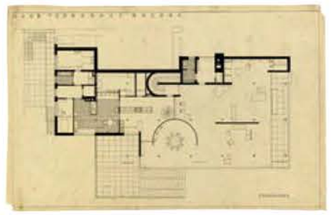


Source materials for **The Glass Room** (clockwise from top left): Architect Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe in the living room of Villa Tugendhat, Brno, Czechoslovak Republic, February 1931; photo: Fritz Tugendhat; source: Villa Tugendhat website / Bösendorfer Piano / Plan for the replacement of the two retractable windows, Villa Tugendhat, Brno [Brünn], 14 June 1930 / Podium level plan, Villa Tugendhat, 1928-1930

חומרי מקור ל**חדר הזכוכית** (משמאל למעלה ובכיוון השעון): האדריכל לודוויג מיס ון דר רוהה בחדר המגורים של וילה טוגנדהאט, ברנו, צ'כוסלובקיה, פברואר 1931, צילום: פריץ טוגנדהאט, מקור: אתר וילה טוגנדהאט / פסנתר בוזנדורפר / תכנית להחלפת שני חלונות ההזזה החשמליים, וילה טוגנדהאט, ברנו, 14 ביוני 1930 / תכנית קומת הפודיום, וילה טוגנדהרט, 1928–1930

The Map, the Story and the Territory

Nili Goren

In terms of cultural criticism, simulation is a process in which the representations of things transpose the represented things. Using Jorge Luis Borges' fable of the map,[1] Jean Baudrillard illustrates a process in which social representations become more important than the reality they represent. The map drawn by the cartographers in the tale was so detailed, it occupied the entirety of the Empire, hiding and in fact concealing the real territory. The Empire's citizens lived on the map and lost touch with the area itself, a quality which, according to Baudrillard, is analogous to the comfort of living in an imagined environment and contemporary society's dependency on the simulations constructed for it by the media. In Borges' tale, however, the territory preceded the map, whereas today the map precedes the territory. By precedence Baudrillard refers to simulations that no longer represent things that preceded them; copies without an origin, representations which he terms *simulacra*. This, according to Baudrillard, is the fourth and purest stage of simulation relationships, when the correlation between symbol and real object, between signifier and sign, is wholly breached, the index quality is disrupted and the map no longer fits reality. It becomes a total fiction, a hyper-reality, a space of signified with no hold on reality.

Media technology constructs an endless plethora of such detached signifiers, leading to the sterilization and depletion of meanings. Distinction between media products and reality is blurred, the plethora of data obscures its contents and the substance of reality becomes details in a tale. Simultaneously, the figures that have no real-world parallel obscure it and annul the distinction between reality and fiction. Simulation that precedes reality is parallel to the map preceding the territory. Similarly to the visual abstraction of locations as they appear in maps, so the artistic world of Jed Martin, the protagonist of Michel Houellebecq's *The Map and the Territory*,[2] is characterized by the abstraction of emptiness and tedium. The novel, which takes place in the art world, tells the story of a (fictional) young artist who has dedicated his life to art and to photographing geographic maps from Michelin Guides, which have gained him fame and outstanding success.

When Jed became interested in Michelin maps and began purchasing enthusiastically any such map that he came upon, he turned away from film photography and acquired a

high-quality, high-resolution digital back for his Linhof camera. An ecstatic review of his first solo exhibition, showing photographs of the maps and entitled "The Map is More Interesting than the Territory," noted that Marten "moves away […] from that naturalist and neo-pagan vision by which our contemporaries exhaust themselves in an attempt to retrieve the image of the Absent One. […] [H]e adopts the point of view of a God co-participating, alongside man, in the (re)construction of the world."[3]

Generally speaking, one can say Jed Martin's work testifies to seeking a generic language, similar to the imaginary languages which Borges deals with in many of his stories. In her work *The Map and the Territory* from the series "Priming," Orit Raff presents Michel Houellebecq's study. The room in the photograph matches the description of the space given by the anonymous narrator who is, of course, Houellebecq himself. Using the clear, concise description, Raff meticulously recreates the minimalist room and shifts the space from a verbal representation, seeking to mediate an image, to a visual representation relying on this description rather than on a real space. This cyclical move, reminiscent of Borges' looped writing, elucidates well the complex transitions Raff creates between literary and visual descriptions, between text and photograph, between reality and fiction. Like many photographs in recent years, the works are printed using a computerized process of injecting ink using a file of algorithmic data whose translation to color parameters provides the visual image. Unlike many other photographs, however, Raff's visual file is not the product of photography but of pure simulation. This difference is especially relevant for the photograph in which Raff chose to represent Houellebecq's novel, because of the many layers extending between the protagonist's artistic ambitions and the visual expressions of their application.

