From *Performing the Wound: Practicing a Feminist Theatre of Becoming*

Routledge, NY, 2022 https://www.routledge.com/Performing-the-Wound-Practicing-a-Feminist-Theatre-of- Becoming/Tulk/p/book/9780367644888

Chapter 4

Dreaming In-Between: Landscape, Trauma and Meaning-Making in the Work of Renée Green

Renée Green is a self-professed "combination artist"—visual artist, writer, filmmaker, and researcher. "My work," she explains, "has for some time included multiple parts, created to coexist and this creates a density of layers, spatially, geometrically, sonically, visually and textually" (382). This density means that in analyzing Green's art, one negotiates a layered landscape. Each step into her vast body of work—which includes films, essays and writings, installations, digital media, architecture and sound-related works—is to *experience* an idea, to *inhabit* it, and to do so in a complex, multifaceted way.

Green uses a concept of art event as encounter rather than exhibit. An encounter does not guarantee a conclusion, but provides a framework for witnessing, and potentially change. Through encounter Green explores transcultural experience, public and private memory, archives, temporality and historical trauma. The notion of encounter is especially significant because Green's films can serve as meeting place, interface and site, in and on which a "dialogue" with wounds can take place. It is timely here to revisit Griselda Pollock's articulation of encounter in her discussion on the aesthetics of trauma, quoted in the previous chapter: "Might we then think about it in terms not of event (which we cannot know) but of *encounter* that assumes some kind of spaced time, and some kind of gap as well as a different kind of participating otherness?" (43, emphasis added). These encounters within spaced time and their

connections with collective trauma are what I will be exploring in this chapter, with a close study of two works: *Walking in NYL* (2016), and *Climates and Paradoxes and Selected Life Indexes (2005)*. Both are film installations involving sites of trauma and memorialization in which Green makes understated visual journeys into the ways violence, particularly colonial and racial violence, has been covered over—and confronted—in Lisbon, Portugal, and Berlin, Germany respectively. I examine Green's documentation of the effects of historical trauma on the re-creation of these urban environments, with a focus on the language of memorials. Although her films are embedded in a larger installation, I will discuss the film elements in the most detail. It is important to note at this point that I viewed both works together as part of a retrospective exhibition—but not, however, in their chronological order. The way the two film installations were presented meant that one approached *Walking in NYL* (2016) immediately upon entering, whereas *Climates and Paradoxes and Selected Life Indexes (2005)* was housed on a lower level of the building. In the light of the embodied nature of my research, my discussion reflects how perceiving the first work framed my understanding of the second, as well as the fact that my physical journey through the exhibition meant I took in one work before the other.

Traumatic experiences occupy interfaces—there is that of the subject with the trauma event/s, but also the interface where bodies collide with a geographical site and what has happened there. All these spaces are contact zones, and Green's work investigates particularly the contact zone of collective and cultural wounds. The idea of the contact zone, referenced by Green many times in her writing, was developed by ethnologist Mary Louise Pratt. Pratt explored the concept of "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt 34). She contends that these spaces, although sites of conflict and confusion, simultaneously allow new connections and

relationships to emerge. She describes the juxtapostioning thus: "Along with rage, incomprehension, and pain there [are] exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom—the joys of the contact zone" (39). Green proposes that art-making occurs in a similar place: a site that allows for the mingling and interaction of "the concepts of co-presence, transculturation, and aspects of interactivity and improvisation" (243). As Gloria Sutton says in her introductory comments to *Other Planes of There,* Green's archival installations are themselves a "'contact zone,' a foundational way to 'provoke questions' and 'rethink established notions'" (21).

Green's films are not presented in a darkened cinema—they do not, in that way, exist on their own. They are embedded in an archival space, a gallery installation in which other overlapping works are also present: banners printed with words, letters read aloud and broadcast around the room, framed photographs and poetry lining the walls. To "watch" one of Green's films, as I did, is to sit in a place that simultaneously insists on intimacy and public viewing. The colorful muslin and wood screens carve out a corner that is nevertheless only three-sided—the back is the rest of the exhibit, so you are never separate from it. Any sense of intimacy garnered by the screen, by facing the video and wearing headphones, is illusionary, and yet it is also genuine. In this exhibit, I am alone and together with others; I am witnessing films on cities that deal with trauma and the signifying of remembrance, while at the same time I am bathed in the sounds of others' voices, footsteps and competing archival elements of film, audio broadcasts and images. This stimuli is not so much a distraction, but rather a site wherein the borders between "perceivers" (as Green terms her audience) and the different components of the installation are blurred. I experience each work in relation to the others, even if that relationship at times is only spatial. If I were to view the film in the dark, in a cinema, I might feel isolated

from others or anonymous in my response. Here, however, there is a certain accountability in having to sit in broad daylight, my back to others as if I trusted them, and to immerse myself in work that explores the spaces we publicly and collectively inhabit—spaces tinged with the aftermath of major societal trauma.

