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Christelle Serée-Chaussinand

- 1 "Lost Horizon" corresponds to the 25th "chapter" in the work of British artist Simon Morley, which counts 36 chapters to date. The particularity of this ekphrasis – which took the form of an exhibition with Art First, a London gallery, in 2014 – is that it convenes not just one artwork but several, from both Western and Eastern culture, high and popular culture, which have a common interest in the theme of utopia: a fifteenth-century traditional Korean handscroll painting by artist Ahn Gyeon entitled *A Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Paradise* (1447); René Daumal's uncompleted surrealist novel *Mount Analogue: A Novel of Symbolically Authentic Non-Euclidean Adventures in Mountain Climbing* (1952); James Hilton's best-selling novel *Lost Horizon* (1932) and its Hollywood black and white adaptation by Frank Capra (1938), not to mention philosophical texts by Proudhon or Thomas More who coined the word 'utopia' in his famous 1516 work.
- 2 On the page of his personal website dedicated to "Lost Horizon", Simon Morley explains his interest in utopia, emphasizing the political dimension of his work and the fact that there is an abyss between the dream and the reality of utopia, as many created Utopias have turned into nightmarish communities:

Probably one reason why I'm interested in exploring this theme now is that a few dozen miles north of where I've been making my works lies a monstrous nation committed to Utopia: The Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Its leaders and people are stubbornly persisting in the most absurdly ruinous and barbaric attempt to realize Shangri-La. This State exposes the nightmarish consequences for a people when its leaders believe in the possibility of producing a society that is timeless, absolute, pure, perfect and idealized. In North Korea, perhaps, the communist dream is clung to as a kind of angry and impotent resistance to the visible collapse of what communism once promised, but as the latest wave of scholarship emphasizes, we shouldn't assume that North Korea is any longer subscribing to a Marxist-Leninist or even Stalinist Utopian agenda in anything other than name. Instead, it is more accurate to describe the DPRK as a fascistic regime committed to

the maintenance of a troubling fantasy: the purity and superiority of the Korean race.¹

- 3 Morley reiterates similar remarks in the introduction to the exhibition catalogue when he refers to Robespierre, Jean-Paul Sartre and George Orwell. Purity, perfection, the absolute, eternity only really exist on the horizon of thought and become monstrously corrupted in their concrete implementation. The text by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon that inspires one of the first sections of "Lost Horizon" and that Simon Morley chooses to be the preamble to his exhibition catalogue illustrates how dangerous extremism is – be it Proudhon's anarchist radicalism or the absolutism it condemns:

To be GOVERNED is to be at every operation, at every transaction noted, registered, counted, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, prevented, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. It is, under pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be placed under contribution, drilled, fleeced, exploited, monopolized, extorted from, squeezed, hoaxed, robbed; then, at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, vilified, harassed, hunted down, abused, clubbed, disarmed, bound, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and to crown all, mocked, ridiculed, derided, outraged, dishonored.

- 4 But the political dimension of "Lost Horizon" is not what interests us most here. We shall rather focus on the formal dimension of Morley's work. Beyond the political and philosophical reflection that his creation does not fail to provoke, "Lost Horizon" is indeed an opportunity for the artist to play with form, to practice different styles and media, different techniques and different formats, to combine, oppose and recompose them: "I've also used this occasion to try out some new styles and techniques, including working on *hanji* – Korean mulberry paper – and mounting works in East Asian formats, such as the hanging-scroll and the folding 'concertina' album".²
- 5 The notion of format is a very rich one, tying in with such connected notions as size, scale, proportion, orientation, convention, code, etc. Endowed with an aesthetic and pragmatic value but also a semiotic and ontological one, format can be defined as the "convention and assemblage of material, technical and symbolic features that allow for a relatively stable identification and assessment of works of art and other artefacts in a given cultural context".³ Format has thus a relative value, articulating dialogues between forms and counterforms, between genres and cultures. But format can be defined in a more practical way as "a matrix and operatory framework, made up of norms and rules that arrange representations and practices, governing the functioning of symbolic forms and forces, allowing their experience and their uses."⁴ Such a definition is totally appropriate in Morley's case. For him, formats are clearly "operatory frameworks" which prove to be incentives rather than constraints for his creativity, giving him opportunities to visit and revisit canons. Abiding by norms and rules but not being slave to them, he indeed systematically transforms and appropriates his sources of inspiration. Each individual section in "Lost Horizon" bears the mark of his transformative and appropriative action. The original formats of the works that inspired Morley are multiple: two novels, a Hollywood black and white film, satellite pictures and videos, postcards, a traditional Korean painting and its inspirational poem, philosophical texts. All these formats are to be found in "Lost Horizon" but reprocessed and altered. Morley replicates images, reproduces techniques of graphic or iconic production but systematically introduces a twist. He disseminates words in images; he changes their size and composition, zooming in or out on details, refashioning their orientation and framing, fragmenting them; he modifies their

