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In his famous essay on the uncanny, first published in 1919, Freud begins by complaining that aesthetes has not paid much attention to the aberrant and the repulsive. This complaint is also an expression of anticipatory pleasure, in so far as the uncanny in particular has no "literature" with which he will have to contend - but Freud has to admit that there is one exception, namely the essay translated below (Standard Edition vol. 17, 219). Jentsch emphasizes that the uncanny arises from a certain experience of the uncertain or the undecidable, and this seems to be intolerable for Freud. Freud decides, in other words, that the undecidable cannot be tolerated as a theoretical explanation, but it nonetheless recurs in his own essay, undecidably (221, 230-31). He also pays close attention to Jentsch's argument about the uncanniness of automata (226-27, 233).

The two passages of this article quoted by Freud in "The Uncanny" are here italicized, with references to the Standard Edition of Freud's works.

Ernst Anton Jentsch was born in 1867. A doctor by profession, he wrote several books of psychology and pathology, including a study of mood (Die Laune, 1902) and a two-volume work on music (Musik und Nerven, 1904-11); he also edited a volume of Havellock Ellis in German (1907). Thinking the home involves thinking the un-homey, the un-heimlich, that calls into question the opposition between the unknown and the known. Reference is sometimes made to Jentsch's essay, in the vast secondary literature on the Freudian uncanny, as if its content were known - familiar in advance, and therefore not requiring to be read. But especially since (as far as we can see) the essay has never before been translated into English, it might be more appropriate to call its appearance here "uncanny".

Roy Sellars

ernst jentsch
ON THE
PSYCHOLOGY OF
THE UNCANNY
(1906)

It is a well-known mistake to assume that the spirit of languages is a particularly acute psychologist. Thanks to this spirit, gross errors and astonishing naïvetés are often quite readily disseminated, or at least supported - errors and naïvetés which are rooted partly in the uncritical tendency of observers to become caught up in their own projections, and partly in the limited lexical material of a particular language. Nevertheless, every language still often provides particular instances of what is psychologically correct or at least noteworthy in the way in which it forms its expressions and concepts. In a psychological analysis, it is always a good idea to make the terminology clear in one's own mind; something can often be learned thereby, even when one cannot always make use of the result of the investigation.

With the word *unheimlich* ["uncanny"]

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the German language seems to have produced a rather fortunate formation. Without a doubt, this word appears to express that someone to whom something "uncanny" happens is not quite "at home" or "at ease" in the situation concerned, that the thing is or at least seems to be foreign to him. In brief, the word suggests that a *lack of orientation* is bound up with the impression of the uncanniness of a thing or incident.

No attempt will here be made to define the essence of the uncanny. Such a conceptual explanation would have very little value. The main reason for this is that the same impression does not necessarily exert an uncanny effect on everybody. Moreover, the same perception on the part of the same individual does not necessarily develop into the "uncanny" every time, or at least not every time in the same way. But this does not mean to say that it would be impossible to give a working definition of the concept of the "uncanny", since one can perhaps suppose that the impression which generates the feeling will be constituted along the same lines for a certain psycho-physiological group. In the present state of individual psychology, though, one can scarcely hope for a step forward in knowledge by this path.

So if one wants to come closer to the essence of the uncanny, it is better not to ask what it is, but rather to investigate how the affective excitement of the uncanny arises in psychological terms, how the psychological conditions must be constituted so that the "uncanny" sensation emerges. If there were people for whom nothing whatsoever is uncanny, then it would be a question of psyches in which such fundamental conditions are completely lacking. But since (with the exception of these conceivable extreme cases) opinions as to what in this or that case can be described as having an uncanny effect will greatly diverge, it is a good idea provi-

sionally to limit the posing of the problem even further, and merely to take into consideration those psychical processes which culminate experientially in the subjective impression of the uncanny with some regularity and sufficient generality. Such typical events can be singled out from the observation of daily life with some precision.

If one takes a closer look at everyday psychology in this sense, it can easily be seen that a quite correct and simply confirmable observation underlies the image used by language that was noticed at the outset.

