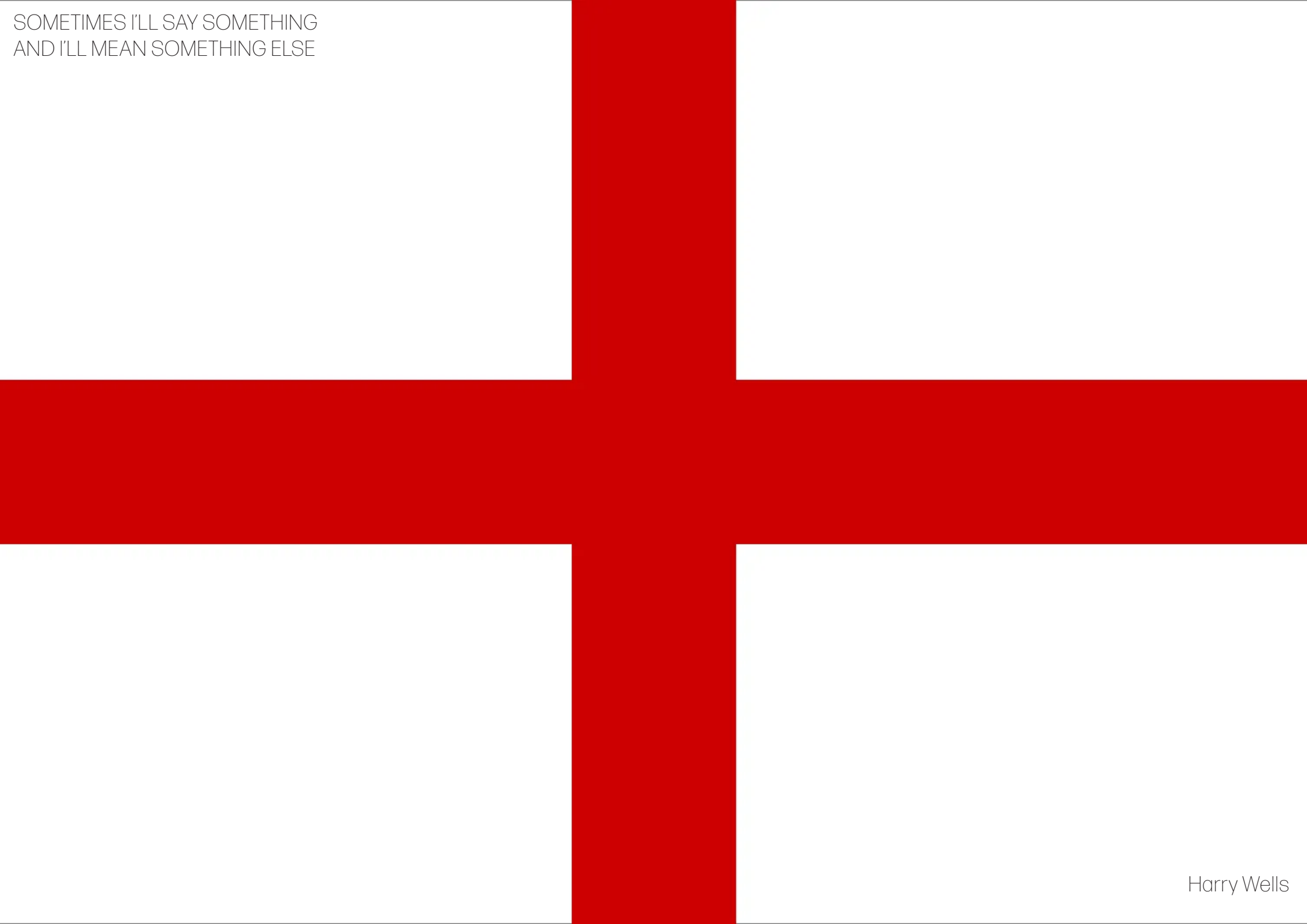
SOMETIMES I'LL SAY SOMETHING
AND I'LL MEAN SOMETHING ELSE



Harry Wells

‘SOMETIMES I’LL SAY SOMETHING AND I’LL MEAN SOMETHING ELSE’ is a project that explores the tension I perceive within my Englishness, consisting of a photobook, a video and an installation.

