

Distortions of Memory
November 10, 2007
1:00 p.m.
The Philoctetes Center

Levy: Francis Levy
Nersessian: Edward Nersessian
Oppenheim: Lois Oppenheim
Bair: Dierdre Bair
Clement: Bruno Clement
Conde: Maryse Conde
Hirst: William Hirst

A: Speaker from audience

Levy: Good afternoon and welcome to *Distortions of Memory*. We have many, very interesting books for sale due to the nature of our panelists today. Please buy all the books. And t-shirts, which have nothing to do with the panelists.

I'm now pleased to introduce Lois Oppenheim. I really know Lois Oppenheim very well, but I'm going to give a formal introduction. Lois Oppenheim is Distinguished Scholar, Professor of French, and Chair of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Montclair State University, where she also teaches courses in psychoanalysis and the literary and visual arts. She has authored or edited ten books and published over seventy articles, many of them extremely brilliant—that's my own editorial comment. Her most recent books include *A Curious Intimacy: Art and Neuro-Psychoanalysis* and *The Painted Word: Samuel Beckett's Dialogue With Art*. Dr. Oppenheim is a member of the advisory board of The Philoctetes Center. Dr. Oppenheim will moderate this afternoon's panel and introduce the other panelists.

Oppenheim: Welcome to this afternoon's event. I'd just like to mention that I received an email yesterday from someone saying to me, "How do you possibly think you're going to talk about memory on a panel in two hours?" I had been very excited about this roundtable and all of a sudden I thought, what can we do in two hours? It's true: not a lot. But we're going to try. And we have an extraordinary group of panelists here to make this happen.

To the left of Francis Levy, we have Maryse Conde, otherwise known as the Grand Dame of Caribbean Literature, who was born in Guadeloupe but has lived in several different countries in Africa and Europe, as well as the US. She's taught in France at various campuses of the University of Paris and, in this country, at a number of universities, including Harvard and Columbia, where she created and chaired the program in Francophone Studies. She's published a great many books, the best-known of which are probably the two-part historical novel *Ségou: Les Murailles de Terre* and *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem*. All of her work has been translated into English by Richard Philcox and her book have been awarded several prizes, including the prestigious Prix Littéraire de la Femme and the Boucheron Prize.

Sitting directly across from her is Dierdre Bair, who is the author of four biographies: *Samuel Beckett* (winner of the National Book Award), *Simone de Beauvoir* (*NY Times* “Best Books of the Year” and *LA Times* Book Prize finalist), *Anais Nin* (*NY Times* “Notable Books of the Year” and a BBC Arts 4 documentary), and *Jung: A Biography* (*NY Times* “Notable Books of the Year,” *LA Times* Book Prize finalist, and winner of the NAAP Gradiva Award for Best Biography of the Year). Her most recent publication is *Calling It Quits: Late Life Divorce and Starting Over*, a cultural study published by Random House earlier this year. She’s currently writing the biography of Saul Steinberg, the *New Yorker* artist and cartoonist, which will be published by Doubleday.

Ed Nersessian, who is sitting directly opposite me, is known to all of us as the Co-Director, as Francis mentioned, of the Philoctetes Center. He is a psychoanalyst in private practice and on the faculty here of the New York Psychoanalytic Institute. He is as well Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Weill-Cornell Medical College. He has authored numerous works on psychoanalysis and was co-editor of *The Textbook on Psychoanalysis*.

William Hirst, to my right, is Professor of Psychology at the New School for Social Research. He has previously taught at Rockefeller University, Princeton University, and Cornell Medical College. He is a leading expert on memory, especially autobiographical memory—which I’m sure we’ll be talking about a lot today—and social influence on memory, and has published articles on amnesia, traumatic memory, collective memory, and memory relating to September 11.

Bruno Clement, who comes to us from Paris, sitting diagonally across from me, is Professor of French literature at the University of Paris VIII, and was, until very recently, the President of the Collège International de Philosophie. He is the author of numerous books and articles on subjects as diverse as the writing of Samuel Beckett and Jean-Paul Sartre, among others; the act of reading; and literary theory. In his most recent work, which is more specifically concerned with the interrelation of philosophy and literature, he focuses on the philosophical text as a literary work as opposed to a more neutral medium for the expression of thought.

I welcome all the panelists. I’d like to actually begin this discussion of memory and memory-distortion, which is the title of this roundtable, with a quote, not surprisingly, from Marcel Proust. It’s a brief passage which occurs when the narrator of *À la Recherche Du Temps Perdu* realizes that the imagination “individualizes people,” as he puts it, and provides each with what he calls “a legend.” In the passage I’d like to cite he’s describing how the wind wrinkled the surface of the lake and large birds were perched on the great oaks, which, as he says, “helped me to understand how paradoxical it is to seek in reality for the pictures that are stored in one’s memory, which must inevitably lose the charm that comes to them from memory itself, and from their not being apprehended by the senses. The reality that I had known no longer existed. The places that we have known belong now only to the little world of space on which we map them for our own convenience. None of them was ever more than a thin slice held between the contiguous impressions that composed our life at the time. Remembrance of a particular form is but regret for a particular moment, and houses, roads, avenues are as fugitive, alas, as the years.”

The phrase that I find most stunning here is “remembrance of a particular form is but regret for a particular moment.” This brings me to my first question, which I would address to all the

panelists, which is: is there something inherently creative in memory? Is there something that is naturally distortive about memory? And how can we talk about memory in terms of the imagination? Would anyone like to get the ball rolling on that one?

Bair: Well, I'll tell you some stories concerning Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. When I was doing the research for the Beauvoir biography, every time I talked to her about her childhood, it was dark, it was gloomy, it was grey, it was ugly, it was black. I went to the childhood apartment, which was above La Coupole, and it was the top floor and round windows and light flashing in from every direction. So I went to her sister, Helene, two years younger, and I said, "You know, this is so strange. She's always talking about how dark and gloomy your house is and, even if you had thick, thick velvet curtains, you must have had so much light."

She took me by the hand and said, "My dear Dierdre, Simone remembers everything as dark and gloomy and tragic and sad and ugly and you must allow her her memory."

Then I went to interview Natalie Sorokine and she said Simone de Beauvoir was a terrible liar. She never got anything right. She couldn't be trusted. I said, "Well, you must tell me. You must tell me the instances in which you think she's a terrible liar because I will need to check them out. I'll need to correct them."

She said, "Every time she writes something about me, it's 'Natalie Sorokine in her green dress, her green hat, her green suit.' I never wear green. I hate the color. I always wear blue. And if she can't get that right, what could she possibly get right?"

And then one more story about Sartre. Giacometti was absolutely furious with Sartre and decided he didn't want to be his friend anymore because Giacometti had been in an accident that he felt had a great deal to do with the kind of work that he began to do after this accident—I believe it was an auto accident, if my memory serves. It happened at a certain place in Paris and the place was terribly important to Giacometti. Sartre wrote about it and made it happen somewhere else. Giacometti said, "He's not allowed to do that. Those are my facts. He's not allowed to take my facts and use them for his own means."

Oppenheim: Let me ask you, since you got the ball rolling here, how do you decide as a biographer what memories of your subject to include and what to leave out? You've written so many extraordinary biographies of people, these life stories. How do you determine how important they are to them; how do they feel to you?

