

Begin Again ... Closer ... in NYL

Planes and Paradoxes of Here and There, and Other Writing, Walking and Water Spacings by Renée Green

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1 Renée Green, *Other Planes of There: Selected Writings*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina and London, 2014, p 423, p 426

2 *Tracing Lusitania*, as 'ongoing floating proposition', is made up of many components not necessarily shown simultaneously, *ibid*, p 317. It has been exhibited in the Johannesburg Biennale in 1997 and in Green's shows 'Between and Including' in Vienna in 1999, 'Returns: Tracing Lusitania' in Lisbon in 2000, and 'Endless Dreams and Time-Based Streams' in San Francisco in 2010, *ibid*, p 319. See also Nicole Schweizer, ed, *Renée Green. Ongoing Becomings. Retrospective 1989–2009*, JRP Ringier and Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Zurich and Lausanne, 2009, p 58, pp 120–121.

3 Renée Green, ed, *Negotiations in the Contact Zone/Negociações na Zona de Contacto*,

To trace, to touch. A finger moving over a page, following contours, locating place names, pointing out words, underlining them in pencil, testing their sound with a voice. Returning again and again to the books and to places, to find something previously missed. Something that has a different meaning after different encounters, different inhabitations, and different journeys over the passage of time... Until we meet again.

Renée Green, *Come Closer*, 2008¹

Renée Green has been engaging with the city of Lisbon since *Tracing Lusitania* (1992).² As part of this project, she organised the symposium 'Negotiations in the Contact Zone' at the Drawing Center in New York City (NYC) in 1994, which culminated in a homonymous bilingual publication nine years later, upon Green's return to exhibiting in Lisbon in 2000.³ *Returns: Tracing Lusitania* (2000), involved further investigations into the complex entanglements between the imperial past and the diasporic present of contemporary Portugal, and the colonial, anti- and postcolonial histories of migration and contact within and beyond 'Lusophone' geographies.⁴ Back in 1992, at the time of the celebrations around the figure of Columbus and debates on identity politics and multiculturalism, Green's project intended to 'complicate the terms of some of these debates' by thinking across geographies, histories, theories and practices.⁵ The aim was to 'trace the magnitude of Portugal's past as a seafaring power', which included a trip by boat to Ceuta, Portugal's first conquest in the African continent in 1415, in present-day Morocco.⁶ Such purpose was to be undertaken by means of observations of 'the traces of this past in contemporary Portugal', ranging from 'architectural and cultural artifacts to the current heterogeneous population', in



'Spacing', Lumiar Cité, Lisbon, 2016, installation view, courtesy of the artist and Lumiar Cité, photo: DMF

Assírio & Alvim, Lisbon, 2003. The notion of the 'contact zone' is taken up from Mary Louise Pratt's work (see Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Routledge, London, 1992). *Returns: Tracing Lusitania*, 2000, was exhibited between December 2000 and February 2001 at the Centro Cultural de Belém Project Room in Lisbon.

4 In 2004 Green had the solo exhibition 'Elsewhere? Here' at Galeria Filomena Soares in Lisbon, and in 2008 she exhibited *Come*

the understanding that 'an examination of the past enables us to grapple with the complexity of the present'.⁷ This was a particularly urgent task, then as much as now, 'as borders change', 'the effects of diasporic movements are unavoidable', and the so-called Age of Discoveries continues, in 2016, 'to provide a recurring, near-mythic source for Portugal's formulation of a national identity'.⁸ Despite the increasing number of researchers, writers, artists and film-makers contributing to these debates, the urgency of a politics, ethics and aesthetics of history and memory relevant to thinking critically about the colonial amnesias and imperial nostalgias that pervade Portugal's contemporary postcolonial condition, resulting in neocolonial patterns of globalisation and uneasy relationships with diasporic and migrant communities, remains valid today. Green was also prescient with regard to the potential of cultural and artistic intervention when she decided to focus, for her own project, on the cultural realm, its artefacts and their contexts – interwoven as they are with the political, the social, the economic, the gendered, the racial – in view of the possi-

Closer (Lagos Version), (2008), *Here Until October 2004*, (2004), and *Elsewhere?* (2002), in the group show 'Mundos Locais/Local Worlds' at the Centro Cultural de Lagos, Portugal (13 June–7 September 2008). See Lúcia Marques and Paula Roush, eds, *Mundos Locais: Espaços, Visibilidades e Fluxos Transculturais/Local Worlds: Spaces, Visibilities and Transcultural Flows*, exhibition catalogue, Centro Cultural de Lagos, Lagos, 2008, pp 38–41.

5 Green, *Negotiations in the Contact Zone*, op cit, p 25

6 Ibid

7 Ibid

8 Ibid

9 See the film's inter-titles.

10 Ibid

11 James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1997

12 See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Verso, London, 1993; Paul Gilroy, *Darker than Blue: On the Moral Economics of Black Atlantic Culture*, The W E B Du Bois Lectures, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 2010. On the Lusophone Black Atlantic, see Miguel Vale de Almeida, *An Earth-Colored Sea: 'Race', Culture, and the Politics of Identity in the Post-Colonial Portuguese-Speaking World*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, 2004; Nancy Priscilla Naro, Roger Sansi-Roca, David H Treece, eds, *Cultures of the Lusophone Black Atlantic*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2007.

bility of detecting 'the intricate workings of certain ideologies' and to raise questions without falling into didacticism. In fact, apart from certain literature, history and social sciences departments in academia, some of the most interesting contributions to these debates in Portugal have come from literature, cinema, and, slightly later, the visual arts. But at the time Green embarked on her journey to Portugal, the silence, for the most part, was still deafening.