Talking about England isn’t easy - it’s a place inextricably linked to colonialism, hooliganism, racism and divisive contemporary politics. My ‘Englishness’ has been something I’ve avoided for this very reason. As a slight respite from this, I have turned to the England of my childhood in an attempt to make some sense of this aspect of my identity. I grew up in a small commuter town, out in the countryside but with quick access to the city - a place in-between. It’s in these places where you can begin to see England for what it is: pushing for change, while also resisting it. Stuck, the commuter town is a microcosm of the country.

There is a beauty and brutality that makes up England - a country always wishing for something else, full of contradictions, and with a romantic draw to it. I hoped in my book to capture some of the essence of what makes up this tension. The cover uses the provocative image of the St. Georges Cross. It’s a weighted symbol, and something I felt fitting because of what it means to people: an emblem of pride and patriotism to some, of barbarity to others. It’s these starkly contrasting ideas that present the tension we see throughout the book, and opens up the question central to it - how does England live in these two states? There exists on one side a deep pride, and on the other there is resentment.

SOMETIMES I'LL SAY SOMETHING
AND I'LL MEAN SOMETHING ELSE



Harry Wells

When I think of England, I think of the Flag. The St. Georges cross hanging from the window of the flat by my old house, embellished with a football club's badge, and the words 'PRIDE OF ENGLAND' across the centerline.

Then, I think of football games my father took me to when I was a kid. Overly excited at the treats I was allowed to dig into at half time: a pack of Wine Gums, Starbursts, or Black Country Pork Scratchings. I thought I hated football. It was all so masculine, too laddish. I think the passion scared me, or I just couldn't understand it. Now I'm learning to love it. The insanity of it, the religion of it. On the train with a beer for breakfast, or Radio WM on the drive back from The Hawthorns.

English culture is a strange one: a few pints down the pub; watch the footy; off to the kebab house; pass out around 1am. Old men cramped around the bar on stools in the Midlands. Behind them: a flag, Blue and White instead of Red and White, with Tommy Shelby's mug plastered across it. A BBQ at the first sight of sun (it's still early Spring). Sixteen year olds drinking tinnies down the park no matter the weather. My mother's perfect Sunday roast. My five cups of tea a day.

A few gurners and the worst music you've ever heard. Surrounded by the worst bastards you've ever seen. That's Bristol, that's Brighton. That's every English festival every summer. That's every field party I went to at 15. Recovery the next day: a full English breakfast (no beans, extra sausage please). Greasy hair after a night of sweating on a dance floor, why not make the food match?

I grew up making fires in abandoned buildings and running through thick woods or green fields. I spent the end of my teens falling in love on the beach, sweltering summers, swimming all day. A seagull nicking your portion of chips, your mate laughing at you but giving you some of his. Skimming stones the way my father taught me.

There's plenty good and plenty bad. My Dad calls it 'Broken Britain'. I say we're made up of beauty and brutality. There's a palpable tension in England. I'd rather it wasn't there. That we'd all get along.

It's still my home. I'm attached to England at the hip, through blood, through thick and thin.
I don't understand it, but it's all I know.