contrast and brightness. He translates, recalibrates, borrows but above all manipulates; he plays with textures. The introductory paragraphs that accompany each section of "Lost Horizon" in the exhibition catalogue often help the viewer to appreciate both the lineage and the departure from the original art piece and tradition.

- 6 According to the criterion of format, the constitutive parts in "Lost Horizon" can be divided into two broad categories. A number of pieces are in formats borrowed from traditional high culture both in Western art (Morley's culture of birth) and East Asian art (Morley's culture of adoption).⁵ Other pieces are in formats borrowed from pop culture.
- 7 "In These Days... (1938)" belongs to the first category. It reproduces two frames from the beginning of Frank Capra's film which opens with a brief epigraph printed on the open pages of a book. The geopolitical context in which the film was released was extremely troubled – the world was about to tumble into war – so the epigraph refers to utopia as the dream of a realm of peace and security:

In these days of wars and
rumors of wars – haven't
you ever dreamed of a –
place where there was
peace and security, where
living was not a struggle
but a lasting delight?
Of course you have.
So has every man since Time
began. Always the same
dream. Sometime he calls it
Utopia – Sometimes the Fount-
ain of Youth – Sometimes
merely "that little chicken farm".

- 8 For his ekphrasis, Morley chose the diptych format, which he combined with the modern artistic practice of monochrome, to produce two cobalt-blue twin paintings on which the text is legible thanks to a subtle relief and texture effect. But the classicism of the diptych format, which echoes the classicism of the opening of Capra's film, is challenged by an explicit reference to the work of Yves Klein. In the catalogue, Morley likens his cobalt blue to the ultramarine blue patented by the French artist in 1960 under the name *International Klein Blue*. Now this deep blue was the medium Klein had precisely chosen in his quest for immateriality and infinity to free himself from forms, formats and codes, because in his eyes, blue was the only colour that expressed pictorial sensibility in its pure state, because it had "no dimension" and was "beyond dimension".⁶ So while the diptych format is maintained visually, it is inwardly undermined by the choice of the monochrome and a colour that is said by Klein to be "freed from the prison of the line."⁷ In the introduction to the volume that he dedicated to the genre, Morley actually insists on the virtually "format-free" dimension of the monochrome:

[The monochrome] pushes painting towards non-relational and anti-structural unity, or, more accurately, it negates the relation between parts from within the four edges or frame of a work, pushing them over its edges, and potentially, beyond the object itself onto the wall, the exhibiting space, the culture in general – and yet further outwards from the initial encounter with the work.⁸

