

## ***Still Life: on returning to the theme of déjà vu in the work of Cristina Iglesias***

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Introducing her 2003 exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, Cristina Iglesias noted that ‘some things you see will remind you of others’.<sup>1</sup> This phrase closely described my own encounter with the works in the gallery – where the memory of one would return in another.<sup>2</sup> I related these experiences to the qualities of a psychic feeling Sigmund Freud called *déjà vu*, and in the penultimate configuration of *Site-Writing*, I positioned the perceptions, illusions, dreams and memories the seven works in the show produced in me, in such a way as to allow observations made in earlier parts of the book to return.<sup>3</sup> Here I return to that essay on Iglesias’ work to see how the psychic theme of *déjà vu* and some of the aesthetic gestures she has deployed in her previous works, return in *Forgotten Streams* (installed in 2017).

### ***Déjà Vu***

For Freud *déjà vu* or ‘the recollection of an unconscious phantasy’ is ‘a category of the uncanny’.<sup>4</sup> The first time he uses the term comes in 1907, in an addition to ‘The Psychopathology of Everyday Life’, an essay originally published in 1901. Here Freud discusses the experience of a 37-year-old patient. She recalls how, on a visit she made when she was 12 and a half to childhood friends in the country whose only brother was very ill, she felt she had been there before. Freud comes to understand that this visit reminded his analysand of the recent serious illness of her own only brother, but that this memory was associated with a repressed wish – that her brother would die, thus allowing her to be an only child. For Freud, it is in order to prevent the return of this unconscious and repressed wish, that her feeling of remembering was ‘transferred’ onto her ‘surroundings’.<sup>5</sup>

### **Returning: *Guided Tour* (1999–2002)**

*Guided Tour* (1999–2000) is a short film, a 10-minute loop that Iglesias produced in collaboration with documentary filmmaker Caterina Borelli. The film moves between the cities of New York and Madrid – streets and corridors, formal gardens and glimpses of wild countryside; and through the work – mazes lined with vegetation, trellis-works embedded with text. Shot with a hand-held camera, just above the ground, architectural details and natural foliage rush past and into one another. The work frames the city and the city frames the work, both providing guides to one another. Usually a specifically choreographed sequence, a guided tour is a spatio-temporal figure

that asks the visitor to pause at various points on a predetermined itinerary in order for specific details in the context to be pointed out – visual features of the urban fabric, sites of future interventions, important moments and stories in the making of a place. As the journey unfolds through space over time, an alternative narrative may evolve for the viewer, a passage between inner and outer, promoting the chains of thought psychoanalysis describes as free association, where external objects prompt internal reflections, and inner memories get projected back onto outer spaces.

### ***Forgotten Streams I***

On a street corner, adjacent to Bank Station, *Forgotten Streams* places an apparently still pool of water right in the flux of urban life. Two others, divided by a bridge, can be discovered a short stretch of a walk away along the Bloomberg Arcade, re-laid, as part of this urban design around the new Bloomberg Headquarters, along the reinstated line of the Roman Watling Street. Amidst the particularly frenetic pace of activities at the heart of the city of London, these pools are places to pause, and gather one's reflections, as well as those of the buildings and activities around.

### ***Déjà vu – in dreams***

In 1909, Freud turns his attention to *déjà vu* in dreams, describing in an addition to 'The Interpretation of Dreams' (1900) how: 'In some dreams of landscapes or other localities emphasis is laid in the dream itself on a convinced feeling of having been there once before.'<sup>6</sup> He asserts that: 'These places are invariably the genitals of the dreamer's mother; there is indeed no other place about which one can assert with such conviction that one has been there once before.'<sup>7</sup> And in 1914, he returns to 'The Interpretation of Dreams' once again, to insert another sentence which identifies the feeling of 'having been there once before' in dreams as a specific kind of *déjà vu*: 'Occurrences of '*déjà vu*' in dreams have a special meaning.'<sup>8</sup>

### **Repeating: *Untitled (Vegetation Room VIII) (2002)* and *Untitled (Vegetation Room X) (2002)***

She exits the dark cinema and climbs the stairs; at the top, she is immediately plunged into a narrow passageway, surrounded on both sides by proliferating patterns of flora and fauna – lilies and octopi – reminding her of a tilted surface, she previously encountered. The claustrophobic atmosphere suggests the experience of a maze or labyrinthine structure. It is easy to imagine that the density of the organic matter continues deep into the room, conjuring up images of the fantastic worlds from which these creatures and foliage derive. At first it appears that the screens are composed of an infinite range of fabulous matter, but a closer look reveals that the pattern of imprints, consist of

repeated elements. The illusion of a never-ending natural proliferation of difference is broken and replaced by a more nightmarish one – the potentially infinite extension of the artificial and unnatural space of repetition.

