The Photographic Uncanny

Photography, Homelessness, and Homesickness

Claire Raymond
The Photographic Uncanny

“Raymond’s compelling book throws into relief the political uncanny that haunts photography and the homelessness—or instability—of photography. By returning to pre-Freudian understandings, Raymond’s lucid book draws out the political uncanny in the work of photographers whose images attend to estrangement, unbelonging, and moments of subtle political resistance. Raymond weaves together elegant close readings of photographs with a politics of seeing that attends to photography’s entanglement with moments of social violence and the uncanny experience of looking at photographs. Importantly, this book is subtly, but firmly, threaded through with a disquiet about the current political climate. Raymond’s sharp ability to combine cultural critique with rich and detailed discussions of a range of photographs makes this a revelatory book, one that has made me return to—to look again at—many photographs.”

—Dr. Jane Simon, Macquarie University
Acknowledgements

Work on this book was supported by a fellowship at the International Center for Jefferson Studies, in Charlottesville, Virginia, where Endrina Tay was especially helpful and simpatico. Stephen Arata extended a Visiting Scholar position that gave me a short respite from teaching, and this made all the difference. Thanks to Ellen Contini Morava for talking through etymologies that matter so much for this book. I’m grateful to William Wylie for discussions about Eugene Atget. Thanks to Amanda Phillips for an office in which to write! Margaret Bendet and Jacqueline Siegal helped with editing and research in brilliant and extraordinary ways—without them, this book would never have been completed. I have learned so much about writing itself by working with Margaret. Noah Grabeel (Sister Inda Beginning), graciously read chapters. Dale Maharidge shared his knowledge of the children of Hale County share-croppers, changing the course of the book. Above all, I thank the students in my Photography and the Uncanny Colloquium: Yash, Anna, Hannah, Katerina, Aryaman, Sara, and Lillian. All writing is conversation, and you all were a great group for this conversation about the uncanny. Acknowledgments would be incomplete without mention of my editor Lina Aboujieb, whose steady patience and encouragement saved this book.

All mistakes are mine.
## CONTENTS

**Part I  The Moderns**

1  A Political Uncanny: The Homelessness of Photographs  
   
2  Eugene Atget’s Sacred Spaces: Uncanny Capitalism  
   41  

3  August Sander’s Habitus  
   73  

4  Walker Evans’s Emotions  
   105  

5  Diane Arbus’s Uncanny Aura  
   137  

**Part II  New Centuries**

6  Second Selves: Francesca Woodman, Ralph Meatyard, Bear Allison  
   173  

7  North American Uncanny: Shelley Niro’s Activist Photography  
   221
8  Ghosts of West Baltimore: Devin Allen’s Instagram  257

9  Conclusion: Revisiting the Eighteenth-Century Visual Uncanny  287

Index  319
List of Figures

Fig. 1.1 William Henry Fox Talbot, *Reading Panorama*, paper negative—calotype, ca. 1839. The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK (Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum) 17

Fig. 1.2 August Sander, *The Notary*, from the series “People of the 20th Century,” 1924. Black and white photograph on paper, 25.8 × 19 cm. Edinburgh, The National Galleries of Scotland (Courtesy of the National Galleries of Scotland) 25

Fig. 2.1 Jean-Eugène Auguste Atget, *Magasin, avenue des Gobelins*, 1925. Gelatin silver printing-out-paper print, 21 × 16.7 cm. Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago (Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago) 49

Fig. 2.2 Charles Marville, *Ecole des Beaux Arts in the Snow*, December 31, 1852 or 1853. Salted paper print from paper negative, 16.2 × 21.5 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris 52

Fig. 2.3 Jean-Eugène Auguste Atget, *Statue of Pan at Versailles*, 1906. Albumen silver print, 21.6 × 17.7 cm (Courtesy of the George Eastman Museum) 55

Fig. 3.1 August Sander, *Beggar Couple, Neuwied (Bettlerpaar, Neuwied)*, 1928. Gelatin silver print, 24.3 × 18.3 cm. Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Trust 81

Fig. 3.2 August Sander, *Tramp, Cologne (Landstreicher, Köln)*, 1929. Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur—August Sander Archiv, Cologne (Courtesy of the August Sander Archive) 85
Fig. 3.3  August Sander, *Unemployed Man in Winter Coat, Hat in Hand (Arbeitslos)* 1928. Gelatin silver print, 23 × 14.7 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art)  87

Fig. 4.1  Walker Evans, *Sharecropper’s Wife, Hale County, Alabama/ Mrs. Frank Tengle, Wife of a Cotton Sharecropper, Hale County, Alabama*, 1936. Gelatin silver print, 19.6 × 7.3 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum)  111

Fig. 4.2  Walker Evans, *Alabama Tenant Farmer Family Singing Hymns*, 1936. Gelatin silver print, 12.3 × 19.8 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art)  118

Fig. 5.1  Diane Arbus, *Naked man being a woman, N.Y.C.*, 1968. Gelatin silver print on paper; created 1968. 36.20 × 36.80 cm. National Galleries Scotland (Courtesy © 2019 The Estate of Diane Arbus)  151

Fig. 5.2  Diane Arbus, *The backwards man in his hotel room, N.Y.C.*, 1961, printed after 1971 (Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper, 21.5 × 14.3 cm. Tate Museum, London. © 2019 The Estate of Diane Arbus)  157

Fig. 6.1  Francesca Woodman, *I could no lo longer play I could not play by instinct*, 1977 (© 2019 Estate of Francesca Woodman/Charles Woodman/ARS New York)  180

Fig. 6.2  Francesca Woodman, *Face, Providence, Rhode Island*, 1975… (© 2019 Estate of Francesca Woodman/Charles Woodman/ARS New York)  182


Fig. 6.4  Francesca Woodman, *Untitled (four Woodmans)*, 1977 (© 2019 Estate of Francesca Woodman/Charles Woodman/ARS New York)  187

Fig. 6.5  Ralph Eugene Meatyard, *Lucybelle Crater and her 15-year-old Son’s Friend*, 1970–1972. Gelatin silver print, 18 × 17.6 cm. Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago (Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago)  193

Fig. 6.6  John Bear Allison, *Lost on the Trail*, from *Boogers* series, 2017–2018 (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Bear Allison Photography/Raven’s Eye Media)  197
Fig. 6.7  John Bear Allison, *Frost Bitten* (representing Kituwuh) from *Boogers* series, 2017–2018 (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Bear Allison/Raven’s Eye Media)

Fig. 6.8  John Bear Allison, *Raven Mocker*, from *Boogers* series, 2017–2018 (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Bear Allison Photography/Raven’s Eye Media)

Fig. 6.9  John Bear Allison, *Tom Snow*, from *Boogers* series, 2017–2018 (© 2019 Bear Allison Photography/Raven’s Eye Media)

Fig. 6.10  John Bear Allison, *Smallpox* (gourd), from *Boogers* series, 2017–2018 (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Bear Allison Photography/Raven’s Eye Media)

Fig. 7.1  Shelley Niro, #5 from the series “Flying Woman,” 1994. Gelatin silver print, 36.2 × 47 cm. Light Work Collection, Syracuse, New York (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Shelley Niro)

Fig. 7.2  Shelley Niro, *Bagging It* from the series “Stories of Women,” 2011. Series of digital prints, 101.6 × 152.4 cm. Gallery 44, Toronto, Ontario (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Shelley Niro)

Fig. 7.3  Shelley Niro, from the series “Are You My Sister?” 1994. Photographic installation. Color photographs, hand-drilled mat board, 101.6 × 64 cm. Agnes Etherington Art Center, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Shelley Niro)

Fig. 7.4  Shelley Niro, from the series “Are You My Sister?” 1994. Photographic installation. Color photographs, hand-drilled mat board, 101.6 × 64 cm. Agnes Etherington Art Center, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Shelley Niro)

Fig. 7.5  Shelley Niro, from the series “Are You My Sister?” 1994. Photographic installation. Color photographs, hand-drilled mat board, 101.6 × 64 cm. Agnes Etherington Art Center, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Shelley Niro)

Fig. 7.6  Shelley Niro, *Nearing Infinity (Hiawatha’s Belt and Other Visions)*, 2011 (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Shelley Niro)

Fig. 8.1  Devin Allen, *My Famous Time Cover*, image from cover of *Time* Magazine and *A Beautiful Ghetto*, 2015 (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Devin Allen)

Fig. 8.2  Devin Allen (copwatch activist Kevin Moore places his hand on a mural dedicated to Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland) from the book *A Beautiful Ghetto*, 2017 (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Devin Allen)
PART I

The Moderns
Years ago, I was a teenager dragged along on a family vacation on a tour bus through the Alps. The tour guide took an unwelcome interest in me, spiking the boredom of bus rides and prepackaged sightseeing with queasy moments when he professed his longing. One afternoon, while fleeing his attentions, I happened onto a village graveyard in the Italian Alps where many of the gravestones were covered with photographs: images of the deceased affixed to gravestones. The photographs were paper, sealed in plastic sleeves, worn to varying degrees by the elements. This iteration of the faces of the dead set on tombstones epitomized haunting of a culturally specific kind. The affixed photographs articulated a kind of “exergue,” uncanny supplements to the names, dates, and epitaphs carved in stone.\(^1\) One might also say the photographs functioned as masks, performing a ritual release or translation of the dead.\(^2\) The second death, the death that follows physical death and is achieved through symbolic action, was anticipated and enacted by these photographs affixed to gravestones.\(^3\) They were not professional additions but vulnerable and amateur.

As a fourteen-year-old, I was disturbed by what I first saw as the youthfulness of so many of the dead: the photographs showed people in their twenties and thirties. Reading the dates of the deceased, I realized that the mourners had placed photographs of the dead taken while they were young, regardless of the person’s age at death. This small graveyard was full of youthful masks. The passage of time showed only in the wear of elements on the photographs, bleached by sunlight, shaggy from rains.

\(^{1}\) C. Raymond, *The Photographic Uncanny*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28497-8_1
that the plastic shields did not entirely keep out. The photographs would disintegrate long before the gravestones. I wondered why the mourners had participated in what seemed a futile ritual—these photographs were such transient mementos juxtaposed with stone. Though now, after so many years, and many more graveyards visited under various circumstances, that is the graveyard I remember because of the photographs.

It was very much like standing in a square of ghosts, in the sense of ghost that Avery Gordon intends in *Ghostly Matters*: the ghost as social figure. The faces of the dead fluttered like small flags, doubles for the dead. This doubleness is the essence of photography’s uncanniness: a photograph is in some ways a copy of another noun, showing a person, place, or thing in the material world. As such, it stages a return to what may have been right in front of the camera years, days, or only moments ago, but is already—as is the case of all materiality in time—changed by time. A photograph is the imprint of the patterns of light that render the seen world visible. The faces of the dead in that graveyard were accurate representations of faces and also startlingly inaccurate to the reality of time, the substance of bodies in time. The actual persons were, to be blunt, corpses, skeletal remains. But the photographed faces were earnest, pretty, well-groomed, delicate miniatures of the almost still living—almost, that is, in the sense that someone was still tending these graves, so the dead still had social lives through photographic public memorial. It was an ordinary practice and also uncanny, eerie. The photographs on the tombstones in that village graveyard were at once familiar and also exceptional and strange. The everydayness, the quotidian feel, of the graveyard rubbed against the strangeness of the photographic masks of the dead. By dying, they had become strangers, the buried, and the villagers used photography to articulate and engage this transitional otherness. Critic and scholar Jae Emerling’s haunting claim that “It is the image that has the potentiality to traverse the discourse, that is, to be ‘untimely,’” shapes my approach to understanding photographs in their uncanniness. For at its core the uncanny is that slip in time that awakens us to the strangeness of the gaze we usually normalize, the untimely world we inhabit.

**Ordinary Uncanny**

Pierre Bourdieu in his classic sociological study, *Photography: A Middle Brow Art*, calls photography “the most ordinary thing.” He grounds his understanding of photographic practice in the everyday, the familial and
domestic. Yet Bourdieu also argues that, once photographed, an object, person, scene, or place ceases to inhabit the quotidian and is articulated as significant beyond the ordinary. What one photographs is, by dint of being photographed, visually set apart as exceptional, strange. Susan Sontag has taken this argument further, suggesting that we confer value only on that which manifests as a photographic moment. Paradoxically, photography defines the familiar at the same time it transmogrifies the familiar into that which is strange and set apart. This cleavage is an aspect of the uncanny: at the precise point of the photograph, the familiar diverges into the strange. Photography marks this boundary where the familiar edges away. Photograph the uncleared breakfast table and suddenly, as image, the quotidian scene will seem to carry a message. Nicholas Royle argues that the uncanny is a “peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar.” Photography is always already approaching this familiar–unfamiliar quality.

The practice of photography reflects and is actively part of the social creation of community, family, and self. It is a way of constructing and also, at times, deconstructing the familiar. Bourdieu points to the precept that in the industrialized West one must photograph one’s progeny to participate in the articulation and construction of class. Bourdieu’s research is dated—it was originally published in 1967 and is based on research undertaken years before—but many of its insights hold: photography is both entirely familiar, “the most ordinary thing,” and also strange, the image-object that carries a stain of otherness revelatory of time.

Photography has inherently to do with the concepts and use of home, or the core experience of embodiment, because photography so faithfully mimics the appearance of the spaces we inhabit. Yet it also presents that which radically estranges us from home: being entirely image, it is inhospitable to occupancy, fully embodied experience. Photography estranges physical space. Photographs are halfway marks between what we’ve got (maybe a family, maybe a certain social life) and what we can lose (house, social identity, biological life). A photograph is fundamentally homeless—and never more so than when it is a photograph of a house. As such, it marks a space we have lost, usually through time or distance but sometimes through more traumatic fractures. An incompatibility with—and yet a dense and inextricable tie to—home is a definition of the uncanny, the unheimlich. That which is “heim,” or “geheim,” is “of home,” covered, protected, and yet that which is “ungeheim”
is a secret unmasked, a place that feels familiar and yet is not comforting but disturbing.\textsuperscript{15}

The German word “\textit{unheimlich}” indicates a nonspecific sense of anxiety, edging toward horror but different from horror in that the uncanny is strange rather than immediately physically threatening. “\textit{Unheimlich}” means “not-homey”—“\textit{heim}” being German for “home” and also connoting refuge and asylum. “\textit{Unheimlich},” then, is that which is not like home, and not of refuge. Importantly, the German “\textit{geheim}” also means “secret” and “hidden,” so that “\textit{unheimlich}” means something that was kept a secret and no longer is.\textsuperscript{16} The \textit{unheimlich}, then, is something revealed that was formerly concealed. It carries the implication of something disturbing that we would rather not know. It rearranges our sense of the structure of the familiar, making what was home decidedly not homey.

In this book, I develop a definition of the photographic uncanny by articulating ways that specific photographs comment on their own identity as uncanny image-objects. My theory of the uncanny moves to the side of the Freudian uncanny and also does not have much to do with horror films, cyborgs, or spirit photography images evoking the supernatural.\textsuperscript{17} Photography, of course, encompasses these categories, staging the uncanny in its dead-on capacity to mimic the human form, to act as its double, to trick the spectral, but these are not entirely the uncanny I am seeking. Rather, the photographs discussed in this book exemplify a subtle protest through the uncanny, a political uncanny.

In \textit{Uncanny Encounters}, John Zilcosky makes a persuasive case for the need to historicize the uncanny.\textsuperscript{18} Carrying forward that gesture, I approach the uncanny not from Freud—whose 1919 essay on the uncanny itself must be historicized—but rather through the longer history of the term.\textsuperscript{19} The European idea of the uncanny emerges in tandem with the rise of the European press to colonize the Americas, parts of Asia, and Africa.\textsuperscript{20} While the word itself comes into frequent use in the nineteenth century, I concur with Terry Castle that the roots of its surge in popularity as an explanatory term are to be found in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{21} The concept of the uncanny and the idea of photography both emerge from eighteenth-century European discourse, even as the flowering of the use of the term “uncanny” and the development of the technology of photography do not take place until the nineteenth century. This dual birth emerges from shifting Western notions and practices of home, as well as from changes in the scientific gaze and aesthetic theory.
Drawing from Anthony Vidler’s seminal work, I interpret the uncanny as a problem with home, a disturbance in dwelling, that attends modernity. An uneasy sense of losing ground as an underpinning of modernity has been described by Martin Heidegger and Michel De Certeau, viewing the uncanny as constitutive of modernity. Anneleen Masschelein, however, interprets the uncanny as a “young,” and therefore unfixed, concept. For Nicholas Royle the uncanny is precisely that concept that ravels the comfort of generic classification. Sui generis as an image-object, the photograph appears as a quasi-mythic space in which the mortal pace of time is graphically rendered. Here, I do not quite mean “myth” in the way that Roland Barthes deploys the term with regard to photography. Instead, I mean a more holistic sense of photographicity—the visual structure of the photographic—as the myth of the modern.

The photograph is the ultimate homeless trace, ever more so in the digital age, when photographs rarely are stand-alone material objects but, rather, borrow their materiality from screens: iPhones, computers, tablets. As we move into the digital era, the question of whether the photographic image has any stability of any kind, or is rather a constantly morphing assemblage of cgi (computer generated images) haunts our interactions with the medium. Any photograph is ontologically unstable—uncanny in its dense yet elusive strands that suggest to the viewer that of which it is an image but also deny completion of any action in response to the imaged object. Photographs, more than other technologies of image-making, evoke the uncanny double and so connote a lack of authentic origin. They can fit almost anywhere, eroding meaning and stasis with their ubiquity.

This homelessness is a fact of all photographs; they are everywhere and nowhere. Some photographs, however, make reference to their own role as purveyors of—and become commentators on—homelessness and the uncanny. These photographs are themselves uncanny images that oscillate between giving the viewer all that is visible while withholding the possibility of habitation. Such photographs mobilize the photographic uncanny. These are the focus of this book. The twin, the double, is a figure of the uncanny, and photographs partake of this duality, being copies by definition. Even so, the twinning that photographs set in motion can be, and usually is, subsumed into banal discourses of commercial interests or of art that aspires mainly to sell. By contrast, photographs that comment on their own conveyance of the uncanny have
an expanded capacity: they pull into legibility the uncanniness of their existence as images, oscillating between materiality and the hallucinatory sign. Return is the heart of photography and also a key to the uncanny: the return to a strange place that one expected to be familiar, or the return to a place where one did not intend to go. Photography is the art of the return and hence the art of the uncanny. That does not necessarily mean, of course, return to a geographical place. Rather, return in the expansive and haunting sense that is suggested by the definition of the uncanny as the strangely familiar. That said, the photographs studied in this book do depend on geographical and social specificity: Atget’s Paris, Sander’s Germany, Evans’s Hale County, Arbus’s New York City, Meatyard’s derelict South, Woodman’s Providence, Allison’s Qualla Boundary, Niro’s Grand River, and Allen’s Baltimore.

In this book, then, studying photographs that express and interrogate uncanniness guides my discussion. Through study of these images, I trace a slender, counter-history of modernity’s homelessness as shown in some of its photographs. Working within and also against the grain of art history’s “disciplinary desires,” I seek the uncanny in the place of modernity’s image: the photograph. My study begins in fin de siècle Paris, just after Haussmann’s modernization. It concludes with twenty-first-century American protests of police brutality in Baltimore, Maryland. Moving between these cities, cultures, and times, I engage the question of the photographic uncanny as a politics of seeing.

The photographs studied in this book are windows through which questions are framed: How do we practice home when our politics applaud earth’s destruction through advancing technologies? How do we practice home when our politics agitate toward pushing the dispossessed from country to country—making them ever unwelcome, casting them out, even villainizing them? Photography is part of our modern practice of home, and some of our photographic practices indicate just how far from home we have come. In online news sources, we look at photographs of refugees, the homeless, children torn from their parents at the US border, and these images are ruthlessly segregated from the photographs that foster and display middle- and upper-class domesticity and sociality. Never in a bourgeois home will you see photographs of homeless people framed in silver plate and nestled with loving care on the piano. Facebook users, likewise, segregate photographs by social spheres.

The projection of “home” in modernity, thoroughly imbricated with photographic practice, escalates the visuality of exclusion: an exclusion
effected by the practice of contrasting the homeless, the outcast, the refugee, to bourgeois domesticity through curation of photographic images. In this visual field, the dispossessed are set in a conceptual no-man’s land, contained through images that articulate difference, kept apart in space and time from bourgeois domestic space, whether virtual or embodied. And yet, the photograph as the crux of home is an estrangement of the usual object-effect (that is, a material object in place). Spectral images of ancestors, however carefully curated, carry a Gothic aesthetic, hearkening back to The Castle of Otranto and its living painting. Materially vulnerable flags of photographs decorating bourgeois homes display the modern temporality of displacement as a mode of being. The almost disembodied flicker of photographs on Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, and the like, extend this mode of displacement through image, a spectral flow of what becomes invisible.

Photographs of people who are politically and economically displaced and without homes are curated by a different, but intrinsically related, impetus: the overarching project of capitalist discourse, shaping a sense of home as that which excludes those without capital. Photographer August Sander, however, places such people within his sociology of photography. The crisis of home’s uncanniness is the crisis of modernity, a crisis with which photography is involved as social practice and, in some instances, as revelatory image. This book focuses on that category of uncannily revelatory images, by working through the sociality of haunted spaces from which those images emerge and which they carry. The photographs studied in this book are images that, through variable tropes of displacement, reveal modernity’s haunted house. “It is hard not to be disturbed by the contingency of our origins,” argues David Summers, indicating an essential path for the uncanny: unease connected inextricably to home. While Summers is commenting on art as such, I draw from his insight to launch this inquiry into the uncanny conditions of photography’s origins, as they manifest across time in photographic practice.

UNCANNY EMPIRE

In contemporary scholarship, the term “uncanny” is associated with Sigmund Freud’s influential essay on the topic and with surrealist art. But the uncanny, as concept and word, significantly precedes Freud’s work, and the uncanniness of photography is perhaps more the realm
of realism than it is surrealism, if one understands the uncanny as the familiar estranged. The wholly unknown is not uncanny. Rather, this category signifies that which one expects to be comforting and homey but finds instead to be distorted, estranged, frightening, or even threatening. The idea of the uncanny is a shock within the familiar, the effect of an unhappy reality that comes to light. In this book, I recognize and draw from important work done on the uncanny in the 1990s, when it was the “master trope” of the decade, work that emphasizes Freudian theory. I move beyond these versions of the uncanny, however, by returning to the pre-Freudian use of the term and exploring specifically photographic aspects of the uncanny. I make this move in recognition of the contemporaneity of the emergence of photography and also the shifting notions of the mode of appearance and temporality in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when the terms “unheimlich” (in German) and “uncanny” (in English) were coming into common usage. The “uncanny,” as a term and concept, was simultaneous with the European press to violently colonize the non-European world and also roughly coincident with shifts in ways of seeing that led to the technology of photography. The racialized and spatial inflection of uncanniness is intrinsic to the discourse of photography. The very act of aggressively colonizing the Americas estranges home, making the homes of Indigenous Americans a violated and estranged social space.

Claude Levi Strauss, in *Tristes Tropiques*, writes of the melancholy of the colonizer, who feels lost from home. It is this very process of colonization, inflected by mercantilist and capitalist agendas, that makes home uncanny not only for the colonizer but also, and especially, for the violated indigenous community. This force of colonization, then, burgeoning in the eighteenth century, recreates home as a place of violence and estrangement. In the oscillation between violence and the domestication of violence, Westerners come to see themselves in the distorting mirror of the act of violating another’s home place (for example, the American continent). Euro-American “home,” then, in the process of colonization emerges from someone else, for example, indigenous Americans, suffering a loss of home. This secret—ideologically suppressed in the national discourse after conquest is a fait accompli—is a source of eerie domesticity that feeds the rise of interest in the concept of the uncanny in the West in the centuries of colonization. Photography does not create the discourse of the colonization in the West; rather it emerges at the same time as and along with the cultures that promulgate
colonization. Photography’s protean capacities render it an object that offers commentary regarding the very shifts that created the technologies of photography. Photography is, thus, a kind of inverse cultural mirror, capable of destructive acts of reflection and circulation but also capable of broader revelations that critique the harms of the culture that has produced the technology.

In this book on photography’s uncanniness, I draw from multiple earlier theorizations of spectrality, haunting, as well as theories of photographic technologies. Jacques Derrida’s argument as to the fundamentally haunted structure of modern society and identity is a touchstone for this book, yet I step away from Derrida’s white, male perspective to consider how the uncanny appears from the perspective of the oppressed, the subaltern. Derrida rightly argues that we, as a society, must recognize our haunted condition before we can begin to offer justice. By drawing on Eve Sedgewick’s theory of empathy and affect in art, I expand on an understanding of how some of the very images that haunt us, and that perform our haunting, can also reckon with that haunting. Photography is a flat art, one that inscribes space rather than fully inhabiting it. This has always been true, and becomes ever more so as photographs become digital data. Yet, as Barthes points out, photography also is an affective and empathic art. Barthes’s theory of the pain of photography is essential to my notion of medium’s uncanny force. Photographs can bruise us, frightening us with their revelations. This pain has a history—pictorial, scientific, cultural—and is informed by that history.

The Gothic aesthetic that arose in England in the eighteenth century was obsessed with lifeless objects coming to life. The 1764 publication of *The Castle of Otranto* shows a Gothic vision of the home as a disturbing and untrustworthy domain, predicting aspects of the photographic uncanny with a painting that haunts with lifelike verisimilitude. The domestic space that appears homelike, while hiding fatal secrets, is an abiding feature of the Gothic. Something entirely new and completely without any kind of familiarity is not uncanny: the unknown is not uncanny unless it perverts the familiar. Photography in the early nineteenth century emerges from the cultural-historical matrix and social space of mistrusting the stability of home. This paradigm presents that which at once is familiar (the world as it appears, in hyperrealistic representation) and that which is freakishly unfamiliar (the world as it is becoming modern.) The presence of photography is itself prime among the strange effects of modernity’s new world.
Photography’s progenitor, William Henry Fox Talbot, immediately turned his new technology toward his home, photographing Lacock Abbey in the late 1830s. In taking photographs of his ancestral home, Talbot estranges it, creating uncanny doubles through his images. The double is the icon of uncanniness; it draws into doubt the ontological authenticity of the original as the double obviates the status of the original. While Talbot’s images of Lacock Abbey are, of course, easily distinguishable from the abbey itself—being small paper prints of large architectural edifices—they are less easily distinguished from the eye’s imprint of the edifices. Photography’s uncanny effect emerges in part because the technology transfers to a print the traces of those impulses of light waves that cause vision itself to occur when they reach our eyes.

The photographic negative is the essence of the photographic uncanny in its ability to take what is quotidian and common—a bright sky, a building, and men standing before the building—and make it appear otherworldly. The disrupted norm of the photographic negative is the way it takes familiar forms and makes them uncanny, that is, not homey, thus making of this known sky another, stranger, sky. That the Gothic space of Lacock Abbey, a thirteenth-century building, was the birthplace of photography emblematizes how embedded this technology is in the uncanny. With Talbot’s conventional system based on the negative—which gives him claim to being the progenitor of photography—there is never an original photographic image only a reversed copy. The photographic negative displays the disrupted norm that characterizes the uncanny: it takes familiar forms and makes them strange. Talbot’s original photographic negatives create a strange familiarity, a midnight world in which solid, structured architecture appears spectral, fleeting. Vidler contends that the architectural uncanny is foundational to modernity, and photography’s relationship to architecture is of import in the early nineteenth century. Talbot’s choice of architectural photographic subjects are ancient buildings, not only his home of Lacock Abbey but also Oxford University. The decision to photograph architecture is practical: his method of Calotype took significantly longer than later photographic practices and so buildings, which hold still, were natural subjects.

But Talbot’s penchant for architectural photography indicates also his implicit understanding of the uncanny meaning of photography for architecture. Architecture, especially in the venerable buildings that Talbot favored, stands for history. Buildings often last longer than other human creations. Medieval and Norman edifices litter England. Talbot,
then, turns his infant technology of photography onto the oldest objects
at hand: buildings.\textsuperscript{57} Of stability, he creates evanescence, a decisive turn
toward the modern uncanny where everything solid melts into air.

The photograph is an eidetic object, an object that expresses \textit{eidos}—
the visual form of an idea. But the photograph also expresses the
\textit{a}-materiality of light impressed into the fragile materiality of silver print,
or digitized content for that matter. Light becomes image through
interacting with a silver colloid capture medium or with the many mini-
tature photo sites on a digital camera’s sensor. The photograph carries
the aura of both the presence and nonpresence that invades and fills our
lived experience of space-time. In this sense the photograph is not only
the creation of modernity but also an object that reveals an inescapable
aspect of mortal existence: nonbeing always at the boundary of being.

A skewing of time charges photographic images. Talbot’s photographs
of the ancient buildings inscribe the old with the new, motivated by the
uncanny asymmetry between the stable stone buildings and their eva-
nescent paper images. (At this point in his career Talbot was only a few
years beyond the frustrating “fairy pictures” that photographically cap-
tured images, which then disappeared—as he had not yet figured a way
to fix the image.) Even so, it is the photograph that swallows the stone.\textsuperscript{58}
Uncannily, the photographic image becomes an archive for the material
world in Talbot’s earliest images. Transmogrified in this way through
photography, the buildings have a lasting record in their nineteenth-
century appearance as photographs.

If the uncanny is typically discussed in terms of Freudian theory,
earlier ideas of the uncanny are more logically applicable to the early
development of photography, which preceded Freud’s essay by nearly
a century.\textsuperscript{59} Talbot developed his process of photography contemporane-
ously with emerging theories of perception and the uncanny, in con-
nection to and with an awareness of the intellectual trends of his era.\textsuperscript{60}
Cross-fertilization between German and English natural philosophy and
theories of aesthetics was taking place in the decades before Talbot began
his experiments with photography and influenced his development of the
photographic negative.\textsuperscript{61} The influence of German Romanticism on the
history of photography is implied by Geoffrey Batchen, in \textit{Burning with
Desire}, inasmuch as Batchen posits a line from the English poet Samuel
Taylor Coleridge (who was influenced by the Jena Romantics) to the
inception of photography.\textsuperscript{62} My suggestion here is that Talbot absorbed
theories of uncanny aesthetics from the era in which he lived not only
from other Englishmen but also from other Europeans: the German concept of the *unheimliche* is a sensibility that facilitated Talbot’s belief that the negative images he generated through his experiments with photography had aesthetic value not despite but rather *because* of their qualities of eeriness. They were sublimely disturbing, and also desirable—*because* they were sublimely disturbing. The German word “*unheimliche*” indicates also a nonspecific sense of anxiety—connoting an absence of refuge and asylum, a frisson of unresolved disturbance.

The philosopher F. W. J. Schelling explored this concept of the uncanny, popularizing it in his *Philosophie der Mythologie* (*Philosophy of Mythology*), published in 1835, precisely the time that Talbot was developing the technology of photography. Schelling’s book defines the uncanny thus: “Uncanny [*unheimliche*] is a term for everything which should remain mysterious, hidden, latent and has come to light.” It is striking that in the very year *Philosophy of Mythology* was published, Talbot inaugurated experiment with primitive photography. Talbot did not conceive the idea of the photograph because he wanted to create something uncanny. Rather the uncanny was in the cultural air, the use of the term in ascendance in Germany and England. This concept, then, facilitated acceptance of the strangeness of the photographic image, which made permanent the trace of light, eerily mimicking the action of the eye. This aesthetic turn allowed photography, with its unsettling mimicry, to appear desirable.

At the time of this cultural zeitgeist, the familiar overturned and nature’s secrets brought to light, not coincidentally the nineteenth-century West was also experiencing a sharp increase in the forces of capitalist industrialization and colonization. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s popular novel *Frankenstein* (1818) jolted readers with the iconic figure of Victor Frankenstein’s monster, epitomizing the fear that scientific discovery had ruptured the very fabric of the ethical and was creating living death. This was an era in which Gothic horror fiction became popular. Bringing to light that which is hidden and terrible, Gothic romances encode the trope of aristocratic ancestral spaces that hold dark secrets. As Allan Lloyd Smith makes the case, nineteenth-century American fiction picks up the trend, with Edgar Allen Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne creating literatures of domestic haunting. Talbot was haunting his own domestic space by photographing Lacock Abbey.

Schelling’s definition of the uncanny applies aptly to the idea of the photographic negative: “a term for everything which should remain mysterious, hidden, latent and has come to light.” The negative articulates
the structure of objects precisely not as they appear in daily life, since it is tonally reversed, yet also renders such objects formally recognizable. In the negative we see the forms familiar to us but they, and our ability to see them, are revealed by the photographic negative in their inverted relationship to light. The photographic negative reveals a world secreted inside the familiar world, rendering the known strange, a metaphor and emanation of the physics of visibility. The negative reveals that the places we inhabit are ephemeral, surrounded by the consuming fire of sunlight. The photographic negative casts the structure of the world in tonal reverse, connoting a cohesion with disappearance and night.

Drawing from Schelling’s *Philosophy of Mythology*, I note that the photographic uncanny is that visual space in which home is brought to light as an absence or a trauma. The photographic uncanny extends from the medium’s oblique and estranged relationship with time and space, its capacity to represent time and space as fragments while presenting material structure accurately. The photographic image draws back from, or cuts, normative perceptions of space-time.

Although Freud’s early twentieth-century essay, “Das Unheimliche,” quotes Schelling, a vast difference separates Schelling’s statement that some things should *not* be brought to light from Freud’s theory of the curative force of exposing traumatic familial secrets. Schelling’s uncanny precedes Freud’s notion of mental health and, drawing principally from Schelling’s uncanny in this book, I argue that the photographic uncanny operates beyond truisms of health, both mental and physical. Acknowledging the anxiety of the modern—the homeless, the refugee, and the dispossessed as well as the rootlessness of the bourgeois, who are physically supported by the proletariat—the photographs studied in this book reveal rather than heal the uncanniness of modernity. A photograph, done well, is the opposite of a healing mark: it is, rather, a wound (as Roland Barthes argues in *Camera Lucida*), a jagged opening.

Eugene Atget’s photographs of Paris, August Sander’s photographs of Germany, Walker Evans’s photographs from Hale County, Diane Arbus’s images of New York City, Shelley Niro’s pictures of Indigenous America, and Devin Allen’s photographs of Baltimore—these exemplify photography’s capacity to comment on its own uncanniness. Likewise, Francesca Woodman, Ralph Meatyard, and Bear Allison make use of masks in photographs that unsettle Western tropes of self-regard. These photographers articulate an estranged relationship to home: uneasy, often painful, reflecting the modernity of displacement and the displacement of self that is modernity.
Lacock Abbey

The photograph’s uncanniness inheres, in part, in its capacity to show that all we see are traces—and that all we, as embodied entities, are, are nothing but traces. We are not shadows in the definition of the term by optics, but metaphorically speaking, we are shadows, mere passing facts. The understanding of the shadowland as a place where life and its meaning are nullified has a deeply rooted history in Western philosophy.\(^7^3\) When Talbot, a philologist and translator of ancient Western texts, described his new technology as “fixing a shadow,” he wrote from familiarity with the classical notion of the shadow as the metaphor for the dead.\(^7^4\) And yet there is another layer to the shadow world of photography, as Talbot explained it. He seemed to understand that his modern and modernizing invention, photography, would be part of the force that brings about a sense of human life as nothing more than embodiment. Photography reveals life’s anchorage in the fragile material of embodiment, object, that which casts shadows. This uncanny double knowledge pervades Talbot’s development of photography as well as his writings on his invention.\(^7^5\)

The knowledge of physicality’s transience emerges, paradoxically, from the photograph’s uncanny reiteration of the visible. The experiments with photography that Talbot conducted on his estate bring a strangeness to the very place that to him would have seemed deeply normal. The photographs he created in this place and of this place in particular inverted and estranged Talbot’s home. In photographic negatives from the 1830s and 1840s, Lacock Abbey epitomizes a photographic uncanny, a home whose midnight structure has been brought to light as image. The allure of Talbot’s early negatives of Lacock Abbey emerges from the tense contrapuntal pull of home and of estranging home. He took photographic images of the familiar. He did not hold onto the familiar but cast it in images that presaged how these objects would be lost to him when he died. In the photograph, *Reading Panorama*, shown here (Fig. 1.1), the figures are rendered as ghosts, presaging mortal ends. Panoramic photography’s time-skewing oddness reverses what we might have thought “reading” is, substitutes image for language, stasis for transience, as well as dark for light and flat image for three-dimensional experience.

The photographic negative, here, places strangeness, uncanniness, in the image of the familiar. Analogue photographs emerge from darkness,
From this uncanny negative, the image’s latency. The photographic image emerges from the structure of light that underpins and makes visible solid objects, light being the matrix (granular and wavelike) within which we see. The photographic negative shows the strangeness of light and, as such, becomes a metaphor for the uncanniness of memory, time, and vision itself. Talbot’s early negatives presage shifts in the way of life of the British landed gentry: the photograph tells us that what we see—all the visible world—is not permanent but can be broken down into forms that are vulnerable to time and enveloped in light, which is itself a mode of experiential time. And by its very repeatability, the photograph shows us that images, vision, and memory are not real and solid but are only the mirror backing of transience and disappearance.76
KEEPING SECRETS, SHOWING SECRETS

Coming back to the meaning of *unheimliche*, home is not secret but the concept of home entails both shelter and origin, so it merges with a secret: home is that which is within my history but not perhaps on the surface as my presentation. Where I am from may be embedded within me, but it is often not the first thing people see when they meet me—unless I am Allie Mae Burroughs photographed by Walker Evans. In this photograph, Burroughs’s home is revealed as her origin and her secret, a concept I discuss in Chapter 4 of this book. Evans’s portrait of Allie Mae Burroughs at once reveals and conceals her hardscrabble home and origin. The uncanny aspect of the photograph, to paraphrase Schelling’s definition of the uncanny, is the coming to light of what *should* have remained hidden. The photograph is the hidden structure of objects glanced by light, so that light’s transience, its movement, manifests as image pattern only in the photograph. Also, our transience the photograph captures. The photograph shows something we would not otherwise see: that we, and all the material world, are engulfed in a fire, in sunlight. In the photographic negative, the force of light is revealed as destructive, a burn or singe. But in images like Evans’s portrait of Burroughs, what is revealed is a particular structure and meaning of the subject’s embodied vulnerability within that place of singe.

I have suggested that Talbot’s ease, in going forward with his photographic experiments as well as enjoying the strangeness of the look of photographic negatives, stems from the cultural interest not only in science as progress but also in the Gothic trope of revelation that was contemporary with his work in photography. As noted, the earliest Gothic novel, Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) has as its central motif an ancestral painting that comes to life. This conceptual, if fanciful, precursor of the photographic predicts Talbot’s uncanny photographic exploration of his home. The strangeness of photography is the strangeness of home in modernity, the skewed clarity of that breach of decorum that is the photographic stare, a strangeness that bridges Walpole’s castle to Evans’s Hale County.

The capitalist myth of home disavows death, denies the reality of endings, pretends that living without recognition of death and dissolution is possible: that one can own a photographically beautiful home and thereby elude suffering or, in another uncanny extension of photography, that one can access virtual reality to avoid the penances of mortality.
A photograph can postpone the absolute losses of death and burial by preserving the face of the dead. In this disavowal, however, the photograph acts uncannily to disarticulate the connection of death with burial and substitutes the images of ancestors. This translation is the translation of the modern. In Talbot’s early images, the photograph performs the uncanny shift, making earth’s substance—the ancestral place—into ephemeral transient image. In uncanny distillation of image, Talbot predicts what the photograph will be: unsettling; enchanting, and a flat substitute for burial and mourning. Its uncanniness is the premise of preservation that it can never truly offer, as it is only image.

**BRINGING IT TO LIGHT**

Schelling’s early nineteenth-century uncanny, that which has come to light but should have remained hidden, nostalgically responds to losses forced by emergent industrial capitalism: the exchange of a stable, earth-based domicile in favor of purchasable, rentable, and transient, dwellings. Domicile skewed, home aslant, is one heart of the uncanny—being uncanny, it has two hearts. The words “uncanny” and “unheimlich” were used more frequently as the rise of industrial capitalism disrupted longstanding patterns of European habitation and as colonizing ravaged Indigenous peoples, uprooting home as the earth where one’s ancestors were buried, where one expected to be buried oneself. Being brought to light was a vanishing of home, replaced by citizenship. But if the home that is not home constitutes the uncanny, photography—which even as it evokes the look of spatial experience denies actual spatial experience—is the doppelgänger of the uncanniness of modern habitation. Emerging from the discourse of Enlightenment, the belief in European exceptionalism (and hence the belief in a rightness of aggression against non-European peoples) and the loss of stable domicile for Europeans as industrial capitalism develops, converge to create the cultural uncanny. The technology of photography watches and also carries the violence of industrial capitalism, colonizing aggression, a secret in the house of the modern.

But what does photography have to tell us about that secret? Arbus’s claim that “a photograph is a secret about a secret” seems to fly in the face of the most obvious aspect of a photograph: that it shows something. Photography would seem to be a medium that confesses. Its exactitude of detail—what Barthes calls the “violence” of photography,
crammed full as it is of what is there—suggests that photography reveals rather than conceals. But the revelation of the photograph is a confession under elision.

I interpret photography’s quality of confession through omission as it appears in images that present the abandoned, the homeless, the barely sheltered, the excluded. As Agamben notes, the backing of modernity is life at its least, bare life. The photographers studied in this book create a photographic uncanny, articulating that which is not homey even when they photograph home by radicalizing the tropes of home’s representation, revealing the secret loss within the modern. The photographs of Atget, Sander, Evans, Arbus, Woodman, Meatyard, Allison, Niro, and Allen comment on the photograph as symbolic sign and tangible mark of the loss of home as ground. They reveal Paris as it is transformed by Haussmann, Germany at the cusp of its ethical unraveling, the rural South as the Gothic basement of America; they lay bare desolate apartments of socially marginalized urbanites, plundered ancestral homes of Indigenous Americans, and the destitute homes of impoverished African Americans fighting against racist violence. In other words, Atget, Sander, Evans, Arbus, Woodman, Meatyard, Allison, Niro, and Allen create image maps of modernity’s sorrows, its homelessness, and rootlessness. Photography is uncanny—homeless—at its root; hence it is the tool for visually knowing the uncanniness of modernity. While oftentimes photography—commercial, vernacular, and fine art alike—covers up homelessness, the images studied in this book expose it, articulating the disavowed possibility of home that is modernity’s secret pact with commercialism, colonization, and capitalist industrialization. For Schelling, that which should not have been brought to light is uncanny, a species of dread. This dread circles back to a problem at home, or a problem with home, as constitutive of modernity as is photography. In this book, I define “home” expansively and narrowly: as the ground or condition of knowing and as a place in which someone lives.

To sound out the uncanniness of photography, I draw from Schelling’s theory of perception as emerging from a ground that is common in both the perceiver and the perceived and that yet cannot reveal itself. It is known only as the result of the process of perception and carries a weight of sorrow because of its essential quality of transience. Schelling moves away from Kantian epistemology—which posits a transcendental subject as a condition for perception—instead arguing that the ground of perception inheres in the production of what is perceived.
as it emerges from the identical source of the one who perceives.\textsuperscript{93} For Schelling, then, representation is ontologically grounded and not a floating illusion. But this granting of ground—a home for perception—comes with a structure of emergence by which the subject can never access her own act of perception. Schelling posits here a secret (hidden) structure of thought, one in which perception itself is understood as uncanny: unseen and unseeable, while also intimate and definitive of the self. Schelling’s theory of perception is melancholy, emphasizing an unending flow of transience, understanding home as that which always changes.\textsuperscript{94}

For Schelling, visual art can reveal what philosophy or theory cannot represent. The exteriority of art—as appearance—means that it may, in some instances, bring to light the structure of thought.\textsuperscript{95} What Schelling describes as the force of self-revelation continuously creates appearance because it emerges both from that which is seen and the one who sees. This claim places art in the terrain of the uncanny: the home or ground of the perceiving subject is essentially uncanny for Schelling, a continual process of bringing to light the apparitional essence of appearances. There is no ontological fixity other than the production of vision.

Appearances and the subject producing perception all emerge from an identical \textit{physis}: using Gothic nomenclature, Schelling claims that we have an unknowable, “dark,” capacity by which we perceive.\textsuperscript{96} The ground of our capacity for perception is endless transience, melancholically bound up in finite time: “For pure reason there is no time, for it is everything, and everything at once; for reason insofar as it is empirical, everything comes into being, and what arises for it is all merely successive.”\textsuperscript{97} While our capacity to see and know is essentially fluent, time manifests as a presentation of fragments: “Since time, in and for itself, or originally, betokens a mere limit, it can be outwardly intuited, that is, united with space, only as the fluxion of a point, i.e. as a line.”\textsuperscript{98} We cannot know the “dark” engine that turns perception, and since it is bound up in the fragmenting force of time, we experience linear time, which misrepresents the fragmentary nature of temporality.

Time effects its own dissipation as it becomes appearance. It can only manifest as this duality. Photography precisely figures this fragmentary point, which is cut from the line of time: its uncanniness is to show the fragmentary nature of time that appears as a limit, a line. Photography breaks the temporal line, revealing the fragmentary nature of being. The photographic experiments of William Henry Fox Talbot coincided with
the timing of Schelling’s theory of an uncannily interior/exterior principle by which we see: the underlying premise of the creation of photography presumes a simultaneously mechanistic and metaphysical mode of vision. Because Schelling’s theory of the uncanny and Talbot’s invention of the photographic negative are precisely contemporary it would seem that rather than one influencing the other both emerge from a common intellectual moment. Following Schelling’s theory of perception, one sees that photography brings to light the visible world’s individually finite, particulate wave of appearance, a record of what has been, inscribing with light the hidden quality of perception that is both memory and the condition of memory’s formal possibility. I explore this confluence of theories of perception, aesthetics, and the origins of photography to make the case that photographic images interrogating the uncanniness of modernity are not incidental to the medium but turn toward an intrinsic quality in photography.

THE FACES OF HOMELESSNESS

I began this introduction with a description of the photograph as a kind of prosopopoeia, that is, a making of the face of the dead. “Prosopopoeia” is a figure of rhetoric, a turn of phrase a speaker uses when he wants to invoke the authority of someone who is dead. Johannes Fabian makes the persuasive case that the roots of Enlightenment belief in European primacy can be found in classical Greek rhetorical structures of visualizing thought: the memory palace. This is not the same as the trope of prosopopoeial speaking, but it is related as one of the methods of classical oratory. In the practice of the memory palace, an orator is trained to create in his mind (public speakers were male in this place and time; the Latin “public” refers to pubic maleness) a phantasmagorical series of rooms containing objects, each object symbolizing a point in the speech he has prepared to deliver. For Fabian, this shift in the way Western thought conceives of memory—as image—lays the groundwork for the rhetoric of modern science and time. He argues that the originary gesture of modernity is the conceptual act of externalizing image and of turning image into knowledge.

Photography, in social practice, functions as a vast memory palace, a radical externalization of image, overloading us with signs: photographs are the rooms of our chronic displacement from home. The uneasy space of photography, appearing realistic even as it dislocates and strips
extensive physical space, allows photographs to function as a memory palace. As John Jervis makes the case, photography effaces the distinction between the literal and the figurative. The structural feeling of a photograph is always at a remove. A photograph places before you an unfolding space of happenstance and possibility, but it is also a locked box: you cannot be there, wherever there is in a photograph. You cannot be there even if you are in the very spot where the photograph was taken. This is the modern paradox that, wherever you are, images will haunt you on myriad screens—phone, tablet, laptop—and so you will be wandering between spaces. And, for the economically and socially dispossessed of modernity, an economy run on chronic hyper-visualization feeds into the treatment of some human beings as disposable goods, images to be passed over. It is facile to blame photography for the ills of late modernity and capitalism run amok. Yet, photography has the capacity to engage modernity’s ills with a force unequaled by other arts precisely because modernity and photography are so deeply intertwined. This is not simply a happenstance of history but, as I have argued, has to do with the alteration of theories of perception and memory in the epistemological break of the modern. The works of Atget, Sander, Evans, Arbus, Woodman, Meatyard, Allison, Niro, and Allen are characterized by a turn in which the photograph faces the conditions of its own existence. The structure of the feeling of the photograph is distance but also—and only as a possibility—revision through revelation. The uncanny moment of such facing is the topic of this book.

A Political Uncanny

As I make the case throughout this book, the uncanniness of modernity is not the undead in a theatrical or even superstitious sense. Rather, it is the supervisory gaze of modernity itself that is uncanny, and appears as such when exposed. Philosopher Mladen Dolar argues, “Ghosts, vampires, monsters, the undead, etc. flourish in an era when you might expect them to be dead and buried without a place: they are something brought about by modernity itself.” The uncanny that I trace in this book is subtler. Drawing from Marx’s definition of political struggle, I delineate an uncanny at work in the images studied in this book as, in an elusive sense, a political uncanny. I am not always writing of images that directly address politics. Rather, I see a political uncanny in photographs that connote the political as a haunted space in modernity.
It is not haunted by vampires and ghouls but by human beings. Sander’s public notary, from his series “People of the 20th Century,” does nothing but stand before what appears to be the doorway to his flat (Fig. 1.2). And yet, in his face, his clothes, even his dog, surfaces trace evidence of the impossibility of a life in that very domicile before which he stands. It’s more than just his worn coat, shining with thinned fabric, or his tense grimace, which looks almost like a smirk but could be any sign between pain, perseverance, and displeasure. The stairway and door behind him are as much characters in the sad assemblage as are the dog and the man. It stands as the house wherein the man’s identity is not sheltered but protracted, carried out, attenuated. There is, in this photograph, the uncanniness of the resemblance between the look of the man and the look of his dog—the way that the coat’s sheen matches the dog’s pelt, the expression of looking away and looking askance that is active in both faces. There is a twinning of man and animal, both unsheltered by the paltry domesticity of the stairs and the door, melancholic and spectral figures.

The uncanny, here, is not surreal; it does not hint at any supernatural eventuation, no communion beyond the grave. No vampires, no undead. It is rather a reflection of the politics of estranging home, a photograph of a home that is not homey, a home that is a locked secret and also a secret revealed. That the photograph is taken before the ascension to power of Hitler’s malevolent regime is, without question, part of the force of the image. But rather than say that knowledge of Hitler creates the unease of the image, I would say the image’s unease deepens my knowledge of the social world that brought forth and permitted the Third Reich. It is a social world that is threadbare, without resources for human replenishment. The year of the image, 1924, Hitler was in Landsberg Prison after a failed coup attempt. Historian Peter Ross Range argues that this year was pivotal in Hitler’s ultimate rise to power.109 How can one imagine the domesticity of such a world, the quotidian everydayness of it? In August Sander’s photograph, we see domesticity stripped of any capacity to provide spiritual shelter and comfort; it exists physically, yes, but as an “incision,” a cut in space and time.110

Truncation and fragmentation of home is the master-trope of the modern: time to move, pack up the house, and not in age-old patterns of curvilinear tradition (as some Indigenous American groups, for example, moved between summer and winter dwellings) but in linear fashion, without return. In this temporality, photographs become our return, our only mode of going back to the places we’ve left behind.111
Susan Sontag blames photography for the problems of modernity, but I take the approach that photography, as a signifying function, assesses the social and physical world for which it is a mode of perception and comment.¹¹² Significatory functions do shape the social and physical worlds of which they are part, but arguing that photography causes the homelessness of modernity—as opposed to showing it, commenting on it, or perhaps positioning it—is a little like saying that our bodies are shaped by light. Photography, as Barthes points out, is not a language; it is a skin.¹¹³ Barthes calls it a skin of light, and that lyrical description is physically apt.¹¹⁴ But photography is also a skin of vision-in-culture: an

Fig. 1.2 August Sander, *The Notary*, from the series “People of the 20th Century,” 1924. Black and white photograph on paper, 25.8 × 19 cm. Edinburgh, The National Galleries of Scotland (Courtesy of the National Galleries of Scotland)
imprint of how it is that we inhabit the modernity that extends from the early nineteenth century to the present.

Tom Gunning suggests that an “optical uncanny” arises in the nineteenth century, not only in photography but also through illusionist tropes of performances like Pepper’s Ghost, with spirit photography especially situated between the performance of magic and photography. Gunning astutely calls the uncanny a “reading position.” The nineteenth-century self emerges through the articulation of vision’s allegiance with illusion. Vision becomes the dangerous and also thrilling terrain of mysticism, ostensibly pressed to the margins by the discourse of science as truth-effect. John Jervis, developing his argument from Michel de Certeau, says that we can only live in places that are haunted. What he means is that we are not at home in places that have no accretion of cultural meaning. However, the uncanny home is the one that cannot attend to its own haunted condition.

Gunning associates the uncanny with a disruption of temporality, a disruption of the flow of time. Time itself can be considered our home, the pacing of our mortality marked through rituals, but the uncanny disrupts the capacity of these rituals of culture to ease the strangeness of time. The uncanny is deeply entwined with memory, at the edge—between hallucination and rationality. Uncanny photography “intervenes [into quotidian life] in a strange way” creating a memory palace of places that attest to their condition of not being at home in the world. The photographic uncanny signifies a condition of modernity, a quality of homelessness ranging from the shallow social field of the bourgeoisie to the deep vulnerability of the dispossessed, the refugee without shelter of any kind.

**Contingency and the Uncanny**

In *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism*, David Summers makes the case that all art participates in symbolic modulation of space, the basis of his argument for wrestling the study of art history from its Eurocentric bias. Whether Summers succeeds in this goal—it can be argued that the privilege of electing to eliminate Eurocentric bias stems from Eurocentric bias—he puts his finger on an ellipse that clarifies photography’s contingent uncanny. The
photograph is spatially unreal: it is an image, and, even for an image, it is hyper-flattened. There is no texture of paint, not pencil or woodblock impress. The daguerreotype image—which sits upon the plate—must be sealed in flat smooth glass if it is to survive. To paraphrase photographer Francesca Woodman, the photograph flattens its subject to fit the medium.

In its extreme flattening, the photograph stretches the Cartesian plane to a bend, a conceptual bend, that is, under the gravity of perspectival illusion. To look at a photograph of, say, one’s living room is to be surprised by the containment of its spatial dimensions. All that space that one inhabits daily unfolds in the image and is contained at the point at which it ceases to unfold. As Barthes notes, the photograph cannot be transformed. Seeing a photograph can be a transcendent experience, but what ultimately transforms the viewer is the off-camera, the blind field—all the infinity that the image gestures toward, curving against what is visible, the truncated spatio-temporality of the image as formal echo.

Think of Diane Arbus’s photograph, Transvestite Showing Cleavage: here, the young person is caught by Arbus’s camera in what appears to be their home. Arbus’s word, “transvestite,” is offensive now but was standard nomenclature for her day; indeed, that shaming word is part of the intense affect that drenches the photograph, part of the image’s mournful weight. From this vantage of half a century after the photograph was taken, there is no way to know whether the subject is a transgender woman or a man who dresses to perform drag. In the absence of fuller biographical information about this specific photographic subject, in reference to the subject I use the pronoun “they.” The subject watches Arbus’s camera the way one might watch a feral but captivating animal that had wandered into one’s apartment. They watch her camera for its capacity to see them as they wish to be seen, that is, as a feminine subject, but also carried in this stare is the wary knowledge of the many conscriptions and punishments the subject faces, in mid-twentieth-century America, as a biological man evoking femininity. The force of the photograph stems from its homeplace setting. It is redolent of the subject’s position at the margins of mid-twentieth-century American society. Emphatically, I reject the shaming that the society of the day placed on
this subject, and I believe that Arbus’s photograph is all about excavating and exorcising this shame, showing how it strips its subject of home.\textsuperscript{128}

This photograph is radically different from shots Arbus took of drag performers in their dressing rooms, for here the subject is found by the camera’s gaze in retreat, presenting a femininity that is fully lived, but also acknowledged by the subject’s watchful gaze to be linked with the fear of being shamed.\textsuperscript{129} Being feminine isn’t the source of the subject’s shame: it is merely the impetus or trigger for those who shame the transgender subject. This fear of judgment connects intimately with home. Home is where we either shed social judgment or suffer it most heavily. The person in this photograph is not in public. In viewing the photograph, we too are in the subject’s home; the subject is cornered there at the last degree of self, as are we all when in our homes. And yet this photograph is a mediation of some kind: the photograph is not the same as “just seeing.” It is an emblem, a sign, an art. This eerie juncture between private and public, secret and confession, between the affects of shame and celebration, Arbus marks as her unique terrain.

Here, the portrait subject’s home is uncanny not because the subject is a biological male appearing feminine. Rather, the home is uncanny because it, like the subject inhabiting that home, has been pushed to the margins. Arbus’s photograph does not present this person as uncanny. They are portrayed as beautiful, soulful, real, and human. But the home is presented as uncanny. The home is depicted by the image as a fragment, or rather an incision, from the whole: a corner of a bed. The harsh intimacy of the photograph is jarring: the photograph cuts off almost all of the room, coming in so close to its subject that all we can see is a section of bed and a section of wall. The sitter’s body slightly sags inward as one does when sitting on a soft surface with nothing behind on which one can lean back. There appears no sofa or chair, only a wall behind the subject’s bed. And this situation becomes metaphor in the image: nothing and no one seems to be there to catch the sitter, to support them. The photograph expresses the apartment’s failure to be “home” in the weightiest sense of the word. It is a modern space. One can physically live in it, but it is not, to draw from de Certau, haunted.

Arbus’s photograph of this space, however, \textit{is} richly haunted in that it returns us to the place of the one without home, the existentially homeless. The biological male performing femininity was, in Arbus’s 1960s, a figure on the margins, cast out of domesticity as it was popularly conceived in mid-twentieth-century America.\textsuperscript{130} At that time in America,
domesticity was marketed and policed as the province of heterosexual white people. Hence, one might be tempted to argue that the figure’s social position at the margins is a source of the image’s uncanniness. But this uncanniness of domesticity is intrinsic to all of Arbus’s most powerful images, whether they are of the wealthy, the suburban, performers called “freaks,” drag queens, nudists. Her work pulls us toward envisioning the uncanny as a condition of modern domesticity: everyone is uneasy in this social world. Seen through Arbus’s lens, the margins become luminously haunted. As her daughter, Doon Arbus, suggests, Arbus refused to turn her back on those whom others shamed: “She was determined to reveal what others had been taught to turn their backs on.”

A thread of this book on the uncanny in photography is clarifying the difference and also the commonality between those who are homeless in the sense of lacking stable (or any) housing—refugees, the displaced, the impoverished, and the homeless of urban worlds—and those who, as modern citizens, lack home as a homey space. Those who live on the streets suffer immeasurably more than those who, as modern subjects, feel an unending sense of not being home and yet are housed. Even so, both states emerge from late capitalist industrial economies. The uncanniness of the photograph is its bend or oscillation between the Cartesian, flat emptied plane, and what Summers defines (not unproblematically but still very usefully) as the space of return, a centering force that characterizes what might be called non-Cartesian space. The photograph lacks a center and also, in some rare instances (such as the images studied in this book) offers flat visuality as itself a center, one that is paradoxically anchored by its revelation of our lack of centering space.

Sarah Lyons, to be sure, critiques what she considers a proverbial commonplace, the argument that “the rise of science and capitalism leached the world of its mystery and meaning.” For Lyons, this shibboleth needs re-examining. Capitalist industrial culture did not erase religion from society, she contends. There was some tendency toward secularization, but also a countervailing press toward extreme religiosity. What did shift in however modernity is embodied temporality: the markers of the uncanny are political, as I read them in this book, because they are images of embodiment estranged from time. This estrangement emerged from Enlightenment thought and manifested as the disposition to enforce European temporality onto the Americas and Africa through violent processes of colonization.
arrived the ideology of the primacy of European time—the colonizer’s paradigm—and also emerged photography, as practice, as technology. The uncanniness of photography inheres in its twinship with this epistemological break into the primacy of image as time. It is, to extend the metaphor, a fraternal rather than identical twinning, giving photography the latitude to critique the conditions of its own origins and productions. The photographic uncanny is that critique.

NOTES

5. Robert Burley, The Disappearance of Darkness: Photography at the End of the Analog Era (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 2012). A photograph can be a material object: a printed image. Or it can be a data set that is visible via the materiality of a screen. While I include digital photography in my definition here, I exclude images created entirely from previously stored data, cgi. A photograph, whether taken by film or a sensor translating light to code, is the imprint of light.


notions of “home” are not so much solved by Heidegger’s use of dasein as rather reflected in the ideology undergirding his hermeneutic.


28. Sontag, *On Photography*, 54; Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 6. Sontag notes this relationship saying the photograph is like a piece of the cross. Barthes also meditates on the “laminated” connection between the photograph and the noun—person, place or thing—of which it is a picture.


30. This idea of the photograph as the realm of return I develop from Shawn Michelle Smith. Where I go in my path of return—in this introduction and in a later chapter—is different, but note here a source of this connection of photography and return. Shawn Michelle Smith, public lecture and conversation with author, April 14, 2018, Washington, DC: National Gallery.


48. Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire, the Conception of Photography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1999); Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*. The dates of photography’s origin precede and include the 1820s, as several different scientists and experimenters were working toward creation of the technology.