Bair: The first several drafts of every biography I write are so enormous and the number of pages is so massive, because I just write everything. It could be a very minor essay and I will do a fifteen-page essay on this minor essay, knowing that I'm going to maybe use a paragraph at the most, or a couple of sentences probably, in the book. But I don't know what sentences I'm going to need or what paragraph I'm going to need, and I just write it all. I call them the three P's: the passionate purple prose. I just put it all in there. Then when I finish I go away from it for a while and come back and it's only at that point, after I've written everything, that I'm able to say there's a pattern here. There's a theme there. There are important aspects that I must develop on this, that, or the other thing. But you don't know that when you're dealing with the material of

someone else's life. You must allow it all to unfold and then only afterward, I think, a biographer should begin to shape it.

Oppenheim: I'd like to address the same question to Maryse Conde, who writes of her own memories and has written her own autobiography, has written much of her childhood.

Conde: First of all, I have to say that there is something very important about me. I'm a colonized subject, meaning I belong to a country which is still a community of France. So the collective is much more important than the individual. We are trying to find a collective memory in order for our people to define themselves against the French idea. As a collective group of people, we are trying to find a way of proving that. When you come to autobiography, like I did in *Le coeur à rire et à pleurer*, you do it with a sort of guilt complex. Normally, you should not talk about yourself. You should talk about your people, about your community. If you have the audacity to talk about yourself as a person, it is with treason. Normally you should be concerned with the group and not with the individual. So when I wrote *Le coeur à rire*, all the time I was feeling very guilty and I had the feeling that maybe it was a kind of entertainment that I should not indulge in.

Oppenheim: Nevertheless, one's individual memory is always somewhat a collective memory. And collective memory is always tied into one's—it's a question of how one constructs a sense of self, and isn't that what we do actually in the analytic situation? We're constructing a narrative. We're constructing a self through the reconstruction of our past.

Nersessian: There is very little autobiography that is very accurate. Most of what is autobiographical, especially from years past, has gone through a series of alterations and continues to go through a series of alterations, depending on the situation where it comes up. If you have been involved in analysis and listening to patients for a number of years, you come to the conclusion that almost everything can be understood in a different way, and when you find the distortions in it, you get a whole set of new memories. At which point those memories are accurate, I don't know. It may be that they never are. But they seem to be more freeing in terms of the result that you get from understanding the conflicts. So I think it would be very hard to write an autobiography or a biography that you would consider a completely accurate representation of a person.

Oppenheim: Maybe you can throw in something here about false memory?

Hirst: A variety of things that people have said raises issues in my mind. In terms of memory distortions, of course I think you're absolutely right. Our memories are extremely unreliable. But one of the interesting things, I think, is how much our present attitude really reshapes our past. Our past is stuck in the present in some way, shape, or form. It comes out in experimental studies, for instance. In one study they asked college sophomores to talk about the particular intimate relationship they've had with another individual, and some people said it was good and some people said it was bad. Then they went back six months later, and this being college sophomores, some of them were still together and some of them were not still together. What you found was that—depending on whether you were together or not—the memory for that relationship varied to a great degree. If they were no longer together, they remembered that partner as being god-awful. "I always knew he was god-awful and I told you he was god-awful."

But that of course is not what they reported if they were still together. Their memory of the relationship was that six months ago it was a good relationship. So I think that, in some sense when you talk about this process, it's the process that's occurring in the present which constantly reconstructs your past to make it consistent. Where would we be if we weren't somehow imprisoned by the past? We want the past to somehow give comfort to our present self, and I think, to a great degree, it does.

The other question that I was thinking as you were talking about autobiographies and biographies: historians make this big distinction between history and memory, from **Noren [ph]** on. I was wondering how that plays out in the writing of the autobiography or biography, in that to what extent is it a process of assembling memories, if you like, and a process of this more scholarly endeavor of checking the facts and putting it all together? The psychoanalytic situation is not a scientific process like that at all. I assume you just accept whatever the patient says, at some level. You don't go and then check it out. But your job, I think, is to check it out. Isn't it?

Bair: Yes, exactly. I was struck when you were talking about how the past is the present, of Anais Nin, the great diarist, about whom I also wrote. I think that, besides Anais Nin, I'm the only person in history who has read every word she wrote.

Hirst: Not even her.

Bair: The papers are still sealed at UCLA and I had permission to use them for my book. Three enormous footlockers about as big as this table, I swear, plus untold boxes and shopping bags filled with her writings. I had to learn to interpret them, to decipher them, if you will. She'd write of something that happened and something in me would say, you know, this is one of the red flag passages. She's going to come back to this. She hasn't told me everything about this anecdote, this event, this person. And a little later, maybe two or three years later, there would be a bit more about that earlier writing. Then finally—it could be as long as twenty to thirty years later—she'd say, "It's been nagging at me all this time and now I'm going to tell you everything that really happened." She will then proceed to write of it as a historian would write of it. It's not her memory, her emotion, her feeling; it's "at ten o'clock in the morning at such and such a day, I met Mr. X at the coffee shop on 13th Street." Then she would proceed from there. I didn't really analyze that kind of writing in the book, but she did pretty much—

Hirst: Yes, but historians, and I assume biographers, have certain technical criteria that they have to use in order to assess a fact.

Bair: Absolutely.

Hirst: Whereas when you merely remember—whether you're just a person on the street or you're on a couch—those technicalities don't apply, in some sense. You accept your distortions in a way that a historian is not allowed to.

Bair: Absolutely. I have an expression that I use: "You can't say it was a nice day until you check the weather report in ten newspapers for a week before and after."

Nersessian: Well, in some ways it doesn't matter. I want to make two comments. First, psychoanalysts check their facts. There's a special way of checking their facts, which is not like going out and checking with the family or the husband or the wife.

Hirst: Right, which is what she would do.

Nersessian: But I don't know if checking the facts in that way makes them any more accurate. I would guess it doesn't. The second thing you talked about is really more to do with emotion, because it doesn't have to be college students six months later. You can have somebody tell you today that their wife is an angel and, three days later, they have a fight and he says she's the worst person on earth. The emotion influences the whole set of memories that are remembered at that moment, so you don't have to wait six months. You can do it from day to day with anybody.

Clement: Listening to everybody here, I think about Beckett. We are three Beckettarians here, at least. I remembered when Dierdre was speaking, the beginning of the second part of *Molloy*. He says, "It was midnight. It was—" I know it in French.

Oppenheim: Yes. "It was raining."

Clement: Yes, "It was raining." And the last sentence is, "It was not midnight. It was not raining." And in Beckett, too, there's the sentence—I don't remember exactly where—"I invented my memories." Your question was, is there something creative in memories? My opinion, thinking about Beckett and Proust first of all, is it's possible that memory can be creative, not only for novelists, but for critics, thinkers, and philosophers. About autobiography, I think that all you say is absolutely exact. We compare what you can check of the reality and what is written and the dress was red or blue, and there is something truthful, something like that. May I change something? May I put that the dress is blue? Yes, you can. You see the picture of the dress with another color. But I think that there are many ways for autobiography and perhaps it's strange to say that philosophy is one of them. You can speak about yourself and reconstruct your memories, seeming to speak of something absolutely different. On creating concepts, for instance, I believe that very deeply.

Oppenheim: Can you give us an example?

Clement: Yes. The example is not mine. If you read Derrida, for instance, a very important but very short book. It is a kind of autobiographical text, *Circumfession*. It's an allusion to Augustine, *Confessions of Augustine*. Confession and circumcision. How do you say—two words in one?

