Master's Creative Research Report

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Short Cut: A Feminist Reflection on the Postcolonial Uncanny

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Masters of Arts in Film and Television in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, nor has it been prepared with the assistance of any other body or organisation or person outside of the University of the Witwatersrand.

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ABSTRACT

This research-led praxis Masters interrogates and explores Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory on the uncanny to realise a short film text, entitled *Short Cut*. Specific attributes of the uncanny are applied in the film's attempt to produce a sensibility of the uncanny, in order to convey the anxiety and fear of femicide experienced by women in South Africa on a daily basis. The film is effectively created through the theoretical considerations of the research. Drawing on primary texts from Sigmund Freud, Homi Bhabha and Teresa De Lauretis, the research deliberates on how the uncanny is a critical register through which to articulate conditions of dread and horror shaping the lives of women navigating the spectre of femicide in South Africa. The uncanny is marshalled as an aesthetic-conceptual tool consciously and intentionally used by filmmakers and as an aesthetic and conceptual tool for filmmakers interested in exploring the experiences and traumas of postcolonial women. In so doing, it seeks to provide new possibilities, insights and expressions of representation on film, through the intersectional conceptual lenses of gender, postcolonial theory and psychoanalysis.

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Introduction

According to the South African Police Service (SAPS) statistics, in the five-year period between 2015 and 2020, a total of 13,815 women over the age of 18 years were murdered, an average of 2,763 murders a year, or about 7 women a day. Between the first quarter of 2021 and first quarter of 2022 there was a 52% increase in the murder of women. According to the 2019 Global Homicide Report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) drawing upon the SAPS statistics, South Africa ranks among the five countries with the highest female homicide rates with Central and South American countries like Venezuela, Honduras and El Salvador. A task as mundane as a visit to the post office as in the case of the university student Uyinene Mrwetyana in August 2019 can result in a woman's rape and murder.

We have seen national protests with people taking to the streets, and campaigns like #totalshutdown and #AmINext, #SayHerName and #MeToo as part of an upsurge movement spearheaded by women calling upon political powers and the judiciary to tackle the violence against women. The South African government's response has been to organise two presidential summits on gender-based violence, 2018 and in 2022, where President Ramaphosa stated that, "Not a day goes by without a story in the newspapers, on television or online about a woman or child that has lost their life or been abused in the most horrendous manner." (Eyewitness News, Nov 2022) The disposability of women's lives and the sense in which women are detritus needs vehement and urgent challenge.

Danai Mupotsa, an African literary and feminist academic, argues that gender inequality should be undertaken with a research ethics based upon a 'politics of rage'. She states "I do so, because I think that what I have to say about sex and gender is important and that what my peers have to say about the matter is also important. I believe that these are matters of power, identity that reach the core of the messy, rotting world within which we live." (Mupotsa, 2008, p. 104). It is within this 'politics of rage' that the Masters is situated, as a contribution to the conversation around femicide both South African and global.

This research-led praxis Masters (MA) first interrogates and then employs psychoanalytic theory to the creative component of the MA, a film text entitled *Short Cut* around femicide, deploying specific aspects of the uncanny to attempt to produce such a sensibility in the film. The film is consequently created through the theoretical considerations of the research.

The MA research investigates the concept of Sigmund Freud's uncanny as a productive category through which to articulate the anxiety of femicide as experienced by women in a post-colonial urban context. It proposes the uncanny as an important and rich lens through which to engage with issues of gender in South Africa; as an aesthetic-conceptual tool consciously and intentionally used by filmmakers and as an aesthetic and conceptual tool for filmmakers interested in exploring the experiences and traumas of postcolonial women.

Drawing on primary texts from psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha, feminist film theorist Teresa de Lauretis and feminist art historian Alexandra Kokoli as well as other academic work I seek to reflect on how the uncanny can become a register through which to articulate conditions of dread and horror shaping the lives of women navigating femicide in the South African postcolonial context.

These central conceptual prisms which provide an analytic framing are also undertaken to simultaneously develop aesthetics towards producing the sense of the uncanny in the experimental and narrative film *Short Cut.* The narrative is a reflection on a black migrant woman's daily walk to work. She takes a short cut along a path that she anxiously experiences as precarious, a path along which other women have disappeared or been disappeared or where she might disappear.

In conversation with the theory, the film attempts to represent the anxiety around patriarchy and to render palpable, the fear women experience in the face of femicide. In so doing, it hopes to provide new possibilities, insights and expressions of representation

on film, through the intersectional conceptual lenses of gender, postcolonial theory and psychoanalysis. Ultimately the research strives to contribute to the discursive possibility of the uncanny as a rich and productive area for the intersection of postcolonial and gender concerns in South Africa.

Chapter 1 provides a definition of the uncanny and how it is qualified, focusing on repression/ambivalence, doubles/dopplegängers and repetition. In Chapter 2 a postcolonial reading of the uncanny and its articulation of postcolonial modernity is explored. The chapter examines how the uncanny enunciates a particular psycho/social state of encountering patriarchy through the fear of femicide. And finally, in Chapter 3, the research engages with the uncanny as a critical category of psychoanalytic feminism towards its use in resisting, challenging and subverting patriarchy towards agency, and its implications for feminist film-making practice.

The respective theoretical findings were subsequently used to both derive filmic language to produce a sense of the uncanny for *Short Cut,* an intimate study of one woman's daily journey to work, and to reflect upon the uncanny in the narrative. Techniques and strategies derived from the qualities required for the experiencing of the uncanny, as articulated by Freud, are attempted within the film work to affect the uncanny 1) the use of the doppelgänger and doubling in the narrative and aesthetics 2) the use of repetition to drive the ethos of haunting 3) the unhomely psyche of the postcolonial subject 4) the implied positionality of the woman spectator's point of view in the film for a seizing of the gaze in the tradition of feminist filmmaking practice. In so doing *Short Cut* endeavours to bring to the fore daily conditions of horror and dread which haunt women in South Africa within the broader spectre of femicide.

Taking the city of Johannesburg as its context, a post-colonial city haunted by the traces and economic legacy of both the colonial era and apartheid, the story is set in an artery, on a path that juts off a main road, a path that meanders through an overgrown "no (wo)man's land," populated by trees and grass, running alongside a river. This small spot is set within the broader historical and socio-political intersection of lingering and ghostly

settler colonialism and apartheid. Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe in their work, *The Elusive Metropolis* (2008) describe contemporary Johannesburg as an “Afropolis”, “The African modern is a specific way of being in the world. As elsewhere in the global south, it has been shaped in the crucible of colonialism and by the labour of race.” (2008, p. 1) From its sudden formation around gold mines in 1886, Johannesburg became a city of migrants, of ghostly travellers – formed mostly of the working class and itinerant. Under apartheid and the Group Areas Act instituted in 1950 black people and other groups of colour were forcefully removed from city dwellings into the outskirts in race-segregated areas. The roads leading into Johannesburg were and continue to be conduits that supply workers to its economic centres and to its suburbs.

There is an implicit remark in *Short Cut* about these side roads, paths that workers are propelled upon. A particular echelon of working-class people who service the suburbs, especially domestic workers, the focus of the film, traverse the landscape and with it the precarities both suggested and thrown into their paths on their daily journeys. As such these women are made vulnerable to the broader frame of patriarchal concerns that surround their daily navigations and are situated in the nexus of unequal gender relations which impact on their sense of safety. In a country where women feel unsafe walking, the daily walk to work raises its own fears. It is with this psychological state that *Short Cut* is concerned.

The uncanny is explored through an intimate study of one woman’s daily journey to work. In so doing it brings to the fore daily conditions of trepidation which haunt women in South Africa within the broader spectre of femicide. Drawing on the idea of the uncanny the film conveys the psychic journey and experience of a domestic worker who takes a short cut to work through a wild and overgrown area along a path where the landscape feels precarious and fraught as a path where other women have disappeared, been disappeared, and where she might disappear. The landscape of wilderness that she must encounter on her short cut elicits an internal landscape of fear, expectation and trepidation. This path that is seemingly innocuous carries within it the angst attendant to patriarchal violence that can be visited upon her at any moment, at any point on her way

to and from work. It is the labyrinthine space of the uncanny. Other women, also domestic workers, will also take this path and they all share in this form of anxiety. It is this other worldliness that the uncanny conveys.

Chapter I: QUALIFYING THE UNCANNY AND SEVERAL ATTRIBUTES INTRINSIC TO ITS EXPERIENCE

The concept of the uncanny was introduced into critical thinking by the German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch in his 1906 essay, *Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen (The Psychology of the Uncanny*) in which he defines the uncanny as a particular form of anxiety. Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud in his 1919 treatise *Das Unheimliche* (*The Uncanny*) argues that Jentsch's definition of the uncanny as a mild form of anxiety, as "intellectual uncertainty" that results from "lack of orientation" is not comprehensive enough to describe the particularity of the feeling; its provenance and its effects. (Schlipphacke, 2015, p. 164)

In *Das Unheimliche* Freud expands upon its definition and distinguishes the uncanny as an unspecified *feeling* or *psychological state* of dread, fear, unease, disquiet, eeriness, lurking horror, apprehension, anxiety, strangeness, terror, a state of being unsettled. The uncanny, he asserts "…belongs to all that is terrible – to all that arouses dread and creeping horror…" (Freud, 1919, p. 1) and is comprised of an intrinsic quality which he then attempts to define. For this endeavour, Freud turns to the fields of aesthetics and psychoanalysis.

The idea of the uncanny was in general circulation in 19th Century Europe and in Britain in particular (Royle, 2003, p. 23) during a period when Victorian society was preoccupied by the paranormal, mediums, automata, hypnosis and the like, in what has been described as a nineteenth-century "crisis of faith". (McCuskey, 2006, p. 430) This urge towards the irrational was a middle-class response, an opposition to the growth of rationalised knowledge and professions such as medicine, law, and education. In eighteenth and nineteenth-century gothic literature the use of the word "uncanny" was

related to the sublime but there were no theoretical texts on the uncanny dating from that period, “Indeed, the one thing that nearly all critics agree on is that Freud’s text *The Uncanny* (*Das Unheimliche)* provides the starting point for the twentieth-century conceptualization of the uncanny - even if Freud himself does point out some earlier sources of the uncanny (Jentsch and Schelling).” (Masschelein, 2002, p. 54)

But Freud departs from the ‘popular’ usage of the term and locates his enquiry in the field of aesthetics arguing that the uncanny is most easily apprehended in literary examples as aesthetics readily lends itself to conveying the uncanny because it does not have to obey the laws of reason and goes beyond naturalistic causality to appeal to emotions, “because supernatural literature is free from naturalistic rules, it can present psychoanalytic concepts especially well by using devices such as the double.” (Peel, 1980, p. 410). In order to deepen his inquiry, Freud then couples aesthetics with psychoanalysis in so far as both fields relate to “the theory of the qualities of feeling.” (Freud, 1919, p. 1). Freud is immediately signaling the qualitative nature of the term, that it is not measurable when he thus situates his argument. And thus, he effectively sets off to prove what is not provable.

In *Das Unheimliche* Freud delineates attributes integral to the uncanny which he argues first through the genealogy of the term, then by proffering a close reading of *The Tales of Hoffman* a supernaturalistic literary work by his contemporary Ernst Hoffman searching for literary incidences of the uncanny, as well as turning to real life situations and cases including biographical experience to present the various ways in which the uncanny arises, in his search for its intrinsic qualities.

In his analysis Freud suggests the uncanny moment as a return to an earlier psychic experience, which involuntarily re-emerges, as an adult. Masschelein argues that he “introduces the uncanny as a special shade of anxiety, which can be experienced in real life or in literature, caused by the return of the repressed or by the apparent confirmation of surmounted, primitive [childhood] beliefs.” (2002, p. 54)

Critics have noted Freud's inability to arrive at a conclusive definition of the uncanny. "Freud yearns to make the uncanny take "a very forcible and definite form"; he stalks it from example to example, hoping to conjure up and then corner a working definition." (McCuskey, 2006, p. 425) He circumnavigates the term making his way between aesthetics and psychoanalysis and this is symptomatic, as Emma Zimmerman suggests, of his "essay [as] a tentative exploration continually shadowed by doubt…" (2015, p. 77). And as post-structural theorist Hélène Cixous describes it, Freud's inability to escape his very own experience of the uncanny and circular endeavour of attempting the definition through the axis of science and aesthetics.

> As a commentary on uncertainty with its tightly drawn net mended by its plots and their resolutions, this long text of Freud employs a peculiarly disquieting method to track down the concept *das Unheimliche*, the Disquieting Strange, the Uncanny. Nothing turns out less reassuring for the reader than this niggling, cautious, yet wily and interminable pursuit (of "something" – be it a domain, an emotional movement, a concept, impossible to determine yet variable in its form, intensity, quality, and content). Nor does anything prove to be more fleeting than this search whose movement constitutes the labyrinth which instigates it; the sense of strangeness imposes its secret necessity everywhere. The ensuing unfolding whose operation is contradictory is accomplished by the author's double: Hesitation. We are faced, then, with a text and its hesitating shadow, and their double escapade. As for plots, what is brought together here is quickly undone, what asserts itself becomes suspect; each thread leads to its net or to some kind of disentanglement. (Cixous, 1976, p. 525)

Cixous is describing Freud's attempts at a definition of the uncanny; he ends up in a series of meanderings and returns in his inability to arrive at a final definition. According to Cixous his very endeavour to define the uncanny constitutes the nature of and is symptomatic of the uncanny.

Emma Zimmerman sees Freud's undertaking in *Das Unheimliche* as his "…inability to put his finger on the essential quality of the uncanny [as] uncanny itself and thus the essay's very form communicates the uneasy slippage of the term and the crucial blurring of boundaries it encapsulates." (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 77). This in part because Freud works out of two disciplines, one based in the "real" and the other in fiction, that of psychoanalysis and that of aesthetics, searching his way towards a definition. Hence the very form of the essay, striving in its nature, conveys the sense of the uncanny and the difficulty of being able to provide a single definition of the concept.