It is an old experience that the traditional, the usual and the hereditary is dear and familiar to most people, and that they incorporate the new and the unusual with mistrust, unease and even hostility (misonieism). This can be explained to a great extent by the difficulty of establishing quickly and completely the conceptual connections that the object strives to make with the previous ideational sphere of the individual - in other words, the intellectual mastery of the new thing. The brain is often reluctant to overcome the resistances that oppose the assimilation of the phenomenon in question into its proper place. We will therefore not be surprised that misonieism will be weakest where these resistances are smallest, where for example associative activity in a corresponding movement is particularly prompt and lively, or where it takes its course in some particular way: in the case of youth, of high intelligence, or of a permanent aversion to the well-tempered fashion of judging things and reacting accordingly (as happens in a hysterical disposition, for instance).

That which has long been familiar appears not only as welcome, but also - however remarkable and inexplicable it may be - as straightforwardly self-evident. No-one in the world is surprised under usual circumstances when he sees the sun rise in the

morning, so much has this daily spectacle crept into the ideational processes of the naive person since early childhood as a normal custom not requiring commentary. It is only when one deliberately removes such a problem from the usual way of looking at it - for the activity of understanding is accustomed to remain insensitive to such enigmas, as a consequence of the power of the habitual - that a particular feeling of uncertainty quite often presents itself. In the example mentioned above, this happens when one remembers that the rising of the sun does not depend on the sun at all but rather on the movement of the earth, and that, for the inhabitants of the earth, absolute movement in space is much more inconsequential than that at the centre of the earth, and so forth. The feeling of uncertainty not infrequently makes its presence felt of its own accord in those who are more intellectually discriminating when they perceive daily phenomena, and it may well represent an important factor in the origin of the drive to knowledge and research.

It is thus comprehensible if a correlation "new/foreign/hostile" corresponds to the psychical association of "old/known/familiar". In the former case, the emergence of sensations of uncertainty is quite natural, and one's lack of orientation will then easily be able to take on the shading of the uncanny; in the latter case, disorientation remains concealed for as long as the confusion of "known/self-evident" does not enter the consciousness of the individual.

Apart from the lack of orientation arising from the ignorance of primitive man, an ignorance which under usual circumstances is therefore hidden from him to a great extent by the everyday, some stirrings of the feelings of psychical uncertainty arise with particular ease either when ignorance is very conspicuous or when the subjective percep-

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tion of vacillation is abnormally strong. The first case can easily be observed in children: simple things can be inexplicable for him and even slightly complicated situations can represent dark secrets. Here is one of the most important reasons why the child is mostly so fearful and shows so little self-confidence; and bright children are in fact generally quite the most fearful, since they are clearer about the boundaries of their own orientational abilities than more limited children are - although, as must of course be added, the latter can become particularly impertinent and cheeky once they have managed to achieve a certain intellectual mastery over a particular area.

As a rule, a certain insight with regard to the estimation of one's own intellectual capacities in the assessment of a situation is generally present in healthy people, as long as strong passions or psychically harmful factors (such as narcotic substances, exhaustion, and so on) are not involved. Such insight can be reduced, since excessive associative activity - and also, for example, a tendency to unusually strong reflexivity - do not allow one to complete the formation of a judgement at the appropriate time. But one's insight can be especially reduced because of a rampantly proliferating fantasy, as a consequence of which reality becomes mixed up in a more or less conscious way with the additions of the apperceiving brain itself. In the latter case, confusion must of course be the result in how one regards things and, equally, in how one intervenes appropriately in one's environment. It is certainly not necessary that the processes in question be articulated very clearly in order for the well-characterised sensation of psychological uncertainty to be aroused. Indeed, even when they know very well that they are being fooled by merely

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harmless illusions, many people cannot suppress an extremely uncomfortable feeling when a corresponding situation imposes itself on them. In games, children strive by means of grotesque disguises and behaviour directly to arouse strong emotions in each other. And among adults there are sensitive natures who do not like to attend masked balls, since the masks and disguises produce in them an exceedingly awkward impression to which they are incapable of becoming accustomed. This abnormal sensitivity is not infrequently a phenomenon accompanying a generally nervous disposition. It should therefore ultimately not make a great difference whether the affective availability of a certain class of moderately unsettling influences that do not generally or persistently concern healthy people is to be ascribed to a particularly intensive and rapid proliferation of the potential chain of consequences of the phenomenon in question, or whether, in more causal terms, their availability represents an excessive combination of more or less apposite unsettling reasons for the origin of the images exciting the affect. In any case, a stronger tendency to bring about such sensations of uncertainty under certain external circumstances is created in the case of an abnormal disposition or merely of a psychical background deriving from an abnormal base, as for example in light sleep, in states of deadening of all kinds, in various forms of depression and after-effects of diverse terrible experiences, fears, and in severe cases of exhaustion or general illness. The breakdown of an important sense organ can also greatly increase such feelings in people. In the night, which is well known to be a friend to no man, there are thus many more and much larger chicken-hearted people than in the light of day, and many people are much relieved when they have left a very noisy workshop or factory floor where

they cannot make out their own words.

