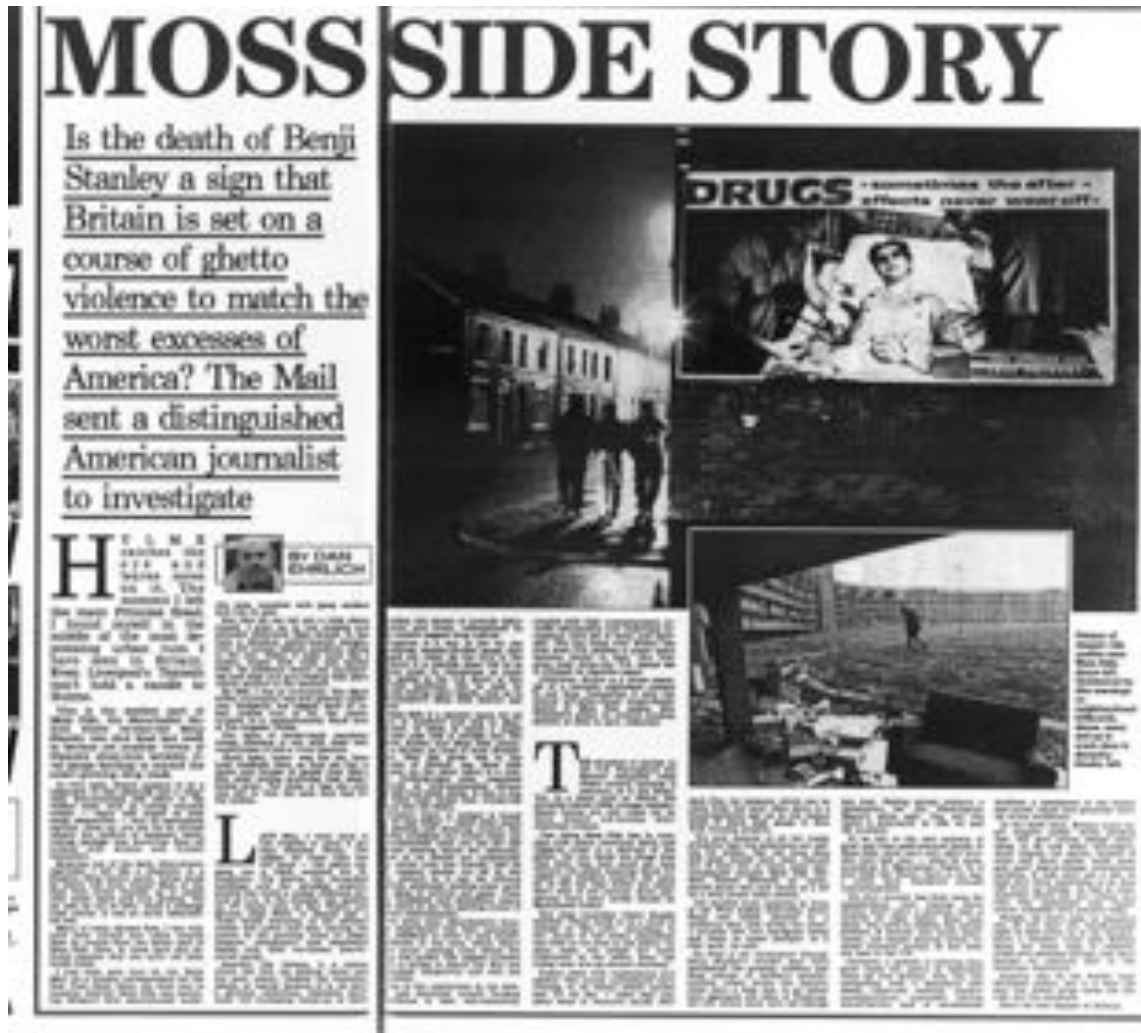


Fig. 89 National Union of Teachers advertisement, 'Diarrhoea. Dysentery. Hepatitis' poster in *Daily Mirror*, 8 April 1992, p. 31

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Diarrhoea. Dysentery. Hepatitis. The Third World?



