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## CHAPTER 1

# In Search of Lost Space: The Letter and the Artist

‘The Real Van Gogh: The artist and his letters’ was the title of a recent exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in collaboration with the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam (January-April 2010). As its title indicates the core of the exhibition was not Van Gogh’s paintings, but his letters, conceptualized as documents of life that can offer ‘an insight into the complex mind of Vincent van Gogh.’<sup>1</sup> The articles surrounding this exhibition have particularly highlighted the force of the letters to unveil meaning not only around the work of art but also around the artist’s mind: ‘when analyzing different works of art, art historians and appreciators try to uncover meaning in the work itself, but it is rare that the intent, motivation and perception can be drawn directly from the words of the artist himself especially posthumously.’<sup>2</sup> The sponsors’ statement went even further to reconsider the relationship between words and images:

They say a picture is worth a thousand words, yet in ‘The Real Van Gogh: The Artist and His Letters’ words redefine our understanding and appreciation of one of the most revered figures in the Post-Impressionist movement. Through the juxtaposition of Van Gogh’s letters and his art, we see his life, work and passions illuminated as never before.<sup>3</sup>

Mounted as ‘a landmark exhibition’, ‘a monumental event for Van Gogh admirers’<sup>4</sup> ‘The Real Van Gogh’ exhibition exemplifies the importance of letters in the discourses of Art History: ‘the letters constitute the bridge linking the man and his art’ as the introductory essay of the Van Gogh exhibition catalogue put it. (Bakker et al. 2010, 15) Indeed, letters have long been used by art historians as sources of artists’ biographies. After all Art History as a discipline is founded in the Vassarian tradition: a continuum of artists’ biographies and their work, biographical accounts that legitimate and celebrate the uniqueness of the artist and the sublime of the art. Georges Didi-Huberman (2005) has particularly discussed and criticized the underpinning discourses of this tradition and has put forward new ideas about rewriting the history of ‘Art History.’

But why have letters become so popular? What is it with them that opens up windows in the artist’s ‘true self’? As life documents letters carry the im-

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mediacy of the moment they are written in and are thus considered to be ‘nearer’ to experience and life. Letters are also particularly ‘private documents’: their intimate character allows for thoughts, inner feelings and emotions to be expressed. What is also important to remember is that letters as a genre of communication is almost universal—a phenomenon with diverse geographies and histories.<sup>5</sup> Even artists who are not expected to be ‘good with words’ can and have written letters, thus creating epistolary archives for posterity.

Drawing on Didi-Huberman’s critique but taking the analytical stance of a narrative researcher, what I want to do in this book is to interrogate and challenge the way letters have been used in women artists’ auto/biographical representations particularly focusing on Dora Carrington’s epistolary narratives, drawings and paintings. In doing this I am following strands of epistolary analytics in auto/biographical research that I now want to present and discuss.

### **Epistolary narrativity**

As Liz Stanley (2004) has instructively shown, there is a great deal of discussion around the use of letters as useful ‘documents of life’ (Plummer, 2001) in auto/biographical research. Responding to Plummer’s suggestion that the overwhelming, fragmentary, unfocused and idiosyncratic nature of letters cannot really provide useful sources for sociological analyses, Stanley counterpoises the argument that letters and particularly correspondences can create rich fields of auto/biographical insights in sociological research. In this light she has created three analytical planes on which epistolary narratives can be deployed: the dialogical, the perspectival and the emergent (2004, 202-204). Letters are dialogical, argues Stanley, opening up channels of communication and reciprocity not only between the correspondent parts, but also between the writer of the letter and any reader (202). Their perspectival aspect means ‘that their structure and content changes according to the particular recipient and the passing of time’ (203). Finally, in having emergent properties, letters evade ‘researcher-determined concerns’ (203) and instead display ‘their own preoccupations and conventions and indeed their own epistolary ethics’ (203).

While Stanley (2004) has urged for a robust analytic approach to the use of letters in auto/biographical research in the social sciences, Elizabeth MacArthur (1990) has tackled the question of whether letters should be analyzed as narratives, pointing out that epistolary narratives do not adhere to the

Aristotelian imperative of the end. Emphasizing the particularities of the epistolary mode of writing and drawing on ‘real’ and ‘fictional’ collections of letters, MacArthur has instead turned her attention to the analysis of the dynamics of the epistolary form and has argued that such a conceptualization can move us towards ‘a richer and more complicated definition of narrative’ (13).

