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Fascinated by the paintings wherein Constantin Guys attempted to capture the essence of the modern, Baudelaire wrote: ‘This seems to be the fear of not going fast enough, of letting the phantom escape before the synthesis has been extracted from it and recorded ...’.¹ What is the status of ‘phantom’ here? Bronfen’s remark that the uncanny may well occur when there is ‘an effacement of the distinction between literal and figural’² is suggestive, just as one might go on to observe that this traditional use of ‘figural’, referring to tropes as a ‘figurative’ dimension of language, has increasingly been supplemented, in recent scholarship – including this essay – by a use of ‘figure’ and ‘figuration’ in deliberately more ambiguous ways, indeed pointing to this very effacement to which Bronfen refers.³ This encourages us to ask about Baudelaire’s use of ‘phantom’ here, so as to understand how the figurative can, at times, vibrate the always insecure boundary that insulates it from the literal, and conversely, insulates the real from the fantasies that necessarily partake of it. And the ‘synthesis’, that has to be ‘extracted and recorded’? This synthesis of a phantom, itself phantasmatic, reminds us both of the spectre of the past – apparently past yet with us still – and the fantasy construction of the whole in representation: the imaginary unity of the image, figuring what cannot coherently be grasped. The spectral can figure a state of ontological undecidability or tension, where there is an insistence, a presence of whatever resists us, recalcitrant to our understanding. What this little quote calls for, then, is an exploration of ‘presence’ as a possible object and context of experience; its relation to our sense of time; our ability to capture it through representation, particularly as image; the resulting instabilities in the experiential field that can generate ‘presences’ out of what is conventionally ‘absent’; and how all this relates to our sense of the modern, of ourselves as modern.
‘Presence’, one might say, can only be experienced, not represented, which in turn means that even its status as experience is problematical; it cannot be known as experience, even as it is experienced. The gap that is opened up here, the ‘empty space’, is both a gap, a distance within the self, and is also the place of the image, as an attempted fixing of the present moment, giving us the imaginary plenitude of presence even as it disappears. This image always carries a past with it, that very past that is constituted through this disconnection from presence, the disconnection that renders the image free-floating, and thereby carries with it the permanent possibility of the uncanny. In a sense, then, the present is always an awakening, and this awakening is also a remembering. And history has to be understood as a stream of disappearing traces, each alienated in the very moment of its appearance, hence giving us that sense of modernist distance, in Baudelaire and beyond, ‘as if the modern artist is committed to a moment in which he can never be properly inserted’, for the heroic immersion in the now actually invokes a past, forever impossible to escape. Howells adds that ‘what appears as a diachrony – a distancing of oneself from an earlier past, whether one’s own or that of a previous “generation” – is in reality a synchrony – the inability to coincide fully with the present, that is, with presence ...’.4 In this way, adds Rancière, modernity is ‘not contemporaneous with itself’, and is ‘deprived of the categories of its own understanding’.5 In effect, the possibility of the uncanny looms.

Freud defines the uncanny as ‘that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar’;6 this reminds us that it is first and foremost a sensation, a feeling, a shudder of apprehension or fear. It disturbs deeply held, taken-for-granted assumptions about what is real and unreal, or imaginary, about the world, and the entities within it; whether these entities are dead or alive, animate or inanimate, natural or artificial, self or other. And hence one can be disturbed by something, even when one is not necessarily sure that there is a ‘something’ there to be disturbed by. The uncanny shakes fundamental categories of knowledge and experience, while yet depending on them; it challenges the limits of experience and understanding, given the world we (think we) live in. We cannot, therefore, ‘locate’ the uncanny; we cannot ask where it ‘belongs’. ‘If it belongs, it is no longer a question of the uncanny.’7 Thus it disturbs our sense of atmosphere, makes us ‘apprehensive’ in our apprehension of ‘presence’, of the here, the now, of time, the taken for granted framework of experience. The uncanny therefore incorporates suspense, the experience of the possible presence of the past in the present, stretched out indefinitely, hanging
between past and future, the present as impossible infinite. One ‘apprehends’ the present, reaches out for it, ‘apprehensively’, experiencing it as troubling, a troubling that brings into play that dimension of experience that does not recognise boundaries, hence does not acknowledge the boundary-defining aspect of thought: ‘experience’ as that which is neither inside nor outside, self or other, or both at once. Thinking always involves categories; experience just is, even as it escapes through the very act of being ‘grasped’, apprehended. Thus the very registering of these experiences as experiences can contribute to our regarding them as ‘uncanny’. And it is the particular boundary between epistemology and ontology, between the ‘real’ and the ‘known’ as apprehended in experience, that seems to be crucial for our sense of the uncanny as atmosphere, underlying the manifestation of the uncanny in more specific ‘presences’.

If we return to Guys, we can recall that he was painting the modern, in an era when the photographic image was already coming to be seen as offering greater potential for capturing the sought-for immediacy, the presence of the present. Yet no more than the painting can the photo represent the very absence that makes it possible, the presence of the present, for it can never overcome the gap in time, space and experience that constitutes its very ability to purport to represent presence, but renders presence forever inaccessible. This gap corresponds to a well-known paradox of the image: its capacity to represent what it, itself, is not; its capacity to replace, defer the real, in the very act whereby it calls attention to the real, ‘presenting’ it to us even as it aspires to abolish its own role, render itself transparent, the invisible film over the surface of the real. Mapped onto linear time, this ‘difference’ of the image becomes a necessary inability to attain presence; hence the pastness of the image becomes its own explosive presence, locking it into a reality that is neither – or both – past and present. Given the modern sense of a discontinuity in the nature of the image – its status as ‘mere’ image, separate from the real – the image has a resultingly obscure ontology, a place in the twilight, caught between past and present, real and unreal, always liable to float free of its moorings, always potentially phantasmatic. Haunting the tracks of the modern experience, the uncanny thus reveals presences, traces of the past in the present, and of the other in the self. It suggests an atmosphere, concentrated in a ‘presence’ located uneasily between time and space, and between material and immaterial, real and unreal – a sense of the world as unfamiliarity, of our own presence in it as ‘unbelonging’. It reminds us of our own inability to be sufficiently present to ourselves, the limits of reflexive awareness, suggesting
that there are always potential surrogates, ‘presences’, for this necessarily absent presence, particularly what are, in secular modernity, those necessarily absent or displaced presences: the dead, and one’s past self. These possible experiences of the uncanny are linked closely to the role of the image as a product of modern technologies of the visual, involving a sliding of representation into experience, their mutual penetration as inherently productive of the uncanny. And we will see that this technological figuring of the uncanny, mapped onto the idea of ‘absent presences’, serves further to introduce the ‘mechanical’ uncanny, of dolls and automata, where representation becomes reproduction, nature becomes artefact, and the result hints at ‘unnatural’ life.

Apparitions of the self

In his story *The Oval Portrait*, Edgar Allan Poe narrates an encounter with a painted image, and the history of its subject. In a dark, obscure corner of a chateau, the flickering light of a newly moved candelabra illuminates a hitherto-unnoticed portrait, to startling effect. Among a roomful of ‘very spirited’ paintings, this one was particularly so: a portrait of a young girl ‘just ripening into womanhood’, her features emerging radiantly out of the ‘vague yet deep shadow which formed the background of the whole’. So intense is this, that the narrator is initially shocked into closing his eyes; but on recovering his composure, being startled into ‘waking life’, he subjects the portrait to the full intensity of his gaze. He never doubts that a portrait is indeed what it is – despite his previous drowsiness, he never mistook it for a living person – but he concludes that the spell of the picture lay in ‘an absolute *life-likeness* of expression’, which had ‘confounded, subdued, and appalled’ him. Turning to the little book he had found nearby, which purported to describe the pictures, he learns that the depicted maiden had married the painter, who, alas, had ‘already a bride in his Art’, and who insisted on painting her; despite her jealousy of this ‘other bride’, she submits. So obsessed was he, as he continued painting, that he would not see that ‘the light which fell so ghastly in that lone turret withered the health and the spirits of his bride, who pined visibly to all but him’. Those who caught sight of the emerging portrait regarded it as a ‘mighty marvel’, and proof of his love, as well as his skill. Time went on, and still he would not see that ‘the tints which he spread upon the canvas were drawn from the cheeks of her who sat beside him’. Finally, it was finished. Seeing, aghast, that it was ‘*Life* itself’, he turned to see that his beloved was dead.8
It is made perfectly clear by the narrator that the portrait itself derives its power from its properties as an image. It is not mistaken for a real person. At the same time, it is a kind of apotheosis of the image: its attributes, like its powers, the vividness of its presence, constantly strain towards the real. Hence it is uncanny, apparitional. Indeed, if the narrator, in his overawed confusion, holds fast to the distinction between ‘life-likeliness’ and ‘life’, the painter himself goes the other way: ‘This is indeed Life itself!’ And all this is true to the uncertain status of the image, poised uneasily between representation and reality, its ‘presence’ paradoxically drawing on both the reality of its materiality and its power to double the object or experience it ‘represents’, while purporting, through ‘presence’, to abolish the very gap that makes its power possible. This oscillation of the image is what renders it permanently a liminal phenomenon, disturbing the neatness and clarity of the real/unreal boundary whose very difference makes it possible.

This boundary is made all the more problematical by its relation to another, that of depth and surface, fundamental to the modern ontology of self and self-identity. Indeed, the self is a very difficult organising construct of the Western tradition. This self is nebulous, unseen: so how are we to represent it? The problem can hardly be avoided: ‘some form of manifestation is always necessary’, Cadava reminds us, but this mysterious ‘manifestation’ is always difficult to map onto the self from which it purportedly ‘emanates’. The self is poised uneasily between the function of the subject, a bearer of linguistic location in an essentially grammatical, non-material way, and the body, inherently material, organic. The self is postulated as the mode of existence of the body that enables us to refer to ‘personal identity’, but a mode of existence that designates a theatre of depth, an ontology of personal identity as the deep principle of integration of body and mind. Although referring to depth, to a sense of ‘underlying character’, for example, such a self can only be represented as surface, as image; and, given the necessary individualism of ‘personal identity’, it cannot have the featureless generality of the pre-modern ‘soul’. As such, the image of self can only be that of body itself, body as adorned, presented in culture, the encultured body as mine, as me. The representation of myself is as my body: myself as representation is the absence of body in its very appearance as representation. Thus the spectre can be seen as the appropriate representation of myself as self, myself. And thus also the problem that seems to arise when the image, as ‘mere’ surface, seems to take on the features of depth, since this maps it, again, as spectral. In her comments on the story, Bronfen remarks that ‘A sense of the uncanny is provoked when
depth, the one dimension that differentiates model from copy, seems to have been added to the imitation.¹⁰

This can serve as a foundation myth, then, of the emergence, the ‘emana-
tion’ of the self, from the murky depths; of the production of the image from the obscure background, the dark turret of the real; of the creativity of the artist as mysterious, self-generating charismatic power. And in this story – as generally – it is the male artist, whether as the painter or his double, the narrator of the book, or redoubled, as the author of the story himself. These doublings cover over, but simultaneously repeat, the par-
adox of the initial situation. And the story gives a further twist, for these productive doublings are also destructive: the life of the beloved is sacri-
ficed to the life of the image, and thus to the celebration, the very possi-
bility, of masculine procreative power. The spectral power of the image emerges as the appropriate mode wherein these paradoxes, of real and unreal, literal and figural, depth and surface, can be ‘resolved’ through being revealed.

