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Undisciplined Disciplines

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'But my mind was too confused … so with a kind of madness growing upon me, I flung myself into futurity … What strange developments of humanity, what wonderful advances upon our rudimentary civilization, I thought, might not appear when I came to look into the dim elusive world that raced and fluctuated before my eyes. I saw great and splendid architecture rising about me, more massive than any buildings of our own time, and yet, it seemed, built of glimmer and mist … the earth seemed very fair. And so my mind came round to the business of stopping.'

So The Time Traveller in H.G. Wells's novella *The Time Machine* recounts his experience of temporal speed — as the fluctuation of landscape. In Wells's often relentless fascination with the possibilities of 'progress', future time is made real as architecture, and as the eradication of landscape and its replacement by the ever larger and more complex reshaping of the material environment.

The Time Traveller's increased velocity is Wells's reflection on modernity's acceleration, as well as being a warning against the moral dangers of cultural exponentiality. And the Time Traveller is not an eccentric inventor but an Everyman figure caught up in the excitement of 'Progress'. He is in thrall to technology's possibilities and Wells ties him, with some authorial cruelty, to the narrative of humanity's onward march. *The Time Machine* provides an obvious allegory for contemporary Ireland, in which 'the business of stopping' this onward rush, the withdrawal period from the adrenalin of progress, makes the glimmer and mist as terrifying as Wells's Traveller eventually finds the future. (2) See Michael

Cronin, 'Ireland, Globalisation and the War Against Time' in Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin (eds), *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy* London: Pluto, 2002, pp. 54-66

As anticipated by Marx, in Grundrisse's contemplation of the collapse of space through the acceleration of time, (3) John Bellamy Foster, 'Marx's Grundrisse and the Ecological Contradictions of Capitalism' in Marcello Musto (ed.), *Karl Marx's 'Grundrisse': Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy 150 Years Later* London: Routledge, 2008, p. 100 the Time Traveller's initial sense of time travel, hurtling along the corridor of capitalist history, is a sensory blur, then a spatial illusion:

> The landscape was vague and misty … The whole surface of the earth seemed changed — melting and flowing under my eyes. The little hands upon the dials that registered my speed raced around faster and faster. (4) H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine,* p. 21

It is not only that the built environment rises up above and around the human as History progresses. Not only that cities proliferate at the expense of the rural, and that technology becomes a dream at the extremity of a scientific imagination. Wells reveals a common anxiety — that the corporeal capacity of human perception will not be able to keep pace with the changes brought about by technology. For the Time Traveller here history is beginning to accelerate in tandem with alterations in the landscape which are beginning to exceed the time of perception; the ground flashes past as time; the journey in time, a metaphor of journeying, dissolves its comparison of temporal and spatial movement. The material becomes molten and flowing and time, equally, becomes fluid and above all inhuman.

It is a fear of speed which brings the Traveller's mind around 'to the business of stopping'. And the parallels between his journey and contemporary Ireland's is that Ireland has, it would seem, currently come to the point of crisis, the point at which speed is self-destructive — the very moment which Wells's character anticipates, when the sense of what it is to be human (including, and centred on, the senses) loses definition, and when perception, and the metaphors which anchor perception in understanding, are blurred, like the time registered in spinning dials on the Time Machine or the places which move in geological and environmental flux as the Machine passes through epochs. Ireland's economic crisis is often registered in exactly this allegorical language of speed and 'crash'. This is the case even among those analysing more than lamenting the crash.

Daniel Finn, for example, in his essay on Ireland's post-crisis economics in *New Left Review* begins with the familiar notion that, before the Celtic Tiger, Ireland 'lagged behind' the rest of the western world.

As an historical analysis the notion is a little suspect, but it does create a sense of slowness in nice contrast to the mad catch-up of the Celtic Tiger years, which then reaches its narrative apotheosis now that "the southern state is in freefall, shedding jobs at a dizzying rate". (5) Daniel Finn, 'Ireland on the Turn? Political and Economic Consequences of the Crash', *New Left Review,* 67, 2011, p. 5 The tone of I-told-you-so in Finn's discussion is understandable. Notions of speed, progress and inadvertent braking cannot be held at too much of a distance in his discussion, despite their echoes of the media reportage of the global crisis, since Marxism itself is underwritten by a teleological version of history which anticipates the jolts and shudders of both small and global catastrophes in the capitalist economy. The metaphors are revealing though — 'freefall' and 'dizzying', for example, both echo the Time Traveller's concern that undue speed leads to a dangerous incapacity to perceive the real. It is as if history in extremis turns the landscape, that base reality, to nothing but flux. 'All that is solid melts into air', as the much-used phrase goes. The repetition of these tropes should suggest that they are not just metaphors. History in overdrive threatens human perceptual categories; when hyper-History stops the social and actual landscape slowly comes back into relief and sharp contours.