Written to the moment, epistolary narratives create meaning by narrating the present without knowing what the future of this narrated present will be, how it will ultimately become past. Thus the anticipation of closure, the end, cannot impose meaning and order in the overall structure of the narrative. However, as MacArthur notes, a present that unfolds is narrated differently than a present that has already ‘chosen its course’ (1990, 8). This difference however and particularly the inability of the epistolary mode to orient the narrative towards ‘the end’ deploys a series of narrative technologies that are extremely interesting. Rather than imposing an overarching meaning derived from a central organizing narrative authority or character, epistolary narratives ‘provide multiple perspectives on the same event’ (14) and thus reveal multiple layers of meanings and complex ‘regimes of truth’ (Foucault 1980a).

As I will further discuss, instead of being a defect of the narrative mode, the openness of the epistolary form has the possibility of diverting the analysis from the obsession of classical narratology with coherence and closure (Hyvärinen et al. 2010), to the process of how stories create meanings as they unfold. Narrative sense in this context emerges as an agglomeration of fragments, stories that are incomplete, irresolute or broken. Yet when brought together, these fragmented narratives create a milieu of communication where the silenced, the secret and the unsaid release forces that remind us of the limits of human communication, the inability of language and representation to express the world. But how can these fragmented narratives be brought together?

Theorizing the epistolary novel, Jean Rousset (1962) has noted that ‘the epistolary method forces the narrative into discontinuity, it fragments it and disperses it among several writers who don’t know its totality; only the book reader is in a position to reconstitute it’ (cited in MacArthur 1990, 9-10). In ‘real life’ correspondences of course, it is the researcher who can have access to the totality of a collection of letters and consequently the overall narrative that they have generated. Following these lines of thought, I will therefore argue that Carrington’s letters can be analyzed as narratives, but their narrativity emerges if they are theorized ‘as units, within a unity’ (Altman 1982,167). In this light, narrative sense emerges as an effect of the exploration and indeed juxtaposition of wider collections of letters and bodies of cor-

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respondences, what Stanley (2004) has theorized as ‘the epistolarium.’ Janet Altman’s configuration of ‘the letters as unit and the letter as unity’ is crucial for my analysis, as the latter draws on Carrington’s individual letters but is situated in the context of three large bodies of correspondence: her letters to Mark Gertler, Lytton Strachey and Gerald Brenan. However, the consideration of the context should not override the analytic attention to each individual letter, subsuming its singularity under the demands of a supposedly overarching structure of the whole. The ‘unity’ itself, the epistolarium in Stanley’s conceptual vocabulary, can take different forms. As Stanley (2004, 218) has charted them:

The idea of the epistolarium can be thought about in (at least) three related ways, with rather different epistemological complexities and consequentialities: as an epistolary record that remains for *post hoc* scrutiny; as ‘a collection’ of the entirety of the surviving correspondences that a particular letter writer was involved in; and as the ‘ur-letters’ produced in transcribing, editing and publishing actual letters (or rather versions of them).

Stanley has performed a meticulous examination of ‘the different epistemological complexities and consequentialities’ emerging from the analysis of the three versions of the epistolarium as delineated above. What is interesting in her theorization is her conclusion that despite the epistemological, ontological and ethical problems emerging in their analysis, collections of letters do have a narrative structure and offer useful and rare insights in the life of the auto/biographical subject (2004, 221).

Of course working with letters as documents of life in narrative research raises a quite complex spectrum of questions around representation, context, truth, power, desire, identity, subjectivity, memory and ethics, questions that are now well identified and richly explored in the field of auto/biographical narratives. (See Smith and Watson 2001) However epistolary narratives have their own take on these questions and indeed demand ways of analysis that are particularly oriented to the specificities of their ontological and epistemological nature.<sup>6</sup> It is, I suggest, by working within specific contexts that methodological problems in analyzing epistolary narratives can best be addressed and it is around Carrington’s letters that my discussion will revolve.

### **In Search of Carrington**

My choice of Carrington is not accidental. While working for a feminist genealogy of the constitution of the female self in art (Tamboukou 2010a),

Carrington emerged as a particularly intriguing figure. I knew something about her life through a film with Emma Thompson I had seen in London back in 1995, which had deeply moved me.<sup>7</sup> What I had not realized while watching the film was that some of its best parts were based on verbatim extracts from Carrington's letters and diaries; I would discover this 'detail' when I worked closely with these life documents. Carrington's times and geographies were within the fin-de-siècle milieu of my genealogical explorations. While doing background research about her life, I first read her only published biography, *Carrington, A Life*. (Gerzina-Holbrook, 1989) In reading this biography I was deeply impressed by the richness of Carrington's letters, which I was keen to find more about. David Garnett's edited collection of Carrington's letters and diaries, published in 1970, was the first step here. This is indeed a rich anthology but like all edited collections it operates with certain inclusions and exclusions; as Liz Stanley has pithily commented: 'the selection of some letters entails the deselection of many more' (2004, 205).