50. As Talbot develops the technology, he is ensconced in his ancestral estate. The landedness of his life is deep: as an English aristocrat...
Talbot owned his ancestral estate not by mortgage but by inheritance. Lacock Abbey, originally built in the thirteenth-century, was his place in a way that would have a psychological meaning different from most modern experiences of owning a mortgaged home, and very different of course from being homeless, displaced, or refugee. The heimlichkeit, or homeyness, of Talbot’s estate, entails a deep sense of home as the place where one’s ancestors lived. I do not wish to tout the egregiously unjust forms of class privilege that Talbot enjoyed nor to suggest there is some Gothic secret that Lacock Abbey hides. I point out merely that for Talbot the normalcy of home would be its quintessence as stability.

51. One could disagree with this naming of Talbot as the progenitor of photography. But it is he who created the technology of the photographic negative. My discussion of connections between William Henry Fox Talbot’s development of the photographic negative appears in an earlier form in 16 Ways of Looking at a Photograph: Contemporary Theories (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

52. Batchen, Burning with Desire, 17–51; Confino, Germany as a Culture of Remembrance. Batchen persuasively argues that photography has not one but several origins, and I concur. Significantly, cross-fertilization between German and English philosophy and aesthetics took place in the decades before Talbot began his experiments with photography; early German theories of aesthetics influenced the sensibility behind Talbot’s development of the photographic negative.


64. Castle, *The Female Thermometer*, 123. Zilcosky discusses at some length the Germanic origins of the uncanny. The term and concept crossed into British discourse in the eighteenth-century. As discussed, the German word “heim” means both “home” and also “secret, hidden,” so that “unheimliche” means something that is not home and is now not secret—something now uncovered, that one would rather not know. The uncanny, then, is something revealed that was formerly concealed and that rearranges our sense of the structure of the familiar, making what was home decidedly not homey.


66. Collins and Jervis, *Uncanny Modernity*, 78–82. As Tom Gunning points out, the trope of eyes, and eyes out of place, are part of the intellectual currency of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, part and parcel of what Gunning calls the optical uncanny.


71. Strachey, *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 219–252. In Freud’s practice of the talking cure, bringing secrets to light heals the uncanny intrusion of mental illness, returning the family to homeyness.


76. Sontag, *On Photography*, 3–27. This was precisely Plato’s argument about the material world, that is, the visible world as such, but—and here is the difference—the photograph gives an emblematic manifestation of this argument; it is a way to experience reality, to think about the capacity to see. Sontag famously draws on Plato in the title “In Plato’s Cave,” an essay collected in *On Photography*.

77. As a white woman living in the United States, I am aware that not being asked to account for where I’m from is a form of race privilege.

78. Please see Chapter 4 of this book for an extensive discussion of this portrait.

79. F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978), 94. Schelling argues, “The self, in its intuitive capacity, is completely fettered and bound in its producing, and cannot be both intuitant and intuited at once. The production is thus totally blind and unconscious... now the self’s concern was not with the product, but with itself. It seeks to intuit, not the product, but itself in the product.”

80. Walpole, *Castle of Otranto*.


83. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 10. Bruno Latour defines the modern as precisely such a rupture with translation between states.


92. F. W. J. Schelling, “The Philosophy of Art,” in *Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 58, ed. Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 229–230. For Schelling, “The work of art merely reflects to me what is otherwise not reflected by anything, namely that absolutely identical which has already divided itself even in the self. Hence, that which the philosopher allows to be divided even in the primary act of consciousness, and which would otherwise be inaccessible to any intuition, comes, through the work of art, to be radiated back from the products thereof.”

93. Damon Linker, “From Kant to Schelling: Counter Enlightenment in the Name of Reason,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 54, no. 2 (December 2000): 337–377; Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 29. Schelling states, “This is the incomprehensible base of reality in things, the indissoluble remainder, that which with the greater exertion cannot be resolved in understanding but rather remains eternally in the ground. The understanding is born in the genuine sense from that which is without understanding. Without this preceding darkness creatures have no reality.”


96. F. W. J. Schelling, “Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie,” *Sämtliche Werke* 1, 3 (Stuttgart und Augsburg: Cotta, 1799/1858); Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 17–53. The question of whether Schelling responds to racialized tropes of dark and light when he formulates his theory of a dark principle by which we know is difficult to answer, given the long history of metaphors of darkness and light, blindness and vision, in Western thought, metaphors that preceded the invention of the ideology of race.

111. Shawn Michelle Smith (Professor of Visual and Critical Studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago), in discussion with the author, April 14, 2018.
120. Collins and Jervis, *Uncanny Modernity*, 75.


128. In making this argument, I do not impute intent to Arbus herself; rather I read the photograph.


132. Arbus only used the term “freak” to refer to people who chose, under what economic pressures one can only imagine, to perform in venues that were at the time commonly referred to as freak shows. In other words, she did not ascribe freakishness to any one in particular, but used the language of her day in describing her subjects. Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).


137. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception; The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty offers a way of understanding embodied subjectivity that moves away from Cartesian dualities. However, he fails to connect the disciplinary force of these dualities in shaping hierarchies of voice.
Writing about Eugene Atget’s Paris, one carefully steps over the bones of clichés: Paris as the city of romance and tender memory, the eternal city, also the idea of Atget as the hermit artist, the photographer’s photographer, stands as a cliché, separating us from his actual work. Walter Benjamin’s brilliant description of Atget’s photographs as exemplifications of the vanishing aura of art has itself become a scholarly cliché, albeit a misprision.1 A twist of cliché is the uncanny: the familiar altered, the well-known estranged. In this chapter, I seek the uncanny impetus of Atget’s obsessive photography of Paris, the eerie sense of loss, liminality, and marginality that drive the aesthetic and the oeuvre. Understanding Atget through the privacy of his work, the constrained reverse of his now public role as the posthumously renowned photographer of old Paris, I seek uncanny tilts to the clichés, places where truisms of nostalgia, tourism, and stereotypes of unacknowledged genius give way to his images’ insistent stress on the form and fabric of the home that is changing before you even as you seek it. Atget’s Paris is not a home that can be reclaimed, not even through nostalgia. Instead, his images are the place of a raw nostos, an unresolvable pain that limns but never holds that home. In their unresolvable tension, Atget’s photographs envision the uncanny loss of place that inaugurates modernization, making a kind of shadow-box of old Paris—a shadow-box consisting of thousands of printed images and negatives.

What is at stake in this reading of Atget’s work is its politics. His images repeatedly stage a resistance to modernity’s regularized
surveillance and to the demolition of the city’s hiding places. Writing of photographs as a counter-memory to surveillance brings forward the paradox of Atget’s undertaking: to hold onto the hidden (geheim) places of old Paris, he photographs them, making them visible, and this visibility is the uncanny (unheimlich) in his works. The tension of the photographs stems from this double venture of bringing to light before they disappear the city’s secret places, its private signs and sights, in images that reflect the photographer’s awareness that what is shown will disappear, is already in the process of vanishing. Atget’s Paris elegiacally presents the new city’s conscription to the violence of seeing and spatial being in modernity. The sacred—set apart—spaces of his photographs signify a protest against the erosion of the sacred in the construction of the modern city, as regulation takes over the lived places of the city. Atget’s oeuvre—hoarded and treasured by the photographer during his lifetime, publicized after his death—stands at this edge, looking in two directions, toward both the receding past and the oncoming future, emblems of a political protest against the erosion of the private in the urge toward the modern. What is at stake is Atget’s relationship to the modern, not necessarily to Modernist photography but necessarily to modernity. If Delacroix admits taking on a “modern” subject, stating “I have undertaken a modern subject, a barricade…,” 2 in Atget’s work I see the barricades of buildings, crossed with shadows and light, Atget’s world of estranging images.

GLASS AND SILVER

For Eugene Atget the impetus to photograph stemmed from the desire to deploy photography as a means of collecting and possessing old Paris, a city undergoing aggressive, if fitful, modernization from around the time of his birth, in the mid-nineteenth century, to around the time of death, in the early twentieth century.3 His attitude toward the glass-plate, silver-print photographs that he produced incorporates an initiate’s awareness of the medium’s uncanny tilt. Atget saw his works as documents of, and also as spaces containing, old Paris. Toward the end of his life, the photographer sought to give his sizable oeuvre to Paul Léon, director general of fine arts at the national archive in Paris.4 Atget did not seek payment (although some payment by-the-by was given) nor recognition as an artist.5 Rather, he wanted his images to survive him.
His belief that the images had their own life, their own properties, casts the photographs as being imbued with the uncanny quality of images that surpass the semiotic function of yielding information. Instead, he believed his photographs contained expansive realities. And, indeed, his photographs are reliquaries of the old Paris. Reclusive and unknown during his lifetime, Atget was discovered by his neighbor, the surrealist artist Man Ray, in the last years of the photographer’s life. Man Ray introduced Atget to the American photographer Berenice Abbott, and it was Abbott who shaped Atget’s reputation as a fine art photographer after his death. During his lifetime, Atget saw himself as a creator of “documents” not artworks, a collector of pieces of Paris through the photographs he took. At times, he sold his images to artists, securing them as precursors to art.

Positioned in this way as liminal—precursors to art, documents for artists—Atget’s photographs evince an eerie aesthetic of absence or partialness. In this chapter, I make the case that this aesthetic epitomizes a photographic uncanny. Atget’s uncanny is the revelation of the impossibility of home in modernity. It is not the stuff of obvious terror but instead a subtle, eloquent expression of the emptiness and flatness of space compelled by modernization. The work achieves this eloquence by elegizing the detailed material lineaments of architectural and public spaces captured precisely at that juncture of encountering modernization’s capacity to erase public space—that is, to erase shared spaces recognized as public through communion with others. Atget’s work is uncanny in its unmasking of the not-home that modern urban space becomes. Paradoxically, his photographs are haunted by an awareness of the erosion of haunting from the public realm.

In Atget’s photographs of Paris, Walter Benjamin, writing in the decade just after Atget’s death, recognized an eerie, original visual world. Benjamin notes the unsettled emptiness of the photographs. Atget’s photographs rarely show people. This is due in part to the time of day at which Atget preferred to photograph, earliest morning. This liminal time is a perfect doorway into Atget’s uncanny, providing light that has not yet fully extended its reach and yet is sufficient for clear vision. By deploying the word “sacred” in this chapter’s title, I indicate the “set apart” quality of Atget’s work and question how the sacred itself becomes uncanny at the turn of the twentieth century. In reading his work, I pursue an uncanny theory of place in image through the frame of the concept of the sacred space as a place of memory.
Philip Sheldrake’s *Spaces for the Sacred* opens with a consideration of Martin Heidegger’s theory of “dwelling” in its analysis of the fate of sacred spaces in modernity. Given Heidegger’s personal relationship with fascism, one notes that his philosophy of dwelling is problematically intertwined with the contemporaneous politics in which Hitler’s regime developed a propaganda of *heimat*, homeland. It is, then, difficult to credence Heidegger’s theory of “dwelling” as a perception untainted by the politics of Nazism. So, in drawing from Sheldrake’s work, I move beyond the Heideggerian paradigm that interprets *heimat* as the quintessential zone of the human. Instead, in my development of the idea of a political uncanny in photography, I aim to strip from the notion of home the very urge to dominate that characterizes not only the politics of Hitler’s regime but also the policies of colonization that go hand in glove with modernization’s tendencies. Social space that is marked as place because of shared, public memory and meaning, is not the same as Heidegger’s concept of “dwelling” in that a Heideggerian dwelling carries with it the implicit hierarchy of temporal origin. For Heidegger, the meaning that emerges from “dwelling” takes a starkly nationalistic configuration. In contrast, my analysis of the uncanny homes of modernity interprets signs—words and images—as a way of reinvesting temporally lost space with meaning so that it becomes, in aftermath, place. “Place” is space that carries public meaning and memory. I suggest that the photographs studied in this book, including Atget’s, seek a way to re-envision place outside of the aggressive Western politics of colonization and conquest. However elliptical, these photographs’ imagistic revisions are political gestures. Revising our relationship to inhabiting places that are created or shaped by human beings is the political resistance at the heart of the photographic uncanny.

**Away from Home**

The problem of “home” is tied to the problem of sacred space. As Sheldrake rightly points out, the role of meaningful “place” in modernity (Sheldrake uses the term “post-modernity,” but I stay with the term “modernity,” expanded in scope as indicated in my introduction) is eroded and forsaken. We no longer privilege the inhabitation of places—“place” being habitable space given deep and lasting social meaning—but instead emphasize the ability of wealthy, twenty-first-century subjects to travel, to leave, to exist online as social media
presences, to continuously move away from place. \textsuperscript{16} While keenly insightful, Sheldrake’s gloss of the late capitalist ideal of being nowhere somewhat leaves out the fate of the many twenty-first-century people who live nowhere because they have no choice—refugees, the dispossessed, and the homeless. \textsuperscript{17} In the United States, undocumented emigrants live in fear of deportation, an act that can be inflicted upon them because laws establish this population as \textit{not living where they in fact do live}. \textsuperscript{18} In such a political climate, a distorted notion of place accrues a violent meaning: nationalism is a project of enshrining the national boundary, making a realm of surveillance and governance into a false proxy of place.

The sacred, even so, remains a needed social space. \textsuperscript{19} It is into this place of need, the need for the sacred, that Atget’s photographs intervene. An autodidact, he systematically photographed Paris beginning around 1897 and continued working until the early 1920s, creating an oeuvre of thousands of prints and negatives, images of Paris and its parks and environs. \textsuperscript{20} Through Atget’s fin de siècle and early twentieth-century oeuvre of photography, Paris becomes his, a collection he holds, possesses, a city of uncannily distilled images. \textsuperscript{21} In these photographs, Atget mourns the passing of the old city, taking the images of the old at the precise moment when the new Paris is being erected. Often his photographs articulate the boundary where the old is encroached by the new. Always his camera is itself a paradoxical tool for the revelation of the infringement of modernity into pre-modernity. His camera is deployed to mourn the passing of Paris as a place or a set of memory places.

What is the nature of this photographic mourning? Theoretically at least, the pull of nostalgia can arise from any physical place, no matter how troubled, horrifying, banal. Atget’s Paris is depicted in his photographs as uncanny precisely because it is always of the everyday and always presenting the everyday as haunted by some unspecified force or set of forces. Caught in the diurnal shifts of light that his large-format, glass-plate technology so evocatively captures, Atget’s Paris draws tight urban corners and open park vistas into contrapuntal relationships. His work is suffused with \textit{nostos}, the sense of returning home, even as he remains in the same city where he lives and does not leave it. Instead, the city is in the process of leaving him. Each image he takes recognizes its departure. Since Paris is, obviously, still standing and filled with people, what does it mean to say that Paris was leaving Atget at the turn of the twentieth century?
As Richard Rogers argues, at this time “The [modern] city has been viewed as an arena for consumerism. Political and commercial expediency has shifted the emphasis of urban development from meeting the broad social needs of the community to meeting the circumscribed needs of individuals... Paradoxically in this global age of rising democracy, cities are increasingly polarizing society into segregated communities.”

Atget’s Paris is haunted by precisely this shift, from the communal to the individual, of the medieval city encountering advancing capitalism. He does not present his disappearing city as utopia, in the sense of its being a good place, but as being depopulated, desolate, and also achingly desirable in its aesthetic force. It is a no-place utopia, a world of insomnia (those early morning wakings), abandonment, and orphanhood (almost no human beings inhabit the pictures). Atget presents his Paris as the first city to be swallowed by modernity. Others came before it; none were photographed in this way. Georges-Eugene Haussman’s modernization of Paris had been begun by the mid-nineteenth century but was halted and then carried on, coincidentally, until the year of Atget’s death, 1927.

Atget’s photographs carry as title the specific place photographed. His early twentieth-century photographs from the avenue de l’Observatoire evoke a radical transumption, making a copy of the reflected place that is eroded through modernity. In the photograph Coiffeur, avenue de l’Observatoire a hairdresser’s shop window reflects an eighteenth-century building. Through the motif of the building reflected in the store’s window glass, Atget merges in the one image the two cities—the old and the new, the communal and the commercial.

This photograph is driven by uncanny doubling—the image we see directly and the reflected image do not agree with each other. The photograph unfolds the literal and figurative plane through panes of glass and, implicitly, through glass-plate photograph, the technology Atget worked with exclusively. The sense of vertigo created in the image derives from its presentation of the dislocation of the human. The mannequins in the photograph are eerie markers of the human, painted to look like women but also fragmentary—the mannequin on the left is merely a bust. Eerily, the mannequin shrugs so as to cover her chest, suggesting modesty for this human-like, doll figure. The mannequins are invested with uncanny emotion and thought in Atget’s photograph.

The living doll, the automaton, is a key figure of the uncanny. The life-sized doll Olimpia, presented as a daughter, enchants the ill-fated
protagonist of E. T. A. Hoffman’s “The Sandman.” In the story, this automaton daughter is an expression of the malevolence of her “father,” who is actually her inventor. She is a beauty but, because she is a machine, she has no soul. Her inventor has created an automated doll that he entirely controls. The automaton that cannot be visually distinguished from the human is a master trope for the anxiety of modernity. The creation of a human that is not fully human is evoked in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, published contemporaneously with Hoffman’s *Die Nachtstücke (The Night Pieces)*, in which “The Sandman” appeared—just as Enlightenment philosophy was shifting to early Romanticism. This era, that is, the second decade of the nineteenth century, was also the time of photography’s inception, a time when the notion of movable eyes engendered the conceptualization of the camera that can use lenses (moveable eyes) to produce permanent images.

Hence the idea of the automaton’s eyes—the concept of eyes that are not embodied, that can see but not intrinsically for the body—lays the conceptual groundwork for the camera and photography not in functional but in imagistic, imaginative, terms. The camera shares a conceptual origin with the uncanny automaton, the living doll, whose eyes function physically but do not “see” insofar as seeing involves a mind that interprets and makes sense of images. Atget draws this trope of the uncanny—the life-size and visually lifelike doll—into his haunting photograph of mannequins in Paris store windows. There are no human beings in these images, only mannequins. But these mannequins are seen by a human gaze, Atget’s gaze and the gaze of the photograph’s audience. From this perspective—the human gaze onto the automaton’s unseeing visibility—emerges the uncanny. The intersection of the human gaze on the human-like mannequin shapes an uncanny chiasm. Atget’s photographs of the mannequins’ unseeing gaze are inflected with *nostos* and pain: this gaze is positioned before the window, at the window, and held outside the never-entirely-communal space of the store (because who can enter stores depends, ultimately, on who can pay). The mannequin’s eyes can never see but always appear on the brink of being able to see.

In *Coiffeur, avenue de l’Observatoire*, through reflection, the image of the store is coupled with the shadow world of the past: the ancient building and the trees reflected in the shop window. In these reflections of trees and ancient buildings, and in the casting of shadows, the human gaze finds its home in Atget’s photograph of mannequins. The store and the human-like mannequins are alienating and spooky, but the trees,
and building, and the physical fact of shadows, ground the photograph in a human gaze. This duality shapes the photograph’s uncanniness. It is not horror but on horror’s edge. Atget locates the photograph not in the space that is controlled by capitalism—the store that only those with money can enter—but rather in the public space of the window’s visibility. In this still-public space, his image mourns the loss of the truly communal urban space, that which has given way to the thinly transient public space of capitalist decoration.

Atget’s images of Paris are evocatively affective but not sentimental. Rather, they locate and envision an uneasy return to the familiar, angled as they are to show the violence of history—in this case, the violence of the revolution, and the violent abuse of privilege that inspired it. This then becomes image through the lens of the far-reaching violence of the new: the modernization of space that ferrets out place, snuffs out the privacy of suffering and of pleasure. Atget’s photograph of a clothing shop window, *Avenue des Gobelins, 1925* (Fig. 2.1) similarly mirrors the old against the new. Here, eerily, the masculine mannequins, even though not alive, seem flush with a nearness to life. These figures inhabit what Masahiro Mori calls “the uncanny valley.”

Their reflections flashed through the glass of the shop echo against the implicit glass-plate of Atget’s photograph (the method by which he captures the image), leveraging the reflective properties of light on smooth transparent surface to create ghosts that are neither spiritual nor of the occult, but of the modern everyday: these mannequins in a men’s shop are symbols for the citizens of the new Paris. Stripped of depth as modern shop goods, the mannequin’s inhabit glassed storefronts and wide avenues that take the place of tight medieval impasses—the older architectures that had been capable of containing the secret self, the self not exposed through public display of purchasing power. Atget’s photograph reveals the specific loss of ground that is the condition of modernity. Glass takes over, echoing image, human form without humanity. In Atget’s *Avenue des Gobelins, 1925*, gender and social identity become spectral, the male mannequin’s “masculinity,” a hollow masculinity, available only by purchase. Atget accentuates the painted avidity and eagerness of the male mannequins’ faces, adumbrating these with reflections of buildings and leaves—the old architecture, the trees that seem to remember forest—that reflect through the vacuous newness of this assemblage of store mannequins. The child mannequins reach frozen hands toward you in an arrested gesture of communion, impossible to fulfill.
With Baron Haussmann’s modernization of Paris came a landscape that afforded greater control of the populace. In this new urban realm, Atget’s work as a photographer evokes the flâneur, the person...
unattached, socially floating and observing the city. And yet, given the
unsociable hours at which Atget took most of his photographs, he is an
uncanny flâneur. The object for the true flâneur is to be *in* the crowd
without being *of* the crowd. But Atget is not part of any crowd. He
arrives before the crowds. Before most people awaken, Atget’s camera
arrives, does its work, and departs. His oeuvre interrogates the architec-
tures and physical objects—the shops and shop goods—of the old city as
it leaves him, as it moves into modernity.

Atget interrogates the space of transition, using the camera as a way
to collect what is disappearing, or will disappear, but also as a way to
contradict that vanishing, to be more than an observer. Rather, Atget
is an articulator of that which is disappearing. His photographs are not
neutral; they are political. The politics of this work can be missed in the
recessive formal depths of the images. Image after image catalogues the
city of Paris. Yet it is precisely in the obsessiveness of Atget’s work, which
should be read as one massive series, that one can see these photographs
as a protest against modernity’s stripping away of the private places
where, commingled, human beings might exist in communally mean-
ful urban landscapes. This protest is subtle because it deploys the politi-
cal uncanny to make its case, depicting the importance of these privately
sacred spaces in the urban milieu by estranging the spaces that are there.
Atget presages Richard Rogers’s claim that modern cities will “increas-
ingly polariz[e] society into segregated communities.”

Before Atget came the photographs of Charles Marville, who
worked under Haussman in the official capacity of documenting Paris
before and after its metamorphosis. Marville’s Paris scenes (*Bibliothèque
Historique de la Ville de Paris*) before and after both the demolition of
the old and the construction of the new, predate Atget’s works by dec-
ades—with Marville’s last works taken in the late 1870s and Atget’s ear-
liest in the 1890s. At times a photograph by Marville might almost be
mistaken for one by Atget, so similar is the gaze shared between them of
the transition from the old Paris to the modern. And yet, the difference
between the two photographers’ works indicates the extent to which
Atget was engaged in a private and obsessive quest to reengage place
through image, in contrast to Marville’s transiently factual approach.
Marville’s scenes of desolation can evoke the experience of exile-in-
place (that is, of losing home while remaining home) that characterizes
nineteenth-century Paris, but there is a coolness to Marville’s
images. His vistas are open and balanced—he is not eerily drawn to
EUGENE ATGET’S SACRED SPACES: UNCANNY CAPITALISM

minutiae, to eloquent details, as is Atget—and this distinguishes his photographs from Atget’s haunted work. Marville is doing a job; he is a man with regular income and the social “right” to be where he is and to be doing what he’s doing. This normalizing social position is perceptible in his photographs. I do not mean that Marville’s work does not question, interrogate, and at times critique Baron Haussman’s programmatic altering of the city. Rather, I mean that Marville’s more prosaic accounting of the work of demolition and construction, which is visible in his photographs, reflects his stance as a decently remunerated laborer for the state. He is in the employ of those who are doing the work of modernizing Paris. His images convey the disturbance of modernization, but they also seek to offer reassurance. In Marville’s photographs, we see the old become the new through the eyes of those paid to make it happen. Marville is no lackey of the state. But the gentle and often beautiful melancholy of his photographs convey to the viewer a sense that although a set of places is being demolished, another world is emerging. This may be an unsettling world, but it is a valid world. By contrast, Atget’s photographs emanate a sense of standing at the cusp of absolute loss.

In this discussion, I mean “world” in the phenomenological sense of the social and material surroundings that build a sense of self in place. Atget’s gaze is that of a self out of place, a self running out of places to be. There is a sublime sense of panic in the images. What makes these photographs forceful is that even though the photographer worked without the cultural, social, and financial mooring of Marville, Atget’s photographs rarely articulate explorations of his own personal plight. Instead, they echo loss—indicating the shifting lost places of Paris, articulating the feeling of an empty house, a house that no longer shelters and is divesting itself of meaning.

Consider Marville’s Passage de l’Opéra (Galerie de l’Horloge) (ninth arrondissement), c. 1868. It is a splendidly slant view of the passage, capturing its ornate attractiveness. From the photograph one does not get the sense that anything is missing. It is a row of shops. This effect of normalcy is achieved by Marville’s tactic of opening the space, creating a vista wide enough for the looker to feel she could walk there, could inhabit the area comfortably. Likewise, the perspective of the camera’s gaze is roughly eye level, normalizing the plane of the viewer, making her at home. Were she to be embodied in the scene, she would stand stably in Marville’s photograph.
Similarly, Marville’s photograph of the *Ecole des Beaux Arts in the Snow* (December 31, 1852) (Fig. 2.2) visually welcomes the viewer into the scene. The gate is open, the camera placed centrally, implying the viewer might walk through the gate. The snow’s textural and luminous quality makes it appear that the entire architrave and gate are stage sets to something real behind them or, inversely, that the real place is the dark entrance and that one then walks through into a snowy world in the process of disappearing. This is a salt print, a technology Atget did not use, but the main factor that differentiates Marville’s visual meditation from an Atget photograph is the sense of future possibility that plays through this image. By contrast, Atget’s works almost always connote a foreclosure of options. In Atget, a closing in of space imbricates the viewer’s sense of agency. Atget’s photographs suggest that place is communal, a meaning that occurs through commonality; place is where communal space garners private meaning that is, still, shared with others.

Fig. 2.2 Charles Marville, *Ecole des Beaux Arts in the Snow*, December 31, 1852 or 1853. Salted paper print from paper negative, 16.2 × 21.5 cm. Paris, Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris
Atget’s photographs, coming after Marville’s, chart the disintegration of the communal place, the erosion of the shared space that contains the possibility of hiddenness for an individual. Atget, a wanderer—a man whose income, social position and, most important, reasons for being out in the streets taking photographs were not fully integrated into normative society—produced an oeuvre that is not beholden to the idea of progress. His somewhat outcast status allowed Atget to access the city of Paris with a private view of public space. This is the work’s uncanniness: that it is at once a secret view and also a revelation of a change in the meaning of public space.

Atget’s photograph of trees, Avenue de l’Observatoire, adumbrated with slanting tree shadows, suggests a bucolic expanse in city—Avenue de l’Observatoire was lengthened in 1866—and yet Atget’s pastoral view of trees also encodes a sense of threat. The shadows suggest movement, a breeze in the trees, but the absence of human figures in this image implies an incompleteness in the project of imbuing the city with nature. Here is nature, but it is unconnected to human beings. The uncanny swerve of Atget’s photograph inheres in its displacement of the structures of comforting domesticity.

His images take spaces that the photographer treasures—recall his comment to Léon that through his photographs he possesses Paris—and reveal them not as stable sanctuaries but as vulnerable, imminently changeable landscapes. It is Atget’s ability to show the vulnerability—vulnerable meaning woundable, the place where the wound can occur—of the public space he photographs that renders his city of Paris uncanny. He shows Paris as a home that is not home, a home that is becoming a place where no one can hide. Atget’s camera locates the way that the modernizing of Paris effects a broaching of hiding places. As the geheim, the secret, spaces of the city are eroded by the process of its modernization, it is Atget’s overarching intention to create a visual library of images that show the devaluation of secret—set apart, sacred—spaces. His work is immensely private even in its revelation. His photographs reveal the secret of the disappearance of private, secreted, place.

Atget’s work in the public gardens of Versailles emblematizes this eerie and slant vision. From this park, Atget’s early twentieth-century photograph of the orangerie staircase places the viewer at the base of the stairs, looking up from an angle so low that it is like the perspective of a small child. The stairs appear enormous and far away. Dark, cloud-like trees stretch above, their leaves merging into shadow. The columns
and iron fencing make the approach to the stairs ominous, as if one were being compelled to walk up them. In the absolute emptiness of early morning, Atget rediscover's an image that echoes the French Revolution, more than two-hundred years before the time of this photograph. In other words, the photograph doubles the old history of violence symbolized by Versailles with the new story of an implicit and unstated aristocracy of capitalist industry—a new order that is demolishing the individual’s political right to inhabit public space without being monitored. Atget uncovers this empty public space in the earliest morning and makes its stairs appear parlous; this public space connects government and the body of the governed, becoming a dangerous intersection for the person out alone.

Atget’s turn-of-the-century photographs of statues at Versailles predict his exploration of the uncanny human figure of mannequins, in the slightly later work I have just considered. His 1906 photograph of a statue of Pan at Versailles (Fig. 2.3), creates a visual conversation between the seated human figure in the background and the statue of the god of the wild. At a diagonal from Pan, the seated human figure is recessed, appearing much smaller than the statue—the figure of the statue fills the photograph’s foreground. The man is wearing dark, heavy clothes and is seated hunched over, while the figure of Pan is shown as enormous, standing up on a plinth, naked, and playing his pipes. The vividness of the statue, then, contrasts with the plainness of the person: the human being looks cornered, contained, small, clothed, politely folded into himself, while the statue is erect and, paradoxically, full of life. Atget’s depiction suggests no critique of the lone man hunched on the park bench—suggests, rather, the photographer’s full sympathy with the man. Atget is, after all, a wandering citizen himself.

The structure of the image implies a triangle of the photographer/viewer, the statue, and the man, along the slant lines of the picture. Atget’s image exudes empathy for the man’s desire to be part of the wilderness portrayed by the god Pan and the wilderness more prosaically represented by the park. But of course, at the same time, it is a haunting photograph of an early morning wanderer who perhaps has nowhere else to go, who may be homeless, pressed to the edge of the increasingly rigorously bounded spaces of the city. It is precisely such wanderers who will be increasingly sequestered and put out of sight by the regulations of the modernized city.
Philip Sheldrake points out that the process of modernization has created a city with a “replacement eschatology,” that is, a belief in continuously getting rid of everything and replacing it with the new. He claims that
modern urban spaces dissolve the “reality of place identity.” In other words, public space is now reconstructed so that its main purpose is to “facilitate movement across rather than encounters within it.” Michel de Certeau suggests that cities have become spaces that exclude “whatever is not treatable and thus, constitutes, the garbage of a functionalist administration,” creating an increasingly “placeless culture.” The shallow social field of the modern creates a city that is “depthless” and fragmented. In other words, modern social space breaks apart segments of society into functional units, and these spatial fragments are not evocative Romantic ruins but mechanisms, space denuded of place. Atget’s work is a protest against fragmentation of social space. Uncannily, however, as an oeuvre of photographs, this work also performs shallowness and fragmentation. Imagistically, what could be shallower and more fragmented than a photograph that reproduces three-dimensional space in an image on a flat print or screen and removes from its context all that this image represents?

Atget’s wide-format photographs were printed directly, that is, the prints were the size of their negatives. These prints are around 21–22 inches by approximately 17 inches. They were, then, small pieces of the scenes the photographer captured of Paris. The prints are materially shallow: paper prints. The uncanny torque of his oeuvre is that it retains the old Paris in images that articulate its non-retainable quality. Atget’s photographs carry the force of elegy: here is the place that won’t come back, seen for the last time by the gazer who understands the place’s worth. This irretrievable loss is the message of many of his photographs.

His photograph of the syrinx statue at Versailles, “In the Park of Versailles, c. 1900, Albumen print after glass plate-negative (21.2 x 17.1) Private collection”, likewise hinges on this delicate act of reflecting what persists in its capacity to go away. Here, the trees and the statue at Versailles recede from the camera’s view along an ellipse so that rather being centered in the image, we, the viewers, are at its edge. A pronounced shadow curves the grass, and the viewer implicitly is placed within that shadow. The statue, the central feature of the image, turns from us. We are behind the statue. The point of view is that of someone looking from the margins; the perspective evokes liminality. This liminality places us in the scene as if we were already haunting it, or as if it were haunting us. The statue, symbolizing music and wildness, is contained, but in Atget’s photograph it seems contained by time rather than by its status as a stone carving. From the vantage at which Atget has caught the image,
the statue seems to turn slightly toward the viewer, as if becoming aware of us. We are at the edge of an uncanny conversation with the image. There is always the feeling in Atget’s photographs that what is being shown is being seen for the last time, relinquished in a kind of sacred rite. It is not that the garden of Versailles has actually gone away. It is still a public park. But privacy, silence, being unseen and not kept track of are no longer part of visiting the public park of Versailles. It is this privacy and silence—this anonymity—that Atget elegizes in his photographs of Versailles, and in his almost anonymous oeuvre.51

**Homo Sacer, Homo Economicus**

Inhabitation is a two-way street: we are created by the environments we inhabit, and we, in turn, shape these environments according to our beliefs in what constitutes the lowest and highest suprema of habitation—that is, the least and the most desirable human habitations. Perhaps the most salient characteristic of modernity is the enormous gap between what we allow as the least acceptable condition of habitation—border territories wherein we permit many to live in painfully cramped and polluted domiciles—and the violative realm of the ultra-rich, that is, the personal accrual of goods and land and services that violate everyone but the recipients of said goods, land, and services. The discrepancies of this hierarchy have been pointed out by Myles Little in his 2017 photography exhibit, “The 1%.”53 While Atget’s photographs do not make the obvious political statements we see in the twenty-first-century images from Little’s exhibit, in a subtler vein Atget maps early manifestations of this coming crisis.

Thomas Lemke, discussing Michel Foucault’s Lectures at the Collège de France (1978), traces the argument that neoliberal thought creates a new *homo economicus* “by encoding the social domain as a form of the economic domain.”54 Here, the word “domain” signifies not habitations of space, and definitely not of place, but rather of conceived social realms. Yet it is precisely in our inhabited spaces that we experience the meaning of “encoding the social domain as a form of the economic domain.”55 The modernization of Paris occurring between 1890 and 1925, the main years during which Atget photographed the city, echoes a shift from classical liberal thought (based on the presumptively rational citizen) to neoliberal thought (based on the enforcement of economic domain through patterns of social dominance that impact the material
domain—the domicile). I would say that the distinction between classical and neoliberal thought is not as great as Lemke draws it. The latter emerges from the former, coming not as a break but as extension. To understand how the neoliberal concept of the private sector as a non-spatial domain effects the circumstances of human habitation, consider the symbolic shift from mercantilism to capitalism. Consider as well the parallel shifts from classical liberal to neoliberal theories of agency and community. Within these nonspatial domains of agency are set forth the implicit boundaries of real living space and an individual’s place in a community. In other words, economic systems of domination create modern domesticity in thoroughgoing and material patterns.

Of the shift from mercantilism to capitalism, Foucault notes that under mercantilism money—metal coinage—carried a “public value and a private signature.”56 That is, during the transition from mercantilism into capitalism, money as sign shifted. This shift precedes Haussman’s modernization and Atget’s photographs of Paris and lays the groundwork for the conditions of modernization by altering the meanings of “public,” “private,” and “inhabitation.” Importantly, the notion of the “private” domain shifts so that old Paris, the subject of Atget’s obsessive attention, permits privacy in medieval impasses and bucolically marked margins, while the new city that his images catch and predict does not afford such places of unpurchased privacy. “Privacy” means privacy of space and, ultimately, place that allows thought and memory. Atget’s photographs of Paris elegiacally reference places that are private not because one has paid top dollar but because earlier architectures do not keep surveillance of all who are to inhabit and utilize public spaces. As noted earlier in this chapter, the impetus to modernize Paris is a wish to gain control over the populace, if not always in explicit surveillance yet always moving in that direction.

In neoliberal theory, privacy is not spatial and certainly not a “place” (that is, as Sheldrake has defined the term, space with memory), but rather refers to the economic forces of the free market.57 The point here is far deeper than the semantics of so-called “private sector” economies. Privacy becomes, in late capitalist thought and in neoliberal doctrine, an economic force leveraged by those who hold large amounts of capital, and privacy of domicile becomes a commodity to be purchased at the highest price.58 As Lemke, glossing Foucault, points out, neoliberal thought creates a system of governance—in obeisance to the idea of the
free market—by pretending it has discovered the system it in fact creates. As Foucault makes the point that “docile bodies” are created by the push toward a neoliberal government.59 By “docile,” he means physically observable and, as such, controllable. It is by controlling, through gerrymandering of economic and political access, inhabited space that modernization in the liberal/neoliberal vein is achieved.60 Atget’s photographs protest this transformation at the outset, depicting the temporal edge of the loss of privacy, secrecy. Except, of course, the fin de siècle is not the outset of modernization as such but rather a fork in the road where domination and terms of subjectivity take on their late stage. He photographs, then, the end of the end of privacy: the end of the end of the concept of the holy city.

“The private sector,” as an economic term, falsely implies having a space of freedom from surveillance and regulation, being outside government control. But, as is suggested by Foucault’s unpacking of the neoliberal theory’s creation of the reality it purports to analyze, the private sector is not related to privacy in the sense of spatial place imbued with memory. Instead, the private sector is the very engine of the demolition of those communal, physical spaces imbued with place-specific, cultural-memory meaning. While Haussman’s modernization of Paris was government driven, Foucault’s argument allows us to see how the sinuous economic philosophy of neoliberalism makes government a functionary for the private sector. In this way, the private sector abolishes inhabited privacy in community—in a spatial, place-based sense—precisely because the engine of neoliberalism is driven by economic profit for a small number of people (the one percent, one might say) rather than by any value, however incomplete or even debased, that may be granted to communal meaning of space as place.

In this paradigm, public space becomes flattened, functional, without any meaning other than the desire to move inhabitants of cities to the domains that have been allocated to them by capitalism. The wealthy ride in private vehicles between plush apartments and offices, while others ride buses and subways between smaller domiciles, spaces often rented from the wealthy. The impoverished are housed in spaces actually called public housing and under significant surveillance by the government that supports the private sector.61 The most extremely impoverished are the homeless, who live without privacy—out in the street, visible. The capacity for the impoverished city inhabitant to access real privacy is largely vitiated by private sector actions. This, then, is the reality that Atget’s photographs uncannily predict, and their lyrical limning
of the contours of a vanishing meaning of place are uncanny because they show how the use of space is changing as modernization becomes late capitalism.

For Atget, the photograph becomes a way to hold onto the sacred spaces reflected by an architecture of communality. Each image builds his protest against the erosion, or erasure, of these places. The protest is subtle. He had to create so many images because his protest was obsessive. Anchored in visual details, it gathers on itself, image by image. It cannot be summed up but only fully appears across the eerie and hyper-vigilant expanse of Atget’s life’s work. If this chapter discusses some images that exemplify the photographer’s goals, here I emphasize the significance of the serial force of his work. His photographs were not intended to be seen as individual works, like paintings. Instead, couched as precursor art—documents for artists rather than works in their own right—Atget’s masterpiece is all the images gathered together in one place, a shadow-box of Paris. This is the uncanniness of his project: the disavowal of the art of the image with the goal of recreating a Paris that disappears and resides instead only in these images. Within that eccentric goal, the images’ uncanny aesthetic becomes legible.

This uncanny status of the image as residue of lost place is exemplified in Atget’s Sur les marché des Carmes, place Maubert, 1910–11. This photograph shows rows of shoes and a man behind a window mending shoes. The photograph combines the residual memory—the place memory—of the religious order of the Carmelites and the covered market that was built, in the early nineteenth century, in its stead. Atget captures, here, layers of modernization, the religious space rendered an early capitalist/late mercantilist space. Then that space itself becomes antiquated and vulnerable to erasure through modernization that will emphasize widened streets and the tourist markets that are the twenty-first-century occupants of the space.

In Atget’s photograph, the shoes before the store speak eloquently of human embodiment: we who wear shoes, who wear out those shoes—human beings with vulnerable feet. The human mode of crossing space—walking—is evoked by this image of so many shoes. The humility and needfulness of the human body, its frailty and dependence on protections such as shoes—all these are brought to the fore in the photograph, which reveals the condition of needing to cross space, and also the need to be anchored in place. The uncanny, here, inheres in the sense of instability along the edges: the photograph is an image of an
old tradition, mending shoes, which stands in contrast to Atget’s photographs of a decade or so later, which are of shops selling new merchandise. The image marks a shift to an economy that emphasizes the purchase of the new over the mending of the old. The full weight of Atget’s oeuvre as an immense series is essential to the reading of this image. The contrast of the older photographs with the newer builds Atget’s political uncanny, his protest of neoliberal modernization vested in his many private photographs of one city, Paris.63

The objects we must buy to survive—food, shoes, clothing—draw Atget’s camera. Images of stores and markets are frequent in his oeuvre. In photographing the places teeming with needful objects, Atget shows connections between the places and spaces we inhabit and the needs of our bodies. The human body is rarely photographed by Atget (though there are some nudes) and is more often signified by him through material signs of the body’s needs: food, clothing, shelter. In this way, Atget’s images come to terms with the inescapable demands of human embodiment—the unavoidable intimacy of our embodied relation with space. He deploys the photograph, a technology that emerges from Enlightenment-era advances in optics and the understanding of the physics of light, to resist Enlightenment-inspired notions of being human, that is, to resist the notion of the rational as the bedrock of the human.64

In Atget’s Paris, to be human is to have need: to need food, clothing, shelter and also to need the ineffable force of place, space as social memory. To be human, for Atget, is to need the images of cultural memory.

The erosion of place in late capitalism began with the mercantilism that was a precursor to capitalism. This origin is not merely historical but also symbolic, and formative. As Foucault points out, under mercantilism, the paradox of whether money is a sign or a commodity, a pledge or a value, depends on shifting vantages of what is “hidden” and what is “visible.”65 That is, money, based on metal—principally silver and gold—is held in the seventeenth century as a precious value that emerges from the hidden space of the mine (with its hypogeal enclosure) and then becomes the visible sign of wealth’s guarantee (this sign as revelatory of identity). Explaining the shifting value of money in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Foucault clarifies the “diamond-water” paradox—that is, the uselessness of precious stones and their simultaneous force as purveyors of wealth versus the need for water and its relative cheapness—but he takes us beyond this chestnut of economics by articulating the way in which circulation becomes money as a sign that accrues material force.66
This shift from the private, the metallurgical treasure, to the public—money as sign that garners meaning through circulation—has explanatory power with regard to Atget’s oeuvre. This is so because Atget’s work reveals the uncanniness of capitalism. Capitalism, as emergent from mercantilism, carries the trace notion of a secret, hidden, source of wealth—all of which must be extracted from earth—into a manifestation of wealth that cannot function except as a sign. The circulation of capital in effect is the circulation of a sign. Capital is a sign that points to material possessions but, paradoxically, also creates material possessions through its revelation as sign. This is the uncanny paradox of capitalism: there is no there there. It is not simply that use value is belied by exchange value. Rather, the origins of capitalism, from mercantilism derive from shifting notions of the meaning of precious metal coinage, coins that originally are understood to draw from the secret, the hidden, the subterranean mine. Mercantilism’s core notion of extracting wealth reveals this emphasis on the buried, secret, geheim quality of wealth’s source. Capitalism’s emphasis on the concept of circulation signifies wealth that exists only when it acts as revelation, becomes unheimlich, unhidden, sign. Circulation of capital only functions in the specific sense that money acts as a sign when it accrues interest and when it is given to ventures. Capital cannot circulate unless it opens the secret, hidden, source of wealth’s extraction, into a broadly and intricately coded sign of social power. Capitalism creates an uncanny, eerie public use of space; the uncanny social vistas of capitalism depend on this shift from the buried treasure (of precious metal) to the open sign of capital as a structure of spatial exclusions. To be wealthy, simply put, is to be able to use the signature of money to exclude others from the spaces you inhabit.

Atget’s photographs are, however, in no explicit sense against capitalism. The photographer never explicitly conveys a message, any message, and may well have had no conscious intention to do any such thing in his work. Through his acute attention to each material detail of each place of Paris, the photographer does, however, seem to refute the idea that public space should be relinquished. Instead, and to the contrary, Atget’s photographs insist on saying stay here, look. You cannot enter his scenes because, of course, mere photographs forbid entrance, but at the same time you are not granted an easy way to look away from his scenes. These places he presents are not meant to be transverse arcs, not meant to be moved through quickly.
As Berenice Abbott, Atget’s pivotal and most enthusiastic acolyte, later wrote, “photography teaches you how to see.” She seems, here, to have been thinking of Atget, whose work teaches us how to see—and whom she claimed was the only photographer for her. Atget does not, however, teach us formal aesthetics for its own sake. He teaches us how to enter the photograph’s uncanny physical space at the very hinge of the capitalist reshaping of the physical world. The photograph, for Atget, becomes this hinge between the old and the new. It is capitalism that is uncanny, that makes home not a home but a commodity, and Atget’s photographs reveal this uncanny visually, taking on the quality of the duality of a secret revelation.

Regardless of the photographer’s intention, Atget’s oeuvre, the photographs of Paris, puts political pressure on the surface dream of capitalist modernization. The capitalist project of transforming the dirty, close, secret, and abraded places of the old Paris to gleaming spaces that inhabitants can move across in their pursuit of capitalist success or, more likely, can be ushered away from proximity to others’ capitalist success, his photographs reveal. Atget’s photographs construct a political uncanny. They are a collection of images that allow him to possess the very city that the capitalist production of the modern erodes. The private publicity of his photographs limns a political uncanny. He keeps his work secret and yet also desires its salvage; he seeks out the vantage, vista, and place, of memory and privacy, the sacred. His devotion to finding the image that yields precise understanding of his time and place is pure.

The idea that Atget’s work is pure is also a cliché. But what is meant by this vacuous term, purity, in application to his work is the insistence of his images on visualizing privacy and its deterioration, despite the pain of that revelation. Here is the essence of the uncanniness of Atget’s photographs: each image conveys the appearance that here, only, is home and it is already going away. Such is the force of the sacred in his work, each image conveying that if only we could stay here, we would remain in a sacred place, a place that has memory and meaning. But also, crucially, each image also conveys that we cannot stay here. Not simply because “here” is a photograph but rather because each image inculcates its own revelation of the uncanny disappearance of place in the modern city. The photographs pick out details to suggest the transience of the specific material world they show: angles and vantages that indicate the viewer is himself aware of what is in the process of being lost.
Every image reminds us of that feeling of awakening in one’s childhood house on the day that it is to be sold (to extend Benjamin’s famous, and brilliant, metaphor of Atget’s photographs as apartments empty before the next tenant arrives), seeing for the last time its details even as the packed boxes inaugurate their loss.  

TECHNOLOGIES

Foucault claims that “techniques of dominance and techniques of the self” are intertwined in “technologies of domination.” For Atget, the camera becomes a technology of self that resists techniques of domination. The politics of an effective image of protest cannot be obvious, or if they are obvious, the actual revolution of the image is embedded behind or beside the obvious point being made. Atget’s images do not make obvious points. They are, just as he states, “documents.” Whether intended as documents for artists, the photographs become documents of another sort: documents of the human, documents that testify of the gaze of the human in a world shifting away from communality and toward capitalist functionality. His images do not find comfort or peace in their spaces.

What they convey is the uncanny of modernity. Atget’s uncanny is not horror film uncanny; his work is a visual requiem that understands the terms of its mourning will not return the normal, the comfortable. *A la biche, rue Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire, 1905* exemplifies this sense of a quiet homelessness. Two figures face the camera, blurred through glass and through the relatively long exposure time of Atget’s large-format camera. Above them, an archaic carved deer draws into question the “unity of composition” principle developed by the street’s early nineteenth-century namesake, Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire. The natural world that is brought into the medieval city through carved depictions of animals, Atget recognizes as fragile, passing, ceding to the multiplication of capitalist signs. The delicate carven doe is the dramatic center of the image, with the women, seen through the window, positioned as maids for the doe. The ironwork forest around the doe both evokes wilderness and the city’s constraint, its closing of the wilderness.
Abbott and the Archives

Atget’s work launches a protest against the stripping away of the *geheim* in urban spaces. When Walter Benjamin writes that Atget’s photographs suck the aura from turn-of-the-century Paris, he is not stating that Atget’s photographs lack aura. Instead, they survive as works of art by absorbing and illuminating an awareness of fin de siècle Paris as a city that is becoming a place without secrets. The uncanny turn of his photographs suggests haunting: in Atget’s work, we approach continually that which is pulling away from us. The reception history of Atget’s work doubles this estrangement, in that Atget remained largely unknown as a photographer until after his death. It was then that the American photographer Berenice Abbott purchased 1500 glass negatives and 8000 prints and brought Atget’s work out of oblivion. The strangeness, the unlikelihood, of this relationship to the public is encoded in Atget’s photographs. He expected that they would not be widely seen, would remain in privacy. Abbott’s devotion to his work wrested it from the archives that Atget had felt was the work’s destination. Abbott took privacy away from this work that devoutly explores privacy. Her actions Americanized Atget, leading the images away from their Parisian “home” in the archives where Atget had sought to enshrine them.

It seems likely that Atget intended his work to be archival. This is not to say that Abbott harmed the only photographer she ever admired. Had Abbott not intervened in the posthumous path of Atget’s work’s reception, it would likely be sequestered—it would be holy, sacred, which is to say set apart and unseen—in archives in Paris, its own city, and largely unseen. Only through Abbott’s willingness to profane this work did Atget’s œuvre become publicly known photographs. The images carry Paris as a sacred space precisely because Abbott wrested them out of that space, causing them to circulate uncannily outside of Paris.

Had the images remained buried in an archive repository in the very place where they were made, they would be less uncanny. This is not to say that the photographic uncanny does not inhere in the formal aesthetics of Atget’s individual works. Certainly, it does. But it also emerges from the strangeness of the mode and venues of reception. Abbott—a young American who perhaps did not understand why Atget worked as he did and what the images meant to him, who perhaps saw them only as formal accomplishments—appropriated the work in the most loving and venerating way. Abbott made the photographs sacred as art, whereas
for Atget the spaces themselves were sacred, the subject matter of the photographs made the photographs his repository of sacred space. It was a shift of consequence, from Atget to Abbott.\(^8\) The uncanny of photography can never be separated from the material conditions of the images’ afterlives. With Atget’s photographs, we see them outside of their origin. Even so, Abbott was moved to hold aloft Atget’s work—to buy it, venerate it, and above all circulate it—precisely because she saw in it an exemplar of photography. And it is exemplary uncanny, photography being the medium of an uncanny displacement of embodiment and embodied habitation of space.

Atget’s Paris does more than merely show of the shift into the modern—for that we can go to Marville. Rather, Atget’s photographs immerse the viewer in the loss of place, as social memory, that modernity fashions. The uncanny of Atget’s work inheres in the connections it draws between statues, mannequins, and the viewer; the tension it creates between the viewer’s need to inhabit space as place and the photograph’s revelation that precisely this need is disavowed by the shift to modernity (which is embodied in photography as nowhere else). Atget’s attention to rag pickers and their dwellings exemplifies this sympathy with those who survive at the edges of capitalism.\(^\) The photographer himself, creating and collecting his documents for artists, functions as something of a rag picker himself, picking up images, holding onto them, making them into an uncanny oeuvre through which he possesses a Paris that does not exist except in his images of it.

**Notes**


16. Sheldrake, Spaces for the Sacred, 12.

17. Sheldrake, Spaces for the Sacred, 8.


23. Some 100,000 Parisians were displaced as Haussman’s modernization tore up the old city. It was rumored that the real gambit of Napoleon III’s motivation for creating wide boulevards was to maintain military control over the populace: Pitt, Walks Through Lost Paris, 1–8.


29. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “chiasm”.


32. Mori, “The Uncanny Valley.”


34. White, *The Flâneur*, 16.


37. Kennel et al., *Charles Marville*.


41. “Atget’s style is more conservative and controlled than in the park pictures of ‘The Ancien Regime.’ It is, if anything, comparable to that of Charles Marville, whose extensive survey of Paris in the 1860s, in advance of Baron Haussmann’s street-widening crews, serves as a precedent for Atget’s endeavors. Marville [is] a photographer whose kinship with Atget is most obvious.” Andy Grundberg, “Photography View; Eugène Atget—His Art Bridged Two Centuries,” *The New York Times*, March 10, 1985.

43. As Diane Arbus writes, “A photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you the less you know.” Patricia Bosworth, preface to *Diane Arbus: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1984), xi.


57. Walter Brueggemann underscored the important distinction between space and place: “Place is space which has historical meanings, where some things have happened which are now remembered and which provide continuity and identity across generations.” Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Augsburg Books, 2002), 5, quoted in Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 7.


76. Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred*, 111–112. As Sheldrake points out, the medieval city had porous boundaries, admitting the wild, connected to farmlands in ways that the modern city, because of trains, ships, trucks, gains substance from the region outside the city, but citizens remain for all intents and purposes unaware of, cut off from, the sources of the goods they consume.


80. “Berenice Abbott, later a prominent photographer and teacher in her own right, became acquainted with Atget’s work in 1925, while she was a student in Paris. During nearly four decades, through books, articles, and exhibitions, she has sought to achieve for Atget the deserved recognition which he never received during his own lifetime. She made his prints available for important exhibitions in Paris [and New York]. The powerful influence which Atget has exerted upon the course of photography is evidenced by the continuing exploration of the potentials of documentary photography as seen in the work of Berenice Abbott, André Kertész, Brassai, Walker Evans, Robert Frank, and many others.” The Museum of Modern Art, 29 September 1968, no. 87, “Eugène Atget Archive Collection,” The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

81. “The ragpicker is a theme, like the petits métiers, that had been a subject for artists in the nineteenth century. The area where they lived was going to be demolished, so Atget wanted to portray them and the way they lived. Some of the ragpickers were very proud of their self-sufficiency. Atget’s motivation was not only from his social conscience; these photographs were also part of his documentation of things that were going to disappear.” Eugène Atget and Gordon Baldwin, Eugène Atget: Photographs from the J. Paul Getty Museum (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2000), 118.
From Pierre Bourdieu’s perspective, the practices of art historians often miss the point of art. Art historians, he argues, pay attention to catalogued categories of images, missing how art, in its essence, depends on none of this. In response, Bourdieu forwards his notion of an aesthetics of disposition, an analytical approach to understanding how art emerges from the individual artist’s habitus, his actions in the social field. For Bourdieu, the currency of art is broadly social. He claims we can know an artist’s work only by interpreting it through the artist’s everyday manifestation of self in society, “habitus” being Bourdieu’s term for the social practice that produces identity, a pivotal concept in his theory of a dispositional aesthetics. Clarifying the function of habitus in social formation, Bourdieu argues that culture and identity entwine violently as we cut the man to fit the cloth. According to Bourdieu, social worlds are held in place through myriad practices of symbolic violence against the oppressed, a violence that works in favor of the oppressor.

Bourdieu’s influential *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1980) levies sociological research against claims made in Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (1790) regarding the universality of aesthetic judgments. Against Kant’s ideal of immutable and socially extrinsic aesthetic boundaries of perceptual experience, Bourdieu argues that the socially dominant classes exert symbolic violence to create and maintain hierarchies of taste that exclude the proletariat. He suggests that the entire ideology of class depends on leveraging a notion of aesthetic taste as an absolute marker of social capital and dominance.
Hence, Bourdieu sees the attempt to establish criteria of aesthetic analysis as a classist exercise and claims it was launched precisely as the shift into a new capitalist class system was taking hold. Aesthetics emerged as a weapon to divide the populace into social classes.7

Yet in Bordieu’s *Manet: A Symbolic Revolution*, published posthumously and based on lectures he gave at the turn of the twenty-first century, the philosopher thickens the approach he took in *Distinction*, reengaging and, to an extent, rehabilitating the notion of “aesthetics” that he previously had been so concerned with dismantling.8 The intent of his later book is to expand the well-trodden argument that Manet’s work inaugurates modern art to a further-reaching and subtler theory regarding the capacity for “symbolic revolution” in art.9 With this term “symbolic revolution,” Bourdieu draws from his earlier concept of symbolic violence to shape a broad commentary on Manet’s formative impact on modernity. “Symbolic violence,” as the phrase implies, is violence enacted without physical force.10 It is a core concept for Bourdieu, explaining why those who are oppressed—by dint of gender, class, race, or ethnicity—often struggle to resist domination even when physical force is not being used against them. Symbolic violence sets its many symbolic cuts and shards into the social, intellectual, and emotional lives of the oppressed.11 But what does this theory of social power bring to a consideration of artworks that contend with modern and contemporary social crises? What, for example, does it bring to a consideration of August Sander’s photographs “*Die Letzten Menschen*” (The Last People)?12

To address the uncanniness of Sander’s work, I draw from Bourdieu’s theorization of social space and social power to move beyond readings of Sander’s work as being dependent upon earlier images of peasants. It is not that I disagree with such analyses. The careful and brilliantly insightful scholarship of Christian Weikop, George Baker, and others bring August Sander’s work to the vanguard of art historical concerns.13 I am, however, addressing only a particular aspect of Sander’s work: its uncanniness. The uncanniness of Sander’s images of the homeless comes to the fore in analyses that move away from iconological readings of the photographer’s lifelong project of photographing the German people, both in his unfinished project “*Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts*” (*People of the 20th Century*) and also—especially—in the images of the jobless, homeless, and those whom Sander’s poetically and enigmatically calls “The Last.”14 As Hans Belting (not referring to Sander’s work) writes,
“We search there for a mystery, one that would escape our customarily quick and superficial gaze.” It is precisely this sense of moving outside the superficial gaze of habit that presses Sander’s work into the uncanny. The faces and bodies of the homeless, the dispossessed, the marginalized, and the barely surviving as represented in Sander’s photography are the subject of this chapter. It is here that homelessness and the uncanny converge.

Bourdieu would tell us that art historical readings of images—interpretations founded in locating precursor images—are incomplete measures of the meaning of a work of art. He says that these approaches yield insufficient understanding of why the work matters in the first place. They fail to contend with the actual emergence of the work as a work, in lived time and social space. Bourdieu describes his approach to interpreting art as that of breaking through an open door; he sees himself as revealing what is to him obvious: the fact that art does not emerge as art historians interpret it but as the artist’s habitus produces it and as it is received in a social field. Art history, as Bourdieu sees it, comes in after the fact and neatens the painful and wildly human act of art.

I am neither an art historian by training nor entirely innocent of the discipline, and so I approach August Sander’s art as an evolving expression of revulsion in the face of the rise of German fascism, a protest instantiated in portrait photographs, a protest that emerges from his practice as a photographer. I do not suggest that Sander began his masterwork, “Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts” (People of the 20th Century) with the idea of political resistance to fascism. Drawing from Bourdieu’s theory of an aesthetics of disposition, I read Sander’s portraits of jobless and homeless German people as images generated by the photographer’s dispositional interest in the human photographic image as it made its uncanny emergence before him, from secret places in the unseen lives of people in his own place and time: interwar Germany. The uncanniness of Sander’s massive series—in alignment with the eerie expansiveness of its reach, “People of the 20th Century” being a title so grandiose as to almost ask for rebuttal—seems to stem from the sincerity of Sander’s belief in the photograph’s revelatory capacity. Like Bourdieu, Sander is not an art historian’s natural ally, for the photographer’s belief in the sociology of photographic representation appears sincere. And yet, in the time that I write now, Sander has become a favored subject of art history, written into the field in part by the brilliant art historians
mentioned above. Sander may be influenced by *Neue Sachlichkeit*, the “New Objectivity” that arose in Germany after the World War I, and he may be influenced by earlier images of German peasantry, but Sander’s disposition goes toward stripping a social subject of supposition—even the supposition of linear historical inheritance of image typologies. The lure for Sander is the subject in social and geographic time, which allows many of our suppositions but can also disavow them, if we look as closely as does Sander. The photographer’s disposition moves toward uncovering the secret vulnerability of the subject-in-time, and he finds this vulnerability by facing the subject-in-social-place. Hence, his people of the twentieth century are all German not because he venerates a racialized vaterland or heimat but, on the contrary, because he seeks visual specificity against such nationalizing concepts as these.\(^{20}\)

Born into the family of a mine carpenter and reared in a mining town near Köln (Cologne), Sander knew from his earliest years the context of the *geheim* (hidden) space—the mines where his father worked as a mine carpenter.\(^{21}\) He learned photography within the social world of the mines; his practice of photography emerged in proximity to, and with awareness of, the secret and covered-dark space of the mines. Sander’s photographs of the German “People of the 20th Century” are an uncovering of this depth, processually. The photographs depend on the depths: draw from it and are drawn toward it. Sander’s work draws from the dual force of the hidden—the subterranean, the mines of his childhood—in counterpoint with the photograph itself as that which brings images to light, which excavates hidden forces into light’s visibility and clarity. In deciding to photograph so as to reveal Germany’s people, Sander may be drawing from earlier peasant images, but I suggest that he draws also from his own background in the mines, as the son of a mine carpenter. The depths of the earth he saw in childhood and youth become, in his massive series of German people, the depths of nationalist politics that he sees as an adult photographer. By excavating time through place, Sander’s images reveal how the early decades of the twentieth century draw toward the culmination of Hitler’s disavowal of the human. He gives visual structure to social depths.