This is not to suggest that the critique dismisses the value of *Das Unheimliche*. A genealogy of the term as demonstrated by Anneleen Masschelein (2002) traces its importance as a concept for post-structuralist theorists like Jacques Lacan and its resurgence in the latter part of the 20th century to theorise around architecture, alienation, subjectivity, homelessness, and social concerns. In another sense it is Freud's inability to clearly "author" the uncanny that has leant itself to current arguments around the instability of knowledge, the de-centering of the author and de-centering of subjects. For academic Molly Molloy,

> According to Freud, situations characterized by "intellectual uncertainty" or "disconcerted logic" are likely to be experienced as uncanny…The uncanny, then, has connotations of psychic and rational confusion and it is not surprising that, in this age of the destabilising of knowledges, "the uncanny" should emerge as a salient concept in cultural analysis. (1999, p.156)

The theorist Julia Kristeva argues that the uncanny allows us to recognise our interior otherness hence allowing for an ethical embrace the other [immigrant] in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1994) and Nicholas Royle in his work *The Uncanny*, insists on the continued significance of the uncanny to interrogate contemporary issues of identity and othering in everyday life; othering in the self, in constituting one's identity, of the self and of others. (Royle, 2003, p. 23) Postcolonial theorists have looked to the uncanny to interrogate the "hauntology" of colonialism in the present and its continued trace in subjecthood and

subjectivity. Homi Bhabha (1992) for example has found the uncanny an insightful category and has infused it with socio-political aspects in order to proffer a postcolonial reading of our times/world and to interrogate questions of belonging. The uncanny therefore is very much alive as a contemporary register.

In order to engage with its usage, it is important to return to Freud's foray into the uncanny which suggests, among several, certain attributes critical or germane for its experience; namely repression/ambivalence, doubles and repetition. Further, these have been considered and employed in the aesthetic and thematic production of the research-led practice film work *Short Cut.* In the making of the film *Short Cut*, several techniques are derived from several areas qualified by Freud as central to the iteration of the uncanny, namely; repression (trauma) and ambivalence (as it relates to disorientation), doubles (as it relates to framing/shots, characters, events, objects) and repetition (as it relates to temporality). These are employed in the film to drive the uncanny (unease, anxiety) in the aesthetic.

Repression

Although the uncanny refers to a sensibility of dread and horror it is constituted by a further peculiarity that distinguishes it from a generalized fear. Freud argues that it belongs to "that class of terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (Freud, 1919, pp. 1-2) more specifically "to all that remains hidden that comes to light." (Freud, 1919, p. 13). It is in effect a return of the repressed; a return to an earlier psychic event in one's childhood development.

In order to demonstrate this peculiarity Freud pursues an etymological route focusing on the semantic meaning of two terms, tracing the term *heimlich*[1] which he defines as "…familiar, known…belonging to home," (Freud, 1919, p. 3), in essence friendly, intimate,

[1] Freud variably, according to German grammar, uses capitals for Heimlich/Unheimlich, usually when they are nouns. For this thesis the small letter version, as per English grammar will be used, and italics to indicate the words as German.

tame, comfortable. He then examines the term *unheimlich* as meaning strange, unfamiliar, frightening. These would be considered their *primary* definitions. And in this instance, they *appear* as opposites.

> The German word *unheimlich* is obviously the opposite of *Heimlich*, *heimisch*, meaning “familiar,” “native,” belonging to home”; and we are tempted to conclude that what is uncanny is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar. Naturally not everything which is new and unfamiliar is frightening, however; the relation cannot be inverted. We can only say that what is novel can easily become frightening and uncanny; some new things are frightening but not by any means all. Something has to be added to what is novel and unfamiliar to make it uncanny. (Freud, 1919, p. 2)

This addition to the unfamiliar is its *familiarity*.

After examining the concept through European, Latin and Greek language dictionaries and lexicons, Freud arrives at an interesting meaning in the *Worterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (1860) by Daniel Sanders (Freud, 1919, p. 2) through which he interrogates two less used definitions for *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich*. There he finds a *secondary* definition which describes the *Heimlich* as something that is hidden, private, secret “concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know about it…” (Freud, 1919, p. 3). *Unheimlich* in turn means something that is exposed, unconcealed, a secret which is *inadvertently* revealed or uncovered, “everything is uncanny that ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light.” (Freud, 1919, p. 4) It is something repressed that comes to light.

For Freud it is on this point that the two terms share a definition - everything that is uncanny ought to have remained secret and private but is suddenly or unexpectedly exposed. Rather than being opposites, they *coincide* on the shared definition of privacy/secrecy; of a concealed matter and something that *should remain* concealed,

> among its different shades of meaning the word *heimlich* exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, *unheimlich*. What is *Heimlich* thus comes to be u*nheimlich*. (Cf. the quotation from Gutzkow: "We call it *unheimlich*; you call it *heimlich*.") In general we are reminded that the word *heimlich* is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which without being contradictory are yet very different: on the one hand, it means that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept out of sight. (Freud, 1919, p. 4)

The two terms are confounded just as the experience of the uncanny is confounding. What is therefore in the domestic sphere or home (the familiar) must be kept hidden and private because it is strange, unfamiliar, threatening. This in effect means that what is housed in the home (the private), a site deemed to be safe and secure, is also the unfamiliar and strange – the home can suddenly become a place of unsafety and insecurity.

> Freud reveals how the uncanny is far from being a supernatural phenomenon and is, in fact, entrenched in the destabilization of traditional notions of home…The uncanny is therefore a salient feature of everyday life and a concept premised on unsettling important spatial and psychological binaries conventionally associated with but not limited to, the domestic home: familiar/unfamiliar, interior/exterior, private/public." (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 77)

What is significant about the conflation of *heimlich* / *unheimlich* around secrecy is that what is in the home *must be* kept private and secret *necessarily* because of the possibility of the excess/outpouring of the strange from this supposed domesticity. By arguing that that which is familiar must be kept out of sight – it also means that its strangeness must be kept from public view. There is the aspect of the secret with the uncanny. "The uncanny has to do with the sense of a secret encounter…it disturbs any straightforward sense of what is inside and what is outside" (Royle, 2003, p. 2) or what is familiar and unfamiliar.

These two sensibilities are simultaneously housed within one another, and are part of one another and it is when one pierces through the other that the uncanny is experienced; something familiar is rendered familiarly unfamiliar and when something unfamiliar is rendered familiarly familiar.

> But the uncanny is not simply an experience of strangeness or alienation. More specifically it is a peculiar comingling of the familiar and the unfamiliar. It can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context. It can consist in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of heart and home. (Royle, 2003, p. 1)

Nicholas Royle is further enunciating the particularity of the uncanny with regard to its unexpected occurrence through simultaneous unfamiliarity and familiarity pointing to the domestic/known as its domicile. The importance of the familiarity inherent to the uncanny as we will see has to do with repression.

The uncanny therefore is encountered when within the familiar something unfamiliar emerges; when the home suddenly becomes unhomely, a strange place and yet the strangeness remains familiar.

> this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression. This reference to the factor of repression enables us, furthermore, to understand Schelling's definition of the uncanny as something which ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light." (Freud, 1919, p. 13)

It is through the relationship of the cohabitation of the terms within one another that the idea of repression which is integral to the uncanny is exemplified. The *heimlich* effectively represses the *unheimlich*. When the *unheimlich* breaks through, it is something concealed that inadvertently comes to light. It is the return of the repressed, "that class of

terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar." (Freud, 1919, pp. 1-2)

If the conscious correlates with *heimlich* and the unconscious with *unheimlich*, the conscious effectively represses the unconscious and the uncanny is the return of the repressed. What qualifies the uncanny (as opposed to the return of just any memory), is the additional element to which Freud refers, the way in which something familiar surfaces out of the unfamiliar and the unfamiliar out of the familiar in a *sudden* moment of [mis]recognition.

This return materialises against one's will, and emerges through and against the self/ego, and in so doing disorients and terrifies, as something in the unconscious "ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet" against the will of the subject "has come to light." (Freud, 1919, p. 4) The unconscious lurks in the conscious just as the *unheimlich* lurks within the *heimlich*, always ready to spill through, always threatening the stability and "unity" of the subject.

> The uncanny has to do with a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality. It may be that the uncanny is a feeling that happens only to oneself, most of all, with what is not oneself, with others, with the world 'itself'. It may thus be construed as a foreign body within oneself, even the experience of oneself as a foreign body, the very estrangement of inner silence and solitude. (Royle, 2003, p. 2)

The sense of liminality and being made foreign to oneself, and within oneself is central to the thematic of *Short Cut*. The *heimlich's* (conscious) repression of the *unheimlich* (unconscious) is destabilised on the path as fear inadvertently materialises. The woman (women) becomes estranged to herself (themselves) as the unconscious anxiety filters through the terrain to surround and both enter and emerge from her (them). This is denoted in the narrative as a woman embarks down a path and through a series of moments, of fear and disorientation, effectively splits from herself into others. The split

could connote a split from the self or a split into other women or the same woman split in different ways, in different manifestations. It signifies an estrangement from the environment, from the self and within the self. The split articulates the repression of the fear of femicide that surrounds her walk – women have to effectively repress the portent of the violence of patriarchy in order to get on with daily life. The path that is walked every day is a site of the repression of fear.

The soundscape of night noises (frogs, crickets) is omnipresent in the day, and the wilderness presented along the path – the detour into the wilderness is a foray into the fear. On the other side of this is the wilderness as a possible place of freedom; the longed-for meandering and wandering that the path might present – it could be this longing too that is repressed. Footsteps linger and haunt – are they there? Are they being suppressed or heard through the subconscious? The *heimlich* and the *unheimlich* are in interplay as one glimpses the unconscious through the wild and through the real and/or imagined sounds.

Rather than *explaining* the repression, the film instead opens a series of questions around repression, and the ways in which the *heimlich* and *unheimlich* emerge in the narrative, with various possible readings available. Is this a story about repression in the self, or of the double, or of the possibility of what she (the woman) would like to be (free, wandering, unafraid)? Does the other woman (do the other women) return out of the repressed to be claimed? To claim? Is this about all the women who have died breaking through from the subterranean unconscious into consciousness? Is it about the trauma becoming exposed to the self?

These multiple women relate to the idea of repression and the uncanny, suggesting on one hand the subject as non-originary made evident by the moment of disjuncture/trauma. This is not the first woman who has encountered the prospect of violence and this is not a specific woman either; the trauma is ongoing and collective. There is no unified subject. If we take the subject of the film as a single woman; these other women rise to the surface in her and if taken as many women; these many women lurk in each woman.

In her argument around the space and time of the uncanny as it articulates trauma, Heidi Schlipphacke argues that in his essay,

> Freud returns, after many digressions, to a model for the uncanny that has traditionally informed basic trauma theory: the return of the past that generates an anxiety based on the temporary flattening of a topographical and chronological order. That which is below rises to the surface, and that which has past has entered the present. (2015, p. 165)

The uncanny blurs the boundaries Royle argues of what is inside and what is outside, the past and the present and as Schlipphacke suggests, effects a temporal collapse. It brings to the fore the unknowability of the self. “Freud’s definition of the uncanny...lays bare its essence as an “unconscious” structure, unknowable and concealed to the self…the uncanny [is a] property which resists knowing” positing the spectre of the split or non-unified subject. (Park, 2003, p. 61)

> However, Freud points out that *heimlich* can also be defined as that which is “concealed, kept hidden, so that others do not get to know of it or about it and it is hidden from them”. This element of secrecy, far from being homely, means that *heimlich* “becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*”. The uncanny, then, “is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed” and this emerges as “something that should have remained hidden and has come into the open… (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 77)

The unconscious, which is unknowable and concealed to the self, as the something familiar that should have stayed hidden, erupts into sight through trauma; and the experience of trauma as Schlipphacke argues is both spatial and temporal in nature. In order to arrive at an experiential sense of trauma, *Short Cut* attempts both a conflation

and extension of time in the work; conflation through the replication and replacing of one woman into another and extension through the drawing out of the walk.

The doubling and conflation of the women produces an anxiety through their confounding or collapse into one another. This also informs the sense of a temporal collapse whereby the moment of trauma becomes intermittently unconcealed. The temporality is suggestive of the nature of trauma as is the split woman/women whereby they can be read to be porous, inside and outside of one another, between one another and placed into an ambivalent relationship as friend and/or harbinger and/or foe along the path; there is no guarantee that the women ghosts are not malevolent or vengeful.

To convey the topographical and temporal flattening innate to trauma as articulated by Schlipphacke, *Short Cut* makes use of screen geography, of having the characters in discontinuity wander onto and off the path into areas of wilderness and containment in order to confound space. This topographic foray explores the psychic journey of character(s) and works towards the temporality of the trauma; an elongated and extended walking marked by psychic detours along a perilous path. The narrative itself shows a journey with no beginning and no end on a path that is seemingly distended in a psychic loop.

In the return of the repressed, it is significant that the revelation is inadvertent in nature (as being against one's will). Rather than merely being concealed from others, it is more significant that the revelation is concealed from *the self* and then *inadvertently* becomes exposed to the *self*. In this disjunctive moment or rupture of revelation is the experience of the uncanny, as an anxiety, as a trauma even, as "that class of terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar." (Freud, 1919, pp. 1-2)

> [more] particularly, it concerns a sense of unfamiliarity which appears at the very heart of the familiar, or else a sense of familiarity which appears at the very heart of the unfamiliar…trauma is usually perceived as an overwhelming past experience (as Cathy Caruth argues, an experience that was so intense that we

> missed it) whose intensity nevertheless haunts the present, causing the shell shock symptoms experienced by war neurotics... A past trauma is repressed, pushed down, as it were, only to reappear as the uncanny, that which is both "heimlich" and "unheimlich." (Schlipphacke, 2015, p. 16)

In the inadvertent moment of bringing to light that which must be hidden, in *Short Cut*, one woman effectively pierces through another in the narrative, to replace, take one another's place, to repress or to elucidate the violence at play, depending on the reading.

Central to this exposure is the repression that spills through in the moment of disjuncture when the women are caught up in disorientation (trees swirling) (sun glancing down) and also signified by a break with screen geography to traverse the screen wilderness, in a psychic journey that speaks to the unconscious wherein fear and loss circulate and break through from women to women in the continuum of the journey to work.