In recent years in Ireland there have been a variety of photographic projects which have tracked the effects of the Celtic Tiger, and its aftermath, on the built and human environment. In what follows I discuss Anne Cleary and Denis Connolly's *Moving Dublin* (2009), Mark Curran's *Southern Cross* (2002), Dara McGrath's *By the Way* (2003), Simon Burch's *Under a Grey Sky* (2009), Martin Cregg's *Midlands* (2009) and Jackie Nickerson's *Ten Miles Round* (2009). These projects are, of course, diverse in their approaches, techniques and philosophies. However, they all examine the phenomenon of blurring and dizzying the landscape and how that is a direct result of the economic and political pace of Ireland's 'catching up' from 'lagging behind'. Some of these projects were clearly made in the midst of the hurtling pace of economic 'growth'. The later projects register an emptying out of 'place' in the period of abrupt braking.

If the haunting legacy of the property boom in Ireland is now embodied in ghost estates and the contemporary folly which is the shell of the proposed Anglo Irish Bank headquarters, its less physical manifestations are in unemployment, migration and reduced standards of living. Even less tangible and quantifiable is the experiential emptiness which is left behind in the small-scale economic and geographical displacements and reconfigurations of everyday lives. The expansion of the commuter belt, new housing developments and the commuting lifestyle which go with them, leave behind alterations of the sense of

space and distance. Real spaces become dominated by travel and travel time, in the same way that the most accurate of maps exaggerate the scale of roads or as Harry Beck's London Underground map "captured or 'discovered' within its logic of visualization a reality that already had been produced through transformations of productive forces and relations". (6) Janin Hadlaw, 'The London Underground Map: Imagining Modern Time and Space', *Design Issues,* 19:1, 2003, p. 28 Travel becomes a modern mode of existence so dominant that it forces the science of cartography out of scale, and in this is a reflection of how modernity changes perception of time and space. Meanwhile, the enhanced radial road map of Ireland, its web pushing out ever more assertively over the last fifteen years from its centre in Dublin, appropriately imitates the map of the new economy which is the prize for thorough modernization, the virtual space of web connectivity. It also acts as a reminder of the functionality which has changed the patterns of everyday existence for many people; working days dominated by movement, transport, long-distance commuting and as a result a sense of place understood increasingly as something seen through the window of a moving car.

Symptomatic of, and in tandem with, this speed is its spawning of a commercialized yearning for the slow: slow food; growing it yourself; the fetishisation of rural life; history as heritage. In photography the conceptual equivalent of the impulse to temper fast food with the organic is a visual nostalgia and an impulse to valorise the sublime. The difficulty with such countering reactions is that they are at once compelling and packageable, instinctive and commodifiable. Nostalgia cannot work against the culture of speed because it is already part of it. In his book *Non-Places*, Marc Augé notes the nostalgia for slow history which, in France at least, is written into the regulated speed of the road systems. Augé discusses the ways in which road signage on French motorways constantly invites the motorist to linger in the traces of history through "texts planted along the wayside", those brown road-signs that seem to invite the motorist to detour in order to see vineyards or medieval churches. But, as Augé notes, these signs largely reaffirm the 'distance' of the landscape so that the motorway "avoids" "principal places" while "it makes comments on them", a contemporary and shadow version of the intensity of place implicit in the "Combray philosophy" of Proust. (7) Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity,* London: Verso, 2008, pp. 78-9 and 63

The ironic dialectic of these vestiges of history is that they are made animate by what Augé calls "non-places". The motorway and the airport are prime examples, for Augé, of non-places. They "cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity". (8) Augé, Non-Places, p. 63 They are "surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the

temporary and ephemeral": (9) Augé, Non-Places, p. 63 they are, then, everywhere and nowhere.

As is obvious and often discussed, the globalization of urban space has increasingly lead to all western (and many non-western) cities looking like each other in terms of their street architecture, their pedestrianisation, their hierarchies of commercial and shopping districts. As is less discussed, the peripheries of cities are now made as conforming non-places in which the transit of goods and people-as-labour and people-as-consumers is given priority. Paul Virilio imagines this global geographical relationship, in which geography becomes only a simile, as a "global de-localisation" which "undoes 'social' identity". (10) Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb,* London: Verso, 2005, p. 10 The "local city is now only a district", (11) Virilio, *The Information Bomb,* p. 11 Virilio writes, so that locality becomes a merely exemplary syntactical manifestation of a global urban grammar. There is a "virtual hypercentre, of which real cities are only ever the periphery", (12) Virilio, *The Information Bomb,* p. 11 an effect which presumably makes the city's own peripheral regions doubly disinterred of 'reality'. For Virilio, in this replacement of real space by cyberspace there is a compensatory "amplification of the optical density of the appearances of the world". (13) Virilio, *The Information Bomb,* p. 14 In a world where everything is surveyed (Google Earth) and nothing is seen, the landscape takes on an over-laden semantics precisely because of its actual emptiness, yet its persistent signification of nostalgic fullness.

