I, Catherine Whitson, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Art History.

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Haunted Spaces: Architecture and The Uncanny in the Work of Rachel Whiteread, Thomas Demand, and Gregory Crewdson

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Haunted Spaces: Architecture and The Uncanny in the Work of Rachel Whiteread, Thomas Demand, and Gregory Crewdson

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I explore the use of “uncanny” architecture and space in the work of three contemporary artists: British sculptor Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963), German sculptor/photographer Thomas Demand (b. 1964), and American photographer Gregory Crewdson (b. 1962). I demonstrate how concerns with psychologically charged urban and domestic spaces associated with early and mid-twentieth-century modernist art and visual culture, often suggesting feelings of desolation, emptiness, or melancholy, resurface in contemporary art practice of the late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century. I investigate how contemporary artists deploy effects of the “uncanny” to evoke social and economic changes in urban, suburban and domestic landscapes, and their effects on those who inhabit or move through these spaces. My analysis of the uncanny in the work of these three artists, whose work has not been grouped together before, leads the way for a new examination and understanding of the context of the “uncanny” and “haunted space” in contemporary art. In the first chapter, “Minimalism and Haunted Architecture”, I explore the notion of the void in the post-minimalist sculptures of Whiteread. I examine Closet (1988), Ghost (1990), House (1993), and Embankment (2005) to demonstrate how they operate to embody negative space, a constant theme that shows the familiar imprint of wear and tear produced by inhabitants on objects that surround them. In the second chapter, “Appropriated and Haunted Memories”, I examine the role of the uncanny and anti-realist architectural spaces in the sculptures-turned-photographs of Demand. I examine Demand’s photographs, Corridor (1995), Bathroom (1997), and Terrace (1998), to demonstrate the “haunted”
and suburban spaces that Demand constructs in order to document the history and memory of domestic urban spaces in the late twentieth-century. In the third and final chapter, “Ordinary Cinematic Wonder”, I focus on the role of haunted space in the cinematic photographs of Crewdson. I analyze Crewdson’s photographs Untitled (Ophelia) (2001), Untitled (Esther Terrace) (2006), and Untitled (Brief Encounter) (2006), to further examine the concept of the “uncanny” and “hauntedness” in American suburbia, already explored by Edward Hopper (1882–1967) in paintings such as Second Story Sunlight (1960). Despite the differences in the contexts of their artistic work and their approaches to media and materials, Whiteread, Demand, and Crewdson share common concerns relating to the affective and psychological aspects of urban and domestic interiors, architecture, and street scenes, echoing the concerns of Hopper’s mid-twentieth-century paintings.
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I would like to first and foremost extend a great deal of thanks to my thesis advisor, Dr. Morgan Thomas. In the most simple and grateful way put: without her willingness to advise me on this topic (and the previous topic before this one), I would never have been able to complete this project. I knew this process was not going to be easy, and it was most certainly not at all how I imagined. Morgan stood by my side to assist me—her guidance, support, and constant advice have been invaluable. While I am able to thank her, there are no words that truly express my
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INRODUCTION

In this thesis I explore the use of “uncanny” architecture and urban space in the work of three contemporary artists. The word “uncanny” is generally used to describe the effect of something that combines elements of the old and familiar with elements of the strange in a striking or disquieting way.¹ I demonstrate how concerns with psychologically charged urban and domestic spaces, widely associated with early and mid-twentieth-century modernist art and visual culture, often suggesting feelings of desolation, emptiness, or melancholy, resurface in contemporary art practice of the late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century. I investigate how contemporary artists deploy effects of the “uncanny” to evoke social and economic changes in urban, suburban, and domestic landscapes and their effects on those who inhabit or move through these spaces. In the work of British sculptor Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963), German sculptor/photographer Thomas Demand (b. 1964), and American photographer Gregory Crewdson (b. 1962) that spans from the late twentieth-century to today, the viewer encounters spaces—rooms, houses, buildings, domestic interiors, furniture—that are familiar and even banal in many ways. Yet these spaces are also characteristically disquieting, as if something has gone wrong.

The atmosphere conjured by these artists in their work may recall notions of the “uncanny” and of “haunted” spaces; significantly, both of these terms are associated with the return of spirits and ghosts, and with the idea that in certain

spaces, the past makes itself disturbingly manifest in the present. These qualities are also evident in the American domestic and urban interiors, landscapes, and street scenes of Edward Hopper’s paintings (1882–1967). Although Hopper’s concerns with psychological aspects of urban life in mid-century America may seem removed from those of contemporary artists, I argue that these humanist or expressive concerns return in the work of artists such as Whiteread, Demand, and Crewdson. The impact of the built environment on the lives of its inhabitants, as well as vice versa (the impact of the inhabitants on their environment) are central to their work. This analysis of the “contemporary uncanny” in the work of these three artists, whose work has not been grouped together before, leads the way for a new examination and understanding of the context of the “uncanny” and “haunted space” in contemporary art. Despite the differences in the contexts of their artistic work and their approaches to media and materials, Whiteread, Demand, and Crewdson share common concerns relating to the affective and psychological aspects of urban and domestic interiors, architecture, and street scenes, echoing paintings by Hopper dating to the mid-twentieth-century.

In the first chapter, “Minimalism and Haunted Architecture”, I explore the notion of the void in Whiteread’s post-Minimalist sculptures. Whiteread creates her sculptures from plaster casts out of the negative space surrounding everyday objects, such as beds, rooms, and the spaces between desks and chairs. As Briony Fer notes, Whiteread explores and reconstructs spaces derived from specific urban environments that evoke particular histories; her work is concerned, not with absent

objects, but with the absence of space that is the void. Whiteread explores these intimate, and generally domestic, spaces using minimal and abstract forms to produce a sense of the “haunted” and the “uncanny”. Architectural historian and theorist Anthony Vidler argues that spaces of modernism frequently aimed to reflect the “…tormented psychological states of modern alienation…” and sought in this way to respond to the pathological conditions of the modern metropolis. I argue that Whiteread sculpts “voids” that reflect our feelings and anxieties concerning the spaces of contemporary urban life.

Much of Whiteread’s work references the legacy of American Minimalism. In the 1960s, Minimalist artists such as Donald Judd (1928–1994) were interested in the look of the simple and the pristine, as well as in industrially fabricated cubes; Minimalist artists also explored the ideas of mass production and the relationship between the viewer’s body and the space occupied by the objects. I examine Whiteread’s sculptures, Closet (1988), Ghost (1990), House (1993), and Embankment (2005) to demonstrate how they embody negative space, a constant theme that shows the familiar imprint of wear and tear of daily use. These spaces conjure memories but also evidence of the artist’s rejection of the minimalist interest in the pristine object. Whiteread’s Ghost, for example, is a cast of a room in a Victorian house that memorializes and reveals the “haunted” void of the lives of its inhabitants.

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As the space was cast, specks of wallpaper and paint once adhered to the interior structures were all that remained, leaving a haunted memorial of the domestic interior.

In the second chapter, “Appropriated and Haunted Memories”, I examine the role of the uncanny architectural spaces in Demand’s sculptures-turned-photographs. Demand’s signature procedure for the production of his images involves constructing paper and cardboard models that recreate sites of significant historical or cultural events, usually of a disturbing nature. For example, many locations are associated with crime and extreme violence. Demand then photographs the models, creating images that appear to be at once realistic, yet also strangely anonymous, abstract, and vacant, producing an uncanny and anxious combination of the alien and familiar. For the viewer of Demand’s photographs, the site or event to which they refer may not be easily identifiable. His work may in this way recall Freud’s observation that “…anxiety refers to a primary phase when the ego has not yet been differentiated from the external world…” where anxiety is linked to the proximity of life and death.6

I examine Demand’s photographs, Corridor (1995), Bathroom (1997), and Terrace (1998), to demonstrate the “haunted” spaces that Demand constructs in order to document the history and memory of domestic urban spaces in the late twentieth-century. Demand’s haunted spaces have once been or are soon to be occupied by individuals, repeatedly suggesting disquiet and a sense that something

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has gone wrong. Demand's *Corridor*, for example, depicts a hallway that leads to the apartment that belonged to American serial killer, Jeffrey Dahmer (1960–1994). The hallway appears pristine, lacking any clues as to the identity of this vacant space. The viewer may imagine something lurking within the image as the ceiling lights highlight one door, that of Dahmer's apartment. The lack of visual information allows anxiety to grow.

In the third and final chapter, “Ordinary Cinematic Wonder”, I focus on the role of haunted space in Crewdson's cinematic photographs of American suburbia. Crewdson cites Hopper and two films by Alfred Hitchcock (1899–1980), *Vertigo* (1958) and *Psycho* (1960). Crewdson’s photographs, like Hitchcock’s films and Hopper’s paintings, emphasize themes of dislocation, alienation, and projection. Vidler notes Robert Vischer’s (1847–1933) theories of optical perception which posit that the psychology of space is devoted to adjusting the shifting sensations and moods of a “...perceiving subject whose perceptions had less to do with what was ‘there’ than what was projected to be seen.”\(^7\) I examine the psychologically charged spaces and compositional elements Crewdson uses to evoke a sense of the “uncanny”.