There is a strong hint here of an intimacy between the lives of the self, the image, death and the spectral. It has already been implied that the object must die, for the image to be truly alive. And this corresponds to a truth of the image: that only by establishing a precarious distance from the object of representation can it exist as image. Once again, as we have seen, it is real and unreal, both or neither, intensely simulacral. And when it is the self that is being represented, the image is challenged in another way. If the image conjures up the death of the self, this death cannot, for all that, be represented. We are forced to represent death indirectly, again through its effects in the body. Death in representation is death as illness or violence, figured as the corruption or dismem-
berment of the body which must nonetheless remain recognisably mine. It is death as violence that most clearly marks the necessity to destroy the body, as essential vehicle of the self. The self can thereby be ‘seen’ to die; except that its death, like its life, can never be ‘seen’ anyway. Or rather, it can only be ‘seen’ as spectral; for the spectre, as pure appearance, appearance divorced from matter, yet in identifiable, personal form, is exactly the self as imaged, the form of life appropriate to it as self, a form of life that is neither life, nor death either.

At the same time, the spectre can be a decisive mark of death, of my death; Baudrillard reminds us of the commonly encountered idea that ‘Whoever sees his double, sees his death’.¹¹ The self, as representation of itself, has become too ‘other’; all that can be left is the death of the body, of my body, me in ‘myself’. So Bronfen adds that this lack of dis-
tinction between representation and reality, whereby the representation
seems to take on a life of its own, is both productive of the uncanny and ‘metaphorically figures the experience of one’s own mortality’. We see the impossibility of representing my death, the death of me, myself, the spirit that animates the body and that can, itself, only be represented as separate, in its impossible separation from the body, an impossible separation that is, nonetheless, opened up as possibility by representation itself, its non-existence as that through which and by which a reality beyond is pointed to, so that if the pointing succeeds, the gesture abolishes itself. By that very same token, representation makes itself real, abolishes reference, asserts its self-sufficiency. It oscillates between real and unreal – like the ghost; and the self. Thus Cixous suggests that the ghost, as the ‘direct figure of the uncanny’ is the ‘fiction of our relationship to death’, and that ‘What is intolerable is that the Ghost erases the limit which exists between two states, neither alive nor dead.’ We can superimpose the impossible materiality of representation on the impossible immateriality of the self, producing the represented self as spectral body: the very image of death.

In the story, Poe offers us a narrative, but it is a narrative that exists in a relation of some tension with what it is about: a portrait, an image. Reality – the artist’s wife, the ‘beloved’ – has to be subjected to being painted, presented in a portrait. Then, she has to be re-subjected, to the anonymous narrative in the book that purports to tell us the truth of her ‘story’. Finally, obsessively, she has to be subjected to a further narrative, that of the storyteller himself, rediscovering, redoubling, her story. Thus is the ‘truth’ of the image revealed, as an obsessive subjection and resubjection to narrative, desperately seeking closure: not just endless narrative, but endless narrative that aspires to end in the revelation of the ‘secret’, the depth that explains the surface, the mystery of the self at last revealed. And yet, at the end of it all, the portrait of the woman is still there, staring back, enigmatic, spectral, yet so full of life ...

If narrative is productive of the fictional self, this is true in both senses: the self in fiction, and the self as fiction. And this narrative productivity is always troubled, for if our sense of self is inseparable from the images through which memory is constituted and accessed, then these images will not coexist seamlessly with the narratives wherein we seek to recuperate them. This will seem all the more true of images coded as ‘unconscious’. Indeed, this brings into play the fundamental obscurity of the unconscious, whether as concept or as the ostensible object designated. It is only within the modern, spatial, depth/surface model of the self, codified in the Freudian topography, that we are compelled to locate an unconscious ‘inside’, as it were; and this is, indeed,
powerful imagery, carrying with it the idea of deeply troubled depths disrupting the placid surfaces of rational self-understanding. But this is no less powerful if it is allowed to trouble the inside/outside boundary itself; as Royle suggests, the uncanny ‘disturbs any straightforward sense of what is inside and what is outside’, and is hence ‘an experience of liminality’.14 If the self has obscure boundaries, developing out of the darkness of its background, this ‘background’ could as well be external as internal, opening up a ‘space’ for uncanny encounters as much as for unsettling eruptions from the depths. The unconscious cannot ‘explain’ the uncanny; rather, they are both cut from the same cloth. If the uncanny is a projection of the unconscious, this is only because the unconscious is already an internalisation of the uncanny.

**Ghosts and soft furnishings**

This inside/outside tension can also be troubling in the context of the home. We are told of Benjamin’s experiences as a child in the photographic studio, learning dissembling and disguise, doubling himself through the props and furnishings that become as lifelike and demanding of him as he becomes objectified among them.15 Asendorf reminds us that the interior of the bourgeois home of the 1870s and 1880s was ‘sunk in twilight’, full of elaborate tapestries and fussy, excessive furnishings, and quotes an observer at the time who refers to the ‘faculty of delusion’ necessary for us to ‘feel at home’, which gets pretty close to a sense of the Freudian uncanny. Thus we find, adds Asendorf, a ‘transparently delusory life insurance, the compulsively stuffed interiors a kind of “magical defence”’.16 Defence against what? The ghosts that their very atmosphere calls up? Ghosts prefer their apartments to be furnished, it would seem. And as homes, these excessive furnishings remind us of another excess, the excess of domestic feeling, the intimacy and affection that is so central to the ideology of the domestic sphere. Indeed, this suggests a sense in which the sentimental and the uncanny entail one another, as necessary opposites. Just as the uncanny is the strange in the ordinary, the ordinary extended into the strange, the ordinary rendered other, so the sentimental is the ordinary brought closer, the other rendered homely, the excess of the homely.

These rooms can also be locations for the tragic and the decadent. One can recall Renée Vivien, a leading figure of the ‘Sappho 1900’ movement of turn-of-the-century Paris, dying alone, in her twenties, of anorexia, consumption and soft furnishings, in her luxurious apartment, surrounded by oriental drapes and tapestries, the ornate curtains
permanently drawn to exclude the threatening, unwanted sunshine. That there could indeed be a relation between decadence and the uncanny is suggested by the way decadence seems to encourage, or imply, the spectral. At the most overt level, decadence performs the modern alienation of nature, taking it to extremes: nature is rejected in favour of style, artifice, cultural excess. Yet this very extremism also incorporates a return to nature: nature now as sickness, the irreducible ‘other’ side to life, inseparable from it, even an indicator of a ‘healthy’ attitude to, and practice of, life itself. If life is inseparable from death, that death must be incorporated in it, lived in it. Decadence is an excess of both culture and nature; the modern lived as abjection and excess. Decadence haunts the modern, then, and this spectral presence comes out in two ways: the urge to transcend nature and natural limitations produces a mode of life of the person as a spiritual presence in culture, an ethereal transcendence; and the urge to explore the ‘other side’ of progress, the sense in which it represents a sickness of culture, or rather, has to be explored as a route to cultural health through sickness and death, now resulting in the person as the abjection of culture in the sick, enfeebled body. Either way, the decadent is already only half-alive – pale, shadowy, intense – and this spectral death-in-life is thereby presented as a condition of creativity. If, as de Certeau tells us, ‘Haunted places are the only places people can live in’, we can see that they are appropriate places to die in, too.

In these over-stuffed rooms, the objects that jostle jealously for space are never sufficiently accountable in terms of their function, even if they have one at all, yet their obsessive, insistent presence makes demands on people, reducing them to props, doll-like, simultaneously real yet mysterious, like everything else in the twilight. The things that are not needed begin slowly to appear as strange ... They simply sit there, like untouchable images of the divine in an imaginary cult of boredom. These objects conjure up memories, a past; their vestments, always slightly faded, and dated, remind us of those who came before; they embody dreams, delusions of presence now past. They possess aura, or transmit live memories of aura under the aegis of its decline. They remind us that aura in modernity is ‘experienced primarily in its withdrawal or destruction. This is why the aura is always a matter of ghosts and specters.’ And one can see the closeness of the links between aura, the uncanny and the sentimental by recalling that aura is, for Benjamin, ‘the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be’. Hence Cadava on ‘auratic darkness’, namely that ‘what is nearest to us is the distance that keeps us from ourselves’, further implications of
which will need to be explored later. We can see what Benjamin means by referring to ‘the immense forces of “atmosphere” concealed in these [everyday] things’.24 ‘Atmosphere’: a distinctive presence that materialises into presences, poised between the real and unreal in the liminal experience of twilight.

And inside these rooms, we encounter the miniature microcosm of the home itself: the doll’s house. This period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the great age of this condensed spectacle of domestic theatricality, small in extent but resonant with symbolic coding. Stewart reminds us that the doll’s house reveals the house’s articulation of a tension between inner and outer, exterior and interior: it is ‘center within center, within within within’. It is a ‘materialized secret’, with the promise of an ‘infinitely profound interiority’.25 And, one might add, the promise that it might come alive; at night, perhaps, when its inhabitants surge forth, uncanny others of those who appear to use it – play with it – in the daytime. And the doll itself? A simulacrum of the living being, a supplement or substitute for life itself, generally on a scale with the child playing with it, the doll does not seem to threaten the child with its potential for seeming – or being – alive, as indeed Freud remarks. That may, after all, be part of the doll’s fantasy identity for a child, part of the point of it; you can have a relationship with a doll. It is only later that the ‘living doll’ becomes potentially uncanny, after the child has internalised the key distinctions that set in place the modern ontology of the real: the distinctions between living/dead, organic/inorganic, natural/artificial. If the ghost is uncanny through raising issues of life as representation, the self as spectral, as living image, the doll attains this status through raising issues of life as reproduction, the body as inorganic, as mechanism.26

The doll can also be a powerful signifier, carrier of fundamental messages, of child and adult, self and other, and of gender, which can be mapped on to one another to reinforce this uncanny potential. In her modernist – yet simultaneously decadent – classic Nightwood, Djuna Barnes makes the doll a key player in the relation between Nora and Robin, and it also serves as a figural resource drawn on in other contexts. Above all, it signifies forbidden love, the ‘third sex’: here, the doll can resonate with a sense of the ‘unnatural’, a loaded term that can incorporate both ontological and moral assumptions, and that seems to apply to so many of the situations that can produce a sense of the uncanny. Nora says to her confidant, Dr O’Connor, that when a woman gives a doll to a woman ‘it is the life they cannot have, it is their child, sacred and profane’, to which he replies that ‘The last doll, given to age,
is the girl who should have been a boy, and the boy who should have been a girl’, since ‘The doll and the immature have something right about them, the doll, because it resembles, but does not contain life, and the third sex, because it contains life but resembles the doll’. And we learn of Frau Mann, highly ‘unnatural’, her costume stitched so tightly that she was ‘as unsexed as a doll. The needle that had made one the property of the child made the other the property of no man’.27 Some light is cast on this by Stewart’s comment that ‘the body of the child is a body erased of its sexuality – the seamless body of the doll’,28 which reminds us of the way the ‘third sex’ could be characterised both as ‘illicitly sexed’ and as ‘sexless’, because non-procreative, and, in this sense, child-like. Overall, then, for Barnes, explorer of the transgressive uncanny, ‘Decadence inhabited the domestic; the apartment was a world in which moral and sexual codes were reversed’,29 a place in which luxury and soft furnishings cohabited easily with perversion. For her, home becomes ‘the figure for universal loss, grief, and desire’,30 a place of familiarity where the secrets invariably raise the spectre of taboo and transgression, with their profound consequences for identity.

