

ROBINSON IN BLACKPOOL : Patrick Keiller (1950-)

by Neil Young

PROLOGUE

Commander Lop made the first sighting as we cruised along the shoreline phase, above the flat concrete of the watcher's protuberance known as Promenade. 'O Bok,' he squeaked, 'I see his eyes.' Sighting confirmed by rest of excursion, who peered from saucer windows. The two huge balls, located in the watcher's shoulder-boil, were turned on us; our vessels juddered as they hit the beams. We had met the centre of Blackpool consciousness.

Blackpool Vanishes (Richard H Francis; Faber and Faber; London, 1979) p167

IN spring 2003, having perhaps - in retrospect - too much time on my hands, I spent a day or two ranking Europe's leading film-directors. A somewhat anal exercise, one could argue, to say that director X was somehow better than director Y... and while we most readers of this magazine would probably agree that the films of, say, Claire Denis, are preferable to those of, say, Luc Besson, when it comes to choosing between, say, Mike Leigh and Ken Loach, it's surely essentially a matter of subjective taste.

I acknowledged this when drawing up my list which, inspired by football, I christened the "Directors' Euroleague" and posted on the internet (on the website *Jigsaw Lounge*, to which I've contributed since January 2000) with the warning that the ranking was intended only semi-seriously as a stimulator of debate, and perhaps a help to funding-bodies trying to decide how to allocate their precious cash. My criteria was simple: the list was arranged not according to an entire body of work, but according to how much I, myself, was looking forward to the *next* film from this particular director.

The list was also restricted to those whom I judged as 'active' - i.e., likely to come up with a new theatrical feature within the next few years. By using a complicated knockout system, I whittled down a "long list" of 64 to a Top 50 ranking, and asked the website's picture-editor to dig out photographs of those - all men, I'm rather ashamed to say - who occupied the top five positions. The full Euro-League is, sadly, lost in the mists of cyberspace, but those five faces remain fresh in my memory: the old-testament-prophet visage of Michael Haneke is, once seen, impossible to forget. Alongside him: Christian Petzold, Victor Erice, Otar Iosseliani and, sitting pretty at number one, and very probably the most obscure of the bunch, Britain's very own Patrick Keiller.

Patrick who? Even *KINO!* subscribers would be forgiven for not being familiar with Keiller's *oeuvre*, such as it is. Two features: *London* in 1994, *Robinson In Space* three years later. Difficult to classify them - not quite documentaries, not quite anything else. Beforehand: five seldom-screened shorts (more fictional than documentary, and thus not really within the remit of this edition of *KINO!*) plus a trio of very early works, apparently no longer extant in screenable form.

Afterward: *The Dilapidated Dwelling*, which was, upon its completion in 2000, the most expensive documentary ever commissioned by Channel 4 - but which was never transmitted (and which, bearing in mind the name and remit of this particular publication, I do not intend to discuss in much detail herein.)

Rumours of a third film have swirled over the years since *Robinson In Space*. When I travelled to Keiller's Oxford home around 2002 to interview him for *Critical Quarterly*, he spoke with enthusiasm about a project he referred to, tantalisingly, as *Robinson In China*. The interview filled two full C90 cassettes - but when I got home to Sunderland and started to transcribe it, only faint hissing sounds were present on the tape. In spring 2007, I curated what was very probably the first full Keiller retrospective anywhere in the world, at the Bradford International Film Festival. After the screening of *Robinson In Space* I interviewed Keiller again - and would have included the text in this magazine, if I hadn't been prevented from doing so by copyright issues too tedious to explain - and now the talk was of *The Robinson Institute*. This "might" be a film - or "it might be something else." In 2003, Keiller had stated that "the third Robinson project is called *The Robinson Institute*. I have not yet managed to secure patronage for this film from any of the conventional sources, but have instead found myself working in academic research as if I

were (though I hasten to say that I am not) an employee of The Robinson Institute."

For Keiller fans - and there's no shortage of us, around the world - the wait for a new Keiller film is an exquisite torture. It's often remarked that the scandal of the British film industry is that a director as eminent, acclaimed and accomplished as Terence Davies (*The Long Day Closes*; *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives*, etc) struggles to obtain funding for his movies - as it happens, a Davies retrospective was also included alongside the Keiller sidebar at Bradford. And the Davies situation is, by any measure, regrettable - his most recent feature remains *The House of Mirth* in 2000, described by David Thomson in *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film* as "a great film (dreadfully missed by critics and public alike)... If he can keep working freely--or as he elects--he has great things ahead."

Thomson doesn't find space for Keiller - whose struggle for funding (or rather 'patronage') is as shameful an indictment of the British system as you'll find - in his book, at least not a stand-alone entry. Keiller is in good company - Thomson (who notes that Pauline Kael "rather neglected foreign films) also omits Haneke, Erice, Iosseliani and Petzold. But his omission seems odd when you read the entry on Paul Scofield:

He is perhaps the best example of a truly great stage actor who has never seemed interested in conquering film. Yet he has an Oscar to his credit - for Thomas More in A Man For All Seasons (66, Fred Zinnemann) - as well as a fine King Lear (71, Peter Brook), and several telling supporting performances. Nevertheless, this book would trade the lot for his two dry, elegant, dreary narrations in two films by Patrick Keiller - London (94) and Robinson In Space (97). It's not just that Scofield catches the rhythm of eighteenth-century prose. Just as important, he has the authority and the casual charm for a kind of movie voice that really has no equal. Why, after all, aren't all movies like Keiller's?

Why not indeed? Some movies *are* like Keiller's, of course. His love of "static" shots (whereby the tripod-fixed camera observes a certain landscape or scene for a given period of time) isn't a million miles away from James Benning's trademark style, and at various periods Benning has also deployed narration to dry, occasionally incongruous effect. Among the younger set, John Gianvito's *Profit motive and the whispering wind* (07) and Gerhard Friedl's *Hat Wolff Von Amerongen Konkurselikte Begangen?* (*Did Wolff Von Amerongen Commit Bankruptcy Offences?* 04) are among several which could be described as 'Keiller-esque' (and/or 'Benning-istic').

But even if Keiller never himself shoots another frame, *London* and *Robinson In Space* warrant his inclusion in any survey of 'non-fictional' film-making, even if they themselves occupy that intriguingly hazy frontier between 'fact' and 'fiction'. But how best to explore Keiller and his work, for the purposes of this article? Inspired by the recollection that both of his films are about geographical journeys of various kinds, examining along the way the interface between the past and the present, between the real and the fictional, I decided to stage an expedition of my own: a pilgrimage of sorts (or rather, pace David Cronenberg, a PilgrImage).

And so it was that, in the middle of September 2007, I made my way to Patrick Keiller's birthplace, the town where he spent the first years of his life, taking along with me a rather obscure British science-fiction/comic novel of the 1970s which happened to be set in the area. *Blackpool Vanishes*, written by one of my old university professors, was the sort of thing I liked to imagine that Keiller and his films' two recurring 'characters' - Scofield's never-named 'Narrator', and his great friend, the never-heard never-seen 'Robinson' - might well have approved of. In *London*, the Narrator proclaims that the film relates "a journey to the end of the world". My journey was rather less ambitious: to the beginning(s) of Patrick Keiller.

