

A Public Haunted House: the Uncanny Urban Space on Screen

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis investigates how specific urban built forms have been used to unsettle cinema audiences at certain points in cinematic and architectural history. Drawing upon Freud's theory of the uncanny in combination with extensive architectural criticism and discourse on cinema and its intersection with the city, I argue that uncanny architecture provides a fundamental critical framework for representing, expressing and dramatizing fear towards the metropolis. Divided into three chapters I analyze three different architectural epochs revolving around a historical narrative of the emergence, decay and absence of architectural Modernism. Beginning in Weimar Berlin I examine Walter Ruttmann's exploration of first wave Modernity in *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City* (1927) and his exploitation of the primal, mystical uncanniness hidden within a city of proposed rationality, functionalism and strict geometry. I then turn to the architecture of British brutalism and explore a shining modernity decayed into neo-gothic ruins, in Andrea Arnold's *Red Road* (2006) in which a British audience is haunted by the ghost of an earlier social idealism. I then conclude by moving to contemporary Tokyo in Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Pulse* (2001) and confront the uncanniness endemic in a city invested so heavily in non-human technology and "non-architecture". Throughout I argue that the metropolis will always find a way to haunt itself. Ideas of transience, death and spatial disorientation will remain fixed foundations for any developed city and that the urban uncanny is a malleable, shifting condition, consistently capitalized on by the cinema.

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INTRODUCTION

'The uncanny arises out of the supposedly and necessarily empty character of the supernatural as a category; it is not so much that the uncanny fills this category (with ghosts, revenants etc.) – though it may do this readily enough – as that it suggests a fundamental indecision, an obscurity or uncertainty, at the heart of our ontology, our sense of time, place, and history, both personal and cultural' (Collins 2).

In the year 1801 the world's first machine-produced interior iron framework was implemented into the construction of the Phillip and Lee cotton mill in Salford, Manchester (191 Giedion). This seemingly small innovation was to signal the beginning of a sea change in structural urban organization and design, which would forever change our experience of metropolitan dwelling. With the onset of the industrial revolution in the second half of the nineteenth century there materialized a gradual but prolific mechanization of all facets of city life in Britain and beyond. By the turn of the century large swathes of important commercial trading centers such as London, Paris and Berlin had been forever altered by a new and alien topography of mills and factories housing even stranger industrial forms and mechanisms.

Yet it was not until after the First World War that the true impact of these developments was to be felt in the domestic sphere. As the celebrated and influential twentieth century architecture critic Sigfried Giedion states: "it was out of those technical innovations which appear only behind the scenes in nineteenth century architecture, that the architecture of the future had to grow.

Construction was, as it were, the subconsciousness of the architecture: thereby dormant in its impulses that only much later found explicit theoretical statement" (183).

That "theoretical statement" we can broadly take to mean as signifying architectural Modernism. Beginning in earnest in Berlin in the twenties but also in other pockets around central Europe and then eventually the world, architects both domestic and public, now sought to foster a more organized and rationalized version of urban existence previously thought unimaginable. Machine produced artifacts adorned machine produced housing in service to a new type of urban functionality in which "volume and transparency, the regularity of the grid over symmetry and an aura of technical refinement" (34 Sadler) sought to remove any remnants of the Victorian city with its sprawling and disingenuous labyrinths of dark slums and menacing shadows. In their desire to break entirely from the irrational imprecision of the pre-industrial age, Modernist architects informed by a new futurism attempted to remove all sense of "past" from their designs completely (Vidler 63).

Since this period, the trend for the "surgical opening up of cities to circulation and light" has only continued in the drive to forever irradiate all notions of "myth, suspicion or tyranny" (Vidler 168). The idea of an irrational urban dread and anxiety has not disappeared however. Indeed the introduction of new external forms, structures and technologies into the urban environment across the twentieth century has invariably signaled the arrival of new internal psychological fears.

As Anthony Vidler states in his book *The Architectural Uncanny*, from the industrial revolution onwards with the dissolution of a knowable domestic

context, the disappearance of the pictorial representation of the human form ushered in by mechanical design and its eerie inhumanity, the modern city became very much an experience of “generalized uncanny anxiety” (6). In their desire to distance themselves from romanticism and the renaissance with its traditional evocation of ancient civilizations and legends, the Modernists in fact ushered in a whole generation of new ghosts into the city, formed through a troubled human engagement with inhuman forms.

The cinema presented a similar paradox. At the same time as cities were transformed through trams, trains and automobiles, the cinema began to display the manner in which a new technology based upon precision, rationality and mechanical process can often create its own lingering specters and startling effects. As Laura Mulvey has pointed out, this most modern of media in fact often appealed to something much more primal within the public psyche. She claims that “a mind bewildered by optical and other kinds of illusions, doubting the reality of what it sees, is more prepared to be credulous when exposed to emanations of the supernatural” (33). Far from rationalizing a public urban mentality, cinema, in tandem with its surrounding new architecture, often led into a troubling new interior landscape of the uncanny by only further accentuating this new, intensely visual environment of mechanical simulation and trickery.

The Uncanny in Film and Architecture

Appearing in 1919 within the midst of this new urban world and at the height of the defiantly modern horror of the First World War, Sigmund Freud's original essay *The Uncanny* presented a psychoanalytic theory upon the nature of aesthetics that proved quite remarkable in its elusive, fluid and amorphous theoretical character. Put most simply we might summarize the piece as an investigation into the evocation of a very specific type of psychological fear: our unease at that which is at once both familiar and unfamiliar. Yet it seemed to Freud to emanate from an astonishingly wide range of "impressions, processes and situations" (135). As a concept, the uncanny is at once both precise in its terminology and meandering in its manifestation.

The Uncanny has therefore proved a particularly adaptable and useful tool within the context of academic study for observing and analyzing a great variety of different subjects, contexts and narratives within a multitude of different disciplines. As Freud himself points out, the quality by which something might become uncanny is a shifting culturally and aesthetically dependent construct (124-5). There is no single manner by which somewhere, something or someone is uncanny. It is a process of subjective psychological perception that moves in and out of objects and spaces according to the rules and boundaries of a particular historical and social context. It is also a condition, often associated, as Nicholas Royle has stated in his eloquent and exhaustive study upon the subject, "with an experience of the threshold, liminality, margins, borders" and "frontiers" (1).

Indeed taken in isolation one might dismiss *The Uncanny* as of liminal cultural or historical interest given Freud's initial description of the text as an investigation into a "marginal" or "specialist" branch of literature (123). Yet the uncanny has become one of the major metaphorical and theoretical tools of the twentieth and twenty first century for understanding what Vidler has described as "a fundamentally unlivable modern condition" (x). Resurfacing in the nineteen seventies within the humanities after almost half a century "underground" and going on to become what Martin Jay described in 1998 as the "master trope" of that decade (Collins 1), it has haunted human engagement with technology and what we might broadly call a modern architecture since the very beginning of the western industrial age. It is a device that has proved of use within discourses ranging from those of post-colonialism to the mystical and occult.

This new found popularity within the academy and in particular the humanities is inseparable of course from what has been identified as the "spatial turn" in much recent theoretical discourse (Warf, Arias 1). This is an umbrella term used to describe the tendency displayed by many academics in recent years to move away from traditional theoretical analytic frameworks such as semiotics, post structuralism and psychoanalysis in favour of a new focus upon various discourses of "space". As Barney Warf and Santa Arias have commented, this signals a fundamental acceptance of the fact that "space is every bit as important as time in the unfolding of human affairs" and a view in which "geography is not relegated to an afterthought of social relations, but is intimately involved in their construction" (1). As such there has been a great proliferation of discussion on issues such as: our bodily engagement with the city, spatial organization within film and literature, ideas of globalism and how

our understanding of space has shifted through various new virtual and actual transportative technologies, to name but a few.

This is a development however that gels quite naturally with Freud's original concept, which as Vidler points out has always had a fundamental and persistent sense of "spatiality" built into it (x). Invariably the basic mechanics of an uncanny effect are found to be dependent upon the stylistic formation of its surrounding architecture or landscape. Instances and images such as faces half glimpsed through windows, the loss of one's orientation within a familiar urban district or the revealing of a hidden room or cellar within a family home for example, all remain framed and shaped by our psychic engagement with space. Quite often it is the altering of an organization of a space and its boundaries, which then causes us to recoil in horror as the borders of what we considered familiar or unfamiliar, usually defined by the thresholds of doors, passages or walls is shifted, exploited or obscured.

This thesis sets out to apply Freud's formulation of the uncanny within a study of urban space and architecture in the post-industrial city as represented by cinema. Cinema and architecture have shared a long and close relationship. René Clair famously stated that "the art which is closest to cinema is architecture" (qtd. by Virilio 69). Film and architecture both map, dictate and construct our most basic understanding of landscape and space. As media they similarly divide, colonize and rationalize for us what would otherwise -- in both the image of a blank screen or an empty vista—remain abstracted, blank and expansive.

Filmic techniques in combination with built forms can reveal hidden qualities and new spatial depths to architecture. As Giuliana Bruno states, by

taking a cue from Eisenstein, “film, like architecture – apparently static – is shaped by the montage of spectatorial movements” (57). By analyzing these twin spatial media we find a major visual and theoretical framework for the uncanny. The cinema can unlock and heighten the visual uncanny potential within built structures, which employ a sense of mobility, disorientation, structural repetition or general otherworldliness. Both separately and in combination we find two media providing measureable and definable systems of spatial organization for Freud’s condition of the uncanny.

If one fundamental theoretical aspect of the uncanny is its spatiality, then the other most irrefutably, is a focus upon visuality and the act of seeing. Indeed the uncanny is often predicated almost entirely on the effect and exploitation of arresting and troubling images. Not only is this signified through Freud’s exploration of the menacing and lifeless visage of automatons and dolls in his essay but also more explicitly in the central position he affords Hoffman’s tale of *The Sandman*, in which bodily violence towards a child’s eyes forms a central narrative uncanny premise. Hoffman’s description of the piercing and removal of the eyeball is perhaps the final abject conclusion of an aesthetic psychoanalytic theory invested entirely in a discussion of what it means to “not believe ones eyes”.

The cinema clearly then provides the perfect vehicle for this theory. As a medium it has since its inception worked consistently to manipulate and deceive the eye in search of seemingly magical psychic effects. Many of Freud’s formulations of what a condition of the uncanny might mean have found their most highly defined visual and sensory form of representation within the flickering lines and curvatures of the cinema screen. Cinema preserves ghosts. It

immerses us into the world of the mechanical and deathly (Mulvey 33-53). It records spaces and structures in the landscape, which have long since vanished. The movie camera, with its visual tricks and deathly mechanics becomes the ideal tool for accentuating and identifying the uncanny spatial traits of the technological metropolis “travelling”, as Andrew Webber has put it, “apparently disembodied through the spaces of the city” as some kind of “ghostly machine” (6).

The Uncanny and the Death Instinct

It is first necessary of course to set out more clearly exactly what Freud meant when using the term “uncanny” and how I shall be using it from this point forward. Initially Freud embarks to examine what he calls the “specific affective nucleus” of that which “evokes fear and dread” (123) often arising within a context of “intellectual uncertainty” or disorientation (Jentsch qtd. by Freud 140). Such situations, he wrote, lead to incidents in which one’s sense of what is “heimlich” (familiar) and “unheimlich” (unfamiliar) becomes inverted or confused. He observed that when an object, person or place that we thought was of one nature reveals itself to be of another the psyche then often experiences an acute sense of fright or anxiety. An obvious example of this reaction might be the discovery of the inanimate and lifeless nature of a manikin, masquerading through trickery as an animate human form. In this way the psyche performs a specific type of fearful shudder whenever the “lifeless bears an excessive likeness to the living” (Freud 141).

At the heart of this process is the idea of “the double” (142). It is when we are confronted with a certain form of doubling or unexpected repetition in the process of mental perception that the uncanny occurs. As a result it is invariably devices such as dummies, dolls or the experience of losing one’s way on a foggy path only to return again and again to the same spot, which most commonly provoke an uncanny reaction in the psyche. The brain recoils with a quite unique type of anxiety when the unfamiliar invades, corrupts or multiplies that which we have previously considered mundane or unremarkable.

At points of “intellectual uncertainty” such as this Freud states that the “boundary between reality and fantasy is blurred” (150). Our certainty is shaken about the nature of a previously rationalized symbol or signifier as its meaning shifts in the face of an irrational fear. As a result, the spaces and objects around us can become suddenly destabilized through the lurking constant threat of psychological menace. All that is most familiar to us might perceptibly alter in its benign affect at any moment given the right (or wrong) aesthetic context or circumstance.

In terms of explaining why such a strong reaction might occur Freud initially seems vague. Indeed by far the strangest element of the essay is his refusal to settle upon a single mode of explanation for this seemingly irrational fear. The text wanders and roams between a variety of different case studies, hypotheses and recurring instances that might provoke in us a feeling of the uncanny without ever providing a unified line of reasoned psychoanalytic explanation. The reader is merely given obtuse references to the frequent sense of “return” contained within the uncanny to something more primitive in our mental development “that was once long familiar” but has since been repressed

(Freud 124). Or we are presented with his most mysterious comment that the double is “the uncanny harbinger of death” (142). It is only when placed within his full bibliography however that the essay truly reveals itself as a tantalizing and imaginative theoretical precursor to his most radical psychoanalytic formulation in 1921 of the death instinct. Read retrospectively, as Nicholas Royle states, “the death drive lurks, as if forbidden to speak its name, everywhere in the 1919 essay” and in “eerie silence” (86).

In this later text Freud speaks at length of the idea that from the earliest age of development the animate living form will always maintain at least a partial unconscious desire to return to the inanimate state from which it originally emerged (36). Here Freud identifies two competing drives within the human psyche: the “life instinct”—as embodied within procreative sexual desire and our sense of self-preservation—and the “death instinct”—as displayed within acts of both sadism and masochism and neurotic obsessive behaviour in which the psyche willfully causes itself “unpleasure” to attain a “pleasure” – exemplified by obsessively returning to an unpleasant event in our mind in the hope of better understanding it (33).

These drives then remain in constant competition (49) with the death instinct generally relegated to the realm of the unconscious or resurfacing only within neurotic disorders. Yet it becomes clear when read in unison with Freud’s earlier essay that it is a slippage between these two urges that often signifies an uncanny effect. Our “uncanny” unease at doublings or unexpected “repetitions” (as found within dolls and mechanical automations) clearly, according to Freud, alludes to the primal desire inherent in all organic life to: “restore to an earlier state of things” and return to the state of “inertia” from which all life springs

(36). Dolls, machinery and any number of unliving “doubles”, as found within the modern metropolis often moving as if by magic, highlight in their technological limitation and capacity to either break or stop the fundamental tendency for stillness and death within the animated living form.

The uncanny therefore remains such a poignant and malleable theoretical tool across so many different disciplines because it often interrogates the only human certainty: our own eventual absence. In Freudian terms, if the uncanny signifies a sense of “return” in the psyche, it is because we are glimpsing what it might mean to “return” to the unknowable nothingness from which we came.

This thesis will not always treat instances of the uncanny as symbolic of an innate desire for death within the human psyche, yet I do wish to capitalize upon it as a way of reading and describing the inherently deathly or transient nature of much contemporary urban life. In its structural historical palimpsest, ability to outlast us and in its technological advancement, the modern city demands a constant engagement with forms and spaces, which are in truth far closer to our absence or inertia than our transient, animate and finite mortal state. Uncanny urban effects found in spatial doublings, decayed or vanished buildings, allow for a reminder of the fact that the city, however much we may invest it with our utopian hopes, designs or grievances, will eventually move thoughtlessly on without us.

It is also essential to note here, as Freud does, that the German words “heimlich” and “unheimlich” themselves are by no means fixed in their meaning. Listing a variety of different translations within the essay, Freud also points out that another formulation of the two might be as “homely” or “unhomely” (133). This is an idea that has since been taken up enthusiastically by Vidler and will

serve as a fundamental spatial dichotomy within this thesis for describing instances of the urban uncanny on screen. Vidler puts forward the idea that the unsettling nature of the modern city is often caused through an interplay between these two terms as the boundary and significance of “the threshold” (6) within the modern metropolis, and its ability to serve as a dividing line between the home and the outside world, has become drastically altered. With the advent of railways, commuter travel and the immense covered interiors of shopping arcades at the historical inception of the modern metropolis, the boundary between public and private, interior and exterior, as well as the very permanence of “dwelling” (with the introduction of rented apartments) came into question. Thus when analyzing specific urban spaces on screen and in my consideration of their uncanny effect I will consistently examine their position in relation to the private and public sphere and precisely how what is “homely” or “unhomely” is both spatially and psychologically delineated. For as Heidegger wrote in his famous *Letter on Humanism* in 1947, “homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the modern world” (Heidegger 219).

As a guiding narrative throughout the thesis I will employ a detailed and precise investigation into the architectural styles and forms of several key historical periods, revolving broadly around the birth, decay and eventual disappearance of the Modernist project from world cities as represented and explored by the cinema. By analyzing and observing films that have all used the urban topography to unsettle or provoke fear in the viewer, I wish to examine how cinema has traversed and embellished upon an architectural uncanny throughout the twentieth and early twenty first century. For if we are to accept the claim of Giedion that architecture is the “unmistakable index to what was

really going on in a period" and "indispensable when we are seeking to evaluate that period" (19) then an even more tantalizing concern is to investigate the uncanny architecture of a period.

In terms of cultural and historical significance, the uncanny can reveal to us the limitations and boundaries of what is familiar and unfamiliar to us in our perception of the built environment at any given time. Exploring the stylistic forms and modes of urban organization that have fundamentally ruptured or troubled the public psyche can teach us the conceptual end points and plateaus of rationality within the urban experience throughout the modern age. Each new architectural epoch therefore, with its own unique housing of the uncanny, provides a definable and measurable framework within which to examine exactly what is or is not uncanny for each generation. Which urban structural forms, materials and vernaculars cause anxiety for which cities, at which time and why? And furthermore how has this been capitalized upon and exploited by the cinema, a medium which has long made the most of "haunted houses".