What also returns from the repressed in *Short Cut* is the horror of the disappearance of other women and the prospect of one's own disappearance, in effect the disappearance of the self. It is this inadvertent disclosure that seeps through the work/film.

An intrinsic aspect of the *heimlich*/*unheimlich* coupling is its attendant *ambivalence*; brought about by the simultaneous experiencing of the familiar and the strange and exemplified by the slippage, the overlapping of the two terms, *heimlich* and *unheimlich*.

Both terms hinge on the idea of hiding something from others/keeping it secret and turn towards one another on this point, *heimlich* moves from being familiar and domestic to taking on the element of threat, "[the] notion of something hidden and dangerous…is still further developed, so that *heimlich*" comes to have the meaning usually ascribed to *unheimlich*." (Freud, 1919, p. 4) So familiarity and threat occupy the same place at the same time in a relationship of ambivalence. One term always has the potential to emerge from the other. The ambivalence resides in the simultaneity of being both familiar and unfamiliar. Two opposing terms occupying the *same feeling* at the *same time*. The

heimlich and the *unheimlich* are two sets of ideas, “which without being contradictory are yet very different…” (Freud, 1919, p. 4)

It is through their shared second definition that they are *relationally* bound – coincide in meaning - and as a pair there is an intrinsic genetic connection rather than opposition. “*Heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *Unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *Heimlich*.” (Freud, 1919, p. 4)

> In his initial discussion of the etymological development of the concept of the “unheimlich”, Freud comes to the famous conclusion that “heimlich” and “unheimlich” are, in fact intimately linked…Opposites collapse into one another; boundaries are blurred. Here, as in the examples of the doppelgänger, ambivalence is the key, the slippage between self and other. “The “lack of orientation” and “intellectual uncertainty” that characterize feelings of the uncanny, according to Jentsch, are prefigured in Freud’s initial analysis of the symbiotic, even tautological relationship between “heimlich” and “unheimlich”. (Schlipphacke, 2015, pp. 165-166)

One term is housed in the other, not as opposites, but as a continuum. The simultaneity of the *heimlich* and *unheimlich* within one another produces an ambivalence. Something is at the same time familiar and unfamiliar. The full semantic turn of the term is itself expressive of the experience of the uncanny. The two terms inhabit one another, haunt one another, and their simultaneous experience produces an anxious and split subject.

> Freud understands anxiety as a response to repression, as that which emerges after the process of repression has taken place. The content of the anxiety is, according to Freud, irrelevant. Like a coin that can be used everywhere, anxiety signifies in the same manner whether it is the product of aggressiveness or love.” (Schlipphacke, 2015, pp. 166-167).

Anxiety is therefore an effect of repression. Its existence implies that something is being contained/suppressed; it acts like an alarm. For Freud the content of the anxiety is not important, but what is significant is that the anxiety is being experienced at all, indicating repression. Hence where there is anxiety, look for repression. The uncanny is experienced as a form of anxiety and brings into relief doubt for example around notions of "fixed" identity,

> The uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced. Suddenly one's sense of oneself (of one's so-called 'personality' or 'sexuality' for example) seems strangely questionable. The uncanny is a crisis of the proper (from the Latin proprius, 'own'), a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property including the properness of proper names, one's so-called 'own' name… (Royle, 2003, p. 1)

The uncanny speaks to aspects of repression with the self, of personality, sexuality, race, of origin. It brings a defamiliarisation or uncertainty to one's sense of self as wholly constituted. The defamiliarisation occurs when the *heimlich* and *unheimlich* collapse into one another or are experienced simultaneously cathecting an ambivalence that is experienced as anxiety.

Short Cut explores ambivalence and simultaneity as a theme within the overall (unending) narrative. There are journeys between both threat and safety; between both the living and the dead; between one woman turning into another or turning into many; the ambivalence of both haunting or being haunted by another or many women. The ambivalence is also evident when a woman crosses over from fear into the idyllic or life, on the other side of the tunnel.

Ambivalence works to suggest multiple meanings and relationships at play between the women as well as intersubjectively. It suggests anxiety; an anxiety of being a split subject, of being violated, of being killed, of being split or spilled into many women; of suffering their fate or the ambivalence of acting; a question put to the viewer at the end when being looked back at by the women doubles in the film; what are we going to do about the disappearing of women? We the viewers are caught up in an ambivalence between action and non-action.

Topographical disorientation is brought about when the first woman sits on a tree trunk and looks towards a tunnel wherein another woman emerges; on the other side of it, who is herself, the same, but different. Trauma is so overwhelming that it in effect returns out of repression through the disappearance of the other woman through the tunnel and emerges out of the story of the other woman on the other side of the tunnel; both the women hold the repression and the trauma. Or is the woman who emerges out of the tunnel wandering nature in freedom or is she dead? Is this wandering and freedom only possible for dead women? The film leaves this open and floats the ambivalence for the viewer.

The film's stylistics or aesthetic language of the unconscious around femicide draws upon the continuum of *heimlich*/*unheimlich*, on ambivalence and repression, as the conceptual through line and employs devices of doubling and repetition to attempt to produce an experience of the uncanny both for the subject(s) of the film and for the viewer. It uses doubling in shots and in protagonist(s) to de-centre the subject – and to express the specific kind of anxiety experienced through the uncanny of simultaneity of the familiar and the unfamiliar.

Several factors have to be present to experience the uncanny. Uncertainty is critical and disorientation brought about by the familiar/unfamiliar, self/other, private/public are confused in temporal collapse. This experience unsettles reason and a sense of one's proper self; throws oneself into doubt. It presents a rupture in the sense of self where there is a recognition that one is not whole/cohered. Nothing better exemplifies this split

subjectivity and split subject than the uncanny double, an expression of anxiety, a signifier of repression of the self and which exemplifies the blurred boundaries necessary for the uncanny, the slippage between self and other. This indicates, as asserted by a number of theorists, the non-originary nature of identity.

The moment of the uncanny is experienced as a slippage of past into present, self and other, self and self, of social conditions that suddenly emerge in the subject. It is the return of the repressed. What is implicated by the slippage is a temporal and spatial collapse; a sense of disorientation brought about by the slippage. Temporal collapse is central to *Short Cut* and it is achieved through the aesthetic use of doubling and repetition in both form and content in order to achieve collapse linear temporality in order to produce an anxious subject. Through the temporal collapse, the uncanny emerges in the sense of the non-ending liminal nature of the walk that women endure on a daily basis.

Doubles and Doubling

Historically the "doppelgänger" or the "double" has been described as a threatening figure. It developed as a motif within German Romanticism and in Gothic literature, "Doppelgänger characters tend to be associated with evil and the demonic; thus, one can infer that the Doppelgänger presents a notion of the subject/subjectivity that is defective, disjunct, split, threatening, spectral." (Vardoulakis, 2006, p. 100)

Freud describes an "eerie sensation of a split-level consciousness" (McCuskey, 2006, p. 431) in his encounter with his double on a train journey. He happens to a catch a glimpse of himself in a mirror of the carriage and doesn't recognize himself. In that moment of familiar/unfamiliar he experiences a moment of the uncanny. He describes this moment in the *Das Unheimliche* essay where he expands upon psychoanalyst Otto Rank's work in *Der Doppelgänger* (1914) on the double. The double is a representation of the ego and can take on a multiplicity of forms; twin, reflection, shadow, ghost, resemblance, mirror, Other.

For Freud the double is yet another example of the uncanny as something hidden that is then brought into light; a return of the repressed. It is the return of the narcissistic stage of the child in adulthood, it is the return of the something from the unconscious that merges through the superego into awareness, into the conscious.

According to Otto Rank, cited by Freud, the double also acts as “a preservation against extinction”. (Freud, 1919, pp. 9-10). The double is first then an Other that is projected by the child outside its body and in this instance provides a sense of comfort and familiarity. The soul/body double “was originally an insurance against destruction to the ego.” (Freud, 1919, p. 9) With the instinct to self-preserve against death, is the sex drive (pleasure principle) or the will to live, and these drives (which Freud locates in the id or instinctual part of the mind) immaturely experienced by the child, are not yet repressed into the unconscious.

When we first encounter the double it is as children in the narcissistic stage when the ego is not yet sharply differentiated from the world or other people. (Freud, 1919, p. 10). During this stage of self-love, when the ego is developing, the child forms as a defense against mortality the first projected double, that of the immortal soul and its separation from the body. (Freud, 1919, p. 9) Post-structuralist Jacques Lacan aligns the mirror stage (age 6-18 months) with the narcissistic stage and in this phase, the child encounters the first double in the form of its own body.

Children up until the mirror phase identify with the mother, as the site of plenitude and with whom they are one since in the womb. With the advent of the mirror phase, the child comes into recognition of itself as separate from its mother and is split from the mother’s body. When confronted by its image during the mirror phase at first the child does not recognise itself and then it goes on to confuse the image with reality. That is to say that at first when the child sees itself in the mirror, the child experiences a lack of control over its body and its body as fragmented and disjunctive and subconsciously realises that it is constituted by lack in so far as it can never return to the mother’s body, to the site of plenitude or unity.

As the child continues to develop there is finally a projection of unity that comes with seeing oneself whole in the mirror and this is when narcissistic self-love comes into being; the self, falling in love with the self as a whole/entirety, and overcoming the sense of fragmentation. It is in effect a [mis]recognition as the self is never whole or full and is instead constituted by lack; the image/unity is a fiction. (Lacan, 1949, pp. 1-3, 172-175) But what the image is the harbinger of the first double. It carries the ambivalence of the familiarly unfamiliar and the unfamiliarly familiar in the [mis]recognition.

As the child develops there is the surmounting of the narcissistic stage and with it, the advent of the superego (the censorious faculty of the ego) during which the concept of the double falls into abeyance, repressed into the shadow of the unconscious. And with its repression so too is the id with its primal drives repressed. But there is always the possibility of the return of the Other/double. “The idea of the “double” does not necessarily disappear with the passing of the primary narcissism, for it can receive fresh meaning from the later stages of development of the ego.” (Freud, 1919, p. 10). The uncanny is then activated when we later in life encounter ourselves as the double; or when that repressed Other/double returns to consciousness. When as an adult something triggers the narcissistic stage of the child in an encounter along with the id’s drives, the uncanny arises,

> …being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long since left behind, and one, no doubt, in which it wore a more friendly aspect…has become a vision of terror.’ (Freud, 1919, p. 10)

When the double reappears in adulthood, it no longer takes the shape of comfort but instead brings threat and fear. The return of the double marks through this encounter the familiar turned unfamiliar. Something from the narcissistic stage breaks through the repression and returns to the conscious ego, that “something which ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light” (Freud, 1919, p. 13), in adult life and in an uncanny encounter, the familiar is turned strange, “the double takes on a

different aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, he becomes the ghastly harbinger of death." (Freud, 1919, p. 9) Instead of taking on a familiar and comforting aspect, there is rather a sense of threat and fear, as the drives threaten to eclipse the superego and come into full force. As in *Short Cut* the doubles throughout the work carry the threat of femicide; they are both friend and foe, bringing a warning, becoming a "harbinger of death". The footsteps can be that of the double towards the end of the film who has been in pursuit of help and/or of revenge, or death itself in the guise of a ghost appearing on the path. The path itself is no longer familiar and comforting but a site of threat and fear.

The threat/fear of mortality and unleashing of the drives is displaced and projected onto the figure of an Other, a double that carries the unaccommodated instincts of the ego. The unleashing of the id is when what we are afraid to allow because of the superego, against our will, emerges in the form of a projected Other, the Other who dares to do what we would not do, the unacceptable part of the ego. The repressed drives are projected onto the figure of the double who acting as the shadow self, threatens the security of the ego which experiences "...an anxiety that resembles the uncanny feeling when the doppelgänger reveals himself as a skewed version of the self." (Schlipphacke, 2015, p. 166)

How does this threatening Self/Other transpire? The uncanny is in part produced by drawing on an earlier forgotten mental stage when the double took the form of something friendly. The double therefore traverses from a friendly familiar to an unfriendly familiar at a later stage bearing the ambivalence of being both simultaneously familiar/comforting and unfamiliar/threatening. For Heidi Schlipphacke the double is not constituted as a binary but rather as a liminal figure along a continuum.

> The recurring trope of the in-between in Freud's later reflections on anxiety shed, to my mind, light on the insistent, nagging in-betweenness evoked in "The Uncanny". "Heimlich" and "Unheimlich" are neither opposites nor the same. The doppelgänger is neither self nor other." (2015, p. 170)

Vardoulakis suggests that the doppelgänger be understood in a positive form as a challenge to the idea of an originary and stable identity or origin. He describes the doppelgänger as relational to something else – and reflexive. “The subjective ontology that the Doppelgänger introduces should not be seen as positing an originary substance or essence.” (2006, p. 100)

Freud argues that the figure of the double is best exhibited in creative works where the uncanny is best expressed. Although it is possible to experience the uncanny in lived life, it is rare to do so, and he accords to fiction a special capacity to produce and manipulate the uncanny to great affect “…there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life.” (Freud, 1919, p.18) The writer has freedom to choose nature of reality and the setting of the story, the fantastical and so on.

Freud turns to the *Tales of Hoffman* by Ernst Hoffman (1816) to illustrate his argument,

> [Hoffman’s] themes are all concerned with the idea of a “double” in every shape and degree, with persons, therefore, who are to be considered identical by reason of looking alike; Hoffman accentuates this relation by transferring mental processes from the one person to the other – what we should call telepathy – so that the one possesses knowledge, feeling and experience in common with the other, identifies himself with another person, so that his self becomes confounded, or the foreign self is substituted for his own – in other words, by doubling, dividing and interchanging the self. And finally, there is the constant recurrence of similar situations, a same face, or a character-trait, or twist of fortune, or a same crime, or even a same name recurring throughout several consecutive generations. (Freud 1919, p. 9)

The above passage delineates some of the different guises of the double; physical resemblance, telepathy between two people, identification with another to the point of losing the self, and recurrences. In relation to identity, the split subject is best exemplified

in the figure of the doppelgänger. “When the notion of origin is no longer a simple “content”, then the doppelgänger can be allowed to make a contribution toward an ontology of the subject.” (Vardoulakis, 2006, p. 100) He goes on to describe “chiasmic subjectivity” which is constituted by repetition without origin, “the chiasmus undermines the originator of identity.” (p. 110) That the way in which subjectivity is inscribed is through repetition, it does not emerge out of origins but instead performance; a double indicates the performance of self.