In a similar way to Demand’s staging of architectural spaces, Crewdson stages scenes of American neighborhoods and homes by recreating these indoor environments; his outdoor settings are cast in the town of Pittsfield, Massachusetts. He uses a range of materials, such as live plants, to create a naturalistic yet uncanny atmosphere. In a 2004 film interview, Crewdson notes his interest in the ways that

\(^7\) Vidler, 295.
people’s ordered lives are easily altered by some event, big or small. In his photographs, Crewdson captures these psychological moments of disorder based on a given “inconsistency” in his character’s lives. I examine Crewdson’s photographs Untitled (Ophelia) (2001), Untitled (Esther Terrace) (2006), and Untitled (Brief Encounter) (2006), to further develop the effect of the “uncanny” and “hauntedness” in American suburbia previously explored by Hopper in paintings such as Second Story Sunlight (1960). Crewdson focuses on anxiety as a result of America’s response to the altered metropolis of mid-century America and the emergence of post-World War II suburbia. While Crewdson’s spaces appear to be tranquil, there is a lurking sense of alienation, anxiety, and, as Crewdson himself says, “…troubling psychology in these spaces.” Untitled (Brief Encounter) displays these effects of alienation and anxiety as Crewdson depicts a snow-covered street with a car having just turned off of a side street and onto the main road. There is an “uncanny” and voyeuristic sense to the scene, as if an eerie force is at work in this isolated neighborhood.

Christiane Schneider, in her 2005 exhibition review, Rachel Whiteread, discusses Whiteread’s architectural sculpture as a means to investigate modes of human existence in the spaces that we inhabit. She notes that whether Whiteread’s sculptures are located indoors or out, the work becomes a part of the urban

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9 Gregory Crewdson, “Under the Influence: In a Lonely Place,” Aperture 190 (Spring 2008), 80.
environment and is recognized as a component of domestic space.\textsuperscript{10} In addition to Schneider's discussion, Margaret Iversen, in her article, "In the Blind Field: Hopper and the Uncanny" (1998), compares Whiteread’s work to the works of Hopper. Iversen’s analysis on the title and function of Whiteread’s *Ghost* assists in investigating contemporary notions of the uncanny, absence, and loss seen in the psychologically saturated domestic spaces of Hopper. In investigating Whiteread’s artistic effects, Vidler notes in his article “Interpreting the Void: Architecture and Spatial Anxiety” (1998), that “negative space” is a response to the spaces and pathological conditions of life in the metropolis and the instability of identities in modern society.\textsuperscript{11} In the case of Whiteread’s sculpture, Vidler discusses how contemporary artists evoke feelings of the “uncanny” in domestic spaces that are or have been associated with mid-twentieth-century culture.

Eckhard Schneider, in “Thomas Demand: Phototrophy” (2004), argues that Demand purposefully deprives his photographs of human figures to generate a sense of anxiety, and suggests a sense of foreboding or evil. François Quintin, in “Thomas Demand Exhibition, 2000-2001” (2001), argues that Demand’s work is characterized by what Quintin calls a “psychological strangeness” in which a story exists just below the surface, or serves as a response to a historical event. Similarly, Vidler notes that all space has a history, or rather, has many histories, as it correlates with economic, political, and social factors.\textsuperscript{12} The works of C. Schneider, E.

\textsuperscript{11} Vidler, 296.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 292.
Schneider, Quintin, and Vidler aid in my analysis of Demand’s appropriated photographs through their attention to the economic, political, and social considerations at work in contemporary media and society.

In an interview with Tate Modern curator Stuart Comer, Crewdson discusses Hopper’s ideas and imagery that focus on beauty, sadness, rootlessness, and theatricality, proving influential in the production of his photographs of the psychologically charged urban spaces. In another interview with SITE Santa Fe’s Antonio López, Crewdson speaks of Hopper’s interest in alienation, the American vernacular, and his optimist views of suburbia with a “sense of possibilities”.\textsuperscript{13} Vidler argues that while a certain elation in the ambiguities of anonymity marked twentieth-century art and culture, the feeling of modernity also brought with it a sense of loss and of the unexpected—a sense of frightening return where a sense of the familiar turns, without warning, into the unfamiliar.\textsuperscript{14} These different texts serve to further illuminate the role of the “uncanny” in Crewdson’s photographs.

\textsuperscript{13} “Q & A with Gregory Crewdson: Photographic Close Encounters of the Cinematic Kind,” Interview with Gregory Crewdson by Antonio López, SITE Santa Fe, February 2001.

\textsuperscript{14} Vidler, 297.
CHAPTER ONE

POST-MINIMALISM AND HAUNTED ARCHITECTURE

I’m a socialist – it is very much a part of my life. You can’t help it, living somewhere like London where you’re seeing things crumble around and you’re seemingly helpless to do anything…I am involved in the making of sculpture, of exploring formal questions about how a work sits on the floor, or about the space surrounding it.¹⁵

- Rachel Whiteread

Rachel Whiteread makes sculptures that capture negative spaces. She explores the voids in between and within everyday domestic objects and spaces, such as beds, rooms, and furniture. She reconstructs spaces derived from built environments that evoke particular histories. From a formal perspective, the legacy of American Minimalism is significant to Whiteread’s work.¹⁶ One could think, for example, of works such as Judd’s Untitled (Stack) (1967, Figure 1) and Robert Morris’ (b. 1931) Untitled (Mirror Cubes) (1965, Figure 2). Whiteread’s sculptures echo the simple forms favored by Minimalist artists, their use of serial, repetitive structures, and their interest in the relation between the viewer’s body and the space it inhabits. In this chapter I will explore the notion of the void in Whiteread’s work, focusing on her post-Minimalist sculptures as memorials or traces of human lives. Each work evokes the “uncanny”: spaces that have been forgotten or left behind are cast and reconstructed as sculptures that are both familiar and unfamiliar—that is, they look

¹⁶ Fer, 165.
simultaneously old or used (showing signs of wear) and newly made (freshly cast plaster surfaces).

Whiteread’s early work, Closet (1988, Figure 3), was completed just after she earned her Masters degree in Fine Arts from the Slade School of Art in London.\textsuperscript{17} To make Closet, Whiteread cast the inside of an inexpensive wooden wardrobe that she had purchased at a thrift store. The right side of the wardrobe consisted of six small square compartments. On the left was a larger, vertical space. After the plaster had set, Whiteread destroyed the outer wooden layer to reveal the cast of the interior space replete with markings of the moldings, shelving, and the door. As art historian and critic Charlotte Mullins notes, the cast surface revealed its vulnerability: the pale plaster surface registered signs of the imperfections of the original object, with traces of discoloration from the wood varnish, dye, and paint.\textsuperscript{18} Finally, Whiteread covered the white cast in a smothering black felt. As Neal David Benezra remarked in his essay “Rachel Whiteread: A Sense of Silence,” the artist views the felt as a “dead material,” yet also commented on the way that the surface was “…sensitive and picks up details, leaving a mummified space and sense of silence—a furry black space.”\textsuperscript{19}

With regard to Closet, Whiteread recalls a memory of sitting in her parent’s wardrobe as a child. It was full of boxes, clothing, and fabric, completely engulfing

\textsuperscript{19} Benezra, 104-105.
her in the darkness. Whiteread also recalls how she felt comfortable and protected in the compact space, and at the same time frightened by the eerie darkness and intensely aware of the smells and sensations of her surroundings. By covering the cast of *Closet* with black felt, Whiteread visually conveyed her awareness of the confined space and made tangible the fear she felt in the dark. In an interview with Mullins, Whiteread discussed her motivations in making *Closet*:

> It was originally about making a childhood experience concrete. I was aiming for a material as black as the frightening childhood darkness I experienced. I was trying to use a material that would suck the life out of light—the black felt seemed qualified to exhibit that sense of memory I wanted to make tangible.

Viewers of *Closet* may experience an uncomfortable feeling of suffocation enfolding the work. She has wrapped the black felt around the plaster, covering its rough surfaces. Whiteread aims to transform the space inside the wardrobe into a solid object in order to evoke the heightened emotions a child might feel inside—the emotions she experienced.

