

MIGNON NIXON

The setting is like the darkness in a cinema,
like the silence in a concert hall.

—Federico Fleggenheimer

There is a scene in Nanni Moretti's film *The Son's Room*(2001) in which a prospective patient, a middle-aged man making his first visit to a psychoanalyst, pauses upon entering the consulting room to examine the couch. It is a fine couch, he remarks, "simple, comfortable, even elegant in its way... But I have no intention of lying on it."

Still, the analyst's marine-blue couch receives many visitors over the course of the film. One woman spends the hour calculating her losses. How much does the analyst really understand—20 percent of what she is saying, or 30? There have been 460 sessions, she chides, and after every one, to assuage her disappointment, she shops. A male patient gushes dreams. They pour from him in unbroken succession, filling the analytic hour like water flowing noisily into a bath. A woman suffers from obsessional thoughts. Her time on the couch is measured as metro-nomically as her daily routine, in a recitation of the rituals that mete out her hours. The analyst's thoughts drift across to the cupboard where he stores a private collection of objects, a treasury not of antique figurines such as Freud favored, but an extensive array of running shoes—fetishes not of Eros but of Nike—stacked in precisely ordered rows.

While the patients talk, the tall, bearded analyst, his long limbs folded into an armchair classically positioned behind the couch, smiles, sighs, takes notes, drops and lifts his eyes, flexes his fingers, makes the occasional tactful observation, but mostly abides. In one session, he mentally counts the seconds until the patient departs. For these visitors are sufferers in need of his help, but also intruders,

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whiners, time wasters, and bullies. He needs his space. At the end of the day, Giovanni Sermonti closes the doors of his office and, in unmistakable emulation of Freud at Berggasse 19, in turn-of-the-century Vienna, enters the adjoining rooms, the scene of his apparently contented bourgeois life.

Then, one Sunday morning, amiable Oscar, the dream gusher (whose stream of consciousness, however, is punctuated by fleeting fantasies of suicide), telephones in a state of distress. It is a blow for the analyst, who has just persuaded his son to join him for a run. The moody adolescent boy has been much on his mind. But Oscar persists, and the analyst finally agrees to meet him. He drives to the countryside, where he finds Oscar padding disconsolately about his untidy house, crumpled by the discovery of a spot on his lung. Returning to town that afternoon, the analyst learns that his son has been killed in a diving accident. Now he can no longer endure the talk of the patients, their trivial worries, their inconsolable sadness, and, even worse, their joy. Tears flow as he struggles to listen from the lap of his chair. As for Oscar, whose distress call took the analyst to the countryside while his son was dying in the sea, Giovanni cannot resist dashing the man's wishful fantasies, blotting his hope. Yet the cancer has deepened the patient's insight; it may be his cure. At last, Oscar breaks off the analysis. Soon Giovanni expels all the patients from his life. He closes his practice and asks his patients to leave him alone.

Imagine you are lying on Freud's couch. What can you see?

—John Forrester

From my reclining yet propped-up, somewhat Madame Récamier-like position on the couch, I face the wide-open double door. At the foot of the couch is the stove. Placed next [to] the stove is the cabinet that contains the more delicate glass jars and the variously shaped bottles and Aegean vases. In the wall space, on the other side of the double door, is another case or cabinet of curiosities and antiques; on top of this case there are busts of bearded figures—Euripides? Socrates? Sophocles, certainly. There is the window now as you turn that corner, at right angles to the cabinet, and then another case that contains pottery figures and some more Greek-figure bowls. Then, the door to the waiting room. At right angles again, there is the door that leads through the laboratory-like cupboard room or alcove, to the hall.

—H. D.

Freud's original conception of the psychoanalytic setting is commemorated in two museums, one at Berggasse 19 in Vienna, where he lived and practiced medicine and then psychoanalysis from 1891 to 1938, and another in Hampstead, north London, in the house where he took refuge at the end of his life, and to which his extensive collection of antiquities, his library, and his couch were spirited through the intercession of well-placed friends. For some forty years after Freud's death in 1939, his psychoanalyst daughter, Anna Freud, continued to live and work in the



Freud's couch, 1938.
 Photo: Edmund Engelman.

house at 20 Maresfield Gardens, preserving Freud's rooms exactly as he had left them, as if in anticipation of the moment when, upon her own death in 1982, the house would be officially converted into a museum, or, as John Forrester has observed, "a museum within a museum: a museum of precious ancient objects, within an ordinary house in Hampstead where a great man died."¹ London's Vienna counterpart opened earlier, in 1971, with no collection to display. Here there are no antique statuettes, no vases, no bowls, no books, and no furnishings beyond the waiting-room chairs and a few minor items that Anna Freud, already planning the museum in London, would subsequently deliver into the empty hands of the Sigmund Freud Society of Vienna. In contrast to the diorama of discipleship in London, the centerpiece of Vienna's museum, with its bare walls and uncarpeted floors, is a panoramic display of life-sized photographs of Freud's consulting room and study. These pictures, which were taken on the eve of the family's departure in 1938, stimulate a reflection on the historical forces that shaped psychoanalysis as a diasporic culture. As Forrester has written of his own visit to the museum in 1975: "It had a derisible atmosphere, perhaps one deliberately induced to remind visitors of

1. John Forrester, "Collector, Naturalist, Surrealist," in *Dispatches from the Freud Wars: Psychoanalysis and Its Passions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 132.

yet one more loss that the war had visited on Vienna; but it still prompted the thought that a museum of fake souvenirs is a fake museum—a screen museum, the Freudian might say.”²

The photographic history of the psychoanalytic consulting room begins with a young engineer-photographer, Edmund Engelman, summoned to Berggasse 19 by August Aichorn in May 1938. Working in secret and using only natural light for fear of alerting the Gestapo, Engelman produced some 150 negatives, including a complete photographic record of Freud’s consulting room and study.³ At the Freud Museum in Vienna, the enlarged photographs wrap around the walls at wainscot level so that the visitor entering the consulting room will be facing the carpet-draped couch and Freud’s chair tucked discreetly behind it. In her psychoanalytic memoir, *H. D.*, one of Freud’s more devoted analysands and a devotee also of the couch, leads us ceremoniously to the scene. After passing up a curved stone staircase to a landing, and being ushered in through the door to the right (the one to the left leads to the family apartment); after possibly meeting the previous patient on the stairs; after crossing the carpeted waiting room and depositing one’s coat on one of the pegs in a narrow corridor reminiscent of a laboratory or school; after being invited into the consulting room itself, beyond which lies the book-lined study filled with antiquities; after tracing this path, one will find “tucked into the corner, in the three-sided niche made by the two walls and the back of the couch,” the Professor. “He will sit there quietly, like an old owl in a tree. He will say nothing at all or he will lean forward and talk about something

2. Ibid.

3. Engelman left Germany for the United States in 1939. The negatives remained in London with Anna Freud. See Edmund Engelman, *Berggasse 19, Sigmund Freud’s Home and Offices, Vienna 1938* (New York: Basic Books, 1976). For a systematic and illuminating analysis of Engelman’s photographs, see Diana Fuss, “Freud’s Ear: Berggasse 19, Vienna, Austria,” in *The Sense of an Interior: Four Writers and the Rooms That Shaped Them* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 71–105.



*View from the consulting room into the waiting room, taken from approximately the position of the couch, Freud Museum, Vienna.
Photo © Gerald Zugmann/Vienna.*

that is apparently unrelated to the progression or unfolding of our actual dream-content or thought association. He will shoot out an arm, sometimes somewhat alarmingly, to stress a point. Or he will, always making an ‘occasion’ of it, get up” and light a cigar.⁴

An early plan for the Vienna museum would have placed a replica couch and armchair, each in its assigned position, in an otherwise empty consulting room.⁵ By instead relying on photographic documentation, supplemented by letters and memorabilia arranged and numbered in shallow glass vitrines—by “eschewing reconstruction, which would suggest historical continuity,”⁶ in favor of an archival presentation—the architects chose instead to present the history of Freudian psychoanalysis through the medium of “a screen museum” (a “screen memory” being, in psychoanalytic terms, a false form of remembering that covers desire). At the Freud Museum in Hampstead, Forrester observes, the visitor encounters by contrast “a meticulously conserved milieu: the real furniture, the books, the little objects useful in everyday life and useless anywhere else,” most notably the couch.⁷

Continuously on display at the Freud Museum in London since 1986, Freud’s own couch, that sacred relic of psychoanalysis—that “flying carpet for unconscious voyaging,” as Marina Warner describes it in the museum’s guidebook—now lends itself to the scopophilic curiosity it was charged with frustrating in the treatment itself, in which the patient was prevented from observing the analyst.⁸ By Freud’s

4. H. D., “Writing on the Wall,” in *Tribute to Freud* (1970; Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1985), p. 22.

5. Christian Huber, Freud Museum Library, Vienna, e-mail communication to the author, May 27, 2004.

6. Lydia Marinelli and Georg Traska, “Besuch einer Wohnung: Zur Architectur des Sigmund Freud-Museums,” in *Architektur des Sigmund Freud-Museums* (Vienna: Freud Museum, 2002).

7. Forrester, “Collector, Naturalist, Surrealist,” p. 132.

8. Marina Warner, Preface to *20 Maresfield Gardens: A Guide to the Freud Museum* (London: Freud Museum, 1998), p. viii.



Freud's couch and desk, Freud Museum, London.

own account, the couch had “a historical basis,” being “the remnant of the hypnotic method out of which psychoanalysis was evolved.”⁹ The couch was apparently the gift of a patient, one Mrs. Benvenuti, who presented it to her doctor in 1891.¹⁰ In his 1913 essay “On Beginning the Treatment,” following a detailed discussion of what he deemed the crucial factors for initiating analysis—“arrangements about *time* and *money*”—Freud offers “a word about a certain ceremonial,” the relative positions of analyst and analysand, in which the patient lies on the couch while the analyst sits behind her or him and out of sight.¹¹ The first consideration is “a personal motive”—“I cannot put up with being stared at by other people.” Second, “since while I am listening to the patient, I, too, give myself over to the current of my unconscious thoughts,” Freud observes, there is a danger that the analyst will be interfered with in this process by the patient, who may also be influenced by the other’s facial expressions. Freud’s brief note concludes: “The patient usually regards being made to adopt this position as a hardship and rebels against it, especially if the instinct for looking (scopophilia) plays an important role in his neurosis.”¹² And this may perhaps go some way toward explaining the notable fact that the cultural and phantasmatic history of the psychoanalytic scene, the setting or frame, has been constructed preeminently in the privileged arena of modern scopophilia and voyeuristic desire—in cinema.