Learning photography in the milieu of the mines, Sander inaugurates a photography of the depths. His aesthetics of disposition emerge from this background knowledge of the work of the mines—the work of going beneath the surface. The photographer goes beneath not to extract metal but to see, to excavate understanding, and to raise
that understanding to visibility. The twelve images of Sander’s early “Stamm-Mappe” (Portfolio of Origins) (1910) set the groundwork for his “People of the 20th Century” in the sense that it begins his practice of using photography as a kind of cultural cartography, anchoring the images of human beings into the places and times from which they emerge.22 His term, *stamm-mappe*, translates to something like “portfolio of origin.” *Stamm* is the German word for “root” or “origin.” It relates to the English “stem.” To ask, in German, “Where are you from?” is to ask, “From where do you stem?” (*Woher stammen sie?*) The stem, the origin, is a part of the self that is both hidden yet visible, unknowable yet utterly available to be seen—if you’re photographed by August Sander.

It is apparent that Sander’s disposition, his urge to categorize through visuality, has much in common with the disturbing practice in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in both Europe and the United States, to hierarchize racial and national types through photography, through anthropometry.23 But Sander’s work, rather than expounding the discourse of racism, undercuts it, demonstrating that the German people were by no means morphologically uniform. In his photographs, there is no German “type.” The extremely fine-detailed, map-like quality of Sander’s portraits prevents them from being employed as support for paradigms of racism. In these photographs, Sander is interested not in genetic archetypes—the whole conceptualization of which is tainted with racism—but rather in habitus. His work delves into the origin of happenstance, of the place and the way you live. Sander’s “Stamm-Mappe” is not concerned with biology but with culture, place, and land as place. The connection of human beings to socially formed environments, the habitus in the social field, is the meaning of “origin” that Sander sounds out in his photographs.24

Christian Weikop astutely observes that Sander’s notion of what constitutes the German peasantry is far different from the ideas of racial purity that fueled the Third Reich.25 I think the difference is even more fundamental than Weikop suggests. Sander is not concerned with a biological category called race.26 He is concerned with human beings in social space; moreover, he is concerned with how social space is reflected by and revealed in the faces and bodies of human beings. In his encyclopedic photographs, Sander’s goal is to reveal this secret that comes from place; he wants to show the way we are shaped by the places we inhabit—the places where we earn our keep, survive, suffer, yearn,
love, and mourn. Sanders is obsessed with is this interior secret of the social world, the way it emerges on the face and body, in the dress and stance, of the person who lives it. This he makes into images that open to viewers with a kind of chill—uncanny in their revelatory force. The German “mappe” for “portfolio” has etymological connections to the English “map” through the Latin. The word “map” is American English slang for “face.” And Sander’s photographs are maps of faces, or faces as maps, showing the way that place becomes the person, and the person becomes, then, a map of her own origins. In this sense, “origins” refer not to biology or genetics but to the place—social, physical, socio-physical—from which the person comes. Sander’s images of the dispossessed/jobless/homeless especially hold the place of the uncanny in his oeuvre. Even so, his images of all strata of society bend toward uncanniness, remarking on the very strangeness, the estranging force, of social strata itself. This eeriness is particularly relevant as a symptom, and marker, of the dissolution of German society in the years leading up to and during the Third Reich.

**Original Images**

In the productive gap between the history of the image and the social history of the person-in-place, the habitus, inheres Bourdieu’s dispositional aesthetics. He asserts that the artwork does not emerge entirely in imitation of previous art but comes, instead, in its essence from the habitus of the artist. According to this theory, expounded in different ways in Bourdieu’s various works—*Distinction* and his posthumously published book on *Manet*—the social emergence and force of a work of art is found in the artist’s habitus, working through the social field. Bourdieu’s theory of a dispositional aesthetics is a useful approach for unpacking the uncanny force of Sander’s photographs. The uncanny is a problem with place—and it is his subjects’ place that interests Sander. In his “Stamm-Mappe” photographs, Sander confronts the way that the workers of the land with whom he grew up, the farmers of Herford and Westerwald, become the very images of their lives while working this soil. His concern is not their biological origin as Germans—a topic of nefarious interest to the Third Reich and to many of his contemporaries—but rather his subjects’ emergence in the place where they have lived. Here, I wish to emphasize that the verb “stammen” implies emergence, growth from a specific place. Everyone stems from somewhere, and the place
from which we stem leaves a secret imprint upon us. Like Manet, Sander disrupts and disturbs the normative assumptions of his contemporaries and, like Manet’s paintings, Sander’s photographs establish a modern art form: documentary photography.

The renowned art historian Christian Weikop charts precursor images to Sander’s photographs of peasants in the “Stamm-Mappe” and “Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts.” The line that Weikop draws between Albrecht Dürer, Erhard Schön, Hans Weiditz, Peter Flötner, and August Sander as depicters of the German peasantry is persuasive and illuminating. This deep history of the image provides an essential framework of visuality from which Sander may have drawn. And yet, the unsettling force of Sander’s photographs is not exhausted by iconographic history. I would say, instead, that the uncanny pull and blister of Sander’s photographs emerges from his disposition in reaction to his medium and social field: a mine-carpenter’s son enamored of the, then, fairly new technology of photography and the constant conceptual practice of emerging from subterranean depths to arrive at and refine light and vision confronts people in the grip of egregious shifts in sociality. This is the impetus of every photograph in his “People of the 20th Century” series—a series driven by the impossible intention of bringing to light all people, in their place and in time. My emphasis is on the section enigmatically titled “Die Letzten Menschen” and on images of the unhoused and dispossessed. Here at the raveling edge of subsistence within modernity, Sander illuminates an uncanny loss that, in the hindsight of post–World War II, bears a Cassandra-like clarity. As if he knew what was coming.

THE LAST GO FIRST

Seeking a specified mirror of the uncanny, in this chapter I focus on Sander’s photographs of the unemployed and the homeless as well as the photographs in a category he grouped with “Die Letzten Menschen.” The photographs of the itinerant, unemployed, and homeless turn up in various portfolios, including “Traveling People,” and “City Types,” but I hold onto the poetic term, “Die Letzten Menschen” (The Last People) that the photographer applied to images of the homeless to access the larger claim made by the photographs: the idea of loss, ending, finality, nothing left. Here, ethical questions of Sander’s sociology of photography come to the fore. The eeriness of his project endows the images
with a sense of being at a border, a boundary, outside the comforting center of any social world. These are the people with nothing left, they who come last.\footnote{55}

As Sander seeks to show all people of the twentieth century connected to this place, Germany, which was only formally created as a nation at the end of the nineteenth century, he photographs Roma, circus performers, the blind and disabled, and—my focus—the jobless, indigent, and homeless. In these choices of portrait subjects, he diverges from any program that might be construed as friendly to National Socialism.\footnote{56} It was perhaps Sander’s inclusion of the dispossessed in his photographs of Germans that, in 1936, caused the Nazis to destroy some and curtail all of Sander’s work.\footnote{57} Sander’s photographs of the unemployed and homeless in Germany operate against the racist aims of National Socialism by depicting Germans who did not fit the Third Reich’s visual paradigm. Photography of Sander’s subjects theoretically could operate within the racist aims of other regimes, in that photographs of human beings whom fate has rendered relatively powerless, impoverished, injured, destitute, can themselves be mechanisms for producing the imagery of—and belief in—a constitutively oppressed class. I argue, however, that Sander’s photographs of “Die Letzten” do not participate in this kind of symbolic violence or “soft” racism (as opposed to the Nazi’s hard racism).\footnote{58} Instead of creating an illusory underclass, his photographs of those without homes bring us, the collective viewer, to an awareness of our own vulnerability to homelessness, that most uncanny state.

Our vulnerability is always there. For everything must be paid for and, under capitalism, the only currency is financial wealth. With a radical loss of money, anyone can be rendered homeless, socially null. Sander’s photographs depict this peculiar uncanny of the modern precisely because they do not participate in the soft racism that at times surfaces in documentary photographs. In his portrait photographs that present the homeless, the barely sheltered, and the excluded, Sander pursues images of home, even in its desolation. This produces a photographic uncanny, imaging that which is not homey even as it stages home, working through defunct tropes of \textit{heimat}, homeplace. The photographs comment on the tangible loss of home as ground. Consider Sander’s photograph \textit{Beggar Couple, Neuwid}, 1928 (Fig. \ref{fig:3.1}). The middle-aged couple stand against a solid stone wall with a metal door. They stand, then, in an urban area, one that conveys stability, even monumentality, through its stone and iron architecture. Against this backdrop of stability, these
Fig. 3.1 August Sander, *Beggar Couple, Neuwied (Bettlerpaar, Neuwied)*, 1928. Gelatin silver print, 24.3 × 18.3 cm. Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Trust
two people are at once transient and frozen in place. It appears that their
clothes were at one time decent, sober garments, but they show wear
and dirt. The woman appears to be carrying her belongings beneath her
cloth, a self-protective gesture that makes her appear misshapen. Literally,
her burdens form her. The slightly clenched jaws of both man and
woman indicate a posture of resistance commingled with resignation.
They will not ask for pity, and they do not expect better than they have.

What makes the image uncanny is the stability and sturdiness of the
building from which they are closed out. This is clearly not their dwell-
ing place. Even though they are surrounding by stable buildings, these
people have nowhere to live. Here, one sees the uncanniness of modern-
ity: homelessness in the context of architectural shelter.\textsuperscript{39} The cultural
decision not to shelter those who have been cast out shapes the peculiar-
ity, the modern uncanniness of dispossession within fields of possession.
Sander’s photograph \textit{Beggar Couple, Neuwid} reveals this uncanny. While
Katherine Withy, in a sympathetic reading of Heidegger, contends that
simply being human is uncanny,\textsuperscript{40} I suggest that the uncanny is specific
to the encroachment into the human experience of space-time of poli-
cies and power hierarchies that are elided, hidden, invisible. This abro-
gation itself manifests as the uncanny. In other words, the uncanny of
Heidegger is historically specific and is connected with racist violence.
The Heideggerian uncanny flows with the philosopher’s apparent com-
fort with Nazism.\textsuperscript{41}

Sander’s work, against National Socialism, stands as a form of coun-
ter-memory, turning away from Heideggerian illusion. We encounter
homelessness in August Sander’s photographs in two ways: (1) the lived
homelessness, or near homelessness, of marginalized, dispossessed peo-
ple, and (2) the loss of home that Sander himself experiences as he con-
tinues to inhabit the place where he was born, Germany. His homeland
itself moves away from him as the Third Reich distorts its people into a
grotesquity that will echo for decades, perhaps for centuries, as the pin-
nacle of barbarism. “\textit{Die Letzten}” are the last people in the sense that
they are the bottom of Germany’s failing economy, those who have been
unable to secure a place to live, a way to live.

Given the rampant corruption of the Third Reich, there is an implicit
ethical purity to these last people: they have not compromised them-
sew themselves by bribery; they have not acceded to the corrupt system and
have been cast aside by it.\textsuperscript{42} This does not mean, of course, that the
jobless and homeless took a principled stance against Hitler’s regime
(if they had, they likely would have been killed or imprisoned like August Sander’s son). What it does mean is that the Third Reich did not like the look of them, did not want them to be included in a photographic catalogue of Germans. “Die Letzten Menschen” also seems, obliquely, to predict a Germany that, after World War II, becomes ein andere, “a different place,” set apart from virtually all other nations for its enactment of its so-called Final Solution. So, “Die Letzten” are, perhaps, all Germans as World War II approaches: they are the last Germans to be perceived by others as unmarked by the barbarism of Hitler’s regime. They are the last Germans to have had even a chance to overthrow Hitler’s regime. This “lastness” is legible in Sander’s images of all Germans—and it shows in its most eerie clarity in his photographs of the dispossessed.

Seeing the Dispossessed

Roland Barthes identifies a general “melancholy” of photography, but only some photographs self-reflexively comment on their identity as melancholic appearances. The melancholy of photography inheres in its relationship to time, place, and materiality. Needless to say, what is photographed recedes in time. Sander’s work reveals a problem of home, a problem at home. He records not simply the losses of time but the limits of nostalgia for precisely such losses. Sander was German, and while he was creating this body of work, “People of the 20th Century,” his country was scourged not only by the radical evil of Hitler’s regime but also by the poverty and social instability that preceded it. His photographs trace a place to which one does not want to return.

Sander creates his work as a person suffering heimweh, which means “nostalgia/pain of home/homesickness,” while living in a home, in this case a culture and geographical location, that has become estranged from him—even though he has not left it. Faced with a Germany in which fascism is mobilizing, Sander is disoriented, a stranger in his home, homesick for a lost place that he yet inhabits. Sander’s images of the jobless and homeless, the dispossessed and mendicant embody Germany’s ills on the eve of World War II even as the propaganda of the Third Reich seeks to obfuscate inconvenient facts with tactics like removing women from the workforce to make it appear that unemployment is less severe than it really is. Sander’s work is anti-propaganda.
Beggar, 1926 shows a man backed into a corner. He is not backed into a corner by the photographer but rather is a mendicant, settled there to beg. The man is seated as his damaged leg will not allow him to stand, but his shoulders look strong and the gaze he turns on Sander (and, hence, the viewer) is fierce. He is unhappy with the photographer but unafraid of him as well. This man shows himself engaging the knowledge of his own image: a man whose uncanny home is a street corner. The corner where he begs, his home in the urban landscape, is defined by angular convergences of metal and stone. The image delimits unheimlichkeit on several layers. First, the man’s body is shown as damaged and, given the interwar timing of the photograph, suggests he may be a former soldier, his wound a “secret” of war. War was then popularly considered to inflict manliness not harm on its combatants. Second, despite his plight, the man’s composure drives the picture’s tension and also forefronts its uncanniness—his no-home is his body that has absorbed violence, cornered in the urban landscape that pushes him to its threshold. Germany is not this man’s fatherland but the place of his dispossession.

The phrase “der Vaterland” became an impossible phrase after Hitler’s barbarity: Here is an unraveling of the modernizing project that attempted to unify Germany toward the end of the nineteenth century. The putative fatherland, after the Third Reich, is not something to claim but a source of shame. Sander’s photographs of homeless or marginally housed men reveal this oncoming sense of shame, showing secrets that dislocate the possibility of heimat for Germans, and in particular tear at the idea of a masculinized space of security, der vaterland. There is no fatherland because Germany’s masculinity in the Third Reich was barbaric and vicious. The men Sander’s photographs, those dispossessed in der vaterland, are shown as contained by and expelled from architectural and social structures, adrift and lost in the supposedly secure space of masculine home.

In a 1929 photograph of a vagrant, a bearded man standing at the outskirts of town (Fig. 3.2), Sander shows the at-the-boundary condition of the town receding in the background behind the dispossessed. Here, the distant town appears as a figure for home that the dispossessed can never reach. The man is positioned in Sander’s photograph as if he were architectural rather than human, so tall does he appear in contrast to the town behind him. This exaggerated perspectival geometry shows the impossibility of the man reaching the town in any real sense. He can walk
Fig. 3.2 August Sander, *Tramp, Cologne (Landstreicher, Köln)*, 1929. Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur—August Sander Archiv, Cologne (Courtesy of the August Sander Archive)
to the town, but it will expel him: it is an impossible destination, uncanny in its look of hominess in contrast to his isolated distance from it.

*Unemployed Man, 1928* (Fig. 3.3) shows a similarly lost man. Photographed by Sander, he leans against a beveled corner, a narrow medieval alley receding behind him. The gaunt figure does not meet the photographer’s (or viewer’s) gaze but looks to the side, holding his hat like an emblem of identity that he has had to take off. His jobless condition is echoed by the depopulated urban landscape that surrounds him: the stone buildings hedging him in, the tight medieval alley that recedes toward the vanishing point. The wall against which he leans and the alley suggest a claustrophobic impossibility of admission: he is entrapped outside. The photograph evokes unease, stirring feelings of simultaneous entrapment and exclusion. A photograph, any photograph, as such, is an uncanny space: a rendered scene that cannot be entered or even meaningfully touched, a fragmentary trace of light. It invites us and excludes us. The blind field of what we cannot see is part of the secretiveness of a photograph. Who else is in this town on this bleak day? In Sander’s photograph the trope of blindness is existential: The man bows his head, blind to what might come to light around the corner, stripped of the pretense of social identity that might be used to defend himself. He is almost ontologically groundless, and when Sander creates the image, he brings into vision the groundlessness of the man’s position. The uncanniness of the image is that Sander brings to light—makes visible—the painful way that the ability to appear, to be seen, is not conjugate with having steady ground from which to appear. The visible world is not limited to that which asserts itself as appearance; instead, and uncannily, physical materiality rises to appearance without stable substance. Sander’s photographs of men without homes locate and articulate a vacancy at the core.

Another angle of this same jobless man Sander presents in a photograph similarly titled, *Unemployed, 1928*. Here, the man turns toward us. His emaciation contrasts unnervingly with the way that he, like the woman in *Beggar Couple* discussed above, appears to carry belongings under his coat. These bulges beneath his coat make his thin shoulders look even thinner by comparison. His lack of a shirt and the absence of a hat underscore the more substantial deficiencies he faces. Although he stares straight at the camera, he does not meet the gaze of the viewer but looks slightly past us, with an expression related to shame. He is tall and gaunt, but looks as if he could be strong if he had enough to eat.
Fig. 3.3  August Sander, *Unemployed Man in Winter Coat, Hat in Hand (Arbeitslos)* 1928. Gelatin silver print, $23 \times 14.7$ cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art)
His gaze, slightly averted, is intelligent, understanding. He is a “last” man because of the economic circumstances in which he finds himself; he’s at the end of his options. Sander’s photograph of this man has him pressed up against a solid stone wall. This is not rural, bucolic Germany, but Germany all the same. An architecture of exclusion frames Sander’s photograph of the jobless man. The solidity of the wall excludes him, both in its capacity to offer shelter and the denial of that shelter. The wall appears impenetrable and even immense; in Sander’s photograph the frame of stone wall encloses the view, one can see nothing beyond walls’ regressions. The man so photographed could have come from any background. Maybe he was once a peasant farmer, maybe a factory worker, a coal carrier, a bricklayer. Maybe he is a former teacher. The whole point of the photograph is that these designations shift and elude the eye in the context of homelessness and joblessness. These designations no longer matter.

A Political Uncanny

Beaumont Newhall, writing on Sander in 1980, claims that Sander was “utterly nonpolitical” in his photography. And yet, consider that Sander includes in his category *Die Letzten Menschen* a photograph of the death mask of his son, Erich, who resisted the Third Reich, was imprisoned, and died in the Nazi’s prison. Yes, this is his son but the image is also a public photographic statement. This fusion of politics and personal mourning is precisely the essence of Sander’s quiet and subtle political resistance through photography. For George Baker, as for Newhall before him, the suggestion that Sander is a political photographer is not supported by the details of the artist’s life. By my way of thinking, Sander is a political photographer but not in any straightforward sense. Admittedly, Sander is not a John Heartfield, the German who pioneered the use of art as a political weapon. The photographic uncanny is not overtly political. Baker insightfully speaks of the tension inherent in Sander’s work, assessing that “Sander’s work is betrayed by the uncanny, static repetitions that precisely belong to the photographic medium itself.” I contend that Sander’s photographs are not betrayed by photography’s uncanniness but, instead, succeed as images through the deployment of that uncanniness. Leveraging the strangeness of photography, Sander’s oeuvre emerges through reflection of that strangeness, the very loss of ground in image. What I mean by this is that Sander’s
portrait-style photographs are not so much studies in personality as studies in place—people marked by social spaces and by geographic, architectural, and economic conditions. His photographs bend through the arc of their own photographic strangeness, an anamorphosis that reveals rather than distorts the spatiotemporality of the photographic image. Far from being betrayed by the “decaying” province of the portrait, as Baker suggests, Sander’s photographs depend on that decay. I suggest that his work depends on the photograph’s eerie quality, its capacity to show exactly how often damaged and always marked we are by the places we live, and the places where we come from. Weikop and Baker are entirely correct in their notable readings of Sander’s work, in their essays that display impeccable art historical lineage, but they leave almost untouched the way that the work slants to show the uncanny texture of ideas origin and experience of inhabitation in modernity.

If Sander meant to create uncanny works, the photographer did not avow this. He does, however, state that he intended to create works that made people look bad or, put more gently, that told the truth, visually, no matter how harsh was that truth. Habitus, Bourdieu argues, emerges “without any deliberate pursuit...without any conscious concentration.” Sander’s disposition toward revealing rather than concealing the multifarious aspects of misrecognition that shape our origins and our place within them virtually ensures that the images he creates are unsettling. From his early work “Faces of Our Time” (1920) Sander presents a haunting photograph of a young homeless man. The shadowed corner in which this man leans and his youthfulness speak of an uncanny future for Germany—in shadows, without hope. The young man is not frantic; he is somehow settled into his loss of home, and it is this settled quality that appears uncanny. He accepts his homelessness.

Sander’s photographs of the homeless and the indigent unsettle us precisely because they do not depict these men as fated, conscripted, or born to suffer. No. Sander’s homeless young man appears almost freakishly neat, considering the way that homelessness ravages personal appearance and sartorial style. The young man is dressed in black, suggesting unspecified mourning. He looks up at Sander, and his camera—a large-format, glass-plate apparatus—with something like disregard. The man is visually at one with the shadows, as if he has found a place in placelessness. The look on his face is almost as if Sander had interrupted him from being a ghost and made him, just for a moment, alive.
The uncanny pull of this photograph is the way the young man appears just about to get up to greet us, the viewers, and then does not. He acknowledges and simultaneously seems to realize the pointlessness of acknowledging this act of seeing with which Sander dispassionately confronts him. Homelessness, of course, precedes modernity. But the uncanniness of homelessness in modernity remarks on the increasingly disparate styles of living in place or without place.

The homeless live in a barren landscape, surrounded by the relative luxury of the housed. The homeless live without private plumbing (being able to access bathroom facilities only on the fly, or on the sly), and they live often without walls, roofs, or belongings beyond those they can carry on their person. The men dispossessed in interwar Germany reveal in Sander’s photographs of them a Germany stripped of propaganda. It is the same architecture and the same landscape as the Nazis extoll, but Sander shows the shadow-side, the side that uncannily brings to light the lost sociality that is Third Reich Germany. Sander’s is not the Germany of “race”; it is instead a visual sociology of the human image of place.

Bourdieu sharply criticizes racism through his theory of habitus, saying, “The substantialist mode of thought...which characterizes racism” creates the fallacy of biological origin as if it were a substantial property “inscribed once and for all in a kind of essence.” This mistake of substantialist thought Bourdieu contrasts to his notion of the habitus, which emerges through creation of and interaction with social space. Social space is precisely the focus of Sander’s portrait work: social space as it becomes embodied in Germany’s inhabitants. Because Germany is an eerie social space in the decades leading up to the World War II, Sander’s photographs of the German people in this time are uncanny. Yes, the photograph itself is an uncanny medium, but not every photograph exploits this capacity of the medium. Sander’s images do. They leverage the strangeness of the medium to convey the eeriness, the unheimlichkeit, of the social space of Germany leading into World War II. Sander’s photographs, then, are not betrayed by photography’s uncanniness; they depend on it.

The social field of the photographs is formed by unease, both the unease of Weimar Germany and also the uneasiness of photography itself. Analogue photography cannot gloss over the marks of time and the world without contending with its own propensity for material, physical accuracy. Sander’s avowed aesthetic is this accuracy: to make people look, in the photograph, the way they look in the world, rather than falsifying
the photograph through pictorialist style processes. Of course, the notions of “false” and “true” are only judgments. What does it mean to say that soft, blurry foci and printing processes—used by the likes of Clarence White, Gertrude Kasebier, and the early Edward Steichen—are falsifying of photography, when in fact these pictorialist photographers were deploying photographic processes to create their works. Such work, though deploying intaglio printing to create the positive image from a photographic negative, is photographic in every way except, perhaps, in its aesthetic. In other words, the judgment of the “true” photograph is aesthetic rather than technical. I make the case that Sander’s works present painful social facts about Germany in the interwar period on the basis of an aesthetic argument, that is, on the basis of how his photographs look. No photographic process, properly defined, can be called “true” or “false,” inasmuch as any process that involves capturing the imprint of light on a permanent capture medium, through the rubric of a lens of some kind—even a pinprick lens—is photography. This applies to pictorialism as much as to straight photography. It is the image itself that is true or false to the conditions of its own visibility. My contention is not that Sander necessarily had a conscious, stated political agenda but, rather, that his photographs offer a political view, whether or not this was his intent.

Social facts, argues Bordieu, work through a level of invisibility: the more influential the social fact is, the more hidden it is, “an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident.” The ideological beliefs of the rising Nazi movement, in Sander’s time and place, were racism and isolationism. There was, in other words, an inaccurate belief that economic harm was occurring in the so-called fatherland because of racial minorities. Hence, the quotidian, diurnal social space of interwar Germany was already uncanny, radically deceived as to the economic forces at work shaping the lives of its inhabitants.

But when we focus on Sander’s photographs of the homeless, we enter an even more uncanny terrain. Bourdieu makes the case that each person is “characterized by the place where he or she is situated more or less permanently... by her place of residence...; those who are ‘without hearth or home,’ without...domicile fixe, have almost no social existence [thus] the political status of the homeless.” Bourdieu indicates that the homeless are almost outside politics, and yet not entirely. He contends that the “social space is the first and last reality,” and suggests that those
outside the polis, without real franchisement, are most expressive of its conditions. It is this suppressed reality that Sander captures in photographs of the homeless.

Bourdieu’s theory of habitus emerges, notably, from the sociologist’s reading of art historian Erwin Panofsky: Bourdieu develops his idea of a dispositional aesthetics drawing from Panofsky’s theory that art expresses, through condensation into the artist’s personality, the social facts of the milieu, era, or—as Bourdieu would have it—social field, of his time and place. The homeless of interwar Germany that Sander photographs have an elliptical relationship to their place and time. When Bourdieu indicates that the homeless “have almost no social existence,” he does not mean that homeless people are ontologically different from the housed. He means that social existence emerges from place: space with memory. The homeless of the emerging Third Reich coexist in time and space with Hitler’s regime, but they are also not of it, having “no social existence” within it.

Sander’s photographs bring forward the intermediary quality of these men, the way they are grappling at the edges of the failing economy, the morally collapsing society. It is little wonder that Hitler’s propagandists did not like the inclusion of the jobless and homeless in his photographs of Germans. Not only do such photographs show people who did not look like the fantasy Aryan ideal, not only do such photographs demonstrate the unraveling of the nation that propaganda tried to hide, but even more deeply these photographs of the homeless reveal the uncanny darkness and harm in the premise of heimat, and Vaterland. Sander’s photographs of jobless, homeless Germans in the interwar period reveal the emplacement of loss that is modernity; they brought to light the way that precisely what Hitler’s regime was claiming as its core principle—vaterland, heimat or, worse, blut und boden (blood and soil)—was a misunderstanding of the premodern, a misunderstanding manufactured as modern propaganda.

As Weikop shows, the idea of the German peasantry as foundational to the meaning of being German—a late nineteenth-century, late Romantic, ideological fabrication—seems to have influenced Sander’s early interest in photographing German peasants as people of the soil. Apparently he saw them as human expressions of the life of the land. Even so, the idea of a tie to the land as the meaning of heimat is not what is visually carried by Sander’s photographs. In his images of peasants, the photographs’ aesthetic strength resides in their faithfulness to
depicting the exhaustion, even the deformation, of the body that hard labor begets. His peasants are not exalted. Though Weikop is clearly correct that Sander’s initial interest in this specific photographic subject emerged from the Romantic view of the peasantry into which he was born, it is fair to say that Sander’s art quickly developed beyond this initial frame.

Instead of following through with an ideological misperception—with which he may have begun his earliest work on the project—Sander instead created a body of photographs that correct the falsehood of a romanticized heimat, and nowhere did this happen quite so potently as in his photographs of the homeless. There, as Margaret Olin observes, affect and photography cohere.72 Margaret Iversen extends this claim, showing how photography carries trauma, in its cultural use and aesthetic force.73 Photography is the medium of touch, precisely—and uncannily—because the analogue photograph is so untouched, having no texture of paint, no remnant of the hand. The photograph is touched by light, however, in the same way that we and all the visible world are touched by light. Photographs carry the trace of light’s embrace, and in this fact, which is inscribed in photographic images as emotional potency, lies the lure of an almost fleeting sensation—the subtlest and longest lasting touch.

Sander’s portraits of the homeless of pre–World War II Germany work by mustering an affect of a peculiar sort. They drag nostos, the pain of longing for home, into the place that is home. In this sense they are anti-nostalgic, that is, disavowing the possibility that actually going home is restorative. The overlap between the wounded and the homeless (two of Sander’s subjects have lost limbs, probably in battle) suggests a potential overlap between former soldiers (in World War I) and the homeless—a link that remains true now in America, with a disproportionate number of wounded veterans among our homeless. After World War I, Germany had some four million disabled veterans, many of whom joined the ranks of the nation’s six million homeless.74

In Sander’s photographs of disabled, homeless veterans, he turns the tables of nostalgia by suggesting that the soldier who longs for home—for heimat, the Vaterland—is denied home precisely when he returns to Germany after fighting abroad. The homeless are exiled in their place of origin; the soldier is denied shelter once he has returned to the country for which he fought. The affective weight of Sander’s photography of the homeless is not pity but mourning and fear—an aching fear of the
horror of complicity. The men are photographed in Germany; they are Germans; they fought as soldiers for Germany. But, uncannily, for them there is no shelter in Germany’s urban buildings—which appear granite, solid, and even elegant as backdrop to the homeless in their shadowed corners—or in Germany’s bucolic fields and village roads. Sander’s photographs excavate this decisive horror.

The photographic uncanny, then, makes visible the eeriness of ghosts who are alive. These men are the memory of actual Germany, the counterpoint to propaganda. As Michel de Certau makes the case: “Memory mediates spatial transformations…it produces a founding rupture or break. Its foreignness makes possible a transgression of the law of the place. Coming out of it bottomless and mobile secrets, a coup modifies the local order.” Though de Certau is not speaking of Sander, nor of photography, he could be describing August Sander’s photographs of the homeless. Precisely the “foreignness” of the once-familiar place is Sander’s topic in his photographs of homeless Germans. Image vivifying memory, his photographs of the homeless differentiate the foreignness of the real from the false familiarity of propaganda—and distinguish the violence of the “law” of Hitler’s Germany from the real needs of German citizens, including Jews, Roma, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people. The “bottomless and mobile secrets” of Sander’s photographs of the homeless stage a sublime coup: intentionally or not, these photographs challenge the local political order. The photographer’s use of memory marks place—space with memory—as that which is created not through the surface glance of propaganda but instead through a painful torque of nostos, the pain of home.

In Sander’s presentation of nostos, the pain of home occurs at home; there is no home to return to for easing this pain. Paradoxically, Germany’s urge to romanticize its land damaged or destroyed the capacity of that country to be a place of home for many Germans, not least those killed by the regime. Nostalgia for an agrarian economy is a symptom, not a cure, for the homelessness of modernity. The problem is not in longing for a connection to one’s ancestry nor in desiring a close connection with the earth. Rather, the problem is a racialization of place. Place has meaning because it is space cut by memory, opened by memory, marked by memory. The uncanny force of Sander’s photographs of the last people—the Germans who are jobless, homeless, disabled by war—emerges from the specificity of his gaze, from his willingness to see what rises from the depths as a representation of the depths.
The homeless men photographed by Sander are revealed to have been ostracized not because of other peoples inhabiting Germany but, on the contrary, because of German political policies that seek to cast aside the unpalatable look of suffering. Sander’s subtle photographs leverage the uncanniness of photography to show the utter loss of world that the Third Reich visits on those who inhabited the Germany it controlled.

I discussed the Heideggerian philosophy of dwelling in Chapter 2, in regard to the work of Eugene Atget, but it is worth returning to Heidegger briefly here inasmuch as the philosopher’s involvement with the Nazi Party is an unavoidable hindrance to taking whole-cloth his theory of dwelling as providing a resolution to the uncanny condition of homelessness in modernity. Heidegger—unlike Nietzsche, Hölderlin, or Kant all of whom died long before World War II—developed his philosophy with knowledge of Nazism and its distortion of heimweh and heimat. Germany’s National Socialist concepts of a home, which were articulated with violence against emigrants, flow with Heidegger’s naturalization of dwelling. As James Elkins puts it, “One of the challenges for the current generation of art historians is to come to terms with Heidegger’s place in current understandings of historical art.” Not only does Heideggerian theory open the door to a negative “pathos,” as Jacques Derrida has pointed out, it also pushes toward an uncritically nostalgic conceptualization of home. It is this latter that concerns me most in my consideration of the photographic uncanny. As Elkins states, “the Westerness of space is buried in Western historical consciousness.” What Sander’s photographs of “people of the soil” teach us is the uncanniness of the modern Western idea of home. In contrast to ideology, his photographs, in their veracity, slip the boundaries of ideological containment. Materially, of course, the photograph often moves away from its place of origin: as I write this chapter, I am in Virginia, looking at a book of Sander’s photographs, which were published in New York and, of course, photographed originally in Germany. I could, of course, be looking at the images online, anywhere in the world with access to the internet.

And the photographs in Sander’s work suggest the already potent force of space slipping away from place in the face of the photograph as in the context of modernity. His homeless men appear as if one were always already walking away from them—as we so often do walk away when confronted with the homeless. Sander, with his camera, holds the gaze of the lost, the homeless, and articulates the encounter formally, and with decision, as it gathers in the homelessness of photography as a
medium. He shows the hollow of this empty space that is called *heimat* by the propagandists in the flat space of the photograph. Heideggerian “dwelling” is not the essential condition of being human. And yet, privacy, whether social or individual—a space wherein one is in place—may be. Privacy is stripped from the homeless, not by Sander’s camera but by the late capitalist forces that cause dwelling to be a commodity that must be purchased.

**Uncanny Valley**

Masahiro Mori creates the term, “the uncanny valley” to illuminate the paradox that the more an inanimate object appears human, the more uncanny it is.\(^8\)\(^0\) Mori developed this argument in regard to robotics, but I apply it to photography and to Sander’s photography. His photographs of the indigent and homeless show people who have little to hide behind. Whatever social performances most people engage in—a professor, a mother, an athlete, whatever it is we “do”—the subjects of Sander’s Letzten are stripped of that layer. They do not wear clothing that represents their social status, their work, their city of origin. Uncannily, they are human beings depicted without social cover. I am most definitely not suggesting that this omission makes them like robots, but I do draw the point from Mori’s argument that this is what makes Sander’s photographs of the homeless so *unheimlich*. These photographs specify in detail the stripped quality of the homeless, the representation of being human without, as Bourdieu puts it, a social space of claim. It is not that homeless people, in Sander’s time or in ours, are themselves uncanny. What I am saying is that Sander uses photography to show the *unheimlich*—both “secret” and “not homelike”—conditions of modernity in interwar Germany in the faces and bodies of the dispossessed. The secret, of course, is the decidedly *not* homelike conditions created by racist fascism. Through the subtlety of photography’s uncanny capacities, Sander wages a critique of racist fascism, with its romanticizing of nationalism, an issue that transcends his historical epoch.

It may be that we have new need of that critique, a way to see the uncanny parameters of our own twenty-first-century obsessions with defining national borders, defining who is a “real” citizen of a given Western nation. August Sander’s photographs of “Die Letzten Menschen” constitute a set of images that speak of the homelessness that was iconic for the impact of the Third Reich. But the work moves beyond
that historical frame, bringing the ache of homelessness forward as a human response to specific modes of modernity. I would not agree with Heiddeger that the essence of being human is *dasein* (presence). Rather, Heidegger’s theory reinterpreting Hegelian *dasein* emerged in the Third Reich as an exclusion of the non-German—a way to deny to these specific groups of people the social presence in place and time that is, perhaps, unreservedly human. Heidegger’s *Dasein* is a nationalist world-view that imagines a relationship between embodiment, language, and history vivifying—and vivified by—a notion of home as that which can exclude others.81 August Sander’s eerie photographs disrupt such a view of home. They show that exclusionary practices create estrangement, the loss of home even when one remains in the place where one was born. Sander’s last people, his unhoused and dispossessed, are German in the sense of being people born in Germany who continue to live there. But their experience of home is structured by the exclusion enacted upon them. They present an always liminal, aching space of social nonbeing.

This is the uncanny of the modern nation state. That human beings can be created as nonexisting even as they continue to exist.

**NOTES**


35. It is hard, here, to ignore the Biblical echo, “The first shall be last and the last shall be first” Matthew 20:16, The Holy Bible, King James Version.

36. Weikop’s argument that we should not presume Sander was not influenced by Nazi propaganda extolling the virtues of peasantry and *echt-Deutsch* family is fascinating and compelling and yet, as I’ve pointed out, it seems likely that Sander and the fascists were both influenced by late nineteenth-century trends in Germany’s mythologizing of its own origins, which is not the same as Sander being aligned with fascists.


with those of his son, my interpretation, on the evidence of his photographs, is that Sander leaned left, arriving at his politics through the practice of photographing: through the act of looking closely at his fellow human beings.


64. Mary Street Alinder, Group f-64: Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, and the Community of Artists Who Revolutionized American Photography (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 223. I am not grouping Sander’s work with group f-64 style clarity of truth in photography. This has to do with the political differences, or differently placed politics, between the photographers.
65. Jacques Ranciere, Aesthetics and Its Discontents (New York: Polity, 2009), 31–35. Jacques Ranciere makes the persuasive case that only through aesthetic, formal, reenvisioning is the political truly reached.
73. Margaret Iversen, Photography, Trace, Trauma (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 1.


81. Charles Guignon, “On Saving Heidgger from Rorty,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 46, no. 3 (March 1986): 401–417. While Heidegger states that *Dasein* is not about mastery, even in this retreat the shaping influence of a nationalistic frame remains. In particular, the idea of “homecoming” as ontology implies that being in the world (dasein) entails drawing boundaries against others.
Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that in some works of art we encounter “objects…that do not pass quickly before our eyes in the guise of objects that we ‘know well’ but on the contrary hold our gaze, ask questions of it, convey to it in a bizarre fashion the very secret of their substance which, so to speak…stands ‘bleeding’ before us.”¹ This claim of a visceral aesthetic force that Merleau-Ponty evocatively calls “bleeding” I bring to Walker Evans’s photographs of Hale County, Alabama, taken in 1936.² Evans’s iconic photographs of Hale County sharecroppers—which he undertook with the writer James Agee and which first appeared in 1941 in a book by Agee, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men—have become such well-known object-images as to be almost incapable of exciting emotion.³ What could these fame-cauterized images have to do with Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of art as images that “bleed”? And yet, these photographs enact a process of opening familiar objects—those nouns shown in the images themselves—so that they bleed before the viewer in the manner Merleau-Ponty describes. Merleau-Ponty’s use of the word “bleed” is aesthetic and phenomenological, and must be understood in that context. He specifically means that some images move beyond the conveyance of iconic or indexical meaning and assert their presence within the mind of the viewer as eidetic objects that shimmer between seeing, thinking, and physical experience, that touch us as if through consanguinity, as if we became objects ourselves in beholding such image-objects. For Merleau-Ponty, it is precisely these images that have aesthetic force. Through their uncanny disruption of the boundary...
of mind–body duality they compel our awareness of our own embodied way of knowing the world of objects, haptic and bodied. Some images move, thus, fully into the perception of the viewer, changing our sense of our own embodied, material, identity. They are unsettling, threatening, and sublime. They make us aware of space and time as shifting, and of our own imbrication in mortal embodiment.

In this chapter, I approach Evans’s Hale County work in a manner that may be distressing to those accustomed to a given view of Evans’s work. Here, I am not arguing against older interpretations of the photographer but rather laboring to extend our collective understanding of the power of his work. Of Walker Evans’s Hale County photographs, I suggest that it is precisely because they “bleed,” threatening us with the contaminating uncanny uncertainty of home that is constitutive of America, that these photographs have become static icons. We turn them into the cliché of what Merleau-Ponty terms the well-known image-object to protect ourselves against the risk of seeing Evans’s revelation of the uncanniness of the American myth, the social violence hidden inside patriotism and its bitter twin, rampant nationalism. It is Evans’s brilliance in exposing the uncanniness of the American project that makes his work of continuing importance in the twenty-first century.

The question of class cannot be put aside in looking at Evans’s photographs of sharecroppers. The images are haunted by the problematic of social class, drenched through and through with that very issue. The risk of looking at Evans’s photographs of sharecroppers is that we might see our cultural consanguinity, that we—the well-educated who view art—might be like these people with bad teeth, emaciated bodies, desperate eyes. The risk is also that we might see what we, as Americans, are—how uncannily we inhabit this land that was entirely the domain of Indigenous Americans not all that long ago.

Evans himself seems to have been aware of this subterranean force of his work, noting of his photographic subjects that “the thing itself is such a secret and so unapproachable.” Walker Evans captures the eeriness of this place—impoverished, rural Alabama—as no other photographer has. Perhaps for this very reason, the people in his images of Hale County are almost universally seen as being “other.” The sense that we (well-educated, art-absorbing Americans) are not they (ill-dressed, poorly fed sharecroppers) often attends interpretation of these images. But in this chapter, I contend that there is another way
to read Evans’s Hale County series: the images offer us the terrifying, and uncanny, possibility of not distancing ourselves from these families, the Burroughs, the Fields, the Tingles. If we consider the Burroughs, the Fields, the Tingles as being our own, of us, how does this alter our notion of America? Can we tolerate this altering lens? For me, writing as an academic whose family hails from Georgia and Alabama, regions not far from Hale County, the sense that I know the subjects of Evans’s work is especially pronounced and troubling. Though I was born after the watershed of the Civil Rights movement, I know the culture of Hale County because it is so close to my own culture of origin; it is familiar and it is what I disavow.

To say that Walker Evans’s photographs “bleed,” that is to impute affect and emotion to the images, flies in the face of the idea of the photographer’s renowned restraint, classicism, and control of his subject matter. But I do not contest the aesthetic accomplishment of his works. Rather I seek to deepen our understanding of the work’s force. As an unchosen bodily act, bleeding is feminized, associated with bodily fluids that elude social boundaries. Even so, for Merleau-Ponty art that has aesthetic force causes the objects it presents to bleed, to become overwhelmingly meaningful, almost painful to the gaze. For him, the meaning of perception of the object world is opened by such art. But Merleau-Ponty dismisses photography as mimetic, quotidian, incapable of aesthetic force. I draw from Merleau-Ponty’s theory of perception, then, as a theory of affective aesthetics that illuminates Walker Evans’s photography, rather than as a theory that the philosopher specified for photography. I note that Walker Evans’ Hale County photographs are not only pictures of the quotidian but also deploy a medium that fought a long rear-guard battle to be seen as fine art.

In addition to presenting everyday objects, photography is itself an everyday object. When we think about photography—even that which, like Walker Evans’s work, is now considered art—we cannot pretend it partakes of a radically different materiality from that of everyday photographs. Walker Evans’s photographs of sharecroppers fall more in the category of everyday objects than other fine art photographs because Evans’s are so widely circulated. Allie Mae Burrough’s face, through the alchemy of Evans’s photograph of her, and reiterated in Sherrie Levine’s series “After Walker Evans,” and on the cover of the textbook The Contest of Meaning, becomes something other than a unique person, becomes a face on a textbook that is recycled through countless
students’ lives. Sherrie Levine’s point in creating “After Walker Evans” is to illuminate precisely how sealed in static acts of perception his images have become. While Merleau-Ponty makes his observation about Modernist painting, “Penetrating to the heart of things, to the object as it is in itself,” I suggest photography can bleed more easily than other art. Photography bleeds when it carries the object imaged so nakedly, and in Evans’ time, photography is the naked image-object—small, thin, spatially unassuming.

Imagine you have taken a group of photographs, printed them, set them aside in a box, forgotten them, and then rediscovered the cache two decades later. In this rediscovery the photographic image-object bleeds: there, too close for comfort, stand the family of your youth, classmates, a friend with whom you’ve lost touch, a relative now deceased—all in detailed, intimate, pictorial form. The distance from embodied experience afforded by painterly technique is absent. Up close, these people, appearing innocent of the knowledge of their own capacity to be shifted out-of-time, pose for photographs wearing party dresses, holding balloons, dressed in tuxedos of a now-outdated cut. The absurdity of self-presentation, the ache of embodiment in time, as such, bleeds from photographs. What once appeared just ordinary—the room where the party was held, the dress one had purchased at half-price off the sale rack—is imbued with an eerie and extraordinary presence: the capacity to haunt.

What of the clothes of Allie Mae Burroughs and her daughters in Evans’s family portrait? In The Burroughs Family, 1936 the eldest daughter, a teenager, wears a too-tight dress. The fit is a sign of a girl having outgrown her Sunday-best dress when the family cannot afford a replacement. If we follow Merleau-Ponty, thinking of perception as an embodied experience, we come to the photograph not only through our own embodied perception, but also through a sympathetic awareness of the embodied experience of the photographic subject and the photographer. I don’t mean “sympathetic” in the sense of feeling a positive regard for the Burroughses. I am thinking instead of a more fundamental sense of connection in which, as the viewer who sees a realistic image of human beings, we imaginatively place ourselves in their gaze and in their stead. Photography is an intensely social form of watching. Evans’s photograph trades on its verisimilitude by the evocation of specific embodiments: there is the embodiment of the family standing before
their house; the invisible, yet present, embodiment of the photographer who establishes the viewer’s perspective; and the embodiment of the viewer, a shadow space implied by the photograph. While photographs may seem to recede to an abstracted, objectivist point of view, in fact the disembodied tenor of photographs folds on itself. The medium depends upon the intimacy with which it suggests the memory of embodiment. Writes Merleau-Ponty, “The places in which I find myself are never completely given to me: the things which I see are things for me only under the condition that they recede beyond their immediately given aspects.”27 A photograph uncannily mimics this aspect of embodied perception. It presents parts of a whole. Yet it is given meaning by what recedes, what is suggested but unshown. Barthes calls this aspect of the photograph the “blind field” and aligns it the photograph’s aesthetic and emotive force.28

Among Walker Evans’s portraits from Hale County, the Burroughs family stand before us in their Sunday best. But in the photograph what we see is not a comforting depiction of American-ness. Instead, their house and their land appear before us as barren and stripped as a dwelling can be. There is almost nothing there. The flat, hot Alabama sun damages every object it touches, searing the family into a shadow outline against their house. The dry, hard earth surrounding the house is also the soil they work for a living, but there is no sense here of romanticizing the connection between the laborer and his fields. Instead, the photograph is purposively full of a lot of nothing. There is nothing in the yard; the house is decorated by nothing. The family is presented as pure blunt physicality, the result of procreation almost devoid of sociality. And yet, the family is also shown to be bound together by a shadowy integument that supersedes the happenstances of sex and birth, the material conditions of subsistence. These people cling to each other, becoming one form in the photograph, conjoined as a shadow. Their clothes are paramount to the sign that is the image. The clothes are clean. It must have been a good deal of trouble for Allie Mae Burroughs, probably with the help of her eldest daughter, to achieve that cleanliness. Even though some lack shoes, the family makes an effort to signify that they are not of the dirt they till. Still, the aspirational clothes rhyme, tonally, with the hard sun that defines the Alabama landscape where they work. The bright clothes serve as a signifier of their mergence with this place.
Unhidden

Part of the uncanniness of Walker Evans’s photographs of the Burroughs, Tingles, and Fields families is the divergence of the photographs’ evidentiary force from the cliché of America’s aspirations for whiteness. As James Baldwin clarifies, whiteness is created in America as a category that merges exceedingly disparate groups of people.29 Baldwin points out that whiteness is nothing other than a rhetorical device for sequestering people with dark skin—principally, African Americans and Indigenous Americans—into a rigorously dominated class. The politics of the Farm Security Administration in photographing Americans impacted by the Depression are marked by racism in stressing photographs of impoverished whites.30 But Evans’s work in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men excavates oppressive ideologies of whiteness by showing the uncanniness of the category as such.

The uncanny edge of colonization and racism is the subtext of Evans’s photographs of the sharecroppers of Hale County. I do not mean that the photographer explicitly refuses the racist terms of the FSA. Rather, it is notable that in working for Fortune he shifts to his own vision, quietly subverting the intent of the FSA. Specifically, he walks a very fine line between presenting the Burroughs, Fields, and Tingles as dignified, as noble in their suffering and revealing the families as simply suffering.31 Suffering in the sense of undergoing hardship without choice and not always with much dignity. Evans’s family photograph of the Fields, in their cabin and his portrait of Mrs. Tingle (Fig. 4.1) in particular move away from presenting the white sharecroppers as suffering nobly and, instead, showing them as simply suffering.31 In the Fields’s family portrait, of the family members only the matriarch is fully clothed and one young male child lacks a garment to cover his genitals. Their clothes are visibly dirty, even though the portrait is black and white. Mrs. Tingle, in her portrait, is presented in a three-quarter turn, reminiscent of paintings of, say, John Singer Sargent’s formal portraits of society ladies.32 Yet Mrs. Tingle—unlike Singer Sargent’s coquettish society women in resplendent gowns—is presented in an obviously filthy smock, with a look on her face that does not flirt, that barely covers what seems to be a combined sense of shame and horror at being so seen. She holds her hands as if cradling an invisible offering, a nonexistent piece of herself that she cannot give because she lacks it. She lacks almost every material thing.
Fig. 4.1  Walker Evans, *Sharecropper’s Wife, Hale County, Alabama/*Mrs. Frank Tingle, Wife of a Cotton Sharecropper, Hale County, Alabama, 1936. Gelatin silver print, 19.6 × 7.3 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum)
The subtext of horror and shame is the force of Evans’s photographs: the terror of having nothing and letting others see that you have nothing. At the time when Evans took this photograph, Francis Galton’s pseudo-science, anthropometry, was dwindling in influence but still believed in many quarters. In the United States, the brunt of this form of eugenics fell on African Americans and Indigenous Americans; however, impoverished whites were also victims. Almost from its inception, but decidedly gathering steam in the late nineteenth century, photographs were deployed as a tool that eugenicists believed scientifically proved differences in intelligence and temperament between the races. Disturbingly, this discourse of scientific racism is seeing a resurgence in the twenty-first century, as well-regarded geneticists make the claim—apparently unfounded—that genetics can show us differences in intelligence between races. In the main, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the separation between photographic methods applied to bourgeois whites and those applied to impoverished African Americans and dispossessed Native Americans was wide and clearly demarcated. The photographer and art critic Allan Sekula calls the photographs intended for purposes of scientific racism a kind of “shadow archive.”

Critic Alan Spiegel writes that the ambiguity of Evans’s approach indicates something that “cannot be named” in the text of the photographs. I suggest that what “cannot be named” in Evans’s work is the suppressed—the uncannily known and disavowed—text of American racism, which is based on an assumption that whites should have freedom from suffering.

I contend that Evans’s photographs of white Hale County sharecroppers are uncanny, in part, because they oscillate between two figural tropes: the portraiture of bourgeois and middle-class white subjects—photographs taken for the white people because they’ve paid for them—and putatively scientific or ethnographic images of other races, primarily African American and Indigenous American. These latter images are neither made for nor typically given to the photographic subjects but, instead, are circulated as objects of so-called science or, at times, as trophies of conquest. Consider that the Indian Hall, a grillroom restaurant in New York City’s Astor Hotel, housed until 1937 a substantial collection of photographs of Indigenous Americans, none—not one!—of them given to the hotel by Indigenous Americans. Instead, the images circulated as trophies of a sentimental and nostalgic kind, allowing the
white guests of the hotel to eat surrounded by images evoking the “wild west” and the conquered “savage,” glorifying westward expansion as the US manifest destiny.40

Deploying the image of the nonwhite person as a sign of uncanniness, a bearer a traumatic otherness, is a tradition with, tragically, roots as deep as colonized America.41 Critic Ronald R. Thomas shows how nineteenth- and early twentieth-century detective fiction deployed tropes of the racial other as figures not only of criminality but also of otherworldliness.42 The preeminent British ghost-story writer, M. R. James, writing at the turn of the twentieth century, shapes the ghost story “Canon Alberic’s Scrap-Book” around two forms of the uncanny that intersect with my reading of Evans’s photographs from Hale County.

In James’s short story, Canon Alberic’s scrapbook appears to hold a demonic picture.43 This picture is a drawing in a book otherwise made up of devotional images and Christian sacred text. The drawing appears to be that of a demon, but James’s language in describing said demon is overwhelming racist, signifying a horror of people with dark skin and long dark hair.44 Articulating the racist discourse underlying his presentation, James repeatedly describes the demon as having a level of intelligence slightly below that of a human being, a reference to the theory held by scientists of his day that the indigenous peoples of Africa, America, and Asia, were able to “mimic” intelligence but did not truly have the intelligence of northern European men.45 Strikingly, James’s ghost story is resolved when the white British scholar who encounters the image of the demon photographs the image and then destroys the original.46 Through the alchemy of photography, the demonic power of the racial other is neutralized. I suggest that this gesture, ending James’s most famous story, reflects the way that European men of science used the photograph to assert power over the colonized subject, whether African, Indigenous American, or Asian. James’s ghost story suggests that the photograph seals and contains the putative otherworldly power of the racial other. And, indeed, photography was used as part of the construction of the discourse of racism that allowed colonization’s brutal practices and effects to be accepted by the majority of whites.47

But in his Hale County photographs Walker Evans blurs the line between the style used for photographing the oppressed racial other and the white middle-class subject. Both Galton and anthropometry’s criminologist Alphonse Bertillon believed in a criminal caste, including white people of supposedly subpar intelligence.48 But Evans
is not photographing criminals. He is photographing sharecroppers. He does not photograph them as if he were creating a clinical study of their faces and heads. He photographs them in family groups and individual portraits. Nor does Walker Evans settle on a single approach to photographing his subjects. His photograph of Floyd Burroughs is fine and elegant, with the handsome man turned toward the photographer—although there is no intimacy here, and the lack of social equality between the men causes Burroughs to hold a look of distance, so that he does not appear desperate in his poverty. As well, in the family photograph, Floyd Burroughs literally holds the family form together, reaching his arms out across his wife and eldest child, holding them in a way that refuses Walker Evans’s social position as the superior “holder” of the Burroughs family through his photography.

Unequivocally, the sense that different races could be uncanny stems from racism, from the very ideology of race. So, when I write that Evans’s photographs of the Burroughs family oscillate between the gaze of the colonizer photographing Indigenous Americans and the gaze of the itinerant portrait-taker photographing middle-class white subjects, I am most emphatically not indicating a distinction based on identity. As Barbara Fields points out, race is an ideology not an idea.49 That said, photographic style changed according to the photographic subject, and it changed in reflection of ideological beliefs about identity. As W. J. T. Mitchell writes of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, the project does not settle into a generic paradigm but resists the paradigmatic form of the photo-essay.50 In the same vein, I suggest that the photographs themselves, removed from the book and viewed without Agee’s text, resist paradigm and genre. Even within Agee’s text, the photographs stand apart. They do not agree with so many points made in Agee’s writing.51 In this chapter, I suggest ways that Evans’s uncanny nerves—his emotions that bleed from the photographs—have a specific source in the suppressed discourse of racism in the United States and, in particular, in its Southeastern portion.

Compare his portrait of Allie Mae Burroughs with Zeno Shindler’s photographs from almost a century earlier of Choctaw and Muscogee tribe members—a delegation that came to Washington, D.C. to negotiate treaty rights.52 The Muscogee are part of the larger group, both the Choctaw and the Creek who, together, dominated Georgia and Alabama until they were forced to leave in the 1820s.
The photograph Schindler took of two Choctaw girls in 1868 is part of the US government’s effort to catalogue the faces and tribal association of Indigenous American delegates who came to Washington, D.C. to negotiate treaties. Zeno Schindler was a photographer for hire, so we cannot know his thoughts regarding the Indigenous Americans he photographed. It is unlikely that he had free agency in creating these images. A typical approach was to photograph the subject first facing straight ahead and then in profile, creating a clinical perspective of the figure, as if this subject were a specimen for scientific study. This photographic trope indicates the status of the human being photographed as specimen rather than as civilized individual.

In Walker Evans’s photograph of her, Allie Mae Burroughs is backed against the outer wall of her house. In this position, she looks a bit like a pinned butterfly. She does not look spooked or terrified the way the two young Choctaw girls do in Schindler’s photo. But just as these girls are pinned, so is Allie Mae. There are differences, to be sure. Allie Mae Burroughs—whose face graces the cover of the textbook The Contest of Meaning—does contest Evans’s photograph of her. His frame is so close-up it is violative, violating her space and cutting her body into a modernist fragment—just the face, nothing else of her person. But the closeness of the frame also gives Allie Mae a chance to contest what the photograph does to the viewer, how it mobilizes all the distance and space, the social and temporal places, that exist between us. Unlike the anonymous Choctaw girls, Allie Mae is granted the chance to interrogate us, her viewers, paradoxically through the rudeness of the proximity of Evans’s camera to her. This is the essence of the uncanniness of Evans’s project in the photographs from Hale County: He does not decide his own goals. The photographs treat their white sharecropper subjects as specimens and also as portrait-sitters. Walker Evans cannot make up his mind. His feelings get the better of him, and he seems not to know his own intentions. Allie Mae is almost beautiful. In Evans’s portrait of her, there is something like desire and its refusal. What Evans and Schindler share in their treatment of Allie Mae and the anonymous Choctaw is their intimidation of the subjects—the look of fear and of being visually pinioned is the same in both photographs.

Allie Mae’s fear is commingled with the specific terror not only of being trapped but also of being seen as desirable, a contest in which she barely has the means of voice. In this sense, Evans’s photograph of Allie Mae is hauntingly similar to Schindler’s earlier images of Indigenous
Americans, a push and pull of longing, desire, admiration, together with domination, humiliation, control. Notably, the photographs whites took of Indigenous Americans were almost never given to the Indigenous Americans; instead, they were a kind of trophy, however benevolent the whites may have felt their idea of indigenous peoples to be. Likewise, Walker Evans fails to give the Burroughs family the book in which they appear. As the youngest child, Charles, observes: “They should have had enough respect to come back afterwards…at least send a copy of the book. I know I would have.”

H A U T N I N G A M E R I C A

In Walker Evans’s Hale County photographs there is more than a whiff of the Southern Gothic. The Southern Gothic generally refers to literary works by the likes of Flannery O’Connor and Carson McCullers, works in which embodied forms of grotesquery stand for the discomfort and ethical dis-ease of the region in the twentieth century. The South is the Gothic space in the American imagination. The South is the place in the United States where slavery was maintained until the defeat of the Confederacy in the Civil War. The region is haunted by slavery, and also Alabama and Georgia are haunted by the earlier, brutal removal of Indigenous Americans. The Northeast and mid-Atlantic regions, which also participated in slavery and also enacted colonization that caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Indigenous Americans, completed these tasks of domination decades earlier than the South. No American region is innocent of such violation, but the South held onto this violence for a longer period of time. One need look back only a generation or two to locate the violence of the South. Jim Crow, the racist rule of law in the South, for example, was not stricken from the law books until some fifty years ago. Southern Gothic, then, evokes both the memory of violence and also the ongoing presence of violence. Flannery O’Connor once said that it would be very nice to meet James Baldwin but not nice to meet him in Georgia. What she meant is that in Georgia this brilliant African-American intellectual would not be treated with respect, that Baldwin would be brutally mistreated in the very context wherein the fragile O’Connor was sheltered.

New Orleans’ photographer Clarence John Laughlin epitomizes the Southern Gothic aesthetic, photographing decrepit, derelict, dilapidated Southern architectures superimposed with Greek Revival style statues,
which, in his photographs, take on the look of ghosts. Like Laughlin, Evans photographed buildings in the South. The work he produced such as Belle Helen Plantation House with Uprooted Tree 1935 just before beginning his series of sharecropper photographs in Hale County could be mistaken for Laughlin’s Beneath the Rain of the Moss 1946. In the preamble to his work in Hale County, Evans created photographs showing ruined plantation interiors and exteriors, depopulated, haunted by the light of the camera.

But Evans’s Southern Gothic turn is only intimated in the 1935 photographs of defunct plantation houses. It is in his Hale County photographs that the Gothic takes on a human text and is given a human face. The Southern Gothic of Flannery O’Connor and Carson McCullers comes to the fore in Evans’s photographic representation of the Fields family in their home. Unlike the Burroughses, who have stepped outside their home and are wearing their Sunday best for their family portrait, the Fields stay inside their rough house. Inside this house, they are shown partly unclothed and the clothes they wear are visibly filthy. There is an appearance of generational ambiguity to the group: There is a rather old woman, an equally old man and then a young woman holding an infant with a dirty child just past toddler age standing bare-bottomed. With the much older father and a very young mother, the photograph implies something like incest, which was a reality in one of the sharecropper families that Evans photographed, although not in this family. Here, the older man and woman are not the productive conjugal unit, but instead the old man is connected to the very young woman, she who is holding their infant.

The sense of generational disturbance, visible in the Fields family portrait, bleeds out into another photograph, the troubling and eerie image of the incestuous patriarch Frank Tingle, leading his family in the singing of Sunday hymns (Fig. 4.2). Frank Tingle’s incest is indicated in the research of journalists Dale Maharidge and David Whitford, who in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries conducted interviews with the next generation. According to Maharidge’s source, Frank Tingle fathered at least one child on his daughter Elizabeth. In discussing Evans’s photograph, I draw from the work of these journalists because knowledge of the tragic history of incest in this family illuminates the eerie pain of Walker Evans’s photograph of the Tingles singing Sunday hymns.

