# ONE CANNOT TRANSLATE SHANGRI-LA

"…for a horizon is always a horizon of the same"[1]

Hadass Marder

Welcome back.

You cannot arrive in Shangri-La, you can only return to it. In this earthly paradise, the green is too green. The image threatens to explode; its realness heralds an imminent collapse, reinforced in direct relation to its seductiveness. The invitation to (re)enter a primordial perfection elicits an anxiety of death which transforms, by a quick evolution, into an obsessive nuisance, a repetitive act in a concrete space (image) whose purpose cannot be indicated; a space which is subordinated not to linearity but to cyclicality–during which the signifiers switch, but movement remains. Raff engages in the preservation of the place which has no place. Meticulously she circles the absolute Other, stretching out a hand, erasing, deepening saturation, retouching. With a handful of sugar she sweetens the sea. The labor of the symptom is equally excruciating and gratifying.

What is preserved in the preservation? What is there to preserve in a postcard? Isn't the postcard an act of preservation in itself? The postcard preserves the visible, yet conceals exile, its own exile, therein.[2] Confrontation of that which is supposed to form an absolute Other/One (the closest to the domestic, the farthest from home) is exhausting because it never ceases to produce more and more. The excess must be reintroduced to it, so that it may sustain its perfect Otherness/Oneness (as efficient an act as pouring a river into a test tube). Thus, the pool is not as clear as might have appeared upon first encountering the image; its clarity must be enhanced, the sky-blue, the shiny cleanliness of the stairwell banister. The Other/One must be rendered increasingly more so, until one cannot even express the word "excess." The word "excess" has already been flooded by excess, thus another word must be sought to contain it, until that word is deconstructed too, perhaps Shangri-La.

In 1939 James Hilton published his *Lost Horizon* in paperback.[3] Shangri-La came directly from the UK and was applied to a lost Far Eastern kingdom. From there, in a foreseeable turn, it returned westward, to hotels, spas, and slimming methods. Hilton set out to find otherness, and found himself, itemized into pruned shrubs, marked paths, and artificial waterfalls. Wild nature was embedded with his fingerprints as soon as it was conceived in his mind.

"O man, of whatever country you are, and whatever your opinions may be, behold your history, such as I have thought to read it, not in books written by your fellow-creatures, who are liars, but in nature, which never lies. All that comes from her will be true; nor will you meet with anything false, unless I involuntarily put in something of my own."[4]

Upon encountering a foreign body, a solid, unfamiliar oneness with unknown inner rules (or possibly devoid of any regularity whatsoever), Robinson Crusoe[5] displays needed healthy human neurosis–he begins to introduce order. Crusoe arranges a narrative not only

1 Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 118. The complete quote reads: "The infinitely-other cannot be bound by a concept, cannot be thought on the basis of a horizon; for a horizon is always a horizon of the same, the elementary unity within which eruptions and surprises are always welcomed by understanding and recognized." For additional reading on Derrida's notion of the "horizon," see: Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority," in Jacques Derrida, *Act of Religion*, trans. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 230-298.

2 The Hebrew words for visible (*galuy*, גלוי), postcard (*gluya*, גלויה), and exile (*galut*, גלות) share the same root.

3 The first edition of *Lost Horizon* was published in 1933, and for a long time it was erroneously considered the first American paperback. The first American mass-market pocket-sized paperback was, in fact, rather ironically, Pearl S. Buck's novel *The Good Earth*.

4 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Origin of Inequality*, trans. G.D.H. Cole (New York: Cosimo, 2005), pp. 24-25.

5 Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (Hertfordshire: Wordworth Classics, 2000).

in the foreign outside into which he stumbled, but also inside himself, in what becomes the strangely familiar, the "uncanny" (*unheimlich*) in Freudian terms.[6] The sacred intimacy is interrupted when it comes up against the senselessness of Crusoe's arrival to the island, and he, in response, strengthens his belief in fate. Fate organizes the discreet contingencies into a narrative, whether private or collective, in a manner which generates depth. Things are not as they appear; a division is created into visibility and reality, whereby each perceived event has an "underlying layer," a type of historical subconscious. Misunderstanding in such a system is always relative, never the nonexistence of meaning as such.

