



RISS

M

Materialien

Uncanny 101

RISS

Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse  
Materialien 6

Uncanny 101

An untimely  
celebration  
of Freud's  
*Das Unheimliche*  
Edited by  
Marcus Coelen,  
Andrea Krauß,  
and  
Elisabeth Strowick

5	Andrea Krauß, Elisabeth Strowick, Marcus Coelen Editorial »Uncanny 101«	
11	Michael G. Levine Uncanny Perspectives on Infinity	93 Rishi Goyal What's so Uncanny about Neuroscience?
25	Andrea Krauß Uncanny 138	107 Marcus Coelen <i>wirklich unheimlich witzig.</i> Notes on the Uncanny, the Joke, and a Real of History
41	Elisabeth Strowick »But how can a table—just a table——«: Freud's <i>Uncanny</i> and the »séance of the table«	119 Orna Ophir The Interior Design of the Kleinian <i>Heim</i> : Donald Meltzer and the Afterlife of Freud's Uncanny
59	Anthony Vidler The Return of the Uncanny	
79	Oliver Simons The »Work« of the Uncanny	135 Jamieson Webster Uncanny Conversions
		151 Anke Wenzel <i>Rascharascha, 2004–2007</i>
		165 Abstracts
		169 Authors
		173 RISS Editorial Board
		176 Imprint

Behind »uncanny 101« is a leap from a *too early* to a *too late*, or vice versa: »uncanny 101« developed from the symposium »uncanny 99«, which took place at New York University in 2018 and focused on celebrating the centennial-minus-one of the publication of Freud's text *Das Unheimliche* [*The Uncanny*] (1919). How can the uncanny be commemorated in anything but an untimely manner? Is what motivates Freud's essay on the uncanny not an untimeliness, which again and again takes Freud to a dubious district during his stroll on a »hot summer afternoon« in a »small city in Italy«, and consequently (namely in his 1920 essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) impels him to conceive his theory of drives anew based on such untimeliness? Repetition and belatedness are figures of temporality that had already haunted Freud's thinking since his early *Entwurf einer Psychologie* [*Project for a Scientific Psychology*] and are concentrated further in this primal scene [*Urszene*] of a stroll in 1919. The primal scene/encounter with the real – according to Lacan – is »always too early or too late«. <sup>1</sup> The same can be said about the uncanny.

But what follows from the untimeliness of repetition compulsion with respect to the question of celebration, given that repetition is constitutive for every anniversary and hence every celebration of an anniversary? Let us hear what Deleuze has to say about repetition and celebration:

This is the apparent paradox of festivals [*célébrations*]: they repeat an »unrepeatable«. They do not add a second and a third time to a first, but carry the first time to the »nth« power [...] as Péguy says, it is not Federation Day which commemorates or represents the fall of the Bastille, but the fall of the Bastille which celebrates and repeats in advance all the Federation Days. <sup>2</sup>

Freud's *The Uncanny*, it can therefore be said, is always already its own untimely celebration.

Hence, we are also not the ones to celebrate Freud's *The Uncanny*, but can only join the untimely celebration that *The Uncanny* itself is. The question that thus arises is whether »uncanny 101« or »uncanny 99« is untimely enough. In his essay, Freud does not speak of an »nth« power«, but of an »nth time« [*»xtenmal«*]<sup>3</sup>, and with this »x« [*»n«*] highlights just that unknown that dictates the repeated detours and untimeliness of the uncanny. The celebration of the uncanny carries the first time to the »nth time« [*»xtenmal«*]. »Uncanny x« would hence probably have been a more precise title than »uncanny 101« or »uncanny 99«. This, however, would have brought greater logistical problems along with it, hence, for example, making it impossible to schedule a symposium or to issue a publication.

As impossible as celebrating »uncanny x« is for practical reasons, so is celebrating an »uncanny 100« for theoretical ones. If one single text deserves a centenary celebration, it must be truly canonical, significant in many respects, and outstanding in comparison with other texts. It has to be a text that has inspired a wide range of readings and controversies. We could certainly underwrite all of this in connection with Freud's *The Uncanny*, and nevertheless do not want to do so. With the year before or after it, with 100 plus/minus 1, we have decided in favor of a certain sort of transgression, which minimally shifts the text being celebrated away from the center. To us, this seems suitable for a study that, like the one by Freud, bears the uncanny in its title and then more encircles or circles around the uncanny in complex twists than succinctly clarifies it. Every reader, we would dare claim, is exposed to the effect of these twists: they compel one to undertake nth or x readings, which repeat a preceding reading, and after this reading always require another.