In late January 2016, Green returned yet again to Lisbon for her third solo exhibition – 'Spacing' at Lumiar Cité (30 January–20 March), curated by Jürgen Bock – which included the premiere of *Walking in NYL* (2016), her latest film made in and about the city. Let us not forget *Walking in Lisbon* (1992), *Walking in Lisbon (Slow Motion)* (1992), *Slow Walking in Lisbon* (1995) and *Walking in Lisbon* (2000), depicting Lisbon's urban space through the artist's wanderings, were already made visible in the multiple trajectories of *Tracing Lusitania* and *Returns*, fragments of which also re-emerge in *Come Closer* (2008). Borrowing from the title of the latter and of another video work on view in 'Spacing' – *Begin Again, Begin Again* (2015) – one could say Green *began again*, but *closer*, after so many different encounters over the years with Lisbon and its inhabitants, its multi-layered histories and spaces.

Significantly, in *Walking in NYL*, beginning again, closer, meant arriving at NYL from another NY – NYC, more specifically the island of Manhattan, not identified as such but recognisable, and signalling the artist's North American location, a biographical point of departure, a possible home. That is, besides the beginning again, closer, at arrival, as yet another return to Lisbon, there is also a more literal beginning again, closer, at departure, as the beginning of the journey from home. But what is literal about beginning or home? Beginning, home, a sense of national and/or cultural origin emerge in the guise of a never fully identified location, with which NYL, also never explicitly identified, becomes inextricably, if always subjectively, linked. In fact, to be more precise, in *Walking in NYL* there is no such thing as an actual, explicit moment of departure from New York to Lisbon. At the beginning of the film, images of 'a city by the water' – 'Call it NYL' – transport the viewer from one location to the other without warning, whereby New York and Lisbon merge into this somewhat fictional, affective, 'continuous city' – and acronym – by the water, made up of moving images of, and the artist's movements between, the two.⁹ Although the viewer is permitted the recognition of change in urban setting, which contributes to emphasising the particularities of Lisbon's space (after this initial transition, New York never returns to the screen), this connection of both cities through film, language, water, and the artist's own moving and walking subjectivity – in this city 'movement happened' – necessarily disturbs any possibility of fixed origins, stable identities, or fetishistic identifications with the space of the city and its inhabitants.¹⁰ What becomes constitutive of subjectivities and spaces is the contingency of the *route* rather than any essentialist sense of *root*, as James Clifford famously argued.¹¹ *Walking in NYL* tells elusively but decisively many stories of past and present, individual and collective (including voluntary and involuntary), material and immaterial crossings – notably oceanic and Atlantic.¹²

The spaces traversed by the artist are many but the eastern part of town stands out, notably the *Bairro das Colónias* (the Colonies

- 13 The Carnation Revolution was a coup d'état undertaken by officers of the Portuguese Armed Forces. Since 1961 and under the aegis of the *Estado Novo* dictatorial regime, they had been fighting in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau to maintain these African territories as Portuguese colonies, which,

Neighbourhood), thus named before the Carnation Revolution on 25 April 1974, with its street names (*Angola, Moçambique, Guiné, Timor, Macau*, etc), unaltered thereafter, reflecting Portugal's colonial and post-colonial histories.¹³ The eastern part of town has traditionally welcomed poorer and diasporic populations but has become gentrified in the last decades, in a process that continues to extend eastwards.¹⁴ The artist walks across several of these areas, impoverished post-industrial neighbourhoods near the riverside area of Lisbon's port and *Santa Apolónia* train station, directing her gaze towards graffitied walls, façades, windows and sidewalks. Some such scribbles inscribed on the city's decayed stone surfaces, text and images woven by its inhabitants over



Walking in NYL, 2016, film still, courtesy of the artist and Free Agent Media

at the time, were called 'overseas provinces' by the regime. Prompted by the 'colonial war' – called the 'war of national liberation' by the liberation movements in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau – the coup put an end to forty years of Estado Novo's fascist and colonialist rule in Portugal and was immediately embraced by the population.

- 14 Many diasporic communities from the former colonies and their descendants inhabit peripheral neighbourhoods outside of Lisbon. Some eastern and northern parts of town have also been inhabited by former settlers, after having to suddenly leave the former colonies upon their independence.

15 See the film's inter-titles.

16 Ibid

- 17 The Tropical Botanical Gardens (*Jardim Botânico Tropical*) were created in 1906 as the Colonial Gardens (*Jardim Colonial*), having been renamed as Overseas Gardens (*Jardim do Ultramar*) in 1951. This name change was one of the many introduced by the Estado Novo after World War II, when it tried to hold on to its colonial possessions by resorting to the idea of a 'pluricontinental nation' – the colonies were named overseas provinces at the time – rather than that of a colonial empire. The gardens were formally named Tropical Gardens only in 1983.

the years, become fragmentary traces of the country's histories of revolution and decolonisation in the 1970s, post-revolution and shift towards the EU in the 1980s, and gentrification, crisis and austerity from the 2000s – or unfulfilled 'April dreams'.

The camera lingers as it moves: from the indoor space inhabited by the artist, through its windows, towards the outside; horizontally along walls and vertically across façades; zooming in and out on details and vistas; and capturing the sounds of the city. 'Still walking' and 'studying by feeling' emerge on the screen in between images of the *Estufa Fria* (Cold Greenhouse) gardens in central Lisbon.¹⁵ Again, never identified as such but recognisable, the gardens unfold as a space 'beyond place' and 'beyond name' for 'what grows beyond containment' 'in a city by the water'.¹⁶ They appear as a non-locatable, anonymous, green landscape amidst the urban ocean, where life thrives and is continuously growing, as well as rest, contemplation and imagination. We know, however, that the threads with which gardens (and islands) are woven, whether real or imaginary, are more intricate than this. And Green has been devoting many of her investigations precisely to the task of unravelling the hidden ideologies sustaining apparently neutral, natural and contemplative spaces, while signalling the political significance of an aesthetics of utopia and dream opened up by landscape and nature. Botanical gardens in particular possess a long history of appropriation, classification and exhibition of specimens from territories under colonial domination for metropolitan knowledge and pleasure (not to mention the European expositions where human types were part of the display). Although one can indeed find botanical specimens from all over the world at the *Estufa Fria* gardens, including tropical and equatorial at their *Estufa Quente* (Hot Greenhouse) section, their history is not weighted by the colonial past like that of Lisbon's Tropical Botanical Gardens filmed by Green in *Elsewhere?* (2002).¹⁷ The latter are haunted by the colonial impulse to reproduce the empire in both vegetation and decoration, with their African busts and Chinese pavilion. Despite their differences, Green's walking gaze through the former gardens reveals that they are no less marked by structures of containment than the stone city. In gardens as much as cities, however, such structures always prove themselves ultimately unsuccessful in fully containing dynamics of resistance, erupting as infiltration, occupation or appropriation, even if temporary. Upon leaving the gardens, Green continues walking and studying by feeling the subtle, ephemeral, but resolute occupation of the city's walls and façades by all sorts of vegetation. After all, this is a continuous city; a multi-layered, uncontainable, historical and imagined, living and lived space.