For photography then, in its documentary, art or even photojournalistic modes, the considered image of place is in danger or being either outdated and nostalgic for a lost reality, or swept up into the modes of surveillance in which images also career along the pathways of the virtual. My interest here is partly in the ways in which photographic projects counteract this pincer movement: how to see the new landscapes, the non-places of a new Ireland, without recourse to a nostalgic sublime on the one hand, but combatting the pacey circuits of the virtual on the other. My suggestion is that the photographers I will discuss do this in two, interconnected ways. The first is the use of a 'slow' form of photography which accepts its role as a cataloguing and recording enterprise; which looks to forms of repetition of viewpoint and subject matter as, in itself, a critical aping of the ennui of the contemporary landscapes which humans inhabit; and as a photographic mode which looks at these new landscapes askance, adopting pre-existing twentieth-century movements within photography for the purposes of twenty-first century Ireland. The second aspect of these photographic projects is that they offer to turn the landscape human by being a photograph — that is, by getting there and being there. By being the evidence of a journey to a non-place, where a camera is set up, they constitute a further record,

not of the place but of the effort to get there, the decision to notice this nothingness. In the process of getting there, these photograph are reminders of history and geography as deliberative human processes rather than unstoppable futurology.

The second of these, the photograph as record of a critical and actual geographical journey, has remnants of that Situationist conceptual byway known as psychogeography. (14) Psychogeography has roots in the Baudelairean 'flâneur' and is first manifested as an activist/artistic mode in the ideas of Ivan Chtcheglov, especially his essay 'Formulary for a New Urbanism' (see Ken Knabb's translation at http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/Chtcheglov. htm [accessed 22.6.11]). Through the complex histories of the coteries which led from the Lettrist International and then the Situationist International (dominated by Guy Debord) psychogeography took on a serious/playful tone before dissipating along with the Situationist International. A lively introduction to psychogeography is Merlin Coverley's *Psychogeography* (London: Pocket Essentials, 2006), which includes a delineation of a parallel 'English' tradition of psychogeography, kept alive in the writings of Iain Sinclair and the film-making of Patrick Keiller. Psychogeography's current manifestations, after the initial flurry of Debordian activity, has, in the English language at least, its best known practitioner in the figure of the often deliberately cussed writing Iain Sinclair. Sinclair begins his book of London walks, *Lights Out for the Territory* (1997) with the intention to, as he says, 'vandalise dormant energies by an act of ambulant signmaking'. (15) Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory: 9 Excursions in the Secret History of London,* London: Penguin, 2003 [1997], p. 1 Sinclair, in this opening chapter, is looking specifically for and at graffiti, what he calls 'the pictographs of venom', (16) Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory,* p. 1 but his journey in this chapter is also an outline of a methodology, in which 'official' geographical and social 'paths' and authorized routes are seen to be marked by the textual remnants of those excluded from the official narratives and versions of place. Sinclair's idiosyncratic mode of writing and the force of his vision stand as a resistant mode of urban perception. Seeing more than is 'allowed', he is suspicious, conspiratorial, and at times paranoid, but all of this is a strategy aimed at lamenting and critiquing the ways in which place is into turned into space, or non-place.(17) The now commonplace critical distinction between place and space is central to Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001 Paramount to Sinclair's methodology are walking, reading and writing. His reading creates a near-obsessive and deeply partisan archive of a textual London, while his writing, for all its paradoxes and linguistic density, is fundamentally based in the notion of text as mnemonic record. Under its layers of irony and syntactical contortion Sinclair's writing retains a documentary mode. The walk in Sinclair's work, meanwhile, is

its phenomenological root/route, a guarantee of its and his 'reality' as against the 'society of the spectacle' which threatens to overwhelm the everyday and its real mysteries.

My suggestion is not that Sinclair is a specific influence on the photographers I mention below. Rather it is useful to remember that his work, and psychogeography in general, inhabits the same conceptual territory as these projects (with some shared and fragmented inheritance from what Gerald Raunig calls 'transversal activism' — (18) Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century,* Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2007 —), pitted against the regulated forms of urban life which are 'capitalism's method for taking over the natural and human environment'. (19) Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle,* London: Rebel, [no date], p. 95 Moreover, these projects deploy a phenomenology of travel, or more precisely the journey and the physicality of standing in one place as an antidote to the inhuman non-place. Just as Sinclair, for example, emphasizes his early morning starts, the sweat and dirt he accumulates on his walks, (20) See, for example, his walk to Jeffrey Archer's apartment in the chapter 'Lord Archer's Prospects' in *Lights Out for the Territory* (pp. 161 — 204) in which self-consciousness about his appearance plays a comic role so we should remember, in looking at this kind of landscape photography, that it is a form of critique that, as well as being visual, is editorial (that is, it involves a choice to photograph this) and perambulatory. The journey to get there is implicit in the image. If we forget the journey we lose part of the impact which the image can have.