This is how I was eventually driven to the archives and got immersed in the dusty world of manuscripts. Between January and June 2004 I worked on a weekly basis at the manuscript section of the British Library in London reading Carrington's unpublished diary, *D. Partridge: Her Book* and the ten files of her correspondence with Lytton Strachey.<sup>8</sup> Apart from the rich data I collected there, what really struck me with the manuscripts were the artistic drawings of the letters and the delightful entanglements of images and words. [Fig.1] Virginia Woolf, who was one of Carrington's correspondents, considered her letters to be 'completely unlike anything else in the habitable globe.'<sup>9</sup>



Fig.1: Letter to Gerald Brenan, 1921

I had seen Carrington's epistolary drawings in Garnett's volume but I had not realized the artful way that words and images were interlaced in the body of Carrington's letters, 'tearing like a may-fly up and down the pages',<sup>10</sup> as Carrington had vividly described them. This was one of the many pleasures of working with the manuscripts, which later became a theme in my analysis:

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the importance of epistolary art in the constitution of the self and the entanglements of human relations.

Studying Carrington's letters to Strachey made me want to read more and this is how I traced the bulk of her remaining extant correspondence at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre at the University of Texas at Austin (HRC). A small grant from the Art and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)<sup>11</sup> gave me the opportunity to visit this amazing research centre, where I worked intensely between June and July 2004. Carrington's letters are kept in ten files of out-going correspondence between 1915-1931 and seventeen files of in-coming correspondence from 1912-1932. What I was also able to read in Austin was the Brenan-Carrington correspondence, 434 letters to Brenan (1919-1932) and 465 letters from Brenan (1919-1932) which was actually the surprise of my research visit there: this body of correspondence gave me rich data on the theme of the constitution of the female self as an artist. The point is that I was expecting to trace this theme in Carrington's correspondence with her friend and ex-lover Mark Gertler, who was also a painter. However the correspondence with Brenan was actually the richest source for this theme, something I had not expected to encounter, since Garnett's edited volume had largely ignored or excluded letters between Carrington and Brenan where these themes were discussed.

Finally in the HRC collection I was able to locate the only letter I have ever read from Carrington to her husband Ralph Partridge, something I also had not expected to find since according to Garnett, 'her letters to Ralph Partridge were not preserved' (1975, 15). This is certainly a big and interesting gap in Carrington's correspondence and I really feel very satisfied even with the single letter I was able to detect.<sup>12</sup> It has to be noted here that the content of this letter is not significant—Partridge was away for a sports event and Carrington was writing news from Tidmarsh. This preserved letter however has opened up an intriguing theme in my analytical tropes: the significance of absence, letters that were lost or destroyed. As Carolyn Steedman has poetically put it: 'you find nothing in the Archive but stories caught half way through: the middle of things: discontinuities.' (2001, 45) The letter that was preserved thus became a constant reminder that my archival documents are full of fragments and discontinuities. In this light Carrington's extant letters were read with the letters that were lost or destroyed in mind; in the same way that we interpret voices, we should perhaps start interpreting silences or somehow include them in our 'ur-letters' in Stanley's analysis above. (2004, 218)

In making these references to the lost or destroyed letters, what I am trying to do is to underscore the inevitable partiality of life history documents

and auto/biographical narratives. As a narrative researcher in the archive I have also created my own rhythms, made selections and decided on inclusions and exclusions. Instead of obscuring the methodological and analytical interpretational strategies of my research I will rather expose them, inviting my readers to join the overall process of deconstructing auto/biographical sources and narratives, a move that I will now turn to.

### **Entanglements of matter and meaning**

Steedman has eloquently written about the historian's loneliness particularly experienced in the archive: 'The Archive allowed the imagining of a particular and modern form of loneliness, which was perhaps analogous to the simultaneous conception of the Historian's relationship to the past 'as one of irretrievable dispossession' (2001, 72). She has further suggested however, that 'the Historian goes to the Archive to be at home as well as to be alone' (72). I want to reflect on loneliness and on these strange connections between loneliness, the archive and the feeling of being at home drawing on my experience at the HRC archives in Austin, Texas.

I arrived in Austin on a very hot June afternoon in 2004 and after leaving my luggage in a colonial style bed and breakfast, made my way to the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre, which was nearby. Everything seemed strange: summer in Texas but in a city which was so different from the usual stereotypes of what Texas means for Europeans: the motto on almost every merchandise in the souvenir shops was 'Keep Austin weird'. There was also an extraordinary Research Centre housing the bulk of the Bloomsbury papers: 'how on earth had they ever landed there?' I kept wondering ...