In *Short Cut*, the doppelgänger figure has been used to articulate the horror of the spectre of femicide. Through the double, repression and haunting (loss) come together to create a sense of the uncanny. The use of doubles and doubling occurs on several levels.

The film starts with a subject walking along a dirt path with one wall on the side and a wilder area made up of trees and bushes. As she walks more deeply into the wild her fears become visible. At different moments she stops. When she sits to remove a stone from her shoe, by a tunnel she then splits (from herself or into another, when she stops to remove a stone by a tunnel. The story then through a disjuncture turns to her double, a woman lying in the grass, who then meanders into the wild, and then along the path which leads to her double, walking to work along the path, who also stops similarly to the woman at the start of the narrative and who also when sitting to remove a stone at the tunnel, splits through disjuncture into another woman searching along the wild, the narrative then cuts to the first woman walking along the path towards her double, they stop through points of view and look at one another and both continue on their way, and before them the path, the perpetual loop.

This doubling of the subject proposes itself as the experience of one woman’s walk or many women’s walks. Doubling of the figure decentres the subject; on one hand the doubling alludes to her psychic experience of anxiety and on the other it marries this figure with other women. Through doubles the subject is decentred – and subjects are multiplied and multiple (non-originary) - the fear is experienced as a continuum rather than having a beginning and an end. Women who have been impacted have no beginning and end.

Whom is being haunted by whom and who is haunting who? Women who similarly fear, women who have disappeared, women who have been assaulted, women who have been killed, women who have been and women to come, mothers, sisters, daughters?

There is the uncanny collapse of self and other; the woman is haunted by the disappearance of her predecessor, and is haunted by her own demise. Each woman is inhabited by another woman's body, another woman's story and so a telepathic relationship between doubles is established, communicating fear, history, and the possibility of rescue. By one woman identifying with the other woman and embodying her experience; stepping into her body every time that she takes the path and haunting out the truth while simultaneously being haunted by the disappeared. With this identification with a ghost comes telepathy, Déjà Vu, the prospect of a malevolent double who carries a projection of darkest wishes/repressed impulses, desires and fears.

Actions and objects are doubled in the narrative and also work towards the conflation of time and space integral to and constitutive of the experiencing of the uncanny. These repeated objects and actions tie the women together; they effectively tie the experience of navigating the path between different women. These actions, objects and locations act as mirrors, refracting in multiplicity.

In postcolonial and gender analyses of the uncanny the double as a split subject becomes of critical importance. The idea that one is not self-constituted and not in control over the unconscious and the repressed also suggests a social theorisation of the subject; that there is no essential identity for example based upon race / sex and that we are split subjects developed by forces not within our control; historical, political, social, familial. The uncanny then brings these forces to bear in the subject in its moment of (non)recognition. "[The uncanny] has to do with a sense of ourselves as double, split, at odds with ourselves." (Royle, 2003, p. 6) The uncanny makes us in a glaring moment recognise that there are disjuncts in who we are; whether in the self, in relation to others and in the world. This will be further explored in the chapters on the postcolonial uncanny and feminist uncanny.

Repetition

Involuntary repetition is a central attribute to experiencing the uncanny. It provokes a sense of inescapability or fatefulness; to be caught up in the repetition or recurrence of situations, events, actions so that "…this phenomenon does undoubtedly subject to certain conditions and combined with certain circumstances, awaken an uncanny feeling, which recalls that sense of helplessness sometimes experienced in dreams." (Freud, 1919, p.10) Freud again turns to literature to illustrate repetition compulsion. "He specifies the repetition of the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, or even the same names through several consecutive generations…" (Royle, 2003, p. 89) What feels uncanny is the sense of something fateful, inevitable, inescapable about this repetitive return.

In the *Das Unheimlich* essay, Freud goes on to describe his own experience of repetition as uncanny, of walking different streets in an Italian village only to arrive at the same place, "[a]s, for instance, when one is lost in a forest in high altitudes, caught, we will suppose, by the mountain mist, and when every endeavour to find the marked or familiar path ends again and again in a return to one and the same spot, recognizable by some particular landmark." (Freud, 1919, p. 11). As if one has no control over their actions or the situation hence the sense of fatefulness. Freud feels himself as if being propelled along the streets.

Repetition-compulsion is a facet of the unconscious. He ascribes the "repetition-compulsion" as a part of the structure of the unconscious based upon and intrinsic to instincts, "whatever remind us of this inner repetition-compulsion is perceived as uncanny." (Freud, 1919, p. 12) For Freud recurrent similarities evoke the uncanny.

Freud links the repetition compulsion to the return of the repression of the death drive as articulated by Nicholas Royle, "...the uncanny seems to be about a strange repetitiveness. It has to do with the return of something repressed, something no longer familiar, the

return of the dead, the constant recurrence of the same thing, a “compulsion to repeat’.” (Royle, 2003, p. 84) Freud argues that the death drive (manifested in the compulsion to repeat) is power enough to overrule the pleasure principle. The death drive is in constant motion, compulsively repeated, interior to life, driving all life. It takes the form of mechanical repetition when experienced as the uncanny. “The death drive manifests itself in a ‘compulsion to repeat.’ It is the very repetition itself that is uncanny rather than the content of what is being repeated. “It is not a matter of discovering something ‘behind’ the repetition…The feeling of the uncanny would seem to be generated by being reminded of the repetition compulsion, not being remedied of whatever it is that is being repeated.” (Royle, 2003, p. 90) The death drive, privileged by Freud, is intrinsic to the drive for life, to eros as its double.

> The death drive is...the drive par excellence: it typif[ies] the repetitive nature of instinct [or drive] in general…[I]n so far as it is “the essence of the instinctual, [the death drive] binds every wish, whether aggressive or sexual, to the wish for death. The death drive is in the driving seat. But the driving seat is impossible to locate. It is never possible to find, let along put the death drive in its place. It is always different. Precisely in so far as it underlies all other structures and logics, the death drive is not to be isolated…. It is essentially alien, not-at-home, unowned, unownable. Rather it inhabits affects, impels everything, above all its supposed opposite, in other words life or Eros.” (Royle, 2003, p. 92)

The metonymic silent and unobtrusive engine of the death drive manifests its own uncanniness in being both continuously absent and present, “...the strangely placeless place of the death drive.” (Royle, 2003, p. 98); but becomes tangible and experienced, in anxiety, through compulsive repetition in the encounter with the uncanny. The repetition in *Short Cut* draws on notions of what is absent/present – the metonymic death drive – and this anxiety is experienced by the character(s).

Emma Zimmerman argues that this encounter of the uncanniness of the repeated return of the repressed is the experience of trauma, in the form of involuntary memory. The repressed past comes back to haunt through involuntary memory.

> [Freud] argues that “constant recurrence” is a potent example of something that invokes the uncanny feeling through recalling “the helplessness we experience in certain dream-states”. The repetition involved in the simple recollection of past events is not uncanny, but the process of repetition compulsion – via involuntary memory – is. (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 88)

Repetition indicates, is a symptom of anxiety. In the process of repetition compulsion, the “...repressed past comes back to haunt...directly in an involuntary memory” which is experienced as disorienting and confusing. (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 87) Freud argues that we all have a compulsion to repeat but what distinguishes the repetition as traumatic is if our compulsion to repeat is involuntary rather than voluntary. He asserts that trauma brings us into involuntary repetition of the repressed past and qualifies trauma as repeating something from the past, that should have remained in the past, in the present.

> The problem associated with this repetition compulsion is not the repetition in itself, but rather the method by which the repetition occurs – in effect, as voluntary or involuntary memory. Referring to psychoanalytic practice, Freud explains that trauma patients tend to “repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, remembering it as something belonging to the past.” This form of traumatic remembering can be understood as the working of involuntary memory…” (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 87)

The above relates to the temporal aspect to repetition compulsion. On one hand the temporal propulsion towards death, and on the other a repeated (if you will rhythm) that produces the sensibility of the uncanny and on the other the nonlinearity of repressed trauma that erupts through repetition which disorients.

What can be said about the time of the uncanny? The uncanny implies the *compulsion* to repeat. It can be found through repetition first in the folding back of the term onto itself / the doubling and then of the experience which is both familiar and unfamiliar. Repetition in the form of déjà vu, finding oneself returning, repeating, is a central quality of the uncanny.

> This repetition, or folding back of the word on its opposite, echoes the doubling and "repetition of the same," which is associated with uncanny feelings. An event is experienced as uncanny because it is familiar, but also strange – occurring or recurring in a disjunction or unexpectedly…The uncanny is fearful, in part, because it evokes a lack of clear boundaries, a doubling, dividing, and interchanging of past and present, imagination and reality, self and other. (Molloy, 1999, p.156)

As well as the repetition is the rhythm or temporal element of the repetition; the short (compressed) period between events which render them from coincidental to uncanny due to their frequency, "And that impression of uncanniness would have been strong still if less time had elapsed between [an] exclamation and the untoward event…" (Freud, 1919, p. 12)
However,

> [t]he uncanny does not repeat a certain X; rather it emerges in the recognition of repetition, through the connection of disparate and distant moments stretched over the temporal and spatial expanse... When we notice repletion, the uncanny will have occurred; it can have no beginning, for we can never see the first element of a repetitive structure until it has been repeated. (Bernstein, 2003, p. 1125)

In effect the temporality of the uncanny can be characterised as a time that ghosts, repeats, doubles itself, and has no origin. As Royle puts it “the uncanny entails another thinking of the beginning: the beginning is already haunted. The uncanny is ghostly.” (Royle, 2003, p. 1). Time is always haunted by the spectre of death, it’s anterior.

Repetition is the temporal mode used in *Short Cut* towards affecting the sense of the uncanny. This is done through repeating of actions, movements, objects, locations, shots, sounds. These to produce the sense of the compulsion to repeat, and a sense of the uncanny for the characters and the viewers. Women are forced upon paths all over the country on a daily basis to earn a living; they are doomed to repeat.

In the narrative we see a repetition of motifs, repeating protagonist(s), repeating of the walk along the path, women repeating along the path, repeating events, repeating reoccurrence of items that belonged to a predecessor that now get taken by a protagonist. Or the objects could be a harbinger of the fate that awaits.

In the aesthetics the mise-en-scene proffers the doubling of objects, wardrobe, women walking up and down the path similarly dressed wearing doeks (head wraps) and long skirts, bags, jerseys, stones picking up stars, scarves. The mise-en-scene works through mirroring and repetition.

There is a repetition of detail, events, themes; a stone, a star, doeks (head wraps), clues to the disappearance of the Other/Self. The use of objects from the disappeared domestic worker that keep on reappearing also symbolise the return of the repressed. Repetition also creates a sense of inescapability of the same shared fate; each woman being propelled upon the same path as the other; women being pursued; women in pursuit. Who is following her? Who is in pursuit? Or is she being haunted by another woman. The ghost of another or the spectre of one to come?

With actions, locations and objects doubled in the narrative this also works towards the conflation of time and space integral to and constitutive of the experiencing of the

uncanny. These repeated objects and actions tie the women together. They effectively tie the experience of navigating the path to and between the different women. These actions, objects and locations act as mirrors, refracting in multiplicity.

The repeated actions comprise of the subject(s) looking behind her, hearing the same footsteps in different places, is it a man following her, the ghost of a woman? Are the footsteps real? Or are they indicative of her continuous fear? The repetition of finding a stone in the shoe when she sits on a fallen tree to remove the stone and sits by the tunnel to take out the same stone from her shoe – the stone has reappeared in the shoe as foreshadowing, a premonition of her prospective demise. There is repeated clothing found strewn in the bushes; the remnants of another woman and/or the clues to her recuperation. The star appears on different garments and on a path, again tying women together and foreshadowing threat/danger.

With regards to stylistics there are doubles of shots and sounds; the same shots and sounds are used in various places in the narrative. The hand up towards the sun; a glancing down of the sun, the portent of violence and a moment of disorientation. The low angle shot of the swirling trees indicates the same? The shadowed path that carries with it the ghosts and footsteps of other women and the unending spectre of femicide/patriarchy. The shot that zooms into the tunnel; is this the promise of death or freedom – who emerges on the other side of the tunnel? The woman's shadow on the path; the woman as ghost or real? And of course the path itself, repeated, unending, endured. There is the doubling of sound. The footsteps repeated which linger as ghostly, as threatening, as a haunting. The night sounds which are brought into day effectively doubles the day into night, to subconsciously produce a sense of the uncanny. The reference for this is René Magritte's series, "The Empire of Light" (1953), a painting of a house at night under a bright, sunlit sky which produces a feeling that is both paradoxical and harmonious; uncanny.

We see repetition by one woman identifying with the other woman and embodying her experience; stepping into her body every time that she takes the path and haunting out

the truth while simultaneously being haunted by the disappeared. With this identification with a ghost comes telepathy, Déjà Vu, the prospect of a malevolent double who carries a projection of darkest wishes/repressed impulses and desires.

What is being repressed is the frame of patriarchy that surrounds the walk, the precariousness and how the broader conditions emerging in the individual. Is *Short Cut* about women haunting women, women haunted by femicide, is it about women in search of women who have disappeared, women recuperating women?

Short Cut implies as its frame, the postcolonial context of Johannesburg. Turning now to Bhabha's rearticulation of the uncanny as the postcolonial unhomely. And to how the socio-political inhere/erupt in the subject as the uncanny.

Chapter II: POSTCOLONIAL UNCANNY

Nicholas Royle argues that the uncanny is a critical discursive frame of contemporary everyday life bringing to the fore themes from 19th Century Europe, especially Victorian Britain, around "otherness" that are still present, pertinent and resonate today.