PART ONE : 'ALIEN DETACHMENT'

LONDON

9/10 : UK 1994 : Patrick Keiller : 80 mins

Using the most basic cinematic tools – long, static-camera shots of the urban landscape, stark

intertitles, narration, restrained music – Keiller’s debut examines London over the course of a year, from January to December 1992. “It is a journey to the end of the world,” doomily intones the unnamed, unseen Narrator (Paul Scofield), as his photographer friend, Robinson (who never appears or speaks) returns from a seven-year exile.

The pair set off on a series of “exercises in psychic landscaping” - “investigations” that aim to explore “the problem of London.” As the city broods with an “atmosphere of conspiracy and intrigue” under siege from the latest IRA bombing campaign, the Conservative government marks its 13th year of power with an unexpected election victory for John Major. When our invisible protagonists observe Major’s victory speech outside 10 Downing Street, the narrator provides an alternative oration in which his (and Keiller’s) anger at Tory misrule boils over - a satirical stroke of subversive genius that constitutes the most eloquent and persuasive of responses to the prevailing right-wing hegemony.

Dispensing with conventional expectations of narrative, *London* instead derives its energy from the dynamic between the invective passion of its ideas and the cool dispassion of its style. This is the most literary of films, Keiller and his ‘characters’ sharing a supernatural alertness to the ghosts of London’s previous chroniclers and visitors – including Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Herzen (who saw the place as “a fearful antheap”) H G Wells (entirely fitting for this “journey through time and space”) and Laurence Sterne, credited as cinema’s conceptual founding father.

But despite the relentless stream of high-falutin’ references, Keiller’s deadpan wit ensures his film is anything but a dry, highbrow essay: the Baudelaire quote, for example, is illustrated with a shot of a huge, inflatable Ronald MacDonald bobbing in the wind above a burger joint. Another amusing (and slyly subversive) disparity between image and sound comes when the Queen (in one of two appearances in the film) is welcomed by crowds at Leicester Square, and the only sound we hear comes from the nearby Swiss Centre clock.

London’s running time isn’t long, but by the end the viewer will feel that there isn’t much in this city of nine million that we *haven’t* been shown – thanks to Keiller’s penetrating, quizzical, endlessly curious and erudite observations, his film is simultaneous piercingly specific and all-encompassingly universal. *London* transcends its self-imposed rigid geographical and chronological limits to push cinema into genuinely fresh territory – and ends, brilliantly, on a poetic note of unexpected, magical, hard-won grace.

Neil Young

for *Jigsaw Lounge : The Film Lounge*

2nd October, 2002

ROBINSON IN SPACE

10/10 : UK 1997 : Patrick Keiller : 82 mins

The best British film of the nineties is, appropriately enough, an insanely ambitious portrait of Britain in the nineties. Neither documentary nor fiction, Keiller’s followup to *London* (1994) instead stakes out its own territory – quite literally, as we rove all over England, though, paradoxically, the camera never moves within individual shots.

There are two unseen ‘characters’: ‘The Narrator’ (Paul Scofield), and his friend Robinson, an enigmatic, hard-up intellectual hired by an unspecified ‘international advertising agency’ to investigate ‘the problem of England.’ As well as being invisible to us, Robinson is also never heard, but he’s emphatically the driving force behind the pair’s excursions through countryside and town, industrial estate and port, supermarket and factory, back alley and country house. Along each step of the way, we see what they see, we hear what they hear, with the Narrator imparting fact after fact.

Seven expeditions are planned, in recreation of Daniel Defoe’s three-volume *Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-6) – but, as in David Fincher’s *Se7en*, the fact that the film *has* at least a notional (septiform) structure is of much greater importance than that structure’s t-crossing completion. Despite its appearance of rigorous, Greenaway-esque adherence to a precise formula, *Robinson In Space* is an engagingly shaggy creation: in defiance of Defoe, our heroes never quite make it to Scotland or Wales, and there’s one brief, startlingly unexpected detour to continental Europe.

‘The Narrator’ is very well named, as he never shuts up – but since Scofield has one of the great all-time speaking voices (check out the moment in *The Crucible* when he booms “*Now* we will touch the bottom of this... *swamp*”), this is a major plus, not any kind of minus. Expressively deadpan whether

intoning profundity or absurdity (and there's plenty of both along the way) he gives warmth to what could easily have been a chilly exercise in alien detachment. And when he *does* occasionally fall silent – including right at the very end – the impact is astonishing.

Keiller spins together episodes from history, events from novels, arcane aspects of modern science (a running joke revolves around mysterious carbon particles 'Buckminsterfullerenes'). His fascination with his nation's past only serves to sharpen his disgust at the iniquities of the present – there are moments of searing polemical anger at the degradations of the Conservative government to rank alongside anything in Ken Loach, even if the prevailing note of bemused good humour is much closer to, say, an Alan Bennett monologue.

Among writers, W G Sebald and Iain Sinclair are the most obvious parallels; in the cinema, *Robinson* takes its place in a lineage that runs from Dziga Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera* (1929) to James Benning's *Los* (2001). High-brow, high-flying company indeed, but Keiller's work if anything deserves marginal precedence by being so eminently approachable – the combination of Scofield's voice and Keiller's prose would probably make for outstanding radio on their own, but we also have some remarkable images to look at, puzzle over and absorb.

Some are conventionally 'picturesque' (including the raging sea at Keiller's native Blackpool), straight from a Tourist Board video. At other times, we're taken into hidden, semi-forbidden areas of trade and manufacture: gleaming high-tech business parks, or enterprises so old they've passed into the national cultural consciousness, like the factory where 'England's Glory' matches are made. In his pathological fascination with this hidden industrial underbelly, Keiller has a surprising amount in common with Michael Mann's vision of Los Angeles in *Heat* (1996) – another connection is the fact that audiences may never want either dazzling movie to end.

Neil Young

Jigsaw Lounge : The Film Lounge

30th September, 2002

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... if the beings inside the 'flying saucers' are really the size of bacteria, as several deductions have led me to suspect, then we had better alter our assumptions about the kind of confrontation that will eventually take place between us and them. It might be wholly wrong to think in terms of 'war' or any kind of human negotiation, the 'Take me to your leader' business. I might have been wrong, for example, to talk in terms of Blackpool being 'invaded' by fleets of 'flying saucers.' Perhaps it would have been more appropriate to say that the town kept contracting a disease. This isn't a quibble, it seems to me to be a very important point, although I don't know why.

*Blackpool Vanishes*, pp100-1

**I arrived in Blackpool determined to take a 'Keillerish' approach to Keiller and his place of birth. The Narrator, and Robinson, seem irresistibly and repeatedly drawn to public monuments, especially those commemorating local worthies or historical events. Having settled in at my lodgings - a mid-priced, old-school bed-and-breakfast on Hull Road (a quite short street in which every house seems to be a classic b&b of the old school) - I thus set out in search of imposing statuary, sure that the burghers of Blackpool would miss no opportunity to chronicle the remarkable history of their town.**

Non-British readers may not be aware of Blackpool - a large town on the Lancashire coast (weather: unpredictable) with a population of around 150,000 but for a century or so it has been *the* British seaside resort *par excellence*. According to *Lonely Planet*, "Basically, Blackpool offers little else but unadulterated fun ... Its famous 'golden mile' is packed with amusement arcades, fairground rides, fish and chip shops, pubs and bingo halls ... Blackpool is famous for its tower, its three piers, its Pleasure Beach amusement park and its Illuminations ... from early September to early November, 5 miles of the Promenade are illuminated with thousands of electric and neon lights ... " It attracts 10 million visitors every year - a sharp decline from its early-70s heyday, when over 17 million visitors packed into the place each year and, so the legend goes, "you couldn't see the sand for people."