There was definitely a strange combination of cultural dynamics, ethnicities, spaces and places: a UK based researcher of Greek origin funded by a British Institution to read the papers of a British painter, which had been sold to a USA Institution. It was the perfect combination for disorientation, which was significantly raising the levels of 'the archive fever' both in Steedman's and Derrida's conceptualization.<sup>13</sup> To sum it up, there I was in a terra incognita, having given up my summer holidays: I was alone in the archive but certainly not feeling at home, or so I thought.

As the days started passing by, the initial 'out of place feeling' was gradually receding and a 'home-like' routine was being created: I would work in the archives from nine to five, immersed in the Bloomsbury atmosphere of Carrington's correspondence; when the archives closed, I would take the bus and dive into a nearby natural swimming pool at the banks of the Colorado

river in a Mediterranean mode of what summer should be about. The experience on the bus was interesting on its own since it familiarized me with people I could never talk to as a ‘visiting scholar’. In the evening I would dine downtown at some American rock, jazz or blues bar—Austin prides itself for being the world capital of life music and there is life music almost everywhere you go. Back in my colonial style bed and breakfast I would write my field notes for the day. As I was moving in between several real-and-imaginary spaces and places, day after day, my reading of Carrington’s letters would focus more and more on the theme of placelessness: an endless striving not just for a studio of her own, but also for a place in the world. This *search of lost space*<sup>14</sup> eventually became ‘a plane of consistency’ for the different expressions and forms of Carrington’s letters to be charted and held together. It has to be noted here that ‘consistency’ in Deleuze and Guattari’s analyses (1988) should not be understood as a constant reproduction of sameness or as the segmentation of certain structures and forms of analysis:

the plane of consistency, or planomenon, is in no way an undifferentiated aggregate of unformed matters, but neither is it a chaos of formed matters of every kind ... Continuum of intensities, combined emission of particles or signs-particles, conjunction of deterritorialized flows: these are the three factors proper to the plane of consistency;

(Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 70)

In this light, ‘a plane of consistency’ in my research refers to the consistency of a grid of analysis and writing style through which differences in form, content and expression within Carrington’s epistolarity have been assembled not as oppositions but as rich heterogeneities, narrative forms in becoming. The *search of lost space* has further emerged as the refrain of this book, a kind of a musical repetition that draws circles within the chaos of the correspondence and is soothing both for the researcher and the reader.<sup>15</sup> This refrain of ‘the lost space’ has helped me find my way while navigating the rough seas of the archive and has been discursively expressed in the form of the monograph. Carrington’s letters and diaries, archival practices, theoretical ideas and methodological strategies, in short matter and meaning, have been entangled in the making of this book. But how has this happened?

In reflecting on my experience at the HRC archives at Austin what I want to argue is that the material conditions of working in the archive are not mere practicalities or technicalities; they are always interrelated with specific methodological decisions and theoretical paths that the researcher is led to follow. This brings me to the question of how the researcher’s experience in the

the archive creates certain conditions of possibility for what will emerge from the archival research: how she will make selections about what to see, note, transcribe or ask to be photocopied.<sup>16</sup> These questions relate to wider issues of how the researcher can oscillate between pathos and distance, how she can create a transitional space that can accommodate both her involvement and her need for detachment; it is this forth-da movement that will eventually shatter norms and certainties about what can or should be researched, within real-and-imaginary spaces. I will try to tackle this problem drawing on Karen Barad's (2007) notion of 'intra-actions', which I will explicate below.

Drawing on quantum physics and more specifically on Niels Bohr's philosophy-physics<sup>17</sup>, feminist theorist Karen Barad (2003, 2007) has introduced the neologism of 'intra-actions' as a theoretical juxtaposition to the usual notion of interactions. In doing this she denotes a significant difference: while interactions occur between already established and separate entities, 'intra-actions' occur as relations between components. Entities—both human and non-human—actually emerge as an effect of these intra-actions, without having stable points or positions, an argument succinctly summarized below:

Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating. Which is not to say that emergence happens once and for all, as an event or as a process that takes place according to some external measures of space and of time, but rather that time and space, like matter and meaning, come into existence, are iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action, thereby making it impossible to differentiate between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future.

(Barad 2007, ix)

Making connections between intra-actions in scientific experiments in the field of quantum physics and narrative research in the social sciences, what I want to argue here is that 'the researcher', 'the letters in the archive' and the 'research strategies of narrative analysis' cannot be taken as separate and pre-existing entities that interact in the final stage of the research process, the writing of an article or a monograph in my case. The 'research findings' and consequently the book about Dora Carrington rather emerge through the multifarious entanglements—both material and discursive—between 'the researcher', 'the research object' and 'the research context'. As a matter of fact 'the researcher', 'the research object' and 'the research context' are not pre-defined entities either: they are constituted through entangled intra-actions and their particular constitution can only hold within the conditions of the research process, the experiment or rather the 'narrative phenomenon' within which they emerge.

