

Valuing Subjectivity In Documentary Photography and the Media

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Abstract

This paper examines issues of subjectivity and objectivity in regard to documentary photography in the broader context of the mass media. It argues that subjectivity cannot be divorced from the process of representation, even though the default belief in 'objectivity' continues to function in the commercially driven mass media. However, it is argued that the Internet and alternate media afford documentary practitioners the opportunity to display frank subjectivity. How objective and subjective ideologies alter 'documentary' photography is examined through a case study on nuclear devastation, which draws examples from National Geographic, The Digital Journalist, and the work of Robert Knoth and Antoinette de Jong.

Introduction

Subjectivity cannot be divorced from the process of documentary photography: 'the journalistic photographer can have no other than a personal approach...it is impossible...to be completely objective. Honest – yes. Objective – no' (Smith 1966, p.103). However the default belief in objectivity and the perception of photography as 'a child to the hopes of positivism' continues to flourish within the 'opportunism of corporate capitalism' (Berger 2002, p.55). This putative objectivity is argued by some to be a rigid formula that constrains journalists and audiences into a framework suited to the commodity market.

As a means of examining the issue of subjectivity, a case study of contemporary works on nuclear devastation provides a pertinent framework for a discussion of how the admission of subjectivity might affect 'documentary' photography. The visual examples in the case study are drawn from *National Geographic*, *The Digital Journalist*, and the works of Robert Knoth.

This dissertation will focus upon the issues raised by the case study in the context of the subjectivity/objectivity debate, and the writings of John Berger (2002), Sarah Pink (2007) and Robert Coles (1997). Berger argues that the denial of subjectivity is bound up in capitalism and its 'adoption' of positivism (Berger 2002, pp.49-53). However, Pink and Coles argue that subjectivity is inescapable and therefore already central to the production of knowledge, that it is 'one of many possible takes, not the story, but a story' (Coles 1997, p.250; original italics).

Using the case study as a contemporary example to fuel discussion, it seems clear that there are significant moral arguments underpinning these works, which suggest photographic images are not simply entertainment, they 'continue to reflect and shape our world' (Marien 2002, p.xv). As images are part of our global experience, it is important to analyse how contemporary 'documentary' work is positioned within a global media culture that helps 'produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behaviour, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities' (Kellner 1995, p.1).

This paper is organized into three sections. Section one will define subjective and objective ideologies through theories linked to documentary photography, journalism and the media. This will present a framework for section two to discuss the case study and the openly subjective photographic practices in contrast to the ostensibly objective formula used by media giant *National Geographic*. In section three visual evidence examined in the case study are investigated and compared to each other in order to discern the validity of operating within a subjective framework. The conclusion considers the continuing commercialisation of 'objectivity' and speculates on the future of documentary photography in light of the opportunity to recognise more widely the social function of subjectivity.

On the Question of Subjectivity, Documentary and the Media

'The camera was invented in 1839' just as Auguste Comte (1798-1857) was 'finishing his Cours de Philosophie Positive' paving the way for positivism, photography and sociology to grow up together (Berger 2002, p.54). Positivism sustained the belief that 'observable quantifiable facts, recorded by scientists and experts, would one day offer man total knowledge about nature and society' (Berger 2002, p.54). Photographers working within this paradigm adopted conventions of a 'styleless' style, such as photographing 'natives' against plain backgrounds, and employing captions that often left the subjects unnamed or titled 'native', to emphasise what was then believed to comprise scientific neutrality (Marien 2002, p.39). This 'neutrality' is now regarded as a visual perpetuation of 'a hierarchy of superiority', which placed Indigenous peoples on the lowest rank (Croft 1992, p.22) justifying the 'imperial division

of the world' (Berger 2002, p.53). Significantly, this idea of photographic 'objectivity' can be traced to present 'realist' images circulated in the media. As John Berger (2002) claims, what we are left with today is not a 'positivist utopia' where rational facts have 'solved' the problems of society and nature, but a global capital system 'wherein all that exists becomes quantifiable' because it 'can be' and 'has been' reduced to a commodity (Berger 2002, p.55; original italics). In this sense, Berger's claims prompt a debate on the social function of subjectivity in relation to documentary photography as a practice and in the wider context of the mass media.

In such a [capitalist] system...all subjectivity is treated as private, and the only (false) form of it which is socially allowed is that of the individual consumer's dream...The way photography is used today both derives from and confirms the suppression of the social function of subjectivity...(Berger 2002, pp.54-55).

Since the latter part of the twentieth century, postmodernist questioning of the 'hegemonic sway of the sciences and the authoritarian tone of the researcher's voice' has meant that any discipline, which allegedly held authority over 'reality', has been the subject of intense discussion (Blakely & Lloyd 2007, p.1). The supposed credibility and objectivity of these media, such as documentary photography, have likewise been called into question in all kinds of ways (van den Heuvel 2005, p.105). Despite the relentless questioning of positivism – by post-colonialists, postmodernists, feminists and more – media critics contend that the ideology of positivism continues to function because media corporations and journalists use 'objectivity' as a means of maintaining hegemony and authority that supports commercial gain.

Robert McChesney (2001) reasons that the guise of 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' continues to privilege those in power through the ways in which legitimate difference is excluded, undermining the right to democracy (that is a society based on egalitarian values) (McChesney 2001, pp.1-12). Dan Schiller (1981) concurs that such a process enforces notions of superiority and 'expertise' because objectivity is marketed as professional and 'bias' is the diversion of 'amateurs', thus the objective framework legitimises 'the exercise of social power over the interpretation of reality' (Schiller 1981, pp.3-196). For Lise Garon (1996) the media are not really objective, 'but they do have to look so' which has nothing to do with objectivity (as an ideal) but 'everything to do with influence' (Garon 1996, p.2). The allure of the power of influence is how 'objectivity remains the standard by which journalists are judged' (Pedelty 1995, p.171; Griffins 1998).

In countering these assumptions, Sarah Pink (2007) maintains we need to go beyond the criticism of

traditional research methods, beyond questions of ‘bias’, or assumptions that we ‘could (or should)’ avoid subjectivity and instead, subjectivity should be engaged with as central aspect of ‘knowledge, interpretation and representation’ (Pink 2001, p.23).

By focussing on how...knowledge about how individuals experience reality is produced, through the inter-subjectivity between researchers and their research contexts, we may arrive at a closer understanding...It is not solely the subjectivity of the researcher that may shade his or her understanding of reality, but the relationship between the subjectivities of researcher and informants [and audiences] that produces a negotiated version of reality (Pink 2007, p.24).

Pink argues that within the social sciences the uptake of reflexive practice and an emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches has meant that explorations of the human condition now recognise the centrality of subjectivity to the production of knowledge (Pink 2001, p.23-25). This departure from the positivist paradigm, Pink argues, has meant that the visual is now accepted as ‘no more subjective or objective than written texts’ (Pink 2007, p.1).

Jay Ruby extends this claim by arguing that there is in fact ‘a social obligation not to be objective’ as to ‘present ourselves and our products as anything else fosters a dangerous false consciousness on the part of our audiences’ (Ruby 2005, p.45; original italics). In his book *Doing Documentary Work* (1997), Robert Coles extends this by suggesting that it is the subjectivity of the individual that defines the integrity of documentary work:

In documentary work, imagination encounters and tries to come to terms with reality; and the way in which that is done, the outcome achieved, is as various as the individuals involved... (Coles 1997, p.267).

The documentary process, Coles argues, is never impartial. From our ‘natural curiosity’ to tell stories, documentary work is our impulse to connect with others and share this connection through narration (1997, p.251). For Coles it is in this process, and through the ‘questions we ask of ourselves’, that ‘we hope to be confirmed in our own humanity,’ to know the world for what it is, and through this knowing and connecting, make some difference (albeit modest) in our communities, our cities, our nations (1997, pp.86-252).

To summarise, photography has a history of entanglement in ‘objectivity’, which harks back to entrenched beliefs in mechanical reproduction and scientific positivism, that have continued to be reinforced by

mass journalism throughout the twentieth century and the present day (Griffins 1998, p.312; Marien 2002, pp.364-410). Yet whilst there are strong political and economic forces for maintaining ostensible objectivity, there are also powerful voices for admitting frank subjectivity around documentary work. Contemporary documentary works on nuclear devastation, which are produced under the auspices of objective or subjective ideological positions, provide an example of these voices, and will be examined in the following case study.

The Case study: Nuclear Devastation

Using the case study, this section demonstrates how the 'objective' ideology of National Geographic and the subjectivities of individual documentary photographers produce quite different perspectives on nuclear devastation in the former USSR. The case study examples are drawn from *National Geographic* magazine's *The Long Shadow Of Chernobyl* by Gerd Ludwig and Richard Stone (2006, pp.32-53); *The Digital Journalist* (on-line), *The Forgotten Ukrainians: Chornobyl [sic] and AIDS* by Joseph Sywenkyj (March 2002); and Robert Knoth and Antoinette de Jong's work *Certificate No.00358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Belarus, the Urals and Siberia* (2006), shown on-line and through the book format.

