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## Shellburne Thurber Analysis

Texts by Lia Gangitano, Daniel Jacobs  
 Interview by Jess T. Dugan with Shellburne Thurber  
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**On the couch with Sigmund Freud—a photographic study of psychoanalytic offices**

For much of her life, American photographer **Shellburne Thurber** has been engaged in an ongoing photographic investigation of the relationship between constructed space and human energy. Long intrigued by the idea of lived space as an extension of the body and a site for projection, she has photographed a wide variety of subjects, beginning with the homes of family and friends who have passed, to generic back road motels, churches, abandoned and derelict homes and hospitals, as well as commissioned projects such as the renovation of the Boston Athenæum and the Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site. She is especially interested in spaces that are both public and private. This volume comprises a selection of images Thurber made in 1999 and 2000 of psychoanalysts' offices in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and the New England area of the United States.

From the text *Psychoanalytic Interiors* by Lia Gangitano:  
 While the subject of psychoanalysis has appeared in the work of many contemporary artists, particularly through the citation of psychoanalytic theory, Thurber takes another route in arriving at one of her most significant bodies of work—a series of square format chromogenic prints depicting the unoccupied office spaces of psychoanalysts. Initiated in 1998 in Buenos Aires, the project continued through a Bunting Fellowship (Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University) in 1999–2000, enabling her to pursue the project in the Boston area. Unlike art practices that seek to demonstrate theoretical premises, Thurber's work instead elaborates upon a long photographic history, fusing particular formal concerns with an interest in people: their varying abilities to communicate, and the ways in which the constructed environment (homes, motels, offices) can articulate, by containing, the complexities of the lives that pass

through them. The issues most clearly raised by her psychoanalytic interiors and the ideas they evoke — absence, emptiness, the unconscious, the unstable boundaries between self and other— are also subjects of Thurber's work as a whole.

From the text *Staring into Space* by Daniel Jacobs:  
 The analytic office will forever be a space of paradox: a place of safety as well as danger. A place where one tries to hide from oneself among attempts at self-discovery. A place where it is a joy “to remain hidden and a disaster not to be found”. It is a space that is at once private and shared; a space whose possession is contested. The objects in the rooms that Thurber captures incite shifting feelings of desire and distress as our associations drift among them. As Elizabeth A. Danze observes, “The room is [the analyst's] space, not mine. It has things in it and I look at [them] almost every day. After a while they start to become mine too, but not in the same way they are his. I don't know their history and I don't know his, but I start to overlay mine onto them.”

**Lia Gangitano** is the founder and director of Participant Inc. in New York City.

**Daniel Jacobs** is a Training and Supervising Analyst at the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute and Director of the Hanns Sachs Library and Archives there. He is also Director of the Center for Advanced Psychoanalytic Studies in Princeton.

**Jess T. Dugan** is an artist whose work explores issues of identity through photography, video, and writing.

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## Press images



01\_Cambridge, MA. Office with blue fabric couch and three wall prints, 2000 © Shellburne Thurber



02\_Buenos Aires. Analyst's desk with flowers and hand-shaped paperweight, 1999 © Shellburne Thurber



03\_Buenos Aires. Office with peach-colored wall, 1999 © Shellburne Thurber



04\_Buenos Aires. Green plush analyst's chair with embroidered antimacassar, 1999 © Shellburne Thurber



05\_Brookline, MA. Porch office with antique couch and clown print, 2000 © Shellburne Thurber



06\_Jamaica Plain, MA. Analyst's desk with lamp and antique glass shade, 2000 © Shellburne Thurber





07\_Brookline, MA. Office with soft fawn-colored fabric walls, 2000 © Shellburne Thurber



08\_Newtonville, MA. Blue couch with multiple portrait of Freud, 2000 © Shellburne Thurber



09\_Lexington, MA. Analyst's office with toy box and two chairs, 2000 © Shellburne Thurber



10\_Andover, MA. Office with chartreuse analyst's chair and brown floral print, 2000 © Shellburne Thurber



11\_Brookline, MA. Analyst's chair with worn leather hassock, 2000 © Shellburne Thurber



12\_Cambridge, MA. Analyst's desk with bust of Freud and cloth cat, 2000 © Shellburne Thurber