Freud himself rejected such “plastic representation” of psychoanalysis, at least on the one occasion when the idea was put to him.¹³ That was in the summer of 1925, when Karl Abraham, founder of the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute, relayed a proposal from Hans Neumann, an independent filmmaker in Berlin, for an “educational film” about psychoanalysis.¹⁴ Abraham described the project as a “popular, scientific, psychoanalytic” film, to be based on an actual clinical case. A short treatise on psychoanalysis was to be provided to the audience “like an opera libretto.”¹⁵ Freud demurred. “My chief objection,” he wrote Abraham, “is . . . that I do not believe that satisfactory plastic representation of our abstraction is at all possible” (this film about the talking cure would be silent).¹⁶ Abraham died of a sudden illness in December, the break with Freud unended, but not before he and another of Freud’s disciples, Hans Sachs, had seen the project through to filming. Taken over by the German UFA film company, Neumann’s *Lehrfilm* (a

9. Sigmund Freud, “On Beginning the Treatment (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psychoanalysis I),” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 12, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), p. 133.

10. *A Guide to the Freud Museum*, p. 54.

11. Freud, “On Beginning the Treatment,” pp. 126, 133.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

13. Sanford Gifford, “Freud at the Movies, 1907–1925: From the Piazza Colonna and Hammerstein’s Roofgarden to *The Secrets of a Soul*,” in *Celluloid Couches, Cinematic Clients: Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy in the Movies*, ed. Jerrold R. Brandell (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), p. 147.

14. Hans Neumann to Karl Abraham, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 151.

15. Karl Abraham to Freud, June 7, 1925, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 151.

16. Freud, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 152.



G. W. Pabst. From *Secrets of a Soul*. 1925. Rights: Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung. Distributor: Transit Film GmbH.

genre of the time, with others being produced on subjects including gynecology) became the commercial offering *Secrets of a Soul*, directed by G. W. Pabst and featuring Werner Krauss and Pawel Pawlow as patient and psychoanalyst.

The consulting room in which the treatment unfolds is a capacious salon richly appointed with flowered carpet, heavy draperies, lace curtains, and a wide couch that thrusts diagonally into the room, facing away from a bank of windows against which the analyst is seated. The case concerns a chemist whose symptoms include a knife phobia and fantasies of killing his wife, with whom he is impotent. The treatment begins with the two men facing each other across a low table, but the patient soon transfers to the couch. Dwarfed by its great size, he rolls around, tormented by the memory of violent dreams, at times adopting a quasi-fetal position and frequently turning to face the analyst, who answers these signs of distress by reaching over to pat the younger man gently on the arm, gestures charged with the affective resonance of speech in the talking cure. In the absence of sound, the spatial setting assumes an exaggerated significance, posing a question that remains largely unspoken in the literature of psychoanalysis: “What state does lying on a couch induce?”¹⁷

17. Steven J. Ellman, *Freud's Technique Papers: A Contemporary Perspective* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1991), p. 204. As Ellman is one of the few analytic practitioners to write on the use of the couch, it is worth quoting him more fully: “From my perspective, the important question is whether or not lying on the couch more easily induces a state that is difficult to replicate while sitting up or being in any other position in an analytic office. One might then ask what state does lying on a couch induce? The answer to this question is crucial, if one maintains that lying on a couch is a necessary condition for an analysis. The alternative to this position would profess that complying with the analyst's conditions is a necessary condition for analyzability. This is an untenable position if one also wants to provide a condition in which the patient is able to freely say what is on his mind.”

*Points of importance at the beginning of the analysis
are arrangements about time and money.
—Sigmund Freud*

The psychoanalytic couch is an icon of modern culture. Yet “Freud hardly wrote anything on the subject after his original recommendations,” notes the editor of a recent special issue of *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* devoted to this neglected point of technique, the use of the analytic couch. This reticence on the part of the founder, the editor suggests, is enough to ensure that the couch is “a topic that is perhaps the least controversial in psychoanalysis.” For even if “using the couch in psychoanalytic treatment constitutes the sine qua non of the whole enterprise,” the editor observes, the clinical literature studiously avoids discussing it. Or rather, he contends, *because* the couch is the sine qua non of the whole enterprise, it must be taken for granted and ignored.¹⁸ “How droll,” then, remarks another practitioner, “that one of psychoanalysis’s two clinical fundamentals” (the other being free association) “should receive more attention as an icon than as a technical dimension.”¹⁹

The scene of psychoanalysis is commonly referred to as the frame.²⁰ The frame unites the time and space of psychoanalytic experience, regulating the frequency and duration of the sessions, the arrangement of the consulting room and its furnishings, and the postures of analyst and analysand. Deviations from the established pattern break the frame. A patient who misses appointments, neglects to pay the fee on time, or refuses to lie on the couch breaks the frame, as does an analyst who fails to keep to time, miscalculates the fee, or interrupts the session by answering the telephone, for example. Breaking the frame is seen to signal unconscious resistance to the analysis. And because resistance is valued in psychoanalysis as a part of the transference (or, in the case of the analyst, the countertransference), these minor actions assume a heightened significance. Transference—the displacement onto the analyst of emotions originally associated with central figures in the patient’s life—is brought into focus by the frame.

Psychoanalysis, writes Jean Laplanche, “leads to the dissolution of all formations—psychical, egoic, ideological, symptomatic” but, crucially, also “offers the constancy of a presence, of a solicitude, the flexible but attentive constancy of a frame.”²¹ The function of the frame is to contain. “It is because the principle of constancy, of homeostasis, of *Bindung* is maintained at the periphery, that analytic unbinding is possible.”²² He compares the role of the frame to that of the ego in

18. George Moraitis, “Prologue,” *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 15, no. 3 (1995), p. 275.

19. Alvin Frank, “The Couch, Psychoanalytic Process, and Psychic Change: A Case Study,” *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 15, no. 3 (1995), p. 324.

20. See Luciana Nissim Momigliano, “The Analytic Setting: A Theme with Variations,” in *Continuity and Change in Psychoanalysis: Letters from Milan*, trans. Philip P. Slotkin and Gina Danile (London: Karnac Books, 1992), p. 33.

21. Jean Laplanche, “Transference: Its Provocation by the Analyst,” in *Essays on Otherness* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 227.

22. *Ibid.*

dreaming. In its desire for sleep, the ego assumes a “peripheral place . . . leaving the field open to the primary process.”²³ Just as sleep is the medium of the dream, for Laplanche the frame supports the process of analysis.

Writing in the 1960s, the Argentine psychoanalyst José Bleger also proposed a distinction between the “process” of analysis and the frame, “made up of constants within whose bounds the process takes place.”²⁴ Bleger compared the frame to an institution. The analysand may experience a particularly strong transference to the frame itself, he points out, “instead of the therapist,” and this may enable her or him to “share in the prestige of a great institution”—or, conversely, by negative transference, may lead the patient to disparage (or break) the frame.²⁵ In much the same way that, for a student, the university setting itself may hold greater importance than the faculty or fellow students, an individual analysand may experience analysis primarily as an effect of the frame.²⁶ For Bleger, the conventions that structure analysis and guarantee its constancy are institutional features. “A relationship which lasts for years, in which a set of norms and attitudes is kept up, is nothing less than a true definition of *institution*,” he observes, concluding: “The psychoanalytic situation is an institution in itself, especially the frame.”²⁷

The institutional conventions of psychoanalysis—hours and fees, carpets and cushions, the chair and the couch—support the task of unbinding. That is, psychoanalysis is an institution paradoxically devoted to dissolution. Even the frame, Bleger maintains, must ultimately become an object of analysis, or unbinding, and “here we are likely to find the strongest resistance.”²⁸ For when the

23. Ibid.

24. José Bleger, “Psycho-Analysis of the Psycho-Analytic Frame,” *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 48 (1967), p. 511.

25. Ibid., p. 514.

26. Donald Winnicott observed, “In some cases, it turns out in the end or even at the beginning that the setting and the maintenance of the setting are as important as the way one deals with the material” (D. W. Winnicott, “The Importance of the Setting in Meeting Regression in Psychoanalysis,” in *Psychoanalytic Explorations*, ed. Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd, and Madeleine Davis [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989], p. 96). Winnicott describes the setting as the “environmental provision” in the analysis, commenting that “the patient is not there to work with us except when we provide the conditions which are necessary” (p. 97). These conditions, he observes, vary from one patient to another, and the analyst may sometimes be unable to create, or sustain, the necessary environment. A patient may, for example, demand absolute constancy in the placement of objects in the room, or insist that the curtains be always drawn. Here is another scenario:

Let me take a very crude example. A patient of mine went to an analyst and very quickly she got confidence in him and therefore she began to cover herself over with a rug and lie curled up on the couch with nothing happening. The analyst said to her “Sit up! Look at me! Talk! You are not to lie like that doing nothing; nothing will happen!”

According to Winnicott, “the patient felt that this was a good thing for the analyst to do” since it was obvious by his response that he could not meet her needs. “She got up and talked and got on very well with the analyst on the basis of a mutual interest in modern art”—until another analyst could be found (p. 97).