I was among those 17 million - my family went to Blackpool every summer, staying in the same bed-and-breakfast under the beady eye of one of the town's notoriously bad-tempered landladies (not-so-distant cousins of the doughty *babushkas* you'd find employed to keep an eye on every floor of old-school Soviet hotels). The rise of cheap package holidays in Spain, however, precipitated Blackpool's decline - although the Pleasure Beach remains Britain's most popular free tourist attraction.

The gaudy excitements of the sea-front perhaps explain why the city's biggest park - looking at a satellite map (via GoogleMaps), indeed, it's only park of any size - is located so very far away from the centre of town: it was a good 20 minute walk from Hull Road before I found myself at the gates of Stanley Park. Keiller has mentioned the park in numerous interviews, and it even crops up in *Robinson In Space*, when the Narrator and Robinson arrive in Blackpool as part of their truncated "tour through the whole island". He quotes the park's designer, Thomas Hayton Mawson (1861-1933), who apparently said that "Blackpool stands between us and revolution" - the bread-and-circuses diversions of the resort proving a crucial element in ensuring that the Industrial Revolution didn't segue into tumultuous political foment.

It's hard to imagine Stanley Park ever having much impact one way or the other when it comes to revolution. A rather large enterprise, hemmed in by housing on all sides, it features several distinct areas - boating-lake; Italian Garden (including stone lions purportedly dating back to the Rome of Pope Leo X [1475-1523]); bowling greens, etc - but, I was startled to discover, a notable lack of public and/or monumental statuary. This realisation was even more jarring, as my perambulations around the town centre had also yielded something of a blank in this specific area: Robinson and the Narrator would have had to make do with a standard-issue war-memorial Cenotaph near the sea-front.

I did find *one* monument to a local dignitary, however, in the form of Blackpool's *other* tower (the symbol of the town being *the* Tower, a 185-metre shoreline landmark visible for many miles around and built in 1894 along the lines of Paris's Tour Eiffel). Located at the 'far' end of Stanley Park, the Cocker Tower is a 26-metre stone edifice, erected in 1926 to mark the Jubilee of the Incorporation of Blackpool (i.e. the 50th year since the town became a town.) The Cocker Tower specifically commemorates one William Henry Cocker, Esq, JP, MRSC Eng, LSA - 'First Mayor and Honorary Freeman of the Borough' - and his "long career of unselfish devotion to public duty. It was his constant endeavour to increase the popularity of Blackpool as a health and pleasure resort...", the inscription going on to commend "the wonderful developments which he foresaw and advocated with steadfast faith and confidence." Duly edified, I headed back through the park down Mawson Drive, back towards the town and the seaside, guided - as ever in this particular locale - by the reassuring presence of Blackpool Tower on the horizon.

from an interview by Ed Hardy with Patrick Keiller, *Kamera* magazine, 2003:

**How does Blackpool stand "between us and revolution"?**

'Blackpool stands between us and revolution' was apparently said or written by the landscape architect Thomas H Mawson, who designed Blackpool's Stanley Park (in 1922) and other well known parts of the town's topography. I assume he meant that were it not for Blackpool, the United Kingdom would be at risk of revolution. His statement appears to predate Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture*, in which the final chapter is 'Architecture or Revolution'. For me, Blackpool might stand between us and revolution for the quite different reason that it is sometimes (depending on the weather, especially the extraordinary quality of Blackpool light) just this side of 'The Revolution of Everyday Life'.

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PART TWO : ROBINSON IN BRADFORD

2.1 From the catalogue of the 13th Bradford International Film Festival (2007) :

PATRICK KEILLER - A RETROSPECTIVE

"I'VE been looking again at the films of Patrick Keiller. His masterpieces are *London* and *Robinson In Space*, both of which tour around the industrial wastelands of modern Britain and find

poetry and insight there. Each frame could be a photo by Andreas Gursky, so great is the composition. He combines these images with a voice-over in which a narrator offers us his thoughts on modern life. These two [films] remind you that he's one of the greatest auteurs in this country."

Alain de Botton, *The Independent*, August 18, 2006

PATRICK Keiller was born in Blackpool in 1950, and from 1967 to 1979 he studied and practised architecture. He then studied Fine Art at the Royal College of Art. He has been making films since 1981; his audio-visual installations were exhibited at the Tate Gallery in 1982; and he exhibited in the British Art Show in 1990. His commissions include the Arts Council, the British Film Institute, the BBC and Channel Four, and he is best known for the features *London* (1994) and *Robinson In Space* (1997; adapted and extended into book form in 1999).

Patrick Keiller is an Arts and Humanities Research Board Fellow in the Creative and Performing Arts at the Royal College of Art with a project The City of the Future, which examines how the city, and our experience of it, evolved during the first hundred years or so of cinema. His most recent project is *Londres/Bombay: Victoria Terminus* at France's National Studio for Contemporary Art in Le Fresnoy near Lillt, a moving-image reconstruction of Mumbai/Bombay's largest railway station. He has started preliminary work for a third Robinson film, to be provisionally entitled *The Robinson Institute*.

Neil Young

3.2 Notes taken during, and after, the Bradford retrospective screenings

3.2.i : THE FIVE SHORTS

Patrick Keiller on the shorts: "In these films, fictional voice-over narration is added to documentary footage of landscape and townscape. The narratives were written after the pictures were shot and edited."

"Patriotism is certainly a fragile affair."

STONEBRIDGE PARK

1981 : 21m : 16mm and video : black and white : [7/10]

"... a riveting combination of formal-concrete cinema and glassy eyed schizo realism" - Raymond Durgnat.

"... seeking flowers of evil, not on the rain-spattered pavements of Montparnasse, but along the Harrow Road." - Sheila Johnston

"... visually inspired by a railway bridge in an outer London suburb. Images from a hand-held camera are accompanied by a voice-over commentary presenting the thoughts of a petty criminal panicked by the consequences of robbing his former employer." - Patrick Keiller

* "Part One".

The first person we see is, seemingly, a man in drag - but this is not remarked upon or presented as significant. View of a footbridge. It's Keiller's own voice narrating, first-person. First-person ambulant camera, black-and-white film. ... *impulsive acts ... general economic circumstances*. London's North Circular Road : the chronicle of a decline. Lunchtime drinks; a narrative familiar from early Fall (*Cruiser's Creek*, perhaps). ... *general circumstances of the world ... conspired against me ...* Horror in suburbia. A branching bridge : turning-point in life : disillusionment has set in : the view from the bridge (passing cars, unaware). His course, in search of *the good life*... his *vision of suburban contentment ... finds himself instead in the ditch ...* Stasis amid progress: it's 1981 - the Thatcher slump, pre-Falklands boost. We're set up for the execution of A Suburban Crime.

* "Part Two - Some Time Later."