In employing the notion of ‘narrative phenomenon’ I follow here Barad’s reconfiguration of Bohr’s thesis that ‘things do not have inherently determinate boundaries or properties, and words do not have inherently determinate meanings’ (Barad 2003, 813). It is only through the configuration of a particular ‘phenomenon’ that things can be bounded and acquire properties and words can take up meaning. As Barad explains, ‘Bohr’s epistemological framework rejected both the transparency of measurement as well as the transparency of language’ (813); in this light the primary epistemological unit for Bohr was ‘the phenomenon’, marked by the inseparability of ‘the observed object’ and ‘agencies of observation’ (814). While challenging the separation between subject and object and knower and known, Bohr’s philosophy-physics maintained and defended the possibility of objective knowledge within the configurations of a particular phenomenon. What Barad’s proposition has added to Bohr’s thesis however is that phenomena are not only epistemological units, milieus within which things can be measured and meaning can be enacted; phenomena in Barad’s theorization are ontological units, constitutive of reality:

Reality is not composed of things-in-themselves or things- behind-phenomena but ‘things’-in-phenomena. The world is intra- activity in its differential mattering. It is through specific intra-actions that a differential sense of being is enacted in the ongoing ebb and flow of agency.

(2003, 817)

It is precisely my entanglement in this intra-active world of differential mattering that I have found fascinating about working in the HRC archive with Carrington’s letters, diaries and drawings. In recognizing that the complex matter/space/time relations of my research experience at Austin created a specific ‘narrative phenomenon’ wherein material conditions and discourses were intertwined, I agree with Barad’s argument that the research apparatus—the archive in my case—is inevitably entangled with the phenomenon. Drawing on Bohr’s epistemological framework, Barad has particularly problematized the nature and meaning of ‘the apparatus’ in scientific research:

According to Bohr apparatuses are macroscopic material arrangements through which particular concepts are given definition, to the exclusion of others and through which particular phenomena with particular determinate physical properties are produced ... the apparatus plays a much more active and intimate role in experimental practices than classical physics recognizes. Apparatuses are not passive observing instruments; on the contrary they are productive of (and part of) phenomena.

(Barad 2007, 142)

The neutral role of the apparatus has thus been seriously challenged in quantum physics but this challenge is clearly not restricted within laboratory experiments. In drawing analogies between the apparatus in scientific research and the archive as an apparatus in narrative research, what I want to emphasize here is that the specific material, spatial and discursive conditions of my archival research at the HRC in Austin Texas had a significant impact on the conduct and outcome of the research. In the same way that ‘apparatuses are not passive observing instruments’, archives are not neutral sites within which researchers ‘objectively’ read, take notes and accumulate data. ‘Apparatuses are open-ended practices’ according to Barad (2003, 816), and so are archives. The archive is a dynamic spatial and discursive milieu forcefully acting upon the research process, the analytics of the research, the ‘research findings’ and the researcher herself, in short it both produces and becomes part of the specific ‘narrative phenomenon’ under scrutiny. It is through the entanglement of such forceful ‘intra-actions’ that ‘entities’ like research reports, articles or books eventually emerge as effects of a research experiment within the particular conditions of the ‘narrative phenomenon’.

But what are the conditions of possibility for meaning to be enacted and particular types of knowledge to emerge within the material and discursive entanglements of the phenomenon? This is where Barad’s notion of ‘agential realism’, a recognition of matter’s dynamism becomes crucially important:

The dynamics of intra-activity entail matter as an active ‘agent’ in its ongoing materialization. Or rather, matter is a dynamic intra-active becoming that is implicated and enfolded in its iterative becoming. Matter(ing) is a dynamic articulation/configuration of the world.

(Barad 2007, 151)

As already noted above, matter does not refer to pre-existing entities with stabilized substances and calculable properties and attitudes; it refers to phenomena and their intra-active entanglements. It is this dynamic process of materialization that Barad conceives as agential or rather as ‘a congealing of agency’ (2007, 151). ‘Intra-actions’ is actually a notion that according to Barad ‘constitutes a reworking of the traditional notion of causality’ (2003, 815). Why is that? Causality as a relation presupposes pre-existing entities that act upon each other being constituted as causes and/or effects. In the absence of separability among the components of the phenomena, intra-actions between them become agentic forces through which the components become determinate within the conditions of the phenomenon they are part of. As Barad succinctly argues: ‘it is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the ‘components’ of phenomena become deter-

minate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful.’ (2003, 815) This is how the conditions of possibility exist for meaning to be enacted and knowledge to emerge within the phenomenon.