Levy: Condensed.

Oppenheim: Suitcase.

Clement: Suitcase, yes. It says in that very important text that, in his opinion, thinking of what he wrote many, many years ago, probably all these concepts—for instance, the breach, margin, peripheries, etc. All these concepts probably were to be related or linked to something which is absolutely impossible to say for him. A kind of memory, but not a memory, because if it was a memory, it would not be necessary to invent, to create this concept. The thing is, if you say one

word but the word is not sufficient by itself, it's circumcision, precisely. A very difficult word to say. But the creation of these concepts, they do something to a memory, but this memory must be reconstructed in many, many senses, for instance, by creating some concepts. I've tried if it was possible to do the same work reading other philosophers. I think it's possible, but there are many other ways philosophers can tell their story. Descartes, for instance, is an autobiographical philosopher. He says "I": "I was born," and so on. And, of course, what he says is absolutely not true.

Bair: I am wrestling with something now and I'm going to throw it out. I'm eager to hear what other people have to say about it because I don't know what I'm going to say. I haven't actually started to write this. Saul Steinberg, whom I'm writing about now, was born in Romania and was educated in Italy and came to this country and became deeply and profoundly American in everything that he did. He swore that after he left Romania as a college student to go to Italy, he had never been back, and that he would never go back. He told Christo and Jeanne-Claude—who were Bulgarian friends of his—when Christo was thinking that he would go back to Bulgaria after communism ended there, Steinberg said, "You mustn't go. You mustn't go. You must hold to your memory because it is your memory of the place that establishes and promotes and allows to flourish your creativity. If you go back, you won't have that foundation of memory and you won't be able to create." Now, here's the interesting thing about Steinberg. When he was in the Navy in Italy, there's a file this thick in the national archives of all the strings he pulled to get himself back to Romania. There's a collection of photos of him in the uniform of a naval lieutenant with his family and friends all over his childhood haunts in Romania. Yet he said he never went back.

Oppenheim: It's a very interesting question, and actually, I'd love to hear what Maryse has to say about it, in terms of your return to places where you grew up and how this has affected you.

Conde: First of all, you should not look for yourself, but I did. I looked for Maryse Conde, which is a kind of crime in my society. I went to all the places I grew up and you know, there is a kind of imposition of values. You are supposed to like certain parts of your country. You are supposed to be moved when you see sugarcane fields because a sugarcane field is supposed to symbolize the suffering of your people and the suffering of your mother. The most important Caribbean books talk about mothers and grandmothers dying in the sugarcane fields. But I think for me a sugarcane field had nothing to do—so I had to look for something very personal, very individual. For somebody like you, who are born in Europe, it is easy to talk about yourself as you are. But to talk about yourself as you are, when you come from the Caribbean, in that society is actually made complicated. It is a kind of quest for a person. You go through all sorts of extensive and harsh complications just to get yourself as you are.

Oppenheim: Did you find what you were looking for?

Conde: Yes, I found myself, but it was very complex. It took me a long time. I don't know how many years, because it is only a few years ago that I wrote that autobiography. I could not have written it before. I had a set idea about to be a Guadeloupean, what I should talk about, what I should feel. I had to feel like Maryse Conde, talk like Maryse Conde. It was another experience.

Clement: May I ask her a question?

Oppenheim: Please.

Clement: Perhaps we can help you to feel less guilty now. My question is that I quite understand why you say it's very, very hard to speak about oneself and to honor, to care of the people as you are, but don't you think—it's a real question—that you can be, you, anyone in your position can be a kind of link between one person and the people, because people need sometimes to have one person they admire, and it's very important to do that for you, but also for the people who need it. Perhaps you are too modest to say yes to what I say, but I think it's very important that you did that for your people, not only for you.

Conde: But I left Guadeloupe forever two months ago. Why did I wait? Because I have been looking for Maryse Conde all that time, trying to speak as Maryse Conde, to write as Maryse Conde, which was not at all appreciated by the rest of the people. They look at me with a bit of anger, resentment. So I did not see why I have to be all the time regarded as a traitor and I decided to leave. And now I feel better. I can talk about myself and you can help me, as you say. Thank you very much.

Clement: I try. Because the point is very important, the tension point between individual and collective memory.

Hirst: Halbwachs is the person that I think probably coined the term "collective memory." He was a student of Durkheim's and he's complicated to read, but for some people's reading of him, there is no individual memory in some sense. We have a sense of individual memories because we have a unique intersection of many collective memories. We are Guadeloupe. We are people who taught at Columbia. All of those various collective memories that you have, the way they intersect makes you uniquely you, but there is no individual memory to be found. The tie between individual and collective memories, from his viewpoint, is really rooted in the multitude of collective memories that we have, which then uniquely make you you, whoever you happen to be.

Oppenheim: I think we're talking as though memory is something cognitive, or memory is something state-related and affective. But we haven't really touched on the question of memory and the body and it being a perceptual phenomenon, as well, and how what we feel in our bodies has to do with what we remember in our minds.

Hirst: I think we've been talking about what cognitive psychologists would call "explicit memories." That is, memories which come to mind that are put at the footlights of consciousness, that which William James would say you have a personal belief that it occurred in your past, your personal past. Whereas I think body memories are more what psychologists would call "implicit memories." That is, memories that aren't associated with any sort of conscious recollection. There are really two quite different memories and there are different brain mechanisms involved in those kinds of memories. They're really grounded in quite different psychological phenomena. Both are important. Our selves are determined as much by our implicit memories as our explicit memories, I think.

Conde: Can I ask you one question? I'm sorry to be so focused on Guadeloupe, but I'm from Guadeloupe. I was born there. There is a kind of mythology built by the French about

Guadeloupe. It is supposed to be a kind of paradise, full of wonderful smells, wonderful sights, wonderful “Others.” But we ourselves don’t see it that way. We see poverty, we see disease, and so on. So how can we reconcile those outside views of Guadeloupe and our personal feeling—memory, if you want. How can we reconcile, or shall we not?

Hirst: Good question.

Nersessian: I’m not so sure why you would want to reconcile the tourist advertisements with reality.

Conde: Not tourists, but white people that come to Guadeloupe and all of them say, “Ah, that’s wonderful.” We come to Guadeloupe and we say, “Oh, how pitiful it is to be a Guadeloupean.” We would like to find a medium between the people from the outside and the people from the inside. Not the tourists, but the people who are outsiders. If you go to Guadeloupe you are not going to be a tourist. You are simply an outsider.

Bair: Bruno has been working on correspondence lately, I believe, between Hannah Arendt and Heidegger, for example You just taught a seminar on that.

Clement: Yes, I’ve been working on philosophers’ correspondence, that’s true, but it’s a very difficult subject, especially if you try to do the link between memories and correspondence. When we read correspondence, we read something that in actuality did not exist because the book in which you’re reading it never existed before the publisher decided to put together those letters, to select some of them, to put some others out of the book for some reason. So this is a decision, and when one has read 1,100 letters, you have a kind of selection, even if they say at last it’s the “complete” correspondence. You know that it’s not possible.

If we try to speak about “selective memory”—we have not said that word yet—I think it is very important because memory is always selective. Perhaps you know or have read that short story by Borges, the title of which is “Funes, el memorioso.” Funes has got a kind of disease: he remembers absolutely everything. He can’t forget anything. The least thing he cannot forget is that he dies. He cannot live. You can’t live if you don’t select, if you don’t choose some memories. Is that the problem of the biography?