In *Closet*, Whiteread casts a memory of a common object that is familiar to everyone. Whiteread solidifies the darkness of the interior space while maintaining the domestic allusions of this object. She also evokes anxiety relating to mortality; the black felt covering the rectangular wardrobe corresponds to the shape and form of a coffin, like a *memento mori*. In our everyday lives, we collect particular objects to surround ourselves with familiar materials to create a comfortable environment. We also grow tired of these objects and replace them. Yet the object we see when

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20 Mullins, 18–19.
21 Ibid., 19.
22 Ibid.
we view *Closet* also alludes to the recollection and repression of childhood memories—and, in particular, to Whiteread’s own childhood fears and emotions. In this sense it is literally a haunted space. In *Closet*, the “uncanny” emerges as a recollection re-made as a sculpture, a thing that is both familiar (a common wardrobe) and unfamiliar (a strange object cast in plaster and covered in felt).²³

Whiteread’s *Ghost* (1990, Figure 4) is a plaster cast of the living room of a Victorian house at 486 Archway Road, London. Whiteread coated the walls of the room with plaster to make a cast. Once the plaster was set, Whiteread destroyed the outer skeleton, leaving a cast of the absent space remaining. The outcome was a large, ghostly, off-white form that conveyed the scale, look, and detail of a domestic interior space, yet also recalled the appearance of Minimalist sculpture. By using the casting process, she was able to highlight the subtly textured surfaces. These include remnants of wall coverings, soot from the fireplace, and splinters from the windows and doors that belonged to the original space. She rendered solid every corner and indentation of the space.

The spaces that Whiteread uses in her work are no longer functional as they were originally intended, yet they operate to commemorate the seemingly unimportant features of familiar spaces that usually go unnoticed.²⁴ In an interview with curator Craig Houser in 2001, Whiteread said:

*Ghost* was a hand cast that I made entirely on my own. It was the first piece in which I realized that I could disorient the viewer completely. While I was

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making it, I was just seeing one side of the sculpture at a time, and then I took all the panels to my studio to fix them to a framework. Once we finally put the piece together, I realized what I had created...there was a door in front of me and a light switch back to front...and I realized that I had become the wall.\textsuperscript{25}

As her comments suggest, Whiteread’s casting process unsettles conventional ideas about familiar spaces, including the distinction between empty and occupied spaces or the distinction between the space of an artwork and everyday space. Whiteread turns these opposites of space inside out. The viewer, like the artist, “…becomes the wall.” In everyday life, walls function as a protective shell for those who occupy interior spaces. Whiteread’s work reverses this set-up. Here the walls, or their imprint, capture the aura of past inhabitants and seem to store their personal histories or to evoke their memories. Conversely, viewers of Whiteread’s work may find themselves “unhoused”—confronted not only with traces of the lives of others, but with traces of absent spaces. They remain outside of, and cut off from, these lost interiors.\textsuperscript{26}

\textit{Ghost} is a monumental work that is psychologically loaded. The bleak whiteness of the plaster, in contrast to the darkness of the felt in \textit{Closet}, creates a feeling of claustrophobia, as if the walls that hold traces of memories are closing in. The box-like structure contributes to this sensation; the solid form of the work seems to mummify the silence of this space. In her essay, “I Dreamt I Was a Wall,” architectural historian and theorist Beatriz Colomina notes Whiteread’s consistent references to mummification in the artist’s comments on her architectural sculptures. Colomina states that Whiteread observes the intention of \textit{Ghost} was to “…mummify a

\textsuperscript{25} E. Schneider, 8-9.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 9.
sense of silence in a room."\textsuperscript{27} Here again, Whiteread creates a mausoleum-like space. She links the work to her own memories and past history, for example, with regard to the "...room in the Victorian home where she [Whiteread] was born."\textsuperscript{28}

In London, however, there were large areas of devastation as a result of the bombings, which completely demolished several areas. In a rush to rebuild, homes and building complexes were created. In an attempt to re-build London houses, builders constructed interiors using mock-ups of earlier structures, which nevertheless served as ghostly reminders of these edifices. In his essay, "Interpreting the Void: Architecture and Spatial Anxiety," Vidler suggests:

\begin{quote}
\ldots we might characterize the space of modernism from the outset as psychological space. This space was developed to respond to what were seen to be the pathological conditions of life endemic to the metropolis—it follows that psychological space was first formulated as negative space of psychopathological space. By design, modern space was constructed to display the 'tormented psychological states of modern alienation' in response to the pathological conditions of the metropolis.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

Vidler underlines how modernist architecture relayed anxieties regarding change, place, and identity. After the war, Londoners experienced anxiety in the face of the changing urban landscape as a result of bombings during the war, the surge in post-war redevelopment, which was largely pursued without regard to its psychological and material impact on local residents.

Figure 5). The house in question was slated for demolition, but Whiteread had alternative plans for it. She sprayed the entire interior of the home with concrete. Piece by piece, Whiteread and her team removed the remaining outside shell of the home, leaving a concrete cast of the interior space. House was located at 193 Grove Road in London, the same road where the first bomb fell during World War II. This fact increased Whiteread's interest in the rebuilt home, itself a replica of a house that was destroyed in World War II.\textsuperscript{30} Whiteread had other location options for this project. However, when she was granted permission by the local community housing board to make a work on this lot, Whiteread felt she had found the best place and time for her project.\textsuperscript{31} In her essay, "A House is Not a Home: The Sculpture of Rachel Whiteread," Guggenheim Director Lisa Dennison comments:

> A house is a microcosm of the world at large, a shared space, a place of social interaction where basic human needs and desires are fulfilled that harbors our past and history as occupants. A darker side of a home reverts to 1970s discourse in that a home is a place of work for the females, implications of conflict and oppression by that of the male figure of the home.\textsuperscript{32}

Like Ghost, in House Whiteread creates a memorial to the intangible but it is a psychologically, emotionally, and politically charged site that marks this tumultuous period, and serves as a part of Londoners' lives. As Jon Bird notes in his essay, "Dolce Domum: House," the work connects realities of city and corporate life at the end of the twentieth-century in London marked by the breakdown of neighborhoods.

\textsuperscript{30} James Lingwood, "Introduction," in Rachel Whiteread: House (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 11. All of the other houses on Grove Road had been demolished.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 7.
\textsuperscript{32} Dennison, 35.
and communities in the face of gentrification. With *House*, Whiteread displays nostalgia for the lost spaces of childhood and memories of past lives, memorializing the past in the present.

These feelings of nostalgia, loss, and anxiety suggested in Whiteread’s work are comparable to the kinds of emotions evoked in the paintings of Edward Hopper. In her article, “In the Blind Field: Hopper and the Uncanny,” art historian Margaret Iversen discusses the relationship between Whiteread’s *House* and Hopper’s *House by the Railroad* (1925, Figure 7). According to Iversen, both Whiteread’s *Ghost*, and most notably *House* convey a sense of the architectural “uncanny” as in Hopper’s painting. Both artist’s works respond to the violence of rapid industrialization and modernization. The isolation and desolation of *House* echoes the isolation of Hopper’s *House by the Railroad*; both works are placed in broken or dislocated landscapes; they are both “out of place” in their locations. We may sense a degree of nostalgia in Whiteread’s invocation of the past in *House*, and a recollection of the time when this home existed next to other absent houses prior to post-War demolitions and rebuilding in the area. The work links an evocation of the violent, rapid industrialization, and modernization that doomed the original structure to a logic of repression. Freud argues that anxiety can be registered unconsciously, manifesting itself in the blocking or enclosing act of repression. This is reflected in

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35 Ibid., 411.
the blank and forbidding presence of the sculpture itself as a site, or form, that locates the absence of a house as much as its presence.\textsuperscript{36}

The impact of Minimalism is evident in Whiteread’s work. In \textit{Embankment} (2005, Figure 6), her commission for the Tate Modern in London, Whiteread reflects again on the place of personal and private memories, as well as collective memories, as she reconstructs the interior spaces of thousands of cardboard boxes. \textit{Embankment} was inspired by the rediscovery of several forgotten cardboard boxes that filled her late mother’s home. Whiteread returned to a space filled with objects from her past. As curator Catherine Wood notes, the personal and familiar objects seemed to have a haunted quality; Whiteread identified her mother’s mortality with her own.\textsuperscript{37} The death of her mother, along with the rediscovery of fragments of her own past, led Whiteread to produce the series of white, tactile casts of interior voids of cardboard boxes. She stacked them throughout the large gallery space of the Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall. In her book \textit{On Abstract Art}, art historian Briony Fer notes partial resemblances between Whiteread’s work and characteristic structures of Minimalist sculpture. Characteristics of Minimalist sculpture include the appearance of simple, hard-edged, serial, and industrially fabricated forms. As Fer notes, Whiteread draws on the Minimalist vocabulary evident in the work of Judd, for example, with her stacking of simple, modular units. This modular approach is particularly evident in \textit{Embankment}.\textsuperscript{38} In her work, as Mullins observes, Whiteread

\textsuperscript{36} Ronen, 46. \\
\textsuperscript{37} Wood, 25. \\
\textsuperscript{38} Fer, 164.
typically uses the “most minimal of titles.” Whiteread, furthermore, credits Minimalist artist Carl Andre (b. 1935) with “…giving her the confidence to place a white block in the middle of the floor and simply let it be a white block.” She also refers to other Minimalist (or post-Minimalist) artists, such as Eva Hesse (1936–1970) and Richard Serra (b. 1939), in particular highlighting the manner in which they personalized Minimalist art through their use of unconventional materials (plastic or sheet metal), laborious methods of construction, and informal approaches to installation.