In this photograph (Fig. 4.2), beside the patriarch stands an adolescent daughter who may be Elizabeth, whom the father sexually abused
and who bore him at least one child. Cross-referencing to Evans’s individual portraits of Elizabeth Tingle and her sister, Dora Mae, it is hard to tell which of the young women is in this photograph singing hymns as the subject’s face is slightly turned. What is legible in the photograph of the hymn singers is the sense of violence coiled into the ostensibly holy act of singing. In this photograph, only the father looks calm. The children sing fiercely, as if distressed by some unseen (or, as Spiegel aptly suggests, unnamed) object. Their mouths are held as if they sing in pain. The father holds the hymnal so that only he can see it. Apparently, the children sing the words and notes from memory. Or they struggle to follow without access to the hymnal itself. This sense of having lost the hymnal, the guide to worship, pervades Evans’s photographs of the Tingle family. From Evans’s photograph of this Sunday hymn singing, one gains an almost synesthetic knowledge of plaintive sound of the hymns, sung in isolation against a harsh background. There is no church, no congregation, just the father and his vulnerable children.

Fig. 4.2 Walker Evans, *Alabama Tenant Farmer Family Singing Hymns*, 1936. Gelatin silver print, 12.3 × 19.8 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art)
I focus on Walker Evans’s photograph of Frank Tingle and three of his children singing Sunday hymns (Fig. 4.2) as this is the image that, to use Merleau-Ponty’s evocative term, “bleeds” the most for me. Maybe that is because of my own cultural knowledge as a daughter of the region. In this part of the South, Protestant Christianity long held absolute sway and was practiced among whites as a deeply patriarchal religion, a cudgel to dominate women and African Americans, and dispossess Indigenous Americans. I also note that this photograph of hymn singing is not embalmed in the popular imagination, not frozen in the fixed cultural zone of art that has moved beyond its first reckoning and been consecrated as iconic. In comparison to Evans’s more widely circulated photographs of the Burroughs family, this image of the Tingles still shocks. Here, the father holds the hymnal so that his children cannot see it. Frank Tingle can read. While literacy rates among white men were fairly high in the South, at this time, literacy in the region was not universal. Access to literacy was racially restricted, in part to suppress the African American vote.

Frank Tingle, the patriarch in the image, holds the hymnal thereby controlling the text. He alone looks comfortable singing. We are told in the caption that the children are singing, yet, from their facial expressions, they appear to be wailing. The daughter stands nearest to her father. She, like her brothers, is significantly shorter than the patriarch. But, unlike her brothers, the daughter appears to be pubescent, and her shirt looks uncomfortably tight across her breasts. All the family is wearing white, a signifier of Sunday worship, but only the daughter’s breasts in outline are visible through her white shirt. In the photograph, she looks painfully vulnerable, grouped without a mother or sister, in a line of males. Studying the history of this Tingle family, we learn that the Tingle daughter Elizabeth was incestuously abused by her father, the sharecropper Frank Tingle. The daughter never regained control of her life after this trauma; tragically, for her entire life she was never able to remove herself from her father’s interference.

Emphatically, I do not suggest that Walker Evans knew of this history. Instead, I argue that his photograph’s genius is that the image conveys the uncanny chill of this family even without explicit knowledge of its contours. The knowledge of the family’s history gives a terrible weight to the photograph of these singers of Sunday hymns, but the
haunted condition of their singing is present in the photograph even if we do not know of the family’s abusive structure. Without a congregation or church, they stand in isolation, wearing white for Sunday. This photograph’s paradox is a crystallization of an American uncanny. The uncanny is the security and calm of home disrupted by a strangeness emanating from within. The eeriness of perverting religious faith drives Walker Evans’s photograph. We see the grievous subtext laid bare. While incest cannot be read at the surface, certainly imbalance of power can be seen. And the hypocrisy of this white patriarch (no matter how poor) infuses the image with uncanny valence. Walker Evans does not participate in the violence. His camera witnesses it. His photograph of Sunday singing (Fig. 4.2) illuminates a specifically American uncanny: the space of white presence in a historically indigenous land, Christian Protestant patriarchy expressing itself as an isolating, insular force. The family sing hymns not with a congregation, not in a church, chapel, or temple, but alone. There is no trained or consecrated priest to convey the tenets of the religion but a father taking it all for himself. Evans’s photograph witnesses this distillation of the American uncanny.

In invoking the word “witness,” I am, however, treading close to cliché. As I’ve said, I am also from the rural South. I well remember the jokes that fellow students at Yale told me when I first arrived there. The cliché of the backward Southern man whose whiteness posits him with the dominant class of Americans but whose Southerness reads as a sign of retrograde humanity is a twist on the older emblem of America as a wild, savage land, a place that perverted the Europeans who lived there. This oscillation of the racist belief in a so-called superiority of Europeans moves along the lines of contamination theory: that living so near the putative wildness of America, even whites became wild. Of course, none of this speaks to actual statistics on child abuse and father-daughter incest, a crime that transcends class, race, religion, and nationality. Even so, incest among Southern dirt-farmers—this was the term used when I was growing up—is a master trope of the representation of the haunted South. And this trope surfaces in the elocution of some of Evans’s Hale County photographs. However they may try to invoke holiness, the Tingle family carries its tragic opposite: incest.

As Allan Lloyd-Smith argues, incest is a signifier of disarray—of generations out of whack, temporally and reproductively disordered—and as such it epitomizes the uncanny. Incest takes what is “home,” that is, family of origin, and makes it the opposite of safe, renders it
unheimlich, unhomelike. At the same time, incest is hidden, geheim, a secret buried in the familial house. Frank Tingle, singing hymns beside a vulnerable daughter, appears to be the patriarch and also is revealed in Evans’s photograph as the malevolent double to the proper father.

In Evans’s photograph, there is no denotive sign to indicate that Tingle perverts the role of father by having sex with his daughter. And yet there are many connotative signs, indicators in Evans’s photography of the Tingles: the look of chaos and dirt that supersedes the conditions imposed on the wife and children by poverty. The eerie sense of self-regard and pride that Tingle himself shows in Evans’s portraits of him. And, most powerfully, in the photograph of the singing of Sunday hymns we see the children’s pain expressed on their faces. In Evans’s photograph of Sunday singing, there is no benignity of the holy spirit. Instead, on the children’s faces there is an overriding pain—a pain that the singing father ignores.

This pain is, arguably, a core of the uncanniness of the project of America, as the nation emerges from the actions of white men who disregard the pain of others—the suffering of Indigenous Americans displaced from ancestral homelands, the anguish of African Americans forced to labor as chattel, and, yes, the pain of their own daughters whose lives are also shaped by the nation’s originary repressive template. I am not suggesting that Walker Evans pins the blame for all this on Frank Tingle. And I am definitely not pinning blame on Walker Evans. Rather, I am describing the brilliance with which Evans’s camera perceives the haunted text of Hale County. Evans’s photographs are discreet, reserved. His 8 by 10 view camera lends formal composure to the sharecroppers’ portraits; his angled shots of their dwellings can make the sparse rooms look elegant, following a minimalist aesthetic. The idea that in these photographs Evans gives us unvarnished “realism” is the prevalent reading of the images. But his realism skews uncanny. The sharecroppers are presented by Evans’s camera as otherworldly, set apart. Is this America? This poverty? Dorothea Lange’s photographs from the 1930s manage to assert, or perhaps insert, a moral lesson into the images. Evans’s photographs offer no moral code. It’s a mistake to say he gives universal dignity to his sharecropper subjects. How can Frank Tingle, rapist of his daughter, be considered dignified? But the force of Evans’s work is the way it reveals the real by skewing the angle of vision. He does not present dignity, he presents the uncanny. He shows an America that is not the standard notion of the country, not whites at the top of a hierarchy.
Walker Evans’s sharecroppers do not look like superior folk. Evans reveals white ghosts in this Alabama terrain. The ideology of manifest destiny was premised on the belief—erroneous of course—that Indigenous Americans were wild, savage, needful of subduing. Walker Evans came to a place where the brutal removal of the Southeastern tribes had happened only a hundred years earlier, and his photographs show that nothing like civilization has replaced the ancient culture of Indigenous Americans native to the Southeast. Hale County is near Moundville, so named for the “mound-builders,” a sophisticated Indigenous American culture that was displaced by centuries of colonization. In other words, the uncanniness of Walker Evans’s photographs of Hale County stems from its reflection of the reality that these tenant farmer workers of the hardscrabble land are not at home. The land is harsh to them. It does not succor them. The ancestral right to the land, if one wants to follow that line, belongs to the Southeastern tribes expelled from Georgia and Alabama a hundred years earlier. I suggest that in Evans’s photographs of Hale County, we see the bereft quality of a place whose indigenous inhabitants have been forcefully, brutally, evacuated.

In the early twentieth century, Edward Curtis was hard at work photographing Indigenous Americans, bearing out his belief that this was a vanishing race. We can think of Evans’s photographs as conceptual palimpsests that show the absence of culture left in the wake of forcible removal of the mound-builders. Hale County’s stripped condition is visible in the sparse, harsh, world of Walker Evans’s sharecroppers. Indigenous Americans did not mystically vanish, but rather were forced out of their Alabama homelands. Then the ancestors of the sharecroppers moved in. The uncanniness of the landscape emerges from this violent history. It is this very uncanny quality that is revealed through Walker Evans’s camera’s lens. The land became harsh through white husbandry of it, yes, but Evans’s photographs subvert through revelation this violent history.

Revelatory Images

The revelatory image is a Gothic trope. In the eighteenth-century novel *The Castle of Otranto*, the revelatory image is a painting. But in M. R. James’s nineteenth-century ghost story “The Mezzotint,”
it is an engraving. Mezzotint as a process of image-making precedes photography but also has bearing on the development of later photographic reproduction and printing technologies. In James’s story, the mezzotint in question reveals the murder of a baby. The image makes this revelation because a figure moves in the mezzotint. The image reveals what language, with its circumlocutions, is able to conceal. I am not suggesting that Walker Evans’s photographs show what James Agee’s words hide. Agee’s prose is hardly shy or even circumspect. Yet the lives of the sharecroppers is presented as far more complicated in Walker Evans’s photographs than in Agee’s text. The uncanniness of Evans’s gaze on his rural Alabama subjects inheres in its seeing something more human, more thwarted by and embedded in history.

As a point of comparison: Agee, writing about the family Bible of Allie Mae Burroughs (called Annie Mae Gudger in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*) and its listing of births and deaths, begins to wax about the ebb and flow of life in Hale County, Alabama, concluding that it has been nearly eternal, the births and deaths of these people in this area. But historical reality is a sharp corrective to Agee’s eloquence: whites are relative newcomers to Hale County. Indigenous Americans were the long-term inhabitants of the area and kept the land very differently when it was their home. The ebb and flow of cash crop agricultural life that Agee reads as timeless is embedded in history and is relatively new in early twentieth-century Alabama. Much of the harshness of these Alabama farms derives from the way the land is handled—by whites who clear-cut forest to manufacture fields and by the cash crops these whites grow. It is a manufactured landscape rather than a reflection of what the land is, as such. Evans’s photographs are a corrective to Agee’s suggestion that the life cycle of the sharecroppers has been going on for generations in Hale County. Evans shows just how estranged these people are from the place where they live. That estrangement is an American uncanny: a land made inhospitable through ill-use after having been taken away from the long-term inhabitants, Indigenous Americans. This is the uncanny that Evans’s photographs show, with their bald, stripped shimmer. His uncanny images stand in sharp contrast to Agee’s gracefully imagined white eternity. Evans’s photographs of the sharecroppers show them as strangers in a strange land, which they are. It is the homeland of the Muscogee and Hitachi, not of the sharecroppers.
WHAT BLEEDS: THE GOTHIC SOUTH

The uncanny and the Gothic are not the same, though they run beside each other, currents of anxiety and privileged positioning, fear and insight. The Southern Gothic is a twist on the colonialist British Gothic but, like its progenitor, Southern Gothic depends on simultaneous revelation and disavowal of a violent and oppressive cultural system. This social violence bleeds into the meaning and reading of objects and images and into the interpretation of the images of objects. In the traditional South of my upbringing, certain objects held a meaning that I have never met outside the Southeastern United States: the family silver, the inherited china. It went far beyond the actual monetary free market value of these items. These were the items that had been inherited and which, like talismans, proved the family different from the likes of the Tingles, the Fields, the Burroughs, those people who lived in geographic proximity to my grandparents. When Walker Evans photographs the uncanny sparseness of the material lives of the sharecroppers, he opens his lens onto a peculiarly Southern wound. I chose my word carefully here: “peculiar,” as in “peculium,” as in the possessions of an enslaved person. The person whose possessions are held at the pleasure of, under the absolute control of, another is the feared specter of the South. In the region’s caste system, the fear of losing specific objects—objects that signify ownership rather than being owned—places an uncanny aura on those objects. The family silver and china become talismanic objects. Walker Evans, likely, does not know this, as he was not a Southerner, but his photographs draw at least some of their uncanny verve from their representation of the absence of owned objects. It is not simply showing poverty but showing the shame of lack that haunts the Burroughses, Fieldses, Tinges, shame peculiar to this region of the American Southeast. In these images, Evans comes as close to photographing nothing as one can while still showing the nothing that is.

As Merleau-Ponty suggests, “silent signals...emanate” from the image. He is writing of painting, but I extend his argument to understand Walker Evans’s 1936 images of Hale County. The sense that Merleau-Ponty offers of the image’s unbounded boundedness corresponds to Evans’s Alabama photographs. The sense of something so sparse, so restrained, and yet also something that bleeds meaning gives the photographs uncanny duality. Developing from Schelling’s theory that appearance is the result of a continual emergence from hiddenness,
Merleau-Ponty argues that “philosophy, [like] art is the act of bringing truth into being.” Bringing into being the perception of the real is a movement of emergence. In Merleau-Ponty, perception itself becomes uncanny as it moves from the hidden to the visible.

What bleeds in Walker Evans’s photographs in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is the fear of contamination that racist politics—such as those of the Southeastern United States in the 1930s—creates merged with the general fear of mortality that all human beings share. The uncanny shimmer of his photographs of Hale County sharecroppers stems from the oscillation between revelation and elision of what is revealed. The images’ aesthetic is uncanny because of this double valence. In the photograph of the Tingles singing Sunday hymns (an image that did not appear in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* but was photographed with that group), for example, one can trace a revelation of the father’s violence in the distorted faces of the children. Yet this revelation is buried by the image’s surface gesture toward presenting humble religious devotion and family unity in the face of poverty. Likewise, the portrait of twenty-seven-year-old Allie Mae Burroughs—often described as showcasing the young woman’s dignity in the face of poverty—also violates her. The photographer’s gaze comes too close, and we can see her resistance and fear. The American uncanny of Walker Evans proceeds from entangled threads of realm and substance, and proceeds from the ossified assumptions we make about the images—that they are dignified, restrained—intertwined with the emotions Walker Evans evokes through his photographic subjects. These are emotions that cannot be released from their trauma.

The myth of Walker Evans as the visual poet of restraint is tested in the very images that give him that fame. The photographs do not so much offer reserved and disinterested poetry as, rather, they carry a suffering that takes a formal pose and to which we—the audience in general—respond by sealing the trauma away. Rather than confronting the text of capitalist violence, the history of displacement that is Alabama (the homeland of the indigenous Creek), the subtexts of racism and patriarchal sexual violence visible in the images (and which in fact engender the conditions in which Evans finds his subjects), we at times seal the photographs in the cliché of restraint, calling them art.

This urge to suppress Walker Evans’s emotions stems from the constitutive role that his images play with regard to American identity. As Ronald R. Thomas contends, the history of national identity as such
is relatively new, and in this newness there are moments when a national identity is especially stressed and the culture responds by forming a closed set of conditions that designate the proper citizen. American identity goes through such a critical epoch in the Great Depression, when questions of race and nationality haunt the poverty that many Americans endure. Evans’s photographs of Hale County haunt us even as we disavow their uncanny force. They are uncanny in their double pull, revealing and concealing the violence of America, revealing subtexts of racism, dispossession, sexual violence, while also concealing these forces under the shimmer of a poverty-endured-with-dignity platitude. The sense of these specific photographs as wounds that do not heal pushes against their cultural status as icons, a status protected by the strength of Walker Evans’s artistic genius and his white male pedigree.

As a well-educated white man, from the Northeast, Walker Evans is untouchable in a way that James Agee is not—in the creation of the cultural myth of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. James Agee uses the word “excrement” in his description of the place and its people, stating his wish that he could present the reader with the abject objects of Hale County, down to its very excrement. Agee performs, here, as the crude Southerner—writing about bodily effluvia and writing about sexual desire running between himself and some of the women of Hale County. Walker Evans’s persona and, by interpretive extension his photographs, diverge from his Southern partner’s excesses. Bodily products with which Agee infuses his words are not shown by Evans. Yet Evans’s photographs bleed more than Agee’s words. Secretly, uncannily, like the haunted mezzotint of M. R. James, like the ghostly living painting of Otranto, Evans’s photographs of the sharecroppers bleed. They bleed about racist violence that pushes Indigenous Americans from their ancient home terrain; they bleed about capitalist violence that forces styles of unacknowledged indentured servitude; they bleed about sexual violence. Extending his gaze across Allie Mae Burroughs, the photograph bleeds sexual desire and the pain of structures of patriarchal and financial dominance. The experience of Evans’s Hale County work is uncanny because his photography to an extraordinary degree reveals the hidden force of objects and human lives among objects. Walker Evans is not at home in America even though it is his country—his in the sense that he is the white, male, Northeastern, wealthy, with full claim of citizenship. In the cauterized pain of his Hale County photographs, Evans acknowledges his lack, his loss, as the other side of the fully enfranchised white, male, wealthy Northeastern scion.
Walker Evans’s uncanny still haunts America in the second decade of the twenty-first century. As Americans, we are still bitterly fighting about the question of what this country is, of who is and who should be at home here? Who should be allowed in? Who owns or should own this country? Do we really think a rule by wealthy white men identifies our nation? Is this what we aspire to be? Walker Evans went down to Alabama not to create iconic images that mean nothing, that become mute objects of art history, but rather to raise into a vision—to bring to light—an American uncanny the brunt of which might, even now, help us understand the political forces that haunt and compel our national swing to the far right. As the second decade of the twenty-first century nears its end, how do the great-grandchildren of Walker Evans’s Hale County sharecroppers feel about America now?

Notes

2. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Three Tenant Families* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980); Donna West Brett, “Damaged: Ruin and Decay in Walker Evans’ Photographs,” in *Walker Evans Symposium*, Center for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, October 7, 2016. Merleau-Ponty develops a nuanced and original theory of aesthetic perception, one that guides my writing in this chapter in particular, but it is important to say that his work is influenced by phenomenology.
5. It would be remiss if I did not mention, at the outset of this chapter, my gratitude to journalist and Pulitzer winning researcher and author, Dale Maharidge, who took the time to discuss with me Hale County and his extensive research there. Maharidge’s support and information are crucial for this chapter. Dale Maharidge, in conversation with the author, May 11 and 12, 2019.


10. My own biological family is also from this area, that is, Georgia and Alabama, going back eleven generations. From conversations in particular with my father’s mother, Claire Rogers Peacock, from 1981 to 2001, I learned much about the way life was for rural Southerners in the 1930s. From personal observation I have seen that many aspects of the culture have been resistant to change over time.

11. West Brett, 1.


14. In this book, I use the spelling, Tingle, that researcher and journalist Dale Maharidge argues is the correct family spelling. However, when I give the title of Evans’s photograph of the family, I use Evans’s spelling, Tengle, as needless to say it is his title. Dale Maharidge, in conversation with the author, May 11, 2019.


16. I draw my aural/oral knowledge of the region from my grandparents, great-aunts and great-uncles, as well older family friends (my parents were not born when Evans took his Hale County photographs). My paternal grandmother, Claire Rogers Peacock, is the person who most conveyed to me this knowledge of the history and character of the region, with stories regarding specific families therein.


20. Imre Szeman and Maria Whiteman, “The Big Picture: On the Politics of Contemporary Photography,” *Third Text* 23, no. 5: 551–556. Even the works of Jeff Wall and Andreas Gursky, that expand the photograph to monumental size, do not use a fundamentally different technology from the quotidian; rather they use the same technology differently. To be sure, such artists’ use of technicians and costly printing apparatus would be unavailable to amateurs but this is a matter of degree rather than kind.


23. Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, 55. This claim is also, obviously, connected to Roland Barthes’ theory of the punctum. Roland Barthes,

24. Interesting to ponder if such a rediscovery could occur in the context of twenty-first-century social media. Could one accidentally, say while cleaning a closet, happen onto a two-decade-old social media feed?


32. See, for example, John Singer Sargent, *Lady Meysey Thompson* (1901), his *Portrait of Mrs. Robert Harrison* (1886) and his *Portrait of Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland* (1904), which use similar bodily angles and the long glance at the subject’s garment.


40. Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 23–29. Conversation with the author, Adriana Greci Green, Curator of Indigenous American Art at the Fralin Museum, Charlottesville, Virginia, April 12, 2018. The photographs of Indigenous Americans in New York City’s Astor Hotel’s Grill Room were later given by Lady Astor to the University of Virginia, where they remain in storage.


46. James, The Collected Ghost Stories, 12.

47. Gidley, “Visible and Invisible Scars,” 28; Thomas, Detective Fiction, 255.


51. Agee and Walker, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, 153. Agee speculates about the sexuality of the sharecropper women, stating (without
citing evidence) that some of the women are attracted to him and to Walker Evans. Agee makes the claim that a day in bed with them—i.e., a prolonged sexual encounter between a sharecropper woman and the photographer or writer—would be a pleasure for said sharecropper woman. He notes, on a woman’s garment a “tincture of perspiration and of sex.” Nothing in Evans’ photographs suggests sexual desire emanating from the women of Hale County toward himself.

52. Walker Evans, Allie Mae Burroughs, Hale County, Alabama, 1936. Film negative, 20.3 \times 25.4 \text{ cm}. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Antonio Zeno Shindler, Two Choctaw Girls, 1866.


56. Barthes, Camera Lucida, 55.

57. Anne Makepeace, Edward S. Curtis: Coming to Light (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2001). Makepeace is complimentary of her subject, Curtis, yet even she admits that he keeps the images for himself, for his collection, and for those wealthy white people who purchased his expensive books.


59. Eric G. Anderson, Taylor Hagood, and Daniel Cross Turner, eds., Undead Souths: The Gothic and Beyond in Southern Literature and Culture (Louisiana State University Press 2015), 178. I am not the first to see a connection between Walker Evans’ photographs and Southern Gothic. Still, Evans was not a Southerner; any claim that he speaks for the region through his images is complicated by the reality that he was not of the region.


61. Christopher D. Haveman, Rivers of Sand: Creek Indian Emigration, Relocation, and Ethnic Cleansing in the American South (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 21–33.


73. Janice Bergman-Carton and Evan Carton, “James Agee, Walker Evans, Tenants in the House of Art,” *Raritan* 20, no. 1 (2001): 5. Evan and Janice Carton’s allusive and literary review of the reissue of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* asserts an elliptically religious frame to the book. But I think Evans and Agee are atheists in their work; the South which has been called Christ- haunt—by Flannery O’Connor—in these photographs appears stripped of that quality.

74. The photograph was not included in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. However, other factors may also play into its lack of iconicity. Martin Kemp, *Christ to Coke: How Image Becomes Icon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1–43. Kemp lays out new terms for our understanding of iconic works of art and images.


95. Jodi Byrd, *Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 110–112. Indigenous Americans also manipulated the landscape but had been in the area for so long that their changes of the land appeared to respond more wisely to the lands natural capacity rather than imposing cash incentives on it.

96. As I’ve noted, with the removal of southeastern tribes occurring in the 1820s and 1830s, by the time Evans arrives with his camera in Alabama the whites have, at the most, lived there alone for one-hundred years. A few generations, yes, but nothing compared to the earlier Creek (the term generally used to describe the Hitachi and Mvskoke tribes) inhabitance.


106. Dale Maharidge and Michael Williamson, *And Their Children After Them: The Legacy of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: James Agee, Walker Evans, and the Rise and Fall of Cotton in the South* (Seven Stories Press, 2008), 22, 119. Here I mean now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, what are the dominant politics of Hale County, Alabama? I learned while completing the research for this chapter that Dale Maharidge has continued his research in the area and is preparing a new edition to *And Their Children After Them*, following the families Walker Evans photographed, to be published in 2020.
Diane Arbus’s photograph, *Identical twins, Roselle, New Jersey, 1967*, could stand as the icon of the photographic uncanny. The young girls are doubles, dressed identically, bearing the embodied fluke of genetic rhyme.\(^1\) Arbus’s photograph of these young girls, who appear to be middle class and white, inspires Stanley Kubrick to base the child ghosts in his horror film *The Shining* on Arbus’s photograph of the living girls.\(^2\) It has been suggested that the girls represent the good and evil twin, and that Arbus’s fascination with doubles, including twins, indicates her unhealthy psyche, her own unstable identity.\(^3\) Louis Sass interprets Arbus’s twins as signifiers of epistemic instability.\(^4\) In unpacking Arbus’s uncanny photography, I move away from interpretations of the artist’s identity and instead read her photographs as self-aware purveyors of photography’s uncanny arc. By this I mean that Arbus’s photographs, regardless of whether she intended them to express such, work by a visual code that pulls the quotidian into the profound, “the inexhaustible openness” of the photograph.\(^5\) The doppelgänger, the double, as a central motif of the uncanny is an animating principle in Arbus’s camera work with twins and triplets.\(^6\) And yet in her photograph of female twins, the haunting specter of ego loss—of lost *self* because there is another just like the self—is not pathological. Rather, the photograph meditates on ways that our sexist culture interprets girl children and women as implicit replacements for each other, a source of erotic or emotional pleasure rather than a locus of identity.\(^7\) In her photographs of female twins and triplets, a loss of self is protested.
The sense in an Arbus photograph that her subject has been entirely seen, exposed, uneasily brought to light is the commonality across her oeuvre. One could say it is her genius. And this is a genius loci, attached to place. Arbus’s work is deeply ensconced in the place of the artist’s origin: most of the oeuvre is composed of photographs of inhabitants of New York City and New Jersey, the part of the world into which Arbus was born and where she lived her life. Through the relationship between place and image, the uncanny aura of her work emerges.

Arbus’s oeuvre, one might say, is an extended trope of return, returning to the city where she was born, New York City; returning, though she never left, via a camera-eye that estranges the photographer from her original point of view. In her photographs, Arbus looks at her own origins from another angle, another side. I am not in agreement with Susan Sontag’s suggestion that Arbus “violates” her own innocence in her choice of photographic subjects for I do not separate her innocence from her experience. The essence of the uncanny is the way it blurs innocence with experience, a feeling of return to the known merged with an eerie difference. I began this book with a discussion of how the photographic uncanny stems from Schelling’s uncanny—contemporaneous as this is with the actual emergence of photography. Now, at this halfway point in the book, I approach Diane Arbus’s oeuvre acknowledging that when we reach mid-twentieth-century America, Freud’s conceptualization of the uncanny has penetrated Western culture so thoroughly that the poet W. H. Auden said of Freud, he is a “whole climate of opinion.” The metaphor of “climate” is important here for it poses Freudianism as an amorphous influence that affects the air we breathe rather than as a clear-cut philosophy with which we can either agree or disagree. The Freudian climate of mid-twentieth-century New York City is Diane Arbus’s domain, and yet she seems—in her photographs—to have disagreed with virtually every tenet of Freud’s actual philosophy of mind. In this chapter, I distinguish between information in Diane Arbus’s photographs and what we might imagine—guess—to be the contents of her mind. To apply the thoughts of philosopher Maurice Blanchot on images to Arbus, her photographs are images that think. Conclusions I draw about these images stem from the images, reflecting also the general social milieu and purlieu of Diane Arbus; they are not reflections on her biography. Unlike the male photographers discussed in my earlier chapters, Arbus, a woman, has been turned into a notorious figure by some otherwise
temperate critics. And so I stay away from interpreting Arbus and pay attention to the photographs she created.

The uncanny sense that what you see and what you are is not original but is rehearsed, repeatable, and reversible stems from and feeds into the photograph’s uncanny repetition of the visible. Arbus’s work exemplifies an encounter with this optical unconscious, as she seeks subjects who reveal the subtext of mid-twentieth-century America, with its enforcement of stereotypical roles. The uncanny, the secret that has become visible, is Arbus’s visibly manifest theory of photography. Her photographs give themselves away at the same time they hold their secrets in reserve. Perhaps it is this quality that has spurred critical attempts to paint Arbus as mentally ill, as well as to lay a host of other ills at her door—as if such labeling would protect the critic from the visionary force of Arbus’s photography. Her photographs chill us; Arbus’s photographs can be understood to show the unseen social real. With Arbus’s distinctive merging of portraiture and documentary, the portrait—as metaphor, not example—enters the lexicon of photography and finds the razor-fine edge of the visionary real. In On Diane Arbus, Philip Charrier writes that the photographer has been misread by masculinist and feminist critics alike, who leverage her gender, the fact of her being a woman, to argue that her photography is aggressive and amoral when it is rather clear-eyed and accurate.

RETURN OF THE MODERN

For French anthropologist and philosopher Bruno Latour, the essence of being modern is to believe that one’s own gestalt is the only fully human reality and that everyone else is catching up. He is saying that to be modern is to venerate this temporal illusion that only one’s own time enjoys the full fruits of human progress. In a related argument, Walter Benjamin contends that the essence of modernity is to encounter the erosion of the aura not only from the work of art but also from our culturally habitual way of seeing. Benjamin argues not only that mechanical modes of reproduction change the work of art from its earlier manifestation in singularity but, more significantly, that looking at the world in the way that modernity dictates—through photographs and reproductions; through the windows of trains, planes, and automobiles—makes us gradually incapable of seeing what of aura still persists in the world. In other words, both Latour and Benjamin flag how we,
as “Moderns,” are conditioned to see as a problem and would resolve this problem by requisitioning and radicalizing our habits of looking. For Benjamin, the work of art becomes a testing ground, a chance to see anew.

In this chapter, I use the term “Moderns” with the pointed anthropological shaping that Latour gives the word: a group of human beings engaged in pursuits of colonial domination, adhering to hierarchical social patterns, and aggrandizing the aims and means of science. It is a stance, but this stance analyzes the concerns and social structures that constellate around this myopia of modernity. Latour makes the case that to critically view the moderns (which we are, ourselves), we need testing grounds that allow us some critical distance.

I offer Diane Arbus’s work as one such testing ground. Just as Latour argues that “Moderns” are defined as those people who see “others” as extraneous to reality—or real only insofar as they are brought into the frame of belief of the moderns—Arbus shows us our own otherness. She shows this through the uncanniness of return, return being the essential photographic gesture. The photographer’s insistent quest to return—return to a place that is both familiar and strange, home and not home, secret and revealed—shapes her uncanny. Arbus’s comment, “A photograph is a secret about a secret, the more it tells you the less you know,” sounds like a fairytale, a riddle the reader needs to solve in order to pass through some test. Arbus’s oeuvre feels like that as well: the images are a place the photographer encounters, striving to understand, a passage through to comprehension—for herself as well as for us. The photographs present visual configurations that critique the modern tendency to see the self as the limit of the real, as the photographer returns over and over to fissured places in the sealed terrain of the modern, seeking an open passageway to an understanding of the beliefs and myths that underpin modernity’s overwhelming faith in itself. It is this search that locates Arbus in the uncanny domestic. Her milieu, her time and place, is mid-twentieth-century New York City, with its convergence of intellectuals, wealth, skyscrapers, and also emigrants, poverty, tenements, all those seen as the “other” to American hubris.

Return is the heart of photography and also a key to the uncanny: the return to a strange place that one expected to be familiar or the inadvertent return to a place where one did not intend to go. Photography is the art of the return and, hence, the art of the uncanny. In his essay on the uncanny, Freud describes the experience of walking repeatedly
into a foreign city’s red-light district, which he at once feels to be familiar, as if the place were known to him, and where he feels estranged by the women he sees. Perhaps the passage is a lightly veiled confession, admitting that Freud, father and husband, makes use of the prostitutes’ services and then disavows his familiarity with the erotic comfort intrinsic to that place. Freud’s description calls to mind E. T. A. Hoffman’s Olimpia (discussed in Chapter 1) in the sense that the prostitutes are described as if they lack any agency and are merely visual objects in windows, like Olimpia, the automaton: “Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a while without being directed, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, but only to arrive yet a third time by devious paths in the same place.”

Freud’s mergence of the uncanny and the female is offensive: He describes female genitalia as uncanny, claiming that one knows one has already been there and yet in a different way from sex—meaning, of course, that a man is born through the vagina and then has sex with the vagina. In this formation Freud entirely objectifies female subjectivity and also presumes that all men are straight. He creates no structure for female, feminine, or queer experience of the uncanny. Freud elsewhere describes woman in sexist and racist terms, allying female sexuality with the “dark continent,” Africa. I am not the first to point out the sexism of Freud’s postulation that the uncanny is at root an acknowledgement of one’s creepy feelings about one’s mother. The idea that return must be connected to sex is deeply problematic in Freud’s gendering of it. Even so, the trope of return in Arbus’s work is not entirely without erotic valence. The uncanny is always a form of return, whether or not that return is erotic.

Return, for Arbus, is depth, a quest. The titles of her twenty-first-century, posthumous, exhibits—Revelations and In the Beginning—reflect a sense of return, completion as return, through their biblical invocations, the alpha to the omega, the omega (Revelations) to the alpha (In the Beginning). These exhibits of course were not named by Diane Arbus, however, they do reflect perception of the work by those closest to it, the organizers of said exhibits. The uncanny aura of Arbus’s photographs stems from a double recognition of modernity’s limits—so blinkered is the modern gaze by belief in its own rightness that it has a limited ability to see what is real—while also making visible the way that
modernity takes from us the capacity to actually return to unchanged places. The press of the modern is always toward change so that returning to, say, one’s childhood home becomes an uncanny event of parking in front of a stranger’s yard and looking at a house owned by strangers. The burden of return devolves onto the photograph. Photographs of places reply to the modern understanding that few of the spaces we inhabit will remain unchanged: houses are capitalist objects, made to change hands. Schools and cities aggressively keep up with the pressure to develop new buildings. Capitalism presses architecture into ceaseless change. The capitalist urge to change material landscapes is, paradoxically, the urge to assimilate, to move away from uniqueness or singularity.

As Benjamin argues, the work of art in the age of its mechanical reproducibility is no longer singular. The singular work is that to which we can return and to which we are drawn to return. If I want to see Da Vinci’s Mona Lisa, I would have to return to the Louvre where it is housed. This return might not be an act of worship—Benjamin’s frame of discussion contends with the loss of the sacred in the relationship to the work of art—but it would be a return through an embodied act, and that embodied act would gather to itself many small moments of embodied contact with memory. I have not been to the Louvre since I was fifteen years old. So, the act of going back to see La Giaconda would garner memories of place (museums are the repositories of time in modernity). The act of seeing the painting would accrue meaning beyond just seeing it. Since I do not live in France, the most obvious meaning to my making such a trip would be a sense of devotion to art.

But what if I were to happen upon an exhibit of Diane Arbus’s box of ten photographs, such as the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, DC, staged in April of 2018? What if I saw her images without making a pilgrimage but almost by chance? The character of photography is such that—before accidentally happening upon and seeing the original prints in the spring of 2018—I have already seen very good reproductions of Arbus’s photographs chosen for the boxed set. With access to a good library, one can see high-resolution reproductions, scanned from originals, expertly printed and circulated, and these copies have a high degree of verisimilitude. The curators know this reality of
photography’s ease of reproduction, so they buttress her stunning photographs with paraphernalia surrounding Arbus’s images: her hand-typed letters and hand-written personal notes that the viewer will not have seen elsewhere. In effect, the holy, quasi-religious force of the exhibit is shouldered off onto these objects of the haptic: the accoutrement her hands have unmistakably touched.

The exhibit modulates between presenting the original prints as themselves auratic and making a tacit admission that their auratic presence as singular image-objects may not go far enough; that for the typical art worshipper to feel wholly absorbed in the physical act of visiting the museum exhibit, she must be given access to Arbus’s hand-typed and hand-written notes. I do not make these statements to critique the exhibit, which I adored visiting and in which I felt very much the pilgrim having found her saint. Hence, in this case, the meaning of seeing the work was not imbued by effort but solely by aesthetic experience.

It is interesting—by way of exploration—to compare this Arbus exhibit to one staged at the National Portrait Gallery, which is housed in the same building with the Smithsonian American Art Museum, on the American poet Sylvia Plath. The Plath exhibit shared not only a similarity of reliquary display focusing on the handwriting and hand typing of this dead woman genius who had killed herself. For me, a poet who often writes about photography, finding these two exhibits in the same building on the same day was deeply moving. The exhibits’ similarity says something uncanny about photography: it suggests that, on its own, photography uneasily acts as locus of the reverential testimonial. Not even when one is viewing the object produced by the artist’s hand: Arbus’s original prints.

Given how easily good reproductions of these images can be made, however, the hand-of-the-artist testimonial force of Arbus’s box of ten was uncertainly legible. Hence the exhibit’s curators augmented the photographs with the “proof” of the hand of Arbus: her handwriting, and her hand-typed words. Here, she discusses how she chose the photographs for the box of ten. These sacred objects of her own hand give the photographs sufficient gravitas for the pilgrim seeking inimitable Art. The prints, the photographs, are also objects of Arbus’s own hand, but you cannot see in them the obvious and apparent mark of her hand. Without question, Arbus worked harder creating the photographic prints than she did writing those letters. Her genius is in the prints. But to the average museum-goer, a print made by Arbus’s hands may not look
much different from a print made by someone else. Darkroom skills may not be easy to come by, but they have been learned by other people in addition to Diane Arbus. Neil Selkirk does a superlative, heartfelt, sensitive job printing from Arbus negatives. The visible mark of the hand is elusive in regard to the photographs, and, so, the exhibit offers the pilgrim access to Arbus’s holy hand by surrounding her prints with other items that can be universally read as tactile relics of Arbus’s touch.

What’s uncanny is that, in terms of aesthetic force, you get almost as much from a well-made Arbus print—made, for example, by Neil Selkirk—as you can from an original print actually done by Diane Arbus. The formally articulated thematic qualities of her images emerge from both. Thus, photography has scant allegiance to its original printmaker. The photograph eludes the artist’s hand; it stands away, a machine–human hybrid that disavows the human. If you look at a good reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*, it will be nothing like seeing the original painting. If you look at a Selkirk print of an Arbus negative, it will be an amazing experience. If you look at a high-quality reproduction of Arbus’s twins, you have seen much of what is there to see in the image.

Walter Benjamin makes this point precisely in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*: photography changes our experience of *all* art. What Benjamin argues is that we see differently now than did our pre-photographic ancestors. We (moderns) see differently because photography has changed our habits of seeing. Benjamin’s argument as to the aura’s erosion in the photograph is widely misunderstood; I take the heart of his meaning as a stepping off point to explore the uncanny in Arbus’s work. Arbus, like Atget before her, uses photographs to strip the aura from the world she photographs. Arbus’s photographs carry auratic presence, if one follows Benjamin’s development of the term, because they negotiate the terms of losing aura that afflicts modern modes of existence, of being at home in the world. As images, Arbus’s works are singular. Her twins will stop you in your tracks so compelling is the photographer’s vision. But you can get this “aura” from a reproduction of her original print. Its force emerges from the image as such and not merely from the original print that she made.

The stripping of aura from the world is shown in Arbus’s photographs because the photographer pictures uncanny, elided fault lines whereby the homelessness of modernity is revealed. Arbus reveals the urge of her work in her early invocation of Orpheus, Alice in Wonderland, and Virgil, all literary figures who find illumination by descending to the
depths. Arbus describes the descent into Hubert’s Museum, in New York’s Times Square, halfway through the twentieth century, to be like that of Orpheus going down into the land of the dead. She states: “You’d go along that unmitigated 42nd Street...and descend, somewhat like Orpheus or Alice or Virgil, into the cellar.” The comparison is telling in that Arbus builds her photographic oeuvre by photographing the depths of society—and what I mean by this is its margins. Arbus photographs the deep edge, placing her camera at the fault line where what we believe is true of our modern culture is shown to be false. She exemplifies the gaze of self-awareness that Bruno Latour argues we need to turn toward ourselves. Diane Arbus is a singular anthropologist of us “moderns.” Rather than showing comforting images that shore up the belief that our world is the only world, she reveals modernity as uncomfortable in its uncanny lack of reality.

TWIN-SHIP

I return to Identical twins, Roselle, New Jersey, 1967. Here, Arbus photographs a seemingly prosaic topic: little girls, middle class, white, in hand-sewn dresses. And yet the photograph has become iconic. The difference between Arbus’s superlative surrealism and the surrealists is the absence of predigested belief in her work. Man Ray photographs complex ideas; Dora Maar concocts dreamscapes (though dreams are actually more like Arbus’s photographs). Diane Arbus, allied with no vested artistic movement, photographs the strangeness of the real. She visits a middle-class gathering of twins. She is interested in twins, interested in what we might learn by seeing two people who are genetically identical. But her camera accomplishes something beyond this prosaic interest. Her camera catches something haunting, to my eyes something deathly, in the trappings of the most benign terms of modernity.

What is it about those cute little girls that so reminded Kubrick of ghosts? The girls, as Arbus photographs them, are backed against a wall. The wall is plain, its paint chipping, and you can see the detritus of paint chips around their feet. The sense that the world can be sealed, made clean and non-permeable, is the master narrative of moderns. We believe in our triumph over the natural world. Arbus shows the lie of this. The paint will chip; the wall we have built between ourselves and dereliction will erode. The frame of Arbus’s photograph is tight, making us feel uncomfortably intimate with the girls. There is no scale and no
surrounding. We do not see little comforting signs like party hats, parents, toys, or even discomforting signs like cigarette butts. Nothing but a pale wall. The emptiness of the girls’ environment is voluminous and claustrophobic at once.

The girls themselves, while physically nondescript, are captured by Arbus so as to look almost unspeakable. They do not appear to be afraid, angry, acquiescent, or bored—reactions one might expect from young children forced to pose for a strange photographer. Their expressions are inscrutable. They look like they are up to something, like they know something they shouldn’t know. Arbus’s photograph suggests that these girls have some ulterior knowledge. The carefully hand-sewn dresses, signifiers of the proper, middle-class accomplishment of their housewife mother, look out of place on these secretive, gnomic twins. The brushed hair, the matching tights and shoes are revealed as costume, covering what the girls really are: secret agents of the critique of mid-twentieth-century American racist domination. Needless to say, I do not actually believe these twins were anything other than little girls whose mother dressed them up and who dutifully posed for the lady photographer. But Arbus’s photograph makes them appear to carry a secret life, a secret and searing insight into the mundane and frightening trappings of American power—the nation as a newly emerged superpower—just past the midway point of the twentieth century, immersed in endless war.

The symbolism of the double, as Freud following Ernst Jentsch notes, is a sign of the uncanny as a kind of doom. To see one’s doppelganger is to receive an ominous message. Arbus noted her interest in people considered abnormal by others as the allure of such people’s “aristocracy”—they are “aristocrats,” she contended; “their trauma is behind them.” Her photographic subjects, whether considered normal or abnormal by society at large, are always shown in Arbus’s lens as having moved beyond the social effort to become. Instead, they have arrived at their identity, however marked, and she shows this social fact. Photographing the twins in New Jersey, she locates the social fact of doubleness that stands parallel to her photograph (in the box of 10) of Christmas in a house in Levittown. What is the modern suburb if not an extensive repetition of the double? Each house looks like the next house. The twins are a human embodiment of this phenomenon of the everyday uncanny in suburban America.

Recalling Freud’s description of his uncanny wandering whereby he returns to the red-light district, I took a walk several summers ago,
leaving my aging housing stock rental house, entering by chance a new suburban development nearby. I became completely lost. All the houses looked exactly the same. At first I thought, *I will just keep going, and at some point this will end.* But it did not end; instead, I was making a circle and could not find the exit. It was like being lost in the woods, but the woods were composed not of trees but of treeless suburban houses, each the same as the next. It began to grow dark. In panic, I took the main chance when I saw a woman opening a door to let in a cat and called to her. She laughed, said, “That’s just what this place is like,” and gave me clear directions—street name by street name—back out of the development, back into the shabbier surrounding neighborhood that held my rental house. That is the home of the moderns: its sheen is based on willingly submerging oneself in being forever lost within identically multiplied spaces.54

Arbus’s twins, then, are shown as renegades, critiquing the suburbs they inhabit. The uncanny shimmer of the girls’ facial expressions suggests supernatural detachment from their putative role as purveyors of the white, female, “cute.” For Arbus, photographing the children also is a return. She knows children.55 She is the mother of two daughters. Women, in our culture, are assumed to have a special affinity for children; women and children are given interlocking cultural terrains. Consider the furor, as I write in the fall of 2018, over the US Supreme Court and abortion rights. Why does anyone care about another person’s abortion? Because moderns fuse the idea of woman and compulsory, generative sex.56 With this photograph, Arbus returns to the scene of proper womanhood—the twins’ mother’s dutifully sewn dresses, the twins’ mother’s dutiful procreative act on display with and as the bodies of her progeny—and also shows us how extremely strange is this enforced celebration. The photograph makes us aware of how bizarre we are, in our normalizing modernity, our self-congratulating belief in our own reality, our unwillingness to see how bound we are by ritual.

The twin, the doppelganger, is the privileged symbol of the uncanny. The twin is that configuration through which the self, rather than solidified and made whole, becomes partitioned or nullified. What are you if another is exactly like you? The double erases you. A photograph is erased but also articulated by the circulation of copies. The truly singular photograph—the only extant print—is superseded by digital technology.57 A scan can be made of any photograph. Arbus’s fascination with twins and triplets is also her fascination with photography, her medium.58
Arbus painted in high school but photography called her. How to make the diurnal eerily clairvoyant? Arbus’s emphasis on the strangeness of the normal reprises a larger task of fine art photography: taking the quotidian for itself, Arbus photographs the everyday world showing its luminous strangeness. While surrealist photography estranges the everyday world by pre-theorized tropes of visual pun and collage, Arbus plays it straight—and in that straightness inheres the uncanniness of her work. It is the uncanniness of seamless modernity that disavows any reality but its own and aggressively elides and occludes the violence of this very stance. Arbus shows us our own myths of the real; she brings us to see what we, moderns, truly are: mythmakers sealed in self-regard. Her work is not a return of the repressed but a return to the disavowed.

At Home with Arbus

Interviewed by Newsweek’s art reporter Ann Ray Martin in 1967, Arbus stated that she loved to go into people’s (that is, photographic subjects’) homes. Consider Arbus’s photographs of people that her titles describe as men being women. The most eloquent of these images are photographed in the setting of the subjects’ homes. In this next section, I think through what it meant for Arbus to photograph biological men dressing in traditionally feminine clothes in the context of their homes. Eve Sedgwick’s idea of the “periperformative” is the explanatory model from which I draw to understand these affectively moving subtexts—and the subtextually moving force—of Arbus’s photographs of gender-non-comformists in mid-twentieth-century America. In extending Sedgwick’s work in queer theory to my reading of Arbus’s photographs, it is important to note that I am making a cultural and historical argument, contextualizing Arbus’s photographs in the time and place where they were created. I do not impute to Arbus herself any of the claims that I make about the photographs.

To preface my discussion, then, I note that there is always a distinction between the reality of the cultural-historical situation in which a photograph is made and the limits of what can be known about each individual photographic subject. Arbus’s work photographing people who appear to move between genders has been interpreted by some as disrespectful. But I see her images as being subversive to heteronormativity and supportive of her queer photographic subjects. I suggest that
the photographs’ force is that of a searing empathy with those who were considered, by mainstream American culture at that time, as unworthy of regard.\textsuperscript{65} In my discussion of these photographs, I draw from Sedgwick’s work in \textit{Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity} to limn the way that Arbus’s haunting photographs create their uncanny effect of home.\textsuperscript{66} It is not Arbus who turns her back on her nonconformist subjects. Instead, her photographs empathetically face these subjects, her camera engaging them as worthy of being fully seen. When I discuss Sedgwick’s theory of “shame” in this section I leverage a cultural and historical argument regarding social conditions in the United States in the mid-twentieth century.

By invoking Sedgwick’s theorization of the periperformative, then, I begin this discussion about home—about the eeriness of being “at home” in mid-twentieth-century America for people who do not perform compulsory heterosexuality—with some history. When Arbus is photographing non-gender conforming subjects, she photographs human beings whose lives are held by mainstream mid-twentieth-century American to be shameful—a mode of self to be disavowed or hidden—because they do not conform to traditional, Western norms of gender.\textsuperscript{67} Being gay or queer or trans—named then by the clinically pathologizing term “homosexual”—was considered by the psychiatric establishment of the time to be proof of psychiatric disturbance, an illness in need of cure.\textsuperscript{68} Sigmund Freud led the way, with arguments suggesting that being gay was at the root of paranoia.\textsuperscript{69} Rather than seeing that being gay in a world biased against you might be a reason for anxiety and trauma, Freud suggested that being gay was a source of madness, and mid-century America largely appeared to agree with him.

But Arbus shows a reality of home divested of bourgeois codes of sexuality as productivity.\textsuperscript{70} Arbus’s photographs \textit{Transvestite showing cleavage, N.Y.C., 1966}; \textit{A young man in curlers at home on West 20th Street, N.Y.C., 1966} (an image she chose for her box of 10); \textit{Seated man in bra and stockings, N.Y.C., 1967}; and \textit{Naked man being a woman, N.Y.C., 1968}, form a visual uncanny. To my mind, these images are not uncanny because of their subject matter but because of the way that Arbus’s photographs reveal and ravel the meaning of domestic space. Domestic space in these photographs leans against the grain of the subjectivity of affective shame, even as they are images of homes on the outskirts of social norms.\textsuperscript{71} Arbus’s photographs’ titles use the words (common and ordinary in her day), “transvestite,” which is now an offensive word,
and “man,” which may have been an inaccurate gender designation for some of her subjects. The word use of her titles reflects the historical period of the photographs. Even so, this reflection may be part of the experience of empathy with the outsider that Arbus offers in her searing images.\textsuperscript{72} It is, at this point in history, impossible to say whether each of the subjects of Arbus’s photographs listed above were transwomen and therefore misgendered by Arbus calling them “men.” Or, just as possible, some may have been gay men dressing in clothes of traditional femininity. In my discussion of the images, I use gender-neutral language. However, I do not shy from the issues raised by Arbus’s titular language. The affective register of the images has everything to do with this pain of misnaming and being misnamed, the social pain and ostracism of being queer in America in the mid-twentieth century.

Given the affective force of the photographs, it is my contention that Arbus’s images enact an abnegation of heteronormative shaming. She does not participate in shaming. On the contrary, she excavates its haunting force. This excavation happens, as it must, at home: in the domestic spaces of the subjects. The photographs are uncanny because, as I will explore in discussion of each, they suggest home as a liminal space, a space of transformation, a margin, a risk, a fragile hold of self (Fig. 5.1).\textsuperscript{73}

Begin with the nakedness of Arbus’s images, their stripped domesticity—begin with \textit{Naked man being a woman, N.Y.C., 1968}.\textsuperscript{74} The person photographed is placed by the photographer’s title as claiming both genders. The subject is named a man and also a woman. The subject of the photograph appears to be a woman in the sense of ontology (having social, visual, and material presence of a woman) yet to be a man in the view of dominant mid-twentieth-century ideology (which held biology as destiny). It is paramount to interpret the photograph as emerging from a particular place and time: New York City in the 1960s. This is the social field in which Arbus’s habitus acts.\textsuperscript{75} One must interpret Arbus’s work as emerging from mid-twentieth-century cultural beliefs about gender and sexuality in order to give full, haunting heft to the queer activism that arose from Stonewall, arose from ACT UP and the art of David Wojnarowicz, arose from Michel Foucault’s brilliant unraveling of bourgeois givens—all of which reshaped the academy, politics, and to an extent the sociality of Western nations.\textsuperscript{76} To honor the originary force of Arbus’s subjects in what becomes the ethos of pride in the queer
community, it is essential to interpret these photographs in their time and place—a time and place that levies shame against queer subjects.77

In the 1960s, even after Stonewall, the general and dominant belief in the United States was that gay men, feminine men, transwomen, and biologically male people who had their ontological being as women—all—were not part of respectable society or normal psychology.78 As Sedgwick clarifies, shame was the dominant affect attached to being gay in mid-twentieth-century America.79 Drawing from Silvan Tomkins’s dyad of affect, the shame-humiliation dyad, Sedgwick carefully unpacks declensions of sexual shaming, of shaming people because they are gay.80

How is Arbus’s *Naked man being a woman, N.Y.C., 1968* shamed?81 My first contention is that this person is not shamed by Arbus’s
photograph. The image shows the person as beautiful, lithe, graceful. No penis is visible, although it is fair to say that the figure is recognizable as a biological male. And yet, the figure is also clearly a woman: that is the feminine is a quality of this person’s being. The image, as I have said elsewhere, evokes Botticelli’s Venus. But because it is by Arbus, the photograph places Aphrodite not rising from the waves but at home. In this case, home is an apparently small and not exceptionally clean apartment. Around the goddess’s feet are empty beer cans. A cheap fabric curtain suggests that the space is partitioned, perhaps to allow multiple persons to share one apartment and save money. In other words, poverty haunts the photograph, the poverty of someone pressed to the margins of society and, therefore, unable to earn much money. Poverty sets this naked home at odds with capitalist celebrations of modernity’s material comfort and plenitude. Even as Arbus portrays the subject as beautiful, it is through the subject’s tenderly hesitant pleasure in presenting as a woman that shame is conveyed. The sense that Arbus offers a gift, an empathic lens, by which this person is moved to strip naked, is visually immersed in the affect of shame that dominates the picture.

Arbus does not shame this naked person being a woman. Rather, she shows the haunting traces of shame in the subject’s face, the shame the subject feels for pleasure in being a beautiful woman. The photograph is chilling because Arbus does not comfort us, her viewers, in this place of shame by obfuscating the beautiful person’s experience of having been shamed for being a biological male who has feminine beauty. Instead, we experience viscerally the pull of the beauty of the naked figure and also on the subject’s face the almost blank-wall look of shame that is vulnerably grateful to be photographed as beautiful.

The beauty of the subject photographed in *Naked man being a woman, N.Y.C., 1968* is not a publicly applauded beauty in mainstream America of the 1960s. Arbus’s photograph reflects this reality in its setting, the person’s home. In wearing feminine clothing, the subject may be acclaimed as beautiful by those who make up the gay community, but the dominant, heteronormative world does not applaud, not in the 1960s. The home where the person’s beauty is displayed is a private tableau, a privacy marked by shame. It is uncanny because the home is marked as a space in which the biological man can be a woman and, in Arbus’s astonishing photograph, one feels so poignantly this boundary: that outside the home the person is not free to celebrate this ontology of womanhood. The subject can perhaps appear in drag clubs, a space in
which this feminine beauty is celebrated, or dress femininely in public. But Arbus’s instinct to photograph the person at home reveals the eerie shame inflicted on the feminine man who is a beautiful woman in a way that a photograph taken in a performance space, a public space, would not.

Home is full of the pain of the lived social world. It is where we show the marks of how the world has shamed us. There, we take off our clothes, literally, figuratively. The photographer is going as deep as she can—like Orpheus—into the lived space where the wider social world becomes the intimate personal room. I contend that this instinct is not violative, but that it is a desire to reveal the uncanny of the modern. I don’t suggest that Arbus theorized this approach. Rather, her photographs show what is beneath the surface of the world we tell ourselves we have achieved. The United States of the 1960s rejected gayness, rejected biological males who are beautiful in their ontology of womanhood. Arbus’s photograph, *Naked man being a woman, N.Y.C., 1968* has the nakedness of certain disturbingly clairvoyant dreams. Looking at the photograph, we have a sense that we cause the beauty’s shame. We are responsible for having shamed this beautiful person, and now we stand in the immense intimacy of the person’s home. We see the edge of the bed where sleep makes vulnerable this beautiful person and, around the bed, the trash, the cheap curtain. We see what we have done. The uncanny force of the photograph is this ethical revelation through the contours of the domestic.

**Cleavage**

Writing about sex, fame, and aesthetics, critic Wayme Koestenbaum converges on the iconic idiom of cleavage: the bust line. Titling his turn-of-the-twenty-first-century collection of essays *Cleavage*, Koestenbaum invokes the cultural topos of femininity as bounty but also as vulnerability, signifying a divide, a doubleness. Cleavage occurs between breasts, and breasts tend to be appendages of human females and often exist in pairs. Not all biological females have two nor any breasts, and cleavage can also be found between surgically placed breasts and breasts engendered by estrogen supplements. The word “feminine” emerges from a Latin word that means “to suckle at the breast.” Breasts, as appendages, are fungible. A biological woman can lose them through surgery. A transwoman can gain breasts through surgery, prosthetics, hormone therapy.
When my son was born, I found breast-feeding overwhelmingly melancholy but stayed with it, believing breast milk healthiest for the baby, as was militaristically touted in my social circle. I think about it now, the social meanings that adhere to breasts, the melancholia of cleavage. Koestenbaum’s *Cleavage* moves between celebration and mourning, a fissure that he associates with our culture’s read of the feminine. To be feminine is to give yourself away, sometimes unwillingly.

In *Transvestite showing cleavage, N.Y.C., 1966*, this question of home, of what it means to be at home, percolates through Arbus’s decision to photograph her subject in a private domestic place. Home. The question of what defines home in modernity pulls at the image. In late capitalism, privacy is something a person has to buy. If you can afford the rent, the mortgage, or buy outright, then you can have privacy. The less money you have, the smaller your domain of privacy, in a physical and also often social sense. If you can afford only a small apartment, then that is your domain. The extremes of poverty illustrate just how much privacy is a commodity, insofar as those who live in public housing are routinely scrutinized by police and social workers, while those who have no housing at all—the homeless—are virtually on display on the street.

Arbus, as noted, calls her subject a “transvestite” in the photograph’s title, her use of the term being in keeping with the time and place from which the photograph emerges. This antiquated word keeps us at some distance from the subject’s everyday life. What does tell us about the subject’s life is Arbus’s photograph. In particular, it tells us about the subject’s home life. The photograph carries an overwhelming sense of closeness without intimacy. Arbus’s uncanny emerges through her interrogation of home. Arbus pushes the home scene into a close and uncomfortable mergence with the camera’s gaze even as the subject pushes breasts together. The look in the subject’s eyes, wanting to be seen as feminine and expecting to be seen as a someone who does not have a full right to be feminine, is—for me—the punctum of the photograph. By invoking Barthes’ concept of *punctum*, here, I indicate the social pain I see (and feel) in this photograph. Sedgewick’s emphasis on shame as a fulcrum of our connection to art, the way that we touch and feel art, clarifies the eerie duality of this photograph. It is uncomfortable to see the history of being shamed that Arbus captures in her subject’s eyes. And yet it is deeply moving to encounter the affect of the photograph’s encounter with this pain. The photograph does not cause shame. It comprehends shame. And it does so specifically in the context
of domestic space. The image frame closes in on the feminine person who is biologically male, just as when they press together their breasts to create cleavage, hoping we the audience won’t see this as a *trompe l’œil*, so also Arbus signs her photographic practice (in this instance) with compression, so we see the photograph for a revelation not a trick, for an encounter, a work of art that achieves itself by showing what we cannot see without Arbus’s vision.

Arbus’s photographs from New York City in the 1960s often move into this private space of home as the place where the subject struggles to create and sustain authentic identity. Taken out of the realm of performance, the need to be seen as what one is—feminine—and to be socially valorized for that ontological status regardless of one’s sex at birth emerges in Arbus’s uncomfortable photographs. There is great beauty to the melancholy, an understanding that something passes between Arbus and this so-called “transvestite.” What is shared is an understanding of the problem of home in mid-twentieth-century America, a discomfort with home, an uneasiness in this space. Arbus must have had her own problems at home, that is, her own struggles with the stifling, domestic, cincture-enclosing expectations of straight womanhood in that time and place.90

**Discomfort**

Arbus’s signature in the photographs of subjects in their homes—not only small apartments and rooming houses but also the more opulent dwellings of the rich—is to look through surface domestic arrangements to reveal a keen discomfort in this mid-twentieth-century habitation. Showing the subjects in a temporary dwelling place, photographs such as *Mexican dwarf in his hotel room, N.Y.C., 1970; A Jewish giant at home with his parents in the Bronx, 1970; Blaze Starr in her living room, Baltimore, Md, 1964; Lady bartender at home with a souvenir dog, New Orleans, 1964; Triplets in their bedroom, NJ, 1963; Brenda Duff Frazier, 1938 debutante of the year at home, Boston, Mass, 1966; and The backwards man in his hotel room, N.Y.C., 1961* all convey an uncanny sense of being out of place, uncomforted, and not “at home” for one who is at home—or, rather, in the place one pays rent or a mortgage to inhabit.91 So what is “home” in late capitalism? It is not, as Robert Frost supposed, where when you have to go there, they have to take you in.92 Rather, home is delineated by what you can afford to pay. Diane Arbus left no written
record of overtly stated critiques of capitalist hierarchies and their impact on the lived social world of Americans, but her photographs eloquently show the sorrow of home in late capitalism.