Shangri-La must be substituted with "Shangri-La"; the other is, at best, a foreigner.[7]

Raff strives to rescue the savage, and does so precisely with an act which appears diametrically opposed to it. Instead of dreaming of untouched nature, she touches, over and over again. Instead of reconstructing a lost virginity, she penetrates the surface of the image, sometimes gently, at others – aggressively. This is the same fantastic irony described by Jean Baudrillard when he sketches the mute face of the masses: "the irony of false fidelity, of an excessive fidelity to the law, an ultimately impenetrable simulation of passivity and obedience, and which annuls in return the law governing them..."[8] Raff preserves the image's irreconcilability in that, unlike Crusoe, she does not generate a difference, but only an addition, an interpretation on top of an interpretation, urgency:" by an *allergy* to reference, to the message, to the *code* and to every category of the linguistic enterprise, by a repudiation of all this in favor of imploding the sign in fascination."[9] Raff does not try to generate herself as a subject looking outward, but as a gaze locked in, always inside. The moment of photography is redundified – for what decisive moment is there in a place which is devoid of time?[10]

Raff *appropriates*, performing the *appropriate* deed.[11] She does not try to evade the slippery plane, but rather becomes a part of it. She knows that the way to the collapse of the image is not by breaking free of it, but on the contrary – by its exaggerated use, its pushing to the edge with an inertia which generates a deviation. It is an act of provocation par excellence, small-scale terror which takes place within the boundaries of the existing image, reproducing it as a mythical image or as a simulacrum; "an orbital and nuclear violence of intake and fascination, a violence of the void."[12] Raff freezes that which is already dead, interrupting the endless salinity with miniscule sweetness, correcting the incorrigible.

Only a glass screen partitions between the outburst of leaves and the spotted cushions placed on the sofa by an exacting, hidden hand.

6 Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* [*Das Unheimliche*], trans. James Strachey, Standard Edition, vol. 17 (London: Hogarth Press, 2003), pp. 217-252.

7 The Foreigner (*xenos*) as occupying the ethical-social space in his ambivalence as *hostis*: both guest and enemy. He is differentiated from the absolute other, the absolutely excluded and heterogeneous savage. See: Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), pp. 5, 21.

8 Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, trans. P. Foss, J. Johnston, P. Patton, A. Berardini (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), p. 57.

9 Ibid., p. 59.

10 The image of the landscape is perceived as both the place of origin and the utopian prospect of the future, always fleeting beyond the present. See W.J.T. Mitchell, "Holy Landscape: Israel, Palestine, and the American Wilderness," in W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.), *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 277.

11 In Heidegger's writings, too, one may find an affinity between these two ostensible poles. The thought of the event (*Ereignis*) carries an ambiguity: the appropriation of the proper (*eigen*), on the one hand, and expropriation (*Enteignis*), on the other. See: Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 90.

12 Baudrillard, op. cit. n. 7, p. 73.

# ON A LOST HORIZON IN SHANGRI-LA

Drorit Gur Arie

Orit Raff sets out to sweeten the sea. She scatters white powdered sugar on the water, which she draws from a pocket attached to her apron. As in a fairy tale, she seeks a miraculous path which may, with the flick of a wand, transform the turbid mirror of reality. Her ongoing attempt to "rectify" the sea, however, is doomed to a foretold failure. The waves crash against the shore, erasing the route strewn with sweetness that has penetrated them like a foreign, threatening substance.

In her works, Raff endeavors to change states of aggregation, to subvert the laws of nature via repetitious ritualistic acts. In one of her works (*Palindrome*, 2001) she feverishly spread mattresses inside an arctic igloo over and over again, in an attempt to infuse her freezing body with some warmth. In another work (*Insatiable*, 2005) she exerted herself to mend a stale loaf of bread. Her hands tore the bread's flesh, dug in its bowels with a quasi-Beuysian, near-Sisyphean frenzy, in a desire to reconstruct its shriveled crust, but the loaf crumbled between her reddening hands, and the tormented process began all over again.