Without being a retrospective exhibition in any immediate sense, 'Spacing' allowed for multiple and intimate connections between Green's past and present work to surface on its innumerable screens. Besides the premiering *Walking in NYL* on a monitor screen to the right, central to the exhibition, and centrally placed, was the recent *Begin Again, Begin Again* (2015), with its soundtrack enmeshing with the images of the three surrounding headphoned monitor screens. It was faced by *Climates and Paradoxes* (2005), while a third monitor to the left screened *Come Closer* (2008), *Excess* (2009) and *Endless*



Walking in NYL, 2016, film still, courtesy of the artist and Free Agent Media

Dreams and Water Between (2009). Then 'screens' appeared also in the form of hanging banners: the larger *Relations, Brasil + (a)* and *Brasil + (b)* (2009), and the twenty-eight smaller, double-sided banners of *Space Poem #5 (Years and Afters)* (2015). These were accompanied by the horizontal 'screens' of letterpress and digital prints, placed in vitrines.

Come Closer (2008) involves a personal retracing of Green's previous engagements with the history of Portuguese colonialism and ensuing migratory entanglements within Lusophone geographies in *Tracing Lusitania* and *Returns*. It may also be seen as a prelude to the larger endeavour 'about ceaseless desires and attempts to fulfil these ... and the diverse impetuses leading to the traversal of water and what is or isn't found'

18 Green, *Other Planes of There*, op cit, p 419

19 Cabral was assassinated in January 1973 and the independence of Guinea-Bissau unilaterally declared by the PAIGC (*Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde*) in September 1973. Among the five African nations achieving independence at the end of the Portuguese empire in 1974 – Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, and São Tomé e Príncipe – the Guinean independence was the first to be recognised by Portugal after the Carnation Revolution in September 1974. On Cabral's theories, see Amílcar Cabral, *Obras Escolhidas de Amílcar Cabral: A Arma da Teoria: Unidade e Luta, Volume I*, Mário de Andrade, org, Seara Nova, Lisbon, 1976.

20 Green, *Other Planes of There*, op cit, p 423

21 Ibid, p 420

22 *Endless Dreams and Water Between* was commissioned for Green's first UK solo exhibition, 'Renée Green: Endless Dreams and Water Between', curated by Lisa Le Feuvre at the National Maritime Museum, London, in 2009. See Green et al, *Renée Green: Endless Dreams and Time-Based Streams*, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, 2010.

