

**bats**

IN

**in**

CONVERSATION

**the**

WITH

**old**

PAUL

**ghost**

GARCIA

**ride**



Published by the Canadian Academy in Rome

**[www.canadianacademyrome.ca](http://www.canadianacademyrome.ca)**

Digital Edition • ISBN 978-0-9952205-2-2

Copyright © 2016 Canadian Academy in Rome

Interview text has been edited for clarity.

SPECIAL THANKS

Paul Garcia

more information at **[paul-garcia.co.uk](http://paul-garcia.co.uk)**

CONTRIBUTORS

Interview: Alex Willms

Design: Alex Willms & Stephane Gaulin-Brown



**Paul Garcia is a photographer, painter, and writer based in Liverpool, England.**

**Starting in February 2016 we exchanged messages online. We often sent questions or answers in batches so the resulting conversation is not as linear as a verbal exchange. But Paul's work does not appear to evolve linearly – it revisits the same places and ideas with ever-increasing interest and precision – so, in the end, the format seemed fitting.**

**Alex Willms:** Very nice photos! Not sure how I first discovered your work but I was just revisiting your website.

**Paul Garcia:** hello. just ordered your book. postage was more expensive than the book – ouch – but it is always nice to support other photographers. cheers for checking out my website. i like working in the blocks of nine. takes a long time to put them together, but hopefully it shows people how i see as much as what i see. such things matter. always enjoy your work. i like the structure and rhythm. like collage made real. the world is both absurd and beautiful in equal measure. i'll let you know when the book arrives and give some feedback.

**AW:** Thanks for ordering the book! That means a lot. I would welcome any feedback.

The photos are paired on each spread according to certain “rules”. Seems similar to your blocks of nine. I really like the blocks though, because you can try to convey a very complex way of seeing. In “trashed” for example I think the inclusion of the photo with the spray paint on the brick corner is a really nice move.

**PG:** the spray paint is on a wall on an abandoned pub not far from

my house. it is always amazing what you find on your daily walks. small random events that translate as magic. it would be impossible to construct this kind of image, let alone replicate it – yet a kid with a can saw a reason to do it. my entire life centres around precision and perfection, and yet simultaneously relies on vandals, fly-tippers and thieves. an uneasy contradiction. but i have always tried to recover the beauty in every situation. i never move anything or add to it. i'll either reposition myself or wait until it changes. i suppose i differ to most artists in that i studied as a scientist and still treat everything as research. i am as fascinated by the angle of the can, the distance from the wall, the height of the person, the colour of the paint, as with the social side. yet even that kind of black brick tells its own story of sixties urban fabrication on the cheap. there is so much information wound up in these everyday finds. this is something you'll probably understand as you also have a very practical eye for composition. every piece of architecture supposedly has a purpose, and yet these things are built to look absurd.

good luck with the book. my last project with my partner was a disaster. even selling at cost online they are too expensive for most of our followers. we now have a coffee table made of coffee table books. humiliating.

**AW:** You've mentioned a lot of interesting points here... I wonder if we could continue the exchange and think of it as an “interview” that could be published. Are you interested?

**PG:** alex. always happy to do an interview. i write quite a lot about photography. find the theoretical side interesting. always fascinated by the necessity of what we do – where the instinct comes from and what function it serves. there is an older interview on my tumblr page, which gives an insight to how i work, and might give you some

ideas to discuss. just fire me some questions/comments and i'll start giving them some thought.

**PG:** alex. short note. your book arrived this morning. it was printed and posted from the uk. brilliant work. we see in a very similar way – find the same things in different places. love when that happens. makes it worthwhile. the pairs are wonderful. if you get the chance to look at the split zine i did with di, “no direction left to turn”, we did a similar thing. i am addicted to repeated patterns and what creates them. whether it is through chance or circumstance. also love your balance between contrast and overlap. makes for a thoughtful narrative. the words work well too. same sense of observation and dry, detached comment. i like the incessant rhythm of the prose. that walking pace style is nice. excellent stuff. only downside is the print quality. really poor. you can get a lot better digital printing these days for pretty affordable prices. definitely worth looking around for your next project. the work deserves a better print.

**“it is always  
amazing what  
you find on your  
daily walks.”**

**AW:** Glad you got the book. I thought the quality would be better. In any case, we're trying to make each project better than the last.

