

Uncanny Eden

The photography of Patrick Shanahan by David Brittain

"He tied the end of the thread round his ankle and set off into the darkness."

José Saramago, *All The Names*.

In the 1930s Walter Benjamin painted a fascinating picture of Baudelaire as a fencer, "parrying" against the "shock" of modernity¹. Using Freud's theory of the unconscious as a model, Benjamin noted that even as Baudelaire resisted the teeming crowd, his poetry was suffused by a horrific image of it that lay submerged in his memory. Elsewhere, in the work of the Parisian photographer, Eugene Atget (1856-1927), Benjamin found "a salutary estrangement between man and his surroundings"². For Benjamin, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Atget's deserted streets and the work of the surrealists manifested or mirrored causes and effects of the changing social/psychic landscape of urban Europe at the turn of the 20th century.

Patrick Shanahan, who embarked on his new series, 'Esperantis' in the closing years of the 20th century, has also produced art that aspires to represent a changing social landscape, giving form to the unseen forces which shape it and those who populate it. His photography explores the traumas and delights of a 'post-landscape' era by a subtle and complex artistry.

The images that comprise 'Esperantis' were taken between 1998 and 2001 as part of a practice-based doctoral thesis about urban estrangement. A key moment in the evolution of the project was in 1994 when Shanahan discovered the photography of the 80s by Italian contemporaries, such as Olivo Barbieri and Luigi Ghirri. The thematic and stylistic roots of 'Esperantis' can be traced to two series from the following year - 'Personal Geography/Private Landscape', and 'Cornwall: A Post-Landscape Project'.

Before examining the work of this period, and how it laid the foundations for 'Esperantis', it would be useful to describe the key social and artistic trends of the late 70s and early 80s that shaped Shanahan's attitudes and practice. A concern with place and placelessness, and with synthesizing poetic approaches, has been central to Shanahan's work almost since he began taking pictures. He discovered photography almost by chance in the late 70s while practising as a fine art student at Stourbridge College. He was encouraged by two tutors, John Taylor and the photographer John Myers, who were then involved with starting *Ten·8* magazine. "Because of them the college had a good library of photography books. It was a revelation to discover that photography was more than a recording medium - with more potential than was evident in its use in conceptual art."³ Having discovered such canonical figures as August Sander and Walker Evans, Patrick Shanahan fervently immersed himself in the craft of photography. The first images (in 1980 a selection was exhibited in Liverpool at Open Eye and Blue Coat galleries) were portraits produced in the 'extraordinary-of-the-ordinary' manner of Diane Arbus.

Between 1980 and 82, while studying for a photography MA at the Royal College of Art, Patrick Shanahan's work underwent a major shift from black and white to colour, from figuration to the depiction of depopulated urban landscapes, and from a 'straight' and naturalistic documentary style to a more nuanced approach. These shifts were beginning to happen across British photography at this time. Old boundaries separating 'documentary' from 'constructed' photography, and 'conceptual

1 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, (Fontana, 1973), p. 177.

2 Walter Benjamin, *A Small History of Photography*, 1931.

3 Patrick Shanahan, interview with David Brittain, July 2002.

photography' from 'fine art photography' were beginning to blur under the influence of new trends, especially American 'new colour' photography. The catalogues of various survey exhibitions of British photography of the 80s, and the pages of Creative Camera testify to these processes which reflect a new determination to liberate 'independent photography' from its 70s ghetto and redefine its diverse yet discrete practices as post-modernist.

Two key 'sites' of polemical and political contestation at that time were the city and the landscape. According to the US critic Rebecca Solnit, artists of the 70s had made landscape "the principal battlefield of our time"⁴. A prophetic figure in this was land artist Robert Smithson, who, in the late 60s, theorized the culturally constructed 'entropic' post-war landscape as distinct from land as nature or wilderness.