27. Bleger, “Psycho-Analysis of the Psycho-Analytic Frame,” pp. 512, 514.

28. Ibid., p. 517.

analysis turns to the frame, it touches on the “catastrophic situation” of infantile vulnerability, the fear of change.²⁹

“The analyst modifies the furniture of the consulting room, changes the couch, moves. . . . As is well known, in these circumstances very intense reactions can be noticed, which can be real, even if only temporary, psychotic episodes, as if the change that has taken place mobilizes very primitive anxieties, of a symbiotic type, that are normally contained by the familiar set up.”³⁰ So writes Luciana Nissim Momigliano, the Milanese psychoanalyst to whom Nanni Moretti refers his audience for a theoretical understanding of the proposition that, as Momigliano puts it, psychoanalysis is an encounter between “two people talking in a room.”³¹ The strange dynamic between analyst and analysand, however, is also a ritual that unbalances social intercourse through a series of calculated discrepancies: one speaks while the other listens in silence; one reclines while the other sits upright; one is charged with the exercise of singular self-restraint, while the demand on the other is to speak as freely as possible. As Laplanche explains, the work of analysis depends on this “essential dissymmetry in the relation” in order for the transference to develop and to evolve.³² The distance rigorously maintained between analyst and analysand, the scopical and social estrangement of the two people talking in a room, and the admonition to avoid contact outside the ritual space all contribute to the atmosphere of an encounter Laplanche describes as enigmatic, as contracted in an “enigmatic dimension.”³³ “What is *offered*,” observes Laplanche, “is a place for speech, for free speech, but not, properly speaking, the place of an exchange.”³⁴ Analysis offers a place for speech within the enigmatic dimension of the frame.

In a published discussion between Moretti and a group of analysts, one audience member objected that, “in Germany, psychoanalysts would not go to visit a patient on a Sunday” as Sermonti does in *The Son’s Room*. To which the filmmaker testily replied, “Perhaps in another country an analyst would never go and visit his patient on a Sunday; instead, in Italy, in a film of mine, he would!”³⁵ This in turn prompted another panelist, the psychoanalyst Stefano Bolognini, to announce, in his closing remarks: “I just want to reassure our colleague who spoke earlier about the Italian analyst’s methods of practice: yes, usually they are human and affective, but they do not go to the home of the patient!”³⁶ To one rule—psychoanalysts don’t pay housecalls—the analysts of Germany and Italy, if not the

29. Ibid., p. 515.

30. Momigliano, “The Analytic Setting,” p. 59.

31. Ibid.

32. Laplanche, “Transference,” p. 228.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., pp. 228–29.

35. Nanni Moretti, Paola Golinelli, Stefano Bolognini, and Andrea Sabbadini, “Sons and Fathers: A Room of Their Own, Nanni Moretti’s *The Son’s Room* (2001),” in *The Couch and the Silver Screen: Psychoanalytic Reflections on European Cinema*, vol. 44 of *The New Library of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Andrea Sabbadini (Hove, U.K.: Brunner-Routledge, 2003), p. 69.

36. Bolognini, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 72.

filmmakers, apparently can agree, but the century-long debate over the proper distance between analyst and analysand, or the institutional limits of the frame, is not yet at an end.

Films about psychoanalysis routinely deviate from the rules, breaking the frame so as to motivate the plot. Moretti, however, is insistent about his fidelity to the analytic situation. "I wanted to respect the setting," he remarks. "I wanted the analyst's work to be carried out in his consulting room." While an American screenwriter might, Moretti claims, "tend to feel that this might be a boring thing to represent . . . I wanted my film, the work in my film, to be carried out within those walls, within the consulting room."³⁷ Turning to a leading theoretical voice on the setting, he mentions the work of Momigliano, who contrasts the rigid adherence to orthodoxy in psychoanalysis in America to analysis in Europe. In the "hyper-rigid technique" once "popular in the United States," she observes, "the principle of abstinence becomes the 'rule' of abstinence; in an effort to follow the rules of impersonality and anonymity, consulting rooms were left bare, so that none of the analyst's personality or taste could be seen."³⁸ In America, it seems, filmmakers find the setting boring, and analysts make it so.

Such asceticism is contrary to Freud's own invention, the consulting room as a repository of past civilizations embodied in the serried rows of so many statuettes, figured vases, reliefs, textiles, and objets d'art of every description. For Freud, as Forrester has observed, the very model of psychoanalysis is collecting: "Freud opened up a whole set of related fields of phenomena, whose scientific study would require assiduous and painstaking collections: dreams, jokes, parapraxes, early memories."³⁹ And it is "alongside these distinctively Freudian collections," he observes, "that we should place his contemporaneous collection of antiquities," a treasury displayed exclusively in the consulting room and study as one index of "its intimate connection with his psychoanalytic work."⁴⁰

Freudian psychoanalytic technique, however, did demand a renunciation of visual contact between analyst and analysand, effecting a displacement of scopic desire from the face of the analyst to the milieu of analysis. Freud recommended that the two people talking in a room look away from each other, the analyst seated behind and at right angles to the couch; and unlike H. D., who relished the view of Freud's collection (and claims to have impressed her analyst by inspecting first the room and only then turning her gaze to the doctor himself), some patients balk at the couch. "It's a fine couch. . . . But I have no intention of lying on it," Giovanni's prospective patient assures him. "A particularly large number of patients . . . ask to be allowed to go through the treatment in some other position," Freud acknowledged, "for the most part because they are anxious not to be

37. Moretti, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 65.

38. Momigliano, "The Analytic Setting," p. 39. See also R. P. Fox, "The Principle of Abstinence Reconsidered," *International Review of Psycho-Analysis* 11 (1984), pp. 227–36.

39. Forrester, "Collector, Naturalist, Surrealist," p. 118.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 118, 116.

deprived of a view of the doctor.” He persevered. “I insist on this procedure,” Freud explained, in order “to prevent the transference from mingling with the patient’s associations imperceptibly, to isolate the transference and to allow it to come forward in due course sharply defined as a resistance.”⁴¹ One function of the couch, therefore, is to keep analyst and analysand apart, to prevent them from becoming visually, or reflectively, entangled.

His original “recommendations on technique,” Freud observed, “were essentially of a negative nature,” cautioning the prospective analyst about “what one should not do”—above all, the analyst must not reciprocate the patient’s demand for love—without requiring that the would-be analyst emulate Freud’s clinical technique in every particular. As the culture of psychoanalysis calcified into the institution of psychoanalysis, however, “the docile analysts did not perceive the elasticity of the rules that I had laid down, and submitted to them as if they were taboos.”⁴² In short, “the institutionalization of psychoanalysis,” as Moustapha Safouan trenchantly observes, “was carried out as if psychoanalysis had never existed”—through repression.⁴³

In repression, “the subject effaces her- or himself as a subject who knows what is going on.”⁴⁴ “Elided as the subject of her or his own utterance,” the “docile” analyst is content to “present her- or himself purely as an interpreter of the Text,” obedient to the word of Freud as to dogma. And “an institution founded on dogma,” Safouan observes, “is repression *personified*.”⁴⁵ For Momigliano, the hardening of the principle of abstinence into law, characterized by a clinical sterility in which the consulting room was left bare and the “analyst always wore the same clothes,” amounts to a repression, an effacement of the analyst as a subject who is capable of responding creatively to the patient.⁴⁶ So if, to extend Momigliano’s suggestion, the frame of psychoanalysis is a symptom of the institution that underpins it—a repressive institution founded on dogma—a critique of the institution of psychoanalysis might begin in the consulting room itself.

41. Freud, “On Beginning the Treatment,” p. 134. Adam Phillips has remarked that “In the first psychoanalytic setting—the paradigm of every psychoanalytic consulting room—the patient could not see the analyst but could see his idols,” his collection of figurines (Phillips, “Psychoanalysis and Idolatry,” in *On Kissing, Ticking and Being Bored* [London: Faber and Faber, 1993], p. 117).

42. Freud to Sándor Ferenczi, 1928, quoted in Momigliano, “The Analytic Setting,” p. 37. Among the not-so-docile were Ferenczi, who treated his more disturbed patients with marked affection; Melanie Klein, inventor of the psychoanalytic play technique; Donald Winnicott, author of the influential idea that the setting is “the summation of all the details of management”; and Jacques Lacan, who experimented with variable lengths, including the short session, from which a patient might be dismissed after five minutes or sooner.

43. Moustapha Safouan, *Jacques Lacan and the Question of Psychoanalytic Training*, trans. Jacqueline Rose (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 63.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67. Or, as Adam Phillips observes, “the one thing psychoanalysis cannot cure, when it works, is belief in psychoanalysis. And that is a problem” (Phillips, “Psychoanalysis and Idolatry,” p. 130).

46. Momigliano, “The Analytic Setting,” p. 39.

The couch was slippery, the headpiece at the back was hard. I was almost too long; if I were a little longer my feet would touch the old-fashioned porcelain stove that stood edge-wise in the corner. . . . There was the stove, but there were moments when one felt a little chilly. I smoothed the folds of the rug, I glanced surreptitiously at my wristwatch. . . . I tucked my cold hands under the rug. I always found the rug carefully folded at the foot of the couch when I came in. Did the little maid Paula come in from the hall and fold the rug or did the preceding analysand fold it, as I always carefully did before leaving?

—H. D.

Then there is the couch itself, which may be low, broad, comfortable, or quite the contrary; the chair of the analyst; the arrangement of the consulting room—shall it be furnished as a study or as a drawing room? Or shall it be left totally unfurnished apart from the couch and the chair?

—Alice and Michael Bálint

The room had the harsh and anguished modernity of the rooms in the paintings of Francis Bacon; in its motel-like detachment from the things of this world, it was like analytic abstinence itself. The couch was a narrow foam-rubber slab covered with an indifferently chosen gold fabric; over its foot, where the patient's shoes rested, a piece of ugly black plastic sheeting was stretched. The room was like an iconoclast's raised fist: this analyst's patients didn't come here to pass the time of day, it told you.

—Janet Malcolm

Dr. Schrift had two Utrillo prints and one Braque. (It was my first shrink, so I didn't realize these were the standard APA-approved prints.) He also had a Danish-modern desk (also APA-approved), and a brownish Foamland couch with a compulsive little plastic cover at the foot and a hard wedge-shaped pillow, covered with a paper napkin, at the head.

—Erica Jong

In Buenos Aires in 1999, the Boston-based photographer Shellburne Thurber began a project to document psychoanalysts' offices. Returning to Boston the following year, she continued the series, photographing consulting rooms, studies, and waiting rooms. The photographs' subjects range from plush private suites to cluttered institutional cells. Most concentrate on the business end of the couch, showing the relative positions of the head of the sofa and the analyst's chair. On the evidence of this series at least, Freud's rug-draped convalescent bed, or its cousin, the vintage claw-foot fainting couch, continues to be used by some analysts. More often it is replaced by day beds, camp beds, cots, or even ordinary living room or bedroom furniture equipped with odd-sized pillows. Some analysts remain ensconced behind the couch, while others seem to have migrated into positions alongside the analysand, nestled noiselessly in

deep, soft armchairs, keeping their feet raised on broad ottomans. Others sit upright in straight-backed chairs, swivel, or rock.