23 Green, *Other Planes of There*, op cit, p 428, emphasis added

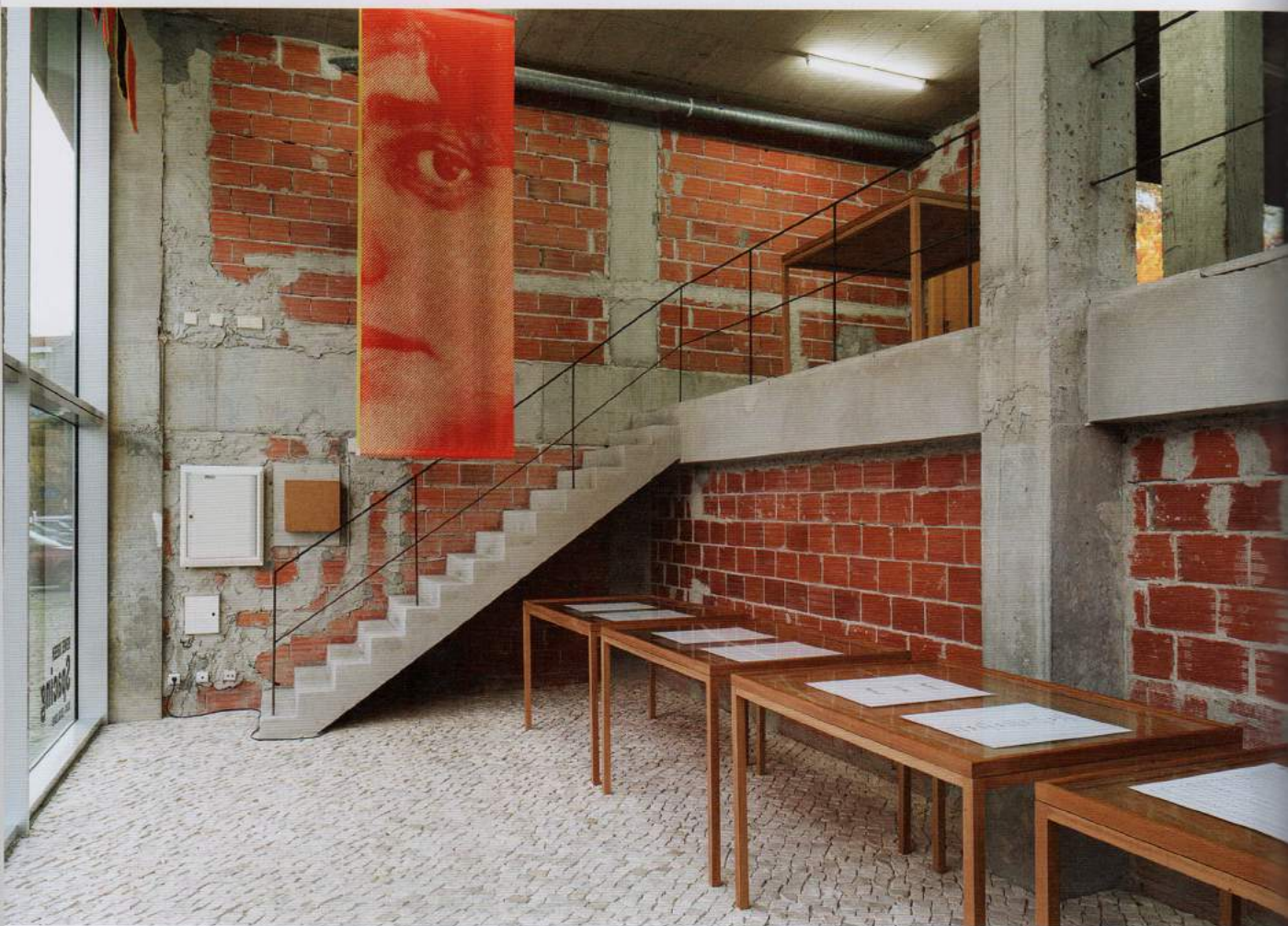
of *Endless Dreams and Water Between* (2009).¹⁸ In itself, the shorter *Come Closer* is an evocative compilation of fragments of previous films, including images of Green's boat trip to Ceuta, of her Lisbon walks in 1992 and 2000, and of her conversations with the Portuguese documentary film-maker Diana Andringa about censorship in 1960s Portugal. These emerge alongside images of Green's re-encounter with Andringa in 2000, who, together with her son Paulo, discusses how divisions within the Left continue to compromise the country's political and social life. The camera sifts through family photographs and books, CDs and DVDs from and about the Portuguese-speaking world, which, alongside the excerpts evincing Green's intimate relationship with the Portuguese context, make up a rather personal archive of an affective geography between Portugal, San Francisco, New York and Brazil. The main protagonists connecting these locations by the water are Green's Brazil-based brother Derrick, the lead singer of the Brazilian band *Sepultura*, and her friend, the Brazilian film-maker Karim Aïnouz, who she first met in New York and who we see speaking about his film *Seams* (1993), at a seminar in San Francisco. They were both living in Brazil at the time Green made this film, a place Green had always been curious about but had never visited. *Come Closer* is a film about longing for the people and places one holds dear, including those of the imagination and of history. This is the case of Amílcar Cabral (1924–1973), the leading figure of the struggle for the Guinean and Cape Verdean independence from Portuguese colonial rule in the 1960s and early 1970s, and one of the most important theorists of revolution and liberation, whose spectral presence emerges, like that of a friendly ghost, on the cover of a book.¹⁹ Then, 'another link in the present to many pasts' was Nuno Ramalho, a young Portuguese artist Green met in San Francisco, who lent his image and voice to her film.²⁰ Here, the female voice-over in English becomes a male voice-over in Portuguese, recounting Green's own evocative script on her Lusophone-affective geographies. The way in which the voice-over operates displaces enunciation from any stable, univocal point, and contributes to the overall sense of a multiple, peripatetic and dialogic subjectivity, made up of many reverberating voices. Moreover, the shift in language underscores the several meanings migration acquires in Green's work, and the ways in which languages themselves have been changing terrains of contact and struggle: 'The history of languages and their movement is an important component, as it involves the spread and struggles over territories and between different systems of belief.'²¹

Many of the questions explored in *Come Closer* were taken up in *Endless Dreams and Water Between*. Again, one might say, Green 'began again', but making a film very different from its prelude in the process.²² Not incidentally, at the beginning of this feature film, *Aria*, one of its four fictitious characters, quotes Gilles Deleuze's *Desert Islands and Other Texts: 1953–1974* (2003), while musing on the imaginary and mythological character of the deserted island and how it has functioned as metaphor – not always benign – for utopian ideas of re-creation and re-beginning in Western thought: 'It is not enough that everything begin, everything must *begin again* once the cycle of possible combinations has come to completion.'²³ So beginning again her reflections on 'the ways in which perception is shaped by longing, from

different directions and through time', Green proposes a new cycle of possible combinations.²⁴ Here, an epistolary and archipelagic subjectivity is woven by the voices of Aria, Raya, Lyn and Mar, four friends who exchange letters on their experiences, dreams, desires and thoughts from their insular locations: Manhattan, Majorca and the peninsula and islands of the San Francisco Bay Area. These are places which, alongside Portugal, Green acknowledges to have been chosen because of their pull and affect upon her life, all of them involving bodies of water, and literal or metaphorical islands.²⁵ Accompanied by the women's voices, the spectator sees and hears a constellation of visual and sonic material relating to the islands they inhabit, which thus become protagonists themselves. These islands' collective histories are evoked through the individual experiences of these four women, whose thoughts do not elide how islands and oceans have constituted spaces of violence in the past and the present: for instance, how Manatay became Manhattan;

24 Ibid, p 419

25 Ibid, p 421



'Spacing', Lumiar Cité, Lisbon, 2016, installation view, courtesy of the artist and Lumiar Cité, photo: DMF

how Alcatraz became a prison. Literary and philosophical voices relating to the islands in diverse ways, from George Sand to Gertrude Stein and Laura Riding – some of whose texts, among others, these four women have been reading and of which they write about to each other – also emerge as characters. Contrary to other narratives, where the relevance of what these writers produced was shadowed or diminished by their male peers, here they partake of a ‘planetary’ web of thoughts and affects, traversing water, time and space, and traversed by history and desire. The dreams emerging here are not simply those of utopia taken as imaginative projections of individual and collective configurations into never realisable futures, no matter how resourceful. On the contrary, in line with Ernst Bloch’s theorisations of utopia, they embody a potential for agency, including the disruptive and revolutionary, in so far as they reveal lacks in need of address in the here and now. According to Bloch, art, literature and music have the force of providing glimpses or leaving traces of what is realisable.²⁶ Besides Aria’s dream of reconnecting with her friends through writing, which they fulfil together, she also proposes the creation of a community of thinkers and creators of which she dreamt and which would gather every year by the sea – the ‘September Institute’. This community is not utopian, we are told, but rather a ‘momentary nexus’ embracing the present with an awareness of the past, and devoted to the retrieval, reanimation and dissemination of the ideas and productions of those who have been forgotten, through research, discussion and publication, in print and online, of neglected visual and textual material.²⁷