- 9 Another piece inspired by Western high culture, "To Be Governed", takes after the "phylactères" or banderols that are to be found in the religious paintings of the great masters of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. On these banderols, the ancestors of the speech bubbles of present-day comic books, one could read divine messages in Gothic script, either a few words from a prayer or verses from the Bible. This format is one that Morley is familiar with, having used it for the exhibition "Messagerie" at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Dijon in 2010.⁹ At the time, the choice of this format was a means of dialoguing with works whose messages had become utterly sibylline for contemporary viewers because of their antiquated graphic design. Here, the banderol format is an opportunity to bring together the sacred and the profane in their most accomplished formulation while opposing the verticality and fragmentation of a list to the linearity of a text.
- 10 "Blue Moon No. 1 to 5" and "Mirror, Mirror" have a similar shape to "To Be Governed", yet they refer to the East Asian tradition of hanging scrolls, which are very common in Japanese, Chinese and Korean art and which are used for vertical compositions, both in pictorial representations and in calligraphy. "Blue Moon" is painted in acrylic on Korean mulberry paper.¹⁰ Morley bases his work on satellite images of the surface of the Moon in reference to the location of Shangri-La, the ideal city imagined by James Hilton in *Lost Horizon*. In the novel, as in Capra's film, Shangri-La is said to be located in the Valley of the Blue Moon at the heart of the Himalayas. Morley magnifies the satellite images to the extreme to retain only a detail of the original image and then reprocesses them chromatically in two colours, cobalt blue and white. This double manipulation leads to a blurring of the image that the artist fully assumes: "I have painted fragments of the moon's surface. (...) I was interested in giving a strong visual contrast between blue and white, but I reduce the image to a very simple code, so it is not easy to 'read' close up or see as an image".¹¹ This remark underlines, if it were necessary, the influence of size or scale on the reception of the work: the sensory perception of the work is, so to speak, fully "format-dependent". "Mirror, Mirror" plays on another key parameter for perception, namely orientation. The work consists of a list of 36 names that designate an ideal city or land in a variety of cultures: "Utopia, Arcadia, Cockaigne, The Island of the Immortals, Jannah, The Pure Land, (...), Paradise, (...) Narnia, The Matrix, (...) Tìr Na N'òg, Elysian Fields, (...), El Dorado, (...) Christianopolis". Each of these names is written in inverted format on the surface of a mirror whose shape is reminiscent of hanging scrolls. Unlike traditional scrolls, "Mirror, Mirror" is neither foldable nor easily transportable. However, this distortion of format is less striking and destabilising – at least for a Western viewer – than the reversal of the text. This piece makes the viewer aware of the directionality of print. Evocative of East Asian languages which use the traditional *zongpai* or *tategaki* ('vertical writing') styles that read from top to bottom and from right to left, it stresses the importance of text orientation as an ingrained habit, an acquired format. The legibility of print is utterly challenged if the text is "mirrored", that is flipped horizontally. Here, in a quite relevant manner, the concept of utopia becomes hardly graspable to Western eyes as a result of Morley's directional encoding.
- 11 The 'concertina' folder format of the next piece, "Utopia", derives from two kindred formats that are also widespread in East Asian high culture: the folding fan and the folding screen. Folding fans, made of folded paper braced by thin bamboo sticks, were decorated with small-scale paintings or calligraphic inscriptions. Folding screens, for

their part, were commonly produced in pairs and could include up to eight panels, although six-panelled screens were most common. They were typically made of a light wooden frame holding a lattice of thin wood strips. Layers of paper were fixed to the lattice to create a support onto which the paper or silk painting was attached. The individual panels of the screen were connected with a complex assembly of paper hinges. An outer frame, frequently covered with black lacquer, completed the assembly.¹² Morley reproduces not only the form but also the complex technique of these fans and screens in this piece: each of his ten small panels is the result of an elaborate succession of collages. Letters are collaged to form the word 'utopia' on square pieces of paper which are themselves collaged on card and then bound together with silk to create the concertina folder. But what is particularly striking is the singular typography of the letters used by the artist, a typography that rises to the level of calligraphy through the diversity and idiosyncratic combination of colours, sizes and shapes of letters. Here rhythmic energy is not conveyed through changes in ink gradation, through strokes and dots done with a brush, but it is created by scissors that clipped individual letters and the artist's hand that arranged them. Drawing from magazines with cosmopolitan Western origins – France, Germany, Great Britain, the United States, Italy – and from issues published at troubled times in the history of these countries, Morley thus bridges the gap between Asia and the West, high culture and popular culture, and confronts the ideal with the prosaic, the eternal with the daily, harmony with disorder, fullness with lack.¹³