National Geographic: The Long Shadow of Chernobyl

National Geographic magazine has held worldwide influence on the prestige of 'realist', 'objective' and 'beautiful' photography (Collins & Lutz 1993, p.27; Marien 2002, p.222). As an organisation that uses documentary photography as its hallmark, its self-promoted illustriousness is that they have been offering a visually dazzling 'window on the world' to 'generations of armchair explorers' (Bryan 1987, pp.19-20). But as Collins and Lutz's research shows, there are several factors that strongly influence this 'window on the world':

The National Geographic Society has...[for over a hundred years] employed a number of strategies in constructing its authoritative position...It has always been private, but has powerful ties to the [US] government; it is a 'scientific' institution, yet dependant on the sales and popularity of its magazine...Through its long history, the National Geographic Society has strategically deployed realist codes and has fashioned claims to objectivity in order to secure its position as both 'scientific' and 'popular'...it has sought to strike balance between piquing the public's interest in countries unknown but worthy of exploration and presenting the world as a safe, well-ordered place (Collin & Lutz 1993, p.15).

The extensive research of Collins and Lutz into the life of *National Geographic*, highlights the magazine's

history as one steeped in the trope of ‘objective classifications of race’, and as a product of a society deeply permeated by racism and gender difference, reinforced by images taken by the Geographic photographer as the ‘whitest’ of white men; ‘the great hunter/adventurer’ who is free to roam the globe... virile in his freedom’, and brave for ‘entering the dangerous realms at the ends of the earth’ (Collins & Lutz 2002, pp.92-112).

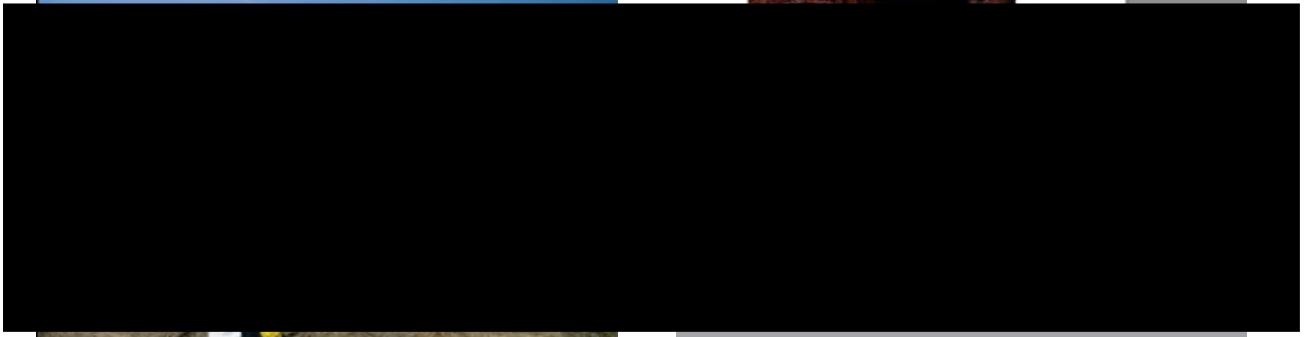


Fig.17

Fig.18

In the editorial of *The Long Shadow of Chernobyl* (April 2006), editor-in-chief Chris Johns portrays Geographic photographer Gerd Ludwig as a man scientifically and technologically savvy (figs.13, 17- 18), who took a calculated risk in face of danger (‘invisible killer radiation’) for the ‘right shot’ (Johns 2006, p.13).

In John’s editorial, Stone (writer) and Ludwig are described as ‘motivated by curiosity and a passion for truth’ that ‘put their health on the line to tell the story’ of the ‘worst nuclear accident in history’ (Johns 2006, p.13). In *The Long Shadow of Chernobyl*, Stone’s representation of the voices of the actual ‘victims’ who live with cancer today is minimal or absent. In the meantime, readers are greatly assured that the Chernobyl is being ‘fixed’ by science, displayed through graphs, maps, and ‘realist’ images of men hard at work maintaining the highly radioactive and rickety sarcophagus (figs.5-6). The human cost? As Stone suggests life ‘continues’, plagued perhaps with a few more cancers and psychological fears (Ludwig & Stone 2006, p.44-51):

Believing that they are doomed some live in fear, while others pursue a devil-may-care lifestyle: eating mushrooms and berries from contaminated soil, abusing alcohol, or engaging in promiscuous sex (Stone 2006, p.44).

For Stone to privilege the voice of scientists and psychologists as ‘rational’ voices, and typecast the people

of Chernobyl as such, is partisanship of the worst kind. Medialens – an Internet watchdog (whose slogan is: ‘correcting the distorted vision of the corporate media’) – noted that this type of bias is common:

[In media reports] we see the double standard journalists employ when dealing with ‘real’ people - senior government and corporate managers with power and influence - and ‘unpeople’, including members of the public (Esler 2007).

In the profit driven mainstream media, it seems Berger’s (2002) case that subjectivity is suppressed in a commodity market is astute: *National Geographic* exploits ‘objectivity’ for the purposes of creating an aura of authority. As phrased by the previous editor-in-chief Bill Allen (retired 2005), ‘I believe our job is to present a vivid, unbiased and completely true picture of the world around us. (Allen in Tungate 2004, p.169). The question that must be asked of this statement is, accurate to whom? *National Geographic* is both ‘broker and a maker of scientific knowledge’, each story in the magazine offers ‘glossy, stylised’ presentations made up of a ‘highly limited number of themes...[and] as such it is clearly located in what theorists of the Frankfurt School called mass culture’, created by those with powerful political interests, to ‘manipulate’ consumers (Collin & Lutz 1993, pp.5-24).

As a mass media product viewed by an estimated 37 million people worldwide (Collin & Lutz 1993, p.221), *National Geographic* magazine’s *The Long Shadow Of Chernobyl* (figs.1-11) is potentially quite influential. For some it may be disconcerting to find out that the National Geographic Society has a historical partisanship for ‘softening’ up viewers to nuclear power and the atom bomb (Collin & Lutz 1997, p.36).

Despite the fact that the cold war period saw the construction of bomb shelters, the stockpiling of nuclear weapons, and the McCarthy hearings... The Geographic contributed to softening the entrance to the nuclear age with articles such as ‘Nevada Learns to Live with the Atom’ and ‘Man’s New Servant, the Friendly Atom.’ In the meantime, the non-socialist third world continued to be portrayed as simple, childlike, and friendly – in the words of one caption, as ‘Paradise in search of a future.’ (Collins & Lutz 1997, p.36).

How much, then, has actually changed? *The Long Shadow of Chernobyl* (‘one of the worst nuclear accidents’) is immediately preceded by an article that proclaims this type of optimistic ambiguity: ‘It is Scary. It’s Expensive. It Could Save the Earth. Nuclear Power Risking a Comeback’ (Petit 2006, p.55). While Collins and Lutz argue that there are potentially various identifications and interpretations readers (consumers) will have of *National Geographic*, their summation is that *National Geographic* uses tactics to ‘play into notions of balance and political neutrality’ while imposing a conservative, perhaps

patriarchal, view upon others; a view which rarely cries out for 'change', mentions the 'painful', or asks questions which may cause embarrassment or 'discomfort' (Collins & Lutz 1993, p.280). As Pedelty stated, 'reflexive analysis' is 'anathema' for the proponents of objectivity (Pedelty 1995, p.172).

It is clear from these arguments that *National Geographic* is actually partial (in both senses of the word), but proclaims objectivity. The visual and written extent of this ideological misuse of 'objectivity' in *The Long Shadow of Chernobyl* will be examined further in the chapter Visualising Subjectivity.

The Digital Journalist and Joseph Sywenkyj: 'Chornobyl' and Aids

In contrast to the ethos of *National Geographic*, the Internet site, *The Digital Journalist*, is a free monthly multimedia online magazine for visual journalism. This site owes its continuation to several sponsors, and operates in partnership with The School of Journalism, University of Texas at Austin, and the *Digital Vision Network*, which brings together several major documentary websites. While *The Digital Journalist* is seemingly focussed on Euro-American visual journalists, it does offer space to emerging and established journalists to contribute stories that may not get published in the corporate media (www.digitaljournalist.org).

