

## Contextual statement: 'More lonely ere' by Phil Hill

Watford, Hertfordshire is situated between the city of London and the pastoral countryside of the Home Counties. It has an identity associated with its commuting infrastructure; people sharing the same space yet living according to an individual rhythm (Stene-Johansen, et al., 2013, p. 9). Roland Barthes' termed this an 'Idiorrhythm' (Barthes, 2012), referring to a monastic existence within the bounds of the same compounds without any interaction with others. Barthes' is commenting on individualism and disparateness inherent in contemporary community. This early research of a Barthian' community lens has been influential on my practice and continues to provide the frame in which I approach the project. The town is designed to take you away, through and past it however, with the pandemic and lockdown, an opportunity to re-evaluate this relationship between community and its spaces began, challenging its identity as a commuter town when there's no more commuting. It was also a chance for me to consider a proper photographic dialogue (Fairey & Orton, 2019) with a place I lived for the past 7 years but never connected.

Aiming to understand Watford as a kind of between place, I first explored the idea of 'Rurality,' and the boundaries, as discussed by Malcom James Benyon et al, noting: "*The definition of rurality has long been in dispute and comprises an elusive concept*" (2016, p. 2), which led me to look more closely at Marion Shoard's 'edgelands,' (2002). This is also outlined in great detail by Paul Farley and Michael Symmonds Roberts: "*where urban and rural negotiate and renegotiate their border*" (2011, p. 5), whose text unknowingly sum up the very nature of Watford, even referring to parts of the landscape located here (p. 132).

Interested in the constructed nature of the photograph and the impact that its qualities have on the perception of the image, my project purposefully uses B&W to reference tropes of photo nostalgia, which are part of a cultural lexicon learned through iconic imagery, such as the FSA, supported by Sally Stein's assertion that "*Migrant Mother is often treated as the quintessential 1930s documentary photography*" (2020, p. 59) and feed into the way that we abstract elements of the past. From here, I created portraits and landscapes sequenced using a 'hero's journey' narrative structure identified by Christopher Booker (2004, p. 4), to push this idea of perception:

*"this ability to conjure up whole sequences of such images, unfolding before our inner eye like a film, which enables us to have dreams when we sleep, and when we are awake to focus our attention on these mental patterns we call stories"* (p. 3).

This is to construct my own narrative and lead you on a journey through it, stopping to consider the characters within – existent, or not. It is also a sequence inspired by Robert Frost's 'Desert Places' (1936, p. 44), which links between the iddiorythm and the edgelands using metaphors of negotiating the rurality and individual feelings of connection: "*since the landscape of the desert is dry, silent marginal ... it may serve as a metaphor for anything from death, poverty, or religion to the primitive past, desolate future, or nomad culture*" (Stene-Johansen, et al., 2013, p. 14).

My aim is to question if a community is able to come to terms with the 'new normal,' versus the perception of its former self. The result is a dichotomy between the idealised community and its reality. The photographs represent a truth; one a perception of a community through a nostalgic lens and one that highlights the way in which a community will naturally evolve its own identity - even when we place romanticised abstract nostalgia upon it.

## Bibliography

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*'More lonely ere'* is presented as a 10x8 landscape digital book dummy, displaying as spreads on screen.

# More lonely ere



Phil Hill

‘More lonely ere’ is a body of work inspired by Robert Frost’s poetry.

Located inside the M25 but not London and within the boundary of Hertfordshire but not the pastoral idyllic of the Home Counties.

This is a between place.

The project is a journey through a separated existence of individual rhythm to evaluate the idea of home and sanctuary; it forges a new relationship with spaces and the people I share them with.









































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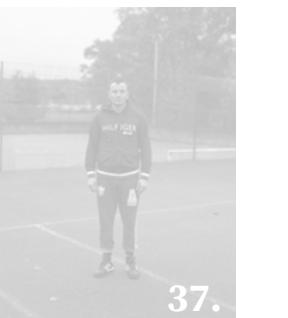
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5. Home [Anticipation]. 7. Suburbs [ordinary world]. 9. [The Call]. 10. The doubter [St Thomas, Awaiting demolition]. 11. Ryan [companion]. 20&21. Woods [Journey cont]. 23. Alistair [sage]. 25. Kate [Turning Point]. 26. [Arrival]. 35. [Ordeal]. 37. Paul [A Stranger]. 38. [Return]. 39. Jess and Darcie [Resolution].

13. Mark [Samaritan]. 14&15. [The Helpers]. 17&19. [Journey] 27. Harry [at the playing fields]. 29. Tom [worker]. 31, 32&33. [The Frustration] 41. [Goal].

