

ACCENTED VOICES

Certainly, the voice is central to psychoanalysis. It is through the modality of the voice, through speaking our free associations, that our repressed desires, psychic traumas and the common unhappiness of our everyday lives acquire a voice. But it is through our own and the psychoanalyst's listening that we are heard. Both elements are integral to clinical work.⁴³ Having Vera Frenkel's installation *Body Missing* inside the Freud Museum London provided a way of conceiving of speaking and listening to the voice as an ethical encounter. Frenkel's use of the voice in considering the Nazis' art theft policy encouraged us to take note of the ethical bond that exists between the individual and the social by connecting the sound of the voice with matters of personal and traumatic histories.

Body Missing is a multichannel, multimedia installation (1994), which later included a website⁴⁴ designed for ISEA '95, and made in relation to an earlier work, ...*from the Transit Bar* for Documenta IX (1992).⁴⁵ All three of these works dealt in various ways and forms with the Third Reich's *Kunstraub*, art theft policies. *Body Missing* was first produced as a site-specific artwork for the 1994 exhibition *Andere Körper (Different Bodies)* curated by feminist art historian Sigrid Schade. The exhibition was held at the Offenes Kulturhaus in Linz, a building that was once a Wehrmacht (German Army) prison, and is now the city's centre for contemporary art. This building, in Hitler's schoolboy hometown, is near the Altaussee salt mines, one of the Nazis' largest storage facilities for artworks plundered under the *Sonderauftrag Linz* (Special Assignment Linz). Established on 1 June 1939, Hitler's most secret pillaging project included artworks forcibly taken from collections of occupied countries, those 'bought' under duress for very little money, and those appropriated and stolen from the possessions of persecuted and later murdered minorities. Over 6,000 works were stored in the Altaussee mines. All of these, and others stored across Austria and Germany, were to have formed the collection for Hitler's dream of building a *Führermuseum* in Linz, larger than any in Europe, of

which he was to be the chief curator. When the Allies opened up the mines in 1945, many of the works were missing. Some of the ones that were found were repatriated, but many are still 'lost', and the search for them continues today. Coming to learn about this history while planning her installation for the Linz exhibition, Frenkel constructed *Body Missing*.

Body Missing consists of six stations. Each station includes a different but related six-minute video: *Reconciliation with the Dead*; *Recalling the Benign World of the Things*; *Trail of Fragment*; *The Apparatus of Marking Absence*; *Athena's Polished Shield*; and *The Process of Redemptive Naming Begins*. In Linz the windows on the facade of the Offenes Kulturhaus building included a series of large translucent photographs of images taken from the videotapes and collaged together. Later, these black-and-white transparencies were inserted into wooden lightboxes, echoing the notion of travel, displacement and exile, while others, in colour, became photographic wall works; both types of mural are included as a part of each station.⁴⁶

The videos are made up of densely layered and edited still and moving images with two temporalities. On the one hand there are the archival images that represent a historical moment: black-and-white images of anonymous hands saluting the Führer; photographs from 1945 or before of the stored artworks in the salt mines; photographs of Hitler and Mussolini visiting a museum in Rome; lists of objects, their provenance and their movements throughout Europe during the *Kunstraub*; the drawings and model for the *Führermuseum* (both of which Hitler took with him when he went into hiding at the end of the war); and the evacuation of work by the Allies at the end of the war. On the other hand there is the imagery that brings this historical moment into the present. This includes colour footage shot by Frenkel of, for instance, present-day Linz, its monuments and architectural facades, as well as the Vienna Academy of Art (which twice refused Adolf Hitler's application to study art). In addition, the more contemporary film includes as key protagonists a group of women and men. Are they

artists? Art historians? Forgers? It is difficult to say. We only know their first names. We have no idea who has hired them, but what we do know is that they have been set the task of 'embodying the missing works of art'. With list upon list drawn up by the Nazis of the artworks they had stolen, the task at hand is almost impossible. So, they begin alphabetically and have only a few bits of information about each work: an artist's name – Caravaggio, Courbet, Rembrandt – the work's title, and its dimensions. It is almost impossible to 'reconstruct' the lost work. Using what they can find – pictures, references in diaries and letters, and 'invention' – each artist is allocated a painting, and a time frame in which to complete the job. This artistic intervention embodying what is missing – in this instance, actual works of art – is central to *Body Missing*. To this day, repatriation of these stolen artworks continues, with the original and forged works coming to light in auction houses and collections around the world.