Barad’s discussion emphasizes the fact that ‘agential realism’ as a theoretical proposition goes beyond the understanding of scientific practices: ‘agential realism offers an understanding of the nature of material-discursive practices, such as those very practices through which different distinctions get drawn, including those between the “social” and the “scientific”.’ (815) In this light, through intra-actions between fragments of letters and correspondences, the fluid conditions of the archive and the researcher’s labile position within its milieu, narrative sense is enacted and knowledge emerges in the form of a report, an article or a monograph. This form of narrative knowledge is not an effect of a linear causal relation between ‘the data’ and ‘the analysis’, ‘the observer’ and ‘the observed’, ‘the knower’ and the ‘known’. What can be known and by whom is merely an effect of specific intra-actions, within the conditions of the phenomenon. Narrative sense and the particular types of knowledge that derive from it thus need to be charted within the conditions of the phenomenon or the network of phenomena within which they are constituted: this is I argue a crucial task for the narrative researcher.

In thus drawing on Barad’s proposition of ‘agential realism’ and the correlated notion of ‘intra-activity’ what I have argued is that the material/spatial conditions of my research at the HRC archives cannot be disentangled from the directions, interpretations and thematic orientations of my analysis and theorization. My experience actually affirms an important corollary in Barad’s proposition: ‘[since] the primary ontological units are not things but phenomena ... the primary semantic units are not words but material-discursive practices through which boundaries are constituted’ (2003, 818). In this light, my bodily experiences, emotions, ideas, theoretical preconceptions, initial methodological strategies, previous archival and literature research as well as practical concerns of space/time limitations and financial constraints were dynamically enfolded within the cultural spaces and natural places of Austin. The ‘research findings’ emerged through and as part of their entangled intra-relating with material and discursive practices. Research is thus conceived as an ongoing process of folding, unfolding and refolding that is still going on as I am writing these lines while on sabbatical in Paris, France not Texas.<sup>18</sup>

In taking up the notion of ‘the fold’ to chart material practices within specific spatial configurations I draw here on a Leibnizian concept that is central in both Foucault’s and Deleuze’s philosophies. Deleuze (1993) has used the concept of the fold to trace connections between space and bodies: the

world folds into the self in different speeds and on a variety of levels and intensities affecting the ways we live, relate to other bodies and make sense of our worldliness. At the same time however, we keep folding out into the world, Foucault in his later work argued, acting upon received knowledges, discourses and practices and thus moulding ourselves as subjects through the deployment of *technologies of the self*. (1988) Elspeth Probyn has particularly pointed to the crucial concept of the fold in both Foucault and Deleuze's analyses, foregrounding the very constitution of subjectivity as an incessant process of folding and unfolding: 'The act of pleating or folding ("la pliure") is thus the doubling-up, the refolding, the bending-onto-itself of the line of the outside in order to constitute the inside/outside—the modes of the self.' (1993, 129) As I will further argue throughout the book, Carrington's letters and diaries should be conceived as 'modes of the self', *narrative technologies* as I call them of how a woman artist is being constituted as a subject within a continuum of foldings and unfoldings.

Barad has actually pointed to the importance of Foucauldian analytics in human sciences research and has made connections between Foucault's conceptualization of discursive practices with Bohr's account of apparatuses, 'the role they play in the material production of bodies and meanings' (2007, 147). Here again however, Barad (147) has shown the limits of Foucault's theorization in claiming that material practices merely support or sustain discourses and thus erasing the dynamism of matter itself. 'Bohr's point entails a much more intimate relationship between concepts and materiality, matter and meaning', Barad notes (147) although anthropocentrism remains a common limitation of both Foucault and Bohr's account.

As an entanglement of spatial and discursive practices the experience of doing archival work at the HRC at Austin is intra-actively related to the themes, codes and analytical directions of my research with Carrington's letters, drawings, diaries and paintings. The actual process of working in the archives from nine to five day after day, created rhythms and material conditions through which some themes and ideas became central and others remained in the peripheries of my research interest and attention. These ideas and themes emerging from the daily work at the archives became axes along which the research was structured, while material conditions were themselves modified by the orientation of the research: letters read at the end of the day would be revisited the following morning and repetition would enter the archival rhythm as a necessary move to make up for the effects of tiredness upon the research. As Barad has pointed out: 'discursive practices and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to each other;

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*rather the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity.* (152, emphasis in the text)