As Lisa G. Corrin notes in her essay, “A Conversation with Rachel Whiteread, March 2001,” Whiteread’s sculptures catalogue the idea of absence. The voids that Whiteread casts relate directly to intimate aspects of human lives. They evoke a realization of our own mortality and imply an intensified awareness of our humanity, including feelings of anxiety and loss. Whiteread’s sculptures of everyday objects and spaces engage with the contemporary urban environments while pointing to the history of an irrecoverable past. Surrounding ourselves with objects like closets, and living within domestic spaces, we leave an imprint of our physical existence as we sleep, eat, or bathe. In her article “Concrete Poetry”, critic Jane Burton recalls

39 Mullins, 19.
40 Benezra, 105.
43 Ibid.
44 C. Schneider, 18.
Whiteread describing her artistic approach as “minimalism with a heart.”

Whiteread places her viewer in a “…mental position adjacent to the casted space.”

Moving beyond classic Minimalism in this respect, her serial and modular casts invest sculpted environments with social implications that involve “…memory and nostalgia, in which empty space becomes matter.”

Spaces that have once been forgotten are remade as tangible casts that reveal memory, childhood experiences, and scenes of origins and endings. Evoking life and death, Whiteread’s sculptures act as an institution of memory and our developmental experiences. They are in this sense intensely haunted spaces.

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47 Dennison, 38.

48 Bird, 112.
CHAPTER TWO

APPROPRIATED AND HAUNTED MEMORIES

My sculptures are only imitations, dummies made up of things that carry enough symbols so as to be recognizable. I don’t wish to be weighed down by objects.49

- Thomas Demand

Thomas Demand produces photographs that demonstrate the haunted histories of social spaces. These sculptures-turned-photographs developed from an inexpensive and hybrid form that later became his signature. Demand’s subjects and locations refer to a range of historical and cultural events from late twentieth-century Germany and elsewhere. Demand grew up in Münich—a city marked psychologically and physically by World War II. The end of the war and American occupation in Germany brought a surge of rehabilitation to the city; builders followed an accurate and traditional planning grid to preserve the city as it stood prior to the War. Memories of the Nazi headquarters and resistance executions during the 1930s continue to haunt Münich today. The city was restored to hide its ghosts and assume a permanent innocence in a post-War period. In this chapter, I will examine Demand’s psychologically charged sculptures-turned-photographs. The architectural spaces seen in Demand’s photographs appear surreal. His sculptures and photographs are composed of narrative elements that provide a

sense of the “uncanny”—they are at once familiar and disturbing, or even horrifyingly inhuman and cold. They are unheimlich (unhomely), and discomforting.

Demand studied sculpture at the Kunstkademie Düsseldorf in Germany (1989–1992). In 1993, he began using photography to document his paper sculpture since it was difficult to keep his sculptures due to their fragility.⁵⁰ He attempted to learn photography under fellow German photographers, Bernd Becher (1931–2007) and Hilla Becher (b. 1934). Demand became discouraged once he learned of their requirements needed to gain the necessary knowledge of camera techniques. He thus taught himself different approaches to photography. Once Demand photographs his sculptures, they are destroyed.

The quasi-architectural spaces Demand constructs are predominantly modern interiors, such as studios, bathrooms, kitchens, staircases, and hallways. They are spaces related to exceptionally charged scenes of political or cultural importance appropriated from mass media regardless of their initially banal appearance.⁵¹ Demand’s keen interest in architecture enhances the accuracy of his work. He uses this knowledge to emphasize the meaning behind abstract forms and spaces. To Demand, architecture does not just signify a space, it also acquires a personal history. In his essay “Interpreting the Void: Architecture and Spatial Anxiety”, Vidler suggests that “…all space has a history, or even many histories,” if it is correlated with economic, political, and social forces.⁵² Demand’s sculptures and photographs attempt to recapture the plainness or innocuousness of historically

⁵⁰ Kluge, 38.
⁵¹ Ibid., 7.
⁵² Vidler, 292.
violent spaces; he aims to achieve a basic, incorrupt first impression of an impacted space.

At first glance, his images appear ahistorical, tricking the viewer into thinking that their appearance is merely aesthetic.\(^5^3\) His sculptures involve life-size reconstructions of historical spaces and seemingly insignificant situations. As François Quintin notes, as soon as the viewer discovers Demand’s photographs are re-creations of actual places, they encounter a “psychological strangeness.”\(^5^4\) Viewers experience a sense of familiarity with scenes—these spaces are made of paper and cardboard. As Gallery Director Ralph Rugoff comments, the objects and architectural structures within Demand’s images possess what Rugoff calls a “disquieting sameness”—Demand uses no variation in surface textures because of his consistent use of the same type of paper.\(^5^5\) He creates a world composed of disturbing uniformity, yet resembling the world in which we live. Hence Demand’s work leads viewers to question their perception of what is real and what is artificial. This further confronts viewers with a discomforting ambiguity, making them question the validity of the scene that is captured. Demand appropriates images from the media that display psychologically and historically charged locations, including sites of suicides, murders, and attempted assassinations. As Rugoff notes,


his images “re-present existing information, rather than depict it.” Demand’s appropriation of media imagery evokes a sense of familiarity. The viewer cannot identify the specific memory but the images suggest locations we think we know.

Furthermore, Demand’s photographs are void of people. This disrupts our conventional expectations based on what we are accustomed to seeing in photographs. When we first view the scenes, we are unaware the scale of these images; the lack of human figures inhibits our point of reference. In her essay, “Thomas Demand, Jeff Wall, and Sherrie Levine: Deforming Pictures”, art historian Tamara Trodd notes a common aesthetic response to Demand’s photographs; Demand’s use of interior space provokes “…strong reactions from the viewer: a sense of claustrophobia, of airlessness, and of an inward shudder or quiver, like nausea, as though the pictures led inwards into our own bodies.” Humans are “swallowed up”; the sculptural object is externalized and repeated “within the frame.” Demand’s images appear to be closed and uninhabited; the missing objects are withdrawn only to leave a surface of empty space with anonymous architectural elements.

In “Thomas Demand: Phototrophy”, Rugoff notes that in contrast to Whiteread’s work, Demand’s photographs contain a noticeable absence of signs of use. Demand omits graphics, such as the text on a piece of paper, logos on household items, or numbers on the buttons of a phone. The artist uses these blanks

56 Rugoff, 6.
58 Ibid., 963-964.
to produce suspicion concerning the images, creating discomfort as the viewer attempts to fill-in missing information Demand intentionally omits from these photographs. Initially, the viewer questions whether the photograph is indeed a representation of a real space. Next, the viewer examines scale and proportions—the absence of details produces a sense of uncertainty. Even if the viewer is familiar with the original media image, they cannot recall the specifics missing in Demand’s image, the ghosts of actual events. Any human interference would disrupt the cleanliness and pristine construction—Demand’s anonymous spaces appear uninhabitable.

Most of Demand’s work represents everyday spaces in which people come and go. As curator Rachel Thomas notes, his photographs consistently place the viewer in a position between a lived experience and a representation, creating a double but disparate world of violence and disorder.\footnote{See Rachael Thomas, “Weapon of Choice,” in \textit{Thomas Demand: L’Ésprit D’Escalier} (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 123.} An example of an image implicitly linked to violence is \textit{Corridor} (1995, Figure 8). The photograph depicts a hallway of an American apartment building: Apartment 213, 924 North 25\textsuperscript{th} Street in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This corridor leads to the apartment belonging to infamous serial killer, Jeffrey Dahmer (1960–1994). Demand depicts three yellow apartment doors. He frames the composition so that the hallway is viewed at an angle, as if the viewer arrived from an elevator or steps. There are two lights on the ceiling, casting eerie shadows through the hallway. Demand uses the two ceiling lights in his paper construction, yet the floor directly underneath the lights does not reflect the given
paper materials. Another hallway appears on the left, its egress populated by darkness and shadows. Demand uses white, yellow, and gray paper, which absorbs and reflects the ceiling light in specific ways. The main light source does not come from the ceiling lights, but from the audience’s point of view outside the scene. The absence of people, fixtures, and signs that would otherwise indicate an apartment number or resident’s last name, inhibit viewers from connecting this apartment complex to such a gruesome history. The scene appears innocuous. Demand’s deliberate removal of these identifying elements corresponds with our desire to forget the disturbing incidents.60

In an interview with Sarah Crompton, Demand discusses the meaning behind his one-word title:

...I never made a mystery of [Corridor] because if people wanted to know more, they would ask and I would say. I did not make a piece about Jeffrey Dahmer, I just did something about the knowledge that you and I have about him. I need to put it all out in front of you [the viewer]. I can't really say anything about the crime itself but I can only say something about the fact that I know about the crime.61

Viewers are unaware of the identities of the inhabitants of this hallway space—unless they are conscious of the prior media coverage of Dahmer’s story, the hallway is like any other. Viewers may question which apartment belonged to Dahmer—his apartment was possibly the apartment most brightly lit, or the shadowed apartment farther in the background. Viewers may try to empathize with the victims. This strangely lit hallway is geometric, and clean. Gazing down the hallway, we are

overcome by an unsettling sensation. We are forced to catch our breath; we fear the shadows. A heightened sense of emotion evokes anxiety of what may confront us. As curator Régis Durand comments, here we are alone in this hallway, isolated from the outside world, in a space haunted by the historical and violent rage of the past.62

Demand’s photograph, Bathroom (1997, Figure 9), provides the viewer with a series of different perspectives—the “real” quality of the scene makes it difficult to accept that it is entirely made out of paper. The tub occupies most of the photograph; the inner portion of the tub is a brilliant white in comparison to the repetitive dark, blue square tiles of its exterior. The blue tiles also line the wall and the floor. An ivory shower curtain is drawn back, partially framing the right side of the scene, a matching ivory bathmat that lays on the tile floor. The water inside the bathtub is murky with bubbles—alluding to a person’s recent presence. The door is slightly ajar, open to a dark external space.