The interview on your tumblr page is actually what prompted me to message you. I'll start with some thoughts. Maybe we'll end up with an unconventional format.

**PG:** alex. received your questions. already sketching out a few ideas. will try and make them interesting. add a few things things that you can respond to and we'll edit it into something more discussion-based. it'll probably take me a few days because i am working on a few other things at the moment.

**AW:** Is there anywhere I can see your paintings? Do they definitely exist?

**PG:** the paintings exist. my studio is filled with them. they take so long, years, that no one could possibly afford to buy them and neither do i want to give the children away. they recently left the house for the first time and drove up to middlesbrough. i did a pop-up exhibition with di in a warehouse. she displayed photographs of bus sides, and my paintings were paired underneath. worked well. unfortunately the paintings photograph terribly. they have a mirror finish, so you always see too much. i'll come up with a solution eventually. you'll have probably gathered i am not an ambitious person. always been an outsider, living on a farm, growing what i need to survive. these days i spent more time in the garden than i do on the paintings. it is all the same anyway.

**AW:** I like the mirror finish – you could almost then think of them as sculptures (you have to move around them to experience their qualities).

Not sure about ambition... some would call it ambitious to live at a slow pace, taking time to make art and think. But I could be romanticizing the farm thing.

Is the interview on your site an interview with yourself?

**PG:** the interview on the blog was originally for an online magazine. the editor asked a few of the questions – but i ended up constructing the interview in such a way that made sense to me. i actually agreed to the interview because the images she selected to share on the website were a strange selection that, unknown to her, were all taken from the same spot, just looking in different directions across the seasons. i often return to this patch of wasteland between two motorways. the clearing has such an unusual vibe. that it is possible to record and share this feeling underpins everything i enjoy about photography – that the illusion can be made real. i can trace this feeling back to a magician at primary school – i watched as the dove struggled in the secret compartment – rather than being upset

**“we line ourselves  
up with the  
environment to  
make ourselves  
present.”**

with the realisation that it was a trick, i was more fascinated by the magician’s sleight of hand and the need for the people around me to be amazed. it dawned on me such things could translate to mean the same thing; we can place faith in the craft. thirty years later and the scientist in me wants to analyse

the dry, poisoned soil in which no plants grow, and research why the sheltering firs cast their beautiful blue shadow, while the artist still wants to believe i’m a natural diviner marking the spot ley-lines cross. of course, it is probably more likely my memories of this place simply make me more open and connected to the possibilities. same way sportspeople have favourite grounds. the reality is that we’ll never know whether these photographs work because of something

chemical, psychological, or spiritual. it is more likely that “instinct” exists as a combination of all three elements. for me, understanding this instinct is the start point. interestingly, the last time i returned to that place there was a stake driven into the middle of that spot with a small red ribbon attached. kind of scary. maybe a cruel practical joke played on me by my future self... a lesson that time will tell.

**AW:** Do you carry a camera with you all the time?

**PG:** yes. whether i’m wandering the streets or fixing tiles up on a roof. it is battered and bruised. has no light metering, a skewed viewfinder and no frame counter – so i self-meter, lean slightly to the right and the pressure on the crack tells me whereabouts i am in the film. i enjoy the little idiosyncrasies. makes it like a personality.

the camera originally started as sketchbook, but the more interested i got in ideas like necessity and ritual, the more important it became. now i see photography more as a form of camouflage – how we line ourselves up with the environment to make ourselves present; how we position ourselves to make something safe. a little like turning a kaleidoscope until it is boring again. a photograph is an action, it is something felt, with a result. i worry not many other photographers think in these terms of survival. they are collectors, collecting, but i prefer to think more about controlling and shaping. it is hard to explain, but i always found the constant stream of information exhausting. it frightened me. i’d scratch my eyes out trying to process everything. my head would ache. this is probably why my own creative process is the opposite of what people would consider creative. i am more interested in simplification. reducing things to bite size chunks. the camera effectively slows the world down so i can study it at leisure. without it, the spinning world would spit me out.