Excess, made in the same year as *Endless Dreams and Water Between*, and sharing its monitor screen alongside *Come Closer* in the context of ‘Spacing’, is similarly about a retrieval and reanimation of the past. Through the filming of a series of hand-written index cards, where we can read Green’s reflections, and of heterogeneous archival material, including books, notebooks, paintings on book covers and postcards, *Excess* evokes the unfulfilled epic dreams of avant-garde cinema in the 1960s and 1970s. It speaks of the ambitions of those who planned to make experimental serial feature films, which, however, remained incomplete due to difficulties in production and distribution. Yet, the stream of superimposed index cards reminds us that the dream of making an epic in several parts did not die, and recalls the possibility of reading traces of such utopian endeavours in the plans and notes their authors left behind, and of watching some of their remnants in film archives, online or in DVDs. These reflections then apply to Green’s own dreams, ideas and projects for films, and to the importance of the activities of reading and writing, which, although remaining off screen for the most part, in *excess* of, are fundamental to the films: ‘depicting the private activity of reading or writing is impossible’, ‘only remnants remain here’, ‘a ghost room’, ‘to eventually be rearranged’, ‘the complete dream movie is always unfathomable’, we read on cards. So *Excess* is a sort of retrieval and reanimation – an always incomplete rearrangement – of what has been left out, of the invisible traces of Green’s own work, notably of *Endless Dreams and Water Between*. We can glimpse George Sand’s autobiography *Story of My Life* and books on islands and ocean crossings; ‘epic dreams’ rehearsed on the pages of her notebooks; ‘the sea and ambitions to traverse it’ emerging on card; depictions, not devoid

26 See Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, Anthony A Nassar, trans, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics Series, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2000; Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg, trans, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought Series, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1988. See also Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, Verso, London 2005.

27 Green, *Other Planes of There*, op cit, p 448



Come Closer, 2008, film still, courtesy of the artist and Free Agent Media

of violence, of conquerors and explorers travelling by boat, from fifteenth-century caravels to twentieth-century dreadnoughts, yachts and liners; postcards of islands, from Manhattan to Mallorca. As *Come Closer* was a sort of preamble, the similarly short-length *Excess* seems a kind of afterword. Significantly, it reaches a 'designated limit' that is a '*fin*' (the end), but it also repeats, *begins again*. Its completion is that of a cycle of possible combinations, among others equally possible, but in excess. The sense of limit that allows for completion also undoes any utopian, totalising pretension of attaining an all-encompassing film, whether in large or small format. And repetition, as we know since Derrida, is the terrain where difference as deferral of meaning inescapably occurs.²⁸

This same concern for what remains hidden or left out of certain narratives, notably those of history, had already prompted *Climates and Paradoxes* (2005), and, ten years later, is at the core of *Begin Again, Begin Again* (2015), with which I will purposefully conclude my take

28 See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, trans, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, [1967] 1976; Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Alan Bass, trans, Routledge Classics Series, Routledge, London and New York, 2001.

on 'Spacing'. Somewhat similarly to what Green does in *Excess*, I am giving myself the limit of concluding with what will repeat – this time, in larger format.

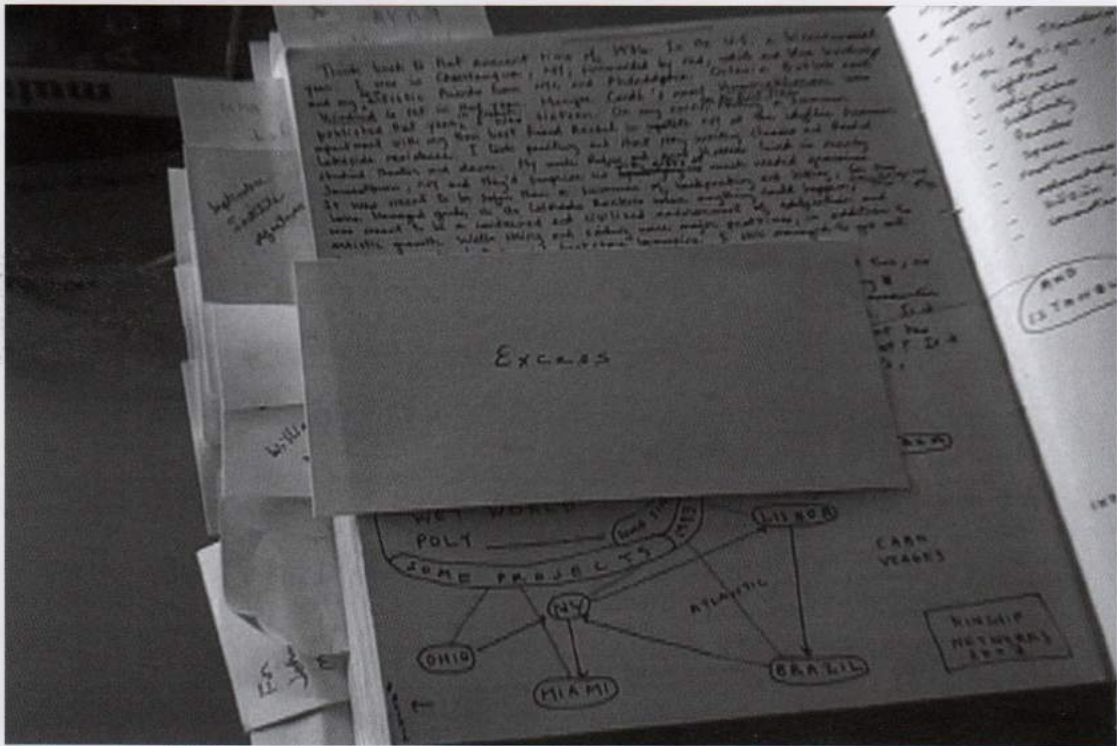
In *Climates and Paradoxes*, Green investigates forgotten histories embedded in architecture and in the urban fabric of cities, even when the places where such histories unfolded in the past have been destroyed. In 2005, the 100th anniversary of Albert Einstein's theory of relativity was celebrated, which prompted Green to consider why his political views for peace, justice and self-determination never seem to receive the same degree of attention as his scientific work. From her own inhabitation of a 1970s high-rise apartment building at 123–125 *Kurfürstenstrasse* in Berlin, she delves into the history of what preceded it in the first half of the twentieth century – the building that housed the *Bund Neues Vaterland* (BNV). This was an organisation, founded in 1914, that opposed the militarism of the German imperial order and of which Einstein was a member. Green looks for traces of his life in Berlin and in the neighbouring village of Caputh, site of his summer house between 1929 and 1932, where she finds the 'museification' he never desired.²⁹ Her camera looks at the rebuilding and gentrification process that Berlin has undergone since reunification in the 1990s. In line with the Einstein celebrations, this process preserves the past only if neutralised, and so Brecht's and Einstein's trails and the world of banks, the bristly and sleek, emerge side by side.³⁰ Einstein never returned to Caputh, the place where he felt