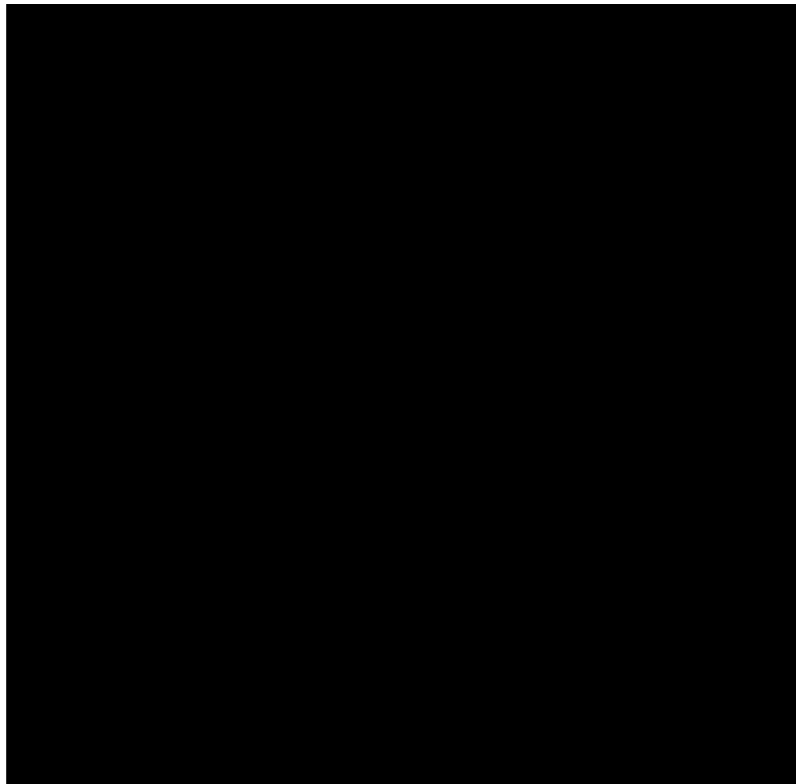
The potential space for the admission of subjectivity on *The Digital Journalist* can be traced to founder and photojournalist Dirck Halstead. Kurt Foss writes about Halstead's vision that led to founding *The Digital Journalist* in 1997:

Dirck Halstead...preaches...the potential for a golden age of visual storytelling, empowered and enhanced by changing technologies. 'New paradigms will be created in which the primary platforms for the new journalism will no longer necessarily be the traditional giants of the media,' Halstead says. In the World Wide Web...Halstead envisions a myriad of new opportunities for those skilled in the new tools and methods of the high-tech area. A demand for new types of visually rich, interactive content -- blending words, still images, audio, video and animation -- along with additional avenues for immediate, global distribution (Foss 1997).

For Edward Herman 'the real hope for critical journalism lies in the creation of new media outside of corporate control – the Internet is our best hope in this direction' (Herman in Barker 2007, p.23). While it is impossible to examine all the debates around the World Wide Web within this dissertation – such as the digital divide between those who 'have' and those who 'have not', privacy issues, or how certain governments use online police and censorship – the Internet is currently perceived by those with access as having democratic potential to connect people worldwide (Heaton 2007).

An important aspect to the personal media revolution [on the Internet] is the social or "connected" nature of it. [People]...are creating marvellous tools to connect to each other... This is counterintuitive to the traditional press, which has built its empire on remaining disconnected, except through hierarchical organizations that work to maintain the status quo (Heaton 2007).

The Digital Journalist undoubtedly represents the perspective of the photographer/videographer as 'author' of the stories they tell and participate in. *The Forgotten Ukrainians: Chornobyl [sic] and Aids* (2002), American-Ukrainian photographer Joseph Sywenkyj's subjectivity is overtly displayed through the expression of his processes and reflections, visible in his written statements, video interviews and still images (Fig.19-30).



I don't use the camera as a shield. I try to think of it as a door. You hear some photographers saying that the camera is a wall for them that keeps them on the opposite side emotionally from the people that they are photographing. Where as I try to think of it as a door and I try to walk through that door. And I try to put myself in those people's shoes, albeit it is only for a short time, and as an outsider and a photographer. But I try to understand where they are coming from and I let them know where I am coming from, and the pictures happen from there (Sywenkyj 2002).

Sywenkyj's approach is openly displayed in a series of short video interviews which appear to be useful to audiences by allowing them the possibility of overtly discerning Sywenkyj's politics. An example of this is that Sywenkyj describes in prose how he purposefully used the Ukrainian spelling of 'Chornobyl' to align himself directly with his own cultural heritage and language. For Sywenkyj, doing documentary work is both the desire to express what is happening in the world, and:

...a personal experience for me, as these two projects were done in the country where my grandparents are from. I feel very comfortable there. I speak the language. I don't need to work with a translator, I work by myself. Basically my perspective as a documentary photographer is that I am young and I am picking stories that actually have been done for many years by many different people. However, by doing them in my own way, I can get people interested in them again. I feel that these are issues that need to be revisited over and over again until some kind of solution can be brought to them (Sywenkyj 2002).

Sywenkyj self-funded the project *The Forgotten Ukrainians: Chornobyl and Aids* (2002). The project arose because of his choice to volunteer for The Children of Chornobyl Relief and Development Fund, 'a humanitarian organization established to protect and save the lives of children confronting the human legacy of the world's worst environmental disaster' (www.childrenofchornobyl.org). Because Sywenkyj was well accepted, the organisation sponsored some of his project. But Sywenkyj makes it clear to viewers that even still; the project was only possible within a short timeframe because of a lack of resources.

Contrary to the approach taken by National Geographic, in Sywenkyj's representation of the children suffering the impact of 'Chornobyl', he has made his ideological message quite clear:

The public needs to be informed that exposure to the radioactive fallout of Chornobyl continues to destroy lives. The total number of those affected may not be realized for at least another fifteen years... Today Ukraine is facing a health crisis. The quiet cries for help from sick children must be heard... **THE WORLD CAN NOT AFFORD TO IGNORE WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN UKRAINE. WE MUST LEARN FROM THIS NUCLEAR DISASTER** (Sywenkyj 2002; original capitalisation).

This impassioned response comes from witnessing the lives of the children of 'Chornobyl' and his obvious interest in raising money for these children to help better their quality of life (fig.24). In his encounters, Sywenkyj faces the pain of cancer, birth defects, mental illness, death and the abandonment of defective children (fig.26) in orphanages across the Ukraine.

In several orphanages I witnessed and photographed an absolute nightmare. Half-naked children

in tattered clothing lay on urine soaked wooden floors. Legs and bodies were contorted in every angle but straight. If all children are angels, these children had their wings clipped and were thrown into a living hell [fig.28-29] (Sywenkyj 2002).

Sywenkyj adds:

A lot of these kids live their entire lives in these tiny beds, and they don't receive any kind of physical therapy or training. I am sure a lot of these kids could learn to fend for themselves to an extent...[given the opportunity] They are never going to have normal lives, but their quality of life is so poor. They just spend their lives in these tiny little beds. And I think it was really when I was back [from the Ukraine], when I was looking at my contact sheets and making prints that I broke down (Sywenkyj 2002).

By examining Sywenkyj's subjectivity, and the issues he chooses to portray, prompts further questioning by others. In this edition of *The Digital Journalist*, Helen Buttfeld argues:

When you know what a photographer chooses to look at, you have already learned a great deal about [them]...Joseph Sywenkyj, who is still a very young man, has already chosen to enter a world that most of us choose to avoid: the field of human suffering...he has taken on the darker, more dreadful silence caused by our ignorance of the suffering that has resulted from the explosion at Chernobyl in 1986...Photographers like Joseph, who can look steadily at the unbearable, have a...power to...convert ignorance into awareness and fear into understanding, without which there can be no change...(Buttfeld 2002).

Sywenkyj visually tells this story of suffering through portraits of the children and contextual scenes (figs. 19-30). These images in relation to the tradition of photographic portraiture will be examined further in *Visualising Subjectivity*.

Robert Knoth and Antoinette de Jong: Nuclear Devastation

Dutch photographer Robert Knoth and journalist Antoinette de Jong collaborated to tell the stories of the people living with the consequences of nuclear accidents and nuclear tests across the former USSR (Knoth 2007). The result was a seven-year journey, published by Greenpeace International and UNICEF in a book titled: *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Belarus, the Urals and Siberia* (2006).

In their book, Knoth and de Jong reveal portraits and testimonies of families living in these regions that suffer from all manner of cancers and rare diseases. The purpose of the book, as the introductory text suggests, is to examine the social, economic and environmental impacts of 'human made nuclear catastrophes' (Knoth & de Jong 2006, pp.6-7). The combination of Knoth's photographs and de Jong's

voice, interwoven with testimonies from local people and experts, creates a multi-dimensional story. For the most part this story privileges the voices and the identities of the people who experience the reality of poor health caused by exposure to radiation (figs. 31-58).

‘At the time,’ says Mrs. Salikhyanova, who saw the red circle going up in the sky, ‘we didn’t realise what had happened, not until calves with two heads were born.’ Another woman from Muslyumovo mentions a dog. ‘It gave birth to a puppy with ass’s ears and eyes at the back of its head’... Unfortunately, these are not unfounded rumors. The medical faculty in the regional capital Chelyabinsk... has a morbid collection of deformed embryos and foetuses. ‘It is the largest collection anywhere in Russia,’ says professor of embryology Gennady Vasilievich Bryukhin. He shows foetuses with bone-like tissue forming instead of healthy skin. ‘And here is a child without legs, as in Andersen’s fairy tale,’ the professor says pointing to a child that looks like a mermaid (Knoth & de Jong 2006, p.11).