we are all pattern-forming creatures surrounded by chaos. so when we see something smashed, not only do we work out where the impact was, and interpret the forces at play, we instinctively try to piece these things back together. understanding doesn't reverse the process, even if that is the ambition, but recovering some element of beauty is a nice alternative. it gets interesting when the puzzle is incomplete. our emotional response becomes very different. there is a tension within the system and it stops being a nice thing to look at. unless, of course, you have your own missing piece. the photographer's aim is to compensate for the loss of balance, by shifting their own – this is how i understand composition. i am not taking, or adding, simply reflecting something to find that point of balance and share that momentary stillness. a favourite recent picture is of a brick pavement. cars have repeatedly turned right across it to enter the car park. the herringbone pattern has become distorted, but over time, the bricks have slowly realigned themselves laterally instead. something like this beautifully explains the cyclical nature of order and chaos and how the simple act of observation can be oddly reassuring.

**AW:** Has taking photographs led you to any unusual or interesting situations or interactions?

**PG:** i tend not to photograph around people. to be honest i find them distracting and unnerving. sadly i recognise nothing of myself in others. i even struggle to picture family members when i close my eyes. my childhood memories are empty. and yet i remember the architecture of the spaces with frightening clarity – i can still draw out the tiled pattern of a villa floor i knew as a teenager, yet i can no longer remember who i was with on that particular holiday. this probably explains why i go to places that are empty, then search for traces of people. i recognise more of myself in the fate of herringbone bricks than i do in the people parking. sometimes i

think i am a survivor of a war that didn't happen. the strange thing: in the last few years i have come to rely entirely on other people's collections, habits and destruction. if it wasn't for kids with wire cutters, i would never see what life was like on the other side of the fence.

things changed when i met di and we started working together. i've been increasingly shooting the arrangements of other people, rather than the random scatter of nature – wondering if my own logic survives theirs. i've noticed that junk differs in different countries; the english throw stuff senselessly and lazily, the japanese stack high and compact in all available spaces and the icelanders have everything spaced neatly on colour coded pallets. you realise there is a cultural element to the collecting, but one that is dictated by demographics and geography. i know one day this will be a beautiful essay to write, but i'm still not entirely comfortable with the social side – so for now i am happy photographing all the junk in such a way that it still belongs to me.

**“we are all  
pattern-forming  
creatures  
surrounded by  
chaos”**

i never move or reposition things. i'll just wait until something happens to change it. i think as soon as you start altering the environment you are asking the viewer a different set of questions – i am not asking them to trust me, but encouraging them to trust themselves. it is an important point – one that gets increasingly lost as the arts accelerate, and people want attention before they are good enough. i know mine seems a strange and slightly

contradictory ambition: to be visible, but unseen; passive, but active, sharing myself through my relationship with what i find, but this is probably the story of every shy child. when friends went to the beach, i would play in the builders' yard. i'd spend hours making my own paths around the derelict wasteland instead of playing football in the park. we can't escape ourselves, so we grow to like what we know best. i increasingly think art is the preservation of where i felt most happy and comfortable as a child. the maintenance of innocence.

**“a photograph is more about what you feel than what you see.”**

for me that was the bleak empty landscape of failed industry. i now travel looking for the same.

the empathy i feel for abandonment and decay is not some constructed ideology, it is actually an inescapable part of my day – i live on a farm that is too big to look after. so, while half is well-maintained,

the rest is left to nature. i have watched an entire stable block go from having horses in it, to being virtually indistinguishable from the woodland behind. it is fascinating to see how something can deteriorate in stages if left unchecked. what we think is permanent is roughly thirty years away from being reclaimed. we are temporary. so if i take a picture of a drip slowly eating away at a stone sill, it is not just a comment on time or material, but a part of me actually feels involved. guilty, even. these days, what i can't recover i work hard to understand. a photograph is more about what you feel than what you see.

**AW:** When I look at your book “No Direction Left to Turn” I see

various criteria for pairing. But why do we do we make these pairs? Are they jokes? For me, the effect of the pairing is a forced change in perception similar to what I experience while drawing from life: the image is abstracted and I can see it as something more like raw visual data. There's something pleasantly surprising about being quickly shifted into this mode of perception. But it seems like you also try to convey this way of seeing with each individual image. So how did you arrive at an interest in pairing and grouping?

