

NORTH

Volume 2

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Kevin Crooks



interVieWed
By Brian J morrison





Brian J Morrison
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Kevin Crooks
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Since completing his undergraduate
education Kevin has worked profession-
ally within the field of photography,
producing a range of projects that tackle
social and spatial mobility and the
politics of community. Kevin is currently
head of Photography at Carmel College.



Brian J morrison: I would like to begin with your most recent work, M62 Scammonden which incorporates, photography, video, oral histories and archival material, can you give me a description of the project and the key themes as you see them?

keVin crooks: The project initially stemmed from an assignment that I completed as part my Ma at UCLan. The Module called ‘Space, Location and Territory’, allowed me to choose a location and landscape that interested me and to produce a project in response.

I had always been intrigued by the M62 motorway and its surrounding landscape, and was initially drawn to this location as I thought that the environment would be challenging to document but yet visually interesting.

My preparatory studies consisted of researching material which commented upon the concept, motives, design and construction of the motorway. I have recently been working on a project which documented the closure of the North West Sound archive, and following a discussion that I had with the sound archivist who worked there, he recommended that I listen to an oral history recording which consisted of an interview conducted with a construction worker, Stewart Bradbury who had worked on the building of the M62 motorway between junction 21 at Milnrow and Junction 24, huddersfield/halifax. Stewart talked of the role that he had and the details of the contract and what was involved in his day-to-day work. however, he also commented upon the impact the construction had, not only on the workers but also those that were living within the communities that the motorway crossed through. he also mentioned a number of folkloric tales, along with the story of the circumstances of the farmer at Stott hall farm, where the farmhouse is sandwiched between both carriageways.

although I was interested in the impact the motorway had brought to those people who were directly involved with the construction of the motorway, I was however more focussed, at this stage on demonstrating how the industrialisation of the landscape, particularly through the inclusion of the motorway, had irreversibly altered and manipulated the environment in which it was situated. This was in direct response to an assignment brief that was delivered as part of the Space, Location & Territory module, titled ‘The anthropocene City’

My original intention was to document one space, which would allow me the possibility of examining information on a more global scale, in the hope that I could provide some comprehensive and contemplative images that would provoke and provide a visual explanation of the anthropocene and its effects. I began to think of spaces, environments and landscapes that have witnessed clear and dramatic man-made changes over a prolonged period of time. The M62 has developed, altered and

has been manipulated into the motorway it is today because of its ever-increasing need to accommodate an ever-growing population. The environment in which the entire length of the motorway is situated will continue to change through the need and desire for it to be more economically efficient, provide more economic growth, allow for sustainable development and be more environmentally considerate.

These thoughts and considerations which were initiated in response to the research conducted throughout my Ma studies, then allowed me to consider what is the ‘M62’ today, and how will the future developments of the motorway affect the regions that it travels through? In a climate of economic austerity, can the M62 contribute to the suggested necessity towards the creation and sustainability of a Northern Powerhouse?

I see the motorway as a visual reference; there is a contradiction within the motorway, it is there to connect people and places, however the people who travel on the motorway are somewhat detached, not only from the landscape that they travel through but also the people, who occupy the same stretch of motorway within cars that travel the very same route that they themselves are travelling.

There is a specific focus on connectivity in George Osborne’s vision of how the Northern Powerhouse is to be created and facilitated, however do the towns that the motorway passes through really benefit from these initiatives?

have the towns (and cities) that the M62 travels through really benefitted from the inclusion of the motorway, in the same way that increased connectivity through the creation of the Northern Powerhouse is to be envisaged?

BJm: This notion of contradiction would appear to have a significant role in the visualisation of your research, specifically when we considered much of the recent criticism surrounding the specifics of Osborne’s Northern Powerhouse vision. has it been this aspect that has driven you to include oral histories from construction workers involved, alongside archive material and your own photography?

kc: Initially the inclusion of the oral histories within this project was to provide my potential audience with an adequate and appropriate insight into the development of the project. although the research element of the project was conceptualised through the studies that I had conducted, in reference to the themes and content that I wished to visualise and communicate. I was, however adamant, and felt that it was important and useful, to adopt a practice-based research method and approach which could aid the continued development and refinement of the production of the project. Therefore, although I had clear objectives throughout the project in terms of the progress that I intended to make, I was

also very determined to allow and encourage opportunities to arise, that would possibly enable me to pursue and consider other alternative contributions that could, and would often assist with facilitating and creating more concise, interesting, dynamic, in-depth outcomes.