Uncanny intertextualities

It is hardly possible to avoid The Sandman when contemplating the uncanny, not only because of the central importance of the Hoffmann text to Freud, but because it has become widely read in its own right. Having recently read it myself, in its entirety, for the first time, I found my mind wandering off, thinking of parallels. I had already earmarked Nightwood as a possible text to use, as its perverse atavistic ‘modernism’ seemed to give it uncanny qualities, but now certain more specific parallels with the Hoffmann text struck me, notably a certain resemblance between the doll Olympia, with whom Nathanael is infatuated, and the somewhat doll-like Robin, Nora’s beloved. Then, out of the blue, that final scene in Hitchcock’s film Vertigo (1958) hit me, and its similarity to the end of Sandman. At the time, I experienced this as decidedly ‘uncanny’. Finding such parallels and repetitions myself, thus experiencing the findings as encounters, as real experiences, marked them as uncanny – irrespective of whether the parallels are ‘really’ there (whatever that might mean). That is, the experience of them as resemblances – involving both subject and object, form and content – constituted these experiences of resemblance, this fusion, as uncanny. It is as though the experience threatens to entail its own impossibility by threatening the boundaries that mark the independence of the self
as its necessary location. It is the fusion that challenges, that disturbs, precisely because it seems to lie astride these powerful, taken for granted distinctions – self/other, subject/object, same/different – that are central to the spatio-temporal coordinates of identity. Hence the sense in which a certain instability of experience itself is suggested – or precipitated – by the uncanny, as in Royle’s characterisation of it as ‘the continuing experience of an uncertainty, or as a decisive suspension of experience’, adding that, as déjà vu, it seems to involve ‘the experience of experience as double’, as ‘a trembling which is the trembling of experience itself’.31

Barnes may have been familiar both with the original Hoffmann story, and the Freud paper in which it is analysed.32 The figure in Nightwood to whom the aura of the uncanny clings most strongly is, as implied above, surely Robin. Indeed – reminding us of the original sense of ‘aura’ as a kind of physical emanation or envelope surrounding a person – Barnes has to run through the whole sensorium to describe its presence in Robin, ‘the pretty lad who is a girl’,33 beloved by all, men and women, possessed by none, ever elusive, unattainable. Her body exudes a perfume of ‘earth-flesh, fungi’, her flesh is ‘the texture of plant life’; around her head ‘an effulgence of phosphorus glowing’, as if her life lay in ‘ungainly luminous deteriorations’, as is appropriate for ‘the born somnambule, who lives in two worlds’.34 And these ‘two worlds’ shift and alter. If she is decaying plant life, yet human, she is also animal, ‘a wild thing caught in a woman’s skin’, and she is also not nature at all, but culture, an artefact, ‘gracious and yet fading, like an old statue in a garden’. Robin is ageless, yet as old as history, or nature itself; as their unwanted presence in modern culture, she has nowhere to go, a figure superficially attractive yet doom-laden, ‘the infected carrier of the past’.35 She resembles one of the objects in the museums, wonder cabinets and flea markets that she and the other characters are obsessed with, doomed to fragment and disintegrate as ageing memorials, rather than being subject to a natural death. She becomes an allegory of a modernity ill at ease with itself, eternally young even as it disintegrates within. And she carries an evasive promise of redemption: ‘Crossing the boundaries between beast and human, between female and male, between night and day’, claim Gilbert and Gubar, Robin thus ‘enacts and sanctifies a myth of herself as an invert who recaptures the chaotic, chthonic energies that have been debased by culture’.36

For the Count, Felix Volkbein, who impetuously falls for her, as comprehensively as Nathanael does for Olympia, Robin does indeed have doll-like qualities. Felix found her eyes expressionless yet mysterious;
when he walked with her, she was ‘so silent’; her movements were ‘slightly headlong and sideways; slow, clumsy, and yet graceful’. She had a ‘childish face ... her eyes fixed ... she opened her mouth but no words came’. It is, indeed, all oddly reminiscent of Olympia. And she is accompanied by a warning: ‘The woman who presents herself to the spectator as a “picture” forever arranged is, for the contemplative mind, the chiefest danger’; she may turn out to be ‘beast turning human’, and her every movement ‘will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience’. So here we have it: the woman who exists in the male gaze may be dangerous even in her passivity, her existence as fantasy precipitating the uncanny return of the unresolved mysteries of the past. The man of the obsessive gaze may thereby be prevented from seeing. It may be added that this affliction seems to be congenital in the Volkbein household. Felix’s father had a home ‘peopled with Roman fragments, white and disassociated’, with ‘blind bold sockets’ as eyes. As for Felix, into one eye was set ‘this monocle which shone, a round blind eye in the sun’; and his son will turn out to need heavy lenses, making his eyes bulge forward.

Where Felix seems visually impaired, Nora sees too much, but this excess does not give her a clear vision either. Her eyes were ‘large, protruding and clear’, but succeeded only in reconstructing what she looked at ‘in her own unconscious terms’. She does not recognise her own role in constructing the Robin she relates to, and in the end the relationship is doomed. As O’Connor subsequently said to her, she had ‘dressed the unknowable in the garments of the known’. But for a while, Robin is alive to her, happy with her, her gaze more active. On her night time jaunts alone, Robin’s eyes searched for ‘the sculptured head that both she and Nora loved’, a Greek head ‘with shocking protruding eyeballs’, which reminded her of Nora’s love, ultimately impossible in its excess. While Olympia seems to exist, as a person, only in Nathanael’s gaze, Robin’s identity is more nuanced, shifting with her relationships, never resolved. In a sense, the repetitions and fragmentations present in the Hoffmann text – Coppelius/Coppola/Spalanzani, Clara/Olympia – are here used to disintegrate notions of identity, including gender identity, by internalising them in each character, shifting the register of the uncanny more towards the ‘nightwood’ of everyday life.

And then, when the affair is over, there is, finally, Nora’s dream. She stands at the top of a house, looking down, into the house, and sees Robin, in a company gathered below, in a scenario uncannily reminiscent of Nathanael looking down from the tower and seeing Coppelius in the crowd. First, though, he has looked through the spyglass, and
seen Clara, the act that precipitates his final suicidal madness. Does he, at that moment, see Olympia in Clara? He is, after all, using the spyglass Coppola sold him, the spyglass through which Olympia came alive for him, as the object of his obsessive love. And, by comparison, we are told that when Nora looked down at Robin, she seems to recede: it was as if she and Robin ‘were a pair of opera glasses turned to the wrong end, diminishing in their painful love’. Then, at the end of the dream, going towards the statue in her garden, she catches sight of Robin and the ‘other woman’, the Coppelius/Clara equivalent, so that her eyes ‘dropped from their orbit by the falling of her body’, a ‘fall’ not into the literal death that met Nathanael, but into the knowledge of the death of her relationship, and the blindness of mourning a love she can never understand, and never terminate.

That both stories also contain a confused mesh of relationships, in which family, love and gender identities somehow fragment, fade, reappear, superimpose themselves, reduplicate, is also suggested in this dream. The location at the top of the house is ‘Grandmother’s room’, and Nora hears herself saying ‘Come up, this is grandmother’s room’, yet knowing this was impossible to do, as the room was ‘taboo’. So we encounter grandmother, who is and isn’t there (the room was ‘the absolute opposite of any known room her grandmother had ever moved or lived in’, but ‘saturated’ with the ‘lost presence of her grandmother, who seemed in the continual process of leaving it’); Nora, who is and isn’t her own grandmother – a grandmother who was also ‘for some unaccountable reason, dressed as a man’ – and who now summons Robin, who is and isn’t her grandchild, to engage in what would and wouldn’t be incestuous acts of love. And here, we must indeed remember that ‘Robin is incest too, that is one of her powers’. A full gamut of possibilities is opened up here: that the boy-girl Robin, as Nora’s lover, might be her child, that Nora in turn might be her child or wife, always there when Robin, father-husband, comes in at night; that Robin might be a projection of herself. And over all these, contributing to making the superimpositions uncanny, hangs the shadow of the past, the ‘lost presence’. Thus the oracular Dr O’Connor can pronounce that ‘In the acceptance of depravity the sense of the past is most fully captured. What is a ruin but Time easing itself of endurance? Corruption is the Age of Time. It is the body and the blood of ecstasy, religion and love.’ And hence Nightwood indeed emerges as a master work of the transgressive uncanny; and Marcus can conclude, of Barnes, that ‘her articulation of the female uncanny and its relation to writing in a complex of signs around images of dolls and
eyeless statues participates in female modernism’s larger interrogation of gender and the writing self under the male gaze’. 47

And in The Sandman, too, we have the same frenetic oscillation of possible and tabooed identity positions. For the moment, maintaining a certain focus on Olympia, one can just observe that Freud must, of course, be partly right in presenting her as a projection of Nathanael’s fantasy, though this could also be partly true of Clara. Her coldly rational side marks her as a possibly prohibited love object: she is, after all, given her place in the same domestic unit as Nathanael, positioned structurally as his sister. Juxtaposed, Olympia and Clara seem like two broken halves of a femininity that never comes together, just as, for Felix, Robin seems to be the ‘converging halves of a broken fate’; 48 superimposed, though, a degree of assimilation is apparent. After all, the coldness of Olympia – before she is warmed into life by Nathanael – is several times remarked on, and ‘cold’ is used just as repetitiously of Clara. But this reminds us of other ‘broken femininities’, doublings; this time, in Vertigo.

The slightly uncanny, dream-like quality of the film overall is particularly brought out when Madeleine is on the screen. And there is surely something doll-like about Madeleine. She, too, barely speaks; one of the most striking features of the film is how little she speaks, given the length of time she is on screen. And it turns out that her speech, her whole identity, are constructs: she is a puppet, reading Elster’s script, there to fool Scottie and serve as a cover for Elster’s murder of his wife; but she also becomes Scottie’s obsessive fantasy, just as surely as Olympia does for Nathanael. The brief point at which she seems to depart a little from the script, revealing something of herself, turns out to be the moment that precipitates her ‘death’, the apparent fall from the tower. And this returns later: for Judy, supposedly the ‘real’ figure underlying the phantom Madeleine, is herself made doll-like by Scottie, desperate to make her into as close an approximation to the ‘real’ Madeleine of his fantasy as he can.