In the video piece *Sweating Sweet* (2008) the obsessive endeavor to violate the world's order takes on the dimension of archaic urgency. The artist's walk on the water, as if she were the Savior, as well as her attempt to change the composition of the sea water and miraculously metamorphose its salinity, implode, leaving no hope. The manual drawing of sugar out of her pouch/body is a futile erotic act in the spirit of Marcel Duchamp's pseudo-illogical machines; a frustrating, fruitless act.

The choreography created by Raff, utilizing her own body, strives to push the boundaries of art and to generate an inner balance by means of a restricted, yet pure and succinct physical gesture. She spins in the water in endless circles, with the "sugar machine" attached to her flesh like a womb. Her body grows tired, weakened and even bruised, and her sweet sweat drips onto the water. Effort and suffering fuse in the shamanistic act of healing, eliciting quandaries about the way in which things disappear, dissolving into ephemerality. Raff's performances always return to the body, to the physical gesture which serves as an axis from which her artistic practice flows. Images of pain and sexuality accompany her, alluding to the constructions attached by Rebecca Horn to her body/herself, or her performances in which body and movement metaphorize yearning, passion, and their imperceptible elusiveness.

Similarly, in the series of photographs *Shangri-La*, Raff strives for the unobtainable, for a place which draws away the closer one comes to it. She processes landscape representations which she downloads from the website of a hotel chain named "Shangri-La"; these are seductive advertising images, spectacular tourist traps. Shangri-La first emerged in James Hilton's formative novel *Lost Horizon* (1933) as a utopian model, an inaccessible region in the Himalayas whose dwellers are immortal. The Western phantasm about that land – ostensibly mystical and perfect, yet isolated and sealed off – was also an expression of an exotic yearning for the East, for the Orient. Utopia as a type of reflection, as the power of abstraction and the imagination, was described in Thomas More's novel, *Utopia* (1516), as a society fencing off the land of contentment from the land of disorder, limiting the presence of outsiders in its territory, either by wild nature or by human measures.

The world of Shangri-La withdraws from imitation and depiction of reality. Shangri-La is a non-place, and as such – it is historically unreliable; a fantasy that proposes pastoral images as a representation of the false and artificial. Raff's photography – based on readymade images which were a-priori (before

she processed them) subject to digital manipulation intended to produce "perfect" images – calls for a discussion concerning practices of contemporary photography in the context of the processes involved in the very act of photography. This renewed scrutiny may indicate the intricate nature of photographic representation today. Current photographic trends avoid the mimetic value of photography as the visibility of a pictorial imprint in space and as an apparatus for reflecting and documenting reality. This process is assisted by the gaze of the digital era, which led to a deepening of vision and to a change in the perception of the relations of space and gaze, from the moment in which the camera penetrates the fabric of reality – based on the impression of the reproduction masterfully described by Walter Benjamin in terms of changing the visual perception and eliminating the distance between subject and object – to the object's transformation into a mobile sign, into fragmented impressions, in what Paul Virilio diagnosed as the expansion of the boundaries of sensory perception, the splitting of modes of perception and representation, the creation of a virtual reality of visual transplantations and simulations, leading to morphological intrusions in a space collapsing from the geographical sphere onto the digital realm.[1]

Raff's virtual journey into the landscapes of Shangri-La is typified by processes of fragmentation, distortion, and various acts of camouflage. Raff inserts misleading alterations into interior spaces and natural expanses, blurring boundaries between "fact" and "fiction." The hackneyed touristy images soon transform into a saccharine-sweet excess, threatening in part; they oscillate between utopian perceptions and a dark postmodern dystopia. The fantasy of perfection is shattered when Raff freezes the blue waters of a pool, erasing colorful touristy props, casting an invasive light beam onto the dark setting, or opening up a black hole in the foreground of a verdant lawn. The fragmentations, cuts, erasures, and shifts generate a morbid, even nightmarish reality which neither reproduces the existing order, nor relies further on the technology of photographic representation as an image-fixing apparatus.