Dry comedy is the tone. Now we see a railway bridge. The narrator is plagued by a *horrible alsatian*. He suffers *frenzied anguish*. Keiller himself appears, Hitchcock-cameo-style, as a passer-by (he's now 31). The narrator (let's call him K) moves in a landscape *suffused with guilt*. We see graffiti on the railway bridge : GUILT. We're in the present, but anticipating the future: *fear of a potentially-unbearable last moment*. Verbose narration as, post-crime, suffused with guilt, K teeters on the brink of... suicide? Circumspect and introspect - which will emerge victorious. Two bridges... passers-by... Poe's 'Man of the Crowd'... We learn details of the crime: he was *obliged to hit* [his employer] *over the*

head... A Dostoyevskyan betrayal... A confession of murder! K has fallen *out of sympathy with society*. We note the Twin Towers of Wembley Stadium on the horizon - that is the direction towards which K, i.e. the camera, is moving. *Patriotism is certainly a fragile affair*, he remarks, "eye" fixed on the home of English football. Oppression of 1981 atmosphere: landscape/suicide. Analysis of his own guilt, but jocular: *my own little escapade* ("a frolic of his own", indeed.) Camera visible: the film draws attention to its own processes. Wembley coming into focus. K seeks absolution, to transcend *the iron grip of history*. Litterstrewn bridges, football graffiti: fans were here.

* Coda : a twist, told only in bald on-screen text : related K's flight to The Continent (the underworld of Nice.)

"I survey my former habitat with some detachment."

NORWOOD

1983 : 26m : 16mm : black and white : [8/10]

"Imbued with loss on the edge of despair, *Norwood's* cultural pessimism is fitting for these fag-end times." - Michael O'Pray

"In his film *Norwood* the narrator describes his return from France to live in the eponymous south London suburb. His story tells of his attempts to become a property developer there, attempts that are stymied by the scheming, ultimately murderous builder he has employed. After he is killed he goes to heaven, a place about which he restlessly speculates: will it be always warm and wet? Will he be able to go on holiday?"

* We're told, quite specifically, the date: it's December 11th, 1980 (i.e. three days after the death of John Lennon, though this may or may not be significant.) Suburban street-walking, the camera ambulant. Suburbia as state of mind: the *smell of lavender*. After his spell in Nice, the narrator (let's call him K again, as Keiller again narrates) embarks on a *new career in a southern suburb*. There's a mysterious reference to *the department of inversion*. *Norwood* is "an idyll". Where Handel wrote "I know that my redeemer liveth". Pissaro woz 'ere in 1883... *but Norwood persists*. ... *I survey my former habitat with some detachment*... Evil is afoot: the monologue of a verbose south London loner, responding to the zeitgeist. If this is 1980, the events in *Stonebridge Park* must have occurred in the late 1970s. Post-exile, he's wealthy - and these are the early days of Thatcherism. Was forced to leave France when the *subtle balances* of the Nice underworld went out of kilter. Rusting cars. In the steps of Pissaro: *I came not to paint the streets of Norwood, but to buy them*. He's drawn to another footbridge. Atmosphere: charming/sinister. Bloom Grove becomes his target - there's a *malaise of development*. People want him *out of the way* - and he's thus marked for murder. Dreamlike pursuit... a hammer blow ... his death! But *death brought no extinction of the spirit*. Narration is thus supernatural, metaphysical, explicitly spoken by a wandering spirit. There are no innocent bystanders in this world. *There's* the man-in-drag again, from the start of *Stonebridge Park*: a transvestite, marginalised Angel of Death. K, dead, approaches Valhalla: a faceless block of flats. *Here I stand, an exile*.

"I turn my eyes inward on the mind."

THE END

1986 : 11m : 16mm and video : black and white : [7/10]

full onscreen title *La Fine : The END : Un film di Caduta MASSI*)

"... Keiller brings a graphic and compositional sense of landscape to this complex essay film following a conceited modern-day *flaneur* who conjects ruminatively over images of a curiously ill-defined European landscape. From within these images of construction, roadways and the never-ending to-ing and fro-ing of Europe's numerous train stations, can be glimpsed the visage of the old Europe, defined by borders, varied cultures and a distinct sense of place." - Adrian Danks

"The travelogue of a pedestrian, which expounds (amongst other things) the convenient but inept supposition that 'in any train of thought, the END of one is followed by the beginning of the next'". - Patrick Keiller

* Vladek Sheybal is Keiller's first non-Keiller narrator. His Italianate, actorly tones initially jar, post-*Stonebridge/Norwood... I turn my eyes inward on the mind*. From northern France to Italy, spurred on by *the threat*. (Caduta Massi = "falling rocks" on an Italian road sign). We're Euro-hopping with supernatural grace, like Godard's travellers negotiating space in *Alphaville*. The landscape is transfigured. But what's going on? *The monster has become an abstract power!* Sheybal excitable, garrulous, spouting a language that isn't quite Keiller's own mother-tongue ("Often enigmatic, sometimes fascinating, the English is as seductive as phrasebook Italian" - Renata Rubnikowicz, *The Guardian*). Borders and oppositions abound - a Manichean vision of Europe? *Fear of falling objects*. The fields, the villages, of Europe... tomato-trucks in Italy. The camera restless, ever-moving, impatient. *For every helmet there is a ghost, a Roman road through a pine forest*. Keiller moving towards the oblique, the arch: Greenawayesque puzzles? Corners of Tuscany, Rome: Pantheon, Trevi Fountain (around this time: PG's *Belly of an Architect* trod similar august terrain). The image BREAKS DOWN, but the sound, somehow, persists.

"I walk amid the atmospherics of my fear."

VALTOS, or THE VEIL

1987 : 11m : 16mm : black and white : [6/10]

"... a sort of molecular exchange between kinds of chaos, in the human mind and the world at large." - Caroline Collier

"*Valtos* is a story told from thirty years hence, in the last moments of its narrator, who awoke one day in 1987 'with the knowledge that I had been duplicated during the night, and that I was an inferior replica of myself.' There follows a relentless, epic pursuit of an absconding phantom - his 'original' - which ends in catastrophe at *Valtos*, a place at once ethereal and terrifying." - Lux catalogue

* Narrator is again Vladek Sheybal. Talk of *atoms and a void*. Camera now gently meandering, from left to right, The narration: philosophical speculation. Walking on hills - a sequel to *The End?* Democritus theories on *the cause of madness and melancholy*. Navigating **BRITAIN** for the first time, or rather **ENGLAND**. The Manchester Ship Canal... some interiors (for the first time in Keiller.) Bridges and water. Blackpool attained, to the soundtrack of Kathleen Ferrier (the greatest lyric contralto England has ever produced... Born in Blackburn, Lancashire, she went from being a telephone operator in the mid-1930s to becoming a nationally known singer within ten years, followed by a further five years of international fame.) Donkeys under Blackpool pier. Sellafield, Barrow-in-Furness (home of Trident, Britain's nuclear "deterrent.") Britain-hopping in pursuit of the self. Reimagining the landscape - it is colonised with *strange insects*... *I walk amid the atmospherics of my fear*. Whiteouts: no frame is wasted. The name of the game is Transfiguration. Psycho-geography in reverse.

"The next day we relived the history of the planet."

