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David George's Nightscapes: Interartial Sanctuaries of Darkness

Les paysages nocturnes de David George : éloge interartial de l'obscurité

Valérie Morisson

- 1 London-based landscape photographer David George is a photographer of the night. While a strand of contemporary photography displays brightly lit places or landscapes and probes space with acute neatness, George's works are imbued with anachronistic spectrality. His fascination with tenebrous atmospheres evokes Bill Brandt's highly contrasted cityscapes, Don McCullin's dimly lit images of the English countryside or Raymond Moore's photographs of empty streets and landscapes. David George selects the places he wishes to work on during his diurnal walks but photographs nocturnal landscapes systematically devoid of human presence, thereby revisiting the romantic genre of the nightscape. Night has long irrigated the artists' imagination (Kelen unpaginated); it transforms our familiar environments into mysterious poetic places and heightens our responsiveness, triggering either fearfulness or *rêverie*. David George's works revisit the poetic motif of the nocturnal which John Donne keyed to spiritual contemplation thereby echoing the voices of many poets celebrating night as the "mother of gods and men". From Shakespeare to contemporary fiction night has been ambiguously perceived in literature: keyed to sleep, dreams and the realm of the supernatural, it has also been associated with lawlessness, criminality or archaic drives. Nightscapes are inevitably tinged with an array of feelings or states of mind and artists have used natural and artificial light to heighten their ambivalence. In his landmark essay, *Des Lumières et des ombres*, Henri Alekan argues that light is an emotional palette allowing artists to transcend reality (Alekan 32); as light fades at night, shapes get blurred and colours dissolve leaving room to our imagination (Alekan 47). David George's at times extremely dark nightscapes reveal traces of the collective unconscious lying dormant in the landscape. As Pierre Taminiaux suggests in *The Paradox of Photography* "to reveal is to demonstrate in a poetic manner the mental closeness of the material reality that surrounds us", adding: "what is photography, if not a medium that sheds light on objects, places, people to make the world more visible

through a process of sheer revelation" (Taminiaux 89). Paradoxically though, in David George's photographic series, such poetic revelation is achieved not through nocturnal exposure.

- 2 The photographer's sources of inspiration are multiple ranging from the romantic or sublime landscape to documentary photography and its concern with banal landscapes; from gothic literary cityscapes to the *film noir* and its highly contrasted urban imagery. Most series hinge on intericonicity: *Enclosures, Badlands & Borders* (2009-2012) conjures up 19th century literary representations of industrial Britain; *Shadows of Doubt* (2011) seeks to recreate the atmosphere of Hitchcock's films in photography; *Hackney by Night* (2014-2015) juxtaposes photographic landscapes with a short story by Karen Falconer while *Gingerbread House* (2010) is inspired from the famous German tale; the images from the *Backwater* series (2012) inevitably bring to mind Arnold Böcklin's paintings. Bearing the imprint of collective history and individual stories, the landscapes which the artist captures confirm that the space we inhabit is fraught with subjective as well as cultural memories and haunted by our collective imaginary, itself informed by artistic representations. While David George's works do partake of what is commonly termed "the spatial turn", they are also endowed with narrative qualities as they intersect with the cinema or literature and stage emotions such as melancholy.
- 3 In a famous essay on landscape photography, Robert Adams argued that landscape pictures can offer three verities, namely geography, autobiography and metaphor: "Geography is, if taken alone, sometimes boring, autobiography is frequently trivial, and metaphor can be dubious. But taken together [...] the three kinds of information strengthen each other" (Adams). These three verities underlie the photographic series by David George as this paper intends to demonstrate.