The signs used by Raff in the act of "manipulated photography" correspond with her previous works which explored the traces of objects and bodies in various spaces. Scratches, carvings, stains left by objects, and dust balls are enlarged and examined on the photographic surface as if they were remnants and residues left in a crime scene. This time her traces are planted in the virtual; they are shifted to the constituent elements of an imaginary landscape, between appearance and disappearance, ostensibly referencing the hidden landscape traces which Micha Ullman leaves in public spaces, signifying the absence, the void, in signs ranging from the material-concrete to the conceptual-spiritual. Raff's traces are anti-matter, erasures and additions of readymade internet images; technical images that were cut off, emptied, and erased, they introduce the range of possibilities at photography's disposal in realms centered on a manipulative intervention in the process of photography, thus offering a different view of reality, which is not a single truth, but the cloning, blurring, and masking of the photographic reality. "The universe of technical images, emerging all around us, represents the fulfillment of the ages, in which action and agony go endlessly round in circles."[2]

1 Paul Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance* (1980), trans. P. Beitchman (New York: Semiotext[e], 1991); Paul Virilio, "Critical Space," in *The Virilio Reader*, ed. James Der Derian (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 58-72.

2 Vilém Flusser quoted in Walead Beshty, "Abstracting Photography," cat. *Pleated Blinds* (curator: Ory Dessau) (Petach Tikva, Israel: Petach Tikva Museum of Art, 2010), p. 117; see also: Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reakton Books, 2000), p. 20.

## ORIENTALISM UNMOORED

Esther Gabara

If the first definition of "Shangri-La" in Webster's dictionary refers to James Hilton's novel, *Lost Horizon* (1933), and the high mountainous town that offers a retreat from the modern world, the second names Franklin Delano Roosevelt's use of the term less than a decade later. When asked about the secret location from which the bombing of Tokyo in 1942 had been launched, the U.S. president wryly responded, "From Shangri-La." From this moment forth, Shangri-La has come to denote both a utopian space of refuge and "any secret starting place of bombing raids or other military operations."[1] The invasive power of this fantasy is made even clearer by the commission of an aircraft carrier called the U.S.S. Shangri-La at the end of the Second World War. This ship would serve in wars in the Pacific and beyond, including the war in Vietnam, until being decommissioned in 1971. Almost from the moment that English was bent into imagined Asian-esque sounds, those syllables simultaneously stood for the West's imagined Eastern refuge from violence and its means to destroy that very place of sanctuary.

Tomoko Masuzawa, who draws our attention to the secondary, powerful meaning of the name of this fantastical Orientalist site, also goes on to reflect on Tibet, the territory where Shangri-La would be located were it to exist.[2] As an autonomous region belonging to China, Masuzawa explains that Tibet's quasi-national status is "predicated on a spiritual principle rather than on the usual base material reality of power"; it is the "dharma nation."[3] Indeed, the Orientalist myth that underwrites Hilton's novel requires this separation of spiritual purity from anything as common and pragmatic as political and military power. To maintain Western power, the religico-spiritual must be separated from the political, such that there is no possible agent of Eastern resistance to attacks on its sovereignty.

From her home in Israel, another nation whose identity and military might are uncomfortably stitched to religion, Orit Raff traveled by Internet to the most recent incarnation of this fantasy, the elegant Shangri-La hotel chain. Headquartered in Hong Kong, the hotel seduces travelers from both East and West in digital photographs of the luxurious, yet understated, pleasures it offers. Raff's exhibition demands answers to a series of questions about Shangri-La today. Is there an attack being launched from this contemporary Shangri-La? Will Asia again be the target? What happens to Orientalist fantasies when they are taken up and manufactured anew in China? And finally, what happens when those new utopias are exported back to the West that first imagined them?

This series represents a significant shift in Raff's work, away from the metaphorical investigation of traces that has occupied her photography for over a decade. Past series examined burnt remnants of bread left in ovens, scratched messages on desks from long graduated students, and imprints of furniture left on carpets after tenants moved away. Working primarily with analog photography, in this earlier work Raff meditated on embedded inscriptions of inhabitation and uses – and the psychic and social significance of such traces – in a medium that has long celebrated the trace of light on sensitive film and paper.