I have chosen three case studies of uncanny architecture on screen from three separate architectural epochs. The psychological effects, anxieties and fears we find in these films are not exclusive to the time periods they depict however. While the uncanny is an amorphous condition, it deals with an immovable and eternal idea: our anxiety over death and non-existence. One might find similar aesthetic tropes and effects in a variety of historical architectural periods on screen, from a variety of different geographic or national locations. While the specific mechanics of their uncanny effects may be unique, the condition of their uncanny end point is not.

To illuminate this point I have chosen three cities that all share a common history in that they have at one time or another, undergone some form of extensive structural damage. Berlin, London and Tokyo all suffered varying degrees of architectural destruction during the Second World War. These three disparate examples will I hope serve to identify ideas of transience, anxiety, desolation and the destructive passage of time as universally informative of the foundation of any developed technological city. I have also chosen these cities as they all communicate something to us about the uncanny potential of the Modernist style in the public consciousness, whether signified through its bombastic presence, spectral memory or total absence.

In order to carry out such an investigation I will employ a combination of references to both architectural theory and criticism in tandem with more theoretical notions of the city dealing with an urban psychology of spaces. For as Andrew Webber has pointed out, "the density of the metropolis in its exterior spatial organization – which is often taken, metonymically, to be 'the city' – is massively complicated by its character as an amalgamation of interiors" (6). When considering this interior and more figurative dimension of the city I will draw consistently from the writings of Walter Benjamin whose work, particularly within his unfinished *Arcades Project*, sits specifically at the threshold between the interior and exterior of city space.

Ruminating upon what he called the phantasmagoria of city life in late nineteenth century Paris--"the transformation of the urban world into a visual and spatial spectacle" habited by "the shadowy hauntings of the fleeting and insubstantial" (Collins 1)--Benjamin consistently found a troubling confusion between that which could be considered either internal or external in the

modern metropolis. He saw the modern city as a disturbing new environment in which space constantly “opens up as a landscape, even as it encloses round (one) in a room” (Arcades 417).

We can take this dichotomy between interior and exterior as something both literal and more figurative. In one sense quite literally as the introduction of covered commercial buildings blurred the physical boundary between the exterior street and a roofed or housed interior space and yet also more metaphorically as the aesthetic strangeness of new external built forms forced the psyche inwards through “interior” psychological and defiantly uncanny effects.

For example when describing the “arcades, interieurs, exhibition halls and panoramas” of Paris Benjamin describes them as “the residues of a dream world” and “the realization of dream elements in the course of waking up” (Arcades Project 45). He positions this architecture of a new modernity as existing as much within the mental sphere as in the material world. This is a theoretical stance that we can clearly take as uncanny. Benjamin locates the arcades as standing at exactly the spatial point of “intellectual uncertainty” and spatial unfamiliar familiarity between “reality and fantasy” that Freud cites.

A paradigm for this idea is highlighted through Benjamin’s account of the introduction of first gas and then electric lighting in Paris in which he explicitly references the “uncanny” and “brutal shock” provoked at the spectacle of “entire cities, being suddenly illuminated by electric light” (Modern Life 82). The event signals an external trauma which then leads towards internal turmoil by confusing or inverting a sense of “homeliness”. The illuminations gesture towards an idea of comfort and domesticated fireside security and yet they

remain alien, alarming and cold in their synthetic-ness and industrial scale. Such devices blur the threshold between the homely house and the unhomely exterior city and provoke an interior, primal affect, in which urban technology by way of the uncanny reveals its true deathly, inhuman and yet often aesthetically seductive quality.

The urban uncanny was only augmented through the cinema. Because cinema was a medium unique in history due to its capacity for both reflection upon the urban topography and in its position as a new, alien piece of technology itself, it allowed for a complete immersion inside the true uncanny promise of an increasingly abstracted urban reality. As Giuliana Bruno points out when placed upon trams, trains or cars in the films described as “phantom rides” at the beginning of the twentieth century, “the camera becomes the vehicle” (20). It “becomes” an unnerving agent of the uncanny not only in its ghostly, automated movement but also through an alignment with the deathly stillness inherent in a piece of moving technology. The cinema through material kinship accentuated these technological forms as inhuman and indifferent devices, which both delight and simultaneously alarm us. Propelled without human labour and by a cold rationality the cinema could provide genuine and disturbing “views from inside the machine age” (Bruno 22).

Beginning with the city of modernity of which Benjamin and Bruno have specifically spoken, my first chapter will deal with nineteen twenties Berlin as represented in Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927). During this period Berlin was home to the Bauhaus school, which along with the Congress of Modern Architecture, formed the corner stone of the international Modern Movement. The Bauhaus proliferated, a vision of Modernism which was

unquestioningly rational and forthright, prioritizing function and universalism over avant-garde stylistic traits and employed the fundamental belief that architectural form dictated and precipitated social change. By examining Rutmann's film I shall observe the manner in which cinematically the film equally seeks to rationalize and reduce the city to a represented grid of knowable shapes and volumes while often only further accentuating Benjamin's vision of the city as a dreamscape. Ideas of interiority and the very problem of "dwelling" are evoked through the introduction of radical new built forms into the city, and are confronted.

Chapter Two considers the now infamous architecture of the New Brutalism in Britain during the nineteen fifties and sixties as screened in Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and more recently in Andrea Arnold's *Red Road* (2006). These are two films in which we see the unified modernist zeal of the twenties in glaring absence as the twisting, labyrinthine concrete structures championed by Alison and Peter Smithson and James Stirling are reconfigured as frightening neo-gothic spaces of the decayed metropolis. In these films brutalist architectural spaces are screened as hyper-realized dystopian environments forming an architectural uncanny not only in their deployment of shadows, darkness and spatial confusion but also historically in their evocation of memories of a lost idealism and cultural ideological unity within the architectural process. I shall examine how these spaces in their retro futurism in fact fulfill a highly romantic, pre-modern and more traditional idea of the uncanny gothic space. By employing "staring walls" and decrepit memory-soaked hallways, such spaces effectively fulfill Fred Botting's idea that the gothic

has throughout recent history served as a shadowy and adaptable “underside” to Modernism and “its enlightenment and humanist values” (2).

I shall then conclude with a consideration of what has been described by anthropologist Marc Augé as the urban “non-place” on screen by drawing from Kiyoshi Kurosawa’s Tokyo-based film *Pulse* (2001). Capitalizing upon a hyper-real and de-centered urban landscape of transit, virtuality and vanished industry Kurosawa’s film utilizes an architectural uncanny created not so much through specific external forms or structural styles but more through the absence of an urban presence. This section will also serve somewhat as an architectural eulogy to Modernism. For a topography such as this fulfills the ultimate abandonment of the unity of the Modernist project by signifying a (non) architecture, concerned less with the introduction of new radical forms and functions into the city and more a disparate patchwork canvass of varying “scenographies” comprised of “flaccid”, cheap and anonymous sites of transit (Ghirado 42). I also here provide a brief look into what the future holds for cinema and its exploration of new and uncanny urban forms, and how we might move beyond the apocalyptic and influential rhetoric of post-modern urban theorists such as Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio.

By presenting more than merely continued vague references towards cultural anxiety or urban dread within the modern city, I wish in this thesis to quite specifically locate a correlation between the uncanny psychological process and individual architectural forms on screen. Much of what is unsettling about the modern city can be bracketed under an argument as broad and malleable as the uncanny, but I wish to identify exactly how, when and why the cinematic city has fostered an uncanny space over a particular historical period and with what

built structures. I shall work from the basic premise that throughout the modern age architecture and cinema have both consistently served as mediators between the material and figurative qualities of city life “in ways that can be both primitive and visceral” (Ballatyne 23) and as essential indicators of the rational limitation of each generation’s public imagination and sense of mental security.

CHAPTER ONE

Lost Houses: Berlin and Modernity

Throughout the nineteen twenties and early thirties in Weimar Germany Berlin became an international beacon for Modernism. Architects, artists and government were united in their attempt to “come to terms” with the age of the machine and mass industrial commerce (Banham 281). An unbounded faith in technology, plurality and efficiency ruled within both the art schools and local councils as large-scale solutions were sought for widespread social challenges. This was to signal the birth of the Modern Movement, a loose international group of sympathetically minded architects and designers, who as Simon Sadler states, “took the revolutionary, firebrand mission of the avant garde and packaged it as reasoned, methodical and authoritative” (34), designing mass solutions for apparently “universal” problems.

With an astonishingly rapid wave of industrial expansion in the city after World War One Berliners suddenly found themselves living within the most fully realized vision of technological urban modernity that the world had ever seen. With its gargantuan steel bridges, extensive public transport system, shimmering glass fronted department stores and, most significantly, vast new swathes of apartment-based social housing Berlin was the city of the future.

At the heart of this modernization process and pioneering spirit was the Bauhaus. Set up in 1917 by Walter Gropius in Weimar and with a radical new workshop based approach to multi-disciplinary design, the school became the world leader of the Modern Movement, teaching and proliferating a technique of all encompassing “total design” (Banham 275), built upon Bruno Taut’s belief that “at this point there will be no boundaries between the crafts, sculpture and

painting, all will be one: Architecture" (Taut qtd by Frampton, 123). In thrall to the age of "New Objectivity", ushered in by large scale production technology, the Bauhaus students were taught their craft not in service to art for arts sake or in the name of personal expression but to consciously prepare themselves for mass production and industrial commerce (Frampton 126). This was finally a realization of the growing marriage between industry and art that had been identified and explored by intellectual urbanists and architects such as Walter Benjamin and Sigfried Giedion since as far back as the 1870's: the age of the engineer (Giedion 214).

What is perhaps most surprising, however, as the architectural historian and critic Reyner Banham has observed, is the extent to which radical architectural thinking was actually put into real physical practice causing a direct and irrefutable impact upon citizens' day to day domestic lives. From 1924 onwards "progressive organs of local government" began to commission and build "designs for large scale, low-cost housing developments" with a "surprisingly large proportion" of the work going to "comparatively extreme Modernists" (Banham 272). Through this unique marriage of economic circumstance and radical architectural theory, Germany, but primarily Berlin, found its urban topography quite drastically and rapidly altered. Buildings deploying new synthetic materials and functional forms of structure were no longer hiding "behind the scenes" within the columns and girders of mills and factories as they had been for nearly eighty years since the onset of the industrial revolution but were now out in the open and imposed upon the public space and consciousness (Mertins 204).

With their disavowal of the past or any concept of historical aesthetic and structural continuity, architects and designers looked forward towards a brave new world of standardization, speed, cleanliness and an endemic sense of “nowness”. They were energized by the possibilities suddenly open to them by way of a new perceived technological and spatiotemporal “simultaneity” (Giedion 436). Writing in 1926 Swiss architect and eventual director of the Bauhaus Hans Meyer proclaimed ecstatically of a “New World” in which “Borrough’s calculating machine sets free our brain, the dictaphone our hand, Ford’s Motor Car our place-bound senses and Handley Page our earthbound spirits”, how “the stadium has carried the day against the art museum, and physical reality has taken the place of beautiful illusion”. Most significant however is his unequivocal assertion, which was engrained within the Modern Movement, that “the unqualified affirmation of the present age presupposes the ruthless denial of the past” (Meyer 106-7).

Architects now wished to lay the ghost of the Victorian city to rest for good. With its squalor, chaotic sense of geography, disease and dilapidated housing, its age worn walls and closed off cellars housing Gothic revival superstitions and pre-industrial irrational secrets (now apparently blown apart by psychoanalysis and technology), the Modernists envisioned a new city of grids and zones ruled by structural geometry rather than blind generational palimpsest. In their minds an architecture reflecting such thinking would prepare citizens for the perceived “marathon of modern life” with its new rules, challenges and boundaries (Vidler 63). The buildings of the future therefore would need to be entirely different from anything that had come before.

Yet the specter of the past could never quite be exorcised. As Meyer's architectural peer and kindred intellectual spirit in France Le Corbusier wrote in 1924, despite the fact that "little by little this new spirit is forming", "the greatest crisis of the present day stems from the conflict between our new situation and our way of thinking which is retarded by adherence to traditional practices and beliefs" (Le Corbusier 135). Somewhat annoyingly for the Modernists, the fact of the matter was that many citizens, unlike their architects, *liked* these old remnants of days gone by. As Andrew Ballantyne reminds us, "clapped out old buildings", can "symbolize continuity and stability if they have 'always' been there" (22).

The exchange of history between differing structural forms, from different epochs, can in this sense provide a readily manageable narrative of "homeliness" and linear history within metropolitan life that was in stark contrast to Meyer's "ruthless denial of the past". And this has proved a popular stance that, in the long run, has led to the failure of architectural Modernism in Europe and eventually the world. Throughout the twentieth century the contemporary city has consistently defied the unified vision of the Modern Movement and instead opted for a multi textural, often schizophrenic patchwork of disparate styles and individual aesthetic visions sprawling ever outwards. It is this conflict and disjunction of spatial organization however that I wish to pursue, exploring Walter Benjamin's gambit that in the historical dialectic of urban topography: "modernity is always citing primal history" (41).

The uncanny is formed within the conflict formed by the dissonant gap between old ideals and new, and consequently, the familiar and the unfamiliar. Festering at the edges of the rational urban grid, within the stalled engine of the

high-speed locomotive and buried in the dull eyes of the department store manikin, an uncanny deathly stillness and invitation towards more primal fears will always lie in wait for the unsuspecting citizen. In Weimar Berlin, especially in the wake of this “denial of the past” and in its new architecture the city often seemed to harbour a particularly high concentration of “more mysterious, uncanny and always potentially traumatic shadow sites and sights” (Webber 69). In its attempt to deny all vestiges of the past and traditional spatial superstitions, the emergent modern city in fact often fostered something far more troubling: the sense that if much of this new world was “unhomely” it was because the very historical concept and measurement of what was “homely” had now irrevocably been shifted in the public imagination by strange new urban designs (64 Vidler).

This chapter shall examine this new architecture and space-time of uncanny “shadow sites” as represented in Walter Ruttmann’s celebrated 1927 film *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City*. To undertake such an analysis, especially within the context of the uncanny, is of course to enter into a somewhat crowded discursive arena, as there have been several recent investigations of Ruttmann’s film in conjunction with ideas of a first wave modernity and its uncanny “shock of the new” in recent years.

Andrew Webber for example has spoken of the uncanny relationship between automated transit and stillness in Ruttmann’s film by stating that everywhere throughout the film, despite its hectic pace and obsession with new moving technology, the threat of inertia lies in wait. In the capacity for trains and trams to crash and in Ruttmann’s “mechanical” and regulated treatment of the city as a cold and deathly series of planes and volumes, he identifies a much quieter and ominous sense of primal stillness waiting in the wings of the busy

modern metropolis (Webber 56-71). Carsten Strathausen similarly finds an uncanniness in the mechanized nature of the film and the fusion between man and machinery into something like an early example of Donna Haraway's famous "cyborg" (33) in which the human is "dissolved into the new life organism of the metropolis" (30). Nora M Alter and Thomas Elsaesser have also both provided long and detailed analyses of Ruttman's film and its uncanny potential by examining the context of the human within a new and alien technological city.

Despite repeated references in all these articles to a "new architecture" however and the Modernist project of "transparency" in reconfiguring the spatial gloom and darkness of the pre-modern city (Strathausen 15), the extent to which these critics have actually engaged with specific structural forms and their individual relationship to the cinema, remains vague. Indeed across the board, in a burgeoning discourse of cinema and "the urban" in light of the spatial turn in the humanities (Koeck and Roberts 1) and a much lauded and apparently proliferating intersection between the study of architecture and cinema in recent years (Koeck and Roberts 2010, Penz and Thomas 1997, Lamster 2000), it has been surprising to note the lack of attention paid to the simple matter of what built forms do what.

For this reason I wish to frame my analysis of Ruttman and the uncanny within strictly structural, architectural and more precise spatial terms. Such a maneuver I hope will not only capitalize upon the sense of "spatiality" endemic within Freud's original theory but also serve as a means of demonstrating the particularly close historical, aesthetic and affective relationship shared between cinema and the architecture of the Modernists throughout the Weimar period.

Also, by using the literal structural narrative of “the house” as a manner in which to measure and explore the unhomely, I hope to provide a degree of theoretical and analytic precision when exploring the uncanniness of space in Ruttman’s film that has perhaps been absent in other, more general explorations of Berlin and its broadly troubling “modernity”. Rather than simply regarding the city as a blurred and shifting mass visual, made from a disparate miasma of different elements in constant transit (Clarke 1997, Webber 2008), a perspective we can attach to the now deeply academically engrained and much discussed figure of the Flaneur (Koeck and Roberts 2), I wish to pause and look at several key structures on screen in isolation and examine exactly what about them is uncanny.

I also wish to use the film as a way of exploring the urban environment as a site of mass uncanny effect, not only in its recording and identifying of specific architectural forms, but also through the manner in which, as a film, it offers a unique and often uncanny point of technological mediation between interior trauma and external built space, at a specific point in history. For as Richard Koeck and Les Roberts have commented “of the celebrated ‘coincidences’ that the birth of cinema shared with other emerging Modernist projects”, “cinema’s emergence as a quintessentially *urban* set of practices has ensured that the city and the moving image have remained inseparable constituents of the modern urban imaginary” (1). Throughout my analysis I shall thus employ an examination of Berlin’s Weimar architecture and its theorists in tandem with an investigation into its subsequent psychic and more conceptual implications, by drawing upon figures who all wrote and ruminated upon the city in the wake of

the industrial revolution such as Georg Simmel, Sigfried Giedion and the “doyen of urban modernist thinking” Walter Benjamin (Webber 3).