> [T]he uncanny is linked to…[m]ale and female interactions involving power and sexual desire [as] determinants; so also may be the historical and political experiences of class, race, or age, and certain specific feature of culture, such as imperialism and the fear of what is brought back from colonial adventures. All these nineteenth century issues are still with us, in some respects more subtle and attenuated perhaps, in others more widespread, indeed 'global', and profound. (2003, p. 23)

The uncanny is linked both psychologically and politically to wider issues around gender, power, desire as well as historical and political experiences of class, race, age and imperialism. If we are to understand the uncanny as a marker of our time then it is to understand its significance with regards to constitution of the subject as well as

subjectivity framed by socio-political context which is a trace of the colonial; a postcolonial context.

Even though Freud does not provide a socio-political reading of the uncanny, critical theorists have derived socio-political aspects through their respective interpretations of the uncanny, “tempting as it is to indict Freud for pernicious apoliticism, however, we should acknowledge that the socio-political dimension of the uncanny is perceptible only because Freud throws it into relief through a highly theatrical act of repression, avoiding a premise so consistently and clumsily that it gradually takes shape.” (McCuskey, 2006, p. 428) Freud’s non- articulation means that the socio-political can be gleaned by its very silence as a way of reading for the political through the uncanny – providing it with a “re-reading” through this prism.

> The uncanny, then, is not merely an ‘aesthetic’ or ‘psychological’ matter (whatever that might mean): its critical elaboration is necessarily bound up with analysing, questioning and even transforming what is called ‘everyday life.’ This applies not only in relation to issues of sexuality, class, race, age, imperialism and colonialism – so many issues of potentially uncanny ‘otherness’ already evident in the nineteenth century… (Royle, 2003, p. 23)

It is in effect psycho-political.

Since the 1960s and 1970s, through structuralism and post-structuralism in particular, the concept of the uncanny has been revived into Freudian and popular vocabulary becoming in the late 20th century a term with theoretical currency. (Masschelein, 2002, p. 54). This is because the uncanny allows for exploration of the idea of split subjectivity and provides a discursive register through which to interrogate ideas of the Other as well as the other from within/without, discussed later in this chapter.

> One can turn to the uncanny as “a means of thinking about so-called ‘real life’, the ordinary, the familiar and everyday. Inextricably bound up with thoughts of home

> and dispossession, the homely and unhomely, property and alienation, the uncanny becomes, in the words of Anthony Vidler, 'a metaphor for a fundamentally unliveable modern condition…Estrangement and unhomeliness have emerged as the intellectual watchwords ... (Royle, 2003, p. 6)

Returning to the moment in the train carriage where Freud encounters his uncanny double in the mirror, there is a (mis)recognition of the self – the uncanny implies the de-centred subject, a subject constituted by a split which "others" itself to the self. With its premise on split subjectivity and concern with "Otherness", it is in effect a critical signifier of/for modernity. This otherness is the terrain through which to engage with identities, with institutions, with social forces rather than as a priori instead as *always coming into being*; as not fully constituted but instead always in the making; hence negotiable. The split subject indicates that nothing is fixed and that this coming into being through recognition of interior and exterior otherness means a social reading of the possibility of social change and implies an ethics of recognising and valuing otherness.

The uncanny as an idea can argue for non-essential racial, gendered identity as it illustrates the process of an always coming into being, in the moment of (mis)recognition rather than a being that is originated and concluded. In the moment of the uncanny, the dread or fear is that we have no originary self, signified or suggested by the split; the moment of seeing oneself in the mirror and not recognising yet at the same time recognising the (non)self.

Postcolonial theorists have found the uncanny to be a cogent analytical concept and "have focused on tropes of haunting as a way of bringing an awareness of colonial history into the present in order to revise conceptions of the contemporary nation and its cultural relations." (Coburn, 2015, p. 875)

Homi Bhabha (1992) posits the uncanny as a lens through which to reflect upon modern estrangement brought about by socio-political-historical forces that are the trace of colonialism in the present. He recuperates the term towards a theorisation of the postcolonial subject in this context. He argues the concept of "unhomeliness", as an uncanny state of a simultaneous "non-belonging" and "belonging" that characterises the postcolonial world. That this state is constituted by powers of difference, rather than sameness – so otherness is evidenced in our social contradictions and as the trace of history, and that no one is immune to its effects. This idea speaks to the split subject and troubles questions of identity, belonging, citizenry and the nation.

The Unheimlich Unhomely

In his essay, *"*The Home and the World*"* (1992) Bhabha draws on the history of colonialism to posit a postcolonial interpretation of Freud's uncanny. Elucidating Freud's idea of the unhomely home, Bhabha postulates that the modern world is constituted by the unhomely; it is a postcolonial world shaped by otherness and a mix of cultures, economies, ways, ideas, disjunctive histories. "In the stirrings of the unhomely, another world becomes visible. It has less to do with forcible eviction and more to do with the uncanny literary and social effects of enforced social accommodation, or historical migrations and cultural relocations "(1992, p. 141) Although he is making reference to world literature, Bhabha is also indicating that the postcolonial world is epitomised by a surpassing of "national" traditions and is instead concerned with the,

> transnational histories of migrants, the colonised, or political refugees … border and frontier conditions…The centre of such a study would neither be the "sovereignty" of national cultures, nor the "universalism" of human culture, but a focus on those "freak displacements" …that have been caused within cultural lives of postcolonial societies." (Bhabha, 1992, p. 146)

A "freak displacement", or the unhomely moment, is the encounter between the personal psyche and history brought to light through a moment of disjuncture or trauma. And these

freak, inadvertent, displacements brought about by the history of colonialism are experienced as trauma in moments of collapse which give rise to a spatio-temporal disorientation.

Bhabha asserts a *hauntology* of contemporary conditions; our present always haunted by the colonial past. This invisible historical frame or context seeps through the ways in which we inhabit our everyday lives.

> The postcolonial, let us not forget, emerged out of situations of resistance to colonial inequality, its core concepts born out of anti-colonial struggle. And though our times may appear superficially postcolonial, unequal conditions analogous to those under empire, or stemming from them, continue to pertain in ex-colonizing [and ex-colonised] countries. (Boehmer & De Mol, 2014, p. 65)

And the ways in which the effects of this history manifest are in the personal, in subjectivity. It is in this psycho-political terrain that the uncanny comes to have an important role, bringing into visibility what is invisible, namely the spectre of colonialism. “Intrusions from the past are a reminder of the amnesias of the present.” (Chakravorty, 2012, p. 119)

Bhabha describes the postcolonial uncanny as the experience of the *unhomely*, “because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place.” (Bhabha 1992: p.141). The domestic space of the home, or the body becomes the site of intricate invasions from the world revealing that the home and the world are not discrete spheres. What distinguishes the unhomely is the very erasure of the familiar division between the private and the public, between the self and the world, when “uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other.” (Bhabha, 1992, p. 141)

The home as a familiar place, of comfort, security, domesticity and intimacy is unhoused by the incursion of the world into its hearth; this incursion takes shape through the subject,

through the psyche and emerges through an experience of estrangement from the familiar as the “unhomely”. The imposition of colonialism created environments of estrangement and migration that are still today having ramifications within the home/domestic.

This process does not occur through a countering of one term against the other, the “home” as opposite of “world”. But rather mimicking the relationship between the *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich* so does the unhomely arise out of the confounding between the world and the home; two terms and states that coincide, to produce something else altogether, a form of *the uncanny as the unhomely*.

Bhabha argues that the socio-historical is unconsciously lived and emerges through the subject manifesting in the home, the intimate. “The unhomely moment creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow and suddenly you find yourself...’taking the measure of your dwelling’ in a state of incredulous terror.” (Bhabha, 1992, p. 141) because this dwelling is no longer recognisable or rather is strangely recognisable. The surfacing of the uncanny, suddenly renders the home strange, renders the subject strange to herself and estranged from herself, effectively unhomed through a moment of rupture.

> In a feverish stillness, the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions. In that displacement the border between home and the world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting.” (Bhabha, 1992, p. 141)

Short Cut expresses the anxiety experienced by women on a daily basis whereby the spectre of femicide is palpable, in the air. There is something troubling the path where these women walk and that something is the spectre of femicide; our protagonist(s) is/are aware only of a floating fear of the disappearance of women, of the self. What is also present is the ‘double’ to the spectre of femicide, the spectre of patriarchy, of a circulating looming violence that emerges out of patriarchy in an arbitrary register of power. As women walk this path; the fear of disappearing is suppressed, but also the broader social

trauma has been repressed in order for women to just get on with living (and working). Any man could be a killer. The malaise of the society surrounds, and the woman carries its symptoms.

The security and domesticity of home (or the woman's body) is destabilized and exposed to the vicariousness of the world; and home is now both a place of refuge and a place of threat; simultaneously inhabiting one another, mirroring the relationship between the *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich*. Ambivalence strikes through this disavowal, the home seeming secure and coherent is threatened by the ghost of history and its social inheritance in the narrative of the present. "The home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world." (Bhabha, 1992, p. 141)

The unhomely then gives a glimpse of historical trauma and social conditions that have been repressed, and disjointed from their subjects. Subjects catch a glimpse in moments of unhomely trauma of the socio-historical-political apparati that has been fundamental to their coming into being and by which they are unconsciously marked,

> The unspoken context…is colonialism's dehumanising effects. Surely colonialism is the quintessential *revenant*, particularly in settler societies, that which returns again and again to haunt, the modern body politic, its effects repeating themselves long after the formal structures have been dismantled" (Molloy, 1999, p. 165)

And manifesting in itself in subjects through the unhomely. When the historical trauma (world) erupts into the intimate (home) it does so through freak displacement whereby subjects suddenly or not so suddenly find themselves in conditions and places that they could not have anticipated. One is "drawn from the world of seclusion" (Bhabha, 1992, p. 142) and disoriented through the postcolonial interconnectedness of histories and the inescapability of one's entanglement in the social and the historical. That something hidden, the history of colonialism, that comes to light in the domestic / the subject.

> Viewed as an element of uncanny experience, the past is never safely locked away, but rather forms a distinct thread in the fabric of the present. In the mutual disintegration of two distinct terms – whether terror and comfort or past and present – and in the specifically temporal schema of the uncanny, there are clear applications ….in the trope of postcolonial representation…with an ever-present colonial past clashing with an impossible postcolonial future." (Johnson, 2010, p. 216)

In critical race theory W.E. Dubois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks* (1952) have both explicated this experience of unhoming/freak displacement as occurring through the uncanny experience of racialisation. Neither uses the term but it is implicit in their considerations. For Dubois in the form of precipitating double consciousness, the moment of recognising that one will be a part of America but not belong due to race and from that point onwards one is unable to constitute a cohesive subjectivity. For Fanon it is the process or moment of racialisation. Both speak of this experience as minorities in white dominant contexts, both theorists suggest the experience of uncanniness (they don't however use the term) of becoming unfamiliar to oneself through the eyes of the other.

Fanon describes the moment of being othered to himself, singled out by a little girl whilst on a train in France and made aware through her gaze and fear, of his blackness. Made other to himself by being made other to his humanness, so that in her eyes he is black first complicating his own sense of humanness, through epidermal difference as such,

> Look a Negro…Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened…I could no longer laugh, because I already know there were legends, stories, history and above all historicity…Then assailed at various points, the corporal schema crumbled its place taken by a racial epidermal schema…In the train it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person. In the train I was given not one but two, three places. I had already stopped being amused. It was not that I was finding febrile coordinates in the world. I existed triply: I occupied

> space. I moved toward the other…and the evanescent other, hostile, but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea…I was responsible at the same time for my body, my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination. I discovered my blackness…(1952, p. 112).

Not only is Fanon coming into the uncanny through a primacy of race over humanness but with it the burden of the historical trace, the projections of fear and desire from the history of colonialism imbued in the signifier of being black. This historicity erupts in spatial-temporal collapse, into the personal, in an uncanny moment of (mis)recognition; him being forced into (mis)recognise himself through race and to the girl his humanness being elided – (mis)recognised.

In *Short Cut* the path is a site of displacement and fraught with the spectre of femicide. The woman/women who take the path are displaced from their bodies, drawn from the world of seclusion through fear/trauma. They are effectively eclipsed and unhoused from their bodies due to the fear of femicide. and unhoused on the path, in the public sphere. To be unhoused from the body means in effect to become unhoused into the world through fear and the prospect of one's own disappearance. The fear that one carries is of the world housed in the body – as patriarchy, as femicide, as a looming imminent violence.

This walk and this fear are repeatedly endured. Hence in the film the women always returning to the same place; the path that has no beginning and end, that is both a source and a destination, that is the uncanny confusion of private and public becoming one, and in so doing disorienting both the subject(s) in the narrative and the viewer.

Through the subjective experience of the unhomely, we are brought into an encounter with the histories of colonialism, the violence of race, gender, class, with the violence of social conditions that mark our everyday lives, and living. The women in *Short Cut* remain outside of the houses they clean; these houses on the other side of the path are not for them, they may work there but the houses are not theirs, and this exemplifies the social

conditions that mark their lives. There is no separation between histories and our subjectivities; we are caught up in the entanglements of history, of the social, which shock us out of comfort and familiarity when they are returned to us through freak displacement and our split subjectivity.

On Agency

For Bhabha as much as the unhomely cathects the connection between us and the past, and foregrounds our split subjectivity in its moment of bewilderment, it also provides the opportunity for agency, to transform our lived conditions through a politics and ethics situated in the experience of trauma and otherness.

In “The World and the Home” Bhabha wishes to put to rest the idea that we are self-constituted subjects with full agency over our thoughts and actions. We are in fact divided selves and this becomes palpable in the disorienting moments of the uncanny unhomely when the social and the personal collapse into one another and the superficial line between the private and the public is dispelled. The confounding uncanny throws subjectivity into crisis – who one is and what one is experiencing.