In his essay, “Paper Truth: The Know-How of Thomas Demand”, art historian Efrat Biberman compares Demand’s Bathroom to Jacques-Louis David’s painting, The Death of Marat (1793, Figure 11).63 David’s oil painting refers to the assassination of the radical journalist, Jean-Paul Marat, on July 13, 1793. In The Death of Marat, there is a clear reference to death. Marat is lying in the bathtub holding a piece of paper with writing. Next to the bathtub is a wooden table with text on the side. Instead of depicting actual events, David depicted what might have happened; the focus was

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not the historical event but its painterly representation. In *Bathroom*, Demand depicts a space that looks like any generic bathroom, but relates to a specific bathroom.\(^6^4\) He has constructed this image from media reports relating to the discovery of German politician, Uwe Barschel, who was found dead in 1987 in an apparent election scandal. The narrow point of view, square bath tiles, and angled composition of Demand’s photograph replicate those of the original photograph seen on the cover of *Stern* magazine.\(^6^5\) A significant difference between David’s painting and Demand’s photograph is the characteristic absence of people and text in Demand’s work—the compositional elements that Demand uses barely informs the viewer of the event. In an interview with film director Alexander Kluge, Demand explains that he, “…sees media as architecture, a vast landscape where scandals and murders have taken place; spaces that have all been touched by evil.”\(^6^6\)

German critic and historian Ulrich Baer notes *Bathroom*’s ability to “…open the door of interpretation thematically.”\(^6^7\) *Bathroom* is a scene of uncertainty and suspension, perhaps prompting the viewer to question whether this image is a “before” or “after” scene. According to curator Roxana Marcoci, Demand chose to ignore a series of fine forensic details, such as an abandoned shoe left on the floor

\(^{6^4}\) Biberman, 4.
\(^{6^5}\) Ibid., 5.
\(^{6^6}\) Kluge, 19.
\(^{6^7}\) Baer, 99.

In this article, Biberman is citing Roxana Marcoci, who claims that Demand had based his reconstruction of *Bathroom* off of a set of photographs he had access to, which reveal several forensic details. Marcoci discusses these claims in “Paper Moon,” in *Thomas Demand* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2005), 20.
and smudges that were found on the floor mat. Instead, Demand creates an image that focuses on the uniformity of a banal blue-tiled bathroom. Again, certain compositional elements, such as the absence of fixtures, like door handles or hinges, mute the image. The partially drawn shower curtain provokes a sense of dread, enticing the viewer to reach and pull the curtain back further to reveal something or someone concealed in the corner of the bathtub.

Demand creates a sensation, not of absolute terror or anxiety, but of the unhomely. In his book *The Architectural Uncanny*, Vidler discusses Freud's concept of the “unhomely”. Freud's concept refers to an instance where an environment or feeling is familiar yet foreign at the same time. In Demand’s photographs, the viewer may feel uncomfortable in a common and familiar place. In *Bathroom*, a viewer might consider that if they look closer at the tiles, they might catch a glimpse of a mirrored reflection of a figure concealed from view. The viewer may question these reflections, just as we may wonder what resides in the shadows past the open door. The viewer may even imagine a figure of a human or spirit staring back at them through the shadows. We feel a sense of hostility and foreignness when we examine *Bathroom*—these feelings invade our sense of the “homely” (the comfort one feels at home).

These elements evoke a sense of the uncanny contributing to the aura of the scene. Demand populates *Bathroom* with clean and pristine architectural elements,

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68 Rugoff, 6.
while also suggesting loss and dread. This surely colors our impression of this
image regardless of whether we are aware of its historical implications.\footnote{Rugoff, 6.}

Demand manipulates paper and cardboard in a labor-intensive process that
can take months to complete a single piece. Demand uses light and shadows to blur
the line between “reality” and simulation. In Terrace (1998, Figure 10) he depicts a
room opening out to a terrace with a large table at the left. There are plates of
partially eaten meals, crumpled up napkins, and half full beverage glasses. Above
the table are three glowing, circular paper lanterns in blue, yellow, and red. A large
square void for the window and vertical void for the door are present. He creates a
geometrical and dark abstraction. To the right of this space is another table, again
with remnants of food on plates, used napkins, and drinking glasses. Above the
table on the right hangs a blue lantern, casting a green glow on the wall.

*Terrace* is an example of Demand’s tangible “uncanniness”. His images
repeatedly deliver emotional impact even before the viewer is aware of the
photograph’s historical point of reference. In *Terrace*, an emptying has occurred;
the viewer seems to become a spectator of some unforeseen intervention. In

“Thomas Demand: Catastrophic Space,” writer Stephen Horne notes:

Demand’s image is frozen like a crime scene photo; an anxious emptiness
appears in a flatness bordering on psychosis, as if instantly being evacuated.
This image serves as a replica of something rather transposed or translated
without human touch.\footnote{Stephen Horne, “Thomas Demand: Catastrophic Space,” *Parachute* 96
(October/December 1999): 21-24.}
Unlike the other two photographs, which relate to historical violence, this terrace does not depict disorder or appear untroubled. Elements of the dimly lit room, dark window, and door exhibit an anxious emptiness that provokes the viewer to re-examine their relationship with perception and understanding of spaces. The dark areas of the window and door leading to the terrace close off the space. As in *Bathroom*, he uses this darkness to evoke anxiety and the fear of the unknown. Demand’s images unnerve the viewer by what may (or may not) be hidden in the darkness. Demand’s desolate scene may trigger a feeling of repulsion—the scene threatens the viewer by the impeding darkness and strange lighting. The appearance of *Terrace* makes the viewer wonder, perhaps, why the room’s occupants have fled. Looking at the scene, the viewer may worry they might become the next victim.

Demand’s photographs typically engender an uncanny mixture of familiarity and uneasiness. Demand’s use of photography is linked to Freud’s theme of the “double”. In his essay *The Uncanny*, Freud discusses the double as an insurance against destruction of the original ego—an “…assurance of immortality that becomes the ‘uncanny’ harbinger of death.” It may not be as important to recall what event occurred in a space Demand portrays, as it is to recognize that indeed, something has happened or that something will happen. Demand provokes the viewer to become a voyeur. Demand simulates reality in contemporary culture. According to French theorist Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007), contemporary society is

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dependent on models, symbols, and signs; we have replaced all reality with a simulation of reality. Baudrillard suggests that contemporary society no longer has the capacity to distinguish between what is real and what is artificial. The simulacrum omits the distinction between reality and its artificial representation. Baudrillard writes that the simulacrum is a negative reality, or a hyper-reality, in which contemporary experience is a simulation of reality. Different in this respect from painting’s trompe-l’œil, Demand’s photographed paper-made sculptures betray their status as models—their distance from the truth of representational photography. Conversely, it should not be forgotten that Demand photographs his models in a conventional, straightforward manner without manipulation, analogue or digital. These spaces, or scenes, are at once true and false to the models.

Demand does not base his work on lived experience. He models his photographs on stories in contemporary media. Demand plays with reality in order to captivate the viewer. He places the viewer between an awareness of uncomfortable—a certain recognition of familiar yet virtual spaces. These psychologically charged spaces induce feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and isolation. They lead the viewer to question what act or event they might be intruding upon or a witnessing. Demand’s use of light, specifically a green light seen in Untitled (Brief Encounter) and Untitled (Esther Terrace), evokes a surreal, yet realistic sense of the “uncanny”—the scene that leaves the viewer to feel anxious and uncomfortable in the space. In an interview with Demand, Thomas asks how he

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manages to create such an “uncanny” tension in his work. His simple response, “…there is ‘a sense of suspended time’.”\textsuperscript{77} The passage of time does not exist in Demand’s images; time stops in his artificial world.