This entire group of states of psychical uncertainty, already determined in many subsidiary ways by abnormal conditions, can show similarities with or transitions to the general disorientation that appears in psychical illnesses.

The affective position of the mentally undeveloped, mentally delicate, or mentally damaged individual towards many ordinary incidents of daily life is similar to the affective shading that the perception of the unusual or inexplicable generally produces in the ordinary primitive man. This is the source of that characteristic wariness in relation to unusual people, who think otherwise, feel differently, and act otherwise than the majority, and in relation to processes that for the time being elude explanation or whose conditions of origin are unknown. It is not always just the children who watch the skilled conjurer – or however he calls himself now – with a certain nervous feeling. For the more clearly the cultural value of an enigmatic process strikes one, the more strongly the sensation aroused doubtless approaches the pleasant and joyful feeling of admiration. The appearance of this stirring always presupposes the individual's insight into a certain higher form of expediency of the phenomenon in question. So the remarkable technique of a virtuoso or a surgeon is simply admired, while an "artist" who has huge stones crushed on his head, swallowing bricks and petrol, or a fakir who has himself buried or walled up, do not receive the genuine admiration of the majority but rather leave behind a different impression. A slight nuance of the uncanny effect does also come to light now and then in the case of real admiration, and can be explained psychologically in terms of one's bafflement regarding how the conditions of origin for the achievement in question were brought about, on

account of which such a nuance is generally lacking in those who are special experts in the field at stake.

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Among all the psychical uncertainties that can become an original cause of the uncanny feeling, there is one in particular that is able to develop a fairly regular, powerful and very general effect: namely, *doubt as to whether an apparently living being is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate* (SE 226) – and more precisely, when this doubt only makes itself felt obscurely in one's consciousness. The mood lasts until these doubts are resolved and then usually makes way for another kind of feeling.

One can read now and then in old accounts of journeys that someone sat down in an ancient forest on a tree trunk and that, to the horror of the traveller, this trunk suddenly began to move and showed itself to be a giant snake. If one accepts the possibility of such a situation, this would certainly be a good example to illustrate the connection indicated above. The mass that at first seemed completely lifeless suddenly reveals an inherent energy because of its movement. This energy can have a psychical or a mechanical origin. As long as the doubt as to the nature of the perceived movement lasts, and with it the obscurity of its cause, a feeling of terror persists in the person concerned. If, because of its methodical quality, the movement has shown its origin to be in an organic body, the state of things is thus explained, and then a feeling of concern for one's freedom from personal harm arises instead – which undoubtedly presupposes, however, a kind of intellectual mastery of the situation for the sake of all other forms of intensity.

Conversely, the same emotion occurs when, as has been described, a wild man has his first sight of a locomotive or of a steam-boat, for example, perhaps at night. The feeling of trepidation will here be very great, for as a consequence of the enigmatic autonomous movement and the regular noises of the machine, reminding him of human breath, the giant apparatus can easily impress the completely ignorant person as a living mass. There is something quite related to this, by the way, when striking or remarkable noises are ascribed by fearful or childish souls - as can be observed quite often - to the vocal performance of a mysterious being. The episode in *Robinson Crusoe* where Friday, not yet familiar with the boiling of water, reaches into simmering water in order to pull out the animal that seems to be in it, is also based on an inspiration of the writer that is psychologically very apposite. Likewise, the timidity of many animals may originate in the fact that they actually see the living object of their terror (the principle of the scarecrow), and the impression concerned produces in this case a particularly baroque effect, since the associative activity which usually provides a transition into another affective sphere is here very slight. This "weakness" in beasts of burden is therefore treated successfully by, for instance, presenting or holding out to them the suspicious object so that they can see it or smell it, whereby a kind of intellectual classification of the object exciting the affect is undertaken by the animal and the object is at the same time turned into something familiar which, as mentioned above, easily loses its terrors for them. So when a few years ago, on the occasion of a great carnival procession, some tame elephants forming part of it took to their heels and created considerable confusion when faced with the dragon Father spewing fire and flames, this

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does not seem so remarkable in view of the fact that the elephants had not read the trilogy [in which Fafner appears].

