

Susan Hiller in conversation with Roger Malbert

Introduction

This is an edited transcript of an interview that took place between Susan Hiller and Roger Malbert at the Fourth International Symposium on Surrealism at West Dean College, Chichester on 13 May 2005. In exhibition during the conference was Susan Hiller's series of lightboxes, 'From India to the Planet Mars,' illustrating examples of automatic writing from various sources that she has collected. The conversation focused on the theme of automatism and explored the relationships between this historical surrealist practice, its mediation through subsequent art production and criticism, and Susan Hiller's work.

The conversation was transcribed by Kerry Cundiff and edited by Susan Hiller and Roger Malbert. Annotations and additional editing are by Samantha Lackey.

Roger Malbert: I'm very honoured to be introducing Professor Susan Hiller to you. I'm sure that much of her work will be known to many of you, but that's not to say that all of you will be familiar with everything she has produced, because it's a long career, a very diverse career, with work which relates in many different ways, I think, to surrealism.

We're going to concentrate on one or two particular aspects of Susan's work, but there is a rolling image bank of past work behind us which gives an idea of the

whole range. At the moment, she has a new work on in London at the Timothy Taylor Gallery called the *J Street Project* (2002-5), which has grown out of a DAAD fellowship in Berlin. There is another work which she is just about to finish installing in Bristol as part of a group show, and I mention that partly because of its title, which is very significant. It's called *Psychic Archaeology* (2005).



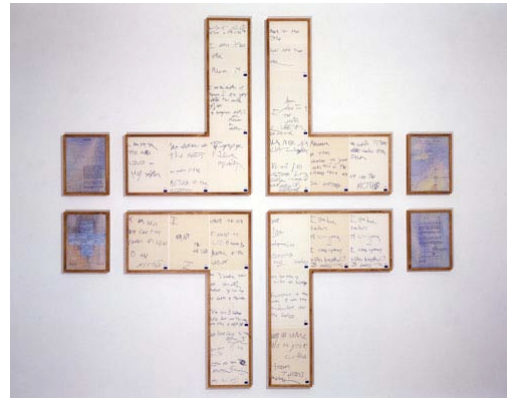
Susan Hiller, *Psychic Archaeology*, 2005. Commissioned by the City of Bristol for 'Thinking of the Outside.' © Susan Hiller.

And there is a third work - which I hope that you will have a chance to at least glimpse upstairs: called *From India to the Planet Mars*.¹ It is a selection from a larger series of light-box works, and that work



draws on one really quite consistent interest of Susan's over many years: in automatism, automatic writing and in collecting in a kind of archival way, examples of, broadly speaking, material culture - in this case, versions of automatic writing which come from many different sources. Some come from books to do with psychical research, some come from psychoanalytic case histories, some from artists; some of them are fraudulent, some are nineteenth-century studies of paranormal phenomena, designed to prove some point about spiritualism or mediumistic work. And since we have her work here, and automatism in one way or another has been a theme of Susan's work since a piece in the seventies called *Sisters of Menon* (1972), which is the first complete work employing automatic writing, I thought it would be interesting to start with a question relating to that, perhaps in a more historical way. Shall we take as a point of departure your origins in the United States, where you first started making work: how automatism was perceived in America at that time and what you were engaging with; were you picking up on something from surrealism that had

been already filtered through many different voices and interpretations?



Susan Hiller, *Sisters of Menon*, 1972. Automatic writing on A4 paper arranged on 4 L-shaped panels with typed labels; 1972. Commentaries on 4 panels, typescript and gouache on paper, 1979. © Susan Hiller.

Susan Hiller: It's a little complicated to dissect the threads of all this and I know that most of you here are much more knowledgeable about surrealism, the histories of surrealism and aspects of surrealism than I am. So I'm only going to speak from my own point of view. I think I first have to somewhat correct something you said, Roger, because I didn't really begin to work as an artist until I came to Britain in the late sixties. It's true that my background was in the United States, which has a slightly different trajectory in relationship to various modernisms than this country, but my interest in surrealism came about through an experience of automatic writing. This was a very strange



and interesting spontaneous experience. I know at least one person sitting in the room has heard me talk about this as long ago as the seventies so it's a bit difficult to talk about it again now but, let me see, how can I start?