Fig. 53

Knoth and de Jong’s personal involvement in the project is frankly acknowledged throughout the book. Knoth intimately engages with people by taking their portrait, which represents what Pink defined as the ‘subjective negotiation’ of reality, a reality between Knoth and the people he photographs (Pink 2007, p.24). In these portraits many people from these regions look directly back at the viewer (for example see fig.31-33). This approach, Fred Ritchin argues, breaks down our resistance and ‘compassion fatigue’:

By looking at Knoth's straightforward photographs and de Jong's understated texts we have entered their lives, and they have entered ours. Not as spectacle, but as people (Ritchin 2007, p.2).

Knoth's and de Jong's approach is about trust, connecting with, and responding to people. 'We adopted a very low-key approach and never pressed the people—if they didn't want to cooperate, or didn't like the Polaroid photos I took to show them, we didn't go any further', said Knoth (Knoth in Skinner 2007). At times, Knoth put down the camera to participate in daily family routines, as he did when he helped a desperate mother of two sick children harvest potatoes (Knoth in Skinner 2007). 'You try to be a part of the community you work in, even if it just for a short time. The closer or more personal you get to the people you'd like to photograph, the better are your photos—it also keeps you sane' (Knoth in Skinner 2007).

In 2005 Knoth approached Greenpeace and UNICEF for funding – with the stipulation that he remained independent of both organizations – and ultimately it was this support that facilitated the completion of *Certificate No.00358* (Skinner 2007, p.3). The book and various exhibitions were launched in 2006, and the reaction has been 'overwhelming' (Skinner 2007, p.3). On the Internet, the bandwidth of the online service pixelpress.org that was displaying Knoth's work, 'had to be increased to handle daily traffic' which 'peaked at 26,500 [online visitors] in April, 2006' (Skinner 2007, p.3). Because of this, Knoth was inundated with e-mails from people interested in the project and specific individuals he had photographed (figs. 57-58) (Skinner 2007, p.3). For Knoth – as for Sywenkyj – the Internet and alternative media and funding creates possibilities for independent documentary practice, as well as a means for the public to interact and respond creating what Heaton (2007) termed 'a personal media revolution'.

The ideology behind Knoth's and de Jong's work is evidently a desire to expose injustice, while creating a sense of justice by respecting the views of people living within these communities, not just the views of 'experts'. Offering people a voice in the media is not about sensationalism, it is at times about acknowledging what we as humans do to each other so we can (hopefully) learn and make informed decisions for the future. Knoth's and de Jong's documentary work, as Coles suggested, confirms for us a sense of 'our own humanity', while starkly reminding us to ask questions of ourselves and to ask questions of the misuse of government and economic powers.

Knoth's visual methods will be examined in section three, along with the tradition of the portrait and the 'neutrality' of the black and white photographic tradition.

The evidence from this chapter suggests that frank subjectivity within documentary work is finding ways to be heard through alternate media, books, galleries, museums and the Internet (Gierstberg 2005, pp.124-145). The integrity of the admission of subjectivity, as Coles (1997) and Pink (2007) suggested, continues to relate to the individual and the context in which their documentary works are shown. While Berger (2002) argued all subjectivity is suppressed within capitalist opportunism, documentary works shown free-of-charge on the Internet challenge this idea to a degree. But as Frits Gierstberg reminds us:

Processes of representation in the media...are (often consciously) controlled by commercial and ideological interests that are by no means always evident, but of which we can be certain that they allow (apparent) credibility to prevail over confrontation, complexity and nuance... (Gierstberg 2005, pp.135-136).

Visualising Subjectivity

Larry Gross (1988) argued that it was 'hardly a novel statement' to suggest objectivity is a myth; but it was one that required evidential exploration to test the ethics of mass media and its treatment of minorities outside the mainstream (Gross 1988, p.189). For Gross, the media uses 'objectivity' as a means of 'mainstreaming' ideas to sit 'somewhere right of the centre' (1988, p.189). The continued relevance of this debate to contemporary modes of representation is undeniable. As John Pilger recently argued, the 'media clichéd language' of objectivity 'normalizes the unthinkable' (Pilger 2007).

Stone and Ludwig's work in *National Geographic* requires a contextual examination, as the layout of the images combined with the text creates a visual and narrative language that is more than the sum of its parts (figs.1-11). The sequence of *The Long Shadow of Chernobyl* essentially informs readers that the event at the reactor was a disaster (figs.1-4), men are fixing it (figs.5-6), we remember (mainly the good of times of Pripyat), but life continues (figs.7-11): essentially this equates to the ability of science, man and nature to 'overcome'; where rumours of 'birth defects' are more due to 'fear among new mothers' than actual science (fig.10) (Ludwig & Stone 2006, pp.50-51). Let us consider this latter example – fig.10 – where the seductive language of 'objectivity' is evident in the juxtaposition of images and caption text (above and left).

Next to the these texts (fig.10) readers are presented with two images: a woman who has just given birth looks down at her newborn baby, whilst the accompanying pull-out quote (fig.10a) influences reader's interpretation of the mothers gaze. Above it is a slightly smaller image of a 'mentally disabled' child sniffing a flower in an institution for the disabled in Belarus (Ludwig & Stone 2006, pp.50-51). The

images taken in full colour 35mm format are both tranquil, reflecting *National Geographic's* argument that 'strong pictures may offend some viewers or may be inappropriate for children' (Collins & Lutz 1993, p.71). In the case of the disabled child there is a warm off-camera light that adds a comforting mood to his environment (fig.10). Reader's fears of post-Chernobyl child deformity are somewhat ameliorated.

**“The psychological effects have been devastating.
Many women feel they will give birth to unhealthy
babies or babies with no future.”**

Fig.10a — detail

SICK WITH FEAR

Mentally disabled children (left) live in an institution in Belarus. Children born in the region are said to have a higher rate of birth defects and retardation because of Chernobyl, a belief not supported by a recent UN study. The study did find that the accident left a damaging legacy of fear among new mothers like Yelena Banchuk, 32 (below), exposed to fallout as a girl in Belarus.

Fig.10b — detail

Objectivity, as its proponents suggest, provides 'balance' by presenting (usually two) conflicting ideas so as audiences can make up their own mind (Pedelty 1995; Gross 1888). Yet which of the conflicting ideas receives precedence in this example (fig.10)? The major text reference, which visually dominates the story, is the large quotation followed by the images and the caption 'sick with fear'. Furthermore, at the end of this hierarchy of design is the voice of 'opposition' that suggests 'a higher rate of birth defects' due to fallout. As James Guimond argued, 'the Geographic uses captioning in support of a particular view of the world' (Guimond in Collins & Lutz 1993, p.78). Similarly, Roland Barthes described the 'anchorage' of the caption that 'loads' the image, 'burdening it with culture, a moral, an imagination (Barthes 1977, pp.25-26). For Susan Sontag, 'photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions' (2003, p.10). In *The Long Shadow of Chernobyl* (2006) Ludwig's image (Fig.2) of a 13-year-old thyroid cancer victim from Belarus is captioned to state that he is 'unlikely to have developed cancer because of ' the Chernobyl fallout (Stone 2006, p.35). Stone contradicts himself within the article text, stating 'the fallout... triggered an epidemic of thyroid cancer in children' (Stone 2006, p.36), fortifying Schiller's argument that 'objectivity' is a 'formidable barrier to comprehension' (1981, p.197).

Whilst such bias in National Geographic is at first glance not easily discernible, the central argument of this essay has been that the state of subjectivity is unavoidable, and that whilst their stated position remains otherwise, the framework of *National Geographic* is partisan. Most notably, in *The Long Shadow of Chernobyl*, there exists a conflict of messages between the pathos, loss and suffering in some of Ludwig's images (figs.2, 3 & 9), compared to the reserved tone of Stone's (and editor selected) associated captions and text which labels Ukrainians as having largely 'psychological wounds' and engaging in 'misconduct' such as eating contaminated berries and having promiscuous sex. The disparity between Stone and Ludwig's view is even more apparent in Ludwig's feature on The Digital Journalist entitled *The Broken Empire: Pollution* (1999) (figs.59-60):

My photographs report quite a different vision of the former USSR than the one that had been projected by National Geographic during the gloomiest period of the Cold War. Images of the bald children of Chernobyl and the limbless children of Moscow disclosed deep disturbing truths. Birth defects and infant mortality not just in the vicinity of a major atomic catastrophe but even in the ailing empires once proud capital, strike the peoples of this land at twice the rate of the industrial nations of the west (Ludwig 1999).

Unlike the view projected by *National Geographic*, Blake R. Fitzpatrick argues that independent documentaries on nuclear devastation have constituted a 'era of testimony' and remembrance that requires 'making visible' the 'invisible' causes of historical happenings, such as memories of nuclear fallout and cancers caused by radiation pollution (Fitzpatrick 2002, p.5). It is this 'invisibility' and retracing of history, Fitzpatrick argues, that demands a greater conscious, subjective choice as to how photographers document nuclear devastation (Fitzpatrick 2002, pp.5-6).

