

THE LEGEND OF FREUD

EXPANDED EDITION

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Uncanny Thinking

Two Notes . . .

The three essays that constitute the first edition of *The Legend of Freud*, written some twenty-five years ago, sought to explore how Freud's writing and thinking are progressively caught up in what they set out primarily to describe and elucidate. Such involvement of the observer in the observed contrasts with the efforts of most scientific or scholarly texts to keep their subject matter at a safe distance. The assumption of an extra-territorial position with respect to the matter being considered is constantly called into question by the very movement of the Freudian text, and this in turn demands a certain type of reading. It is a reading that is traditionally more at home with literary than "theoretical" texts. A text can be considered literary to the extent that its propositional, semantic, thematic *content* is *exceeded* or undermined by its syntactic movement. *What* it says is never separable from the *way* it says it. Moreover, the articulatory "how" is in literature never merely an instrument of a semantic "what." This is a trait that the texts of Freud share with "literature": they call for a mode of reading that is prepared to follow a movement of signification even where the latter surpasses or undercuts the explicitly intended meanings. In contrast to certain literary texts, the propositional content of a Freudian text is never to be taken lightly. But it is also not

necessarily to be taken as the final word. As a result, the relation of “thinking” to “knowing,” of “perceiving” to “observing”—and of all of these to *writing*—is no longer to be taken for granted.

Such an exigency is not, of course, original with Freud. Ever since Kant, at least in the history of philosophy, “thinking” has been carefully but emphatically distinguished from “knowing.” In a footnote to the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant elaborates this distinction as follows:

In order to *know* an object, I must be able to prove its possibility, either from its reality, as attested by experience, or *a priori* by means of reason. But I can *think* whatever I please, provided only I do not contradict myself, that is, provided my conception is a possible thought, though I may be unable to answer for the existence of a corresponding object in the sum total of all possibilities.¹

To qualify as “thinking,” a thought need not correspond to a really existing object: it need only avoid contradicting itself. For instance, Kant continues, an idea such as “freedom” can be *thought* even if it cannot be “known” theoretically, in the sense of being identified with a determinable entity or attributed to a determinable action. It can nonetheless be both a legitimate and necessary thought. It can even entail a kind of knowing, albeit one that does not contribute to theoretical understanding. Kant calls this kind of knowledge “practical,” since it has to do more with doing than with understanding.

The distinction between “knowing” and “thinking” thus implies, in Kant, a distinction *within knowing itself*, between the theoretical knowledge of an object that is determinable in spatial-temporal terms, and a practical knowledge of things that elude such determination, but that nevertheless can still qualify as “thoughts,” as long as they do not contradict themselves.

Compare this Kantian distinction with that of Freud, who, on the threshold of his discovery of psychoanalysis, recounts an exchange with “Miss Lucy R.”:

(Freud:) If you knew that you were in love with the Director, why didn’t you tell me that?

(Lucy:) I didn’t know it or rather, I didn’t want to know it, I wanted to get it out of my head, never to think about it again.

Another and better depiction of the peculiar condition in which one both knows something and at the same time doesn’t know it I could never obtain.²

Lucy “knew” about her amorous feelings for “the Director” all the while she was being treated by Freud, but it was only after a certain lapse of time that she was able to acknowledge this “knowledge.” Previously, then, she *knew something without knowing (that she knew) it*, or rather, as she puts it, without wanting “to think about it *again*” (my italics). Which is to say, without wanting to dwell on it, to repeat it, quite literally, to *re-cognize* it. Repeating without recognizing the repetition is perhaps what makes possible that “peculiar state” of knowing without knowing. Nothing could be further from the Kantian definition of a thought, which demands for it an inner consistency free of all contradiction. In not wanting “to think about it again,” Lucy does her best to fulfill the Kantian demand. But although *she* may not want to think about *it*, “it” certainly “thinks” about her. She acknowledges as much by admitting to Freud that she “knew it all the time,” even if she didn’t *think* about it *as such*.

Freud knows that his future readers will probably react no differently to this exchange from the way Lucy herself initially reacted: if a thought is not consistent, it is not worth thinking. Hence, he does not try to convince them of the enormous implications of Lucy’s admission, of the “peculiar state” (*eigentümlichen Zustand*) that such “knowing without knowing” entails. Instead, he merely confirms that they will not be able to understand what he has just recounted unless they are willing to acknowledge that they have already “found themselves” in such a state. Since this is not something one can command or presuppose, Freud takes a different tack. He tells a story drawn from his own experience.

Only those who have at some time found themselves in such a state can apparently understand this. I have a very conspicuous memory of this sort, one that stands vividly before my eyes. If I try to remember what went on in me at the time, the result is disappointing. I saw something at the time that didn’t fit in with my expectation, and not in the least did I allow my expectation [*Absicht*] to be shaken, even though it should have been eliminated by this perception. I was not aware of the contradiction nor did I take any more note of the affect of repudiation [*Affekt der Abstoßung*] that doubtless was responsible for the fact that this perception did not have any influence on my psyche. I was struck by that

“blindness with seeing eyes” [*Blindheit bei sehenden Augen*] that is so admired in mothers with respect to their daughters, men with respect to their wives, rulers with respect to their favorites.³

The story, it turns out, is hardly any less bizarre or *eigentümlich* than the state it is designed to recall and explore. On the one hand, Freud begins by declaring that he “disposes over a very conspicuous memory of this sort, which stands vividly before my eyes.” He can understand what Lucy has gone through because, unlike many of his readers, he has already been through something similar himself. On the other hand, when he makes the effort “to remember what went on in me at that time,” he has to admit that “the result is disappointing.”

And indeed, readers who were expecting a juicy anecdote must be not only disappointed, but also puzzled. Does Freud remember or doesn't he? Is he merely pretending to remember, to entice his readers into making the effort? Is he purposefully disappointing his readers because he does not want to disclose what it is that he remembers? Or could it be that he remembers without remembering, in a manner akin to Miss Lucy R.'s knowing without knowing? In any case, his story turns out to be remarkably abstract and general: no concrete situation, no specific event, merely the general parable of a “perception” that did not “fit in” with his “expectation” of the time, but which, instead of leading him to revise his expectation, was itself dismissed. Moreover, not only does Freud reject the evidence of his own two eyes, but he also admits that he remained unaware of the “contradiction” in which he was thereby caught. It is this latter absence of awareness that will later earn the name of the “unconscious”: not merely a lack of consciousness with respect to an object, but a blindness of consciousness with respect to its own activity (of dissimulation). In view of this blindness, the “affect of repudiation” of which Freud writes (*Affekt der Abstoßung*) must be understood as *affecting* not merely the perception qua object, but the agent as well. In short, the movement goes both ways, rejecting the perception but at the same time splitting the subject off from itself, dispersing it in an action—not repressing the perception so much as denying its implications—that is essentially inaccessible to consciousness.⁴

It is the dynamics of this dispersion and its ramifications that distinguish Freud's writing and thinking from that not just of nonpsychoanalytical authors, but of most psychoanalytical writers as well. Such scat-

tering marks the movement of metapsychological conceptualization, and endows Freud's use of concepts with its distinctive instability and ironic openness. But this dispersion can also be discerned in Freud's style of writing, which, as in the passage quoted here, makes use of narrative and autobiographical discourse, but in a way that undercuts the stability of both. For neither narrative nor autobiography come full circle. Rather, they are inscribed in scenes that subvert their self-identity. It is this process of scenic inscription that I want to examine.