As with Whiteread’s work, uncanny traces of historical knowledge and memory remain significant for Demand. While Whiteread’s sculpture aims for permanence through the use of plaster and concrete, Demand records his sculptures through the photographic process. Whiteread’s sculptures capture once forgotten domestic space, whereas Demand’s photographs depict scenes of historical violence, originally captured by another lens. In both Whiteread’s and Demand’s work, human beings are absent, yet their presence is palpable. Whiteread’s once inhabited space can no longer be inhabited, but displays signs of human existence. Demand’s sculptures are made of cardboard and paper that create a flat and anonymous space. In his photographs, he invites us to imagine a human presence through visual evidence that simultaneously accents the complete unreality of his scenes. Whiteread’s sculptures \textit{Closet, Ghost, and House}, appear more as reliefs—particularly noticeable of the protrusion of the sooty fireplace in \textit{Ghost}. The dimensions and composition of these absent or anonymous spaces draw out an isolated and disturbing tension; Whiteread’s and Demand’s ghostly white and faceless works, respectively, evoke a psychological charge of isolation, anxiety, and memory.

\textsuperscript{77} Thomas, 122.
CHAPTER THREE

ORDINARY CINEMATIC WONDER

I’m interested in the question of narrative…this idea of creating a moment that’s frozen and mute, that perhaps ultimately asks more questions than it answers…that allows the viewer to, in a sense, complete it. Ultimately, I’m interested in this ambiguous moment that draws the viewer in through photographic beauty, through repulsion, through some kind of tension.⁷⁸

- Gregory Crewdson

Gregory Crewdson makes photographs that initially appear ordinary and familiar. He evokes quotidian suburban American life, both in outdoor and interior scenes. Yet Crewdson’s photographs are also disquieting representations that speak to loneliness, beauty, unexplained sadness, and desire.⁷⁹ Like Demand, Crewdson stages the scenes that he photographs, allowing Crewdson to create a hyper-real setting. Through lighting and post-production enhancements, Crewdson creates a dream-like world that destabilizes our recognition of the familiar scene (for example, the green of the grass is too green). Crewdson heightens and intensifies everything. He presents macabre sights in calm settings. For example, the floating female in Untitled (Ophelia) (2001, Figure 13). Producing photographs that exist between theatricality and everyday life, Crewdson couples familiar and disjunctive elements with larger-than-life intensity (borrowing from cinema) that recurrently produces “uncanny” effects. In this chapter, I examine the psychologically charged spaces and compositional elements Crewdson utilizes to evoke a sense of the

“uncanny”. Crewdson portrays quiet and tranquil scenes, yet below the surface the reality of everyday life is marked by a troubling, psychological event.\textsuperscript{80}

Introduced to photography at a young age, Crewdson’s recalls a Diane Arbus retrospective in 1971 that his father took him to at New York’s Museum of Modern Art. Crewdson’s father was a psychoanalyst, and had his office in the family’s basement. His father’s career played a significant role in the development of Crewdson’s imagination. The artist recalls how he would lie on the floor and try to eavesdrop on the conversations below. Crewdson places psychology at the center of his images and draws from his own experiences to create a recognizable and eerie image.\textsuperscript{81}

Crewdson is drawn to photography because it is an intimate medium instantly comprehensible to our contemporary society. In his interview with López, Crewdson notes that two mid-twentieth-century psychological thriller films, \textit{Vertigo} and \textit{Psycho} by Hitchcock have influenced his work. Crewdson credits several artists prior to his time, most notably and comparatively the work of Hopper.\textsuperscript{82} Crewdson is influenced by the still image and its limitations; he is attracted to its narrative capacity where the image is frozen with no beginning or end.\textsuperscript{83}

Crewdson refers to himself as an “American realist landscape photographer”, grouping himself with other American realist photographers such as William

\textsuperscript{80} Crewdson, “Under the Influence,” 80.
\textsuperscript{82} Crewdson, “Under the Influence,” 85.
\textsuperscript{83} López, “Q & A with Gregory Crewdson”.
Eggleston (b. 1939) and Walker Evans (1903–1975). These photographers were influenced by the American Realist painters of the early twentieth century, such as George Bellows (1882–1925) and Hopper. The American Realist photographers and painters reflect upon a time of a surge in American culture. Their scenes portray a period during the twentieth-century that gave rise to cultural events—the rise of music, art, and the American Dream. Although from New York City, Crewdson sets his photographs in the suburbs—the dark side of the American Dream and suburban landscapes were always a great wonder to him. Families moved out of the metropolis and traveled across the country to experience the magnificent American landscape—to live and experience life on the open road. However exciting this was, the freedom of this new landscape also isolated Americans. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, artists began capturing scenes of desolate landscape and human anxiety, especially areas hit hard by the economic collapse.

In his photographs, Crewdson aims to confront the viewer with realistic and uncomfortable still-frames of the American landscape by focusing on the vulnerability of isolated modern society. An example of this is Untitled (Brief Encounter) (2006, Figure 12). In this image, the artist creates another scene of the American vernacular—desolate and alienated. Crewdson photographs an image of a small, suburban town. There are quaint, family-owned shops rather than big-box stores. Unassuming Hopper-esque apartments are located above these shops,

enticing the viewer to peer inside. The street is covered in snow; the only tire tracks belong to a car that just turns onto the main street. A lone figure stands on the right sidewalk, underneath a movie theatre sign reading, “Brief Encounter, 7:30 pm.” A solitary car passes a store at the corner where a brunette woman in a pale pink dress sits in the corner restaurant behind the window. She is not peering out of the restaurant towards the viewer, but appears to be looking at something in front of her as if something or someone is just beyond the frame.

Crewdson emulates Hopper’s tendency to frame his figures within windows, doorways, and shafts of light. Hopper’s technique enables the domestic and natural spaces to become narrative fragments and appear realistic. The woman in the corner restaurant evokes a sense of loneliness and sadness. Crewdson places the woman within a large glass window frame, enticing the viewer to become a voyeur. Oppositely, Iversen argues that windows are a space’s eyes looking out at us. A “blind vision” effect creates the sensation of being watched while viewing this image. The viewer becomes a silent witness to the scene, straining to look through the windows but unable to see what is hidden. The viewer desires to know if this figure is alone or what has or will happen in this suspended narrative. Crewdson states that the “window is a look into another world”—we see another possible existence lurking below the world we know. He makes a scene that is open to

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87 Iversen, 427.
multiple narratives. Crewdson’s vistas are inhabitable yet foreboding and inaccessible due to the lack of invitation and concealment.

Crewdson is drawn to a sense of mobility and isolation. He believes that the American dream and this idea of class and social mobility is a strong part of the “American psyche.” Crewdson’s cinematic Untitled (Brief Encounter) is reminiscent of Hopper’s Nighthawks (1942, Figure 18). In Nighthawks, Hopper depicts a waiter, a male customer, and a couple at a corner diner. The diner’s façade is composed of glass, inviting the viewer to look. The figures do not appear to be conversing with each other; they are lost in their own thoughts. Although Hopper’s Nighthawks illustrates the loneliness of a large city, we see a suburban parallel in Untitled (Brief Encounter). The woman in Crewdson’s restaurant resembles the woman in Hopper’s Nighthawks, both in physical appearance and in clothing. Hopper presents a tranquil scene on the surface, but when evaluating Nighthawks further, we see an uneasy and troubled psychological image. Both Hopper’s and Crewdson’s images exude an uncomfortable sense of loneliness, sadness, and mystery. Both artists reference scenes from real life. We inquire what event occurred to produce such desolate and melancholic scenes. Also, Untitled (Brief Encounter) is compositionally similar to Hopper’s Nighthawks. The left portions of both images are composed of storefronts, apartments, and windows. In addition, the tracks left in the snow as the car turned the corner resembles the diner’s sidewalk frame in Nighthawks. The car’s paused location is vertically in line with the

stoplight. This outline of the car tracks, car, and stoplight Crewdson creates resembles Hopper's compositional outline of the diner in *Nighthawks*.

Crewdson also emphasizes his figures and their relations to their surroundings. Unlike Demand, Crewdson includes human figures as part of the scene to provide potential for narrative. His characters are isolated or in a state of extreme distraction or transcendence. They contribute to the heightened emotion in these psychologically charged photographs of alienation and disfunction. In a filmed interview with director Michael Blackwood, Crewdson states:

> To me, the most compelling reason to make the picture is the complicated beauty that is terrifying. I try to make an image that has a sense of danger or repulsion and a nice bounce between death and transcendence...a spiritual image.\(^90\)

Crewdson captures a mystical and intriguing quality in his photographs. Many of his images are disturbing, but Crewdson's primary interest is in bringing an image to life.\(^91\) He aims to produce an image of transcendence, an image that amalgamates the natural, the sublime, and the grotesque.\(^92\) Such psychological transcendence is seen in *Untitled (Ophelia)*. He sets the scene in a typical suburban living room. This interior is replete with floral wallpaper, framed pictures of family members along the staircase, furniture, and scattered clothes. In the center of the living room, a young woman is dressed in sheer lingerie covering her body like a shroud. She floats in a reflective liquid, presumably water, that fills the room. She is staring upwards toward the corner of the image in what looks like a comatose or

\(^90\) Blackwood, *Aesthetics of Repression*, (DVD).
\(^91\) López, “Q & A with Gregory Crewdson”.
\(^92\) Ibid.
transcendent state. A ray of light comes through the windows, shining down on this possibly morbid scene.