While Shanahan was at college Britain was undergoing sweeping social changes under the Thatcher government - notably the encroachment of the private sector in many aspects of the public realm. The needs of 'weightless' industries and a burgeoning service and leisure industry created new edifices which transformed the landscape - featureless 'new' towns (Basingstoke acquired the allusive nick-name, "Doughnut City")⁵, Disney-style theme parks, heritage sites and patrolled shopping malls. These transformations manifested a global social/economic phenomenon known as 'placelessness' that had begun to be theorized by urban planners and sociologists in Europe and the US in the late 50s. "The importance of place has diminished," writes Nan Ellin, "as global flows of people, ideas, capital, mass media, and other products have accelerated. And the walking city has evolved into a less legible landscape ...". Placelessness has become a metaphor for broader cultural change, notes Ellin: "...as boundaries between city, suburb and countryside were blurring, so were those between high culture, mass culture and popular culture, those among the academic disciplines and between fiction and non-fiction ...".⁶

In 80s England, as Shanahan searched for an artistic identity, issues related to placelessness were regularly debated in the media and in cultural circles - from the concerns of environmental groups over the threats to habitat of new roads, to anxieties about the homogenization or 'loss of place' from the spread of chain stores⁷. In 1984 placelessness - equated with the 'failure' of Modern architecture - entered public discourse when HRH Prince Charles controversially criticized a proposed extension to the National Gallery in London⁸.

Among early cultural responses to placelessness was an exhibition that would have a significant impact on Patrick Shanahan and his peers. 'The New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape', featuring Lewis Baltz among others, was showcased at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York, in 1975. Robert A. Sobieszek would note that between 1956 and 79, the year of Tarkovski's film, *Stalker*, "a new order of landscape had taken hold of the imagination", which was reflected in literature and art. "[I]t was as if Eliot's fabled wasteland had completely displaced sylvan pastorals and Edenic backdrop." Invoking Smithson, Sobieszek considers Baltz to have redefined the new landscape of the American West as, "an entropic terrain vague

⁴ Rebecca Solnit, *As Eve Said to the Serpent: On Landscape, Gender, and Art*, (University of Georgia Press, 2001), p. 45.

⁵ Anna Fox used the title "Doughnut City" for her documentary series about Basingstoke, (Creative Camera, November 1986).

⁶ Nan Ellin, *Postmodern Urbanism*, (Blackwell, 1996), p. 1.

⁷ Non-governmental bodies as diverse as the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) and Common Ground commissioned artists and photographers to produce images to raise awareness of these issues.

⁸ Speech by HRH Prince of Wales, at the 150th anniversary of the Royal Institute of British Architects, May 30, 1984.

where what is built is merged with what is unbuilt, where sprawl and blight have become the picturesque norm, where the positions of observer and inhabitant are confounded and where past and present are intermingled."⁹

Patrick Shanahan encountered the work in 'New Topographics' at a lecture in the Royal College of Art by the British photographer Paul Highnam. Another visiting lecturer around the time was Bill Owens, whose book *Suburbia* - along with Chauncey Hare's classic, *Interior America* - focused on the human experience of placelessness. A contributor to the 1985 Photographers' Gallery exhibition, 'Image and Exploration', Highnam successfully toured an abridged version of 'New Topographics' around Britain during 1981 and 82. Despite having grown out of a very specifically American attitude - reflecting both the misplaced romanticization of the West, and the artistic legacy of Weston and Adams - this 'styleless' photography impressed practitioners throughout Europe. Another contributor to 'Image and Exploration' was Jem Southam who designed the catalogue for Highnam's show¹⁰. Bob Phillips and Shanahan, who knew each other, were most impressed by the work of Stephen Shore, the only colour photographer included in the original 'New Topographics' exhibition. They agreed that Shore, like Eggleston, used colour neither formally nor decoratively.

American New Topographics photography offered solutions for British photographers who were eager to avoid being pigeon-holed as part of an atavistic 'documentary tradition'. Shanahan recalls that the work gave them permission to photograph "the unheroic" landscape. The static view camera that was favoured by the Americans, in homage to 19th century landscape photography, offered an attitude to counter the "choreographed" practice of hand-held documentary photography¹¹. Equally the New Topographics photographers' Flaubertian detachment and eschewal of the human figure (Baltz wrote that the "vernacular model" was the real estate photograph) contrasted with the 'decisive moment' ethos of previous decades. Like Southam, Highnam, Bob Phillips and John Davies, Shanahan followed the example of these US counterparts and explored the man-made landscape without mystification, irony, sentimentality or moralising.