If her past work tracked those scratches of lived experience that photography pictured and enacted, this new series pursues the inventive possibilities of digital photography. Raff has never set foot in any of the Shangri-La hotels, never stayed a night in their sleek corporate suites or swam in their sapphire pools. Her contact with the Shangri-La was purely virtual, based only on images downloaded from the hotel's website, which were intended for use by PR firms. Moreover, the "original" photographs that Raff downloaded

1 Tomoko Masuzawa, "From Empire to Utopia: The Effacement of Colonial Markings in Lost Horizon," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 7 (2), 1999: 542.

2 The subjunctive mode is crucial here – were it to exist – but for now, let's accept that contradiction and continue.

3 Masuzawa, op. cit. n. 1, p. 541.

and altered for this exhibit were already enhanced and altered by the hotel's photographers, in order to provide the perfect image of an Orientalist retreat both of and beyond the modern world of global commerce. There is seemingly no trace or worldly referent of any kind in Raff's beautiful, empty images.

Nevertheless, Raff's ongoing fascination with myth provides the link between these analog and digital images. If in the earlier work she focused the viewer's eye on subtle or minute traces of the past, her amplification of them invited, even required, an imagination of the characters whose lives produced those remnants made visible by her camera. We fantasized about the future lives of the children whose desks were illicitly decorated with infantile dreams, and wondered about the people whose circumstances led to the abandonment of the apartment with the indented marks of their absent furniture. This new series of images expands upon the myth-making potential of marks, now the pixels of digital photography, in a series that works with them as a powerful form of fiction. Raff so completely erases the human beings who inhabited the publicity photographs of the Shangri-La hotels that the images do not suggest any characters at all. Nonetheless, the erasure of bodies presents emptied spaces that invite us to imagine what happens to the powerful and violent myth of Orientalism as it travels from its site of origin in the West, to the East, and ultimately back again.

Let us examine the precise form of the fictions pictured in these digital images to understand this process of myth formation and transformation. A single path approaches an open pagoda surrounded by greenery while three glistening paths depart from it, as abundant vegetation obscures their origin and endpoint (ill. 9). The image thus contains the familiar Orientalist fantasies of both exuberant nature and manmade symmetry. Even more revealing, the photograph's treatment of Orientalism, as much as its composition, recalls Jorge Luis Borges's short story, "The Garden of the Forking Paths." This mystery is narrated by Dr. Tu Tsun, a former English professor from Tsing Tao, China, who spied for the Germans against the English during the First World War. The story follows his flight from his English pursuers, and culminates in his encounter with the sinologist and former missionary, Stephen Albert, in a house in rural England. In this key scene, Albert invites Tsun in, and shows him what turns out to be a long lost garden designed by his grandfather, Ts'ui Pên. The Englishman reveals to Tsun that the lost "Garden of the Forking Paths" is both a novel and a maze made of ivory. What is most special about his grandfather's double invention, he learns, is that: "In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of Ts'ui Pên, he chooses – simultaneously – all of them. He creates, in this way, diverse futures, diverse times which themselves also proliferate and fork."[4] Like Borges's divergent and doubled story, Raff's photograph leads the viewer into an unending series of fictions. The paths recede into glistening bamboo, which she generated in the place of a hotel building in the original (doctored) publicity photograph. Eerily, Borges's Dr. Tsun seems almost to describe Raff's photograph: "Beneath English trees I meditated on that lost maze: I imagined it inviolate and perfect at the secret crest of a mountain [...] I imagined it infinite, no longer composed of octagonal kiosks and returning paths, but of rivers and provinces and kingdoms..."[5] The artifice of natural purity dominates these Orientalist images.