What I have thus attempted to do in exposing the material conditions and discursive practices of my archival work at Austin is to present it as a ‘narrative phenomenon’ marked by the dynamism of agential intra-actions through which local separabilities were enacted between ‘the knower’ and the known’ creating conditions of possibility for meaning and knowledge to emerge. It was within the boundaries and limitations of the specific ‘narrative phenomenon’ that certain letters were selected, themes were created, figures and characters emerged, questions were raised and theoretical frameworks were used to support the analysis and discussion. This cartography of intra-actions was further transferred in the writing of the book: in ‘opening up the black box of the archive’ (Tamboukou 2010c) I do not present Carrington’s letters, drawings and diaries as ‘evidence of experience’ (Scott 1991); I consider them as partial truths, fragments that shed light on some moments of being while obscuring and shadowing others. I do not suggest that there are no causal links in my rendition of Carrington’s life and art; these are not linear causalities however: unproblematic connections between what she wrote, what she created and what she thought, or ‘who she really was’, the ‘real Carrington’, like ‘the real Van Gogh’.

In mapping the narrative phenomenon within which I have worked, I have further charted a colourful diagram of textual and visual images that carry traces of Carrington’s *lines of flight*<sup>19</sup> through real and imagined spaces: those she painted, drew and wrote about. The visuality of her letters and diaries is I argue a unique element of the auto/biographical archive, ‘the plane of consistency’ that I have created for this study. ‘You know my life is entirely visual’<sup>20</sup> Carrington had written in a letter to Brennan. It was through her art that her visual life was so elegantly and colourfully entangled with her auto/biographical texts. It is therefore through the visuality of these documents and their intra-actions with her paintings that a tentative life sketch for Carrington can be drawn. If we cannot know very much about ‘the real Carrington’ we can have glimpses in the web of material and discursive practices constitutive of the world she was entangled with. As Barad has noted ‘the boundaries that are enacted are not abstract delineations but specific *material demarcations not in space but of space.*’ (2007, 181, my emphasis)

As I will further show throughout the book, it is the materiality of the ink drawing on the surface of the letter paper, the colour on the canvas, the glass, the wall, the tile or the cloth—in short the variety of media that Carrington went on painting—that enact and reconfigure spatial boundaries and relations in her life and leave their traces on her letters, diaries and artwork. Through

intra-actions between material and discursive practices—what Carrington makes, what she thinks and what she writes—her subjectivity is folded, unfolded and refolded within ‘the entanglement of matter and meaning.’ (Barad 2007) The form of the book has thus emerged from these entanglements and I will draw here a sketch of its chapters and themes that could help the reader find her own way into the textual and visual assemblage of Carrington’s letters, diaries, drawings and paintings.

So far in Chapter One, *In Search of Lost Space: The Artist and the Letter*, I have made a critical overview of the field of artists’ biographies and have discussed its constraints and limitations particularly in relation to the use of letters. What I have argued is that epistolary narratives cannot represent lives or subjects, but they are exceptionally useful tools for genealogical analyses of the constitution of the female self in art. In the light of these problems and challenges around auto/biographical representation I have looked into the minutiae of archival research and have shown how spatial practices and discourses have been dynamically intertwined in the process of the research and the writing of the book.

Chapter Two, *Art, Gender and Space*, looks into Carrington’s early years particularly focusing on the effects of her art education at the Slade. The chapter further explores significant artistic influences upon Carrington’s work and her differentiated relationship with the Chelsea and Bloomsbury artists respectively. Her involvement in the Omega Workshops is particularly highlighted as critical in the strong decorative trends of her art. A problem that seems to emerge from this chapter is the gap between the early promising young artist and her eventual erasure from the discourses of British Art History.

In Chapter Three, *Letters as Images*, I focus on Carrington’s epistolary art and analyze the themes, the narrative tropes and the drawings of her letters. I am particularly interested in multifarious deployments and variations emerging from the addresser / addressee relationship and I am making intertextual connections with literary genres, artistic trends and epistolary practices of the period.

The focus in Chapter Four, *Landscapes for the Self*, is on paintings and narratives of spaces. There are two groups of paintings in Carrington’s work that I look into: landscapes and still lives. In considering Carrington’s paintings alongside her letters I am raising questions around space, movement and aesthetics in the constitution of the self. What I suggest is that studying paintings alongside epistolary texts is a move beyond the limits of narratives and maybe beyond the limits of genres.