For Green, writing is a fundamental methodology, used to search, interrogate and dream. It is also a way that perceivers are invited to engage with Green's work in an indirect way. Texts in street signs, conversation fragments—in a myriad of ways, spoken and written language frame and expand the conceptual content. Through the films' inter-titles, for example, Green borrows texts drawn from a range of discourses that include her own poetic reflections. Throughout her work, these texts and textual fragments initiate a mental dialogue with the material—in viewing her films, therefore, I also read. The possibilities of text become re-imagined and re-purposed—Green writes, with both words and a filmed, traveling body, of holes and sites of rupture. She herself remarks on the "recurring strain in my work [that] has involved the probing of in-between spaces, which can appear to be holes, aporias, absences" (*Other Planes,* 271). Writing becomes, in Green's own words, "an attempt to access memory, give body to experience, and track time and what this traveler collects and pieces together to allude to her sense of self" (*Other Planes,* 92). Writing appears in banners, framed on the wall, in inter-titles of her films, and read aloud in her audio installations. There is a sense that she is *still writing,* that none of the pieces are actually finished, and what the perceivers are experiencing is an iterative process in which their own responses might play a part. A constant becoming.

Green writes using the body: from the perceivers who curate their own stories as they wend their ways around her installations, to her film work where Green's own breath is heard under the ambient soundscapes, the camera moving with the pace of her walking. The human

body is there-not-there in her films, which explore the absent, as well as present, physical body as she moves around Lisbon and Berlin. "Studying by feeling" is the way Green describes the idea of generating knowledge, of theorizing, through the visceral senses (*Climates and Paradoxes*, inter-titles). This means that in analyzing her work, any discussion necessitates a language that tries also to *feel* its way in to the place with its ideological complexities; developing a *felt* theory. Green notes that "there is a mysterious interaction that can occur between visual, oral and spatial stimuli and text that can't be completely equated with theory" (41). These are perhaps the layers she references: where the textual and spatial co-exist; where sound is also rendered visually. It is this site—these multilayered sites—of interaction that Green prepares for her perceivers: entire environments that perform all at once, in a variety of media. She asks: "Can it be acknowledged that there are unknown, intangible aspects beyond the designator's understanding that emerge when a work is encountered? Other planes of there?" (172).

Throughout this chapter, I will be drawing on Diana Taylor's theorizing in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, particularly her discussions about where and how a human body is situated in relationship to the archive, and to what extent the archive supersedes live, physical presence. I argue that Green's work proposes an expanded relationship between the archive and the repertoire: that the archive—especially the city as archive—can allow voices and stories to breathe, rather than suppress embodied voices crushed out of mainstream history. Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger's work on the matrixial, the concepts of border-swerving and the polyphonic "I" will also be significant for my discussion, as Ettinger's work demonstrates how art has the power to re-link and invent new subjects and forms through

the use of light and space. This in turn has ramifications for a discussion of urban design as having the potential for existing as an ethical site in which to encounter historical trauma.

I spent many hours, spread over two days, experiencing Green's retrospective exhibit in the Spring of 2019, *Renée Green: Within Living Memory,* at the Carpenter Center at Harvard University, and it is there that I will now begin.

When I enter the Carpenter Center, I notice first that the gallery is sparse: concrete floor and white walls, a backdrop of large windows—and outside, the trees and the red-brick, dignified Harvard buildings. I sit down at the first station, half-hidden by muslin screens painted in bold primary colors. Sitting on a birch stool rests a set of headphones. I put them on and seat myself on the stool; the headphones are attached to a large video monitor in front of me. I am alone, but the solitude feels comforting rather than unsettling, here in this half-enclosed area that feels more like a secret reading nook than a public exhibition space. I already feel a sense of intimacy, away from the public gaze, where I can privately experience this digital installation, *Walking in NYL* (2016). I can feel the vibrations on my skin of Green's additional audio installations in the gallery. If I turn around on my stool, I see white walls hung with framed photographs, maps and texts. I can also watch others push open the heavy glass door and enter, scanning me quickly to see what I am spending time on, perhaps deciding when they might have a turn of the stool and headphones. The film is embedded in a much larger world of visuals, text and sound that fills the Carpenter Center. The exhibition is a community of sorts—one where everyone and everything interfaces with varying degrees of connection. The context is important: the films are video installations, part of a space filled with daylight, banners, framed words and photographs. They are, additionally, part of an ongoing iterative process—Green talks about her work as an artist as that of *becoming,* and her films are part of this journey. They are never over

or finished, but merge into the wider experience of the matrixial realm Green has set up here—the moving together and apart of perceivers and art, the way the film becomes fluid as it exists in this amorphous space. “The story I have to tell is an artist’s story,” she writes in *Other Planes of There.* “This becomes the story of many people through time. It is a growing seed” (3).

Green has had a long association with the city of Lisbon, Portugal, beginning in 1992 with the celebration of Columbus and its attendant deep, wide-ranging conversations regarding colonialism, identity politics and multiculturalism (de Oliveira 43). Green’s works about Lisbon have included installation iterations—shown subsequently in different permutations in different places—collectively titled *Tracing Lusitania* (1992), and her *Walking in Lisbon* films, made from 1992 until the year 2000, culminating in *Returns: Tracing Lusitania* (2000). The installation settings have combined the films themselves with artifacts, banners and pieces of writing to be both listened to and viewed. Through these multi-media experiences Green investigates traces of Portugal as a sea-faring, colonial world power with aggressive connections to Latin America, Asia, and, of course, Africa.

Figure 1. Film Installation Nook. Renée Green, *Pacing: Within Living Memory,* Carpenter Center for Visual Arts, Harvard University, 2018. Author’s photograph.