As a number of critics have pointed out, Benjamin himself considered the movie camera as the perfect tool for revealing and further understanding the new technologically driven reconfiguration of space that had developed since the mid nineteenth century. Writing in 1935 he famously exclaimed that “with the close-up, space expands; with slow motion movement is extended”, and that the “enlargement of the snap-shot” can “reveal entirely new structural formations”. The medium of film according to Benjamin offered nothing less revolutionary than an introduction to a new world of “unconscious optics” (Art 12). Whether or not he had Ruttman’s film in mind (which had been released 8 years previously) when writing his essay remains unclear but all of these claims are put into striking effect within *Berlin* and so throughout my thesis I shall regard the medium of cinema as Benjamin saw it to be: a dynamic and unique insight into hidden and potentially unsettling modes of spatial practice.

A Symphony for the Machines

Organized into five Acts, Ruttmann’s film presents us with a prolonged meditation upon a single twenty-four hour time cycle within Berlin. Utilizing concealed camera footage, staged events and a prodigious deployment of rapid montage and cutaways, the film seeks less to document the city as a subject than to get inside the very industrial rhythm of it. Often relegating its citizens to the realm of mere shadow forms on screen or swaying members of a faceless crowd organized by strict patterns of mechanical work and rigorous spatial

streamlining (something criticized vehemently by Siegfried Kracauer (187) upon its release), the film presents the city as an abstracted and interlocking web of planes, surfaces and volumes. This was an attitude to cinematic representation symptomatic of much Weimar film however, which, like the Bauhaus, as Thomas Elsaesser has observed, was often far more concerned with responding to commerce and technology, than functioning as a form of traditionally expressive or sympathetic “art” (3).

In this sense the film is uncanny in a way that another “city film” such as Vertov’s *Man With a Movie Camera* is not. Instead of portraying a harmonious or mutually beneficial union between humans and technology or even one of ownership and servitude, Ruttman presents us with a city that seems to move happily on without us. The metropolis violently and eerily dominates the citizen who often appears more as a trespasser upon an alien landscape than as the spoiled, liberated master of new technology as promised to the public by Modernists such as Meyer. Throughout the film we gain a prolonged “view from inside the machine age” (Bruno 23). The camera is cold, dynamic and unfeeling, in tune with the machinery, architecture and industrial rhythms that it documents. We remain unwaveringly within the territory of the uncanny as the human, animated form is filtered consistently through the inhuman and inert mechanism of the camera (Webber 57).

Indeed our first impression of Berlin in the film is entirely devoid of humanity. The opening close up shot of the surface of the sea with its own complex canvass of interweaving lines and spatial rhythms gradually morphs into a similar pattern of telegraph lines, electric cables and train tracks. We then travel into the city with a fixed camera shooting out of a train window. Upon

arrival in the early morning before the commencement of work, the city is presented as deserted, silent and mysterious. It is also uncanny in the most overt sense as an unsettling sense of the unfamiliar or eerie invades a topos of the acutely familiar and everyday. Once drained of traffic, crowds and noise the empty streets and concourses become quite unnerving (see fig.1).



Fig. 1 – An Uncanny Urban Stage: Act 1, *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*

The city is seemingly not a place for humans but a landscape that exists on its own terms populated by a host of strange, bastardized and inhuman industrial forms communicated in an ominous series of close ups and cut up visual fragments. Placed in close juxtaposition with the natural spectacle of the water, it is as if the city and its synthetic shapes have grown up organically from the earth and without human invention. The complex intercrossing lines and volumes of the city appear as a vast internal nervous system which materializes out of nowhere, mirroring the primal geometry of the natural element that we are first shown. The city of the future is uncanny in this sense because it appears to exist “ex-nihilo” and beyond our means of comprehension. It is mystical.

This primal effect points to the fact that more than merely providing cheap shocks through “doublings”, dummies and the threat of a desensitizing

technology, Ruttman instills Berlin's new technology with a genuinely mythic sense of uncanny fear, fulfilling Benjamin's linkage between modernity and primal history. It also proves Corbusier's criticism that the pursuit of new forms and ideas by the Modern Movement were persistently "retarded" by the adherence to old habits and superstitions. The shots of mysterious factory machines at the beginning of the film appear in a pre-human context before we are introduced to any human subjects, and they soon take on a symbolic or unconscious significance in the mind of the viewer, suggesting something primal, or long forgotten which lies at the very heart of the city and outside of human comprehension. They guard the gateways to the city as we arrive by train and begin to move towards the center (see fig. 2). We are shown a variety of different machines from different factories and train yards but presented with no exploration of their functional anatomy or actual industrial purpose. Instead they all merely share a writhing and twisted form which appears almost organic or monolithic.

The huge curved sections and portions of this industrial machinery which we are only shown in fragments, are as still and unmoving as before the commencement of work. They seem to have grown up from the very surface of the earth and then will linger in the memory once the city is later bustling and animated. Indeed one might say that they are presented as silent prehistoric monsters lounging among shadowy caves as the ancestors of this later history. Such an archaic, fantastical reading of the eminently modern is suggestive of the fact that built into this new topography of structural, machine-driven functionalism was perhaps an equal sense of fantasy and irrationality. This was certainly a quality observed by Benjamin who fundamentally saw the

“phantasmagoria” of capitalism as mythic. Or at least as a phenomenon, which, in its transient and illusory nature, indulged the tendency for mythic belief within the human psyche (Mertins 198).



Fig. 2 - Industrial monsters and monoliths

Through an uncanny effect, structures such as the ones explored by Ruttmann here undermine post-industrial rationality by indulging primal and monstrous fears by “returning” us to an apparently “long surmounted” set of beliefs (see fig. 2) (Freud 154). Stripped of their function they are simply presented as menacing monoliths devoid of a recognizable face or visage. We are shown merely the divorced curvatures of pipes apart from their whole structure or the compository cogs of larger wheels in macro close-up and so they are reconfigured into surfaces and shapes floating as abstract forms within filmic space. The film unlocks and reveals the dormant potential within everyday industrial forms for more metaphysical perspectives. Or to repeat a phrase by Benjamin “they linger on the threshold” as “residues of a dream world”. They are “the realization of dream elements in the course of waking up” (Modern Life 45) positioned at the uncanny and disorientating spatial boundary, “half way between reality and fantasy” (Freud 150).

Such instances back up Carsten Strathausen's accusation that Ruttman's film, and indeed the rational Modernism it immerses itself in, ultimately remains something of a "failure" (18). However much the film may map and direct its action according to the strict lines and spatial delineations of the Modernist grid, the images which linger in our memories, and indeed the spaces and objects with which Ruttman's camera remains most concerned, gesture towards something much more imprecise, irrational and primordially frightful. Speaking of *Berlin* and Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera*, and their subscription to Meyer's utopian descriptions of a new born functionalism and technologically driven "simultaneity", Strathausen states: "the goal remains the same – namely to eradicate the fear of darkness and multiplicity that haunts modernity" yet "Vertov and Ruttman fail in their efforts because they ultimately end up projecting this fear onto technology and city life itself" (18). Despite the rigorous theoretical proclamations of figures such as Meyer, Gropius and Taut of a new objectivity, the uncanny will always find a new way to haunt the city, for it is perpetually and necessarily "modernity's blind spot" (Strathausen 16).

New Fantasies

Such readings of filmic space and architecture do not need to remain merely within the realms of conceptual filmic theory however. Despite its strict functionalism and rationalism, there was a quite pronounced sense of "fantasy" deliberately built into much of the new architecture as conceived and proliferated by the Bauhaus. As Gropius himself said, although rigorously functional these buildings were equally meant as structural "symbols" for the

new world (Gropius qtd. by Banham 321) so they needed therefore to have a degree of figurative and more poetic gesticulation built into their machine-like facades.

In a striking formulation of structural theory highly reminiscent of Benjamin's own separation between the material structures of capitalism and their unintended phantasmagorical consequences, the French filmmaker and painter Fernand Leger stated in 1924 quite unequivocally that "every machine object possesses two material qualities: one, which is often painted and light absorbent", and "is fixed (architectural value)" and "the other (most frequently bare metal) which reflects light, and fulfills the role of limitless fantasy" (152). This is something we can clearly see in the "industrial monsters" above in that they serve a very qualifiable and rational industrial function yet at the same time, in their glistening and ominous twisted shapes, send the imagination spiraling into abstracted and primal depths. While they may have been keen to separate themselves from more traditional and "irrational" ideas of lyricism, the Modernists still allowed for a degree of fantastical indulgence within their designs with which to stimulate the viewer's imagination. It merely occurred by way of new and dynamic structural and spatial means.

Not least because they employed a spatial perspective, different from anything that had gone before them. By taking their inspiration from Cubism and the shapes and lines of machines such as the ones above, and then incorporating them into ideas of domestic design, rather than the age old symmetries of the Renaissance or Baroque (Wolfflin 78), the perspective of the Modernists was one of mobile simultaneity rather than static cohesion. As Giedion (much quoted and admired by Benjamin) stated of these new structures, "the advancing and

retreating planes of cubism, interpenetrating, hovering, often transparent, without anything to fix them in realistic position, are in fundamental contrast to the lines of perspective, which converge to a single focal point". (Giedion 437)

These buildings created a continuously "floating interrelation in space" for which there was no "human measure" (449). In this sense the modern city took the deathly and human-less idea of uncanny spatial effect as a foundational structural starting point. By confusing and destroying previously timeworn borders and "floating" or hovering in space, these new structures sat at the very threshold between reality and illusion, disorientating the citizen and creating an uncanny intellectual uncertainty about what should have been a rational, traditional location. This is something we see in Figure 3. The two walls of an apartment block, connected at a right angle, viewed by Ruttmann from a low angle, seem to "float" into each other. Our eye is not drawn to a single focal point. The flat geometric planes of these new machine fabricated domestic spaces simply hover in the air as the psyche is confused by a visual spatial disjunction in the cityscape. The cinema unlocks a mobility and uncanny sense of fantasy within the static building.



Fig. 3 -Apartment Block in Act 2 (an interpenetration of "hovering" planes)

Ruttmann's camera-work and editing consistently capitalizes upon this sense of simultaneity effectively fulfilling the idea that it was film rather than painting or sculpture, which was the true cousin of the new architecture. As Giuliana Bruno states, the filmic gaze has often erroneously and throughout history been conceived as "the direct heir of Renaissance perspective", encouraging a narrow, reductive and unified geometric understanding of space, (16) while in fact, as Benjamin pointed out, the inverse is often true. Film is the perfect realization of the Cubist perspective.

The camera can wander, roam and rapidly jump between disconnected points in space to explore a structure from all sides and perspectives within a micro time frame, or even all at once through superimposition, in a manner quote divorced from human spatial reality. The camera has the potential to unlock and reveal the impossible mobility endemic in the Cubist perspective and thus fulfill the Modernist dream of constant movement in individual structures. Speaking of the original Bauhaus school building designed by Gropius in Dessau in 1926 for example, Giedion wrote: "the eye cannot sum up this complex at one view; it is necessary to around it at all sides, to see it from above as well as below. This means new dimensions for the artistic imagination, an unprecedented many-sidedness" (497). As we can see in figure 4, Gropius's building re-arranges its aspect and façade depending from which side one views the building. There is no single static view which captures the structure as a single, cohesive building or unified panorama.



**Fig. 4 – Cubist design: The Bauhaus School
designed by Walter Gropius, Dessau 1926**

Yet Ruttmann's vision of the city rarely flirts with such a utopian view of "simultaneity". Indeed as the film reaches its penultimate act and the "symphony" reaches its crescendo, the anxiety hidden behind the Modernist project, and its impossible mobility, becomes far more palpable. During Act 4 we witness a woman's suicide as she leaps from a vast iron bridge into the river below. The insertion of this scene is significant because her death appears to the audience as leaving no other motivation than a horror at the (newly altered) nature of the city itself. It is also significant because it occurs at the very height of an intensely rapid montage sequence. Her death is the final conclusion to an ever-increasing pattern of urban, spatial cutaways and leaps in space. The human form is clearly not built to handle the fragmentary mobility and animation gestured towards elusively and tantalizingly by buildings such as Gropius's, or the apartment blocks shown above, and indeed mirrored in Ruttmann's filmic editing process. In the attempt at using the machinery of the cinema to unlock this mobility, the human psyche finds the limits of its psycho-spatial tolerance and perception.

As the camera provides a melodramatic close up of her face, moments before jumping, we see the visage of a subject recoiling as though confronted

with something truly monstrous, violent or unsettling (see fig. 5). The image might be more at home in a film such as *Noferatu (1922)* or *The Golem (1920)* than within a mere examination into the dynamics of a working city. From this point onwards therefore the film's foundational and mysterious sense of dread becomes more explicit. The scene makes clear a process which lies at the very heart of the city and its uncanny affect: the linking of the external city with internal mental turmoil. In short, space incites trauma. Indeed as Vidler reminds us, the spatial uncanny manifested itself quite often during this period as a genuine medical ailment signified through complaints of both agoraphobia and its inverse claustrophobia (6). These two conditions only rose to psychoanalytic prominence with the birth of the modern city and were broadly recognized as a fundamentally modern complaint.

Architecturally speaking, it is also significant that the suicide scene, as the apex of urban anxiety and irrational human despair, takes place upon a bridge. Suspended in the air between two points in space, by a vast industrial form, the woman finds herself alone, isolated and entirely lost outside the threshold of her own home. She is overwhelmed and distraught at the unfeeling nature of the unhomely world around her. The city in which she lives provides no comforting sense of place or locale but merely speed, transition and frightening new built forms, always connecting but never housing. She throws herself from one of them. The bridge, like the station, is the perfect built expression of a permanent but entirely transitory urban structure and Ruttman's choice to stage a suicide here is indicative of its dubious mental effect.



Fig. 5 – Urban Dread: Act 4

At the heart of this affective process is a displacement and corruption of the historical construct of “the house”. Throughout history as Freud identified and Vidler has embellished upon, the uncanny has consistently and most poignantly manifested itself around a narrative of the house. As Vidler states: “with its apparent domesticity, its residue of family history and nostalgia, its role as the last and most intimate shelter of private comfort”, a traditional house “sharpened by contrast the invasion of alien spirits” (17). Historically therefore a corruption or confusion of the domestic threshold often lay at the heart of what Freud saw as the uncanny effect by blurring the lines between that which we find comforting, safe and enclosed and that which is frightening, threatening and exposed.

With the onset of the Modern Movement and the birth of the modern city however, the uncanny “went public” as the house as a dominating, organizing and containing social structure was thrown into the wind (Vidler 58). It was no longer possible to draw such sharp distinctions between the domestic threshold and the world outside as citizens began to spend increasing amounts of time away from the home on public transport, in offices and factories or out shopping. The definition of what even constituted a home at all gradually shifted with the house, as both a literal and symbolic structure was gradually abandoned in

favour of the apartment. Even for those in the bourgeoisie who remained in traditional houses it was clear that the ideological enthusiasm of the day remained firmly rooted in the machine-designed and proletarianized apartment.

The house as a psychological entity became, as Vidler puts it, a memory “not now of a particular individual for a once inhabited dwelling but of a collective population for a never experienced space: the house had become an instrument, that is, of generalized nostalgia” (64). A citizen’s fundamental sense of homely and unhomely had become displaced, dispersed and uncontained. With the idea of the house itself now floating “oneric” through the city (Bachelard 6) so too the uncanny moved in and out of strange new post-industrial and technological spaces as the rotting corridors and cavernous cellars of the vanished Victorian city now moved out into factories, stations and apartments.

As a result, vast new portions of the city become internalized by the public psyche in place of the lost safety of the domestic interior. As Benjamin wrote: “the private individual, who in his office has to deal with reality, needs the domestic interior to sustain him in his illusions”, “from this arise the phantasmagorias of the interior – which, for the private man, represents the universe. In the interior, he brings together the far away and the long ago. His living room is a box in the theatre of the world” (38).

With the onset of a mass daily commute to work, shopping and the proliferation of mass-produced standardized apartments however this relationship became confused. The “real” world, with its connotations of work, commerce and exposed space, and the comforting womb of the private dwelling were now intertwined as the distinction between the two dwindled. And so new

public spaces of business and travel, which gestured towards the domestic in their design by creating vast covered interiors such as shopping arcades and railway stations, became invested with a displaced sense of homeliness and internal reverie. As Benjamin states, “the arcades are something between a street and an interior” and subsequently became a new kind of “dwelling place” (68).

An eloquent example of this uncanny confusion between interior and exterior space is displayed in Giedion’s account of the Eiffel Tower of which he observed that in its upper level staircases were “among the earliest expression of the continuous interpenetration of outer and inner space” (436). Constructed out of a seemingly twisting and writhing steel framework, the upper innards of the Eiffel Tower jarringly juxtaposed the symbol of the staircase which previously had remained roofed and housed at the centre of the domestic space, with the unbounded and exposed panorama of the city. Indeed it is hard to imagine a better example of the public and private suddenly forced into such uncomfortable and uncanny proximity as polluted air and god-like views of gargantuan steel bridges over the Seine suddenly shared space with a facsimile copy of the womb-like surroundings of the family staircase with its walls and external roofing dissolved and its passage suspended in space.

This dissolution, dismemberment and displacement of the house is something explored extensively in *Berlin*. At the beginning of the film’s first act as the camera gazes out of the train window travelling from the outer suburbs into the center of Berlin, we are shown the half-finished structural skeletons of a series of new Modernist housing blocks. Standing ominously at the edge of the railroad tracks, these structures are the very definition of the “porous” house positioned at the threshold between interior and exterior space – usurped,

destabilized and ruined by the new route of the railway. The structures appear as preemptive future ruins as the external air moves in and out of their exposed dimensions, with the memory of the “house” drifting away into the ether.