### ***Forgotten Streams II***

The echoes of faces, of buses, of buildings, are held still by the water and offered up for reflection, shimmering when a breeze blows across the surface, glimmering at dusk when the desk lights glow like jewels. More luxurious even than the gloss of the other glass-walled offices in the vicinity, Norman Foster's baroque turn for Bloomberg, adds an unusually curvaceous opulence, a hint of a natural flourishing, to his more usually lean repertoire, tinting the monochrome of his typically monochrome palette with burnished bronze, flecks of gold and touches of rose.

### ***'Fausse Reconnaissance ('Déjà Raconté') ...'***

In 1914, in his paper '*Fausse Reconnaissance ('Déjà Raconté')* in Psycho-Analytic Treatment' Freud describes *fausse reconnaissance* and *déjà vu* as analogous terms and compares them both to *déjà raconté*, a feature of psychoanalytic treatment where the analysand believes erroneously that s/he has already told the analyst something. Acknowledging for the first time here the contribution made by Joseph Grasset and others, Freud outlines the 'activation of an unconscious impression' in *déjà vu*.<sup>9</sup> Returning to his earlier consideration of the *déjà vu* experience of his 37-year-old analysand Freud now emphasizes the activating role of her *déjà vu* experience, which, he argues, was 'really calculated to revive the memory of an earlier experience'. He underscores how, because the analogy between her repressed wish that her sick brother should die and the dying brother in the house she was visiting could not be made conscious, the perception of this analogy was 'replaced by the phenomenon of "having been through it all before"', so dislocating the identity of the common element onto the geographical location – the house itself.<sup>10</sup>

### **Reflecting: *Untitled (1993–1997)***

From a distance the rectangular concrete slabs propped against the gallery wall appear to be static. As she closes in, they become something else. At one end the slab is close to the wall, at the other it is bent away, revealing its underside, and inviting her to enter a place where a peeled-back surface discloses a secret interior. In the distorted reflection of an aluminium panel she glimpses the gentle colours of a blurred arcadian scene. Yearning to see more, she leans into the gap and discovers a pastoral hunting image represented in a faded eighteenth-century tapestry, reminding her of a

landscape she has earlier encountered. But the exposed part cannot be seen directly, and with her body blocked by the gallery wall, any further attempt to feast her eyes on the remainder of the image lying covered by the concrete is prevented. In this interlocking gesture of enticement and prohibition, she is forced to face her own disappointment.

### ***Forgotten Streams III***

But this pool is not always full, almost imperceptibly the water drains away, and when laid bare, I am saddened. The forest floor is revealed. Cast in monumental bronze, the material of memorials, branches are strewn across the ground, there is autumn leaf fall, held for eternity. Viewing this in the context of the rapid death of the planet itself – of ecocide – it is hard not to be stirred by this image of a beautiful yet deathly earth. And because of the work's location, I look for meaning in my surroundings, all beacons of financial capitalism. Involved we all are, in one way or another, of stripping mother nature bare, extracting her bounty for material wealth, converting her riches into commodities, architectural and other.

### **Derealization**

Much later in life Freud turns his attention to the allied phenomena of 'derealization' and 'depersonalization'.<sup>11</sup> In his 1937 paper, 'A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis', Freud recounts a visit to the Acropolis made with his brother. Here he focuses on the odd sense of depression they shared in Trieste when it was first suggested that they might make the visit, followed by an analysis of his own response once at the Acropolis – his surprise that it *really did exist*. Through a series of careful reflections, Freud slowly uncovers what he believes is at stake here: that what he felt as a child was not so much disbelief that the Acropolis existed as disbelief that he would ever get to visit it. This insight allows him to understand that the depression both he and his brother felt in Trieste was in fact guilt – a guilt that they would do the forbidden thing, surpass their father and visit the Acropolis, as he never had. Freud goes on to interpret the phenomena of derealization as a kind of defense – a need to keep something away from the ego.<sup>12</sup> He connects these derealizations, where 'we are anxious to keep something out of us', to what he calls their 'positive counterparts' – *fausse reconnaissance, déjà vu, déjà raconté* – which he describes as 'illusions in which we seek to accept something as belonging to our ego'.<sup>13</sup>

