



ECONOMY

The Elephant and Castle

Contents

6

Michal Honkys

14

Rebecca Harley

22

Francesco Stelitano

30

Wing Ki Lee

40

Steve Mepsted

48

Rhian Clugston

56

Marta Moreiras

64

Freya Najade

72

Tommaso Protti

80

Marco Pavan

90

Julian Lass

98

Duncan Nicol Robertson

106

Sean Hayes White

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The Elephant and Castle

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Shooting the Elephant

Each year the MA Photojournalism and Documentary Photography students at the LCC work on a project documenting the Elephant and Castle. They are responding to an area undergoing the profound changes of regeneration. The course tutors give the students a simple theme, like work or community, and encourage them to find engaging ways of producing documentary photographs. A key concept for this element of the course is taking risks and challenging their practice. The results are naturally unpredictable: some of their best work has emerged from these assignments and occasionally, to be fair, some of their worst. A trilogy of books: Home, Community and now Economy has been edited from their outputs.

Each year a different group of students is sent out into the locality to make fresh work. Inevitably some of their projects overlap: the same subjects are photographed but in different ways. What has emerged is not simple repetition. The differing visual strategies employed to document the same territory has led to a rich layering of imagery. The result is a statement about

the Elephant but also about the processes, potential and partiality of all forms of documentary photography.

The widely held stereotype of the area is encapsulated by Giles Coren’s description of the Elephant as a “stabby shite hole of staggering grimness”. This negative image has recently produced unexpected dividends: while the few remaining Heygate tenants were being “decanted” from their homes, the estate became a popular film location, a backdrop offering directors an instant dystopia, an atmosphere redolent of decay, dread and urban anxiety. The Brad Pitt zombie movie World War Z was filmed here, complete with exploding cars, Michael Caine’s Harry Brown too.

The regeneration plans and timetable have been substantially affected by the credit crunch and recession. However, demolition crews have finally begun to dismantle the Heygate. Inside the estate it often seems surprisingly quiet: the massive slabs of council flats blocking out the sound of traffic. But now, depopulated, the place has an extra stillness. Birdsong cascades down from

the canopies of thirty year old trees, belying the very idea of blight. In amongst the dense greenery, part of the “Walworth Urban Forest”, small vegetable plots crowded with broad beans, garlic, fennel and brassicas have appeared, symbolic acts of regeneration and resistance. They echo Gerard Winstanley’s community of diggers on St Georges Hill.

This project would not have been possible without the involvement of the local people of the Elephant and Castle who gave access, permission and in many cases substantial assistance to the students. The project, production of this book and the accompanying exhibition was generously supported by Southwark Council, Getty Images, LCC and C3 Imaging. A website www.theelephantvanishes.com will be launched later in 2012.

Patrick Sutherland
Director
The Elephant Vanishes Project
January 2012

Open for Business?

Wing Ki Lee

Shopping is at the very heart of the Elephant and Castle. The famous pink shopping centre adjacent to the main roundabout was the first shopping centre to be commissioned in the UK (though not the first to open) Once celebrated as a beacon of modern retailing, the centre now has a downbeat quality that distinguishes it from the identikit malls that have sprouted in every town centre in the UK. Sure it has some chains: a Tesco, Lloyds TSB, Greggs, WH Smiths, Boots and Iceland but there is also a bookstall with no English titles, where you can buy the Harry Potter books but only in Spanish. There's a bingo hall and a bowling alley on the top floor, hairdressers catering for the Afro-Caribbean community, a Polish café and deli, a Columbian restaurant, two pawnbrokers and four money transfer centres that facilitate sending earnings abroad.

Walking through the Elephant I discovered a myriad of retail outlets, eateries and stalls. Dragon Castle, my favourite Chinese restaurant in London sits on the ground floor of a student accommodation complex. The graffiti covered bicycle shop called Recycling lies under the railway arches. Angelus Temple, the Foursquare Gospel Church, is located in a shop on the Heygate Estate. These photographs of the façades of shops in the Elephant epitomise this local, particular and richly multicultural economy. As this area

experiences the inevitable transformation of regeneration, this typology of shops will undoubtedly shift.

At St Georges Circus, a series of fake façades of shop windows has been pasted over the row of boarded up shops adjoining the old Duke of Clarence pub. These detailed photographic images show expensive designer boutiques and upmarket grocers selling organic foods. They look like an old-fashioned unspoiled high street in a prosperous town, not what we think of the Elephant. There is no sign of Payless in this developer's vision of the future.

This record of shop fronts offers a miniature time capsule, a record of a locality, its high streets and retails outlets at a particular point in time (May 2009). The pattern of the local economy in the Elephant is bound to change. What will the regeneration do to these outlets? How many of these small local businesses will survive or even flourish? But the shopping centre is no longer scheduled with demolition. The latest plans are for a major refurbishment. Perhaps the new centre will still have space for the small market traders who cluster below the roundabout.













ECONOMY features the work of students from the MA in Photojournalism and Documentary Photography at the London College of Communication (LCC).

This postgraduate programme has been running in various forms for over two decades. An online and part-time version of the course was established in 2007 and teaches students in locations all over the world.

The programme has established a remarkable international reputation and track record of achievement. Students have gone on to win major international awards including World Press Photo Awards (seven times), the Jerwood Photography Prize (five times), the Sunday Times Ian Parry Award (twice), Royal Photographic Society Postgraduate Bursaries (twice), Winston Churchill Scholarships (four times), the Visa D’Or at the Perpignan Festival of Photojournalism (twice), Arts Council Awards (three times), the Eugene Smith Award, the Unicef Photographer of the Year Award, the European Book Publishers Award, the Royal Photographic Society Hood medal, the KLM Paul Huf Award, the Joan Wakelin Bursary, the Olivier Rebbot Award, the Sony Photographer of the Year Award, the F Award, the 3P Award, the Arts Foundation Fellowship and the Inge Morath Award amongst many, many others. Their work is represented by leading agencies including Magnum, VII, Panos and Getty Images. Alumni have been selected for the World Press Masterclass on many occasions, produced over thirty books of documentary photographs, innumerable spreads in major international magazines, made films for UK television and exhibited at venues ranging from the Houston Fotofest in Texas, Tate Britain and the Courtauld Institute in London, Foam Gallery in Amsterdam to the Metropolitan Museum of Photography in Tokyo.

www.lcc.arts.ac.uk