It is this collaborating act of response between photographer and viewer that implicates the photograph not only in the production of historical knowledge but also in the production of historical subjectivity and a critical viewership. On these terms...we learn to think of documentary artworks as providing more than information, objective truth or evidence insisting instead on educative visual practice of witness and responsibility (Fitzpatrick 2002, p.6).

Such 'educative visual practice' is visible in the works and contexts both Knoth and de Jong, and Sywenkyj. Both photographers use photographic portraiture as a core method to visually share the stories of the people they encounter (figs.19-56). Historically, photographic portraiture – throughout various contexts – has essentially symbolised the tensions between notions of subjectivity and objectivity, the 'objective' and 'subjective' self (Marien 2002, pp.4-274). For Pink, in both 'historical and contemporary' photography, 'the experience, the motivations and the social positions of the photographers are intrinsic to the images' and an important issue for portrait photography (Pink 2007, p.69):

It is the context created by the 'book' format of Knoth's and de Jong's work, as well as the online contexts for Knoth's photographs that allows for subjectivity. The design of the book privileges both de Jong's written and Knoth's visual research to form a cohesive politic (figs. 27-51). For Pink, there is a need for practices that recognise the autonomy of the image to making a contribution in its own right (Pink 2007, p.151). Pink's argument is a contrast to traditional research practices that have tended to make photographic meaning contingent on written text (Pink 2007, p.151). On the website pixelpress.org (fig.57-58), Knoth's work is edited so viewers see the images before the captions, as the captions are hidden as 'rollover text' (web term), and at the end of this series of images, online viewers are given the option of adding their own comments to a discussion forum about Knoth's work (fig.58).

In the book Certificate No.000358, Knoth's choice to switch between the 35mm format images of daily life (fig.42), to panoramas of tainted landscapes (figs.51-52), to the portraits taken on medium format film (figs.47-50), visually portrays a clear choice in 'telling' or constructing a story of nuclear witness. The medium format camera, used by both Sywenkyj and Knoth, encourages a slow and patient engagement on the photographer's part with the subject. In both Sywenkyj's and Knoth's respective contexts, the portrait is given the space to be (subjectively) mediated upon by readers (for example fig.20 & fig.55). Such space is not made available in *The National Geographic* magazine or the website, which is littered with advertising incurring Berger's (2002) argument of the suppression of subjectivity in a commodity market (fig.14).

From this contemporary case study, it is very apparent that all photographers (writers and so forth) are subjective. What is important is how subjectivity is acknowledged and in what context works are (re) presented. As Becker wrote 'the definition of the genre of a photograph depends more on the context in which it is viewed than its pertaining to any one (socially constructed) category (Becker in Pink 2007, p.67).

Conclusion

Subjectivity *is* inevitable. Yet with the admission of its inevitabilities comes the admission of significant and unavoidable responsibilities. This essay has set out to argue that not only does the admission of subjectivity affect the perception of documentary photography, but acknowledging subjectivity becomes an ethical act when practicing documentary work.

Works of documentary art have the potential to initiate a call for this type of vigilant attention and critical response. They can not be judged solely as a tool for objective truth or evidence because

they are also traces of acts, which in turn initiate other acts. Important here, is the linkages that such work can create between multiple histories and the present (Fitzpatrick 2002, p. 239).

The actions of Knoth and de Jong perhaps begin to level the playing field with regard to the ideological power structures of media narrative. By facilitating the voices of many people, not just the experts or the politically powerful, Knoth and de Jong use documentary media in a broadly egalitarian way, and one that is undoubtedly raising awareness in the international community. In the work of Sywenkyj, it is his voice that essentially campaigns for the rights of the 'Children of Chornobyl', and attempts to create awareness in the minds of those living in privilege to support change in improving these children's quality of life. Furthermore, it is the intent behind such self consciously subjective acts as those of Knoth and Sywenkyj, which may initiate further (positive) acts of subjective engagement.

For documentary photographers working for media institutions such as National Geographic, there is seemingly very little place for the social function of subjectivity. The façade of 'objectivity' in such media becomes a convenient paradox that continues to compromise the ability to examine ourselves (particularly as media makers) and ask critical questions. For Pilger the consequences of this are not merely theoretical:

In every university, in every media college, in every news room, teachers of journalism, journalists themselves need to ask themselves about the part they now play in the bloodshed in the name of a bogus objectivity (Pilger 2007).

While there may be a place for idealistic objectivity (as based on a search for truths, not conforming to powerful ideologies), issues of ethical consequence demand the respect of an explicitly honest and subjective approach.

As the power of media conglomerates increases and as the control of Internet usage and access tightens (Google in China, or the US government's bid to increase tariffs for Internet radio, are clear examples that this is happening), it will prove telling to witness whether the acknowledgment of subjectivity diminishes, or whether the sway from positivism will lead to more types of media that can facilitate subjective voices. In the meantime, perhaps certain liberties accrued through present alternate media can 'make a difference'.

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Figs. 1—11 Gerd Ludwig & Richard Stone, from *The Long Shadow of Chernobyl* (2006). THE COPY OF THE ARTICLE HAS BEEN REMOVED AS PERMISSION WAS NOT GIVEN TO USE THE IMAGES IN THIS PAPER. There is no online link to the article. A copy of April 2006 National Geographic Magazine would need to be obtained from a library.

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Fig. 12 Gerd Ludwig & Richard Stone, from *The Long Shadow of Chernobyl* (2006).

Fig. 14 Gerd Ludwig, from *The Long Shadow of Chernobyl: Gallery* (2006).

Fig. 15 Richard Stone, from *The Long Shadow of Chernobyl: On Assignment* (2006).

Fig. 16 Charles Petit, from *Nuclear Risking a Comeback* (2006) (a kid mowing the lawn with a reactor behind).

Fig. 13, 17—18 Gerd Ludwig, (detail self-portrait) from *The Long Shadow of Chernobyl: Sights & Sounds* (2006).

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http://digitaljournalist.org/issue0203/js_intro.htm

Please locate the images on the Digital Journalist Website

Figs. 19—30 Joseph Sywenkyj, from *The Forgotten Ukrainians: Chornobyl [sic] and AIDS*, (2002).

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Figs. 31 — 55 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.00035: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia* (2006).

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Figs. 56—57 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358 series*, (2006).



Muslyumovo. Daniel and Inga.



Muslyumovo. Elvira Gainullina and her friends are placing flowers at the grave of their friend Rais, who killed himself at the age of 22.



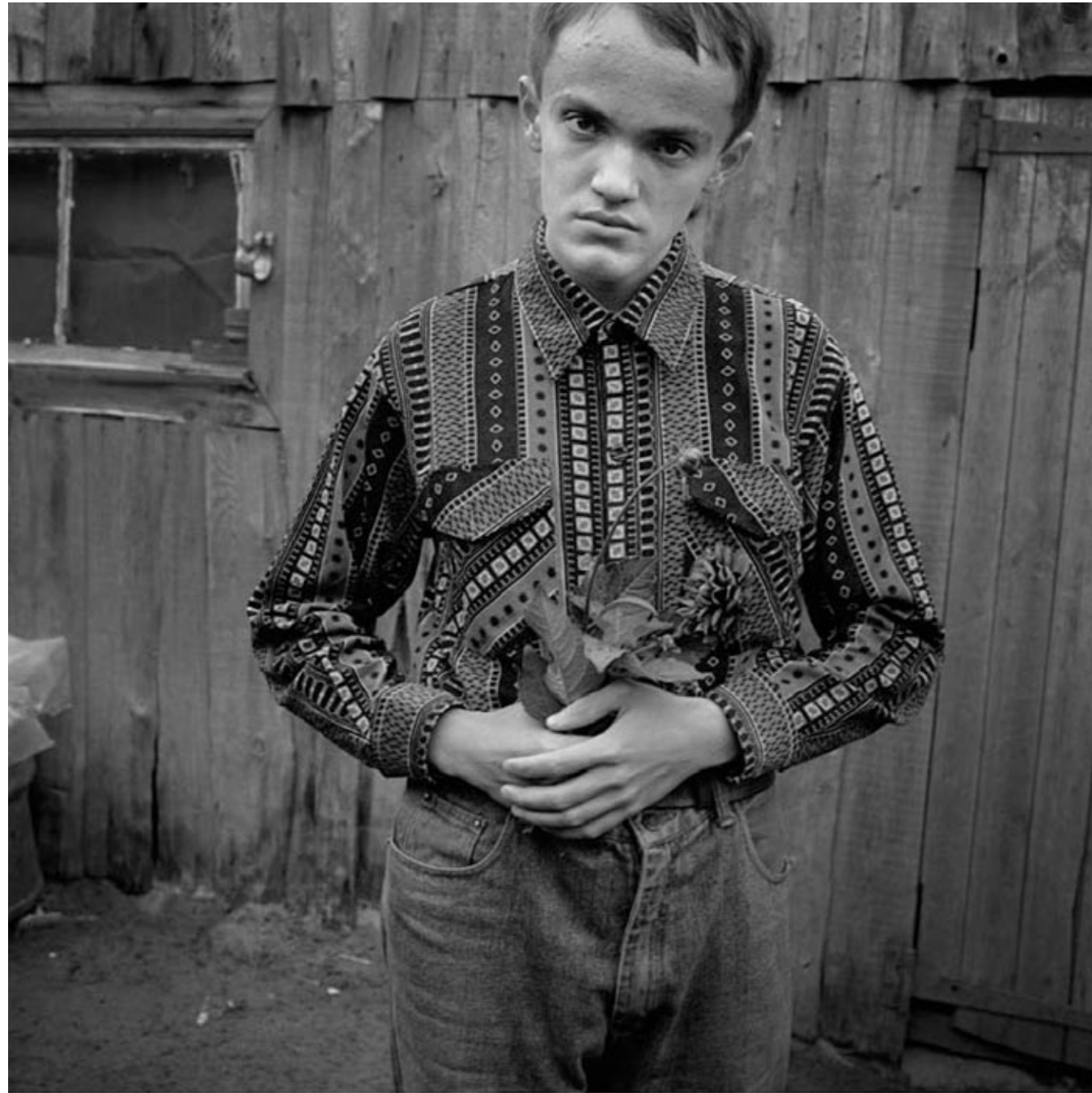
Bashakul. Natalia Nekrasova was operated on a brain tumour when she was eight years old. Her little brother Kostya has Down's syndrome. Their mother Lyudmila blames her children's illnesses on the river Techa. Despite Natalia's bad health, she completed her degree in business economics. After she graduated, the government decided to stop her

