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Masterarbeit zum Thema:

**Haunted Houses, Haunted Selves – Feminist Readings of Uncanny Domesticity:
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Shirley Jackson and Francesca Woodman**

Zur Erlangung des Grades Master of Arts

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1 Introduction

One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –
One need not be a House –
The Brain has Corridors – surpassing
Material Place –
Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)¹

The first stanza of Emily Dickinson’s poem encapsulates the idea that hauntings take place in the mind. The house is a reflection site of the mind’s haunting. Alas, this does not mean that the house as a space is a negligible background. To the contrary, the characters’ intimate relationship with the space they dwell in and how their interior is externalized is what calls for attention. The literary texts and the photographs that will be discussed further share one particular quality; they use the haunted house motif to express the protagonist’s psychological state by transferring mental hauntings onto the narrative’s spatial layer. In this thesis I will argue that the aesthetic phenomenon of the uncanny in literature and art is a spatial and gendered aesthetic concept, which is expressed in the spatial characteristics of a literary or photographic narrative. The intention of this thesis is to evaluate the entanglement of the uncanny, space, domesticity and femininity in the context of Gothic literature and photography. These four objects can only be read in their interplay with each other and how they each function as structural principles in the framework of Gothic fiction and photography. The focal point will be the interaction of these elements, namely the concept of the uncanny, how it is transferred on to the spatial level and how domestic space is portrayed as uncanny for female characters in Gothic literature and art. In this context the haunted house is understood as more than merely a trope or motif commonly used in the Gothic mode, the haunted house is regarded as a structural principle. Especially thought-provoking are the material quality, design and sensual effects the space has on the female protagonists, who appear to be in liminal stages in their lives, in processes of becoming or disappearing. Invoking the uncanny effect proves to be a highly charged stylistic device for expressing feminist attitudes towards the home and domesticity in both literary fiction and photography. These are the processes I wish to examine as they unfold on the pages of “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), “The Lovely House” (1950) and in the photographic self-portraits by Francesca Woodman (1958-1981) from her series *House* and *Space*². To establish a connection between the concepts at hand, the uncanny, domesticity, spatiality and femininity, I will be defining these terms

¹Dickinson, Emily. “One need not be a Chamber” *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by R.W. Franklin, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005, p. 407.

and their thematic overlap in the introductory paragraphs. Further I will describe how the uncanny manifests on a spatial level as an atmosphere and therefore in the interaction between subject and space. Following the term definitions will be an overview of how domestic politics and gendered perceptions of and behaviors in spaces are expressed in the Gothic mode in particular. Considering the haunted house as an essential Gothic trope I will be discussing its typical characteristics. For the literary analysis I have chosen two ways in which the Freudian uncanny features in the haunted house narrative, first the house as the site of repetition and second the house as a stand-in for the maternal body.

The following paragraph shall serve as a preliminary explanation of the term uncanny and how it is understood in the context of this thesis. Any text on the uncanny would inevitably be incomplete without a reference of Sigmund Freud's seminal essay "The Uncanny" [Das Unheimliche] from 1919, because although over a hundred years have passed and a vast number of writers have elaborated on and adapted the theory of the uncanny, the discourse and tradition of thought traces back to Freud's comprehensive definition.² The two essential layers of the psycho-aesthetic category³ of the uncanny⁴ are summarized in Freud's following statement: "The uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar."⁵ The uncanny effect has a negative, a frightening, connotation and manifests itself in the resurfacing of familiar but repressed emotional impulses. The connection to the house and domesticity is already given in the etymological background of the German word *unheimlich* [literally un-home-like], notably the prefix [un-] serves as a reminder of the "token of repression"⁶. Therefore, the process of repression estranges the emotional impulse and when it is triggered again through circumstances like coincidence or the encounter of a doppelgänger it frightens in form of the uncanny. A constitutive attribute of the uncanny is the ambivalence and "intellectual uncertainty"⁷ it provokes in the subject.⁸ The uncanny

²cf. Lehmann, Florian (2016): "Einführung. Das Unheimliche als Phänomen und Konzept" in: Florian Lehmann (ed.): *Ordnungen des Unheimlichen: Kultur – Literatur – Medien*, Königshausen & Neumann, pp. 9-30, p. 9.

³cf. *ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴The words uncanny and *unheimlich* will be used interchangeably because the German origin points to the connection of the home as a source of the uncanny.

⁵Freud, Sigmund (1999): "The Uncanny" [1919] in: James Strachey (ed.): *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XVII, Hogarth Press, pp. 218-252, p. 220. "[...] das Unheimliche sei jene Art des Schreckhaften, welche auf das Altbekannte, Längstvertraute zurückgeht." Freud, Sigmund (2020): *Das Unheimliche* [1919], Reclam Verlag, p. 7.

⁶*ibid.*, p. 245.

⁷*ibid.*, p. 221.

⁸Fuchs, Thomas (2011): "Das Unheimliche als Atmosphäre" in: Kerstin Andermann & Undine Eberlein (eds.): *Gefühle als Atmosphären: Neue Phänomenologie und philosophische Emotions-theorie*, Akademie Verlag, pp. 167-182, pp. 170-2.

is therefore not the fear of concrete danger, but the tingly apprehension of danger.⁹ Interestingly enough, even though Freud focuses on psychological case studies and a small selection of uncanny literature, most notably E.T.A Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* (1816), he does mention the haunted house as a source of the uncanny. Everything related to death, dead bodies, the return of the dead, including ghosts and spirits, appears uncanny to most people. Freud remarks, how most modern languages translate an *unheimlich* home as a haunted house.¹⁰ The haunted house is a ubiquitous motif in Gothic fiction used as a setting that reflects the characters' psychological state.¹¹ Female Gothic in particular has expressed "women's terror at confinement within the home, with heroines kept behind locked doors."¹² The haunted house is an inverted image of the idealized home, connotated positively as a private and safe sanctuary, turning it into a place of imprisonment, control and danger. The house as the metonymy for the ideology of domesticity and therefore instrument of social control of women serves as both the setting and the tool of imprisonment. Supposedly familiar and comforting, the home turns frightening when it is distorted by haunting. As Emma Liggins points out, "[h]aunting in its broadest forms not only denotes the appearance of ghosts but a sensation of being troubled, discomfited and trapped in the past."¹³ The occurrence of uncanny effects in (long-term or temporary) homes further supports the idea that essentially all domestic dwellings, their praxis and architectural structure are charged with expectations and ideals of gendered behavior. On a spatial level the uncanny effect manifests itself in what Thomas Fuchs calls a space-filling atmosphere.¹⁴ Atmosphere in this context is not an objective quality of space but is produced in the interaction between subject and object, namely the perceptual process of the subject.¹⁵ This perceptual process is heavily influenced by the person's aesthetic receptivity,¹⁶ which in turn

⁹cf. Fuchs, pp. 167-182, pp. 170-2.

¹⁰Freud 2020, pp. 37, 42. "Im allerhöchsten Grade unheimlich erscheint vielen Menschen, was mit dem Tod, mit Leichen und mit der Wiederkehr der Toten mit Geistern und Gespenstern zusammenhängt. Wir haben ja gehört, daß manche moderne Sprachen unseren Ausdruck: ein unheimliches Haus gar nicht anders wiedergeben können als durch die Umschreibung: ein Haus in dem es spukt." On the other hand, the German equivalent to 'haunting' is '*Heimsuchung*', literally home-visit or home-search.

¹¹cf. Ng, Andrew Hock Soon (2015): "Introduction: The Subject of the House in Gothic Narratives" in: Andrew Hock Soon Ng (ed.): *Women and Domestic Space in Contemporary Gothic Narratives: The House as Subject*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-24, p. 1; Ferguson Ellis, Kate (1989): *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*, University of Illinois Press, p. ix.

¹²Liggins, Emma (2020): *The Haunted House in Women's Ghost Stories: Gender, Space and Modernity 1850-1945*, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 7.

¹³ibid., p. 5.

¹⁴Fuchs, p. 170.

¹⁵Lehnert, Gertrud (2011a): "Raum und Gefühl" in: Gertrud Lehnert (ed.): *Raum und Gefühl: Der Spatial Turn und die neue Emotionsforschung*, transcript Verlag, pp. 9-25, pp. 15, 16.

¹⁶ibid., p. 15.

is evidently shaped by the person's cultural background, class and, not insignificantly, gender. The staging of domestic space as dangerous, haunting, uncanny is well established in the Gothic tradition. Walls are especially thought-provoking in the context of space, entrapment and domesticity because they perform the tasks of inclusion or exclusion of certain objects, bodies and actions as well as establishing and dismantling literal or figurative boundaries.

While walls may surround a room, they do not, however, construct space. It is imperative to clarify how a materially constructed room encompassed by walls is not the same as the concept of *space*, although there are obvious areas of overlap. Nonetheless, space does not inherently need material matter like brick and mortar to exist.¹⁷ According to sociologist Martina Löw, space is not static and always in flux according to the paradigm/framework of how bodies and objects relate to each other.¹⁸ Space is constituted through two parallel processes: spacing and synthesis. The former means the placing, building, positioning of buildings and movable objects confined to one, usually geographic place in a material sense.¹⁹ The operation of synthesis is the mental connection and arrangement by way of processes of perception, imagination and memory of them in relation to each other, which constitutes an interpretative act.²⁰ Space is therefore first and foremost a product of action.²¹ The interpretative act is dependent on the observer's perspective, so two (or endlessly more) distinctly different spaces can take shape in the same place.²² Nonetheless, the operation of synthesis does not happen arbitrarily as all people's perspective is colored by standardized and institutionalized habits of perception according to their social and cultural background.²³ The effect of the uncanny, therefore, primarily materializes on the level of synthesis, because one space might feel uncanny to one individual and not inspire such anxiety in another. Spaces generate and visualize social hierarchies, in which class and gender act as structural principles.²⁴ Löw calls this a duality of space, meaning the recursive process of spatial structures producing a form of action that reproduces precisely these spatial structures in the constitution of spaces. To clarify, spatial structures produce gendered action and behavior, which in turn constitute space. Institutionalized ideas and ideals of gendered behavior constitute the space in which that behavior happens. Gendered action and gendered space inevitably and recursively reproduce one another. So-

¹⁷see cyber-space.

¹⁸cf. Löw, Martina (2001): *Raumsoziologie*, Suhrkamp, pp. 113f., 159.

¹⁹cf. *ibid.*, p. 158.

²⁰cf. *ibid.*, pp. 113f., 159.

²¹cf. *ibid.*, p. 160.

²²cf. *ibid.*, p. 159.

²³cf. *ibid.*, p. 161f.

²⁴cf. *ibid.*, p. 173f.

cietal notions of gender roles shape the spacing and synthesis of domestic space in a way that domesticity in turn shapes and reinforces gender roles. Domesticity as a means of patriarchal control and entrapment of women, be it as wives, single women or daughters, erects spaces that execute male power. Societal norms as a form of power, or in Antonio Gramsci's terminology *cultural hegemony*, are inextricably linked to the socio-cultural production of space.²⁵ Among other structures and objects in the domestic space, walls reflect the protagonists' psychological state and emotional impulses like a mirror because their appearance and effect are produced by the subject's synthesis of space. These are the processes I wish to examine as they unfold on the pages of "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), "The Lovely House" (1950) and the photographic self-portraits of Francesca Woodman (1958-1981) from her series *House* and *Space*².

From a feminist perspective the concept of home and its hetero-patriarchal practices can be perceived by women, heterosexual as well as lesbian, as oppressive. In many societies women have been (and often still are) traditionally relegated to the so-called *private sphere* and entrapped in a patriarchal ideology of female domesticity.²⁶ This idea is based on the socio-cultural construction of binary gender division which is mirrored in the division of (female) private and (male) public sphere, these spheres are not inherently gendered but reflect social gender construction. Due to the industrialization and mechanization that industrial capitalism promoted and the growing prosperous middle class, the gender differences between the constructed binary of male and female were greatly exaggerated because women became even more economically dependent on their husbands.²⁷ The socioeconomic shifts that were taking place during the nineteenth century were rationalized by a domestic code, which maintained appropriate gendered behavior: "[the domestic code] was built on the conviction that the home required women's moral and spiritual presence on a full-time basis."²⁸ The so-called cult of domesticity not only subtly camouflaged the exploitation of unpaid female labor it also confined women to "the private realm inside, the four walls at home" by assigning them their roles as wives and mother "enclosed within the boundaries of domestic space."²⁹

²⁵cf. Jakubowski, Zuzanna (2010): *Moors, Mansions, Museums: transgressing gendered spaces in novels of the Brontë Sisters*, Lang, p. 19.

²⁶cf. Palmer, Paulina (2012): *The Queer Uncanny: New Perspectives on the Gothic*, University of Wales Press, p. 109. I would like to acknowledge that the separate sphere ideology is a social model which merely reflects an ideal of womanhood. The separate sphere ideology does not reflect the lived reality of most, especially working-class, women and should therefore not be read as a universal rule.

²⁷cf. Allen, Polly Wynn (1988): *Building Domestic Liberty: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Architectural Feminism*, University of Massachusetts Press, p. 13.

²⁸ibid., p. 15.

²⁹ibid., p. 16; Ferguson Ellis, p. ix.

The Gothic genre has been traditionally suitable for telling narratives about the female subject and domestic space because of three literary Gothic conventions, firstly the reveal of a dissonance in patriarchy's fundamental principle, that in the binary of male and female, male is the superior term.³⁰ Second, owing to the overall dynamics of female and male being imagined in terms of the patriarchal family, it is not surprising that disorders of the system would be expressed in familial and domestic contexts.³¹ Third, the literary Gothic has a well-established tradition of drawing parallels between the state of the home and the state of the family.³² It has recognized the "quality invested in the domestic space that has the power to unnerve, fragment, and even destroy its inhabitant."³³ In addition to that, feminist criticism has been largely in agreement as to why the Gothic mode has been historically popular with female authors and female readers alike: the mode with its typical settings and plot expressed the female terror and rage women experience in patriarchal social arrangements, especially marriage.³⁴ The mode of the Gothic has a long and rich history of literary transformations and can therefore not be pinpointed to a concrete time interval or geographic location. Rather it is defined by its literary conventions and shared motifs. The explored themes are the dark and irrational side of the human mind as well as the transgressions of socially constructed moral codes.³⁵ The motifs of haunted castles, spectral visions, virgins buried alive, mad wives in the attic etc. serve as facilitators for social critique. In the subversive Gothic the dominant ideologies, especially female marginalization, are often challenged.³⁶ Femininity is traditionally linked to interior spaces and the Gothic mode allows female writers and artists to express their attitudes towards this ideology in oftentimes disguised ways, for example under the veil of the motif of the haunted house or other prevalent Gothic motifs such as being buried alive. Alive burial is also one of the uncanny fantasies described by Freud, who posits the uncanny fear of being buried alive stems from the fantasy to return to the maternal womb.³⁷ I would go so far as to argue that evoking uncanny effects is a central technique in female Gothic art. Diana Wallace and Andrew Smith describe

³⁰cf. Williams, Anne (1995): *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, University of Chicago Press, p. 99.

³¹cf. *ibid.*

³²cf. Banks, Emily (2020): "Insisting on the Moon: Shirley Jackson and the Queer Future" in: Jill E. Anderson & Melanie R. Anderson (eds.): *Shirley Jackson and Domesticity: Beyond the Haunted House*, Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 169-188, p. 170.

³³Ng, p. 1.

³⁴cf. Williams, p. 136.

³⁵Giakaniki, Maria (2021): "Haunted Domesticity in Late-Victorian Women's Writing" in: Clive Bloom (ed.): *The Palgrave Handbook of Steam Age Gothic*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 299-318, p. 299.

³⁶cf. Giakaniki, p. 299.

³⁷cf. Freud 2020, p. 41.

[...] the Female Gothic as a politically subversive genre articulating women's dissatisfactions with patriarchal structures and offering a coded expression of their fears of entrapment within the domestic and the female body.³⁸

The typical setting of the Gothic novel, the haunted house (including the haunted castle, manor, ruin, etc.) which is oftentimes already iconized in the title³⁹ functions as more than a backdrop to the plot, if anything, it is the very thing that engenders terror.⁴⁰ There are two principal types of the haunted house narrative, either the occupant or family is cursed supernaturally or metaphorically which invariably affects the condition of house they live in, sometimes for generations (a notable example is Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" 1839) or the house itself is the source of strangeness and anomaly and will possess, destroy and engulf the inhabitants⁴¹, as in the case of Shirley Jackson's *Hill House* and "The Lovely House". Either way, the Gothic mode has recognized the potential for a dialectical relationship between subject and space.⁴² It has been criticized how often scholarship reads the house as a mere symbol or metaphor and therefore disregards the material quality of domestic spaces.⁴³ A close reading of the material level of architecture is valuable to recognize to which level the house shares intimacy with the occupants and the resulting consequences of this intimacy.⁴⁴ The sensual interaction with the material house informs the psychological effects of dwelling in spaces.⁴⁵ As stated above, walls as carriers and producers of meaning have turned out to be a fruitful condensation point in regards to the analysis of gendered spatial arrangements in the works I have chosen. Walls and the inevitable boundaries they create render transgression possible or in some cases impossible. Walls are not only architectural elements, walls are also figurative stand-ins for all kinds of boundaries and surfaces, such as skin, the uterine walls of the maternal body and paper as the medium for writing.

According to Natascha Würzbach, a subject's relationship to their surrounding space, shaped by thinking, feeling and perceiving, constitutes a fundamental component in the development, endangerment or stabilization of identity.⁴⁶ The women

³⁸Wallace, Diana; Smith, Andrew (2009): "Introduction: Defining the Female Gothic" in: Diana Wallace & Andrew Smith (eds): *The Female Gothic: New Directions*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-12, p. 2.

³⁹Note for example "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), *Wuthering Heights* (1847), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), *We have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962), *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851).

⁴⁰cf. Ng, p. 1.

⁴¹ibid., pp. 1-2.

⁴²ibid., p. 2.

⁴³cf. ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁴cf. ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁵cf. ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁶cf. Würzbach, Natascha (2001): "Erzählter Raum: fiktionaler Baustein, kultureller Sin-

in the chosen works are suspended in a moment of transition or in the process of becoming. These liminal moments of transition are, among other things, expressed in the figures' engagement with the spaces they inhabit. In these situations and spaces, the female protagonists experience the uncanny effect as a catalyst for transition, identity formation or dissolution of the self. They experience either dissolution in or emergence from their absorbing domestic surroundings.

Famously, the protagonist in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is obsessed with, or possessed by, the eponymous wallpaper in the room she is confined to during her "rest cure" ordered by her husband-physician. Eleanor Vance, the protagonist of Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* is stalked by bloody messages on the walls of the notoriously haunted Hill House, whereas the protagonist of her short story "The Lovely House" is trapped in the former by being woven into the tapestries on the wall. Francesca Woodman's self-portraits in an abandoned house in Rhode Island show her disappearing into or emerging from the derelict interiors through a fusion of the body with the walls and objects that surround her. Taking the texts and photographs, which were created in a timespan of almost a hundred years and connecting them to a larger network of feminist art that shares similar concerns and 'image formulas' is greatly influenced by the technique of *crossmapping* coined by Elisabeth Bronfen in *Crossmappings: Essays zur visuellen Kultur* (2009). Crossmapping is a category of comparative criticism that tries to trace shared concerns and visual language instead of attempting to detect evidence of direct influence of one work on another.⁴⁷ It goes further than the idea that all texts are inherently intertextual, rather, crossmapping is a reaffirmation of Mieke Bal's concept of 'preposterous history,' meaning the historical is an after-effect of visualizations and representations.⁴⁸ This type of close reading asserts a claim on unfolding a 'cognitive space' which juxtaposes theory and aesthetic visual formulas in order to map their cultural legacy.⁴⁹ Applying theoretical concepts from the fields of semiotics and psychoanalysis which unfold their own visuality, to texts of different media (in this case short story, novel and photography) along an axis of shared imagery maps out the shared language between the visuality of narrative texts and the narrative quality of images.⁵⁰ The aforementioned visual formulas are accessed from our 'shared cultural imaginary'. By mapping out those formulas in texts that evidently have no intertextual refer-

nräger, Ausdruck der Geschlechterordnung" in: Jörg Helbig (ed.): *Erzählen und Erzähltheorie im 20. Jahrhundert*, Universitätsverlag C. Winter, pp. 105-130, p. 117.

⁴⁷cf. Bronfen, Elisabeth (2009): *Crossmappings: Essays zur visuellen Kultur*, Scheidegger & Spiess, p. 8.

⁴⁸cf. Pollock, Griselda (2018): "Foreword" in: Elisabeth Bronfen: *Crossmappings: On Visual Culture*, I.B. Tauris, p. xxvi.

⁴⁹cf. Bronfen 2009, p. 8.

⁵⁰cf. *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

ence to each other, it is possible to uncover similarities of aesthetic formalization that might have been historically overlooked: “To trace a line of connection between comparable image formulas that have occurred at different historical times and in different media means taking the inheritance of history seriously.”⁵¹

During this process one is also able to trace how aesthetic concepts have endured the test of time and how their transfer between media have influenced them. Once again, the intention is not to establish evidence of intertextuality but rather uncovering the circumstances of such relation. Taking this idea of relation as a jumping-off point one can describe the connection between the texts analyzed here as a form of kinship in which visual formula are inherited. Following the kinship metaphor one can say “The Yellow Wallpaper” functions as a type of mother-text that bequeaths aesthetic concepts and formulas to the following generations of texts. How do female artists engage with inherited concepts of femininity and how do they re-appropriate them in their art? These visual formulas, for example the female figure being consumed by the domestic space around her, is what tethers the texts and photographs to each other. In the context of this thesis the uncanny is understood as an intermedial aesthetic concept, which is produced in both literary and visual arts. Certain visual formulas are employed again and again across varying historical contexts, which enables readers, spectators and artists to “decipher symptoms of cultural discontent, which function as visual ciphers for anxieties and desires *haunting* our culture at large.”⁵²

To summarize, the intention of this thesis is to evaluate the entanglement of the uncanny, space and femininity in the context of Gothic literature and photography by applying a feminist lens to the texts at hand. Especially focusing on the material quality, design and sensual effects the spaces described have on the protagonists and on the narrative as a whole, it becomes clear that the haunted house is a condensation point of the uncanny, space and femininity. Andrew Hock Soon Ng highlights how the domestic space has an impact on the subject:

[...] the domestic interior is undoubtedly more than “place” and “centre”; it is, for lack of a better term, an experience that, as a result of dwelling, is borne of its occupant’s conscious and (especially) unconscious desires, but also exceeds them, becoming in the process an independent property now integral to the architecture capable of implicitly influencing its occupant’s subjectivity.⁵³

The home is not simply a place where people meet their most basic needs, it is a

⁵¹Bronfen, Elisabeth (2018): *Crossmappings: On Visual Culture*, I.B. Tauris., p. 7.

