Staging Devices: Setting the Scene for What Might Have Been

Jane Rendell

One of the short films in artist Jasmina Cibic's installation *For Our Economy and Culture* stages an imaginary conversation between an actor playing Vinko Glanz, the architect of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, and an actress playing Linda, a young journalist who is conducting an interview about his architectural practice. The setting is the Villa Bled, a building Glanz was commissioned to design as summer residence for Tito and the government of the new republic between December 1946 and July 1947. In Bled, Glanz had inherited a complex project – a site that, in addition to many other historical twists and turns, contained a two-story villa called Suvobor built from 1883 to 1885 by the Austrian aristocrat Duke Ernest Windischgrätz. The villa was purchased in 1922 by Alexander Karađorđević, king of the then new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and the Yugoslav royal family planned the construction of a new villa next to Suvobor that would be designed by Jože Plečnik. However, by the time of Karađorđević's death in 1934, only the 30-metre pillars above the lake had been constructed and Plečnik's project was left unfinished. The old villa was demolished between 1934 and 1936 and the construction of the new villa taken up by the Germans during the Second World War. By the end of the war, the building was roughly completed and was taken over in this condition, without finished interiors, by the new socialist government and finally passed on to the architect Vinko Glanz. After Glanz's successful completion of the project in 1947, the building served as Tito's summer residence for many years, a place where he hosted numerous official state visits. Villa Bled also served to position Glanz favourably with respect to Tito, resulting in his appointment to the position of chief architect of official buildings in former Yugoslavia.[1]

My practice of site-writing takes criticism to be a form of situated practice and suggests that the changing sites the critic occupies – emotional as well as conceptual, physical as well as ideological, private as well as public – perform critical attitudes.[2] I am interested in tracing and constructing the interlocking sites that relate the critic to the work and artist on the one hand, and to the essay and reader on the other. Art

[1] Much of this historical information is taken from the following article: Damjan Prelovsek, "Vila Bled", *Piranesi,* vol. 5, nos. 7–8 (1998): pp. 8–25.
[2] Jane Rendell, Art and Architecture: A Place Between, I. B. Tauris, London, 2006.

historian and critic, Claire Bishop, has suggested that it is the "degree of proximity between model subject and literal viewer", which may "provide a criterion of aesthetic judgment for installation art". [3] I suggest, however, that with his/her responsibility to "interpret" and "perform" the work for another audience, the critic occupies the discreet position as mediator between the artwork and the audience. For my part, I argue that it is the situatedness of the critic that plays a key role in determining the performance of his/her interpretative role. Critics from feminist and performance studies have also expressed an interest in the performative qualities of criticism. Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, for example, take issue with the tradition that the interpreter must be neutral or disinterested in the objects that s/he judges, and posit instead that the processes of viewing and interpreting involve "entanglement in intersubjective spaces of desire, projection and identification". "Interpretation", they argue, "like the production of works of art, is a mode of communication. Meaning is a process of engagement and never dwells in any one place."[4]

In psychoanalysis, the "setting" is a term used to describe the main conditions of treatment, within which the psychoanalytic encounter occurs. Following Sigmund Freud, these conditions include "arrangements" about time and money as well as "certain ceremonials" governing the physical positions of analysand (lying on a couch and speaking) and analyst (sitting behind the analysand on a chair and listening).[5] Coined by Donald Winnicott "as the sum of all the details of management that are more or less accepted by all psychoanalysts",[6] the term has been modified by other analysts. For José Bleger, for example, the setting comprises both the process of psychoanalysis and the non-process or frame that provides a set of constants or limits to the "behaviours" that occur within it.[7]

---

[3] Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History*, Tate Publishing, London, 2005, pp. 13, 131, 133.
[4] Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, "Introduction", in Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, eds., *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, Routledge, London, 1999, pp. 1–10, 8.
[5] Sigmund Freud, "On Beginning the Treatment (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis I)" (1913), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, ed. James Strachey, vol. 12, *The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works (1911–1913)*, Hogarth Press, London, 1958, pp. 121–144, 26, 133.
[6] Luciana Nissin Momigliano, *Continuity and Change in Psychoanalysis: Letters from Milan*, Karnac Books, London and New York, 1992, pp. 33–61, 33–34.
[7] José Bleger, "Psycho-Analysis of the Psycho-Analytic Frame", *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, vol. 48 (1967): pp. 511–519, 518.

