Telling Stories:
Countering Narrative in Art, Theory and Film

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Edited by

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Part Three: The Cinematic Essay

PREFACE

JANE TORMEY AND GILLIAN WHITELEY

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the development of alternative forms of writing criticism and theory and in the reconfiguring of the relationship between writing and artistic practice. Such preoccupations derive perhaps from the performance of Jacques Derrida's writing and its encounters with creative themes, its challenge to the boundaries of disciplines and of the distinction between the rational and the subjective. Peggy Phelan speaks of the centrality of performance in contemporary thought[1] and uses "performative writing" to force a "different way of reading critical commentary," suggesting a different relation between the writer (performer) and the reader. She describes "performative writing" as an attempt to find a form for "what philosophy wishes all the same to say," and configures the form and manner in which something is *told* as integral to what it has to say *or* what it has to say as integral to the form which it takes.[2] This performative move could also be said to apply to forms of contemporary art practice: to what photography, film, objects wish to say.

Telling Stories: Countering Narrative in Art, Theory and Film explores these preoccupations through a series of writings and photo-essays which understand *contemporary making* and *writing practices* as multi-faceted, interdisciplinary and trans-medial. It aims to explore the performative exchange across and between verbal and experiential disciplines and to interrogate the manner, structure, assumptions and alternative conceptions of narration through theorising and practice. It sets out to consider how visual and performative encounters contribute to thinking. How might they *tell* theories?

It results directly from a series of symposia, *Telling Stories*, organised by Nelson Diplexcito, Mary O'Neill, Jane Tormey and Gillian Whiteley and held at Loughborough University School of Art and Design in February, April and September 2007. The programme, which included papers, screenings and performances, was based around the convenors' shared interests in the notion of *performative writing* and in the examination of inter-

disciplinary forms of narrative and counter-narrative. The call for papers invited writers, theorists, critics and practitioners to address and challenge the conventional expectations of meaning and objectivity emerging in current modes of both critical writing and the visual arts. This book, a collection of selected papers and presentations and commissioned essays, addresses this trend, investigating the manner of narrative/counter-narrative, authorial presence, style, language, rhetoric and the assertion of performance across a range of contemporary practice and theory. It specifically focuses on three aspects—experimental forms of *Theories and Criticism*, *Objects and Narrative* and the particular format of *The Cinematic Essay*. This edited collection is indicative of the nature of contemporary art practice and theories that set out to encounter the world, its social conditions, its global perspectives and the nature of aesthetic discussion that is no longer confined by formalism.

Trespassing disciplines and binding together practice and theory, *Telling Stories* crosses strange territories and occupies liminal spaces. It addresses a contemporary preoccupation with narrative and narration which is being played out across the arts, humanities and beyond.[3] In the context of such a vigorous debate, we hope that *Telling Stories: Countering Narrative in Art, Theory and Film* makes a useful contribution to a re-thinking, re-writing and re-telling of theories and practice.

Notes

With thanks to Sandra Leeland for all her help and support with the organisation of the symposia and final preparation of the text and index.

[1] Peggy Phelan,"Performance, Live Culture and Things of the Heart," *Journal Of Visual Culture*, Vol. 2(3) (2003): 291-302.

[2] Peggy Phelan. *Mourning Sex, Performing Public Memories* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), 11.

[3] Our own symposia at Loughborough University followed the conference *Show/Tell: Relationships between Text, Narrative and Image*, University of Hertfordshire in 2005. Indeed, since *Telling Stories*, a series of subsequent conferences have explored similar territory, including *Disrupting Narratives, A Symposium for the Electronic Media Arts*, Tate Modern, July 2007; *Telling Places: Narrative & Identity in Art & Architecture* at Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, December 2007 and *Engaging Objects*, ASCA International Workshop Amsterdam, March 2008, which forms part of a series entitled "Ways of Writing: The Object Speaks Back."

PART I

THEORIES AND CRITICISM

INTRODUCTION: THEORIES AND CRITICISM

MARY O'NEILL

> The narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks. [1]

The phrase *telling stories* is deceptively simple; it conjures up thoughts of childhood tales, fabulous beasts, magical lands and dream-like existences. It is associated with *in the beginning* and *happily ever after*. We are familiar with the structure, the beginning, middle and end in which we experience a temporal unfolding. Stories are inextricably linked to memory, which is a privileged view based on the teller's knowledge of the outcome. While this unfolding happens in one direction in time for the listener, Paul Ricoeur reminds us it happens backwards in time for the teller.[2] The *story* in fact offers the possibility of multiple time-frames and distortions as well of multiple voices and perspectives. The listener's trust in the telling of a story is that there will be a *dénouement*, where motivations will be made clear, and secrets revealed. However, the great power of stories, the endurance of the form and the compulsion to tell them suggests that telling stories is not merely an entertainment, an optional extra which we can choose to engage with or not, but a fundamental aspect of being. We tell stories to construct, maintain and repair our reality. When we were conceived, when the sperm met the egg, we were not there, but there is a second self-conception which is our own. We conceive ourselves in our minds and then through the speech-act of our stories, we are born. The telling of stories is more than an individual process, through our stories we form relationships; our family stories bind us to those with whom we have shared experiences and our collective stories become our tribal, regional or national identity. These stories are performed and performative; they do not leave us unchanged but can in fact motivate us to fight and be willing to die for an ideal or a belief.