In *The backwards man in his hotel room, N.Y.C., 1961* (Fig. 5.2) the subject is contorted and covered in a raincoat with a mat beneath his feet. This middle-aged man is a performer in what were, at the time, called freak shows. But Arbus’s photograph of the man suggests nothing of the cruel, carnival atmosphere of these venues. Rather, the image is haunting, melancholically eerie. This man earns his living as a contortionist, and the pain of his work shows in his face, which has a studied expressionlessness. The hotel room is down-at-the-heels. It is this contrast between the room’s quiet desolation and the man’s drama of pain that ignites the photograph. It is as if Arbus photographed him falling through himself. Caught in his fate, he catches himself at that hinge where choosing is no longer possible. This holds the deep humanness of the photograph, as we are all caught in our fates. The uncanniness of this image derives from the contrast between the portrait of the man’s face and contorted body in a raincoat and the bland hotel room with the plastic covering. These unhomey markers intensify the sense that the man has nowhere to rest, nowhere is home. The photograph conveys that the subject’s hotel room is as much home as he has, that he spends much of his life traveling with his work and inhabiting such hotel rooms. The hotel room is evoked as the ultimate uncanny space through contrast with Arbus’s searchingly humanist portrait of the performer.

In Arbus’s photographs of people at home there is uncanny empathy, a perspective almost too close for comfort, revealing too much to easily bear. In the photograph *Transvestite with a torn stocking, N.Y.C., 1966*, the wound of the torn stocking is shared between Arbus, the photographic subject, and the viewer. The subject’s wound is that they are shamed by mid-twentieth-century America for precisely these qualities that they carry so gracefully—the beauty of eyes, and soft posture. This wound is metaphorically expressed by the torn stocking, which is an opening between us—Arbus, the beautiful one, and the viewer. This torn stocking is an opening through which the comfort of home leaks away; it is a wound displayed to us parallel with the eyes of the subject. The tear in the stocking, then, is the wound—as Roland Barthes would say, the *punctum*—through which the photograph addresses us. This tear in the stocking is the tear in the fabric of being comfortable and safe and comforted and *at home* while at home.
Fig. 5.2  Diane Arbus, *The backwards man in his hotel room, N.Y.C., 1961*, printed after 1971 (Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper, 21.5 × 14.3 cm. Tate Museum, London. © 2019 The Estate of Diane Arbus)
And in Arbus’s photograph, this home is uncanny. She shows no trappings of homeliness; no comforting tchotchkes, family photographs, memorabilia, or even furniture besides a few inches of the bed. Instead, the frame is so close in that we do not know the actual blind field, only the intimated blind field. She harnesses such a close frame that we see only the garments the subject is wearing—the torn stocking and the slip—as if these were his only possessions. And herein is the tear, the gap, the hole, the wound. Through this wound, we see the uncanniness of modern notions of what constitutes a family and a home. We see the harshness of a home being what money can buy. We see the rigid gender designations. We see the pain of the person pushed to the margins of society. Pre-Stonewall, the cross-dresser was part of a hidden group. Arbus often described her subjects as being in subcultures. And yet subculture does not contain the devastating way that Arbus’s subjects who dress wearing traditionally feminine garments inhabit a fault line of home in the mid-twentieth-century United States.

This wound at the edge of the photograph—a blind field of homes that are sparse, spare, tentative, transient—enunciates the cruelty of mid-twentieth-century America, its exclusions and suppressions. Arbus does not join in that cruelty, but she angles her camera to show it. As she says, the camera is crueller than the eye. I think what she really means is that her camera is crueller than her eye. Many people in this world are far meaner than Diane Arbus’s camera. What she points to, in this enigmatic statement about the camera’s cruelty and her effort to be good to counterbalance its cruelty, is the double dynamic in her works: a push and pull between the immense empathy that is Arbus’s “good” eye—her empathy for those who suffer—and the camera’s clinical clarity, the brilliant and inimitable way that Arbus picks up details that tell us quietly and emphatically about suffering at home, loneliness at home, not being at home at home.

Coming back to Sedgwick’s luminous meditation on the shame-humiliation affect, I return to the question of shame as a current that runs between us: between Arbus, her camera, her subjects, her viewers—and, for that matter, between Tomkins, Sedgwick, and her readers. As Sedgwick makes clear, in mid-twentieth century, mainstream America one could not reveal one’s gayness; one had to hide it, ashamed. There are many other wellsprings of shame, and these Arbus also taps. She catches the middle space wherein the subject who feels shame puts on a good face for the camera. She catches this look that she calls a gap
between how you conceive of yourself and how you appear to others in her photograph of Brenda Frazier.\textsuperscript{100} In \textit{Brenda Duff Frazier, 1938 debutante of the year at home, Boston, Mass, 1966}, this subject is revealed as being at once aware of her beautiful bone structure and postural grace and also aware, and in terror of, the demons that have robbed her of health: anorexia and drug addiction.\textsuperscript{101} Arbus’s photograph of Frazier at home is beautiful, commanding, and tragically revelatory of the uncanny space of home that this woman now occupies. Cast out of the wealthiest echelons of society, Frazier is seen clinging to fractured fabrications of class. Home is always uncanny seen through Arbus’s lens, a place wherein the subject can “let down her guard” and, thereby, reveal the inadequacy of home, as defined in late capitalism’s delimiting agenda. Home is your perch, what you can hold onto, what you scratch for. And for so many—so many of Arbus’ subjects, yes, but also so many Americans—home is an unstable space, a space shot through with the society’s withering and judgmental gaze. Arbus does not represent this gaze; to the contrary, she reveals it—eloquently reveals its cruelty, its capacity to haunt the shamed subject even in the putative privacy of home.

Think of \textit{The backwards man in his hotel room, N.Y.C., 1961} (Fig. 5.2). This Arbus photo is, in its quiet way, as emblematic of the mid-twentieth-century American uncanny as is the photograph of twins with which I began this chapter. Arbus delicately, quietly, captures the backward gaze that this performer carries even into the domain of his private room. He appears in a show of fabricated anomalies, racist typologies, and genetic outliers such as Americans used to pay to see.\textsuperscript{102} Arbus was fascinated by these performers as people pushed outside the margins of society, but she always saw them as performers as well. Arbus intuitively understood the connection between the photographer and the performer, and she sought performers—Blaze Starr, Brenda Frazier, drag queens, and yes also freak show performers—to photograph.

The backward man is a performer. He has trained himself to assume this contortion that makes it appear that his head faces to the back. You can see that his raincoat is part of the trick, that it is turned so as to make his body appear deformed. But the story of the man is in his face. As Arbus shows him, he is a figure for Orpheus: He is the poet who looks back to be sure his Eurydice is following him and, in so looking back, loses her. Arbus makes him a symbol for us all, for our universal and human longing to look backward, to secure our past, to not lose sight
of it. Of him, Arbus noted “Joe Allen is a metaphor for human destiny—walking blind into the future with an eye on the past.” She shows the backward man as a figure of stoicism in the face of the way that the past recedes. We are all backward-looking people. We look back, and we contort ourselves in order to do so; still, we cannot reclaim what has gone away.

**BACKWARD**

Housing, in modernity, moves away from home. It becomes a utilitarian term as in “to house” the populace, to enclose people in built partitions; it’s a function of biopolitics, a way to control and keep under surveillance the populace. Think of the thousands of new developments around prosperous American cities: cookie-cutter houses, apartments marketed to incoming workers for transient stays. Arbus photographs home in America at the precipice of this completed shift from living in a house built by one’s family or by someone known to oneself to living in housing developed by real-estate speculators as a way to generate income. In my reading of these images, Arbus brings to light the painful meaning of home in America, beyond the myth of nationality, beyond the racist dominance of whiteness. She anticipates the twenty-first-century economy of sprawl and mourns it.

With all this, Arbus’s eye is never sentimental or nostalgic. The urgency with which her photographic subjects experience discomfort at home, home as discomfort, is fueled as much by traditional cruelty, aggressive heteronormativity, as by shifts in the production and distribution of capital. Sedgwick opens *Touching Feeling* with a confession that she does not give full credence to Foucault’s theory of the formation, as opposed to the repression, of the erotic self. She writes that Foucault misses the extent to which we are negatively affected by restriction, critique, shame, and humiliation. In Arbus’s photographs of Americans at home there is a contrapuntal pull between the force of shame—ashamed to be gay, ashamed to be a performer in a “freak” show, ashamed to do drag, ashamed to be female—and a constructive force of self, not so much a resistance as an expression alongside and in contradistinction to shame. We could call this a pleasure in the self. For Foucault, the subject produced through social codes is an uncanny subject, a secret core without a secret. Foucault is saying that the subject is produced through multiple levels of social instigation, leaving open the question of whether
our secret selves are private or quite the opposite—merely the cumulative effect of multiple social impetuses. Foucault’s argument throws into question the meaning of the private self, making of the self an uncanny domain wherein what we feel as our deepest urges are, instead, involutions of social instigation. Insofar as Foucault’s work—in the *History of Sexuality* and in *The Order of Things*—is a coming to terms with modernity, one can say that Foucault’s idea of an uncanny self is revealed even in its hiding places, for its hiding places were never strictly hidden. But Sedgwick argues that Foucault has the wrong emphasis, that he underestimates the intensity of the effect of prohibition. In this claim Sedgwick posits a self in modernity that carries a different valence of the uncanny. For Sedgwick, the self takes form from shame-humiliation, the duo of influences that Silvan Tomkins argues are not fundamental to being human but rather come with the development of modernity. Unlike Foucault’s, Sedgwick’s shamed self is a secret self whose privacy has been violated by the social force of humiliation.

This uncanny, I suggest, is closer to Arbus’s photographs than the subjectivity posited by Foucault. Arbus’s work shows the oscillation between the formation and repression of identity, revealing how we are shaped by social injunctions and imprimatur. The subjects in her images pulse through with desires and knowledges not sanctioned by society. Arbus’s topic, one might say, is the persistence of the self in the face of modernity’s complex prohibitions. Certainly, modern selves are urged on by various vectors of societal reward, but Arbus’s photographs brim with tension that emerges also from the desires of the subject pressed to the margins. Those margins are revealed in many of Arbus’s photographs as the very places where the subjects are at once at home and uncomfortable, inhabiting a dissonance, cornered and resistant.

This revelation opens through Arbus’s perceptive empathy. The uncanniness of the backward man, at home in a room where he yet carries his social role as performer of backwardness, acts as our own backward-looking nostos, a pain of home, a longing for a place that turns us backward. In Arbus’s photograph of him the backward man is a metaphor against nostalgia, showing the contortion and distortion of always looking back. His position in the uncanny image that Arbus creates does not suggest that going back in time would ease the uncanny position of the never-at-home condition of modernity. So much of the power of Arbus’s work inheres in its unwillingness to hide what is there, its
ceaseless and ceaseless principle of revelation, bringing to light that which has been hidden and suppressed.

Drawing from Sedgwick’s theorization of affect in art, one may say that if Arbus’s photographs have a corner on the realm of the uncanny image, it is because “they seem to compact into a general gesture.” Arbus’s aural images draw their aura from the ebbing of meaning of home in modernity. She draws out the imagery of vanishing privacy, disappearing home, and she does so traumatically, auratically. The uncanniness of Arbus’s photographs of people at home emerges from her ability to visually articulate the way that late capitalist modernity alters our experience of home, eroding the meaning of inhabiting a domicile. The affective force of her work can be almost overwhelming. From the blinding depth of emotive pain, her work gains the traction of readability by securing the register of the uncanny, a sense of estrangement rather than outright collapse and horror. She photographs modernity’s survivors in their homes, showing their home as scars. While home is not the same as aura, the conditions overlap. As Benjamin argues, it is the condition of modernity that erodes our ability to see auratically. He suggests that we want to open everything we see, bring it violently close, own it, obtain it, divulge it. This constant mode of acquisition strips the aura not just from the work of art but also from the world. And yet, Diane Arbus’s uneasy and eerie photographs gain back some of the lost aura of modernity. Her uncanny distillations of people in homes where the estrangement of modernity shines have precisely the quality that Benjamin assigns to the auratic: “the unique appearance of a distance.”

Notes

2. Stanley Kubrick, Stephen King, and Diane Johnson, The Shining (Los Angeles, CA: Warner Brothers Pictures, 1980). The movie does not use Arbus’s actual photograph; the image in the film is inspired and influenced by Arbus’s vision rather than a direct quotation of it.


5. John Tagg, The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 15. States Tagg, “Photography has no identity; but the photograph may, for the photograph captures meaning even as the inexhaustible openness of the photographic appears to be captured and fixed by the discursive apparatus of the frame.”


23. Michelle Smith, “History, Photography, and Race in the South.” This idea of the photograph as the realm of return I develop from Shawn Michelle Smith. Where I go in my path of return—in this chapter—is different, but note here a source of this connection of photography and return.
35. Diane Arbus and John P. Jacob, *Diane Arbus: A Box of Ten Photographs* (New York: Aperture, 2018). The exhibit actually showed 12 photographs. *Diane Arbus: A Box of Ten Photographs* was exhibited at the Smithsonian American Art Museum from April 6, 2018 to January 27, 2019. The museum is located at 8th and F Streets, NW, in Washington, DC.
36. Arbus, *Diane Arbus: A Box of Ten Photographs*.
39. The *Box of Ten* as conceived by Arbus included only ten prints. The exhibition had eleven prints on view because Bea Feitler’s *Box of Ten* included 11 prints, one as a special gift for the purchaser. The Smithsonian exhibit was limited to Feitler’s box.
40. Here, it is noted that only Neil Selkirk has been given access to her negatives. Without access to those negatives, obviously, high-quality reproduction/prints cannot be made. Neil Selkirk, “In the Darkroom,” in *Diane Arbus: Revelations*, 266–275.
44. Arbus’s reflection of Weegee may also play into this sense of the estranged, eerie modern urban.


59. In a 1968 radio interview with Studs Terkel, Arbus states: “I didn’t want to be told I was terrific…I had the sense that if I was so terrific at it, it wasn’t worth doing.” Diane Arbus, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, 40th Anniversary Edition (New York: Aperture, 2012), 6.


63. Nan Goldin, “Nan Goldin Interviewed,” interview by Adam Mazur and Paulina Skirgailo-Krajewska, February 13, 2003. Arbus, in her photograph titles, uses terms such as “transvestite”: the word is offensive but was standard for her time. Likewise, she calls the subjects men, even as they appear feminine and happily so. The question of whether these performers, her photographic subjects, were in fact transgender women is impossible to settle. Regarding these photographic subjects some
may have been gay men who performed in drag, some may have been transwomen.


67. “‘Remember the fifties?’ Lily Tomlin used to ask. ‘No one was gay in the fifties; they were just shy.’” Sedgwick, Touching, Feeling, 63. Michel Foucault also—importantly—makes clear that our idea of traditional genders emerge historically and are not eternal, universal, nor even always true of Western culture. Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume 1 (New York: Penguin, 2004).


70. For his seminal discussion of sexuality, in modernity, as produced by and for and through capitalist tropes of—well—productivity, see Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: 1: The Will to Knowledge, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 114.

71. I claim no knowledge of the contents of Diane Arbus’s mind when creating these works. Rather, I describe the images’ effect.


85. Koestenbaum, *Cleavage*. Cleavage is a complex book of individual essays. And yet it would be fair to say that much of Koestenbaum’s emphasis is on mining the vulnerability beneath surface appearances.


never look that way again. The camera is cruel, so I try to be as good as I can to make things even.”


109. Foucault, “The Will to Knowledge.”


113. Miriam Bratu Hansen, “Benjamin’s Aura,” *Critical Inquiry* 34, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 336–375. It is Miriam Bratu Hansen who clarifies that even in his use of the term appearance Benjamin invokes the spectral—the semblance, the apparitional.
PART II

New Centuries
Before embarking on a discussion of the uncanny in twenty-first-century works, I pause for an interlude to observe recent shifts in culture that have transformed our recognition of photography as a mode of perception. Clearly, the most obvious shift in the second decade of the twenty-first century is the explosion of digital images on social media. While this omnipresence of the photographic in our lives—on our screens, our media feeds—assuredly creates a technological uncanny worthy of discussion, my emphasis in this book is on the formal, aesthetic elements of a photographic uncanny. In other words, I am less concerned with limning the uncanny social-visual structure that photography’s digitized proliferation creates and rather more with looking at formal cues in specific images that invoke the uncanny. These two strands of the photographic uncanny cannot be cleanly separated: all photography exists in the context of its circulation (social media sites on phone and tablet screens, family album, gallery, museum, and so on) but the conditions of circulation are not identical to aesthetic claims made by the image. There are many generic examples that could be described, but a particular one from my own experience I put forward now.

While I was staying, last summer, in a boutique hotel in the northeastern United States, above the bathroom toilet I saw a black-and-white photograph of a thin young man, bare-chested, his white skin shining with water, a tattoo on his chest with a heavy silver necklace echoing the emblem of the tattoo, his hand wiping water from his mouth.¹ I found the photograph in bad taste. Of course, it was an image placed over a

---

¹ While I was staying, last summer, in a boutique hotel in the northeastern United States, above the bathroom toilet I saw a black-and-white photograph of a thin young man, bare-chested, his white skin shining with water, a tattoo on his chest with a heavy silver necklace echoing the emblem of the tattoo, his hand wiping water from his mouth. I found the photograph in bad taste. Of course, it was an image placed over a
hotel toilet, so what could I expect? Hotel art is a synonym for bad art and, from the many hotels where we’ve stayed, my son and I keep an informal, oral history list of the worst offenders. I had chosen to stay in this hotel because it was not owned by any chain.\textsuperscript{2} I thought it might not have that smell, ubiquitous in chain hotels, of petrochemical carpets and fire-retardant coatings on virtually all surfaces. Though traveling, I wanted to stay somewhere more like a home. I wasn’t looking for someplace homey and cozy in the sense of grandmother’s doilies, but rather wanted to be in a physical space that was not mass-produced. Indeed, this hotel pitched the notion that here the traveler could step outside the corporate-owned chains and stay someplace authentic. Around the corner, in two different directions were construction zones for chain hotels. I had passed preexisting chain hotels on the walk from the station to this hotel, apparently the only one locally that was not a franchise property. Still, the melancholy impossibility of a room sold by the night actually being homelike was anchored in this photograph hung above the toilet.

The young man stares out from the image. He’s too thin; he doesn’t look exactly healthy. At first, I thought it was a quasi-erotic photograph, but the more I studied it, the less erotic it became—and the more melancholy. I began to feel that this boy—he looks sixteen, maybe seventeen—was a lost person, a subject far from home, lost in a hotel room and trying to appear cool. The photograph is an apparent imitation of Ryan McGinley’s turn-of-the-twenty-first-century style and subject matter, and the boy’s demeanor, like a mask, may be generational. This young millennial wears his rootlessness lightly.\textsuperscript{3} There is no possible home behind him or in front of him; he accepts this. The emptiness of the photograph (which shows nothing surrounding the young man) suggests that only this young (and very white) human body has the possibility of meaning: no cultural apparatus offers itself; only the young body that can feel pleasure exists, and in this photograph the white, male body stands as locus of ontological stability. The boy is exceedingly pale. McGinley (this photograph is not his but imitates his style) has photographed many non-white people, but his early, breakthrough, work was unsettlingly focused on the world of white youth. In the hotel bathroom photograph, the surroundings of the youth are transient. Water, soap, shelves used by people who do not know each other, cleaned by young women who speak Spanish when, while leaving the hotel mid-afternoon, they discuss their evening plans. The bathroom photograph expresses transience: water is
its emblem. The water on the boy, the water of the bathroom. The photo-
tograph is in the hotel, so it has a place, some place being preferable to
actual homelessness. The boy does not appear to be without housing,
only without home.

I think of this boy, the photograph an homage to Ryan McGinley, as
a kind of icon for the loss of the expectation of home. The photograph is
uncanny because of its obliquely truncated relation to the idea of home
as a place for embodiment. Here, the loss of home is not haunted by
home’s memory but is a signifier of its having vanished, disappeared into
a suburban childhood of daycare, an adolescence of virtual experiences,
a life of screen time, the advent of ceaseless, virtual social-media. The
youth may have fallen out with his parents. But he can live anywhere and
with anyone, moving lightly, without the meditative quality of thinking
about the meaning of home’s loss. That loss, here, is a given. As a mem-
ber of America’s Gen-X, I remember the loss of home as a trauma. For
the millennial, that loss loses traction.4

This framed photograph is the only image in the sparsely decorated
suite—the uncanniness of the image inheres in its offering to the traveler
this boy as a kind of anchor of the human, all the while showing that the
boy himself has no anchor and that the viewer is not supposed to care.
That is the most important part of the image: its rejection of the reasons
for affect. It is post-sympathy. I want to say it is post-uncanny; a twen-
ty-first-century emblem of how home has become so eviscerated, even as
an idea, that its loss is no longer significant. But the uncanny persists as a
category always at the horizon of perception.

My son, like most of his Generation Z peers, has lived in many
houses, gamely going along with moves made for various reasons.
Being polite, he says that he is at home when he is with his parents. If
this is true, it means that at some point he will feel he has no home.
In my own peripatetic childhood, the small spaces of depth that char-
acterized my life—the gulches of honeysuckle and kudzu that ran thick
behind houses—are now consumed by development. It seems that in the
ten-thirty-first century, being at home has to mean something other than
being in a physical place. Home is a website’s starting point. Are we
then post-uncanny? Or are we so deep into the uncanny that the main-
stream of American culture cannot perceive its own slide into virtual
uncanniness?

In this book on the photographic uncanny, I have so far traced
the work of Eugene Atget, August Sander, Walker Evans, and
Diane Arbus—photographers who lived and worked in the early to mid twentieth century. They are not contemporaries of each other—Atget was born in 1857, Sander in 1876, Evans in 1903, Arbus in 1923. But their work comes decisively before the advent of digital photography. While I do not intend this book on photography and its uncanniness to be a history of photography, I do follow a loosely linear historical frame of photographic works. What binds these works is not necessarily the commonality of influence but rather the eeriness, the aslant strangeness, of the aesthetics of the photographers’ oeuvres. John Zilcosky makes the argument, in Uncanny Encounters, that the twentieth century is the most uncanny century or, rather, the century wherein the uncanny comes into its own. He makes this argument because Freud’s heavily influential essay both reflects and sets the tone for the twentieth century’s obsession with uncanniness. Throughout this book, I contend that the uncanny emerges from eighteenth century-European shifts by which home becomes a hollowed signifier; even so, it is also clear that the fruition of the idea of the uncanny occurs in the twentieth century. But this leaves open the question—one that Zilcosky does not pursue—of the twenty-first century. How much stranger can photography become? Is photography, in any real sense, part of virtual reality or do we hold onto a definition of photography as an image created primarily through light’s mark and, hence, part of physical reality? Light is not tangible but excitable. Literally, light is the excitement of particles.

As I’ve argued, the experience of looking at a photograph is, in itself, uncanny: one sees extraordinary details of a physical scene, object, person; one sees space that is not there. What is there, in the twenty-first century, increasingly is a screen: not a framed material bearing the marks of light but a computer, phone, or tablet screen bearing the pixilated translation of light’s mark to electrical impulse, image stored as algorithmic code. One could say this fact increases the uncanniness of the image—it floats before us, no longer a mark but an impulse. If the encounter with the photograph has always been estranging, that encounter has taken on a level of transience that intensifies the image’s homelessness in digitized virtual space. In the twenty-first century, photographers attend to this condition of eidetic homelessness as not only part of the culture but also part of the image-world, turning the image’s floating and anchorless ontology into a means of understanding the growing uncanniness of Western capitalist culture. There is an eerily
tensile relationship between the increasing estrangement (from embodiment) of visual technologies and our domestication of them, our compulsive urge to bring them into our home life.

FUTURES

Michel Foucault writes compellingly of epistemological breaks—fracture points in the history of belief—where what once was a structure of cultural thought is taken apart and a new structure of belief arises. Foucault emphatically does not see such shifts as progress but rather, as episodes in a kind of archeological strata of history. My emphasis in the final half of this book, then, is on the way that photographers at the end of the twentieth century and in the early twenty-first century look at photography through the lens of knowing its past failures. Their work is canny as well as uncanny, and it constitutes a kind of photographic shift. Whereas photographers Cindy Sherman and Richard Prince participated in a post-modern avant-garde as artists who copied earlier images to make the statement that there is no new image to create, the photographers I turn to now emphatically create the original, haunted image. Francesca Woodman, Ralph Meatyard, Bear Allison, Shelley Niro, and Devin Allen create images that are new precisely in their urgent reckoning with the old. The fold of photography across the boundary of the digital has meaning not because a digital image is synthetic as opposed to mimetic but because the circulation of images through digital technology alters the scope of the image as appearance. For Woodman, Meatyard, Allison, Niro, and Allen—photographers working on either side of the boundary of the twenty-first century—photography becomes a form of activism. These photographers deploy the technological turn of Western culture to confront the history of European and patriarchal violence against women and non-Europeans. How can photographic activism be uncanny? My suggestion is that it has to be uncanny to succeed: it has to show the fissures and eeriness, the strangeness of our technologically enthralled time and place.

In this chapter I consider the mask: here, twentieth-century photographers Francesca Woodman and Ralph Meatyard, who came to fame posthumously in the twenty-first century, and contemporary Eastern Band Cherokee photographer John Bear Allison (who goes by Bear Allison), create works of photography that deploy masks with uncanny effect. In this book on the photographic uncanny I mostly eschew some
expected categories, such as surrealism and spirit photography. I do so not from a perverse wish to avoid the obvious but rather to chart a fresh path through the uncanniness of photography, to see anew the way that it estranges, recovers, and reveals buried—covered—problems with home. Home is a political form, an atom of the polis; the photographic uncanny is a political uncanny because skewing home by bringing to light its troubles, cruelties, and suppressions is a political act. In this chapter, however, I consider the work of three photographers whose oeuvres fall somewhat more typically in the domain of the uncanny—their work is spectral, overtly signaling the Gothic. Francesca Woodman, Ralph Meatyard, and Bear Allison estrange and disturb the genre of the photographic self-portrait and portrait. Meatyard’s *The Family Album of Luciybelle Crater*, Woodman’s penchant for acephalic self-portraits, and Allison’s work with Cherokee Booger masks tear apart neoliberal notions of self as capitalist consumer citizen, held intact by personal purchasing power. Instead, Woodman, Meatyard, and Allison, confront the subject, the self, torn apart: torn apart by colonization, sexism, depression, cancer, racism, time, and history. While Meatyard and Allison deploy masks to subvert our assumptions of a contiguous self, Woodman makes of the erasure of her face and head an alterior version of the mask. Woodman effaces and defaces herself, covering or removing her face from the photograph so that the photograph becomes her mask. The uncanniness of the work inheres in its disruption of normative tropes of self and in the way the works create a dual sense of pleasure and fear.

The link between photographic portraits, including of course self-portraits, and masks is obvious: the mask replaces the face, covers the face. The photographic portrait as *head shot* displaces and stands for the face. As Barthes suggests, the photographic portrait is a death mask, an impression of the face that moves away from the living body in time toward death, anchoring the face and body in visual relationship to death. The masked self and the photographed self stand as uncanny twins. I begin, then, with Francesca Woodman’s strange and signal explorations in defacement as photographic mask.

**Woodman: Photo Booth**

Woodman’s self-portrait with a cut breast that bleeds photo-booth images of her face figurally draws this connection but estranges it from the expected temporal flow of mortality, inserting death into the space
of the living. In this image, *Untitled “I could no longer play I could not play by instinct”* (Fig. 6.1), Woodman sets up the *trompe l’oeil* that she has cut her breast, and out of the breast flows not blood, and not milk, but image: her face repeated on photo-booth film. The mother’s milk of vision here is entwined with a disturbance of self. Woodman’s face is not shown in the photograph where it should be—attached to her body—but instead is dislocated, subsumed into the reiterative compulsion of photography. The violence of the image has inspired critics to invoke the femme fatale, reading Woodman as posing danger. Woodman is only fatal to herself. In this image the only victim is Woodman. The photograph is not a tableau of her eventual suicide at age twenty-two (though the violence of this image suggests the artist’s willingness to explore self-violation). Instead, the image works through the dislocation and disarrangement of self that photography imposes. The face is no longer with the body but becomes its own object, floating in the world of objects. This “blood,” or flow, of self-image—the images we cast as we move through our mortal paces—Woodman’s photograph presents as concurring with the partitioning force of photography. How many faces of Woodman could be created in that photo-booth film? Almost endlessly many, photography being a life-blood that cannot be stanched except by the viewer’s turning away. And yet none of these photographic self-images would show the real Woodman because none represent anything more than a passing moment.

The multiple faces on the photo-booth film in Woodman’s *I could no longer play I could not play by instinct* (Fig. 6.1) paradoxically suggest dissolution rather than permanence. Human beings were, of course, mortal before the advent of photography. But photography promulgates an awareness of mortality, and it does so specifically at the point where we attempt to salvage an image of self against the erasing force of time. We may come to photographic self-portraits to reassure ourselves that we exist, that some image of us can last beyond our time. But photography gives us the slip, taking the self-portrait image and turning it into a death mask. Woodman’s self-portrait with photo-booth tape running from her breast exposes photography’s doubleness, its uncanny hovering between the place of vision and the space of vision’s negation.

The photo booth invoked in Woodman’s uncanny self-portrait is legible as a mid-twentieth-century staple of traveling fairs and pinball arcades, spaces where friends and family members pose together for the immediate pleasure of seeing themselves out on a lark. The cheery
Fig. 6.1 Francesca Woodman, *I could no longer play I could not play by instinct*, 1977 (© 2019 Estate of Francesca Woodman/Charles Woodman/ARS New York)
vernacular arc of the photo booth (photography typically far from fine art) Woodman wrenches into the uncanny. She is in the photo booth alone but she multiplies herself there: a string of Francescas emerge from that photographic space, a suggestively endless reduplication of self. If this self-portrait suggests that Francesca Woodman bleeds photography, it also casts the photo booth as an uncanny place, where the cheerful idea of play and intimacy is shown in reverse, revealing the desolateness of photo booths, a hard edge of American consumer culture. The uncanny quality of photography—that it occurs in a dark box (a camera obscura) that shelters the image and then releases this image to the unsheltered vastness of being seen, or being lost, or being erased—finds apotheosis in Woodman’s self-portrait. It adheres to the self. The sticky substance of vision adheres uncannily to her self-portrait with photo-booth film. The artist has taken off the mask of sociality and put on a photographic mask so seamless that it cannot be removed. She has removed from the picture the expected sight of a young girl’s pretty face together with her body and has replaced this expectation with the mask of self that is the photo-booth self-portrait. The uncanniness of the image inheres in its taking apart the tropes of gender and nubility that mark our cultural configurations of young women. Where we anticipate sexual allure, Woodman gives us the blood of photography. Where we anticipate a new articulation of self, Woodman demonstrates erasure, leaving the outline so that we uncannily see and do not see her, know and do not know her.

**Vagina/Mask**

Woodman’s self-portraits leverage claims as to the unavoidable uncanniness of being a young American woman late in the twentieth century. In a seated, acephalic self-portrait *Untitled, Providence, Rhode Island 1975* (Fig. 6.2), Woodman focuses the viewer’s gaze on the female body—her female body, to be precise. Seated naked and with legs apart, she places a white mask on her exposed crotch to subvert what would otherwise be a soft-porn shot. Instead, the viewer is drawn to the mask’s displacement of Woodman’s face. Where her face should be, the photograph’s frame is cut off. We don’t see her actual face, and where her exposed private parts presumably are, we do see a face. Albeit not Woodman’s; the face on her crotch is a mask. You can almost sense her smirk, as surely Woodman was laughing when she made the photograph. In the seated self-portrait with a mask
covering her crotch, Woodman’s hands are visibly stained by photography chemicals. It is a self-portrait of the young artist as a young artist.

In this self-portrait of the artist as a masked vagina, then, Woodman contemplates her artistic origins. Not merely in the biological sense of being woman born of woman but rather in the sense of being an artist’s child: she emerges from Betty Woodman, who is a noted ceramicist.19 Francesca Woodman’s art comes from this maternal lineage. And this domestic origin appears haunted and uncanny. In this space of emergence, the young artist is stripped, without protection. Rather than

---

Fig. 6.2 Francesca Woodman, *Face. Providence, Rhode Island*, 1975… (© 2019 Estate of Francesca Woodman/Charles Woodman/ARS New York)
showing a nascent self, Woodman’s photograph suggests the opposite: an eversion from sociality. The image pointedly implies the trouble of gender: that a woman will be interpreted primarily as a person who has a certain kind of genitalia, an envelope. The mask in front of her vagina signifies in an eerie way Woodman’s rejection of this identity. Masks mark and connote a transition. Once she puts on the mask, the wearer becomes something else. In some cultures, masks are imbued with the power to bring the wearer into contact with the dead and the spirit world. It’s very clear, however, that Woodman does not participate in a specific cultural tradition when she puts the white mask across her vagina. But this is precisely what makes the image uncanny. Her photograph acknowledges the lack of belief, the hollowness, of late twentieth-century American, white, predominantly suburban culture. There is no religious meaning to her odd gesture, though she does allude to Surrealist practice.

The mask covers the part of her that will be taken up and used by the society the adolescent Woodman moves into—white, well-educated, American society—but the mask does not endow her with power. On the contrary, the image plays through the melancholy reality of the lack of real social power she has as a young woman. Even so, on this edge of lacking agency, she accesses a kind of ritual power: the mask, however ordinary and lacking in specific cultural power, becomes haunting and awful in the image (Fig. 6.2). It is a disturbing image, one that causes us to mistrust the world of white America from which it emerges. It is not Gothic—there’s no secret covered by the mask; we know exactly what the mask covers—and yet it is uncanny. The daughter’s position in the social world of white America, Woodman reveals as eerie, unstable, without a face.

The photograph is not deathly—the girl’s body shown is clearly healthy and young—and yet the mask is invoked as a kind of death mask, for it signifies the lack of full agency that being female often brings in a world socialized toward reverencing the masculine. Woodman was not an avowed feminist. She died young, perhaps too young to avow such programmatic belief. Then again, many women are most ardent about feminism in their teens and early twenties. Woodman’s lack of ardency for feminism is notable. In the photograph, she presents a dilemma (a two-horned problem) for feminism, but no solution. The uncanny does not offer solutions; it reveals the hidden places covered by our socially avowed selves.
Another masked self-portrait seems to emerge from a grotto, a place within the house but outside its usually traversed space: *Self Portrait at 13* (Fig. 6.3) appears to be taken in a basement or an attic, an out-of-the-way space containing an old bench and other discarded pieces of furniture. The photograph shows Woodman’s head but not her face, which is obscured by thick hair. Here, the hair manifests as a mask, covering the face of the sitter, whom the portrait calls “self.” The portrait dramatically emphasizes the shutter cord that Woodman pulls to create the image. Maybe a more skilled photographer would elide or hide the shutter cord, but the very young Woodman does not. The technology of the image, here, is forefronted. It is the main subject of the photograph. The girl recedes, drowning in light and the room’s depth; she literally is falling away from us, an image only. She grasps the shutter cord as a drowning man grasps a rope. She pulls herself toward the present, the viewer, the living. This would be so even if Woodman had not, ultimately, killed herself.

What I describe here is not Woodman’s life or death, historically, but this eerie self-portrait of a figure drowning in light. *Self Portrait at 13* makes explicit the way all people photographed are drowning, moving away from the viewer in time and space, appealing to the viewer to be seen. The depth of field in the photograph is set askew along the angle of the shutter cord, so that the subject seems to be leaning so as not to fall out of the frame. The entire picture brings into view photography’s uncanniness. The photograph dramatizes the disappearance of the subject into image. It reveals the subject’s struggle against such disappearance. It frames the tie between the viewer and the viewed, the shutter cord an umbilicus pulling between us. The image, rather than presenting a young girl on the cusp of a promising adulthood, presents the unacceptable wager of embarking on a life. The image holds us, but it does not save us. In *Self Portrait at 13*, the stairs leading up behind Woodman, with their architecture of ascent and escape uncannily suggest immobility, no exit. The scene that should be a young woman launching herself as an artist—and, in fact, is just this—even so has a valedictory feel.

In *Self Portrait at 13* Woodman is not showing us herself nor trying to learn about herself through image as self-exploration. Instead, this haunting self-portrait turns away from self as a concept overvalued and without use. The Colorado house where the young Woodman creates this early self-portrait appears nondescript, ‘regular’ America. But we see in this the hither side of domesticity, a space that will not launch
the young artist into her work but swallow her. Her work is created through this engulfment. Her photographs rehearse a loss proleptically, a loss that hasn’t yet happened but that inhabits the images of masks in the place of revelation: self-portraits by and of a person who does not believe in the self.

Woodman’s self-portrait, from New York City with a limp shutter cord visible and herself masked by a cloth that entirely covers her face
and head, extends conceptually from the images discussed above. This photograph, taken less than a year before the artist’s death, deploys the mask in a more despondent gesture. Whereas the earlier images have a harsh sense of play to them, the New York City photograph lacks tension—literally the sitter is slouched, the shutter cord not tense but loose and curved, as if something is already given up. The sitter looks cornered, confronting the viewer not with a visual game but with despair. And yet the image has its force because of the mask of cloth that the sitter wears. In that mask is the whole gambit of Woodman’s aesthetic, estranging the self as the self becomes photographic image.

Here, the mask is featureless: unlike Self Portrait at 13 where hair formed a mask at once deflecting and intimate and unlike the vagina mask self-portrait where the mask has a face, this third masked self-portrait is a complete effacement. The mask here has the uncanny property of negating the subject even though—and this is the paradox—the photograph is taken, and we look at the photograph, so as to engage the subject. The uncanny double step of Woodman’s image conveys the sense that this room where this image is taken—an apartment in New York City—will absolutely never be homey. Instead, it will be haunted by Woodman’s uncanny presence as image. Or, rather, Woodman’s photograph stages the way that masks create hauntings.

A further Woodman image makes more playful use of masks (Fig. 6.4). Here, Woodman photographs her face and creates a simple mask from the images, then gives two friends copies. In other words, she creates one photograph in which multiple, identical copies of another photograph serve as masks. The women in the image are entirely naked, except for Woodman who wears only her signature Mary Janes. A fourth copy of the photograph of her face is tacked to the wall. The image displays Woodman’s virtuosic ability to draw out photography’s strangeness in relation to tropes of identity. Every self-portrait is a little uncanny, oneself and not oneself. Photographic self-portraits intensify the strangeness of this turn: they show us ourselves seeing ourselves as not ourselves. In this photograph, Woodman comments on the sexist notion that all young women are interchangeable objects of sexual desire. The young women’s nakedness reveals their difference, their non-identity with each other. But, in the photograph, they all appear as young women wearing the mask of Woodman’s photographed face: captured in that unity by the photograph itself. The photographer’s face covers them all. Photographs and femininity eerily interchange for each other.
When I was twenty-one, my mother insisted that I, as had my sisters, aunts, cousins, and mother herself before me, have a formal portrait taken. In her traditional culture, the belief was that a woman’s beauty reaches its apex at twenty-one, and everything after that will be downhill. This was given as the reason to have the portrait made. Dutifully, I had the picture made but then refused to allow her to display it. The photograph floated up this past summer, decades later, in my mother’s house, and I must say that it is nothing like myself. It’s not just having

Fig. 6.4  Francesca Woodman, *Untitled* (four Woodmans), 1977 (© 2019 Estate of Francesca Woodman/Charles Woodman/ARS New York)
“lost one’s looks”—the very prediction of the imprimatur of being photographed at age twenty-one—but rather having no relationship to the person pictured, not those earrings, lipstick, facial expression. Far from giving us ourselves, the photographic portrait takes us away from the interiority of memory and its dense and compelling continuity.

Self-portraiture, positing image as self-knowledge, implies we can only inadequately remember ourselves through interior discourse of memory. It tends instead to create a rebuff to memory’s fluent certainty. Woodman’s visual game of three friends, all posing holding up photographs of Francesca Woodman’s face, playfully challenges the viewer to find the “real” Francesca Woodman even while the point of the photograph is to show how photography de-realizes the stuff of the self. No one is the real Francesca in this picture. For Woodman, the uncanniness of photography is a tool to reveal the suppressed reality of gendered oppression. In the photograph of three Francescas, the young women appear as cisgender women, and vulnerable in that. Woodman’s triplicate self-portrait (or quadruplicate counting the image tacked on the wall) leverages photography’s uncanniness in that her eerie reduplication makes the case for individuality: for women to be seen and treated as individual people rather than as a group. Her uncanny self-portrait as three girls shows that the difference between the self and the other is elusive, a fable. The photograph suggests that the uncanniness of grouping women together can be undone by seeing each woman as an individual person.

Meatyard: Family Album

Southern photographer Ralph Meatyard, like Woodman, creates photographs with blur and a Gothic sensibility. Meatyard interrogates the boundary between self and other—as Baudrillard argues, the death that is visible in seeing one’s double. Meatyard’s use of mask in his oeuvre is varied; in this section I focus only on his use of masks in The Family Album of Lucybelle Crater series of photographs. Meatyard used masks in other, earlier photographs, usually in settings around his Lexington, Kentucky, home. But my interest in The Family Album of Lucybelle Crater series turns on Meatyard’s painful subversion of the suburban domestic as he approached the end of his life. Unlike his haunting earlier images of his family members in abandoned houses in the rural landscape outside Lexington, the Lucybelle Crater series is set in contemporary Southern suburbia—not where people once lived, not ruins, but where people live in the now of the photographs. The punch of the earlier mask
images, set in abandoned houses, was the contrast between Meatyard’s healthy, youthful family—a pretty wife and three robust children—and the dereliction of the rural South. In the *Lucybelle Crater* series, it’s the opposite contrast. Here, the subjects typically inhabit well-maintained places in a Southern town, but Meatyard—who inserts himself into the images in a repetitive, eerie self-portrait gesture—grows frailer as the series progresses. He himself becomes the ruin.

*The Family Album of Lucybelle Crater* draws its title from Flannery O’Connor’s double character, Lucynell Crater, in the short story “The Life You Save May Be Your Own.” The characters, a mother and daughter both named Lucynell Crater, are an embittered, lonely mother and her beautiful, intellectually challenged daughter, living on a hard-scrabble farm in the rural South. The daughter ultimately is kidnapped by a drifter for the sake of her mother’s car in a story of gallows humor. The drifter meditates on saving his own life while he abandons the disabled girl at a roadside café. The life that Meatyard, when he is making this photographic series, *cannot* save is his own. He knows that he is dying of cancer while he creates the series. But there is something he uses the series to save.

*The Family Album of Lucybelle Crater* is a dying man’s visual glossary of a home that is becoming estranged from him. Meatyard, when he was healthy, did not take many photographs of his ordinary surroundings. Instead, he took his children out into the rural countryside, seeking abandoned houses—the decrepit, fallen South—in which to photograph his young charges. But when he is dying, Meatyard turns to his own environs. To explore the strange, the uncanny, the not-home, he no longer leaves where he lives. His illness brings in the strangeness that all his art encounters. In his final series of photographs, his death becomes the place his art will reach.

Meatyard uses masks for the family album in a ritually repetitive gesture of photography that obscures the identity of the subjects photographed in the *Lucybelle Crater* series. The photographed subjects wear the same two gruesome Halloween masks throughout the series, standing and sitting in domestically comfortable spaces, though always outdoors, on porches, sidewalks, at the edge of a park, outside a farm building. These same two masks cover the subjects regardless of the images’ titles, clothes, and subjects. Meatyard is invoking the family album popular in mid twentieth-century-suburban America: a compilation of snapshots gathered over time. Coming into the world around
the time Meatyard was leaving it, I encountered albums of this sort as a staple of familial sociality. Such albums implied *we are in an album, we belong together, our history is one*, sealed by images collected in plastic sleeves. The albums fed a voyeuristic gaze with their nonchalant confessionalism.

Meatyard takes on creation of the family album (often the task of women) and works the hither side of it. His album contains all the stock shots of a typical white person’s Southern family album, mid to late twentieth century, before the advent of digital and social media. Family relations are intricately and erroneously (and hilariously) described in the photographs’ captioned titles, establishing the reason for family albums: the twentieth century equivalent of the nineteenth-century family Bible, a place to keep record of who is in the family. Meatyard positions himself wearing his wife’s clothes in the last photograph of the album. Wasting away with incurable cancer, he has become smaller than she is and leans on her. The series *The Family Album of Lucybelle Crater* displaces home, showing how in the space of comfortable American suburbia—with the world’s highest standard of living—the body can be disarticulated, ravaged. Meatyard’s consistent use of masks has the effect, across the series, of flattening identity, making it uniform. Everyone appears wearing those same two masks, but not as the same person. The masks, which are all we learn of the family’s faces, are standard issue, dime store, Halloween masks: creepy and certainly not meant for special ritual.

And yet, Meatyard precisely uses the masks as a uniquely specified ritual. Drawing from O’Connor’s story’s title, “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,” Meatyard saves his life to lose it. Knowing that, given treatment options at the time, his cancer is incurable, Meatyard saves his life in photographs, charting his death and thereby creating a broader parable of loss in late twentieth-century America. As his earlier work shows his family in abandoned houses far from intact domesticity, his last work shows his family in domesticity, or at its edge, while he himself is going to the outskirts, to the body’s ruins, to death. His family album brings to light the haunted spaces of white suburbia.

The premise on which the American standard of living is based is the idea that within our suburbs and gated communities, our luxury high rises, we will not experience hunger, violence, sickness, and death. Death is cast out of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century, affluent, white community. But recognition of the process of dying used to be at the heart of community. Americans took and treasured post-mortem
photographs of family members from the nineteenth into the early decades of the twentieth century. The proposition of the suburban standard of living is the excommunication of death.

Meatyard, then, brings death back into the place from which it has been exiled, hiding it in a mask. Danse Macabre, the medieval trope of the dance of death, is what Meatyard replays in these melancholy images of his family, masked and gathered around him as he is dying. The masks prevent the viewer from making an immediate emotional connection with the images; in particular, as the illness takes its toll, we do not see its manifestations on Meatyard’s face. We also cannot see what is happening in the faces of the subjects who love him, cannot see their grief, their exhaustion. The masks act like a level line drawn across all the photographs in the series, connecting them and keeping us at a distance from them, occluding their most apparent affective information. This ritual of masks Meatyard creates in the context of a mid twentieth-century, white American culture that has banished ritual in favor of science. Why use masks to find a way, through photographs, to understand one’s death? As noted, a photograph is itself a kind of mask. A photograph of a mask is a mask of mask, a *mis-en-abyme* of hidden selves.

A mask, as such, imbues the wearer with privacy, difference, and specific powers: the power of hiding while being able to see others, the power of dissemblance. In the state of Virginia in the year 2019, where I live at the time of writing this book, for anyone over the age of sixteen to wear a mask in public is a felony. Meatyard’s project, had it been conducted in Virginia, might have received exemption, provided he could convince the authorities that his photographs constituted authentic theatrical productions. Barthes argues that photography is closest to theater, drawing on the Noh mask as an emblem for the photographic aesthetic. Meatyard’s theater of death is carefully executed to dovetail with the family ritual of taking snapshots and saving them in albums. But his photographs convey a haunting melancholy, one that does justice to O’Connor’s painful story of illusion and betrayal.

Lucynell Crater, as noted, is the name of both mother and daughter in Flannery O’Connor’s “The Life You Save Could Be Your Own.” An uncanny doubling is the subtext of Meatyard’s series in that O’Connor’s story also works through the trope of the double. Her story begins with the arrival of a drifter to a rural Georgia dirt-farm where Lucynell (mother) and Lucynell (daughter) live alone. The mother needs a man...
around the place and takes the drifter in as a general laborer, all the while suggesting in not subtle ways that if he stays, he can have her severely intellectually challenged daughter as a wife. In other words, she offers the man the chance to have sex with her daughter, who is too severely impaired to possibly consent so that she, the mother, can have his help on her farm. The drifter conspires to steal the old woman’s car on pretext of taking the daughter, Lucynell, for a honeymoon and then leaves the helpless girl at a roadside diner, while he drives away from both Lucynells forever. O’Connor narrates the story from the drifter’s perspective, so we learn that he feels no guilt over what he has done. The absoluteness of human cruelty, then, is a backdrop of Meatyard’s *The Family Album of Lucybelle Crater* series, insofar as it clearly invokes O’Connor’s Gothic story. The cruelty that Meatyard explores, however, is not so much human action as the workings of fate.

The subjects in Meatyard’s photograph *Lucybelle Crater’s 15 Year Old Son’s Friends* (Fig. 6.5) appear to be Meatyard’s wife, Madelyn, and Meatyard’s son’s friend. The women are wearing the same Halloween masks as appear in all the *Lucybelle Crater* photographs; their smooth hair and feminine clothes render the masks all the more strange. Only the masks differentiate the women from standard-issue, upper-middle-class Southerners. They stand at the edge of a park, beside a slightly decrepit stone wall. Wind is moving their hair; it appears to be autumn. The age of the “son,” given in the title, anchors the image in the time-span of the dying photographer. How many more years will he be able to see his children growing up? The fictive son-and-girlfriend pair is subtly proffered as a reproductive duo who can carry on after the photographer is gone. In this photograph, the self-congratulatory safety of suburban America is stripped away. The masks connote a distance from this security, bringing an uncanny vista to American suburbia. It is perhaps too much of a stretch to say that the images critique the racism, sexism, and class oppression on which the American project of race-segregated suburbia is based. But in these photographs, Meatyard does open the door for critique of these oppressions, for seeing anew what we might think of as the ordinary spaces of America. He rebels against the suburbs and opens the door for the work of younger photographers who draw on masks as an expression of a subversive ethos.

Allison: Masked Rebellions

Bear Allison is a fine arts photographer and an enrolled member of the Eastern Band Cherokee who has created a series of photographs, *Boogers,*
using traditional Cherokee Booger dance masks. The series invokes the Cherokee figure of the Booger (related to the word bogeyman), who is represented by men wearing masks during the Booger dance. The Eastern Band Cherokee develop the term Booger from the Celtic Bogey, a term that in the southeastern United States means a devil figure. In Cherokee belief, Stone Coat or Nvyvnuwi, a Cherokee mythical figure who brings death but also bestows medicine and prophecy, and who originally taught the Cherokee the Booger dance. The Booger dance is a ritual dance to protect the Cherokee from death, invasion, and assimilation (into white society). Traditionally, the dance is a ritual of protection against death, invasion, and disease. It developed into its present form in reaction to European invaders. The Eastern Band Cherokee
living in North Carolina today are the descendants of those Cherokee who hid in the Carolina Mountains and thereby evaded removal in the nineteenth century, as well as some Cherokee who were removed and came back. Evading and resisting whites was paramount for their survival. Ritually reenacting encounters with invading whites, the Booger dancers put on European style garments that are damaged and torn and masks made from gourds, wood, and empty wasp nests. The grotesque masks represent different threats to the Cherokee—white men and diseases. The dance of the Boogers is ribald and manic but with an eerie edge. The Boogers perform in sometimes provocative and raunchy ways, playing through what is seen by Cherokee as white men’s unnaturally intense sexual appetites. Boogers wear masks that sometimes suggest phalluses where noses should be, and the performance names of individual Booger often reference reproductive organs and sexual prowess. The Booger dancers play-act men who come from far away, who are not Cherokee. They enact the alien “other” who brings diseases to the Cherokee. Hence, the Booger dance, for all its ribaldry, is an act that preserves sacred space and the safety of the Cherokee people. The Booger are uncanny doubles of white men—in mimicking whites’ promiscuity and violence—and also of Cherokee men, the dancers who wear the Booger masks. The masks, then, blur neoliberal tenets of individuality, laying claim through ritual to a larger, community-based, notion of self. Bear Allison’s photographs using these masks invoke the uncanny double, the spectral self.

His Boogers series of images are taken mostly in the North Carolina mountains, using friends and family as models. They thereby invite comparison to Meatyard’s use of family and friends wearing masks in The Family Album of Lucybelle Crater. Allison, also, at times dons a mask and appears in the Boogers series himself, however there is no clear way to know in which images he does this—it is essential to any representation of Boogers that the viewer not know the identity of mask’s wearer. And because the Booger is a mythical character enacted through traditional dance, the boundaries of self are different in this series than in Meatyard’s Lucybelle Crater photographs.

The cultural background of Meatyard’s work is the Euro-American late twentieth-century belief in individuality as the definition of self. Meatyard plays on that definition, critiquing it from within by showing everyone in the same reiterative masks. But this uncanny play is based on the viewer’s (and artist’s) entering assumption that the
self is an individual. Allison’s Boogers series emerges from a different (and more long-standing) cultural tradition, that of the Cherokee. Obviously Indigenous North American culture conceptualizes individuality. However, the role of ritual also affords a space in the cultural imagination in which the individual is subsumed into the role he plays, spatially and aesthetically, by donning his mask and enacting ritual dance. As Allison explains this, “The most important thing about the Booger is the medicine, and that medicine only works if the ‘patient’ doesn’t know who is behind the mask.”

The men who enact the Booger while masked and dancing are, for the stretch of time that is the performance, actual Boogers, not individuals, while the patient (the audience) is also in this instance the one to be healed, as part of a whole. For Allison to photograph friends and family and, at times, himself as Boogers is a way of extending the ritual.

Allison’s Boogers series of photographs, then, is not an exploration of the individual self in the neoliberal sense, but rather a means of reclaiming cultural identity in history in opposition to that Western notion of self. This reclaimed identity comes through re-envisioning history. These photographs are portraits of Boogers, in a performative and ritualized sense. Allison’s portraits of the Boogers shift the meaning and force of self away from the neoliberal notion of the self as the only entity of concern and ontological stability. Instead, for Allison’s Boogers series of photographs, identity is achieved ritually, collectively. The Booger dance is not sacred, not kept invisible; however, it is a dance that protects the sacred. In this sense, the chilling feel of Allison’s photographs carries a warning, an intimation that while the viewer is beckoned to look at the photograph, he is not in this act of looking brought into Cherokee culture but instead may—or may not—receive the medicine. The medicine of the image occurs in the interaction between viewer and image viewed, transcending questions of cultural appropriation, maintaining the boundary of the secret/unknown identity of the masked Booger. Bear Allison’s masked figures, I argue, are inherently uncanny because the mask always already creates a double, a second self.

The concept of the boundary is doubly evoked in Allison’s Booger’s Courthouse, a photograph depicting a Booger at Devil’s Courthouse. The idea of justice, and injustice, is implicit in the unsettling image of this grotesquely masked figure overlooking the state boundary which, traditionally for Cherokee, is the boundary between the spirit and living worlds. This is also the Qualla Boundary near the state line; hence, it
also contends with boundaries imposed by colonization. In the Booger figure, white encroachment is given bodily form, the mask a grotesque rendition of a white man. But also, uncannily, this figure merges with the Cherokee. For this photograph, Allison puts a blanket on the subject, obscuring the body. The masked Booger turns to face the viewer. He stands over a vista that looks picture-postcard pretty, mountains opening to the sky in shades of tourmaline and aqua, in the terrain that belongs to the Eastern Band Cherokee. But this masked Booger figure would profoundly unsettle a tourist postcard. Given the role tourism plays in sustaining the economy of the Eastern Band, the Euro-American tourist, who comes to take pictures of the “natives” and spend money at the casino, is a figure mistrusted and also economically needed. In that Allison’s photography business often provides the tribe with media representations for tourism, he knows how to take a photograph that will appeal to tourists and that will be suitable for marketing. That type of work is subverted here.

In his Boogers series, Allison takes the stereotype of tourist-friendly photograph and inserts the Booger. Suddenly the landscape appears risky, a space that is threatening and non-welcoming to outsiders. The relationship between indigenous artist, the indigenous viewer, and the white viewer/tourist is dramatized and problematized. The tangled knot of this relationship is at the heart of Allison’s uncanny representation of the Booger. The uncanny force of the photographs inheres in the masks, the anonymity that the masks assert. As Bear Allison states “The medicine only works if the patient doesn’t know who is behind the mask.”

In her article “The Mask Stripped Bare: The Work of Hybridity in the Twenty-First Century,” Ruth Phillips argues, “The universalizing process of formalist appreciation …occludes localized identities.” How then to approach the Booger series without stripping bare the mask by interpreting the series either as art, paternalistically endowed with claim by the Euro-American gaze, or as ethnography and, thus, denied the place of art in Euro-American culture? Neither of these responses accurately captures the work, insofar as the responses described above both locate the power of decision, choice, and the power to label with Euro-Americans, while Bear Allison’s Boogers series is very clearly created for and by the Cherokee gaze. In my reading of this photographic series, I strive to interpret the work in its uncanny context of moving between Cherokee and white cultures, always noting the meaning and force of vision for the Cherokee viewer of the images.
Consider Bear Allison’s presentation of the work: he has exhibited some of the series photographs in “Renewal of the Ancient: Cherokee Millennial Artists,” an exhibition held in the fall of 2018 at the Museum of the Cherokee Indian in Cherokee, North Carolina. Likewise, one of the series images, *Lost on the Trail* (Fig. 6.6), was given as a gift by the Eastern Band of Cherokee to the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC. When I saw his work, much of it was laid out on card tables as part of NMAI’s Cherokee Days celebration.

I describe this history to point to the “hybrid” space of indigenous artists and indigenous art in white culture, that is, the frequent presentation of indigenous artists as somewhere *between* art and ethnography. With Allison’s *Boogers* series, this enforced social space of hybridity is sharply commented on. The images are the opposite of tourist kitsch, a rebuke to such, as they place serious masked figures at those very junctures that disrupt the expected tourist view. The images perform traditional Cherokee medicine but not in ways that proffer the culture to tourist eyes. Allison’s *Boogers* photographs are not ethnography,

---

Fig. 6.6  John Bear Allison, *Lost on the Trail*, from *Boogers* series, 2017–2018 (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Bear Allison Photography/Raven’s Eye Media)
nor useful for ethnographers. Even as all the masks in the photographs are traditional Cherokee Booger masks of wood or gourd, the images are never of the Booger dance but, instead, of Boogers outside of their ritual dance. This hybridity of categorization of the masks is essential to Allison’s intent in his *Boogers* series. The uncanniness of the images forwards an implicitly activist position, critiquing colonization and its effects.

It is a series that explores masks as permutations of ritual and identity in their power to estrange the viewer from expected scenes of knowledge and to offer instead new knowledge through transformative confrontation. The masks are the thread that joins the series to the ritual enactment of the Booger dance. The Booger rebels against, refuses, white domination and does so by playing through, and rendering grotesque, the behaviors of whites. He performs the threat from outside and diffuses it through ritual reenactment. This “medicine” is the recurrent act of Allison’s series. But Allison’s photographs also comment on the troubled boundary between indigenous ritual and white consumption of indigeneity. The images traverse the unhomely boundary between Cherokee culture and the white consumption of that culture—consumption both in the historical sense of encroachment, removal, and genocidal violence and also in the contemporary sense of nostalgic tourism. Even so, the creator of the *Boogers* series describes his photographs as a means of offering Cherokee medicine to anyone open to taking it in. “Even though some of the images I produce are dark and ominous,” Bear Allison says, “the energy and intent behind them are positive. The medicinal properties of the masks are to help ward off things that are bothering you or to desensitize you to things you are afraid of.”

Allison argues that we all have Boogers, that is, aspects of the world that terrify us, violence we have encountered and remembered, and so his series is universal in its reach.

In his *Boogers* photographs, Allison exposes colonization’s violence and repositions its remedy at once within and reaching beyond the private space of Cherokee dances. Whereas the Booger dance is performed by Cherokee among Cherokee, Allison’s photographs—which are inspired by the dance but never show or intimate that dance—are somewhat public. I say “somewhat” because Allison chooses to show his art in settings that are predominantly Indigenous American. The Museum of the Cherokee Indian and the National Museum of the American Indian are venues for Indigenous Americans; whites can go to these
places, but such institutions are for Indigenous Americans. Even so, the images can circulate beyond those venues because, as photographs, they are eminently translatable. Photographs are objects that notoriously slip the bounds of their original intents. This was so before the advent of the internet because oftentimes photographs are small objects, mere slips of paper. Photographs are even more translatable as digital content floats throughout the web, carried on the eddying stream of a million strangers’ random urges to “share” images. Bear Allison’s Boogers can be viewed on his website, and anyone with a computer, tablet, or phone can access that website.

A photograph is an image-object that gives away a story and hides its completion. Consider: not only the masks but also photographs of Iroquois false face masks are the subject of disputation as the tribe seeks to reclaim the sacred masks and images of them. Likewise, the first Euro-Americans to photograph the Hopi Snake Dance engaged in a competition with a clearly violative urge: the penetration of the privacy of a Hopi ritual. Booger masks are not believed by the Cherokee to be living beings with animacy when not placed on a human face. On the other hand, when the Booger dance is performed, the masks are transformed into objects with active, animate, vivid and life-changing properties.

But Allison does not photograph the dance; rather, he photographs Cherokee men wearing the masks, presented outside the communal context of the dance (Figs. 6.6, 6.7, 6.8, 6.9, and 6.10). His photographs both represent and enact the Boogers moving outside the Cherokee community and, through that action, defending the community. The anthropologist William Douglas Powers argues that, historically, the Booger mask dance is a ritual by which Cherokee return to the sacred and protect the sacred. Allison’s own view of his Boogers photographs is that they go out into the world protecting and preserving sacred spaces. “This series represents my belief that we all have Boogers,” he says. “They follow us everywhere. Creating the images has helped me deal with my own Boogers. I hope seeing these images, and learning about them, can help others as well.” The photographs are a conceptual extension of the dance’s task but not a reenactment or performance of it.