Bair: Yes.

Clement: The autobiography, too.

Hirst: But I think it’s not just selection, it’s distortion. You can’t live unless you distort.

Clement: Selection is a distortion.

Hirst: In some way, it’s easy to manufacture a memory that’s extremely accurate. Computers are very accurate: you input it, it sits there, and it comes out in exactly the form you that you inputted it. That’s very much unlike our memory. It’s very hard to build our kind of memory, if you’re going to build it. Memory that distorts things so that it gives meaning, if you like, to your life. I think we would be imprisoned; we would not be able to live with ourselves if we remembered everything. We would be overwhelmed with all of these bad memories, all of these

good memories. It would be very inconsistent with our present attitude. And also socially—if we all had our own initial individual rendering of past objects, we'd be living in a *Rashômon* film our entire life, in which everybody had different renderings of exactly the same thing. There would be no social bonding between us. So I think that it's not just selection. It's not just that we select, we distort in order to make ourselves comfortable with ourselves and ourselves comfortable with each other. In my mind, rather than distortion being a bad thing and rather than selection being a bad thing, it's exactly the opposite. God bless that we can do it.

Oppenheim: But we're also talking of memory as a fixed entity. What you remember at a certain moment is not how you remember it—

Hirst: No, I think I'm saying just the opposite. It's constantly being renewed by your present.

Nersessian: Distortion in a certain way is necessary because that's the way we manage to control the emotions, the painful emotions. But once you talk about distortion, you are talking about an ongoing event, which means what you are distorting is also there.

Oppenheim: It's a process.

Nersessian: No, but what you have distorted is there. It has not disappeared. Psychoanalysis essentially works on the fact that you can remove certain distortions—you're never sure how much of it—but you can remove certain distortions and find something that is behind that was not known. So it's not that we don't have all these memories. It's not that they've all been thrown away and cast away and no longer exist. Some of them continue to exist, in fact, to the degree that they're the ones that affect our behavior.

Oppenheim: We're talking about the meaning of an event. We're talking about the meaning of a relationship.

Nersessian: Or the memory of an event.

Bair: I'd like to throw a concrete example in here from Beckett's life. I think that everything everyone has been saying relates in some way to what I found when I was writing the Beckett biography. I was just about finished with what I thought was going to be a published book and I had had two collections of letters. Beckett was—he called it “exile”—in Ireland and he was writing letters at the time to a poet named Dennis Devlin and to another poet in London who was helping him to get published, George McGreevy. Now to Dennis Devlin, who was in Dublin, he presented a picture of such a happy man. “I have pupils. I'm tutoring in French. I have an office in my father's building. I'm going to make my life here. Everything is fine.” To George McGreevy it was: “I really need to come back to London. I really need to get out of here. And please, please hurry up and get a book published so I'll have the money to do it.” Then he's writing to both of these people about how “Mother is giving me her blessing and I'm going to go off and live in Paris for awhile and everything is so marvelous and wonderful between me and Mother.”

I was going to publish this and then, after years of trying, I was given access to the letters that he wrote to Thomas McGreevy, who was the only person I found in his life to whom I think he was completely honest. He said things like, “Last night I was so drunk, I woke up lying in a gutter

like a turkey with my mouth open and water coming in. And various people in Dublin picked me up and sent me home. And when I got home I was so furious with my mother—it was two days before my brother’s wedding—that I smashed all the crockery in the pantry and I had to be the best man at my brother’s wedding with my hands bandaged. And if I don’t get out of Ireland soon, I’m going to have a nervous breakdown or I’m going to kill my mother.” And within weeks after his brother’s wedding, he was in Paris.

Now, okay, the biographer’s dilemma: what if I didn’t have those letters and I presented this happy vision of Mother sending him off to Paris, a thirty-six year old man and she’s patting him on the head like a child and telling him to go. What if I had only had that? And then what about the three different sets of memories that he chose to distribute among the people that he knew? Granted, of course, the degree of friendship or intimacy with these three different people had a great deal to do with what he chose to write.

Clement: To choose, too. There is your choice and the choice of the publisher after you. It’s so important, as important as his choice for us.

Hirst: Do you think there’s a true memory, though? That in the deep, deep privacy of his bedroom, he has a true memory, and then he’s just spinning little stories? Or if I go back to one of the great psychologists of memory, Frederick Bartlett, who says there is no real memory. There is no memory to point at. It’s all a reconstructive process that’s built out of some potential to remember, and nothing is really stored away. Because he’s writing to one friend, this is what comes to mind—lovely Mother. Sometimes mothers are lovely.

Clement: Not Beckett’s.

Hirst: He’s writing to another friend who maybe he drank a lot with, so the drinking experience is probably important. Then he’s writing to another friend—. What each one brings to mind is not inauthentic, in some sense. It’s just tailored toward the audience to which he’s writing, and it’s as good and true a memory as the next one. It’s just a different spin. Or is there some private memory deep down inside which he is then sort of spinning off these fairy tales from?

Nersessian: I would like to comment on that just briefly. You have to distinguish distortion that is consciously done, purposely presenting yourself a certain way to a friend. If you are looking for them to invite you to London, you may sound so miserable. That’s not the kind of distortion we are talking about. We are talking about distortion that you are not aware you are doing. As regards to what you found, which sounds more like his own feelings about what was happening—this would fall more into what you described as explicit or episodic memory. If he said “I remember Tuesday at 5:00 in the morning, on December 11th, I woke up in the gutter,” then you would know that that memory is most likely going to be distorted. If he repeatedly woke up in the gutter and he said, “I wake up in the gutter most of the time,” then that would probably not be that distorted. That would fall more into what is called implicit or semantic memory, which would be a description of events, like we all do. We say, “I remember I went to France in October.” That’s a fact, but what I did when I arrived there at a particular moment, that’s much more liable to be distorted.

Oppenheim: I think when you're going to talk about Beckett you have to also remember that he was extraordinarily ambivalent about his mother.

Hirst: Aren't we all?

Oppenheim: Well, luckily not quite as much as he was. I really think that played a significant role in his correspondence and how he described his relationship to his mother.

Bair: The only person to whom he spoke in a negative way was McGreevy.

Oppenheim: No, he also spoke to Jim Knowlson negatively about his mother.

Bair: Well, that was a long time after.

Oppenheim: It was much later.

Bair: After my book was published.

Oppenheim: Yes, it's true.

Nersessian: So you'll have to redo it now.

Bair: No, no. I mean, there were a lot of things that he said to Jim Knowlson that were directly in response to my book.

Oppenheim: I don't know how far you want to take this.

Clement: The truth is, when you say you are going to kill your mother, you are drunk. You say the truth when you are in that state.

Hirst: Do you think that the whole term "memory distortion" is somehow wrong? It assumes that there is a memory that then gets distorted, whereas it may be that we just have memories, some of which—if a biographer comes along and checks it—turn out to be completely wrong and self-serving and all sorts of things. On some level they're distortions, but they're probably really good memories, as well.

Oppenheim: You're actually asking if all memory is mis-remembering.

Hirst: Well, yes. You had asked that question, too. Is there any memory that's not somehow imagination?

Nersessian: All autobiographic memory we are talking about. Because there are other memories that are not—

Oppenheim: Yes, of course.