The static, cohesive home (with its interior “traces” and ornaments vanished) is viewed now only transiently and in the corner of the film’s frame as the mechanically propelled train rushes past unthinkingly. The traditional domestic space merely rots silently and anonymously at the margins of an irrevocably altered city made obsolete by a new technology and architecture of plurality. Put most simply, Ruttman presents the house from the offing, as thoroughly redundant, a point hammered home later in the film as we watch the smiling inhabitants of shining new Bauhaus-esque apartment blocks waving to the camera from inside strict rows of geometrically arranged windows. Indeed the scene might be an advert for the Bauhaus’s brave new vision were it not so unnerving in its prison-like presentation (see fig. 3). Again and again in the film we are presented with gestures towards the “nostalgic memory of the house” as Ruttmann’s camera gradually recontextualizes the city into one large and shifting un-home with the memory of its doorways, borders and corridors, like the staircases of the Eiffel Tower, displaced and separated amongst the new fractured topography of the city. Vast archways, doors and windows gesture towards the memory of an imagined, larger and humanly inhabited house without ever actually showing it.

As the film goes on we constantly see citizens rushing up and down nameless and non-geographically specific staircases in public spaces. The staircases are not so much interior homely spaces but abstracted points in space which lead nowhere. The constantly moving and pulsating rhythms of bodies

moving in these shadowy points of spatial connection are ethereal and otherworldly. In Act One we are shown a collection of hotel facades: their doors and windows serving as symbols of a temporary, commercially driven and illusory domesticity. At the beginning of Act Two we then see a series of shutters opening outward into the street in quick, regimented and machine-like succession. They do not reveal the domestic interiors of homes however but the pluralized facades of shop-fronts en masse. Their windows provide screens through which to view trinkets, pots, pans and gramophones. These objects are not personal possessions however but merely commercial goods on sale.

All of these architectural features -- anonymous stairwells, temporary bedroom facades and rows of commercial windows -- are plural industrialized visual spectacles, filtered through the deathly mechanics of the camera, rather than the ornaments of homely thresholds of security and individuality. The composite features of the memory of the house are floating loose about the city.

The door is the variable point of boundary between the homely and the unhomely as it straddles the fault line between the internal and external world both literally and metaphorically. If we are to trace and highlight this shifting of the homely border then our fundamental, architectural and symbolic concern within the film is that of the door. It serves as the movable point of protection between the domestic interior of stability and the threat of invasion or intrusion from the other side. To further explore this idea it is worth quoting at length from George Simmel's 1909 essay "Bridge and Door". Ruminating upon the organization and consequence of domestic and public space he wrote:

The human being who first erected a hut, like the first road builder, revealed the specifically human capacity over against nature, insofar as he or she cut a portion out of the continuity and infinity of space and arranged this into a particular unity in accordance with a ‘single’ meaning. A piece of space was thereby brought together and separated from the whole remaining world (67).

He then goes on to state of the emergent industrial city that:

The finitude into which we have entered somehow always borders somewhere on the infinitude of physical or metaphysical being. Thus the door becomes the image of the boundary point at which human beings actually always stand or can stand (67).

And finally that: “The door forms a linkage between the space of human beings and everything that remains outside it, it transcends the separation between inner and outer” (67). Ruttman’s film has a great preoccupation with doors and they are indeed often treated with a due amount of something like mystical reverence. From the beginning of Act I onwards we are presented with a series of doors, shutters and gates all opening as if by magic and in unison with the onset of the working day. By presenting a series of displaced and geographically incongruous doors all opening in tandem onto the deserted and alien city and often in extreme close-up, the viewer is invited to dwell upon the abstract significance of the opening and closing of a door and what is being shown on either side of it. This opening and closing motion will then continue throughout the film as each act is variously peppered with instances of large commercial doors into hangers, factories and stations all opening and closing, constantly confusing the position between internal and external space and highlighting the fact that the threshold of domestic space in the modern city has become

fundamentally “porous” (Coles 140). The defining and protective border of the door is always ajar.



Fig. 6 – the mobile threshold in Act 1

Simmel, like Benjamin, saw the unique potential for the reconfiguration of spatiality within the visual arts and explicitly stated that by representing transitional structures such as bridges and doors the artist can “visualize something metaphysical” within a seemingly functional space (Simmel 69). Indeed he claimed that an explanation for the ongoing appeal of bridges and doors across the centuries in painting might be precisely because they gestured towards something beyond us, towards the fundamental separation between spaces and objects, which the human had tried to usurp with the construction of the first hut. It is not insignificant therefore that Ruttmann chooses to stage his suicide scene on a bridge.

Such a process is clearly uncanny. Within an abjectly familiar and commonplace structure, we find an elusive memory and trace of something “that was once well known and long been familiar” now imposing itself upon our conscious waking life. To reveal or dwell upon these qualities within the bridge or door in *Berlin* is to revel in the uncertain boundary between the rational Modernist grid and the fundamental and incomprehensible and deathly “un-

connectedness", which actually exists outside it. The door, robbed of its function and presented for consideration by the camera, harks back to "primitive" beliefs "long since surmounted" (Freud 154).

Ruttmann evokes Benjamin's vision of film to capitalize upon this unsettling mode of spatial practice. And this finds its most memorable expression within his treatment of the railway station interior which is the first interior space that we are shown as we travel into Berlin by train. Reconfigured by Ruttmann as a gargantuan gothic cathedral of transit and the unhomely with its great glass windows and walls dwarfing its customers, it is within a space such as this that Giedion's "Eiffel Tower effect" -- the interpenetration of interior domestic and exterior public space -- finds its most overt exemplification. Viewed from inside the station we see the large yawning archway of the station entrance opening out before us, creating a striking intermingling of light and darkness as the mobile threshold between inner and outer space is confused.

With the camera unable to process the low light levels of the foreground inside the station, the background is by contrast entirely overexposed so that the outside world merely appears as a blurred mass of bleached white light. The film thus acts as an uncanny intervening machine between two spaces (interior and exterior) by blurring the definition and boundary between the homely and unhomely into an eerie and ghostly half-light with Berlin's citizens presented as half vanished spectral silhouettes on the border (see fig. 7).

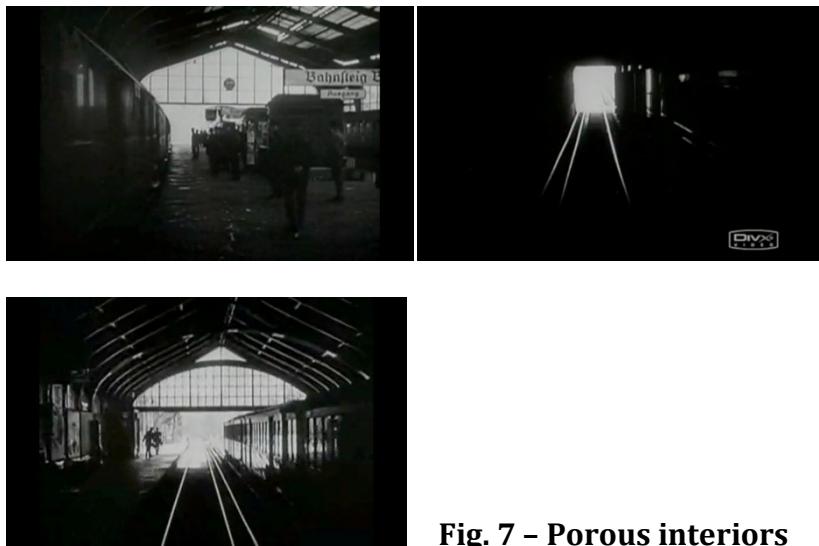


Fig. 7 – Porous interiors

These great doorless points of transition in the city are then returned to periodically throughout the film as organizing rhythmic junctures during the “symphony” highlighting the point that there is no real “house” or interior to return to. It is impossible to close the door between the domestic and the public as we are only ever travelling between stations without ever returning home, as there is no cohesive “house” structure to fulfill this function. These instances remain the perfect visualization of Benjamin’s internalization and domestication of the public space. The architecture of the building pertains to a womb-like interior while the camera reveals its unhomely and free-flowing connection with the outside “real” city through an uncanny aesthetic affect by way of a deathly visual technology.

In this chapter we have seen architectural Modernism on screen in its most strident, dynamic and wide-reaching form. Ruttmann’s vision of Berlin successfully captures the rationality, universalism and functional utopianism of the Bauhaus aesthetic and ideal, and the extent to which such ideas genuinely ushered in a new cultural epoch. By immersing the viewer so deeply and

resolutely within the literal and figurative machinery of this world however something else begins to materialize. We see something primal and visceral in the delirious enthusiasm of the ultra-modern. Individual architectural and spatial details such as doors, machinery, abstract planes and empty streets once divorced from their true spatial context by the filmic editing process, lose their rationality and place-bound sense of position. They become internal and uncanny psychological constructs as much as external built forms, floating across a porous psycho urban threshold by way of the movie camera.

Within the architecture of the “New Objectivity” is a powerful sense of uncanny fantasy. Within its hovering cubist perspective we see a structural form and geometry that appeals as much to a dream-like sense of mobility, transience and anxiety as regimented rationality and functionality. In Ruttman’s Berlin we see the impact of such forms on the public imagination. The idea of the metropolis as a lived, domestic and knowable system of thresholds shifts into a machinic web of exposed unhomes and unheimlich transitory spaces.

As we leave Berlin we are left with a fleeting, fractured and uncanny filmic record of a vanished city of utopian vision that was never to be fully realized. Not only in Berlin (with much of the architecture explored here destroyed by either the Nazis or the Allies in the wake of World War Two), but across Europe, the designs of the Modern Movement were themselves to become an uncanny memory of days gone by, as structural urban unity was abandoned in favour of more individualized and expressive visions.

CHAPTER 2

A Future in Ruins: The Ghost of British Brutalism



Fig 1. Park Hill Flats, Sheffield, in the early eighties

"Nothing froths the British into a frenzy, quite like concrete brutalism" - Tom

Dyckhoff, The Times, 2004

Brutalism in twenty first century Britain exists in the background. Left festering at the edges of major towns and cities, the structures of the brutalist style have become a filmic and televisual byword for poverty, social blight and urban decay. Large social housing units such as Park Hill in Sheffield, the Heygate Estate in London's Elephant and Castle or Gateshead's infamous multi-storey car park, which have all either recently been demolished or lie under threat of annihilation with residents facing relocation, have received a more solid, if slightly dubious immortality by way of the moving image (see figs 3, 4 and 5).

Audiences can see these mysterious, often emptied and ruinous monoliths week in and week out on popular TV cop shows like *The Bill* or lurking in the background of myriad UK Hip Hop and Grime videos as young MCs patrol their local estate, moving in and out between the stairwells, concourses and alleyways (fig 2). Or most famously perhaps they were morphed (Alphaville style) into science fiction, as demonstrated by Kubrick's reconfiguration of London's Thamesmead Estate into an apocalyptic and dystopian nightmare in *A Clockwork Orange* (1972).



Fig 2. Marger Feat. Sibling – My Thing (Music video filmed on Ainsworth Estate, West London 2011)

The fact is that while the general public, large numbers of the architectural community and most famously Prince Charles, may rebuke it as nothing but an aesthetically ugly and failed social experiment, brutalism has found a natural home within cinema, television and music videos. Visually it fires the imagination. It is extreme, forceful and yet sensual. It provokes reverie and reflection even if it remains only within a narrative of repulsion. With its exposed concrete, aerial walkways, sculptural poetry and relentless geometrical repetition, brutalist architecture remains a tantalizing visual and narrative

proposition of something halfway between dream and waking life (Vidler 11). These buildings survive as the imperfect signification of an architectural utopia, which never actually materialized. Indeed as a number of contemporary artists, critics and academics have pointed out in recent years, it points aesthetically to a future far more futuristic than the one Britain actually realized (Brennan 1).

As they now cling on to life in the battle to be listed by the English Heritage Society as worthy Modernist relics, these buildings have gradually moved into the realm of the uncanny, straddling a porous and shifting line between acute familiarity and defiant alien-ness. While they are often entirely mundane in their workaday functionalism as car parks, cinemas and council flats and could not be more familiarly engrained within the day-to-day routine of cultural memory and experience, one is always aware of the ghost of a far more extraordinary memory perpetually swirling about their edges. They gesture towards a very different, socially minded and aesthetically daring Britain of the near past: of the welfare state, nationalization and large-scale working class housing schemes. These relics are, as Owen Hatherly puts it, “along with the National Health Service, the most persistent reminder of British Socialism” (40). In strictly architectural terms they also serve as the last remaining vestiges of what is persistently referred to as Britain’s “failed Modernism” (Hatherly 15-17).

In their decayed and abandoned state these structures have become the mysterious and liminal haunted houses of the modern British city housing a forgotten social history. They constitute the part of the metropolis that scares us, or the spooky side of town that we’d rather not visit at night. They are commonly deemed to be “places of crime and intrigue, places where you could easily get lost, where strange people do strange things,” and so it is perhaps not surprising

that they have become such overused settings to evoke horror, fear or dread in media terms (Hatherly 42).

This can be a suppressed bourgeois fear of working class poverty, crime and gang violence in something like *The Bill* as primetime viewers watch police race endlessly around labyrinthine and intimidating housing estates in South London, vicariously crossing the threshold into sites where they'd never really dare tread. Or a more traditional fear of the supernatural in something like Chris Cunningham's music video for Aphex Twin's *Come To Daddy* in which the now demolished Ferrier Estate houses a terrifying band of androgynous dancing dwarves and a repulsive skeletal demon in the garages beneath a tower block.

Brutalist structures have come to fulfill Robert Mighall's definition of the pre-modern gothic site as: "what the city (civilization) banished or refused to acknowledge, except in the form of thrilling fictions" (54). As they've decayed through abandonment, these structures have moved away from the sphere of the functional and ultra modern and into the realm of the shadowy, primal and haunted. This condition fulfills Vidler's assertion that the uncanny "is not a property of (a) space itself nor can it be provoked by any particular spatial conformation" but is an "aesthetic dimension, a representation of a mental state of mental projection" which shifts and changes according to each new generation with its own specific, if unacknowledged fears and cultural boundaries (11).

These are imprecise, indulgent and romantic ideas that seem out of step with the rational and shining ideals of the Modernist project and yet these buildings were originally envisioned as the shining beacons of a functional and benevolent second wave Modernism. Architects such as Alison and Peter Smithson, James Stirling and Sir Basil Spence (all loosely grouped around the

ideology of the CIAM faction, Team 10) working for local councils and government saw themselves as the direct heirs to Gropius and Le Corbusier's line of clean and functional social architecture (Smithsons 2). They believed in the power of form to denote function and the ability of brave new structural shapes to precipitate powerful social change. So what happened?

This chapter shall explore the representation of several brutalist estates (social housing projects) on screen with an extended focus upon Andrea Arnold's *Red Road* and her uncanny exploration of thresholds, urban memory and structural urban decay. In the process I shall explore the fate of brutalism within the context of British social history, tracking these structures' conceptual progress from emblems of the future to neo-gothic ruins.

What the Future Looked Like

In the two decades following World War Two, Britain, much like Weimar Germany in the twenties, was a broken country. Bankrupt, dispirited and brought to its knees by the war effort, the nation had also suffered significant and extensive structural damage to its towns and cities through mass German bombing raids. In poorer areas such as the East End of London, neighborhoods were often reduced to nothing more than vast mountains of rubble surrounded by the last remaining clusters of Victorian slums. The Labour government led by Clement Attlee however was determined to transform this situation by pursuing a campaign for the proliferation and provision of government funded social housing larger than the country had ever seen.

By the nineteen sixties, as the effort hit its legislative stride with the publication of the William Parker Morris report, the campaign had found its structural vernacular: concrete (Jacobs, Cairns, Strelbel 6). It was cheap, malleable and fresh and local councils and architects began with vigour to construct a wave of schools, car parks, shopping centers and high-rise flats in harsh and uncompromising pre-stressed concrete. By the early nineteen seventies significant swathes of Britain's cities had now been transformed into either a visionary manifestation of the future or an oppressive and alienating Ballardian dystopia, depending who you spoke to. The former view was usually enthusiastically put forward by the architectural elite and the latter by everybody else.

From the outset these buildings signaled a conscious and controversial invasion of the unhomely and unfamiliar into the homely sphere. As structures these complexes did not look remotely like any domestic buildings that had come before, even compared to the Bauhaus's designs. Uncompromising in their size and starkness, and ruthless in their drive to realize Corbusier's dream of an entirely functional "machine for living in" the brutalists took the Modernist ideal of merging the aesthetics of the industrial and domestic worlds to radical new lengths (Banham 89), not least through the dogged and impassioned use of concrete. During the twenties, with concrete still an underused and comparatively new material it had been assumed that it would only be suitable for "industrial and similar" buildings due to its extreme visual harshness and high susceptibility to weathering (Croft 18). Yet within three decades it was the accepted material du jour for the majority of British social housing.

This was no accident of course. Its cheapness suited the councils while its aesthetic proved perfect for a young radical group of new architects wishing to redirect the trajectory of a skewed Modernist legacy. The harshness of these structures was an entirely conscious decision on the part of the Team 10 architects to restore Modernism to the hard line rigor of its original remit, which they felt had been hijacked by a gradual leaning in the mainstream towards a softer Swedish style (Frampton 275/6). As a point of ideology they used “raw, reinforced concrete, without render, without façade, not smoothly filed down, or textured by shutters and brush hammers but allowed to stay rough. A material both futuristic and primal” (Hatherly 29).

