

The



ISSUE 2. 2009. £5

W

Against

It

Cliché

Issue

Escape to Your Unconscious

Psychoanalysis and art have a lot in common, says artist and analysand, **Laura Gonzalez**.

GOING TO psychoanalysis is exhausting. It requires, above everything else, plenty of time and money. After my sessions, which last a strict fifty minutes, I always feel I need more: more thinking, more talking, more exploring, more curing. But, I find this cannot happen if I am surrounded by people. As recourse, I have taken to visiting art galleries on my way home from the consulting room. Here, seated in front of the works of art, I try to resume the conversation with my unconscious—and all its tricks—from right where I left it when I got up from the couch.

There are some clear parallels between art and psychoanalysis. The aims of both seem directed at the impossible, an inaccessible object of desire. The shortfall between the goal and the distance reached is fundamental to the practice of art and, in the same way, the knowledge desired and the failure to obtain it are constitutive of the practice of psychoanalysis.

Both are, also, relational practices that focus on an object, be it the work of art or the analyst. Like the artwork, the analyst is converted into an object of desire that is perceived to hold or know some truth.

Both practices happen in specific contexts: the gallery space and the analytic room. Each space is comprised of the conventions of the institution and interior design. In the case of the analytic space, these include time and fee of the sessions, carpets, cushions, chair, couch, prints, paintings, books, objects; in the gallery space, white walls, ceiling light, a fire hose. These settings provide the constants within which the work takes place. According to the British psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott, this environmental provision, this arrangement of place, is a condition of analysis (and, I would add, of art), essential to the unbinding that needs to be done. The viewer and the analysand (the person being analysed) have both entered the world of an other, since neither

artworks nor analysts regularly come to one's home.

Thus, the gallery and the analytic room are privileged enclosures that are testimony to an enigmatic encounter that only happens to a few and which is governed by particular rules of engagement, conventions and quasi-ritualistic behaviour. In a gallery, the distance between the viewer and the work is calculated, voices are lowered, behaviour is socially controlled, walking happens at a certain pace. In the analytic room, the positional relationship between analyst and analysand is precise, rules about laying down on the couch and not looking at the analyst are observed, talk outside of analysis is kept to a minimum, the analysand is free to ask, the analyst is bound not to answer. However, within these conventions, there is space for almost anything to happen. One could, acting out one's anxiety, get up in the middle of a session and look the analyst in the eye; or, in a *passage à l'acte*, just leave.

In Darian Leader's wonderful book *Stealing the Mona Lisa*, we find an example that illustrates another key characteristic shared by these practices: their relationship to distance and absence. Using the 1911 theft of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, Leader

explores what art gives to people, its relationship to desire and the visual seduction it represents.

With the painting gone, queues formed to look at the empty space left by the theft. From this, Leader puts forward the theory that, rather than humans being image-capturing devices, it is in fact the other way round: images are human-capturing devices, especially in their absence. The people queuing to see the empty wall had not queued for the actual painting. Leader plays with the idea of desiring objects, of objects embodying the enigmatic and the malevolent dimension of the look of the Other. Allurement and deception are, for Leader, intrinsic to the image. Desire requires a certain distance or, even, an absence, as described in Leader's example; or the impossibility to obtain the desired object. Distance from the analyst is necessary for transference and, thus, for the treatment to take its course.

In the analytic room and the gallery space, resistance and commitment are both present. While the former is inevitable, the second is required in order for the encounter to develop. Many clinicians have argued that resistance is structurally important to the practice of analysis. A riddle-like resistance

is also necessary to put art pieces to work. A prime example of this is Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, a copy of which can be seen in London's Tate Modern. Although numerous attempts have taken place, everything about it resists interpretation: from its title, to its choice of materials and its imagery.

And then, of course, there's gaze. The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan separated the concept of the gaze from that of the look, the latter being concerned with the organ of sight and with the subject. The alignment between the two is impossible. For Lacan, gaze is the partial object of the scopophilic drive; it is an object that cannot be assimilated and has no representation. Gaze is fundamentally linked to the object cause of desire; not the object to which desire is directed, but that which elicits desire. When I take my place on the couch, the analyst sits at my head, where I cannot see him. In the presence of his absence, in its separation from the voice that speaks, gaze plays an important part in that dual, challenging and complex relation between clinician and patient. Is he looking? Is he awake? Am I boring

him? Does he need to distract himself by playing word games with the book titles along the spines? Has he noticed what I am wearing? So does gaze affect my perception of our relationship. This kind of thinking is also what I do in the gallery space. Freud's concept of scopophilia where the act of looking, and the experience of being looked at, are associated with pleasure is particularly relevant in these contexts.

Sitting here, in front of a work of art that, without eyes, looks at me as much as I to it, I feel transference, a redirection of my feelings and my conflicts. My unconscious unravels and I want to speak. But here is where the similarities between the two threefold interactions I have been exploring—Art, with the artist, the work, the viewer; and Psychoanalysis, with the analyst, speech and the analysand—stop: in a gallery, one should not speak, least of all to a work of art. So this is what the £40 was for! The freedom to speak about whatever comes to mind for a whole fifty minutes, is something that I don't get anywhere else these days. And that, my friends, is both the blessing and the crux of the analysand that here writes.

New Friends

Dickon Edwards is a professional dandy, writer and musician. He fronts a pop band called Fosca and has been an online diarist since 1997. www.dickonedwards.co.uk

Cath Ferguson is a writer from Glasgow. She has appeared in various collections, magazines and anthologies.

Marco Graziosi is a scholar and expert on Edward Lear and is currently publishing his diaries in blog form. www.nonsenselit.org/diaries

Albert Haro is a gentleman.

Omar Rahman is an artist from Montreal. Omar is a regular contributor to *Lickety Split* magazine and once designed a tattoo. He once dressed up as a bee in order to steal honey.

Edward Lear was an English artist, illustrator and writer known for his literary nonsense in poetry and prose and for popularising the form of the limerick. He died in 1888.

Professor David Miller is Professor of Sociology and Geography at Strathclyde University. He is also a political campaigner, lobbyist and author of several books. www.spinwatch.org

Laura Gonzalez is an artist, writer, ballerina, theorist and object of analysis from Bilbao, Spain. www.lauragonzalez.co.uk

Joshua Reynolds is a graffiti artist in New York City.

A.S. is an illustrator from Boston.



9 771755 567001