THE CLOUDS

1989 : 29m : 16mm : black and white : [8/10]

"Over a series of industrial and rural images of Britain, a narrator tells the story of his conception and birth, weaving in a mythic history of the formation of the world and its early inhabitants. ... With its dense, poetic and philosophical text and its sequences of apparently unrelated images, *The Clouds* has many threads: the narrator makes parallels between his own conception and birth and the geographical formation of the earth. Descriptions of geological time are echoed by images of rocks and water. Mythical giants who lived early in the earth's history show their remains in electricity pylons that dominate the landscape; boats and bridges are the backdrop to Kathleen Ferrier's rendition of traditional Scottish song. Keiller's characteristic use of shots in which the camera doesn't move, but instead switches from one scene to another, or between different perspectives on the same scene, is reminiscent of the early British documentary tradition, of Humphrey Jennings and even Free Cinema. But Keiller has moved away from using images to narrate, using them rather to obliquely illustrate a fractured and personal text." - Danny Birchall

"The film operates like a periscope from the womb, the narrator marking his moment of conception while his parents peruse a museum display of the earth's evolution... Nearly halfway through *The Clouds* the narrator finally gets born, 'in a city of our time, a city of sedimentary rocks and reborn expectations.' " - Rachel Moore

* A Scots voice: Iain Cuthbertson narrates. Jodrell Bank: *the next day we relived the history of the planet*. A youngish woman on a train: *my mother*. Exhibits in a museum, examined by an unusually mobile Keiller camera. Barrow-In-Furness: the moment of conception. Ferrier, again. The Manchester Ship Canal, again (not a sequel to *Valtos*, but a reconfiguration of those preoccupations within a different quasi-fictional framework). Black-and-white adds distance. The creation of the Earth: Keiller probes the interstices between the cosmic and the local. The British landscape made strange and wonderful, as if seen by a foreign eye (Antonioni?). More of an explicit narrative this time, as we examine *the crystalline structures*. Shandean tale of the author/narrator's conception and birth. Intellectual breadth and scope continues to expand. Lucretius: molecular speculations. Out into the natural world again: a waterfall. Repetitions and juxtapositions. The elements: earth, air, fire and water. And the stones. Pre-*Robinson*: a Happy Eater roadside cafe, and horses at dusk. The persistence of memory and vision. *Weary of life...* but life has not yet begun. Dense texts, these. *Tomorrow, we are going to the sea*.

3.2.ii : THE TWO FEATURES

"It is a journey to the end of the world."

LONDON

<i>It is a journey to the end of the world!</i> [mock-heroic]	silent-movie-style intertitles : classy white on black ... typefaces
<i>... his investigations ...</i> [11.1]	
<i>a catalogue of modern miseries</i>	
<i>the problem of London</i>	fictional narrative : "the University of Barking" (UEL Campus)
<i>the failure of the English revolution is all around us</i>	expeditions take place while a certain wreath hangs
<i>atmosphere of conspiracy and intrigue</i>	it's election year! (spectre of unmentioned, unmentionable MT!)
<i>romanticism</i> [giant inflatable Ronald McDonald bobs in the wind]	
<i>exercises in psychic landscaping</i>	elegaic (ill Robinson) ... Benning
	facts : War Museum was Bedlam! soundtrack!
<i>Irish war</i>	dystopia //// wonder intellectual breadth and curiosity
	10.3 : Horace Walpole's house >> BOMB!! >>> terrorism
<i>When we awoke, it was spring (!)</i>	unlikely connections are sought and wrought
	timelessness, though specificity of 1992 dates is stressed
<i>(# e un pueblo olvidado #)</i>	Maastricht Treaty : EU as Single Market
	quick edits! keep up!! breezy verbosity
<i>fearing violence from the owner's lackeys...</i>	famous names abound : Turner, Reynolds, Walpole
	comic touches 2 x flaneurs on expeditions
	a wealth of research and erudition (Iain Sinclair)
<i>(city may yield) the molecular basis of historical events</i> [thus allowing R to see into the future]	keeps returning to WATER classical music
<i>London had become a political issue</i>	6.4 : pivotal moment in recent UK history
	London under threat Polling day!
<i>a ghastly premonition ... fear and foreboding</i> [The Green Man, Putney Heath : <i>War of the Worlds</i>]	Images match words (mostly)
<i>We were living in a one-party state</i>	[silent footage at #10 : Norma in fuchsia : Major's victory speech
	Robinson's predictions]
<i>It seemed as though there was no longer anything a Conservative government could do to cause it to be voted out of office</i>	horror of Tory Britain {{{>>> an accurate foretelling??}}
	9.4.92 :
<i>our alienation ... spleen</i>	{{ { Keiller : silenced?}}

**Robinson began to consider what the result would mean for him.
His flat would continue to deteriorate and its rent increase.
He would be intimidated by vandalism and petty crime.**

The bus service would get worse.
 There would be more traffic and noise pollution, and an increased risk of getting knocked down crossing the road.
 There would be more drunks pissing in the street when he looked out of the window, and more children taking drugs on the stairs when he came home at night.
 His job would be at risk and subjected to interference.
 His income would decrease.
 He would drink more and less well.
 He would be ill more often.
 He would die sooner.
 For the old, or anyone with children, it would be much worse
 For London as a whole there now would be no new elected metropolitan authority.
 The public transport system would degenerate into chaos as it was deregulated and privatised.
 There would be more road schemes.
 Hospitals would close.
 As the social security system was dismantled there would be increase homelessness and crime, with the police more often carrying guns.
 The population would continue to decline as those who could moved away, and employers followed.

<i>he was A Man of the Crowd</i>	BOMB ... BOMB ... BOMB ... > diary format crammed with detail eerie poetry of bombed Baltic Exchange facade architecture surrounds us 28m in : Brent Cross : camera movement! Apollinaire in Brixton - plethora of illustrious visitors retracing the steps of Sterne : succession of ideas : invention of cinema (LSq) Mid-May : terrorism responsibility passes to MI5 construction of £240m tunnel under Thames : MI5-MU6
<i>the gateposts had stopped talking since the election</i>	
<i>as if the nineteenth century had never happened</i>	
<i>Robinson is a realist; his vision of the universe that of Lucretius the absurdity of our circumstances</i>	Greenaway-style progression : mathematical chronology QM / Bomber Harris : 28.5 Canary Wharf reimagined as monument to Rimbaud HMQ in LSq : "Pay your taxes, you scum!" Flowers provide restful punctuation (what lurks behind??)
<i>splendour and squalor</i>	packed with observation and detail. documentary in narrative form - only Robinson speaks in this "dialogue" safety in numbers is the key HMQ again : Trooping the Colour (in rain) HMQ at a distance
<i>The Monarchy and its military trappings</i>	[narrator notices such things after seven years' absence : public takes it for granted] anthropological : concerned with transport (Dominick Hide!) anger and despair are palpable (THIS is the response!) immaculate tripod compositions a compendium of facts ... finding the extant houses
<i>... the number 15 a sacred bus route</i>	[The London Stone!] Dunnish roiling Thames is seldom far away Cosmic concerns / quotidian specificity optimism : the people
<i>interesting people, most of whom would prefer to be elsewhere</i>	house of Dafoe : Protestant Isolation Oval : birds on the cricket pitch Mordant wit abounds ... THE MOON
<i>the most unsociable and reactionary of cities</i>	[unlikely host to Europe's biggest street party : Carnival : end of August ... Bartholomew Fair] Post Office Tower (7.9) as monument to Rimbaud and Verlaine POE is the presiding spirit accessible, but in a way quite hard work (extensive quotations)
<i>fearful antheap</i>	[A.Herzen : <i>in the evening, when my son had gone to bed...</i>] SOLITUDE the City > Bohemian?
<i>a city of fragments</i>	[movement to the suburbs] rain on water : mutability ... Black Monday ... ERM
<i>an impoverished provincial future</i>	cut . cut . cut .
<i>Robinson was full of plans</i>	scratchy 78s Wembley on the horizon

always longing to escape

his memory collage
edge of the city
typefaces
12.10 BOMB (eight in a week)
pit-closure announcement
turning away from the Tories : the decisive moments
marching with the miners :
observers of, and participants in, history
loosely-planned "expeditions" (end is always marked)
follow their perambulations with an A-Z (**dynamic duo**)
wordless sections
4.11 Maastricht vote (M.Brunson on TV near HoP)
epigram-studded
editing / music
individual politicians are unnamed