In the early seventies I was interested in making participatory works for groups of people, which sometimes took a quasi-scientific form, but the basis was always an attempt to examine something which was considered to be irrational or trivial. One of the things that had always struck me was the way that there seemed to be a kind of ideology of 'influence' and a notion of 'progress' in the way art history was constructing what artists did. There was supposedly an artist who did something first, then there were other artists who followed afterwards. But of course when you are an artist you know that isn't the way things happen. Lots of people get ideas at the same time and develop them in different places and somebody gets the credit for being first but it isn't like that. This always made me very cross and so I decided to do a piece of work, and the piece of work that I wanted to do was based on a series of experiments in telepathy that were designed by the

American socialist novelist Upton Sinclair (some of you may have read his novels). Upton Sinclair was married to a woman who was clairvoyant and they developed a drawing practice which is quite fascinating. He would go into one room and select an image from a random assortment of images and he would look at it and she would be someplace else and she would draw it. Then they extended this experiment so that they got further and further apart in distance and it went on like this. He, being a socialist and a rationalist, believed that he had discovered something very important and very true and he wrote a book called *Mental Radio* - a great title - about it.² I had read this book and I thought how interesting it could be to set up some kind of quasi-experimental situation with groups of artists. This was the period of postal art, which some of you may know something about. So, I designed a postal art project and the idea was that at certain times, on certain dates, I would select an image from about a thousand images that had been cut out of magazines, not by me, and I would just blindly select one of these images and stare at it for a long time and artist friends around the world at that same



time would try to do a drawing, and then they would send me the drawing, and we would decide whether there were interesting connections or not. This was in 1972. On one of these occasions when I had finished staring at my magazine picture, I put it down and I suddenly began to write; my hand began to move, and as I said afterwards, it was a very uncanny experience because I was just observing my hand writing. I felt a total dissociation from the experience. What I wrote was a sort of text that was a combination of undecipherable hieroglyphics which turned into readable words with several puns: a sort of shape that looked like a child's drawing of an eye for 'I,' and a lot of mirror writing, backward, reverse writing and so forth, the sort of classic surrealist-type drawing if you like. The problem for me was that I didn't have the ideology of spiritualism or any other belief system that would support this kind of experience. I didn't think spirits were dictating to me or anything of the sort. I was just left with this drawing, really, and that led me to look again at surrealism and the repressed history of automatism within modernism which I've spoken about on other

occasions, but that is a somewhat different point.

RM: Yes, so that was your beginning. I think it is worth talking about that repressed history for several reasons; obviously you were coming to this practice quite a bit after the initial experiments of the surrealists with which you identified?

SH: But they were the only people I could think of who had done anything like this. Then I got interested in ideas like the relationship between writing and drawing and the fact that the Greeks had only one word for the two practices, and psychoanalytic theories and ideas coming from linguistics - but there's no time to go into all this now. At that time of course, the early seventies, surrealism in terms of conceptual practice was really a sort of dirty word. No one talked about surrealism, no one evoked it; it wasn't a meaningful model for anybody. It was considered rather embarrassing, and that interested me because I am always interested in things that are thought to be embarrassing, or disturbing or not to be spoken of etc. etc., and I began to look back on the history of how this had come



to be. What I discovered which is probably not in accord with other people's histories of the time is this: in the United States, the extremely important and wonderful artist, Ad Reinhardt, had in the late fifties been influenced by Jackson Pollock or he had the desire to work like Pollock. He was interested in this idea of spontaneous expression and he started to make some calligraphic works which are called the Kufic drawings because the marks look like Arabic. Shortly afterwards he attempted to suppress or withdraw them and to get these drawings back from various collectors. As you know, Ad Reinhardt was an extremely witty and brilliant and articulate artist and he wrote very influentially against surrealism and against the notion of the unconscious, which he considered to be a myth and a romantic weakness. He deliberately positioned himself in opposition to his own experience of automatism, to paint those black paintings which are totally self-referential and conscious. And at the same time Clement Greenberg was attempting to erase all traces of the automatic surreal heritage within Pollock's work, so much so, that Greenberg's essays on André Masson and Mark Tobey are totally

denigrating and he attempts increasingly over time to separate Pollock's expression from any of that history. Reinhardt's rigorous self-referential approach to art practice was a huge influence on the next generation who were the minimalists, Sol Le Witt, Donald Judd etc., who also attempted to create art out of surface, if you like (that's one way you could describe it). At the time that I was beginning to make work, the most important movement was the emergence of the first generation so-called of conceptualists, the linguistic conceptualists who followed very clearly down that same line.