**Screening: *Untitled (Celosia I)* (1996) and *Untitled (Celosia VII)* (2002)**

Framed within the point of entry to the next room is an intricately carved screen. On her approach, she sees how there are in fact two separate structures both composed of intricate latticework, configured as a series of screens, of just above head height. In one, the screens have been arranged to prohibit entry; the other is laid out in a form that invites her in. Her perception of the two structures – the one that can be entered, and the other that cannot – changes as she begins to interact with them. In denying physical entry, the self-contained sculpture invites imaginative projection, hovering between that of a refuge of protection and a site of entrapment, it remains a place of mystery and speculation. As she moves into the u-shaped enclosure created by the companion piece, her point of view changes. From her now hidden position she is offered a secret view back through to the gallery and the works within it that she has just seen, which appear familiar, yet somehow different.

#### ***Forgotten Streams IV***

After some time, water begins to flow back into the pool. I become aware of the rhythm of the ebb and flow, and how it is operating at a much slower tempo than the pace of the feet around me. This draws my attention outwards to consider the times of the city, from the chaotic rush to and from transport nodes at either end of the working day, and how these frenetic pulses oscillate with the quiet of the nights, to consider the weekend pauses that stretch out just long enough into the languishing hours of late Sunday, to just about forget it all, to start all over again on Monday morning. As the water slowly veils and unveils the forest floor beneath it, the never-ending blinking of the electronic screens continues throughout, without rest.

#### **Screen Memory**

In a fascinating cultural history, Peter Krapp has considered *déjà vu* in terms of the ‘recurring structures of the cover up and the secret’,<sup>14</sup> stressing how in his first published account of parapraxis from 1898, Freud discusses the ‘psychical mechanism’ as parallel to what he calls ‘unconscious hiding’.<sup>15</sup> This spatial emphasis on the structure of concealing and revealing Krapp continues to explore through his understanding of screen memory as ‘no mere counterfeit, but the temporal folding of two “memories”’.<sup>16</sup> Freud put forward three different temporal models for his ideas around screen memory, one where an earlier memory screens a later one, explored in his paper ‘Screen Memories’,<sup>17</sup> a second, where a later memory screens an earlier one, and a third where the screen memory and the memory screened come from the same period in a person’s life.<sup>18</sup>

#### **Passing (through): *Untitled: Passage I (2002)***

Entering the final room of the exhibition, she walks beneath a mesh canopy suspended from the ceiling, made of series of overlapping rectangular rush mats. Like the screens she has previously hidden behind, these esparto or fibre sunscreens are embedded with words, whose shadows scatter letters onto her shoulders and the floor below. As she bends her head back to look up and decipher the text, signs fall across her face, and the rush of blood to her head makes her dizzy. *Passages* has positioned her between two textual planes – one above and the other below – activated by light, shadow and movement. The architectural typology of the *passage*, or arcade in English, is a space that is both interior and exterior, an interpenetration of private and public, and a site of promenade and transition from place to another.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Forgotten Streams V***

In 2002 I was invited by the late Jules Wright, to take an audience on a guided tour to Wapping. I was working at the time on what I called ‘angelic topographies’, sites of exchange and transformation. From the index of the *London AZ* I had located all the streets connected with the word angel, and found many related to early springs. Linking them together the walk I constructed took us along lines marked by some of London’s buried rivers, the Walbrook under Bank, and the Fleet crossing beneath Angel Street behind St Paul’s. Following and traversing lines of buried water flow reminded me of another walk I had followed years before, led by the environmental artists Platform. From the soggy grassy spring in Hampstead Heath we tracked the course of the buried Fleet down through the city to the point where it entered the Thames behind a set of banal metal grilles. Platform encouraged us to imagine what London would have been like with majestic rivers flowing down its valleys: ‘Imagination is the root of all change’, they said. Crouching down at the banks of Iglesias’ pool I peer into the edges, where the forest floor meets its stone boundary, and see how the branches and leaves seem to stretch out for ever.

### **The Uncanny**

The folds – including the gaps, the oversights, the repeats and the returns – are the strangest aspects of Freud’s work on *déjà vu*. The most obvious is the fact that, despite describing *déjà vu* as included in ‘the category of the miraculous and the “uncanny”’ in his 1907 addition to ‘The Psychopathology of Everyday Life’, Freud omits the term from his 1919, ‘The Uncanny’.<sup>20</sup> An essay in which his main argument is that the uncanny marks the return of the repressed – the homely (*heimisch*)<sup>21</sup> returning as the unhomely (*unheimlich*) located in the memory of the mother’s body.<sup>22</sup> Through a careful examination of the etymology of the German term *heimlich*,<sup>23</sup> and discussion of examples of the uncanny in literature, especially the relation between animate and inanimate, alive

and dead, in E. T. A. Hoffmann's story *The Sand-Man* (1817), Freud shows how the uncanny is 'the opposite of what is familiar' and is 'frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar'.<sup>24</sup> But he is careful to stress that not everything unknown and unfamiliar is uncanny, rather, and here Freud follows F. W. J. Schelling, the *unheimlich* is everything 'that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light'.<sup>25</sup>