The Day of the Dead [5.11 Bonfire^^^]

*the failure of London ... fear of cities
violence... towards the Lord Mayor
(London is) an absence ... truly modern ... the first metropolis to disappear*

beauty, poise, elegance, eloquently magisterial

Beethoven, Brahms

9th December 1992 : THE MOON

The next morning I woke at 5.30.

"A peripatetic study of 'The Problem of England'."
R O B I N S O N I N S P A C E

first audio : train-sounds
Paddington : CAMERA

sitting comfortably ... *the revolution of everyday life*
a bridge between imagination and reality must be built

Reading, spring 1965

Wilde : *the true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible*

Rimbaud 1874 : Reading's unlikely literary associations

hifalutin / quotidian

it's like a story

Adam Ant : the music industry micro-electronics

McAlpine NAMED (unlike coy *London*)

international advertising agency hires them to complete

"A PERIPATETIC STUDY OF THE PROBLEM OF ENGLAND"

Quinlan Terry monument - money which would otherwise have gone to *tax-gatherers*

Holmes : sin in countryside

Mordant wit

Centenary of Martian landing (treated as fact) : **frogspawn** underwater

John Redwood NAMED

Daily news : Greenpeace blockade

flowers abundant

23.4 : occupation of Wisley

ENGLAND AS PALIMPSEST

[1] 4.5 local elections

seven journeys : Defoe's tour as SPY (follow the Thames to the sea)

THE HISTORY OF ENGLAND (not Scotland, not Wales)

Henley : Heseltine NAMED

a blizzard of facts and dates ... illustrated lecture

Hurd NAMED

junctions of art, history, politics, literature (plus unannounced extracts from the literature)

a Factory! : Bendi Toys ("Bendi products are made in natural rubber")

unannounced extracts from the "literature" (corporate/promotional)

'Brain Haulage' : found images, found sounds

port expansion statistics

all sorts going on at once and all around

"It was environment week kin Dartford" : plans are afoot all over

"Total Team Culture, in which overtime is unpaid" (anti-union)

[2]

"But we had to press on"

PUB SIGNS ... Oxford

"The authorship of appearances in the English countryside"

12.6 Oxford ("Hitler's preferred capital")

connections, ownership ... plans, plans, plans!!

Scofield : sounds like *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* Peter Jones (the proverbial phone-book reading)

You and I are deeply disillusioned people

never so happy as when visiting Burton sites (anatomy of melancholy)

asylum-seekers held in prison-like conditions

rock music!

Whatever is terrible is a source of the sublime

It's like a comedy

16.6 MK : fortnight! *that night, we slept in a shed*

British worthies : Shakespeare, Milton, Locke

they are **pilgrims**

re-election of Major as Tory leader (in background)

after lunch, and several games of table football (Gilbert & George double-act)

PORTS and statistics

found sounds

the beauty of containers

continental detour : Zeebrugge/Lille

compositions

Presiding spirit : Defoe

we were expected in Brighton, and soon forgot our bad thoughts
Felixstowe : owned by Hong Kong group

**THOSE OF US AESTHETES WHO VIEW
THE PASSING OF THE VISIBLE
INDUSTRIAL ECONOMY WITH REGRET,
AND WHO LONG FOR AN AUTHENTICITY
OF APPEARANCE BASED ON
MANUFACTURING AND INNOVATIVE
MODERN DESIGN, ARE INCLINED TO
VIEW THIS ENGLISH CULTURE AS A
BIZARRE AND DAMAGING
ANACHRONISM. BUT IF SO, IT IS NOT AN
UNSUCCESSFUL ONE.**

an embattled manifesto M3@ Twyford Down : Newbury bypass completed
Portsmouth > Southampton : *the new dark fibre-optics*
1834 : Tolpuddle Martyrs : quoted (approvingly) ... Tesco : £3.53/hour
Poundbury THE PROVINCIAL SPY eats at Tesco ("palatable" food - but they fall ill)
Yeovil : Tim Eggar / Westland six Jane Austen adaptations underway
14.7 : Bristol Channel water to water ... import and export
[3] loosely-defined expeditions abruptly end
The Llandoger Trow, where Defoe met Selkirk
'Gold Mine' 'After London' (apocalyptic) *mistaken for a documentary*
succession of images : edits are crucial : jarring juxtapositions, visual and verbal
talk of Lord Mackay ... *It was very hot*
Merry Hill : largest shopping centre in Europe / offices of CSA / site of former steelworks
We always know where and when we are (light and sound indicates the season)
Illness : bad food ... *seriously worried about the weather*
11.8 West Bromwich : International Motors ... Phoenix Drawn Tube
Smallman Lubricants (pre-office)
... most people still live in places like Harlesden or West Bromwich
Hiatt (Birmingham) 1780
handcuffs / leg irons (Robinson : S+M tryst arranged via the internet (! in 1995!))
Jaguar body plant at Castle Bromwich *neither of us knew anything about Johnson (!)*
fetishwear in Derbyshire Toyota : dramatic music! ACCOUNTS
Midpoint @ 48mins *we turned towards the north west* (via the Derwent Valley, of course)
Tesco is still expanding in the north of England ... Six more superstores are scheduled to open in the north by May 1997
The company did not want us to photograph the scrap (an injunction disobeyed)
Scofield sugar on the factual pill clues and hints dropped all over the place
Liverpool, September : port statistics ... (in : coal, out : scrap) their mysterious *appointments*
KINDERCARE : Americanisation (&prisons) Huskisson monument in disrepair
pit closure > supermarket distribution centre
where they stay : *our rooms were quite new - nobody had ever stayed there before*
scrapings of voices are audible
Hero : Turing (A.T. Way) : suicide at 42 DEFOE abundant
calm retrospective ... a record of activity ('O Lucky Man')
Look-around-you travelogue ... Jan Morris : *we went and have a look* Engels in Ancoats, 1842
Milnrow Travel Inn
The John Milne : *a passion for volcanoes ... seismograph* [5] numbers and dates propel us on
wind farm : *we're both very fond of Halifax ... a decent cup of coffee* Delph tower!
Bradford : *but the police station is new*
Britain as historical narrative
Pevsnerish guide ... Bergson *if we could come into direct contact* (mother came from Doncaster!)
Wackenhut prison : *a record of violence and chaos* (non-union)
manufacturing industry Drax / Bond
Stella Rimington, David Hart : Miners' Strike (DH ... Portillo) October : Hull
unseen public statuary reexamined
Wilberforce ... *materialists like us ... fixations on ports*
gadfly skittering *London + Robinson* : companion-pieces eloquent silences
Perverse compendium of port statistics [6] DRACULA (Demeter / James Cook)