RM: Rationalism and materialism?

SH: Yes. And made pronouncements about propositions that pre-existed in language. For that reason I would call myself a second or third generation conceptualist. We had already had Fluxus and other movements that were more playful and more interested in getting gently outside that kind of set of constraints. It seemed to me that if you only dealt with things that were already in language you were giving up a great deal



of what art could do and what artists could be working on. So that was really where I came in. There were so many other artists of that generation who took this road, not necessarily in relation to surrealism but as a kind of rebellion against the constraints of that early set of practices.

Anyway, you can see that my relationship to surrealism is really rather indirect, but I do think that the return of content in art has its historical roots in surrealist practice. The two things about historical surrealism that interested me were not the paintings, far from it, but the sort of two-pronged interest in the idea of the unconscious and the idea of the political. Nowadays these two poles seem to define current art practice, but hardly anybody goes back and talks about surrealism in relation to those practices. Surrealism is usually thought of as a set of stylistic manoeuvres, which I think is a bit unfair.

RM: But the practice of automatism, is really where you, as you have said, were determined to insert yourself?

SH: I said I was trying to insert myself in, and against, the history of psychic automatism as it had developed because,

on the one hand there is the ideology of spiritualism and then on the other there is the self-expressive notion of abstract expressionist painting. I didn't feel comfortable with either of those but it's quite clear that whatever it is, this kind of spontaneous mark making which is part of most drawing practices, is something that needs to be looked at more closely and it isn't looked at closely because of the histories.

RM: So Reinhardt suppressed his images?

SH: Yes, his automatistic drawings. It's very interesting looking back and reading his texts against this information.

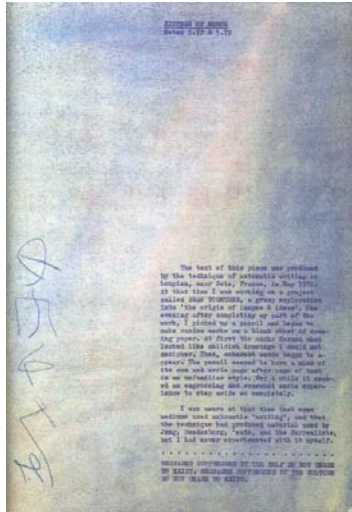
RM: What is coming out is something he rejected, in a way, but you have adopted it?

SH: Yes, well it's the return of the repressed, isn't it really? I mean after all, how many people can go on making black paintings?

RM: Yes it's pretty rigorous. But there was an almost indecipherable hieroglyphic



language that came out in your own practice. Usually you mediated it, you didn't show it directly: you didn't show the drawings themselves, but reproductions.



Susan Hiller, *Sisters of Menon*, 1973 (detail).
©Susan Hiller.

SH: On the original *Sisters of Menon* - my piece from 1971 - the paper has gone all funny so it's hard to show it now. I was just working on really cheap paper, whatever was at hand. In fact, I used light blue pencil on this cheap sugar paper which has now gone yellow and the light blue has faded, you can hardly see it, but it's still there. I presented the original scripts alongside their translations, in so far as they could be deciphered, and some contextual material as well. Nowadays the work is exhibited in the form of an exact replica of the original. Then later I did a lot of other automatistic works because I

found it very easy to use as a drawing practice. I've done this experiment with art students: if you're right-handed you take the pen with your left hand - there are several different tricks you can use to achieve this dissociation. Recently I haven't done much of it myself, I have been more interested in collecting other people's automatistic examples.

RM: Are they your translations?

SH: Yes they are my translations. A few of them are exhibited upstairs. It's a series called *From India to the Planet Mars*.

RM: The idea of the unconscious is inherent in the early practice of automatism.

SH: Well, whatever the unconscious is. I mean when you say 'the unconscious,' it makes it a thing and that's always misleading. But it could be whatever it is that temporarily escapes the scrutiny of normal everydayness, or whatever it is that surprises you in some odd way, or disturbs a smooth practice or work, or inserts itself into something unexpectedly. We can call those things eruptions of



unconscious tendencies but I don't even like to use the word 'the unconscious' as a noun anymore, I just sort of leave that alone.