According to historian José Neves, Portugal largely sees itself as one of the “kinder” colonizers, one that has advocated for a more “progressive” form of colonialism, whereby, through investing in infrastructure, education and agriculture, it was able to help transition its “provincial” territories and countries to achieve independence and a place on the world stage (Neves 488). In this way, Portugal shifted, particularly over the 1930’s and 40’s, from viewing colonialism as “vessels and discoveries” to “industries, agricultural development and improving the living standards through hygiene” (489). Perhaps the attitude Neves elucidates—that of paternalism

viewed as progressiveness—lies behind an enduring resistance to building any public acknowledgement and memorialization of Portugal's, and particularly Lisbon's, pivotal role in the global slave trade of black Africans. Indeed, "Lisbon remains largely silent on its legacy of white terror and black captivity" (Barragan). In the last few years activist group Djass (the Association of Afro-Descendants), with its founder and former Lisbon mayor Beatrice Diaz, have worked hard to ensure the planned construction of a Memorial to Enslaved Peoples: *Plantation – Prosperity and Nightmare,* a project by the Angolan artist Kiluanji Kia Henda. Diaz, like Neves, comments in an interview with Gisele Navarro Fernandes on Portugal's "denial of racism and racial discrimination," and the extreme difficulty of developing meaningful, society-wide conversations on structural racism and Portugal's history of slavery. In discussing the challenge of advocating for the memorial project, she talks of the "myth of Portugal's civilizing mission" and notes that it includes the idea:

> … that Portugal played a crucial role in the civilization of populations, contributed to them being able to come out of the darkness, the obscurantism they were in and to be enlightened, to rise up to the level of European civilization, fighting primitivism and making those people more technologically developed, more civilized. And, above all else—and I think this is the deepest root of Portuguese denial—the idea that Portuguese colonialism was a benign colonialism, and that, therefore, Portugal was a good colonizer.

Portugal has much to acknowledge. In the mid 1400's, Portugal's naval expeditions to West Africa led to early colonization of the Madeira Islands, using slaves from the nearby Canary Islands. As early as 1444, the first slave auction of kidnapped Africans was held at Lagos, a southern seaport not far from Lisbon, and by 1550, African slaves made up 10% of Lisbon's population of 100,000 (93). Lisbon became a hub for the dissemination of slaves to Europe and the Americas. Historian David Brion Davis explains that "because the Portuguese took the lead before 1650 and after 1810, they ultimately carried the most Africans to the Americas" (91). The

treatment of African slaves in Lisbon, as everywhere, was brutal—their bodies often left to die in the street; they were treated as dumb pack animals who did not merit anything but force and cruelty to control them (32 – 33). As Diaz intimates, the trauma of slavery is still very much present, even though unheralded, in Lisbon. Historian Yesenia Barragan writes the following, by way of example:

> Over time, a black neighborhood called Mocambo (located in the present-day neighborhood of Santa Catarina) formed in northwestern Lisbon as a place of black refuge … Beneath the pavement of today's Rua do Poço dos Negros (Street of the Blacks' Pit) lies a mass burial pit of enslaved Africans in what used to be Mocambo. In fact, as [historian James H. Sweet] has found, Mocambo was "widely known as a spiritually powerful space, perhaps as an embedded, communal memory of the dead Africans who were buried there." At night, the African-descended peoples of Lisbon gathered at the main crossroads of Mocambo at São Bento to "invoke the powers of the spirit world for the purpose of divining and healing," such as the African-born slave José Francisco Pereira who buried several talismans at the crossroads in 1730. Today, there is no public memory of this sacred space for Lisbon's African diasporic communities—it is simply a quaint corner with benches for jostling Portuguese teenagers. (Barragan June 26, 2017)

This historical and cultural background, with its contemporary debates and denials, is what Green navigates as she visually combs Lisbon. It is a sunny, bustling and beautiful Lisbon, such a contrast to the history that lies literally underneath the winding, cobbled streets. In her filmic mapping Green documents silence, silencing, and also the ways that the wounds of the past reveal themselves in odd and unexpected ways. Her methods are quiet and indirect, allowing me, as perceiver, to be in charge when I listen and look; not crowding me with the experience, but letting it be a part of the wider installation that involves daylight, space, and many places to wander and read. Her films allow me to be in another world at the same time I am in the physical world of the Carpenter Center—they allow me to be both in and out of her meditative video. Both the performance and the mediation of site strike me particularly in the filmic aspects of Green's retrospective. The techniques she uses to engage viewers with the underlying historical

trauma of well-known places are radical in their use of positioning both viewer and artwork as co-carrying subjects. In place of the omniscient viewer, there is one *I* who dialogues with the multiple *Is* inherent in the film. The creation of a nook inside the wider installation, the quiet intensity of Green's work and the constant invitation to be aware of how the content is being curated, are aspects that expand my ideas on the possibilities of multimedia and audience emplacement.