> Private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy. It is an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed. These spheres of life are linked through an “in-between” temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history.” (Bhabha, 1992, p. 148)

Invisible faults of histories rise to the surface in the subject taking the shape of trauma. They reveal our split subjectivity and reflect that we are not discretely separate from the world, acting upon the world with full agency, or a subject with full sovereignty. It can be that the subject is further fragmented through Othering; gendering, through racialisation as delineated by Fanon when writing about his moment of racialisation, “It was no longer

a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person…I was responsible for my body, for my race, for my ancestors." (Fanon, 1952, p. 112)

Instead, agency is overdetermined by history and the social in ways that continuously split, decentre, and destabilize. "The uncanny is fearful, in part, because it evokes a lack of clear boundaries, a doubling, dividing, and interchanging of past and present, imagination and reality, self and other." (Molloy, 1999, p. 156) The characters in *Short Cut* find remnants which blur the boundaries between past, present and future; there are no clear boundaries between imagination and reality, between self and other.

What characterises the postcolonial is the intermingling between historical, social and intimate. We are decentred (from the illusion of a unified coherent self) by historicity and circulating social forces that are the historical inheritance bequeathed to the postcolonial world. "The unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence." (Bhabha, 1992, p. 144).

When the uncanny arises it unhouses the subject to disclose the split subjectivity with agency determined by outside forces of which the subject is often unconscious, as in the case of Fanon, triply removed from himself through the body, the epidermal gaze of the other. "It is a crisis of the natural, touching upon everything that one might have thought was 'part of nature'; one's own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world." (Royle, 2003, p. 1)

Fanon's humanness was placed into crisis and there was in his displacement an alienation of his proper self, his human self, to himself, a (mis)recognition cathected by and imbued by historicity and race.

One way that the uncanny emerges is through the unspeakable/inexpressible, through trauma. The social/historical unconscious creeps up on the subject, and in the experience of trauma overwhelms the subject. The historical unconscious emerges in the postcolonial subject; the intersection of conditions of trauma experienced through one's specific positionality, as poor, black, woman, through culture. Even though we seemingly are the agents of our lives, it is the broader socio-historical narrative that shapes and gives meaning to our acts and "de-authors" us. "In any series of events that together form a story with a unique meaning...we can at best isolate the agent who set the whole process into motion and although this agent frequently remains the subject, the hero of the story, we can *never point unequivocally to [the agent] as the author of the outcome*" (Bhabha, 1992, p. 143)

This is to shift the rhetoric away from individual responsibility for social conditions towards recognising that we are situated by the historical narratives which precede our lives, by which we are interpellated. Bhabha is arguing for a broader narrative around colonialism, the history of race through which to provide meaning to singular acts. Through split subjectivity he moves away from the notion of author (writer of destiny), to being authored, inscribed by historical forces.

In describing the literary work of Jean Rhys, scholar Emma Zimmerman employs Bhabha's prism of the unhomely to engage with the displacement experienced by the

black migrant woman who is stranger/foreigner/outsider in a European city. “None of Rhys’s female protagonists seem to be European – a crucial factor that intensifies their vexed relationship with the city.” (Zimmerman, 2015, p. 75)

And further,

> Although it is not always obvious whether Rhys’ protagonist’s share her Caribbean origins, it is clear that they are all culturally and geographically displaced from a colonial home. They thus emerge as Homi Bhabha’s “unhomely” subjects for whom “the borders between home and world become confused. Such a liminal existence prevents these protagonists from ever being able to locate and inhabit a secure space of belonging… Rather than being supernatural, the uncanny ...can be understood as spatial and psychological symptoms of the [racinated] modern urban condition, with which single, penniless women ...must contend.” (Zimmerman, 2015, p.75)

Johannesburg is the post-colonial city with which the migrant woman/women in *Short Cut* must contend; it is the frame trembling on the outside of the film text. Johannesburg was founded upon several mines in 1886 seeing with this, migrants travelling to the nascent city in search of work. Later, during the apartheid era, the city was formally delineated into areas of inclusion and exclusion with workers being segregated into townships outside of white suburbs and economic hubs. As argued by Erica Johnson in her work on the postcolonial urban uncanny, “The city houses the nation’s past, present, and future in such a way that these temporal frameworks become enjambed in one another. What results is a postcolonial urban uncanny, in that the colonial past – entirely expressed in the spatial layout of the city – intrudes upon characters whose lives span colonial and

postcolonial periods in history even if these characters share a desire to “trample on the past.” (2010, p. 216)

Today that past continues to be imbricated in the present but with different newly lived layers and characteristics brought about by post-apartheid social and economic change. But still traces of the colonial and more recent past linger; haunting its present shape and spaces have become entangled with the free movement of people and upward mobility in a city that once forcefully controlled access through the apparatus of apartheid. So there is no discrete line between the colonial and postcolonial – they in effect haunt one another in a” …rearrangement of temporality through space…whereby the terms “post” and “colonial” enter into a mutually haunting, as opposed to sequential relationship.” (Johnson, 2010, p. 210)

In *Short Cut* the protagonist is set upon her path by a number of unarticulated historical forces that have led her to become a migrant – traversing the world between her own home and where she works. These forces being the apartheid city, economy/globalization, patriarchy and femicide, the ghostly discourse of the history of violence against women which enters the world of the path “from the outside” – as it were.

The path through a suburb of Johannesburg acts as the uncanny signifier of the journey of the domestic worker in postcolonial, post-apartheid South Africa. The path is situated in a city demarcated by the history of apartheid and the history of apartheid that haunts; placing people in protected and unprotected spaces; those who live in the suburbs and those who live in the townships.

The path acts as the liminal place of where the socio-historical forces intersect to force her subjectivity into an estrangement through her doubling (identification with the other) that in turns leads her into the uncanny. Workers must traverse the margins to the hubs of work and in the migratory nature of comings and goings women are exposed to the precariousness of danger. The path that one must take between the domestic space and the world is a site for intricate invasions. Women are in between safety and disappearance

on this path which is also an in between transit point and cross-roads, between the city represented by the road and the wilderness that surrounds the path.

Contemporary Johannesburg is characterised by temporalities that are disjunctive; the flow of capital, the imperative of earning money. It is a global city, where the social and geographical areas "are globally connected," but in "a selective, discontinuous and point to point fashion." There is no centre to Johannesburg but rather areas which connect through transit. And its economic inequality is witnessed by the coexistence of wealth and privilege against misery and dispossession. It is like other "cities where the circulation of wealth in the form of cash is ostentatious and immense, but the sources of cash are always restricted, mysterious, or unpredictable…and the search for cash in order to make ends meet is endless." (Appadurai 2000, p. 628 cited in Mbembe & Nuttall, 2008, p. 5) The migrant workers in *Short Cut* are part of this circulation in the economy, where they traverse a path shaped by the past that presently situates them in a search for cash to make ends meet.

Especially interesting is the concept of the subterranean nature of the city. That it is not just the topographical layout that bears witness to the past but what lies underneath the surface. The underground of Johannesburg produces its own narrative. The underground rises to the surface in the way in which Johannesburg was planned; around mining. But under the surface also signifies the invisible, the lower classes, detritus that comes to the surface, the bodies of women buried, half buried by femicide and the women who uncannily walk their paths back and forward to work every day. This is where the path for *Short Cut* is situated.

Women traverse and return to the same point(s) day after day. They mimic the journey that Freud describes as uncanny in his essay, whereby he continues to return/ to repeat his return to the same point while visiting a foreign city. And in so doing loses his sense of self.

> As Freud points out, one prevalent consequence of an uncanny encounter is that "the subject" identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self." Freud provides the example of a traveler lost in a foreign city who unintentionally returns to the same, anxious place time and again, thus encountering the strangely familiar within the foreign." (Johnson, 2010, p. 218)

The uncanny is marked by one's return to a once familiar space/place which becomes an encounter with one's own foreignness.

The defamiliarisation, split subjectivity, effected by the uncanny moment and experienced through anxiety brings with it, political portent; as a subject who in anxious recognition of its non-originary self, initiates and creates the space for multiple identifications, including with the stranger in him/her/themself which might allow for relating to others, and in so doing the possibility for solidarity and (collective) action.

This argument calls for a solidarity and socio-political ethics grounded in the uncanny. It is a call to action as proposed by Julia Kristeva in *Strangers to Ourselves* cited in Rumble whereby "the ethics of psychoanalysis implies a cosmopolitanism…of a mankind whose solidarity is founded on the consciousness of its unconscious." The appearance of the Freudian concept of the uncanny in this context suggests that the goal of this movement is in a sense its starting point" …Recognising the subject as forever divided – limited in agency, incapable of self-knowledge. We can "promote the togetherness of those foreigners that we all recognize ourselves to be." (Rumble, 2011, pp. 168-169). This is because by recognising our own foreignness we are called upon to recognise the foreigner in their subjectivity/humanity; the concept of the uncanny is a place of both politics and ethics.

Bhabha also enunciates the possibility for solidarity through the uncanny. Referring to Toni Morrison's work *Beloved* (1987), he explores how in this instance the repression of

the violence of race, gender and slavery erupts in the uncanny form of the ghost who haunts the house at 124 Bluestone Road and how trauma comes to light through the uncanny. “The unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence. Beloved, the child murdered by her own mother, Sethe, is a daemonic, belated repetition of the violent history of black infant deaths, during slavery…” (Bhabha, 1992, p. 144)

But when the historical and social do in effect come into light through the psychic landscape of the subject this opens up the space for understanding and from an ethical perspective contextualises and re-contextualises acts that might seem unspeakable.

> But the memory of Sethe’s act of infanticide emerges through ‘the holes – the things the fugitives did not say; the questions they did not ask…the unnamed, the unmentioned.’ As we reconstruct the narrative of child murder through Sethe the slave mother, who is herself the victim of social death, the very historical basis of our ethical judgements undergoes a radical revision.” (Bhabha, 1992, p. 144)

For Bhabha, locating Sethe, the slave mother who killed her child, within the historical trauma of slavery provides a different ethical prism through which to gauge her act, one which resists moral judgement and invites understanding. As a slave mother Sethe was already socially dead. And her child too was to share the same fate. So Sethe’s infanticide was the ultimate act of love, sacrifice and protection – for a daughter for whom she did not wish to share her fate, that of a black woman slave.

Referring back to Kristeva’s ethics of the uncanny, discovering an Other/foreigner within through the disjunctive moment of (mis)recognition in the encounter with the uncanny, produces the possibility of engaging with Others in the social context; immigrants, foreigners, sexual difference, difference. This empathy can also be twinned with telepathy, “for strange / familiar feelings of the uncanny are the precondition for an “opening toward the new, as an attempt to tally with the incongruous”, a manifestation of a ‘psychic law allowing us to confront the unknown and work it out’. For Kristeva, the

condition of our being *with* others' the foundation of sociality. (Molloy, 1999, p.157) This anxiety forms the restless ground upon which to form social connections and solidarity.

Trauma lies at the interstices between the intimate and the public between the home and the unhomely. This is the case with femicide. This unnamed social patriarchy that circulates and penetrates when the woman's (in this instance) body is exposed through the violence of rape and/or murder. This moment of the uncanny that is both unsayable and unspeakable. Again the uncanny appears at the interstices – in between public and private; in between history and the present, in between the self/home and the world, in between man and woman, in sexual difference.

But trauma is also the site from which women who have disappeared/been ghosted (through femicide) can be reclaimed. It is through the unspoken that resistance is at work. Where there is trauma, look there, and bring its historical and social dimensions into light. If you engage with personal trauma you will find the intersection of the psyche with the social and the historical; hence a woman who has been abused in the home suffers the effects of broader systemic violence; patriarchy, culture, race, class.

> "understanding that the victims of violence are themselves "signified upon"; they are the victims of projected fears, anxieties and dominations that do not originate with the oppressed and will not fix them in the circle of pain. The stirring of emancipation comes…" (Bhabha, 1992, p. 151)

When women are victims of violence it is the projections of patriarchy, the anxiety of patriarchy, and signifiers of patriarchy that are at work; these projections, anxieties, signifiers need to be deciphered in order to understand how patriarchy functions and to show that women are not responsible for the violence. If women recognize that they are not to blame for the violence but understand how it is emitted from systems of domination, then there is a way for resistance/for speaking and fighting back – as the violence is not inevitable nor inescapable.

Through the work of *Beloved* emerges the idea of women naming the women who have slipped into invisibility; raped, battered, dead women who are victims of systemic violence being recalled back into existence. By identifying, naming, claiming these lost women, comes a claiming of the self of self-love and healing. This too is the story of women in South Africa and of *Short Cut* in particular. A story that takes up the peripheral and invisible women who traverse Johannesburg. And missing women, dead women felled by femicide who need to be named.

By reclaiming the woman, this means the reclamation of all other women who have been disappeared. So too do the women in *Short Cut* reclaim one another's lives. Women replace women not only in a reading of them as victims but also with the possibility of another reading; of women replacing women in solidarity, recuperating one another out of disappearance into visibility. In *Short Cut* the use of doubles lends itself to this idea as does the implied telepathy that indicates the link between women, not just of fear and the subtext of patriarchy but also as a life line that women feel when they see other women in the public, on the same path. By seeing each other, and in so doing speaking, naming.

By hunting for lost women and through their respective haunting bringing their bodies, their stories, their histories, bringing them out of oblivion, bringing them up from the subterranean, and by identifying with them, bringing them into being by speaking up for them and reclaiming them is the act of solidarity, this too is a way that the uncanny can bring the discourse around women and femicide into visibility; recuperating women out of the abyss into enunciation. Women 's endangerment is something that is socially repressed, to have remained secret, that has come to light. It is this challenge of women being pulled out of invisibility that is posed to the viewer situated through the gaze of the women double(s) at the end of *Short Cut.*

Chapter III: THE FEMINIST UNCANNY

Historically there has been a fraught relationship between psychoanalysis and feminism. The Anglo American second-wave feminists of the 1960s and 1970s (Women's Liberation Movement) were particularly vociferous in their critique of Freud's problematic theorisation around women, for example his interpretation of women's gender and sexual initiation through castration anxiety (envy of the penis/desire of the father) that he argues emerges during the oedipal stage of development, and the Freudian "woman as hysteric". "Second-wave feminists proved especially eager to rebut Freud and ferociously attacked the misogynist underpinnings of psychoanalysis." (Buhle, 2000, p. 207). Betty Friedan was one such critic of Freud and her work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) became a central text, a manifesto for women who in their fight for women's equality were determined to resist the domesticity and maternity imposed upon and experienced by their mothers (post World War II).