A soundtrack accompanies the images, although often they are not synchronized, creating a disharmony that accentuates the difficult nature of what is being represented. The soundtrack includes ambient noises from inside and outside the Offenes Kulturhaus. The sounds of shoes clicking against the marble tiled floor as the artists move through architectural spaces of transition: across interior courtyards, down hallways, up stairwells, and into storage facilities, the transitional nature of the spaces echo their covert task. Note the noise of traffic, cars and trains, church bells ringing, rain falling, and the faraway sound of children playing. But the voices are most striking. Voices reading from lists: many different types of lists all encoded by the Nazis working on the *Sonderauftrag Linz* – lists of artworks, collections, truck numbers, insurance policies, storage spaces and depots. One of Frenkel's fictional characters draws up a 'list of lists' in order to draw attention to the elaborate systems that Hitler's *Kunstraub* project created and employed. Other voices are in conversation reading archival transcripts from the interrogation of those involved in the art theft policies. A contemporary reporter informs us of an ongoing legal



VERA FRENKEL, *BODY MISSING* (DETAIL) STATION 1: RECONCILIATION WITH THE DEAD (1994), FREUD MUSEUM LONDON, 2003

trial related to the *Kunstraub* and the repatriation of the artworks to their proprietors, while the dialogue between the artists about how best to 'restore' the missing artworks, through research and invention, continues. Punctuating these are versions of the song 'Maikäfer Flieg' (Ladybird, Ladybird, Fly), sung in German and in English, either as a solo or in a round: a song about death, destruction, family and loss. Throughout the video stations we hear the voices of women and men reading and singing this song in German, and when in English sung either by a native speaker or one with a German accent. Often there are English subtitles. The faces of those who speak are never shown. All of these voices and sounds are strategically punctuated by silence.

There are many fine interpretations of Frenkel's *Body Missing*.⁴⁷ The installation is read through the historical, political, bureaucratic and social prisms of the Nazis' art theft policies during the war, after it, and the ongoing project of repatriation and restitution that is still under way. The installation has encouraged a critical analysis of the politics and practices of art collecting itself, in public and private museums and galleries, as well as the function of the art market. It has provoked discussions on the trauma of migration, displacement and exile, particularly in



VERA FRENKEL, *BODY MISSING* (DETAIL) STATION 2: RECALLING THE BENIGN WORLD OF THINGS (1994), FREUD MUSEUM LONDON, 2003

light of psychoanalytic work on trauma. This reality inevitably draws us to the Holocaust. Although there is a consensus that the missing artworks are not metaphors for those who went missing and perished in the Holocaust, there is an understanding that a contiguous relationship between them exists. *Body Missing* raises the sight and site of the traumatic body, while keeping it and its histories, its horrific past and its concomitant connection to the present, in place. Griselda Pollock summarizes the breadth and depth of these analyses well when she writes:

Body Missing is a video meditation on memory and amnesia, loss and mania, restoration and recreation, bureaucracy and crime, and Hitlerian looting and his cultic adulation as a symptom of the delusional search for bliss by means of the acquisition of things and a faith in a false messiah.⁴⁸