Shanahan recalls that all this veneration of American work prompted a terse debate about the 'Britishness' of British photography in the early 80s, which further politicized the representation of landscape. British topographic photographers sought out "nowhere in particular" (as Ian Jeffrey noted in the catalogue of 'Image and Exploration'), though this was easily located inside Thatcher's Britain. Bob Phillips documented the "intimate landscape" of English suburban and municipal gardens, John Davies surveyed the industrial landscapes of the North-east of England for evidence of social change following the death of traditional industry, and Jem Southam lovingly documented Cornwall as a place whose identity had been eclipsed by a mythical world of pixies and pirates. The conceptual artist, now photographer, Keith Arnatt, produced a series of images called 'A.O.N.B.' (1980-86) which were critical of the institutional ownership of the countryside. Shanahan's vision of England and Wales was a compelling and elegiac portrayal of faded seaside resorts and brooding city streets. From this perspective, the work seems more concerned with place than land, and intended to explore fiction, transcendence and psychological states, rather than raise specific environmental or social issues.

Like many British photographers who matured during the early 80s, Patrick Shanahan shifted from an anthropological to a topographical style - within a few years he

⁹ Robert A Sobieszek, 'Terminal Documents: The Early Desert of Lewis Baltz', in *Perpetual Mirage: Photographic Narratives of the Desert West*, (Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996), p. 181.

¹⁰ Katy McCleod, 'Jem Southam - Images of Cornwall' (*Creative Camera*, December 1985), p. 21.

¹¹ Bob Phillips, interviewed by Susan Butler, (*Creative Camera*, May 1985), p. 23.

adapted to, then rejected, the limitations of 'straight' black and white photography.

Liberated by the expressive potential of colour and inspired by the subject matter and forward-looking critical approach of 'New Topographics', Shanahan's work of the early 80s seems stylistically sophisticated yet is unresolved in its attitude to the changing landscape. On the other hand, Shanahan was beginning to explore themes which would resurface later. There is the fascination with the "artificiality", of what he calls the "cultural landscape" which alludes to issues of authenticity. A similar anxiety about the loss of the authentic is present in the metaphor of the ploughman's lunch in the 80s film of the same name. At some point this 'typically English' snack is revealed to be a nostalgic fiction constructed by the advertising industry. There is an uncertainty about the identity of place. It is notable that England doesn't look like itself in these images. A photograph of a statue that is somehow out of place and out of time in a shady square by the Thames, looks forward to the work of the mid-90s. The combination of colour and shadow to seduce and to heighten the sense of artificiality, with the uncanniness of the statue as surrogate human, all foreshadow images that would be taken in 'hyperreal' environments.

In 1994 Patrick Shanahan moved from Wales to Cornwall, following a 12-year period as a successful commercial photographer. Now working as a lecturer, he began to photograph the fabricated landscape surrounding him. Cornwall was one of the first areas of Britain to be altered by industry then one of the first to be transformed by tourism in the wake of the collapse of industry. Across the county museums, heritage centres and theme parks were cropping up, employing some workers formerly engaged in tin mining. Ugly caravan sites scarred hillsides.

The pictures taken in Cornwall date from 1995 and were published in the journal *Proof* in 1998 under the title, 'Cornwall: A Post-Landscape Project'. The 12 images of 'Personal Geography/Private Landscape', were edited from many pictures taken in Cornwall and Italy, and were exhibited twice, initially at the art college in Falmouth.

Prior to 1995, as Shanahan made the transition from commerce back to artistic practice, he was introduced to contemporary Italian photography as part of his research into the representation of post-landscape. He was instantly impressed with Luigi Ghirri's book, *Italian Landscape*. "Ghirri was the missing link", Shanahan recalls. "The concern with the space between reality and the unreal hadn't been present in Eggleston or Shore, but it was concrete with Ghirri."¹²

Shanahan was also surprised to discover that developments in Italian photography of the 80s - the adoption of colour and 'New Topographics' as the antidote to the documentary ethos of the 60s and 70s, the eschewal of natural landscape for the man-made one - closely mirrored the scene he knew in Britain. Ghirri, a prolific writer and influential figure in Italian topographic photography, began using colour in the early 70s. He particularly admired Walker Evans, Lee Friedlander, Eggleston and Joel Meyerowitz. Since the 70s Ghirri's themes had been representation and post-landscape. He referred to his subject as "social landscape".