Keiller not so bothered with purely natural features		chemical and steel in surplus
sounds like a science programme for schools	near-extinction of merchant shipping fleet	11.10 Redcar
		Boro : 17% unemployed
	LEAVENING HUMOUR	construction of Home House
Sedgefield Forte hotel opened by Tony Blair MP, 1995	Menwith Golf Balls (USA encroachment)	HMQ at Wynyard : quick drivepast
	exploitation of BuckminsterFullerines : arrival of life on earth via meteorites	STERNE at Shandy Hall
<i>Robinson was beginning to act strangely</i>	23.10 Saudi Tornado "sabotage"	[7]
		Blackpool : home town
Blackpool : Diwali / illuminations : <i>Robinson says that Blackpool holds the key to his Utopia heart ... must either burst or turn to stone</i>		
Blackpool > Barrow : 3rd Trident submarine nearing completion		
	<i>Blackpool stands between us and revolution</i>	
Nirex proposal	30.10 contract abruptly terminates	
	... Tornado crashes in North Sea (!)	
	Rublev : stone-age carvings, birdsong	MYSTERIES!
	Newcastle bridges : modes of transport, water	

I cannot tell you where Robinson finally found his Utopia .

2.3 miscellaneous filmography

Three early film-installations, no longer in exhibitable form

- **The Tourists' Return - Episode 1** (1980, 5m) "A story of two young men travelling through southern France in a large car, and how their interpretations of their surroundings suggested that it was time to return to London."
- **The View behind Wormwood Scrubs Prison** (1980, 6m) "While pursuing another matter, a man was obliged to remove his head, and then inspected the views through it. This is, no doubt, an allusion to the paradox of the camera's view."
- **The Iron Grip of History** (1982, 5m) "The subsequent story of the two young men in the car of *The Tourists' Return - Episode 1*."

One television-programme, in two parts, never transmitted

- **The Dilapidated Dwelling** (2000; 2x40m = 80m)

"This is an examination of the predicament of the house in advanced economies, the UK in particular. A fictional researcher (with the voice of Tilda Swinton) returns from a 20-year absence in the Arctic to find that, though the UK is one of the most electronic of the advanced economies, its houses are the most dilapidated in western Europe. The film includes archive footage of Buckminster Fuller, Constant Nieuwenhuys, Archigram and Walter Segal, and interviews with Martin Pawley, Saskia Sassen, Doreen Massey, Cedric Price and others."

(descriptions courtesy of LUX catalogue)

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Oddly enough, despite the fact that Tun was by far the most lenient of all the local magistrates, and was notorious in legal circles for his unwillingness to convict or sentence, he was feared and loathed by the rather old-fashioned breed of crooks and villains which Blackpool tended to produce.

*Blackpool Vanishes.*, p154

**Having thus completed my quizzically-investigative, 'Robinsonian' peregrination around the town, I decided to track down what traces of Keiller himself I could find about the place. My first port of call was the central library, an ornate medium-sized affair not far from the seafront, built as part of a bequest by Scottish-American millionaire Andrew Carnegie (whose munificent funds were responsible for dozens of libraries all over the UK, including no less than three in my own home-town of Sunderland.) All that I knew of Keiller's birth was that it took place in 1950, in Blackpool.**

A trawl through the birth-records in the library's local history department confirmed that a male child, George Patrick Campbell Keiller (those extra names came as a pleasant surprise, a small but valuable reward for my detective-work) was born to the Elsie Keiller at Blackpool's Victoria Hospital (adjoining Stanley Park, as it happened), on August 17th 1950. A consultation - via micro-film reels - of the back issues of the local newspaper, the *West Lancashire Evening Gazette* - yielded further details:

*"Keiller. On August 17th, at Victoria Hospital, to Elsie (nee Emery), wife of Lt-Col L.E.Keiller, High Crossroad, Poulton-le-Fylde, a son (Patrick)."*

The nearby public-record office provided yet more information, Keiller's birth-certificate identifying his father's job and employer: 'Area Manager, Bristle Brush Manufacturers'... manufacturers of bristle-brushes being, of course, exactly the type of enterprise chronicled during *Robinson In Space's* saunter around what remained, post-Thatcher, of Britain's non-service-industry economy.

Back at the library, I took the opportunity to cast my eyes over the newspaper's other pages: on the front page a BIG BREAK THROUGH was THREATENED in the Korean War ('Reds Hit Hard... 32 Americans Bound, Shot). An unfortunate WOMAN HAD 22 STAB WOUNDS; another GIRL "CONFESSED" TO STOP CANING - MOTHER FINED; there was talk of a EUROPEAN ARMY PROPOSAL; but by far the most Keillerish/Robinsonian headline was the one warning of DEARER GAS IN MIDLANDS.

Although in 1950 Britain was still under toiling under post-war austerity measures - including food-rationing, which would not be fully discontinued until 1954 - Blackpool was still very much Blackpool, and the paper's entertainments section promised all manner of excitements. This has never been much of a cinema town, however - *live* shows have always predominated - and, just as there's now only one town-centre cinema (not unusual in 2007), there was also just the one back when Keiller was born (*most* unusual for 1950, when any British town or city of any size would have well over half a dozen 'movie-houses' to choose from.) Showing on the 17th August, at the Palace Pictures in the Palace Ballroom, daily at 2.15, 5.50, and 8.10: *Black Magic* with Orson Welles as Cagliostro, the notorious hypnotist who "uses his powers for revenge against King Louis XV's court."

A far cry indeed from the measured, quietly, scholarly films which Keiller himself would eventually compose. But when Keiller brought his cameras to Blackpool - for *Robinson In Space*, and also the short-film entitled '*Valtos*, or *The Veil*' - the images he would present of the town would, coincidentally enough, capture meteorological conditions similar to those recorded in the *Gazette* on the day of his birth: 'Weather: SQUALLY.'

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### PART THREE : 'ANALOGIES WITH CONSCIOUSNESS'

#### 3.1 : From 'the North'

September 5th, 2007

Dear Neil,

Thanks for your message. Here are replies:

1. I was born in Blackpool in the Victoria hospital, but we lived a few miles out. We moved to (near) Haltwhistle in Northumberland about three months before my 5th birthday, and lived there for about three years.
2. I'm not aware of any surviving relatives in the area.
3. I was last in Blackpool on New Years Eve in 2003, for a day out with two of our children. We used to visit for a day every year or two, usually in late October, but for various reasons this is less easy than it used to be.
4. My parents had grown up in the town. My mother was born in Bolton, and my father in Manchester. His family then lived in north London during the First World War. I think my mother's family probably

arrived in Blackpool either just before or during the (first) war, and my father's family a little later. My mother taught in east London in the early 1930s, and my father had lived in Redcar for a time, but both had returned to the town by the time they met.

Best wishes,  
Patrick

### **September 12th**

Dear Neil,

Thanks for your last message. You asked: *Do you, in any practical way, regard Blackpool as your "home town"?*

No. I'm honoured to be connected with the town, but I never really experienced it in that way. I consider myself to be from 'the North'.