**PG:** i'll never be the photographer that takes a single spectacular photograph that wins a prize. i will only ever be that drip on the window sill, not the beautiful waterfall crashing behind. even when i travel to incredible places, my pictures are indistinguishable from those taken at home. i will always be drawn to what i recognise. so i have to rely on repetition of forms and feelings to make such points. each shot must work individually/compositionally, but it is also a building block toward my own way of seeing. each picture you take exists in the next. if you were to overlay all my images they would tend toward a definitive pattern. what i would look like if you chopped me in half. by editing these images into pairings (for publishing) or groups of nine (online), i am trying to develop a kind of language. explaining by example, not thorough satire or spectacle. the phrase “raw visual data” is put well. this is very much how i see. structured, with a purpose. it is more like research than art. it is surprisingly difficult to collect nine images together, that work singularly, but as a collective whole – but when it clicks it is a lovely thing. the game-play aspect almost becomes like photography itself. it is another level of refinement. at the moment there seems to be a preoccupation with the idea of projects and series – people move from one fashion to next – but i'm more interested in sharing a way of seeing the world. the best compliment will always be when someone with no interest in photography tells me they saw something i would have liked – whether that is a plastic bag in a puddle, of a wall that has

fallen under its own weight – it is special when others see it for themselves.

**AW:** Thoughts on Architecture versus buildings?

**PG:** building is making shelter, architecture is a solution to living.

ok. that'll do for now. it needs a bit of editing and streamlining. i generally say everything before then deleting until what i say is the stuff worth reading. feel free to respond to these ideas and we can argue some of the details. or ask more questions or for clarification. i figure it'll take a few emails before we have something that works for both of us.

**AW:** Hope you don't mind the delay – work picked up suddenly!

It's ritualistic/meditative to keep returning to the same place, but it also shows that, in a way, you're not interested in the constant aspects of the place. If you were, as you say, "collecting" through photography, you might visit a place only once. So – if you're in a place only once (perhaps travelling), do you treat it differently as you take pictures?

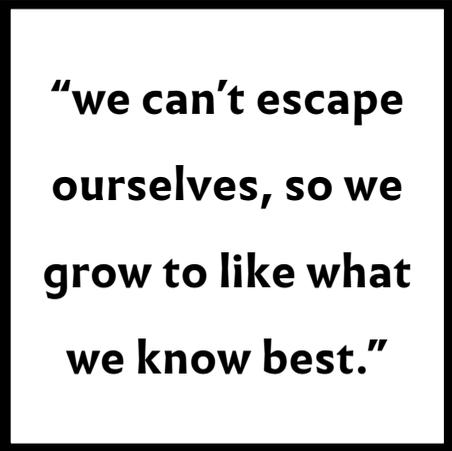
Also, I know exactly what you mean about pictures from new places looking indistinguishable from others. In a way then, is it true that the goal of working to "see" the familiar is to process the world in a way that is distanced from accumulated connotations of language, culture, behavioural habits...? To see the world in a way that is uniform, much like it actually is at a particulate level, lacking semantics. That makes sense as a childlike way of seeing; things don't have names. The flattening nature of the photograph helps with this.

**PG:** writing about photography can sometimes be dangerous. do we write about what we believe, or believe in what we write? even honesty differs depending on who we are being honest with. i walk the same few paths around my hometown as a course of habit, but the connection i feel to these places gathers a certain momentum when i start to collect and share them – so we tend toward words like ritual and folklore because it is easier than accepting that a photographer's life is spent aimlessly wandering, getting nowhere. it is a balance between fetishising what we already know – chasing the plastic bag – or waiting for the bag to come to us, and relying on the fact we'll respond to it in the right way when it comes. i think when you become so familiar with a place (i've lived here my

whole life) you become inextricably linked to the details. you start shrinking to fit. crawling around on your hands and knees. desperate to mark the day with some kind of change. i've seen car parks built upon and then flattened to make car parks again and streams change their course, but i've also seen grass bent slightly in wrong the direction and

been equally amazed. each day feels more like detective work when you start to care about the outcome. i think cataloguing these small changes actually immunizes you against the wider fear of change.

for years i relied on this familiarity and connection to understand my place. as i started to take photography more seriously i started travelling to new towns, cities and countries. found it difficult. that