Stories are not merely about things that have happened, but are about significant events that change us. Through our stories we demonstrate that we not only have had experiences but that those experiences have become part of our knowledge. The etymology of the term *experience* suggests that it is a form of authority based on trial, experiment and observation, which

is opposed to theory.[3] One of the overarching themes of *Theories and Criticism* is the possibility that if we combine experience, observation and the authorial presence in the form of the story-telling, we can move beyond a preconception of what constitutes theory to achieve a new form of authority.

Stories are a contract and their existence requires another, a listener, to complete the event that is telling, even if that listener is oneself or an imagined other. Derrida describes the stories told to the self as "*auto*-biographies," in his discussion of Nietzsche's declaration "I will tell myself my life story," in *Ecce Homo*.[4] The relationship between the author/teller and the listener is fundamental to the writing of Peggy Phelan who emphasises not only the relationship between narrative story-telling and performance but that this form addresses the "persistent separation between the critical imagination and creative imagination." [5] Phelan also does not shy away from the emotional communicative potential of narrative. In *Unmarked: the politics of performance*, she expresses the wish to bring to critical theory "a certain affective emotional force." [6]

My interest is in knowledge and how we communicate knowledge to others. Regardless of what the knowledge relates to—how to wire a plug, what it is to be afraid, a theoretical understanding of experience—how we communicate that knowledge to others will determine how that knowledge is received. Different relationships between knowledge and the means of its communication is demonstrated in this collection by an exemplary variety of forms, all of which reflect the complex interrelation between form and content, between teller and context, and teller and listener/reader. Knowledge, communicated in the form of a story, may appear to lack veracity because of the association with childhood story-telling. However, looking for a literal truth in a story may both miss the point and misunderstand the form. The connection between fact and fiction, and the shifting sand that is truth and lies, is explored in this section through ideas, theories and images, suggesting the possibility that stories offer a different form of truth, be it poetic, metaphoric, psychological, theoretical or critical. In recent years there has been a re-conceptualising of the function and possibility of narrative, suggesting that the underlying structures of story-telling, which is associated with invented accounts, is identified as intrinsic to recounting non-fictional information. This turn to narrative and story-telling in disciplines beyond literature is the focus of this section on *Theories and Criticism*.

Notes

[1] Walter Benjamin, In *The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Lesion* (London: Fontana, 1992), 89.
[2] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative: Volume 1* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 42-43.
[3] Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (California: University of California Press, 2005), 10.
[4] Derrida refers to Friedrich Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* (New York: Vintage Books 1969) p.221 in Derrida, J.*The Ear of the Other: Octobiography, Transference, Translation* (Nebraska: the University of Nebraska Press 1988) p.43-44.
[5] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the politics of performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 297.
[6] Ibid.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SETTING: PARADISE LOST (AND REGAINED)

JANE RENDELL

In this essay I argue that the concept of the psychoanalytic setting is indispensable for exploring the spatial and textual relationship between critic and work. This is precisely the project I have been investigating in my *Site-Writing* project which develops an understanding of art criticism's spatiality by writing essays informed by the frame and process of the psychoanalytic setting, and its combination of analytic and associative modes.[1] Here I consider the main characteristics and activities at work in the psychoanalytic setting such as association, attention, construction, conjecture, interpretation and invention as devices adopted to tell stories, and explore these through my engagement with an artwork by Rosa Nguyen entitled *Petites Terres* (2008).