Ghirri's work instantly reminded Patrick Shanahan of that of the Englishman Raymond Moore, an influential keeper of the flame of American transcendental photography. Not only did both photographers begin taking pictures in the 1960s, after which they became marginal figures, but they explored a terrain vague (Moore explored the 'seedy' seaside towns of the borderlands of Scotland and England) and shared a common willingness to test the limits of 'straight' photography. Ghirri's photographs - like some of Magritte's paintings - contain mixed signs that invite contemplation of the

¹² Patrick Shanahan, interview with David Brittain, July 2002.

space between the real and the artificial, the original and the copy. They exploit confusion between different forms of representation - mirrors, windows, photographs, paintings, simulacra. Raymond Moore once wrote that to photograph was "to convey a revelation of the marvellous"¹³. Ghirri also spoke of an interplay between places and emotions when he appealed for "a new visual alphabet, one that moves onto different methods and modes of representation, unifying gaze and vision, interior and exterior, poised somewhere between the revealing and the surveying of places, or landscapes."¹⁴

Ghirri believed we had reached the end of the era of "discovery" to arrive at "a closed chapter in the history of images." It was "not post-modern, but loss of centre."¹⁵ Yet he argued that irony and disenchantment with the world of appearances should be resisted. We should look without judgement or sentimentality. It would seem that taking photographs was, for Ghirri, a redemptive act - not only because his images confirmed his view that there still existed "vast and as yet unexplored territories... of representation..."¹⁶ but because he believed the camera could be used as a tool to inoculate us from the malaise of "the already seen" (a by-product of a culture saturated by photography).

Writing in the catalogue for 'Personal Geography/Private Landscape', Mike Venning argues that the significance of Ghirri, for Patrick Shanahan, was the former's sophistication as a thinker and communicator. His style of photography was more like literature: "... in order to explore the 'reality' it suggests, we read the language of that photography just as we do the words on a page, connecting the ciphers of that language with the imagination in order to establish a personal set of meanings."

Theorists have argued that the key condition of placelessness, or post-landscape, is the dissolution of fixed categories and boundaries in the environment and in culture generally. This causes anxiety and an irrational yearning for the immutable and stable that encourages different forms of escapism, such as nostalgia and the romanticism of the pre-Modern. Shanahan's practice-based research into post-landscape commenced in 1995 with the two series 'Cornwall: A Post-Landscape Project' and 'Personal Geography/Private Landscape'. They were produced in parallel but were, it seems, intended as separate if discrete avenues of research. It would be accurate to describe 'Esperantis' as the progeny of these two contrasting projects.

'Cornwall' extended Shanahan's earlier investigations into urban landscapes - except now the project was constructed around the theme of the tourist landscape. For Shanahan the man-altered landscapes of Spain, Cornwall and Italy embodied many effects identified with post-landscape (the threat to identity of the advance of homogenous styles of architecture, their 'flatness' as signs; pastiche as evidence of a lack of continuity with the past; the 'end of history', and so forth). Shanahan's 'disinterested' topographic gaze renders these Disneyfied landscapes as 'natural' (a word used by Ghirri to describe Walker Evans's way of giving equal weight to the most banal or spectacular subject). His framing exploits the absurd conjunctions of objects found in a place such as the 'World in Miniature' in Cornwall, where visitors encounter Lilliputian replicas of the Sphinx, the Taj Mahal, the Parthenon, and so on, amidst prim English shrubbery. Shanahan has been very deliberate about what and how he frames. The mothballed jet fighter glimpsed between bushes has been deliberately framed to place the viewer in the position of the stroller - the deadpan quality of the image mimics the 'blasé' reaction of the spectacle-weary tourist. The way objects are photographed from below, as if to 'restore' to the replicas the monumentality of the

¹³ Raymond Moore, *Photographs by Raymond Moore*, (Welsh Arts Council, 1968).

¹⁴ Luigi Ghirri, *Italian Landscapes*, (Quaderni di Lotus/Gingko Press, 1989).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

originals, evokes a disturbing slippage between real and unreal, alluding both to the 'loss' of an authentic sense of place and the global advance of non-place.