So if one wishes to know why these buildings seem quite so relentlessly and purposefully *ugly*, it is because they were meant to be. Team 10 wished to keep architecture functional, striking and honest about both its intent for the public and the nature of the world in which it took its place. They wanted to return Modernism to its raw and challenging avant-garde roots with designs that forced unprecedented and often confusing images into the public consciousness with one eye on social care and working class interests and the other on stylistic posturing. As Reyner Banham put it, “the paradox of Brutalism was its intent to at once produce an earthy everyday style for the use of the proletariat (one where they wouldn’t have to mind their manners inside) and at the same time create avant garde, shocking images, to be a brick bat flung in the public’s face” (Hatherly 31).

There is no single characteristic to these buildings that we might define as “brutalist”. The term allows for a great deal of personal expression and variation according to the whims and stylistic preoccupations of each individual architect.

Generally however in terms of a shared ethos, they all demonstrated a certain boldness and sculptural bombast in their appearance, an obsessive preference for concrete over brickwork and a broadly left leaning utopian intent in their paternal spatial organization. They were designed not to fit in with their landscape but to dominate it by creating new and totalizing locales for the proletariat – each with their own unique shape and form. They were idiosyncratic mini worlds heavily influenced by Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation completed in Marseille in 1952, a vast concrete housing complex, linked by elevated walkways (or "streets in the sky"), in which shops, leisure facilities and flats were all contained on site and within easy access of one another. This was how the brutalists saw the future, with the city comprised of a continuous series of these sites.

We can also broadly typify them as being of significant or gargantuan height, comprised of continuous block-like and geometrical patterns (often linked through elevated walkways) and with the functional frameworks of the buildings, such as elevator shafts and their supportive structural skeletons, left naked and undisguised. In the images below for example we can see the exposed nature of the interior driving ramps and concourses, open to the air, in the Gateshead Multi Story car park (fig.3), while in figure 4 we see the overt accentuation of the elevator shaft on the left hand side of the Trellick Tower, which is then linked to domestic living spaces on the right hand side of the building by a repeated series of symmetrical walkways.

In both cases the mechanics of the buildings are on full and pointed display as *how* the building works denotes its entire visual appearance. There is little or no "window dressing" or softening of the visual impact provoked by such

stark, raw and mechanical designs. Writing in 1925 Corbusier had stated “mechanization is based on geometry”, “and our lives depend on geometry, that is our very language, by which I mean that geometry denotes order and that mankind expresses itself only through order” (132). While such ideas obviously fed extensively into “the New Objectivity” of the Weimar period in Germany (Frampton 126), the brutalists took this “mechanization” of the living space much further than previously thought achievable, or appropriate. While the Bauhaus took mere inspiration from a new “machine aesthetic” many new brutalist structures actually *looked* liked machines.



fig 3. Gateshead Multistorey Carpark

in 2008



fig 4. Trellick Tower, West London

in 2003



London in 2008

fig 5. Heygate Estate, South

On the one hand therefore we can regard these buildings as uncanny simply by virtue of the fact that they often looked as if they had been beamed in from an alien planet, positioned on semi-rural urban edge lands or surrounded by Georgian villas in urban centers. The familiar and bourgeois British idyll of the Georgian house was now challenged by the troubling unfamiliarity of the machine-age as bizarre new buildings suddenly morphed the “homely” landscape of the British suburban street into a new, and to most people, defiantly “unhomely” panorama of the future. Raw, uncompromising and violent in their imagery these were buildings that made a swaggering structural statement in the name of a moral architectural crusade against British traditionalism and the picturesque, even if it was met with at best, bemusement and at worst disgust, from the public. As architecture critic Stuart Jeffries states “British modernism – of which brutalism was the most derided sub species – never behaved itself. It

imposed itself on a blitzed Britain and a baffled population without a by your leave" (1).

To the architects however this futuristic and often aggressive style made perfect sense. As Peter Smithson famously stated in his essay "The New Brutalism" in *Architectural Design* in April 1957 "Brutalism tries to face up to a mass-production society, and drag a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces which are at work" (Smithson qtd by Banham 113). In this sense the structures were at once both interpretative and prescriptive. The Smithsons positioned their work on a new and unexplored fault line between stark state oriented functionalism and a tangible subjective lyricism, with a defiantly dark bent. They wished, resolutely, to create a better world for their residents by building for what the Smithsons called "the socialist dream" yet they also incorporated many distinctly more dystopian elements of the present day into their designs in the name of a Modernist architectural honesty (Hatherly 33).

The brutalists did not attempt to soften the blow of the increasingly fractured and mechanized nature of contemporary city life but instead took such ideas to their furthest possible extent and incorporated them into their buildings. In the pursuit of an "honesty" about a machine dependent society they consequentially presented their buildings as almost pathologically repetitive, standardized and automated in their appearance. Ideas of symmetry and duplication were now taken to bold new extremes, as seen in the image below, in which the mechanically reproduced nature of the domestic living space is pushed consciously to the forefront of the façade. Row upon row of flats in regimented spatial union, divided by harsh and stoic concrete lintels, positions "the house" as

something, entirely replicable, prefabricated and self consciously non-individual (see fig.6).



Fig. 6 - Robin Hood Gardens in 2010

Yet Smithson's use of the word "poetry" is also indicative of the fact that however "machinic" the structures may have been in their ethos, one often finds a more sculptural Corbusian flourish in their design which somewhat undermines their rigorous symmetry, as seen in the graceful rightward curve of the housing block at Robin Hood Gardens in the image above (see fig. 6). So it is wrong to regard brutalism as without artistic expression. Indeed the Smithsons and the Team 10 faction often proclaimed their love for a kind of exquisite detritus, which they perceived in much of modern culture. They took inspiration from adverts, images of war violence and grainy, degraded photography (264/7). They seemingly found a nihilistic pleasure in the damage done to man by machines, mass commerce and industry. As J. R Curtis states: "trying to convey the rough grain of modern life in a new art", "the group were united in their distaste for the suavity of the English cultural elite and in their interest in Continental ideas stemming from Existential writers like Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre" (530).

One thus often finds the geometric and mechanical appearance of many brutalist structures such as Robin Hood Gardens frequently offset by the more fluid and gentler curvatures of connecting walkways, or bridges. These add significantly to their uncanny implication by creating a kind of machinic and dystopian dreamscape in which we see vast and terrifying geometric mechanical monoliths linked by frozen, writhing rivers of concrete, suspended in the air. What was hidden under the surface in Ruttman's depiction of Berlin becomes much more explicit here. The monstrous curvatures and cogs of the industrial monoliths I spoke of in Chapter One here become consciously integrated into the facades of domestic designs.

In this sense we can regard brutalism as a far darker counterpoint to the Bauhaus's brand of original Modernism. No longer so naïve about a utopian vision of technology as the new liberator of man, as proliferated in the twenties and thirties by figures such as Hans Meyer and Walter Gropius, this new architecture would address the world "*as it is*" (Sadler 41). If their buildings were to achieve the socialist utopia desired by figures such as the Smithsons they would have to highlight the realities of a mass production society (both good and bad) rather than mask them. This was in the hope of achieving a radicalized and conscious working class united by industry-driven circumstance and a standardized spatial, domestic proximity. So while they may be stark and minimal "machines for living in" they are equally interpretative, imaginative and stimulating intellectual "images" (Banham 16) of a dark post-industrial reality.

It is this double-ness, duality and sense of contradiction however, with the buildings standing as both emblems and interpretations of modernity, which frequently lends brutalism its uncanny implication. The buildings have never

remained stable or fixed in their conceptual meaning. They are riddled, both literally in their appearance, and figuratively in their ideology, with doubles, hidden meanings and paradoxes.

So from the beginning they have essentially existed within two worlds concurrently. On the one hand the bold, futuristic and darkly poetic world envisioned within the minds of the architects, and on the other the often bleak, post war reality of the world for most Britons. There was a large and cavernous gulf between an imagined utopia and the failure of its realization. Writing in *Vers une Architecture* in the thirties Le Corbusier for example had “complained that his architectural contemporaries failed to “see” let alone, exploit, the machinic world that was manifest around them” (Jacobs, Cairns, Strelbel 5). This proved to be a continuing problem for the brutalists as many people refused to see, or could not see, the socialist dream world in which the architects positioned their work. Eventually, these mysterious housing blocks gradually falling into disrepair and disregard became cultural depositaries for an ongoing public discourse of conflicted interpretation, failed hopes and frustrated desires.

Two Places at Once



Fig. 7 - Thamesmead upon opening 1969 (aprox) and the Heygate, abandoned, in 2010

"It is a thrilling place to be in, all psychedelic Piranesian perspectives, bridges and gothic horror angles, Gormenghast rendered in Cubist form" – Architecture critic Tom Dyckhoff describing the Tricorn Shopping Centre in Southampton (Clark 243).

"You have to give this much to the Luftwaffe, when it knocked down our buildings, it didn't replace them with anything more offensive than rubble" - Prince Charles attacking postwar brutalism in Britain, Corporation of London Planning and Communication Dinner, December 1987

This double-life, as either a radical new vision of the future or an offensive and dehumanizing experiment in socialism, depending on whom you spoke to, could not be symbolized more succinctly than by two films made within five years of each other both depicting imagined realities on the vast and sprawling

Thamesmead Estate in South East London. *Living at Thamesmead* is a 1974 propaganda film made by the Greater London Council encouraging young couples and families to settle in the complex. Charmingly shot in dazzling sunlight, the short piece depicts two teenagers, Sally and Tom, as they move around the estate chatting to various happy and contented public figures and friends all advocating the joys of communal concrete living. Complimented by a backdrop of small children splashing around in the huge man-made lakes between the tower blocks and chasing each other around the dense network of elevated walkways, the film is a defiant vision of social utopia achieved through architectural dynamism.

A Clockwork Orange (1971) uses the same spatiotemporal destination to make a visual reality for an imagined future city of an Orwellian and totalitarian nightmare. The same concourses and walkways become menacing and shadowy no-go zones upon which are played out horrifying scenes of the “good old ultra violence”. The site is now entirely foreboding and menacing as Alex (Malcolm McDowell) and his gang stalk the deserted estate along the walkways and paths bordering the expanses of landscaped waterways, which stagnate between the prison-like tower blocks.

The two films both project resolutely into the future. The former looks towards a functional and happy future of working class solidarity and dynamic domestic design, while the latter places its narrative quite literally in the future by moving Thamesmead into the realm of dystopian science fiction. So the estate becomes two (imaginary) future destinations at once and each, in their own way, has a foothold in present tense reality, neatly symbolizing the two competing visions of brutalism held in the public imagination upon its introduction.

While many residents in the seventies *were* pleased with their new and pristine homes away from the slums from which they'd been relocated as the interviews in *Living at Thamesmead* show, many more traditionally minded and anti Modernist critics still had strong reservations about the homogenizing and alienating effect of such grand scale, aesthetically avant-garde mass housing. Published shortly after the Parker Morris report in 1965, Dutch architect Nicholas Harbraken in his book *Supports* accused architects and planners of being "bewitched by partially understood technical possibilities", which would result in an objectionable social "automatism" (qtd. By Jacobs, Cairns, Strelbel 7). Public opinion towards Modernism in Britain was clearly split.

By comparing two filmic interpretations of the same space such as this we can see quite how unstable and variable these sites were in their conceptual public image, even upon initial construction. The two films neatly display the dichotomy between the dream utopia envisioned by the architects and the ulterior dystopia as seen by the traditionalist cynics. While *Living on Thamesmead*, the later film, shows the estate as clean, friendly and socially functional (encapsulating the aspirations of the architects) it is already possible within the same decade, in an earlier film, to witness a more troubling reading of the same locus, as deserted and semi ruined without too much creative intervention on Kubrick's part. Beside from strewing the place with rubbish and emptying the site of its residents, the architecture actually remains entirely unchanged.

It is simply how the site is presented and perceived that actually provokes either fear or admiration within the viewer. It is whether the dream of brutalism, and its hard-line Modernism, is believed or rejected by the filmmakers (and us) rather than the structural architecture itself, which actually affects us.

Thamesmead is simply a stage, which has two fantasy futures built into it that the cinema can then turn into reality or not depending upon which conceptual image it teases out from the site. We can take the specific stylistic form of the architecture as merely a boundary of cultural aesthetic definition and a marker of what is or is not heimlich. Thamesmead is an uncanny spatial point at which we can identify a troubling ambiguity about what was deemed an acceptable “home” during a certain architectural epoch and so by turn, serves as a highly affective cinematic location. The audience is haunted by its own unresolved anxiety about a new specific structural form and how it affects their vision of domesticity.

Unfortunately for the architects however, it was Kubrick’s perspective which prevailed in the mainstream public imagination. By the early eighties, with a right wing Tory government intent on selling off large swathes of public housing into the private sector, many estates fell into a state of crime-ridden disrepair, underfunding and poor public image. Inner city complexes such as Thamesmead, Park Hill and Robin Hood Gardens came to symbolize everything opposed by the new administration: collectivism, futurism and government funded social welfare. These are concepts, by and large, which have not returned to the mainstream political arena or public zeitgeist since.

Watching *Living at Thamesmead* and *A Clockwork Orange* in close proximity, in 2011, thus now produces a defiantly uncanny effect serving to accentuate not only the dualistic nature of the brutalist project within the public psyche but also the repression of its memory. The former has disappeared into the realm of fiction and kitsch while the latter is perceived to be an increasing reality as the public continues to regard such structures as intimidating, isolating

and misguided in their overt social engineering. To regard Thamesmead as anything but a Kubrickian nightmare thus (for most people) signals the invasion of unfamiliar thinking into familiar discourse by disturbing and reactivating a hidden memory (utopian modernism) which to use Freud's terms "was once long familiar to the psyche" but has since been "surmounted" (148, 143).

While most members of the general public are vaguely aware that such buildings, once, were intended as a force of good, these ideas (state funded paternalism and avant garde working class architecture) now seem so distant -- as Modernism has faded from consciousness and favour -- that the effect is uncanny. To see such a space as shiny, new and benevolent in its construction goes entirely against the grain of how they are now usually presented to us as rotting liminal spaces in cop shows and music videos. Such images remind us that things were meant to be different. Superimposing these two films one on top of the other creates an unsettling double exposure for the viewer through which a long vanished ghost is evoked.

In both films for example we see the same walkway running along by a lake. In *Living at Thamesmead* John and Sally embrace each other by the waterside picking out fish in the water while speaking about their future together and discussing the new sections of flats being built on the western side of the site. Thamesmead is not even completed yet and has an undecided future. It is unknown whether either the utopian dreams of the architects or the teenagers' romance will work out.

When we watch Kubrick's presentation of the same walkway by the lake however, it is litter-strewn, unwelcoming and ultimately far closer to the reality of Thamesmead in 2011 in its decayed and underfunded state. The 1974 film

becomes spectral and relegated to the realms of fictional memory. As we watch Alex and his gang fight viciously with each other, pushing one another into the water in mesmerizing slow motion, we cannot help but hear the ghostly echoes of John and Sally's sedate and optimistic conversations in the background as Thamesmead is haunted by its own unrealized future. With *A Clockwork Orange* in mind, *Living at Thamesmead* quickly becomes sinister and unsettling as the film's intended familiarity and pleasantness is ruined and disfigured by the backward gaze of history (see fig. 8).



fig. 8 - The Two Thamesmeads: the waterside path in Kubrick's film (a) and two young residents smiling happily by the same pathway in the early seventies (b).

This process of conceptual “superimposition” is something that we can identify as “hauntology”, a phrase that has recently found great currency in experimental music criticism as a way of describing music that takes old or decaying analogue sound samples and then re-edits and filters them to create new and arresting aural forms (Fisher 1). A pun on the word ontology, it was originally coined by Jacques Derrida to describe the academy’s engagement with Marxism since the fall of the Soviet Union (Derrida 161). The way in which academics have frequently attempted to evade Marxism’s “spectrality” i.e. -- its constant theoretical presence, yet increasing governmental absence in the world -- is by “placing the figure of the ghost in an ontological context” (Trigg 135). Derrida found such an idea to be useful in avoiding a simple past/present view of history. As Buse and Scott have said of the concept, by embracing “the ghostly undercurrent of the present” a greater understanding of historical process was possible as “in the figure of the ghost, we see that the past and present cannot be neatly separated from one another, as any idea of the present is always constituted through the difference and deferral of the past, as well as anticipations of the future” (10-11).

The stark contrast between these two films’ reading of the same place as they both project into unknown fictional futures thus re-energizes and recontextualizes how we see Thamesmead’s present tense extra cinematic reality. The two films in unison highlight the fact that Thamesmead in truth is neither a benevolent utopia nor a fearful dystopia but caught somewhere dialectically between the two. Film as a medium with the ability to jump in points between time and space and evoke myriad imagined pasts, futures and presents aids us in accentuating this idea. It destabilizes such strict readings of

urban space by presenting ulterior viewpoints. By witnessing such wildly conflicting stagings of the same place, it helps to point towards the idea that the urban environment is never fixed, either mentally or materially, but is constantly changing and flowing as our perception of structures and spaces alters and shifts according to cultural progress and opinion.

Cinema and the New Ruins

The ability of brutalism to haunt present tense reality with an unresolved past has only increased since many of its structures have now fallen into quite literal ruin. Indeed it is often the case that British brutalism only makes it onto the screen once it has become ruined. Empty and condemned housing estates have remained consistently desirable hot spots for filmmakers and artists in recent years looking to capitalize upon cheap and effective locations for the invocation of urbanism taken to its most dystopian extent.

Gary Oldman's harrowing *Nil by Mouth* for example, a claustrophobic tale of domestic abuse, crime and drug addiction was shot almost entirely on the abandoned Bonamy estate in 1994 in an environment, which, he tellingly described as feeling "like an empty movie set" (Oldman 275). The condemned Heygate Estate in South London has since 2007 provided the location for a staggering 76 films and music videos as well as serving as a regular shooting location for *The Bill* (*Southwark News* 1). While there may only be a few fully functioning brutalist estates left in Britain (such as the Trellick Tower and the Barbican), those which have been left behind and discredited as social failures have found great success as filmic locations.