On the evidence of Thurber's photographs, overdetermination is the design strategy par excellence of the psychoanalytic consulting room. The walls are often lined with books, gaps opening to betray a little of the analyst's "personal taste." A scattering of rugs, busts, wall hangings, paintings, and, most common of all, prints (these last being mostly abstract compositions of the landscape-of-the-mind type) complete the look. Rows of figurines, strategically placed for optimal visibility—on a shallow shelf beside the couch, for example—pay tribute to Freud's own collection of antique statuettes. The founder's fascination with cultural syncretism also finds echoes in the selection of prominently displayed artifacts, a Native American wall hanging or an African mask. Less poetic symbols of contemporary culture occasionally infiltrate the scene. In one Buenos Aires office, a picture of Freud keeps company with a television set. Inside the door of a Framingham, Massachusetts, office, the corner is filled with file cabinets and an untidy stack of boxes containing, according to Thurber, prescription drugs.

Thurber's project began serendipitously in Buenos Aires when, as the house-guest of an elderly psychoanalyst, she was given the use of the consulting room one afternoon to read. "Struck by how intense and energetic" the analytic setting was, she asked to photograph it. The analyst "not only agreed but offered to contact her friends to see if they would like their offices photographed as well," and Thurber returned to Boston with a series of a dozen or so pictures. Continuing the project there, she traded on a prestigious fellowship to gain the entrée granted more casually in Buenos Aires. "I encountered some resistance getting into the oldest and biggest institution, Boston Psychoanalytic," the artist recalls, but "I managed to break through, thanks to the Harvard letterhead."⁴⁷ Back home, Thurber assembled a more extensive series of some seventy-five consulting-room pictures that testify to the significance, more specifically the transference significance, of the setting for the analyst.

"Having patients 'on the couch' may be a source of pride, supporting one's identity as an analyst," one practitioner admits.⁴⁸ And if the presence of the couch itself stakes this claim to legitimacy, busts and images of Freud, a fixture of the rooms Thurber photographs, reinforce it. In one, a blue velvet couch, its soft lap spooned out by the settling-in of so many backsides, its creased, rumpled upholstery the proof of frequent and sustained use, is gently illuminated by a floor-length curtained window. Behind the couch is the analyst—not the occupant of this actual consulting room, but Freud. Or rather, sixteen Freuds, his bearded visage repeated in a multiple portrait arranged in a Warholesque grid of photographic portraits made at different moments in his life. The desire of the analyst to occupy the place of the master,

47. Shellburne Thurber, conversation with the author, October 13, 2004. Some analysts from Boston Psychoanalytic were receptive and helped facilitate the project, she adds. The artist held a Bunting Institute fellowship from Radcliffe College at the time.

48. Roy N. Aruffo, "The Couch: Reflections from an Interactional View of Analysis," *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 15, no. 3 (1995), p. 370.



*Shellburne Thurber. Newtonville, Mass.:
Blue couch with multiple portrait of Freud.
2000. Courtesy the artist.*

Safouan has noted, is the fantasy with which psychoanalysis as an institution has always had to contend. From the outset (in Freud's own time), the institutionalization of psychoanalysis was, writes Safouan, "a piece of acting out, a staging of desire at its most stubbornly resistant to signification: that is, of desire as essentially bound to (not to say effectively identical with) the defense which forbids each and every one of us from enjoying a certain quotient of pleasure held out or 'promised' by the place of the master."⁴⁹ The desire to occupy the place of the master is repressed, and with it theoretical curiosity about its surrounding space, which is the setting.

How, then, do we even know what contemporary psychoanalytic consulting rooms look like, apart from those we might pay to see? Turning from Thurber's photographs to the pages of a professional journal, *International Psychoanalysis*, the bulletin of the International Psychoanalytic Association, we find it—confirming José Bleger's prescient observation that it is important "to consider the psychoanalytic situation as an institution in itself, especially the frame"—illustrated with a locally inflected global survey of analytic interiors. A Seattle consulting room is dominated by a Native American wall hanging, a patterned couch, and a geometric rug; in Hamburg, a parquet floor is warmed by a Turkish rug; in Paris, a Mies-type couch is illuminated by a wall of light-flooded windows. The June 2003 issue, however, also offers, on its Letters page, a comment from one analyst, Willem Linschoten, objecting to the disappearance of cartoons in favor of the waiting-room and consulting-room pictures. To illustrate his complaint, Linschoten provides a photographic caricature of his own "ivory tower" cell. A first attempt to produce this (digitally manipulated) image was, he reports, busy with the paraphernalia of the electronic office—computer equipment, cables, and adapters. "The first version of my 'room full of insight' was blurred with the seemingly useless trivia of our digital age." A second effort, cleared of this "abundant chaos," was instead "too sparse," an effect rectified by the "cunning placement" of a few objects: guitars propped in the corner, a "gaudy" abstract painting, a volume of Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* on the analyst's chair, a female figure on a pedestal, a statuette of Michelangelo's *Moses* and a "coffee-table book," in the form of Edmund Engelman's 1976 monograph, *Berggasse 19* with Freud's picture emblazoned on its cover, and a framed diploma over the couch.⁵⁰

The issue of *International Psychoanalysis* in which this parody of the frame appears, highlighting the analyst's own transference to the couch, examines a "crisis in psychoanalysis." As measured by indices such as numbers of new patients and training candidates, psychoanalysis, it reports, is in decline. "The model of the typical analysis, handed down from generation to generation through the mythical image of the armchair and couch, is now restricted to the privileged," Elisabeth Roudinescou has observed in a recent manifesto for a "renewal of Freudianism."⁵¹

49. Safouan, *Jacques Lacan and the Question of Psychoanalytic Training*, p. 62.

50. Willem Linschoten, "Letter," *International Psychoanalysis* 12, no. 1 (June 2003), p. 4.

51. Elisabeth Roudinescou, *Why Psychoanalysis?*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 140, 141.



*Thurber: Brookline, Mass.:
Office with Native American wall hanging.
2000. Courtesy the artist.*

“Soon psychoanalysis will only be of interest to an ever more restricted fringe of the population,” Jean-Bertrand Pontalis has predicted, asking: “Will there only be psychoanalysts left on the psychoanalysts’ couch?”⁵² In this light, the photographic portfolio of consulting rooms in *International Psychoanalysis* might be seen as compensatory, securing the identity of the analyst as one who (still) has patients on the couch, even if they are only other analysts.⁵³

Until recently even the clinical literature has been reticent on the matter of the frame. “I shall not waste many words on the question of the furnishing of the consulting room,” remarks Henrik Carpelan—in an article entitled “On the Importance of the Setting in the Psychoanalytic Situation.” The furnishing of the room, the author continues, “is decided by functional necessities, and the analyst’s personal taste,” as if neither factor was worth the trouble to explore in the kind of depth that is devoted to other elements of the frame, the timing and frequency of sessions, for example, or the length of the analysis—or payment. “The consulting room should not be an art museum or an exhibition hall,” he advises. On the other hand, “this does not mean that it should necessarily be spartan and cold.” Above all, it should not elicit “excessive envy” from the analysand.⁵⁴ The brittle tone of these recommendations persists when it comes to managing patients who sometimes “complain about the hardness of the couch, or the cushion being too high or too low, too hard or too soft,” or about the upholstery being irritating or causing them to sweat. “Most of these complaints are accessible to analysis”—meaning that they are transference responses that can be integrated into the analysis itself. Some patients, however, preferring “material well-being to psychic balance and internal satisfaction,” present a “serious problem in this regard.”⁵⁵

Exasperation with patients who complain about the couch is a recurrent theme in the literature that touches on the topic, and is in marked contrast to analytic attitudes toward actions that break the frame in other ways. Even when patients use the couch uncomplainingly, the analyst may criticize the way this is done. One analysand of Carpelan, for example, “had the habit of moving the cushion and folding it double. He pretended it was more comfortable in this way. Only after analyzing his narcissistic need of making the analysis on his own conditions was he able to leave the cushion as I had put it.”⁵⁶ One is left to wonder whether the unstated demand to leave the cushion as the analyst has placed it is simply a matter of respecting the frame of the analysis, consistent with Freud’s

52. Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 16.

53. One contributor, Hamburg-based author and photographer Claudia Guderian, has recently published an illustrated book on the subject, trumpeted as the first global survey of the setting, a volume whose very existence attests to the threatened disappearance of the couch. See Claudia Guderian, *Magie der Couch: Bilder und Gespräche über Raum und Setting in der Psychoanalyse* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2004). See also Guderian, *Die Couch in der Psychoanalyse: Geschichte und Gegenwart von Setting und Raum* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2004).

54. Henrik Carpelan, “On the Importance of the Setting in the Psychoanalytic Situation,” *The Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review* 4 (1981), p. 152.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

56. *Ibid.*



Thurber. Buenos Aires: Analyst's office with television and picture of Freud. 1999. Courtesy the artist.

original demand that patients lie on the couch, or might also betray some frustrated professional fetishism. Or, to think of it another way, perhaps the analyst fears that the patient absorbed by creature comforts is soft, a descendant of the nineteenth-century salon-dweller that Walter Benjamin described as a somnambulant whose “gaze was enveloped in billowing curtains and swollen cushions.”⁵⁷

For psychoanalysis does not consider itself a soft option. The silence of the analyst, the strict routine, the scopic and social deprivations of the ritual, and of course the fee, all underpin a stringency that, as Roudinescou observes, may now be its undoing:

When it comes to contemporary patients, they bear little resemblance to those of earlier periods. Generally speaking, they fit the image of this depressive society in which they live. Impregnated with contemporary nihilism, they present with narcissistic or depressive disturbances and suffer from solitude or loss of identity. Often lacking either the energy or the desire to submit to long analyses, they have trouble with regular attendance at analysts’ consulting rooms. They often miss sessions and can often no longer stand more than one or two a week. Lacking financial means, they tend to suspend the analysis as soon as they realize there has been an improvement in their condition, even if that means taking it up again when the symptoms reappear. This resistance to entering into the transference setup indicates that if the market economy treats subjects like commodities, patients too have a tendency in their turn to use analysis as a form of medication and the analyst as a receptacle of their sufferings.⁵⁸

If, as Freud observed, “points of importance at the beginning” of analysis are “arrangements about *time* and *money*,” these remain points of cardinal significance at its historical end. The institutionalization of psychoanalysis, predicated on the multiplication of the setting into so many private rooms where the couch and the chair would meet at right angles to make the frame, is now dominated by the very “medical order” in which, as Safouan has observed, institutional psychoanalysis also, at its cost, sought to enlist.⁵⁹ In Freud’s own time, his followers had already “consolidated the one trend that Freud wanted to avoid: the shrinkage of psychoanalysis into an annex of psychiatry.”⁶⁰ In a series of photographs of clinical settings, including the disused furniture of the Royal Psychiatric Society—hard, flat, overused couches in stark contrast to Thurber’s homier surrounds—the British artist Sarah Jones documents the particular demise of the couch as a psychiatric accessory.