Although Freud, whether deliberately or not, does not go any further into the contents or ramifications of the “conspicuous memory” that “stands vividly before [his] eyes” but yields such meager results, a similar experience (and story) occupies a decisive place in his later writings. In these subsequent texts, however, it is not Freud in particular, but all children, and in particular all male children, who find themselves confronted by a perception that doesn't “fit in” with what they expect. What they expect is more of the same: the ubiquity of the male sexual organ. What they are confronted with is the “anatomical sexual difference” through the perception of the female genitals. The rejection of this perception ushers in the story of “castration”—but also its foundering as story—its *Unter-gang*—in the “downfall of the Oedipus complex.” Castration in Freud's writing is above all the title of a *story* that children of both sexes tell themselves, but from a single point of view—that of the male child—in order to render the perception of sexual difference compatible with the “expectation” of male identity. The perception of the female genitals doesn't “fit in” with the expectation that all human beings should be identically equipped with the male sexual organ. Through the construction of a story, the perception of feminine genitals is not simply rejected outright, but is, as one might say today, “contextualized”—framed in a narrative that transforms sexuality from a differential relationship into the expression of a positive self-identity.

The narrative construction can thus be described as performing two functions. First, it permits the child to retain an “expectation” of a single, unified identity by “temporalizing” difference and thereby redefining it as a modality of identity.⁵ “Once upon a time,” the story goes, the penis was there; today it is no longer there, and if I am not careful, tomorrow it may be my turn.” Through such a narrative, the future is thus rendered com-

patible with the narcissistic “expectation” of a self that wants to see itself as intact, whole, and autonomous. The second function of the narrative construction is related to the first: it suggests that, qua storyteller, the ego can assume a position sufficiently separated from the events it is recounting so as to remain impervious to them. The “I” that tells itself this story thereby strives to secure its position as mere “observer,” situated at an ostensibly safe remove from the disturbing possibilities it seeks merely to describe or retell.

But the story does not end there, as the “downfall” or *Untergang* of the Oedipus complex indicates. This downfall calls into question, or into play, precisely the position of a contemplatively detached, omniscient observer and narrator. And in so doing, the narrative reveals that what is also, and perhaps above all, at stake in its performance is the position of the narrator. The telling of the story itself becomes part of the “action,” a performance inscribed in a scene that is not separated from what it describes. The “I” or ego reveals itself to be not so much a *speaker* as an addressee, someone *spoken to*.⁶ The structure of the psyche is thus irrecoverably *dispersed* among a multiplicity of instances that are both interdependent and irreducibly discrete. The Oedipus complex goes under because the separation it sought to dominate is now experienced not as an obstacle to be overcome by an ego but as a constitutive force of an irrevocably scattered and singular self. The site of the subject is no longer unified and self-contained; it is a scene from which “others” can never be fully excluded. In “going under,” the story of Oedipus and castration is reinscribed as a scenario.

Through the intrusion of these others, the narrative function and position of the self “finds itself” in a theatrical space. A space is theatrical when the representation that takes place “in” it plays to the “gallery,” to others out “there.” Representation is thus turned inside-out, but the audience, conversely, can be said to be turned outside-in. This redefinition of “positions” can be compared to the different perspectives in the daydream and the (night) dream. In the daydream the position of the dreamer appears to be unified and set apart from the spectacle. This kind of dream is also commonly known as “fantasy.” In the night-dream, by contrast, the position of the dreamer can not be assimilated to that of a detached observer, despite the ostensible distance of the subject who recollects the

dreaming of the dream. The dream is both distant and all too close. Indeed, distance and proximity are no longer mutually exclusive and the space or scene of the unconscious must be rethought to take account of this non-exclusivity. The “I” that remembers, like the “I” of the dreamer, finds itself scattered throughout the dream despite its apparent distance from it. To be both nearby and far away at one and the same time is to be subject to the effects of a certain *dispersion*. And indeed, Freud insists that the dream can only be understood as a form in which the I abandons itself to such dispersion.⁷

This dispersion is what marks the space of the dream, and that of the unconscious, as an “other scene” that is irreducibly theatrical. Like a theatrical stage, this scene is relatively delimited, localized, singular. But its limits are never fixed, once and for all, because they must be open to the other without encompassing it. A theatrical scenario thus never takes place “once and for all” but rather “one scene at a time.” It is singular and yet repetitive, ongoing and yet never complete. It is both nearby and distant, familiar and strange, present and passing. It is marked not by acts or even by actors but rather by acting. Its tense and temporality is that of the *present participle*. “Presenting” rather than “present,” it entails a *participation* that never comes full circle, never forms a whole. This is what distinguishes all theatrical staging, including that of the Freudian text, from “art” in the aesthetic sense: the former results not in a *work*, but (at most) in a “working-through.” In its immediacy and elusiveness, such theatricality is familiar and yet strange. Strange in its familiarity.

I want to argue that this uncanny theatricality is indissociable from Freud’s writings, and perhaps from psychoanalysis as a whole, without being reducible to either of them. Through a reading of two texts, which stand in very different relationship to psychoanalysis, I want to explore certain aspects of this uncanny theatricality.

Taking the Plunge: “The Sandman”

The first text, or rather, one scene from it, is at the heart of Freud’s essay on the uncanny. It is inscribed at the beginning of E. T. A. Hoffmann’s celebrated tale, “The Sandman.” The story as a whole revolves—and the word here is no mere metaphor—around a series of encounters

and memories: encounters that provoke memories and memories of encounters. In a letter to his fiancée's brother, Nathanael, a young student, recounts an ostensibly banal event that recently "happened to me" (*mir widerfuhr*): "An eyeglass vendor walked into my room and offered me his wares. I bought nothing and threatened to throw him down the stairs, whereupon however he left on his own."⁸ In order to explain his surprisingly violent reaction to this apparently anodyne scene, Nathanael recalls another encounter he had experienced as a young boy, when his house was regularly visited by an ominous "Sandman" whose identity remained concealed from the boy for a long period. All he knew was that whenever this mysterious Sandman came to visit, the children were sent off to bed by their parents. These visits were accompanied by a sense of gloom and foreboding, and yet were apparently impossible to avoid. Nathanael's parents seemed incapable of keeping the Sandman out, just as Nathanael himself, so many years later, is unable to stop the eyeglass vendor from simply coming "into my room" (*in meine Stube trat*); it is almost as if neither walls nor doors presented the slightest obstacle. Although Freud does not comment on it, this is not the least ominous sign of the Sandman's overwhelming power: his ability to penetrate domestic space, suddenly to be *there*, his arrival announced by the sound of his "heavy, slow steps mounting the stairs" (332). The abruptness with which the Sandman suddenly and irresistibly appears, or rather is heard, suggests the vulnerability of a domestic space permeated by forces that can drive it asunder.

How does Nathanael respond to this truly terrifying situation? He seeks to *locate the threat*. To do this, he attempts to turn what is initially an *acoustical* encounter into a *visual* one, at first by asking his mother: "Mama, who is the evil Sandman, who always drives us apart from Father?—What does he look like?" (332). To determine the identity of the Sandman is to know what he "looks like," *wie er aussieht*. But the name and story of the Sandman already anticipates this effort and incorporates it, as it were, into the threat. The Sandman, Nathanael is told by his mother, "doesn't exist," except possibly as a turn of phrase: "When I say, the Sandman is coming [*der Sandmann kommt*], that only means that you children are sleepy and can barely keep your eyes open, as though sand had been thrown into them [*als hätte man euch Sand hineingestreut*]" (322).

Let me interrupt my recounting of this story to note a curiosity in

translation. In German, Nathanael's mother uses the present indicative to describe the turn of phrase: *der Sandmann kommt*. But in translating this into English, I have shifted the tense to the present participle, for the Sandman does not "come," once and for all, the way a factual event might be said to take place. Rather, it seems inevitable to say that he is "coming," in the more ambiguous sense of an action that is announced, one that may even be audible, but is never definitively completed. The Sandman *is* insofar as he is *coming*; Nathanael's problem is related precisely to the ubiquitous possibility of this coming, an eventuality that cannot be foreclosed by any of the borders with which we seek to wall in our spaces and control access to them.