And so it is that on a cold day in Boston, I gaze upon footage of the sunny city of Lisbon, the cobbled streets carving their way between old buildings painted in cream, soft pink—the peeling paint strips appearing like late spring petals on a tropical flower. I am aware of the sound emanating through the headphones: the hum of a radio playing a song in Portuguese, the rhythms of the *scrape scrape scrape* of a man planing stucco onto a cracked wall. The film almost feels like tourist footage, but more meditative. I experience the buildings and birds, then words appear on a black screen that gently interrupts the visual narrative: "I awake to not having arrived." Suddenly I no longer feel like a virtual tourist. The paradoxical and poetic phrase I have been given, this small textual frame, *re-frames* what I have just seen: It is a dream, perhaps, of what Lisbon might be like, or perhaps a memory that changes what it remembers. I am aware of slippages: of time, scents, places, light. What I am seeing is no longer sure. It is a place of ruins, but also of life forcing its way upwards, of many small insistent reminders of a past that we must not forget. And this, Huey Copeland suggests, is an intentional part of Green's ongoing work: "grounding her projects in aspects of personal narrative in order to make transnational connections among shards of the past and to literally unearth long-neglected histories" (156).

I hear people enter the exhibition behind me, and someone asks a docent for information. I am aware of others now sharing the space; I notice that it irritates me to realize the gallery is no

longer just mine to enjoy in solitude. I feel almost invaded, and suddenly the brightly colored pod is a rudimentary form of shelter. I feel almost as if I am sitting in my own tiny city, and others are entering and threatening my primacy here. By locating the film in a city with a history of colonization, while having me with my back to the wider space, aware of the sounds and energetic changes in the room, means that I am viscerally experiencing sensations and responses that help transition my entry into the work. After the first moments of surprise, however, the feeling of threat recedes—in fact, it gives way to a subtle awareness of arrivals and departures, of sharing a space with others as I try to map my own path through the work. I have to negotiate with shifts caused by people I do not know; the film is not just a film—I am reminded again that it is part of a larger environment that affects my watching and my listening. I stop, ears pricked, then hunch a little closer towards the screen.

In *Walking in NYL* (2016), Green takes viewers through a complex city, redolent with architectural and cultural traces of a violent past. The journey, however, also offers images of the dynamism of revolution and resistance that marked the 1974 Carnation Revolution in Lisbon. The revolution resulted in the decolonization of Portuguese "provinces," along with the subsequent emergence of Portugal as an EU country, struggling—like many European countries with histories of colonization—with its influx of peoples from former colonies who are now a fundamental part of Lisbon's vibrant social fabric. How does the city of Lisbon exist as memorial and container for an event that is still ongoing, the continued fractures of postcolonial reckonings with communities of color within its walls? Green's camera answers me in part, as it now wanders through the Colonies Neighborhood, *Bairro das Colónias,* in the eastern part of the city. Here the streets, named prior to the Carnation Revolution and curiously not re-named, highlight places of colonial conquest and plunder, for example: *Angola, Moçambique, Guiné,*

Timor, Macau. Her camera hovers over the names. Each one is a stand-in for thousands of decimated Black and Brown lives, reminding me of the traumatic history of Lisbon and its foundational part in the death marches of the Middle Passage. And yet, devoid of any clear frame of reference or information, these street signs are enabled to be names only—and probably ignored by locals and tourists. Through filmic moments like these Green explores how Lisbon's past continues to weave into and affect the contemporary city, and not in a way that allows that past a voice which might change the present or affect it in some way. Far from instructing and reminding walkers that here lies a history that should not be forgotten, the very existence of these signs dilutes the power of those hidden stories. The signs announce without context—the clues are there only for those who already know. This makes the signage an incomplete step, a pretense even of reminding inhabitants and tourists of Lisbon's history. These everyday street signs, so ordinary on the surface but indexes of deep trauma, are a banal evil, to re-purpose the words of Hannah Arendt. In this way Green addresses, as De Oliveira explains, "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 globalization and uneasy relationships with diasporic and migrant communities" (44). The signs index not just trauma, but racist and colonial amnesia.

The gentleness of the camera work implies a sinister presence: of the armies that have left here to colonize such a large part of the world, the people who have suffered, corruption's gangrene. As I watch, I realize that this city, that any city, can never be truly owned, never truly known. I am reminded in Green's work—both in this installation, and the second one I will

investigate, *Climates and Paradoxes and Selected Life Indexes (2005)*—of a passage in Italo Calvino's beautiful and mournful book, *Invisible Cities:*

> In the lives of emperors there is a moment which follows pride in the boundless extension of the territories we have conquered, and the melancholy and relief of knowing we shall soon give up any thought of knowing and understanding them. … It is the desperate moment when we discover that this empire, which had seemed to us the sum of all wonders, is an endless, formless ruin, that corruption's gangrene has spread too far to be healed by our scepter, that the triumph over enemy sovereigns has made us the heirs of their long undoing. (5)

Watching the footage of a physically crumbling yet vibrant metropolis, I think of layers of conquest, of arrivals, the imperialist gaze, and how seeing—imagining what we see—has been the precursor to so much violence.