In the work of André Green, the setting is a casing or casket that holds the "jewel" of the psychoanalytic process.[8] Green has drawn attention to the setting not as a static tableau but as a psychoanalytic apparatus, not as a representation of psychic structure but as an expression of it. For Green, the position of the consulting room between inside and outside relates to its function as a transitional space between analyst and analysand, as does its typology as a closed space different from both inner and outer worlds. In Green's work, the setting is a "homologue" for what he calls the third element in analysis, the "analytic object" that is formed through the analytic association between analyst and analysand.[9]

In Cibic's film, the architecture is deployed as a setting, located in the area of overlap between the architect and journalist in conversation about and within a building, positioned both as the object of study and as the scene that stages their dialogue. The camera continues to create scene after scene, setting us – the viewer – in an ever-changing relationship to the three protagonists of the film – architect, journalist, and building. As we enter the film, Villa Bled is glimpsed high up in the trees, set behind the faces of the man and woman as they talk to each other in a boat. As they leave the lake and mount the long ceremonial stone stairs to the villa, we follow, watching them, at first from behind, then from the side, and finally from in front, looking down on them as they approach the building, travelling with them through its various interiors, to be left behind in the interior as they exit the final scene.

Psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas has noted that Freud's clearest account of his method, outlined in "Two Encyclopaedia Articles: A. Psycho-Analysis",[10] suggests that psychoanalysis takes place if two functions are linked – the analysand's free associations and the psychoanalyst's evenly suspended attentiveness.[11] In "On Beginning the Treatment", Freud explains how, in including rather than excluding

---

[8] The French word used is "écrin". See André Green, *Key Ideas for a Contemporary Psychoanalysis: Misrecognition and Recognition of the Unconscious*, Routledge, London, 2005, p. 33n.

[9] André Green, "The Analyst, Symbolization and Absence in the Analytic Setting (On Changes in Analytic Practice and Analytic Experience) – In Memory of D. W. Winnicott", *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, vol. 56 (1975): pp. 1–22, 12.

[10] Sigmund Freud, "Two Encyclopaedia Articles: (A) Psycho-Analysis" (1923), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 18, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works (1920–1922)*, Hogarth Press, London, 1955, pp. 235–254.

[11] Christopher Bollas, "Freudian Intersubjectivity: Commentary on Paper by Julie Gerhardt and Annie Sweetnam", *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, vol. 11 (2001): pp. 93–105, 93.

"intrusive ideas" and "side-issues", the process of association differs from ordinary conversation.[12] Bollas defines free association as that which occurs when we think by not concentrating on anything in particular, and where the ideas that emerge, which seem to the conscious mind to be disconnected, are instead related by a hidden and unconscious logic.[13] In order to achieve evenly suspended attentiveness, Bollas explains that the analyst also has to surrender to his own unconscious mental activity; s/he should not reflect on material, consciously constructed ideas or actively remember.[14]

Present in Freud's later writings, where he distinguishes between construction and interpretation as different forms of analytic technique, is the indication of the creative aspect of the analyst's work:

> "Interpretation" applies to something that one does to some single element of the material, such as an association or a parapraxis. But it is a "construction" when one lays before the subject of the analysis a piece of his early history that he has forgotten … [15]

Green also proposes that analyst uses a form of "conjectural interpretation".[16] Psychoanalyst Ignes Sodré, in a conversation with writer A.S. Byatt, asserts that in "offering the patient different versions of himself", the analyst operates as a storyteller, and thus suggests an inventive aspect of interpretation.[17] Psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche, however, has been strongly critical of the "putting-into-narrative" or storytelling approach to analysis. This understanding of narrative with its own "driving power", for him, "privileg[es] the construction of a coherent, satisfying and integrated story", and as such works against the aim of analysis which is to recollect the past.[18] For Laplanche, analysis is first and foremost a method of deconstruction, (ana-lysis) with the aim of clearing a way for a new construction, which is the task of

---

[12] Freud, "On Beginning the Treatment", pp. 134–135.
[13] Christopher Bollas, *Free Association,* Duxford, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 4–7.
[14] Bollas, *Free Association,* p. 12.
[15] Sigmund Freud, "Constructions in Analysis" (1937), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 23, *Moses and Monotheism, An Outline of Psycho-Analysis and Other Works (1937–1939)*, Hogarth Press, London, 1963, pp. 255–270, 261.
[16] André Green, "The Double and the Absent" (1973), in Alan Roland, ed., *Psychoanalysis, Creativity, and Literature: A French-American Inquiry*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1978, pp. 271–292, 274.
[17] Rebecca Swift, ed., *A. S. Byatt and Ignes Sodré: Imagining Characters: Six Conversations about Women Writers*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1995, p. 245.
[18] Jean Laplanche, "Narrativity and Hermeneutics: Some Propositions", tr. Luke Thurston and John Fletcher, *New Formations*, vol. 48 (2002): pp. 26–29, 26.