If we bring in Midge – the homely ‘friend’ who would seem, like Clara, to be more like a sister than a love object – we can perceive two successive sets of contrasted pairings here: Midge/Madeleine and Judy/Madeleine, with Midge leaving the film as Judy enters. These two sets of contrasts seem to map onto Clara/Olympia reasonably well. And we could also map the underlying dichotomy as that of reality/fantasy. This is revealed in the outcome, whereby fantasy wins out, and ‘destroys’ – literally or metaphorically – the ‘real’ person or pole of each dichotomy. Madeleine destroys Judy both through Scottie’s inability to
accept the ‘real’ Judy, with her history (just as Nathanael is unable to accept Clara), and, more speculatively, through the way the finale in the tower develops. This episode – with Judy falling to her death, this time for real – could reveal Judy reverting to her Madeleine identity, under the continued psychological pressure from Scottie, or in the sudden fear precipitated by hearing the footsteps of the nun, who might, after all, have been the returning Elster; hence the panic reaction that kills her.49 If we recall the ‘grey bushes’ spied from the tower by Clara, the bushes that recall the bushy eyebrows of Coppelius, heralding his possible return – the bushes that lead Nathanael to get out his spyglass and look at her one last time – then the nun/bushes and Elster/Coppelius symmetries are striking indeed.

Strange powers

‘Do you believe that someone dead, someone out of the past, can take possession of a living being?’ This question clearly has a resonance for Scottie and Madeleine/Judy; but, asked early in the film, it ostensibly refers to the alleged obsession of Elster’s wife with the figure of her great-grandmother, Carlotta. It is actually Carlotta’s necklace that seems most important here. It plays something of the same role in enforcing the return of the past as a haunting presence in the present as does Coppola’s spyglass in the Hoffmann text. It is Judy’s wearing of the necklace – ‘careless’, yet deeply motivated in the structure of the film – that enables Scottie to ‘see’ Judy-as-Madeleine, through his instant recall of the image of Carlotta’s necklace in the portrait, just as the use of the spyglass by Nathanael always transforms his vision, enabling him to ‘see’ Olympia, and, at the end, Clara-as-Olympia. These objects – Carlotta’s necklace, Coppola’s spyglass, Nora’s opera glasses – all raise questions about vision and the image, about power and powers, that can certainly be answered within the modern world view, but also implicitly question it, suggest certain unresolvable, underlying tensions that can be a powerful carrier of the uncanny.

Going back to the earliest story, we can recall that Coppola is described as a ‘barometer-seller’, an innocuous enough description. But Castle points out that barometers and thermometers seem to have led an active cultural life in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They were thought to register not just physical, but also psychological states. Placed in proximity to a woman’s body, her emotional state could be measured, as if the heightened state of the thermometer reading would testify to the sexual arousal of the woman. And, as wits of the time noted,
it was by no means impossible that the actual use of such equipment could help precipitate what it ostensibly measured. A spyglass, in turn, would not necessarily be innocent of such a potential to bring about what it ostensibly only recorded, especially given the state of the person using it. And in this specific case, ‘Coppola’s weatherglasses may be taken indeed as a metonymic sign of those wild mood-swings and disturbing sensitivities he provokes in his victim’.50 One could say that one of the most intriguing and problematical aspects of the modern cultural imaginary – a strict distinction between a subjective, psychological realm of affects, thoughts and images, and a physical realm of causal determinism – is by no means decisively established at this period.

In effect, this psychological realm, this theatre of affects and images, is what we think of as ‘mind’, how we picture it; but, in some tension with this, its function is to provide the direction, the guarantee almost, of individual self-identity. It provides the grounding of the idea of the self as self-creating, undetermined, not a mechanism that runs automatically or at the behest of some external force or programming power. This is an aspect of the project of modernity, the idea that mastery of the world requires mastery over the self, by the self, a self that must, in this sense, be logically separate from the world, irreducible to its laws. Hence ‘the Enlightenment belief in the essential coherence of the self as will’,51 a will that has to be one’s own. But how can one know this to be the case, how can one be sure? After all, the mythical postulate of the unique will has to coexist with our acceptance of science, which is cast in the language of causal mechanisms, without residue. The ultimate recalcitrance of will to phenomenological understanding – my inability to know it as mine – appears to entail the possibility that neither I nor the other may necessarily be what we appear to be; that what appears to be a human being may turn out to be an automaton. When enough happens to bring this theoretical possibility closer to realisation, the uncanny glimmers through.

This surging of the uncanny happens in both the story and the film. Olympia seems, right from the start, both doll-like and automaton-like, alternative versions of the mechanical simulation of life. And if it is the Spalanzani-Coppola pair that constructed Olympia – Spalanzani providing the basic mechanism, Coppola adding the eyes – then just as surely Elster and Scottie make Madeleine, Scottie adding the power of the gaze without which Elster’s deception would not work. Scottie is thus both a participant in creating Madeleine and also the victim of Elster’s plot, through his own obsession – which is where Scottie comes to play the Nathanael role. Here again the issue of free will and determinism is
raised: for both Nathanael and Scottie, through their obsessions, become ‘taken over’, mechanical automata in the grip of a power they cannot control. They become entirely suitable subjects for the objects of their fantasy.

In the case of Nathanael, this can all be taken further. Early in the story, Coppelius dislocates and replaces the child Nathanael’s limbs. In thus implying that Nathanael himself – and each of us? – could be an automaton, Hoffmann is simultaneously genuflecting to the power of the scientific world view and yet also pointing to its subversive implications for our notions of free will. The fear that this spectre of determinism could indeed reveal itself anywhere is brought out light-heartedly in another episode in the story. Following the unmasking of Olympia as an automaton, we are informed that partners felt impelled to test the ontological status of their lovers: might one be in love with a wooden doll? One’s beloved should preferably say something unpredictably meaningful from time to time ... Quite an insightful parody of the mix of eccentricity and transgression to which the modern individual is pushed in order to manifest its necessary autonomy, as a self in charge of its destiny.

In the wider context, this is reminiscent of Marx’s analysis of the fetishism of commodities, and his claim that commodities become ‘autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own’. Derrida’s lively account brings out the animism/mechanism nexus here, whereby, in effect, we find a world peopled with Olympia figures: we can become thing-like, just as forces can work on us through things, which ‘figure’ these forces; and, in turn, the constructions of novelists and film-makers can reconfigure them, all the more dramatically. And when Gordon refers to ‘the fundamentally animistic mode’ by which ‘worldly power’ makes itself felt in our lives, we return to one of Freud’s two key perspectives on the uncanny – but this time, the repetitive, atavistic quality is produced and reproduced within the modern itself: Freud read in the light of Marx, the Surrealists, or Benjamin ...

But where there is determinism, there can also be manipulation: the scientific drive to understand is also a drive to control. Throughout the story, one has the sense that Nathanael is being manipulated, at the mercy of forces, whether from outside or from his unconscious, forces he can neither understand nor control, and which work both against him and through him. But we, as readers, may also have this feeling – the author, Hoffmann, as arch-manipulator, we as puppets, not so different from poor Nathanael. The storyteller is also the ironic manipulator of the text, and as much of the reader as of the characters in the
narrative. This is even more obviously true of *Vertigo*, which is after all a product of the master manipulator himself: Hitchcock is known to have enjoyed plotting the involvement of his audience; his surveillance incorporates the viewer, not just the characters.\(^{55}\) One of the uncanny moments in this film brings this out: Madeleine’s arrival at the McKittrick Hotel, followed later by Scottie, who is informed by the receptionist that she has not been there, that her key has not been taken that day, and that her room is undisturbed ... This is set up in such a way that one could construct a rational explanation, but it retains that uncanny feel, and is clearly designed specifically to this end. Again, the Elster phone call, during the brief conversation in Scottie’s apartment after the ‘attempted drowning’, conveys the sense that both Madeleine and Scottie are puppets, dancing to Elster’s tune. There is also a resonance here with *Nightwood*, where part of the uncanny feel comes from the way the words seem to ‘pass through’ the characters, rather than being meaningfully ‘spoken’ by them. So we encounter a dialectic of conspiracy/deception and mechanistic determinism, conveying the sense that scientific demystification of the world, the drive to understanding, is always potentially an exercise in re-mystification.

In their potential for an ‘uncanny effect’, mechanism and the temporal structure of experience can work together, through the idea of the hold of the past, the insistence of the past in the present. Barr refers to ‘the film’s intense and rather magical quality of rootedness: in the city and its environs, in its historical past and in the uncanny dimensions waiting to be explored within and around it’, adding, more generally, that ‘The more anchored they are in the real, the more convincingly the interior and exterior environs can add up to comprise an alternate world of subjectivity and dream’. He also observes that ‘there is no division between worlds, but rather a hesitation’:\(^{56}\) a hesitation within which the whole world of the uncanny, the world *as* uncanny, resides. We could refer here to ‘uncanny realism’: the world has to be fundamentally *ordinary* before being invested with an uncanny aura; or, the uncanny works *through* the ordinariness of the world, even produced *by* it, as though a de-sacralised, disenchanted world becomes uncanny in its very essence. And many of the ‘tricks’ associated with a sense of the uncanny, from the original phantasmagoria magic show, through early film and beyond, convey the sense of an ordinary world rendered extraordinary through perfectly ordinary mechanisms that we can manipulate but can never understand sufficiently to ensure closure, hence condemning us to an uncanny awareness of the issue of free will and determinism through our very immersion in such a world, a world
where experience always exceeds our reflexive grasp, where ‘presence’ always implies the possibility of the continuing hold of a spectral past.

Production, reproduction, representation

Mastery is also creativity: the god-like ability to realise will is a modern way of mapping the mysteries of creativity and origin, production and reproduction. Nathanael’s father, Coppelius, Spalanzani, Elster – but also Hoffmann, Hitchcock – are engaging in male procreation. The most dramatic instance is clearly at the beginning of the tale, in the dramatic scene where the frightful Coppelius, and Nathanael’s father, with the ‘hideous, repulsive mask of a fiend’, are working together at the furnace into which the domestic hearth has been transformed, endeavouring to produce humans, real or simulated. Here we see the scenario of modern creativity, as imaged in the early nineteenth century in terms of fire, smoke, smelting, foundries – the ‘palaeotechnic’ vision of the First Industrial Revolution – brought into the heart of the ‘female sphere’ of the home, where it is most alien: the strange in the familiar, indeed. And the exile of women resonates at several levels, here and elsewhere; notoriously, the Olympia creation scenario again involves two male parents, Spalanzani and Coppola. And while this may be fundamentally patriarchal, it also superimposes the modern myth of the self-created self, and the paradoxes that necessarily flow from this. After all, this initial episode could be seen as Nathanael’s birth scenario, and an implicit denial of parentage. In successfully not losing his eyes, and managing to run from the room, Nathanael becomes self-created, born in trauma, a trauma that will shape his future through unresolved avoidances and repetitions of his origin, simultaneously horrific and impossible. There is a parallel here with the film: Scottie, hanging from the building in the very first shot, apparently about to plunge to his death, has as traumatic a ‘birth’ as one could envisage; and that it is a birth is made clear in that we are carefully informed of his resulting lack of a job, and of any apparent family. The former Scottie is no more; but the new one, it turns out, will be just as traumatised as Nathanael, just as unable to find successful resolution. Both episodes code birth as rebirth, the emancipation of the self into culture from nature, with all that entails (particularly, of course, the devaluing of the female role in procreation).