Nersessian: Only with autobiographic memory would that question come up. I don't know if the answer can be known. You know, Freud felt differently. Freud thought that you kept the traces, so it was one on top of another on top of another. Whether it's so or not, I don't know. But

certainly in the analytic situation, you find out other things behind other distortions and at what point you stop and say, "That's it—"

Hirst: Is it like an onion? Once you peel it away there's nothing there.

Bair: But are there other kinds of memory besides autobiographical? The person who was at Hiroshima or Pearl Harbor—war is in my mind these days, so I bring up historical memories. The person who was there has a particular sliver of the event because the memory is both historical and autobiographical, and we write history, we base history, on so much that is autobiographical. Even historians of the Roman Empire who believed that they were writing true histories of the Caesars brought a personal interpretation to it.

Conde: I would like to say something. You say that memory should not be—all memories are distorted. But it seems to me that the specialty of collective memory is to try not to be distorted. Individual memory can be distorted—yes. It's bound to be distorted. But collective memory has to be right.

Hirst: Why do you say that?

Conde: Because if we go on believing as a group in some lies, it affects the society we belong to. So the effort that we are trying to make all the time is to put things right as far as the collective is concerned. Collective memory should not be full of fantasy, full of distortion. It should be right, it seems to me.

Nersessian: It should be. Whether they are is another issue.

Conde: In order to allow the individual memory to be as it is, we need the collective memory to be right.

Hirst: This is your faith.

Conde: My faith.

Oppenheim: We also have to remember that when Maryse is talking about memory, she's talking about her own experience, her subjective experience of something that happened in her past. When Dierdre or Bruno is talking about writing about the memory of somebody else, it's passing through somebody else's mind and it has to have some kind of distortion to some degree by the mere fact that it's coming through your mind and not directly from the person who experienced it.

Bair: Yes, because I'm selecting—

Oppenheim: So it's a selective memory.

Bair: I'm selecting as a historian, as a scholar of comparative literature.

Oppenheim: It's memory by proxy.

Bair: Exactly. It has to be based on fact. In other words, the biographer has to be the “artist under oath”—that’s Desmond McCarthy’s wonderful phrase. The biographer cannot tell you anything unless it’s true. I’ve just finished reading Diane Ackerman’s marvelous book, *The Zookeeper’s Daughter*, and this woman constructs a story that is absolutely glorious to read and everything she says is based on a document, based on an archive, based on a journal. And they’re historic.

Oppenheim: But there again you’re making a distinction between historical fact and the idea of truth in memory, which I think Ed has articulated doesn’t exist as such.

Levy: Didn’t Janet Malcolm deal with this a lot in her essays about biography and autobiography, the relationship between the autobiographer and—. Not to interrupt.

Bair: No, no. You’re right.

Nersessian: I’m not so sure if two different writers with exactly the same facts would write the same book.

Oppenheim: I’m certain they wouldn’t.

Nersessian: Therefore there is some other—if you want to call it “distortion”—that is imposed on the facts by the person who’s writing.

Oppenheim: The mere fact of having chosen a particular writer to write about is important as well. Why did you choose to do a biography of Beckett or Jung or anybody else? I read recently that you like to write biographies—actually, you haven’t necessarily done so—but that you prefer to write about living authors. I’d love to hear about that in a minute, but I think before we get onto something new—go ahead, Bruno.

Clement: You had spoken about the distortion. We seem, all of us, to think that distortion is not voluntary, but perhaps sometimes it is. That’s my answer to what you said, too. This is a political question because the memory of a people—collective memory—it can be transformed. It can be changed. It can be manipulated by political power. That’s a very important point. That’s a distortion, a real one.

Hirst: Yes, and not always intentionally. Sometimes our collective memories are unintentionally distorted. It doesn’t always have to be some authority imposing down upon it.

Conde: But don’t you think that it is only if collective memory is not distorted that individual memory can be free to distort, change, improve, metamorphose. It seems to me that once collective memory has become something sure and definite that we can trust, we can allow ourselves as an individual to be totally free. We cannot before.

Hirst: I’m not so sure you can ever reach your ideal. Bruno said this earlier—when you essentially consult these cultural artifacts in order to check the facts, the cultural artifacts are as much manipulated as anything else. In American history, at some points the archives didn’t exist at all. Then at other points they were very underfunded and so the amount of documents that

were collected varies at various points in American history. This budgetary consideration has a huge impact on our ability to construct a collective memory.

It's also true for autobiographical memory. That I decide to put a picture on my wall will have an immense impact on how I remember my past, because I will look at that picture of a friend and suddenly, every time I look at it, these certain memories will come to mind. Whereas if I didn't, because there's not enough wall space, or I don't know why—if I don't put that picture on the wall, suddenly my whole autobiography has changed.

In the same way, if you build a memorial, if you don't fund the archives, or if you over-fund the archives, you create a certain collective memory. If development comes to Guadeloupe and they knock down all those sugarcane fields, you've lost either a positive or a negative cultural artifact. It's there and it's going to shape your memory, like it or not.

Bair: Bruno has, for the first time, said a word that I think has been underlying almost everything that any of us has said here today. He used the word "political." I think that that's an important aspect to bring into our discussion.

Conde: Yes. You know it depends. For you, policy is political matters, unimportant. But for somebody like me, political matters are essential. I'm more a political subject than any of you because I'm involved in fighting to keep myself entire, in front of a political body, a political institution. For people of my part of the world, of my nationality—if we can call it nationality—it is more important than for you. I don't even know if I have a nationality. I'm supposed to be French, is that true?

Nersessian: I can't really comment on that politically because I have no expertise or knowledge, except having witnessed the recent issue of Armenians and the genocide and how it kept going back and forth, depending on political needs, and gave rise to some comments from prominent people that were in essence kind of stupid. I think everybody acknowledges between a few hundred thousand and a million Armenians died at that point. But someone, I think it was Representative Murtha, said, "Well, it's not clear whether it was a massacre or genocide." So if 500,000 people died, as a massacre, it's okay. If they died as genocide, that's terrible. So we can't vote on it. But I don't know what to do with that in terms of what we are talking about.

I want to go back to this idea of memories being completely non-existent and give a clinical example, so that, at least for me, it has more conviction. This man tells in his treatment that he drove to college and two days later got a phone call that his father had died. During the work of the analysis, he starts revising that story and comes to the conclusion that, in fact, he had a fight with his father before he left and then, two days later, he got the phone call that his father died. As the work keeps going, he comes up with a new version, which is he fought with his father, got in his car, got to college, and by the time he got to school, he got the phone call that his father died. So we worked on that and the distortions about that, in terms of whatever relationship and feelings and ambivalence he had toward his father, to understand better that relationship.

As a consequence of this, he had been telling me a story which he remembered, which we in psychoanalysis call "screen memories." These are kind of like, as Phyllis Greenacre called them, "islands of recollection from childhood." It's a specific, well-delineated memory that you have

from your childhood. His memory was: he went home and his father wasn't home and his mother said, "Your father has gone looking for the dog who has escaped." And the father comes back without the boy's dog. "We can't find the dog. He has escaped." Following the work on the college trip, he remembers that in fact, it may well be that his father didn't go after the lost dog but that there had been talk that the dog was sick and he put the dog to sleep. He went to his mother—his mother's still alive—and asked her. That was the true fact, that the father had taken—. So somewhere in the mind they exist. If that answers your question. I don't know.

Oppenheim: Does anyone want to respond to that?

Clement: It depends on what you think is important. What really matters to you, or to you. The true fact, as you just said, doesn't matter for you.

