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# Shadow Worlds | Writer's Rooms: Freud's House

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**Abstract.** This submission comprises an audio-visual installation created by Brass Art with composer Monty Adkins and programmer Spencer Roberts. The installation comprises a looping 4-minute film and uses footage captured via three Kinect scanners of staged 'sojourns' by Brass Art at 20 Maresfield Gardens, the house Sigmund Freud occupied during the last year of his life in London.

**Keywords:** Brass Art, installation, Kinect, Freud, audio-visual.

## 1 Introduction

Brass Art are a creative collective comprising Chara Lewis, Kristin Mojsiewicz, and Anneké Pettican. Within their collaborative art practice analogue and digital technologies are used as a means to disrupt conventional narratives, and to capture performances in real and imagined situations. This has included match-moving real and illusory footage of a hot air balloon flight navigated by the artists; trespassing moorlands and military listening posts with neon signage operated from a travelling suitcase; and merging 4D facial scan data of three artists to create a single inflatable sculpture of gigantic proportions.

This playful exploration and irreverent application of new and analogue technologies allows them to edit and insert themselves into select environments, often penetrating perceived boundaries in the process. At the forefront of Brass Art's recent practice is the impulse to occupy well-known collections of celebrated authors under the project title **Shadow Worlds | Writers' Rooms**. They have used Microsoft's Kinect on-range scanner, in collaboration with programmer Spencer Roberts, to capture, record and process their actions at The Brontë Parsonage, Wycoller Hall and The Freud Museum, London.

## 2 Between the subverting and comforting powers of the house

The trope of the 'haunted house' was explored relentlessly in the Gothic literature of the 19th Century through the terrors of the sublime. While it was accepted (by Burke et al) (Vidler 1996) that not everything that induced terror was rooted in the sublime, the uncanny was seen as an especially subversive concept because it seemed, to paraphrase Vidler, "at times indistinguishable from the sublime." (Vidler 1996) As an aesthetic category, the attributes of 'nonspecificity' have made the uncanny a rich vein for exploration, as it encompasses a spectrum of meanings, including polar opposites. It is this affiliation which Freud saw as disturbing and compelling - he extended Ernst Jentsch's definition of the uncanny (Jentsch 1906) as an 'unknowing' brought about by (intellectual) disorientation, to form his theory on the Return of the Repressed – the bringing to light of that which should have remained hidden.

The concept of the uncanny (what is canny - possessing knowledge / uncanny - beyond knowledge) is extended by the German etymology of *unheimlich* (*heimlich* - at or of home / unhomey - not at home in). Vidler claims that the multiple significations of the *unheimlich* were most interesting for Freud, returning,

as it did, to the scene of the domestic; the home and dynamics of the family. Furthermore, as Freud approached the *unheimlich* through the *heimlich* he, 'exposed the disturbing affiliation between the two'; that their interchangeability was perhaps the most uncanny aspect of all. Freud cited, from Daniel Sanders' German Dictionary of 1860, a 19th Century illustration of this interchangeability by social critic and dramatist, Karl Ferdinand Gutzkow,

The Zeck's are "Heimlich" ... "Heimlich? ... What do you understand by heimlich?" ... "Well ... they are like a buried spring or a dried up pond. One cannot walk over it without always having the feeling that the water might come up there again." "Oh we call it unheimlich, you call it Heimlich." (Gutzkow 1910)

It is from this position then that Brass Art approach the uncanny within their collaborative art practice and engage with the sense of possible reanimation of objects or sites; a revisitation of a power that may seem ostensibly 'dead'. This reanimation of site or object evokes a sense of the mnemonic and brings to the fore aspects of memory, knowledge, translation and inscription. Just as mnemonics use a virtual retracing of rooms, sequences and objects to aid recall and sequential narrative, so film theorist Giuliana Bruno reminds us of the importance of motion linking memory, film and the museum:

Places are the site of a mnemonic palimpsest. With respect to this rendering of location, the architecture of memory reveals ties to the filmic experience of place and to the imaginative itinerary set up in a museum. (Bruno 2007)

Gaston Bachelard exhaustively described the housing of memory in configurations of garrets, basements and nurseries to be returned to and mined throughout adulthood. Most interestingly perhaps he suggested that:

A psychoanalyst should, therefore, turn his attention to this simple localization of our memories. I should like to give the name of topoanalysis to this auxiliary of psychoanalysis. Topoanalysis, then would be the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives. (Bachelard 1994)

The writers whose homes the artists visited - whether part of the literary or psychoanalytic canon - have been rigorously studied and mined. Cornelia Parker, an artist who often works with culturally loaded objects from such significant sources, describes her approach,

... I'm always trying to find the opposite, the banal, the everyday, to find uncharted territory in the most visited spots. Between the monumental and the mundane is a different place that I am trying to get to in the work, which when I find it, it becomes a kind of revelation. (Pace et al 2001)