Ruins have a unique and unsettling effect, which work quite potently with the cinema. As Laura Mulvey points out one of cinema's fundamental and enduring uncanny effects lies in its ability to "preserve time" across the ages, much like a ruin (107). Mulvey, following Vidler, posits that ruined architecture and cinema both evoke "the idea of history suspended, the dream come to life, the past restored to the present" (107). Both forms can provide visual traces and recordings of potentially long vanished human forms, which then travel across the ages to trouble and inform the present. Cinema can thus greatly heighten the experience of ruins because as a medium, it immerses us in a similar world of traces, memories and ghosts impressing themselves upon the present tense.

In its chequered and uneven topography, a city will always bear the remnants and architectural relics of the past, even if their original meaning has shifted. As Julia Hell states "the ruin is a ruin precisely because it seems to have lost its function or meaning in the present, while still retaining a suggestive, unstable semantic potential" (6). We can now approach most brutalist sites in much the same way as Benjamin experienced and utilized the Arcades in Paris - as modern ruins (Buck Morris 1). They are outmoded and dilapidated oddities within the urban landscape, which undermine and alter the ideals of the present by holding the key to an untold or misunderstood historical past.

As Dylan Trigg states in his book the *Aesthetics of Decay*, ruined Modern spaces interrupt the seamless flow of capitalism's persistent realism and proliferated sense of present-tense time by creating somewhere wilder and more desolate, which exists outside of the usual historical narrative of day-to-day city life. These spaces are hauntological in that they insist upon the integration of the past into the present by troubling the citizen with an uncanny

effect – evoking a primal sense of “return” to an earlier period. At such “explicitly uncanny” borders “located in the discrepancy between place and time”, there occurs “a creation of a new place from the ruins of the old (Trigg 123)”. The present day site becomes a temporal hinterland haunted by the relics of a previous epoch.

Since the Victorian period the Gothic has remained the ideal fictional vehicle for capitalizing upon this idea. As Fred Botting states, the gothic style has consistently served as “the shadow that haunted neoclassical values, running parallel and counter to its ideas and symmetrical form, reason, knowledge and propriety”, “the traces of the gothic and romantic forms appear as signs of loss and nostalgia, projections of a culture possessed of an increasingly disturbing sense of deteriorating identity, order and spirit” (114). The gothic site haunts the modern site by refusing to let the memories and architectural forms of a previous generation rest. This is something signified through a series of structural forms such as “rotting” walls, “crumbling” rooms and graveyards, which, in their porous and imperfect materiality, record the passing of time in their very material texture. This in turn creates gloom and shadow: spatial qualities that create uncanny situations by dissolving usually well-known borders of spatial orientation and definition (Botting 32).

These sites, as Robert Mighall states, are usually positioned just beyond the boundaries of normal city life. They are the homely city becoming unhomely, as one moves to more “obscure” places (over the river or just outside of the city gates) and away from the hustle and bustle of the center (55). Gothic conventions have been used consistently in this way to “dramatize a deeply divided society” by providing fictional conceptual sites for the marginalized and

rejected members of the city and their history (55). They work upon the fear that somewhere hidden within the metropolis are sites that refuse to let go of their past historical associations. Something shown in Mighall's citing of this example from G. W. M Reynold's *The Mysteries of London* (1844-8) describing a predominantly criminal area of town in Victorian London called "The Mint":

The houses are old, gloomy and somber... Most of the doors stand open, and reveal low, dark and filthy passages, the mere aspect of which... (inspires fears) of being suddenly dragged into those sinister dens, which seem fitted for crimes of the blackest dye. Even in the daytime one shudders at the cut throat appearance of the places into the full depths of whose gloom the eye cannot entirely penetrate (55).

Reynolds goes on to explain that The Mint "was once a sanctuary...and although the law has deprived it of its ancient privilege, its inhabitants still maintain them by a tacit understanding" (56). In such spaces, as Mighall states, repressed histories, and customs refuse to be forgotten. It is an abandoned area of town haunting the present day through its gesture towards a past which still lingers on the edge of the city and its public consciousness

This is exactly what has happened with brutalism. Through the aesthetic sublimity of visual decay the buildings have regressed into the mode of the very irrational and shadowy Victorian architecture they were built to replace. They stand now in British culture as hauntological artifacts of a vanished and failed Modernism haunting the margins with a memory that many people would like to forget, as proved recently by Theodore Dalrymple's astonishingly vitriolic denouncement of the style as "totalitarian", "humiliating" and the direct consequence of not only Stalinism but the proto fascism of Pol Pot (1). Like the mansion in Edgar Allan Poe's *Fall of the House of Usher*, these structures stand on

the edge of ruination, in eerie solitude and housing the forgotten dreams and secrets of a dead family line.

Red Road

With these ideas in mind, the Red Road estate, as it appears in Andrea Arnold's 2006 film *Red Road* is a fascinating cinematic structure to analyze. On the way to both abandonment and scheduled demolition but with many residents still housed there, the gargantuan tower blocks stand as transient and haunting images on the very threshold of annihilation. With the first block of flats demolished in 2005 the whole site will soon be banished to the scrapheap of British cultural memory along with other vanished brutalist structures such as Gateshead Multistory Car Park, the Tricorn Center in Southampton and the Ferrier Estate in South London (see fig. 9). Like many brutalist sites in the twenty first century Red Road does not exist so much as a part of city life, but in spite of it.



Fig. 9 -

Vanished Ruins: Tricorn Centre Southampton, Gateshead Car park both being demolished in 2004 and 2010 respectively

Set in and around Glasgow's infamous Red Road flats, Arnold's film tells the story of Jackie, a recently bereaved security woman who works as a CCTV operator in the center of town. Positioned every day in front of a huge bank of monitor screens her job is to observe the day-to-day movements and actions of the city's residents in an effort to prevent crime and public disorder. Her focus soon becomes centered around Red Road however as she spots a man, Clyde, whom she recognizes from her past. It becomes gradually apparent that this man, Clyde, is in some way connected with the death of Jackie's husband and child as she furiously tries to ascertain why he has been released from prison.

As the film continues, Jackie slowly moves away from her virtual voyeurism and begins to visit the flats in person, gaining entry to the building in which Clyde lives and systematically infiltrating her way into his life without revealing her identity. We eventually find out that Clyde ran over and killed her family while inebriated a few years before and has now been released early from prison. This information is only revealed at the end of the film, however, and we are led throughout the film to believe that Clyde is someone far more

premeditatedly monstrous than he really is. Only by visiting the site time and time again can Jackie eventually lay her memory to rest and in turn reveal the true nature of Clyde's crime to the viewer.



(a)



(b) Fig. 10 – Building

Red Road in 1968 (a), Demolition begins in 2005 (b)

The film serves as an extended mediation upon borders, spatial transgressions and the relationship between memory and place with Red Road itself serving as the real star of the film in which Arnold casts the space as fundamentally gothic. The director uses a doomed and semi ruinous structure for the sake of evoking past memories to trouble the present. In the same way old castles were used throughout early nineteenth century fiction to evoke memories of a “feudal past associated with barbarity, suspicion and fear” (Botting 3), Arnold picks a location that houses equally troubled memories in the form of a failed, unpopular Modernism. Jackie is challenged not only by her own troubled memories but also by breaching the boundaries of the intimidating and culturally rejected structure which houses them.

Positioned on the edge of town and reachable only by bus, Red Road's huge high-rise tower blocks loom up out of the distance like the turrets of Dracula's castle as Jackie crosses an invisible boundary into a marginal world of

urban decay, crime and restless memories. Throughout the film we are consistently confronted with the question of what Red Road *means* both spatially and symbolically within Glasgow's urban topography in 2006. How does it fit in with the city and what does it mean for Jackie to go there (see fig. 11)?



Fig. 11 - Jackie crosses the boundary into Red Road

Within the very texture of the walls of Red Road lies a history that cannot be ignored. Whereas structures such as Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Marseille have aged gracefully and attractively under a hot Mediterranean sun, buildings such as Red Road in wet and rainy Scotland have merely rotted. As the *Architectural Review* warned, presciently in 1946, "time and weather, which give mellowness to brick and stone, make untreated concrete more and more dirty, dark and untidy, and rapidly lower its initially low power of reflecting light" (Croft 18).

Because of this, however, the deathly passage of time and memory is contained within the very architectural texture of Arnold's film. Not only stained by the elements but also covered in layers of graffiti, and in some places literally

falling away to nothing, Red Road's concrete, like the rotting familial walls of the *House of Usher*, records time, a spectacle usually avoided by capitalism's more recent architectural tendency towards "clean" space through the use of less temporally absorbent materials such as glass and plastic (Trigg 125)(see fig. 12).

The nature of concrete however, which, ages so badly *enforces* a consideration of the past onto the present. Red Road is a palimpsest of repressed histories both personal, as contained within Jackie's tragedy, and public, as symbolized by the collective memory of a failed Modernism. And so Red Road becomes an uncanny primal site, like "The Mint", which scares the viewer by housing an unresolved and malignant past.



Fig. 12 - Recording Walls – Jackie walks past Red Road's decaying concrete

This idea of the site as a primal mental landscape is also mirrored directly in the shape and formation of its architecture. In their "obsessive and weird" (Hatherly 36) repetition of architectural forms the eight tower blocks provide a consistently uncanny sense of doubling. The spectacle of the structures grouped symmetrically together in space evokes a series of deathly "repetitions" within the psyche. They suggest automation and doll-like inertia in their prefabricated and mechanical design. Yet at the same time they appear as almost ancient or

primordial in their size, fulfilling Banham's comment that brutalist buildings can quite often appear as "thrilling", "forces of nature, like fortresses in castille which grow from the earth" (Banham Times 1). Like the gothic castle they have lost their rational structural functionalism and morphed into a more organic and romantic landscape of the mind (see fig.13).



Fig 13. Neo Gothic - A Brutalist Castille - the camera gazes up at the Red Road flats, lit by the spectral glow of the streetlamps.

The idea of Modernism reconfigured into a gothic castle of the mind perhaps signals the ultimate drift of brutalism away from reality and into the "dream world", which was always endemic within it. Indeed the divided nature of brutalism and its perpetual position between two conceptual worlds at once is something cannily explored by Arnold, as she splits her representation of the Red Road site directly in half. On the one hand we have the flats as seen on CCTV and on the other the flats as Jackie visits them in reality. We do not actually see the site in proximity until nearly half way through the film. Up until this point we view it only through Jackie's monitor screens and so our first impression of the flats remains virtual rather than actual.

When Jackie gazes upon the site on her monitor screens, both the tower blocks and their residents look entirely spectral in their oversaturated translucency as they are mediated through the crude video technology (see fig.14). Each time the blocks appear on her screen, their image is accompanied by an overtly sinister and horror-film-esque soundtrack. Bathed in a perpetual and obliterated yellow light from the sulphurous glow of the street lamps, the architecture becomes a living, breathing character -- making us uneasy each time it appears -- as some portions of it remain visible while others are shrouded in shadow.



Fig. 14 - Jackie watches spectral figures on the CCTV screen.

As the film continues, we are gradually exposed to longer and more extensive CCTV shots of the site before Jackie eventually visits it in person. By this point however Red Road has taken on a supernatural life of its own in the viewer's mind. By delivering the flats through these imperfect and ethereal fragments through CCTV in the first half of the film, accompanied by such a disturbing soundtrack, the site is now as much a landscape of the imagination as it is of reality. The architecture with its great rows of "staring" windows and

rotting, textured walls becomes internalized as its image is forced inwards (in both ours and Jackie's mind) through uncanny effects. We knit together these fragments, superstitiously, into a troubling and fearful mental landscape. In this sense *Red Road* fulfills entirely the idea of the irrational gothic site on the margins of the city, which blurs the line between reality and fantasy through its invocation of unsettling spatial formations, heightened by the fears of its observer. *Red Road* as it is seen through the CCTV screens, as a half glimpsed, distorted and unreliable spectral image neatly symbolises brutalism's generally accepted position within the public imagination.

One of the most dynamic formal features of the film's treatment of brutalism however lies in its eventual refusal to cast the architecture either one way or the other. Unlike *A Clockwork Orange* and *Welcome to Thamesmead* which both take their readings of brutalism to the furthest possible conclusion as either fictional utopia and abject dystopia respectively, *Red Road* presents its site as a dialectical, hauntological place for the viewer's consideration. By placing such a divisive line in the film's narrative between the virtual and the actual, Arnold takes brutalism's dualism between utopian dream and everyday decayed reality as an accepted facet of its existence within the public imagination.

Yet what drives the action of the film is actually the gradual peeling back of perceived fears about the site and its residents. As Jackie gets closer to the heart of her painful memories, she also gradually gains deeper access into the interior of the building -- finding an access code for the door, braving the elevator and finally walking into Clyde's flat uninvited at a party -- but rarely finds an event or character monstrous enough to sate her own anxieties.

Indeed we are consistently challenged to address our potential misconceptions and prejudices about a maligned landscape as the residents, by and large, are presented as by no means miserable or unhappy. As Jackie stalks Clyde around the elevated walkways and spaces between the pub, café and flats waiting for him to do something heinous she (and we) in fact merely watch him borrowing change for a laundry machine from two friendly passers by, chatting to friends and engaged in good humoured banter with a waitress. The local bus driver lets Jackie on the bus for free when her purse is stolen in the flats. There is a sense of community and working class solidarity within the site, which clearly shocks Jackie. And in these instances one gains a sense of large scale, bold and self-contained utopian architecture *actually working*. The flats are not perhaps the forbidding fortresses they look from a distance but merely outdated homes for a forgotten and abandoned working class.

As the film draws to a close and Jackie finally confronts Clyde with her true identity, the development occurs in bright and unmysterious daylight. Clyde is not the serial killer or paedophile that we have been led to believe he is throughout the narrative, but merely an ex drug addict who found himself responsible for a terrible accident. The repressed memory of her family's death and our fear of the brutalist structure has essentially disappeared and been resolved. The reality of both situations do not add up to the fearful reputations surrounding them. The building, while run down and isolated, actually holds no supernatural qualities. It is simply the trace memory of a past epoch, whose ideals and utopianism has been repressed, ignored and transfigured into the realm of threat in the public imagination.

By the end of *Red Road* a sense of unity is brought to our perception of brutalism, as it is no longer quite so divided between dream and reality. By beginning with and then abandoning, the gothic mode, Arnold shows us how and why brutalism can frighten the public but she ultimately presents it as a memory that needs to be resolved, or at least experienced in physical proximate reality before it is written off entirely. And so we might even agree with Hatherly's enthusiastic and sympathetic neo-Modernist assertion that "brutalism is not so much ruined as dormant, derelict – still functioning even in a drastically badly treated fashion, and as such ready to be recharged and re-activated" (42).

The fate of British brutalism displays the manner in which many Modernist structures have come to symbolize the very urban psychological conditions that the Modern movement had originally sought to replace. As the concrete has rotted, and as the shadows have thickened and deepened in their corridors and stairwells, they are now breeding grounds for irrational fears, anxieties and prejudices. Not so much for the residents perhaps but for the wider culture, at large they are perceived as places to be avoided and feared. The dark expressionism of their design and the repression of their ideology has lead to a deeply fertile source of cinematic spatial affect.

In contemporary cinema the age-old gothic devices of crumbling castles and sinister mansions now often exist only in the realms of cliché or pastiche. Such spaces no longer scare audiences in the way they once did. With brutalism however British directors have found a new liminal architectural zone, which can haunt the public imagination with genuinely unresolved and primal fears. Such spaces indicate a deeply uncanny urban borderland nestled, forgotten and avoided, within the very heart of the contemporary city.

The celebrated master of the Victorian ghost story M.R James once wrote that all good supernatural stories should be set around twenty years in the past (339) so that the events and landscapes described, were familiar enough to his readership as to be psychologically proximate, yet long enough ago to evoke a sense of the alien and unknown. This is what brutalism represents on screen: something acutely familiar transfigured into a desolate unfamiliarity. In its quotidian vernacular it serves as the perfect architectural stage for a popular cinema wishing to create new and effective “haunted houses”.

CONCLUSION

Tokyo and Supermodernity

"A positive exploration of voids"

-Diane Ghirardo's description of Louis Khan's Salk Institute building,

La Jolla, California.

Due to the stringent and highly micro managed laws of private land ownership in Tokyo, the concept of the modernist “block” formation encompassing a variety of different businesses and establishments in one large built unit, which swept across Europe and America throughout the twentieth century, has largely remained absent in the city. One business usually occupies one individual building. For this reason, as Ryoji Suzuki notes, “regardless of the difference in scale between neighboring buildings a thin slice of ‘gap’ is always left between a building and the boundary of its plot” and “since adjacent structures are built to full capacity under allowed regulations, these gaps are as narrow as possible” (19). At a certain time of day this unique structural quirk has lead to a peculiar spectacle known as the “linear aura” effect, beloved of filmmakers and photographers, in which the sun penetrates through the gaps from behind the buildings and casts an array of needle-thin beams of light across the main street in front (19).

With all the stylistic effort and money spent on the appearance of the facades these gaps, or “vide” as they are known, are left entirely ignored and unintended, resulting in a forgotten row of voids at the side of a street encased in dirt and inhabited only by exposed pipe work and sprawling air conditioning

equipment (19). With this in mind Suzuki goes on to suggest that “the will of a city at a certain time” often becomes localized in a specific area or district of the metropolis at a certain point in history. A close concentration of alien new architectural forms will often appear simultaneously in a relatively compacted geographic area. He gives the skyscrapers of Manhattan in the 1890s or Haussmann’s boulevards of central Paris in the 1860s as examples. He then posits the “vide” of Tokyo as the equivalent of this phenomenon in the late twentieth century, stating that these gaps which have been “forsaken (or perhaps released) by both man and space, make up the unique foundation of Tokyo” (19).