The power of the Sandman, then, inheres in his ability to invade and occupy what in the modern period is considered the most sacred of spaces: the private space of the family, the *home*. At the same time, however, as he turns the home inside-out, he also reaffirms domestic space, but in a way that transforms it from a place of security into one of dread and danger.⁹ After he is told by his mother that the Sandman is merely a figure of speech, albeit hardly an arbitrary one, Nathanael receives a very different account from the "old woman" who takes care of his youngest sister. She tells him that the Sandman "is an evil man who comes to children when they won't go to bed and throws a hand full of sand in their eyes, so that their eyes jump out (*herausspringen*); then he throws the eyes into his sack and carries them to the half-moon to feed his children, who are sitting there, in their nest. They have beaks like owls, which they use to peck the eyes of those misbehaved children" (332–33).

The disruptive threat of the Sandman is thus inseparable from that which it threatens, the domestic interiority of the small, nuclear family "nest." However, the nest is no longer entirely intimate or self-contained: it is duplicated, doubled, but in the process also dehumanized (the Sandman's children are like owls, with razor-sharp beaks). The family nest still revolves around the meal shared in common, but that meal, far from stabilizing and confirming the integrity of the bodily subjects that participate in it, marks their vulnerability: the separability of eyes from bodies, for instance, becomes the *conditio sine qua non* of that *other* family, that *other nest*, the *other scene* that takes hold of Nathanael and never lets him go.

The effect of this doubling is twofold. First, Nathanael is increas-

ingly gripped by the “uncanny specter” (*unheimlichen Spuk*), by “the image of the horrible Sandman,” by the “fantasy . . . of investigating the secret myself, all by myself, of seeing the fabulous Sandman.” This fantasy does not merely take hold of his “childish mind”: it occupies it as though it were a nest (*sich einnistet*). The effect of this occupation is literally inscribed in the syntax of the German phrase with which Nathanael describes his compulsion to uncover the mystery: “aber selbst—selbst das Geheimnis zu erforschen, den fabelhaften Sandmann zu sehen” (333). This repetition of the word *selbst* precisely articulates the ambivalence that informs Nathanael’s “fantasy” while also exceeding it. The desire to have the “secret” all to oneself confirms the disunity of that self, which is double before being single.

It is this splitting of the self—or rather, the emergence of a self that only “is” in being duplicitous (*zwiespältig*)—that the “coming” of the Sandman underscores, acoustically rather than visually. Thus, the decisive moment arrives at the stroke of nine in the evening (*auf den Schlag neun Uhr*). Although the German word *Schlag* emphasizes the “blow” that marks the hour, thereby situating a certain violence at the core of chronological time, its English equivalent, “stroke”—with its more erotic connotations—is not entirely inappropriate, as we shall see.

But before we do see, we must first proceed to what could well be described as the *Urszene* of this story, and perhaps also of Freud’s psychoanalytical thinking in general. What qualifies this scene to be described as “primal”—or rather, more literally and closer to the German, as “originary” or *originating*—is that through its particular contents it stages the abrupt *emergence of the scene as such*, which is to say, the transformation of a “story” into a “scenario.”

The scenario goes something like this. The sound of the Sandman’s heavy steps mounting the stairs, and Nathanael’s realization that he must leave, go to bed, get out of the way, separate from his parents—all of this provokes great anxiety in the young boy, against which he reacts with the scopophilic desire *to see* the Sandman and thereby *to discover* just who he really is. This defensive and reactive desire impels Nathanael to slip into his father’s study sight unseen and hide “behind the curtain of an open wardrobe standing right next to the door, in which my father’s clothes hung” (333).

Barely hidden behind his father’s clothes, Nathanael takes up his precarious position as observer while the menacing steps of the Sandman grow ever louder. He hears human noises, albeit involuntary ones such as coughing, together with animal and inanimate sounds such as growling (*brummen*) and rustling (*scharren*). The noises come ever closer before suddenly being punctuated by a series of more definitive sounds: “A sharp step—a violent blow on the doorknob, the door springs open, rattling (*rasselnd*),” and Nathanael finally *sees* “the Sandman standing in the middle of my father’s study, the bright glow of the lights shining in his face! The Sandman, the fearful Sandman, is the old lawyer, Coppelius, who sometimes eats lunch with us” (334).

Nathanael believes he has finally penetrated the mystery, discovered who the Sandman is, and can put him in his place. But where *is* that place? The Sandman stands bathed in light, as though lit up by a spotlight, at the center of a *stage* (“in the middle of my father’s study”). Nathanael thinks he can finally identify this figure once and for all, which means identifying him *by name*. But that name is framed, as it were, by a strange and indeed uncanny predication. “The Sandman *is* . . .” No English translation, including this one, can capture just how singularly odd this “is” turns out to be in the German text. For the “is” does not stand alone: it is echoed by another word that is almost its phonetic double, or *Doppelgänger*, and which thereby inscribes what should be a proper name in a most improper and inappropriate wordplay: “*Der Sandmann ist der alte Advokat Coppelius, der manchmal bei uns zu Mittage ißt*” (334; my emphasis).

Just when it seems that the Sandman is finally locked into place as an object of sight, and also as an object of recognition, he turns out to be part of a bad joke. For the place he occupies is the center of a stage, and the scenario that is playing itself out there is anything but clear and distinct. There is the shock of recognition, to be sure, but that recognition—and everything uncanny entails such a recognition—is at the same time a misrecognition, a misapprehension, for reasons that are condensed in this play of or on words. For recognition presupposes repetition or recurrence, but what repeats and recurs never entails simply the return of the same. What recurs is in its recurring tendentially *different* from what came before while at the same time partaking of what it alters.¹⁰ All of

this is condensed in the repetition of the two German words *ist* and *ißt*: “is” and “eats.” The Sandman is recognized as Coppeliuss, the lawyer, a frequent lunch guest at the family table. Coppeliuss “Law,” perhaps, is that he only *is* insofar as he *eats*. At least that is how he presents himself to Nathanael.

The old woman’s story about the Sandman feeding his young in their nest thus comes home to roost, as it were. To understand how this strange homecoming transforms the family roost, we need only read further. No longer invisible, the Sandman can now be described, compared, identified. But the answer to the question, “What is the Sandman really like?” remains less than reassuring. Because what the Sandman turns out to be *like* is that to which he should be most *unlike*, since it is of an entirely different genre. What he is like is above all the *inhuman*, whether animal or inanimate. His traits, for instance, are described as feline, although the reference is not necessarily to house cats: “Bushy, gray eyebrows, below which a pair of piercing, green catlike eyes emerge sparkling [*ein paar grünliche Katzenaugen stechend hervorfunkeln*]” (334). This allusion repeats the motif of the old woman’s tale and anticipates the *Augen-angst* upon which Freud will place such emphasis in his attempt to interpret the story, and the uncanny generally, in a sense that is appropriate to and appropriable by psychoanalytical theory. But these eyes that “emerge sparkling” resist all such efforts at identification and integration; they do not so much join as separate. The Sandman’s eyes are described as “piercing”—literally puncturing, *stechend*—as virtually leaping out of their sockets (*hervor-funkelnd*). Instead of being put in their proper place, once and for all, the eyes here emerge as an exemplary instance of the failure of things to stay put, the failure of places to be proper. But it is not only his eyes and their surroundings that seem to exceed the bounds of the human. “A strange hissing noise” is described as “escaping through clenched teeth.” And what most revolted the children, Nathanael recalls, were “his large, gnarled, hairy fists,” so much so that everything they touched at the table became repugnant. Instead of helping feed the children, this Sandman touches the food their mother seeks to give them and makes it off-limits.