Birth and rebirth, creator and created, representation and the represented: all reveal issues around legitimacy and the twin senses of ‘production’, as reproducing/representing the real, and as procreation. How
closely should the result resemble the source? Should the ‘reproduction’ – in either sense – be indistinguishable from the ‘original’? It seems fair to say that when the two move ‘sufficiently’ close – and clearly the precise point cannot be specified in advance, if at all – then this produces a sense of the uncanny. In effect, this excessive proximity subverts the necessary spatio-temporal distance between the separate entities; it questions, threatens their separate identities through an excess of presence, disturbing the boundaries. And it is not just individual entities, but categories that can be at stake here, notably the distinction between organic and inorganic, real and artificial. ‘Legitimate’ representation and reproduction must respect the necessary distance, the necessary boundaries. Hence, again, we recall the reaction of the citizens to Olympia’s unmasking, propelling themselves into individuality and therefore authenticity, each asserting a distinctive ‘signature’. Huet indeed brings out the parallels with art by suggesting that ‘legitimate’ representation, involving a proper lineage, might be taken to involve a degree of imperfection, and an artist’s signature, since perfection would abolish the space between model and image. A representation that does not offer itself as such, that takes the place of the model or the origin, is ‘monstrous or fantastical’. Hence Olympia, and the portrait in the Poe story.

But a further twist is added, if we take the portrait of Carlotta in the film, with the necklace, which are together supposed to help validate Madeleine’s story, as the wife of Elster. For it turns out, at the end, that although ‘great-grandmother’ Carlotta did have a child, this child died without offspring. Neither portrait nor necklace give any real link to the past, neither validates a line of descent. (And, once again, we find the woman’s procreative role eliminated in favour of the cultural myth of autogenesis.) We also saw that Nora’s contradictory dream of her own grandmother signalled its own unreliability. These identities are never really knowable, these guarantees are never worth much, as the presences reveal their absence in their very assertions of presence. Identities, guarantees: these exist to produce something that, if it existed, would be the opposite they seek desperately to avoid, the representation that replaced the reality through its very identity with it.

Identities, boundaries: that the subversion of these is connected to a sense of the uncanny can be further illustrated by a return to the role of eyes in the Hoffmann text. Subsuming both the flaming eyes of Coppola’s spectacles and the ones thrown at Nathanael by Spalanzani, and the spyglass Nathanael actually buys from Coppola, under the term ‘optical supplements’ or ‘detached eyes’, we could say, following Møller, that these constitute a third term, between ‘eyes’ and ‘no eyes’: they are
neither, or both. ‘They are related to insight as well as blindness, to life as well as to death’; they reveal ‘the desire to create and to animate, both figuratively and literally speaking, and the desire for knowledge and insight’. And it is a desire for mastery, transgressive in involving the modern – and male – quest for power beyond limits, beyond boundaries. The optical supplement is the eye of the other, the transformative vision that risks madness and death: if Nathanael refuses it, out of terror, Clara denies its very existence. And for the reader, this is a text that conveys contradictory imperatives too. We are encouraged into the narrative, invited to use the spyglass, experience the frisson of the uncanny; but we are also invited to stand back, take our distance; most dramatically, by the ‘professor of poetry and eloquence’:

‘The whole thing is an allegory – an extended metaphor!’

This apparently reflexive comment is inserted innocently enough into the text – it is easy to pass by without really noticing – but is surely worth pondering. Firstly, though, we can see the professor’s comment as being of a piece with the author’s style, which at times inserts a vein of irony into the text. Irony, in this respect, could be counterposed to the uncanny: it defies experience in the interest of reflexive distance, simultaneously lamenting the inability of language to capture the plenitude of experience while celebrating this very inability, this distance, as a form of superiority. A condition of such an ironic reading is to separate out levels of the text: the ironic distancing of language from experience is mapped onto an ability to read this in the text, which in turn leads us to recognise that this is an ability that Nathanael does not seem to possess, an important key to his fate. Bresnick suggests that ‘To recognize irony, then, means to be able to perform the act of critical negation that would separate the literal from the figurative; yet it is precisely this negation that proves impossible for Nathanael’, who is ‘invariably swayed by the positivity of his fantasy’. Yet there may be more to this than an inability to master irony.

So, if we now follow the professor’s advice, and read allegorically, can we see Nathanael as the tragic Romantic hero? In a sense, after all, this hero has to refuse these commonplace distinctions (such as literal/figurative) in the intensity of his insight; his ‘tragedy’ is that he must either betray this insight, in the act of writing or painting – to communicate it is to corrupt it – or be trapped by it, unable to function in everyday life, where these distinctions are fundamental. He seeks obsessively to create unity out of these separate spheres, integrate the distinctions into
an unattainable whole, the irrecuperable sublime of the Romantic aesthetic quest. He knows his will is not his own, that the ‘autonomy of the will’ is a chimera; he does not fall for that hoary Enlightenment myth. To use Nathanael’s own words, he feels himself a ‘plaything for the cruelty of dark forces’.64

Nathanael’s poem seems crucial here. It is a poem centred on a vision of an attempt by Coppelius to destroy the love between him and Clara. In his earlier writing, Nathanael is presented as lacking in talent; but this is different. On reading the finished work aloud to himself, he is gripped by terror, and shrieks: ‘Whose hideous voice is this?’ He does not recognise it as Coppelius; we, as readers, are bound to see it as having some relation to the latter, whether as ‘return of the repressed’, as alienated other, or as the Romantic-demonic voice of creativity. What is clear is that he does not recognise it as in any sense his. So his tragedy is perhaps that he is not sufficiently the Romantic hero: he cannot perform the transition from the pre-modern to the modern that is implicit in the very possibility of Romanticism and the status, powers and limits of the modern imagination. He unwittingly embodies an important aspect of the uncanny itself, reminding himself, and us, of a world of portents, signs and powers that might once have been meaningfully reinforced as part of the cultural imaginary but has now become an atavistic return of something uncomprehended, strange. He takes the ‘dark forces’ as straightforwardly literal, rather than metaphorical, and remains trapped in this polarity that he cannot ‘master’. It is precisely the Romantic notion of the transfiguring power of the imagination, mediating the absolute terms of that opposition, that is not available to him. If Coppelius could be taken to represent the terrible gift of creativity – beyond law, morality, even culture itself – then Nathanael could be said to disavow or betray the gift, through fear and horror.

If Nathanael is doomed to carry the torch of nascent Romanticism, Clara is clearly his opposite: she allegorises the project of Enlightenment, even in her name.65 She articulates, very cogently, what is in effect the ‘official’ modern view of these matters, together with the practical emphasis on how to deal with the problem of false or archaic beliefs. Her view is indeed very close to that of Freud himself, whose psychoanalysis is essentially a more elaborate framework built on these foundations.

Clara argues that if there is indeed a ‘dark power’ that ‘places a thread within us’, then ‘it must take the same form as we do, it must become our very self’; only then can we come to believe in it. If we can recognise these ‘alien and malevolent influences for what they are’ and be resolute,
then ‘the uncanny power must surely perish in a vain struggle to assume the form which is our own reflection’.\textsuperscript{66} While rather complex in form, this argument has the ring of everyday plausibility, of common sense; but it is worth pausing to note just how strange and tension-laden the argument actually is. Clara is purporting to argue \textit{against} Nathanael’s belief in ‘dark powers’, yet she seems to agree with him in giving them at least a twilight reality. This power doesn’t exist; yet it ‘places a thread within us’, it ‘struggles’ to assume our form, and we can destroy it. It has to be in some sense \textit{there}, so that we can vanquish it, yet it is never really there at all. We must destroy it before it really exists; once it \textit{does} exist, it does so as ‘our very self’, so again, either it does not really exist, or else our ‘self’, in being identified with it, is threatened by the same state of non-existence, or of existence as what we could call ‘alienated other’, no longer our self at all. And this acute tension speaks to the very tension in the Enlightenment approach to the ontological status of self, other, and those problematical presences that threaten the purity and clarity of the everyday disenchanted modern world view: dreams, visions, fantasies, hallucinations, ghosts. They all ‘exist’, as contingent realities of consciousness from time to time, just as they cannot ‘really’ exist, beyond these forms of consciousness themselves. We are in the world of phantasmagoria and the other innovations of visual technology around the time Hoffmann was writing: visual phenomena whose appearance as ‘real’ could be conceded, but only on condition that they could be ‘explained’ by being ‘explained away’, rendered unreal, ‘mere’ projections of mind, like the images projected by the magic lanterns in the phantasmagoria magic shows.\textsuperscript{67}

Clara herself, in her own developing argument, emphasises the way such projections can be superimposed on ‘the other’: if we surrender to the dark psychic power, it draws ‘alien figures’ from the outside world into our ‘inner selves’, so we ourselves give life to the ‘spirit which our strange delusion persuades us is speaking from such figures’. So the other becomes, in effect, the ‘phantom of our own self’; such power as Coppelius/Coppola may have is a function of this phantasmatic projection: ‘his power consists only in your belief’.\textsuperscript{68} Again, the self is conjured up, only to disappear into the other; it is difficult to see what residue can be left, to what subject such ‘beliefs’ can be attributed. But if we do accept this oscillation, whereby power returns to the self as ‘belief’ in order to deny power to the other, then this power of belief must be extraordinary indeed, if it can produce such phantoms with malevolent power to harm or even destroy the self. Is this so different from Nathanael’s attribution of influence to ‘dark forces’ from \textit{outside} the
self? In swinging between outside and inside – or from outside to inside, as is required by the modern view of the self – the ontological structure remains (uncannily) intact, continuous. Nor, as we have seen, is it so easy to ensure that the transition from ‘external’ to ‘internal’ is so straightforward: the boundary is unstable, and the direction is always in principle reversible. Indeed, as we have seen, even on Clara’s own argument there are grounds for thinking that the location of the ‘dark power’ is necessarily indeterminate between these possibilities.

