

## **Tailoring the British Landscape: Tim Walker's Stage Designed Fashion Photographs**

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### **Résumé**

Tim Walker est connu pour ses séries photographiques insolites très britanniques publiées dans *Vogue* ou *Vanity Fair*, et pour son absence d'intérêt pour les images de défilés de mode, ou les photos prises en studio (pour lesquelles il éprouve cependant une curiosité grandissante). En lieu et place de cela, il bouleverse l'ordre des intérieurs des grandes demeures britanniques, ou invente des mises en scènes extravagantes en extérieur, qu'il s'agisse d'un dîner bohémien suspendu dans les arbres, d'un squelette burtonien dans un champ de roses déclinant tous les tons de rouges, d'une soucoupe volante planant au-dessus d'une horde de chiens lancés à la poursuite d'un renard dans la campagne anglaise, ou d'une poupée géante déambulant dans les bois d'un Northumberland mystérieux. Les grands espaces du paysage anglais, des contrées insulaires de l'ouest au comté du Northumberland, jusqu'au nord, vers les Highlands écossais, sont le terrain de jeu du photographe, et lorsque l'extérieur n'est pas physiquement présent, il ressurgit par le truchement d'arbres, de ruisseaux, de petits lacs, de clairières ou de neige recréés artificiellement à l'intérieur, entre les murs des grandes demeures. Walker donne vie sans contraintes à ses visions, et utilise la photographie de mode comme outil pour explorer ses rêves et désirs fantaisistes. En travaillant avec la lumière naturelle et de gigantesques accessoires, le photographe révèle le paysage britannique d'une manière inattendue dans des tableaux vivants méticuleusement conçus, prenant leurs racines dans le surréalisme et la tradition de la peinture paysagère britannique. L'impulsion créatrice repose sur le simulacre d'un sentiment d'appartenance à une Angleterre depuis longtemps perdue ou imaginée, et dans ses images affleure un néoromantisme prégnant. À partir d'une approche interdisciplinaire basée sur des écrits récents dans le champ de la géographie culturelle, cet article s'intéressera à la façon dont Walker présente le paysage britannique comme produit social et culturel, medium physiquement présent plus que toile de fond, qui questionne le processus de (re)construction de l'identité nationale britannique.

### **Abstract**

Tim Walker is known for his very British whimsical photo shoots for *Vogue* or *Vanity Fair* and his lack of interest in catwalks and studio pictures (although his curiosity for the latter has recently grown). Instead, he chooses to challenge indoors and outdoors settings in his fantastical *mise en scenes*—whether it is with a Bohemian dinner party suspended in trees, a giant Burtonian skeleton in a field of crimson roses, a flying saucer gliding along a fox hunt in the British countryside or a huge doll crashing through the woods in Northumberland. The open spaces of the British landscape from the West Country to Northumberland and further North to the Scottish Highlands are Walker's playground, and when the land is not immediately there, trees, streams, ponds, glades or snow can be recreated artificially indoors.

Walker unrestrainedly gives life to his visions and uses fashion photography as a tool to explore his dreams and fantasies. Working with natural light and props, the photographer reveals the British landscape in an improbable way in punctiliously crafted *tableaux vivants* with roots in Surrealism and the traditions of British landscape painting. As pretence is the creative spur that nourishes Walker's pictures, a sense of longing for a lost England seems to pervade his pictures with Neo-romanticism. Drawing from recent approaches in cultural geography this paper will discuss Walker's treatment of the British landscape as a social product, a palpable physical medium and an imaginary cultural representation, questioning the (re)making process of the British national identity.