The walk as the basis of an art work has a long tradition, going back to the Romantic period and beyond, as Rebecca Solnit, among others, has explored. (21) Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* London: Verso, 2001 In postwar artistic practice artists as diverse as Marina Abramovic and, most influentially perhaps, Richard Long have used the walk as means of remembering the corporeal and the body as marker of time and distance. Long has included Ireland on his travels, though taken in the round his work has a tendency to allow the conceptual to dominate over the local. (22) The best collective representation of Long's work is to be found in *Richard Long: Heaven and Earth,* London: Tate Gallery, 2009 For the photographers I'm interested in here it is exactly that disappearance of the local, or the idea of the local, which is under consideration. However, their collective method (in as much as their work represents a collective response to the contemporary Irish landscape) draws from the same resources as Long — with a sense of the solitariness of the individual, purposefully wandering artist underpinning these ventures, the surface of their construction, against this strongly authorial, neo-romantic backdrop, is a blank objectivity. The physicality of the (too often forgotten) journey to make the image is captured nicely in the

following extract from David Farrell's blog for the *Source* website, in which he recounts one of his many re-visitations to the sites of the Disappeared which formed the material for his exhibition and book *Innocent Landscapes*: (23) David Farrell, *Innnocent Landscapes,* Stockport: Dewi Lewis, 2001

> The resumed search here at Oristown, which began in late summer 2010 continues its slow pace along three banks of turf with a solemn intensity. The bog if not frozen has the consistency of porridge…to a depth of six inches or so, which makes walking across it an unpleasant experience. One feels all energy being leeched away into the cold sodden earth and yet this place possesses a quiet beauty that is reassuring. (24) David Farrell, 'Revisits, Discovery and a Renewed Search, 1999-2009', http://source.ie/blog/ [accessed 9.3.11]

Often in apparent contrast to the personal endeavour involved in making an image in this mode is the image itself. In contemporary art photography, of a kind which retains the momentum and ethos of documentary (however 'questioned' that might be), (25) For a consideration of the politics of the issues involved in the move from documentary photography as a mass media format to book publication, and the gallery wall as a place of dissemination, see Julian Stallabrass's discussion of the work of Sebastião Salgado: 'Sebastião Salgado and Fine Art Photojournalism', *New Left Review,* 1/223 (1997), pp. 131—162 a curious form of 'objectivity' has underwritten the photographic gaze — perhaps precipitated by an anxiety to find a stance between the liberal ease of commitment and hedonistic voyeurism, an attempt, that is, to avoid both. In contemporary Irish art-documentary photography this mode draws, at varieties of removes, from two, interlinked twentieth-century photographic histories, the 'New Topographics' and the Düsseldorf School. The influences of these two 'schools' overlap in many ways — a revivification of deadened ordinariness, for example — and, for all the variety that exists within both, tends to treat landscape as a manmade entity and, even more precisely, as a socio-economic marker of (post-)industrial 'progress'. As Wendy Cheng points out in a review of the recently restaged version of the 'New Topographics' exhibition, the original exhibition was understood by its curator, William Jenkins, as an exercise in non-judgmental objectivity. (26) Wendy Cheng, '"New Topographics": Locating Epistemological Concerns in the American Landscape', *American Quarterly,* 63: 1 (2011), pp. 153-4. The photographers involved in the exhibition (sometimes retrospectively) have dissented from this impossible position, insisting that their work neither rejected the sublimity of landscape often associated with Ansel Adams nor tried to be 'objective'. Cheng points out, for example, that

Frank Gohlke thought the term 'topographics' misleading (precisely because of its implied drive for objectivity) and considered geography a more apt term, thus suggesting that these photographs should be looked at for their human density rather than their cool cartography. Similarly, Bernd and Hilla Becher, founding influences on (and in many cases tutors of) the Düsseldorf School, stressed the relative nature of their supposed objectivity, (27) See Robert Silberman, 'Photography in Contemporary German Art', *The Burlington Magazine,* 134: 1073 (1992), 555-556 a relational potential played with by their students in a dialectic which allows for the full resonances of the possibility of objectivity and its inevitable failure. Such semantic valences are evident in the landscape photography of Thomas Struth and, perhaps most influentially, of Andreas Gursky (who arguably forms the bridge between the legacy of the New Topographics and Düsseldorf). (28) See Stefan Gronert, *The Düsseldorf School of Photography,* London: Thames & Hudson, 2009 Collectively these two 'schools' form a counter-argument to John Tagg's skepticism about the capacity of documentary photography to live up to its "act of compassionate looking", a civic impulse which is, for Tagg, always subsumed into the liberal-capitalist machinery of the state before its impact can be registered. (29) A view expressed by Tagg throughout his writing. See, for example, John Tagg, 'Mindless Photography' in J.J. Long, Andrea Noble and Edward Welch (eds), *Photography: Theoretical Snapshots,* London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 16—30 Tagg's desire for photography (and photographic theory) to throw "the first brick" (30) Tagg, 'Mindless Photography', p. 29 is inevitably a disappointed one. The deadpan aesthetic which derives from work such as that of the New Topographics and Düsseldorf can appear lacking in either compassion or anger, can seem weakly disengaged. But the 'relativity' of objectivity which the Bechers stressed, the insistence on the fullness of 'geography' (that is, place, not just space) which Gohlke prefers, point to a mode of 'landscape' photography which assumes that a structural depoliticisation of the image will happen, and attempts to counter it from within that structure. The sideways glance, the editorial eye which looks askance at the inconsequential, deploys the meta-framing of documentary in its traditional form but refuses its drama. In doing so it draws attention to the neglected, the unseen and the idea of the unseen. In this small way it nags, not as a brick thrown, but as (what may be only a liberal) reminder of the detritus created by the force of late capitalism's relentlessness. Against the car, there is the walk. Against the speed along a proscribed route there is the detournement of the sideways glance. The photographic projects which I'm interested in here partake, to different extents, in this attempt to record, witness and comment on the after-effects of the bulldozing history which Ireland has experienced in the past decade or so. The 'lessons' of this photography