As for the Enlightenment in practice, it has to be remarked that occasions when Nathanael actually follows Clara’s advice, or takes into account how she would look at the situation, invariably seem to presage disaster. For example, only when she reminds Nathanael of Coppelius’s existence, by bragging about how they have driven him off, does he remember his poem; and, towards the end, it is she who suggests going up the tower (to get a good view, see the town in all its clarity before leaving – a typical Enlightenment-panoptic conceit), spots the bushes, and thus precipitates the final disaster. The down to earth, literal-minded Clara is resolute in driving away any hint of the figural or phantasmagorical: thus she is always trying to separate the phantom Coppelius from the ‘real’ Coppola, and reduce him to his appropriate state of unreality altogether. But Nathanael cannot resolve this either: to accept the figural and the phantasmatic as real, to grant the reality of spectral presences simpliciter, is again to miss the point, and remains just as one-dimensional. Both Clara and Nathanael are slaves to the literal, in their contrasting ways: for Nathanael, the ‘dark power’ is literally there; for Clara, it is purely imaginary, not-there. At best, it can be mere misleading metaphor. Neither shows any adequate grasp of the ‘real’ possibilities (and limitations) of the figural. Clara consistently applies rationalist criteria in all situations, and always seeks the explanation that explains away. She pursues closure, the dream of total presence, total transparency, just as obsessively as Scottie in the second half of Vertigo. Determined to banish Coppelius and Olympia through rigorous, reductionist logic, she ensures their return. This will to absolute understanding and absolute control suggests a model of the Enlightenment as death drive; perhaps it is appropriate that, at the end of his dream-poem, when Nathanael manages to gaze at Clara, ‘what looks at him from Clara’s kindly eyes is death’.69

Fantasy, one might say, should not overcome or displace the ‘real’, but reminds us that the latter can only be grasped in transfigured form. One might say that reality lies in the gap between the real and the unreal, or the superimposition of the one on the other that enables us
to appropriate it through constituting it through the imagination of the figural: and it is from this gap, or out of this superimposition, that the uncanny emerges, the unresolvable in the modern, the presence of presence in its very displacement.

The self, the image, the darkroom

These issues raised by the contrasting perspectives of Clara and Nathanael can seem like a re-run of debates on ‘spectral evidence’ that had occurred a little over a century before, during the Salem witch trials of 1692. These debates focused on the ‘evidence’ that the shapes, the forms, of the accused had actually appeared to the bewitched, the victims of the witchcraft attacks. Pudaloff presents this as ‘the Lockean moment, when argument and interest shift from the powers of supernatural beings to the role of human senses in gaining knowledge and their reliability in evaluating it’. Both advocates and sceptics of the claims around ‘spectral evidence’ agreed that one should ‘trust the senses and the self as the bases of all knowledge’.70 In effect, the demise of witchcraft beliefs and trials involved the gradual ‘explaining away’ of the sensory evidence by relocating it decisively on the side of the subject, as a matter of fantasy, dream, or delusion – though, as we have seen, the ‘decisiveness’ turns out to be not so simple after all. So the challenge for the Enlightenment in this area became, as Castle suggests, ‘how to explain away the supernatural without “inventing the uncanny” in its place’71 – a challenge it never really succeeded in meeting.

Let us now take the crisis of belief and representation. Both the category of belief, and the nature of the image as a product of imagination, have in common a difficulty in conveying negation, though the nature of the problem differs. ‘Surmounted’ beliefs, such as those in spirits, witchcraft, etc., pose the problem that even the assertion of disbelief seems to covertly self-refute: ‘not believing’ seems to posit the object of disbelief even in denying its existence. And when something happens that seems to ‘confirm’ the old belief, this counts as uncanny. Again, as mentioned earlier, in connection with presence and absence, ‘imagined entities’ have an obscure status, neither properly existing nor not-existing; and the uncanny is the mode of existence of the imagined ‘unreal’ or absent. And these can be linked together: not believing in what we see is still seeing. It is still an experience. The uncanny is the presence of the absent and the ‘not real’; the implicit presence of disavowed, transgressive forms and locations of personal experience. We see here that any culture that insists on a strict categorial distinction
between ‘real’ and ‘unreal’ as basic to its ontology will have problems. After all, ‘unreal’ is at least as paradoxical as ‘undead’, since it pretends to the status of absolute negation but actually can only function as mediator, hinting that the unreal cannot be wholly so, for it could not be known or labelled as such, without becoming at least ‘slightly’ real, which contradicts its point. Nor can the ‘real’ be insulated here; if there are problems with the ‘unreal’, there must be with the ‘real’, too. One could, for example, say that the real defies its own adequate representation; its representation is always inadequate, poised between adding to the real, and the nothingness, the paradoxical ‘unreality’, of mere representation. As we have seen, as representation moves closer to the real, either it, or the real, becomes uncanny, a spectral doubling. And to this ‘other’, uncanny side of the world, corresponds the allegorical. The world as allegory is the world doubled, with overt surface and hidden depth of meaning, but the modern world is no longer straightforwardly legible because these are no longer so securely fixed together, hence no longer existing save in fragments. And the ‘doubling’ of allegory reinforces the uncanny, as a sense of an absent presence: an occult materiality present in the world, potentially able to spread anywhere.

Recalling that list of ‘problematical presences’ – dreams, visions, fantasies, hallucinations and ghosts – it is clear that what they have in common, whatever their differences, is an involvement with the image. The demise of ‘spectral evidence’ in effect gives enhanced scope for the imagination, resulting in the production of the mind as a phantasmagoria, an inner theatre of the imagination, populated with images that could come to have a powerful reality of their own. Castle elaborates the consequences of this increasing emphasis, during the eighteenth century, on the internalisation of the self as a theatrical space, with boundaries, an ‘inside’ to the ‘outside’ of the body and its communication with the rest of the world through the senses. Rationalism thereby produced ‘a new human experience of strangeness, anxiety, bafflement, and intellectual impasse’, because the ‘demystifying project’ was seriously compromised from the start: the rationalists ‘did not so much negate the traditional spirit world as displace it into the realm of psychology’. If ghosts were thoughts, thoughts in turn became images: ghostly, haunting. Ferriar, propounding his theory of hallucination in 1813, claimed that normal thought itself has a spectral side: memory is a process of ‘spectral representation’, since ‘From recalling images by an art of memory the transition is direct to beholding spectral objects, which have been floating in the imagination’. And as a vivid illustration of the continuities with the time of Salem, we can recall the
intriguing episode at a phantasmagoria show when a man strikes in fear at a phantom with his stick – just as, a century earlier, ‘there were several instances of striking at spectres’. This, then, is the context – of a lively imagination of the spectral, in both popular culture and Romanticism, and a counteracting, sceptical Enlightenment attitude – in which Nathanael’s misadventures take place.

This period – the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – is also one that Batchen has identified as manifesting an endemic ‘desire to photograph’, a precondition for the subsequent invention of photography itself. This desire can be characterised as a desire for the mechanical transcription of nature, but not cast exclusively, or even primarily, in the language of representation as domination. Rather, the conception seems more consistent with Romanticism, a conception in which representation and reproduction seem totally entwined: the representation of nature is simultaneously reproduction by nature. The inventors of photography present the photographic process as a mode of representation that is ‘simultaneously active and passive, that draws nature while allowing her to draw herself, that both reflects and constitutes its object, that undoes the distinction between copy and original, that partakes equally of the realms of nature and culture’; a mode of representation that had become implicit and frequently explicit in late eighteenth century views of the relation between the viewer, vision and landscape. The viewer is inherently caught up in this process whereby ‘viewing’ is also ‘reproducing’, so the viewer becomes ‘a being who is for the first time both the subject and the object of representation’. With authors like Coleridge, ‘mind came to be regarded as something constitutive of the self rather than simply reflective of the outside world’, with the imagination playing a central role in this shift of emphasis, so momentous in its consequences.

In effect, what we encounter here is an essential continuity, or homology, between two processes, along with the models we construct to understand them: the production and reproduction of nature through the photograph, and the production and reproduction of the self through the image. Cadava suggests a model of the body as space, with ‘an interiority devoted to the production of images’, such that ‘the body is a kind of darkroom’, basing this on hints in Benjamin, such as the latter’s brief deployment of the concept of ‘image-space’ in his paper on Surrealism. This spatialisation of the image involves a fixing, a kind of trapping of the image in time that simultaneously telescopes time into the image. The photo attempts to ‘fix’ the present moment, but inevitably embodies the paradox of the difference of that very presence.
Something of this is captured in the term itself, the linkage of light and writing in ‘photography’: the instantaneous quality of light impossibly transcribed in the textual temporality of inscription. Thus Batchen refers to photographic desire as entailing ‘the desire for an impossible conjunction of transience and fixity’. And this of course implicates the viewer, so that ‘The present during which we look at the photographic image is but a staging point, a hallucinatory hovering that imbricates both past and future’.79

What we ‘fix’ in the image is necessarily both a construction and a projection. If we cannot simply ‘reflect’ nature outside, as we are intimately involved in the production whereby it is fixed as image, no more can we reflect nature inside, the self and its experiences. Attempts to grasp ‘our self’ reflexively are broken-backed; we can only grasp it, be conscious of it, by distancing from it. We thereby subtly reconfigure it, as image, in the very act whereby we grasp it through doubling it, in alienation from it. It is like taking a photo; it is part of the sense in which modern culture is ‘photographic’. And this ‘doubling’ is related to the constitution of identity in this interior darkroom, wherein reflexive experience mediates presence into presences, into doubles and other figures. In this process of self-constitution and self-projection, the self as problematically reflexive, seeking self-knowledge, and the self as charismatic creator, come together in their inevitable separation. And one symptom of this is a heightened possibility that these recalcitrant experiences of separation and doubling will be coded as ‘unconscious’; that the unconscious, indeed, is a category that presupposes this revolution in consciousness.

Castle writes that ‘For as long as the external world is populated by spirits ... the mind remains unconscious of itself, focused elsewhere, and unable to assert either its autonomy or its creative claims on the world’. From having been unconscious of itself, it becomes conscious of its unconscious, as it were, even as it engages with its own disturbingly paradoxical spirit-producing powers, which make it capable of going beyond its own ‘appropriate’ limits, into madness itself, in ‘the compulsive image-making of the reverie-prone individual’ that results in ‘the unleashing of spectres’.80 One might say that going from being ‘unconscious’ of the mind’s workings to attempting a reflexive understanding of them merely and necessarily displaces the darkness, relocates an unconscious ‘inside’, and constitutes mind as a perpetual struggle to grasp and discipline the recalcitrant images and fantasies that are themselves the results, the projections, of its own activities. The doubling of the self as image, and its inscrutability as ‘unconscious’, go hand in hand, while our ability to construct the ‘master narrative’ of
coherent selfhood out of the play of unruly images and fantasies is forever inadequate, just as the imperative to make the attempt, in the name of the ‘rational self’, is constantly there. Thus, the unconscious is the uncanny in the self, reflecting its obscurity to itself, its reflexive inability to coincide with itself, even perhaps the self as it questions its own location, and that of its spectral products.