### **Returning: *Untitled (Vegetation Room VIII)* (2002) and *Untitled (Vegetation Room X)* (2002)**

It is at precisely the point where the live and the dead, the animate and inanimate, are brought together that the uncanny is located – Michael Newman points this out, with reference to Iglesias' work, when he discusses the relation between the cast and its anthropological connection with the death mask, and the imprint as a proliferation that connects with the self-perpetuation of life.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Forgotten Streams VI***

The ceilings of the offices in the Bloomberg buildings look like petals, delicate and pink, a repeating pattern, ornate and symmetrical, that seems infinite. They remind me of the underside of Iglesias' *Untitled (Tilted Hanging Ceiling)* (1997), the first work that she encountered when entering the Whitechapel show all those years ago. The pattern of what looked to me like sea urchins and shells returns, and how I wondered if it was a fossilized section of the ocean floor. And this memory reminds me of another one – of George Monbiot's comments on the way in which attitudes to climate change have built up, through layers of repression, yet to be released – that first came the denial that climate change exists; then that it exists but is not caused by humans; and then that it exists, is caused by humans, but doesn't matter; and now, that it exists, is caused by humans, does matter, but that it's too late.

Or is it?

*Nature morte.*

Still life.

What is it about life and death, that *Unforgotten Streams* suggests in the constant return of movement to stillness, stillness to movement?

That life is still, that life has been stilled, that life is dead.

Or that there is still life, yet life in the death, still time for life to return.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2003, I was invited to give a gallery talk about the exhibition *Cristina Iglesias* (7 April – 1 June 2003) curated by Iwona Blazwick at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London. *Cristina Iglesias*, curated by Michael Tarantino, debuted at the Museu Serralves, Porto, 2002, and after the Whitechapel travelled on to the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, 2003. This phrase is taken from notes I made of *Iglesias'* verbal presentation at the Whitechapel opening.

<sup>2</sup> Other critics have commented on how Iglesias's work uses a number of aesthetic strategies that bring together two different times and/or spaces, for example the discovery of one thing in the place of another, or the unexpected return of a forgotten detail or feature. For example, curator Ulrich Wilmes explores how Iglesias's 'concept of the sculptural work has an inherent dialectic of closed form and open interpretation, perceived as both real and fictitious at the same time'. See Ulrich Wilmes, 'The Dramatization of Space: Cristina Iglesias: *Three Suspended Corridors*, 2005', *DC: Cristina Iglesias: Drei Hängende Korridore (Three Suspended Corridors)* (Köln: Museum Ludwig and Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2006) p. 16–21, p. 19. For Michael Tarantino: 'The discrepancy that lies between exterior and interior is central to Cristina Iglesias' wall pieces ...' See Michael Tarantino, 'Enclosed and Enchanted: Et in Arcadia Ego', *Enclosed and Enchanted* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 2000) pp. 19–32, p. 24. Curator Penelope Curtis suggests that Iglesias' works 'operate as a kind of passage or window between the physical and the mental' and that 'Iglesias collides the interior and the exterior ...'. See Penelope Curtis, 'Introduction', Penelope Curtis (ed.) *Gravity's Angel: Asta Grotting, Kirsten Ortwed, Cristina Iglesias, Lili Dujourie* (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 1995) pp. 4–5, p. 5 and Curtis, 'Cristina Iglesias', in Curtis (ed.) *Gravity's Angel*, pp. 28–37, p. 31. Marga Paz describes how Iglesias's works are 'marked by the physical imprint of other previous objects', making reference to the Freudian term of 'screen memories'. See Marga Paz, 'Al Otro Lado Del Espejo' ('Through the Mirror') translated by Alison Canosa, *Cristina Iglesias* (Miengo, Cantabria, Spain: Sala Robayera, 1998) pp. 10–13, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> See Jane Rendell, 'That Which Keeps Coming Back', *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism*, (London: IB Tauris, 2011), pp. 161-77

<sup>4</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Psychopathology of Everyday Life' [1901] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume VI (1901): The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1960) pp. vii–296, p. 265.