⁵²ibid., p. 14. (italics, V.P.)

⁵³Ng, p. 11.

complex structure whose design uncovers systems of power, hierarchies and boundaries.⁵⁴ The way subjects dwell, interact with objects and act out relationships – be they gendered, raced or othered – shapes that space. It would be a loss to literary analysis to treat the house as a static metaphor and disregard its architecture, spatial and material presence in its own right. Gothic fiction in particular has “exploited the house’s differentiated sexual spaces, thereby revealing the sinister link between interiority, domestication and entrapment.”⁵⁵ The way subjects act and interact in a space charges that house with either uncanniness or homeliness.⁵⁶ Instead of being the safe haven, domestic space becomes fragile and dangerous when familiar aspects of it become strange and threatening.⁵⁷ The house as domestic space should not be neglected as a backdrop to the plot but its role as a complicit driving force of domestication and entrapment.

2 Uncanny Spaces

As has been noted above the seminal essay by Freud is the initial seed⁵⁸ of the larger discourse on the uncanny. Still, up until the 1970s it was very sparsely discussed as an aesthetic concept in academic discourse but has since, especially in the 1990s, been elevated to a “master trope” in the field of Cultural Studies.⁵⁹ Florian Lehmann has criticized the dilution of meaning that results from such a viral use of the word, but does acknowledge how the concept can and should remain open to reevaluation post-Freud.⁶⁰ Freud’s specific legacy is the connection between the uncanny and the process of repression.⁶¹ In more recent criticism Freud’s preoccupation with the possession of a phallus (or lack thereof) seems to be less relevant.⁶² What is more interesting is the idea of how the uncanny is associated with animistic thought, because the uncanny also reflects the dichotomy between animistic and rational thought in the modern mind according to Freud.⁶³ When the boundary between

⁵⁴cf. Ng, p. 18.

⁵⁵ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁶ibid., p. 14.

⁵⁷cf. Anderson, Melanie R., Kröger, Lisa (2016): “Introduction” in: Melanie R. Anderson & Lisa Kröger (eds.): Shirley Jackson: *Influences and Confluences*, pp. 1-6, p. 4.

⁵⁸Freud’s “Das Unheimliche” is preceded by Ernst Jentsch’s 1906 essay “Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen” which has brought up the spatial quality of the *unheimlich*, yet it was Freud who expanded the theory to include the process of trauma, repression and the distorted resurfacing of trauma as the central focal point.

⁵⁹cf. Lehmann, p. 9.

⁶⁰cf. ibid., pp. 9-10.

⁶¹cf. ibid., p. 22.

⁶²cf. ibid., p. 22, Newman, Judie (1990): “Shirley Jackson and the Reproduction of Mothering” in: Brian Doherty (ed.): *American Horror Fiction: From Brockden Brown to Stephen King*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 120-134, p. 121.

⁶³cf. Freud 2020, p. 46.

phantasy and reality is blurred, when we believe to see something supernatural, like an uncanny coincidence or a doppelgänger, it creates a rift between rational enlightened thought and our, believed to have been overcome, animistic beliefs.⁶⁴ The uncanny element here is the resurfacing of archaic beliefs – magic, demonic powers, the return of the dead among others. One can subdivide three categories of the uncanny as they appear in his essay, first those elements that are related to the notion of a double, e.g. doppelgänger, twin, ghost or coincidental repetition or *déjà vu*, second castration anxieties, e.g. the fear of female genitalia or the loss of one's eyes or eyesight and third, uncanny feelings associated with familiar or unfamiliar spaces, getting lost, and haunted houses.⁶⁵ The uncanny elements related to the notion of the double are connected to what Freud calls the repetition compulsion, “a compulsion powerful enough to overrule the pleasure principle, leading to certain aspects of the mind their daemonic character” and arouses “the sense of helplessness experienced in some dream-states.”⁶⁶ The doppelgänger is uncanny as it is a form of ego-disturbance.⁶⁷ Seeing a doppelgänger harks back to the phase when the child's ego had not yet separated itself from the external world and other people.⁶⁸ Repetition, doppelgängers, the female body and haunted houses are all sources of the uncanny and will be discussed in the second half of this text.

Once again, the uncanny is not frightening because it is unknown, but precisely because the familiar is, through the process of repression, distorted. Freud writes, “Thus *heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*.”⁶⁹ Ambivalence is the key word in describing the uncanny, as it refers to the dynamic effect uncertainty causes. On the one hand, on the level of the perceiver (reader/viewer) on the other hand, on the level of the perceived (text/image) the “fixed categories of experience – such as dream/reality or supernatural/everyday – become ambivalent.”⁷⁰

Anthony Vidler writes the uncanny is rather a field of connotations or a set of attributes, than a clearly defined concept:

[...] sinister, disturbing, suspect, strange; it would be characterized

⁶⁴cf. Freud 2020, p. 34, 46.

⁶⁵cf. Creed, Barbara (1993): *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, p. 53.

⁶⁶Freud 1999, p. 236.

⁶⁷cf. *ibid.*

⁶⁸cf. Freud 2020, p. 30. “Es handelt sich dabei um ein Rückgreifen auf einzelne Phasen in der Entwicklungsgeschichte des Ich-Gefühls, um eine Regression in Zeiten, da das Ich noch nicht scharf von der Außenwelt und vom Anderen abgegrenzt hatte.“

⁶⁹Freud 2020, p. 15.

⁷⁰Gunning, Tom (2008): “Uncanny Reflections, Modern Illusions: Sighting the Modern Optical Uncanny” in: Jo Collins & John Jervis (eds.): *Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 69-90, p. 69.

better as ‘dread’ than terror, deriving its force from its very inexplicability, its sense of lurking unease, rather than from any clearly defined source of fear – an uncomfortable sense of haunting rather than a present apparition.⁷¹

The definition of the uncanny benefits from staying fluid because its reception by the subject is colored by their subjective perspective and the historical context.⁷² For example, Lehmann attributes the prevalence of the uncanny feeling to the 18th century early modern period and the emergence of middle-class private spaces. The idea of the familiar private sphere as a refuge and the inevitable threat to this refuge has been reflected in Gothic fiction of that time.⁷³ As will be elaborated in the chapter on the Gothic, it is a particularly fitting framework for expressing anxieties towards the homestead and the shifting gendered power dynamics within it as a miniature reflecting societal anxieties around gender roles.

In his analysis of the Fantastic genre Tzvetan Todorov distinguishes between two types of the Gothic novel, the explained supernatural and the accepted supernatural. At the end of the novel the reader either accepts the fantastic elements (a form of suspension of disbelief) or they are presented with a rational explanation for the supernatural phenomena.⁷⁴ The concept of the uncanny comes into play when the decision between the two types cannot be made, when the narrative remains ambivalent beyond the ending.⁷⁵ For example, in Henry James’ *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) readers are kept guessing whether the protagonists are haunted by ghosts or if they are influenced by the manor’s uncanny atmosphere to believe they are haunted. A variation of this type – the fantastical-uncanny – is on hand when the narrative lets readers accept the supernatural while leaving a trail of clues about the rational origin of supernatural disturbances that might not be registered during a first reading.⁷⁶ In “Das Unheimliche” Freud himself anticipates the discourse on the uncanny in literature. Freud writes an uncanny tale must employ reality effects in order to produce an ambivalence in the decision about whether the supernatural elements are ‘true’ or not.⁷⁷ According to this definition, the uncanny can be understood as a “reading position founded on a prolonged uncertainty about the nature of the fictional world.”⁷⁸

⁷¹cf. Vidler, Anthony (1992): *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, MIT Press, pp. 22-3.

⁷²cf. Lehmann, p. 10.

⁷³cf. *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷⁴cf. Todorov, Tzvetan (2013): *Einführung in die fantastische Literatur*, Wagenbach, 1970, p. 56.

⁷⁵cf. *ibid.*, p. 58.

⁷⁶cf. *ibid.*, p. 59.

⁷⁷cf. Freud 2020, p. 49.

⁷⁸Gunning 2008, p. 71.

2.1 Uncanny atmosphere

Thinking of the uncanny as a spatial phenomenon and usually an effect of space on the subject it is useful to think of the uncanny as an atmosphere. The effect and aesthetic category *atmosphere* is a product of an interplay between subjective perception and the given attributes of a space.⁷⁹ Usually atmospheric potential is created consciously through architecture and design, think for example of the luxurious atmosphere of a grand department store that subconsciously encourages consumers to spend money through visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory impulses.⁸⁰ Atmospheres have a synesthetic quality, which means multiple senses are stimulated simultaneously⁸¹ but also that different elements can create the same type of atmosphere.⁸² The perception of atmosphere is subjective, yet not arbitrary, as it is based on the qualities of the space the subject is perceiving: atmosphere is the shared reality of perceiver and the perceived.⁸³ All in all, atmosphere is the product of a process of perception and a, sometimes more sometimes less conscious, interpretation (in Löw's terminology process of synthesis) of the spaces where we dwell.

When a familiar space – and what space could be more intimately familiar than home – turns strange and vague, the potential for the atmospheric uncanny unfolds.⁸⁴ The uncanny, a space-filling atmosphere,⁸⁵ is remarkable in the way it only surfaces during the process of transformation; for the uncanny to be perceived, something about a space must undergo an estrangement. It is exactly the ambivalence between familiar and unfamiliar, between normal and strange, that produces the ominous, eerie, weird, sinister feeling that turns home into a terrifying, seemingly haunted space.⁸⁶ The supposed threat oscillates ambiguously between foreground and background and is therefore merely vaguely perceptible, which works especially well in the perceptual field's blurred boundaries, for example when it is distorted by fog, mist and dusk,⁸⁷ which create a semi-transparency.

The uncanny feeling does not appear abruptly, rather it is a growing perception of dread, which manifests in bodily sensation like shuddering, shivering, trembling. The skin, as the barrier between self and space, acts as the resonance organ for

⁷⁹cf. Böhme, Gernot (2013): *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*, Suhrkamp, p. 23.

⁸⁰cf. *ibid.*, p. 136., Lehnert, Gertrud (2011b): "Einsamkeiten und Räusche. Warenhäuser und Hotels" in: Gertrud Lehnert (ed.): *Raum und Gefühl: Der Spatial Turn und die neue Emotionsforschung*, transcript Verlag, pp. 151-172, p. 155f.

⁸¹cf. Böhme, p. 96.

⁸²cf. *ibid.*, p. 77.

⁸³cf. Böhme, pp. 23-24.

⁸⁴cf. Fuchs, p. 168.

⁸⁵cf. *ibid.*, p. 170.

⁸⁶cf. *ibid.*, pp. 168-9.

⁸⁷cf. *ibid.*, p. 169.

uncanny atmospheres.⁸⁸ The uncanny resides in the interstice, in the liminal. Anthony Vidler describes the transitional moment in which the familiar turns uncanny as a “disquieting slippage between what seems homely and what is definitely unhomely.”⁸⁹ What about a room makes one perceive the uncanny effect? Rooms can have their own aura, which they have acquired, or which has been ascribed to them over time.⁹⁰ They absorb past feelings and moods which they then emit.⁹¹ In *Poetics of Space* Bachelard argues how memories and fantasies are equal building bricks in the construction of home as brick and mortar:

the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in place [...] the places in which we have experienced daydreaming reconstitute themselves in a new daydream, and it is because our memories of former dwelling-places are relived as day-dreams that these dwelling places of the past remain in us for all time.⁹²

Along the same line, the lore, myth and gossip that surrounds a place, contributes to its atmosphere, which primes subjects to be especially perceptive of uncanny sensations. This receptiveness for ambivalence mirrors our inner ambivalence and lability between latent animistic thought and a rational world view as mentioned further above. Anthony Vidler argues, the uncanny is not an objective property of any particular place, but rather the representation of a person’s mental state projected onto the aesthetic dimension.⁹³ Transferring the concept to the literary and visual arts, spaces are coded as uncanny through typical characteristics, which reflect cultural alienation during any particular time⁹⁴, drawn from our collective cultural image lexicon. This notion aligns with Bronfen’s theory of shared visual formulas in our collective cultural memory that are transferred across media. The conclusion must be, according to Vidler, that there is no such thing as uncanny architecture, but rather, uncanny characteristics are attributed to architecture in accordance with the anxieties of any particular time.⁹⁵ For example, the Victorian mansion, which borrowed stylistic elements from European gothic architecture, was the desired architectural design for homes of the wealthy during the Victorian era but has since the decline of the Gilded Age become a signifier of dread and iconic

⁸⁸cf. Fuchs, p. 170.

⁸⁹Vidler 1992, pp. ix-x.

⁹⁰cf. Lehnert 2011a, p. 9.

⁹¹cf. *ibid.*

⁹²Bachelard, p. 6.

⁹³cf. Vidler, Anthony (2002): *unheimlich: Über das Unbehagen in der modernen Architektur*, Edition Nautilus, p. 30.

⁹⁴cf. *ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

⁹⁵cf. *ibid.*, p. 31.

formula in horror stories, films and paintings of the Gothic mode.⁹⁶ Volker Adolphs also recognizes the uncanny as an individualized effect of perception:

The uncanny does not define an enduring, objectively valid domain. Not everyone sees something as uncanny in the same manner; and not everything that was once considered to be uncanny continues at all times to be uncanny. The emergence of the uncanny depends on the individual emotional and psychological conditioning of the subject, on his knowledge and lack of knowledge as well as on historical location.⁹⁷

Apart from utilizing motifs and themes that evoke the uncanny effect – the vitality of dead things, shadows and darkness, liminal spaces, deserted or derelict spaces, fog and mist among them – it is also achieved through the procedure of representation.⁹⁸

2.2 Gendered perceptions of domesticity

One of the arguments this thesis posits, is that the domestic space, the home, emerges as the primary site of uncanny effects, and that it does so particularly for women as femininity has been traditionally linked to domesticity, often to the detriment of women’s autonomy and identity development. Vidler has pointed out that the house provides an

especially favored site for uncanny disturbances: its apparent domesticity, its residue of family history and nostalgia, its role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort sharpened by contrast the terror of invasion by alien spirits.⁹⁹

And although this reading is insightful into the phenomenon of the uncanny home, what is missing, as Emma Liggins has noted, is “the recognition of the particular terrors of home for women, an omission borne out by the male authors and theorists.”¹⁰⁰ The nostalgic construction of the domestic, the home, as a place of stability, reliability and authenticity codes the home as female.¹⁰¹ As feminist geographer

⁹⁶see Burns, Sara (2012): “Better for Haunts’: Victorian Houses and the Modern Imagination” *American Art*, Vol. 26, No. 3, pp. 2-25.

⁹⁷Adolphs, Volker (2016): “The Sites of Fear” in: Volker Adolphs (ed.): *The Uncanny Home: Interiors from Edvard Munch to Max Beckmann*, pp. 32-52, p. 38.

⁹⁸cf. Vidler 1992, p. 40.

⁹⁹ibid., p. 17.

¹⁰⁰Liggins, p. 4. For example, in prominent titles in the field of contemporary scholarship on the uncanny, such as *Unheimlich: Interiors by Edvard Munch to Max Beckmann* (2016) none of the twenty-five featured artists are women, the same is true for *Das Unheimliche Heim: Zur Interieurmalerei um 1900* [The Uncanny Home: Interiors around 1900, V.P.].

¹⁰¹cf. Massey, Doreen (1994): *Space, Place and Gender*, Polity Press, p. 180.

Doreen Massey points out, it is no surprise that it is those who have the ability to leave home (men) that long to return to a nostalgic version of home, whereas those who are confined (women) might not view the homestead in such nostalgic and idealized terms.¹⁰² Female writers and artists who express these attitudes are a counter voice against male perspectives which present home as an idealized haven of safety, warmth and nostalgia as exemplified in Gaston Bachelard's widely referenced *Poetics of Space* (1957). As Würzbach puts it:

An archetypal semanticization of home on the foundation of anthropological constants, fails to withstand historical and ideological criticism due its claim of universality. The house cannot be narrowly coded as intimate and comforting. The advancing confinement of women to the domestic sphere as their only domain since the 18th century has coded the home as prison.¹⁰³

She further posits that when looking at literary spaces literary scholars are well advised to refer to social geography's body of knowledge, which sharpens our perception of the meaning behind social room- and space-attribution especially when it comes to gender dynamics.¹⁰⁴ Although the separate sphere ideology focuses on the division between the private/domestic sphere and the public/urban sphere according to gender, it is important to note that the domestic sphere is itself also split up into male- and female-assigned rooms, for example in the Victorian era the library or study would be coded as male spaces, whereas the drawing room and boudoir would be coded as female spaces in a middle- and upper-middle class household.¹⁰⁵ A room's size, design/decoration and appropriate etiquette as it pertains to the space demonstrate and visualize gender and power dynamics in the domestic sphere.¹⁰⁶ In literary texts the division of fictional spaces serves a structuring function for character constellation, action and plot.¹⁰⁷ For a feminist critique the question of the rigidity and permeability of boundaries and their transgression is of special importance.¹⁰⁸

To further highlight the particular connection between femininity and the home, I would like to refer to the association between the female body and domestic architecture, which will also inform the close reading in the second half of the thesis.

¹⁰²cf. Massey, p. 180.

¹⁰³cf. Würzbach, p. 112. [translation V.P.]

¹⁰⁴cf. *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵cf. Würzbach, p. 120; Spain, Daphne (1992): *Gendered Spaces*, University of North Carolina Press, p. 115.

¹⁰⁶cf. Würzbach, p. 120.

¹⁰⁷cf. *ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁰⁸cf. *ibid.*

During the Industrial Age the conceptual conflation between women's bodies and domestic interiors was most prevalent, where one stood symbolically and metaphorically for the other: "the woman was seen as the embodiment of the home, and in turn the home was seen as an extension of her".¹⁰⁹ This phenomenon is illuminating on the bourgeois gender roles in Europe and North America and how gender, the domestic, fashion and the decorative arts intersect.¹¹⁰ According to Beverly Gordon, this conflationary metaphoric relationship remains intact to this day in form of interior decoration discourse focused primarily on female consumers, and while the architectural profession is dominated by men, the upkeep, management and decoration is primarily integral to paid or unpaid female labor.¹¹¹ Both advice literature and fiction during the Industrial Age featured female characters that would share physical traits with their houses or who changed themselves to suit their houses more perfectly.¹¹² For example, Jacob Von Falke advised women "she should be the noblest ornament of her ornamented dwelling"¹¹³ in *Art of the House* (1878). This sentiment was reproduced in turn-of-the-century portraiture, for example in Childe Hassam's *Tanagra* (1918), in which women literally blend into the interior.¹¹⁴ Following Gordon's argument, the conflation of female bodies and interiors is yet another manifestation of the separate spheres ideology, as men moved to the sphere of economic activity and became less involved in matters of the home, whereas women's position in the home solidified. The connection was made most visible in the parallel between body adornment and home décor, for example, the choice of fabric of the women's morning gown would correspond to the light and airy breakfast room, whereas the formal dining room would reflect the rich, dark fabrics of female evening attire.¹¹⁵ Parts of the home would be adorned in a similar fashion as the female body, meaning flowers, tassels, fringe etc.¹¹⁶ Simultaneously, the semantics around houses framed them as an organic entity with skeletons (framework) and circulatory systems (plumbing), while the female body

¹⁰⁹cf. Gordon, Beverly (1996): "Woman's Domestic Body: The Conceptual Conflation of Women and Interiors in the Industrial Age" *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 31., No. 4, Gendered Spaces and Aesthetics, pp. 281-301, pp. 281-2.

¹¹⁰cf. *ibid.*, p. 281.

¹¹¹cf. Gordon, p. 281.

¹¹²cf. *ibid.*, p. 282. Examples include Edith Wharton's fiction, several advice books for the homemaker and the novel *We and Our Neighbors* (1875) by Harriet Beecher Stowe, paternal great-aunt of women's rights activist and author of "The Yellow Wall-paper", Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

¹¹³Falke, Jacob Von (1878): *Art in the House*, quoted by Gordon p. 283.

¹¹⁴cf. Gordon, p. 283. A contemporary example of a cinematic narrative, in which the house reflects the protagonist's emotional and physical downfall, is Darren Aronofsky's film *Mother!* (2017), which also employs the Gothic mode in its narrative.

¹¹⁵cf. *ibid.*, p. 286.

¹¹⁶cf. *ibid.*, p. 289.

acquired spatial characteristics, for example when it was referred to as a temple.¹¹⁷ This metaphor continues in the parallel cyclical tasks that maintain both house and body, like seasonal changes in wardrobe and décor or the daily grooming and cleaning routines. This conflation of female bodies and domestic spaces can also be found in the afore-mentioned *Poetics of Space* by Bachelard, who likens the nostalgic home to a mother’s body.¹¹⁸ One could go so far as arguing that merging women with their homesteads not only reinforces the link between femininity and domesticity, but it also undermines their agency and objectifies them as a decorative element in the domestic arrangement.

In this section the interconnection between the uncanny, spatiality and the homestead has been outlined. In the following chapter, the aim is to combine this theoretical groundwork with the notions of femininity and domesticity, condensed in the separate sphere ideology, within the framework of the Gothic genre. As stated at the beginning of my thesis, my intention is to evaluate the entanglement of the uncanny, space and femininity within the genre of Gothic literature and photography. In order to contextualize the primary texts, the following chapter will give an overview of the Gothic in order to show why this mode provides such a fruitful ground for the discussion of the uncanny as a phenomenon, that vividly mirrors female attitudes towards the home and its implications on their lives.

3 “Domestic horror”: The Gothic and femininity

The Gothic genre has a long and rich history of literary transformations and is therefore not contained to a time interval or geographic location. Rather it is defined by its literary conventions and shared motifs. It is therefore more fitting to think of the Gothic as a mode rather than a genre as proposed by John Frow. According to Frow, modes are extensions of certain genres beyond formal structures to a broader sense of ‘tone.’ Modes specify thematic features, forms and modalities of speech rather than formal structural rules or limitation to certain media. According to Frow, this applies especially in the case of the Gothic, which survived in its modal form through several transformations. From its roots, it has branched out into the Victorian melo-drama, Poe’s short stories, sensationalist novels, Dicken’s oeuvre, the vampire novel, the detective novel and in more contemporary iterations, into Hollywood films, *film noir*, thriller, horror, to name a few.¹¹⁹ The themes explored in the Gothic mode are the dark and irrational side of the human mind as well as the

¹¹⁷cf. Gordon, p. 287.