Photography and the geographical imagination: wavering between reality and myth

- 4 David George's work testifies to the renewed and interdisciplinary interest in the landscape since the 1990s. An increasing number of photographers have documented the metamorphosis of the landscape and drawn our attention to the multitudinous interactions between man and his environment. Such interactions have repeatedly been underscored by the geographers who shaped "the spatial turn", a tightly woven theoretical network emphasising the layeredness of the landscape. Ever since Henri Lefebvre's seminal studies on the interconnectedness between nature and culture, the landscape has been investigated as a symbolical representation (often a visual one) premised on sight; as shaping and being shaped by social practices and models; as being contaminated by and reflecting power-relations; but also as intersecting with affects—one may consider the development of psychogeography. Admittedly, the landscape results from the entanglement of observable realities, lived experiences and collective or individual imagination: it is "a hybrid term expressing the continual and inescapable symbolic shaping of the material world" (Haberman 2-3).
- 5 Photography is particularly apt to transcribe parts of our environment into complex, hybrid images. It bears witness to the layeredness of the landscape, both a milieu shaped or scarred by history, a scenery fraught with underlying cultural references and a projective space. Unsurprisingly its transcription of the landscape has been said to

waver between historical realism and romantic transcendentalism: British landscape photography has, Graham Clark contends, either recorded the specificities of a given environment or pictured a rural harmony derived from the picturesque (Clarke 55). These two poles of landscape photography may in fact coalesce as Liz Wells explains: “Artists collect, log and sift through a diversity of information about places in order to deepen the insights that will inform photographic methods and processes. [...] They are story tellers whose depth of research and analysis is reflected in the philosophic perceptions and visual rhetorical strategies which characterize their picture-making” (Wells 14). David George’s series, all landscapes, articulate geographic information and artistic imagination as they unleash the poetic potency of banal places. They result from long and meticulous explorations of his familiar environment. The photographer, a solitary *flâneur*, uses large-scale maps and google earth to establish areas he might like to work in, then walks these places during daylight to explore the districts before photographing them by night. His method leaves room for unpredictability: “I set off with an idea of what I might like to photograph but inevitably end up photographing something completely different,” he confesses, thereby confirming that both the act of walking and the enchantment of night time add something unexpected to the perception of space and its representation.

- 6 Some of David George’s photographs show how blurred the historical division between the countryside and the city is nowadays owing to the sprawl of the periphery. The picturesque canon through which the landscape had long been perceived no longer matches the reality of our suburban environments. *Enclosure, Badlands & Borders* tackles the “typically ‘English’ ambivalence between country and city” (Clarke 70). The ghostly presence of industrial buildings, road-signs, poles and fences in unbounded natural spaces is enhanced by the low-angle viewpoint which enables the artist to include embankments and brownfield areas in the compositions and contrasts starkly with the high scenic viewpoint of picturesque landscapes. The series echoes Adams’ lament that: “few of us can any longer hope to own a piece of undisturbed land” (Adams 13). Yet, departing from the tradition of landscape photography initiated by Adams in the United States and Raymond Moore in England, favouring formal detachment, David George shows this evolution resorting to a post-industrial romanticism which owes much to nocturnal light. Although he highlights the objectivity of the series and evokes the topographic school of photography as a source of inspiration, night endows his images with an unsettling sublimity. While the hazy artificial glow of electric light, beautifully yet cynically imitating moonlight, heightens the contrast between the natural environment and the man-made infrastructures, it also suffuses the luminescent industrial buildings with eerie beauty.
- 7 David George’s iridescent nightscapes are subtly illuminated by natural moonlight or dawn, electric light whether it be lampposts reminiscent of Alfred Stieglitz’s famous photograph, *An Icy Night* (The Metropolitan Museum, 1898) and the *film noir* or more contemporary neon light as well as digital painting. Nocturnal lighting fashions the real and stages the landscape; it plays on the evanescence of apparition thereby eliciting mystery. The contrast between artificial light and poetic darkness, the subtle transition between visibility and invisibility, presence and absence in David George’s nightscapes is a visual equivalent to the opposition between life and death. Alekan explains how the contrast between light and darkness in night scenes echoes that between good and evil, happiness and dejection, pleasure and pain (Alekan 84). The juxtaposition of moonlight—which Alekan ties to continuity, tranquillity, melancholy,