Jed visits Houellebecq in Ireland, in order to make his acquaintance for writing a catalogue text for him, in exchange for Jed painting Houellebecq's portrait. These visits are accompanied by many descriptions of the author's house and the neglect evident not only in the house and garden but also in its owner's looks. Their dialogues include concise, succinct definitions about Jed's work, the shift from photography to painting, the differences between their relation to reality and Houellebecq's double role—a character in a novel at times playing its own role in reality. The dialogues emphasize the illusionary dimension unique to the novel and its analogy to the illusionary effect of photography compared with painting. The complex relationship peaks in the novel when the author's painted portrait becomes one of the protagonists; a protagonist who causes a dramatic turn in the detective part of the plot and brings about the brutal destruction and dissection of the author's body, until the body (corpse) no longer holds the appropriate signifier/signified analogy, like a map that no longer corresponds to the territory. At this point

in time, Houellebecq's portrait, painted several months before his murder, is solid proof to the (albeit past) existence of the man, beyond the remains of his dismembered body. The representation relations have become blurred, and the sign that originally signified the author's character now represents his literary quality alone.

Raff chose to represent the novel with Houellebecq's study, using the description taken from his second meeting with Jed. Jed had come to photograph him in his study, planning to base the portrait on the photographs. The detailed description of the final portrait, as analyzed by a Chinese art critic, reveals that the painting is not a faithful copy from the photographs of the study and that Jed had added a dramatic background based on huge enlargements of Houellebecq's hand-writing and notes, as he had expected to find by his computer. Raff returns to the moment of documentary photography, to the paragraph detailing the room. Based on the literary description she constructs, by a meticulously thorough process of representation, a study that is faithful to the novel's description and to the many preparatory photographs Jed had taken there. Raff's photograph recreates with wonderful accuracy a space whose real existence is from the outset an image rather than reality, and is probably similar if not identical to one of Jed's photographs in the location. Yet the very existence of these photographs takes place in the virtual sphere, as a literary metaphor; their only visual expression is realized in Raff's representation photograph, in a complex system of signs that have no touch to reality but only to its detached images, the simulacra.

[1] Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude and Science" [1935], in *Collected Fictions*, translated by Andrew Hurley, New York: Viking Penguin, 1998, p. 325.

[2] Michel Houellebecq, *The Map and the Territory* [2010], translated by Gavin Bowd, New York: Knopf, 2012.

[3] *Ibid*., p. 60.

What Goes Unseen

Jenny Erpenbeck

1

When I walk through Schiller's house in Weimar, which is now a museum, I think: This is where Schiller worked.

I think:

Here's the desk drawer where he kept the apples that were starting to rot so he could take them out and smell them every once in a while.

I also think:

This is where the cleaning woman dusted today.

She repositioned the sign that reads "Please Do Not Touch!" to ensure that visitors to the Museum actually see it.

This is where two weeks ago the electrician repaired the wall socket where the cleaning woman plugs in her vacuum cleaner.

I wonder how long there's been a wall socket in Schiller's house.

Is Schiller's wall really still a wall that belongs to Schiller?

I know that during the war Schiller's furniture was stored for a time at the Buchenwald concentration camp just outside of Weimar.

I think of how a friend of our family, who was a prisoner at the Buchenwald concentration camp, borrowed a book from the prison library, which he never returned because the war had ended meanwhile. It was a book of Göring speeches that this former prisoner later used to prop up a wardrobe whose one leg was too short.

When I walk through the Schiller Museum in Weimar, I think of how a place designed to destroy human lives also contained a lending library.

I wonder where Schiller is living now.

2

Whenever there's a break from rehearsals at the theater, the actors head to the cafeteria for coffee, a stagehand uses his cordless drill to set up one more platform and then wanders back across the stage to the other side; shortly after this, a few hammer blows can be heard backstage and then all is still. For a quarter of an hour, the set is deserted and the director and set designer sit in the eighth row in the empty house, looking at the empty stage. They both know that the play will never be more deeply understood, the staging never more right, than during this quarter of an hour when no words are spoken and no one appears on stage, this silent quarter of an hour when the only light is a work lamp and the stage set simply *is*.