Following Sigmund Freud, in psychoanalysis the main conditions of treatment include "arrangements" about time and money, as well as "certain ceremonials" governing the physical positions of analysand (lying on a couch and speaking) and analyst (sitting behind the analyst on a chair and listening).[2] Freud's "rules" for the spatial positions of the analytic setting were derived from a personal motive—he did not wish to be stared at for long periods of time, but also from a professional concern—to avoid giving the patient "material for interpretation." [3]

> I insist on this procedure, however, for its purpose and result are to prevent the transference from mingling with the patient's associations imperceptibly, to isolate the transference and to allow it to come forward in due course sharply defined as a resistance.[4]

In a discussion of Freud's method, psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott distinguishes the technique of psychoanalysis from the "setting in which this work is carried out." [5] In his view, it is the setting which allows the reproduction of the "early and earliest mothering techniques" in psychoanalysis.[6] Italian psychoanalyst Luciana Nissin Momigliano describes how Winnicott "defined the 'setting' as the sum of all the details of management that are more or less accepted by all psychoanalysts," [7] while Argentinian psychoanalyst José Bleger redefined Winnicott's term setting to include the totality of the "psychoanalytic situation." Bleger argues that the process includes what is studied, analyzed and interpreted and the non-process or frame provides a set of constants or limits to the "behaviours" that occur within it.[8]

Contemporary French psychoanalyst, André Green, who uses both Freudian and Winnicottian concepts in his work, considers how the analytic setting "corresponds precisely to Winnicott's definition of the transitional object." [9] Winnicott's idea of a transitional object, following on and developing aspects of both Freud and Melanie Klein's work, is related to, but distinct from, the external object—the mother's breast, and the internal object—the introjected breast. For Winnicott, the transitional object or the original "not-me" possession stands for the breast or first object, but the use of symbolism implies the child's ability to make a distinction between fantasy and fact, between internal and external objects.[10] This ability to keep inner and outer realities separate yet inter-related results in an intermediate area of experience, the "potential space," which Winnicott claimed is retained and later in life contributes to the intensity of cultural experiences around art and religion.[11]

According to Green, the position of the consulting room between inside and outside relates to its function as a transitional space between analyst and analysand, as does its typology as a closed space different from both inner and outer worlds. "The consulting room," he writes, "is different from the outside space, and it is different, from what we can imagine, from inner space. It has a specificity of its own."[12] Michael Parsons, in a commentary on Green's work draws attention to his understanding of the analytic setting not as a static tableau, but as a space of engagement, not as "just a representation of psychic structure," but as "an expression of it." [13] Parsons explains that for Green: "It is the way psychic structure expresses itself, and cannot express itself, through the structure of the setting, that makes the psychoanalytic situation psychoanalytic." [14] In Green's work the setting is a "homologue" for what he calls the third element in analysis, the "analytic object," which is

formed through the analytic association between analyst and analysand.[15] Green argues:

> The analytic object is neither internal (to the analysand or to the analyst), nor external (to either the one or the other), but is situated between the two. So it corresponds precisely to Winnicott's definition of the transitional object and to its location in the intermediate area of potential space, the space of 'overlap' demarcated by the analytic setting.[16]

This overlap consists of the relation between the psychic processes of transference and counter-transference, whose roles Green describes as creating an "analytic association." [17] Psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas connects the relation between transference and counter-transference in the interaction between analyst and analysand to the interplay between free association and evenly suspended attentiveness.[18] Bollas has noted that Freud's clearest account of his method, outlined in "Two Encyclopaedia Articles: A. Psycho-Analysis," [19] suggests that psychoanalysis takes place if two functions are linked—the analysand's free associations and the psychoanalyst's evenly suspended attentiveness.[20] For Freud, in including rather than excluding "intrusive ideas" and "side-issues," the process of association differs from ordinary conversation.[21] Bollas defines free association as that which occurs when we think by not concentrating on anything in particular, and where the ideas that emerge which seem to the conscious mind to be disconnected, but are instead related by a hidden and unconscious logic.[22] He explains that evenly suspended attentiveness can only be achieved when the analyst also surrenders to his own unconscious mental activity; and does not reflect on material, consciously construct ideas or actively remember.[23]

In his later writings Freud went on to distinguish between construction and interpretation as different forms of analytic technique:

> "Interpretation" applies to something that one does to some single element of the material, such as an association or a parapraxis. But it is a "construction" when one lays before the subject of the analysis a piece of his early history that he has forgotten … [24]

Green also proposes the term "conjectural interpretation" to define the constructive mode of analytic interpretation.[25] And psychoanalyst Ignes Sodré, in a conversation with writer A.S. Byatt, asserts that in "offering the patient different versions of himself" the analyst operates as a story-teller suggesting an inventive aspect of interpretation.[26]

As both the site framing the encounter between analyst and analysand, and created through the technical procedures of transference and counter-transference, the setting is clearly a space of engagement both emotional and intellectual, which involves the psychic processes such as attention and association, interpretation and construction, active in criticism as well as psychoanalysis. While the frame, or the non-process based aspect of the setting, brings into play the material sites in which the critic encounters the work, the mental interactions which reverberate between analyst and analysand influence the production of different ways of writing the interaction between critic and work.