At least the Sandman is now identified, recognized, remembered. From his place of hiding, Nathanael feels himself absolutely “spellbound”

(*festgezaubert*)—paralyzed and unable to move. In order to see, he must stick his head through the curtain that separates him from the spectacle. “To work!” cries the Sandman, whereupon he and Nathanael’s father throw off their everyday clothes and put on “black smocks.” Then, Nathanael’s father

opened the folding doors of a wall closet; but I saw that what I had long taken to be such was in fact not a wall closet at all, but rather a black crevice [*schwarze Höhlung*] in which there stood a small oven. Coppeliuss approached it and a blue flame crackled up [*knisterte . . . empor*] over the hearth. All sorts of strange utensils [*Geräte*] stood around. Oh God!—as my old father bent over toward the fire he appeared completely different [*da sah er ganz anders aus*]. A gruesomely convulsive pain seemed to have twisted his soft and honest features into a detestably repulsive and diabolical image. He looked like Coppeliuss. The latter swung the glowing red tongs, plucking out of the thick smoke brightly blinking masses upon which he then meticulously hammered. To me it was as if human faces appeared all around, but without eyes—instead, disgusting, deep black holes. “Bring the eyes here . . . here!” cried Coppeliuss in a muffled, threatening voice. I screamed, and seized [*erfaßt*] by panic, I plunged from my hiding-place onto the floor. Then, Coppeliuss grabbed me [*Da ergriff mich Coppeliuss*]. (335–36)¹¹

In what sense is this nightmarish scene an *Urszene*? To be sure, it does not directly depict the parental coitus that Freud usually associates with the concept of “primal scene.” But what it does show is no less passionate, and no less erotic: two men undressing before the eyes of the transfixed child, who is medusized, as it were, before the unexpected spectacle that unfolds before him. The “wall closet” opens its doors to disclose not another domestic space, filled with clothes, but a “dark crevice” containing an oven. This oven, although it resembles the domestic hearth, turns out to be far more dangerous. The heat and light it generates fly off as sparks that mimic the separation of eyes from their sockets, of the seen from the familiar: “Oh God,” Nathanael sighs, as he sees how different his “old father” looks from what he expects and remembers. In the light of the fire, Nathanael’s father looks not like his usual reassuring self, but rather convulsed, in pain (or in pleasure?): “He looked like Coppeliuss.” And what Coppeliuss looks like, he now sets about performing: he *ist* was he *ißt*, and he “eats” not just eyes, but bodies, human bodies which are expected to appear as the epitome of organic wholes, beauti-

ful, self-contained forms. His taste for eyes, however, is hardly arbitrary, since eyes are the bodily organ to which the expectation of bodily unity is traditionally attached. What can be seen with one's "own two eyes" can be identified: to find out "who the Sandman is" is to discover "what he looks like." The Sandman, however, turns the tables: not only does he not look *like* anything *familiar* and recognizable, but he makes others look like him. To Nathanael, for instance, his poor old father suddenly *looks like* the Sandman; which means, he looks convulsive, repulsive, diabolical, "*ganz anders*." If Coppeliuss is a lawyer, the Law he observes is not simply the Law of the Father. Except perhaps in the sense of that *nom du père* of which Lacan insisted that *les non-dupes errent*—that those who look to such a law to provide the basis of reliable recognition are bound to go the furthest astray.

In a certain sense, this is Nathanael's fate. In the hopes of putting an end to the specter of the Sandman by discovering who he is, whom he resembles, he discovers that the Sandman names the violence of a certain disassemblage, which provokes fear and loathing, to be sure, but which also evokes fascination and desire. For what is perhaps most noteworthy about this scene—and the point where it ceases to be mere story and spectacle and becomes a theatrical scenario instead—occurs when Nathanael, haunted and tempted by those eyes without bodies, leaps out of his hiding place and throws himself at the Sandman's feet. In so doing he forsakes his role of spectator, seeing but unseen, and takes the plunge . . . onto the stage, into the theater, abandoning himself to the dangerous sight of others, despite (and perhaps because) of the risks such exposure entails. The convulsive and painfully passionate scene he has just witnessed overwhelms him and literally hurls him screaming onto the stage.

It is a fateful plunge that will be repeated at the end of the story. Indeed, it gives the story an ending. When Nathanael, having climbed the tower with his fiancée, Clara, in order to take in the view, is seized by a fit of madness; he tries to throw Clara from the heights and finally takes the plunge himself. Hoffmann's tale, then, is framed between two violent and involuntary plunges. First there is a plunge from the ostensibly hidden and protected security of an unseen viewing position onto a stage whose borders are difficult to define, since they change in function of movements they cannot simply contain or situate. The spasmodic con-

vulsions of disembodied eyes suggest one such movement, which is, however, by no means limitable to that particular bodily organ. Coppeliuss, having seized hold of Nathanael, first goes for his eyes. But upon the suplications of Nathanael's father, he accepts a substitute:

"Let the boy keep his eyes to cry his heart out in the world; instead we will take this opportunity to observe closely the hands and feet." Thereupon he took hold of me so violently that all joints cracked, he screwed my hands off, and my feet as well and replaced them first here, then there. . . . And everything around me grew dark and black, a sudden spasm shot through my nerves and bones and I felt nothing any more. (336)

Nathanael, in short, takes the plunge, leaps from the womb, plunges onto the stage (the German word, *stürzt*, designates "plunging" in both senses: taking a fall and being thrust or thrown off balance). This second birth thus involves a fall from the security of the audience onto and into the exposed space of the stage. And the site of such exposure is, first and foremost, the body. Or rather, not just "the body," as though there were such a thing, but rather the narcissistic conception of the body as a matrix for the ego: self-contained, unified, integrated. It is this conception of the body that is dismantled on the stage. Nathanael's limbs are un-screwed, his body dismembered, and as a result, he loses consciousness in a "sudden spasm." This loss of consciousness is tied to the narcissistic conception of the body as an integral whole: when it goes, so does consciousness—which must always be consciousness of an object, which is to say, consciousness of *an object that is one*. When the object is revealed as being more or less than one, as split or doubled, like the space itself of the scene we are rereading, what results is a "sudden spasm" in which it is probably impossible to separate pleasure from pain.¹²

In his reading of this text, Freud insists that "intellectual uncertainty"—the term introduced by Jentsch, his predecessor in the study of the uncanny—is not what counts. It is not, he insists, uncertainty or delusion concerning Olympia that is uncanny in this story, but rather the (castration) anxiety associated with the figure of the Sandman, and hence with the fear of losing one's eyes. And yet, despite the fact that Freud presents this interpretation with great conviction and force, "intellectual uncertainty" returns throughout this essay to haunt its main thesis, and in fact

to help dismember it, scattering it into a variety of different theses, of which the discriminations between repression and overcoming, between fiction and reality, are only the most manifest examples. If castration anxiety has a structural significance for psychoanalysis, it is to the extent that it returns to haunt the story the subject would like to tell itself in order to confirm its self-identity as an "I." But anxiety in general, and castration anxiety in particular, as Freud was later to maintain, mark the danger that all subjectivity construed as an ego cannot escape: it can only respond to this danger in different ways. One—if not the major—response to this danger is, of course, anxiety, and the uncanny presupposes anxiety. Such responses, to be sure, are never made once and for all: the temporality of the unconscious, and in particular of its originating scene, its *Urszene*, is never linear or punctual, but always subsequent, *nachträglich*, *après-coup*. What the uncanny suggests, above and beyond Freud's explicit discussion of it, is that the structure in which that subsequence articulates itself is precisely that of the "*coup de théâtre*," of theatricality as a *coup*, a blow or a *Schlag* that gives the beat, marks time, but also interrupts the expectation of a continuous, progressive, linear-teleological course of events. In short, the uncanny is that resurgence or repetition which abruptly, but also subsequently, belatedly, reveals its "coup" to be split into a present that never comes full circle and a future that is always oncoming but never fully here.