3

When a book is being discussed at a reading, one of the readers in the audience is sure to ask the author why the main character—"Clara," say, or "Jeff"—does one thing or another. The question goes like this: I don't understand why Jeff can do this or that after such a long time. Or: Clara must have known about... So why did she…?

The beliefs and behavior of Clara and Jeff from the book are discussed in the same way one might talk about one's neighbors Clara and Jeff—people one used to know who are now dead, perhaps, or who are supposed to be arriving for a visit next week. In asking about Clara or Jeff, this reader has forgotten they are characters in a book. Or did he never know they were? The author might try for a little while to make his answers reflect the fact that, after all, he was the one who decided to have his characters behave in such and such a way, but in the end he will capitulate and start saying things like: Well, Jeff's in love. Clara would have liked to do things differently, but if you keep in mind how young she was when her parents died…

Or words to that effect.

Is there a difference between the sentence "Well, Jeff's in love" referring to a character in a novel and the same sentence applied to our actual friend Jeff, whom we've known since we first started school?

And if someone gives us a present, is there a difference between the times we look

at the present when the giver is still alive and the times we look at the present after the giver's death?

4

Orit Raff is an artist who plays with all the overlays through which we look at reality and make images of it, including all the overlays of others that we see through our own overlays, overlays these others use to look at reality and make images of it. Is there a difference between looking at reality and looking at the image of a reality? And is it only ever knowledge that makes it possible for us to realize we have fallen prey to an illusion? Or does the deception—despite itself, despite its own nature and deepest intentions—also wind up revealing itself? What makes these works by Raff so compelling is the way they lead us layer by layer through various strata of perception, at the same time speaking to us of how limited our gaze is, how limitless our imagination.

5

Can you tell by looking at the rooms Raff has created, based on books like Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Michel Houellebecque's *The Map and the Territory* or Scarlett Thomas's *The End of Mr. Y*, that they do not exist or never existed—at least in the truth of what we call reality? Can you instead perceive their literary truth? Are they crime scenes, stage sets or just films at a standstill? What Raff unleashes on us here is a speculative art. If we know that these rooms belong to books we once read, we can fill out what we see with the stories we remember. With our eyes we follow the traces of plot Raff has hidden in these spaces, enjoying the deviations between the story told in the book and the space of the book as we see it here—but also the deviations between the space we saw in our mind's eye while reading and the one Raff perceived.

If we don't know the books, however, we see the stories contained in these pictures much the way we use "x" to name a variable in mathematics that we understand as located, as variable, in the middle of recognizable reality. In Raff's rooms, books are transformed into time and time feels perpetually vibrant, even though one can never know all that happens in a given period of time.

6

And what if we had no idea that Raff had invented and created these rooms? What then? If we didn't know that nowadays something that looks on first glance like a photograph does not necessarily have to be one? And if we didn't know that these rooms do not exist, in fact never existed, in the truth of what we call reality? Would we see the rooms' unrealness when we look at them? And would we still see the stories they are the skin for? One thing they definitely are *not* is illustrations. They do not show what happens. We see only the places: empty rooms. Rooms for people with no people in them. Human traces, but no human beings. Places of possibility. Places where something might have happened or might happen still. Places whose present tense is filled with past and future. Fraught rooms that compel us to linger. The emptier what we are seeing is, the more uncanny our own imaginings appear to us. Even when all there is to see is a desk, a trash can, a pair of sneakers, a hot water bottle or a turned-down bed, nothing special, we still have to keep looking at this room because the fact that all this is being shown already draws us into the invisible tale. What we are being told is that there is a story here.

7

On first glance I found it almost obscene when all at once I saw the hotel room where Emma Bovary came to meet her lawyer so clearly *defined* in Raff's picture, so *delimited*, ruthlessly pinned down as if in a photograph. An intrusion into the intimate sphere of a book that until that moment had been hidden behind a cloud consisting of all the imaginings of all the book's readers. It was also an intrusion into the intimacy of an age that had only just heard of photography. In any case, it was an intrusion into the story itself, the intimacy these two characters would have had if they existed. Raff steps into the room at a moment when she herself can go unseen, undiscovered; she is both interloper and voyeur, and she turns us too—since we are following her gaze—into interlopers and voyeurs. A picture like this looks at first like an act of violence compared to a book in its immateriality.