Literary critic Mary Jacobus has described "the scene of reading" in terms of the relation, perhaps a correspondence, which exists between the inner world of the reader and the world contained in the book.[27] Taking up this insightful observation I suggest that criticism involves a movement between inside and outside: works take critics outside themselves offering new geographies, new possibilities, but they can also return the critics to their own interior, to their own biographies. This double movement suspends what we might call judgement or discrimination in criticism, and instead constructs a series of interlocking sites—settings if you like—between critic and work.

Paradise Lost (and Regained)[28]

Out of my front door, along the access corridor, past the cawing of dishevelled rooks on the mobile phone masts. Next the piss-drenched lift, then the snarling streets of London, trying to ignore the clogged drains, the overflowing rubbish bags, the pavements dotted with cigarette butts and chewing gum, the incessant scream of power saws slicing up tarmac, anxiously avoiding the aggression-fuelled vehicles—vans, buses, taxis. Then the unnatural crushed silence of the tube, until finally I reach the Euro-cool oasis of St Pancras Station. I slip thankfully into my seat, the Eurostar takes me to Paris, the TGV to Toulouse, and then on to Boussens. Finally my clattering thoughts begin to recede, and I am able to actually "see" the landscape, as it shifts from forested slope into pastures, and meadows lush with springs. My heartbeat slows, my mind stretches and thoughts float into inter-connected patterns.

Between two grand but slightly rusty iron gates, across a lush grass courtyard and around its majestic cedar tree, I enter the pale stone loggia fronting the building and leading to the central stairwell, lit from a window

high above. Elegant steps wind up to the first floor, presenting a view back down to the original source. The scene below is of a checkerboard inlaid with circles: bright green tufts in dark brown soil ringed with blue enamel are laid on marble squares of black and white. This enhanced pattern is made of lids from antique nineteenth-century jars. The usual function of a lid is to hold tight the contents of a container, to prevent their escape or the ingress of other unwanted conditions or particles. Yet these lids have been over-turned and used as the basis for growing. In their interiors a series of gardens have been planted. The new grass seed springs lithely up towards the light defying the earthbound logic of the lid to hold things down in the dark—goose fat, ashes, even seeds.

Beyond the stairwell three rooms with identical windows overlook the entrance. In one a landscape of plates float off the floor. Glazed white with petalled edges, each one contains a small garden. The gardens refer to one another; they are variations on a theme combining earth and gravel, two materials from the site, variously planted with a range of seeds—grass, radish, and lettuce. The plates have been made in traditional moulds from the ground on which the building stands. The live earth is burnt, transforming nature into culture; the firing kills one life but engenders another. Here the plates, which usually contain food—vegetables and animals—cut from the soil and culled from the land, are returned to nature, and become life givers, coming alive as a seedbed for plants. The floating position of the plates between ground and table reflects the setting these miniature gardens offer: between nature and culture, life and death, freedom and containment.

The three rooms along the building's front are flanked by two larger exhibition spaces. The one to the right displays its wares on the floor, an arrangement of various plates, bowls, jugs, and fragments of vessels, sorted according to colour, bringing to mind Tony Cragg's *Spectrum* (1983), which ordered found items by their colour on the gallery floor, and Richard Wentworth's *Spread* (1997), a collection of ceramic plates laid out in a circle. Delicately balanced on the ceramicware are tiny vessels, glazed in the region's traditional blue, each one nurturing a new sprouting seedling, re-awakening the frame of this still-life.

On the wall of the exhibition space to the left, a tile collection, comprising traditional patterns from the region, is arranged in a grid. They remind me of the work of Adriana Varejão, the Brazilian artist who paints tiled interiors associated with various psychic states—phobias and

anxieties—in works such as *O Obsceno* (2004) or *O Obsessivo* (2004), as well as *Azulejaria Verde em Carne Viva* (2000) and *Parede con Incisao a la Fontana 3* (2002), where the tiled exteriors of ceramic structures are threatened by the bursting out of fleshy life-forms held captive by the rigid rectilinear geometry.

The pattern of evenly spaced squares can also be associated with the layout of cultivated nature: fields separated by hedgerows, the distinct but fine lines between paddy fields, vegetable gardens with their evenly spaced rows of onions, carrots, and lettuces dissected by troughs. Although there are precedents—the kitchen, cottage, medieval herb and walled garden—we are less acquainted today with considering the working garden and the growing of food as an aesthetic location and meditative act.

The representation of nature in gardens is traditionally associated with paradise, with the absence of labour. Paradise gardens have a spiritual rather than a pragmatic function—they are places removed from the everyday—sanctuaries often used for reflection. While the Japanese dry garden forms a symbolic analogue to nature, the rugs of the middle-east follow the sanctity of water in dry lands and depict walled gardens with dancing fountains at their centre, exemplified in the design of religious architectural complexes, such as those built in Seville, Granada and Córdoba. In the west we have tended to separate the productive use of irrigated land for farming and agriculture, from the contemplation of nature in its various romantic forms, the untamed sublime of the wild and its domesticated and more comforting picturesque equivalent.