¹¹⁸cf. Bachelard, Gaston (1994): *The Poetics of Space* [1957], Beacon Press, p. 15.

¹¹⁹cf. Frow, John (2015): *Genre*, Taylor & Francis, pp. 71-72.

transgressions of socially constructed moral codes.¹²⁰ The motifs of haunted castles, spectral visions, virgins buried alive, mad wives in the attic etc. serve as facilitators for social critique. In the subversive Gothic the dominant ideologies, especially female marginalization, are challenged.¹²¹ The Gothic is always in dialogue with the values and anxieties of its time and reveals counter-narratives to socially established values.¹²² The Gothic art of an era reflects the cultural anxieties of said era. Hence, there is no use in speaking of one quintessential Gothic plot because it has undergone a number of modifications in accordance with the social and political upheavals of time.¹²³ According to Fred Botting, the Gothic expresses “unconscious desire, a release of repressed energies and antisocial fantasies.”¹²⁴ The Gothic is preoccupied with people, objects and practices that are widely considered irrational, immoral and fantastic.¹²⁵ It is this framework which allowed female writers to write of the “unspeakable”¹²⁶, as Anne Williams puts it. Williams detects two different formulas of the Gothic, depending on the writer’s gender, which will be briefly summarized in the following paragraphs, because this will illustrate what I mean when writing of the Female Gothic and why it is intertwined with domesticity and the uncanny. In addition, it will show how the chosen texts subvert conventional stylistic and plot choices.

According to Williams, the male formula differs from the female on three levels, narrative technique, assumption about the supernatural and the plot.¹²⁷ First, the female Gothic generates suspense through the limitations imposed by the narration and focalization. The readers share the heroine’s often warped perceptions or are deceived by a female unreliable narrator. This is demonstrably the case in Shirley Jackson’s and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s fiction. On the other hand, the Male Gothic creates a mode of objectivity and relies on an omniscient narrator or multiple points of view, even employing other modes of discourse like material from a scholarly book, official report, news coverage and the like weaved into the main narrative. Second, the female tradition usually explains ghosts and supernatural phenomena rationally, for example as nervous responses to her environment that reflect her mental state, whereas the male formula expects a more forward suspension of disbelief. This is most likely an appropriation of Todorov’s binary of explained and accepted supernatural Gothic novels on a gendered model. Third, the male

¹²⁰cf. Giakaniki, p. 299.

¹²¹cf. *ibid.*

¹²²cf. Botting, Fred (2013): *Gothic: The Critical Idiom*, Routledge, p. 1.

¹²³cf. *ibid.*

¹²⁴*ibid.*, p. 12.

¹²⁵cf. *ibid.*, p. 1.

¹²⁶Williams, p. 100.

¹²⁷cf. Williams, pp. 102-104.

Gothic usually follows a tragic plot that ends in financial loss, social decline or death, whereas the female plot demands a positive ending, a rebirth, like a rescue from being locked up, walled in or otherwise disappeared, and, not surprisingly, marriage. According to Williams, the Female Gothic

[...] creates a Looking-Glass World where ancient assumptions about the male and the female, the line of good and [...] evil, are suspended or so transformed as to reveal an entirely different world, exposing the perils lurking in the father’s corridors of power.¹²⁸

The fact that male and female writers or rather writers who employ either a male Gothic mode or a female Gothic mode, shows that male and female fears and desires – “Gothic’s twin fascinations”¹²⁹ – differ dramatically. Whereas male luminaries like H.P. Lovecraft or Algernon Blackwood turned to fantastic and supernatural worlds, female writers’ weird tales rendered the social and domestic realities visible through Gothic fiction.¹³⁰ Ghost stories that explored psychological issues incorporated the supernatural or paranormal into the expression of “internalized fears and desires that return to haunt the subject,”¹³¹ which once again shows the association between Gothic conventions and Freud’s concept of the uncanny. Eugenia C. Delamotte has also persuasively argued that supernatural phenomena in the Gothic tale work as metaphors for real harbingers of dread, namely the fear of the supernatural acts as a fear of power in a political sense: “social forces so vast and impersonal that they seem to have supernatural strength,”¹³² namely prescriptive gender roles perpetuated by an oppressive patriarchal system in all realms of law, economy, religion and education.

3.1 The Gothic and domesticity

The major site of Gothic plots remains the gloomy homestead. In the beginning, primarily a castle, which has later given way to the old mansion,¹³³ especially in the American Gothic, where older structures are much rarer (for example, Hill House is merely eighty years old but considered an old mansion). Nonetheless, the outdated architecture highlights the spatial and temporal separation from the past and its

¹²⁸Williams, p. 107.

¹²⁹Davison, Carol Margaret (2004): “Haunted House/Haunted Heroine: Female Gothic Closets in ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’” *Women’s Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 47-75, p. 50.

¹³⁰cf. Giakaniki, p. 300.

¹³¹cf. *ibid.*

¹³²DeLamotte, Eugenia C. (1990): *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic*, Oxford University Press, p. 17.

¹³³cf. Botting, p. 2.

values for the present: “The pleasures of horror and terror came from the reappearance of figures long gone.”¹³⁴ The home as a metonymy for both the architectural building and the genealogical family line is the site where anxieties are negotiated, “political revolution, industrialization, urbanization, shifts in sexual and domestic organization, and scientific discovery.”¹³⁵

In the chapter on uncanny domesticity the concept of the separate spheres has been mentioned already, yet it is important to keep in mind throughout as the basis for women’s anxieties around the concept of home and their entrapment within it. During the highpoint of Gothic popularity, the separate sphere ideology was in full effect, so it is not surprising, that the moral idealization of home would be subverted in Gothic novels. Simultaneously middle-class female readership grew due to their increasing leisure time enforced by this ideology and gravitated towards the Gothic genre.¹³⁶ As mentioned above, the uncanny unfolds in the resurfacing of past trauma or animistic beliefs – more often than not a combination of both, where the animistic belief functions as a vehicle for the exposure of trauma – and in the context of the Gothic genre it is expressed in a fundamental “shift in terms of the relationship between the house and its inhabitant.”¹³⁷ In the Gothic genre, by means of the uncanny effect, women’s relationship to the house exposes the patriarchal structures built into the space and the house becomes a symbol for female entrapment and subjugation.¹³⁸ Unlike other spaces which women frequent which also reflect power dynamics and gendered hierarchies, the domestic space like no other generates and visualizes desire and control. The domestic space is more than the sum of architectural elements and objects within a place, it is a product of spacing and synthesis, which differs according to gendered perspectives. In Ng’s words, it is

[...] an experience [...] borne of its occupants’ conscious and (especially) unconscious desires, but also exceeds them, becoming in the process an independent property now integral to the architecture capable of implicitly influencing its occupants’ subjectivity.¹³⁹

3.1.1 The Haunted House: Architecture of Evil

The haunted house is an inherently textual phenomenon, which has been known before the emergence of Gothic fiction, but the nineteenth-century ghost story molded

¹³⁴Botting, p. 2

¹³⁵ibid.

¹³⁶cf. Ferguson, p. x.

¹³⁷Ng, p. 2.

¹³⁸cf. ibid., p. 4.

¹³⁹ibid., p. 11.

it into the formula it is today in our cultural imaginary.¹⁴⁰ According to Edwards-Boon, any house’s spatiality is riddled with ambiguity, because its significance does not only depend on its visuality (architectural features) but primarily its social function:

Gothic literature is not only architect but interior designer, replete with the horrid scenes, sounds and scents of gothic effect and affect. Architecture as a literary object undergoes an imaginative “renovation” as authors use these sites as vessel for social anxieties and transgressions.¹⁴¹

In order to render the uncanny legible as a Gothic device, it is useful to apply the framework of uncanny spatiality on the sites which are represented. According to Botting, “Gothic atmospheres – gloomy and mysterious – have repeatedly signaled the disturbing return of pasts upon presents and evoked emotions of terror and laughter.”¹⁴² Gothic fiction has been concerned with architecture and specifically places and spaces devoid of architectural beauty and harmony since its founding texts such as Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) or Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Typically, beauty is juxtaposed with ugliness, for example disproportion or distortion, which is a major principle in the Gothic genre, the countering of the norm by depicting the opposite.¹⁴³ By highlighting the ugly and the evil, the Gothic produces an unsettling effect on the reader.¹⁴⁴ The Gothic upsets order by depicting transgression of conventions. It is for this reason that female authors appropriated this genre for their narratives of transgression and female-written Gothic became one of the most prolific sub-categories of the Gothic.¹⁴⁵ The haunted house as both a site and narrative device – a structural principle even – is popular because it is an easily accessible visual formula firmly established in our collective cultural memory or ‘cultural image repertoire’ due to its frequent occurrence in different art forms, its legibility across different media, renders it a meaningful signifier of dread. Edward-Boons argues the haunted house is not only a Gothic topos, it should be considered an archetype, a sign which is communicable through access of a “bricolage of textual sources” which collects the literary, architectural, iconographical, and sensory characteristics of what one

¹⁴⁰cf. Edwards-Boon, Alicia (2021): “Journeys Through the English Haunted House” in: Clive Bloom (ed): *The Palgrave Handbook of Steam Age Gothic*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 125-142, p. 126.

¹⁴¹ibid.

¹⁴²Botting, p. 1.

¹⁴³cf. Matek, Ljubica (2018): “The Architecture of Evil: H.P. Lovecraft’s ‘The Dreams in the Witch House’ and Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*” *CounterText*, Edinburgh UP, pp. 406-423, p. 407.

¹⁴⁴cf. ibid., p. 407.

¹⁴⁵Ellen Moers coined the term in *Literary Women* (1976).

associates with a haunted house.¹⁴⁶ Emma Liggins argues, that spectral hauntings can be read as metaphors for emotional and psychological distress: “[h]aunting in its broadest form not only denotes the appearance of ghosts but a sensation of being troubled, discomforted and being trapped in the past.”¹⁴⁷ The house itself, the architectural foundation of the domestic space is itself a repository of decades and even centuries of memory, tradition,¹⁴⁸ intergenerational trauma, oppressive power dynamics and other forms of Othering, be they gender-, class-, or race-related. As described further above spaces emit atmospheres and if we assume trauma is built into the foundation, walls etc. of a house, the metonymy of domesticity itself, every house, and therefore its people, is haunted by the ghosts of the past.

3.1.2 The Haunted House Formula

The houses represented in the chosen texts and photographs share many characteristics, which is unsurprising, because the haunted house motif is so ubiquitous. Dale Bailey has even produced a formula, which summarizes the typical qualities the haunted house shares across several genres, from Horror to Gothic. Bailey also locates the roots of the haunted house in the European Gothic tradition but highlights how the story telling device has assumed a looming role in the American tradition since Poe described the House of Usher in 1839.¹⁴⁹ According to Bailey’s formula, the haunted house has an unsavory history, an aristocratic name and is disturbed by supernatural events. The characters are either middle-class family or a family surrogate, skeptical of the supernatural who move into the house or a group of helpers who believe in the supernatural and/or an oracular observer who warns of danger. The plot usually follows an escalating series of supernatural events which isolates the family and leads to the discovery of the event’s provenance. The climax is either the escape of the family and destruction of the house or the continued existence of the house. A twist ending might establish the recurring nature of evil. The common themes are class or gender conflicts, economic hardships, consequences of the past (i.e. unpunished crimes), the clash of good and evil, a clash of scientific and supernatural world views and the cyclical nature of evil.¹⁵⁰ Apart from the characteristics described in the formula, the haunted house usually has a local reputation of being haunted, is located at a deserted site or surrounded by nature and therefore secluded from society, has a history of abandonment and most eerily

¹⁴⁶cf. Edward-Boons, p. 127.

¹⁴⁷Liggins, p. 6.

¹⁴⁸cf. Vidler 1992, p. 18.

¹⁴⁹cf. Bailey, Dale (1999): *American Nightmares: The Haunted House Formula in American Popular Fiction*, Popular Press, p. 6.

¹⁵⁰Bailey, p. 56.

of all, it is often described as having anthropomorphic features.¹⁵¹ The haunted house motif is not exclusively used by female writers, in fact many male writers have made it their trademark, yet it is remarkable how popular this uncanny motif is among female authors across centuries. The haunted house motif is so common because it reflects women’s identification with the domestic space prescribed by the separate spheres ideology. Female writers “inherited a series of themes and images – of women victimized in their own homes”¹⁵² and used the trope as a metaphor to express critical attitudes towards the limits imposed by the domestic ideal under the veil of the supernatural or disturbing. As a setting, the haunted house invites readers to participate in the “semiological process of signifying the domestic space”¹⁵³ as a dangerous, confining and scary place (for women).

4 (Dis)appearing Women – Uncanny Domesticity

The aim of this chapter is to argue how spatial arrangements work as metaphors for emotional and psychological impulses, focusing especially on the metaphorical qualities of walls as stand-ins for skin, the maternal body (the uterine walls), and paper in the chosen artworks. Drawing on the theoretical framework on space introduced in earlier chapters, I understand walls as both a signifier for the binary between inside and outside, one the one hand in terms of the separate sphere private (inside) and public (outside) but also in the transferred sense of personal emotional and psychological states and their outward expression. This binary construct also opens a cognitive space for formulating how spaces affect subjects through atmospheres, in other words, how the outside seeps into the inside. The intention of this thesis is to evaluate the entanglement of the uncanny, space and femininity in the context of Gothic literature and photography. These four objects can only be read in their interplay with each other and how they each function as structural principles. The spaces the protagonists inhabit are far more than simple backgrounds or settings, on the contrary, the spaces themselves become motivational factors for plot and character development; their relationships with the places they inhabit are the actual catalysts for conflict which elicit a process of becoming (identity formation) or disappearing (identity destruction). In the following chapters two overlapping viewpoints of the uncanny in the haunted house formula will be examined, first the haunted house as the site of repetition and second the haunted house as maternal

¹⁵¹cf. Vidler 1992, pp. 19-20.

¹⁵²Carpenter, Lynette; Kolmar, Wendy K., (1991): “Introduction” in: Lynette Carpenter & Wendy K. Kolmar (eds.): *Haunting the House of Fiction: Feminist Perspectives on Ghost Stories by American Women*, pp. 1-25, p. 14.

¹⁵³Edward-Boons, p. 127.

body. Both approaches are based on Freud's essay and serve as examples for how the uncanny features in the Gothic mode.

4.1 Uncanny doppelgangers - The Haunted House as the Site of Repetition

As has been outlined in the chapter on the uncanny, the concept is closely related to what Freud calls the repetition compulsion [Wiederholungszwang], an impulse to repeat an event or its circumstances again and again. According to Michelle Massé, the phenomena of repetition and trauma are staple components of the Gothic mode. Repetition functions as a reactivation of trauma and facilitates recognition of said repressed trauma, in Massé's terms the unspeakable.¹⁵⁴ The unspeakable trauma that is traditionally expressed in the Gothic mode is the prohibition of female autonomy.¹⁵⁵ While this thesis focuses on the oppressiveness of domestic ideals on femininity, the prohibition of female autonomy refers to all gender expectations woven into the culture that deny women their identity and perpetuate trauma. In this context trauma is not necessarily a singular event but an enduring situation, which shapes individual identity and coping mechanisms.¹⁵⁶ In the Gothic mode Massé calls "marital Gothic" the narrative is shaped by the female narrator's or character's anxiety, trauma, reenactment of trauma and the attempted resolution.¹⁵⁷

Repetition in women's Gothic mimes the claustrophobic circularity of women's real lives in that it shows the heroine, who must confront the same terrors repeatedly, doing the same thing over and over. In its presentation of multiple female victims Gothic romance also shows the same thing being done to women over and over; it suggests the inescapable victimization of Woman in general.¹⁵⁸

4.1.1 Repetition & doppelgangers in "The Yellow Wall-paper"

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's famous short story "The Yellow Wall-paper" (1892) – a creepy story about a creeping woman¹⁵⁹ – has been part of the established literary canon since its re-discovery by feminist scholars in the 1970s. It can be read as a

¹⁵⁴cf. Massé, Michelle A. (1990): "Gothic Repetition: Husbands, Horrors, and Things That Go Bump in the Night" *Signs*, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 679-709, p. 681.

¹⁵⁵cf. *ibid.*

¹⁵⁶cf. Massé, p. 686.

¹⁵⁷*ibid.*

¹⁵⁸Delamotte 1990, p. 10.

¹⁵⁹cf. Delchamps, Vivian (2020): "A Slight Hysterical Tendency: Performing Diagnosis in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wall-paper'" in: Johanna Braun (ed.): *Performing Hysteria: Contemporary Images and Imaginations of Hysteria*, Leuven University Press, pp. 105-124, p. 119.

dreadful tale of a woman's slow descent into madness, a tale of ghostly possession, a feminist manifesto against domestic captivity and for the freedom of female writers, and a denunciation of the rest cure prescribed by doctors like S. Weir Mitchell for allegedly hysterical women.¹⁶⁰ The different branches of interpretation attest to the richness and palimpsestic qualities of the text. The intricacies of the wallpaper and the possible meaning of the woman trapped behind its bars have been extensively discussed. In the context of this thesis, however, the focus shall lie on the wallpaper's atmospheric quality, the uncanny effect it produces and how the uncanny operates as the catalyst for the narrator's emerging self-knowledge. I wish to argue that the trapped woman the narrator gradually identifies in the intricate pattern is in fact her repressed rage and frustration at her status as wife and mother and entrapment in the private sphere in the form of a doppelgänger. The walls function as a projection site for her repressed emotional impulses, which she must confront due to the uncanny nature of said yellow wallpaper. This confrontation is facilitated by repetitions of pattern, most notably her repetition of the haunting creeping cycle she sees in the wallpaper.

In the short story a couple, the unnamed first-person narrator and her husband John, rent a residence for the duration of the summer, while work is completed at their home. Simultaneously, this stay is meant as a variation of the rest cure for her "temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency"¹⁶¹, presumably as the result of post-partum depression. Her day-to-day routine is strictly regulated by her husband, who is also her physician, and consists mainly of resting. She is strictly forbidden to write. With no outside social contact and little to no stimulation the narrator starts obsessing over the patterned yellow wallpaper in her attic-bedroom, apparently hallucinating a female shape trapped inside it and eventually ripping it off the walls in a state of mania or epiphany at the climax of the story.

From the beginning it is clear the narrator is intimately familiar with the Gothic literary tradition as she references the trope of the haunted house and therefore the setting expectations and a gloomy Gothic atmosphere readers can access from the collective cultural imaginary: "A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a *haunted house*, and reach the height of romantic felicity – but that would be asking too much of fate!"¹⁶² Despite this caveat the narrator describes the "ancestral halls"

¹⁶⁰cf. Heilmann, Ann (2000): "Overwriting Decadence: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Oscar Wilde, and the Feminization of Art in 'The Yellow Wallpaper'" in: Catherine J. Golden & Joanna Schneider Zangrando (eds.): *The Mixed Legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, University of Delaware Press, pp. 175-188, p. 175. Perkins Gilman herself was a rest cure patient of Weir Mitchell's and stated she drew from her own experience for the short story.

¹⁶¹Perkins Gilman, Charlotte (2004): "The Yellow Wall-Paper" [1892], in: Catherine J. Golden (ed.): *Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The Yellow Wall-Paper: A Sourcebook and Critical Edition*, Routledge, p. 131. [All subsequent citations are from this edition.]

¹⁶²Wall-paper, p. 131. (italics V.P.)

in a manner which invokes exactly that, the haunted house in the Gothic mode. Also, the choice of the qualifier “ancestral” is noteworthy in this context as it is neither her nor John’s ancestors she is talking about given the house is rented.¹⁶³ Is it in reference to the history of domestic entrapment as it has been practiced by ancestral generations? A further clue she is familiar with the Gothic mode is her likening the ancestral halls to “English places that you read about.”¹⁶⁴ By mentioning the haunted house by name, the narrative invites readers to participate in the semiological process by inferring from the “bricolage of textual sources”¹⁶⁵ in their cultural imaginary. First, it is both surprisingly affordable and has been unoccupied for a while, therefore providing it with a dubious backstory. Second, it is surrounded by an air of mystery and gossip due to some legal dispute amongst “heirs and co-heirs”¹⁶⁶, another staple of the haunted house formula and very similar to the inheritance scandal in *Hill House*. Third, although this house is not described as having an evil face there are several architectural attributes that locate it in the Gothic tradition. The trope of anthropomorphisms is instead transferred to the eponymous wallpaper itself. The house is isolated from the nearest village, far away from the road and surrounded by hedges, walls, and a locked gate, which locks the narrator in.¹⁶⁷ Physical and social isolation is a trope reproduced in both “Lovely House” and *Hill House*. Although the narrator does not get tired of exclaiming how beautiful the place is, her first impressions of the atmosphere are quite telling: “there is something queer about it”¹⁶⁸ and “there is something strange about the house – I can feel it.”¹⁶⁹ The garden has been neglected and the greenhouses are broken down. The little “box-bordered paths”¹⁷⁰ lend the garden a quality of an inescapable maze. In step with Gothic classics, the narrator even feels a cold spot on a moonlit night, a guaranteed indication of ghostly hauntings in the Gothic mode, which reminds one of the cold spot at the nursery entrance in *Hill House*, but it is dismissed as a “draught” by her husband.¹⁷¹

Even before the narrator introduces the yellow papered room or even mentions its

¹⁶³All the literary examples have in common that the haunted houses are not the protagonist’s permanent home. The unnamed narrator’s stay at the ancestral halls, Eleanor’s expedition to *Hill House* and Margaret’s visit at the lovely house are meant to be temporary. Nonetheless, these spaces are connotated as home. As Bachelard puts it, “[...] all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home. [...] An entire past comes to dwell in a new house. The old saying ‘We bring our *lares* with us’ has many variations.” Bachelard, p. 5.

¹⁶⁴Wall-paper, p. 132.

¹⁶⁵Edwards-Boon, p. 127.

¹⁶⁶Wall-paper, p. 131.

¹⁶⁷cf. *ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁶⁸*ibid.*

¹⁶⁹*ibid.*

¹⁷⁰Wall-paper, p. 132.