[Right] N20 South Hill, By The Way,
(2001-2003) Dara McGrath

Southern Cross is a critical response to the rapid development witnessed in Ireland, the largest transformation in the history of the Irish Republic. The work surveys, through the spaces of development and finance in and around Dublin, the economic aspirations of a country on the western periphery of Europe. It presents the face and landscape being transformed in response to a massive migration of global capital. The project was completed between 1999-2001 in the Dublin and County region. Commissioned by the Gallery of Photography as recipient of their inaugural Artist Award 2000 and shortlisted for the first AIB Award 2001. A full-colour publication accompanied the exhibition with poem by writer, Philip Casey and essay by Dr. Justin Carville.

[Right] Financial Centre 5 (IFSC, Phase II, Dublin, February, 2001) Part of the series, prospect from the project SOUTHERN CROSS, (Gallery of Photography / Cornerhouse Publications 2002)

are in their gaze at the ordinariness of space. They stop the pace of time to see the 'splendid architecture', as the Time Traveller calls it. Travelling the highways of modernity, they pull up and look to the side, the resultant photographs treasuring, having their aesthetic built around, the extended glance to the (literal, geographic, reconfigured) margins, in, for example, Dara McGrath's images of roadsides. They see the immense social and physical blankness which overwhelms the human in (post)modernist materialism, as in Ann Cleary and Denis Connolly's photographs of the embargoed pedestrian walkways of South Dublin, where new road building has reconfigured the geography of suburbia in favour of the car. In Simon Burch's *Under a Grey Sky* a Becher-like image of an old turf works at Derrinlough considers the fate of the relics of past slowness, as the factory drifts into probable obsolescence, a once-modern sign now becoming the past. In Jackie Nickerson's *Ten Miles Round* we see the bleaching of the individual in a world of conformity, the traces on the landscape of mechanized farmwork, as with Burch's factory, suggesting that even this diesel-driven version of labour is out-of-time.

In Mark Curran's *Southern Cross* there is an image of a handrail at the International Financial Services Centre. An ordinary detail of an anodyne corporate architecture, when added to the portraits of those who work in the IFSC it points to the small vestiges and exclusions of the human in the psychogeography of late capitalism. So my suggestion about this photography is that, through its inherited aesthetic, it is an intervention on a psychogeographic scale. It does not have the makings of a radical manifesto. It is not a nostalgic lament for a lost organicism. But it is a registering of the new marks on a landscape, seeing ordinary lives contained and reshaped by a narrative of progress. These photographic projects, in a diversity of ways, make journeys which cut across that notional progress. They walk in the wrong places, off the set paths. And in that they are evidence of how the vulnerability of everyday human interaction with a given built environment is changed by the relentless speed with which non-places proliferate.

Mark Curran's *Southern Cross* (the book version was published in 2002 — (31) Mark Curran, *Southern Cross,* Dublin: Gallery of Photography, 2002 —) links together the engine of change in International Financial Services Centre [IFSC] (in the section of the exhibition entitled 'prospect') and housing development ('site') on the outskirts of Dublin in 2000 and 2001. There is a real prescience to this work and this linkage, since global finance and housing development were to later become the twin collapsing pillars of the febrile economy of the late Tiger years. In 'prospect' Curran marks out the anodyne spaces of the IFSC by placing individuals in the geographical spaces between buildings in portraits which finely balance their human specificity against the function that

they seem to be about to perform in the labour market. The notion of the individual as only meaningful in the context of this place (this high-level work environment) is reinforced by the image of a spindly tree emerging from the pedestrian walkway alongside its supporting post. The cladding on the wall behind is ominously marked by some trace of human activity — the vulnerability and potential strength of organic, living matter here competes with the antiseptic flatness of the IFSC's ambitions, as reflected in its architecture. In 'site' Curran replicates the method, with portraits of builders, and a sense of the 'new' rapidly and drastically replacing the old (an image of torn wallpaper is one of the few hints of what that old might be). In the first photograph in the book version of the project, weeds grow through an orange mesh barrier fencing, signalling an interest which reappears in all the projects I am discussing here — the line drawn by the landscape architect, and the line cut by the machine to mark out the rebuilt territory. Curran's work is evidence of the rasping, clawing deformation of the landscape, the visceral human individual in the midst of burgeoning idea of progress-as-building, propped up by finance-as-economics. And thus it stands as an extraordinary warning of the future that was then yet to come.