We cannot forget, though, that Tsun's discovery of the ideal fiction invented by his forebear takes place only as part of his plot as spy. Tsun is a strange sort of spy, one whose decision to risk his life and betray his adopted country is not due to any love for Germany, but rather "because I sensed that the Chief somehow feared people of my race – for the innumerable ancestors who merge within me. I wanted to prove to him that a yellow man could save his armies."[6] Tsun wishes to confront German racism not by attacking its source but instead by joining forces with it, and by demonstrating his power to come to its aid. He takes up the European discourse of racism with the idea of directing it toward a different conclusion. The end of Borges's story reveals that his apparently providential meeting with the sinologist who has his grandfather's lost garden was in fact crucial to this mission. Tsun explains that he randomly chose this particular man, this particular house, because he had to kill a man by that name, so that the newspaper article recounting the attack would publish the two names together: Tsun and Albert. This was how he communicated the name of the bombing target – the city of Albert – to his German handlers.

In the encounter with his lost, wise Asian grandfather who holds the ancient family secret, Tsun discovers a genuine source of his "Oriental" self. As much as Borges consciously reproduces a classic Orientalist fantasy here, he shows Tsun embracing the stereotype, and then sacrificing his connection to his forebear for the German cause. Borges thus asks about the fate of Orientalism when placed in Asian hands. The end of the story does not reassure the reader in any way that this Asian Orientalism will perform the anti-racist gesture for which Tsun longs.

It is worth stating clearly here that Orientalism, preceding and following Edward Said's groundbreaking work on the concept, has been broadly defined as the imaginary projection of the Orient from the West. But Raff's photographs, like Borges's story, pursue another version of Orientalism within Asia, one that is on the verge of making its return to its source in Europe. In its publicity shots, the Shangri-La chain transforms the myth of "Oriental" natural balance generated by the West into a commercial desire that may be shared equally by the new Chinese business class and its Western counterparts. In Raff's version of the garden of the forking paths, her mythic vision of nature again produces this neo-Orientalist, Asian fantasy. By cloning the Orientalist fiction, as Photoshop cloned the greenery surrounding the forking paths, Raff draws us even further down the path of Eastern Orientalism: the Shangri-La hotel's manufacture of a contemporary, Chinese Shangri-La.

Raff, in essence, draws our eye to a vision of globalization grown out of coloniality. That is, if Orientalism originally mediated European colonial relationships with the so-called Far East and the Indian subcontinent, after independence (in India) and the Communist revolution (in China) and in a new era of globalization, that coloniality continues in a new form. The Orientalism fancied in England during its centuries of colonial might is made perhaps most brilliantly manifest in the spectacular Royal Pavilion of King George IV (begun 1787) in Brighton, which on the outside appears as a small Taj Mahal, and on the inside is filled with a mixture of Chinese art and objects made by Chinese artisans in an Orientalist style for use in the West. In today's Shangri-La hotels, this English Orientalism has traveled back east again, in work by Chinese artisans that similarly fuses Chinese materials, aesthetics, and workmanship with English desire.

In the Shangri-La hotels, these designs satisfy both Western and new Chinese tastes. By emptying the rooms and gardens of people, Raff focuses on furniture and decorative objects made for an abstracted subject of the global economy. As much as one photograph

4 Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, trans. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1964), p. 26.

5 Ibid., p. 23.

6 Ibid., p. 21.

features "typical" Chinese elements of golden bamboo against a bright red backdrop, some of the furniture and decorative design recalls European rococo. Raff's interventions into the image of the sleek swimming pool – lightening the aquamarine water, erasing the contrasting red of lounge chairs – transform a corporate escape decorated with a few marks of Orientalist color into a minimalist monochrome that promises the sleekest contemporary aesthetic. This cool digital image reveals a common thread through the entire series: what Raff refers to as their "morbidity." By elaborating and emphasizing the Orientalist images of the global chain, completely emptying sparsely populated spaces, enhancing some already enriched colors and muting others, and cloning images of nature's controlled bounty, Raff reveals the death that haunts them.

Much as James Hilton imagines Shangri-La as a soft, warm cage, Raff pictures the global chain of hotels as a kind of poisonous if flourishing greenhouse. In the installation, the glossy images, printed and hung as windows onto artificial scenes with no worldly referents, surround an enclosed glass cube: the sculpture entitled *Close(d)*. Inside the transparent cage, a tiger-print rug on the floor signifies the exoticism of Orientalism as much as its artifice and lifelessness. Hilton writes that Shangri-La is the one place that will survive after the world is destroyed by modern warfare, and will be a repository for Western art and literature. In these digital images and oversized vitrine, Raff shows that this museum of Western thought housed in the East is actually a mausoleum. Roosevelt's sardonic comment that the planes that destroyed Tokyo in 1942 took off from Shangri-La draws us close to the fiction of Raff's "Shangri-La." The power of these fictions – Raff's as much as the others – is that they can provide a safe haven for the most destructive forces of the modern world.