Nersessian: That he's better is what matters to me.

Clement: Yes. What is important is what your patient did with all that. I mean, the creation. That's the first word of the roundtable—memory is creative—and you hope that your patients will be creative with their memories because only finding the true fact is not so important for them. Is it?

Nersessian: Whether it's the true fact or not, the fact that will help unravel certain conflicts is important. In terms of the question, I don't know whether you meant "creative" in the sense of creating art, or you meant just creative in the sense that memories are created.

Oppenheim: I meant in the second sense. But now I'd like to ask in the first sense. And then we'll open it up to the audience. How can memory help us to be more creative as artists? How can memory serve us, to free our creativity—

Conde: Individual or collective?

Oppenheim: Either. Individual.

Conde: It seems to me that writing is using memory all the time. I don't see any difference between writing and making use of my memory. Either it is fabricated, distorted, or pure. I don't think there is anything like a "pure" memory.

Oppenheim: So there's no such thing, either, of creating something completely new that doesn't have some element of—

Conde: It is already there.

Oppenheim: Right. Maybe we'll open this up to the audience. Questions?

A: I just want to ask the panelists or anybody to think about memory in terms of non-verbal memory and whether there are ways in which our memory is not just verbal. It seems always in this panel to be given rise to language and I was wondering if you could talk about that.

Nersessian: Procedural memory?

Hirst: Clearly there's a bias, because that's what most of us are dealing with: verbal memories. We look at letters; we look at what people say. But people draw. People express their memories in a variety of ways. I suspect the process is a little bit different, yes. But it involves similar mechanisms, if you like.

Clement: You have spoken about the body, about the amount of memories of the body, by the body—

A: Body memories.

Nersessian: Tennis players.

Levy: Yes, muscle memory.

Oppenheim: Dancers use it. I mean, there's no such thing as the body forgetting.

Clement: I am a piano player, too.

Hirst: Why don't we relate body memory to distortion again and get back to my favorite psychologist of memory, Bartlett. When he argued that memory was reconstructive, that there was no memory there—he doesn't express it this way, but the field was using nouns too much. They should use verbs. He called his book *Remembering*. And you should talk about the verb of what you do rather than this thing, this entity. He said that when you remember something explicitly, whether it's like you say something verbally or draw it or whatever, he said that it was this reconstructive process the same as a motor activity is a reconstructive process. He said, if you think about a tennis player swinging his tennis racket, it makes no sense that they have stored away billions of possible tennis strokes and then they retrieve some particular memory of a tennis stroke and fulfill that. Rather, it literally grows out of the situation: whether you were drinking the night before, whether you were in the gutter the night before, whether you hate your opponent or like your opponent, where the position of the sun is, plus all your past experiences of playing tennis. All of that comes to bear, both the present and the past, to create, on the run, that stroke. He said that your explicit memories, your autobiographical memories, and your collective memories and the like were of the same kind.

Nersessian: What are the past experiences? What's happened to them?

Hirst: His term was that you had a schema, an organized representation of your past, but it was not as if you could point to anything—this, the tennis stroke that I made on October 4th. At each point you weave each experience into it and it becomes a potential.

Oppenheim: Let me ask you a question, then. Are you saying that there has to be a cognitive element in it; there's no such thing as a muscular memory? There's no such thing as a familiarity in the body that recognizes—

Nersessian: Procedural memory, which has to do with—

Oppenheim: Of course. If you know how to ride a bicycle, you always know how to ride a bicycle.

Nersessian: Or playing tennis. Yes. Whether you call it schema or whether you call it memory, I don't know what the difference is. It is recorded someplace and it exists in some form in the central nervous system. It's not being created over and over. Otherwise you wouldn't be able to play tennis because you wouldn't know how to play.

A: One point on the body memory before I ask my question. If you take a baseball player and he doesn't play for five days, his memory is not the same as it is when he's playing every day. The body forgets. The timing isn't as good. The memory is something that's very detailed in terms of such things. The memory is not always equal. Now, the question is about distortion. In a sense, it's maybe not a good word because, for example, as Mr. Hirst said, it's the interpretation that counts. In other words, if I'm looking at something back a long time ago, I really don't see it right unless I try to interpret it and look at it a lot of times as the writer does: revising, revising, and revising until they get exactly what they want. It seems to me that distortion should sort of be changed because it's not the distortion, you just can't remember it right. Memory in general is an error, unless you work on it. And it's not the memory that's important. It's getting to the truth and the memory helps you get to the truth. Is that true?

Nersessian: I think memory is tendentious, essentially. If you don't like distortion, memory is tendentious.

A: What does that mean?

Nersessian: It means you alter it according to certain needs that you have.

Oppenheim: But then if you're saying you alter it, there's that "it." You run into the same problem again. I mean, of course, we agree with you. There's no other way to think of it. But we can't get away from that essence, as though there's something there that we are—. I understand what you're saying.

Hirst: We can alter something with that thing no longer being there. I can alter a sculpture and the previous sculpture is gone.

Nersessian: Right. Then the new one will be on the new one.

A: Just a top of the head lay opinion, which goes really back to what Professor Hirst said, and I think to some extent addresses what the last questioner said, is that I believe that we really ought to talk about memory as memory and drop anything about distortion or truth. A memory is. I think, in a way, it's helpful to begin there from any perspective: psychoanalytic, historical, philosophical, what have you. But to go to Ed's last comment, which I think was the last before we opened it up for questions—when you talked about what's important from a psychoanalytic point of view, you used the word fact, the fact which enables the resolution of conflict. Again, to some extent based on what I just said, how strongly do you believe that what you're talking about is a fact or some psychological readjustment in some sense, irrespective of what the facts were, that will enable that psychological healing to take place?

Nersessian: If you want to call it 'readjustment,' I'm fine with it.

A: No, no. I guess what I'm pointing at is that from the standpoint of a psychoanalyst, the fact is important, but to what extent is the memory. Obviously what you said was sort of the basic Freudian concept, that even though your memories can change over time, the tracks are always there.

Nersessian: What was important about the patient I gave in the example was the recognition of his intense, ambivalent relationship with his father. Whether the dog got lost or was put to sleep or sent to Mars, from a psychoanalytic point of view, it's irrelevant. But that there was an alteration under which hid a whole other set of things having to do with his relationship with his father—that's what was important. So which one is fact? You choose it.

A: But what you're really talking about is that you've reached a deeper emotional truth about how he felt.

Nersessian: Always.

A: And that emotional truth in a way supersedes what the actual facts might be.

Nersessian: Well, it contains within it experiences.

A: Yes, without question.

Clement: I just want to thank you for the word "readjustment" because I think it's really exactly the right word, and I think that the question between you two is about readjustment of fact. But I think that—if I understand quite well—readjustment becomes a fact at the end.

Oppenheim: Right. That's true.

A: Two issues: one, it seemed like when we were talking about body memory we got stuck back in procedural memory in terms of bicycle riding and tennis and all of that. But I'm thinking about the ways that gestures and the way we carry ourselves are often linked to whether it's a specific language or culture or period in our life, and that often, when we go back to that place or we speak that language, our whole self experience can change. I don't know whether that's an area that gets distorted in the same sense. Do we believe that that's more accurate? I don't know if you understand what I'm trying to say, but it does seem to me like that's another quality of body memory that's very different from learning to play something.