**Mots-clés :** Photographie de mode contemporaine, britannicité, identité nationale, paysage

**Keywords :** Contemporary fashion photography, Britishness, national identity, landscape

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## Introduction

Many of past and recent photo series imagined by Tim Walker underline a permanent concern with defining, expressing and preserving Britishness. The titles of the commissioned editorials, mainly portraits, speak for themselves—"Made in Britain" (*British Vogue*, December 2013), "Dressing like the Dickens" (*US Vogue*, December 2013), "National Treasures" (*British Vogue*, May 2012), or "Merrie England" (*British Vogue*, June 2011). They sum up Walker's sense of belonging and his response to the notion of keeping identity alive. He chooses to make images speak for themselves as part of the process of construction of the national identity<sup>1</sup>, but he also submits them to the demands of commissioned fashion photography and accepts that editorial text or clothes descriptions might force the reader to deal with the "co-presence" (Louvel, 1998, 156) of image and text, their simultaneity, tensions and dynamic juxtaposition. The reader's sensibility is stimulated by the interaction between text and image, the image attracting the reader's attention to the aesthetic and cultural experience he is having, focusing on the national sentiment in the series. The "Made in Britain" editorial reads: "Christmas is the time we traditionally return to our roots. Photographer Tim Walker gathers Britain's brightest and best in this portfolio of homegrown stars and celebrates the immense fashion heritage of our unique isles" ("Made in Britain", *British Vogue*, December 2013). The uniqueness of Britain and Britishness is often signified by Walker in the natural settings he uses or diverts, combined with iconic celebrities. Natural elements circulate from one image to the next, as bits and pieces of a bigger picture, the

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<sup>1</sup> "[L]e choix de *faire parler* les images comme des acteurs à part entière de la construction nationale" (Arrivé, 2014).

British landscape. Walker uses it not only as a backdrop but as a full component of the British identity that he seeks to infuse his pictures with. Largely based on contemporary theories in cultural geography, this paper will first focus on the landscape as a sign of Britishness and on signs of Britishness in the landscape (what Pomian called “*semiophores*” in Pomian, 1999, 167), i.e. visual objects that are given significance by society at a certain point in time, and on. It will also be interesting to take into account the visual contradiction at work in Walker's pictures, with landscape considered as culturally constructed national heritage over time (as in traditional paintings for example), as opposed to the Surrealist influence that he openly acknowledges and which implies a rejection of the past. All Walker's “pictures” become “images” in the sense that they are a representation of something the photographer had in mind, which is not necessarily exactly the same as what comes out physically when the set is created and the photo shoot performed, or to what is perceived by the viewer. Each picture series tells a story, more often than not becoming the narrative of a nation, regardless of the constraints of the fashion photography genre.

## **Redesigning the British countryside and diagnosing signs of Britishness**

Landscape for Walker is seen as a subject, a material that can be modeled as in British orchards, gardens or forests, and as a locus with in-site specific arrangements. He has favorite locations that he sees as emblems or leitmotifs of Britishness such as Northumberland, Essex, Sussex, Suffolk, Devon, Oxfordshire, Scotland, among other countries. To prepare his photo shoots, he draws sketches which show how carefully the scenes are staged, paying special attention to light. In Colchester, he once chose to crash a Rolls Royce (an emblem of British automobile excellence) into a field of roses, starring Erin O'Connor, Jacquetta Wheeler and Lily Cole for *British Vogue* (2004). Hand-written instructions in his scrapbook give precise lighting indications such as: “back light sunbubble”, “light up car lights”, with a hand-drawn sun in the top left corner (Walker, 2008). The more he uses these recurrent locations in his pictures, the more they become part of what is identified as typical British landscape and thus culturally constructed in the contemporary art field. For the photographer, and as stated by Stephen Daniels: “Geographical interest in art is part of broader, interdisciplinary exploration of the culture and meaning of landscape in the humanities and creative engagement with landscape as a genre in contemporary art practice” (Daniels, 2004, 430). According to Daniels, national identities are defined by “enduring traditions”, “hallowed sites and scenery<sup>2</sup>”, a process which runs through all cultures, participating in the elaboration of a community of national identities—shared ideas and memories and feelings that bind people together and vice versa. Tim Ingold goes further in saying that to him, landscape is about “dwelling” in it (Ingold, 1993, 154), marking a pause to really look at it as well as living in it, relating to it, and not only representing it.