To have an installation such as *Body Missing* inside the Freud Museum was to make visible a very personal connection between the *Kunstraub* and the Freud family. In 2003 Frenkel and the then director Erica Davies installed *Body Missing*. The curatorial strategy was uncomplicated and appropriate. It followed the flow of the house. The entrance hall held Station 1, the consulting room housed Station 2, the dining room included Station 3, the two parts of the

landing held Station 4, while Station 5 became a part of the Anna Freud room, and Station 6 was placed in what was Martha and Sigmund Freud's bedroom. The curatorial strategy ensured that the house was bathed by this history in the present. Here I mean that while *Body Missing* functions as a historical document, it is not finite: the issues at stake in it continue to resonate today. When placed inside the Freud Museum it ensured that the particularity of the Freud family's history within this larger historical context remained animated today. Without explicitly describing this, *Body Missing* invoked the Freud family having to 'sell off' belongings to pay for their safe transit to London. It also pointed to the tragic perishing of Adolphine (Dolfi) in the Theresienstadt ghetto concentration camp, and Regine (Rosa) 82, Maria (Mitzi) 81 and Pauline (Pauli) 79 in the Treblinka II camp as individual losses, and the social trauma of the Holocaust. By way of these personal and historical traumas, the installation connected us to the work Freud and his successors have done on trauma within the field of psychoanalysis. In walking through Maresfield Gardens and *Body Missing*, the various voices activated these personal and historical traumatic realities.

Hearing the German and English voices from *Body Missing* throughout the Freud Museum – where the talking cure took place between Freud and his analysands and between Anna Freud and her patients – encouraged this association. It also connected psychoanalysis with its broader ethical remit: to address and work through the multifaceted trauma caused by the displacement, exile and extermination of people. In the case of *Body Missing*, the particular trauma invoked was associated with the rise of European fascism and its aftermath.

What one soon realized, upon entering what was once Minna Bernays' bedroom, was that in addition to the Freud family's *Home Movies*, and Anna Freud's raspy, accented voice speaking to us, there was another voice that also addressed us, that of Sigmund Freud. The only known recording of Freud's voice, an audiotape, made on 7 December 1938, shortly after the family moved into Maresfield Gardens, is now a part of the Museum's permanent

display. In a short, pre-written English text, Freud informs the BBC of his professional activity, the discovery of the unconscious, the resistance to that discovery, and the founding of psychoanalysis. The thick Austrian accent embodying the English words, and the slow halting nature of his communication, caused by his having to speak through a mouth prosthesis (needed because he suffered from an incurable jaw cancer), do not deflect our attention.

In a lecture about *Body Missing* by Lydia Marinelli, she discussed how Freud, when he first arrived in England, found it impossible to transfer his experiences into a new language. In a letter to him, his friend Raymond de Saussure empathized with his situation and listed the losses an exile incurs. For Freud, the list remained incomplete because he answered his friend's letter with the following words:

You left out one point that the emigrant experiences as particularly painful. It is – one can only say: the loss of the language one has lived and thought in and that in spite of all efforts towards empathy one will never be able to replace by any other. With painful understanding I observe how otherwise familiar means of expression fail in English and how even every fibre in me wants to struggle against giving up the familiar gothic handwriting. And yet one has heard so often that one is not German. And indeed, one is happy not to have to be German anymore.⁴⁹

The linguistic failure that Freud was feeling and articulating was emphasized by the sound of the *Body Missing* voices inside the Freud Museum: voices that read, repeat and reveal fragments of a political, cultural and social history of displacement and exile in both languages. *Body Missing* and its precursor *...from the Transit Bar*, another six-channel video installation and functional piano bar, first installed at Documenta IX, Kassel, in 1992, work with the failure of translation – the inability of one language to fully capture another – and the function of silence, of not speaking in a certain language, as a form of repressing trauma. Vera Frenkel was born in Bratislava into a Jewish family in what was then Czechoslovakia. In 1938, after the country's secession to the Third

Reich, Frenkel's father was able to escape to Britain. After many months of negotiation, in 1939, as invoked in a subsequent work, *The Blue Train* (2012), a baby Vera Frenkel and her mother were able to move across several European borders to reconnect with her father in London. Frenkel notes how language becomes a marker in her work on her family's history and her own and her family's immigrant status.