But since these pictures are not photographs after all, since they are in fact themselves an invention, since the rooms are not made of walls, the furniture not made of wood and

the glass not made of glass; since a bed sheet is not a bed sheet and a fold in the fabric is just a fiction, the violence turns into playfulness as we look at it and see that truth consists in the response of one immaterial world to another immaterial world, both of them at home in impermanence.

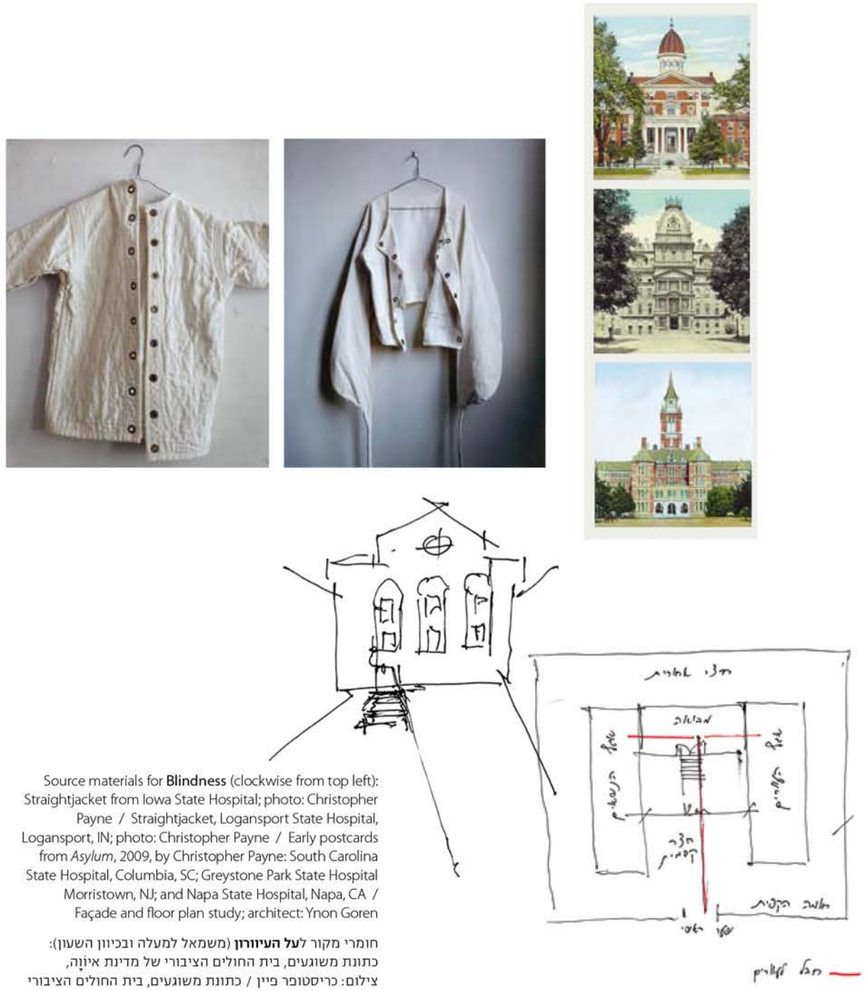
8

The strata between which Raff moves with her pictures are multilayered and intricate, just like the themes and structures of the books she takes as her point of departure: suppositions about which different stories might underlie an unchanging exterior view; hopes and fears regarding who knows or is to know these stories, from whom they must remain hidden, and who, despite many attempts, will never learn of them; one's own life that is interwoven with the life of another without this bond ever being revealed, or the other way around: one's own life that is conjoined with the life of another without the connection being deeply rooted.

Whether the secrets of a double life, such as the one led by Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, or the rift between inner perception and external behavior, like the one that troubles the main character in Amos Oz's *My Michael*; whether contemplations over why the human mind is constituted in such a way that a map of a territory interests it more than the territory itself, as in Houellebecque's *The Map and the Territory*, or the project of using language to examine the exterior view of an event as if approaching truth cartographically, as it were, as Robbe-Grillet attempts in *Jealousy*—none of these scenarios is more exemplary with regard to the ostensibly realistic perfection of Raff's pictures than the perfidiousness with which the two ostensibly ideal children in Henry James's ghost story *The Turn of the Screw* conceal their secrets from their governess, so that paradoxically they become increasingly uncanny the more perfect they appear to be.