Issues of landscape and “making, remaking and unmaking” national identity (Daniels, 2004, 435) are closely related, and forcefully trigger anxieties, ambiguities and cultural limits

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<sup>2</sup> “National identities are co-ordinated, often largely defined, by ‘legends and landscapes’, by stories of golden ages, enduring traditions, heroic deeds and dramatic destinies located in ancient or promised home-lands with hallowed sites and scenery. The symbolic activation of time and space, often drawing on the religious sentiment, gives shape to the ‘imagined community’ of the nation. As exemplars of moral order and aesthetic harmony, particular landscapes achieve the status of national icons” (Daniels, 1995, 5).

revealed in relations between landscape art and national identity. David Matless posits the art of landscape as a visceral as well as a visual matter, two aspects which highly define Walker's art (Matless, 1998). If landscape art was still described as "polite" or "conservative" (Daniels, 2004, 435) in the twentieth century, it was then "revived as an art of creative, indeed avant-garde, engagement" (Daniels, 2004, 435). How does Tim Walker's creative commitment with landscape in fashion photography produce an "iconography of nationhood"? He partly answers this question as he says: " 'I'm just cutting and pasting various British icons together to create a montage of pure Britishness' [...]. These photographs are rather romantic visions of an England past' " (Walker, 2008, 9). In "Mrs. Lishman and Her Flying Saucer" in Beale, Northumberland, he playfully illustrates how the (sub)urban landscape becomes a cultural image, "a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings" (Cosgrove, 1988, 1), with a composition in which he inserts one of the most British of all objects, a giant teacup and saucer. The ritual he alludes to in this parodic sci-fi narrative literally shows how landscape can be seen as a social stage where men exchange signs, a framework within which a network of relationships is established (Cauquelin, 1989, 127). Cultural landscapes can be rural or natural in Walker's work, rarely urban, industrial or institutional. They often reflect a certain type of Britishness which is politically and socially codified, and linked to British high society (Roll Royce, mansions, delicate teacups, for instance). Landscape is often seen as seemingly obvious, to be taken for granted, but it has to be deconstructed for the viewer to become conscious of its artificial construction in the pictures.

Walker's scrapbooks allow the viewer to understand how he associates pictures, visual reminiscences of his own past works and seen images. In 1998 for *British Vogue*, he performed a photo shoot at Glastonbury, a paradigm of Britishness in worldwide festival culture. At that time, in the late nineties, the New Labour government's first attempt at branding Britain as young, creative and diverse was dubbed "Cool Britannia" by the media, making one wonder how instinctive or constructed the concept of national identity is. Walker's vision of Britishness is made of bits and pieces which are accumulated on the page for the viewer to reconstruct the whole narrative of a day at the festival. This shot is composed as a still life, with jumbled tents, stoves, rain boots, sleeping bags and blue boxes of eggs, i.e. the whole gear of the initiated festival goer. In the same vein, Walker's version of a map of England for the "Being British" editorial for *Italian Vogue* (2005) is covered with odds and ends representative of the British paraphernalia used by the artist as props, such as gardening gloves, a watering can, antlers, shells, or a hot water bottle. These objects also seem to be emblems of the "temporality of the landscape" defined by Ingold as the "record of—and testimony to—the lives and works of past generations who had dwelt within [the landscape], and in so doing, have left something of themselves" (Ingold, 1993, 152). "Senses of place must be related to senses of time if only because places are in a continuous state of becoming" (Ashworth *et al.*, 2005, 4). These objects stop being empty clichés because Walker injects a new life in them, imaginatively staging things from the past in the present. "I like capturing stuff that is disappearing—that's the point of photography. [...] What I am photographing is an imaginary place that never existed, but is connected to something that has already been [...] to provoke something in people, whether as escapism or relief" (Sinclair, 2008).

Walker's pictures stress the sense of passing time, of death-in-life or life-in-death as illustrated by his Burtonian series shot at the Cants of Colchester before Tim Burton's retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art (*Harper's Bazaar*, 2009). The clothes are gothic

creations by Vuitton, Ralph Lauren, Gautier or McQueen with a vegetal or feathery touch to them, as if contaminated by the natural surroundings. The props look like black tree roots standing up on the model's hair, the crimson red wig is even redder than the roses, and the gigantic white bones of the distressed skeleton are part of Walker's archaeology of the British landscape and gothic literary tradition. The strange rosy light coming through the cloudy skies with all the shades of grey give a sort of tender melancholia to a photo shoot that is otherwise both slightly scary and darkly humorous.