the analysand. He writes of Penelope, who in the myth, weaves with the sole aim of unweaving, to gain time until Ulysses returns, and discusses the Greek word *analuein*, which is to undo, unweave, and to analyze. Laplanche sees the work of unweaving "as the very model of psychoanalysis", and writes of "unweaving so that a new fabric can be woven, disentangling to *allow* the formation of new knots."[19]

The conversation between female journalist and male architect in Cibic's film is based on material gathered from archival research. These words taken from other sources are performed as an imagined dialogue. At times provocative, the journalist operates a little in the mode of analyst putting before the architect her own interpretations of his design as constructions. In Freud's sense, Cibic's work might be understood as offering us a construction or a piece of early history, but following Laplanche, perhaps the work is to be understood as a deconstruction, that provides us with an unweaving of history so that we have the opportunity to reweave it ourselves.

In *The Studies on Hysteria* (1893–1895), Freud explores the way in which memory traces are stored in an archival fashion according to several methods of classification such as chronology, position in chains of association, and accessibility to consciousness.[20] This means that a single event might be stored in various places: perceptual, mnemic, and connected with the presentation of ideas or *Vorstellung*.[21] Freud suggested that separate systems of registration existed.[22] He explained his thinking on this to Wilhelm Fliess in his letter of 6 December 1896:

> As you know, I am working on the assumption that our psychic mechanism has come into being by a process of stratification: the material present in the form of memory traces being subjected from time to time to a rearrangement in accordance with fresh circumstances – to a retranscription. Thus what is essentially new about my theory is the thesis that memory is present not once but several times over, that it is laid down in various kinds of indications.[23]

---

[19] Jean Laplanche, "Time and the Other" (1992), tr. Luke Thurston and Jean Laplanche, in John Fletcher, ed., *Essays on Otherness,* Routledge, London, 1999, pp. 234–259, 251–252.
[20] Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, tr. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Karnac and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, London, 1973, p. 247.
[21] Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, p. 41.
[22] Joseph Breuer, "Theoretical from Studies on Hysteria" (1893), in Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 2, *Studies on Hysteria (1893–1895)*, Hogarth Press, London, 1955, pp. 183–251, 188n.
[23] Sigmund Freud, "Letter from Freud to Fliess, 6 December 1896", *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess* (1887–1904), tr. and ed. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 207–214, 207.

In his Leonardo study, dating from 1900, Freud compares the way in which the individual stores memory to two different kinds of history writing: the work of chroniclers who make continuous day-to-day records of present experience, and the writers of history, where accounts of the past are re-interpreted in the present.[24] Freud juxtaposes a person's conscious memory of ongoing events to the writing of a chronicle, and the memories a mature person has of their childhood to the writing of history "compiled later and for tendentious reasons".[25] Examining how memories can be falsified retrospectively to suit current situations, Freud went as far as to state in his 1899 paper "Screen Memories" that: "It may indeed be questioned whether we have any memories at all from our childhood: memories relating to our childhood may be all that we possess."[26]

While this paper considered the screening of a later event by an early memory, in his earlier paper, "The Project" from 1895, Freud had looked at a reverse type of screen memory, the screening of an early memory by a later event.[27] With reference to the case history of Emma, Freud investigated how the laughter of the shop assistants in a later scene "aroused (unconsciously) the memory" of the grin of the shopkeeper who had "seduced" her in an earlier one.[28] This later "resurfacing" of the traces of childhood events, not registered consciously at the time, is developed subsequently by Freud into the two-phase model of trauma, *Nachträglichkeit*, where as Green describes: "Trauma does not consist only or essentially in its original occurrence (the earliest scene), but in its retrospective recollection (the latest scene)."[29]

Laplanche suggests that Freud's theory of memory involves both conscious memory, such as screen memory, which is closer to history, and unconscious

---

[24] Jean Laplanche, "A Short Treatise on the Unconscious" (1993), tr. Luke Thurston, in Fletcher, ed., *Essays on Otherness*, pp. 84–116, 95.
[25] See Sigmund Freud, "Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood" (1910), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 11, *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works (1910)*, Hogarth Press, London 1957, pp. 57–138, 84.
[26] Sigmund Freud, "Screen Memories" (1899), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 3, *Early Psycho-Analytic Publications (1893–1899)*, Hogarth Press, London, 1962, pp. 299–322, 322.
[27] James Strachey makes the point that the topic of memory distortion preoccupied Freud since he started on his self-analysis in the summer of 1897. See the editor's note in Freud, "Screen Memories", p. 302.
[28] Sigmund Freud, "Project for a Scientific Psychology" (1895), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 1, *Pre-Psycho-Analytic Publications and Unpublished Drafts (1886–1899)*, Hogarth Press, London, 1966, pp. 281–391, 354.
[29] Green, *Key Ideas*, p. 175.