**“we can't escape  
ourselves, so we  
grow to like what  
we know best.”**



feeling of being in a dark room and going into the light; i think the limitlessness of possibilities is what stops a lot of people from starting. i found holidays even more daunting. i was guilty of falling into the trap of using the camera as a surrogate for memory, chasing, rather than just accepting – was even worried about what the images would look like, believing they somehow had to be bigger and better to justify the cost of flights. the reality is you don't have the time to understand the subtleties of the light or nuances of the materials when you are just passing through – but what you do have is long-term apprenticeship in form and structure and that instinct that you carry with you. it is not simply that we start to find the same things in different places, but that empathy we feel for materials also translates. what you develop is a way of seeing, born from necessity, and this becomes more important than what you are seeing. we are actually sharing what we felt at the time.

last year my three favourite images were all on the same strip of negative. it often happens. for whatever reason in that moment, things just lined up and i saw with genuine clarity. i'd walked the same route the day previous and not taken a single shot. a lot of my interest in photography lies within the complexities of this relationship between the object and the viewer and how we link one thing to the other, and then the next thing to that.

**“cataloguing these  
small changes  
actually immunizes  
you against the wider  
fear of change.”**

**AW:** I'm very interested in the dynamics of collaboration. A good collaborative relationship can be difficult to develop/maintain. Maybe you could expand slightly on working with Di and how that came about – or just thoughts on collaboration in general.

**PG:** me and di met through a shared appreciation of each others photographs. although our work isn't immediately recognisable as being related, we are both drawn to the same places and respond in the same way to the abandonment and decay. we both use old 35mm cameras and stubbornly refuse to change. interestingly, liverpool and middlesbrough are on opposite sides of the country, but have similar histories and character and share a lot of connections. they are also both post-industrial coastal towns and dying from the inside out. lots of failed regeneration and fenced-off wasteland. when you compare our work, di tends to get closer and more intimate, whereas i'll generally step back and focus on a mid-distance. it is more the spirit of the images that overlap. i never thought i would be able to shoot with another photographer. the way i approach things is quiet and closed. it almost relies on the feeling of emptiness and weight of loneliness. yet these days i actually prefer shooting with di. we skip from place to place holding hands, bouncing from mattress to mattress, but when we find ourselves in an interesting location we'll slow and separate. drift. then we'll come together and share what we saw. it is like two like animals sharing difference niches within the same small system.

**AW:** You say we can't escape ourselves. I find that when I think I'm escaping myself, I'm actually doing the opposite. For example, in retrospect, each of my architecture school projects dealt with the same two or three concerns – but at the time I thought each one was new. And if I look through my oldest photos, the recent ones seem to be in there, diluted.

But your photos don't strike me as nostalgic, so I guess the "innocence" you're trying to "preserve" has no inherent aesthetic identity. Rather it's internal; you're trying to maintain a mindset, a way of being in the world in general, and this feeling then incidentally allows you to take pictures in the way that you do. Does that make sense?

**PG:** the key sentence here is "a way of being in the world in general". this has always been the question i am trying to answer. for me, creativity comes down to control, not necessarily expression. i was always the child that pulled things apart to see how they worked, then put them back together to make them work some more. i am still doing that with photography – an obsessive pursuit of trying to stay in one place. like a decorated futility. most artists are afraid to admit this to themselves. but i think the selfishness is inherent in what we do. you'll find a lot of photographers are often difficult people. not particularly friendly or community-minded. i now think this protectiveness and possessiveness is a prerequisite of being a photographer, and that idea of "taking" is actually more of a character trait than an ambition... thinking your own view of the world is somehow better, more complete and more important than others'. of course, the irony is that if you commit to this kind of stubborn certainty, the work you make can achieve a universal quality. such is the nature of circles. the problem is that a lot of photographers hold something back for themselves. deep down, whatever your motives, i think that moment you press the button has to be joyful, and that is what you are trying to share. i still shake with delight, like goldilocks when she finds something just right. the artists i like generally understand the idea of being both absent and present as a real thing, rather than a contradiction.

**AW:** Do you think or plan much regarding future work? Maybe the whole point is to stay in the present. Are there any new projects/

formats you'd like to work with? Or is your workflow suitably refined for the moment, accomplishing all it needs to?