¹⁷¹cf. *ibid.*

ghastly pattern, readers are meant to recognize this domestic setting as a Gothic site of haunting, possession, and terror. The aim of this chapter is to argue how the short story reproduces and adopts the Gothic convention of conveying attitudes towards domesticity, confinement and male control underneath the veil of descriptions of the house's design, layout and atmosphere, which functions as an organizing principle: "the worst thing I can do is think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad. — So I will let it alone and talk about the house. The most beautiful place!"¹⁷² Condition is ambiguous as it refers to her mental distress but also covertly to her marital situation. This is an apt example of what Eugenia C. Delamotte has identified as the "female double immurement", first in the domestic space as wives, mothers and daughters and the second immurement inside themselves, meaning the parts of them which are not socially accepted: rebellious, angry and sexual.¹⁷³ The first-person narrator writes she gets "unreasonably angry with John sometimes"¹⁷⁴, which shows she has adopted an outsider's male coded perspective on her own feelings and desires, dismissing them as unreasonable and suppressing her justified anger directed at her dominant husband. Around him she attempts to control her moods ("I take pains to control myself") but is permanently exhausted by her efforts. She allows herself to get furious at the yellow wallpaper instead: "I get positively angry with the impertinence of it."¹⁷⁵ One of the first conflicts between the married pair is the choice of bedroom, while the narrator would have preferred a bedroom "downstairs that opened onto the piazza and had roses in the window"¹⁷⁶, she is given no choice in the matter and is banished to the yellow room in the attic although she as a woman could be considered the keeper of the domestic sphere, John her husband and doctor, therefore an authority on two levels, decides over her movements or (lack thereof) within the domestic space. The fact she is meant to stay on the attic floor draws a parallel between *Wall-Paper* and Charlotte Brontë's Gothic classic *Jane Eyre* (1847) and the trope of the madwoman in the attic, to borrow Gilbert & Gubar's phrase. As Suzanne Owens points out, there are plenty of similarities between *Jane Eyre* and *Wall-Paper*: Jane gets nightly visits by Bertha, the madwoman in the attic at Thornfield Hall, likewise the narrator sees the woman most clearly in moonlight and Bertha's breakout and burning down of Thornfield Hall is hinted at when the unnamed narrator dreams of being able to "burn the whole place down."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷²Wall-paper, p. 132.

¹⁷³cf. Delamotte, Eugenia C. (1988): "Male and Female Mysteries in 'The Yellow Wallpaper'" *Legacy*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 3-14., p. 5.

¹⁷⁴Wall-paper, p. 132.

¹⁷⁵Wall-paper, p. 134.

¹⁷⁶ibid.

¹⁷⁷cf. Owens, Suzanne (1991): "The Ghostly Double behind the Wallpaper in Charlotte Perkins

The wallpaper as the medium for the uncanny is an effect born out of the turn-of-the-century discourse on home décor and (mental) health, which Perkins Gilman was most likely well aware of.¹⁷⁸ As I have described in the paragraph on the conflation of women's bodies and domestic space, women were encouraged to represent their moral guardianship of the private sphere through the tasteful decoration of their homes. In that sense women were even assigned a didactic role because their choice of interior decoration was supposed to instill an aesthetic and moral education for the whole family as well as reflect their social status.¹⁷⁹ The year 1890, two years before the publishing of Gilman's short story, marked the height of patterned wallpaper's popularity, which was supposed to evoke a refined and rich atmosphere in the abundant and over-decorative style of the Gilded Age.¹⁸⁰ As the guardians of the private sphere women were even encouraged by marketers to do the papering themselves and change the wallpaper often which afforded them the opportunity to "control the nature of the wall itself as a conceptual space" by layering walls with ornamental designs and personal items and turning walls into "site[s] for the expression of design values and for revealing economic status and aspirations."¹⁸¹ Ornately patterned wallpaper flooded the market and was advertised to female consumers, yet tastemakers and domestic reformers pinned a moral discourse on the decorative element.¹⁸² Concerns about women's abilities to choose appropriate designs and styles were expressed in the same breath as concerns about the sensuous temptations on the so-called weaker sex.¹⁸³ In fact, wallpaper presented a real bodily health risk when it was dyed with dyes, green and yellow in particular, which contained toxic ingredients like arsenic, which can form a dust which is toxic when inhaled.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, an interpretation that the wallpaper's toxic dust and odor triggered the narrator's hallucination is not unlikely. But not only color offended taste, the patterns and representations on wallpaper were a subject of debate. Guidebook writers used language describing the patterns anthropomorphically, suggesting a patterned wallpaper 'crowded' the room or impossible to dodge flowers,

Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" in: Lynette Carpenter & Wendy K. Kolmar (eds.): *Haunting the House of Fiction: Feminist Perspectives on Ghost Stories by American Women*, The University of Tennessee Press, pp. 64-79, p. 73.

¹⁷⁸cf. Kolich, Thomáš (2020): "Haunting or Hallucination? Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and Contemporary Theories of Decorative Art and Psychiatry" *Gothic Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 266-285.

¹⁷⁹cf. Jennings, Jan (1996): "Controlling Passion: The Turn-of-the-Century Wallpaper Dilemma" *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 31, No. 4, pp. 243-264, p. 244.

¹⁸⁰cf. Jennings, p. 244.

¹⁸¹cf. *ibid.*, p. 248.

¹⁸²cf. *ibid.*, p. 244.

¹⁸³cf. *ibid.*, pp. 249, 253-5.

¹⁸⁴cf. Jennings, pp. 255-6. The infamous pigment Paris Green used to dye luminous wallpaper was also used as rat poison in Parisian sewers, hence the name. It can cause convulsions and even fatal diseases. See Kolich, p. 273.

writing an occupant “might almost be struggling with a nightmare.”¹⁸⁵ Different literature accused certain types of wallpaper to morally corrupt women – it is no surprise that women in particular were deemed vulnerable to moral corruption by domestic décor by male writers – through suggestion of sexual innuendo by *bulging* or *throbbing* flowers.¹⁸⁶ Perkins Gilman received an education in art and design at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence – around a hundred years later Francesca Woodman became an alumni as well – and was well aware of this discourse, so she deliberately over-exaggerated it to the point of using wallpaper as a metaphor for madness, a connection her contemporaries would be able to pick up on.¹⁸⁷ In the widespread scholarship on this short story the material quality of the wallpaper and the question of how it actually looks has been neglected in favor of the question of its meaning.¹⁸⁸ Kolich places the short story in the wider framework of mental health and psychologically-harmful wallpaper designs. Taking into account the turn-of-the-century discourse on the “medical reasonings about the disturbing effect of wallpaper”¹⁸⁹ contributes to the analysis of the pattern in the short story. Kolich identifies the wallpaper’ design as an “intricate pattern”, a Gothic motif found in several other Gothic stories, for example Poe’s “Ligeia” (1938). The intricate pattern is

an ornament that is complicated and visually confusing, based on geometrical interlace or vegetal arabesque. Usually, it is not completely aniconic and some of its shapes can resemble humanoid features. It does not matter if the intricate pattern is part of a stucco, carvings, tapestry or wallpaper, what matters is its design.¹⁹⁰

The effect this pattern achieves is creating an uncanny ambivalence for the reader who cannot tell if the narrator is experiencing a haunting or hallucinations. Its “effect tends to be enhanced, catalyzed or just accompanied by a disturbed mental state of the first-person narrator.”¹⁹¹ This effect of uncertainty is further supported by the narrator’s detailed yet changing descriptions of the wallpaper, ranging from “bloated curves and flourishes” and “great slanting waves of optic horror”¹⁹² to “where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down.”¹⁹³ The reader cannot settle on a definitive image, so they cannot decide

¹⁸⁵cf. Jennings, p. 258.

¹⁸⁶cf. *ibid.*, p. 259.

¹⁸⁷cf. *ibid.*, p. 256.

¹⁸⁸cf. Kolich, p. 266.

¹⁸⁹*ibid.*, p. 267.

¹⁹⁰Kolich, p. 267.

¹⁹¹Kolich, p. 268.

¹⁹²Wall-paper, p. 134.

¹⁹³*ibid.*, p. 136.

which of the observed characteristic are indeed featured in the design and which are a product of the narrator's impressions or hallucinations.¹⁹⁴ The discourse on the negative effects of patterned wallpaper on the human psyche was reproduced in both medical literature and advice literature for the homemaker. Both medical professionals and housewives were warned of the mental irritation a wallpaper's visual design could have on recovering invalids or kids.¹⁹⁵ Considering the narrator's husband is a health care professional he should have been well aware of the published concerns around this topic, which adds a further sinister flavor to his deliberate and unwavering choice of putting his wife in a room with possibly psychosis-inducing wallpaper. Either way, the narrator exhibits precisely the behavior contemporary medical advice literature warned of, obsessive study of the pattern.¹⁹⁶ Apart from the compulsion of counting, the narrator also exhibits the tendency of evoking the aspect of animation, describing the wallpaper in anthropomorphic terms and seeing humanoid features in the pattern, for example eyes and necks. Pareidolia, the human mind's tendency to perceive a facial structure where none exists, was believed to be a sign of mental illness or at least psychologically harmful by medical professionals at the time.¹⁹⁷

The narrator starts out the description of her bedroom naively optimistic. She describes it as airy and sunny interpreting the sinister features "the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls" as signs the room was formerly used as a nursery or gymnasium.¹⁹⁸ And while the common consensus among critics seems to be that the "rings and things" indicate they were used to restrain other women, I would like to point out the symbolism of the rings as wedding bands, less overt devices of entrapment. Her artistic sensibilities are offended by the "horrid paper"¹⁹⁹ in the "atrocious nursery".²⁰⁰ By synesthetic combination the pattern, the color, "the strangest yellow"²⁰¹ and even its smell – "it creeps all over the house"²⁰² – contribute to the oppressive atmosphere only the narrator seems to perceive. The papered wall serves as both a mirror and a projection site for the narrator to confront and voice her repressed emotions. While she speaks highly and always positively of her husband "Dear John! He loves

¹⁹⁴cf. Kolich, 271.; Betjemann, Peter (2008): "Charlotte Perkins Gilman's grammar of ornament: stylistic tagging and the politics of figuration in 'The Yellow Wallpaper' and 'The Unexpected'" *Word & Image*, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 393-402, p. 394.

¹⁹⁵cf. Kolich, pp. 273, 275-6.

¹⁹⁶cf. Kolich, p. 276.

¹⁹⁷cf. *ibid.*, p. 277.

¹⁹⁸cf. *Wall-paper*, p. 132.

¹⁹⁹*Wall-paper*, p. 134.

²⁰⁰*ibid.*, p. 133.

²⁰¹*ibid.*, p. 140.

²⁰²*ibid.*, p. 141.

me dearly.”²⁰³ in her writings, she expresses her fear of her husband covertly in a language indicative of sexual violence and domestic violence but pertaining to the wallpaper pattern, effectively transferring the fear of his physical and mental violence onto the visual field: “the pattern is torturing. [...] It slaps you in the face, knocks you down, and tramples upon you. It is like a bad dream.”²⁰⁴

The narrator’s intense engagement with the wallpaper’s visual, tactile and olfactory properties as a distraction from her repressed impulses renders these perceptible on the projection and reflection surface of the wallpaper. Its synesthetic qualities (“a smouldering unclean yellow smell”)²⁰⁵ emit uncanniness in what Thomas Fuchs has referred to as a space-filling atmosphere forcing the narrator to confront the source of the uncanny. With the addition of the writing process, an act of defiance against male control, the narrator taps into her own *sub-pattern* beneath the outer pattern, the façade of the obedient wife she displays for the benefit of social expectation. The longer she studies the pattern and putting her emotional impulses into writing, actually turning her *rest cure* into a *writing cure* so to speak, the more does the sub-pattern emerge.

After two weeks she sees eyes and broken necks in the pattern but as she travels along the trajectory of her emerging self-knowledge the woman behind bars, the key to her epiphany, materializes. She describes the paper’s uncanny pareidolic effect: “Up and down and sideways they crawl, and those absurd, unblinking eyes everywhere. [...] I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before.”²⁰⁶ and virtually anticipates Freud’s text. The pattern itself – “a kind of debased Romanesque”²⁰⁷ – is so irritating to her artistically trained eye as it is

[o]ne of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin. It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide – plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions.²⁰⁸

The *sinful* pattern which doesn’t seem to follow any symmetrical or logical guidelines reminds one of the evil architecture that constitutes Hill House which was built “without concession to humanity” and “[flew] together into its own powerful pat-

²⁰³ibid., p. 136.

²⁰⁴ibid., p. 139.

²⁰⁵ibid., p. 141.

²⁰⁶ibid., p. 134.

²⁰⁷ibid., p. 136.

²⁰⁸Wall-paper, pp. 132-3.

tern under the hands of its builders”.²⁰⁹ The “ancestral halls” are a haunted house, haunted by the generations of women who have been pressed into the mold of the angel-in-the-house²¹⁰ meaning the ancestral is not in reference to her or John’s ancestors but ancestors in general. In a way the institution of heterosexual marriage is haunted by oppressive conventions. On the other hand, the narrator is haunted by her repressed rage at her husband which is expressed in her rage at the wallpaper. Realizing her husband does not sympathize with her discomfort in the yellow room and outright refuses to let her leave, she decides to covertly study the wallpaper instead:

Of course I never mention [the wallpaper] to them anymore – I am too wise, – but I keep watch of it all the same. There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will. Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day. . . . And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. I don’t like it a bit. . . . I wish John would take me away from here!²¹¹

These two sentences bring together the secret she keeps from them and the secret she has detected in the pattern to express how the wallpaper is linked to her mental state. She is beginning to allow herself to feel her frustration – “the dim shapes get clearer every day” – which she still keeps from him. It is also ironic John does not seem to realize he’d have a better chance of reinstating his wife as angel-in-the-house if he took her away from the yellow wallpaper, and therefore her painful growing consciousness that she is trapped, now literally behind bars, as a wife and mother in the domestic sphere. The repetition of the bars motif in the wallpaper and in the room the narrator is sleeping in links the narrator to her doppelganger inside the wallpaper. Lying awake she keeps watching the pattern and processing the truth she has been hiding from herself: “so I kept still and watched the moonlight on that undulating wallpaper till I felt creepy. The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out.”²¹² The story’s conclusion is prefigured in this sentence on two counts. The repetition of the word ‘creepy’ to describe her feeling and the corresponding verb ‘creeping’ to describe the trapped woman’s movement which the narrator later mimics at the climax of the story link them together linguistically in a form of foreshadowing. The woman’s ‘faint figure’

²⁰⁹Hill House, p. 35.

²¹⁰An ideal image of domestic femininity described by Coventry Patmore in his 1854 poem *The Angel in The House* based on his wife Emily. In 1891 Perkins Gilman published a short story titled “An Extinct Angel” in which she mocks Patmore’s poem. In the story the angel eats from the forbidden tree of knowledge and goes extinct.

²¹¹Wall-paper, p. 138.

²¹²Wall-paper, p. 138.

acts as a homonymous clue to John's eventual fainting at the sight of his creeping wife: "Now why should that man have *fainted*? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to *creep* over him every time!"²¹³ The narrator sees the woman *behind* the pattern shaking it as if to get out, meaning she sees a pattern and sub-pattern. The notion that the wallpaper has a dual nature mirrors Gilbert's & Gubar's description "of the palimpsestic works produced by nineteenth-century women writer's where 'surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning.'"²¹⁴ This is an inherently uncanny characteristic considering the uncanny resides in the ambivalent relation of fore- and background.²¹⁵ The dread does not emerge directly but is intuited in the ambiguity or cognitive dissonance.²¹⁶

Whenever the narrator tries to confront John with the seriousness of her mental distress and that all she wants to do is leave this house, he is patronizing and unyielding:

he sat up straight and looked at me with such a stern, reproachful look that I could not say another word. [...] So of course I said no more on that score, [I] lay there for hours trying to decide whether that front pattern and the back pattern really did move together or separately.²¹⁷

This dispute presents a turning point in the narrator's journey to self-knowledge. After this nightly confrontation the narrator does not plead to leave anymore, instead she is determined to stay and investigate the wallpaper. Once again, as soon as she feels the need to suppress her frustration because her husband leaves no room to voice her opinions, desires or needs, she turns her attention to the wretched wallpaper. She is on the precipice of realization. The uncanny atmosphere of the room condensed in the wallpaper allows room for contemplation, which makes her arrive at the conclusion she has been hiding a part of herself behind bars inside herself – female double immurement – for the sake of surviving in the domestic sphere. The moment she frees the woman in the wallpaper by tearing it off the walls, can be read as a union of her two selves instead of a fragmentation. The act of tearing down the wallpaper *births* the woman behind the wallpaper. The labor of struggling to emerge from the womb is like the narrator's labor of tearing the paper off the walls. In that moment she recognizes herself, asserts her identity and agency no longer repressing and suppressing her rage at her husband and the powers which

²¹³Wall-paper, p. 144. (italics V.P.)

²¹⁴Davison, p. 63.

²¹⁵cf. Fuchs, p. 169.

²¹⁶cf. Fuchs, pp. 169, 173.

²¹⁷Wall-paper, p. 139.

hold her in place as a wife and mother. Her internalized repression, the knowledge she is oppressed by an unjust social system and her husband as enforcer of said system remains until the conclusion unspeakable, unthinkable even, so whenever she threatens to come too close she veers off into descriptions of the architectural space around her, only tiptoeing around the imposed restrictions on her mobility within it. While John does not go so far as locking her in the room and throwing away the key, he prescribes a strict routine which alternates between sleeping after each meal and resting, therefore essentially banning her to inactivity in the bedroom for most of the day. The real madness and horror is how powerful her husband is over her and how she as his wife is unable to free herself of this oppression, not the frantic ripping off wallpaper not the creeping along the four walls of the yellow-papered room. Some local non sequiturs point to the narrator's suppressed emotions: "John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage" and "John is a physician, and perhaps . . . perhaps that is one reason I do not get well faster."²¹⁸ In both cases the clauses connected by 'but' and 'perhaps' should not be in a causative relation, yet their discordance shows how her frustrations get overridden by the masculine hegemonic discourse²¹⁹ and the causative relation expressed by 'perhaps' hints at her veiled mistrust in John. The fact that she is forbidden from writing and does so anyway, hiding it from John, shows the narrator's potential for rebellion. Considering she is not writing in her journal for an implied audience but rather as an outlet for her 'unspeakable' thoughts ("I would not say it to a living soul [...] but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind")²²⁰ but still only covertly refers to her rage, "taking pains to control [her]self", expresses the amount of self-denial she feels the need to perform obedient femininity. The narrator covertly reveals the similarity between the woman in the wallpaper and the woman we encounter on the pages. The woman on the "dead paper" is herself a double of the narrator. A persona she puts on for the sake of the journal entries. In the beginning she seems almost resigned – "but what is one to do?" – but the longer she ponders over the horrid wallpaper the more defiant she becomes. Merging with her doppelganger inside the wallpaper she becomes the creeping woman.

4.1.2 Repetition & doppelgangers in "The Lovely House"

This chapter aims to showcase the inescapability of inter-generationally inherited trauma of entrapment in the domestic sphere as it is exemplified in Jackson's short story "The Lovely House" or alternatively titled "The Visit" first published in 1950.

²¹⁸Wall-paper, p. 131.

²¹⁹cf. Massé, p. 705.

²²⁰Wall-paper, p. 131. (*italics V.P*)

Margaret, the third-person narrator, visits her schoolmate Carla Montague at her family's estate. Carla takes her on a grand tour of the lovely house, showcasing the many rooms which feature reproductions of the house itself in the form of tapestries, cross stitch and tile work. They are soon joined by Carla's brother, the gloomy captain, and his guest Paul, whom Margaret mistakes for Carla's brother. Margaret and Paul form a potential romantic connection. She is intrigued by an old lady who appears to be her older doppelganger that lives in the tower of the house. In the end she realizes Paul is only visible to her and her doppelganger and appears to be a ghost. Only too late does Margaret realize she is being woven into the tapestry and therefore confined at the haunted Montague estate, which traps its dwellers in eternally repetitious cycles.

I would argue that the lesser known "The Lovely House"²²¹ (1950) is in many ways a precursor to *Hill House* (1959) and contains several stylistic and plot elements that Jackson reused in the famous novel. The doppelganger motif of the younger Margaret and the older Margaret illustrates the two diverging paths for women, on the one hand, conventional heterosexual marriage, children, domestic work, and the endless performance and reproduction (biological and artistic) of domesticity. On the other hand, the lonely existence of a spinster or madwoman in the attic is mirrored in the figure of main protagonist Eleanor. This oppressive binary choice or rather illusion of choice is one of the key elements in *Hill House* as well. The doppelganger motif and repetition in the form of mirrors and artistic renderings are the two obvious sources of the uncanny effect. Similarly to *Hill House* and the ancestral halls in "The Yellow Wallpaper", the lovely house is isolated by nature "with a park and a river and a wooded hill surrounding it."²²² The house is described as having "perfect grace, [...] a long-boned structure within, [...] curving staircases"²²³ which reflects the conflation of female bodies and domestic spaces, transferring language used to describe a human anatomy onto the architectural elements and vice versa. The house is further repeatedly imbued with liveliness, for example its stone elements feel warm to the touch²²⁴ and the white china has "*veins* of gold running through it."²²⁵ The descriptions of humanoid anatomy culminate in the house's similarity to Mrs. Montague, "a tall lady wearing pale green and pale blue" who, Margaret realizes, is standing in "a pale green and pale blue long room

²²¹Subsequently I will be referring to the short story by its original title to avoid confusion and because the earlier title underlines the significance of the setting to the plot.

²²²Jackson, Shirley (1996): "The Lovely House" [1950] in: Joyce Carol Oates (ed.): *American Gothic tales*, Plume, pp. 204-225, p. 204.

²²³ibid., p. 204.

²²⁴Lovely House, p. 204.

²²⁵ibid., p. 208. (italics V.P.)

with tall windows.”²²⁶ Mrs. Montague’s connection to the domestic space does not end here. As Margaret discovers on her tour of the house, its walls are covered in great expansive tapestries depicting the lovely house itself made by Mrs. Montague and the countless generations of Montague women before her:

Mama has embroidered all the hangings for her own room, the room where she writes her letters. The other tapestries were done by my grand-mamas and my great-grandmamas and my great-great-grandmamas.²²⁷

Through domestic work, embroidery and cross-stitch, the Montague women perform domesticity and therefore femininity endlessly as the exaggerated escalation from mama to great-great-grandmama expresses. Readers share Margaret’s, the third-person narrator and focalizer, perspective. Perspective is significant, as she remarks several times that the tapestries are so large, they are only possible to see from a great distance.²²⁸ Margaret is struggling to see the bigger picture from her vantage point as she remains unaware of the danger the lovely house poses to her freedom until the very end. The lovely house traps its dwellers in endless repetition like the cult of domesticity contains and produces a continuous line of women who continue domestic work. The fact that the artistic reproductions of the same object are from different times make Margaret both trapped in space and time.²²⁹ The Montague ancestors continually inhabit the manor in form of artistic reproductions: “Down here, at the end of the hall, [. . .] is where all my grandpapas and grandmamas and my great-great-grandpapas and grandmamas *live*.”²³⁰ The people in the portraits actively “leaned down to stare at Margaret and Carla” seemingly alive but trapped in the artistic reproductions (portraits). At one point the figures in the paintings in other rooms are suggested to be moving around by the use of the gerund: “[Margaret] felt sure she could stay happily and watch the small painted people playing.”²³¹ Mrs. Montague keeps cross-stitching the “face” of the house from memory, reproducing the reproductions already surrounding her and has even “learned the faces of the house better than the faces of her children”²³², suggesting she is so absorbed by performing domestic tasks she is alienated from the living people in her family.²³³

²²⁶ibid., p. 205.