What remains to be said is that Raff is engaged in an operation much like Borges's protagonist Tsun, and like the Shangri-La hotel chain. Her participation in the production of this contemporary Orientalism, her amplification and enhancement of the already existing images, is part of a long history of Jewish and later Israeli engagement with the myth. The history of Jewish Orientalism is similarly complicated and shifting: Jews were Orientalized as Europe's internal Easterners during the height of Orientalism in the 17th and 18th centuries, and this same exclusion was embraced as a foundational national difference in Zionist thought of the 19th century. Yaron Peleg quotes a late 19th century description of the founder of the Zionist movement, Theodore Herzl, as: "The prototype of a handsome Oriental. The cut of his features, the dark hair, the dark beard and moustache, the dark eyes all proclaimed eloquently that here sat a son of the East… How does that slim figure come to be wearing a modern business suit; that figure which was so obviously created for the robes of an Oriental prince?"[7] The founding discourse of Israeli nationhood internalized European Orientalism as much as the Shangri-La hotel does. Like it, Israeli Orientalism coexisted with the nation's celebration of its modern character. Nonetheless, European Zionists turned the racism of that same Orientalist discourse against their Arab neighbors when they arrived in Ottoman Palestine.[8]

Raff's images do not pretend to be free of the dangers of Orientalism; she does not offer us, as art viewers, a safe distance from which to regard the global, corporate aesthetics they still contain. Simultaneously viewers of art and consumers of publicity images, we are inextricably and deeply embedded in the history of desire and violence that Orientalism has wrought worldwide. Because of the nature of the labyrinthine layers of fiction in these images, the repetitions of Orientalist fantasies that circulate between East and West, these images do not remain innocuously in the field of the imagination. Much as myth structures the foundational narratives that order our perception of the world, the myth of Orientalism takes root in society and politics today. Raff notes that the popularity of Hilton's novel led to the re-naming of real towns in China and Tibet after "Shangri-La," in an attempt to attract tourists. That Shangri-La can be fictionally and now concretely found in Tibet, a land marked by religion and victim of a civilian occupation coordinated by the Chinese government, brings it closer yet to Raff's own geographical and political location. Despite the fact that she never slept in a Shangri-La hotel, the complex operation of Orientalism in the national history of Israel and the violence now haunting its occupied territories make it truly another Shangri-La.

Today, the hotel chain reproduces the cloning of Orientalism exponentially, boasting nearly one hundred hotels around the world. These hotels are mostly found in Asia, the Indian sub-continent, and the Middle East. Of late, however, a western expansion has begun. Currently the only Euro-North American location is in Vancouver, but between 2010 and 2013 hotels are planned to open in London, Moscow, Paris, and Vienna. The Shangri-La website promises a new luxury hotel in central London in 2012:

"At 1,016 feet high, London Bridge Tower is regarded as one of the most ambitious architectural endeavors in the United Kingdom. Its height will make it one of the tallest buildings in Europe, while its soaring spire shape will make it one of the most distinctive… The uniquely Asian view of service at this luxury hotel in London embodies the core values of respect, helpfulness, courtesy, sincerity and humility."[9]

As much as China and Israel, then, Western Europe will soon have to confront anew the only apparently benign ghosts of the West that are returning from their sojourn in Shangri-La.

7 Yaron Peleg, *Orientalism and the Hebrew Imagination* (Ithaca & London: Cornell UP, 2005), p. 7.

8 Peleg's broader argument is that Zionism's Orientalism reveals that the current virulence between Arabs and Jews did not always exist. That discussion belongs elsewhere; for our needs here, his history of Jews and Orientalism must suffice.

9 http://www.shangri-la.com/en/property/london/shangrila.