coldness, and death—and artificial light—equated with liveliness, complexity, instability, materiality, warmth and life—(Alekan 90) adds further richness to the light palette that George uses. The use of digital photography allowing for painterly light effects creates puzzling light effects which dramatize the landscape. The uncanny light plunges the viewer in a different world and time. As Jacqueline Kelen notes, night is “space stripped of temporal boundaries”; it makes our thoughts and sensations shift towards an alternative time and space (Kelen 10).¹ In *Enclosure, Badlands & Borders*, the concrete moorings of the contemporary buildings is superimposed on the timeless nocturnal oneirism, so that the man-made structures are shrouded in an anachronistic blackness which opens up a temporal breach. The discrepancy between the undeveloped natural areas and the amenities is heightened by the process of long exposure through which, as the artist explains, “the man made is static whereas the natural is organic and has movement with a timed exposure creating an aesthetic difference (and therefore tension) between the natural and the man made”.² Two different times are therefore conflated: the stillness of the inanimate collides with the slight movement of the animated world that is recorded. Hence, the photographs display what the artist terms “a malleable, elastic narrative”. This disjointed time bestows some aura upon the pictures: it introduces what Georges Didi-Huberman calls a double distance (*la double distance*).

- 8 The polychrony of photography has repeatedly been highlighted, by Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes and Georges Didi-Huberman among others. The latter reminds us that, according to Walter Benjamin, the aura of an image is « *un regard œuvré par le temps* », « *un regard qui laisserait à l'apparition le temps de se déployer comme pensée, c'est-à-dire qui laisserait à l'espace le temps de se retramer autrement, de redevenir du temps* » (Didi-Huberman 105). David George's nightscapes allow for such a temporal unfolding of space. They explore forms of liminality which are not conducive to the carnivalesque³ but that are moored in the anthropological notion of threshold. In *Enclosure, Badlands & Borders*, the absence of topographic information induces a sense of placelessness that is attached to edgelands. Deserted and shrouded in darkness, David George's landscapes seem to be “uncentered”, to quote from J.G. Ballard, who holds that “in the suburbs you find uncentered lives. The normal civic structures are not there. So that people have more freedom to explore their own imaginations, their own obsessions” (Sinclair 84). The viewers are taken to peripheric places or places of in-betweenness. Now, as Rob Shields notes in his study on liminality, “marginal places, those towns and regions which have been ‘left behind’ in the modern race for progress, evoke both nostalgia and fascination” (Shields 3), which is what the photographs do. The series echoes the liminality of the overlooked and unloved landscapes that drew the attention of Marion Shoard, who suggested that edgelands could be beautiful, and that of poet Michael Symmons Roberts, who allowed edgelands “a kind of imaginative life” (Farley 5) and explored these “unobserved parts of our shared landscape as places of possibility, mystery, beauty” (Farley 6). David George often selects unpicturesque, low viewpoints that offer an intimate contact with the land or water, an immersion in the landscape. Graham Clarke reminds his readers that “in the British tradition [of the 20th century] the photographer is put to the margins of the landscape, using such habitats to recover a sense of isolation. The photographs make available icons of an alternative existence: primary spots of release and contemplation” (Clarke 67). In most series by David George the shadowy foreground, formerly used in picturesque compositions to create a sense of depth, shelters and envelops the viewers who stand on the threshold of the

landscapes, both immersed in photographic space and on the margins of the visible parts of the scenery. They are taken to in-between spots or twilight zones where the limit between the visible and the invisible, reality and fiction vanishes.

- 9 In *Le Réel de la photographie*, Arnaud Claass proposes a spatial counterpart to Barthes' *ça-a-été*. The temporal melancholy which Benjamin and Barthes saw as the ontology of photography would be accompanied by a form of spatial melancholy (Claass 278). In the same way as a photograph invites the viewer to drift along time and navigate a chronological river, it would lead the beholder to an alternative, endogenous topos which is not the out-of-frame part of the landscape but "*une étendue escamotée*" (Claass 279), an unfathomable place impossible to locate in reality. These lost places which photography presents or reactivates are both eternal and ephemeral: "*Ce sont des moments 'photographiques' où le fugace et le continu se rencontrent dans des étendues. Et ces étendues, dans leur infinitude potentielle, peuvent être des territoires psychologiques, géographiques et culturels à la fois*" (Claass 280). The artist himself stresses the dislocation induced by his nightscapes stating that "when used in certain combinations, some images depict what seem to be new other worlds that do not exist anywhere except within the photographic image, forming new, imagined, internal places from the crystals or pixels that make up the photographic image. A world of myth and melancholy".⁴