**PG:** i don't really plan. i often talk about medium format, but only because better photographers than me use medium format and i get jealous of mamiya 7s, kodak portra and the beautiful scenery – but that is not who i am or how i see. i only have one camera and one lens attached. i value having a consistent archive taken on the same camera, with the same film. it means when i was putting the website together i could pair work from years apart. the general rule is that you use the tool until you find it limits what you want to do, but at the moment the 35mm format still suits the way i see and the environment i work in, so i can't see myself changing any time soon.

ok. this will have to do for now. di's here this week, so i haven't got much spare time to spend on the computer. we spend most days wandering the streets together and watch overlong eastern european cinema at night. the more bleak the better. let me know how this reads and whether you want me to expand on anything or ask any more questions. there was one more point you made that i haven't answered, so i might get around to that over the weekend.

**AW:** This is great – I love getting into these ideas. If you'd like to add anything else, feel free, but I think we have a good amount.

Again, thanks! And no rush on wrapping this up. Enjoy your eastern european cinema.

**PG:** alex. pleased you've enjoyed reading it. i always like to try and say something at least interesting. even if that runs the risk of contradicting myself. for the last few years i've tried to engage with fellow photographers, but they always seem so reluctant to

discuss their work and suspicious of sharing. i find it strange that photography has worked so hard to be discussed alongside art, but photographers somehow afford themselves a lot more license and privacy than artists. if i was an artist and told people that i didn't want to talk about my work, i'd get laughed off the stage – but photographers love to hide behind the pictures. the hardest thing about being a painter, photographer or writing is asking yourself why anyone else should give a damn that you can see, scratch or type. so i think every day you have to work to make it relevant.

if you want any pictures, just say. i have a few unpublished “nines” that i'm sitting on. you would be welcome to share them.

**“that moment  
you press the  
button has to  
be joyful”**

ok. no rush on the edit. always here at this email to discuss anything. i'll look over your tumblr in a few days. it is impossible for me to follow new people these days – i only have 0.5 mb broadband and currently follow over a thousand blogs – so i just have to check in from time to time.

**AW:** Thanks for the nines. I like number 22 in particular.

Just saw your post about the novel. Is there somewhere I can order a copy? I'd be interested in reading it.

**PG:** alex. no time this morning. just heading to the train station to catch a train to sheffield. we are meeting up with al, a fellow photographer. over this past twelve months me and di have been

making an effort to travel and meet other like-minded photographers. we are the most unlikely people to do this – being shy and antisocial – but for some reason we took on this challenge to connect a few of the dots. people taking pictures of pavements and industrial estates. for all the “community” feel of a platform like tumblr, nobody ever meets anyone else. it is fascinating shooting with people for a day. you get a different perspective for their work. get to ask them questions. i also think photography is quite an active, physical pursuit. it is almost like performance art. this aspect has been lost, to some degree.

if you want to read a copy of the book, just send me your address and i'll post one across tomorrow. the cost of international postage is killing me. ten dollars to america. crazy. no wonder the world is digital. but for the time being i can just about absorb the costs. i am interested in feedback. good or bad. my writing style isn't the easiest to read, so it is a bit of a risk.

ok. got to run. speak soon – paul.

**AW:** Thanks for the book and note (nice architectural drawing). Got it yesterday and read up to section 2.4 during my morning commute... I don't want to say too much yet, but I am enjoying it.

**PG:** alex. cheers for the note. much appreciated. the publishing of the book was probably a mistake. i've only managed to give thirty copies away. turns out i didn't know that many people, and half the people i do know told me they didn't want a copy. my reputation goes before me. a month after i posted them all out, only one person has actually given some feedback. i worry that people are either too embarrassed that they haven't read it, so don't write, or are too embarrassed because they have, and don't know what to say. or maybe no one



has the time or patience to read anymore. i hope the toronto book fair goes well. me and di have tried a few, but never sold anything. people just like to chat and browse. we had people taking a card and then preferring to look at the book online. it was difficult to explain to them that the work was right there, in front of them, they just had to flick through the pages. they seemed happier to see someone else do it on youtube. probably the same people who go to a gig and watch their phones recording instead of the people on stage. we are becoming increasingly detached from the experience of things.