The sealed and self-contained world of the garden is a particular kind of setting one which could be described as a "heterotopia"—a place with a different ordering system.[29] Unlike paradise, the "no place" of the perfect world depicted by utopia, the unique logic of the garden also has a material physical location. The tiny and perfect verdant worlds contained in the lids and plates invite us to imagine new ways of life.

Petites Terres (2008) is a new installation by ceramic artist Rosa Nguyen where domestic ceramic-ware—pots and plates—finds new life through its support and containment of vegetal growth. The site-specific work is set within in a gracious nineteenth-century thermal spa building, built in 1857-1858 at Barthete on the river Louge in the foothills of Pyrenées. It is situated at a hot spring, whose waters, like those of the other such establishments in the area, have been enjoyed for health treatments

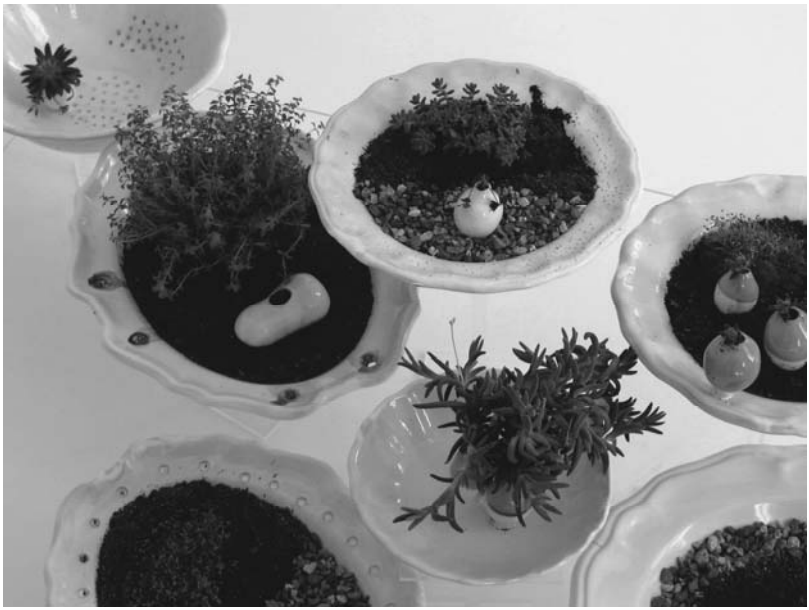
from the Roman period onwards. The baths closed in 1926, and were used as a summer camp until the 1980s, after which Barthete laid empty for a number of years, part of pattern of decline in the popularity of spas across the region. It has been brought "back to life" by a museum, which houses a collection of 1500 pieces of pottery from the immediate vicinity, from France, as well as further afield: Algeria, Germany, Italy, Morocco, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Tunisia.[30]

Rosa Nguyen, *Petites Terres* (2008)

The museum project is the creation of its two curators, Claude Lege, an artist from the Ariege, and Suzanne Danis Lege, an art historian originally from Canada. Their collection of earthenware reminds us of the close association between agriculture and pottery in the ancient Comminges region. This area has a long history in the craft production of ceramics. The process used clay and limestone mined in the area, metal for the tin oxide glazes—blue, green, yellow, red, and violet, even the kilns were fired by wood from the surrounding forests.[31] The early production of *faience* ceramics in this area was an interconnected enterprise in close harmony with its context. However, with the changes brought by industrialization across Europe, came the pressure to transform to practices

that were more polluting and drew on the unsustainable use of resources. Although this situation may not have been perceived as problematic at the time, current knowledge shifts perspective.

Today we face different problems. The beautiful hills, streams and forests of this region seem, for a visitor, like a pristine natural paradise. Yet this is a working landscape, much of the land is needed for farming, and with the impending global food crisis no doubt this will increasingly be the case. Maize is grown for human consumption, but also for animal feed, plastic bags, and more recently "biofuel." The frequent reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides draws life out of the earth but also discharges poison into rivers. The increasing use of water for domestic, industrial and agricultural purposes in Southern Europe, combined with the lack of rain and snow caused by climate change, have resulted in the damaging of aquifers and the drying-up of natural springs. With a future of drought predicted, it may be that spas will be rejuvenated. Public bathing may come back to life, and for functional uses—washing clothes and bodies—not just for leisure.