This troubling scene of the young floating Ophelia recalls John Everett Millais’ *Ophelia* (1851–1852, Figure 15). Millais’ *Ophelia* portrays a young woman floating face up in water. In William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1599–1601), Ophelia is the young love of Hamlet who drowns. Hamlet’s mother, Queen Gertrude, is questionably linked to Ophelia’s death as a result of her unceremonious announcement of the young woman’s demise. In her essay “Representations of Ophelia”, writer Martha C. Ronk discusses the portrayal of Hamlet’s Ophelia in various works of art. She argues that Ophelia is emblematic and seen as a projection of others. According to Ronk, Ophelia’s depiction in art frequently induces a fear of death. The cause of Ophelia’s drowning is unrevealed. Artists have brought forward repressed emotions through Ophelia’s representation. Ronk relates the myth of Ophelia to the concept of Freud’s essay, “The Uncanny”. Ophelia’s presence provokes the fear of death, the most primal fear. As in Millais’ version, Crewdson’s contemporary Ophelia creates a kind of super-ego as found in Freud’s concept of the “double”. Freud’s theory explains that a double prevents any figure from dying as it insures the indestruction of the super-ego.

Crewdson plays on the ubiquitous fear of mortality by depicting Ophelia floating in a familiar yet bizarre setting. The home is inviting, yet the water and floating Ophelia make it inaccessible. Ophelia is often depicted in nature, however,

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94 Ibid.
Crewdson reworks the myth and places her in a modern domestic space. In his interview with Blackwood, Crewdson states that he “...is interested in certain moments of dislocation and a sense of hovering.” Crewdson talks about exploring “…a state of psychology that exists between one place and another...and the floating body represents this sense of dislocation.” Crewdson's Ophelia is a rootless and sad young woman who exemplifies the psychological disquiet associated with the American family. His setting allows us to speculate that this Ophelia felt trapped within a stereotypical domesticity, becoming a prisoner of her home, and now her resting place. Crewdson’s photographs draw from a reservoir of psychological anxieties where a calm exists below the surface, as we seen in Ophelia as she hovers in her inexpressive state of dislocation.

Crewdson emphasizes the natural, ordinary, and vernacular American landscape. This emphasis tends to reverberate in reversed form, for example, the unnatural and unusual. Crewdson is consistently producing a “double” of naturalness—making highly artificial, carefully composed images that are frozen in time. His indoor scenes are created on a soundstage while his outdoor scenes are shot in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. He uses these locations to pull the viewer into a scene of beauty and repulsion; a combination of the familiar and the unnerving. Untitled (Esther Terrace) (2006, Figure 14) is an example of Crewdson’s production to create a highly artificial and meticulously composed photographs.

96 Blackwood, Aesthetics of Repression, (DVD).
97 Ibid.
In this photograph, we are presented with a scene of a suburban street lined with repetitive white houses. There are four houses on the right and two houses on the left. A figure stands on a second floor terrace of one house; a nondescript silver-blue car is parked on the left side of the street. Time is absent, proving it difficult to determine if the sun is rising or setting. A faint green haze falls over the street, mixing with little light from the streetlight and sun. This same faint haze can be seen in Vertigo. In Hitchcock’s film, the scene depicts Judy, played by Kim Novak, emerging from the bathroom after completing her transformation to look like Madeline, also played by Kim Novak. In a haunted, green haze, a ghost-like Judy crosses a hotel room towards Scottie, played by James Stewart. This moment in Vertigo conveys a surreal and dreamlike state of romantic obsession. Crewdson also uses Hollywood cinematic elements incorporated in his photographs to portray an isolated and anxious American society. Crewdson’s photographs are scenes that have been momentarily interrupted.98

Untitled (Esther Terrace) recalls Hopper’s Second Story Sunlight (1960, Figure 16). We sense a recurrence of the familiar suburban street where the houses are repetitive and appear isolated. Crewdson’s house selection was influenced by the famous house in Psycho, which was modeled by Hitchcock on Hopper’s House by the Railroad (1925, Figure 7). In both paintings we experience an extraordinary sense of radiance and heightened theatricality. In Second Story Sunlight, the surface is banal as two people bathe in the sunlight. However, in Untitled (Esther Terrace), Crewdson fills the street with unsettling green haze, as if there is an evil lurking. Both ordinary

98 Banks, 9.
situations feel psychologically charged; the figure(s) in both paintings have empty and distant gazes that suggest loneliness. These scenes capture a mix of domesticity, nature, and alienation. There is an uncanny disruption between the landscape and a certain disturbance of normality. Crewdson's scene is immediately ordinary and familiar. These elements of the familiar, yet unrealistic destabilize our recognition of this landscape. In his essay, Freud comments on the uncanny repetition that we may experience if we become lost. We might retrace our steps only to recognize our surroundings and find ourselves back where we started. Vidler explains that a certain elation in the ambiguities of anonymity marked twentieth-century art and culture. Modernity also provided a sense of loss and the unexpected—we sense a "frightening return" as our theatrical, often dramatic perception of the familiar turns to the unfamiliar.

Another example of Crewdson's natural and uncannily realistic scene is *Untitled (Butterflies and Shed)* (2001-2002, Figure 17). In this image, the photographer depicts a young girl, mesmerized by light coming out of a shed in a suburban backyard. In his essay, "On the Iconography of Light in the Works of Gregory Crewdson," art historian Martin Hochleitner discusses Crewdson's placement of characters in numerous categories of emotional and psychological situations in relation to light. In *Untitled (Butterflies and Shed)*, danger fuses with Crewdson's hyper-suburbia caused by something lurking just out of our reach; the

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99 Morrow, 27.
100 Vidler, 297.
terror that lurks below the surface of everyday life. In his carefully staged scenes, Crewdson uses lighting to create uncanny, mystical, and supernatural images of America.

In his essay, “Gregory Crewdson: Beneath the Roses,” writer Russell Banks explores Crewdson’s altering of the “American Dream”. According to Banks, Crewdson takes the optimism and fervor of the American dream and turns it into what the terms the “American Nightmare.”102 The idea of the American suburbs is traditionally characterized by a sense of possibility and hopefulness. Instead, Crewdson provides a series of moments where troubled Americans have done something wrong or have something horrible happen to them. Banks also states that American society is informed by the idea of a paradise. When that paradise is realized to only be a fantasy and unobtainable, we turn into violent creatures.103

Through his carefully composed photographs, Crewdson mocks the sadness, alienation, and beauty in his images. These elements allow him to create a naturalistic and uncanny atmosphere of mystery, strangeness, and familiarity. His hyper-reality pulls the viewer into a scene of beauty and fear; a combination of the familiar and the unnerving. Crewdson’s highly detailed photographs require sustained attention to absorb the small details. They are open to mysterious ambiguities that conjure feelings of loneliness, repression, and regret.104 Crewdson notes that without the work of Hopper, and the psychological uncanniness of

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102 Banks, 8.
103 Ibid., 8.
104 Ibid., 10.
Hitchcock’s films, his vision to capture and explore the surreal and dysfunctional American suburban landscape would have surely been quite different.

Like Whiteread’s work, Crewdson’s work focuses on domestic spaces and vulnerable or dysfunctional social worlds. Whiteread and Crewdson capture homes and neighborhoods that have been affected by social changes. Demand and Crewdson are closely related in terms of their use of staging, and the suspended time of the photographic image. Demand’s concern with specific events of historical violence or cultural interest differs from Crewdson’s handling of familiar yet macabre scenes of American small-town or suburban life. Their materials differ as Demand consistently uses paper and cardboard materials whereas Crewdson uses a range of built, natural, and cinematic materials. Crewdson’s production process is unique. When photographing an outdoor scene, he uses the small town of Pittsfield, Massachusetts. The indoor scenes are created on a film set—as a result of the sophistication of his processes, his composed staged scenes look surreal, heightened in emotion and color. The figures in his photographs may be regular townspeople or actors he has hired, but rarely betray any real sense of individuality. Crewdson layers his photographs in three layers. The foreground, middle ground, and background are all pristine and well focused. Crewdson’s manipulation of the layers of his images is also surreal in effect: it is unnatural to have all three planes in focus. Like Whiteread and Demand, Crewdson uses figures of doubling to evoke repression, the malaise of the “uncanny”, and staging to prompt viewers to think about contemporary life and culture.
CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have explored how the logic of the “uncanny”, which involves a disturbing mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar, influences the work of three contemporary artists: Rachel Whiteread, Thomas Demand, and Gregory Crewdson. These artists all deal with material and psychological signifiers of the malaise at the heart of contemporary life in the West. The aura of these artists’ works invokes notions of the “uncanny”, and of “haunted” spaces. The American domestic interiors, landscapes, and street scenes of Hopper’s paintings have similar qualities and analyze the psychological aspects of suburban American life. Although Hopper’s concerns with mid-century American society may be far removed from those of contemporary artists, similar concerns are evident in the work of these three artists.