The spectre, the phantasm, can thus be seen to have two coinciding sources in this ontology of the modern experience. Both mind and camera operate as mechanisms for the production of the image, as a surrogate for presence, the means whereby presence is reconfigured into presences. Firstly, in the context of mind, the double, as image of the embodied self, seems to ‘lift off’ from the surface of the world, take on its own reality, known in its difference by its appearance in places it should not be, or would not be expected (yet related to its place and time of origin ...). In the second case, it is as though the image floats free of the technological apparatus of its production, in photography and film. The result is the same: the phantasm can become the uncanny double of the image, even to the point of becoming visually identical with it. Spirits and spirit photos emerge as manifestly products of the same universe. The prevalence of phrases such as ‘modern necromancy’ in early discussions of the photo\(^8\) seems hardly surprising, and Gunning has explored the conjunction of the scientific and the uncanny in the world of spirit photography, presenting ‘a uniquely modern conception of the spirit world as caught up in the endless play of image making and reproduction’.\(^8\)

**Shadowing the modern**

In trying to know itself as itself, the self engages in this uncanny game of doubling and haunting, reflexively unable to capture the experience of selfhood, experience as such, in its immediacy and plenitude: there is always a remainder, a residue, a shadow, represented, in displaced form, through the vagaries of ‘representation’ itself. This in turn runs parallel to the impossibility of project as realisation, the Enlightenment project of the modern, whether as a social dynamic or refracted through the projects of our lives: it must always be haunted by its own darkness. These two, together, constitute the uncanny structure of the modern, with its implications for our inability to theorise it adequately as experience. In elaborating both these dimensions, as we move towards a conclusion, we can further suggest that this approach, in turn, both presupposes and implies a perspective on ‘figuration’ itself.
We are told that Kant defines enlightenment as ‘the freeing of the individual from his fear of shadows’. But perhaps enlightenment is productive of shadows in the first place: to reveal, to cast light, is to constitute the background as dark, hence to take away with one move the knowledge one acquires with the other. In this respect, the Enlightenment would embody the paradox inherent in the Freudian uncanny, the twofold process whereby hidden becomes unhidden as familiar becomes unfamiliar. Conversely, then, if enlightenment is the goal, and the project aspires to its total realisation, it points towards the ‘paranoid city of absolute transparency’, in which the lightness of being emerges as the darkness of the project involved in bringing it about, in which power emerges as, paradoxically, the power to render obscure in the very obsession with surveillance and revelation. In such a world, shadows would indeed be potentially ever-present, and objects of fear. And what is radical in Benjamin is his recasting of enlightenment in the language of the everyday cycle of night and day, with ‘awakening’ as the key that subverts the awake/asleep dichotomy of Enlightenment as project. To awaken is to inhabit a strange twilight realm, half- clarity, half-dream. And the dream faces both ways: it is the aspiration to a better future – as emphasised in the rhetoric of enlightenment – but it is also life in/as penumbra, day as inseparable from shadow, night spilling over into day. For Benjamin, the Jetztzeit, the ‘now of recognizability’, is the point at which things put on their true (Surrealist) face, a moment in which ‘awakening’ is as much dream as lucid consciousness. This conjunction of sleeping and waking provides the twilight state of modern consciousness.

The Enlightenment, on this reinterpretation, needs its darkness: that is both its point of departure, what makes it possible – and necessary – and its horizon, its limit. But this darkness is a darkness it can live with, rather than a threat. Darkness reminds us that to realise the project would be darkness indeed, the darkness of tyranny. Enlightenment reminds us that, after the light, there comes again the night; and this darkness, from which we awake – though perhaps never fully – is the darkness inherent in life itself. For Rancière, modernity thus entails ‘the thinking of emancipation in terms of unfulfillment’. Always one has to live – and one has to write about – modernity in the relative absence of enlightenment; hence the inevitability of twilight and ghosts. This absence is the horizon of the modern, the dual face of its dream, stretching the infinity of its promise over the repetitive return of its night-time visions; the very condition, perhaps, of living the experience that constitutes it.
And this is just as true of the ‘reflexive’ aspect of modernity: either the reflexive move itself takes time, hence becoming or remaining recalcitrant to its own grasp of itself; or it fractures time into a multiplicity of mini-times; or its reflexive grasp remains formal, abstract – and both of the latter imply that ‘time’ as linear and continuous escapes altogether. Modernity as time is thus constantly producing and reproducing the conditions of uncanny figuration, aspects that return as potentially familiar yet misrecognised. Producing the time that it is comfortable with – ordering it in terms of progress and/or decadence, utopianism and/or nostalgia – modern culture endlessly reproduces a figural past that haunts it, a past in which the past as past, and the dead as dead, are forever ‘unplaced’. The apparently small, even trivial, voice of the uncanny can thus reverberate powerfully through the whole structure of modern civilisation. It suggests not only that no closure could ever be possible, no state of self-sufficient transparency beyond darkness, beyond the penumbra, but that the ‘reflexive’ aspect of the project itself contributes significantly to the recalcitrant unease and obscurity that is continually reproduced at its heart.

We can move towards the figural by remembering that the project of modernity presupposes a model of the integrated, ‘rational’ subject with a necessary degree of ‘self-awareness’, and there are two categories of limitations to the latter: firstly, the inscrutability of motives, the possibility of systematically engendered self-misunderstanding, producing theories of the ‘recalcitrant subject’, both suffering from, yet also complicit in, its own mystification (Marx, Nietzsche, Freud); secondly, reflexively inadequate understanding, the impossibility of getting a grasp of the total picture when inside it, a perspective latent in structuralist and post-structuralist positionings of the subject in language and culture but not as often given explicit formulation. Both of these involve not just the subject but its relation to the object, and, crucially, to the object as ‘context’, as that which ‘surrounds’ the subject, ultimately something it participates in, not something it can simply distance itself from, but this comes to the fore particularly in the second perspective, which is indeed led to interrogate self/other and subject/object distinctions themselves, in the light of this ‘reflexive inadequacy’ of self-understanding.

A theory of figuration characterises the way aspects of the reality of which we are a part necessarily escape our grasp but are still ‘present’ to it, in a change of register whereby the penumbra around what is overt, available as representation, becomes figured, or ‘figures’ in the representation, as a distortion in its contours. One of the implications of this is
that we can no longer refer simply to ‘representation’, since the distinction between ‘reality’ and ‘thought’ is itself necessarily questioned by this reflexive figuration, the products of which are neither simply aspects of reality nor merely metaphorical substitutions within the world of thought. Rather, ‘grasp’ or representation thereby slides into projection, a bodying-forth, in specific ‘concrete’ form, of the penumbra. And such ‘projections’ are not necessarily or exclusively projections of those aspects of the subject that may, at the time or generally, be most readily seen as ‘subjective’; they can also be projections as embedded or embodied in the world, and may indeed be experienced as more to do with the world than with the subject. They may be experienced as obdurate, obscure, intense aspects or presences of the world itself. This figuration becomes ‘uncanny’ when our fundamental sense of the ‘proper’, of space, time and identity, along with our ability to grasp these, are challenged, hence involving both subject and object in this disturbance of the experience/representation/reality boundaries. A feature of the latter can be, as we have seen, that ‘representation’ can seem to float free of its ‘proper’ moorings, revealing the way that the modern development of ‘mediated’ representation, in conjunction with modern notions of the self, grasped or projected as image, are both interlinked and central to this sense of the uncanny.

We can get closer to this if we recall that these ‘figures’ have effects. In this sense, it is unimportant whether a reader is startled, frightened, or shocked, by reading an uncanny narrative, or by having a more direct, less mediated, uncanny experience. What matters is that whether in fiction or everyday life, something has to feel real if it is to be experienced as ‘uncanny’, just as that feeling coincides with acute ontological doubt around precisely that reality/fiction, truth/illusion boundary itself, and ‘where’ the experience is ‘placed’, relative to it. Figuration itself begins in this uncertain area, just as it only forms itself through an appearance – and an apparel – that moves across these boundaries, reproducing ambiguity, uncertainty and otherness. Thus ‘presence’ comes costumed in borrowed vestments, as the play of figure, opening up possibilities of displacement and dissociation whereby the ‘otherness’ (of the self, the body, the social, etc.) becomes alienated, unrecognised, whether in ordinary life or the phantasms of popular culture.

To pursue this, we can return to the language of shadow and penumbra, and take up some suggestive comments from Marina Warner, who reminds us that photography was seen as ‘shadow play’, with the camera able to convey ghostly images suggesting the ‘shade’ (Latin penumbra)
that thereby also evoked the person after death. She adds that ‘Those who are neither living nor dead cannot project an image, either as mirror reflection or as shadow’: spectres and images, shadowy presences that are also non-presences, are already shadows, one might say, and shadows that figure figuration itself. Claiming that shadows ‘can help summon the insubstantial character of spirit and the emergence of ideas’, one can add that this also engenders the figural as this very relation between ‘self’ and reflection on experience.

Referring to the power of black and white photos, and silhouette images, as emerging from the light that played over the subjects, she writes: ‘They are emanations, captured and stilled. Is that a figure of speech? They are copies of the originals, and in that sense, their character ceases to be metaphorical. It is here, on this edge where the figurative touches the actual and the image becomes reality, that shadow eerily communicates individual presence’, and this effect grows as shadow becomes shade or reflection. Then, ‘the projected image of a person brushes the condition of spirit’. This passage vividly refuses the conventional distinctions, the constitutive distinctions of modern consciousness – metaphorical/literal, figurative/actual, image/reality – in order to focus on the impossible point between them, where figuration itself is bodied forth, as that which both makes these distinctions possible, grounds them, and yet cannot be formulated from within these terms, through them. And this is where modernity both opens up the possibility of experiences that reveal disturbances or uncertainties across these boundaries, while making them necessarily unresolvable within thought, closing off the possibility of making sense of them.

The ‘impossible point’ – this void, this absence in the real that indicates my impossible self-presence – it is this that constitutes the ultimate condition for uncanny figuration. Thus Elkins refers to an abyss, suggesting that ‘An abyss is literally a cleft in the world, and figuratively a fissure in meaning ... you can stare at it forever without hope of understanding it’. He reminds us, for example, that paintings can have ‘empty centers, voids where something should be’, just as ‘We can feel an uncanny residue, an inexplicable supplement, an aura, a presence that is indisputably there even if no one can see it’. And we have an intriguing brief comment by Žižek, where he suggests that a scene in Vertigo where Scottie is shown observing an image of Madeleine in a mirror, through a barely open door, in effect shows him observing her from ‘a crack in our reality’, or a ‘pre-ontological shadowy realm’, a crack that fissures two worlds, reveals them as disjointed, a displacement into the film of our own real disjunction from ourselves. And one
might add that death seems to be inseparable from this cleft in the world, this uncanny presence, as was implied in the previous discussion of the Poe story; hence doppelgängers, doubles, shadows and reflections become displaced figurations of this impossible self-presence.

The figural is produced from within, yet cannot be articulated from within; it has a potential for haunting. It is never fully present, yet not absent either; it embodies indeterminate efficacy, the efficacy of the imagination; it can relate form to content, space and time. It is always potentially able to float free, as spectral. Hence the uncanny as ‘possible experience’, taking place in space and time, even as it dislocates them, involving a sense of diffuse unease, along with more specific ‘figures’ which challenge the boundary and identity assumptions of modern culture. Suggesting that ‘phantasm’ and ‘phantom’ cannot be clearly distinguished, Wolfreys adds that the phantasm ‘is not itself nor a representation of itself, but rather a figure, one amongst many, which spaces and haunts my identity’, a formulation which appropriately links ‘figure’ to the theme of selfhood discussed previously.

