

Darwell, John (2002) John Darwell, the unclear age. *Baby* (7). pp. 18-19.

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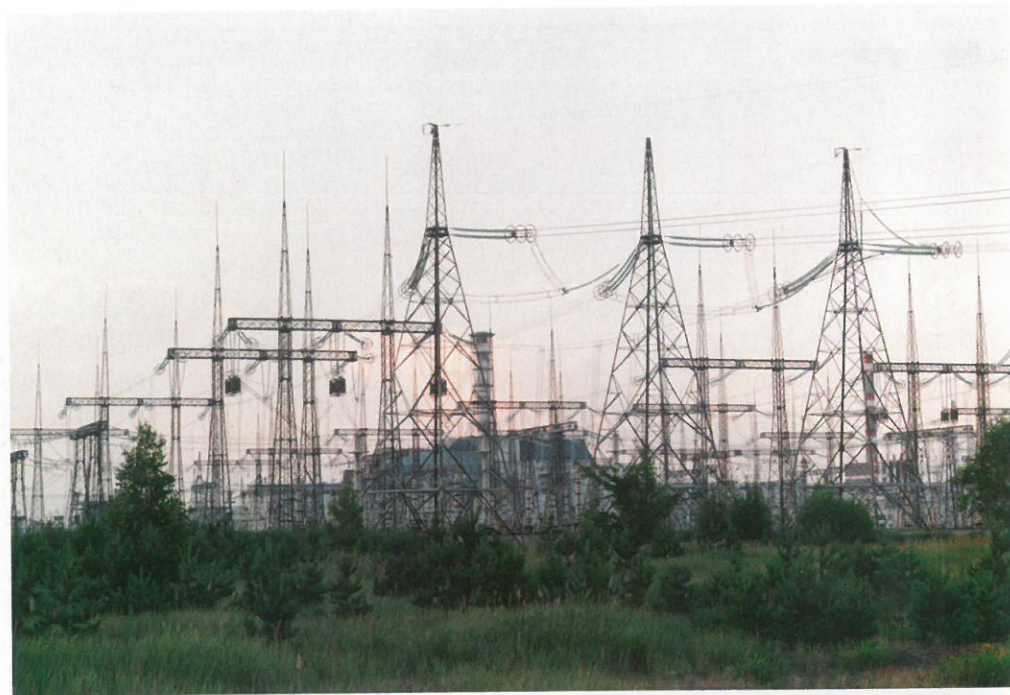
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JOHN DARWELL, *The Unclear Age*

Darwell's photographic documentation of nuclear fallout reflects the secrecy and banality surrounding the colossal nuclear disasters of our era – and the ongoing consequences of these events. The *Legacy series*, takes us inside the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone showing the remnants of human life after the massive evacuation of 1986.

A thirty-mile 'Zone of Alienation' around the power plant will remain radioactive for 25 000 years. But the risk of exposure to nuclear fallout has not been enough to stop some of the 336 000 displaced people from returning to the hazardous farms, towns and cities surrounding Chernobyl.

The Zone has its own administrative system, as well as a secret service which tolerates the 600 or so illegal returnees to the area. Pripyat, a satellite city three kilometres from the plant, was deserted within twenty-four hours of the disaster. Local residents were evacuated often to grim, lifeless



tower blocks in faraway cities. They left behind a once lively little town, with schools, urban apartments and a brand new children's fairground, which remains unused to this day (opposite page, bottom right). Eventually the pull of home overcame the threat of living with some level of radioactivity and residents began to return to the Zone. Although armed guards patrol the borders, there are clearly ways of negotiating entry. Back in their home village, this couple (above top) now grow their own vegetables, pick wild fruits and drink milk from their cow – despite living downstream from the radioactive river.

Darwell's pictures show a deserted civilisation which is both a contamination zone and for those who returned, a place where they lived amongst their friends and raised their families. (LS)

Legacy, ISBN 1 899235 58 2, is available in book form, and can be ordered from Dewi Lewis Publishing on +44 (0)161 442 9450 or through any good bookshop.