during the conception of the project and the initial planning stages, I was clear that I wanted to respond to the challenge of photographing a motorway that has a number of negative connotations attached to it. Motorways are naturally often seen as ugly, man made necessities that are constructed without any consideration as to how they are situated within a landscape. This is in fact incorrect and became increasingly more apparent through the studies that I was conducting.

The M62 motorway and its surrounding Pennine landscape, visually reflect the industrialisation of the north of England. although the motorway is situated within a landscape that, in parts has remained untouched for many centuries, there are areas within this landscape that have witnessed significant and irreversible manipulations and alterations. all of which have been a result of increased populations within the towns and cities within the region, and the economic and infrastructural needs to support this growth.

George Osborne's vision was to rebalance the economy of the country by improving and realising existing and new infrastructure programmes which would be utilised to stimulate and sustain economic growth.

'our shared aim is to transform Northern growth, rebalance the country's economy and establish the North as a global powerhouse.' (Department for Transport, 2015)

In light of the result of the EU referendum vote, it is difficult to see how George Osborne's vision is to be now realised within this current parliament. however the Government has recently appointed Andrew Percy as the new Northern Powerhouse Minister who has confirmed that 'I've been in post 10 days now but I wanted to make it clear that the Northern Powerhouse is here to stay' and has stated that 'It's about bridging that gap between northern and southern' economies (Murphy, 2016)

BJM: Indeed, there is a shroud of uncertainty around many societal and economic aspects of post Brexit, Britain, and perhaps most significantly the freedom of movement of people and produce. To come back to the visual material for a moment, for me it evokes an almost classical tragedy, with paradoxical components and potential responses. Is there an attempt here to poeticise an otherwise fairly unpoetic aspect of society?

kc: Throughout my research I was keen on depicting the motorway, which is usually seen as an unwanted feature of a landscape, in a way that allows for more considered appreciation of not just the motorway but also how it sits, sympathetically and appropriately within the overall context of the landscape. a motorway is a dominant feature within any landscape, however when travelling through and over the Pennines the M62 becomes a dramatic and dominant feature which sits within a number of expansive, vast and open vistas.

Motorists are provided with the opportunity to appreciate and consider a significant and historic section of the northern landscape, which is only possible through the inclusion of the motorway. By what other means would such a large quantity of the population be able to view this area and the vistas that it has to offer?

It would be easy to conclude that the motorway, particularly within the Pennine section is a scar that unsympathetically cuts through a natural and untouched landscape. however, this landscape had been manipulated, exploited and altered long before the inclusion of the motorway. This environment has witnessed significant and irreversible changes, particularly as a result of the significant industrialisation of the north throughout the Industrial revolution. For example, the reservoirs and dams, which scatter this landscape, were created to provide water for rapidly growing populations, as well as feeding the canal system, whilst also providing the ever-growing number of factories and mills within the region with a reliable and plentiful water supply.

The weather and terrain within the Pennine area has historically restricted the accessibility of the landscape, and although the hills separate and divide this northern region, the communities, towns and cities have cultural commonalities, which have been present, and have developed over a number of centuries. The motorway and the other routes over the Pennines have provided easier mobility and connectivity, which has aided the growth and development of the communities that they connect. Therefore, is it not essential that we continue to manipulate and alter our landscape to facilitate the growth and development of the northern region? or, should we consider more creative, sympathetic, appropriate and sustainable alternatives?



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With a special thanks to the
continued support From the uniVersity
oF central lancashire, preston

puBlished noVemBer 2016
isBn 978-1-909755-08-6

First published 2016 by the University of
Central Lancashire, Preston, pr1 2he.

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a catalogue record for this publication is available
from the British Library.

Part of The Great Northern Creative Festival,
The Fieldworks Conference and the Photography
research Group.

WWW.uclan.ac.uk
WWW.photouclan.com



voluMe 2

ISBN:
978-1-909755-08-6