57. Walter Benjamin, “I [The Interior, the Trace],” in *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 213.

58. Roudinescou, *Why Psychoanalysis?*, p. 140.

59. Safouan, *Jacques Lacan*, p. 63. See also Jean Clavreul, *L'ordre médical* (Paris: Seuil, 1978).

60. Siegfried Bernfeld, “On Psychoanalytic Training,” *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* (1962), p. 467, as cited in Safouan, *Jacques Lacan*, p. 62.



Sarah Jones. Consulting Room (Couch) (XIV). 1997. Courtesy Maureen Paley.

In vanishing, however, the couch has become newly visible. While psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, and seemingly any therapy involving “talk” have lost currency—both in the psychotropic drug culture of contemporary psychiatry and in that most discursive of cultural spaces, the university—a surprising number of artists have repaired to the couch. Two trends of thought about psychoanalysis seem to be at work in these recent projects. One extends an interest of some Conceptual art in the Freudian logic of collecting and is materialized particularly in photographic and object-based compendiums. Another seeks to explore, within the medium of video, the “dynamics of transference” in psychoanalysis.⁶¹

Plush—the material in which traces are left especially easily.
—Walter Benjamin

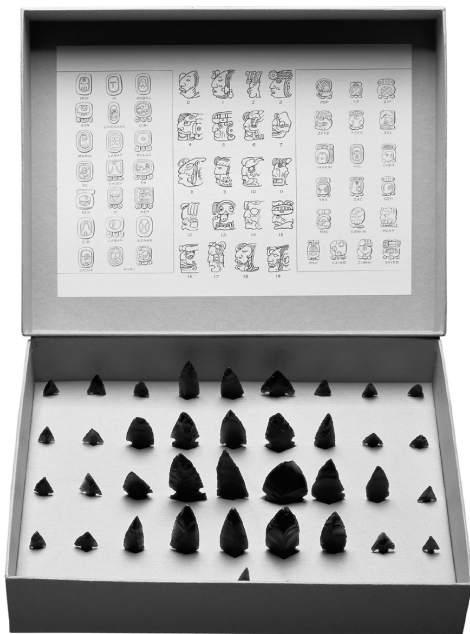
Susan Hiller’s *After the Freud Museum* (1995) investigates Freud’s habits of collecting. Each of fifty brown cardboard boxes, of the type used by archaeologists for storing and sorting samples, contains a selection of specimens—potsherds in polythene bags, toys, chemists’ vials filled with the waters of ancient rivers, a miniature television monitor—each piece artfully arranged, titled, and accompanied on the inside lid by a supplementary text or picture. Box 021, “Joy,” for example, contains a set of thirty-six mounted slides, duplicates of the glass slides Hiller discovered in the Freud Museum in London. “I sorted and catalogued the remnants and found there were four types: scientific specimens, miniature curiosities, traditional magic lantern slides, and early Disney cartoon strips.”⁶² Echoing both the cabinet of curiosities and the Fluxbox, *After the Freud Museum* makes the heterogeneity of Freud’s collections its organizing principle and connects with Freud as, in Forrester’s description, “a collector of farts and grimaces, an archaeologist of rubbish

61. Sigmund Freud, “The Dynamics of Transference” (1912), in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 12.
62. See Susan Hiller, *After the Freud Museum* (London: Book Works Press, 2000).

avant la lettre, as well as a collector of the fading yet precious detritus of Western civilization.”⁶³

In 1995, Cornelia Parker, too, made a pilgrimage to the couch, extracting a souvenir, a few feathers plucked from the pillow on which the heads of analysts once rested. From this trace of the talking cure she produced another, a photogram. Parker also collected samples of nicotine. Taking custody of rags used to clean the tarnish of cigar smoke from articles in the museum, she harvested Freud’s exhalations as a material for drawing. For Parker, Freud’s feathers, and Freud himself, were to be part of a larger set of historical figures, whose physical traces (including, for example, a feather found floating through the air in Benjamin Franklin’s attic) are incorporated into her oeuvre.

Hiller and Parker explore Freud’s principle of collecting, Hiller by assembling a heterogeneous collection of objects “after” Freud, Parker by taking her specimens “from” Freud. Both reflect on “the spirit of ‘scientific’ acquisition pervading Freud’s collections.”⁶⁴ Thurber and Jones, too, participate in Freud’s propensity to collect. None of these artists produces anything like a comprehensive archive. Nor did Freud. “This was never meant to be a visual catalog comparing and contrasting different offices from various parts of the globe,” Thurber says, but a limited



Top: Susan Hiller. Chamin-ha: From the Freud Museum. 1991–97. Courtesy the artist and Timothy Taylor Gallery, London.

Bottom: Cornelia Parker. Feather from Freud’s pillow (from his couch). 1998. Courtesy Frith Street Gallery, London.

63. Forrester, “Collector, Naturalist, Surrealist,” p. 122.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

series, in keeping with the artist's other projects documenting site types, motel rooms and abandoned houses, for example.⁶⁵ Freud's model of collecting is expansive but selective, aspiring to initiate new collections—dreams, parapraxes, and jokes—and to combine these with the collection of antique objects that represented, for him, civilization itself. In the antique setting of psychoanalysis, the ancient collection and the psychoanalytic one rub elbows in a dialectical fashion: “The model of the dream consistently subverts the model of permanence offered by the ancient statues in their cases, standing guard over desk and couch.”⁶⁶

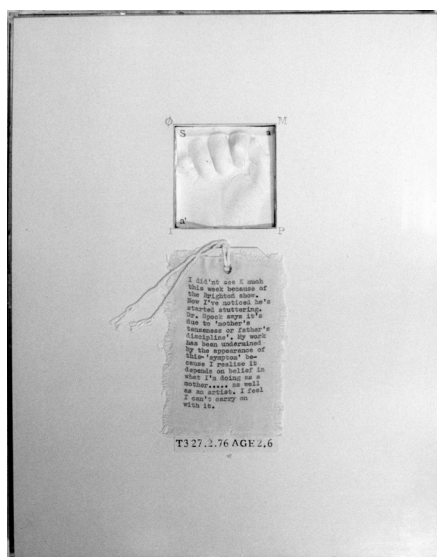
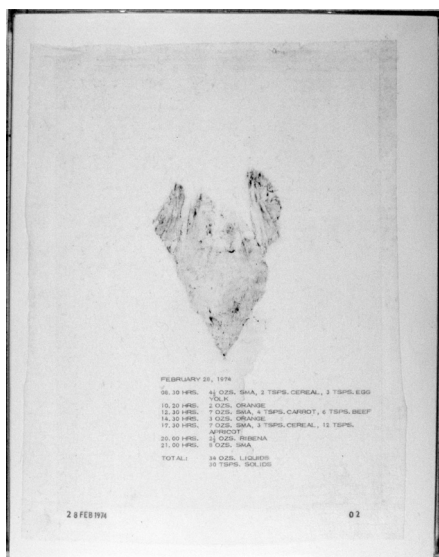
Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*, begun in 1973, is a psycho-conceptual museum of maternity commemorating, from the maternal subject position, the early childhood of the artist's son.⁶⁷ At one level, this exhibition of the maternal-infantile relation both extends and counters Freud's collection of antiquities, which Forrester describes, paraphrasing Marx, as “a concise compendium of his version of civilization”—a collection in which “every piece or item . . . represented a paternal figure standing guard over the mysterious feminine.”⁶⁸ For *Post-Partum Document* offers its own set of fragmentary relics—textiles, casts, tablets engraved with mysterious characters—a collection in which every element refers to the maternal figure Freudian psychoanalysis overlooks. It adopts Freud's own habits of collecting to constitute the maternal subject both materially and linguistically, in things and in words. It partakes of Freud's ambition to turn dreams, jokes, and slips of the tongue into the “serious stuff of science,” extending that logic to the

65. Thurber, conversation with the author, October 13, 2004.

66. Forrester, “Collector, Naturalist, Surrealist,” p. 130.

67. See Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

68. Forrester, “Collector, Naturalist, Surrealist,” p. 137.



“covert objects of shame” associated with the maternal role.⁶⁹ To the archive of “farts and grimaces” assembled by Freud, Kelly adds fecal stains, baby talk, and maternal fetishism, incorporating the maternal subject and placing its objects, too, into the public discourses of psychoanalysis and of Conceptual art.

First exhibited at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London in 1976, *Post-Partum Document* was received with indignation by the British tabloid press. The perceived scandal of a mother contaminating the maternal-infantile bond and the aesthetic autonomy of the gallery at once was predictably in keeping with the cultural anxiety that has attended psychoanalysis and the art it has inspired throughout its history. The Freud Museums of both Vienna and London, accordingly, have more recently welcomed the involvement of artists and the display of contemporary work as a means to demonstrate, in their different ways, the continuing cultural resonance of psychoanalysis.

In London, the museum has presented installations by Hiller, Sophie Calle, Sarah Lucas, and Valie Export, among others. For Lucas’s exhibition, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2000), the artist was given the run of the house, and trashed it. In a series of savagely humorous interventions, she occupied the rooms with installations of overturned furniture, cast-off underwear, and, assigned pride of place above the couch, an enlarged photograph of the artist’s own headless torso, one nipple shown slyly protruding from a hole in her shirt. Caricaturing the

69. Ibid., pp. 125, 126.



Sarah Lucas. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Installation view, Freud Museum, London, 2000. © The artist, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London.