The motif of Allison’s photographs is uncanny: the settings are often gorgeous vistas, usually in the Carolina mountains. Very often, the images show late fall or winter. The images are set, often, in clearings
near forests, or beside streams or fields. They are, that is, often set at boundaries. One image, for example shows a Booger by a frozen waterfall.⁶¹ This place signifies a transitus between the spirit world and that of the living but the Booger cannot get back to the spirit world because the water is frozen. Bear Allison states that Booger medicine is best performed in cold weather.⁶² Hence, the landscape of the Carolina mountains in winter dominates the series. Against this backdrop the Boogers stand. Their faces engage the audience with expressions that are threatening and also unreadable: they turn their masks toward us, at times looking over their shoulders as if they know something we do not. Traditionally, the Booger dance ends with the Cherokee men who played the lecherous white Boogers leaving the room and then returning, unmasked, as proper, polite Cherokee men. The Boogers in Allison’s photographs, then, may be in the process of leaving, looking back. Or they may be accosted by the photographer, their expressions of guilt indicating white guilt in the face of the gaze of the Indigenous American photographer.

Fig. 6.7  John Bear Allison, *Frost Bitten* (representing Kituwuh) from *Boogers* series, 2017–2018 (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Bear Allison/Raven’s Eye Media)
Some of Allison’s Booger photographs are not located in Carolina; some pointedly place Cherokee Boogers in Washington, DC. Positioned at the edge of iconic emblems of the United States of America’s hegemonic power, the White House and the Washington Memorial obelisk, Allison shows Boogers not as threats in a direct sense to business-as-usual in America but certainly as questioners, signifying critique of the ongoing colonialist project that continues to inform the United States. The photograph of a Booger emerging from bushes near the White House caught my attention.\(^{63}\) It stages a Booger undertaking an act that, if caught, would likely result in punishment or at least removal by the Secret Service. Bear Allison confirms the photograph, while digital, is not digitally manipulated but rather presents a Booger who was physically located in the bushes by the White House.\(^{64}\) The force of the image inheres in its revelation of the Booger’s interruption of this symbol of American power. The pained look on the face/mask, the youthfulness of the figure combined with traditional garments make the image both poignant and frightening. The Booger risks his personal safety to come...
to the heart of the symbol of American power and contest the properness and propriety of that power, in a geography that was taken by force.

Other images from the Boogers series invoke Cherokee symbols. A Booger walks past a cornfield in Frost Bitten (Fig. 6.7). Allison identifies the setting of this photograph as Kituwah, which is said to be where the Cherokee originated. The time of the photograph is night, which is when Boogers appear. The figure, walking by a cornfield, invokes
the Corn Mother, a sacrificial and regenerative icon of southeastern (Cherokee and Mvskoke Creek) belief. The photograph is at once reverent, hopeful, and frightening, pitched on the uncanny edge between the maternal and ancestral home and the threat of death and night. The corn is half-mown down, half-standing; the figure turns toward the viewer, dressed for a Booger dance but clearly not participating in that dance at the time of the photograph.

The photograph seems to be parallel to another image in the Boogers series: of a Booger wearing what appears to be a bird’s mask, Raven Mocker (Fig. 6.8). This figure Bear Allison identifies as Raven Mocker, a sinister mythical figure that can eat souls. Like the half-shorn cornfield, the bird mask is presented at night and suggests ambiguity. For the Cherokee, the raven can be a sign of death—the Raven Mocker eats the souls of the vulnerable—but also of visionary sight.

In these photographs it is the quality of ambiguity and mediating between worlds that marks the images as carrying forward traditional beliefs in a twenty-first-century world that is mostly ignorant of these
beliefs. The photographs’ uncanny dissonance drives the images’ aesthetic force. It is precisely this ignorance, of mainstream America, that the Boogers confront, turning as in the image of five Boogers who stand in rural North Carolina and confront the viewer. Are they menacing? Or simply watching?

Likewise, an arresting image from the series, Tom Snow Booger (Fig. 6.9) shows a young man in standard twenty-first-century American clothes, turning to face the viewer as if answering a question, as if we had asked him to speak. The “voice” of the figure is his mask which is at once eloquent of the confrontation the Booger stages and also quiet, preserving his otherworldly anonymity. The series agitates along this uncanny edge of showing the viewer forms of Cherokee medicine while never revealing other cultural secrets. Retaining such cultural privacy is integral to the images’ power. Figure 6.10, Smallpox, like Tom Snow, evokes a young man in standard twenty-first-century winter garb, standing at the edge of a snowy forest. Because he wears a gourd mask the Booger’s expression is inscrutable, seemingly part of the winter landscape he inhabits. However, the spots on the Booger’s mask and the photograph’s title make clear the haunted terrain: smallpox was used as a weapon to kill Indigenous Americans and was used in particular against the Cherokee. Historian Paul Kelton explains, in Cherokee Medicine, Colonial Germs: An Indigenous Nation’s Fight Against Smallpox, 1518–1824, that Euro-Americans’ introduction of smallpox played a significant role in diminishing Cherokee territory during colonization. Hence, Smallpox (Fig. 6.10) the photograph, conjures a deep historical and inherited pain. The crime, and anguish, of genocide is confronted in this photograph, faced through the Booger’s medicine.

Since Bear Allison makes clear that the medicine of Booger mask performances is safest in winter (the medicine can be too strong to use during warm months) the pocked white mask’s merging into landscape of dappled snow, in Smallpox, is intrinsic to the force of the image, in its traditional use as medicine. The photograph haunts us with its representation of a young man’s body merged with monstrous mask. The horror of genocide is condensed, here, into an image of masked young man standing beside a winter forest, in a clearing, facing an uncertain future.

As Phillips argues, the “imbroglio” of terms that represent both the dominance and raveling of the project of modernity—that is, the concept of the Modern—reveal flaws in the model of the Modern.
Latour points to the problematic urge to purify categories, to try to separate and keep apart acts of culture, intellect, belief, inheritance. Bear Allison’s *Boogers* series of photographs purposively blurs the boundaries between indigenous art and, broadly speaking, Western art. Using photography, Allison creates the *Boogers* images with the same technology used by any person who avails himself of digital technology. The technology of digital photography is not a traditional indigenous American art. At the same time, the dramatic and aesthetic pull of the images is the Cherokee Booger mask, a traditional form. The photographs, then, are the epitome of hybridity. They cannot be made, and cannot be understood, from an exclusive frame of reference—they are traditional Cherokee and also Western pictorial. Indeed, Allison studied photography and filmmaking in art school before starting his business, Raven’s Eye Media, LLC.

Is such hybridity also an imbroglio? Is it an entanglement? The uncanny swerve of Bear Allison’s *Boogers* can cause viewers discomfort. The images could cause the white viewer to be aware of how mistrusted he is by Indigenous Americans, and likewise it could cause Indigenous Americans to be aware of how much work still remains in the fight for indigenous rights. The photographs are not necessarily soothing, although Bear Allison states that “some people do find them soothing; depends on their interpretation of the image.” In this way, they can be medicine through confrontation of fear. Like Meatyard’s *Lucybelle Crater* series, Bear Allison’s *Boogers* unsettle us because they confront what haunts us. Where we might expect the quiet, white, suburban family, Meatyard gives us masks that occlude the identity of the happy family, making them spooks, nightmares. Meatyard shows us, in *Lucybelle Crater*, the path of his own mortality. Where we might look for ethnographic images of “primitive Indians,” Bear Allison offers haunting Boogers who occupy the boundary between traditional indigenous and contemporary cultures, sophisticated images that complicate their own reception, however ultimately healing, in a nexus of Indigenous creation and its haunting knowledge of white consumerism. The uncanny of his *Boogers* series is the shock of danger and mystery (as conduits for medicine) in the place where we do not expect it.

Recalling Bear Allison’s photograph *Lost on the Trail* (Fig. 6.6): the image presents in evening shadows a spectral form. The figure is a Cherokee wearing a Booger mask. But the image does not show the mask precisely. It shows rather the shadow of the mask as a distortion
of the figure’s face. At first, we might think we see in this photograph a Cherokee who continues to haunt and wander the Trail of Tears, some two-hundred years after the forced removal of the people from the southeastern United States. But the Eastern Band Cherokee were not removed. They hid in the mountains and stayed.77

John Zilcosky (not writing specifically about the Cherokee) suggests that the discourse of the “uncanny” began in the so-called Age of Discovery.78 The idea that home could be estranged from itself and radically reshaped co-occurs for Euro-Americans and also for Indigenous Americans with the advent of European invasion of their lands. The uncanniness (as well as the brutality) of the Trail of Tears is not only an Indigenous phenomenon but also an American phenomenon; Euro-Americans create an uncanny home for Indigenous Americans and, in turn, Indigenous Americans unsettle Euro-American belief in their right to take this land. Georgia (USA), one of the main sites of forced removal had for centuries been a place where the “friendly Creek” and the Cherokee were considered civilized by their white invaders. Then, of a sudden, the US government violently displaced them.79

Consider: the name for Kennesaw Mountain in Georgia is derived from the Cherokee word for “cemetery” or “burial ground.”80 A space, then, that was long a sacred site is now a state park for anyone on holiday. The specificity of “translation” that Bruno Latour suggests we need in place of imbroglio or entanglement comes to mind in this landscape.81 Kennesaw Mountain, though, would seem to be a space in which translation has not yet occurred, only occlusion or elision. Even so, one asks whether Latour’s concept of translation itself carries the baggage of a colonizer’s point of view. The uncanniness embedded in the Booger dance in which the colonized “other” critiques Euro-Americans is a profound translation—it’s a ritual of translating the grotesque Euro-American face of domination into Cherokee terms of survival. The blind spot of Latour’s otherwise useful theory of translation as a solution to modernity’s imbroglio is the theory’s assumption that it is the right of Europeans and Euro-Americans to control the terms of culture, to be the translators.

Bear Allison’s photographs resist easy translation; their uncanny use of masks positions them almost as riddles. It is a series of photographs not about how to come together but about how to stay apart—even as it offers medicine (healing) to those who look carefully. One might say that Allison’s Boogers series celebrates the power of the knot.
The photographs deploy the Booger mask as an emblem for invaders and also a symbolic way to resist these invaders, whomever they are; the images entangle white and indigenous, placing on indigenous bodies grotesque emblems of white faces. To translate the series would be to suppress, elide, the violent reality of colonization, along with its history and its continuing impact. The ethical force of the political uncanny is that it resists translation; it makes us uncomfortable in irresolvable ways. The figure lost on the Trail of Tears in Bear Allison’s photograph may have been chosen by the National Museum of the American Indian because, in contrast to the full-color images in his Boogers series, it is less directly confrontational. Or perhaps it was chosen because it is so deeply mournful.

In this particular photograph, we might imagine the figure to be a ghost disappearing into the mist. But this view changes if we approach the image of Lost on the Trail in the context of the larger series. Bear Allison’s Boogers are not vanishing Indigenous Americans. They are Indigenous Americans who refuse to make the history of European invasion pretty, refuse to smooth over the violence. Instead, the images keep the viewer in a place of “psychic uncertainty.” As Zilcosky rightly argues, the uncanny emerges from and merges into centuries of colonization. The concept of the uncanny is inseparable from the European drive to invade indigenous territories. But this leaves open the question of whether it is only a European concept. The Booger dance precisely conceptualizes the uncanny invasion of the “other”—that is, the white “other.” Through this performance, Cherokee creates the uncanny mask of the Euro-American as the face of disease.

In his re-envisioning of the mask as a photographic object, Bear Allison breaks apart modernist tropes of appropriating Indigenous masks for aesthetic effect. Ten years ago, George Baker argued that the field of photography was “foreclosed” because he felt that neither narrative nor static representation were open to innovation in the medium, as it moved into digital, social media venues. But the questioning of modernism must reach much deeper, and Bear Allison’s work would seem to refute the idea of photography’s foreclosure. There is, of course, a history to white art (and art commentary) attempting to foreclose indigenous work. The relationship of mask to modernist photography is paramount. Man Ray’s Noire et Blanche (1926) appropriates an indigenous African mask to create an aesthetic tableau entirely stripped of the original maker’s intent of meaning for the mask. In Bear Allison’s
photographic work, by contrast, masks have active properties. He claims the mask for the Cherokee gaze, rendering its theft by white artists almost impossible. The masked figures in Allison’s *Boogers* are neither part of an implicit narrative nor posing in a still-life. Though not performing a traditional Booger dance, they are ritual figures. The figures are not part of an extended narrative but an intensive revelation. They reveal the dissonance between Cherokee ritual performance that preserves the holy and sacred space of the culture and Western photography that often works to confess, to give away personal knowledge.

The Booger dance circumscribes, protecting sacred knowledge rather than performing it, hence both narrative and static. Bear Allison’s photographs are set at the outside of the perimeter of this ritual performance, which is itself a way of creating a perimeter around the secret, sacred knowledge of the culture. These photographs are elliptically narratively driven—though static images, these still photographs hold a hidden narrative, a history. This duality of the work is its uncanny.

The *Boogers* series of photographs do not deploy their masks as merely aesthetic forms; rather they leverage the masks’ imagistic presence as both act and sign. By mixing traditional Booger masks with photography, Bear Allison structures an interrogation of the way Western culture makes Indigenous Americans its own “other.” In this sense, Bear Allison’s photographs participate in the act of protecting the Cherokee from the Western gaze.86 The idea that Western scholars, photographers, and ethnographers should preserve Cherokee (or any other Indigenous) culture out of a sense of noblesse oblige is directly refuted by Bear Allison’s *Boogers* series. In these photographs, he uses the mask as a double trope of otherness that works through estrangement to resist appropriation.

The history of the tribe that evaded removal during President Jackson’s reign of terror has been perilous. Although the Treaty of 1819 was supposed to guarantee Cherokee stability in their homeland, Jackson’s desire to conquer Indigenous Americans led to the Removal Act of 1830, signed by Jackson, that codified illegal and unjust violence the United State took against the Cherokee people, forcing their removal.87 The survival of the Eastern Band, historically, was achieved despite the violence of Euro-American people and their policies. The interaction with Euro-Americans, then, is fraught with concern for protecting the private, sacred, center of Cherokee culture. Even so, at this
time under capitalism, the Cherokee people also now need the income and resources that come through interaction with whites.

Allison’s *Boogers* limn this contradiction. The series might seem to offer secret, private, sacred knowledge about Cherokee culture, but it is effectively a rebuttal to whites who seek access to this private space. Traditional clothes are interchanged with Western garments, and even the landscape shifts as, while most of the Booger series is photographed in the Carolina mountains, some images are taken overseas in New Zealand as homage to Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, in its turn, is a work based on reimagining indigenous Briton history and language.

Bear Allison’s *Boogers* photographs give the lie to the notion that a mythic, “primitive,” past can be accessed through the bodies of living Cherokee. While his models for the series photographs are fellow Eastern Band Cherokee, you cannot definitively tell this from the photographs. Allison says that the point of the Booger is Cherokee medicine, and that this medicine works only if the identity behind the mask is kept secret. They are scrupulously anonymous. So, the masks that cover the photographic subjects are at the heart of the series’ authenticity—skewing whites’ compulsive consumption of “authenticity” in indigenous culture, subverting the power structure implicit in the very paradigm of the authentic.

Each performer in the series invests the photographs with stillness and spectral narrative. The stillness of the images is their positioning at the boundary, the periphery. Mountains are, of course, natural boundaries, and the southeastern mountains are old enough, low enough, to stand as a series. That is, you can see the row of Blue Ridge mountains from each other. Thus, a kind of narrative emerges from the seriality of the mountains themselves, while the narrative the Boogers enact is, by connotation, a mournful suggestion of the struggle to maintain the boundaries of the sacred within these mountains. Within that mourning there is the fractured memory of cultural trauma. The very cultural memory of the trauma is itself fractured: who can tell the story of the Eastern Band Cherokee’s losses? The survivors of a near genocide hiding out, refugees in their own country. The Booger dance holds in place a sacred core despite repeated white violations of the culture of the Cherokee.

The Trail of Tears involved removal of the Creek from Georgia in nearly as great numbers as Cherokee were removed from Georgia and North Carolina. Among the Creek, some Métis in western Georgia
chose to accept Georgia citizenship, renouncing their Creek identity in return for keeping their land, but they were absorbed into the state, losing their identity. The Eastern Band Cherokee, however, fled and hid in the Carolina mountains, resisting removal and retaining their identity. Allison’s photograph *Lost on the Trail*, calls out to these variants of southeastern Indigenous American displacement, offering a way home, to where the Eastern Band alone have retained their ancestral land and their identity as Cherokee.

Here, it is useful to compare his photograph *Lost on the Trail* to Edward Curtis’s *The Vanishing Race* (1904). In Curtis’s image, Indigenous Americans are intimated to be a disappearing people: they face away from the viewer and their individuality is undefined. In Allison’s photograph, the isolated figure is by contrast witnessed by the camera in his persistence. The figure in Allison’s photograph is not disappearing but refusing to disappear, unwilling to go away. He is liminal and “lost” but not vanishing. Rather he is seeking a way. The witnessing of the camera, here, acts to support the lost figure, to call him home. The figure is “lost” in this image in the frame of a gaze that wants him to come home, to come in. He symbolizes a manifold people—Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole—all pushed from their native southeastern United States. The Eastern Band Cherokee stand as the Cherokee who stayed in the southeast. They are, then, in a position to call home those pushed out of the southeast during the removal.

Indigenous landscapes are fraught spaces in the still colonial regime of the United States. Not only are southeastern Indigenous Americans largely pushed out of their traditional homeland but also the land itself has been largely desacralized. The mounds of Alabama and Georgia remain uncannily adrift in a landscape that continues to present itself as the Old South, that is, portraying the depth of its history as antebellum. If we consider Meatyard a Southern photographer (albeit one born in Normal, Illinois) it should be noted that his is only one version of the South. Bear Allison’s photographs mark the haunted relationship of the Cherokee with the American southeast, where they lived for thousands of years and countless generations. As such his photographs reflect the uncanny situation of exile within one’s homeland, and the force of mask as representation and as act transforms this reflection to visual activism.

Masked representation is a sign, a simultaneous mark in time and space. At once hiding and presenting, the mask reveals and conceals,
blurs the boundary of sign and identity, setting forward a limbo of time and space. The mask disrupts the viewer’s access to the figure, and also the mask disrupts the figure’s place in time and space. He is not there: his mask is there. The mask of the Booger is an image that is also a three-dimensional object and, in this sense, replaces rather than represents the face. The photograph also replaces the figure, which is itself a mask. But a photograph does not (usually) perform an active ritual. Bear Allison’s photographs are acts as well as images. These photographs position the Boogers on the periphery, holding the sacred for a culture that white America almost destroyed and onto which it still infringes.

**The Mask**

For Woodman, Meatyard, and Allison the mask performs a kind of metamorphosis when photographed. Through image, a double transformation emerges: the photographic subject both appears and hides. The mask effects a second self. If Baudrillard argues that seeing one’s double is a sign of impending death, the mask protects and deflects this encounter. The masked self, or masked figure, plays through ritual circumscription in Woodman, Meatyard, and Bear Allison’s work. For Woodman, the acephalic self-portrait, the mask of the elided face, questions the Western trope of searching for authentic self and places the photographer, taking her own picture at the perimeter of any formal identity. Her ritual is personal, but the photographs succeed because of the intensity of her belief in the meaning of making these images. For Meatyard, in his final series of photographs, the mask performs a cession of self as image. Through these images, Meatyard releases his world, allowing the mask to absorb him. For Bear Allison, the work of the mask is the drawing of a boundary that is not yet completed. The bright colors in many of his photographs, with their lush mountain vistas, jar against the urgency of the larger project of decolonization that his Boogers photographs perform. Allison, in these photographs, draws the need to protect his culture from the everyday symbolic violence that Euro-America inflicts on Indigenous America. In his photograph Booger Rebellion (not part of the Booger series but clearly related to it), Allison captures Cherokee sculptor Joshua Adams’s carving of a Booger set against a stark black background. Here the political import of the Boogers is revealed: they resist encroachment by non-Cherokee into Cherokee culture. While the Booger dance has comical elements, the
music for the Booger dance is haunting; it traces the circle that protects the sacred, that allows the culture to survive.

Hans Belting, in *Face and Mask: A Double History*, makes the argument that we lose face as we move deeper into the realm of twenty-first-century circulation of photography of ourselves. Baker argues that in the early twenty-first century the photographic object is in crisis, but for Belting it is perhaps the photograph itself that *brings* crisis. This crisis has specific relation to the self and to the face, as the photograph, via social media, has come to elide the actual face, standing for the self while the embodied self retreats. In Woodman, Meatyard, and Allison’s mask-based works, however, the self is not eroded by photography but has been uncannily set aslant or askew. The mask emerges as the image of a liminal self—the self between adolescence and adulthood in Woodman’s work, the self between life and death in Meatyard’s work, and the self becoming a decolonized subject in Allison’s work. The transformation effected by the mask is held in these uncanny photographs as always incomplete: photography’s temporal eddy, which never completes the action it initiates. This is also the mask’s temporality, holding expression still and without reaction to the external world. In the very superficiality of the mask and the photograph inheres their interiority, holding time as inexpressible trauma. The ritual aspect of the photographs with masks that I’ve discussed in this chapter is part of their serial allure. They draw the viewer into an uncanny liminality. Through Woodman, Meatyard, and Allison’s photographs as masks, we, the viewers, are transformed. Watching these still images in the eerie landscape of late twentieth and early twenty-first-century America, we see its places haunted by differences that refuse to disappear.

**Notes**

1. No title, attribution, nor signature was given in this photograph displayed in a hotel bathroom.
2. I have taken care here to write nothing that could identify the hotel discussed but, for the record, I had a lovely stay there and certainly saw the hotel as a good place to stay the night.
March 10, 2019). The idea of defining generations by relationship to technology and economy as opposed to familial relations (the daughter of the daughter of the daughter of…) indicates a shift in the notion of social world.


9. For Woodman and Meatyard this activism is carried on posthumously as others bring the oeuvres and Woodman, dead by 1981, and Meatyard, dead by 1972, before a twenty-first-century audience that embraces their work giving them presence in the art world that eluded the photographers while alive.


21. It may be an allusion to Man Ray’s photograph, Noire et Blanche (Le masque Africain), 1926, which appropriated an African mask.

22. Francesca Woodman, Untitled, 1980


26. Randall Hansen and Desmond King, Sterilized by the State: Eugenics, Race, and the Population Scare in Twentieth-Century North America (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). O’Connor’s figure of an intellectually challenged young woman being effectively traded for sex, by her mother, becomes especially haunting when one places it in the context of forced sterilization of people described—legally—as insane, imbecile or epileptic by the state of Georgia at the time of her writing.


43. Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, 156.
45. Michael J. Zogry, *Anetsu, the Cherokee Ball Game: At the Center of Ceremony and Identity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 121–123.
48. The artist also receives medicine from this process of photographing Boogers, that is, specifically from seeing them. John Bear Allison, in conversation with the author, September, 2019.
54. The artist consistently refers to and emphasizes the force of the images as medicine, a term that has different connotations in Cherokee, but that does imply healing. John Bear Allison, letters and conversation with the author, April, 2018; February 2019; August 2019; September 2019.
56. As of May 2019, John Bear Allison’s website address is www.bearallison.com.
62. The *Boogers* series photographs are taken during cold weather because during these months it is safer to represent and be exposed to Boogers’ medicine. John Bear Allison, conversation with the author, February 2019.
64. Bear Allison does not use Photoshop in the *Boogers* series but he is skilled in the technique and holds open the possibility that he might use it in the *Boogers* series as he is continuing to create this work. In other words, “authenticity” of the image as non-digitally manipulated is not a core concern for him. John Bear Allison, letter to author, February 2019.
73. As of May 2019 the website for this business is http://www.ravenseyenc.com.
76. A Booger mask, specifically, is a mask that has been ritually fashioned, by the tribe, as a Booger mask. As a non-Cherokee, I cannot say anything more about that ritual other than to make clear as I do here that the ritual creates the mask’s force. There is no other definition of a Booger mask. John Bear Allison, Letter to author, February 2019.
77. H. Thomas Foster, “Introduction,” in *Archaeology of the Lower Muskogee Creek Indians, 1715–1836* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007). As many Creek (Muscogee) were removed as Cherokee during Georgia’s early nineteenth-century act of ethnic cleansing.
80. Foster, *Archaeology of the Lower Muskogee Creek Indians 1715–1836*, 11. Georgia was originally Creek, but white infringement pushed tribes from their traditional lands.

86. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” *Boundary* 2, no. 12/13, vol. 12, no. 3–vol. 13, no. 1, On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism (Spring–Autumn, 1984): 333–358. I draw from Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s classic essay “Under Western Eyes” the understanding that Western ways of seeing non-Westerners serve to erode agency in those not of European descent even when the Western gaze claims to be protective.


94. Given the transience of most photographs, the way they get lost, destroyed, deleted, and given that most images are now digital content only, never printed, taking a photograph can be considered a ritual act that does not actually produce an image but rather a fleeting sign. That may be true of digitized, vernacular photography in the twenty-first century but it is less true of fine art photography which, depending on an artist’s success in the field, is sometimes very carefully preserved.

The uncanny is a problem at home. From the nearness of what is familiar, the uncanny emerges as a discomforting distance, a place that cannot be assimilated with one’s unthought, habitual practice of self. ¹ To inhabit an uncanny space is to be not at home; to see an uncanny image is to experience the unsettling shift wherein one ceases to feel at home. But the idea of being “at home” does not necessarily invoke clichés of the quotidian domestic. Rather, it means to be sure of oneself as a social entity. A raucous bar scene in a college town where American fraternity brothers get drunk may not conjure notions of domesticity, but it is not uncanny from the perspective of the frat boys. It’s not uncanny for them because white fraternity brothers in a bar in the United States are not outside their domain of social power. Fraternity life has, however, been described in decidedly gothic terms by Liz Seccuro, a survivor of sexual assault in a fraternity house. ² Uncanniness has an inverse relationship to power and the sense of one’s personal safety. In this book, the uncanny I pursue through readings of photography is a political uncanny: it is about power and powerlessness, bodily integrity and its abrogation—all the ways that power and bodily integrity are projected onto and picked up by socially coded space through images. This political uncanny is reflected in photographs that reveal power dynamics that are usually suppressed into invisibility but are excavated by art. ³

In this chapter, I investigate the shape of a North American uncanny through the photography of Shelley Niro, an artist who is an enrolled member of the Mohawk Six Nations Reserve, Bay of Quinte...
Kanien’keha:ka Mohawk Nation, Turtle Clan. In interpreting Niro’s oeuvre, I draw from her work in still photography but note that she is perhaps best known as a filmmaker and that there are deep links between her photography and her film works. For instance, her series of photographs The Shirt (2003) directly connects to her short movie of the same title. The film and photographs together express Niro’s vision of the cheapness of the culture created by capitalist colonization, the damaged and damaging force it still yields. The photographic image distills the non-material space between act and impact, event and narrative.

In general, Niro’s work invokes the eerie, and largely unacknowledged, trauma at the heart of the United States’ double-tongued history of attempting to destroy Indigenous American culture and peoples while covering up that violence in discursive modes—religious, filmic, verbal, and pictorial—that claim the European settlers’ right to the full use of the North American continent. Theorist Mark Windsor perceptively describes the uncanny as an impossible duality, a category violation, for example a book that rains, a mirror that speaks. We can see the American uncanny is just such a case: the uncomfortable duality of a government espousing freedom and liberty while suppressing the nation’s own formative history of genocide. In using the word “genocide,” I reference the work of scholars David E. Stannard, Benjamin Madley, Karl Jacoby, Jeffrey Ostler, and others, making the argument that the catastrophic population loss of Indigenous Americans, during the “settling” of America, is best understood as genocide. This history of erasure is crucial background knowledge for my unpacking of Shelley Niro’s photography. Not all historians agree on the numbers and nomenclature, but I think we can all see that America and Canada are social and geographic spaces in which Indigenous Americans historically have been killed, silenced, and constrained to a significant extent.

In this chapter, I emphasize the way that Niro’s work dramatizes uncanny boundaries, eerie spaces of unresolved grief and loss. Her work is not only haunting but also haunted. Renée Bergland identifies the image of the Indigenous American as a ghost, the uncanny “other,” and, thus, as a constitutive, if negative, trope of Euro-American identity. My argument in this chapter, however, subverts Bergland’s, in ways that will become clear. Bergland’s The National Uncanny lays out the long history of Euro-Americans envisioning Indigenous Americans as ghostly, death-bound, and invisible, a process Bergland calls “discursive colonization.” Early settlers mythologized the Indigenous peoples whose land
they were invading as forest-dwelling devils, which Europeans feared.\textsuperscript{11} These concepts predate photography, but photographs came to play a key role in disseminating racist ideologies.\textsuperscript{12} For example, early twentieth-century American photographers Edward Curtis and Gertrude Kasebier created images romanticizing Indigenous Americans as a “vanishing” people, already ghosts, reflecting a creepy nostalgia for the days of pre-contact North America.\textsuperscript{13} Even as the North American settlers deployed violence against Indigenous peoples, these Europeans saw themselves as the ones at risk, creating discursive structures that depicted Indigenous Americans as soulless waifs.\textsuperscript{14} Indigenous Americans were represented in the emerging national discourse as either already dead or deserving to be killed.\textsuperscript{15}

The European invasion and colonization of North America shaped an uncanny homeland for Indigenous Americans, a social and physical “home” in which their ancestral space and place were violently estranged.\textsuperscript{16} Developing beyond Bergland’s classic work, in this chapter, I explore the opposite side of her thesis on the uncanny. Rather than looking at ways that whites saw, or see, Indigenous Americans as ghosts, I look instead at how contemporary Indigenous North American photography represents the impact of colonization as uncanny for Indigenous Americans. Overturning Bergland’s argument that Indigenous Americans see themselves as ghosts, I trace ways that Indigenous Americans view Euro-American culture as deathly, haunting, and uncanny—the opposite of homey and life-giving. As Bronislaw Malinowski argues, some words are untranslatable across cultures, for as we move into different cultural groups—say, from Indo-European to Iroquoian—not only does the structure of language change but also the mode of thought. Some words just cannot be accurately translated.\textsuperscript{17} Yet, though the notion of the uncanny—that which estranges one’s homeplace and makes it eerie—stems from European discourse, still it suffuses the traumatic and offers a paradigm for seeing colonization from an Indigenous perspective.\textsuperscript{18} One might say that Europe infected America with uncanniness. In the Iroquoian group language, Onondaga, the words for “strangely wonderful” (\textit{jachte wagelichwajenteri}) and “terribly strange” (\textit{jachgatgathonochsaje}) are related but distinct, suggesting a concept of the uncanny that distinguishes between the mystically inspiring and the frighteningly abnormal.\textsuperscript{19} Shelley Niro’s work pulls on both registers, bringing wonder and beauty to stories of terror and loss that are part of Iroquoian history.
I focus on the photography of Shelley Niro to illuminate the uncanny home of colonization’s aftermath, following my book’s thesis that in photography the uncanny shimmer of modernity’s double gaze catches us. Niro’s work is at times described as quietly humorous. But her work has a force that goes beyond such soft descriptions. Niro attends particularly to geography; the place is evocatively drawn in her photography and film. In her work I trace the representation of post-colonial North America as a place that has become uncanny for Indigenous Americans. In Niro’s work, we do not see Indigenous Americans as spectral, ghostly figures. To the contrary we see ways that the United States and Canada have become haunted spaces in the Indigenous American gaze.

The violence exerted against the indigenous peoples of North America during this region’s colonization created the epitome of the uncanny experience for Indigenous peoples—making what was for thousands of years their home no longer homelike for them. That this violent upheaval was pushed beneath the threshold of public statement meant that the true nature of this colonization was secret, hidden. In Niro’s work, the tragedy of one’s own ancestral homeland made strange through the process of forceful colonization is displayed in unsettling images that remove us from the stereotypes of “wild Indians” and dying, vanishing Indians, as well as clichés of Indigenous American spirituality.

For the survivors of what historian David E. Stannard calls North America’s holocaust, home becomes uncanny because America remains their ancestral space and yet inherited access to and control of this domain is lost. Imagine that someone were to come into your house tonight and take everything out, removing also all forms of your identification so that you had no way to replace the losses. You still live in your house, but you are forced to sleep in a corner of the basement (or attic) while the thief inhabits the place at will, moving in with his family, killing your husband and taking your daughter for his wife. What I’ve just written, a parable of the Indigenous American experience, sounds like a gothic horror story. The Western roots of the concept of the uncanny are formed concurrently with aggressive colonization of the Americas. The notion of “home” estranged from itself—enforced secrecy, hiding the violence of one’s home’s history—emerges in Western discourse precisely as Western nations are engaged in violating Indigenous people’s lands in the Americas.
In Niro’s photographic works, we see the real national uncanny: not the imaginary figure created by whites of the Indian-as-ghost but the image of home, a geographic place inhabited by one’s ancestors for millennia, made strange, unreal, and unhomelike through the violent work of colonizers. The subject of Niro’s work is the strangeness of America after colonization, the abiding reflection of North America as an uncanny social space—uncanny not because it was once inhabited solely by Indigenous Americans but, on the contrary, because it is no longer a predominantly Indigenous American land. Her photographic and film works are driven by the uncanniness of a home that is not home, of ancestral homelands that have been perverted, turned into power plants and real estate developments, divided by abrupt national boundaries. Niro fosters a re-envisioning of Canada and the United States, allowing us to see our uncanniness as nations through the lens of this Indigenous artist who impassively contemplates the eerie social space created in North America through colonization.

**Boundaries and Frontiers**

Niro’s work points to the strangeness of the Euro-American social space and the long history of Euro-American geographical aggression, its constant urge to expand its own domain. Niro’s 1992 photographic series, “This Land Is Mime Land,” presents Niro, alongside some of her female family members, poking sartorial fun at the self-reflexive ideologies of domain and dominance that fomented North America’s history of colonization and that continue to shape ideas of citizenship in North America. The series features a triptych, *Final Frontier* (1992) that opens with a self-portrait of the photographer dressed in mimicry of the *Star Trek* television series. The triptych’s name evokes the *Star Trek* catchphrase, “Space, the final frontier,” as an emblem of the Euro-American celebration of conquering frontiers. Niro’s photograph unveils the ideologically fabricated notions of the nation-state domain with “frontier” being conceived as the territory not yet conquered. In her costume, Niro makes the point that Indigenous Americans are not included in the varied racial discourse of *Star Trek*, except in the problematic episode, “The Paradise Syndrome,” which makes all too clear the seamless fusion between the television show’s notion of outer space as a final frontier and the foundations of Euro-American belief in conquering Indigenous people as requisite to manifest destiny. “The Paradise
“Syndrome” presents Indigenous Americans as aliens, entirely different from Europeans and lost in a past from which they cannot return. In the *Final Frontier* (1992) triptych, Niro in the Star Trek costume is juxtaposed with a photograph of her daughter, playing with a skate-board and the family dog. This image appears to be taken in bright sunlight as the dog is overexposed and the little girl shields her eyes. The third image is, again, Niro herself this time in nondescript, late twentieth-century clothes. The three images together reveal the everydayness of Mohawk life and culture, indicating the radical inappropriateness of Euro-America’s pronounced tendency to see Indigenous Americans as “other,” as a group that lies beyond the pale and inhabits even now—in the twenty-first century—an imagined frontier.

On the surface, Niro’s triptych mocking *Star Trek* is playful, as are her photographs of herself costumed as Snow White in the triptych *The Warning of Snow* and her photograph of herself costumed as Marilyn Monroe in *500 Year Itch*, all part of her “This Land Is Mime Land” series. What appears strange in these photographs of an Indigenous North American woman dressed as Snow White, a Star Trek crew member, and Marilyn Monroe, is not the Mohawk woman herself but the photographs’ unsettling exposure of these costumes of white femininity. These ideas of femininity—Monroe’s fabrication of the dumb blonde and Snow White’s commercially produced whiteness—oppressively enforce onto the female body strictures and paraphernalia of powerlessness, lending it a kind of deathliness that is read as allure. Marilyn Monroe and Snow White are configured as women evacuated of agency and force, manifestations of the living dead. Snow White, in the European fairytale as in Disney’s appropriation, appears to die when eating the poisoned apple, while Monroe was a Hollywood studio creation of a femme enfant without agency, wholly serving the erotic desires of men. The emblematic tableau of both Snow White and Monroe is the dead/sleeping woman who never gains agency. These repressive feminine strictures are also part of the fabric of dominant “whiteness,” social patterns that exclude Indigenous American women, make them appear to be alterior, outside accepted social boundaries.

Femininity is structurally outside the traditional boundary of Western citizenship, but these images in “This Land Is Mime Land” are more than just a critique of male domination. The photographs unearth an intersection of the gendered and racialized parameters of citizenship, a nexus of maleness and whiteness that constitutes social power.
They point to that which is uncanny and surreal about contemporary North America: a social space dominated by pop culture icons, with those figures creating a discourse that erases Indigenous American presence in their own homeland. Snow White is almost killed at home—unsafe there because her vengeful stepmother appears with the poisoned apple—while Marilyn Monroe dies at home, swallowing sleeping pills. Snow White lies in a coffin at home, and Marilyn is embalmed in cultural memory as the couchant, supine suicide found in the nude. Neither of these images of the white feminine can keep a home safe and happy—or keep herself safe and happy at home. Yet this very powerlessness is used as a symbolic cudgel to dispossess non-Euro women of visibility.

Niro gives visibility to Indigenous North American women in her triptych photographs *The 500 Year Itch* (referring to five hundred years of colonization) and *Warning of Snow* (referring to the encroachment of white people in North America). The photographs in “This Land Is Mime Land” are all triptychs, contrasting the mimicked photographs of white pop icons with photographs of Niro and her mother, daughter, and sisters dressed in everyday clothes and ensconced in Mohawk domesticity. These countering images of Native American women point to the strangeness and un-homeyness of the white pop icons that Niro invokes. The term “at home” implies a specific relationship to citizenship. To inhabit a home space or homeland that is not uncanny is to inhabit a space over which one has some degree of control. In the liberal and neoliberal discourse that shapes nation-states, this control is called “citizenship.”

The Euro-American notion that citizenship does not apply to those people who for millennia have inhabited North America but does apply to an amorphous and promethean smorgasbord of coded “white” qualities—for instance, being Christian and having a pale complexion, a snub nose, an Anglo name—is crucial both to the history of colonization and also to the territorial disputes that are, as I write in 2018 and 2019, fueling controversy along the southern border of the United States of America. Consider that, until 1924, Indigenous Americans were not considered US citizens and, unlike most people arriving from other countries, were also barred from becoming citizens. In 2018 and 2019, most of the people seeking to enter the United States across its southern border are descended wholly, or in part, from Indigenous Americans—that is, they are Latinx people—and because of their deep, historical context of being Indigenous inhabitants of the North
American continent, they were refused entry. The US government’s policy of so-called strong borders is precisely aimed at preventing peoples of Indigenous American descent from moving freely around the North American continent. This form of immigration restriction emerges, then, from earlier Euro-American notions of conquest and dominion. It carries with it a trace of frontier logic, that is, the idea that terrain must be physically strictured, marked off from indigenous peoples. Overwhelmingly, it carries with it the idea that Indigenous Americans must be controlled—physically and, when necessary, by force. Hence, the current US administration’s policy of punishing prospective immigrants at its southern border by separating these children from their parents is, by another name, a policy against Indigenous Americans—a policy that has its foundation on the demagogic mobilization of the idea of a frontier.

Frontier space is an ideological uncanny. A frontier is a geographical representation of the ideology of dominance, achieved by describing people as “other,” people who must be conquered and whose space must be invaded in order for the invader to feel “at home.” The very word “frontier” denotes that which is not settled, an unstable or contested domain. The notion’s uncanniness inheres in this idea of absence, of a vacancy in terms of social space. “Frontier” implies a place not yet made home. It is a contested space, and it, truly, is not a home—neither for the Indigenous people whose territory has been contested nor (yet) for the colonizers. Niro’s work critiques and re-envisions the concept of the frontier, the ideological premise of a boundary beyond which an unrecognizable “wild” other lives. Displacing and dislodging the notion of frontier, Niro visually instates a reconceptualization of land, one based on mutual respect and also—importantly—holding a respectful distance between cultures, as each society and realm respects the distinctness of the other. Her photographic series, “Stories of Women,” “Borders,” “Passages,” and “Battlefields of My Ancestors,” and her films Tree, It Starts with a Whisper, and Kissed by Lightning, play through tropes—geometric, political, and conceptual—of uncanny boundaries, staging re-encounters with colonization’s past through seeing anew its present impact. Niro’s work shows the uncanniness of colonization. For Indigenous Americans, staying in North America becomes a process of inhabiting an uncanny terrain, a land estranged.
Territory, Nation-State

If Niro’s photographic works give visual form to a different notion of social space—expressing the potential for a sociality of fairness—this is in stark contrast to the Euro-American imperialist ideology of nationality and national boundaries. From the sixteenth century onward, the model of the emergent nation-state was aggressively imposed onto the North American continent in a pattern of European colonization that did not acknowledge an ethical right of Indigenous peoples to maintain their civilizations on their traditional ancestral lands.\(^{48}\) The process of taking the North American continent for the use of people of European descent was, more than anything else, a process of disregarding boundaries and borders and, later, of ignoring treaties negotiated with Indigenous Americans.\(^{49}\) This habitual disregard stems from the model of the European nation-state. Rooted first in mercantilism and then in capitalism and holding a winner-take-all approach to resources, the territorial nation-state gave spatial and social form to the ideology of might is right. In other words, if you could, it was acceptable to take everything from your neighbor.\(^{50}\) In this sense, the nation-state was a superficially peaceful stasis covering over an underlying philosophy of war without limits.\(^{51}\) In North America, over the course of five centuries of colonization, the impact of this ideology was that the land became a zone of erasure, wherein much of the physical presence (and to some extent the cultural memory) of Indigenous Americans was elided.\(^{52}\) Rather than shaping boundaries in which groups could coexist, the territorial nation-state model could not, and cannot, tolerate the forceful, fully enfranchised civic presence of North America’s Indigenous people.\(^{53}\) This intolerance creates an uncanny world, one that from the perspective of Indigenous North Americans is a home eviscerated of homeliness, safety, fidelity.\(^{54}\)

It is within, and also beyond, this haunted social space that Niro navigates and negotiates in photography. Against the pressure of assimilation, Niro posits an elegant geometry of distance and, in her frequent evocation of the figure of Sky Woman, a sense of beyond-ness—looking at the sky as the last zone that has not been colonized.\(^{55}\) For Niro, images of Sky Woman symbolize a refusal to assimilate to the Euro-American culture and, at the same time, an effort to come to terms with the mournful reality of history and with the present-day reality of a nation-state run according to capitalist ideology. Her series of photograph collages, “Flying Woman,” evokes Sky Woman in a contemporary
idiom (Fig. 7.1). Here, the social text of contemporary American culture is framed beneath the gaze of a woman who literally flies above it all. Niro’s flying woman is a liminal figure. She has no wings but is not presented as a ghost; she exists as a reflection of the unhomey terrain of contemporary North America, flying above it and resisting the loss of home through physical distance. Physical space is uncannily evoked in Niro’s “Flying Woman” series as the domain of a woman who flies with no wings. The flying woman moves above groups of people who do not notice her or, if they do, seem to barely see her. She does not appear afraid or vindictive. Nor does she appear to have a specific goal in flying. She is simply airborne, slightly outside the earthly, though close enough to see it, a figure at the boundary who observes and refuses to come down.

Fig. 7.1  Shelley Niro, #5 from the series “Flying Woman,” 1994. Gelatin silver print, 36.2 × 47 cm. Light Work Collection, Syracuse, New York (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Shelley Niro)
Here, Niro’s activist art engages a subtle figuration of protest. Her flying woman is suspended, liminal, between zones. In that we define home by its edges, the flying woman is not at home. She traces boundaries rather than residing within them. But it seems that she has not given up looking for home: she flies low, apparently seeking a place to come home. Geographic boundaries that have been violated, with European encroachment of Indigenous American lands, are echoed by systemic violation of economic boundaries.57

In her elegiac film Ongniaabra/Niagara, Niro deploys a slow-moving image of the falls overlaid with sparse dialogue. In conversational caption phrases, this dialogue limns a young woman’s difficult life and premature death.58 The boundary of the Niagara Falls is, of course, a national boundary, the demarcation of the United States and Canada. In this film, the falls is also shown to be an uncanny boundary between the living and the dead as the slowly shifting camera mobilizes the force of water to reconnect the filmmaker and the film’s viewers with the dead woman, whom we learn, with painful shock, is the filmmaker’s daughter. The film vivifies a ghost not by showing the dead but by addressing her in an extended, visual apostrophe. Niro states: “There is a narrative in this video… a memory of my mother, telling me about a dream she had. She passed away two days later… the narrative is [also] about my daughter. The night she spent in jail, she was very sad and [then] suddenly a boy recognized her voice. She laughed as she told me this part.”59 When Niro presented this film at the Boarding House Gallery in Guelph, Ontario, she also presented beadwork done by impoverished Haudenosaunee women since the nineteenth century, demonstrating that the nearby Niagara Falls is more than a boundary between nations and between the living and the spirit world—it is as well a site of economic domination.

Euro-American encroaches, expressed through the workings of capitalism such as land sales, have further shrunk the geography of Indigenous American reservations, which were already formal articulations of displacement.60 With capitalism as the implicit law of the United States and Canada, part of what Niro protests is the negative environmental effects of unchecked capitalist-driven development. In her work is a deeply mournful engagement with the land itself. After centuries of colonization, Indigenous Americans now find themselves doubly displaced.61 The Mohawk people were pushed out of their homeland in what is now New York State after the Revolutionary
In Niro’s series of photographs, “Battlefields of My Ancestors,” connections between the so-called Indian Wars and the contemporary capitalist selling of land are shown to work in tandem to estrange the ancestral land of the Mohawk from the living people of the Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois Confederacy: the Mohawk, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Seneca, and Tuscarora.

In “Battlefields of My Ancestors” Niro invokes the boundary of the Mohawk River as a haunted space and sacred place. In Niro’s work, rivers evoke haunted places of longing. Rivers mark boundaries impressed onto indigenous land by Europeans but they are also older, traditional borders, and suggest boundaries between the dead and the living. Expressing a longing to reintegrate with this land that is ancestral to her people—the original, pre-Revolutionary War, Mohawk territory that reached across much of the northeast, far beyond the border of Canada—Niro’s subtle photographs investigate the eerie visuality of colonization. In her outlay of image, Niro represents the ethics of respecting not only those human beings who are ancestrally of North American land but also the ethics and morality of not violating the land itself, or, as we moderns are wont to call it, “natural resources,” a term that places the earth into a capitalist framework. Niro’s work presents geography in terms of an ethic of respect for the land as opposed to a political policy with respect to a “border” and a “frontier,” with “frontier” meaning the terrain that the nation-state is striving to claim.

In these photos, Niro contends with the problems of national borders and the violence that creates and enforces them. “Battlefields of My Ancestors” is a group of clear, digital, color-photographs showing demarcation lines that have fractured the traditional Haudenosaunee world, zones of “frontiers” and the battles for their domination. The images are a kind of cinéma vérité of the geographical marks and apportioning of land left by history. In the calmness of the photographs, Niro presents the mournful aftermath of battles that stripped her ancestors of their homeland.

The series of photographs speaks in two ways at once. On the one hand, the images are calm and straightforward testimonials. Revising documentary photography to give it historical depth, they show what is happening here, in the twenty-first century, in the aftermath of centuries of colonization. The photographs take the mask off the dominant social myth of Euro-American ideology, the myth that the “settling” of North
As a counter-memory to this myth of Euro-American settler hero-ism, Niro’s photographs are emblems of memory and mourning for the Haudenosaunee. Her images show an estranged landscape, a place that was turned into a no-man’s-land by imperialist-capitalist policies that raped this land, taking it by force. Exposing the way that North America’s history of violence has shaped its geography, how battlefields have metamorphosed to boundary zones, Niro’s series has a quotidian rhythm and a surface look of calm—but, from underneath, these images express the pain of geographical violation.

A key photograph from the “Battlefield” series, *Site of Indian Village* shows a New York State plaque commemorating the destruction of a Mohawk village. It is unclear from the plaque whether this fact is being celebrated, mourned, or simply stated for the record. Niro’s photograph exemplifies photography’s uncanny power: she shows the nondescript plaque, the green and mown roadside bank, the slope of the road curving into a slightly askew vanishing point. Everything in the image is quotidian: everyday America, business as usual. Then, suddenly, looking at the image, we realize there is nothing left of this Mohawk village. Niro’s photograph articulates how this plaque is profoundly insufficient recompense for the loss it records. The corner of a red barn is visible in the photograph, so we can see that what has survived on this spot of earth is Euro-American. The intense fore-fronting of the plaque skews the image’s scale. The relatively small plaque is rendered enormous while the landscape recedes.

What matters in the long perspective of the image is the lost village, signified by the plaque: all that holds this knowledge of this lost place and lost community is the plaque. Without the plaque, the village would be completely erased. And yet the plaque itself also functions as erasure, turning what was a robust village into a tiny plaque by the roadside, turning what was a battle and a slaughter into a space not especially reserved for mourning and contemplation. But the lost village is also connoted by the long view of the photograph. Niro harnesses photography’s perspectival geometry to cast a long backward glance at this landscape that bears witness to the disappearance of Indigenous peoples from the place of that village.

Her eerie photograph engages the viewer in our need to mourn and to think. It does so by dislocating our habits of seeing, deploying
photography’s alternate, uncanny nature to show that the cozy tourist lane of rural upstate New York, green and lush, is a battlefield haunted by the ever-unresolved issues of boundaries, treaties, rights, and geographical ethics in this country that elides the history of its own Indigenous people. This Haudenosaunee ancestral home has been displaced, in the photograph, by the plaque that Niro foregrounds, making the point that Indigenous displacement not just an event from the past; it is a contemporary reality. This is chronic and ongoing displacement is a past that shapes the geography of the present day. The crisp color of her digital image brings the view right into the second decade of the twenty-first century: we are here. The past does not recede; it uncannily remains with us.

In another image from “Battlefields of My Ancestors,” Tutela Heights, Niro captures a placid and beautiful autumnal landscape with a river running through it—a lovely scene that seems remote from the series title, though its color saturation is eerily bright. The image shows Tutela Heights, near Brantford, Ontario, where the Mohawk retreated when forced out of the United States by General George Washington. Niro clarifies that “People from the Six Nations Reserve know what Tutela represents. During the Indian Wars, mid 1800s, the Tutela Indians came to this territory and asked if they could stay here, away from the violence. They were given some land along the river. There are variations of this story. History books will say disease wiped them out, some say they were adopted into Iroquois life and others say they were chased out by the white population that was squatting on the borders of the Grand River.” The area is now being sold for development.

Niro’s photograph of the river running beneath Tutela Heights evokes a double to the Mohawk River in the Mohawk Valley in upstate New York, which is the heart of Mohawk ancestral homeland and no longer in the domain of the tribe. Tutela Heights looks at an eerie space of a river, holding ancestral meaning that has been co-opted by colonization. The river is photographed from a distance, emphasizing the presence of the land itself. The photograph is placed, aesthetically, on the unnerving edge between the beautiful and the disturbing. If it were not part of a series called “Battlefields of My Ancestors,” we would not consider the violence that has been encoded by history into this landscape. Still, the image would convey to us something unsettling and sublime.

As an aesthetic category, the sublime draws from Immanuel Kant’s Enlightenment era theorization of pleasure-pain in aesthetic
experience. In turn, the Enlightenment creates some of the most violent discourse with regard to race: theorists from Horkheimer and Adorno to Foucault develop the compelling argument that the Enlightenment belief in the superiority of reason and rationality feeds into the colonials’ justification for their dominion over non-European terrain and their violent subjugation of the colonized. How, then, could Shelley Niro’s photograph—an image created by an activist artist as a work of de-colonization—fit the definition of “sublime” established by Kant? Niro’s photograph of this beautiful river and serene foliage is a recognition of displacements among Indigenous North Americans and of the community’s continued vulnerability to new encroachments upon their land. The image produces pleasure-pain in viewing; its sublimity inheres in the uncanny and paradoxical space it commands, showing the beautiful as evidence of the unjust. In this way, Niro’s work conveys the aesthetics of justice.

Through its stunning discomfort, the image teaches us something beyond ourselves. The sublime, as I argue elsewhere, is that theoretical space wherein Kant ravel his notion of the supremacy of rationality. It is the movement of the sublime that becomes active against the violence of other codes of Age of Reason philosophy. Kant’s sublime dismantles them. Aligned with the sublime, Niro’s work drives aesthetic experience wherein a given viewer’s belief system of the supposedly rational course of Western history is shifted, radically altered, through the poignancy of her images. Theorists who cherry-pick Foucault’s critique of Kant (Foucault considered himself a troubled Kantian), ignore Kant’s own raveling of the code of hyper-rationality in pursuit of his aesthetics of the sublime. More to the point, the assumption made by these theorists that non-European people and women are anti-rational is deeply problematic. To argue otherwise is to fall (surely by accident) into racist doctrines that suggest only male Europeans are rational. Enlightenment ideology of rationality formed a perverse justification for European violence, but this does not mean that rational thought itself is perverse. The root of the concept of “rational” is dispassionate balance in thought. This is exactly what Niro’s photographs present.

The real estate development, Tutela Heights, that the artist photographs in “Battlefields of My Ancestors” is on the site of an Indigenous American village whose residents were caught up in the Battle of Beaver Dam in the War of 1812. This battle from 200 years ago displaced Indigenous Americans and, in 2010, they were once again displaced as
a consortium called the Walton Group developed the site for real estate and dredged up the artifacts of Indigenous people. Their village was twice displaced. Niro’s eerie photograph *Tutela Heights* makes the point that the land remains holy while it also emphasizes a sense of distance and longing, setting up a frame wherein the viewer can never reach the river, never reach the place that is established by the photograph as so hauntingly desirable. The image almost suggests the quintessence of home, peace, tranquility: a river that brings fish, water, and health. And then it takes away from the viewer access to that home with its fecundity. It is the angle from which Niro takes the digital image that conveys this slant approach. It is not a neutral image of natural beauty but a canted image that makes us aware of our distance from that desired place.

**Ideological Geographies**

In contrast to the ideological mapping of the nation-state, the Haudenosaunee view of social space expressed in Niro’s work resists belief in a “frontier” or a place of wilderness that must be controlled and surmounted by civilization. Instead, the natural world is seen by the Indigenous American as a part of civilization, a part of home. In the way that theorist bell hooks has described the work of photographer Carrie Mae Weems, so also Niro’s work is not post-colonial but anti-colonial, de-colonizing. One might say that to discuss “post-colonial” Indigenous America is misprision: what colonization did to North America’s land and to the continent’s original people cannot be undone because the losses and displacements suffered by larger North American tribes, not to mention extinctions of many smaller tribes, are not only historical facts but a part of the living present. Indigenous American descendants of those who survived the genocide of their people are not in a “post-colonial” social world: they continue to live the inheritance of genocidal violence. Unless the North American continent were returned to the stewardship of the continent’s original people, the term “post-colonial” has little real meaning. But “anti-colonial” and “de-colonizing” are terms that apply accurately to Niro’s meditative acts of resistance in photography.

Niro’s photographs trace uncanny boundaries. While her subjects are sometimes photographed in front of their houses—for example, in the series “Are You My Sister?”—it is not the domestic space of the house that dominates Niro’s imagination. Rather, it is the idea of a landscape of
home. Home is about control of liminality. It is a ritually defined space even if the rituals that define it are elided into everydayness. If someone enters my house when I have not asked them in, that entry is a violation, and such a violation demonstrates one principle of home. A home is a zone of negotiated space. This invaded home becomes uncanny when a pretense of home is continued, kept up, even though the social space of home is no longer intact. Whereas a public space anticipates the flow of people through it, a home space implies some restriction of this flow. Friends may come in freely because they are considered part of “home.”

Liminality, then, is an evocation of being at the boundary. Niro contends with visual tropes of liminality in the landscape of North America in two of her photographic series, “Stories of Women” and “Are You My Sister?” These series deal with ways of bringing a liminal daughter back into the safety of home. I discuss the works in tandem as the two series have obvious intertextual resonance, a deep commitment to understanding the cultural and ecological worlds of present-day North America by understanding the situation of its women. In this series, Niro draws from the idea of woman as cisgendered woman, but her insights regarding gender and sociality extend to transgender women.

“Stories of Women” conveys the idea of a national border, a national boundary as a dangerous place, as a site of betrayal. At the same time, by figurally representing boundaries in these works, Niro re-inscribes proper borders, respectful boundaries, imagining space in which borders and boundaries are not inscribed with the Euro-American urge to conquer and colonize. The eeriness of colonization, and the endless, uncanny afterimages of its violence, Niro brings forward in the “Stories of Women” photograph collage *Bagging It* (Fig. 7.2). This depicts a young Indigenous American woman holding a body bag, an image that references a severe influenza outbreak in 2009 on the Wasagamack and God’s River First Nation reserves, in response to which the Canadian government, rather than sending flu vaccine and anti-viral medication, sent body bags.

In *Bagging It*, behind the standing woman runs a line of high-tension wires and electricity towers that demarcate the boundary of the reservation. Here, Niro shows the boundary of the reservation as a space of a form of sanctuary but also of restriction and even death—a border that is penetrable to sickness inasmuch as the nation outside the reservation brings in the influenza virus and then offers no meaningful remedy.
Given the role that Western diseases have played in decimating Indigenous North American populations, Niro’s image evoking death from an influenza outbreak and a government’s callous response is both haunting and descriptive of the condition of being haunted. Here, it is not Indigenous North Americans who are spectral and ghostly but...
rather Indigenous North Americans who are haunted by Euro-American violence. The colors of Niro’s digital image are dark, almost lurid, but within that rufescent schemata is the invocation of the power of blood, female fecundity and strength, as an answer to the deathliness of the government’s gesture. As with all of Niro’s photographs of Indigenous North American women, the young woman in Bagging It is presented as self-sufficient and strong. She faces menacing boundaries imposed by electric towers and the body bag, but she stands on her own terms. Precisely because the woman herself seems so potent and alive, the image is eerie, otherworldly, as if it carries a secret. The boundary of life and death is evoked by the young woman’s position on a riverbank with the electric towers standing over her. The landscape is surreal: it estranges home, referencing a government that sent implements of death to First Nation people rather than sending vaccines to help the people survive a flu epidemic.

In “Are You My Sister?”—a series of photographs of contemporary Indigenous American women—Niro juxtaposes unnerving silhouette images with warm photographs of women. Framing the photographs of women are hollow silhouettes of a woman’s body, a river, and a human shadow (Figs. 7.3, 7.4, and 7.5). The series photographs are arranged as triptychs, framed by images of a womanly silhouette, a river, and a shadow. Niro begins the series with a sepia-tinted photograph of river and lush trees. She brings the viewer home with this image that places us in the city of Brantford and the Grand River. In the next image, Niro presents a woman’s shadow cast across autumnal leaves, all in sepia. And then there is a series of smiling contemporary Indigenous American women, of varying ages and sartorial style. They are vivid with individuality, caught in conversation with the photographer. There is nothing strange or uncanny about these lively women. But Niro’s framing images—of shadow, silhouette, river—take the series in a different direction, into a conversation with the uncanny.

In Fig. 7.3, the initial image of a shadow appears to be the photographer’s own, as the image suggests looking down at one’s own shadow. It is somewhat frightening, conjuring a sense of someone approaching you or looking over your shoulder, their shadow thrown across yours. The final images of a woman’s skirted silhouette filled with sepia tone in Fig. 7.5 leaves also suggests burial, death. This photograph is not of a woman but rather of earth, with leaves and grass on it, in a cut-out shaped like a woman. The frame of the image’s limit is a woman’s
Fig. 7.3  Shelley Niro, from the series “Are You My Sister?” 1994. Photographic installation. Color photographs, hand-drilled mat board, 101.6 × 64 cm. Agnes Etherington Art Center, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Shelley Niro)
Fig. 7.4  Shelley Niro, from the series “Are You My Sister?” 1994. Photographic installation. Color photographs, hand-drilled mat board, 101.6 × 64 cm. Agnes Etherington Art Center, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Shelley Niro)
Fig. 7.5  Shelley Niro, from the series “Are You My Sister?” 1994. Photographic installation. Color photographs, hand-drilled mat board, 101.6 × 64 cm. Agnes Etherington Art Center, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario (Courtesy of the Artist. © 2019 Shelley Niro)
form. So that we are asked, very directly, *Are you my sister? Can you step into this frame?* The silhouette with leaves in it and a twin silhouette of spectral empty white space, also in the shape of a woman wearing a dress or skirt, present an uncanny opening in the text of the photograph series. We are brought to the earth, suddenly, by these images of a woman’s outline filled with leaves and then pressed into the empty mirror, or hollow sky, of the ghostly white twin silhouette at the end of the series. While the center of this work is grounded in the everyday and the living, its edges invoke the dead. “Are You My Sister?” gives formal body and makes a formal mark of the erased, the dispossessed. But it does not present these figures of the dead and the spectral as necessarily Indigenous American. The silhouette, the shadow, the river, signify mortality and eternity beyond ethnicity.