What is shattered by this blow, this *Schlag*, this *coup*, is ultimately the unity of place, which becomes the disunity of the stage. Why is the stage disunited? Because it cannot be seen, taken in, from any one perspective. Nathanael's story cannot be told from a single point of view, but must first be written in first-person discourse, in letters to his friend, and then, following an abrupt and awkward shift, continued in the discourse of a third-person narrator.

It has been said, again and again, that the uncanny cannot be treated as a serious object of study because it entails feelings and is therefore not sufficiently objective or objectifiable. And yet, the uncanny is neither simply subjective feeling nor objective event. Rather, it marks the confounding of this polarity: of first-person and third-person discourse. But the instability is not just *between* narrative positions: it is already *within* both of them, just as the Sandman is already within the walls of the household. This becomes clear in what is perhaps the most uncanny

moment of the entire text, at least upon repeated reading. Once the reader has discovered the "contents" of the story, "intellectual uncertainty" or undecidability can no longer relate to simple events or facts but rather to their significance. The most striking element in this text is one whose significance emerges in stark contrast to the apparent nullity of its content. It is a casual remark, which, however, triggers the fatal dénouement. At the top of a tower the two have climbed to take in the panoramic view, Clara calls Nathanael's attention to a bizarre sight:

"Look at the strange little grew bush that seems to be coming toward us" asked Clara. Nathanael grasped mechanically his side-pocket; he found Coppola's glasses (*Perspektiv*), he looked sideways—Clara stood in front of the glass!—Thereupon his pulse and veins began to throb convulsively—deathly pale he stared at Clara, but soon streams of fire coursed and sparkled through those rolling eyes, he cried out horribly, like a hunted animal; then he sprang high into the air and laughing monstrously in between, he cried out in a cutting tone, "Wood puppet turn around, turn around wood puppet"—and with enormous force he seized Clara and tried to throw her off [the platform]. (362)

Since I have already commented on the strange move *sideways*,¹³ I will limit myself here to a remark on the short sentence that triggers the advent of madness and the effort to throw Clara to her death. It is a phrase no more obtrusive, no more dramatic, than the banal scene with which the story began, the entry of the salesman, Coppola, trying to sell his wares. The phrase, which Freud completely ignores in his commentary, and yet which is placed in the decisive position, is simply this: "Clara stood in front of the glass!" (*Clara stand vor dem Glase!*). What I want to point out is something equally simple: that this statement, especially its exclamation point, is a clear case of what is known in French as "style indirecte libre" and in German as *erlebte Rede*. It is grammatically couched in the third person, and thus implies a certain separation from what is being described; but the use of the exclamation point creates an urgency that corresponds to a first-person perspective. It is this inextricable confounding of the perspectives of first and third person, of ego and id (and we should remember that in German, Freud uses the far more idiomatic pronouns *Ich* and *Es*) that marks the uncanny discovery Nathanael cannot bear, and that transforms what grammatically would be a simple constative into an exclamation: "Clara stood before the glass!"

But what of the glass before which Clara stands? In German, the word used throughout for glass is *Perspektiv*. It is clear that since the seventeenth century this word designated a telescope—a prosthetic, optical device to supplement the organs of sight. Nothing could fit better with the Freudian story of castration: the telescope would be the technical device predestined to produce, in the here and now, the impossible desire to make the invisible visible, so as to discover everywhere the Same. But instead of the Same—the same closet, for instance, or the same paternal clothes—what the prosthesis brings closer is the inescapability of *separation*: the separation of eyes from sockets, of the *perspective* from that which it reveals and that which sees through it. The “other side” of Coppola’s “perspectives” is what his name signifies in Italian: *eye socket*. The socket is what is left of the body when its members have separated themselves from the whole and taken on a life of their own, “turning about” like “wood puppets,” revolving in a circle without end. All that is left for Nathanael is the circle itself, condensing both the hope of the sight he will never see and the confirmation of its fatality, were he ever able to see it: “Circle of fire turn around” (*Feuerkreis dreh dich*) (362). Within this circle no one, nothing can remain what it is, and so Nathanael has no choice but to leave the circle, and once again to take a second plunge: this time not toward a birth on the stage but toward his death.

It should be noted that Coppola is a vendor of wares, of merchandise, of commodities: of “beautiful eyes” (*Sköne Oke* in a German cut apart by the “foreign language,” Italian), which are in fact technological prostheses, confirming the absence of a certain power to see. Those *Sköne Oke* are the distant but recognizable precursors of what today is called television—with effects that are hardly any less uncanny.¹⁴

This final scene, then, reveals that the uncanny cannot be separated from the question of *perspective*, in both senses of this German word. No point of view is proper and self-contained; hence the inevitability of a prosthetic supplement, of a *Perspektiv*. But like the commodity, this *Perspektiv* can never be definitively appropriated: it only is in *circulating*, and in circulating it merges with and diverges from other perspectives. Such circulation never comes full circle and therefore leaves no place undisturbed, no body whole. Letters arrive at unintended destinations, eliciting unwanted and unexpected responses. Nathanael’s let-

ter to his friend Lothar is mistakenly addressed to Lothar’s sister Clara, who, much to his annoyance, replies to the letter she was not designed to read (for now-obvious reasons: the letter should have remained *Männersache*, a matter among men). But this unexpected and unavoidable interference of the other—of the other woman, of woman as the other—can only appear, from a certain perspective, as uncanny: all too familiar and yet irreducibly alien.

No appeal to authentically lived experience—be it that of the “new” third-person narrator in Hoffmann’s story or that of Freud in his account of Miss Lucy R.—can overcome this uncanniness; for, like the Sandman, it is already busily at work at the heart and hearth of every home, contaminating and corrupting all authority, just as the *style indirecte libre* blurs the boundaries between authoritative third-person and engaged first-person narratives.¹⁵

It is not just the authority of the “third-person,” but also the position of the *reader as spectator* that is called into question. Indeed, the *theatricality* of the uncanny consists precisely in inscribing every *perspective* into a scenario that can therefore no longer be taken in simply as a spectacle. This is also what distinguishes such theatricality from “theory” in the traditional sense: there is no longer the possibility of a stable separation from that which is under consideration. A certain promiscuity marks the inscription of spectator into the scene, of narrator into the scenario. “Positions” and “perspectives” become “roles” and “parts” of a process that never gets its “act” together to become a whole, or a “work.” And the recognition that this process has always been “at work” behind the scenes of the ostensibly stable dialectic of subject and object is what causes it to be put aside as all too familiar and even as slightly disreputable.

Nevertheless, the shunting aside of the uncanny by most “scholarly” discourse and research doesn’t succeed in putting it to rest. Rather, like the Sandman, the uncanny crops up again and again, with surprising resilience, where it is least expected: as a figure of speech, an atmosphere in a story, an allegorical instance. Announced by the sound of approaching steps, of heavy breathing, wheezing or coughing, or other semi-articulate sounds, uncanny figures and situations return to remind us of the difficulty of distinguishing clearly between language and reality, between feelings and situations, between what we know and what we ignore. Defig-

uring of the figure, the Sandman marks the spot where what is (there) and what is not, presence and absence, coming and going, can no longer be clearly distinguished.