- 12 If Pop Culture shows up indirectly in "Utopia" through popular magazines, it is the main source of inspiration in several other sections in "Lost Horizon" that play with well-known popular formats: the postcard format, the paperback format, the Hollywood film format.
- 13 "I Place In Your Hands" exploits the postcard format. Popular since the 19th century, postcards are double-sided: the front side, where the image is displayed, emphasises the picturesque, monumental or unusual nature of the natural and urban landscapes it depicts, while the back, where the recipient's address is written, is an opportunity to send a light, informal message. In Morley's creation, the text invades the image: a word is inscribed in golden letters in the centre of various mountain landscapes in which it blends more or less depending on whether the image is in colour, black and white or sepia.¹⁴ The succession of postcards reproduces a quote from Frank Capra's film: "I place in your hands the future and destiny of Shangri-La". This statement, imbued with great solemnity and implying transmission or filiation, contrasts radically with the triviality of messages traditionally written on the back of a postcard. The vertical arrangement of the 11 cards that make up the exhibited artwork counterbalances the effect of fragmentation and recreates the original syntax of the sentence pronounced by the Great Lama in the presence of Robert Conway, the hero of Capra's film; but above all, this arrangement is opportunely reminiscent of a film roll, whose frame-by-frame structure is transformed into a continuous filmic image when the film is screened.¹⁵
- 14 "Lost Horizon (1947)" plays, for its part, around the paperback format, paying tribute to James Hilton's novel that is credited with revolutionising the publishing world. Although paperbacks had been around since the mid-1800s, *Lost Horizon* is indeed often considered the first American paperback book ever as Hilton's bestseller was chosen by Pocket Books publishers – a division of Simon and Schuster founded in 1939 – to be

Pocket Book #1. Several million copies of *Lost Horizon* were sold in paperback format, helping to make it one of the most popular novels of the 20th century. Morley's piece is a small, rectangular, monochrome painting and reproduces the front cover of an early paperback edition of Hilton's fantasy novel. The highly codified elements that appear on every novel cover – the title, the author's name, the nature of the work, the publisher's name and its colophon – are embossed here on a uniformly golden background. This variation on the book as object is not new to Morley, but rather corresponds to a format that he created for himself and which he refers to as "book-painting". Earlier examples of this hybrid format include "Collected Works of George Orwell" (2000-2001), "Rossa" (2005) and "Albert Camus" (2014) which recreates the NRF Gallimard cover.¹⁶ Emphasizing once again the influence of the format on the reception of the work, the artist comments upon the evolutive relationship between the viewer and the book-painting: "At first the viewer perceives a rectangle of single colour, but on approaching, they can make out the text, which is painted in relief. A shift occurs between seeing, reading and 'touching'".

- 15 This trompe-l'oeil effect characterizes another section, akin to "Lost Horizon (1947)": "Lost Horizon n°1 to 4" repeats the creative technique of book paintings but substitutes an image for the usual monochrome background. Various names of the ideal community are thus set against the Hollywood vision of paradise on earth, in this case fragments of the sets created by Stephen Goosson for Capra's film. The words gradually become legible and the deliberately blurred images also gradually appear as filigree as the viewer's eye progressively perceives relief on the flat canvas and the outlines of buildings and gardens in a gradation of grey or brown. It feels as though an invisible hand were varying the contrast and brightness sliders, as in "You've Got Utopia", a 7'30 video, which shuffles and transforms two shots of the same emblematic Goosson settings by means of a slow fade, a change of framing and a fragmentation into 24 vignettes that begin to spin before coming to a standstill, merging again and fading out completely. The vacuity of any representation of utopia, the city that is nowhere, the city that is a non-place, is thus underlined in an ironic counterpoint to the title of the work which, on the contrary, signals possession.¹⁷
- 16 "Blue Moon", one of the last sections in "Lost Horizon", equally plays on the Hollywood film format by copying a standard from the "Star Wars" saga: in this short silent video, a list of the names for the perfect land unfolds horizontally in the manner of the opening textual narratives featuring at the beginning of Star Wars movies. As in the Hollywood blockbuster, the various appellations of utopia disappear as they reach the surface of the moon.
- 17 However, if Morley manipulates and transforms his sources of inspiration to create each ekphrastic piece in "Lost Horizon", his play with formats is also traceable at the 'meta' level in the exhibition catalogue that exists only in digital format, accessible either on the artist's personal website or on the Art First Gallery website.¹⁸ What makes this catalogue unusual is first the distribution of its sections that differs slightly from a traditional distribution. Even though it is an integral part of the work, "You've Got Utopia" is for instance externalized, separated from the other creations by a critical essay and placed just before a brief bibliography entitled "To Continue the Journey...". Likewise, this bibliography is not structured in a standard manner: alternating indiscriminately between references to books, videos and blogs, it includes barely twenty or so works on the theme of utopia. But the most original section of the