In Gordon Manley's *Climate and the British Scene*, the moist climate becomes "an integral part of the cultural environment" and "a sign of its visual order" (Daniels, 2004, 431). The very changeable weather has immense impact on the photography. The picture "Sun City" for *British Vogue* (1999) is shot with natural light. It humorously and tenderly pictures freezing Karen Elson awkwardly wrapped up in a fur coat, standing under a big-lettered yellow sign like one at a dull fun fair. The wet pavement indicates that it clearly rained a few hours before. In "Eglingham Children and Swan" (*Japanese Vogue*, 2002), the greyish tones of the picture illustrate how Walker is mostly attached to using natural light in a British seaside setting. The giant swan was made of cardboard, plywood, netting, and set out on the beach under bright blue skies, before a storm came, sweeping the swan into the sea. It had to be brought back by Walker's designers and looked battered but very real, joyfully worshipped by dressed up kids playing around it. With Caroline Trentini for *British Vogue* in Suffolk (2010), the swan has threateningly entered Glemham Hall and laid eggs there, as if taking over the place with its decrepit wallpaper and broken furniture.

Glemham Hall and other country estates encapsulate a "powerful yearning for lost national glory" (Su, 2002, 552). The hundreds of balloons at Eglingham may at first look quite festive, but they disturbingly seem to be gushing out of the doors and windows as if the house was filled with nothing but air. "The diminished condition of the estate is taken to be emblematic of the nation as a whole" (Su, 2002, 553) and can be read as "the 'crisis of inheritance' narrative that reads the fate of the nation through the condition of the English country estate [...] more generally because of its long-standing associations with continuity, tradition, and Englishness [against cultural turbulences]" (Su, 2002, 553-554)<sup>3</sup>. In Walker's pictures nostalgia is essential to re-envision what constitutes "genuine" Englishness. By contrasting memories of the estates in their glory with their present state of disrepair, he offers an "originary set of national ideals" (Su, 2002, 555) and insists on a return to the "true" ethos or spirit of nation which can only be recognized in the midst of decline, a sense of belonging, an individual story that is part of a larger collective one. Nostalgia for England's lost colonial grandeur can be felt in "Lily Cole Takes a Trip" (*British Vogue*, 2005), where the eccentric British tradition of colouring animals takes an Indian elephant for a victim<sup>4</sup>: "Very often there's a kind of nostalgia built into a photograph by virtue of you taking it. You've taken the photograph and it's immediately a thing of the past the moment you press the shutter" (Walker, 2012, 190). Clementine Keith-Roach in her Botticellian "Oyster Shell Bed" (*Casa Vogue*, 2010) shows how old houses and English settings dominate in Walker's work with

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<sup>3</sup> "Precisely when the nation's international stature is declining, the estate is proclaimed to be 'one of the greatest British contributions to European civilization' [Cornforth, 1998, 1]. [...] [N]ationalisms forge solidarity through 'invented traditions' [Hobsbawm *et al.*, 1992, 1] that depend upon monuments like the English estates to function as sites for commemorating the putative national past" (Su, 2002, 554).

<sup>4</sup> Walker refers to the eccentric British aristocrat Gerald Berners and a certain period of British history, the 1920s, with the 'Bright Young Things' set and their uncontrollable pranks.

Pre-Raphaelite overtones. Working on the Beaton archive gave him a romantic “ ‘spirit of the place’, most usually rural and paradisaical” in geographical parts of the UK that have become ‘talismanic’ for him” (Muir in Walker, 2008, 8-9). An open air projection of *Brief Encounters* by David Lean (1946) in Devon was shot for a series titled “The Good Old Days” and the film unravels on the wall of a countryside house at the start of “a very British nostalgia trip”.

This attachment to the idea of what Britain once was—even what Britain should have been—is, I believe, the key to many of Tim Walker’s photographs. And what, in [...] childhood storybooks [...], it meant: loyalty and camaraderie; long golden summers, an unquenchable thirst for adventure and, as a backdrop, the constancy of the English landscape and the inconstancy of the English climate (“Paradise Regained” by Robin Muir in Walker, 2008, 9).