No. The Third Form.

According to a recent survey more than half of all secondary schools have no facilities to comply with the Government's own regulations.

What's more, one in six primary schools and one in twelve secondary schools in Britain are still using outside toilets.

At the same time hygiene-related diseases like Hepatitis A and Dysentery, which thrive in cold, damp conditions, are on the increase.

These diseases should not occur anywhere, let alone in late 20th century Britain.

Last year the Government allocated less than a third of the money local authorities requested to replace and improve school buildings. Britain is now spending a smaller share of its national income on education than it did in 1979.

Little wonder then that there is a shortage of books, a shortage of teachers and that so

many schools are in urgent need of repair.

And of course it is our children who are paying the price of this underfunding.

Yet their education is an investment in the future of Britain.

If the necessary resources are not made available now, how can today's Third Formers possibly hope to live in a first class economy tomorrow?



Our children are paying for cheap education.



Fig. 91 Ken Lennox's photographs of a rubbish-filled housing estate in S. Young 'We have a big job to do in those inner cities' in *Daily Mirror*, 6 April, 1992, pp. 16-17



Fig. 92 Mark Power, 'People live here not animals', 1985

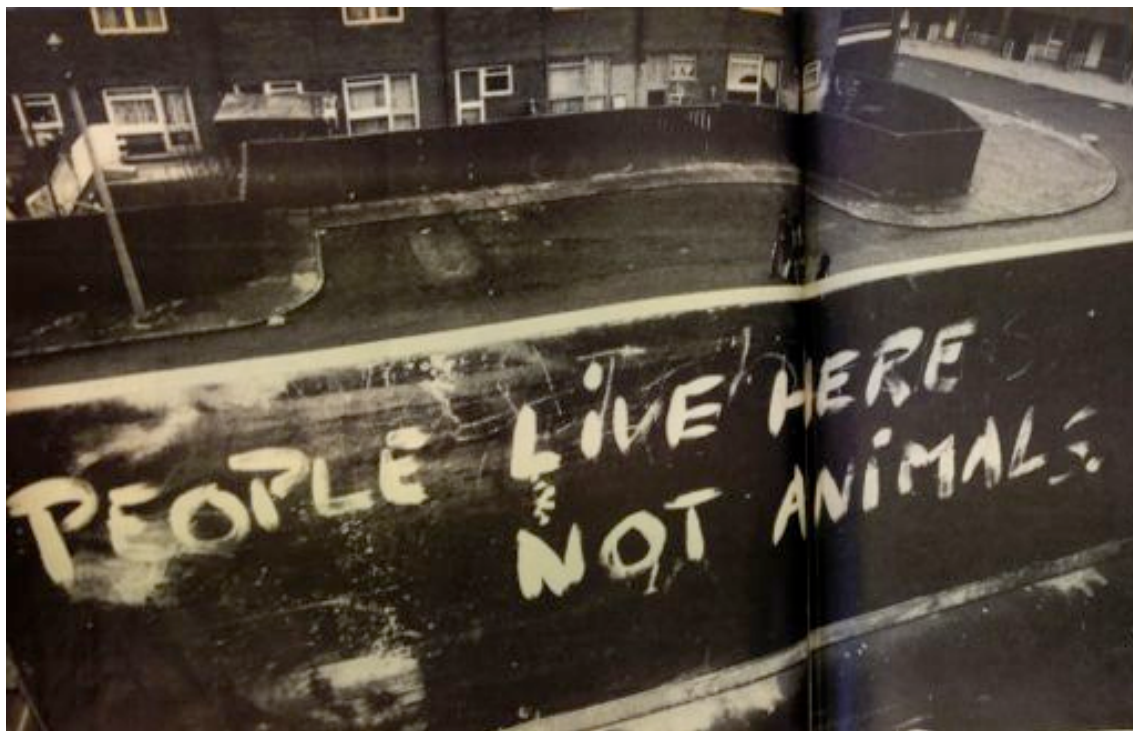


Fig. 93 Front cover of Nick Waplington's 1991 book *Living Room*, 1991

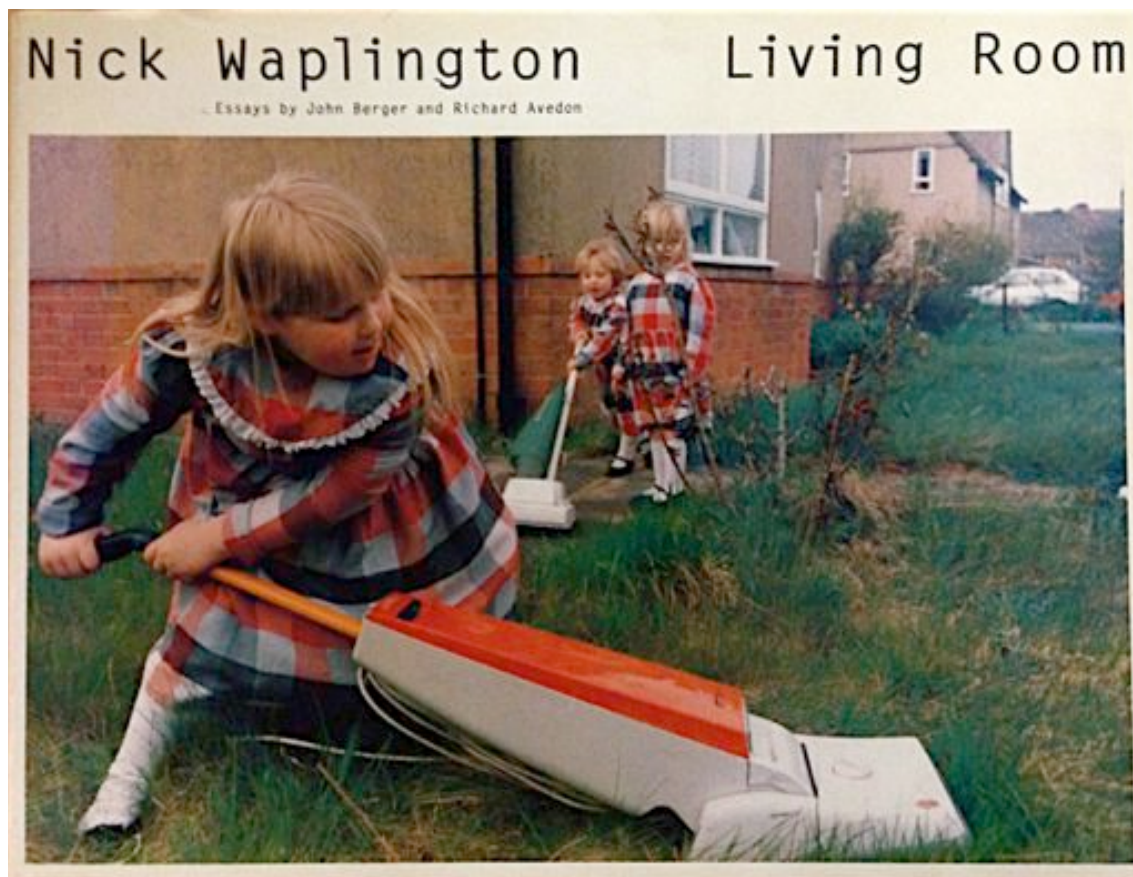