²²⁷ibid., p. 206.

²²⁸ibid., pp. 205, 206, 207.

²²⁹cf. Antoszek, Patrycja (2018): “The Uncanny Tapestry of Shirley Jackson’s “The Lovely House” *Kultura Popularna*, Vol. 58, No. 4, pp. 108-116, p. 110.

²³⁰Lovely House, p. 207, (*italics V. P.*)

²³¹ibid., p. 209.

²³²Lovely House, p. 212.

²³³cf. Hattenhauer, Darryl (2003): *Shirley Jackson’s American Gothic*, State University of New York Press, pp. 54-55.

The house seemingly knows no ends, continuing like a maze of beautiful octagonal rooms²³⁴ that serve no other purpose but to be marveled at. Just as Margaret is taken on a tour throughout the house so are the readers. Her perspective serves as the ‘eye’ for the reader so Margaret is both protagonist and the tour guide of this imagined spatiality. In the mirror room Carla and Margaret find themselves to be reproduced infinitely in a *mise en abyme*:

They passed then into a room where everything grew smaller as they looked at it: the mirrors on both sides of the room showed the door opening and Margaret and Carla coming through, and then, reflected, a smaller door opening and a small Margaret and a smaller Carla coming through, and then, reflected again, a still smaller door and Margaret and Carla, and so on, endlessly, Margaret and Carla diminishing and reflecting.²³⁵

The tapestries in the mirrored room show the house as it is reflected in the lake, themselves reflected among the mirrored walls. On the one hand the two young women are likened to the domestic architecture in their reflective quality. On the other hand, the endless repetition causes an effect of uncanny disorientation, immobility and entrapment.²³⁶ Also, mirroring the outside view of the house, the face so to speak, infinitely in of the rooms of the house itself, obliterates the boundary between the interior and exterior, undermining these fixed categories.

Margaret is intrigued by the tower and asks several times if she can go up there but is ignored repeatedly, the other characters choosing to ignore the tower. Margaret is initially kept away from the tower, encountering a *doppelgänger* in a tile work on the floor instead:

It was a curiously made picture of a girl’s face, with blue chip eyes and a red chip mouth, staring blindly from the floor, [...] She stepped back again, holding her head up and back to read the letters, pieced together with stone chips and set unevenly in the floor. ‘Here was Margaret,’ it said, ‘who died for love.’²³⁷

The object of Margaret’s affection arrives soon after. Only in the end does it become clear that one of the men, Paul, is only visible to Margaret. It is hinted at, when no one calls him by name or addresses him. He is the only one who acknowledges

²³⁴cf. *Lovely House*, p. 209. Possibly a precursor to the concentric room structure at Hill House.

²³⁵*ibid.*, 206.

²³⁶cf. *ibid.*, 207.

²³⁷*ibid.*, p. 210.

the tower and its inhabitant, evoking witch imagery²³⁸ to describe the woman who lives there alone: “She doesn’t live there at all but goes there because she says she cannot endure the sight of tapestry [...] She has filled the tower with books and a huge old cat, and she may practice alchemy there [...] she has one of her spells of hiding away.”²³⁹ The witch imagery mirrors societal ostracism of women who diverge from the prescribed path of marriage, motherhood and domesticity. The tower appears to be a separate realm, the spiraling staircase separating the house and the tower into two different spatial and chronological domains.²⁴⁰ The tower room has open windows on all sides leaving it open to the elements, referred to by the old lady as her “tapestries.”²⁴¹ The older woman introduces herself as Margaret, Margaret’s older doppelganger.²⁴² She is aware of Paul’s visit: “‘He should have come and gone sooner,’ the old lady went on as though to herself. ‘Then we’d have it all behind us. [...] We’d be well out of it, Margaret, you and I.’”²⁴³ It seems like a sinister prophecy that Paul’s visit has (and has had before) an impact on both the older and younger Margaret’s lives. Younger Margaret senses “somehow that there might be a *thin thread* of reason *tangling* the old lady and the cat and the tower [...]”²⁴⁴ The language used to describe this impact borrows from cross-stitch and tapestry paraphernalia, establishing a linguistic connection between Mrs. Montagues artistry and the spatial entrapment in the house. Older Margaret knows she cannot alter the course of fate, simply remarking on her inability to help Margaret escape from its cyclical nature: “I *would* help you if I could.”²⁴⁵ After Margaret leaves her doppelganger behind in the tower, she starts becoming part of the domestic architecture. Dressed for a ball, she takes on reproductions of the house as adornments of her body – she holds a fan “from the fan room” with a tiny picture

²³⁸Jackson humorously used witch-imagery to market her literary work, for example one of her titles featured her as “the only practicing witch in New England” and she described her home as a “dank old place with a ghost that storms around in the attic.” Her biographer Judy Oppenheimer writes: “She liked to pretend she was a witch; she liked to make people believe it; at the same time she liked to poke fun at the entire business, and the very people who believed her so literally.” Judy Oppenheimer (1988): *Private Demons: The Life of Shirley Jackson*, G.P. Putnam’s Sons. One could speculate that her use of witch-paraphernalia in her literary work is an escapist fantasy of a life unburdened by motherhood (Jackson was a mother of four) and marriage (her husband Stanley Hyman was a notorious cheater) as a powerful single female with a space of her own.; see also her recent biography Ruth Franklin (2016): *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life*, Liveright Publishing.

²³⁹Lovely House, p. 214.

²⁴⁰cf. Studniarz, Slawomir (2018): “Weaving the House of Fiction: Spatial Politics in Shirley Jackson’s *The Lovely House*” in: Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga (ed.): *Space in Literature: Method, Genre, Topos*, Peter Lang, pp. 213-232, p. 224.

²⁴¹Lovely House, p. 216

²⁴²cf. *ibid.*

²⁴³*ibid.*, 217.

²⁴⁴*ibid.* (italics V.P.)

²⁴⁵*ibid.*, p. 218.

of the house painted on its sticks.²⁴⁶ At the ball Margaret's older doppelgänger and Paul reunite and it is evident they have shared a relationship when they were both young. Margaret has aged, whereas Paul has not and "never will."²⁴⁷ Older Margaret says she has forgotten what she is supposed to say, so Paul feeds her her line as if from a script: "'You're supposed to say,' he told her seriously, 'And you really leave us so soon?'"²⁴⁸ This supports the reading that the events have happened before and the lovely house traps its dwellers, now Margaret too, in repetitious cycles. From the reactions around Margaret it becomes clear the other characters see neither older Margaret nor Paul. After the ball Margaret feels as though she has been wearing her ball gown "for an eternity in the house" and the events "seemed to have happened longer ago than memory."²⁴⁹ She compares herself to the figures in the tapestries on the walls and her friend Carla to the portraits in the long gallery.²⁵⁰ The girls have become "models of stillness,"²⁵¹ merging with the house as a further element in its adornment. At the beginning of the short story Margaret is impressed by Mrs. Montague's cross-stitch, remarking that she knows "she would never be able to bring [her own embroidery] into this room"²⁵², which on the surface could be interpreted as an admission of inferior skill but is revealed to be a foreshadowing of her imminent entrapment. She would never be able to bring her own embroidery because she will never be able to leave. The house contains and produces women who will keep on performing domesticity for eternity. The only alternative to this cyclical domestic repetition, a partial one at best because she is still trapped within the structure, is the withdrawal to the tower, a different chronotype²⁵³ where Margaret is allowed to age but as a spinster, a "woman who defies patriarchal perennial duty and seeks refuge in [...] seclusion."²⁵⁴ In contrast to Margaret, Carla's brother is free from the passed-on loss of agency and mobility outside the domestic sphere. Before leaving he turns the attention to the deteriorating state of the house – tears in tapestries, broken statues, the fish are dying and one of the stone walls has a considerable crack.²⁵⁵ The last point especially can be read as a reference to Poe's Gothic tradition. The fall of the House of Usher is foreshadowed by a crack in its foundation. The spatial arrangement which splits off the tower as a separate entity from the rest of the manor, which houses an idealized domestic arrangement, foreshadows Margaret's fate. The

²⁴⁶cf. *Lovely House*, p. 218.

²⁴⁷*ibid.*, p. 220.

²⁴⁸*ibid.*, p. 220.

²⁴⁹*ibid.*, p. 221.

²⁵⁰cf. *ibid.*

²⁵¹*ibid.*, p. 225.

²⁵²*ibid.*, p. 206.

²⁵³cf. Studniarz, p. 213.

²⁵⁴*ibid.*, p. 228.

²⁵⁵*Lovely House*, p. 222.

two alternative paths for Margaret, wife or spinster, are split in the form of the doppelgänger, which in turn embodies her disunification and split identity. Margaret sees the house as a “complete body of story together”²⁵⁶ thereby the Montague house becomes the house of fiction, haunted by ghosts, in this case Margaret and Paul. Jackson seizes the Gothic trope of houses as embodiments of narrative meaning as metaphors for the character’s psychological condition. The story’s self-reflexive nature is referenced in the themes of art, reproduction and perspective. Margaret is only able to perceive the tapestries from certain perspectives, usually being too close and only seeing threads, not the whole picture. Therefore, she realizes only too late she is being woven into the tapestry and entrapped as a decorative motif in the domestic space mirroring the entrapment by the cult of domesticity. “The Lovely House” features two modes of representation, visual (tapestries, pictures, miniatures) and textual in its self-referentiality as a narrative (“body of story”) commenting on the equivalence of literary and visual narrative.²⁵⁷ The *mise en abyme* motif in the mirror room is another self-reflexive embedding of the short story’s interplay of visual and textual narrative. According to Patrycja Antoszek the uncanny effect on the reader is produced precisely by its self-reflexive quality:

Weaving the heroine into the tapestry of the story not only exposes the narrative’s status as a fictional construct but also makes the readers participate in the process of entrapment, filling them, at the same time, with a sense of anxiety about the ambiguous boundary between fiction and reality, past and present, reading and writing.²⁵⁸

By reading the story and therefore being complicit in Margaret’s entanglement readers recreate social complicity in upholding oppressive structures. The lovely house as “a space of endless repetition” is in itself the source of the uncanny effect.²⁵⁹ The repetition and distortion disrupt Margaret’s perspective, disorienting her and disrupting her ability to see what is truly there or not, meaning Paul’s and Margaret’s ghosts. The house, which she has embraced as home upon arrival, becomes *unheimlich*. Older Margaret’s inability to stop the course of events harks back to Freud’s concept of repetition compulsion [Wiederholungszwang] and is a comment on patriarchal control of female agency.

²⁵⁶Lovely House, p. 204.

²⁵⁷cf. Studniarz, p. 219.

²⁵⁸Antoszek, p. 115.

²⁵⁹cf. *ibid.*, p. 110.

4.2 The Haunted House as Maternal Body

In the Gothic mode the domestic, in its material and spatial presence, acts as a stage for psychic displacements and repression. Taking into account the traditional link between domesticity and femininity I would like to argue how the Gothic mode utilizes the haunted house motif as a metaphor for the maternal body to express on the one hand the fraught mother-daughter relationship characterized by the ambivalent desire to fuse with and separate oneself from the maternal body. In *Poetics of Space* Bachelard uses maternalistic metaphors in his descriptions of the meaning of childhood homes. He compares the house as a replacement of the womb, citing a number of qualities commonly associated with the maternal womb and applying them to the home, for example the house as “human being’s first world,” a space that is “enclosed, protected, all warm.”²⁶⁰ Inside the home a child is “bathed in nourishment”²⁶¹ just like in the maternal body’s amniotic fluid. Bachelard’s nostalgic and exclusively positive connotation of home as the secure and comforting shelter that allows one to develop a sense of self and an individual identity clashes with feminist psychoanalytic theory of the home as a source for the uncanny. Freud, on the other hand, establishes a connection between the uncanny motif and the womb in “Das Unheimliche”. According to psychoanalysis the terrifying phantasy of being buried alive is an uncanny distortion of the lascivious phantasy of “intra-uterine existence.”²⁶² The film scholar Barbara Creed has vividly demonstrated how the haunted house can be read as an uncanny metaphor for the womb in the Freudian sense:

[...] the womb is represented in the horror film in at least two main ways: symbolically in terms of intra-uterine settings and literally in relation to the female body. [...] These intra-uterine settings consist of dark, narrow, winding passages leading to a central room, cellar or other symbolic place of birth. [...] The symbolization of the womb as house/room/cellar or any other enclosed space is central to the iconography of the horror film. Representation of the womb as a place that is familiar and unfamiliar is acted out in the horror film through the presentation of monstrous acts which are only half glimpsed or initially hidden from sight until revealed in their full horror.²⁶³

²⁶⁰cf. Reid, Luke (2020): “Endless House, Interminable Dream: Shirley Jackson’s Domestic Architecture and the Matrophobic Gothic” in: Jill E. Anderson and Melanie R. Anderson (eds.): *Shirley Jackson and Domesticity: Beyond the Haunted House*, Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 77-96, p. 80.

²⁶¹ibid.

²⁶²Freud 1999, p. 244.

²⁶³Creed, pp. 53-54.; Creed’s theory is applied to horror films, which is an extension of the

There is a spatial relation between the uncanny and the house in the sense that it becomes an analogue to the human body, a paradigm which has been touched upon in the chapter on the conflation of domestic spaces and female bodies across different media. The house can be seen as a symbolic space of beginnings, very much like the womb is, where gender dynamics and familial power struggles are played out.²⁶⁴ Creed describes how the body/house is the space where desires and the quest for identity is haunted by the mother's presence through intra-uterine symbols.²⁶⁵ The following chapter on Shirley Jackson's novel *The Haunting of Hill House* will demonstrate how Jackson utilizes the architectural oddities of the Gothic haunted house motif as a manifestation and projection site of the protagonists mental disturbance that stems from her inability to separate from the maternal body and follow the script of gendered expectations of mid-century Americana. Addressing several senses, visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile, the space becomes a metaphor for the maternal body. Walls producing blood, comfortable but rejecting surfaces, cold spots and the smell of decay manifest as hauntings which confront Eleanor with her unresolved mother-daughter relationship.

4.2.1 “What a complete and separate thing I am” – Identity formation and dissolution in *Hill House*

Shirley Jackson detected horror in the everyday world instead of relying on the supernatural to craft her Gothic tales. Instead, she employed the supernatural as a metaphor for people's relations to each other and society at large.²⁶⁶ As a midcentury housewife,²⁶⁷ mother and writer, she was well aware of what Betty Friedan famously called “the problem that has no name,”²⁶⁸ the dissatisfaction with the limited role of wife-mother-housekeeper, not necessarily in that order. Simultaneously influenced by the looming Second Wave of feminism and the resurgence of post-war domesticity in America²⁶⁹ Jackson wrote *Hill House* in a time when women's identities were complexly entangled with their spaces. According to L. N. Rosales, Jackson utilized

Gothic mode.

²⁶⁴cf. Creed p. 55.

²⁶⁵cf. *ibid.*

²⁶⁶cf. Joshi, S.T. (2001): *The Modern Weird Tale*, McFarland & Company, p. 15.

²⁶⁷Jackson humorously told the anecdote of how a hospital clerk refused to write down her occupation as “writer”, instead insisting on “housewife”, when she was admitted to the maternity ward for one of her children. see: Franklin, Ruth (2016): *Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life*, Liveright.

²⁶⁸Friedan, Betty (1963): *The Feminine Mystique*. In the same book Friedan criticized Jackson as a “housewife writer” who perpetuated the domestic myth which entrapped women in domestic roles. see Junker, Christine (2019): “The Domestic Tyranny of Haunted Houses in Mary Wilkins Freeman and Shirley Jackson.” *Humanities*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 1-13, p. 8.

²⁶⁹cf. Junker, p. 3.

the gothic mode to critique mid-twentieth-century idealized visions of domesticity. By reshaping the domestic as a frightening – rather than a comforting and familiar – sphere, she highlights the perilousness of the cult of domesticity prized at that time.²⁷⁰

Referring back to Martina Löw’s theory of space, I would like to reiterate how societal scripts are gendering space which in turn means the performance of gender is prescribed by space. Identity and subjectivity are therefore both gendered and spatialized. The tasks which maintain the domestic space are inextricably linked to performing and maintaining femininity.²⁷¹ Successfully performing femininity ensures belonging in societal structures. The sense of belonging, be it in a social or domestic context, is a theme that runs through Jackson’s fiction. Not-belonging has the potential to twist the familiar and homely into sources of discomfort and terror.²⁷² The American ideal of suburban midcentury domesticity is subverted to express how domestic spaces are “traps, both for those who live within the expectations of ‘normalcy,’ and for others who seem to be betrayed by the perceived security those spaces offer.”²⁷³ In Jackson’s Gothic, ‘normalcy’ is a cipher for white heterosexual middle-class Americana and those who fail to perform domesticity as it is socially prescribed are at risk of being crushed by social doctrine. Shirley Jackson’s most widely read novel *The Haunting of Hill House* is a prime example of Jackson’s particular brand of American Female Gothic, which is present in her whole body of work, from her semi-autobiographical suburban family-life sketches published in magazines like *Mademoiselle* and *Good Housekeeping* to her most disturbing short stories and novels. In her Gothic mode the house serves as both a site, in the sense of background, and tool for female entrapment, rendering it unhomey in the Freudian sense. Jackson uses the supernatural as a metaphor for the lurking and ever-present evil, namely the oppressive patriarchal society in which her protagonists try and usually fail to live.²⁷⁴ By the end of the novel the main protagonist Eleanor is subsumed and destroyed by the power of the haunted house. The architectural structure of Hill House is a metaphor for the maternal body, an entity Eleanor is unable to separate from to become her own individual person. Her traumatic

²⁷⁰Rosales, L.N. (2020): “‘Sharp Points Closing in on Her Throat’: The Domestic Gothic in Shirley Jackson’s Short Fiction” in: Jill E. Anderson & Melanie R. Anderson (eds.): *Shirley Jackson and Domesticity: Beyond the Haunted House*, Bloomsbury, pp. 59-67, p. 60.

²⁷¹cf. Junker, p. 3.

²⁷²cf. Dalpe Jr., Michael J. (2020): “‘You didn’t look like you belonged in this house’: Shirley Jackson’s Fragile Domesticities”, in: Jill E. Anderson & Melanie R. Anderson (eds.): *Shirley Jackson and Domesticity: Beyond the Haunted House*, Bloomsbury, pp. 43-58, p. 43.

²⁷³Dalpe Jr., p. 44.

²⁷⁴cf. Anderson, Melanie R. (2016): “Perception, supernatural detection, and gender in The Haunting of Hill House” in: Melanie R. Anderson & Lisa Kröger (eds.): *Shirley Jackson, Influences and Confluences*, Routledge, pp. 35-53, p. 35.

unresolved mother-daughter relationship proves to be the haunting presence.

Hill House is considered Jackson's most Gothic novel for three reasons. First, it features her fullest development of the house as a metaphor for the disunified subject.²⁷⁵ Second, the narration is unreliable due to Eleanor's delusion and third, certain aspects of the supernatural are left undecidable by the end of the novel, meaning it is up to readers' discretion to decide whether Eleanor or ghosts are responsible for the haunting. *Hill House* embodies the topic which permeates almost all her oeuvre "the manner in which a house can subsume its occupants"²⁷⁶ in an especially dreadful setting, the haunted house. Although, Hill House is much more than a backdrop for the plot, rather it is portrayed as a sentient being, with a dark will and personality – "arrogant, hating, never off guard"²⁷⁷ – of its own. Imbuing the house with a mind of its own reactivates what Freud has called primitive animistic beliefs, namely the tendency to ascribe evil intentions that can harm us through "special powers"²⁷⁸ to people or unknown entities.²⁷⁹ The ambiguity between the rational world view and the animistic belief in magic or demonic powers triggers the uncanny effect.²⁸⁰ Both the characters in and the readers of *Hill House* are oscillating between the belief in coincidence and the apprehension of a latent intentionality of evil forces, in this case the evil architecture.

The main protagonist, Eleanor Vance, a timid thirty-two-year-old, who has spent her youth caring as a nurse for her invalid mother, "lifting a cross lady from her chair to her bed, setting out endless trays of soup [...] steeling herself to the filthy laundry"²⁸¹, is called upon by Dr. Montague, a researcher of the paranormal, to join him at the notoriously haunted Hill House. As a group of four, Eleanor, Theodora, Luke, the eventual heir of Hill House, are tasked with documenting the "causes and effects of psychic disturbances in a house commonly known as 'haunted'"²⁸² under the guardianship of Dr. Montague. Eleanor, socially awkward and debilitatingly self-conscious, is left penniless, romantically inexperienced and with "an inability to face strong sunlight without blinking"²⁸³ after her mother's recent death and agrees to the scientific endeavor to finally find a place of belonging after living as a hermit for the past eleven years and then as an unwelcome guest. At the beginning of the novel Eleanor is caught in a moment of transition, after her mother's death she has been relegated to a cot in the nursery at her sister's – "the only person

²⁷⁵cf. Hattenhauer, p. 155.

²⁷⁶Toshi, p. 24.

²⁷⁷Hill House, p. 35.

²⁷⁸ibid., p. 243.

²⁷⁹cf. Freud 1999, 243.

²⁸⁰cf. Fuchs, 172.

²⁸¹Hill House, p. 7.

²⁸²Hill House, p. 4.

²⁸³ibid., p. 6.

in the world she genuinely hated, now that her mother was dead”²⁸⁴. She is quite literally home-less and does not belong anywhere. Her sense of self is not only shaken it has never properly developed under the burden of caring for her mother. The scripts for female behavior handed down to her, marriage and motherhood, she has ‘failed’ to adhere to. Even from the grave her overbearing mother exerts influence on her behavior, for example she is too timid to put on the red slacks she bought, as her mother would not approve the ‘provocative’ attire (slacks, a red sweater and red sandals) – “Mother would be furious.”²⁸⁵ Even before arriving at Hill House, Eleanor is repeatedly infantilized by those around her because her societal worth is diminished due to her spinster-status. Apart from sleeping in the nursery, she is not allowed to use the car the sisters inherited from their mother, due to some pretextual possibility the family might need the car for the baby. In an unprecedented act of defiance Eleanor steals the car and takes off to Hill House. Her venturing out from the protective and restricting homes of two dominant women (mother and older married sister) presents the first opportunity for her independent identity formation, but, as I would like to argue, her inability to separate herself from her mother figure is amplified in the setting of the haunted house on which she subconsciously projects her past trauma. Instead of identity formation she ends her journey in identity dissolution due to the house, as a stand-in for the maternal body, consuming and subsuming her.