Tell-tale photography and the narrative imagination: the nightscape as intrigue

- 10 *Hackney by Night* illustrates the above-mentioned conflation between the *ça-a-été* and *ça-a-eu-lieu* as it weaves together landscape and autobiography by evoking events that have *taken place*. An interstitial project, it combines a short story and photographs shot in Hackney, East London, an area that is familiar to the photographer. Although the images document the history of the district and its diversity—showing the banks of the Thames and surrounding parks, old brick houses and residential units, industrial buildings and modern amenities, empty alleyways and the cemetery—no caption identifies the places. The images are neither strictly topographic nor elegiac; the sites are apparently banal without being "non-places". In this work, David George intended to explore the interstice between real and imagined geographies: "What I wanted was to take the reader on a gentle meander through the night, to feel like they'd have a bit of a dream".⁵ The text written by Karen Falconer is a first person narrative which introduces autobiographical elements. The photographs never simply illustrate the text nor does the text illustrate the images, yet the reader may connect the fictional narrator with the subjective lens of the camera. The book opens on the photograph of a block of flats, shot at low angle, emerging from a park. A few windows are still lit but most of the occupants must be sleeping. The words "My house stands alone" (*HBN* unpaginated) intersect with the image in a stimulating way since they reveal the loneliness of modern life while tying the homeliness of a "house" to the block of flats. On the subsequent pages, the landscapes printed with no accompanying text map out a silent promenade. The stifling darkness permeating the photographs gathered in the volume induces a sense of protection and danger simultaneously. Even though the shadowy foregrounds provide imaginary hideouts they elicit a sense of loneliness and vulnerability heightened by the impression of silence. Walking at night, the narrator of

the short-story remembers the last moments he spent with his departed sister: "As soon as I take my first steps outside, I am on a journey through time and place; in an open park, I am again a boy, my younger sister at my side". The *flâneur* visiting places slowly drifts back in time: "As light shines at night, veils and screens are lifted and one is led beyond appearances. Night light incites us not to step back but to remember" (Kelen).⁶ Nocturnal twilight illuminates the human psyche, triggering thoughts and reminiscences, freeing deeply buried thoughts and unlocking multiple stories.