catalogue is without doubt its table of contents. Breaking with the conventional format, it takes the form of a map on which each "location" corresponds to one of the works making up "Lost Horizon". The typical order found in tables of contents has been retained, since each "location" is numbered; however, this spatialization in the form of a map is unprecedented, allowing a panoptical vision of the catalogue's contents as well as a virtual perambulation in utopian territory, each "location" having a hypertext link that gives immediate access to the pointed section. By its very nature – an engraving by Abraham Ortelius whose refinement is due as much to the meticulousness of the topographical details represented (groves of varied trees, mountain ranges, small hamlets, etc.) as to the elegance of the cursive chancery hand much appreciated in the Renaissance – this table of contents thus borders on the format of the frontispiece, which it refashions in three ways: by spreading it out over a double page and changing its orientation (landscape rather than portrait format), and by giving it a functional value as a table of contents.

- 18 "Lost Horizon" is thus a work rich in formats that Morley translates, adapts, reshapes, hybridizes, deconstructs and reinvents according to his ekphrastic dynamics. But whatever format is used, Morley does not manage to frame and circumscribe "utopia" exactly. It eludes his grasp; the artist names it from section to section but cannot quite represent or inscribe it in his work; it remains the blind spot or vanishing point of his creation. Or to say things differently, his multiple formats prove utopian formats – that is, they are impractical to reach and fully catch utopia. In the end, Morley's work does not so much represent utopia as it presents its attempt to represent utopia or its representation of works that attempt to represent utopia. Utopia is ultimately lost in this *mise en abyme*; an impossible subject, it is always *beyond*, *above*, *behind* or *below*. Absence is consubstantial with each of the works devoted to utopia that Morley addresses; it is also consubstantial with his ekphrastic creation. The marks of utopia's evasion are many, starting with the very title "Lost Horizon" which unequivocally expresses the vanity of the enterprise. The piece "The Door to the Invisible" is also exemplary in this respect. Inspired by a puzzling quote from René Daumal's surrealist novel *Mount Analogue* (published posthumously in 1952), Morley's creation magnificently plays on the theme of transparency and circulation. Just as crystal can be seen through, a door is a passageway between two spaces. But here, not only is the door not human-sized and cannot be passed through except visually, but it does not separate two spaces; on the contrary, it is surrounded and engulfed by the same space.¹⁹ In the same way, one does not access the entire quotation by "crossing" the door but by "going around" and "reading around" it, the viewer's gaze colliding successively against each of the sides of the door like a screen on which the components of an engraved sentence stand out: "The door to the invisible / must be visible". Here the door is visible but the invisible – utopia – remains fundamentally inaccessible. Finally, some of the works that sparked Morley's ekphrasis are absent too: no variations on Ahn Gyeon's painted scroll or on Tao Quian's poem which inspired the 15th century painter are to be found in "Lost Horizon".²⁰ Likewise, Thomas More's text that can be considered the founding text, the *Urtext* of utopia, is missing except for a brief epigraphic quotation at the beginning of the catalogue. Lastly, it is remarkable that the map chosen by Morley as the frontispiece *cum* table of contents for his work is not the map that illustrated the very first edition of More's *Utopia* but a later edition. Morley does not appropriate the map by Ambrosius Holbein that featured in the 1516 edition, nor the map that Holbein the Elder's first-born son made for the 1518 edition, but a

map by Abraham Ortelius that dates from ca. 1595. And this very map is not fully reproduced but partially truncated: the title and cartouches together with coastal contours of the imaginary land are cut off.²¹