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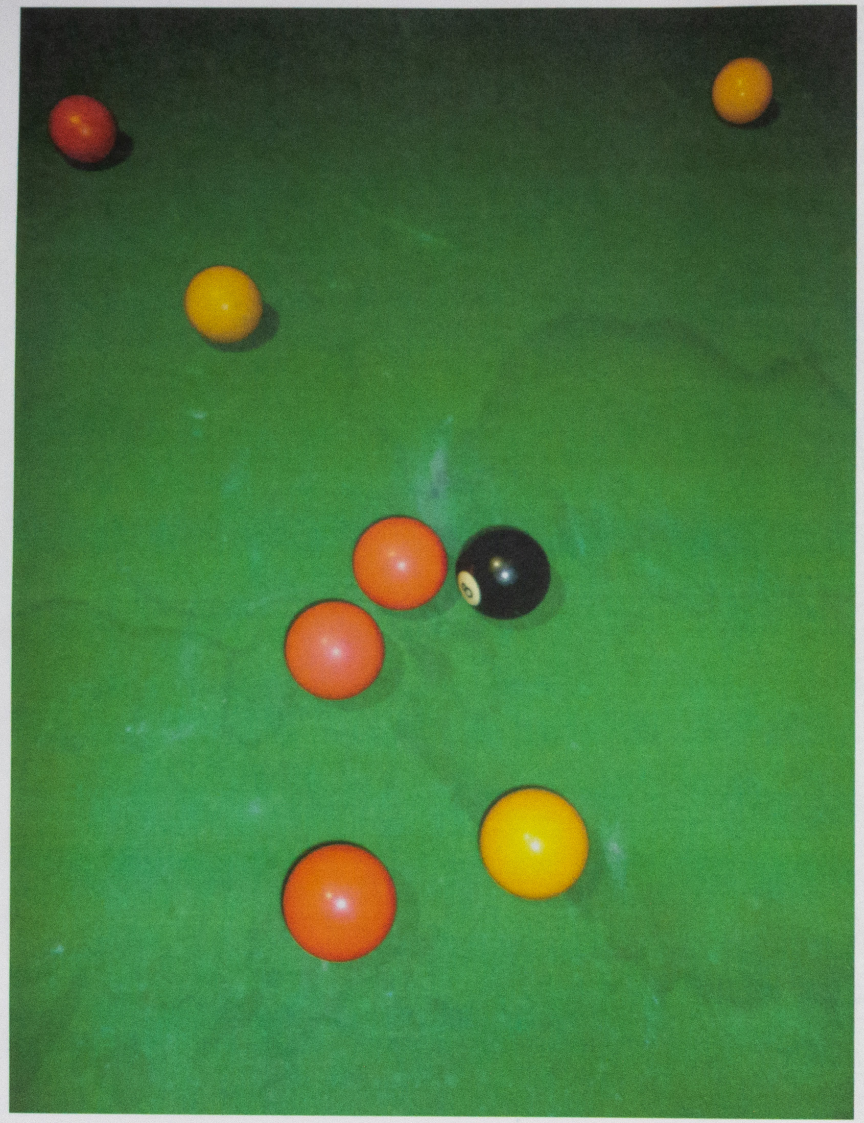

TODAY'S
SPECIAL
FISH CHIPS
PEAS



The images have a strange atmosphere - confined to a tight crop in often liminal situations. They flow into one another, flitting between gentle harmony and harsh clashing - a sweet, young lamb being bottle fed, into an upside down England flag; a rusted trolley left to abandon, into the blood and beer stained floor of an Essex nightclub. We go through this publication as I have gone through my relationship with England, weaving between beauty and horror. This flow is also laid out in the writing that opens the book, setting the tone and explaining aspects of 'my' England. It takes us all over, images and memories that could've been made in any county, town or city. This is important to the experience I wanted to convey in the book - this mix of beauty and disintegration can be found up and down the country. The final image on the back cover is of a goal post in disrepair, fallen into the overgrown field that kids will have once played football on. It's the image that sums it all up for me - England has always existed in a state of decay.