- 11 The landscapes in *Hackney* also bear the traces of our collective imagination: "I sit at the edge, the narrator remembers, and look across to the island. A number of Ophelias, cats and carcasses might sleep there" (*HBN* unpaginated). In the short story, night enables the narrator to acknowledge loss but is also propitious to encounters with the dead. The photographic medium duplicates this encounter as "photography is the medium in which we unconsciously encounter the dead. [...] Photographs are not signs of presence but evidence of absence. [...] Photographs contain a realization of loss" (Prosser 1). The bridges and footpaths which often feature in the compositions symbolize this double experience of loss and bonding while materializing the idea of a threshold. The autobiographical and the metaphorical intermingle as night turns the landscape into a projective space harbouring our sorrows, our fears and anxieties. As Liz Wells acknowledges "the real, perceptions of the real, the imaginary, the symbolic, memory and experience, form a complex tapestry at the heart of our response to our environment, and, by extension, to landscape imagery" (Wells 7). In *Hackney by Night* the landscape is experiential, deeply tangled with emotions and memory, it becomes a memoryscape. These landscapes of absence "incite psychogeographic journeys—quests, pilgrimages, divinations, exorcism, excavations: a cultural archaeology of trauma, hope or oblivion" (Andrews and Roberts 7). They are interstitial and liminal, that is to say "familiar yet unknown; [...] secure, and yet intimidating" (Dowey). Walking across these empty places, the narrator mourns his dead sister, allows the souvenir of her to resurface and acknowledges the loss. The death of his sister—"she vanished and I did not see" (*HBN* unpaginated)—is visually evoked through the emptiness of the landscapes in twilight and the ensuing feeling of suspension or estrangement. Along the book images of forlorn streets, alleys, parks and ponds framed by trees alternate in a circular manner which echoes the circularity in the narrative ending with the following ambiguous lines: "It is as if she were waiting for me to come. 'I'm here,' I say and take the plunge" (*HBN* unpaginated). Like the narrator of *Hackney by Night*, gazing at David George's landscapes we feel both here and there, inside and outside, included and excluded, protected and exposed, localized and dislocated. Georges Didi-Huberman's notion of *double distance* is relevant here: « *Peut-être ne faisons-nous rien d'autre, lorsque nous voyons quelque chose et que tout à coup nous en sommes touchés, que nous ouvrir à une dimension essentielle du regard, selon laquelle regarder deviendrait ce jeu asymptotique du proche (jusqu'au contact, réel ou fantasmé) et du lointain (jusqu'à la disparition et la perte, réelles ou fantasmées)* » (Didi-Huberman 117).
- 12 In *Shadows of Doubt* and *Gingerbread House* reality and fiction equally overlap. The two sets of images, in which darkness entails uncanniness, further explore the specific narrativity of photography. Lewis Baltz wrote that "it is possibly useful to think of creative photography as a narrow but deep area lying between the cinema and the novel" (Badger). David George creates some generic in-betweenness as his photographic imagination intersects with literature, painting, and the cinema. We

inevitably interpret his photographs through the generic conventions of these art forms, which also shape our perception of the real landscape (Huglo 10).

- 13 *Shadows of Doubt* pays a tribute to Hitchcock's films and what they reveal about "our present moment, fears and desires" (Sprengler). Far from reconstituting the filmmaker's native Edwardian East End, the series invites the viewers to "*re-imagine* [my emphasis] the geographic, topographic, and architectural elements that constituted his childhood environment, elements that were feeding everyday, covertly, into his psyche and expanding aesthetic".⁷ The photographer was lastingly influenced by the numberless films he saw when a child so that his landscapes are imbued with blatant cinematographic qualities. The night scenes, the vivid contrast between light and shadow, the low points of view and the suggestion of a perambulation at night evoke Hitchcock's films without mapping out a clear intrigue. The juxtaposition of different nightscapes takes the viewer across the city on a mysterious journey. No clue is provided, no object is strewn on the empty streets, no figure is seen through the backlit windows, no piece of vegetation has been trampled upon in the parks and yet, the subjective point of view incites the viewer to weave a story out of the series. Faced with a landscape devoid of human presence and breeding a network of associations, the viewer may project his own fantasies or anxiety onto the gloomy urbanscapes: "I tend towards the dionian/romantic/subjective with my work as I think it allows the viewer more space to create their own, personal stories when viewing the work," the artist states; the deliberate absence of protagonists leaves room for imagination (James). Despite the absence of protagonists and the impossibility of a transformation occurring, the series regularly plays on the narrative potentialities of the photographic image. Seriality introduces something crucial to narrativity, namely coherence and ellipses.⁸ While photographic images remain "equivalents of visual perception (or, possibly, of visual imagination, like images in a dream)" (Schaeffer),⁹ their making and reception may entail forms of narrativity. This is all the more true when images are "perceptively and hermeneutically unstaurated and when what is showed must be transcended by representational extrapolation" (Schaeffer).¹⁰ Photographs never are closed entities, they always intersect with something other, either a story, a feeling, or the photographer's presence. However, the photographic image is ontologically a fragment, an incomplete part of reality telling only fragmentary tales. What is not clearly recorded in the image as well as what is beyond the frame are triggers for story-building as if the photographic images were the emerged tip of the narrative iceberg.
- 14 While, in British culture, pastoral and picturesque representations have contributed to "constructing a simplified and benign rural imaginary, to picturing countryside as safe" (Wells 64), David George's landscapes are unsettling as a sense of the uncanny often percolates. *Gingerbread House*, a series displaying houses, dens or shelters of different types and sizes shrouded in intense darkness is redolent of fairy tales or contemporary novels by Peter Ackroyd, J.G. Ballard or Iain Sinclair.¹¹ Aware of Freud's definition of the uncanny, the artist investigates the limit between the known and the unknown, the familiar and the unfamiliar. Referring to the German fairy tale, the series puts to the fore everyone's deep-rooted fear of abandonment as well as the precariousness of our protective shelters: a sense of isolation and ominousness prevails as the electric lighting and flashlight bestow a forensic atmosphere upon some of the scenes. These very dark photographs suggest that "every dwelling is a fortress built to defend its human occupants against the elements; it is a constant reminder of human vulnerability. [...] Every human-made boundary on the earth's surface—garden hedge,