This series owes something to one of the great poets of placelessness, J.G. Ballard, who writes about the threatening presence of architecture and simulacra in the new Europe. *Cocaine Nights*, which is set among the gated ex-patriot communities of the Costa del Sol, contains descriptions of "... King Saud's larger-than-life replica of the White House and the Aladdin's cave apartments of Puerto Banus [which are] a magnet to the unwary."¹⁷

By contrast the square format icons of 'Personal Geography/Private Landscape' are primarily about process. There is evidence of lively experimentation with special camera effects - such as the "worm's eye" view once favoured by Modernists as a radical attack on "all fixed habits and tastes"¹⁸. The series contains various examples in which the photographic process has been used to provoke sensations of uncanniness. The uncanny - which is related to the experience of the sublime - was central to Patrick Shanahan's research into post-landscape and aesthetics. At the beginning of the 20th century the uncanny was psychologized as one of a number of diseases associated with the effects of modernity. More recently theorists have returned to the uncanny to formulate aesthetic experience. Freud theorized that mirrors, shadows, and *Doppelgänger*s were all likely to trigger uncanny sensations. He wrote that the child's invention of a double (like primitive man's animism) was a self-protective gesture, an assurance of immortality. Later the double returns to become "the ghastly harbinger of death"¹⁹.

'Personal Geography' contains three images which evoke uncanny sensations by collapsing distinctions between imaginary and real. The first picture, of goal posts reflecting into water, seems to have been taken with a long exposure to reveal forces (the motion of water, the play of light) that are invisible yet are always in process. It recalls scientific techniques such as chronophotography (of Marey or Muybridge), or X-ray photography that fascinated the avant-garde. For Walter Benjamin such images were evidence of an "optical unconscious"²⁰ that was latent in appearances. Two other key images in the series also prefigure the pictures of 'Esperantis' by appealing to this unsettling notion of a 'suppressed' image belying the familiar. Freud classed as uncanny (*unheimlich*) "everything... that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light." Each image depicts a conventional beach scene. Beaches, of course, feature in the work of the 80s, and are the sort of liminal spaces - between nature and culture - which symbolize placelessness. In one image, the familiar sand appears unfamiliar by being represented in unnatural colours. In another, a beach shower seems to be defined by a strange light. The skies are black, suggesting night. The odd colours could be the result of a Photoshop intervention, but they are actually caused by reciprocity failure - a 'naturally' uncanny effect by which a negative chemically produces an unfamiliar 'double' of itself. The effect, which happens during long exposures, is always unpredictable and the resulting colour shift is generally unwelcome (though not to Shanahan).

Since the early 80s Patrick Shanahan has been refining a type of image which would engage intellect and imagination while remaining steadfastly 'photographic', yet non-formalist. Chirri's work combined topographic literalness with a poetics of place and demonstrated how landscape photography could be redemptive in a European

17 J.G. Ballard, *Cocaine Nights*, (Flamingo, 1997), p. 17.

18 Simon Watney, 'Making Strange: The Shattered Mirror', in *Thinking Photography*, ed. Victor Burgin (MacMillan, 1982), p. 173.

19 Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, 1953-73.

20 Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, (MIT Press, 1993).

context. Maybe the discovery of Ghirri's work was most important for Shanahan because, not only were its ambiguities analogous to the estrangement of placelessness - but each picture seems to have been constructed with the intention of galvanizing viewers with equal doses of anxiety and delight.

Announced in the title 'Esperantis' are Shanahan's themes of loss of meaning, inauthenticity and globalization. 'Esperantis' is: "suggestive of both an imaginary and mythical place (Atlantis) that has global connotations (Esperanto)."²¹ The series taken in Cornwall and Europe lay the ground for 'Esperantis' in contrasting ways. 'Cornwall: A Post-Landscape Project' used photography to enhance the strangeness of the tourist landscape which, as we have seen, is a trope of placelessness. 'Personal Geography' functioned as a laboratory in which uncanny effects could be tested. Both strands - the effect and the affect - meet, synthesize and become a compelling hybrid of the indexical and the invented.

The causes and effects of the estrangement of urban non-places are doubly coded into these documentary images. Firstly, unsettling signs of ambiguity are sought out on location then prosaically documented. In one image, the voyage of three sailing boats, rigged and ready, appears permanently delayed behind a low wall and trimmed box hedges. Are they 'real' or simulacra (a word which has been defined as a copy without an original)? In another a fantastic castle rises out of an ocean - yet we are unsure whether this is a kitsch scene from some theme park. The haunting quality of the image itself resembles (could be mistaken for a double of) a postcard or poster illustrating a spectacular feature. As already noted, uncertainty about the identity of place has been a theme of Patrick Shanahan's work since the start. Shanahan discloses that the 'Esperantis' pictures depict various carefully selected locations along the Spanish and Portuguese coastlines. Yet the choice of the marginal and typical site confounds attempts to tell which country is being represented - prompting unsettling thoughts about the hegemony of the pre-fabricated landscape. Locations include beaches, car parks, esplanades, industrial parks and similar "defensible" and "pseudo-public" spaces²². The anthropologist, Marc Augé contrasts such "non-places" (among them airport concourses and hotel lobbies) with "anthropological places" in which there is "social interaction, identity and temporal connectedness."²³ Attempts to identify location are further frustrated because the only clues are evidence of the sort of ubiquitous architecture that belongs to no specific place.