This sense of the loss of scale, as measured by the human body, and its replacement by a material geometry dictated by the combustion engine and machinery of the economy is the animating principle of Anne Cleary and Denis Connolly's *Moving Dublin* (made in 2007 and 2008: the book version was published in 2009). Of all the projects under discussion here, *Moving Dublin* is closest to the activist tradition which has links to, amongst other art heritages, the Situationist sense of urban geography. One of the parts of *Moving Dublin* features a dance improvisation in Liberty Square. During the filming of this dance event a local man, called Séamus, joined in the dance, imitating the moves of the professional dancers with some alacrity. The spontaneity of this moment is captured in a photograph (and film) which later form part of the project.(32) The book version of *Moving Dublin* includes the reproduction of correspondence about this part of the work, and criticism of the nature of the potential 'exploitation' of Séamus as an over-determined view of the local inhabitants. Eileen Casey, during this correspondence, suggests that Séamus 'reclaims his personal territory, retaining his absolute autonomy, the enigmatic nature of his own individuality'. See Cleary + Connolly, *Moving Dublin,* Kinsale: Gandon, 2009, p. 29 This sudden reorganization of urban space (first the idea of the public space being used for dance, then the interaction with the non-dancer) is in some ways the epitome of Debord's ideas of Situationist practice.(33) For example: "To actually destroy the society of the spectacle, people must set a practical force in motion"; Debord, *Society of the Spectacle,* p. 111 The movement, and relative freedom, of this liberation of urban geography is in contrast to the ways

in which Cleary and Connolly examine, by imitation, the cut-off nature of travel and the restricted epistemology of the city in their photographs and films shot from the inside of a moving car or train. Barriers abound in their work, whether physically made of glass or metal, or more subtly made by class ('Private Property' signs; gated housing) or perception (as is clear in the testimonies in the accompanying film '*Moving Dublin*. First Movement'). *Moving Dublin* shifts between registering these enclosures and a desire to empower those who are, and who feel, excluded.

Dara McGrath's *By the Way* (2003), (34) The book accompanying this exhibition is Dara McGrath, *By the Way,* Dublin: Draíocht, 2003 and Martin Cregg's *Midlands* (2008) (35) Martin Cregg, *Midlands,* Dublin: Gallery of Photography, 2008 both have that spider's web of N and M roads strung underneath their collections of images. McGrath's *By the Way* tracks the deadened landscape of the verge; sometimes very immediately and literally on the roadside, but also in the effects of road-building on the land adjacent to new roads — so the artificial cricket pitch in Marlay Park, in South Dublin, becomes metaphorically false grass, just as a later image shows the destruction of artificial grass (presumably on what was once a sports pitch) while the new, orbital M50 extension makes its presence felt in the background in fences and mounds of fresh moved earth. Ironically, the cricket pitch in Marlay Park, also within batting range of the M50, has since fallen into disrepair, as if the M50 has sucked the energy from the landscape that lies along the chute the motorway slaloms through. McGrath's work struggles with the possibility of deeper, almost allegorical meaning in the midst of the documentary photographs of the road networks' advance. The very idea of the verge offers itself as a heavily resonant metaphor for the ever-expanding, constantly corrosive margins — only the weeds which appear as opportunely as possible when earth is moved suggest some simile of nature's reassertion. In Cregg's *Midlands*, too, there is a focus on the liminal spaces which are created by the 'progress' of the road network and, by implication, the wider notion of progress which it signifies. In his images of 'Vacant Units' (enterprise parks and business opportunities) in Longford Cregg echoes Lewis Baltz's work on industrial architecture, which formed a substantial part of Baltz's contribution to 'New Topographics'. The reduction of this empty, pristine architectural space to near-modernist abstraction at once draws on the near utopian New York of Berenice Abbott's or the geometric abstraction of Harry Callahan's photographs of New York architecture, yet diverts its hopefulness in the same way that Baltz did into a fascinated gaze at the blankness which the mundanity of modern, functional architecture is capable of. Cregg makes the same visual point in his photographs of (what is largely intended as dormitory) housing in these once marginal and now potentially commuter counties, allowing this distant suburbia-

in-waiting to resound in the repeated images of empty, almost finished houses in the portentously named estates of 'Grange Manor' and 'The Manor', both in Roscommon.

Simon Burch's *Under a Grey Sky* (2009) visits the topic of Irish geographical 'modernity' by examining an absence in the landscape. In Seamus Heaney's famous 'bog poems' the bog as symbol of historical and mythic depth drew on a set of cultural assumptions about the unshakeable rootedness of the idea of 'Ireland'. Burch's images of worked-out and exhausted bogs show that depth to have reached its end, to have bleached the historical metaphor of meaning. So the same pervasively blanched palette of colours is evident throughout this work — on the land, the roads, the buildings, even the skin tones of those whose portraits he takes. The ashen colourings of the end of the peat industry are appropriately a kind of lament for the death of history, and a 'dust to dust' for the mythic Ireland now mined out of existence. In common with Cregg, Curran, McGrath, and Cleary and Connolly, Burch places visual significance in the traces of human activity evident in the landscape, and particularly the tyre tracks and marks left by heavy machinery. In *Under a Grey Sky* these traces are leftovers of work, its last remnants after it has moved away.