29 Green, *Other Planes of There*, op cit, p 392

30 Ibid, pp 398–399



Endless Dreams and Water Between, 2009, film still, courtesy of the artist and Free Agent Media



Excess, 2009, film still, courtesy of the artist and Free Agent Media

most at home for only three years, or to Germany after 1932, and, Green reminds us, was cast as a stranger throughout his life.³¹ So she invites us to consider the paradox, here suggested through Avery Gordon's reading of Derrida's writings on haunting and spectres, of how 'to bring back the dislocated and the dead', how 'to exorcise not in order to chase away the ghosts, but this time to grant them the right...to...a hospitable memory...out of a concern for justice?'³² In other words, how to remember Einstein in a way that does justice to the complexity of his life and thought and does not neutralise his politics? Green's response is to remember him 'beyond isolation', that is, alongside other figures, some of whom Einstein himself knew, living in the United States after World War II, similarly cast as strangers, and supporters of pacifism, civil rights and internationalism. They are Muriel Rukeyser, Paul Robeson, W E B Du Bois and Lou Harrison, whose lives spanned from 1868 to 2003. They emerge in images of Green's notebooks and books, and in voice-over excerpts of the African-American actor, singer and activist Paul Robeson's narration for Paul Strand and Leo Hurwitz's 1942 *Native Land* – a semi-documentary film on corporate-sponsored spying on trade unions and attacks on civil liberties in the US during the Great Depression. The viewer also listens to fragments of *White Nile* and *African Skies: The Theme*, from the 1993 *African Skies* album, released by Kelan Phil Cohran and Legacy in tribute to Sun Ra, upon his death. Together with Robeson's voice, the lyrics of *African Skies: The Theme*,

31 The Caputh summer house was designed by the German modernist architect Konrad Wachsmann, who also fled Germany and lived in Chicago and Los Angeles.

32 Green, *Other Planes of There*, op cit, p 399. See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning and the New International*, Peggy Kamuf, trans, Routledge Classics Series, Routledge, London and New York, 1994; Avery F Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008.

become the soundtrack for images of two colourful banners, placed on the façade of 123–125 *Kurfürststrasse* welcoming its listeners ‘to the skies of history’ which are those of ‘today’. In the first, one can read Einstein’s forgotten statement at the height of McCarthyism in 1949, in both English and Esperanto: ‘The flag is a symptom of the fact that man is still a herd animal.’³³ On the second, one reads ‘Bonvenon!’, Esperanto for ‘Welcome!’. By resorting to Esperanto, the ‘dream universal language’ expressing the hope of peaceful exchange, which these figures shared, and by replacing national flags with welcoming banners, fluttering from the windows of her own Berlin home, previously the home of BNV, Green is literally and metaphorically granting these ghosts the right to hospitable memories.³⁴ Besides their emergence on the screens of video and sound, these figures are also ‘within living memory’ in the printed material displayed in the vitrines at the entrance level of Lumiar Cité.³⁵ The *Climates* with which the film begins relate to something similar to the *Paradox* with which it ends, that of exorcising ghosts by learning to live *with* them, which, for Derrida, meant, precisely, to live more justly.³⁶ Derived from the Greek *klima*, ‘climate’ refers to ‘an inclination to slope’, to what falls from understanding as much as from the sky, and ‘the changing atmospheres in which we live’.³⁷ Borrowing from Ralph Waldo Emerson and Eduardo Cadava’s *Emerson and the Climates of History* (1997), according to which what is difficult to grasp can only be embraced and newness produced by means of memory and

33 Green, *Other Planes of There*, op cit, p 400

34 Ibid, p 400

35 See Renée Green, *Within Living Memory*, 2015, one letterpress print in Vitrine 3 (see also the list of works in the press release of ‘Spacing’).