city wall, or 'radar' fence—is an attempt to keep inimical forces at bay. Boundaries are everywhere because threats are ubiquitous" (Tuan 13). The changing light throughout the series invites us to imagine a night walk and induces various moods ranging from fear to hope. Like memory photography creates places or spaces which are filtered through affects and collective or individual imagination. David George's series evidence the deep connection between photography—offering a *double distance* or some *étendue escamotée*—and memory. The artist is familiar with Aristotle's view that "Memory is, therefore, neither perception nor conception, but a state or affection of one of these, conditioned by lapse of time" which he quotes in his text on his *Dissolution Series* (2009).¹² David George's nightscapes prove to be sanctuaries for the imagination. To him, "photography sees the world in ways the human eye never can",¹³ an echo to Edward Weston's claim that "photography as a creative expression [...] must be seeing plus" (Wells) even though this "seeing plus" is paradoxically predicated on intense darkness.

Photography and metaphor: melancholic waters

- 15 Most of David George's series features images of ponds or rivers. The liquidity which oozes from the photographs trigger Bachelardian *rêveries*. *Backwater*, a series showing damp areas on the fringe of urbanized environments, evokes the dead murky waters of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories (which Bachelard scrutinizes) as well as those painted by Böcklin in *Island of the Dead* (1883, Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig) or *Tombstone* (1880, unknown location). Landscape photography has kept a very intimate relation with paintings and "remains encoded within the language of academic painting and the traditions of landscape art which developed during the 18th and 19th centuries" (Clarke 55). Digital photography has reinforced this relation. Besides, through long exposures the surface of the water in David George's works becomes almost painterly and onereic. In *L'Eau et les Rêves*, Bachelard notes that the reflection induced by the surface of the water creates strange reversals and visual thresholds as in a dream (Bachelard 61). In the photographs of ponds and rivers, the surface of the water dissolves the structure of the landscape and blurs the lines or grids that normally shape our perception of space and landscape.

- 16 Water takes the viewer on a journey towards melancholy.¹⁴ Looking at David George's rivers and ponds one cannot but remember these lines from Wordsworth's *Prelude*:

With trembling oars I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the covert of the willow tree;
There in her mooring-place I left my bark,
—And through the meadows homeward went, in grave
And serious mood; but after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind

By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.
(Prelude IV)

Other poetic voices could accompany *Backwater*, notably verses by Ted Hughes whose collection entitled *River* ties water to self-knowledge, revelation and memory.