The work does not answer the question “Are You My Sister?” for us: it asks *us* the question. One way to approach “Are You My Sister?” is to assume that the work is for Native American women and girls since images of Indigenous American women, shown in eleven photographs, make up the bulk of the exhibit. The silhouette cut out in a woman’s form, the twelfth image, is the place to welcome all Indigenous women seeing the exhibit. In this sense, the question of the series title separates viewers. If you are not an Indigenous woman seeing the exhibit then, no, you are not the artist’s sister. If you *are* an Indigenous woman seeing the exhibit, then the openings of the photographs that show female outlines are for you: they bring you in like a mirror placed among portraits. You are part of the sisterhood. But the question of the work’s title is possibly also a feminist gathering call across race. It may be asking all women who see the exhibit if we, any of us, are capable of being “sisters” to the artist and to the women whose photographs make up the exhibit.

What would such a sisterhood mean? Art historian Penny Cousineau-Levine suggests in *Faking Death* that Niro’s cutout figure showing the earth in a woman’s form is a ghost figure, a figure of mortality.92 It’s not hard to see where Cousineau-Levine gleaned this reading: the figure on the wall looks ghostly with no human features, only a human form. The figure resembles a shadow, and the scene of earth contained in the image of the cutout woman’s figure suggests burial. Even so, in this series I do not surmise that Niro is rehearsing what Renée Bergland sees as the tendency of Indigenous Americans to present or perceive themselves as ghosts. Instead, I would say that the eerie silhouette and shadow images perform the essential work of the photographic uncanny: they dislocate
our sense of what is normal and homey. The silhouette and shadow figures are emblems of possibility and also threats.

It is fair to say, then, that Niro’s question “Are You My Sister?” isn’t meant to be comfortable to answer. If a white female viewer says yes, then this simplistic claiming of sisterhood Niro immediately complicates by visually insisting that such sisterhood entails risk and commitment. To truly be Niro’s sister is to move into the haunted terrain of the boarding school, colonization, genocide, facelessness, featurelessness, and possible erasure. The cutout figures and shadow figure would allow any of us who might wear dresses to envision ourselves in this series, provided we are willing to accept the pain and risk entailed in real sisterhood. Yet Niro’s series “Are You My Sister?” makes clear: if we are going to be sisters, we accept the terms of Indigenous history, where land is sacred but also a space of loss and, as Gerald Vizenor terms it, survivance.

Niro’s work reckons, from an Indigenous perspective, with the uncanny home that colonization enforced, and enforces, onto Indigenous peoples. The artist’s work draws on photography’s capacity to show those spaces of home that we cannot inhabit, using the camera to shape a critical distance from the discursive colonization of Euro-America. The photograph is always uncanny: it shows what is not there, even if we are still standing on the same spot at which this frame was shot. The photograph is image dislocated from time and place. But photographic images that harness this quality of the medium, its swerve in space and time, exemplify photography’s uncanniness. A photograph is a gap, a place where something is missing. For Niro, what is missing is a full acknowledgment of what has been lost in the process of colonization and a broad cultural arrival, in North America, of revivifying Indigenous presence. Consider, in closing, her photograph Hiawatha’s Belt and Other Visions (Approaching Infinity) (Fig. 7.6). Here, a sense of historical reckoning and merging of time frames carries the crepuscular image. We see a quiet river, studded with power stations and power lines, framed by traditional Iroquois beading patterns. The view is at once serene and threatening, a quiet riverbank regarding and regarded by a precipice-like higher elevation bank that carries a series of high tension towers. Industrialization has claimed the landscape, the Grand River. And yet it is still Mohawk territory, when seen by Niro’s camera. The river is also the boundary of the United States–Canada border, cutting
through Mohawk reservation land on either side of a nation-state divide, a divide imposed of course by colonization. Here in the uncanny distillation of Niro’s photograph appears the home that is not one.

NOTES


Indian population fell from perhaps 310,000 to 150,000. Some 62,600 of these deaths occurred at or near California’s coastal region missions, and, in 1946, journalist Carey McWilliams initiated a long debate over the nature of these institutions when he compared the Franciscan missionaries, who had held large numbers of California Indians there, to “Nazis operating concentration camps.” While the argument that Indigenous North Americans alive today are survivors of genocide is contentious, this contentiousness stems largely from the way that genocide studies emerged initially as Holocaust studies. The Holocaust, the government of Germany systematically murdering millions of Jewish and Romani people, became the definition of genocide in twentieth-century academia. By contrast the historical scope of the “settling” of North America makes it impossible to define any one unified governmental policy that dictated genocide of North America’s original people: the unstable and shifting definition of government, during this time, resists such resolution. The net effect of centuries of European colonization was massive and overwhelming displacement, and population depletion, of North America’s original people. For example, many of the Haudenosaunee whose ancestral home is New York state, were pushed into Canada, after General George Washington, following the US Revolutionary War, declared his aim to eradicate the Iroquois confederacy. Please also see Notes 14, 15, and 16 of this chapter.


21. Troy, *The Specter of the Indian*, xiv. Kathryn Troy makes the argument that the figure of the ghostly Indian is a sign of Indian presence rather than absence. There is some validity here: ghosts are indeed signs of some residual power held by the sacrificed. But the larger reality is that Indigenous North Americans still exist and do not wish to be represented solely by ghosts of their dead. Indigenous people are alive and very capable of representing themselves as living human beings.

22. Jeffrey Ostler, *Surviving Genocide: Native Nations and the United States from the American Revolution to Bleeding Kansas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019). What I mean by “pushed beneath the threshold of public statement” is that ideologies such as manifest destiny created an
emerging national discourse in which the killing, silencing, and displacing of Indigenous peoples was considered either benevolent or benign.


30. Rebecca Nagle, “Research Reveals Media Role in Stereotypes About Native Americans,” *Women’s Media Center*, July 18, 2018; Margaret Armen, “The Paradise Syndrome,” *Star Trek: The Original Series, Paramount Television*, October 4, 1968. The photograph also draws attention to the lack of Indigenous American representation in America’s icons of popular culture, with the original Star Trek television series, for example, presenting White, African American, and Asian characters, but no Indigenous Americans.


35. “Imagine the history of fairytale as a map, like the Carte du Tendre… drawn by Parisian romantics to chart the peaks and sloughs of the heart’s affections… there is no psychology in a fairytale.” Amanda Craig, “Once upon a Time Review—Marina Warner’s Scholarly History of the Fairytale,” *The Observer*, October 19, 2014.

36. James Baldwin, “Letter from a Region in My Mind,” *The New Yorker: Reflections*, November 17, 1962. “Allah allowed the Devil, through his scientists, to carry on infernal experiments, which resulted, finally, in the creation of the devil known as the white man, and later, even more disastrously, in the creation of the white woman. And it was decreed that these monstrous creatures should rule the earth for a certain number of years—I forget how many thousand, but, in any case, their rule now is ending, and Allah, who had never approved of the creation of the white man in the first place (who knows him, in fact, to be not a man at all but a devil), is anxious to restore the rule of peace that the rise of the white man totally destroyed.”


43. That is, the urgent discrimination against Latinx people extends a centuries-long pattern. See, Leslie Marmon Silko, Almanac of the Dead (New York: Penguin, 1991).

44. Berkofer, The White Man’s Indian, 129, 156–159.

45. My concern about this policy is hardly singular. One reference point, the “Open Letter from Concerned Scientists,” addressed to former Secretary of Homeland Security Nielsen, https://sites.google.com/view/letter-to-secretary-nielsen/home?authuser=0 (accessed May 12, 2019).


47. While Bergland has written about the ways that Euro-Americans envision Indigenous Americans as “ghosts” and uncanny, spectral people, in this chapter, I reverse the argument, pointing to all the ways that it is not Indigenous Americans who are uncanny as rather the process of colonization that creates for Indigenous Americans an uncanny homeland, a place that is their home but that has been rendered utterly strange by the forces of colonization.


49. So much so that a Red Power movement slogan was manifested into action when a group of Red Power activists, in the 1970s, traveled America following “the trail of broken treaties.” Vine DeLoria, Jr., Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties: An Indian Declaration of Independence (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).

50. Todorov, The Conquest of America, 168–185. Mercantilism, precursor to capitalism, set the stage for the desolation of the colonized other in the so-called New World. The North American continent was ideologically mapped, by European settlers and their governments, as a space from
which natural resources must be extracted. Indigenous Americans, whose systems of trade and exchange were not mercantilist and not pre-capitalist, resisted these systems but even so were mapped by them, in the cultural schematic of European invaders. Niro’s work mobilizes another way of conceptually mapping the land.


53. The question of whether Indigenous Americans were only accidentally displaced and killed by Euro-American settlers, during colonization, is still an item of debate amongst historians. I agree with theorists and historians who point to multiple incidents of Euro-American on Indigenous American slaughter, and multiple Euro-American directives to displace North America’s Indigenous people. Brendan C. Lindsay, *Murder State: California’s Indigenous American Genocide* (University of Nebraska Press, 2015).

54. The concept of the frontier, then, emerges from formations of nation-state, a specific conceptualization of territory: what lies beyond that conquered territory is thought of as “wild,” considered not yet inhabited, even if it is well known to be inhabited by human beings, but those not of European descent. But the “wilderness” beyond the frontier is not the uncanny part: what is uncanny is the conceptualization of the human beings who inhabit the frontier and the so-called wilderness as radically Other. As social space, the frontier is the boundary between the nation-state’s territorial conquest and that space, geographical and socio-political, not yet fully accessed and claimed by the nation state. From the perspective of Indigenous North Americans, there was never a conceptualized frontier as rather multiple zones of struggle and resistance.

55. Shelley Niro, *Flying Woman #4, Staying with the Old Ones*, 1994. Gelatin silver print, 36.2 × 47 cm. Light Work Collection, Syracuse, New York. Though airspace has been claimed and apportioned in the nation-state system, nation-state claim on the sky is less substantial.


63. Ryan Nagelhout, The Mohawk People (Milwaukee, WI: Gareth Stevens, 2015). Shelley Niro indicates the eerie way that Indigenous Americans are exiled within their ancestral homeland. The reservation is itself a conceptually uncanny home, set aside and apart from the United States, sovereign but also abject, to the side of the nation’s self-avowed norm.


66. Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 23–24. As Frantz Fanon makes clear, the two-step dance of colonization begins with overwhelming violence against the colonized and then covers over that history of violence with myths of White benevolence.


68. “It is indeed a different nature that speaks to the camera from the one which addresses the eye.” Walter Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography,” Screen 13, no. 1 (March 1972): 7.

69. Shelley Niro, Battlefields of My Ancestors, 2017, Ryerson Centre, Toronto.

70. Nagelhout, The Mohawk People.

71. Shelley Niro, personal communication with the author, June 2019.

72. Shelley Niro, Honey Moccasin; Niro, Rice, and Nanibush, Shelley Niro: Scotiabank Award.


75. Christina Hendricks, “Foucault’s Kantian Critique: Philosophy and the Present,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 34, no. 4 (May 2008): 357–382. Kantian ethics and how they impact readings of his aesthetics is a complicated topic. That Kant wrote racist works is a discussion I confront later in this book; whether it negates all his work or just those works in which he espouses racist ideology is an open question. For me, I see Kantian philosophy as often self contradictory. But some of its insights have been formative of my understanding of aesthetics. As Foucault argues of himself, of myself I am forced to confess that I am a Kantian who dissents from some of Kant.


79. Jones, *Seeing Differently*, 25. There is a weird and I’m sure entirely unintended bias to assuming that women and non-Europeans are fundamentally outside the rational.


85. Samuel Totten and Robert K. Hitchcock, eds., *Genocide of Indigenous Peoples* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2011); Karl Jacoby, “‘The Broad Platform of Extermination’: Nature and Violence in the Nineteenth Century North American Borderlands,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 10, no. 2 (June 2008): 249–267. As noted, historians argue that there is sufficient evidence of a general belief, among many though of course not all European settlers, that killing Indigenous Americans was a benign or beneficial act, to establish in the main a genocidal intent, even though such was not a consolidated stably stated policy of the government.

86. Janet Berlo and Ruth Phillips, *Indigenous North American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 74. The conceptual map of the land from the perspective of European settlers was shaped by the desire to use the land for farming and for European dwellings, even though Indigenous peoples already lived there, and had been inhabiting North America for at least 14,000 years.


90. Troy, *The Specter of the Indian*, 68. Kathryn Troy makes the case that whites’ creation of the idea of Indians as ghosts is not a form of Indigenous erasure, because ghosts persist, but one may see that to be ghostly is not the kind of empowered agency that living human beings need. Niro’s work is all about agency in the social space of the living.

91. Here, the substance of life, and of being human, also serves as frame, as boundary: Sky Woman is both a real woman and also the spirit of the
woman’s capacity to carry inheritance in herself, in her body, and to generate new life, evoked by Sky Woman’s pregnancy when she fell to earth. This 2011 image, however, is only one among many different evocations of Sky Woman that Niro has created. Strikingly, in her earlier “Flying Woman” series, Niro uses geometric motifs to reduplicate figures evoking Sky Woman. Lee Ann Martin, “Shelley Niro: Flying Woman,” in After the Storm (Indianapolis and Seattle: Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art with University of Washington Press, 2001), 61–67.

92. Are You My Sister? is Shelley Niro’s photo interrogation of relationship among women. See it in the exhibition, What Is the Name of the River Renew: Indigenous Art from the Collection at the Agnes. Curator Norman Vorano writes: “In this installation, the artist presents her photographic portraits of her mother, sister, a daughter, and other First Nations women artists. Her sitters’ confident yet relaxed poses exude composure and intimacy with the photographer, and celebrate the strength of women without the distancing element of humor seen in many of her other photographs. These photographs are also a challenge to stereotypical images of “Indian women,” and anonymous anthropological photographs found in museums and archives. The accompanying matt-boards, drilled with decorative arabesques based on Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) beadwork designs, suggest another dimension through which women’s identities were configured.”
Devin Allen’s photography began at home: West Baltimore, Maryland. A young Devin Allen photographed the 2015 protests erupting from the killing—a killing many called murder—of Freddie Gray, a twenty-five-year-old black man in his West Baltimore neighborhood. Allen posted his images on Instagram, where they caught the eye of art critics. A few months after the crisis, I heard a lively discussion of Allen’s work from a panel at a national conference of the College Art Association. So, within months of being posted online, Allen’s photography became the subject of academic discourse. Conceding to academic discourse, in this chapter, I preface my discussion of Allen’s photography with a consideration of how the language of uncanniness is itself bound up in the very uncanny structures—of sociality and visibility—that it describes. Ultimately my goal is to excavate the uncanny structure of Allen’s photographs of West Baltimore as a kind of haunted mirror—he shows what is there on the surface to be seen in ways that are revelatory of the depths.

**Speaking of the Uncanny**

A few paragraphs into his 1919 essay on the uncanny, Freud considers whether any equivalent of the word “unheimlich” exists outside the German language. Wending his way through various Western languages, some Latinate and some Germanic, all Indo-European, Freud decides the term is quintessentially German. The German word “unheimlich”
does depend on a particular cultural sense of home as enclosure, *heimlichkeit*. Malinowski, as I’ve noted in an earlier chapter, makes the case that some words are untranslatable as we move across the social contexts enfolded with languages. While “uncanny” arguably could be such a word—meaningful only in relation to a specific European culture and time—it seems to me that variances in terms indicating that which unsettles by its simultaneous nearness and difference rather reveal implicit priorities of various cultures. Here, then, I divagate briefly on the idea of the uncanny in non-Germanic and some non-Indo-European languages, so as to more accurately position my interpretation of the uncanniness of some of Devin Allen’s West Baltimore photographs.

The closest comparable word to “uncanny” in Yoruba, “ajeji,” translates not to “unhomelike” but rather indicates a stranger, someone alien to the community. In Greek, μυστηριώδης, connotes occult knowledge, suggesting “enclosure” but not the enclosure of domesticity. The enclosed space of sacred mystery behind the iconostasis, for example, in a Greek Orthodox cathedral is not a place one would be at home (women and girls, for example, are not allowed in that space). In Finnish, the closest translations, *käsittämätön*, suggest “the incomprehensible,” or “nonsense.” In French, the comparable word indicates “estrangement,” which does not necessarily suggest an invasive abrogation of home, but rather a distance from home, an estranging of its codes of domesticity. In Muskogean, to say something is “uncanny” would literally translate to saying it is “enormous or serious,” with “estomabe,” the word used for “very real or more than real,” also meaning “very large.” In Igbo, “omimi” translates roughly to “uncanny,” however it indicates profound depth, a sounding of the depths, rather than abrogation of safe enclosure. English is a Germanic language but the word “uncanny” pulls “canny” from the Scottish: “sly,” “deleterious,” and “having truck with the supernatural.” In this book, I have emphasized the German sense of the uncanny as a disruption of the comforting everydayness of home because this sense of the term encompasses eighteenth-century English texts that are foundational to the English usage of the word “uncanny.” The intellectual cross-fertilization between German- and English-speaking worlds of the eighteenth century brings the terms “uncanny” and “unheimlich” toward a convergence in meaning.

With notions of *unheimlich* and uncanny both emerging from European cultures also widely represented in the American white population, this element of cultural specificity makes me concerned about the
propriety of applying the concept “unheimlich” to Devin Allen’s photographs, images the photographer creates in specific protest against abuses enacted by white American culture. I note here, then, the Wolof concept of the uncanny, “siis,” indicating an action that is unsociable, especially describing a person unwilling to share with others. I offer this slight shift of frame as a necessary supplement for this chapter’s meditation on Devin Allen’s poignant and disturbing photographs meditating on racial tensions in Baltimore, Maryland. This Baltimore neighborhood is predominantly African American so the argument could be made that some trace aspects of West African cultures of origin still echo in the community, yet I am not suggesting that either Devin Allen or this community that is his home operate within a Wolof cultural frame. I bring in the Wolof sense of the uncanny (uncanny as that which violates community) as opposed to the German sense of unheimlich (an enclosed domestic space violated) to re-envision uncanniness as a violation of the communal value of sharing what we have with others.

In this chapter, I retain the argument that uncanniness is a disturbance of home but now add to this the notion of uncanniness as an element of the uncalled-for: something that is impolite, improper, invasive, and that exists outside morality of communality. This shift brings an ethical valence to the concept that is necessary for a reading of Allen’s explicitly activist work. It is not enough to see enclosure abrogated in Allen’s photographs. We must also see the ethical and political point he is making: that police and other members of Baltimore’s supervisory community have behaved in improper and uncalled-for ways in Allen’s neighborhood. Moreover, the national economic structure shaping this city at the edge of the southeastern United States is biased and unjust in improper and uncalled for ways, injustices that cause suffering for African Americans in their home place.

The title and substance of Devin Allen’s first book, A Beautiful Ghetto (2017), carries the idea of home and its pain. A “ghetto” is a segregated area set apart for the poor. In Third Reich Germany, Jewish people were forced into ghettos they could not legally leave. Theoretically, the people of Devin Allen’s neighborhood, that which he calls both beautiful and ghetto, could leave. There is no contemporary law against their doing so. However, decades and indeed centuries of racist laws, policies, and customs, have created a ghetto that is nearly impossible for most residents to escape. Redlining is responsible for the current situation facing West Baltimore. Mostly African American and impoverished,
the residents of Devin Allen’s neighborhood of origin live in the area not because of a contemporary government mandate but due to decades of systemic racial discrimination in housing and in education, policies that long excluded African Americans from other residential areas. This social structure, which goes deep, results in a constant sense of mistaken identity, as African Americans are seen as criminals just for inhabiting the social space that is their home. As Allen evokes in his poem, “Untitled Stress”:

Black boy, black boy running down the street.
I know you have a soda in your hand, but the police
might think it’s the heat, might leave you dead in the streets.¹⁸

Here, the image of a young boy drinking a soda on a hot day turns to a scene of death because of the uncanny shift wherein a soda-bottle transmogrifies to a gun, in the eerily mistaken gaze of law-enforcement, as Allen’s poem describes it.

The word “ghetto” is a term for the de facto segregation that persists in America decades after segregation became illegal under US law. The uncanniness of Allen’s photographs emerges from this crossing of home—the place where he and most of his photographic subjects live and are “at home”—and the radically estranging effects of police presence, and police violence, in their home neighborhood. Devin Allen’s photograph We Buy Homes, taken during the protests, exemplifies this revelation of uncanny conditions of home.¹⁹ The photograph shows row houses fallen into decrepit and dilapidated condition, even as their fundamental structure is inviting, architecturally ‘homelike.’ Windows are boarded up, like eyes knocked out. An oversize sign states that homes (these homes?) can be sold to a company that does not give its name only its telephone number. This Ponzi scheme—of predatory companies buying the houses of less affluent for well under cost—afflicts impoverished neighborhoods throughout America and particularly targets the elderly, effectively taking all they have. Beneath the sign, an armored tank and two fully vested guards in riot gear pace. One guard appears to be African American, another white. A few African Americans, apparently residents of the neighborhood, stroll along the sidewalk, a teenage girl wearing earbuds in a touching attempt to block out the whole scene. The uncanny here is manifold: the sign attests to the value of “home.” If you have nothing else, you can always sell it. But this value is, of course,
immediately undercut, threatened, by the sign itself which intimates the loss of home—you sell your house to them, and you have nothing. The houses themselves look desperately in need of structural renewal. The armored tank and the guards in helmets carry the specter of military occupation. These details jar uneasily against the citizens of the neighborhood, doing their best to carry on with life regardless.

In my interpretation of Allen’s photographs’ uncanny iterations, I do not suggest that the West Baltimore people photographed are eerie, strange, or representative of “other.” To the contrary, Allen’s images reveal how uncalled-for is the violent policing brought to bear on this group of people in their home neighborhood, Old West Baltimore. In this chapter, I trace in Allen’s photographic imagery revelations of the uncanniness of home, finding in the photographs protest against the uncalled-for character of police violence and the invasive surveillance of West Baltimore. This chapter is more than anything else a search for a ghost, sounding out how aggressive police actions against one young man resulted in a death that resonated, through Devin Allen’s photographs, to become a national cultural haunting.

_Ghosts of West Baltimore_

In Baltimore, in April of 2015, protests erupted in response to police brutality that caused the death of a young man named Freddie Gray. Mr. Gray was killed while in police custody. The protesters insisted on justice for him, insisted that his killers be punished not excused. Gray was arrested in the Gilmor Homes neighborhood of Baltimore, an impoverished area of public housing with high crime rates. As I write in late 2018, this housing project is scheduled for demolition due to its dilapidated condition. Growing up in substandard Baltimore housing, Freddie Gray suffered from lead poisoning as a child, and this affected his personality into adulthood. He was, for this reason, given a small amount of government money as compensation. In 2015, he was arrested for carrying a knife that the police deemed to be illegal, although later this was determined to be perfectly legal to carry. Class, race, and home location factored heavily into Gray’s arrest. One could imagine that, say, a white, male professor at Johns Hopkins University, not far from West Baltimore, could carry an identical knife in his briefcase and not be arrested—nor even stopped and asked to open his briefcase. Most likely, police would be nowhere near this hypothetical white
professor because while police are heavily represented in the Gilmor Homes area they are scarcely present—unless explicitly called for—in the hallways of Johns Hopkins University. These areas though only three miles away from each other are, as the saying goes, a world apart. When arrested, Mr. Gray objected vociferously, and witnesses report that he was beaten and “folded” by the police officers so that his spine snapped. He fell into a coma in the police wagon and was taken to hospital, where he died of his injuries.

In some uncanny way, after his death, Freddie Gray became a ghost. His death affected not only those who knew him but many who had never met him. People who had not known Gray while alive protested for his rights after death. Following his funeral, the city of Baltimore was declared to be in a state of emergency due to these protests and clashes with police. So, after his death, Gray became a ghost in the sense that his fate crystallized with overwhelming meaning the social structure of the life experience of most people in his neighborhood. Protestors wore shirts saying Justice for Freddie Gray. His death became a community trauma and, then, a national flashpoint. Devin Allen, then an unknown young photographer from the area whose main platform for showing his work was Instagram, began to photograph the protests, and suddenly found his photographs and himself famous. His images became another form of protest, a perhaps more lasting way of signifying Mr. Gray’s posthumous, ghostly transformation into an iconic figure for justice.

Janet Carsten argues, in Ghosts of Memory, that the social figure of the ghost especially emerges within social groups that have experienced “pasts disrupted by migration, personal trauma, political upheaval.” The African diaspora consists of communities that have been disrupted by forced migration and horrific trauma: the slave trade, lynching, and Jim Crow laws. Carsten notes that “collective memory” attaches to specific geographies and generates social experiences of hauntings. She concurs with Veena Das’s theory of “critical events” that break apart the sense of surface cohesion of a group and instigate hauntings. Notably, Carsten argues that we must understand kinship and cultural memory to be inextricably connected. And what entwines kinship and cultural memory is place: here is where we are we; here is where what makes us we happened. Freddie Gray became a ghost because his death was a critical event in the home-place of West Baltimore and Gilmor Homes. His death signified and entwined kinship, memory, and place, and its
violence resulted in haunting. Allen’s photographs are the visual record of this haunting.

The history of West Baltimore is “a political history.” By this I mean that the neighborhood was created by decades of racial discrimination in housing and education. At the turn of the twentieth century, most African Americans lived in the American southeast, in rural communities. But by the mid-twentieth century, the population had dramatically shifted, becoming largely urban. The Great Migration was fueled in part by African American desire to flee the oppression of the South, the region that had fought to retain slavery and that brutally punished African Americans under Jim Crow laws. Even so, Northern industrialists made use of African American labor to undercut the rise in power of white unions. Outside the South, most white laborers were intensely racist and would not unionize with African Americans. Likewise, most Northern urban whites objected fiercely, and at times violently, to African Americans living in their neighborhoods. African Americans fleeing the rural South were brutally attacked by white laborers in the cities to which they had fled. Moreover, national government policies regarding home loans became the engine of white home ownership, because they followed racist policies, making it extremely difficult for African Americans to receive loans toward buying a home. Hence, working and middle-class white people were generally able to own homes through mortgaged loans, while blacks generally were not.

The African American (and to some degree Latinx) ghetto emerged from decades’ long government policies that created uncanny home spaces for those living in ghettos. These were “uncanny” in the sense of being a home that was not under the control of those purported to be at home there. Ghetto residents did not, for the most part, own the places they lived in and so, given the capitalist frame of the nation, therefore they also lacked full control of their home community’s sociality. To the contrary, the heavy police presence in such neighborhoods made these places where impoverished people of color lived—but did not own their homes—feel haunted. Haunted by injustice, by severed ties to the past, and also haunted by a past that was itself violent and unjust, West Baltimore emerges in Allen’s photography as an uncanny place, at once home and an impossible home. As Robert Koulish makes clear, “Post-panoptic regimes deploy technologies of power which appear to the public as racially neutral...but which have particularly deleterious effects on communities of color.”
As Carsten suggests, in the collective memory of societal trauma a fragmented and fractured story of identity emerges. For African Americans living in West Baltimore, the history of home contains starkly uncalled-for actions by white Americans: blacks were attacked when, during the Great Migration in the early twentieth century, they tried to live in white working-class neighborhoods; they were actively and legally discriminated against by the US government when seeking housing loans, and they were in danger as well. Police killings of black men in West Baltimore have been endemic since the Great Migration. Even now, despite changes in housing laws and policing laws, African Americans are drastically under-represented in homeownership and over-represented in prison populations. The scene that Freddie Gray’s killing haunts is already a space of “fragmented collective memory.” This group was on the verge of seeing ghosts from its collective traumata of working without civil rights in the share-cropper economy of the post-Civil War South, of coming to the North in the Great Migration and being violently attacked by white northerners, of being denied reasonable opportunity to own their own domiciles, of being the subject of police invasion and brutality. In eerie reflection of this reality of social haunting, the slang “getting ghost” (leaving, disappearing) reflects this haunting. Less than full citizenship carries with it the condition of cultural haunting, that is, of being haunted by an unrelieved burden of trauma, both past and ongoing.

When Devin Allen takes out his camera, though, he is not photographing ghosts but people, his friends, the people of his neighborhood. It is from this perspective of intimacy that the uncanny force of the photographs emerges. Allen’s photographs are uncanny precisely because the photographer’s devotion to the people of his neighborhood brings them alive in the context of the unhomely and unjust system they inhabit. Allen is, clearly, a street photographer, but he is not a documentary photographer in the tradition of, say, Susan Meiselas or Sabastio Salgado. He does not leave home and photograph the suffering other. Rather, Allen’s photographs are intimate, close not just in their spatial proximity but also in their visual tenderness.

Consider the cover image of *A Beautiful Ghetto* (Fig. 8.1): a lone young man running with a battalion of police just yards behind him. It is not clear if the police are chasing this young man, in particular, but the mass of their uniforms, darkly unvarying behind the running figure, conveys a sense of horror. The image awakens feelings of nightmare:
of oneself as an isolated runner with a large group of people in power converging toward one. The young man who is running appears to be in his early twenties, an age by which some 50 percent of black men living in the United States have already experienced being arrested. As Dorothy E. Roberts contends, “African Americans experience a uniquely astronomical rate of imprisonment, and the social effects of imprisonment are concentrated in their communities.”
The young runner in Allen’s photograph is slender. He runs gracefully, but he’s not wearing sports clothes; he’s not out for exercise or sports training. Allen recalls that shortly after he took this photograph, he himself was engulfed by the police, who had come to the neighborhood to quell protest in the face of Freddie Gray’s killing. The neighborhood itself, the place of home for Mr. Allen as well as for Mr. Gray and very probably for the runner, looks nothing like home in this photograph. The scene looks like America, but it looks like an invasion by a force—an invasion, as it happens, by the police. The skewed symmetry of the image—many against one—suggests the viewer might step inside the image, which seems to come toward us. It appears as if the running man were not only fleeing the police but also leading them to us.

My contention is that Allen photographs the social fact that the ghost of Freddie Gray haunts West Baltimore: this haunting takes on embodied form because the photographed subjects—men and women caught up in the political act of protest—appear as people grappling with a ghost. They are the haunted. This running man in Fig. 8.1 is, we know from the protest’s context, caught up in the explosive tension between protesters and police. But, stripped of that context, the image also shows something starker. The image shows a haunted man running. The angle of the photograph emphasizes the vanishing point, making it appear that all space and time converge with the group of police from whom the youth is fleeing. This is the uncanny slant of the photograph: the horror that this haunting is taking place at home. The young man is not running from Freddie Gray. He is running in fear of becoming, like Gray, a victim of police invasion.

Another image from the protests, showing a man on his knees, is accentuated by the American flag that is part of the décor of his hoodie. He is an American citizen. He shows this by wearing the flag. But in a dramatic replay of Freddie Gray’s death, this protestor is pleading on his knees as if he had no right to voice his political opinion, no right to speak. Instead, his body speaks for him. He reenacts Mr. Gray’s pleas before death. Here the presence of the ghost is clear: the man reenacts the trauma of Mr. Gray, replays the way the young man begged the police to leave him alone, not to beat him, not to arrest him. In this reenactment, the ghost is both visible and invisible. We see a begging, pleading, figure on his knees, but it is not Freddie Gray. The drama of the ghost is the intimate aftermath of his haunting. The photograph also shows that no matter how intensely felt the protest, no matter how
sincerely the protesters “play” Freddie Gray with their bodily gestures, it is always too late to actually save him, the dead man. Here, Allen’s camera centers precisely on the beseeching and protesting figure. A public bridge in the background appears, by the photograph’s trompe l’oeil, to be supported by the kneeling man’s raised hands. In that the man is not at that moment being attacked by police, we can see that he is acting through some drama that gains its meaning from outside the immediate circumstance. The haunted quality of the image emerges from this sense of a past immanent and intimate but also invisible. Or rather visible only through the enactment of the haunting.

Devin Allen posted the images taken during West Baltimore protests on Instagram, aspiring to merge art and documentary photography with the legendary Gordon Parks as his idol. The online response to Allen’s photographs became a second wave of haunting. The photographs posted by this unknown photographer went viral, and thousands of strangers began “watching” the protests through Devin Allen’s photographs. The haunting gathered magnitude through his photographs, until the whole country was pulled into it.

Sociologist Jeffrey Alexander argues that cultural trauma follows an arc from the instigating traumatic event through the public telling of the story. For Alexander, cultural trauma is defined only by the story. He suggests that there is no way in the social sciences to define what constitutes a cultural trauma—that is, a trauma shared by a cohesive group—from the outset, but instead it can only be known afterward by the kinds of stories that are told and the way these stories circulate. There are some problems with his thesis: specifically, it seems to neglect the material reality of traumatic events. Alexander, however, does not claim that trauma does not exist; rather he says that it is defined by patterns of aftermath. And the persuasiveness of this thesis is born out by what happened with Devin Allen’s photographs of the ghost of Freddie Gray. The statistics of African American men killed by police make clear that Gray’s death was not singular. His death was not the sole cause of the haunted condition it instigated, this haunting that became visible during the protests. Rather, in response to his death, the simmering knowledge of injustice crystallized. Perhaps there is no way to quantify exactly which aspect of Gray’s tragic fate set off the haunting that Allen’s photography captures. I suggest that Allen’s photographs carried the haunting out of Baltimore to the rest of the country—though, obviously, there are key differences between seeing the ghost of Freddie Gray on
Allen’s Instagram feed and actually being part of the neighborhood and part of the protests. I will attend to these differences as my discussion progresses.

Alexander contends that the definition of “cultural trauma” is this creation of story, possibly also through image, and that it is the story’s circulation that signifies the trauma as cultural belief. The haunted condition of the stories that a group that survives cultural trauma tells itself, and tells others of itself, then, is a diagnostic measure of trauma. Sociologist Ron Eyerman argues that African Americans are, by definition, a group that suffers collective trauma. What he means by this is that the history of enslavement, Jim Crowism, the racist bias of laws before the civil rights movement, and continued instances of micro-aggressions even in an era when laws have been rectified, have led to a condition in which everyone who is African American, to one degree or another, is affected by the group’s collective trauma. The people living in Freddie Gray’s neighborhood are, however, a specific subset of African Americans. Following Eyerman’s argument, we might say that Devin Allen’s uncanny images of the protests emerged not only from the haunting that he saw but also from the haunting he had experienced. Allen is part of the group of people from Freddie Gray’s home neighborhood, a space of uncanny home where comfort has been broken through by police surveillance and, at times, violence.

Philosopher Stanley Cavell suggests that uncanniness is inherent in just being human: that all our daily lives are imbricated with a sense of our knowledge that our repeated actions are strange. His argument stems from existentialist work that forefronts the quotidian quality of our relationship to fate and mortality. But race theorist Cornel West places a wedge in such existentialist theories of despair, arguing that young African American men experience a level and degree of despair that rewrits the suburban white version of nihilism. A third image from Devin Allen’s photographs of the Baltimore protests carries with irony and sharpness this alternate sense of despair. A protestor, who looks a little older than a youth—a survivor of youth, one might say—holds a sign that reads #ILoveBaltimore. The man’s face looks mournful, stern, and exhausted; he has deep bags under his eyes. He wears an old-fashioned cap as if commemorating not only the violent death of Freddie Gray but also that of Thomas Broadus, some seventy years earlier. The subject’s jaw is thrust out, his mouth clamped shut against weeping. The meaning of his sign #ILoveBaltimore is double. This man lives in Baltimore, so for
him to say that he loves Baltimore is a truth. One does love one’s home of origin. At the same time, he is participating in protests that condemn the governance of the city that allows black youth to be killed without consequences for the killer. The sign, then, has moral weight as well as irony. The sign is saying, *I live here, and I claim this place as mine and demand we be treated better.* But, of course, the sign and Allen’s picture of it also raise the question of irony: the protestor is holding up to scrutiny the cliché of tourism as he marches among banners of enraged protests against Baltimore’s police killing of Freddie Gray.

Allen photographs the man front and center, in a direct shot, and conveys with his photograph a similar message. The photographer also loves Baltimore. It is his home and the place of his work. But he protests the conditions that led to Gray’s death and that prevent Gray’s attackers from being brought to justice. This photograph is what art historian W. T. J. Mitchell defines as a “meta-image”—that is, it is hyper-aware of its own status as image and works by circulating that awareness. It is, literally and metaphorically, a sign within a sign. Its uncanniness inheres in its doubleness. The man and the image of him love, mourn, and protest the city where this haunting occurs. The ghost of Freddie Gray emerges through these images of ambivalence and pain.

**The Young Men’s Dance**

Sociologist Kai Erikson suggests, in *Everything in Its Path*, that collective trauma bends a community in ways that repeat across the board despite differences in the kinds of trauma suffered. Erikson notes that communities that have suffered collective trauma—his archetype here being Buffalo Creek in West Virginia after a devastating flood—become uprooted not only in material ways but also culturally in that their sense of ethics, of needing to adhere to widely agreed on social codes, is eroded. In his more recent book, *A New Kind of Trouble*, Erikson distinguishes the impact of natural disaster from that of man-made disaster. He writes that when purposeful, man-made decisions bring suffering to the group, the trauma has a greater impact than when the traumatic event is a natural occurrence. While responding to natural disaster can bring a community together, the opposite happens with the demeaning and humiliating experience of suffering trauma because of other human beings’ violent social dominance. Such an experience tears a community apart. A problem with Erikson’s argument is that it can be difficult to
distinguish a natural from a man-made disaster, given that many natural disasters have a greater impact on victims because of human decisions that leave the poor especially vulnerable. Even so, Erikson’s distinction is useful in understanding Baltimore: the knowledge that other human beings have caused your suffering alters the nature of a group’s collective trauma. In the haunting of Freddie Gray, only human agency was involved in inflicting trauma on the Baltimore neighborhood in which the young man had lived.

The history of police brutality in this area, as well as others in the United States, is deep and broad. In 1942 a black soldier, Thomas Broadus, who was visiting Baltimore on leave from Fort Meade, was pummeled and then shot by a white policeman while attempting to find a cab. The death spawned protests, but the policeman responsible for this brutal killing was never brought to trial. Some seventy years later, in the immediate aftermath of Freddie Gray’s death, Baltimore magazine reflected that “Infant mortality rates in parts of the 175-block neighborhood collectively known as ‘Old West Baltimore’ are more than 3.5 times the national average. Life expectancy is more than 10 years below the statewide average, almost 20 years shorter than in Roland Park, which sits just a few miles away—ranking below famine-afflicted North Korea. Children in Sandtown-Winchester, where poverty rates surpass 30 percent, face the direst economic prospects of the top 100 US metro areas, and poor teens in the city deal with living conditions worse than their counterparts in Nigeria.”66 Developing from Eyerman’s argument regarding the collective cultural trauma of African Americans, I would say that Freddie Gray’s killing—and I think one could say “murder”—was not a sudden, unexpected trauma but rather a manifestation of ongoing trauma that took on intensely symbolic form.

For literary theorist Cathy Caruth, “trauma” is defined as something unexpected, something so out of the ordinary as to be impossible to assimilate into one’s sense of the normal, quotidian world.67 For Caruth, a trauma is that which shatters one’s former certainty in the cohesion and fairness of the social world one inhabits.68 But the trauma of Freddie Gray’s killing in its role as a collective trauma does not follow that arc. Instead, his death comes after decades of systematic social and physical violence against the African Americans in their own neighborhood. Far from being unexpected, the violent death of this lead-poisoned young man is a continuation, a “more of the same,” stemming from discriminatory housing policies put in place by national and local governments that
long prevented African Americans from owning their homes.\textsuperscript{69} These housing policies, in turn, led to reduced educational opportunities, creating a ghetto wherein police brutality could, and did, develop. The uncanny is a paradigm for grasping the particular trauma of the home/not-home that is West Baltimore. In this realm the trauma of police brutality is not a surprise; it is part of the space: an uncanny, haunting trauma. And in the home/not-home that is West Baltimore, there is, as well, an architectural uncanny that shapes this social space.\textsuperscript{70}

Knowing that Gray suffered lead poisoning as a child due to substandard housing, we see that Gray’s childhood home, the house in which he grew up, qualifies as Gothic in its capacity to attack the body of the growing child. The very space that is meant to shelter this young child, the home in which he spends his infancy and early childhood, for Freddie Gray was a source of poisoning.\textsuperscript{71} The walls that held and were to shelter the infant and young child shed a neurotoxin, lead, that significantly impaired his intellectual development. The derelict condition of the housing is a direct result of a governmental housing policy that effectively mandates that African American families will be the ones to occupy the worst available city housing. Gray’s \textit{childhood home}—this phrase evoking cozy safety—is itself uncanny: the home is poisonous, and the child damaged irreparably therein.\textsuperscript{72} In the 1960s, the Black Panther Party instituted health care initiatives including lead poisoning testing in inner-city environments, but as the Panthers retreated from the scene, lead poisoning of inner-city African-American children resurged. Gray, born in 1989, might well have benefitted from the continued work of the Black Panther Party, but the party broke apart under external pressure from the FBI and internal fractures among the leadership and was no longer trying to prevent lead poisoning among African-American children during Gray’s childhood.

The uncanny space of damage in the place of home, then, alters the very definition of trauma in West Baltimore. It is not unexpected but, rather, is expected. Gray’s death is traumatic not because, as Caruth theorizes, it is a surprise or indigestible shock but rather because, as Eyerman theorizes, it further tears the fabric of a beleaguered society. In other words, from the cultural and collective trauma that is the haunting of Freddie Gray emerges an understanding of trauma as that which is normalized, predictable, and, thereby, even more harmful and damaging.

This shape of trauma is also the shape of the uncanny: it is what we know, familiarly, and yet it is dangerous. In Devin Allen’s photograph of
young men vandalizing a car, we see the uncanny energy of home that is harmful.\(^7^3\) During the protest following the death and funeral of Freddie Gray, some young men who lived in his neighborhood began to vandalize the material places of the neighborhood itself.\(^7^4\) I suggest that these acts of desolation emerge from the uncannily unhomelike space of the place that is their home. The neighborhood is theirs because they live in it, but it is not theirs in the sense that they do not own it, nor is it theirs even in the sense that they have legal control over its realm. The inhabitants of Old West Baltimore are subjected to the nightmare position of never being able to claim, with publicly recognized distinction of pride, the very social space that is their home. Here we see the young men attack the physical substance of the neighborhood where not only Freddie Gray had been killed by police but also where they themselves have been manhandled by police, and possibly also arrested.\(^7^5\)

In Devin Allen’s photograph of young men destroying a car by stamping on it, the men’s feet are shown as if at the angle of a dance. Their knees are gently unlocked, they are wearing work boots, their legs appear both slender and strong; they move with the suppleness of youth. The car’s windshield is shattered and yet the onlookers do not seem alarmed. Another young person raises an arm toward the car. It is almost like a celebration. But what could be celebratory about destroying someone’s car? The car does not appear to be a police cruiser. Parked as it is in the neighborhood, it might belong to someone who actually lives there. Clearly, though, it is the neighborhood that is the source of anguish. The very place that Devin Allen—in love and fidelity for his roots and home there—goes out to photograph is what these young men take joy in destroying. And yet Allen’s photograph also captures their joy. It is not a scary image but is somehow elating. The young men’s dance is part of the enthusiasm of youth. To be sure, for the owner of the car, this act of destruction is impossible to interpret as anything other than violence. Violence against material property not only takes away something that may be needful and even loved by a human being but also intimates the capacity to enact violence against the body of the owner of said property. The dance that Allen captures, then, is uncanny precisely because it presents this razor’s edge. On the one hand, it is a frightening photograph, one that shows an act of violence. On the other hand, it is a mournful, grievous photograph, revealing the deeply uncanny social structure of what theorist Rob Nixon evocatively terms “slow violence,” that is,
violence that is enacted against the vulnerable in ways that are not immediately apparent but that leave deep wounds.76

Philosopher Cornel West joked once that African American youth feel a nihilism that isn’t about wearing black and dancing on Nietzsche’s grave.77 But here, in Allen’s photograph, the young men are dancing their nihilism: uncannily the pleasure of home, in Allen’s photograph of the car, is the pleasure of tearing apart the home that has hurt you. Allen photographs the shot so that we cannot see the dancers’ faces or any identifying features. On the one hand, this is surely a form of deference, not allowing the photograph to identify the men since the act in which they are engaged is illegal. Even so, the framing of the shot is precisely what makes it uncanny. We cannot see the dancing men’s faces, only their legs and feet, so the pleasure of the dance is intimately conveyed to us without intrusion of personality. It feels as we are dancing. Are the men’s facial expressions serious? Angry? Aloof? We do not know, and because of that gap in our knowledge the image has a kind of sangfroid. This dance is what has to happen, the image shows, the broken world has to be broken apart further to make it whole.

The photograph steps from photojournalism into something bordering on the surreal. Allen is not judging nor even documenting the young men dancing on the car—vandalizing the car as clearly it is being smashed. Instead, he is somehow with them. I don’t mean that he valorizes violence, rather the photograph moves into the space of the young men’s dance, setting the viewer off-balance, at a slant. Rather than immediately recoiling from a scene of violence, we are brought in at angle. What is being attacked here is not a human being but an inanimate object, an object that signifies domination. For the photograph, the thought that the men’s destruction of the car might cause some human being pain does not exist. Instead, it positions itself in sympathy with the men whose feet stomp on the car, by taking the odd angle of the men’s emotions. Behind these men, you can see onlookers cheering, arms raised.78 There is a sense of celebration, of, if not dancing on Nietzsche’s grave, then dancing out the mourning and grief of Freddie Gray’s difficult life and harrowing death. The young men’s dance, as captured by Allen’s camera, is a dance of mourning that affirms life—and affirms the power of one’s own living body in the face of material oppression. It is a photograph that exposes the materiality of haunting, the body’s vulnerability and also its power, pitched against a material world that enforces oppression.
The Ghost Appears

When Allen photographs a graffiti memorial created after Gray’s death, and burial, and after the protests, he shows copwatch activist Kevin Moore opening his hand to touch the mural (Fig. 8.2). Moore’s open hand forms a tactile bridge, bringing the viewer into the image. The hand touching the graffiti that commemorates Gray acts as an index, an open and unfolding index: the man in the photograph is not merely pointing to Gray’s tragic fate but opening himself to it, opening his hand along the skin of the commemorative dates, name, and design. There is a long-standing argument about photography and indexicality.79 Barthes suggests that the photograph collapses signifier and referent, enfolding into one uncanny image-sign the distance between signifier and signified.80 For Barthes, this collapse is mystical, initiating a skin-on-skin contact between the skin of light that imprints the photographic image (whether digital or analog, photographs begin with photons) and the embodied observer, contained in his skin. This merging of erotic and filial intimacy, Barthes suggests, is an umbilicus of light, drawing the viewer into the possibility, though never the certainty, of painful pleasure through the intensity of the photographic image.81 Shawn Michelle Smith observes, however, that race is a blind spot for Barthes. I acknowledge the power of her argument even as I suggest that, still, Barthes’s work can be drawn upon to understand and theorize African American photography.82 The blind spot of race that haunts Barthes’s writing on photography I consider to be a wound in the semiotician’s theoretical apparatus, a wound through which we can access the fear of photography that drives Barthes to write about photographic images as a source of pain—bruising and puncturing him. This pain of the unacknowledged wound of race must be included in deploying Barthes’s discussion of signified, transmogrified to signifier as an interpretive field for Allen’s work.

In Fig. 8.2, Allen’s photograph shows copwatch activist Kevin Moore as a kind of doubting Thomas: his hand touches the cultural, symbolic, commemorative mark as the wound of Gray’s death. He touches the sign to come closer to Gray, to pay homage to Gray, to express his grief for and his unity with Gray. The photograph itself does not tell us the man’s specific relationship to Freddie Gray nor his specific relationship to this commemorative graffiti. Is he its creator? An admirer? But the image does convey that the man cares, achingly and hauntingly, about Freddie Gray and that the man finds the emblem of this grief—the sign of Gray’s
death on the wall in his neighborhood—emotionally moving. We do not need to know the facts of Moore’s activism to see, in this haunting image, the ghost of Freddie Gray.

The sign literally draws Moore toward it, as Allen’s photograph captures him reaching as if to trace the sign with his fingers. It is a deeply affective photograph. Just as Barthes posits that the photographic image has a force lacking in other modes of image-making because of the umbilicus of light that conjoins the viewer and the conditions of the image’s visible presence, so also in Allen’s photograph the man’s hand engages a tactile link between the viewer of the photograph and Freddie Gray’s ghost. We are drawn to the feeling of that touch, pulled by the mysterious reasons for the touch, moved by its haunted quality.
The man’s hand that opens on brick and paint—the makeshift memorial painted on the side of a building in Baltimore—is placed precisely in the terrain of home. The memorial image evokes angels, halo and wings, as well as clouds that begin to drip and droop, bringing a disturbing sense of ooze to the design, as if the horrible physicality of the assault that caused Freddie Gray’s death cannot be entirely kept from the mind of the artist creating this commemorative image. Allen’s photograph has a surreal staging, with the wall suggesting one set of contained spatial parameters and the street beyond it suddenly pulling away this sense of containment. The vanishing point moves into blur, and the trees lining the street become spectral, over-saturated with light. The young man sitting alone in the midday light is a poignant figure, mourning alone at a small, vernacular monument to Freddie Gray. The photograph situates the monument within this home space of West Baltimore but draws the homeplace as haunted, empty. No one is there but the mourner. The image cuts off the sign at the top so that we have a feeling of foreclosure, of a closed down horizon.

It is a picture of Freddie Gray’s ghost and as such reveals an absent presence, showing us that we will never see the ghost. Instead, here we are shown through Allen’s photographs Gray’s haunting effect on his neighborhood. We are shown the haunted place of a community that has survived the trauma of losing not only Freddie Gray but also all the young, African-American men detained and arrested and, thereby, removed from the community. As Eric Lotke and Jason Ziedenberg note, these unjustifiable incarcerations have had the effect of “depopulating” entire neighborhoods. The ghost-ridden social space of West Baltimore after Freddie Gray’s death hosts more than just one specter. It is not only the vanishing of Freddie, who was transformed from a vivid young man into an emblem on a wall, but also the disappearances of thousands of other young black men that shape the home place of the West Baltimore neighborhood once shared by Freddie Gray and those who survive to mourn him.

**Uncanny Apertures**

Devin Allen’s work is digital photography, circulated on social media with its hyperkinetic speed of transmission and equally quick boredom fade. At the time of Freddie Gray’s killing, Allen was a very young man taking digital photographs and posting them on Instagram, the social
media platform. The shift from analog photographs that are physical, material, mementos to photographs that are translations of photons into electric signals coded as data also puts into motion a shift in the way that photographs haunt us and are haunted by us.\textsuperscript{84} Many of us haunt photography voraciously in our consumption of online image data. We go back to social media again and again, several times a day, checking social media feeds, asking the images for something they can never give us: peace from the need to continue seeking images. When the young Allen began posting photographs of the Baltimore protests onto his Instagram account, he set in motion a wave of haunting, pressing beyond the immediately affected community. Allen’s images translated West Baltimore’s haunted condition for the consumption of the nation and the world.

This shift removed the photographs from their home-of-origin, West Baltimore, and placed them in the placeless field of social media. Alexander and Eyerman suggest that secondary witnesses to a trauma experience a different, and lesser, kind of cultural trauma: even as their definition of cultural trauma depends on storytelling, the creation of the social narrative of collective harm, they argue that secondary witnesses—those who learn of the trauma only through the story told and have no direct link to it—are differently, and less intensely, bound up in the cultural trauma.\textsuperscript{85} Dominick LaCapra suggests that the distinction between absence and loss is critical in understanding trauma.\textsuperscript{86} We can think through his paradigm to begin to move into the difference—and distance—between the haunted condition of West Baltimore after the death of Freddie Gray and the haunting reception of Devin Allen’s photographs. It is a difference that oscillates between absence and loss. If the national and international viewers of Allen’s photographs who are not people of his neighborhood see the absence of Freddie Gray as a given, an always already known fate; those of the homeplace feel it as a substantial loss, something that might have been avoided. The haunting images that Devin Allen creates are fueled by this more immediate trauma: the pain of believing that Gray’s violent death might have been avoided because one either knew Freddie Gray when he was alive or knew someone like him and, therefore, knew this was a human being whose life was valued and valuable. By contrast, viewers of the images outside the immediate neighborhood only know of Freddie Gray as a dead man, an invisible fulcrum of injustice.
The Angel

Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on Philosophy of History”—written as the mid-twentieth-century political crisis in Europe deepened—is an essay that contends with violence and trauma through aesthetics. In it he describes Paul Klee’s painting *Angelus Novus* as an “angel of history.” Benjamin argues that what we perceive as a chain of events, history, is in reality one traumatic event—a catastrophe. The essay’s guiding metaphor, the angel of history, is so deeply immersed in the visual that it conjures the photographic flash, the instant in which an image comes to represent the world. Benjamin views photography as a visual technique in which trauma is constituent. His use of the term, “angel of history”—a visionary creature that is powerless to change what it sees—describes with eloquence the way that photography composes and reflects the fractured existence of modern life but, in general, cannot change it.

The trauma of photography is the abruptness and absoluteness with which it records its image of what happens. The abruptness of this manner of image-making reflects the abruptness of the modern world, the way things happen suddenly without our being prepared for them—like car accidents, for instance, or, in Benjamin’s life, the rise of Nazism. In Devin Allen’s life, the violence is that of police brutality and surveillance. But the photograph is also, following Benjamin’s idea of the optical unconscious, an image that can hold information about past, present, and future in one form and that can redeem the fractured and broken present. The photograph, then, is at once a medium that imposes a traumatic gaze—fractured, sudden, rapid—and that also is capable of recording layered traumas. Photography as the medium of trauma is Benjamin’s insight into the photograph’s relationship with aura. Yet photographs can also be endowed with uncanny clarity. Photography stands—implied Benjamin’s elliptical “Theses on Philosophy”—as the only way that the trauma of history can be seen: photographically, in a flash. Benjamin claims that everything that “has been smashed” can only be made whole again if we turn and see the layers of history not sequentially but all at once. This suggests a photographic mode of seeing. One thing that is remarkable about photographs is that they remove from context every person, object, and event that they represent. This, however, is also what gives a photograph its capacity for haunting force. The camera can be turned to see what is smashed—though this act alone
cannot rescue what it sees. Photographs, torn from their context, reflect the social structure of the modern, violent, and random.

The uncanny visual space of Allen’s photographs of the protests moves between these positions, modulating a way to make loss visible through absence. Earlier in this book I bring up the concept of the uncanny valley, which stems from robotics theory. This is the argument that the feeling of the uncanny occurs when an android appears to us to be almost human but then is recognizable as not. The uncanny work of Devin Allen’s photographs of the Baltimore protests of 2015 moves us into a different kind of uncanny valley. We always almost see Freddie Gray as a living presence in his neighborhood of origin but we never actually see him. The photographs dramatize his life and death, bringing into international visibility the eerie domestic space of home invaded by surveillance and the violent actions of those who perform surveillance of one’s home. In each image we almost see Mr. Gray; we see the shadow-effect of his life and death, but we never see him. We are continuously approaching the ghost and then landing in the uncanny valley of his unapproachability. I’ve made the case that the social terrain of Devin Allen’s beautiful ghetto is haunted by confluent histories of cultural and historical trauma—not least of which is the very government policy of redlining that created this ghetto—yet certainly the uncanny turn of his images is their ability to vivify a ghost who remains ever so slightly beyond our sight. The mystery of Freddie Gray’s life, death, and the force of his haunting of Old West Baltimore, remain intact in Devin Allen’s searing photographs. In that discretion inheres their uncanny staying power, outlasting the immediate circumstances of their creation and defining visually a haunting force of North American racism.

NOTES

4. Masahiro Mori, “The Uncanny Valley,” trans. Carl F. MacDorman and Norri Kageki, *IEEE Robotics and Automation Magazine* 19, no. 2 (June 2012): 98–100. The term “uncanny valley” is a translation into English from the Japanese 不気味の谷現象 after the 1977 essay by Masahiro Mori. The idea of the uncanny valley, as I’ve discussed elsewhere in this book, is that the more nearly something—for example an automaton or android—removes the human the more eerie it is. Consider, for example, lifelike dolls marketed at relatively high prices to collectors. There is an inescapable creepiness to the dolls precisely because unlike cheap mass-market dolls these look very nearly human.


18. Devin Allen, “Meet Devin Allen,” *Endpain* (2017). Here the word “heat” means a gun. Even as Allen has publicly acknowledged his earlier participation distributing drugs (before his career in photography began), Allen’s public statements also indicate that he does not see these behaviors in other young black men as the core problem that needs to be solved. Rather, he locates the originating source of violence as the surveillance state in the ghetto.


24. Rector, Dance, and Broadwater, “Riots Erupt.”


29. Carsten, *Ghosts of Memory*, 19. I draw the phrase from Carsten; however she is not specifically writing about West Baltimore in this description.


no. 1 (January 2001): 95–133. For African Americans living in West Baltimore, the history of home contains starkly uncalled-for actions by white Americans: blacks were violently beaten when, during the Great Migration, they tried to live in white working-class neighborhoods; they were actively and legally discriminated against by the US government when seeking housing loans; police killings of black men in West Baltimore have been endemic since the Great Migration, that is, since the early twentieth century.


43. In this regard, one may consider Orlando Patterson’s theory of social death, or the *non né*. Yet, the specifically uncanny revelations of Devin Allen’s photographs of West Baltimore depend on this continual tension of oscillation and transformation: the subjects are born in the mutual, interstitial gaze of Allen’s camera. But then they are revealed as haunted by social ghosts: for the uncanny emerges at points of tension and contestation. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).


48. Here, as throughout this chapter, I mean ghost in the sense of a social figure. I do not reference the occult. Roberts, “The Social and Moral Cost of Mass Incarceration,” 1277. Roberts, discussing Ernest Drucker’s work, refers to this haunted condition as “years of lost life,” that is, years lost to incarcerated young men as well as the years lived in the absence of these men experienced by their communities.


54. Here, a comparison could be helpful. Consider traumata that are kept secret, such as childhood paternal incest. Even as such events are traumatic they rarely form a story of public identity because they do not become public story. Hence, the barometer of cultural trauma is this: becoming story.


57. Cavell, In Quest of the Ordinary, 34–35.


59. Devin Allen, The Uprising, April, 2015

60. Ron Cassie, “Tale of Two Cities.”


63. Erikson, Everything in Its Path, 111.
75. Roberts, “The Social and Moral Cost of Mass Incarceration in African American Communities,” 1271–1305. I do not write here about the specific men in the photograph, whose identities are not divulged by Allen if indeed they are known to him, but rather indicate the heavy statistical likelihood of young men in this cultural milieu having had negative encounters with police.
Conclusion: Revisiting the Eighteenth-Century Visual Uncanny

Thomas Jefferson, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, describes with an air of calm, careful observation his act of vandalizing an Indigenous American barrow on the bank of the Rivanna River: “I first dug superficially...then came to a collection of human bones, at different depths, from six inches to three feet below the surface.” Arguably the most intellectually influential US president, Jefferson’s vision of a nation wherein church and state are separated by law was based on his deification of rational thought. He believed that rational thought, when applied to religious belief, could create a “natural” religion in which a state would be governed by moral law arrived at through rationality. Jefferson’s eerie act of digging up Indigenous American remains was undertaken as part of what he saw as scientific enquiry. The self-described scene of him unearthing human burials is uncanny, combining what Jefferson considered science with what is also an abrogation of Indigenous Virginians’ home, in the specific sense that burial grounds and the remains of ancestors define us as human beings (burying our dead is at the heart of human culture). In this final chapter, I explore how Jefferson’s endeavor tallied with the visual rationalism of the time.

Conceptual and cultural shifts in the long eighteenth century that set the stage for the creation of photography also make the uncanny the mode and mood of modernity. The uncanny sublime of Burke and Kant connected with natural science theories of the day as processes of seeing. In the eighteenth century, the redefining of natural curiosities and wonders—once supposed the bones of giants and unicorns—as objects...
for scientific enquiry exemplified an epistemological shift in which the visible surface came to stand as the real. Teasing apart the sublime and the uncanny, in this concluding chapter I seek an understanding of the way that terms of visibility, essence, and science in the long eighteenth century informed the uncanny art of the photograph, which, as I’ve noted, was developed by Joseph Nicephore Niepce and William Henry Fox Talbot working independently in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

Now, looking more closely at how the Western concept of the “uncanny” emerged from Enlightenment tropes of vision, here in my conclusion I map some contours of this emersion, exploring the eighteenth-century scientific obsession with differentiating the apparently normal from the abnormal. I reach back before photography’s early nineteenth-century origins to where eighteenth-century theories of embodiment, aesthetics, and their intertwined meanings laid the foundation for the inception of photography. In keeping with uncanny temporality, my conclusion for this book is a return to before the beginning.

Cuvier and Jefferson, Linnaeus and Buffon enter this consideration: their interlocking and overlapping concerns with species and race shaped a scientific uncanny. How did Enlightenment theories of vision and aesthetics lay the groundwork for the conditions of uncanniness that enfold the process of colonization in the eighteenth century? Visibility as veracity—the belief in the surface, skin, delineation—is the mark of the real that emerged in eighteenth century thought and prepared the way for photography as a technological invention. As Jefferson implies, “[To speak] of immaterial existences is to talk of nothings:” the material surface becomes the real. But this shift in the meaning of the visible co-occurred with an oppressive obsession with the non-European—whether plant, animal, or human—as curiosities in need of categorization. I wish to chart the way that in this era lineament, the organism as image, became the locus of interpretation, leading to the eerie ideology of racism and also, perversely, to the shift in conceptualizing visuality that underlies photography.