- 19 Before reaching the conclusion of this paper, I would like to briefly argue that this absence is not merely due to the nature of so coveted an object as utopia. Here, it also tells something about the practice of ekphrasis, which Liliane Louvel defines as a factor of opacity as much as a revelation: "ekphrasis, because it seduces and keeps us under its spell, enters into tension with its maieutic function of revelation. It is therefore like an agent of opacity under cover of transparency".²² Above all, ekphrasis allows only for an asymptotic approach to the work it evokes. There is always a gap, a distance, as Gary Shapiro shows in an article entitled "The Absent Image: Ekphrasis and the 'Infinite Relation'". Admittedly, Shapiro focuses on a strict definition of ekphrasis as a verbal description of a visual work. But his remarks can be extended to any form of ekphrastic dialogue between artworks and to the kind of intermedial and intertextual ekphrasis practiced by Simon Morley. Shapiro argues that ekphrasis may be unfaithful to the original it addresses but that the original is reciprocally unfaithful to its ekphrasis. Referring to Foucault and Derrida and taking the example of Cy Tombly's ekphrasis of Homer's account of the shield of Achilles in Book 18 of *Iliad* – considered the oldest instance of ekphrasis in western tradition – he says that translation across the gap between the verbal and the visual is always "a scrawl". There is always a loss. But the loss does not solely reside in the translation – the loss or the absence is also consubstantial to the original. He further argues that "this absence is not an obstacle but that which enables ekphrasis".²³ This is precisely what is observed in Morley's "Lost Horizon": the artist acknowledges his "tangential and elliptical" approach to utopia.²⁴ He dialogues with the works that inspire him, highlighting their distinctive elements by re-producing, trans-posing and re-creating them. But rather than being fully revealed, these works vanish behind his own creation. An awareness of absence subtly gnaws at the illusion of presence. Morley's motley ekphrastic creation *de facto* enhances the presence-absence of the source art-objects that inspired it. Or to say things differently, his attempt to represent utopia by drawing on a selection of utopian works ultimately reveals the utopia of ekphrastic re-presentation.
- 20 The diversity in artistic, visual and philosophical references in "Lost Horizon" is matched by the diversity of Morley's techniques and productions: his ekphrasis is a densely intertextual, intermedial and intercultural set of paintings, scrolls, screens, videos, postcards with text, word lists, laser-cut texts, installations, *trompe-l'œil* watercolours and book-covers. The artist successfully navigates through the various formats which he appropriates and creatively reconfigures, trans-forms and de-forms in his exploration and exegesis of the enigma of utopia. Doing so he leads the viewer to ponder over the practice of ekphrasis, a practice which is less mimetic than inventive in his case. This inventiveness, this ability to think and create outside of the box (the box of format for one) appears the only way to approach utopia as he notes in the introduction to the exhibition catalogue: "to envisage utopia it is necessary to travel outside the *doxa* – the conventional – and this means daring to believe in the impossible". We are only too happy to follow him on this journey...

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NOTES

1. <http://www.simonmorley.com/losthorizon/index.html> (accessed August 30th, 2021). Utopia has also been at the core of Simon Morley's work as an artist since 2003 when he created "Utopia Press", a publishing entity dedicated to the production of exhibition catalogues and artist's books.
2. <http://www.simonmorley.com/losthorizon/index.html> (accessed August 30th, 2021).
3. My translations, from David Zerbib, « L'Ère du format », in David Zerbib, ed., *In Octavo. Des formats de l'art*, Dijon-Annecy, Les Presses du Réel, ESAAA, 2015, p. 352.
4. David Zerbib, « Le format, principe d'une esthétique contemporaine », *Interfaces*, Vol. 45, July 2021. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/interfaces/3023> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/interfaces.3023>. (accessed August 30th, 2021).
5. Simon Morley was born and educated in the UK. For several years now, he has been living in Seoul (South Korea) where he is Assistant Professor in the School of Fine Art at Dankook University. The Western and East Asian cultures meet and combine in his works.