They protested what could be called Freud's biological determinism which was being circulated in the socio-cultural spheres wherein "Freud's legacy had become so entangled with reductionist ego psychology that he served as a convenient target of errant attack. Second-wavers therefore assailed Freud for making the biological disparities between man and woman the basis of an elaborate rationale for sexual inequality." (Buhle, 2000, p. 211)

Refutation of Freud was based upon a popular reading of Freud which premised the secondary status of women upon their biology. Rather than upon an actual engagement with Freud's theory. "Freudianism" was widely circulated in the public sphere in pop form. "It was not so much the scholarship of psychoanalysis that engaged them but the popular renditions in Hollywood films, middlebrow commentary, childrearing and marriage manuals, and the bestselling trades books. For this reason second-wave feminists issued their complaints within the realm of public rather than learned discourse." (Buhle, 2000, p. 210). Feminists such as Kate Millett (1970), Shulamith Firestone (1970) and Germaine

Greer (1970) sought to entirely dismiss psychoanalysis for its male bias and phallocentricity.

There were and are however other feminists who understand Freud's work to have critical value, as a means to critique patriarchy and engage with the discourse towards recuperating psychoanalysis to further feminist strategies and critical theory. These are "feminist advocators of Freud…who utilise his ideas revise them for their own purposes, while interrogating psychoanalysis as a discourse." (Chauduri, 2006, p. 21). For theorists Juliet Mitchell (1974), Gayle Rubin (1975), Helene Cixous (1976), Jacqueline Rose (1985) and Julia Kristeva (1989) the relationship between psychoanalysis and feminism has proven a productive terrain and they argue through their work the complexity and relevance of Freud's analyses; pointing out his inability to ever arrive at a conclusive understanding of the psycho-sexual development of women. They apply the theory as well as interrogate psychoanalysis, positioning Freud within his own discourse in order to deconstruct his arguments through psychoanalytic theory. "Especially as Freud himself provides the analytical tools by which to have his own work probed." (Kokoli, 2016, p. 29) This inherent reflexivity has been a tool exercised by psychoanalytic feminists.

In effect they have concentrated on the anti-essentialist possibilities offered by psychoanalytic theory which in turn provide a political underpinning to psychoanalytic feminism. Central to their argument is that Freud recognises that gender is not innate but rather *comes into being* (at the Oedipal stage), is constructed, hence dispelling the notion of biological determinism traditionally deployed in the subordination of women, namely that sex equals gender under the guise that being female means being the "second sex." Instead psychoanalytic feminism argues that gender is not fixed but malleable and fluid pointing to the social construction of "woman" and as such, "woman" can also be socially deconstructed or dismantled.

Feminist theorists have found a fecund and productive relationship not only out of psychoanalysis but in the very tension between the two fields in the speaking back to and speaking through psychoanalysis. (Kamber, 2016, pp. 1-2) Psychoanalysis and feminist

studies shape one another through the disjunctures and gaps. This room for conversation between the two means that psychoanalysis in the hands of these theorists is to be repurposed and subversively deployed as a tool with which to interrogate, challenge and even overturn patriarchy.

> One reason, [Juliet] Mitchell points out, why Freud is still relevant to us today and why he is not 'the culture-bound product of a small-minded "Victorian" patriarch, as some feminists would have him, is his notion of the unconscious. For Freud, the unconscious is eternal – it will always exist – but that does not mean that it transcends history. The unconscious plays a crucial role in the way we internalize the laws and beliefs of our society. Although these laws and beliefs are themselves subject to cultural change, they have historically laid the foundations of patriarchy. Therefore, Mitchell argues, psychoanalysis is not 'a recommendation for a patriarchal society but an analysis of one'. This makes psychoanalysis indispensable for feminism." (Chauduri, 2006, p. 18)

Furthermore, the unconscious allows for a socio-political understanding of the forces at play in creating subjecthood – forces that can be tackled and transformed once identified. If interpreted through psychoanalytic categories, there can be an understanding and explanation of how subjects and subjectivities are formed, are interpellated rather than self-constituted. This has meaning (portent) for the ways in which we can recognise and grapple not only with the social unconscious and gender identity but also the social apparati which encode and construct gender; that subjects are decentred in their constitution by broader unconscious social forces which inscribe the psyche.

Psychoanalysis, the Uncanny and Feminism

Contemporary feminist art theorist Alexandra Kokoli asserts that despite their troubled relationship, psychoanalysis and feminism can through their interaction manifest their most radical potential.

> One of the key advantages that psychoanalysis presents to feminism is not to minimise or contain its difficulty (on the contrary, in many respects it amplifies it) but rather to foster a fearless self-reflective capacity for acknowledging and working through it. Conversely, feminist thought has revolutionised psychoanalysis...[with its] sustained attack on binaries…most feminist encounters with Freudian psychoanalysis are inherently and profoundly catachrestic…(Kokoli, 2016, pp. 4-5)

By *catachresis* Kokoli is speaking about a feminist practice to usurp and turn something on its head, co-opt from "master" discourses for strategic and subversive purposes. With this in mind, she focuses on the uncanny's place in [Western] women's art in her book *The Feminist Uncanny in Theory and Art Practice* (2016) and argues the uncanny's subversive alignment with feminism and feminist art in particular.

> In the uncanny, which Freud famously described as the disturbing fallout of the return of the repressed, feminism discovered an unexpected ally in its attempt to forge subversive countercultural strategies, to claim a place in the canons of creative practice and critical theory, and to revolutionise them in doing so. Such strategies involve a process of defamiliarisation, namely of uncovering the strangeness of what is assumed to be known, established or ordinary, which is tinged with an indictment of the division between the familiar and the unfamiliar in the first place, a division that is viewed as intrinsically hierarchical and imbued in the politics of power. (Kokoli, 2016, p. 2)

Kokoli is arguing that the uncanny as a concept with its [inadvertent] return of the repressed easily lends itself to feminist revolutionary strategies as it brings to the fore [mis]recognition of established categories and readily accepted presumptions and offers itself as an oppositional lens through which to engage with gender. This she argues has to do with how the uncanny can be brought to bear upon the strangeness (de-naturalisation) of gender. Defamiliarisation as a Brechtian technique in art is well known and the uncanny similarly lends itself to defamiliarization because there is the space for

distanciation through the moment of disjunction or [mis]recognition; a stepping away from oneself as the projected whole into a fragmented self. And in this moment where distance or defamiliarization can emerge, so can questions around the “naturalness of gender”; if it can be de-naturalised then it can be negotiated, transformed.

For Kokoli the uncanny acknowledges the ambivalent relationship between feminism and psychoanalysis that “the two are never quite at home with one another” (Kokoli, 2016, p. 3). But it is this not-being-at home that provides the rich terrain from which to theorise as it demands an engagement and commitment to working through the fraught nature of the relationship and in so doing provides the potential for radical feminist art (film) work.

> The fairly straightforward proposition that feminism found in the uncanny an apt subversive strategy is not without its caveats. On the one hand, feminism and psychoanalysis do not always make a happy pairing: as with Marxism, their relationship has been troubled as well as productive. On the other hand, the uncanny is among the most flawed and flickering critical formulation, already mutating within Freud’s writings, which do not fully acknowledge previous attempts to pin it down, and becoming increasingly elusive in theoretical and practice-led reworkings thereafter…The uncanny makes ideal vehicle for an arrangement marked by ambivalence and acts as a constant reminder that, even though feminism ended up revitalising psychoanalysis through their critical encounter, the two are never quite at home with one another. (Kokoli, 2016, p. 3)

The uncanny and its subversive potential for feminist art practice is due to its emphasis on the unconscious, defamiliarisation, and the exposure of hidden politics of power between what is perceived to be a (false) division between private and public as well as exposure of systemic patriarchy. Because of its intrinsic qualities of rendering the familiar unfamiliar or unfamiliarly familiar, a space is offered in the moment (of mis)recognition, one that offers political possibility. Because of this moment, what has seemed natural, a priori, essentialised is defamiliarized and hence its actual socio-psycho construction can be glimpsed and challenged. The gap therefore presents a space for contention,

resistance to what has seemed until that moment a priori. This means the uncanny can be deployed towards interrogating apparati of power and patriarchy. It dismantles hierarchies precisely because it works with the unconscious. The uncanny renders gender strange to itself and in the moment of collapse offers a possibility for a new reading, reconstruction, for its apparent 'fluidity'.

> In the uncanny, the return of the repressed is not horrifying due to what has been repressed but due to the unearthing of the event of repression. In feminism, the feminine that returns is not monstrous or grotesque in itself, although both monstrousness and grotesqueness have been used as vehicles for exploring the effects of its repression. The return of the feminine bears the mark of its imposed exile, from which it broke free; its scars are what is uncanny and its return against the odds is terrible. The feminist uncanny is thus perpetually suspended between revision and revenge. (Kokoli, 2016, p. 39)

Kokoli dispatches the feminist uncanny to provide a reading of the return of the oppressed; that when women have been elided, ignored and oppressed the return of the repressed to recall women out of the abyss through feminism erupts with a vengeance in order to reinscribe women back into culture (s) and in order to seize and rewrite the narrative. The symbolic violence must not only be rectified, it must be overturned. This does not only take the form of reason but also rage and revenge.

"Woman" to Women: The Uncanny Double of Feminist Film Practice

One such feminist working to differently inscribe women is film theorist Theresa De Lauretis (1984) who does not overtly speak about the uncanny, but engages with the

question of woman as spectacle and spectator in her analysis of “Woman” and “women” in their uncanny relationship

De Lauretis is vested in a “radical rereading of our culture’s master-narratives [and] a ‘radical rewriting’ of them” (Chauduri, 2006, p. 62) and situates herself in a dialogue with Freud and Michel Foucault. She argues firstly that there is value in Freud being interested in the woman subject at all, at bringing women into subjectivity during a historical period of the erasure/elision of women. Secondly, that psychoanalysis brings to the discourse on subject formation a critical understanding of the split subject; a subject interpellated and constituted by social forces which inscribe gender through repetition and social practice and a subject through which the social emerges through the psyche/unconscious rather than under the naturalisation of gender by sex identification.

De Lauretis contests the idea argued by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey, that women are solely oppressed by the male gaze on screen and that the only strategy to counter this gaze is to create a cinema of defamiliarization, to work within avant-garde traditions breaking away from mainstream narratology and in so doing resisting the gaze. For Mulvey the avant-garde is the way in which to break with the patriarchal strictures of mainstream film narratives and filmmaking practice. De Lauretis asserts that avant-garde filmmakers equally have been blind to questions of gender, race and class as mainstream filmmakers, as long as concerns around gender, race, class remain uninterrogated in their work.

She also argues that avant-garde strategies do not contest patriarchy in film because avant-garde work does not escape narratology given that identification is always present; that is, the spectator always has a relationship to the film work. Identification is a part of disidentification which implies desire. The spectator is unable to escape desire. Simply by looking at the screen one is caught up in the gaze and in the economy of desire or scopophilia. Desire is inherent to the medium. In fashioning a women’s cinema she says the following, “The project of women’s cinema, therefore, is no longer that of destroying or disrupting man-centred vision: [instead it is] to construct other objects and subjects of

vision, and to formulate the conditions of representability of another social subject. (De Lauretis, 1985, p. 162) In other words to reconfigure the terms of who is being looked at and how and by whom, and who is doing the showing and the why of it all, within the economy of visual pleasure.

Short Cut takes as its subject women and as its point of identification women spectators. Although patriarchy is implied it is in the social around the film and although it speaks to the frame of patriarchy no man is presented in the work- just the “un” of the uncanny in the form of repressed signifier of the patriarchy around the frame. The subject, centre of the work is women. The film explicitly ties the viewer into the experience of the woman from the point of view of a woman situated viewer. In this sense it is a film that foregrounds a woman-centered vision and offers a different subject; a woman who is turned in on herself; on her experience and a social subject from the more invisible rungs of South African society, the domestic worker.

De Lauretis is interested in how to recognise narrative and visual pleasure not solely as oppressive (male gaze, desiring women’s body) but instead as a means of working through contradictions, unsettling and subverting dominant formations and challenging hegemony through the discourse of visual pleasure. De Lauretis points to a fluid gaze for the woman spectator rather than being imbricated only in a male gaze. She locates the ‘origins’ of the gaze with the mother, the primary figure of desire for all children.

> In cinema, identification takes place along three registers – that of the look, narrative and sound. When these are explored all together, it is possible to find a space for female desire and identification. Here, de Lauretis refers to the female Oedipal trajectory. Like the boy, a girl’s first love is her mother. Freud characterises the pre-Oedipal stage as the little girl’s ‘masculine phase’. This is due to the active aim of her libido, in contrast to the passivity she develops when she is initiated into femininity during the Oedipus Complex, faced with the social or instinctual demands of heterosexuality, the girl surrenders her desire for the mother but, unconsciously or not, the desire stays active, leading to a bisexual disposition and

> a fluctuating pattern of (masculine and feminine) identifications and object-choices in later life. All this makes the passive 'feminine' identity sanctioned by patriarchy unstable and difficult to achieve…this 'sexual differentiation' within spectators challenges Mulvey's and other film theorists' definition of cinematic identification as masculine: 'the analogy that links identification with-the-look to masculinity and identification with-the-image to femininity breaks down precisely when we think of a spectator alternating between the two' (De Lauretis, 1984, pp. 142-43)

If it is acknowledged that the child's love interest (of any sex/gender) is the mother then it is to the mother that the desiring gaze is directed, and therefore an identification with the mother in the oedipal (gender forming) stage rather than the father. This means that the primary point of desire, of the gaze is from woman to woman and likely gender fluid in "nature", as argued by De Lauretis. The uncanny moment presents itself in women's recognition of this deeper gaze housed, repressed within the male gaze; one that comes to light in the cinema, where women seek out their own image in whichever form with an urgency around their social articulation. The uncanny also presents itself when there is a disjunct between the woman on screen and the women in the audience; and it is in this uncanny moment that the possibility for new representations and configurations between spectators and image arise.