Walker’s work is suffused with Neo-romantic yearning for a bygone era, and this can be perceived in the way he recycles past images (paintings, pictorial echoes to art movements, movies or literary references) in a playful, iconoclast, derisive or respectful way. Based on Gérard Genette’s definition of intertextuality in *Figures III* or on Clément Chéroux’s theoretical approach (Chéroux, 2007), the intericonic dimension of his work takes root in the traditions of English landscape painting, as well as in Surrealist influences, which may seem contradictory since Surrealism is seen as a challenger of national identity and heritage.

### **Intericonicity in Walker’s pictures: landscape as national heritage versus a Surrealist rejection of the past**

Stella Tennant posed for Walker for a series on Alfred Munnings’s landscape and equine paintings (*British Vogue*, 2005). Whether they are idealized scenes imbued with the spirit of the classical past, more individual and personal visions of the natural world, or highly imaginative landscapes and seascapes that relate to no specific time or place, the typifications of a national landscape offer visual encapsulations of the memory of a shared past which is also modeled by the political measures implemented to protect landscape as national heritage (e.g. “English Heritage” policies and governmental advice). Thatched cottages with grass sprayed in yellow by Walker are a synecdoche of the preservation of rural values in an unspoiled England with Karlie Kloss in Rye, East Sussex, for *W Magazine*, 2010. Nowhere else in Europe than in Britain is landscape “so freighted as legacy. Nowhere else does the very term suggest not simply scenery and genres de vie, but quintessential national virtues” (Lowenthal, 1991, 213). The great flowering of English landscape painting came during the first half of the nineteenth century, primarily in the works of two masters who “framed” England. John Constable with his views of the English countryside expressed romantic ideals about the essential harmony and pastoral beauty of nature—images of place transcending the locality and picturing national sentiment. J. M. W. Turner sought to project the way in which natural elements affected and transformed the physical world. In *Court traité du paysage*, Alain Roger discusses the fact that the country (“*le pays*”) is in fact the “zero degree” of landscape (“*paysage*”), elaborated through the artistic process (“*artialisation*”) which modifies our perception of the world<sup>5</sup> (Roger, 1997, 17-18).

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<sup>5</sup> “Le degré zéro du paysage, ce qui précède son artialisation, qu’elle soit directe (in situ) ou indirecte (in visu). Voilà ce que nous enseigne l’histoire, mais nos paysages nous sont devenus si familiers, si ‘naturels’, que nous avons accoutumé de croire que leur beauté allait de soi ; et c’est aux artistes qu’il appartient de nous rappeler

What Walker finds stimulating in Surrealism is precisely the way it shakes up our ways of seeing the world “by ways of dreams, coincidences, correspondences, the marvelous, the uncanny, a reciprocal exchange connecting conscious and unconscious thought” (Caws, 2004, 15). Walker’s Surrealism *à la Magritte* reflects the “British notion of Surrealism as slapstick, endless summer fun” (Walker, 2008, 10). With illogical settings, pervading joy, a sense of ease, away from the strangling realities of the bleak times we live in, Walker invites to look at the British landscape differently. Finding over three hundred Aran jumpers at the beginning of June to fit the panels of each Wolseley in Suffolk can only revise our habitual ways of thinking and seeing, an invitation to look with new eyes. The *Clockwork Orange* subversive look of the model Guinevere Van Seenus (Suffolk, England, *British Vogue*, 2006) conjures up Burgess’s literary and Kubrick’s filmic backdrops (abstract or mentally constructed inscapes). Juvenile defiance, malevolence and violence can be perceived as if the model, wheel in hand, had played a nasty trick that she is in fact quite happy about. The landscape looks plain and dull, but the visual signs associating the British cars, the knitted jumpers and the bowler hat, together with the white outfit of the model calling to mind the movie’s white jumpsuits worn by the “droogs” led by Alex the Large, make it a picture undoubtedly set in a British environment, as if losing control was all that artistic creation is about—when in fact the scene is minutely crafted.