RM: But the spontaneous element, the improvisational...that is very important to you in your work?

SH: I have moved further and further away from any kind of programmatic approach to art-making. I think that if one doesn't have a context in some sort of mystical universe and yet one knows that there are ways of perceiving and ways of behaving and ways of acting and ways of making art that aren't so readily describable in other terms, there's an interesting 'between place.' I have tried to make work increasingly that puts the viewer where I am, in this situation of 'undecidableness,' if you like, as for example, in that piece that came up in our slides a moment ago. It's called *Psi Girls* (1999) and it uses clips from five movies, heavily edited and altered clips. I used five films that show girls, pre-adolescent and adolescent, who have telekinetic powers, that is, they can mentally move objects. I've made an immersive environment

using these images which of course suggests relationships between the power of art and magic. Basically what I do with the soundtrack in that piece is to have a minute of silence followed by a minute of very compelling music by a gospel choir which has a very strong rhythmical beat. I'm attempting to introduce a situation to the audience so that when you look at the images, the moving, exciting, colourful, huge images in silence, you are allowed a distanced scrutiny. When the music starts, you feel your heart pumping, you feel this music which is of course designed to drive you towards some sort of belief and you have a completely different experience. This is a deliberate attempt on my part to share my own 'between' position.



Susan Hiller, *Psi Girls*, 1999. © Susan Hiller.

RM: ...between this extreme kind of subjectivism and the experience of making



something unexpected and the rational order.

We don't have to drop in the question about women's place, women artists' place in that history, but there may be something you wish to say about that?

SH: Well, I mean I have said this so many times. We all know about women in surrealism. I'm not going to go into that ...

RM: I was thinking of automatism specifically, although we could talk about surrealism. I'm thinking of people like Madge Gill. I mean there is a parallel history, isn't there?

SH: Well, this was one of the motives that I had when I first started all this. It was a redemptive project to look at the shadow side of modernism, the mediumistic practices, to make sure they got acknowledged, which was the thing that Greenberg drove out, like trying to get rid of witchcraft and all the women. He wrote them out and I had a big programme going on about that in my own mind. Interestingly enough, although I don't think feminism has succeeded in many ways, I do think that in the art world now there are

so many women artists that many of those issues have completely changed; the power balance has changed tremendously and so from that perspective it almost seems like a non-issue now. I think there are people who are very aware of the spiritualist origins of the practices and they are very aware of the role of women artists, both the professional artists and the non-professional artists.

RM: Within a sort of gestural expressionist tradition as well?

SH: The historical record still remains to be rewritten; I'm only talking about the present when I say things have changed.

RM: And the other thing, which we were just talking about earlier, which is very central to your work, is appropriation of images and the use of existing material, referring briefly back to your training as an anthropologist and your gathering of material. There are often examples of a systematic assembling of found material. That's now really commonplace.

SH: Yes, it is very commonplace, but of course it wasn't, there was always a time when something wasn't commonplace and



certainly in the seventies when I started making work I was doing something that no one else was. I think the first big work that I made that got shown at all was a piece called *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists* (1972-6) which is based on postcards of rough seas and I assumed that the unknown artists were women who did the hand tinting of all these postcards. I was interested in the relationship of words - the postcards' captions - and the images.



Susan Hiller, *Dedicated to the Unknown Artist*, 1972-6. © Susan Hiller.

RM: Right, so that was the meaning of that title?

SH: Yes, that was what the title's about. But of course I was attacked for not doing what all the other conceptualists were

doing. It's so difficult looking back, I hate being retrospective. It just seems to be a normal and innovative 1970s work now, but at the time this piece was very controversial.

RM: Because you were using a minimalist form of presentation?

SH: I was using a minimalist and conceptualist format with charts and so forth, but I was dealing with popular imagery and I was accused of trying to combine pop art and conceptualism which was said to be impossible. And the only review I had - I was very proud of it, I had worked for years without a review - said it was like the contents of a handbag. So, things have changed a lot and it's very difficult now to realise that there could be, if you like, considered art moves which could be controversial. The things that cause controversy in art now are not intellectual moves but they are attempts to shock and outrage which of course also has a long history but it's a slightly different kind of history.