Anna-Freudian diorama of discipleship, Lucas “played out her role as bad-girl rebel . . . with singular relish and inventiveness,” Linda Nochlin has observed—a transgression against the setting, a spectacular splintering of the frame, which the museum readily accommodated.⁷⁰ For by taking out her defiance of the master on the setting—by enacting her negative transference to psychoanalysis in its own milieu—Lucas also claimed psychoanalysis for her own. Borrowing the title of a work by Freud in which the master himself laid siege to his own theories, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” uses psychoanalysis as an object that, in Juliet Mitchell’s formulation, survives through our very efforts to destroy it: “The artist or critic is helped by the theory of psychoanalysis to develop the capacity to destroy that theory so that she or he can make use of it.”⁷¹

In Vienna, the involvement of Joseph Kosuth in an exhibition to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Freud’s death resulted in the formation of a foundation to create a permanent collection of work, donated by the artists—including John Baldessari, Jenny Holzer, Ilya Kabakov, Sherrie Levine, Haim Steinbach, and Franz West—and displayed in the former family apartment at Berggasse 19, rooms now used by the museum as library and exhibition space. The mission of the foundation, according to Kosuth, is to assemble “an art collection in which post-Freudian thought would actually be manifested internally in the work.”⁷²

Freud himself, however, was little interested in the effect psychoanalysis began to exert on art in his own time. “The interpreter of dreams,” writes Forrester, “would never have dreamed of adding a Picabia or a Duchamp to his collection of antiquities.”⁷³ It is in Freud’s writings that “we encounter the typical modernist objects—the readymade, the found object, the bit of detritus, the god as a shout in the street, the Surrealist transvaluation of values,” not in his artistic tastes. Visiting Vienna on his honeymoon in 1921, André Breton called on Freud, intending to alert him to the role his theories might play in the Surrealist revolution to come—only to find that the inventor of psychoanalysis was a fatherly doctor who didn’t “much like France” and was indifferent to modern art.⁷⁴ Breton’s recollections of that afternoon are a study in negative transference to the master, expressed as bitter disappointment in the analyst’s style.

70. Linda Nochlin, *Sarah Lucas: GOD IS DAD* (New York: Gladstone Gallery, 2005), p. 8.

71. Juliet Mitchell, “Theory as an Object,” this issue, p. 33. Mitchell cites Mary Kelly’s *Post-Partum Document*, of which she observes, linking her own history to Kelly’s: “I hope we have been destructive of psychoanalytic theory (though I know I have very often only related to it); it has obviously survived our, and other, more powerful attacks not only in the generic sense that it is bigger and stronger than we are. It has survived in the sense that matters: its survival can only be assured by the fact that it has changed, though certainly not utterly.”

72. Joseph Kosuth, “Text for the Sigmund Freud Museum,” *Foundation for the Arts, Sigmund Freud Museum Vienna*, vol. 2 (1998), p. 13.

73. Forrester, “Collector, Naturalist, Surrealist,” p. 125.

74. André Breton, “Interview with Doctor Freud” (1921), in *The Lost Steps*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (1924; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), pp. 70–71. I am grateful to David Lomas for drawing my attention to this text.

A modest plaque at the entrance: "Dr. Freud, 2-4"; a not very attractive servant girl; a waiting room whose walls are decorated with four mildly allegorical engravings—Water, Fire, Earth, and Air—and with a photograph depicting the master among his collaborators; a dozen or so patients of the most pedestrian sort; and once, after the sound of a bell, several shouts in succession—not enough here to fill even the slimmest of reports. This until the famous padded door cracks open for me. I find myself in the presence of a little old man with no style who receives clients in a shabby office worthy of the neighborhood G.P.

—André Breton

Glenn Ligon's *The Orange and Blue Feelings* (2003) is an edited video recording of three meetings with his therapist. Its total length, about an hour, is that of a single session. Through the technique of dual-channel projection, therapist and patient are relegated to discrete frames, their respective scenes playing slightly out of sync. The therapist, a middle-aged woman partial to flowered prints and bangle bracelets, twirls in her swivel chair. Her foot in its kitten-heeled shoe rests delicately on a cushion. Stroking her bare arm rhythmically, she stirs the bangles. Her face is never seen. A pillow tucked into the chair cradles her body to this "habitual seat, a sort of nest padded with accustomed objects," as Janet Malcolm has described the analyst's armchair, comparing it to "a chronic invalid's chair."⁷⁵

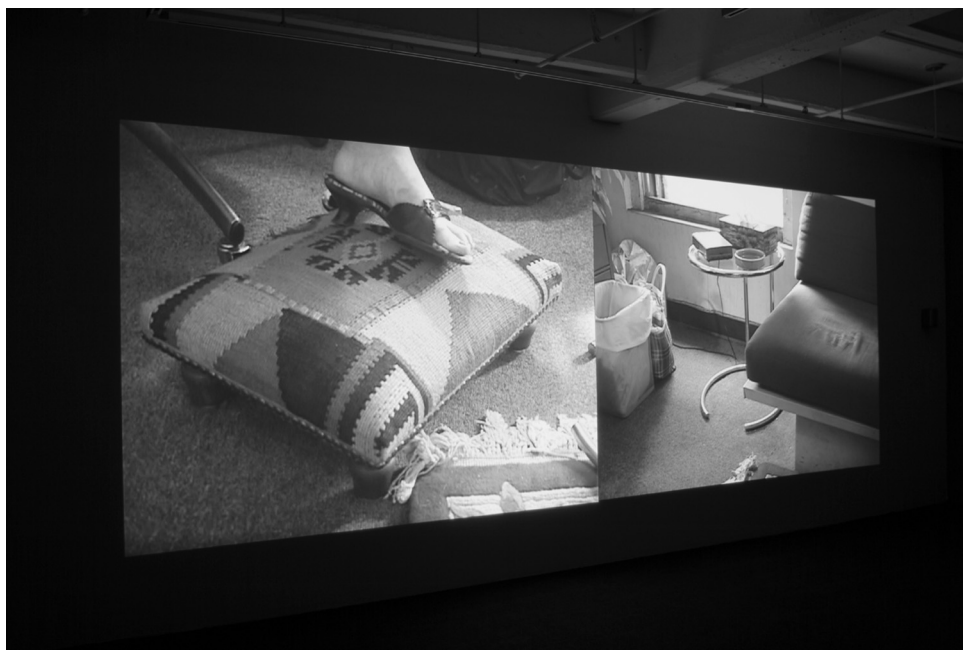
The patient, Ligon himself, remains offscreen, his frame filled by the unoccupied end of a couch. Camera movements are small and desultory, mimicking the glassy gaze of a patient undergoing the talking cure, eyes sliding aimlessly over a prosaic assortment of props. The camera lingers on a box of tissues in front of an open window. Catching the breeze, the paper ruffles. An untidy pile of bags sunk on the floor, a houseplant, a shelf lined with books, bric-a-brac, a Freud doll, a corner of patterned carpet, a vase of flowers, a row of framed photographs, a diploma, and a desk piled with papers provide the camera with other vignettes. Once, it jerks unexpectedly toward the window, briefly training its lens on the street below. For almost an hour we listen in as the invisible patient and his Gena Rowlandesque therapist explore Ligon's anxieties about some recent work.

Transference, writes Laplanche, is "the very milieu of analysis, in the sense of its surrounding environment."⁷⁶ The milieu of the transference, he observes, is most perceptible when change is in the air, for "one notices a milieu less when one is plunged in it; more so when it is rather briskly altered or when one leaves it."⁷⁷ Ligon's video portrays an analysis in media res. The figure of the analyst, with her husky voice, coquettish wriggling, and flamboyant dress, is recorded with detachment. If the camera's gaze falls on the foot resting on the pillow, this seems

75. Janet Malcolm, *Psychoanalysis: The Impossible Profession* (London: Granta Books, 1983), p. 47.

76. Laplanche, "Transference," p. 216.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 217.



Glenn Ligon. The Orange and Blue Feelings. 2003. Installation view at The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia. Photo: Aaron Igler.

to be as much because, in face-to-face therapy such as this, the patient cannot always be staring back at the therapist and must find relief from the other's gaze somewhere, as because the shoe seems flirtatious. The setting, too, is presented with scant curiosity, like the accustomed environment of a neighbor's living room in which a vase or a picture is occasionally moved but without altering the overall effect. And if the camera wanders around the room from time to time, poking into corners and grazing objects, its investigation is perfunctory. The long, static shots do not probe, highlight, or inventory the room's appointments so much as confirm their familiar presence. Bad taste and comfortable clutter have become the institutional furniture of the frame.

What returns attention to the milieu of psychoanalysis, according to Laplanche, is change. When the milieu is altered, it attracts fresh notice. This occurs especially when the analysand "acts out" by committing "an infidelity to the analytic relation."⁷⁸ The patient actualizes desire, goes outside the relationship, acts on an impulse (to have an affair, in the classic scenario) rather than bringing this wish to analysis. Freud called this lateral transference, an action that sidesteps the analyst. In *The Orange and Blue Feelings*, Ligon agonizes over the possibility that therapy will vitiate his art, that "a more balanced life makes for banal work." Preferring to keep his art separate from his therapy (for reasons that become evident as the recorded session's crash tutorial in postmodernism falters), he recognizes the threat to the analytic relation this withholding represents. His solution is to make his therapy the subject of his art, to turn the consulting room into a set, actually to move in. This gesture, however, goes beyond infidelity to the analytic situation and dissolves it.

The acting out that is the real drama of *The Orange and Blue Feelings* is Ligon's shattering of the frame. He nullifies the analytic contract by taking over the role of the analyst as "the director of the method."⁷⁹ The video begins with Ligon informing the analyst that overnight he has listened to the recording of a previous session. ("I thought my voice sounded really faggy," he tells her. "That's another thing I have to deal with in therapy, why I hate my voice"—to which the therapist weakly replies, "Oh dear.") Presently, in response to Ligon's account of a childhood memory he holds in his mind as a photograph, uncertain when or even if the event ever occurred, the therapist, recovering her authority, announces, "It's called a screen memory, in fact." By this time, however, the analyst has become the star of the show, the body on the screen, and it is the patient who is directing the analysis.⁸⁰

The analyst must be "director of the method," contends Laplanche. Failing this, "there is no analysis."⁸¹ In Ligon's video, analysis dissolves. Yet the situation suggests another possibility. According to Laplanche, the patient's acting out does

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid., p. 227.