I wonder how the others entering the Carpenter Center see me, my back against the brightly colored muslin squares—and I speculate on how they feel about not being able to view the film because they need to wait for me to finish. To know something or someone requires that person or thing give up its fortress; to give up one's fortress without violence requires trust. Suddenly this enclave feels like a tiny fortress that I do not want to give up; I have turned my back on the others in the space. Trust needs to be earned. Ettinger says that:

> Art today is the site of a trust that comes *after the death of trust.* Our generation has inherited, and lives through, a colossal requiem, from the harrowing memories of the 20th century and before, to the continued violence we witness today. Our time is pregnant with the impression of loss and suffering. So the question of art, like that of the human subject it is intended to be experienced by, is always also the question of this loss and of the bringing of compassion back into life, for the future, starting from both image and from an abstract horizon … Art has the power to re-link and invent new subjects and forms in and by light and space. (Ettinger, "Art in a Time of Atrocity")

In this vein of inhabiting the question of loss, and beginning from the image to bring back a critical compassion, Green wanders through Lisbon. She does so "armed" with a camera that floats, that does not frame what it captures with any apparent agenda. Green's camera work has

an openness about its composition; the hand-held filming style, for example, allows me to see without seeing-to-conquer. Every time I feel a hint of omniscience, the camera wobbles, or she suddenly and awkwardly zooms in or out—mawkish gestures that have the sense of the intentional amateur. The camera murmurs to me: *Don't get too proud, too insulated from what you see. Your eyes are imperfect, the way you see is flawed, because you are human*. I am being given an opportunity to view outside the strictures of the colonial gaze, or at least made aware of the existence of that gaze—and therefore the opportunity to stand next to it rather than being swept up unconsciously in it. Even so I am aware of the constant potential for my gaze to shift into a more dominating mode: one that makes conclusions, that judges, that becomes no longer open to being surprised or led. "The artist's aim in these videos," writes Copeland, "is not to provide us with a documentary account, but to conjure up the texture of her experiences as well as those placeless subjects who cannot be represented in its frame" (173). The gaze-space Green creates positions me somewhere between creating a narrative of what I am looking at, and having that narrative constantly shifted so that I am compelled to listen and watch without judgment, without curation. I am not, in short, allowed to form opinions. Instead, I am invited—even compelled—to hover, walk, notice, breathe, and move with an open mind. I am invited to join in Green's "grounded engagement" with place (Copeland 172). This is not a tour, the aim is not to *get* anywhere and *achieve* anything. Green discourages me from conclusions and agendas: I am invited simply to look. In truth, I have no right to do anything else, and the place will give up its secrets and its wounds only when there is no compunction. By light and space, as Ettinger has suggested, new links are forged and new ways of seeing.

Here in my nook with the edges of the colored screen around me, I am aware of the white light pouring in through the enormous windows. Light and space. They are on the screen in

Green's mediated version of Lisbon—light and space are also here, in the quiet of the gallery. This situating of the film as installation blurs the borders of the screen and the room. The nature of her film-making, so unassuming and yet powerful, allows my mind to slip in and out of its world, and in and out of the Carpenter Center. The light and space echo each other in each site, and reflect each other. I inhabit neither, both. I see Lisbon and Harvard both bathed in light and space—both places suddenly feel connected. I think of former Harvard President, Drew Gilpin Faust, and her words, explaining that "Harvard was directly complicit in America's system of racial bondage from the College's earliest days in the 17th century until slavery in Massachusetts ended in 1783, and Harvard continued to be indirectly involved through extensive financial and other ties to the slave South up to the time of emancipation." I notice the bricks on the buildings outside the windows that are built by slave hands (Smith and Ellis), and then I see the cobbles on the Lisbon streets. New links—new ways of seeing.

Figure 2. Colored Banners. Renée Green, *Pacing: Within Living Memory,* Carpenter Center for Visual Arts, Harvard University, 2018. Author's photograph.

Both in the film, and the way it is contextualized in the Carpenter Center, Green creates a matrixial space, where borderlines are blurred between an object and its spectators. There is no longer object, not even multiple objects, but inter-connected subjectivities. In Ettinger's work, the matrixial is a metaphor that uses the uterus as a way to examine a more ethical and non-binary relationality. Matrixial space embraces a constant and fluidly shifting, non-hierarchical relational space that dissolves the subject-object dichotomy that is so embedded with ways of seeing and perceiving, understanding it instead as an encounter of subjectivity. Griselda Pollock explains that "the unremembered traumatic dimension of the Matrix is not about fusion/loss, but about shareability and co-emergence" ("Art/Trauma/Representation," 48), and accordingly

Ettinger maps out a way of art that is joining, non-binary and non-hierarchical. Such a situation is, therefore, ethical and thus holds potential for healing: this kind of work draws/invites people into an experience that is not a witnessing, but wit(h)-nessing, a coming alongside and really seeing an-other, not an Other. There is something in Green's skill at opening up new ways of seeing the urban space of Lisbon, and the understated ways she connects it to the experience of slavery across the world, that allows a shareability. She is not condemning, she is not re-presenting trauma—she is evoking the stories and silence. Even the title of *NYL* evokes connections between New York and Lisbon, aligning North America with Portugal's past. Everyone is connected in this web-linking, and the quietness and inclusive sweep of her camera enables these connections to be acknowledged with room for perceivers to respond.