Fig. 94 Nick Waplington Untitled, from the series Living Room, 1991

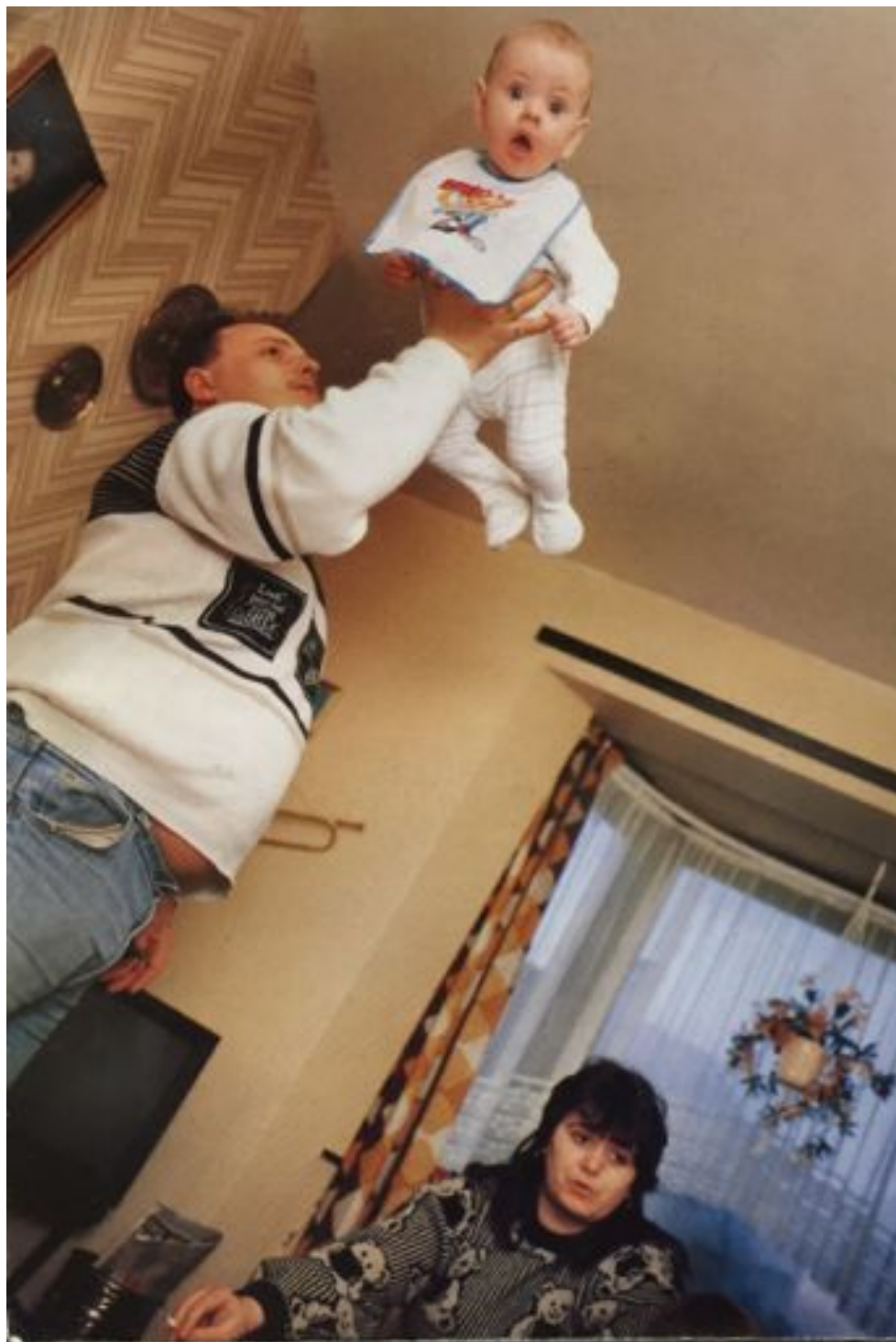


Fig. 95 Nick Waplington, *Untitled*, from the series *Living Room*, 1991



Fig. 96 Nick Waplington, Untitled, from the series *Living Room*, 1991



Fig. 97 Nick Waplington, *Untitled*, from the series *Living Room*, 1991



Fig. 98 Nick Waplington, *Untitled*, from the series *Living Room*, 1991



Fig. 99 Si Barber, Massage Pleasure Zone Caravan, Darlington, from the series *The Big Society*, 2011



Fig. 100 Si Barber, *Nothing Left*, from the series *The Big Society*, 2011



Fig. 101 Si Barber, Scarecrow, Norfolk, from the series *The Big Society*, 2011



Fig. 102 Si Barber, Prison Tattoo, Bradford, from the series *The Big Society*, 2011