80. Apropos of matters of time and money, Ligon reports that he paid the therapist a location fee for the use of the consulting room for filming, including footage of the empty office shot after hours. Glenn Ligon, conversation with the author, March 9, 2005.

81. Laplanche, "Transference," p. 227.

not lead inevitably to rupture. An act of infidelity, he proposes, “may be drawn back into that relation, interpreted, in sum, as a *transference of transference*: ‘What you could not, did not wish to tell me, you have signified, enacted, outside.’”⁸²

The Orange and Blue Feelings extends over three sessions and concerns the mysterious disappearance of a painting. A portrait of Malcolm X, based on an image copied from a children’s coloring book and intended for an exhibition at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis—“the most interesting painting in the show”—turned up missing from the shipment, stirring anxieties of loss and longing that Ligon associates in therapy with early childhood experience. The portrait was actually produced with the help of a child, he explains to the therapist. As an artist-in-residence at the Walker, he was asked to take part in the museum’s educational programming, an obligation he discharged by inviting local schoolchildren to “color in” motifs from his archival source material: vintage coloring books featuring black heroes of American history—figures such as Harriet Tubman, George Washington Carver, and Malcolm X. When one child responded with a vision of Malcolm X resplendent with rouged cheeks and pink lipstick, Ligon, captivated by the fearlessness of “the little queer child who puts lipstick on the image of the father,” translated the motif into a large-scale painting that was to be the centerpiece of the Walker exhibition.

“A little boy did that?” the therapist asks. “I’m assuming it was a he,” Ligon answers uncertainly, sounding suddenly curious about what the therapist is saying, “unless I’m just projecting myself backward.” Up to then, the therapist has been hung up on the fact that Ligon copies. Even as a child, he acknowledges, he “never drew from imagination,” preferring to copy from source material. “Maybe it’s time,” she urges, adding, “Maybe it’s long past time.” “Throw your stencils on to the fire, so to speak?” he demands. “Mmm, I don’t know.” “I have a lot of anxiety about talking about art work in therapy.” He tells her instead about making art in school as a small child, about being ridiculed by a teacher for painting a papier-mâché ocean liner orange and blue. “You’d think art class would be the one class where anything would be fine, where there wouldn’t be rules,” she replies. “Everybody has an agenda,” he reminds her. “I ended up painting the boat black.” “You don’t like my colors. Fuck you!” she cheers. “I was just thinking about people in the gallery listening to this,” he remarks. “It’s embarrassing.”

Ligon showed *The Orange and Blue Feelings* alongside the original portrait of Malcolm X. He recovered the rolled canvas from the trash after inadvertently—unconsciously, to say the word—discarding it in a studio sweep-up. “I found it between the first session we recorded and the second,” he announces to the therapist toward the end of the tape, adding, “I was thinking about the fact that I didn’t tell you.” Ligon’s infidelity, his lateral move—what he “could not, did not wish to tell” his therapist and has instead “signified, enacted outside”—cycles back into the analysis as the ending of the story. His disclosure is timed to conclude the

82. Ibid., p. 217.

work, the video-analysis he is directing. Ligon broke off therapy shortly after the work was first shown.⁸³ But if the video records the dissolution of the analysis, it also enacts what Laplanche calls “a transference of transference” from one locus to another: “In other places—during analysis, outside analysis—other possibilities of ‘transference’ are available to the analysand, other poles for the elaboration of an individual destiny.”⁸⁴

Video’s real medium is a psychological situation, the very terms of which are to withdraw attention from an external object—an Other—and invest it in the Self.

—Rosalind Krauss

Critics reviewing *Going There*, the 2003 New York gallery exhibition in which Ligon first presented *The Orange and Blue Feelings*, expressed surprise and disappointment at its apparently confessional mode. In contrast to Ligon’s previous work, including stenciled word paintings, in which passages of text are applied to white canvases—works that, as one critic observed, “managed to address subjectivity and its politics by way of elegantly conceived formal frameworks”⁸⁵—*The Orange and Blue Feelings* instead seemed self-centered, seemed to summon Rosalind Krauss’s early critique of video as producing “an aesthetics of narcissism.”

By connecting the medium of video and the condition of narcissism, Krauss observed, “one can recast the opposition between the reflective and the reflexive into the terms of the psychoanalytic project. Because it is there, too, in the drama of the couched subject, that the narcissistic re-projection of a frozen self is pitted against the analytic (or reflexive) mode.”⁸⁶ The reflexive mode of analysis facilitates alienation from a self-image that encapsulates the subject. “The process of analysis is one of breaking the hold of this fascination with the mirror.”⁸⁷ Or, as Laplanche expresses it, there is a primordial split at the heart of transference, “which means quite simply that the other is the other . . . he is other than me because he is other than himself. External alterity refers back to internal alterity.”⁸⁸

As Laplanche observes, there is an “essential dissymmetry” in the analytic situation, a distance, or difference, that is preserved especially by the silence of the analyst. In Ligon’s video, dissymmetry is the organizing principle. Therapist and patient are relegated to separate screens. One is visible, the other is not. One is a woman, the other a man. One is white and the other, as we know, is black. For Ligon’s work has often referred, indirectly, to the identity and subjectivity of the artist. His early paintings quote from literary texts. In one particularly well-known work, *Untitled (I Feel Most Colored When I Am Thrown Against a Sharp White*

83. Glenn Ligon, conversation with the author, March 7, 2004.

84. Laplanche, “Transference,” p. 231.

85. Johanna Burton, “Glenn Ligon, D’Amelio Terras,” *Artforum* (March 2004), p. 184.

86. Rosalind Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” *October* 1 (Spring 1976), p. 57.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

88. Laplanche, “Transference,” p. 221.



Ligon. *Untitled (I Feel Most Colored When I Am Thrown Against a Sharp White Background)*. 1990–91. *Courtesy the artist.*

Background) (1990–91), this sentence written by Zora Neale Hurston is stenciled in black oilstick on a door-sized white panel. The writing is crisply legible at the top but, like a newspaper passed from hand to hand, becomes smudged and murky from overuse toward the bottom. Gummed and clotted, the stencils transfer the inky oil from one application to the next down the panel so that each line is less distinct than the one above. Toward the bottom end, the text fades out into illegibility.

Continuing to investigate the medium of printing in *Runaways* (1993), a lithographic series, Ligon solicited physical descriptions of himself from ten friends and

typeset the texts in the format and graphic style of his archival source, mid-nineteenth-century posters designed to track down fugitive slaves. One read: "Ran away, Glenn Ligon. He's a shortish broad-shouldered black man, pretty dark-skinned, with glasses." Throughout his work, Ligon mines text to represent the historical and cultural construction of identity, using the figure Glenn Ligon as a frequent, but not exclusive, point of reference. He returns to this strategy in *The Orange and Blue Feelings*, at one point handing over to the therapist a school evaluation report in which the child, Glenn Ligon, is described as a moody boy who sometimes withdraws. When he brought the report home, he recounts, "My mother did a dramatic reading of that," warning him, "This will go on your record"—meaning, he elaborates, "my record with a capital R." As she saw it, "That's how black kids get labeled."

Text, Krauss observes, is what is missing from performance-based video. Its absence is what renders the medium narcissistic. For performance, she notes, conventionally relies on some form of text, "whether that is a fixed choreography, a written script, a musical score, or a sketchy set of notes around which to improvise."⁸⁹ By contrast, video performance, centered on the body of the performer before the camera, produces the effect of a "collapsed present" equivalent to the space-time of mirror reflection, or the patient on the couch—the very task of analysis being to convert the "fascination with the mirror," or reflective mode, into a reflexive one. "The analytic project," Krauss observes, is one in which "the patient disengages from . . . his reflected self, and through a method of reflexiveness, rediscovers the real time of his own history. He exchanges the atemporality of repetition for the temporality of change."⁹⁰ In short, psychoanalysis is not a confessional mode, in which self-image is nurtured, but a gradual process of alienation from the sovereign self.

Ligon has consistently relied on thick citation to represent the historical construction of identity through transference. "Making a painting, for me," he explains, "is akin to making a film adaptation of a text: it's just one possible way out of many of responding to a given text."⁹¹ His experiment with video-analysis appears to be a departure from this practice of citation because the text it adapts, or interprets, is an autobiographical narrative. But if we understand psychoanalysis as a reflexive mode, opening onto the dimension of alterity, then its task is to render the subject, to borrow a term favored by Ligon, "opaque."⁹² "Yes, you can take me for an other, because I am not what I think I am; because I respect and maintain the other in me."⁹³ This, writes Laplanche, is the statement the analyst addresses to the analysand. It also offers a possible description of how the work of Glenn Ligon attempts to address its audience.

89. Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," p. 53.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

91. Glenn Ligon, interview by Byron Kim, in *Glenn Ligon: un/becoming* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1998), p. 53.

92. As Lacan puts it, "In this labor, which he undertakes to reconstruct this construct *for another*, he finds again the fundamental alienation which made him construct it *like another one*, and which has always destined it to be stripped from him *by another*" (Lacan, *The Language of the Self*, trans. Anthony Wilden [New York: Delta, 1968], p. 11). Cited in Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," p. 58.

93. Laplanche, "Transference," p. 228.

I don't remember if he asked me to kiss him. I don't remember at all.
 —A contributor to *an inadequate history of conceptual art*

“Sometimes artists rush in where critics refuse to tread,” Yvonne Rainer once remarked.⁹⁴ So in 1998, the artist Silvia Kolbowski wrote to sixty artists, inviting them to take part in an oral history project she would call *an inadequate history of conceptual art*.⁹⁵ Each artist was asked to select a Conceptual work—“not your own, of the period between 1965 and 1975, which you personally witnessed/experienced at the time”—and to attend a taping session with Kolbowski. Prospective participants were admonished to refrain from refreshing their memories by conducting research and, in the taping itself, to avoid disclosing their own identities or those of the artists whose works they described. Twenty-two artists ultimately participated in face-to-face sessions with Kolbowski, who recorded their statements and videotaped their hands as they spoke.⁹⁶ In the resulting installation, projected images of the speakers’ gestures played in a darkened room while their voices could be heard in an adjoining space. The two recordings were deliberately run out of sync so that an “essential dissymmetry”

94. Yvonne Rainer, “Looking Myself in the Mouth,” in *A Woman Who . . . : Essays, Interviews, Scripts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 89.