De Lauretis is interested in the relationship between the women in the audience, and the woman on the screen or in the image. She argues that between the two there is a terrain of "working on problems", meaning the problems between the Woman (with capital W, the image) who is projected on screen and the women in the social sphere; she interrogates this positionality of Woman to women. For a radical shift to happen in the image of Woman means engaging with differences between women – encountering all kinds of women (race, culture, class) in society to be projected onto screen. De Lauretis is interested in this intra-women centred conversation and its filmic iterations. (De Lauretis, 1984, p. 29)

> Radical change requires a delineation and a better understanding of the difference of women from Woman, and that is to say as well, *the differences among women*. For there are, after all, different histories of women [class, race, cultural]. There are women who masquerade and women who wear the veil; women invisible to men, in their society, but also women who are invisible to other women, in our society." (De Lauretis, 1985, p. 164)

The endeavour to make a feminist work requires the foregrounding or privileging of the woman spectator. Feminist films are made with women spectators in mind and addresses its spectator as a woman, "The idea that a film may *address the spectator as female*, rather than portray women positively or negatively, seems very important to me in the critical endeavour to characterize women's cinema as a cinema for, not only by, women." (De Lauretis, 1985, pp. 161- 163) Hence we don't need to provide positive images of women in our making of women's work but Woman with whom women can identify and work out problems. This does not mean that the spectator must be female but rather that the spectator must occupy a female point of view.

By situating the *Short Cut* story of femicide on the daily path walked by a working woman, we engage with the politics of a feminist point of view and the poetics and stylistics related to the point of view. A "relations of subjectivity, meaning and experience which en-gender the social subject as female." (De Lauretis, 1985, p. 175) The point of view is comprised of the relationship between the spectator, the filmmaker and the character.

Short Cut is made with the woman spectator in mind and is structured as a narrative interested in the female spectator's [desiring] gaze. "In saying that a film whose visual and symbolic space is organized in this manner *addresses its spectator as a woman*, regardless of the gender of the viewers, I mean that the film defines all points of identification (with character, image, camera) as female, feminine, or feminist." (De Lauretis, 1985, p. 161) This argument proposes that gender of the spectator or filmmaker

does not matter; what matters is that who is being addressed is the spectator from a point of view of identifying with women characters in films in their fully feminist guise and in their representation. This requires working out of two logics for feminist filmmaking, that of the filmmaker so the filmmaker's use of formal language, stylistics, poetics and that of the character, content or conceptual through line in the film.

Short Cut's content, stylistics and intentions speak to such a filmmaking practice. The use of mixture of elongated time, and playing with the doubling of women, the identification with the Woman in the film and her experience as well as the mundanity of the daily walk; of her daily labour all speak to De Lauretis' argument about addressing the spectator as a woman.

We cannot do without the gaze but we can create a women-centred gaze. De Lauretis articulates the complex relationship between "Woman" and "women". "Woman" is signifier, is the representation/image on screen and "women" are the real historical beings watching (making) that image. She argues that this relationship is in continuous flux, and that the reading of Woman arises from the ideological/social/political and unconscious readings at play in the specific woman spectator.

> By 'woman' I mean a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western cultures (critical, and scientific, literary or juridical discourses), which works as both their vanishing point and their specific condition of existence…a speculation…By *women*, on the other hand, I will mean the real historical beings who cannot as yet be defined outside those discursive formations, but whose material existence is nonetheless certain…. (De Lauretis, 1984, p. 5)

De Lauretis goes on to argue that the two are not synonymous but rather the relationship is "like all other relations expressed in language, it is an arbitrary and symbolic one, that is to say, culturally set up. "(De Lauretis, 1984, pp. 5-6) In this way she predicates the uncanny, the gap between the real woman who watches her symbolic double, the represented woman on screen. She is interested in the non-coincidence of women and

Woman and the destabilisation of the meaning of these representations. “What happens, I will ask, when Woman serves as the looking-glass held up to women?” (De Lauretis, 1984, pp. 6-7)

So that Woman is the fiction held up before women and is comprised of a distillation of dominant Western (and other) discourses and women constitute real historical beings or those who watch Woman on the screen. The two do not coincide but are related and effected by one another.

> Very often the notion of ‘Woman’ is an attempt to contain women within ideas of femininity, enigma, proper womanhood, nature or evil. By contrast, the term ‘women’ designates the real historical beings who cannot as yet be defined outside of those discursive formations, but whose material existence is nonetheless certain.” (Chauduri, 2006, p. 64)

So Woman is who is projected upon with desire and women are those effected in the real by the discourses on Woman. But women can also shape and change the discursive inscription and perpetuation of Woman.

This encounter of destabilisation of women to Woman, as articulated through the spectator in the cinema is one of identification. It does not suffice to claim that women’s representation is fetishist, pornographic- in effect closing off the space for political engagement, “however acceptable it may have seemed, the proposition that cinema is pornographic and fetishist resolves itself in the closure of the syllogism: begging its question and unable to question its premise, such a critique is unable to engage social practice and historical change.” (De Lauretis, 1984, p. 27)

Instead the multiple identifications produced by the encounter between women spectators and Woman is the space for struggle, contestation and address including in standard narratives which offer sites of resistance – of a reading back of Woman- in their paradoxes and contradictions that come to the fore in the encounter between women and Woman.

With the recognition of the separation, connection and the separation (the ambivalence) between women and Woman comes the space for intervention. From a psychoanalytic view, she positions the woman spectator as one who is positioned by desire towards her own image – that of women as Woman. Visual pleasure indelibly part of the medium of film is not to be destroyed but redeployed.

> The present task of women's cinema may be not the destruction of narrative and visual pleasure, but rather the construction of another frame of reference, one in which the measure of desire is no longer just the male subject. For what is finally at stake is not so much how "to make visible the invisible "as how to produce the conditions for a different social subject." (De Lauretis, 1984, pp. 8-9)

The relationship between women and Woman could be described as a "double consciousness". There is always in this gap between the two the space for the uncanny; whereby "changed perception, triggered by the sensation of estrangement, might lead to new ways of perceiving the world." (van den Oever, 2010, p. 193) The uncanny with its inherent qualities regarding disorientation, defamiliarization is a useful strategy for the speaking back undertaken by feminist filmmaking. It is by engaging with the estrangement produced between women and Woman that the uncanny can present, with its political portent; naming women, pulling them out of invisibility, claiming women, recuperating women, being held accountable to women.

This is what *Short Cut* attempts to do through its poetics/stylistics and point of view engaging with the relationship between the [women] spectator and Woman on screen. The possibility of Woman's familiar unfamiliarity for women and the opportunity to thereby render a new representation and relationship.

The radical potential for catachresis is in the space between Woman and women.

> Feminist catachresis, partly concurrent with the Situationist *détournement*, is an established form of feminist practice albeit not usually identified by name. In art

> informed by feminism, 'deflection, diversion, rerouting, distortion, misuse, misappropriation, hijacking, or otherwise turning something aside from its normal course or purpose' have all organically and/or programmatically emerged as prominent creative and political strategies. (Kokoli 2016, p. 3)

We see this catachresis in feminist films (note that does not mean only women made films) that are "working on problems" (De Lauretis, 1984, p. 29)

Women are split subjects who watch and desire themselves on screen; caught up in the regime of the gaze and of themselves watching in a complex relationship of desire and partial (mis)recognition. This doubling of spectator and spectacle produces a sense of the uncanny, of an estrangement and suturing of women and Woman which creates the space for political intervention, the kind of intervention that De Lauretis and Kokoli argues is critical to subverting patriarchy. A relationship that requires a constant working on and working through the problems presented by the imbrication of women in Woman and Woman in women.

The articulation of the horror of femicide in *Short Cut* resides in the haunting of one woman by a woman who has disappeared. By having a woman double along the very path of the woman who has disappeared is to in effect replace her. Through the replacing, that one woman can also replace the other as victim. But also through replacing women they recuperate one another out of the abyss, through identifying with one another, in solidarity towards visibility and naming, pulling her out of anonymity – and disappearance. Woman taking up other women out of invisibility, through the interchangeability and solidarity of self and other.

What is brought "into seeing", are the invisible women. What needs to be worked out between women and Woman is precisely the space between the two. What do women do about the daily conditions encountered in patriarchy? How to contest? How to actively resist? For *Short Cut* there is an uncanny working out of the problem between the two. The identification and dis-identification that breaks with linearity and temporality because

of doubling and repetition creates a space between the woman spectator and woman image in a feminist encounter and dialogue. Together women and Woman are brought into a reading of patriarchy.

CONCLUSION

For feminist academic Pumla Gqola, South African women are caught up in the “female fear factory” whereby,

> The threat of rape [femicide] is an effective way to remind women that they are not safe and that their bodies are not entirely theirs. It is an exercise in power that communicates that the man creating fear has power over the woman who is the target of his attention; it also teaches women who witness it about their vulnerability, either through reminding them of their own previous fear or showing them that it could happen to them next. It is an effective way to keep women in check and often results in women curtailing their movement in a physical and psychological manner…The manufacture of female fear works to silence women…and therefore blackmails us to keep ourselves in check…It is a public fear that is repeatedly manufactured through various means in many private and public settings. (2015, pp. 79-80)

This means having to daily live with and survive the ubiquitous fear produced or manufactured by patriarchy and its cultural, social and political institutions, whereby “male violence against women is a structural feature of patriarchy which variously implicates all women…all women are impacted by male violence to the extent that they fear and perceive it as a constant threat. (Dosekun, 2007, p. 90). Specifically when it comes to rape there is a gendered discourse whereby women even if they not been raped feel themselves vulnerable to rape, “thinks of it as always inherently possible because of her gender.” (Dosekun, 2007, p. 90). This is due to the social idea inhered in patriarchal violence that men can violate despite non-consent, which then in effect produces an effect of vulnerability that forms part of the socialisation, subject constitution of women, because

they assume a vulnerability to rape…"women readily imagine, fear and thus talk of the possibility of rape. This imagination and fear restrict them in their daily lives, compromises their sense of embodied agency and infringes upon their full rights as South African citizens." (Dosekun, 2007, p. 90).

Short Cut is situated in what Danai Mupotsa has termed a politics of rage, a feminist interrogation, a speaking out and about, the effects of patriarchy. The film intends to produce a sense of the uncanny as a way to respond to the spectre of femicide encountered daily by women in South Africa. Although the group being represented in the film is migrant women workers, the work articulates what women in South Africa and in general suffer living their lives under a sense of threat, and with vigilance.

> In the uncanny, the return of the repressed is not horrifying due to what has been repressed but due to the unearthing of the event of repression. (Kokoli, 2016, p.39)

The ambivalence with which women walk paths all around Johannesburg and the country is comprised of repression of the violence of patriarchy and at the same time complete horrific awareness of their mortality, which refract simultaneously in their journeys.

The uncanny helps to articulate the very repression *of* women and *for* women as well as provides a way to understand how the trace of the colonial makes its way into the psyche and into the post-colonial every day; of the home-in-the world and the world-in-the-home. With its constitution around repression and ambivalence it speaks to the daily conditions which are endured by women in South Africa. In its postcolonial formation it speaks to colonial socio-political and historical fissures that break through from the past into the present.

The uncanny continues to be a cogent register with which to interrogate contemporary life, subjectivities, history and socio-political conditions. Through its articulation of repression it hauls into consciousness from the unconscious the subjects themselves, women, in order to reinscribe them back into the narrative with reason and rage.

In *Short Cut* the poetics and stylistics used to connote the uncanny deepen on one level the experiential nature of the trepidation as well as reflect upon the social conditions that place women in a state of fear. This is done by mixing realities; doubling the women so that one becomes another one, maybe a ghost, or maybe many women, in an act of acknowledgement of the many who have passed and the many who have been recuperated. This forms part of the disorientation and intellectual uncertainty which are essential to the experiencing of the uncanny. Through the shooting style (the repeating of shots, framing, repetition of doubling of women, repetition of using the same path, the circumambulatory nature of the journey to and from work and repeating of points of view) a disoriented point of view serves to convey a sense of anxiety which is more important than arriving at any actual truth.

The uncanny plays out in the temporality for the viewer whereby the present dissolves into a non-sequential experience of time and immediacy; one woman, many women, a path that reappears, has no end. And the protagonist walks haunted by the prospective loss of herself, “For the poetic effect to have the necessary impact, the reader should be disorientated, taken away from normal or habitual aesthetic expectations, and left in a state of vulnerability comparable to that of the disoriented ego, stripped of defences as it were.”(van den Oever, 2010, p. 190) These strategies mitigate against the idea of an origin and unified subject and instead speak to split subjects evoking the experiential that speaks to the unconscious in its sensibility. The narrative is split and the subject is split by fear.

The path is a signifier for both the geographic and psychic space, it is a no [wo]man’s land. The elongated sensation of time has to do with “the topographical with the temporal, as the strangeness of place disrupts time into an elongated “sensation” … the raw, unmediated sensation of “now-ness” stumbles into an excess of reality, untranslatable and “strange.” (van den Oever, 2010, p. 192) Time is drawn out on the path so that the moment of the present becomes uncannily pronounced.

Through silences, drawn out moments and the collapse of one woman into another a circular narrative structure emerges with no beginning and ending point – including with regards to patriarchy. Where does it begin and where does it go? That there is no conclusive ending or perspective but instead a perpetual loop of the overextended present, allows the viewer to work out for themselves the questions and problems, bringing the invisible women (and the act of femicide) into visibility.

What is witnessed in the psychic journey is the unhousing of the body in the postcolonial city of Johannesburg; the body in effect becomes unhoused into the world (home-within-the world and world-within-the-home) through fear and the prospect of one's disappearance. The fear that one carries of the world housed in the body – as patriarchy, as femicide, as a looming, imminent violence. And with it all the questions and the work that needs to be done, beyond the frame. This work sits with the viewers and the those who place the women on the screen, the filmmakers.

It is with this in mind that *Short Cut* seeks to contribute to both the conversation and the action around the conditions of women in South Africa, in a contestation of patriarchy.
The film, *Short Cut* and the reflective thesis hope to have proposed the uncanny as an important and rich lens through which to engage with issues of gender in South Africa; as an aesthetic-conceptual tool consciously and intentionally used by filmmakers and as an aesthetic and conceptual tool for filmmakers interested in exploring the experiences and traumas of postcolonial women.

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