RM: I was reminded of *Dedicated to the Unknown Artist* when I saw your new work



the *J Street Project* for several reasons. It has a similar methodology behind it in terms of the systematic grouping, the sequence, a series of images with a sort of implicit explosion in them. It is a highly charged but a very quiet and controlled piece. The work consists of a film which is an hour and seven minutes long which is shot in three hundred different towns across Germany, where Susan has been living for three years. It uses just shots of the street signs containing the word 'Jew,' *Judengasse*, *Judenweg*, etc., and it's very controlled: the camera hovers for a minute or two in each street and people are passing. There is a sense of the banality of everyday life - its quietness and orderliness - and I think we can perhaps bring that word 'heimlich' in; there is a 'homely' atmosphere of ordinariness, of children running across the road between cars...



Susan Hiller, *The J Street Project*, 2002-5.
Index. © Susan Hiller.

SH: Well you know, if you want to talk about surrealism, this bringing together of two things, the ordinary and the not ordinary - juxtaposing them - could describe what I'm doing in this work. Because I'm looking at street signs, and street signs are signs, and signs stand for what is no longer there. Here we have actual street signs which name what was once there but isn't there anymore and the effect is actually very disturbing. I don't make any comment on it really, I'm just presenting the material but I'm obviously aware of the strange disjunction between the two elements.





Susan Hiller, *J Street Project*, 2002-2005, Video Stills. © Susan Hiller.

RM: So this was an anthropological exercise but it's also highly charged and presumably emotional...?

SH: I don't know what 'anthropological' means; people like to say this to me a lot, and I don't know what it means.

RM: No you're right, it's too easy to drop back into that, but I guess I was implying that there is a distance, that there is a double vision.

SH: Yes and no. That's what artists do; artists are both participants and observers. You have to take shared internalisations that are collectively formed and find a shape for them. There are the two parts to art practice and there's always the participation and then you have to step back and make something of it.

RM: Yes, and this relates to your interest in memory - your big show which opened at Baltic and then travelled to Basel and Portugal was called *Recall*.³ Could you say something about the title?

SH: Who was it who said that 'the longer you look at a word, the further away it gets from you'? *Recall* obviously has to do with recollection, which isn't quite the same thing as memory: it's the calling back into the now. But it was also to do with the fact that a lot of the pieces in that exhibition were audio pieces and they had to do with sound.

RM: Yes I see... *Witness* (2000), another one-word title, was also an amazing piece that again played with really a fantastical realm of imaginary experiences...⁴





Susan Hiller, *Witness*, 2000. Installation, earphones hanging from the ceiling, recordings in various languages. © Susan Hiller.

SH: I'm interested in contemporary visionary experience and I'm interested in the forms it takes, collecting stories and listening to stories. When you listen to a story you form a mental picture of what the story is about. I collected hundreds of these stories of people who had had an experience, an extraordinary experience. The way they tended to talk about it was in terms of a scientific idea of creatures from outer space, or flying vehicles of some kind. The basic ingredient in all this experience was always an experience of light. Of course that links these experiences to the traditional kind of mystical vision: there is really no difference, but instead of talking about angels or devils, people are talking about Martians.

People say to me, 'Well are these stories real?' Well, yes, they're real stories, they're social facts, they are real social facts. 'Are they really, really true?' What does that mean? I have no idea what it means, it's not my job. I don't even know how many philosophical paths you have to go down to even argue that one, but they certainly exist as social facts. I think this is an interesting issue for artists because now when artists are being encouraged to do a lot of research, what's the difference between the kind of research that an artist does and an art historian does? I think it's on that kind of point that there is a difference. You know I like to use Paul Cézanne's apples for an example - may I repeat that?

RM: Sure.

SH: Ok, Cézanne painted apples. Is it relevant to ask what kind of apples they are? How much do they cost? What market did he buy them at? Does that matter? No that is irrelevant. I mean, is he an expert on apples? In a way he is a complete expert on apples but in another way he knows probably very little about them and that's how I feel about the



material I collect. I mean I can't do the kind of thing that I do with the material if I always have to pre-censor myself by asking the kinds of questions that I think a scholar would ask.