What is notable about Suzuki’s proposition is the fact that Tokyo’s contribution to this trend is not so much a specific architectural form or vernacular but an abstracted void. Or to use a more Western term: a “non-place” (Augé vii). They are also not particularly localized but spread throughout the city according to the sprawling rules of Tokyo’s disingenuous and “piecemeal” construction (Bognar 9). Much like the vast industrial bridges which Georg Simmel identified in the emergent modern cities of late eighteenth century Europe, or the great yawning entrances to the railway stations which I spoke of in Berlin in Chapter One, these “non-places” accentuate an unnerving truth behind the metropolis: that all structural “connectedness” is actually merely an illusion. For as Simmel states: in reality “no particle of matter can share its space with another and a real unity of the diverse does not exist in spatial terms” (66). All built structures, at their heart, will engage with an empty void.

Half way through Kiyoshi Kurosawa’s *Pulse* (2001) Harue explains to Ryosuke about a computer programme, which they have been working on in the

computer lab at her university. In the programme a series of circular white forms move endlessly around a monitor screen. If they get too close together the forms will die and disappear. Yet if they drift too far away from each other they become inexorably drawn back towards one another. Harue describes the programme as “a miniature model of our world” in which, despite an overwhelming desire for proximity and connection, humans remain fundamentally and irretrievably separated from one another. Unsurprisingly she also warns Ryosuke not to stare at it for too long.

Both the computer programme and the “linear aura” essentially amount to the same uncanny visual effect. They deal with a spatial void at the heart of the human process of spatial urban perception. Both the light penetrating through the “vide” of Tokyo’s buildings and the haunting interplay of the computer programme’s symbols signify a seductive spectacle, which is in truth dependent upon an underlying and abject emptiness. Both are a reminder of the fact that however much the city may invest in high-speed travel technology, wireless communication or housing schemes, in which large groups of people live in close and regulated proximity, in real and symbolic terms, we remain “mercilessly” and undeniably separated in space from one another (Simmel 66). Intriguing or disarming spatial spectacles such as this fascinate us because they point towards a kind of pre-urban and human-less desolation within the developed city limits.

Such an effect can be profoundly troubling. It gestures towards a very primal fear. For as Simmel explains, only the human species would stare across a river and see the two banks as not just “apart” but “separated”. Indeed “if we did not first connect them in our practical thoughts, in our needs and in our fantasy, then the concept of separation would have no meaning” (66). The human psyche

is seemingly incapable of understanding these two points in space as independently indifferent from each other or as simply two unconnected entities. We are endowed with an apparently innate desire to connect and bridge them. The void of space in between is not something we are comfortable with or perhaps even able to rationally comprehend.

Points in space, which negotiate this void will thus immediately signal explicitly uncanny boundary lines. It is through the rejection of unconnected voids that our equal obsession with borders and thresholds materializes. We set up borders, both literally and figuratively, to keep this abyss of unconnection at bay. For this reason, as this thesis has consistently confirmed and explored, the uncanny is a phenomenon intrinsically bound up with our experience and transgression of borders, spatial limits and edgelands. Seemingly familiar built forms can often employ extraordinarily unfamiliar effects through their position at the threshold between connected, rationalized and colonized space and the unknowable expanse of separation (conceptual or actual) beyond.

Manipulated in a certain way either through cinema, painting or photography one can often experience something entirely metaphysical and non functional in images of bridges, doors and other built forms of connectivity. They can gesture towards something beyond our comprehension. Such architectural borders signal “the boundary point at which human beings actually stand or can stand” (67). They provide the physical built platform for Freud’s definition of the uncanny, which occurs at the blurred and disorientating point of interchange between reality and fantasy. Indeed while never using Freud’s term specifically Simmel does quite explicitly state that “before we have become inured to it

through daily habit, (the bridge) must have provided the wonderful feeling of floating for a moment between heaven and earth" (68).

The uncanny is by no means a benign phenomenon however. As I explored in the introduction, uncanny effects point towards the idea of our own death or annihilation. With the psyche fundamentally unable to comprehend the idea of its own non-consciousness, devices such as mechanical doubles, dolls or spatial disorientations trouble us because they remind us of the lifeless "nothingness" and inertia from which we all came and will eventually return (Freud 36). The uncanny is brought about by a slippage between the life instinct (usually associated with the organic, animated and human) and the death instinct (signified by the mechanical, inert or empty). The uncanny "returns" us to our most primal, distant and yet abjectly familiar memory: our own non-existence.

So when Simmel speaks of the bridge as existing at the boundary between humanly "separated", knowable space and an "infinite space" beyond our comprehension (67), we might clearly take this absolute unconnectedness as similar to Freud's "nothingness". This unfathomable separation gestures towards a similar impossible absence that evokes a powerful sense of return in the psyche. It indicates a return to the darkness of pre "separated" human spatial awareness, which the life instinct (as signified by the relentless progression of built architectural styles across history, with their bold forward gaze into the future) seeks to utterly deny. Yet to cross a bridge will still always involve, albeit perhaps fleetingly or unconsciously, a fundamental engagement with death. We stand at the threshold between human connectivity and the void of unconnected space beyond, which in truth surrounds us at all times. The bridge signals a built

form at once entirely familiar in its workaday and life facilitating functionalism and yet utterly, utterly alien to our process of spatial understanding in its employment of a post-human and deathly nothingness, as it floats abstracted and unconnected in the air.

I shall conclude my thesis here by examining not the uncanny representation of a specific architectural style on screen, but instead the absence of one. Since the nineteen seventies as architectural modernism has fallen entirely out of favour, apart from within the realms of pastiche and self conscious imitation, there has been a global augmentation of built structures concerned less with creating a physical and static structural reality and more the facilitation of commerce, flow and transit. This has lead to a proliferation of what the anthropologist Marc Augé has called “non-places”: spaces in between or housed by built forms, which gesture more towards a transient spatial absence, than a bold architectural presence. In the airports, shopping centers and supermarkets which have now spread around the world since the nineteen eighties, Augé finds an array of blank and shimmering spaces which are non-rational, ahistorical and without a tangible identity (63). In their facilitation of constant travel, flow and speed these spaces seem to quite purposefully revel in, rather than disguise, a spatial void. Or to use a metaphor, they position us consistently in the central and deathly “floating” core of Simmel’s bridge rather than upon either side of the riverbank.

Up until this point I have sought to identify the uncanny unintentional “blind spots” of the modernist city on screen. Through both specific structural detailing and more conceptual historical readings of the modern metropolis I have found the uncanny to arise most frequently in those aspects of the city

which have remained hidden, denied or left to abandonment and decay. In *Berlin* for example we see a city haunted by the shock of the new, and the chilling thrills of an occult vision of industry and transit, which exists just below the surface of city life. Ruttman uses the new spatial expressiveness of the cinematic medium to tease this out and, to use a Freudian phrase, reveal something eerily familiar and primal within the ultra modern that had previously remained hidden. With brutalism on screen we saw a shared public consciousness haunted by the transfiguration of a once familiar homely space into something repressed and unhomely. Films such as *Red Road* capitalized on the enforced return of a restless and unresolved urban memory of utopianism back into the viewer's contemporary consciousness.

At some point however both these uncanny effects arrive at the same consequence. They both usurp the developed technological city by evoking something primal, pre-modern and on some level terrifying to us. They signal visual spectacles, which push us to the limits of rationality and objectivity. In short, at its core, the urban structural uncanny is the inability of the psyche to process forms that gesture towards our own death. Uncanny urban forms unnerve us because they can outlast us. They will probably remain standing long after we have vanished and the post-human city will again become unconnected, unmapped and desolate. Decayed buildings, new built shapes and empty spaces bridge the symbiotic gap between "desolation and civilization" (Trigg 129), which informs the very foundation and self-definition of the city as developed, built up (rather than empty) and non-rural.

Within much contemporary architecture the housing of "desolate" voids and empty spaces has become normalized and engrained however. The leading

Japanese architect Kengo Kuma for example has stated: “my ultimate aim is to ‘erase’ architecture” (8) by creating built forms entirely indistinguishable from their surrounding landscapes. Through an analysis of the sprawling and disparate spaces of Tokyo on screen in Kurosawa’s *Pulse* in combination with a brief cultural history of the global drift into architectural “supermodernity” (Augé 24/5), I wish now to finish by exploring the idea that if the uncanny “went public” in the modernist cities of Europe in the early part of twentieth century, then it has now, in an age of global, disparate and fragmentary megalopolises become absolute and all pervading. I also wish to conclude by considering how and why the global city may or may not continue to haunt us in the future and the extent to which the developed city of supermodernity, offers the opportunity for the aesthetic contemplation and representation of built or virtual forms, beyond merely the dystopian.

The End of Modernism

British brutalism was to signal one of the last sustained efforts anywhere in the world to proliferate and build a cohesive architectural project according to the original universalized principles of modernism, as championed by figures such as Gropius and Corbusier. As early as the late nineteen sixties mainstream support within architectural discourse and debate for ideas of utopian paternalism, functionalism and radical socialism in architecture had begun to wane dramatically. As Simon Sadler states: “critics started to agree that the ‘true avant garde’ of architectural modernism, the one that thrived from the 1910’s to the 1930’s, driven ideologically by the will to overthrow bourgeois society” and

proletarianize its public had “become practically extinct” by the seventies in the capitalist west (44). Even leading modernist architects such as Gropius himself, had by the fifties found themselves increasingly employed by individual and well moneyed corporations in America over left leaning and state funded local councils in Europe.

With the acceptance of ideas of a new school of young, predominantly American architects such as Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Jane Jacobs there came “a renewed appreciation for visual variety in the cityscape” (Ghirardo 14). “Urban designers began to juxtapose different elements rather than seek a continuous screen, and to accept the value of the existing and varied elements in the city” (14). Architects and theorists such as Venturi celebrated “messy vitality over obvious unity” and most famously, proclaimed the ecstatic benefits of “both-and” instead of “either-or” (Ghirardo 17). Personal vision came to triumph over pluralized principles and form came to quite defiantly supersede function.

Architects and planners moved away from the idea of a uniformed urban grid, and gradually began to drift back towards the disingenuous, labyrinthine and disorientating juxtaposition of myriad styles and vernaculars that the Modernists had once sought to replace. In place of the championed rationality and objectivity came a self-conscious indulgence in so called, “fuzzy logic” (Ghirardo 14). With architects no longer in service to “honesty” and rationality, personal expression and lyricism in design began to rise to the fore once more. The paradox within the brutalist project of keeping one eye on social care and the other on stylistic posturing had now swung entirely in the latter direction. What was once genuinely “avant garde” now became “neo avant-garde” (Sadler 44). Architects presented radical structural forms not as a social challenge but as

points of bombastic artistic expression or merely to contribute new and exciting images to the cityscape.

Any architects of note wishing to flex their creative muscles no longer looked towards the challenge of state funded housing but the design of corporate sponsored and idiosyncratic mega structures. The architectural stage was now a much more global and commercially driven, rather than local and socially minded, affair. Architects didn't tie themselves to the improvement of one whole city for any great period of time but moved around the world, one high-paying project at a time. This has lead to a situation now where renowned "starchitects" such as Frank Gehry, Jean Nouvel and Richard Rogers are employed on a regular basis to put cities on the global map. As Augé states: "leading architects have become international stars, and when a town aspires to feature in the world network it commissions one of them to produce an edifice that will stand as a monument, a testimony proving its presence in the world, in the sense of being wired into the system" (xv).

These buildings have nothing to do with the specifics of their geographic location however. Their entire purpose is to gesture towards the global rather than local. Yet such is the contrast between their dazzling space age aesthetics and the more sober reality of their often bucolic surrounding landscapes that to navigate to, through and around them is to experience something entirely schizophrenic (see fig. 2). Cutting edge contemporary architecture, in its disregard for context, seems more and more to exist not for its everyday citizens, but in service "to a planetary society that is yet to materialize", which "suggests the brilliant fragments of a splintered utopia in which we would like to believe" (Augé xvii).

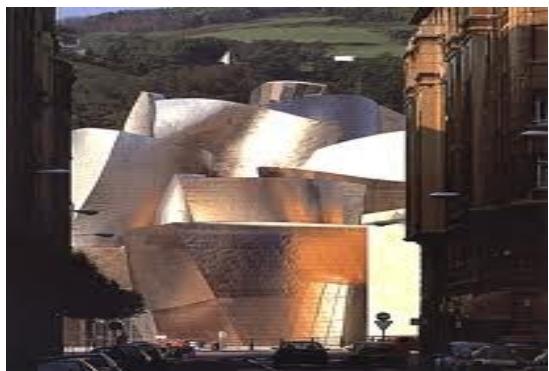


Fig. 1 - Schizophrenic aspects – Frank

Gehry's Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain, 1997, shares space with more traditional urban forms.

As cities prioritize the global over the local, the day to day-lived experience of much western urban life has morphed into something very decentered. With more and more money spent on cities' points of soft connection into the global network through airports, rail travel and internet-communication, the city that is left behind has become far more dispersed and without a knowable, fixed or tangible center. As Frances Bello warned in 1958: "building more and more transportation to keep the central core more accessible may carve so much space out of the city that little worth while will remain" (53). This has arguably come to pass. Indeed if Baudrillard is to be believed we are presented with the threat of an abject "vanishing point" in which "speed is simply the rite that initiates us into emptiness" (7). Architecture no longer exists to house us but merely to direct and facilitate the flow of our movement. The obsessive compulsion to travel rather than "dwell", in the Heideggerian sense, means that constant transit and commuting essentially creates an "aesthetics of

disappearance” in which the very act of automated movement can “produce a kind of invisibility”, a “transparency or transversality in things” (Baudrillard 7).

If we are looking to identify a contemporary urban uncanny therefore the affective mechanics and designs of specific architectural structures has now become increasingly obsolete. The uncanny exists in the gaps in between them, as we spend more and more of our time in transit between loci or immersed in the virtual landscape of the Internet. And so it is for this reason that Marc Augé can confidently state that “the non-places are the real measure of our time” (60). Airports, supermarkets and shopping malls are the (non) architectures, which need to be examined if we are to understand the spaces, which truly haunt the contemporary urban imagination. They are spaces that haunt us by signifying the attempted mass normalization of spatial nothingness and unconnected voids, into the everyday reality of city life.

When defining the concept of the “non-place”, Augé states, “if a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity will be defined as a non-space” (63). Due to the proliferation of Venturi’s “fuzzy logic” in urban design, our transitory experience of much urban space means that it is invariably attributable to no particular ideology, epochal style or even a particular corporate name as the functions of structures remain abstracted and secret. Portions of space are so privatized and micro managed that it is often impossible to know within whose space you are passing, and what function that space serves, at any given time. Yet while non-places have no concern with urban historical continuity or visual spatial cohesion, the fragmentary canvass they

form, the world over becomes curiously homogenized by the high speed and dream-like manner in which we travel between them.

If one is looking to identify a contemporary urban uncanny in the early twenty first century therefore it often lies in the absence of any lived, tangible experience of city life at all. As the design of the city has continued to drift outwards, and the idea of a cohesive urban center has morphed into an empty and meaningless relic, often all that remains is a void. The hustle and bustle of a tactile and physical urban existence has become nothing but an uncanny collective memory, gestured towards in architectural form but entirely absent in reality. While cities spend vast amounts of money on one-off gargantuan avant-garde designs by superstar architects, peppered at key points of commerce and tourism throughout the metropolis, the rest of the city invariably becomes a slightly less exciting canvass of cheaper and blander built forms in service to their connection.

If we apply Simmel's notion of the bridge as a fundamental human boundary point of rational spatial understanding, then such an increased focus upon urban connection would actually heighten the threat of exposure to an awareness of primal unconnectivity even more. With less time spent in individual locations and more time between them, we actually engage with the deathly void of space more and more, as we float perpetually in transit at the border or threshold of somewhere else.



Fig 2 - Richard Roger's Terminal 5 building – Heathrow, London, 2008

The Vanished City

The international city that encapsulates such ideas best is Tokyo. As Botond Bognar explains, “until the mid 1970’s Tokyo regarded its own urbanization in negative terms” (8). During the fifties and sixties architects had failed to successfully impose the concept of a western modernist grid and its geometric aesthetic of forms onto Tokyo and so they regarded the city as “sick and incurable” (8). However “after the 1970’s and the advent of the post-industrial information age, Tokyo began to see itself as a valid urban model, more orientated to the future than the cities it had previously wanted to emulate” (8).

In its subsequent self-conscious avoidance of the rationalized and regulated grid, Tokyo has since been allowed to develop in “piecemeal” fashion and by true “fuzzy logic” (Bognar 9). Tokyo is the perfect working model of the “both-and” city for western architects such as Venturi. In its fragmentation, irrationality, sense of fantasy and improvisational system of urban layout, Tokyo

stands at direct odds with the modernist dream of a gridded map of functional, and universalized geometric blocks.

It is also a highly desirable model because it works. Tokyo does not have the same fractured and heated discursive relationship with the memory of Modernism that many European and American cities do. The fragmentary, de-centered and “piecemeal” formation of the city is not derided or obsessed over so much because it has always been that way. As Masao Miyoshi and Harry D. Harutoonian affirm, “one should not confuse Japan’s non-modernity with the west’s “postmodernism”...the two... are differently foregrounded in history” (xi). Tokyo has essentially not altered its approach to urban planning, really, from the original prototype set out by ancient Edo, in which vast numbers of houses were built in macro proximity to each other and with the boundary lines and thoroughfares of the city, formed organically around them, as the neighborhoods grew.