Specifications:
Tabloid Size (289mm x 380mm)
55 gsm improved newspaper
48 pages

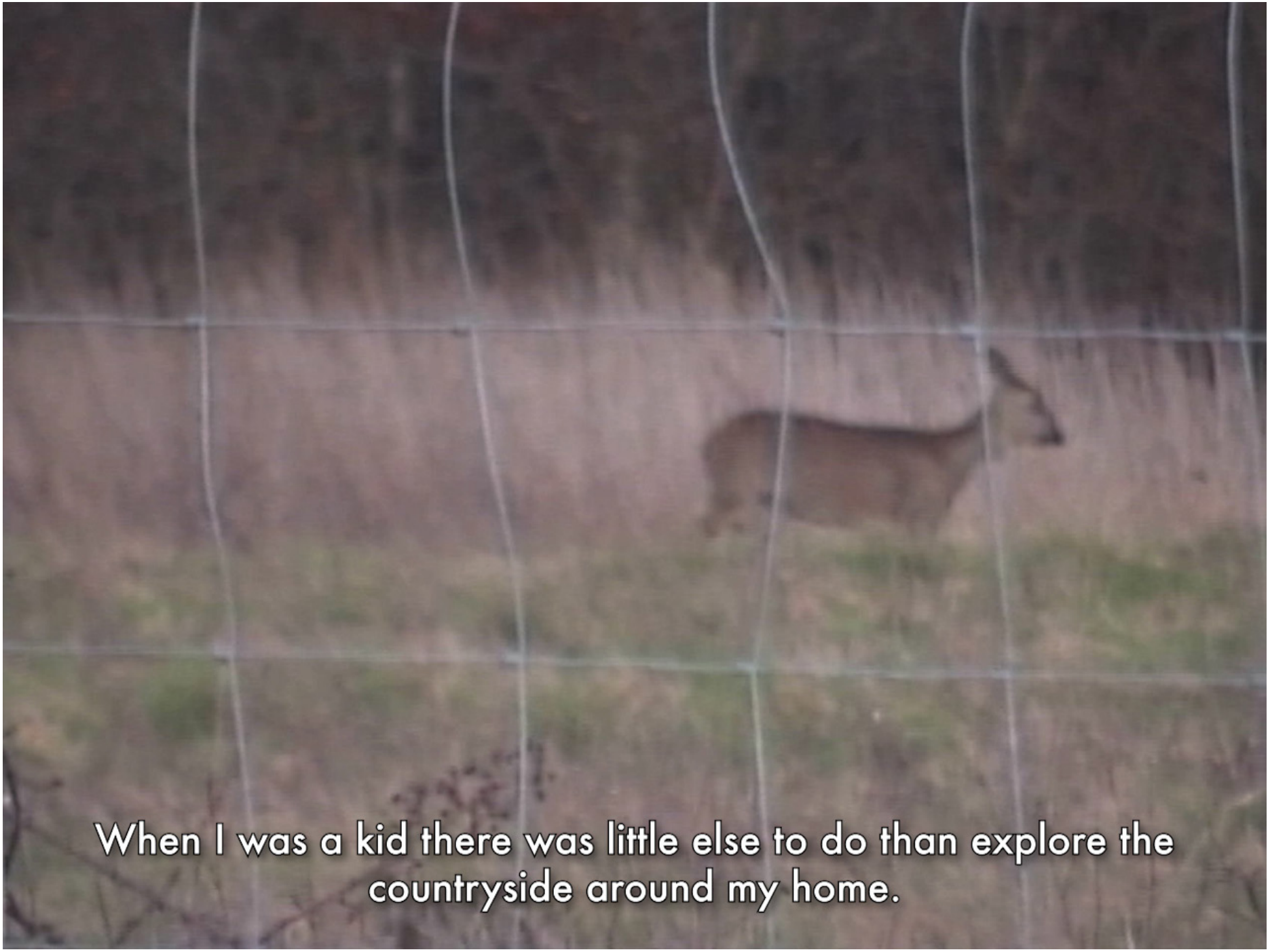
The full book flick-through:
https://youtu.be/I-8054JT34o