Carrington led a passionate and emotionally turbulent life within and beyond heteronormative discourses. My analysis in Chapter Five, *Portraits and Lovers*, focuses on Carrington's amorous epistolary discourse, as well as portraits and drawings of her lovers. I am particularly interested in the subtle ways that narratives on love are interlaced with heteronormative discourses of sexuality circulating in the European fin-de-siècle bohemian groups. In this context, I follow narrative lines of how these discourses sometimes create conditions of impossibility for a woman to speak of her desire and recognize herself as an artist and as a subject in love.

In my final concluding chapter, I revisit what drawing on Foucault I have called, 'the private hypothesis' and attempt to show how the analysis of Carrington's letters, diaries, paintings and drawings can become part of a genealogy of spaces and powers, shedding light on the dark sphere of privacy and unravelling entanglements between the public, the private, and the right to privacy and solitude in the constitution of the female self in art.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The exhibition was curated by Ann Dumas of the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in collaboration with Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker of the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. (23/1-18/10, 2010)  
<http://www.royalacademy.org.uk/exhibitions/vangogh/exhibition/>  
<http://blog.vangoghgallery.com/index.php/2010/01/29/the-real-van-gogh-the-artist-and-his-letters-contest/>  
 (both accessed, 15-4-2010)
- <sup>2</sup> <http://blog.vangoghgallery.com/index.php/2010/01/29/the-real-van-gogh-the-artist-and-his-letters-contest/>, accessed, 15-4-2010.
- <sup>3</sup> Sponsor's statement in the Royal academy website as above. The exhibition was sponsored by the Bank of New York Mellon.
- <sup>4</sup> Van Gogh gallery blog as above.
- <sup>5</sup> For a rich discussion of the universality of letters see Gilroy and Verhoeven 2000.
- <sup>6</sup> See Stanley 2004, Jolly and Stanley 2005, Tamboukou 2010b.
- <sup>7</sup> *Carrington* (1995), directed by Christopher Hampton, co-written with Michael Holroyd, Lytton Strachey's biographer.
- <sup>8</sup> British Library/Manuscripts/ Add. 62888-62897/ Dora Carrington correspondence with Lytton Strachey; Add. 65159/ Dora Carrington Diary, *D.C Partridge, Her Book*.
- <sup>9</sup> Virginia Woolf to Carrington, 18/1/1932, cited in Hill 2000, 33.
- <sup>10</sup> Carrington to Brenan, June 1922, in Garnett 1975, 215.

- <sup>11</sup> AHRC was actually a Board (AHRB) when I got the grant: B/SG/AN10693/APN17267
- <sup>12</sup> HRC/DC Collection/B.3/ F.7 /Partridge Ralph, 1919/Letter from Carrington.
- <sup>13</sup> I refer here to Steedman's *Dust*, a lucid analysis of archival work, which also addresses Derida's famous *Archive Fever* (1998). See Steedman 2001.
- <sup>14</sup> There are intertextual connections here of course with the Proustian search of lost time.
- <sup>15</sup> The refrain is a DeleuzoGuattarian concept, further theorized and discussed in the *Thousand Plateaus*. (1988) See in particular, Part II, 310-350.
- <sup>16</sup> There were certain restrictions of how many photocopies researchers were allowed to have according to the HRC regulations.
- <sup>17</sup> The Nobel laureat physicist Niels Bohr (1885-1962) was one of the founders of quantum physics and also the most widely accepted interpretation of the quantum theory, which goes by the name of the Copenhagen interpretation; this was the first general attempt to understand the world of atoms as this is represented by quantum mechanics and is today mostly regarded as synonymous with indeterminism. Bohr saw quantum mechanics as a generalization of classical physics although it violates some of the basic ontological principles on which classical physics rests: the principles of space and time; the principle of causality; the principle of determination; the principle of continuity and the principle of conservation of energy. Since Kant's philosophy showed that classical mechanics is in accordance with the transcendental conditions for objective knowledge, the problems that quantum theory has raised vis-à-vis the principles of classical physics can thus be extended to the Kantian conditions of possibility for objective knowledge. (See Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy on the Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/qm-copenhagen/>, accessed on 15-08-2010)
- As an endeavour to understand the fundamental properties of matter in the microcosm of particles and waves, what quantum theory definitely brings forward is an understanding that things are intertwined and interdependent to an unfathomable degree, just as the particles in an atom are. For a detailed discussion of Bohr's philosophy-physics, see Barad 2003, 2007.
- <sup>18</sup> The first draft of the manuscript was completed while I was on sabbatical in Paris between March and May 2010.
- <sup>19</sup> 'Lines of flight' is a term in Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual vocabulary (1988) that denotes resistance, getting away from constraints and limitations. For an extended discussion of *lines of flight* as resistance in women artists' narratives, see Tamboukou, 2009 and 2010d.
- <sup>20</sup> Garnett 1975, 309.