Rosa Nguyen, *Petites Terres* (2008)

Petites Terres draws together opposite principles, not in order to cancel out their meaning, but to entice one entity with the transformational potential held by its reverse, life out of death. This theme is strong in Nguyen's previous works, where she has brought live and vibrant natural elements into close proximity with the burnt earth of ceramic forms. A residency in Japan stimulated an interest in Ikebana, the art of flower arrangement, which, based on schematic principles connected with life forces, has developed out of the Buddhist practice of offering flowers to the dead. In Ikebana the potential offered by the container forms a key element in the composition. Here at Barthete, Nguyen's hybridized artefacts, ceramic containers brought to life by sprouting seeds, fed by spring water, respond to the attitude and methods of display that govern the curation of the collection. This museological code works against convention preferring to organise according to a desire to combine whole forms and fragments, and consider the sensual appeal offered by visual taxonomies of colour and pattern rather than the more usual regime of geographical origin, date or style.

The *nature morte* of the display ceramic is reactivated by its new use, while the motifs of artificial nature in the decorative patterns of the tiles and plates are reanimated with the fronds of living matter. In such a force field, *Petites Terres* makes adjustments to our understanding of the delicate balance between nature and culture, life and death. The paradise we believe we have lost is based on a state of not knowing. Once knowledge is gained, paradise as the bliss of ignorance really has gone.

Petites Terres could be understood in a number of ways, but for me these miniature perfect worlds are not simply vegetal scenes presented for our delectation, in which we can safely contemplate paradise lost. Rather they draw attention to the incompatible co-existence of what they contain—seemingly perfectly-balanced microcosms fed by spring water, and what contains them—the parched and polluted imperfection of the world. To consider *Petites Terres* as a setting where inner imagined and outer reality exist in tension, in a state of unresolved overlap, is to acknowledge that the difficult task of recognizing the loss of paradise is accompanied by the desire to escape that recognition and instead to dream of that which has been lost.

Notes

[1] See Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism* (London: IB Tauris, forthcoming 2009). See also Jane Rendell, "Architecture-Writing," in *Critical Architecture*, ed. Jane Rendell special issue of the *Journal of Architecture*, 10, 3 (June 2005): 255–264 and Jane Rendell, "Site-Writing: Enigma and Embellishment," in *Critical Architecture* ed. Jane Rendell, Jonathan Hill, Murray Fraser and Mark Dorrian (London: Routledge, 2007), 150-162.

[2] Sigmund Freud, "On Beginning the Treatment (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis I)" [1913] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII (1911-1913): The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1958), 121-144, 126 and 133. For a detailed description of Freud's consulting room, see Diana Fuss and Joel Sanders, 'Berggasse 19: Inside Freud's Office', in *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity* ed. Joel Sanders, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 112–139. For an extended discussion of the frame or scene of psychoanalysis in relation to contemporary art practice, see Mignon Nixon, "On the Couch," *October* 113 (Summer 2005): 39-76.

[3] Freud, "On Beginning the Treatment," 134.

[4] Freud, "On Beginning the Treatment," 126.

[5] D. W. Winnicott, "Metapsychological and Clinical Aspects of Regression Within the Psycho–Analytic Set-Up," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 36 (1955): 16-26, 20.

[6] Winnicott, "Metapsychological and Clinical Aspects of Regression," 21.

[7] Luciana Nissin Momigliano, "The Analytic Setting: A Theme with Variations," in *Continuity and Change in Psychoanalysis: Letters from Milan* (London and New York: Karnac Books, 1992), 33-61, 33-34.

[8] José Bleger, "Psycho-Analysis of the Pscho-Analytic Frame," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 48 (1967): 511-519, 518.

[9] André Green, "Potential Space in Psychoanalysis: The Object in the Setting," in *Between Reality and Fantasy:Transitional Objects and Phenomena* ed. Simon A. Grolnick and Leonard Barkin (New York and London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1978), 169-189, 180.

[10] D. W. Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena —A Study of the First Not-Me Possession," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 34 (1953): 89–97, see in particular 89 and 94. See also D. W. Winnicott, "The Use of an Object," *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 50 (1969): 711-716.

[11] Winnicott discussed cultural experience as located in the "potential space" between "the individual and the environment (originally the object)." In Winnicott's terms, for the baby this is the place between the "subjective object and the object objectively perceived." See D. W. Winnicott, "The Location of Cultural