The unpleasant impression is well known that readily arises in many people when they visit collections of wax figures, panopticons and panoramas. In semi-darkness it is often especially difficult to distinguish a life-size wax or similar figure from a human person. For many sensitive souls, such a figure also has the ability to retain its unpleasantness after the individual has taken a decision as to whether it is animate or not. Here it is probably a matter of semi-conscious secondary doubts which are repeatedly and automatically aroused anew when one looks again and perceives finer details; or perhaps it is also a mere matter of the lively recollection of the first awkward impression lingering in one's mind. The fact that such wax figures often present anatomical details may contribute to the increased effect of one's feeling, but this is definitely not the most important thing: a real anatomically prepared body does not need in the least to look so objectionable as the corresponding model in wax. Incidentally, it is of considerable interest to see in this example how true art, in wise moderation, avoids the absolute and complete imitation of nature and living beings, well knowing that such an imitation can easily produce uneasiness: the existence of a polychrome sculpture in wood and stone does not alter this fact in the least, and nor does the possibility of somewhat preventing such unpleasant side-effects if this kind of representation is nevertheless chosen. The production of the uncanny can indeed be attempted in true art, by the way, but only with exclusively artistic means and artistic intention.³

This peculiar effect makes its appearance even more clearly when imitations of the

human form not only reach one's perception, but when on top of everything they appear to be united with certain bodily or mental functions. This is where the impression easily produced by the automatic figures belongs that is so awkward for many people. Once again, those cases must here be discounted in which the objects are very small or very familiar in the course of daily usage. A doll which closes and opens its eyes by itself, or a small automatic toy, will cause no notable sensation of this kind, while on the other hand, for example, the life-size automata that perform complicated tasks, blow trumpets, dance, and so forth, very easily give one a feeling of unease. The finer the mechanism and the truer to nature the formal reproduction, the more strongly will the special effect also make its appearance. This fact is repeatedly made use of in literature in order to invoke the origin of the uncanny mood in the reader. Not the least pleasure of a literary work (or of a play, and so on) lies in the empathy of the reader or audience with all the emotional excitements to which the characters of the play, novel, or ballad, and so forth, are subject. In life we do not like to expose ourselves to severe emotional blows, but in the theatre or while reading we gladly let ourselves be influenced in this way: we hereby experience certain powerful excitements which awake in us a strong feeling for life, without having to accept the consequences of the causes of the unpleasant moods if they were to have the opportunity to appear in corresponding form on their own account, so to speak. In physiological terms, the sensation of such excitements seems frequently to be bound up with artistic pleasure in a direct way. However strange it may sound, there are perhaps only very few affects which in themselves must always be unpleasurable under all circumstances, without exception. Art at least manages to

make most emotions enjoyable for us in some sense. For we can observe in children that they often show a certain preference for ghost stories. Horror is a thrill that with care and specialist knowledge can be used well to increase emotional effects in general – as is the task of poetry, for instance. *In storytelling, one of the most reliable artistic devices for producing uncanny effects easily is to leave the reader in uncertainty as to whether he has a human person or rather an automaton before him in the case of a particular character. This is done in such a way that the uncertainty does not appear directly at the focal point of his attention, so that he is not given the occasion to investigate and clarify the matter straight away; for the particular emotional effect, as we said, would hereby be quickly dissipated. In his works of fantasy, E.T.A. Hoffmann has repeatedly made use of this psychological artifice with success (SE 227).* The dark feeling of uncertainty, excited by such representation, as to the psychical nature of the corresponding literary figure is equivalent as a whole to the doubtful tension created by any uncanny situation, but it is made serviceable by the virtuosic manipulation of the author for the purposes of artistic investigation.

Conversely, the effect of the uncanny can easily be achieved when one undertakes to reinterpret some kind of lifeless thing as a part of an organic creature, especially in anthropomorphic terms, in a poetic or fantastic way. In the dark, a rafter covered with nails thus becomes the jaw of a fabulous animal, a lonely lake becomes the gigantic eye of a monster, and the outline of a cloud or shadow becomes a threatening Satanic face. Fantasy, which is indeed always a poet, is able now and then to conjure up the most detailed terrifying visions out of the most harmless and indifferent phenomena; and

this is done all the more substantially, the weaker the critical sense that is present and the more the prevailing psychological background is affectively tinged. This is why women, children and dreamers are also particularly subject to the stirrings of the uncanny and the danger of seeing spirits and ghosts.