9

Just as these authors do with their books, so Raff explores in her pictures this same tension between surfaces and what may be concealed beneath them. As these texts reveal and surrender their stories and pictures to our gaze, they are asking what kind of perfection we ought to desire. Does our reaching a goal make it reachable? Can the images of happiness we envision ever be identical to happiness itself? And are we not instead tacking off course with our own desires and beliefs about how much we need to know in order to move in the world, and how blind we really are all this time we are moving? It is also a matter of the agreements human beings enter into with regard to what is left unsaid, the inability to communicate and the egoism of the individual. And yet these external beliefs have long since been internalized, and we can see them in Raff's pictures: in the counterfeit views of a counterfeit nature, the snow falling through a pair of rotting rafters into the dusky light of a storehouse, the blank windows. Attempting to shut out the wilderness, man has taken this selfsame wilderness into his interior, bringing it inside his own four walls. And his fear of what is superior to him—for it survives him—is still every bit as great as it was before these four walls existed. The perfect artificiality and flawlessness of Raff's pictures speak to us, just like the books these pictures are based on, of mankind's efforts to conceal what is referred to in our language as *dirt*, *ephemerality* and *history*.



Source materials for **Blindness** (clockwise from top left): Straightjacket from Iowa State Hospital; photo: Christopher Payne / Straightjacket, Logansport State Hospital, Logansport, IN; photo: Christopher Payne / Early postcards from *Asylum*, 2009, by Christopher Payne: South Carolina State Hospital, Columbia, SC; Greystone Park State Hospital Morristown, NJ; and Napa State Hospital, Napa, CA / Façade and floor plan study; architect: Ynon Goren

חומרי מקור ל**על העיוורון** (משמאל למעלה ובכיוון השעון): כתונת משוגעים, בית החולים הציבורי של מדינת איוָה, צילום: כריסטופר פיין / כתונת משוגעים, בית החולים הציבורי לוגנספורט, לוגנספורט, אינדיאנה, צילום: כריסטופר פיין / גלויות ישנות מתוך הספר ***Asylum***, 2009, מאת הצלם כריסטופר פיין: בית החולים הציבורי של דרום קרוליינה, קולומביה, דרום קרוליינה; בית החולים הציבורי גרייסטון פארק, מוריסטאון, ניו ג'רזי; בית החולים הציבורי נאפה, נאפה, קליפורניה / שרטוטים של חזית המבנה ותכנית קומה, אדריכל: ינון גורן

The Fact of the Fiction

Eva Díaz

It is astonishing how a reader's identification with the setting of a novel can transport her beyond the often-mundane sites in which the act of reading takes place. Aboard the cross-town bus there is that bookworm, jammed elbows to ribs amid cranky straphangers and parcels and strollers, who very nearly misses her stop while eagerly turning the pages of a paperback set on a faraway planet. At home unanswered emails pile up along with dirty laundry—and that sink full of dishes isn't washing itself!—but a book describing just about any other place in the world is a sure diversion from those nagging tasks.

Immersion in a good story can be so complete and its absence (say, on a long trip) so vexing, that the hunt for appealing new reading material is a preoccupation as consuming as any book itself. As private as reading can feel (and, of course, reading requires solitary contemplation even when it transpires in public settings), any novel conjures not merely a diagetic space within its pages. Also at play are the external spaces of the acquisition and collection of books, and the sites of social communication that circulate around books: of readers browsing library stacks or bookstore displays; of conversations in which recommendations are exchanged ("Ooh if you liked *Dahlgren* you should *really* check out John Crowley's work…"); and, of course, of the screen time we all put in online, keying terms into search boxes, then scrolling through algorithmically generated results and suggestions for further reading.