In this chapter I would like to argue how the novel uses the setting of a haunted house to confront the main protagonist with her repressed emotions and facilitate her identity dissolution. The space produces an uncanny effect in Eleanor through typically Gothic supernatural phenomena and the disorienting architecture which resembles the maternal womb which trigger her psychological downward spiral that ends with her suicide. The house emits an uncanny atmosphere as it spatially reproduces the maternal womb and forcefully confronts Eleanor with her unresolved mother-daughter conflict and her non-belonging in the social order as an unmarried and child-less woman. The ambivalent mother-daughter dynamic and unresolved trauma from the role-reversal caused by her mother’s ill health, which balances the contradictory impulses to connect and to separate, is a prominent theme in the Gothic mode, also called matrophobic Gothic.²⁸⁶ According to Luke Reid, Jackson’s haunted house narratives utilize spatial poetics to acknowledge and critique how domestic space “spatially organizes the female body’s uncanny estrangement from self.”²⁸⁷ Using anthropomorphic features in the architectural description renders

²⁸⁴Hill House, p. 6.

²⁸⁵ibid., p. 41.

²⁸⁶Reid, p. 78.

²⁸⁷ibid., pp. 77-78.

the house alive, resembling a mother – “mother house [or] housemother”²⁸⁸ – and expresses Eleanor’s fear and longing to fuse with the maternal body in her personal search of home.

On her way up to Hill House she conjures up different homes for herself, because she is essentially home-less, she does not belong anywhere, is not wanted anywhere. In the dream-like fairytales she imagines different homes and scenarios for herself where she is cared for;²⁸⁹ in one fantasy she is a princess in a fairyland with the proverbial prince on horseback waiting for her (“and we shall live happily ever after.”)²⁹⁰ But what stands out about her day-dreaming is not only a longing for a heterosexual relationship but acquiring a space of her own, where she belongs, a state characterized by things belonging to her: oleander trees, white cats, curtains.²⁹¹ In one fantasy she is taken care of by a little old lady bringing her trays of tea,²⁹² which shows her desire to be mothered. In another fantasy she invokes witch imagery, fantasizing about living in “a tiny cottage buried in a garden” where “people will come to me to have their fortunes told, and I will brew love potions.”²⁹³ This imagery is very close to that used for the doppelgänger Margaret in the tower in “The Lovely House”, namely practicing witchcraft (love potions/alchemy) and having an animal familiar (cat/robin). Her daydreaming of domestic spaces she has never inhabited, meaning she is not reproducing a nostalgic memory of home as described by Bachelard, but creates a fantasy of dwelling in enclosed and protected spaces where she is welcome and cared for, either romantically or by a mother-figure. Jackson intertwines these domestic spaces with conventional images of heteronormative romance, marriage and mothering in an amalgamation between maternal haunting, suppressive normativity and domestic architecture.²⁹⁴

The Hill House façade, etymologically related to the face (lat. *facies*), lends itself well to the emphasis of anthropomorphic features which produce an eerie effect.²⁹⁵ In Hill House the windows become eyes and the door becomes a maw, which highlights its role as an active protagonist in the novel and lends an inanimate structure agency, which is a key element of the uncanny:

No human eye can isolate the unhappy coincidence of line and place
which suggests evil in the face of a house, and yet somehow a maniac

²⁸⁸Hill House, p. 211.

²⁸⁹ibid., p. 18.

²⁹⁰ibid., p. 20.

²⁹¹cf. ibid., p. 15.

²⁹²cf. ibid., p. 22.

²⁹³cf. ibid., p. 20.

²⁹⁴cf. Reid, p. 84.

²⁹⁵cf. Fox, Michael Allen (2016): *Home: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, p. 39.

juxtaposition, a badly turned angle, some chance meeting of roof and sky, turned Hill House into a place of despair, more frightening because the face of Hill House seemed awake, with a watchfulness from the blank windows and a touch of glee in the eyebrow of a cornice.²⁹⁶

This description by the limited first-person narrator Eleanor Vance not only expresses how the façade is ugly and uninviting, but it also bestows the house with evil intent and consciousness (“seemed awake”), referencing animistic beliefs about evil intentionality. In most of the chosen texts and photographs the domestic spaces seem to possess more agency than their female dwellers, which culminates in them being consumed – even devoured – by these monstrous houses. The quote above also highlights Jackson’s employment of what Ljubica Matek calls the architecture of evil, meaning “shaped according to a scale unknown and repulsive to humans.”²⁹⁷ According to Matek, Gothic texts rely on the upsetting of architectural proportion as means for the literary figuration of evil and by showing the uncanniness of the house counter the idea of home as a known, safe and governable space.²⁹⁸ Irregular and confusing architecture disorients the protagonists and psychologically and/or physically traps them within. Built eighty years prior to Eleanor’s stay by eccentric Hugh Crain, Hill House is built off-center and disjointed, not adhering to any known architectural principles:

[it] had an unbelievably faulty design which left it chillingly wrong in all its dimensions, that the walls seemed always in one direction a fraction longer than the eye could endure, and another direction a fraction less than the barest possible length.²⁹⁹

A “clashing disharmony”³⁰⁰ characterizes the house where every angle is almost imperceptibly wrong, the stairs are ever so slightly off-kilter and “all these tiny aberrations of measurements add up to a fairly large distortion in the house as a whole”,³⁰¹ which begs the question if the hauntings are truly supernatural or a psychological result of a disturbance of the inner ear.³⁰² Due to this ‘faulty design’ all doors keep swinging “sensibly shut”³⁰³ as if the house, possessing agency, preferred it that way. From the description it is clear that Hill House is an especially offending specimen of the Victorian mansions of the Gilded Age, “[t]hey made houses so oddly

²⁹⁶Hill House, p. 34.

²⁹⁷Matek, p. 406.

²⁹⁸cf. *ibid.*, p. 409.

²⁹⁹Hill House, p. 40.

³⁰⁰*ibid.*, p. 38.

³⁰¹*ibid.*, p. 106.

³⁰²*ibid.*, p.107.

³⁰³*ibid.*, pp. 3, 65.

back when Hill House was built, [Eleanor] thought.”³⁰⁴ It reminds her of a Gothic mansion with its turrets and buttresses, Gothic spires and gargoyles³⁰⁵ and similarly to the narrator in “The Yellow Wall-Paper” Eleanor’s inner monologue shows that she is well familiar with the Gothic tradition and therefore immediately sensing its atmosphere, thinking “perhaps Hill House has a tower, or a secret chamber, or even a passageway going off into the hills and probably used by smugglers”³⁰⁶ and therefore indirectly referencing *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and other Gothic classics. After managing the way up to Hill House, hidden in the hills, she comes “face to face”³⁰⁷, with it, sensing from its visual properties that it “is vile, it is diseased; get away from here at once.”³⁰⁸ The use of the adjective ‘diseased’ endows the house with an organic quality and concurrently establishes a connection between the architecture and her mother’s ailing body she has been reluctantly caring for. Her instinct to leave is juxtaposed with her insistent efforts to enter. The ominous gate is locked by a heavy padlock³⁰⁹ and she has to persuade the malicious caretaker Mr. Dudley to let her in thrice over, “You’ll be sorry I ever opened that gate”³¹⁰, which adds a fairytale element to the narrative and shows the conflicting desires to fuse and separate. The space surrounding and including Hill House is clearly demarcated by the gates and separated from the rest of the world. Eleanor overstepping the boundary can be interpreted as a ritualistic act. According to Judie Newman, the difficulty of finding the house in conjunction with the locked gates guarded by the caretaker “reinforces the impression of [the house’s] desirability as a *heimlich*, secret, a home kept away from the eyes of others.”³¹¹ By the end of her first evening at Hill House, she feels the grip it has on her: “I don’t think we could leave now if we wanted to. [...] Perhaps it has us now, this house, perhaps it will not let us go.”³¹² The allure of Hill House is its potential of belonging. On her first night she feels like she has finally arrived: “I am the fourth person in this room; I am one of them; I belong.”³¹³ She recognizes her autonomy for the first time, a radical act for Eleanor “whose previous existence was peripheral to her family’s needs.”³¹⁴ At Hill House she starts her delayed development of self and individuality – “What a complete and separate thing I am”³¹⁵ – but is ultimately unable to complete the

³⁰⁴Hill House, p. 32.

³⁰⁵ibid.

³⁰⁶ibid.

³⁰⁷ibid., p. 33.

³⁰⁸ibid.

³⁰⁹cf. ibid., p. 28.

³¹⁰ibid.

³¹¹Newman, p. 173.

³¹²Hill House, p. 75.

³¹³ibid., p. 172.

³¹⁴Banks, p. 170.

³¹⁵Hill House, p. 172.

process. Eleanor's decision not to follow her instinct to leave proves fatal because with every passing hour she spends at Hill House, she falls under its spell until she is determined to stay and claim Hill House as her home no matter at what cost.

The house itself is a labyrinth whose odd layout upsets Eleanor's sense of direction. Wandering around the house she finds herself in circular and windowless rooms unable to tell in which part of the house she is. Eleanor becomes a victim to both architectural and internalized entrapment.³¹⁶ The architectural tricks conjured up by Hugh Crain tricks the protagonist's expectations of architectural unity, for example due to its off-set assembly one cannot see the big library tower from certain perspectives so once one turns a corner it springs up on you.³¹⁷ This builds a sense of apprehension of danger or a looming sense of unease that makes Eleanor question her own sanity³¹⁸ and in turn makes the readers question whether or not she is a reliable narrator. In order to streamline the argument, I will focus on the two most conspicuous instances of haunting, first the appearance of bloody messages on the wall, calling Eleanor home, and the nightly occurrence of loud pounding of the walls, which recreates Eleanor's mother's nightly knocks. In addition to that I will focus on the two spaces which have the strongest uncanny effect on Eleanor, the library and nursery.

Eleanor feels, at times subconsciously and therefore uncannily, her mother's presence at Hill House, which is both alluring and repellant to her. For example, she feels physically unable to enter the mansion's library – “She backed away, overwhelmed with the cold air of mold and earth which rushed at her. ‘My mother –’ she said”³¹⁹ –, due to her repressed frustration at having to read love stories to her mother every night instead of living out her romantic life outside her mother's reach. She perceives the library books' strong moldy smell and reinterprets it as a grave-like smell of decay and death she associates with her mother³²⁰ which exemplifies how the physical and sensual properties of space are synthesized to uncannily reveal the character's repressed trauma. The nursery is another room Eleanor feels unable to enter at first. It is called the “heart of the house”³²¹ by Dr. Montague, the house thereby once again acquiring human or organic quality, and appears to be the cradle of the supernatural phenomena. A large musty room on the end of the hall, barred off from the rest of the house by a distinct cold spot, “a piercing cold that struck her between one step and the next; it was like passing through a wall of ice”³²², a

³¹⁶cf. Newman, p. 126.

³¹⁷cf. Hill House, p. 155.

³¹⁸ibid.

³¹⁹ibid., p. 103.

³²⁰cf. ibid.

³²¹ibid., p. 119.

³²²ibid., p. 118.

tangible barrier to the nursery, where the Crain daughters lived. Their mother was killed in an accident before ever entering the house, therefore the Crain daughters have themselves experienced a type of motherless-ness, which she evidently picks up on. Eleanor perceives the cold spot as a “doorway of a tomb”³²³ and again smells the tombl-like decay smell the others cannot detect, which underlines her individual synthesis of the rooms uncanny properties is greatly influenced by her repressed emotions. The room itself is dark and the walls are painted with nursery animals somehow “not at all jolly, but as though they were trapped or related to the dying deer in the sporting prints of the game room”.³²⁴ The atmosphere emitted by the room, “an indefinable air of neglect”³²⁵, transfers Eleanor’s feeling about her ‘un-mothering’ mother³²⁶ to the room closest associated with the mother-daughter-relationship. The animals painted on the walls as well as the two grinning heads on the wall³²⁷ are especially scary to her as they confront her not only with a distorted version of a nursery but a distorted version of childhood itself, the Crain sisters’. Both the library and the nursery are part of the house’s strange floorplan, consisting of concentric circles comprised of inner and outer rings of rooms, leaving the inner circles without windows or direct ways outside. This structure traps Eleanor within an encircling space, exemplified by her impression that the house is engulfing and isolating her by “press[ing] down from all around”³²⁸ her. Luke Reid calls this effect Hill House’s “intrauterine allure.”³²⁹ Instead of the nurturing and life-sustaining space that a womb conventionally represents, this imagery is uncannily distorted to reveal the womb’s all-encompassing threat, or “intrauterine terror.”³³⁰ Eleanor’s ‘failure’ to separate from her mother, even after the latter’s death, stunts her emotionally and romantically. She is unable to have meaningful relationships with neither her hetero- or homosexual romantic prospects she meets at Hill House, Luke and Theodora.³³¹

Towards the end of the novel, when Eleanor has almost truly succumbed to the lure and promise of home at Hill House, she acquires a supernatural feeling of the structure itself, hearing things that are impossible to perceive for the human ear:

³²³Hill House, p. 118.

³²⁴ibid., p. 119.

³²⁵ibid.

³²⁶cf. Hattenhauer, p. 161.

³²⁷cf. Hill House, p. 120.

³²⁸ibid., p. 86.

³²⁹Reid, p. 87.

³³⁰Reid, p. 88.

³³¹For an in-depth exploration of the ambivalent lesbian attraction between Eleanor and Theo see Emily Banks (2020): “Insisting on the Moon: Shirley Jackson and the Queer Future” in: Jill E. Anderson and Melanie R. Anderson (eds.): *Shirley Jackson and Domesticity: Beyond the Haunted House*, Bloomsbury, pp. 169-188.

Eleanor sat, looking down at her hands, and listened to the sounds of the house. Somewhere upstairs a door swung quietly shut; a bird touched the tower briefly and flew off. In the kitchen the stove was settling and cooling, with little soft creakings. [...] She could even hear, with her new awareness of the house, the dust drifting gently in the attics, the wood aging. Only the library was closed to her; she could not hear [...] the books rotting or rust seeping into the circular iron stairway to the tower.³³²

This new “awareness of the house” and its small sounds all around her is reminiscent of the child’s hearing the mother’s internal body sounds within the womb. Eleanor feels she is being consumed by the house’s structure like “a small creature swallowed whole by a monster” who feels her “tiny little movements inside”³³³ just like a child inside the maternal body. This interpretation of a distorted mother-child dynamic which induced dread instead of comfort is supported by the continuous and increasingly aggravating infantilization of Eleanor by the other characters. As mentioned above she has been relegated to a cot in the nursery at her sister’s house, apparently befitting her inferior status in the family hierarchy as a single thirty-two-year-old. She is forced to steal the jointly inherited car as her sister takes liberty to not allow her to use it. Infantilization as a technique of dis-empowerment and even disenfranchisement used on women as a means of oppression is also present in “The Yellow Wallpaper” discussed further above. John addresses his wife as “little girl” or “blessed little goose”³³⁴ and even carries her up the stairs to bed like one would a small child. His rhetoric and behavior express his incessant belittlement of her needs and desires. In *Hill House* Eleanor’s disempowerment is expressed in seemingly endearing and therefore all the more frightening terms. As the plot progresses the other characters shorten her name to Nell or Nellie and talk about her in the third person even with her in the room: “‘Nell doesn’t want messages from beyond,’ Theodora said [...] ‘Nell wants her warm bed and a little sleep.’”³³⁵ Theodora practically nurses her like an infant holding a cup up to her lips to drink.³³⁶ As her identity and sense of self keeps unraveling the other characters seize the opportunity to patronize her: “‘Come along, baby,’ Theodora said. ‘Theo will wash your face for you and make you all neat for breakfast.’”³³⁷ Eleanor gradually slips from being a “complete and separate thing” into a disempowered child role imposed by the other

³³²Hill House, p. 223.

³³³ibid., p. 41.

³³⁴Wall-paper, p. 138.

³³⁵Hill House, p. 194.

³³⁶cf. ibid., p. 201.

³³⁷ibid., p. 205.

characters and the motherhouse.

One day after one particularly scary night of ear-splittingly loud banging on the walls and doors at Hill House, which leaves all four participants of the ghost-hunting party shaken, writing appears on the walls. In red large and straggling letters, spanning from one end of the long hallway to the other, “almost too large to read” the writing reads “HELP ELEANOR COME HOME.”³³⁸ The writing’s meaning stays somewhat ambiguous due to missing punctuation, so it is either a summon for Eleanor to help and come home, or a request to assist Eleanor in returning home. Eleanor is greatly troubled by being singled out by whoever, or rather whatever, wrote those words: “I should not be on the walls of this house. [...] It knows *my* name, doesn’t it?”³³⁹ The origin of the red writing, which occurs again after, stays ambiguous as well. Eleanor is accused of having written it herself to garner attention by Theodora (“You know that none of us wrote it”)³⁴⁰, which accelerates her alienation from the group and identification with Hill House. Shortly after the incident Theodora’s room is vandalized and all her clothes are smeared with a liquid that appears to be blood and more writing, “HELP ELEANOR COME HOME ELEANOR”, appears on the wallpaper in shaky red letters, still wet as it “dripped and splattered”.³⁴¹ Theodora’s clothes are smeared with the red substance which recalls Eleanor’s timidity at wearing her newly bought red slacks, sweater and sandals her mother would disapprove of.³⁴² The smell in the room is “atrocious, disgusting.”³⁴³ Several critics have argued this is evidence that Eleanor is responsible for both instances of the writing, unconsciously in a type of fugue state, as the second time can be read as punishment for Theodora but overall, an expression of her desire and longing to belong and find a home where she is loved and wanted. Several of these critics interpret the red material to be menstrual blood³⁴⁴ but although it is possible Eleanor has suppressed her memory of vandalizing the walls herself – she is even self-aware of her unreliable narration, feeling she is not “quite coherent in this moment”³⁴⁵ – it would be physically impossible for her to produce enough blood to smear the walls and sully all of Theo’s clothing. When she cleans Theo’s red smeared hands she is repulsed by her, “She is wicked [...] beastly and soiled and

³³⁸Hill House, pp. 145, 146.

³³⁹ibid., p. 146.

³⁴⁰ibid.

³⁴¹ibid., p. 155.

³⁴²cf. ibid., p. 41.

³⁴³ibid., p. 155.

³⁴⁴cf. Hattenhauer, p. 164; Bailey, p. 40; Hodges Holt, Shari (2016): “The tower or the nursery? Paternal and maternal re-visions of Hill House on film” in: Melanie R. Anderson & Lisa Kröger (eds.) (2016): *Shirley Jackson, Influences and Confluences*, Routledge, pp. 160-182, p. 161.

³⁴⁵Hill House, p. 155.

dirty”³⁴⁶ as it subconsciously reminds her of nursing her mother, as the repeated use of the word ‘soiled’ in both contexts suggests.³⁴⁷ However, this does not explain how the blood or red ink disappears without a trace after the group has left Theo’s room locked for several days after.³⁴⁸ This suggests the bleeding walls are in fact not Eleanor’s doing but a true paranormal phenomenon at Hill House. Producing and releasing blood is another way the house is coded as organic, female and maternal like a (bleeding) womb. In a conversation with Eleanor Luke Sanderson, the heir, likens Hill House’s inviting and repelling atmosphere to that of a mother figure:

It’s all so motherly,” Luke said. “Everything so soft. Everything so padded. Great embracing chairs and sofas which turn out to be hard and unwelcoming when you sit down, and reject you at once – [...] and hands everywhere. Little soft glass hands, curving out to you, beckoning –“ [...] “A mother house,” Luke said [...] “a housemother, a headmistress, a housemistress.”³⁴⁹

The interior fittings and décor are essentially the physical comforts Hill House provides but in their comfort they are inherently ambiguous, the beckoning hands are made of cold unyielding glass.

Lastly, I would like to point out the nightly knocking as the most disturbing instance of haunting and the most compelling evidence for the argument that Eleanor’s mother-daughter relationship exemplified in her fear and desire to fuse with the maternal is transferred onto the spatial qualities of Hill House as a projection site. At night Eleanor and Theo are kept awake by a knocking that gradually turns into banging on the walls:

It is only a noise, and terribly cold. It is a noise down the halls, far down at the end, near the nursery door, and terribly cold, *not* my mother knocking on the wall. [...] Banging is the best word for it; it sounds like something children do, not mothers knocking against the wall for help [...]”³⁵⁰

The sound’s quality is synesthetic (“terribly cold”) which expresses the bodily effect it has on Eleanor, “the cold crept and pinched at them, filling and overflowing the

³⁴⁶Hill House, p. 158.

³⁴⁷Tricia Lootens suggests this passage shows how “Hill House echoes and amplifies Eleanor’s hatred of ‘dirty’ female bodies, including her own.” Lootens, Trisha (2005): “Whose Hand Was I Holding?” *Familial and Sexual Politics in Shirley Jackson’s The Haunting of Hill House*” in: Bernice M. Murphy (ed.): *Shirley Jackson: Essays on the Literary Legacy*, McFarland and Company, pp. 150-186, p. 185.

³⁴⁸cf. Hill House, p. 192.

³⁴⁹Hill House, pp. 209, 211.

³⁵⁰ibid., p. 128.

room. [...] icy little curls of fingers on her back.”³⁵¹ The sound seems to be coming closer, loud and deafening, moving methodically from room to room looking for Eleanor as if it possessed a material quality:

The little sticky sounds moved on around the doorframe and then, as though a fury caught whatever was outside, the crashing came again, and Eleanor and Theodora saw the wood of the door tremble and shake, and the door move against its hinges.” “You can’t get in,” Eleanor said wildly, and again there was silence, as though the house listened with attention to her words, understanding, cynically agreeing, content to wait. A thin little giggle came, in a breath of air through the room, a little mad rising laugh, the smallest whisper of a laugh, and Eleanor *heard it all up and down her back*, a little gloating laugh moving past them around the house,, it was over.³⁵²

The movement of the sound around the doorframe is mirrored in the sensation moving up and down Eleanor’s back. And although Eleanor appears sufficiently scared after this night she wishes to surrender to the house: “she wanted to reel, chanting, [...] she wanted to sing and to shout and to fling her arms and move in great emphatic, *possessing* circles around the room of Hill House; I am here, I am here, she thought.”³⁵³ The word *possessing* in this case can refer to both her actively claiming Hill House as her chosen home and also Hill House possessing her like a demon or ghost. When the nightly knocking and banging reoccurs Eleanor’s identity keeps becoming undone: “I am disappearing inch by inch into this house, I am going apart a little bit at a time because all this noise is breaking me; why are the others frightened?”³⁵⁴ This passage shows how Eleanor relates the spatial qualities of Hill House, the hauntings so to speak, to herself only: “[...] the metallic overwhelming sound of it washed over her like waves; she put her cold hands to her mouth to feel if her face was still there [...]”³⁵⁵ and feels as though the crashing sounds indeed come from the inside of her own head, the barrier between her and the house becoming ever more porous. She is trying to reassure herself of her identity by touching her face. Finally, Eleanor reveals to the group, and the readers, why the knocking is so disturbing to her, it uncannily reminds her of her mother’s death for which she feels responsible: “She knocked on the wall and called me and called me and I never woke up. I ought to have brought her her medicine; I always did before. But this time she

³⁵¹Hill House, p. 130.