As Sharon Block observes, into the seventeenth century the notion of race was conceptualized as humoral, but by the end of the eighteenth century it was denoted by skin. In other words, it wasn’t until the eighteenth century that skin color became definitive of the ideological construct that is called race. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson discusses the “mixtures of red and white” as the
ideal complexion, as opposed to that of African Americans. Jefferson, here, is referring to the supposedly ideal complexion for a European. Indigenous Americans of the time were described by white colonizers according to delineations of color: “copper,” “metaline luster,” and “cinnamon.” Author and trader James Adair described Indigenous American skin as a “fine cowl.” A fixation with the surface—the skin of the other—made the appearance of Indigenous Americans and African Americans a source of obsessive categorization for eighteenth-century Euro-Americans. There was a shift from a medieval Western European belief in the humoral theory of selfhood to an Enlightenment belief in the surface, the person as image. In this shift, image became meaning. The dual inception of the notions of race and species, as these taxonomies reflect ideology, also indicated a new stress on the meaning of the visible. Race, as Barbara Fields points out, is not an idea but an ideology. In the eighteenth century, the ideology of racism seamlessly merged with what was considered science. Cuvier argued that the farther from Europe one goes, the more degenerate are all species of plant, animal, and human.

The intermarriage of European American, Indigenous American, and African American led to panic in the early republic: How to categorize those whose appearance merged two or more of the five so-called races delineated by Blumenbach? Such frantic categorizations must be understood in connection with strictly hierarchical systems of organizing human beings. Cuvier is known as a father of natural science, but he must also be seen as bringing violence to the practice of science in his study of Saartje Baartman. Cuvier’s sexualized obsession with a deceased woman he called the Hottentot Venus was a nadir in a continuum, in natural science, of interlinking ideologies of race and seeing.

In the colonial system of the eighteenth century, European domination was supported by an urgent emphasis on the appearance of plants, animals, and persons. In arguing that one aspect of photography’s uncanniness is its descent from Enlightenment theories of category-by-visibility, I emphasize how eerily violent is this cognitive ancestry. But it is the mark of the uncanny to suggest dread rather than overt terror. Rather than directly confronting its own violence, the eighteenth-century uncanny was informed by an unacknowledged awareness of the violence of the visible in racial hierarchy.

Literary critic Terry Castle argues in the Female Thermometer that uncanniness haunted eighteenth-century European culture as the
rise of rational thought triggered the oppositional return of the irrational. But this dichotomy is itself a symptom, rather than an analysis, of Enlightenment ideology. At its root, “rational” means “a mode of thought that aims to strip away illusion.” The rational uses method to arrive at knowledge. Locke asserted this conceptual frame against a scholastic philosophy that believes all items in the material world have essential and nominal properties. For Aristotle, this distinction was the descriptive versus the real. In Locke, however, appearance became reality; as ideas emerged from “sensation” and “reflection,” the descriptive became the real. Sensation, that which is evidential, was read as the prime basis for the new rational. In eighteenth-century science, appearance—the material world as the theater of scientific enquiry—became reality. The surface now (in the eighteenth century) is not just a sign of the essence; it is the essence. Locke changed Aristotle’s scheme, arguing that in the descriptive technology of calculus the nominal merges with the essence. Insofar as multivariable calculus “reads” the surface of a three-dimensional object it, like the photography that followed, was an Enlightenment technology for seeing. So, if—in the scientific gaze—the nominal and the essence were seen to merge, did the secret, the interior, take refuge in the uncanny realm of the subconscious? No. On the contrary, the uncanniness of Enlightenment thought inhered in its obsession with the curious nature of what is seen, its uneasy investigation of the strange. This is not the subconscious irrational but the concerted work of the scientific gaze.

According to Castle, that which is submerged—which is non-evidential—becomes the irrational or, in Freudian nomenclature, the subconscious. But, just like race, the subconscious is not an idea but an ideology—an ideology that arose from Freud’s erroneous belief that Enlightenment thinking represented adult conceptualization whereas, for Freud, non-European, non-Enlightenment thought tallied with what he saw as the non-European’s supposedly childlike mind. The idea of such teleological progress stood with his false premise that human beings have a rational adult mind combined with a childlike irrational subconscious, a belief expressive of the European view of the Enlightenment, continuing through Freud’s era. In his 1919 essay, Freud’s deposition of the uncanny recapitulated the dogmatic belief of dominant European culture as adult, rational.

As I use the term in this book, the uncanny is, however, neither the irrational nor the subconscious. On the contrary, it is the eerie, seeping,
awareness of the flaw at the heart of that social dominance of the European over the non-European that, from Enlightenment onward, deemed itself rational. It is, as Jervis and Collins suggest, the anxious underpinning of the modern. As such, it is a dreadful but inchoate inkling of the problematic of that social dominance that deems itself rational by asserting a clinical gaze across the field of the material world. The uncanny is neither nominal nor essential, confession nor secret; it is the space where these shimmer into each other, creating a modern sense of dissonance or, as Bruno Latour would name it, hybridity. The uncanny is the eerie revelation of that dissonance that becomes, in modernity, the ideological surface-as-real. The uncanny is appearance-as-essence, and modernity is its home without interiority.

This uncanny is not a revulsion against the rational, but rather it arises within aesthetics and science as the visible is cast as the new location of the real. And this homeplace is estranged by the very process of becoming the surface to investigate. Cuvier, Buffon, and Lamarck developed a science of species taxonomy based on appearance. The very term “species” emerged from the Latin for “appearance” or “form”—that is, an external limning of what is visible moved toward a meaning of the organism. As Charles Withers argues, the geography of this dissonance, or hybridity, is key to this era. Withers describes the fusion of eighteenth-century species taxonomy with that of geography and physiognomy, all focused on appearance. The prevalent scientific thought was that the place in which a person, animal, or plant took form determined the appearance of said person, animal, or plant. Samuel Stanhope Smith’s 1787 *An Essay on the Variety of the Complexion and Figure of the Human Species* argued that the children of African slaves in the Americas were developing lighter skin due to the influence of the environment—rather than because of European men fathering children on African women, whom they had raped. Jean Baptiste Lamarck argued that environment shapes the physical substance of organisms. His theories fed into Darwin’s theory of evolution and, notably, Lamarck’s work emphasized the idea that the outside, the exterior, shapes the interior.

With this was laid some of the thought that led to the rise of photography: A belief that seeing the exterior with utter accuracy could lead, by detailed reflection, to knowledge. William Henry Fox Talbot was a gentleman scientist, profoundly influenced by scientific theories of his day. He and Joseph Niecephore Niepce each developed the technology of photography in the wake of eighteenth-century theories regarding
the meaning of appearance—appearance as emergent from and revelatory of the meaning of place.\textsuperscript{34} Both of them claimed, in separate writings in eerily similar phrasing, that photography is nature replicating her own image. Photography emerged from this elevation of the visible as the mark of place, instating an uncanny duality wherein the difference between image and place is ever to be resolved. We can never be there; instead we look.

What is uncanny about the shift toward a belief in the veracity of external appearance is this reconceptualization of place-as-image, person-as-image, intermixed with the contemporaneous racism of colonization. The science of the day was obsessed with the supposed strangeness of the non-European, and this ideology merged into an obsession with visuality, denoting the non-European as freakish. This approach to natural science emerged from a longer standing interest, beginning in Europe in the seventeenth century, with what were then called curiosities. One of the intellectual precursors to the development of photography was the epistemological break from a medieval belief in what was seen as miraculous substantial proof of God’s wonder, evidenced by the bones of giant fauna that were, from time to time unearthed in farming, to an Enlightenment interest in the visual contours of what were now known to be fossils. Locke applied geological ideas to his notion of the ideal human society, one strictly stratified into ranks.\textsuperscript{35} Implicit in these ideologies of order was the belief that all things, including human beings, are known through visible means, that the visible is ontology. Locke’s “rationalizing of religion” fomented a cognitive space in which belief was thought to result only from rational observation. The eye was seen as supreme.\textsuperscript{36}

The idea that one needs to see accurately in order to know the real, the essence, made the act of seeing the rational anchorage of knowledge and laid the groundwork for the urge to create the photograph. The eighteenth century was the time wherein a European belief in the veracity of the visible arose. This conceptual shift was necessary for photography to be seen as desirable. As John C. O’Neal contends, the Enlightenment elevated vision above all other senses and gave experience the authority of knowledge.\textsuperscript{37}

This rational gaze is the Enlightenment uncanny. At the same time that this gaze became paramount, significantly, there was an unprecedented rise in the idea of, and interest in, the strange, the other, the curious. Thus, rather than mere unbiased observation, this rational gaze reflected a vested interest in dominating that which appeared to be
“other.” The shift to the visual as epistemological veracity emerged as an interest in the weird, and the weird quickly came to be cast as that which is non-European and non-male. This connection is made with a nefarious slant in Edmund Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Burke aligned the sublime with a sadistic fear of the other, with pleasure in watching the other be harmed. Burke argued that we feel sublime pleasure in watching pain from which we ourselves are immune and that he saw non-European human beings as freakish. In his sublime, then, violence and fear entwine with the gaze. While the sublime is not a cognate for the uncanny, the categories overlap as aesthetic modes that engage affect and that establish a space between seeing and knowing. For Burke, seeing people of African descent was an experience of terror and freakish interest. Although Burke described this interest in decidedly negative and racist terms, he paradoxically implies an allure, an attraction, to that which he saw as the uncanny racial other. Importantly, this attraction is visual. Burke’s theory of the sublime, as well as Kant’s, instated the power of the visual, the force of the visible surface.

For these influential theorists, the racial other was viewed as strange, uncanny, even sublime because of skin color, that most superficial aspect of appearance. With Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, the most consequential text of Enlightenment aesthetic theory, and his earlier paper “On the Different Races of Human Beings,” a convergence of a theory of race as the visible real coalesced. Robert Bernasconi suggests that “Kant’s understanding of race is... at stake in the discussion of teleology in the *Critique of Judgment.*” In the 1777 work, Kant brought together geography, botany, and anthropology when he argued that environment shapes race. Kant emphasized skin color as the key racial determinant. He also stated that African people “have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling,” and he recommended whipping Africans to silence them. In other words, on the sole basis of skin color, Kant established a system that stripped African people of response, and this vicious paucity of his thought came to influence what was regarded as scientific fact.

**PLACE, ESTRANGEMENT, GAZE**

In his work *Placing the Enlightenment*, Charles Withers writes, “In the Enlightenment the earth was the subject of scientific study as never before.” Whereas pre-Enlightenment studies of the visible were
attempts to bring the material world into line with biblical accounts, by
the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries this habit began to
change. By the late seventeenth century, Newton and Descartes began to
apply observation and mathematics—specifically, calculus—to study grav-
ity’s effect on material objects and to establish that the planet was shaped
like a bulging ellipse. Calculus, which emerged in the Enlightenment,
uses numerical equations to map surfaces. It deals with limits, using for-
mulæ to map the surface of lines and, with multivariable calculus, the
surface of three-dimensional objects. Because calculus maps the rate
of change along a physical surface, it acts as a “seeing” of the surface.
Strikingly, it also accepts incomplete seeing as adequate knowledge.
Because calculus only approaches a surface—using closer and closer
equations but never wholly reaching its goal—it demonstrates that what
we see is always incomplete. Calculus, then, ushered in a way of seeing
the material world with the clarity of predictability and it also introduced
the idea that partial knowledge can be accepted as accurate. Both modes
of vision have obvious resonance with photography, which sees the mate-
rial surface accurately and partially.

This belief in mathematics as vision coalesced with efforts by Pierre-
Louis-Moreau de Maupertuis to measure the earth and classify its
inhabitants. Eberhardt Zimmerman’s 1777 work Specimen Zoologiea
Geographicae Quadrupedum used mathematical logic to make the case
that plants and animals, rather than being created by the direct hand
of God, were fashioned by geography—another form of surface. As
Linnaeus argued, “The earth is nothing but a museum of the all-wise
Creator’s masterpieces.” The surface, the visible, the seen and observ-
able world had become reality. The science of botany handles surface
detail differently from that of mathematics and yet it shares the steadfast
belief that surface detail carries the real. Thus, the surface was no longer
seen as the cover, the book of God’s creation, no longer a typology of
the Bible, but rather the museum.

If the world is a museum, we attend to it by looking. And, also, we
recognize it as strange—strange enough to be a museum. If the world
is a museum, it is not entirely our home. As a concept, the-world-as-
museum view presents our environment as a kind of estrangement of
home: we inhabit a space that we share with organisms that are not, any
of them, shaped by a paternal God but are instead the results of surface
interaction. The environment is the surface, and yet its effect is to cre-
ate the depths, the interior, the unseen. In this sense, in Enlightenment
thought the unseen emerged from the seen and was secondary to it. This shift created, just as Schelling’s philosophy entwining epistemology and ontology described, the sense that the surface enfolds onto eerie interiority. The surface was measured, calculated and—ultimately—photographed in precise mimicry in order to get at some hidden, secret, unhomelike reality that the surface was seen to contain, as meaning.

In all its careful looking, the Enlightenment coupled the visible with the weird. The uncanny entered eighteenth-century thought not, as Castle makes the case, through the resistance of irrationality, superstition, witchcraft, ghosts, in the face of civilized progress but, on the contrary, through presumably rational thought, through scientific and aesthetic theory. Aesthetic theory was an odd element of Enlightenment thought: just as the turn toward the age of reason disavowed the epistemological weight of belief, inherited truth, and the haptic, it emphasized and raised up the epistemological force of the visual, the visible, and the visually quantitative. The aesthetic category of the sublime exemplified the strange evulsion of Enlightenment elevation of the visible. If medieval Western Europe understood the material world as the book of God’s wisdom, a typological structure of the seen, Enlightenment saw the material world as its own revelation, and that revelation was seen to unfold from the surface as appearance. The surface rose to become the essence in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*: the sublime state of consciousness in which radical new knowledge co-occurred with pain. For Kant, the sublime was an internal event and yet, importantly, it was an internal shift in knowledge that brought the external in. Even as Kant specified the sublime as a state of interior consciousness, it was seen as this because it brought the surface in.

The sublime, as I’ve said, is not the uncanny. But it overlaps the terrain of the uncanny in Burke and Kant’s theorizations. As Andrew Smith suggests, in *Freud’s Uncanny Sublime*, the uncanny intervened in memory whereas the sublime appeared as the wholly new. When Ernst Jentsch, writing at the turn of the twentieth century, confronted the uncanny, it was with a coded anxiety that the uncanny is an aesthetic category that oozes into affect; he argued that only people with less intelligence perceive the uncanny—women, children, the mad. And yet, Jentsch indicated precisely the fear of modern simulacra—figures and images that appear exactly lifelike but aren’t—as the unspeakable intersection where the modern (science) encroached on the comfortable human. In other words, although Jentsch portrayed the uncanny as an
illness of the mind, his essay belied this view, giving clear directions for seeing the uncanny as the condition of the modern. The modern capacity to create simulacra is at the heart of Jentsch’s anxious essay. This capacity—and the anxiety attending it—began in the eighteenth century with a shift in habits of looking. At that time the visible world was full of strange curiosities, which manifested as emblems of memory: bones that had been thought to belong to giants were now seen as coming from ancient species and, in the racial views of the Enlightenment, the non-European “other” now emerged as the supposed childhood of the European.

This last distinction was critical: Cuvier’s theory of degeneration hypothesized the perfectibility of man and other living organisms as situated along a fragmentary, linear temporality. Human beings were assumed to be developing toward what Cuvier saw as the perfection of the northern European. Yet this development began not to follow linear temporal logic but instead became fragmented with the appearance of different races, which were presumed to occupy different points along the path to perfection. Paradoxically, degeneration implied aftermath—something that had been intact was becoming less so. My point here is that eighteenth-century thought began to link seeing the non-European with a feeling of dread. This is not a repressed “old” feeling of ancient superstition but one that emerged with the new visuality of the Enlightenment and the violent acts of colonization. When Jentsch wrote his essay in 1906 describing the feeling of the uncanny as a pathological state, it was precisely this affect that he was unable to shed.

I suggest that this turn is endemic to the uncanny: as the aesthetic quality of modernity, the uncanny persists in counterpoise between denial and revelation. The more appearance is aligned with a believed real, the more all that appears real causes anxiety.

**Cuvier to Niepce**

In Cuvier’s theories we see an unsettling application of this belief in the veracity of the visual. As I’ve indicated, Cuvier’s interests led him to the mutilation of the genitalia of a dead young woman. Cuvier’s obsession exemplified the metamorphosis of natural philosophy’s interest in what it cast as the curious and the strange into nasty scientific racism. As Tony Bennett argues, with the rise of the museum—the place to display the strange and exotic, including human relics and at times even human
beings is an “object lesson in power—came the power to command and arrange things and bodies for public display.” Ellen Fernandez Sacco makes the case that the impulse to order visibility in the context of the museum reflected “a broader need to establish economic social and political structures” along the lines of a “masculinist and white supremacist national culture.” Aesthetics and natural philosophy entwined: The idea of looking as learning was not separated from looking as a source of pleasure, and looking as a sublime experience of pleasure in pain.

Increasingly in the eighteenth century, pleasure meant a supervisory gaze across the body of the non-European and non-male. Castle suggests that the uncanny blurred the distinction between the real and the phantasmatic. While, needless to say, people, animals, and plants not of Europe are real and not phantasmatic, positing the non-European as a blend of the phantasmatic was an intellectual theme of the era, from colonial writers in America limning Indigenous Americans as ghosts to Cuvier’s theory of degeneracy of all organisms outside Europe, Freud defined the uncanny as a “feeling of dread and creeping horror” and specified that this feeling arises when triggered by persons, things, places that revive what the neurologist refers to as “infantile” complexes. Freud, writing in the early twentieth century, reflected a long-held belief that whatever distorts the familiar is disturbing and dreadful in the specific sense of triggering the so-called “primitive” part of the mind. In other words, the notion of the uncanny is bound up with the ideological belief in a phantasmagorical quality of the non-European other and specifically emerges—in Freud’s formulation—as a reflection of the erroneous belief that Europeans are a more advanced form of human being. As Johannes Fabian makes the case in Time and the Other, the illusion that European time is preeminent emerged from Enlightenment thought, as it picked up on and developed classical Greek thought regarding place, memory, and time.

Enlightenment revisions of epistemology emerged in the context of colonial encounters. James Merrell dramatizes this sense that one could read the person through his skin and features in “The Cast of His Countenance: Reading Andrew Montour,” tracing eighteenth-century misinterpretations of the Métis scout, guide, and translator Andrew Montour. The belief was that Montour’s European heritage could be read in his countenance and that, therefore, he should be trusted to help Europeans. But Montour was something of a double agent, often acting against European interests. The apparent uncanniness, for Europeans,
of Andrew Montour derived from this double reflex, to trust his European-toned skin only to learn that he was, in the words of Europeans at the time, a “savage.” Eliding the violence of the era, Castle problematically falls in line with Freud’s argument—one extending from the Enlightenment urge to order objects, animals, and persons in place, time, and space—that there is a primitive and a civilized version of being human and the uncanny is the return of the primitive in the space of the Enlightened civilization. I disagree with this strand of Castle’s argument. Instead, what gives rise to the uncanny—which she rightly argues emerged from the Enlightenment—is the creation of the ideological construct of the primitive: the imposition of temporal, racialized, and spatial hierarchy ordering persons, animals, plants, places.

This structure holds a double edge, making the visible world always the only reality (home) and also strange (unhomelike). For Schelling, the uncanny was the forced emergence of that which should not have been brought to light. His argument is potent, comprehending in the uncanny the emergence of the visible as a source of pain. The idea of that which should not have been revealed articulates Schelling’s larger theory of seeing and knowing. For Schelling, knowledge emerges as vision from an unseen place of origin, becoming visible; this emergence is continual and melancholy because it conflates seeing with mortal time. In other words, we see and know because visuality, as the real, emerges continuously from a substrate that is itself the condition of being bound in the temporal flow. For Schelling, the uncanny is experienced when this melancholic source of knowledge is revealed. He meant, literally, that which should not have been brought to light is seen when we experience the uncanny, a distortion of temporality. But what was the cultural apparatus feeding Schelling’s sense that time itself is uncanny? I suggest this stemmed from European thought just preceding and contemporaneous with his work.

A temporal uncanny emerged when Enlightenment taxonomies inculcated the ideology that non-Europeans are the primitive version of Europeans with whom their lives are, in fact, precisely contemporaneous. But this uncanniness, I want to stress, did not arise because the non-European world is primitive or is the childhood version of the European. That subtends Freud’s and Castle’s false notion of the uncanny. Rather the uncanny is a revelation of modernity’s distortions of time and visibility. The uncanny is a reflection of the melancholic condition of the visible in modernity.
For Castle, the uncanny arose in the West because of the eighteenth century’s experience of “disenchantment.” The uncanny returned, in her view, as a kind of repressed need for the supernatural. In this, she draws from Horkheimer and Adorno’s influential claim, in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that Enlightenment is the disenchantment of the world. My thought is that the uncanny arose as a result of the co-occurrence of two emerging ideologies: belief that the visible surface of the world holds meaning and also belief that European civilization is temporally superior and advanced over all others. It was not disenchantment but, rather, a shift in the mode of conceptualizing both seeing and social power. An obsession with small variations in appearance led to the racist anatomical studies conducted by Cuvier in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, conjoining the radical shift to the visible with egregious racism. As Castle suggests, “The urge to obtain a new and objective knowledge of the world makes it, at another level, all the more bewildering.” The uncanny emerges from the dynamics of creating the scientific strange: an eerie world supervised by the purportedly rational, male, European gaze. The repression that shapes the uncanny, I suggest, is not one’s infantile fantasy nor a “primitive” past of superstition, but rather a disavowal of the colonized world’s pain in being so violently acted upon as strange.

This uncanny carries with it the revelation of real social violence. The chapters preceding this conclusion work through various historical moments of social violence. There are differences, of course, but at their foundation is an uncanny similarity of representation of the violated. Photography, which emerged from the Enlightenment urge to take hold of the visible, is deployed in the images discussed in this book as a tool to reveal the uncanny structures underlying modernity. Enlightenment thought, like Leibniz’s study of the geology of his patron’s land, emphasized the visible surface, and the desire to take photographs flowed from this same scientific gaze. Geoffrey Batchen aligns photography with Romantic thought in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, saying that photography emerged from and participated in the cultural meanings of memory, self, and desire. Batchen compellingly links the desire, in the early nineteenth century, to create photography with Coleridge’s revision of the terms of memory and image. Yet it seems clear that the technical inception of photography depended on specific experiments that resulted in a permanent image imprinted by light. The urge to take hold of vision in this way was a gesture of
Enlightenment, even as Romanticism stemmed from the Jena Romantics who overlapped with Kant and his circle. So, photography emerged from the Enlightenment through several vectors. For Fabian, the “memory palace” (the rhetorical tool by which one remembers one’s points by fastening them conceptually to images which are then placed in an imagined house) was the first cause of the emphasis on the surface as the real that later constituted Enlightenment thought. This connection of the belief in the visual surface as the container of the truth had a clear allegiance to photography’s inception. Photography is only the capture of the surface (an X-ray shows the interior as surface). Photography is figurally, metaphorically, and literally the skin of light recorded, the imprint of the material world.

The microscope’s invention in 1590 was a preparatory step to the photograph but only the cultural shifts of the long eighteenth century conceived the need to see the everyday world photographically. When Nipce and Talbot began their experiments with photography, they worked in a scientific and cultural world that believed in the value of seeing the visible real. The idea of using photography for science was preeminent; more importantly the new ideology of science had created the idea of the value of photography before photography itself arrived. Enlightenment practice of caring about, devoting time and lavishing attention to the surface, the anatomy—whether of plants, animals or people—led to the desire for an exact copy, a replica. Photography’s gift at precisely showing anatomy perfectly matched the veneration of such vision.

Talbot signified a link, metaphorically, between his early photographs (called Calotypes, or beautiful pictures) and the supernatural. His first images he called fairy-pictures because he had not yet devised the chemistry to fix the image. Initially, he would see a perfectly executed photograph on silver-treated paper but the image would then darken, becoming illegible within minutes. Once Talbot had devised a way to set the image—through hyposulfite, a technique suggested by British scientist John Herschel—he called his new technology of photography a way of “fixing a shadow.” This phrase deserves attention. Photographs are the opposite of shadows in terms of the action of light that imprints a photographic image. A shadow occurs when the path of light is blocked by a solid object. Light then bends around the obstacle, and the space of the curve within the bend is visible as shadow. A photograph, on the other hand, is the imprint of reflected and refracted light,
which bounces off material substances and is captured on a silver-treated matrix. In terms of light’s behavior, then, a photograph is the opposite of a shadow, and Talbot knew this, as he was at the vanguard of experiments with light, co-conducting experiments with the physicist Michael Faraday. For Talbot, “fixing a shadow” referred to specters, shadows as the haunted realm of the dead.

In other words, for photography’s inventor the process took on the eeriness of doubling the living and the dead. A photograph shows the living vivid world as if in prediction of its death. Roland Barthes makes this argument in *Camera Lucida* in the twentieth century, but more than a hundred years earlier Talbot was already aware of photography’s link with the dead. For Talbot, the eeriness of photography emerges from and is merged with its accuracy. The reason photography more than any of the other mimetic arts—painting, printmaking, sculpture—“fixes the shadow” is that photography alone records the precise lineaments of the physical world in a specific time frame. The photograph captures physical surfaces in a narrow band of time—a few minutes, a few seconds, a split second. Time is the frame of mortality, finitude. Talbot instinctively cast photography as an exemplification of time’s passage. Photography as the art of haunting began, then, with Talbot’s understanding of his new technique. He saw it as the exemplar of tracing the surface. In this sense, photography relates to fossils: a photographic image is the physical evidence of something that once was vivid and mobile. Photography also, then, emerges from valuing fossils as records of the real. The curiosity of the gaze, the gaze upon curiosities, is what gave rise to the desire to create this lasting image of the act of gazing: the photograph.

**Who’s at Home in America?**

The Enlightenment gaze uncannily came up with more and more intensive modes to observe surfaces—mapping, measuring, ordering, calculating, and at last photographing—and all of this led to a sense of estrangement from place as all materiality became recast as a “museum” of observable phenomena. For Hume and Linnaeus, this posited a geography of literal estrangement, that is, in their belief the farther you get from Europe the weirder the surface. Rather than recognizing the strangeness as simply being new to the European, they saw it as absolute in itself. While Hume did not entirely credence that climate shaped human character or sociality, for Montesquieu, another analyst of the
day, geography—as surface—was mappable destiny. Montesquieu argued that in the North we “meet with people who have few vices, many virtues” whereas in the South we are “entirely removed from the verge of morality.”

John Arbuthnot in his 1733 *An Essay Concerning the Effects of Air on Human Bodies* made the even more surface-obsessed argument that the air itself shapes our bodies.

Linnaeus laid the groundwork for the concept of race—the exterior that determines the interior—and he and Buffon established the criteria of race ideology by interpreting human bodies as effects of environment. Buffon wrote of the “degeneracy” of Indigenous Americans. Hume chimed in that “all other species of men …are naturally inferior to the whites”. The reality that Indigenous North Americans look somewhat different from Indigenous Europeans has no intrinsic meaning, but these Enlightenment thinkers gave it social meaning because the mode of their thought was to attribute depth of meaning to surface form.

Moreover, temporality shaped an ideology that moved the surface into historical depth. For it was in Enlightenment thought that the notion of “human progress” came to the fore. The belief of the perfectibility of man shaped a temporal field of depth against which to perch the structure of the surface as the real. Vico, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, argued that differences in human society emerged not randomly or without hierarchy but, on the contrary, expressed development toward the European ideal. Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* rebutted Buffon’s theory of the degeneracy of Indigenous Americans. Jefferson’s goal, however, was not to repudiate the ordering of human beings that we now call racism but to prove that the environment of the southeastern United States is salutary and does not cause degeneracy. He wanted to make it clear that white farmers could thrive and flourish in America.

The force of the Enlightenment, then, was the scientific/medical gaze itself; it was this gaze that made the world not one’s home but a museum with one’s fellow human beings, if non-European, cast as figures set out for display. In arguing that photography is the most uncanny medium, I make the case that photography estranges home because it extends from this Enlightenment habit of disciplinary seeing. This relationship of photography to the estranging of home, a definitive factor of modernity, extends from the trope of Enlightenment thought that turned the world into a museum. This does not, however, mean that photography always carries with it the violence of the scientific/medical gaze. Rather
the photographs studied in this book respond to this very aspect of photography, facing it directly, confronting it, and subverting it.

**A Night in the Museum**

The uncanniness of the eighteenth century, then, was not a resurgence of ancient Western European and Celtic superstitions but rather, as John Zilcosky argues in a different context, “uncanny encounters” with flora, fauna, geography, and human beings scrutinized for their non-Western surface attributes.\(^8^9\) What arose from the logic of pure perception became the barbarity of genocide: purging the North American continent of its indigenous people. The uncanny as a feeling of “dread” and “terror,” then, cannot be read as a reemergence in Enlightenment of ancient European superstition but instead directly maps the convergence of seeing the non-European as strange, contained within the belief that surface appearance creates an ontologically valid hierarchy.

Photography carried its uncanny aesthetic by emerging from the belief in the veracity of the surface. Before photography, images were readily circulated by printmaking techniques and intaglio printing processes (aquatint and lithography). However, to view aquatint and lithography as conceptual precursors to photography is to miss that photography limns the surface of the visible world while intaglio is a printmaking technology only.\(^9^0\) If photography’s ease of reproduction owes much to aquatint and lithography as precursors, still intaglio printing processes do not share photography’s physics of imprinting the material world to create image—that is, receiving the imprint of the contours of the material world and turning those contours into an image where before they were an object. With the camera, the world manifests as a museum and, extending specifically from eighteenth century thought, the eye’s gaze onto the material world is elevated to a curatorial gaze.

Let us return to Thomas Jefferson, who exemplified the uncanny duality of eighteenth-century attention to the visible, combined with an eerie disregard for common humanity in his digging up of the barrow on the Rivanna, the emblematic incident with which I begin this chapter.\(^9^1\) Jefferson’s emphasis on discerning the surface as the mark of history extended from his veneration of Locke.\(^9^2\) Anthony Wallace’s exploration of this painful paradox illuminates more than just the character of Thomas Jefferson: it makes of Jefferson an exemplary case of the Enlightenment uncanny. Jefferson was fascinated by Indigenous
Americans and wanted to uncover their ancient origins. He believed, erroneously, that Welshmen came to the Americas hundreds of years ago and disseminated whiteness among Indigenous Americans. Jefferson’s theory of assimilation laid the groundwork for the termination policy that became law in the twentieth century, based on the notion that Indigenous Americans could become like white people if they gave up their identity as indigenous. This thinking was based on the erroneous assertion that mixed white and indigenous people looked white after only one generation. In other words: it was based on the surface view. Jefferson also calculated how many generations were needed to “whiten” African Americans who intermarried with whites. He also suggested that women of African descent copulate with orangutans. As bizarre as this offensive suggestion is on its face, it is even more inscrutable in that Jefferson was paramour to Sally Hemmings, a woman of part African American lineage who was enslaved to him.

When Jefferson unearthed the bones of Indigenous Americans along the Rivanna River, he demonstrated a most eerie connection between himself, the Enlightenment focus on the surface, and eighteenth-century uncanniness. Barrows, burial mounds, of Indigenous Americans were plentiful along the Rivanna in the eighteenth century and also were in use by Indigenous peoples at that time. They were sacred spaces for Indigenous Virginians. Jefferson saw this; he himself described tribal members visiting the site after he had disinterred it. This American scientist—a founder of the University of Virginia who would go on a few years later to become the third US president—dug up and studied recently buried human remains because he believed, in keeping with eighteenth-century intellectual thought, that he was engaged not in desecrating a barrow sacred to Indigenous peoples but in a legitimate scientific pursuit of knowledge of the visible. The scientific uncanny of Enlightenment thought, then, is paradoxical: the gentleman scientist and grave robber.

I suggest that these bones were like photographs. Why would bones, so examined, be more the conceptual precursors to photography than aquatints? Intaglio printing methods were not, of course, considered scientifically valid revelations of the surface of the material world. Rather, they were mimetic ways of conveying images. A photograph is also a mimetic way of transferring image data. But even before it could be easily copied through the negative technology developed by Talbot,
a photograph was seen as a transcription of the surface of the visible, material world. It was (and is) the bones of light.

For Jefferson, then, to study indigenous burial sites exhibits contiguity of belief in the veracity of the seen, visible, object and that belief seamlessly merged with a belief in the absolute “otherness” of Indigenous America. For Southeastern Indigenous Americans’ burial mounds were a subject of particular fascination to Jefferson. He did not credence reports from the territory of the Creek (Muscogee and Hitachi) that indigenous peoples had built ancient monuments of a sacred character. Rather than accept that Indigenous Americans had created monuments more impressive than, say, those of indigenous Celts, Jefferson argued that travelers exaggerated small barrows. Hence, the consubstantiation of his earnest desire to see clear and rational evidence of the visible world cohabited with an engrained use of “logic” to invalidate the equal humanity that the non-Western other might inspire. Mapping the visible world here became a form of imperialism or, what literary critic Renee Bergland calls “discursive colonization.”

By the twentieth century, the scientific gaze began to be separated—at least conceptually—from that of the sometimes more humanistic ethnographer’s lens. But, in Jefferson’s time, these fields were indistinct. For him, to study specimens of America—whether these be plants, animals, or human bones and languages—was to practice the scientific gaze. And yet, as Warwick Anderson notes when writing on encounters between twentieth-century Freudians and Aboriginal Australians, the rules of scientific ordering are as culturally bound as are indigenous cultures’ rules governing expression of kinship and taboo.

Photography of Indigenous Americans taken in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century by white government agents patently represents these indigenous subjects as colonized, or captured. Zeno Schindler, working as the photographer for the United States in the late nineteenth century, photographed tribal representatives who came to Washington, DC, to negotiate treaty rights for their people. These images are haunting in the dual presentation of Indigenous American leaders as specimens kept under file by the US government and yet also as resistant subjects whose individuality shines through the dry vestige of government photographic archive. Before the US government gathered these photographs, Great Britain conspicuously circulated pre-photographic images of Indigenous Americans. British cartoonists represented Great Britain’s loss of its American colonies by depicting
Euro-Americans merged with Indigenous Americans in cartoons such as 1776, London, Or Who Shall suggesting that, in severing their ties to the crown, Euro-Americans merged bodily with indigenous people. Contemporary maps of America contained images of Indigenous Americans, conflating the cartography of mapping of the terrain with the mapping of the image of the indigenous. Illustrated reports of Indigenous Americans were circulated in Europe via block print, aquatint, and other intaglio methods of reproducing images.

Navigating the transition from intaglio print to the photograph, one notes that, in the eighteenth century, the purpose for creating and circulating images of Indigenous Americans generally was to evince conquest: to show that Europeans were in a position to archive images of Indigenous Americans. This was true before and also after photography’s invention. The images make claims for the ideology of “typical” Indigenous American faces, evincing the urge to categorize according to differential appearance from Europeans. The photograph as exemplar of typology stemmed from this visual and conceptual discourse; it emerged from the urgent need of empire to create a typology of race, fusing place and identity.

An extensive collection of eighteenth-century images of Indigenous Americans is held by Yale University’s Lewis Walpole Library, founded by Wilmarth Sheldon Lewis, an expert on Horace Walpole. Walpole is the author of The Castle of Otranto, the quintessential uncanny text of eighteenth-century Great Britain. The Lewis Walpole Library contains most of the papers from Walpole’s residence, Strawberry Hill. Here, the uncanniness of colonization returns home as the papers of Horace Walpole, author The Castle of Otranto, the foundational Gothic text, settle in beside European images of Indigenous Americans that express precisely the invader’s uneasy sense that the Indigenous Americans whom they are violating are fully human. The inquisitive tracery of the scientific gaze—the gaze that sought to bring back to Europe and for Europeans the trophy of the image of the Indigenous American—shines through the images. That these images are housed with Strawberry Hill’s artifacts and papers is an uncanny coincidence; if we see Horace Walpole as a key figure of the uncanny Enlightenment, then the event of his collections containing several instances of pre-photographic European and Euro-American images of Indigenous Americans indicates how entwined are the seeing of the Indigenous other and the promulgation of the uncanny Gothic, bridging aesthetic and affective experience in the Enlightenment.
Intaglio print images are precursors of the photographic in two senses: (1) their ease of reproduction and (2) their use of the image as a way of knowing the other. For example, Bernard Romans’s *Characteristic head of a Creek War Chief* suggests that there is such a thing as a “characteristic Creek.” The Creek were actually two tribes, the Muscogee and the Hitachi, whose homes were in Georgia and Alabama. Robert Beverley’s quasi-anatomical study of indigenous people of Virginia in 1707 likewise exemplifies the urge to categorize through tropes of visual hierarchy, an urge that precedes photography and creates the urge and the need for photography: for greater accuracy in typology, for greater immediacy of vision and, hence, control.

While one might say there is nothing particularly uncanny about categorizing another population, I suggest that it was precisely such urgent efforts at material comprehension that fomented in eighteenth-century colonial ventures a sense of deep confusion, a feeling of uncanniness with regard to what constitutes the self. The very idea of a self is thrown into dread and abnegation, a sense that one’s identity as European must be fought for against the seeping dread of the constructed “other.” For indigenous peoples the dread of the Western “other” is more defensible, more practical: it is the dread of a violent invader. The emphasis on the self’s relationship to the ideology of race, then, emerged in this century that codified appearance as a venue of scientific enquiry. The ideology of race emerged from this century, much as photography was a nineteenth-century technology that emerged from eighteenth-century discourse. Writing of Andrew Montour, Merrell argues in “The Cast of His Countenance,” as the eighteenth century progressed, the social space for being *both* indigenous and European vanished.

**DIGGING UP THE BONES**

In his description of his dig on the bank of the Rivanna, Jefferson made it clear that he knew he was working in a massive grave, a sacred space used by Indigenous Americans over the course of generations. He noted that he uncovered “four strata” of remains and conjectured that “in this barrow might have been a thousand skeletons.” So, Jefferson was well aware of the scope of his action, and, given his position as an Enlightenment scientist, it never even occurred to him that he might seek permission for this action from the tribes who had used this burial site from antiquity. He described cutting open the barrow so as to access
its full contents; he described as well with systematic rigor the condition and appearance of the bones.

Jefferson’s own description placed his emphasis on appearance: for him, the meaning of these bones inhered in their appearance. The bones’ surfaces gave him the information he sought—the “truth”—in terms of science as he understood it. He disregarded the possibility of any other truth—the Indigenous Americans’ burial rituals, for example, or any sacred meanings they might ascribe to these bones of their ancestors. Here is the quintessence of the uncanny: this American gentleman scientist of European descent opened a sacred place of the racialized “other” and unearthed from that hidden place what he saw as the “truth” of the other—material information regarding the other’s life, the significance of which was interpreted through Enlightenment scientific, aesthetic, and imperialist discourse.

Anthony Wallace points out that Jefferson justified vandalism of this still-in-use gravesite by claiming, erroneously, that these Indigenous Americans (Powatan, Pamunky, Mattaponi, Monacan) had already vanished from Virginia. In fact, though the tribes of Virginia were diminished in the eighteenth century from their precontact numbers, they continued to live there, and their descendants still live in Virginia today. Wallace argues that Jefferson purposely misled his reader, claiming Indigenous Americans had by then disappeared from Virginia to create the idea that the Virginia of his day was open terrain without human inhabitants, welcoming and ready for white settlers. Whether Jefferson’s misinformation was purposeful, it was certainly carefully laid out in Notes on the State of Virginia. In this text Jefferson performed a precursor to statistics, carefully listing the numbers of warriors and citizens of various tribes. Hence, the misinformation seems formidable: it seems to trace facts with scientific accurately.

The uncanniness of Jefferson’s Enlightenment vision, then, is not a stepping away from logic and rationality, not a movement as Castle would suggest of the eighteenth-century birth of the uncanny in reaction against rationality. The rational insistence on the truth-value of the surface (bones, skin, numbers, and eventually photographs) was itself uncanny. Even though reading through his lengthy description of unearthing and handling the bones in their riverside barrow is a Gothic scene, rendering the Rivanna banks a haunted space, the uncanniness of the event inheres in its scientific visuality that did not see itself as haunted. That is precisely why it is so uncanny. Jefferson’s motivation is to further
scientific knowledge by examining the visible world. This action of digging up Indigenous American remains was for him a way of seeing, aesthetic manifested as belief—belief in the aesthetic as revelatory. This scientific visuality preceded photography and gave birth to the valorization of photography as a desirable way to create images. Aesthetic theory reframed the knowledge of the senses as a source of truth, a fulcrum of Enlightenment science.

This shift in the gaze is an urge to see closer, to take in detail, to look longer, and it is answered a few decades into the nineteenth century by Talbot and Niepce’s invention of photography. The photographic gaze did not arise because Talbot and Niepce were randomly experimenting with photosensitive materials. It arose because of this uncanny urge of eighteenth-century thought to make the surface speak. From the barrow on the bank of the Rivanna emerged this eerie scene of the statesman, scientist, philosopher, Thomas Jefferson, digging up bones. As F. W. J. Schelling argued, the uncanny is that which should not have been brought to light. But Schelling, writing in the early nineteenth century, was already writing in a time in which photography had arrived and, with it, the practice of bringing the material world “to light” in all its uncanny enclosure and disclosure of buried secrets.

William Bartram, visiting Georgia, remarked on the beauty of environment there and the physical elegance and “nobility” of the Creek, who were the majority in Georgia until 1800. Eric Hinderaker and Peter Mancall suggest that there is a paradox in Bartram’s noting the beauty of the place and the people when he visited what is now Augusta: He was in Georgia specifically to set in motion the stripping of land from the Creek in the Removal of 1836. But the gaze that Bartram expressed is that of the Enlightenment pleasure in seeing through the scientific-aesthetic lens. His observations of the Creek would not—to his way of thinking—hinder his plans to take everything from them. That is the Enlightenment uncanny. The gaze that Bartram deployed against the Creek was a disciplinary gaze, even as it was a gaze of approval.

Photography is a “disciplinary frame,” as John Tagg argues. This discipline encompassed the years between 1500 and 1826 (the year of Niepce’s success), a time during which the West came to understand order as visible and instituted—with violence—a visually racialized hierarchy. When Jefferson argued that the best outcome for Indigenous Americans would be to marry whites and stay on American land by assimilating, he was indicating the erasure of Indigenous American skin
tongue" and facial features as a desired culmination of colonization.\textsuperscript{115} He didn’t even consider the catastrophic loss of culture and language that would have attended his hoped for assimilation of Indigenous Americans. Archival photography emerged as a continuance of the eighteenth century’s “scientific” codification of physical appearance.\textsuperscript{116} This is not, of course, to say that Talbot and Niepce ever articulated an explicitly racist agenda for their invention. Certainly not. Rather, their work flowed directly from the obsession with appearance as meaning that had preceded them; the photography they developed delivered a means by which appearance might be held indefinitely as image. If the uncanny is involved with the subconscious, I would say that it is not, as Freud suggests, our memory of our mother’s genitalia.\textsuperscript{117}

Photography’s uncanniness inheres in its simultaneous instatement and elision of the violent social facts that produced the conditions of its own inception. From its inception, photography has had a privileged relationship with the modern uncanny. Photographic images estrange us from time and space, because of their verisimilitude even as they are always only representational fragments. Photographic technologies have been at the vanguard of bringing technology home: people photograph themselves, each other, their houses, their belongings, their lives, in this odd dialectic of using photography’s estranging capacity to distil space and time into image by bringing it home. Contemporary photographer Dayanita Singh argues that in the twenty-first century there is no more photography: there is “only the frame.”\textsuperscript{118} With the ubiquity of digital images there is no stasis to any image, rather a stream of images through a frame that is now, almost always, the screen of a device: a computer, phone, tablet. If social media platforms claim to offer more democratic access to the terms of image circulation, they also increase photography’s uncanny presence in our lives, bringing the image deeper into our intimate social worlds while underscoring and retaining the very hierarchical surveillance patterns wherein white men (who are overwhelmingly the creators and owners of social media platforms) watch the rest of us.\textsuperscript{119} Whether such universal gazing will serve only to more deeply reinscribe the terms of hierarchical colonialist surveillance, the origins of which I have described here, remains to be seen. Staring at images of people, places, objects that are not embodied before the viewer but, instead, shown only on a screen is the quintessential act of the twenty-first century. We fold the uncanny vista of the image ever more tightly into our domestic lives, as if by going deeper into the image’s world we might find a foundation.
Notes

33. Gregory D. Smithers, *Science Sexuality and Race in the United States and in Australia, 1780s–1890s* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009);


45. Withers, *Placing the Enlightenment*, 112.


49. Withers, *Placing the Enlightenment*, 125.


63. In many ways, I am tracing John Zilcosky’s argument, in *Uncanny Encounters*, backwards. I read Freud as by no means a revolutionary thinker but instead a server or host of racism and sexism for which eighteenth century intellectual thought set the table.
71. Castle, *The Female Thermometer*, 16.
77. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other*.
82. Withers, *Placing the Enlightenment*, 140–141.
83. Withers, *Placing the Enlightenment*, 141.
84. Withers, *Placing the Enlightenment*, 145.
86. Withers, *Placing the Enlightenment*, 149.
87. Withers, *Placing the Enlightenment*, 158.
88. Redman, *Bone Rooms*.
89. Zilcosky, *Uncanny Encounters*, 244.


100. David Lavender, *The Way to the Western Sea: Lewis and Clark Across the Continent* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 389–395. This urge to map is emblematized in the travels of Lewis and Clark (who took with them a pregnant Indigenous woman, Sacagewea) and were working for Thomas Jefferson. Their travels were intended to (1) map the geographical terrain and (2) bring back and observe scientific artifacts pertaining to flora, fauna, and indigenous human beings of the terrain.


119. Facebook was founded by Mark Zuckerberg in conjunction with Dustin Moskovitz, Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum, and Chris Hughes, while Instagram was founded by Kevin Systrom and Mark Krieger. In common between these uncommon men is their maleness, their apparent whiteness, and their inherited status of socioeconomic privilege before founding their companies.
Index

A
Abbott, Berenice, 43, 63, 65, 66, 69–71
abortion rights, 147
Adams, Joshua, 211, 219
Agee, James, 105, 114, 123, 126–129, 131–135
Hale County, 105–107, 109, 122–124
20th-century, 123
Alexander, Michelle, 283
Alps, 3
Angelus Novus (Klee), 278
Aryan ideal, 92
Atget, Eugene, 8, 15, 20, 23, 41–54, 56–71, 95, 144, 175
fin de siècle images, 45, 59, 65
Auden, W.H., 138, 163

B
Backwards Man in His Hotel Room, The (Arbus), 155, 156, 159, 169
Baker, George, 74, 88, 89, 98, 101, 102, 207, 212, 217
Baudrillard, Jean, 188, 211
Beautiful Ghetto, A (Allen), 259, 264, 281
Beggar Couple (Sander), 80, 82, 86
Belting, Hans, 74, 98, 212, 213, 215, 219

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2019
C. Raymond, The Photographic Uncanny,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28497-8
Benjamin, Walter, 33, 34, 38, 41, 43, 64–67, 139, 140, 142, 144, 162, 164, 165, 170, 253, 278, 286
Blanchot, Maurice, 67, 138
Blaze Starr in Her Living Room (Arbus), 155
Blood, 92, 179, 181, 239
Blue Ridge mountains, 209
blut und boden (blood and soil), 92
Booger Courthouse (Allison), 195, 215
Bourdieu, Pierre, 4, 5, 30, 32, 73–75, 78, 119, 153–155, 168
boobs, 119, 153–155, 178, 179
Brenda Duff Frazier (Arbus), 155, 159, 169, 170
Burroughs, Allie Mae, 18, 107–110, 114–116, 119, 123–126
Burroughs Family, The (Evans), 108, 114

C
Carsten, Janet, 32, 262, 264, 281–283
Castle of Otranto, The (Walpole), 9, 11, 18, 32, 33, 36, 122, 306
Certau, Michel de, 26, 28, 56, 94, 103
cgi. See computer generated images (cgi)
Charrier, Philip, 139, 163
Civil Rights movement, 107, 268
Cleavage (Koestenbaum), 153, 154, 168
colonization, effect of, 113, 198
computer generated images (cgi), 7, 30
Critique of Judgment (Bourdieu), 73, 293, 295
Curtis, Edward, 122, 132, 210, 223

D
Danse Macabre, 191
Das, Veena, 262
Derrida, Jacques, 11, 33, 95, 255
“Die Letzten Menschen” (The Last People) (Sander), 74, 79, 80, 82, 83, 88, 96
Die Nachtstücke (Night Pieces, The) (Hoffman), 47
Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste (Bourdieu), 73
Doppelgänger, 19, 137
drag performers, 28

E
Elkins, James, 33, 95, 103
Emerling, Jae, 4, 30, 32
Eurydice, 159
Eyerman, Ron, 268, 270, 271, 277, 282

F
Face and Mask: A Double History (Belting), 212, 215
“Faces of Our Time” (Sander), 89, 102
Family Album of Lucybelle Crater, The (Meatyard), 178, 188–190, 192, 194, 214
Fazism. See Nazism
Foucault, Michel, 57–59, 61, 64, 69, 70, 150, 160, 161, 167, 170, 177, 213, 235, 250, 254, 316
Frankenstein (Shelley), 14, 35, 47, 68
Freudian theory, 10, 13
Frost, Robert, 155, 169
G

gender versus nongender, 48, 148, 149, 237

Generation X, 175

Generation Z, 175

German, 6, 8, 10, 13–15, 20, 31, 34, 35, 74–80, 82–84, 88–97, 99, 100, 247, 257–259, 280. See also Nazism

Romanticism, 13

words, 91

Ghostly Matters (Avery), 4


of West Baltimore, 257, 261, 262, 264, 266, 276, 279, 283

who are alive, 94

Ghost of Memory (Carsten), 262, 282, 283

Gilmor Homes, 261, 262

Gordon, Avery, 4, 30

Gothic, 9, 11, 12, 14, 18, 21, 34, 116, 117, 122, 124, 178, 183, 192, 221, 224, 271, 306, 308

South, 20, 116, 117, 124, 132, 188

vision, 11

Gray, Freddie, 257, 261, 262, 264, 266–277, 279

Great Depression, 126

Great Migration, 263, 264, 283

Gudger, Annie Mae. See Burroughs, Allie Mae

H

Hale County (Alabama) images (Evans)

daughters, 108, 109, 117, 119–121

photographs that bleed, 105–108, 114, 124, 126, 178, 181


Heidegger, Martin, 7, 31, 32, 44, 82, 95, 97, 103

heimat (homeland), 31, 44, 76, 80, 84, 92, 93, 95, 96

History of Sexuality (Foucault), 161, 170

Hoffman, E.T.A., 47, 67, 141, 245, 317

Hölderlin, Friedrich, 95


problems with, 7, 20, 44, 83, 94, 155, 178, 221

as sacred space, 44

Hopi Snake Dance, 199

hotel art, 174

I

Identical Twins (Arbus), 137, 145

images

aura, 13, 65, 138, 142–144, 162, 278

of beggars, 84

bleeding, 105, 107, 108, 117, 119, 124, 178, 181
of disabled, 80, 93, 94
of dispossessed, 8, 9, 15, 23, 75, 78, 79, 83, 90, 243
haunted, 9, 11, 23, 28, 29, 106, 120, 121, 126, 177, 182, 186, 212, 222, 229, 238, 239, 266–268, 276, 277, 279
of homeless, 5, 7–9, 20, 28, 29, 54, 64, 74, 75, 78–80, 83, 93, 94, 96, 144, 154, 176
on Instagram, 9, 257, 262, 267, 268, 276, 277
of jobless, 74, 75, 78, 80, 83, 92
of marginalized, 75, 82
of non-Aryans, 92
unclothed, 117
of vagrant, 84
Cherokee, 198, 200, 204–208, 210
Chickasaw, 210
Choctaw, 114, 115, 210
Creek, 114, 125, 206, 209, 210, 305
Seminole, 210
In the Beginning (Arbus), 141
Iverson, Margaret, 246

J
James, M.R., 113, 122, 123, 126, 131, 289
Jewish Giant at Home with His Parents in the Bronx, A (Arbus), 155, 169
Jim Crow laws, 116, 262, 263, 268
Johns Hopkins University, 30, 32, 67, 69, 214, 261, 281, 285, 317

K
Kant, Immanuel, 35, 73, 95, 97, 234, 235, 254, 287, 293, 295, 300, 313, 314
Kasebier, Gertrude, 91, 223
Kennesaw Mountain, Georgia, 206
Klee, Paul, 278
Koestenbaum, Wayme, 153, 154, 168, 169
Koulish, Robert, 263, 282
Kubrick, Stanley, 137, 145, 162

L
La Capra, Dominick, 277, 286
Lady Bartender at Home with a Souvenir Dog (Arbus), 155, 169
La Giaconda, 142
Latour, Bruno, 32, 36, 67, 139, 140, 145, 164–166, 204, 206, 217, 291, 312
Léon, Paul, 42, 53
Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (Agee), 105, 110, 114, 123, 125, 126, 131, 134, 135
“Life You Save May Be Your Own, The” (O’Connor), 189, 190
light, early morning, 46, 54
Lord of the Rings (Tolkien), 209
Lost on the Trail of Tears (Allison), 207
Lotke, Eric, 276, 286
Louvre, 142
Lucybelle Crater’s 15-Year-Old Son’s Friends (Meatyard), 192
M
Maar, Dora, 145
Malinowski, Bronislaw, 223, 248, 258, 279
Manet, 74, 78, 79, 97
Manet: A Symbolic Revolution
(Bordieu), 74, 97, 98
masks
death, 3, 88, 178, 179, 183, 186, 188, 190, 191, 203, 211, 212
Halloween, 189, 190, 192
as metamorphosis, 211
Noh, 191
Raven Mocker, 203
rebellion, 192
“Mask Stripped Bare, The: The Work of Hybridity in the Twenty-First Century” (Phillips), 196, 216, 217
McGinley, Ryan, 174, 175, 212
Meatyard, Ralph, 8, 15, 20, 23, 177, 178, 188–192, 194, 205, 210–213
Meiselias, Susan, 264
“Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts”
(People of the 20th Century)
(Sander), 74, 75, 79
Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 39, 68, 70, 105–109, 119, 124, 125, 127, 129, 130, 135
Mexican Dwarf in His Hotel Room
(Arbus), 155, 169
“Mizzotint, The” (James), 122, 126
Mona Lisa (Da Vinci), 142, 144
Moore, Kevin, 274, 275
Mori, Masahiro, 48, 68, 96, 103, 280
Museum of the Cherokee Indian, 197

N
Naked Man Being a Woman (Arbus), 149–153, 167
National Museum of the American Indian, 197, 198, 207
National Portrait Gallery, 98, 143, 165
National Socialism. See Nazism
Nazism, 44, 82, 95, 278
Hitler’s disavowal of humanity, 76
Newhall, Beaumont, 88
New York City, 8, 15, 112, 131, 138, 140, 150, 155, 185, 186
Nietzsche, 95, 273
nightmare, 205, 264, 272
Night Pieces, The (Hoffman), 47
Niro, Shelley, 8, 15, 20, 23, 177, 221–239, 243–246, 249, 250, 252–256
Noire et Blanche (Ray), 207
nudes, 61, 227

O
O’Connor, Flannery, 116, 117, 189–192, 214
Olimpia (Hoffman), 46, 141
Olin, Margaret, 33, 93, 102, 135, 286
“On Diane Arbus” (Charrier), 139
Order of Things, The (Foucault), 70, 161
Orpheus, 144, 145, 153, 159

P
Panofsky, Erwin, 92, 102
as described by Atget, 8, 15, 41–43, 45–48, 50, 53, 56–60, 62, 63, 65, 66, 71
during fin de siècle, 8, 45, 65
Phillips, Ruth, 196, 204, 215
photography
as activism, 150, 177, 210, 275
cultural mirror, 11
familiar versus unfamiliar, 5, 11
of homelessness, 7, 8, 20, 22, 25, 26, 75, 80, 82, 88–90, 94–96, 144, 175, 176
of joblessness, 75, 78, 80, 86, 88, 92, 94, 98
in 19th century, 6, 11–13, 26, 42, 46, 47, 60, 80, 84, 112, 190, 194, 231, 288, 299, 305, 309
non-gender subjects, 149
of nudes, 61, 227
ordinary, 4, 5, 108, 149, 189
physical space, 5, 23, 59, 63, 174, 230
of poverty, 83, 114, 121, 124–126, 152, 154
in pre–World War II, 93
on tombstones, 3, 4, 310
in 20th century, 42, 43, 45, 74–77, 79, 80, 83, 113, 116, 122, 145, 146, 176, 177, 190, 191, 301, 305
in 21st century, 8, 106, 112, 173, 175–177, 204, 212, 232, 234
of vagrant, 84
Photography: A Middle Brow Art
(Bourdieu), 4, 30, 33, 38
pictorialist photographers, 91
politics, 8, 23, 24, 41, 44, 50, 64, 76, 88, 91, 100, 102, 110, 136, 150, 160
aggressive Western, 44
Nazism, 44
racist, 125
portraits, self, 178, 179, 181, 182, 184–186, 188, 189, 211, 225
Powers, William Douglas, 199
Prince, Richard, 177
propaganda, 44, 83, 90, 92, 94, 100
R
racism, 77, 80, 90, 110, 112–114, 125, 126, 150, 178, 192, 288, 289, 292, 296, 299, 313, 314
American, 110, 112, 146, 192, 279, 302
German, 77, 91
whiteness, 110, 160
Ray, Man, 43, 66, 145, 207
reflected image, 46
Revelations (Arbus), 141, 170
Roberts, Dorothy E., 99, 130, 265, 283–285
Rogers, Richard, 46, 50, 67, 68
Royle, Nicholas, 5, 7, 30–32, 35, 134, 245
S
Salgado, Sabastio, 264
Sander, August, 8, 9, 15, 20, 23, 24, 74–80, 82–84, 86, 88–98, 100, 101, 175
“Sandman, The” (Hoffman), 47
Sass, Louis, 137, 163
Schelling, F.W.J., 14, 15, 18–22, 33, 36, 37, 101, 124, 138, 295, 298, 309, 311, 314
Seated Man in Bra and Stockings
(Arbus), 149
Sedgwick, Eve, 39, 148, 149, 151, 158, 160, 161, 167, 168, 170
Self Portrait at 13 (Woodman), 184, 186
self-portraits, 178, 179, 181, 182, 184–186, 188, 189, 211, 225
Selkirk, Neil, 144, 165
Sheldrake, Philip, 44, 45, 55, 58, 67, 69, 70
Shelley, Mary, 14, 47
Sherman, Cindy, 177
Shining, The (Kubrick), 137, 162
sites for photographs
family albums, 173, 189, 190
galleries, 173
museums, 173
phones, 173
tablet screens, 173
Smith, Shawn Michelle, 32, 38, 130, 164, 247, 274
Sontag, Susan, 5, 25, 30, 32, 36, 38, 138, 170
South, the, 8, 20, 116, 117, 119, 124, 189, 210, 263, 264, 302
Southern Gothic, 116, 117, 124
Spaces for the Sacred (Sheldrake), 44, 67, 69
Steichen, Edward, 91
Stonewall, 150, 151, 167
Strauss, Claude Levi, 10, 33

T
“Theses on Philosophy of History” (Benjamin), 278
Third Reich. See Nazism
Thomas, Ronald R., 113, 125, 131
Tingle family, 118–120, 130, 133
Tolkien, J.R.R., 209
Tomkins, Silvan, 151, 158, 161

Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity (Sedgwick), 33, 149
Transvestite Showing Cleavage (Arbus), 27, 39, 149, 154
Triplets in Their Bedroom (Arbus), 155, 169
Tristes Tropiques (Strauss), 10
trompe l’oeil, 155, 179, 267

U
Uncanny Encounters (Zilcosky), 6, 31, 33, 176, 213, 217, 303, 315
“uncanny” in foreign languages, 10, 258
“uncanny valley”, 48, 68, 96, 279, 280
unheimlich (uncanny), 5, 6, 10, 14, 18, 19, 35, 42, 62, 96, 121, 257–259
Untitled, Providence, Rhode Island (Woodman), 181
“Untitled Stress” (Allen), 260
US Supreme Court, 147

V
Vanishing Race, The (Curtis), 210
vaterland (fatherland), 76, 92, 93
Venus (Botticelli), 152
visible versus invisible, 266, 267

W
Walpole, Horace, 18, 32, 306
Washington Monument, 201, 305
Weikop, Christian, 74, 77, 79, 89, 92, 93, 99, 100
Weimar Germany, 90
West Baltimore photographs (Allen), 257–259, 261–264, 266, 267, 272, 276, 277, 279, 283
White, Clarence, 91
White House, 201, 216
Wojnarowicz, David, 150
Wolof cultural frame, 259
Woodman, Betty, 182
Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, The (Benjamin), 144, 164, 165, 170
World War I, 76, 93
World War II, 79, 83, 90, 93, 95

Y
Young Man in Curlers at Home on West 20th Street, A (Arbus), 149

Z
Ziedenberg, Jason, 276
Zilcosky, John, 6, 31, 33, 35, 37, 176, 206, 207, 213, 217, 303, 315