Similarly, blurring the boundaries between the natural and the manmade, inside and outside, Walker sets up a boat in a library, debunking the traditional painting genre of marines, or installs tents inside in “It rained outside so we camped inside” (Chanters House, Devon, *Italian Vogue*, 2002), organizing the escape inside with a bit of imagination to make the adventure begin, a spark which ignites a whole fire of thought and imagination surrounded by dark bookshelves (or “bookscape”). Walker is not “seeing *as if*” (Krauss, 1986, 60), he is “seeing as”, as epitomized by the gigantic props he chooses, whether for a spitfire crashing indoors (Glemham Hall, Suffolk, *British Vogue*, 2009), a stream gushing forth inside a pink room at Eglington (*Italian Vogue*, 2004), or beds suspended in trees in Northumberland (*Italian Vogue*, 2002). With the props he uses, natural elements boisterously enter British country houses with a fantasy twist. Tree leaves are replaced by cakes baked by village women in Northumberland with supermodel Lily Cole wearing a Burberry dress (“Imaginary Fantastic Bizarre”, *Italian Vogue*, 2005). “The Dress Lamp Tree, England” (*L’Uomo Vogue*, 2002) underlines the ethereal quality of the luminous dresses. They seem to embody Walker’s magical world, as if the tree were a human model itself with multiple limbs.

There is a visual contradiction at the heart of Walker’s work in the caustic and mutinous spirit at play with the decorum and conventions, a rejection of logic, embracing extravagance, deriding traditions, rejecting things from the past—a sort of *tabula rasa* against the nation state. And yet, Walker’s conception of the nation is quasi spiritual and a recurrent source of inspiration in his pictures—a vision close enough to Ernest Renan’s definition of what the nation is<sup>6</sup>. Spontaneity, chance, things brought together incongruously are the basis of Surrealism with an apparent lack of aesthetic concern as stated in Breton’s manifesto. On the contrary, Walker’s “ocularcentric” art, i.e. the privilege of vision over other senses (Berger,

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cette vérité première, mais oubliée : qu’un pays n’est pas, d’emblée, un paysage et qu’il y a de l’un à l’autre, toute l’élaboration de l’art” (Roger, 1997, 17-18).

<sup>6</sup> “[...] la possession en commun d’un riche legs de souvenirs ; [...] le consentement actuel, le désir de vivre ensemble, la volonté de continuer à faire valoir l’héritage qu’on a reçu indivis” (Renan, 1882).

1972), pays crucial attention to carefully crafted scenes to reach his aesthetic purpose, always making the viewer question what he sees, in the way Magritte does in “La Condition humaine”, for example. In “Contradiction and Chaos” (*British Vogue*, 2007), Coco Rocha in a tutu dress by Viktor & Rolf has tumbled on upholstery inspired by Magritte’s blue-skied “La Malédiction”. The relationship between nature and image is envisaged through a frame, which invites us to take a look at the real world. In “Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee” (Colchester, Essex, *British Vogue*, 2004), the pantomime stage acts as such. Walker feels that “[y]ou look through the viewfinder and there’s a window to something magical. You haven’t seen it before... You see something you haven’t yet caught... It’s such a thrill...” (Walker with Martin, 2009). Perspective shapes reality and landscape continues behind or beyond the frame, as Anne Cauquelin argues: “Je suppose – et crois fermement – que le paysage ‘continue’ derrière le cadre, à ses côtés, loin, bien loin, encore et toujours, à l’infini. [...] Le cadre réclame son hors cadre comme son élément constitutif, sa condition nécessaire” (Cauquelin, 1989, 125).

In the “Far Far from Land” editorial released in *W Magazine* in December 2013, the frame becomes three-dimensional. A mermaid, in the human form of model Kristen McMenamy, is trapped in the human world, captured in a giant cage for others to see as if in a freak show, far from her natural aquatic setting. This modernized and quite dark version of a fairy tale redolent of Damien Hirst’s installations shows how deeply anchored the fairy tale genre is in Tim Walker’s surrealist stories. How does fashion as a photographic genre allow him to achieve such wondrous *mises en scène* in the British landscape?