³⁵²ibid., p. 131. (italics, V.P.)

³⁵³ibid., p. 141. (italics V.P.)

³⁵⁴ibid., p. 202.

³⁵⁵ibid.

called me and I never woke up.”³⁵⁶ Hill House reproduces the knocking in a distorted manner, instead of a human-made sound it is “metallic” and moves around the walls swiftly. The sound produces a bodily feeling, a cold or freezing sensation, meaning the atmosphere transcends the barrier of inside/outside the skin, literally touching Eleanor. It is however curious how Eleanor knows for sure her mother was knocking for her on the night she died, if she in fact was sleeping and could not have heard it. So, either Eleanor is delusional or she has been lying to herself the whole time and repressing the memory of her actively choosing not to come to her mother’s aid and thereby being passively responsible in the latter’s death.³⁵⁷ The fact that she admits her mother was the most hated person in her life and that she “had learned to sleep very lightly [...] when [she] was listening for [her] mother”³⁵⁸ supports this interpretation. Thus, having realized the trauma Hill House has confronted her with and admitted that to the others, and more importantly herself, does Eleanor’s reabsorption by the “motherhouse” truly accelerate. During her last night at Hill House, she heads for the library, the room she had been unable to enter prior due to the “odor of decay, which nauseated her”,³⁵⁹ which now feels “warm, drowsy, luxuriously warm”³⁶⁰ like a motherly body. She calls out for her mother and receives a response from what appears to be the house itself “Come along.”³⁶¹ Eleanor runs around the house pounding on the walls and doors, laughing madly and therefore embodying the hauntings of the previous nights.³⁶² Dancing around the veranda in circles – like the house’s concentric circle floorplan – and proudly proclaims “I have broken the spell of Hill House and somehow come *inside*. I am home, she thought, and stopped in wonder at the thought. I am home, I am home, she thought;”³⁶³ She has come inside, entered the womb. Her embrace of Hill House as her home also completely changes its atmosphere, it is now “deliciously, fondly warm” and “the stone floor move[s] caressingly, rubbing itself against the soles of her feet, and all around the soft air touched her, stirring her hair, drifting against her fingers, coming in a light breath across her mouth, and she danced in circles.”³⁶⁴ A corporal shift takes place as the surfaces of Hill House caress Eleanor warmly in a way that suggests an erotic union and at the same time an intoxicating rapture in contrast to the cold bodily terror she felt before. She climbs the rickety stairwell up the tower, meaning to climb the turret, where a former inhabitant of Hill House has hung

³⁵⁶Hill House, p. 212.

³⁵⁷cf. Hattenhauer, p. 158.

³⁵⁸Hill House, p. 227.

³⁵⁹ibid., p. 228.

³⁶⁰ibid.

³⁶¹ibid.

³⁶²cf. ibid., p. 229.

³⁶³ibid., p. 232. (italics V.P.)

³⁶⁴ibid.

herself years prior, and seemingly seeking to repeat her suicide, but her attempt is thwarted by the rest of the group. By morning they have resolved to banish her from the house for her own good. Eleanor insists “[t]he house wants me to stay [...] walled up alive.’ Eleanor began to laugh again at their stone faces. ‘Walled up alive,’ she said. ‘I want to stay here.’”³⁶⁵ She awards the house more vitality and agency than her human companions, their “stone faces” a testament to how Hill House seems more organic to her than they are. The imagery of a walled up, essentially buried alive, virgin comes straight from the Gothic mode canon. Her insistence on becoming a structural part of the house is both an expression of her succumbing to the power of the house as well as a retrospect on how she has lived her life immured as her mother’s nurse which left her with “an inability to face strong sunlight without blinking.”³⁶⁶ Unable to face separation from Hill House, her home as she claims, and no other place to go to, she purposefully crashes her car into the large tree in the driveway at full speed. Hill House has eroded her sense of self and beguilingly offered itself as a home space for her. In the seconds before the fatal crash a hint of doubt over her own volition in her suicide flickers: “Why am I doing this? Why am I doing this? Why don’t they stop me?”³⁶⁷ Eleanor has been tricked by the evil at the core of Hill House.

As Judie Newman argues, Eleanor’s eventual union with the house is a reabsorption by the mother that she both resents and desires thus dramatizing her fraught relationship with maternity and her own female sexuality.³⁶⁸ The ending is ambiguous and has been read as both a sad conclusion of Eleanor’s descent into madness as well as a happy escape from societal expectations of marriage and motherhood. The fact that at the last moment she questions whether she had any agency in the life-ending decision at all suggests to me that she has not maintained her individual sense of self briefly glimpsed upon her arrival at Hill House. It is a house marked with a history of unhappy and dead women, an atmosphere the house has absorbed and keeps reproducing. According to Tricia Lootens, Hill House is about “the ways in which people, especially women, are destroyed by the nuclear family, sexual repression, and romantic notions of feminine self-sacrifice.”³⁶⁹ Hill House has an eighty-year-old history of dysfunctional family dynamics and its distorted structure and hauntings expose what often lies underneath the illusion of domestic happiness.³⁷⁰ Hill House has never known a happy family. The architect and first owner Hugh Crain’s first wife dies before ever setting foot in the house, the second

³⁶⁵Hill House, p. 240.

³⁶⁶ibid., p. 6.

³⁶⁷ibid., p. 246.

³⁶⁸Newman, p. 161.

³⁶⁹Lootens, p. 168.

³⁷⁰cf. Hodges Holt, p. 161.

wife dies in a fall, the third becomes ill and has to leave the country where she also dies. The two Crain daughters grow up motherless in the cold dark house supervised by their father who insists on protecting their “virtue”. According to Lootens, “what Hill House reveals to its guests is a brutal, inexorable vision of the ‘absolute reality’ of nuclear families that kill where they are supposed to nurture.”³⁷¹

All things considered, the aspects of haunting described in the paragraphs above show how though all characters perceive the haunting, it is Eleanor, due to her pre-existing psychological distress caused by her ambivalent feelings about her mother’s death, guilt and relief, who is most affected by its uncanny nature. By the end Eleanor becomes part of the (maternal) body of Hill House, because her identity formation is ultimately stunted and she is consumed by the structure, physically due to her suicide, and metaphorically as she becomes part of the lore and mystery of Hill House. She embraces her infantilization and fusion with the structure. Hill House has ultimately lived up to its expectations, namely its atmosphere that “can find out the flaws and faults and weaknesses in all of us, and break us apart in a matter of days.”³⁷² As diagnosed by Dr. Montague Hill House was “never meant to be lived in,” which shows life has no place at Hill House. The house is simultaneously monstrous and motherly, comforting and rejecting, safe and murderous. In its oppositional binaries it reflects and reproduces the fraught mother-child relationship with its dual forces of unity and separation. Her inability to transform from daughter to wife and mother means she is home-less in a society where this are the two roles required to assume status. The consequence is dissolution of self in the form of re-attachment to the mother figure. Hill House as an evil space produces the type of haunting that confronts Eleanor with her repressed trauma, uncannily reproducing its pivotal points, the cold spot in the nursery representing her mother’s coldness, the smell of decay in the library representing her stunted romantic life, the bleeding walls representing the connection to the ambiguous womb and lastly, the nightly knocking as a manifestation of her guilt. The desire for a home envisioned on the drive up to Hill House, characterized by oleander trees, white cats and self-made curtains is replaced by the unattainable desire to fuse with the maternal body. At the end Eleanor suffers the same fate the former female inhabitants of Hill House have suffered before her, whose life have ended in accidental or self-inflicted death. Dying on the grounds of Hill House she will become a part of its malevolent legacy and mythic gossip surrounding it. In her ultimate self-sacrifice to the domus she has not achieved belonging. After all, “whatever walked there, walked alone.”³⁷³

³⁷¹Lootens, p. 180.

³⁷²Hill House, p. 124.

³⁷³ibid., p. 255.

4.2.2 The post-domestic visuals of Francesca Woodman

“The body is the house of the self, the dwelling of the soul.
But the body can also be our prison and our burden.”³⁷⁴

Upon first seeing examples of Woodman’s photographic work in class I was reminded of Victorian spirit photography, a historic genre of the 19th century which claimed to capture spirits and ghosts, on camera. It was accidentally discovered by the American photographer William H. Mumler in 1961 when he spotted a faint figure next to him on one of his self-portraits. Amid the rising wave of popular spiritualism spirit photographers became sought after service providers who allegedly exposed ghosts in the form of faint figures or glowing orbs next to their survivors in portraits. The effect was usually caused by double exposure, dust particles, lens flares or other purposeful or accidental manipulation of the photograph.³⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the public remained fascinated and enthralled by the photographic ghost apparitions. Woodman’s active career took place in the 1970s and early 1980s long after the spirit photography craze of Victorian times had died down but a trace of it remains in her self-portraits. They are haunted by a female spectral figure who materializes and dematerializes before our very eyes. One the one hand her signature long exposure in conjunction with slight movement of the body produces a blurring effect which reminds one of ghostly apparitions. On the other hand, her tragic death by suicide at the young age of 22 remains a point of fascination with critics, as it is remarked upon in almost all literature on her. Some even go so far as searching for clues of her immanent “self-annihilation”³⁷⁶ in her oeuvre or interpreting her photographs as “rehearsals” of her death.³⁷⁷ Tom Gunning has remarked upon photography’s inherent uncanniness which is especially prominent in spirit photography:

The Spiritualist encounter with photography reveals the uncanny aspect of this technological process, as one is confronted with doubles that can be endlessly scrutinized for their recognizable features, but whose origins remain obscure. Although mere images, photographs remain endlessly

³⁷⁴Palm, Anna Karin (2015): “The Body and Its Stories: Thoughts on Francesca Woodman’s Photography” in: Anna Teilgren (ed): *Francesca Woodman: On Being an Angel Catalogue of the Exhibition at Moderna Museet Stockholm*, Verlag Buchhandlung König, pp. 19-23, p. 20.

³⁷⁵cf. Kaplan, Louis (2003): “Where the Paranoid Meets the Paranormal: Speculations on Spirit Photography” *Art Journal*, Vol. 62, No. 3, pp. 18-29, p. 18.

³⁷⁶Somerville, Kris (2010): “Clues to a Lost Woman: The Photography of Francesca Woodman” *The Missouri Review*, Vol. 3; No. 3, pp. 79-91, p. 80.

³⁷⁷cf. Phelan, Peggy (2002): “Francesca Woodman’s Photography: Death and the Image One More Time” *Signs*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 979-1004.; see also Ray Mark Rinaldi: “Removing Suicide as the Filter for Experiencing Francesca Woodman’s Photography” *Hyperallergic*, 17.12.2019; Andrew Dickson: “Francesca Woodman: The eerie images of a teenage genius” *BBC Culture*, 12.12.2021; Heather Murphy: “Is Francesca Woodman the Sylvia Plath of Photography?” *Slate*, 28.03.2012.

reproducible, able to survive the physical death of their originals. While serving, on the one hand, as evidence of a supernatural metaphysical existence, spirit photographs also present a uniquely modern conception of the spirit world as caught up in the endless play of image making and reproduction and the creation of simulacra.³⁷⁸

The aim of this chapter is to show how the Gothic visual formula of the haunted house as the facilitator of uncanniness transfers from the literary to the visual medium photography. Most of Woodman's photographs are small, measuring 8x10 inches or smaller and therefore insisting on an intimate mode of perception through close proximity. Jane Simon argues that their small scale and Woodman's use of her own body as (often nude) model facilitates an intimate experience between viewer and photograph.³⁷⁹ All the photographs discussed here have two things in common, they are staged within the derelict interior and in all of them Woodman's face is obscured, hidden, blurred or out of frame. This is not necessarily typical for her work, as she did frequently photograph outside, for example on the beach, in the woods and in a graveyard and she often showed her face, even toying with it in an image in which three young models – doppelgangers so to speak – are holding up prints of Woodman's face covering their own. Still, the photos I have chosen showcase the haunted house motif through the derelict interiors and Woodman's spectral quality facilitated by the obscuring of her face. The photographs' transitional or liminal quality is created by blurring through long exposure and movement by the model (usually Woodman herself). In others her form is partly hidden by transparent fabrics or plastic sheets that create the ghostly notions which evoke Victorian spirit photography. In some photographs her body is fragmented by architectural elements like doors and mantle pieces. Woodman's interest in body-space relationships is documented in her notebooks:

I am interested in the way people relate to space. The best way to do this is to depict their interactions to the boundaries of these spaces. Started doing this with ghost pictures, people fading into a flat plane – ie becoming the wall under wallpaper or of an extension of the wall onto floor. Closer to what I am doing now is my beginning last spring of (M) or myself enclosed by a glass coffee table. Also video tapes – people becoming, or emerging from environment.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁸Gunning 1995, p. 67.

³⁷⁹cf. Simon, Jane (2010): "An intimate mode of looking: Francesca Woodman's photographs" *Emotion, Space and Society*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 28-35, p. 28.

³⁸⁰Francesca Woodman quoted in Marker, Nadine (2017): *Francesca Woodman & Eija-Liisa Ahtila: Zur Bildhaftigkeit und Präsentation von Emotionen in Räumen medialer Künste*, Unipress

Oftentimes interpretations of Woodman's photographs have privileged a viewing which understands her portraits as analogous to other visual formulas of entrapment, and several scholars, Elisabeth Bronfen among them, have compared Francesca Woodman's work with "The Yellow Wall-Paper."³⁸¹ One of many, a self-portrait "From Space², Providence, Rhode Island, 1975-76" (Attachment A) lends itself especially well to this comparison, as it shows Woodman's nude body partially hidden by scraps of torn wallpaper in-front of the same wallpaper behind her. In the center of the black and white photograph Woodman stands with her back to the wall facing the camera head on. She is holding large scraps of crudely torn flower-patterned wallpaper against her body, partially concealing herself. The only parts we can see are her right arm, her stomach and hips, her shins and feet, whereas her other arm, breast, head and most of her legs are hidden. Her stomach and navel are in the center of the composition, obliquely referencing the umbilical cord, maternal womb and bodily connection to the maternal body. Behind her the derelict house she used as a studio is crumbling apart, scraps of plaster and wallpaper littering the floor, the wall behind her is cracked severely in several places. The wall is almost bare, except for one remaining piece of the same flower-patterned wallpaper in Woodman's hands. The positioning of the wallpaper on the wall and the piece in her hand creates a seamless transition, meaning due to the two-dimensional character of the paper it is hard to tell whether the pieces are attached, therefore blurring the lines between wall and body. Due to long exposure time and very slight movement of the hands the edges of the body and wallpaper are blurred. This is one of several examples in which Woodman blends into the space behind her, showing a moment of appearing or disappearing, a point of ambivalence. Is she blending into the wall or emerging from it? How much agency does she have in either process? As Elisabeth Bronfen puts it, "what is captured in the photograph is not a figure that has become something, but the process of becoming."³⁸² Furthermore, the state of the derelict house shows a fragile space in the cracks in the walls and pieces of plaster scattered on the floor.³⁸³ Bronfen points out the ambiguity of fragility, who is more fragile the hidden female figure or the dilapidated house?³⁸⁴ Is she being consumed by the house? This has been a common interpretation of her work. In her influential essay "Just like a Woman" (1986), that brought Woodman a lot of notoriety after her death, Abigail Solomon-Godeau argues Woodman "enact[s] tableaux of entrapment, engulfment, or absorption of the women in those spaces – both literal and

Verlag, p. 44 from Francesca Woodman's Notebook, Notebook #6, "Journal Extracts", ed. Goerge Woodman, Phaidon, 2006, p. 244.

³⁸¹Posner, pp. 169-170, Solomon Godeau.

³⁸²Bronfen 2014, p. 28.

³⁸³cf. *ibid.*

³⁸⁴*ibid.*, p. 27.

metaphorical – to which she is conventionally relegated.”³⁸⁵ Comparing it to “The Yellow Wallpaper”³⁸⁶ she posits the woman’s body is physically devoured by the house, which not only imprisons but consumes her.³⁸⁷ Following her interpretation, Woodman enacts a scene of (self-)victimization in the form of a “living sacrifice to the domus.”³⁸⁸ Chris Townsend, on the other hand, sees Woodman as an active agent who consciously disrupts the space by inserting herself as a disturbance in the field of vision.³⁸⁹ The torn wallpaper and the marked floor are the obvious reference points to Perkins Gilman’s short story, which have the same spatial features. The presence of Gothic tropes in her work such as graveyards and ruins as well as veiling and immurement point to her self-identification as a Victorian heroine.³⁹⁰ Apparently, Woodman was convinced she was born in the wrong era and would have been better suited as a Victorian. She was also interested in modern retellings of Victorian literature seeing as *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* were her two favorite novels.³⁹¹

The derelict room she positions her body is not lived in, it might have been but has since fallen in disrepair. The ideal of domesticity represented by the abandoned house as its metonymy is crumbling, deconstructed, rejected as the relic of another time even. Looking at the wallpaper as the house’s inner membrane, Nadine Marker posits, Woodman appropriates it as a second skin for herself, positioning herself in the tiny interstice between wall and wallpaper.³⁹² On the one hand this is a restrictive pose, meant to hide the feminine form behind the domestic attributes. On the other hand, it can be read as a self-empowering gesture through the appropriation of space for inhabiting.³⁹³ It is at once an incorporation of and inscription of self into space. The readings of the series *House and Space*² as a (self-)victimization are based on the assumption that the home is a place of confinement and equate femininity with interiority.³⁹⁴ According to Harm Lux, the main theme of Woodman’s artistic

³⁸⁵Solomon-Godeau, Abigail (1986): “Just like a Woman” originally published in: Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Ann Gabhart & Roslind Woodman Krass (eds.): *Francesca Woodman: Photographic Work*, <https://www.galeriewinter.at/kuenstler/francesca-woodman/abigail-solomon-godeau-just-like-a-woman/> [20.04.22]

³⁸⁶Although she attributes the short story to Olive Schreiner and not Charlotte Perkins Gilman, it becomes clear from the context she means Perkins Gilman’s short story.

³⁸⁷cf. Solomon-Godeau.

³⁸⁸Solomon-Godeau.

³⁸⁹cf. Townsend, Chris (2007): *Francesca Woodman: Scattered in Space and Time*, Phaidon Press, p. 26.

³⁹⁰cf. Townsend, p. 21.

³⁹¹ibid.

³⁹²cf. Marker, p. 43.

³⁹³ibid., p. 44.

³⁹⁴cf. Liu, Jui-Ch’i (2004): “Francesca Woodman’s Self-Images: Transforming Bodies in the Space of Femininity” *Woman’s Art Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 26-31, p. 26.

work is the female body's symbolic captivity.³⁹⁵ Woodman's representation of her body "physically devoured by the wall(paper) of the dilapidated house suggests [...] a fear of being abandoned in the space of femininity."³⁹⁶ Liu, on the other hand, detects more nuance in Woodman's photographs and accredits feminine agency to the figure as opposed to the passivity and victimhood interpreted by the aforementioned scholars. Instead, she asserts that the female figure shows "an active longing and positive struggle to merge with the wall."³⁹⁷ According to her, the haunted house is associated with a place that is both familiar and unfamiliar, a metaphor for the womb as human beings' first home.³⁹⁸ However, in these photographs she creates an alternative domestic space, a liberative sphere with Surrealist connotations not controlled by patriarchy but a space split off from late 19th century cult of domesticity.³⁹⁹ The derelict house functions as an uncanny stand-in for the maternal womb as the place of origin and unity as described by Barbara Creed. This "intra-uterine metaphor"⁴⁰⁰ is taken up again in "House #3, Providence, Rhode Island, 1875-76" (Attachment B) in which she is crouching in a fetal position in a corner. Through long exposure and body movement her body and face are so blurred, the boundaries between body, floor and wall are almost unrecognizable. Only one of her legs is sticking out almost unblurred and clearly identifying her by her signature Mary Janes (or Chinese slippers, it is hard to tell). She has covered most of her body in large wallpaper scraps. The blurring creates the impression Woodman was caught in the act of pulling the wallpaper over her like a blanket, hiding herself. According to Liu,

Woodman's Surrealist-oriented self-representations employ the dilapidated and decorative wall(paper) [...] to metaphorically recreate a nostalgic space of femininity, calling to mind her longing for the primal bond with the mother. Feminine space is transformed into a reflection of a daughter's active desire and fantasy.⁴⁰¹

As mentioned further above I utilize the word haunting in a broader sense including Liggins' definition of haunting as more than the appearance of ghosts but the sensation of being troubled, discomforted and being trapped in the past⁴⁰² or the atmo-

³⁹⁵cf. Harm Lux, Harm (1992): "Roads of Access to Francesca Woodman's Work" in: Harm Lux & Friedrich Meschede (eds): *Francesca Woodman: Photographische Arbeiten/Photographic Works*, Shedhalle Zürich, pp. 14-21, p. 15.

³⁹⁶Liu, p. 26.

³⁹⁷Liu, p. 26.