As discussed in Chapter One, the notion of the void is central to Whiteread’s post-Minimalist sculptures. Her oeuvre is filled with casts of the intimate, and generally domestic, spaces in which she uses minimal forms to produce a sense of the “haunted” and the “uncanny”. In his essay, “The World is the Totality of Facts, Not of Things,” writer Mario Codognato argues:

Architecture is the mirror and material of human life. The documentation and critical analysis of the spaces built by human beings make it possible to reconstruct the aspiration and social order of a given civilization in a historical moment.106

Through casting absent space, Whiteread provides a memorial to the space once inhabited and affected by human presence. Through her work, she reminds us of the passing of time and of our own mortality.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Demand’s sculptures-turned-photographs analyze the role of the uncanny and psychologically charged architectural spaces. Demand’s photographs of his paper and cardboard models appear realistic, yet they are also unusually anonymous, abstract, and vacant, producing an uncanny combination of strangeness and familiarity. Baer argues that:

Demand’s photographs do not actually suspend existing stories. They reveal that such stories are as constructed as our notion that the world is available to us as an image. Every photograph offers only evidence of an isolated moment.¹⁰⁶

Demand’s often refers to a violent or cultural historical event in his photographs. He draws upon images already disseminated by the media. His images seem familiar though the locations are not; the site or event may not be easily identified by the viewer, thus evoking an unsettling feeling of anxiety.

As discussed in Chapter Three, Crewdson’s photographs examine the role of haunted space in Crewdson’s cinematic photographs of rural and suburban America. Crewdson is strongly influenced by Hopper and Hitchcock’s psychological thrillers, Vertigo and Psycho. Crewdson’s photographs, like Hitchcock’s films and Hopper’s paintings, emphasize disquieting representations of loneliness, isolation, and unexplained sadness. Recalling the staged photographs of Demand, Crewdson stages his scenes of American neighborhoods, which allow him to turn the ordinary

¹⁰⁶ Baer, 100-101.
into something magical and otherworldly.\textsuperscript{107} His photographs theatricalize everyday life, creating complex and psychologically charged scenes that appear surreal.

Freud was the first to investigate the concept of the “uncanny”. Artists, film directors, and authors use various techniques to instill a sense of the strange into familiar objects, images, and narratives. One final example of the uncanny in the work of two of the artists considered here might be useful to sum up here: let us consider the recurrence in the color green. We associate the color green to life and growth; green is the color of grass and plants. Conversely, the color green can function as the epitome of the “unnatural” or “de-natured” when it appears in a displaced context. Hitchcock, for example, used this mysterious and dream-like green haze in \textit{Vertigo} (Figure 19). As Kim Novak walks through this green haze, the scene is presented with a psychological charge. The green haze is an electric or neon green. It is not the color that is normally associated with plant life or growth. The shade of this green helps play up the eerie and dream-like aspects of the scene. Crewdson uses this haze in many of his photographs.

In Crewdson’s \textit{Untitled (Esther Terrace)}, we see a cloudy haze floating across the street; it is not the same shade of green that we see in \textit{Vertigo}. He employs the green haze to evoke a fear or sense that the space is haunted. Elsewhere, Crewdson favors very intense green in his pictures of (too) perfectly manicured suburban lawns, thus highlighting the artifice of our desire for “nature” in our backyards. Demand also uses a green haze in \textit{Terrace}. The paper lantern that hangs on the right is blue, yet a neon shade of green is cast upon the wall. It is difficult to discern

\textsuperscript{107} Morrow, 29.
Demand’s intentions with addition of the green haze—we can speculate that he uses this green to heighten the viewer’s sense of anxiety. The effects of the glowing green light in addition to the black voids of the window and door create a sense of the uncanny; we fear what person or object will confront us as we stand frozen in time.

The work of Whiteread, Demand, and Crewdson has not been grouped together and examined before. Differences are evident in the contexts of their work. Whiteread’s use of plaster to cast modular sculptures conceptually differs from the sculptures-turned-photographs of Demand. Whiteread solidifies a once forgotten space affected by past inhabitants. Demand’s sculptures are constructed with paper and cardboard to re-present a scene of historical violence. His paper materials create a “disquieting sameness”—they are pristine and anonymous in appearance. These sculptures are devoid of human presence and, in their photographic form, of a scale that the viewer is unable to fully gauge. Demand photographs his sculptures to preserve their appearance. His sculptures are then destroyed, thus leaving the photograph to depict a replication—a historical image of the past in the present. Crewdson consistently uses the Pittsfield, Massachusetts for his outdoor scenes. He hires actors and local citizens to portray his characters. For his indoor scenes, he creates a staged set. His work is comparable to Demand’s as both artists photograph staged scenes to create a sense of the “uncanny” in a photographic representation of the past. Crewdson’s scenes are heightened and surreal—they are too beautiful and crisp to be real.
These artists share common concerns that relate to the psychological aspects of suburban domestic interiors, architecture, and street scenes. These psychologically charged spaces echo Hopper’s mid-twentieth-century paintings. In Whiteread’s, Demand’s, and Crewdson’s work, evocations of aspects of domesticity, violence, or the suburban landscape take on complicated resonances, inflected by specific histories. This analysis of the contemporary uncanny in the work of Whiteread, Demand, and Crewdson leads the way for additional examination and understanding of the “uncanny” and “haunted space” in contemporary art.
Figure 1  Donald Judd
*Untitled (Stack)*
1967
lacquer on galvanized iron
22.8 x 101.6 x 78.7 cm (12 units)
Museum of Modern Art, New York City, New York
Figure 2  Robert Morris
*Untitled (Mirror Cubes)*
1965
mirror plate glass and wood
91.4 x 91.4 x 91.4 cm
Museum of Modern Art, New York City, New York
Figure 3  Rachel Whiteread  
*Closet*  
1988  
plaster, wood, and felt  
160 x 8 x 37 cm  
Museo Madre, Naples, Italy
Figure 4  Rachel Whiteread

_Ghost_

1990
plaster on steel frame
269 x 355.5 x 317.5 cm
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Figure 5  
Rachel Whiteread
*House*
1993
lokcrete with metal armature
Dimensions unknown
Destroyed January 1994
Figure 6  Rachel Whiteread  
*Embankment*  
2005  
polyethylene and cardboard  
various dimensions  
Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London
Figure 7  Edward Hopper  
*House by the Railroad*  
1925  
oil on canvas  
61 x 73.7 cm  
Museum of Modern Art, New York City, New York
Figure 8  Thomas Demand
_Corridor_
1995
c-print/diasect
183.5 x 270 cm
Collection of Thomas Demand
Figure 9  
Thomas Demand  
*Bathroom*  
1997  
c-print/diasect  
160 x 122 cm  
303 Gallery, New York City, New York
Figure 10  Thomas Demand  
*Terrace*  
1998  
c-print/diasect  
183.5 x 268 cm  
Collection of Thomas Demand
Figure 11  
Jacques-Louis David  
*Death of Marat*  
1793  
oil on canvas  
162 x 128 cm  
Musee du Louvre, Paris
Figure 12  Gregory Crewdson
*Untitled (Brief Encounter)*
2006
Digital carbon print
144.8 x 233.5 cm
Luhring Augustine, New York; White Cube, London; Gagosian, Los Angeles
Figure 13  Gregory Crewdson  
*Untitled (Ophelia)*  
2001  
digital carbon print  
121.9 x 152.4 cm  
Museum Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden, Germany.
Figure 14  
Gregory Crewdson  
*Untitled (Esther Terrace)*  
2006  
digital carbon print  
144.8 x 233.5 cm  
Luhring Augustine, New York; White Cube, London; Gagosian, Los Angeles
Figure 15  John Everett Millais
*Ophelia*
1851-1852
oil on canvas
76.2 x 111.8 cm
Tate Britain, London
Figure 16  Edward Hopper  
*Second Story Sunlight*  
1960  
oil on canvas  
101.92 x 127.48 cm  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City, New York
Figure 17  Gregory Crewdson  
*Untitled (Butterflies and Shed)*  
2001-2001  
digital carbon print  
121.9 x 152.4 cm.  
Luhring Augustine, New York; White Cube, London; Gagosian, Los Angeles
Figure 18  Edward Hopper
*Nighthawks*
1942
oil on canvas
84.1 x 152.4 cm.
Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
Figure 19  Alfred Hitchcock
Vertigo
1958
Judy Barton/Madeline Elster, played by Kim Novak
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**DVD**