An »x« would thus enter the celebration once again, as a variable that clings to the uncanny and deprives it of being accessed in the center of an examination. When Freud is searching for a light switch in the dark and in the process collides with the same piece of furniture »for the nth time« [*»xtenmal«*], in the nth reading

of his study we then stumble over obstacles that are embedded in the uncanny in the process of understanding it. Such complications call to mind a phrase by Foucault. Freud, as Foucault writes, is not just any author, but instead an »initiator[] of discursive practices«. <sup>4</sup> His work »not only made possible a certain number of analogies that could be adopted by future texts, but, as importantly, they also made possible a number of differences. They cleared a space for the introduction of elements other than their own, which, nevertheless, remain within the field of discourse they initiated«. <sup>5</sup> Texts from his oeuvre require a form of reading that Foucault calls a »return«. This movement is a return »to a text in itself, specifically, to a primary and unadorned text with particular attention to those things registered in the interstices of the text, its gaps and absences. We return to those empty spaces that have been masked by omission or concealed in a false and misleading plenitude«. <sup>6</sup>

There have been various impressive attempts to return to Freud's *The Uncanny*, including readings by Hélène Cixous, Neil Hertz, and Samuel Weber,<sup>7</sup> to name just a few. They have raised and facilitated further important questions: questions about the gaps and absences which Freud's text circles around, moves and shifts, links with one another, and quite often doubles and potentiates. Such gaps are found in each step of Freud's essay: In the text's odd starting passage, which is dedicated to the status of the aesthetic with respect to psychoanalysis; in the discussion about already existing considerations regarding the uncanny, which contribute something relevant to the matter, but nevertheless do not arrive at its essence; finally, in the course of the argumentation, which oscillates between excessive dictionary research, opinionated consideration of literature, and seemingly clear examples.

The contributions to this special issue follow Freud on the track of the uncanny and thus open up a broad spectrum of questions. Michael Levine reconstructs structures of repetition that generate *mise-en-abîme* structures of reflection and unfathomable perspectives on infinity. Andrea Krauß analyzes Sigmund Freud's *Brautbriefe* to Martha Bernays with a view to literary figurations of desire and their uncanny effects on understanding. Elisabeth Strowick explores the scenic potential of the uncanny based on

L. G. Moberly's *Inexplicable* – a short story to which Freud's *The Uncanny* makes reference, though only in passing. Anthony Vidler discusses the uncanny as a spatial concept with reference to Freud and the work of the artists Mike Kelley and Rachel Whiteread. Starting from the frequent use of the term »work« in Freud's *The Uncanny*, Oliver Simons examines its discursive valences with a view to economic theories from Adam Smith through Marx. Rishi Goyal addresses the uncanny connections and shared trajectories of both neuroscience and psychoanalysis. Marcus Coelen offers a short remark on the constellation of Freudian uncanny, Freudian joke, and Lacanian real, encountered as history and speech in the clinic. Orna Ophir projects the uncanny into the claustrum, a space discovered and described by Donald Meltzer for his explorations of meta-psychological phantasy life. Last but not least, Jamieson Webster asks about the heritage of the uncanny as clinical term in Freudian psychoanalysis to link it, through Lacan's seminar on *Anxiety* and clinical material, to a generalized concept of *conversion*.

Celebrating the uncanny means intensifying the gaps and absences in which the uncanny dwells, and readers are warmly invited to examine and take such gaps and absences further with this RISS publication. —

Andrea Krauß, Elisabeth Strowick, Marcus Coelen

- 1) Lacan, Jacques: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. Ed.: Jacques-Alain Miller. Transl.: Alan Sheridan. London, New York 2018: Routledge, p. 69
- 2) Deleuze, Gilles: *Difference and Repetition*. Transl.: Paul Patton. New York 1994: Columbia University Press, p. 1
- 3) »Or one may wander about in an unfamiliar, dark room, looking for the door or the electric switch, and collide, for the nth time, with the same piece of furniture [*Oder wenn man im unbekanntem, dunkeln Zimmer wandert, um die Tür oder den Lichtschalter aufzusuchen und dabei zum xtenmal mit demselben Möbelstück zusammenstößt*].« (Freud, Sigmund: *Das Unheimliche*. In: *Studienausgabe*. Vol. 4. Frankfurt/Main 2000: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, pp. 241–274, here: p. 260, translation E. S.
- 4) Foucault, Michel: *What is an Author?* In: *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ed. Donald F. Bouchard. Trans.: Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press 1977, pp. 113–139, here: p. 131
- 5) *Ibid.*, p. 132
- 6) *Ibid.*, p. 135
- 7) Cixous, Hélène: *La Fiction et ses fantômes*. In: *Poétique III*, 1972, pp. 199–216; translated as *Fiction and Its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's Das Unheimliche*. In: *New Literary History*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Spring 1976, pp. 525–48; Weber, Samuel: *The Sideshow, or: Remarks on a Canny Moment*. In: *MLN*, Vol. 88, No. 6, 1973, pp. 1102–33; reprinted in: *The Legend of Freud – Expanded Edition*, Stanford 2000: Stanford University Press, pp. 207–37; Hertz, Neil: *Freud and the Sandman*. In: *The End of the Line: Essays in Psychoanalysis and the Sublime*. New York 1985: Columbia University Press, pp. 97–121; Weber, Samuel: *Uncanny Thinking* [1999]. In: *The Legend of Freud – Expanded Edition*, pp. 1–31