³⁹⁸cf. *ibid.*

³⁹⁹*ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰*ibid.*

⁴⁰¹*ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴⁰²cf. Liggins, p. 6.

sphere created by past trauma which attaches to a space. In the case Woodman's photographs the haunting is represented by both the physical attributes, namely peeling walls, scratched floors and dirt left behind by former dwellers and Woodman's physical presence distorted by blurring and transparent materials draped over her body. In "My House, Providence, Rhode Island, 1976" (Attachment C) the model (most likely Woodman herself) is hardly visible at first glance. Standing in a corner flanked by an empty built-in bookshelf to the right and a large window to the left she is hidden beneath a large plastic sheet. Her nude body is facing the wall only clothed with one black glove held behind her back. The plastic sheet is reflecting the light from the large window, which is in turn also shrouded in a transparent fabric, obscuring most of her form. The billowy sheet gives her a ghostly appearance floating a few inches above the floor. The floor next to her is littered with two other plastic sheets. Inside the cupboard one of the rags seems to be almost floating out of it like a ghost, maybe attached by a nail. Like in "From Space²" the sheet as a household item, associated with saran wrap for example, is appropriated as a second skin. The abandoned interiors in the photographs are clearly connotated as domestic and feminine, for example in one she is half-buried in a larder or supply cabinet, the body's fusion with the space around it is desired as a reunion with the maternal. On the precipice between visibility and invisibility, she plays with art historical conventions which offer the female body to the male gaze for the viewer's visual pleasure.⁴⁰³

In "Untitled, Providence, Rhode Island, 1976" (Attachment D) we see a woman's nude lower body laying inside a built-in cupboard, her pelvis and legs sticking out resting on a ledge. The rest of her body from the naval upwards is hidden inside the cupboard behind the tiled wall. The perspective is skewed, the camera must be standing on an incline which destabilizes the viewer's perspective and creates a "sense of spatial instability."⁴⁰⁴ Once again, the setting of the derelict house, presumably a kitchen, indicated by small-scale flower-patterned wallpaper and the built-in cupboard messily lined with yet another wallpaper and filled with a few bowls and plates. Part of the wallpaper on the walls is ripped off to reveal the heavily stained wall. All in all, the room looks abandoned (a moving box in the right corner serves as a remnant of past domesticity) and dirty, several stains adorn the cupboard and the linoleum floor, traces of former dwelling. It is eerie how her upper body fits inside the cupboard and more importantly behind the wall, seemingly disappearing in some dark hidden realm beyond the kitchen. Her body position is

⁴⁰³cf. Bronfen 2014, pp. 19, 22.

⁴⁰⁴Binotto, Johannes (2014): "Outside In: Francesca Woodman's Rooms of Her Own" in: Gabriele Schor & Elisabeth Bronfen (eds): *Francesca Woodman Works from the Sammlung Verbund*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König pp. 51-62, p. 51.

passive, reminding one of an unconscious or dead body or even like a piece of meat or carcass in its fragmented state. The cupboard's upper zig-zag paneling looks like sharp teeth, invoking the image of a female body as prey disappearing inside the predator's maw, the predator being the domus. The visual of the haunted house as predatory monster consuming the female protagonist is strongest in *Hill House*, but is reproduced in all narratives discussed above. This photograph reproduces the visual formula used by Claude Cahun in her 1932 "Self portrait (in cupboard)" posing as a sleeping child inside an open cupboard. By reproducing the formula I do not mean to imply that Woodman was familiar with Cahun's self-portrait and recreated or referenced it. Instead, this visual formula of female entrapment is familiar to female artists and holds a universal truth about femininity and domesticity. Abigail Solomon-Godeau writes of pairing both photographs with each other: "[it] indicates that the visual metaphorization of feminine constraint or sequestration are intuitive and shared concerns, although entirely separated by time and space."⁴⁰⁵ Thus, influence, in cultural, social, and psychological terms, does not mean an artist has seen prior work and recreated it, but rather that it is circulating in the collective cultural memory as described by Elisabeth Bronfen.⁴⁰⁶

In "Untitled, Providence, Rhode Island, 1975-1976" (Attachment E), another black and white silver-gelatin print, one can see a peeled-off display cabinet segmented into four parts. The upper two and the lower left contain stuffed animals and bird in a type of diorama behind glass doors. The lower right segment is slightly open, a female body (likely Woodman) spilling out of it. Her hair is on the floor, the head lolling out and the rest of her body is stuffed inside the cabinet. One can make out her patterned dress and naked feet but most of her body is obscured in darkness by the glass door's reflection. She is lying in a fetal pose, her knees drawn up to her chest. Although her face is turned away from the camera and only visible in profile it is clear her eyes are closed. She seems more dead than asleep due to the uncomfortable pose in which her head is protruding from the cabinet. Uncannily, the stuffed animals, a fox and a racoon seem more alive than her, perched in an aggressive attack position baring their teeth directed at the model. They and the birds take up around three quarters of the image area and pull focus due to their aggressive faces. The model looks passive and unimposing in comparison. The boundary between inside and outside is disturbed on two levels. For one, the unity of the display case is disturbed by the open door with the female model is transgressing the boundary. On the other hand, the wild predators are confined to a box inside an interior within an interior. Simultaneously, like in the photographs described above,

⁴⁰⁵Solomon-Godeau, Abigail (2017): "Body Double" in: Sarah Parsons (ed): *Photography after Photography: Gender, Genre, History*, Duke UP, pp. 171-189, p. 186.

⁴⁰⁶ibid.

she as prey is in the middle of being devoured by a domestic structure or emerging from it. What is captured is the moment of transition. It is not difficult to imagine her disappearing into the darkness, the glass door swinging shut leaving behind the fletching fox and racoon as witnesses. The boundary between live and artifice is straddled with her as the live model passing as dead whereas the dead animals are posing as alive in their aggressive stance. The tableaux's unsettling ambivalence of entrapment/consumption and escape/transformation produce an uncanny effect.

By using herself as a model most of the time and exposing her nude body to the viewer's gaze, Woodman's nudes recreate visual formula we are familiar with from art history. Famously, the Guerilla Girls 1989 poster poignantly summarizes the female body's status in art: "Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art Sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female."⁴⁰⁷ The female form has been used as a surface, to be gazed upon, and a projection site for desire in the Western tradition.

The female body. Throughout the ages praised, depicted, described and elevated, pined for and idealized. But also turned into a taboo, regulated, dissected and analyzed, confined and used and subdued. By the male gaze, power and narrative voice.⁴⁰⁸

According to Solomon-Godeau, Woodman subverts the idealization of the female form by linking the female body to the walls and surfaces and therefore staging the body as a surface. The female body in patriarchal culture – "its incarnation as sign"⁴⁰⁹ – is both worshipped and adored as well as debased and violated.⁴¹⁰ Referencing visual formula, "archetypal illusions, mythologies, emblems, and symbols adhering to the feminine"⁴¹¹, she fills them with an uncanny quality. Acting as both the model and the photographer, object and subject, she plays with the gaze, the gendered visual axis. Bronfen calls this "the double gaze", the female artist who works with her self-image engages in an exchange of looks where she as the surveyor is herself male and the surveyed female, turning herself into an object or a sight: "Any female must engage with this double gaze of herself, always aware of the effect she has for an implied viewer."⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁷Guerilla Girls. *Do Women Have to Be Naked To Get Into the Met. Museum?* 1989, Tate Modern, London. www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/guerrilla-girls-do-women-have-to-be-naked-to-get-into-the-met-museum-p78793 [02.05.22]

⁴⁰⁸Palm, p. 20.

⁴⁰⁹Solomon-Godeau 1986, p. 13.

⁴¹⁰ibid.

⁴¹¹ibid.

⁴¹²Bronfen 2014, p. 19. Woodman used flowery dresses, garter belts, high heels and jewelry to highlight the "fetish status of the woman's body" in Western art.

The rooms have a distinct atmosphere on having been lived in but now abandoned. The domestic setting is deconstructed and aged. There are remnants of domesticity, some forgotten objects, dirt, a moving box, but Woodman stages herself in what I would call post-domesticity. She seems like a left behind or forgotten remnant of past domesticity. Deconstructing the space around her by hiding behind the wallpaper or inside a cupboard she is toying with notions of a woman's place in the domestic space. Her movement or rather poses are playful and eerie at the same time. Looking at the pictures I am involuntarily reminded of the reverence one felt when breaking into condemned houses, so called 'lost places', or even of the photographs from the ghost city of Pripjat in Ukraine left abandoned and conserved post-Chernobyl. The spaces represented in Woodman's photography are uncanny, creepy, eerie but, or maybe conditionally, at the same time sublime. They open a realm of Otherness that is both challenging and disorienting. Her blurred body contours and blurred face give her an ephemeral quality. At the same time her blurred body contours also blur the boundary between her and the space, she begins to metamorphose into the home.⁴¹³ Interpreting Woodman as the victim of the domus is obvious but one-sided. After all, who is really the fragile entity in the photographs? The crumbling interior, with its cracked walls, shredded wallpaper, dirty floors and tattered fabrics is not a solid structure. Bronfen attributes the photos' unsettling atmosphere to the ambivalence between destruction and recreation exemplified by her process of becoming.⁴¹⁴ The spatial setting functions as a stage and a prop used to fragment the body and distort the face, which forces the viewer to engage in the "dialectic of dismemberment and (re)assembly"⁴¹⁵ of her shape.

5 Conclusion

All domestic spaces are haunted by gendered conventions, by the history of trauma, abuse, neglect in the name of women's bond to the house. Exorcising the ghosts of the past projects them on the architectural surface. The intention of this thesis was to evaluate the entanglement of the uncanny, space and femininity in the context of Gothic literature and photography. These four objects can only be read in their interplay with each other and how they each function as structural principles in the

⁴¹³cf. Posner, Helaine (1998): "The Self and the World: Negotiating Boundaries in the Art of Yayoi Kusama, Ana Mendieta, and Francesca Woodman" in: Whitney Chadwick (ed.): *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*, MIT Press. pp. 156-171, p. 168. Posner compares this metamorphosis to Louise Bourgeois' *femme-maison* paintings.

⁴¹⁴cf. Bronfen 2014, p. 28.

⁴¹⁵Söntgen, Beate (2014): "'I show you what you do not see.'" Francesca Woodman's Force." in: Gabriele Schor & Elisabeth Bronfen (eds): *Francesca Woodman Works from the Sammlung Verbund*, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, pp. 63-72, p. 65.

framework of Gothic fiction and photography. The focal point was the interaction of these elements, namely the concept of the uncanny, how it is transferred on to the spatial level and how domestic space is portrayed as uncanny for female characters in Gothic literature and art. In this context the haunted house is understood as more than merely a trope or motif commonly used in the Gothic mode, the haunted house is regarded as a structural principle. The uncanny home is the home haunted by the past. For women, the house is the site of imprisonment, control or danger. It is a metonymy for the cult of domesticity and the family in the sense of the heterosexual nuclear family structure. The home is both the setting and the tool of patriarchal control over women. As a space the home rooms gender ideals and regulates gendered behavior. A person's relationship to the surrounding space shaped by thinking, feeling and perceiving is a fundamental component in the development, endangerment or stabilization of identity.⁴¹⁶ The uncanny effect produced by the space works as a catalyst for the protagonist's identity formation or dissolution. The concept of the uncanny as described by Freud, being the resurfacing of a repressed emotional impulse originates from two sources, first the believed to have overcome archaic (animistic) beliefs and second, repressed childhood trauma. The connection between the uncanny and the haunted house is already established in Freud's text. After all, he points out the common translation for the *unheimlich* house is the haunted home. As the home site it is the source of the uncanny. The uncanny effect occurs when the boundary between reality and the supernatural is blurred, and the ensuing ambivalence or intellectual uncertainty is its emotional manifestation. The haunted house motif is a gendered motif because the perception of domesticity is inherently gendered due to femininity being traditionally linked to domesticity in the framework of the separate spheres ideology. This link is made very apparent in the metaphoric conflation of the female body and the domestic architecture. This dynamic, the shifting and porous boundary between the female body and the home is the guiding thread running through the texts. Why is the Gothic mode especially suitable in this context? The Gothic is always in dialogue with the anxieties of its era. The Gothic works as a framework for verbalizing "the unspeakable."⁴¹⁷ The supernatural phenomena, the hauntings so to speak, in the haunted house act as mediators of fears and desires, psychological distress or oppressive structures. In order to show how the uncanny effect manifests on the spatial level and how it acts as a catalyst for identity formation or dissolution I have chosen two different approaches on how the uncanny effect can be achieved. On the one hand, the haunted house as the site of repetition in accordance with Freud's writing on the link between the

⁴¹⁶cf. Würzbach, p. 117.

⁴¹⁷Williams, p. 100.

repetition compulsion and the uncanny. On the other hand, the haunted house as the maternal body. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive, in fact they can heavily overlap.

As the site of repetition, the haunted house repeats the unspeakable trauma of prohibition of female autonomy. In “The Yellow Wall-paper” the doppelganger in the wallpaper is a visual and spatial manifestation of the narrator’s repressed impulses. Whenever she is about to express rage, frustration, disappointment or fear of her husband or at her confinement she diverts the narrative to the qualities of the wallpaper. The ugly design triggers pareidolia and she perceives the pattern and sub-pattern’s anthropomorphic features. Perkins Gilman reproduced the contemporary discourse on the dangers of vulgar wallpaper for women and subverts it as the catalyst for self-knowledge. She engages readers in a semiological process when coding the “ancestral halls” as a space of haunting, possession and terror. The narrator experiences what has been called the female double immurement, entrapment within her mind as much as in her dwelling. The inter-generationally inherited trauma of repeated domestication is at the heart of Jackson’s short story “The Lovely House”. The artistic processes of cross-stitch and tapestry weaving is inherited female labor which maintains the house and therefore the cult of domesticity. The artistry and the repetitious supernatural entrapment are linked linguistically through the cross-stitch metaphor. Margaret’s doppelganger, older Margaret, defies the endless repetition of domesticity. Unlike the others she is allowed to age but is sequestered in the ruinous tower coded as a witch and spinster in a separate chronotype, the tower.

The female body as a source of the uncanny was described by Freud although from a male perspective, meaning referring to male patients who perceived the female genitalia as uncanny. I took a different approach by looking at the womb as the source of the uncanny post maternal turn, meaning taking into account Bracha L. Ettinger’s matrixial theory and applying the haunted house as the uncanny resurfacing of the ambivalent mother-daughter relationship. Both Eleanor and the spectral presence in Woodman’s photographs exhibit an ambivalent relationship to the space they dwell in, both fearing the consumption and desiring the reunification with the maternal body in the form of the house. The haunted house is both embracing and at once rejecting like the womb. Eleanor is haunted by guilt and her relief at the recent death of her mother. Having cared for her for the better part of her life she has failed to adhere to the socially prescribed norms of marriage and motherhood herself when she mothered her own mother as nurse in the role reversal. Due to this she has no place in society and is literally home-less. The evil at Hill House triggers her infantilization and grinds down her already distressed psyche through super-

natural phenomena so she submits to the house, halting and reversing her identity formation after her mother's death. Hill House is coded as female, a "housemother" and "motherhouse", with bleeding walls which communicate with Eleanor to come home, home being the maternal, through suicide. This ambivalence between intra-uterine allure and intra-uterine terror is continued in the self-portraits of Francesca Woodman. Through the blurring of the boundaries between body and space and fragmentation of the body she shows the desire to both merge with and emerge from her surroundings.

In the course of the research, I have come to several conclusions. One, the haunted house is a sign. It is meaningful and communicable because it is filled with visual and other sensory associations derived from a pool of literary and visual art sources. Second, although not exclusive to it, the haunted house is a topos firmly established in the Gothic mode. Third, the female Gothic is a subcategory of the Gothic and has its own particular perspective of the haunted house because femininity and domesticity traditionally have been linked more intimately than masculinity and domesticity. Fourth, those who work within the bounds of the Gothic mode, be they authors or photographers use overt and covert references to the Gothic mode to communicate effects and affects associated with the Gothic mode and access an intertextual spatial imaginary. The references in the texts discussed above are for example the references to "The Fall of the House of Usher", *Jane Eyre*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and many other Gothic texts that someone with a much richer knowledge of Gothic literature would be able to identify. For example, Perkins Gilman's reference to those "English places you read about" places it directly within the reading tradition of the Gothic and communicates the established associations to readers without even mentioning the term directly. Fifth, the Gothic haunted house tale has an uncanny effect on both protagonists and readers. On the one hand, the uncanny is an effect produced to express the resurfacing of repressed emotional impulses (guilt, rage, frustration, fear, etc.) with the uncanny house as a catalyst. On the other hand, the narrative's ambiguity about the supernatural phenomena produced by the narrator's limited perspective or unreliable narration produces what Freud calls the intellectual uncertainty. This is what Todorov calls the fantastical-uncanny which leaves readers with the inability to unequivocally arrive at a decision about the nature of the fictional world. Whether the paranormal/supernatural phenomena are an expression of the protagonists' disturbed mental state or a form of the 'truly' fantastical opens a whole room for thought about the different natures of suspension of disbelief. Sixth, the haunted house and the uncanny are both literary spatial phenomena. The haunted house in its entirety or its fragments (walls, ambient noise, decoration, location, etc.) is a projection site for the characters' interior.

While the haunting may take place in the character's mind, note for example that only Perkins Gilman's narrator sees her double – the faint figure – in the wallpaper and Jackson's Margaret is the only character who sees her spectral doppelganger and the haunting presence of Paul, the space is what makes the haunting possible. The synthesis of space is what produces the spectral visions or in Eleanor's case the beckoning calls to come home. Knowing the sign and what it encodes makes Woodman's self-portraits legible as part of the Gothic mode. The blurring of boundary between space and body is the visual progression of the conflation of female bodies and domesticity discussed in the literary texts. The archetype of the haunted house is the entanglement of the uncanny, spatiality, domesticity and femininity. Emily Dickinson wrote one need not be a chamber to be haunted. But the popularity and endurance of the haunted house archetype shows how this entanglement flares up intensely across different media and different times as the ambivalent relationship between femininity and domesticity persists. Literary analysis would also benefit from further research of this archetype, for example in the form of a collected phenomenology of the haunted house with an intersectional approach. The themes of domesticity, oppression and imprisonment would be ideal topics to look at from different perspectives such as gender, queerness, race and class and how they overlap in the haunted house narrative. In this text I have briefly referenced film scholarship in the form of Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous Feminine* and her research into the maternal body in horror films. Further research of uncanny domesticity could look into the shared visual language among literature, photography, film and even stage productions of the haunted house phenomenon.

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[02.05.22]

Appendices

A Attachment 1



Francesca Woodman. "From Space²," Providence, Rhode Island, 1975-76. 5 1/4 x 5 3/16 in. Gelatin silver print. - Anna Teilgren (ed.): Francesca Woodman: On Being an Angel Catalogue of the Exhibition at Moderna Museet Stockholm, Verlag Buchhandlung König.

B Attachment 2



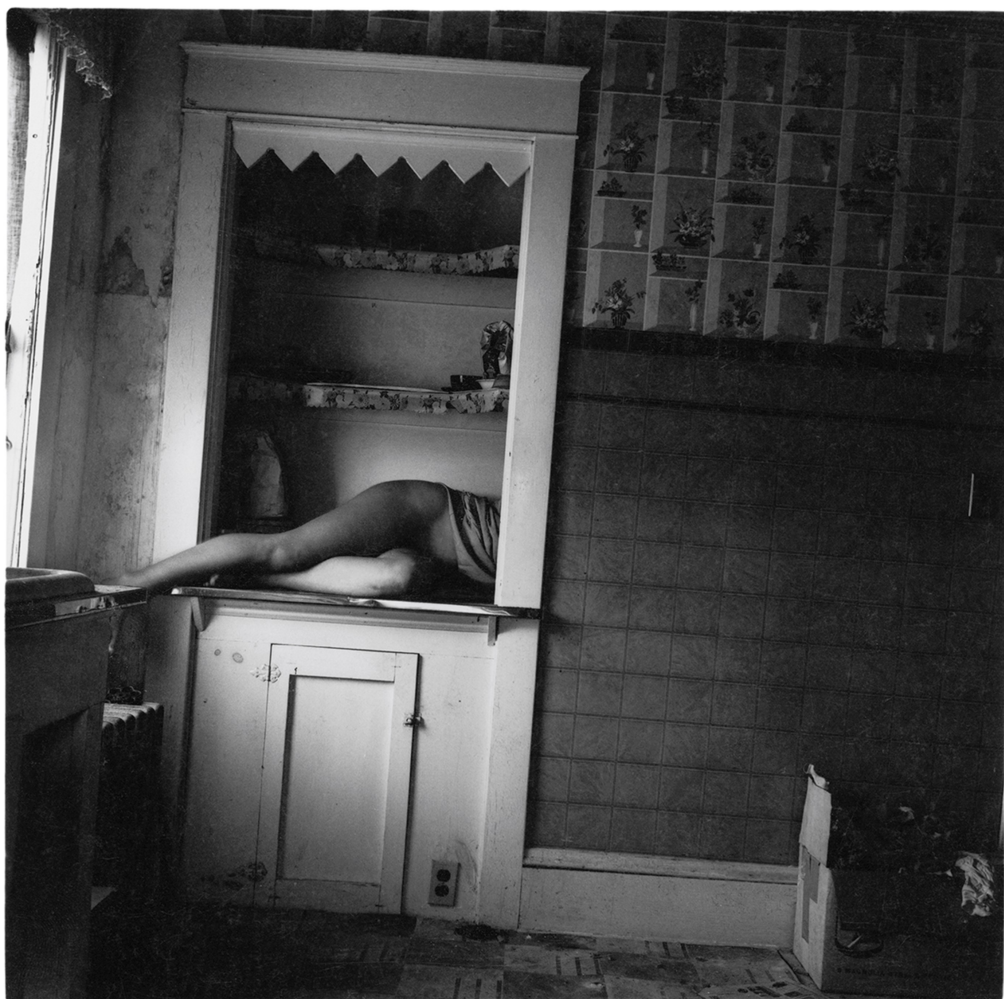
Francesca Woodman. "House #3," Providence, Rhode Island, 1975-1976. 5 1/4 x 5 3/16 in. Gelatin silver print. - Anna Teilgren (ed.): Francesca Woodman: On Being an Angel Catalogue of the Exhibition at Moderna Museet Stockholm, Verlag Buchhandlung König.

C Attachment 3



*Francesca Woodman. "My House," Providence, Rhode Island, 1976.
5 1/4 x 5 3/16 in. Gelatin silver print. - Anna Teilgren (ed.): Francesca
Woodman: On Being an Angel Catalogue of the Exhibition at Moderna
Museet Stockholm, Verlag Buchhandlung König.*

D Attachment 4



*Francesca Woodman. "Untitled," Providence, Rhode Island, 1976.
5 1/4 x 5 3/16 in. Gelatin silver print. - Anna Teilgren (ed.): Francesca
Woodman: On Being an Angel Catalogue of the Exhibition at Moderna
Museet Stockholm, Verlag Buchhandlung König.*

E Attachment 5



*Francesca Woodman. "Untitled," Providence, Rhode Island, 1975-76.
5 1/4 x 5 3/16 in. Gelatin silver print. - Anna Teilgren (ed.): Francesca
Woodman: On Being an Angel Catalogue of the Exhibition at Moderna
Museet Stockholm, Verlag Buchhandlung König.*