memory, which is closer to archaeology.[30] In examining how psychoanalytic and historical methods of interpretation differ from one another, Laplanche argues that Freud's aim was not to restore historical continuity by reintegrating lost memories, but rather to produce a history of the unconscious. In this history – one of discontinuity, burial, and resurgence – the turning points or moments of transformation are internal rather than external, described in terms of "scenes" as opposed to the "events" of history.[31]

In the script for Cibic's film, there are, in addition to the words in quotation marks, those written to be spoken, phrases in brackets – sad, smiling, etc – that seem to indicate stage directions, suggestions for the state of mind that the actor might adopt, instructions for facial expressions for example. However, there is a third type of text, sentences that slip to the side, that are neither in quotation marks nor in brackets, that sometimes set the scene – phrases like "He can see she's sincere and he softens a little" – and at other times seem to offer an additional layer of interpretation as in – "Glanz knows where she's going; and that he's been caught in a trap." These slippery sentences provide a hint that to approach the history of this nationalist architecture one must somehow be able to imagine what is not being said, or what is set to the side, out of view perhaps, that to try and understand the full range of possible meanings available for interpretation requires an encounter with an emotional register, the kind that is enacted in a relational setting. The figure of the journalist somehow allows for these internal feelings to be played out, underscoring how architecture, although seemingly external and public, needs to be considered with reference to a more intimate psychic framing. Here the role of personal memory, located between history and psychoanalysis, acts as a more fluid and multi-directional negotiator of the relation between past and present, fact and fiction, enacted through the scenes of the film that renegotiates the events of history.

This film by Cibic deals specifically with the history of one building, yet the issues of visual culture, memory, and national identity that it raises reverberate with the building featured in Cibic's other film, the one Glanz is most known for – the Slovenian Parliament. That these two works of architecture have until now been almost invisible in the discourse of socialist modernism of the Soviet era is perhaps

---

[30] Jean Laplanche, "Interpretation between Determinism and Hermeneutics" (1992), tr. Philip Slotkin, in Fletcher ed., *Essays on Otherness*, pp. 138–165, 150.
[31] Laplanche, "Interpretation", p. 148.

due to their cultural references. If one follows their stylistic influences back from Glanz, we look first to Plečnik, Glanz's tutor, and before him to Otto Wagner, Plečnik's tutor, and to Vienna at the turn of the last century. This focuses our attention on the elaborate viewing conditions produced in the domestic interiors of the bourgeois home, which include Freud's consulting rooms located at his family house at 19 Berggasse, Vienna[32] and villas designed by the architect Adolf Loos, critic of the Viennese secession movement and of ornamentation, yet also a designer of the most complex and elaborate stages for looking.

As part of his interlocking sets of interior spaces in his villas in Vienna, such as the Rufer House (1922), and also the Müller House (1928) in Prague, Loos's interiors set the scene for relations of viewing that adapt those of the public theatre to the private home, situating the gaze of the female occupant of the boudoir (or theatre box) in a dominant position as owner of a field of view into which others must enter, but also at the same time as an object of the gaze herself.[33] Positioned as viewers in front of Cibic's films, her installation surrounds us with an endless interior surface modelled on the wooden linings and architectural details of the two Glanz buildings, further embellished with a wallpaper whose claustrophobic pattern repeats the motif of the cave beetle *Anophtalmus hitleri* – an endemic species – isolated in the interior of Slovenia, yet also, like us, on display, located as an object of the gaze, at the heart of the spectacle that is the Venice Biennale.

Yet *us* is not we, but rather you and I. You, abandoned by Vinko Glanz and Linda, left behind in the Villa Bled to read this essay, embraced by the interiorising charm of Cibic's Venetian Slovenia – *For Our Economy and Culture*. And I, in this, the latest scene, which might well be the last – that certainly for me as writer took place earlier, even if you as reader arrived in it later – imagine a conversation between us, a dialogue between you and I which might have been.

---

[32] Freud's setting, located first in Vienna and then in London, has been the site of much research, both by artists creating installations in his home and consulting rooms, but also academics studying the ways in which the design and use of his own interior space contributed to the development of his psychoanalytic theory and practice. For a detailed description of Freud's consulting rooms in Vienna, see for example Diana Fuss and Joel Sanders, "Berggasse 19: Inside Freud's Office", in Joel Sanders ed., *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1996, pp. 112–139, and for an art project located in Freud's consulting room in London, see Sophie Calle, *Appointment: Sophie Calle and Sigmund Freud,* Violette Editions, London, 2002.

[33] Beatriz Colomina, "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism", in Beatriz Colomina, ed., *Sexuality and Space*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1922, pp. 73–130.

Jane Rendell