- 17 The melancholy suffusing David George's emotional landscapes stems from its connection with past images such as Henry Fox Talbot's early photographs of ponds surrounded by trees. Borrowing from the pastoral aesthetics of the pictorialist tradition in photography, George nonetheless introduces electric poles, wires and lights, metal fences or straight roads in his landscapes drawing attention to the rampant colonization of natural spaces and man's impact on the environment. In the series, electric lights could be mistaken for moonlight but, far from inviting contemplation, they blind us. Space is bounded and we feel the poetic beauty which still suffuses these suburbanized places will soon disappear, hence a longing for unspoiled places. "Much of the new [British] photography underlines the extent to which landscape is very much bound by an atmosphere of melancholy" (Clarke 72). In this respect, water also seems to be a timeless presence, retaining beauty as its reflective surface opens onto alternative space and time. David George's liminal landscapes compensate our severance from the realms of imagination and introspection.
- 18 What is yearned for is not merely the reassuring pastoral ideal but the possibility of experiencing melancholy. Photography almost inevitably entails melancholy as Georges Didi-Huberman notes in his analysis of Walter Benjamin's text since modernity has deprived the world of its aura and undermined sensory experience (Didi-Huberman 109). David George's series are emotional landscapes and in this respect are part of the "affective turn" in landscape representation which Ina Haberman and Daniela Keller define as a "focus on embodiment and the senses, on the constant trade between material objects and the imagination" (Haberman 2). Countering the widespread electric lights which gnaw on natural darkness at night, George's landscapes reacquaint us with a revealing darkness that increasingly disappears from our environments. In *The End of Night*, Paul Bogard underscores the encroachment of light upon the darkness of night in an attempt at preserving what is left of primal darkness and the magic experience of a night sky. Geographer Tim Edensor also argues that the "monumental banishment of the dark and mysterious within such a modern topography [limelighting visibility and transparency] leaves little room for gloom and the disordered yet evocative matter which might lurk there" (Edensor 135). The presence of organic land and water in the landscapes drives us back to times when space was perceived through myths and imagination. Edensor's essay ties in with Jack Bowring's call for melancholy. In societies pursuing happiness relentlessly, melancholy, just like darkness, has been marginalised, even evicted. "The landscape, he writes, holds within it the natural habitat for melancholy, as the locus of places of contemplation, memory, death, sadness" (Bowring 9). To him, landscape is "the place from which we draw meaning, feeling; it is the armature of existence, the realm in which place and culture co-exist, and where the self dwells" (Bowring 11). His interpretation of melancholy as spirited sadness, or *tristitia utilis*, resonates with David George's *Tristitia* series: "I like melancholy, the photographer says, because it's a choice. It's not like depression. You can choose to be melancholy".¹⁵ *Tristitia* is dedicated to "cultural ideas of melancholy, especially those that involve the notion of melancholy as an aesthetic emotion or ideal". Melancholy encompasses nostalgia and mourning as

well as sadness and grief, emotions that are anchored in the nightscape. Since “the landscape has a role in proffering places of escape, of rebuilding the capacity for contemplation” (Bowring 12), David George’s landscapes may be viewed as sanctuaries for melancholy.

- 19 Interweaving the three strands of landscape photography which Robert Adams singled out, geography, autobiography and metaphor, David George’s landscapes reenchant darkness, melancholy and mystery by unravelling the literary, artistic and cinematographic celebrations of night which make up our cultural landscapes. Through these interstitial *flâneries* he draws our attention to the very specificities of photography: its fragmentary or incomplete nature leaving room for imagination; its temporal and spatial hybridity leading to the *espace escamoté* that Arnaud Claass delineates. David George’s photographs may therefore be construed as geographical doppelgängers: spectral landscapes that are intimately liminal.

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NOTES

1. La nuit est « espace délivré des lisières du temps ». La nuit « fait imperceptiblement basculer nos pensées, nos sensations dans un autre espace-temps, elle ne les engourdit pas mais les étire à des dimensions plus vastes ».
2. Unpublished interview with the artist, 19 Sept. 2017. Quoted with his kind permission.
3. In *Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experience and Space In-between* (London; New York, Routledge, 2012), Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts expand on Rob Shield's view of liminality as alternative geographies possibly tied to the carnival (Rob Shield, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*, London, Ashgate Publishing, 1991).
4. The artist's website, <http://www.davidgeorge.eu/index.html> (last accessed 15 November 2019).
5. *Idem*.
6. « La nudité de la nuit offre la véritable lumière que très peu d'humains ont contemplée. Parce qu'il y a la lumière du jour-devenue presque ordinaire, attendue-et la lumière de la nuit qui ne se réduit pas à l'éclat des étoiles ni à la pâleur de la lune. Cette lumière propre à la nuit demande que voiles et écrans soient l'un après l'autre levés et que l'on s'aventure au-delà du rideau d'apparences. Elle ne veut pas que l'on se fracasse mais elle invite à se souvenir » (Kelen 10).
7. The artist's website.
8. « C'est bien une forme d'écriture que le spectateur est amené à décrypter, en procédant, d'une part, à une lecture de chaque photographie particulière et, d'autre part, à la recherche d'un sens