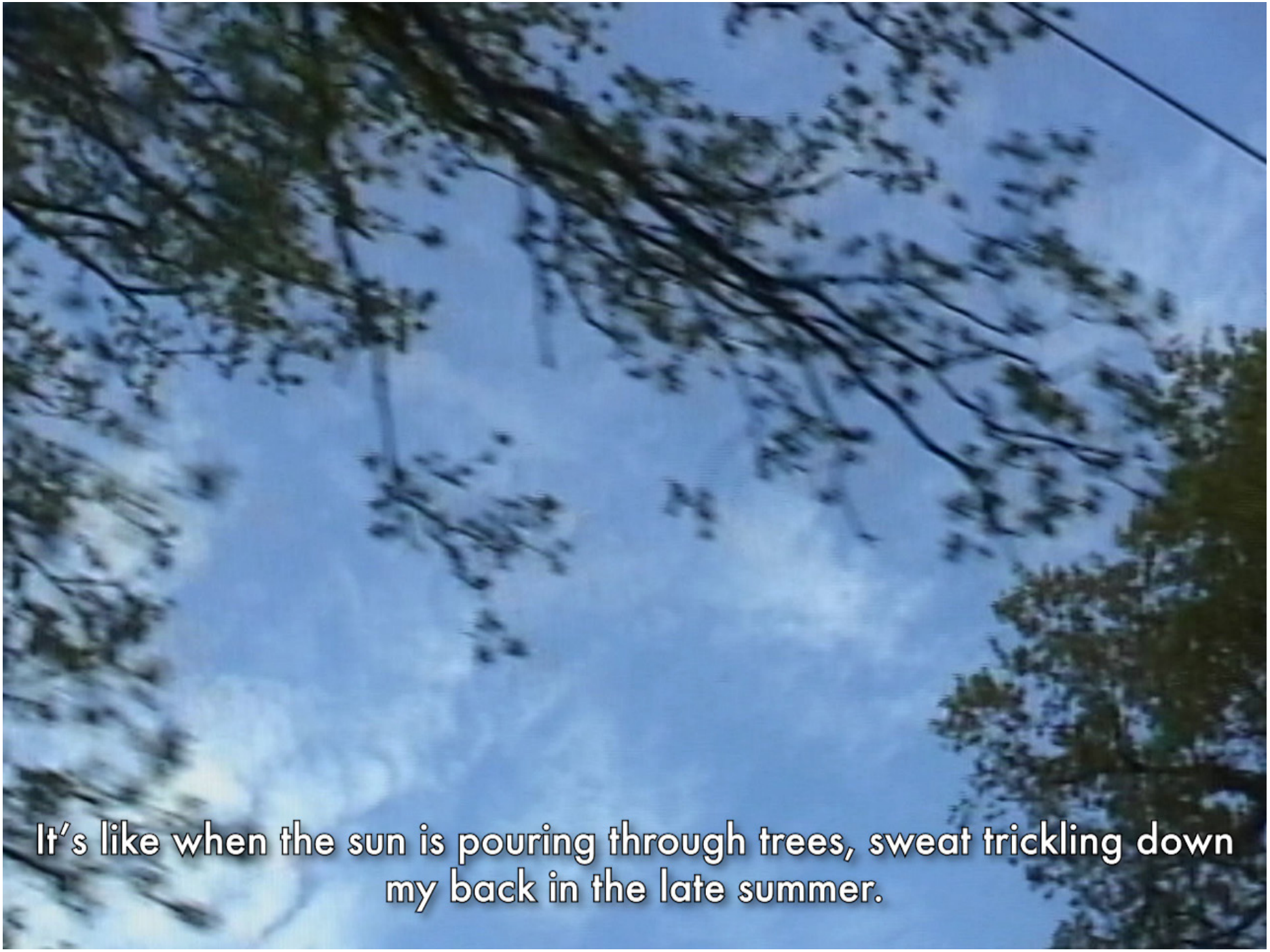
The film is about home, a key theme in my practice. The narrative of the book is built around contrast and opposition, which in the video is replaced by a cohesive bird song and serene images of the English landscape. We flit through childhood memories, with compositions heavily influenced by the filmmaking of James Benning. A sweet, sometimes sickly nostalgia is developed through the imagery. This romantic notion I have towards my youth is positioned within the English countryside, an idea I wanted to use the film to explore. We see little more than nature in the film - my memories are tinged with a 'grass green' contour. I understand that my teenage years are an almost universal experience - there are very few countries where countryside kids aren't exploring the place they live in a similar fashion to how I did. However, I can't separate what I know of England from my teenage years, they inform one-another. My youth was spent in rural England and so that is how I now perceive youth - an escapade into the rural, where the outside world is the greatest place to find freedom and yourself. The piece became a love-letter to youth spent in a rural town.

The full video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVZpVwH5yk0




When I was a kid there was little else to do than explore the
countryside around my home.


Formative years spent starting fires, kicking a football about,
spraying ugly graffiti on fallen trees.


It's like when the sun is pouring through trees, sweat trickling down
my back in the late summer.

There's humour throughout the work which I think is integral to Englishness. Our sporting heroes are not usually remembered for being just great players, but also having some sort of character to them. I think it's possible we crave it as a release from our pent up atmosphere - a country built on obsessive politeness. Once again our contradictions come to the forefront here: some are shocked and offended by the character of our stars, others are struck and fascinated by them. They're made into 'celebrities' due to our push and pull, our 'you either love it or you hate it' tension. The humour in the book is borne out of these contradictions too.

I want to bring this to the England I'm talking about, and talking to. To open the silence up and break through it. I thought of displaying it in a pub for this very reason - the images in the project often appear as overlooked memories, vague and hazy, but recognisable symbols of Englishness to those who grew up in places like I did, and are lucky enough to escape the small-town ideas that consume these areas. I hope those who see the images and resonate with them would talk about their England too. The pub is another microcosm, the perfect home for these images. It's where many conversations about the project were had, ideas conceived and pints sank.



Prints:
289mm x 380mm
Printed on 55 gsm newspaper
Mounted with pins

Video:
4 minute run-time
Projected
4:3 Hi8 Recording
English subtitles



The contradictions that make us up as a nation are far too integral to ever be shaken off. So, when I say something, but really I mean something else, I know that this is England talking through me. It's not something I think I'll lose, it's my own constant reminder of home.