Experience," *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 48 (1967): 368-372, 371. See also D. W. *Winnicott: Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1991).
[12] André Green and Gregorio Kohon, "Dialogues with André Green," in *The Dead Mother: The Work of André Green*, ed. Gregorio Kohon, (Routledge, London, published in association with the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1999), 10-58, 29.
[13] Michael Parsons, "Psychic Reality, Negation, and the Analytic Setting," in *The Dead Mother*, ed. Kohon, 59-75, 74.
[14] Parsons, "Psychic Reality," 74.
[15] André Green, "The Analyst, Symbolization and Absence in the Analytic Setting (On Changes in Analytic Practice and Analytic Experience) – In Memory of D. W. Winnicott," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 56 (1975): 1-22, 12.
[16] Green, "Potential Space in Psychoanalysis," 180.
[17] André Green, "Surface Analysis, Deep Analysis," *International Review of Psycho-Analysis* 1 (1974): 415-423, 418.
[18] Christopher Bollas, "Freudian Intersubjectivity: Commentary on Paper by Julie Gerhardt and Annie Sweetnam," *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 11 (2001): 93-105, 98.
[19] See Sigmund Freud, "Two Encyclopedia Articles: (A) Psycho-Analysis" [1923] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII (1920–1922): Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), 235-254.
[20] Bollas, "Freudian Intersubjectivity," 93.
[21] Freud, "On Beginning the Treatment," 134-135.
[22] Christopher Bollas, *Free Association* (Duxford, Cambridge: Icon Books Ltd., 2002), 4-7.
[23] Bollas, *Free Association*, 12.
[24] Sigmund Freud, "Constructions in Analysis" [1937] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXIII (1937-1939): Moses and Monotheism, An Outline of Psycho-Analysis and Other Works*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1963), 255-270, 261.
[25] André Green, "The Double and the Absent" [1973] in *Psychoanalysis, Creativity, and Literature: A French-American Inquiry* ed. Alan Roland, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 271-292, 272-273, 274.
[26] Rebeccca Swift, ed., *A. S. Byatt and Ignes Sodré: Imagining Characters: Six Conversations about Women Writers* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995), 245.
[27] Mary Jacobus, *Psychoanalysis and the Scene of Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 18.
[28] John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is an epic poem in blank verse. It was originally published in 1667 in ten books and concerns the Judeo-Christian story of the Fall of Man: the temptation of Adam and Eve by Satan and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Later in life, in 1671, Milton wrote the much shorter *Paradise Regained*, charting the temptation of Christ by Satan, and the return of the possibility of paradise.

[29] See Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," in *Rethinking Architecture* ed. Neil Leach, (London: Routledge, 1996), 348-367. Even for Foucault who coined the phrase, it is not clear whether the different orders expressed by his examples of heterotopias, from floating brothels to prisons, are to be held up as shining ideals to aspire to, or as options to avoid.

[30] For more information about Barthete see http://www.barthete.com/thermes.php (accessed 10 April 2008).

[31] For a discussion of the history of ceramics in this region see for example Penny Collet, "Faiences Françaises and Martres Tolosane," *Craft Culture*. See http://www.craftculture.org/World/pcollette1.htm (accessed 10 April 2008).

CHAPTER TWO

NOT YET THERE: ENDLESS SEARCHES AND IRRESOLVABLE QUESTS

EMMA COCKER

> An artist might advance specifically to get lost, and to intoxicate himself in dizzying syntaxes, seeking odd intersections of meaning, strange corridors of history, unexpected echoes, unknown humors, or voids of knowledge … but this quest is risky, full of bottomless fictions and endless architectures and counter-architectures … at the end, if there is an end, are perhaps only meaningless reverberations.[1]

The list unfolds like chapters or episodes from a Paul Auster novel: the blind following of another's footfall, the retracing of an already failed endeavour, journeys with guidebooks whose content is obsolete, global expeditions at the request of tree fanatics, a tragic sea voyage in search of the miraculous, the hunt for angels.[2] Looking towards examples within artistic practice, I am interested in how the notion of an irresolvable quest might be reclaimed from the vaults of Romanticism and redeployed as a strategic research methodology or framework for critical enquiry. As a model of practice the irresolvable quest can be understood as a particular process-based or performance strategy at the heart of a piece of work where the process itself is valued above the object of its endeavour. This could involve the artist undertaking a journey or task in pursuit of an outcome that could seem to be improbable, ambiguous or arbitrary, or alternatively they might appear locked into a form of quest or task that remains endless, is wilfully thwarted or somehow strategically fails. Whilst the method of a traditional quest narrative might be adopted, the notion of the *telos* is often rejected or sabotaged in favour of a redeemed or strategic form of anti-climax or deferral where the indeterminate or latent potential of being *not-yet-there* is privileged above the finality of closure.

