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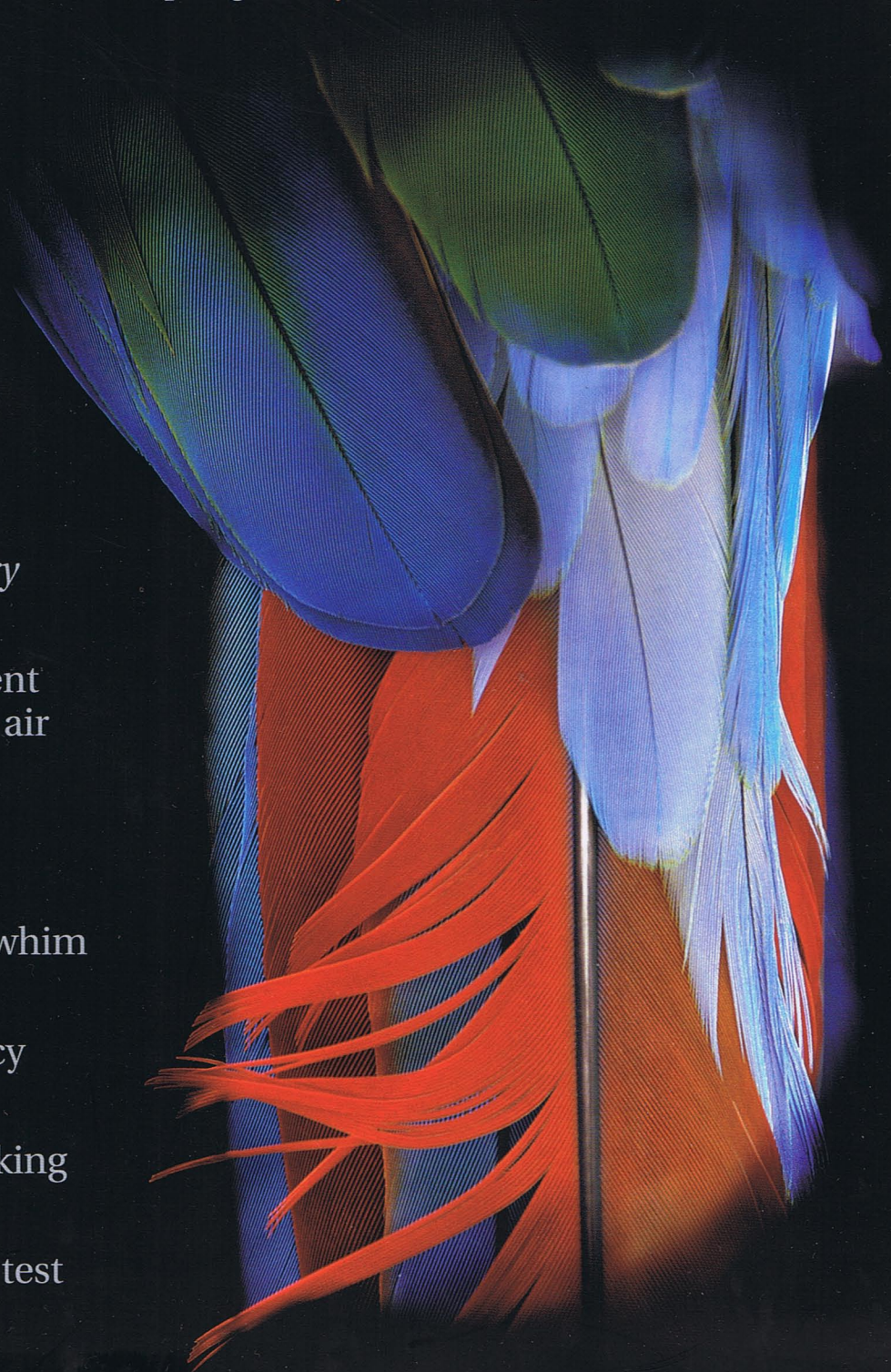
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From Russia with love

In the afterword to his new book, *Motherland*, photographer Simon Roberts alludes to the vast scale of Russia in being "the vital region to capture to win the board game Risk." In July 2004 Roberts set off with his wife (and camera) on a journey that would take them a year and 75,000Km from east to west, recording the landscapes and diverse peoples that make up the biggest country of the world. The distances are great and the ethnicity of the inhabitants contrasting, yet their sense and understanding of the concept of motherland (or *rodina*) is a pervading theme. In an introduction to the book, Russian literature scholar Rosamund Bartlett provides an interesting context for the photographs with her discussion of the motherland concept within Russian history and by quotation from some of the country's best-known writers. We follow Roberts' journey via more than 150 images as a document of contemporary Russia unfolds through his landscapes and intimate portraits. As his camera moves on from one area to the next, Roberts provides extended captions covering the historical background to the way the people here live today. The work makes a refreshing change from much of the pessimistic documentary we have seen from the former Soviet Union. Roberts' images record the diversity of the country and its people, who through their shared national pride, attachment to place and modest self-esteem make clear that, although for many life remains hard, the Motherland is not the miserable place some would have us believe.

Motherland, by Simon Roberts, is published by Chris Boot at £25, ISBN 1-905712-03-0.

Work from *Motherland*, by Simon Roberts, will be on show at Photofusion, 17A Electric Lane, Brixton, London SW9 from 13 April–26 May, and in the Print Sales Gallery at The Photographers' Gallery, London, until 14 April.



Nikita Kruktunov and Rufina Muharanova, Omsk, Western Siberia.



Road safety sign, Magadan, Far East Russia. Both images from *Motherland* © Simon Roberts, published by Chris Boot.