This uncontrollable possibility—the possibility of a certain loss of control—can, perhaps, explain why the uncanny remains a marginal notion even within psychoanalysis itself. For psychoanalysis, today as in Freud's lifetime, seeks to establish itself in stable institutions, to ground itself in a practice and a theory that rarely question the established conceptions of truth and the criteria of value that prevail in the societies in which it is situated. These conceptions and criteria, however, presuppose precisely the kind of space, place and positioning that the young Nathanael seeks to assume but is forced to abandon under the impact of the spectacle he first witnesses, then enters: the position of the detached spectator. In taking the plunge, however involuntarily, he abandons a distance that has never really protected or prevented him from participating in the scene. What changes with his position is his *role*. And it is this role, perhaps, that makes the uncanny itself so uncanny: so familiar, even banal, and yet so elusive and unmanageable.

As Freud himself was forced to acknowledge, however implicitly, the uncanny is difficult to separate from “intellectual uncertainty” because it calls into question the basis of all judgment; the *position* from which distinctions are drawn. Ever since Descartes, the search for “certitude” has been the force driving the project of constituting and securing an autonomous subject. This project is the condition of the Uncanny, which “returns” to haunt it as its shadow. Whereas for Descartes the essential condition for attaining certitude was the subject's withdrawal from a world that *in its alterity* could no longer be relied on, it is precisely the discovery that such withdrawal is a *fata morgana*, an unsustainable construct, that informs the misrecognition that constitutes the uncanny. The uncanny is nourished by the ineradicable suspicion that the reflexivity of the Cartesian cogito is no less mediated, no less distant from itself, and hence no less “certain” or secure than the world it seeks to supplant. Hidden behind his curtain, Nathanael believes he has discovered, with his own two eyes, just *who* the Sandman really *is*. He believes he has replaced the figurative designation “Sandman” with an authentically proper name. But the name he comes up with turns out to be a link in a signifying

chain that unravels what it is intended to close up: “Coppelius” becomes “Coppola,” the vendor of *Perspektiven*, whose name, as already noted, signifies “socket” or “hollow,” but also recalls, phonetically, *copula*. The Sandman “is” the lawyer who “is(st).” The lawyer “is” the vendor of protheses, whose name recalls the operator of predication itself. But the “is” *ißt*, and in thus consuming its univocal meaning, this *is(s)t* emerges as the disjunctive junction of that which diverges and yet coexists, as a part that never becomes a whole. It is an *Ur-teil* that merely is, without *judging*. “Clara stood before the glass!” We are never told if Nathanael saw her, or didn't see her there, standing before the glass. All we are left with, as readers, is the power of that exclamation point, which punctuates without forming a period. Clara stood before the glass! Period.

Perhaps this replacement of the period by the exclamation point can help to explain why the uncanny has remained so peripheral an issue in theoretical discourse, psychoanalytic or not. For it confounds predication, judgment, and lets a certain form of “constative” discourse reveal itself as always already “performative.” This mixing of the genres poses a challenge to a notion of scholarship that still insists that knowing and not knowing are mutually exclusive.

The Uncanny Happening

The second text I want to reread could hardly, on the surface at least, be more different from Freud's. To be sure, it entails a reading of a literary text. The text in question, however, is not modern, concerned with problems of self-consciousness. Rather, it is concerned with the essence of human being, or so at least it is presented. The text is the second Chorus from Sophocles' *Antigone*, and the reader is Martin Heidegger, who, in the final chapter of his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, comments upon this text in the context of his discussion of Parmenides' celebrated and enigmatic dictum, *to gar auto noein estin te kai einai*, usually rendered as “thinking and being are the same.”¹⁶ According to Heidegger, this conventional translation is deceptively simple and requires extensive reworking. His decision to recur to the text of Sophocles is the first step in that process. The use of a poetical text here thus follows a long and deeply ingrained philosophical tradition: recourse to a literary text serves as a propaedeutic in approach-

ing the more difficult, more serious, less accessible philosophical one. As with Freud, then, in Heidegger's reading the uncanny occupies an eccentric position with respect to the central task of advancing our understanding. The understanding at stake for Freud is of course that of the psyche; for Heidegger, it is that of Being. In both bodies of work, the discussion of the uncanny will therefore occupy an important but clearly delimited space: neither Freud nor Heidegger will return to the subject once it has been dealt with explicitly (Freud in his essay on the uncanny, Heidegger first in *Being and Time* [1927] and then, a second and final time, in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, lectures first held in 1935).

In introducing Sophocles' text Heidegger makes it very clear why, despite the importance he accords to this text and to its articulation of the uncanny, the latter topic can only serve as a transitional term for him. In the Chorus, argues Heidegger, "the decisive determination (*entscheidende Bestimmung*) of human being" (112/146)¹⁷ is articulated. But that which is "decisive," *ent-scheidende*, is also that from which one has to depart (*scheiden*), namely, from the term "human." In short, what is uncanny, for Heidegger at least, is the recognition of the "human" as that which defines itself by departing from itself and becoming something else, something all too familiar and yet irreducibly alien, strange, and singularly overpowering.

It is precisely this emphasis on power rather than fear, anxiety, or desire that distinguishes Heidegger's discussion of the uncanny from Freud's. Heidegger's translation of the Chorus—which I have retranslated into English (adding italics for emphasis) with as much "syntactical literalness"¹⁸ as possible—makes this perfectly clear:

Multiple is the uncanny, yet nothing
shows itself, beyond man more uncannily *jutting* forth.
He sets out on the *foaming* tide
in the south storm of winter
and crosses the crests
of the wildly cleft waves.
Of the Gods even the most sublime, the Earth,
he exhausts, indestructibly inexhaustible
overturning it from year to year,
driving back and forth with steeds
the plows.

Also the light-winged flock of birds
he entraps and hunts
the beasts of the wild
and the ocean's native hosts—
circumspectly *meditating* man.
He overwhelms with tricks the animal
that roams the mountains by night and wanders,
the raw-maned neck of the steed
and the untamed bull
with wood the neck *enclosing*
he forces under the yoke.

Also in the resonances of the word
and in wind-swift all-understanding
he found himself, also in the courage
of rule over cities.

Also how to escape he has considered,
from exposure to the arrows
of the weather, also the inclemency of frost.

Everywhere *making* his way, but with no way out
he comes to naught.

Against one assault only unable, against death,
through any flight ever to defend himself,
even if debilitation through illness
he has successfully avoided.

Possessed of his wits, fabrication
skillfully *mastering* beyond all expectation,
he succumbs at times to misfortune
still, at times accomplishes great things.
Between the laws of the Earth and the
conjured order of the Gods he wends his way.
Rising far above the sites, deprived of the sites,
is he, to whom always *Unbeing being*
for the sake of the venture.

Not my hearth will be familiar to such a one,
nor share with me his madness my knowledge,
who brings this to be in a work.

(112–13/146–48)

The italicized words and phrases have one thing in common. They are all adverbs or adverbial phrases constructed around the present par-

ticiples: jutting, foaming, overturning, driving, meditating, enclosing, making, mastering, rising, and, above all, unbeing being. Man is thus defined in terms of a way of “being” for which “unbeing” and “being” are no longer simply opposable or distinguishable. The linguistic “tense” in which this convergence of being and unbeing tends to articulate itself is that of the present participle and the adverbial nouns that are formed from it—nouns such as “being” and “unbeing.” What could be more common, more familiar, more “heimisch” than the present participle, which commonly designates those activities and processes that are going on around us all the time? But if we inspect this tense more closely, we discover that such goings on, repetitive and recurrent, never come full circle, never come “home,” and are never complete. The present *participle* thus signals a departure from other forms of the present construed on the basis of the present *indicative*, the “is,” which Heidegger, in *The Introduction to Metaphysics*, singles out as the paradigm of the “forgetting of being,” or rather, of the ontological difference between “being” and “beings.”¹⁹ It is immediately apparent, however, that in English this difference is already obscured, insofar as *Sein*, the infinitive noun, is rendered through the gerund, being, from which Heidegger precisely seeks to distinguish it. It is as if the English language were itself the repository of *Seinsvergessenheit*, of the forgetting of being, of the ontological difference. Unless . . .