RM: But you love to make works where the voice enters as a whisper, or is almost incomprehensible, or there is a sense in which it's coming from some secret hidden or immaterial place.

SH: Well, I like the idea in *Witness* and also in *Clinic*, which has voices of people talking about near-death experiences, that there are some secrets to share. I have been inspired particularly by the internet which is where I do most of my research for these kinds of works. And the internet, as we all know, is the biggest confessional booth you can imagine, I like to think of people going into a chatroom late at night and telling something which they have seen: they've just seen this thing and they have to tell somebody and so they tell everybody. And that interests me, so, secrets, yes, but we all get to hear the secrets.

RM: Could you say something about ghosts...

SH: Yes, what would you like?

RM: Well, all your work is concerned with ghosts. Take this *J Street Project* as one example.

SH: Yes, I have finally realised that. That is correct. Everything I do is about a ghost or ghosts, but you see, my idea of a ghost is that a ghost is something that some people see and other people don't see. Our lives are haunted by ghosts, I mean our own personal ghosts and collective social ghosts and those are the kinds of cultural materials that interest me to start with, those are my starting points, and then I try to make a work that in some way is true in this old-fashioned kind of way that I was taught - truth to materials. I try to make something that is materially true to its starting point and that's the only kind of guideline I have formally for the works. I used to try to describe my starting points in different ways by saying they were materials that were denigrated or relegated, or embarrassing, or whatever and then I realised there is just a very



simple way to explain, I'll just think of them all as ghosts.

RM: There is a wonderful sense of engagement with other people's experience, a shared world in most of your work; in fact, just going back to automatism for a moment, I remember you said something about your interest in the early experiments, they were collective investigations, they were mostly anonymous. Those were the things that appealed to you, and that obviously has a counterpoint in the underground of the late sixties.

SH: Yes it does, doesn't it? I mean, you know, one of the things that I think is interesting is how as you go on you have to give up certain illusions or delusions perhaps that you have about what you're doing. When I first started to work I worked anonymously under a pseudonym and I was interested in collective works which were not theatrical, that is there was no performer and there was no audience. The group was both performing and also being the audience for each other and that was a kind of commitment. I worked very hard to make works like that and then at a

certain point I realised there was a futility to this because if there was anything really interesting coming out of this kind of work, no one else would ever know about it, except the six or seven or twelve people who had taken part, so I tried to think of other ways to work which could have a more public aspect.

RM: Let's have a few minutes of question and discussion.

AUDIENCE: I'm really interested in what you were saying about the fact that basically surrealism has no style and that surrealism is a not a matter of style. I just wonder whether this is something that you felt was being misrepresented?

SH: Well I always felt that - people can be really angry with me if I say this - but I always thought that there was too much attention just on the painting which was the most marketable side of surrealism. But I myself loved things more like the magazines or poems or strange games, this was my personal preference. I didn't like the clear-cut images in the paintings, but I shouldn't go down that road.



AUDIENCE: Go down that road.

SH: I'm just not a big fan of what is said to be surrealist painting. I like the experimental side of things and if it ends up like a painting that's fine, I have nothing against a painting *per se* but when it hardens into a repeatable style, I have a problem with it. That's why I stopped doing personal automatic works, because they all started looking extremely lovely and were all looking the same. It was a habit - I can reproduce it now all the time - and so I just don't want to go that way. I feel the basic impulse of the surrealist experiment is very important, very, very, very important and I think that it's slightly misrepresented when it's presented to people as a form of painting. I think that should come after the other stuff is presented.

AUDIENCE: No I quite agree with you there, I think there is a very fascinating grey area in automatism between the habitual automatism and the forgotten about and something completely unexpected.

SH: That's one of the interesting things isn't it? And that's why I said that I think that anybody who does a lot of drawing, or painting - something physical, a physical practice - will have moments when they are dissociated from what their hand is doing and there is this great pleasure. Everyone loves those moments when you know something happens and you are not thinking about it consciously. But we don't anymore talk about it in terms of automatism, do we?

AUDIENCE: Well I think it's a very strange relationship because thinking about my own tracks as an artist if I glide into my own visions and in a sense persevere with them they turn into something else.

RM: Well that happens, and the series upstairs illustrates that move away from it.