Modern skyscrapers and apartment buildings were built in a similar fashion: quickly and efficiently but not according to any cohesive map or plan. This has lead to a curious mass urban psychological effect. The impossible but functioning dream of Tokyo seems to simply have coalesced together. Writing about modern day Tokyo Fumihiko Maki states, “it was once a city of wood and paper; it has now become a city of concrete, steel and glass. The feeling of lightness however, remains” (Maki, qtd. by Bognar 295). A number of other critics have also identified the manner in which, despite its sprawling size and monumental presence on the landscape, Tokyo manages to maintain a curious air of transience and immateriality. With the city in such a consistent state of flux and ongoing re-construction, as dazzling new corporate buildings in a variety of

new colourful styles and materials spring up seemingly overnight, and in its apparent temporariness and velocity, Tokyo has come to symbolize a new kind of urban model of abstracted dream architecture. Despite serving as one of the three most important capitals in the world it has also come to signify “a vanishing architecture, which is both there and it is not” (Bognar 295).

On the one hand we can put this down to the thin and delicate nature of many of the materials used. Japanese architects have consistently created a sense of the temporary by using contemporary materials and techniques according to much older and traditional principles of Japanese design. While they are now often built of glass rather than paper, many of the walls and dividing sections between spaces in a wide range of Japanese buildings, from skyscrapers to shopping malls, still remain separated by a very thin and “membrane-like” screen (Bognar 74). There is delicateness to Tokyo’s gargantuan design and scale that remains utterly unique. As Bognar states: “Japanese art and architecture have traditionally been more suggestive than directly expressive... from a western perspective, Japanese design can often seem to be a world of make believe and illusion... Japanese designers and builders have produced the illusion of space, of more than there actually is” (139).

This dream-like sense of lightness and spatial illusion has also been heightened extensively in recent years, like many other international cities, by the proliferation of electronic screens into the urban landscape. These devices, in their softness and virtuality, destabilize and corrode the extent to which we can actually perceive the city as dependent upon any tactile experience or physical manifestation of built space at all. As Vladimir Krstic states, the integration of an electronic screen into the façade of a physical building is monumental in its

consequence because it allows for “something hitherto conceived as a mere technical appliance, to assume an architectural dimension, and to be cast into the space of the city as a real object” (38).

The potential for uncanny spatial effect here is thus also profound. Electronic screens provide the illusory double of an object which in truth is merely a spectral reproduction or residue formed in the void of space, without structural foundation or any solid connection to the physical world. Such images float and hover in space. They invite our attention through aesthetic spectacle but they cannot be touched or measured. They highlight our fragmentary “separation” and isolation in space as they revel in a shifting and flickering immateriality. As Krstic states of such developments: “the crisis (of space) then is one of “dimension”, of the loss of the measure of a visible reality and the destruction of an official (geometric) discourse by way of which we could assert, describe and inscribe reality”.

The third and most significant reason for Tokyo’s perceived “lightness” lies in its repeated annihilation. During the course of the twentieth century it has twice been entirely destroyed and twice completely rebuilt: once after the great earthquake in 1923, and then again after the firebombing by the allies at the end of World War Two. The knowledge of this process in the public consciousness would clearly add significantly to the air of temporariness, lightness and transience, which pervades the city. Tokyo’s architecture becomes more amorphous and fleeting as it divides and maps the air, simply for as long as it withstands disaster. As Bognar reiterates “in its rebuilding it has become – perhaps returned to being – a city without heaviness” (295).

The ongoing threat of future earthquakes and the troubled memories of past catastrophes mean that the threat of annihilation remains ever under the surface of everyday life in Tokyo. The idea of complete urban destruction exists not merely as an unknowable nightmare or fantasy, as in many western cities, but for at least some people, as a genuinely remembered twice over reality. It is perhaps for this reason, as Catherine Russell points out, that since the appearance of Honda Ishiro's *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* in 1954, Tokyo has undergone a continuous and ritualized form of cinematic destruction (220). Through a proliferation of science fiction, horror and disaster movies, as well as in books and comics, Tokyo seems consistently to have dreamt of destroying itself and the image of its annihilation has remained a fixed occurrence within the public imagination.

All of these contributing factors point towards an acute, if unconscious, awareness of a spatial sense of human-less absence in the urban landscape. And it is for these reasons that Susuki identifies the "gaps" between buildings, rather than any particular buildings themselves, as serving as the appropriate expression of Tokyo's contribution to urbanism at the end of the twentieth century. These vacant voids in the air point towards the true heart of Tokyo: the nothingness into which its buildings have vanished, reappeared and yet may well vanish again. It is perhaps no accident then that the city has consistently chosen an architecture of glass-based transience, immateriality and virtuality in recent decades. These spaces serve to accentuate a deeply uncanny urban experience in which nothingness and absence serve as a foundational principle for the reality of everyday city life.

Malignant empty spaces

Harue: "what first made you want to get online?"

Ryosuke: "I'm not sure exactly".

Harue: "wanted to connect with other people? People don't really connect you know. Like all those dots simulating humans, we all live totally separately".

-Scene from *Pulse*

Pulse tells the story of ghosts slowly invading Tokyo as its human population begins to disappear. With the afterlife overcrowded, restless specters begin to spill over into the physical world and appear to citizens through the Internet in the form of grainy and unnerving webcam videos. Upon witnessing these videos the humans begin to gradually turn into ghosts themselves. They lose both all will to live or any faith in "connecting" with other people at all and so they eventually commit suicide, leaving nothing but a black, shapeless trace of colour on the surface of the wall or door nearest to which they have died.

Throughout the film a series of mysterious doors sealed by red tape also begin to appear around the city. Each one houses its own ghost. These empty and closed off spaces are the porous points of interchange through which the ghosts actually materialize into the physical world. For the human to enter into these spaces is equally to succumb to death. Upon opening the door and witnessing the apparition in the empty room, the individual again soon loses all faith in life or "connecting" with others and eventually fades from existence, dematerializing and leaving nothing but the same black trace of shapeless colour. One by one the film's characters all succumb to either the seduction of the red taped room or the

pull of the Internet and Tokyo becomes an emptied and apocalyptic landscape of absence. Planes fall from the sky and highways fall silent with crashed cars littering the streets and sidewalks. The film ends with only one surviving character, Michi, escaping Tokyo by boat and leaving the city in a state of haunted and post-human desolation.

Kurosawa presents Tokyo as vast, sprawling, center-less, drab and without character. There is nothing futuristic or dazzling. The Tokyo we are given is one in which we see the reality of individual, static, mundane and "piecemeal" spaces in a city which has invested itself entirely in global connection and flow. They are the lived and anemic spaces left behind. As a number of commentators have noted, Kurosawa has a very architectural filmic eye in much the same manner as Kubrick or Antonioni, in his square and painterly composition of landscapes, yet there are no architectural points of note to speak of in *Pulse*. The film has an architectural eye but with mostly architecturally mundane or non-architectural subjects. We are rarely given exterior establishing shots of buildings but instead a disconnected series of interior spaces patched together by a vague and loose narrative of anxiety: a rooftop garden, a computer room in a university, and various characters' apartments. We are made aware now and again through dialogue that the film is taking place in Tokyo but really this city might be anywhere. It is simply a stream of blank and non-identifiable spaces, which through our pre-conceived narrative of "Tokyo", share a pre-supposed proximity but visually and physically, there is nothing to connect them. They simply bleed oneirically into one another.

Writing about our visual understanding of "non-places" in film and photography Augé states:

The dominant aesthetic is that of the cinematic long shot, which tends to make us forget the effects of (this) rupture. Photos taken from observation satellites, aerial shots, habituate us to a global view of things. High office blocks and residential towers educate the gaze, as do movies... the smooth flow of cars on a highway, aircraft taking off from airport runways... create an image of the world, as we would like it to be. But that image disintegrates if we look at it too closely (xiii).

Pulse is a screening of that disintegration process. It is a morality tale about the danger in giving up the city entirely to an architecture of flow, immateriality, global connection and long-shot aspects. It warns against the subsequent “non-places” which are formed in their wake.

At the heart of Tokyo’s decent into spatial disintegration are the sealed and taped up rooms, which come to be referred to in the singular tense as “the forbidden room”. The empty spaces they house become one shared condition. These mysterious vacant spaces, all over the city, actually lead to the same place: suicide upon the realization of the unconnected nature of urban life. Originally these spaces are presented as forgotten and abandoned but gradually they begin to proliferate and spread until they are everywhere. They come to overtake positive built forms in an eerie realization of Suzuki’s hypothesis that the “vide” between buildings (gaps) which have been “forsaken (or perhaps released) by both man and space, make up the unique foundation of Tokyo” (19).

They appear in every housing block, office building and factory. And as they steadily summon Tokyo’s citizens to their doom, the empty spaces within

them begin to reassert themselves. The emptiness of the void, triumphs over any sense of positive built space. Eventually there is nothing left in the city but empty spaces and ghosts, as the humans disappear into the empty rooms while buildings crumble and rot. Ignored spaces in the metropolis, it would seem, are not without their consequences. Once the citizens immerse themselves in the corrosively empty space of the “forbidden room”, empty space augments itself as the whole city becomes empty, and the humans dematerialize into black trace forms in the air. Voids become malignant.

The driving narrative and conceptual engine behind *Pulse* is essentially the seduction of death signified by an abject “unconnectivity”, and the augmentation of that seduction, formed through a piece meal city of “non-places”. Throughout the film characters obsess constantly over their inability to connect with each other and then, upon entering “the forbidden room”, (an empty space) find the awareness of their true isolation unbearable to the point of suicide. It is being made aware of unconnected space opening up around them and the extent of its existence in the city which upsets them. It is the underlying horror behind the computer programme, which Harue shows Ryosuke at the beginning of the film: that no two particles can share any true spatial proximity and the city has seemingly built an architecture to support that fact.

As the film continues, an all consuming but uncannily familiar sense of desolation and destruction begins to redefine the landscape. We are shown bodies of nameless citizens charred and blackened in a manner reminiscent of the victims of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. Great ruptures appear in the surface of roads and bridges reminiscent of the earthquake. Planes fall from the sky in a fashion reminiscent of World War Two. It as if the ruination caused

by previous disasters is returning. Architecture begins to give way and vanish as the spatial void it denies becomes absolute once more. Tokyo's architecture of non-places, "gaps" and electronic screens disappears with the same "lightness" and delicacy through which it first materialized.

In a poignant scene close to the end of the film Harue and Ryosuke are riding an empty train out of Tokyo. Harue has witnessed a specter though the Internet and since lost all hope in connecting with anyone. Ryosuke tries again and again to convince her to accept his support, friendship and physical proximity but she cannot. Like the city they have left behind she too simply wants to melt into the air. The train then stalls and a rat runs across the empty carriage floor. In the split second Ryosuke's back is turned, Harue flees out into the darkness, leaving him alone and abandoned in the dazzling white light of the train car. On each side of him the camera reveals the hundred upon hundreds of empty seats extending off into the seeming infinity of the adjoining carriages.

The camera then pulls out to reveal a wide shot in which we see the lights of the train flickering and glowing in the darkness as Ryosuke calls out hopelessly for Harue, who has now vanished into the void of space outside. The forward propulsion of the train is now redundant. Roads and train lines lead nowhere. The topology of the city has lost any of its human meaning through mapping. The gaps between buildings, and within the sealed up rooms, which have been so long ignored are now everywhere. Buildings now merely briefly intrude upon the expanse of the gaps rather than the inverse. With the image of the stalled, almost spectral train car, Kurosawa teases out desolation from the spectacle of high-speed urban travel. He unnervingly affirms Baudrillard's

summation of such non-places and their design as “the rite, which initiates us into emptiness”.

A Positive Exploration of Voids

Pulse is an unwaveringly bleak film. It shows the worst possible aesthetic implications of contemporary capitalist society and its architecture of abstraction, temporariness and fragmentation. As Catherine Russell states however, it is “a mistake to give in to the rhetoric of apocalypse and forget that Tokyo is a place where people actually live” (222). Obviously, as an urban model, Tokyo does work. It has become the world leader of cutting edge architecture and serves as a consistently desired example of how to build a modern city. In many ways, as Richard Rogers has stated, Tokyo is “more enlightened than other cities” as “there is a process of dynamic change,” in which the city is not kept as a pristine “museum” to its past but as a site of constant “process” and re-development (35). Or as Donald Richie has put it, Tokyo “is an illustration of itself – a metaphor for continual change” (qtd. by Russell 212).

There has been a tendency across the humanities in recent years to follow the pessimistic line of reasoning of a film like *Pulse* and view the modern city as in a state of inexorable decay and disappearance. Indeed my own background as a film studies scholar has often lead me towards Baudrillard’s “information overload” view of the metropolis (Petro and Krause 2). And such ideas are by no means without their currency. The extreme fragmentation of the urban experience ushered in by the mass digitization of commerce, industry and spatial planning in a city like Tokyo will have, and will continue to have, dubious

psychological implications. *Pulse*, and several other Japanese horror films of the nineties and early 2000's, with their exploration of anxiety carried through soft technology and blank or transitory city spaces, exist for a reason. Such forms are frightening. What began "hidden" within the Modernist project has since both outlived and outgrown it: a human dependence on inhuman forms and the proliferation of spaces created to house them.

As we move into the twenty first century however it is necessary to recognize that that this new city of soft technology, virtuality and transit is not going away. It is only when measured against the remembered contours of the supposedly cohesive Modernist grid system, (a myth in itself frequently usurped by the persistence of pre-modern and primitive anxieties), that the gaping improvisations and cavernous empty spaces of the post-modern metropolis trouble us so much. A movie like *Pulse* appeals to this anxiety. It denounces the city entirely and suggests its only value is the extent to which it pushes us towards the unconscious pleasure of death, expanse and annihilation. Indeed the final line of the film is by no means life affirming. Michi, the sole survivor, simply dispassionately states that: "death comes to us all. Maybe that would have been better, if we'd gone with the others. But we didn't. We decided to keep going into the future."

Yet the reality is that the extra-cinematic city and its citizens will also "keep going into the future", along with all of the anxiety that comes with each new epoch and its uncanny plateau of rationality. *Pulse* and the horror it finds in the voids suddenly opening up all around the city, by way of a transient, disparate architecture of virtuality and digitization, is in this sense, at once both a product of its time (the pre-millennial nineteen nineties) and entirely timeless.

A fear of the spatial urban void, as a symbol of death, will remain an ever-present anxiety of city life, as it has done throughout this study. The metropolis will continue to create its own blind spots and accidents of planning which evoke irrational and unpredictable fears and point more towards “desolation” than “civilization”.

Architectures of transience, virtuality and “lightness” will probably not continue to haunt us however. As these ideas become an increasingly fundamental and unavoidable presence in our lives, they will lose their sense of alien-ness and potential apocalypticism. The sense of divide between the virtual and the actual will also diminish. As the economist Saskia Sassen has stated: “there is today no fully virtualized firm or economic sector. Even finance, the most digitized, dematerialized and globalized of all activities has a topography that weaves back and forth between actual and digital space” (22). To dwell in the modern city is, necessarily, to be in discursive conversation between the “actual and the digital”. The border space between is not necessarily a bad place to inhabit. As Sassen goes on to say, “the promise of the city in an era of globalization is precisely what the city promised in times past: a sort of new frontier zone where an enormous mix of people converge” with new ideas emerging as the products of new modes of urban perception (25).

The architect Kengo Kuma for example has designed lyrical, expressive and experimental structures, which provoke anything but suicidal, doom mongering. Kuma’s recent work is a primal and fundamental paean to a dialectic of immateriality and built presence in the landscape (see fig. 3). His buildings take the transience and lightness of the post-modern metropolis into account and signal bold new forms for the future, which immerse the viewer,

contemplatively and consciously into this condition of “lightness” and disappearance. They are humane, calming and tranquil rather than dystopian. Kumo turns the “lightness” of Augé’s “supermodernity” into something dazzling, absorbing and seductive rather than ephemerally vacuous.

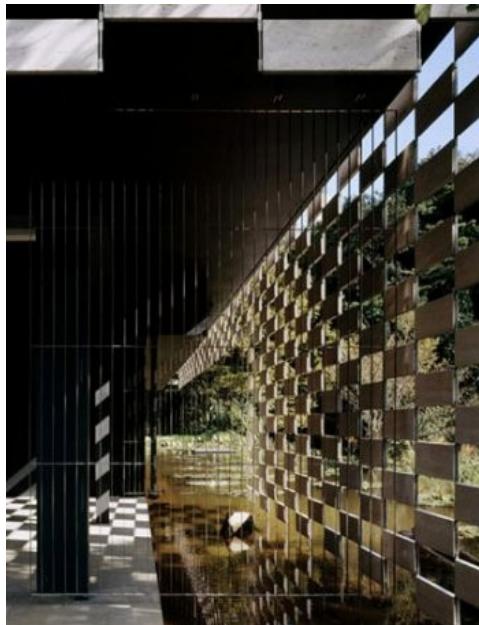


Fig. 3 - Kengo Kuma, Lotus House, Tokyo,

2006

Cinematically speaking we simply need to find a new way of representing and understanding such a spatial topographical interface. As we consume films, television and adverts more and more in the spaces of our own homes rather than the cinema, in small fragments, and on smaller screens, the concept of fragmentation and the dissolution of a “grid”, will become an irrelevant consideration. Indeed future generations may come to be, or perhaps already are, haunted by the unfamiliar form of a feature length film, in the same way a feature length film like *Blade Runner* (1982) is haunted by the hyper-compressed micro fragments of images and electronic screens, loose in the cityscape.

We will probably need to wait for at least some temporal hindsight however before the uncanny potential for architecture such as Kumo's is appropriately represented on screen. And it is not likely to happen by way of anything so archaic as a film. It is perhaps only by moving between different media and points of exhibition that the strange effects of such a building could ever be capitalized upon on screen. Such challenges however are simply an affirmation of Vidler's fundamental assertion that: "there is no such thing as an uncanny architecture, but simply architecture that, from time to time and for different purposes, is invested with uncanny qualities" (12). The ghosts of unknown quantities will always haunt each epoch. And each epoch will always need its ghosts.

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