36 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, exordium, op cit, non-numerated page

37 Green, *Other Planes of There*, op cit, p 396



Excess, 2009, film still, courtesy of the artist and Free Agent Media

non-repetitive repetition, Green ends by reminding us of the Derrida-inspired apparent paradox that only an inventor subordinated to the present knows how to borrow from the past.³⁸ The climates of history and the paradoxes of memory come together, in and for the present, when we hear Cohran's *African Skies* of 'history' and of 'today', while the camera zooms in and out, from the upper windows, on five young girls from several cultural backgrounds playing in the garden of 123–125 *Kurfürstanstrasse*. The spectre of Derrida reappears in the final words on-screen: 'Ensemble vivre, vivre ensemble'; that is, beyond isolation.³⁹

In *Begin Again, Begin Again*, we see climates of history and changing atmospheres of life between 1887 and 2015. The voice-over, Green's brother Derrick, recounts R M Schindler's 1912 *Modern Architecture: A Program*, the manifesto he wrote in Vienna before moving to LA, where he developed his 'space architecture' in the 1930s. In between Schindler's programme, one hears the passage of time in the form of a list of years, where his date and place of birth, 1887 Vienna, his date and place of death, 1953 LA, and Green's own date and place of birth, 1959 Cleveland, are highlighted. Interspersed with the manifesto's numbered statements and the listed years – both readable in the letterpress prints in the vitrines, and the latter also appearing in the double-sided banners of *Space Poem #5 (Years and Afters)* hung along the glass walls of *Lumiar Cité* – a third subjectivity ponders on life, death and survival through excerpts from Paul

38 Ibid, p 399, p 401

39 See Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, George Collins, trans, Phronesis Series, Verso, London and New York, 1997.



Climates and Paradoxes, 2005, film still, courtesy of the artist and Free Agent Media



Begin Again, Begin Again, 2015, film still, courtesy of the artist and Free Agent Media

Bowles' poem *Next to Nothing* (1981), Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (1924), and the architect Minsuk Cho. The images making up the forty-minute video are retrieved from a multiplicity of archival sources. Some depict events spanning twentieth-century history, such as the Spanish civil war, World Wars I and II, the civil rights movement, anti-Vietnam war protests, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and Occupy Wall Street, unfolding to the sound of the passing years. We see Alcatraz, Hollywood, alongside Vienna and other locations, together with excerpts from *Endless Dreams and Water Between*, among other films by Green.⁴⁰ Images of changing cities and architectures are interwoven with images of changing land, oceans and skies – the climates or skies of history, the changing atmospheres in which we live. They are accompanied by a multifarious soundtrack where the sounds of nature enmesh with Schindler's numbered assertions on modern building and dwelling in space, the passage of time as a countdown of calendar years spanning between Schindler's birth and the year the film was made, and the subjective musings on life and survival.

Schindler's manifesto is imbued with an optimistic faith in humankind's ability to master nature: '83. The man of the future does not try to escape the elements. 84. He will rule them... 86. The earth has become his home'.⁴¹ Comfortable dwelling equates the

40 The inhabitation of and dislocation between Austria and California also have an affective resonance, as Green moved to Vienna in 1997 and then to California in 2003.

41 See Renée Green, *A Manifesto: A Program*, 2015, two letterpress prints in Vitrine 4 (see also the list of works in the press release of 'Spacing').

42 Ibid

43 See Renée Green, *Space Architecture*, 2015, one

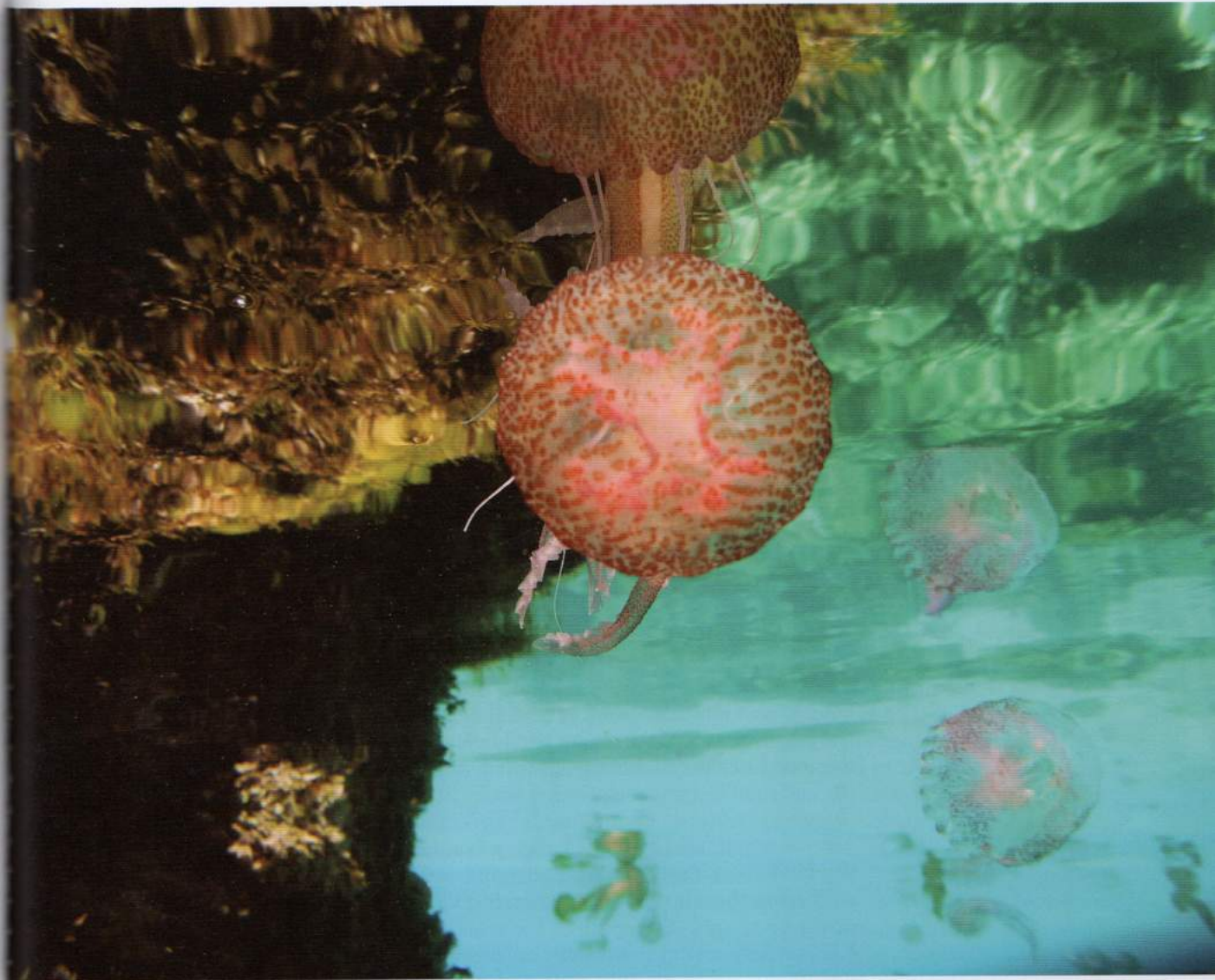
letterpress print in Vitrine 4 (see also the list of works in the press release of 'Spacing').