Unless that ontological difference is itself inescapably associated with the present participle and its various derivatives. It is precisely this suspicion that Heidegger’s translation and, even more, his discussion of the Chorus from *Antigone* encourage us to explore. His reading of that text is divided into three *Gänge*, or “run-throughs” (bearing in mind, of course, that a thinker like Heidegger walks, even marches at times, but never runs). The first reading, which aims at discerning the inner structure of the text, begins with a discussion of the ambiguous meaning of the Greek, *deinon*, of which the superlative, *to deinotaton*, is used to designate “man”: *deinon* is translated by Heidegger both as the “overpowering” and as the “powerful,” as overwhelming force and as the exercise of power. Man is the most uncanny, *to deinotaton*, in forcing his way beyond the limits of the familiar towards the “overwhelming.”

It should be noted that like Freud, Heidegger approaches the un-

canny through the ambivalence of the word itself. But is it the same ambivalence? For Freud, “uncanny” (*unheimlich*) is a subset of “canny,” *heimlich*, which in itself contains the notion of “familiar” but also that of “concealed.” Heidegger, on the other hand, appears to accept the logic of opposition in explaining why *deinon* should be translated as *unheimlich*: “We understand the uncanny to be that which throws us out of the ‘homey’ [. . .] The uncanny does not let us be at home (*einheimisch*). This is what makes it over-whelming.” “Man,” however, he immediately goes on to argue, experiences this not as a force external to him but rather as part of his innermost being. According to the Chorus, man is impelled to forsake the borders of everything familiar—home, country, family—and this constraint under which he must make his way exposes him to the overwhelming. It is the making and losing of one’s way that Heidegger reads out of the Greek “*pantoporos aporos ep’ouden erchetai*,” which might be rendered succinctly as “always, no way”—or more comprehensibly as “everywhere making his way, but with no way out / He comes to naught.” This verbal antinomy is repeated, Heidegger points out, in the next strophe with respect to the *polis*: *hypsipolis apolis*, which one might be tempted to render as “hyperpolitical apolitical,” were it not for Heidegger’s warning that the “polis” in question is neither simply a political notion nor simply the city-state. Rather, he insists, it is the site where history happens. Such happening cannot be derived from the institutions we recognize as political, because it is only *by virtue of* such historical happening that such institutions are founded in the first place. It is this site that man, in his uncanny violence, can never really occupy. True violence consists therefore in the inability of human beings to “have” a site, to inhabit a place, to accept its laws and observe its boundaries. It is precisely this inability that defines human being in terms of an uncanny convergence of power and vulnerability.

This brings Heidegger to his second run-through, in which he proposes to retrace the dynamic evolution of the text, now paying attention to the sequential, syntactic relation of its elements, within which the semantic content discerned in the first run-through is now to be reinscribed. Indeed, it is precisely the notions of content and containment that are implicitly at issue in this second reading. Somewhat paradoxically, this reading is more concerned with place and space than with time:

man gives up the firm ground under his feet in order to set out into the unknown, and this “beginning” harbors all the rest. In leaving what he knows for the unknown, man seeks to impose his order on all areas of life. But although he succeeds in developing great skill in organizing and opening realms of being, he finds himself thrown back again and again onto the paths he has already traversed. In short, like Nathanael in “The Sandman,” man here is caught in a circle. In it, “he turns around and about in his own circle” (121/157), caught in the rut of the all too familiar, and however agile and ingenious he may be in discovering all sorts of paths, there is no way out. In death even the most powerful human abilities meet their match: for death “surpasses all completion, [. . .] exceeds all limitation.” (121/158). And it is here that the uncanny emerges:

But this uncanny, this un-homey, *dieses Un-heimliche*, that expels once and for all from the home, is no special event that deserves mention simply because in the end it also occurs. Humans have no way out of death not merely when the time comes to die, but constantly and essentially. Insofar as man *is*, he stands in the blind alley of death. Being-there (*Da-sein*) is thus *un-canniness happening*. (121/158; my emphasis)

It should be noted that when it comes time to formulate just why and how the uncanny is “nothing special,” neither monumental nor compartmentalizable, and that it has nothing to do with dying considered as an actual event, Heidegger resorts to the present participle of the verb “to happen” (*geschehend*) in order to designate the temporality that distinguishes the uncanny as *happening* from death as an empirical event. This is of particular interest given his preceding remarks on the circularity of the paths that mark one’s history and on their tendency to revolve around themselves. “Circle of fire . . .” The circle of familiarity, of the home, tends to turn into the less virtuous circle of solipsism, tautology, and even death, from which one can easily yearn to escape, to break out in search of adventure and of the unknown. But such yearning supposes that one can find the beginning of the beginning, the circumference of the circle of the familiar and of the family. Otherwise, how can one hope to escape?

Although we begin to see why Heidegger resorts to a term with military connotations to describe this move outwards—*aus-rücken*, colloquially translated as “to move out,” as an army would do—the term has

another connotation that is also of interest here: literally, *aus-rücken* means to “back out.” And since, as Heidegger’s own choice of texts indicates, any move forward also involves a move backwards, *breaking out* can at the same time entail *backing out or up*. The purely martial tone of this discourse is thus overtaken by an uncanny shadow. Could such a convergence of moving out and moving back be one of the dimensions of the uncanny happening? The convergence of breaking out with backing out would be uncanny in its confounding of the directional poles of forward and backward, progress and regress. What sort of “history” as happening, upon which Heidegger so insists, would then be thinkable?

In any case, it is clear for Heidegger that “with the naming of this force (*Gewaltigen*) and uncanny (*Unheimlichen*) the poetical outline of being and of human being reaches its intrinsic limits.” What follows, then, can be nothing more than the summing up of what has previously been said, by relating it to its “fundamental trait”: the duplicity of *deinon* already discussed. This duplicity is now developed with respect to two other terms: *techne* and *dike*. *Techne* is not simply technology, but rather what Heidegger first translates as *Gemache*, and subsequently, in his commentary, as *Machenschaft*. I translate the first as “fabrication,” the second as “machination.” *Dike*, which Heidegger translates as *Fug*, might be rendered in English as “articulation.” Fortunately, what is more important here than the (impossible) translation is the result of the conflictual interaction of these two forces or stances, which elaborate and further determine the relation of the “overwhelming” (*Fug*) to the “violent” (*Gewalt-tätiger*). *Techne*, Heidegger argues, is above all a kind of “knowledge,” but not that which simply recognizes what is. Rather, it entails know-how, “the ability to put Being to work as the being of such and such a being” (*das Ins-Werk-setzen-können des Seins als eines je so und so Seienden*) (122/159). And to describe the distinctive nature of this process, Heidegger once again resorts to the present participle: “The setting-to-work is the disclosing wreaking of Being in being” (*eröffnendes Er-wirken des Seins im Seienden*) (122/159). It is as if the decisive movement of opening up here requires the present participle (*eröffnendes, er-wirkende*). And again in his résumé of the process: “Violence [*Gewalt-tätigkeit*] is the using of force [*Gewalt-brauchen*] against the Overwhelming [*das Überwältigende*]: the knowing [*wissende*] struggle to bring hitherto contained

being to appearing [*Erscheinende*] as the being [*als das Seiende*]" (122/159). This brings Heidegger to his third reading.