Best wishes,  
Patrick

### **October 17th**

Neil,

You asked: *May I ask how progress on the projected third 'Robinson' film is coming along?*

About the film (if it is a film – it might be something else), this isn't necessarily going to be a Robinson film, and we don't start work on it until next year. The project of which it is part is going very well.

Best wishes,  
Patrick

### **3.2 : from *The Robinson Institute* by Patrick Keiller**

[STARTS] Most of us spend much of our time in spaces made and previously occupied by other people, usually people of the more or less distant past. We might reasonably expect our everyday surroundings to feel haunted but, by and large, they don't. Haunting is still relatively unusual. We all live, as far as we know, in the present, and the present in Nepal, in Tokyo, or on Mars, can sometimes seem nearer than yesterday morning in one's own kitchen. As it has become easier to move around in and communicate across space, have we, perhaps, become more sensitive to the fact that we are inescapably stranded, shipwrecked almost, in our own present, and are we therefore increasingly attracted to the idea of time-travel?

... ..

One of the internet's most intriguing capabilities, for a topographical film-maker, was that it offered contemporaneous views of distant landscapes. During 1996, I had heard that there were websites where one could access the cameras that observe traffic on UK motorways, and immediately conceived a strong desire to explore, and perhaps to sample, what I imagined would be a large and increasing number of real-time moving images of landscapes throughout the world...

The first site I came across that offered anything approaching real-time moving pictures was that of a company called *Actual Size Internet Solutions*, who had a camera in a first floor office overlooking Trinity Square, Colchester, in Essex. This showed a fresh still every two or three seconds, and was particularly impressive at night, when occasional figures passing along the pavement suggested an Essex *noir*.

...

Another early favourite was a camera at Mawson Station, an Australian research base in Antarctica. To begin with, this was a single image of the station, updated every hour. If it was dark ... the screen was black. If it was daylight, with a blizzard, it was white or grey. At other times, there was a view of huts, sometimes illuminated. It didn't occur to me at the time, but I suspect that part of the attraction of this view was the ease with which one could misconstrue it as a window looking into another time.

Mawson Station is named after Sir Douglas Mawson, whose Australasian Antarctic expedition took place in the years 1911-14, and the rudimentary monochrome images were not unlike those of Polar explorations of the period. They also evoked the *decor* of the Howard Hawks-produced film *The Thing From Another World* (1951).

The name of Mawson was familiar as that of the landscape architect who designed Stanley Park, in Blackpool, who is said to have asserted: "Blackpool stands between us and revolution." Stanley Park in Blackpool is named after a member of the family of the earls of Derby, other members of which have given their names to Stanley Park in Liverpool and Stanley Park in Vancouver (as well as, I imagine, Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands, which is not *that* far from Antarctica.)

... ..

In the last 150 years or so, technology has radically altered the way we communicate, but the built environment has not changed anything like as much as people used to predict it would. The way we experience space now changes much faster than the fabric of the spaces that we occupy. When looking at images of the past, I have been increasingly struck by the contrast between the familiarity of the spaces depicted, and our distance from the lives of those who then inhabited them. The ease with which we now communicate with distant spaces in the present may be a factor in this, but there is another reason, which is that the medium of film, too, has become old. The virtual past exists in many media - in the topography of novels, like *Bleak House*, in maps, paintings, photographs and so on - but film's *duration*, and its oneiric aspect, suggest analogies with consciousness, with lived experience. At the same time, film provokes seemingly unanswerable questions about the inner life of its human subjects in a way that the novel, for instance, does not - novelists enjoying access to the thoughts of their creations. Perhaps such questions *are* unanswerable, but perhaps, with the aid of literature and other sources, one can make the attempt. Time travel may not yet be an actual possibility, but it has long been a virtual one. [ENDS]

Selected from *The Robinson Institute* by Patrick Keiller : a DIFFUSION eBook (Proboscis, 2002)  
The full text of the essay is downloadable free at  
[http://diffusion.org.uk/species\\_of\\_spaces/D\\_SOS\\_Keiller\\_A4.pdf](http://diffusion.org.uk/species_of_spaces/D_SOS_Keiller_A4.pdf)

~~~~~  
Blackpool was our test-case, our pre-mortem. Previously we had only analysed the remains of cities, as these people indicate themselves, underground. Our analysis of the Blackpool matrix demonstrated two basic, and intertwined, life-support systems, continuous and staccato. Continuous was thingness and took the following phases: watery, aerial, dirty, stony (including concretion), in flat or containing forms, each locked on to the adjacent with no gaps. Staccato was discrete organic form with executive intelligence.

Blackpool Vanishes., pp167-8

I stayed in Blackpool - in a single room at the B&B, my parents across the hallway in a double - for a couple of days, the first nights I'd slept in the town since those 1970s visits. Traces of Keiller proved to be - unsurprisingly - few; examples of Robinson's beloved public statuary - surprisingly - even scarcer. But the journey was, nevertheless, a worthwhile and productive one, and not just because I was able to read and finish Richard H Francis's *Blackpool Vanishes* in the most appropriate of settings.

The joy of Keiller's work is that, like much of the greatest cinema, it simply enables the viewer to see the world to see through the mind and the sensibility of another, and it's a process which, with certain film-makers, does not come to an end with the end of the film itself. To experience the world as it is experienced by Robinson, the Narrator and - by extension - by Keiller - has been, for me, a transformative experience. It is a state of mind: perpetually curious, perpetually questioning, gently iconoclastic.

The physical world, Keiller reminds us, is not the way it is by accident, or because of some supernatural design. The buildings and monuments we move among have been placed there because of economic, social and political forces - likewise, the shops and the factories, the hidden industrial hinterland explored so imaginatively in *Robinson In Space*. Except it's not really hidden - merely taken for granted and thus rendered invisible. Keiller's cinema transfigures the landscape, turns the mundane into the remarkable; exposes contemporary reality as a palimpsest that is being continually shaped and re-shaped even as we attempt to read it. In his work we find a dialogue with the past that points toward numerous possible futures - glimpses of utopia and dystopia, imagined futures among real and imaginary pasts.

And whether it be *Robinson in Blackpool*, *Robinson in China* or *Robinson on Mars*, it's surely - to say the very least - about time we had a third film from Mr George Patrick Campbell Keiller.

It is only the watcher who watches: he truly is Spirit of Blackpool. The rest is protuberance.
Blackpool Vanishes, p167

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## **EPILOGUE**

I don't know how Robinson would react to the re-election of Tony Blair. Towards the end of *Robinson In Space*, he loses his reason, having developed increasingly manic notions about the United States and the UK's involvement with its military. Perhaps the unfortunate events of recent years would not have been quite as unexpected to him as they were to most of the rest of us.

Patrick Keiller, *Kamera* magazine, 2003

It will, we are confidently assured, be a "make-or-break" annual seaside conference speech for the leader of the Conservative Party. It always is. I would be surprised if anyone who follows these matters could recall a Tory leader about whom this was not said, year after monotonous year. Only the identity of the resort changes, although the Conservatives now seem unable to vary even in that detail, returning again and again - inexplicably - to Blackpool.

Dominic Lawson, *The Independent*, October 2nd, 2007