I return to the footage, which now shows an urban environment made familiar yet strange through Green's filming, and a gentle ethnography unfolds. The camera zooms in, zooms out, pans across, always conscious of itself; making me—*wanting* to make me—know that I am engaged in an act of viewing. I am not omniscient, I am located in space, I share subjectivity with whom and what I view. Green focuses her camera as much on plants, and the angles and gnarled corners of buildings, as she does on people. Two women in pink dresses, pink bougainvillea, a pink wall. A bright yellow car, a green trashcan. Geraniums grown wild on a tiny balcony pressed into a high-rise apartment block—the flowers providing the only color in an otherwise vast, grey scene. Green shoots take up stolen space in splintered pavements, graffiti steals onto walls. The cracks of ground and building are subversive places—even the streets exist as fractures amidst the architecture, people slipping into them from doorways and from behind corners. More footage: where details expand into streetscapes, where wild weeds are juxtaposed with urban decay—roofs without tiles, rusted fences; torn curtains sway in an empty window. "In

gardens as much as cities," writes de Oliveira, "such structures always prove themselves ultimately unsuccessful in fully containing dynamics of resistance, erupting as infiltration, occupation or appropriation, even if temporary" (47).

But it is not only the joy of green growth that erupts; sometimes there is a different, smoldering resistance to that very growth. More pink graffiti, and then—in a corner, but glaringly loud, a small swastika: is it a footnote, or a sinister seed? Again, Green complicates the levels of existence in the margins and fissures of history—occupation, appropriation, eruptions of trauma that the city has tried to build over. But Green has her own resistance to glossing over a difficult history, her insistence on "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" (de Oliveira 43). The encounter that Green invites is "an encounter with an 'other' with all of its attendant psychical, and spatial, complexity" (Kreider 13). "Encounter" involves aspects of a chance engagement in conflict or meeting with difficulties. Inherent in this multifaceted definition is the sense of coming up alongside, or against—either way the meeting will not be an easy one. An encounter, then, is not a face-to-face meeting that is sentimental or straightforward; there exists in the encounter the possibility of further wounding. But this edge of chaos is a rich place too, a dynamic one where both parties must engage in a type of dance together to ensure that the dynamism doesn't tip into chaos or into a frigid, frozen state. Encounter describes this "line," this potent border space wherein something new can be formed.

The headphones are a key part of the installation *Walking in NYL*, instilling the film with an intimacy, a secrecy even, that simply watching the images on a large screen would not provide. It is as if Green has called me into her corner, cupped her hands and now whispers

something in my ear that the other visitors to the gallery cannot hear. I am alone and together with the rest of the exhibition, and once more I experience the sense of what it is to wander through a city, brushing against others, amongst humanity and yet in solitude. This experience makes me want to peer more closely, notice details, find connections. I hear breath in the headphones as Green walks through this "continuous city; a multi-layered, uncontainable, historical and imagined, living and lived space" (de Oliveira 47). Once more, a different type of seeing is going on here—not seeing in order to own, not seeing in a colonial sense, but looking in order to awaken the possibilities of connection with an-other. To adapt the words of Jane Rendell (quoted in Kreider 12), Green's camera work and the way of seeing in this digital installation induces in the perceiver, "From the close-up to the glances, from the caress to the accidental brush … [the camera work] draws on spaces as they are remembered, dreamed and imagined, as well as observed … to … challenge criticism as a form of knowledge with a singular and static point of view located in the here and now." There is no singular and static point of view, and indeed Green fights this with the camera's sudden swerves, its frequent diving into tiny details. Similarly, text is used sparingly and there are long passages of silence, a lack of commentary except for at specific and infrequent moments. When the words appear, they do so as islands seen in a context of constantly shifting oceans—islands that change shape as I approach. Again, nothing is singular or static.

As another day in Lisbon comes to a close, Green offers words on a simple black background; they are words that do not so much frame what I have experienced, where we have walked, but words that plant seeds of connection; words that throw me outward into what I do not know. In an inter-title, Green offers the phrase: "studying by feeling," and in this choice of language she invites me into an ontology of not knowing, of unfixed-ness—she also highlights a

way of capturing what has already captured her. Green seems to suggest—in the location that, for all its changeability, is nevertheless signposted with Portuguese and colors, sounds and sights that place me in a southern European city—that I am "beyond place" and "beyond name." *Don't reduce or label,* is the implication here, as she leads me on a visual and sonic journey through "what grows beyond containment" (Inter-titles). In the same way, the film seems to extend time; there is day, then night, followed by words that guide me into the next day. It feels like a creation story of a city: it was morning, then it was evening, and thus ended the first day. The first day of realizing one does not arrive; simply, one exists in space. One exists. We are here and not here—I am invited to hold presence and absence, together. I look up, take the headphones off for a moment. The film continues, silent, and the people wandering the gallery become the new movement. A woman and I make incidental eye contact, we both smile: the flower in the pavement crack. I have felt almost out of my body with the film, but now I realize the hardness of the wooden stool under me, the sound of Green's other audio installations, a blast of cold as the door opens and someone leaves. I am *here.* The film is a river that moves me to and from this body, this place. I have been with Green's body, viewing as she views. Now I am viewing as myself, but affected by her footage. I notice the color of a man's sock, a pigeon settling on a tree outside, the rustle of a program. I have been made more aware; I am seeing anew.

Writing forms both the foundation for, and the connection point between Green's many works and their wider temporal, spatial, intellectual and artistic context. Much of it moves beyond traditional text, manifesting as photography and installation pieces. In the case of her films, the writing exists as inter-film titles, voiceovers, and the ways the camera—moved by Green's body—traverses place. For Green, to write is to both travel into a space and also to experience it, with the ever-present possibilities of struggle and friction. Writing is far broader

than marks on a page; it is text rendered spatially, geographically, sonically. It is also, importantly, rendered with *the body,* real and virtual. I have walked in here, and have been faced with not just a spatial choice, but a writing choice. Do I view the films, let myself be drawn into that part of the gallery where an audio installation is broadcast, or to follow my eyes along the far wall where her photographs and writing are framed? Whichever order I choose, I will craft a particular narrative and accumulative journey—that order will mark out the sense, the story, my steps a form of syntactical traveling.