In her recent series "Priming," photographer Orit Raff merges these features of reading: exploring how the captivation of the diagesis can transcend the physical reality of a reader's surroundings, while investigating how conversations between readers, and the relationality between fictional works, create spaces beyond the site of "active" reading. Raff does this by reaching into the pages of selected historical and contemporary novels to painstakingly recreate key locations in these stories, in much the same way a production designer would stage a set for a movie. At the same time, in the twelve photographs displayed in the current exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Raff moves the viewer laterally between stories, with each photograph functioning like a way station on a journey through associations among the works. In combining these aspects—the

productive and the connotative—Raff's show is like a carefully edited reading list in which tantalizing details of coming attractions are bestowed upon the viewer, while "sets" from familiar stories are presented for visual consideration. Raff's decision to illustrate certain locations in the novels is enticement to gallery goers not only to discover or explore again the books she has selected, but to rethink the relationship between real places and their fictional counterparts, between sites of consumption of and discussion about fiction. In so doing, she adds the art gallery in which viewers see her work to the spaces of discursive communication about books.

Just as fiction constructs spaces with no material existence other than the word, Raff's works are entirely computer generated and, until they are outputted to a printer, consist entirely of pixels on a screen. As the artist explains:

> The images are all 3D renderings, built completely on the computer, like animation frames for a movie… the photorealism is crucial for me. The images are done after I do long research on the period the story takes place, where it takes place, [the] architectural style, the design of furniture, [and the] building techniques. I then collect references (photos, Google Earth, architectural plans and sketches) and bring detailed plans to the studio that builds it all on the computer, like sculpture and painting… I work with an architect, interior designer, 3D animation studio, etc… The crew uses architecture programs like 3D Max and Autocad, animation programs like Z Brush, Photoshop, lighting software, and so on. I treat each frame like a set, choosing the angle of the camera but of course there is no physical set, no physical stain or trace, and no camera.[1]

Raff's use of a 3D rendering process is important and it is worth probing what "render" signifies in this context, coming as it does from the French *rendre*, "to give back." Render has a range of meanings in English: to give what is due, to translate, to cause to become and even to melt down fat. In the context of visual art, a rendering re-presents something in the form of a drawing or painting. It is rooted in the notion of "giving back" to nature (which is experienced in three dimensions) an accurate two-dimensional representation, especially by using tools of perspectival representation that translate objects between two and three dimensions. Render is not a term often associated with photography, a medium understood to be a near-instantaneous indexical imprint of nature, unlike the accretive and constructive process of drawing or painting. Yet, as Raff's description indicates, with the rise of digital technologies a new kind of rendering is possible in which there is no film or camera, a kind of representation taking place in front of a computer screen, with or without a photographic output. "Screen time" is a space where many writers spend

most of their hours as they construct their discursively based illusions; in her use of screen time to produce her work, Raff has cycled the in-the-field reportage of the photograph back into the intimate space where novels get written. Constructing each section of the surface of her images colored pixel by colored pixel, Raff's works are more akin to richly modeled paintings than traditionally conceived photographs.

Though 3D rendering processes have proceeded apace of remarkable technological advances in digital representation, camera-less photography itself is not new. The main technique for producing a photographic image without a camera has been the photogram, which captures the silhouettes of objects placed on a photosensitive paper. It could be argued that another technique of camera-less production is the photomontage, in which various source images (some originally photographic) have been cut out of their original contexts and juxtaposed into new scenarios without being reprocessed or resynthesized through a camera. Raff's construction of her images should be understood within the genealogy of these camera-less processes: she sources images of architecture, pictures of objects and photographic perspectives to collage a new patchwork stitched together without a single camera's final perspective. One can think of this application of camera-less photography in two ways. The first is literal: Raff refers us to the traces, imprints and indexes of early photograms that were seen as more "accurate" because of their physical adjacency to their source. The second way is figurative: she creates camera-less scenes, much like photomontages, which demonstrate that photographing or literally bringing the camera's eye into the fictions of the novel is an unachievable task. Though any published book possesses an indisputable physicality in its paper and binding (or, in the age of the Kindle, in its arrangements of words on a screen), Raff's work translates the words on the page into spatialized forms and makes visible spaces previously available only through textual means. As she has stated, she intends in her process "to make words physical."[2] Yet her materializations of words create impossible spaces, traversable only by the eye, existing in no indexically confirmable realm.

In each of Raff's photographs she makes evident a particular slice of the source novel's fictional world. The images are 65×80 cm, except for one that is 140×110 cm. All are smaller than life size; as objects on the wall, they appear like picture windows framing the "shot" that Raff has constructed. The photographs are empty of the story's characters, and at the reduced scale they can seem like dollhouses or crime-scene models. Shown together as a series, Raff's works impel a particular kind of curiosity—to go back to novels to understand how the prose sketches plausible yet wholly imagined architectures on the page. The creative control Raff exercises in fabricating these locations is immense, taking as she does the few phrases or key passages from the novels that describe a space

and then building out the entire set from the vivid but sometimes scant details that the authors employ.