<sup>5</sup> Freud, 'The Psychopathology of Everyday Life', pp. 266–267.

<sup>6</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Interpretation of Dreams' [1900] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume V (1900–1901): The Interpretation of Dreams (Second Part) and On Dreams*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953) pp. 339–628, p. 399.

<sup>7</sup> Freud, 'The Interpretation of Dreams', p. 399.

<sup>8</sup> Strachey notes that this point was interpolated in 1914. Freud, 'The Interpretation of Dreams', p. 399, note 1. But it is one thing to propose that the repressed unconscious wish whose return *déjà vu* aims to circumvent through displacement has its origin in a dream, but it is quite another to suggest as Freud does that it is possible to experience *déjà vu* while dreaming. Strachey comments that the interpretation of *déjà vu* Freud advanced in his additions to the *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) made in 1909 and 1914, is very different to the one he first made in 1907 and re-acknowledged in 1917. See Freud, 'The Psychopathology of Everyday Life', p. 268, note 1.

<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Fausse Reconnaissance ("délà raconté") in Psycho-Analytic Treatment' [1914] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIII (1913–1914): Totem and Taboo and Other Works*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955) pp. 199–207, p. 203. The paper referred to is Joseph Grasset, 'La sensation du "délà vu"', *Journal de Psychologie Normale et Pathologique* v. 1 (1904) pp. 17–27. Three years later, in 1917, Freud adds an acknowledgement to Grasset's work to 'The Psychopathology of Everyday Life'. See Freud, 'The Psychopathology of Everyday Life', p. 268, note 1.



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<sup>10</sup> Freud, 'Fausse Reconnaissance', p. 203.

<sup>11</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis' [1936] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXII (1932–1936): New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis and Other Works*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964) pp. 237–248.

<sup>12</sup> Freud, 'A Disturbance of Memory', p. 245.

<sup>13</sup> Freud, 'A Disturbance of Memory', p. 245.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Krapp, *Déjà Vu: Aberrations of Cultural Memory* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) p. xxiv.

<sup>15</sup> Krapp, *Déjà Vu*, pp. 2–3. Krapp is referring to Sigmund Freud, 'The Psychical Mechanism of Forgetfulness' [1898] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume III (1893–1899): Early Psycho-Analytic Publications*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962) pp. 287–297 which, as Krapp indicates, with certain changes in the sequence of argument, formed the basis for the opening chapter of Freud, 'The Psychopathology of Everyday Life'.

<sup>16</sup> Krapp, *Déjà Vu*, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Screen Memories' [1899] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume III (1893–1899): Early Psycho-Analytic Publications*, translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962) pp. 299–322, p. 322.

<sup>18</sup> Freud, 'The Psychopathology of Everyday Life', pp. 43–44.

<sup>19</sup> See for example Johann Friedrich Geist, *Arcades: the History of a Building Type* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983). In In Walter Benjamin's major uncompleted work, the *Passagen-Werk*, or the *Arcades Project*, the arcades of Paris were places of collective dreaming. See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project (1927–1939)* translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999). For an account of the arcade as a dialectical image see for example Jane Rendell, *Art and Architecture: A Place Between* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006) pp. 76–78.

<sup>20</sup> Freud, 'The Psychopathology of Everyday Life', p. 265. The strangeness of this omission is noted by Nicholas Royle. See Nicholas Royle, 'Déjà Vu', Martin McQuillan (ed) *Post-Theory: New Directions in Criticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) pp. 3–20, p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Freud states that: 'The German word "unheimlich" is obviously the opposite of "heimlich" ["homely"], "heimisch" ["native"] ...'. See Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"' [1919] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XVII (1917–1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* translated from the German under the general editorship of James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955) pp. 217–256, p. 220. He also notes that: 'It may be true that the uncanny [unheimlich] is something which is secretly familiar [heimlich-heimisch]'. See Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', p. 245.

<sup>22</sup> Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', p. 245.

<sup>23</sup> This investigation leads Freud from definitions of the word 'heimlich' as an adjective meaning, 'belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, friendly', to situations where it is used in the opposite way, as both an adjective and an adverb, to refer to things or actions that are 'concealed', 'kept from sight', 'withheld', 'deceitful' and 'secretive'. Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', pp. 222–225.

<sup>24</sup> Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', p. 220.

<sup>25</sup> Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', p. 225.

<sup>26</sup> See Michael Newman, 'Imprint and Rhizome in the work of Cristina Iglesias', Blazwick (ed.) *Cristina Iglesias*, pp. 121–164, p. 125.