This question of language in Frenkel's work is taken up by visual culture scholar Irit Rogoff when she notes how, upon hearing the 'polyglot speech' in ... *from the Transit Bar* in Kassel in 1992, she was reminded of the 'babel of languages' in her childhood in Israel, her then present life in California, and in Europe at that time, with Yugoslav refugees on the move, and the news coverage of foreigners living in Germany being singled out for vicious attacks.⁵⁰ Rogoff uses these personal anecdotes to set out the historical, political and ethical import of Frenkel's use of language. She goes on to unpack the ways in which Frenkel's work binds together the traumatic displacement and extermination of people from World War II, the breakdown of Eastern Europe, and violations of human rights beyond Europe, to trauma and its psychoanalytic formulations and facilitations. What Rogoff demonstrates is that psychoanalysis meets cultural politics in the act of translation, in voices.

Although Rogoff is writing about ... *from the Transit Bar*, the situation of *Body Missing* within the Freud Museum, with its associations, partially constructed through the sounds of voices – throughout Marefield Gardens, by Anna Freud, Sigmund Freud, those at each of Frenkel's Stations, the voices of the international visitors to the Museum – provoked a similar affect. The failure of translation, what Sigmund Freud considered the failure of expression in another language, is a reality for those living in between different worlds. This reality is not merely represented in *Body Missing*; it is also produced as an ethical imperative within the work, and provoked by the work as we engaged with it. We became active participants in this failure of language and translation to speak and articulate the trauma of exile, dislocation and extermination.

SINGULAR AND YET ANALOGOUS

Along with the ethical imperative of Frenkel's work situated within the sound of a voice and its failure to translate all that it contains, including its traumatic personal and social histories, in this chapter, we have seen other strategies, tactics and means of approaching trauma through a politics and ethics of art making. In Freeman's work, the material traces of the artist's political and aesthetic ambivalence towards documents he found concerning his Jewish parents' exile from Nazi Europe became the matter through which he worked through the melancholia and mourning of this personal and civic encounter with the past. In having Koorland's work inside the Freud Museum what was revealed was the way in which her mediated and palimpsestic artistic practice, the result of an astounding amount of physical labour over long periods of time, became a form of psychoanalytic afterwardsness. The temporality of this process, which engaged with the past within the present in material, narrative and methodological terms, defined a political and ethical art practice.

What is most striking about all of these artistic practices is the way in which a profound material relationship is embodied between artist, his or her practice and postmemory. The translation and transcription of the experience of trauma – personal, inherited, collective – constitute these radically different material approaches to trauma: Frenkel's manifestation of the voice as a mode of articulating personal and social histories of trauma; Freeman's engagement with the materiality of personal documents that encourage the working through of traumatic history from a process of personal melancholia to one of communal mourning; and Koorland's attention on protracted artistic labour that insists on a recognition of the difficult and long process of engaging with trauma. The material process also embodied an ethical engagement with the political nature of trauma as a historical, collective and individual experience in relation to the self, the other within the self, and the other outside of the self. It is this bond between artistic practice, the larger political and ethical contexts, and the

Freud Museum as site that has motivated my readings of these artworks and interventions.

My point in this chapter is not to claim that these artistic and material practices are the only means of approaching trauma. There will be, and have been, other political and ethical methods employed in the work of different artists. Rather, my proposition is that there is a site-responsiveness functioning between these exhibitions and practices, the personal and political histories that they referred to and recounted, and various political and psychoanalytic theories on trauma that are invoked by having the work within the Freud Museum London. When artworks produced through a materially, politically and ethically charged artistic practice that attempts to encounter trauma enters the Freud Museum, the artworks usefully activate the connection to the Freud family's relationship to the rise of European fascism and the Holocaust. The artworks also address the way in which psychoanalytic practice and theory are key to our understanding of trauma. Inside the Freud Museum, the interpretation of the art practice as singular and yet analogous to psychoanalytic practice becomes the framework through which trauma can be approached in a politically and ethically sound way. In this chapter, I have been enabled by reference to a series of artistic practices to consider various means by which we may ethically confront, stand by and live with the trauma we may inherit and experience in our lives.