Working against the dominant teleological grain of Western epistemology, the paradigm of an endless or impossible quest can be framed as a critical and conceptual approach for exploring meaningful non-productivity or irresolution, where it functions as a device for creating desirable states of aporia and conjecture. Performed according to an ephemeral, unfolding logic, it is a model of enquiry whose findings emerge through constant (r)evolution, where observations remain in transitional flux or interminable disarray. The search will always remain pleasurably unfulfilled and unrewarded, or return only with the most peripheral or unforeseen discoveries. The irresolvable quest enables a framework for tangential and transitory practices of meaning making. It offers a way of encountering and understanding the world and our place within it, that retains rather than eradicates the potential for uncertainty and disorientation, and that emphasises rather than disables the interplay between facts and fictions or between reality and the imagination. Using the practice of artists Heather and Ivan Morison as a point of reference, the intent is to explore the critical potential of the irresolvable quest as a form of non-rationalist knowledge construction and meaning making where irresolution and contingency, subjectivity and transitivity, partial truths and telling stories are redeemed alongside more empiricist methods of exploration.

The notion of an irresolvable quest is central to the work of Heather and Ivan Morison where their staging of grand, episodic adventures or global expeditions appears to produce outcomes that are slight or dematerialised, idiosyncratic or obscure, or else highly personal or anecdotal. In 2003, for example, they proposed to undertake a year long period of research, which would take the form of an irredeemably impossible *Global Survey* across the Baltic States, Russia, Western Siberia, Mongolia, China and New Zealand, where akin to "a pioneering exploration there (was) no end destination, only points to navigate by." [3] Chance encounter and opportunity were adopted as the critical decision making processes, whilst random meetings and conversational exchanges plotted the route taken or determined the direction for each episode of the adventure. The actual motivation for the journeys themselves often remained undeclared or arbitrary, or alternatively seemed nonsensical or absurd, or even poetic or purposeless. At times the object of their search functioned akin to Hitchcock's *Macguffin*, where it became a tactic for creating points of arbitrary focus from which to explore resultant peripheries or tangential narratives. It operated as a ruse or foil through which to undertake an alternative trajectory of enquiry.[4]

Recalling a folkloric order or logic, the artists' quests often appear marked by a particular task, challenge or performed ritual. At times, their journey was motivated by the process of fervent searching for, or collection of rare objects or sounds, whilst on other occasions they followed directions obtained from some strange or eccentric conversation

Fig. 1. Heather and Ivan Morison, *As his spaceship* Divine Vessel *enters orbit, Chinese astronaut Yang Lewei gazes down at earth*, image from *Chinese Arboretum*, 100 images of Chinese trees for billboards, 2003/2004. Courtesy of the artists and Danielle Arnaud Gallery

with a stranger met along the way. In the *Still Life* series of radio broadcasts for Resonance 104.4 fm, Heather and Ivan Morison presented recorded conversations from their various meetings and encounters, which included their discussions with an astronomer and an ornithologist *(Still*

Life #1), a collection of sounds gathered during a long, slow journey across various continents *(Still Life #4)* and an audio recording beginning with the sounds of a house band aboard a ferry crossing the Baltic Sea and ending in a Lithuanian flower shop *(Still Life #5).* In *Divine Vessel* they attempted to write a science fiction novel based upon the onboard events witnessed during the isolation of a one-month sea voyage from Shanghai, China to Auckland, New Zealand. In *Chinese Arboretum* they followed the guidance of tree fanatics as they searched for rare trees, at times travelling thousands of miles across China to record a single specimen. Resulting in over one hundred photographs of trees, the titling of each image locates the geographical position of each discovery, but also makes reference to the highly personal dramas or daily events of individuals living nearby.

Operating in a realm that is neither wholly fact nor fiction, these various projects are characterised by a form of reportage or storytelling. LED announcements broadcast the artists' oblique messages from remote locations, whilst local radio stations transmit their intermittent conversations from distant lands. Newspaper insertions offer small glimpses from the poles of both humour and horror, by presenting fragmented narrative revelations of both prosaic and poetic proportion. A thousand limited edition mailed cards recount the artists' anguish at the demise of the Siberian larches, whilst from Beijing the same neatly typed signature informs selected postal recipients that, "Heather Morison is haunted by the horrific death of her two beautiful Java Sparrows …. Ivan is not so upset." [5] In other work, publicly sited billboards present their reportage through more democratic though no less ephemeral offerings.

These brief, curious forms of correspondence serve to reassert the experiential and negotiated lived space of the artists' travels. Heather and Ivan Morison recuperate the notion of a subjective itinerary or tour. They return value to the lost narrative that has arguably been eclipsed by the dominance of the objective or panoptic map.[6] Rather than trying to present a substitute for the actual experience of their journeys, their documentary residue offers only random, fractured clues or evidence from which an audience must draw their own individual conclusions. They issue a form of makeshift narrative emerging at the interstice between fictional, autobiographical and documentary perspectives. For theorist Michel de Certeau such "stories about places" are always provisional and incomplete, where they operate within what he describes as an "order (that) is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning: it is a sieve-order." [7]