Brass Art share her desire to find and bring to light 'that which is overlooked': in traversing a room they harness the lasers' touch to measure their own bodies against its proportions; in gaining privileged access to items of furniture and artefacts, they interrogate them, and their status, from a new perspective. Parker's work, using forensic-like methods or approaches, rescues the subject from the myth, puncturing received perceptions\*. Any collection has restrictions put upon it for the conservation of the artefacts - these are obvious and explicit - and Brass Art push these as far as possible, performing sometimes in a uncontained way within circumscribed, hallowed spaces. Perhaps less clear are the unspoken restrictions around the mythography of the subjects: who owns or directs those, and what that might mean for the emergence of potential counter narratives created by the artists.

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\* For example: Cornelia Parkers' *Brontean Abstracts* series (2006), and *Marks made by Freud, Subconsciously* (2000) part of her ongoing *Abstracts* series - forensic forays into the minutiae of iconic thinkers.

## 2.1 The Double

The **Shadow Worlds | Writers' Rooms** project enabled the artists to enter the domestic spaces the authors occupied. As an investigation of simple, domestic spaces it creates the possibility of thinking about the everyday, the ordinary and the familiar as the most vivid potential sites for uncanny revelation and transformation. Crucially the uncanny invites a personal interest in language that attempts defamiliarization or 'making strange'. In re-animating the 'familiar' domestic spaces of these authors (everyone recognises what a bedroom is, or what a staircase is for) such artistic sojourns invite a re-evaluation of these spaces, their particularities and peculiarities. Brass Art's performances with capture technologies, create an unfixed and constantly evolving form: a direct copy of the original space - a double - but with shifting and unexpected points of view in immeasurable time periods, and the artists' doubles the surprising and submerged occupants.

In **Freud's House: The Double** - the second chapter of Brass Art's project **Shadow Worlds | Writers' Rooms** - the double is the signifier of uncanny experience, triggering the sense of both the familiar and unfamiliar. Attempting to mimic each other's movements and gestures in time and in space the artists created a series of mirror-image performances that 'refuse' to replicate their doubles; in and out of step in the twinned performances, the atemporal pursuing the temporal. The looping projection and soundscape reference the inner compulsion to repeat - a condition where present, past and future merge. In her writing on Surrealism, Rosalind Krauss posits:

It is doubling that produced the formal rhythm of spacing – the two-step that banishes the unitary condition of the moment, that creates within the moment an experience of fission, for it is doubling that elicits the notion that to an original has been added a copy. (Krauss 1985)

Such temporal interplay and its creative potential lie at the heart of exploration in **Writers' Rooms** and the uncanny. Freud, in his chapter 'The Creative Writer and Daydreaming', states that,

... a fantasy hovers ... between three periods involved in our ideation ... this is the daydream or the fantasy, which has its origins in present experience and the recollection of the past: so that past, present and future are strung together on the thread of one desire that unites all three. (Freud 1919)

In entering Freud's study (a highly personal world of collected artefacts and memories) there is a deep sense of the past, present and futures colliding. On a practical level, it is experienced at every turn.

## 2.2 Beyond the Walls

There is an interesting dimension to playing 'beyond the walls' of the museum or heritage site; in this moment, the space is alive to being re-worked and re-animated. Duration articulates space; and practiced space becomes place. A sojourn allows for temporary occupation, and as the props are brought into the scene, so a gesture, movement or dance evolves. The domestic scale of each space is perfect for the Kinect (it was designed to be used in this context) and emphasises how the artists capture the scene as it unfolds focussing on which viewpoint or perspective it is seen from and revealed. Similarly, the identities the artists adopt in response to the site are specific, recurring and other. Being both present and also absent, through the use of disguise, is vital to how they can translate and give 'form' to the space. As woman, as man, as shadow, as other, these potent forms of embodiment are where submerged and disrupted identities are formed and framed. In creating the work, it is important that the artists use themselves, and are physically present in the space they have captured.



**Fig. 1.** Brass Art, Monty Adkins & curator in Freud's library and study, Freud Museum London

At the Freud Museum Brass Art extend the range of the captured image by experimenting with 'threshold' performances: in this they conjoin data captured by several Kinect devices located at different points within a scene. This enables them to move freely between rooms and spaces in the editing process - thus fully animating the house as the lasers capture points of entry or exit. A simultaneous collaboration with Monty Adkins coaxed sound recordings from the largely silent spaces.

