

Reflections | Iterations

Joanne Morra

On the 22nd August 1938, a year before Sigmund Freud's death, in exile from the Nazis, away from the apartments in Berggasse 19, Vienna, a building in which he lived and worked for almost 50 years, Freud turned his thoughts to space and the psyche. In the safety of a temporary London abode, and a mere month away from moving into the Freud family's new permanent home at 20 Maresfield Gardens, London, a space that would form a meticulous, near duplicate of his consulting room and study in Vienna, Freud made a short, cryptic observation. Freud noted that 'space may be the projection of the extension of the psychical apparatus. No other derivation is probable. [...] Psyche is extended; knows nothing about it'.¹ For Freud, the human subject's psychical apparatus – the conscious and unconscious – is projected onto space. One could say that space is thus formed out of our memories and desires, dreams and traumas, the ghosts of our past, the 'ordinary unhappiness' of everyday life, as well as our aspirations for the future. Perhaps it was necessary for Freud to be out of place in order to recognize the way in which we are so bound by place – the spaces we inhabit. For Freud, what had become noteworthy was the fact that space is constituted by our psychic life; and in turn, space constitutes us.

Leaving but a fragment of a thought, Freud's pithy statement makes us wonder: How might this projection of the psychical apparatus become manifest? Be reflected? Be iterated? Be visualized? What is the structure of such a space – figuratively, topographically, and architecturally? Does it have a geometry? How does it feel to be embodied within this space of our psychic life? Can we enter someone else's space? What might we hear? What is the sound of memory?

Freud's House: The Double || Freud's House: The Double Mirror

Recently the artists Chara Lewis, Kristin Mojsiewicz, and Anneké Pettican working collectively as Brass Art have embarked upon a project called *Shadow Worlds | Writers Rooms*.² This tripartite work follows the artists as they enter into the worlds housed at the Brontë Parsonage and Wycoller Hall, the Freud Museum London at 20 Maresfield Gardens and, hopefully in the future, Virginia Woolf's Monk's House. By visiting and reflecting upon these individual spaces of intellectual and creative practice as well as domestic life, Brass Art engages with each of the sites in a series of performative, digital, analogue and aural practices. By employing a Kinect scanner, and working in collaboration with programmer Spencer Roberts, Brass Art's performances, movements and, intriguingly, their unseen shadows are captured on video. The bodies of the artists, the architectural setting and the objects within it become shimmering pixels that animate and haunt the resultant video. The artists consider the time spent in these spaces as 'sojourns' through which:

A domestic space [is] brought to life by its new, temporary occupants. A scanner-eye sees through walls and doors; the certainty of interior and exterior dissolves, leaving nothing less than the dissolution of the architecture of the house. A sound echoes upstairs and through closed doors [...]³

¹ Sigmund Freud, 'Shorter Writings' (1938/1941), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XXIII, trans. James Strachey, et. al., (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 300.

The Freud family arrived in London in June 1938, and moved into rented accommodation at 39 Elsworthy Road, but it was only free until the end of September. At that point, the family moved into their permanent residence at 20 Maresfield Gardens.

² For more information on *Shadow Worlds | Writers' Rooms*, please see the artist's website at: brassart.org.uk.

³ Brass Art (Chara Lewis, Kristin Mojsiewicz & Anneké Pettican), 'Submerged and disrupted identities | Beyond the walls', unpublished lecture presented at the CHArt conference, Kings College, October 2014.

What's more, the scanner also picks up the 'shadows' or occlusions formed by the lack of data cast by these same bodies, objects and settings. Unseen by the human eye during the filming process, these occlusions become black shadows that also appear in the video. The technical aspects of the scanner, its ability to document the seen and unseen, turns into a series of metaphors for understanding presence and absence, thoughts and memories, the conscious and unconscious, figures and their ghosts. In this way, the artists propose that they are able to

engage with the sense of [a] possible reanimation of objects or sites; a revisitation of a power that may seem ostensibly 'dead'. The reanimation of site or object evokes a sense of the mnemonic and brings to the fore aspects of: memory, knowledge, translation and inscription.⁴

What these practices invoke, is the way in which *Shadow Worlds / Writers' Rooms* makes manifest the rich complexity of Freud's conception of space as the projection of the psychic apparatus. In order to unpack this claim, I would like to spend some time with two works in particular; those that were a product of Brass Art's sojourn inside 20 Maresfield Gardens. *Freud's House: The Double* is Brass Art's initial iteration of their stay. A single-channel film that recorded visually and aurally (in collaboration with musician Monty Adkins) the artists' time in this space, this work was first exhibited inside the Freud Museum itself.⁵ The second iteration resulted in *Freud's House: The Double Mirror* an immersive installation that bifurcated the previous work, turning it into a mirror image. It was first shown at The International 3 in Salford.⁶ The two iterations of *Freud's House* reflect the spaces in which they were made and exhibited, as well as being reflections and iterations of one another.