Michel de Certeau's concept of writing as spatial gesture, such as those gestures made as we walk through our environment, suggests that movement is a way of writing narrative with our body. This narrative may or may not be rendered further in written or spoken form (*The Practice of Everyday Life*); it is an organic, moved response to—an ongoing negotiation with—place. It is a dynamic process that is not about a narrator so much as a story emerging out of the relationship of walking in a city, the chemistry of human migration and material surroundings. What the human brings, in terms of lived experience, meets the architecture and shaped, material history of a place. A new set of stories is birthed from this interaction, this interface. De Certeau notes that "moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces" (93). These fragments are held in the city, as in an archive, the margins between each artifact (abstract memory or physical object) open up possibilities of through-lines not yet explored, or not yet explored at *this* time, by *this* person. The very fact that I have choice in what path I take allows me, as a perceiver, a degree of agency that opens up a range of levels of engagement. I can move close to, apart from, the works. The environment is one to which I can adapt and then create my

own borders with what I experience. This makes it possible for me to take courage to come close, to be shifted.

In *Walking in NYL* (and this is true also in *Climates and Paradoxes and Selected Life Indexes*), the body writes in multiple ways. To once more approach the above quote from de Certeau in a wider context:

> They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner,* whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban "text" they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen … The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems in which each body is an element signed by many others …intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other. (93)

Green's work also explores the ways a body might perform *in absentia*. As mentioned in the opening sections of this chapter, Green's body is clearly felt and indexed in her work, while not actually, physically present in the film. The moving of the camera through space traces Green's walking, her looking and her *being-there* as she moves through Lisbon (and, later, Berlin). The films express textural, and textual, elements through their visual and sonic aspects, and these in turn imply and sketch out the imprint—a living, breathing imprint—of a body writing in space. The sites of Lisbon and Berlin are both places that contain trauma in their histories—Portugal's colonialism and slavery, and the rise and rule of the Third Reich in Germany. Both cities contain traces of these traumata, and in journeying through them Green is also navigating—via these traces—through that trauma. Her traveling body creates a narrative around as well as through the trauma that has occurred in that site, rendered in the curation of sights and sounds. Copeland comments on Green's walking and its political and historical connections to issues of racial and colonial trauma:

> Green's walking, I want to say, constitutes a kind of *petit marronage*—defined by historian Richard Price as the practice among New World slave populations of

> ‘repetitive or periodic truancy with temporary goals’—that both references past strategies of African diasporic resistance and recalls the sojourns of those lost to the archive. This operation renders the artist a kind of archive as well, perpetually displaced in a voluntary but nonetheless haunted performance of the black subject’s political-ontological homelessness. (172)

Green’s body is traveling through the city as archive, and as Copeland suggests, her body is also operating as a type of archive: of one experience of Black diasporic wandering. The archive and repertoire overlap and co-exist, excluding the idea of their having a binary existence.

I add here that Green’s film installations, importantly, offer her perceivers an indirect contact with this suffering. She allows me to be absorbed into the environment through her film-making and to vicariously experience these traces, thus inviting me to wit(h)ness, if just for a moment, the cultural and historical trauma that still, in some form, continues. I am involved in Green’s wanderings, but I am also sitting on this stool, in Harvard. Outside the window I once more notice those brick walls. This campus is here because of the slave labor that built it. Slave plantations and industry funded the growth of graduate programs and buildings (Smith and Ellis). I am a beneficiary of these programs, these buildings. I am here because of those enslaved hands—and this complicates my location and my being here. I cannot hide from responsibility and culpability—although I do not understand it, I feel it. I am surrounded by a city that has its own stories of trauma which tie in to the colonial project of Lisbon. I am part of that culture that produces street signs as acknowledgement—in place of true acknowledgement that might lead to healing and change. Green’s film installation dissolves borders between there and here, between past and present, between Green and myself, between white colonial dominance and my own whiteness. This inclusion feels invitational, not forced. I am allowed a choice in when I look, whether I take the headphones off, whether I swivel around and face the present moment of the rest of the installation. This feels resonant with matrixial space—I am joining with what I see,

and also separating from it. I have the agency to approach the wounds I now notice more keenly in the spaces around me, the wounds that are touching my own, and yet I have agency to also withdraw, to allow them to affect me without being overwhelmed. There is great compassion at work here—because there is no excusing the responsibility of those who benefit from a system of oppression. I do not deserve to be only invited to look.