In the post-landscape, power is palpable but inscrutable. Nan Ellin comments: "... placelessness renders the exercise of power more elusive. It is everywhere and nowhere, assumed ubiquitous, or alternatively, assumed absent."²⁴ The evacuated spaces of 'Esperantis' allude to the all-seeing security infrastructure that lights and furnishes defensible space to ensure continuity of profitability and to discourage interlopers. The emptiness of 'Esperantis' is also a useful metaphor for the state of retreat from the public realm that is being facilitated by the 'super modern' world of TV and VCR, Walkman, PC and Play Station (in computer games, all the action takes place in the cyber equivalent of non-space). "Western society is on the brink of collapse - not into crime, violence, madness or revolution, as many would believe - but into withdrawal", argues Martin Pawley²⁵. This apparent retreat from communal and democratic discourse would seem a post-modern refinement of the "state of savagery"

21 Patrick Shanahan, *Esperantis - Theorising the Post-Landscape*, (PhD thesis, Royal College of Art, London, 2001).

22 Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*, (Verso, 1990).

23 Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe, (Verso, 1995).

24 Nan Ellin, *Postmodern Urbanism*, (Blackwell, 1996).

25 Martin Pawley, quoted in Nan Ellin, *Postmodern Urbanism*, (Blackwell, 1996), p. 111.

of the isolation of the Modern city dweller, noted early in the last century by the poet Valéry.²⁶

Again, anxiety is a by-product of the symbolic functioning of the combination of the unreal colours of reciprocity failure and artificial light. This advertises the photograph (already a mirror image) as an uncanny double of itself. The quality of light renders space and time ambiguous: is this early morning or early evening? Are the shadows the result of the play of 'natural' light? These are effects of what Shanahan has christened the aesthetic of "luminous uncanny". The false colours are evocative of 'image enhanced' pictures that are used by states to reveal the presence of illegal immigrants (paradoxically, their omnipresence is amplified by their absence in 'Esperantis').

A further level of ambiguity surrounds the ontology of the images. Though appearing artificial - an effect enhanced by their relatively large scale - they gradually reveal themselves to be 'real photographs'. Traces of light, here and there, betray the passing of time during long exposures. Members of a colony of cats (those emblematic creatures of the uncanny) leave see-through traces of their restless movements under and around a single parked car. To realize - as evidence suggests - that these places actually exist, and furthermore were really bustling, not deserted; and to understand that instead of silence there was noise (in one image reflections off an ascending hot air balloon leave streaks in the sky like lazy brush marks) is to confuse 'lies' with 'truth' and 'symbolic' with 'real', and to experience what Shanahan calls the "metaphysical shudder" of the uncanny. Perhaps this is similar to the unease experienced by some viewers of David Lynch's film, *Mulholland Drive*, after belatedly realizing that the plot which 'grounds' the atmosphere of menace and fantasy is itself a menacing fantasy.

'Esperantis' beckons us to follow, in our imaginations, dark stairways and pathways and to transgress beyond unknown borders. The photographs threaten with their double 'strangeness', yet they are seductive. At this moment, when unease yields to amazement, the work functions how Shanahan intended: as a "redemptive experience"²⁷ - photography as art as revelation.

I have argued that Patrick Shanahan's artistic temperament was shaped by the volatile milieu of the late 70s and early 80s, which also supplied his themes. In the 90s, after exposure to Ghirri's work, he adapted his style to address the social landscape. Reflected in the work's concern with urbanity, architecture, and in its moral neutrality, is one of the most enduring cultural legacies of the 70s: topographic photography. The European topographic photography movement, which began in France in 1983 with the DATAR survey, drew much of its initial style and attitude from American 'New Topographics'. Lately, though, voices in the movement have been calling for a fresh approach to replace the approach that Joe Deal once referred to as the "disembodied eye". One model is suggested by the curator, Roberto Margini. He witnessed photographers in the Emilia-Romagna district of northern Italy grappling with "a new grammar of the gaze" that would replace the "style without style" of the 1980s. He identifies various tendencies including, "the use of symbolic and not simply geographical titles and the greater freedom in the use of colour", as well as the desire to "create actual worlds of invention based on a strongly personal vision."²⁸

Another 90s project that advocates fresh initiatives that might address the perceived deficiencies of photography as a form of mapping is Italy - Cross Sections of a Country.

²⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, (Fontana, 1973), p. 176.

²⁷ Patrick Shanahan, *Esperantis - Theorising the Post-Landscape*, (PhD thesis, Royal College of Art, London, 2001).

²⁸ Roberto Margini, 'Paradigms of Recent Italian Photography', in *History of Photography*, vol. 24, no. 3, Autumn 2000, p. 191.

It was a collaboration between the urban planner, Stefano Boeri and the photographer, Gabriele Basilico, to try to create a new form of representation that would favour the "extended city" (over the old "coherent city") and a way of surveying from the "ground view" (eschewing the aerial view). Boeri singled out six portions of Italy, each comprising 50km long and 12km wide, and each beginning at the centre of a large urban area, proceeding outwards to the peripheries. Basilico's shifting multiple viewpoints formed a fascinating exhibition and book that illustrated Boeri's concept of "eclectic atlases". These are hypothetical maps that aim to represent urban development, post-landscape, by documenting spaces where boundaries blur dynamically.

Boeri and Margini argue for a shift in the representation of urban space from one presently biased towards a scientific/institutional model, to something that is critical yet also intuitive and inventive. Boeri believes his eclectic atlases could be multidisciplinary and harness "a harmony of viewpoints to depict, from several different angles, a terrain that can no longer be represented by a single voice 'offscreen'...".²⁹ Margini imagines that the photographer of the future will be a shamanistic or magical figure who will "reinvent the meaning of a journey to the point where it becomes an example of nomadic art."³⁰

From this evidence one might argue that the paradigm has shifted, between the 80s and 90s, from a 'topographic' one to a 'psychogeographic' one - a term borrowed from the Situationist International. Its principal theorist, Guy Debord, speculated that: "psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals."³¹

Through the work of 'Esperantis' Shanahan clearly demonstrates an affinity with the aspirations of Boeri and Margini, which were prefigured by Ghirri's proposal for a new "visual alphabet", which unified "gaze and vision, interior and exterior, poised somewhere between the revealing and the surveying of places". The pictures engage critically yet imaginatively with urban space. Implicit in Shanahan's artistic statement, that he "speaks for"³² the estranged, is the knowledge that he shares the estrangement felt and communicated with his viewers. His admission of subjective intention - coupled with a highly symbolic approach to image-making - contrasts with the 70s topographic photographers' eschewal of all things demiurgic. Shanahan's presence at the moments and places of his photographs, is an issue. Though there were no 'decisive moments' to capture, there were paths to discover and wander, 'shocks' to deflect or absorb, accidents and chance encounters to enjoy and visceral sensations of place to experience and savour. In this sense the aesthetic of 'Esperantis' resembles 'derivé' - central to the practice of psychogeography. Derivé (to drift) has been described as random, creative but politically motivated strolling through the city.

While Roberto Margini welcomes photographic experimentation he cautions that future topographic practice may come at "the expense of that revelation of everyday reality that presupposed the photographer to be aseptic and anonymous ...".³³ Patrick Shanahan, has finally arrived at a kind of image which will be sympathetically received

²⁹ Gabriele Basilico, Stefano Boeri, Italy - Cross Sections of a Country, (Scalo, 1998).

³⁰ Roberto Margini, 'Paradigms of Recent Italian Photography', in History of Photography, vol. 24, no. 3, Autumn 2000, p. 195.

³¹ Guy Debord, 'Introduction to a New Critique of Urban Geography', in Situationist International Anthology, ed. and trans. Ken Knabb, (Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), p. 5.

³² Patrick Shanahan, Esperantis - Theorising the Post-Landscape, (PhD thesis, Royal College of Art, London, 2001).

³³ Roberto Margini, 'Paradigms of Recent Italian Photography', in History of Photography, vol. 24, no. 3, Autumn 2000, p. 191.

because the taste, at present, is for the artificial, the hybrid and the overtly subjective. Yet, at such a time when fabricated tends to mean digitally created, Shanahan's images gain force from the sudden and unexpected realization that they do, after all, contain the revelation of "everyday reality".

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