i've been with di for the last two weeks. we spent the time shooting and working in the garden. i taught her how to lay bricks. maintenance is like a dagger through my heart - all that work to stay in one place. sometimes even the weight of the metaphors hurts my back. the better news is that the films from the days out shooting have been developed and scanned and i've got some nice stuff to share in the coming weeks. we are the world's weirdest tourist. we generally go to industrial estates and miserable dead-end towns. luckily we are blessed in the northwest with a lot of this habitat. i especially like the old, tired seaside towns that have run out of people. places with penny arcades, circling drug addicts and people playing crazy golf on mobility scooters. rhyll used to have a famous indoor pool - the kind with wave machines and fun slides. it was the most exciting place in the world aged seven. now it is boarded up. all the exotic plants inside have overgrown and then died. there is glass strewn from where the windows have been smashed. the plastic has faded. the tiles have cracked. clearly it would cost too much to renovate. so instead it sits and waits until the land becomes more valuable as something else. interesting that thirty years later it remains an exciting place - but the reasons have changed.

the next day we explored an old disused theme park outside manchester. it closed about five years ago. everything of any value

had long since been stripped out. all that remains are the poorly built shells of prefab buildings - half of which are kicked in or burnt out. we only got forty minutes of shooting before security caught up with us and escorted us out. as we left, we saw others sneaking in. the guy said it was a full-time job kicking out photographers... and yet at night the security guards go home and the place gets trashed by kids. the theme park has a planning application for 420 homes, and the owners are clearly sensitive to anything happening that might slow that process down. like a photographer finding bats in the old ghost ride. it was a strange week. returning to places i remember from childhood. seeing how they change, and the underlying politics of that change. i sometimes feel a bit guilty that my work doesn't discuss the wider social aspects of these places.

i'm also working on a new page for the website. been working on a new set of nine nines. going crazy shuffling things around late into the night. something is slowly forming out of the chaos. i'll let you know if it comes to anything. no rush on a reply. good luck with reading the book.

**AW:** Yes, weird tourists - but only according to most people. i've been putting together a photo submission and am thinking of calling it "the worse, the better".

Also, still reading your book. Just curious - did you have someone else edit the book? And how long did it take to write?

**PG:** alex. good luck with submitting. i know photographers that spend more time writing than shooting. i know people who have even paid to have their work reviewed. insane. it feels as if we are being humiliated to do this thing we love. the more i see, the more cynical i get, and the more i think we have to take it back - hire

spaces, get friends together, etc. the gallery system doesn't make sense anymore. one curator once told me if he didn't already know who i was, then he wasn't interested... the work was irrelevant when compared to the name. that one comment just about sums up the art world. submissions these days have to be more like cosmetic surgery – an exaggeration of something attractive/seductive, to the point the fantasy is more important than the reality. the concept is more important than the quality. people need something to grip onto. i think when you submit, you have to think like a salesman and deliver a product for a market. so, for example, if you said that each of your shots was the aftermath of some terrible workplace accident, then they would get more attention. pair it with beautiful framed medical notes and death certificates and suddenly it looks like art. it doesn't even have to be true – if your lie is caught out, you just say you are playing with the concept of reality. the bullshit is fine provided there are enough layers... where conceptualism fails, satire saves. of course, i don't believe in this, but the sad reality is that the kind of work we do is miles behind the game – it is too personal, too subtle, and too rigorous. people don't want to invest the time in trying to understand a way of seeing or a sense of something, they want to pride themselves on being told. the majority of people aren't interested in the psychology of patterns, they just want to be flattered and/or entertained. publishing has become more like an intellectual accessory – the label on an expensive handbag, rather than what is actually inside. i suppose my advice is somewhere in the middle – to keep true to what you do, but don't be afraid to ham up the submission to get noticed.

i started writing the book around age twenty-five. took me about ten years. on and off. you'll notice it starts with part two. that is because part one, which took a few years, got deleted. never regretted this. all that work got me to a place. like building models that collapse until you finally get one to stand. my writing process is a lot like my

painting. i write in layers – overlapping, deleting, etc. – until each sentence reads in a way that feels right and maintains that sense of rhythm. the interesting thing is, when you deconstruct each sentence and try and simplify it, something weird happens in the english language – a vagueness creeps in – so a lot of the sentences can be read in different ways. i think that is why people find it complex. the writing itself is very basic. i know the book has a few problems. i am not a story teller and never started with a story in mind, and

**“photography is quite an active, physical pursuit. it is almost like performance art.”**

it all seems a bit self indulgent. but that said, i am proud of it.