In the moving image work **Freud's House: The Double** shadows suggest there has been occlusion by a solid form, the reality of a presence at the original site is stated (or confirmed), yet the experience is of a space fractured, permeable and transgressed. Both flesh and architecture are equally de-materialised and re-presented as a homogenous surface of shimmering pixels. The medium of photography, a literal 'writing in light', retains 'an internal relationship' between object and shadow. Through the same corporeal exclusion of light, (albeit laser in this instance) the affect is equivalent. The audience faces indecision between the real and the virtual - confronted by the projected shadows and those created by their own agency - the status of the shadow is able to slip between index and icon

Such moments of transformation, and its dream-like register, underpin the collaborative practice of Brass Art and lends itself particularly well to the capture process. In creating a set of identities particular to each place, and capturing them through the scanning process, the artists are able to submerge them - through data processing - into the environment, so that they become inscribed within it. In Maresfield Gardens their performed identities alluded to the enigmatic collections and case studies that influenced Freud's world and writings.

The unnatural and inexplicable bringing to light of something (which surely ought to remain hidden) has particular resonance in Brass Art's use of the Kinect, in that it allows walls to appear permanently

permeable, 'revealing' the reverse of the scene as the scanner rotates. The inexplicable light is comparable to the scanner-eye of the Kinect laser rolling over and skimming surfaces until it renders the scene (unseen by the artists at that point) in shimmering pixels. This supposed 'revelation' of the literal fabric of the building can be seen as an ungrounding – the passage from home to unhomey. This is also revealed in Thomas De Quincey's development of the spatial uncanny; his hypnagogic<sup>†</sup> visions of Piranesi (De Quincey 1821)<sup>‡</sup> entombed within structures of his own making in an imaginary void, doomed to forever repeat the same futile movements through spaces, staircase, corridors. Vidler sees him, "... caught in a vertigo *en abîme* of his own making, forever climbing the unfinished stairs in the labyrinth of carceral spaces." (Vidler 1992)

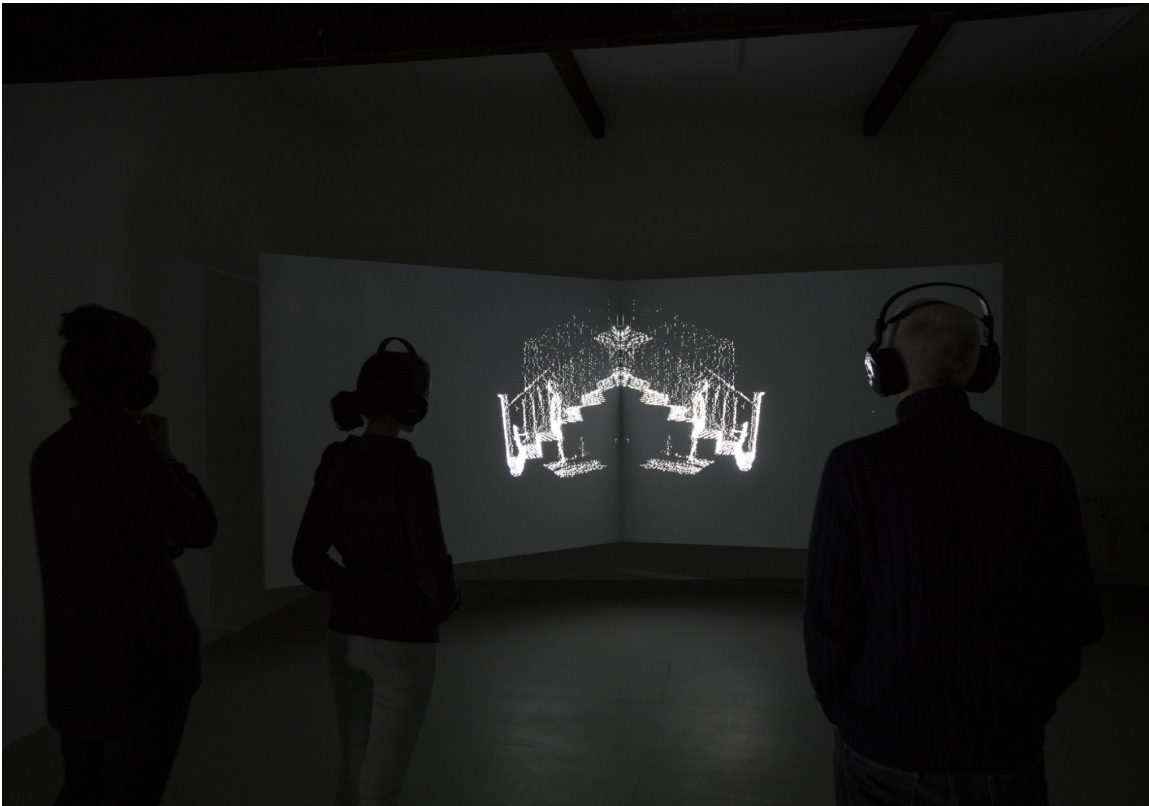


Fig. 2. Audience experiencing installation *Freud's House: The Double Mirror* (2015) International3 Gallery

### 3. Silence and shadows

In **Freud's House: The Double** the sound is composed of resonant noises recorded on site and in the studio, and brought together into a sonic composition. Brass Art remained open to the unconscious influences that determined their actions, behaviour and movements whilst Adkins recorded fleeting and involuntary aspects of these performances, and coaxed sounds out of long-dormant objects. The installation of this work is immersive in scale but intimate in the use of personalized sound. Given privileged access in Freud's house at Maresfield Gardens, Adkins recorded Freud's chair, unlocking the draws of Freud's desk, as well as the elaborate curtain mechanism and door of the study. In addition, sounds of the artists moving around

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<sup>†</sup> hypnagogic: the transitional stage from consciousness into sleep.