## **The British landscape as part of the artist’s narrative dreams and fantasies**

Walker claims: “I was never interested in fashion when I started out. I was interested in people. Fashion photography allowed me to explore dreams and fantasy, and that’s what I love about it” (Fox, 2013). Walker is constantly “walk[ing] the tightrope between fashion and art [...]”. Mr. Walker says the key way to tell fashion photography from art is to ask if the picture pushes boundaries or follows a prescribed formula designed to sell clothes. [...] ‘It’s a hysterical search for emotions’ ”, he adds (Lane, 2013). One had to look for the right setting, the right fragment of landscape, to tell the right story. As critic Homi Bhabha notices in his 1990 book, “nation and narration” are intimately linked. National identity and nations are created through written and rewritten stories, myths and symbols. For Walker, the “stability of meaning in landscape” and storytelling have become a response to “the perceived chaos of the modern world” (Cosgrove, 1988, 8).

As a set visionary and builder, he has interest in various scales (huge and small), in the physicality of the décor whether it has to do with a spitfire, tables in trees, huge spiders, swans or snails, or a giant 6-foot Humpty Dumpty’s real cracked egg-head (Rye, East Sussex, *W Magazine*, 2010). Walker could have taken an egg in the kitchen, broken it and dropped it in, but it is physically there, with the yolk and right jell for slime, the right blue for the distraught eyes, the perfect colour for the shell. The essential details are carefully crafted: Karlie Kloss’s hand seems to be really reaching out to pick Humpty Dumpty’s gloved white hand, for it to look emotionally right. The ambition and scale of his narrative images is especially impressive as they are not digitally manipulated. He has chosen analog photography because he likes the fact that there is an end point to the photo shoot as he is

self-rationing his resources, like “a loaded gun”. There are “only so many shoots before the target changes” (Walker with Martin, 2012). He argues that one is only seeing what one is taking, and there is intimacy and trust, vulnerability even between the photographer, his subject, and changing conditions in the landscape. “When you’re a fashion photographer everything is contrived from the start. Nothing is real. So what you’re trying to do in this fake world is to make a real moment happen by installing genuineness into the artifice” (Walker, 2012, 26)<sup>7</sup>.

Different stories can be read in photographs by each viewer: telling a story seems to be the same as taking a picture. The “Baby Doll” series (*Italian Vogue*, 2012) features a 15-foot tall doll and looks like a frozen silent movie scene with a spooky actress, 3-second exposure, frozen poses, and although it looks funny at first, it then seems really frightening, with the photo taking a life of its own. Trees and woodland often feature in many children’s fairytales, as they can create powerful images of scary, dark places where it is easy to get lost and never find your way out, as in the Annie Leibowitz’s 2009 photo shot for *Vogue* with Lily Cole, one of Walker’s fetish models. Facets of the British culture are exaggerated or pulled out in his pictures, as when Kinga Rajzak is riding a U.F.O. over the Bewicke Hunt in Beale, Northumberland, for *British Vogue* (2009). In this fox hunting scene, he reinterprets things that have to do with Britishness. Walker literally gives life to his visions, ignoring practical constraints, raising fashion photography to museum material<sup>8</sup> and using it as a tool to explore his dreams and fantasies. A recent exhibition at the Bowes Museum (Durham) was inspiringly called “Dreamscapes”. In this photograph, three huntsmen in scarlet coats ride their horses over a dilapidated fence, above which a giant UFO hovers with a female pilot on board. A pack of nine hounds runs along beside the riders. “It took hours to get the right shot”, said Walker, “because the horses—accustomed to chasing foxes, not aliens—had to learn to tolerate the shiny silver object suspended on poles hidden in the picture. Even with all the practice, one horse hid behind the UFO in the shot, while another spooked at the fence” (Lane, 2013). In the Mulberry series (Shotover House, Oxfordshire, Fall/Winter 2011), the British landscape is reconstituted with flowery patterns, giant foxes, birds and eggs which travel from one picture to the next, from his scrapbooks to the pictures he takes.