Dierdre, you almost specialized, and maybe all people have this in their biographies, but so many of the people you've written about have deliberate different stories of themselves that they tell while their life is happening. Then at some point, they perhaps start to believe those stories. Anaïs had several different versions of her biography and then she had her image which she was maintaining and certainly the image that many people—you know, how people thought of her. The same with de Beauvoir, I think. To what extent do they then "remember" the version of themselves that they like? I think Bill's done research about how telling stories, like the way families tell stories, will then affect the memory of the people in the family. It's a sort of individual version of a constant repeating of a version of ourselves, but it started off with deliberate distortion.

Bair: Yes.

Clement: Just a comment about the second question. I remembered when I heard that a kind of tool was made by Sartre in trying to say something about Flaubert. The name of the tool is a little bit complicated, but very important for us, I think: regressive, progressive method. What does that mean? It's very simple, in fact. About the multiple versions of the autobiography. You must have a look behind you, regressive moment of the method, to try to establish some facts. But this is not sufficient. You must go ahead and readjust at every moment of your life. You must go— what are the continual—?

Oppenheim: Come and go.

Clement: Come and go. We must come and go between regressive moment, progressive moment, regressive moment, progressive moment. And that's life. And that's distortion, permanent distortion, or "readjustment." I prefer, really, a readjustment of memory.

Oppenheim: Good point.

A: You can use those words. I was very struck that only once in this discussion, and an hour into it, they used the word "lie." That word came up very momentarily and then it disappeared. I feel like the process of memory that we're discussing here can really change depending on what kind of thing it is you're remembering. When you brought up the two versions of Guadeloupe, it reminded me that thirty-five years ago, I went to a Guadeloupe as a tourist. My memory of it is how beautiful it was. The sea was beautiful, wonderful wildlife. It was terrific. Then when you raised that question, I remembered from the airport to the resort, you could see horrible things. You saw the sugarcane fields. You saw people living in terrible poverty. The whole week that I was there, which I had forgotten until you brought it up, I would see local people working in the resort, and there would be these huge spreads, these buffets, and I felt terrible every day, thinking, what are these people thinking? All this food being served and wasted. But both of them are true. The French version of Guadeloupe is true: it's a beautiful place. But it also is a probably terrible place to live if you are born there, in general. Those kinds of things can both be true.

But then I was thinking of what you said, Dierdre Bair, about Steinberg. He either went back to Romania or he didn't. That's the kind of thing where it's not like both versions can be true. I think only one of them can be true for that kind of fact. Gunter Grass was either in the Waffen-SS or he wasn't. There are some things, I think, that we have to say that people can actually lie about and that's different than memory distortion. I think it's true that people may not know themselves sometimes, but I don't know if you think that Steinberg didn't know it.

Nersessian: It was pre-Photoshop, so he had to have gone there.

Hirst: But if you don't know it, if you don't remember it, is it a lie?

A: Did he not remember it, or is he lying?

Hirst: That's the same as—what's his name—Wilkomirski, who remembers an entire childhood of being in a concentration camp, and yet documents show that he could not have been. He was in Switzerland.

Bair: He was Swiss, yeah.

Hirst: So there it's not just one week, it's a whole childhood. It's just simply not clear whether he's lying, which would mean he knows the truth and he's not telling you, he has distinct memories—or he believes it. I would say if he believes it he has a valid memory, it just happens not to be the correct one.

Oppenheim: Many of our memories are what we've been told by our parents or siblings of things that never happened.

Hirst: In his case he came to recover those memories later in life.

Oppenheim: Right, but I'm just saying that a number of things we've been told by those in our family are their memories, which are not our memories, and are not accurate memories because they're their distortions.

Hirst: So I'm not sure it's a lie.

A: There's a continuum that we're talking about—it's now called "truthiness."

A: It's actually a different tack. As someone who studies memory in literature and has studied Proustian memory a lot, I think there is a notion that might be helpful here, which we touched upon but didn't go into deeply enough. I think the notion is important because it helps us distinguish between personal memory and collective memory and it also brings us back to the whole question of art and memory and the aesthetic dimensions of memory. Oliver Sacks, who thinks in terms of Proustian memory when he works with some of his amnesiac patients, says somewhere that, for him, remembering is scenic and melodic. What we need to understand is that for the person remembering, for the person involved in remembering and the rememberer, there are qualitative dimensions to the act of remembering. There are modes of emphasis. There are ways in which the memory picture—which travels from the body into the place of consciousness—is inflected with points of vividness, with points of emphasis, with a richness in the representation that is part of the validation of the memory for the subjective rememberer. For example, in *Screen Memories* it's very clear that Freud recognizes in the intensity of certain images that his alter ego presents, signs that there might be more investment in that element in the picture that might bring us closer to a truth, just closer to a truth. But the advantage of thinking of memory in qualitative terms is to get away from the binaries of distortion or of lies, and to recognize that to any creation that is a memory—and that's very Proustian, in a way—you recognize the elements of an aesthetic gesture that invests in that picture.

Nersessian: Thank you.

A: Okay, this is an improvisation. I love complexity and I feel like I'm in the lap of life in this discussion. There's an image in my mind of people of different heights standing in water and having a discussion of who's dry. That's part of the complexity of what's happening with this.

Now, the next point, I want to set out something about where I'm at and why I love this discussion. I think it's a crossroads of postmodernism, ways of liberation, such as Buddhism, for autobiography and those issues. "Always already" is the phrase. By the time we're reflective, if you want to talk about whether it's memory or narrative, we're always already embedded in some ways, and there's no way out of that. We're embedded in language, we're embedded in personal history, we're embedded in body, as we've been referring to it. Maybe we're not aware of the significant range of that, even. If we look at films from different cultures, the ways people move their bodies can be culturally influenced.

So we're always already embedded by the time we become reflective, which I think is the postmodern statement. We're always in narrative. Part of, again, being embedded in water and talking about who's dry is that there are politics in this—which came out of the postmodern discussion—that people are going to speak of this already politically influenced in terms of their investment, in terms of meaning, in terms of the interaction. And emotionally, in terms of fear, insecurity, or confidence, because self is challenged when we see life as an already influenced narrative. Some of us may be more or less ready to look at our narrative and accept its limitations over and against the absolute. We know we're in a culture of absolutes when we have people taking the kinds of positions that we're confronted with today.

I want to add one more thing. The other aspect which is absent but I think is very present is, in the ways of liberation, in the uses of meditation, a totally different cultural approach to these experiences, and is a non-narrative approach finally, I believe. That is, people are coming to a sense of peace, or a different sense of resolution through that. Which, in terms of some of what you say as a psychoanalyst, raises questions of are there prejudices in your approach to what you think is making someone better, that are real issues in terms of what's going on. I don't know if this is going to provoke anything from the people here, but I think these are modern, contemporary issues regarding self and identity that can be very disturbing and frightening, or very liberating, and face us with options as to where we go or don't go with this.

Oppenheim: Thank you. Ed, do you want to respond?

Nersessian: I'll pass.

Oppenheim: Does anyone want to respond to any of that?

A: To get back to a comment that somebody made in the very beginning, to Proust: is there any such thing as memory or are we always searching for lost times, and therefore, what is true memory? Is there any such thing as true memory? I noted to myself that one word that has not been used is emotional memory. Is emotional memory true memory? Is it less-true memory? Also, to get back to Greenacre's comment, "islands of recollection from childhood." A child's early memories are continually re-formed through life because the child is not capable of making sense of the memory fragment. So it has to get distorted. Then it gets built on as cognition develops, as family stories feed into it, and also, for many people, history. As history impacts upon that memory, it takes on a new and more powerful and very different form.