monthly medical allowance, claiming she would now be able to provide herself with an income. However, she has not been able to find work and says nobody wants to employ her because she has cancer. She was forced to return to her mother's house to live there because she has no money.



Muslyumovo. Abdulvaley Galimov (69). Almost everybody he loved has died of cancer: his parents, uncles and aunts, brothers, sisters and one of his daughters have all died of cancer. His remaining daughter and son are unable to have children and they have moved to Chelyabinsk. Galimov: "Those who stay in this village, die a slow death."

Fig. 32 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006



Kurmanovo, Russia. Ramzis Faizullin (16) has hydrocephalus. "I don't like to go to school, because the boys call me bad names. The girls avoid me and don't want to go out with me. I hope I will not have children who look like me."

48

II Chernobyl – Certificate no. 000358/

When she was just four years old, little Anna Pesenko, trying to be a good girl, sitting up straight and eating her food nicely, would sometimes just pass out and fall flat onto the table. "Annya" as she is called, could not explain very well what was wrong with her. No wonder her mother Valentina got very worried and took her to the doctor, who discovered a tumour in the girl's head. The cancer was removed, but Annya never regained her health and has seen so many doctors that she gets terrified when-ever she sees a white coat.

Even so, a committee of such doctors decided she should have a "Chernobyl certificate" because Annya's father Vyacheslav was from a village that became highly contaminated as a result of Chernobyl. They visited Zakopytye often before the village was destroyed and buried. Annya carries certificate no. 000358/. It reads: "This person has the right to the privileges that are given by the government of the Republic of Belarus for the victims of the Chernobyl catastrophe as specified under article 18/ issued by the Gomel Municipality." The much sought-after piece of paper gives the holder access to certain health institutions, a selection of free medicines, a fifty percent discount on utilities bills, and free public transport.

Now, at fifteen, Annya is still trying. When she is strong enough, she studies together with her teachers, who come and visit her at home: "Our republic is rich in resources: limestone, salt, chalk and oil are amongst them," Annya wrote down in the spring. A week later the neat regular handwriting continued: "The Russian scientist Mendeleev created the periodic table of elements. The city of Gomel has a chemical plant."

There are no recent entries. Last month Annya was rushed into hospital and kept on artificial respiration at the intensive care unit for seventeen days. This has become almost a routine since the brain tumour reappeared in 2000. Back home, she lies back onto her pillows like a wilted plant, too weak to move, surrounded by her cuddly toys.

Two boys from the neighbourhood, Andrey and Zhenya, have been her faithful friends. Annya's mother shows a picture where her daughter has cut out the face of a girl. "Last autumn Annya's hair fell out," she says. "I think boys understand her better." Girlfriends have stopped visiting, deliberately or out of cruel forgetfulness. The young, the strong and healthy are maybe too pre-occupied with growing up and living or afraid of being confronted with someone who is so obviously not.

Annya whimpers in pain as the masseur kneads her legs to improve blood circulation. "Especially the places where we inject her medication are very painful. We have to use force and press the skin to keep the medicine in," her mother explains. This week the masseur has come every day, and each time he presses more firmly. "Don't cry, Annya. Don't cry,"

49

Fig. 33 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006

Valentina repeats her soothing mantra, trying to calm her daughter down.

She takes a picture of the Saint Anne, her daughter's namesake, and bends over to whisper a prayer into Annya's ears.

At night, Valentina and Vyacheslav Pesenko sleep on the floor next to their daughter's bed, for Annya has to be turned every fifteen minutes to prevent bedsores. The girl needs help with everything. While Vyacheslav washes the soiled sheets by hand, Valentina carefully replaces them from a pile of freshly washed and pressed cotton towels, stacked in a corner. Nobody in the family gets much sleep; all three are exhausted.

Vyacheslav leaves for his chauffeuring job at the chemical plant first thing in the morning. "And I drink coffee all day to stay awake, but I am so tired," says Valentina.

When the nurse comes and busies herself with looking after Annya, Valentina has time to show the picture albums that she is putting together to document her daughter's life. There are pictures of Annya on her trip to Scotland and silly ones of the girl dressed up as the Russian rock idol Zemphira. There are also pictures of the last trips to the farmhouse with the frail girl all wrapped up in a big thick coat to cushion her, a wide smile under a woolly beanie hat.



Gomel, Belarus. Annya Pesenko, Chernobyl certificate no. 000358/.



Fig. 35 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006



54

55

Fig. 36 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006



Fig. 37 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006



58

59

Fig. 38 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006



Fig. 39 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006



Annya before her brain tumour reappeared.

62

63

Fig. 40 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006



Fig. 41 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006



Fig. 42 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006



Muslyumovo. Potato harvest on the banks of the Techa River. The soil is contaminated with radioactive elements. When the men take the potatoes to the market they never say where these are from, otherwise nobody will want to buy them.

14

Muslyumovo. Farmers collecting hay alongside the banks of the Techa River. The soil is contaminated with radio-active particles.

15

Fig. 43 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006



Narodichi. Football match between “Zone-2” and “Zone-3”.

Fig. 44 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006



Rogin, Belarus. Lyudmila Novikova on her morning milk round for the collective farm.

90

91

Fig. 45 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006

Doctors and Chernobyl

Just ahead of the holiday season, the hospital's corridors and consulting rooms are full. Surgeon Igor Komisarenko, head of the Institute for Endocrinology, has been operating all morning. Most of his patients are women with thyroid cancer. "Four years after the explosion we were confronted with a surge of cases of children with thyroid cancer. The closer to Chernobyl, the higher the chances of getting thyroid cancer." Many more cases are still expected. The Unicef representative for the Russian Federation and Belarus, Carel de Rooy, writes in this book that Unicef and other UN offices have been campaigning for years for a policy of universal salt iodization. That would make thyroid glands much less vulnerable to radioactive iodine through becoming saturated with the iodized salt. So far, Ukraine, Belarus and Russia have not been willing to adapt their regulations. Doctor Komisarenko: "After the Chernobyl disaster, iodine was distributed too late, but radiation can affect all parts of the human body. It can of course affect the stomach, the respiratory tract and the gynaecological organs." He has also noticed a rise in serious kidney diseases. Along the Kiev roads, notice boards try to encourage the public: "Make love! There are forty-eight million people in Ukraine, and we need to have fifty-two million!" The target is not very likely to be met any time soon. Nowhere in Europe has the population aged more dramatically than in the areas surrounding Chernobyl. After a shockwave of medical abortions

that followed the disaster, the birthrate in Ukraine is only half of what it was in the mid-seventies of the last century. From eight hundred thousand newborns a year, it has plummeted to less than four hundred thousand.