In the way he constantly plays with the inside and outside, it is easy to see how he was influenced by fashion photographers like Norman Parkinson who remodelled the world of British fashion photography in the 1940s by taking his models from the stifling studio environment to outdoor settings closer to British traditional ways of life. Walker admires Jacques Henri Lartigue’s playful pictures influenced by Picasso and Cocteau, Irving Penn who famously observed that “fashion photography is about selling dreams and not clothes” (Rosser, 2010), Gregory Crewdson’s neo-pictorialism in cinematic staged scenes, and Beaton’s art for stage set. Circulating objects can be found from Beaton’s work in Walker’s pictures, whether they are bed springs in a Daliesque setting in “Like a Warrior” (*Italian Vogue*, 2013), or an electric thread in Beaton’s portrait of Alice Toklas and Gertrude Stein

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<sup>7</sup> For the anecdote, the props are now in a container in a Sussex field and no museum has yet thought of acquiring them. Walker explains that he “drags everything in front of the camera” and “creates a set” (Ray, 2011), not being concerned with any photographic consideration such as depth of field, etc. To him, “digital is like following a recipe and cooking with a microwave”. The “emotion of spontaneity” created via analog shooting is easy for viewers to spot and helps separate his creative endeavors from the often stifling confinements of commercial photography (Lane, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> For a thorough insight into the relationship between fashion photography and the museum, see Williams, 2008.

turned into barbed wire in a picture of Kristen McMenamy with the daunting air of a modern Amazon ready to do away with the slanted ruin of a derelict castle straight from Arthurian legends, a resilient sign of persistent—yet weakened—Britishness (*W Magazine*, 2012).

His dream world finds echoes in nursery rhymes, movies or in his favourite books like *The Magic Toy Shop* by Angela Carter, a gothic novel which follows the evolution of the heroine, Melanie, as she becomes aware of herself and her sexuality. In the *Love Magazine* series with Kate Moss, paper clips from the novel and pictures set up by Walker dialogically interact to give an eroticized representation of the model's body as landscape. Melanie's opening words "O, my America, my new found land" are taken from John Donne's "To His Mistress Going to Bed". Kate Moss's iconic body (and the most British of all models) ironically undergoes a transatlantic migration to the Americas, as if suddenly rediscovered by the photographer in spite of the multitude of pictures taken of her. "Mountain ranges" and "secret valleys" constitute a geography of the body that projects and mirrors Walker's preoccupations with landscape, whether literal or metaphorical, and which is lingering in the "Made in Britain" editorial, quoted at the beginning of this paper and shot in Northumberland, with its sinuous path lines and smooth hills. There's a bizarre contrast in this picture between Moss's delicate abandonment half-clad in a tartan blanket, and the rude mountain-shod foot (probably the photographer's) that can be seen in the foreground, as if about to push her down the vale, disappearing into the landscape.

## Conclusion

What seems striking in Walker's use of the landscape in his fashion photo shoots is that they may look extremely beautiful but there seems to be something quite dark to them. He says that "[s]weetness can't exist genuinely without a darkness for it to have depth to it [...] challenging oneself, going against sweetness to communicate something else visually" (Walker with Martin, 2012). Nature frightens rather than soothes, as one explores Walker's work beyond the pages of *Vogue* and other fashion magazines. In recent studio portraits, the landscape vanishes into blankness, as if the artist had (temporarily) ended its exploration of British settings. Walker is now feeling the need to single people out and strip things back, as he is trying to mirror who the characters are (their inscapes), endeavoring to meet the person in the performing act. He is also intrigued by the moving image. He explains how there is "a beauty to the looseness of implication in stills" as opposed to "a definite story in film" (Walker with Martin, 2012). After really exploring the big sets and giant props and the aspects of storytelling, there seemed nowhere else to go except film. He chose to shoot *The Lost Explorer*, the story of an explorer lost in a London garden, an epitome of Anglicana. For Walker who grew up "on the Devon-Dorset border, 'among hedgerows and cliff paths'" (Hume, 2010), the British landscape will always be going through the wardrobe to Narnia, as literally shown in the picture "Use your Family Photographs" (Eglington Hall, *Italian Vogue*, 2003).

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## **Biographical information**

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