The Photographic Uncanny

Photography, Homelessness, and Homesickness

Claire Raymond

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"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*

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A Political Uncanny: The Homelessness of Photographs

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

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.[4] 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.[5] 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.[6] 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."[7] 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.[8] What one photographs is, by dint of being photographed, visually set apart as exceptional, strange.[9] Susan Sontag has taken this argument further, suggesting that we confer value *only* on that which manifests as a photographic moment.[10] 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."[11] 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.[12] 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.[13] 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.[14] 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.[15]

The German word "*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. "*Unheimlich*" means "not-homey"—"*heim*" being German for "home" and also connoting refuge and asylum. "*Unheimlich*," then, is that which is not like home, and not of refuge. Importantly, the German "*geheim*" also means "secret" and "hidden," so that "*unheimlich*" means something that was kept a secret and no longer is.[16] The *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.[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 *Uncanny Encounters*, John Zilcosky makes a persuasive case for the need to historicize the uncanny.[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.[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.[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.[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.[22] 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.[23] Anneleen Masschelein, however, interprets the uncanny as a "young," and therefore unfixed, concept.[24] For Nicholas Royle the uncanny is precisely that concept that ravels the comfort of generic classification.[25] *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.[26]

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.[27] 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.[28] 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.[29] 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.[30] 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.[31] 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.[32] 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.[33] 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.[34] 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.[35] 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.[36] 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.[37] 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.[38] 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.[39] 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.[40] 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.[41] 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.[42]

Claude Levi Strauss, in *Tristes Tropiques*, writes of the melancholy of the colonizer, who feels lost from home.[43] 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, bourgeoning 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.[44] 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.[45] 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.[46] 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.[47] 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.[48] 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.[49]

Photography's progenitor, William Henry Fox Talbot, immediately turned his new technology toward his home, photographing Lacock Abbey in the late 1830s.[50] In taking photographs of his ancestral home, Talbot estranges it, creating uncanny doubles through his images.[51] 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.[52] 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.[53] The photographic negative displays the disrupted norm that characterizes the uncanny: it takes familiar forms and makes them strange.[54] 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.[55] Talbot's choice of architectural photographic subjects are ancient buildings, not only his home of Lacock Abbey but also Oxford University.[56] 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.[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 *eidos*— the visual form of an idea. But the photograph also expresses the 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 miniature 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 evanescent paper images. (At this point in his career Talbot was only a few years beyond the frustrating "fairy pictures" that photographically captured 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.[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.[59] Talbot developed his process of photography contemporaneously with emerging theories of perception and the uncanny, in connection to and with an awareness of the intellectual trends of his era.[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.[61] The influence of German Romanticism on the history of photography is implied by Geoffrey Batchen, in *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.[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.[63] The German word "*unheimliche*" indicates also a nonspecific sense of anxiety—connoting an absence of refuge and asylum, a frisson of unresolved disturbance.[64]

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."[65] 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.[66] 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.[67] 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.[68] 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.[69] 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."[70] 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.[71] 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.[72]

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.[73] 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.[74] 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.[75]

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,

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)

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.[77] 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.[78] 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.[79] 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.[80] 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.[81]

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.[82]

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.[83] 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.[84] 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.[85] Being brought to light was a vanishing of home, replaced by citizenship.[86] 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.[87] 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"[88] seems to fly in the face of the most obvious aspect of a photograph: that it shows something.[89] 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.[90] 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.[91] 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.[92] 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.[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.[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.[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 *physis*: using Gothic nomenclature, Schelling claims that we have an unknowable, "dark," capacity by which we perceive.[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."[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."[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