6. Yves Klein, "Lecture at the Sorbonne (1959)", in *Studio International*, Vol. 186, 1973, p. 43.
7. "I am against the line and all its consequences: contours, forms, composition. All paintings, whether figurative or abstract, seem to me to be prison windows with lines as the bars. (...) The reader of a painting with lines, forms, composition, remains prisoner of his five senses." (My translation, from Yves Klein, « Le dépassement de la problématique de l'art », in Yves Klein, *La Vie, la vie elle-même qui est l'art absolu*, sous la dir. de Gilbert Perle et Bruno Corà, Nice, Musée d'art moderne et d'art contemporain de Nice, 2000, p. 71).
8. Simon Morley, *The Simple Truth: The Monochrome in Modern Art*, London, Reaktion Books, 2020, p. 23.
9. <https://www.simonmorley.com/messagerie/index.html> (accessed August 30th, 2021).
10. "To Be Governed" is ink on Chinese linen.
11. <http://www.simonmorley.com/losthorizon/index.html> (accessed August 30th, 2021).
12. https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/pfor/hd_pfor.htm. "Paintings Formats in East Asian Art", The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (accessed August 30th, 2021).
13. "Shangri-La", a trompe-l'œil painting in watercolour, is also an exercise in calligraphy. Beautifully arranged twigs, branchlets and leaves from Morley's balcony garden in Seoul form letters that spell the word 'Shangri-La'. The frailty and deadness of this random flora contrasts sharply with the connotations of the word it spells.
14. The mixing of verbal and visual elements leads to the creation of what Morley calls a "topographic space" in *Writing on the Wall: Word and Image in Modern Art*, that is to say "a space in which writing is severed from its role as mere verbal description and is experienced instead as both a verbal and a visual phenomenon." (Simon Morley, *Writing on the Wall: Word and Image in Modern Art*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2003, p. 17).
15. "Future and Destiny", a 51-second video and companion piece to "I Place in Your Hands", unfolds the same phrase of the Great Lama, each word standing out against a star-studded sky.
16. <http://www.simonmorley.com/orwell/index.html>; <http://www.simonmorley.com/rossa/index.html>; <http://www.simonmorley.com/camus/index.html>. (accessed August 30th, 2021).
17. At the beginning of the video, the soundtrack samples words from Capra's film but they soon merge into electronic music and only surface as a distant insubstantial echo at regular intervals.
18. Given its consummate design and aesthetic quality, Morley's exhibition catalogue is akin to an artist's book. It is a "work of art in the form of a modern book", as defined by Anne Moeglin-Delcroix in *Esthétique du livre d'artiste (1960 - 1980)*. As such, it is fully part of the ekphrastic process and may be approached either as an alternative (*substitute*) practice to the exhibition or as an alternative (*variant*) exhibition practice.
19. Although the catalogue of exhibition may visually delude the reader into assuming that it is normal size, Morley's door is approximately A5 size: 25 x 15 x 5 cm.
20. The absence of Ahn Gyeon's painting in Morley's "Lost Horizon" interestingly resonates with the actual exile of the work from Korea. While it is considered an iconic

national masterpiece, it is housed at Tenri University in Japan, the Japanese having stolen the painting in the late 16th century during the Imjin War.

21. Morley keeps the unusual orientation of Ortelius' map in which "Septentrio" is located at the bottom of the map and "Oriens" appears on the left-hand side.

22. Liliane Louvel, « Déclinaisons et figures ekphrastiques : quelques modestes propositions », *Arborescences*, Vol.4, pp. 15-32. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1027429ar>.

23. Gary Shapiro, "The Absent Image: Ekphrasis and the 'Infinite Relation' of Translation", *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 6(1), 2007, pp. 13-24. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1470412907075065>.