In Belarus the trend is similar. Doctor Vyacheslav Izhakovsky is director of the children's hospital in Gomel, the second largest city in the country. He says that only one in every four children is born healthy. In the intensive care unit, there are children with different congenital defects; a cleft palate, no ears, no nose, and children with very serious hydrocephalus. "In 1985 we had two hundred children with congenital defects, now we have eight hundred," says Izhakovsky. The total number of births registered by the hospital went down from thirty thousand to fifteen thousand. "The birthrate is decreasing, like everywhere in Europe, but an important factor is that people realise the dangers of having children here." According to Izhakovsky, the lack of economic perspective is also affecting the birthrate. "The average salary is equivalent to 150 US dollars. Life is particularly hard in the villages. People are forced to eat whatever they can grow and radioactive contamination is high." Research in the contaminated areas has shown that more children are contracting illnesses of the respiratory organs, the bones and connective tissues or the digestive tract. There are also increased cases of kidney disorders, cataracts, and heart and vascular diseases. Autopsies on children who died suddenly revealed

that these children had higher levels of the radioactive element Caesium 137 in their bodies. Izhakovsky: "We think Caesium 137 replaces another element in the heart muscle, and by doing so it is causing damage." The overall condition of many children is weak, according to the hospital's director, and the children's immune systems are under-performing.

The worst-hit countries have all seen a clear rise in cases of congenital diseases. Especially disturbing is that this trend is also evident in areas exposed to lower doses of radiation. This phenomena was noticed by Anna Gorchakova. In the Belarusian capital of Minsk, she is running a hospice programme that assists children who are terminally ill, as well as their families. Gorchakova says she has seen an increase in congenital disease in the areas that were not so heavily exposed: "I find it very worrying. Some of these children are real monsters. I'm sorry, I don't want to hurt anybody, but I don't know how else to put it."

In the social and economical isolation of Belarus, many parents are not capable of looking after their children. Many children are placed under the care of state institutions.

The independent Belrad Institute in Minsk has done research throughout Belarus. Director Aleksei Nesterenko says that in large parts of the country people still ingest radioactive elements through the food chain: "Half a million children in Belarus have concentrations that are too

high." Since the mid-eighties, children have been sent on holidays to so-called pioneer camps and to other clean areas. Many children still go abroad to stay with foster families. Clean food and exercise can help the body eliminate part of the contamination. The Belrad Institute has developed a supplement of vitamins, minerals and pectin that can do this as well; several courses a year at regular intervals can reduce the contamination levels by sixty percent, says Nesterenko. "But we don't get enough money to supply half a million children. We have only enough for twenty-five thousand." Almost twenty years after the Chernobyl accident, children are thus being put at risk and are left more vulnerable to many diseases. Paediatrician Valentina Smolnikova has seen the consequences in Buda-Koshelyovo in the south of Belarus. She has been working there since 1979 and has seen dramatic changes since the nuclear disaster: "Before that, we hardly had any oncology problems concerning children. Now there are many cases of brain tumours, cancer of the eyes, kidneys and other organs." She noticed the first increase after the disaster in cases of bone and skin cancer, "and there were also disorders of the nervous system with stress, depressions and abnormal behaviour." After some years, the pattern changed and Smolnikova then started getting patients with thyroid cancer and leukaemia. "Now there are many children with congenital heart and kidney diseases." According to Smolnikova, in her area only

ten percent of the children are born really healthy: "Many children have chronic diseases or they have very low immunity.

Very young children have been here between thirty and fifty times. They are here every single month of their lives."



Gomel, Belarus. Aleksandra Prokopenko (9) with her father Vitaly. Aleksandra has hydrocephalus. Vitaly has quit his job. He is the only one strong enough to hold Aleksandra when she sits up to eat.

> Kiev, Ukraine. Institute for Endocrinology. Nila Bondarenko from Zhytomyr has her third operation of the thyroid gland. Surgeon Igor Komisarenko says after her second operation: "Microscopic particles of the cancer got into her blood vessels and started growing there." Bondarenko also has kidney cancer.

Fig. 47 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006



Buda-Koshelyovo, Belarus. Pavel Kurbatov (4) has twice had eye cancer.

104



Buda-Koshelyovo. Nastya Eremenko (9) when she was three years old she was diagnosed with cancer of the uterus. Later on she also had metastasis in her lungs. Nastya has had several blocks of chemotherapy.

105

Fig. 48 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006



Gomel. Irina (19) and Yelena (24) Patuchenko, both had brain tumours. In 1998 Irina was diagnosed with a brain tumour.

106

Kiev. Institute for Endocrinology. Larisa Lototskaya (60) from Kiev and Paulina Yasnuchuk (61) from Zhytomir, Ukraine. Both have thyroid cancer. Three months later, her sister Yelena had to go into hospital, also with a brain tumour. Irina's left arm is partly paralyzed because of the surgery.

107

Fig. 49 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006



Minsk, Belarus. Vadim Seliganov (14) from Orsh has sarcoma of the prostate gland. He lives in a hospice centre.

Kiev. Galina Miroshnichenko (34) has thyroid cancer.

112

113

Fig. 50 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006



Seversk, Russia. The Black Lake area is close to the SGCE. Radioactive materials are injected into underground storage. Through soil migration and leakages the area around the Black Lake and the lake itself have been heavily contaminated.

118

119

Fig. 51 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006



Fig. 52 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006

Ground Zero, Kazakhstan. This is one of three test sites. The first Soviet nuclear bomb was exploded here.



162

163

Fig. 53 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006

Lake Balapan, Kazakhstan. The Sultanat family has a farm only 4 kilometres from Lake Balapan, the location of 115 nuclear tests. During one of the tests, their house collapsed. Father Yergasy has sent his children to Semipalatinsk to go to school there because it is less contaminated than at home. Two daughters were born dumb; the mother has severe problems with her immune system and the thyroid gland.



Semipalatinsk. Valentina Sarova (71) worked for the army's nuclear research centre in the closed city of Kurchatov and witnessed several nuclear explosions: She has been living in the old people's home in Semipalatinsk since she had a stroke. Sarova has been alone for years. She was not able to have children and shortly after doctors told her this, her husband left her.

Semipalatinsk. The Research Institute of Radiation Medicine has a large collection of foetuses and stillborn children born with different defects. In this contaminated region ionizing radiation has caused genetic mutations and serious birth defects. Fear for congenital diseases as well as social and economic deprivation has led to many abortions. For every child born in this area, two abortions have taken place.

Fig. 54 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006.



Semipalatinsk. Ardak (33) is suffering from a rare bone disease that makes his body shrink. As a thirteen year old boy he witnessed a nuclear test near Degelen Mountains. “There was an explosion and the earth was shaking. A column of smoke and dust rose up to the sky.”

188



Semipalatinsk. Ayna Gul (6) has not grown since the age of three. Her father is from the village of Znamenka close to the Polygon test site. Ayna’s parents are ashamed of their daughter and have withdrawn her from school. They are also considering putting her in an orphanage because they lack the money to take good care of her.

189

Fig. 55 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358: Nuclear Devastation in Kazakhstan, the Ukraine, the Urals and Siberia*, 2006