95. Silvia Kolbowski, “an inadequate history of conceptual art,” *October* 92 (Spring 2000), p. 53.

96. Of the sixty invited artists, forty agreed to take part, of whom twenty-two were recorded.



Silvia Kolbowski. an inadequate history of conceptual art.
 1998–99. View of audio/visual installation from video room,
 Secession, Vienna. Photo: Hannes Boeck.

between the hand and the voice, or the video and the audio components of the piece, was strictly maintained.

By asking artists to describe a work from memory, and in her presence, and by imposing a set of rules on the procedure, Kolbowski set up, loosely speaking, a psychoanalytic situation. "I thought that if I asked artists to speak from memory about Conceptual projects from the past, the recountings would include both valuable recollections and the fallacies of human memory," she has commented.⁹⁷ "I'm somewhat resisting your original request that it has to be something that I experienced," one contributor begins, setting the psychoanalytic tone of the piece. "I guess I should ask myself why this stuck in my mind all these years, over thirty years," reflects another. "I guess the reason I'm talking about it is that it stuck with me for a long time as to what this was about," one acknowledges. "It's easy to remember, it's easy to remember, it's easy to remember," chants another speaker, as if to will the act.

"An inadequate history" might be another name for psychoanalysis itself, for the subject of psychoanalysis is constructed in resistance and repression, in forgetting as much as in remembering. "Freud's analysis of the collection of screen memories revealed how memories are tendentious, how their function as witnesses is a false function, a false form of remembering instead of desiring," Forrester observes.⁹⁸ "A screen museum" is his description of the Freud Museum in Vienna, "a museum of fake souvenirs," tokens of the kind by which we purport to remember what we actually desire. It is worth remembering, too, that this screen museum was conceived in 1971, the midpoint of the time period, from 1965 to 1975, that brackets *an inadequate history*. And it is important to observe that certain of the strategies informing the installation of the Freud Museum are also characteristic of Conceptual art. These include the displacement of the object by the photograph and the text and the concomitant frustration of scopic desire, as well as the reorientation of the museum or gallery from an exhibition space, or space of display, to an archive.⁹⁹ The Freud Museum, with its "derisive atmosphere," its photographic record of the rooms in Freud's time, its research library, its carefully labeled and indexed "minor memorabilia"—and, ultimately, its art collection curated by Kosuth—is a screen museum on the Conceptual art model.

In particular, it invites comparison with Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*, a pivotal work of Conceptual art that is often omitted from that history. One aim of *an inadequate history*, according to Kolbowski, is to contest exclusionary histories by reconceiving Conceptual art in terms that, as the artist has noted, "allow for the inscription of women artists," some of whose work (unlike Kelly's) still is not well known, into an alternative art history.¹⁰⁰ For *an inadequate history*,

97. Kolbowski, "an inadequate history," p. 53.

98. Forrester, "Collector, Naturalist, Surrealist," p. 130.

99. See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990), pp. 105–43.

100. Silvia Kolbowski, conversation with the author, May 12, 2003. Kolbowski cites, for example, the exhibition *L'art conceptuel: Une perspective*, organized at the Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in

Kolbowski therefore invited participants to employ a notably inclusive definition of the term:

For the sake of the project, the definition of conceptual art should be broad enough to encompass such phenomena of that period as actions documented through drawings, photographs, film, and video; concepts executed in the form of drawings or photographs; objects where the end product is primarily a record of the precipitant concept, and performative activities which sought to question the conventions of dance and theater.¹⁰¹

Such an elastic description, as Alexander Alberro has observed, privileged “the most transitory manifestations of the movement, those most likely to have left ‘inadequate’ traces and thus most dependent on the memory of direct witnesses for insight into their initial receptions”—those, in short, that are most likely to reveal a screen history.¹⁰² One contributor highlights this very possibility by observing of her own recollection, “I like telling people about it, because I like it a lot. But I don’t think I actually saw it.” A male speaker, describing a video work that addressed viewers by solicitation, reports: “I don’t remember if he asked me to kiss him. I don’t remember at all.”

As well as expanding the history of Conceptual art, *an inadequate history*, as Rosalyn Deutsche has observed, “forges a link between history and psychoanalysis.”¹⁰³ For the manner in which speech and gesture are combined in the work is, as she points out, evocative of the hybrid discourse that constitutes one of Freud’s principal clinical discoveries: that the words and gestures of the analysis may not carry the same message. In *an inadequate history*, visual attention falls on the small gestures of the body, particularly on the hands. The subjects sit facing the camera. Sometimes the camera is trained directly on the body, so close that the rhythm of breathing becomes part of the action; more often a table occupies the middle ground between the camera and the speaker. Fingers twist and pinch, tap the table, fidget. Hands stir the air, fly out of the frame, or fold together. Gestures, creasing and unfolding pockets of space, betray the effort of recollection as memories are traced, gathered in, and pinned down. Concentrating almost forensically on the hand of the artist—famously canceled as a marker of the artist’s presence in Conceptual work—the videotape excludes the facial image. The stutters of memory to which Kolbowski refers consume the body as much as the voice.

1989, and its catalog, as an official history from which work by women was largely excluded, noting that this show “set the tone for the ‘return’” of Conceptual art in contemporary practice.

101. Kolbowski, “an inadequate history,” p. 53.

102. Alexander Alberro, “Silvia Kolbowski: American Fine Arts Co.,” *Artforum* 38, no. 4 (December 1999), pp. 148–49.

103. Rosalyn Deutsche, “Inadequacy,” in *Silvia Kolbowski: inadequate . . . Like . . . Power* (Vienna: Secession, 2004), pp. 77–78.



*Kolbowski. an inadequate
history of conceptual art.
1998–99. Details.
Audio/video installation,
first installed at American
Fine Arts, New York, 1999.*

Kolbowski's own voice is never heard. Her role in eliciting and collecting these oral histories is marked only by the texture of a silent and invisible presence, a presence that structures the work as, in Krauss's terms, a reflexive situation rather than a reflective one. As in psychoanalysis, the listener establishes the parameters. The speaker is asked not to research the work as to be described (a rule that resonates with Freud's instruction to patients not to prepare material for sessions), not to reveal her or his own identity, and not to disclose the authorship of

the work described. Some participants break the frame. A few have obviously researched their contributions, delivered with a fluidity and factual accuracy that betrays them by comparison with others who, struggling to remember, piece together stories that are full of holes. Kolbowski's *an inadequate history* interrogates the history of Conceptual art psychoanalytically by demonstrating that those who witnessed it, even those who produced it, cannot exactly remember it.

*If we interpret a transference movement, it is not to attack it as a defense,
nor to resolve it; it is in the end to make it evolve, to help in its evolution.*

—Jean Laplanche

An earlier postmodernism expanded the compass of psychoanalysis beyond the confines of the consulting room to embrace a broader culture. The current return to the analytic scene instead reconnects with the history of psychoanalysis as a practice and, even more, an institution in dissolution, making historical psychoanalysis visible in its vanishing. “Even in its failing,” Roudinescou observes, psychoanalysis has a role to play in waking the depressive society from its dreamless, drug-induced torpor.¹⁰⁴ “Less theoretical and more clinical,” more eclectic in technique and “detached from the conflictual passions that marked the preceding period,” the contemporary psychoanalysis of Roudinescou’s description shares something in common with contemporary art.¹⁰⁵ Both have reached the point of “greatest resistance,” which is the analysis of the frame.

The survival of the artist as a pivotal figure in postmodernism, beyond the putative death of the author—a central tenet of much Conceptual art—in itself evidences the role transference plays in establishing, and sustaining, a dynamics of transference in art. In *an inadequate history of conceptual art*, Kolbowski reflects on the role of the artist, even the most self-effacing Conceptual artist, as a figure of transference. An unidentified artist describing an unidentified work by another unidentified artist elicits transference on the part of the audience—through the enactment of transference itself. The presence in the scene of a listener, even (or especially) one who is silent and invisible, stimulates this dynamic. What is of even greater concern to the histories of Conceptual art and institutional critique, however, is transference to the frame. The vaunted austerity of Conceptual art concentrated attention on “matters of time and money,” and of setting—on opening and closing hours, the duration of an exhibition or a work, the function of captions and catalogs. These seemingly neutral elements showed the frame itself to be, as Laplanche writes of analysis, “situated *in* transference.”

Yet despite being, as Joan Copjec observed in 1984, “coextensive with the very field of psychoanalysis,” transference is a pointedly neglected dimension of its

104. Roudinescou, *Why Psychoanalysis?*, p. 143.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

history.¹⁰⁶ In cultural criticism, those who invoke psychoanalysis give a wide berth to transference—wary, perhaps, of the concept's association with a clinical practice that is seen to be outmoded. It is a given of contemporary criticism that the theory and practice of psychoanalysis are separable, that psychoanalytic theory has achieved autonomy from the frame. But this division (in psychoanalytic terms, this splitting) has given rise to an academic psychoanalysis that is often dismissed, with some justification, as institutionalized, docile, and dogmatic—a form of cultural criticism in which the critic effectively “effaces her- or himself as a subject who knows what is going on.”

Psychoanalytic criticism, like art that explores psychoanalysis, has a responsibility, in Laplanche's terms, to “evolve.” “Perhaps we are looking the wrong way round” in seeking to apply psychoanalysis to culture, Laplanche proposes. “Maybe transference is already, ‘in itself,’ outside the clinic.”¹⁰⁷ For Laplanche, transference is always already extramural, beyond the clinic, and the ultimate aim of psychoanalysis is a “transference of transference,” returning transference to the world. How, then, does psychoanalysis end? “Briefly,” writes Laplanche, “this problem of ending replays, precisely, the whole problem of analysis.”¹⁰⁸

106. Joan Copjec, “Transference: Letters and the Unknown Woman,” *October* 28 (Spring 1984), p. 68.

107. Laplanche, “Transference,” p. 222.

108. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

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