24. <http://www.simonmorley.com/losthorizon/index.html> (accessed August 30th, 2021).

ABSTRACTS

In "Lost Horizon", a 2014 ekphrasis, Simon Morley summons up not just one artwork but several that have all in common to deal with utopia: a fifteenth century traditional Korean handscroll painting by artist Ahn Gyeon entitled *A Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Paradise* (1447); René Daumal's uncompleted surrealist novel *Mount Analogue: A Novel of Symbolically Authentic Non-Euclidean Adventures in Mountain Climbing* (1952); James Hilton's best-selling novel *Lost Horizon* (1932) and its Hollywood black and white adaptation by Frank Capra (1938), not to mention philosophical texts by Proudhon or Thomas More. Splicing together Western and Eastern traditions, high and popular culture, Morley engages in a clever and subtle play on formats in his exhibition and exhibition catalogue. He reproduces images but changes their orientation, proportion or framing, zooming in or out on details; he scatters words on a variety of media, changing their size, orientation or typography; he practices various techniques of graphic production, including traditional Asian formats, but always taking some liberties with the canonical techniques and formats or introducing a personal twist. The materiality of his creations is thus constantly highlighted, as is his appropriation of works and traditions. But "Lost Horizon" fails to fully capture, reproduce and reveal the works that inspire the artist. They are a vanishing point in Morley's creation, which is all the more relevant (or ironic) as they are themselves woven of absence insofar as they aim to represent a "u-topia" – that is, literally a "place that does not exist", a presence-absence. This paper therefore aims to show how, by playing with multiple formats, Morley addresses and problematizes the conundrum of utopia while shedding thought-provoking light on the ekphrastic practice.

Dans « Lost Horizon » (2014), Simon Morley ne s'inspire pas d'une seule œuvre d'art, mais de plusieurs qui ont toutes comme dénominateur commun de s'intéresser à l'utopie. L'artiste crée ainsi une ekphrasis multiple et hétéroclite évoquant tour à tour une peinture coréenne traditionnelle du quinzième siècle, réalisée par l'artiste Ahn Gyeon et intitulée « *Voyage rêvé au pays des pêcheurs en fleurs* » (1447) ; le roman surréaliste inachevé de René Daumal, *Mount Analogue: A Novel of Symbolically Authentic Non-Euclidean Adventures in Mountain Climbing* (1952) ; le roman à succès de James Hilton, *Lost Horizon* (1932) et son adaptation hollywoodienne en noir et blanc par Frank Capra (1938), sans oublier les textes philosophiques de Proudhon ou de Thomas More. Empruntant à la fois à la tradition occidentale et à la tradition orientale, à la Culture et à la

culture populaire, Morley se livre à un savant et subtil jeu de formats tant dans l'exposition que dans le catalogue qui l'accompagne. Il reproduit des images mais modifie leur orientation, leur proportion ou leur cadrage, zoomant ou dézoomant sur des détails ; il dissémine des mots sur une variété de supports en changeant leur taille, leur orientation ou leur typographie ; il s'exerce à diverses techniques de production graphique, notamment aux formats asiatiques traditionnels, mais en prenant toujours quelques libertés par rapport aux techniques et formats canoniques. La matérialité de ses créations est ainsi constamment mise en relief, de même que son appropriation des œuvres et des traditions. Mais « Lost Horizon » ne parvient pas à saisir, à reproduire et à révéler tout à fait les œuvres qui l'inspirent. Elles sont un point de fuite dans la création de Morley, ce qui est d'autant plus pertinent (ou ironique) qu'elles sont elles-mêmes tissées d'absence dans la mesure où elles visent à représenter une « u-topie » – c'est-à-dire littéralement un « lieu qui n'existe pas », une présence-absence. Cet article s'attache donc à montrer comment, en jouant avec de multiples formats, Morley aborde et problématise l'énigme de l'utopie tout en apportant un éclairage intéressant sur la pratique ekphrastique.

INDEX

Mots-clés: format, utopie, ekphrasis, intertextualité, intermédialité, interculturalité

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