This possibility will be especially close, once again, when the imitation of an organic being is itself given. The boundary between the pathological and the normal is crossed here with particular ease. For people who are delirious, intoxicated, ecstatic, or superstitious, the head of a pillar (or the figure in a painting, and so on) comes alive by means of hallucination: they address it, carry on a conversation with it, or mock it, showing familiar traits. These means of arousing uncanny effects are also often exploited by poets and storytellers. It is a favoured and quite banal trick to come up with the most hair-raising things and then to reveal all that happened to the reader in three lines at the end as the content of a wild dream vision – favoured, because in this case it is possible to push the play with the reader's psychological helplessness very far with impunity.

Another important factor in the origin of the uncanny is the natural tendency of man to infer, in a kind of naive analogy with his own animateness, that things in the external world are also animate or, perhaps more correctly, are animate in the same way. It is all the more impossible to resist this psychological urge, the more primitive the individual's level of intellectual development is. The child of nature populates his environment with demons; small children speak in all seriousness to a chair, to their spoon, to an old rag, and so on, hitting out full of anger at lifeless things in order to punish them. Even in highly cultivated Greece, a dryad still lived in every tree. It is therefore not

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astonishing if that which man himself semi-consciously projected into things from his own being now begins again to terrify him in those very things, or that he is not always capable of exorcising the spirits which were created out of his own head from that very head. This inability thus easily produces the feeling of being threatened by something unknown and incomprehensible that is just as enigmatic to the individual as his own psyche usually is as well. If however there prevails sufficient orientation with respect to psychical processes, and enough certainty in the judgement of such processes outside the individual, then the states described – under normal psycho-physiological conditions, of course – will never be able to arise.

Another confirmation of the fact that the emotion being discussed is caused in particular by a doubt as to the animate or inanimate nature of things – or, expressed more precisely, as to their animatedness as understood by man's traditional view – lies in the way in which the lay public is generally affected by a sight of the articulations of most mental and many nervous illnesses. Several patients afflicted with such troubles make a quite decidedly uncanny impression on most people.

What we can always assume from our fellow men's experiences of ordinary life is the relative psychical harmony in which their mental functions generally stand in relation to each other, even if moderate deviations from this equilibrium make their appearance occasionally in almost all of us: this behaviour once again constitutes man's individuality and provides the foundation for our judgement of it. Most people do not generally show strong psychical peculiarities. At most, such peculiarities become apparent when strong affects make themselves felt, whereby it can suddenly become evident that not everything in the human psyche is

of transcendental origin, and that much that is elementary is still present within it even for our direct perception. It is of course often in just such cases that much at present is generally accounted for quite well in terms of normal psychology.

But if this relative psychical harmony happens markedly to be disturbed in the spectator, and if the situation does not seem trivial or comic, the consequence of an unimportant incident, or if it is not quite familiar (like an alcoholic intoxication, for example), then the dark knowledge dawns on the unschooled observer that mechanical processes are taking place in that which he was previously used to regarding as a unified psyche. It is not unjustly that epilepsy is therefore spoken of as the *morbus sacer*, as an illness deriving not from the human world but from foreign and enigmatic spheres, for the epileptic attack of spasms reveals the human body to the viewer – the body that under normal conditions is so meaningful, expedient, and unitary, functioning according to the directions of his consciousness – as an immensely complicated and delicate mechanism. This is an important cause of the epileptic fit's ability to produce such a demonic effect on those who see it. On the other hand, the hysterical attack of spasms generally has a limited alienating effect under ordinary conditions, since hysterics usually retain consciousness, falling over and hitting out so that they do not (or only slightly) harm themselves – whereby they reveal precisely their latent consciousness. Then their type of movement again frequently reminds one of hidden psychical processes, in that here the muscular disturbances follow a certain higher ordering principle; this stands in relation with the dependence of their fundamental affliction on processes of imagination (in other words, processes that once more are psychical).