The Shape of Memory || The Sounds of Memory

When I first viewed *Freud's House: The Double*, I was struck by the ways in which memory is activated by the artwork – its images and its sounds. Watching the landscape of the film unfold before me, and enveloped by the haunting soundscape, subjective memories based on the historical figures that once inhabited 20 Maresfield Gardens – Sigmund and Anna Freud's colleagues and patients, the Freud family and their friends – came to life. A suited figure with hat climbs up and then down a set of stairs, he lies down on the floor in a child pose, later, he begins a graceful dance with a female figure wearing a skirt. In a beautiful *pas de deux*, voices sing as the figures swing. I project onto the image the figures of Sigmund and Martha Freud. Dancing in Vienna when they were first engaged. But, then remember that I am here: in London, in the space that is reflected in the film. Have I been conjuring up Freud's memories? My desire for what may have been for the couple seems to have been captured, evoked and provoked by the film. A form of haunting is functioning here in a series of intriguing ways. The memories I experience are somewhat uncanny: familiar to me, and yet deeply unfamiliar: reminiscent of something that is mine, but also something other.⁷ Some time later, the music turns darker, sullen, there is

⁴ Ibid., Brass Art, 'Submerged and disrupted identities'.

⁵ On the relationship between contemporary art and the Freud Museums in London and Vienna, see, Joanne Morra, *Inside the Freud Museums: History, Memory and Site-responsive Art* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016).

⁶ *Freud's House: The Double* was a part of the group show *The Unconscious Revisited* at the Freud Museum from 24 June 2015 to 4 October 2015. The exhibition *Brass Art: Shadow Worlds | Writers' Rooms – Freud's House* was installed at The International 3 from 18 September to 30 October 2015.

⁷ For a in depth analysis of *Shadow Worlds | Writers' Rooms* in relation to the uncanny, see op.cit., Brass Art, 'Submerged and disrupted identities'; and Chara Lewis, Kristin Mojsiewicz & Anneké Pettican, 'Brass Art: A house within a house within a house within a house', *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice*, 7/3 (2014), pp. 375-85.

crackling, and ominous words are spoken: the suit throws the skirt over the landing. It was not a figure at all, but an object representing femininity. I begin to wonder about the suited figure: is it a man after all?

Gender is key to this work. *Freud's House: The Double* highlights the transitional, feminine spaces of the home – the staircase, the landings that were known to be mainly occupied by the female inhabitants in Maresfield Gardens, it was here that the women congregated to talk, knit, sew and spend time together. Even though these are domestic spaces, it is difficult not to remember the work undertaken by Anna Freud, the child analyst who developed many of her father's theories, as well as the numerous female patients that worked with Sigmund Freud at Berggasse and upon whom psychoanalysis was built.

The narratives I imagine in experiencing this artwork, the memories drawn up, the histories I bring to it are speculative. Speculative: on the part of myself reading the images, on the part of the artists who perform the memories that they project onto the space, in the form of the memories created and preserved by the museum's curation of the space. It is what we imagine, what we desire to be the spaces of 20 Maresfield Gardens that *Freud's House: The Double* evokes – visually and aurally – in us.