There are likely few viewers to the current exhibition who will have read all the novels Raff portrays: *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert, 1856; *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James, 1898; *Jealousy* by Alain Robbe-Grillet, 1957; *My Michael* by Amos Oz, 1968; *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt, 1992; *Blindness* by José Saramago, 1995; *Special Topics in Calamity Physics* by Marisha Pessl, 2006; *The End of Mr. Y* by Scarlett Thomas, 2006; *Visitation* by Jenny Erpenbeck, 2008; *The Glass Room* by Simon Mawer, 2009; *Freedom* by Jonathan Franzen, 2010; and *The Map and the Territory* by Michel Houellebecq, 2010. Because of the number and diversity of the titles, many viewers will be encountering photographs of fictional spaces for which they may have no direct experience of the textual source to draw upon. Perhaps, as was the case for me, one will initially concentrate on the photographs portraying locations from books one has read, to then tease out the logic of the selection of the books and of the settings within the books. *Madame Bovary*, the oldest of the books Raff represents, will likely be among the most familiar to viewers of the novels (it was for me), and thus a good focal point for considering Raff's project.

Raff's image for *Madame Bovary* portrays what initially seems to be an upscale boudoir, replete with furniture upholstered in gold-hued brocade, walls papered with a delicate floral pattern and windows and bed hung with heavy drapes in rich red tones. The mahogany furniture sits atop an elaborate patterned rug and oil paintings of landscapes and floral still lives line the walls. The large sleigh bed is unmade and pillows are strewn about the floor. Near the large window on the far side of the room is a dressing table. Beyond the translucent inner curtains of this window one can see a balcony overlooking a building of some size across a street; this room is in a city and appears to be some stories above street level. Back within the room, set upon a round table beyond the foot of the bed, is a tray holding a pair of champagne flutes and an apple, indicating that this is probably a hotel room; the room's decor, though seen in an untidy state, is somewhat devoid of lived-in details in the manner characteristic of temporary lodgings. Only the incongruous furry pink slippers at the foot of the bed and the hat on the dressing table present the viewer with possessions specific to any one resident. These signs of a feminine presence are not joined by any other suggestions of permanent habitation.

Madame Bovary is a tale of a woman living beyond her financial means, her love life constrained by the codes of rural, provincial morality. The room, given the urban setting beyond the window, must therefore be the site of Emma Bovary's sexual assignations with one of her lovers, the young law student Léon from Rouen. The champagne glasses and

tousled sheets are clues that the space is one of romance and sexual intimacy—few objects like champagne flutes form so great a trope of "the lovers' tryst." Like all other "Priming" images, Raff's work contains no people, so the viewer can scrutinize the setting without fear of catching a stray glance from the story's characters. Given that many discussions of fiction writing focus on characterization, plotting and narrative, Raff's emphasis on setting is a pointed move. The depopulated nature of the works in Raff's series give the photographs an enigmatic and stagey quality, as though the participants in the narrative have been called away from the setting and props when a director called "cut."

Of the countless locations Flaubert describes in *Madame Bovary*, Raff's selection of this opulent hotel room in Rouen condenses the main themes of the novel: Emma Bovary's reckless sexual dalliances and her overweening aspiration to improve her class situation. In the novel, the lovers adore the "dear old room" while simultaneously forgiving, in the haughty manner characteristic of Emma's worldview, its "rather faded splendors." The room unites them: "They were so completely wrapt up in each other, so oblivious of the outer world, that it seemed like being in their own house, and they dreamed they would continue to live there always, eternal bridegroom and eternal bride, world without end." Yet within a few pages of Flaubert's vivid, though selective description of the contents of the room, where the lovers meet each Thursday, he quickly moves his characters' bliss towards estrangement and separation, hastened by Emma's mounting debts. In faithfully reconstructing the Hotel de Boulogne, down to the two "big pink shells" on the chimney-piece, Raff has chosen the site of Emma's last ecstasy before the novel turns inexorably towards tragedy.