- 44 *Begin Again, Begin Again* premiered in the solo exhibition 'Renée Green: *Begin Again, Begin Again*', which took place at the MAK Center for Art and Architecture at the Schindler House in Los Angeles between 21 January and 29 March 2015, and featured previous works such as *Climates and Paradoxes*. The version exhibited at the Schindler House was shorter than the forty-minute piece shown in Lisbon. However, the latter was screened at Ooga Booga #2 in Los Angeles on 25 March 2015, towards the end of the MAK show, in the context of a discussion by Renée Green and the poet Fred Moten, whose response to the film also took the form of a poem (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5mm441Pf6g>, accessed 15 May 2016). See also the section 'Begin Again' of the text and sound piece *Imagine This Wherever and Whoever You Are*, 2008, presented at the Manifesta7 in Bolzano, Italy, in 2008 (Green, *Other Planes of There*, op cit, p 417).

- 45 In *Endless Dreams and Water Between*, Aria mentions some of the myths surrounding California as a 'New World' island abounding with gold (Green, *Other Planes of There*, op cit, p 430). See also Green's text on *Come Closer* (ibid, pp 419–421).

- 46 Homi K Bhabha has famously argued for the condition of being 'unhomed' in a text where, not incidentally, Green's critical examinations of modernity through architecture, including that of exhibition spaces, are discussed (Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994, pp 4–5, p 13).

'complete control of: space, climate, light, mood', in view of the attainment of a 'harmonious life'.⁴² In the 1934 *Space Architecture*, Schindler looks back at 1911 Austria, where he first realised that space, rather than matter, is architecture's real medium and conceived of a rebirth of architecture as a 'creation of space forms' of unlimited possibilities.⁴³ Aided by mathematics and the machine, the human mind would possess the limitless power to control nature's forces in order to produce a new monumentality. In *Begin Again, Begin Again*, Green invites us to consider such creative dreams and futures past of progress and freedom, without forgetting that the ambition to master nature in order to live more harmoniously has colluded with the capitalist exploitation – both colonial and neocolonial – of natural resources worldwide. It has prompted the genocidal oppression not only of Jews, communists, black people, homosexuals and other groups in Europe and beyond, but also of colonised and enslaved populations in Africa, Asia and America. Green's film evokes the histories of conquest, slavery, and ensuing and ongoing inequalities to which Native-American and African-American populations have been subjected in the US – and does so not only in its entwinement of selected words and images, but also through its exhibition history and the way it has been installed in architectural space. One should remember that this work was commissioned for a solo exhibition at the Schindler House (1922) in LA in 2015.⁴⁴ California figures prominently, even mythically, in the history of white settler occupation as place for re-beginning, going back to the conquest of the so-called 'New World' and the 'Wild West Gold Rush' to Hollywood, and of which the very history of early twentieth-century modernist architecture might be considered a chapter.⁴⁵ Contrary to the historiographical narratives that keep these events apart, *Begin Again, Begin Again* brings them into relation, as the often unspoken reverse of modern – and modernist – purportedly universal conceptions of progress, freedom and harmonious life by means of mastery over nature. The unfolding of the twentieth century recalls that some of the major consequences of such conceptions have been genocide, oppression, inequality and environmental crisis, to the point of endangering survival on earth. Modern building and dwelling in space, even in their most creatively liberating forms, where the inside seems to welcome the outside and the home appears to open onto the world – while often evicting perceived strangers and aliens and keeping them out of sight – have not necessarily allowed for individual and communal ways of being at home in the world.⁴⁶ At the Schindler House, Green's installation had the effect of opening its door to the flooding water – to so-called strangers, to ghosts, to climates, to matter, to forms of life. It let the interplay between time and space, between history, architecture and nature, already at work in the images, words and sounds of the film alone, also to operate quite literally in architectural terms. The work enacted a sort of hospitable counter-occupation, a disturbance of repossession, the 'unwelcome' invasion of poetic restitution, the homeopathic infiltration of the architectural body of the host by filmic matter, part stranger, part guest and part temporary host, beneficial through life-giving inoculation against amnesia, isolation and death.⁴⁷



Begin Again, Begin Again, 2015, film still, courtesy of the artist and Free Agent Media

47 Although somewhat modernist looking, the glass-walled Lumiar Cité offered a very different setting for Green's film, located as it is in northern Lisbon, in a far from socially privileged and peripheral area.

Portrayed in *Begin Again, Begin Again* in its overwhelming beauty, Nature is shown to be a deeply historical and political space. It is a 'climate of history' and 'of today'. In between Schindler's rejection of matter in favour of space and the human mind, we can hear matter being described as sentient and alive, as heralding the beginning of life on earth. One must *begin again*, Green seems to be suggesting in this film and in 'Spacing' as a whole, and be able to conceive of, and experience, harmonious lives otherwise, that is, beyond isolation. This in turn requires that we learn to live *with* all that is alive: strangers, ghosts, climates, matter. To *begin again* demands that we embrace the present in the awareness of the past, which may ultimately allow not simply newness, but sheer survival.