SH: What's upstairs, is part of my bigger presentation of other people's automatism to show some of the things that happen when writing turns into drawing or drawing turns into writing. You get mirror writing and back and forth, all sorts of really interesting things which are classic tropes that we know about because the



surrealists laid them out as part of art. It's absolutely fascinating that these elements always emerge. Tutors often talk to art students about drawing and suggest to them that they might relinquish a subject for their drawing and just make some marks on a paper and see where it goes, and they make lovely things. But it can be a bad habit. Practitioners know what I mean, I think.

AUDIENCE: You did an installation *From the Freud Museum* (1991-1997) and I was going to ask you whether the guiding script there was 'Freud the Jewish psychologist' or was it 'Freud mediated through surrealism'?

SH: My own interest in Freud is probably complicated. I think we all live inside the Freud Museum. The Freud Museum is a cultural concept we can't really escape. I was interested in a lot of aspects of Freud, for example his art collection which my installation invokes. Most of the objects in the work of mine you mentioned are personal, but they took on a special aura through being shown first in the actual Freud Museum in Hampstead.

I've owned for many years a wonderful book of essays called *Psychoanalysis and the Occult* which has some intriguing texts by Freud about telepathy and clairvoyance in relation to his patients.⁵ What interested him, as you know, was why his patients were so fixated on him that they could mysteriously discover mentally where, for instance, his furniture was placed in his private rooms which they had never seen. He said he was 'on the side of the common people' when it came to being interested in this kind of strange transmission of knowledge. Later when he and Jung broke, he paid less attention to these phenomena. It wasn't surrealism that got me interested in Freud so much as this book and then later, the invitation to make a work in his last home.

Regarding my piece *From the Freud Museum* which you mentioned - which went on to be shown in many other places and is actually one of the most popular works I've ever made, even though I thought not many people would be interested in it - I think my use of the magic word 'Freud' in the title makes people gear up their attention and energy for scrutiny and interpretation, and they consider everything in it in a certain



intense way which is quite wonderful and surprising.



Susan Hiller, *From the Freud Museum*, 1991-1997. Documentation Alan Cruikshank. © Susan Hiller.

a superior position and that isn't what I do. That is ethnography, the history of ethnography; you can't get away from it.

Audience: It isn't the current view...

SH: I make complex, embodied, large scale works, not academic texts. I think my works speak for themselves in this regard. I don't think what I do is anthropology and I'm always offended when people say that it is because that's a way of saying it's not art and if it isn't art, it isn't anything.

AUDIENCE: I understand that you are against the linking of your practice to anthropology, but I can see in your work - perhaps it is my misconception - an ethnographer, a disciplined observer, where you're actually collecting work...

SH: No, that's not possible.

AUDIENCE: Could you tell me why...

SH: Because the basis of ethnography is in colonialism and the study of others from



¹ *From India to the Planet Mars* is also the title of a book by the Swiss psychologist Théodore Flournoy. Published in 1900, under the title *Des Indes à la planète Mars: Étude sur un cas de somnambulisme avec glossolalie*, Geneva, it describes Flournoy's investigation and interpretation of the mediumship of Hélène Smith who, under trance, produced automatic writing and drawing derived from her experiences as Marie Antoinette, a Hindu princess and visits to the planet Mars. A serious study into the properties of the subliminal imagination, the book was highly influential in the development of psychology, and noted by André Breton in his 1933 discussion of the development of surrealist automatism, 'Le Message automatique.' See 'The Automatic Message,' in *What is Surrealism?*, translated and edited by Franklin Rosemont, New York, London, 1989, 97-109.

² Upton Sinclair, *Mental Radio*, published by the author, Monrovia, California, 1930. This book is readily available as a paperback with a preface by Albert Einstein: Upton Sinclair, *Mental Radio (Studies in Consciousness)*, Hampton Roads Publishing Company, Charlottesville, Virginia, 2001.

³ 'Susan Hiller: Recall - A selection of works 1969 - 2004,' Baltic Centre for Contemporary Arts, Gateshead, England, 2004.

⁴ 'Witness,' Artangel commission at The Chapel, London, England, 2000 and accompanying publication, Susan Hiller and James Lingwood, *Witness*, London, 2000.

⁵ George Devereux (ed.), *Psychoanalysis and the Occult*, New York, 1953.