The process of opening up being in a determinate work yields a result that is as fragile and ephemeral as it is conflictual. A different kind of movement has to be described from that with which we are familiar. Time draws the human towards its end not merely by moving it toward the moment of its disappearance, but by allowing it to define itself, to be what it is in an endless circle of tautological repetition. The only escape from the demonic tautology of this repetition lies not in breaking out or away, but in backing out, as it were, by backing up and making way for repetition to recur as something other than simply the return of the same. This occurs through the breaking up of the *work*, through a work constructed in order to allow such a break-up to occur. This is the work, and the human considered as "breach," and it requires a very special kind of place: "The human is however forced into such being-there, into the necessity of such being, because the Overwhelming, as one such, in order to appear [in its] prevailing [*waltend zu erscheinen*], needs for itself the site of openness" (124/163).

The breaking up of the work opens the place of the human as a breach, into which Being emerging breaks (*erscheinend hereinbricht*, 124/163). *Dike* shatters the dike of the human, of its *techne* and work, all of which are there ultimately for the sake of being overwhelmed. In being thus overwhelmed as breach, human being is forced to open itself to alteration, transformation, deformation. For it is only in this forced and violent opening, which can also entail violence and even disintegration, that there is space for something else to happen.

Despite the apparent stasis of Heidegger's categories, especially that of being, his discussion of the uncanny is framed by what might be called a temporality of disjunction, that which alone, he insists, deserves to be called "historical," *geschichtlich* in the sense of *geschehend*, of happening. Such happening is never fully predictable or calculable, never simply a particular dependent upon a general the way a part depends upon a whole. A happening is historical when its singularity resists such subsumption (or sublation in the Hegelian sense). And the way such resistance is articulated most powerfully, most simply, in its familiarity and strangeness, is in the uncanniness of the present participle, in which the

part is brought before our eyes and ears as a reiteration that is forever incomplete, never coming full circle, always open to change.

Where is the presence of the present participle to be found? In the interstices of its reiterative recurrence. The present participle thus best articulates what Heidegger finally describes as the definition of human being: a *Zwischen-fall*, an "in-cident," literally a "fall-between." Human being can thus be said to "fall between" the recurrences of the present participle, marking the disjunctive incidence of such presenting, those discontinuous goings-on that participate in the "here and now" while also being "there and then." How are we to construe this strange "place" that is both here-and-now and there-and-then? Heidegger, as is well known, will designate it as a "clearing," a *Lichtung*. But in the strange chiaroscuro that marks the uncanny, another name for this site suggests itself, one that implies both delimitation and openness. This site discloses that which can never be seen as such.

In his translation of the passage from the *Introduction to Metaphysics* quoted above, Ralph Manheim inscribes this name almost as an afterthought: "Man is forced into such a being-there, hurled into the affliction [*Not*] of such being, because the overpowering as such, in order to appear in its power, *requires* a place, *a scene of disclosure*" (163). The site (or *Stätte*) that opens up to disclose the overwhelming in and as the happening of the uncanny is designated here as a "scene." Nowhere, to be sure, does Heidegger (in contrast to Freud) use any equivalent term in German: *Stätte*, site, has nothing particularly theatrical about it. And yet . . . only a certain kind of theatricality can fulfill the purpose that Heidegger assigns to this place, not only because this place is one of disclosure or of exposure, but also because it entails dissimulation and misrecognition.

In a somewhat embarrassed and cursory comment upon the last strophe of the Chorus, Heidegger finally takes cognizance of the Chorus as such, acknowledging that the latter exists as a singular instance, that it is *situated*, if not in a theater, then at least in relation to what it has been describing, the conflictual interrelation of *dike* and *techne*, the conflictual interdependence of the "overwhelming articulation" (*überwältigende Fug*) and the "violence of knowing" (*Gewalt-tätigkeit des Wissens*) (126/165). The final words of the Chorus, which no longer state what *is* but rather utter a wish or an admonition, depart from the ostensible neutrality and trans-

parentage of the Chorus's previous discourse and demonstrate a profound involvement with what is being said: an involvement that expresses itself defensively, precisely in order to protect its home and hearth (*dem Herde*) from what has just been described. But, as young Nathanael's discovery of a *Herde* ("a small oven") in the false wall-closet, suggests, for the Chorus, too, the enemy is already *intra muros*, inhabiting the home as the privileged stage of human finitude. The Chorus, speaking in the subjunctive in Heidegger's translation, utters the fearful wish and resolution that its "knowledge" (*mein Wissen*) be protected from the "delusions" (*Wähnen*) of those it has just described. But what it has just described is not a particular type of heroic personality, but rather, according to Heidegger at least, human being itself. How then can *mein Wissen*, my knowledge, be protected from human being, which is necessarily involved in desire, fantasy, delusion—in *Wähnen*? Not by way of the defense of the hearth and its institutions (as *Antigone* amply demonstrates), nor in the creation of the play as a *work*, as certain other texts of Heidegger might suggest. Rather, knowledge is preserved, if not protected, precisely in that breakdown of the work that Heidegger chooses to ignore, although he describes it with great precision as the ambivalence of the Chorus—the entity that participates in the play while striving to keep a safe distance from it. It is this impossibly split desire that is staged in and as the theatricality of a work that is also a *Stück*, a *pièce*, a play that is a part but that never adds up to a whole.

It is precisely in the theatrical derangement of the "work" that the uncanny takes place, and it is this, perhaps, that ultimately distinguishes *theater* as *medium* from *art* as *genre*, as prescribed by classical aesthetics. Unlike the work, the play is never self-contained: it only "is" in its "execution," which entails not so much *form* as performance, or rather, *deformation*; its temporality is that of the unexpected and the discontinuous, the Aristotelian *peripeteia*, the *coup de théâtre*. Theatrical performance is suspended between this "coup" and the traces it leaves. Theater, as Walter Benjamin put it, is most of all "*Exponierung des Anwesenden*," an "exposing of the present" or more literally, of "presenting."²⁰ The present participle irrevocably exposes the present to a movement that is both uncanny and theatrical, but once again also somehow disreputable. Correlatively, what is theatrical, in the sense of the medium or the scene, is held to be a mere

diversion from what is considered essential: the thing itself. One need only reread the *Poetics* to see how Aristotle avoids valorizing anything directly related to the scenic *medium*, preferring instead to discuss the way tragedy represents a certain content, an action, so that the latter becomes meaningful and integrative. But in place of the Aristotelian call for "synoptic" viewing, what we find, both in the text of Heidegger and in that of Freud, is the inscribing not just of *the spectator*, but also of irreducibly multiple and split *perspectives*, in the scene and its scenario.

Why, Freud asks again and again, do certain themes and events—such as a hand that has been severed from the body—sometimes appear uncanny, and sometimes not? This recurring question marks Freud's own intellectual uncertainty, which haunts all of his efforts to dismiss Jentsch's notion of "intellectual uncertainty" and thus to wrench possession of the uncanny from his predecessor in the field. Here then is Freud's final attempt at a definitive response to this question.

The answer is easy to give. It goes this way [*Sie lauter*]: In this tale we are focused [*wir (werden) eingestellt*] not upon the feelings of the princess, but on the superior cunning of the "master thief." The princess may well not be spared the uncanny feeling, we will even concede as plausible that she has fainted, but we feel nothing uncanny, for we do not put ourselves in her place but rather in the place of the other.²¹

In the end, then, the uncanny is inseparable from questions of perspective, of positioning, and hence from a relation of spectator to scene and of scenario to spectator. What is at stake in the uncanny is nothing more nor less than the disposition to "put ourselves in the place of the other." For Freud, the place of that other is occupied not by the "Princess," to be sure, but by the cunning "master thief." But—as Heidegger's reading of the Chorus suggests—no amount of "cunning" will ever be great enough, no thief masterful enough, to steal away from a being that is forever presenting itself in the multiply ambiguous perspective of a participle that never adds up to a whole.

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