As we have seen, uncanny experiences are disturbing because they suggest the possibility of the cataclysm: they provoke doubt, uncertainty, a frisson of fear, about the adequacy of our grasp of the whole structure of experience. The boundaries waver; uneasy borderlands loom up, in the penumbra, around the fringes, of thought and consciousness. This is well expressed by Rodley, who suggests that the attributes of the uncanny are ‘those of dread rather than actual terror, of the haunting rather than the apparition’. The uncanny is the zone of intersection between the known and the felt, and the familiar and the strange – the place of ‘haunting’, whether or not a ghost is involved. Spectres haunt, but haunting – always uncanny – can occur without the spectral; haunting indicates the potential manifestation of figure in more determinate form. The spectral can be haunting precisely because the figure is, in itself, fundamentally shadowy, indeterminate, uncanny. The ghost is a most appropriate figure, the most appropriate figure perhaps, for figure itself. In this sense, Derrida is right to suggest that ‘it is perhaps the hidden figure of all figures’. And this fits with Richardson’s study of ghost experiences in the Hudson Valley: ‘actual’ ghosts are more specific ‘manifestations’, figurations, of this ‘sense of troubling uncanniness’, so that ‘a sense of hauntedness is not necessarily reliant on actual apparitions’; there can simply be ‘assertions of eerie imaginative and emotional connection to the past at specific sites’. Let us stay with the ghost itself, for a moment, in the light of this perspective on figuration. We can recall the intriguing theory of Balzac, that each body ‘consists of a series of ghosts, in an infinity of superimposed
layers’, and that each photo detaches one of these. These spectral layers, floating through the air (or ether), seem uncannily similar to the images we would construct of ghosts in our minds anyway, as Scarry suggests when she asks why a good ghost story can be so believable when most of us would claim no actual experience of ghosts; she argues, in response, that ‘the story instructs its hearers to create an image whose own properties are second nature to the imagination: it instructs its hearers to depict in the mind something thin, dry, filmy, two-dimensional, and without solidity’. Thus ‘we at once recognize ... precisely the thing described’. And accounts of alleged ghost experiences fit this quite well. Richardson shows how ghosts are described in terms of ‘vagueness, colourlessness, wispiness, incompleteness’, manifesting ‘lack of definition or identifiers’; they are ‘inchoate or faded’. They are presences rather than identities, as it were.

The uncanny, then, as ‘unformed feeling’, in the gap between perception and cognition, is interesting because it is suggestive of the foundation of experience as it is grasped, figured, in aesthetic terms. The uncanny is feeling as it is available to be shaped, projected by the imagination, rather than appropriated conceptually in knowledge. So the ‘uncanny feeling’ points to the necessity of a more proactive imagination to give us a sense of the ‘something other in’ cognition that is also beyond it, the aesthetic shading that blurs the boundaries of our endeavours to represent experience and thereby situates itself – obscurely – in these very borders. And it is this that makes possible the figuration of experience, its potential to disrupt the smooth representational economy of cognition and literary or artistic appropriation.

There is a sense of power or force that fractures meaning, even as we try to grasp it as meaning. Just as the disruptive figures of film or text can evoke mysterious ‘powers’ or a sense of the supernatural, so our very (in)ability to grasp this maps that very same process, whereby we figure the experience as uncanny in a way that reproduces that power in our experience, in aesthetic mode, reflecting the excess of experience in or over any attempt to know it. The uncanny, then, points us towards a grasp of these dynamics of figuration that suggest an irreducible dimension or condition of modern experience: both an aspect of this, and a particular ‘structure of feeling’ within it. This affects our very ability to categorise experience, make judgements about particular kinds of experience, the relations between them, and the sense we can make of them. Disturbing our feelings simultaneously disturbs our ability to ‘sort’ these feelings. Clearly this is in some sense ‘aesthetic’, but it is aesthetics as the disturbing home that endeavours to find a place for the ultimate in the unhomely.
The uncanny is an experience that calls into being our reflexivity, reminds us of it, of our inability to switch off our minds when 'experiencing' an experience, even as it emphasises the impossibility of grasping presence as such. The uncanny exists in and through these specific experiences, even as it shows them to be penetrated by broader reflexive concerns that in turn throw us back into specifics, into figuration, through their very status as unresolvable. The only promise the uncanny can offer, then, is the promise of irresolution. In raising these worries about experience from within it, the uncanny questions the nature of the fundamental, taken for granted categories that serve to constitute these experiences as intelligible for us. And it necessarily questions the whole reflexive project of modernity itself, the idea that we could ever be sufficiently 'present' to ourselves. What we encounter is the world of secular allegories of fragmentation that both feed on and reinforce the uncanny, the sense of the uncertain in experience, the reflexive gap, the sense that experience is inflected with a reflexive consciousness that it can never escape and never resolve. Hence this unhomely modern world, strange even in its familiarity, in which we can be strangely at home – at home to the very strangers who are ourselves.

Notes


3. A limited reaction against the emphasis on discourse and textuality found in post-structuralist and deconstructive approaches is evident in hints at a theory of figuration that draw significantly on theorists who at least partially resisted this emphasis, notably Lyotard and Deleuze. For discussions and applications of these, and other approaches, see D. N. Rodowick, Reading the Figural, or, Philosophy after the New Media (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); R. Bogue, Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Arts (London: Routledge, 2003), ch. 5; J. Elkins, On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), ch. 3; and S. Lash, Sociology of Postmodernity (London: Routledge, 1990), ch. 7. Influenced by a ‘corporeal turn’ in cultural studies, linking affect, the uncanny, and figures of the social, see also J. Elmer, Reading at the Social Limit: Affect, Mass Culture, and Edgar Allan Poe (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).


11. J. Baudrillard, Symbolic Exchange and Death (London: Sage, 1993), p. 142. One can add that Freud, logically enough, points out that the double can also be seen as indicating the opposite, immortality (‘Uncanny’, pp. 356–7).


20. Asendorf, p. 133.


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33. Barnes, p. 194.
34. Barnes, p. 56.
35. Barnes, pp. 206, 65, 60.
37. Barnes, pp. 64, 73.
38. Barnes, p. 59.
40. Barnes, pp. 80, 80, 136.
41. Barnes, p. 91.
42. Barnes, pp. 94, 96.
43. Barnes, pp. 94–6.
44. Barnes, p. 221.
46. Barnes, p. 169.
47. Marcus, p. 244.
48. Barnes, p. 60.
49. In her insightful, Freud-inflected account, Bronfen (pp. 339–46) particularly explores this fascination with death and the complexity of motives in this scene of the film.
55. See for example D. Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Doubleday, 1976). And Hitchcock himself is known to have been influenced, in his imaging of the uncanny, by the paintings of Edward Hopper, whose haunting pictures of spaces that are as claustrophobic when depicting the outside as the inside can stand as prime figurations of ‘uncanny presence’. See M. Iversen, ‘In the Blind Field: Hopper and the Uncanny’, *Art History* (1998) 21: 3, pp. 409–29.
59. Bronfen (p. 345) points out that the end of the film could be seen as a re-staging of the initial trauma, rather than its resolution.


63. Bresnick, p. 129.

64. Hoffmann, p. 100.


66. Hoffmann, pp. 94–5.

67. Castle, ch. 9.

68. Hoffmann, pp. 95, 101.

69. Hoffmann, p. 102.


71. Castle, p. 17.


73. Castle, pp. 8, 174.

74. Cited in Castle, p. 181. One can add that the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* lists ‘an object or source of dread or terror, imagined as an apparition’, and ‘an image or phantom produced by reflection’ as meanings of ‘spectre’: these nicely encapsulate the subject/object, experience/representation tensions inherent in this model.

75. Pudaloff, p. 345.


77. Cadava, p. 76.

78. W. Benjamin, ‘Surrealism’.

79. Batchen, pp. 91, 93.

80. Castle, pp. 143, 183.

81. Batchen, p. 92.

84. J. Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (London: Athlone Press, 1999), p. 84.
85. Rancière, p. 28.
86. Hence Derrida on ‘Figures of Borrowing, Borrowed Figures, Figurality as the Figure of Borrowing’, *Specters*, p. 136 (109).
97. Richardson, pp. 26, 26, 27.
98. Two other recent accounts, those of Gordon and Derrida, put more emphasis on the political and moral dimensions, ghosts as insistent voices demanding justice. In her account, often moving, Gordon presents ghosts as ‘the unhallowed dead of the modern project’ who force us to confront ‘the violence of the force that made them’ (p. 22). This emphasis is valuable, but there are problems: ghosts do not generally make demands or articulate grievances, though they can do so. (See Richardson, pp. 27, 160–72; and R. C. Finucane, *Ghosts: Appearances of the Dead and Cultural Transformations* New York: Prometheus Books, 1996.) Of course, Derrida’s account goes well beyond ‘ghosts’, as it were; but there is a tension in *Specters* between the emphasis on the specificity, the identity and the demands of the ghost, and Derrida’s own recognition that ‘ghostliness’, or the uncanny sense of ‘haunting’, somehow points to this sense of *irresolution*, this disturbingly timeless sense of the uncanny as ‘other’ to the time of modernity, questioning it. The ghost itself seems to swing uneasily between the two – at times, in the process, seeming to become a rather empty trope – and his ‘hauntology’, elaborating the abstract and potentially metaphysical pole of the contrast, seems to take us away from the task of elaborating a theory of figuration to link them more closely.
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Introduction to Law: This course aims to familiarize the student with the study of law; to begin the development of certain basic skills, such as reading, analysis and synthesis of legal decisions, and interpretation of statutes; to discuss fundamental aspects of the legal process, e.g. how courts "make law" and the function of the courts with respect to statutory law. 1) This course covers the fundamental principles governing the formation, interpretation, performance, and enforcement of contracts. In addition, special attention is given to the requirements of offer and acceptance John j. collins and. PETER W. FLINT With the Assistance of Cameron VanEpps. VOLUME ONE. The contributors were invited with a view to representing the spectrum of opinion in the current interpretation of the Book of Daniel, over a wide range of subjects. Only one of the essays has been published before: Johan Lust's "Cult and Sacrifice in Daniel. The Tamid and the Abomination of Desolation," which appeared in J. Quaegebeur (ed.), Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 55; Leuven: Peeters, 1993) 283-99.

John Bloomfield Jervis (December 14, 1795 – January 12, 1885) was an American civil engineer. America's leading consulting engineer of the antebellum era (1820–60), Jervis designed and supervised the construction of five of America's earliest railroads, was chief engineer of three major canal projects, designed the first locomotive to run in America, designed and built the 41-mile Croton Aqueduct New York City's fresh water supply from 1842 to 1891 and was a consulting engineer for the Boston