In Jackie Nickerson's *Ten Miles Round*, the same tracks and traces of automised human work are registered. *Ten Miles Round* includes images of the muddy to and fro of tractor traffic and a series of photographs of the edges of a tillage field which has been cut for straw. The stubble marks the line of the machined harvest and the images are dominated by the wildly overgrown grass, and the stray fronds of the crop which the harvester could not reach. Here the borderline is between worked and non-worked land, and the visual signs are of labour on the landcape. Similarly the agricultural landscape is rendered by messiness rather than order — the mud left behind by the harvesters and tractors in a laneway uses a kind of realism which is meant to counter romantic visions of farming life, but it does so by registering human contact with the land as a form of violence, just as the 'nature' of the photographs which show overgrowing vegetation points to an awareness of the attacks which can be made on human desires for order by the natural world.

There is a division of images in *Ten Miles Round* (inside and outside, person and place) which overcomes and moves beyond its own initial sense of organic wholeness in the 'ten miles round', creating a sometimes miniscule disjunction between the landscape and its inhabitants. The landscape and the domestic interiors are almost entirely devoid of people, leaving the viewer with the task of peopling the landscape and wondering whether those portrayed in the exhibition feel more comfortable in and on the landscape than they do in front of a camera. There is one image

in *Ten Miles Round* of a farmer (almost) outdoors; it appears only in the slideshow included in the exhibition, showing him pausing from work in a cattle barn. Elsewhere what are, presumably, his cattle are being fed silage in a shed through an adapted farm gate, though the cattle are in almost total darkness, discernible only by their yellow eartags. Both images verge on showing work being done, as against the still inactivity of the portraits. These two images initially seem out of keeping with rest of the work, but the fact that they are centred on gates and boundaries hints at the interest in the other landscape images, in particular in the meeting of distinct spaces and the points at which that happens. Of all the work discussed above, Nickerson's work is the closest to pastoral. It explores an agricultural environment and it toys with the notion that people and landscape not only co-exist but interact in some way that is reflected in a discernible visual organicism. Yet the near invisibility of its focus on boundaries and the lines where two worlds meet means that *Ten Miles Round* is balanced, a little like the farmer on the gate, between one space and another. The tractor tyre-tracks and the remnants of the harvesting machinery are not only signs of the industrialisation of farming. In the context of the Ireland in which the exhibition appears, they point back to the lack of clear boundaries between rural and urban Ireland, and to the advance of the urban, the machine, and the road across the 'developing' Irish landscape.

In their recent book, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness*, Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts pit their take on the 'real' England against two other, competing perspectives on the English/British landscape. They distinguish themselves from 'some so-called *psychogeographers*' for whom the 'edgelands' are 'merely a backdrop for bleak observations on the mess we humans have made of our lives'. (36) Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness,* London: Jonathan Cape, 2011, p. 9 (italics in original) They are equally scathing about those who wish to escape from the urban and suburban to find transcendence in 'the wilds of northern Scotland, or on the fringes of our island archipelago'. (37) Farley and Symmons Roberts, Edgelands, pp. 8-9 Positioning themselves against Iain Sinclair's mode of London psychogeography and Robert Macfarlane's macho fetishisation of the idea of wilderness, (38) The reference at this point in *Edgelands*, though the book is not mentioned, is to Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places* (London: Granta, 2008). Later in *Edgelands* Macfarlane's book is scathingly mentioned as typical reading for urban barge-dwellers. Sinclair is perhaps the most prominent of contemporary London-based writers who might be said to adopt a psychogeographic model. Others would include Patrick Wright (*A Journey Through Ruins: The Last Days of London* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009]) and Sean Borodale (*Notes for an Altas* [London: Isinglass, 2003]) Farley and

Symmons Roberts are perverse positivists. They are belligerent believers in the authenticity of what they call the edgelands:

> Somewhere in the hollows and spaces between our carefully managed wilderness areas and the creeping, flattening effects of global capitalism, there are still places where an overlooked England truly exists. (39) Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands,* p. 10

Despite their disavowal of the method, Farley and Symmons Roberts partake of a weak and effectively populist form of psychogeography, one which follows the format of looking differently at urban geographical patterns. But they mistake simple polemic and faux nostalgia for the real jaggedness of the best psychogeography. Farley and Symmons Roberts, of course, find themselves confronted with a distinctive post-industrial landscape, and hence their nostalgia gathers its grime from a backward look at the industrially reinforced class system of northern England. It is too simplistic to think of Ireland as bypassing that industrial era (an assertion occasionally made in Irish criticism), but as the photographic projects discussed here show, the nature of economic development in Ireland in the last decade and more has been such that it can mean that the material sweep of globalization takes place over grasslands as well as brown-field sites. Farley and Symmons Roberts misplace their quest for the authentic as antidote to the contemporary by assuming that it can be found in a perverse nostalgia (for sewage-works, wasteland 'dens' and car parks) against placeless cosmopolitanism. Edgelands disavows psychogeography (while inevitably repeating some of its methods) and celebrates the blank banality of the modern peripheral cityscape in ways which, superficially, echo the 'New Topographics' and the Düsseldorf School. But Edgelands' investment in the authenticity of the dire destroys its critical capacities. It is not authenticity but some more delicately poised interaction, some partially parodic relationship with objectivity of observation and subjectivity of experience, which allows for a negotiation through contemporary waste sites and 'ignoble masses of reinforced concrete'. (40) Ivan Chtcheglov, 'Formulary for a New Urbanism' http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/Chtcheglov.htm — Accessed 27 / 6 / 11 Richard Long, interviewed by Nick Stewart, talks of his work as:

> … a combination of the natural energy and the abstract idea — the human dimension. So if I do a walk in a circle, the circle is a perfect idea but the actual walking of it is up and down and full of the same kind of mud [as in my paintings]. My work has always been this balance between the energy and shape of nature and the formality of human ideas. (41) Richard Long and Nick Stewart, 'Richard Long: Lines of Thought, A Conversation with Nick Stewart', *Circa,* 19 (1984), p. 9

In the play between the camera and the (intellectual) journey which is undertaken in the projects I have discussed here there is that same tense balance between the physicality and mechanicity, the walk and the codified form of vision — all echoes of a cruder nature versus the human collision. Richard Long is at the less self-consciously, historically-engaged end of the spectrum of such 'landscape art', though the implications of his work (and what it works against) are the same as those of the photographers I've been discussing, embodying both a resistance to the inhumanity of the urban while conscious that the choices alternative to urban living are conceptually neutered.

The Situationist analysis of the link between socio-spatial disintegration and rampant capitalism still holds and still illuminates these artistic dilemmas. Debord says of the 'society of the spectacle':

> While eliminating geographical distance, this society produces a new internal distance in the form of a spectacular separation. (42) Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle,* p. 94

The repair of this rupture is the tempting but impossible option. The temptation is to believe that we can hike our way experientially back to fullness. Artistic work with this tendency (which includes that which I have discussed here) leans on a potentially uncritical belief in the subject (and, in turn, the 'artist') as site of authentic experience. But the injection of (even a faux) 'objectivity' is a way of, if not countering, then rendering 'critical' this indulgence of the heroic in a wider response to this 'separation' as it disintegrates a notional sense of place in the creation of the non-place. And the geographical movement of the subject, of its own volition, inasmuch as that is possible, as an expression of a liberal artistic subjectivity, is one of the last refuges, or strategies, against the boredom and constriction which Debord bemoans:

> The free space of commodities is constantly being altered and redesigned in order to become ever more identical to itself, to get as close as possible to motionless monotony. (43) Debord, *Society of the Spectacle ,* p. 94

The photographic projects mentioned here address exactly this 'motionless monotony', the ennui of contemporary capitalism as it standardises the landscape. And they do so, not through a direct assault on the ideology of underlying late capitalism, but rather by calling the bluff of the 'motionless' through a different form of stillness, and equally by calling the bluff of monotony by rendering it in the mode of the picturesque, allowing the ghost of the sublime to animate its boredom. And all the time the work is underwritten by the evidence of being there, a last stand against the virtuality of landscape as something to be traversed quickly.

What this work shows is that to live against 'motionless monotony', to try to work inside a comprehensive ideology of progress, means small strategies of compromised alteration — the relatively spontaneous moment of participatory dance in Cleary and Connolly's *Moving Dublin* being the closest in these projects to a 'situation'. These photographic projects do however, have one other small and key residual resource, the idea, as Foucault describes it, that 'we may still not have reached the point of a practical desanctification of space'. (44) Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics,* 16: 1 (1986), 23

The notion of a 'sanctified' space is a troublesome one for a liberal secular imagination faced with the material eradication of historical space. Taken too literally, it points to the remnants of a spirit of place, (45) For an excellent discussion of this trope in an Irish cultural context see Oona Frawley, *Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth-Century Irish Literature,* Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005 and thus leads the way to a wilful blindness to modernity and a reinstatement of an (Irish) sublime which the imagery of tourism is waiting to recommodify. It is the refusal of the possibility of sanctified space to slip away, not its sure and certain place within culture, which Foucault points to, so that it becomes a nagging critique of space as utility (the logic of which extends to validate any space as 'non-place'). For Foucault heterotopic alterity is found in exemplar in the cemetery, a social space which has itself been pushed out of the city in the past century and a half, but which nevertheless is "ultimately the only trace of our existence in the world and in language". (46) Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', 25 In Dara McGrath's *By the Way*, he traces the expulsion of nature in the controversial N11 road, and, in an image of the 'Wicklow By-pass', he shows chaotically leaning, almost ruined, concrete pillars as if they were replacements for tree stumps — replacements which seemed to have failed. In another roadside image, related to that of the Wicklow by-pass in its vision of road-building detritus, he allows the transmogrification of temporary road-builders' markers into the form of three crosses on what looks like a hill. The newly dug earth is then ironically a graveyard of the past, the crosses a lament for the death of the landscape, all produced, not by a staging, but by visiting and seeing. This is, in its roundabout methodology, an example of what Thomas F. McDonough notes is the "ludic-constructive" (47) Thomas F. McDonough, 'Situationist Space', *October,* 67 (1994), p. 77 — The term is originally Debord's — strategy of Situationism. And part of that serious playfulness is the way in which the road-building, the creation of the non-place of speed, has been found to have lamented the death of the landscape and, maybe, hinted, in the shadow image of the crucifixion, at resurrection, or at the failure of the non-place to fully desanctify place •