The Geometry of Memory || Inter-subjective | Intra-subjective

In a blacked out gallery space, with split screens, we are surrounded and enfolded by *Freud's House: The Double Mirror*. On one side we see *Freud's House: The Double*, on the other, its reflection. With the soundscape from *The Double* haunting this now dual landscape, ghosts, memories and desires of the past are once more evoked in this alternative expanded and elliptical spatial arrangement. However, these are now altered. Stairwells collide and merge and then are released from one another; bodies touch briefly and then pull apart; landings open up, twirl and dance away from one another. Rotating at various degrees and angles, circling and un-circling, flipping in and out of concave and convex formations, insides and outsides are dissolved as we encounter a dizzying range of shapes and movements. The narrative, albeit the non-linear one found in *The Double*, is fractured by the complexity of the image, while at the same time held together by the filaments of the soundscape. What we once understood to be a stairwell, a room, a desk, an object, a figure dancing and moving in space, are opened up and transformed into geometric shapes and patterns. What we find ourselves within is a geometric spatialization of the psychic apparatus. Rather than seeing Freud within these environs, we find the figure of Jacques Lacan, the psychoanalyst whose reflections and re-iterations of Freud's work brought to us, amongst other things, a new topography of the formation and function of the human subject.

One of the topological figures that Lacan employed was the Möbius strip. The Möbius strip is a rectangular strip that is twisted and joined at the ends. One of the important features of the Möbius strip is that inside and outside are both separate and conjoined. Lacan used this figure to represent a set of complex relationships in which the players are always inside and outside of one another, distinct and yet connected. On the one hand, Lacan found the Möbius strip helpful in understanding the inter-subjective relationship between the subject and the 'other' – whether this is a parental figure or one's analyst. On the other hand, the Möbius strip enabled him to think through the formation and function of the conscious and the unconscious, the 'Other' within

the subject. In each of these relations, Lacan was exploring the way in which duality is always based on similarity and difference.⁸

Turning back to *Freud's House: The Double Mirror*, the figure of the Lacanian Möbius strip becomes animated. As we enter the installation and become embodied by its architectural and figural images and its soundscape, we are at once wrapped within it and yet detached from it, as we remain bound by the company of our own thoughts and memories, and within our own bodies. The torsions of the figures and architectural image enfolding and opening out move in ways that are similar to the Möbius strip. The contortions reflect an inside and outside separately and simultaneously. In being encased by the mirror image around us, it is as though we are experiencing a geometric spatialization of the two Freud Museums and their psychic apparatuses. The architecture itself, as a form of landscape, is undergoing analysis. Its repressed histories and memories, those projected onto it by its various inhabitants, have been brought to the fore. What we see and experience in the doubling of Maresfield Gardens is the way in which Berggasse forever haunts it. London and Vienna are inextricably linked and intertwined. Similar and yet different: connected and yet separate: present and absent: these relational terms are activated by *Freud's House: The Double Mirror* in ways that remind us of the Lacanian subject figured through the Möbius strip.

Absence || Presence

When we think of Freud's home, we always think about a pair: the apartments in Berggasse 19 Vienna, and the house at 20 Maresfield Gardens London. We also always think about Freud's consulting room and study. The images we have of Freud's psychoanalytic spaces are either those from Vienna – those that photographer Edmund Engelman took in 1938 before the Freud family fled to London, or the duplication and reflection that we sense in the London space, which is no coincidence. London is meant to echo what Vienna once was. And yet, there is a paradox at the centre of both spaces: the objects with which psychoanalysis is symbolically aligned – Freud's couch, his desk and anthropomorphic chair, his antiquities – are present in London. These same objects are absent from Vienna, from the space in which they were 'used', imbued with their phenomenological presence.⁹ In both of Brass Art's iterations of *Freud's House*, these objects are not a part of the videos: they are absent, and as such they haunt the works. We await their next reflection,

Joanne Morra is Reader in Art History and Theory at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London. Her book *Inside the Freud Museums: History, Memory and Site-Responsive Art* is forthcoming with I.B. Tauris.

Commissioned by The International 3 on the occasion of Shadow Worlds | Writers' Rooms : Freud's House a solo exhibition by Brass Art at The International 3 from 17th September – 30th October 2015

⁸ See, Jacques Lacan, 'Of Structure as an Inmixing of Otherness Prerequisite to any Subject Whatever', in *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy*, eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), downloaded on 4 September 2015 at <http://www.lacan.com/hotel.htm>; Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London and New York: W.W. Norton, 1966/1977); Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London and New York: W.W. Norton, 1973/1981).

⁹ I am employing the term 'use' as developed by D.W. Winnicott in 'The Use of an Object and Relating Through Identifications', *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1971), pp. 115-37. On the Sigmund Freud Museum Vienna, see, Joanne Morra, 'Seemingly Empty: Freud at Berggasse 19, A Conceptual Museum in Vienna', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 12/1 (April 2013), pp. 89-127.