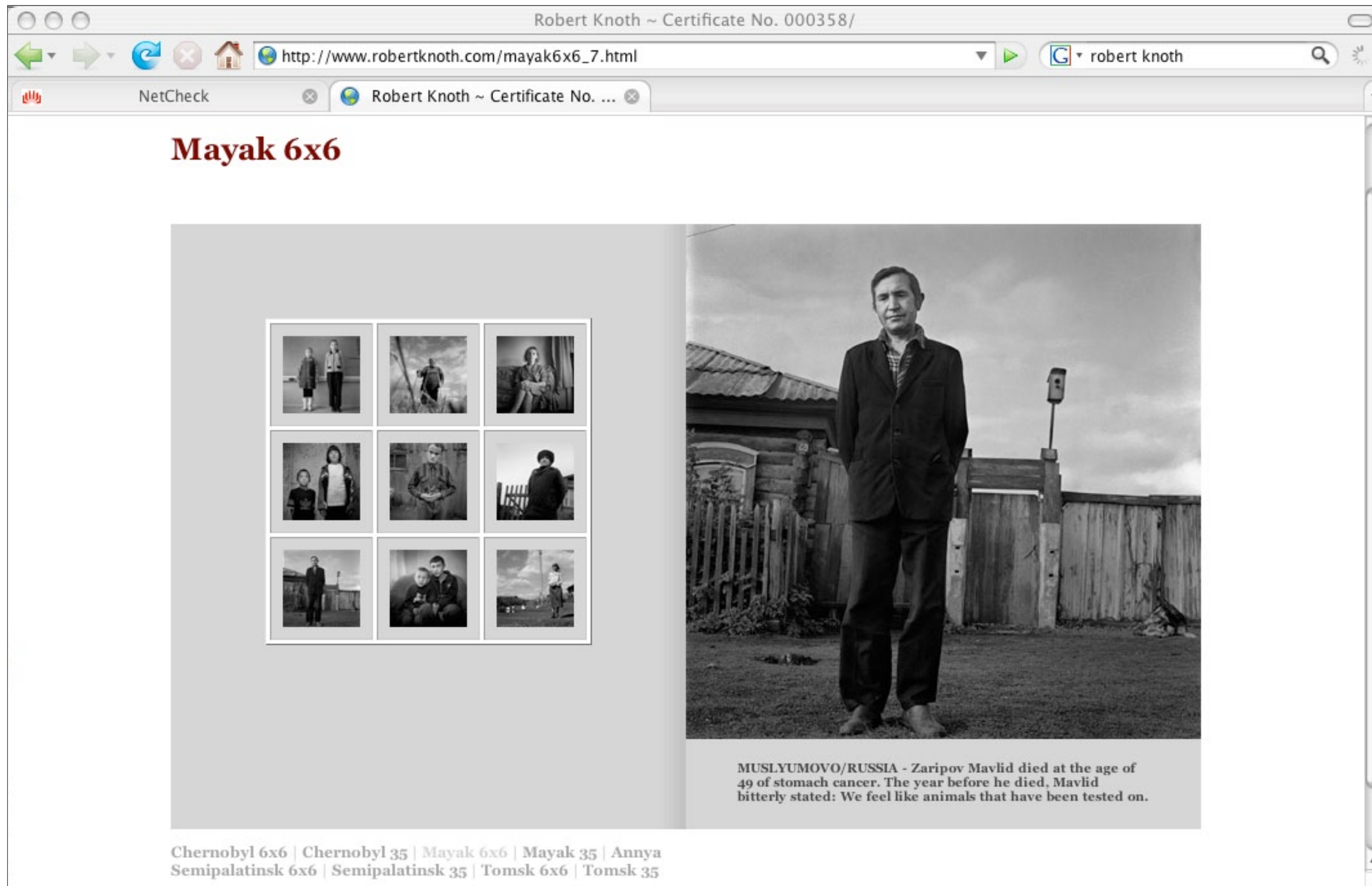


Fig. 56 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358*, 2006 (online)



< BACK

scroll to the right >>>

NEXT >

Fig. 57 Robert Knoth, from *Certificate No.000358*, 2006 from pixelpress.org



I am a first time visitor to your website. The work you have done is so necessary. It is heart wrenching and disturbing to know that mankind continues to treat his fellow human beings as disposable in the quest for money and power. Information and education must be a priority in every school, in every nation. We must fight the powers that be who choose the negative path to gain money and power. Children here in the US are taught how "safe" nuclear power is, how "clean" and necessary it is. It's all propoganda from the nuclear power industry. We need more people telling the dark and inhuman side of living with our irresponsible ways.

Those suffering from the Chernobyl disaster give mute testimony to mankind's indifference to his fellow man.

I hope we stop living in a very small, very selfish place as human beings. If we don't there won't be many humans to enjoy this planet.

Thank you for your supreme site.

Franki Lane
Oregon, USA

In 1993 I spoke with a Swedish engineer who was traveling the world visiting fire stations to share his experiences in Chernobyl. His slides and commentary were sobering and heartbreaking.

There are no comments I can make to describe the depth of despair to which you have enlightened me and whoever sees this documentary. I am ashamed that I had forgotten my engineer friend's lesson in '93. Thank you for bringing me back.

Emory Kendrick
Assistant Fire Chief (Ret)
Orlando Fire Dept.
Orlando, Florida, USA

Some years back, I recall seeing a feature on PBS dealing with the Chernobyl aftermath. The clips of the birth defects common in the area after the disaster still rank among the most disturbing images I have ever encountered. I happened upon this feature in the middle of the night, somehow awoken from sleep. I couldn't get back to sleep for at least an hour afterward, and was haunted for days by what I had seen.

Perhaps the most disturbing element of all is that there have been no significant reforms, so that such a disaster could easily occur again. And the knowledge that people in these communities have no real place to turn invokes a true sense of claustrophobia. Because of economic circumstances they are forced to remain in these contaminated areas, and thus live through generations upon generations of these horrendous effects. It truly breaks my heart, and this

photo essay brought all these feelings back anew. Surely, something must be done.

Jeffrey Hubbard

I just want to thank you for the job you're doing. My father was a scientist whose job it was to invent radiation measuring devices and other ecological control devices. He died in November of heart attack after radiation resulted in a heart mutation.

My regards and best wishes, you're doing a great thing,
God help you,

Maria Yanina
Moscow, Russia

I have just read excerpts from the "Nuclear Nightmare" essay. At the time that the disaster happened I read a lot about what had occurred, but most information got lost in the political face leant to it.

Western countries were quick to point out the dangers of ignorant and irresponsible use of nuclear energy as they called for the need to control who had access to this "power." Those already affected and their progeny will continue to suffer for a long, long time. To think that radiation is still evident in some areas gives a grim picture of what to expect in the future.

Yet, in spite of this, we still find proliferation of nuclear activities in various corners of the world. The excuses are varied - the need to protect ourselves from neighboring enemies, the need to develop "scientific" uses for nuclear power, the need for a cheaper source of energy as other fuels become intolerably expensive.

My question to the world is:

Is it really necessary to continue these experiments (whether scientific or military) when you know it can only do harm in both the short and the long term ?

Is it not possible to survive and grow with the use of natural resources rather than experiment with this man-made source of "power"?

Do we really know where we heading, say 50 years from now ?

N. Iyengar
Mumbai, India

I was very impressed by the pictures. It's good that you are shaking people awake about this issue of nuclear activity. I never thought it could be so destructive. There is a company here in Almelo, Holland that makes uranium (Urenco) so I hope a disaster such as Chernobyl will never recur. Keep up the good work of waking people up!

Chris Pennings
Almelo, Holland

I am truly horrified. I will never ever complain about anything ever again! I don't know how these people can even begin to pick up the pieces of their devastated lives and carry on. I feel a sense of despair for these people beyond anything I have felt in long, long time. No one should have to live through this kind of hell. My heart and my soul weep for these humans and the human condition that created the cause of all of their suffering. Something has gone terribly wrong. Please send prayers for the suffering. Everywhere. And never complain, always be thankful! Always! Peace to us all.

Tamara Evans
North Dakota, USA

There is no end to the horror going on in the world. Yet, as an American I know none of it. During bad times all I have to do is look at things like this to know things could be much worse. Why would such an experiment be performed with safe guards off? The Soviet Union had such a bad track record with technology that they had no business operating nuclear power plants in any case. The fact is that with the current oil situation we may be forced back to using this dangerous technology. If this takes place in the USA I hope it's in the desert, underground and with the strictest measures. I live in Kansas one hundred miles from the Wolfcreek nuclear power plant. I think about it frequently and go nowhere near it but I'm not far enough away as it is.

Terry Stangle
Kansas, USA

Thank you for these pictures. What insight to a horror that I know little of here in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada.

I spent 6 weeks in Estonia last summer and these pictures hit closer to home because of my exposure to another group facing different post-Soviet situations.

It is important to educate this generation and the ones yet to come in the future. Thank you for giving a voice to the suffering. They otherwise may never have had someone to tell their story to the rest of the world.

Tamara Knutson
Regina, Canada

My heart weeps. May all those people get the help that they need immediately and for as long as it is necessary.

The nuclear age must end NOW. There are other ways to create renewable energy that are better for the environment. Nuclear energy will never be safe, efficient or an honest choice for keeping greenhouse gas down.

Uranium mines must be closed and all tailings and waste sites cleaned up. The whole system including processing mills, refineries, reactors and enriching plants, as well as nuclear weapons factories must be closed down. Nuclear medicine must stop until 100% of radioactive waste materials can be dealt with. We must put all research efforts into

carefully making all these sites as harmless as possible and finding a system to monitor and guard all radiated sites forever.

Eleanor Knight
Saskatoon, Canada

I am shocked beyond belief at the horror and misfortune that the people of this region have had and continue to endure. As I paged through the photographs I cried in empathy for them, and became intensely enraged at the sheer injustice. Thanks to this photo essay, my perspective about the world we live in and the severe need to reevaluate our energy solutions has been realigned to seek a greater respect for our earth and our people. These images will continue to haunt and sicken me until the day that every person whose ill-thought decisions contributed to this disaster have been tried and forced to live in the hell they created in their utter disregard for humanity. Let them and their generations be the ones to look after this mess for the next twenty thousand years.

David Kim
Los Angeles, USA

Powerful..... I think I am going to cry..... Now I know why I hate governments..... They don't care about anyone or anything. Just money and getting rich.

Roger Evans

I am a 15-year-old student from Vancouver, British Columbia and I stumbled across your webpage recently. I was greatly saddened when I learned of the incident from your site and saw the powerful images of the affected victims. It is very hard to accept how lucky I am to be able to live a normal life while others are suffering with conditions that are extremely hard to imagine. The people who were affected by this disaster were all innocent and did not deserve this.

I feel that people are very irresponsible and do not deal with safety concerns and issues until after a terrible tragedy has happened. At the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant many safety measures were unattended to and broken, which led to the accident.

Earlier this year my science class helped raise money for the Jeans for Genes foundation, which is an organization that helps to find cures for genetic diseases. It frustrates me to not be able to do anything useful in life right now but maybe in the future, I will definitely try. I think more people should be aware of this and help fund for research for genetic diseases.

Jacqueline Tsang
Vancouver, Canada

* Note: Some responses have been edited for clarity and length

[text copied from website to make for easy reading. Visit <http://www.pixelpress.org/chernobyl/responses.html> for original layout and format].