<sup>‡</sup> In *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), De Quincey based this on a conflation of his own dreamscapes with Giambattista Piranesi's *Carceri - Imaginary Prisons* (1740-), as they were described to De Quincey, probably by the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

the house, particularly the staircase was also captured. These materials were recorded using a dummy head to capture binaural recordings. These convey a sense of spatial movement within the sounds when replayed over headphones during the installation for the audience. The only non-binaural recording was that of Freud's chair which was captured using a contact microphone. This provided a sense of uncanny intimacy to the sound as the listener is at first not aware of what the sound actually is due to the proximity of the recording. These sounds were processed in Reaktor and Max often using the spectral content of the sounds to create resonant filters that were then used to process other materials from within the pool collected at the Museum. Having processed these sound materials to create a bank of sonic resources, Adkins then worked with Brass Art in the studio to capture something of the intimacy of the domestic space. With a nod to unconscious connections, the refrain from *Take this Waltz* by Leonard Cohen (after the poetry of Lorca) repeats as a short loop half-way through the video.

Much thought was given to the nature of the sound world given Freud's dislike of music. An overtly musical treatment of the sounds could have acted as a Jungian sonic mirror presenting the viewer of the installation with what was 'lacking' in the Freud house. In the final version of the installation a more understated sound world was chosen. This enhances sonic elements heard within the house and captured during Brass Art's performances. The treatment of the sound therefore mirrors Brass Art's performative interventions in the house itself. Stuart Feder writes that:

Freud himself never wrote specifically about music and his writings contain few references even of a metaphorical nature. Indeed, he appears to have been least sensitive to music than any of the arts, an anomaly in late nineteenth century Vienna.

Freud himself wrote that:

I am no connoisseur in art, but simply a layman...Nevertheless, works of art do exercise a powerful effect on me, especially those of literature and sculpture, less often of painting ... I spend a long time before them trying to apprehend them in my own way, i.e. to explain to myself what their effect is due to. Wherever I cannot do this, as for instance with music, I am almost incapable of obtaining any pleasure. Some rationalistic, or perhaps analytic, turn of mind in me rebels against being moved by a thing without knowing why I am thus affected and what it is that affects me. (Freud 1914)

One possible reason is that Freud, who is known to have suffered from various neurotic symptoms including obsessions, compulsivity, death anxiety, migraines and psychogenic fainting spells, may have also manifested melophobia - fear of music. It has even been suggested that Freud suffered from an extremely rare form of seizure disorder known as musicogenic epilepsy. In such cases, music, either while played or heard, triggers an underlying neurological dysfunction, resulting in mild to severe seizures, and hence, an understandably powerful fear and avoidance of certain types of music.)

As with other specific phobias ... melophobia involves anxiety reactions to some specific stimulus. In Freud's case, this auditory triggering stimulus seems to have been music of almost any sort. When exposed to music while out on the town in Vienna or Munich, his automatic response was reportedly to immediately place his hands over his ears to block out the sound. What could have caused such a negative reaction? Was Freud's hearing, so finely tuned by decades of psychoanalytic listening, acutely hypersensitive? Or could his problem have been more deeply rooted? It is evident that Freud devalued the feminine in his psychology as in himself, and overvalued the more 'masculine' qualities of thinking, reasoning, logic, analysis, intellectualism and scientific reductionism. Did Freud fear his own 'feminine side'?

Music is all about feeling, emotion, passion, the irrational, the heart, the soul, and is closely associated with the "feminine" mode of being and, in men, what C.G. Jung called the 'anima'. Freud denied this "irrational" side of himself, his more mystical, spiritual leanings, his religiosity, and feared and rejected Jung's

fascination with such esoteric and 'occult' matters, fighting tenaciously to exclude them from his purely rational science of psychoanalysis. But, as Jung rightly pointed out, that which we try to exclude from our conscious personality inevitably becomes part of the 'shadow'. Here the idea of an invisible 'double' comes in through the absence of music in the Freud household.

**Freud's House: The Double** with its Kinect video and binaural sound world, presents another set of doublings and mirrorings – a central seam ruptures the screen, and folds the original back on itself to create a double. To the original has been added a copy; a haunted twin.

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