Trauma is a site of lived experience— not simply an "event" or series of "events" that "happen/s." Trauma is both site and experience that, although overwhelming, has paradoxically not been fully lived, so that it haunts until it is processed. The body is intrinsic to that experiencing, and also the archiving of that experience. It makes perfect sense, therefore, that the body that must play a central part in communicating that experience—talking from within the trauma experience, not about it. This aspect of the moving body, the body writing its paths through the world, is fundamental in discussing the way trauma narratives can be expressed in this type of performance: where materials, sound, landscape, architecture and the camera perform. Cathy Caruth, in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History,* points out the repeating ideas of "departure" "falling" "burning" or "awakening" in work that has come out of, or reflects trauma (5) and notes that such narratives become "inextricably bound up with the problem of what it means to fall … The story of the falling body" (7). Caruth refers to literary work, nevertheless the terms she uses reference movement and embodiment as being a central way to express and communicate trauma. The written words on a page index—may evoke—moving bodies, but the type *is not itself* a moving, or falling, body. Literature is a powerful mediator of the embodied experience of falling, but cannot itself be that body. A language that precludes the body, therefore, could be deemed as incomplete. A performance poetics such as I investigate in this book is complex enough to encompass the written word, and then facilitate

that word's embodiment. Performance can be a site for more fully exploring the experience of the falling body in ways that fixed marks on a page can never achieve, because they cannot fall, move or otherwise shift, whereas the body in space can do this—as can the camera held by that body, the sounds made by that body. Where Caruth talks about falling being a recurring motif of trauma literature, it is again this scene of the body in motion, though space, that is the most able to transmit the *being-ness,* the presence and visceral ontology of experience. I argue that performance—in all the ways Green explores—expands the possibilities of language that Caruth lays out here. The moving and falling body can communicate itself in a multi-text site: sound, breath, light, space. The body is always in relationship with the space around it, and performance allows this relationship, with all its interplays of multiple "languages" and media, to more fully express the trauma story.

The notion of writing with the body in space is foundational to Green's film-making; Green generates text/s from her body moving through the world, contemplating life and everything inherent in the environment. In her film installations, text and the body are not exclusive entities, but are interconnected parts of her process of creation and reflection. In Michel de Certeau's thesis on walking, the acting out of a spatial trajectory becomes an act of enunciation, of creating a narrative (99). In forming her narratives of place, Green writes on page and path. Her movement through cities is an act of writing with her body, tracing her own storied maps—texts—of place. To borrow the words of literary critic and scholar Shoshana Felman in *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J.L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*, there is an "indissoluble relation between the physical and the linguistic, between body and language, act and discourse" (65). Green also writes in response to her physical path-making, in reflection of it—and also to create more movement. The act of writing, and the product of

writing itself, can help craft, shift and articulate the physical path. It does not have to "fix" the narrative trajectory, it can allow both the process and "product" of itself to be free to keep becoming. The creation of written words that both perform and help construct a space for someone to move and speak is a grounded practice that expands the nature of writing. The body is made to move, perform, and write. Additionally, the body writing and sensing and moving is always also political: it involves relationship with the *polis.*

Diana Taylor writes in her chapter on 9/11 in *The Archive and the Repertoire,* about what happened when everyday New Yorkers were banned from being present at the site of the city's trauma, Ground Zero. Drowning in images from outside media outlets about their crisis, ordinary people used photography—they could take pictures from a distance, even if they were physically isolated from the site. This way, they could interact with what had happened, and develop some measure of agency over their own response. Taylor describes it as: "we were all framing what we saw from our position" (255). In this case, the body's role as listener and watcher, as the one who documents, was forbidden—so the camera took on the range and motion that the body itself was denied. It was through the filming from buildings, from the edges of Ground Zero that citizens of New York City could make "an effort to gain access, to gain understanding" (255). Green too seems to be trying to access a measure of agency in Lisbon—a site that historically denied equal and liberated access to Black people. Although free now to wander the streets, she is also documenting the traces, a ghost testimony, of those who, in the past, were not free. She frames what she sees from her own position, which, according to art critic André Rottman, "expand[s] the concept of site specificity to include not just an examination of the intrinsic qualities of a given place but an articulation of the interstices and absences by which it is equally defined." Green points her camera at these interstitial spaces, where slaves were once prevented

from moving freely—or even moving at all—and therefore she frames their absence, capturing crisis at a distance. Until their testimony is heard and acknowledged, if we are to believe Caruth, that wound will speak and cry out. Green is trying to tune in to that cry. Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière write of the inscription of "a story cut out of history" on the body, and that trauma will inscribe itself there until it is no longer cut out, but acknowledged (*History Beyond Trauma,* 251). Green's camera catches those inscriptions.

The work Green does in interacting with the trauma of a place and its people is done with a double presence. She is physically present, moving through an actual space, working *in situ,* yet she does not allow us to see her body moving in this space, involved as she is in "breaking apart discursive unities sedimented around the excessive visuality of the black body in Western modernity" (Kobena Mercer). There are hints sometimes—one of the onlookers, occasionally, is a Black woman, seen from the back and with the same long dreadlocks as Green, yet we know it is not Green herself. She teases us, or perhaps reminds us that her camera work is also a way of being present and floating, ghostlike. It is also a way that she disrupts the binary of the subject who gazes and the object who is watched. Green is opening up an(other) way of examining history of site, and her camera work and her amorphous physical presence "disrupts the simplistic duality of arguing only about exclusion and inclusion (the rhetoric of bureaucratic multiculturalism). It goes beyond the binary mode of narration in which history's victims and victimizers can only trade places, and opens instead onto a third space" in which it is possible to encounter traumatic memory as a shared and inclusive experience rather than something that happens to an-Other (Mercer). In watching this film, I find that I am also floating, eyes without a body, yet physically anchored by the stool and the headphones on my ears. I gain access through