In the case of an expert, the corresponding emotion will occur only rarely or perhaps be completely lacking, for to him the mechanical processes in the human mind are no longer a novelty; and even if he is still exposed in particular cases to numerous errors with regard to their course, at least he knows that they exist and rediscovers their trace so often elsewhere that their appearance no longer has the power to affect him to any extent. The situations mentioned are also naturally quick to lose their emotional effect if someone is or has become otherwise used to such incidents, as is the case with a nurse, for instance, and – if one can speak of them in this way – with sick people themselves.

The uncanny effect which an insight into the deranged system of a sick person produces for most people is doubtless also based on the fact that a more or less clear idea of the presence of a certain urge to associate – that is, a mechanism – appears in man which, standing in contradiction to the usual view of psychical freedom, begins to undermine one's hasty and careless conviction of the animatedness of the individual. If clarity regarding the relevant conditions is established, then the special character of the peculiar emotional state disappears – a state whose roots are to be sought simply in people's current disorientation with regard to the psychological.

The horror which a dead body (especially a human one), a death's head, skeletons, and similar things cause can also be explained to a great extent by the fact that thoughts of latent animatedness always lie so close to these things. Such a thought may often push its way into consciousness so that it is itself capable of giving the lie to appearance, thereby again setting the preconditions for the psychical conflict that has been described. It is well known that such stir-

things tend more or less to become lost in the case of those belonging to particular professions who are continually exposed to the corresponding impressions. Apart from the force of habit, the associative working through of the awkward affect that mostly occurs in such cases plays a very significant part in the affect's disappearance. Whether this working through is factual or not is of no great importance, as long as its final result is accepted by the individual. In intellectual terms, for example, the superstitious person also masters in his fashion a great part of his imaginative field, and he too has his doubts and his certainties: the inappropriateness of his entire judgement does not alter this psychological fact at all.

The human desire for the intellectual mastery of one's environment is a strong shelter in the struggle for existence. However it came to be, it signifies a defensive position against the assault of hostile forces, and the lack of such certainty is equivalent to lack of cover in the episodes of that never-ending war of the human and organic world for the sake of which the strongest and most impreachable bastions of science were erected.



Translated by Roy Sellars

NOTES

1 "Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen" was published in the *Psychiatrisch-Neurologische Wochenschrift* 8, 22-23 (1906) p.195-98, 203-05. (The bibliographical references in the Freud editions, incidentally, do not make it clear that Jentsch's essay is spread over two separate issues of the weekly.) As far as we can tell, the essay has never been reprinted.

2 "The 'Uncanny'" in *The Standard Edition of the*

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on the psychology of the uncanny

Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, vol. 17, ed. and tr. James Strachey et al. (London: Hogarth, 1955) p217-56; or in *The Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 14, ed. Albert Dickson, tr. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) p335-76. For Freud's German text, see the *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 12, ed. Anna Freud et al. (London: Imago, 1947) p227-68; or the *Studienausgabe*, vol. 4, ed. Alexander Mitscherlich et al. (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1970) p241-74.

3 [At this point Jentsch's essay breaks off, to be resumed in the next issue of the *Wochenschrift*. Trans.]

Ernst Jentsch's essay "On the Psychology of the Uncanny" [1906] is "in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established".¹ It forms the starting point, the point of disagreement, for Sigmund Freud's celebrated essay "The Uncanny" [1919]. In that essay, the form as well as the argument of which explores doubt and uncertainty at every turn, the one thing that is certain is the inadequacy of Jentsch's account of the uncanny (as the product of intellectual uncertainty).

Freud's essay has attracted a great deal of attention in recent years. For Harold Bloom "it is the only major contribution that the twentieth century has made to the aesthetics of the Sublime" (101). Readers as well-known and as careful as Hélène Cixous, Samuel Weber, Sarah Kofman, Jeffrey Mehlman, Neil Hertz, and Maria Torok have worked through its text brilliantly and at considerable length. In most cases, the analysis of E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale "The Sandman" – Freud's essay's first and most elaborate example – has formed the basis of their readings, readings which have staged provocative encounters between psychoanalysis and literature.

And yet the only "literature" Freud can find to read before writing "The Uncanny" is Jentsch's "On the Psychology of the Uncanny". As many of the readers above return to "The Sandman" and the other literary examples Freud deploys, they refer to Jentsch and his essay's argument. They refer to it without themselves returning to it.² They quote it but only to quote Freud quoting it.³ With only one exception in the vast "literature" that has built up around "The Uncanny", Jentsch's essay has remained unread.⁴

The repressed, however, always returns – the uncanny in "The Uncanny" is about nothing