véhiculé par l'ensemble des clichés. Pour que le dispositif séquentiel fasse sens, chaque image doit donc être déterminée en fonction de l'espace et du temps, de manière à donner l'illusion de la continuité nécessaire au sens, à la compréhension. À cette participation spectatorielle correspond donc en amont une véritable préméditation de l'ensemble séquentiel par le photographe-narrateur » (Leennaerts).

9. « une image n'est pas une proposition sur le monde, ou une assertion sur la réalité. Certes, elle partage avec les actes de langage la capacité de renvoyer au monde, mais elle le fait en nous donnant à voir un équivalent d'un acte de perception visuelle (ou éventuellement d'imagination visuelle, telles les images de rêve) et non pas en nous communiquant des assertions sur le monde » (Schaeffer).

10. « une image induit la narrativisation lorsqu'elle est perceptuellement et herméneutiquement non saturée et que la monstration doit être transcendée par une extrapolation représentationnelle » (Schaeffer). Translated by the author.

11. One recent influence is Matthew Beaumont's *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London* (James).

12. <http://www.davidgeorge.eu/Statements/dissolution.html> (last accessed 15 November 2019).

13. Unpublished interview with the artist, 19 Sept. 2017. Quoted with his permission.

14. Adams: "The beautiful places to which we journey for inspiration surprise us by the melancholy they can induce" (Adams 13).

15. <http://www.bjp-online.com/2015/12/hackney-at-night/> (last accessed 15 November 2019).

ABSTRACTS

David George's photographs are landscapes devoid of human presence systematically shot at night. While contemporary photography tends to favour analytical clarity and brightness, the works under scrutiny foreground obscurity or twilight. The artist places his work at the crossroad of photography, painting, literature and the cinema exploring different evocations of the night. The banal, familiar landscapes that he shoots are thereby turned into mysterious, uncanny, emotional places. His rendering of nightlight, underscoring the ambivalence of our response to darkness, plunges the viewer into an alternative time and space. These liminal landscapes of absence are memoryscapes, places of contemplation and revelation in which water plays a key role. The series are endowed with narrative qualities, telling fragmentary stories of loss, fear and renewal. Documenting changes in the urban or suburban landscape but also celebrating melancholy, the series of photographs sound like a hymn to darkness.

Les photographies de David George sont des paysages dépourvus de toute présence humaine et systématiquement photographiés de nuit. Tandis que la photographie contemporaine privilégie une certaine clarté analytique, les œuvres étudiées ici sont obscures ou crépusculaires. L'artiste travaille à la croisée de la photographie, de la peinture, de la littérature et du cinéma convoquant de multiples évocations de la nuit. Les paysages banals et familiers deviennent mystérieux, étranges, chargés d'émotions. Son travail sur la lumière nocturne souligne l'ambivalence de notre rapport à l'obscurité et nous plonge dans un temps et un espace autres. Ces paysages liminaux, des paysages d'absence où l'eau joue un grand rôle, éveillent les souvenirs, stimulent la contemplation, permettent des révélations. Les séries photographiques sont fortement narratives : des histoires fragmentaires de perte, de peur et de renouveau se tissent. Le travail de

David George témoigne des évolutions du paysage urbain ou périurbain mais célèbre aussi la mélancolie comme un hymne à l'obscurité.

INDEX

Keywords: darkness, landscape photography, melancholy, nightscape, lighting, nocturnal, uncanny, water

Mots-clés: eau, éclairage, étrange étrangeté, mélancolie, obscurité, nocturne, paysage de nuit, paysage photographique

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