**AW:** Quick update – i'm three quarters of the way through the book and still going. Hope you're well! Really great pictures lately.

**PG:** alex. good to hear from you. keep going with

the book. the ending is almost very nearly dramatic. or what passes as drama in my world. i've now had two readers finish it. so their feedback has cost me about 150 pound each. sometimes i think self-publishing is like a tax on the naive.

cheers for the compliments on the recent pictures. i've just had six new films developed, so have a nice selection of new work to choose from. di was staying last week, so we spent most days shooting. same patterns. look at the map in the morning, make a plan, make a picnic, and head out into the wilderness. by wilderness i mean the empty towns around manchester and liverpool. usually we head

to the derelict land that has been fenced off with plywood. it is a strange and uniquely english pastime. the more they fence, for no reason, the more we try and get inside, for no reason. it is a perverse rebellion. to be on the inside – or outside. it is increasingly hard to tell which side of these fences we are on. over the last few months i have started to notice the phenomenon of peeling plywood - where it feathers beautifully from the top downwards and flutters in the wind. there something very elegant about materials returning to their nature. these are my perfect kinds of shots. the small details describe a place and a time more accurately than the media. it is about possession, and then neglect. a very modern concept. the more time you spend shooting, the more fashions like this you notice. especially around the building trade. materials get cheaper as safety gets more elaborate. years ago, scaffolding would just be metal poles, now they have to be wrapped in protective yellow foam, buildings were then covered in netting, and more recently a strange stretched white shrink-wrap has evolved. i just love how economics, politics, and materials drive our immediate environment.

**“materials get cheaper as safety gets more elaborate.”**

in other news. i'm looking forward to my greenland trip next month. i have the guide book alongside and keep thumbing over maps. to be honest, there is not much more planning i can do. all the guides specialise in the best and most beautiful parts of a place. even online there is no information about the uglier sides. maybe that is what me and di should do – write contemporary travel guides for the outsiders – listing industrial estates and nearest toilet facilities, derelict buildings

and detailing where the best hole in the fence might be. one place i really want to visit is called qullissat. it is a derelict mining town. the homes and mines have just been left to rot on the shores of the fjord. i'd arranged a charter with a boatman out there and negotiated a price. it was costing 200 pound for a daytrip – which is horribly expensive, but just about worth it. i was just about to give my card details when i double checked the exchange rate and realised my small mistake... it wasn't 200 pounds for the day, but 2000. i nearly had a heart attack. i wrote back and explained my mistake. i haven't even made 2000 pound as an artist in the last ten years. maybe i should build a boat.

**PG:** alex. a quick note. the new web page is finally up. i've actually been working on this new set for about eighteen months. working in grids makes the editing process slow and complicated. take a look here: <http://paul-garcia.co.uk/9-3> . i think my work, and my words, make a lot more sense in this format. the idea that each shot is connected and part of wider understanding. i've now got three pages on the website. the aim is to eventually have nine – yes, a grid made of nine sets of nine nines. at the current rate it'll probably take me another thirty years to complete. i seem to be shooting more, but keeping less.

**AW:** I like these new nines a lot. The connections between images seem even more complex.

Looking forward to the Greenland images...

i've started to format the interview. i'd like to include quite a lot of our exchange, even pieces before and after the “interview proper”. You'd see the whole conversation unfolding naturally. What do you think?



**PG:** feel free to edit the interview as you see fit. if there is anything you want me to clarify, or expand, just let me know and i'll add to it. i have no problem with you using material from the emails. although i am not quite as guarded in the emails, and i do have a tendency to moan and bitch about pretty much anything – for an interview i think it needs to be a bit more focussed. anything published online you have to pitch for bland-but-eccentric, because as soon as you start having an opinion, it is open season for the haters.

i've just read through an interview with frederic nord – this is a good example. although it is a bit long to read online. i think the printed "conversation with" is a great idea. a mixture between essay and photobook. there needs to be more of it.

ok. tired tonight. i've been hedge trimming all day. usually it is about two weeks work to get through them all. very proud of my hedges. they are flat and level and oversized. tomorrow i tackle the laurel, it is thirty foot high and similarly wide. each year i risk my life swinging in the branches for little reward. other than the satisfaction.

speak soon – paul.

## **Image Sources**

Images courtesy of Paul Garcia.