Raff likewise selects a transitional space in the narrative arc of Saramago's *Blindness*. In this image she focuses on a pivotal location in the story: the abandoned asylum returned to use as a quarantine zone cum prison for those afflicted with the mysterious epidemic of blindness that is the plot's conceit. Like the protagonist of *Blindness*, a woman feigning illness to remain close to her stricken husband, viewers of Raff's image are witness to the dire circumstances in which the sightless townspeople find themselves. Raff's photograph of the weedy brick structure, like the *Madame Bovary* image, contains subtle but unmistakable signs of the absent characters. In the case of the *Blindness* image, Raff's work pictures the rope used as a guideline to assist the entrance of the newly blind into the asylum, a rope receding eerily towards the door of the compound in which order and decency break down after a lawless band of inmates exploits the other victims of the disease. The rope stretching into the distance is therefore a highly fraught object within the story, a symbol of the helplessness of the central characters and of the power of others, including the viewer's, over their predicament.

There are perhaps no power relations so asymmetrical as that of the photographer to the sightless subject—recollect the famous 1916 Paul Strand work of a woman who wears a large, hand-lettered tag proclaiming her "BLIND," an image in which the viewer's inspection of the woman feels invasive yet unavoidable. Blindness presents a peculiar problem for photography beyond the ethics of capturing images of the sightless; blindness is itself a kind of visualization that substitutes imagination for the optical transcription of reality that a photograph requires. Just as a flash of visibility was once the necessary condition for the production of a photograph, blindness is the limit horizon of its reception.

As Raff's work moves beyond the camera's confirmation of external reality to the spaces of the computer-rendered digital painting, exploring this dynamic of blindness and visibility can help us understand the project as a whole. Taking a final example from Raff's series to illustrate this point, consider her construction of the West Indian plantation from Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy*. Raff is assisted in this task by the unnamed narrator's obsessive interest in the surrounding architecture; the novel's text is in fact accompanied by a diagram of the house floor plan, annotated with the locations of nearby landmarks. *La Jalousie*, Robbe-Grillet's original French title, has a double meaning: it refers to the emotion—a suspicion about rivals—as well as to the louvered windows common in tropical climates (thus named because they allow one to see out without being seen). Raff's work portrays the expansive wraparound veranda whose detailed description, practically down to the cosine of the sun's shadows on the terracotta porch tiles, opens the novel.

Raff's image is created from the perspective of someone standing within the porch near the foreground railing. The front door of the house is closed, but the shutters are flung open, revealing the slats of the jalousie blinds and a dark interior. These blinds act like an aperture for which the events of the novel are framed, reduced and inspected. Is the narrator, who is quite possibly but never definitively stated to be the jealous husband within the story, lurking behind these shutters? If so, then viewers inhabit the uncomfortable perspective of being scrutinized by this voyeur.

Because Raff's scenes are unpopulated, viewers experience more than a tinge of voyeuristic pleasure when studying her images, examining spaces of fantasy previously lacking visual embodiment. In *Jealousy*, Raff has returned the responsibility of the gaze to the viewer: the knowledge that in seeing we are implicated in the power dynamics of what we see unfolding before us. Raff has described her role in this series as akin to that of a photojournalist, delivering visual intelligence from the realm of the fictional. Her use of the word "photojournalist" seems particularly important; sometimes the kind of witnessing lumped under the photojournalism heading gets a (justifiably) bad rap, particularly when it functions as a kind of salacious reportage of other people's problems;

journalists are sometimes faulted for missing the big picture in their quest for topicality. It seems that in "Priming," the relationships between art photography, the photo essay and journalism are at question. Raff is proposing that we consider spaces that exist outside of history yet portray alternative, fictional histories. Raff seems drawn to these spaces because they represent tensions about society that photography might not be able to represent in its own time: the sequestered zones of illness and quarantine, the spaces of the illicit affairs of the spendthrift bourgeoisie, or the sites of colonialization in which geographic isolation triggers an obsessive interest in the microcosmic detail. Raff's digital constructions play with the relationship between fictive spaces conjured imaginatively and material realities understood perceptually and create a third space between index as truth and fiction as fantasy. For, as we move among her works, the meticulous nature of Raff's interpretations of these spaces allows us not only to project ourselves into them in the public setting of the gallery, but also to explore the interrelated mechanisms of visual representation and the creative imagination expressed in the printed word.

[1] Email conversation with the artist, 2 June 2013.

[2] *Ibid.*