Oppenheim: Thank you.

A: Hi, I'm recently reading a book called *Follies of the Wise* by Frederick Crews, in which he places the blame for the creation of false memories in psychoanalysis on Freud's theory of repression. I wanted to know to what extent does the panel think that Freud's theory of repression is responsible for the creation of false memories in psychoanalysis?

Oppenheim: The connection between repression and false memory.

Nersessian: I'm not so sure what it is you mean by false memories. If by false memories you mean the kind of thing that happened back fifteen years ago, where suddenly everybody had incest and their parents abused them and their fathers or the mothers did this or that.

A: Yes. That's what he's referring to in the book, yes.

Nersessian: That came up because somebody before Crews was criticizing Freud for saying that many of those memories were fantasy. So Freud was criticized for saying they were fantasy. And now he's being criticized for saying that he is responsible for these ones that are supposed to have been accurate memories and now later have become false memories. You know, Freud—you can criticize him any way you like. There's always plenty there.

A: This is a question about different kinds of collective memory that I thought of actually when you raised the question of families that tell stories and plant memories so that there's the collective memory of a little group like a family. Of course those of you who write on artists and writers and intellectuals have another kind of memory of their forbearers, right? Certainly the surrealists would create genealogies of people who lived for several hundred years beforehand. These are another kind of collective memory and I thought everybody would have something to say about how the memories of others become already distorted over time and generations and become readjusted yet again. I thought you might each have something to say about that.

Clement: Yes, that's true. Nietzsche has written two versions of his genealogy. We have found, perhaps twenty or thirty years ago, that the second version says exactly the opposite of the first one that was published. This is very interesting. It's a philosopher, and the book is a book of philosophy.

A: Did I misunderstand, or did one of the panelists say you first have to have the memory and then you distort it? As a psychologist, I don't think that's true. I think your recall itself is a process of distorting.

Oppenheim: I think that's actually what we've been playing with, here.

A: What I brought with me here is something that no one in this room has ever seen before, and it's a memory. Obviously, not one of us has ever seen a memory. Memories are personal experiences. All we ever see is a token expression of a memory. All we can ever measure is a person's expression of a memory. But we can never see a memory. I think much of what we're talking about really should not be referred to as memory but as memory tokens, particular expressions of memory. I don't think we can make generalizations about memory because it's irreducibly personal and all we get are sentences and propositions that come out of memory.

Hirst: Let me ask you this. You can never see it, you can never point at it, you can never feel it, you can never in any way, shape, or form verify its existence, so why assume it exists? Maybe it is the token. What you're saying is tokens of memories are the memories and there is no memory there except those tokens, if you like.

A: I have no problem with that. I'm only saying that we are talking about memory, actually, as if it's reified, and I think it only exists in these—

A: You can't see germs, but they're there.

A: Yes, but germs aren't irreducibly un-seeable. You can find better and better instruments. Memories are irreducibly un-seeable.

A: First of all, I have to make a comment about that. For someone who has some training in neuroscience, I'm not sure that's technically true, from a neuroscientist's point of view. But that's not what I want to ask about. Actually, my question is primarily to Dr. Hirsch, and that is: what categories do we put emotional memory in and do you recognize emotional memory? We've got a brain that is a physical thing that the neuroscientists study and they can see activity happening in it. What can you tell us about what we know about the physics of emotional memory? By physics I mean the organic—

Hirst: Of course there are emotional memories. We all have memories of emotion. Actually, someone asked previously how reliable they are. I suspect they're less reliable than memories for facts. For instance, I'm pretty sure that the square root of 2 is 1.414, approximately. I'm pretty sure of that. But I'm less sure what I was thinking about when I was seventeen and dating somebody. I'm not so sure my memory of that is very reliable.

Oppenheim: I'm not sure she means by emotional memory, memory of emotion.

A: No. I mean more about the sense of yourself and how you feel about yourself when things happen in the world and the expectations you have of yourself.

Hirst: I would break that down into much finer categories. What I think about myself takes a verbal form, it takes an emotional form, it takes body form. There are endless numbers of forms. I would want to break that down to smaller categories.

A: That's exactly what I'm asking. From your point of view, what are those categories? I mean, basically to educate us—

Oppenheim: I think there's cognitive, there's sensory, there's—

Hirst: Yes, but from my viewpoint, I'd have to show that you could map them onto different brain structures and the like, and I'm not sure the science is quite there yet. Clearly, when I talk about emotional memory, it seems to be mediated through the amygdala and that's unique to emotion memory. Whether that's true of all sorts of affect—. Sensory memories probably break up into different kinds of sensory systems.

A: I realize it's a big question, but I thought it was at least worth us acknowledging in this discussion. Thanks.

A: There was a question asked earlier that didn't really get answered in my mind. If I can recall slightly, it was something like: how can memory help us be more creative as artists? I was very surprised that that didn't get much of an answer because that's very much what I'm in the process of studying and writing about right now. And it seems to me that to the extent that memories are, as one of the gentlemen earlier mentioned, a reflection of how we process recollections of whatever type. Some of the things that I've been reading and studying about in terms of neuropsychology is that we take in information and knowledge and we maintain it. Our sense of reality, if you will, or our sense of that which exists: the models we understand of the world, the physical attributes that elements of our world have that we know—we associate those memories with things that we understand and we can process and make sense of.

To the extent that our memories are reflections of our sense of these models in our world, then memories, from my perspective, are simply an asset we can utilize to call upon and make associations with other things one degree of separation away. That is just the basic level of creativity—you take something that you understand, you take something that you've seen, and you associate it analogously with something else that is a foundation of your reasoning. Once that memory has a certain level of perception, then you can call upon any one of those memories and perhaps tweak it a little bit. And there you have something new. There's creation. There's creativity.

Hirst: I'll make one response. When you responded to that question, what you said—if I remember correctly—is you're right, and I suspect that in any creative process—. Most of the time, even when I'm telling someone a story about the past, I'm not aware that I'm really remembering. It's not like you sit there and you stop and say, "Now I'm going to remember this," and then you remember. You just talk and memories come out. You just write and memories come out. I know nothing about the creative process, but I suspect it's the same way. Maybe some people do voluntarily, intentionally, call upon their memories, but I suspect that most of the time, you don't even know you're relying upon your memories. Yet they shape in a profound way everything that you do. I suspect that when you just write, you may not be aware that you are actively working to retrieve the past. But there it is. When you go back and look at it, or some critic looks at it, you say, "There it is." I suspect a lot of the creative process is like that.

A: For each of us, our memory is our sense of reality. Every new memory increases our perception of reality.

Nersessian: Well, Francis writes a poem a day, so he could tell us what role his memories play in that creative act.

Levy: What?

Nersessian: You write one poem every day. So what—

Oppenheim: What role does memory have in that process for you?

A: Use the microphone, please.

Levy: Can I think about that?

Oppenheim: Yes, you can. One last question.

A: This conversation reminds me of Will Roger's statement that things aren't what they used to be and never were. Just on the very nature of memory, I think that in science, we're stuck very much with a similar problem when we talk about energy. We can talk about all the manifestations of energy, but nobody can actually say what energy is—only its expressions. Memory, I think, is filtered by our perceptions and our needs and then limited by our capacity to express our internal experience.

Oppenheim: Well, on that very articulate comment, thank you.